

DOWN & CONNOR

SHARING THE GOOD NEWS



Dear Reader,

I greet you on this Pentecost Sunday, the feast of the presence and working of God's Holy Spirit among us. Whether parishioner, fellow Christian, agnostic or non-believer, I wish you every blessing in life as you look through these pages. They give a glimpse of the faith life of this local Church in the diocese of Down and Connor. They tell of the great things God does among us (Ps 126.3). They sketch something of the faith-inspired life of a Christian community in its parishes and diocese. Not everything is written in this book (Jn 20.30) and we readily admit in pain that "evil and good stand thick around in the fields of charity and sin" (E. Muir).

Still, imbued with the hope of the new life in the Risen Christ, we have put these pages together to open our eyes to the spiritual life, to the vitality, and creative impulses of the Spirit of God, so evident in our parishes. As I visit the parishes I have the privileged opportunity to witness their life of prayer, worship and outreach. So much that happens in so many arenas is voluntary service - inspired by faith - to parish, community and society.

May these pages open our minds to the mystery of God, incarnate in Jesus Christ and ever alive through the promptings of the Holy Spirit both in human history and eternally – and among us in and through the life and work of the Church.

+Noel Treanor
Pentecost 2017



THE DIOCESE OF DOWN AND CONNOR

www.downandconnor.org





WORKING TOGETHER in our Diocese

Parish Pastoral Councils

We currently have 60 Parish Pastoral Councils around the diocese, with a further 8 going through the formation programme offered by the Living Church office. The key focus of the Pastoral Councils is to reflect prayerfully, discern the pastoral needs of the area and propose initiatives. In almost every case they are concerned to make our communities more open and welcoming to new people.

Diocesan Pastoral Council

In January 2014 the inaugural Diocesan Pastoral Council (DPC) met for the first time. Made up of clergy, religious and lay members it has sought to support the bishop in discerning the pastoral needs of the diocese. Stephen McAnee, the first chair of the DPC, describes the members as 'pioneers' on a new journey. "Bishop Treanor encouraged us to get out and attend local Consultation gatherings and to try some new things. We in the DPC are privileged to be able to see the many great things going on around our diocese!"

Pastoral Communities

'Ní neart go cur le chéile.' We are always stronger when we pull together with our neighbours. During the past year a lot of patient and

generous work has gone into setting up our new Pastoral Communities in which neighbouring parishes can and will support and enrich each other. In every instance each parish will be represented on a new Pastoral Community Forum made up of laity and clergy representing each member parish. The forums will work to ensure the widest access to sources of renewal and missionary action are made available across all of our Parishes. As the forums establish there will also be opportunities for members to gather with our Diocesan Pastoral Council.

Facilitative and Discerning Leadership Training

This Spring one hundred people, clergy and laity together, completed a two-day course in Facilitative and Discerning Leadership Training. The participants are all involved in Parish Pastoral Councils or other services in the life of the diocese. This first group are now engaged in an ongoing follow-up programme and, based on the success of the first round, the Living Church Office is preparing to repeat the programme for another 180 participants in the coming year.





MIDSUMMER EVENING

There are many creative and missionary ventures taking place across the diocese. In the past two years the Diocesan Pastoral Council has gathered people from every part of the diocese for an opportunity to share good ideas.

In 2015 St Mary's on the Hill in Glengormley hosted over 150 people and we heard inputs on initiatives from the parishes of Ballymoney, Downpatrick, Newcastle, Randalstown, St Malachy's and the North Connor Pastoral Area. These initiatives included: celebrations for volunteers; renewing our Baptismal promises; door to door evangelisation; and starting up welcoming teams in our parishes.



In 2016 St Genevieve's High School, Belfast, hosted us and we heard lively stories from Ardglass, Ballymena, Duneane, St Mary's on the Hill, St Colmcille's, St. Patrick's, Diocesan Safeguarding and the Syro-Malabar community. The inputs included: catechesis for our children; adult faith development programmes; renewing the life of prayer within our parishes; and befriending the elderly and the lonely in our parish communities.





PASSING ON THE FAITH in Down & Connor

The challenge of passing on the faith and nurturing a personal and life-giving relationship with Jesus is being taken up every day:

Our Catholic schools are rooted in Gospel values and engender in our young people respect for life, love, solidarity, truth and justice. The work of St. Mary's University College and the recently formed Diocesan Trustee Support Service assists schools in strengthening and developing Catholic ethos. This is complemented by a new and improved religious education programme for primary schools, Grow in Love. It is presented in an imaginative and engaging manner and utilises multi-media and online resources.

SACRAMENTS IN 2016

4916

Baptisms

4541

Confirmations

4953

First Communions

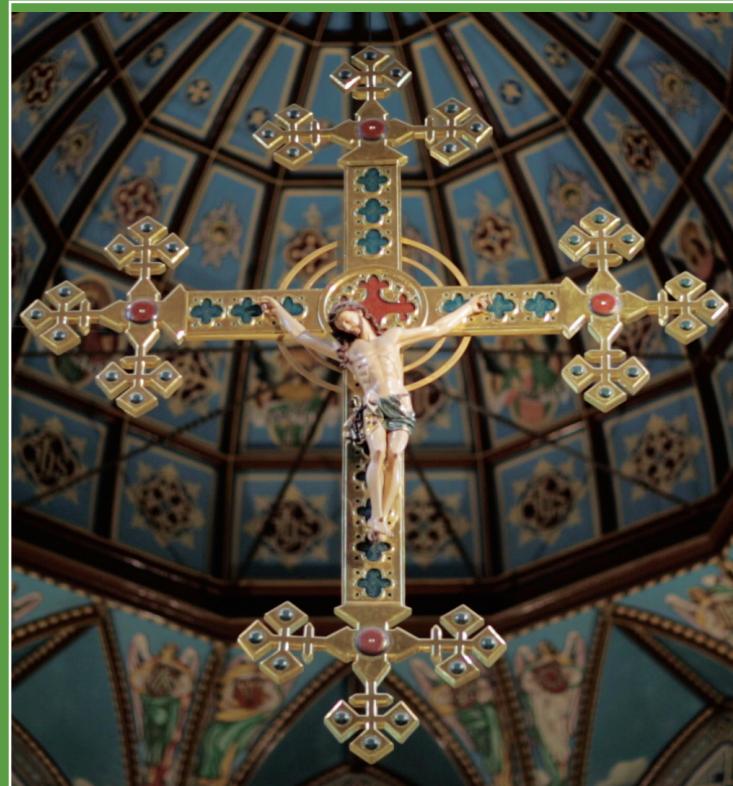
983

Marriages



RCIA

It is increasingly common that people are attracted by Jesus and his teachings in adulthood. The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) attracts not only those new to faith, but also so-called ‘cradle Catholics’ who want a deeper understanding of their faith. A key moment in the journey of initiation is the Rite of Election when candidates commit themselves to a period of intense preparation for baptism or confirmation and First Communion at Easter. On March 4th 21 candidates wrote their names in the Book of the Elect at a ceremony in St Mary’s Church in Belfast. Candidates for next year should contact their Parish Priest.



YOUTH

In parishes, a range of creative, age-specific catechetical and faith development programmes are in place to nurture in our young people a lively spirit of faith, service, prayer and worship. In recent years the Parish GIFT 1 and 2 programmes, aimed at Years 8 and 9, are taken up in parishes across the diocese. Supported by Living Youth, more than 200 children gathered for diocesan celebration days in Dunloy and Ardglass. We are delighted that there is a demand from the young people to stay committed to the GIFT experience. We developed a GIFT 3 resource for Year 10 pupils which will be shared out this year.

The Pope John Paul II Award continues to grow year on year. This year 245 young people received their Award and 400 are taking up the challenge for the year ahead. Many of the young people have gone on to complete Catholic Youth Alpha. This involves 12 sessions where young people explore the basics of the Catholic faith together and a residential session in Corrymeela.

Young people love to pack their bags and head off on an adventure. Last summer over one hundred young people from our diocese went as volunteers to assist sick and elderly pilgrims on the Diocesan Pilgrimage to Lourdes. This is always a moment to grow in faith and virtue through Christian service.

Fr Raymond McCullagh led a team to Ethiopia on the Living Youth Habitat for Humanity project. In the coming year a group will go to India.



CLERGY CONFERENCE

Each year a series of clergy conferences are organised for the Priests of the Diocese. The conferences provide input on a variety of themes, sharing of Diocesan business and, most importantly, time for clergy to catch up with one another. In February the conference focused on the pastoral response to those affected by suicide. The sessions led by Fr Cathal Deery gave the clergy a much needed opportunity to speak about their experience in supporting families impacted by suicide. The May conference, led by Dr John O'Keeffe from Maynooth, focussed on liturgy.



VOCATION

Vocations to the Priesthood and Religious life are a source of great joy in the Diocese. In 2016 we celebrated the ordination of Fr James O'Reilly in his home parish of Christ the Redeemer, Lagmore. Sr Máire McAteer became the youngest professed sister in the Diocese when she took her final vows in August in the Adoration Convent on the Falls Road, Belfast. Most recently Manuelito Milo was ordained deacon at the Missa de Gallo at 7am on Christmas Eve in St Vincent de Paul Church in Ligoniel. Manuelito will be ordained to the Priesthood next month.

Currently 8 men are in training for the priesthood in the diocese in St Malachy's Seminary, Belfast and in St Patrick's Seminary, Maynooth. The first group in the diocese to prepare for the Permanent Diaconate are in their third year of formation.



DUBLIN, IRELAND

WORLD MEETING OF FAMILIES

22-26, AUGUST 2018

WORLD MEETING OF FAMILIES

Fr Tim Bartlett, a priest of our diocese, and a native of North Belfast has been appointed Secretary General of the World Meeting of Families. This international gathering (Dublin 21st to 26th August 2018) is an opportunity for us to welcome and host Catholic families from around the world.

On taking up his new role Fr Bartlett said; "The choice of Ireland as the venue for the WMOF was a huge surprise. At the end of the last meeting in Philadelphia representatives from certain other countries were on tenterhooks expecting that their capital city would be named as the next host. Totally out of the blue it was announced that Pope Francis himself had decided that; 'The next World Meeting of Families must be in Dublin!'

The Pope clearly has a sense that the time is right for Ireland to stand up and take a lead. He himself dearly wants to come and be with us for this great event. I believe it is a wonderful privilege and opportunity for the Church in Ireland and I dearly hope that many people from Down and Connor will be at the heart of it."

ADULT FAITH DEVELOPMENT

Since the Year of Faith in 2011 many of our parishes have continued to offer annual adult faith development courses. The courses have a DVD input from excellent presenters often followed by small group discussion with a cup of tea. The Parish of St Bernadette's is one of many parishes that now offers a course each year. Joe McGinnity, a retired teacher, leads programmes:

"The adult faith development programmes we offer have brought great life to the Parish. The courses not only deepen our faith but they give us the opportunity to build friendships in our Parish and have meaningful conversations about our lives and our relationship with God."

FAITH & LIFE CONVENTION



This year on Saturday 30 Sept we will welcome Cardinal Kevin Farrell, appointed by Pope Francis to the new Dicastery of Family Life and Laity, as our keynote speaker. Save the date!!

The Faith and Life Convention is now an annual 'don't miss it' for over 500 people. Last year former MP turned passionate advocate for Refugees, Sarah Teather, set the tone for the day with a powerful keynote address. Held in Our Lady and Saint Patrick's College, Knock one of the highlights of the day is the opportunity to take part in two afternoon workshops. These address themes as varied as 'Making good decisions', 'Faith in a Broken Culture', 'Caring for our common home', 'Young Male and Catholic; what's that like?' and 'God in the poetry of Séamus Heaney'.



PILGRIMAGES

The age-old tradition of going on Pilgrimage has enjoyed a welcome revival in recent times.

The Jubilee of Mercy witnessed many individuals and faith groups from throughout the diocese visiting the Door of Mercy at St. Patrick's Church, Donegall Street and Clonard Monastery.

Each year, priests and people from Down and Connor journey to ancient pilgrimage sites such as Saul, Slemish, Lough Derg and Bangor. The national shrine at Knock continues to be a much-loved place of encounter with Our Lord in the Eucharist and of devotion to Our Lady of Knock. Many pilgrims from our diocese have contributed generously to its recent refurbishment and modernisation and have helped make Knock a world-class place of pilgrimage. Our one day diocesan pilgrimage to Knock will take place on Sunday 11th June.

Every year hundreds of our people don walking boots and rucksacks and head off on the long trek to the shrine of Santiago de Compostela. Travelling together as a pilgrimage group is an uplifting experience for the Diocese and we look forward to the pilgrimage to Fatima in this special centenary year and our annual pilgrimage to Lourdes. On pilgrimage we see the Church community in action as both young and old gather together for beautifully celebrated liturgies. The sick and their families receive the excellent care and attention offered by volunteers who freely and generously give of their time and skills enabling their brother or sister in Christ to make their pilgrimage.



MERCY LIVES ON

In October 2016, we celebrated National Prisons' Week. Christian communities throughout Northern Ireland prayed for the needs of all those impacted by prison as well as those who suffer the effects of crime. Prisons' Week culminated with a moving service in St Patrick's Church, Donegall Street, led by prison chaplains and attended by Assembly Justice Minister, Claire Sugden.

Chaplains working in the Belfast Health Trust celebrated St Luke's Day in October with events held at each of the city's major hospital sites. The Mater Hospital invited patients, families and staff to a celebration of faith and friendship in the hospital's atrium. After coffee, chat and prayer, staff had the opportunity to take part in a hand blessing ceremony. In November, Bishop Noel had the opportunity to visit Zimbabwe with the Trócaire team to see at first-hand how monies raised from the Lenten Trócaire box appeal make a profound difference to the lives of those most in need. Together with other Irish bishops, he learned about the various projects supported by Trócaire including water provision, irrigation and crop management as well as the promotion of human rights and combating violence to women.

The diocesan response to the Syrian refugee crisis launched in 2015 has now realised more than **£383,000** of funds to date which, through the work of Trócaire and Saint Vincent de Paul Society, directly supports people in refugee camps and the families now living here in Belfast. The Vatican has also written to acknowledge the generous donation of €98,119 for the people of Ukraine. "His holiness is most appreciative of the charitable assistance which you have given for those who are suffering. He also sees this gift as a sign of ecclesial communion, motivated by faith in Jesus Christ." As well as our response to humanitarian crises the diocese commits to regular giving and volunteering throughout the year enabling the on-going support of local projects and overseas development work.



SAFEGUARDING

ONUS is a new initiative that aims to raise awareness of domestic violence and abuse in society. The ONUS initiative provides training, empowering all Churches to safeguard Children and Adults. Following a programme of two training sessions a Church receives a "Safe Church Award". A number of Parishes in the Diocese have attended Safe Church training and have received awards. In addition 35 Diocesan Clergy attended awareness raising training with ONUS.

One member of the Clergy commented "The training I did with "Onus" gave me many extremely valuable insights and guidelines in this area, as well as a very enriching experience of the Church collaborating with civil society in the interests of the common good."

