

# Session Report 2023

## Introduction

As the year 2023 comes to a close we as a congregation can praise Almighty God for His upholding hand keeping and sustaining us all throughout the past year. "It is good to give thanks to the Lord" Psalm 92:1. During the year there were a number of changes to the congregation, members were saddened by the deaths of Mrs Connie Martin, Mrs Aileen Malcolmsen and Mrs Minnie McKibbin, widows who had been unable to attend worship for some time. As a congregation we express our sympathy and pray for God's grace and compassion to be upon their families and as a congregation we feel the loss of these members. The year 2023 was one in which several members of the congregation continued to experience ill health and two of our young adults left us for further educational opportunities. However we can thank God that through the year we have continued to hold worship services, morning and evening on each Lord's Day.

## Work of the Session

Session continue to carry out their duties and appreciate the assistance provided by Mr Harold Kerr an interim elder from the Dromara congregation. Session met on five occasions during the year in its role of congregational oversight and pastoral care. Session was also constituted on three occasions, in January, May and October for the communion seasons. During the year pastoral visitation of the congregation continued with the elder and the Minister visiting homes. Rev. Watterson and his wife regularly visit our elderly members who are confined to their homes, nursing home and those who from time to time are admitted to hospital.

Rev. Watterson and Mr Joe Watson continued to represent the congregation at the Presbytery and Synod Meetings held throughout the year. Mr Watson serves on the Synod Congregational Aid Fund Committee, and assists the Synod Board of Trustees in the oversight of the graveyard at Ballymacashen. Both Mr Watson and Rev. Watterson are members of the Eastern Presbytery Student Oversight Committee.

## Work of the Minister

The Session is grateful to our minister Rev. Watterson for his continuing faithful exposition of the Holy Scriptures. During the past year in morning worship he completed preaching through 2 Corinthians and began a series from Leviticus which has continued into the book of Numbers. Evening worship continues with preaching through the Westminster Confession of Faith, and helpful notes are provided for this series. On the first Lord's Day evening of each month Rev. Watterson preaches a Psalm exposition. Rev. Watterson leads the mid-week Prayer and Bible Study and prior to morning worship the Adult Bible Class for which he provides informative notes.

Rev. Watterson continues to represent Synod on the Council of the International Mission to Jewish People. He also serves on the General Benevolent Fund Committee and the French sub-section of the Overseas Section of the Mission Committee.

He continues as a lecturer in the Reformed Theological College teaching Hebrew to the students. He also had opportunity in 2023 to conduct morning assembly to the children in Anahilt Primary School. He has also delivered a short course on the Psalms for the Cornhill Training Programme in Belfast.

Throughout the year Rev. Watterson had opportunity to conduct worship in a number of our other Congregations including some that are vacant. These congregations included Dromore, Galway, Kilraughts, Limavady, Limerick, and Trinity.

## Congregation

As a Session we continue to remember all our members, young and old before the Throne of Grace. Three of our elderly members through frailty and weakness are no longer able to attend worship services. The Session are encouraged by the regular weekly attendance of the young people connected

to the congregation and pray that they each will continue to grow in their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Since the autumn two of our young adults, Miss Lydia Watterson and Miss Grace Bajko have been greatly missed by the congregation. Lydia has taken up studies at Edinburgh University and Grace is on a year-out-work experience in New Zealand. However it is encouraging to learn that they both have joined themselves to Churches where they continue to receive Christian teaching and fellowship.

As a congregation we have been encouraged by visitors attending some of our morning and evening services during the year and it is our prayer that God would be pleased to enlarge us with new families.

## **Sacraments**

The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper was held on three occasions: 15th January 2023, entitled 'The Seven Feasts of Leviticus', Leviticus chapter 23; 14th May 2023, entitled 'The King in Isaiah', Isaiah chapters 6, 9, 32, 33; and 15 October 2023, entitled 'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever', Hebrews chapter 13.

## **Adult Bible Class**

The Adult Bible Class, led by Rev. Watterson, meets weekly prior to the morning service, with adults and young people attending on a regular basis. The topic for the year was 'Read Scripture'. Rev. Watterson provides helpful study notes to encourage familiarity with the Old Testament Scriptures. On the first Sabbath of each month the class takes the form of a missionary prayer meeting praying for mission work at home and abroad. Session continues to be encouraged by the members' participation in prayer.

## **Prayer, Bible Study, Women's Fellowship**

The evening service is preceded by a short prayer meeting attended by up to seven persons.

The Wednesday evening Midweek Meeting is attended by eight adults. The format is a short Bible study and a time for prayer. The studies are taken turn-about by Rev. Watterson and Mr Watson. Rev. Watterson has been reading through John's Gospel chapters 13-21, initially making use of Sinclair Ferguson's book 'Lessons from the Upper Room'. More recently he has begun studies in 2 Timothy chapter 3. Mr Joe Watson leads a study on the Tabernacle on alternate weeks. These meetings are spiritually encouraging and a spirit of prayer is evident among those who attend with prayer offered not only for our own denomination but also for International ministries beyond it including the Persecuted Church.

Members of the Women's Fellowship have had opportunity to meet on a number of occasions during the year enjoying fellowship and activities together. In June Mrs Watterson stepped down from the Woman's Fellowship Central Committee and the Synod Mission Committee, Irish Section.

Session thanks the ladies of the congregation who in August hosted a farewell lunch after morning worship for Lydia and Grace who were leaving for further education. A very tasty meal was enjoyed by the members of the congregation.

## **Outreach**

A monthly youth club meeting for our young people and others from outside the congregation continues. Our own young people have also been attending a monthly joint CY, combining with young people from the Dromara, Dromore and Lisburn congregations. Our young people also attend the monthly meetings of the Eastern Presbytery CY. Session is pleased with their attendance at these meetings.

Two young people, Lydia Watterson and Abel Bajko, attended and benefitted from the Senior Camp in July. Lydia also attended camp reunion in February.

## **Missionary Interest**

The workers and work of Mission and Evangelism both at home and abroad is continually brought before the congregation with intercessory prayer offered from the pulpit, and in other settings and meetings. We hosted a deputation meeting in October, and the speaker Mr Asaf Pelled a missionary with International Mission to Jewish People gave a discourse on 'The Gospel in the Feast of Tabernacles', one of the Old Testament Jewish Feasts. Invitations were distributed in the Anahilt area and to the local Churches, and the meeting was very well attended by many visitors from the district and was of great interest to those who attended. Session notes that there continues to be a deep prayerful interest by our members in the work of Mission at home and abroad. Lydia Watterson spent a week working with Gospel Literature Outreach in Prague, Czech Republic, in August.

## **Congregational Committee**

The Session is thankful to God for the conscientious work of the Congregational Committee throughout the year. We appreciate those who ensure that we meet for worship in warm, comfortable and safe surroundings. We are grateful to our Treasurer for the careful administration of our finances.

The Committee are currently considering maintenance and repair work to the Church Hall, and it is hoped that this work will be carried out early in the New Year.

The Session also recognise that the exterior grounds and graveyard are also maintained in a neat and tidy condition and are thankful to all those involved in this work.

## **Exhortation**

It is very commendable that the congregation has again met the various financial targets for the year set by Synod. Session thank the members for their continued generous financial support and also for their generous support of other missions and appeals.

The Session also thanks those members who as magazine agents carry out this useful service on behalf of the congregation. We are also thankful for our precentor who leads us in our praise and those involved in the work of the youth club meetings.

Session commends our members for their attendance, faithfulness and loyalty to the ministry and work in Bailiesmills.

As we enter another New Year it is the prayer of Session that all our members will be built up in their faith and continue to know and exhibit God's blessing in their lives day by day. "...my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labour is not in vain." 1 Corinthians 15:58

Joe Watson

Clerk of Session