

Secretary's Report for the Year 2024

Madam Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It has been an incredibly busy year in our church calendar and if this report seems long, I can only blame our Minister for the special services and events that she has so enthusiastically embarked upon.

Rev Kane has an aim to grow the church numbers and is optimistic about encouraging new members despite consensus which would suggest that most congregations are decreasing.

An apt quote might be:

"What happens around us is largely outside our control, but how we choose to react to it is inside our control. We can throw our hands up in defeat or we can choose to trust in God for His solution."

Deaths

- 01/08/24 Mr Robert (Roy) McClay – will always be remembered for generosity and kindness. When the snow drops bloom under the trees in our gardens, many of us remember Roy giving the bulbs to us and there were many other flowers as kindly distributed. A basket of sweets is always available in the vestibule in memory of Roy's long standing generosity in this regard. Mr McClay was a very regular attender at church and liked to welcome those coming through the doors.
- 16/09/24 Mrs Ivy Scott – was a life long member of this church as were most of her extended family. A very interesting lady with a store of knowledge and tales to tell. She had been in a nursing home for some time and died in her 105th year.
- 13/12/24 Mrs Iris Spence – was formerly a regular member of the congregation but in recent times was unable to attend.

Marriages

07/09/24 Mr Shane Meharg to Miss Abigail Ford; On the sunniest day of 2024 the Rev Campbell conducted a beautiful service, with organist Ethel Logan and accompanist Lisa Dawson. Afterwards guests were able to relax with refreshments in the Church gardens.

Baptisms

There were no baptisms during the year.

Special Services and Events

During the year Rev Kane held some special services and decorated the Church accordingly.

Valentine Weekend

A special service was held on Sunday 11th February 2024 during Valentine's weekend, on the theme of "All is Love". The Church was decorated in full Valentine flow.

However, the message the Rev Kane emphasized was that, while much is written and talked about love in all its various forms it is an individual and subjective concept. It is much more than any one day can indicate. Love is a central and recurring theme in all religions – the Love of God, Love for our neighbours and for ourselves, and we can only understand a fraction of God's all encompassing love for us.

World Day of Prayer

The World Day of Prayer, held on 1st March 2024, was prepared by the Christian Women of Palestine, on the theme of "I beg you..... Bear with one another in Love". The booklet for the service featured art work showing three Palestinian women praying under an olive tree, which is a sign of everlasting and abundant life, as olive trees can last for thousands of years.

It was hosted by St John's Church of Ireland, Ballyclare and members of our Church attended and took part in the Service.

Afterwards refreshments were served in the church and it was good to renew friendships and fellowship with those from other churches in the Ballyclare area.

Mother's Day Service

Mother's Day Service was held on 10th March.

St Patrick's Day Service 17th March

On St Patrick's Day, again Rev Kane decorated the Church and spoke on the theme of "A Godly Chat". St Patrick believed he heard God directing him to spread God's word. He believed the boat he escaped from captivity in was provided by God for this purpose.

Rev Kane cited Paul and others who had had dreams or heard God's whispered command and asked if it were possible for us to also be directed by God. This, she believed does happen, when we are guided by thoughts, feelings and niggles that do not go away and make us feel we need to help a cause, a person or get involved in some aspect for good.

Annual General Meeting

The AGM was held on 21st April after a shorter sermon. Reports were read and officers re-elected.

Easter Service

Easter Sunday was celebrated on Sunday 31st March, a service of hope and celebration.

Communion

Communion service was held on May 5th and Elders Evelyn Meharg and Richard Laird assisted Rev Kane in the service.

No Children's church was held but children were invited to participate in Communion.

The second communion service was held on Sunday 3rd November. Trevor Forsythe and Jacqueline Crooks were the elders helping at this service. Rev Kane invited everyone to participate and emphasised inclusivity, and asked everyone to be seated at the front of the Church.

Favourites Hymns Day

In preparation for this Day, a list had been displayed in the Vestibule for congregants to choose their preferences

Favourite Hymns Day was held on 12th May and was led by Rev Campbell who outlined the background for each of the Hymns chosen. These included "Nearer My God to Thee", "Amazing Grace" and "Will Your Anchor Hold?".

Children's Day

Children's day was held on 16th June and it was lovely to see the children of the Sunday school taking part and receiving book tokens for attendance.

Harvest Thanksgiving

In preparation for Harvest and to support the local community, contributions for the food bank commenced on the 15th September.

The Harvest Service was held on Sunday 6th October and led by the Rev Kane. The ladies gathered on Saturday 5th of October to decorate the church with flowers, fruit and greenery, which was very evocative of the time of year, and donations for the food bank were added to the display. The Congregation joined in singing "Come Ye Thankful People, Come", "Welcome Harvest Now Beginning", "God Who's Farm is All Creation" and "The God of Harvest Praise".

Valerie Green read from Ecclesiastes 3, Edward Laird read from Mark Chapter 4 and a speech by Paul Harvey, given at the Future Farmer's of America Convention "So God Made a Farmer" was read by Evelyn Meharg.

Sunday 10th November – Remembrance Sunday

The Rev Kane spoke on wars and conflict throughout the centuries in the name of religion, politics and greed. Rev Kane read “In Flanders Fields” and Evelyn Meharg read “For the Fallen”. The new reading lamp at the lectern was of great assistance.

There was a poppy appeal in the vestry and the congregation were urged to support this cause.

Sunday 24th November

The service was led by Alan Kirk of All Souls, this was his first service in Ballyclare.

Christmas Family Service

This service was held on Sunday 22nd December and led by Rev Kane. Andrew Todd read “The Christmas Story”, Valerie Green read from Jeremiah 29 v 4-19 and John Logan gave us “Saturday Night at the Bethlehem Arms”. The congregation joined in singing “O Little Town of Bethlehem”, “In the Bleak Mid-Winter”, “See Amid The Winter Snow” and “Silent Night”.

We were all enthralled by the children of the Sunday School and very much appreciated Sophia Gilpin playing the piano, AJ Laird playing clarinet and Sara Kane reading a poem.

Candlelit Service Tuesday 24th December

Once again Rev Kane welcomed friends, family and other congregations to the church on Christmas Eve. Candles were lit, the Christmas tree radiated a welcome light and the service was well attended. Adults and children alike listened attentively to Mrs Clause, (AKA Rev Heather Walker) as she related her children’s story. Both Rev Walker and Ruth Gregg sang wonderful solos which made the service rather special and the congregational hymns included “Once in Royal David’s City”, “Away in a Manger”, “Hark the Herald Angels sing” and “Silent Night”. Jeanette McKendry, Irene Campbell, Jennifer Forsythe, Wilson Logan and Evelyn Meharg read poetry and excerpts from Luke’s gospel.

Afterwards mulled wine, shortbread and mince pies were served in the school room as old acquaintances were renewed, news caught up with and Christmas greetings relayed.

Social Events

Friday 5th January

A wonderful night was had by many of the congregation as we joined with Colin and Kathleen in Ballyclare Golf Club for Rev Colin Campbell’s retirement dinner. Congratulatory and emotional speeches were made in recognition of the wonderful,

kind, caring and devoted service Rev Campbell has given to his congregation over the period of his ministry.

Colin played his guitar and songs were sung for a night to remember.

He will be greatly missed.

Burn's Night

"Our" first Burn's Night was held on Friday 26th January. Rev Kane excelled herself preparing and decorating the school room beforehand. Despite a last minute hiccup, the Haggis was pipped in by Alan McAnally who very graciously stepped in at the last minute. Wilson Logan toasted the Haggis and his speech ensured many of us were enthusiastic and converted Burn's supporters. Ethel Logan gave a very entertaining reply to the Toast to the Lassies which had been toasted by Alan Kirk in the form of a poem. The caterers did a wonderful job with the haggis, neeps and tatties and between Janine Burnside, Rev Campbell, Jeanette McKendry, Big Aggie and Dott we were thoroughly entertained.

Unitarian AGM

Rev Kane attended the Unitarian Annual Meeting and signed the role of the Unitarian and Free Christian General Assembly – the first student in 35 years to re-establish these historic training links.

Christian Aid Week

Christian Aid Week ran from 12th to 18th May. Envelopes were left in the pews for donations.

Refreshments were served in the school room to thank everyone for their contributions. £255 was collected for this charity.

Open Day – 18th May

It was decided to open the Church during May Fair week to encourage people to visit and find out more about the Church and congregation.

Tea, coffee and biscuits were provided and many thanks to the Rev Kane for the wonderful display she created on the history of the Church.

Thanks also to those who lent books, photos and artifacts which made this a most interesting and educational event.

Synod

In June Rev Kane was elected to clerk of Synod.

Congregational Outing

Unfortunately, the planned outing to Hillsborough Castle Gardens was cancelled due to booking problems and mobility issues. But we will certainly be organising one for 2025.

European Heritage Open Days

The European Heritage Open Days were held on 14th and 15th September, and the Church was opened over the two days to allow people to learn more about the congregation and the church. Again Rev Kane created a very interesting and enlightening display and quite a few visitors showed great interest.

Quiz

A great night was had by all those attending the Halloween Quiz on 1st November. The new trophy for the Quiz Night was won by Dr Trevor Forsythe's team. The Moderator, Right Rev Alister Bell was in attendance and dressed for the occasion. Over £260 was raised for the Moderators Appeal and the Church raised the donation to £300.

Friday 15th November

It was good to welcome visitors and members of the congregation to a Safety, Nutrition and Mental Health awareness night. The neighbourhood PSNI attended to advise on home safety and being alert. Janine Burnside had a wealth of knowledge on nutrition and Rev Kane discussed good mental health practice in winter. The evening was well attended, entertaining and those there appreciated the tea and cake.

Book Sale

A book sale was held on Saturday 30th November in the School room. The proceeds were in aid of "Aware NI" and £200 was raised.

Women's Group

The Women's Group accounts still show a healthy bank balance although it would be fair to say activity has dwindled in recent months. Perhaps in the coming months it would be nice to reconfigure a social group for everyone.

Property and Investments

The ongoing maintenance of the church buildings and grounds remain a priority for the Church Committee. Weed suppression, electrical servicing and repair as well as fire and safety checks and replacement of fire extinguishers have all been attended to. A new vacuum cleaner has been purchased and the sound system regularly checked.

The Committee had investigated the replacement of the decaying wayside pulpit with a modern digital display board. However, this necessitated the availability of electric and Wi-fi connections and cabling which would have meant disturbing the new resin bound paths. After due consideration it was decided a more viable option was to replace it with a new aluminium framed board which would be durable, neat and more cost effective.

Investments have been closely monitored by Dr Trevor Forsythe, as our treasurer along with Evelyn Partners, our financial advisers.

Thanks

May I, on behalf of the congregation sincerely thank the Rev Lynda Kane for all her commitment, enthusiasm and care. It is obvious from the reports of services and events that the Rev Kane has put much care and energy into fellowship, friendship and faith within the Church. The amount of time and energy she has expended in researching and organising both social and educational events in the church is commendable.

To Trevor Forsythe, our treasurer, who continues to be a main stay in all aspects of the church's welfare – our sincere thanks and gratitude.

Thanks to our Sunday School staff Cathy Warnock and Jennifer Hall who encourage our younger generation.

What would we do without Ethel Logan, our dedicated organist, who brightens each week with her presence and gives so much to our services. Also thanks to John Dourris for regularly playing the organ in our services.

Many thanks to Jacqueline Crooks, our Representative Elder and to Mary Surgeoner for her upkeep of the Church.

I would extend our sincere thanks to the Elders and Members of the Church Committee who continue to organise the ongoing maintenance and care of the church and its grounds.

I would also like to mention the family and staff at Brown's, who continue to offer help and support throughout the year.

That Madam Chairman concludes the Secretary's report.