

CONNOR

connections

The Jewel
in the Mess
book launch
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The magazine for the Diocese of Connor Summer 2019



Jim and Rosemary Patterson at Windsor Castle, where Jim was presented with a gift of Maundy money by Her Majesty the Queen.

Maundy money gift for 'faithful service'

Ballysillan parishioner Jim Patterson was presented with the gift of Maundy money by Her Majesty the Queen in Windsor on Maundy Thursday.

Jim was nominated for the Royal Maundy gift by the Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev Alan Abernethy, and was accompanied to St George's Chapel in Windsor on April 18 by his wife Rosemary, former Personal Assistant to the Bishop.

Jim was one of 93 men and 93 women to receive the Maundy Purse this year. The number distributed correlated to Her Majesty's age.

Jim said the day at Windsor Castle had been 'absolutely brilliant.' "We had a bird's eye view of the Queen all the way through the service. When she smiles her whole face lights up," he said.

"We were told that distributing the Maundy money was the only job she will not let anyone else do as long as she is able, as she sees it as part of her Christian duty."

Royal Maundy is one of the most ancient ceremonies retained in the Church of England. This year Her Majesty was accompanied by Princess Eugenie.

Monarchs including Elizabeth I have taken part in the custom, which commemorates the Maundy and Last Supper of Jesus Christ with the Apostles. The Queen offers 'alms' to retired pensioners, who have been recommended by clergy and

ministers of all denominations in recognition of their service to the church and to the local community.

Jim said the Queen moved up and down the aisles of the Chapel, personally presenting the Maundy Purse to each of the 93 men and 93 women. "We were told to say 'Thank you, Your Majesty' and bow. The Queen replied 'thank you,' and moved on," Jim said.

“ It was very humbling ... This was the Queen's gift to us. ”

Sitting beside Jim, Rosemary was also very close to the Queen. "The service was awesome," said Rosemary. "The Queen was radiant, I could not take my eyes off her. I felt very emotional when she gave Jim his money. She was beaming from ear to ear. She was beautiful."

Following the service in the Chapel, all the recipients were invited to the State Apartments at Windsor Castle for a reception.

Rosemary and Jim opted to walk to the Castle through the gardens in the sunshine, and spent a couple of hours enjoying the reception and viewing exhibits, including the dresses worn by Princesses Eugenie and Beatrice at Eugenie's wedding held in St George's Chapel last October.

When he nominated Jim for the Maundy money, Bishop Alan said Jim's commitment and faithful service to St Mark's over 40 years could not be overestimated.

"He and Rosemary remained in their community during a very tumultuous period of the Troubles. They continued to live, worship and serve in St Mark's and the diocese, and share their faith within their community," Bishop Alan said.

Jim, 76, was baptised and confirmed in St Mark's. He married Rosemary there in 1974 and they still worship in the parish.

Jim's roles within St Mark's have included Select Vestry member from 1966 until the present, Honorary Treasurer of the Parish from 2000 to the present, and he has been rector's churchwarden since 2003.

Jim has also held the roles of Diocesan Council member and Glebes Secretary within the Diocese of Connor and has been a member of the Church of Ireland General Synod for decades.

Jim grew up on the Upper Crumlin Road, and has never lived outside the parish boundary of St Mark's. He began his career in the printing business with the firm of WW Cleland in Durham Street, and remained with the same company, through its many changes, until he retired in 2006.

Reflecting on the day at Windsor, Jim said: "It was very humbling in many ways. The Lord High Almoner explained to us that this was the Queen's gift to us, this was her chance to honour ordinary people."

He added: "Thousands of people have done more than I have done. It was just fortunate that Bishop Alan picked me out of a number of others he could have chosen."

Another recipient of the Maundy money was Mrs Mary McGrath who was also nominated by Bishop Alan, with the help of the Roman Catholic Bishop, Noel Treanor, as Bishop Alan wanted to reflect the excellent relationship that exists between the Diocese of Connor and the Diocese of Down and Connor.

Mary, originally from the Falls Road, now lives in Randalstown, and has served the Apostolic Work Society for more than 50 years.

Summer 2019

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Cover photo:

Sunflowers like this will form a stunning display beside Whitepark Road, Portrush, later this summer, as part of a fundraiser. Full story on this page.

Photo: Helen Anderson



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

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Time to be refreshed

Dear Friends. As I write this column, the Easter season is about to finish. I have valued the time to reflect on the Easter stories and experience afresh the risen power of Jesus as a disciple and church leader.

This edition of 'Connor Connections' reflects Kingdom work locally and globally and the many partnerships that continue across the miles. In particular, it is encouraging to see the reopening of Yei Vocational Training Centre after a recent visit by Billy Smyth. We see parishes and churches raising funds especially through cycle rides. Alongside this is the local outreach of parishes in their community.

We welcome new clergy to the diocese as they begin a new ministry in their parishes, as well as seeing new responsibilities for Canon Kevin Graham as the Director

of Ordinands, the Rev Peter Jones as Warden of Readers and Mrs Sally Cotter as Diocesan President of the Mothers' Union. We give thanks for the ministry and service of Canon Will Murphy as Director of Ordinands.

We continue to uphold in prayer Bishop Alan in his treatment for cancer and pray for the Lord's peace, presence and healing for him and His strength for his family. We were delighted that he was able to launch his new book, 'The Jewel in the Mess,' before he started his new treatment.

Finally, if you find time for a holiday locally or abroad, support the local church where you are and pray for its ministry and mission. Take time to be refreshed spiritually.

Archdeacon Paul Dundas

Sunflower display - a sight to behold!

Later this summer, a section of land running alongside the Whitepark Road in Portrush will be ablaze with colour as hundreds of sunflowers dance side by side.

It will be a sight to behold, and farmer Archie Linnegan, a parishioner of Holy Trinity Parish Church, Ballywillan, is hoping visitors to the north coast will swing by Whitepark Road to enjoy the display.

Former glebeward Archie is planting the sunflowers as a fundraiser for the church building fund and the Liver Support Group at the Royal Victoria Hospital. He plans to put an honesty box at the roadside for passers-by to make donations.

Archie has planted 10 kilos of sunflower

seeds on a half acre plot running lengthwise along the roadside. At the launch of the project at the parish family service on June 9, he gave the children potted sunflower seedlings to take home – eventually the children will measure their sunflowers to see whose has grown the biggest!

The sunflowers will be at their prime in the second part of August. "People are always looking for something to do. They may drive up just to look around for a few minutes," Archie said.

"I am probably the only person in Ballywillan Parish with a farm. That in itself is generating interest!"



Relentless Prayer in North and West Belfast

During Lent, 29 churches and Christian communities in North and West Belfast, along with two schools and a youth club, worked together to encourage people to pray for themselves, their churches and their local communities, providing prayer space each day. The 'Relentless' initiative, started last year by the Rev Canon Jim Carson and Heather Carson in Lower Shankill, encourages people to pray and ask for God's blessing and healing on the people and life of their communities. Representatives of some of the communities taking part in Relentless 2019 in North and West Belfast are pictured at the launch service in St Stephen's on March 3.

SERVE leadership programme to be launched in September

Connor Youth Council will be launching the SERVE leadership programme, developed by Tim Burns, Diocesan Youth Officer for Down & Dromore, in September.

The course will be led by the Rev Philip Benson and Connor Youth Officer Christina Baillie.

It helps young people aged 15-19 to explore leadership, and equips them to lead in their local parish context.

Christina said: "We believe it will enthuse young people to develop in their leadership capacity, and then challenge them to glorify God by serving in their church family."

Further details at www.connor.angican.org.

Connor Takes the Castle 2019

Applications are open for the annual Connor youth diocesan discipleship weekend from September 6-8.

Diocesan Youth Officer Christina Baillie said: "Connor Youth Council would love to see youth leaders bring groups of young people from parishes across the diocese to join them for a fully planned weekend, taking place in Castlewellsan Castle. The weekend is for all young people aged 11-18 to attend with their leaders.

"There will be sessions led by The Big House; worship; small group time as well as big activities including Soft Arrow Combat and Salt Factory Sports for the Saturday afternoon slot."

Get set for Streetreach!

Streetreach 2019 will partner with Mossley Parish to facilitate a local missional experience for the young people of the diocese.

The team will work alongside parish members to run a kids' club, outreach to families, practical work and a community event.

A commissioning service for Streetreach took place in the Church of the Holy Spirit, Mossley, on June 16. The team was commissioned by Archdeacon George Davison.



A place to ask the right questions

Affirm, a new project to support young people going through difficulty, is making an impact on young lives across Connor Diocese.

Affirm was launched by Connor Youth Officer Christina Baillie last October. The project makes use of local expertise through different established organisations, specifically The Big House.

Training sessions for youth groups have taken place in Ballymena, Lambeg and St Stephen and St Luke's parishes, and several teenage girls took part in 'Made for More,' a girls' residential weekend organised by The Big House and held at Whitepark Bay Youth Hostel in April.

Together with The Big House, Christina is currently working on a resource which will be launched at the Connor Takes the Castle weekend in September.

Project Director of The Big House, Mark Kernohan, said: "We have a vision of having a place where young people can come and feel safe, but until we get a house, we have been going out to churches and speaking to young people about difficult issues, and exploring what a safe place looks like within the church.

"We talk about how they manage their difficulties, and about healthy coping mechanisms."

Mark said one of the hardest places for young people to face difficulty is in church.

"We find there is a perception among young people that you should not have any problems if you have Jesus. Young people are afraid to say that they are struggling when they are told that if they read the Bible more often they will be able to cope."

He said social media, where people tend to profile all the good things in their lives, added to young people's problems. "They are left to think that their own life is rubbish," he said. "It is still early in terms of research into the impact of social media, but it is already clear the influence it has. Social Media presents a façade, not real life."

Christina said social media can also have its benefits. "If a young person is facing difficulties they are connected with others 24/7, and can send a cry for help to a friend even in the middle of the night," she said. "Social media can be helpful in terms of getting support, but the negative is that it can also be used for bullying."

The Big House offers counselling services on a one-to-one basis to young people at clinics normally held on the north coast. Young people who attend are referred to the project, generally by their parents.

The residential retreats, like that held in April, are purposely kept small, with 14

young people being supported by 12 staff and volunteers. "The residential offers the experience to get away somewhere beautiful where they can find Jesus in difficulty," Mark said.

"We offer a place for everybody, the young person may be accompanied by a friend or youth leader."

Christina said it was her own experiences that inspired her to seek the resources to launch Affirm. "For me personally, part of it was being a teenager and feeling overwhelmed and not sure how this related to church and faith. Then, as a young adult, seeing my peers still struggling with it," she said.

"We have not fixed ourselves yet and we probably haven't even found good ways of coping. I worry about the next generation. I worry that they will continue to struggle and in 10 years' time will not be equipped to deal with issues and particularly how this relates to faith.

"I have had conversations with clergy and youth leaders about these issues, and see that they are prevalent in our churches."

Mark said: "Most church youth leaders will say their kids are okay, but we talk with them and find they are not - they are afraid to tell their leaders how they feel.

"The church has some amazing people there for young people, but we need to be equipped and ahead of the game and I fear we are lagging."

The Big House has six part-time staff and works primarily with churches, although the organisation has also had conversations

with Scripture Union groups and helps resource other youth organisations.

All its resources are faith based. The new resource, to be launched at the Connor youth weekend in September, will focus on healthy coping. "We will be putting forward 20 different healthy coping mechanisms, and in our explanation of each of these there is a theological or biblical basis of how we can engage in that coping mechanism as Christians," Christina said.

She wants youth groups in the diocese to use the resource to help young people talk about their difficulties. "For me, a purpose of this project is to support clergy, leaders and youth workers, telling them there is an excellent organisation in Northern Ireland to support you. The next step is that our leaders are able to facilitate safe spaces with young people coming forward to talk about difficulties, not something they try to avoid. It should be part of our teaching and part of our structure."

Mark added: "It is not hard for young people to open up once we ask them the right questions. This new resource encourages people to open up in a safe and healthy way."

There will be a special 'listening space' provided at the Connor Takes the Castle weekend where young people can talk to someone confidentially if they wish.

The youth weekend marks the beginning of the second year of the Affirm project, which has been funded for two years by the Church of Ireland Priorities Fund.

To learn more about The Big House, visit www.thebighouse.org.uk.

I learnt God is with me - no matter what

When I was 14, my youth leader suggested a Big House camp to me. Our youth leader said the camp would be fun and a chance to hear more about who God says we are, writes a **young person**.

When we arrived, the team helped us settle and get to know the other girls. Everyone was new to camp, so it wasn't that hard to make friends.

I really enjoyed all the games on the beach, the music and the crafts. But what stood out for me the most was the way the team talked about God. I learnt that God loves me and is with me, no matter what is happening in my life, and He says incredible things about who He has made me to be (loved, forgiven, cherished).

I really enjoyed spending time in the prayer room, and learning new ways about how to relax and talk to God about absolutely anything. One of my other favourite things about camp was having the chance to chat to someone in The Listening Space about my exam worries. She helped me come up with helpful things to do when I feel stressed, and these really helped me during my GCSEs.

I was helped to give the right support

I contacted Big House when I wasn't sure how to best support a young person who was struggling with her mental health and finding some situations at home difficult, writes a **youth leader**.

She had signed up for a residential programme with the youth group, and I had some uncertainties about whether I could offer the right level of care for her.

Big House walked through my concerns. They gave me practical advice on how to approach the weekend with the young person and the best way to ensure we put the right support in place with her. They suggested things I hadn't thought of, and also reassured me of what I could do.

During the training they provided us as leaders, I learned about healthy and unhealthy coping mechanisms. I was able to walk through these with the young person as we prepared for the residential, and when we were away. I was able to encourage her to keep using the healthy coping strategies at different times when she was finding things difficult.

Thanks to Big House, I had more confidence in my role to support her.



Young pilots remembered

Young lives lost in the service of their country were honoured as the RAF Benevolent Fund marked its centenary in Belfast Cathedral on Sunday May 19.

The service was attended by veterans and senior figures in the Royal Air Force, including Air Vice-Marshal Harvey Smyth, and RAF Chaplain-in-Chief, the Venerable (Air Vice-Marshal) John Ellis QHC, who preached.

The service included the unveiling of the Roll of Honour for the pre-World War II Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve and the Receiving of the new No 502 (Ulster) Squadron Standard.

A unit of the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve (RAFVR) was formed in Belfast in January 1939. The Reservists came from all walks of life and social backgrounds.

More than 300 young men joined the RAFVR between January 1 1939 and May 1 1940. In September 1939, 140 were called to full time service and within six months of advanced training they were flying Lancaster bombers or Spitfire fighters over enemy-held territory. Sadly 92 were killed in action.



Some of those who took part in a Good Friday Prayer Walk from St Andrew's, Glencairn, to St Columba's, Whiterock.

Bushmills exhibition

The annual Bushmills Through the Wars exhibition, organised by Glenda Rodgers McCormick of Dunluce Parish Church, returns for its 13th year this July.

The exhibition commemorates the men from Bushmills village who died in both world wars. Proceeds this year go to the Bishops' Appeal and the Parish.

The exhibition runs from July 11-21. Displays include rations, fashions, women's role in the wars, evacuees and more.

Over the years, the exhibition has raised more than £40,000 for charity, and Glenda was awarded the British Empire Medal in this year's New Year's Honours list for her services to the community in Bushmills.

Not your average clerical life! says Will

Looking back on his years in ministry following his retirement as Connor Diocesan Director of Ordinands (DDO), the Rev Canon Will Murphy declares 'it was not your average clerical life!'

Indeed not, for since his ordination in 1973, Will has served as a curate, prison chaplain, RUC Reservist, TA padre, and Chaplain to the Church's Ministry to Deaf People. He was also awarded an MBE for his services to prison ministry.

Will retired as Connor DDO, a post he held for 27 years, at the end of April. He has been succeeded by the Rev Canon Kevin Graham, rector of Stranmillis.

Ordained in Lisburn Cathedral in 1973, Will was curate at the Cathedral for six years before doing a Chaplaincy Diploma in Deaf Ministry in England. He was appointed Superintendent of the Ulster Institute for the Deaf in 1979, a post which has evolved to become Chaplain to the Church of Ireland Ministry to Deaf People.

In 1983, Will was awarded a Travelling Fellowship by the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust (WCMT), enabling him to visit universities and churches for deaf people in Washington DC, Los Angeles and Edmonton, as well as a prison in Boston and rehabilitation centres for deaf people in Toronto and Dallas.

"I would encourage all in different aspects of ministry to consider applying for these Fellowships in their appropriate fields of expertise," Will said.

Will continues to carry out his chaplaincy to deaf people some four decades later, and can be found in the Kinghan Church in Belfast's Botanic Avenue most Sundays conducting a service for the deaf.

He was also Chaplain in the Maze Prison for 19 years.

He was appointed Diocesan Director of Ordinands by Bishop Samuel Poyntz, and has served in this role under Bishops Poyntz, James Moore, Alan Harper and Alan Abernethy.

"It has been an exciting 27 years under four Bishops, each one with their own particular slant on the work," said Canon Murphy. "I have got on remarkably well with them all."

CHALLENGES

Will took over as DDO from the Rev Brian Moller in 1992. "Challenges have always appealed to me. I knew nothing about the role," he admitted. "An ordination committee of lay and ordained people met four to five times a year chaired by the Bishop. This was abolished 10 years ago.

"The committee was a support for the DDO. It held a dinner every year for Members of the Fellowship of Vocation. The Fellowship still exists but not to the same extent. Then, everybody who wanted



Canon Will Murphy in Germany when he was a TA padre.



The Rev Canon Will Murphy MBE, who has retired as Connor Diocesan Director of Ordinands after 27 years.

to be ordained had to be a member for a couple of years before the Bishop would consider sending them to selection conference. Some people would have been in the Fellowship for years!

"Those were good years. We had bigger numbers. Everybody had to be contacted by letter, which was a colossal challenge. Communications were not instantaneous as they are today."

Will said that in the early days, his role was simply to recommend potential ordinands and send them to the Bishop for interview.

"When Alan Harper became Bishop he wanted me to be present at the interview, which kept me in the loop. Bishop Abernethy has maintained that. This kept me up to date with everyone's progress and that was invaluable," he said.

On average, six people are sent for ordination training from the diocese a year.

FOUNDATION

The new foundation access course, a part-time course of one year for potential ordinands and two years for Diocesan Readers, has seen the end of Non-Stipendary Ministry, which could be done on a part-time basis as the candidate continued to work elsewhere.

All ordinands must now do the full-time course (two years in the Theological Institute and one as a deacon in parish ministry) although at the end there is the option to be ordained to part-time ministry.

Candidates must be recommended by their rector. These days, candidates will leave the interview with the Bishop and DDO knowing whether they are going ahead to Selection Conference or not, or if their entry will be deferred.

Selection takes place over two days. "It



The Rev Canon Will Murphy during his time in the RUC Reserve.

is a challenging process. The Church is trying to identify your calling. Nowadays, I find more people have a greater depth of church experience, especially parish youth workers who feel a call to ministry," Will said.

"Youth workers did not exist 20 years ago. Curates did the job – successfully or unsuccessfully!

“ Seeing people ordained, seeing God’s call realised, that is fantastic. ”

"Under the old system, there was little focus on real-life parish ministry. Now you have a full year in a parish which is hands-on training. I believe this has improved the pastoral side of things dramatically."

Will said it is no longer compulsory to do Hebrew and Greek, although these subject are offered. "I would encourage any ordinands to follow this. I love these

languages and they are very useful. In 1978 I used them in my Master of Theology Degree and again in my Doctor of Ministry in 2007. I translated the Book of Ruth into a drama, and then translated it into sign language and the Hebrew again came to the fore. It is a lovely language."

Will said his greatest satisfaction as DDO was 'seeing people ordained, seeing God's call realised, that is fantastic.' "My greatest ministry was encouragement," he added.

Will is married to Joan, a former staff nurse who worked at both the Royal and City Hospitals, primarily in the breast cancer units. "She had a greater ministry than me," Will says of his wife.

They have three children, Kathryn, who lives in York, Hayley in Lisburn and Paul in Singapore, and six grandchildren.

SECURITY

Will was awarded an MBE for his work in prison ministry, but for security reasons, this was never announced locally. "I would have sat down with a cup of tea and spoken to the IRA in the Maze and took classes for UDA and IRA members in sign language. People asked me if I wasn't afraid of being poisoned. Maybe I was naïve, but I never saw the point of killing a Church of Ireland chaplain," he said.

"I worked closely with the Roman Catholic Chaplain, Father John Murphy, they called us the two spuds!"

Will also did 10 years' service with the RUC Reserve in the 1980s. "That was another interesting ministry, but somewhat bordering on the insane. I realised that it was highly risky to be seen in RUC uniform when prisoners were being released, so I left and changed my uniform for one worn by the Territorial Army (TA)!"

Will was TA padre throughout the 1990s, while also working as DDO. He was not allowed to carry a weapon, but took part in exercises at home and abroad.

"We weren't allowed to be sent to war zones in that time. The TA Reserve Force was not used until Afghanistan, when Regiments were sent out along with Padres," he said.

"I had to leave the TA when I was 55, so I settled down to do crosswords!

"It was not your usual clerical life. I couldn't be a rector, I wouldn't know how, although I loved my time in Lisburn Cathedral."

Will added: "I admire those taking on the ministry today. It has changed so dramatically since I was a curate."

Gratitude follows Hub's mega cycle



The Hub Chaplaincy's 400miles4Uganda team celebrates on the finishing line at Malin Head.

The Rev Barry Forde, Chaplain at Queen's University, Belfast, looks back on a four-day challenge which saw a team from the Hub Chaplaincy cycle from the bottom of Ireland to the top to raise funds for the charities Abaana and Waakisi.

Our '400miles4uganda' cycle has been completed, and with that comes a deep sense of gratitude. The idea was birthed in the melting pot of hairbrained schemes dreamed up by the Uganda 2019 mission team back in December last year. Since 2015 the Church of Ireland and Methodist Chaplaincy at Queen's (now reaching out across other campuses in the city) has partnered with two amazing organisations that carry out vital work in Uganda.

At the heart of the chaplaincy is a residential community that provides discipleship, care, encouragement and support to around 50 students each year who are in the throes of education before moving out into the world.

At the heart of Abaana and Waakisa are two residential communities that provide discipleship, care, encouragement and support to orphaned boys on the streets of Kampala, and young girls in crisis pregnancy situations, giving them an education along the way before helping them move out into the world.

The chaplaincy has sent two teams, in 2015 and 2017, to work with the charities. It sponsors several boys in Abaana's New Life Homes centre, and tithes its café takings towards both charities.

At the end of May 2019, a third team travelled to Uganda, and in preparation they had to raise funds and awareness for the team, and for Abaana and Waakisa. This is where the mad idea of cycling the length of Ireland came in.



The team in high spirits on the road.

A few of us had cycled together before, and within a matter of weeks, five were committed to going – James, myself, two members of the chaplaincy worshipping community, Peter Anderson and Chris McDowell, and James' father, Alex. James' mother Carol volunteered to drive a support vehicle. We set up a website and 400miles4uganda was born!

We drew up the cycle routes, donned all manner of ill-fitting lycra, and started to spread the word. This is where gratitude comes in. So many people got on board to support the cause. Some businesses known to us helped get the sponsorship up and running. The parishes of Christ Church, Lisburn, Belvoir, Desertcreat, and Seagoe very generously supported bun sales to make up for having to listen to me speak at their events and services.

Friends, family and work colleagues donated to the cause and our DCO and Church of Ireland Press Officer got the word out across the dioceses.

The 'News Letter' was in touch, and next thing I was cycling in front of Queen's wearing lycra and a dog collar. Not a good look! Stranmillis College invited us in to shoot a video about the cycle. Chain Reaction serviced the bikes and supplied us with nutrition and mechanical spares.

As the starting line got closer, the checks on the weather became more frequent, and the cheques for the charities kept coming in. By the time we set off on the morning of Friday May 3, we had already passed £10,000. Gratitude. Unfortunately, we still had to cycle over 400 miles.

What followed next was truly unforgettable. By this stage, a sixth cyclist was added to our ranks, as Armagh DCO Jonathan Hull joined us. A seventh cyclist, Andrew Campbell, a former University friend, joined us half-way through the second full day. Gratitude. Having two more sets of legs and lungs was an enormous help.

Along the way, we were richly blessed, and literally fuelled by amazing hospitality. It was such a privilege to see how the Church of Ireland could work together the length of the whole island.

The whole team was bowled over by the hospitality shown to us along the way.

Around 440 miles later, having cycled through the Caha Pass in Glengarriff, Molls Gap along the ring of Kerry, taken the beautiful crossing on the Shannon ferry, traversed around Spanish Point, the Cliffs of Moher, sampled the delights of Galway on a Bank Holiday weekend, navigated through Tuam, Sligo, Bundoran and Derry, we made it to Malin Town. Nine miles from our destination. Awaiting us were balloons, cakes, scones, and the best wishes of the parishioners of Malin. What a way to finish!

With one last round of carbohydrates and bad sugars suitably digested, the peloton made its way to Malin Head, 'resplendent'(!) in our custom-made '400miles4uganda' cycling jerseys, to be greeted by family and friends. Gratitude.

We made it. Safely, with no bumps or bruises, and only one puncture and a few sensitive backsides to speak of! All told, we rode for around 450 miles for Uganda.

We have now raised more than £17,900 for two amazing charities. The extra distance covered by weary legs pales (rather like the legs) into insignificance compared to how far this money will travel in Uganda. Gratitude. Deep, deep gratitude. Thank you to everyone who got on board, supported and prayed for us.

Thank you to the Church across the island. Thank you to God for all of it. Gratitude.



Lord Mayor of Lisburn and Castlereagh, Councillor Uel Mackin, jumped aboard with the team of Patrick's Mysterious Adventure on opening day at Christ Church, Lisburn.

Patrick's story comes to life in Lisburn

More than 600 people, including 360 children, learned all about Ireland's patron saint at Patrick's Mysterious Adventure in Christ Church, Lisburn.

The interactive exhibition and story trail in Christ Church Parish, Lisburn, ran from March 13 until March 16, with a special St Patrick's themed service on March 17.

The event was organised by Connor Children's Council. Jill Hamilton, Connor Children's Project Development Officer, and Karen Webb, North Belfast Centre of Mission, said it had been a great success.

"It was a privilege to bring Patrick's Mysterious Adventure to Christ Church and to work in close partnership with the clergy and parishioners," they said.

"We loved sharing the story of Patrick in such a creative and enjoyable way and were delighted so many local schools and members of the community participated.

"Our special thanks to Ross Jonas and Chris Neilands from Play It By Ear Drama Company, the Ven Paul Dundas and all the team at Christ Church."

On the first three days, the story trail led the audience around seven zones, each depicting a different stage of Patrick's life, and the children had the chance to do a history and an art workshop.

The trail began with a visit to Patrick's childhood home, where the children met Patrick's parents, before moving to the next zone, where they encountered Patrick just as Irish pirates arrived to take him away on a boat bound for Ireland and six years of slavery. The audience jumped on board, and had to row to Ireland singing sea shanties.

The trail continued with a re-enactment of Patrick's life as a slave in Ireland, his escape, journey back home and eventual calling by God to come back to Ireland as a missionary.

Finally, the children saw Bishop Patrick in Ireland teaching the pagan Irish the good news of Jesus, and they learned about his lasting legacy in Ireland.

Spencer Cusack from the St Patrick Centre in Downpatrick led the history workshop. The art workshop centred on drawing an Irish Celtic cross.

This year, the event featured an evening for youth organisations co-ordinated by Victoria Jackson, who is on Connor Children's Council and is the Development Officer for CLCGB.

On Saturday March 16, Patrick's Mysterious Adventure welcomed the public, with four timed performances of the story trail throughout the day, as well as a café, craft workshops from Jumping Clay and Julia's Ceramics, a reptile exhibition from Talking Reptiles and Irish dancing.

At the special St Patrick themed service in the church on March 17, the Ven Paul Dundas, rector, thanked all the team involved and gave a special mention to the Rev Derek Harrington who co-ordinated the Christ Church team.

Connor's Children's Council members would like to say a big thanks to Paul, Derek and the team from Christ Church for their support in making Patrick's Mysterious Adventure so successful this year.

'All Aboard' training evenings

Ripple – Children's Ministry Connor, has hosted three training evenings for its new All Aboard programme.

Children's Project Development Officer Jill Hamilton said: "It was fantastic to see so many participate in the evenings. The enthusiasm and interest of the voluntary leaders was very encouraging."

The first session took place on May 14 in Dunluce Parish Centre in Bushmills. The following day, the training took place in St John's Parish Centre in Ballyclare.

On May 16 the training moved to St Stephen's, Belfast. Around 70 leaders came along over the three evenings.

Jill said: "The All Aboard programme has 36 sessions and will be suitable for a year's programme. It will be delivered to churches in printed form in August ready for September. There will also be pen drives included which will contain the 36 sessions as well as digital resources. Extra resources will also be available online via the Ripple website.

"The plan is that there will be three years of material produced. There have been eight churches piloting the programme this year and those who wish to continue with the programme next year will receive Year 2 in August."



Enjoying the All Aboard training session in Ballyclare.

Easter workshop fun

Carnmoney Parish Church held its first-ever Children's Easter Workshop on Good Friday, attended by 30 children aged between two and 13.

There were different craft activities in the hall – the children decorated Easter biscuits and cardboard eggs, and made Easter cards and Easter crowns.

At midday, everyone decamped to the church where, after some singing, the Vicar, the Rev Andy Heber, told the Easter Story. The morning finished with an egg hunt and everyone left with an Easter egg.



Elaine McDonald, Patricia Fleming, Anita McNeill and Patricia McVeigh were undeterred by the weather on the last night of the programme!

Ladies wellness project a big success

Drummaul, Duneane and Ballyscullion ran a very successful Fit for ME Fit for LIFE programme during May. This encouraged ladies to take part in a series of walks co-ordinated by Aurelia Kelly, Amanda McCallion and Sarah Simpson.

On May 15, the walk started at St Colmanell's Church, Ahoghill, with guest speaker Estelle Wallace, eating psychology and health & fitness coach.

Drummaul Parish Church, Randalstown, was the starting point for the walk on May 22, when the speaker was Patricia McVeigh - Walking Updates vlogger and business owner.

The final walk on May 29, the Fisherman's Walk along the River Bann from Portglenone Parish Hall, was a soggy affair, but this did not deter the 51 ladies and girls who turned up. Afterwards there were healthy refreshments and a talk by guest speaker, Janice from Ballymena Foodbank.

Organiser Aurelia said: "To all our guest speakers, thank you for your words of inspiration, hope and self-belief."



Rosamond Bennett, Chief Executive of Christian Aid, presents a gift to Ramoan and Culfeightrin parishioner Doreen Girvan, who has been collecting for the charity during Christian Aid Week for 51 years. Also pictured are the Rev John Stanbridge, Presbyterian Minister, Ballycastle, and the Rev David Ferguson, Rector of Ramoan and Culfeightrin, joint chairs of the Ballycastle Christian Aid Committee, along with secretary, Ms Dobbie McCaughan.

Five parishioners from Ballinderry travelled to Ethiopia in January to support Operation Rescue. Their trip was part of an established link between Ballinderry Parish and the charity.

Merville and Thelma Boyd, Shannon Boyd, Ian Megarry and Denis Ferguson from Ballinderry were accompanied by Victor and Rosemary Magowan from Enniskillen. Their visit was to encourage the staff of Operation Rescue Ethiopia (ORE) at three existing centres in Mekelle, Adigrat and Adwa. The team also visited the construction site of a fourth centre in the city of Maichew.

Operation Rescue is an international charity, and Merville and Thelma are involved in the Northern Ireland branch which focuses on Ethiopia. The Boyd family have visited projects in Ethiopia on several occasions. "It is infectious," said Merville. "The work just draws you in. They are an incredibly friendly people who give us more than we could ever give them."

ORE has 58 staff working on three sites, supporting up to 700 children. They offer food and care before and after school. Social workers visit the children's homes to identify those who need extra support. Many of the social workers have come through ORE themselves.

"There are many children living below the poverty line who need help," said Merville. "The government would like to see many more placed with ORE as educational grades are monitored and they can see the difference. The government doesn't have the finance to do this itself."

Changing families in

In Ethiopia, Aids is still prevalent and many children grow up in one-parent families. "ORE is trying to set up an addiction support group for mothers with Aids," Merville said. "It is still killing the poorest of the poor. There are a lot of broken families."

"The day centre is a happy place of fun and learning, but it shrouds the reality of the homes the children come from. It is quite traumatising to see the conditions they live in, often home is a one-room shack with seven children in it."

Merville said the picture is improving in Ethiopia. Mekelle is a university town, but there are still families for whom there is no leg up. "The real key is to improve education," he said.

"At the centre, each day starts with a 30 minute devotional before the children go into classes for private tuition. They do their exams in their schools, not in the centre. When they move from secondary school to further education, we help them with things like laptops and continue to give them further teaching assistance."

The charity funds two social workers at each centre. There is no money spent on administration and Merville stressed that 100 per cent of all donations go directly to Ethiopia. Merville and his daughter Shannon are Trustees, and all staff at ORE are Ethiopian.

The charity raises funds through speaking at church meetings, grants, local charitable trusts and child sponsorship. At present, people



The team from Ballinderry and Enniskillen (Merville Boyd is to the right of the photo) with Getachew Tesfay, kneeling, Director of ORE.

g lives for n Ethiopia

in Northern Ireland sponsor 70 children, at £20 a month. A sponsor is asked to commit to following their child through his or her secondary education.

“Denis Ferguson from Ballinderry had the privilege of meeting his 19-year-old sponsor child,” said Merville. “He and his late wife Joyce, who had no children of their own, had sponsored this young lady for a number of years. He was very nervous about meeting her, but when he got to her home she came out and hugged him. She had pictures of Joyce and him and had kept letters that Joyce had written to her. The meeting just emphasised the difference the £20 per month and the odd gift and letter were making.”

Merville said the team’s January trip was to encourage the local ORE staff. “They all go above and beyond their remit. The cooks often have to create meals with no electricity, using just a charcoal oven, the social workers frequently have to work over their paid hours.

“We are always striving to make a difference and it is not just about giving people food and money. It is about controlled education. Even the children recognise that if they can get an education and a job, they will improve life for their whole family.”

There is also a small orphanage attached to Operation Rescue in Mekelle.

Ballinderry Parish has been sending teams to Ethiopia since 2006, but the visit in January was Ian Megarry’s first, and he was traumatised when he visited his sponsor child Diana’s home.

Diana’s parents had died of AIDS and she lived with her very elderly grandparents in a one-room house. “The first shock was seeing how thin and unkempt Diana was, even compared to the other children,” Ian said. “There was a sadness about her. It took a while to gain her confidence.

“There was very little furniture in their home, but the big thing that hit me was there was absolutely no food. Not even coffee. Diana’s grandparents had no income, and any grants they received went to pay the rent, so Diana was going to school in the mornings with no breakfast, and the only food she was getting was the one meal a day at ORE. It was heart-breaking.”

Accompanied by Denis and the ORE social worker, Ian went to a nearby store and bought



Happy handshakes at the Operation Rescue Ethiopia centre in Mekelle.

food for the family that would last them a month. He has paid a local baker to give Diana some bread every morning for the next two years.

“At least when she goes to school she has had a wee bit of breakfast,” Ian said.

Ian has sponsored other children before Diana. “It was good to get to Ethiopia and see the good work being done,” he said. “It was a very powerful experience. I would like to go back again.”

The link between Ballinderry and ORE was established by the former rector, the Rev Ernest Harris, and his wife Ray in conjunction with Crosslinks Mission Partner Karen Salmon.

Merville, Thelma and their children, Hannah, Jenna, Shannon and Daniel, have all visited. Last year, ‘Connor Connections’ reported how Shannon had travelled to Maichew, site of the new Operation Rescue centre currently being built.

ORE held an information evening in Ballinderry Parish on February 24. Seven more parishioners came forward to offer sponsorship to children.

“They are told the names of their sponsor

child,” said Merville. “This is not just about raising money, but creating links.”

A container full of toys, computers, white goods, medical equipment, curtains and more, arrived at Operation Rescue’s new centre in Maichew at the start of June. When the items are distributed, the container will be used as an office.

“It was a joy to see the faces of those whose lives are going to be made just a little bit happier,” Merville said.

Further information about Ballinderry Parish’s partnership with ORE can be found on the parish website. Anyone interested in sponsoring a child should email info@operationrescue.co.uk.



Thelma Boyd, Ballinderry Parish, with some of the children whose education is supported by ORE.



The Rt Rev Ken Good, Bishop of Derry and Raphoe, at the Quiet Morning with Archdeacon George Davison, left, and Archdeacon Paul Dundas.

Leadership is focus of Quiet Morning

The Rt Rev Ken Good, former Bishop of Derry and Raphoe, was the speaker at a Connor Clergy Quiet Morning in Christ Church, Lisburn, on March 7.

Bishop Ken spoke on the theme of leadership, and, with reference to the story of Moses and the burning bush, put it to clergy that they could at times feel 'isolated, in a wilderness, or stuck.'

During the first of two sessions, he encouraged clergy to write a prayer to God, asking them to respond to the Lord's request that they, like Moses, turn aside.

Almost 40 clergy from the diocese attended the Quiet Morning, which began with refreshments, followed by a short service led by the rector of Christ Church and Archdeacon of Dalriada, the Ven Paul Dundas.



The Rev David Lockhart and the Rev Elaine O'Brien catch up at the Quiet Morning.

Welcoming Bishop Ken, who retired as Bishop of Derry and Raphoe in May, Archdeacon Dundas said: "We are delighted you are with us today and are

conscious of the changes coming up in your life."

Addressing his fellow clergy, Archdeacon Dundas said: "I pray that today will be a time you spend with Jesus and also those you share ministry with. I pray this is a time to go deeper into our worship with God, a time of peace, a time to listen, to grow and to flourish."

Bishop Ken remembered the Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev Alan Abernethy, currently receiving treatment for prostate cancer, and paid tribute to Archdeacons Paul Dundas, George Davison and Dr Stephen McBride for doing an 'excellent' job as commissaries to the Bishop.

Referencing the earlier reading from Luke on the Transfiguration, Bishop Ken said the Quiet Morning was 'a gift from the Lord.' "It may not be a mountain top experience, but the Lord may wish us to receive today as a gift from him," the Bishop said.

His second session found Moses after the Exodus, stuck with 'too much management and not enough leadership.' Bishop Ken said all clergy were trained to be managers, but in a time of change, leadership was very important.

"The ability of a leader under God is to rally people to see where you are going, and have them go with you," he said.

Outlining the qualities of leadership, Bishop Ken told clergy: "I hope this provokes you to ask, 'Lord, what do you want me to do in leadership in my parish?'" The second session ended with a period of contemplation.

Bishop Ken was thanked for his time and for his words by the Archdeacon of Belfast, the Ven George Davison, and clergy enjoyed fellowship over lunch, provided by the ladies of Christ Church, before returning to their parishes.

Bangor Worldwide Missionary Convention

The 83rd Bangor Worldwide Missionary Convention takes place from August 23-31 with the theme: 'Go into all the world.'

The majority of the events will be held at Hamilton Road Presbyterian Church, but there are also events in the neighbouring Baptist Church as well as in Belfast, Lurgan and Magherafelt.

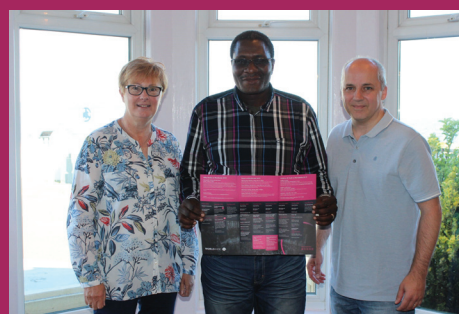
Chairman Tom Clarke said: "We are delighted to have Don Carson with us for the first time, along with a host of other international speakers.

"Our first main evening meeting will be

held at Assembly Buildings in Belfast on August 24 at 7.30pm. Don Carson is guest speaker and a presentation on the impact of Worldwide, directed by Etta Halliday, will also form part of the programme. New Irish Arts will lead our praise."

Bible studies take place each weekday at 11am. Don Carson has chosen 'Isaiah speaks in troubled times' as his theme.

Another new event in 2019 will be a bus tour around the north Down coast, focusing on the life of Amy Carmichael, on Saturday August 24.



The Rev Walter Madimutsa from SIM Zimbabwe looks over the Bangor Worldwide programme with committee members Lorraine Moore and Jonny Sanlon.

See the flyer inserted in this issue of Connor Connections for more information on all the events taking place during the Convention.



At the service of Institution in Templepatrick on May 30 are, from left: The Rev Canon Derek Kerr, Rural Dean; Archdeacon Paul Dundas, Bishop's Commissary; the Ven Dr Stephen McBride, Archdeacon of Connor; the Rev Canon William Taggart, Registrar; the Rev Jeremy Mould, new rector of Templepatrick and Donegore, and the Rev Canon Tom Keightley, preacher.

New rector in Templepatrick

The Rev Jeremy Mould was instituted as rector of the United Parish of Templepatrick and Donegore on May 30 by Bishop's Commissary, Archdeacon Paul Dundas. Preacher was Canon Tom Keightley, a former rector of Belvoir Parish.

Jeremy is married to the Rev Jacqueline, with whom he has job shared the curacy in Belvoir Parish for the last 16 years. They have three sons and two grandchildren.

Jeremy spent his first five years in Africa before returning to High Wycombe in England. He studied History at Nottingham University and first came to Northern Ireland as a volunteer with the Presbyterian

Church's Careforce (1985-1986) before moving to the Church of Ireland Youth Office from 1986-88.

Jeremy was ordained a curate for Mossley Parish, Connor Diocese, in 1981. He later served curacies in St Columba's, Drumragh, Omagh, and the Parish of St Andrew's, Kinson, Bournemouth.

Jeremy returned to Northern Ireland in 2000 to co-lead Dungannon Community Church until 2003, and then to do a PGCE at Queen's University. He worked as Tutor for the SEELB, and was a Volunteer Youth Worker before his appointment as job share curate in Belvoir Parish.

'Back home' in Portstewart!

The Rev Malcolm Ferry was instituted as rector of the Parish of Agherton, where he had served his first curacy, at a service in the Church of St John the Baptist, Portstewart, on May 10.

Malcolm was previously rector of St Augustine's Parish Church, Diocese of Derry and Raphoe, and a Canon of St Columb's Cathedral, Londonderry.

He was instituted by the Ven Paul Dundas, Archdeacon of Dalriada and Commissary to the Bishop of Connor. The preacher was the Ven Robert Miller, Archdeacon of Derry.

Malcolm is married to Carol and they have three grown-up children.

Brought up in a large family in the Parish of Donaghmore, Armagh Diocese, Malcolm graduated from Stranmillis College, Belfast, and taught for two years before taking a position in industry.

After ordination in 1996, he was appointed curate in Agherton. Following his first incumbency in Kilwaughter and Cairncastle with Craigyhill in the Diocese of Connor,



The Rev Malcolm Ferry with Bishop's Commissary, the Ven Paul Dundas, at the Institution service in Agherton.

he moved to the Diocese of Derry and Raphoe, where he was rector in Castlerock with Dunboe and Fermoy, and then Clooney with Strathfoyle before moving to St Augustine's.

Looking ahead to his new role in Portstewart, Malcolm said: "We have many happy memories and Agherton Parish was formational for me in my ministry. I am delighted to be going 'back home' to the town and people of Portstewart."

New Warden of Readers appointed

The Rev Peter Jones, rector of Mossley Parish, has been appointed Warden of Readers for Connor Diocese.

He succeeds the Rev Canon Kevin Graham who is now Diocesan Director of Ordinands.

Peter is married to Kim and dad to Timothy and Hannah. He has been rector of Mossley since August 2017.

"It is a privilege for me to take on this new role," he said. "I look forward to being able to journey alongside our existing Readers, while also encouraging more people to explore Reader Ministry in the diocese."



The Rev Peter Jones.

Award for 'Journey'

Connor Youth Forum's resource 'Journey' received an award at the Irish Youth Ministry Gathering held in Belfast.

'Journey,' a resource written for and by young people, was nominated in the 'Best for Bible Engagement' category, and at the awards on May 16 the judging panel named it a runner-up.

The prize was a £100 donation for the project and Connor Diocesan Youth Officer Christina Baillie was there to collect the award from Bishop 'Fanta' Clarke.

Air Ambulance boost

St Nicholas' Parish Church, Belfast, raised £750 for the NI Air Ambulance through its Christmas Tree Appeal. Grace Williams, Area Fundraising Manager for NI Air Ambulance, attended to collect a cheque from William Carlisle, churchwarden.

Appointment

The Rev Nigel Kirkpatrick, rector of St Dorothea's Parish, Gilnahirk, Diocese of Down and Dromore, has been appointed rector of the Grouped Parishes of Kilroot and Templecorran, Connor Diocese. The institution will take place on September 4.



The Dean of Belfast, the Very Rev Stephen Forde, with new Chapter member, the Rev Canon Kevin Graham.

New Canon installed in Belfast Cathedral

The Rev Kevin Graham, rector of St Bartholomew's, Stranmillis, was installed as a Canon of the Chapter of St Anne's Cathedral, Belfast, on Sunday May 26.

Kevin, who was recently appointed Connor Diocesan Director of Ordinands, has been rector of Stranmillis since October 2013, and is Rural Dean for South Belfast and a former Connor Warden of Readers.

The Dean of Belfast, the Very Rev Stephen Forde, said: "Kevin will bring many gifts and skills to the Cathedral, and I look forward to working closely with him across a range of ministries."

Well communicated!



In the prizes! Jacqueline Weir from St Matthew's Parish and David Holmes from St Bride's, Kilbride.

Kilbride Parish won first prize in the parish website category of the Church of Ireland Central Communications Board's 2019 Communications Competition.

Another Connor winner was St Matthew's Parish, Belfast, which was runner-up in the Innovative Use of Social Media category. The Diocesan website was commended.

Awarding Kilbride first prize, the judges stated: "The website is full of life and tells me that the parish is full of life and energy."

Of St Matthew's Facebook page, they said: "... a truly wonderful presence on social media – it is a page that is faith-filled, welcoming and evangelising in nature."

The diocesan website was commended for its "... great landing page full of colour and excellent content."

Cyclists pedal past 106 Connor churches

The Rev Arthur Young and his people's glebewarden at St Paul's Parish Church, Lisburn, headed out on their bikes over Easter – and called at (virtually) every church in Connor Diocese!

Arthur and George Irwin covered 386 miles, all within the Diocese of Connor, over six days to raise funds for a church in the Diocese of Kajiado, Kenya, with which St Paul's is in partnership.

It took just three months to plan this pedal round the diocese – and everywhere in-between – and a large crowd of parishioners saw the dynamic duo off after a Parish Lunch on Easter Sunday.

The lunch itself raised £500, and the cycle brought in £4,000. In total, the parish is aiming to raise £20,000 before a 12-strong team visits Kenya in August 2020. There, they will paint the church which was built with funding from St Paul's, and work on an adjacent accommodation block which houses theological students.

Blessed with good weather, Arthur and George visited a total of 106 churches. "We just pulled up outside and took photos to prove we had been there, because our time was limited and we needed to stick to our schedule," Arthur said.

They began in Lisburn and Belfast; day two took them from Kilroot up the coast road through Glenarm and Carnlough to Ballymena; day three was spent pedalling around the Kells, Randalstown and Ballymoney areas; day four took in Ballycastle, Rathlin and the north coast;



Arthur and George enjoy a well-earned ice cream en route.

on day five they headed to Antrim and Ballyclare; and their final day brought them back to Lisburn via north Belfast and Lambeg.

Visiting more than 100 churches in the course of the cycle meant there was quite a bit of stopping and starting. "But there were also quite a number of long stretches," Arthur said. "Like the section from Kells to Randalstown all along country roads that never seemed to end!" They also found the hills en route to be exceptionally challenging.

Arthur will travel to Kenya next year as part of the team in a trip co-ordinated by CMS Ireland. "I have been to South Sudan before, but this will be my first time in Kenya. The people of St Paul's are very passionate about this link," he said.



St Paul's Parish sees the Rev Arthur Young and fellow-cyclist George Irwin off in style after a parish lunch on Easter Sunday.



Bishop Alan Abernethy, centre, with speakers at the launch of his book 'The Jewel in the Mess,' Prof David Jones and the Rev Dr Heather Morris.

Book reveals Jesus as 'Jewel in the Mess'

The Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev Alan Abernethy, launched his latest book, 'The Jewel in the Mess,' at the Spectrum Centre in north Belfast on May 7.

Guest speakers were the Rev Dr Heather Morris, General Secretary, Home Mission Department of the Methodist Church in Ireland, and Professor David Jones, Pro-Vice Chancellor, Education & Students at Queen's University, Belfast.

This is Bishop Alan's third book, and was written during a sabbatical he took in the early part of 2018. In it, Bishop Alan, who has been Bishop of Connor since June 2007, examines how his years of leadership in the church caused him to lose sight of the original awe that called him to his faith.

Around 70 clergy and lay people attended the launch, and were welcomed by Mr Martin O'Brien from publishers Columba Press. "It has been a joy to see 'The Jewel in the Mess' come to fruition. It is a very gripping and engaging read," Mr O'Brien said.

In his words of welcome, Bishop Alan, who is currently undergoing treatment for prostate cancer, thanked many people, including the people in Connor Diocese. "I have been overwhelmed by the support and prayers of those in the diocese," he said. He also thanked the Rev Clifford Skillen for proofreading 'The Jewel in the Mess,' Bishop Tony Farquhar and Father Martin O'Hagan for their presence at the launch, and his 'very, very special' family, particularly his wife Liz.

Bishop Alan said this was his favourite of the three books he has published. "The



Bishop Alan welcomes guests to the book launch.

Jewel in the Mess is Jesus," he said. "I have made many mistakes along the way, but He has never stopped loving me. I trust that when you read this you will find Jesus among its pages."

Dr Morris said she was honoured to speak at the launch. She said how in the Church one can feel isolated. "You grapple, think, act and pray and implement different programmes. This book addresses these issues and many other things, unhesitatingly and unapologetically bringing us to the feet of Jesus," she said.

Adding that it explored the mess of the 'tortured and beautiful community' of Northern Ireland, Dr Morris said that the book was significant in its honesty, its courage and its challenge. She concluded: "This book invites us to love, be dispensers of grace, and sit awestruck in the presence of Jesus."

Prof Jones said he had found the book to be 'such a personal journey.' "'The Jewel in the Mess' has allowed me to embrace faith in a way I never thought I could again," Prof Jones said.

Publishers Columba Press describe 'The Jewel in the Mess' as a very personal book which looks at the idea of God without the institutions and hierarchy, and instead refocuses on the figure of Jesus at the heart of the Bible.

The book explores how, through his struggle with depression and his diagnosis with prostate cancer, Bishop Alan has come to find the message of Jesus in the difficult, dark and chaotic parts of life.

He pares faith back to its core beliefs, before the bureaucracy, to Jesus, with his messy, humble and human beginning, who blessed the people around him.

Bishop Alan's previous two books - 'Fulfilment and Frustration' (2000) and 'Shadows on a Journey' (2011) - were also published by Columba.

'The Jewel in the Mess' can be ordered from Columba Press on 353 (1) 687 4096 or email sales@columba.ie and is also available from The Book Well (www.thebookwell.co.uk).

Connor Diocesan Readers meet for training

Diocesan Readers met for the latest ongoing training module on March 21.

The Rev Barry Forde, Chaplain at Queen's University, spoke on 'The Diocesan Reader and Mission.' The seminar focused on each being the image bearer of God, equipping others also to be image bearers wherever they are and to whoever they speak.

The evening was hosted by the Diocesan Warden of Readers, the Rev

Kevin Graham, who thanked the rector and Select Vestry of St John's, Malone, for providing the hall for the gathering.

Kevin said: "For all of us, attaining maturity in faith and becoming more like Christ is a lifelong exercise. Not least then, those of us involved in authorised ministries, ordained or otherwise, must also participate in lifelong learning so that we may have integrity in our ministries and remain skilled at our work."



Some of the 79 people confirmed by Bishop Hilary of Yei at Immanuel Cathedral in February. Billy Smyth is standing in the centre of the picture beside Bishop Hilary.

Seeds of hope in Yei

As the rainy season approaches in South Sudan, seeds are being sown around Yei – buds of hope for a future free of civil war.

Billy Smyth has just returned from three weeks in Yei Diocese – which has been in partnership with Connor since 2007. It is a place he knows well - Billy and his wife Jenny were the first Anglican Mission Partners to move into southern Sudan in 2003 after a bitter civil war.

They moved from Arua, Uganda, where Billy taught carpentry, building and vehicle maintenance to Sudanese refugees at the West Nile Training Centre, established by Bishop Hilary of Yei.

Accepting the Bishop's call to come to Yei with their two young children, Billy developed the Vocational Training Centre (VTC) to teach skills which could improve lives locally. Billy and Jenny, now CMSI Mission Director, returned to Northern Ireland in 2007, but the VTC continued to thrive under local management. The Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev Alan Abernethy, visited in January 2013.

South Sudan gained independence in July 2011, but less than three years later factions within the fledgling country took up arms, and thousands were again forced to flee to refugee camps in neighbouring countries. The biggest of these is Rhino Camp in Arua, home to many Yei citizens.

Billy has visited the camps. "I found it really difficult to see people who had been our neighbours in Yei back living in camps. For some younger families, it may have been their second time in a refugee camp, but for some of the older people it was their third time," Billy said.

He and Jenny travelled to Yei in July 2016

with their children to meet old friends.

"We had to leave very abruptly," Billy said. "We arrived on the Saturday and had to be airlifted out by MAF (Mission Aviation Fellowship) on the Monday. The airstrip in Yei is some distance from the town and we met an army checkpoint. The soldiers were told not to let anyone pass and it was a very threatening situation. The MAF plane was circling overhead, and after some tense negotiations, they let us through."

People are planting crops and getting on with life. The change in just a few weeks is remarkable.

Billy has since been in Uganda twice, once with a youth group from the family church, St John's, Moira, and last October, with a CMSI team which attended a Peace and Reconciliation Conference in Arua.

In February, at the request of Bishop Hilary, he returned to Yei to investigate the possibility of reopening the VTC.

VISION

Bishop Hilary's vision is to offer hope to young people through vocational training opportunities, which he sees as essential to maintain the fragile peace process.

Billy also took part in a Peace Conference held in Immanuel Cathedral, Yei. Billy said



Billy at the service to reopen the Vocational Training Centre, held in a classroom at the centre.

that the town had remained remarkably unscathed through the recent conflict, and attributed this largely to the decision by Bishop Hilary to remain in Yei.

"Yei escaped most of the ransacking that occurred in other towns because Bishop Hilary stayed and was an encouragement to the people," Billy said. "Other dioceses in South Sudan give credit to him that Yei is fairly intact. His presence in the town was very significant, and it cost him considerably. His home was attacked, and by the grace of God he wasn't there at the time."

Immanuel Cathedral continues to hold three services every Sunday, and in February Billy attended a Confirmation Service in the Cathedral, when 79 people were confirmed by Bishop Hilary.

Billy found that the situation in Yei had improved considerably between his visit in February and his return in April. "In February, most of the shops were closed and there weren't many people about. The town didn't have a nice feel to it, but this time round it was much better.

"People have started to come back from the camps, shops are opening, and there is more of a buzz. People are planting crops and getting on with life. The change in just a few weeks is remarkable."

Local churches are reopening and Bishop Hilary is planning to visit the rural village of

Longamere (which hosted members of the Connor team in 2013) for the first time in three and a half years.

"People are going about much more freely," Billy said. "The locals are still nervous about going out after dark. Access to the internet is difficult, and when I was there in February mains electricity disappeared completely."

Like the Connor team, Billy stayed in Yei Diocese's ECS Guesthouse, along with a number of NGO staff, as the compound is considered very secure.

ECONOMY

He found that while the buildings of the VTC were intact, most of the equipment was gone. "Over the past few years, to cover costs, there has been a tendency to sell off equipment. The local economy has collapsed, so we cannot expect new students to pay fees. The place will need a huge cash injection," he said.

The VTC is located on church land close to Immanuel Cathedral. "Reopening the training centre is a very high profile project in the diocese. Having it up and running again will be a psychological and morale boost for many young people who have lost out on an education. It will offer them the opportunity to learn practical skills in just a few months," Billy said.

One of his first tasks in April was to install solar panels to provide power for the administration block. He stopped in Arua en route to Yei, bought the panels and other equipment including tools and sewing machine, and these were transported by jeep the 85 miles to Yei. Billy flew – the roads are still considered too dangerous.

He arrived in Yei for the official opening of the VTC. That first day, 65 students were



Serious concentration in the sewing class.



The vehicle mechanics course gets underway at the VTC.



Billy Smyth at work installing solar panels on the roof of the admin building at Yei Vocational Training Centre.

enrolled, aged from late teens to early 30s. By the time he left, that number had risen to 69 – maximum capacity is 70. Fifteen families displaced during the unrest are still living in the compound.

New tutors had to be found, and some were recruited from the refugee camps. A new secondary school, founded by Bishop Hilary in 2014 at the VTC compound, had to be relocated, and the 400 high school students are currently being accommodated on the Immanuel Primary School site.

PRINCIPAL

As soon as the opening service ended, Billy set to work erecting the solar panels, giving newly-appointed VTC principal Morris power for his office. Morris is no stranger to the VTC, having worked in administration there for 10 years before the most recent civil war.

There was a roof which had been damaged by a falling branch to repair, and the ancient pick-up had to be prepared for students studying vehicle mechanics and driving. Unfortunately it is still not roadworthy – Billy said a replacement vehicle is urgently needed to allow the driving lessons to proceed.

The VTC tractor, which Billy introduced to the compound in 2004, needed work and is still not quite ready to be used for ploughing due to a hydraulic lift problem.

Other courses which have restarted are plumbing and electrical installation.

One class which was able to proceed without issue was the tailoring class, made up of nine ladies and one man, all

working with the sewing machines Billy had purchased in Arua. "The idea is that when the students graduate they take the sewing machines with them," Billy said. "We will have to find the funds to replace these."

NGOs and other agencies in the town have been supportive of the reopening of the VTC, but Billy said that support has not been translated into hard cash. One organisation, however, has indicated it will fund training for 100 students. "If that comes through, it will give the place a bit of a financial uplift," Billy said.

Despite signs of progress, South Sudan is still a dangerous place. When he was there in February, Billy heard rumbling in the distance. "I thought it was thunder, but, although I didn't know it at the time, it was artillery fire about 10 miles away. There were 6,000 people displaced in that incident," he said.

Bishop Hilary's hopes that reopening the VTC will be a high profile boost to the morale of the local community are justified, Billy said.

He shared a message from Yei Diocesan Education Secretary Francis Taban who wrote: "The VTC is bringing a lot of hope to the people of Yei. People appreciate it opening so much. Life seems to be gaining momentum. Praise God."

Billy added: "I think a lot of the people are really fed up with all the fighting. They really want to get on with life. The underlying cancer is corruption."

"It is so encouraging now to see things starting to move again and to see people out planting crops."

Crafty ladies!



Talent knows no bounds in the parish hall at St Mark's, Ballymacash, where the Tuesday Crafters gather to work and chat.

The group, which meets twice a month, was established by popular demand last September. The rector, the Rev Lynne Gibson, was delighted by the response at that first meeting, when 28 ladies attended.

Most are knitters, but the group includes some talented at crocheting, and skills are being taught and passed on.

When we visited on a Tuesday afternoon in February, several of the ladies were knitting Easter chicks, which would later be filled with cream eggs and distributed to the housebound over the Easter period.

Others worked on figures for a Last Supper tableau to go on display at Easter. This idea is a follow up to the wonderful 'Knitivity' they put together last Christmas.

The group is also knitting trauma teddies which are donated to the PSNI and used to help calm children in many different and difficult situations. They have also made hats and mittens for Women's Aid, and twiddle mitts for people in nursing homes.

Some of the group are youngsters in

their 60s, but many are older - the oldest member is 98-year-old Edie Patton.

Lynne said: "They are really good craic. They may have seen each other in church, but didn't really know each other, and this provides an opportunity for fellowship as well as learning new skills, and it also gets them out for a few hours."

Margaret Irwin, 79, and Lily Greer, 86, were working on figures for the Last Supper model, having been delighted with the results of their work on 'Knitivity.'

Both are seasoned knitters. "I enjoy coming here," said Lily. Margaret has nine grandchildren, so says she had to be a knitter! "I love the club. I have made so many friends. You see people in church but you don't really know them."

Another Margaret, Margaret Vaughn, was busy knitting Simon Peter in preparation for Easter. "I haven't knit toys before," she said. "I do patchwork and made a banner which was put up in church for Christmas. I love knitting baby clothes, and I donated

a quilt and cardigans for a boy and a girl to Baby Basics.

"I find knitting very rewarding. It is my hobby, but it is nice to see something you have made being used."

May Elliott is 95 and her passion is knitting teddy bears. She has a collection of 120 that she has knit herself. A former wages clerk, May has lived on her own for 14 years, and has been a parishioner of St Mark's for more than 50 years. "I have met plenty of new friends through the Tuesday Crafters," May said.

Marion Rankin pauses her needles, on which hangs the deflated body of a trauma teddy, to reflect on what she enjoys about the club. "It's the camaraderie," she says. "We are talking to each other half the time."

Helen Guiller came to the club to learn to crochet. "I more or less knew everybody to see in church, but now I am interacting much more with them," she said.

Jean Morrison comes for the 'craic.' "I used to knit a lot but now I would rather read, or do the crossword or gardening, so really I am here for a rest," she jokes.

Kay Beck is a knitter, but suffers from arthritis. "I don't do so much now, but the little figures aren't too hard. I am knitting disciples. I had done five or six but I lost one to my great granddaughter yesterday!"

Margaret Moore's needles are clacking away (or should that be clucking!) as she finishes her 12th Easter chick. "I did a donkey and some sheep for the 'Knitivity,'" Margaret said. "We all did something and when it was all put together we realised how good it was.

"I enjoy the craic here at the club, and it is good to see what everyone else is doing."

The Tuesday Crafters Club is one of a number of organisations which meet at St Mark's. There is also the Monday Club for senior citizens, Mothers' Union, Scottish dancing, yoga, a Saturday Kids' Club, bowls and a youth group.





At the Connor Mothers' Union Festival service are, from left: Archdeacon Stephen McBride, Connor MU Chaplain, Mrs Valerie Ash, outgoing Connor Diocesan President, Mrs Sally Cotter, new Connor Diocesan President, and the Very Rev Stephen Forde, Dean of Belfast.

Sally commissioned at Festival Service

Mrs Sally Cotter was commissioned Diocesan President of Connor Mothers' Union at the annual Festival Service in Belfast Cathedral on Sunday April 7.

Mrs Cotter, who succeeds Mrs Valerie Ash, was commissioned by the Chaplain of Connor Mothers' Union, the Ven Dr Stephen McBride, Archdeacon of Connor. The theme of the service was 'Listen, Observe, Act – In Step with God.'

The preacher was the Dean of Belfast, the Very Rev Stephen Forde. Worship was led by the Cathedral Choir. The readings were by Mrs Lyn Cassidy, Mid Connor Area Secretary, and the Rev Dr Bob Cotter, husband of the new President. The Prayers of Intercession were led by Joyce Bond, Faith and Policy Unit Co-ordinator, and Irene Gates, Diocesan Secretary.

Banners for all Mothers' Union branches in Connor Diocese were carried in procession and presented to the Diocesan Chaplain before the service, and carried out again in procession at the end.

Sally, a former primary school teacher, has been a member of Mothers' Union since 1989, and has held posts at all levels.

Her first branch was St Nicholas', Carrickfergus, where she was branch young members rep; area education rep. She was on the Prayer and Spirituality Unit and in 1996 was appointed Diocesan Marketing Co-ordinator.

In 2001, Sally became All-Ireland Marketing Co-ordinator and in 2007 was appointed to the Marketing Unit Committee at Mothers' Union headquarters in Mary Sumner House.



MU Banners process in at the start of the Festival Service.

She was Diocesan Worldwide rep from 2007-2013, and since 2013 has been Vice-President of Fundraising and Communications in Connor Diocese.

Sally joined the Broughshane branch of Mothers' Union in 2010, when her husband Bob became curate in the parish of Skerry, Rathcavan and Newtowncrommelin, Broughshane.

She taught in King's Park Primary School in Newtownabbey for 31 years before taking early retirement. She and Bob have one son, Christopher.

Rededication after works in Ballycastle

At a service on March 3 in Holy Trinity Church, Parish of Ramoan, Ballycastle, the Archdeacon of Connor, the Ven Dr Stephen McBride, rededicated the church after its major refurbishment.

Archdeacon McBride also commissioned Ramoan and Culfeightrin's new children and families' worker, Mrs Laura Kane-Kelly, for her role in the parishes.

The rector, the Rev David Ferguson, said: "It was a wonderful day with many community representatives and parishioners from Laura's previous parish of St Jude's, Belfast, in attendance."



At the service of rededication and commissioning in Holy Trinity Parish Church, Ballycastle, are, from left: Mrs Sharon Wilson, Diocesan Reader; The Ven Dr Stephen McBride, Archdeacon of Connor; Mrs Laura Kane-Kelly, children and families' worker; and the Rev David Ferguson, rector.

Well trained!

Members of Carnmoney Parish have undertaken a number of training courses laid on by experts in their fields.

On March 9, 19 people attained a level 2 Food Hygiene Qualification. On April 27, 12 people undertook a basic First Aid Course leading to a three-year qualification.

The following week, eight members with little or no computer skills undertook training over two afternoons in the Vicarage led by one of the parish's own members, Elaine Munn.

The Vicar, the Rev Andy Heber, said: "All three courses were hugely enjoyable as well as providing invaluable learning for those who took part."



Successful First Aid trainees in Carnmoney.



The United Parish of Ballynure and Ballyeaston (Ballyclare) presented a cheque for £1,432.41 to the Northern Ireland Children's Hospice. The money was raised at its 2018 Christmas Tree Festival. Pictured with the cheque on April 2 are, from left: Jeannie Lynd, Catherine O'Hara (Northern Ireland Hospice), Errol Lynd, and Jacqui and Billy Wells.



The Abaana New Life Children's Choir from Uganda led the Good Friday Walk of Witness in Lisburn. Dean Sam Wright (Lisburn Cathedral) is pictured addressing the crowds at the service which followed the Walk.



A charity pancake party hosted by Cloughfern Parish on Shrove Tuesday, March 5, was very well supported and raised £203 for SOS NI.



The Rt Rev the Lord Eames OM, former Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All-Ireland, was at All Saints', Eglantine, on March 10 for a Service of Confirmation. Lord Eames is pictured with the rector of Eglantine, the Rev Jason Kernohan, and the candidates who were confirmed.



Christ Church Parish, Lisburn, presents items for Baby Basics Belfast, to Karen Webb from Connect Base, Connor's North Belfast Centre of Mission.



The United Parish of Christ Church and St John's, Ballyclare, held a commissioning service for new Families' Associate Dianne Hamilton on St Patrick's Day. Pictured are the Rev Jonny Campbell-Smyth, rector, Dianne and Luke Hamilton and Andrew Brannigan.



Harding Memorial Primary School was the winner of the 2019 St Anne Trust Belfast Primary School Choir of the Year Competition. Representatives of the Choir were presented with their award by Belfast Lord Mayor Deirdre Hargey and Roisin McDonagh, Chief Executive of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland. Adjudicator Richard Yarr, BBC, is also in the picture.



Killead Parish took on the Baby Basics four-week challenge during February. 'Pins and Needles' (from Killead, Gartree and St Jude's churches) contributed lots of knitted items. Connor Children's Officer Jill Hamilton collected the items on Easter Sunday.