

Gateway Christian Fellowship Trustees Report to Charity Commission NI 2024

We are thankful to God for all his blessings to us in 2024, a year which has seen several significant events in the life of Gateway Christian Fellowship. It has also been a difficult year for some in our congregation with bereavement and significant health issues of themselves or family members being experienced. Others have had the challenge of new work situations or new training to adapt to. We assure everyone of our continued prayers that they might know the Lord's grace in all of these circumstances.

Retirement of our Minister

The year began with the unexpected announcement of our minister's intention to retire from the pastorate of Gateway Christian Fellowship at the end of April. He has been pastor of the congregation since it was formed in 2012. As a session we express our appreciation for his faithful ministry of God's Word and pastoral care of the congregation over the last 12 years. Session appreciated that the burden of lecturing in the college and pastoring the congregation had become too much for him and reluctantly acquiesced in his decision.

The Western Presbytery meeting in the new Gateway building in May 2024 accepted our minister's request to retire and dissolved the pastoral tie with the congregation. Another local minister was appointed by the Presbytery as our interim moderator. The retirement was marked at a congregational meal in the Maldron Hotel in November when tributes were paid to the work of our minister and his wife among us, and gifts were presented.

Property

As 2024 began we were still meeting in the front part of the Pump Street building while we awaited the completion of the renovation works in the rear room. These were completed so that we were able to meet for worship in the rear room on the last Lord's Day of April. Fittingly, this was also our minister's last service as pastor of the congregation. The rear room has since proved to be a bright, warm, comfortable and welcoming space for our worship services and other meetings.

Work continued in preparation for the opening of the shop with the sourcing of suitable furnishings and stock and the shop opened on 7th July 2024. It has continued to operate from 10:30-16:30 each Tuesday to Saturday except for the week of the Share Holiday Conference in August and the week between Christmas and New Year. A more detailed "Gateway Shop" report has been provided to Session.

In addition to support already received from the Western Presbytery and the Home Section of the Mission Committee, we are thankful for financial support from several RP Congregations. We have not yet needed to draw down any of the financial support previously offered by a local congregation of the RPC.

At a Session Meeting on 22nd May 2024 Session concluded that it would be wise to sell the manse and split the proceeds between the minister and his wife and the Western Presbytery in proportion to their contribution to the purchase. The agreement of the congregation to the sale was granted at a congregational meeting on 6th June 2024. The sale was completed by the end of November.

During the year we registered the congregation for internet banking so that our payments are almost all completed by bank transfer. It has been a challenging year for our treasurer with lots of transactions as a result of the renovation work, the stocking of the shop, the regular income and expenditure generated by the shop and the fact that we have a different preacher to pay each week!

Public Worship

Public worship took place each Lord's Day in 13a Pump Street apart from the Lord's Day which fell during the Share Holiday Conference.

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. We also have a small number of adherents who attend occasionally.

We thank our former minister for his faithful ministry during the first 4 months of the year when his preaching was primarily based on John's gospel.

Throughout the rest of the year, we have enjoyed and profited from the preaching of a range of ministers, elders and theological students from across the RP Church of Ireland with the Gateway elders filling any gaps in the schedule. We are grateful to our interim moderator who has done a good job in ensuring that we have not had too many gaps to fill.

The children of the congregation have benefited from children's addresses during the worship services on most occasions and also have Sabbath School classes after worship.

The Lord's Supper was celebrated 3 times during the year in the months of January, April and October. Fellowship meals were held at the home of one of our elders after the January & April Communions. Prior to the October communion, our interim Moderator helped us prepare by leading a mid-week meeting looking at relevant questions in the Larger Catechism.

We thank the main precentor for her work and others who have assisted from time to time.

We also thank various members for their work in recording the services and putting them on the website and making regular updates to the Gateway Facebook page.

Work of Session

The Session of the congregation was constituted for formal business on 7 occasions in addition to the 3 times when constituted to oversee the Lord's Supper.

We were very pleased to welcome a new member into communicant membership on profession of faith and acceptance of the terms of membership at our Session meeting on 10th April. The membership vows were taken before the congregation at the communion service on the following Lord's Day. This new member had been with us for several years having come to Derry to study at the University. He had completed the membership class and other one-to-one Bible studies with our minister. We were sad to have to say goodbye to him before the end of the year as he headed to London in the hope of finding suitable work there.

In January Session interviewed one of our male members who had expressed his desire to commence training at the Reformed Theological College (RTC) in September. Having interviewed him and gone through the questions recommended by Synod for prospective candidates wishing to enter the College, Session agreed to recommend that he be taken under care of the Western Presbytery with a view to his undertaking training at the RTC from September 2024. He was taken under care of the Presbytery at its meeting on 1st May 2024 and commenced studies in September. Session assures him of the prayerful interest and support of the Session and congregation.

Our minister continued to lecture in Old Testament Literature at the Reformed Theological College in Belfast each Thursday during term time.

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

No pastoral visitation was undertaken during 2024 but we hope to carry out that responsibility in the near future.

At the meeting of the Western Presbytery meeting during the meetings of Synod, in June, Session sought and was granted permission to make out a call. This means that whenever we feel we are ready to call a minister we can proceed with that.

Congregational Life

Bible Study and fellowship meetings were usually held in the Pump Street building though on a few occasions due to poor weather conditions they were held on Zoom.

During the first half of the year the Lord's Day evening meeting took the form of a (monthly) prayer meeting or further study on the topic of the morning sermon or a "Book" study. We have used several books ("Truth on Fire" by Adam Ramsey, "Christianity Considered" by John Frame and the Character of Christ by Jonathan Landry Cruse) to focus our thoughts on Biblical truths.

After becoming a vacant congregation, the format of the Lord's Day evening meeting was in the hands of the visiting preachers. Some chose to preach again in the evening, and some chose to lead a Bible study.

During the first half of the year at our Thursday evening Bible studies we studied the books of 1 and 2 Peter. The elders led these meetings during the Reformed Theological College term time. One of the elders also led a short series on the life of Gideon. Since the summer we have listened to a Ligonier on-line series on the Life of Peter delivered by Rev Derek Thomas. This has been well received by those attending.

On occasions members had the opportunity to attend special meetings organised in the other local RP Churches or further afield. In February Gateway members organised a meeting highlighting the work of Operation Rescue a Christian charity which works among other places in Tigray province in Ethiopia, the region where our denomination previously worked. A good sum was raised for the work of Operation Rescue on that night.

The ladies of the congregation have been invited to a range of ladies meetings particularly in Bready and Faughan. A number of members were blessed by attending part or all of the Share Holiday Conference in Lisnaskea in August.

Outreach and Service

The primary means of outreach has been through the shop. Most members of the congregation have helped with manning the shop as they are able. We have been helped by members of 4 of the other Western Presbytery Congregations.

Fliers informing people about the presence Gateway Christian Fellowship and the Gateway shop were distributed by members of the congregation and by the Northwest Go Team in July.

Members of the local Cathedral Quarter Business Group, our landlord and tradesmen who had worked on the renovation work were invited into the building for a preview on the evening of 8th July before the shop opened on 9th July.

We are encouraged by the Bibles and Christian Books bought, the free literature which has been taken and conversations of a spiritual nature which have been held. We are also pleased that a number of local folk are becoming regular visitors to the shop. One of our regular visitors to the

shop has attended morning worship on one occasion and we hope and pray that in due time others will do as well.

Gospel Calendars and copies of the evangelistic edition of Evangelical Times were offered to those who came into the shop towards the end of 2024. A supply of free literature including gospels is always on display outside the shop and people often stop to look at it and some has been taken. Free gospels and Bibles have also been taken from the "Free Section" of the shop.

A McMillan Coffee Morning in the building in September and a weekly "Stitch and Chat" session during November were held with a view to attracting more people into the Shop.

The "Christmas Market" organised by the Cathedral Quarter Group took place in Pump Street for 4 days in early December. The street was pedestrianised and filled with stalls. This greatly increased the footfall and sales in the shop over that period and served to make many more people aware of its presence.

Two male members continued to serve as officers at the Boy's Discovery Camps and Camp Re-unions.

One of our young ladies continues to represent the congregation on the Western Presbytery Youth Committee. We were pleased to host a Presbytery Youth Event in our building in November.

As we end 2024, we do so with thankfulness for the LORD's help in the new challenges we have faced as individuals or as a congregation. We continue to look to Him for strength to live to His glory in the year ahead remembering words revealed to the apostle Paul in 2Corinthians 2:9 ***"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness"***

Respectfully submitted.

Graham Fallows (Clerk)