

McCracken Memorial Presbyterian Church

Annual Report for year ending 31 December 2022

Minister's Report

I entered 2022 as I exited 2021, with my foot in a cast. One of our Babies and Toddlers helpers commented that breaking my ankle on the stairs might have been the best thing that ever happened as it became a great talking point for the parents and grandparents, and an excellent way to become acquainted. Babies and Toddlers started back in January 2022 with a bang after a pause of almost two years. It was instantly obvious that so many in our neighbourhood were very eager to connect with others again. Children who had been born during the pandemic needed the opportunity to socialize with other children, and as the weeks went on, we were almost overwhelmed by the numbers attending.

For me, being there each week was one of the ways I felt that after the pandemic we as a congregation needed to be looking outwards in every activity that we started up again. Babies and Toddlers was one of the first to get back. Other groups soon followed but it became clear that it wasn't just a matter of getting back to things exactly as they were. The previous two years had left their mark. Many of those who had led activities previously felt unable to continue to do so, and it was time to reach out to new people.

By the end of the year we saw the PW come back, the Tuesday Luncheon Circle restarted, as well as the bowls and badminton. Choir practices were back with a few new young and keen recruits. Bethan reached out to local schools, and we had a flood of new primary aged children regularly coming along on to our Crackerjax Youth Club on Friday evenings. Coffee moved to Thursdays, and the Women's Bible Study started up again with many coming along who hadn't been before. Our uniformed organisations returned. Axis gained new members and we began another Alpha Course in September. The church was abuzz with activity again.

A number of things provided us with a bit of direction as we sought to move forward. The first was that for the past couple of years, I along with a few others from our congregation have been following a course led by a Church of Scotland group called 'Cairn'. It's focus through 2022 was helping us build communities of disciples, or 'learning communities', as well as multiplying leaders which was very timely in 2022 as we emerged from the pandemic. The course continues to be very helpful and inspiring.

The second was our Kirk Session Away Day in June 2022, at which we set ourselves some measurable goals to work towards. One was the goal that no one should do anything in church alone but should seek to be preparing at least one other person to come alongside them to learn, and to follow after them. We also did some useful reflection upon the make-up of our Kirk Session in terms of our ministry strengths and weaknesses, in preparation for seeking new elders in 2023.

The third was an encouraging South Belfast Presbytery Consultation report on our congregation which was presented to us by Rev William Harkness on Sunday 16th

October 2022. Common themes emerged, of the need for increased participation in our Sunday morning worship, and having more all-age involvement, with a mix of traditional and contemporary worship to appeal to all ages.

In March a service of communion in our church marked the handing over of my moderatorship of Presbytery. A couple of months later I also got to hand over my convenorship of Belvoir to Rev Ben Walker of Saintfield Road Presbyterian as the two congregations began to explore an exciting new partnership.

Our Back to School with God service in September was very well attended by younger families reinforcing the need for more of these types of services. For the older generations, the Jubilee Afternoon Tea in May was a very joyous occasion at which many ventured out for the first time to such an event since COVID.

All of us were deeply touched in 2022 by what was happening in Ukraine, and it was heart-warming to see members of our congregation respond in different ways, including hosting in their homes those whose faces have now become familiar to us in church. We very much welcome them and continue to remember them, their families, and their country in our prayers.

Thank you to all of you who have put in so much prayer and effort into helping us get on our feet again in 2022. I express my thanks and deepest appreciation again to Rosemary, our Clerk of Session, Alastair Rankin, our Treasurer, and Brian Henderson, our Congregational Secretary, Bethan, our Youth and Family Worker, and Laura our Office Secretary, but also to all our conveners, committee members, elders and leaders and volunteers.

Yours in Christ,

Rev Barry McCroskery

Kirk Session Report

2022 brought about a return to some sort of normality – not exactly as we had known it before, but a life without, in the most part, masks, being two meters apart, separated pews and quiet singing! A year when we returned to our normal Communion, a way we knew, felt at home and familiar with, passing salvers and wine trays to each other, whilst being able to say “the body of Christ broken for you” and “the blood of Christ shed for you”. A feeling of intimacy of being in the presence of God, caring, sharing.

As usual Kirk Session met regularly during the year. Several items had been discussed and delayed because of Covid restrictions. The Presbytery Consultation process had been on hold but eventually took place and a report was given to the congregation in October. Prior to that Kirk Session held an ‘Away Day’ in Helen’s Bay Church coming up with some ideas to enhance the spiritual opportunities for young people who remained at home for their further education and discussion programmes for men. Also plans were considered to make the halls more visually Christian with Biblical themes and that was started in the Autumn. The Book Case in the Dowling Hall vestibule was enhanced and further plans were encouraged for the New Year. Elections for several new Elders had been discussed and also the appropriate times

for elections for both Elders and Congregational Committee members. This plan was encouraged in the Consultation Process and as such are moving ahead for New Year elections meanwhile a Task group had been set up to discuss the number of Elders required and the possibility of a change in Districts. An interesting exercise was undertaken at the Away Day to established for each Elder's own information which of a 5- Fold Ministry Test they represented. The headings were Prophet, Teacher, Apostle, Evangelist and Shepherd/Pastor. Confidentially in order of personal consideration the headings which when collated anonymously showed a personal preference for Shepherd/Pastor, followed by Teacher, then Evangelist, Prophet and finally Apostle. A thought- provoking exercise which resulted in further consideration at Kirk Session.

Kirk Session was saddened by the decision of our respected Elder, Richard Wilson to retire from Kirk Session and although efforts were made to dissuade him he felt compelled to retire. Richard had given sterling and dedicated service to McCracken as a District Elder and Congregational Secretary and had very successfully headed the Stonework Appeal. For all this faithfulness on his part, to Richard, our thanks.

The Moderator and some Elders had attended the Cairn Course and also a Mapping Planning meeting to encourage us to think missionally at home and further afield. Both led by the Reverend Alan McWilliam from Scotland. Others attended the Four Corners Festival which was well publicised with a personal blessing by the Pope and prayers from the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Our Minister had completed his year as Moderator of the South Belfast Presbytery and Brian Henderson remains the Representative from Kirk Session. The General Assembly was to be attended by Maggie Blakeman but unfortunately Covid prevented her attending, however she streamlined the debates and provided us with an excellent report of proceedings. Graciously Elizabeth Simpson stepped in at the last minute to ensure we had a representative vote at the Assembly, as well as that of our Minister.

In June we celebrated Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth the Second's Platinum Jubilee with a splendid Afternoon Tea Party, in the Dowling Hall, our Minister's idea, on Thursday 2nd June, Anniversary of Her Majesty's Coronation, and enjoyed by many members and guests. Sadly, a few months later we mourned the passing of a gracious and courageous lady when Her Majesty, our longest reigning Monarch, died on Thursday, the 8th September.

The Kirk Session is always mindful of those rejoicing in births and those mourning loved ones, our thoughts and prayers have been with these many members.

As the year progressed, we became aware that our Minister had not received his due annual Sabbatical and Study week, and our Minister had selflessly not reminded us of this oversight. Therefore, it was decided that in 2023 he would take seven weeks Sabbatical, and one week's Study leave with part of his Annual leave. Our Minister will plan this time and will arrange for Stand-in ministers and those covering pastoral care.

We, in McCracken, are most fortunate to have dedicated members who serve in many capacities, known and unknown. From Bethan Dillon, Juliet Mills and David Scott who care for our younger members spiritual knowledge and learning, our Women's Bible

Study group, our Prayer groups, Axis'. Brian Henderson who seemingly can turn his hand to every need, Alastair Rankin who is our expert mathematician, Mervyn Hughes our Master Builder, our Hospitality Team, our music guru Richard Brown and all the songsters, Denise Hughes and the publishing team, the dedicated leaders and helpers of the Babies and Toddlers group, the welcoming ushers, our secretary Laura and so many more too numerous to mention, we are indebted to them all.

Finally, our most sincere thanks to our dedicated Minister, the Reverend Barry McCroskery who leads as the loving shepherd, caring for his flock, in sickness and in health. Barry's ministry is one of true devotion to us all. Always there when needed, ready with an encouraging word, a sensitive glance and an encouraging smile. We thank God for blessing us with this humble caring pastor and for the Manse family, we have 'lent' Elsie to Windsor Presbyterian Church but she remains our Minister's wife consequently a most important member of our church family together with their daughters, Rebecca and Gisell.

To God be the Glory.

Rosemary EC Simpson
Clerk of Session

CONGREGATIONAL COMMITTEE

As had been the arrangement throughout 2021, the first two meetings of the Congregational Committee in 2022, in January and March, were conducted using Zoom technology but, as the various levels of restrictions put in place to limit the spread of the Covid 19 virus eased, it was considered safe thereafter to meet in person in the Minor Hall and four further meetings, in April, August, October and November were held on church premises.

At the first meeting of the year held on 25th January the Annual Accounts for 2021, including the submission to the Charity Commission, were tabled and approved. The proposed salaries of the church staff for the year then commencing were also agreed at this meeting.

It has been the usual practice that in advance of each of the Congregational Committee meetings the Honorary Treasurer circulates detailed financial statements for perusal and consideration. These include up to date records of all the income received and all the expenditures incurred since the previous circulation, together with the previous year's corresponding income and expenditure figures. This enables direct comparisons to be made as a means of spotting at an early stage any concerning income and expenditure trends that the Committee should be aware of. When meetings were less frequent during the worst of the pandemic the Honorary Treasurer also circulated electronically at the end of each month comments on the state of the church finances and this he continues to do. It was also decided that the income and expenditure figures for 2019, the year before Covid, be included to overcome any distortions in the comparisons that may be a consequential of the congregation not having worshipped on the premises during 2021. We as a congregation are greatly indebted to Mr Alastair Rankin for the thoroughness with which he oversees and

attends to the church's financial affairs, a task that I on behalf of the Congregational Committee wish to thank him for continuing to undertake.

Our gratitude is also due to Mr Mervyn Hughes and the members of the Property Committee for their diligence in ensuring that the church properties are maintained in a good state of repair and for expeditiously dealing with any issues as they arose. To satisfy insurance requirements the church properties were checked each week when not being extensively used to ensure all remained in order. In last year's report I mentioned that one of the church's three heating boilers had ceased to function and it is unable to be repaired. Thankfully the remaining two boilers have proved sufficient to meet heating requirements. Several major items of work were undertaken during the year, namely the replacement of the metal framed windows in the Youth Centre with double glazed uPVC units and the addressing of problems with dry rot and issues with the church roof. Mr Ivor Kinghan voluntarily kept the grass to the south side and rear of the church cut throughout the growing season and the programme of church gardening and tidying of the grounds on the first Tuesday of each month has kept all looking as it should. Thanks are extended to Ivor and to those who regularly volunteered to help with these tasks. A special word of thanks is extended to Mr Raymond Todd for willingly providing the means of regularly conveying quantities of gardening waste to a recycling centre on whichever of his range of farm trailers seemed most appropriate to the task. This included the Christmas trees after the festive season. The trees were erected by members of the gardening team and decorated by those that regularly meet in the Axis study group.

Before the period of lock down our church premises were being much used. In last year's report I mentioned that as the restrictions eased a number of the external organisations that use our range of halls for activities such as Ballet, Pilates, Keep Fit, Judo and Unislim classes had returned. The Sunday School had also recommenced meeting in the Dowling Hall, the Bible Class in the Youth Centre and the Sunday morning Prayer Group in the Minor Hall. Several Messy Church gatherings had also been held in the Dowling Hall. The Badminton Club had also restarted on a Monday evening. In 2022 all the other organisations such as the Women's Bible Study, the Indoor Bowling Club, the Luncheon Circle, the "Babies and Toddlers", the Coffee Drop In, the Presbyterian Women meetings, the Art Club, "CrackerJax" and the uniformed organisations have recommenced meeting again on church property at differing times throughout the year as soon as members felt it was safe to do so. Since recommencing most of the organisations, especially the "Babies and Toddlers", CrackerJax and the Luncheon Circle, have seen an increase in numbers attending which gives an indication of how much they were missed.

Choir practices on a Wednesday evening are again taking place in the choir room after a period of being held in the church sanctuary where it had been possible to maintain social distancing.

The Macmillan Cancer Support Coffee Morning also took place again after a gap of several years. Two other special events, the Queen's Jubilee Tea and a showing of the movie "Paddington", were also held with all three events being very well supported.

Members of the Flowering Arranging team ensured that the church was decorated with flowers on each of the occasions that Sunday services in the sanctuary took place and

they organised the decoration of the church at Harvest with food items for donation to the Storehouse charity. Choir members installed and decorated the candle holders in place for the Candlelight Carol Service.

Members of the Hospitality Committee continue to organise the refreshments following Sunday morning worship in the Dowling Hall and at other times when requested to do so.

As you will note the various activities are now back to very close to pre Covid levels and thankfully so.

Births, baptisms and the anniversary of deaths still continued to be acknowledged in appropriate ways and Mrs Di Hanna reports on these and other Congregational Care matters at the Congregational Committee meetings.

2020 saw the commencement of the electronic circulation of "The McCracken Times", that like "The Chronicle" was eagerly awaited and enjoyed by so many of us especially during times when opportunities for social gatherings were limited. With the returning to a greater degree of normality it was decided that production of "The McCracken Times" was no longer necessary. Mrs Laura Landi, our Administrative Secretary, was the person who with assistance from Mrs Patricia Rees, compiled and circulated by email the editions to all on the mailing list. In addition to "The Chronicle" Mrs Landi also produces the copies of the Annual Report, the Sunday morning Orders of Service and the Sunday service Power Point slides using her training in Marketing and Communication and IT skills to great effect. Our Youth and Family worker Mrs Bethan Dillon's knowledge of computing and internet technology has also proved to be invaluable. We thank both ladies for their innovations, enthusiasm, cooperation and willingness to readily tackle many of the challenges that have arisen during the past year.

Mr Trevor Templeman, the Church Caretaker, continued to attend to the caretaking duties. When required he had augmented the routine cleaning duties with the sanitising of those points of personal hand contact such as door handles, the church pews and the toilets each time the property was used to lessen any risks of the Covid virus possibly being present and infectious. We are in the fortunate position that our premises are again being widely used. This can be very disruptive to having a pre planned work schedule so Mr Templeman's times of working often have to vary. We thank him for his flexibility in this regard and his willingness to continue to do all that was asked of him.

We also thank Mr David Kennedy for organising and participating with others last September in a thorough cleaning of the sanctuary.

To fulfil all the expectations of our congregation and others using the premises is a mammoth task. It is therefore appropriate that this is shared amongst as many of the congregation that remain fit and able and we are grateful to all who have assisted in any way. Additional help is always welcome so if you consider that you could offer some assistance please don't hesitate to make this known.

In conclusion the members of the Congregational Committee would wish to again record their heartfelt thanks to Rev Barry McCroskery for his chairmanship of the Committee meetings and for his leadership, encouragement, wise counsel, guidance, support and pastoral care of the congregation, during a year in which for the first couple of months he was Moderator of the South Belfast Presbytery, a duty that added to his more normal work load.

Brian Henderson
Honorary Secretary,

FINANCIAL REPORT

The ending of lockdown appears to have brought out the generosity in members of McCracken as our income from Freewill Offering, Building Fund, Outreach, Presbyterian Children's Society, Presbyterian Women, United Appeal and World Development envelopes all showed increases over 2021. In addition, the response to the two Moderator's appeals – for Afghanistan (£1,380.00) and Ukraine (£5,995.00) – showed particular generosity. The total amount received for work outside McCracken amounted to £37,379.12 compared to £28,138.34 in 2021. However, we again failed to meet our Target of Honour of £9,600.00 in respect of the United Appeal falling short by just under £2,000.00.

The Outreach Committee was able to donate a total of £7,900.000 to the David Gordon Memorial Hospital, Livingstonia (£2,400.00), to help educate five girls through Stephen and Angelina Cowan in Tuum, Kenya (£2,500.00) two of whom have now entered university in Nairobi, to Taughmonagh Presbyterian Church (£750.00) and to the International meeting Point (£1,250.00). The Outreach Committee also gave smaller amounts to South Belfast Friendship House, the Leprosy Mission, the Corrymeela Community and the Simon Community.

We were very fortunate to receive a bequest of £26,021.75 representing a one third share of the residue of the estate of the late Patricia Roberta Jane Campbell who had been for many years a Sunday School teacher and a member of the choir until she moved to Hollywood some years ago. The Committee decided to allocate part of this bequest to the cost of installing new double-glazed windows in the Youth Centre (£10,980.00) and to invest £6,375.00 in the General Investment Fund of the Presbyterian Church. We also received a legacy of £2,500.00 from the late Lady (Audrey) Crossland which the Committee has also invested in the General Investment Fund.

As well as installing new double-glazed windows in the Youth Centre the Property Committee carried out work to eradicate dry rot in the church, to fix the ceiling panels in the church and replace some slates on the church roof.

As the church and halls were closed for the early part of 2022 our bills for heat and light were not as horrendous as they might have been. While in January 2023 the church has received £600.00 as part of the Government's contribution to ease the cost of electricity it is unclear what further assistance, if any, will be given to the charity sector as the church buildings are heated by gas.

About 50 of our members have set up monthly standing orders which assured us of a steady income even during lockdown. If any member would like to set up a standing order, or if any of the members who have created standing orders would like to increase their monthly amount please get in touch with me.

As always I should thank the members of the counting team who stay behind after Church on Sunday mornings to count and record the offering. A special thank you goes to Brian Henderson who is always willing to stand in when others are unable to do so.

Finally a big thank you to Tim Browne our Independent Examiner who has very quickly approved our detailed accounts, as seen by Kirk Session and the Church Committee, as well as the abbreviated accounts attached to this report which will be downloaded on the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland's website in accordance with our legal requirements. If any member wishes to receive a copy of the detailed accounts, they should get in touch with me.

Alastair J Rankin MBE
Honorary Treasurer