

IMMANUEL CONGREGATION OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN IRELAND

TRUSTEES ANNUAL REPORT

For the year ended 31 December **2023**

The Trustees present their Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December **2023** including a Statement of Assets and Liabilities as at that date.

REFERENCE AND ADMINISTRATIVE DETAILS

Immanuel congregation of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland

Agnes Street

Belfast BT13 1GG

Registered Charity in Northern Ireland (**NIC104450**)

CHARITY TRUSTEES

The Charity Trustees who served during the year or who were Trustees at the date of this report were (in alphabetical order)

Mr Derek Bailey

Mr Michael Beck

Mr Alan Bridle

Mr Russell Coates

Mr Brian Davidson

Mr Joe Fittis

Rev. Colin Gamble

Mr Tom Hamilton

Mr David Harvey

Mr Simon Houston

Mr Tom Irwin

Mr Trevor Smith

Mr Ian Stewart

PRINCIPAL OFFICE BEARERS

Minister Rev. Colin Gamble

Clerk of Session Mr Alan Bridle

Treasurer Mr Kevin Harvey

Secretary Mr Tim Fitzsimons

INDEPENDENT EXAMINER

S Huddleston FCA

Chartered Accountant

24a High Street

Ballynahinch BT24 8AB

BANKERS

Ulster Bank

11-16 Donegall Square East

Belfast BT 1 5UB

SOLICITORS

Hewitt & Gilpin

14-16 James St South

Belfast BT 2 7GA

IMMANUEL CONGREGATION OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN IRELAND

TRUSTEES ANNUAL REPORT (cont'd)

STRUCTURE AND MANAGEMENT

The Kirk Session

The charity trustees of the congregation are the members of its Kirk Session. Under the congregation's governing document, The Code, the book of the constitution and government of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, the Kirk Session seeks to watch over and promote the spiritual interest of the congregation and of persons not connected with any congregation who are within its bounds. It ensures pastoral care is in place in the congregation and seeks to further the contribution of the Church to Christian witness and service in the local community. The Kirk Session has delegated to its Congregational Committee the temporal affairs of the congregation including administering all funds and property belonging to the congregation. Members of the Kirk Session are ex-officio members of the Congregational Committee.

The Kirk Session consists of the ordained minister and the ruling elders of the congregations. All members are entitled to propose, speak and exercise equal votes at meetings, except that the Moderator, the minister in active duty in the congregation, has no deliberative but only a casting vote.

Stated meetings of the Kirk session are held on a monthly basis.

To be chosen for the office of the eldership in the congregation a person must be a voting member and a regular attendant on its ordinances. The selection of those proposed to be called to the office can be either by the congregation or by the Kirk Session.

Presbytery

Under the Presbyterian Church in Ireland form of governance the corporate oversight of a congregation is the responsibility of a Presbytery which superintends generally the spiritual and temporal affairs of the congregations assigned to it by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. Immanuel congregation of the Presbyterian Church has been assigned to the North Belfast Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. The membership of the Presbytery consists mainly of the active ministers of congregations assigned to it by the General Assembly, ministers who have retired from active duty and an elder appointed by the Kirk Session of the congregation.

The General Assembly

The General Assembly is the supreme court of the Church, representing in one body the whole Church and acting as its supreme legislative, administration and judicial authority, in dealing with all matters brought before it. The General Assembly is normally constituted during the first week in June for worship and to conduct its business. At the end of business it is dissolved. The membership of the General Assembly consists mainly of the active ministers of each congregation, retired ministers and a representative elder appointed by the Kirk Session of each congregation.

DESCRIPTION AND PURPOSE

The charitable purpose of the congregation is the advancement of religion.

Immanuel is a congregation of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. The Presbyterian Church in Ireland, as a Reformed Church within the wider body of Christ is grounded in the Scriptures, and exists to love and honour God through faith in His Son and by the power of His Spirit, and to enable her members to play their part in fulfilling God's mission to our world.

The congregation's mission purpose is to glorify God and to promote the advancement of Christ's Kingdom. We seek to do this by:

Joining together in heartfelt worship.

Applying the Word of God to our lives.

Seeking His will through prayer as we live for Him each day.

Making the gospel known at home and supporting opportunities abroad.

Showing God's unconditional love to everyone we meet.

As a church we believe in God who is Lord and sovereign over all things – without Him we can do nothing. It is God alone we worship, and to Him we give all the praise and glory. We stand firmly on the Gospel set forth in the Bible, which is central to our beliefs. There is only one Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who alone offers forgiveness of sin and peace with God.

As a congregation of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, we believe that the Bible is the supreme authority over all we do, and that the Westminster Confession of Faith, along with the Larger and Shorter Catechisms set out what we understand the Bible teaches on key matters of Christian faith and practice.

ACTIVITIES AND OBJECTIVES

The congregation meets for worship every Sunday and visitors are welcome to join. The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper is observed on four occasions during the year and all those who have been baptised and who have made a profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ are admitted to the Lord's Table. The congregation also holds a midweek bible study and prayer meeting and has had a range of other organisations and activities including,

- Children's Church
- Junior Christian Endeavour
- Youth Fellowship
- Uniformed Youth Organisations – Boys' Brigade / Girls' Brigade
- Presbyterian Women
- Ladies Bright Hour
- Tealeaf
- Immanuel Tots
- Fresh
- Young Adults
- Caring Team

KIRK SESSION REPORT 2023

“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:1-3)

“Polycrisis” and “Permacrisis” were two of the words of the year again in 2023 as events on the global stage and closer to home brought much heartache and despair. The continued war in Ukraine was followed by renewed and bloody conflict in the Middle East while the continued suspension of the Stormont Assembly and ongoing financial constraints on public services and among households with cost-of-living pressures were enduring. We didn't have to look far to see bad news.

Yet, as Christians we are called to proclaim the good news of the gospel to a needy world and the verses above – covered in one of Rev Gamble's sermon series during the year – bring timely reassurance of the status of the believer “in Christ” and instruction to apply both our hearts and

minds to seek heavenly things, whatever is happening all around us. It is there we find true joy in serving God.

The Kirk Session would again place on record our thanks to Rev Colin Gamble for his faithful ministry of the Word and sacraments during 2023, for his studies in both the Old and New Testaments and during the midweek prayer meeting. His pastoral visitation is also appreciated and an ageing congregation has inevitably resulted in him conducting funerals on a more regular basis. This has also brought a requirement for additional catering and we again express our sincere thanks to the ladies who freely give of their time for these and many other occasions during the year. It is much appreciated.

In October, George Ussher, elder emeritus, was called home and we give thanks for his life and service for His Lord and His church in this place. We continue to remember all in the church family who have been bereaved in the last year and commit them to the care and keeping of Almighty God in these days.

2023 was a year of elections in Immanuel and we congratulate all who have come through to serve on either the congregational committee or, in due course, on Kirk Session. May they find joy in service and for the task ahead. Psalm 100:2 instructs us to “serve the Lord with gladness; come before his presence with singing”. The Kirk Session would again express our gratitude to all the leaders and helpers in our organisations over the past year for their faithful dedication to the work and their witness to all who come into our premises. The work among children and youths can be particularly difficult and we must pray for continued wisdom and patience. At the annual de-brief meeting with leaders in the summer, the challenge of succession planning was again highlighted.

The annual report also affords an opportunity to say “thank you” to the church secretary and treasurer for their work in 2023 and to the musicians, those who operate the sound desk and to numerous others who work quietly in the background on the tasks that allow the church to operate. As Clerk, I would again express my personal thanks to Russell Coates, the deputy clerk, for his ever-willing help during the year.

At the start of 2023, the Kirk Session was pleased to appoint Mrs Barbara Gregg as our Designated Person to help keep us compliant with all the regulations regarding Child Protection and Safeguarding. We thank Barbara for taking on this important role and pray that she will be blessed as she serves in this capacity.

2023 will also be remembered as the year of coronation for King Charles III and as a church we were able to mark this historic occasion in May with a service and special lunch when we were reminded of the “King of Kings” and all that He has done and will continue to do for us. Some of the children from the church organisations took part in the service. The Kirk Session is very aware that it is only on the occasions when the children are participating, will the parents and guardians attend a service of worship. This is a pattern repeated elsewhere. However, we do give thanks to the group of ladies who took the initiative to come down and engage with the parents of children in JCE, GB and BB while they were waiting for their children in the halls on the nights when they were meeting.

In general, attendance numbers at morning and evening worship, while lower relative to the past, were relatively steady. However, it is encouraging to report an extra helper was needed to cope

with the growth in creche numbers while the Tea Leaf was able to resume after an extended period when Mrs Lauren Bingham came forward with an offer to lead. Towards the end of 2023, it was also good to see the Caring Team being refreshed and remobilised to support and look in on some of the older members who perhaps live alone or have particular pastoral needs.

Ahead of the start of the winter's work, the Kirk Session issued a letter to the congregation on the importance of corporate prayer and accompanied this with a little card, as a reminder and encouragement for more to take the opportunities available to gather together before the evening service and especially at the midweek prayer meeting. On occasion, the numbers for the former have been a little higher while on Wednesday nights the numbers are broadly unchanged. We would repeat that not only will you be blessed by gathering with others, but your attendance will be an encouragement to others.

At Easter, we were pleased to join again with our friends at West Kirk in sharing Good Friday and Easter Sunday evening services with the venues reversed from the previous year. In the summer, the outreach programme continued with open-air meetings in May and door-to-door visitation in late August. Gospel tracts were again distributed at Easter and Christmas and we appreciate all who took part and helped. It is recognised that this work is becoming more challenging with many reporting on more doors being closed and relatively few people in the district prepared to engage at the door-step in a meaningful conversation about the gospel.

For the second consecutive year, we were very pleased to have special choirs leading the worship at both the Harvest and Christmas services and this was enjoyed by all. Our thanks to Karen Fitzsimons for arranging and leading and to all the enthusiastic members who participated. The occasional "songs of praise" after the evening service were also well received.

In December, we were pleased to host a Youth event organised by Presbytery when over 120 teenagers and young people gathered for a time of praise and to hear of some of the dangers of social media in a presentation from the Love for Life organisation. Thanks to all who helped facilitate and provide supper. The Session recognises these are especially difficult times for teenagers and young people with all the apparent attractions and temptations and when it is all too easy to be led astray. Please make this a priority in your prayers.

During the year, there were a number of specific items on the Kirk Session agenda which commanded attention. Following changes approved at the General Assembly, a recommendation from Kirk Session to transfer our Trustees to a new legal entity – The Presbyterian Church in Ireland Holding Trustee Company - was approved at a meeting of the congregation before Christmas while further consideration was given to PCI's Back Together Again document which challenges the leaders of congregations to reflect afresh on church life and witness in a post-pandemic world when much has changed. Towards the end of the year, the Kirk Session received a presentation from Mr Phil Dunn of EMF on what partnering with one of the Mission's associated churches would entail. This information was subsequently shared with the congregation as part of a wider consultation.

In a sign of changed times, our minister and some elders attended a PCI conference on Pastoral Care aimed at those struggling with issues of gender identity and same sex attraction. Some also attended and found benefit from an evening on "Renewing your Calling as an Elder" while others participated on a seminar on evangelism.

At the end of 2023 we heard the sad news that Jersey Street City Mission – with whom we have had a long and important association – was to close and Immanuel was represented at the final service on Christmas Eve. We give thanks to God for the work of the mission in proclaiming the gospel to children and families in the Shankill area over many decades and the faithful devotion of those who were called to serve. We remember Tom and Deborah Gamble as they seek the Lord's will for the times ahead.

At the time of writing, a new year appears to stretch out ahead of us with all its uncertainties, crises, joys and sorrows but as the old chorus reminds us ... "I know who holds the future and he holds it in his hands, with God things don't just happen, everything by him is planned".

May we find comfort and reassurance in such times and follow Paul's instructions to the church at Philippi – ***"Do not be anxious or worried about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition with thanksgiving continue to make your requests known to God". (Philippians 4:6)***

Alan Bridle

Clerk of Session

January 2024

PUBLIC BENEFIT STATEMENT

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland meets the public benefit requirement by providing benefit to its members and the general public by making known the Christian Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ through the advancement of religion.

The direct benefits which flow from the purposes of the Church include the gaining of an understanding in Christian beliefs as set out in the Bible and in the Church's subordinate standards (the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Shorter and Larger Catechisms) leading to spiritual and moral development and opportunities for response to Bible teaching. In turn, this framework leads to practical expressions of Christian beliefs and standards in the local community such as through the care of those in need (including the sick, disabled and bereaved).

Generally the above benefits are delivered locally by congregations and their members, or are facilitated through presbyteries or are organised and delivered centrally. Local delivery is facilitated by central resources in almost all cases. Public access is made known through the use of noticeboards, printed material, press advertisement, websites, and social media or in other ways.

The benefits are demonstrated through regular evaluation of the services and informal and ad-hoc feedback from members, their families, and members of the public.

The purpose does not lead to harm. The only private benefit flowing from our purpose is related to Ministers, Missionaries, Deaconesses, Irish Mission workers and Lay Agents who receive benefits as a result of their holding office or employment. However, this is incidental and necessary in order to further our charitable purpose. There are no other private benefits. The beneficiaries of this purpose are members, their families, other individuals that the Presbyterian Church in Ireland is in direct and

indirect contact with, the community in which pastoral services are provided and other communities throughout Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, and worldwide which benefit from our engagement with and support for both Christian and other secular organisations, charities and individual members of the public.

The Kirk Session has had regard to the Charity Commissions Public benefit requirement statutory guidance.

STATEMENT OF TRUSTEE RESPONSIBILITIES

The Trustees are responsible for preparing the annual report and the financial statements of the congregation in accordance with applicable law and generally accepted accounting practice.

As the congregations total income does not exceed £250,000, the Trustees have elected under Section 64(3) of the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 to prepare a receipts and payment account and a statement of assets and liabilities.

The Trustees are responsible for keeping adequate accounting records that are sufficient to show and explain the congregation's transactions and disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time its financial position. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the congregation and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

Approved by the Kirk Session at a meeting in **April 2022** and signed on its behalf by

Alan Bridle (Clerk of Session)

Russell Coates (Deputy Clerk)

Date 17th April 2024

Date 17th April 2024