

Donegall Street Congregational Church Trust

Registered Charity No. 102063

Chairman: Rev Tom Boyle. 11 Abbey Court. Abbey Gardens. Belfast BT5 7JE

Hon Treasurer: John Chapman. 25 Richhill Park. Belfast BT5 6HG

Trustees Annual Report – 1 January to 31 December 2024

Introduction and Background

Donegall Street Congregational Church has existed on its present site since the early 1800s. The church's trust deed dates from December 1804.

By 2012 the existing congregation was declining in numbers and most members were elderly. The church's office bearers recognised that the situation was not sustainable in the longer term. At the same time, they were conscious of the church's original remit of providing a Christian witness in the area in which it is located. The Ulster University has recently acquired substantial land beside the church and was in the process of relocating from its site at Jordanstown. This created an opportunity and need that the existing church felt unable to meet.

The Donegall Street church became aware of a new and growing church (Redeemer Central Belfast), which was meeting in rented premises and was outgrowing those premises. They urgently required larger accommodation but lacked the resources to finance such a move. The doctrines and structure of the Redeemer church were broadly in agreement with those of Donegall Street Congregational Church.

Following discussions between the two churches it was decided that the objectives of both could be satisfied as follows –

1. Donegall Street Congregational Church ceased to hold services at the end of 2012.
2. Redeemer Central Belfast rented the Donegall Street church premises from January 2013 and held services in it from that date.
3. Redeemer Central Belfast leased the premises from the trustees on an annual basis, free of rent, and made quarterly payments to the trustees of Donegall Street Congregational Church to reimburse the trustees for building maintenance and insurance costs.
4. The remaining members of Donegall Street Congregational Church were free to attend Redeemer's services or to move to another church of their choice. In either event the church's former minister, Rev. Tom Boyle, would continue to visit them and provide pastoral support for as long as they wished.

This arrangement continued until the end of 2015 when the situation was reviewed. The leasing arrangement, having worked to the satisfaction of both parties, was renegotiated and a new 20 year lease was signed and became effective from 29 February 2016. Under

the terms of this lease the annual rent from Redeemer to the Donegal Street Trustees is one pound (if demanded). The Redeemer church is fully responsible for all maintenance and repairs to the Donegal Street Church building. The Donegal Street trustees are responsible for insuring the building and are reimbursed by quarterly payments from Redeemer.

The lease includes a right of first refusal to purchase by Redeemer Central Belfast should the trustees decide to sell the premises at any point during the term of the lease.

At time of writing (September 2025) the two churches and their respective solicitors are exploring the possibility of Redeemer gaining ownership of the building by means of asset transfer.

Purposes and Public Benefit

The purposes of Donegal Street Congregational Church are set out in the church's trust deed as follows – "Set up, finish and maintain in repair the house of worship now building on the said lot of ground for the public preaching of the gospel and dispensing other divine ordinances amongst the church and intending statedly to worship in the said house and also for supporting the institution by doing whatever the trustees or their successors in office or their quorum shall deem necessary for that end."

In view of the numerical decline in membership of Donegal Street Congregational Church, the trustees believe that by leasing our church premises to Redeemer Central Belfast, we have continued the Christian ministry and witness which has been maintained unbroken for more than 200 years to people in Central Belfast. In addition, through the ministry of Redeemer Central Belfast, the Donegal Street Congregational Church has sought to establish a witness to the student body of the Ulster University which has recently been established beside the church premises.

The trustees believe that through their actions and decisions during the year they have had due regard to the Charity Commission's public benefit guidance when exercising any powers or duties to which the guidance is relevant.

Year ended 31 December 2024

1. Trustees and Office Bearers

There were no changes to either the trustees or office bearers during 2024.

2. Activities and Beneficiaries

As Donegal Street Congregational Church no longer functions as a practicing congregation, all activities in the premises consistent with the trust deed are carried out by Redeemer Central Belfast. In addition to regular services of public worship the Redeemer church conducts community support activities within the area.

The trustees no longer maintain any pastoral support of former members of Donegall Street Congregational Church.

The trustees are not aware of any private benefit to any individual arising from the work of Donegall Street Congregational Church.

3. Finance

As per Receipts and Payments accounts under separate cover.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "J.H. Alipana", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Hon. Treasurer