

Immanuel Presbyterian Church



Annual Report and statement of accounts

For year ending 31 December 2024

Minister's Letter

To all members of Immanuel

At the end of 2024 we were studying the book of Ecclesiastes on Sunday evenings. The book was probably written by King Solomon and it contains his observations on life in this fallen world 'under the sun'. And life in this fallen world is often perplexing, because things happen which puzzle us and which we can't explain.

In the first part of the book, Solomon tried to find meaning and purpose in his work and leisure. But it eluded him.

In the second part of the book, he said that there's a time for everything: 'a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted' and so on. There's a time for everything, but we can't understand how what happens to us fits in with the whole of our life. Something bad happens to us and we can't understand the reason for it.

In the third part of the book, he refers to various 'evils' which take place in this fallen world. When he refers to these 'evils', he means things which trouble us. He's referring to all the grievous or sickening tragedies of life. So, God gives someone great wealth, but he doesn't enable that person to enjoy his wealth. He gives someone a long life, but not the ability to enjoy it. Or a righteous man dies before his time, whereas a wicked man enjoys a long and happy life. Why does God let these things happen?

In the fourth part of the book, he points out more of these puzzling things. For instance, 'The race is not to the swift or the battle to the strong.' That is to say: life doesn't turn out as you'd expect. In an ideal world, you'd expect the swift person to win the race. You'd expect the stronger army to win the battle. But often that doesn't happen. In an ideal world, you'd expect brilliant, smart people to be wealthy and learned, well-educated person to be rewarded. But often, the brilliant, smart people struggle to make a living, while someone who knows nothing makes a fortune on TikTok. The learned, well-educated person is despised for being a know-it-all, whereas fools are praised. Life doesn't turn out the way we would expect.

This is not the way the world was meant to be, but this is the way the world has become ever since Adam's fall in the beginning when sin came into the world and ruined everything. And so, when Solomon looked at life in this fallen world, he saw lots of things which are not right and which puzzled him and us.

This is how it will continue until Christ comes again in glory and with power to renew God's good creation which has been spoiled by sin. In the new heavens and earth, everything will be put right and everything will make sense. There will be no more sickening tragedies to puzzle us in the new and better world to come.

And while we wait for Christ's return, what should we do? How should we live in this fallen world under the sun? Solomon tells us at the end of his book: we should fear God and keep

his commandments. In other words, we should worship God and walk in his ways. Solomon says: this is the whole duty of man.

So, we should fear God and keep his commandments. And even though we live in a fallen world, God is able to give us contentment and joy. He's able to keep us from brooding over the things that happen to us by giving us gladness of heart.

And so, as we make our way through 2025, we should look to the Lord to give us the gift of contentment. And we should ask for his help to worship him and to walk in his ways, because this is his will for us.

Colin Gamble
Belfast, Northern Ireland
gamblec@gmail.com

Office Bearers 2024

Minister Emeritus

Rev. Victor Patterson

Clerk of Session

Alan Bridle

Deputy Clerk of Session

Russell Coates

Congregational Secretary

Timothy Fitzsimons

Asst. Congregational Secretaries

Elders and Congregational Committee during 2024

District	Elder	Committee
1	D Bailey	N Simpson E White
2	T Smith	E Coates
3	R Coates	M Murphy
4	D Harvey	I Houston
5	R Coates	S Irwin
6	M Beck	P Irwin
7	T Hamilton	J Smith M Bryans
8	J Fittis	C Hamilton
9	B Davidson	W Watt
10	T Irwin	D Bridle
11	Acting Elders	M Gregg
12	S Houston	J Anderson R Newburn
13	I Stewart	P Bailey
14	A Bridle	
15	K Harvey	

Elders and Congregational Committee during 2024

Elder Emeritus

N Cranston

H McClure

J McKelvey

Committee

T Fitzsimons

K Harvey

D Newburn

Church Sub-Committees during 2024

Finance

Convenor: K Harvey

Committee: A Bridle, E Coates, E White, M Bryans

Property

Convenors: D Newburn & S Houston

Committee: R Coates, T Smith, W Watt

Reception

Convenor: I Houston

Committee:

Kitchen & Cleaning J Smith

Committee E Coates

Organisation Leaders and Church Agents

Anchor Boys Leader Mrs E Coates
Bible Reading Notes Mrs J Anderson
Boys' Brigade Captain Mr S Houston
Child Protection Officer Mrs B Gregg
Children's Church Leader Mrs M Cooke
Christian Endeavour President..... Rev. C Gamble
Church Magazines Mrs J Stewart
Cradle Roll Mrs R Irwin,
Creche Leader Mrs R Irwin
Flowers for Church Mrs P Campbell
Fresh Ms J McAteer
FWO Secretary Miss E White
Girls' Brigade Captain Mrs M Cooke,
Junior CE Leader Mrs G Beck
Junior Section Lieut. in Charge Mr P Irwin
Leprosy Representative Mrs E Paddock
Immanuel Tots Mrs Dorina Bailey & Mrs K Harvey
Presb. Orphan & Childrens Soc. Mr A McAteer
Presbyterian Women Leader Mrs Y Gamble
Tear Fund Representative..... Miss N Simpson
Wider World Agent Mrs Y Gamble
Women's Bright Hour Leader Mrs M Murphy
Youth Fellowship Leader..... Mr & Mrs D Bridle

Notices - see also Church Website www.immanuelbelfast.com

Public Worship	Sunday 11.30 am and 6.30 pm.
Children's Church	Each Sunday during morning worship.
Creche.....	Each Sunday during morning worship.
Sacrament of the Lord's Supper ..	At morning worship First Sunday January, April and October; last Sunday in June. (Normally)
Youth Fellowship.....	Sunday 8.15 pm.
Junior Christian Endeavour.....	Monday 7.00 pm.
Kirk Session	Fourth Monday 7.30 pm.
Congregational Committee	2nd Mon 7.45 pm. Sept, Nov, Feb, May
Presbyterian Women	1st Monday each month 7.45pm
Women's Bright Hour.....	Tuesday 3.00 pm.
Girls' Brigade.....	Explorers & Juniors Tuesday 6.45 pm Seniors & Brigaders Tuesday 7.45 pm
Mid-week Bible Class	Wednesday 7.45 pm.
Immanuel Tots	Thursday 10 am - 12 noon
Boys' Brigade	Anchor Boys Thursday 6.45 pm Junior Section Thursday 7.00 pm Company Section Thursday 7.45 pm.
Mens Prayer Meeting.....	Thursday 7.00 pm.

Kirk Session Report 2024

“Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labour, If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up”. (Ecclesiastes 4:9,10).

In one of Rev Gamble’s sermon series in 2024, the Teacher (most likely Solomon) reminds us of the significant benefits of having others run the race of life with us. In setting forth the principle of partnership, Solomon articulates the advantages of joint effort and mutual toil, the importance of having a companion during times of difficulty, for warmth and protection when under threat or danger. With all our weaknesses and frailties, we need the strong support and security of a community of believers in Jesus – the church.

In 2024, Immanuel embarked on a new partnership with EMF when we agreed to a (minimum) 5 year commitment to support a little church in Jyväskylä in Finland under the ministry of Eelis Halmemies. This decision was taken after Eelis had preached in Immanuel and met separately with the elders to share something of the work of the gospel and challenges of a being a small, reformed church in a country with an historic Lutheran tradition but is now increasingly secular.

At the end of November, we were pleased to pass on a financial contribution to EMF, raised directly from the giving from the congregation. However, the partnership is about much more than money. We pray for each other, we have exchanged videos to introduce each other, we share updates on zoom calls and our Minister was able to make a short personal visit to Finland during his summer holidays. A different country, a different culture but the same gospel and we look forward to seeing the partnership develop further in the coming years.

A highlight for the congregation in 2024 came in December with the service of Ordination and Installation of Kevin Harvey as an Elder of Immanuel Presbyterian Church in the Presbytery of North Belfast. We pray that Kevin will know God’s guiding hand as he takes up these new responsibilities and joins the Kirk Session in the spiritual leadership of this congregation.

The Kirk Session’s agenda in 2024 was again busy and varied. Following a report from the Mission Standing Committee, the Presbytery requested the Kirk Session to complete a detailed “7p’s” questionnaire looking at all aspects of congregational life and further engagement, including identifying areas for action, is anticipated in early 2025. At a PCI denominational level, discussions are ongoing on a “reconfiguration of ministry” in response to the shifting trends both within and outside the church.

Following a consultation, the Kirk Session approved the earlier starting time of 6.30pm for the evening service during the winter months with the initial feedback broadly favourable. Average attendance is largely unchanged and the YF is able to start their meeting a little earlier. Please pray for our young people and for their protection in these days of temptation and social media.

In early 2024, permission was granted to Mr Neil Cranston to access our records for the purposes of copying for the North of Ireland Family History Society. The Kirk Session also took the opportunity to review and update our Child Protection Policy and introduce some changes to the procedures for the appointment of organisation leaders.

Some members of Kirk Session met with organisation leaders for an end-of-year debrief in June when we heard of encouragements, blessings and disappointments from the past year. Some leaders report seeing modest growth in numbers, some are stable but others commented on the difficulty of retaining young people given the many competing attractions in the area. The growing numbers of children and young people with more complex needs and from different backgrounds was also a common theme.

The Kirk Session would again express our appreciation to Rev Colin Gamble for his faithful ministry and pastoral visitation during 2024. We give thanks for those who have recovered after a period in hospital and we continue to remember in prayer all who are bereaved and those with short and long-term health conditions, some of whom are scheduled to have surgery in 2025. We thank the members of the Caring Team who look in on others with friendship and support, particularly those who are sorrowing and lonely. During periods of leave, we were again pleased to welcome back the Rev Frank McKeown to conduct worship.

In 2024, the Kirk Session had extensive engagement with solicitors with regard to the receipt of a rather unusual bequest from the Trust Estates of JH and EAM Hutchinson. As a consequence, the Kirk Session approved the appointment of Mr Simon Houston, Mr Kevin Harvey and Mr Alan Bridle as new Trustees of this estate on behalf of the congregation. It is hoped that the administrative work will be completed in early 2025 and the legal transfer of Trustees will be executed.

The Kirk Session would again also say a big “thank you” to all the leaders and helpers in our organisations over the past year for their dedicated service. We must pray for continued wisdom and patience, particularly as the work among children and youths is increasingly difficult. Our sincere gratitude also goes to the church secretary, treasurer and designated person for all of their work in 2024 and to the musicians, those who operate the sound desk and to numerous others who work quietly in the background. As Clerk, I would offer my personal thanks again to Russell Coates for his invaluable assistance during the year. In general, average attendance numbers at morning and evening worship and midweek prayer meeting are relatively steady although clearly much lower than in the past. There is always room for more. The Kirk Session would again encourage the congregation to take every opportunity to gather together for times of corporate worship and prayer.

We were again very pleased to have special choirs leading the worship at both the Harvest and Christmas services and this was enjoyed by all. Our thanks to Karen Fitzsimons for arranging and leading and to all the enthusiastic members who participated. The occasional “songs of praise” after the evening service were also well received and also provided an opportunity to celebrate important anniversaries with some of our members.

At Easter, we were pleased to join again with our friends at West Kirk and Woodvale in sharing Good Friday and Easter Sunday evening services and during the year we also heard more about PCI's new work in West Belfast with the Rev David Moore. We were also reminded by David Surgenor from the Vine Centre of the many addictions and social ills within our own district and the much-needed practical and spiritual support being provided. Immanuel's foodbank on Monday afternoons continues to report increased demand and we thank all who give of their time and resources to help with this.

In the summer, the outreach programme continued with open-air meetings in May and door-to-door visitation in late August. Door-drops of gospel tracts again took place at Easter and Christmas and we appreciate all who took part and helped. The very limited response on door-steps has given the Kirk Session cause to reflect and to consider prioritising the homes where we already have some family connection through the organisations or, who live in the immediate vicinity of the church.

In this context, we are planning a slightly different morning service in early new year to which families and neighbours will be invited, with a focus on the basics of who God is and what he has done for us in Christ. In 2025, Immanuel will also be a host venue for one of the North Belfast Presbytery services while a revamp of the church website is also planned. In the 2023 report we heard the sad news that Jersey Street City Mission – with whom we have had a long and important association – was closing. During 2024, it was pleasing to hear that outreach from the hall in Jersey Street was to resume in a new format as the Jersey Street Hub.

At the time of writing, 2025 stretches out ahead of us with myriad uncertainties. It may be wise to conclude by returning to the book of Ecclesiastes - despite what may be perceived as a rather bleak and pessimistic outlook that everything is meaningless, the Teacher still reveals glimmers of hope and goodness. As we journey this road of discipleship, we're not alone. Christ walks with us and will deliver us safely to His Father's home. Ultimately, the great truth of Ecclesiastes lies in the acknowledgment of God's ever-present hand on our lives and that the key to life is not in life itself.

***“Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter:
Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind.
For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing,
whether it is good or evil.” (Ecclesiastes 12:13,14)***

***Alan Bridle
Session Clerk***

Committee Report 2024

1 Peter 4 verse 10: Use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace.

This is my ninth report as Congregational Secretary of Immanuel Presbyterian Church.

The Committee continues in its role of stewardship on behalf of the Congregation.

Rapidly increasing energy costs were a challenge for the Committee during 2024 and were discussed at the first meeting on 19 February 2024. During the meeting several options were examined in an effort to reduce Church running costs. The cost for heat and light alone had increased by 25%. It became clear that a special Committee meeting was needed to examine the Church's running costs. This took place on 11 March 2024. The Committee soon realised that many of the Church's costs were fixed, while others had little scope for significant savings. The Secretary had reviewed the Cleaning Contract with QCS, the cleaning contractor. This was because a reduction in hours was feasible as the number of hours the Church Halls were being used had reduced since the COVID pandemic Emergency. This resulted in reducing the number of hours the cleaner worked from 17.5 hours per week to 12 hours per week and reduced the monthly payment from £1750 to £1275.

The heating system in the Church and Halls is divided into 3 zones: the Church, the Halls, Nelson Room / Church Vestibule. Each of these zones can be turned on separately. However, if only the Dunlop Hall is needed, the heating system will also heat, the Baird Hall, the Simms Hall, The Kitchen, the Link and the Toilets. In an effort to improve the efficiency of the heating system, the Maintenance Subcommittee were asked to investigate the feasibility of having the system modified so that the Dunlop Hall could be heated without having to heat other Halls that were not in use.

The original light fittings installed in the Church when it was built were for fluorescent lights. Unfortunately, the light fittings for these the lights are starting to fail and are no longer available and LED replacement lights, for this type of light fitting, have not been made. The Maintenance Subcommittee investigated various options for replacing the current lighting. The options ranged in price from £4500 to £40,000, the latter being for the replacement of all the light fittings with new LED fittings and lights. The maintenance Subcommittee's recommendation was for the option costing £4,500. This involves providing replacement light fittings and lights around the centre of the Church Ceiling.

At the September meeting the Secretary had raised concerns about the lack of storage space and that this was leading to chairs being left in walkways in breach of health and safety. The Secretary proposed that he led a Subcommittee to investigate the issues and report back to Committee. The Committee approved this and the Subcommittee recommended the keeping of 64 plastic chairs in the Baird Hall and disposal of the rest as they are no longer needed and this would also alleviate Health and Safety concerns. A total of 120 seats would be left in the Baird Hall, any additional seats that would be needed could be taken from the Church. Other recommendations included the removal of all old Notice

Boards, tidy up of Minister's room, installation of additional shelving in the Office and removal of obsolete printed literature and the Guillotine.

I would like to thank of all members of Committee and Elders involved and members of the Congregation for their help and support throughout the Year.

The Committee members or Deacons' role, according to Scripture, is to collect and disperse resources. They are to take care of the physical and logistical needs of the Church. Therefore, to fulfil this calling it is vital that we pray for wisdom to make good decisions that are honouring to the Lord and so the Committee would greatly value the prayers of the Congregation.

Tim Fitzsimons
Secretary

Free will Offerings(FWO) 2024

Envelope	Amount	Amount			
1	490.00	67	120.00	256	360.00
3	2435.00	69	325.00	257	1200.00
6	945.00	71	1710.00	258	720.00
7	102.50	72	530.00	260	480.00
8	2410.00	74	200.00	261	360.00
9	550.00	75	1710.00	262	2640.00
12	2210.00	76	2100.00	263	1200.00
13	280.00	77	1100.00	265	2900.00
16	40.00	82	1400.00	266	1680.00
17	860.00	83	1085.00	267	3400.00
18	240.00	84	480.00	268	1300.00
20	90.00	85	380.00	269	60.00
22	200.00	86	850.00	270	240.00
23	178.50	88	275.00	271	1190.00
24	118.00	90	650.00		
25	1175.00	92	440.00		
27	2870.00	94	575.00		
28	280.00	95	110.00		
29	70.00	96	7400.00		
30	590.00	97	100.00		
32	2510.00	98	70.00		
33	1580.00	99	900.00		
34	60.00	100	243.60		
36	360.00	101	415.00		
37	1700.00	102	140.00		
38	1650.00	103	3700.00		
39	1650.00	104	520.00		
40	2000.00	105	710.00		
41	340.00	108	1690.00		
43	2540.00	111	400.00		
44	8.40	113	144.00		
45	485.00	114	36.00		
46	690.00	115	4410.00		
47	765.00	116	745.00		
48	510.00	118	120.00		
49	120.00	120	230.00		
51	1600.00	121	580.00		
52	560.00	122	10.00		
53	110.00	125	350.00		
54	1440.00	126	300.00		
55	765.00	127	2590.00		
56	650.00	130	110.00		
57	366.00	250	1300.00		
58	200.00	251	1032.00		
59	310.00	252	600.00		
61	265.00	253	600.00		
62	520.00	254	1325.00		
64	490.00	255	480.00		
65	680.00				

Church Accounts Summary 2024

<u>2024</u>	<u>Income</u>	<u>2024</u>	<u>Expenditure</u>
<u>Unrestricted Funds</u>	<u>£</u>	<u>Unrestricted Funds</u>	<u>£</u>
<u>FWO etc</u>	119120	Total Assessments	20774
<u>Property</u>	8814	Salaries & Allowances	54501
<u>United Appeal</u>	8026	<u>Other Congregational Expenses</u>	49710
<u>Missions & Charities</u>	13533	<u>Property</u>	5498
<u>Other Funds</u>	2927	<u>United Appeal</u>	7345
		<u>Missions & Charities</u>	18085
Unrestricted Total	119120	<u>Other Funds</u>	10988
Restricted Total	33300		
Income Total	152420	Expenditure Total	166901

**Organisation Accounts
Summary**

<u>2024</u>	<u>Opening Balances</u>	<u>Closing Balances</u>	Cash in Hand	Bank Balance
120th Boys Brigade	5970.65	6952.15	61.23	6890.92
234th Belfast Girls Brigade	4515.90	4526.61	1952.55	2573.96
Ladies Bright Hour	66.92	499.30	499.30	0
Immanuel Tots	55.00	71.00	71.00	0
Junior Christian Endeavour	74.20	74.20	74.20	0
Presbyterian Women	310.72	317.29	123.70	193.59
Tea Leaf	169.05	169.05	169.05	0
Youth Fellowship	636.41	1375.34	111.32	1264.02