

Discipleship and ministry are focus of Bishop's Lent talks

The focus of the Bishop of Connor's Lenten courses for 2014 will be Discipleship and Ministry.

Two seminars will be delivered in three venues – Bushmills Parish Centre, Jordanstown Parish Centre, and Christ Church, Lisburn.

Announcing the course details, the Rt Rev Alan Abernethy said: "As a Church, we have often talked about everyone having a ministry and, indeed, it is present in our baptismal liturgy.

"However, it is something that is difficult to implement and it is becoming more difficult to get volunteers in an increasingly busy and demanding lifestyle for many.

"In the Lent course, I will be focusing on what it means to be a disciple in our present culture and how we might continue to grow in faith as individuals and as communities.

"I will also be reflecting on how discipleship leads us to ministry and how every disciple has a ministry within the body of Christ, what this might mean and how we can seek to develop the ministry of all."

For dates, venues and booking form turn to the back page.

Flower festival in Carrickfergus church

St Nicholas' Parish Church, Carrickfergus is hosting a flower festival from May 15-18.

This is one of the most historic and beautiful churches in the Diocese of Connor. Recently thieves broke into the church and destroyed a panel of one of the church's beautiful stained glass windows.

Vestry member Gillian Dalton said: "Two of the oldest wall memorials have started to crumble and Health and Safety are not happy with the height of the balcony rail the list goes on. Such are the joys of maintaining a 12th century building as the venue for a living and vibrant church."

Gillian said it was hoped that the flower festival, with the theme 'Lord, for the Years' would defray some of these costs.

Groups interested in attending the flower festival should contact Jean on 07776 154 956, jean.stewart@live.co.uk with any catering enquiries.



People from a village in Burkina Faso gather to listen to the local pastor as the FIA well drilling operation carries on in the background. Inset: Drew Johnston of Lisburn Cathedral, chairman of Friends in Action, Northern Ireland.

Giving people the water of life in Africa

A charity headed by a Lisburn Cathedral parishioner is bringing both water and the gospel to remote parts of West Africa.

Drew Johnston is chairman of Friends in Action (FIA) Northern Ireland, which he founded with local man Mark Collier in 2002. Mark is now based in Burkina Faso.

In the past 11 years, the charity has drilled more than 350 wells, providing safe clean drinking water for some 350,000 people in some of the most remote villages in Africa. Up to eight teams travel to Africa each year and several of the volunteers are from Lisburn Cathedral.

FIA is an international charity, but its drilling ministry in Africa is run and directed in Northern Ireland.

While drilling for water is the charity's main focus, FIA has been involved in other one off projects, including erecting a donated Bailey bridge (shipped from Northern Ireland) over a 300ft river in the Tanda region of Guinea, West Africa, which was often cut off by floods in the wet season. Since then FIA has also built a clinic, school and opened the first Christian Church in this Muslim area.

FIA first started well drilling in Ivory Coast but had to leave after a few months because of civil war. God then led FIA to Ghana and then finally into Burkina Faso.

"Burkina Faso is more than 90 per cent Muslim and is the fourth poorest country

in the world. It is hot and dusty for nine months a year and the people are in desperate need of clean water," said Drew

The average life expectancy in some villages is as low as 34 years. Women and children often have to walk up to four hours a day carrying 20 kilos water on their head."

When Northern Ireland Water analysed a sample of Burkina Faso village water, the bacteria in it was equal to the bacteria in raw sewage. "It is no wonder that average life expectancy is so low," added Drew.

FIA works in partnership with mission agencies and pastors already working in villages. The charity's aim is to demonstrate God's love and provision by offering the people a 'cup of clean water in Christ's name'. FIA only drills when requested by the missionary or pastor.

"We plan a year in advance and Mark and our team of geologists, hydrologists and drillers from Northern Ireland who live there have the area surveyed so when a volunteer team arrives members know exactly where to drill. Drew explained.

"FIA has to take care not to offend anyone by drilling in what the villagers call 'sacred ground.' We will only drill in common ground, ensuring the water is freely



FIA volunteers building a Bailey bridge in a remote village where the river often flooded in the wet season.



Women and children walk for miles to collect water that can contain as much bacteria as raw sewage.



Celebrations as villagers are given 'a cup of clean water in Christ's name' by volunteers with FIA, a charity headed up by Lisburn Cathedral parishioner Drew Johnston which drills wells in remote parts of Burkina Faso, West Africa.

available to all regardless of religion or tribal background."

Conditions during drilling trips can be basic. The team travels from village to village along rough tracks with a cumbersome convoy of drilling rig, tool trucks and generating gear. Accommodation is normally in beds protected only by mosquito nets and meals are prepared around an open fire.

Drew said drilling attracts a lot of attention, with people waiting for hours in anticipation of the first signs of water in their village. "You can just imagine the impact that having clean water in their village brings. It's immeasurable in terms of health and quality of life. If the people no longer have to walk for hours to get water, the children will have more time to go to school, the women can earn an income by growing more crops and taking care of their families," he said.

He recalled the celebrations after one well was finished. "The well was beside a church that had only 19 parishioners. People had to walk three miles each way every day for water. We hit water at 7pm on the third evening. The local people started singing and dancing and they were still dancing at 4am. Membership of that church has increased to 149 and it is still growing."

Arthur Canning from Lisburn Cathedral has volunteered with FIA in Burkina Faso and has seen the difficulties families face on a daily basis. "Ladies have to walk several miles to get water so dirty you or I would



Getting water from an FIA well sponsored by St Michael's, Shankill Road, Belfast.

not even use it to wash our cars," he said.

"This type of mission is not necessarily for everyone. You need a certain amount of health and strength to do what is a physically challenging job. Drilling and welding skills are not essential, FIA will take anyone with a servant's heart who is willing to lift a shovel, push a wheel barrow, carry drill rods and even cook."

Arthur added: "You see how a well can change lives. When you give someone a cup of cold, clear water in Christ's name, you see what that means to them. The smiles on their faces are wonderful."

Arthur was also involved in the bridge project. "When it was complete the local Imam allowed the people to accept the Christian faith. The villagers named their bridge the Jesus Bridge. That is God's spirit at work," he said.

A volunteer team normally goes to Africa for two weeks and during this period FIA would hope to drill four to six wells. But the need is huge as currently the charity has requests for more than 150 wells.

FIA is a faith based mission agency and no one is paid a salary. One hundred per cent of donations go to drilling wells.



Lisburn Cathedral parishioner Arthur Canning volunteering at a well drilling site in Burkina Faso.

Drew said: "The average cost of a completed well in West Africa is £5,000 and a minimum of 500 people will benefit from each well. That's £10 to give some clean drinking water for life."

To learn more about donating, volunteering and the work of FIA, contact Drew at drewjohnston@faintl.org or visit www.friendsinaction.org.uk.

'Shrieks of pure delight' when the water starts to flow!

I have three strong memories of drilling wells in Burkina Faso. The first is of the crowds of villagers watching the drilling, waiting eagerly for many hours to see water appear from far below. The second is of their joy and ours at seeing the water coming to the surface.

The third is of meeting members of the Church there, who share the same faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and especially praying together at a well and offering thanks to our heavenly Father.

Denis Fullerton, , Lisburn Cathedral, FIA volunteer

The difficult part of a well drilling trip is seeing the people waiting and watching, from the moment we roll into their village. Sitting like an expectant audience with their buckets, basins, five gallon drums, anything which will hold water. No pressure then?! The awful thought of failure and having to leave without a good result.

And the good bits? The whoops, the cheers and the shrieks of pure delight when the water starts to flow out of the parched ground they have walked on for generations.

Keith Forsythe, Lisburn Cathedral FIA volunteer