

# Trustees' Report 2023

The year 2023 was a year of industrial discontent in the United Kingdom and Ireland. Strike action by teachers, healthcare workers, civil servants and transport workers on a scale not seen since the 1970s was common throughout the year as inflation reached 19.6% for a time. Northern Ireland politicians failed to restore devolved government as the DUP demanded change to eliminate an Irish Sea Border affecting goods moving from Great Britain to Northern Ireland. Industrial unrest seems likely to continue.

Despite this grim news, there were celebrations as King Charles III was crowned in a lavish ceremony at Westminster Abbey. One of his first duties was to present the MBE to our own Director of Music, Richard Yarr that had been announced by his late mother in her final birthday honours list in 2022.

In the wider world, the war between Russia and Ukraine entered its second year. This was overshadowed in October when the Hamas organisation launched a bloody surprise attack on Israeli civilians and military posts. Since then, Israel has responded with massive military force in Gaza. This asymmetric conflict seems likely to continue throughout the coming year.

At First Church, we have had a mixed year of blessing and sorrow. In June we welcomed Rev Brian Ammons to our community as a consultative interim minister. Working with the support of a Transition Team, he submitted a report setting out strategic priorities for First Church over the next three years. Despite some initial misgivings, Brian soon endeared himself to the congregation. He was delighted to welcome our distinguished guest, HRH the Duchess of Gloucester, to baptise one child, lead our communion service, play a part in our annual music service and our Carols by Candlelight Service and conduct a memorial service for our much-missed friend, Beth McCay.

Beth McCay was faithful to First Church to the end. Just over a week before her death, she was delighted to meet HRH the Duchess of Gloucester and tell her of the great musical talent that has played in First Church over recent years, and a few days later came in and tidied up and reorganised the drawers in the kitchen of the Central Hall. She was truly a remarkable woman. We miss her deeply.

First Church also lost Dr Allan Blackstock, a distinguished historian, a former academic at Ulster University and author of several books on Irish history, and

Adrian Webb, a longstanding member who had been a great friend of our late minister emeritus, Rev Tom Banham.

In May we were visited by the Village Community Choir from California, USA who brought a bit of American razzamatazz to our service.

In July and August, we were delighted to see that the regular Summer Recitals series had recovered from the Covid setbacks of recent times. This year we held five recitals.

We were delighted to conduct two baptisms in 2023; young Zoe Rose Swaker, who was baptised by Rev Robert McKee in August and young Thompson Jack Alan Spence in October who was baptised by Rev Brian Ammons.

This year we have welcomed a variety of people to lead our worship. Thanks are due to Mr Des McKeown, Rt Rev Chris Hudson, Mr Jean Dumas, Rev Mike O'Sullivan, Rev Brigid Spain, Rev Alister Bell, Rev Cheryl Meban, Lord John Alderdice, Rev Alan Kennedy, Rev Robert McKee, Rev Andrew Rawding, Mr David Alderdice, Mr Ray Allen, Mr Des McKeown, and Mr David Kerr.

**David Kerr**  
**Honorary Secretary**