

Lisburn Session Report 2023

This year we took as our theme Ephesians 3:20-21, "Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever, Amen."

As a Session, we met 15 times during the year, and also had a joint meeting with Deacons in December. Between the months of February and September pastoral visitation was carried out with almost everyone in the congregation.

Preaching Ministry

Our minister preached 77 times in our congregation on both individual texts and on series which were based on Matthew 14-17, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Samuel 1-15, Romans 8, Hosea, and Isaiah 9 verse 6 . A series of sermons in 1 John is ongoing.

Average attendances at morning and evening worship services were 77 and 66 respectively. While the average morning attendance has dropped slightly (average 78 in 2022), we note with thankfulness to God the increase in our evening attendance (average 63 in 2022). It has been particularly pleasing to see parents bringing children to the evening service and we warmly encourage this practice.

On occasions our minister supplied the pulpit of other congregations in the denomination. He also accepted invitations to speak at the Newry CY, Theological Foundations for Youth, preach at the Dervock Church weekend, and to give two addresses at the Banner of Truth Border Conference in Carlisle (however, the latter engagement he had to withdraw from due to pressing family circumstances). We are pleased that he has opportunity to take four school assemblies in the neighbouring Ballymacash Primary school.

Sacraments

We celebrated the Lord's Supper in January, May, and October with 54, 52 and 52 communicants respectively and with the overall theme "He is able". In January our minister took "He is able to build, He is able to give grace, and he is able to strengthen." In May, we considered "He is able to help those who are being tempted, He is able to save, and He is able to do." In October, we considered "He is able to keep the gospel, He is able to keep His promises and He is able to keep His people."

Home Communion

In January, having given intimation to the congregation during the morning service, the Lord's Supper was administered in two homes of the congregation in the afternoon: the home of Mr. and Mrs. Fred Milligan and the home of Mrs. Leahy. In the Leahy home, Dorothy Green and Eileen Keenan (sister of Mrs. Leahy) were additional participants, the latter having shared her testimony and profession of faith beforehand.

There was 1 baptism in the year, when Adam Thomas Somerville was baptised on the 15th January.

Changes to the Membership Roll

We were deeply saddened by the death of Mrs. Beatrice Milligan, a much-loved member and keen servant of Jesus Christ who was called home in the early hours of Wednesday 30th August. Our sympathies are with her husband Fred, and the children: Ivy; Adeline and her husband Jeffrey; Robert and his wife Lindsey; and the grandchildren. A service of thanksgiving was held on 6th September at 1.30pm.

Having received disjunction certificates from Tullyvallen congregation and after a satisfactory meeting we received Claire & Christine Murphy into membership on the 13th March. We also had the joy on Sabbath 10th September of receiving three of our covenant youth, Isobel Lyons, Cassia Moore, and Naomi Moore into full membership of the congregation.

We were further encouraged when Elizabeth May & Andrew Elliott took their vows of membership before a commission of Session in December.

Current as of the end of 2023, our membership and adherent roll stands as follows:

- 52 households
- 69 communicant members and 22 covenant children
- 15 adherents and 3 children.

Short Term Service

When Daniel Moore, on his “year out” prior to taking up his academic course in Cambridge, expressed a desire to assist the Rev Sylvester Konteh with the mission work in The Gambia, we supported his application and were delighted when the Mission Committee accepted him on Short Term Service. He left on the 14th February and completed 4 months in the Mission Field.

Midweeks and Prayer Meetings

A corporate time of prayer was held on the first Sabbath morning of each month, replacing the Bible Class, with an average of approximately 18 participants.

A Zoom meeting was held each Friday morning at 9.00 am on alternate months. When we specifically prayed for “the lost” in our families and among our friends and communities, with an average attendance of 13.

Over the course of the year, we had an average of 24 attending our midweek meetings, which included Home Discussion Groups, which met in the homes of Vera Cromie, Malcolm and Muriel Ball, Mervyn and Dorothy Green and Robert and Emma McCollum.

After our Outreach week in August, Mr McCollum held three Bible studies entitled “Hope Explored” with circa 20 people who had expressed an interest in attending. This was followed up in November with a Christianity Explored course led by him with 8 young adults.

We had several guest speakers throughout the year:

- On 22nd March, Ross and Hannah Murphy who joined us via Zoom and spoke on their work with Arab World Ministries.
- On 26th April, Steven McCollum (Knockbracken RP) spoke to us about his time on a Asialink Team, delivering Bibles to persecuted Christians in Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Thailand.
- On 17th May 2023 the EMF representative, Mr. Philip Dunn, was accompanied by Rev Iliya Marinov, who addressed the meeting about his Church planting work in Bulgaria.
- On 20th September Robin Magee and Kyle Harris from Open Doors UK came and spoke to us about their work amongst the persecuted church.
- On 18th October we had a Zoom meeting where Robert interviewed Iliya Marinov, EMF missionary in Bulgaria.
- On 14th December Andrew Lytle updated us via Zoom on the work in Nantes.

EMF Gospel Partnership

At our Midweek meeting on 17th May, Mr Philip Dunn the representative from European Mission Fellowship explained how EMF had developed a policy where an established Church in the UK could enter into a “Gospel Partnership” with a Church planting work in Europe. He suggested that Lisburn RP Church might consider a partnership with missionaries Iliya and his wife Christina Marinov, since the parties were theologically compatible, both subscribing to the Westminster Confession of Faith.

At a joint meeting of Elders and Deacons on 26th June, Philip was invited to further develop this idea and answer any questions.

The implications of this partnership would be: -

1. The Lisburn congregation would take a special interest in this particular area of EMF work.
2. A significant portion of the current financial support from Lisburn congregation to EMF would go to this specific work in Bulgaria.
3. The Ministers would keep in touch for mutual encouragement.
4. Needs for prayer would be shared.
5. There may be Zoom meetings occasionally and possibly even visits in person.
6. These arrangements would be for an initial period of 4 years.

It was agreed at the end of the meeting to progress this project. The decision was announced and explained to the congregation on Sabbath 10th September.

It is pleasing to learn that Bready RP and Ballyclare RP congregations have entered into similar EMF Gospel Partnerships with Iliya Marinov, with the four ministers meeting monthly via Zoom for fellowship, support and prayer.

Nursing Home Ministry:

We were invited to resume this ministry by Nicholson House Nursing Home and we are grateful to Norman Greer and Tom Somerville who were appointed to lead this work. The visits took place on six occasions, roughly on a bi-monthly basis: 26 Mar, 28 May, Tue 15 Aug, 24 Sept & 26 Nov. Having received a request to resume a similar ministry in Pond Park Nursing Home it is hoped that with some extra help we could hold a short worship service in two Homes simultaneously.

Go Week

We held our Go Week of Outreach and Fellowship from 13th to 18th August and it was a very encouraging week with a good attendance and participation at the morning Bible studies. We distributed 15,000 leaflets around Lisburn with the help of a Go team of 16 individuals who also assisted with the Bible Club which was well attended.

Fellowship Events

At our Annual General Meeting on 27th January, over 50 of us gathered to conduct the necessary business. Supper was enjoyed afterwards followed by Daniel Moore giving a short presentation about his upcoming Short Term Service trip to The Gambia.

On Saturday 24th June, 60 of us went to Oxford Island Nature Reservoir for a hot dog lunch. We were delighted to be boosted by about 20 friends and visitors, including the congregation of Cookstown RP.

At the commencement of the Go Week a picnic lunch after the morning service. This was kindly hosted by Mervyn and Dorothy Green. Despite the wet weather, 80 of us, including the GO team, gathered together.

On the 10th of September, after the evening service, Daniel Moore gave a pictorial account of the work that he was involved with in The Gambia.

On the 26th November we had our Church Fellowship evening which was well supported and thoroughly enjoyed by all. After a delicious meal, David Currie spoke of his time with the Go Relief team in Nantes and showed the congregation photographs of the progress that had been made in the Church building.

Cookstown

It was with joy that we joined with the Cookstown congregation for the installation of Rev Paul Wright which took place at a meeting of the Eastern Presbytery in Cookstown meeting house on 23rd March 2023.

It is planned that there will be an election of Elders in early 2024, however we anticipate that as a Session we will still continue to have oversight as we seek to mentor the Cookstown Session.

Involvement in the Wider Church

As a congregation we form a part of the denomination of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland and several of our members serve the denomination in the following capacities:

Committee to liaise with Covenanter Residential Association – Gregg Somerville

Eastern Presbytery - Interim Session of Cookstown - Lisburn Session

Eastern Presbytery - Interim Elder of Dromore Session - John Somerville

Eastern Presbytery Ministers' Fraternal Co-ordinator - Malcolm Ball

Board of Trustees - Marcus McCollum (secretary)

Finance Committee - Marcus McCollum (treasurer)

Go Committee - Tom Somerville

Share Holiday Conference Committee – Tom & Hannah Somerville

Reformed Theological College (Superintendence & Library) - Robert McCollum

RPC representative on European Mission Fellowship - Robert McCollum

RPC representative on Evangelical Fellowship of Ireland - Robert McCollum

As we come to the end of 2023 we have reflected on the presence and blessing of God in all the joys and sorrows that we have encountered as a congregation of God's people. We are reminded of the promise found in the closing verses of Romans 8,

"For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Marcus McCollum

Session Clerk