

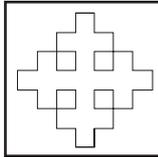
CONNOR

AUTUMN 2006

The Magazine of the Diocese of Connor

connections





The Rt Rev Alan Harper, Bishop of Connor, preaching at Linkoping Cathedral in Sweden

THE SPIRIT'S HOLY WHISPER

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

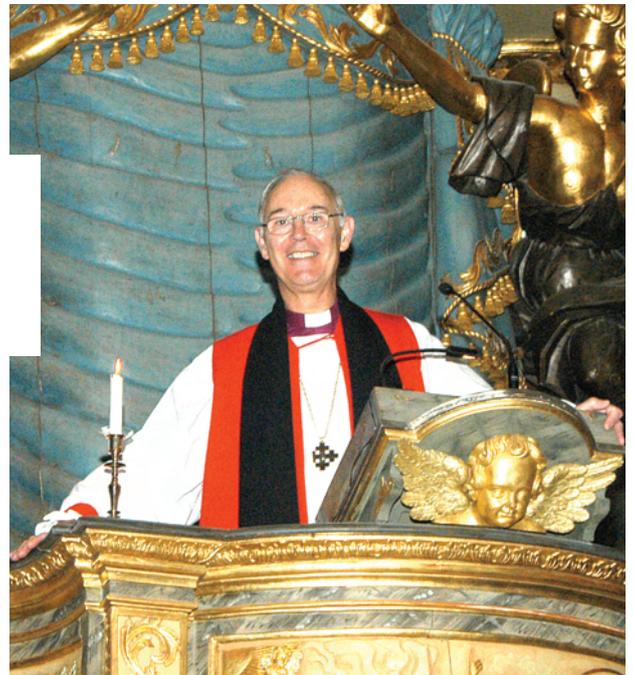
On June 9, St Columba's Day, I preached in Linkoping Cathedral at the pre-ordination Service of Vespers. Earlier that day, I had attended the examination of candidate priests and deacons and saw how such things are conducted in Sweden. Then on Trinity Sunday I took part in the Ordination Service itself - a genuine pleasure and a privilege.

Some parishes in Connor have links with Swedish parishes. Others are establishing links in Edinburgh Diocese. At our Diocesan Synod in October I hope we shall ratify a link with the Diocese of Yei, in the Church of Sudan.

Why? What is the point of companionship links?

There are many reasons for strengthening contact with churches across the world, but for me one outweighs all others - access to a bigger vision of God's Church in all its rich diversity. Obviously we make personal friendships and receive fresh insights along the way. We also discover our differences and how history, culture and experience have moulded us differently in our respective spiritual journeys. But that breathtaking sense of the rich breadth of the Church and its diverse witness to Christ throughout the world is surely the greatest benefit. It is easy to become trapped in the pre-occupations and perspectives of the Church in one's own backyard. We need a global perspective, a bigger picture, exposure to alternative estimations of the things that really matter.

Connor Connections recently carried a piece entitled 'Sacred Space' about quiet prayer in St Bartholomew's Church, Belfast. Sacred Space is one of the things that really matter. Being in Linkoping gave me a chance to



enjoy utter quiet, overnight, alone by the shores of the lake at Vardnas Retreat Centre. How I wish we had a Vardnas in Connor!

All people, lay and clergy alike, need time to hear, uninterrupted, the gentle, urgent, promptings of the Spirit. Modern lifestyles drown out the Spirit's holy whisper. I am grateful to Linkoping for 24 hours of Sacred Space.

In the end, what matters most is that opening wide of the inner eye which results from glimpsing a bigger vision and sets the spirit free to soar. It is not necessary to copy what others think or do in order to see things afresh and to seek that space where the Spirit is to be found - "outside the box".

+ Alan Connor

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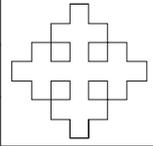
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THIS EDITION OF CONNOR CONNECTIONS HAS BEEN DESIGNED BY GARY BROWNLEE.



PLAIN SAILING FOR THRIVING MEN'S SOCIETY



Members of the Men's Society en route to Rathlin Island

It was plain sailing for 61 members of the Church of Ireland Men's Society whose annual outing took them by ferry from Ballycastle to the beautiful Rathlin Island.

First port of call was the refurbished Manor House, a National Trust property, for morning coffee. The group then moved on to St Thomas's Church which was last year rededicated after major restoration. Here a service of Holy Communion was celebrated by the Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev Alan Harper.

NEW DIOCESAN WEBSITE LAUNCHED

www.connor.anglican.org

Connor's new-look website is set to be launched at the Diocesan Synod in October. The website has been totally redesigned and incorporates Connor's colours and logo.

As well as a comprehensive news and events section, the website includes easy to navigate sections on training, youth activities, the Mothers' Union, mission, the work of the Age-ability Committee, and a valuable On-Line Ministry section.

The Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev Alan Harper, has a dedicated page, and there is also information on the diocese and its history.

Each parish has its own page, so visitors to the site can see at a glance the times of services, organisations in the parishes, directions to the churches, and the names and contact details of clergy. The diocesan magazine, Connor Connections, can also be downloaded from the website.

The former Archdeacon of Dalriada, the Ven Jack Patterson, who had been instrumental in the lobbying and applying for funding for the restoration, spoke of the history of the church and island. The first Christian church on Rathlin had been established by St Comgall, Abbott of Bangor in 580 AD, but the present church dates from 1722 and was rebuilt in 1822.

After lunch in the Manor House most of the group availed of the island bus to visit the RSPB bird sanctuary at the West lighthouse. Back on the mainland, the men dined in the Royal Court Hotel, Portrush.

The Men's Society was founded in England to provide an organisation, similar to the Mothers' Union, for men in parishes.

Among those active in promoting it in Northern Ireland were the late Bishop George Quinn, along with Dean Hamilton Leckey and Eddie Beckett, the society's early secretary. Both men are still involved in the society's activities.

These include an annual conference, an outing, a Quiet Afternoon and an Annual Service with guest preacher.

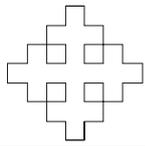
Although the Men's Society in England ceased to exist, the Church of Ireland Men's Society continues to thrive in Northern Ireland.

Karen Bushby, Diocesan Communications Officer, said: "The new website will be a vital tool for keeping everyone in the diocese informed of news and other activities. It is still very much in its infancy, and I hope it will evolve and improve in response to input from parishioners and other visitors.

"It is worth remembering that this site now puts Connor on the worldwide web, and we expect many of the visitors to be from places far beyond the boundaries of the diocese.

"I welcome comments and contributions from our clergy and parishioners as with their help I hope to ensure the Diocese of Connor website can always boast something fresh and informative no matter how often you visit."

Information, contributions or comments should be sent to Karen Bushby, Diocesan Communications Officer c/o Church of Ireland House, 61-67 Donegall Street, Belfast, BT1 2QH; email dco@connor.anglican.org or telephone 028 4066 0798 or mobile 07766 103880. Visit the Connor diocesan website on www.connor.anglican.org



HEALING FAITH

Rev Jennifer Bell,
chaplain at Belfast City Hospital



The patient was in denial. As her treatment progressed the Rev Jennifer Bell, chaplain at Belfast City Hospital, listened to her fears and guilt, and offered support that only faith can bring.

Finally the young mother accepted her illness. She is now in remission. The journey with this cancer patient is one of the high points of Jennifer's hospital chaplaincy.

There have been lows too. To cradle and bless the lifeless body of a tiny baby, born too soon, would be more than most people could handle. For Jennifer such pastoral care is a crucial part of her work.

Jennifer is 29, but looks younger. She has been chaplain at Belfast City Hospital since last December, and before that was assistant chaplain in both the Royal Victoria and City hospitals.

This work is a far cry from the experiences she had as a lab supervisor when doing a degree in agriculture with animal science at Harper Adams University College. But the seeds of a 'daft idea,' planted when she was just 17 – the result of a week's work experience with the Rev Neil Cutcliffe, rector of the Church of the Holy Spirit in Mossley – started to grow.

During that week she preached at Sunday evening service, and parishioners began asking if she was considering a career in the Church. "I just laughed," she said. "Can you see me in a dog collar? I was going to be a vet. My life was all planned but it planted a seed that never went away."

While Jennifer's name was put forward for selection to the Diocesan Director of Ordinands she completed her degree and worked in a nursing home.

"The Bishop had advised me to get a more people related job because he thought I needed to get out of the lab," she said.

Unfortunately Jennifer was ill for part of her three years at the Theology College in Dublin. "I had looked on the three years as a chance to grow and mature in myself so I had more of myself to bring to the ministry, but I felt that I had been so busy being ill that I had not grown," said Jennifer.

Encouraged to consider studying chaplaincy, and with the support of Bishop Alan Harper, she was accepted on a 15 month Clinical Pastoral Education residency at Hartford Hospital in Connecticut, USA.

I SEE HOPE IN DEATH, NOT JUST DEATH. THAT IS NOT EVERYONE'S BELIEF, BUT THAT IS WHAT ENABLES ME TO SIT WITH SOMEONE WHO IS DYING OR WITH A BEREAVED FAMILY

"It was a real baptism of fire. After a week you were given a ward and told to go visiting," said Jennifer. "Here, I am responsible for all Church of Ireland people who want to see a chaplain. In the States you visited everyone regardless of religion, colour or creed. I found that a little strange.

"I remember visiting a Jewish gentleman and thinking he is not going to want to see me because I am a little Christian girl from Ireland, but it turned out to be one of my best visiting experiences at Hartford.

"He had had quite a heavy life and he told me things he acknowledged he could not have told his Rabbi. I was able to help him get stuff off his chest.

"Where you come from in pastoral care is important but at the same time you have to meet the patients where they are and listen to them, not try to press your story onto them. That is one of the valuable lessons I have learned."



Rev Jennifer Bell, chaplain at Belfast City Hospital, chats with patient Raymond Priddy

Death is a difficult part of her work, but something Jennifer has been dealing with since her days in the nursing home.

"I see hope in death, not just death," said Jennifer. "That is not everyone's belief, but that is what enables me to sit with someone who is dying or with a bereaved family. I believe in the death there's still hope in the resurrection of Christ."

Jennifer works in the City Hospital four days a week, visiting up to 25 new admissions daily.

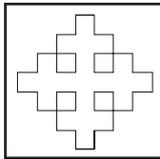
"I think that when people are sick they feel the need to know there's somebody in control and for those who profess to be Christian, that person is God," she said.

Raymond Priddy, 52, a parishioner at Magheraculmoney in Ardress, County Fermanagh, travels for regular treatment in the haematology and oncology ward at the City.

"Jennifer is welcome to stop with me anytime, I am always happy to see her," said Raymond "I have no inhibitions when I'm talking to her."

Jennifer, who is also assistant priest at St Nicholas, Belfast, intends to continue working in the hospital for the foreseeable future.

"I love my work. There is variety in parish work but here there's a huge variation in terms of people with different illnesses, people from all over the place. You never know what you are going to get each day," she said.



WARM ARCTIC MEMORIES

Darren and Karen McCartney have spent three years in the icy chill of the Arctic encompassed in the warmth of the people there. The couple, both 32, return home in October when Darren becomes curate at St Nicholas, Carrickfergus.

They have been living in Pangnirtung in Canada, where Darren has been minister in charge of St Luke's Anglican Parish. It is accessible only by plane.

"Christianity has been here for more than 100 years," said Darren. "There is also the Shayman who is a bit like a witch doctor, but the majority of people see themselves as Anglican."

The weather plays a big part in the couple's lives. "We had a blizzard at the weekend. Sometimes we can be cut off for a week or more," Darren said. "Everything comes into the town by plane, including perishable goods."

"I have not gone outside the town in the past year. You can drive about three miles. It's a road to nowhere."

Darren sometimes gets out of town by less conventional means. "I went by skadoo to the spring camp run by the school for young people to hunt and fish. They drill holes in the lake, and the ice can be six feet deep. You step out on the lake and it goes on for miles and you are surrounded by nothing but snow and mountains. The vastness of this place is amazing. It makes you feel really small," he said.

Most of the inhabitants of Pangnirtung work as either hunters or for the decentralised government, running vital services such as refuge collection, sewerage pumping, and water delivery, and despite high unemployment the people are quite well off.

While temperatures are sub-zero most of the year, the ice begins to disappear in June and it can reach as high as 16 degrees. Occasionally polar bears will come to town, foraging for food. By law, a community can shoot up to five polar bears a year.

As minister in charge at St Luke's, Darren's first responsibility is as rector of the parish. He is also chaplain to students at the Arthur Turner Training School.

Many of the students speak English, but their first language is Inuit, and Darren conducts most of his church services in Inuit.

A recent population boom in the town means around 60 percent of the population are teenagers. But Darren said the children tend to rule the home and many take drugs, which has given rise to another problem – suicide.

"In my first year here there were seven suicides," Darren said. This is something he has found challenging.

"I would have to say that the lowest time for me was when I had to inform a young girl, who attended the youth service, that her boyfriend had committed suicide. We had developed a good friendship with both of them.

**THE VASTNESS OF THIS
PLACE IS AMAZING. IT
MAKES YOU FEEL
REALLY SMALL**

"I remember sitting in the girl's bedroom with her mother, waking her from her sleep and then breaking the news. As she wept, her little daughter lifted herself up in her cot."

But Darren said the church is having an impact. "We run the youth services and support networks, and have a lot of young leaders in the parish. Unfortunately there is no marked reduction in the use of drugs. Young people are still battling with it, and there is big money being made pushing drugs here," he said.

"But Christianity gives people hope. It gives them an alternative lifestyle and people who are part of the church and who seek to follow the ways of Christ are, from my perspective, the backbone of this community.

"The Inuit have a strong understanding of scripture. For a long time the Bible was the only book they had in their own language.

Darren and Karen are looking forward to returning to Northern Ireland, but their departure from the Arctic will not be without a little sadness.

"I think it will be tough leaving here in some ways. We have built up good relationships. I will miss the closeness of the community and the lay involvement in the parish," said Darren.

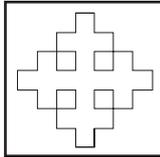
His work with young people has been the highest point of his time in the Arctic. "Seeing young people who have come to the youth service and received prayer in the past, or who have phoned, smiling whenever we meet in the town. That is a highlight I will always remember," he said.

A little Inuit girl



The Rev Darren McCartney and his wife Karen enjoy a sunny day in Pangnirtung, Canada





BIG DANDER 2006

More than 180 walkers of all ages put their best feet forward on Saturday September 23 when they stepped out on Big Dander 2006.

The walk began at St Patrick's Parish Church, Ballymena, and meandered through the Ecos Millennium Park. Participants had the opportunity to answer a series of questions as they enjoyed the beautiful scenery and wildlife in the park.

Parishioners and clergy registered from all parts of Connor, including Agherton, Dunluce, St Stephen and St Luke, Belfast, Ballyrashane, Glenarm, Tirkmacrean and Greenisland to name but a few.



Don McBride and Grace Rea check out clues.

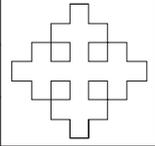


Jean Craig and Pat Lanigan, from St Patrick's Ballymena, were among the first to finish.

After the walk refreshments were provided in St Patrick's Church Hall and children had the opportunity to let off steam on the bouncy castles. The day ended with a short service in St Patrick's Church and the presentation of the prize to competition winners St Catherine's, Killead.

Thanks to Canon Stuart Lloyd and his team at St Patrick's, Ballymena, for all their hard work on the day. More photographs of the Big Dander 2006 can be viewed on the Connor diocesan website on www.connor.anglican.org.





Rev Neal Phair with parishioners from Dunseverick and Ballintoy ready to step out on Big Dander 2006.



Nine-year-old Kori Magee from Holy Trinity, Joanmount, Belfast, with her dog Benji.



Chloe Bond, aged two, has fun on the bouncy castle.

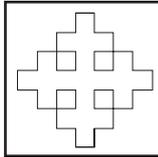


Sarah Hamilton, St Mary's, Crumlin Road, and Woody in St Patrick's Parish Church after the Big Dander.



Striding out are Amanda Adams and Larry and Jean Cunningham from St Columba's, Whiterock.





THE MUSIC MAN

Music and the church have played a major role in the Rev Dr Bob Cotter's life.

A teacher of German and French at Inst, Bob was ordained deacon in 2005 and serves in the Church of the Holy Spirit, Mossley.

Previously a member of Holy Trinity, Woodburn, he had helped with the intercessions and had done some preaching as part of a Certificate of Christian Studies.

"My sense of wanting to be involved in the church was growing. I got a lot of positive feedback and felt maybe God was helping me to have a bigger role," he said.

Because he wanted to continue teaching, Bob applied for the auxiliary ministry, and enjoyed a very different experience to Woodburn during his placement in Templepatrick.

He was ordained priest in June, and continues to teach full time.

He has one Sunday off per month, otherwise, he admits, he would risk burnout. He also does his pastoral ministry one evening a week, as well as hospital and home visits.

"To do both jobs you need to be very disciplined and you need to be able to say no," he said. In one particularly busy week he had three funerals to conduct, as well as visiting the bereaved families along with his other duties.

"It is wonderful. When you teach for 22 years you basically know what you are doing. The work I do for the church is something I have never done before, such as hospital visiting. To sit with a bereaved person and see the sheer strength they show through the quietness of their faith leaves me speechless. At times like that you sit in the car afterwards and shed a tear."

YOUTH NO BARRIER

He is only 24 and has the task of caretaking the busy parish of Agherton in Portstewart. A native of County Cavan, the Rev Niall Sloane is a child of a mixed marriage and believes this has been good preparation for Northern Ireland's unique sectarian melange.

He studied theology and biblical studies at Trinity College, Dublin, and spent two years in the Church of Ireland Theological College. He was appointed curate at Agherton in June 2005. Rector at the time was Archdeacon Patrick Rooke, now Dean of Armagh.

"The biggest fear I had was doing youth work and hospital visits," said Niall. "People have a perception that as a 24-year-old you are going to be wonderful with young people and that's far from the truth. Young people have their own perception of you. Because you have a collar on they think you are totally removed from them.

"I found that I could show them I was still in touch with them and I enjoy it now. I have also found hospital visits very rewarding.

"When Patrick was here he was someone I looked to for encouragement and to guide me through. When he left I realised just how much a rector does in a parish." He added: "The only thing closer than the relationship between a rector and curate is that between husband and wife."

As a single man, that relationship is one Niall has yet to explore, but if his parishioners have their way – that day may come sooner than later.

"They are putting pressure on me to get married, but I have no special lady at the moment. Fingers crossed she might appear," he smiles.





WORKPLACE MINISTRY

He comes from a long line of Methodist ministers, but the Rev Andrew Ker was last year ordained deacon in the Church of Ireland.

Pictured above with his wife Nuala, the 41-year-old father of three, a full time computer programmer, is now auxiliary minister at the parish of Larne and Inver with Glyn and Raloo after being ordained to the priesthood in June.

His relationship with the Church of Ireland started with a visit to the Church of the Holy Spirit in Mossley.

"I felt at home and had a real sense that I really want to be part of this place," Andrew recalls.

As a lay reader he was asked to go to Greenisland Parish. "The people there were so supportive and encouraging and gave me such a sense of my own ministry," Andrew said. Three years later he decided to offer himself for the auxiliary ministry.

"Through the years of my training many things happened to test me, but now I have a real sense of value of the auxiliary ministry itself and how important it is to be ministering in the workplace too."

With his rector the Ven Stephen Forde off on holidays, he found the summer busy. "It gives me such a wonderful sense of privilege to be doing liturgical functions. To me, celebrating my first communion was actually more special than ordination to the priesthood the Sunday before," he said.

"My year as deacon was very much getting to know people, establishing a working relationship with Stephen and developing that growing sense of belonging and feeling that you are helping everybody in the parish in their walk of faith. Stephen has been a superb mentor."

IN THE RIGHT PLACE

She loves clothes, hairstyles, make-up, and wears purple tights and a toe-ring! And believe it or not, she's a curate.

The Rev Diane Matchett certainly breaks the mould, but her commitment to her work is inspirational.

Her first job was in a nursing home, but her faith took her to Northumbria Bible College.

Diane described these as four amazing years. "You begin to grow as a person and in your faith. In Northern Ireland you have all kinds of trappings of religion. All of that fell away and the core of my faith remained the same even though it was challenged from time to time."

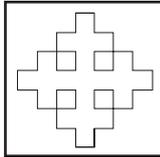
On graduating, Diane worked at Derryloran Parish in the Diocese of Armagh. She travelled to Africa with CMSI and during three years at Theological College completed a rare Honours Degree. Diane also worked in both the Episcopal Church and as a hospital chaplain in Pennsylvania.

Diane was ordained deacon last year and priest in June 2006. She got engaged that same night to fiancé Mark Stuart, and is now curate in Christ Church, Lisburn.

"It is a large parish, and my biggest challenge is managing my time in terms of writing sermons," she said. "I had my first wedding in June and was very nervous, and at my second baptism I had people standing when they should have been sitting. It was hilarious.

"Paul (Rev Paul Dundas) is very supportive and encouraging and he shares Ministry. I know I will have a fantastic learning experience here. God has called me here. I don't know where it will lead, but I know I am in the right place."





THE PROFESSOR OF HARD SUMS

Rev Professor Ken Houston with his grandchildren Frances and William

After 33 years teaching mathematics at the University of Ulster at Jordanstown (UUJ), the Rev Professor Ken Houston has finally hung up his mortar board.

He will now be able to devote more time to his job as auxiliary minister at St Andrew's Parish Church, Glencairn, and to his family.

Ken's journey with the Diocese of Connor has been a faithful one. Baptised in All Saints, University Street, Belfast, in 1943, he was confirmed in the same church in 1958 while a student at the Royal Belfast Academical

Institution. He studied mathematics and gained a PhD at Queen's University.

After his marriage to Patricia in Holy Trinity Church, Belfast, in 1967 he took up a lecturing post at Sheffield University, and spent a year on study leave at the Goddard Space Flight Centre, Maryland USA. During this time the Apollo 13 drama unfolded before the eyes of the world and Ken watched as President Nixon visited to speak directly to the Apollo 13 astronauts.

Ken and Patricia returned home in 1974 when he was appointed principal lecturer in the School of Mathematics

and Computer Science at the Ulster Polytechnic, later UUU. He was Head of Department of Mathematics in UU from 1984-94 and was promoted to Professor in 1996.

He was licensed as a Diocesan reader in 1983 and was ordained deacon in 1985, and priest a year later.

He is a man who has combined a gift for teaching with his love for the church. "I have had a calling to Christian ministry for most of my life, first through Sunday School teaching and then through leadership in the Boys' Brigade. In 1980 I was called to ordination in the auxiliary ministry and was selected for training," he said.

After his ordination as deacon Ken served in the grouped parishes of St James and St Silas in Belfast and in 1991 moved to Glencairn.

I WILL MISS THE DAY TO DAY INTERACTION WITH OTHER COLLEAGUES, BUT AS A CLERGYMAN I WILL STILL BE TEACHING AND HELPING OTHER PEOPLE DEVELOP AND LEARN

"The church had gone into decline and was not paying its way," said Ken. "Bishop Poyntz felt something radical needed to be done. He had heard about Captain Scott McDonald of the Church Army and the good work he had been doing in a housing estate in Newcastle Upon Tyne, not unlike Glencairn. The Bishop invited him to come and work here and we have been together ever since."

Ken describes Glencairn as 'the longest cul de sac' in Belfast. It is home to 400 families. "This is an area of social deprivation, and there was a time when there was a big paramilitary presence. Many of the 1970's maisonettes have been knocked down and new houses are being built, so it is likely another 30 or so families will be coming here to live," Ken said.

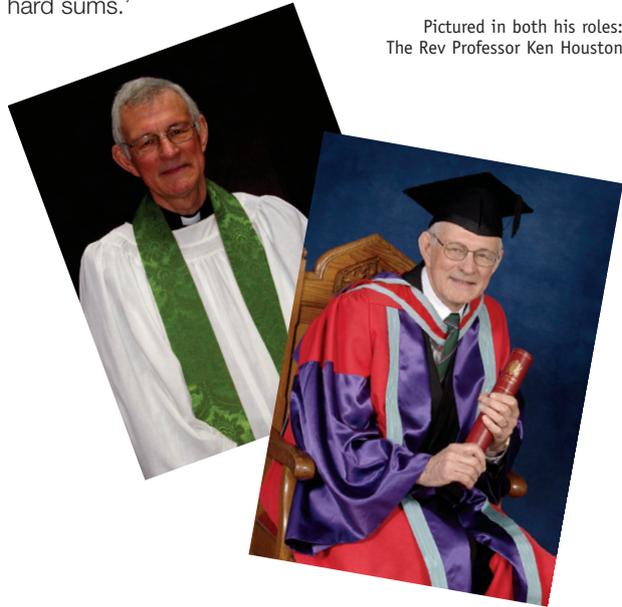
The future is looking brighter, and the appointment last year of Sister Valerie Thom as community evangelist for three parishes in the upper Shankill has enabled a greater ministry to children in the area. The annual visits of the Liverpool FC community coaching team have been particularly well supported.

"Valerie reports that a number of young people gave their life to Christ during the summer," said Ken. "It does not necessarily mean they are going to come to our church on a Sunday, but it does mean they are drawn into a Christian influence."

But his ministry at St Andrew's is only part of Ken's day to day life combining it, as he has done, with his work at UUU.

"I have always been good at mathematics. I found it easy to do and easy to learn. My calling was to be a teacher, but I ended up teaching in a university," he said. Some now affectionately refer to him as 'the professor of hard sums.'

Pictured in both his roles:
The Rev Professor Ken Houston



Ken has also conducted research in atomic physics and has published several articles in this field. He has chaired numerous committees and belonged to a wide range of professional bodies, as well as writing or editing several books and more than 100 articles on mathematics education.

Teaching, however, is his passion. "For most of my career I have been interested in good teaching, developing teaching and finding out where students have difficulty learning and helping them to learn," Ken said. He was appointed a Distinguished Teaching Fellow by UU in 2005.

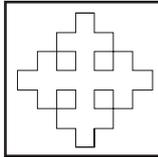
Ken and Patricia have three children, Mark 38, Kerry, 34, and Sarah, 30, and courtesy of Mark and his wife Ruth, two grandchildren, William, 9, and Frances, 7.

On his retirement, he was made Professor Emeritus at UUU. He is still doing external examination work and is part of an international research team into student learning and the professional development of mathematics lecturers.

"I will miss the day to day interaction with other colleagues, but as a clergyman I will still be teaching and helping other people develop and learn," he said.

"My wife and I will continue to travel abroad for as long as we are fit to do so. We will include many more visits to our children."

A special service to mark Ken's retirement took place in the Prayer Room at UUU on Monday October 9 with Ken celebrating Holy Communion and the Bishop of Connor preaching.



WINNING IDEAS

Comfy cushions for a school library and snugly blankets for premature babies were among the projects to pick up awards in a Connor Mothers' Union competition.

The O'Neill Cup - held every three years - attracted entries from 26 branches across the diocese. Entrants were asked to develop a project around a need in their parishes or communities.

This resulted in a wide range of ideas including monthly dinners for older parishioners, busy bags, teddy bears, message in a bottle for those living alone and supporting a new alternative church service.

The judges, the Bishop of Connor; Lady Christine Eames, former MU Worldwide President; and Mrs Louise Wilson, past President of the Methodist Women in Ireland had a difficult task. Only one point separated the first and joint second entries, with Eglantine, Lisburn, taking home the cup and Christ Church, Lisburn and St Nicholas, Belfast sharing second place.

Eglantine MU had made floor cushions for children with learning difficulties who attend Brookfield School. "The feedback has been great. The children love them and the cushions are used a lot," said Sandra Goffe, branch chairman.

A variety of initiatives including happy bags, welcome packs for new families, financial support for the parish website and supporting a new youth officer helped the St Nicholas, Belfast, branch take joint second place.

Chairperson Pauline Scott said every member had been involved in the project. "We are a small, fairly elderly branch and we were looking for things that would be achievable and would also help the parish," she said.

Sharing second place was Christ Church, Lisburn, who made blankets for premature babies. Branch secretary Sheila Walker said the branch handed 90 blankets and quilts to the Royal Maternity Hospital. Each piece had a label saying 'Christ Church MU - a gift for you.'

"The blankets are all in different patterns and colours, and help make each baby look individual. It helps the parents feel more homely. We are hoping to continue this relationship with the special care baby unit and will see if there are other things we can make for the babies, like hats and booties," Sheila said.



Representatives of the many branches of Connor Mothers' Union who competed in the O'Neill Cup competition with special guests Lady Christine Eames and The Rt Rev Alan Harper, Bishop of Connor.

NORMA REPRESENTS CONNOR MOTHERS' UNION AT PALACE GARDEN PARTY

Mrs Norma Bell, Diocesan President of Connor Mothers' Union, was one of six MU representatives invited to a Royal Garden Party at Buckingham Palace in July. Norma, the only MU representative from Ireland, joined 7,600 other guests in the Palace grounds on a sweltering hot day.

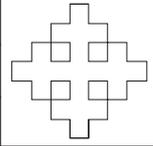
Norma said: "People from all walks of life were present, making the occasion very special.

"The atmosphere was unique and the surroundings were beautiful. People carrying parasols and colourful umbrellas and others in a variety of uniforms and national costume all added extra colour to the occasion."

Two military bands entertained guests while members of the Royal family mingled with the crowd. During the afternoon Norma was introduced to HRH The Duke of Gloucester. "It was a privilege to attend a Royal Garden Party and represent the Mothers' Union whose patron is Her Majesty the Queen," said Norma.

GLENCAIRN CHAMPIONS

In the last issue of Connor Connections we inadvertently denied the young 5-a-side players from St Andrew's, Glencairn, their full glory in our report on the Connor Challenge Cup. The headline on the article mistakenly read 'Armoy lift the Cup!' when it should have read 'Glencairn lift the Cup.' Apologies to everyone at St Andrew's, Glencairn



ADDRESSING THE NEEDS AND ABILITIES OF OLDER FOLK

One third of church membership in Connor is aged 65 or over. Some of these people are able to contribute actively to church life, others may be less able but still keen to play a role.

All these groups have specific needs and talents and the Diocese of Connor Age-Ability Committee is striving to identify these needs and talents and assess how they can be met and utilised.

This month the committee launches a paper entitled 'The Church and Older People' – the first in a series of documents tackling the subject of older age.

The paper will form a subject of discussion for two conferences taking place in October. Speakers include Michael Collyer of the Church Army, and one of the focuses of the conference will be the development of weekday clubs.

The Age-Ability Committee was set up under the Diocese of Connor's Building for Generations initiative. Its aim is to identify some of the circumstances, problems and opportunities common in older age and bring these to the attention of the leadership in each parish.

The Rev Grace Clunie, a member of the committee, said a survey revealed the 65+ age group formed a huge part of the church.

"It is surprising how much is being done in a lot of parishes, but there are others where very little is being done for older people," she said. "It may be that people just need some suggestions or back up like this because churches have so much on their schedules that ideas would be very helpful."

Committee secretary Jeffrey Johnston said the weekday club was identified by most rectors as being the most effective way of meeting the needs of older parishioners. "We called a meeting of weekday club leaders and visited a number of clubs," said Mr Johnston.

The paper 'The Church of Older People' has been penned as a result of the survey and a conference last year with weekday club leaders, and focuses largely on the 'older old.' Future papers will address the situation and potential of the 'younger old.'

Mr Johnston said: "The committee hopes the conferences and our work in general will lead to a clearer appraisal of the needs and potential of older people in our church and community."



LEFT - RIGHT: At the Glee Club are Lila MacArthur (89), Ernie and Betty Matchett, and Lily Skelton

FUN AT THE GLEE CLUB

Older folk from the parish of Eglantine in Lisburn have been reaping the benefits of a weekday club for the past six years.

The Glee Club meets once a month, and its 20 or so members enjoy an annual summer outing and Christmas meal and theatre trip.

Their meetings are a chance to hear speakers from a variety of backgrounds as well as enjoy games like whist and beetle drive.

For most, the Glee Club provides an opportunity for people to get out of their homes and enjoy chat and companionship.

Club leader Helen MacArthur said: "They really love it. For these people the most important thing is the fellowship. Many of them who go to the evening service never knew the people who went to morning service, and even if they were at the same service they would not necessarily have spoken to each other. This has helped them get to know other older people in the parish and form a network of friends."

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