

**KNOCK EVANGELICAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
TRUSTEES ANNUAL REPORT 2022**

“Then Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Ebenezer, saying, Hitherto hath the LORD helped us”.
(1 Samuel 7:12)

After two years of restrictions and uncertainties due to Covid-19, we were so thankful to be able to return to a greater degree of normality in 2022. Average attendances at Sunday worship were encouraging overall, with an average of 37 at the morning service and 28 at the evening service.

However, the fallout from Covid cast its shadow over the start of the year when our esteemed fellow-elder, Mr Jim Stephenson, resigned from the membership of Knock (and thus from Session) on 19 January, due entirely to his concern about aspects of Session handling of Covid-19 issues in the congregation. His wife Linda also resigned her membership from that date. Both had been members of Knock since 26 April 1994. Jim was installed as a deacon on 5 February 1997 and as an elder on 5 March 2000. For a quarter of a century, Jim had served the congregation with diligence, commitment, prayerfulness and enthusiasm, and his resignation was a seismic blow to Knock congregation and the wider EPC. Jim and I had served together on Session for 22 years, and I was deeply affected, on a personal level, by his departure.

Jim’s resignation meant that until an assessor elder was appointed by Presbytery, Session had no authority to meet. The matter was brought to Presbytery, and Mr Harold Gibson, elder in Stranmillis, expressed his willingness to fulfil the role. Session then met on 16 May at which it was agreed in principle to proceed later in the year with an elders election.

It was subsequently decided, after much prayer and discussion, that we should seek two new elders. The various stages took place in accordance with the EPC Code, and the election was held during w/c 20 November. Counting took place at the Session meeting on 28 November. Out of four names on the voting paper, Mr Paul Watson well-exceeded the required 60% threshold and was therefore deemed elected. This result was announced to the congregation on Lord’s Day 4 December, and at the Presbytery meeting on 5 December a Commission was appointed to make the necessary arrangements for Paul to be ordained and installed in early 2023. We were very conscious of the Lord’s help in the whole process and were greatly heartened by the sense of unity within the congregation. We are looking forward to working with Paul in the days that lie ahead and would covet your prayers for the new Session.

We also want to place on record our indebtedness to our brother Harold Gibson for his role as assessor elder in what turned out to be very difficult personal circumstances. In the early summer, Harold’s dear wife Patricia became seriously ill and passed away on 30 August. As a result, Harold was unable to be involved in any Session meetings until 28 November. In the interim, Robert and I met informally on several occasions to discuss matters and to pray together. Although these meetings had no formal standing, we enjoyed good fellowship, and notes were taken for the

record which have been filed with Session minutes. Meanwhile, please continue to remember Harold in your prayers.

Three of our congregation were called Home to Glory in 2022. Mrs May Hamilton took unwell at the start of the year and passed away on 21 February. Her funeral took place in Knock on 1 March and was conducted by Robert. Jennifer Frizelle had been a faithful member of Knock for many decades but was prevented from attending worship for most of that time due to significant physical disability. She passed away on 19 May and her funeral, conducted by Robert, took place in Knock on 25 May. Mrs Mary Johnston, who had been unwell for some considerable time, passed away on 17 November. Her funeral took place on 21 November in Ballycairn Presbyterian Church and it was also conducted by Robert. Please remember the Hamilton, Frizelle and Johnston families in your prayers.

The Lord is building His church and we were delighted to welcome James and Alison Edwards into membership on 6 March. The sacrament of baptism took place on the morning of Lord's Day 22 May when James and Alison's children Kristyn, Alannah, Caleb and Seth were baptised by Robert, and we later enjoyed a lovely congregational lunch and time of fellowship at the Edwards home.

We were similarly delighted when Tim and Caoimhe Woodrow were married in Knock on 30 July 2022, and we welcomed them into membership on 4 September.

As a congregation our priority is to reach out to the community with the Gospel, and we were very encouraged that we were able to re-commence our children's and young people's work on a proper footing again after Covid. Other reports will highlight this in greater detail.

We also reached out to the community on the day of the major NI Centenary parade from Stormont to the city centre on Saturday 28 May. We opened the church facilities and served burgers etc (thanks again to Michael Harrison!) at the front of the car park. The good weather and large crowds created a carnival atmosphere and enabled us to engage in some very useful conversations. We also produced a special tract for the occasion which was well distributed. An orange lodge from Scotland later wrote to us to thank us for our hospitality and kindness. Please continue to pray for the seed sown on that day.

Towards the end of the year, we decided to depart from the traditional Wednesday night mid-week for a number of weeks. The women's fortnightly Bible study was held on four Wednesdays in October and November, with the men having the same fortnightly Bible study on the other Wednesday nights. It was quite a radical idea, but we feel it was very successful and that it helped to enhance the spiritual life of the congregation. We reverted to our normal arrangements over the Christmas period.

As we look back over 2022, we are encouraged. The congregation is vibrant and there is a good balance and a good mix. We are very grateful to all who give of their time and talents, and we do not take anyone for granted. We would love to see some of our older friends back worshipping with us, but we recognise that this is not always practical, and we must keep our housebound friends in our thoughts and prayers.

In conclusion, we refer you to the text at the start of this report. Samuel had erected a memorial giving praise to God for deliverance from the enemy and called it Ebenezer or “stone of help”. Commenting on this verse, Matthew Henry says, *“Through successive generations, the church of God has had cause to set up Ebenezers for renewed deliverances; neither outward persecutions nor inward corruptions have prevailed against her, because ‘hitherto the Lord hath helped her’ and he will help, even to the end of the world”*. Let us go forward in that confidence.

Wallace Thompson

On behalf of the Trustees of Knock EPC