

CONNOR

connections

Hospital
Chaplaincy
in Belfast
pages 10-11





Mrs Mamie Cassidy, a member of St Hilda's Mothers' Union, who celebrated her 100th birthday in October. She received a visit from Norma Bell, Connor All Ireland Indoor Members' Contact.

Parishes gather items for Baby Basics

The Baby Basics project run by Connor Children's Officer Jill Hamilton and Sister Karen Webb of the North Belfast Centre of Mission continues to receive excellent support from parishes.

Recent contributors include Greenisland and Lambeg and Hilden Centre. The churches took part in Baby Basics' four-week challenge, collecting items which will support new mums and their babies.



The Rev Eddie Coulter and Lambeg Church Wardens with items collected for the Baby Basics project.



Rector of Greenisland, the Rev Paul Lyons, and members of the parish present the Baby Basics items to Connor Children's Officer Jill Hamilton.

Bishop's Lent Talks

The Bishop of Connor will deliver three talks on the topic of 'God's Mission and the Church today' for his Lent series 2018.

Talks will take place on Monday March 5 in Bushmills Parish Centre; Thursday March 15 in Jordanstown Parish Centre; and Tuesday March 20 in Lisburn Cathedral.

Tributes to St Anne's organist Ian Barber

Organist Ian Barber's contribution to the life of Belfast Cathedral over 35 years was recognised at a special Choral Evensong in St Anne's on January 10.

Ian was at the organ for the service, and many warm tributes were paid.

Dean's Vicar, the Rev Canon Mark Niblock, said: "Someone described Ian's playing as 'swimming in sound,' that sums it up, he has that touch that makes you inhale the music."

Dr Michael Callender, a member of the Cathedral's Music and Worship Committee, pointed out that Ian had been making music on 'this quite ancient instrument' for a full third of the life of the organ. He said Ian's contribution to music in St Anne's had been recognised when he was made an Associate of the Royal School of Church Music some years ago.

He commented on Ian's steadfastness, the way nothing ever bothered him, and described him as 'a musical fixed point in a world of change at St Anne's.'

Dr Callender also paid tribute to Ian's wife Jean, who faithfully turned the pages for him at every service.

Mr Philip Prosser, a former Lay Clerk in the Choir, presented Ian with a gift of a mounted organ pipe, and Mrs Joan Thompson made a presentation on behalf of the Friends of Belfast Cathedral.

The Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev Alan Abernethy, quoted from John 1, describing Ian as 'a man in whom there is no guile.' He paid tribute to his ability, his humility and his incredible faithfulness, and said the Cathedral wished to honour Ian by making him Organist Emeritus.

In response, Ian thanked the choir, the musicians and everyone present. He recalled services which particularly stood out for him, and had a special word of thanks for his wife Jean. "Without her I could not have done this," Ian said.

Appointed to Kilwaughter and Cairncastle

The Rev Philip Benson, curate at Larne and Inver with Glynn and Raloo, has been appointed Priest-in-charge of the Parish of Kilwaughter and Cairncastle with All Saints'. Philip will remain in Larne until the vacancy created by the departure of the Ven Stephen Forde for his new post as Dean of Belfast, is filled.



Ian Barber at the organ he has played in St Anne's Cathedral for 35 years, his wife Jean by his side.

"I feel very lucky to have been here and thank you for the opportunity you have given me," he said.

Ian won a scholarship to the Royal School of Church Music. He is a graduate of the Royal College of Music in London and a Fellow of the Royal College of Organists (FRCO) with a choirmaster's diploma. He has a Degree in Theology and Clergy Training from Bishop's University, Quebec.

Before he came to St Anne's in 1983, Ian had been organist at St Philip and St James, Holywood; St Mark's in Ottawa, Canada; St Catharine's, Ontario; St Columb's Cathedral in Londonderry and Ballywalter Parish. He taught at Victoria College and later Strathearn School where he was Head of Music for 21 years.

In September 2014, Belfast Cathedral's new chamber organ was dedicated and named The Barber Organ in honour of Ian.

The Rev Harold Sharp will look after the Parish of Kilwaughter and Cairncastle with All Saints' in the meantime.

Philip was ordained a deacon in September 2014 and served his internship in the Grouped Parishes of Finaghy and Upper Malone, becoming curate in Larne in September 2015.

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Cover photo:


Choristers from Belfast Cathedral welcome Chihuahua Mary My Lovely to the Pets' Service and Blessing in St Anne's on October 9. Photo: Ann McManus. Full story on page 9.




Please contact us if you would like to contribute to the next issue of 'Connor Connections.'

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Sheer joy of this tiny, beautiful, special baby

We received the message in the early hours of Tuesday January 9th that we had become grandparents to Patrick Robert Abernethy, weighing in at 7lbs 3oz. Peter and Rosanna are proud parents and mother and baby are thriving.

It is a moment we will not forget, the sheer joy of this tiny, beautiful and special baby, a gift to his parents and the wider family circle. Being a grandparent is a delightful chapter in our family life and one we are enjoying with daily photographs! At this moment I am very glad of modern technology and mobile phones with cameras.

We have been for a visit to enjoy the moment with his parents and to cuddle and hold Patrick. There is something unique about the birth of a baby. The vulnerability, the dependency, the innocence and the joy they bring to so many.

It was poignant that Patrick was born just after Epiphany when I was still reflecting upon the wonder of the incarnation and the birth of Jesus.

It is the word vulnerable that has been the source of my reflection. A tiny, newborn baby is incredibly vulnerable and in need of love and care. It is the vulnerability of



Proud grandparents Bishop Alan and his wife Liz enjoy a cuddle with baby Patrick.

God's love to us in Christ that causes me to pause in wonder and awe!

This vulnerable love calls us to be with those in our communities who are vulnerable, to be Christ to them in whatever form we can and that is usually more about presence than words.

Grace and peace,

+ Alan Connor

Stephen Forde is new Dean of Belfast

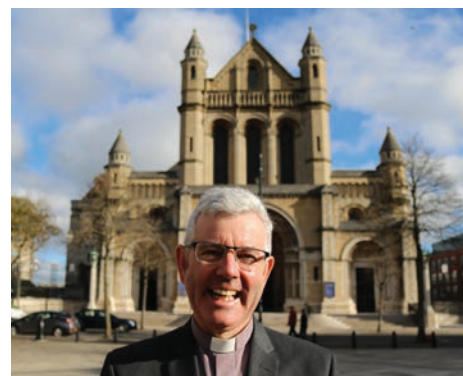
The Ven Stephen Forde, former rector of Larne and Inver with Glynn and Raloo and Archdeacon of Dalriada, was installed as Dean of Belfast in St Anne's Cathedral on Sunday February 4.

A report of the service will appear in the summer issue of 'Connor Connections.'

Dean Forde succeeds the Very Rev John Mann. Aged 55, he grew up in Rathfriland, Crossgar and later Belfast. He was ordained a deacon in 1986 and a priest in 1987. He was educated at Campbell College, Belfast; the University of Edinburgh and the Church of Ireland Theological College.

He is married to Fiona, a Staff Nurse at Antrim Hospital, and they have three children, Rachel, Amy and Michael.

Dean Forde was curate at St Mary's, Crumlin Road, Belfast, from 1986-1989 and was Chaplain at Queen's University from 1989 until 1995 when he moved to the Grouped Parishes of Booterstown and Mount Merrion, Dublin Diocese.



Former Archdeacon of Dalriada Stephen Forde who was installed as Dean of Belfast on February 4.

In 1999 he returned to Connor as rector of the Parishes of Larne and Inver with Glynn and Raloo.

The Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev Alan Abernethy, Chairman of the Board of Belfast Cathedral, said of Dean Forde: "He has been a very able archdeacon, a faithful, hard-working rector, a trusted colleague and an encouraging friend. He brings a breadth of experience, a humble spirit and a joyful faith to his new role."



Bishop Alan welcomes Her Majesty's Lord Lieutenant for the County Borough of Belfast, Mrs Fionnuala Jay-O'Boyle, to Connect Base.

Lord Lieutenant pays visit to Connect Base

Her Majesty's Lord Lieutenant for the County Borough of Belfast, Mrs Fionnuala Jay-O'Boyle CBE, visited Connor's North Belfast Centre of Mission on October 26.

Mrs O'Boyle was accompanied by her Deputy Lieutenants in a visit which took place at the invitation of the Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev Alan Abernethy.

The Centre of Mission, known as Connect Base, is located in the Spectrum Centre on Belfast's Shankill Road. The evening was

organised to give Mrs Jay-O'Boyle and the Lieutenancy an insight into the work being carried out from Connect Base to benefit the local area.

Guests were welcomed by Bishop Alan, who said the Centre of Mission was all about connecting churches and the people

of a local area, and offered a model for parishes to be part of the community.

Mr Trevor Douglas, Diocesan Development Officer, gave a presentation on the work of Connect Base. He introduced the team of Karen Webb and Stephen Whitten, Church Army Evangelists; Jill Hamilton, Diocesan Children's Officer and Christina Baillie, Diocesan Youth Officer.

The Centre of Mission aims to support existing clergy, build relationships and develop new partnerships in the diocese, resource the local church, train and encourage new Christian leaders and then replicate this model in other parts of the diocese, Trevor said.

He added that Connect Base worked with other agencies, namely TLG (Transforming Lives for Good); CAP (Christians Against Poverty) and Baby Basics.

Jill spoke about the background to Baby Basics, the connections already established with health professionals, and how the project works in practice. She outlined the four-week challenge, which parishes around the diocese have signed up to, to provide the items for the Moses baskets for mums of new babies.

Stephen spoke about the TLG programme, which is early intervention for upper primary school children at risk of being excluded from school. The project is partnering with Malvern Primary School.

"Education is a major issue for young people, particularly in working class loyalist areas where the devaluing of education is part of the culture," Stephen said.

Jill spoke about the work of CAP in the area, which is aiming to tackle the root causes of debt. There is a CAP Job Club already operating in St Michael's Parish, and a CAP Life Skills course was launched in St Matthew's on February 1.

Summing up, Trevor said the Centre of Mission would continue to build on its partnerships to serve the community. It will explore the possibility of acquiring its own building and will continue to be a safe place and a centre of help for all.

Billy Festival a hit!

A Christmas Tree Festival hosted by Billy Parish Church proved so popular that it was continued for a further three Saturdays.

The Conifer Canticle Festival took place from December 1-3. On Sunday evening the church was full for a carol service with Harmony & Co, Ballymoney ladies community choir, leading the praise.



A beautiful silver cross was dedicated in St John's, Malone, on October 8 in memory of the parish's former organist, Dr Donald Davison. The cross, which now enriches the Edward Garrett Memorial Chapel, was the gift of Donald's wife Rosemary, his daughters, Ruth and Debbie, and his son Andrew. Donald Davison served as Organist and Choirmaster in St John's from 1977 till his death in 2013. Pictured following the dedication of the cross are, from left: Canon Robert Jones (rector), Ruth Patton, Rosemary Davison, Andrew Davison, Debbie Davison and Bishop Edward Darling. (Photograph: Arthur Macartney).

Bishop's PA Rosemary to retire

In March, Connor Diocese will say farewell to Mrs Rosemary Patterson, Personal Assistant to the Bishop of Connor, who is retiring after devoting her entire working life to the Church.

Rosemary has been full-time secretary / PA for Bishop Alan Abernethy since he became Bishop of Connor 10 years ago, and was part-time secretary to his predecessor, Bishop Alan Harper, for three years before that.

Rosemary's career with the church began in 1965, when she worked with Church Mission Society (CMS) Ireland for four years before moving to the diocesan office for Connor and Down and Dromore, then based in May Street, in 1969.



Bishop Alan's PA Mrs Rosemary Patterson who is to retire after devoting her entire working life to the Church.

In 1976 she took some time out following the birth of her daughter Helen. Rosemary returned to work in diocesan office in 1989, and since then has worked in Stewardship, Board of Education and with the Bishops.

Rosemary is married to Jim, Connor Glebes Secretary and a member of Diocesan Council. Their daughter Helen currently works as a receptionist / administrator with Connor Diocese. Rosemary is mother-in-law to Chris and grandmother to Andrew and Rebekah.

She will remain as Bishop's PA until March 2018.

Bishop Alan said: "Rosemary has served the Church of Ireland in various capacities, stewardship office, education office, diocesan office and Bishop's personal assistant. She has given nearly 40 years of faithful and dedicated service.

"Since I became Bishop of Connor she has been a great support to me. Her loyalty, confidentiality, encouragement and discernment are great gifts to me. She has been able to organise my diary but above all she has looked after 'me.' I will be forever grateful for her care and friendship."

CD will support Tanzanian home

Musician James McCabe, a parishioner of St Patrick's, Jordanstown, has released his first solo album which will raise funds for a Tanzanian orphanage.

James, whose parents are St Patrick's Church Warden Marshall McCabe and his wife Grace, is a former co-principal of the famous Black Dyke Band from Yorkshire, and a past British Open Cornet champion.

His CD, entitled 'Blessings' will raise money for the Tanzanian Christian Farm Development Fund.

The music on the CD features Belfast Salvationist composer David Catherwood on two tracks with arrangements of popular gospel tunes and the classical music of Gabriel Fauré.

The artwork on the CD is by another St Patrick's parishioner, Ricky Darling. Ricky, James, Grace and a number of St Patrick's parishioners have visited mission projects in Tanzania in recent years including kids4school and the Leprosy Mission.

To purchase a CD visit www.james-mccabe.co.uk.



The Rev Andrew Ker, rector of Templepatrick and Donegore, flanked by long-serving choir members Pat MacKean and Noreen Clendinning, and choir members and Church Wardens. Photo: Alan Walbridge.

Long-serving choristers are an inspiration

The Parish of Templepatrick and Donegore has celebrated the combined total of 104 years of unbroken service given by Mrs Pat MacKean (54 years) and Mrs Noreen Clendinning (50 years)

The ladies were presented with flowers from junior choristers and framed certificates by rector, the Rev Andrew Ker.

The four-part parish choir, which is affiliated to the Royal School of Church

Music, boasts a number of members who have received the long-term service medal of the RSCM. Inaugurated in 1963 and robed in 1967, the choir has maintained a strong four-part choral tradition throughout its history, a rarity for a small rural parish.

"This is an amazing milestone for Pat and Noreen and the choir. They are an inspiration to all of us," said organist Mrs Pat Maxwell.



Sara and Nagat came to Northern Ireland from Sudan.

‘It’s much more than teaching English’

The room is chilly but the welcome is warm. Clasp steaming mugs, a dozen or so ladies, many wearing hijabs, settle down for their weekly English language lesson.

Their classroom is the parish hall of All Saints’, University Street, Belfast, and their teacher is Johanne Martin, an All Saints’ parishioner who works with a Christian charity.

Johanne is supported by a team of volunteers who help the ladies with their lessons, while others entertain children in the crèche in a corner of the hall.

These English lessons have been running weekly in All Saints’ for the past three years. Originally the students were all refugees, primarily from Sudan, but now many are migrant workers or relatives of students at nearby Queen’s University.

It is November 29 and temperatures outside are barely over freezing. The climate is definitely not what many of today’s students - who come from Turkey, Brazil, Sudan, Jordan and Somalia - are used to, but none are complaining.

Instead they concentrate on the lesson, which is the story of Jacob and Esau. All Johanne’s classes (she teaches refugees and migrant workers in other church halls across Belfast too) are based on learning English through the Prophets. The students listen and learn the story, and this helps them remember the words they are being taught.

After the ladies complete a warm-up

vocabulary crossword, Johanne begins to talk. The story allows her to introduce an image of pregnancy, the words needed to express feelings during pregnancy, stages of birth, birthdays, language that is important as many of the ladies present are young mothers, in fact some have had babies since arriving in Northern Ireland.

Their stories are varied. Most of the ladies in class today are here because their husbands came to Belfast seeking asylum or employment. Sara, from Khartoum, Sudan, has been here for almost two years with her husband and five children, now



Johanne Martin has been running the class in All Saints’ University Street, for three years.

aged from six to 13.

“I like it in Belfast,” she says. “It is very quiet, the people are friendly and the children love their schools. A friend from Sudan told me about the class. I have learned a lot in this class.”

Nagat, also from Sudan, has been coming to the class for four years, and this is evidenced by her excellent English. She is one of the advanced group – the class caters for all levels.

Nagat’s husband is working in Northern Ireland. They arrived with one child. Her second and third children, a baby and a boy aged three and a half, were born here. Both enjoyed playing in the crèche while Nagat did her lesson. She continues to come because she says the class is a great social outlet. “I like to meet other people and Johanne has become a good friend,” Nagat says.

Noaby, 24, is from Brazil. Her husband is Northern Irish, and they both work as missionaries with indigenous people in Amazonia, northern Brazil. They will be living in Belfast for several months, and Noaby saw the class as an opportunity to improve the English she learnt back at school. “The class is really good,” she said.

‘I come here to have fun, to meet other people and to learn more English’

“And yes, as a missionary I am familiar with the Bible stories!”

Naciye comes from Attalia, Turkey, where the weather is generally very hot. She has three sons, the eldest of whom is in P5. She has been in Northern Ireland five months, and is finding the classes are helping her a lot with her English.

Maisa, from Jordan, is a civil engineer by profession and is in Belfast to spend time with her daughter who is a Pharmacy student at Queen’s. She has been here two months but thinks she will probably stay for the next two years until her daughter finishes her studies.

Sitting beside her is Taman, a Palestinian whose husband is doing research work at the university. Taman’s five children are grown up and remain in Jordan. “I come here to have fun, to meet other people and to learn more English,” she says with a beaming smile.

Brazilian Vanessa, 30, has come out prepared for the weather and keeps her bobble hat firmly in place throughout



Saman from Somalia and Noaby from Brazil concentrating hard in class!



Brazilian Vanessa says she feels her children are very safe in Northern Ireland.

the lesson. Vanessa has left São Paulo for Belfast with her husband, a software developer. She has eight-year-old twin girls.

"I don't mind the cold," she said. "I like the people here, and I feel very safe. Brazil is very dangerous. Here my girls can be safe and they are very happy."

After Johanne tells the story, the ladies are put to work on a grammar exercise, assisted by the teaching volunteers. Among them are Hannah and Isobel.

Music graduate Hannah also helps run a homework club for refugees in west Belfast and is not a member of the parish, while

Isobel is a parishioner, as are the majority of the crèche volunteers.

Johanne previously worked in north Africa. When she returned five years ago she wanted to use her English teaching skills, and initially volunteered with NICRAS - the Northern Ireland Community for Refugees and Asylum Seekers.

"A group of Sudanese ladies asked me for a class with a crèche and we set this up here in the parish hall," Johanne says. "When I started, the class was made up mainly of Sudanese refugees but now it is a mixture of migrants and relatives of students. It is only for women as the Arab and Muslim ladies wanted to be in a single-gender class.

"I like having so many nationalities because it forces them to speak English to each other in class and it helps them to build friendships."

She says the volunteer help she receives is vital. "I could not do this unless people from the church community are willing to come and run the crèche. I also needed the help with running the lessons as this class is quite unique in that it is multi-level and I need people to help the ladies at whatever stage they are at."

Johanne says the class has a high turnover. "The aim is to get them to a standard so they can apply to join the

English class at Belfast Met. To get in they have to have a certain level, and the voluntary sector has been helping people achieve that.

"They learn other lessons too, such as turning up on time, switching phones off, concentrating on what they are being taught. For many of the ladies their lives have been so disrupted they have not had a chance to learn these skills."

Johanne believes focusing on stories of the Prophets is a good way of teaching English, and also of opening up dialogue about faith. "It is good to show that we are free and it is ok to talk about our faith and about our differences as well," she says.

"Coming to Northern Ireland can be confusing for refugees and migrants as they are told they are coming to a Christian country, but so much of life here is secular. But they feel confident coming to a church where it is safe and welcoming. They ask me for help and advice, often about practical things, and it is good to be able to signpost them to things or even just provide a listening ear.

"You get a privileged insight into people's lives because they are missing their families and their usual support structures. This class is a community they can come to for support and advice. It is about much more than teaching English."



A special presentation took place at Cloughfern Parish Church on October 8 to choir member Jennifer Boyd, who has notched up 50 years of service as a member of the choir. Jennifer has sung with the Parish Choir since she was a girl. She is pictured with the other choir members and the rector, the Rev David Lockhart.

Parishes say farewell to Archdeacon Forde

Parishioners from St Cedma's, Larne, St John's, Glynn and St Columba's, Raloo, said farewell to their rector of almost 19 years at a social evening on January 12.

The Ven Stephen Forde was leaving Larne to take up the position of Dean of Belfast, and the evening was organised by Church Warden Ronnie Lee. Invited guests included representatives of Larne Clergy Group, former curates of the parish, the Rev Mikael Leckströms, from Larne's link parish of Väderstad in Sweden, as well as family and friends of the outgoing rector.

There was lots of music, with plenty of audience participation in songs reflecting Archdeacon Forde's early life until the present day – with song lyrics adapted appropriately!

"The Sunday School did a lovely item which delighted Stephen because he has done so much work over the years for young people in the parishes," Ronnie said.

There were presentations of gifts to Archdeacon Forde and his wife Fiona. On the following Sunday, more than 200 people attended Archdeacon Forde's final service in St Cedma's.



Parochial nominator John Brownlees with Archdeacon Stephen Forde at the farewell evening on January 12.

St Aidan's shares to encourage others

A year into a three-to-five year strategic plan, the parishioners of St Aidan's in Belfast's Sandy Row say they have learned a lot and want to encourage other parishes considering the same path.

Guided by Diocesan Development Officer Trevor Douglas, the team launched the plan in October 2016, capturing the parish's aims in the strapline: 'Enabling people to find a living faith in a loving God by serving Christ in the community.'

St Aidan's now has four teams working to see this plan realised: Enable people to know God team; Be relevant for all ages team; Develop parish facilities fit for purpose team; and the Become financially sustainable team.

Elizabeth Collins is a member of the Enable people to know God team. "The team is looking at different styles of worship," Elizabeth said. "These include informal services, a service held in a local day centre, a prayer points service, a quiet morning and a prayer point service."

The parish already has Messy Church. It hosted a pets' service last July, and a concert featuring the Route Choir on December 3. There have also been several favourite hymns services.

Despite all this, things were not going as positively as the team members had hoped. "As we reflected with Trevor a year into our plan, we were a bit disappointed that we did not make a bigger inroad into the community," Elizabeth said. "However, after a discussion we concluded that we were motivated by the greater bonding of the church family, with members being more involved in church life, prepared to meet the challenges, building individual confidence, showing gifts and talents.

"So we would like to encourage other churches by saying that the journey begins within the church family and when you strengthen these bonds you really can see God working and leading into a new, challenging, exciting and rewarding mission with the greater community."

One of the parish's most successful projects was a production of 'Joseph.' "It started off a little shakily," said Margaret of the Relevant to all ages team. "But in the end it was fantastic. People who came along to be helpers on the first night ended up being in the cast. It really brought people in the church together and on the



A beautiful harvest display in St Aidan's last October. night we had a full house."

John Griffin of the Finance team said the group was investigating where the parish can save costs. "Energy audits will allow us to identify potential savings from each building," he said.

"In addition we are discussing placing a donation page on the website, targeting local businesses for specific sponsorship such as covering printing costs, sponsoring an event etc, and looking at setting up a 'Friends of St Aidan's' group although this element needs separate governance setup and therefore significantly more work."

Alwyn Campbell, Glebe Warden and a member of the Parish facilities committee, said that the parish wanted to share what it is doing with others. "Our expectations may have been a bit high, but there are now families who do come into the church who would not have come before," he said.

Alwyn explained that to create a welcoming meeting space, pews were taken out of the west transept of the church, and this area was converted into a coffee area, where the chance to have a chat encouraged people to return week on week.

The parish also created a room for Sunday School so the children no longer have to leave the service and walk across several roads to the parish hall. "The ultimate aim was to bring everything into the church," Alwyn said.

The parish currently has permission,

Blessing of the pets at Belfast Cathedral



The parish's colourful production of Joseph really brought people together!

supported by the Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev Alan Abernethy, to look into selling its assets, namely the hall, rectory in Royal Lodge and curatage in Ashley Avenue.

The hall was built in the 1940s and is home to a thriving thrift shop run by the parish. It is used by various community groups, including Cobra fitness classes, but Alwyn said the hall needs a lot of work to bring it up to standard.

Alwyn said. "I look at the buildings with less emotional attachment than some of the other members. I see how they are being used and I ask why can we not do more with the buildings and the resources we have? Church is a business, no matter what way we look at it.

"We have to balance the books. Some people expect that the church will always be here, but the reality in 2018 is that if the money doesn't come it will not survive. It is our responsibility to ensure that the church is here for generations to come."

There is no land around the church building, so Alwyn said any vision for the church will be confined by existing space if the assets are sold. More space may have to be used in different ways. A mezzanine floor shown in historic plans could potentially be recreated, for example.

Elizabeth said the parish teams had looked for skills within the church and were working together to see what could be introduced to appeal to the local



The Rev Bobbie Moore, centre, in Naval uniform, getting into the spirit of the Vera Lynn era with landgirls Irene Cowan and Pat Williams.

community, and make the church a more universal place for everyone.

"The plan was a good blueprint. People now know what we are striving to do and where we are going. But it is daunting!"

Dorothy and Margaret are members of the Relevant for all Ages team. "I would say pretty close to half the congregation are now involved," said Margaret. "It is amazing to see people who would in the past have been observers now putting themselves forward and taking part as they realise they have a talent to give."

Both paid tribute to priest-in-charge, the Rev Bobbie Moore, for her leadership and forward thinking. Dorothy added: "Her best gift is that she allows us to do things that we would not have contemplated before."

She added: "Our mission is to make St Aidan's buzz. We need the people of Sandy Row to feel this is the place to go to. While we may not yet be engaging the community as much as we had hoped, we have certainly engaged our own congregation, and St Aidan's is definitely buzzing."

In addition to the 'Joseph,' production the parish also hosted a coffee morning in support of Macmillan last October which raised almost £600; and had a hugely successful Vera Lynn Night on November 20 marking the 100th birthday of the Forces' sweetheart.

The Christmas Lights switch-on drew a big crowd and was supported by local politician Emma Little Pengally. The outdoor crib also captured the imagination of neighbouring families.

Plans for 2018 include a games night and a St Patrick's Night barn dance.

One year into the strategic plan, a small core group continues to keep the vision alive but they feel they now have the whole church on board.

"There is a great love for St Aidan's amongst us all," Dorothy said.

The Rev Ron Elsdon blesses a cute dog during the Pets' Service at Belfast Cathedral in October.

Belfast Cathedral held a special service for pets on October 15, with hundreds of dogs and other animals flocking to St Anne's for praise and blessing.

All the animals were well behaved, there was no fighting in the pews, no dogs chasing cats chasing hamsters, and even Norman the Parrot politely declined to heckle during the Rev Canon Mark Niblock's reflection.

In this, Canon Niblock said the service was meant to be fun, but also made the serious point about the place pets have in our lives.

"In so many ways they add to our wellbeing, calming us when we're upset, listening to us rant and rave, enjoying special moments of joy, and walking with us through illness and bereavement," Canon Niblock said.

The service featured appropriate music and readings. During the final hymn, a collection was taken for local animal welfare charities.

After a general blessing, owners were invited to have their pets individually blessed by members of the clergy.



Two new Lay Readers were commissioned by Bishop Alan Abernethy in St George's, Belfast, on September 27. They were Mark Wardle from St George's, left, and Andrew McFaul from Muckamore.

Privileged to listen, pray & wait

My name is Sanna Mallon and I am Chaplain in the Royal Group of Hospitals, which also includes Royal Maternity and the Children's Hospital, plus I am Chaplain in Musgrave Park Hospital.

I am married to Allister and we have three grown up children. In my spare time I enjoy walking and keeping fit because hospital corridors are very long!

I have been a Chaplain for 10 years. Before that, I worked in a primary school and was also involved in parish ministry, visiting hospitals and nursing homes. Encouraged by the Bishop, I began assisting the Chaplain in the RVH and, several years later, successfully applied for the post of the Church of Ireland Chaplain in the Royal Group and later Musgrave Park Hospital.

I am employed by the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust. Chaplaincy has a high profile in an organisation which aims to provide a holistic framework for the healing and care of all who pass through its doors. This is the largest hospital in Northern Ireland and provides the most astonishing range of medical skills and expertise.

The pastoral and spiritual care of the individual is a recognised and valued component in the hospital's duty of care and it is with a great sense of dependence and faith in God that I do my best to represent the Church's mission to support its people at a time of worry and concern in their journey to find change and healing.

All who enter our hospitals are confronted by crisis with health. This includes the sick, of course, but also their loved ones and friends. As Chaplain, I visit the patient to tell of God's concern for them and how medical specialists, ranging from consultant surgeon to the lab technician, are blessed with skills and gifts which can bring change to broken bodies and, indeed, broken lives.

There are many stressful days and very late nights (which are exhausting) and I have to remind myself that I am called simply to be a presence and stay alongside those who are trying to deal with hurt or grief.

An awareness of the stress under which staff are coping is vital to my work. I spend a lot of time listening to these staff, remembering that they have a life at home where they try to switch off from the



pressure and strain of work and what they have seen and heard.

Chaplaincy is a work experience sometimes far removed from parish life. Hospitals are a special place apart from daily life. Here, I am surely privileged to listen, pray and wait with those who turn to God when their hearts are troubled.

I often don't know what the day will bring. As I prepare to go to the wards, I may receive a call to attend something urgent. I try to spend time in the hospital chapel to think and pray about the day ahead.

I always let the patient talk about what they want to talk about. I am there to listen and, if it is appropriate, I ask the patient if they would like to pray. The best thing about Chaplaincy is that it is a real privilege to share in other people's worries and tell them of God's love and concern for them.

In the case of some long-term patients, I get to know them very well. In many cases, it is a joy to see them getting better and later hear of how they are getting on at home. In some cases, the outcome can be very sad and it is very humbling to share in some people's journeys.

Here are some stories which give an insight into my work.

Eddie is a long-term patient with chronic illness. He always greets me with a smile even though he is painfully aware his condition is worsening. He is being assessed for a move from his own home to a nursing home, and fears for the future.

Since the Health Service began appointed to provide spiritual chaplaincy in the Belfast Trust and the Rev Rosie Morton

I tried to reassure him that the move would feel like a fresh start and he would no longer have the stress and worry of keeping his house. He is a person of great faith and always appreciates the opportunity to pray and bring his concerns and thanksgivings to God.

I was called to visit a four-year-old who has leukaemia. The little boy was away for tests, so I had time to be with his mother who was very upset and worried. I have got to know the family well and they were very happy to allow me to contact their local rector and to re-connect with their parish. Both the rector and myself regularly visit and minister to this lovely little family.

On my rounds I visit the Royal Maternity Hospital, a place of both great joy and, too often, terrible sadness. Today, I was called to see a mother whose baby was stillborn. It is often the most difficult conversation to have, when someone has lost their treasured and beloved child, who had embodied so many hopes and dreams.

I often have a quiet service of Holy Baptism or Naming Ceremony to give some comfort and allow the words of the service to discover some way of finding God amidst the darkness and sense of hopelessness.

Prior to ministry, I was a nurse specialising in cancer and palliative care. I trained for ordained ministry at Queen's Foundation, Birmingham. I spent a term at Tamil Nadu Theological College in South India, **writes the Rev Rosie Morton.**

Ordained as a priest in 2006, I served my curacy in Birmingham Diocese. I worked as a Hospital Chaplain in Northampton and Newcastle upon Tyne before returning to home to Belfast in 2014.

I am now Church of Ireland Chaplain to Belfast City Hospital and the Mater Hospital. I was Secretary of the Northern Ireland Healthcare Chaplains Association (NIHCA) and since June 2017, I chair the NIHCA Research Network.

There is no typical day, as each day is varied and unpredictable. Hospital Chaplaincy is all about 'being in the moment' in your encounters with staff,

In 1948, Chaplains have been in care. In this focus on hospital area, Chaplains Sanna Mallon on write about their work

patients and relatives. Working across two hospitals means I can have 60-70 patients to visit each week. Each hospital site in the Belfast Trust has different specialties; here are some 'stories.'

Angela, a patient in a psychiatric ward, has a history of abuse, and intimidation from her family meant she had to cut her ties to them. She had a supportive rector and she is now hoping to start a new life.

John has been on a respiratory ward for weeks and seems more concerned for his wife than himself. He tells me he is anxious at times as he has never been ill before. He has no church connection but appreciates a time of prayer when I visit.

I met Maggie in 2016 when she was having treatment for leukaemia. Her illness has progressed and she has limited time left. She feels guilty at having her funeral in a church she does not attend. I arranged for her rector to meet her and this has given Maggie some peace of mind.

Mr Smith, a surgeon, meets me in the corridor to tell me more about a recent visit to Uganda. He shows me a photograph of the hospital and on one of the walls these words are painted: 'We treat, Jesus heals.'



The Rev Rosie Morton in the Chapel at the Mater Hospital where she is Chaplain.

Each day is varied and unpredictable

We are living in an increasingly secular world, yet at times of illness and adversity people can appreciate the opportunity to see a Chaplain. Chaplaincy is robust about ministering to people who have a church connection and those who do not have any connection. Chaplains may be asked to take a funeral, emergency baptism or arrange a wedding at short notice.

Mostly the ministry is one to one, but there are also large services. For example, the Health and Social Care Trust arrange a Memorial Service for staff who have died.

Hospital Chaplaincy is a different ministry to parish ministry for two reasons:

- The culture and ethos of Health and Social Care is about evidence-based research and developing best practice. Chaplains need to be able to articulate their effectiveness. As professionals we are part of the wider multi-disciplinary team.
- As patient hospital stays are often

shorter and 80 per cent of surgery is now day case, wards are often intense and pressured environments. The intensity is consistent.

What I find rewarding is the variety of people I meet, the privilege that people talk openly and sometimes deeply, and being part of an ecumenical team as you learn so much from other denominations

I find it challenging to build a sense of team when the majority of Chaplains work part-time. At times it is an emotionally draining ministry, and Chaplaincy is not as recognised as Parish ministry

In Belfast City Hospital Chapel each Sunday there is an interdenominational Service at 9.30am – we would appreciate wheelchair pushers to help bring patients to the service. If you can help, please email Rosie.Morton@belfasttrust.hscni.net.

Note: Patient names in both reports have been changed for confidentiality.



The Rev John Pickering, the Rev Julie Bell, the Rev Paul Dundas (rector), and the Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev Alan Abernethy, launching the anniversary book.

Christ Church Parish celebrates 175 years

Christ Church Parish, Lisburn, celebrated its 175th anniversary with a weekend of special events from November 17-19.

On the Friday evening, people enjoyed music by the Howe family while viewing a 'Memory Lane' exhibition in the hall. At the dinner which followed, stories were shared by the Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev Alan Abernethy, Sir Jeffrey Donaldson, Maureen Doran, Jacqueline McComb and by hosts Tom Doran and Jim Fleming.

Bishop Alan launched a book recounting the life and witness of the parish.

The evening also provided the opportunity to celebrate the 25th anniversary of Richard Yarr as parish organist, choir master and director of music. Mrs Barbara Watson made a presentation to Richard.

Marie Anderson, Mildred Briggs and Robin Smythe received gifts for helping gather and shape the material for the book, while Iris Murphy and Beverley Ringland were presented with flowers for their dedication and time planning the weekend and the book.

The birthday cake was cut by Bishop Alan, Mrs Barbara Watson (People's Church Warden) and the rector, the Rev Paul Dundas. The evening finished with singing from Anna Dundas.

Sunday worship was enriched with talks from Connor Diocesan Children's Officer Jill Hamilton and the Very Rev Sam Wright, Dean of Connor and rector of Lisburn Cathedral. Thomas Coates, Emily Thompson, Beverley Ringland and Wesley Dickinson shared about their faith and being part of the church family.

Rev Dundas said: "To see so many people attending as well as former curates, parishioners and people from the community partnerships we have was such a blessing. There was so much mingling and sharing. A real sense of belonging and fellowship within our parish and community."

There was a visit from an ice cream van on

the Sunday morning, and a cake to help in celebrations at both Sunday services, with Mr Jim Anderson cutting the cake at the evening celebration.

The 'Memory Lane' exhibition chronicled the ministry of the parish through organisations and worship, allowing people to reminisce together. The rector expressed gratitude to Frank Higginson for taking so many photographs over the weekend.

He also thanked Richard Yarr and Julie Bell for their leadership and direction of the music groups and choirs, and everyone who worked to prepare for the weekend.

Chemistry award

Congratulations to Professor Tom Moody, Church Warden in St Colmanell's, Ahoghill, on winning the prestigious Institute of Chemistry of Ireland Industrial Chemistry Award 2017.

Professor Moody is Vice President, Technology Development and Commercialisation, at Almac & Arran Chemical Company. His team received the honour based on the excellence demonstrated within Almac Sciences' enzyme technology development research programme.

Looking back on Connor Synod 2017

Around 300 clergy and lay people came together in Carrickfergus Methodist Centre on October 18 for the annual Connor Diocesan Synod.

The business of Synod was preceded by a Service of Holy Communion in St Nicholas' Parish Church at 2pm.

In his Presidential Address, the Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev Alan Abernethy, who had a stent inserted in a blocked artery earlier in the year, spoke candidly about his health scare.

"There is much in the news about the health service but I am grateful for the care I was given and am still receiving," Bishop Alan said.

He stressed that he is now very well, adding: "There is no doubt that being faced clearly with my own mortality helped me

refocus and rethink how I exercise ministry and my personal priorities."

The Bishop said he would be taking a three-month sabbatical during which he proposed to write. "I have always found writing a wonderful way to recover the joy of calling and to renew faith, energy and excitement in this calling," he said. "There is a book slowly taking shape in my mind and heart and it is a book about Jesus for those who are not connected with church that fellow disciples might find helpful."

In his address, Bishop Alan also spoke about the re-organisation of diocesan administration. He referred to developments in ordained ministry, his

annual Lent Course, and urged people to remember Bishop Hilary and the people of Yei and South Sudan in their prayers.

Bishop Alan later presented a gift to Mr Jim Tweedie who retired as Honorary Lay Secretary. Mr Tweedie was a member of Connor Synod for 55 years, General Synod for 48 years, and a member of Diocesan Council for nearly 30 years.

The Bishop also expressed gratitude to Mr John Wallace who has chaired the Connor Finance Committee for many years.

Following the re-organisation of the Diocese, Mr Richard Cotter took up the new post of Finance and Administration Manager in January 2017. Mr Cotter spoke to Synod about his experience and his new role, and joined the Bishop in paying tribute to the team based at Church House.

Diocesan Development Officer Trevor Douglas spoke about the Centre of Mission Connect Base in Shankill Road. Mr Douglas said many projects had been initiated across the diocese and thanked the various funding bodies who had made this possible.

Diocesan Youth Officer Christina Baillie gave a presentation on youth activities, including the new Youth Forum, Summer Madness, Streetreach and a weekend residential in Castlewella. She said many young people were learning to be disciples and to lead others, but stressed that there are also young people struggling with mental health issues. "I would love to see our young people managing their own emotional well-being through a greater understanding of God, and to see our churches becoming a sanctuary for young people," Christina said.

Lay Secretary Ken Gibson expressed thanks to Bishop Alan on behalf of Lay members. "We appreciate that the work of one of the biggest dioceses in the Church of Ireland is a big task and we thank you for all that you do for us," Mr Gibson said.

The Rev Dr Alan McCann, on behalf of clergy, thanked the Bishop for his 'open door policy.' "We thank you for your support, prayers, and phone calls, not about work but about ourselves," he said.

Dinner was provided by St Nicholas' Parish in the parish hall. Synod resumed with representatives of Ballymoney and Glenavy Parishes talking about the challenges of mission and ministry.

A keynote address from a Methodist perspective was delivered by the Rev Dr Heather Morris. Her talk was entitled 'The call of God on our lives and witness.'



Synod members make their way to Carrickfergus Methodist Centre for the business sessions.

Rathcoole commemorates Reformation

St Comgall's, Rathcoole commemorated the 500th anniversary of the start of the Protestant Reformation with a service and exhibition.

Priest-in-charge, the Rev Arlene Moore, said: "We wanted to do something to help the congregation share their faith and reach out to others with the love of God and as a way of bringing the Reformation alive."

Mr Tom Nelson put together a commemorative booklet, and the order of service was compiled using elements from various denominational traditions.

On the Sunday of the anniversary there was an exhibition partly based on the Luther1517 project booklet 'Luther's life in Ten Objects', put together as a joint initiative between the Linenhall Library, Belfast and the Orange Order.

The children were introduced to the symbolism of Luther's rose. Ninety five key facts about Luther's life were woven into the sermon. A scroll containing 95 ideas for random acts of kindness/service and 95 equivalent supporting Scriptures was pinned to the outside of the front door as a statement of protest at human self-centredness, and a desire to repent.

Top award for St Matthew's Guides

Congratulations to St Matthew's Guide unit, 41st Belfast, which has been

awarded Girlguiding's 'Doing our Best' Quality Mark.



The St Matthew's guides and leaders receive their Quality Mark.

During the year, the girls gathered evidence of their programme, policies and procedures, and these were reviewed by Girlguiding and Ambition.

Awarding the 'Doing Our Best' Quality Mark and Badge, the assessors congratulated the team on providing 'high quality experiences for your girls and young women.'

The Ulster Chief Commissioner Brenda Herron and the Deputy Chief Commissioner Tracey Brazier visited the Guides on November 1 to present them with their Quality Champions' Certificate and a Quality Champions' badge for each of the Guides and their Leaders. Less than 200 Guide units across the UK have been awarded this Quality Mark.

A day of festivities!

Young people converged on Ballymena on Saturday December 2 for some fabulous festivities as part of a day of outreach, fun and food!

During the afternoon, 25 young people and leaders gathered with the intention of encouraging local people across the town. The Connor Youth Forum planned the afternoon's outreach and the group went out into Ballymena, distributing free tea, coffee, Christmas cards and candy canes.

The young people encouraged many and prayed with a few people in the town. They returned for a hot meal before setting up for the evening event.

This was a great success with more than 90 attending from Ballymoney; Lower Shankill; Lisburn Cathedral; Church of the Resurrection; St Nicholas', Carrickfergus; All Saints', Antrim; Glenavy; Ballymena; Lambeg; and St Peter's, Belfast.

There were epic Christmas games, photo booth challenges and relay charades.

Christina Baillie, Diocesan Youth Officer,



Outreach in Ballymena town centre.

said: "It was fantastic to celebrate Christmas together before launching into a new programme of events for the youth of the diocese."

Thanks to Ballymena Parish, specifically Richard and Andrea Cotter for providing dinner, and Helen Weir, Lucy McLaughlin and Alan Scott for all their help on the day.

Magheragall JAM supports Baby Basics

Members of the JAM youth group in Magheragall Parish Church have been involved in the Baby Basics project.

In November and December they used a resource called 'The Justice Sessions,' a five-part study sponsored by the Church of Ireland Youth Department. The teenagers then followed up this Bible study course by supporting Baby Basics, linking helping mums and babies with the justice issues.

Baby Basics supports new mothers, and is

run by the North Belfast Centre of Mission.

During December, the young people collected items for Baby Basics and on January 7, Connor Children's Officer Jill Hamilton visited to pick them up.

The rector of Magheragall, the Rev Nicholas Dark, said: "The church as a whole was very interested and challenged to help in the future. Thanks to the JAM group, they have encouraged the parish to take on the project later in the year."

Streetreach 2018 open for applications

Streetreach 2018 - Connor Diocese's fantastic mission experience for young people - is now open for applications from young people and leaders.

Connor Youth Council will be partnering with Glenavy Parish for Streetreach for a second year, and the Streetreach team will again be joined by a group of Americans from Christ In Youth.

Young people who have completed Fourth Form/Year 11 can apply for the full residential option, and spaces for this are limited so will be offered on a first come first served basis.

Young people who have completed First Form/Year 8 can come on a daily non-residential option.

The Youth Council also welcomes applications from those aged over 18 to join in or come as a team leader, there is no upper age limit!!

Parishes can support those attending through prayer, attending the Streetreach Commissioning service, and by helping to fundraise towards their attendance.

Gareth Campbell, youth worker at Lisburn Cathedral and contributor to Streetreach, said: "Streetreach is a great opportunity following on from Summer Madness to allow young people to respond in their faith and put it into practice."

Applications can be downloaded from the Connor website. Further information from Diocesan Youth Officer Christina Baillie on 07753 312405 or email christinabaillie@connordiocese.org



The Rev Mark McConnell and Ballymena and Kilconriola parishioners on Vision Sunday, when the parish launched its plans for future mission and ministry.

Ballymena Parish shares its vision

The parish of Ballymena and Kilconriola has a vision for the future – a vision of community with the goal of bringing more people into the Church family.

The vision was launched at a combined service on October 15, when parishioners were joined by Bishop Ken Clarke who had helped in the preparation of the plans.

The parish launched a leaflet highlighting new initiatives. The rector, the Rev Mark McConnell, said: “We are hopeful that, with the ongoing prayerful and practical encouragement of our Church family, we will realise something of God’s vision for Ballymena.”

One of the key initiatives is the contemporary ‘New Life’ Service every Sunday morning in St Patrick’s Church at 10am. The service has a modern feel and is designed for all, regardless of age or church background. It includes a dedicated Sunday School and refreshments after the service.

‘New Life’ will be an addition to the existing Sunday services on offer at St Patrick’s.

Church members are also visiting local shops and offices. “This town centre chaplaincy will offer direct prayer support, including a dedicated prayer line, friendship, appreciation, listening and gentle evangelism,” Mark said.

There will also be concentrated ‘area-by-area’ visitations and prayer walks to help the parish connect with present and lapsed members. The heart of this project will be to offer prayer ministry to all.

The parish also launched its 3Ts Parish Development Programme to be implemented in spring. Parishioners will be

advised of all new and existing ministries, and will be invited to respond in terms of their Time, their Talent and their Treasure.

Mark said: “Encouraging a genuine faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and providing a Church environment which is welcoming, supportive and encouraging to every believer is more important than ever and remains our first job as a parish.”

He said the new parish initiatives are also key steps towards providing an environment where people can develop and grow a genuine and living faith.

The parish also offers other ministry opportunities through its Christ-Centred Fellowship Groups and Home Groups, including the Men’s Fellowship group, a new Woman’s Fellowship and ‘The Way,’ a new Youth Fellowship group.

St Patrick’s, Ballyclug, will be developed as a venue for Gospel Music Evenings.

Elements of the ‘New Life’ contemporary service will be incorporated into the monthly Family Service at St Columba’s Church and it is also hoped that Messy Church can also be run at St Columba’s.

Overseas Mission Opportunities will be explored. Mark highlighted the many established activities and organisations which offer much to the community of Ballymena. They include the Bellringers, the Bible Fellowship, the Healer Prayer group, the Ladies’ Circle, and Mothers and Toddlers and various youth-focused organisations affiliated with the parish.

Lent Reflection from Christian Aid

The Bible gives us a dramatic picture of wilderness, from the Israelites’ 40-year search for the promised land, to the 40 days Jesus spent in the desert fasting and praying. Every Lent, we travel once more into the wilderness, following Jesus on his journey through the desert, to the Cross and, ultimately, to death.

Just like difficult stories on the news, the wilderness is something we often try to avoid confronting. But for millions of our sisters and brothers across the world, living in the wilderness is all too real. Millions have been forced from their homes for many reasons: Conflict, drought, danger and fear. Two thirds of displaced people globally are seeking safety within their own country, and they’re often ignored by the international community and unprotected. Having experienced severe trauma, they create a life for themselves and their families in unfamiliar surroundings, with little support.

Yet even in the darkest moments there is still hope in God. As we arrive at Easter, the risen Christ welcome us in from the wilderness with the promise of new life. In Jesus’ death and resurrection, we witness God’s love, a love so strong that it even overcomes the grave.

This Lent, we invite you to step into those places of deep suffering and deep hope as we walk with the 40 million internally displaced people in our world today.

To join us in the journey contact: 028 9064 8133 or Belfast@christian-aid.org

Baptism in Lisburn



Ryan McGucken is baptised during a full immersion Baptism and Confirmation Service in Lisburn Cathedral on December 4.



Ken Tate took pictures of the stunning views on the trek in to the start of the Everest Marathon.

A 'brutal' challenge for Ken at Everest

Ken Tate, Sexton at St George's Parish Church, Belfast, returned to the Himalayas in November to take part in his second Everest Marathon and in doing so raised hundreds of pounds for people in need in Nepal.

It was a mammoth challenge for Ken, who at 65 was close to the upper age limit allowed for participants.

He had said from the outset that the key factor in a successful race was getting to the start line in good health. And much to Ken's disappointment, a stomach bug in the days leading up to the race meant he was weakened and dehydrated.

A veteran of many marathons and ultra races around the world, Ken refused to give up, and took his place in the starting line-up close to Everest Base Camp at 6.30am on November 27.

He described conditions on race day as 'brutal,' with the temperature just before the start reading minus 22 degrees.

Ken began running determined, despite his illness, to do what he had set out to do – complete a second Everest Marathon 10 years after he finished his first. But luck was not on his side on this occasion. Ken took a tumble five miles into the race.

Battered and bruised, he carried on to a first-aid post where he discovered he had ripped off one of his big toenails. At another first-aid post at the 20-mile mark, nine hours after starting the race, Ken was told by doctors that he had to retire from the race on medical grounds. It was a devastating blow.

The race came at the end of a three-week acclimatisation period which all competitors had to take part in. Ken spent a few days enjoying the sights of the Nepalese capital Kathmandu before flying to Lukla Airport, described by some as the most dangerous airport in the world!

From Lukla, the marathon team trekked to Everest Base Camp, a challenge in itself. "The trek in was significantly more difficult than I remember," Ken said. "What I remembered as being just a normal wee day's walking turned into 7-8 hour hikes. I didn't acclimatise as well as last time.

ALTITUDE

"It is all about the altitude. Days are not measured in terms of kilometres or miles, but on the elevation. We trekked for 15 days. We slept mostly in tents, although there were some lodges. The area has been considerably developed since I was last there.

"But conditions are still fairly primitive. A lodge is a hut or a shed allowing you to sleep off the ground, but at night it was bitterly cold. During the day it was quite balmy with temperatures up to the mid-20s, but as soon as the sun went behind the mountains it was like opening a freezer door and standing in front of it."

The bulk of the group's equipment was

carried by Sherpas and yaks. The trek in was along dry trails, crossing mountain valleys, with steep descents and, inevitably, steep ascents on the other side. "The trajectory was generally upwards!" said Ken.

"Before I left I said that the essential thing was getting to the start line healthy. Unfortunately I took ill three days before the race, intestinal difficulty of almost catastrophic proportions, but there was nothing for it but to keep going.

"The big difficulty is you are trying to rehydrate, but already you are drinking five litres of water a day and then you are faced with the added burden of trying to drink even more.

"On race day I was very weak but thought that somehow or other I would be able to manage it. There really was no option. There is only one way back down unless it is a real emergency.

"It was bitterly, bitterly cold. I had woken at 3am to get ready and had had hardly any sleep. At 17,000 feet a lot of us were starting to suffer noticeable effects of acute mountain sickness and the only satisfactory way of dealing with that is to descend to lower altitude."

But Ken's situation was made worse when he fell. "I jammed one pole in between boulders and it broke, and the other snapped as I fell," he said. "This was around 5-6 miles and I had to keep going to the next medical station. The doctor found I had ripped my big toenail entirely off my left foot. She bound it up with surgical tape and said there was nothing else she could do. I was reduced to hobbling by this stage."

Ken bravely carried on to the next medical station which was just five miles short of the finish in Namche Bazaar. Here the medics told him not to carry on. "It was quite dispiriting, but had I gone against medical advice I would have been disqualified anyway," he said. "If I had chosen to go on it would also have been putting other team members in danger."

He believes this was one of the most gruelling of the 17 Everest Marathons run since the race began in 1987. "The attrition rate was probably more than 10 per cent. I expected it to be less than five per cent. Conditions on the day were absolutely brutal and that was the undoing of a number of people. Of course there were others who just breezed through it," he said.

"I would have been better if I had been ill the previous week, rather than just before the race. I could not take on enough liquids



Ken Tate in a local town in Nepal en route to the start point of the marathon near Everest Base Camp.

to rehydrate. I was fighting a losing battle.”

Ken and the other participants had a day of rest in Namche Bazaar, and most of the party then walked back to Lukla. “I was so unwell I was taken down in a helicopter along with several others,” Ken said. “I was suffering from general debilitation, exhaustion, cuts and bruises, but my foot bothered me the most which is why I didn’t want to do the long walk out.”

TOUGHER

Looking back on his experience Ken said it was much tougher than he had anticipated. “The additional years on my age were probably a significant factor, and the difficulties I had acclimatising to the altitude, but mostly it was my illness coming up to race day,” he said.

Nonetheless Ken returned from this Everest adventure with plenty of positive memories. “Nepal is a beautiful country with wonderful people. On the race route there is a Buddhist Monastery and I got to spend some time there.

“It is a quite mythical region. A very different

cultural experience for people coming from the west. People live their lives in a different way. There is nothing with wheels, no vehicles of any sort, everything is transported by person or yak.”

Ken describes his feelings about the race as ‘ambivalent.’ “On an intellectual level I know that it was a wonderful experience and success on the day is getting everyone down safe and sound without any major injury or loss of life. But on an ego-driven level, as athletes tend to be, I am disappointed it did not go the way I wanted.”

Ken is now contemplating his next running challenge. As for Everest, well, even this latest experience has not totally deterred him. “I cannot take part in the race again [maximum age is 66 and the race is run every other year] which is fortunate as it takes it out of my hands rather than me thinking let’s have one more go...”

Ken’s efforts raised £1,000 for the Everest Marathon Fund which supports charities with a continuous development programme and works with local people at grassroots level.

Ahoghill and Portglenone are certified Safe Spaces

Parishioners from St Colmanell’s, Ahoghill, collected toiletries for Woman’s Aid at their Harvest.

This followed training the rector, the Rev Gary Millar, and two parishioners completed with ONUS who delivered Safe Space Training in Ballymena.

St Colmanell’s and Portglenone churches are now certified Safe Spaces - places where abuse of any sort is unacceptable and where those being abused may seek help.



Rector of Ahoghill and Portglenone, the Rev Gary Millar, presents items to Hannah from Women’s Aid.

All Saints’ harvest focus on Foodbank

All Saints’, Belfast, included the SouthBelfast Foodbank as a major focus of its Harvest celebrations this year.

Instead of providing the full amount of fresh produce to decorate the church, parishioners were asked to provide a portion of non-perishable food as donations for the food bank.

The Harvest celebration was led by the rector, the Rev Trevor Johnston, and Mr Colin Morris, Crosslinks staff worker, was guest speaker.

Total donations came to 233.5kg of food - enough to completely fill the boot and back seats of a large people carrier.

Boxes for Pakistan

Over the Harvest weekend, Magheragall Parish collected food for Lisburn Food Bank. For the last seven years the parish has also supported Blythwood Care’s Shoebox Appeal and over that period has made up 1,321 completed Boxes.

This year the team completed 230 boxes which were sent from Magheragall to Pakistan in time for Christmas.



Dean-Elect, Archdeacon Stephen Forde, accepts a donation on the steps of St Anne's as part of his training for the role of Black Santa in December 2018.

Trainee Black Santa joins Appeal launch

Anyone passing Belfast Cathedral on December 18 might have been somewhat surprised to see a Black Santa sporting L-plates as Dean-Elect, Archdeacon Stephen Forde, joined the Cathedral team to get some training in for taking on the role this year.

The Cathedral was in the unique position of being between Deans over Christmas, but a team of Black Santas ensured the tradition continued uninterrupted.

This was the 41st annual Sit-out since the appeal was founded by Dean Sammy Crooks in 1976, and the Bishops of Connor and Down & Dromore, and Canons of the Cathedral and other staff, dressed in black, were on the Cathedral steps each day from December 18-23.

At time of going to print, funds raised by the 2017 Sit-out were still being tallied, and the money will be distributed to charities at the Good Samaritans Service which this year takes place on Sunday March 4.

Antrim tree festival

All Saints' Parish Church, Antrim, hosted a very successful Christmas Tree Festival from November 30-December 3.

Proceeds from the 'The Son of God : Love's Pure Light' festival were donated to Lough Neagh Rescue and Macmillan Cancer Support.

The festival included a free Christmas concert by the Harlandic Male Voice Choir, a Christingle Service organised by Connor Mothers' Union and the Antrim Town Community Carol Service.

Archdeacon Stephen McBride, Vicar of Antrim, said: "The church looked spectacular. The trees were really imaginative and the festival brought people in from the fringes of the parish."

MBE for dedicated fundraiser Cynthia

Cynthia Cherry, treasurer in Antrim Parish and a Connor Diocesan Council member, was awarded an MBE in the Queen's New Year Honours for 'Service to the community and charitable fundraising.'

A retired bank manager, Cynthia has raised huge sums for a variety of charities. Her involvement in community work started when she was just 25 when, along with two others, she founded Antrim Junior Chamber, and she is now a lifelong member as a Senator.

She was inspired to begin fundraising following a routine mammogram at Antrim Hospital. "We were asked to wait in the maternity ward. Here were girls with breast cancer surrounded by posters encouraging mothers to breast feed which I did not feel was right. When I asked, I was told that it would take £250,000 to provide a waiting room," Cynthia said.

"I lobbied the Northern Health Trust and was told that it would put in £200,000 if I could raise £50,000.

"I was in the pulpit of every church of every denomination in the Northern Board area every Sunday morning after that asking people to do something to help get the money. In 51 weeks, with the help of many others, £55,000 was raised.

"When I went to the Board with this they asked me if I could raise another £30,000 for an ultra-sound for the breast screening unit."

Cynthia did not want to go back to the same people asking for more money, so she decided to do something she had never done before – run a marathon! She competed in London in 2004 and raised the £30,000 and more.

During the time she collected the £50,000 for the waiting room, Cynthia was also fundraising for a swimming pool for Muckamore Abbey.

After retiring from the Northern Bank at the age of 50, she began working part-time as a practice manager for Templepatrick Surgery. Through this she encountered people who needed funds to support them in their everyday life.

She was asked to help buy a specialist swimming suit for a five-year-old girl who had lost both her legs and an arm due to meningitis. Cynthia met a well-known celebrity who donated a signed postcard



Mrs Cynthia Cherry MBE.

to auction. This raised £1,000, enough to buy the girl two swim suits, one to wear and one for when she grew bigger.

"That wee girl is now doing her own walks for Meningitis Research and is at University. She does dressage with the Irish team and was awarded a British Empire Medal last year," said Cynthia. "It means a lot to see how well she and others are doing."

Cynthia always resisted tying herself to one charity. "I always said I don't belong to any charity and if I see a need I will raise the money. I still do that."

She has, however, been a huge supporter of Macmillan, and established the Antrim Walk to help raise £200,000 towards £500,000 that was needed for a new Macmillan unit.

A 100-mile walk, which she did three years ago, was also for Macmillan. She has since joined Macmillan and has organised many fundraising activity days at Antrim Lough Shore for schools and youth groups.

Cynthia is currently Head of the Northern Ireland Forum of Volunteers. She is also treasurer and secretary of the Friends of Templepatrick Surgery, and in addition to her duties in Antrim Parish and on Diocesan Council she is on the Diocesan Finance Committee, the RB and the Clergy Pension Board.

Of her MBE, she said: "I am absolutely delighted. As it is for community and charity I see it as an Award for the hundreds and thousands of people who have helped me. I could not have done it without that help and all the people who have subscribed to my fundraising."



At the MU vigil are, from left: Rosemary Burnside; Joan Allen; Cathy Dolg; Alberta Miskimmon; Guest speaker Karen Douglas; Valerie Ash, Diocesan President; and Geraldine Montgomery.

Shoes tell a story at Mothers' Union vigil

Connor Diocese Mothers' Union held a vigil as part of the MU's 16 Days of Action Against Gender-Based Violence.

This was hosted by the Belfast Cathedral branch. Members from other branches and the Diocesan Trustees attended. They were welcomed by the Area Chairman Alberta Miskimmon, who explained about the Mothers' Union campaign and the various forms this kind of violence can take.

The guest speaker was Karen Douglas from The Rowan Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) which is located in the grounds of Antrim Hospital. Mrs Valerie Ash, Diocesan President, said: "Karen opened our eyes to the extent of this kind of violence and to how much support can be offered to victims."

Last September some members from Connor attended the MU General Meeting in Edinburgh where they saw an exhibition entitled 'These were the shoes I wore when...'

"This was an exhibition of about 40 pairs of shoes, each with a caption which really



'These were the shoes I wore when...'

enabled me to feel as if I was in the shoes of the victim," Valerie said, describing it as a very powerful exhibition raising awareness of sexual violence.

Valerie thanked Geraldine Montgomery who expanded this idea into an exhibition for the vigil in Mid Belfast. "The members found it very emotional and thought-provoking," Valerie said. The meeting concluded with the Vigil service provided by All Ireland.

Diocese represented at General Meeting

The Diocese of Connor was well represented at the MU General Meeting held in Edinburgh at the end of September.

Connor Diocesan President, Valerie Ash, a number of former Diocesan Presidents, present Trustees and diocesan branch members - together with many of their spouses - joined with MU All Ireland President, Phyllis Grothier, and members from branches in Ireland.

They attended the opening service in a

packed St Mary's Cathedral on the Friday.

The conference took place on the Saturday in the Edinburgh International Conference Centre, when the special speaker was Canon Sarah Snyder, the Archbishop of Canterbury's Special Advisor on Reconciliation.

Members agreed the conference was most enjoyable, with time and opportunities to develop existing friendships and establish new contacts and links.

Private honour for Lord Lieutenant

Mrs Joan Christie, Lord Lieutenant of Co Antrim and a parishioner of Agherton Parish Church, received the Commander of the Victorian Order (CVO) in the recent New Year Honours.

Mrs Christie has been Lord Lieutenant since 2008, and has welcomed international and Royal visitors.

The CVO is a private honour distributed by the Queen and Mrs Christie said she was delighted and very humbled by it.



Mrs Joan Christie MBE, OBE, CVO.

Mrs Christie is due to finish her role as Lord Lieutenant in June 2019 when she will be 75. "I've had the most amazing nine years. I'm looking forward to the final year and a half," she said. "Co Antrim is a great county to be the Lord Lieutenant of - you get so many opportunities with the international airport falling in this area. For example at the G8 conference I got to meet and greet President Obama, President Hollande and President Putin."

Mrs Christie received an MBE for services to government in 1976 and in 2005 she was awarded an OBE for services to education. She was awarded the freedom of the borough for Mid and East Antrim Council last year.

Mrs Christie has been a parishioner at the Church of St John the Baptist, Agherton Parish, Portstewart, for the past 20 years.

A happy 100th!



Miss Charlotte Dickson, a parishioner at Magheragall, celebrated her 100th birthday on November 29. The Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev Alan Abernethy, and her rector, the Rev Nicholas Dark, called in to wish her happy birthday!

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