

## **Lisburn Session Report 2020**

We all know that every year is different from the previous year, as we all experience the changes in our personal lives, our family lives, our neighbourhood and in our nation. Many of these changes are minor and we take them in our stride, however there are changes which are radical, which not only affect ourselves, our families and even our congregation but these generally do not affect our nation. This year will long be remembered in history as a momentous year because of an incident in the Huanan fish market in Wuhan when apparently one person fell ill due to a new virus. This new virus called Covid 19 was to spread across the entire world in a matter of weeks with devastating consequences for all nations, communities, families and individuals.

As a congregation we have been more reminded of God's sovereignty this year than ever before. Psalm 46 verse 10 "Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!"

Lisburn congregation records the death of Mr John Buchanan, who entered his eternal rest on 10<sup>th</sup> March in his 91<sup>st</sup> year. John was born into a godly home where, with his siblings, he was nurtured in the Christian faith. The Buchanan family were faithful and devoted members of the Bready congregation. In 1955 John married Catherine George, a native of North Wales, and together they enjoyed 63 years of marriage, being separated by Catherine's death in June 2018. John was ordained to the eldership in Bready in 1958 and served the congregation as treasurer for 22 years. On his retirement in 1995 John and Catherine moved to Moira and transferred their membership to the Lisburn congregation. John loved Christ and his Word and was able to recite many passages from memory especially when more recent memories began to fade.

We also record the death of Robert Green, the son of Mervyn & Dorothy Green, who died on the 10<sup>th</sup> July after a long battle with cancer. Although Robert had left the congregation in 2012 he still was a frequent visitor to many of our events and his untimely death was felt by many in the congregation. "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord .... that they may rest from their labours, for their deeds follow them." Rev. 14:13

We extend our deepest sympathy to all the bereaved families and commend them to the care of our loving heavenly Father.

We continue to be blessed by our Interim Moderator Rev John Hawthorne through his preaching, Godly oversight and pastoral care in what has been a difficult year for him with health concerns. This did not hinder his work in any way maintaining contact and seeking to provide love and care to individual members of the congregation who were in need. He also consistently provided us with a rich variety of gifted preachers ensuring that we had a veritable feast of spiritual truths, instruction and encouragements from God's Word.

There was an average attendance of 70 at our morning services and 42 at our evening services pre Covid 19 and 51 when morning services resumed in July. There was an average of 16 who attended the midweeks prior to the pandemic but this increased to an average of 31 when the Wednesday night prayer meeting moved online.

The Elders met formally on 18 occasions as well several informal occasions as we had sought God's guidance and direction in steering our congregation through the challenges that this year brought to our door.

It was again because of the pandemic that we had to abandon our annual visitation of the families this year.

We hosted an outreach meeting taken by Philip Robinson (Creation Ministries International) which was well attended with approximately 50% of the audience visitors to our denomination.

We continued our prayer meetings both in Lisburn and Moira on Wednesday evenings and also prior to the evening service until Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> March when they were suspended in response to government advice about the growing Covid 19 pandemic. We quickly resumed our midweek congregational prayer meeting "on-line" (via Zoom) which was very well supported. In addition, monthly prayer letters from Galway, Nantes, Australia, Convoys and Stranraer were emailed to the congregation encouraging prayer for the worldwide denomination.

In May we had Philip Dunn speak (via Zoom) at our midweek and updated us on the work of EMF.

In June, Andrew & Heather Lyttle (via Zoom) gave us interesting insights into their missionary work in Nantes.

In July we were allowed to open our church building and we are thankful to the Deacons for their hard work in risk assessment and protocols to ensure that we could meet in safety and in compliance with the latest health guidelines.

In October we were pleased to accept the Rev Malcolm Ball & Mrs Muriel Ball, retired missionaries from France, into membership of the congregation after they reaffirmed their membership vows.

The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper was observed on two occasions in January and October with an average attendance of 48 communicants.

In December Rev Peter Jemphrey spoke (via Zoom) to our congregation about the work in Galway.

During the year we issued 4 disjunction certificates to Mrs Sandra McCollum, Thomas Beckett, Lyle Taylor and Mrs Jean Taylor.

In December we had the joint baptism of Levi John Somerville and Lydia Karen Gamble.

Many of our congregation's activities and outreach ministries had to be suspended in March and these included Arrows, Little Tots, Upper Room, Nursing Home Witness and the Ladies Book Club. It is hoped that these can be resumed at some stage in 2021.

In addition to our AGM in January we had a further two congregational meeting in February and in October resulting in the congregation issuing a call to the Rev Robert M McCollum which was formally accepted at a meeting of Presbytery on 3<sup>rd</sup> December.

We are delighted that Robert has felt the call of God to be our minister and we look forward with keen anticipation to working with him in the work of the Kingdom. His installation is due to take place on the 13<sup>th</sup> January 2021.

We continue to exhort our members to use their God given gifts and talents in the service of His Kingdom. We commend all those who continue to pray for God's blessing on the preaching and our individual witness to family, friends and neighbours in these difficult days.

We commend the members and adherents for their continued financial support of the congregation, the work of the denomination and mission work in general. As Paul states in 2 Corinthians 9 vs 6-7 "The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver".

After consideration the Session and Deacons decided to use the Dobson Bequest of £20,000 to supply audio visual equipment, refurbish the Upper Room, new Bibles and psalters and for other outreach purposes.

As we look forward to a new year we look to the covenant God who has formed promises for His people from eternity – promises He will keep "Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations," (Deut. 7:9).

In his Christmas Day broadcast in 1939, with Britain at war, King George VI movingly quoted lines from Minnie Haskins's poem of 1908, "God Knows".

I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year, "Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown"; and he replied, "Go out into the darkness, and put your hand into the hand of God. That shall be to you better than a light, and safer than a known way."

At the gate of this year let us together resolve to call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ who alone is the Light of the world.

"Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (John 8:12)