

Gateway Christian Fellowship Session Report 2023- Trustee Annual Report

We are thankful to God for all his blessings to us in 2023 the first full year of a return to post-Covid normality in church life.

13a Pump Street

As 2022 ended we were still unsure if our negotiations over the lease for 13a Pump Street would end successfully. At a congregational meeting on 26th January 2023 the congregation agreed to proceed to sign the lease provided the remaining issues were satisfactorily resolved. This being the case we were able to sign the lease and take up residency in the property at the beginning of May 2023. Since then, we were able to hold most of our meetings in the front section of the building while we awaited planning permission for "Change of Use" of the building as a place of worship. It took until early November, a full six months, for this permission to come through.

As the year ended the first steps in the refurbishment process had begun under the welcome guidance of Mr James Snodgrass and his tradesmen contacts. We look forward with anticipation to the work being completed before too much of 2024 has passed. Once the work on the kitchen area and the worship space is complete, we will be able to vacate the front section of the building and get it set up as the proposed shop. We have been gradually accumulating furniture and fittings for this over the last few months.

We are very grateful to the Session, and Congregation of Bready RPC for their offer of financial support for the Pump Street building.

Public Worship

Public worship took place each week in the Maldron Hotel until mid-May. Thereafter we met in front section of the Pump Street building.

Attendance of members at morning worship has been consistently good when health permitted. We are pleased that some members of other local R.P. congregations support us by attending worship with us regularly. On a couple of occasions, we had a large but welcome influx of visitors which challenged our seating resources. As yet we have had few non-R.P. visitors to our worship services, but we trust and pray that that will change once we get the shop up and running and are able to fully utilise the building for outreach activities.

We thank Rev Neilly for his careful preparation and faithful and challenging exposition of God's Word. Over the year we have benefited from sermon series on some passages in 1 Samuel, Romans chapters 5-11, several Psalms, and laterally a new series on the Gospel of John.

The children of the congregation have benefited from children's address on most occasions.

Rev Neilly also preached in Nantes in France for 2 weeks in the summer to cover the local minister's leave.

We are thankful to those men who have preached in Gateway during Rev Neilly's holidays or when he was required to preach in vacant congregations. The elders as well as preaching in Gateway on occasions have also preached in other congregations in the denomination.

The Lord's Supper was celebrated four times during the year in the months of January, April, September and November. This year the focus of the preaching on those occasions was John's gospel chap 16. There was an average of 13-14 communicants participating. A fellowship meal was held in the evening after each celebration of the Lord's Supper.

We thank our main precentor and others who have assisted from time to time.

We appreciate the work which one of our members does recording the services and putting them on the website. We also thank another friend of the congregation for continuing to keep our congregational website up to date and other members for making regular updates to the Facebook page.

Work of Session

The Session of the congregation was constituted for formal business on 6 occasions in addition to the 4 times when constituted for the Lord's Supper. There were no baptisms or new members received into the congregation in the past year.

Session Members attended the regular meetings of the Western Presbytery, and Synod as required, and a meeting of the Western Presbytery elders' fellowship and the Synodical Day of Prayer.

As in previous years, Rev Neilly attended the annual RP Ministers' Conference at the Drummond Hotel in Ballykelly.

Visitation of the families of the congregation was completed in September when the theme of the visitation was "Work and Leisure".

Rev Neilly continued to lecture in Old Testament Literature at the Reformed Theological College in Belfast each Thursday during term time. This has resulted in much time having to be devoted to preparation.

A congregational WhatsApp group was set up to improve the internal communications of the Gateway Session with the members.

Bible Study and Fellowship Meetings

In 2023 these almost always took place in person. Until we had use of the Pump Street building these were held in the Neilly home.

Once a month the Lord's Day evening meeting took the form of a prayer meeting. Other weeks we have done further study on the topic of the morning's sermon. We have also used a couple of books to guide our thinking on Biblical themes, namely "Truth on Fire" by Adam Ramsey, and "Considering Christianity" by John Frame.

At most of our Thursday evening Bible studies we continued studying the book of Genesis (chapters 36-50) and then began a study of 1 Peter. Attendance at these meetings has been encouraging. The elders have assisted in leading these meetings during the Reformed Theological College term time. In May some members attended a Presbytery prayer time focused on the need for elders across the denomination. They also benefited from special meetings in Faughan RP Church taken by European Missionary Fellowship and Creation Ministries International.

The Ladies' Fellowship has met periodically for Bible study and for prayer. Some of the ladies have joined on-line meetings organised by the denomination's ladies fellowship committee. There have also been informal meetings for breakfast/coffee etc.

Though meetings were planned on a couple of occasions, due to other events, the Men's Fellowship did not meet during 2023.

Outreach and Service

At the end of the year, we distributed gospel calendars, some gospels and other evangelistic literature in the Guildhall Square area of the city. Calendars were also distributed around some housing areas. We pray that the Lord would use this literature for His glory.

As in previous years, some of our members were involved in catering for Girls Discovery Camp and Senior Camp respectively. Others of our members served for a second year as officers at the Boy's Discovery Camps and Camp Re-unions.

Another member has continued to represent the congregation on the Western Presbytery Youth Committee.

As we end 2023, we do so with a sense of expectation but also with some trepidation as we anticipate the opening of our shop/meeting place and welcoming members of the public into it. We are very aware of our numerical weakness and our inadequacy for the task ahead and of our need for the Lord's help in this venture. However, we look to the future with hope trusting in a great God ***“who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine”. (Ephesians 3:20a)***

Respectfully submitted.

Graham Fallows (Clerk)