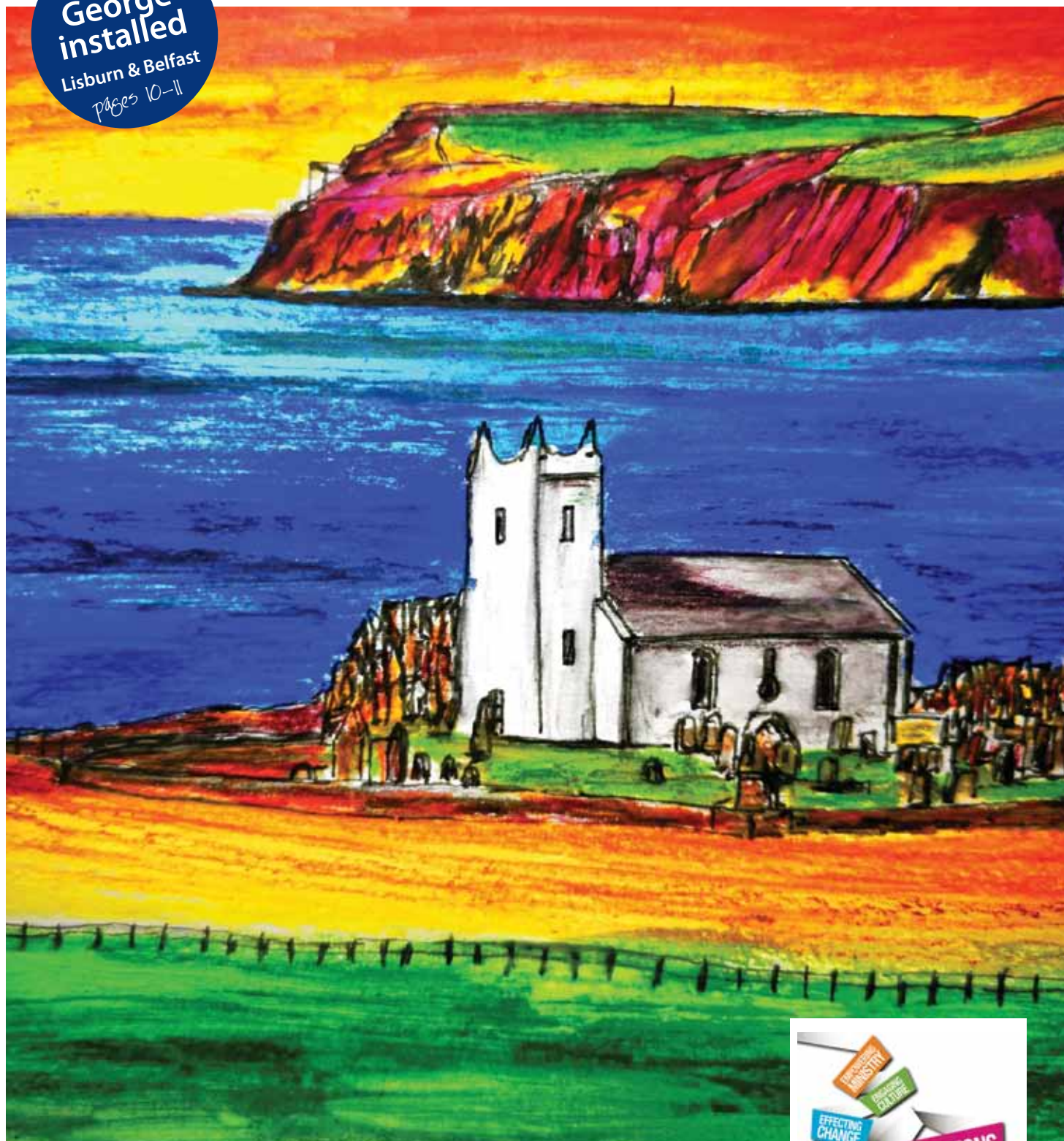


# CONNOR

## connections

Bishop  
George  
installed  
Lisburn & Belfast  
pages 10-11







George and Norma Briggs outside Windsor Castle on Maundy Thursday.

# Royal Maundy honour for George

George Briggs, a parishioner of St Mark's Parish Church, Ballysillan, had 'a fantastic day' when he was presented with the Royal Maundy at a service in Windsor on Maundy Thursday, April 14.

As is tradition, the Royals gifted Maundy money to retired pensioners in recognition of their service to the Church and to the local community. George, 82, was one of 192 older people - 96 men and 96 ladies - to receive Maundy Purses, presented in St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle, by HRH Prince Charles in the absence of Her Majesty the Queen.

George, who was nominated by the Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev George Davison, said he had been 'totally shocked' to receive a letter from Buckingham Palace advising him that he was to receive the Royal Maundy honour.

He was accompanied to the ceremony by his wife Norma, with daughter Kathryn arranging assistance on the flight to enable Norma to share George's big day.

Kathryn travelled with her parents as far as the gates of Windsor Castle, leaving George and Norma to pass through security and walk the short distance to the chapel, where the service was due to begin at 11am. "It was fantastic. The

ambience, the music, the whole pageant was incredible," said George.

"We were seated in rows of 25, and Prince Charles came round and spoke to everybody. The purses were handed to Charles by three ministers, including the Dean of Windsor, David Conner, who picked up that I was from Connor Diocese and told Charles I was from Belfast.

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**I don't suppose many people have been on Diocesan Synod for 40 years!**

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"Prince Charles said to me: 'You're very welcome. Thank you for your service. I present you with these purses on behalf of my mother The Queen who is not able to be with us.' We were only allowed to reply 'Thank you, your Majesty.'"

George said the pageantry surrounding the ceremony had been 'out of this world,'

including the choirs, the Knights of St George and the Almonry team.

After the service, the guests were transported to the Castle's Royal Apartments for a reception, where George and Norma had the chance to mingle with other Maundy recipients - among them Melvyn Lockhart, nominated by the Archbishop of Armagh. George and the former Ulster Regimental Commander of the Church Lads' and Church Girls' Brigade are old friends!

Nominating George for the Maundy Purse, Bishop George said he had faithfully served the people of his local community, his parish and the wider Church of Ireland.

"He has given of himself in many ways, serving as a representative on Diocesan and General Synods for many years, as well as being a valued member of the Connor Diocesan Council and a number of its sub-committees," Bishop George said.

"In addition to the numerous roles he has held over the years in his home parish of St Mark, Ballysillan, George played a key part in the life of St Columba's, Whiterock, in recent times. Following the rebuilding of that church, he chaired the Management Committee as a diocesan representative."

The Bishop continued: "Outside his church commitments, George has served on the boards of a number of local charities and organisations which have benefited from the skills acquired through his business career."

George began his career in textiles, working for LEDU for 17 years before becoming self-employed and helping small businesses. Until recently, he was also involved in the Prince's Trust. He grew up in Broomhedge and moved to St Mark's 58 years ago.

George is the second Ballysillan parishioner to be nominated for the Royal Maundy in recent years - in April 2019, Mr Jim Patterson attended the ceremony in Windsor to be presented with the Maundy Purses.

"We were not surprised when Jim got it, as he has given his whole life to St Mark's, but I was surprised when Bishop George nominated me," George said. "But I don't suppose many people have been on Diocesan Synod for 40 years!"

Bishop George also nominated a member of the Roman Catholic Church, Mary Waide, who is on the regional board of the Society of St Vincent de Paul and has done charity work and work with the Diocese of Down and Connor for more than 40 years.

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## Cover photo:


Ballintoy Parish Church by Randalstown-based artist Johnny Watt of JDW Art. Johnny took up art during the second lockdown after a 20-year break.


Facebook: [fb.me/oldbuildingsart](https://fb.me/oldbuildingsart)  
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**Please contact us if you would like to contribute to the next issue of 'Connor Connections.'**

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# I look forward to coming together



It seems strange to be saying, after 20 months in the office of Bishop of Connor, that I look forward to meeting with the members of the Diocesan Synod in person for the first time this month!

We will gather in Belfast Cathedral to share in the work of the synod, to reflect on where we are as a Church and to take counsel as we chart the direction of the diocese in the year ahead. It will be good to gather from across the diocese and to see synod members face-to-face.

As ever, the meeting of the synod will remind us of the changes around us. There will be familiar faces who are not with us and whose presence and wisdom we shall miss, and there will be new people who will bring fresh insight and inspiration.

The Rev Robin Moore has recently retired after a lifetime of service to parishes across the Diocese of Connor, but with a particular focus on Belfast. I want to express sincere thanks to Robin for all his work, most recently in St Mary Magdalene and St Mary's, Crumlin Road. We are most grateful to him, not least for continuing in retirement to assist in the work of ministry in the parishes whilst new arrangements are put in place.

As I write, we are looking forward to welcoming some new clergy to the diocese. The Rev Jacob Mercer comes to the people of St Brigid's, Mallusk, after a curacy in Bermondsey in London. He is, however, no stranger to these shores, having lived in Belfast for a time before ordination and undertaken a placement

in the Parish of Larne and Inver during his training. His wife, Rebecca, is a native of Northern Ireland and we look forward to welcoming them and their children into the diocesan family.

The Rev Andrew Irwin was previously curate of Seapatrick Parish, Banbridge. A native of Portadown, Andrew comes to work as curate in St Paul and St Barnabas alongside the Rev Brian Lacey who will become priest-in-charge of the parish alongside his current role in St Peter's, Antrim Road.

We wish these clergy and their parishioners well as they prepare for their new ministries. Please continue to pray for those parishes which are in transition and are looking for those who will lead them in the future.

As you turn the pages of this new edition of 'Connor Connections,' I hope you will find encouragement and inspiration from what you see and read. Here are the stories of people and parishes who are living out their Christian discipleship in the situations where God has placed them. As you read, join with me in praying for the people and the work you are reading about and be inspired to fresh service in your own parishes!

+George



Amelia McAlpin, 8, bought 'Jack' by Coleraine artist, Brenda Harper, at the Dunluce Parish Art Exhibition.

## Bushmills event is a big draw!

Dunluce Parish Church hosted its annual Art and Photographic Exhibition from April 29 to May 2 in the Parish Centre, Bushmills, raising £2,471 for Bishops' Appeal for Ukraine.

The exhibition, which returned after a two-year break due to the pandemic, has always been a popular event with residents and visitors to the north coast over the Bank Holiday weekend.

The exhibition was officially opened on April 29 by guest artist, Julian Friers, PPRUA. More than 40 artists exhibited, with around 160 artworks on display.





Members of Connor Youth Forum who organised the Destination event.



Fun for all on the inflatables.

## St Michael's is the Destination for fun and worship!

It was Destination St Michael's, Belfast, on April 10, when around 50 young people came together for fun and worship.

The event was organised by Connor Youth Forum, supported by Diocesan Youth Officer Christina Baillie. Young people attended from St Nicholas', Carrickfergus; St Stephen's and St Michael's, Belfast; Christ Church, Lisburn; the United Parish of Christ Church and St John, Ballyclare; and Christ Church, Derriaghy. Bishop George Davison joined them.

In the early part of the evening, the young people enjoyed table games and refreshments; energetic activities including an inflatable assault course and volleyball in the sports hall,

and creative activities in the art room. There was a room set aside for prayer.

For the second part of the event, they moved into the church for worship, led by James and Elise Turner from the Church of the Resurrection, alongside members of the Youth Forum.

The members of Connor Youth Forum who planned and organised the night are Maddie, Emma, Naomi, Maia, Faith, Alex, Lucas and Isaac.

The following evening, Ballymena Parish hosted a Diocesan Youth Worship night.

## Ministries buzzing post-Covid

With the easing of pandemic restrictions, there is a real buzz in Connor Diocese as in-person youth and children's ministry picks up apace.

These ministries are led by Diocesan Youth Officer Christina Baillie and Children's Ministry Development Officer Victoria Jackson, and a number of events are planned to bring children and young people together with their peers for worship, fun and fellowship.

Summer Madness 2022 has a new venue and will take place from July 1-5 in Portglenone. Christina is encouraging young people to get signed up for the Connor sub-camp.

After a two-year absence, Streetreach returns in-person from July 5-8, when young people will exercise faith in action in the community around Mossley Parish.

During May, Engage Connor Youth facilitated training events with Love for Life for youth leaders and parents of young people. The Hashtags & Hormones programme aims to help equip parents and anyone who has contact with young people to deal with the 'hot topics' and to raise awareness about what's happening in the lives of young people.

Clergy and children's ministry leaders from

across the diocese attended a School Assembly training event hosted by All Aboard – Connor Children's Ministry and Scripture Union on March 30.

They were welcomed by Victoria, who introduced the speakers, Rachel Sheppard, Children's Ministry Co-ordinator with Scripture Union; Andrew Neill, Scripture Union E3 Schools Worker on the north coast; and Jacqueline McCallum, Scripture Union E3 Schools Worker for East Antrim.

The leaders heard about resources and

ideas which will help them as, in the wake of the pandemic, they are once again invited to participate in school assemblies.

Victoria and Christina ran a new leaders' session in Antrim on May 11 and online on May 12, aimed at volunteers who are new to children's or youth ministry or those hoping to build confidence in their roles.

On September 3, Christina and Victoria will be hosting the second annual 'Launch' event in Broughshane. This will be an opportunity to spend time with other children's and youth ministry leaders from around the diocese. There will be discussion as well as some practical training and new resources.



Andrew Neill, Scripture Union E3 Schools Worker; Victoria Jackson, Connor Children's Ministry Development Officer; Rachel Sheppard, Children's Ministry Co-ordinator with Scripture Union; and Jacqueline McCallum, Scripture Union E3 Schools Worker.



Erin Burnett.

# Those with autism find services 'tricky'

For as long as she can remember, Erin Burnett, a member of the Church of the Resurrection, Belfast, has felt different.

Erin is autistic, and has recently published 'With All Your Mind: Autism and the Church.' This uses a blend of Biblical teaching, scientific research and personal stories to offer guidance on welcoming autistic people into the body of Christ and suggests ways that churches can be more accommodating.

Reflecting on growing up, Erin says: "It was as if there were an invisible wall between me and other people. I desperately wanted to experience friendship and connection, yet there was something holding me back. At school I would retreat into my own inner world and spend most of the day in silence. Instead of keeping up with the latest music and social media trends, I had very narrow and intense interests - anything from Pokémon to 20th century politics could capture my interest for months or years at a time."

At 18, Erin was diagnosed as autistic.

"It is very difficult to precisely define autism, as it is a spectrum condition that manifests differently for each person," Erin explains. "The stereotypical image of autism is that of a child, typically male, trapped in their own world and unable to communicate. This is only one of many ways in which autistic people present."

"The autism spectrum can range from

someone who is slightly quirky to someone with profound disability requiring 24/7 care, and every degree in between."

She says the most significant characteristic of autism is social difficulty. "Some autistic people are non-verbal, and those of us who can speak find the unwritten rules of conversation hard to follow. Another characteristic is sensory sensitivity - autistic people tend to dislike loud noise, bright lights and other overwhelming stimuli."

**There are simple and effective adjustments that can be made to make worship more accessible**

But Erin says that despite these difficulties, there are many positive aspects to autism. "We have very intense interests and can hyperfocus on topics that intrigue us," she said. "This is a useful skill to have in academia or STEM careers. Getting a diagnosis was life-changing for me, as I understood the cause of my difficulties and could develop healthy coping strategies. I was able to identify and develop my strengths instead of getting upset over my weaknesses."

Erin was raised in a Christian household. "I started to take my own faith seriously aged 12 after the Gideons visited my school. Reading the New Testament for myself marked the beginning of an intense, tumultuous and ultimately life-giving faith journey. I was particularly captivated by John 15:15, when Jesus says 'I have called you friends' - this verse was an anchor for me when I was feeling isolated."

"Church services can often be tricky for those with autism, particularly churches that have a contemporary approach to worship. Modern worship can be very loud and bright, which may be distressing for autistic people in the congregation."

But Erin says this doesn't mean the church has to change the way it worships. "There are simple and effective adjustments that can be made to make worship more accessible for everyone, such as providing earplugs or broadcasting the service into a quieter break-out room," she says.

At university, Erin attended the Church of the Resurrection, The Hub, Belfast. She now works as a boarding school matron in Brighton while studying part-time for a Master's in Theology. She returns to worship at The Hub when she is home.

"It is a great church to be part of as there is such a diversity of backgrounds and traditions represented in the congregation," Erin says. "Everyone brought something unique to the table. It reminded me of 1 Corinthians 12: 14-27, wherein Paul compares the Church to a human body. Each part has its own unique part to play, and no part is better than another: 'Those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable.' (v 22).

Erin says living with autism has its 'highs and lows.' "I'm deeply grateful for all the supportive church communities I have been part of over the years. As diagnostic services improve, the number of people being diagnosed with autism increases every year - it is vital that churches have an understanding of the condition and are prepared to welcome autistic people into their congregations."

As an autistic Christian, I have a deep desire to be part of something beyond myself, to follow the teachings of Jesus and establish the Kingdom of God on earth. I may struggle with certain aspects of faith, but this I know: God is love, and autistic people are just as capable of giving and receiving love as anyone else."

Erin is hoping to pursue a career in chaplaincy. Her book is available online at <http://erinburnettauthor.co.uk/nonfiction/>.





Kilroot Parish Hall provides a place to relax for refugees and asylum seekers of all ages.

# 'It feels like home' - welcoming refugees

Every Wednesday afternoon, the parish hall at St Colman's Church in Kilroot, Carrickfergus, welcomes a group of refugees and asylum seekers who are housed in a local hotel.

There is space inside and outside the hall for the visitors to relax, chat freely with each other and with volunteers from St Colman's and All Nations Ministries, enjoy refreshments, and take part in board games or play basketball or football and sometimes table tennis.

Recently, the women and children living in the local hotel were moved to Belfast and, rather than let friendships fade, St Colman's Parish has been bringing these families back to Kilroot by bus on special days so they too can enjoy some space away from the confines of their hotel.

Wednesday March 16 was such an occasion, when a local business provided pots of Irish stew as the refugees and asylum seekers joined with volunteers to celebrate St Patrick's Day.

We paid a visit to hear about the impact of this project on those who have had to flee their homelands and to learn more about the initiative from the rector, the Rev Nigel Kirkpatrick, and parishioners who give up their time each Wednesday.

Every refugee has a story to tell and some were willing to talk in halting English about the lives they have left behind. In our photo you will see Masoud Ali speaking to his daughter via What's App. The 45-year-old father fled Syria leaving his wife and



As close as they can get - Masoud Ali speaks to his daughter via What's App.

seven children behind. A video call on his mobile phone is the closest he can get to his family at present, but he dreams of the day he will be reunited with them, outside of Syria, where he describes life as 'very grim.'

Also pictured is Rajaa and her 10-year-old daughter. Rajaa fled Syria with her two oldest children and spent two years



Volunteer Marion Magill sourced a Bible written in Kurdish as a gift for one of the asylum seekers who does not speak English, and presented it to him when the group visited St Colman's on March 16.

in a refugee camp in Greece before she reached Northern Ireland. She had to leave her younger children in Syria with their father and his new wife.

They are difficult stories to hear, but the smiles on the faces of Masoud, Rajaa and the many others who came along that day bear testament to the value this initiative by St Colman's is having on the lives of those it touches.

The refugees and asylum seekers come from Syria, Iran, Uganda and Kuwait. Among those welcoming them is volunteer Sandra Aepli. "I have been helping out for six weeks," she tells us. "We love it when the kids come along, but some weeks it is just the men. They usually bring their drums with them."

Tom Kerr is another volunteer. "I help them play games like chequers, and I also help with the washing up," he says. "It's great fun, the refugees seem to really enjoy it. One of the nice things is how much they appreciate it."

Marion Magill, rector's warden and guide leader in St Colman's, explains that today the mothers and children have come along. "We paid for a bus to bring the families today, something we hope to do for them once a month. Some of the children are now going to school in Belfast."

Marion has a special gift for one of the young men. "I sourced a Kurdish Bible when one of the refugees asked for it. He doesn't have any English and as that was what he wanted to read, I just wanted to help," she said.

Fellow volunteer Betty Bleaks, adds: "When Marion gave him the Kurdish Bible you would have thought it was £1million!" And Ali, the recipient of the gift, was very happy to show us the Bible he had received.

This initiative supporting local refugees and asylum seekers came about through the rector, the Rev Nigel Kirkpatrick's connections with All Nations Ministries, who came to speak at Kilroot's Harvest

Service last year.

"When we realised the families were staying in a local hotel, and that there was no recreation available to them, we decided we could provide basic games at very little cost if we raided our cupboards," Nigel explains.

"In the hotel they have very little to do. They can volunteer, but they cannot be paid to work. We are giving them a couple of hours each week to let off steam.

"We have avoided asking them about their past. They are here now and we are focusing on what we can do for them. If they want to talk to us, we will listen."

Ownies Bar, Carrickfergus, donated the Irish Stew for the visitors on March 16, in honour of St Patrick's Day. Marion said she is finding people are very happy to make a donation. "We have no idea how long this will be needed, but as long as it is needed we will be here. It seems such a worthwhile thing to do," she says. Michael, another volunteer, agrees. "I think this is a really important thing to do," he says.

Nazhad from Iran speaks some English. "I like the people here, they are very nice," he says. "I like this place and the tea and coffee." He fled his home country five months before. "We have problem in Iran. Iran is not good to people," he says, his eyes downcast.

At home in Syria, 45-year-old Masoud Ali was a sports teacher and basketball player. He left his wife and seven children 18 months ago, arriving in Northern Ireland after spending time in Romania, where he said he was unable to get medical attention when he needed it.

Masoud is keen to introduce his family and makes a video call via What's App, allowing us to say hello to his wife and children who are at home. The eldest is 15 and the youngest just three-years-old.

The children, he says, cannot go to school. "It is so dangerous for them. There is so much fighting. I miss my family very much.



Rajaa and her 10-year-old daughter. Two of her four children remain in Syria.

It is a very, very difficult life in Syria. My wife must be both mother and father. It is very grim for the children. All the people in Syria are in a very bad situation, there is no water and no electricity."

Masoud would love to bring his family to Northern Ireland. "I hope to stay in Ireland. It is very nice here, I feel safe. I would like to open a clothing shop, and to play volleyball," he smiles.

Rector Nigel says the volunteers have really thrown themselves into the project. "They have really taken these people to heart. There is always lots of food and they make goodie bags for the people to take away," he says.

"All Nations Ministries had identified the need and got in touch with the hotel. We visited All Nations Ministries' centre at St Katharine's Church, and offered to open up our hall. Our idea was just to throw open the doors and provide refreshments and deal with the need as it developed. We have seen that what the refugees and asylum seekers want most is somewhere to hang out and let off a bit of steam, to meet each other and their



The Rev Canon Nigel Kirkpatrick catching up with some of those who attended on March 16.

local community."

Nigel said the response from both volunteers and their guests has been fantastic. "They are so pleased to be with people who are kind to them. Volunteers put toiletries into gift packs, to welcome them and show them they are valued.

"It can take a man a couple of years to get asylum and once he gets refugee status, he can bring over his family, but many people are misinformed about the length of time the process takes.

"A lot have come through Germany, most never dreamed of coming to Belfast!"

Rajaa is from Aleppo. She cannot hold back the tears as she speaks about the children she had to leave behind. But there is also hope in her eyes. "I want to stay here. Everybody has been very, very kind," she says.

Esther arrived here from Kampala in Uganda. Most of the refugees are Muslim, but Esther is from a Christian background, and has been attending St Colman's, where her daughters, aged six and 12, are members of Sunday School. "This church is home for me," she says. "When I am here, it feels like home."



These men take time out from their basketball game to pose for a photograph.





Loreto McAuley, Music Director at St Patrick's, Whitehead, plays Irish music at the joint service with St Patrick's Episcopal Church in Washington DC.

## From Whitehead to Washington DC!

Parishioners in Whitehead and Islandmagee have walked more than 4,000 miles and formed a special partnership with a church in Washington DC.

This follows last year's virtual walk around Ireland. Jo Pawson, rector's churchwarden, said: "It was suggested that we do a similar challenge to unite our congregation in a common goal. As I reflected on St Patrick's Day, I thought of the Irish diaspora in the USA. It seemed the perfect solution to find another St Patrick's in the USA that shared similar values and beliefs, to walk to and establish a meaningful friendship link."

Research led to St Patrick's Episcopal Church in Washington DC. The rector, the Rev Canon Mark Taylor, suggested a route used by some of the early Christian missionaries – a total of 3,779 miles. The walkers reached Washington DC with six days to spare, covering 4,694 miles!

On March 20, St Patrick's in Whitehead and St Patrick's, Washington, shared a live service online. Inspired by their friends in Co Antrim, the congregation in Washington DC then set out to walk virtually to Whitehead by June 5!

## Happy 100th Tillie!



Congratulations to Mrs Tillie Virtue, a parishioner of Agherton, Portstewart, who celebrated her 100th birthday on February 11. The Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev George Davison, paid a special visit to Tillie, along with the Rev Malcolm Ferry, rector of Agherton. Bishop George prayed with Tillie, giving thanks for a life packed with wonderful experiences and for the future and the making of many more experiences as Tillie continues to live in her own home.

# A celebration of school partnership

A service reflecting on a special journey involving the Parish of Christ Church, Lisburn, and the school community at St Apollo, Kisizi, Uganda, was held in Christ Church on February 27.

It recognised the 10 years since two new blocks were opened at St Apollo School in 2012. It reflected a sense of thanksgiving and celebration for the partnership and all that has ensued through three team visits, prayer, child sponsorship and buildings.

The rector, the Ven Paul Dundas, Archdeacon of Dalriada, welcomed all and led the service. The worship was led by Richard McCrossan from St Paul's Parish. Gillian Maganda from CMS Ireland was present and read from Ephesians 3: 14-21. Gillian also pre-recorded a message about the links with Luwero Diocese, including the training of clergy and supporting the Esther Project.

Some members from the three teams shared their own memories and reflections in pre-recorded interviews. These included Liam McCartney, Jan Knowles, Lisa Caddy, Audrey Knowles, Janice Thompson, Roberta Thompson and Beverley Ringland.

Archdeacon Dundas interviewed Richard Thompson and Johnston Boyle about the building and carpentry work over the three trips, which included working on the roof trusses and making shelves and desks. Beth Harris and John Pickering shared some of their memories about the I AM Girl project and education.

The rector shared some of his memories and reflected on the passage from Ephesians 3 which speaks of the God who can do immeasurably more, and what has

been achieved through this partnership in the Gospel and in terms of education. The school motto is 'Never Lose Hope,' and Archdeacon Dundas reflected on this and shared stories from the developing partnership.

Since the building of the two school blocks, a cookhouse provided by Lisburn Rotary, staff accommodation and a new shower unit have been added.

Helen D'Arcy from Fields of Life read from Philippians 1: 1-6 and shared about the partnership and continued support to the school, pupils and staff, especially after a pandemic.

The parish will support a poultry project this year, as well as continuing to sponsor pupils at the school. Helen highlighted four aspects that are significant for the school - "I am fed, educated, loved and safe."

She introduced a video produced by the Fields of Life team in Uganda and reflected an input of celebration from four of the pupils. At present there are 276 pupils and 12 teachers in St Apollo School.

Audrey Knowles led the prayers of thanksgiving for this journey and for all that lies ahead for the school. At refreshments after the service, a special cake was cut by the Rev John Pickering who was a co-leader on the first team in 2012.

A book telling the story of St Apollo School will be launched in July, priced £4.



At the celebration are members of the three teams from Christ Church who have travelled to St Apollo School in Uganda, and some of those who were due to go in 2020 before the pandemic caused the cancellation of the visit.





# Ancient history!

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, front right, preached in St Matthew's Parish Church, Shankill, during a visit to Belfast on February 6. Also included are, from left; The Rev Tracey McRoberts, rector, St Matthew's; Fr Martin Magill, St John's, Upper Falls; Conor Burns, Minister of State for Northern Ireland; William Humphrey, MLA; and the Rev Don Gamble, St Matthew's.

An ancient crozier that would have been carried by a bishop back in the 9th century caused something of a stir in the Shankill area of Belfast on March 8.

The historic artefact - or the parts that survived centuries underground - were brought to St Matthew's Parish Church from Dublin by staff from the National Museum of Ireland to go on display for one day only.

The crozier was discovered 300 years ago in the grounds of Shankill Graveyard adjacent to St Matthew's, and is kept in the museum in Dublin.

Its trip north was part of a project organised by St Matthew's, Queen's University, Belfast, and the Greater Shankill Partnership to mark the 150th anniversary of St Matthew's Church. To showcase the evolving social history linked to the church and the community, Queen's facilitated an exhibition of photos, artefacts and displays.

The Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev George Davison, loaned four croziers to St Matthew's to be exhibited alongside the 9th century crozier. Pupils from local primary schools attended the launch and were given a talk on the ancient crozier by Bernard Gilhooly from National Museums of Ireland, and on the Connor croziers by Jacqueline Weir from St Matthew's.

Guests heard how the exhibition had come about from the Rev Tracey McRoberts. Dr Jackie Redpath, Chief Executive of the Greater Shankill Partnership, said: "The Shankill has lots of jewels not always recognised. This church is one of them, the Shankill Graveyard is another."

Prof Nola Hewitt-Dundas, Pro-Vice-Chancellor at Queen's, said: "Queen's is committed to working in partnership for societal change. The project at St Matthew's is a perfect example of bringing the best of our talent and expertise to work in partnership with the community to deliver genuine, meaningful local benefit."



At the exhibition launch in St Matthew's, Shankill, are, from left: Prof Olwen Purdue, Queen's University; Researcher Sam Guthrie; The Rev Tracey McRoberts, rector; Heather Stanley, PRONI; Prof Nola Hewitt-Dundas, Queen's Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Jackie Redpath, Greater Shankill Partnership.

Prof Olwen Purdue, Professor of Social History at Queen's, said St Matthew's Parish had an important history, dating back to pre-Christian times.

"This exciting collaboration between academics, public history students and local communities seeks to capture and tell the stories of these streets and the people who lived in them to explore the rich and diverse social history of this neighbourhood and community and develop new resources for learning and engaging with local history," she said.

Celebrations marking the 150th year of St Matthew's started with a visit on February 6 by the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Rev Justin Welby, and his chaplain, the Rev Tosin Oladipo, who were in Belfast for the annual 4Corners Festival.

They continued on March 6 with an anniversary service attended by special guests, the Archbishop of Armagh, the Most Rev John McDowell, Bishop George Davison, and Bishop Noel Treanor, Bishop of Down and Connor. Other special events included a daffodil tea and a concert featuring the Ulster Orchestra.

## Marching on with CLCGB

Members of the Church Lads' and Church Girls' Brigade (CLCGB) are enjoying being able to meet again. Some Covid restrictions may remain, but the girls and boys are enjoying new activities as they begin a brand new Badge Scheme.

The scheme consists of more than 100 new awards across every age group of the CLCGB from Martins (ages up to seven), Y Team (ages 7-10) and JTC (11-13) through to Senior Section (13+). The scheme gives Brigade Leaders a huge variety of different interests and skills to help provide challenging and fun activities for members to participate in as a team every week or complete individually at home.

Outdoor skills awards include camping, nature, hiking and map reading, which will lead to the more challenging geocaching and navigation awards. Community Awards provide an outreach to local communities, and the Senior Section can progress to more specialised training as they cover Service awards by volunteering in hospitals, care homes, charity shops or local community groups. First Aid Awards are also available working in partnership with the St John's Ambulance Brigade.

Other awards include church duty, canoeing, crafts, needlecraft, gardening and athletics or, for something more practical, the electrician award and the tech award.

## New Priest-in-Charge in Mallusk

The Rev Jacob Mercer was introduced as Priest-in-Charge of St Brigid's Parish Church, Mallusk, on May 31.



Jacob, 33, was previously curate of St James and St Anne's, Bermondsey, in the Diocese of Southwark, London. He is married to Rebecca and they have three young children.

A native of Hertfordshire, Jacob has worked in Christian Ministry for the past 11 years, and was ordained in 2018. Rebecca is from Templepatrick and her father, the Rev Peter McCausland, was ordained an OLM deacon for Templepatrick and Donegore last September.



Bishop George Davison addressing the youthful congregation at his Service of Installation in Lisburn Cathedral.

# 'Unique' youth focus at service in Lisburn

The Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev George Davison, was installed in Lisburn Cathedral on February 20 at a service that the Dean of Connor, the Very Rev Sam Wright, described as 'probably unique.'

At Bishop George's request, the special Service of Installation, which due to the Covid-19 pandemic took place two years after Bishop George's appointment, was focused on the youth of the diocese.

It was young people who led the readings and prayers, and members of Connor Youth Forum who read the Charge to the Bishop - one they had written themselves.

As is tradition, Bishop George knocked on the Cathedral door with his pastoral staff to gain admission. Afterwards, he and members of the Chapter of St Saviour (Connor) processed to the front where he was formally installed by the Dean, following the reading of the Mandate from the Archbishop of Armagh by Diocesan Registrar, the Rev Canon William Taggart. He was led to his episcopal seat by Dean Wright.

In his opening greeting, Bishop George said the ministry of a Bishop was one of leadership, but also one of partnership with every person in the diocese who has heard the call of Jesus, adding that not least, that meant a partnership with young people. "In taking on this role, I do so in partnership with you, and I am so grateful to you for

being here," he told the young people in the congregation.

Bishop George made special mention of Connor Youth Forum who shared in the leading of the service and who prepared their Charge for him. "I have no doubt as we share together in this service it will be a

meaningful beginning to the formal ministry that I exercise in this place," he said.

Youth Forum members Isaac and Maddie put questions to the Bishop around his journey in ministry and his role as Bishop, before presenting their Charge.

In this, they challenged Bishop George to continue to be radical in sharing the Gospel; to be a very public Christian leader in order to counter negative views on the Church held by many non-Christian young people; to equip young people in evangelism; to support young people to connect with other parishes; and to share his wisdom with them.

Bishop George responded that he was massively encouraged by this Charge. "The things that you have said to me are things that I have been thinking about," he said.

In another break from tradition, Diocesan Youth Officer Christina Baillie invited the congregation to pick up their phones and connect to 'Menti,' an online app. She encouraged young people to share their blessings for Bishop George, and these quickly started appearing on the big screen. Afterwards Christina thanked everyone for taking part. "That feels really powerful," she said.

Praise was led by the Cathedral worship band, the readers were Maddie and Lauren, and Lucas and Ella led the prayers. The service was led by Dean Wright and the Rev Danielle McCullagh. Bishop George's address was on the theme of the service: Called to Serve.

Afterwards, everyone was invited to the Cathedral Hall for hot dogs, cupcakes and hot chocolate, and a chance to have their picture taken with the newly-installed Bishop in a special photo booth.



Bishop George, the Rev Aaron McAlister and young people from Derriaghy Parish posing in the photo booth after the Service of Installation in Lisburn Cathedral.





Clergy and members of the Chapter of Belfast Cathedral pictured at the Installation of Bishop George Davison. Back row, from left: The Rev John McClure, the Rev Canon Stephen Fielding, the Rev Canon Ronnie Nesbitt, Archdeacon Barry Forde and the Rev Canon Mark Taylor. Front, from left: Dean Stephen Forde, Bishop George Davison, the Rev Canon Gill Withers and the Rev Canon Ruth Patterson.

# Bishop welcomed by diocesan family

Bishop George Davison was installed in Belfast Cathedral at a Service of Choral Evensong on Sunday March 13.

Clergy, lay readers and members of Diocesan Council attended the service, along with the Chapters of Belfast and Lisburn Cathedrals, ecumenical guests and members of the Bishop's wider family. The Lord-Lieutenant of Co Antrim, David McCorkell, and the Lord-Lieutenant of Belfast, Fionnuala Jay-O'Boyle, were among the honoured guests.

Due to the pandemic, Bishop George's Consecration in Armagh Cathedral in September 2020 took place in the presence of a very small congregation, and the Installation Service was the first opportunity for the whole diocesan family in Connor to give formal welcome to Bishop George.

Following the procession of clergy and the first hymn, Bishop George knocked on the closed West door of the Cathedral with his crozier, seeking admission. He was welcomed by the Dean of Belfast, the Very Rev Stephen Forde, and by the congregation.

Moving to the top of the Nave, the Bishop was met by the Diocesan Registrar, the Rev Canon William Taggart, who read the Mandate for Installation, before the Dean guided the Bishop to his stall (throne).

During the service, the Bishop was presented with symbols of his ministry in the diocese - the Rev Canon Kevin Graham, Diocesan Director of Ordinands,



Bishop George knocks on the West door of Belfast Cathedral.

presented a Bible; Alan Mills, Carrickfergus Parish, and the Ven Dr Stephen McBride, Archdeacon of Connor, presented the Bishop with his pectoral cross and ring; and Cynthia Cherry, Diocesan Council, presented the Bishop with a towel.

The first lesson was read by Bishop Sarah Groves of the Moravian Church and the second lesson by the Most Rev Noel Treanor, Bishop of Down and Connor. Bishop George preached the sermon.

Prayers were led by the Rev Nathan Ervine, curate in Carrickfergus Parish; Gillian McCaughey, Diocesan Lay Reader, Belfast Cathedral; and Ken Gibson, General Synod Honorary Lay Secretary, Lisburn Cathedral.

Music was led by the Cathedral Choir, and the service was followed by refreshments.

## Nicky celebrates 100th birthday

Nicky Anderson, a parishioner of St Colmanell's, Ahoghill, celebrated his 100th birthday on March 28, and Bishop George and the Rev Dennis Christie popped in.

At an afternoon celebration, Nicky's son-in-law George and his ukulele band provided musical entertainment. Surrounded by his family, Nicky was happy to share some memories. Originally from Belfast, he was a lifelong member of Drew Memorial Church before moving to Ahoghill when he was 70. He lost his wife Betty two years ago. He has a daughter Joyce and son, David.

Nicky worked in printing. He and Bishop George reminisced about clergy Nicky remembered from the past, and he spoke fondly about Drew Memorial, where he had attended the Primary School and been a member of the Boys' Brigade.

Nicky was in hospital with Covid-19 not long before his birthday, and his daughter Joyce said they were delighted he was home and able to celebrate his big day. "He is a real family man," she added.



Almost 100 years apart! Nicky Anderson on his 100th birthday with his great-granddaughter Georgia.

## New curate for St Paul & St Barnabas

The Rev Andrew Irwin has been appointed curate for the Parish of St Paul and St Barnabas, York Street, Belfast.

Andrew has been curate in Seapatrick Parish, Banbridge, Diocese of Down and Dromore, since September 2018, and served his deacon year (2017-18) in Donacloney Parish, Down and Dromore. A Service of Introduction was held on June 8.

# Power of a picture

## Raising awareness of Secondary Breast Cancer



'Can You Still See ME?' Jennifer Willis's powerful photograph of Cheryl Graham. ©Jennifer Willis

Cheryl Graham is just home from the gym. She looks the picture of health and not like a woman living with a terminal illness. It is difficult to equate this positive, smiling Cheryl with the Cheryl Graham whose haunting blue eyes leap out of Jennifer Willis's powerful photograph featured in 'Seen to be Heard' - a campaign highlighting Secondary Breast Cancer.

Drag yourself away from her eyes, and the photo shows Cheryl's scarred chest - the trauma of a mastectomy painfully raw. Alongside this picture are other hard-hitting images of ladies with scars, bald heads, picc lines piercing their skin. Ladies who are fighting a battle they know they cannot win. Yet they have bared their souls, exposed their scars, to raise awareness of a cancer that has no cure, and help others who may one day be in their place.

The photographs are powerful - 32 in total featuring 16 incredibly strong, brave women - all taken by Jennifer, Cheryl's friend and fellow campaigner.

The 'Seen to be Heard' exhibition ran at the Belfast Exposed Gallery during April and May and will shortly move to other locations. It is the focal point of a wider campaign by a group of ladies asking for greater representation for those with Secondary Breast Cancer in Northern

Ireland's Cancer strategy. They are calling for a clinical audit; access to clinical trials, as well as drugs and treatments available in other regions of the UK; specialist nurse care and access to timely, equitable and person-centred care.

Cheryl, wife of the Rev Canon Kevin Graham, rector of St Bartholomew's, Stranmillis, and mum to Jamie, 24, and Luke, 19, received a diagnosis of Secondary Breast Cancer in November 2020.

Cheryl and the other ladies featured in the exhibition came together to support each other as there are no support groups for Secondary Breast Cancer in Northern Ireland.

"The group members know they are not going to be cured," says Cheryl. "Some remain hopeful. On November 26 2020,

I was given nine months to two years to live, depending on how the treatment worked.

"I had tumours in my lymph nodes, breast, lung and spine. The treatment is keeping me stable. Now I have no discernible tumours in my spine or lungs and those in my lymphatic system are smaller. I am not in remission, but I am in a better situation."

A diagnosis of Secondary Breast Cancer means any treatment is palliative. "That is a word very much associated with hospice and dying, but really it means it will not cure you, but it can control the disease to help extend your life," Cheryl explains. "Timely access to drugs and other treatment lines is vital to relieve symptoms and, crucially, to slow down the spread of the cancer while giving the patient the best quality of life for as long as possible."

Twelve years ago, Cheryl was diagnosed with Triple Negative Breast Cancer - the most aggressive and hardest to beat. Treatments can include chemotherapy, targeted biological therapies, radiotherapy or hormone therapy. "My cancer is HER+ and I am now receiving targeted treatment on the tumours," Cheryl says.

"Kevin was rector in Movilla Abbey when I first found a lump in my armpit. I was 42 and was told I was too young for breast cancer, the lump was moving and breast cancer lumps were never sore. That was all wrong."

Unconvinced, Cheryl went privately for diagnosis, and her cancer was caught early. It never showed up on a mammogram, and Cheryl says younger women can have denser breast tissue which may mask a lump. "As my

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**Jennifer Willis**



cancer was Triple Negative, the treatment was very severe. I had neutropenic sepsis and almost died three times. When treatment finished, I was told my risk of getting breast cancer again was the same as any other women - but actually it was 30 per cent higher."

Cheryl had asked for a mastectomy. As she outlines in a video presentation as part of the exhibition, she was told they would

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not remove healthy tissue. Her requests for genetic testing were also refused. She was given a quadrantectomy, which removes more tissue than a lumpectomy.

Out of the blue in 2018, Cheryl suffered an ischemic stroke. "I woke one

morning not feeling well. Kevin recognised the symptoms and got me to hospital. We have no idea what caused it, I had no risk factors. They said it could be stress."

At the time, Cheryl was a Major Crime Scene Advisor and Crime Scene Co-ordinator. It was a job she loved, but has since had to leave. "I went back to work, but after six months I still felt there was something not right, I believe I had an angel or it was God telling me," she recalls.

In April 2019, Cheryl was diagnosed with Ductile Carcinoma In Situ (DCIS) throughout her left breast, and she finally had a full left breast mastectomy. "I again requested gene testing to understand why the cancer had come back, but because I had no family history, I felt I was dismissed," she says. "After the mastectomy, they told me I had no need for further scans or treatment, and I was booked in for reconstructive surgery."

A clinician, however, supported Cheryl in getting gene testing and in April 2020 she learned she carried the BRCA2 mutated gene which meant she had a greater inherited risk of developing all types of female cancer. Cheryl was referred to the higher care breast unit at Antrim Area Hospital for monitoring. Due to the pandemic, her reconstruction never went ahead.

A scan revealed that, despite the removal of the breast, cells had remained and spread. Cheryl received the diagnosis of Secondary Breast Cancer on Luke's 18th birthday. She and Kevin were alone with the consultant with no nurse to offer support. "It just felt like the carpet had been pulled completely from under me. The consultant told us to go home

and tell the children. I know they didn't think I had very long."

Cheryl believes that the gene testing was key. "Had I not had the test for BRCA2 I would have been dead now, as I was not offered any scans to follow up treatment after the DCIS diagnosis," she says.

"I gave some of my Christmas presents away because I felt I would have no need for them." She asked Jennifer to photograph the family before her treatment began on New Year's Eve 2020 and then to catalogue her journey.

Cheryl recalls the picture used to highlight the 'Seen to be Heard' campaign being taken. "Jennifer asked me to pose showing my mastectomy, and to bring something special to the photoshoot, so I took the red scarf I wore when Kevin and I renewed our wedding vows earlier in the year. I draped it over my shoulder. Jennifer was on a stepladder and asked me to look up. She knew straight away she had captured something special."

Cheryl was now meeting other ladies who had got to know each other at the Antrim Hospital unit. They contacted 'Make Seconds Count,' a Scottish-based charity for women with Secondary Breast Cancer. The Northern Ireland branch of the charity now meets on the last Friday of the month in the Agapē Centre, Belfast.

They aim to raise awareness of Secondary Breast Cancer and the discrepancies in drug availability and treatment in different parts of the UK. They are also fighting for drugs which will help them, including, in Cheryl's case, Tucatinib for HER2+.

"There are no statistics in Northern Ireland for Secondary Breast Cancer. You only become a statistic when you die," Cheryl says starkly.

The group wanted to raise awareness, and Jennifer suggested an exhibition. Cheryl persuaded her friends in the group to take part. "Jennifer promised me that this would be completed within six months because the reality is no one really knows how long they have and she wanted everyone to be there for the exhibition," Cheryl recalls.

"They found it liberating. They did not feel ashamed any more. Jennifer listened to their stories and put them at ease. I want to make a difference and see a change in policy. I don't want people in this position to have to find their own support. It's just not right."

With the help of Jennifer, Julia Darcy and Noelle McAlinden, arts advisor and advocate, Cheryl and the group wrote a manifesto to raise awareness of Secondary Breast Cancer.

Noelle commissioned a film in which the women tell their stories, and this forms a centrepiece of the exhibition. With the

support of Jennifer, Julia and Noelle, the ladies took their campaign to Stormont on March 16, meeting the Health Committee and MLAs. Already some additions have been made to the NI Cancer Strategy for metastatic cancer patients.

"Our campaign will continue," says Cheryl. "I want to distribute infographics depicting the symptoms of Secondary Breast Cancer to as many people in the medical profession as possible. I am a fairly driven person, and am in a position that I can help people, even if it may not help me.

"I have never felt angry, just disappointed that I was not listened to. I am not cross with God. I don't believe illness is given by God. It just happens. I have never said 'why me?' I think 'why not me? Why should it be someone else?'

"Knowing that there are so many people praying for me is unbelievable, it is so, so comforting and I am not afraid. I think at the beginning I was numb, but once I got my head around it, I wanted to fight. I accept that whatever is going to happen will happen. My only regret is the reality that I will leave my family too soon."

**Below are thoughts of some of the other ladies who are part of the 'Seen to be Heard' exhibition.**

“

It felt like they had me dead and buried.

I think when you are told you are not going to live they [medical staff] don't want to get close.

It's not the same when there's nobody to hold your hand.

It is the last opportunity ... I won't have a voice again.

I am trying as hard as I can to stay for as long as I can.

Behind everyone like me, there is a family dealing with the fallout.

I have frozen embryos... one day a miracle may happen.

The thought of my children growing up without a mother... is just frightening.

It is my body, my choice, I should have been listened to.

We are the stories people would rather not hear. We are no longer pretty pink ribbons... women are dying. I am one of those women.

”



Sam Shaw's journey to and from the Ukrainian border.

## A 'wave of love' in support of Ukraine

It is hard to believe that it is almost four months since the Russian invasion of Ukraine began - an act of aggression that caused a tidal wave of refugees fleeing into Europe.

Parishes within Connor reacted quickly, collecting goods and money to support all those exiting Ukraine into neighbouring countries, and those displaced or struggling to survive within their homeland.

In Ballyclare, the United Parish of Christ Church and St John collected donations sent to the Polish border via Hope for Youth Ministries. The rector, the Rev Jonny Campbell-Smyth, said the response had been a 'wave of love' expressed by the community.

The Dean of Belfast, the Very Rev Stephen Forde, staged a special Black Santa Sit-out during Lent, raising more than £56,000 for Habitat for Humanity and Christian Aid projects to help those in crisis due to the conflict in Ukraine.

Lisburn Cathedral parishioners Sam and Silvana Shaw left the security of their home - and their young children - and travelled to help those in need, with Sam driving essential supplies to the Ukrainian border, and Silvana flying to Poland to assist a charity supporting those fleeing the devastation.

For Sam, a puppeteer with 'God's Handiwork Puppets,' this mission was inspired by a country he has grown to love and a people he felt compelled to help.

"The people who trained me in puppet ministry asked me to go to Ukraine to support local Baptists in their children's work," he explained. "I first went out in 2004, and for several years I was in Ukraine for two or three weeks at a time, running programmes in churches, schools, villages and orphanages.



Silvana with a Ukrainian lady she met on a train in Poland. The woman and her daughter had left family behind and were making their way to France.

"My last trip was in 2007 when I travelled through Crimea where this war started." After the invasion of Crimea in 2014, Sam contacted with his Ukrainian friend Tim, who ministers in a rural Baptist church, and his wife Vera. In February, Sam again made contact with his friends, while Brazilian-born Silvana was responding to a tug at her own heart.

She had contacted a Brazilian friend now living near the German border in Poland. "She had set up a voluntary group working to find safe routes out of Ukraine for families who needed help," Silvana said. "It was in my head and my heart to go and do something. My friend said, 'just come!'" Silvana flew to Berlin on March 7 and travelled by train to her friend's house in Zgorzelec.

She was unsure what she could do. "When I arrived, my friend said my just being there was such a relief and joy, she was amazed how God could bring someone from the UK to help."

Silvana's friend's charity initially helped Brazilian nationals living in Ukraine to leave, but then worked with all refugees seeking safe routes out of the country. In Zgorzelec, they identified safe routes for people, and volunteers drove the seven hours to the Ukrainian border to collect refugees.

"One day there were no refugees at the border because there had been a lot of bombing in Kyiv and people were afraid to leave their shelters in the city," Silvana said.

"Another day, a girl in Kyiv was in touch wanting to leave, but there was no train. Volunteers had to analyse where might be safe for her to go, and she was picked up in Kyiv and driven over the border. Christians who have chosen to stay in Ukraine are helping others - we got a What's App message from a 90-year-old woman in a wheelchair. We could not ask her to get on a train, and so we are sending in food for this lady."

As she returned to Berlin by train, Silvana met a lady travelling with her seven-year-old daughter, her sister who had a baby, and a teenager. They had left Ukraine and were hoping to reach friends in France.

"It really touched me," said Silvana. "I gave her some Euros, and she started crying because she was so grateful. Her son and daughter didn't want to come, and had stayed in Ukraine. She showed me their photos. She left behind her mother and father as well. We did not speak the same language, but we communicated through her photos."

Sam had planned to stay at home with the couple's children while Silvana was in Poland, but that changed when Vera was in touch from Ukraine asking if he could bring certain items through Europe. Vera had already fled her city home due to bombing - by a miracle her apartment had escaped unscathed - and was now staying in the countryside at her husband's church.

She sent a list of items required by the church and the Local Citizens' Defence as the men prepared to fight - tourniquets, bandages, medicines, thermal underwear and high vis jackets, sleeping bags, tools for repairing roofs and windows on bombed buildings, ladders, older style mobile phones that would hold a charge for longer, a stove for cooking and heating, large thermos flasks, and a diesel generator.

Sam shared the list with a small number of





Silvana and Sam Shaw back at their home outside Lisburn. The granite plaque was a gift from their Ukrainian friend Vera. Granite is widely mined in Ukraine.

churches, including Lisburn Cathedral, and planned to leave for Ukraine on March 10.

Silvana was not due home until a couple of days later, but their prayers were answered when friends offered to look after their children. Sam and his friend Mick got a van and trailer ready to go. "People from church came to help pack and roughly catalogue everything," Sam said. "Sourcing a large diesel generator in Northern Ireland was hard, but we found one in Dublin and a neighbour drove down to pick it up.

"We were really blown away by the response to the appeal - one business sold us £2,500 worth of tools for just £300."

Sam and Mick left Lisburn on March 10 and drove to Poland via Wales, England, the Netherlands and Germany, with two ferry crossings en route. They arrived at

the Polish border on the night of March 13, planning to cross to meet their friends the following morning. "It was midnight, but well lit. There were lots of armed police and aid organisations with food stalls, but not a lot of activity at the time," Sam said.

Plans had to change when Vera was in touch to say the goods needed to be transferred that night. And as Sam did not have the necessary registration for his

trailer, he was not allowed to drive over the border into Ukraine. Instead, Vera crossed to meet Sam and Mick.

She had been accompanied on the seven-hour drive from her church by two male friends, but as men between 18 and 60 are not permitted to leave Ukraine, Vera had to cross the border alone.

In a carpark nearby, Sam, Mick and Vera transferred everything into her van, finishing at 5am. They said their goodbyes and Vera



Sam (right) and Mick with the van packed full of supplies for Ukraine.

headed back into Ukraine.

"We closed the doors and drove west until we were too tired to keep going," Sam said. "What was beautiful was the number of convoys of vans heading to Ukraine with aid, including four fire engines from Denmark. Just ordinary people doing their bit."

After 'a mad dash' through Holland, Sam and Mick made it home on March 15. The good news had come through that, after 14 checkpoints, Vera had got all supplies from Northern Ireland to the safety of her husband's church.

In a video message, a local church deacon expresses his gratitude. "Dear Irish brothers and sisters," he says, "we are so glad that you help us in so difficult a time for our country. Thank you very much. You have a love for people who you do not know."

Sam thanked all who had responded to his appeal. "We had never thought it was possible to gather up what we did and get it there in the space of a week," he said.

## 'What was beautiful was the number of convoys heading to Ukraine with aid... Just ordinary people doing their bit'



Supplies collected by the Parish of Christ Church and St John, Ballyclare, and destined for the Polish border with Ukraine, are loaded into lorries in Ballyclare.



Dean Stephen Forde presenting a cheque for £56,784 to Rosamond Bennett, Christian Aid Ireland and Jenny Williams, Habitat for Humanity Ireland, raised through Belfast Cathedral's special Black Santa Lent Sit-out for Ukraine.





The Rev Canon Robert Deane, All Ireland Mothers' Union Chaplain; the Ven Dr Stephen McBride, Archdeacon of Connor and Chaplain of Connor Mothers' Union; Diane Innes, secretary of Belfast Cathedral branch of Mothers' Union; Sally Cotter, Connor Diocesan President of Mothers' Union; and the Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev George Davison, at the Connor Mothers' Union Festival Service in Belfast Cathedral on March 20.

# MU Festival banners are back on parade

Connor Mothers' Union (MU) held its annual Festival Service in Belfast Cathedral on Sunday March 20.

For the first time in more than two years, the banners of the different branches within Connor Diocese were paraded at the service as in-person festival services were suspended due to Covid-19.

The service was attended by the Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev George Davison, and the Archdeacon of Connor and Chaplain of Connor Mothers' Union, the Ven Dr Stephen McBride. The preacher was the Rev Canon Robert Deane, All Ireland MU Chaplain.

Among the guests were All-Ireland MU President June Butler, and Mabel Thompson, Diocesan President of the MU in Down and Dromore.



Banners on parade in Belfast Cathedral.



Members of the Grouped Parishes of Craigs, Dunaghy and Killagan Mothers' Union who enjoyed a wonderful prayer walk around Antrim Castle Gardens on May 10. This was led by the Rev Adrian Halligan who also prepared the readings and prayers.



Congratulations to the Mothers' Union in the Parishes of Ramoan and Culfeightrin, whose branch has reached its 130th anniversary! Members celebrated with a prayer walk in Ballycastle followed by refreshments in the Parish Centre.



The Rev Nicholas Dark preaches at the service.

## Sacrifice recalled at ANZAC Service

Those who gave their lives in the Gallipoli Campaign of 1915 were remembered when the Ulster New Zealand Trust held its first ANZAC Commemoration since 2019 on April 24.

The interdenominational service, held at The Ballance House, Crumlin, was led by the Rev Nicholas Dark, rector of Magheragall, and wreaths were laid by Regimental Associations and individuals.

Nicholas, in his sermon, highlighted the shared sacrifice of local people who fought and died with the ANZAC at Gallipoli. They included Alec Martin, a parishioner of Magheragall, who in 1913 emigrated to New Zealand. He joined the ANZAC forces and died at Gallipoli on April 25 1915.

## Marathon ladies



The Rev Melissa Jeffers and the Rev Elizabeth Hanna with their Belfast Marathon Walk medals.

The Rev Elizabeth Hanna and the Rev Melissa Jeffers completed the Belfast Marathon eight-mile walk on May 1, raising £1,265 for the Church of Ireland Bishops' Appeal.

Their particular project of choice is supporting Christian Aid in their work with communities in Honduras. Funds raised will help families who live in the dry corridor become more resilient to climate change through new agricultural practices, rainwater harvesting and drip irrigation and improved nutrition.

Elizabeth and Melissa thanked everyone who supported them, particularly Lydia Monds, Bishops' Appeal Education Advisor, for her encouragement.



# St Polycarp's Church celebrates 90 years

The Archbishop of Armagh, the Most Rev John McDowell, was the celebrant and preacher at a Thanksgiving Service of Holy Communion on Passion Sunday, April 3, to mark the 90th anniversary of the consecration of St Polycarp's Parish Church, Finaghy.

The church, one of the last major works designed by Percy Morgan Jury, was built in the late Gothic style and consecrated on April 2 1932 by the Bishop of Down, Connor and Dromore, the Rt Rev Charles TP Grierson.

It catered for the rapidly-growing population in that part of south Belfast in the early 1930s and has become a familiar landmark on the Upper Lisburn Road, close to the Finaghy crossroads.

Since 2009, St Polycarp's, along with the Church of the Epiphany on nearby Sicily Park, has formed the grouped parishes of Finaghy and Upper Malone.

Welcoming a large number of present and former parishioners and friends, the rector of the grouped parishes, the Rev Louise



Pictured at St Polycarp's 90th anniversary Thanksgiving Service are, from left: The Rev Louise Stewart, Archbishop John McDowell, Victor Stephens and the Rev Clifford Skillen. (Photo: George Hunter).

Stewart, described the day as a 'joyous and very special occasion of thanksgiving and celebration.'

Taking part in the service with the rector were Victor Stephens, Connor Diocesan Reader; the Rev Clifford Skillen, rector of

Finaghy, 1996-2009; and Heather Breene, of St Polycarp's Select Vestry. The choir was led by St Polycarp's Director of Music, Simon Neill BEM.

Archbishop McDowell was returning to the church where he and his wife Mary were married. He recalled that his late father-in-law, the Rev Ross Jackson, was rector of Upper Malone when it was a separate parish, from 1962-1966.

The Archbishop thanked 'those before us and in the present day for making the parish what it is - a worshipping community and in good heart in every respect.'

Following the sermon, Archbishop McDowell dedicated a number of gifts presented to the parish by families and friends in memory of loved ones and former parishioners.

Members of the congregation afterwards went outside for a short, commemorative tree-planting ceremony by the Archbishop, the rector and the churchwardens beside the church's two Gardens of Remembrance.

The anniversary celebrations concluded with a buffet lunch served in the Canon Butler Hall.

## Honour for former school principal

Jordanstown parishioner Mary Sinnamon is looking forward to a visit to Hillsborough Castle to be presented with a British Empire Medal (BEM), awarded in Her Majesty the Queen's New Year Honours List in recognition of her services to education and the community.

A retired school principal and long-time member of Rotary, Mary, 81, and her husband Ronnie have been members of St Patrick's, Jordanstown, since moving to the area from Monkstown in 1966.

She said the honour had come as a 'huge surprise.' "It was never something that was on my radar, I am still trying to get my head around it," she said.

Mary began teaching in 1963, and spent the first 14 years of her career in Hopefield Secondary School in Newtownabbey, before being appointed to Downshire Community School when it opened in 1977 in Carrickfergus.

In 1989 she was appointed as head teacher - becoming the first female principal of a co-educational secondary school in the controlled sector of the (then) North Eastern Education and

Library Board. Following retirement in 1998, Mary was recruited to the Board's School Support Service.

She was Carrickfergus Rotary Club's first female member when she accepted an invitation to join in 1994. In 2001/2002, she was the first female president of a Rotary club in Northern Ireland.

"Membership of Rotary has been a great pleasure, offering me the opportunity to engage with local and international projects and be part of a group of people who, while enjoying each other's company, work together to support local projects and charities concerned with the well-being of others in the community," Mary said.

As Rotary District's Probus liaison officer, Mary worked with other Rotary clubs to establish 10 new Probus clubs across the province.

She added: "I hope to be able to continue my voluntary work for as long as I am fit and the groups I engage with will have me!"

Mary has been a member of an art



Jordanstown parishioner Mary Sinnamon, who received a BEM in the Queen's New Year Honours.

appreciation class for the past 12 years. In Jordanstown Parish, she is a former churchwarden and Select Vestry member, and enjoys helping decorate the church for special occasions.

"I feel hugely honoured to receive the BEM," Mary said. "I think back on all the individuals and teams I worked with during my career, and am grateful for them. They are the people responsible for me getting this."



# Return to Yei

Billy Smyth tries out the stone crusher with its new motor at Yei Vocational Training College.

Jenny Smyth, CMS Ireland Mission Director, and her husband Billy, former mission partners in Yei Diocese, visited South Sudan in February. Connor's 15-year partnership with Yei is due to end in 2023.

Since 2013, South Sudan has been in a state of civil unrest. "The greater Yei area suffered considerably at the hands of different armed groups and people fled village homes into town, settling around Yei Cathedral," Billy said.

"Things are settling down now, but sadly there is still some way to go. The main roads are in an appalling condition, making travel dangerous and arduous. Yei town was very quiet. Trade is slow and many shops remain closed. The main trading routes from Uganda to Juba and the west no longer go through Yei, so it has lost some strategic importance."

The couple said some families have returned to Yei from the refugee camps in Uganda for children's schooling, as the schools in Uganda have only just reopened after two years of closure due to Covid-19.

"Inflation is rampant, and subsistence

farmers are struggling with the impacts of climate change and insecurity," Billy said. "People are tired of peace talks and peace agreements, disenchanted with government, and struggling to believe that the worst is over and there might be a hopeful future. People are turning to the Church for hope and practical help."

Bishop Hilary of Yei has recently retired, and this was Jenny and Billy's first opportunity to meet his successor, Bishop Levi. "During his tenure, Bishop Hilary deeply valued the partnership with Connor and the linked parishes, and it is clear that Bishop Levi recognises the value of these partnerships too," Jenny said.

"Bishop Levi sees his visit to Northern Ireland in August as key to renewing, developing and strengthening these links through opportunities to meet face-to-face, and to worship and pray together. Sadly,

because of many complicating factors over the past few years, planned team visits have had to be postponed and so Bishop Levi is looking forward to re-energising the links and meeting people.

"South Sudan is still a very young country and the Diocese of Yei lacks experience in some key areas such as management, engineering skills, Bible teaching and IT. Bishop Levi would welcome people with these skills, even for only a week or two, as they can make a very positive contribution through working alongside folk to mentor and skill share. Such visits give the diocese huge encouragement."

During this visit, Billy's main focus was the Vocational Training College (VTC). The management committee has resolved to continue the partnership with CMS Ireland as this has been critical in the development and ongoing success of the college.

Jenny said Bishop Levi has been developing a strategic plan for the diocese, and three priorities had been identified: Education and Training, Evangelism and Discipleship and Income Generation.

In respect of this third priority, plans are in progress for diocesan-wide coffee farming, involving all parishes. Jenny said: "An inspiring local agricultural advisor is supporting the programme with training sessions, practical demonstrations and provision of supplies. This should provide the pastors with an income.

"Currently, each pastor is paid 5,000SSP (£9) per month. Growing coffee is a long-term venture - it can be three to five years before a crop is ready to harvest. Bishop Levi has confidence that the years of insecurity in the region are in the past, that the village folk now have the freedom and confidence to plant long-term crops again."

Billy said a top priority was to get the diocesan tractor, a 17-year-old Fiat New Holland 80 66s, running again, as this would support the coffee farming plans as well as help people grow the food they need for everyday survival.

Alongside these plans, ongoing projects supported by parishes through CMS Ireland continue. In Yei, the diocese runs various institutions, including the Teacher Training College, Martha Clinic, Immanuel School, and the VTC, and these were impacted by the civil war.

"By and large, Immanuel Primary School and Martha Clinic remained open despite the immense difficulties of shortages, insecurity and the challenge of sourcing salaries," Jenny said. "The Teacher Training College relocated to Uganda for a short time and has now reopened in Yei.

## Bangor Worldwide Missionary Convention

The theme for Bangor Worldwide Missionary Convention which runs from August 19-28 is 'Compelled.' The majority of the events will be held at Hamilton Road Presbyterian Church.

A special evening will take place in Assembly Buildings, Belfast, on August 20 - mission agencies will give updates on their work before hearing from David Eastwood from OMF, author David Garrison and Archbishop Ben Kwashi. New Irish Arts will provide music and worship.

Bible studies with American author and pastor Zack Eswine take place weekdays at 11.30am. There are events for young adults on both Fridays and a special Equip gathering on August 20 in 1st Bangor Presbyterian Church. A ladies afternoon tea will take place in Hamilton Road Baptist Church on August 25 featuring Suzanne Potter from Latin Link and Joanne Briggs from the Leprosy Mission NI.

Registration will be required for some events, Please visit the website [www.worldwidemission.org](http://www.worldwidemission.org) for more information.



"Immanuel Model Secondary School also remained open, although it had to relocate a few times into borrowed premises due to the long delay in finding enough resources to complete the new building, these times of relocating adding to the considerable disruption already being experienced by the children in the area."

Jenny said she was particularly encouraged to find that the diocese has started a Community-Based Rehabilitation programme. "There are three diocesan staff involved in both community visits to families with children with special needs, as well as to schools encouraging integrated education. They offer counselling, practical support, rehabilitation, special equipment and work with the community to overcome stigma and improve inclusion."

The couple said Yei VTC continues to make a major impact on the lives of many young people. "It is difficult to over-estimate the impact it is having," said Billy. "One young man now driving for Medecins Sans Frontiers said he learned to drive at YVTC. Archbishop Justin's driver, Bishop Levi's driver and Bishop Wilson's driver are all graduates of the college. Everywhere we went, we met folk who had learned skills through the VTC which are still enabling them to support their families and contribute to rebuilding this shattered country."

Billy said the electrical tutor, with the help of his students, had completed several solar installations for the diocese and local people. As tailoring is a business that can be set up and run by an individual at a relatively low cost, tailoring classes are full. "Please think twice before sending second hand clothes to developing countries!" Billy added.

"Many large international development donors see vocational training as a key element in community development through rebuilding the country's infrastructure and getting the economy running again," Jenny said.

Bishop Levi and the management committee organised a strategic review of the VTC to coincide with Jenny and Billy's visit. "We were able to contribute to forming a vision for the college for the next few years," said Billy. "This was a worthwhile exercise, bringing the diocesan team and management committee together with the NGOs and other stakeholders to share views and opinions."

Repairs to the tractor consumed much of Billy's time as it hadn't run for about five years. He had sourced parts in Lisburn, so during this visit, with the help of a mechanical tutor, he managed to get the

tractor running and ploughing again.

When the college closed abruptly in 2016, some vital machine parts went missing. Billy had been striving to replace these and repair ageing machines. During this visit, he managed to recondition the large wood planer machine, the bench circular saw, add a motor to the small stone crusher, as well as bringing out a small inverter welder for use in the workshops. "

Jenny explained that Yei Diocese raises funding from various directions to subsidise the cost of student training, and training will need to be heavily subsidised for some years to come.

Partnership remains important, and Jenny and Billy received a very warm welcome on arrival in Yei. "People in Yei have suffered greatly, and need to know they are part of a much bigger church family, that other Christians do remember and care for them," they said.

"It is deeply humbling to see their faith in action in the face of terrible struggles. Billy was told by one young man that he brings them courage - what a privilege to be able to be an encouragement to our fellow Christians facing such hardships."

Jenny said the Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev George Davison, is keen that CMS Ireland continues to facilitate links between parishes and Yei Diocese even after the official diocesan link ends in 2023. "These links are faith and life-enhancing for all involved," said Jenny.

It is hoped that with the slow return to peace, it will be possible for visits to Yei to resume. "Bishop Levi is very keen to welcome individuals and teams wanting to share in the life and work of Yei Diocese," they said. "There is a beautiful new church guest house wing offering warm hospitality and a comfortable stay."

They were also pleased to hear that Mongo Primary School, part-funded by Connor Diocese, is back up and running with a head teacher in place.

Funds are needed for the completion of Immanuel Model Secondary School, and Jenny said many issues within the diocese drag on for much longer than they should because of the lack of resources. "The years of insecurity have devastated the local economy," she added.

"It has been a real privilege to be able to visit Yei again. Experiencing the work of the local Church serving those in need and shining as a light in the darkness is inspiring and deeply challenging to our faith. Please do remember to pray for Bishop Levi and the Church in Yei."



Billy and Jenny Smyth with Bishop Levi and Mama Agnes.



Mechanics students at work.



Demonstration of the diocesan coffee growing project.



Billy working on the VTC tractor.

**Bishop Levi and his wife, Mama Agnes, will be visiting from August 8-15 for the 'Kingdom Voices' conference organised by CMS Ireland and SAMS Ireland. They will spend time in link parishes, and two special events to which everyone is invited are planned: Evening worship on Friday August 12 in St Anne's Cathedral, and a family fun afternoon on August 13 in Lady Dixon Park. Church leaders are invited to a day conference on August 10 when 40 invited leaders from across the World Church will be present to discuss the outworking of the Five Marks of Mission in their own contexts.**





Recently produced souvenirs for the Platinum Jubilee.



Derek's favourite item is this baby's rattle commemorating the Silver Jubilee of King George V and Queen Mary in 1935.



A miniature book of Royal portraits.



The Rev Canon Derek Kerr with a Victorian cup and saucer.



The Rev Canon Derek Kerr with some of the crockery which forms part of his Royal collection

## Derek puts his Royal passion on display

Drummaul Parish Church hosted a right Royal event during May - an exhibition in honour of Her Majesty the Queen's Platinum Jubilee.

On display were items from the Rev Canon Derek Kerr's vast collection of Royal memorabilia. Derek is well-known as a Royal enthusiast, giving regular talks on the subject, and also as a collector - his Winnie-the-Pooh exhibition has featured on these pages in the past.

Truth be told, one feels as if one is actually in the presence of Royalty when one steps into the front room of Derek's Vicarage. That is not to say that the Rev Canon considers himself to be Royalty, of course, but Royalty is peering down from every wall, every nook and every cranny.

We popped in to view Derek's incredible collection before it was moved to Drummaul Church. Plates, jugs, saucers, photographs, cushions, paintings, framed letters from Buckingham Palace and much more ready to be put on show. "There's more in boxes," Derek admits, "but this is the best stuff."

Derek has been collecting all things Royal for the past 30 years, and has gathered around 500 items, the oldest a jug and some crockery dating back to Queen Victoria's days.

Surrounded by his collection - one has to be careful how one moves through this room as there is a lot of china on display - Derek reflects on how this passion for Royalty evolved. "As a small boy I loved historical characters, especially fantasy characters like King Arthur and the Knights

of the Round Table. I loved the castles and the jousts. The thought of someone getting struck with a 12ft pole was quite exciting for a young boy," he explains.

"As I got older, I progressed to more sophisticated viewing, such as 'Upstairs Downstairs,' 'Sense and Sensibility' and 'Pride and Prejudice,' and of course I loved 'Downton Abbey.'

"But it was with King Arthur that my love of other worldly stuff began - old houses and National Trust properties and a real fascination with the Royal family. Some of my good friends called it delusions of grandeur!"

Derek grew up in Co Tyrone and later worked as an accountant before moving to London and Oakhill Theological College. In 1988-89, he studied at what is now the Church of Ireland Theological Institute in Dublin, and was ordained in 1990.

He served a curacy in St Donard's, Belfast, Diocese of Down and Dromore, and a second curacy in St Nicholas' and Holy Trinity, Carrickfergus, Connor Diocese.

Derek then moved to Devenish and Boho in Fermanagh where he spent 11 'very happy' years as rector before he sensed it was time for another move. He has been vicar of Drummaul, Duneane and Ballyscullion since 2007.

He gave what he refers to as his first 'Royal Talk' during his second year in St Donard's,



when he and his fellow team member, politician Jeffrey Donaldson, spoke at a Summer Madness debate against the argument: 'This house believes there is no future for the monarchy.'

"There were 400 young people there with their leaders, many of whom were clergy colleagues. I did take dreadful abuse from some of the clergy, but it was all in good fun, and as it turned out, we won the debate," Derek recalls.

The wife of a clergy colleague asked him to give a Royal talk to Newtownbutler Mothers' Union, and so it began!

"I wish I had kept a log, but I have done an average of 10 talks a year since then," Derek reflects. "The first few times, there was just me standing talking, but I started collecting things from charity shops and antique shops, and people gave me some interesting and quirky pieces they knew their families wouldn't want to keep.

"I actually got my first piece of Royal memorabilia on my 17th birthday, on July 29 1981, the day Charles and Diana got married. I was given a framed poster of the Royal couple which I hung on my wall. While other kids had football, I had Charles and Di!" Derek rolls his eyes and laughs. "Even I have to admit that was really sad!"

But the wedding piqued Derek's interest, and over the years he took every opportunity to attend Royal events.

His first was the Queen Mother's 100th birthday in 2000, when he positioned himself between Clarence House and Buckingham Palace, seeing Prince Charles and the Queen Mother driving past, and later seeing the Queen Mother with Queen Elizabeth and Princess Margaret on the balcony at Buckingham Palace.

In 2002, Derek hosted an exhibition in Co Fermanagh to celebrate the Queen's Golden Jubilee. This was captured on video, and the Rev Gerry Murphy, rector of Sandringham Parish for nine years, arranged for the video, along with a Belleek Pottery plate and a congratulations card, to be delivered direct to the Queen's lap. For this, Derek and the parish received a letter of thanks. This is one of many he has hanging on his wall, as he always writes to congratulate Her Majesty on birthdays and anniversaries. "Buckingham Palace always replies," he says.

That same year, Derek was a guest at



a Garden Party in Loughry College in Cookstown to mark the Golden Jubilee.

"We were in a group which would meet the Queen and shake her hand, but were told she was running behind schedule and wouldn't be speaking to anyone," Derek recalls. "We were told not to move or speak when she passed us, but I'm afraid I broke the rules! As she was passing, she stopped to take a rose from a lady. I circumnavigated three bodyguards to walk up to her, take her hand, bow and thank her for coming. She said: 'Thank you very much, how kind of you to say so.'"

Derek's boldness paid off a second time, when he was in Windsor for the Queen's 80th birthday in 2006. "She was walking down the other side of the street and the Lord Lieutenant saw I had a gift and offered to take it to her."

"I said, 'Awk, can she not come over herself and get it?'" Her Majesty then stopped, crossed the street, and took the gift - a sachet of hankies - from Derek!

In 2011, when Prince William married Kate Middleton, Derek spent the previous night on the Mall where he found 'an excellent spot' to catch a glimpse of the bride and groom. "The excitement and the atmosphere could not be equalled," he enthuses. "When the bride and groom went past, people cheered, but when the Queen and Duke passed, it erupted and people went completely mad, even though it was the bride and groom's day!"

To mark the Queen's 60th anniversary of her reign in 2012, Derek hosted his Royal exhibition at Drummaul, with proceeds going to parish funds and to the NSPCC. In return, the NSPCC gifted Derek two tickets to Gary Barlow's concert outside Buckingham Palace in celebration of the anniversary. "The vicar was 12 rows from the stage and saw the Spice Girls, Paul McCartney and lots of other class acts."

Derek smiles at the memory.

Three years later, Derek again hosted an exhibition to celebrate Her Majesty becoming the UK's longest reigning monarch. This raised £1,300 for Tabiro School in Uganda which Drummaul, Duneane and Ballyscullion had built through Fields of Life. This was also the year of Derek's own celebration of 25 years in ministry, and he and three others from the parish travelled to Uganda to paint the school and reinstate the playground.

His extensive collection includes items relevant to the Royal family past and present, but it is apparent that Her Majesty the Queen is not only the heart of the family, but the heart of this amazing collection.

"What I admire most about the Queen is her obvious servanthood - even on holiday, Her Majesty deals with her state boxes - and her resilience. She gets on with the job even in the midst of family scandal or threat of danger," Derek says.

He believes the monarchy is essential in the UK as a focus of unity for national events and times of national celebration. "Certainly, the present Queen holds much respect from across the nation and the nation gets behind her," he says. "And when she or one of her family goes abroad there is much interest. This comes from longevity in the position and the history and pomp surrounding it."

Derek's collection includes china commemorating Queen Victoria's 60 years on the throne; a miniature photo book of Royals from bygone days; a plate marking the Silver Jubilee of King George V in 1935; and new souvenirs of this year's platinum jubilee - cushions and gold plated teaspoons.

But pride of place goes to a very unlikely object - a baby's rattle. Holding it up, Derek explains: "This is my favourite item. It was my mother's rattle and commemorates the Silver Jubilee of King George V and Queen Mary in 1935. The King died the following year."

The exhibition ran from May 13-22, raising funds for the parish, with 10 per cent of monies donated going to the Salvation Army in memory of the late Aurelia Kelly.

With the items safely back in storage, Derek headed to London where he hoped to find another 'excellent spot' from which to enjoy the events of the Platinum Jubilee Weekend in early June.



Bishop George Davison and Dean Stephen Forde with some of Connor clergy who attended the Service of Renewal of Ordination Vows in Belfast Cathedral on Maundy Thursday, April 14.

# Clergy renew vows

Clergy from across Connor Diocese came together on Maundy Thursday at the invitation of their Bishop for a service during which they renewed their Ordination Vows.

The Service of Holy Communion was held in Belfast Cathedral and led by the Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev George Davison.

Welcoming those who had attended from every corner of the diocese, Bishop George said: "I am very conscious that we have had a couple of very challenging years and also of the busyness of this season. For these reasons, it is important for us to draw aside as clergy called to serve, to remind ourselves of the heart of our call and to share in Holy Communion together.

"I invite you to take time simply to be quiet, to know God's presence and together we will renew our vows of ordination to serve Christ."

Readings were from 1 Corinthians 11:

23-26 and John 13: 1-17. Bishop George gave the sermon, and the service was followed by refreshments, giving clergy an opportunity to reconnect in the wake of the global pandemic.



The Rev Canon Nigel Baylor and the Rev Colin Hall-Thompson.



The Rev Carol Harvey.



The Rev David Ferguson, the Rev Adrian Halligan and the Rev Harold Sharpe.



The Rev Alan McCann and the Rev Canon Will Murphy.



The Rev Canon Peter McDowell and the Rev Andrew Sweeney.

## 'Unlocking' is theme of Ballyclare weekend



Members of Christ Church and St John, Ballyclare, headed to Kilbroney for a parish weekend on March 19/20.

The theme was 'Unlocking'. The rector, the Rev Jonny Campbell-Smyth said: "After two years of restrictions, we gathered to examine how God wants to unlock in us his desire for the Church and for us as his children."

Guest speakers were Bishop Ken Clarke; Christina Baillie, Connor Diocesan Youth Officer; Victoria Jackson, Connor Children's Ministry Development Officer, and John and Hannah McGrath.





Clergy and those who attended or took part in an interdenominational Prayer Service in St Matthew's, Shankill, on April 8, a year after scenes of rioting disrupted life on the Shankill Road. The service was organised by the Rev Tracey McRoberts, rector of St Matthew's, and Father Martin Magill, Parish Priest in St John's, Falls Road. The group then took part in a Prayer Walk across the peaceline at Lanark Way and up the Springfield Road.

# MindMatters - you're not alone

**By Andrew Brooking**

To declare to the world 'I suffer from poor mental health' is one of the scariest things anyone could do. How will people react? Will I get that promotion? Will I be able to lead in church? Am I a lesser Christian?

I suffer from depression and I know these thoughts all too well. Looking back at my life, I see it has been with me well before I can remember, it's only in adulthood I decided to take action and find out what is going on in my brain, as things were clearly not right.

I was once rebuked by a boss that I couldn't have depression because I was always cheerful. And that, although harmful at the time, is where our faith comes in.

Our identity is not in our mental well-being, but in our love of Jesus Christ. Displaying a fruit of the spirit shows our broken world that God is far greater than any illness, and he is with us even when we're at our most vulnerable. This display of God's power in us isn't something that is forced, or made up, but something the outside world witnesses while our inside self is crumbling with thoughts of 'you're useless and worthless.'

Within scripture we read how God has helped those with poor mental health. Elijah wanted to end his life, but God gave him food for energy to live another day. While Jonah was feeling low, God grew a vine around him to 'ease his discomfort', as though God himself was wrapping His



Photo: Nik Shuliahin on Unsplash.

arms around him. Moses felt weak, but God provided two supportive friends just at the right time.

Jesus himself couldn't avoid stress. While his soul was overwhelmed with sorrow in Gethsemane, he asked his disciples to keep watch over him, but they fell asleep. This can remind us, the Church, to be awake and see that there are people suffering all the time.

We often confess that we're sorry for the things we have failed to do. Failing to stay awake and walk with our brothers and sisters who struggle with poor mental health is something we all need to reflect on.

Telling the world you're struggling should not be scary, even though it is. How often are we reminded to fear not? But fear is what gets in the way of talking about how we feel (especially for us men). Fear even prevents us approaching others who are struggling.

Research suggests that at least one in four of us will suffer at some point in our lives, but in truth we will all have mental health struggles. Church leaders are far from exempt, and if they're struggling, we need to support them, just like Moses' friends.

Let us be a Church that provides the food for the anxious just as God provided for Elijah. Let us become the vine that wraps our arms around those suffering with bipolar. Let us not fall asleep like the disciples, let us reach out and set the captives free through our Lord and Saviour

Jesus Christ.

The Church of Ireland, through MindMatters, wants to address mental health within our communities and is taking the plight of so many of us seriously. It's now time to talk, and remember, if you're suffering, you are no less a Christian and you're definitely not alone.



**Andrew Brooking is a parishioner of St Patrick's, Ballymoney, and a MindMatters Col Champion. He has a Certificate in Christian Theology and Practice.**

**WORLDWIDE**



**Bangor Worldwide  
Missionary Convention**

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