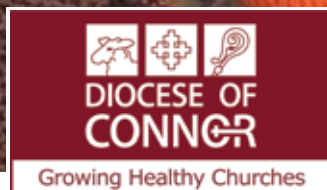


# CONNOR

connections

Living with  
Parkinson's  
Carol's story  
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# Annual Festival Service

The annual Connor Mothers' Union Festival Service took place in Belfast Cathedral on Sunday April 21.

The service began with a procession of colourful diocesan branch banners. The Diocesan Banner, carried by Moira Thom, Vice-President Fundraising and Communications Unit and a former Diocesan President, and the Cathedral Banner, carried by Diane Innes, Cathedral branch secretary, were received by the Dean of Belfast, the Very Rev Stephen Forde.

The service included the commissioning of Cathy Doig as Fundraising and Communications Unit Co-ordinator and a member of the Trustee Board by the Ven Dr Stephen McBride, Connor Diocesan and All-Ireland Chaplain.



At the Connor Mothers' Union Festival Service 2024 are, from left: Iris Suitor, All-Ireland Zonal Trustee; Sally Connor, Connor President; and June Butler, All-Ireland President. Photo: Noel Jenkins.

Mrs Doig also read the Old Testament lesson and Melanie McAlister, Young Member Contact, gave the New Testament reading. The Intercessions were led by Valerie Ash, Worldwide Contact and East Connor Area Chair, and Roslyn Graham, North Connor Area Chair.

The theme of the service was Transformation - Now! and worship was led by the Cathedral Choir, conducted by Jack Wilson, Master of Music, accompanied by organist Stephen Hamill.

Sally Cotter, Connor Diocesan President, read the Mothers' Union Aims and Objectives. The special speaker was June Butler MBE, All-Ireland President, who is in the final year of her six years in office.

Mrs Cotter is also in the final year of her six years as Connor President. Speaking after the service, she said it had been, as always, 'such an uplifting occasion,' adding that it represented 'the high point of the Mothers' Union year, bringing members together in worship, thanksgiving and fellowship from across the diocese in a lovely setting.'

Report by the Rev Clifford Skillen

# 'Big Sing' in aid of Mums in May Fund

Mothers' Union members from all corners of Connor Diocese came to All Saints' Parish Church, Antrim, on May 19, raising their voices in a 'Big Sing' for the Mums in May Fund.

This fund, which supports MU projects all over Ireland, is replenished every third year, and this year a series of 'Big Sings' are being held. These began in St Canice's Cathedral, Kilkenny, in March and will finish in St Patrick's, Ballymena, on November 16.

Funds raised throughout the year will allow the Mums in May Fund to continue to support projects such as Away from it All holidays, holiday lunch clubs, equipment for those moving out of women's refuges, and food and fuel vouchers for families struggling to make ends meet.

All-Ireland President, June Butler, attended the event in Antrim, as did the Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev George Davison, and his wife Nadine.

The sermon was given by the All-Ireland Mothers' Union Chaplain and Vicar of All Saints', the Ven Dr Stephen McBride. The lessons were read by Cathy Doig, Fundraising and Communications Unit Coordinator, and Alberta Miskimmin, Finance and Administration Unit Coordinator.



All-Ireland Mothers' Union Chaplain and Vicar of All Saints', Antrim, the Ven Dr Stephen McBride, providing some musical accompaniment at the 'Big Sing.'

Connor Diocesan President Sally Cotter spoke about the importance of the Mums in May Fund in Ireland.

The hymns sung at each 'Big Sing' were chosen by the members, and the event was followed by refreshments when everyone had the chance to catch up with friends old and new.



At the MU 'Big Sing' in Antrim are, from left: The Ven Dr Stephen McBride, vicar of Antrim and MU Chaplain; Sally Cotter, Diocesan President; June Butler, All-Ireland President; and Bishop George Davison



Above and below: Connor MU members at the 'Big Sing' in All Saints', Antrim, on May 19.



Summer 2024

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## Cover photo:

Noah's Ark, one of 36 knitted exhibits on display at the 'Yarns from the Bible' exhibition in Killead.


See report below right.




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

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# Pray that the Holy Spirit is present in all that is taking place



Dear friends in Connor Diocese, as I write this letter, I'm reflecting on the list of contents of this edition of 'Connor Connections' and the wide variety of stories that it tells.

In these pages, you will find articles which tell of the life and activity of individuals and churches across the diocese.

You can read of the ways in which people in Connor are living their lives as followers of Christ, sharing challenges and celebrations, serving our communities locally and globally, in the workplace and through what they give of their time, money and talents for the good of others.

As you read these pages, can I invite you to do so prayerfully, both holding the people that you are reading about in prayer and asking God to inspire you as you reflect how you serve him and his people in your own life?

As we look forward, there is much happening in the diocese over the next few months! In June, we will celebrate the 120th anniversary of St Anne's Cathedral, Belfast, meet together in Christ Church, Lisburn, for the annual Diocesan Synod,

and celebrate as clergy are ordained to serve in the diocese.

Over the next few months, many of us will participate in or help lead special summer activities - Summer Madness, Streetreach, mission trips, holiday clubs for children and young people in many parishes.

You may be one of those people taking part, or you might not, but all of us can be supporting these activities through our prayers for them.

Please pray for all that has to be organised, for safety, for those participating, but most of all, please pray that these will be times that are full of the presence of the Holy Spirit, so that everyone who is a part of them knows Jesus' love for them a little better as a result!

Yours in Christ's service,

*+George*

## 'Yarns from the Bible' in Killead

St Catherine's Parish Church, Killead, located on Aldergrove Military Base, hosted a 'Yarns from the Bible' exhibition from May 3-12, raising more than £12,000 for church funds.

The Bible's best-loved stories came to life in this colourful knitting display by sisters Doris Killow and Ethel Parks.

Liz Brown, one of the event organisers, said: "Our entire congregation has been absolutely delighted with the numbers of visitors and their obvious enjoyment and admiration of the exhibition.

"It has been a huge source of pleasure to have been able to share our little church with people from many other communities because, for so many years, security considerations at Aldergrove meant that access has been difficult.

"We feel truly blessed to have enjoyed such wonderful fellowship."



A section of a knitted model of the Last Supper.



The Wise Men visit the stable in Bethlehem.





Carol and Malcolm Ferry at home in Portstewart.

# Surgery has 'given me my life back'

At the age of 36, with three children under 10, Carol Ferry was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease. Over the next 20 years, her condition deteriorated until, in May 2022, she underwent Deep Brain Stimulation, a surgery that would literally give her her life back. Carol and her husband, the Rev Malcolm Ferry, rector of Agherton, share their inspirational story.

The first symptom of her illness, Carol recalls, was a finger which kept moving involuntarily. Other early symptoms included walking with a shuffle and dropping things. At this stage, Malcolm was rector of All Saints', Craighyhill, and the family was living in Larne. Initially this was thought to be an 'essential tremor,' a condition which causes the sufferer to shake. The family had moved to Castlerock when Carol got her Parkinson's diagnosis.

"It was the last day of school when we were called to Belfast City Hospital," Malcolm recalls. "I had picked the kids up and we all travelled to Belfast, where they confirmed that Carol had Parkinson's. After the news, we had to drive home with the children in the back seat not knowing their mum had just received devastating news."

As a family they tried to continue life as normal and went to Summer Madness with a group of teenagers from Castlerock. They went on holiday. "We knew there would be no fix," Malcolm says. Carol experienced a slow decline. "It is chronic and degenerative, but at what rate we didn't know," Malcolm adds.

"We kept living life so the children would think it was all normal, even after telling them of the diagnosis of Parkinson's. Carol continued to work as a pharmacist for a number of years. She participated fully in all their big days through our careful planning and managing the situation as best we could."

Carol nods. "We tried not to let Parkinson's get in the way." Malcolm agrees: "If Parkinson's was going to take one of us, it could not take all of us. We saw it as a guest that was present in our home - sometimes very amenable sitting in the corner of the room, and at other times right in the middle of the sofa, or at the kitchen table."

Carol experienced stiffness, rigidity and dystonia (muscle spasms). Things were becoming more difficult. She could not do long journeys easily or be out late in the evenings. Many of the symptoms were due to her medication. "She was on a cocktail of drugs that were working to maintain her, but it was a constant struggle. At the same time, our lives were going on at 150 miles per hour," Malcolm recalls.

He remembers plaiting the girls' hair because Carol had lost her motor skills. "A mother has her role, but when a mother is taken out because of illness, what can you do but fill in as best you can."

The family set about resolving this by making a point of ensuring there was always a role for Carol. "We did our best to find the things that she could do and find alternative way of parenting three young children," Malcolm recalls.

Their children are now grown up. James, 29, is a talent acquisition manager in Manchester having completed a Degree at Chester University. Sarah, 27, has a First Class Degree in Natural Science from Cambridge - her Dissertation was on stem cell research into Parkinson's. She now lives in London. Twenty four-year-old Rebekah, after doing a Degree in Loughborough, is completing her professional examinations as an actuary, also in London. Malcolm and Carol are very proud of their children.

"We sit back and, like the Stephen Hawkins' character in the movie of his life when he is watching his children play, we say 'Look what we made,'" says Malcolm.

Carol was aware many years ago that Deep Brain Stimulation was an option, having seen the difference it had made to a friend who had Parkinson's.

"I would not have considered it when the children were still at home," she says. Malcolm adds: "We were not taking a drill to Carol's head when the kids were still young in case anything went wrong."

Carol was struggling with different medical cocktails when her consultant in Belfast suggested she might be a candidate for Deep Brain Stimulation. She completed all the tests, including physical and psychological tests, and had to stop all her current medication - effectively going cold turkey for the tests. These were completed in 2019. But then Covid hit.

By the time the pandemic restrictions had lifted, Carol had to go through all the tests a second time before she could go to the London National Hospital for Neurology and Neurosurgery for the operation. Carried out in May 2022, it took nine hours.

"After the operation I struggled with the simplest of tasks, but after a couple of days my brain started to recover," Carol recalls.

She has two rods inserted permanently in her brain. A wire runs from these under the skin, behind her ear to a small box, again under her skin. This box sends electronic signals to her brain.



Carol Ferry demonstrates the remote control she uses to stimulate the brain when needed.

“That box replaced the big bag of meds,” Malcolm says. “If Parkinson’s symptoms change, we can sort it with the remote control which is connected to the brain stimulator.”

The handheld remote shows the amount of stimulation being applied to each side Carol’s brain. Carol and Malcolm can use this to alter the stimulation levels. “The big benefit is that before this, if Carol had a trailing leg, we would have to go to the doctor to alter the medication which could take weeks. Now, we can alter it immediately at home,” Malcolm explains.

“If we turned off the stimulator, we would not do any harm, but Carol would go back into full Parkinson’s.”

Every Saturday, Carol uses a portable charger to recharge the box on her chest through her skin and this takes about 40 minutes.



Carol and Malcolm outside the National Hospital for Neurology and Neurosurgery, London, just before she was admitted for the Deep Brain Stimulation surgery in May 2022.

“Everybody who knows Carol prior to the operation and has seen her since cannot believe it,” Malcolm says. “Before, we didn’t make plans because we didn’t know how Carol would be on any given day. Now we will accept any social invitation!”

Carol adds: “I see so many more hours in the day. Before, it took me so long to do simple things.”

Parkinson’s meant Carol had to give up driving. Since surgery, she is now driving again, giving her back her independence. Malcolm smiles: “We are living again. We

can go for a walk on the promenade, meet friends and be out for coffee until 10pm!”

In terms of the surgery, it wasn’t all smooth sailing. “We did have some serious setbacks, recovery took a lot longer. We had to go back to London and into surgery three times,” Malcolm explains. These setbacks included infections, and a very real chance the rods - which were already making such a huge difference to Carol’s life - might have to be taken out. Now, she just has to return for an annual check-up.

After the initial surgery, there was a period of adjusting the stimulation to get the rods to work effectively. Carol admits it was a year and a half before she felt confident. Now, she says: “It has given me my life back.”

Over the years, the family has been fully supported by their parishes, who all ensured rectories had disabled access and facilities suitable for Carol to live as normally as possible.

Prayer played a big part, Malcolm says. “Carol is a scientist so we didn’t pray for healing. We could not deny the science of Parkinson’s Disease. We prayed for the courage to keep going. At no point did we ever feel helpless - every time there was another hurdle, we focused on clearing it.

“We got a sense that we were carried in prayer. Everybody did whatever they could to help us. We felt very much a part of the parish family and very supported by our own family and friends.”

Carol says the treatment is not a cure for Parkinson’s, but is an alternative treatment for some of the symptoms of the disease. “No two people have the same symptoms and for me it was the side effects of the drugs that was the main problem causing dyskinesia [involuntary movements],” she explains. “It has made such a difference to me after 20 years of gradual decline. I am back to driving, using my exercise bicycle, doing yoga and going out with friends. I have a renewed quality of life.”

On May 5, Malcolm and Carol’s family took part in the Belfast Marathon, raising over £9,000 (including gift aid) for Parkinson’s UK. Their niece Vicky ran the full marathon, while their daughters Sarah and Rebekah, along with El, fiancé of their son James, Sarah’s fiancé Max and Vicky’s boyfriend Ed did the marathon relay.

“I am so proud of my children, niece and their partners wanting to do the Belfast Marathon to raise money for research into Parkinson’s,” Carol says. “I want to thank everyone for their support and generosity. Together, we will find a cure.”



Archdeacon Stephen McBride and the Very Rev Sean Emerson.

## Archdeacon speaks at Novena in Antrim

On May 22, the Ven Dr Stephen McBride, vicar of Antrim and Archdeacon of Connor, was the first speaker at St Comgall’s and St Joseph’s Novena in Antrim.

He first preached in St Comgall’s in 2004 and said he was delighted to be invited to take part in the parish’s latest Novena.

Archdeacon McBride and the Very Rev Sean Emerson, parish administrator, first worked together in 1990 when Stephen was rector of St Peter’s Parish in Belfast and Sean was parish priest in the Holy Family group of parishes.

In his address to this year’s Novena, Archdeacon McBride gave a resume of all progress that has been made in Antrim over the past 20 years through the input and encouragement of the local churches.

He said that he was delighted with the warmth of the welcome he received from the parishioners at the Novena.



Congratulations to ‘Trudy and her tea ladies’ from Christ Church Parish, Derraghly, who were the winners in the community caterer category of the inaugural Funeral Awards NI held in the Crown Plaza Hotel on May 24. Attending the awards on behalf of the parish funeral team were, from left: Penny Jarvis, Mildred Leatham, Trudy Hull, Barbara Morrison and Margaret McCullough.





Representatives of MPDA at the awards ceremony. Photo: Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council.

# Volunteering 'MBE' for Muckamore

Muckamore Parish Development Association (MPDA) has been awarded the King's Award for Voluntary Service - the MBE for Volunteer Groups.

This was presented by the Lord-Lieutenant of County Antrim, Mr David McCorkell KStJ, at a special event held by Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council in The Old Courthouse, Antrim, on March 1.

MPDA has been in existence for 16 years and during this time has run a range of projects which have positively impacted the local community, particularly in the Ballycraiga area.

For many years, this work was carried out by a small group of dedicated volunteers, and in recent years the employment of part-time staff, the establishment of the new community hub and the recruitment of more volunteers have increased the scope of this work.

The group has been instrumental in providing essential community services, ranging from sensory play for children with additional needs to one-to-one support services. MPDA works to improve the well-being of both families and individuals by collaborating with and signposting to local services, providing a foodbank, hosting an after-school club and establishing the Muckamore Friendship Group for older people. MPDA also offers skills and training to improve employability, and youth activities to build resilience and improve life and health outcomes.

The Mayor of Antrim and Newtownabbey, Councillor Mark Cooper BEM, congratulated all connected with MPDA. "Their detailed knowledge of the needs of the community and passion to see these needs met has allowed the volunteers to develop strong trusting and supportive relationships with those in the local community," he said.

"The volunteers are the foundation of the organisation and the driving force behind every activity, event and service delivered. Their compassion and generous devotion are inspirational."

The Rev Derek Harrington, priest-in-charge of Muckamore and Killead, and Chairperson of MPDA, said this was 'an amazing honour.' "This award is in recognition of the vast contribution our volunteers make to the work of the organisation in support of the local community and the wider Antrim area," Derek said.

"As minister of the parish and Chairman of MPDA, I would like to pay special tribute to our Project Coordinator and Family Support Worker Kim Dunne and her amazing team of staff and volunteers. As is often said, our volunteers are the life blood of the organisation, and Kim is certainly the heartbeat!"

Derek continued: "Her passion for the community and its people, expertise in her field(s), and her sense of commitment have ensured MPDA has gone from strength to strength.

"I would also like to pay tribute to our former Chair (now Vice Chair) Andrew Stewart and our Treasurer James Moore. Andrew and James have both been involved in MPDA since its inception and their wisdom, vision, courage and dedication continue to be an invaluable asset in furthering the vital support MPDA offers.

"As Chairman, I look forward to see what the future holds as we continue to seek to love and serve our community."



Bishop George Davison, left, with Margaret Sprott and her son David and daughter Sandra.

## 100th birthday congratulations!

Many congratulations to two Connor parishioners who have turned 100 - Stanley Mcllroy MBE on February 16 and Margaret Sprott on April 29.

Margaret, a parishioner of St Comgall's, Rathcoole, since moving to the estate in the 1950s, worked as a seamstress, and during World War Two was busy stitching parachutes, Mae Wests, flairs and targets.

She married her late husband Jimmy in 1956. In church the day before her birthday, Margaret enjoyed a surprise cake, and on her big day, she had some special visitors including the Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev George Davison, and His Majesty's Deputy Lieutenant for County Antrim, Colonel Neil Salisbury OBE DL.

Margaret said: "I worked hard all my life, and I had a wonderful husband) though I didn't get him for very long. I have been on my own for more than 30 years." She added: "I feel good. I don't feel 100!"

Belfast Cathedral parishioner Stanley Mcllroy MBE also received a surprise visit from Bishop George on his birthday, as well as the Dean of Belfast, the Very Rev Stephen Forde.

A member of the Cathedral congregation for more than 60 years, Stanley was a member of the Cathedral Board for over 30 years, and, with the late Dean Sammy Crooks, was instrumental in establishing the Belfast Black Santa Sit-out.

Stanley was awarded an MBE in 2016 for charitable services.



Stanley Mcllroy MBE on his 100th birthday with Dean Stephen Forde and Bishop George Davison.

# Andy's key role with Ambulance Service



The Rev Andy Moore, Chair of the Christian Ambulance Association.

The Rev Andy Moore, curate in the Parish of Kilconriola and Ballyclug, Ballymena, has recently taken on the role of Chair of the Christian Ambulance Association.

Andy, 36, grew up in Groomsport Parish, Bangor, and joined the Ambulance Service aged 19. Despite being ordained as a full-time clergyman, he continues to do a couple of shifts each month as a paramedic.

In his teens, Andy expressed an interest in ordination, but said his rector advised him to 'go and get some life experience first.'

He moved from the Co Down coast to Coventry, England, where he worked with the West Midlands Ambulance Service, obtaining a Degree in the process. He worked in the Birmingham City Council area until he returned to Northern Ireland in 2012.

"It was an amazing experience. I was working in a city made up of every nationality under the sun. It was a good learning experience," Andy said.

He met his wife Laura in England and married when he was 24. As Laura also hails from Bangor, the couple decided to move home, and Andy worked for the Northern Ireland Ambulance until two years ago - he was Paramedic Manager when he left.

"I was in the rapid response car on my own going to some serious calls and also some routine calls," he said. "It was a kind of a vocation, I missed a lot of birthdays etc."

Andy and Laura were worshipping in Bangor Abbey when the Rev Dr Andrew Campbell, currently rector in Broughshane, was curate, and with the encouragement of Andrew and the support of his rector, the Rev Canon Ronnie Nesbitt, Andy did the Foundation Course at the Church of Ireland Theological Institute in 2017 and his Master's a year later - both on a part-time basis as he was still working for the Ambulance Service, covering the Lisburn, Bangor and later Carrickfergus areas.

## SKILLSET

"I still do two shifts a month. The last thing I wanted to do was walk away and lose the knowledge and skillset I have built up over the years," he said.

In addition to his ongoing work with the Ambulance Service, Andy is a volunteer 'First Responder' in the local community, and admits his clerical collar can sometimes give the person answering the door following a call about a non-life-threatening condition a bit of a shock!

"There have also been times when I have gone to someone who has suffered a cardiac arrest and I have prayed for them whatever denomination they belong to," Andy said. "I feel it is a form of mission."

The Christian Ambulance Association is small but growing. "There are a lot of Christians in the Ambulance Service, but for a long time you wouldn't talk about your faith, or wear a cross for instance, but that is changing. The CAA wants to highlight the fact that there are Christians in the workplace. We have around 400 signed-up members, but there are a lot more out there who have not signed up."

Andy learned of the Association's existence on social media five years ago. "At the time, there were only five of us involved in the province and I volunteered to lead for Northern Ireland. Membership has grown, partly because I have been broadcasting about it," he said.

The Covid pandemic did not help, but the CAA continued to meet online. Last year, the existing leadership, confident they had taken the Association as far as they could, stepped back, and Andy was invited to take on the role of Chairperson.

## CHAPLAINCY

"I took a week to pray about it and the Lord didn't say no, so I took up the post in February," Andy said. "We meet every three months, and my role is to build membership and give spiritual direction. I have voiced my desire to expand into chaplaincy and would like the Association to support chaplains who are out and about with training and resources - giving something back to our members."

He is also looking at integration with other Christian groups in such organisations as the Police Service and Firefighters. I would like to set up a network so we can feed off each other," Andy said. "We can pool our resources to build His Kingdom."

He is keen to reach out to organisations in the voluntary sector, such as St John Ambulance.

Like Andy, all members of the CAA Board are volunteers. "It is amazing and humbling to do it. I look back to the time when I was ordained deacon and thought it would mean sticking with just one thing, but part of me was saying otherwise and I went with my heart. This is mission. I don't believe that mission is only done overseas."

"I have had some beautiful conversations with colleagues since they learned that I was a minister."





At the Maundy Thursday Service for Connor clergy are the Dean of Belfast, the Very Rev Stephen Forde, and the Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev George Davison.

## Clergy renew their Ordination vows

Clergy from across Connor Diocese took time out from their busy Holy Week schedules to come together in Belfast Cathedral on Maundy Thursday morning to renew their Ordination Vows.

Along with Lay Readers and others involved in lay ministry in the diocese, they were invited by Bishop George Davison to a service entitled 'I have chosen you.'

The Bishop preached the sermon, and the service included Holy Communion. Afterwards, there was the opportunity for fellowship and catching-up over refreshments in the Cathedral Nave.



Bishop Darren McCartney and the Rev Melissa Jeffers.



The Rev Louise Bowes and the Rev Anne Locke.



The Rev Cameron Mack and the Rev Claire Thompson

# 10 years of fellowship



The Fellowship Café team. Back from left: Charlie Killow, Jim McNerlan, Maurice Langley, Gary Richmond, Drew Buchanan, Graeme Hunter, Terry Shimmon. Middle from left: Chrissi McDermott, Anne Langley, Karen Buchanan, Laura Kerr, Anne Richmond, Joanne Shimmon. Front from left: Joanne Hunter, Joan Cummings and Anne Howell. The team also includes Helen Fittis, Janis Gibson, Valerie Killow, Tracy Bowden and Marjory Edgar.

The Fellowship Café at Holy Trinity, Woodburn, Carrickfergus, which opens every Thursday from 10.30am to 12.30pm, has just celebrated its 10th anniversary.

In 2013, parishioners Maurice and Anne Langley supported a Fields of Life Ugandan Children's Choir as it toured Northern Ireland. They visited a variety of different churches, noticing that many of the more vibrant churches had an area set aside for refreshments and socialising.

"This got us thinking about our own church," Maurice recalled. "Whilst we did serve tea and coffee after the Sunday service, there were no other opportunities during the week to get together, to chat and 'put the world to rights.'"

The couple set about exploring the possibility of organising regular coffee mornings. "We had a suitable room, recently refurbished by our youth fellowship, and some basic equipment," he said. With the agreement of the Select Vestry, the new venture was good to go.

"On April 10 2014 we opened our doors. We called it Fellowship Café because fellowship amongst our congregation and the local community was exactly what was wanted," Maurice said. "We planned no frills, just tea and coffee and some goodies. There weren't, and still aren't, any sophisticated coffee makers or super modern equipment."

Visitors could make a donation or they could accept the refreshments as a gift. Any profits would be given to worthy causes. "We were a simple, humble café and that humility remains to this day,"

Maurice added. "Funded by members of our congregation and supported by our friends at Twinings Tea and Farmview Dairies, our team of just three people - Donna Harrison, Anne and myself - stood behind the counter that first day praying somebody would walk through the doors. Our prayers were answered and the rest, as they say, is history.

"These 10 years have been an incredible journey with many ups and some downs. All through this journey we have been richly blessed by God and he has been our rock and foundation.

"We hope and pray we have been good and faithful servants to him and that everything we have said and done has brought glory to his wonderful name.

"On our 10th anniversary, April 11, we opened for the 401st time. We lost nearly 18 months due to the Covid pandemic, but we re-opened as soon as it was safe to do so. Thanks to our volunteer team, now numbering 28 members of our congregation, and the generosity of our visitors, we have so far donated £27,000 to 86 different local, national and international worthy causes."

And over the past decade, the Fellowship Café has welcomed visitors from the UK, the Republic of Ireland, USA, Canada, Germany, Tenerife, and Australia, along with many from local churches and the local community.





Tom Stevenson with his invitation to the Maundy Thursday service held in Worcester Cathedral where Queen Camilla presented Tom with the Royal Maundy.

## Royal Maundy was 'very humbling'

Lisburn Cathedral parishioner Tom Stevenson described his visit to Worcester Cathedral on March 28 to receive the Royal Maundy from Queen Camilla as a 'great honour.'

Tom, 79, was nominated by the Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev George Davison, and was accompanied to Worcester by his wife Elva. "I was utterly surprised, and it was not false humility but genuine surprise," Tom said of his nomination.

Tom has been involved in the Church of Ireland all his life. Born in Lisburn, he lived in Wallace Avenue in the city until his marriage in 1973 when he and Elva moved to their current home in Pond Park Road.

A past pupil of Belfast Inst, Tom was with the Royal Insurance Company for more than 10 years before working as an insurance broker and eventually running his own independent financial advice firm, where he remained until retirement.

He and Elva have two daughters - Julie is living in Canada and Nicola is in England - while their son Mark is a GP in Edinburgh. They also have nine grandchildren.

In Lisburn Cathedral, Tom was a Sunday School teacher and youth club leader. He joined the Select Vestry at the age of 18 - retiring from this role just four years ago.

Tom was a member of Connor Diocesan Council up until three years ago. He was a member of the Church of Ireland General



Tom and his wife Elva before their trip to Worcester.

Synod for 50 years - Elva was also a member, though not for so many decades!

"The thing that took up most of my time and attention was my role as a lay diocesan nominator for Connor," Tom said. "Every time a parish becomes vacant and needs a rector, there is a Board of Nomination, and I was lay diocesan nominator for 40 years. There were years when there were only one or two Boards, and other years when there were four or five.

"I found it a very interesting and illuminating job - you got to know a lot about clergy."

In 1982, Tom wrote and published a booklet - 'The Work of a Parochial Nominator.' This was reprinted in 2017 and is still in use.

"When a parish becomes vacant, I found a lot of people who were nominators were quite anxious about what this entails and the pressure put on them," Tom explained. "I wrote the booklet to inform them of the procedure they would be following and to put their minds at rest."

'The Work of a Parochial Nominator' is published by the Church of Ireland Evangelical Fellowship (CIEF) and is available from [www.cief.co.uk/publications](http://www.cief.co.uk/publications).

Eight years ago, Tom was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease, and this has impacted his mobility. "I sometimes wonder when I am not feeling great if that is to do with the Parkinson's or because I am nearly 80," Tom smiled.

Elva added: "When we received the letter [from the Royal Almonry Office] we were quite stunned and wondered if we could do this, especially with Tom's Parkinson's. But it is such an honour, we wanted to try and go. This is a once in a lifetime experience."

The Maundy Service was last held in Worcester Cathedral in 1980. As King Charles was unable to attend this year's service due to ongoing treatment for cancer, the Maundy Purses were presented by Queen Camilla. The number of recipients is dictated by the Monarch's age - this year there were 75 men and 75 women.

"The whole occasion was very uplifting," Tom said. "As she presented me with the Maundy Purses, Queen Camilla said 'Thank you for all that you do.' It was a privilege to have been given this opportunity when there are so many others probably more deserving."

He described Worcester Cathedral as a 'beautiful building,' adding that the music was of a very high standard. Although not present in person, the first lesson was read by King Charles and broadcast during the service, along with a message in which the King reaffirmed his coronation pledge 'not to be served, but to serve' with 'my whole heart.' He praised those who 'extend the hand of friendship, especially in a time of need,' and added: "It is for me a great sadness that I cannot be with you today."

Elva said the Cathedral was full of colour and pomp and the music was superb. "It was quite a spectacular day," she added.

Tom said: "It was a great honour and very humbling to be there with so many others."

# Abaana choir tour spreads happiness

Dunluce Parish Centre in Bushmills was ringing with children's laughter at lunchtime on March 6 as members of the Abaana New Life Choir enjoyed a home-cooked meal.

Later that evening, the rafters were raised as the children's voices rang out in song, their energetic and enthusiastic music and dancing bringing joy to those in the audience in this, one of a series of concerts in the UK and Ireland by these 20 young people from Uganda.

The very talented children, whose faces radiate happiness and hope, all belong to schools across Uganda run by Bangor-based charity Abaana. Their ages range from 7-14.

Their concert in Dunluce was part of a six-month tour which began in January and ends in June. The choir performs both Ugandan and English gospel songs and the children share their testimonies.

Abaana's aim is to raise awareness of third world poverty, find sponsors for an additional 200-300 children, and rescue more children from a life on the streets. More than 1,000 new child sponsorships were set up as a direct result of the 2017 and 2019 New Life Choir tours, and six young boys were rescued from a life on the streets and brought into Abaana's New Life Homes.

The New Life Choir has performed a number of concerts in Connor Diocese, including in The Hub, Belfast; Lisburn

Cathedral; and the Church of the Good Shepherd, Monkstown, as well as at other venues across the UK and Ireland.

During their time in Dunluce, the children visited the Giant's Causeway, giving an impromptu concert on the famous causeway stones, sang for the pupils of Bushmills Primary School, and enjoyed the seafront in Portrush.

Sarah is the choir's musical director, chaperone and choreographer. "This tour is an incredible experience for the children - they are getting to taste new foods, visit

**'The children... are not only making a difference for themselves, but for their families and community.'**

new places and experience things they have only ever read about, like snow and the sea," Sarah said. "Everywhere we go, people are so nice. The children settle well with their host families, although as most of them board at Abaana schools, they are used to being away from home."

Jacqueline and Rodney Graham from Ballynahinch are accompanying the children for the entire six months of the tour. Jacqueline, a retired nurse, works in the Abaana office and the couple were asked to lead the tour by Abaana Chief



Executive Scott Baxter.

"We met the children at the airport in January and will be with them until June," said Jacqueline. "We travel with them, organise the chaperone team and manage their schedule.

"It is an absolute privilege to be with these children and we are loving it, but it is tiring, the schedule is very busy. It is not just the concerts - they have about four a week - but they still need to be schooled, and

we have two teachers on the team with lessons every day. There are also their medical needs to see to. Our youngest child is seven, the oldest is 14, but most are aged nine and 10.

"These are very independent children and really want to be here. They love singing, dancing and putting on the concerts, they are always singing on the bus. They are a real family."

Jacqueline said the host churches had all been wonderful. "I have been pleasantly surprised about how relaxed I have felt in other people's homes," she said. "One of my biggest worries was staying with host families, but it has been a joy. I think the host families are also surprised about what a positive experience it is and how quickly the children take to them."

Jacqueline and Graham have visited Uganda several times. "We have seen the difference sponsorship makes. The children in this choir are not only making a difference for themselves, but for their families and community," she said.

Dunluce parishioners April and Neil Salisbury hosted five of the young boys. "This is the first time we have done this



Lunch with an Abaana chaperone and volunteers in Dunluce Parish Centre.





The New Life Choir, chaperones and hosts in Dunluce Parish Centre.



The Rev Brian Harper, rector of Dunluce, with parishioner Glenda Rodgers, who hosted two of the children, and Sarah, the choir's musical director, choreographer and chaperone.

Glenda Rodgers was also hosting for the first time, with two girls staying in her home. "I just feel like crying when I see them, they are such happy children," she said. "They are very proud and showed us pictures of their homes and their pets, although they don't give an impression of being homesick.

"They are so well mannered and not afraid to give you a hug. We are doing this for them now and there is also the opportunity to sponsor them. We would like to find out how they are getting on with their education, and they will write to their sponsors twice a year. One of our girls would like to be a doctor and the other a teacher. This choir will help give them a better future."

The New Life Choir was invited to Dunluce Parish by the rector of Dunluce, the Rev Brian Harper, and his wife Heather, whose previous parish, Ballinamallard, had a visit from the New Life Choir in 2017.

Among their other engagements, the choir was in Lisburn on Good Friday and Easter Saturday, where they performed two concerts in Lisburn Cathedral, and also took part in the Good Friday Walk of Witness through the city centre, helping carry the Cross and singing and dancing during the service which followed.



April Salisbury hosted five of the choir members when they visited Dunluce Parish.

and I hope it is not the last," April said. "It has been an absolute joy and they are very special children. We have three sons, so we are used to boys and the antics they get up to. We thought our two-year-old cocker spaniel might have been too much for them, but they have loved her.

"It is incredible to think about where they have come from, how their lives are so different to ours and how they have settled in. They absolutely loved their boiled eggs with toast! The boys gave us a little performance last night in the kitchen. They are very talented and sing beautifully together."

Jackie Garvin hosted two boys and a choir chaperone. "A friend had hosted choir members some years ago, and I thought it would be nice to do," she said. "They are very good children, very well mannered and not afraid to help themselves at breakfast. They haven't really shared their

stories with us as they tell them on stage, so we are looking forward to tonight's concert. "



The Abaana New Life Choir joined the Good Friday Walk of Witness in Lisburn City Centre.





Jacqui Dixon MBE DL, with her husband the Rev Campbell Dixon MBE, third from left, on the occasion of Jacqui being awarded the Freedom of the Borough of Antrim and Newtownabbey.

# Freedom of the Borough for Jacqui

Congratulations to Jacqui Dixon MBE DL, a parishioner of St Patrick's, Jordanstown, who has been awarded the Freedom of Antrim and Newtownabbey and has also been appointed a Deputy Lieutenant for Antrim.

Jacqui, 58, former Chief Executive of Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council, was granted the Freedom of the Borough in recognition of her contribution to the community and the life of the Borough.

She is married to the Rev Campbell Dixon MBE, formerly priest-in-charge of St Mark's, Ballysillan, and previously a member of the clergy team at Belfast Cathedral. She has a daughter, Amy.

A native of Belfast, Jacqui has a Degree in Food Science from Queen's University and an MBA in Business Administration from Ulster University. After graduation, she moved to Scotland to work on a European funding project and returned to Northern Ireland in 1999 to take up the role of Economic Development Manager with Newtownabbey Borough Council.

"It was a new post and a good opportunity to get involved in the Council and set the new department up," Jacqui said.

In 2005 she was appointed as Director

of Development Services at Craigavon Borough Council, moving back to Newtownabbey in 2007 to take up the post of Director of Development Services. Jacqui went on to be appointed Chief Executive of Newtownabbey Borough Council in 2012 and subsequently Chief Executive of the newly merged Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council in 2014.

## The civic honour is the highest accolade the Council can bestow

The period of the merger was a challenging time. "We were trying to run the two legacy Councils at the one time, while also setting the tone and culture for the new organisation," Jacqui said.

"As Chief Executive, I had to build relations with all the politicians and all political parties. Our elected members were very ambitious for the Borough, so they worked together. We focused on the economy and this lent itself to my skillset. We worked to make our Borough as attractive as possible for investors and to build relationships and

partnerships.

"We had a legal duty to improve our performance annually and we used that to drive performance. Our rates increases were the lowest of all the Councils and our leisure centre membership doubled as a result of this.

"It was quite stressful at times, balancing the needs of so many different stakeholders, especially the staff who were fearful about their jobs, but our strategy was about setting an ambitious vision for the Council and getting all those people to buy into it.

"Covid was also a particularly challenging part of my career because of the fear and uncertainty; people had to continue working on the ground as bins had to be emptied and cemeteries maintained and open. It was very, very difficult, but I think that the Council and I emerged a lot stronger and resilient after that," she said.

Jacqui took early retirement in October 2023. "It's a very demanding 24/7 job and you can only do it for so long. The time was right to slow down and do other things," she said.

It was at her last Council meeting that the honour of the Freedom of the Borough was bestowed - and it came as a total surprise!

The civic honour is the highest accolade the Council can bestow, and historically includes the right to drive sheep unimpeded in the town. It is a symbolic gesture to pay homage to those who have rendered eminent services to the Borough.

At the meeting, the Mayor of Antrim and Newtownabbey, Councillor Mark Cooper BEM, led the tributes to Jacqui. "You have spearheaded the Council through many of its diverse challenges. Always working collaboratively and with a clear focus on

driving improvements into the heart of communities," he said.

"Your vision and exceptional leadership have been instrumental not only to the economic success of

our Borough, but to the highly effective, efficient and impactful performance of our Council."

The Elected Member Group Leaders added their own tributes, describing Jacqui as a dynamic and strategic leader who has shaped the Council into a thriving and progressive organisation.

Speaking at the time, Jacqui said the honour created a perfect way to mark the end of her career: "I am overwhelmed and humbled by this accolade. I can think of no





Jacqui Dixon MBE DL

better way to conclude my career," she told the elected members and council officers.

Previous recipients of the Freedom of the Borough have included Dr Willie John McBride CBE (1992), Sir AP McCoy OBE (2005) and Dr Jonathan Rea MBE (2019).

"It is lovely to be thought of in the same way as some of these people for service to the Borough," said Jacqui. "It was nice, working with all political parties. I did my best to keep everybody happy."

Jacqui was also awarded with the Van Coulter Lifetime Achievement Award by the Association of Public Service Excellence (APSE) for exceptional leadership and her contribution to the local government sector across the UK.

A week before her retirement, she was at Windsor Castle to receive her MBE for services to local government and the community in Northern Ireland, awarded in January 2023 in the King's New Year Honours list.

She said she had been 'astounded' by the Honour. "It is very much a recognition

of the work of the Council, staff and the community," she said. She added that her investiture had been a wonderful day. "I met so many other people being honoured that day from all walks of life right across the UK."

Looking back on her years as Chief Executive in Antrim and Newtownabbey, Jacqui said the highlight was welcoming King Charles and Queen Camilla to the opening of the Coronation Garden at Hazelbank Park in May 2023.

Jacqui enjoys travelling and golf, and she and Campbell are busy refurbishing their new home. Of her newly bestowed 'right' regarding woolly animals, she said: "There are sheep in the field next to my house, but I don't think I will be taking any of them to the town centre!"

Jacqui plans to keep busy in her retirement, doing some consultancy work in the public sector. She is on the Board of Governors of Jordanstown School and a Trustee of the Ulster Society for the Education of the Deaf and Blind. "Professionally, I am looking forward to seeing what future opportunities come up," she said.

## New Rural Dean

The Rev Jonny Campbell-Smyth, rector of the United Parish of Ballynure and Ballyeaston, Ballyclare, took up the role of Antrim Rural Dean on February 1, succeeding the Rev Canon Derek Kerr who has moved to the Diocese of Armagh.



The Rev Jonny Campbell-Smyth.

Having worked in IT for many years, Jonny was ordained a deacon in September 2011 and did his internship in Holy Trinity Parish, Portrush. He served his first curacy in St Patrick's, Coleraine, and his second curacy in St Patrick's, Jordanstown, before his institution as rector in Ballyclare in January 2017.

Jonny said: "I'd like to thank Bishop George for trusting me with this position in Antrim Rural Deanery. I consider it a privilege to serve God's Church in this way within a Deanery that I have already been a part of for the last seven years."

## St Katharine's says farewell to William



The Rev Canon William Taggart at his last Sunday service as rector of St Katharine's.

After more than 30 years as rector of St Katharine's, Belfast, the Rev Canon William Taggart led his final service in the church on Easter Sunday. He continues in his role as Diocesan Registrar, with the Rev Dr Alan McCann taking up the role of Assistant Registrar.

William retired on April 30, and parishioners held a reception after the service where there were a number of speeches and William was presented with gifts, and his wife Tracey was given flowers. Everyone enjoyed the fellowship and the cake.

The service was attended by parishioners, former parishioners, friends and representatives from the community in which William has been working for more than 30 years - his service of institution in St Katharine's was held on July 18 1990.

## Stronger links with Moravian Church

A special service was held on March 18 to celebrate a new relationship between the Church of Ireland and the Moravian Church in Britain and Ireland.

This was a single service in two locations, with the Ministry of the Word in St Patrick's Parish Church, Ballymena, and the Ministry of the Sacrament in Gracehill.

A tree was planted by children from St Patrick's before the first part of the service in the church. The second part was held at Gracehill Moravian Church, with a further tree planting ceremony led by children from its fellowship in the Village Square.

Also present were Moravian Bishops, Sarah Groves from Gracehill and Joachim Kreusel from Derbyshire; Church of Ireland Primate, Archbishop John McDowell, and Bishop Michael Burrows, who leads its Commission for Christian Unity and Dialogue.

Each tree marked the Armagh Agreement, signed in November 2021 to allow clergy from each church to serve in the other.

Participants in the service were welcomed by the Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev George Davison, and the rector of Ballymena, the Rev Canon Mark McConnell, who pledged that the parish would continue to be good friends with its Moravian neighbours. Archbishop McDowell preached.

Speaking at the reception in the Cennick Hall which followed the service, Roberta Hoey, who chairs the Provincial Elders Conference of the Moravian Church in Britain and Ireland, said: "It's been a combination of years of dialogue, understanding and prayerful consideration on all sides." She added: "For us, ecumenism is not merely an abstract concept; it's a lived reality, it's an imperative that calls all to engage in dialogue, collaboration and through partnerships as we strive for unity in Christ."



The Service of Celebration begins in St Patrick's, Ballymena, before continuing in Gracehill Moravian Church.



Connor Mothers' Union representatives Joyce Bond, Sally Cotter and Alberta Miskimmon with special guests Tim McGarry and Alexandra Ford at the Good Samaritans Service in Belfast Cathedral.

## Sit-out is 'a bright light in Belfast'

Representatives of 120 charities gathered in St Anne's Cathedral, Belfast, on February 4 for the annual Good Samaritans Service and to celebrate the £171,000 raised by the 2023 Black Santa Sit-out.

Welcoming guests from across Northern Ireland, Dean Stephen Forde said this was one of his favourite services of the year. "With the generosity of the people from Belfast and across the province, we have raised £171,000, and today I have the huge privilege of giving away that money to 120 charities," the Dean said.

The 47th annual sit-out took place in the 10 days before Christmas, with Dean Forde on the steps of the Cathedral daily, supported by the Bishops of Connor and Down and Dromore, Cathedral Canons, clergy and other friends.

Special guests at the Good Samaritans service were actors Tim McGarry and Alexandra Ford. Welcoming them, the Dean added: "Tim and Alexandra are not the stars of the service. The stars are you, as representatives of charities which have kept going through the cost-of-living crisis, which have supported people impacted by drug abuse and which have supported those whose lives have been changed by Covid.

"A galaxy of work and care and service which you, as members of amazing charities, give every day to young people, older people and people who triumph over challenges."

In his reflection, Tim McGarry said the Good Samaritans Service was a highlight of his year too, describing the Black Santa Sit-out as 'one of the bright lights in Belfast



Ruth Cooke and Rosamund Bennett from Christian Aid with Tim McGarry and Alexandra Ford.

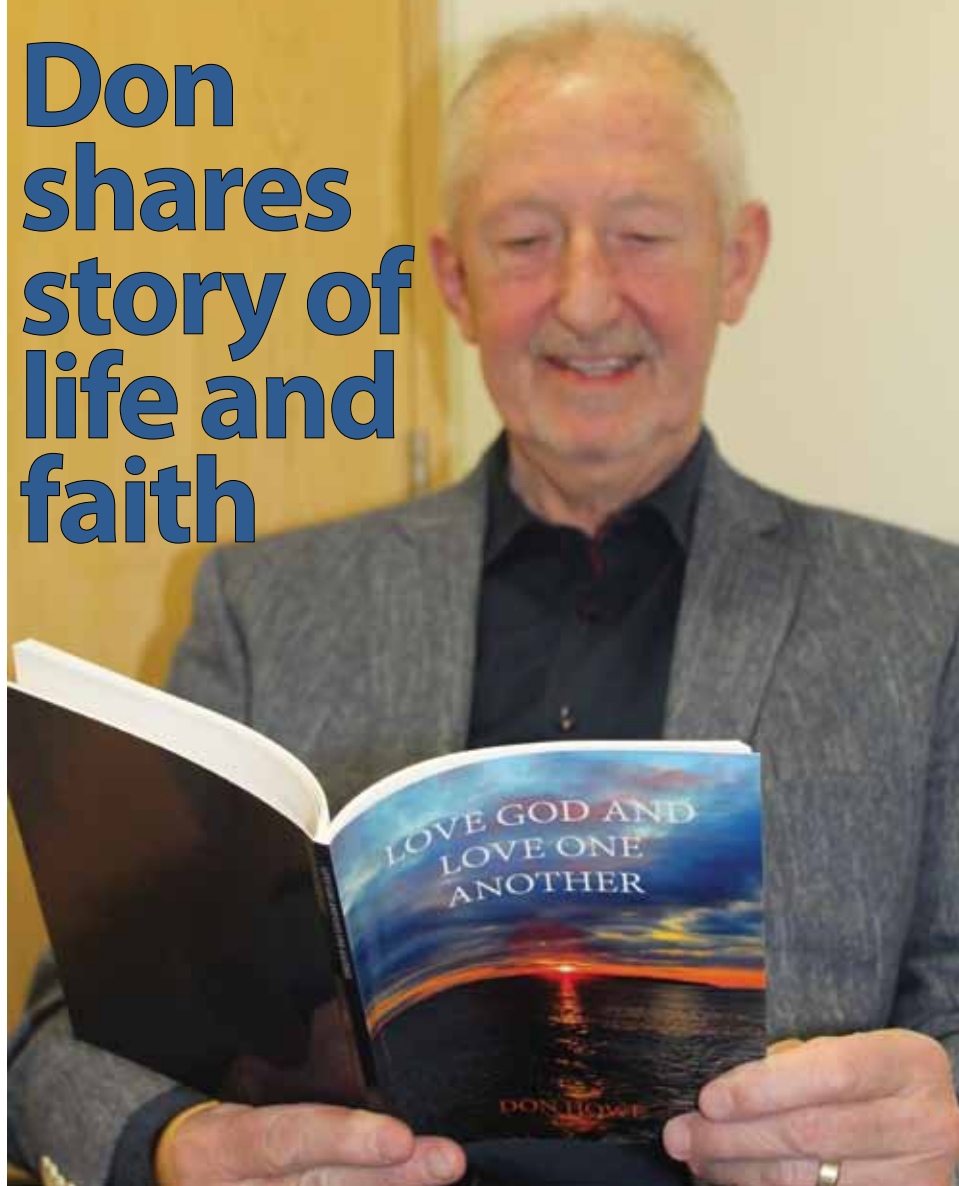
and Northern Ireland.' Adding that the £171,000 raised had been donated by 'normal people,' Tim said: "It is all about love, kindness and goodness."

During the service, the names of each of the charities awarded funding in different fields were read out. These were: Supporting the most disadvantaged families and individuals in our communities; working with those impacted by drug abuse; providing bereavement support in the aftermath of the Covid pandemic; groups doing charitable work in our communities; and charities working internationally.

The service took the form of Evensong, with music from the Cathedral Choir, conducted by Master of Music Jack Wilson, with Stephen Hamill at the organ. Alexandra Ford read the Parable of the Good Samaritan, and a collection was taken for the 2024 Black Santa Appeal.



# Don shares story of life and faith



Don Howe with his book 'Love God and Love One Another.'

Don Howe, a member of St Nicholas' Parish Church, Carrickfergus, and vice-chair of the interdenominational Divine Healing Ministries, has published a book entitled 'Love God and Love One Another.'

Don is also the lead for an affiliate organisation of Divine Healing Ministries called Christian Irish Diaspora Association with the website [Christian-Irish.com](http://Christian-Irish.com).

The son of a Church of Ireland clergyman, Don began a career in the Northern Bank and later joined the Bank of Montreal, working in various parts of Canada, before becoming an office manager with an oil company.

He was in Canada for five years. When he returned home, he worked with a financial company in Omagh and married Grace. The couple have one son, Philip, and two grandchildren.

Don continued to work in finance, at one time running his own business, before a change in direction when he took on the role of Ireland representative with Middle East Christian Outreach (MECO) in September 2006. In 2016, the organisation

merged with Serving in Mission (SIM).

After retiring from MECO, Don began attending healing services in Belfast Cathedral, and eight years ago, Bro David Jardine from Divine Healing Ministries suggested he undertake a course in Divine Healing. He is now involved in giving talks and is a member of the Divine Healing Ministries prayer team.

Don is a firm believer in the power of healing prayer. In his book, he reflects on the years when he was in 'moral decline,' and believes it was the prayers of his family and church that saved his life when an assault in Vancouver left him seriously ill. "The neurosurgeon who operated on me said I was one thousandth of a millimetre off being brain dead or dying," Don writes.

In August 2022, Don was diagnosed with cancer. He had a tumour the size of a small oval ball and this was pressing on

his liver. His treatment included steroids, chemotherapy and a preventative programme which involved week-long stays in hospital.

In the book he writes: "I always told my minister, the chaplain at the hospital and the folk in Divine Healing Ministries, when we are sick, we need to ask people to pray for us. James 5 verse 14 says: 'Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord.'"

Don said that after three sessions of chemotherapy and steroids, the tumour had reduced by 75 per cent. "The doctors have a talent that is God-given," he said.

In writing 'Love God and Love One Another,' Don says he is giving thanks to God. "You can be one of the biggest vagabonds of the day, but God loves us. This book is not about me; it is about getting people to be stronger in their faith and about helping them come to faith. It is an easy read. I have quoted a lot of books I read, and Bro David gave it a glowing review."

In a foreword to the book, Bishop Ken Clarke writes: "This book is Don's story and with honesty and passion he shares about his life, faith and priorities."

The Bishop adds: "Thank you Don for this book. It is never to draw attention to yourself, but rather to point us all to the one who loves us more than anyone else, the one who taught us to love God and love one another."

The Christian Irish Diaspora Association reaches out to Irish Christians around the world, encouraging them to pray for the Island of Ireland. "More than 70 to 80 million people are in the Irish Diaspora," Don said. "Nearly half are in the USA, followed by Australia and Canada. Can you imagine if we could have Christians to join with us in praying for Ireland and their own land, what a difference this would make?"

"It would be lovely to see Ireland back to the land of saints and scholars of the Word. That would be my prayer for this little land which has been torn in two. The Christian faith came to Ireland through St Patrick. There are no denominations in Heaven."

'Love God and Love One Another' is available from Divine Healing Ministries ([www.divinehealingministries.org](http://www.divinehealingministries.org)) or you can order a copy directly from Don at [chair@divinehealingministries.org](mailto:chair@divinehealingministries.org) or call him on 07977 911421.

The proceeds from the sale of the book are for Divine Healing Ministries.

# Praying blessings in North Belfast area

**The Rev Canon Jim Carson, minister-in-charge of St Michael's, St Stephen's and St Luke's in the Lower Shankill area, reflects on the monthly Prayer Walk in North Belfast**

One of the things that has inspired, challenged and encouraged me most since moving to minister in North Belfast is the monthly North Belfast Prayer Walk.

I remember thinking about the move and being slightly nervous, as this would be an entirely new experience and place for my wife Heather and I and our family to live and work.

The Prayer Walks had been happening for some time before we moved, started by Stephen Whitten (formerly Church Army in Connor Diocese), Liam Cluskey (Lamb of God Community) and the Rev Colin Duncan (Shankill Methodist). Heather and I decided to go along one night shortly before we moved to experience the Prayer Walk and to meet the people involved.

We received a very warm welcome and it was inspirational to see people of different faith communities come together to pray blessings on local communities. We have formed great friendships with everyone involved and are supported ourselves in prayer by these faithful prayer warriors.

Over the past eight years in ministry in North Belfast, these walks have taken me around most of North Belfast, from the

Falls, Lower and Mid-Shankill, New Lodge and Tigers Bay, Woodvale and Glencairn and many other places.

We are invited to various churches on the first Monday of the month. We meet at 7.30pm, pray together, have a briefing on the area from a local person, then go out in twos or threes to pray through that area for about 40 minutes, before returning for a debrief and cup of tea. Some people also decide to stay in the building to pray for the faith community we are meeting in and for life in that local community.

The Prayer Walks began following conversations between local clergy of various denominations based generally in North Belfast. The question was, 'what can we do practically for our communities?' and the answer was to pray and walk.

A strong influence on several people in the group was Roy Godwin, from Ffald y Brenin, in Wales. One of Roy Godwin's books, 'The Way of Blessing,' has influenced people worldwide to reach out

to local communities.

Hence the purpose of our prayer walking is to pray blessings on our local communities. Praying blessing of peace and harmony, healing on our broken communities. Praying for the people we may meet perhaps along the way, saying, 'we are Christians from all denominations out praying, can we pray a blessing upon you?' and that prayer has been well received. Praying blessing on community centres, schools, GP surgeries, shops, churches, hospitals, homeless shelters and many other places we may pass. Sometimes literally walking in dark places seeking to bring the light of God, in Christ. In praying blessings, we believe that God does bring hope, our communities will be revived and churches renewed.

In this as Christians from different denominations, we believe that this makes a difference to our communities. It's a simple act of unity and witness, but also something that the Church as a body of people in North Belfast has been doing now for nearly 10 years. We believe it changes the atmosphere - faithful and regular prayer opening a door so God the Holy Spirit can come through and work.

One of the things that inspires and encourages us the most is the sense of fellowship and the bond that our praying has created amongst us. We would love to see more people come along, anyone who has a heart for prayer and blessing communities that need continually brought closer to God.

The walks take place on the first Monday evening each month. Details can be found in the events listings at [www.connor.anglican.org](http://www.connor.anglican.org).



## Bicentenary celebrated in Ballinderry Parish

Ballinderry Parish this year celebrates the bicentenary of the opening of the church. On January 28, the Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev George Davison, joined parishioners at morning worship and cut the cake to mark the commencement of this special year of celebrations. Pictured are, from left: Joan Blair, Rector's Churchwarden; Bishop George; the Rev Trevor Cleland; and David Elwood, People's Churchwarden.





The Rev Brian Harper, rector of Dunluce Parish, Bushmills, and his wife Heather with their medals after the London Landmarks Half Marathon in April.

# Brian and Heather's marathon challenge

They are Parkrun veterans, but the Rev Brian Harper and his wife Heather braved an even bigger challenge when they took on the prestigious London Landmarks half marathon on April 7 in memory of Heather's mum.

Brian, rector of Dunluce Parish, Bushmills, joined almost 19,000 other runners, and by completing the 13.1 mile course, they raised more than £2,000 for Alzheimer's Research UK and Dementia UK.

The marathon is held in Westminster, with the route passing many of London's most iconic sights. While Brian has done a half marathon before - in Liverpool in 2016 when he completed the course in a time of 2:25 - this was Heather's first official half marathon challenge.

"Heather and I had an exceptionally enjoyable day running the London Landmarks half marathon," Brian said.

"We started in Pall Mall and visited

Trafalgar Square, the Strand, St Paul's Cathedral, the Bow Bells, Tower Hill, the Embankment, Westminster and Whitehall, spurred on by an enthusiastic crowd, including drums, bells, choirs and cheerleaders, as well as our granddaughters who had the task of supplying us with Jelly Babies at various locations!

"I completed the route in the official time of 2:26:26 and Heather finished at 2:49:06 - both well ahead of expectations!"

Brian continued: "Together, we have raised £1,685 in donations with £343.50 added on as Gift Aid - a total of £2,028.50 for Alzheimer's Research UK and Dementia UK."

Brian moved to Dunluce last August from Magheracross Parish, Ballinamallard, where he had been rector since 2012. It was in Ballinamallard he first discovered a passion for running 10 years ago after hearing about the Enniskillen Parkrun on the radio.

"I had been doing a bit of jogging, so I did it once and realised there were people taking part who had the same level of fitness as me, although others did it much faster!" Brian said.

Now, the 5k Parkrun is a weekly fixture and at time of writing he had completed 238 Parkruns! Quite an achievement!

Brian and Heather also volunteer with Parkrun - marshalling, scanning barcodes, timekeeping, etc. It was through volunteering that Heather also picked up the running bug.

"I started volunteering in 2015. I have arthritis, and had not been able to run, but my medication changed in 2016, and I saw all these other people out running so I did a 'Couch to 5K' training programme and completed my first Parkrun in 2016," Heather said.

The Covid-19 pandemic interrupted their running schedule, as Parkruns had to be called off, but Brian continued to pound the roads, and in fact did a 'Covid London Landmarks Half Marathon' on his own in Ballinamallard.

"It was a lot harder and also a lot slower. I had asked people to put different landmarks in their gardens, so the kids enjoyed doing that and I found a landmark on a garden on every street. I was fundraising for Prostate Cancer UK," he said.

Heather had a plan for the London Landmarks event. "I run and walk - they call it 'Jeffing' - a lot of people do runs that way," Heather said.

In undertaking this challenge, Heather raised funds for Dementia UK in memory of her mother Sadie Hewitt who suffered from dementia for several years before her death in 2017.

Brian said that his choice of charity was also inspired by Heather's mum. He added: "In ministry, I have encountered the impact of this condition on so many families. Alzheimer's Research UK will be able to fund the research required to either prevent or alleviate the mental and physical distress that this dementia can cause."

Brian and Heather expressed thanks to all those who supported and encouraged them.



The Rev Canon Stuart Lloyd taking part in his 72-hour fast in Broughshane during Christian Aid week to raise funds for the charity. Keeping him company is his grandson Matthew.

# Canon's 72-hour fast for Christian Aid

The Rev Canon Stuart Lloyd, former rector of Ballymena and Ballyclug, completed a 72-hour fast to raise funds for Christian Aid.

Stuart allowed himself only water from 8pm on Thursday May 16 until 8pm on Saturday May 18 in an effort to raise funds for the charity's work with vulnerable communities around the world. His fast was sponsored by parishioners of St Patrick's, Broughshane, the church he joined after retiring as rector of Ballymena and Ballyclug where he had served for 27 years.

Stuart completed his fast while sitting in the mall outside McNeill's grocery and hardware shops in Broughshane, collecting donations and raising awareness of the work of Christian Aid. His grandson Matthew and some of the St Patrick's parishioners sat with him for part of the time, keeping him company.

This was the third year that Canon Lloyd has completed a 72-hour fast to mark Christian Aid Week.

Christian Aid Week, which this year ran from May 12-18, began in the 1950s and is thought to be the UK and Ireland's longest-running fundraising campaign. Each year, tens of thousands of people across the UK and Ireland get involved in raising funds to support the charity's work to reach people

living in poverty and crisis across the world.

Christian Aid Ireland Chief Executive Rosamond Bennett said: "We are very grateful to Canon Stuart for his incredible self-sacrifice and to everyone at St Patrick's, Broughshane, and in the wider community who sponsored him.

"Every year during Christian Aid Week, people across the UK and Ireland raise funds and act and pray for their global neighbours in a celebration of hope for a fairer world. Christian Aid Week brings people together to put our faith into action. Every prayer, every gift, every action makes a difference."

This year's Christian Aid Week appeal focused on the charity's work in Burundi where 70 per cent of the population live in poverty and more than half of children are chronically malnourished. Christian Aid has been working in Burundi since 1995.

Stuart is no stranger to charity fundraising. In 2021, he completed 50 ascents of Slemish Mountain over seven days - equivalent to the height of Mount Everest - raising £15,000 for charitable projects in Nepal.

## Coming up! Summer Madness, Streetreach & CTTC

Our young people are gearing up for a busy summer, with the Summer Madness Christian festival taking place in Portlengone from June 28 to July 2.

Many Connor groups will be there, with the diocese running its Sub Camp with hospitality and a space to connect.

Summer Madness is followed by Streetreach which runs from July 2-5. 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.

For those taking part in the residential, the group will be staying at the White Park Bay Youth Hostel. Young people can also attend on a daily basis.

Connor Takes the Castle, the annual residential weekend for young people aged 11-18 and their leaders, takes place in Castlewellan from October 4-6. Simon Henry, National Youth Officer with the Church of Ireland Youth Department (CIYD), will be speaking, and a range of incredible activities has been lined up.

The cost is £60 or £20 for a Saturday day pass. Contact Christina Baillie on [christinabaillie@connordiocese.org](mailto:christinabaillie@connordiocese.org) for more information.

## Connor Youth - new name, new look!



The old 'Engage Connor Youth' logo (and name) have been updated, and along with the main 'Connor Youth' logo, there are different sub-logo brands, with designs for Connor Summer Madness Sub Camp, Streetreach and Connor Takes the Castle. Check them out!





Family fun at the St Patrick's Story event in Ballyclare. A dual role for Play in by Ear's Chris!

## Fun time sharing the story of St Patrick

The story of Ireland's Patron Saint came to life in Ballyclare on March 16, when families with young children made their way to St John's Church to learn all about St Patrick.

The event featured drama from Play It By Ear, a 'sheep trail' in the town centre where the children were invited to piece together the words of a Bible verse, and lots of arts and crafts in the parish hall.

The event was organised by Victoria Jackson, Connor Children's Ministry Development Officer, and her team.

There was lots of interaction for the children and their parents during the drama, and the colouring and craft activities produced some very artistic results!

Entries to a St Patrick's colouring competition were displayed in the hall, and the rector of Ballynure and Ballyeaston, the Rev Jonny Campbell-Smyth, had a tough time selecting the winners in the various age categories.



The well-supported colouring competition



Ahoy Melad! Play it by Ear's Chris and Ross on the high seas.

## 'Launch' training back for 2024

Connor's youth and children's officers Christina Baillie and Victoria Jackson invite youth and children's leaders to Launch, the annual training day.

This will be held on September 7 in St Patrick's, Broughshane. Places can be booked via the Connor Diocesan website or check for updates on social media.

Victoria said: "Join with us for training, resources and encouragement at the start of a new ministry year. The training will be interactive with lots of opportunities for discussion as well as new ideas to put into practice in your own context."

Bishop George Davison will kick off the event, followed by input from Rachel Sheppard and Sarah Coghlan from Scripture Union Northern Ireland who will be considering five ways to disciple your children and young people.

In addition, Rachel and Sarah will be contributing in the children's and youth sessions respectively. In the youth session there will be contributions from Paul Gallucci from The Big House on Pastoral Youth Ministry and from the Rev Ross Mungavin on 'Engaging Young People with the Bible.'

## NearTu - be inspired

NearTu, an ecumenical conference for children and families ministry, takes place in Mount St Anne's Retreat and Conference Centre, Co Laois, on November 9, organised by the Board for Ministry with Children and Families Church of Ireland.

Children's Ministry Development Officer Victoria Jackson said: "The keynote speaker is the fantastic Rachel Turner who is the founder of 'Parenting for Faith' and the author of 'It takes a church to raise a parent.' NearTu is Irish for 'Strengthen' and the heart behind this conference is to strengthen, equip and encourage those in Children and Family Ministry."

Victoria added: "I know it is quite a trek for a day conference but it will definitely be worth it to be inspired by Rachel!"

Anyone interested should contact Victoria at [victoriajackson@connordiocese.org](mailto:victoriajackson@connordiocese.org).

## Rathlin outing

There will be lots of family fun at a group Sunday School outing to Rathlin Island on Saturday June 22, organised by Victoria Jackson and Connor Children's Council.





News in pictures: Clockwise, from top left: Commissioning Service for Diocesan and Parish Readers in St Patrick's, Armoyn, on May 8 --- Rosemary and Jim Patterson and Jacqueline Weir MBE at General Synod --- Commissioning of Readers in All Saints', Craighill, on January 28 --- Admiring exhibits at the annual Dunluce Parish Art and Photographic fundraising exhibition --- The Rev Canon Kevin Graham MBE DL following his Investiture in Windsor Castle --- The Earl of Caledon presented the BEM to Connor Diocesan Development Manager Trevor Douglas at Hillsborough Castle --- The Rev Canon Tracey McRoberts MBE at her Investiture in Windsor Castle --- The Rev Canon Mark McConnell and Archdeacon Paul Dundas at General Synod --- The St Anne Trust Primary School Choir of the Year event in Belfast Cathedral.