

LEAD PASTOR'S REPORT

It is my honour and privilege to bring this, my fifth, report as Lead Pastor of Megain Memorial Church of the Nazarene, to this Annual General Meeting. As I sat to write this report a real sense of excitement and holy anticipation swept over me as I took the opportunity to purposefully reflect on how far the LORD has brought us a people over this past year; and how that sets us up for all that He has for us in this new year together.

In many ways, 2022 has been a difficult year for us as a people, as we have had individuals we love pass and receive their eternal reward. We remember the godly legacies of loved Church members Maureen Reaney, Eileen Cash and Belle Lamont, and founding member Evelyn Wallace, who have heard those words from the mouth of their beloved Saviour, "*Well done, good and faithful servant*". Yet despite the sorrow and grief, the LORD has been faithful and looked favourably upon us as a congregation as we have experienced, first hand, the truth of Lamentations 3:22-23 in our lives:

*Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed,
for His compassions never fail.*

*²³They are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.*

I am filled with thankfulness and gratitude to the LORD, and His people, for all that has happened over the past year; a year which has seen steady spiritual and numerical growth and increased reach in the community in which we find ourselves planted in East Belfast. This sense of appreciation of the LORD's moving in our midst is perhaps no better illustrated by the step of faith taken in the construction of a staff team with Pastor Joanne and Pastor Ryan joining the staff here at Megain over this past year, as we seek to step into the clear calling that the LORD has given to us to *Share the Hope and Love of Jesus with East Belfast*.

As His Word is proclaimed in Word and in deed, the LORD is continuing to pour out His great love and compassion, blessing us as a local congregation.

The Church in Numbers - 2022

Whilst not the most glamorous side of Church life, the finances of the Church form an important part in our ability to be the people and movement that God has called us to be, here in East Belfast.

Weekly/Monthly Offerings in 2022 amounted to £21,436.73 which was down 21% from 2021 (2021: £26,506.06); GiftAid giving was £18,980.00 down slightly by 0.3% from 2021 (2021: £18,980.00); and expenses at £54,774.44 up 8.7% from 2021 (2021: £50,192.36).

At first glance, these figures look as though they raise some cause for concern, however, in reality these numbers are consistent with those of previous years. Even with a fall in Tithes and Offering based income, coupled with increased expenses, we were still able to make a small surplus of £78.39, in large part due to the ability to avail of the Income Tax Gift Aid Refund scheme and some Community Grants for our community based ministries. With an increase in ministries operating from the Church, and with these expected only to grow in number over the next year, we continue to be encouraged and, quite frankly, taken aback by the generosity of God's people in this place. Your sacrificial generosity of spirit allows us to not only keep the lights and heating on, but to make a lasting impact in the lives of people within this community and I want to take this opportunity to thank you all for your faithful giving to the work of the LORD.

Aside from Gift Aiding your offering, which we encourage all taxpayers to do, you can choose to give via standing order. We thank those who have availed of this method of giving in the past year and, where possible, we would encourage more of our members to move to this giving method as it helps to cut down on administrative costs, ensuring that this money is rather put toward the work of the extension of God's Kingdom in this corner of His vineyard.

Once again, I would like to take the opportunity on behalf of the Church Board and wider congregation to extend sincere and heartfelt thanks and appreciation to our Church Treasurer, Alison Hoy, who once again has worked tirelessly and faithfully behind the scenes to ensure that the pressures of financial administration are something which we as a Church body have not had to worry about. Alison, and indeed husband Henry, are such a blessing to us and we recognise the great cost of personal time which has been sacrificed to ensure that everything has been able to tick over. Alison has indicated to myself that, after many years of serving in this way, she will be taking a well-earned and well-deserved break from serving in this capacity and has decided that this is the right time for her to *"hang up her books"*. Henry, who has served faithfully as a board member for many years, has also indicated that he will not be seeking re-election to the Church Board for the upcoming year, and whilst we know all too well that this couple have served out of their love for the LORD and not for thanks, I would like to take this opportunity to also thank Henry for his faithful and spiritually-minded service over many years as a Church Board member, and for his personal support to me during my nearly 5 years as Pastor here. Whilst we know that they will still remain very much involved in the life and fellowship of the Church here at Megain, it does not in any way dilute our gratitude to them for their many years of service in the leadership of the Church.

Missions

Missions are at the heart of who we are as a people; not only as members of the Church of the Nazarene, but as members of the household of God. Our God is, by very nature, a missional God who seeks out and woos individuals by His prevenient grace, drawing people to Himself and meeting them at the point of their need. It is such a blessing to be reminded that we are called to join Him in His mission to the world and are to be the hands and feet of Christ. It is therefore critical that Missions continue to be a vital part of the DNA of our local Church here at Megain as we seek to honour God and win souls to the Kingdom.

I continue to be overwhelmed by the commitment of our wee Church to this missional call and the way in which this is so consistently reflected in the financial giving to the work of Missions, both Nazarene and other, throughout the world. The faithful giving of the LORD's people in this place has served local and abroad missions over the past financial year in the following ways:

- £600 to Nazarene World Missions Easter Offering.
- £373 to Nazarene World Missions Thanksgiving Offering.
- £700 to Nazarene World Missions Prayer and Fasting.
- £698.20 to Nazarene Alabaster Offering
- £300 to the World Evangelism Fund (WEF) offering.
- £168 to our District Nazarene Missions International Fees (Administration).
- £100 to Nazarene District Table Offering which this year supported the work of the JESUS film.
- £300 to our sponsor child through Nazarene Compassionate Ministries (NCM).
- A further £640.48 was raised through our quarterly Mission offerings, and it was decided by the local Church Board that this would be carried forward to next year and provide the opportunity for the giving to local missional ventures within the life not only of the local Church, but also to support other Mission organisations as and when needs might arise - or the LORD lay them upon our hearts.

When all of these figures are taken into consideration we have, as a local church in East Belfast, raised £3879.68 toward missional work this past year, which will be used to spread the Gospel throughout 164 world areas. It should also be noted that these figures do not take into account the individual, personal contributions of many individuals within the Church body to missional organisations and charities such as Kids4School, Project Romania, The Every Home Crusade, Child Evangelism Fellowship, and many others. Once again, Church, we thank you for your generosity of spirit and commitment to living lives which fulfil the Great Commission. Your giving in this way is helping to bring Kingdom transformation, not only in East Belfast, but throughout the world!

We also thank Dr Graham Greenlee for all the work he does in keeping Missions at the forefront of our thinking as a local Church, and for his infectious passion with which he has carried out the role of Missions Director over the past 12 months.

Church Vision

As many of you may remember, in the last quarter of 2021 we launched a 3 year vision for the Church Family here at Megain. This vision, we believe, was given to us by the Holy Spirit of God as a result of much prayer, seeking and listening to His voice. We felt that He was asking us to focus on 4 key areas/goals whilst living out the values of being a Church who are **loving, compassionate, welcoming, authentic** and **faithful**. Here are some of the ways in which we stepped into this vision in 2022:

Fit for Purpose Church Building

Building on the foundations formed in 2021, our building has been used by a number of outside groups from within the local community as we continue to move towards our goal of being a *Fit for Purpose Church Building* which is of benefit to the community. Community groups and forums, businesses and charities have all availed of our beautiful building this year with groups ranging from Funeral Directors who have used the premises for leadership meetings and staff training, right through to the Inner East Forum or East Belfast Community Development Agency (EBCDA).

It was also a privilege for us as a Church body to host the British Isles North District District Assembly in March 2022 as we gathered with other Nazarene Churches throughout Northern Ireland, Scotland and the North of England for a weekend of teaching, business and fellowship. This was a blessed weekend which was only made possible through the hard work of the congregation who volunteered their time during the weekend to serve in a variety of different ways; greeting at the door, cleaning toilets, serving tea and coffee, manning car parks, ensuring people were well looked after...the list goes on. However, the biggest undertaking was actually in the build up with a number of key jobs being done by volunteers to ensure that the building was spic and span before the weekend took place. So, to everyone who lifted a paint brush, a hammer, a drill, a dust cloth, or any other tool for that matter, and gave so freely of their valuable time to help and make the District Assembly weekend a reality; please accept our sincerest of thanks and join us in praising the LORD that this only takes place in Northern Ireland once every three years!

As if District Assembly was not enough for us, we also had the privilege of hosting a team of 20 young people from Nazarene Youth United Kingdom for a week-long Summer Mission Trip in August 2022; during which they served the local community and local congregation by, amongst other things, leading our *Under The Sea* themed Holiday Bible Club. It was a blessing to have them with us for the week, and to be able to host them within our building allowed for them to bond together in a meaningful way as a team.

Comment cannot be made on a *Fit for Purpose Church Building* without giving a special shout out to Karen Porter for all that she continues to do as the Head of Building Trustees here at Megain. This past year has been a very busy and draining one for Karen personally, but her commitment to the LORD and His house remains a constant source of inspiration, as along with the Building Trustees, she continues to work through the actions of the *Murray Report* (2021) survey of the building. Please continue to be in prayer for Karen, and the Building Trustees, as they seek to lead us in best utilising this space, building and prime geographical location for the extension of the Kingdom; and don't be afraid to show your support by rolling up your sleeves and getting involved in the Church Work & Witness Days which are planned for throughout the year. Many hands make light work!

Nurture the Church Membership & Discipleship

In his book, *Crazy Love*, Francis Chan observes that as the Church, "*We reduce discipleship to a canned program, and so many in the church end up sidelined in a spectator mentality that*

delegates disciple making to pastors and professionals, ministers and missionaries." At Megain Nazarene, we are firm believers that following Jesus is not just for Sunday services, and is something which must be lived out in an intentional way every day of the week by every member of the family of God. As such, we believe that we are called to be a disciple-making people who take seriously the Great Commission which Jesus gave in Matthew 28.

We sense, now more than ever, that God is calling us to return to a more holistic model of Church life, where each and every person who attends the various services and ministries of the Church are equipped and empowered to share their story of faith; understanding that they themselves are a miracle of God's grace and that He is still in the business of transforming the lives of everyday people. A model where prayer is foundational and not an optional extra; where we enjoy God and growing in His grace, together, in community. A model in which people are not only encouraged, but enabled to step into the gifting which have been bestowed upon them by the Spirit of God, for the benefit of the body of Christ. A Kingdom community that are devoted to the Word and being together, and to which *"the LORD add(ed) to their number daily those who were being saved"* (see Acts 2:47).

In this environment disciples are nurtured and encouraged to go and make disciples. And whilst we have not, by any stretch of the imagination, "made it" yet, I am encouraged by the steps which we have taken over the past year to make this more and more a reality in our lives. Might I take this opportunity to encourage you, over this next year, to immerse yourself more and more into the life of the Church. We all benefit whenever this happens. This year, as we officially launch our Life Groups in March, our Prayer and Worship Times on the fifth Wednesday of the month, increase our corporate prayer times and prayer opportunities, see an increase in frequency and variety of different ministries. Let us not reduce discipleship to a canned program that delegates its importance to someone else, but rather let us be a community of disciples who make disciples that the Kingdom of God might be extended in East Belfast to the glory of God.

Create a Meaningful Community Impact in East Belfast

As a Church community, we are strategically placed in the heart of the East Belfast community; a privilege and honour which we should neither take for-granted nor a responsibility we should shy away from. Now in our 72nd year in this community, we do still hold the firm belief that the best days of our church are not behind us, but rather are yet to come.

We believe that God continues to challenge us to make a meaningful community impact here, and over the past year positive strides have been made to do just that. As a Church body we are represented on the Inner East Forum (a forum made up of Statutory, Community and Faith-Based Organisations who work together for the betterment of East Belfast), EB Anti-Poverty Alliance, EB Churches Network, EB Youth Practitioners Forum, EB Tension Monitoring Group and the positive reputation of the Church in the community continues to grow as our voice and compassionate heart is heard and shown in constructive ways.

Most significantly, however, this year has seen meaningful community impact be made through the ministry of the Olive Branch which runs each Thursday evening from 6-8pm. We are so thankful to Pastor Joanne and her team who have created a warm, safe place where individuals from the community and congregation join together for a time of food and fun for all ages. Set up in response to the drastic increase in the Cost-of-Living, this ministry not only meets a physical need in our community, but is also organically becoming a place where the things of Christ are discussed. We are thankful to the James Brown and Son's Community Grant for their generous contribution towards our running costs for the Olive Branch over this past year, and are delighted to announce that we have received further funding, this time from Urban Villages, for the work of this vital Compassionate ministry in 2023.

Strengthen and Grow our Church Programmes for all Generations

As our reach within the community has continued to grow, so too has the demand for more frequent, bespoke and age appropriate ministries within the life of the Church. It was a delight

for me as Lead Pastor to announce the appointment of Pastor Joanne McFarlane as the Volunteer Associate Pastor here at Megain at last year's AGM. This is a role in which Pastor Joanne has really grown and shone over the past year and it is a privilege for us to have her and her family as part of our congregation as she ministers alongside her full-time role as Deputy Director of Kids4School.

Further to this appointment, it was also a privilege to inform, on behalf of the Church Board, the wider congregation of the appointment of Pastor Ryan Smith as our new Families and Community Pastor from October 2022. Pastor Ryan, alongside wife Sarah and son Blake, have slotted into the life of our congregation seamlessly since their arrival and we are thankful to God for calling them to serve in this place for such a time as this.

The increase in staff members who work alongside myself not only increases our capacity as a Church body to meaningful reach into the community and strengthen and grow our church programmes for all generations, but it also enables us to further equip the saints of God in this place to carry out the work that God, in His grace, has prepared in advance for them to do.

This year has seen our Megain Kids Ministries (namely Sunday School and Friday Night Connections) grow from strength to strength and has also seen our bigger annual events such as Easter Saturday Family Fun Day, Holiday Bible Club and Breakfast with Santa making a welcomed and impactful return following a hiatus due to COVID. A huge thanks to Pastor Ryan, our Children's Director; Chloe Robinson; and their team of willing and able volunteers who have continued to give of themselves for the sake of the Kingdom and served faithfully at the different events and ministries of Megain Kids over the past year. It is evident to all who attend our Sunday services that there is a real buzz (and lots of noise) around our Megain Kids department at the moment, and we could not be more thankful - with God's help, please keep doing what you're doing for it is making a difference!

I am also thankful to Gillian Heenan for her faithfulness in organising our Megain 257 ministry which facilitates a time of fellowship and fun for all ages each month with trips to Garden Centres, cafés, conventions and even the cinema, all being enjoyed over the past year. I know there's loads in the pipeline for 2023, so make sure to see Gillian for more details about how you, too, can get in on the action!

And as we look forward, we are excited that 2023 will see the relaunch of Megain Youth and Megain Tots, that our Megain Men and Megain Women ministries will begin, and that, in the Will of the LORD, precious souls will be won and brought into the Kingdom.

Looking Forward

It is with enthusiasm and anticipation that we enter into this new Church year together, confident that He who started His work in us as a people will not leave it unfinished. Keeping our eyes fixed on Him Who is the Author and Perfecter of our faith; and with renewed belief that the fields are white unto harvest.

May 2023 be the year that we become a people of renewed prayer and fasting, who are found in the Word, changed by the Spirit and living for the King. Pursuing Jesus with all that we have, that others too might come into a saving relationship with the Saviour of the World and know the joy of sins forgiven. The year that we step more and more into the calling that has always been upon us - reaching out to the broken, meeting the needs of the needy, the widow and the orphan, being the hands and feet of Christ, that East Belfast might be transformed in His Name.

Hope has a Name, and His Name is Jesus. Let us be a people of Hope.

Respectfully Submitted in the Service of Jesus the King,

Rev Sammy Robinson

Rev Sammy Robinson (Lead Pastor & Chairperson)