

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)
- Assistant Organist
- Voluntary SATB Choir of highest calibre
- Choristers Choirs 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 (then) 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, 2022 & 2023
- A major capital programme “Voices of the Troubles”, 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 and the Ulster University Chaplaincy
- 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

In 2023 the cathedral board restructured the music department and cathedral choirs. The new music department has been established with a half time Master of Music (Organist and Choirmaster) who took up his position on 1st May, 2023, an Assistant Organist, a SATB voluntary choir, and a choristers' choirs of both boys and girls. The Master of Music is an essential member of the cathedral team assisting the Dean and cathedral board to achieve a new vision for the delivery of music. 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 2023.

Belfast Cathedral Mission Statement -

"Under God, in the Name of Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit; to be a Spiritual Centre at the Heart of the City, with the City at its Heart". "A Door to Pass Through, not a Door to Pass by."

The twelve month period from April 2022 to April 2023 has been another period of intense challenge and major change in the life and staffing of St Anne's Cathedral, Belfast. However throughout the change and challenges our core purpose remains to serve the church and its dioceses of Connor, Down and Dromore; to serve the city where we are placed and to serve the community whose needs are our needs. At the same time our service is shaped and driven by our call as a cathedral community to proclaim Christ's transforming love to all we serve and minister to.

Over the past twelve months the delivery of these priorities for the cathedral staff and Board have been constrained by the residual impact of the Covid pandemic and by the financial consequences of soaring costs, particularly for energy. Belfast Cathedral is seldom considered Belfast's warmest building! Yet it now costs £180

per hour to heat the cathedral for services or events! Over the past year the total expenditure to run and maintain all aspects of Belfast Cathedral was £534,000. To ensure that these costs do not exceed income requires a constant focus on raising funds from every possible and appropriate source. In this, the work of Mr Trevor Douglas, seconded from the Diocese of Connor as Cathedral General Manager has been invaluable. In return the payment from cathedral finances to the Diocese, which covers Trevor's salary, is a valuable source of income for the diocese to finance other key priorities.

However, despite every best effort to increase income over the past year, the need to drive down costs also required the cathedral board to reduce expenditure. In particular, this required the cathedral board to move from financing a fulltime Director of Music, with a paid professional choir of adult singers, now in a post Covid context of singing for just two Sunday services per week. Instead a new model of music delivery was adopted, with a half time Master of Music, and volunteer cathedral choirs of both adult singers of the highest calibre, and the re-establishment of chorister choirs for boys and girls. A rigorous process of recruitment was followed securing the appointment of Mr Jack Wilson to the new post of Master of Music at Belfast Cathedral.

After an eight month period without a regular cathedral organist or choir, we look forward to a new beginning under the talented expertise of the new Master of Music, following the model of choral delivery which has been the norm at Belfast Cathedral for most of the past century. As with any significant change, the transfer from the previous choral model to the new model was the subject of considerable public comment. The process exacted a heavy toll on the cathedral board members whose primary responsibility must be the long term sustainability of the cathedral in all of its provision: financial, musical and missional.

A further change in the life of the cathedral was the resignation of Canon Mark Niblock from his position as Dean's Vicar at Belfast Cathedral. The process to recruit a new Dean's Vicar has been approved by the Board, and it is hoped that the name of the successful candidate may be known by the time of the Diocesan Synod.

These significant changes in personnel, in addition to the staff changes through the 24 month period of Covid have meant that the cathedral staffing has been reduced to the minimum possible. However as the demands of cathedral life and ministry did not reduce over the past twelve months, it has been necessary to rely heavily on a willing team of clerical volunteers who have supported the Dean throughout this period. In particular thanks are due to the Reverends Ron and Janice Elsdon, who stepped into the breach created by the departure of the Dean's Vicar. They were also assisted by Canon Kevin Graham who in the second half of 2022 was seconded by St Bartholomew's for one day a week to serve as "Acting Dean's Vicar" (and sometimes "acting Dean"). In turn these were assisted by a rollcall of previous cathedral clergy, the Reverend Campbell Dixon, and Canons Raymond Fox and Will Murphy. Each of these assisted the cathedral team of non-stipendiary clergy and lay readers in the persons of the Reverend Dr Maithrie White Dundas, and Mrs Gillian McGaughey. Without their assistance, and that of a rota of organists willing to play for individual services and visiting choirs, it would have been impossible to maintain the demanding calendar of significant services and events which Belfast Cathedral hosts, which are a core element of the cathedral's mission of service and outreach.

Of all the events which the cathedral hosted over the past twelve months, none was of greater challenge or higher profile than the "Service of Thanksgiving for Queen Elizabeth II", held on Tuesday 13th September, 2022. The service followed just five hectic days after the death of Her Majesty at Balmoral on Thursday 8th September. Preparations for this service had been instigated by the Cabinet Office some ten years earlier. Over the five years that I have been Dean, regular planning meetings were held every six months with the Northern Ireland Office, the Royal Household and all key partners. Every risk and eventuality was considered, except the possibility of the illness of the Dean!

The Belfast Service of Thanksgiving at which the new King made his first visit to Northern Ireland accompanied by the Queen Consort, took place two days after the service at St Giles Cathedral in Edinburgh, three days before the King and Queen Consort travelled to Llandaff Cathedral in Wales and six days before the state funeral of Her Majesty in Westminster Abbey. All four services, one for each of the Nations of the United Kingdom, were meticulously planned and choreographed, and were televised to a worldwide audience.

In this Belfast Cathedral was centre stage for the Northern Ireland part of the national period of mourning. Yet the service was delivered days after the departure of the previous Director of Music, choir and associate organist.

With a tremendous effort on the part of everyone associated with Belfast Cathedral, from the Bishop of Connor and the acting Dean's Vicar to the tireless efforts of the cathedral Sextons, office staff and cathedral congregation volunteers, to the willing assistance of the Priory Singers, with some from Northern Ireland Opera, all under the direction of Philip Bolton, along with the competence of Jack Wilson, released from his duties at Ely Cathedral to be cathedral organist, the service was rehearsed and perfected in time for the vergers to lead the King and Queen Consort into our cathedral on a sunny Tuesday afternoon. And although not in the cathedral for the day, every detail of the service was directed by the Dean, despite being absent on sick leave! In the presence of Church, Faith and Political Leaders from Great Britain, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, and to a congregation drawn from every aspect of life in our province, the Archbishop of Armagh delivered a memorable address, and the cathedral excelled in providing a broadcast service fit for the occasion. to stand alongside those from the other nations. It is for such a day as this that the Church of Ireland and the Diocese of Connor offers its cathedral to serve as the "National Cathedral" for Northern Ireland. It is for such a day as this, in service and in missional outreach, that every other day in the life of the cathedral acts in some ways as a preparation.

Yet the Service of Thanksgiving for Queen Elizabeth was but one day in a busy calendar of events and services, for which the cathedral, its musicians, clergy and staff stand ready to serve and make possible. Each different event enables church and national organisations to offer days of thanksgiving, celebration, commemoration or rededication in a place of faith and before Almighty God.

Throughout the year 2022-23 these significant events included:

- 4th May – Opening Service for the Belfast Meeting of the General Synod of the Church of Ireland.
- 15th May – Pause for Hope Service for those who have died from Cancer and Cancer Research Charities.
- 29th May – The RUC George Cross Centenary Service.
- 5th June – The Belfast Lord Lieutenant Platinum Jubilee Service for Her Majesty the Queen.
- 16th June – The Connor Diocesan Synod Service and Meeting of Diocesan Synod.
- 21st June – In partnership with the Corrymeela Community, the Wave Trauma Centre and Healing Through Remembering, the Courage to Lament Service remembering Victims and Survivors of the Troubles, at which both the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Armagh and Presbyterian Moderator spoke side by side.
- 3rd July – Mariposa Trust Service for those who have lost a child at pregnancy, at birth or in early years
- 12th August – The Kingdom Voices Service hosted by CMSI and SAMS, attended by 16 Bishops of the global south and many of their spouses following the Lambeth Conference.
- 13th September – Broadcast Service of Thanksgiving for the Life of Queen Elizabeth II, attended by the King and Queen Consort.
- 23rd September – With two services on the same day: The Mothers' Union Opening Services for the UK and Ireland Mothers' Union Gathering in Belfast.
- 6th November – The Royal Irish Regiment – Annual Service of Remembrance.
- 4th and 11th December – Province wide Carol Services for the Northern Ireland Hospice and the Northern Ireland Prison Service
- From 12th to 21st December, Carol Services for Grosvenor Grammar School, the Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce, the Centenary Carol Concert for Stranmillis University College, Carol Services for B.R.A and Rockport Schools, along with Peter Corry Christmas Concerts at the cathedral.
- 22nd January – Centenary Service for the Irish Council of Churches, combined with the 50th Anniversary of the Irish Inter Church Meeting attended by the leaders of the 16 Member Churches of the ICC, along with Roman Catholic leaders from the IICM. This important service for reconciliation was addressed by both Archbishop Eamon Martin and Rev Harold Good.
- 29th January – A Service Marking the 70th Anniversary of the Sinking of the MV Princess Victoria with the loss of 137 lives, in partnership with the Mission to Seafarers.
- 5th February – The Good Samaritans' Service for the Distribution to 130 local charities from the £130,000 total collected from the Dean of Belfast's pre Christmas Black Santa Sitout.
- 12th March – Connor Mothers' Union Diocesan Festival Service
- 7th April – Good Friday Three Hour Service on the Final Words from the Cross- given by Dr David Bruce, previous Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

This extensive list shows how many people have been served and impacted across the year by the services and activity of Belfast Cathedral. This is in addition to the regular Sunday Services and Church Festival Services which are attended week by week, not only by our regular cathedral congregation, but by visitors, and visiting choirs from across the UK and across the world. Each encounter is an opportunity to share the message of the gospel and the ministry of Christ's people.

But this ministry of care also finds expression across range of daily cathedral activities. While the cathedral makes a small charge to visiting tourists, the cathedral offers free admission to all refugees and asylum seekers. With the arrival of 10,000 students and 5,000 staff at the now completed Belfast Campus of Ulster University, the cathedral in partnership with the University Chaplains, offers free lunches and opportunities for ministry in the cathedral halls. Many of those sharing in the lunches are students from overseas.

The Black Santa Sitout is now in its 46th year, and for the present Dean his 5th. Despite the impact of the cost of living crisis, and the fire at the nearby "Old Cathedral Buildings" which had caused the closure of Donegall Street to traffic, the significant sum of £130,000 was raised across 7 days. This total was achieved with support for online donations and a daily video blog enabled through our partnership with Price Waterhouse Cooper. Also essential was the willing participation in the sitout from the cathedral canons and bishops from both dioceses, present and retired. At the Good Samaritans' Service on 5th February the whole of the £130,000 was given to 130 local charities. These charities serve and minister into an almost unlimited need for those who are both refugees and asylum seekers, for those trying to cope with the cost of living crisis, and to a full range of other important charities at work across the province. The Dean's Black Santa Appeal remains one of the cathedral's most recognised and well regarded activities held up as the Church working to serve the good of others and not itself.

Through the past year, much time and effort has been giving to developing the Cathedral's "Unheard Voices" project focused on the "Centre for Acknowledgement, Learning and Memory" (CALM). This project will see the crypt of the cathedral repurposed as a major visitor centre and a centre for memory and healing. The centre will acknowledge the cost of violence to our community and society from the 40 years of The Troubles, told through the experiences of Victims and Survivors, and expressed through a range of creative mediums. Making use of wide ranging research and with a growing support from across every spectrum in this society, the cathedral is working towards offering a unique place of remembering and healing within the context of the cathedral's call to minister to all. Achieving this ambitious and challenging project will require courage and perseverance and significant fund raising over the coming years.

On Sunday 2nd June, 2024, we shall celebrate the 120th Anniversary of the consecration of the Nave of Belfast Cathedral in 1904. The completion of the first part of St Anne's Cathedral was an occasion of major significance for the entire Church of Ireland and for the City of Belfast. In anticipation of this most significant anniversary the cathedral is planning "BC120". This is a major fund raising campaign to secure significant new finance to sustain the life of the cathedral and its mission for the coming decades. It will require hard work on behalf of the cathedral board and staff, in creative partnership with outside organisations to secure new funding. But as Belfast Cathedral secures its own future, so it will secure in its mission before God, to Serve and to Proclaim.

Stephen Forde – Dean - June 2023