

DIOCESE OF DOWN & DROMORE



Church Planting News

WINTER 2026

CASTLEWELLAN
THE WELL OPENS FOR
MISSION AND OUTREACH

THE SUITCASE PROJECT
NEW STAFF MEMBER
FOR WOMEN'S OUTREACH



Keith writes...

Dear Friends,

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul provides us with an example of how to adapt our approach so that as many people as possible can be reached with the Gospel of Jesus. Paul did not simply copy and paste his way of engaging with people, but always endeavoured to understand the nature of the community before sharing the message of salvation in that settlement.

Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible... To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.

1 Corinthians 9:19, 22

In Down and Dromore, our church planters are sharing the gospel in many different contexts – loyalist social housing estates, nationalist towns, semi-rural villages and among newcomers to Northern Ireland. In loyalist social housing estates, our pioneers have based themselves in the centres of those estates, in a primary school, a community centre, a mission hall and a bowling club. In this edition, you can learn about how West Winds Community Church is seeking to shine the light, love and life of Jesus in their context through Remembrance, healing, Christingle, Nativity and 'Forget-me-not' Carol services.

In predominantly nationalist towns, our missional initiatives have adopted outreach names and visual identities that are inclusive and unaligned with cultural or denominational symbols and are using culturally neutral venues in town centres as their bases. In updates from Castlewellan, Newry and Warrenpoint, you can read about how these new churches are engaging with local people through youth drop-ins, ladies' nights and community parties, inviting individuals to explore the Christian faith



through Alpha and Alpha Youth and seeing lives transformed by God's love.

Creating Christian community for people of all ages has been key to the growth of new worshipping communities in the villages of Moneyreagh and Dundrum. These community churches are seeing such an expansion in children's ministries and life groups that they are experiencing significant capacity challenges.

In the Suitcase Project, we are delighted to welcome Julie Brown as the new Women's Support Worker. Julie will provide female-only support to women seeking asylum or refugee status, recognising the cultural, religious background and personal experiences that make such support especially important. We are greatly encouraged to read about the new gathering in Emmanuel Hall on Wednesdays for prayer and Bible study.

Please pray for our missional outreaches and pioneer ministers as they seek to serve and witness to the communities they are called to.

Every blessing,

Keith Gardiner

Fundraising Officer for Church Growth
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The Well: A new space for mission and outreach in Castlewellan

The launch of The Well in November 2025 marked a significant milestone in our shared vision to strengthen young believers and create spaces where people can encounter Jesus for the first time and explore faith in a real way.

The launch event—attended by church leaders, mission partners, business supporters and community friends—was a joyful celebration of what God is already doing and a hopeful commissioning into what is yet to come. We are so excited and feel extremely privileged to have this new and comfortable and inviting space to work from.

Since opening, The Well has quickly become a vibrant hub of spiritual growth, community life and mission activity. One of the most exciting developments has been the growth of our youth ministry. Each week we host “Our Place” Youth Drop-In, a welcoming space where young people can relax, build friendships and enjoy activities. We were generously gifted a pool table and table-tennis table, which have become fantastic tools for connection. Alongside this, we launched Alpha Youth, running weekly sessions that are already sparking important conversations about faith and purpose.



Our Sunday evening gatherings continue to flourish, with several new faces joining us – many young in their faith and eager to grow. In 2026, we look forward to helping them take deeper steps of discipleship through mentoring, community groups and friendship.

The Well is building up community with adults through our ongoing men’s and women’s ministries. Men’s game nights and women’s art evenings have created safe, relational spaces for encouragement, creativity and sharing life together. Throughout December, our morning Advent study series saw an encouraging response, with many engaging deeply with Scripture and reflection during this special season.

As we look ahead, we remain grateful for every leader, supporter and friend who stands with us. Together, we believe The Well will equip leaders, disciple young believers, strengthen families and bless our wider community in the year to come.

Trevor & Lorraine Brimage

PRAY we can be beacons of light where God has placed us and that he will use us and this space for His glory.



Moneyreagh Community Church

We are in an exciting season at MCC, filled with new opportunities, new people and significant growth in our midweek Lifegroups. With this growth, capacity – space, finances, volunteers – is a key challenge so we are praying for wisdom as we discern how best to serve our church family and the wider community.

From September, Luke led Alpha in Gourley's Pub in Ballygowan, where a diverse group of 10-15 gathered to discuss faith and explore who Jesus is. We finished with a day away at "The Well" in Castlewellsan, and we pray that those who attended will continue to grow in their journey with Christ.

Our youth and kids' ministries have also seen growth, with more children and



young people joining us on Sunday mornings and evenings. This was driven by the junior leader programme launched during our summer "Connect" week. On Sunday evenings, Phoebe has been focusing on young people encountering God through His Word and our new youth worship band has begun practising.

HOST, our community coffee space, continues to thrive, with many people dropping in for a coffee or a conversation with Gary every day. Our new "HOST Run Club", is creating a real buzz with new connections and drawing together a community from outside the church.

Rory Blake-Knox

St Donard's Community Church, Dundrum

In Mark 10:45, Jesus says He came not to be served but to serve – a call shared by all His disciples.

It has been encouraging to see so many in our church family serving within the church and in the wider community as they reach others with the good news of Jesus. Some serve in community gardens, others in youth projects; some witness in walking groups, others at the trade counter in work, and some have been helping serve other church plants both within the diocese and in South Dublin.



These examples remind us that while gathering to encourage one another is vital (Hebrews 10:24), we are also called to scatter – to go, teach, and make disciples (Matthew 28:19–20). We've been doing this as a church, with a packed season of kids' clubs and village outreach during the summer. We're seeing the fruit of this "going," with more newcomers joining us on Sundays – so many that our kids' space is feeling the squeeze!

Alongside this coming and going, more people are committing to grow in their faith. This autumn, we launched a fourth Grow Group, with over 40 people now meeting weekly for Bible study and prayer.

Colin Morris

PRAY with thanks for the growth that God is giving in both Moneyreagh and Dundrum. Pray for Colin and Rory and their leaders as they discern the way forward.

West Winds Community Church

For the Autumn/Winter term at West Winds Community Church, we took the theme: “Shining His Light, His Love, His Life” for our Sunday teaching and community engagements.

The Sunday teaching series on 2 Chronicles 7:14 led to our very first Healing Service which was very impactful in deepening spiritual and physical understanding of healing.

Our annual Pumpkin Patch focused on “Shining His Light” with many locals admiring the newly installed lighting around a dark area of the community. This was purchased by the local Development Association and erected by members of our church family.

The Season of Remembrance moved us to “Shining His Love”. Our church family invited the local community to place

battery tea lights inside each wellie boot (which is a special space in our community where we have over 170 wellie boots placed on a fence in memory of a loved one) and later, Stephen led a community Remembrance Service “Row on Row.”

As our focus shifted to Advent, we organised a Day of Prayer enabling many to gather seeking prayer - “Shining His Life.” We concluded 2025 using light to show how the Life of Christ can transform each of us through Family Christingles; Forget-me-not Carols (dementia ministry); and an outdoor Nativity LIVE service.

Stephen Doherty

PRAY for Stephen as he leads and for WCCC as it seeks to shine in the West Winds Community.



Reimagining St Patrick's

St Patrick's, one of the largest churches in Northern Ireland, has an extraordinary history as a centre of mission and discipleship which raised up and released leaders.

Due to a rapidly growing congregation, the original church, finished in 1827, was doubled in size in 1860 and a new church with a capacity of 1500 was built in 1893. In the 1920s, three new mission halls were added and over 1500 children attended Sunday School across six mission halls. The church was rebuilt in the early 1950s after being severely damaged in the 1941 blitz.

The life of God has repeatedly broken outwards from a worshipping community on this site over the last 200 years and we believe we will see God do it again.

Architects have been reimagining St

Patrick's as a Resource Church with:

- an 800-seat worship and prayer space, designed for life-giving, Spirit-filled encounter
- five vibrant kids and youth rooms, reclaiming its heritage of raising the next generation
- a Leadership and Training Hub to equip future church planters, pastors and pioneers
- flexible areas for community engagement, ministry and mission

Plans for the redevelopment of St Patrick's have been approved in principle by the Representative Church Body and we hope to see contractors begin the refurbishment in March 2026 and the new Resource Church launched in Autumn 2026.

PRAY that God would prepare the ground for mission; for resources and workers; and for the Darbandi family preparing to move to Belfast.





New staff member joins The Suitcase Project

There have been several exciting developments within the Suitcase Project in recent months.

We are excited to welcome Julie Brown onto the staff team as our Women's Outreach Worker. Julie's role will be to connect with and support women across migrant and host communities, building relationships and developing initiatives that support good relations and integration. She brings a wealth of experience to the role having previously worked for Acacia Path with migrant communities in Belfast and on the North Coast.

The inaugural meeting of our steering committee took place in October, and we are thankful for the wisdom, support, enthusiasm and guidance that its members bring to the project.

In September we began a weekly Wednesday Bible and prayer time which is open to anyone. It has been really encouraging to seek Jesus together through the Bible, to hear stories and experiences from across the world and to pray together. It's not a large group but it is significant for those that attend, and it's important that we have this space for people.



Craft activity at Monday Conversation Cafe

We have started a weekly Wednesday lunch. As we share together, we begin to understand more of who people are, the experiences they have had and their hopes for life here. It is a privilege to be part of this.

There are difficult moments as we try to support people living in challenging circumstances or who have real uncertainty about their future. Some have moved away from the area and support networks because of lack of housing. Others have made difficult decisions to move to other parts of the UK mostly because of housing and employment.

We have the ongoing challenge of finance. Julie has joined us on role specific TEO funding which is an answer to prayer. However, this is short term funding, and we would love to find further support for this role. We also want to continue to develop the work and impact of the project.

Tim Burns

PRAY for Julie as she starts out in her new role; for those we serve, that they would know welcome, connections, and be drawn towards Jesus; for our Bible and prayer time; for the committee as we plan and strategise under God.

Updates..

The Grove

Since September, The Grove has been gathering each Sunday morning to worship together, with additional evening services twice a month that have deepened our fellowship and prayer. These rhythms have encouraged us and helped us grow as a community centred on Jesus.

Our new space has also opened the door to midweek activities. Fourteen adults have journeyed through Alpha, asking deep questions about life and faith, while fourteen teenagers have explored those same questions through Alpha Youth. These groups have sparked honest conversations, strengthened friendships, and created opportunities for people of all ages to discover the hope of the gospel.

Alongside this, our kids' ministry continues to thrive. Each week, children are welcomed into a safe and joyful environment where they learn about Jesus in engaging,



age-appropriate ways. Their enthusiasm and growth remind us of the importance of investing in the next generation.

Most importantly, we rejoice that two adults and two young people have made the life-changing decision to follow Jesus. This is the heartbeat of The Grove: to see lives transformed by His love.

As we look ahead, we remain committed to worship, discipleship, and evangelism, trusting that God will continue to use The Grove to bless our community and beyond.

PRAY *with thanks for these new Jesus followers. Pray that they will mature in their faith as they participate in this growing community.*

Warrenpoint Outreach



We continue to have our weekly Thursday night meetings in which we have worship, biblical teaching and community. This has been well supported by the local community.

At Halloween we had a "Light Party" for the kids, and we also gave out over 100 "UCB Bags of Hope" and hot chocolate to families walking past the hall on their way to see the fireworks display. It was another great opportunity to make connections,

and we had a wonderful group of local volunteers helping us.

In December we held some bigger Christmas events including a Ladies' Night and a Christmas Community Party on 21st December. These are all ways to help our community get to know us better.

We are now finishing up with our Alpha Course attended by 15 people. We had a very powerful and special Holy Spirit Day in which people were able to learn more about faith and the work of the Holy Spirit. We're grateful for all your support and prayers.

PRAY *that our community connections would continue to grow offering more opportunities to invite people into abundant life in Jesus.*



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use to what God has
placed in your hands
to partner with us"*

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