

**FIRST BALLYMENA CONGREGATION OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN IRELAND
TRUSTEES ANNUAL REPORT**

The Trustees present their Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2023 including a Balance Sheet as at that date.

REFERENCE AND ADMINISTRATIVE DETAILS

First Ballymena Congregation of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland
Church Office,
Meetinghouse Lane,
Ballymena,
Co. Antrim
BT43 7BT

Registered Charity in Northern Ireland (NIC105344)

CHARITY TRUSTEES

The Charity Trustees who served during the year or who were trustees at the date of this report were:

Rev Emerson McDowell (Installed as minister on 21 st April 2023)	Mr Maurice Crabbe
Rev Norman Cameron (vacancy Convenor until 20 th April 2023)	Mr Dennis Hanna
Rev Matthew Boyd	Mr Randal Hayes
Mr Hugh James Cameron	Mr Stewart Heaney
Mr James Donaghey	Mr Tom Heaney
Mr Norman Graham	Mr Robert Johnstone
Mr Stephen Lamont	Mr Geoffrey Lamont
Mrs Kay Lorimer	Mrs Catherine Maybin
Mr Alan Montgomery	Mr Ivan McNeill
Mr John McQuitty	Mr Lyle McQuitty
Mrs Diane Russell	Mr Colin Russell
Mr Rodney Wright	Mr Roland Woods
Mr Rodney Bryans	Mr James Wylie
Mr Harry Clarke	

PRINCIPAL OFFICE BEARERS

Minister	Rev Emerson McDowell (Installed as minister on 21st April 2023)
Convenor Vacancy Minister	Rev Norman Cameron (finished term as vacancy convenor on 20th April 2023)
Associate Minister	Rev Matthew Boyd
Clerk of Session	Mr Tom Heaney
Treasurer	Mrs Jacquie Gilmore
Secretary	Mrs Ruth Gibson

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INDEPENDENT EXAMINER

John Finnegan
Potter Finnegan Limited
Unit 25 The Courtyard Business Park
190 Galgorm Road
Ballymena
BT42 1HL

BANKERS

Ulster Bank Limited
49 Wellington Street,
Ballymena
BT43 6AD

First Trust Bank
78 Wellington Street
Ballymena
BT43 6AF

Nationwide Building Society
70 Wellington Street,
Ballymena
BT43 6AF

Cambridge & Counties Bank,
Chamwood Court,
5B New Walk,
Leicester,
LE1 6TE

Santander
Customer Service Centre
Bootle,
Merseyside,
L30 4GB

United Trust Bank Limited
1 Ropemaker Street
London
EC2Y 9AW

SOLICITORS

Samuel Cumming and Son
39 Linenhall Street
Ballymena
BT43 5AJ

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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 interests 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 two ordained ministers and the ruling elders of the congregation. 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 several times a year.

To be chosen for the office of the eldership in the congregation a person must be a voting member and a regular attendant at its ordinances. The selection of those proposed to be called to the office can be either by the congregation or by the Kirk Session. Members are elected if they obtain two-thirds of those who vote.

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. First Ballymena Presbyterian Church has been assigned to the Ballymena 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 each 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. The membership of the General Assembly consists mainly of the active minister 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. First Ballymena 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 its members to play their part in fulfilling God's mission to our world.

The congregation's mission purpose is to have a passion for Jesus Christ and a compassion for people. We aim, by the grace of God, to help people of all ages become disciples of Jesus Christ.

FIRST BALLYMENA CONGREGATION OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN IRELAND TRUSTEES ANNUAL REPORT (cont'd)

The congregation aims to live out its Mission and Vision by being:

- A Family of God's people who care for each other and enable each other to grow as disciples of Jesus at whatever stage of life they are.
- Invitational – inviting people to follow Jesus and then serve Him in His church and His world.
- Restorational – acknowledging that in our church family and our wider community there are broken, hurting people, and broken, fractured relationships that can be restored and healed through Jesus Christ.
and by:
- Serving – acknowledging that as followers of Jesus we are to serve each other and to serve our world.
- Telling the good news of Jesus to all whom we meet.

ACTIVITIES AND OBJECTIVES

The congregation meets for worship every Sunday and visitors are welcome to join. Those who are confined to their home or to a hospital bed and those on holiday can join the morning service via the First Ballymena YouTube webcast. DVDs of the services are distributed to those who have no or limited access to the internet. The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper is observed on several 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 Supper. The congregation holds regular Bible Study meetings and has a wide range of organisations including:

- First Kids and other children's programmes
- Presbyterian Women
- Sports clubs - Bowling
- Luncheon and Coffee clubs
- Youth and Young Adult Programmes

ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE

On 21st April 2023, Rev Emerson McDowell was installed as Minister of First Ballymena Presbyterian Church. There was a large congregation made up of members of Ballylinney Presbyterian Church, family and friends of the McDowell family and members of First Ballymena Congregation. Following the service of installation, during which Rev Alistair Bates (Moderator of Presbytery), Rev Joseph Andrews (Clerk of Presbytery), Rev Norman Cameron, Rev Jeffrey Blue, Rev Richard Morrison, and Rev Darren McCorrison took part, there were several speeches and presentations to the McDowell family and Rev Norman and Mrs Cameron. This was followed by supper served by the ladies of First Ballymena Church.

Rev Emerson McDowell led morning worship for the first time as minister of First Ballymena on Sunday 23rd April 2023.

Eleven new members took their first communion in 2023 and over forty individuals attended an Alpha Course.

All borrowings from the Building Project have now been completely repaid. We give thanks to God for the blessing of this early repayment with a total giving in excess of £1.9 million pounds.

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Worship and prayer

The congregation normally meets for worship each Sunday at 11.00am with an evening service being held on the second and fourth Sunday of each month at 6.30pm. All Sunday services are streamed online with the morning service receiving between 250-500 views each week. Online streaming of services has proved invaluable, enabling the church to remain in contact with the housebound, those on holiday and those who have to work and are unable to attend in person.

During the week, discipleship groups provide an opportunity for members to meet for fellowship, to study the scriptures and for a time of prayer. As well as our regular services during the year we acknowledge God's gift of new life in the sacrament of baptism.

During 2023, 4 families brought their children for baptism. We conducted 1 marriage service and gave thanks for the lives of the 23 members of our congregation who have passed away during the year, seeking to comfort their grieving families. On 31st December 2023 there were 299 communicant members and 306 families connected with the congregation. The average weekly attendance in person is 245 at morning worship with 60 attending in the evening.

Family Prayer Time

It is encouraging to see the commitment of members of the congregation who have been committed to 24-hour prayer on a Thursday once each month. Many of the members of this group meet for prayer also in the church building on the Wednesday immediately prior to the 24-hour prayer day. A number of children are also involved in Wednesday prayer time, using creative crafts to communicate their prayers. Prayer topics come from the Without Walls organisation and others from the Ministry team which are specifically focused on the church family and the local community.

Pastoral care

Members of the congregation who are unable to attend church due to sickness, age or personal crisis are visited on a regular basis by the ministry team, Pastoral Care Co-Ordinator, elders or by one of the congregation's pastoral visitors. Pastoral care is also exercised in our discipleship communities as people share and pray together. The Sunday morning service is also webcast and many who are confined to their homes join us through this facility. We also provide food hampers, clothing, and furniture for some in our congregation who find it difficult to make ends meet. Grants from the Presbyterian Children's Society and from the Guys School Trust are applied for on behalf of parents in our congregation who are struggling financially. Mrs. Diane Russell is the Pastoral Care Co-Ordinator.

Outreach

At local level, the congregation runs a programme entitled First Grace which provides a clothing bank for people in need. First Grace has supported more than 50 families in our community and surrounding area in 2023. First Grace Ministry works on a referral basis. Since the onset of the cost-of-living crisis, increasing referrals have been made by Social Services, Sure Start, Simon Community and Inter Ethnic forum. First Grace greatly appreciates the support of the local food stores, which donate food which would otherwise go to waste, allowing it to be distributed amongst the community in need.

Helping Hands Hamper Ministry

As a congregation we are passionate about meeting both the practical and spiritual needs of those both within our church family and those living in our local community. One of the ways we seek to do this is through our Helping Hands hamper ministry. We have a monthly food collection. Thanks to the generosity of those who have donated, we have been able to provide over 250 food hampers to families during 2023.

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Mission

The congregation supports the United Appeal for Mission which is a central fund of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. This enables congregations to support the wider mission of the denomination and to do mission and outreach on a denominational basis beyond what the congregation could do on its own. The United Appeal Fund provides financial support for mission personnel at home and overseas, assists congregations with the deployment of locally based staff, enables church planting, provides grant support for the upkeep of church premises, assists with the running costs of Union Theological College (the Church's training college for ministry students), and financially supports congregations in the areas of worship, discipleship, global mission, outreach, leadership and pastoral care. The congregation also contributes to the denomination's other special appeals. The congregation takes an interest in a wide range of Christian Missions and organisations. They are prayed for, and financial support is given. In 2023 we supported the following: Silk Road Ministries, Chiesa Battista (Florence), Majed and Anna Tinawi (Poland), Saphara (India), The Salvation Army, Belfast City Mission, Dublin Christian Mission, Glencairn City Mission, Jubilee Farm, Sarah Pederson, Care for Cambodia, First Grace Ministries, Abel Tikazi (Hungary), Gianluca Imperitura (Agape Italy), Coaching for Christ and Elisha Gufwan (Nigeria). We also provided funding to support the creation of wells to provide clean water for villages in Ekwendeni.

Through a charity appeal the congregation donates to some local charities. During 2023 we supported The Presbyterian Orphan Children's Society, Children's Hospice Northern Ireland, Riding for Disabled Association and The Samaritans Ballymena Branch.

Presbytery

The congregation was represented at the regular meetings of Presbytery by our two ministers and their representative elders. This provides an important link between the congregations and the wider structures of the church.

General Assembly

The General Assembly took place in June 2023, as outlined earlier. The Rt. Rev. Dr. Sam Mawhinney was installed as moderator on 21st June 2023. Sam Mawhinney is the minister of Adelaide Road Presbyterian Church in Dublin.

ORGANISATIONS:

First Kids

On a Sunday morning, our children of pre-school and primary school age go out half-way through our church service to be given age-appropriate bible teaching. The programme each Sunday morning, includes worship, prayer, craft work, interactive talks and discussion based on the key teaching points. The aim of First Kids is to help our children to understand the big story of the Bible so that they might have a real and growing relationship with Jesus Christ.

Girls Brigade

Girls' Brigade Northern Ireland is recognised as a dynamic, relevant, Christ-centred organisation effectively reaching out to all girls to value, nurture and equip them for life. The aim of the Girls' Brigade, being a Christian organisation, international and interdenominational, shall be: To help girls to become followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, and through self-control, reverence, and a sense of responsibility, to find true enrichment of life. As a group we meet weekly on Tuesday evenings between the months of September through to the end of March. All our leaders and girls have really enjoyed our weekly gatherings and full programme of activities, which has included favourite activities such as the kitchen for baking and the sports hall for physical activity. We continue to be thankful for the opportunities we have to work with our girls at First Ballymena GB, and pray that our work will help them to "Seek, Serve and Follow Christ".

Boys' Brigade

The Boys' Brigade organisation was formed in 1883 and is a Christian Based organisation for boys aged from 4 to 18 years. The First Ballymena Company was formed in 1932 and is now in its 91st year. The BB meets each Friday night from the start of September through to the end of March. The company is split into 3 sections; Anchor Boys (P1 to P4 age group - meeting from 7pm to 8pm), Junior Section (P5 to P7 age group - meeting from 7pm to 8pm) and Company Section (Secondary school age group - meeting from 7.30pm to 9.30pm). First Ballymena Boys Brigade has a variety of opportunities which includes games, crafts, and Bible teaching - this being the most important part of our organisation's aims.

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First Coffee

We meet weekly for tea, coffee, scones, biscuits, and the occasional cake for special celebrations. This provides the opportunity to socialise in a friendly, relaxed environment and to get to know our church family members and others who join us regularly. We hold an annual Macmillan Coffee Morning and donated £850 in 2023.

On the Move Club

This club is a ladies' walking group (aged 18 plus). It meets on a Monday evening at 7.00pm, September to May, weather permitting. The club walks approximately 3 miles within the town boundary which usually takes 1 hour. As well as exercise it is a good way to make friends.

Tots First

Meets each Tuesday from 10.00 - 11.30am during term time in the minor hall. It caters for pre-school children and their parents or carers, and a healthy snack is provided each week. Members engage in play activities, artwork, singing and rhymes and have visits from Sure Start twice a year. This provides a safe environment for children and carers to relax and develop friendships.

The Luncheon Club

This club meets on the third Thursday of each month, October to March, providing a three-course meal at a very modest price to the Senior Citizens of the congregation and their friends. This enables the Senior Citizens in our community to meet in a safe comfortable environment and share fellowship together.

First Touch Football

Meets every Monday night from 6.15 - 7.15 pm. We currently have 23 children attending (girls and boys) made up from P5-P7 children. At First Touch we want to coach the kids' football through drills and playing lots of matches and have fun along the way. We also have the privilege of sharing the gospel through different talks.

714 Club

The 714 Club is open during term time for an hour and a half on Saturday nights for youth aged 7 – 14 years. It aims to provide activities that promote confidence, self-esteem and to inspire a love for Christ. The normal format for each night includes football, dodgeball, basketball & netball in sports hall. Table tennis, pool, board games, games consoles & tuck shop are in a smaller hall, along with a chill out area for socialising. A short epilogue is delivered at the end of the night, with up to 50 young people attending.

The Catering Group

This group organises general catering for any functions within the Church. We are blessed with a dedicated team of ladies who volunteer on a regular basis and on occasions at short notice.

Presbyterian Women (PW)

First Ballymena PW meets on the second Tuesday of each month in the Minor Hall from September to March. We have speakers who come and share their experiences of life lived through their Christian faith. The PW continues to support both prayerfully and financially the mission work of our church. The age group is between 40 and 70+ and an average of 35 members attending each night.

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Music Ministry

As a congregation we are blessed to have several musicians and singers who help to lead us in praise during our Sunday services. Some Sundays are choir led while others are led by members of our praise bands. Thanks to the dedication and creativity of our music ministry team, we have continued to find ways to engage our church family in the worship and praise of God each Sunday.

We also have a very active children's / young people's praise group who are regularly involved in leading praise.

Our annual First Light concert raised £6,300 for the Cancer Fund for Children.

The Indoor Bowling Club

The Bowling Club met from January to March 2023 and then recommenced the 2023/2024 season in September. It is pleasing to report that the club continued to play league matches in the past year and the members very much appreciated the opportunity to renew friendships during competitions.

Connected

Meeting on two Saturday nights in the month from 8.30pm to 9.30pm, Connected is an interactive Bible Study Youth Group for those of P7 and Secondary School Age. Using dramas, videos, ice breakers and talks, Connected seeks to teach what the Bible says on topics that young people face every day. This year we are studying "Stories Jesus Told".

Volunteers

The Trustees wish to acknowledge their deep appreciation of those who give freely of their time by serving on committees and helping with organisations and other church activities. We have around 200 volunteers helping in a wide variety of tasks.

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 congregational churches and 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.

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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 Commission's Public benefit requirement statutory guidance.

FINANCIAL REVIEW

These financial statements consolidate the income and expenditure for the General account and the other activities of the church organisations.

Overall income has decreased from £394,135 in 2022 to £370,197 in 2023.

The congregation's main source of income is members' contributions through the weekly Free Will Offering. There were 245 contributing families during the year (271 in 2022) donating a total of £133,623 (£127,955 in 2022) to the General account. 97 (2022: 168) families contributed to the Building Fund, making donations of £50,788 (2022: £87,666). 89 families (2022: 86) contributed to the Housekeeping account, making donations of £35,102 (2022: £35,683). 62 families (2022: 76) contributed to the Mission and Charitable funds, making donations of £41,664 (2022: £35,046).

Expenditure increased from £231,633 in 2022 to £271,939 in 2023. The major items of expenditure are costs in relation to ministry and support staff totalling £94,531 (2022: £74,229) and General Assessments to PCI of £35,811 (2022: £30,065). Congregational running expenses and utility costs have increased from £54,669 in 2022 to £71,547 in 2023. During the year donations to Missions and Charities of £54,949 were made (2022: £56,310).

At 31 December 2023, the balance sheet is in a healthy position with net assets of £2,036,100 (2022: £1,937,842).

TRUSTEES' RESPONSIBILITIES IN RESPECT OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

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. The Trustees are required to prepare financial statements for each financial year which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the congregation and the financial activities for that year. In preparing the financial statements the Trustees are required to:

- select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently; and
- make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent; and
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the Funds will continue in operation.

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 and enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Statement of Recommended Practice "Accounting and Reporting by Charities (1st January 2015)". 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.

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GOING CONCERN

We were delighted to be able to fully repay the interest free loans for the building project from members of the congregation in 2023. The congregational finances remain strong. The Trustees are of the opinion that the congregation has sufficient resources at the date of approval of these financial statements to meet commitments, which will arise in the year from the date of signing this report, and, subject to the continuing support from members to fund, on an on-going basis, the congregation's current activities and other financial commitments.

RESERVES POLICY

The Trustees have considered the level of unrestricted reserves that it is appropriate to hold taking account of current and ongoing commitments. It is the aim of the Trustees to hold unrestricted reserves equating to eighteen months normal expenditure. At the year-end unrestricted reserves were £210,912. The Trustees consider that the amounts of reserves will be dictated by future donations and planned expenditure. Processes are in place to review both income and expenditure on a monthly basis. Funding of its present activities is dependent on the ongoing financial support of members.

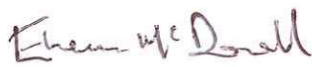
RISK REVIEW

A review of major risks has been undertaken by the Trustees and systems and procedures implemented to manage identified risks. The principal risks are in relation to the likelihood of reputational damage and financial risks associated with the expectation of on-going financial support from members. These risks are mitigated by the Trustees, and the Congregational Committee, regularly monitoring the various activities of the congregation at stated meetings and by encouraging members in their regular giving.

Approved by the Kirk Session at a meeting on 20th March 2024 and signed on its behalf by:

Position: Minister

Position: Clerk of Session



Rev Emerson McDowell



Tom Heaney