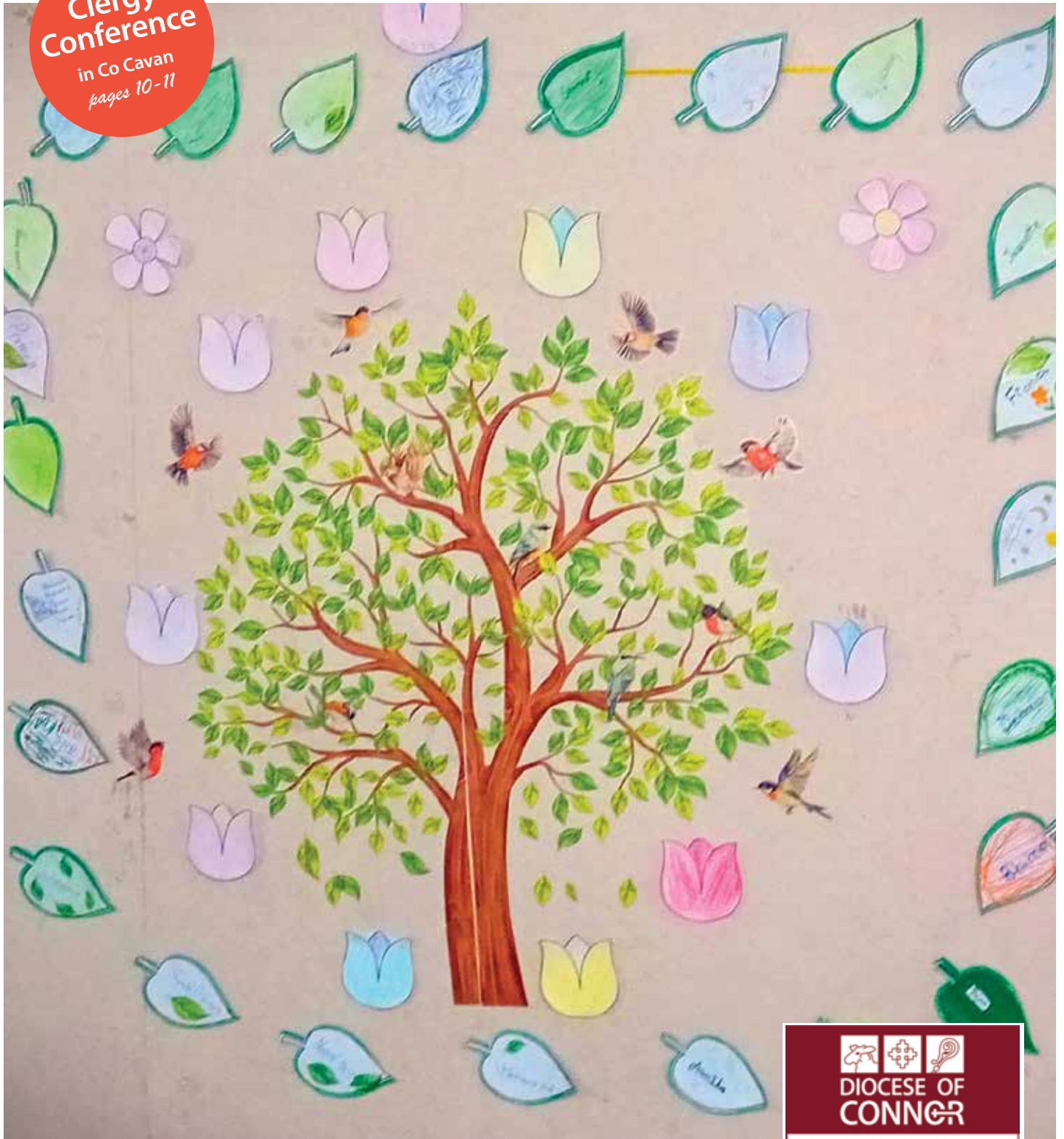


CONNOR

connections

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in Co Cavan
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Dr Daphne Davidson at home in Ballinderry; at the 90th birthday afternoon tea organised by the parish choir (right); and playing the organ in Ballinderry Church back in the 1950s (far right).



Choir treats Daphne as she turns 90!

Dr Daphne Davidson, assistant organist in Ballinderry Parish, is still tinkling the ivories despite celebrating her 90th birthday on November 29!

Daphne is currently filling in for regular organist, Robert Yarr, who has been unwell, and the parish choir organised a special treat for her big day.

Daphne has lived in Ballinderry since 1940, where her father, the Rev JB Lowe, was rector for 32 years. Sadly, Daphne's mother died when she was 10, and it was around then she joined the Ballinderry Parish Choir. Eighty years on, she is still a faithful member!

"I like music and I like hymns and I must say that in the choir I have some lovely friends," she says. Daphne played the piano as a child and was the church organist from age 14-25, when Robert took over. Daphne has been his assistant ever since.

"I am still nervous before I play, so I drive to the church to practise," she admits. "I get a lot of pleasure from playing the organ."

Daphne studied Medicine at Queen's University and worked in Endocrinology in the Royal Victoria Hospital, later moving to Geriatric medicine in the City Hospital after teaching part-time in the Department of Therapeutics at Queen's for four years when her children were young. She worked for her higher degree and was a consultant in the City Hospital until she retired at 60.

"I had wonderful colleagues, we all worked so well together, and that helps when you have a young family," she says.

Before her marriage, Daphne travelled to Tanzania with mission society BCMS. Mission was not new to the family - her brother John spent 17 years in East Africa.

Daphne recalls: "It was 1968. I had done my higher degree and thought this was my opportunity to experience medical work in Africa. I packed in my job and headed to Tanzania for six months, working in Mvumi Hospital near Dodoma.

"They didn't have a lot of facilities, but the staff were wonderful. This was a very impoverished area but the standard of care was good. They ran a nurses' training school and a laboratory training school."

Here, Daphne's work was mostly practical. "I was out of my comfort zone when I had to give anaesthetics," she says. "Occasionally I flew with a surgeon on an MAF plane to rural hospitals. I encountered so many severe illnesses including some I had never heard of. Often, by the time they got to the hospital, the patient was beyond treatment. They carried them for miles and miles. It was so sad."

Daphne recalls a terrifying ordeal when she began her journey back to Northern Ireland. "We were flying from Dodoma to Nairobi and stopped on the shores of Lake Victoria," she says. "When we took off again, the plane did not seem to rise. We were in the air just a few minutes when we came down at speed on an area of

scrubland. It was a scary toss - we didn't know when it would end. When we finally came to a stop, we were told to jump out quickly - the plane had lost most of a wing. There were no evacuation slides, but all got out safely. We waited eight hours in the heat and sun before another plane came to take us to Nairobi. It was a scary experience."

Daphne lost her husband Cecil just before Christmas two years ago. They had known each other from childhood, they were both members of Ballinderry Parish, where they married in 1972. They have two daughters, Barbara and Judith, and two grandchildren, Katy and Freddie.

On her 90th birthday, Ballinderry choir took Daphne to Brownlow House in Lurgan for afternoon tea. It was all a well-kept secret! Organist Robert joined them, along with the Rev Trevor Cleland and his wife Joanne and family members, and Daphne also enjoyed a family party the next day.

Daphne says she has always been involved in church life, taking Sunday School, the Youth Fellowship and the Good News Club. She and Cecil hosted missionary meetings and seniors' lunches in their home, and she has been in the Ladies' Fellowship for many years and continues to help with pastoral care in the parish. She has been a member of Select Vestry and of General Synod and Diocesan Synod.

"Looking back over 90 years, it doesn't seem long. An old hymn puts it well 'Life at best is very brief, like the falling of a leaf,'" she says.

"The rector, choir and my church friends are so kind and caring; indeed, they are like an extended family.

"I am so thankful to the Lord for my parents and the wonderful home in which I grew up, for my Cecil and for my loving and caring daughters and family. I thank God for the good health he has given me."

Quoting missionary CT Studd, Daphne adds: "Only one life, 'twill soon be past; only what's done for Christ will last."

Spring 2026

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Cover photo:

The Friendship Tree, created by young people in Nepal during a CMSI team visit.

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

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Look beyond ourselves



Dear Friends in Connor, I recently had the opportunity to visit my son in Australia, and while there to worship with Christians in a context different to our own.

On the Sunday before Christmas, we attended a traditional service of Nine Lessons and Carols in Brisbane Cathedral - not so different, you might think, but it was the middle of summer, and we sat in church singing carols and listening to Bible readings whilst fanning ourselves with our orders of service because we were so hot. I've never had to do that at the Carol Service in St Anne's!

That's a trivial example, but celebrating Christmas in the heat of summer prompted me to reflect on the fact that many Christians in other parts of the world have a very different experience of the life of faith to us. We make so many assumptions about our own experiences, and take so much for granted, that it can often be a useful exercise to stop to look at how the Lord is working in the lives of others in order that we may better appreciate the difference between the things that are familiar and the things that are important.

This year in Connor, I have asked our Diocesan Council for Mission to provide us with a project that we might engage in together during Lent to help us look beyond ourselves and think about the life of Christians in another part of the world. I'm very grateful to the Council and the Rev

Geoff Hamilton, Mission Director at SAMS, for working to put together a project that I hope will have something to connect with every parish in the diocese. Our project focuses on the work of Christians in the Diocese of Northern Argentina, and introduces us to a number of aspects of the life of the Church that we can support with our prayers and our resources. You'll find more details elsewhere in this magazine, so do take time to find out more and participate in the project for yourself!

I'm hoping that across every parish in Connor Diocese this Lent, parishioners will join me to look beyond ourselves and discover just a little bit more about what it means to be a follower of Jesus in rural Argentina. In doing so, I hope that we will also discover a little bit more about ourselves, our own life of faith and service, and about God's priorities for us as a diocese while we develop partnerships of prayer and support with believers on the other side of the world.

The lessons that we learn as we share in this project will, I trust, help us in the task of Growing Healthy Churches in Connor... and beyond!

Yours in His service,

+George

New Canon installed in Lisburn Cathedral



The Chapter of St Saviour, Christ Church Cathedral, Lisburn, at the installation of Canon James Boyd. Also pictured are Bishop George Davison; Registrar Canon William Taggart; and the preacher, the Ven Roderic West.

The Rev James Boyd, rector of Derryvolgie Parish, was installed as a Canon of Lisburn Cathedral on January 25.

James has been Derriaghy Rural Dean since 2019. He is a Connor Honorary Secretary and Connor Pioneer Advocate. He is married to Shirley, and they have two daughters. He is a former curate of Magheralin with Dollingstown; rector of

Holy Trinity, Dromore, Co Tyrone; and vicar of Willowfield Parish, Belfast.

James has been rector of Derryvolgie since November 2018. He was installed to the Chapter of St Saviour, Lisburn, as Prebendary of Kilroot by the Dean of Connor, the Very Rev Sam Wright. The preacher at the service was the Ven Roderic West.



The Rev Geoff Hamilton and the Rev Peter Jones with members of the local community in a cornfield in Misión Chaqueña in the Chaco.

Growing relations in Argentina

Peter Jones, rector of Mossley Parish, has been Chair of SAMS (the South American Mission Society) for three years. In November, he travelled to Chile and Northern Argentina with the Rev Geoff Hamilton, recently appointed Mission Director of SAMS.

“The purpose of the trip was to reconnect with people and to build relationships,” said Peter.

It also happens that Connor Council for Mission is exploring options following the ending of its partnership with Yei in South Sudan, and a partnership with the Diocese of Northern Argentina is being considered. The chair of the Council, the Ven Paul Dundas, and the Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev George Davison, have met with the Rev Dany Lescano, Vicar General of the Diocese of Northern Argentina.

The diocese comprises 202 parishes - 11 located in urban centres, but the majority are within indigenous communities.

Peter and Geoff began their South American visit in Chile on November 17 – the Diocese of Down and Dromore has a partnership with the Diocese of Santiago. After five days, they flew via Buenos Aires to Salta, one of the larger cities in North Argentina, for a further five days. Peter had previously visited Salta with a SAMS mission team in 2003. “That was my first introduction to SAMS, and my interest has remained and developed,” he said.

From the Chilean capital Santiago, Peter and Geoff flew to the desert port of Antofagasta in northern Chile. “The vicar

who collected us was clearly emotional,” Peter said. “He said we were the first visitors they had received in quite some time.” Antofagasta has a population roughly the same as Belfast, but is marked by an ever-expanding shanty town on its outskirts. During their visit, Peter and Geoff met with the Select Vestry of the small but committed Church of St Andrew.

Back in Santiago, they visited the Theological College (CEP) and met the new Bishop of Santiago and other strategic leaders. They also spent time with clergy and Bible translators.

Moving to Salta in Northern Argentina Diocese, they met with Cecilia Valdiviezo, who was supported by SAMS for many years and is now a teacher. Cecilia hosted a barbecue at her home and spent the first day, Saturday, with Peter and Geoff.

INDIGENOUS

On the Sunday morning, they had breakfast with Chris Wallis, an Englishman who translates the Bible into local languages for the indigenous communities, and his colleague Marcos Humacata, who is being trained to do the same work.

“I really loved meeting Chris and Marcos. They are deeply humble men wholly



Chris Wallis translates the Bible into the languages of the indigenous communities.

committed to sharing God’s Word in indigenous languages,” said Peter.

Later, the visitors met up with Alec Deane from the SIWOK project, who took them in a jeep to Chaco, deep in Amazonia, an area of intense heat and humidity with an abundance of mosquitoes - “Yes, I was eaten alive!” said Peter.

“Alec is working alongside the indigenous communities, passing on valuable skills in agriculture. One example is the ‘Sowing for the Future’ initiative, which is helping 4,500 Wichí children and young people in 45 rural schools to learn gardening, soil care, and nutrition by creating green classrooms.”

Peter and Geoff saw some of the SIWOK projects at first-hand, and spent a night in Chaco before returning to Salta, where they met with Vicar General Lescano.

SOUP KITCHEN

“He wanted to show us the urban side of the diocese and took us to his old church, St Andrew’s, the very church I visited in 2003 and helped to run a soup kitchen for the homeless and those addicted to drugs,” Peter said.

“After all this time, the soup kitchen is still going and that really warmed my heart. I asked if it would be open for Christmas and was told that it would cost around US\$120 to provide all the meals. Thanks to support from a parish in Connor, we were able to send £200 to cover the cost of the Christmas dinner, and we received a wonderful video back with all those who had enjoyed the dinner saying a heartfelt thank you to the folk in Connor.

“They are doing such good work there. Not just feeding people, but the minister Hans from Amsterdam and his wife Priscilla will take time to talk to them, so their social and spiritual needs are also being met, it is an incredible place.”

The Vicar General also took them to



The Rev Geoff Hamilton, SAMS Mission Director, second from right, with Leonardo, Juan and Alec Deane in a wood workshop in the Chaco where items for SIWOK Crafts are made.



Peter revisited the Soup Kitchen he once worked in at St Paul's Church in Salta.



Passing on agricultural skills through the SIWOK project.

another church, St Paul's. "This church has a small but dedicated population. It is in the heart of an area of social deprivation and has been robbed twice, yet the people of St Paul's are working to establish a more profound connection with the community around them," Peter explained.

Illustrating this point in a very human manner, the Vicar General took time to kick football with the children playing in the street outside the church. A new vicar is soon to take on the task of outreach and mission at St Paul's.

Peter said the Diocese of Northern Argentina has various projects in planning. One vision is for a Christian Retreat Centre to be based in a property it owns in the mountains, which Peter and Geoff drove up to visit.

LENT

Connor Council for Mission is running a Lent Project with SAMS and the Diocese of Northern Argentina. "I think there are a lot of similarities between the dioceses in terms of scale, number of churches and projects, and I think there are a variety of ventures planned in Northern Argentina with which the people in Connor could

engage – the Bible translations, social and economic projects working within deprived communities and with drug addicts and alcoholics – alcoholism is a major issue in the indigenous communities," Peter said.

"We can offer prayerful support and practical and financial support - the cost of the Christmas dinner at St Andrew's shows that a little can go a long way."

Looking back on this visit to Northern Argentina, Peter said it had been very rewarding to see the variety of ministries that are taking place and the depth of the passion the people in the Church there have to see the Church grow and flourish.

"The strategic challenges are enormous in terms of oversight," he added. "It's a case of determining what can realistically be achieved and working closely with Dany [the Vicar General], who carries immense responsibility for a vast area. We would like to support all potential projects, but we need to be realistic about what can be done and what is achievable."

- **Please see page 13**

Marathon fundraiser for Parkinson's

Agherton Parish is supporting Rebekah Ferry as she prepares to run the London Marathon in aid of Parkinson's - an illness her mum Carol has lived with for more than 20 years.

Rebekah's dad Malcolm is rector in Agherton. Rebekah said: "I've seen first-hand the impact of Parkinson's through my mum, who was diagnosed with early-onset Parkinson's over 20 years ago, when I was only five."

Rebekah has already completed the London Triathlon and the Amsterdam Marathon in preparation for the London challenge.

The Ferry family has spoken openly about living with Parkinson's, raising awareness within the church and wider community. Their story featured in *Connor Connections* in summer 2024.

Carol, along with some church volunteers, organises a monthly Parkinson's drop-in centre to help those who live with the condition.

You can support Rebekah's fundraiser online at <https://bit.ly/3Z29tuF>



The Rev Malcolm Ferry, his daughter Rebekah, and wife Carol at the London Triathlon 2025.

Appointments to Blackstaff Mission Area and the Glens

The Rev Alan McCracken will be introduced as Priest-in-Charge of the Grouped Parishes of Ardclinis, Tickmacrean, Layde and Cushendun at a service on Thursday March 12 in St Mary's, Ardclinis, Largy Road, Carnlough at 7.30pm.

The Rev Gareth Campbell, curate of Christ Church, Lisburn, will be introduced as Minister-in-Charge of the Parishes of St Mary Magdalene, St Aidan and St Simon, Belfast (Blackstaff Mission Area) at a service on Tuesday March 24 at 7.30pm in St Simon's, Donegall Road.

Standing room only on David's last day!



The Rev Canon David Ferguson and his wife Margaret at David's final service in Ballycastle.

The Parish of Ramoan and Culfeightrin has said farewell to the Rev Canon David Ferguson and his wife Margaret following David's retirement after almost 15 years of ministry in the parish.

David's final service in September saw a packed church at St James', Ballycastle – it was standing room only!

Surrounded by many of his family and friends, David's last Sunday was one which paid tribute to all that he achieved during his time in Ramoan and Culfeightrin, including the refurbishment of church buildings and the creation of a Parish Centre which has become a focal point for the church and the wider community.

Among those taking part in the service were young people whom David had baptised in his early days in Ballycastle. His personal ministry was valued by all those with whom he spent time, whether of the parish or not and he and Margaret will be sorely missed by many in the local area.

After the service, a lunch was enjoyed in the Parish Centre by more than 200 people, bringing together so many whose lives had been touched by David and Margaret over the years.

In Remembrance



Pictured at a Service of Remembrance on Remembrance Sunday at Craigs' Parish Church, Cullybackey, are, from left: Cadet Instructor Sergeant Karen Ashe, Cadet Sergeant Ben Ashe, the Rev Ivan Bond, Cadet Corporal Reece Asquith, and Cadet Instructor Lieutenant Amanda Roxborough.



Ste Fitzgerald, Connor's North Belfast Centre of Mission, and James Turner, The Hub, serve up the barbecue at the free student lunch at St Stephen's Church on October 21 2025.

Free lunches - 'a real blessing to students'

A partnership between St Stephen's, Millfield, and The Hub Chaplaincy which supports students in the area by providing them with free lunches is going from strength to strength.

The student lunches at St Stephen's were established in 2016, when a back room was opened up in the church to offer sandwiches to the young people. It has grown over the years, with up to 120 students now coming along on any one day.

The Hub provides all the food and staff, and St Stephen's provides the facilities and back-up. Parish Development Officer Heather Carson said: "We host the lunch, our parishioners underpin all the activities in prayer, and our staff work with the team from The Hub in serving the food and chatting with students and staff from Belfast Met.

"We have had some lovely messages from parents of students who have said that their young people really benefit from the friendship that builds with their peers and the team during the lunches."

When we called at a Tuesday lunch in October, Amy Atwell from The Hub was sheltering under an umbrella beside a barbecue where her colleague James Turner was cooking some very tempting burgers and sausages. Following the half term break, the cooking and dining would move indoors.

"On a good day, we would have more than 100 students," Amy said. "Usually, they



The Hub's Amy Atwell and Duncan Burnett ready to serve and chat to students at St Stephen's.

just grab a burger and go and sit down. We have lots of different conversations with them, some have told us that if they did not come here, they would not eat lunch as the prices in the college canteen and the cost of shopping have really gone up.

"Some students also struggle to integrate and to make friends. One parent wrote to us to say that her daughter had been eating her lunch alone, but when she started coming here, she made new friends."



The student lunches at St Stephen's draw a crowd every week, with up to 120 being fed on any one day.

Amy said some of the students just appreciate the chance to share with those at St Stephen's. "We have been able to build relationships with people who have come back over the years, as well as make new friendships. Often the conversation opens up when the student asks us why we do this."

Duncan Burnett from The Hub said things are now more difficult financially for the students. "When I went to university, four out of the six years I was there were paid for. Now there's student loans, and so many people with degrees, it is hard for them to get a start."

Duncan's initial role was to stand out in the street to direct the students to the church for the lunch. "Now there is no need, as more and more students are turning up."

"It's a great honour to be able to talk to the students about their hopes and their dreams. We have conversations about many issues," Duncan said.

"This is a very diverse community. The Met is doing language classes for refugees, so we have students from countries like Eritrea and Syria come for lunch, and we provide veggie burgers to ensure they have a choice of something to eat."

The rector of St Stephen's, the Rev Canon Jim Carson, said that the lunches are open to students and lecturers. "Through this, we have developed relationships with the college, and the media studies students now use our facilities."

"The lunch really means a lot to some of the young people and their families. The parent who wrote to thank us also included a donation towards the food, which shows just how important this ministry is for her and her daughter."

"This is a wee bit of personal space for people if they want it. The guys helping here have really good conversations, both



Ste Fitzgerald and the Rev Canon James Carson.



That barbecue is smoking well!



Students take time to sit and chat inside St Stephen's with their food.



Students Leah and Olivia enjoy coming to St Stephen's for their weekly free lunch.

spiritually and practically."

We chatted to some of the students who were enjoying their lunch in St Stephen's. "I come every week, it is so nice to have a meal like this, it really warms the heart," commented Sophie.

Ryan said that there aren't many places to sit and relax in the college. "Students are struggling financially and this really helps. It's also a nice cosy space," Ryan added.

Sadbh had been coming on a Tuesday for about a month. "The cafeteria is expensive, so there is a big demand for something like this," she said.

Marie added: "I like the way the volunteers take time to speak to us. They are very welcoming," while Abbey commented: "They will ask us about our courses, even chatting to the students who don't come inside. It is all very relaxed."

Leah said the lunches really help her to save money as shopping adds up to so much, while her friend Olivia added: "Here we are always met with such friendly faces."

Heather Carson said that the ministry is growing. "We also go on a Thursday lunchtime to Queen's Elms BT1 accommodation across the road from St Stephen's with 'donuts and drinks,' she said.

"This is proving a real blessing to students and staff as friendship and a listening ear is what many young adults need."

"We have also got a meal starting for young adults happening monthly before our Sunday evening service and we are throwing the invite across the city to local and international young adults to see who we can gather in."

Inspiring visit to Nepal



The Rev Jacob Mercer, left, with members of the CMS Ireland team in Nepal, including Fiona and Roger Thompson, fourth and third from right.

The Rev Jacob Mercer, rector of St Brigid's, Glengormley, visited Nepal for the first time last November, returning home inspired by the people he met and by the Himalayan landscape.

Jacob was part of a larger team of eight which also included St Brigid's parishioner Jeanette Alan, Fiona Thompson from the United Parish of Ballynure and Ballyeaston (Ballyclare), and Roger Thompson, Partnership Co-ordinator with CMS Ireland.

St Brigid's has had a connection with SD Church in Kathmandu for 30 years. "We have a 'Pray for Nepal' banner in our church as well as a Lord's Prayer banner in Batik and Psalm 23 in Nepali framed in our lounge," Jacob said. "Recently, we've made a new CMSI Local Mission Partner in Nepal as well. As rector of the parish, I went with the intention of representing the whole congregation and providing some teaching and spiritual care as well."

Jacob said that since the last visit which included St Brigid's members, SD Church has moved from its original premises to a temporary site. "Nepal's constitution has changed to outlaw public proselytising

by any religious group, making Christian evangelism much riskier," he said. "My aim in going was to encourage my brothers and sisters in Nepal and to be encouraged by them. All I had heard about them was so inspiring and I was eager to see it for myself and to tell them that what they're doing is a challenge and inspiration to us on the other side of the world."

Each day the team met to read the Bible, talk and pray, before meeting leaders, staff and community members from SD Church, SDSS, LTD, CMS Asia, and HDCS – for security reasons, names of these organisations cannot be printed in full.

"It was a busy and tiring schedule but every brother or sister I met felt like family," Jacob said. "We learned a lot about the work of the Gospel and Christian mission on the ground both in Kathmandu and in Lamjung, we visited two churches and joined in their worship. It was a privilege to

speak about Mount Zion at a church in the shadow of the Himalayas!"

The team stayed at a guest house owned by a western Christian couple and managed by a 'kind and generous' Nepali family. "It had a fantastic rooftop terrace perfect for open air breakfasts!" Jacob added.

"The highlight of the trip was meeting face-to-face and sharing meals with people I'd only seen on Zoom or in photographs. It was such an encouragement, but a secondary highlight was the once-in-a-lifetime chance to see the Himalayas."

Jacob has four young children and said the biggest challenge had been leaving his family. "It was a long trip, so a big thanks to my wife, parents-in-law and sister-in-law for making it possible," he said.

The visit had a number of benefits, he added. "In one sense, we will continue supporting SD Church and our local mission partner financially - although our gifts to them are small in the grand scheme of things - and in prayer. But the greatest



The CMS Ireland team with students at the ABBS school.



Children and young people enjoying the puppet show at the ABBS school

benefit, I think, was being able to go there and tell them that what they are doing matters. Hearing this from others who see you and are sincerely inspired by you is a huge confidence boost. I hope they felt that from us!

“For me as rector of St Brigid’s, it has given me lots to chew on regarding how we establish and maintain a vision for worldwide mission and mission partnerships within the congregation. I hope we can return to Nepal soon and that new people will join the team.

“It’s also inspired me to plan visits to other partners we support in North Africa. I’m often so busy and focused on life in Glengormley, it’s important to lift my eyes and remember our partners in the Gospel across the world.”

For Fiona, this was also a first visit to Nepal. She described the snow-capped, jagged mountains, crazy city traffic, precipitous bends, delicious Momos (dumplings), sweet Nepali tea and colourful prayer flags as ‘breathtaking and exciting.’ “But what left the deepest impression was meeting and making friends with the Nepali people themselves,” Fiona said.

“As a former primary teacher and currently SEN Learning Support Assistant in a secondary school, my main contribution to the team was to prepare crafts and activities for the children and young adults we would meet on our visit at two of the projects in Kathmandu, SDSS and the ABBS school.

“This was indeed a challenge, as it quickly became clear there was a wide range of ages and abilities - many with SEN/autism, others receiving medical treatment, with limited mobility (eg wheelchairs, callipers) and some with burns from cooking fires.

“I found making a Friendship Tree was the perfect all-age activity as everyone was able to contribute in some way. This involved creating a large wall display of a



Painting a flower for the Friendship Tree.

tree - with the children sticking on leaves which were decorated with names and positive messages, multi-coloured flowers and birds. This was a lovely reminder of our visit, and the tree would grow as each new child added their leaf to the display.”

The team also performed a puppet show, translated from English to Nepali. “Watching faces light up with laughter, children proudly adding their coloured leaf or flower to the tree and bubbles filling the room were very precious memories - no language barrier here, just everyone having fun,” Fiona said.

“This was even more poignant when the team learnt how so many children with physical and learning difficulties often faced stigma and neglect in their own community. Projects in SDSS and the ABBS school provide practical physical and educational support in an atmosphere of safe and unconditional love.”

Fiona continued: “I was both humbled and inspired by the dedication and sacrifice of the Christians we met and in particular Tulsa Sharma, co-ordinator of the ABBS school... today her staff team provides services to over 60 students aged four to 29 years old.

“I left Kathmandu with much to think and pray about, but my overall impression was of smiling, happy faces despite so many challenges, plus the importance of time spent just having fun and getting to make new friends.”



Dean Stephen Forde with Esther Miller and Gillian McGaughey who unveiled the commemorative plaques in St Anne’s Cathedral, Belfast.

Commemorative plaques unveiled

Two commemorative plaques have been unveiled in St Anne’s Cathedral, Belfast, listing the names of those in whose memory, and in thanksgiving, the new chairs in the Cathedral Nave were given.

The 500 new chairs - 200 cushioned chairs and 300 ergonomic wooden chairs - were dedicated by the Most Rev John McDowell, Archbishop of Armagh, at the Cathedral’s 120th anniversary service on June 2 2024.

The Nave’s original wooden chairs had seated capacity congregations and individuals seeking prayer and solace for 120 years, but were never considered comfortable and were difficult to move for concerts and events which provide the Cathedral with vital income.

The Board agreed to replace the chairs, and many were given in memory of family members and members of the Cathedral community. Others were given in thanksgiving. A number of the commercial companies who supply the Cathedral also made significant contributions.

On Sunday, November 30, the plaques listing the names of those commemorated by the gift of chairs were unveiled by Esther Miller and Gillian McGaughey of the Cathedral community, with the Very Rev Stephen Forde, Dean of Belfast.

MU knit chemo hats

Members of Carrmoney Mothers’ Union have been knitting chemo hats to bring warmth, comfort and love to those undergoing cancer treatment. These hats are made with care and compassion, offering both practical support and a reminder that no one faces their journey alone. Finished hats can be donated through your local Mothers’ Union branch or delivered directly to hospitals and cancer support centres.



Clergy and staff from the Dioceses of Connor and Armagh listen to key speaker Prof David Ford at the 2025 Clergy Conference in the Slieve Russell Hotel, Co Cavan.

Connor Clergy Conference 2025

The 2025 Connor Diocesan Clergy Conference in the Slieve Russell Hotel, Co Cavan, was a little different, as it was held in the company of clergy and staff from Armagh Diocese.

The Connor Conference is held every three years and the 2025 event ran from November 4-6. The key speaker was Prof David Ford, who was the Regius Professor of Divinity in the University of Cambridge until his retirement in 2015. Delegates also heard from the Rev John Dunlop, a retired minister in the Presbyterian Church of Ireland.

Clergy from both dioceses attended sessions led by the speakers, and there were also some separate gatherings of each diocese.

Delegates were welcomed on the Tuesday afternoon, November 4, by the Archbishop of Armagh, the Most Rev John McDowell, who also introduced Prof Ford for his first of four sessions on the Gospel of John.

Following a break for coffee, the Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev George Davison, led an informal session for Connor clergy, before the dioceses came together again for

evening prayer.

The second day began with a joint service of Holy Communion, followed by a second session on John's Gospel with Prof Ford. After morning coffee, the conference welcomed Rev Dunlop who spoke engagingly on the theme 'Bonding and Bridging.'

There was free time for all conference attendees on Wednesday afternoon, and following dinner, delegates from both dioceses came together again for the third of Prof Ford's sessions before the day closed with Compline.

Prof Ford delivered his fourth and final talk after Morning Worship on Thursday, and following coffee, the dioceses split for a final diocesan session each.

The Connor clergy heard from a number of speakers as they were encouraged to be outward-looking in their ministry.



Key speaker Prof David Ford.

Paula Ferguson, Senior Relationship Manager with Alpha NI, spoke about the resources offered by Alpha and the success the programme has in reaching those who would not be church-goers.

Ian Hannah and Rebecca Parnell from the organisation Safe Families gave what Bishop George described as a 'very powerful presentation.'

The Chair of Connor's Council for Mission, Archdeacon Paul Dundas, spoke about future diocesan missional outreach and a proposed Lent Project for 2026, working with SAMS and the Diocese of Northern Argentina.

The Rev Cameron Mack, recently appointed as Diocesan Liturgical Officer, introduced the Liturgical Advisory Committee's Resource *Journey Through the Church Year*, copies of which were distributed to all present, as well as a resource on Singing the Canticles.

Conference ended with some closing words from Bishop George who also led closing devotions, followed by lunch before the clergy returned to their parishes, equipped with much food for thought on how to continue the diocesan theme of 'growing healthy churches.'



Bishop George Davison and Archbishop John McDowell leading a Service of Holy Communion during the Conference.



Clergy from Connor and Armagh dioceses listen to Prof David Ford at the 2025 Clergy Conference.



Canon James Carson, the Rev Aaron McAllister and the Rev Claire Thompson.



The Revs Jonny Campbell-Smyth, Andrew Irvine and Gareth Campbell.



The Revs Brian Lacey, Adrian Bell and Archdeacon Barry Forde.



Bishop George Davison and his PA Lorraine Ogilby.



The Revs Derek Harrington, Nathan Irvine and Brendan O'Loane.



Archbishop John McDowell with speaker Prof David Ford (centre) and Dean Stephen Forde.



The Revs Anne Locke and Louise Bowes.



The Rev John Dunlop addresses the Conference.



The Rev Canon Kevin Graham MBE DL and his wife Cheryl at Westminster Abbey on December 5.

Kevin and Cheryl are guests at 'joyous' Royal Carol Service

The Rev Canon Kevin Graham MBE DL, and his wife Cheryl, were guests at HRH The Princess of Wales' Christmas Carol Service 'Together at Christmas' at Westminster Abbey on December 5.

On arrival at the Abbey, each guest was invited to complete a link to form a paper chain on the Christmas tree outside the Abbey, which was later read by the Wales' family on their arrival for the service.

Kevin, rector of St Bartholomew's Parish Church, Stranmillis, and his wife were seated in the South Transept of the Abbey, behind the Royal Household. Kevin, Cheryl and four others were there as nominees of the Lord Lieutenant of the City and County Borough of Belfast, Dame Fionnuala Jay-O'Boyle DBE DStJ DDL.

Speaking after the service, Kevin said: "The service combined the best of traditional Carols and some more modern orchestrations, alongside the Abbey Choir with readings and reflections shared by well-known actors and HRH The Prince of Wales."

He said it had been a joyous and celebratory event.

"It was a lovely way to mark the beginning of the season of Carol Services, with a particular focus on kindness and showing love to others, all in a beautifully candlelit Abbey," Kevin added.



Connor Diocesan Youth Officer David Armstrong, Rob Harrison (St Brigid's, Glengormley), Richard Lyttle (All Saints', Belfast), Jonny Diamond (Gathered), Maddie Todd (Church of the Good Shepherd, Monkstown) and Laura Kilpatrick (Lisburn Cathedral) at the Growing Young Disciples conference.

Joy of shared passion for youth ministry

Six representatives from Connor joined 400 children, youth and families workers and volunteers at Yarnfield Conference Centre in Staffordshire in January for the annual four-day Growing Young Disciples conference.

Delegates came from all over the world, writes **Diocesan Youth Officer Dave Armstrong**. "During the morning sessions, Adam Thrift, Associate Minister at All Saints', Crowborough, helped us to explore the role the local Church plays in youth and children's ministry. We saw how the Church itself, and the message that the Church has to proclaim, is the very answer to many of the challenges that young people face today.

"We were reminded that every Church member has a role in helping young people to know and grow in the stable truth the Church has to offer, and that our responsibility is to see ourselves more as 'inheritors rather than investors' when it comes to sharing the Gospel through word and sacrament with young people.

"Following the morning sessions, we divided into several teaching 'streams,' led by key voices in children's and youth ministries and by church leaders. The five streams focused on areas such as 'discipling young people to stand firm for Jesus,' 'discipling young people to be set apart in an unholy world,' 'foundations of building children and youth ministries that will last' and 'learning to lead in children's and youth ministry.' As the representatives from Connor joined across the various streams, each felt we had come away with significant learning that would greatly help us in our own contexts.

"More than 20 one-off seminars in the

afternoons were a great opportunity to hear teaching on specific areas of ministry and to share thoughts and ideas with others. Topics included dating, evangelism, equipping parents, mental health, identity, schools' ministries, social media and more.

"There were opportunities to relax and have fun with friends old and new, and during our evening sessions, it was a joy to join together in worship, prayer and being built up in God's Word.

"The theme of the conference was 'Living as Exiles,' and as we studied 1 Peter, Andy Prime, Pastor of Gracemount Community Church, Edinburgh, reminded us of what it means to be brought from exile and into the family of God. These sessions not only gave us wonderful encouragement to be passed on to our young people but also refreshed us in our ministries to 'stand fast' even amid trials and disappointments.

"While the Growing Young Disciples conference gave me some of the best teaching and encouragement I have experienced at any conference, one of the highlights for me was the joy of meeting people from all around the world who share a passion for youth and children's ministries. We were able to spend time with a large delegation from Ireland, spanning multiple different denominations.

"I also had amazing conversations with brothers and sisters in Christ, who had travelled a great distance to be part of the

conference. As we worshipped together and shared our passions for young people, I found myself leaving the conference with great hope and a sustaining joy for the work that God has called us to in Connor."

Connor delegate **Jonny Diamond** writes: "My hope for the conference was to be refreshed by the teaching and have practical tips and new ideas about how to engage with children and young people about faith.

"What stood out to me about the conference was seeing such a large number of people who love young people and children and want to share the Good News of Jesus effectively with them. A lot of people would say youth ministry is for 20-30 year olds, but to see such a wide range of ages was so encouraging!

"My highlights were spending time discussing youth and children's ministry with people from right across the UK and Ireland, but more specifically with our Irish friends and being able to spend time in fellowship with them over the four days.

"My experience at the conference has given me a fresh reminder of how Christ and His Word need to be central in all that we do with our children and young people. It is easy just to entertain children and young people, but if we have the greatest news in the world, why would we hide behind games and not share it with those in our care?"

Richard Lyttle, another Connor delegate, writes: "The GYD Conference is a great time to get away from the busyness of ministry and to focus and reflect on why we do what we do.

"A constant takeaway I have from the conference is the need to be patient in the work of making disciples, but also the need to be equipping and praying for parents. From the first conference I went to in 2022, I was shocked at how early a child's worldview begins to shape, and it changed how I view the importance of deep and relevant discipleship for children as young as three years old.

"The conference is a must for those in youth and kids' work for three simple reasons. It's a chance to chat with people facing the same work as you, it's a chance to be refreshed in the ministry you are doing, and a chance for you to sit underneath the Bible and hear the voice of Jesus."

If you would be interested in finding out more about the conference, or would like to attend in future years, please get in touch with David Armstrong at davidarmstrong@connordiocese.org.

'Be the Difference' this Lent

This Lent, Connor Diocese is partnering with SAMS, the South American Mission Society, to support the Church in Northern Argentina.

Resources are available to help resource parishes and individuals who answer the call to 'Be the Difference' this Lent.

The project is initiated by Connor Council for Mission with the support of the Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev George Davison.

On pages 4-5, you can read a report of a recent visit to Northern Argentina by the Rev Peter Jones, rector of Mossley and Chair of SAMS, which helps bring to life the reality for people living in this part of Argentina.

Bishop George stated: "This Lent, I warmly invite you to walk alongside the Church in Northern Argentina, among the remote communities of the Chaco and in the city of Salta. The Chaco is a land of rich biodiversity and diverse indigenous peoples, yet it faces deep social and environmental challenges.

"In Salta, St Paul's is a small church with a big heart, offering hope in a complex and marginalised neighbourhood. As we journey together, may God inspire us and guide us to serve with compassion and joy."

A leaflet published by the Council for Mission and SAMS outlines the various projects this Lent initiative and any future partnership with Northern

Argentina Diocese would hope to support.

These are:

- *Growing skills and hope in the Chaco* - The 'Sowing for the Future' initiative helps 4,500 Wichí children and young people in 45 rural schools learn gardening, soil care, and nutrition by creating green classrooms. Led by Wichí educators, each five-month cycle costs £625, covering training, seeds and tools. Together, participants gain knowledge, grow healthy food, and create a sustainable future.
- *Leadership investment - Centro de Formacion Anglicano (CeFA)* - The Diocese of Northern Argentina is committed to providing practical theological training for both clergy and lay people. At CeFA, participants engage with Scripture while addressing pressing cultural challenges, such as addiction, all within the context of their own culture and language. This vital ministry equips indigenous leaders and lay people from diverse educational backgrounds, helping them to serve faithfully in their local churches and communities.
- *Wichí discipleship initiative* - Many Wichí people live between the Bermejo and Pilcomayo rivers in northern Argentina. Chris and Helena Wallis have spent decades making

God's Word accessible through translation and

training. One example is the Vida Abundante Bible course translated into Wichí. This 18-session course combines self-study and small group learning led by local tutors, helping people grow in faith. Each workbook costs £6, giving Wichí Christians an opportunity to grow in their knowledge of Christ.

- *Urban Church Plant San Pablo* - In Salta, San Pablo (St Paul's) Anglican Church shines as a beacon of hope amid poverty, drugs, and brokenness. Through acts of compassion and words of encouragement, God's love reaches even the most forgotten corners, restoring hearts and transforming lives.

This Lent Appeal invites us to slow our pace and walk more intentionally. "As the Diocese of Connor and the Diocese of Northern Argentina walk together, let's offer our God-given gifts to one another, empowered by the Holy Spirit. In doing so, we serve as one body, faithfully seeking to fulfil God's purposes," the appeal leaflet states.

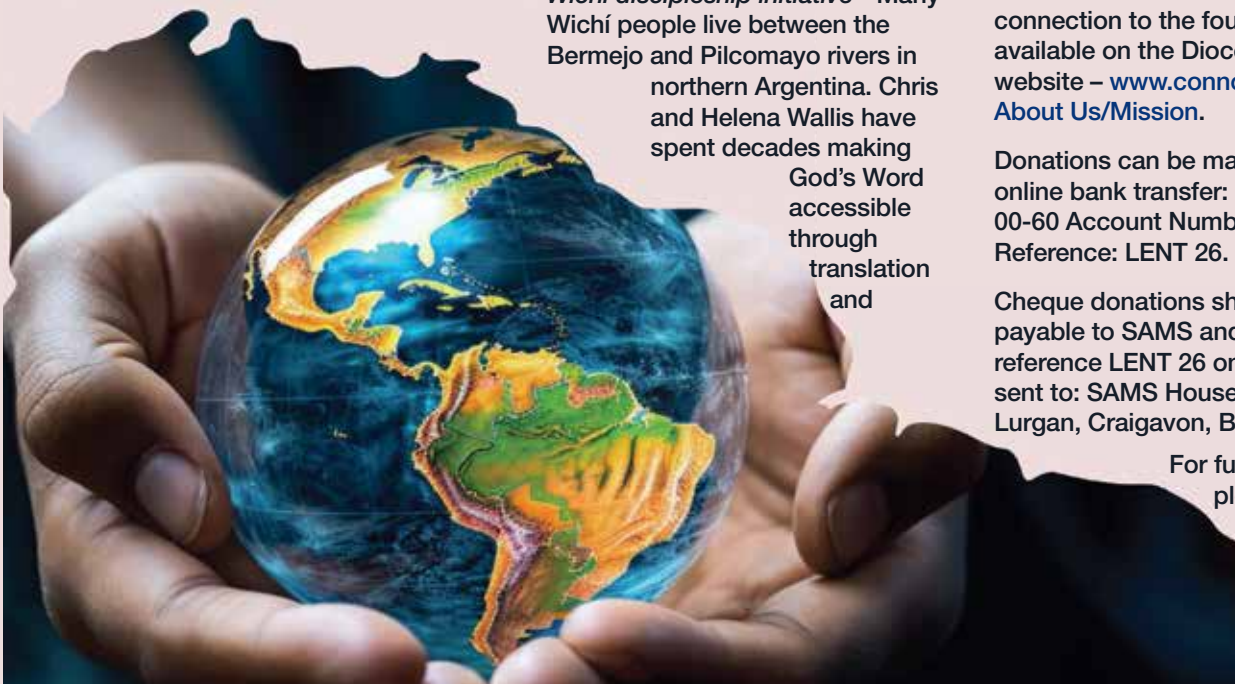
The Rev Geoff Hamilton, Mission Director of SAMS, visited Northern Argentina with Peter Jones, and is available to give a current update on the Diocese of Northern Argentina. Contact SAMS on 028 38310144 or office@samsireland.com.

A fundraising resource, prayer resource and short video offering a visual connection to the four projects are available on the Diocese of Connor website – [www.connor.anglican.org/About Us/Mission](http://www.connor.anglican.org/AboutUs/Mission).

Donations can be made to SAMS via online bank transfer: Sort Code: 98-00-60 Account Number: 52908134 Reference: LENT 26.

Cheque donations should be made payable to SAMS and include the reference LENT 26 on the back and sent to: SAMS House, 1 Irwin Crescent, Lurgan, Craigavon, BT66 7EZ.

For further information, please contact the Ven Paul Dundas, Chair of Connor Council for Mission on paul_dundas@yahoo.com.



MBE for Warden at Belfast Cathedral

Congratulations to Phyllis Forster who was awarded an MBE in the King's New Year Honours for services to the community in Northern Ireland.

Phyllis is a member of St Anne's Cathedral, Belfast, where she is People's Warden and a member of the Cathedral Board. Phyllis was the first female to hold the role of Warden in the Cathedral and followed in the footsteps of her late father, Tom Dawson, who also was a Warden and Board member.

A native of Belfast, she has been a lifelong parishioner of St Anne's and her two brothers, as well as her two sons, are all former Head Choristers.

Phyllis works part-time in a managerial position, and earlier in her career was a Marie Curie nurse on the home care team and in later years a lecturer in Belfast Met.

She has volunteered with a wide range of organisations in different fields for more than 40 years and said the award of MBE was 'a great privilege.'

"Because I enjoy working in the community and helping other people, I never thought about my work being recognised and so I feel very honoured," Phyllis said.



Phyllis Forster MBE in her role as People's Warden during a service in St Anne's Cathedral, Belfast, where she is a lifelong parishioner.



Terry Pateman OBE and his wife Brenda at Windsor Castle following his investiture by Prince William.

Proud moment for Terry and Brenda

Belfast Cathedral parishioners Terry and Brenda Pateman were at Windsor Castle on December 10, where Terry received an OBE from HRH The Prince of Wales.

Terry, who is also a member of the Cathedral Board, was awarded the OBE in the King's Birthday Honours list for 2025 for services to grassroots sport and community relations. He has been involved in all aspects of administering the Northern Amateur Football League on a voluntary basis from 1965 to the present day.

Terry said receiving the honour from Prince William had been 'one of the proudest moments' of his life and acknowledged the 'incredible support' that made it possible.

Carnmoney Pilgrimage in the footsteps of St Patrick

A group of 11 from Carnmoney Parish travelled to Crossgar in September for a pilgrimage following in the footsteps of St Patrick. This was Carnmoney's third parish pilgrimage.

Morning Worship and Evening Prayer were held in the lounge at Tobar Mhuire Retreat and Conference Centre, Crossgar. A different member of the group led the worship each time.

On Monday September 22, the pilgrims visited Inch Abbey for a picnic lunch before a guided tour of Down Museum and the Old Gaol House. The following day, they visited the St Patrick Centre, Down Cathedral, St Patrick's Grave and Saul Church.

Wednesday was a 'day off' and some people headed to places like Newcastle for shopping; to the National Trust property and grounds of Castleward, and others enjoyed walking at Kearney's Point near Portaferry.

On the Thursday, the group visited Ballydugan Viking Medieval Settlement, Struell Wells and Nendrum Monastic site where they experienced longbow archery, watched 'the Vikings' use their axes, swords, shields and spears; and saw examples of what their coins and jewellery looked like.

That afternoon, the vicar, the Rev Andy Heber, led an outdoor service with the

pilgrims in a circle giving thanks for those who chanted psalms in Nendrum Monastery in times past.

The group enjoyed good food, evening games, meals out and the Prayer Garden and other walks in the grounds of Tobar Mhuire, and there was sadness when, after Morning Worship on the Friday, it was time to return home.

(Report by Alfred Knox).



Carnmoney pilgrims retrace the footsteps of St Patrick. Missing from the picture is the Rev Andy Heber, vicar.



Glenavy Parish presents a cheque for £3,500 to representatives of the Belfast City Hospital Renal Unit, proceeds of the October 2025 pop-up shop.



The pop-up shop is a dream come true for organiser Lyn Cassidy. Photo: Reg Haslett.

Thousands raised by Glenavy pop-up shop

A pop-up shop run by Glenavy Parish which began life as a dream – an actual dream! – has raised more than £25,000 for local charities over the past four years.

The first pop-up shop was run in 2018, and initially all proceeds went to Mothers' Union (MU). But since December 2021, each pop-up shop has raised funds for local charities - with around 16 different organisations benefiting to date.

Organiser Lyn Cassidy explained that the idea came to her when she was sleeping. "It was a real dream," she said. "I woke up exhausted after working what seemed like all night in a charity shop!"

"This was whilst I was Area Chair for Derrigahy with Mothers' Union. I could never understand why there were no MU charity shops anywhere and started to make enquiries, even at an MU conference in Swanwick."

Glenavy's first pop-ups were held monthly

and raised £5,477.50 for Mothers' Union but were interrupted by the closure of the parish MU branch, and the Covid 19 pandemic.

"We started again to raise funds for other charities in December 2021," Lyn explained.

"Our first pop-up was for the Salvation Army Christmas Appeal, and since then we have supported many charities. More recently, we have chosen charities with more personal parish/community connections. All our chosen charities must assure us that the proceeds are used in NI.

"The pop-ups are now planned by the season. Since 2021, we have managed to raise £25,655.60 for 15 charities and we are delighted!"

"We have amazing support from across the local community in Crumlin and Glenavy Parish. The charities which joined us on the day have remarked on the atmosphere and 'buzz' - we have so much fun!"

Donations are taken on the Friday before each pop-up and Lyn says nothing is turned away.

Reflecting on her dream, she commented: "It has grown so much, and support has increased so much that I'm now convinced it was a vision!"

New children's books from David Luckman

Author David Luckman's latest books invite young people to witness the wonders of the Gospels in a two-volume edition of *Adventures in the Gospels*.

Volume one introduces children to Jesus' miracles and teachings like the Beatitudes and the Lord's Prayer. Volume two completes the Gospel journey as Jesus teaches through parables like the Good Samaritan and Prodigal Son, building towards his death and resurrection.

With explanations connecting events to their spiritual significance, these books are illustrated by Silvana Di Marcello.

David, who is Church Planter at Hilden Community Church, which is part of Lambeg Parish, says: "These books are perfect for families, classrooms, and churches. *Adventures in the Gospels* will help young readers aged 7-11 understand Jesus' incredible gift of salvation and the hope He brings."

Adventures in the Gospels is available from any Christian bookshop, online stores, or directly from the publisher, at www.christianfocus.com.



A busy pop-up shop last December raised funds for Crohn's and Colitis UK. Photo: Reg Haslett.



The Greenisland team with Pastor Nelson Raja and hosts in Hosur, India.

Greenisland's vision for Indian orphanage

A team from Greenisland Parish visited Angel House in Hosur, India, in January to see at first hand the challenges facing the orphanage established by Nelson Thomas Raja, pastor of Greenisland Methodist Church, and his family.

Since fire devastated the Church of the Holy Name in September 2024, members of Greenisland Parish have been using the neighbouring Methodist Church for Sunday worship and other activities.

The rector of Greenisland, the Rev Isy Hawthorne-Steele, said: "Our ministry team and congregation quickly struck up a good relationship with Nelson, and we listened to his prophecy that we would one day soon visit Angel House orphanage and support the great work of Nelson and his wife Janet and family.

"Every child is created in the image of God and deserves safety, dignity, love, and hope, yet for millions of children around the world, that promise is painfully broken.

"In India, and particularly in the state of Tamil Nadu, many children face daily risks of abuse, neglect, exploitation, and abandonment. Reports show that thousands of cases of violence against children are recorded each year, including physical and sexual abuse."

Isy continued: "Many children are left without protection, some are placed in institutions that are overwhelmed, and others are returned to situations that cannot keep them safe. Systems meant to protect children are often stretched beyond capacity."

Scripture reminds us, Isy said, that caring for widows and orphans is not optional, but central to the heart of God, and it was out of this calling that Angel House was

founded in 2012 by Nelson and his family when they moved to India.

REFUGE

"Angel House became a place of refuge for poor children, abused, abandoned, or orphaned children without a mother or father," Isy said. "It was also envisioned as a place of restoration, where weary people could step away from the pressures of life and find renewal of body, mind, soul, and spirit."

She said in hearing the story of Angel House and the challenges it was facing, the parish recognised the call of God, and a team from Greenisland comprising herself, Lorna Brown, Tony Jones, David Branagh Curry, Dawn Hart, Stephanie Evans, Kenny Baxter and Michelle Adams accompanied Nelson to India from January 6-15.

Isy said that after a long and demanding journey, the team was quickly tested. "Firstly, one of the team, Lorna, our children and family worker, had a gruelling ordeal over her visitor's visa which took two days, with long drives to the capital city to resolve the issue," Isy explained.

"Then she became seriously unwell due to dehydration and was taken to the hospital on the second day. Yet in the midst of prayer and concern, God's hand was clearly at work."

With Lorna thankfully restored to full health, the team was warmly welcomed by Ben,



The Rev Isy Hawthorne-Steele, second from right, and team members making new friends in India.

Nelson and Janet's son and a key member of the Angel House team. Nelson's mother, Kanaga, and sister, Helon, supported the team each day through generous hospitality and home-cooked Indian meals.

Alongside Pastor Manase from Hosur, the team spent the week repairing and maintaining the Angel House buildings. "They worked with their hands and prayed with their hearts, restoring not only walls and spaces but hope for what God could do again in this place," Isy said.

The team visited the nearby school where Angel House children had once been educated, and the Angel House community project, where 80 children from three surrounding villages gather for learning, care, and encouragement.

Isy recalled: "On that day, more than 200 people came together. The children presented a beautiful cultural performance. Angel House shared traditional chicken biryani with the entire village, and gifts were given to children attending Angel House activities. Joy, dignity, and community filled the space."

LAUGHTER

The team also visited a nearby orphanage, meeting 33 children and 10 staff, where they spent time with the children enjoying games, laughter, and prayer.

Isy continued: "During the visit, the reality was shared honestly. Due to ongoing challenges, the children of Angel House had been temporarily placed in other care settings while the team sought a way forward. Even the local school principal appealed for Angel House to reopen, so children could return to stability, education, and hope."

While visiting land near Angel House, Isy said she received a powerful vision of



Games, laughter and prayer - the Greenisland team spent time with children in an orphanage near Angel House.

Jesus standing on the rock, scattering flower petals over the land. "The team embraced this vision and prayed together, believing that God is not finished with Angel House," Isy said.

"Despite health challenges, long journeys, and difficult roads, the team caught God's heart and God's vision. A vision of Angel House restored. A place where God reigns once again. A refuge for children, widows, orphans, and all who are weary and burdened, a place of rest, healing, and new beginnings."

Isy said the journey was not an ending, but a beginning. "May we continue to pray, to listen, and to walk faithfully as God leads, trusting that He who began this work will bring it to completion."

SUPPORT

The team members had been out of their comfort zone; they were challenged by the different culture, traditions, food, hygiene and language, but they have pledged to continue to support this project by visiting again and by fundraising and helping with

governance and policy legislation.

Appealing to others to help support the project, Isy said: "We are heartbroken by the plight of the orphan children, the poverty, and the hopelessness of those who do not walk in God's path.

"We would appeal to anyone who reads this to prayerfully consider joining us in the vision to create a safe space for orphans in Angel House."

You can contact Isy at Revisy@gmail.com.

Carnmoney Mothers' Union celebrates 120 years

Carnmoney Mothers' Union celebrated the branch's 120th anniversary on September 14.

Anne Frances Clarke, wife of the Rev Richard Clarke who was rector from 1903 to 1946, founded the branch in 1905, and the couple are buried in the graveyard beside the church.

The celebration service was led by the Rev Andy Heber, with Diocesan President Alison Skillen giving the address. Also present were Valerie Ash, East Connor Chair; Moira Thom, Diocesan Secretary; and Wendy Halligan, Action and Outreach; past members and office bearers.

Helen Eccles and Eileen Roulston did the readings. The theme of Alison's address was 'Living Stones' from Joshua 4, and Alison reminded members that they are the visible living stones of Mothers' Union, keeping its aims and objectives alive and strong foundations for the future.

Anne Campbell used small stones



Members of Carnmoney Mothers' Union celebrate the 120th anniversary of the branch along with special guest speaker, Alison Skillen, Diocesan President, second from left.

and candles in a short act of worship to illustrate the branch's outreach initiatives - hats, scarves and blankets for seafarers; hats for chemotherapy patients; baby hats, cardigans and blankets for neo-natal units; items for Women's Aid; blankets and twiddle muffs for care homes and emergency

toiletries for local hospitals.

The Rev Carol Harvey and Victoria McFarland led the prayers and Barbara Macklin sang 'Be still for the presence of the Lord.'

Everyone enjoyed a meal in the hall, along with a celebration cake.



Black Santa, Dean Stephen Forde, makes his way from Donegall Quay to Belfast Cathedral, accompanied by members of Belfast Lough Sailability.

Black Santa Appeal raises £140,000

The 2025 Black Santa Sit-out at Belfast Cathedral raised £140,000. This year's sit-out, which began on December 15, was launched in more ways than one! Firstly, after breakfast provided by the Dock Café in Titanic Quarter, the Dean was launched onto the waves in a boat courtesy of Belfast Lough Sailability.

Accompanied by members of the group - one of 108 local charities which received a share of the funds raised by Black Santa in 2024 - the Dean sailed to the Big Fish at Donegall Quay, and from there he and his companions made their way to the Cathedral on foot for the official launch of the appeal.

In the course of a busy few hours, the Dean spoke to and posed for the media; welcomed the Lord Mayor of Belfast Councillor Tracy Kelly who donned a clerical cloak to support Black Santa; chatted to a large group from Belfast Met who arrived to make a donation; and introduced several groups of tourists to this great Belfast tradition.

Dean Forde, supported by Bishops, Canons and clergy from the Cathedral, remained on the steps of St Anne's daily until late on Christmas Eve.

The Dean sounded 'a huge thank you' to the thousands who contributed to this tally in the appeal's 49th year. He said that conditions in the 10 days before Christmas had been 'difficult.' "The weather wasn't wonderful - we had to contend with rain and wind, which is sometimes more difficult than cold," he said.

He concluded: "In a situation where many charities are finding it difficult to maintain the level of giving, it's very pleasing that for the Black Santa appeal we were able to increase what we've brought in."

The £140,000 was distributed to 103 different charities at the annual Good Samaritans Service in the Cathedral on February 1.



The late Rev Allister Mallon.

Rev Allister Mallon

A Service of Thanksgiving for the Rev Allister Mallon took place in St Colman's Parish Church, Dunmurry, on January 11.

In his address, the Very Rev John Bond, former Dean of Connor, said Allister's 'untimely' death followed 'a long and difficult illness, borne with remarkable courage, fortitude and dignity.'

He extended sympathy to Allister's wife Sanna, sons Ben and Asa, daughter Judith, son-in-law Mark, daughter-in-law Maria, his grandchildren, and his brother Nigel.

Allister was born on December 26 1961 in Cookstown, Co Tyrone. He attended Cookstown High School and university in Sheffield where he graduated with a BA, before God's call took him to Dublin for further studies.

He met Sanna in St Anne's Church, Dawson Street, Dublin, where he was a Student Reader and Sanna a parishioner. Allister later secured two more academic qualifications - a BTh and MA from Queen's University.

Allister's mother died when he was only nine years of age, and his father when he was 22 and a student in Dublin.

Allister was made deacon in 1987 and ordained priest in 1988. He served as curate in Ballymoney with Finvoy and Rasharkin from 1987-1990; curate in St Mary's, Belfast, with Holy Redeemer, 1990-1992; bishop's curate in St Mary Magdalene, 1992-2000; and bishop's curate in Stoneyford from 2000-2011.

Allister was chaplain with the Royal Group of Hospitals and Social Services Trust from

2000 until 2011 when he retired.

For those who knew Allister, he was bright, intelligent, a man with a clear mind and a compassionate humanity, Dean Bond said. "Reserved yes, but with a love of observing life, people and situations to understand. To help to make the world a better place, he brought all these qualities into his ministry... Allister's quiet dignified manner drew attention to the Saviour he served. He brought dignity and a sense of occasion to every act of worship."

In 2021, Allister competed in BBC2's *Mastermind*. The Dean said: "He gave a good account of himself and scored impressively in the first round. His specialist subject was 'James Craig 1st Viscount Craigavon.' Allister progressed to one of the six semi-finals - no mean achievement!"

Dean Bond said that in his role as Diocesan Curate, trying to ensure Sunday Services are covered, he was always grateful to Allister for his help and kindness. He was always willing to help and sometimes at considerable inconvenience to himself.

"For Allister it was a joy and privilege to take services and especially here in St Colman's where he has served for many years.

"Thank God for the Allisters of our Church, he will be missed and I know it. Yes, Allister's faith and belief in God was deep and sustaining, a faith he expressed in his ministry and in his everyday life," Dean Bond said.

Canon Sam McComb

A Service of Thanksgiving for the Rev Canon Sam McComb was held in Christ Church, Lisburn, on Saturday January 3.

Reflecting on his life, Archdeacon Paul Dundas told mourners that Sam, who was pre-deceased by his wife Madge last November, was 'a man of great faith, with a heart to serve and help others.'

Sam was born in Cookstown on August 17 1933. He left school at 14 to work as an apprentice with a firm of builders. He later moved to work in the local bacon factory.

He played football for Cookstown Hotspurs, Coagh United and Dungannon Swifts, and was a lifelong Tottenham Hotspurs supporter. Sam was also a keen drummer and played in Orritor Pipe Band. He was a lifelong member of Drumnacross LOL 304 and Gravesend RBP 65.

He and Madge married in March 1962. In 1958, Sam had bought his first motorbike and the couple travelled many miles on it - Sam had a keen interest in following motorbike racing.

Sam joined the Police Force, serving in Beragh and Belcoo, but left after he married and relocated to Antrim where he worked for British Enkalon. Sam and Madge had a baby, Alan, in 1963, but sadly he only lived for a short time. They went on to have twin girls, Jacqueline and Pamela, and another son, David.

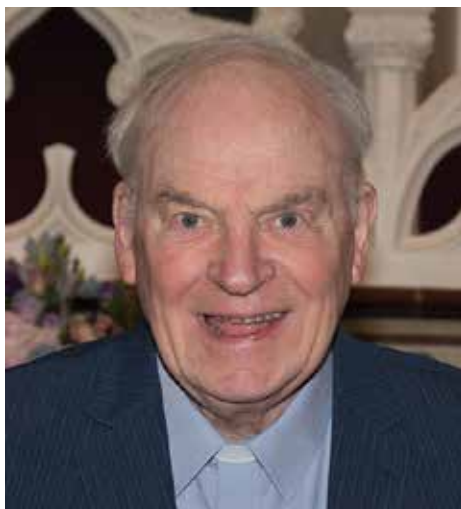
In Antrim, the family attended All Saints' Parish, and Sam felt a calling to ordained ministry. He needed qualifications, and completed these in 1967, attending night classes at Antrim Technical College whilst continuing to work.

He headed to Trinity College, Dublin, to complete his training, and was ordained in 1971, taking up his first curacy in St Michael's, Shankill Road, Belfast, at the height of the Troubles.

He moved to Christ Church, Lisburn, as curate in 1974, remaining until he was appointed as rector of Ballinderry in 1979, where the church built a new parish hall. This experience proved good training for him when he moved back to Christ Church in 1983 as rector.

During his ministry in Christ Church, Sam was also Chaplain to Lagan Valley Hospital.

He led many fundraising groups to support and maintain Christ Church. He was on the Board of Governors of three schools and was honoured to be asked to serve as Chaplain to the Mayor on two occasions.



The late Canon Sam McComb.

During the Millennium, Sam instigated a wider project of fundraising to buy medical equipment to support the local hospital, enabling the purchase a foetal heart monitor for Lagan Valley Hospital and syringe drivers for community nursing staff.

Sam worked hard and never sought the limelight. He had a true vocational calling, and he often said his role was to extend God's kingdom and wanted to be there to help people at their point of need.

Later in his ministry, he was made a Canon of Lisburn Cathedral. After retirement in March 2004, he worked well into his 80s in a part-time capacity serving the Parishes of Killead, Gartree and Muckamore.

He was a devoted family man. He was also a great storyteller and had all his young nieces and nephews spellbound sharing the adventures of 'Tiddles and Tadpoles' - stories which he made up.

Sam was blessed with great health for most of his life, but unfortunately in the last few years his health started to decline.

He was a man of great faith, with a heart to serve and help others and lived his life and treated others as he would want for himself and his family. He was a faithful servant, pastor, teacher and strived to do his best in all aspects of his work.

Sam led a life of service and love and gratitude, with a very strong work ethic, something he encouraged his children to follow.

Sympathy is extended to Jacqueline, Pamela and David and the wider family circle.



Newly commissioned Agherton Parish Readers Dylan Sheppard and Andi Regan-Murphy.

Parish Readers commissioned

Agherton Parish Church marked a significant moment in its parish life on November 30, with the commissioning of Andi Regan-Murphy and Dylan Sheppard as Parish Readers.

The service was led by the rector, the Rev Malcolm Ferry, along with the Rev Canon Amanda Adams, Warden of Readers, who commissioned both candidates and presented them with their licences on behalf of the Bishop of Connor. Canon Adams affirmed their calling to ministry and encouraged them as they step into this new chapter of service within the parish.

Music played a central role in the service. Both Andi and Dylan, who are members of the parish choir, chose hymns that reflected their personal faith journeys.

The church choir added their own tribute by singing a special blessing anthem, 'The Lord Bless You and Keep You,' by Alan Bullard.

Connor full-day Vocations Retreat

'Called to Serve' - a Vocations Retreat for anyone in Connor who is sensing the call of God to ministry (lay or ordained), will be held in Bethlehem Abbey, Portglenone, on Saturday March 28 from 10am-3pm, with guest speaker, Bishop Ken Clarke.

Please contact the Rev Peter Jones, Connor Vocations Director, on rectormossley@hotmail.com for further information.



News in pictures: Clockwise, from top: A group from Ramoan and Culfeightrin Parishes, Ballycastle, at Choral Evensong in Belfast Cathedral on December 5 --- Exploring partnership with Northern Argentina. From left: Archdeacon Paul Dundas, Jill Lester, the Rev Stephen McElhinney, Alec Deane from Northern Argentina, and Bishop George Davison --- St Patrick's, Jordanstown, dedicated a new table in the loving memory of the late Derek Rodgers --- Jackie Heaney and Sharon Walker at their commissioning as Parish Readers in Ballintoy --- Jordanstown Mothers' Union focused on Gender-Based Violence and prepared 'Moving On' basins at the November meeting --- Items donated to the baby bank by members of St Nicholas' craft group, Carrickfergus --- New Pioneer Minister Jonny Diamond, front right, at his Commissioning and Licensing in Dunluce Parish on November 30.