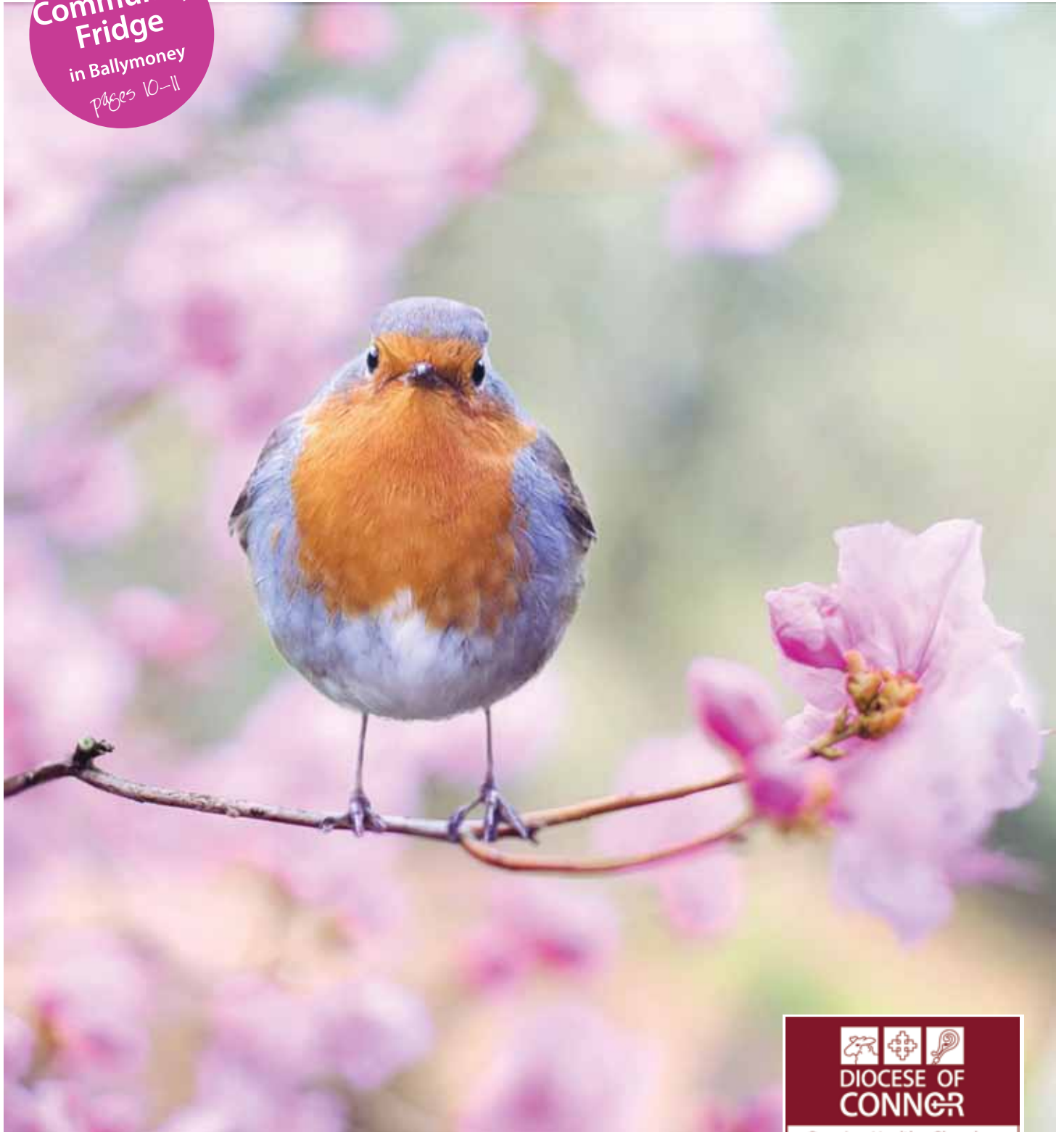


CONNOR

connections

Community
Fridge
in Ballymoney
pages 10-11





Since 2001, Kay Hutchinson, 84, has raised £96,000 for church funds for Holy Trinity Parish Church, Portrush, since starting to sell second-hand items in the parochial centre every summer.

Kay raises £96,000 for parish funds!

A road accident which left her badly injured inspired Kay Hutchinson, a member of Holy Trinity Parish, Portrush, to do something to, in her own words, 'thank God for sparing my life.'

And over the past 22 years, Kay, now aged 84, has raised an incredible £96,000 for church funds through her summer sale of second-hand clothes, bric-a-brac and more.

The tally for last year's pop-up charity shop was an all-time high of £11,081, which Kay attributes to the shop being open until the end of September, whereas in previous years she had closed earlier in the month.

"I started off in 2001, just doing a couple of days, but over the next few years I extended it for the whole summer. We are based in the parochial rooms beside the church, but I could do with a bigger place because even the visitors to the town are bringing me stuff!" Kay said.

"I am open in the afternoons until around

6pm, although sometimes I am there until seven or eight."

ACCIDENT

It was her accident on a darkening evening in November 1999 that spurred Kay on to take up this fundraising initiative. "I was walking up Ballywillan Road pushing my bike when I was involved in a collision with a car. I could have been killed. I broke bones in my legs and had to have a number of skin grafts. Six weeks later I was okay and I have never looked back. I thank God that he spared me."

Kay, who did domestic work locally, went back to work but not to cycling. "I do a lot of walking to keep myself fit," she added.

"Setting up the shop was my way of

thanking God for sparing my life. We had to raise funds for the church as we had had some work done and the parish centre in Victoria Street had been renovated, so I took on the shop after the ladies who ran it retired. Since I started, I have raised £96,000. Every penny goes back into the church.

HOLIDAYMAKERS

"I sell clothes, bric-a-brac, bedclothes, wee bits of furniture, anything that people will buy. Even holidaymakers have been bringing me stuff.

"I have a high turnover because I keep my prices down. I find some charity shops are too expensive. I only charge £3 for a skirt or a shirt - if you charge too much it doesn't sell and ends up just hanging there."

Kay said others help out, and she specially thanked Des Kane who got involved during the Covid pandemic, checking that all precautions were met to ensure the safety of anyone in the shop. "We only missed one year due to Covid, that was 2020," said Kay.

"This year we stayed open until the end of September. We only open in the afternoons because there aren't as many people around the town in the mornings; they may be on the beach, or if they are on holiday, having a wee lie-in!"

HAPPY

Kay is not deterred by the hard work. "I find that if you are doing something that you are happy doing, you don't feel tired," she said. "It is nice meeting people and seeing them return year-on-year. If someone doesn't come in, I worry about them! I am a bit nosy, I do ask people where they are from, and I have customers from all over Northern Ireland and England and Scotland. Two ladies were in from the USA and one of them bought a hand knit jumper - someone had knit me 15 for the shop. Another lady from Londonderry knits me wee cardigans to sell."

At the end of the season, a textile company from Cookstown comes and takes away any items that have not sold - paying for what they take and adding to Kay's tally.

Born near Bushmills, Kay moved to Craighulliar outside Portrush in 1952, and has lived there ever since.

Offering to give advice to any parish which might be thinking of setting up a similar fundraising venture, Kay said: "I want to keep doing this as long as I can. Even though I am 84, I don't feel it."

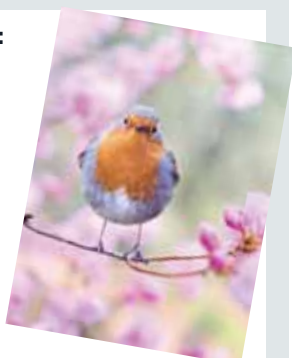
Spring 2024

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Cover photo:


Spring Robin.


Photo:
Pixabay


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

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Discover afresh the joy of serving one another in church



Dear friends in Connor Diocese. One of the joys of being the Bishop in Connor Diocese is the opportunity to share in the life of the congregations of the diocese in a wide variety of ways.

Many of these are special occasions - times when the people of God are gathering to celebrate a significant event, an anniversary, the faith commitment of young and old in confirmation, the offering of service by members of the church family. From time to time, I have the privilege of moments of sharing in significant life events for members of the diocese - a special birthday or a funeral perhaps.

Recently though, I have enjoyed the privilege of sharing in worship with a number of congregations when their own minister was unwell. I wasn't present to do something special as the Bishop, but simply to lead the congregations in their regular Sunday worship.

I enjoyed each of these occasions and reflecting on them, it reminded me of the importance of our gathering together, faithfully, regularly, to worship God and in doing so, to encourage each other as disciples of Jesus Christ. It is the regular life of our church family, not just the special occasions, that show to the community

around us who we are and what makes us tick! Sometimes, we forget that our lives and the things that we do with them are not just about us. Our natural human instinct in church life, as in a whole range of other situations, is to ask the question 'What is this doing for me?' As Christians though, we are reminded that the one we profess to follow spent his life focused on the good of others.

Across the Diocese of Connor, I've been inviting congregations to reflect on what it means for us to be 'Growing Healthy Churches,' to live and shape ourselves in a way that glorifies God and draws others to share the life of worship with us.

As we approach another Lent season, might I encourage us all to use this time to think again about how our faith is reflected in our church membership and perhaps discover afresh the joy of serving one another Sunday by Sunday?

Yours in His service,

+George

Introduction in Monkstown



The Rev Nathan Ervine was introduced as priest-in-charge in the Church of the Good Shepherd, Monkstown Parish, at a service on December 5. Nathan, who was formerly curate in St Nicholas', Carrickfergus, was introduced to Monkstown Parish by the Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev George Davison. Preacher at the service was the Rev Chris St John, rector of St Nicholas', Carrickfergus. Photo: David Hewett.



The Chapter of St Saviour's, Connor, pictured at the installation of Amanda Adams as Canon in Lisburn Cathedral on Sunday December 3. Front row, from left: Archdeacon Stephen McBride, Dean Sam Wright, Canon Amanda Adams and Archdeacon Paul Dundas. Back row, from left: Canon Chris Easton, Canon Peter Galbraith, Canon Mark McConnell, Canon William Taggart, Canon Derek Kerr and Canon James Carson.

New Canons in Lisburn and Belfast

Two new Canons have been installed in Cathedrals in Connor Diocese. The Rev Amanda Adams, rector of Ballyrashane and Kildollagh, in the Chapter of Christ Church Cathedral, Lisburn, and the Rev Tracey McRoberts MBE, rector of St Matthew's, Belfast, in the Chapter of St Anne's Cathedral, Belfast.

Their appointments by the Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev George Davison, follow the retirements of Canon George Graham and Canon David Humphries.

Amanda is an economics graduate from Queen's University Belfast and worked for the Inland Revenue all over Northern Ireland.

She began her studies at the Church of Ireland Theological College, Dublin, in 2003, and was ordained a deacon in June 2006, when she was appointed curate of St Patrick's, Ballymena, before her institution as rector of Ballyrashane and Kildollagh in July 2009.

Amanda has been Transferor Representative on the Northern Education and Library Board, and has been Church of Ireland Transferor Representative on the Board of the Education Authority, Northern Ireland, for the last nine years.

PARTNERSHIP

She also sits on a number of school governing bodies and is a member of Connor Diocesan Council. Her parish has been in partnership with Ibbra Diocese in



The Rev Canon Tracey McRoberts MBE and Fr Martin Magill helping out at the Black Santa Sit-out at Belfast Cathedral in December.

South Sudan for more than 10 years.

Ballyrashane and Kildollagh Parishes have formed a Rural Ministries Partnership with other parishes on the north coast, and during the summer, along with the Grouped Parishes of Ballintoy and Dunseverick with Rathlin Island and St Patrick's, Coleraine, and St Andrew's, Ballysally, Amanda and her team hosted Streetreach for Connor's young people - with Streetreach returning in 2024.

Amanda grew up in the Lisburn area, attending Eglantine Parish Church and later St Paul's, Lisburn.

"I was very surprised to be asked to be

a Canon of Lisburn Cathedral and very humbled, it is such an honour," said Amanda.

"I truly feel that this honour is really the recognition of the efforts and unfailing support of so many people in the grouped parishes and beyond."

Amanda was installed as Prebendary of Connor in the Chapter of St Saviour, Lisburn Cathedral, on December 3. At the same service, Canon James Carson was installed as Chancellor, Canon William Taggart as Precentor and Canon Peter Galbraith as Treasurer.

PEACEBUILDING

Tracey, who featured in the autumn 2023 issue of 'Connor Connections' following her award of an MBE for her work in peacebuilding in the King's Birthday Honours list, was installed as a Connor Canon in Belfast Cathedral on January 28.

She has a BTh from Union Theological College, Belfast, and later did a PGCE. During her two years training in Dublin, she completed a Master's Degree in Leadership and Pastoral Care at All Hallows College and, following her ordination in 2009, she was curate at St Thomas', Belfast.

She has been rector of St Matthew's in the Shankill area of Belfast since 2012, and Rural Dean of Mid Belfast since March 2018.

As a Canon of Belfast Cathedral, she was on the steps with Dean Stephen Forde last December during his annual Black Santa Sit-out for charities.

Announcing the appointment of the two new Canons, Bishop George said: "The Rev Amanda Adams has demonstrated a deep commitment to the Church of Ireland at a variety of levels. She represented the Transferors' Representative Council on the Education Authority for many years. She serves on Diocesan Council and is working co-operatively with neighbouring parishes to seek to do something new and innovative for young people in rural parishes on the north coast.

"The appointment of the Rev Tracey McRoberts to the Chapter of St Anne's Cathedral is recognition of the commitment she has demonstrated to the life and witness of the Church in Mid Belfast. As well as her own parish commitments, she has worked tirelessly to provide oversight to a significant number of other churches in the Rural Deanery. I also recognise the significant contribution she has made towards ecumenical and community relationships in that part of Belfast."

Eco conscious Carnmoney

The Church of the Holy Evangelists, Carnmoney Parish.

Replacing lightbulbs with LEDs, putting up bird boxes, sowing wildflowers and recycling scrap metal are just some of the initiatives set up by Carnmoney Parish's Eco Committee.

The projects are not only having a positive impact on the environment in and around the Church of the Holy Evangelists, but are literally saving the parish hundreds of pounds.

The Eco Committee is entirely made up of lay members of the parish. We paid a visit last November to meet committee members George Baird and Robert Campbell.

"The initiative arose from a Bible Study on God's creation and how we look after it," Robert explained. "Our curate Carol asked someone to take on the eco aspects of the church and I was keen to put up my hand."

Robert has retired from working in engineering. "I was always very interested in environmental issues, and there is a strong contingency of people here who are also interested - I am convinced that if I had not volunteered, others would have done so. There are 14 on our committee," he said.

"We stick by the motto 'Reduce, Reuse, Recycle.' In the church, we use low energy bulbs. Replacing the old lights in the church hall with LED lights was completed at the end of August.

"We should see payback in just under five years - that's only taking into consideration the energy saving. Our light fittings were near their sell-by date anyhow, so we are saving on capital costs as well.

"We went with the LEDs first, and when we assess the energy the hall is using, we can calculate our renewable energy costs and that will dictate the solar panels needed and their payback. We have an excellent south facing roof on the church hall. We



Carnmoney Eco Committee members George Baird and Robert Campbell.

have been renewing some of the insulation, but we did already have quite a lot - the parish has always been energy conscious."

Eight new hand-made bird boxes were put up at the end of June. Boxes had previously been installed here some 15-20 years ago, but Robert said those needed replaced as the squirrels had been eating into them. The new boxes have a special metal front and the apertures vary to attract a variety of species.

"We worked with our faith groups and Sunday School one Saturday morning putting them up at the graveyard, and each box was named for one of the Sunday School members," Robert said.

George added: "We showed them the best places to put them up, so it was also about education. Naming them after the children will also help maintain their interest. There was a bit of competition about whose box would be occupied first!

"One of the new boxes was occupied this year, and we didn't expect that. The initiative aims to provide a welcome, easy home, so the birds stay and then come back next year."

The committee has created a new wildflower area on the lawn between the church and hall which was sown at the end of September. Members have also sown wildflowers in the Memorial Garden, and did a clean-up in the graveyard and spread seeds there to attract insects, birds and bees.

A sunflower competition was organised during the summer for members of the Sunday School and CLCGB, and the committee also ran two litter-picking events and invited children and adults to design a poster to encourage people to pick up their litter.

George has taken on the oversight of the parish's recycling initiatives which have been ongoing for many years.

"I always collected tin cans myself. One person doing it is a drop in the ocean but when you have a whole congregation, it makes a big difference. We collect all sorts of scrap metal - washing machines, cookers, kettles, knives and forks, saucepans - if an item is too big to drop off, I can pick it up. We take the aluminium cans to Cash for Cans in Mallusk, and the metal to scrap metal dealers."

He said the can recycling has been a big success. "These are something we use all the time and throw away. Now we have people saving them up and bringing them to me. To date, we have made £1,550 this year," he said. "We are helping clear the place up as well."

All the money raised through recycling is channelled back into the Church Restoration Fund, and while the committee is investigating grant aid for the solar panels, it is committed to putting in the panels regardless. "All is based on payback, and we will be selling any excess energy to the grid," explained Robert.

The men said the whole parish was enthusiastic about the different measures. "There's a real good buzz around here," said Robert.

"We will be continuing to think of different ideas and different things we can do for the environment and also for education. We are thinking of organising an evening with the support of the council to advise parishioners how they can utilise energy more efficiently in their own homes."

Paying tribute to the work already achieved by the Eco Committee since it was set up at the beginning of 2023, the vicar of Carnmoney, the Rev Andy Heber, said: "It's been wonderful to see the group surging ahead with such enthusiasm and making great contacts within the community too."



Denise Stone offers advice on the use of a defibrillator at the Agherton Parish health and wellbeing event.

Focus on health in Agherton Parish

Agherton Parish provided the opportunity for parishioners and others in the community to meet with health and wellbeing providers at a very successful fair hosted in the parish centre.

Thirteen different organisations attended on September 21 to share details of their work and the support they can offer. The rector, the Rev Malcolm Ferry, said it had been of value to the exhibitors as well as those who attended. "They got so much from it," he said. "They saw it as a real networking opportunity."

"We offered space for teas and coffees. Some charities taking part made use of our break-out room, for example, Aware ran 10-15 minute classes speaking about their work."

The RNID representative not only spoke about the support offered by the organisation, but also fixed hearing aids for a number of people. Denise Stone, a member of the Agherton Parish Choir, is North West Co-ordinator for Defibrillators, and she ran defibrillator training.

The parish has its own defibrillator. "We have done a couple of group sessions in defibrillator training, but this gave people one-to-one training which gave them more confidence to try," Malcolm said.

There were lots of opportunities for people to sit down and get one-on-one information. Representatives of the Library Service, for example, were able to help



Blood pressure checks at Agherton Health Fair.

individuals to get the Library Service app on their phones.

There was information on securing the home, and representatives later went out to homes of those who needed assistance to install safety chains on doors. There was advice for those living alone, for carers, for those who are struggling with bereavement, for people feeling generally overwhelmed.

"A lot of ladies who live alone felt really empowered," Malcolm said. "For the more active older men, there were talks from Men's Shed."

Those attending with younger children were able to leave the kids to have fun



RNID representative mending hearing aids.

with Christina Acheson who opened the parish's Little Surfers Club specially for the day.

Agherton Parish employs two parish nurses, and this event was nurse-led. "When they are doing their work, the nurses identify people who may be concerned about things like falling, home security, or living alone," Malcolm said.

"We are constantly signposting people to services, but bringing everybody together in one place, they can see more and can interact directly with the agencies. This was a one-stop-shop for support. Sometimes, when people are trying to access support themselves, they can spend ages on the phone and get nowhere.

"When our nurses carried out a survey, people said they wanted more information and signposting, so we knew this would be popular."

The parish nurses run health walks once a month. "We are trying to build good health and good practice," Malcolm said.

The health fair ran over four hours and led to lots of follow-up advice and calls.

"As a parish, we now have a reputation and status within these health and wellbeing organisations," Malcolm said. "We have no town hall and we are a bit out of services in Portstewart, so I can see the benefit of a quarterly health hub. That would be a long-term goal.

"Already Surestart has begun using our hall. This has all come from building our reputation as being advocates for good health, independent living and professional service."

Following the health and wellbeing event, Agherton parish nurses expressed their thanks to the exhibitors for their displays and sharing their information. They also thanked the ladies of the church organisations for their beautiful displays and the time they gave to speak to others, and those who prepared and served the refreshments.

'The globe has come to live on our streets'

Derryvolgie Parish has initiated a new cross-cultural project - Global Made Local - aimed at fostering cross-cultural connections and promoting missional thinking within the context of a changing Ireland.

The project got under way in early November with Spanish classes (there is already a waiting list) and a Global Made Local café style event.

The rector, the Rev James Boyd, said: "We used to send people across the globe to 'be on mission.' The globe has now come to live in our streets and communities and the Church needs to find ways to connect with this new movement of people groups."

Marcos, a volunteer from Chile, is currently serving in Derryvolgie Parish through SAMS' FUSION project. "It was in conversation with Stephen McElhinney, Mission Director for SAMS Ireland, that the seeds for this project were first germinated," James said. "The Global Made Local project aims to facilitate meaningful engagement between overseas Church ministry volunteers and the 'New Irish,' individuals who have recently relocated to Ireland and chosen it as their home. By connecting these two groups, we intend to expand the horizons of church ministry beyond traditional boundaries, establishing a welcoming environment for newcomers and promoting cultural exchange, enabling the Church to turn mission on its head.

"Having Marcos with us this year is a pilot scheme that aims to grow the opportunities for connections to be made



with like-minded people - after a successful trial period, we hope to broaden the scope of this project and host up to three overseas volunteers from different nations."

James said the Global Made Local project is not a one-time initiative, but represents a vision for a more inclusive and culturally diverse church community in Ireland. "Through events, programmes and gatherings, we will create a sense of community among the 'New Irish' and provide a support system for their transition to life in Ireland.

"By bringing together people from different cultures and backgrounds, we promote cross-cultural understanding and tolerance which in turn will encourage missional thinking within the Church, extending the reach of ministry and embracing overseas diversity."

The project envisages a process that operates in two complementary directions - both volunteers involved in the project

and newcomers will experience spiritual growth through their interactions, which James said will foster a richer faith experience, which the interns will take back to their respective communities and countries.

Derryvolgie Parish hopes that this will be a collaborative project with others in the Council for Mission and Connor Diocese, enabling interns to be freed up to help other parishes facilitate similar events and structures in order to reach people in their communities.

"It is a significant financial undertaking for us as a parish and we are seeking funding to help with the costs. We believe this project is worth the investment as we seek to carry the good news of the gospel to the communities for which we have been entrusted to love and care," James said.

Ste joins Connor's Church Army team

A new face has joined our Church Army team at Connect Base, Connor's North Belfast Centre of Mission.



Ste Fitzgerald is a native of Liverpool. "I was born into a large inner-city family that had no or little Christian input," he said. "I left school with no qualifications and was heading nowhere until I fully heard the Gospel of Jesus and the Lord's gift of transformation through his forgiveness."

At 23, he attended the Linacre Methodist Mission in Liverpool, before going to a New Wine festival. "Here," he said, "I was wonderfully filled with the Holy Spirit; my life was transformed from any earlier life of unemployment, loneliness and a worldly lifestyle of drink and drugs."

Ste volunteered with the Presbyterian Church in Los Angeles and later went to university to study Youth and Community Studies. He moved to the Bethany Christian Trust in Edinburgh, working with the homeless, coming to Belfast to enrol in Charis Bible College in 2013.

Ste is settling into his new role. "My heart's desire is to see the Lord Jesus change peoples' lives and for transformation in communities take place," he said. Ste joins Sister Karen Webb at Connect Base, after the Centre of Mission said farewell to Stephen Whitten who left in November to focus on a career as a tree surgeon.



For the past 50 years, St Katharine's Parish Church, Belfast, has been donating toys, books and games to the children of Newtownabbey to help make Christmas special for them and their families. On December 10 last, staff from Newtownabbey Family Support & Intervention Team attended the church to receive these gifts on behalf of the children. The Rev Canon William Taggart is pictured at the presentation with a small sample of the parishioners' gifts. At the service, church members learned something of the work the Family Support Team and the needs of families in the Newtownabbey area.



Mr Trevor Douglas BEM.

Trevor receives BEM in New Year Honours

Diocesan Development Manager Trevor Douglas has described being awarded a British Empire Medal (BEM) by King Charles III in his New Year Honours List as 'very humbling.'

Trevor, who is also General Manager of Belfast Cathedral, received his award for services to peacebuilding and to the community in Northern Ireland.

Trevor has worked for Connor Diocese for the past 10 years, and prior to that was manager of the Jethro Centre in Lurgan, Co Armagh.

He is married to Karen, and continues to live in Lurgan, where he grew up in an interface area of the town. "This set me on a course where I realised that this country needed to go down a different route than it was on in the early 1970s," he said.

The owner of a plumbing supplies company, Trevor was a volunteer with Shankill Parish Caring Association for 10 years. He was appointed manager of the new Jethro Centre in 2004.

"The position enabled me to start peacebuilding projects and initiatives in Lurgan," he said. This work continued when Trevor joined Connor Diocese. "Some of the work has been around parading issues, along with community groups in north Belfast," Trevor said.

"I am now working closely with the Dean of Belfast, the Very Rev Stephen Forde, and Fr Martin Magill, together with a small cross-community steering group, around establishing a new cross-community project based in St Anne's Cathedral."

"I have always believed that the best way to serve God is to serve others in his name and the fact that you are recognised by the King for doing that is somewhat incomprehensible to me," he added.

"To be rewarded for something you are passionate about leaves me feeling quite overwhelmed."

'I am honoured and humbled by MBE'

The Rev Canon Kevin Graham MBE DL, rector of St Bartholomew's, Stranmillis, travelled a somewhat varied path into Church of Ireland ministry.

He began training as a Roman Catholic priest and an Aer Lingus pilot (following neither option as a career), then worked as a Scenes of Crime Officer, where he met his wife Cheryl, and later as a Police Constable, before ordination in 2002.

But it was his services to the Reserve Forces and to the community in Belfast that earned Kevin an MBE in the King's New Year Honours List.

A native of Strabane, Kevin is Connor Diocesan Director of Ordinands and a Canon of St Anne's Cathedral.

"I was brought up a Catholic and in 1985 went to Maynooth to train to be a priest but I discovered celibacy was not for me," he said. "I was in the Seminary for a year, then stayed in Maynooth NUI to do a degree in Maths and Physics.

In 1989, Kevin joined the Allied Irish Bank as a currency trader, then left to start a Master's Degree in Maths at Maynooth. "During the course of my Masters, Aer Lingus advertised pilot training, targeted at people with no previous military flying experience. Sixteen thousand people applied and 16 were accepted. I was one of them," Kevin said.

His training took him to Scotland. "I went solo after 8 hours 25 minutes training and got the equivalent of a PPL (private pilot licence) after 47 hours," he said

But Kevin lost his confidence following an incident in which he almost crashed. Although he completed his CAA exams and qualified for his ATPL (Airline Transport Pilot Licence), he did not want to pilot a plane again, and left Aer Lingus after 18 months.

Twenty-four year old Kevin found himself back home in Strabane pondering his future. He was drawn to an advert for Scenes of Crime Officers (SOCO), and that led him to train with the Police Authority of Northern Ireland, firstly as a SOCO and a year later, as an officer with the then RUC.

"During that time Cheryl and I decided we wanted to get married. Cheryl is a Presbyterian and I was occasionally going to Mass, so we decided to go somewhere that would accommodate both our faith needs," Kevin said. As Cheryl lived within the Parish of St Colman's, Kilroot, the couple became

members and married in the church.

"When I disclosed to the rector my interest in the Seminary, he told me I could be an Anglican priest and also be married," Kevin said. He entered the Church of Ireland Theological College in Dublin in 1989. "I thoroughly enjoyed it and became Senior Student," he said. "I also won the Quinn Prize for those who contributed most to the community life of the college. In my early days in ministry in east Belfast, Bishop Harold Miller [former Bishop of Down and Dromore] said I instinctively create community. I still don't know how I do it, it is ingrained in me, but that prize was the first acknowledgement of that."

Kevin served his first curacy in St Columba's, Knock, where he and Cheryl formed friendships that continue today, before becoming rector of Christ Church, Carrowdore, and St Patrick's, Millisle, in 2005. "We had a really enjoyable time there with the boys [they have two sons] growing up in the country with lots of space around the rectory," Kevin recalled.

In 2008, he was made Area Dean for Ards. The following year, the family moved to Newtownards, where Kevin was rector of Movilla Abbey. Six months later, Cheryl was diagnosed with cancer. "In the early days it was a difficult time both for the family and in ministry," Kevin says. "The latter years in Movilla were better and we did enjoy our time there."

In 2013 Kevin moved into Connor Diocese as rector of St Bartholomew's. In 2018 he was appointed Connor Warden of Readers and also Rural Dean of South Belfast, and the following year was made Diocesan Director of Ordinands and installed as a Canon of Belfast Cathedral.

He has served on Diocesan Council, the Diocesan Finance Committee and the Belfast Permanent Committee and remains a member of General Synod.

Kevin's connections with the Forces date back to 2005 when he was Commissioned into the Royal Army Chaplains' Department.

"I was at the institution of the Rev Paul Redfern in Kilbride Parish and noticed two men who were robed and wearing medals. They were both Army chaplains, so after speaking to them about serving as

a chaplain, I made a visit to England. I was interviewed and recommended for a Full Commission in the Regulars,” Kevin said. “This would have been a full-time role and I could have been sent anywhere. I would either have had to leave the family behind or they would have travelled with me and the boys gone to boarding school. Fortunately, one of the TA chaplains decided to go Regular, so that left a vacancy in the TA.”

Kevin was commissioned to serve in the chaplaincy post with 4/5 Royal Irish Rangers, which eventually became the 2nd Battalion Royal Irish Regiment.

“I went on training camps and manoeuvres in many places including the Brecon Beacons, Warminster, the USA, Cyprus, Gibraltar and Belgium,” he said. “The role of the chaplain is mainly pastoral. We offer support to soldiers and their families, we aim to be a moral compass, offer training in values and standards, and give advice to the Commanding Officers.”

He said the role was a vital one.

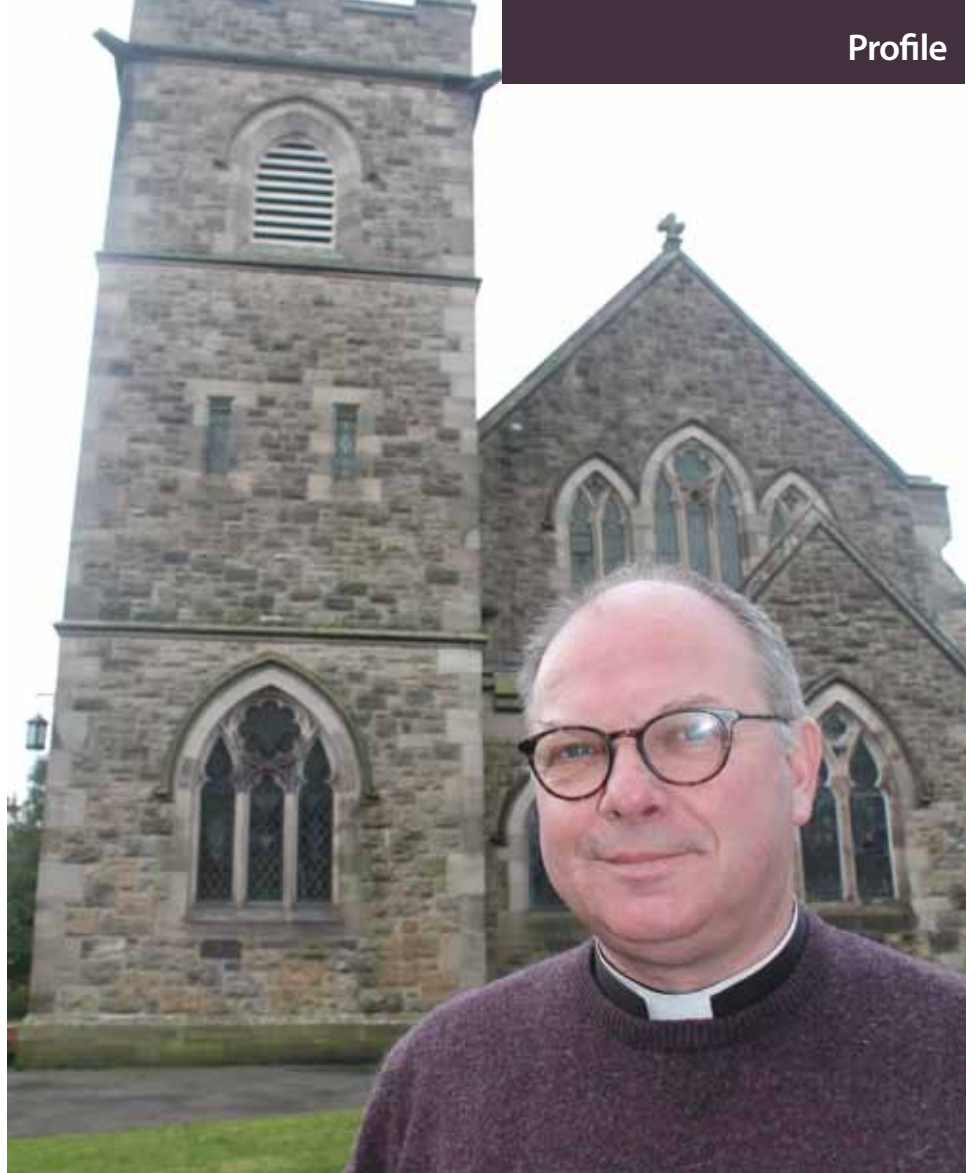
“Sometimes soldiers, particularly if they come from a faith perspective, have issues about the right and wrong of killing people. The chaplain is someone they can talk to. These are enquiring young men and women, they may not be from a faith background, but they can talk to the chaplain. They may be awake in the middle of the night, defending the camp, and the chaplain is the one who has the time to sit and talk to them about life issues.”

“The chaplain also exists outside the chain of command. They can speak to a chaplain in confidence and this can be raised with Command without identifying the source as the chaplain has direct contact with the Commanding Officer.”

There were occasions when Kevin had to head out on a Friday evening to spend the night in Ballykinlar or Magilligan Army Bases. “There were times night training was the last thing I wanted to do, but when I came back I was always completely energised. It was fun. The conversations were genuine and the needs were genuine,” he said.

In 2012, Kevin moved from the Royal Irish Regiment to 204 Field Hospital where he was chaplain to the reservists, regular soldiers and civilians at the Hydebank base. He was scheduled to go to Afghanistan with 204 in 2013, but for health reasons could not go. “I looked after the soldiers still based here and the families of those who had been left behind,” he said. Kevin also completed a Master’s in Theology, funded by the Ministry of Defence.

It was in 2020, when attending a professional development training course at Amport House, the armed forces chaplaincy centre in England, that Kevin decided the



The Rev Canon Kevin Graham MBE DL outside St Bartholomew's Parish Church, Stranmillis, where he is rector.

time had come to step back from Army Chaplaincy. “I had a sense that my vocation was moving away from this line of work, I prayed about it and made up my mind,” he said. “Cheryl had had a stroke two years earlier and a mastectomy the previous year. I looked at my priorities, and it was the right thing to do.”

He stayed as chaplain during the first Covid-19 lockdown, when many 204 staff were working on the frontline for the NHS, but when things began opening up in August 2020, he stood down.

“Whatever I may have done for others in my time as chaplain, I received far more in return - the experience of supporting officer cadets through Sandhurst, the interactions with soldiers, getting to know so many lovely people, the privilege of being in the Irish Embassy in Brussels with the Brigadier General, so many joyful times,” Kevin reflected.

As Forces Chaplain, he worked with the former Lord Lieutenant for the County Borough of Belfast, Dame Mary Peters, and maintains a close relationship with her successor, Dame Fionnuala Jay-O’Boyle DBE DStJ DDL. In July 2023, he was

commissioned a Deputy Lieutenant.

Kevin said he had just popped from the Church Hall to the Rectory to grab some milk on a Saturday morning last November when he discovered an envelope with ‘On His Majesty’s Service’ on the front. The letter said he had been nominated for an MBE.

“I read it three or four times, then remembered the milk and had to go back to my meeting in the hall and pretend nothing had happened,” he said.

“I felt both honoured and humbled. I had to think about accepting it because my initial thought was ‘Why me?’ I feel that I only did what I needed to do, but others obviously felt that what I did was over and beyond. I was humbled that people considered that what I did was worthy of an honour, both for the Reserve Forces and the community in Belfast. The medal says ‘For God and Empire’ - my focus is on God.”

“Looking back at what Bishop Harold said about my ability to create community coming instinctively - I was just doing what I was supposed to do, I don’t think I have done any extra. Thinking of others is just part of me and what I do.”



Both fresh and frozen produce are available free of charge at the Ballymoney Community Fridge.



Ballymoney Community Fridge volunteers, along with co-ordinator Zara Hutchinson, back, fourth from left.

A warm welcome at Community Fridge

The Community Fridge at St Patrick's Church, Ballymoney, is anything but chilly - instead it is buzzing with life and offers the warmest of welcomes!

Through this initiative, the parish invites the local community in every Friday morning for tea, coffee and chat, and to avail of the contents of not only a number of fridges and freezers, but shelves loaded with fresh produce.

The Community Fridge is aimed at stopping food waste by sharing donated food that is close to its sell-by date; offering a safe, warm environment for people to meet, and a place to encourage skills such as cooking, gardening and crafts.

We paid a visit to Ballymoney's Old Schoolhouse on November 24 - a week before the Community Fridge project moved to an even larger venue inside the parish centre.

Zara Hutchinson, co-ordinator, explains: "We are seven months old today, and are moving to the parish hall from next week as we are running out of space."

Community Fridge is part of a network established by environmental charity Hubbub. The Ballymoney project is regulated in terms of food hygiene and has a Level 5 Food Hygiene rating. "It is non-denominational and non-discriminatory," Zara said. "All are welcome - we even have four dogs among our regulars."

Food is donated by various branches of Tesco, Lidl, Supervalu, Eurospar and local stores Apperley's and McAtamney's. Everything that is donated is coming up to



Margaret and her dog Teddy are regular visitors.

its best-before date.

"We have seven fridge freezers and can freeze a lot of items, so we distribute fresh, chilled and frozen food," Zara says. "The refreshments are free and the craic is free. We meet every Friday from 10.30-12.30 and we see those who use the service as friends.

"Our volunteers come from all over - we now have 31 on our books - that's why we want more space, so we can sit and talk to people. One man told us he could put his heating on for longer because he



Volunteers William, David and May.



A fully stocked fridge.

spent some of the day here. The people come not only for food, but for the warmth and company. All our volunteers are very friendly and non-judgemental."

The Community Fridge is an initiative of Ballymoney Parish and was aimed at making good use of the hall. Zara says: "This is also about stopping food waste; offering a community hub - a safe, warm environment for people to meet; and encouraging skills such as cooking, gardening and crafts."

"This winter, we are running a project to re-home winter coats, scarves and hats. Even people coming to take food home are dropping off bags of winter coats. We have a free book swap and free children's toys and are running a children's colouring competition with prizes."

"January and February are going to be quiet and dark. The town library is closed until March for refurbishment, and that is a warm space people might otherwise have used."

There are plans to invite a public service organisation to speak on the last Friday of each month and to run activities like flower arranging and line dancing. Once a month, it is hoped to offer hot food.

"It is about belonging," Zara says. "All the volunteers will tell you the same, it is about friendship. Even though it is hard work, everybody does it with a willing heart. The Community Fridge does not need organising - the volunteers just step up and know what to do. We all have our own stories, but there is a real feeling of wellbeing and belonging to an excellent team."

"Some of our volunteers walk a lady's dog each week, another volunteer does some work as a handyman and gardener."

Among those enjoying the tea and biscuits is Yvonne Alexander (69). "I am trying to adapt to living on my own and my friend introduced me to this four or five months ago," she says. "I like the atmosphere and the chance to talk to other people. It gets me out of the house. It is a good thing the church is doing."

Jackie, another visitor, adds: "You can mingle with people. Everybody's really friendly. There are a lot of families who couldn't do without it."

Lindsay says she appreciates the items she can take home, particularly the bread. "I have eight kids aged 2-16 and they go



Ayeisha with her mum Ray and eight-month-old son at Ballymoney Community Fridge.

through a lot of bread, I have teenage boys and they can eat! The bits and pieces I can pick up definitely save on my shopping bill."

For Kharyn, this was a first visit to the Community Fridge. "Payday isn't until next Wednesday and my fridge is running low. I have two kids in the house and my brother is living with us too, so there are five of us," she says. "I thought it would be mostly older people here, but there is a real mix."

feel more involved in the community. I was working in the CRS (Community Rescue Shop) shop, but it closed. I hate seeing food going in the bin and I know how people are struggling."

Heather Fleming said: "Mum died last May and I felt at a loose end and thought that I would come here and help other people the way I helped Mummy," she reveals. "It is great to see people's faces."

"Mummy scraped the saucepans after we children had eaten. I now realise what she sacrificed for us, and other families are now in the same situation."

"I always thought things would get better - now we are nearly back to where we started."

"More and more people are coming every Friday. This is all about food wastage, food that would have gone into bins is now going into cupboards. It is all donated by local businesses. Anything that cannot be used is recycled."

Volunteer Alan McCloskey enjoys the community that has built around the initiative. "Sitting around a table having a cup of tea, you can identify someone on their own, maybe someone here for the first time, and you can start a conversation with them," Alan says. "One man who came as a friend is now a volunteer himself!"

"A lot of people come for the tea and company. They don't really want anything else, but to sit in the warm and have a chat. It might be the only conversation they have all week."

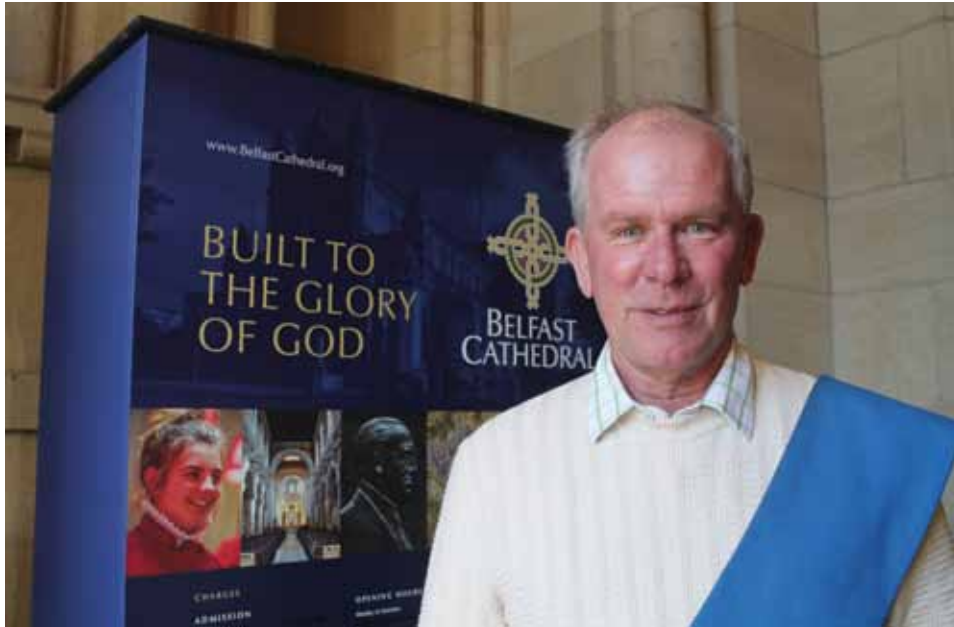
'A lot of people come for the tea and company... It might be the only conversation they have all week.'

Mum-of-two Ayeisha had travelled from Coleraine with her mum Ray and eight-month-old son. "It cuts down on expenses a lot. There is nothing like this in Coleraine," she says. "It is really helpful. After my last child was born, I had post-natal depression. Coming here has really helped me get out. It is definitely worth the journey and everyone is so friendly."

Uel enjoys the social aspect of the project, but adds: "All that bread would be going to landfill, it is better being used up and better for the environment."

Margaret and her companion - her dog Teddy - are getting a lot of attention from others at the Community Fridge. "I meet new people and everybody loves Teddy," she says with a smile. "I live on my own and I love the chat and a cup of tea."

The project volunteers also get a lot out of it. Gwen says: "I started helping here to



Mike Johnston, stewards' convener at Belfast Cathedral, is encouraging others to join the team

Sharing Cathedral's history with visitors

Visitors who step into St Anne's Cathedral will always receive a warm welcome from one of the dedicated team of stewards who are there to greet them.

Stewards' convener Mike Johnston is keen to encourage more people to join the team and experience the pleasure of showing people around one of Belfast's more beautiful buildings - which this year marks its 120th anniversary.

Mike has been volunteering in St Anne's for two hours every Wednesday morning since his retirement seven years ago. A parishioner of St Finnian's in Down and Dromore Diocese, Mike's late father Harden Johnston, a former rector of Greenisland, was a Canon in Belfast Cathedral

"I remember coming here in 1963, the year the curragh went to Iona, marking the 1,400th anniversary of St Columba's journey there," he said. "After I retired, I needed something to do, so I contacted the Rev Janice Elsdon and have been stewarding one day a week since. I also do the stewards' rota and some ad hoc guiding."

The Cathedral currently has 16 voluntary stewards, but Mike said ideally there would be 30, meaning all shifts could be covered by two volunteers. There are three two-hour shifts a day between 10am and 4pm.

"Duties are mainly welcoming visitors

and answering questions or giving them a guided tour if they ask. Really it is all about being the welcoming face of the Cathedral," Mike said.

Stewards who would like to do guided tours are taken around by the more experienced volunteers and will accompany some tours before being asked to guide their own group. Senior guide Norman Weatherall is a mine of information, Mike said.

'The Cathedral has been and still is hugely important to the lives of the people of Belfast'

"You get to find the stories that interest your group. The Americans are fascinated that there was a church on this site consecrated in 1776, they like to hear about our star spangled banner, and how the ceiling in the Nave is made from Californian redwood.

"I really enjoy engaging with the tourists, finding out where they are from and relating to them and the Cathedral. We are not just talking about the Church, we are sharing the history of Belfast and the geology of

Belfast, telling them how, like the Albert Clock, the Cathedral is sinking. And how the Spire of Hope, even though it was dedicated on September 9 2007 by the Anglican Bishop of New York, is not a symbol of hope following the 9/11 attacks."

Mike laughed. "I enjoy expounding the knowledge I have learned over the years."

Ken Holmes has been stewarding in Belfast Cathedral since he retired from the NHS in 2014. "I have an interest in history so when I saw the advert for stewards it appealed to me. I thought that I could learn more about the Cathedral in relation to the history of Belfast whilst working in one of the city's most iconic buildings, sharing that knowledge with visitors from all over the world," Ken said.

"The thing I enjoy most is meeting and talking to so many different people from so many different countries and cultures."

Alwyn Tweed from Ballyclare spends his Tuesday mornings volunteering in St Anne's and says he loves it!

Alwyn had just retired as an English teacher when a member of the Cathedral clergy suggested he consider stewarding. He persuaded his good friend and former colleague David McKendry to join him, and they were shown around by Norman Weatherall.

"Norman explained how the stewarding worked and gave us a very informative tour of St Anne's," said Alwyn. "We learned that you don't need to have any great knowledge about the Cathedral to be a steward, but it is amazing how quickly you pick up a feel for the history and the significance of the place as you talk to people each day.

"There is nothing more enjoyable than meeting the many and diverse people who visit from all over the world.

"I love it when local people come in and realise what they have been missing and the beauty that they have on their own doorstep. There is genuine satisfaction when you see just how impressed they are by what

is theirs and they realise that you don't have to visit Paris or London or Barcelona to see a beautiful Cathedral."

He continued: "One visitor described St Anne's as a 'Hidden Gem' in the visitors' book. How right they were. The Cathedral has been and still is hugely important to the lives of the people of Belfast and, as a steward, I like to think that in some small way I am helping visitors to realise that."

Anyone interested should contact admin@belfastcathedral.org.



Ahoghill and Portglenone parishioner Charlie Smyth, front row, second from right, and the Hope for Youth Ministries team which travelled to Warsaw, Poland, last December.

Polish trip supports Ukrainian refugees

Charlie Smyth, an 18-year-old parishioner of Ahoghill and Portglenone, witnessed the impact the war in Ukraine continues to have on the people who have had to flee when he visited Poland in December.

Charlie, an A-Level student at Slemish College, joined a team from Lisburn-based Hope for Youth Ministries for the trip from December 14-18.

The only Church of Ireland member of the 22-strong team, Charlie was encouraged to sign up by a friend. Most of the team was made up of young adults.

“We were based in Warsaw, in a Baptist Church that doubled as a hostel,” said Charlie. “There was also a Polish team who had set everything up for our arrival.

“We had two objectives. One was to help the local community of Ukrainians who had been displaced by the war. We went to a Ukrainian refugee centre to deliver large boxes filled with food and other essentials.

“Many of the people were searching for somewhere to live. The Ukrainian population continues to grow in Warsaw - we were shocked to see so many arriving at the airport.”

Charlie said that he found there was a genuine appreciation of all they were doing, which was particularly evident in the Ukrainian refugee camp. “One old man, after I gave him his food package, just extended his hand. There were no words, but I knew he was very thankful,” Charlie said.

“The second aim of our visit was to run a Bible Camp for Polish and Ukrainian children and give them a chance to go out and share the word of God. They came to the Baptist Church and stayed overnight.”



Charlie Smyth distributing food aid at a Ukrainian refugee camp in Warsaw.

Charlie said the language barrier was a challenge. “It was definitely hard, but we had a Polish translator, and a lot of the Ukrainians had been learning Polish,” he explained.

This was not Charlie’s first visit to Poland - he has been before on holiday - but admitted this was a bit different. “The food was the biggest culture shock,” he said. “Let’s just say it was ‘not to our palate.’ We eat a lot of potatoes; they eat virtually none. But the Polish team leaders were very nice, they spoke English and were a great help.

“When it came to spreading the Gospel, the language barrier did not impede us as

much as we thought it would.

“My fondest memory was making friends with three young girls. We had done a lot of activities with them and had a lot of fun. Later that day, one of them went on stage and declared she had found the Lord. That made me very happy.”

There were challenges, primarily the lack of sleep. “We went to bed at midnight and were up at 6am,” Charlie said. “I was able to cope with it, I just kept trudging on.”

The trip, he said, had been a very rewarding experience. “I would definitely encourage people to engage in such philanthropy,” Charlie added.

He thanked members of his church for their support. A coffee afternoon held in Portglenone Parish Centre, combined with a Go Fund Me appeal, raised a total of £1,200 towards the Bible Camp.

“I couldn’t have asked for a better church community to support me,” Charlie said.

Albania mission trip

The Rev Jeremy Mould, rector of the United Parish of Templepatrick and Donegore, is organising a summer mission trip to Albania. The project will support a local charity, A2BAlbania, and will help run a holiday Bible club for underprivileged children in Elbasan from July 15-26.

This is a parish initiative open to people aged over 14 from outside the parish. “I have taken mixed teams to India several times and they work really well, as the older folk model the possibility of being a follower of Jesus for the long haul and they also catch the enthusiasm of the youth!” Jeremy said.

Jeremy’s brother Chris is the CEO of a charity called House of Opportunity (HOP) and has long-term contact with Alketa Hassani who heads up the A2BAlbania charitable work, through whom HOP delivers some of its programmes.

“Chris learnt that the church that used to send a team to run Bible holiday clubs had ceased to do so due to a change of leadership, and so there was a gap that needed filled,” Jeremy said.

“Albania is a very poor country and the churches there need as much help as possible.”

The cost of the trip will be approximately £600. To learn more, please contact Jeremy at jermould@gmail.com or call him on 07896 839488.

Support for Air Ambulance NI

The recently refurbished church hall at Ballyscullion (Grange) Parish Church hosted a fundraiser for Air Ambulance NI in September.

The event, which included old time music and storytelling, raised £2,605, with completed Gift Aid bringing the total to almost £3,000.

The church hall, which is more than 140 years old and had previously been used as an Anglican school, was restored by a small band of dedicated volunteers.

All Saints', Eglantine, also raised funds for Air Ambulance NI. At a special service to give thanks for the work of the charity, volunteer Alison Leckey, who is also a parishioner, spoke about the work of the charity and presented the children with knitted Air Ambulance teddies. A collection raised £1,423 for Air Ambulance NI.



The rector of Eglantine Parish, the Rev Jason Kernohan, presents Alison and David Leckey with a cheque for £1,423 in aid of Air Ambulance NI.

New Readers

Six new Parish Readers were commissioned by the Rev Peter Jones, Connor Diocesan Warden of Readers, at a service in St Nicholas' Parish Church, Carrickfergus, on October 22.

They were Stuart Horner, Dianne Innes, Alison Kane, Raymond Gilbert, Philip O'Neill and Jean Stewart.

During the service, two young members of the parish were confirmed by the Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev George Davison.



Pictured are the six new Parish Readers along with Bishop George Davison, the Rev Nathan Ervine and the Rev Chris St John, rector, and his wife Andrea.



Those who served in the Greenfinches were honoured at a service in St Paul's, Lisburn. Photo: Norman Briggs.

Tributes paid to 'brave' Greenfinches

The women who served in the Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR) between 1973 and 1992, known as Greenfinches, were honoured at a special thanksgiving service at St Paul's, Lisburn, on November 26 - marking the 50th anniversary of the first women joining the UDR.

The Greenfinches were also the focus of the Royal Irish Regiment's annual service of Remembrance in St Anne's Cathedral on November 5.

In St Paul's, the Mayor of Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council, Councillor Andrew Gowan, said: "I'd like to acknowledge the sacrifices that the Greenfinches made, putting their lives on the line to serve and protect against the evils of terrorism..."

"When we consider the circumstances back in the early '70s, those women who enlisted provide us with a great example of bravery and selflessness. They are an inspiration to young women today who are thinking of joining the services and indeed helped shape the inclusive Armed Forces that exist today."

At the services, four Greenfinches who died during the Troubles were remembered. Their names were Private Eva Martin, 28; Lance Corporal Gillian Jean Leggett, 33; Private Margaret Hearst, 24; and Corporal Heather Kerrigan, 20.

The Rt Rev Darren McCartney, rector of St Paul's, officiated at the service and blessing which included hymns sung by the Military Wives' Choir and the church choir.

In St Anne's Cathedral on November 5, five former Greenfinches had speaking parts in the service and there were many more in



RIR service in St Anne's. Photo: Jaden Hewitt RAF.

the congregation. A record number of Old Comrades' Associations' Standards were paraded to the sanctuary, followed by the Colours of the 2nd Battalion.

Representatives of the Old Comrades' Associations of those Irish infantry regiments which were disbanded in 1922 attended the service and laid wreaths at the 'drumhead' on the chancel steps.

120th anniversary chairs appeal

On Sunday June 2 2024, the Cathedral Church of St Anne, Belfast, will mark the 120th anniversary of the consecration of the Nave of the Cathedral with a service of Celebration and Thanksgiving.

As part of the Belfast Cathedral 120 celebration, the Cathedral has launched an appeal to replace the existing wooden chairs in the Nave. These have been in continuous use for 120 years and will be replaced with new chairs which will be more comfortable and more easily stacked and moved for the many different events which make up the life of a 21st century cathedral.

Belfast Cathedral is inviting parishioners, friends of the Cathedral, and parishes across the dioceses of Down and Dromore and Connor, to make this possible by purchasing one or more chairs with a donation of £100 for each chair.

The Dean of Belfast, the Very Rev Stephen Forde, said: "We believe that many people may wish to donate a chair in memory of someone whose death occurred during the Covid pandemic when it was so difficult to hold the funerals we would all have wished, or as a memorial to someone special whose death was at another time."



Crowds flock to witness the Consecration of the Nave of Belfast Cathedral on June 2 1904.

Every donation will be listed and acknowledged for the future. Details on how to donate will be posted on the Cathedral website (www.belfastcathedral.org) and on the weekly service sheets. It is hoped that 500 new seats will be in place in the Cathedral Nave for the anniversary service on June 2.

On that date in 1904, the Rt Rev Dr Wellar, Bishop of Down, Dromore and Connor, led the great Service of Consecration for the Nave of St Anne's Cathedral. The numbers in attendance were huge, as the offering of

£3,000 (which the Dean said today equates to £406,000!) testifies.

The weekend of the anniversary will be celebrated not only at the special service, but there will be various other events, and later in the year, a Gala event.

And Belfast Cathedral 120 will extend beyond 2024. "At our 120th anniversary celebrations, we propose to launch an ambitious plan to raise new funding to secure the future viability of our Cathedral for the coming years," Dean Forde explained. "Over a three-year period from 2024 to 2027, and in partnership with the Belfast company Callow Events Ltd, the Cathedral Board will seek to raise funding from across Northern Ireland, across these islands and internationally.

"By establishing a new Belfast Cathedral Foundation with the aim 'Preserving the Past, Building for the Future,' the Cathedral plans to raise a significant sum of new money from individuals and charitable trusts to establish a funded foundation. The foundation will ensure that the future of this great Cathedral is secure for whatever challenges and celebrations the coming decades may present."

Patricia Perry, a member of the Parish of Kilconriola and Ballyclug, has been appointed as the High Sheriff of the County of Antrim for 2024.

As the Monarch's 'judicial representative' in the County, the High Sheriff performs a range of ceremonial roles. The Office is the oldest secular office under the Crown. The first record for a Sheriff in County Antrim dates back to 1343 and the role has changed considerably over the years.

Patricia is a native of Ballymena and has been a member of St Patrick's Parish Church all of her life, having previously been a member of the Parish Choir, a bellringer and a Sunday School teacher.

The new High Sheriff taught in Downshire High School in Carrickfergus before taking over her father's role as Sub Postmaster in Harryville in Ballymena. She later established an art gallery and gift shop in her home village of Ahoghill.

Inner Wheel has played an important part in Patricia's life over recent years. She has undertaken the role of Club President of the Ballymena Club on

High Sheriff Honour for Patricia



Mr Peter Mackie DL presents Patricia Perry with the Badge of Office of the High Sheriff of the County of Antrim. Looking on are Lord-Lieutenant, Mr David McCorkell, and Mayor of Mid and East Antrim, Alderman Gerardine Mulvenna.

several occasions and was honoured to be appointed as District Chairman (all Ireland) for the organisation for the year 2020/2021.

Patricia is involved in a number of other voluntary roles in the local area.

She is married to Jim who is a Deputy Lieutenant for County Antrim. Like Patricia, he has been actively involved in the parish all his life. Jim has been a Diocesan Lay Reader for almost 40 years. They have two adult children.

17th Belfast BB Company celebrates



Four members of the 17th Belfast Company Boys' Brigade who received the Queen's Badge at their annual inspection in 1968. From left: Eric Maguire, Eric Heyburn, William Abernethy and Rodney Kidd.

This will be a year of celebration for members of 17th Belfast Company Boys' Brigade as they mark the 70th anniversary of the Company.

A call has been sounded for members past and present to become involved in the celebratory events which will include a dinner and display.

Diocesan Lay Reader Jim Neill was a foundation member of the 17th Belfast Company, joining when he was just 13, and, keen to make contact with other past members to mark this milestone, he has been researching the history of the 17th Belfast Company.

The Boys' Brigade first became connected with the Church of St John the Baptist, Upper Falls Parish, in 1922, when a Company was formed as 51st Belfast Company. Adam Kilpatrick served as Captain until the company lapsed in 1927 and the title was taken by Agnes Street Methodist Church.

In 1954, the 17th Belfast Company was formed in the parish with the rector, the Rev Charles Jameson, as its first chaplain.



17th Belfast Company Boys' Brigade 1973-74.

Members were enrolled with the 1st Belfast Company at St Mary Magdelene Parish Church.

James McKelvey was the first Company Captain, and along with William Bradshaw, formed the Company Section with 12 members. The Life Boys team of 15 members was under the charge of William Cheshire, assisted by Norman Ferguson, Margaret McKeown and Jean Cassells.

John B Houston, writing in 1975 for the 21st anniversary of the Company, recalled: "Around the fire in the old Rectory on Blacks Road on a Sunday evening, a small group met to discuss the formation of a new venture in an old parish. The old Church of St John the Baptist, Upper Falls, had stood in rural quietness for many decades, but new houses were being built and, of course, this meant many more young people attending Sunday School and it was hoped enjoying church fellowship and activities.

PURPOSE

"So what about a Boys' Brigade Company? Would it serve the purpose in a new housing area? Would its emphasis on discipline, sportsmanship, example by officers and of its high religious ideals be enough to meet the needs of boys in the 1950s? The small group decided to launch the new Company."

Houston added: "When one looks back, the faith and enthusiasm of this little group has been well justified. The 17th has made a great contribution to church, boys, homes, character, training and many of the five principles which Sir William Smith, BB founder, and William McVicker (1st Belfast), had in mind when they pioneered the Boys' Brigade in the 19th century."

The Company formed a flute band, which flourished and later changed its name to 17th BB Old Boys' Band.

TG Haughton, Chaplain, writing in the 21st anniversary order of service in 1975, revealed that in 1969, in the spacious parochial hall which opened in 1966, the Company had an enrolment of almost 100 members.

"Everything looked promising for the 17th. We had boys, we had good leaders, we had good premises. But with the onset of the Troubles, the picture changed drastically," the chaplain wrote.

"Many families left the area and Suffolk Primary School, with an enrolment of almost 900 children, shrank to 400. The same happened to the BB. Numbers fell, nevertheless never once did a drill have to be cancelled and all Church parades were

carried out.”

Over the next few months, Samuel Sedgewick, the present Captain of 17th Belfast Company, will be firming up plans to celebrate this 70th anniversary.

The enrolment service will be held on October 27, followed by refreshments. There will be a parade to and from the service, and dates are to be set for a celebration dinner and display.

SERGEANT

A Diocesan Lay Reader for the past 45 years, Jim, who worships in St Paul's, Lisburn, was the first Sergeant in the new company. “I was a Staff Sergeant and was also a Lieutenant. I was working in an insurance company at the time, so due to work commitments could not continue as an officer. We had a Bible Class which was held on Sundays before Church, and a football team. If the boys didn't come to the Bible Class, they didn't get onto the football team.”

The 17th Belfast Company currently has around 30 members. “It is a great organisation,” said Jim. “It is Christian in principle, promoting the habits of obedience, reverence, discipline, self-respect and all that tends towards a true Christian manliness. The motto is ‘Sure and Steadfast.’”

“The Boys’ Brigade aims at nothing less than leading boys enrolled in its ranks to Jesus Christ as their Saviour, leader and friend.”

If you or someone you know has a connection with 17th Belfast Company Boys’ Brigade, please contact Samuel Sedgewick at samuelsedgewick@btinternet.com or Jim Neill at jneill474@gmail.com.



Mr Jim Neill.



Black Santa, Dean Stephen Forde, centre, with helpers, the Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev George Davison, left, and the Bishop of Down and Dromore, the Rt Rev David McClay, on day one of the 2023 Sit-out.

Black Santa 2023 raises almost £171k

December's Black Santa Sit-out on the steps of Belfast Cathedral raised almost £171,000 - far exceeding Dean Stephen Forde's target sum of £130,000.

The 2023 Sit-out got under way on December 14 with the support of the Bishops of Connor and Down and Dromore, along with a visit by Belfast's Lord Mayor, and over the following 10 days, Dean Forde and his band of assistant Black Santas, made up of Canons of the Cathedral, clergy and other supporters, kept a daily vigil on the Cathedral steps, whatever the weather.

The Sit-out finished at 4pm on Christmas Eve, when the Dean turned his attention to the various Christmas Services which also drew crowds to St Anne's.

Thanking all who donated to the 2023 Appeal, Dean Forde said the total raised in this, the 47th annual Sit-out, was £170,928.22.

This was a sixth Christmas Sit-out for Dean Forde, and the 47th year of a tradition started in December 1976 by Dean Sammy Crooks and maintained by his successors, Deans Jack Shearer, Houston McKelvey and John Mann.

Dean Crooks was dubbed ‘Black Santa’ by the media because he wore a black Anglican clerical cloak to protect him from the elements, and the name has stuck for more than four decades.

The 2023 appeal focused on three specific areas. Firstly on helping smaller local charities who are supporting the most disadvantaged families and individuals in our communities.

“For so many people, the past 12 months of the ‘cost of living crisis’ have been incredibly difficult,” said Dean Forde. “Rising food bills and energy costs have the greatest impact on those who have the fewest resources. Poverty in the Northern Ireland of 2023 is real.”

Another focus was on charities working with those impacted by drug abuse in Northern Ireland. This, the Dean said, was a ‘source of pain and anguish in our community.’

“Drugs are readily available, easily accessed, and devastating in their impact,” he said. “Drug abuse destroys lives, families and relationships and hope. And too often drug abuse takes lives, and leaves despair in its wake.”

A third priority area was those charities and organisations who offer bereavement support services in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic. “Although many in our communities are emerging from the shadow of the pandemic, those who experienced the loss of someone close during those two dark years, when our normal expressions of grief were denied, are often those who struggle most and who are in the greatest need of support,” Dean Forde said.

The funds raised by the Appeal were distributed to local charity representatives at the annual Good Samaritans service on the first Sunday in February.

Be a chorister in Belfast Cathedral

Belfast Cathedral is recruiting choristers, with opportunities for boys aged 7-12 and girls aged 11-18. No experience is necessary, although a love of singing is key.

Cathedral choristers will receive a free first-class musical education; sing to a wide-ranging audience, including in television and radio broadcasts; take part in tours in the UK and abroad; and receive a small payment each year.

There are also opportunities to learn to play the organ and piano at discounted rates; develop confidence and lifelong skills such as teamwork and time management; and the chance to form long-lasting friendships.

Girl choristers will rehearse on Tuesdays from 5-6pm and Wednesdays from 4-6.30pm in term-time. Boys will rehearse on Tuesdays from 4-5pm and Thursdays from 4-6.30pm.

During term-time and at major festivals like Christmas and Easter, choristers will sing at the 11am Sunday Choral Eucharist (girls first and third Sundays; boys second and fourth Sundays); 3.30pm Sunday Evensong (girls third Sunday and boys second Sunday), while girls will sing Choral Evensong at 5.30pm each Wednesday and boys at the same time each Thursday.

To register your interest, please see the advertisement on our back page.



Carnmoney Church Girls' Brigade (CGB) Company won the coveted Archbishop's Award in 2023, making it the champion company for the Church Lads' and Church Girls' Brigade in Northern Ireland. Well done all!

Advent videos shared by Next Steps

Next Steps, the youth fellowship of All Saints' Parish, Antrim, created and published a series of videos during Advent.

These were shown at the start of each church service and posted on social media. The project was co-ordinated by the Rev Peter Blake and was aimed at encouraging engagement with the season in the church and wider community.

SERVE 2023 finishes

Another four young leaders in Connor have completed the SERVE course in preparation for continuing to lead in their local parishes.

SERVE is Connor's young leaders' course for people aged 15 and up. Through the autumn term, the group met over eight sessions to discuss different aspects of Christian leadership and get involved in tasks to develop their leadership abilities.

There was an opportunity to do different spiritual disciplines, lead a book review, learn more about how Jesus led, and deliver a short talk.

This year, young people from All Saints', Antrim, Lisburn Cathedral, Church of the Holy Spirit, Mossley, and St Brigid's, Glengormley, took part in SERVE.

The SERVE course is delivered in partnership with the Hub, the Church of Ireland and Methodist residency at Queen's University Belfast. Oliver Baird, Community Team Lead at the Hub, co-led the course with Christina Baillie, Connor Diocesan Youth Officer.

Christina said: "We were delighted with the four young leaders' participation in the course. They have stepped out of their comfort zone and grown as leaders. We can't wait to see how they continue to serve in their local parishes and in other ways in the coming years!"

Upcoming Children and Youth Events in Connor Diocese

MARCH 16 10AM-4PM St Patrick's Family Day Ballyclare	APRIL 13 10:00AM-5:00PM Building Blocks Children's Ministry Conference Venue TBC	APRIL 25 11:30AM-2:00PM Parents & Toddler group training St Columba's Parish Whiterock	JUNE 11 6:00PM-9:00PM Special Educational Needs Training Lisburn
JUNE 12 6:00PM-9:00PM Special Educational Needs Training St John's Parish Ballyclare	JUNE 23 11AM-3PM Journey to Rathlin Island - Sunday School outing	JUNE 28 - JULY 2 Summer Madness Partglengone	JULY 2-5 Streetreach North Coast
SEPTEMBER 7 9:00AM-12:00PM Launch: Kids and Youth Leader Training Broughshane Parish	OCTOBER 4-6 Connor Takes The Castle	DECEMBER 6 7PM - 9PM Diocesan Youth Christmas Party Church of the Good Shepherd, Monkstown	

Christina and Victoria are busy planning for the next season of Children's and Youth Ministry in the Diocese. Pop these dates in your diary and keep an eye on your emails and social media for more information!



Diocesan Youth Officer Christina Baillie and the SERVE 2023 graduates.

"We're grateful for the partnership with the Hub. It's been great to have Oliver leading with me as well as different students from Connor Diocese and beyond involved at different parts of the SERVE course."

Another SERVE course will be run in 2024 so if you are interested, contact Christina on christinabaillie@connordiocese.org.

Streetreach sign up

Applications for Streetreach 2024, which runs from Tuesday July 2 to Friday July 5, opened in January. For a second consecutive year, Streetreach is partnering with the Grouped Parishes of Ballyrashane & Kildollagh, the Grouped Parishes of Ballintoy & Dunseverick with Rathlin Island and St Patrick's, Coleraine, & St Andrew's, Ballysally.

See the Engage Connor Youth Facebook page for details on how to sign up.

Portglenone hosts 'A Very Connor Christmas'



Young people and leaders in Portglenone Parish Centre for A Very Connor Christmas.

Young people and their leaders from across the diocese came together in Portglenone Parish Centre on the evening of December 2 for 'A Very Connor Christmas.'

There was Christmas food home-cooked by members of Ahoghill and Portglenone Parish, games, a quiz with seasonal questions posed by the Rev Jacob Mercer, worship, and a talk by Jonny Diamond.

Groups attended from Ahoghill & Portglenone; the Church of the Good

Parishes follow the road to Bethlehem!



The Play it By Ear Bethlehem panto was a big hit with local children and groups from parishes across Connor.

Children and families from across the diocese had a fantastic weekend at the Big Bethlehem Pantomime in Ballyclare Parish.

The event took place over two days last November, with six classes of pupils from Ballyclare Primary School enjoying the activities on Friday November 24 and groups from 10 parishes across Connor coming along on the Saturday.

Connor Children's Ministry Development Officer Victoria Jackson said: "We were delighted to host six classes from Ballyclare Primary on Friday and around 150 people on Saturday, representing more than 10 parishes from the diocese.

"The atmosphere was full of Christmas joy and excitement as Play it By Ear Drama performed their pantomime show, and families enjoyed the petting farm, Christmas crafts, dress-up photo booth and coffee stop. It was a lovely way to start the festive season and we were so pleased by the support from throughout the diocese.

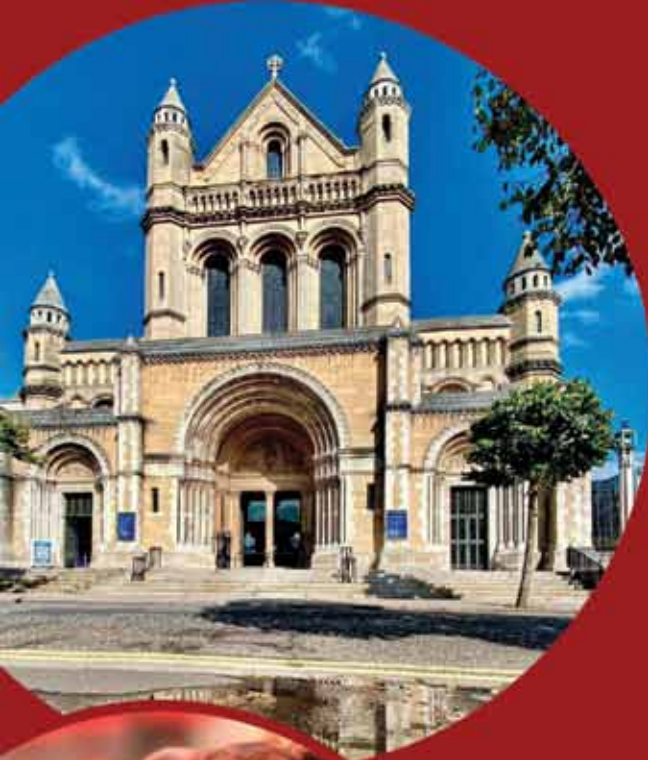
"A big thank you to St John's for being brilliant hosts, to all the wonderful volunteers from the parish, to Karen and Ste from Church Army, and Emily from St Michael's for helping out! It wouldn't have been possible without them."

Shepherd, Monkstown; All Saints', Antrim; Dunluce; St Patrick's, Broughshane; St Nicholas', Carrickfergus; the Church of the Holy Spirit, Mossley; Christ Church Lisburn; and St Brigid's, Mallusk.

Connor Diocesan Youth Officer Christina Baillie said: "Thanks to the hospitality team in St Colmanell's and Portglenone Parish for providing a great feed of sausage and bacon baps for all of us, and to the Youth Council for putting together a fantastic night."



Diocesan Children's Ministry Development Officer Victoria Jackson with children who enjoyed the event in Ballyclare.

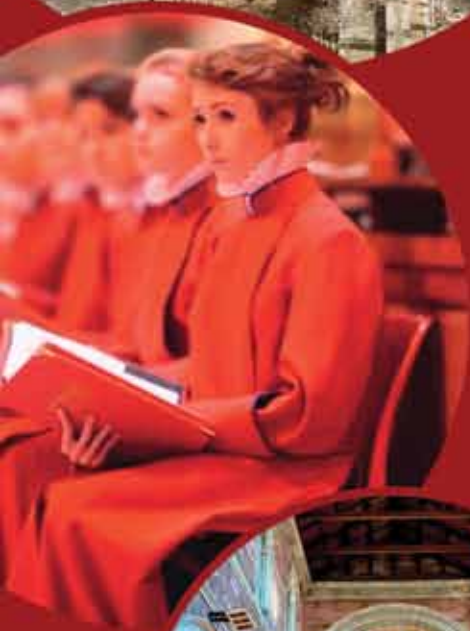


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