

## Down and Connor Diocesan Trust

### Report of the Trustee

The Trustee presents its Annual Report and the audited financial statements of the Charity, Down and Connor Diocesan Trust, for the year ended 31 December 2023.

#### **Constitution and aims**

The Roman Catholic Diocese of Down and Connor was formed from the amalgamation of the Diocese of Down and the Diocese of Connor, both of which were established in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century. The Diocese of Down and the Diocese of Connor were eventually permanently joined in 1439, and The Roman Catholic Diocese of Down and Connor, ('the Diocese') as it is known today, was established, and has continued in existence for the last 585 years.

The Down and Connor Diocesan Trust, a charitable trust, was established by a Trust Deed dated 29 September 2004. On the 17 December 2015, Down and Connor Diocesan Trust was registered as a Charity with the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland and given the registration number 103983. For tax purposes, Down and Connor Diocesan Trust is also registered with HM Revenue and Customs - Reference number XN46141. The sole Trustee of the Charity is a Corporation, Diocese of Down and Connor Trustee. The Company is limited by guarantee and was registered on 5 April 2006, registration number NI058844. On 7<sup>th</sup> November 2006 the Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland authorised Diocese of Down and Connor Trustee to act in any Charitable or Ecclesiastical Trust as a Trust Corporation.

#### **Objectives and activities**

The principal objects of the Charity are:

- the advancement of the Roman Catholic religion in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Down and Connor subject to any future curtailment or addition of area made in accordance with the laws and regulations of the Roman Catholic Church;
- the advancement of any charitable purpose supported by the Roman Catholic Church throughout the world or in any part of the world.

The Church in Down and Connor, in union with the Catholic Church worldwide, seeks to achieve its objectives through activities including the following:

- Proclamation of the Gospel
- Worship of God
- Provision of Clergy and pastoral personnel
- Formation and development of Parish communities
- Support for families
- Provision of educational, pastoral and youth ministries
- Provision and maintenance of places of worship
- Aid for impoverished and needy communities worldwide

The means used to fulfil the purposes of the Diocesan Trust are constantly monitored and reviewed to ensure that the principal aims, and objectives of the Charity are adhered to.

## Down and Connor Diocesan Trust

### Report of the Trustee (*Continued*)

#### **Statement that the Trustee has had regard to the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland public benefit requirement statutory guidance**

The Trustee confirms it has complied with the requirements of Section 4 (6) of the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 to have due regard to the public benefit guidance published by the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland in determining the activities undertaken by the Charity. Throughout this Annual Report the Trustee seeks to demonstrate that the Charity's aims and objectives are for the public benefit.

#### **Structure, Governance and Management**

The operation of the Charity is overseen by the Trustee. The Directors of the Trustee are appointed by the Bishop of Down and Connor who is Chair of the Board. Recruitment of Directors is based upon their knowledge of the local Church and their having the professional skills and experiences necessary for overseeing the affairs of the Charity by ensuring it is solvent, well-run, and that it delivers the outcomes for which it was established.

On appointment new Directors of the Trustee Board attend an Induction Day and are introduced to their role and responsibilities by the Chancellor of the Diocese, the Diocesan Secretary and the Diocesan Civil Administrator and they are provided with copies of the Trust Deed and the latest financial information and reports. Directors attend formal and informal training sessions as required.

The Human Resources and Personnel Committee meets at least four times a year and makes all key recommendations to the Trustee Board on the setting of pay and remuneration for key management personnel; the Committee is guided by a term of reference and has a quorum of Trustee representatives. Part of the Charity's longer-term strategy is the development of a succession plan for key staff and this is considered as part of the overall review of strategic and operational risks.

Archbishop Noel Treanor retired as the Bishop of the Diocese of Down and Connor on 26<sup>th</sup> November 2022 and became Bishop Emeritus of Down and Connor and Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Down and Connor on that date. On 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2023 Archbishop Noel Treanor left the Diocese to take up the position of Apostolic Nuncio to the European Union. The Holy Father Pope Francis appointed Bishop Donal McKeown, Bishop of the Diocese of Derry, as Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Down and Connor on that date.

Post year end the Holy Father Pope Francis appointed Bishop Alan McGuckian SJ, Bishop of Raphoe, as Bishop of Down and Connor on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2024. Bishop Alan took canonical possession of the Diocese on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2024 and replaced Bishop Donal McKeown as director of the Diocese of Down and Connor Trustee on that date.

In the day-to-day management of the Charity, the Bishop/ Apostolic Administrator refers ecclesiastical related matters to the Vicars General, the Chancellor of the Diocese, the Judicial Vicar, the Diocesan Secretary, Episcopal Vicars, and other appropriate officials. Civil administrative matters are referred to the Diocesan Civil Administrator and other officers employed by the Charity. In accordance with the Code of Canon Law a Presbyterial Council, that is a group of priests which represents the Presbyterium (however not in 'sede vacante'), and the College of Consultors assist the Bishop/ Apostolic Administrator in the governance of the Diocese according to the norm of law so as to promote, as much as possible, the pastoral good of the people of God entrusted to him.

Reflecting Canon Law, the activities of the Charity are separated in this Report into Parish and Central Services functions.

## Down and Connor Diocesan Trust

### Report of the Trustee (*Continued*)

#### **Parishes**

The Diocese is divided into Parish communities. Parish Priests/Administrators and Curates are appointed by the Bishop/ Apostolic Administrator to provide pastoral care for Parish communities and to manage Parishes in all juridical affairs thus ensuring Parishes are administered in accordance with the norms of Canon and Civil Law while fulfilling the aims of the Charity.

As encouraged by The Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops (Apostolorum Successores), the Bishop/ Apostolic Administrator, in consultation with Priests and the laity, reviews on a regular basis the Parish structure to ensure the long-term pastoral sustainability of the Parishes. Each Parish is required by Canon Law to have a Finance Committee to assist the Parish Priest/Administrator in the administration of the Parish. Parish Finance Committees include Parishioners with knowledge and experience in finance, property and administration.

#### **Central Services**

The Diocesan Central Services consists of those institutions and persons which furnish assistance to the Bishop/ Apostolic Administrator in the governance of the entire Diocese, especially, in directing pastoral activity, in providing for the administration of the Diocese and in exercising judicial power. It also includes all who participate in the overall administration of the Diocese, especially those who direct diocesan activities such as pastoral support, youth work, education, family life, liturgy, lay voluntary involvement and other facets of the local Church's life.

The Trustee Board delegates oversight of the Diocese's day-to-day financial, property, investment and administration matters to the Chancellor of the Diocese, the Diocesan Secretary, the Diocesan Civil Administrator and other personnel from within the Central Services. Among the other designated personnel who assist the Board of Directors are the Finance Officer, the Property Liaison Officer, the Human Resources Officer and the Director of Safeguarding. All personnel of the Diocese undergo continuous professional development training.

The remuneration of the key management personnel is disclosed in the Financial Statements (note 12). All employment matters and remuneration issues are overseen by the Trustee Board and reviews are undertaken periodically.

#### **Risk Management**

The Trustee Board actively reviews all major strategic and operational risks to which the Charity is exposed and confirms these have been reviewed and that strategies and systems are established to manage exposure to these risks. Each department is required to monitor changes and to develop systems to manage risk whenever possible. The 7 main areas of risk, identified and monitored by the Board via the Corporate Risk Register, during the year are:

- Governance & Reputation
- Safeguarding/ Legal
- Technology
- Strategy (*Pathways to the Future* journey)
- People
- Finance
- Data

## Down and Connor Diocesan Trust

### Report of the Trustee (*Continued*)

#### **Achievements and performance**

The territory covered by the Diocese of Down and Connor has a total population of approximately 1.1 million people of which approximately 350,000 are Catholics. The eighty-six parishes are predominantly in Counties Antrim, Down and parts of County Derry. The Parishes are currently clustered into thirteen Pastoral Communities. Each Pastoral Community consists of a number of adjoining Parishes united in the interests of promoting and realising the objects and the mission of the Church in Down and Connor within their local communities. There are six Pastoral Communities in Belfast and the Greater Belfast area, three in County Down and four in County Antrim (Connor).

#### **Proclamation of the Gospel and Worship of God**

Within the Diocese religion is advanced through the provision of places of worship, the facilitation of religious practice and, particularly, through community celebrations of Mass. There is a public celebration of Mass most days in the majority of Parishes/neighbouring Parishes and on every weekend several community Masses are celebrated in public in every Parish.

During the prior year, on 15<sup>th</sup> February 2022, our churches increased capacity in line with government restrictions.

Other activities of the Charity include conducting religious ceremonies (such as baptisms, weddings, and funerals), running programmes pertaining to spiritual formation and development, encouraging and supporting inter-church relationships and maintaining places of worship, many of which are listed and contain religious works of art and other artefacts all of which form part of our national heritage. These places of worship are open to the general public, people of all faiths or none, they provide a public benefit for the whole community and for many people they are spaces which offer the opportunity for quiet reflection and for spiritual contemplation.

It is within Parishes that people experience what it is to be a member of the Catholic Church and where faith is nurtured and given expression. Parishes, through various means, provide for the moral and spiritual wellbeing of Parishioners young and old. Practical expressions of faith are manifested through the means of Parish organised pastoral, social and educational activities many of which rely on the voluntary involvement of Parishioners. During the current reporting period a total of 3,635 Baptisms took place within the Diocese. In the same period the Sacrament of First Communion was administered to 4,563 young people and the Sacrament of Confirmation was conferred on a total of 4,813 individuals.

As well as pastoral care and the provision of the Sacraments to the members of Parish communities, the Diocese offers chaplaincy services to those who cannot be part of a regular Parish community. Hospital Chaplains and lay pastoral visitors are available at all the major hospitals within the Diocese of Down and Connor including The Mater Hospital, The Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast City Hospital, Musgrave Park Hospital and Ulster Hospital. The Chaplains are regularly available to patients, patients' relatives and staff and are on call to attend in emergencies. The Diocese also provides chaplaincy services to those in Penal Institutions, HM Prison Maghaberry, Hydebank Wood Prison and Young Offenders Centre and Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre.

## Down and Connor Diocesan Trust

### Report of the Trustee (*Continued*)

Each year, priests, and people from Down and Connor journey to traditional pilgrimage sites such as Saul, Slemish, Lough Derg and Bangor. The national shrine of Our Lady 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. Pilgrimage is part of the rich tradition of faith expression in the Diocese and a visible manifestation of the Church community in action. As well as local sites such as Saul, Moneyglass, Slemish and Downpatrick, people from Down and Connor make pilgrim visits to Knock, Lourdes, Fatima and follow the Pilgrim way to Santiago de Compostela. Travelling together as a pilgrimage group is an uplifting experience for all involved. The annual Diocesan pilgrimage to Lourdes in July 2023 was very successful. On pilgrimage the Church community is seen in action as both young and old gather together for inspirational liturgies and prayerful reflection. The sick and their families, when they return to Lourdes, receive excellent care and attention from volunteers who freely and generously give of their time and skills thus enabling their brothers and sisters in Christ to benefit fully from their pilgrimage experience.

The important role played by volunteers who participate in the various activities of their Parish cannot be overstated and their contribution is vital in enabling the Diocese to continue to fulfill and develop its stated objectives. Volunteers generously give of their time serving in various ministries, caring for and visiting the sick, the housebound and those on the margins of society. They play a significant role in helping to maintain Parish property and assisting in financial and other administrative duties such as through membership of Parish Pastoral, Finance and Safeguarding Committees. Such Parishioners are the lifeblood of their communities and their contribution is significant. It has not been possible to quantify the number of volunteers active throughout the Diocese nor is it possible to estimate the financial value of their involvement.

Although the Charity relies principally on donations from Parishioners for its funding, access to religious services is never restricted on the grounds of ability to pay. In addition, members of the Catholic community are encouraged, as a consequence of their faith commitment, to contribute towards creating a better society by becoming active volunteers for the Common Good within their local area through membership of charities, local societies, community groups and, also, by volunteering in all sorts of other ways so as to benefit society in general.

Besides the work accomplished in the Parishes, the Central Services, the central administrative offices of the Diocese, coordinates and carries out a number of essential functions necessary for the advancement of the Catholic Religion at local, national and international level. In order to do this the Central Services operates through Diocesan Commissions, Committees and through various personnel charged with specific responsibilities.

The Diocesan Commissions include the Diocesan Ecumenical Commission, the Commission on Family Ministry, the Liturgy Commission, the Commission for Religious, the Social Affairs Commission and the Vocations Commission.

The Diocesan Committees include the Diocesan Safeguarding Committee and the Diocesan Marriage Tribunal.

## Down and Connor Diocesan Trust Report of the Trustee (Continued)

Personnel with specific responsibilities include the Diocesan Archivist, the Diocesan Knock Pilgrimage Director, the Diocesan Lourdes Pilgrimage Director, the Diocesan Media Liaison Officer, Diocesan Director of Public and Social Affairs, the Diocesan Propagation of the Faith Director and the Diocesan Vocations Director.

### **Provision of Clergy and pastoral personnel**

Central to Parish life is the relationship between the Parish Priest, Curates, Deacons and Parishioners. Clergy are not employees of the Diocese, however, in Canon Law the care and welfare of incardinated Priests of the Diocese is mandatory and is, therefore, part of the Charity's ongoing commitments.

On the whole, it is the clergy ministering in Parishes who organise, animate and motivate the local faith communities. They constantly strive to be witnesses of hope and authentic shepherds for their people. The provision of dedicated, well qualified and competent clergy to serve in Parishes and other ministries remains a priority for the Diocese. Through the means of regular conferences, retreats, courses, workshops and sabbaticals the clergy of the Diocese are kept informed and provided with guidance in regard to current issues and developments in respect of all aspects of ministry and mission. Currently, the Diocese has four candidates in formation leading to ordination to the Priesthood and four candidates preparing for ordination to the Permanent Diaconate. During the year two candidates were ordained to the priesthood for ministry in the Down and Connor Diocese and no candidates were ordained to the Permanent Diaconate. The cost of this formation is borne by the Clerical Students Fund.

The general well-being and care of clergy in active ministry is coordinated by the Pastoral Care of Clergy Group. Priests' stipends and related matters are overseen and regulated through a Priests' Welfare Fund. Equally important is the welfare of priests who are sick or retired. Many of the retired priests have served in Parishes and local communities for over fifty years. Their welfare and accommodation are the responsibility of a committee which administers the Provident Fund of the Secular Priests of the Diocese of Down and Connor. During the year forty priests received assistance from the Fund which necessitated a total spend of approximately £563,367. The Episcopal Vicar for Clergy with special responsibility for Deacons oversees and co-ordinates their ministry.

The objectives of the Charity are greatly supported, and the life of the Diocese enriched, by the contribution made by ninety members of Religious Institutions, Secular Institutions and/or Societies of Apostolic Life serving in the Diocese. The Diocese of Down and Connor expresses its sincere gratitude to these men and women of faith for their ministries of generous service and sacrifice.

### **Support for families**

Pope Francis's encyclical *Amoris Laetitia* alongside The World Meeting of Families which took place in Dublin in 2018 raised the profile of the Church's need to minister to families. Families encounter the church at all key moments in their life; the Baptism of a new child, nurturing the faith of a child through the sacraments of reconciliation, First Holy Communion and Confirmation, Marriage, times of illness and bereavement. 'Family Ministry' within the Diocese is dedicated to strengthening marriage and families by coordinating pastoral programmes and ministries that have faith as their foundation and Christ as their goal.

## Down and Connor Diocesan Trust Report of the Trustee (Continued)

In collaboration with other agencies 'Family Ministry' also offers services and practical resources to assist people, at all stages of life, in order to help them experience, more fully, the love and compassion of God in the ordinary events of life. ACCORD Catholic Marriage Care Service, Marriage Encounter and Engaged Encounter provide preparation courses for couples led by lay people and clergy across the Diocese as couples look to prepare not just for a wedding day but also for life together. The preparation courses offer couples a time of reflection, teaching and prayer supporting couples to have a solid foundation on which to build their marriage. ACCORD also provides vital counselling support to couples at times when their relationship needs support and guidance in their centres.

Bethany Bereavement Support Group and Beginning Experiences are both lay led groups supported by the Diocese to ensure that people experience compassion and support at a time of loss. Family life is challenged by the death of a loved one and the Church cannot fail to offer the light of faith as a support to families at a time of such great loss. Bethany volunteers have completed a training programme to support them in developing the necessary skills for this sensitive pastoral ministry. Clergy of the diocese are supported by local Bethany groups who continue visitation of families in their own homes accompanying bereaved families as they grieve.

### **Provision of educational, youth and pastoral ministries**

#### **Catholic schools and universities within the Diocese**

A key ingredient in our contribution to the local community is through our large network of Catholic Schools. Catholic Schools Week is celebrated throughout Ireland. Through this event, schools focus on the value Catholic Education provides to young people and its contributions to our church, our communities and our country. This annual event calls on Catholic schools to give expression, in a special way, to a particular aspect of Catholic Education. Catholic Schools Week 2023 took place from 22<sup>nd</sup> January to 29<sup>th</sup> January, focusing on the theme 'Catholic Schools: Walking Together in Faith and Love.'

The Church in Down and Connor remains fully committed, through its Catholic Schools, to maintaining, by way of a holistic methodology, the highest standards in learning thus continuing to offer academic excellence and faith-filled education to all young people. Many non-Catholic parents choose to educate their children in Catholic schools, not least, because of the excellent education on offer but also, the identifiable ethos of trust, mutual respect and recognition of responsibility to those in need. Throughout the year the Diocesan Episcopal Vicar for Education exercises responsibility for oversight of the work of Catholic Education within the Diocese.

The Diocese participates in third level education through its involvement in Saint Mary's University College, Belfast. St Mary's is the only Catholic University College in Northern Ireland. Its primary role is to serve the educational needs of the community in general by educating competent and dedicated teachers. The Diocese also provides chaplains at Queen's University, Belfast and at two of Ulster University's campuses, Coleraine and Belfast. The Diocese owns, manages and maintains premises adjacent to Queen's University which is designated specifically for the purpose of providing an outreach for students attending Queen's University. These facilities are currently undergoing major redevelopment.

## Down and Connor Diocesan Trust Report of the Trustee (Continued)

### Living Church

During the year the Living Church office continued to play an integral role in the pastoral renewal and life of the Diocese. The office had a wide-ranging remit and collaborated with departments across the Diocese to ensure that the needs of parishes were successfully met through a holistic approach to service delivery.

#### *Pathways to the Future*

During the year, the Living Church has linked closely with the Diocese's *Pathways to the Future* initiative, providing extensive support for *Pathways to the Future* activities and events. Following the Diocesan and clergy gatherings that took place in 2022 the office facilitated an awareness raising campaign in 2023, calling all baptised people of God to participate in planning for the future of our Church and the Diocese. The awareness raising programme commenced with a pastoral letter from Apostolic Administrator, Bishop Donal McKeown, and included bulletin notices, social media content and key messages provided to parishes for inclusion in homilies and sermons. The Living Church supported the parish census which took place in May and the official launch of *Pathways to the Future* in the autumn, supporting and facilitating a series of Conversations in 9 locations across the Diocese with over 1,200 people in attendance.

#### *Funeral Ministry*

Responding to need identified through the *Pathways to the Future* conversations, the Living Church supported the development and implementation of the first training programme for Lay Funeral Ministers in the Diocese. The first 28 Lay Funeral Ministers were commissioned in June 2023. This represented a significant positive move towards co-responsibility between clergy and laity for the Diocese. The training was evaluated and adapted for roll out in 2024.

#### *Faith Development*

A main function of the Living Church Office was the identification and development of appropriate Faith Development Programmes and resources for use within parishes across the Diocese. In 2023 the office continued to provide catechesis, directly delivering faith formation courses across the Diocese. In addition, the office identified, trained and supported the formation of lay leaders to ensure the roll out of faith development courses across parishes and families of parishes.

The Faith Development Conference took place in January 2023 where keynote speaker David Wells challenged, inspired and motivated the 150 attendees. He spoke to the art of accompaniment and the importance of accompanying people on their own journey of faith. Five new resources were introduced to participants for consideration for delivery within parishes: *Beatitudes for today*, *NUA Origins for Youth*, *Lectio Divina for Lent*, *Seven Joys of Mary* and *Meditating with Mary*.

Following the development of the *Lectio Divina during the Season of Lent* resource, the office provided further training for parish leaders to ensure local delivery of this programme. 30 lay leaders were trained to deliver this programme across 22 parishes. The Living Church also directly delivered the *Lectio Divina during the Season of Lent* online to 47 participants from across the Diocese. Similarly, the office provided training for 40 parish leaders to equip them to deliver the two Marion programmes, *Meditating with Mary* and *The Seven Joys of Mary* in their parishes.

## Down and Connor Diocesan Trust Report of the Trustee (Continued)

In 2023 the course *Unlocking the mystery of the Bible* was delivered to a total of 132 people. This 8-week course helped participants to expand their knowledge of scripture and strengthen their own faith, and personal relationship with God. A retreat day for participants was incorporated at the end of each course which challenged participants to consider how they answer their 'baptismal call' and evangelise in their everyday lives. Course delivery also helped to identify potential lay leaders that could be supported to deliver this programme within parish families in 2024.

A *Biblical Walk through the Mass* was introduced. The 5-week online course was in high demand and attracted 83 participants. Lay leaders have been identified and will receive training with a view to rolling this out in parish families in 2024. The *Beloved Disciples* programme was delivered in three locations in the Diocese. The four-week programme, designed for the over 60's, reminds participants that we are called to discipleship no matter our age. 57 people were given the opportunity to share wisdom and reflect together on the challenges of growing older in faith. Prayer resources were also developed and disseminated among parishes including a November Resource with 4 weekly liturgies for the month of November.

### *Specific Training for Lay Ministers*

In response to need, the office developed and delivered specific training and enrichment sessions for existing lay ministers within the Diocese. These training courses aimed to upskill and equip existing lay leaders with the necessary skills and formation to carry out their roles fully within parishes and, to give them greater confidence in articulating their faith to others.

The courses were delivered across the newly emerging parish 'families' and reached 46 parishes with 354 lay ministers taking part. The training took the form of one online session and a retreat day where participants could come together, share experiences, benefit from enriching discussion and simply be in communion with others.

Three specific courses were developed:

1. Proclaiming the Word of God in the Gathered Community for Ministers of the Word
2. The Eucharist – Food for the Journey for Eucharistic Ministers
3. Baptism – Our Call to Mission for Parish Baptismal Teams

Feedback from participants and clergy was extremely positive and highlighted the continuing need for more specific courses to sufficiently equip our lay ministers and leaders.

### *Passing on the Faith To our Young People*

The Living Church Office focused on developing and delivering a series of retreats for children receiving Sacraments in 2023. The Nua Move and Nua Origins programmes were used to engage children and encourage further engagement with their faith and Parish community. In addition, a programme to connect with parents of children preparing to receive First Holy Communion was delivered in the Colin-Derriaghy area. 612 parents signed up to receive weekly correspondence and information on how to help prepare their children for receiving the Sacrament. The Office supported the coordination of the Lourdes Pilgrimage Youth Team to ensure meaningful participation for 43 young people in the Diocesan's pilgrimage to Lourdes. Training was also delivered to 45 Children's Liturgy Leaders to support the delivery of Children's Liturgy programmes in parishes.

## Down and Connor Diocesan Trust Report of the Trustee (Continued)

### *SPRED and Inclusion of People with Additional Needs*

The office continues to support the SPRED programme across the Diocese. Groups were supported to re-form following COVID closures, and to recruit and train new volunteer Catechists and, in some cases, group leaders. SPRED resources and the 2023 SPRED programme were developed and disseminated amongst Parish groups. Four enrichment sessions were provided for SPRED Leaders and Catechists and specific disability related training was provided to groups, including training in autism awareness and dealing with challenging situations. An annual retreat day for parents also took place and specific Advent and Lenten sessions delivered to groups using Godly play.

Due to the vulnerability of group members, SPRED groups were slow to restart following COVID however, at the end of the year 140 people were involved in SPRED in the Diocese with a Christmas celebration event bringing together 120 people.

The Office also provides support to special schools and teachers across the Diocese in their preparation of children with special educational needs to receive the Sacraments. The Office continues to organise and co-ordinate First Holy Communion and Confirmation Services for children attending special schools with 43 children receiving their first Holy Communion and 40 children confirmed in their faith in 2023.

In June 2023 SPRED Directors from around the world, from as far as Australia descended on the Diocese with the SPRED World Conference taking place in Drumalis. The conference provided an excellent opportunity for connection with others and a sharing of ideas for renewal.

### *Co-ordination of Other Diocesan Events and Activities*

In addition, the Living Church office continues to provide regular social media updates on Feast Days of Saints, key liturgical dates and insights on the Universal Church that are shared by our parishes and have a reach of approximately 20,000 people per week. The Office also organises and co-ordinates other Diocesan activities.

### **Post year end**

In September 2024 Bishop Alan McGuckian, as part of the ongoing process of Diocesan renewal, made changes to organizational structures. Bishop Alan retired the *Living Church* Office after thirteen years of faithful and fruitful service. The next stage of work, developing Parish Pastoral Councils, seeking to form lay ministers and faith development leaders is now supported by the new *Pathways to the Future* team.

### **Safeguarding**

The Down and Connor Safeguarding Office was established in 2008 to coordinate and develop robust safeguarding practices across the Diocese and in response to effective responses to suspicions, concerns, knowledge or allegations against church personnel, compliant with safeguarding best practice and statutory safeguarding procedures and legislation.

The Diocesan Safeguarding Office has developed in line with the Catholic Church in Ireland's response to safeguarding, as evidenced by the establishment of the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland (NBSCCCI) and the publication in 2016 of 'Safeguarding Children: Policy and Standards'. The Diocese of Down and Connor works to this policy and associated standards as well as to statutory and legal imperatives in the field of safeguarding. This also has promoted a "one church" approach across the Catholic Church in Ireland. The work of the Diocesan Safeguarding Committee is overseen by the Diocesan Safeguarding Committee, answerable to the Bishop/ Apostolic Administrator and who meet every two months.

## Down and Connor Diocesan Trust Report of the Trustee (Continued)

Alongside Child Safeguarding, the Diocese also works to its Adult Safeguarding Policy and Procedures. This Policy is in line with statutory policies and regulations in Northern Ireland. At this stage there is not a “One Church” to adult safeguarding as exists with child safeguarding. This position is currently under review within the Church and the Diocese will play a full part to adopting a One Church approach to Adult Safeguarding. In addition, the NI Executive Office invited the Diocese to be a co-design member of a group to develop a Strategic Framework and Action Plan around the Executive’s policy in respect of Ending Violence Against Women and Girls, this initial stage of work concluded in February 2024.

Creating and maintaining safe environments for children and young people who engage in any ministry or activities within the diocese remains a central programme of work for the safeguarding service in Down and Connor. This directly involves supporting each Parish in the Diocese through the establishment of a Parish Safeguarding Committee; a group of Parish volunteers who with the support of the Safeguarding Office ensure safe recruitment and training of Parish Personnel and volunteers who engage with children and young people.

A core element of the work of the Safeguarding Office is case management. This involves the diocesan response to suspicions, concerns, knowledge or allegations relating to child protection/safeguarding and adult safeguarding in compliance with statutory procedures and Church guidance. This work falls exclusively within the role of the Designated Liaison Person/Adult Safeguarding Champion. During 2023 the office had three professional staff, including a new post of Parish Safeguarding Support Officer, and an administrative support staff. Case management within the Diocese is supported by the Bishop’s Advisory Panel, a group of experts from a number of relevant fields. This group is serviced by the Designated Liaison Person and provide guidance and recommendations to the Bishop/ Apostolic Administrator in relation to case management.

Over the year, the Diocese has taken part in two significant safeguarding audits and reviews carried out by external bodies.

1. *Review of Safeguarding Practice in the Diocese of Down and Connor, undertaken by The National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland (National Board).*

This Review was built around the assessment of the Diocese's compliance with the seven standards of safeguarding adopted by the Catholic Church in Ireland. The Review wanted to see “safeguarding in action”. Two independent Reviewers reviewed files and records in relation to case management, spent time looking at safeguarding arrangements within our Parishes including visiting three Parishes and meeting a youth group speaking to leaders and the young people and spoke to the Diocesan Safeguarding Committee, members of the Diocesan Curia and examined governance arrangements including relationship with the Trustees.

This Review confirmed that safeguarding in the Diocese was compliant with the National Board seven standards and that the Diocese worked to all statutory safeguarding procedures and safeguarding legislation.

*“The Diocese of Down and Connor has a strong safeguarding structure which promotes and delivers on engagement with and support for parishes and their safeguarding personnel. None of this would be possible without the commitment and dedication the reviewers witnessed from people at all levels, to ensuring that the Church provides an inviting, safe and happy environment for all children, young people and parents they work with..... there are robust governance arrangements in place, at a strategic and operational level, that ensure safe practices.*

## Down and Connor Diocesan Trust Report of the Trustee (Continued)

### 2. Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI) Section 12 Audit

SBNI is a statutory body which oversees child protection and safeguarding across all the statutory agencies in Northern Ireland, Trusts, Police, Education, NI Probation Service. Section 2 of the Safeguarding Board (Northern Ireland) Act 2011, identifies as a key function of the Safeguarding Board, that it must “monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of what is done by each person or body represented on the Board for the purposes of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of Children”

Each statutory authority is required to complete this Section 12. As chair of the SBNI Interfaith Subgroup the Diocese of Down and Connor was asked to complete the Section 12 audit. Down and Connor was the only non-statutory body to complete the Section 12 Audit. This was a challenging exercise. the Diocese had to report on safeguarding across seven domains.

The SBNI described the Diocesan response to the Audit as “exemplary”.

*“The Catholic Diocese of Down and Connor’s return was assessed as providing an exemplar level of assurance... its;*

- *functions are exercised having due regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, and*
- *any services provided, are provided having due regard to that need.*

*Your return was one of 4 out of 28 returns to be assessed as exemplar.”*

### **Provision and maintenance of places of worship**

Churches play a central role in the spiritual life of Parishioners and along with Parochial Houses and other associated Parish buildings they are often significant landmarks within the wider local community. Public benefit is provided through the provision of safe and worthy places of worship and assembly for not only the Catholic community but for those also who wish to make use of them for personal or spiritual contemplation. Many of the Churches and associated buildings are listed as being of special or historical architectural interest. The proper care of these buildings can be onerous, but they are essential for the ongoing realisation of the principal object of the Charity, the advancement of the Catholic religion.

General maintenance, minor and major schemes of renewal and projects of construction in regard to church buildings and properties often require major outlays which are essential if these important structures, which form part of our national heritage, are to be maintained not just for present use but for future generations. The management of this responsibility is ongoing and is carefully regulated and professionally monitored so that legitimate requests for new works, renovations and adaptations can be readily assessed and progressed.

The Diocese has in place insurance cover in respect of all its buildings so that public access should not be unduly restricted by lack of funds to repair or restore buildings harmed as a result of accidental or other damage.

## Down and Connor Diocesan Trust Report of the Trustee (Continued)

### **Aid for impoverished and needy communities worldwide**

Trócaire is the official overseas development agency of the Catholic Church in Ireland. It was established by the Irish Bishops Conference in 1973 as a means through which people could donate to Trócaire's overseas emergency relief and development aid programmes. Its dual mandate is to support the most vulnerable people in the developing world while, also, raising awareness of injustice and global poverty. The Diocese of Down and Connor, the second largest Diocese in Ireland, is a major contributor to the charitable work of Trócaire and in the year under review contributed over £442,188.

### **Overview**

This brief overview reflects a consolidation of the work of the Charity in the current year and also indicates its ongoing commitment in regard to fulfilling the principal aims and objectives of the Charitable Trust into the future.

### **Going concern**

Like most charitable entities, Down and Connor Diocesan Trust was exposed to effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. During the prior year, on 15<sup>th</sup> February 2022, our churches increased capacity in line with government restrictions for the celebration of public worship across our Parishes.

Since the start of the pandemic in March 2020 there has been a reduction in income and income had not returned to pre-March 2020 in all parishes. However, costs have been reduced where possible. Based on the measures taken and given the level of unrestricted reserves as at 31 December 2023, the Trustee believes that the Trust is well positioned to operate through any uncertainty and beyond. The financial statements have therefore been prepared on a going concern basis.

### **Future Plans**

The Church in Down and Connor will continue to build upon and develop the initiatives and activities outlined in the narrative above and so continue to fulfil the principal aims of the Charity. In addition, a primary focus of the Trustee is to secure the longer-term financial stability of the Diocese and a continuation of its existing core activities. Periodically the Trustee undertakes a review exercise in respect of all aspects of the activities of the Charity through reports from Parish Priests, Parish Administrators and the various bodies which are constituent parts of the diocese.

## Down and Connor Diocesan Trust Report of the Trustee (Continued)

### Review of Financial Performance

The detailed financial results for the year ended 31 December 2023 are set out in the financial statements that accompany this report.

The table below summarises the financial activities of the Diocese:

	<b>2023</b> <b>£'000</b>	2022 £'000
<b>Parishes</b>		
Income	16,652	15,309
Expenditure	(14,003)	(13,039)
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Net income before assessment and transfers	2,649	2,270
Diocesan Assessment and other transfers	11,773	(1,410)
Gain on revaluation of fixed assets	5,139	-
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Increase in reserves	<b>19,561</b>	860
	<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>
<b>Central Services</b>		
Income	4,036	3,291
Expenditure	(8,012)	(5,624)
Diocesan assessment and other transfers	(11,773)	1,410
Gain on revaluation of fixed assets	215	-
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Net (expenditure) before investment gains and revaluation gains	(15,534)	(923)
Investment gains / (losses)	1,999	(4,111)
	<hr/>	<hr/>
(Decrease) in reserves	<b>(13,535)</b>	(5,034)
	<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>
<b>Total increase / (decrease) in Parish and Central Services reserves</b>	<b>6,026</b>	<b>(4,174)</b>

Complete details of the income and expenditure are shown in the statement of financial activities on page 26 and in the notes to the accounts.

### Review of transactions and financial position of the Charity

The reserves of the Charity at 31 December 2023 total £175.5m (2022: £169.5m) and of this total £108.3m (2022: £88.7m) relates solely to the assets and activities of individual Parishes and are not available for the non-parish general purposes of the Charity. Central Services reserves total £67.2m (2022: £80.8m) at the year-end of which £45.5m (2022: £59.5m) are unrestricted with £9.2m (2022: £9.2m) of this relating to fixed assets.

Most of the income received by Parishes is through the Sunday offertory and other donations. This source of income is 69% (2022: 73%) of the parish total. This increased from £11.2m in 2022 to £11.5m in 2023 (note 2). Total expenditure increased by 7.7% to £14m in 2023 from £13m in 2022.

Total Central Services income increased from £3.3m in 2022 to £4m in 2023. Total expenditure increased from £5.6m in 2022 to £8.0m in 2023.

## Down and Connor Diocesan Trust Report of the Trustee (Continued)

### **Investment policy**

The Down and Connor Diocesan Trust Deed, dated 29 of September 2004, provides the Diocese of Down and Connor Trustee with the power to invest and vary the investment of the Diocesan Assets '*...in such shares, stocks, funds, securities, land, buildings, chattels or other investments or property of any nature and in any part of the world...*'.

At present the Trustee's Finance and Investment Committee liaises with the current investment managers and advisors, monitors their performance and reports to the Trustee Board at each of its meetings.

Under Charity Law the Trustee Board must seek to obtain the best financial return possible consistent with commercial prudence.

### **Investment Objectives**

The Trustee Board has adopted investment objectives that seek to protect and enhance the real value of the Diocesan Assets over the long term while also achieving agreed rates of income generation.

In fulfilling these objectives, the Trustee Board adheres to an Ethical Policy that restricts investment in asset classes directly or mainly involved in the manufacture and/or supply of goods and services which are not in accordance with the teachings of the Gospel, the promotion of the dignity and sanctity of human life and the social teachings of the Roman Catholic Church.

### **Investment Managers & Advisors**

The principal Diocesan Trust Investment Portfolios (three separate portfolios totalling £42.73m) are presently managed by Cazenove Capital (Schroder & Co Ltd) operating a 'total return' policy over the medium to long-term. Smith & Williamson Investment Management LLP (Cunningham Coates) manage the much smaller Specified Fund Portfolio (£0.48m) with emphasis on current income with a lower risk profile. Both portfolios are managed on a discretionary basis.

During the year the Trustee appointed Broadstone as investment advisors to perform an investment portfolio review on the principal Diocesan Trust Investment Portfolio managed by Cazenove Capital (Schroder & Co Ltd). The review included performance against objectives, performance against peer groups, responsible investment assessment, income and fees. Trustees were pleased with the outcome of the review.

Given the completion of the Broadstone review work and despite the market volatility experienced during the year the Trustee are satisfied with the performance and management of the investment portfolio of the Investment Portfolio during the year.

## Down and Connor Diocesan Trust Report of the Trustee (Continued)

### **Environmental, Social & Governance ('ESG') including Ethical Investment Policy**

The Trustee Board has Environmental, Social & Governance as a priority and is captured on the Corporate Risk Register under 'Governance & Reputation'. ESG reporting is about showing a considered approach to stewardship (governance), care for people (social), and care for our common home (environmental). This involves the careful use of financial and non-financial resources and care being taken in minimising harms.

In July 2021 an additional investment of £14M (£14.45M at 31 December 2023) was made into a new Responsible Multi-Asset Fund. During the year the Trustee Board engaged with Broadstone, investment advisors, to perform an investment portfolio review including a responsible investment assessment. The outcome of this element of the review included:

- As of 31 December 2023, both the Main Fund and the Provident Fund (combined £28.28M) had superior ESG scores compared to the benchmark MSCI ACWI index, indicating the portfolio is exposed to less financially material ESG risks relative to the Equity Benchmark.
- As of 31 December 2023, the Responsible Multi-Asset Fund (£14.45M) shows a superior ESG scores compared to the Main Fund and the Provident Fund as well as the MSCI ACWI index. The primary reason for the out-performance of the Responsible Multi-Asset Fund from an ESG perspective is the absence of one-globe rated holdings with the majority of holdings receiving at least the four-globe rating (low ESG risk).

At 31 December 2023 the agreed Trustee Board's Ethical Investment Policy is as follows:

No direct investments in companies, or groups of companies, which generate more than 10% of their turnover from:

- exploitation of those living in conditions of poverty through unfair lending practices including payday lending.
- unjust practices which deny employees fair wages and conditions
- biological and chemical weapons, landmines and general weapons and arms of war and mass destruction
- pornography
- contraceptives and/or birth control devices
- the provision of abortions or euthanasia
- embryonic stem cell research, foetal tissue research or human cloning
- activities that violate currently approved environmental conventions.

At present it is understood that complete control over monies, for instance, those held in Funds, is difficult. The Trustee Board may, therefore, have indirect exposure currently to activities which may give rise to ethical queries where these are considered minimal in relation to the portfolio's overall composition.

This Ethical Investment Policy is reviewed periodically by the Trustee Board's Finance and Investment Committee and ratified, along with any updates, annually by the Trustee Board. Post year end the Ethical Investment Policy is being reviewed and the Trustee Board have agreed that the list of exclusions will be extended to include fossil fuels so that the investments are divested from fossil fuels. Other additional exclusions, as well as fossil fuels, are also being considered to ensure that the exclusion list is complete and comprehensive.

## Down and Connor Diocesan Trust Report of the Trustee (Continued)

Parishes within the Diocese are beginning to embrace Pope Francis' encyclical, Laudato Si, Care for our Common Home. One example of this is the installation of solar PV panels on parish hall roofs to help reduce a parish's carbon footprint and move towards carbon net zero.

The Trustee Board are aware that there is much more to be done in the area of Environmental, Social & Governance and have targeted the year ahead for further progress including to confirm an appropriate timeline of actions and targets.

### **Reserves policy**

Unrestricted funds are not all freely available, should the Charity need immediate access to reserves. In order to ensure that the organisation has access to funds it is necessary to adjust unrestricted reserves as recommended by SORP 2019 by excluding Fixed Assets as it would be unlikely that the organisation would be able to liquidate the fixed assets in a timely manner. The Charity's policy is to maintain 12 months unrestricted expenditure as free reserves at 31 December 2023, free reserves are equivalent to 12 months planned unrestricted expenditure of the Charity.

Approved by the Trustee on 3 October 2024 and signed on its behalf by:



Very Reverend Eugene O'Hagan  
Director of Diocese of Down and Connor Trustee

## Down and Connor Diocesan Trust

### Statement of Trustee's responsibilities

The Trustee is responsible for preparing the Trustee's Annual Report and the financial statements of the Down and Connor Diocesan Trust in accordance with applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice).

The law applicable to charities in Northern Ireland requires the Trustee to prepare financial statements for each financial year which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the charity and of the incoming resources and application of resources of the charity for that period. In preparing these financial statements, the Trustee is required to:

- select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently;
- observe the methods and principles in the Charities SORP 2019 (FRS 102);
- make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- state whether applicable accounting standards have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements;
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the charity will continue in operation.

The Trustee is responsible for keeping proper accounting records that disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charity and enable the Trustee to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008, the Charities (Accounts and Reports) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 and the provisions of the trust deed. The Trustee is also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charity and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.



Very Reverend Eugene O'Hagan  
Director of Diocese of Down and Connor Trustee

3 October 2024