



The Rev William Orr, rector of Muckamore, Killead and Gartree, and leader of Flute Band Church, plays along during practice.



Lambeg drummer Ryan Mairs.

'My prayer was: What is culturally relevant to the people here?'

Growing up in rural Rathfriland, William Orr watched the local Pride of the Hill flute band practice and longed to be part of it.

He joined when he was 16. "I loved it. I loved being part of a group of guys who had the same interest. We were the band to beat. I loved the friendship and the craic," William said.

"In my late teens I was bandmaster and took it very seriously. I even carried shoeshine in my pocket! I kept discipline and called the tunes. I loved looking well, marching well and sounding well.

"There are flute bands which are an excuse for drinking and we did have some people push the boundaries, but we were a competitive band and we had to focus. As well as that, the people who headed the band worked hard to protect what they had built up."

When he was 24 William left Pride of the Hill. "I left the band because I was called to ministry and wanted to give it 100 per cent. At the time it was the right thing for me."

William became rector of Muckamore, Killead and Gartree in 2007. A survey carried out by Muckamore Parish Development Association found that the estates which constitute the parish were 93 per cent Protestant, with less than 10 per cent of people practicing their faith in local churches.

"When I came here my prayer was 'what's culturally relevant, what is the most important thing to people living here?' There was my starting point," William said.

"I noticed that there were a few guys in church who used to be in a band. I asked

them to come together and play a few tunes and Flute Band Church (FBC) was born. I started introducing hymns that bands would know like Abide With Me and Shall We Gather at the River and then added to them. Now we only play hymns, usually in a blood and thunder style although we are introducing melody.

"I hope the experience of FBC will lead the person to become a Christian and then assess who they are, rather than allow who they are to be dictated by how they grew up."

William said Christians can belong to mainstream flute bands. "They can use their Christian faith and love of music to reach out to others. It is hard to do, but I encourage people to stay and be Christ in the band as others might be Christ in workplace," he said.



Eric Olliver plays during Flute Band Church practice.



Young Kyle gets a few tips from the Rev William Orr.



David Olliver, David Baillie and Ricky Hunter keep their eyes on the music during Flute Band Church rehearsals.



Flute Band Church flautist Paul Steele joins in during a practice session in Muckamore Parish Hall.

Muckamore mission that is full of music

An energetic form of mission is reaching deep into the heart of the community around Muckamore Parish. *Diocesan Communications Officer Karen Bushby* drops into a meeting of Flute Band Church (FBC), an innovative project established by the rector, the Rev William Orr.

The notes of 'In Christ Alone' resonate round the parish hall at Muckamore as 11-year-old-Kyle snatches a little private tuition from Flute Band Church leader the Rev William Orr.

The hall quickly fills up with flautists and drummers. Ricky Hunter was in a band some 20 years ago. "I started coming to church and became a Christian in June 2011," he says. "Initially I was not really comfortable with the idea of a flute band in church, but William persuaded me to join.

"It is great craic. You get a real mix of people and it is a good place to learn. Some people think you cannot be a Christian and be in a band but you can. When you become a Christian life doesn't stop. My son plays here but his mum would not allow him to join another flute band because they can be associated with drinking and sectarianism. Here, we play for an hour, have a cup of tea, and William will give us something to think about.

"When we perform at events some of us give our testimony, which is often relevant to people listening. The group is really reaching into the flute band community. It can be scary and intimidating, but we need to get out there and do it. There is no point in just sitting here playing to ourselves."

Paul Dunlop, a drummer with Ballycraigie Flute Band, has been a member of FBC for two years. "I really enjoy it. We received funding to run tuition for young ones, it is a good learning environment for them," he says.

Paul has been attending church services since becoming involved in FBC. "It has been a learning curve. At our meetings we have prayer and discussion in a very relaxed atmosphere."

Young Kyle is all set for practice to start for real. He has been playing since his ninth birthday. "I get taught really well here," he says.

Eric Olliver has belonged to a number of flute bands. "The main thing that draws me here is that I enjoy listening to William's talks," Eric says. "They are always relevant and easy to understand. All sorts of things can be said in here but with no venom.

"Flutes bands have been looked down on over the past 10-15 years, and this is giving a different impression. We are going into churches and doing something good, playing music, giving a talk, serving a purpose."

It was Eric's son David, 19, who persuaded him to come to FBC. "William is really

approachable and all the lads help each other out," David says. "It does not matter what mood you are in, when you walk in here every trouble is lifted off your shoulders. We learn so much through William's teaching and from the stories the lads talk about."

David became a Christian in January 2012. "You would think flute band and church would conflict, but William has put them together for good use. This is church done differently and William brings a lot of that. He is somewhat unorthodox!"

One of the band's female flautists is Laura Robb. "There are only a couple of girls but you get used to the banter," she says. "We all have a good laugh and I enjoy the talks and the variety of music."

The time for chat is over as, after a prayer from William, the drummers take their place, and, from their haphazard positions on the eclectic sofas lining the walls of the hall, the flautists raise their instruments, poised.

If young Kyle filled the hall with his solo flute, then the ensemble of flautists, accompanied by the three drummers, quite literally raise the roof. Song of Resurrection; As the Deer; Shine... they play their way through a litany of hymns, conducted, and at times pulled up and corrected, by the rector with the flute /baton!

"Superb..." murmurs Bishop Ken Clarke, mission director of SAMS (the South American Mission Society). He is here to give a talk to members of FBC who are planning a trip to Paraguay with SAMS in 2015.

"People in South America love their music so they could bring their flutes with them they could compare notes on music!" said the Bishop.

Flute Band Church practice takes place on Wednesday nights in Muckamore Parish Hall. The members also bring their unique mission to church services, meetings and events around Northern Ireland. For details visit: www.muckamorekillleadgartree.org.uk/



Drummers Ryan Mairs, Paul Dunlop and Samuel Chestnutt.