

Movilla Abbey Church – Church of Ireland & Methodist Church in Ireland Trustees' Annual Report for the year ended 31 December 2024

**Movilla Abbey Church
63 Movilla Road
Newtownards BT23 8EZ
Charity Number: NIC 102613**

With regard to the Charity Commission's public benefit requirement statutory guidance, the trustees are pleased to present this year's annual report.

Introduction

Movilla Abbey Church (Church of Ireland & Methodist Church in Ireland) is a lively and friendly church in the heart of east Newtownards close to the ancient ruins of Movilla Abbey. It was established in 1980, as a shared ecumenical partnership between the Church of Ireland (COI) and the Methodist Church in Ireland (MCI), by whom the property is equally shared and owned. Until 2021, it was two constitutionally separate denominational congregations on one site.

Since 2021, Movilla Abbey Church has been a united 'Covenant' Church congregation belonging fully and equally to both the Methodist Church in Ireland and the Church of Ireland. Our constitutional, executive, and financial structures were fully merged from Jan 2023 (see 2023 Annual Report), and the charitable status, formerly exclusively pertaining to the COI congregation is now shared.

Purpose and function

The charitable purpose of the Church of Ireland, of which Movilla Abbey Church remains a local expression, and through whom we act as Charity Trustees, is the advancement of the Christian religion.

The principal function of Movilla Abbey Church is to support the advancement of the Christian religion, through engagement with the general public, by promoting the whole mission of the Church, pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical. Being open to and engaging with society as a whole, and offering support for those needing help are fundamental to an expression of Christian faith. The Church's care for the disadvantaged, the sick, the elderly and the young is a clear public benefit. It's ministries of baptism, marriage and funerals provide a vital public service to the community and families from birth, through life and death.

This can be measured and evidenced through increased social integration and pastoral care delivered at the point of need. The direct benefit of participation in Church life includes the enjoyment of public worship and the giving and receiving of pastoral ministry, improved understanding of the values relating to civic engagement, community cohesion, and providing a

bridge between diverse groups; as well as improved educational outcomes through the Church's ministry of teaching both children and adults.

The beneficiaries are the general public, and the public valuation of the benefits can be evidenced through attendance at public worship, participation in Church governance and willingness to support through contributions, the continuing witness of the Church.

As a result of these objectives, Movilla Abbey Church has custody of buildings, property, records, materials and artefacts of significance to the cultural and religious heritage, and maintenance of which (until November 2022) was undertaken separately by both the COI Select Vestry, and the MCI Church Council. Shared responsibilities were governed by representation to a third shared body – the Joint Management Committee. From 20th November 2022, a new united governing body (the Leadership Team) was established, which fulfils all the roles and responsibilities of both Select Vestry and Church Council, and (now defunct) Joint Management Committee.

Governing Document and Constitution of the Charity

Chapter III of the Constitution of the Church of Ireland governs Parishes and Parochial organisation.

Organisational Structure

The Church Leadership Team members are the charity's trustees, and are responsible for the day-to-day management of Movilla Abbey Church. It consists of the serving member(s) of the clergy, two Church Stewards (*analogous to Church Wardens in COI, and Society Stewards in MCI*), two Property Stewards (*analogous to Glebe Wardens in COI, and Property Stewards in MCI*), two Treasurers and six other Leadership Team members. All Church Leadership Team members are nominated, elected and appointed at the Annual Church Meeting (*analogous to Annual General Vestry Meeting in COI and Annual Congregational Meeting in MCI*) which usually takes place in the month of May.

The Church Leadership Team (CLT) is chaired by the incumbent minister or other member of the clergy officiating in the church. CLT members are responsible for making decisions on matters of general concern and importance to the life and worship of the church, including issues of fabric and finance. The CLT meets at times fixed by members (currently monthly during term-time) or by the COI Diocesan Synod, or MCI Connexion. Special meetings may be convened at any time by the Chairperson or the Church Steward.

CLT Office Holders and Members (also Trustees) from May 2024 were as follows:

Clergy	Rev Alan Peek (Co-Chair) Rev Michael Spence (Co-Chair)	<i>Stood down from July 2024</i>
Church Stewards	Patricia Meara Lorraine McVeigh	

Treasurer	Cheryl Stewart
Assistant Treasurer	Martin McAlinney
Property Stewards	Ian Lappin
	<i>Vacant</i>
Leadership Team Members:	David Martin
	Charleen Houston
	Trevor Bristow
	Gillian Clarke
	Barbara Haughan
	Rosemary Lappin

Public Worship & Church Community Life

Our main public gathering for worship continues to be at 11am every Sunday, each of which are focussed differently, through each month

First Sunday	Morning Worship with Holy Communion
Second Sunday	Morning Worship
Third Sunday	All-Age Worship
Fourth Sunday	Morning Worship
Fifth Sunday	Morning Worship

Every service has a relaxed feel to it with a mixture of traditional and modern worship, broadly following the liturgy for a Service of the Word. The Gospel is preached with expectation of change in hearers, and with instruction on how to lead a life centred around Jesus.

During the service there is an opportunity for young people to experience more through Sunday School Kid's Groups. Families with pre-schoolers can make use of our Living Room facility with crèche facilities available while watching the service on a screen. Before and after the service, guests are offered tea, coffee and further fellowship in our Welcome Centre.

We continue to stream our morning services online, and there continues to be a regular 'online congregation' of approx. 40+ people who benefit from being able to access this service. It is of particular encouragement to the housebound, those who are ill, on holiday, or who live many miles from Newtownards.

As mentioned in last year's Annual Report, our monthly 'House of Worship', which runs from 7-8pm on the first Sunday of every month, continued throughout 2024. In contrast to Morning Worship, which is more structured and variable with sung worship, bible teaching, prayer and communion, House of Worship is a very simple format. It is an hour of contemporary worship, led by an invited guest Worship Leader, with the opportunity for Prayer Ministry from trained practitioners. It gained in popularity throughout 2024, attracting up to 70+ people, many of them younger, and many from other local churches or further afield. We advertise widely on social media as much as we can.

Our midweek Life Groups (smaller home-based groups for worship, bible study, prayer and outreach) continued to connect people, and resource them for Christian life and mission.

Our worshipping and community life, as a shared denominational congregation seems to be proving attractive as we have had many newcomers attending our Sunday gatherings over the year, some with little or no faith/church background, and others who have drifted from faith, or come from other churches; with many of them choosing to stay.

We were privileged to baptise two new adult believers, reaffirm baptism for two renewed Christians and welcome ten new people into church membership, as new members of both the Church of Ireland and Methodist Church in Ireland.

Community Involvement, Outreach and Mission

Here is a summary of our community engagement in 2024:

- Parent & Toddler Groups – Two weekly sessions on Tuesday and Thursday mornings, which have had problems with over-subscription, necessitating limiting places.
- Wednesday Coffee Shop – a thriving outreach, run by dedicated volunteers to community members from all walks of life, providing cooked breakfasts, tea, coffee and snacks. Operates in our purpose-built ‘Welcome Space’ with commercial-quality seating and dining.
- Seniors Lunches – a fortnightly gathering providing important social space for isolated and vulnerable older adults, as well as a nutritious hot two-course meal.
- Alpha – an internationally popular 12-week course for outsiders to explore questions of Christian faith. We ran 2 courses in 2024 – one in spring, which attracted 28 people, most of whom from outside; and one in the autumn with 4 guests. Both were significant in terms of the impact had on those attending some of whom came to faith for the first time, and others grew profoundly in their understanding and confidence
- A new initiative for 2024 was a community outreach programme we called ‘Food for Thought’ – a 6-week basic cookery and budgeting course, run from our Church Kitchen, for anyone in the community, looking to save money and feed their family well on a tight budget. It is run by our Catering Manager and her team, and was well received.
- Youth Coffee Bar & The Tribe – ‘Coffee Bar’, an open youth club for 11-18 year olds started in Sep 2023, has gone from strength to strength through 2024. It runs on Friday nights between 7 and 8.30, in our mobile youth room in the church grounds, and provides a safe place for kids to have drinks and snacks, play games and interact with one another and our team of volunteer leaders. Numbers have gone past 60+ on some evenings. It’s growth, has led to the creation of a new Christian Youth Fellowship group we have called The Tribe, for young people who have begun or are interested in a journey of Christian faith.
- Children’s Uniformed Organisations – Guiding, Scouting and Boys Brigade organisations for children of all ages, meet every night Monday to Thursday.
- School Engagement – Church members serving as Transferor Reps on different local school Boards of Governors. The fortnightly, free coffee and drinks ministry to parents and children

at the school gates of Abbey Primary School was suspended during 2024 for logistical reasons but is hoped to restart in 2025.

- CAP Debt Centre – since Jan 2022, we have been financially and managerially supporting (with a number of other local churches) a CAP Debt Centre in Newtownards, helping to employ a Debt Centre Manager to work with individuals and families to bring them out of debt and financial hardship. This work has grown throughout 2024, to the extent that by Dec 2024, 51 families had been worked with, 12 of whom became debt-free
- Summer Kids Club – with Michael leaving us, and other logistical issues we unfortunately did not have the resources to run our own club this year, but hope to again in 2025. We were however privileged to host the Ards & North Down Borough Council Summer Scheme for schoolchildren 3 weeks in July & August of this year, which was oversubscribed.
- Litter-Picking Ministry – a monthly community service on Saturday mornings, providing picking (and safely disposing) of public litter on public streets within a half-mile radius of our church premises is ongoing
- Other work going on outside the building each week includes Pastoral care visits, Life groups each with their own community mission engagement. And then we have the charitable work through which we support organisations by regular donations or fundraising efforts (usually fry mornings, facilitated by our Catering Team). In 2024 we have donated to Newtownards food bank, CAP, Street Pastors, LINK, Samaritans Purse etc.
- Christmas 2024 included several community engagement highlights: We hosted a Big-Screen showing of 'A Muppet Christmas Carol' for families, with over 200 guests; we tweaked our traditional Carols by Candlelight service, to make it more family-focused and included our Movilla Scouts group; a Blue Christmas service (a reflective seasonal service for bereaved and lonely persons), a well-attended nativity service for young families and small children.
- Movilla Abbey Nursery & Playgroup – this is a private enterprise, independent of Movilla Abbey Church, that rent a significant section of our buildings Mon-Fri during term times, but it has very strong ties to our church community, including staff.

Other News

It was a bittersweet day at the end of June 2024, when we said goodbye to Rev Michael Spence, who had shared leadership of MAC since 2014, alongside Rev Alan Peek. He moved on to assume leadership of Glengormley Methodist Church. Rev Alan Peek is staying on for the foreseeable future, and in June assumed a new dual role, when he was welcomed at the annual Methodist Conference as the stationed representative Methodist Minister, alongside his existing role as Anglican Parish Rector.

Compliance with Public Benefit

The charitable purpose of Movilla Abbey Church is the advancement of religion through holding regular worship and communicating with the caring for parishioners and others in our community.

This is achieved through Christian witness and outreach, and is delivered through the provision of

public worship and the various activities outlined above. It is of benefit to all in the community. There is also pastoral support and visits for those in need.

The Parish has given careful consideration to the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland's guidance on public benefit to ensure that activities entered into during the year have helped to achieve the Parish's objectives and activities, while also providing public benefit.

Financial Review

Full details of the receipts and expenditure can be found in the charity accounts submitted separately, alongside this report. All items of income and expenditure included within the receipts and Payments Statement have been accounted for on a cash receipts basis.

Going concern

The trustees have reviewed the budgets for the year ahead and are satisfied that there are adequate funds in place to ensure that the Parish can continue its activities and the financial statements for the year ended 31 December 2024 can be signed off as a going concern.

Statement of Trustees' Responsibilities

The Trustees are responsible for preparing the Trustees' Report and the statement of receipts and payments and statement of assets and liabilities in accordance with the applicable law and regulations. The law applicable to charities in Northern Ireland with income of less than £250,000 requires the trustees to prepare a statement of receipts and payments and a statement of assets and liabilities for each financial year.

The Trustees are responsible for keeping accounting records that are sufficient to show and explain the Parish's transactions and disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time.

Signed on behalf of the trustees

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alan Peek', with a stylized flourish underneath.

Chair of Trustees: Rev Alan Peek
Date: 28 October 2025