

Downshire Church, Carrickfergus

Trustees' Annual Report for the year ended 31st December 2024

The Trustees present the annual report and financial statements for Downshire Church, Carrickfergus for the year ended 31 December 2024.

Reference and Administrative Information

Charity Name: Downshire Congregation of The Presbyterian Church in Ireland
(otherwise referred to as "Downshire Church, Carrickfergus")

Charity Registration Number: NIC104835

Contact Address: Victoria Road
CARRICKFERGUS
BT38 7JE

Correspondence Address: c/o 29 Chilton Road
CARRICKFERGUS
BT38 7JT

Charity Trustees: Rev. Nathan Duddy
Mr. Stephen Bell
Mrs. Christine Cahoon
Mr. Stephen Cahoon
Mr. Adam Cree
Mrs. Hannah Cree
Mr. Jason Crockard
Mr. Robert Devenney
Mrs. Olive Finlay
Mr. Graeme Ritchie (resignation accepted by session 18th April 2024)
Mrs. Pamela Ritchie
Mrs. Deborah Walker

Principal Office-bearers: Minister: Rev. Nathan Duddy
Clerk of Session: Christine Cahoon
Treasurer: Stephen Cahoon

Independent Examiner: James Gillespie, Stevenson and Wilson, 22-30 Broadway Avenue,
Ballymena, BT43 7AA.

Bankers: Danske Bank, Donegall Square West, Belfast, BT1 6JS

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Structure, Governance and Management

The Kirk Session

The charity trustees of the congregation are the members of its Kirk Session. Under the congregation's governing document, The Code, the book of the constitution and government of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, the Kirk Session seeks to watch over and promote the spiritual interest of the congregation and of persons not connected with any congregation who are within its bounds. It ensures pastoral care is in place in the congregation and seeks to further the contribution of the Church to Christian witness and service in the local community. The Kirk Session has delegated to its Congregational Committee the temporal affairs of the congregation including administering all funds and property belonging to the congregation. Members of the Kirk Session are ex-officio members of the Congregational Committee.

The Kirk Session consists of the ordained minister and the ruling elders of the congregation. All members are entitled to propose, speak and exercise equal votes at meetings, except that the Moderator, the minister in active duty in the congregation, has no deliberative but only a casting vote. To be chosen for the office of the eldership in the congregation a person must be a voting member and a regular attendant at its ordinances. The selection of those proposed to be called to the office can be either by the congregation or by the Kirk Session.

Stated meetings of the Kirk session are held at least six times in each year.

Trustees do not receive remuneration, reward or other private benefit for carrying out their Trustee responsibility.

Presbytery

Under the Presbyterian Church in Ireland form of governance, the corporate oversight of a congregation is the responsibility of a Presbytery, which superintends generally the spiritual and temporal affairs of the congregations assigned to it by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. Downshire congregation of the Presbyterian Church has been assigned to the Carrickfergus Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. The membership of the Presbytery consists mainly of the active ministers of congregations assigned to it by the General Assembly, ministers who have retired from active duty and an elder appointed by the Kirk Session of each congregation.

The General Assembly

The General Assembly is the supreme court of the Church, representing in one body the whole Church and acting as its supreme legislative, administration and judicial authority, in dealing with all matters brought before it. The General Assembly is normally constituted during the first week in June for worship and to conduct its business. At the end of business, it is dissolved. The membership of the General Assembly consists mainly of the active ministers of each congregation, retired ministers and a representative elder appointed by the Kirk Session of each congregation.

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Description and Purpose

The charitable purpose of the congregation is the advancement of religion.

Downshire Church, Carrickfergus is a congregation of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. The Presbyterian Church in Ireland, as a Reformed Church within the wider body of Christ is grounded in the Scriptures, and exists to love and honour God through faith in His Son and by the power of His Spirit, and to enable her members to play their part in fulfilling God's mission to our world. As a congregation of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, we believe that the Bible is the supreme authority over all we do.

The congregation's Mission Statement for 2022 - 2027 reads:

"We want to be a body of believers whose focus is the needs of others and whose goal is to win the lost for Christ."

We believe that we have been led to view our fellowship as chiefly a missional community, whose aim is to serve and reach those who have yet to come to faith and to be part of God's ongoing work of renewing and recreating His world. We exist as a community of disciples to show everyone God's love. We believe that an encounter with Jesus, even a glimpse, will bring radical transformation. To this end our vision for 2022 – 2027 is to facilitate circumstances where people can see God's love, know God's love and, through those things, show God's love.

In more detail, our vision is that:

- Through our services, our ministries and our everyday ordinary lives, people who are broken by sin and shame might **see** Jesus and His love and find the healing purpose and life only He can bring.
- **Knowing** God's love, exploring His word and praying without ceasing would be the driving forces that lead us in our journey from seeing God's love to serving Him in our everyday, normal lives.
- We long to be a church that equips worshipful, prayerful, pioneering disciples and releases them into their everyday lives.
- We might live lives that glorify Jesus.

By the power of the Holy Spirit working through us, we would **show** God's love and therefore lead others to a place of 'seeing God's love'.

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Objectives and Activities

Our ongoing objective is to play an active part in meeting the spiritual, physical and emotional needs of our community. Our highlights this year have included:

- Rejoicing with 7 people as they accepted Jesus as their Lord and Saviour.
- Continuation of our meals ministry.
- Development of our provision for young people in P6 and P7.

Achievements and Performance

Worship and prayer

Our Sunday morning services continued in 2024 with a peak attendance of 350 at specific events such as GB enrolment and the Platform Kids and Youth Christmas services. The average attendance at other morning services was 190 people. We also continue to record our services and last year there was an average of 75 views for each service.

We celebrated this year as we conducted 2 infant and 1 adult baptisms. We also rejoiced with 17 new members this year as they publicly declared their faith at the front of church and we welcomed 15 people into membership.

We have a Downshire prayer WhatsApp group comprising 30 members who receive and pray over concerns expressed by church family and others connected to it. Our Saturday morning prayer meeting, held at church at 8am each week, continues. This is an opportunity for people to gather together to pray for our world, community and church, to be still and silent in God's presence and to seek his guidance. In 2024 there was an average attendance of 8 people each week.

Platform Youth and Platform Kids continued to meet on Sundays for worship, prayer, bible study and fellowship. The numbers registered in these groups have risen over the last 2 years. Platform Kids (Stars, Kings Kids and Team 3:16 AM) have seen the number on register grow from 66 in 2022 to 88 in 2024. Platform Youth has seen numbers on register double in size, from 20 to 40, in the same two-year period.

Our prayer room continues to be available for use throughout the year, both for prayer and to access a library of faith-based books.

In 2024 we held evening services approximately once a month. These services had a larger component of praise songs than the morning services and also included a time of teaching or testimony from a member of the congregation. Attendance at these evening services was approximately 50 people each time.

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Achievements and Performance (continued)

Worship and prayer (continued)

We had a variety of different discipleship groups take place during this year. Our home groups continued to meet and followed the same themes as the Sunday sermon series, allowing those present to consider questions and look deeper at the relevant bible passages, as well as providing opportunities for small group prayer and pastoral support. In 2024 there were a total of 50 people connected to these groups, with a regular attendance of 30 each week. The Platform Youth home group continue to meet; this has an average attendance of 10 young people each week.

There is also a bible study group that meets on a Wednesday morning, with an average attendance of 10 people and a book club which this year studied 'The Bible – A story that makes sense of life' (by Andrew Ollerton) and 'Practicing the Way' (by John Mark Comer).

Some of the 7 people who gave their lives to the Lord this year had little or no previous experience of reading God's Word or attending worship. Therefore, a new believers' group was established that allowed these men to share their questions, receive teaching and grow in their faith together. In the space of 6 months this group has grown in number from 3 to 6 as the men invited others to hear the good news of Jesus and the life he offers.

By 31st December 2024 we had 139 communicant members with 174 families connected to the church (comprising 384 individuals). This compares to 2023 when we had 131 communicant members with 171 families (comprising 381 individuals) connected to the church. The average attendance at a Sunday morning service has also increased from 180 in 2022 to 190 in 2024.

Pastoral care

Pastoral care in Downshire is undertaken by each member of the congregation. In looking out for people within the church congregation and in the wider community we believe we are following God's instruction to 'Love our Neighbour'. We also have more formalised methods of pastoral care and these are delivered by the elders and by a designated pastoral care team. The congregation as a whole is divided into groups (called districts) and each district is assigned to an elder. Between them, the elders in the church maintain contact with each person/family in the church to offer support in times of crisis and encouragement on their spiritual journey. The pastoral care team offer additional, ongoing support to those who need it, each member of the team is assigned someone to befriend and visit. At the moment we have 8 people on this team.

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Achievements and Performance (continued)

Mission and Outreach

In 2024 we continued a number of social events such as fellowship teas, shared meals and refreshments after the Sunday service. These are opportunities for conversation and fellowship in an informal setting. The fellowship teas took place at Easter, Harvest and Christmas involving 10 helpers and 41 - 54 attendees. Serving tea and coffee after the service encourages people to stay for a while to talk with others and receive prayer support.

A couple of times in the year the congregation shared a meal together. This was either food provided by a small number in the congregation such as the Soup and Sweet on Palm Sunday or a church family barbeque in the summer. Each of these occasions facilitated conversation, sharing and an opportunity to get to know other members of the church family a little better.

In Downshire we have groups that meet to offer fellowship opportunities. Chapter One is a men's group that meets each Wednesday morning and Chatterbox is a new ladies' group that meets, on average, once a month. Chapter One has an average of 10 attendees each week with 15 men connected to the group. Chatterbox has 17 ladies connected to the group with an approximate attendance of 14 each month.

The floral decorations from our Sunday services are often taken to those who are housebound or going through a difficult time. This provides us with an additional way of showing pastoral care to people connected to the church.

We also have a meals ministry group who provide practical support to families connected to the church when they find themselves going through times of major change or difficulty. Specifically, an offer is made to provide meals when there's a new baby in the family, when someone is discharged from hospital and in times of bereavement. Members of the group take it in turns to cook and deliver meals. In 2024 there were 22 meals delivered to 8 different families.

As a church we have contact with local groups and charities such as Christians Against Poverty (CAP), The Royal Maternity Hospital (RMH), Elim storehouse and Carrickfergus Trussell Trust foodbank. Each year we like to offer practical support to aid the work of these groups and others. This year this has included collections of items to be given to new mums in need as they leave RMH, food items for the foodbank, toys given to CAP to give to families in need at Christmas time, a financial donation to the Childrens' Cancer Unit and taking part and contributing to the Belfast Homeless Christmas Shoebox Appeal.

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Achievements and Performance (continued)

Mission and Outreach (continued)

In March this year, our children's coordinator created a temporary prayer space at Eden primary school. This was the first time we were able to do this in this primary school. The room had activities that could facilitate prayer for all ages within the school and each year group had time in the room with a team on hand to explain more about each activity.

We are delighted that our positive interaction continues with the nearby integrated school with staff and parents being able to use our carpark to help ease congestion on local roads and for additional parking whilst building work has been taking place at the school. They also continue to gratefully accept our input into school assemblies and in setting up a prayer space in the primary school, Acorn, which occurred twice this year.

In the summer we ran a holiday bible club with the theme of Sea Explorers. It ran for one week, Monday to Friday in the evenings. It involved over 40 volunteer leaders and helpers and there was an average attendance of 92 out of the 147 that registered.

Toddlers continued on a Tuesday morning in 2024, with an average of 25 toddlers and babies being brought by their carers each week. This outreach provides an opportunity for fellowship and informal support for those who are caring for young children. It also provides an opportunity to share God's love as many of those who attend are not regular church attendees.

Our Boys' Brigade, Girls' Brigade and Team 3:16 PM all have a significant number of attendees who have no other connection to church or regular opportunity to learn about God.

Boys' Brigade

The Boys Brigade are blessed to have 58 boys attending weekly, and for 69%, BB is their only connection to church. This highlights the vital role we play in sharing the gospel and fostering a Christ - centred community.

The Northern Ireland Boys' Brigade launched its new vision: 'Raising generations of Christ-like men'. At Downshire BB, we wholeheartedly embrace this mission. Our primary focus has always been, and will continue to be, leading boys to Christ and reaching their families with the gospel.

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Achievements and Performance (continued)

Girls' Brigade

The Girls' Brigade has 124 girls registered with an average attendance of 110. There are 51 girls with no other church connection (41%).

The Girls' Brigade theme was 'I believe' where they studied different aspects of believing in God such as: We believe that God is real, We believe God has a plan for us, We believe Jesus is God's Son, We believe we should follow Jesus, We believe Jesus died and rose again, We believe we should live like Jesus. This study (including activities) has helped to lay a solid foundation in the lives of the girls and reflects the GB motto of 'Seek, Serve and follow Christ'.

Team 3:16PM

In September of this year, Team 3:16PM added an element to their monthly meeting, called Inside Out. This was due to a desire to have a more focused biblical teaching element to their evenings. It was decided that this would run before their usual meeting to give these young people an option to decide whether they were ready to engage in focused, faith-based conversations. We were delighted when each young person on the register indicated that they wanted to attend this aspect as well. At the end of 2024 there are 28 on this register with approx. 12 who don't attend church (43%).

Our men's and women's ministries run events throughout the year. In 2024 these included watching a football game together, visiting speakers, making craft items and sharing food together. These events often contain elements of worship and prayer and are certainly an opportunity for pastoral care and fellowship. However, there is also a desire for these events to be an opportunity for outreach, to provide opportunities for those unfamiliar with church and Christianity to attend an event that could be a gentle introduction to finding out more about the hope we have in Jesus.

The congregation supports the United Appeal for Mission which is a central fund of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. This fund enables congregations to support the wider mission of the denomination and to do mission and outreach on a denominational basis, beyond what the congregation could do on its own. The United Appeal Fund provides financial support for mission personnel at home and overseas, assists congregations with the deployment of locally based staff, enables church planting, provides grant support for the upkeep of church premises, assists with the running costs of Union Theological College, the Church's training college for ministry students, and financially supports congregations in the areas of worship, discipleship, global mission, outreach, leadership and pastoral care. During 2024 - £7,264 was contributed by the congregation to this fund (2023 - £7,555).

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Committee

Our committee continues to work hard looking after practical aspects of church life. At present we have 19 people on committee, working in four different teams; audiovisual, finance, property and social.

Presbytery

The congregation was represented at the regular meetings of Presbytery by our minister and/or one of the elders. This provides an important link between the congregations and the wider structures of the church.

General Assembly

The minister and one of our elders were nominated to attend the meeting of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland held in Assembly Buildings, Belfast, in June.

Property

During 2024 the Congregation spent £1,127 on church repairs and £990 on general manse repairs. We expect 2025 to have increased costs as the manse requires several pieces of work and redecoration to be carried out. The congregation spent £10,804 on the church project in replacing the radiators in the Carlisle Hall.

Teamwork

The Trustees again wish to acknowledge their deep appreciation for all those who give freely of their time by praying, leading worship, serving on committees, leading in organisations, encouraging others and helping out with the wide range of church activities, making it the lively and vibrant community that it is. Their help is at the heart of God's work and witness in Downshire and we are very grateful for their commitment and contribution.

Public Benefit Statement

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland meets the public benefit requirement by providing benefit to its members and the general public by making known the Christian Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ through the advancement of religion.

The direct benefits which flow from the purposes of the Church include the gaining of an understanding in Christian beliefs as set out in the Bible and in the Church's subordinate standards (the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Shorter and Larger Catechisms) leading to spiritual and moral development and opportunities for response to Bible teaching. In turn, this framework leads to practical expressions of Christian beliefs and standards in the local community such as through the care of those in need (including the sick, disabled and bereaved). Generally, the benefits are delivered locally by congregations and their members, or are facilitated through presbyteries or are organised and delivered centrally. Local delivery is facilitated by central resources in almost all cases. Public access is made known through the use of noticeboards, printed material, press advertisement, websites, and social media or in other ways.

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Public Benefit Statement (continued)

The benefits are demonstrated through regular evaluation of the services and informal and ad-hoc feedback from members, their families, and members of the public.

The purpose does not lead to harm. The only private benefit flowing from our purpose is related to Ministers, Missionaries, Deaconesses, Irish Mission workers and Lay Agents who receive benefits as a result of their holding office or employment. However, this is incidental and necessary in order to further our charitable purpose. There are no other private benefits. The beneficiaries of this purpose are members, their families, other individuals that the Presbyterian Church in Ireland is in direct and indirect contact with, the community in which pastoral services are provided and other communities throughout Northern Ireland, and worldwide which benefit from our engagement with and support for both Christian and other secular organisations, charities and individual members of the public.

The Kirk Session has had regard to the Charity Commissions Public benefit requirement statutory guidance.

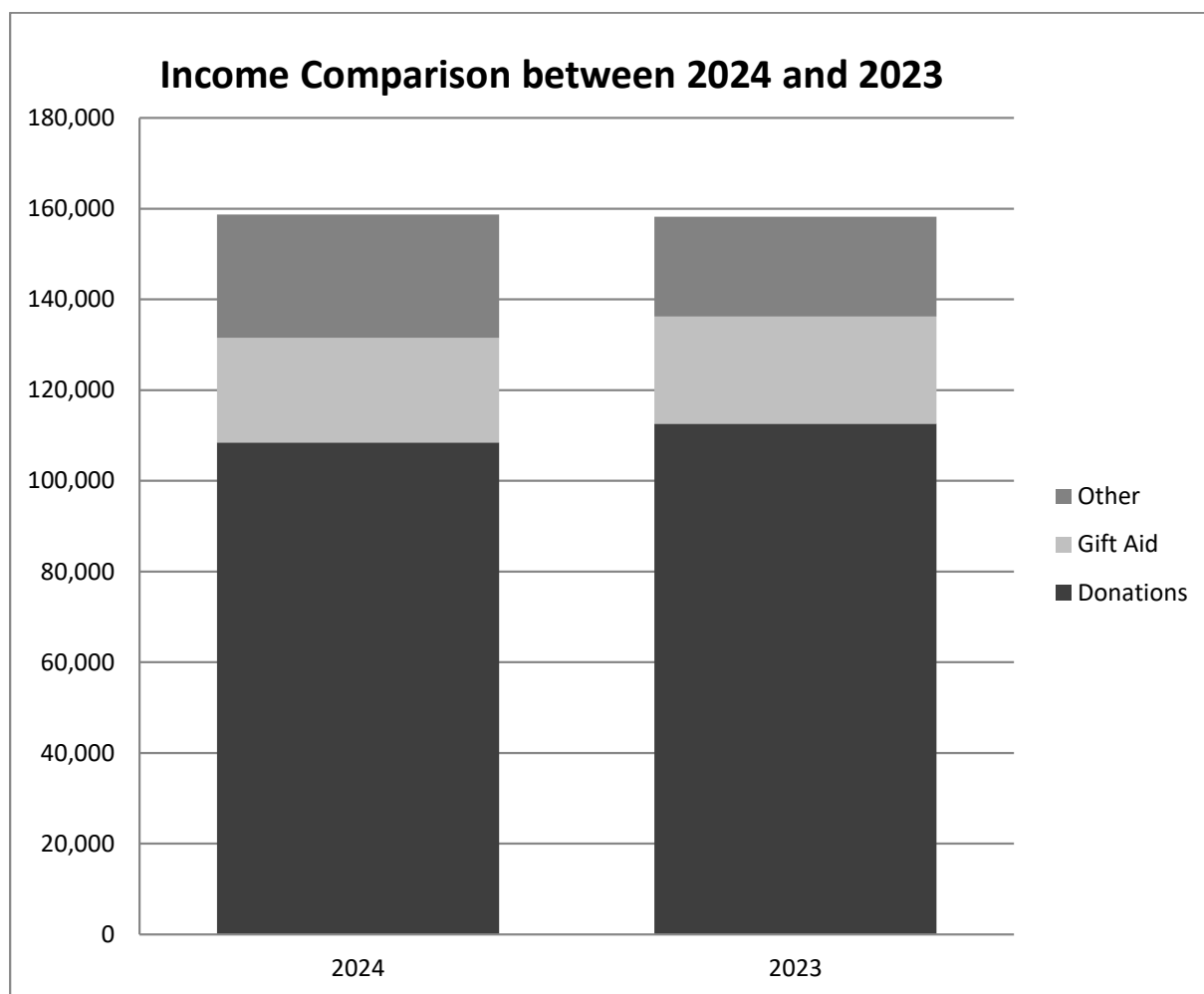
Financial Review

2024 saw us start the year in a relatively strong financial position with the cost-of-living crisis in the rearview mirror and with the contracts for our youth, intergenerational and kids' co-ordinators extended to December 2025, and expanded to include work in local schools, these roles being integral in helping to develop our vision of see, know and show God throughout the congregation and community. We give thanks to God for this and that our total annual income increased by £477, despite our recorded income falling back to 2022 levels. The make-up of this increase and the reasons for it are set out below:

- Donations to the congregation fell by £4,167 this is comprised of recorded giving from the congregation falling £5,749 in 2024 from £110,510 in 2023. This fall is explained by one off donations of £1,985 in 2023 and other demographic changes that saw recorded giving reduce a further £3,764. However, these changes also resulted in loose donations rising by £1,572;
- Gift aid also fell slightly by £496 due to the reduced donations;
- Other income increased by £5,150 on 2023, primarily due to additional grant received of £3,218 and other net increases of £1,932.

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Financial Review (continued)

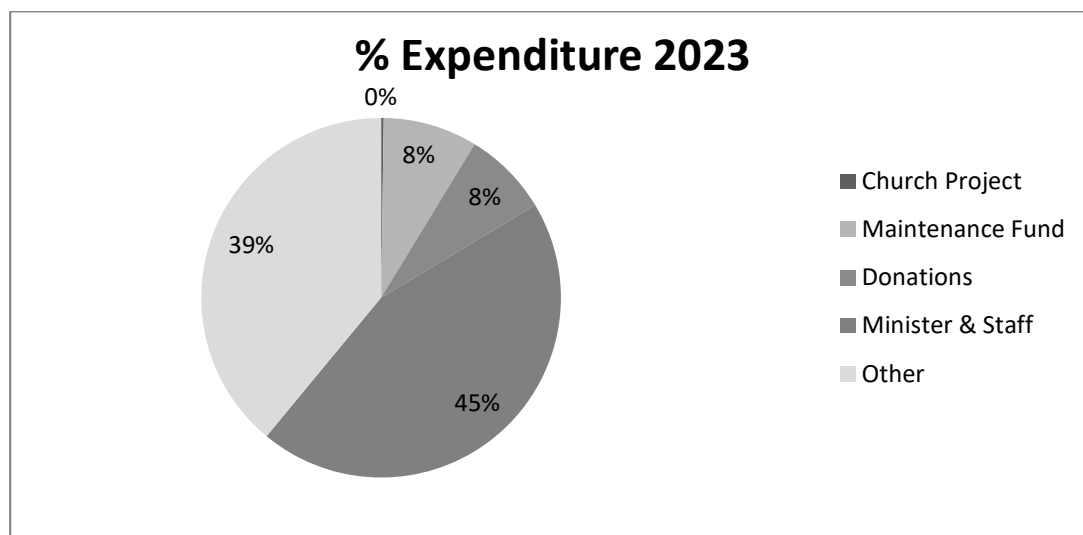
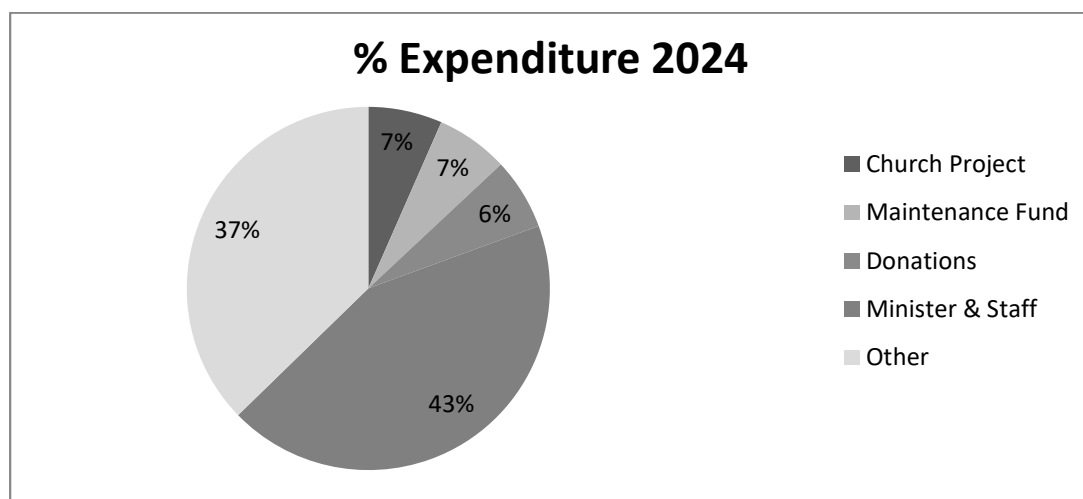
At the end of 2024 the congregation had one negative fund, the Project Fund being £228 in arrears, as the project to replace the Carlisle Hall radiators was completed in 2024. This fund was positive again in January 2025.

Total expenditure increased significantly in 2024 to £163,794 from £144,582 in 2023. This is primarily due to inflation and is explained in the comments and tables below.

- Project spend increased in year as we spent £10,804 to complete the Carlisle Hall radiator replacement project. This is significantly up on the £353 spent in 2023;
- The Maintenance Fund spend reduced by £1,705 in 2024. This reduction is primarily due to reduced church building and ground maintenance in 2024;
- Ministerial and staffing costs are up as a result of inflationary pay increases and additional contracted hours for the kids' co-ordinator for outreach to local schools;
- The congregation's charitable donations fell in year by £669 mainly as a result of having a reduced United Appeal Target and the Students' Bursary collection in 2023 not replicated in 2024;

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Financial Review (continued)

As we look to the future, 2025 sees the economy in a better position with inflation now at a relatively normal 1.8%. However, the next year is not without its challenges and opportunities.

The manse requires a significant amount of work and redecoration and, due to the extent and cost of this work, it will be carried out over the next 2 years.

In Mark 12 41-44 we read, "And he sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. And he called his disciples to him and said to them, ***"Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."***

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Financial Review (continued)

With costs having risen in 2024 and recorded donations having dipped, let us re-examine our financial giving. Do we give everything to God like the widow? Do we give him the first fruits of our labour and then live on the remainder? Or do we simply spend what we want and give God the leftovers?

Reserves Policy

The Trustees' policy is to retain a level of free reserves or general reserves which matches its needs at the current time and in the foreseeable future. Free reserves are those unrestricted reserves not invested in fixed assets, which are available for general use.

The main reason for holding reserves is to ensure that the charity has enough resources to fund its programmes and to hold sufficient resources to meet its commitments. The Trustees believe that our reserves policy is both responsible and prudent, but have not specified a particular level of reserves to be held.

At 31 December 2024 the charity held free unrestricted funds (net of the negative fund) of £49,507. This represents 4 months' expenditure which is in line with what is regarded as an appropriate level.

The charity also held £12,188 of positive restricted funds which have been provided for the purposes specified in Note 10 in the Financial Accounts. No endowment funds are held by the charity.

Funds held as custodian trustee on behalf of others

There are no funds held as custodian trustee on behalf of others.

Statement of Trustees' Responsibilities

The Trustees are responsible for preparing the annual report and the financial statements of the congregation in accordance with applicable law and generally accepted accounting practice. As the congregation's total income does not exceed £250,000, the Trustees have elected under Section 64(3) of the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 to prepare a receipts and payment account and a statement of assets and liabilities.

The Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 requires charity trustees to ensure that accounting records are kept which are sufficient to show and explain all the charity's transactions, which disclose with reasonable accuracy the financial position of the charity and enable them to prepare statement of accounts which complies with regulation under the Act. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charity and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

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In preparing those financial statements, the trustees are required to:

- Select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently;
- Make judgments and estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- State whether applicable accounting standards and statements of recommended practice have been followed, subject to any departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements; and
- Prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the charity will continue in operational existence.

Approved by the Kirk Session on 28th April 2025 and signed on its behalf by:



Christine Cahoon
Clerk of Session



Deborah Walker
Elder