



ANNUAL REPORT 2023



HOLYWOOD BAPTIST CHURCH

MAKING JESUS KNOWN

PASTORS

Alistair McNiece



Another year, another Annual Church Meeting, another pastor's report! It's hard to believe that this is the 16th time I've sat down to write my brief piece for the Annual Report. Where have the years gone? As always, as we look back at another year of church life, we have so much for which to be thankful to God.

We have had many opportunities to reach out to the local community with the message of the Gospel, as we continue to seek to 'Make Jesus Known'. The Holiday Bible Club and Summer Soccer attracted great numbers of children and young people and 'Adventure to Bethlehem' saw many from the local community come into the building. We have been able to help refugees and asylum seekers living in Hollywood, both in practical ways, and through our English Classes which have been attended by people from several different nations including, Afghanistan, Iran, Syria, Ukraine, Bangladesh, Poland, Eritrea and Colombia. GriefShare has provided a valuable ministry to people in the community who have suffered bereavement.

All of these ministries, along with the regular activities in our church - crèche, Junior Church, Ignite, Friday Club, Men's and Women's Groups, Seniors - have required the commitment and dedication of a large number of volunteers. Each Sunday, teams look after welcome, music, refreshments, prayer, sound and IT. Too many to attempt to name them all, but I want to take this opportunity to thank them for their service which is often unseen but very much appreciated by us all.

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I'm also grateful, as always, to my fellow elders for their fellowship and support, and to the deacons who faithfully make sure that the church is managed smoothly and efficiently. My thanks too to Aaron for all his hard work. It is a privilege and pleasure to serve alongside him.

As we see our society become increasingly secular and godless, it is easy to be discouraged and to wonder whether we are making much impact on the town. Paul's words of encouragement to the early believers in Corinth are still as important for us today.

“Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the lord is not in vain” 1 Cor.15: 58

Aaron Williamson



Let me add my 'amen' to Alistair's words and echo my thanks to all who have served in the last year. Let me also thank Alistair for his tireless efforts for the life of the church.

Alistair has outlined many of the events for which we will remember 2023 and we have much of be thankful for. We also realise that there is much more that happened in the spaces between the big events of the church calendar. The Spirit has been at work in people's lives. People have loved Jesus in their hearts, trusted Him through difficulties, pointed others to Him in spoken and unspoken ways. People have forgiven others, helped others, been kind to one another.

There have been many God-glorifying moments that we have already forgotten because they seemed so inconsequential to us but what brings Him honour is not primarily the big events but the little acts of service (what makes the big events so meaningful are the countless little acts of service that it takes to make them happen).

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Then of course there are the moments that we will be glad to forget because we have all acted in ways that have brought Him dishonour in the last year. We are thankful for grace. That brings Him glory too, though we must never presume upon His grace.

Every year is filled with its highs and lows; moments to rejoice in, moments to grieve and moments that we'll just plain forget ever happened. It all is part of God's 'tapestry of grace' that He weaves in the life of a church and in each of us.

I am so thankful for the family of selfless servers we have in Hollywood Baptist who serve our King striving, albeit imperfectly, for humility, selflessness and love.

TREASURER

Angus Biggerstaff



The ongoing conflicts between Russia / Ukraine and now Israel /Gaza have not helped most economies recover from the Covid pandemics but thankfully inflation has reduced and with Stormont back perhaps pressure on living costs will continue to reduce.

Nevertheless, our Church members have continued with their generosity and we should be thankful to God for our relatively peaceful living conditions and His goodness to us.

For 2023 our Income was £233,195 and our Expenditure was £224,213 so that indicates a positive situation and the detail of that is shown in the audited year end accounts.

As in previous years the finances for the Church were mainly protected by most using monthly debit transfer and the willingness of many to allow us to recover Gift Aid from HMRC.

The quarterly payments from HMRC are a major part of our income and therefore if you haven't already signed up then please prayerfully consider if that would suit you. Also, if your financial situation or address, has changed, please let me know to avoid unexpected letters from HMRC.

During 2023 the total membership was maintained at 126 and our giving was slightly below that for last year at £163,267.

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In addition, we received £38,278 from HMRC, £11,650 for Asia Link plus £20,000 as a result of the very kind offer of 2 for 1 from a Church family. The details of the giving are shown on the year end accounts but in summary:

INCOME		EXPENDITURE	
General	154372	Mission & Evangelism	22986
Special Offer	20000	Asia Link	13075
Gift Aid	38278	IF Loans	7500
Building Fund	7420	Staff & Administration	97234
Other	1475	Premises	15918
Asia Link	11650		
<i>Total</i>	233195		2242113

You may recall from last year that we budgeted to repay £65,000 against the Interest Free Loans but we were able to increase that to £75,000. The membership, and in particular, the family who gave the special offer early in 2023 have our sincere thanks for the generosity that enabled that to happen.

Looking to 2024 we have set a budget to reflect an income lower than that for general giving in 2023, since the special offer was a one off, and the detail of the budget will be given at the AGM.

The debt within the interest free loans was £110,000 at the start of 2023 but reduced to £35,000 by the end of the year and it is anticipated that we should be free of debt by mid-2024.

Please feel free to discuss any queries you might have with me directly and lastly my thanks again go the Graham for his oversight and to Anne Baird who kindly continued as our Auditor.

SECRETARY



Gary Robb

For various reasons we had a much smaller team of deacons during 2023. Those that were on the Diaconate did a great job at keeping the church open and functioning during the year, and we owe them all a great deal of thanks!

Many thanks again to Carol Craig who deftly creates and manages all the rotas for the weekly operation of the church and coordinates the bookings for the use of the church by our community and many other groups.

It continues to be a privilege to serve as Church Secretary within Hollywood Baptist, and to be able to take a more involved role assisting in the day to day running of the church. If you would like to help out more in the church and serve as a deacon, please either speak to one of the deacons or myself. Please pray for the Pastors, Elders and Deacons as we seek God's guidance in how we seek to serve Him in making Jesus known in Hollywood.

WORSHIP

Jason McFerran



Do you ever ask yourself why we sing in church? Why we spend a good proportion of our Sunday services and other church meetings singing songs? The first song that appears in the bible is the Song of Moses in Exodus 15, where Moses and the Israelites broke into singing after safely crossing the Red Sea. It was a natural way for them to give thanks to God in a collective corporate way. The psalms are full of songs and encourage us to sing to God.

Psalm 95

1 Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. 2 Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song.

Jesus himself sang with His disciples just before he went to pray on the Mount of Olives. And of course, Paul encourages us to sing to the Lord:

Ephesians 5

19 speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, 20 always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Singing with other believers allows us to join together to worship our God; we are singing “to the Lord”. It should be a natural thing for us to do, just like Moses and the Israelites. Cont...

God takes delight in hearing us sing, and it's not necessarily because it sounds melodic, but because He delights in his children singing His praise, communicating with Him and worshiping Him; in the same way as He does when we pray to Him.

Singing worship songs is also an opportunity to encourage ourselves and each other. As we sing we are being reminded of who God is, what he has done for us through Jesus, and that His Spirit is working in those who have put their trust in Him. The repetitive nature of singing songs each week, getting to know them by heart, means they will remain with us long after the service ends. It is so important that our worship songs are full of biblical truth. The words we sing, particularly since they are put to music, will come to our memory and be a source of comfort, encouragement and strength when we need them. Technology also enables us to listen to songs anytime and anywhere, as we drive the car or go for a walk. Let's tap into those resources and make the most of them.

So let me encourage you to sing praise to God. Whether you are musical, or not, whether you think you have a good voice, or not, God delights in your worship. It is such an encouragement to those of us who stand on stage to hear and see the church worshipping together.

We are blessed in Hollywood Baptist Church to have so many gifted singers and musicians who lead us each week. We also have those who keep the technical side working at the desks on the balcony, looking after all things audiovisual. None of these are easy jobs, so on your behalf I would like to thank them for their work each week.

There is always room for more singers, musicians, and technical folks. So if you want to join the team or find out more, please speak to me or anyone else you know is involved. It would be particularly good to get some more of our young people involved.

Please continue to pray for us. It is our prayer that we can help people to worship, that we can point to Jesus and in no way be a distraction. Thank you for your encouragements.

PRAYER



Graham Speers

There is power in the name of Jesus and we warmly invite you to join with us in the prayer room each Sunday after the morning service.

We give thanks to our awesome God “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weakness but one who in every aspect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in times of need “Hebrews ch. 4 v 15-16.

It is our privilege to pray with you and support you in prayer. Your needs and requests will be held in the strictest of confidence.

CRECHE



Pauline Blair

Creche currently has a small group of around 8 volunteers helping out on a weekly basis. Two volunteers are on the rota each week.

Creche numbers have been small over the last year ranging from no children to 2 children. There was a large shift of children from crèche into Junior church over COVID and we haven't really had any young families attend on a regular basis over the last year.

Creche is held in the purpose built crèche room and children tend to play with the toys provided or are read books from the library within the crèche room. Please pray that numbers will grow in the months ahead.

As I am now involved in leading in Junior Church, I think this is the right time to step down from leading crèche if someone is able and willing to take on this role. I have thoroughly enjoyed leading crèche for the past 8 years or so but I feel that the time is right to step down with both my children now being in Junior Church.

FRIDAY CLUB



Alan Mitchell

'Friday Club' started up just over a year ago and runs for blocks of 5-6 weeks followed by short breaks. It is very encouraging to have around 30-35 enthusiastic and well-behaved primary school children attending regularly. The evening starts with children arriving early for our very popular and competitive 'Challenges'. The winners of each challenge compete to be crowned champion for the evening, with the grand 'Champion of Champions' contested for a trophy at the end of each block.

The remainder of the programme is a mixture of spiritual content and lively games. Each block follows a theme for the Bible stories, with songs, memory verse and quiz to reinforce the lessons taught. There is a break for a welcome snack, and prizes are given to those you are able to recite the memory verse. Our aim is for the children to enjoy all that goes on at 'Friday club' and for them to go home having learned Bible truth that can change their lives. Some come from our own church or other churches, but quite a proportion come from a non-church background.

Thank you for your prayers. Please continue to pray with us that, amidst all the fun and excitement, the Holy Spirit would bring little ones to faith in Jesus, and that those who already know Him would be encouraged and strengthened in their faith.

JUNIOR CHURCH



Leanne Dunlop, Stuart and Philippa Harper

We are so thankful for the children who are part of our church family - it is a joy to see them running out to Junior Church so enthusiastically each Sunday! At the moment, we usually have 20-30 children each week and they are a lovely group to spend time with. Each week they engage with worship through action songs and learn Bible truths through verses, activities, prayers, stories and crafts. We spend some time together as a whole group and then divide up into 3 age groups for a short time to delve a bit further into the Bible content. It has been particularly encouraging recently to see a growing number in our youngest age group.

We are also so thankful for the faithful and creative group of Junior Church leaders and helpers who give of their time and their talents each Sunday! Around 25 of them each take it in turns (once a month) to prepare and teach the children in a variety of ways.

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This year, Benny & Jayne McKeown stepped aside from overall leadership of Junior Church, having served faithfully in this way for many years. We are so grateful for their commitment over the years (particularly all the home videos during COVID lockdowns!) and thankful that Benny is still part of the team! HUGE THANKS to you both!

Since September, we've had a few new leaders and helpers stepping up to join us on the team and we've also started using a new online curriculum resource called 'The Gospel Project.' With a mix of videos, verses, fun activities and teaching ideas to get us all thinking, the focus is on a Christ-centred, chronological approach to the Bible.

So far, we've looked at how creation glorifies God, how creation was ruined, how God's rescue plan began with Abraham and his ancestors and how God was continuously faithful as His people were rescued from Egypt, wandered in the wilderness and learnt more about what it meant to live as God's people and worship Him.

It was great to take part in the annual Family Carol Service in December and we were very proud (if that's allowed?!) of how well the children sang the beautiful songs that Philippa taught and for those who spoke so well in delivering the readings. We combined our final practice with a Christmas party, which was a lovely way to finish Junior Church for the year. What a great bunch!

Our hope and prayer is that the children would more than just learn the stories, but that they would learn what it means to know and love the God of the stories! Do keep praying for this aspect of church life – many thanks for all your support.

HOLIDAY BIBLE CLUB



Aaron Williamson

Jungle Club arrived in August of 2023 in Holywood Baptist. Due to the creative talents of many in our church family we were able to transform the Minor Hall into a jungle paradise to which the children were transported each morning. The boys and girls were introduced to many of the animals in the Bible, through which they heard of the big story of the Bible where God redeems a rebellious humanity through faith in His Son.

Too many people were involved to thank them all: from the snacks, puppets, to games, registration, music and the lessons and much more. We even had some of real jungle animals join us on the Thursday to introduce the children to the wonders of God's creation.

We do have an amazing God and our world is evidence of that. We continue to pray that God will work in the hearts and lives of the boys and girls we come in contact with that they would come to know Him personally.

YOUTH WORK



James Stevenson

2023 was another blessed year for Ignite, for the young people and for us as leaders. We have been so encouraged by the young people's dedicated attendance and their engagement with the Scriptures and activities. We've been looking at the life of Abraham and the book of Acts this year, and through both topics we've been seeing how our God is faithful to His people and to His promises.

We have had a few changes in the leadership team this year. Jonny and Jill Michael have joined the team and have been an excellent addition! They've been very willing to "muck in" with all aspects of Ignite life, and we're very grateful for them. 2023 also saw the departure of Clara Totten, which was a big loss to the team. I'd like to publicly thank Clara for her hard work and dedication to Ignite over the years, and wish her all the best in this exciting new chapter of her life

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In May 2023, we had Chris Boucher from the Big House along to deliver the Big House's "Shaken" course. This course is founded on the knowledge that life is not always easy, particularly for young lives! It focuses on giving young people a biblical basis for standing firm in the trials of life, with coping mechanisms and Scriptural examples of how to deal with unsettling times.

Chris was engaging and the content was excellent, exactly what was needed, especially coming to exam time! Chris is returning in April/May 2024 to deliver the follow on "Steady" course, and we are very much looking forward to it.

Our annual team to Carrickmacross was also very successful. A team of 10 of us, along with Colin and his squad of young people from the area, put on our superhero costumes and ran the Holiday Bible club in the church. It was a true joy to be back, seeing familiar faces and new ones along, all hearing from God's Word, how He loves them and wants relationship with them.

Our youth events in the evenings in Carrickmacross were also very well received. Several of the young people who attended the youth events also helped with the Holiday Bible Club in the morning, so it was great to build relationships with them throughout the day. The teens were enthusiastic as usual, and very attentive to the talks. The young people are such an encouragement, and we pray that each of them would come to know and love God. Please continue to pray for the work in Carrickmacross.

The Ignite Weekend 2024 was a blast! It was a great time of fellowship and strengthening of relationships between us as a group and individually with the Lord. Our speaker this year was Ryan Gray, a good friend of mine, who spoke very practically from the letter to the Philippians. We are very grateful for a good weekend, for safety and for the Word spoken to us. We pray that God would continue to use what was learned in our lives. Also, a massive thanks to Ken, Sadie and Loretta for keeping us well fed all weekend, it was excellent as usual!

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Looking forward, we'd very much value your prayers for the remainder of the year. Please pray for wisdom for us as leaders, and for continued zeal and energy! Pray for the kids and us as leaders as we seek to grow together in our relationship with God. Planning has also begun for Carrickmacross 2024, so please pray that God would be glorified in our planning and execution of this mission.

As a youth leadership team, Jonny, Jill, Andy and I really appreciate all your support, and thank you for your continued prayers as we seek to make Jesus known.

LOCAL OUTREACH



Graham and Angela Speers

I am always challenged in my own life and walk as I read 2 Kings Ch 7 v 9 “ We are not doing right. This is a day of good news, and we are keeping it to ourselves.”

Our heart and passion are to share Jesus with people in our local community and we praise God for the many opportunities he gives us to do that. As we look back on 2023, we thank God for his faithfulness to us as a couple for the energy and strength, safety and placing love in our hearts to share Jesus with dear folks who are without Christ, without hope and travelling on a dark path that leads to eternal separation from God.

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The outreach of Storehouse and Manna Table takes place each week, this brings us into contact with many people in our town, struggling with life, poverty, brokenness and in many cases addictions. We praise God that so often the offer of practical help opens the door to give us the opportunity and privilege to share the reason for the joy, peace, and hope that we have in Jesus. Many families in the town who we have been able to help over the years and build friendships with, have felt they can trust us to come alongside them to listen, help and pray with them when difficult and hard times come. It has been said people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. A massive thank you to Stuart, Philippa, Sam, Beth, and Danny for faithfully collecting the food from Sainsbury's, we so appreciate your help.

We give thanks for the opportunity in the past year to go into two local schools and partner with Amazing Journey. Over 50 children requested a copy of the Bible and it was great to be able to meet with these families and invite them along to the Carol Service. Many thanks to all who helped with this outreach, such a joy to see our Church family working together for his Glory.

The Warm Welcome outreach ran up to Easter and although numbers attending were small, some good friendships were made and opportunities to share Jesus. One man who attended faithfully each week, is now attending his local church each Sunday and came along to a Christianity Explored type course with us. Thanks to all who helped, your presence and faithfulness was a real blessing.

A new outreach this past year was Adventure in Bethlehem, what a massive blessing and encouragement it was. Thanks to everyone involved, I think everyone was touched at the wonder of the birth of Jesus and so moving, as we bowed at the stable scene and in our hearts as we worshipped the Saviour.

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Thanks to David and Debbie and the team who cooked and delivered 35 Christmas dinners on Christmas day, we plan to visit in February each of those who received a meal and would appreciate your prayers.

Street Pastors continue each Saturday night in Hollywood, generally the town is quiet, Seapark can be busy in the summer months, and we give thanks to the many young people who are very happy to engage with us as we build relationships with them. We have had some divine appointments with people clearly under conviction who have sought us out to speak with us and on many occasions happy for us to pray with them.

The group Reality helped with the outreach on May Day and the Christmas Light Switch On, this is a great opportunity to engage in conversation. Please prayerfully consider joining with us at the High Street Church, there is a role for everyone.

Can I encourage you all to be sensitive to the prompting of the Holy Spirit in your life as you speak with family members, work colleagues, friends, sport team members etc. The New Testament calls us to proclaim the good news of Jesus. "I tell you open your eyes and look at the fields, cries Jesus to his followers they are ripe for harvest. Even now." John 4 v35-36.

Thank you for your prayers and please continue to pray for the mission field of Hollywood.

STREETREACH

Graham Speers



A small team from our church go out into Belfast City Centre on the second Tuesday of each month (weather permitting). We leave the church building at 7.00pm and return around 9.30/10.00pm. Our hope and prayer is that by our actions we will demonstrate God's love and compassion to those living rough on the streets of Belfast. We are very aware of our weakness, and we can't fix the homeless problem in our city, but for that small moment in time as we take time to speak, take an interest, find out the person's name, shake their hand, sit beside them on the street they feel valued, loved and cared for.

So many thank us for just stopping to take time with them and treating them with respect and dignity. We carry hygiene packs, water, chocolate, coats, hats and gloves. Many are happy to receive a copy of God's word or some of the books and literature we carry and often they welcome us to pray with them.

Please come and join us you would be most welcome. Please uphold us in pray for our safety and divine appointments. Many nights we come home heavy hearted, some of the lovely folks we meet share their story of hurt and pain and so often it breaks your heart.

Many thanks to our faithful helpers who hold a special place in their hearts for the homeless and which manifests itself when we meet these dear people on the street.

GRIEFSHARE



Judith Hill, Gayle McKee, Peter and Heather Barbour

Griefshare is a 13-week grief recovery support group. It aims to provide a safe, comforting place where participants can talk with others about their grief. It aims to provide support, direction and guidance firmly anchored in the hope of the Gospel.

The Griefshare Team at Hollywood continues to be Gayle, Judith, Peter and Heather. This year's cycle began in November and initially started with 6 participants from Strandtown Baptist and 1 from the local area.

However, the nature of the focus means that it is sometimes difficult for participants to decide if they are emotionally ready to engage with the programme until they experience it. This year only 2 of the initial group felt able to continue with the sessions preceding Christmas. The special pre- Christmas session "Surviving the Holidays" in early December, was well-attended by 10 people.

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However, although most of those were also not ready to commit to the weekly programmes, and some previous participants felt unable to continue, we were blessed by having one new member who intends to join us for the remainder of this year.

We have a very open time of sharing and reflection during each weekly session. The materials used in the previous programme had been completely revised, and therefore it has still been a very valuable time for both the team-members and the participant. We have experienced a real sense of leading by the Holy Spirit in our discussions and sharing each week and we realise that this is very much a result of our own prayers and especially of the prayer support team and other church members who faithfully pray for this ministry.

We extend our grateful thanks to all involved and would encourage others to speak to any of the team regarding joining with this year's group or indeed to begin to pray about attending next year.

SENIORS

Alex and Mavis Larkin



We thank God for the fellowship and blessing that we all have received in coming along on the first Tuesday of each month to share a meal and enjoy conversation with each other. We are thankful for the many individuals who help by providing “varSeniorious” types of delicious homemade soups and the food we have on the special occasions at Christmas, Easter etc..

We thank all who come and bring a short devotional thought and give thanks for all present and remember those who are ill or have prior appointments. Our numbers have been very consistent and are usually in the 25 to 35 range, made up of church members, their friends, and neighbours and we would make welcome anyone else who would care to join us.

This section of church life has provided a means of getting together for many who can feel forgotten or lonely and it can also give an opportunity to care and share with each other.

We thank the team for all their hard work, setting the tables up, serving the food and clearing up afterwards. Without them none of this would be possible.

We also like to thank those whose generous gifts have made it possible for us to donate to Faith in Action Ukraine, The Big House Hollywood, and Asia link sewing machines. We also thank the church, pastors and oversight for making this possible.

LADIES WALK AND CRAFT



Gayle McKee

Ladies craft and walking group meet the first Monday in the month between 7-9pm. It's a social group with a warm fellowship and everyone is welcome, young and old. The crafts are simple and designed so that everyone can participate. The walking group head out for approximately one hour and return so the whole group have tea, coffee and biscuits together.

SUMMER SOCCER SCHOOL



Jonny Michael

The summer offered Hollywood Baptist Church the opportunity to use football to engage with the children of Hollywood and spread the Gospel message. This was the first year that the church utilised Hollywood Rugby Club to deliver the four-day camp and it was well received.

The programme took place between Monday 31st July and Thursday 3rd August and was open to boys and girls from Primary 3 to Year 8. A team of over thirty volunteers took responsibility for coaching, registration, refreshments, first aid, car park duty, and prayer. The team were able to deliver four nights of fun football sessions and a gospel message to the group each evening. On average there were 70 children in attendance each night.

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The programme provided wonderful opportunities to build relationships and deliver the message of salvation to the children of Hollywood and their families. A massive thank you to Craig, Stuart, Andy and Ken for sharing the message each evening.

On the Friday evening the church building was full of excited footballers and holiday bible club participants along with their family members. This was a celebration of the week and concluded with a prize giving and a barbecue. Thanks go to everyone who support the evening in a variety of capacities.

The football outreach programme could not be delivered without the dedication and passion of the members of Hollywood Baptist Church. Their faith, enthusiasm and friendliness have made it possible to provide a nonthreatening environment as an entry point to evangelism and discipleship. The programme has provided children with the opportunities to engage with football and develop their skills but more importantly it has provided occasions to introduce them to the gospel and make an impact on their hearts.

Thank you to everyone involved and to everyone who has supported us in prayer. We look forward to continuing to build on this work this summer and reaching out to the community of Hollywood.

MISSION ACTION TEAM



Jeff Stevenson

The role of the Mission Action Team is to seek to-

- Raise awareness of what God is doing both locally and globally
- Encourage prayerful and financial support for Global Mission
- Challenge church members to be actively involved in mission

Throughout 2023 MAT have endeavoured to fulfil this role.

Prayer is vital to any work for God; indeed, it has been said that “Prayer is the work.” Throughout 2023 the church has taken up the challenge to pray for various faith groups by participating in designated times of prayer for Muslims and Hindus. This has been well supported and the team thank those who have got behind efforts. God is moving in these areas, please continue to be informed and pray.

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Our mission partners are: Mark Grant-Jones, Simeon* and Sarah*, Walter Maguire, Leanne Dunlop, Sally Patty (associate) and Angie Minion (Associate). We have also maintained links with Andrew Elliott (Baptist Missions) as he waits for God's leading for his next steps.

With the conclusion of the ministry of Sandes, Gary Robb has stepped aside as a mission partner. Whilst we are sad at the end of this ministry, we can rejoice at the number of lives that have been impacted for God through it, over many years. We can be certain that no work carried out for God is in vain and are thankful for the blessing it has been to many. We wish Gary God's richest blessing in the coming days.

Our partner churches remain: Église Protestante Évangélique de La Garenne-Colombes, France and Carrickmacross Baptist Church, Co. Monaghan, ROI. At the AGM the church was informed that a further church was to be added to this partner list: - The Baptist Church in Turnu Magurele in southern Romania. There are 5 satellite churches in the surrounding villages attached to the church in TurnuMagurele. Three Pastors are responsible for the ministry there, George Stancu, Costel Paraschiv and Florin Paraschiv. Three teams from the church have visited the Romanian churches since 2018, George and his wife Ligia have also participated in a church prayer meeting via zoom, as well as being guests at our Mission Weekend in November.

Funding has been provided to support Baptist Missions.

The Bangor Missionary Convention was promoted by the Church again this year, many members were in attendance.

Various Missionary speakers came to the church and shared how God is leading and working in their lands. These included folk from Frontiers, Sandes and our Mission Partner Andrew Elliott.

In relation to short term mission, it has been another encouraging year. Many of our folk, young and older, took part in camps and outreach, throughout Ireland and Europe, during the summer holidays. All benefitted greatly from the experience. A team from Ignite participated in a week of outreach alongside the church at Carrickmacross.

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A team from the church also went to Carrickmacross at the start of June to help with outreach at the town fair. It was a very busy event and many people were contacted. The team participated in the Sunday morning service in the church. It was a great time of service and fellowship in the Gospel.

Our Missionary weekend took place at the end of November. This year our focus was on the Balkans and Eastern Europe, with a particular emphasis on Romania. George and Ligia Stancu from Turnu Magurele, Romania were our guests for the weekend. On Saturday morning we heard about life as a Christian in communist times, opposition from the Orthodox Priests to their work and about the difficulties and blessings of their current work for God. George shared God's word to us on Sunday morning. On Sunday evening the focus widened to include reports on the work in Serbia, Moldova, North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro as well as an up-to-date report on the work throughout Romania.

On Saturday evening we were able to bring together as many of our Mission Partners as possible. It was great to have an opportunity to listen as they shared about their work and to pray together informed prayers for them.

The year ended with a Christmas appeal for Andy Hepburn and the work he is leading in Laos. Generous support was given and Andy was very appreciative.

MAT would encourage anyone to come and speak to any of us with your comments or ideas. The team members are Aaron Williamson, Audrey Lockhart, Alan Mitchell, Christine Thompson and Jeff Stevenson.

We would encourage you to maintain your interest in mission and be blessed as you see what God is doing throughout this world. On our doorstep and to the ends of the earth.

MISSION PARTNERS



Sally Patty

CHRISTIAN UNION IRELAND

2023 was a varied year with some highs and lows on the family front as well as so much happening with the mission of CUI - 'Students reaching students for Christ'. I truly thank you for continuing to uphold not only myself but my family and the ministry of CUI.

In CUI January to March is mission season with all the team involved in missions in their region as well as helping with those around the island. Alongside this Equip:Leaders training events for CU leaders were happening in Belfast and Dublin just before Easter. Alongside this the Communications team were producing resources – paper and web to equip the staff to train students. Over the summer we toured our new resources and display stands to Summer Madness, New Horizon, Kinfire and Bangor Worldwide to connect with the wider church.

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The CUI Board began a second round of recruitment for the Director of CUI in early 2003 and Chris McBurney (former Northern Team Leader) was appointed in June 2023. His first few weeks in the role involved representing CUI at the IFES World Assembly (once every 4 years) in Jakarta, Indonesia. He travelled there along with 2 students. Three members of the CUI Board were also there in various capacities along with 2 x-CUI Directors.

Chris reflected on the trip: ‘The balance between those striving to stay present in Asia and North Africa amid the political pressures against Christians, while also hearing of the tens of thousands coming to know in CUs in other parts of Africa. I’m so grateful for the extended time with so many brothers and sisters in Christ over meal times and breaks and those memories of worshiping with 180+ countries will never leave me’

In the meantime, Alison Williams (Southern Team Leader) and myself were more than happy to step back from our extra responsibilities of the preceding 12 months. We look forward to seeing Chris’ vision for CUI unfold and the fresh energy he brings to the role of Director.

The CUI team had a number of changes throughout the year – first Lizzie Irvine went on Maternity leave (baby Lydia arrived safe and well). We welcomed back former Galway Staff Worker, Helen Blakey to cover part of Lizzie’s maternity – EQUIP related work and Sarah Anderson (Relay) stepped up to look after the rest. Olivia Anderson was appointed as Belfast Staff Worker just before Easter and then in the summer we said farewell to 3 staff workers – Hannah Healey (Cork), Isabel Quinlan (Waterford) and Chris McGuire (Dublin).

In August we welcomed Nathan Reynolds (Dublin) and Tiwani Akinlabi (Cork) to the staff team along with a new intake of Relay Workers – 9 in total with all the regions having at least one Relay and one based in the office working on Communications. Finally in September, Hollie Tagle who led the International Student Ministry left to become a student again.

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For EQUIP 2023 we were forced to find a new venue and Lorne Estate welcomed 120+ students, plus staff, volunteers and speakers (inc. Maurice McCracken as the main speaker). The aim of the Conference is to 'fire and fuel' CUs for a year of mission. The range of topics was on anything from our Revelation bible readings to how to run various CU outreach events. It's become such a unique time for us as students from across the island come together and provides a real sense of unity in Christ across the island. Plans are in place for EQUIP 2024 with a return to Castlewellan after a successful appeal to be able to hire a marquee to increase numbers and the council allowing groups to camp again. Bookings are open now and the dates are Monday 26th- Friday 30th August cui.ie/students/equip.

In Belfast 'Carols in the Kingspan' became 'Carols at St George's Market' as the event was moved into the centre of Belfast and closer to students. It was such an encouragement to see about 1200 students coming together to sing carols and hear from John Mark Mullan about the how Jesus being God with us offers us a Freedom and a hope. It was such an encouraging evening which set us up well for the Belfast City-wide mission ('Freedom') in Jan/Feb 24. This is a week of mission organised jointly by QUB, UUB and Stranmillis CUs.

I want to say thank you to Holywood Baptist Church for standing with me as I serve in this ministry. Please know that your prayers are valued by staff, students and myself. Thank you so much for your prayers and support too as I have journeyed with my parents as they have both received cancer diagnosis. We are truly thankful to be on the other side of hospital treatment for both and pray for their continued recovery. The downside of all this activity and life stuff has been the effective on my own health. I continue to fight a persistent cough but after 6 months I am thankful that my energy levels are returning to normal.



Leanne Dunlop

SCRIPTURE UNION NI

Scripture Union has a presence in around 120 countries globally (fun fact – that’s more countries than McDonalds is in!). Every several years the global umbrella of the organisation host a gathering of representatives from SU movements all around the world - to celebrate, give thanks, worship together, share ideas and stretch strategic thinking.

By the time you are reading this, I will have had the privilege of joining this gathering in Malaysia at the beginning of March! What a wonderful small glimpse and anticipation of Heaven, when people from all nations will worship the King we serve together around the world!

For SU locally, there has again been much to celebrate from the past 12 months. I could go on and on...but here’s just a few of the highlights...

- Around 1,000 volunteers leading over 30 camps and missions during the summer months, with many stories of children and young people both coming to faith and growing in faith in amazing ways. It has been particularly wonderful to see a growth in the amount of teenagers engaging with our missions and to hear such positive feedback from the SEN streams we run at New Horizon.
- Around 120 young leaders engaged with ‘Making Your Mark’ and ‘Base Camp’, providing opportunities for us to journey alongside them as they seek to be salt and light both in their school SU groups and on camp and mission teams during the summer.

Cont...

- Literally hundreds of P7 pupils benefitted from our 'It's Your Move' lessons in primary schools last May/June – with staff and local churches sharing about the changes, choice and challenges ahead...and the God who can be with them through this pivotal time of their lives as they prepare to move school.

We're all too aware that ministry is about so much more than the big numbers though and there are countless stories we could also share about the impact of individual primary schools using our SU group and RE resources, individual volunteers who serve so faithfully in both our schools and summer ministries, individual children and young people who blow us away by their responses in a prayer space in a school or a small group at a CSSM, or individual supporters who pray and give so faithfully to allow this work to continue.

As I also reported last year, we're very aware that the culture and context that we serve in can be increasingly challenging, so please continue to pray for wisdom as we seek to further enhance and develop our current ministries within the ever-changing context of N. Ireland today. Our desire is to play a hopeful and helpful part of whatever lies ahead – particularly when it comes to the place of Christianity in schools.

As part of this, we have been seeking to explore and develop the concept of chaplaincy in schools, through Rachel Tweedie's local role as 'Chaplaincy Support Coordinator', as well as through the ongoing work in our local schools through Caroline and Amy – our schools' workers for the North Down & Newtownards area. Do pick up their prayer news each month and pray for them!

Huge thanks, as always, to the Holywood Baptist Church family for all your prayers and support – both for me personally and for the various aspects of SU's ministry.



WALTER MAGUIRE

LIFT

2023 looked like a year when things were back to normal and there was increased interest in people volunteering to go on projects.

The world however is so unstable that plans, although carefully made, can be thwarted in an instant. Our project to the Galmi Hospital in Niger had to be cancelled due to the coup and subsequent unrest in the country. As a result of the coup, the hospital is struggling financially, as costs soar and the number of overseas volunteers has fallen.

Our team in Israel were on a boat ride on the Sea of Galilee on the last day of their project, when one of them received a text message, informing them about the attack from Gaza. We are thankful that after much communication with Embassies and airlines, that everyone was evacuated successfully.

Many of our projects are long term and we return each year, either to continue with construction work or to carry out much needed maintenance. One such project is to the CEF centre in Nazareth, where we have been involved in major redevelopment over the years and now return to support the work as they reach out to the Middle East. We returned this year to the nearby Nazareth Trust Hospital, where we carried out work at their “Nazareth Village,” a reconstruction of first century Nazareth, which attracts many visitors and is an amazing witness to Biblical history.

Cont...

Another example is the CEF centre in Poland, who last year were celebrating 30 years of CEF witness. We have built up a strong relationship with the workers there and it's always a joy to encourage them by helping maintain their premises.

We returned to the Good News Hospital in Madagascar and carried out much needed updates to the electrical systems, installing a new generator.

We had projects in Colombia and Zambia, as well as to a new destination, Malawi, which completed our year.

Many thanks again to Holywood Baptist church for your continued support and prayers for the work and witness of LIFT.



Carrickmacross Baptist

COLIN CREIGHTON

Dear Praying Friends, thank you for your continued interest in the Lord's work here in Carrickmacross. We have been blessed over the last new to have a lot of new folk from the community come and visit our church. It has put the capacity of our building under pressure, and we are in the season of exploring what the way forward is.

Your prayers are coveted for our family, our church family and the community of Carrickmacross, particularly for the following things:

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Support & Outreach Worker – Tim McFarland

Tim is working part time with the church and part time in a local coffee shop. Arlene and himself continue to be great blessing to the church family here. We are excited to see Tim's work and his role develop here in Carrickmacross as he seeks to support the ministry of the church and reach out in the community with the wonderful news of Jesus.

Tutor @ Crosslands Training Academy

I have been Tutoring for the last 9 years, it's wonderful to see young men and women training for all kinds of ministry in the Republic of Ireland and across Europe. I've been teaching short courses on ethics, gender and sexuality for those in ministry exploring these issues.

“Intents Summer Camp”

Working with other gospel centred churches in the area, a teenage summer camp was started in 2017. We run a junior and senior camp, there is also a student program aimed at leadership training. Alongside this we run a family program for children of leaders

Prayers for the Creightons & Carrick Baptist:

Tanya and I have been working in this church since the summer of 2011. It has been wonderful to see the Lord working in our church, in our family and in our community. Please join us in praying for God's continued blessing.



Église Protestante Évangélique de La Garenne-Colombes

KEITH BUTLER

The Lord continues to build his church in La Garenne-Colombes (a town of 30,000 in a north western suburb of Paris). We were delighted to continue the partnership with church interns Romuald Lasnes and Amélie and Olivier Maalouf. Romuald left the church in September 2023 in order to pursue a church plant project in the 11th district of Paris. Amélie has just begun a period of maternity leave.

3 young adults were baptised and 10 people became church members. We give thanks for two thanksgiving services for children of church members and three births expected over the first few months of 2024, but we long equally for spiritual new birth and growth.

Similarly, we long to reach out to the community that surrounds us. Several have become involved in a programme called « 1 day, 1 hour, 1 minute » where local inhabitants offer voluntary service to others. A local pastor visited in June to give an evangelistic talk on Blaise Pascal, and another came in November to speak about Vincent Van Gough's relationship with the Christian faith.

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The children's work continues to flourish. A bank holiday weekend in May saw an outdoor evangelism project in a local park, and October 31 saw our first 'Light Party', offering the children an alternative to Halloween activities.

The attitude in France towards religions in general and evangelicals in particular continues to feel one of suspicion, and the implications of a law against communitarianism with increased controls over religious groups came into operation last year. Nevertheless, relations with the local town authorities remain warm.

We thank you for your prayer and support and encouragement and please come and visit!



Mark Grant-Jones

ARMY CHAPLAIN

I am now Director of Training for Chaplaincy based in the Military Academy at Shrivenham. I have designed and deliver initial training for up to 20 UK chaplains a year. I also support the delivery of continual professional development and career courses for the Army, Navy and Airforce. I am also the lead for delivering training to four tranches of 15 Ukrainian chaplains. These are people of all denominations, including Baptists. They mostly come straight from the frontline and will have experience operating as Chaplains but this training forms part of their official graduation into the Armed Forces Chaplaincy.

Cont...

- Please pray for Ukraine.
- Please pray for the chaplains and their colleagues that they may be effective, faithful and honour God.
- Please pray for myself and my team as we look after the chaplains as well as teach.

The move away from Northern Ireland was hard but the work is unique and hopefully makes a difference to people's lives and the Kingdom. The hours are long, and the challenges are frequent, but this is my last job in the military, and I could not have chosen a more rewarding one. In particular, the opportunity to support new chaplains in their training is a true privilege.

There is also a significant pastoral focus as I look after all who come and study with us and I am currently studying myself with Spurgeon's Baptist College to be accredited as a Pastoral Supervisor with the aim of supporting Spiritual leaders in the demands of their ministries.

I am as always grateful to the rock-solid, sacrificial support of Sarah and the girls. I am also deeply grateful to belong to a faithful fellowship and thank you for the prayerful encouragement and service of the Church, Homegroup and the inspiration of all the mission partners in providing a wider context and encouragement. Whatever the world presents to us, God is sovereign, all powerful and faithful.



Andrew Elliot

BAPTIST MISSIONS

Thank-you for your on-going interest in our ministry and prayerful support. 2023 has been an eventful year, although not perhaps in the way we expected. A couple of visits to Spain in the first half of the year helped to start to refine what we might do if and when we return; the main plan is for us to work alongside the FIEIDE as a whole, helping with church-planting efforts which would entail training, strategizing and also pastoral support for church planters (who are often isolated). Where exactly we might be based and when we would return are as yet unknown.

And in some ways more in doubt after the second half of the year- especially from June onwards, my parents' health has significantly deteriorated- with several crises over the summer, both being in hospital at different times (and sometimes both at same time, but in different places which put a lot of strain on the family). They are more stable, but still very delicate.

On the home front, I have been helping in Dromore Baptist since September, and this will continue through first half of 2024. I continue to do deputation meetings on behalf of Baptist Missions, and we continue to be involved, albeit at a distance, with different things in Spain. Locally, our main involvement is with English language classes for the immigrant community, which has led to growing friendships. Rosalia especially has had many good visits/ conversations with some of the ladies.

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Family wise, Rebecca began studies at the Irish Baptist College in September. That has been very good for her. Natalie successfully finished her A-levels in June; as part of a gap year, she is preparing to go to South Africa to do a 4-month missionary and discipleship training with OM.

Thank you again for all your support.

Simeon and Sarah

ARAB WORLD MINISTRIES

We can thank God that He has sustained and increased the number of brothers and sisters from the Arabian Peninsula who are meeting together. Some old connections have been brought into the group, and I think of one man I met before COVID who joined recently and was soon baptised. One sister from a neighbouring country was also baptised.

My brother who writes and sings worship songs in a local modern style has produced two albums, and these have been shared widely. His songs are usually closely based on Psalms, and he wrote worship songs using the "Songs of Ascents" from Psalm 121 to 130.

There have also been some setbacks. Both of those baptised faced difficulties soon after. The brother was brought to a religious leader to expel the Christian spirit, but was unable to do it, so the family took a court case against him. The husband of the lady who was baptised found out and divorced her, and this is also going through the courts.

Some others working in the country knew of the group and tried to influence some of the brothers. It seems that being connected with or seen to be leading the group would have brought them funding from their home countries, but the attempt was rebuffed.

Cont...

Our youngest son was recently baptised, early one winter morning in the sea. (Even in winter the sea is not too cold!) There was another boy of his age also baptised; his parents are here to reach Pakistanis and one Pakistani man from a Muslim background was also baptised.

Our Syrian friends who were granted (legal) entry to Canada have been doing well. Their daughter has settled into school life and seems very happy when we talk to her. They had a son last year as well. They found a good Canadian church near where they live and are transitioning into it from the Arabic fellowship that we connected with to help process their application to migrate. They no longer have to worry about the religion that is written in their passports, and their daughter is not required to do Islamic studies in school now.

We were able to have Alistair visit us last January and spend some days talking and seeing some of the places in the city that we do not get around to visiting. There was a small cultural festival on at the time, and we were able to celebrate my ("Simeon's") birthday with some good Indian food. "Sarah's" parents visited us again late last year, and our older "children" came out to us during their Christmas breaks from university. Going to the airport to collect visitors is always a highlight. Although last year we passed 20 years since coming to this region, we still miss "home" and particularly family and friends.

"Sarah" continued to help the children of some friends through important exams last year. I had a very large incident at the company that I am responsible for, causing extensive loss and damage, more than anything I had seen in my entire career until now. This has been extremely stressful and set us back a long time, creating pressure from all the stakeholders.

We are grateful to the Hollywood Baptist family for praying for us and for the people that God is drawing to Himself in this land.



Angie Minion

THE BIG HOUSE

Thank you for all your prayerful, practical, and financial support of The Big House over the last year. Thank you for helping us to have impact on young people and bring them a glimpse of the love that God has for them & new knowledge of the help and hope that He can bring them.

The Big House Ireland exists to help young people know more of God's love and hope in their lives, especially when life is challenging. No matter who they are, or what they are facing in life. We look to achieve this through running value-led programmes in The Big House, youth groups, youth events and schools, and our counselling service, The Listening Space. We want our home, The Big House, to reflect good and prayerful home, and to be a place of help, healing, and hope for young people across Ireland.

We also want each young person that we have contact with to know that they are

MADE | KNOWN | LOVED | OF VALUE | WORTHY OF RESPECT.

Over the last year, we have been privileged to provide:

- Approx. 350 free counselling sessions for young people in The Listening Space.
- Retreats @The Big House for 143 ministry leaders/clergy.

Cont...

- Pastoral training and support for over 1000 youth and ministry leaders across Ireland.
- 140 youth sessions across Northern Ireland (youth groups / schools / social work groups / CEF, YFC & SU groups).

We have also provided Pastoral Support to SUNI's summer camps and missions programme, the Methodist Church in Ireland's Youth Weekend, Autumn Soul, and seminars at the Church of Ireland's Youth Festival, Summer Madness.

This included our Programme Worker, Chris, being at HBC's IGNITE for four weeks and taking them through our Shaken programme. I also did Shaken with the ROOTED group later in the year.

We are privileged to see God at work in all these aspects of our ministry work.

The Challenges

We have seen a continued increase in demand for our pastoral support and help over this year and are in no doubt that the young people in Northern Ireland face challenges like never before. If ever a new generation needed their adults and the church as a body to be available to help and to show them the reality of a present God who loves them and can help – it is now.

At the same time, we face financial challenges like never before. Funding has been very difficult to find. Salaries and running costs have become increasingly difficult to pay in 2023.

And yet, the work is far from done, and there are many more people to help and share God's love and hope with.

Please join us in praying that God will provide what is needed for our programmes to continue – and grow in 2024.

Cont...

The Big House Building Development

We were delighted to receive planning permission for a new accommodation block and multi-purpose room – both developments will allow us to realise the fullness of our vision and have youth groups to stay for residential at the house.

We now need someone to lead, and finances, to turn the development plans into reality & expand our programme work at the house!

The Listening Space has moved & says thank you HBC!

During 2023 The Listening Space moved from its Hollywood home in HBC's prayer room to two counselling rooms in Hollywood Family Trust. While we were sad to leave HBC, it was to accommodate a second counsellor and has given us more counselling capacity.

Thank you again for sharing this room with us for so long and all the practical and prayerful support that was given around these sessions. If you are aware of a young person who would appreciate a safe space to process challenges that they are facing, then please do let them know about The Listening Space.

For more info: www.thebighouse.org.uk/listening

Thank you for your support in this work with young people, and please keep praying for God to do immeasurably more than we could ask or imagine!



Turnu Magurele

GEORGE STANCU

First of all, we would like to say that we are truly blessed to be living and serving God in a country where Christians are free to express and manifest their faith. We are thankful to God that we can still speak to people about Christ, we can hold evangelism programs without being afraid that we might end up in jail or lose our jobs because of that.

Therefore, we want to take advantage of this blessing and in March, we organised several evangelism programs, in a village near Turnu Magurele (about 10 km away) called Traian. Every Saturday night, we invited non-believers to church to hear the good news of Salvation. We thank God for all those who responded positively and were part of the services. We pray that the message that has been shared will touch their hearts, will make them think about God's love and will convince them of their need for a Redeemer.

Still in March, during the first week, we held similar programs from Thursday to Sunday in the church from Rosiori, which I currently look after (as mentioned before, it is a church that we planted about 30 years ago; over the years, we have had a close relationship with our brothers and sisters from that town and, when their pastor retired last year, I took the responsibility to minister to them until God calls someone to serve there).

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Another work that we have been involved in the last 30 years is the children's programs which are held in 4 villages. Every week, someone in our church (Florin, his wife, Costel, his wife or myself) have meetings with the children from the village. We teach them Bible stories, sing with them, talk to them and prepare special activities on different occasions (Christmas, Easter, Mother's Day, etc). Most of these children come from disadvantaged families, whose parents have a low income, poor education, alcohol problems, sometimes there are cases of domestic violence, too.

We try to help these children as much as we can, being an emotional support for them, helping them with certain things they need (clothes, school supplies, even food) and offering them a free one-week camp in Zimnicea. We praise God for this amazing opportunity He has given us every year to spend a few days with these kids. Apart from teaching them about God's love, about His Son's sacrifice for us and The Holy's Spirit presence in the lives of those who accept Jesus as their Saviour, we consider the camp a unique occasion to witness to them what Christian life is.

However, we have realized that a few days in summer spent together is too little to create a close relationship with these kids and teenagers. That's why, a group of young people from the church in Bucharest where our children are now serving have had regular meetings with the teenagers from our area who were part of the camp; usually, these meetings are organised in Turnu Magurele and they include worship through singing, a message from the Bible, talks on different topics which are of high interest to teenagers.

Our prayer is that more young people will come to know the Lord, will build a strong relationship both with the leaders from Bucharest but also with each other, so that they will grow in their faith and be able to be witnesses in their families, too.

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During the winter months, in Segarcea and Lunca, the two villages where Costel serves, the service usually held during the week, took place in our brothers' and sisters' homes; it was a great opportunity to invite neighbours, relatives, friends to attend these meetings (which of course are less formal than the ordinary church services) and we have noticed that people who do not belong to our church find it more comfortable and feel less pressure to participate. We pray that God will continue to work in the hearts and minds of those who came to these meetings and we will see more people turn to the Lord and follow Him.

At the end of last year, we had a great opportunity to meet our brothers and sisters in Holywood Baptist, during a 3-day visit in November. We were blessed to share a few things about our ministry, about our vision regarding the work in this part of Romania and we were amazed to see their great support and love for our country and especially for the region we come from. We pray that our fellowship will continue to grow as more people from Holywood Baptist will visit our churches, thus being an encouragement for our congregation.

Personally, I am so thankful to God for the amazing Grace I have experienced in my ministry, for all the opportunities He has created for me to serve Him. I thank Him for Florin and Costel who have been such faithful servants and great helpers to me. God has also blessed us all with families that have supported us and got involved in different ways. We can't thank God enough for the way He has worked in the lives of our children who continue to serve Him in the place where they live now, but they still have a heart for the towns and villages where they grew up and want to be part of our ministry, too.

It is true that the area we live in is not the most attractive from many perspectives; it is a region where people do not think about God, their focus in life does not include worshipping God; very few people come to know the Lord, the churches are small in numbers, most members are old and there are very few cases where the entire family is Christian. However, we strongly believe that this is the place where God wants us to be His witnesses, to show His love and serve the members of our community. We have seen Him at work, we feel His protection every day and we continue to ask for His guidance in everything we do.