

Belfast Cathedral – The Cathedral Church of St Anne, Belfast.

An Overview of the cathedral's life, ministries, challenges and opportunities under God.

Constitution of Belfast Cathedral.

Belfast Cathedral, also known as St Anne's Cathedral, is a Cathedral of the Church of Ireland, part of the Anglican Communion (Episcopalian). As the Church of Ireland was disestablished in 1870, the cathedral is a self funded entity, and does not receive state or civic funding. Belfast Cathedral is unusual in serving two separate dioceses, Connor and Down & Dromore, and so has not one, but two, Bishop's Stalls (cathedra). Both bishops are members of the Cathedral Board.

The Cathedral is managed by the Belfast Cathedral Board which is responsible for all aspects of the governance of St Anne's, including the implementation of all statutory requirements for the use of the Cathedral, its offices, other facilities and grounds, and also the employment of its staff and volunteers. The cathedral's mission is to serve the life and outreach of the Dioceses of Connor and Down and Dromore, to the City of Belfast and to the wider community in Northern Ireland. The cathedral therefore has a core community and ecumenical role, and often functions as the "National Cathedral" for Northern Ireland civic and state events.

A Brief History

The foundation stone for the cathedral was laid on 6th September, 1899. Building began around the old church parish church of St Anne, which continued to be used for services until the end of 1903. By that time the original church was no longer visible from the street! For five months the congregation worshipped in the Clarence Place Hall in May Street.

The first part of the new cathedral to be completed was the Nave, which was consecrated on 2nd June, 1904.

For nearly 80 years the cruciform cathedral church was a work in progress, with sections completed bit by bit: Crypt and foundations for a proposed crossing tower 1922-24; west front 1925-27; baptistery 1928; Chapel of the Holy Spirit 1932; apse and ambulatory 1959; transepts 1974 (The Chapel of Unity) and 1981 (The Chapel of the Royal Irish Regiment). A temporary brick chancel served until the east end was completed. The stainless steel Spire of Hope was lowered into place in 2007.

The only feature of the old St Anne's Church to remain in the present-day Cathedral is the Good Samaritan Window.

Key Priorities for the Ministry, Witness and Outreach of Belfast Cathedral 2023 - 2028.

The following Key Priorities will shape the life and ministry of Belfast Cathedral and its clergy for the next five year period.

Cathedral Mission Statement: "Under God, in the Way of Jesus Christ, enabled by the Holy Spirit, Belfast Cathedral is to be A Spiritual Centre at the Heart of the City, with the City at its Heart"

Aims and Objectives: "Through Worship and Prayer, Outreach and Service, to Serve God's purposes, to Serve our Dioceses & to Serve the City and Society"

HOW?

I. A Place of Prayer and Living Worship

- Ministering to the City
- Relevant to the 21st Century
- Welcoming to All
- "A Door to Pass Through ... Not a Door to Pass By"

2. Always Aiming for Excellence in Music

- Half Time Master of Music (Organist and Choir Director)
- Associate Organist
- Voluntary SATB Choir of highest calibre
- Choristers Choir of Boys and Girls

3. A Cathedral for National Events

- Live BBC Broadcast Centenary Service marking the end of the First World War – November 2018
- Funeral for Lyra McKee April 2019
- RUC Centenary Service – May 2022
- Belfast Lieutenancy Platinum Jubilee Service – June 2022
- Live BBC Broadcast of A Service of Reflection for Queen Elizabeth II in the presence of the King and Queen Consort – 13th September, 2022

4. Theology in the City

- A Venue for Theological Discovery and Engagement at the heart of the city through Lent, and Lunchtime programmes

5. Black Santa

- A 46 year tradition that annually raises up to £200,000 for almost 200 local charities

6. Social and Community Outreach to the City

- Working with the Belfast Welcome Centre and North Belfast FoodBank, the cathedral is located on the interface between city centre affluence and the issues of homelessness and drug addiction.

7. A Centre for Ecumenical Endeavour

- Working in close partnership with the Corrymeela Community – the venue for Courage to Lament services in 2021 and 2022
- A major capital programme “Unheard Voices”, to develop the cathedral crypt as a “Centre for Acknowledgement and Memory” to the victims and survivors of the Northern Ireland Troubles, as both a visitor experience and a place for emotional and spiritual healing.

8. A Focus for Student Chaplaincy and ministry to the Ulster University Belfast Campus

- In partnership with the Church of Ireland / Methodist University Chaplaincy Team
- Developing ways to connect with 10,000 students and 5,000 staff working, studying and living in close proximity to the cathedral.

9. Ministering to the Cathedral Congregation and Cathedral Volunteers as they serve the Outreach and life of the Cathedral

- A cathedral congregation of some 100 households gathering from as far afield as Carrickfergus, Bangor, Lisburn and Hillsborough, and from the North, South and East of Belfast.
- Ministering to the families of choir members and choristers
- Ministering to visitors and tourists.

10. Serving the Dioceses of Connor and Down and Dromore

- As a venue for Diocesan Events and Services, and in support of the ministries of the two Bishops.

Some features of the Cathedral

Many of the decorative elements of the building were given in memoriam. Each of the nave pillars represents an aspect of life in Northern Ireland: North side - science, linen industry, healing, agriculture, music; South side - theology, shipbuilding, freemasonry, the arts, womanhood. The half columns (responds) represent cardinal virtues - courage, justice, temperance and wisdom. Portrait heads above the nave pillars depict theologians and figures of the church, with one woman, the hymn-writer, Mrs CF Alexander.

The stained glass windows of the nave depict major figures from the Old Testament; temple-building is the subject of the west windows; windows in the ambulatory represent five of St Paul's fruits of the spirit.

One of the glories of Belfast Cathedral are the striking mosaics of the West End representing Creation, St Patrick's return to Ireland and Isaiah's vision in the Temple. Above the West Door is a memorial to choir members who lost their lives in the war of 1914-1918.

Music at Belfast Cathedral

The cathedral board is working through a restructuring of the music department and cathedral choirs. The new music department will be established with a half time Master of Music (Organist and Choirmaster) who takes up his position on 1st May, 2023, an Associate Organist, a SATB voluntary choir, and a choristers' choir of both boys and girls. The role of the Master of Music will be key in establishing this new model for the Music Department at Belfast Cathedral. The post holder will be an essential member of the cathedral team to assist the Dean and cathedral board to achieve this new vision. Although the recent past has seen a period of significant change in personnel and model of delivery, the cathedral's century old tradition of musical excellence remains the ambition and goal of the current Dean and cathedral board.

Cathedral Organs

The original cathedral organ was built by Harrison and Harrison of Durham and positioned in the South Aisle. During building work in the cathedral between 1968 and 1975, the organ was moved to the Harrison & Harrison factory, where it was renovated and enlarged, before being installed in the purpose built organ chamber in the newly built South Transept. With 66 separate stops across four manuals, the organ is one of the best instruments on the island of Ireland.

The cathedral also houses the small "Barber Organ", a chamber organ built in 2013 by the Wells Kennedy Partnership and named after a former Assistant Organist, Ian Barber.

Appendix - A Review of Cathedral Life Presented to the Connor Diocesan Synod, June 2022

Set against the financial challenges which the cathedral faces for itself, the past year has seen the unparalleled generosity of the public to the Cathedral's Black Santa Sit-outs. In the 10 days before Christmas 2021, and despite significant Covid restrictions which were re-introduced, both through direct giving to the Black Santa barrel, and on-line giving facilitated by the cathedral's fruitful partnership with financial services company PwC, £150,000 was raised for local charities. This included an emphasis on charities supporting refugees settled in Northern Ireland from Syria and the Middle East, and charities with a particular focus on mental health issues. And on the 6th February 2022, that full sum was given away to 220 local charities at the Cathedral's "Good Samaritans" Service with the assistance of Tim McGarry of "Give my Head Peace" fame, and the performer and impresario, Peter Corry.

However, as the horrors of the Ukraine invasion unfolded on our TV screens from late February 2022, the Dean, felt it imperative that Belfast Cathedral step forward to meet the greatest refugee crisis in Europe since the Second World War. Mirroring the charities supported by the Church of Ireland's Bishops' Appeal, the Dean's Black Santa Lent Sit-out for Ukraine raised £29,000 across the first two weeks that people were able to donate in person and on-line. Once again the partnership with PwC was to the fore. All the funds raised were channelled to Habitat for Humanity and Christian Aid working directly with local and national churches in the countries of Eastern Europe. If, before God, Belfast Cathedral is to be "A Spiritual Centre at the Heart of the City, with the City at its Heart" then the cathedral must continue to be visible as a place of dedicated service, to people at their times of greatest need. It must also continue to serve our church in the two dioceses of Connor and Down and Dromore.

Thus the Bishop of Down was the guest preacher at the cathedral on Christmas morning 2021. The Cathedral also provided the Radio Ulster Christmas morning church broadcast, focused on "The Black Santa Appeal". And on Good Friday 2022 the Bishop of Connor led the Three Hour Service of Reflection on the Words of Jesus from the Cross. The previous day the Bishop of Connor also chose Belfast Cathedral as the venue to which he called all the clergy of Connor Diocese to renew their Ordination Vows in a special Maundy Thursday morning service. More personally for our Bishop, his Service of Installation at the cathedral on 13th March, 2022, delaying for 18 months due to Covid, allowed the clergy of his diocese along with lay readers, vestry members and ecumenical representatives the opportunity for a diocesan celebration to mark the start of Bishop George Davison's ministry to us all. The cathedral was also chosen as the venue for the 2022 General Synod Service for the Belfast meeting of Synod.

But the mission of Belfast Cathedral to serve God's purposes must reach beyond church and diocesan boundaries with the presence and challenge of our faith to today's world. The Dean realised a long held ambition to see the energy of Summer Madness housed in the amazing space of Belfast Cathedral. This was achieved with the "Winter Madness" evening organised in partnership with John Kee and the Summer Madness team on Saturday 13th February, with a Covid capacity attendance of young people.

A further area of extended outreach which has developed across the year, is in university chaplaincy ministry. Although the arrival of the full cohort of 15,000 students and staff to the new Belfast Campus of Ulster University has been further delayed by Covid until September 2022, two members of the Church of Ireland / Methodist Chaplaincy team at Ulster University now operate from an office provided within the cathedral complex. This makes for continuing engagement with student chaplaincy and ministry at the cathedral, allowing foundations to be laid ahead of the arrival of the main body of students and staff later in 2022. A further example of the strengthening relationship between the cathedral and Ulster University was the decision to use Belfast Cathedral on 31st March, 2022 as the venue for the Installation of Dr Colin Davison as 6th Chancellor of Ulster University, and the conferment of Honorary Doctorates by the university, including one to the Rt Rev Ken Good, former Bishop of Derry and Raphoe.

As Covid restrictions gradually eased from August 2021, the cathedral was once again the venue of choice for significant “national scale” events. Of particular note were the following services:

- 21st June – The “Courage to Lament” Event, as a day of memorial and reflection for the 40 years of the Troubles in Northern Ireland, organised in partnership with the Corrymeela Community and the charity “Healing Through Remembering”
- 19th September, the annual Awards Service of the Connor, Down and Dromore Organ Scholarship Board, with the Bishop of Connor as preacher.
- 26th September, the Royal British Legion Centenary Service, in the presence of the Presbyterian Moderator, the Methodist President, the Bishop of Down and Connor, and the Bishop of Connor, along with representatives of British Legion from across Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and GB.
- 6th October – The Order of St John Service for the Installation of a new Knight Commander (Northern Ireland) and new members of the order, in the presence of the Duke of Gloucester, along with awards to members of the St John Ambulance organisation from 2019 to 2021.
- 15th October – Memorial Service for Lady Moyra Campbell, one of the Queen’s six Maids in Waiting who had attended her coronation.
- 17th October – A Service to Celebrate the 60th Anniversary of the Creation of “The Samaritans” charity, with representation from the 13 branches across Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, and in the presence of the Church Leaders.
- 7th November, the Annual Royal Irish Regiment Remembrance Service, marking the 70th Anniversary of the Royal Ulster Rifles involvement in the Korean War, and in the presence of the Korean Ambassador to the UK and military attachés.
- 14th November – Remembrance Sunday performance of Fauré’s Requiem by the Cathedral Choir.
- 23rd January – Opening Event of the ecumenical Belfast Four Corner’s Festival, which included a livestreamed message transmitted to the cathedral from Pope Francis at the Vatican to the congregation gathered in St Anne’s Cathedral. The Four Corners Festival then concluded eight days later with the Archbishop of Canterbury preaching in St Peter’s Cathedral, Belfast.

Each of these national events places significant demands on the staff and resources of Belfast Cathedral, in the expectation that cathedral has at its own disposal the musical and finance resources to facilitate these occasions.

Throughout the year much work was done in forwarding the cathedral’s headline project to develop a Northern Ireland Centre for Acknowledgement and Memory, as a permanent Place of Remembrance to the “Lost Lives” of the Northern Ireland Troubles. This places the cathedral firmly in the space of Reconciliation and Peace Building, in a Northern Ireland, All Ireland, UK and international context. The project will involve very significant outside finance, and has involved engagement with Belfast City Council, the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, and a broad range of partners across the Voluntary Sector, Government Departments and international agencies. This project has the potential to place the mission and voice of the Church of Ireland in Connor Diocese at the centre of a major national and international project for Healing, Reconciliation and Peacemaking.

However, at the heart of Belfast Cathedral remains a small core congregation of some 100 households, on whose shoulders, a musical expectation and the continued maintenance of an iconic building depend. They are also a congregation whose own spiritual needs continue to be met through the ministry of both stipendiary and non-stipendiary cathedral clergy.

The Installation Service of the Bishop of Connor to his stall in St Anne’s Cathedral on 13th March, 2022 reminded us that Belfast Cathedral exists as a cathedral of this diocese to serve and expand the mission, outreach and compassion of the Diocese of Connor, in the name of Jesus and of the parishes of our diocese, far beyond our immediate boundaries. The cathedral faces many challenges. However, its ministry is a resource to be treasured and encouraged, most of all by the people and the parishes of the diocese in which it is located.