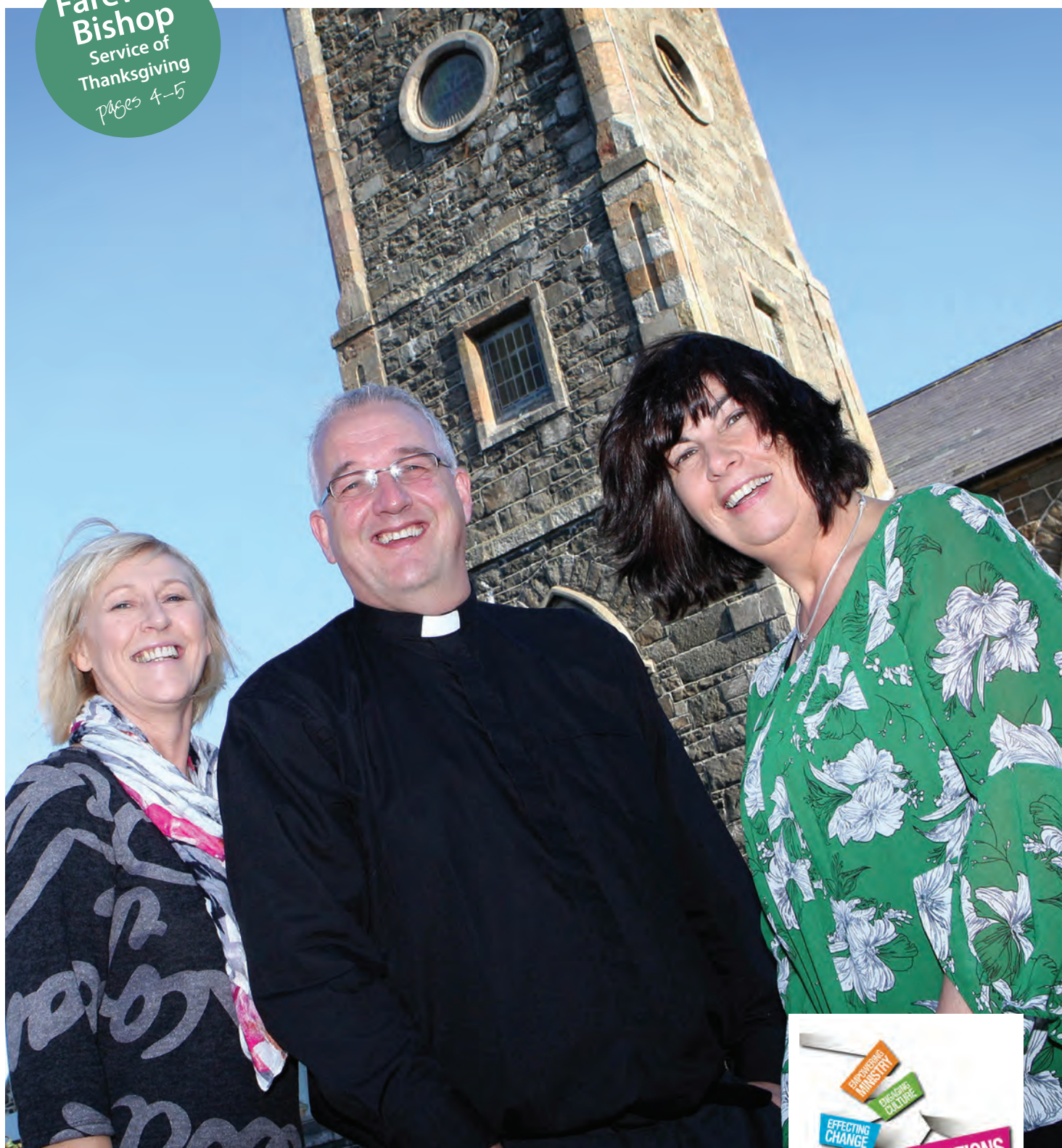


# CONNOR

## connections

Farewell  
Bishop  
Service of  
Thanksgiving  
*pages 4-5*







Organ Scholars, clergy and tutors at Choral Evensong for the Organ Scholarship Scheme in Belfast Cathedral.

# Service for Organ Scholarship Scheme

An Organ Scholarship Choral Evensong was held in Belfast Cathedral on September 29, the Feast Day of St Michael and All Angels.

At the service, certificates were awarded to successful candidates who completed their three-year course. Two new scholars, both from Connor Diocese, were also commissioned.

Since 1990, the Board of Management of the Dioceses of Down and Dromore and Connor has invited applications for scholarships which are awarded annually. The scheme helps provide and equip organists for public worship.

It was established when an anonymous benefactor, recognising the importance of the ministry of music in parish life and worship, provided a generous endowment to train organists in the dioceses. A Trust was set up and administered by the Church of Ireland Trustees and a Board of Management.

The Service of Choral Evensong took place under the direction of the new Director of Music at St Anne's, Matthew Owens. This included Bible readings by Dr Joe McKee, St Columba's, Knock, and Timothy Wilson, Jordanstown. Prayers were led by the Rev Dr Ian Mills.

Dr McKee and Dr Mills are two of the tutors, along with Michael McCracken, Down Cathedral.

The address was given by the Rev Canon John Auchmuty, Chair of the Scholarship Scheme, who said that to be a part of worship is a privilege, connecting with Almighty God and the needs of individual congregations. Canon Auchmuty reminded

the new scholars to embrace whatever has gone before and build on it, to realise the rich tradition expressed in the liturgies, and to give thanks for the opportunity to serve God through music.

Successful candidates who have now completed their three-year course and gained their certificates are Kathryn Robb from St Cedma's, Larne, and Caroline McCartney from St Columba's, Knock. Caroline was unable to attend the service as she was starting her music degree course at Durham University.

New scholars, David Dunlop from All Saints', Belfast, and Clare Kelly from St Patrick's, Jordanstown, were then commissioned for a period of three years.

There are currently five second-year scholars and six third-year scholars:

## Second-year scholars:

Glenn English - St John's, Magherally;  
Jack McCabe - Killinchy, Kilmoody and Tullynakill;  
Sean Turner - Ballymoney, Finvoy and Rasharkin;  
Natalie Bell - Christ Church, Lisburn;  
Tanya Hanna - St Mark's, Dundela.

## Third-year scholars:

Rebekah Wilson - All Saints', Belfast;  
Callum Whiteside - St Mark's, Ballysillan;  
Jane Knowles - Broomhedge;  
Victoria Irwin - St John's, Whitehouse;  
Kathryn Murdie - Ballywillan;  
Amy Norris - Kilmore.

## Movie night for Magheragall MU

Magheragall Branch of the Mothers' Union (MU) travelled to The Web Theatre in Newtownards to see the film 'Jane Eyre' for its November meeting.

Enrolling member Bronwen Dark had contacted her friends Candice and Ian Foster of Ballyholme Parish, proprietors of The Web Theatre, to see if they could host a cinema night for the MU. As well as watching the movie, the ladies enjoyed refreshments in the VIP room.

At their December meeting, members made up hampers for Barnardo's and collected items for toiletry bags for Women's Aid. Both projects are an ongoing part of the branch programme.



Take a bow ladies! Members of Magheragall Mothers' Union on their trip to The Web Theatre, Newtownards.

## Sock appeal for the homeless

Before Christmas, the Parishes of Drummaul, Duneane and Ballyscullion donated socks over a number of weeks to be distributed by homeless shelters throughout Northern Ireland in association with the #NorthCoastSocksAppeal.

A 'Sock Tree' was created by Iris Fry. Socks are the items least likely to be donated to homeless shelters.



The Rev Canon Derek Kerr, rector of the Parishes of Drummaul, Duneane and Ballyscullion, and organiser Aurelia Kelly with a bag of socks for the homeless.

# Spring 2020 Contents

Interview with Bishop Alan	6-7
Opera singer Glenn Tweedie	8
Alzheimer's Society Award	9
Parish nurses in Agherton	10-11
Carnmoney Parish vision	12
Healthy hearts in Derryvolgie	13
Youth news	14-15
Honour for Alan	16
Simon awarded a BEM	17
From Nairobi to Ballyclare	18
Ivan is top lollipop man!	19

## Cover photo:


Agherton Parish, Portstewart, is the first Church of Ireland Parish in Northern Ireland to appoint a parish nurse. Full story on pages 10-11. Photo: The Coleraine Chronicle.




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

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## An eventful few months



Well, what an eventful few months it has been for our diocese!

More than 500 people from across the diocese came together on the Thursday before Christmas in St Patrick's, Ballymena, to share with Bishop Alan as he prepared to take his leave of us after 12 years of faithful service as Bishop of Connor.

It was an occasion filled with thankfulness, as we said thank you to him for all that he had given of himself to us in this demanding role, and Bishop Alan expressed his own gratitude to many in the diocese for their support and encouragement.

This year sees Bishop Alan and Liz settling into their new home in Bangor and we all wish them many years of happy, healthy retirement together.

Some of you may be aware of the sad news that Mrs Audra Irvine from the Diocesan Office took seriously ill during the

bishop's farewell evening. Audra is making progress, but continues to receive care in hospital. I would encourage you to join with us in praying that she would make a good recovery. Do also be mindful of the Diocesan Office staff as they cope with the absence of a friend and colleague at this time.

It may be that by the time you are reading this, we know the result of the Electoral College to elect a new Bishop for Connor Diocese. As I write, we are all praying for those from this diocese and the wider Church of Ireland who are entrusted with that task. In the meantime, the work of the Kingdom continues in the life of parishes across the diocese - I trust that you will know God's blessing as you play your part.

**Yours in Jesus,  
George**

## 150th celebrations at St Stephen's, Millfield



At the anniversary service in St Stephen's are, from left: Gina Rea, Parish Secretary; the Ven Paul Dundas, Archdeacon of Dalriada and Bishop's Commissary; Fionnuala Jay-O'Boyle, Lord-Lieutenant of Belfast; Mr Richard Jay; and the Rev Canon James Carson, Minister-in-Charge of St Stephen's. Photo: Norman Briggs.

St Stephen's, Millfield, celebrated its 150th anniversary with a dinner for parishioners and invited guests on October 25, and a special anniversary service on October 26. Archdeacon Paul Dundas, the Bishop of Connor's Commissary, was the preacher.

St Stephen's was designed by Sir Thomas Drew, architect of St Anne's Cathedral, Belfast, and survived the Belfast Blitz in 1941 when much of the area was

demolished. St Stephen's Parish was joined with St Luke's in 1980, and was listed in 1992.

In 2006, the church became the sole Anglican church in the parish after the closure of St Luke's. The parish has recently completed the first two phases of a major refurbishment programme, and in partnership with the Hub Chaplaincy has established a vibrant ministry to students.





Bishop Alan greets his former PA, Mrs Rosemary Patterson, and her husband Jim.



Bishop Alan welcomes Ms Leah Batchelor.



Waiting for the service to begin.



Clergy who took part in the Service of Thanksgiving for the ministry of Bishop Alan Abernethy. Seated in the front row along with Bishop Alan and his wife Liz are the Rev Dr Heather Morris, Secretary of the Methodist Church in Ireland; the Rt Rev Noel Treanor, Roman Catholic Bishop of Down and Connor; the Rt Rev Sarah Groves, Moravian Church Bishop; and the Very Rev Charles McMullan, Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

# Diocese says thanks for Bishop Alan's ministry

Connor Diocese said thank you to its much-loved bishop, the Rt Rev Alan Abernethy, at a special Service of Thanksgiving to mark his retirement.

Representatives of all parishes across Connor were present at this very personal and poignant service held in St Patrick's Parish Church, Ballymena, on December 19.

Bishop Alan, 62, announced his retirement on health grounds in September, saying it had been 'an amazing privilege and joy' to have served Connor as its bishop.

He was diagnosed with prostate cancer during a sabbatical in 2018. His treatment began early in November that year, and the bishop has taken part in a clinical trial, knowing this may help others in the future. He announced his retirement on the day he had his final session of treatment.

Despite a wet and windy night, St Patrick's was packed with around 550 of the bishop's friends and colleagues, along with a number of special guests, including the Rev Dr Heather Morris, Secretary of the Methodist Church in Ireland; the Rt Rev Noel Treanor, Roman Catholic Bishop of Down and Connor; the Rt Rev Sarah Groves, Moravian Church; and the Very Rev Charles McMullan, Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

Bishop Alan greeted friends at the doors of the church before the service, and during refreshments later.

The service began with a welcome from the Rev Canon Mark McConnell, rector of Ballymena. Prayers were led by the Rev Emma Carson, with intercessions read by the Rev Denise Acheson and featuring the Benedictine Monks from Holy Cross Monastery, Rostrevor, who also intoned Psalm 121.

Readings were by Ann Crawford and Debbie Crawford. Bishop Alan preached, basing his words on John 12 v 21: "We want to see Jesus. Can you help us?"

Before the sermon, the bishop revealed that the cancer which had been in his bones in the pelvic area was no longer there and that his PSA count indicated cancer was not traceable. "It is a miracle of modern medicine," he said, to warm applause. He expressed his thanks to all those who had supported him, and made particular reference to those who had journeyed with his wife Liz.

"Thank you to God, for His amazing love, and to Jesus. I have never experienced peace as I have this year, and I have never felt so close to Jesus," he said.

At the end of his sermon, Bishop Alan told the congregation: "I will be praying for you for years to come."





Pictured before the service are Archdeacon George Davison, Dean Stephen Forde, Dean Sam Wright and the Rev Emma Carson.

Before giving the Blessing, as the service drew to a close, the bishop invited clergy from the different denominations to pray for him. Diocesan Development Officer, Trevor Douglas, and Bishop's PA, Lorraine Ogilby, represented his staff team. The Rev Canon Bro David Jardine, who had often sat and prayed with Bishop Alan during his illness, led the prayers.

As the service ended, thanks were extended to the bishop for his ministry over the years by the Archdeacon of Connor, the Ven Dr Stephen McBride, on behalf of the clergy, and by Pauline High, on behalf of the laity.

Archdeacon McBride said that under Bishop Alan's leadership, Connor Diocese was a 'happy and exciting place to work.' Referring to the bishop's vision for a development team, the archdeacon said: "You have built a strong leadership team. It has been a privilege to work alongside you."

Archdeacon McBride said his overriding memory will be of the fun that Bishop Alan had brought to meetings and retreats.

He recalled the diocesan pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 2011, which came at the end of a period when Bishop Alan had been ill. "I know how much it meant to you to walk in the steps of Jesus," Archdeacon

McBride said. "You led a service of Holy Communion by the Sea of Galilee and at the end you said: 'I'm back!' All 85 of us wanted to hug you!"

"You have dealt with all that has been thrown at you with great courage. You are an example to us all in the way you have dealt with great uncertainty.

"You leave a diocese that is in such great health, and that is a tremendous gift. We are here, not so much to say goodbye, but to say thank you. You are back, laughing and smiling, back to being you, and we say thank you, and give you back to Liz, Peter, Ruth and all the family."

Mrs High said everyone present would have their own memories of Bishop Alan's ministry. She said he had all the qualities needed to be a bishop, including hospitality, teaching, and managing family. "Bishop, thank you for your leadership, humility and the gentle way you have guided us," she said.

Referring to Psalm 143, Mrs High added: "As this new chapter starts for you, it is as you are starting a new day."

Bishop Alan formally retired on December 31. He reflects on his 12-and-a-half years as Bishop of Connor in our interview on pages six and seven.



Bishop Alan Abernethy processes in for the service alongside Bishop Noel Treanor, Roman Catholic Bishop of Down and Connor.



Bishop Alan delivers his sermon.



Clergy taking part in the service and representatives of the Bishop's diocesan team pray for Bishop Alan.



Bishop Alan Abernethy and his wife Liz beside the pier in Bangor, Co Down.

# 'I have my life back - I need to go and enjoy it'

They have only lived in Bangor for a matter of weeks, but it is already apparent that their new house, with its view across Belfast Lough, is home to Bishop Alan Abernethy and his wife Liz.

In a letter of thanks to the diocese of which he has been bishop for more than 12 years, Bishop Alan writes of his 'beautiful' home, his new study, his garden shed, and his bicycle, 'ready to follow the coast to wherever it leads.'

Retiring due to ill health – he was diagnosed with prostate cancer in September 2018 - was not how Bishop Alan wanted to end his ministry in the diocese, but the difficult decision was taken after discussions with his doctors and his family.

He is now in remission. "I realise that this is an amazing gift. I have my life back, and I need to go and enjoy it," he says.

Being in Bangor is something of a homecoming for the bishop, a father of two and now a proud granddad. He had been rector of Ballyholme Parish for 17 years when he was appointed Bishop of Connor by the House of Bishops. The call was not something he had anticipated.

"Our family was very happy where it was, and this was a new role in a new place. At the time I felt inexperienced and

inadequate," he admits. "But I was amazed by the support Connor gave me. I was given a lot of freedom and time to probe and ask questions and work out my vision, and that was a gift.

"The key thing was relationships, with clergy, staff, parishes, community leaders, paramilitaries, key players who opened up doors for other things to happen."

He says these relationships evolved into friendships with people from many walks of life. "It was amazing to have the chance, as bishop, to open doors and be part of the city, the county and Northern Ireland. It was an amazing opportunity, although often we were dealing with conflict situations we could not resolve and did not have the power to fix."

## TENSIONS

He is speaking not only of the work that went on 'under the radar' to ease community tensions and conflict, but also situations that arose within the diocese and its parishes. "When there is a breakdown, it is difficult, as there are no protocols for bishops to help resolve things. You have to rely on instinct and prayers and hope for the best," he says.

Bishop Alan always saw himself as a facilitator, enabler and encourager. He saw his priorities as clergy support, unity within

## The road to becoming a bishop

Bishop Alan Abernethy is a former pupil of Harding Memorial Primary School and Grosvenor Grammar School. He obtained a BA in History and Political Science from Queen's University Belfast, in 1978; a Dip Theol (1st class) from Trinity College Dublin in 1981 and a BD from Queen's in 1989.

After ordination in 1981, he was curate-assistant at St Elizabeth's, Dundonald, until 1984, and curate-assistant, Lecale Group of Parishes and minor canon of Down

Cathedral from 1984 until 1987. During this period he was also officiating chaplain at RAF Bishops court.

From 1986 until 1990, Bishop Alan was rector of St John's, Helen's Bay and chaplain at Crawfordsburn Geriatric Hospital, before his appointment as rector of St Columbanus, Ballyholme, in 1990. He was ordained Bishop of Connor at a service in St Anne's Cathedral, Belfast, on June 29 2007

the diocese, and facilitating change.

"I wanted to support our clergy. I believe the clerical life is one of the most difficult of all. You are very exposed," he says.

"I sought to hold together an incredibly diverse diocese. There are, for example, a whole range of views on issues like sexuality. I think I did create a sense of unity.

"And there was a need to facilitate change, in particular the restructuring of the diocesan office. A bishop needs his own team. It worked, but now it works better."

### HIGHLIGHT

For Bishop Alan, the highlight of his 12 plus years was meeting local parishes and vestries and discussing real issues that affected them, as well as encouraging parishes to think about the future.

"I prefer to go and talk to people. When they see the whites of your eyes, they know you are someone they can talk to," he says. "So much about being a bishop is about relationships. People don't have to like you, but if they trust you, that helps.

"The annual Lent Talks built huge relationships with people. I love preaching and teaching and loved doing the talks. They helped me with my writing and thinking."

He has fond memories of the Connor Diocesan Pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 2011. "It was wonderful that Liz and I were able to go on it together," the bishop says. "We had always wanted to do it, so it was personal as well as diocesan." Eighty-five people from across the diocese took part in the pilgrimage.

Another highlight for Bishop Alan was the Lambeth Conference, which he attended in 2008. Despite the conference falling less than a year after his ordination as bishop, he found himself with a key role to play. "I was a listener and helped draft the final report," he recalls. "We were dealing with very difficult issues. I enjoyed all the discussions."

### VIEWPOINTS

At home, he initiated clergy conferences held in the Slieve Russell Hotel in Co Cavan in 2009, 2012, 2015 and 2018. "I loved getting people together to discuss different viewpoints. The clergy quiet days were also important for this," he says.

Another highlight for Bishop Alan was the

visit of the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Rev and Rt Hon Justin Welby, to Belfast in October 2014. The archbishop met clergy from the city, diocesan staff and, after discussions with Bishop Alan, toured north and west Belfast. "I saw how touched he was learning about north Belfast, and won't forget seeing him accosted at the Peace Wall by a coachload of Chinese tourists who thought he was the Pope, and seeing how he spoke to them," Bishop Alan says. "Being a bishop, you can open doors and have dialogue with other people. I often thought: 'Me, a wee fellow from east Belfast and I am involved in this?' It is very humbling."

Bishop Alan speaks warmly of his friendship with the Most Rev Noel Treanor, Roman Catholic Bishop of Down and



Then and now. Bishop Alan on the cover of 'Connor Connections' in October 2007, looking across at Connor Diocese from Ballyholme, and enjoying a similar view from Bangor in January this year.

Connor. "I valued the opportunities I had to do things with Bishop Noel," he says.

"I also enjoyed working with the archdeacons and the Connor team. I enjoy helping people discover their talents."

He is sorry that, due to the outbreak of further civil unrest in South Sudan, he was only able to visit Connor's partner diocese of Yei once, in January 2013. "South Sudan is a very special place and we have a strong partnership, but I was sad that I could not go more often," Bishop Alan says. "Links like this are very important. It helps a parish become more aware about mission and see afresh that it is about community and serving people and being involved with people."

Looking back on his time as bishop, he says: "I am sure there are things I did wrong, but I tried to do my best and go with my gut feeling. I hope I have left the diocese in good heart. Finances are strong, Connor is more focused on mission and

ministry and Team Connor is a wonderful gift. I have put structures in place for a new bishop to build on. I feel that is a good legacy. It was important that I stayed a reasonably long time. Connor needed stability and I was able to give it that at least. I really felt I had become its bishop."

Retirement at 62 was not how he had planned life. "I wish I did not have cancer," he says. "But you get beyond sadness. I have my life back because I am in remission, and I need to go and enjoy it. Now I can do the things I really want to do. I will continue to have connections with Queen's University, the Church Army in the UK and Ireland and the Friends of the Cancer Centre. And I have definitely not finished preaching. This is just the start of a new chapter.

### FRIENDSHIPS

"Friendships have become more precious, and it will be lovely to have time to enjoy these. I am also looking forward to spending time with my grandson."

The bishop, who has published three books, plans to continue to write. "I am still writing about my cancer journey," he says. "I am about half way through, but found it quite difficult when I was going through the cancer. My dream, inspired by my grandson, is to write a children's book based on the parables."

He is also taking swimming lessons and wants to learn to sea kayak! "I just want to live. This is an amazing gift I have been given," he smiles, looking from his kitchen window to the sea in the distance, and beyond that Co Antrim. "My prayers will always be for Connor Diocese."

## A word from Liz

I would like to say thank you for the welcome I received, especially in the parishes. More especially, for the obvious warmth and love that you had for Alan.

Looking to the future, I am grateful that Alan and I have a future, and hopefully a long one. Thank you so much for holding us in your prayers. I believe they were hugely significant in the positive outcome of Alan's treatment, as well as the sense of peace we experienced in the many difficult days of the last 15 months.

So may I ask you to keep praying for us, that we may continue to experience for many years the fullness of life that Jesus brings us. Also, that we will hear his voice as we seek to follow a new call for this next chapter in our life together.

**Liz Abernethy**



# Opera star Glenn on song in home parish

He has played to full houses in theatres and churches around the world, and last December, opera singer Glenn Tweedie trod the boards at his home parish of St John's, Whitehouse.

Glenn, 53, son of former Connor Honorary Lay Secretary Jim Tweedie and his wife Ruth, was part of the Merry Opera Company's dramatic staging of Handel's 'Messiah' in St John's on December 6.

Glenn first sang publicly when he performed 'O Holy night' in church at the age of eight, discovering a talent for, and love of, singing. "I have been singing ever since," Glenn said.

He grew up in Belfast, before the family moved to Whiteabbey and joined Whitehouse Parish. He was a member of the Church Lads' Brigade until his mid-20s. When he was younger, Glenn sang semi-professionally in churches of all denominations across Northern Ireland.

Following success in competitions, concerts and oratorio, Glenn moved to Manchester to study at the Royal Northern College of Music as an undergraduate for four years, and then the Royal College of Music in London as a post graduate for one year.

Glenn finished college in 2000 and decided to go abroad, moving to Italy and the Teatro del Maggio in Florence to sing and do further study. He later spent some time with the European Festival Chorus in Salzburg, worked with the National Reis Opera in the Netherlands and has toured Australia and New Zealand and, more



Glenn Tweedie.

recently, Denmark and Malaysia, singing opera and operetta.

Looking back on his touring years, Glenn said: "I wanted to travel, singing in bigger choruses and in roles for smaller companies. I was fairly lucky because, as a tenor, I seemed to fall easily into one thing and another.

"To supplement my income, I was teaching and singing in church. I needed work that was flexible and would allow me time off to tour. In England I taught singing in primary schools as part of the national curriculum. I spent seven years going round schools in London travelling on the Underground to places you would never have heard of

with a guitar and piano and working with autistic children."

Having spent 22 years in London and abroad, Glenn returned to live in Whiteabbey four years ago, where he now combines teaching with his own singing and performance. "It is wonderful living here again. I have a range of students, including beginners, children and professional singers," he said.

Glenn has been with the Merry Opera Company since 2011, and said the staging of 'Messiah' performed in St John's was very different from the usual production of the oratorio. He has also been the revival director of this dramatized 'Messiah' for the last two years.

"It brings out the natural passion. There is a cast of just 12. As a performer, it is very liberating. The singing is very exposed and the audience can sense the danger. This version brings out the literal text," Glenn says.

"The music and the words are familiar, but the different characters make the text very clear indeed. People see 'Messiah' in a different way. Handel's intent was to use baroque instruments and small numbers and this strips it back even further."

The performance in Whitehouse was part of the Merry Opera Company's 2019 tour, which included its 100th 'Messiah' in London on November 24 2019.

Glenn continues to perform a portfolio of gala concerts, with a range of repertoire from opera, operetta, music theatre and sacred music. He also produces and directs concerts and productions for several opera companies and singing groups, and has considerable experience in educational workshops and music projects in schools.

## Children enjoy chance to be a chorister for a day!

On October 12 and November 9, Belfast Cathedral hosted a free 'Be a Chorister for a Day' event, inviting children to experience the life of a cathedral chorister.

Almost 70 children, aged between seven and 12, came from schools across Belfast and beyond to enjoy singing, games and workshops and meet some existing cathedral choristers.

Parents were invited to attend the introduction and warm-up session, and the children learnt how to breathe properly for singing, using some amusing techniques.

They were given a cathedral tour and were also treated to a demonstration of the mighty cathedral organ. Here they heard all the many different sounds of the instrument, from the

very highest sounds to the lowest (and quite amusing), and from the softest to loudest.

Both days culminated in children processing in chorister robes into the quire stalls of the cathedral, where they took part in a short service for family and friends.

Every 'chorister for the day' was presented with a certificate by the Dean of Belfast, the Very Rev Stephen Forde, signed by the Director of Music, Matthew Owens, along with a Belfast Cathedral medal. Anyone interested



Photo: Norman Briggs.

in finding out more about becoming a chorister should email Matthew at [music@belfastcathedral.org](mailto:music@belfastcathedral.org).





Jacqueline and Colin Higgins with a photo of Jacqueline's late grandmother Margaret, who had Alzheimer's disease.

# Alzheimer's Award for Upper Falls Parish

They were small things at first, noticeable only to Margaret's carer, her granddaughter Jacqueline Higgins. A misplaced purse, a kettle boiled but never poured, words spoken out of character.

That was more than 10 years ago, and while many others may have dismissed these little changes as just signs of growing older, Jacqueline knew something was amiss. It was almost a year later that Margaret, then aged 80, was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease.

"I was brought up by my granny from the age of 18 months," Jacqueline said. "We were very close. I was her carer and I could see changes that nobody else might have noticed."

Two years after her diagnosis, Margaret had to move into residential care. Jacqueline visited daily. Margaret died last April, aged 92.

Last November, Upper Falls Parish Church, Suffolk, was awarded first place in the Alzheimer's Society Awards in the small/medium dementia-friendly organisation of the year category. Jacqueline and her husband Colin have led the church's work with the charity – driven by their own personal experience.

Jacqueline says that before she was diagnosed, Margaret lost her eyesight and suffered from depression. "My grandfather did his best, but he couldn't deal with the repetitions and questions. I found it difficult. At the time, I had no knowledge of the illness or how to deal with it. Over the next 10 years I learned about emotions and routine, and how being sick can accelerate

their condition," says Jacqueline.

"The brain and body aren't communicating, which is why they get infections so easily. Their speech and mobility are impacted. Times, days, seasons mean nothing.

"The only thing that is really big for them is their emotions - they love small children, pets, music."

Jacqueline says one of the big dangers with Alzheimer's is a failure to eat. "The brain doesn't tell them they are hungry or thirsty. You constantly have to encourage them to take fluids."

Margaret eventually stopped recognising people she had not seen in a while. Like others suffering from the illness, Margaret did not believe how old she was. "With Alzheimer's they never remember the recent stuff, but they do remember the past. They can even think they are still as young as 15," says Jacqueline.

"Granny couldn't understand why she was in a nursing home. She believed she could do her own housework and cooking, and she could get a job, and in fact she thought she should have been looking after me!

"When we took her out, she always wanted to get back to 'work.' She thought the residential home was her work, and they let her fold the napkins for the meals. That kept her from getting agitated."

Margaret's failing sight meant that she had a number of falls, and she also had osteoporosis.

Margaret died in hospital after suffering pneumonia. Her husband John predeceased her in 2013, having fought his own battle with cancer. "We brought her to the funeral, but she did not understand who it was had died," Jacqueline says.

It was only in 2017 that Jacqueline and Colin became involved with the Alzheimer's Society, organising a fundraising tea. Jacqueline had previously attended a talk by the Society in the residential home. "I said they should be out in churches where there are a lot of elderly people who don't recognise the signs and symptoms. They said they would love to target churches, and I said 'leave it with me!'" she says.

That first tea led to a series of parish initiatives, including a cross-community, Dementia Friendly Community (DFC) Workshop which created 46 Dementia Friends; a series of DFC workshops for the Boys' Brigade, creating a further 50 Dementia Friends; a partnership with Finaghy Methodist Church; and further fundraising activities.

"We provided a confidential place for people to speak about what they were going through and how they were dealing with things, including even financial matters," Jacqueline explains.

As a Dementia Friendly Church, Upper Falls has a quiet room which can be used by someone with dementia if required, and a Dementia Friend will sit with them.

Jacqueline said the work with the BB had been valuable in helping young people understand what dementia means, and relate to an elderly relative or friend who may have the condition.

The couple said the award from the Alzheimer's Society had been a massive surprise. "I never expected to win anything, especially when I saw all the big companies who were nominated, including the Housing Executive, Danske Bank and the Health Trust," Jacqueline said. "It was a total shock!"

Looking ahead, she said: "My wish for 2020 is to make Suffolk a Dementia Friendly estate, and to see the church and community work together."

Jacqueline misses her grandmother very much. At Margaret's funeral in May, the family illustrated the order of service with forget-me-nots – the logo of the Alzheimer's Society – and a poignant message for a lady much loved.



## Clergy 'refreshed and challenged'

Connor clergy were 'refreshed and challenged' by the Archbishop of Armagh, the Most Rev Dr Richard Clarke, speaker at a quiet morning on November 5 2019.

The archbishop, who retired as Primate on February 2, told clergy Connor Diocese was in a time of hiatus – "We are looking back and looking forward at the same time," he said.

The archbishop delivered two excellent talks, the first focused on holding fast to what is good, and the second on Christian discipleship – exploring what is unknown.

Thanking the archbishop, the Ven Paul Dundas said: "We have been refreshed and challenged by what you have said."

The quiet morning took place in All Saints' Parish Church, Antrim. Clergy were welcomed with refreshments before the service which was led by the Archdeacon of Connor and Vicar of Antrim, the Ven Dr Stephen McBride, and enjoyed lunch in the parish hall afterwards.



The Archdeacon of Connor and Vicar of Antrim, the Ven Dr Stephen McBride; Archbishop of Armagh, the Most Rev Dr Richard Clarke; the Ven Paul Dundas, Bishop's Commissary; and the Ven George Davison, Archdeacon of Belfast, at the clergy quiet morning.

## Poignant remembrance exhibition

A video featuring a poignant 'Ghost Tommy,' filmed at several locations in the Carrickfergus area, formed part of the Act of Remembrance at Holy Trinity Parish, Woodburn, on Remembrance Sunday.

The parish also hosted a display of WW1 and WW2 artefacts and books. Among the items were a baby gas mask which had belonged to rector, the Rev Alan McCann's, late father, as well as his great-grandfather's medals and death notice from the Somme, and Alan's grandfather's home guard medal.

There were ration books, ID cards, and a booklet from the Royal Naval Fleet which was in Belfast from June to August 1945.



Agherton parishioners along with the Rev Malcolm Ferry welcome newly-appointed parish nurses, Noelle McNinch and Eileen Irwin.

# Agherton Parish has 'so much to say' about communion

Agherton Parish, Portstewart, has become the first Church of Ireland parish in Northern Ireland to employ professional parish nurses.

Noelle McNinch and Eileen Irwin will undergo training with Parish Nursing Ministries UK before taking up the role in a job-share capacity.

The two nurses will realise the Rev Malcolm Ferry's vision of providing three-fold godly care to the families of the parish, namely religious care, pastoral care and spiritual care.

This vision is outlined in a parish review, 'A 360° Approach to Pastoral Care,' presented by Malcolm soon after he arrived in Agherton as rector in May last year.

The post of parish nurse was advertised in August as a part-time role for one qualified nurse. "When we saw the calibre of those who applied, the select vestry agreed that a team of two nurses with different skills would encourage and complement each other," Malcolm said.

Since the parish review, around 20 people have offered themselves as pastoral

visitors. They will now receive training from the parish nurses. "For the first time, we will have ongoing supervision and support for our lay visitors, developing the skills of the team," Malcolm said.

### TRAINING

"These parish visitors will receive critical training in how to talk about a loving God rather than a broken world. They will gain the confidence to share faith and encourage those they visit.

"In a large parish, some people can get lost. This project to upskill our lay visitors has this sense of everybody building towards a people of God, helping, sharing, and being realistic in what that looks like in a modern world.

"The parish nurses will look for those who are most vulnerable - the elderly, people coming home from hospital, new mums and others. This is a holistic approach to pastoral care," he said.





Malcolm and Eileen Irwin. Photo courtesy of The Coleraine Chronicle.

# Something about community's health

"People will be more open to talking about the issues of health if the person visiting them is a qualified nurse."

"An important aspect to these new appointments is that the parish nurses are able to pray as part of the spiritual care of those being visited. When a person in authority prays with someone, it really helps and gives them a heightened sense of God's peace and well-being."

## COMPLEMENTING

"We are not replacing the doctor's surgery or local hospital, instead, we are complementing those excellent services. The parish nurse will be an advocate for the parishioners who need extra support."

Malcolm emphasised that the nurses would not only be looking out for the elderly, but will visit the many different groups active in the parish to give advice and discuss issues such as mental health and nutrition.

"We will also run annual community events, as we want people in Portstewart to feel

that Agherton Parish has something to say about the community's health," he said.

It is planned that the nurses will hold an informal 'clinic' following the Wednesday morning weekly Holy Communion. "We think this is a gentle approach to caring. Building these new relationships will be embedded in our pastoral care. It is ground-breaking and God-honouring as we are trying to serve the people," said Malcolm.

## What an opportunity in these days when there is so much mental illness and loneliness

The parish nurses will not visit residential homes or hospitals where there are nurses on site, but will visit people in their own homes, particularly those who are isolated.

"By reconnecting people in the geographical boundaries of the parish to a church which cares, we want them to reconnect with a church that worships," he said.

Speaking of Noelle and Eileen, Malcolm added: "The panel felt that God had brought these two people of calibre, quality and spirituality to our door. We felt fortunate. Our parish was praying during the recruitment process and that really empowered us."

## BLOWN AWAY

Eileen was alerted to the post by a friend who saw it advertised on social media. "I was blown away by it. I had never heard of a parish nurse before and it ticked all the boxes," said Eileen.

"I have a long history of nursing, most latterly in the community, but with the constraints in the NHS, you don't get the opportunity to explore Christianity or faith."

"I have worked with people with long-term chronic diseases, and that gave me an opportunity to get to know them, and I have prayed with patients on an ad-hoc basis. But when I saw this job, I thought 'Wow, that's what holistic nursing is all about!'"

"What an opportunity in these days when there is so much mental illness and loneliness. There are a plethora of services, but this job is about signposting people to those services, and giving support from a

Christian perspective on their journey."

"I am very excited to be able to share faith and nursing together. It is so new and innovative; it is just wonderful and an interesting new challenge of faith."

Noelle was also directed to the position by friends. "I wasn't really searching for a new job but several close friends posted the advertisement to me thinking it was my ideal post," she said.

"When I read the job description, I realised that yes, this is definitely for me; in fact I was really excited about it."

"My nursing experience has involved school nursing, diabetes, elderly care and palliative care. I have gained counselling skills and have completed courses in youth ministry, pastoral care and recently the 'Cornhill Course.'"

"As a nurse, total patient care is my aim, and pain can be caused by physical, emotional and spiritual distress. This new role permits the nurse to use God's Word, prayer and to spend time with parishioners in order to alleviate their pain and aid in the healing process."

The Ven Paul Dundas, Archdeacon of Dalriada, welcomed the initiative. "As a diocese, we congratulate Agherton Parish and the rector, the Rev Malcolm Ferry, on the development of this new concept of parish nurses and the appointment of Noelle and Eileen to these positions," he said.

"It is an exciting missional step for the parish in its witness to parishioners and their families. We trust that Noelle and Eileen will be used by the Lord in their new vocation in the parish and community of Portstewart."

The cost of this project has been covered by Agherton Parish.

## New rural dean

The Rev Malcolm Ferry, rector of Agherton Parish, has been appointed as rural dean of the Deanery of Coleraine and succeeds the Rev Canon George Graham.

As rural dean, Malcolm will have responsibility for taking care of parishes during a time of vacancy and when an incumbent is off ill.

The diocese is most grateful to Canon Graham for his unstinting faithfulness in service and commitment to the parishes and the parishioners in the deanery during his time as rural dean.



## 'Cakes, Bakes & Faith' in Lisburn

More than 250 people enjoyed mouth-watering treats and inspiring stories when Tearfund's 'Cakes, Bakes & Faith' tour visited Christ Church, Lisburn, on October 3 2019.

The tour featured celebrity bakers, Martha Collison and Will Torrent. Martha was the youngest-ever contestant on 'The Great British Bake Off,' and Will is an award-winning chocolatier, patissier and Waitrose consultant who regularly appears on 'Ready, Steady, Cook.'

Martha and Will spoke about how they got into baking, and their recent trips with Tearfund, sharing inspiring stories of how Tearfund is supporting families in greatest need. Will met cocoa farmers in Ivory Coast, while Martha visited Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

There was a live bake-off on stage between the two special guests, with the rector of Christ Church, the Ven Paul Dundas, helping to judge the winner. In the end, Martha's stacked desert featuring baked apples, digestive biscuits and cream just pipped Will's rice pudding.

Will and Martha also selected a winner from a number of cakes baked by members of the audience.

Paul said afterwards: "On such an autumnal night, it was so encouraging to see more than 250 people engage with Will and Martha as they were interviewed about their love of baking and their faith.

"They also talked about their trips with Tearfund, and people who came along had the opportunity to support the work of Tearfund and to sign up to support this work on a monthly basis."

Paul said it had been a very successful evening for the parish and for raising awareness of the work of Tearfund.



The Ven Paul Dundas, rector, introduces special guests, Gemma Brown, Tearfund, and celebrity bakers, Martha Collison and Will Torrent, to the 'Cakes, Bakes & Faith' evening in Christ Church, Lisburn, last October.



The Rev Andy Heber and members of the Carnmoney Parish Select Vestry at their Away Day.

## Carmmoney explores 'What kind of Church'

*Since September, Carnmoney Parish Church has been looking to the future, and considering its function and priorities. The Vicar of Carnmoney, the Rev Andy Heber, outlines the work the parish has undertaken to formulate a vision and determine 'What Kind of Church' it wants to be.*

Between September and December, we have been considering as a church how we can move forward into God's future for us and grow as a church, not only in numbers but also upwards towards God, inwards in love for each other and outwards into our local community.

Following a sermon series over eight Sundays, members of the congregation met on Thursday nights to discuss the way forward, with the help of a DVD-based course entitled 'What Kind of Church?' produced by the Evangelical Alliance.

Out of these meetings, and through much feedback and discussion, a vision has slowly emerged, and an action plan has been formulated that will hopefully guide our work over the coming years.

This focuses on three areas:

- Growing up towards God (Worship);
- Growing inwards towards each other (Fellowship);

- Growing outwards into our community (Evangelism).

On November 2 2019, the Select Vestry had a very productive Away Day at St Peter's, Antrim Road. In the morning, we considered what our strengths and weaknesses were as a church, and also decided what our main function and priorities should be.

Following a relaxed lunch at the Lansdowne Hotel next door, the action plan was introduced, discussed, tweaked and, finally, unanimously agreed. To conclude the day, as part of our closing worship, we built a cairn together, using precious stones from Iona. This symbolised the stage we have reached in our church's journey, and our desire to continue to move onwards and upwards into an exciting future under God's direction.

During January, the Rev Carol Harvey and I preached four sermons to share this vision with the entire congregation.

## Tackling the stigma of mental ill-health

St Patrick's, Broughshane, welcomed Hope4Life to its first Mental Health Sunday service in November as part of an initiative to tackle the stigma surrounding mental ill-health in the village.

The rector, the Rev Dr Andrew Campbell, said: "Often the stigma surrounding mental ill-health is stopping people from talking about their struggle. As a church,

we are committed to reaching out in love and providing a community in which we can bear one another's burdens."

Campbell Hamilton from Hope4Life said: "It was a privilege to experience the heart Andrew and the congregation have for the issues around mental health and the recognition of the role the church can have to help address mental ill health."

# Healthy hearts in Derryvolgie!

St Columba's Parish, Derryvolgie, purchased three potentially life-saving defibrillators after a well-supported fundraising drive.

The parish originally hoped to raise enough for one defibrillator. The rector, the Rev James Boyd, said: "Our Men's Group had set themselves a project to provide a defibrillator for the church building. Apart from parish activities, church facilities are used each week by numerous community groups."

James said the project received enthusiastic support from church members, and funds were soon in place to purchase the defibrillator which was placed prominently in the church reception area.

But there was more to come. Derek Shuter from the Men's Group said: "Further donations and support from local firm Heartsine brought us another two defibrillators and provided us with an opportunity to provide a resource for use in the local community."

St Columba's values its location at the centre of the Derryvolgie community. "The additional defibrillators provided an opportunity for the church to link with the local community in a practical way," said James. "Indeed, we are very conscious that our history as a church began in Moss Road in the heart of Derryvolgie. In fact, our first services were held some 60 years ago in the shop unit now occupied by Mace supermarket."

As a means of recognising this historic link, St Columba's was pleased to offer

a defibrillator to Mace for use in the Derryvolgie community.

Ian Hall, manager of the supermarket, said: "We are pleased to have this resource for use should an emergency arise. We appreciate the thoughtful gesture from St Columba's."

A second defibrillator was presented to Froth coffee shop at the Skyline Shops. "It's great to be able to partner with the local church and offer this much needed service to the local community," said Karen Campbell, proprietor of Froth.

At a service in St Columba's, James commissioned the three defibrillators for use in the community.

He said: "Whilst these physical defibrillators remind us of our need to ensure our hearts are healthy, they also remind us to ensure that our spiritual hearts are healthy as well."

Using a verse from Matthew 6: 21, 'For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also,' he commented. "Just as these defibrillators regulate our physical hearts, often we need to take the time to examine our hearts before God, allowing him to regulate them to a healthy balance with him once again."



The Rev James Boyd with a new defibrillator provided by the Men's Group at St Columba's, Derryvolgie.

## Parish Reader commissioned for Broughshane

Julie Thompson was commissioned as Parish Reader at a service in St Patrick's, Broughshane, on November 24.

The preacher was Julie's uncle, Henry Montgomery, from Asia Link Ireland. He spoke of the family's pride in Julie for taking this step and encouraged her and the congregation of the need to reach out with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Julie's mother Violet led prayers, and Julie's daughters Ella and Rebecca read during the service, which was very much a family affair.

Julie has been an active member of St Patrick's for more than 10 years, singing in the choir, serving on the Select Vestry and helping with Holiday Bible Clubs.

She said it had been a special day and she was looking forward to what is to come.



Welcoming Julie to her new role, the rector of St Patrick's, Broughshane, the Rev Dr Andrew Campbell, said: "I am delighted that Julie has taken this next step in her own ministry. She is a woman of boundless ability and a committed love of Jesus Christ. It is my hope that others will see how Julie has stepped out in faith and, like her, step into new ministry roles in our church family."

Julie's commissioning is part of a wider parish strategy that seeks to grow leaders and enable the parish to reach out in its mission to the community in Broughshane.

From left: Henry Montgomery, preacher; the Rev Dr Andrew Campbell, rector of St Patrick's, Broughshane; Julie Thompson, Diocesan Reader; and the Rev Peter Jones, Connor Warden of Readers.



# A Big Weekend!



Storyteller Bob Hartman enthralled his audience at the Family Fiesta on the Saturday afternoon of Connor's Big Weekend.

There was plenty of fun, laughter and learning in St Patrick's, Ballymena, over the course of Connor's Big Weekend on November 16 and 17 2019.

On the Saturday afternoon, families with young children came together for the Big Family Fiesta, while the following afternoon, youth and children's leaders attended Snapshot Sunday.

The weekend's activities were organised by Lisburn Cathedral Chapter, working in partnership with Connor Youth and Children's Development Officers, Christina Baillie and Jill Hamilton.

Special guests were storyteller Bob Hartman, the Inspire Band from London, the ever-popular Play it by Ear drama team, and magician, Magic G.

Inspire led a family-friendly concert, with upbeat praise songs and a theme of celebration. They were joined by Bob Hartman, who shared stories and songs

from his latest books.

Play it by Ear wooed the children, who were also fascinated by the tricks performed by Magic G! The afternoon ran from 2pm-4pm, with a break for refreshments, and a fantastic time was had by all, young and not-so-young!

Snapshot Sunday comprised a series of informal workshops led by Bob Hartman, Play It By Ear and Inspire, who all shared a variety of innovative ways to communicate the Bible and worship with children and all-age audiences.

Catherine Little and Paul Coulter came along to share their expertise with youth leaders.

The weekend was rounded off with an All-Age Service on Sunday evening.



These two young ladies enjoying themselves during the refreshment break at the Family Fiesta event.



The Dean of Connor, the Very Rev Sam Wright, and his grandson.



Magician, Magic G, on the Saturday afternoon.

## Sign up for Streetreach 2020

Young people are invited to take part in Streetreach 2020, which will partner with Mossley Parish for the second consecutive year.

Applications are now open, with young people who will have finished Year 8 and up invited to attend on a daily basis, with a residential option open to those who have finished Year 11 by the summer. Cost of the residential is £50 per person, and it is £10 per day for non-residential.

Streetreach, a local, missional experience for young people, will run from June 30 to July 4. Activities will include helping in a kids' club, prayer walking, meeting new people, and learning about God with other young people.

Joining Streetreach again this year is a group from the USA. You can apply via the Connor website /youth/children.



The Bishop of Connor's Commissary, Archdeacon Stephen McBride, right, with members of the Chapter of St Saviour, Lisburn Cathedral; Connor Children's Project Development Officer, Jill Hamilton, and special guests at the Big Family Fiesta in Ballymena on November 16.





Congratulations to the Connor SERVE graduates, pictured with Archdeacon Stephen McBride, Bishop's Commissary.

# Young leaders mark their graduation

Fourteen young leaders from five parishes graduated from the SERVE leadership course at a special ceremony on November 19 2019.

The SERVE course, developed by Tim Burns, Diocesan Youth Officer for Down and Dromore, was run over eight sessions by Christina Baillie, Connor Youth Officer, the Rev Philip Benson, Lesley Donaldson and Stephen Whitten.

The course guided the young people in

biblical leadership, exploring their gifts and how they can lead now as young people in their own parishes.

The graduation, held in St Stephen's Parish Church, Belfast, was a great opportunity for the young people to showcase all they had learned - with parents, friends and

clergy present to celebrate with them.

The Ven Dr Stephen McBride, Bishop's Commissary, commended the young people for their commitment to the course.

The young people led worship, prayed, read, and shared some of the highlights and challenges of the course.

Euan spoke about the book, 'Storylines,' which the group had been reading, sharing some of the more baffling questions that have come up as the group discussed a chapter each week.

Stuart, Alex and Sophie shared about the impact of preparing a five-minute talk about their faith, which they then presented to others in the group.

Christina Baillie said: "Huge congratulations to the young people who graduated from SERVE. It has been a pleasure to see you grow in your leadership, and you are each a blessing to your parishes.

"Thank you to Archdeacon McBride for coming and encouraging the young people in their achievement. Thank you to the Rev Jim Carson and Heather Carson, along with St Stephen's Parish, for hosting us and providing dinner."

Christina continued: "We are really expectant about the impact this course will have on the lives of the young people involved and their parishes."

## Helping our young people respond to difficulties

Connor Youth Council has launched 'Shaken,' a unique resource for young people, written in partnership with The Big House as part of the AFFIRM project.

The resource guides young people to consider how they can respond to difficulties they face in life, from a Christian perspective.

While providing practical advice, 'Shaken' is founded in biblical truths, and demonstrates how faith is integral in discussions with young people around coping with difficulty.

Christina Baillie, Diocesan Youth Officer, said: "It has been a joy to write the resource with the Big House staff team, drawing on their specialist expertise. We have also developed a leaders' guide to support leaders in our parishes,

to use this with groups of young people. The resource is set up for every young person to have their own copy, so they can try out a variety of healthy coping mechanisms."

The resource has sections on the value of talking to others, listening, and spotting feelings. It then provides 20 different healthy coping mechanisms for young people to try together or in their youth group. Within the resource, it encourages young people to review each coping mechanism, knowing that each young person is unique and will have their own ways of coping well.

To request a copy, email [christinabaillie@connordiocese.org](mailto:christinabaillie@connordiocese.org). The AFFIRM project and the 'Shaken' resource have been funded by Church of Ireland Priorities Fund.

## Ballyclare hosts a cracker of a party!

On December 7, young people from various parishes met in St John's, Ballyclare, for an afternoon of outreach and the diocesan Christmas party.

During the afternoon, a group of young people and leaders engaged people in the town, giving out tea, coffee, and Christmas treats. On the suggestion of the rector, the Rev Jonny Campbell-Smyth, they gave out Sellotape and flyers with information about the parish Christmas services.

In the evening, an epic Christmas party began with photos in the grotto. There was a Christmas quiz, a chance to decorate a gingerbread house and an incredible display of Christmas karaoke singing, before treats and a closing encouragement.

Thanks to Melanie McAlister for providing the festive food and to Connor Youth Council for a superb programme. Youth Council thanks Dianne Hamilton and St John's, Ballyclare, for hosting the event.





The Ven George Davison, Archdeacon of Belfast, supports Black Santa, Dean Stephen Forde, on the steps of St Anne's before Christmas.

## Black Santa raises £170,000

The 2019 Black Santa Sit-out for charities took place on the steps of St Anne's Cathedral, Belfast, from December 16 until Christmas Eve.

This was Dean Stephen Forde's second full Christmas Sit-out, and the 43rd Black Santa Appeal since the tradition was established by Dean Sammy Crooks in December 1976.

Each year, the people of Belfast and beyond dig deep to support the Black Santa Appeal, donating funds which are distributed to more than 200 charities at the cathedral's annual Good Samaritans Service. This year was no exception with £170,000 donated to the appeal.

For the first time, Black Santa went contactless, allowing people to make a donation with just a tap of a card.

## Dedication of desk



A desk in memory of Billy Campbell, a parishioner of St Patrick's, Connor, Antrim, was presented by Billy's son Gerry, and Gerry's wife, Jennifer. It was dedicated by the rector, the Rev Ian Magowan, who is pictured with, from left: John McCallion, rector's warden; Gerry and Jennifer Campbell; and Elaine Hamill, people's warden.

## Cheque presented

The United Parish of Christ Church and St John, Ballyclare, raised £1,424 at a craft fair, and handed over a cheque to the NI Branch of Crohn's & Colitis UK on December 13 2019.

# BEM for Ballymena youth leader Alan

Postman Alan Ross, a lifelong member of St Patrick's Parish Church, Ballymena, was awarded a British Empire Medal (BEM) in the Queen's New Year Honours list.

Alan has been captain of the parish Church Lads' and Church Girls' Brigade (CLCGB) for 25 years and a leader for the past 40 years! He is also part-time youth worker in the parish, and is a leader in St Patrick's youth club and Sunday School. His award is for services to the community in Ballymena.

Alan, 58, was baptised and confirmed in St Patrick's. He is married to Dorothy, and they have three sons, Glen, Conor and Callum, who also help as leaders with the CLCGB.

He has worked as a postman in Ballymena for 35 years, and says the job's shift pattern allows him to put the time into the CLCGB and his youth work.

"I joined the Church Lads' Brigade in 1967 and have been a leader from the age of 17, and captain for 25 years," Alan said. "You see the boys coming in when they are in primary school and continuing through secondary school, and even when they go to university and start jobs. It is like being part of a big family."

The brigade has expanded to include girls. "Lots of the boys had sisters and they wanted to come along, so we have quite a few girls in the younger ranks," he added.

"The young people enjoy mixing together and the fun. They also enjoy the badge work, and Regional Development Officer Victoria Jackson has been leading a really good Bible study, which makes it very relevant to them."

The most challenging aspect of his work with CLCGB is getting new leaders, particularly with changing legislation. "We are constantly trying to encourage people, but find these days they often don't have much time," he said.

Alan is a busy man. On top of the day job, he is at the church on Friday nights for CLCGB, Saturday nights for youth club, he takes Sunday School on Sunday mornings and is also involved in youth fellowship some Sundays and other evenings.

He said he was extremely honoured and grateful to receive the BEM. "I would like to thank all those who encouraged me on



Alan Ross BEM. Photo: Johnny Conn.

this journey, as without the support of the leaders, parents and young people working together as a team, I would not have received this award," he said.

A parish spokesperson expressed thanks to Alan for all that he does. "We are delighted that Alan has received this well-deserved award and are grateful for all the many hours he has given the young people of our parish through his role as youth worker and as our esteemed CLCGB Captain. Many congratulations Alan!" the spokesperson said.

Alan is looking forward to being presented with his honour at Hillsborough Castle in April.

## Congratulations to Bill and Rosalind

Congratulations to Bill Eames (96), a parishioner of St Mark's Parish, Ballymacash, who received a BEM for services to the RAF and the community in Enniskillen in Her Majesty the Queen's New Year Honour's list.

Bill was involved in some key battles in World War Two, and his story will feature in the summer 'Connor Connections.'

Congratulations too to Rosalind Bloomfield, Lambeg Parish, who received a BEM for voluntary service to the community in Northern Ireland.



Simon Neill BEM conducting St Polycarp's Parish Choir, and pictured inset.

# St Polycarp's Choir Director honoured

At the age of just 29, Simon Neill, Director of Music at St Polycarp's, Finaghy, has been awarded a British Empire Medal (BEM) in Her Majesty the Queen's New Year Honour's list.

Simon received the award for services to music and community relations in Belfast. He created a Choral Scholarship Scheme in St Polycarp's, which recruits choristers from 20 schools, representing both sides of the community in Belfast and Lisburn.

Simon learned that he was to receive an award last October. "When I saw the envelope it was so official looking that I thought I had done something wrong – I always think the worst!" he said. "I was absolutely delighted, particularly as honours are normally awarded to people

who are older, or who are exceptional, like celebrities or people doing humanitarian work."

Simon has also recently been honoured by the Guild of Musicians and Singers who have awarded him a Fellowship for Services to Music in Northern Ireland.

Simon's parents are Keith and Jennifer Neill. Keith was on the Executive Board of the Summer Madness Festival, and is a former youth officer at Lisburn Cathedral. He and Jennifer now live in Kansas, USA,

close to Simon's sister, Cheryl.

Simon read Music at Queen's University Belfast, and is a former student of Portadown College. During his years in grammar school, he regularly competed in local festivals, and was awarded Portadown Musician of the Year for two consecutive years. He received two scholarships at the age of 17 – one from the local Education Authority to complete his studies as a flautist; and an organ scholarship from the Church of Ireland diocesan scheme, with renowned City of Belfast organist, Dr Donald Davison MBE. The following year, while studying A Levels, he was appointed Director of Music at St Polycarp's.

As a student, Simon specialised in sacred choral music and piano accompaniment, and began to challenge St Polycarp's Choir to larger choral works such as 'I Was Glad,' 'Blest Pair of Sirens,' and 'Messiah,' in addition to several newly-commissioned works.

The parish choir continues to grow with his creation of the Choral Scholarship Scheme, which encourages trebles and teenagers to pursue singing. At present, the choir boasts more than 50 choristers and a repertoire of over 600 works.

The choir has undertaken nine summer tours to a number of historic English cathedrals, abbeys, and collegiate churches, and this year will sing in St Paul's Cathedral, London. The choir's President and Honorary Patron is the renowned musician, conductor, and former President of The Incorporated Society of Musicians, Dr Suzi Digby (Lady Eatwell) OBE.

Simon dedicates his time to teaching, as a peripatetic piano, vocal, and organ tutor in Rathmore Grammar School and St Malachy's College, Belfast. He is a former member of the semi-professional chamber choir, The Priory Singers, founded by the late Dr Harry Grindle MBE.

He regularly accompanies local festivals, BBC broadcasts, examinations, and recordings. Under his direction, the parish choir has recorded two CDs and will record a third next season. Simon is a Trustee of The Ulster Society of Organists and Choirmasters which he served as Honorary Secretary for two years. He was a guest of the Prince of Wales at Hillsborough Castle during a State visit in May.

He will return to Hillsborough Castle to receive his British Empire Medal at a ceremony in April, and has also been invited to a Garden Party at Buckingham Palace in July.

## The Third Order of St Francis

The Third Order (TSSF) is a worldwide Anglican Franciscan Religious Order. The Aims of the Order are: To make the Lord Jesus Christ known and loved everywhere; to spread the spirit of love and harmony; and to live simply.

Francis founded the Third Order for lay people who wished to live according to a Franciscan Rule of Life, without becoming members of the First Order.

Members desire to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ, whom they serve through prayer, study and work. They say belonging to the order has deepened their spirituality and developed their prayer lives. Franciscans seek to worship and serve God in his creation and are therefore pledged to the service of others and to

respect all life. Members are involved in different ways to help make the world a better place, fighting for justice, pleading for peace, and caring for creation.

The order believes the Franciscan way of life has a great deal to offer the Church, and that the emphasis on the practical and the call for action appeals to outlook of the Church of Ireland. It has been said that the Third Order of the Society of St Francis is the Anglican Church's best kept secret! The order wants to encourage more people to consider becoming members.

To learn more about TSSF, please contact Jeni McAughey at 26 Brooklands Park, Whitehead, BT38 9SN or email [jmmcaughey@doctors.org.uk](mailto:jmmcaughey@doctors.org.uk).





The Rev Jonny Campbell-Smyth with Antony Njoroge from All Saints' Cathedral/Urban Development Programme (UDP) in Nairobi, Kenya, who spent several weeks in Ballynure and Ballyeaston.

# Nairobi to Ballyclare

Antony Njoroge from All Saints' Cathedral/Urban Development Programme (UDP) in Nairobi, Kenya, spent three weeks in the Parish of Ballynure and Ballyeaston last September.

His visit was part of a placement funded by the Bishops' Appeal Harman Scholarship, facilitated by Church Mission Society Ireland (CMSI). Antony also worked in St Columba's, Portadown, and St Mark's, Dundela, before heading south for various engagements, returning to Nairobi in December.

We caught up with Antony during his time in Ballyclare, where the Rev Jonny Campbell-Smyth explained that the parish was keen, as part of its vision, to create partnerships in the Gospel with organisations locally and on a global level.

## LINK

With the support of Roger Thompson of CMSI early in 2019, the parish established a link with All Saints' Cathedral/ UDP, based in Kenya. Antony was coming to Ireland for CMSI's Ignite conference in September, and when the parish heard he planned to stay on to learn about church-based youth work here, he was invited to spend time in Ballyclare.

Planning Antony's schedule, Jonny said: "I tried to look at various areas in which he has been involved in models of a similar ministry, but in a different context."

Antony found himself helping out with the parish's different youth organisations. He also worked with the Street Pastors, youth Alpha and Baby Basics, and was involved in football ministry, as he does youth team coaching in Kenya.



Antony at the 'More than Just a Meal' feeding project in Nairobi.

"This helps to create partnership and build connections. We wanted people in the parish to get to know Antony through hospitality, and every night he had dinner with a different family," Jonny said.

Antony said. "It has been a joy to meet everybody, people are so hospitable, sharing their hearts and their experiences."

## SLUM

Aged 39 and recently married to Nancy, Antony is one of a family of nine. He grew up in a slum area of Nairobi, but in 1991, the Government demolished his home and all the others in the slum, relocating Antony's family to a new area some distance away.

"It was a bit of a wilderness. Very empty in many ways," Antony said. "My mum lost her job and became disconnected from her friends. By God's grace I ended up in a children's home with my brother. Some of

the family stayed in the new house, others moved in with family further away."

He recalled that people from All Saints' Cathedral/UDP had come to the new area to help provide food, to build toilets and bring people together, so their needs could be met as a group. That group soon had a name – Tujisadie - which translated from Swahili means 'let's help ourselves.'

Antony said that when they arrived, there was no water, schools, hospitals, or churches near their new home. All Saints' Cathedral came into the area to support the community and advocate for better living conditions. "UDP helped with a school and enriched the fellowship of the community," Antony said.

## EMPOWER

Ballyclare Parish has been supporting UDP financially through CMSI, as the project works to empower the community.

"I was one of the young people active in the community and had a bit of involvement in the projects," Antony said. "In 2003, I reflected on the pain we had gone through, and asked what we, as young people, could do for our children and youth outside of the classroom.

"Families lived in homes 10ftX10ft, with no lighting, so it was difficult for children to study. We found space for the kids, and set up the Tumaini (Hope) African Foundation. The school allowed us to use a classroom for the children to do their homework, and we recycled text books.

"As we shared our dream of having a resource centre, UDP could see the vision and bought us chairs, Bibles, textbooks and installed electricity. As the project grew, we had to move to a new centre – the community around us had also grown from 10,000 to 100,000.

"We had to think about expanding our place, to create a 'centre of excellence,' and we have acquired land for this purpose. It is not just about the resource centre, but we also run a feeding programme called 'More than Just a Meal,' and every Saturday we feed 350 kids. We have 70 come daily to do homework.

"If a community is not educated, it may not do well in life. We also run an outreach ministry to young people. We have a holistic approach, intellectual, social, physical, and health, particularly in relation to drugs, and preventing young people from getting into crime."

Antony expressed his gratitude both to Bishops' Appeal for funding his visit, and to CMSI for organising the logistics.



Carmmoney Primary School lollipop man Ivan Gibson at work.

# Ivan is top lollipop man

Lollipop man Ivan Gibson has been helping children to cross the road outside Carnmoney Primary School for 16 years.

And his commitment and daily good humour have not gone unnoticed, for Ivan was voted Belfast's favourite lollipop person in a contest run by the Belfast Live website.

More than 3,000 names were entered. The top 10 were put out to the public vote, with Rathcoole parishioner Ivan receiving 40 per cent of the votes cast. A cracking endorsement for the 78-year-old.

Ivan's family moved from Belfast to Rathcoole in 1962, becoming members of St Colmgall's Parish Church. When Ivan married Irene in 1965, they moved to live in Carnmoney, but remained members in Rathcoole, where Ivan is now on the Select Vestry. They have a daughter, Jennifer, and son, Philip. Sadly, Irene died in 2014.

As a child, Ivan went to St Mary's Primary School on the Crumlin Road; did his 11+ year at Model Primary School; and his Junior Certificate at Annadale Grammar. He left school at 16 to start as an apprentice at Shorts Aircraft Factory.

Ivan later worked at Bombardier, Rolls Royce, Sirocco Engineering Works, and LFE in Mallusk, before returning to Shorts until he took redundancy in 2001 at the age of 60.

"I did no work for three years, then Irene told me they were looking for a lollipop person for Carnmoney Primary School," Ivan says. "I got the job and have been 16 years at this school.

"The only thing I don't love about the job is the weather – this is the coldest place in Northern Ireland, you know," he points out. No need really, as he is speaking on a gloomy Friday lunchtime – rain pouring down, a biting wind, and the temperature two degrees lower than down in Belfast!

But Ivan is undaunted. "The kids are great, the school's great, the teachers and principal are all very down-to-earth. There is good discipline, the children have very good manners. We have good craic."

He works three and a half hours a day during term-time – guiding children across the road first thing in the morning and at the different finishing times. "I enjoy the banter with the kids and the parents and grandparents, and they enjoy it back," Ivan says. "The presents I get at Christmas...! It's embarrassing!"

He admits that drivers can be testing at times. "It is not so much that they are rude, but they can be distracted, or impatient – silly people. There are the boys who sit revving their engines, and I think you are a bit of a fool, because I am going to keep you waiting a little bit longer. The same with the boys who keep edging ahead."

You get the impression that behind the smiles and the twinkle in the eye, Ivan Gibson is something of an Ironman when it comes to staking his authority in the middle of the road!

Ivan said news that he was Belfast's favourite lollipop person had come out of the blue. "My son rang me to say I had won. I said: 'Won what?' Turns out the world and his Da were voting for me!"

He plans to continue to work as long as he is able. "It keeps me fit and healthy," he says. "School holidays are a big chunk out of my life, the weekends are long, although I go to church on Sundays. I get lonely.

"I lay my clothes for the next day out every night, and I do all my own washing and ironing and hoovering. You have to thank the Lord for your health. This job keeps me well and keeps me in touch with things."

## Songs of Praise night at St Cedma's

A special 'Songs of Praise' evening was held in St Cedma's, Larne, on November 2 2019, organised by the Rev Dr Ian Mills, curate, and Patricia McKinley-Hutchinson.

Favourite hymns were selected and conducted by Richard Yarr, presenter of BBC Radio Ulster's 'Sounds Sacred,' who provided an insight into the writing of the words and music of each hymn.

Accompanied by a brass ensemble and organ played by Ian, who is the current President of the Ulster Society of Organists and Choirmasters, a large congregation had a wonderful evening.

Richard Yarr conducted a short interview with Patricia about local musician Archy McNeill, who died in June 2019, and in whose memory the concert came about.

In addition to inspiring many young musicians through his teaching at Larne High School, Archy was organist and choirmaster in St Cedma's, and along with former rector, Stephen Forde, he had formed the St Cedma's Singers.

The rector, the Rev David Lockhart, expressed thanks to all performers. A retiring collection of £780 was shared between St Cedma's Building Fund and Cancer Focus Northern Ireland.



The brass ensemble with Richard Yarr, the Rev Dr Ian Mills and Patricia McKinley-Hutchinson after the 'Songs of Praise' event. Photo: Steven Williamson.

## 'Irish Anglicanism, 1969–2019'

A history of the Church of Ireland over the last 50 years was launched in Belfast on December 3 2019 by the Archbishop of Dublin and Primate of Ireland, the Most Rev Dr Michael Jackson.

'Irish Anglicanism, 1969–2019' is co-edited by Dr Paul Harron and Dr Kenneth Milne, and features 20 essays including youth work, art and architecture, education, liturgy, the Irish language, and music.

The project forms part of the Church's D150 initiative to mark the 150th anniversary of its Disestablishment.





Having fun at a St Andrew's Night Ceilidh hosted by All Saints', Eglantine, on November 29. The evening raised more than £600 for parish funds. Photo: David Orr.



The sacrifices of two World Wars and other conflicts were commemorated around the diocese on Remembrance Sunday last November. Jim Boyd plays 'The Last Post,' at the Royal British Legion Lisburn Remembrance Service in St Paul's, Lisburn. Photo: Norman Briggs.



A Service of Baptism and Confirmation was held in St John's, Ballyclare, on November 17. The 10 young people had all been led through the Youth Alpha course, and the service was led by Bishop Ken Clarke.



Former Archbishop of Armagh, Lord Eames, was at St Cedma's, Larne, for a joint Confirmation Service on November 17. Pictured, left, are adults who were confirmed at the service, while the young people are pictured on the right. Also included are churchwardens and clergy, from left: The Rev Dr Ian Mills, the Rev Philip Benson; Lord Eames and the Rev David Lockhart.



Members of Eglantine Mothers' Union who celebrated the 75th anniversary of the branch on January 17. Photo: David Orr.



A mental health awareness evening for parents and leaders on the topic of self-harm and suicide among young people was hosted by Holy Trinity Parish, Woodburn, on October 5 2019. The speaker was Mark Kernohan from The Big House Ireland.



The Church Lads' and Church Girls' Brigade NI inaugural Archbishop's Award was won by St Paul's Company, Lisburn. Captain Andrew Maze was presented with the Award and £100 at the Brigade's annual service in St Swithin's, Magherafelt. Photo: Norman Briggs.