

CONNOR

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connections



Linköping link is formally ended

After a decade, Connor's link with the Swedish diocese of Linköping finally ended at a service in Linköping Cathedral on January 10.

Linköping was Connor's first diocesan link, and although it is now formally over, friendships forged through the years between parishes and individuals will continue.

As chair of the Partnership for World Mission Committee back in 1996, Canon Walter Lewis was one of those behind this link. The then Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev Samuel Poyntz, set up the committee to explore potential partnerships, but it was Bishop Martin Lind of Linköping who told Canon Lewis that a link with Connor had been suggested by the Porvoo Implementation Group [the Porvoo Declaration of 1996 had brought all Lutheran Episcopal and Anglican churches into full communion with each other].

Bishop Lind came to Connor where he found the new Bishop, the Rt Rev Jimmy Moore, to be very enthusiastic and the Partnership for World Mission Committee got to work making the link a reality. Canon Lewis recalls. "This was an excellent committee operationally. This was all new and there was tremendous interest. It was a fascinating operation for us to get to know each other and achieved the objective of widening horizons almost immediately. The initiative was warmly welcomed across the diocese."

There followed many twinning projects at diocesan, youth and parish levels, with trips to Sweden, and visitors from Sweden. "One of the remarkable things about the development was we realised that our worship was still very similar even though it was 400 years since the reformation," said Canon Lewis.

A total of 14 Connor parishes established links in the early years with parishes in Linköping. All Saints, Antrim, maintains its link today while St Cedma's, Larne, has an active link with the parish of Väderstad. Canon Lewis's parish of St Thomas's was twinned with Linköping



The Connor group of Canon Walter Lewis, Mrs Evelyn Lewis and Training Co-ordinator Peter Hamill (fourth, third and second from right respectively) pictured with Bishop Martin Lind and other clergy at the service in Linköping Cathedral to celebrate the end of the formal partnership between the two dioceses.

Cathedral, and a curate from Sweden is currently working in the parish.

The Diocese of Linköping, comprising 280 parishes, is a rural area boasting some large towns. In Sweden, 90 per cent of the people belong to the Church of Sweden. The Parish of Linköping Cathedral has 30,000 members, and Canon Lewis described the Swedes as being a 'sophisticated, developed' society. "One of the things they were really interested in was finding out how the Church of Ireland manages without state aid," said Canon Lewis. "Although the government no longer appoints Bishops and Deans in the Church of Sweden, they do receive a large amount of money through state taxes."

He said the Swedes love to come to Northern Ireland. "They love the people and they love the church. We are the one church and they feel very much at home here."

Canon Lewis, his wife Evelyn, and Connor Diocesan Training Co-ordinator Peter Hamill travelled to Linköping for the service in January to celebrate the partnership and give thanks for all it had achieved. Despite the formal end of the link, contacts that have been established and projects that were initiated over the years will continue.

Canon Lewis said: "There is a lot to be gained from positive partnership. It gives us a global perspective of the church and while it can challenge us it allows us to come home mutually refreshed."

Faith - a source of strength



I was recently asked to meet with some sixth form students who are studying RE. It was inspiring to hear their searching and probing questions.

At the end of the session I was asked by one of the students had I ever felt like losing my faith. It certainly set me thinking about my own journey of faith. Throughout my journey I have never felt like losing my faith but there have been moments when faith has been difficult and there have been unanswered questions.

and calm security. It is an adventure of ceaseless battling with troubles; a peace of mind and serenity indeed, but a costly peace and serenity in the midst of conflict."

Faith is not an escape from being human and the struggles that brings but it is a help and source of strength to help us live in the midst of the questions and difficulties. My faith has gained so much from the faith of others as we belong to one another.

As we look forward to Lent my prayer is that we can take time to reflect upon our faith journey and seek the help that is promised to us as God's children.

Grace and peace to you all,

+ Alan Connor

After the event I found the following quotation from Archbishop Michael Ramsey: "Faith isn't a state of easy

2011 pilgrimage to the Holy Land

The Bishop of Connor is inviting pilgrims from across the diocese to travel with him to the Holy Land in March 2011.

The Rt Rev Alan Abernethy has asked Canon John Mann, rector of St John's Parish, Malone, to lead the 11 day pilgrimage which will take place from March 22 until April 1 2011. There are 100 places available at a cost of £1,465 per person.

Pilgrims will have the opportunity to worship with the local Christian community in Jerusalem, and on their journey through the Holy Land they



will have the chance to seek out local Christians and offer them support and encouragement.

Visits will include Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Nazareth, Capernaum, the

Sea of Galilee, the Dead Sea and Qumran, and there will also be time for relaxation and private exploration. There are optional tours to Masada and the Dead Sea.

Bishop Alan said: "This is a wonderful opportunity to engage with the places as well as the texts of the Bible and so to encounter and relate to Jesus in a new and thrilling way.

To reserve a place, please contact Canon John Mann, St John's Rectory, 86 Maryville Park, Belfast, BT9 6LQ, telephone 028 9066 6644 or email john.o.mann@btinternet.com.

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Website: www.connor.anglican.org



COVER PHOTOGRAPH: A MONGO PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPIL WHO JOINED IN THE CELEBRATIONS WHEN A CONNOR TEAM VISITED THE SUDAN SCHOOL IN JANUARY. FULL COVERAGE ON PAGES 8-17

IF YOU HAVE ANY EDITORIAL COMMENTS OR WOULD LIKE TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE NEXT EDITION OF CONNOR CONNECTIONS PLEASE CONTACT:

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		TRAINING

Drink, drugs



Connor is to be the first diocese in the Church of Ireland to offer clergy, youth workers and lay people training in handling social problems like drug and alcohol abuse.

Specialist training will also be offered to equip clergy to respond in the case of potential suicide and to direct the person to the appropriate agencies.

These are just some of a number of innovative courses being organised by the new Diocesan Training Council's Social Issues working group. The Council is also planning to run seminars for clergy helping them to help their parishioners cope with early pregnancy loss, training in helping parishioners with Alzheimer's, and a course in mental health first aid is also under consideration.

The courses in handling drug and alcohol abuse and the ASSIST (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training) will be delivered by the diocese in conjunction with the Shankill based FASA.

Plans are already underway for a course in drugs, alcohol and suicide awareness for 20 youth workers from across the diocese. Sessions for clergy and interested lay people will be run in the three archdeaconries on dates to be arranged.

The various programmes are being co-ordinated by the Rev John McClure of Irish Church Missions, a member of



and suicide

the Training Council's Social Issues working group. In the course of just one month John received 17 calls from clergy in Connor and other parts of Northern Ireland seeking advice on how to deal with someone affected by either suicide or addiction.

In socially deprived areas, those suffering addictions are often young people who have become mixed up in drugs, alcohol, paramilitary and anti-social behaviour, but in all areas there are many, many people addicted to prescription drugs.

Alex Bunting, FASA team leader, said it made sense for clergy to be trained in recognising and helping people cope with the problem. "Fifty two per cent of all those with drug addictions in Northern Ireland are addicted to prescription drugs," he said. "There will be someone in every parish with an addiction."

The problems are worst in urban areas. In the Greater Shankill one in two people takes drugs such as Diazepam or Prozac. Another legal 'drug' – alcohol – continues to be a problem across society. "Alcohol is a major issue even within churches," said Alex.

He said the training courses would be about giving people essential skills so they have someone in the church able


to deal with each problem.

Alex went on: "It is fact that the greatest intervention in getting people off drugs is the belief in God. God's word is a major protective factor in life. With God, even if you have an addiction you are not alone, but it will greatly help if you have the support mechanisms of the church."

Alex said children as young as nine are popping anti-psychotic drugs 10 at a time. There were 34 suicides in Belfast last July. They are often young people suffering drug-related paranoia, owing money to dealers, young people who feel life is no longer worth living.

"The church needs to have a greater outreach to those in need in the community," said Alex. "People think churches are full of good living people who don't want to get involved in their community but the vast majority of youth work in this area is carried out by the churches."

The courses being offered by FASA and other organisations through the Training Council mean clergy will be better equipped to take on the burdens of their parishioners and better able to direct them to agencies who can provide professional help.

CONNOR CONNECTIONS		
	PROFILE	

New secretary set to meet challenges ahead

June Butler, new secretary to the dioceses of Connor and Down & Dromore, is a lady who has never been daunted by a challenge.

She comes to Church of Ireland House from the Electoral Office where she was Assistant Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland.

June grew up near Donaghadee. She went to Regent House Grammar School before studying English at the new University of Ulster at Coleraine. Her first job was with the Ministry of Agriculture. A year later she moved to the new Northern Ireland Housing Executive and then onto the Northern Ireland Training Executive.

She later joined the Northern Council for Educational Research (NICER), based at Queen's University, Belfast and shortly afterwards married Kevin. They have three daughters. Rebecca, 28, Kirsty, 25, and Hannah, 19.

During her 11 years at Queen's June was NICER company secretary and also Secretary of the Northern Ireland Advisory Committee on Teacher Education. In 1987 she was appointed to a senior post with the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland and was Deputy Electoral Officer and Deputy Returning Officer for South and East Antrim, until 1994 when in a major reshuffle she moved to undertake those roles in the four Belfast constituencies.

Here June was thrust into the spotlight – it was her voice that announced the results of some colourful elections on TV and radio, and her authority which maintained some semblance of order at what were often chaotic counts. "I always had to present a non-political, impartial face to all sides of the community, all shades of politicians and all the fairly high-profile personalities involved," she said. "I have memories of disputes between political activists. I once had to stand in the middle of a very difficult polling station in north Belfast and tell them that if they did not abide by the law and conform to the strictures of the legislative process we would have no option but to close the polling station."

In 2001 June was promoted to Assistant Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland and oversaw the introduction of individual registration for voting - the first area in the United Kingdom to do so.

In 2008 she was seconded to the Greater London Authority as project manager for electronic counting during the 2008 mayoral elections. "I learned a lot from being in a different working and political environment," she said.



Mrs June Butler, diocesan secretary.

June's last big election was the European Elections in June 2009. For the first time the verification of votes and count for the whole of Northern Ireland took place in the King's Hall, with a media team shadowing June's every move for a BBC documentary.

She and Kevin have lived in Saintfield for 24 years. June grew up a Presbyterian, but after her marriage moved to Holy Trinity, Drumbo. Kevin still rings the bells there every Sunday, but June is an active member of Saintfield Parish. She is on the Select Vestry and has been involved in the Mothers' Union, at branch and diocesan level, for 18 years.

The move to diocesan secretary at Church of Ireland House presents a new challenge for June. "I felt that it was an environment of which I had some knowledge because of my work with the church and I was ready for a challenge having been in the electoral office for more than 20 years.

"I embrace change and am looking forward to dealing with new people in a different working environment. I will bring many skills I have acquired over the years to the job of diocesan secretary and I hope that I can serve the dioceses well. The bishops and staff have been most welcoming and supportive and also tolerant of my ignorance in many quarters. Already it has proved a steep learning curve.

June added: "I must pay tribute to retiring secretary Neill Wilson who has been willing to share his wealth of knowledge and experience and brings a sense of humour to every situation."

Gdansk experience for Bishop

The Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev Alan Abernethy, was part of a delegation from Ireland to attend a European conference on Catholic social teaching.

The international conference was organised by the Commission of Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (COMECE), and it took place in Gdansk, Poland from October 8-11.

The aim of the conference was to provide an opportunity for Catholic

laity to debate major anthropological and socio-ethical challenges at EU level, inspired by the social teaching of the Catholic Church. The theme of the conference, the first of its kind, was: Solidarity – the challenge for Europe.

Archbishop Diarmuid Martin, Archbishop of Dublin, delivered the opening address. The Irish delegation was led by Bishop Noel Treanor, Bishop of Down and Connor.

Following the Gdansk conference, Bishop Alan said: "As an ecumenical

visitor it was a privilege to be invited and to share in the 'Gdansk Experience.' It was delightful to share in the Irish humour and 'craic.' The depth of information shared from around Europe was very helpful, not least in issues surrounding family."

Bishop Abernethy went on: "From my own perspective it was very helpful to see how politicians were able to share their insights from a faith perspective. To have politicians committed to faith and policy was encouraging and challenging for my perspective."



**St Mark's
MU
celebrates
50 years**

The members of St Mark's, Ballymacash, Mothers' Union (above) celebrated their 50th anniversary on October 18.

The inaugural branch meeting took place on Tuesday October 20 1959 with Mrs V M Newell as the first Enrolling Member.

The succession of Enrolling Members

since then includes Mrs L Rodgers, Mrs F Barr, Mrs D Callan, Mrs H Jones, Mrs D Irwin, Mrs A Armstrong, Mrs M Moreland and Mrs Kaye Somerville.

A special cake presented for the anniversary was cut ceremony by two foundation members, Mrs Jesse Agnew and Mrs Eva Ritchie.

Cycle of remembrance

In June the Rev Bill Boyce, rector of St Brigid's, Mallusk, his curate the Rev Andrew Ker, and Bishop Alan will visit every parish in the diocese by bicycle!

They are planning to cycle 350 miles over six days, linking all parishes in Connor. The cycle will also be a unique tribute to Bill's late wife Sandra, and will raise funds for the Friends of the Cancer Centre at Belfast City Hospital.

The cyclists begin their 'Connor Cycle of Prayer' at St Brigid's on Tuesday June 1. They will finish at St Brigid's on June 6, the first anniversary of Sandra's death, when a special

service will be held at which a Book of Remembrance will be dedicated. This book will be collated along the cycle route, with parishioners throughout Connor invited to enter the names of family members who have also died of cancer.

The service will begin at 3.30pm and the preacher will be the Archbishop of Armagh, the Most Rev Alan Harper. The Bishop, Bill and Andrew are looking for sponsorship for this venture, and are encouraging parishes to add names to the Book of Remembrance. An itinerary and further details will be published on the Connor Diocesan website (www.connor.anglican.org).

Girls get ringing!

Eleven members of the GFS in Ballymena climbed the 52 steps to the ringing room of St Patrick's Parish Church to try their hand at bellringing.

The ringers are finding it increasingly difficult to attract young people to undertake the commitment of ringing the bells for Sunday services.

The main aim of the bells is to 'Call the People to Worship.' Thanks to the GFS leaders who have promoted this exercise the parish hopes to teach three of the girls to ring. There will be a Ringing Trophy and badge to encourage these young folk to learn and hopefully become valued members of the church tower.

Eglantine Parish raises the roof!

Eglantine Parish has replaced the roof on the 134-year-old listed All Saints' Church. The church was reopened and rededicated on All Saints' Day by the Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev Alan Abernethy, who also dedicated new carpet for the Choir Vestry, the gift of the parish's Mothers' Union branch.

The church was consecrated on July 15 1875. The only alterations have been the addition of stained glass windows and the construction of a Rector's vestry room.

During the 1970s it became clear that the roof would require major maintenance. At that stage the inner lining of the roof was replaced and repairs have been carried out to the roof tiles to keep the church watertight.

The recent renovations, costing £220,000, replaced the roof tiles, repaired the gutters and downpipes, re-pointed the stonework and repaired the internal plasterwork, as well as other necessary external improvements. The Parish was assisted with this essential work by a grant of £97,800 from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).

Fund raising activities have taken place and more are planned. Canon William Bell, rector, said: "I wish to thank



At the service in All Saints' Eglantine are, from left: Mrs Maureen Campbell (People's Churchwarden), Mr Geoffrey Simpson (People's Glebewarden), The Rt Rev Alan Abernethy (Bishop of Connor), the Rev Canon William Bell (Rector), Mr Donald Finlay (Rector's Churchwarden) and Mr David Orr (Rector's Glebewarden). Photo courtesy of John Kelly.

everyone who has worked on the planning and construction phases of this project.

The prayers and support from our parishioners and the local community have been very much appreciated by everyone involved. Our objective in taking on this project is to ensure that the church building continues as a place of worship for many future generations."

Creative Liturgy seminars

Connor Diocese held four seminars outlining ways to be creative in the use of liturgy. These were delivered by the Rev Peter McDowell (Diocesan Liturgical Officer) supported by Bishop Alan.

Mr McDowell put forward a model of excellence, encouraging all to take time to prepare, be authentic, collaborative, relevant, inclusive, and in all things be prayerful. He outlined a range of resources to help support the 'Service of the Word' and encouraged those present to try new things.

Bishop Alan outlined the biblical heritage of liturgy and how it is relevant today. He wanted to encourage creative liturgy with the

structure of the prayer book. There was some lively discussion at the seminars which attracted around 150 people involved in delivery of worship.

Institution in Coleraine

A service of institution for the Rev Roger Cooke as rector of St Patrick's Parish Church, Coleraine, took place on September 25.

Roger comes to St Patrick's from Musselburgh Parish, Edinburgh, but has long established links with the local area.

The father-of-three, who is married to Sarah, was born in Ballymoney and lived in Portstewart until the age of five when his family moved to Bangor, Co Down. Roger went to Edinburgh College of Art to study architecture and also spent a year at Rhode Island School of

Design in the USA. He was ordained in 1999.



OBE for Black Santa

The Dean of Belfast, the Very Rev Dr Houston McKelvey, above, was awarded an OBE for services to the community in the Queen's New Year Honours list.

Dean McKelvey, 67, who has been Dean at St Anne's since 2001, holds his Black Santa charity appeal outside St Anne's Cathedral annually over the years has

raised literally millions for charities. The Dean said of the appeal: "It is owned by the community, almost more so than the cathedral. We are simply the organisers, but it is a community response."

The unchurched child

Two presentations by author and Church of England curate Mark Griffiths on the topic 'How can the church connect with the unchurched child' were well attended.

The 'One Generation from Extinction' talks took place in St Brigid's Parish Church, Glengormley, and in St Peter's Parish Centre, Antrim Road. Both were attended by clergy and youth leaders from Connor Diocese and beyond.



Accountant David Cromie at work with Yei Diocesan bookkeeper Samuel Dino.



Bishop Hilary of Yei discusses the team's programme shortly after arrival.

Working partners

A team from Connor travelled to our link diocese of Yei in Southern Sudan from January 17-27. The team, comprising diocesan accountant David Cromie and communications officer Karen Bushby, was led by the Ven Stephen Forde, Archdeacon of Dalriada and chair of Connor Council for Mission.

The trio visited the new school in Mongo village, built with funding from parishes and individuals in Connor. One of the aims of the trip was to lay the foundations for a Mission Experience Team Abroad (META) visit to Yei led by the Bishop of Connor and Canon Cecil Wilson in July this year.

Assisted by the Bishop of Yei, Bishop Hilary Luete Adeba and staff at diocesan office, Archdeacon Forde spoke to those on the ground and determined the skills most needed when the team arrives. He held meetings with different NGOs based in Yei, and attended a conference facilitated by the charity Reconcile to help Sunday School leaders recognise and deal with trauma in young people. Archdeacon Forde also preached at two Sunday services, and was spokesman for the team during the trip.

Accountant David Cromie used his skills in finance and management to introduce Yei diocesan bookkeeper Samuel Dino to a range of computer packages and programmes which will maximise diocesan assets and streamline



Archdeacon Stephen Forde blesses children at a P7 conference in the cathedral.

administration and accounts.

During their seven days in Yei, the team visited various projects supported by Yei Diocese, including the Martha Health Centre and the Yei Vocational Training College, and joined in worship in services in English, Arabic and the local Bari language. They participated in a conference for 700 P7 school leavers and had a private audience with the County Commissioner of Southern Sudan.



Reports and pictures by DCO Karen Bushby

Karen Bushby met with Yei MU and interviewed survivors of the 22-year civil war which ended with the signing of a peace agreement in 2005. She also recorded the reality of life in Yei in pictures, words and video.

The team stayed at the very comfortable ECS Guest House, an enterprise run by the diocese, and enjoyed the benefits of running water (most of the time) and a reliable electricity supply from 7am until midnight.

They flew from London to Entebbe with British Airways, and then onto Yei on a small plane operated by Eagle Air, via the Ugandan town of Arua. The only slight hitch was their suitcases were left behind in London, and only arrived in Yei on January 23!



Archdeacon Stephen Forde preaching in Yei Cathedral on Sunday January 24.



A girl prays in Yei Cathedral.

Next time you complain about hold-ups at Sandyknowes or the holiday traffic on the Portrush to Portstewart road, take a few seconds to think of our friends in Yei.

The roads there are in a desperate state. They are made of dirt and are so rutted that driving at any speed is impossible. Drivers weave from side to side, trying to keep in the tracks. A four-wheel drive is essential. And if the roads are bad in the dry season, they must be much worse when it rains.

Until something is done about the roads to and from Yei, it will remain isolated and vulnerable. Local people cannot take their produce to markets in Juba or other large centres because they cannot transport anything. So despite the incredibly fertile soil there is no point in investing in any large-scale agri industry. Families just grow what they need to survive, but not what they need to thrive.

In a town with no doctors, getting treatment outside Yei may be the only way to save a life. But the flights from Yei's red dust airstrip are too expensive for most, and a six hour drive to a functioning hospital is often not an option.

As the Connor team left Yei, Bishop Hilary was preparing to take his nephew Francis in his jeep to hospital in Juba, 100 miles away. Francis had been left unable to move his limbs after a motorbike accident, and the Bishop had had to pay a 'private' doctor to do an X-ray and confirm that Francis had broken his spine in four places. As we jolted our way along the Juba Road to the airstrip, just a half hour journey, we prayed that the inflatable travel pillow we had left to be used as a neck support for Francis on his journey would be of some use. Tragically we heard later that Francis died soon after his arrival in Juba.



Photos show the rutted road to Mongo and a view of Southern Sudan from the air.



The Eagle Air flight (carrying the team's luggage!) touches down at Yei.

The survivors' stories

Southern Sudan is emerging from decades of civil war. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was signed in 2005, but with elections in April and a referendum next January, the future is uncertain.

There have been two civil wars in Sudan. The first raged for 17 years, and ended in 1972, but the second broke out just 11 years later. During its 23 years, 1.9 million civilians lost their lives, and four million were forced to flee their homes.

In the most recent conflict, thousands of women and children were taken into slavery. Livestock and wild animals were slaughtered for food. People fled to bordering countries including Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda and Egypt, and many hid for years in the massive Sudanese bush.

Despite the death toll, there were survivors and many have found their way home. This is a lost generation, young people with no education, returning to a home with no economy, no investment, and little hope for the future. In three years the population of Yei town has increased threefold, from 50,000 to 150,000. Yei is determined to survive. So are its people, here are some of their stories:

Catherine Aya and her children fled Yei in 1984 taking nothing but the clothes on their backs. In the cold of the open bush, she ripped her own dress to make covers for her children. Then the soldiers stole them as they slept. Catherine spent the entire civil war hiding in the bush, strengthened by her faith. "Despite all the suffering we did not lose faith in a living God. Wherever we fled, we made a church in a shed," she said.

Nineteen-year-old **Duwuki Robert** was born during the civil war. His family moved from village to village and against the odds he managed to get an education. In 2004 he returned

to Yei and is now a youth worker at the Cathedral. "I hope to go to college but my parents cannot afford the fees," he says.

He describes the war years as 'terrible.' "Sometimes the soldiers would attack people in their homes. When you cooked food you had to walk five miles to take it to the garrison. We were always beaten. When the aeroplanes came over you had to rush into the bush and look for somewhere to hide," he said.

Mary Gboka trekked miles to give her children a future.



Joyce Kharmisa was pregnant with her sixth child when the soldiers arrived in Yei. She fled with a baby on her back and one on her neck. "In the bush we survived on wild fruit. We lit fires at night for heat and to keep the mosquitoes from the children." Two of her children died due to lack of medication. In makeshift camps the women were forced to endlessly grind maize for the soldiers. Both factions raped the women and girls. Following the peace agreement, Joyce returned to Yei where she was reunited with her husband after 21 years.

Mary Gboka, 45, learned English in Yei before the war, but like the majority of women she is now jobless. When war broke out she walked to the Congo. After a year she trekked back into the Sudanese bush. A year on and she walked to Uganda. "I had to find a way to save my children. I have five girls and the eldest was 10," she said

Clement Duku is 56 and spent several of the war years working as a nurse at Yei Hospital, before leaving to help people in a camp in Congo. When the war ended he returned to Yei with his children. "Southern Sudan is a rich country, it is fertile, we have oil, but all this is taken by the north," he said. Yet he went on: "It is better that we have suffered so we can build a better life for future generations."



A typical street in Yei town centre today.



Mums and children flocked in their hundreds to the mango trees close to Yei Cathedral, where UNICEF were vaccinating against measles. The mums and children queued patiently for their jabs and each left with a certificate of vaccination and a block of soap. To alleviate the children's boredom, an archdeacon with a digital camera and a communications officer with a video camera were on hand. What delight and amazement in the children's faces when they saw themselves in photographs and video!

30 cleaners but no doctors

You would not want to be ill in Yei. The local hospital is, quite simply, shocking. It has a look of dereliction despite dozens of people in its dusty grounds. They cook, they launder and they wait.

There is no hustle and bustle. The noise of the crickets is punctuated by the gentle sweep of a grass brush as a man of indeterminate age moves leaves and dust from a pile here to a pile there.

This is a hospital with absolutely no doctors, few trained nurses, and limited medical supplies. CMSI associate Poppy Spens tells us there are only 88 practicing doctors and 10 fully qualified midwives in the whole of Southern Sudan, a country of 10 million. The region has the highest maternal mortality rate in the world.

We briefly call into the dark children's ward where the beds are covered in mis-matched sheets and blankets and the paint peels from the walls. There are women and children, but only one nurse is to be seen. Families must be close at hand when a patient is in Yei Hospital, as no food is provided.



We pass an operating theatre which looks alarmingly like a shed. But as there are no surgeons in Yei there are probably no operations. The trolley (pictured above) sits outside, dirty blankets on top, a cat cleaning itself below. In the maternity ward there are three mothers with new



A mother tends her child in the 'brighter' part of the children's ward at Yei Hospital

babies. One baby has an extra little finger on each hand, but these will apparently fall off soon. Nothing to be alarmed about, Alice Sama, the nurse midwife tells me. Alice explains that there is no-one qualified to do a caesarean section if a woman is in obstructive labour.

It is hardly surprising the majority of women chose to have their babies at home. As we leave the hospital we meet Clinical Officer Onesimos Mono, who tells us he has not been paid for five months. We are joined by Margaret, one of the hospital's 30 cleaners. Ironic really, a hospital with 30 cleaners but no doctors.

During the civil war Yei Hospital was run by the charity Norwegian People's Aid. Bishop Hilary is anxious that the NPA be asked to once again take over running the hospital from the Eastern Equatorial State. The Bishop has vowed to put pressure on the County Commissioner to ensure that Yei Hospital is staffed by paid doctors.

Martha Clinic a lifeline for many



Waiting for treatment at the Martha Clinic.

The Martha Clinic run by CMSI associate Poppy Spens is a lifeline for thousands.

When Poppy arrived three years ago the clinic comprised only one building. There is now an immunisation centre and waiting area, while a modern new building has tiled floors, running water,

a fridge, an office and consultation and treatment rooms. Previously medical waste was dumped in the garden. Now the clinic has an incinerator.

Poppy hopes to extend to provide a staff room, and work will soon begin on the conversion of an empty building into a children's ward, eye clinic, and

dental clinic.

When Poppy first came to Yei the clinic saw 20 patients a day. On January 18 this year it saw 120 ante natal patients and gave 120 immunisations. The Martha Clinic also runs a mobile clinic, which takes medicine and vaccinations out to the very many rural villages in Yei Diocese.



Archdeacon Stephen Forde is welcomed to Mongo by the local tribal chief as Bishop Hilary looks on.



A section of the parade which greeted the Connor team on arrival in Mongo.



Three of the older members of the Mongo community listen in to the speeches.



Young people in a musical procession outside the new Mongo School building.



Words cannot describe the welcome the Connor team received at Mongo School. The joy in the faces of the children, young people, teachers, mothers, elders – in fact the entire Mongo community - was breathtaking.

It was the school holidays. We had expected to meet the principal, perhaps a couple of teachers and pupils. What we had not anticipated was the sea of colour, movement and music that greeted us at the end of the dusty road from Yei. It was a spectacle that proved, if ever there was a doubt, that the people of Mongo were enormously grateful for Connor's support.

Bishop Hilary, CMSI associate John Spens and Archdeacon Stephen Forde joined this joyous caterpillar as it wound its way to the front of the new school, built with donations of more than £110,000 from people in Connor Diocese. Among the guests on this special day was William Turumanya, the young builder. Three years ago he employed 20 people, now he employs 50.

We were given a tour of the large, bright classrooms, where new desks stood in proud rows and blackboards gave a hint of the lessons that take place within the walls.

Then it was a short walk to the shade of the mango trees, where pupils used to have their lessons. The singing and dancing continues as Archdeacon Forde is introduced to the important people of Mongo, school principal Eva Lily Henry, the Archdeacon of Mongo, the Ven Stanley Soroba, and the Boma tribal chief.

Finally everyone takes a seat in the shade, and Archdeacon of Mongo welcomes us. "We are not going to forget the people of Connor because what has happened in our diocese has not happened in the history of Mongo," he says. "We cannot help ourselves because of our desperate situation. You have given us a place we can come to get knowledge. We believe that in the future our children will be better people for this."

Santo Ali of Mongo PTA outlined the challenges still facing Mongo School, including lack of trained teachers, text books and high drop-out rates, and a young pupil in faltering English

thanked Connor Diocese for 'building us a school like this.'

Local pastor the Rev Jackson Duku appealed for continuing support. "Our teachers need trained. We need chairs and technology for the school office," he said, adding: "Educate me and I will not forget."

Village elder Cypres Yata greeted the visitors with a song of thanks. Indicating the clearing below the trees, he said: "We thank you for this was once our class and when the mangoes fell they fell on our children. We now wipe the tears from our eyes. The mangoes do not fall on our exercise books, the rain does not fall on us and there is no longer noise from outside and we thank you for that."

Introducing the Connor team, Bishop Hilary explained that a second group would visit Yei in July. He likened Archdeacon Forde to John the Baptist, coming to prepare the road for Bishop Alan Abernethy to open the new school.

In response Archdeacon Forde brought greetings to the children of Mongo from Connor Diocese. He recalled how he stood under the mango trees three years ago. "I had a dream. What if the people of Connor could build a school in Mongo. In the strength of the Lord the dream has come true," he said.

"I have more dreams. One is that Mongo school will be the best in Yei County. Another is that you children will have dreams, so that when you are learning in the classrooms you will dream of becoming teachers, engineers, farmers who grow crops or pastors in the church."

Before leaving the team was served a meal of locally grown produce, including goat, chicken, cassava, rice, beans and peanuts. Along with bottles of soda including Coca Cola and Fanta - how these arrived in Mongo is a mystery! The visit to 'Connor's' school was certainly a highlight. Unlimited joy is hard to forget.



A choir member sings and dances in the shade of the mango trees.



The new Mongo School, shot through the window of one of the school's old buildings.



This mum and daughter dressed in their best for the Connor visit to Mongo.



Mongo School Principal Eva Lily Henry dances with Archdeacon Stephen Forde, Canon John Kanyikwa, and Bishop Hilary at the Mongo celebrations

Church a key to peace

County Commissioner Lokonga Moses does not underestimate the role the churches have played both during and since the civil war.

"Over the 21 years of our troubles it became very clear that the church has played a key role in bringing together the warring parties and in bringing peace," he said. "It is important that the church is being represented in the government of Southern Sudan."

He went on: "The church was the first to deliver basic services like education, and has played a key role in peace building." He said the government, along with churches and NGOs, were identifying Yei's resources and working together to organise training. Together they had drawn up a strategy plan for the next five years.

Looking to the forthcoming elections and the issues surrounding them, the Commissioner said the border which could separate Northern and Southern Sudan had yet to be determined. A buffer zone is currently in place, but with many of Sudan's oilfields lying geographically in the south, the exact line of the border is likely to remain contentious.

Commissioner Moses said that until this point, the Khartoum government had been talking aggressively, but felt that in the days before our interview, its tone had softened. "The President said yesterday (January 19) that if the people voted for a separate Southern Sudan, he would be the first to recognise it. These are big



The County Commissioner talks to the Connor team.

words," the Commissioner said. "It is better to talk about creating relationships if the two regions are separated rather than talking about going to war. The future is now in the hands of the people."

He said Southern Sudan was rich not only in oil, but in uranium, gold and minerals, as well as being extremely fertile. "We need companies to come and invest in Southern Sudan and provide opportunities for our young people," he said.

Bishop Hilary paid a personal tribute to Commissioner Moses. "The community in Yei County is very appreciative of the Commissioner," he said. "He has been a hard worker and is very protective. The people are very pleased."

At home with Poppy and John!



Poppy and John Spens with VTC manager Canon John Kanyikwa.

John and Poppy Spens are CMS Ireland associates and live in Emerald Cottage inside the Vocational Training College compound. They have been in Yei for three years.

John originally ran the VTC, though that task has been handed to Canon John Kanyikwa, and Poppy runs the Martha Clinic. That and much more

besides, for the Spens are very busy people.

Reflecting on their decision to come to Yei, John said: "We worked in the UK where I was in management and Poppy was a health visitor. When I was about 52 we began to do a little mission work.

"We were incredibly comfortably off. I was at the peak of my earning potential, but we asked ourselves if that was what we wanted to do for the rest of our lives. So we volunteered and CMSI took us on. We stayed a second and then a third year. God is leading us step by step."

Emerald Cottage is a far cry from the home comforts the Spens enjoy when they return to Winchester. They have a long drop toilet outside, a cement floor,

sparse locally made furniture and no glass in their windows. But Emerald Cottage is very much a home and emanates warmth and welcome. "It is a bit like camping," said John, "but it is much more comfortable than what most Sudanese people live in."

John went on: "There are enormous frustrations but also great rewards. Like Mongo School. It was a real struggle, Saturday after Saturday trying to balance the books, but it was well worth it when we saw the finished product.

"Nothing is easy here. I used to run a housing association with 160 people and a budget of £20 million. Eighty per cent of what I did was predictable. In Sudan 80 per cent is unpredictable, everything is a challenge. You need tenacity and improvisation."



Sunday School children sing and dance in the Zamba church, just a few hundred metres from the cathedral.

P7s unite in praise

A P7 leavers' conference took place at Yei Cathedral on January 23, hosted by the Scripture Union of Southern Sudan. Among the speakers was CMS Ireland associate John Spens, who addressed the theme 'Fear not, I am with you.'

Afterwards, John asked Archdeacon Stephen Forde to bless any child who wished Jesus to enter into their heart. Two hundred stepped forward that day, an overwhelming response.



The joy of worship

It's an all singing, all dancing affair when more than 1,000 worshippers pack into Yei Cathedral for the first English language service at 7.30am on a Sunday

The service is led by Pastor Richard Ali and features hymns, readings, prayers, and a musical item from the youth choir. The announcements are lengthy, meetings here, youth group here, even a diocesan football match at 4pm in Freedom Square. This is a busy diocese.

Newcomers and guests are welcomed. Archdeacon Stephen Forde and communications officer Karen Bushby are called to stand and bring the greetings of their families, churches and the people of Connor to their friends in Yei.

Archdeacon Forde is preaching, and bases his sermon on Luke 4:14, talking on the subject 'the best things in life are worth waiting for.'

CMSI associate Poppy Spens warns that Holy Communion will be something of a scrum. Dozens crowd forward to kneel at the altar. But soon there is order amidst this apparent mayhem and 1,050 people receive communion without any hitches. The service continues and two hours after it began it is all over.

As the people from that first service file out, those arriving for the



Waiting for Communion in Yei Cathedral. second English language service make their way into the Cathedral. Archdeacon Forde gets a break for tea, but returns to preach at the Bari service later in the morning.

Just 300 metres from the cathedral is the more traditional straw-roofed Zamba Church. Although set amidst a community of tukuls, Zamba Church is not named for the village, it takes its name from the five tribes who worship here together – a unique situation.

The Sunday School performs, the youth choir performs, the people clap, dance and sing. The sun shines and dozens more people lean in over the low walls, participating in this mass of energy praising the Lord.

Pastors Richard Ali (back) and Bishop's Chaplain Jacob Karaba during worship on January 24





They are a damaged generation. Women who witnessed the most appalling cruelty and atrocity, women forced to scrape a living in a barren bush, to kowtow to the soldiers, women submitted to the indignity of being a refugee in a foreign land.

Yet the 1,499 members of the Mothers' Union of the Diocese of Yei are proud and strong. Most are widows. Many spent 21 years living with their children in the wild or in makeshift camps in the bush. Others trekked for weeks in search of the relative safety of the camps for displaced people in the Congo, Uganda or Kenya. They were perhaps the 'lucky' ones, those whose children had a chance to go to school. For those in the bush, a whole generation missed out on education. Many, many died.

Some of their stories are told on page 10. They are home now, earning a living as best they can. For most, this means cutting grass in the bush and selling it in Yei where it is used to roof tukuls and other buildings.

Bishop Hilary's wife Mama Joyce is Patron of Yei MU. Members aim to help others, particularly women, visiting new mothers and the sick all over the diocese. The latter can, in some cases, mean a walk of 80 to 100 miles!

MU members also counsel inmates in Yei Prison. "These are our children, so we do not abandon them," said my translator Mary Gboka, 45. Mary learned English before the civil war, but today has no job. She uses her skills to help the MU. "I feel my calling is to raise the standard of life for women here," she says.

One of the MU's biggest projects in Yei is to run the new nursery school. The ladies are also involved in a basket making project and hand dye fabrics. But there is no local

market for their products.

When Bishop Hilary led me over to the MU office the ladies jumped up from where they sat outside and began to sing and dance. At the end they thanked me for making the journey to Yei and prayed for Connor Diocese. They were delighted when I extended the greetings of Connor MU and diocesan president Moira Thom.

I was presented with two small woven items by branch leader Esterida Amude and we had fun as Mary Gboka tried to work my digital camera to get a group photo. What a joy when, on my request, the ladies again danced and sang. They were an inspiration.

The way forward

The Connor team has identified areas where help is needed in Yei Diocese, both socially and within the church. They also identified ways in which the partnership between the dioceses can grow. It is hoped to take these forward in the near future.

A meeting to launch the July META took place on February 8. It is hoped the July team will run a three day conference for pastors and youth leaders on the topics of preaching, evangelism and discipleship. In addition to clergy other team members are likely to have skills in some of the following: Nursing, teaching, Sunday School or church children's work, practical skills such as building or vehicle mechanics, administration or finance skills or skills in reconciliation. Anyone interested in being part of this team should contact Archdeacon Stephen Forde, email: stephenforde@btinternet.com.

Building for the future

Inside its compound walls the Yei Vocational Training College is a hive of activity. The VTC was set up by the Episcopal Church of Sudan as a response to a shortage of technically skilled workers who are vital to the recovery of post-conflict Southern Sudan.

The college offers practical training opportunities, within a Christian context, to young men and women. It has 90 full time students. Bishop Hilary chairs the college management team. Until recently the college was co-ordinated by CMSI associate John Spens, but is now managed by a local team led by Canon John Kanyikwa.

The college offers training in skills including carpentry and joinery, electrical, plumbing, building and concrete technology, vehicle mechanics and driving. It also runs a micro-enterprise programme which has helped locals start up businesses, and has a successful furniture workshop which made the desks for Mongo School.



A carpentry workshop at the VTC.

The Sudan Recovery Fund is currently supporting the full time and part time training of students in Yei as well as supporting the Micro Enterprise Scheme. Canon Kanyikwa said the college was anxious to include the additional skills of welding and blacksmithing in its curriculum.

Students who graduate return to the villages and pass their skills on to others, he said. "When our students graduate we give them tools so they can go back to their own areas and set up their own workshops," he added.

John Spens took the Connor team on a guided tour of the VTC, and it is hoped a DVD of this tour will be available soon for anyone interested in the work that goes on there.

Educating the youngest survivors

Mongo has a new school, and the focus is now on getting textbooks and training teachers to raise the standard of the education the children there receive.

Shortage of trained teachers is a big problem across Southern Sudan, but schools can and do succeed, and Immanuel Model Primary School in Yei is an example of this. Here the results are the best in the County.

P7s here can be aged up to 19. Graduating from primary school simply means the young adult has completed seven years of education. The shocking fact is that a woman in Southern Sudan is more likely to die in pregnancy or childbirth than to complete her primary education.

At Immanuel we meet Abraham, aged 19, who shows us some of the work he has been doing. Abraham spent much of his childhood in the bush.

He now hopes to go to secondary school, but fears his family will not be able to



Immanuel Model P7 pupil Abraham shows Archdeacon Stephen Forde and David Cromie the work he is doing for his exams.

afford the £75 per term fee. His aspiration is to be a teacher.

The head teacher at Immanuel, Wani Angelo, explains that the school was built with funding from CMS Ireland. It has 624 pupils, and was the first new school to be built in Yei Diocese. Bishop Hilary is justly proud of its achievement.

"This school is the best, the pupils are well disciplined and perform well," he said. He paid tribute to the school's 17 teachers who are paid less than those in government schools but who stay because of their great 'spirit of commitment.'



The future of Yei. Only 60 per cent of children in Southern Sudan attend school.

Yei now has a teacher training college. A new nursery school, built by funds raised by CMS England Mission Partner Carolyn Murray, and run by Yei MU, was open for registration on the team's final day in Yei. It is a sign that things are looking up for the children of this war damaged diocese. With financial and prayerful support, more teachers can be trained and the children can hope for a brighter future.



Bishop Alan with conference speakers Mark Russell of the Church Army and the Rt Rev Richard Henerson, Bishop of Tuam, Killala and Achonry.



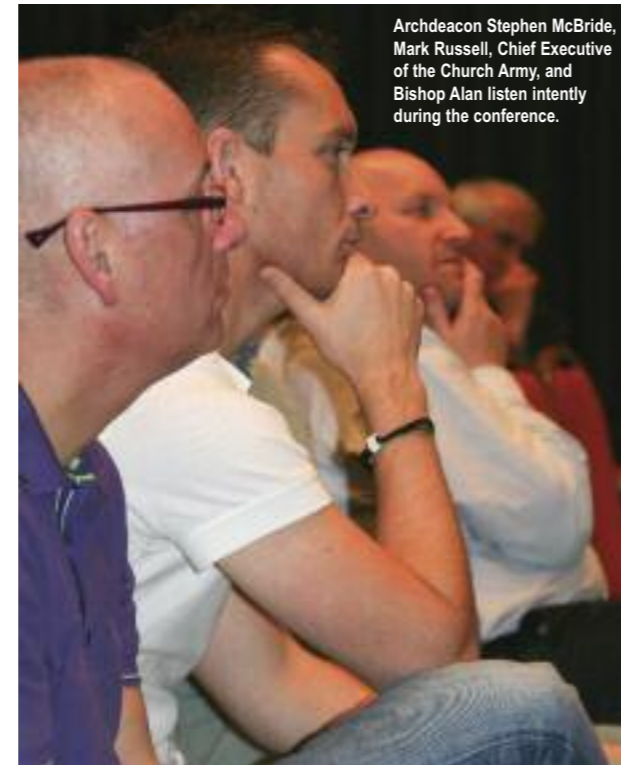
Mrs Lorna Palmer and Canon John Mann played some inspirational music during worship at the Clergy Conference.



The Rev John Bach puts across a point during the open session with Bishop Alan.



The Rev Helen McArthur (left) shares a joke with Mrs Rosemary Patterson, secretary to the Bishop of Connor, during the Clergy Conference.



Archdeacon Stephen McBride, Mark Russell, Chief Executive of the Church Army, and Bishop Alan listen intently during the conference.

Clergy are

Clergy from Connor Diocese gathered at the Slieve Russell Hotel, Co Cavan, in November for a three-day clergy conference.

The guest speakers were the Rt Rev Richard Henderson, Bishop of Tuam, Killala and Achonry, and Mr Mark Russell, Chief Executive of the Church Army.

Both challenged and inspired in their daily sessions and left the 80 clergy in attendance with more than a little food for thought.

It was a time for discussion and debate, a time for worship, and also a time for relaxation and fellowship. Services took place over the three days, with inspirational liturgy prepared by the Rev Peter McDowell, rector of Holy Trinity, Ballywillan, Portrush, and music from Mrs Lorna Palmer, Director of Music in Ballycastle Parish, on keyboard, and the Rev Canon John Mann, St John's Malone, on violin.

The conference opened with a Eucharist followed by a first session on the theme 'Getting to the heart of the matter' with Bishop Richard. In this he spoke about 'the heart of God.'

In his first address, Mark Russell acknowledged the 'huge pressure' clergy have to work under, and thanked them for their faithfulness in God and for the work they do. Mark added: "Nothing will make your church more relevant or real than new Christians. They will shine a



Clergy, guests and speakers at the clergy conference at the Slieve Russell Hotel.

challenged and inspired

light on your church where it needs to change. Evangelism changes the world and the world comes into your church."

Following dinner clergy again united for evening worship, and after Morning Prayer the next day Bishop Richard spoke on The Heart of Jesus, why we are made in God's image and why that matters.

In his second session Mark Russell looked at mission shaped church. His assistant, Sam Follett, told the conference about the success of the 'Adopt a Block' project in which he had been involved in Australia.

There was free time on the second afternoon of the conference, and before dinner that evening Bishop Alan held an open session, telling clergy he had taken time out to reflect on his own thoughts for the diocese. "I have been wrestling with one word which I keep taking apart. That word is 'connections.' I use it because I see so many disconnections in so many places."

He went on: "One of my priorities is to increase the sense that we belong to one another and we have a critical role in our community in Northern Ireland to make connections with each other and with people's lives."

At the end of the session, the Dean of Connor, the Very Rev John Bond, expressed thanks to Bishop Alan. "We are a very large diocese and sometimes we think we know each other but it is only when we come to a conference like this that we get the opportunity to interact," he said.

Evening worship on the second day took the form of a very atmospheric Taize service.

The closing Eucharist on the Friday morning included a third address from Bishop Richard whose final talk on Getting to the Heart of the Matter was on the subject of 'the response of our hearts.'

Bishop Alan thanked Mrs Palmer and Canon Mann for the music over the three days, and spoke of Peter McDowell's 'amazing gifts' for putting liturgy together.

He also thanked the Ven Dr Stephen McBride, Archdeacon of Connor, for organising the conference, his secretary Rosemary and diocesan training co-ordinator Peter Hamill who helped put the programme together.

Of Bishop Richard, he said: "This man was just incredible. He brought us to a very holy place in a very gentle way." Presenting Bishop Richard with a gift, Archdeacon McBride said: "It has been like watching somebody weave a rich tapestry watching you fight and wrestle with some of these ideas which disturb you."

Bishop Alan thanked Mark Russell for his most challenging addresses, and the Ven Stephen Forde, Archdeacon of Dalriada, presented him with a gift saying: "You have reminded us that we are to be a blessing, and that while we cannot always see the benefit of what we do, we hope someone else might."



St Patrick's Church tower before renovations.



Damp on the tower room walls before the work.



The new disabled toilet interior.

Glen church gets

Renovating an historic old church can be a tricky business, as Tickmacrean parishioner Ann Dunlop can testify.

For during extensive work at St Patrick's, Glenarm, Ann had body parts of some 90 long dead worshippers stored in her garage for reassembly!

Only three of the skeletons were intact, but Ann, a physiotherapist, was able to pinpoint numbers due to the variety of body parts. These were exhumed from a trench adjacent to the church vestry under the overseeing eye of Ann's son Colin, an archaeologist.

St Patrick's Church, Tickmacrean Parish, dates back to 1769. Originally it comprised a simple barn nave, three sided chancel, tower and spire, but over the years additions have been made including a transept and vestry.

The Walker organ, which is of national significance, was installed in 1871. In 1878 the bottom of the tower was opened up to create a baptistery and a new entrance porch was added. In the early 1890s the chancel was extended, the vestry rebuilt and most of the stained glass installed in the church.

Although the church was maintained and repaired over the years, time and damp caused serious damage, requiring

substantial investment to resolve these problems. The parish received funding from a number of sponsors, though the bulk of the money came from the Heritage Lottery Fund's Repair Grants for Places of Worship (RPOW) scheme, and the Environment and Heritage Agency. From August 2005 until March 2006 major restoration work was carried out, with roofs repaired, drains re-instated, and walls damp proofed. The electrical system was renewed, a new heating system installed and a disabled toilet added.

A second phase of work, again supported by HLF funding, took place during the summer and autumn of 2009. Most of the work was in the tower, where new floors were laid, new access ladders installed, and cement render was removed and replaced with lime based render on the walls. All the rainwater goods were replaced, the clock face had a facelift and the windows were restored to their original state.

Inside the church a dedicated wheelchair area was formed with ramped access, and the entrance was also made wheelchair accessible.

The exhumed bodies, caringly reassembled by Ann with what bones she had, were laid to rest once again, and peace reigns in the graveyard surrounding this beautiful seaside church. Local people were made aware of the exhumation through advertisements in the local press, and were invited to an open day

Earl attends Remembrance Service for soldiers

His Royal Highness Prince Edward, The Earl of Wessex, was at St Anne's Cathedral on December 2 for an Act of Remembrance and Thanksgiving for regiments and units returning from active service in Afghanistan.

The interdenominational service was hosted by 19 Light Brigade which had returned to its home base in Lisburn after its deployment on Operation Herrick in Helmand Province.

Families of those who died in the conflict were among the 600 guests.

The Earl of Wessex represented Her Majesty the Queen. The Earl is Royal Colonel of 2nd Battalion, The Rifles, based at Ballykinler in County Down and one of the main units in 19 Light Brigade. During the service the names of all those on the Operation Herrick 10 Roll of Honour was read out by Brigadier Tim Radford OBE, Commander of the 19 Light Brigade. There were more than 80 names.

Army chaplains were among the clergy taking part in the service which

was conducted by the Dean of Belfast, the Very Rev Dr Houston McKelvey.

Also present were the Bishops of Connor and Down & Dromore, The Rt Hon Harriet Harman MP, Leader of the House of Commons and Lord Privy Seal; The Rt Hon Bob Ainsworth MP, Secretary of State for Defence; and Sir Jock Stirrup, Defence Staff Air Marshall. The Rt Hon Paul Goggins MP represented the Northern Ireland Office.



Jean Pullins, Ann Dunlop, Bessie McWhirter, Ann Tinsley and Rev Moreen Hutchinson at the Walker organ.

a facelift

to see where the trench was to be dug.

Parishioners were also given a say in the acquisition of grants, particularly as one of the key funders was a lottery distributor. "When we discussed this we drew up a short questionnaire which was sent to every parishioner. We asked if they had any deep seated objections to the use of lottery money and if so would it make them leave the church," Ann explained. "Two said they had reservations but they were not sufficient to make them leave the church, so we went into it with a clear conscience."

Rector the Rev Moreen Hutchinson is happy to accede that Ann, Parochial Liaison Officer for the duration of the project, did the lion's share of the work. And securing funding is no easy task, admitted Ann: "It is an awful lot of work, crossing every T and dotting every I. Everything has to be done in the right order and in triplicate, but we had an extremely good company of architects who guided us through."

Looking proudly at the end result, Ann added: "It definitely was worth it. Before there was an awful amount of water coming in everywhere and the church was cold and damp. The old heating system was a death trap. We had to stand on a rubber mat and use a wooden spoon to turn it on."



Bessie McWhirter, Jack Montgomery, Rev Moreen Hutchinson, Jean Pullins, Ann Dunlop and Stephen Montgomery outside the beautifully renovated church tower.

Fundraising continues and before Christmas the parish organised a successful (and warm) Victorian Christmas celebration. The rector stated: "The support of parishioners and friends of the parish is much appreciated."

The architects for both stages of restoration were Alastair Coey architects, Belfast. The main contractors for the Tower Restoration were Martin and Hamilton Ltd, Ballymena.

New Chaplain

The new Chaplain and Dean of Residences at Queen's University, Belfast, will be the Rev Barry Forde, curate in St Patrick's and St Andrew's, Coleraine.

Barry said: "It is a tremendous opportunity to be an influence on many young lives at a pivotal time, young people who will go on to shape church and culture for many years to come."



St Brigid's marks 50 years

Bill Boyce, Rector (left) Bishop Alan (right) and the Rev Andrew Ker, curate (back right) with some of the parishioners who have worshipped at St Brigid's for the past 50 years. They are (from left) Sarah McClure, Audrey Manning, Helen Lunn, Meta and Larry Nelson, Ina Hill, Ronnie Armstrong, Alyx Nugent and Doris Armstrong. Seated front (from Left) are Kathleen Ruddock and Heather Cooke.

Big occasion for Portglenone

The new Portglenone Parish Centre was declared open on November 2 by Miss Olga Fleming, a lifelong parishioner and enthusiastic fundraiser.

A service conducted by the rector, the Rev Mark Loney, took place in the main hall, during which the Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev Alan Abernethy, dedicated the new building. The Rev Kevin Brew, Mr Loney's predecessor and a major catalyst in the project's early stages, spoke at the service which concluded with supper.

The new parish centre cost just over £300,000. The rector said: "From a parish of only 65 families this is an immense undertaking. A pulling together of inherited resources and some forward planning made the vision a financial reality."

He went on: "It is the hope and prayer of myself and many in Portglenone Church that the new centre will be a place where church and community meet, where the church gets back into the middle of ministering to the busyness and

bustle of everyday things rather than sitting on the fringes expecting folk to come to us."



The Rev Mark Loney, Miss Olga Fleming and the Bishop of Connor at the opening of Portglenone Parish Hall.

Lenten Seminars

Lenten Seminars on the subject of Jesus, led by the Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev Alan Abernethy, will take place as follows: Monday February 15 – St Peter's Parish Church, Belfast; Tuesday February 23 - Dunluce Parish Centre, Bushmills; Wednesday March 3 - Drummaul Parish Church, Randalstown; Monday March 8 - Dunluce Parish Centre, Bushmills; Tuesday March 16 - St Peter's Parish Church, Belfast; Wednesday March 24 – Drummaul Parish Church, Randalstown.

Performing arts school

A school of performing arts has been established at Holy Trinity Parish Church, Woodburn, Carrickfergus.

Founder of upLift is parishioner Ryan Moffett who runs the school with the help of his colleagues Amy Anderson and Carlee

Sounart. Classes including voice, dance and stagecraft are held in Holy Trinity every Saturday and the charge is £5.

Coffee morning

A coffee morning organised by accounts staff Loraine Brown and Nicola Carson at Church of Ireland House raised £255 for the Dean of Belfast's Black Santa Appeal.

An historic record

All Saints' Parish Church, Eglantine has been presented with a Church Record compiled by the National Association of Decorative and Fine Art Societies (NADFAS).

The members of the Ulster Group met monthly over two years gathering and collating information, and the resulting detailed and well illustrated record contains an inventory of everything of interest within

the building. Copies will be given to various records offices including the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Crosslinks team leader

The Rev Trevor Johnston, former chaplain to the University of Ulster at Jordanstown and Belfast and curate of St Patrick's Parish, Jordanstown, has been appointed Ireland team leader for Crosslinks.

Mr Johnston, who has been in post since September 2009, was commissioned by the international mission agency on January 22.

St Nicholas celebrates

Parishioners of Saint Nicholas, Lisburn Road, Belfast returned to worship in the church building on Saint Nicholas' Day after using the Parish Halls for 33 weeks. During that time a number of major repairs

were carried out to the church which included refacing the pillars with Portland Stone and the installation of a new heating system. Carpets were removed to reveal the original tile floor and the front of the church was opened up by removing some pews.

Charities legislation

Two information evenings were organised to help parishes comply with new charities legislation. The Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 came into force more than a year ago.

Diocesan Secretary June Butler told parishes it was probable that each will register individually with the Commission. The Diocesan Office has been working with the Representative Church Body (RCB) in Dublin to see how best it can provide parishes with guidance on what they will be required to do in order to comply with the legislation.



LEFT: Thistle the Donkey makes his way into church. ABOVE: Three young ladies brought their budgies. RIGHT: Andy and Cameron Lowe with Archie and Angus.



Bless my pet!

In an event reminiscent of a sketch from the BBC comedy *The Vicar of Dibley*, All Saints' Church, Craigyhill, hosted a Blessing of the Animals Service on October 4.

The service also marked World Animal Day, St Francis of Assisi Day and the start of Guide Dogs for the Blind Week.

Local animal lovers and amazing creatures of all shapes and sizes filled the Larne church to capacity for the service which was the first of its kind at All Saints.

Cats and dogs, some sporting an array of bling, sat cheek by jowl with mice, hamsters and rabbits in colourful carrot motif collars. Stick insects hitched rides on people's shoulders and there were cages filled with everything from a gecko to several budgies and even a degu (a sort of chinchilla) named Pablo. Thistle the donkey proved as popular as ever and came in to join the service too.

And with singing dogs especially welcome it was no surprise that many did join in with the hymns – All Things Bright and Beautiful and Make Me a Channel of Your Peace, based on the Prayer of St Francis. There was even a python snake taking the collection!

One special animal guest with an unusual life story was Keepa the Japanese Akita. His owners Jim and Geraldine McCurdy revealed: "Keepa is rather special because he actually grew up with Lilly the Barbary Lion cub in Belfast Zoo. Now he lives with

us and has been such a blessing in our home that we wanted him to come along to the service and be blessed too."

The Rev Roger Thompson, rector of the Parish of Kilwaughter and Cairncastle with All Saints', Craigyhill, said afterwards: "God created a kaleidoscope of fabulous creatures with whom we share our planet and many are now much-loved working animals, pets and companions in our homes. The service gave thanks and praise for them."

Special guests the Rev Anne Tolland from Cairncastle Presbyterian Church and Sister Anna Hainey from Drumalis asked God's continued blessing upon the animals.

Roger added: "It was truly a roaring success! There was a veritable Noah's Ark in the church and the lion lay down with the lamb. We were delighted to see so many animal lovers and their pets and thankfully they all behaved in a saintly fashion."

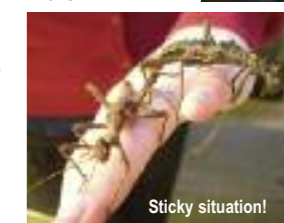
In keeping with the theme of the service, half of the £250 collection was donated to Guide Dogs for the Blind.



ABOVE: Mona Thompson and python. LEFT: Jim, Geraldine and Keepa.



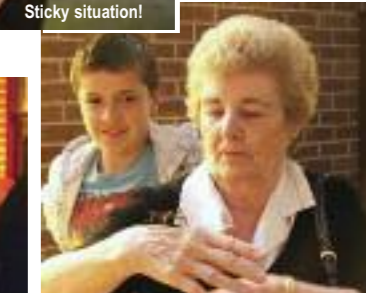
ABOVE: Guide dogs. BELOW: Mabel and Jonathan Gilpen and pet.



Sticky situation!



Awww...



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