

Trustees Annual Report for 2023

Crosscollyer Street Evangelical Presbyterian Church exists to proclaim and advance the Christian Faith, as set out in the word of God, the Bible, and in accordance with the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms. Our aim is to bring God's word and the wonderful message of salvation, the Gospel, to the hearts of men, women, boys and girls both locally in the North Belfast area and across the world to the great benefit of their lives. We believe that the moral ethics of the Bible provides the best basis for successful, healthy and happy living within any community.

After the Covid-19 pandemic church life has returned to normality. We were able to meet together for both Sunday morning and evening services for all of the year and also the mid-week meeting for prayer and Bible study. The Afternoon Circle for senior citizens met on Tuesdays apart from a summer break. Face masks were made available but were rarely worn to services. Hand sanitisation stations continued to be provided and seating arranged so recommended social distancing could be observed. Attendances at both our Sunday and Wednesday services remained encouraging. Thankfully while our members and adherents could still be infected by the virus its effects were usually not severe due to the availability of vaccines and less virulent virus strains. A number of funerals in the local community were also conducted by our interim minister.

Our members and adherents were very appreciative of the encouragement and strength gained from meeting for worship and fellowship together and being able to support each other by their prayers. Many also keep in regular contact through phone and social media. The weekly senior citizens group was also greatly appreciated as an antidote to loneliness.

The damaging results of government policy defining Off-Licences as an essential service has become increasingly clear with a huge number of people showing signs of serious addiction to alcohol. Alcohol related deaths in NI in 2022 have increased by 25% since 2019. We tried to restart our weekly addiction support group but due to a lack of leaders were unsuccessful. We continued to contact all the members regularly by phone. It is our great desire to restart weekly meetings as soon as staff resources become available.

Our Kids Club met from January to March and October to December following a 3-Day Club in September. It is international in membership with at least 4 nationalities represented. The kids mixed well together and numbers attending were the best for many years. We were again able to run our customary summer residential camps in conjunction with other churches in the denomination. A number of our young people attended each of the camps. These were much enjoyed and passed off uneventfully. In March and April all three of our camps held very successful reunions.

Offerings remained similar to previous years and our finances have kept in good shape. The offering at our Harvest Thanksgiving services in October for the 'Help the Needy' fund to support those in great need in third world countries was again encouraging. We give thanks to God for his mercy and the generosity of his people. During the year we continued to benefit from the rental of a house bequeathed to the congregation and this is now a valuable source of income. Our current financial position is on a secure footing.

Our retired minister who is also a trustee was paid mileage expenses from Central Fund to cover travel costs in continuing to care for the vacant congregation. He preached regularly and provided pastoral oversight along with the other members of the Kirk session. During 2023 we continued to give financial support to the Central Fund of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church for the support of its Ministers. Our support level is well below the cost of a Minister and being currently without a

minister we were able to contribute to the support of other financially challenged congregations within the denomination. We are also pleased to have distributed generously to various Mission-type works.

Our search for a suitable man to become the new minister of the congregation finally moved forward when in June a suitable young man from the USA accepted a call from the congregation to become its pastor. He is currently on contract as an Intern with another church but will become available to come to us next summer. There will also be various Home Office immigration requirements to be fulfilled.

It is of primary importance to us that our Congregation and work in North Belfast is founded on the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, the only Saviour of sinners, and is directed by his Word, the Bible. We are glad that this continued to be so in 2023. We believe, and have seen evidence, that lives lived according to God's word are happy and successful and free from many of the problems afflicting those who live in other ways. In the last year we have also witnessed how a strong faith in God gives encouragement and peace when life and health are threatened.