

# Silverbirch Evangelical Church Annual Report to December 2023

## Trustees' Report for the year ended 31 December 2023

### Statutory Guidance Statement

The Trustees hereby confirm that this report has been prepared in the light of "The Charities (Accounts & Reports) Regulations (NI) 2015" and agreed with full regard to the Commission's Public Benefit Requirement statutory guidance.

### Structure, governance and management

SEC is an independent local church constituted by a Trust Deed executed on 22nd February 2015 and amended on 4<sup>th</sup> October 2018. The Trust Deed has been updated as required to reflect changes in the active trustees. Although the Trustees have legal responsibility for the affairs of SEC, the day-to-day spiritual care is carried out by the elders and the day-to-day practical matters are overseen by the deacons and a Premises Committee. The elders form the majority of the board of Trustees. The Trustees meet at least twice a year; the elders meet at least once a month and the deacons twice per year or in the interim as required. SEC registered with the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland on 8 May 2015 as required by the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 (as amended) and comply with the Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP) "Accounting and Reporting by Charities" issued in October 2019 and the Charities (Accounts and Reports) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015. SEC has appointed David McCracken FCA as honorary independent examiner of the financial statements. The Trustees would like to thank David for his willingness to fulfil this role and time it has taken him to examine the Assembly's records and form his report.

### Risks

The Trustees consider that there are two main areas of risk facing SEC, as follows:

**Financial** – SEC almost entirely relies on the income received from freewill offerings, without which the Fellowship would not be able to achieve its charitable objectives. However, should there be a reduction in offerings the Trustees would commence a program of cost reduction to ensure the financial stability of the Fellowship. The Trustees would like to take this opportunity to thank the members for their continued giving to SEC, which is most generous, and we give praise to God for this.

**Reputational** – SEC normally carries on a wide range of ministries with children. In order to mitigate any risk in this regard it has comprehensive policies and procedures in place, which are managed by a designated person and routinely monitored by the Trustees.

# Silverbirch Evangelical Church Annual Report to December 2023

## Objectives and activities

We are an independent evangelical church set up to advance the gospel of Jesus Christ both in belief and faith and in the outworking of that faith in practical terms for the benefit of the world at large. The objectives of SEC, as stated in the Trust Deed and reflected in the purposes of the charity as declared to the Charities Commission are:

- 1 To advance the gospel of Jesus Christ among the general public, in accordance with biblical principles and practice both in the UK and abroad in a manner consistent with the statement of faith;
- 2 To prevent or relieve poverty among those in hardship;
- 3 To relieve those in need due to their adverse circumstances;
- 4 To advance education among those who are unable to avail of education due to their adverse circumstances.

These objects may be pursued in the United Kingdom or abroad at the discretion of the Trustees.

SEC organises a wide range of meetings and activities including (but not restricted to):

- Sunday Morning worship service
- Breaking of Bread Communion Service
- Prayer Meeting,
- Missionary Focus
- Youth Fellowship
- SEC Kids
- SEC Youth
- Sunday School
- Tree Tots (Parent and Toddlers group)
- Alpha Course
- Adult & Young Adult Bible study groups

During the year SEC has continued to support a number of local Christian workers and organisations.

## Achievements and performance

The objects of SEC are spiritual and qualitative and therefore not easily measured in many respects. Nonetheless it has been a pleasure to see God's handiwork in seeing a number of people find Christ as Saviour, being baptized or joined the church fellowship. A high proportion of members continue to be engaged in serving the Lord in a variety of ways in SEC and a significant number of our young adults continue to serve the Lord within and outside the Fellowship.

# Silverbirch Evangelical Church Annual Report to December 2023

## Public Benefit arising from our Activities

For the purposes of this report each of the activities of the church has been assigned to one of the following objectives. It should be noted that many of the activities relate to more than one objective.

### 1. Advancing the gospel of Jesus Christ among the general public

#### Activities within the church

The elders are responsible for the spiritual direction of SEC and to that end they meet to discuss and pray over themed series which incorporate both a gospel challenge for those who have not yet come to faith as well as teaching from the Word of God to encourage and build up those at varying stages along their spiritual journey. Topics are given to speakers who are a mix of those within SEC as well as visiting guest speakers. The Fellowship does not employ any full-time paid teachers or preachers.

The Alpha Course took place over a period of 13 weeks during the Spring. It was well attended and as a result some came to faith in Jesus Christ and some were restored to faith and are now regularly attending services and activities within the fellowship.

We very much regard our Friday evening children and youth activities as advancing the Gospel. Most of those attending attend no other church and those activities present a mix of fun, games and recreation as well as a gospel epilogue. Some of the young people have attended other seasonal activities such as Easter and Christmas services and events.

We had our annual Holiday Bible Club in August which saw the largest number of children attend since we moved to Silverbirch in 2001. Many parents sat in with the children as the young adults from SEC presented the Bible lessons using a Lego theme which went down a treat with the children. The week culminated in a Fun Night (one of a number during the year) which again saw huge numbers support the event in spite of the inclement weather for the time of year.

While the Sunday School numbers in SEC remain small and are almost entirely made up of children of parents from within the Fellowship, the kids enjoy the time upstairs during the main service and it is evident the lessons taught are being taken in and retained by the children.

Tree Tots provides a relaxed environment for parent of babies and toddlers to meet, make new friends, get away from the house and enjoy a safe space to share a cup of coffee while the children enjoy the range of toys and activities. It has a craft table, singalong, visit from Santa at Christmas and is highly regarded by health visitors in the Bangor area who often refer new Mums to the church Tree Tots on a Monday morning.

## **Silverbirch Evangelical Church Annual Report to December 2023**

Families who attend Tree Tots send their children to our other activities (SEC Kids and Holiday Bible Club) when their children out-grow the parent and toddlers group. Monday mornings regularly saw 60 parents (each with at least one child) during the year.

In addition to its in-person ministries, the church uses its presence on social media platforms as a ministry to those of the congregation who are unable to attend for various reasons. The main church YouTube channel, which has been available since we were forced to go exclusively on-line during the 2020 pandemic, has been viewed in other countries (we are aware as far away as Australia), including some hard-to-reach nations.

The SEC website carries all its Sunday morning services and viewing figures remain encouraging. The focus of evangelism includes both corporate gatherings and individuals sharing their faith within their circle of influence

### **SEC church members supporting the advancement of God's Word outside SEC**

SEC, has many members who are involved in Christian organisations outside the church. SEC provides financial gifts, use of premises and prayer support for these activities

We maintain a close relationship with our neighbouring 2 churches, Ballycrochan Baptist Church and Ballycrochan Presbyterian and at least 4 times each year we meet for a joint praise service hosted by each church on a rota basis. We also have a joint children's gospel activity club known as CSSM (Children's Special Service Mission) and one of this Fellowship's young adults, Luke Sherwin, is co-leader of that.

There is also a CSSM in the centre of Bangor – the largest in Northern Ireland. So many children subscribe to attend that event it has to extend over a two-week period. Another of our members, Aaron McAlease, is co-leader of that.

Two of our members, Luke Sherwin and Olivia Anderson are both employed by Christian Unions Ireland (CUI). Both are full time although they must partially support themselves while CUI provides the rest of the required support. They work among the students on the Belfast Campuses and are heavily involved in encouraging the team of CUI workers who reach out to students with innovative programmes and events. Olivia writes, "I play a small part in helping students to understand the opportunity they have to reach people with the Gospel at university. I am also excited to learn from them as they show Christ's love on campus!"

Scripture Union NI also employs several workers around the province as part of its E3 programme. Local churches are affiliated with schools within their locality to assist the E3 workers in delivering programmes to the children within the schools with the Head Teacher's permission. This Fellowship is affiliated with Ballymagee Primary School and one of our members, Alison Kyle, is the person who represents Silverbirch Evangelical Church.

# Silverbirch Evangelical Church Annual Report to December 2023

## Supporting the advancement of God's Word abroad

### SEC Missionaries – Peter and Debbie Turtle

SEC supports the work of missionaries Peter and Debbie Turtle in Moldova as well as their two children. These missionaries work in the rural villages of the northeast region of Moldova, bordering Transistria. In 2023 and into 2024 they have been involved with a local regional church, established a children's work, Bible study and the opening of a small church hall in a remote village.

Their work in the local communities includes visitation, delivering aid (in the form of food parcels and essentials) to the sick, poor and underprivileged people of the area. They are also involved in preaching and teaching while Debbie is involved in after-school and recreation activities with the children and local ladies. Due to the very poor condition of housing stock in this area and lack of rental properties, SEC was able, with the assistance of another charitable trust, to support Peter and Debbie with an interest free loan to enable the purchase and remedial work to a small property to be used as a base for the work in the region.

## 2/3. Preventing and relieving poverty among those in financial hardship or disadvantaged due to other adverse circumstances

### Shades of Hope

SEC regularly supports Shades of Hope. This is a charity (NIC 103169) set up and managed by two members of SEC, Samuel and Zara Ssenyonga to provide support to children and families in Uganda. Shades of Hope has 4 key programmes.

1. Child Sponsorship. Children are sponsored by individuals or organisations through school and on to further education or vocational school. Sponsors support the children by providing uniforms, equipment, school meals and schoolbooks.
2. Street / Slum Outreach project. This programme brings boys off the streets of Kampala to a safe and secure environment (a halfway house) to care for them, feed them, school them and, where it is practical and appropriate to do so, find a next of kin to rehome them with family. A Social Worker works on the Ugandan side to carry out the necessary background checks and administration on the children and family.
3. Gift for Life/ Entrepreneurship provides finance to individuals to start their own small business and to become self-sufficient. The people of Uganda are a proud people and rather than accept charity, prefer to be given the tools and equipment to start their own businesses. This programme also provides training including

## Silverbirch Evangelical Church Annual Report to December 2023

money management to ensure small business get off to a good start. Businesses already successful include pig farming and a sewing business.

4. Youth camps and workshops. In previous years we have been running young people's camps and workshops so we can continue to inspire the young people both socially and spiritually. In August 2021 we ran a young people's camp/workshop for 3 days and the themes were:

- Business start-ups and sustainability
- Social change and character building
- General discussions and questions about the Bible.

### Special Offerings

At least once a year SEC also takes a 'Special Offering' where an area of the world facing a particular plight is the focus. In 2023 the Moroccan Earthquake and the Libyan flood were the focus where information was presented to the church and a lunch of soup and rolls was provided for the congregation, who were asked to contribute the price of their usual Sunday to the disasters. As usual, the fellowship gave much more than expected. Monies were passed through Samaritan's Purse to distribute by their workers in the affected areas.

We also have special offerings where a specific need of a struggling fellowship is brought to our attention such as Patrizio & Jennifer Zucchetto serving in Naples, Italy who were interviewed as part of one of our Sunday Services in September 2023 and an offering was taken to help them in the work of their relatively new church which, as part of their mission, reaches out to those in need in that locality.

SEC is also affiliated, along with other local churches, with 'Foodbank Bangor' which is part of a nationwide network of foodbanks, supported by The Trussell Trust, working to combat poverty and hunger across the UK. We have a shopping trolley available in the church foyer to collect items which members contribute by adding one food item to their weekly shopping for donation to the Foodbank. These are then delivered to the local Foodbank depot.

### Missionary Focus

Approximately once a month SEC has a meeting known as our Missionary Focus where representatives from organisations serving the Lord across the globe come to report on the activities of their mission. Hearing from organisations devoted to spreading the gospel among hard-to-reach peoples (such as Mizpah Outreach working in Greece and eastern Europe who were with us in the Autumn 2023) keeps us informed while also helping SEC members pray more intelligently about areas of need. Often literature and options to subscribe to organisations' communications including newsletters are

## Silverbirch Evangelical Church Annual Report to December 2023

available. Those who attend have the opportunity to give financially to the work of the organisation.

#### 4. To advance education among those who are unable to avail of education due to adverse circumstances.

We invite and financially contribute to organisations focussed on education such as 'Hamsayeh International' which works in a schooling capacity among the Farsi-speaking people in London) to educate them in UK culture and customs and to teach English to these folk who have little or no local language abilities. In 2023 we also supported the charity 'Kidz4school', a charity dedicated to bringing education to the children of Tanzania using finance raised from supporters such as SEC. All of this is, of course, supplemental to SEC's own charity, Shades of Hope which is currently supporting some 54 children through primary and secondary education and on to further education thus equipping these children for well paid jobs to support themselves, their families and ultimately the local communities.

#### **Other important activities that enable SEC to function**

The activities above are only part of those that go on by members who see it as their calling, ministry and responsibility to serve the Lord. A lot of other work goes on, often unseen, that enables SEC to function as a fellowship of God's people.

We have a dedicated team on the AV desk which not only ensures the services are heard and seen but is also responsible for uploading the services to our YouTube channel.

We have a catering committee which provides hospitality when required, at events, fundays and providing refreshments at funerals for families and friends.

The cleaning and maintenance of the premises is meticulously carried out on a weekly basis and the grounds and lawn around the church building are cared for by some of our members. A Premises Committee ensures fire and safety equipment is maintained and carries out regular assessments, calling in professionals when required.

And, of course, regular visitation goes on by many members and seasonal food hampers delivered at Christmas to those who are elderly and appreciate the ongoing contact with the fellowship.

# Silverbirch Evangelical Church Annual Report to December 2023

## Elders comments

The elders continue to be encouraged by what the Lord is doing with us and among us here in SEC and we give Him all the praise and the glory for the spiritual growth and the blessing we see going on around us. We have had several weddings in the fellowship over the past year and these newly marrieds have decided to settle at SEC. Many are involved in the various ministries mentioned above. We have also seen the Lord's hand in salvation and restoration and again spiritual growth and enthusiasm is evident among those who have come to faith or have rekindled their love for the Lord and His people.

The elders have ongoing plans to reintroduce Home Groups in the next year and also to begin a ministry among those who, through age or infirmity, cannot join us regularly at church. We look to the Lord for His leading in these new ventures.

Finally, we give thanks for all of those involved in the various activities in this report and for their faithfulness in supporting practically and financially SEC as the fellowship here seeks to advance God's work locally and abroad.