

LEAD PASTOR'S REPORT

It is so hard to believe that I have the honour and privilege of bringing this, my sixth, report as Lead Pastor of Megain Memorial Church of the Nazarene, to this Annual General Meeting. Each year, as I sit to write this report, I am filled with thankfulness for the provision of God over the year that has gone and with a fresh excitement of all that is yet to come; and this year is no different!

2023, as well as a year that seen growth in the life of the Church both numerically and spiritually, was another difficult year for us as a people as we have seen people we love dearly pass on to glory and receive their eternal reward. We remember with deep fondness Cecil Greenlee, Violet Chappell and Matt McNeice, valued and loved members of the Church family who received their home calls this past year; hearing those much coveted words from their beloved Saviour, "*Well done, good and faithful servant.*"

Despite the sense of sorrow at the losses we have experienced, we do not mourn as those who have no hope and we thank God for His love and faithfulness toward us. With a deep sense of love for one another, it could be said of the Church here those words written by John:

Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹²No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

¹⁶And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them." // 1 John 4:11-12, 16

Whenever I talk with people, time and time again the same topic comes up in conversation: it's very obvious that the people of Megain love God and love one another. This is a real testament to the growth in Christlikeness that is happening amongst us as people; just another reason that it is such a privilege to be the Pastor of this Church. As we continue to reach out and *Share the Hope and Love of Jesus with East Belfast*, it my deep and sincere prayer that as numerical growth occurs that a deepening rather than diluting of this love will take place amongst us as we continue to pursue Christ and all that He has for us and for this community in which He has placed us for such a time as this.

The Church in Numbers - 2022/2023

Now, I know that finances don't excite everyone as much as they excite the likes of Clayre, Dave and, even, Alison, but they do form an important part of who we are as a people. As you know, we are a registered Charity with the Charity Commission NI and, therefore, rely on the faithful giving of our membership here to enable us to effectively be the people and movement that God has called us to be, here in East Belfast; sharing his hope and love with those around us.

Weekly/Monthly Offerings in 2022/2023 amounted to £18,538.91 which was down 14% from 2021/2022 (21/22: £21,436.73); however this figure is not one which causes alarm as many have made the switch to GiftAiding their giving over the past year. GiftAid giving was £25,960.00, up significantly by 31% from 2021/2022 (21/22: £18,980.00). There was, however a big increase in expenditure at £69,184.48 up 23% from 2021/2022 (21/22: £54,744.44). It is important to note that a large proportion (62%) of this expenditure was spent on salary costs at £42,679.64. This, of course, was due to an expansion in our staff team which seen Pastor Ryan Smith serve with us for 15 months (Oct 2022-Dec 2023) in the capacity of Families and Community Pastor.

Again, I know numbers aren't everybody's cup of tea, and at first glance these figures might send off some alarm bells in people's minds; however with the bequeathment of around £24,000 from Harry and Althea Johnston, as well as the ability to avail of the Income Tax Gift Aid Refund scheme and some Community Grants for our community based ministries, we are pleased to report that we were able to make a surplus of £15,977.18. We thank God for His continued faithfulness toward us, and are once again astounded at the generosity of God's people in this place. The faithful giving of you, our members, enables us to do so much more than keep the lights and the heating on, but rather to make continued and lasting impact in the

lives of people throughout the East Belfast Community and I would like to take the opportunity on behalf of the Staff Team and Church Board 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.

This past year also saw the changing of the guard around our Church Treasurership as Alison Hoy stood down and "*hung up her books*" after almost three decades of serving on the Church leadership. With big shoes to fill, the team of Clayre Scott and Dave Loyal were assembled and have 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. We are thankful to both, who voluntarily give of their time and expertise to serve the LORD in this essential and skilled way; returning to the LORD the giftings which He has given them.

Missions

It was Christopher Wright who said, "*The church doesn't have a mission, the mission has a church*" and he was right! God Himself is, by His very nature, a missional God; drawing and wooing people to Himself by the prevenient grace of His Holy Spirit. We are a Missional people, it's part of our DNA as Nazarene's and missions is the heartbeat of who we are as the people of God, commanded to go and make disciples. How amazing is it that God Himself invites us to be a part of His mission of salvation to the world?

I know I say it often, but I continue to be amazed at the commitment of our wee church to the missional call; not only in terms of financial giving, but also in the way in which our membership live their lives outside the church walls and in the spheres of influence that God has placed them in their families, workplaces, schools and universities, and in our community here in East Belfast. The faithful giving of the LORD's people, and your commitment to His mission has served local and abroad missions in the following ways over the past year:

- £600 to Nazarene World Missions Easter Offering.
- £723 to Nazarene World Missions Prayer and Fasting.
- £400 to Nazarene World Thanksgiving Offering.
- £500 to the World Evangelism Fund (WEF) Offering.
- £451.36 to Nazarene Alabaster Offering
- £189 to our District Nazarene Missions International Fees (Administration).
- £300 to our sponsor child through Nazarene Compassionate Ministries (NCM).

When all of these figures and a small surplus which was held back to provide the opportunity for the giving to other Mission organisations as and when needs might arise, we have, as a wee local church in East Belfast, raised £3175.90 this year that will be used to spread the Gospel throughout 164 world areas. As always, it is important to note 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, Every Home Crusade, Child Evangelism Fellowship, Sports Chaplaincy UK, and many others. Church, once again, might I thank you for your commitment to living lives which fulfil the Great Commission.

We once again thank Dr Graham Greenlee for all the work he does in the background, and indeed up front, in keeping Missions at the forefront of our thinking as a local church, and for the way that he has carried out this role in the past 12 months.

Local Church Mission - September 2023

As well as Nazarene Missions International involvement, this past year also saw us run a week long mission in the run up to our 72nd Anniversary celebrations. This week, which ran from

11th-17th September 2023 was a busy, but blessed time together which saw bespoke events for Men, Women, Children and Young People and, indeed, for Families. Before this week of Mission, the Staff Team and Church Board felt that it was imperative that this week be covered in prayer and, as a result, we as a Church entered into a period of 40 days of Prayer and Fasting in the run up to the event. Daily devotions were produced, special prayer times called and faith began to rise as we leaned into what we felt God was calling us toward. What followed did not disappoint, and as we honoured God with our time and sacrifice, He honoured us with His presence and the building and strengthening of meaningful connections in our community here in East Belfast.

As well as the intentional times of prayer and fasting, alongside the daily devotions, we were able to organise, host and put on the following events as part of the Mission Week:

Monday 11th - Megain Men Curry Night with testimony from David Brooks

Tuesday 12th - Megain Women Cake and Craft Night with testimony from Isabel Hamill

Wednesday 13th - Midweek Prayer and Worship Evening

Thursday 14th - Olive Branch Community Meal with testimony from Pastor Joanne

Friday 15th - Special MK: Connections Session with Lucy Allen

Saturday 16th - Gospel Service with Testimony from Gary Simpson and John Menagh

Sunday 17th - 72nd Anniversary Service with Rev Philip McAlister (AM)

- Special Megain Through the Years Service (PM) with contributions from Church members and pastors past and present

We thank God for His faithfulness toward us and we look forward in expectation and anticipation that we will see many seeds planted during this week come to fruition over the next year. There is a feeling that those elected to serve on the Church Board for the incoming year will work with the Staff Team to put on yet another week of outreach this year. Please be in prayer for them as they organise, and also don't be afraid to offer ideas and feedback so that we can ensure that we make maximum impact for the sake of the Kingdom, for His glory.

Church Vision

In previous years, I have used this report as an opportunity to feedback the ways in which we as a Church have worked and stepped into the three year vision launched in the last quarter of 2021. 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**. Those goals, for your remembrance were as follows:

- **Fit for Purpose Church Building**
- **Nurture the Church Membership and Discipleship**
- **Create a Meaningful Community Impact in East Belfast**
- **Strengthen and Grow our Church Programmes for all Generations.**

Over the past year, we have been actively working toward fulfilling this God-given mandate in a variety of different ways; and rather than listing and noting them all here, I would encourage you to read over the various reports which have been produced for our AGM Booklet. Contained within them are numerous instances where God has broken through in mighty and powerful ways, how people have come under the instruction of the Good News of the Gospel in age appropriate ways and how God is blessing the faithfulness of our Staff and Volunteers through the various ministries of the Church.

For the purpose of this report, however, I would like to take the opportunity to speak to the following: Staffing, Community Engagement and Ministries from the Cradle to Glory.

Staffing

It will come as no shock to you that I take the opportunity in this report to thank the Staff Team here at Megain who I have had the pleasure of Kingdom building and leading the church alongside over the past year.

Firstly, to our Associate Pastor, Pastor Joanne McFarlane I take the opportunity to thank you for your continued faithfulness in pursuing the call of God in your life. We are so privileged that God has called you, for this time and for this season, to develop your ministerial and pastoral giftings in this place amongst us. We thank God for your compassion and your love, your can-do attitude and your willingness and example of what it means to follow after God, no matter the cost. We commend you, in particular, for the work of The Olive Branch, our Thursday evening community meal which has seen individuals and families become part of the wider church family here at Megain. As you and your team have faithfully fed, chatted with and drawn alongside people from the community here in East Belfast, building and growing deep friendships and bonds of trust cannot be adequately conveyed in words—but thank you. Also, on behalf of the wider congregation, might I also state that it has been and continues to be a real gift to us as we benefit from you fanning into flame the gift of preaching that God has so clearly given to you. Keep preaching, keep challenging, and please keep adding a couple of minutes every time you preach so people won't show preference to the preacher who'll get them out a little bit earlier on a Sunday morning!

For the past 15 months (Oct 22 to Dec 23) it was also a delight for us to have Pastor Ryan Smith serve as Families and Community Pastor here at Megain. Following the call of God, again for a time and a season, to come here to Megain, Pastor Ryan, Sarah and Blake brought with them energy, faith and a deep desire to see a community transformed. Be it building on the foundations of the work done with Megain Kids, rolling up his sleeves and helping and mingling at the Olive Branch, communicating the gospel message in local schools, preaching the Word either in the church service or to the children in MK: Sundays, or launching our Megain Tots ministry we are thankful for the time that Pastor Ryan, Sarah and Blake shared with us and are sad to see them move on to new ministry opportunities in 2024. I know my taste buds will miss staff meetings in Boojum as we chatted about the things of God and His Church over a burrito, however I have a feeling my waistline won't! Might I encourage the Church Membership to continue to be in prayer for Pastor Ryan, Sarah and Blake as they serve the purposes of God for a short time in Bangor before moving back to Scotland to take up a new pastoral charge in 2024; and may they know they will always be greeted with a warm and loving welcome here at Megain Nazarene.

Community Engagement

This year has been another year in which we have seen the reputation of the Church outside of the Church membership grow positively. As I work in and around the community in East Belfast, particularly in the Voluntary and Community Sector, it is so encouraging to hear the ways in which the Church is spoken about by those who do not (hopefully yet!) Attend. It is clear that the values of being a people who are loving, compassionate, welcoming, authentic and faithful are being lived out by you, the Church membership. Just another reason that I count it an honour and privilege to serve as Pastor of this remarkable group of people here at Megain Nazarene.

This year has seen the Church building used by a variety of community groups, local businesses and networks and forums within the local East Belfast Area including, but not limited to, Funeral Partners, East Belfast Community Development Agency, Inner East Forum, East Belfast Churches Network, Ulster Tower Street Community Agency, East Belfast Anti-Poverty Alliance and Newtownards Road Development Planning Group. As Karen Porter, one of our Church Trustees as often said, to have a building the size of ours is both a blessing and a hinderance, but what a blessing it is to be able to host these groups in our building and use our space for the benefit of the wider community; of which we continue to be an integral and increasingly important part.

It has also been a personal privilege for me this year to be elected to serve as a Board Director of both East Belfast Sure Start and East Belfast Community Development Agency, which speaks not to my own personal reputation but rather to the esteem in which the Church here at

Megain is held in the community. It is also a privilege to be invited to take part in a three-year, community funded accredited leadership training programme called the *Emerging Leaders* programme alongside 15 other leaders in East Belfast. I continue to pray that God will continue to open up doors for service in this community that will enable us as a Church to continue to *Share the Hope and Love of Jesus with East Belfast* in meaningful and tangible ways.

Ministries from the Cradle to Glory

One of the promises that the LORD gave to Chloe and I whenever we arrived at Megain in September 2018 was that He would enable us to become a multi and intergenerational church which contained and provided bespoke ministries for people right across the generations. It has been a joy to watch as God has continued to make this more and more a reality over this past year. Our wonderful God, Who makes everything beautiful in its time, has entrusted us as a Church family with responsibility for and to the youngest right through to the oldest in our community. Starting with Megain Tots and running to the M257, Olive Branch and prayer times, it is a delight to see various ages and demographics catered for and attending the various ministries on offer at Megain Nazarene. These ministries, some more established than others, continue to grow from strength to strength and it our earnest prayer that those being reached would not only experience the love of God extended to those who volunteer their time and lead these ministries, but that our community would also experience the transformation of heart and mind which only Jesus Christ can offer. That we would be a Church who journey with people from the cradle, right through until their home call to glory, and that the 72 years which follow these 72 would be greater than any which have preceded.

Volunteers

None of what we do at Megain Nazarene would be possible without the people who sacrifice and volunteer their time for the extension of God's Kingdom. The truth is, there are too many to name individually, but I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who volunteers their time, expertise, finances, prayers and encouragement to ensure that we can fulfil the calling that God has placed upon us as a Church. Special mention, however, must be given to Mrs Karen Porter who after three decades of faithful service in leadership in the local church has taken the decision to step down from Church Board responsibilities and not allow her name to go forward for nomination this year. Karen, as well as being a close friend and confidant to me as Pastor, has served and represented the people of Megain Nazarene so well and so passionately in her capacity as a board member and, as Pastor, I was and still am thankful for Karen's embodiment of Jonathan's armour bearer from 1 Samuel 14:7. You are indeed, loved and appreciated! Karen won't be going anywhere and will still be involved in a variety of different ways and ministries, serving the purposes of God in this place—but her decision not to stand for election to the Church Board this year is a significant and prayerful one on her part and, whilst she might not want it, her exemplary service over many years deserves recognition.

Looking Forward

As we launch into 2024 together, I do so filled with fresh hope and excitement. Expectant of a mighty move of God in our midst as we consider in an intentional way how we can best embody *The Story that Changes Everything* and live out the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in our every day lives.

May 2024 be a year of fresh vision, renewed hope and a contagious desire to see the Kingdom of God extended in East Belfast. Where individuals, couples, families, streets and whole communities are transformed by Jesus Christ—and might we be faithful in allowing God to continue to write His story with the ink of our obedience.

Respectfully Submitted in the Service of Jesus the King,

Rev Sammy Robinson

Rev Sammy Robinson (Lead Pastor & Chairperson)