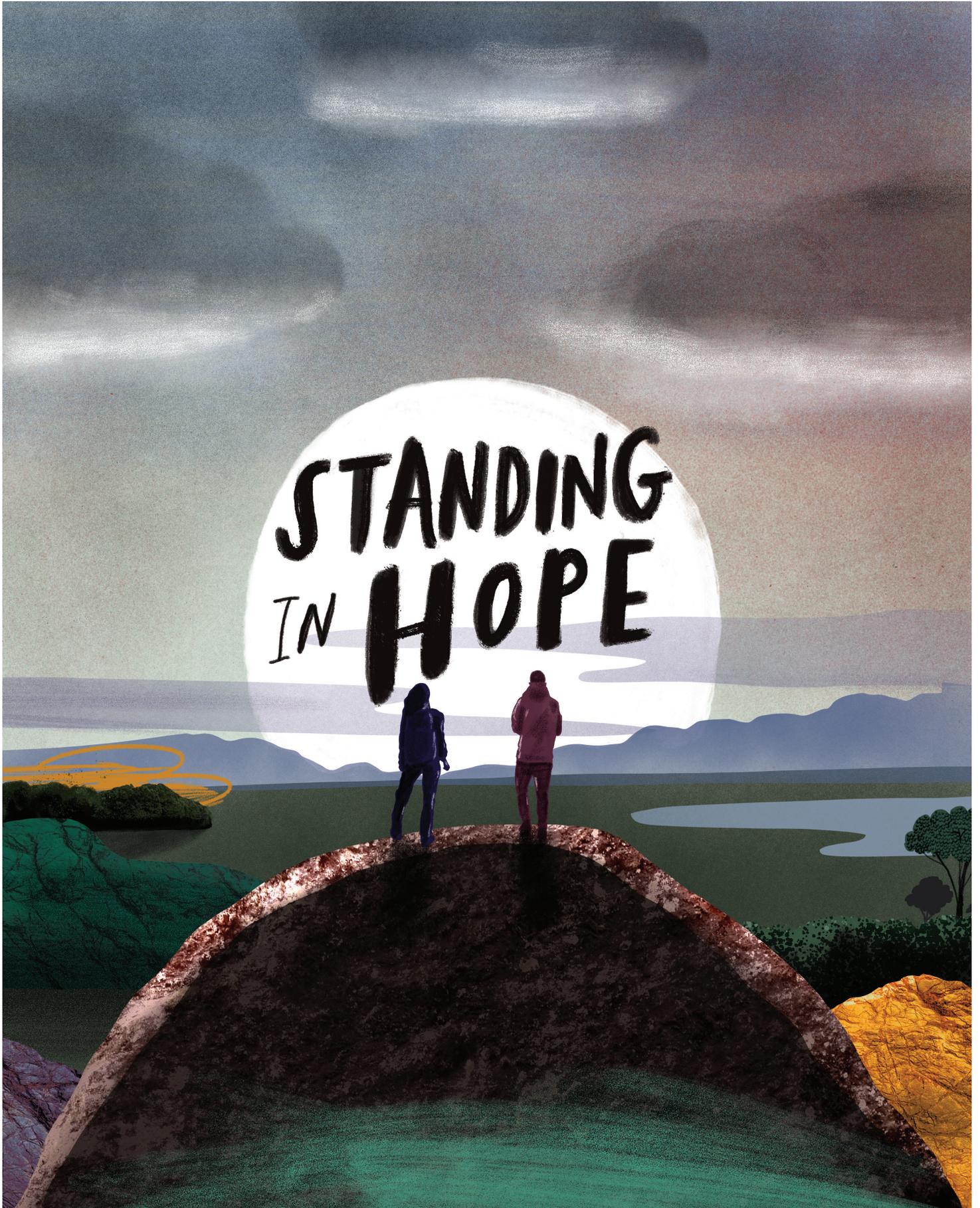


Presbyterian  
CHURCH IN IRELAND

# Herald

WINTER 2021



**UPDATED**  
November 2020

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## CONTRIBUTORS



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# Resilience

What a lot has changed since we last published the *Herald*! We appreciate your understanding for the decision that was taken to halt publication since the April edition, and we thank you for sticking with us into 2021, especially as we move to a new quarterly format, hopefully temporarily.

I don't know what your experience has been of the pandemic so far, but it will undoubtedly represent a significant season of your life. If you have ever used the devotional app *Lectio 365*, you will know it starts every day with the same prayer, which includes the line: "I pause to be still... to recentre my scattered senses upon the presence of God." This line never fails to feel appropriate, and was especially relevant during the early days of the pandemic. Whether your particular struggles have been financial, emotional, psychological or spiritual, I'm sure your senses have often felt scattered and you have needed to refocus them on God's power and presence.

As our church services and sense of fellowship have taken on new forms, you may feel a little fragmented from your own congregation community and the wider PCI family. I hope that through the *Herald*, you will feel more connected, and could I encourage you to recommend to friends and family that they can access a PDF version, online for free, at [www.presbyterianireland.org/herald](http://www.presbyterianireland.org/herald)

In this issue we hope to reflect a range of experiences of the pandemic so far. One example is in the article 'Taking stock', where several Presbyterians share their thoughts. Ron McAvoy also shares his near-death experience after contracting Covid-19. He and wife Gill testify to God's goodness and love throughout the ordeal and the comfort that the Bible brought them: "His Word became the living Word, absolutely real!"

Alan Meban discusses how the church will look going forward and offers some useful suggestions of what congregations should give thought to. Ruth Sanderson considers

the transformation of our online lives in recent months and asks how healthy it has been to conduct relationships on a screen.

We also hear how our brothers and sisters in Christ have been coping around the world. Pip Florit reports on some of PCI's partner churches, including in Malawi, Halmahera and India. Alan Meban also interviews a minister in Beirut and hears the tragic circumstances that the people there are enduring, not just because of Covid-19, but also the devastating explosion that happened in August.

Despite the many difficulties and uncertainties, there is a bold resilience that comes through in these articles, with God's people continuing to trust him in all situations. The principal of the Gujarat United School of Theology says, "More than anything else...the realisation that God is in control has helped people to face challenges and stand firm."

The message of resilience is one that our own Moderator, Dr David Bruce, is also keen to convey. He encourages us that we do not need to do this alone: "Resilience may be found when we stand firm together. The armour of God takes on a new quality when it is worn by a battalion."

We have certainly faced many battles in 2020, and we do not know what is ahead of us in 2021. We may have differing views on the pandemic itself and the best way forward for us as individuals, churches and nations. However, as Rev David Leach affirms in this issue's 'As I see it', our focus should never be on asserting our opinions or using divisive behaviour, but rather on fixing our attention on Jesus; praying to our Lord, who is and always will be, seated on his throne. David says, "Let us not be consumed with fear on our minds or with anger in our hearts, but have our eyes filled with the glory of Christ. Christian friend – keep on..."



*Sarah Harding*

## Survey on adapting to Covid-19

Dear Editor

I represent a research project that examines the impact of the pandemic on ritual and religious life in Britain.

Our project is called 'Social Distance, Digital Congregation: British ritual innovation under Covid-19'. This is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and examines how British religious communities have adapted to the Covid-19 pandemic and the restrictions it has imposed. The project aims to document, analyse and understand the new ways that religious communities are coming together, and to use those findings to help make religious communities stronger and more resilient for the future. You can read more about it here:

<https://bric19.mmu.ac.uk>

We are trying to reach as many people as possible, asking them to share their experiences. I appeal to your readers in Northern Ireland to take part in our survey: <https://bric19.mmu.ac.uk/take-the-survey/>

This survey will build on research done already within Britain's many Christian communities (i.e. the 'Coronavirus, Church and You' survey), but our data will offer new insights into what makes religious gatherings or rituals work best in online (or Covid-19 safe) formats. We hope it will also provide an archive of the enormous creativity and resilience of religious communities during these difficult times. As Irish communities have a rich ritual life, and have undertaken many adaptations, I am sure that these perspectives will do much to inform the research.

*Dr Katja Stuerzenhofecker  
BRIC19 team*

## Letters to the Editor

**Write to:** Presbyterian Herald, Assembly Buildings, Belfast, BT1 6DW  
**Email:** [herald@presbyterianireland.org](mailto:herald@presbyterianireland.org)

**Please note:** Letters are limited to 300 words and may be edited for clarity and length. They will only be published in the *Herald* if the author's name and address have been supplied to the Editor. On request these will be withheld from print. Anonymous letters will not be considered for publication. The views expressed in the letters are not necessarily those of the Editor or PCI.

## Thanks for supporting World Development Appeal 2019

Dear Editor

Such is the pace of change in today's world, that before we know it, we are caught up with a new crisis and the next appeal. So just for a moment, I would like to catch the readers' attention to say a huge 'thank you' and acknowledge the tremendous generosity of Presbyterians throughout Ireland in raising £497,174 in response to the World Development Appeal 2019, 'Farming God's Way'.

This wonderful total has been distributed to facilitate the implementation of a range of good sustainable development projects of PCI's relief and development partners, Tearfund and Christian Aid. 5% of the total has gone to the development work of PCI's church partners in South Sudan, Malawi and Nepal.

In August 2019 I had the privilege of visiting what was the Appeal's featured project located in Inhassoro, Mozambique. I witnessed the remarkable transformation process in which, with the help of Tearfund's partner on the ground, the church and community were learning to farm in a way that realised the potential of local resources,

enabled growth in resilience, and empowered them to shape for themselves a more sustainable and secure livelihood.

Those who plan and organise the fundraising for the World Development Appeal take great encouragement in your ongoing support year after year. This Appeal remains a powerful witness to our calling to be global disciples, sharing God's heart for his world, and demonstrating his compassion for the poorest people, who are often struggling to survive in fragile and dangerous places.

With deep appreciation on behalf of all who are benefiting from your prayerful concern and practical support.

"Those who wept as they went out carrying the seed will come back singing for joy, as they bring in the harvest." (Psalm 126:6)

*Rev Uel Marrs*

*PCI's Global Mission Secretary*

## Quarterly editions for 2021

Due to the ongoing pandemic and to allow for flexibility, as well as reducing risk around production and distribution, it has been decided that only four seasonal issues of the *Herald* will be produced in 2021, instead of the usual 10.

It is intended that each edition will be physically printed unless restrictions make this unfeasible. PDF copies will also be available for free in 2021. To download a copy please go to:

[www.presbyterianireland.org/herald](http://www.presbyterianireland.org/herald)

or to access the digital version go to:  
[issuu.com/presbyterianireland](http://issuu.com/presbyterianireland)

The logo for the Presbyterian Herald, featuring the word "Presbyterian" in a small font above the word "Herald" in a large, bold, serif font.



## Topical Tweets



@pciassembly

#LetsPray for political leaders in Dublin, Belfast and London, for good relationships across the islands and as they continue to manage the Covid-19 crisis. Pray for wisdom and decision-making that promotes the common good.



@PCIModerator

A UK/EU deal reduces uncertainty, and is to be welcomed on this day of hope. We commit to pray for those who now need to implement this agreement. Those involved with logistics, and in business more generally need our backing. We all need to work at this.



@peterlynas

Great to see the new vaccine approved – and that 80% of care homes vaccinated. Now need radical role out involving NHS, army etc to 50,000+ per week vaccinated.



@ChristianAidIrl

While we get out our #coronavirus vaccines in 2021, it is expected that vaccines won't be widely available in many poorer countries until 2022 & even 2023. This can't be allowed to happen! It's vital that the richest countries do not hoard the vaccine for themselves.



@Stoxo

Covid has wisened up our souls... we need them mellowed out... there is some tender work still to do before the vaccine spring...



@Tearfund

Please pray for peace in Yemen. An explosion at Aden airport yesterday killed at least 22 people, including three humanitarian workers from @ICRC. Lift up in prayer the families and friends of those who lost their lives in this terrible incident.



@rickhillni

A word for my soul today: Instead of being a people sharing good news that could transform the world, we've become mired in the 24-hour news cycle, fed a constant diet of hopelessness & despair. We are plagued by a lack of expectation & have begun to believe this is all there is.

## Church-wide initiative

Realising that the need to maintain connection among members has never been more challenging and important, PCI is launching an important initiative for every congregation under the simple theme 'For now'. A high quality, eight-page, booklet is being made available to help congregations connect with and encourage every family in membership.

The booklet entitled, *For Now – Belonging to church in unusual times*, will contain a message from the Moderator, a devotional piece and prayer, some readings from the Psalms and suggestions and encouragement to every family.

Every congregation will be supplied with one booklet per family free of charge during the week commencing Monday 18 January 2021. Booklets will be couriered to each manse, individually packaged to ensure they can then be distributed virus free to members. Congregations are encouraged to make appropriate plans, within whatever restrictions are in place at that time, to

safely distribute the booklets to each family.

A parallel set of six, free, downloadable group Bible studies entitled, 'For Now – Being the church in unusual times', will be released on the PCI website at the same time. Usable in in-person or digital gatherings, these will encourage leaders and core members to be creative and imaginative in the next season of church life in developing what is possible for now in the areas of pastoral care, discipleship, worship, witness and supporting families and young people.

Moderator, Dr David Bruce said, "As we look ahead to 2021, we are filled with hope. Hope that this year will allow us to meet face-to-face as churches in ways that have been difficult or impossible during the past year. I am looking forward to the publication of 'For Now' and pray that as it is distributed to each of our members' homes it will help us catch a vision of the vital importance of re-connecting with church."



## Virtual conference discusses real issues

As Northern Ireland continues to wrestle with how it should deal with the past and the legacy of the Troubles, an online conference has heard a uniquely Christian contribution and perspective as participants unpacked the emerging themes contained in the PCI book *Considering Grace – Presbyterians and the Troubles*.

Welcoming the fact that the conference, entitled 'Considering Grace – unpacking the impact', was able to take place, PCI Moderator Dr David Bruce said, "While there remains little consensus around how the state and its institutions should deal with the legacy of our collective past politically, legacy is more than politics. While it is a sorely contested space, we should not forget that it is primarily about people and their healing, and ultimately forgiveness on a

road to reconciliation, something that we all have a part to play in – especially those of us who profess a Christian faith.

"Through the Considering Grace project, and the process that we have engaged in as a Church, we hope to contribute to an important wider discussion on dealing with the past, reconciliation and forgiveness. This event is the latest chapter in that process."

Originally planned as an 'in-person' conference in March, but postponed due to the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, over 120 people took part, listening to keynote speakers, the Belfast-born Chief of Staff to the Archbishop of Canterbury, Canon David Porter, and Professor Stafford Carson, Principal of PCI's Union Theological College. Those watching online also took part

## Hate crime review

On the publication of Judge Desmond Marrinan's review into hate crime legislation in Northern Ireland, PCI Moderator Dr David Bruce has said that there is much to digest.

Dr Bruce said, "We welcomed the opportunity to meet with Judge Marrinan in August 2019 as part of the review, and appreciated the time he and his team took to listen to our views, suggestions and concerns.

"While there is much to digest in his thorough report, we welcome the recommendation that there should be formal statutory recognition of rights guaranteed by the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, particularly in relation to freedom of thought, conscience and religion and freedom of expression."

The Moderator continued, "There must still be space within society to express views with which others may disagree, recognising that this works both ways and allows people to express views about religion with which we may disagree. After all, the freedom to only express ideas that are popular is no freedom at all.

"Judge Marrinan notes that the changes he proposes will not 'be a panacea for all the evils of hate crime speech'. Indeed, the blunt instrument of the law, nor having an agreed definition of a hate crime is no substitute for the hard and often challenging work of transforming hearts and minds. This is something for which we all have responsibility."

## 'Breathe...' theme for 4 Corners Festival

Professor John Paul Lederach, the internationally renowned conflict transformation expert, is the keynote speaker at the ninth annual 4 Corners Festival, which takes place in Belfast from 31 January to 7 February.

Due to the pandemic most of those attending the Christian arts festival will do so from the comfort of their homes as the events will be streamed online, having been promoted on social media.

This year's theme is 'Breathe...' from the Hebrew word *ruach* meaning 'breath' or 'spirit' – the meaning of life. The festival offers a rich mix of talks, music, drama and prayer, and among those taking part will include singer-songwriter Duke Special, Jamaican-born poet and singer-songwriter Raquel McKee and the poet and theologian Pádraig Ó Tuama.

It is planned that a limited number will be able to attend some of the events, regulations permitting.

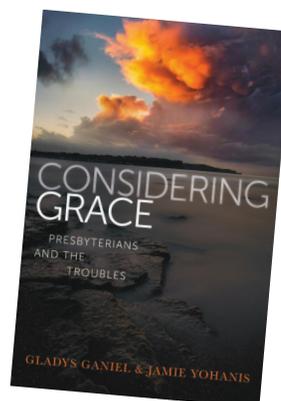
## First Ards member leads Irish Christian Endeavour

Russell Armour, an elder in First Ards Presbyterian Church, has been appointed president of the Irish Christian Endeavour Union.

The Co Down man has chosen 'A new normal with Jesus' as his theme.



in a Q&A session with Dr Gladys Ganiel and Dr Jamie Yohanis, the book's authors, along with Dr Nicola Brady, General Secretary of the Irish Council of Churches, who contributed to the book and the keynote speakers.



## Concern over UK overseas aid cut

**PCI Moderator, Dr David Bruce, has expressed his deep concern at the UK's diminishing commitment to supporting the poorest people on the planet.**

Responding to the announcement that the UK's overseas aid budget will be cut by a third, Dr Bruce said, "When I wrote to the Prime Minister in July, urging him to reconsider the merger of the Department for International Development into the Foreign Office, I did so given our genuine concerns that it would jeopardise the UK's world-leading humanitarian work amongst the world's poorest and most marginalised peoples.

"The government's triple whammy of cutting the UK's overseas aid budget by a third, ending the government's promise to spend just under 1% of gross national income on overseas aid, alongside the departmental merger, will hurt the poorest people beyond our shores who will undoubtedly suffer as a result. This cannot be right," Dr Bruce said.

## Care for the Family event reruns

**Last year, for the first time, Care for the Family ran events free online and it was an incredible opportunity to reach many more families. Realising that not everyone who wanted to watch them was able to do so, the charity is rerunning some events.**

'Mum's the Word' is an event to celebrate all mums, affirming and equipping them to look after their families and themselves.

Designed specifically for Christian women, 'Free to Be' unpacks what freedom really looks like. It reminds us that our identity lies not in the season of our lives nor in our roles and responsibilities, but in Christ.

One of Rob Parsons' most popular events, 'The Wisdom House' is an opportunity to learn lessons the easy way. Those who watched found it inspired them to live differently and gave them ideas on how to solve difficult situations.

Each event will be free and available to watch for a week in February. To book a place, visit <http://cff.org.uk/events-online>



Online events to support your family

## Entries sought for sermon competition

Sermon of the Year 2021 is open for entries. Now in its sixth year, the event invites preachers and sermon writers, aged 18 or over, from all denominations and none, from across the UK to submit their 1,500-word sermons. This year's theme is 'Cross the divide'. The entry deadline is midnight on Sunday 21 February.

Full entry details and the entry form are available at [www.preachweb.org/sermonoftheyear](http://www.preachweb.org/sermonoftheyear)



## New resource: WHOLE

**Now available in the 'Refined' section of the PCI website, this six-session resource explores a biblical approach to living well as whole people made in the image of God, as we seek to follow Jesus in this disrupted season of life.**

Following the pattern of the previous 'Unprecedented' material, the 'WHOLE' resource offers a short, sharp framework for groups, whether gathering in-person or digitally, allowing participants to catch up with each other pastorally, reflect on what God is saying in this moment and respond with renewed faith in him and following in his ways for their lives.

The six sessions cover topics that address the grounded, social, physical, mental, emotional and active wellbeing of individuals.



## Book to raise hospice funds

**Presbyterian minister Rev Jim Lamont has published his third book, with proceeds going to Donegal Hospice.**

*Highland Hope* is a 140-page selection of inspirational 'Thought for the day' style stories interspersed with photographs of the County Donegal landscape.

It follows Mr Lamont's previous two books – *Highland Inspiration* and *Highland Reflections* – which, along with the proceeds of a number of concerts in Letterkenny, raised more than €125,000 for Donegal Hospice.

"I have chosen the title for this book

because it reflects my connection with Highland Radio – which goes back 20 years – and my conviction that we should never give up on hope," said Mr Lamont, who is currently in charge of the Presbyterian congregations at Inch and Burt, and is also minister emeritus of Dunfanaghy and Carrigart congregations and chaplain at Donegal Hospice and Letterkenny University Hospital.

*Highland Hope* retails at €10 and is available from Bookmark bookstore at Letterkenny Shopping Centre, either in person or by mail order. It is also available from various gift shops in Co Donegal and in Faith Mission outlets in Northern Ireland.



Rev Jim Lamont pictured with his grandson Ryan James and his son Philip James.

## IN BRIEF

### Resource for young people

SHAKEN is a workbook designed by The Big House to help young people discover healthy ways of coping when life shakes them. It also introduces young people to the unshakeable care of God. It can be used individually, or as a group. Many youth groups have been using the resource online as government restrictions limit meeting face-to-face. A leader's guide has also been produced to help guide leaders as they go through the book with their young people.

To find out more and to order the book and leader's guide, visit: [www.thebighouse.org.uk/shaken](http://www.thebighouse.org.uk/shaken)

SHAKEN

### Moderator welcomes agreement on UK/ EU trade deal

Moderator, Dr David Bruce, has welcomed news that an agreement between the United Kingdom and the European Union on trade has been reached.

Dr Bruce said, "Northern Ireland's relationship, and interconnectedness, with both the rest of Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom will require significant commitment from us all, to identify ways that will continue to build trust and support the onward pursuit of reconciliation."

He continued by saying, "Moving forward in the days, weeks and months ahead, we commit to pray for those in authority who are tasked with implementing this agreement, those involved with logistics, and for businesses as they begin to trade in this new environment and for our neighbours across these islands."



## **'My strength is made *perfect in weakness*'**

**Suzanne Hamilton** talks to Ron McAvoy about his experience of contracting Covid-19.

**C**ovid-19 brought Ron McAvoy to his weakest point. Lying in a hospital bed seriously ill, with even opening his eyes taking all his energy, he thought he was going to die.

The 60-year-old, who is a member of West Presbyterian Church in Bangor, started to feel unwell last March, initially experiencing normal flu symptoms such as sore joints and eyeballs. His symptoms worsened though and he was rushed to the Ulster Hospital in Dundonald, where it was confirmed he had Covid-19.

Ron remembers how a few days after being admitted to hospital, he felt much better. "On the Monday I felt great. I got up and had a shower. I decided to have breakfast – that was the first I'd eaten for over a week... and I thought I'm getting home today. This is gone, the flu symptoms are gone. Literally within about half an hour it was like somebody had

pulled the plug out and I just went down."

By the next day he couldn't stand, and his lack of strength was such that he could barely lift a cup of water. His consultant told Ron that 1 in 20 people who get Covid will end up critically ill, and he was that 1.

"It just got worse and worse. The nausea was really bad and my breathing – the only way I can explain it is, it was almost like having an elephant sitting on your chest. I just couldn't get a breath.

"By the Wednesday it had got to the stage where I was sure I wasn't going home. I was pretty sure that either that day or the next day or so, I was finished. I

**I was pretty sure that either that day or the next day or so, I was finished. I was dying.**

was dying. The funny thing is I didn't have any fear at all."

He managed to FaceTime his wife, Gill, who begged him to fight on. "I said, 'I've nothing left'." Emotional exchanges over FaceTime with his nephew, brother and two of his children, Peter and Catherine followed, as they said their goodbyes. One daughter, Kerry – a nurse in the hospital – was allowed in to see him.

"She just held my hand. I remember saying to her 'Kerry don't', again trying to get the words out. Really what I was saying to her was, 'Kerry don't be afraid, it's ok'. I had a tremendous sense of peace...I believe it is because I know in whom I believe. I knew I was safe."

After a while, Kerry was told to leave. As he lay in his hospital bed, Ron started to silently pray. "I couldn't get the words out, but in my mind I could shout all I liked." He told God he trusted him and asked that he would look after his

children and Gill, comforting them and strengthening them for what was ahead.

Even at his lowest point physically, Ron remembers the spiritual strength he received from the Lord. Verses started coming into his head such as 2 Corinthians 12:9: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness.”

“As I was lying there, just praying and just talking to God in my head, Psalm 23:4 came in a lot clearer, a lot louder than the others: ‘Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.’ As soon as that verse came into my head, I heard these words: ‘Ron, that’s where we are. We’re walking through but I am with you. I am walking through it with you.’”

Ron felt a tremendous sense of peace, and then he remembers feeling excited, anticipating who he would meet in heaven. Would he see Jesus first or would he see the sister who was stillborn 20 years before his birth? “The funny thing was I knew in my mind I would recognise her.”

Thankfully, Ron recovered and was eventually discharged from hospital, only to be readmitted days later after again suffering breathing difficulties. God again stepped in to help Ron, prompting Gill to get medical aid, and then sending a nurse in A&E who was uneasy about Ron’s condition and took further blood tests, which led to the discovery of a significant clot on his left pulmonary artery. The consultant told Ron that Gill’s actions had saved his life.

Reflecting on his two near-death experiences, Ron says he is not afraid and merely feels peace. He also has a much greater appreciation for his church family and knows he was covered in prayer at the time of his illness by many people. “The consultant told me that my lung capacity would never be the same again and I remember when he went out of the room, I said, ‘Christ I reject that in your name’. I honestly can say my lung capacity is better than what it was before I had Covid. That for me is a testament to God, to that answered prayer that many people prayed – that the Spirit of God would breathe life into me...”

“God answers prayers and the proof of it is sitting here.”



### Gill's story

Ron’s wife, Gill, had to cope with being at home on her own when Ron was taken to hospital. Gill shares her story:

It was horrible to be left on my own. It didn’t really occur to me that I couldn’t go with Ron in the ambulance. So, I packed him off with his phone and his charger, not really expecting that he would be kept in. At first, I was able to ring him or FaceTime him and he could speak a bit, but after a few days he could press the button to answer the phone but he couldn’t really talk.

From then on, for that first fortnight, it became a bit of a nightmare because I had no way to get information. The hospital staff were fantastic with Ron but it was the early stages and I think they hadn’t really taken into account the impact this was having on families – there was no communication at all. Every day I would try to ring but when I was eventually put through to the ward, it would just ring out. Nobody could hug me. Family came and sat out in the garden with rugs around them and rang me. We didn’t even open the door; we just talked on the phone. Everyone was amazing though – family, friends, colleagues, church family – they phoned, prayed and brought me food.

Whenever Ron FaceTimed to say they were thinking of taking him to ICU he wasn’t really able to speak. I could see he was crying but I couldn’t make out anything that he was saying. Eventually he started to say, “I haven’t anything left to give Gill.” We just kind of cried together – and then as a mum, my panic set in,

thinking that my children needed to speak to him. So I really fought with myself, because I thought, “I need to come off the phone to contact them, but is that the last time I get to speak to him?” It was just horrible.

When I look back on it now, I feel like it happened to somebody else. Even right at that moment, I absolutely felt that I was being held by God. And that’s not me being super spiritual – I had nothing else, nothing. I couldn’t even do anything practical – normally if your husband was sick in hospital you could go and visit and take him things and wash his pyjamas. They were incinerating his clothes so there was literally nothing I could do.

I just spent the days talking to God all the time. I don’t mean kneeling in prayer. I just talked to God the whole time and I cried a lot too. There were a couple of songs that I played over and over. I sang and cried at the top of my voice.

### His Word became the living Word, absolutely real.

But I absolutely felt like I was in a protective bubble. I don’t mean I felt that Ron was going to be healed necessarily. But I felt a kind of peace I can’t really explain. Normally I wouldn’t sleep particularly well so I remember asking God for help with this – and he did. Bizarrely I had the best sleep that I have had in a long time, the entire time Ron was in hospital.

I think Ron and I now have a greater realisation of the truth, power and authority in God’s Word. I would have spent a lot of time – especially when I was having panicky moments – when I just declared God’s truth out loud. It sounds a bit bizarre, but as I walked around the house, whatever kinds of doubts I was having, I spoke out the opposite from God’s Word. His Word became the living Word, absolutely real. When you’re in that position it’s not just comforting words – it’s the truth, and a deeper sense that God is in control. We both felt incredibly held by God and supported by the prayers and practical help of our family, friends and church, and we’re very grateful for that.

# PCI's digital offering...



**Lisa Skinner** highlights all the resources PCI has produced online, since the start of lockdown, to aid congregations and individuals with their ministry, witness and faith.

**T**his time last year few of us could have imagined any other way of 'doing church', but with the arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic came a departure from our traditional ways of worship and modes of discipling our people. As the doors of our churches closed, we were forced to reimagine how we might teach, disciple and pastor those in our communities. This gave way to the creation of a number of new digital resources.

While our Church has been operating in a digital space since 1996, when it first launched a PCI website, our online presence has been evolving over the years and now, in light of recent events, we have been catapulted to a different level of digital engagement. Necessity has driven PCI to fully exploit technology to stay connected at a time when the Church has been forcibly scattered.

Initially, when lockdown was first introduced in March 2020 the Church produced a number of digital resources under the theme 'These Three Remain'. The aim of these programmes was to equip church leaders for this

## ...in light of recent events, we have been catapulted to a different level of digital engagement.

very different and difficult season of ministry – to share best practice and encouragement across our denomination, to envision together a way forward and to continue to stimulate and inspire Presbyterians during a time of physical remoteness. The range of resources produced included training webinars, podcasts, blogs, digital devotions and social media communications. To help support and share news of our global mission workers, video prayer letters were also produced – 'Digital Dispatches'.

As we moved out of full lockdown in September, our denominational conversation moved on from what was needed initially in this period of isolation, to seeking God's leading and guiding for the next season of church life together. The discussion became more about

how God might be 'refining' our acts of worship, our means of mission and our modes of fellowship and discipleship.

For many, these resources have proved crucial, particularly for ministers trying to navigate uncharted territory. Rev David McCullagh, minister of Annalong Presbyterian Church, is amongst those who have used these resources to good effect. Mr McCullagh comments, "No one in ministry has ever been trained or prepared to lead God's people through a pandemic. All decisions were made as a response to changes that were happening on a daily basis. Realising that the implications of Covid-19 were going to be far-reaching into the church year, the 'Refined' resources have been a great support for us as a congregation as we navigate this time. The webinars have allowed us to hear from people in other places and how they are working in their locality, giving ideas and sparking thought on how we could do things. The bi-weekly podcasts have provided space to digest particular issues and think through how it impacts our congregation, its worship and its ministry."

It is not only ministers who have upped their digital engagement with

**THESE THREE REMAIN...**  
*Faith, Hope & Love*

PCI over this period of lockdown. Our analytics suggest that several hundred people listened to each podcast episode, with the recordings focusing on mental health, frontline workers and training for youth and children's ministry proving particularly popular. What is also encouraging is that having listened to the podcasts, many of those listeners have shared the links for others to enjoy.

In the last nine months there has been an increase of over 2,500 new followers to PCI's Facebook page, with Twitter and Instagram pages seeing a significant increase as well. The 'Let's Pray' weekly prayer posts on Facebook were among some of the most viewed and shared material, encouraging and uniting individuals and congregations in prayer.

Other posts that received high shares included the Moderator's Sunday services and blog posts that were written by various individuals reflecting on their experiences in lockdown. The Bible reading emails 'Tides', which has been running since 2016, has also seen a huge increase in the uptake, with subscribers up by almost 600 people.

## These resources will... help us to seek his leading and guiding for this next season in church life together...

This is digital engagement on a level that we have never seen before, and this can only be a good thing. Whilst this period of lockdown has caused us to lament many things, it has nonetheless enabled us to reach more people than ever with our message, encouraging evangelism, discipleship and prayer.

In any normal given year, PCI would hold a number of conferences and training events designed to equip its members in various areas of church life and ministry. However, with restrictions placed on large-scale, in-person, face-to-face events, this is yet another area of church life that has been reimaged. PCI has hosted its first digital conference, consisting of pre-recorded material available for use at a time that suits ministers and their congregations.

Welcoming the Refined programme of resources, and in particular the digital conference, Moderator Dr David Bruce recognised the challenges of gathering digitally: "In making use of these great new resources, I hope that they will help us all, as a Presbyterian family across this island, to try and make sense of this new place that we find ourselves. Even though the future may not fully resemble the past we have known, God is walking beside us in every rough step. These resources will also help us to seek his leading and guiding for this next season in church life together, even when we can't yet map every single step ahead of us. But in each of those steps, he is with us and we follow him closely by faith."

Each of these digital resources, even those produced during the first lockdown in March, are still available on the PCI website: [www.presbyterianireland.org](http://www.presbyterianireland.org)  
May you be blessed in using them.

*Lisa Skinner is an administrative officer for the Herald.*

## Refined

Under the heading of Refined a wealth of resources has been provided online at [www.presbyterianireland.org/redefined](http://www.presbyterianireland.org/redefined) Below is an overview of these programmes:

## Refined Ardens sed Virens

**Digital Dispatches** – a selection of short and longer video clips produced by PCI's global mission workers to inspire and equip you to pray specifically for them. These videos are designed to be used in church services and prayer meetings, to raise awareness and prayer for what God is doing across the world as we seek to go deep and wide in global mission involvement.

**Redefined** – stories of church life done differently, with congregations sharing their own experiences of how they have reimaged small group discipleship, pastoral care and women's ministry, to name a few.

**Podcast** – a series of recorded conversations between members and leaders from within our denomination. The podcasts cover a range of topics on church life. To subscribe to the podcasts, search for 'Podcasts from the Presbyterian Church' in your favourite podcast software.

**Blog** – reflections of refining the life and ministry of our Church from different perspectives across PCI.

**Stay Safe at Church** – advice and guidelines on resuming activities in congregations.

**Blended** – explaining and exploring a blended approach to children's and youth ministry with stories of how congregations have been experimenting.

**Digital Ministry Tips & Tools** – advice on continuing to develop digital worship and other online congregational activities.

**Unprecedented** – a series of free downloadable digital small group resources particularly tailored for use in digital gatherings.

**Let's Pray** – PCI's weekly prayer email service. To subscribe to Let's Pray go to [www.presbyterianireland.org/letspray](http://www.presbyterianireland.org/letspray)

**Resources for return to church life** – resources specifically developed for returning to church life, including 'Prism' Bible studies and an 'Opening Up to God' resource for leading out of lockdown.

**Tides** – a simple resource to help you develop a regular rhythm of Bible reading. To subscribe to Tides, go to [www.presbyterianireland.org/tides](http://www.presbyterianireland.org/tides)

**Webinars** – upcoming and pre-recorded training webinars for church leaders.



*Unprecedented*  
Once in a lifetime event.  
Lessons for the rest of our lives.

## CONGREGATIONAL STORY



Ballybay Presbyterian churches at RTÉ in 2019



Patrick Duffield

# *Communities come together* **for Christian Aid**

**Lisa Fagan** highlights how some Presbyterians didn't let lockdown halt their fundraising efforts for Christian Aid.

**P**resbyterian churches on both sides of the border have not let a pandemic stop their charitable efforts, with thousands being raised for international development agency Christian Aid Ireland.

Amazingly, more than €12,000 has been raised by the Presbyterian community of Ballybay in County Monaghan. Almost three quarters of the money was donated anonymously by members of four Presbyterian churches, First and Second Ballybay, Rockcorry and Drumkeen, which have a combined membership of 160 families.

The remainder was raised by local grandmother Nan Bradford who completed a 100km sponsored walk during May. Nan walked an impressive 10km a day for 10 consecutive days, raising €3,500.

Thanking everyone who sponsored her, she said, "I had hoped to raise maybe €1,000 but I never expected to raise so much. I was blown away by the kindness of my family, friends and neighbours. I was also very generously supported by church members and by the local

branch of the Irish Countrywomen's Association."

Nan set herself the walking challenge when the lockdown forced the cancellation of the annual Ballybay coffee morning and sale, an event which has been held every May for more than half a century.

Started by local Christian Aid organiser, the late Rosa Patterson, and then taken on by Rev David Nesbitt, minister in Ballybay from 1967 to 2008, the coffee morning and sale began in a caravan but as it grew, moved to the manse, later to a shop and finally to its permanent home in the church hall.

Hopeful that it will return this year, Nan said, "The coffee morning and sale has become a fixture in the town's calendar and is supported by the whole

**...local grandmother Nan Bradford...walked an impressive 10km a day for 10 consecutive days, raising €3,500.**

community. I think it's important to raise money for Christian Aid because of all the good it does. We are very lucky in this country. We are really blessed."

Christian Aid Ireland chief executive Rosamond Bennett, whose mother Nan Hawthorne (née Brown) grew up in Ballybay, paid tribute to the exceptional generosity of the people of the Co Monaghan town: "I'm so proud of the generosity of the people of Ballybay who show such extraordinary love for the brothers and sisters they have never met, people living in poverty on the other side of the world, and give so generously to ease their suffering. When I was a child, I would stay with my aunt in Ballybay during the summer and it still feels like home."

In recognition of their fundraising efforts over many years, the Ballybay Presbyterian churches were invited to form the congregation for the RTÉ Christian Aid Week service held in May 2019. During the service, they were presented with an award to thank them for their prayerful and financial support for the charity's work.



Gareth Dunlop



Nan Bradford



Margie Savage



Rev Ron Savage

### Gilnahirk Presbyterian Church

North of the border in Belfast, an eight-year-old member of Gilnahirk Presbyterian Church helped raise £500 for Christian Aid during lockdown with a socially distanced art exhibition in the garden of his grandparents' home. Budding artist Patrick Duffield persuaded his grandparents, Rev Ron and Margie Savage, to pin his artwork to the hedge of their east Belfast home and invite neighbours to view it while out on their daily walk, in exchange for a donation to Christian Aid.

Ron (who was minister of Stormont Presbyterian Church until his retirement) and Margie were delighted to raise so much money because they live in a quiet cul-de-sac with fewer than 40 houses. Margie even included a few paintings of her own and thanks to the generosity of their neighbours and friends, raised an amazing £500.

Each May during Christian Aid Week, Ron and Margie carry out a house-to-house collection for Christian Aid but due to the lockdown, they and other supporters had to dream up novel ways to raise money.

The Christian Aid chief praised the eight-year-old: "Patrick really is a lockdown hero and it's great to see he's following in the footsteps of his grandparents by giving his time to raise money for a good cause. There were many lockdown fundraising activities during Christian Aid Week, but Patrick's art exhibition was 'easily' the most original."

### ...an eight-year-old member of Gilnahirk Presbyterian Church helped raise £500...with a socially distanced art exhibition in the garden of his grandparents' home.

### Mountjoy and Drumlegagh

Rev Jonathan Cowan, minister of Mountjoy and Drumlegagh Presbyterian churches near Omagh in Co Tyrone, completed a virtual ascent of Slieve Donard during lockdown. He had calculated that climbing the stairs of his manse 360 times would be equivalent to the 850m height of Northern Ireland's highest mountain.

Admittedly, the views weren't as good as a real ascent of Donard but at least he didn't have to worry about the weather. And he was careful not to wear out his stair carpet, completing the challenge in his 'sock soles'.

He was generously supported by the congregations of both churches, raising around £4,000 which he shared between Christian Aid and sister agency, Tearfund. Christian Aid is grateful for



Rev Jonathan Cowan

the love shown to their global neighbours by Jonathan and the good people of the two congregations.

### Muckamore

Gareth Dunlop, a member of Muckamore Presbyterian Church near Dunadry, Co Antrim, cycled a virtual 'MizMal' during lockdown, pedalling more than 400 miles, equivalent to the distance between Mizen Head in Co Cork and Malin Head in Co Donegal.

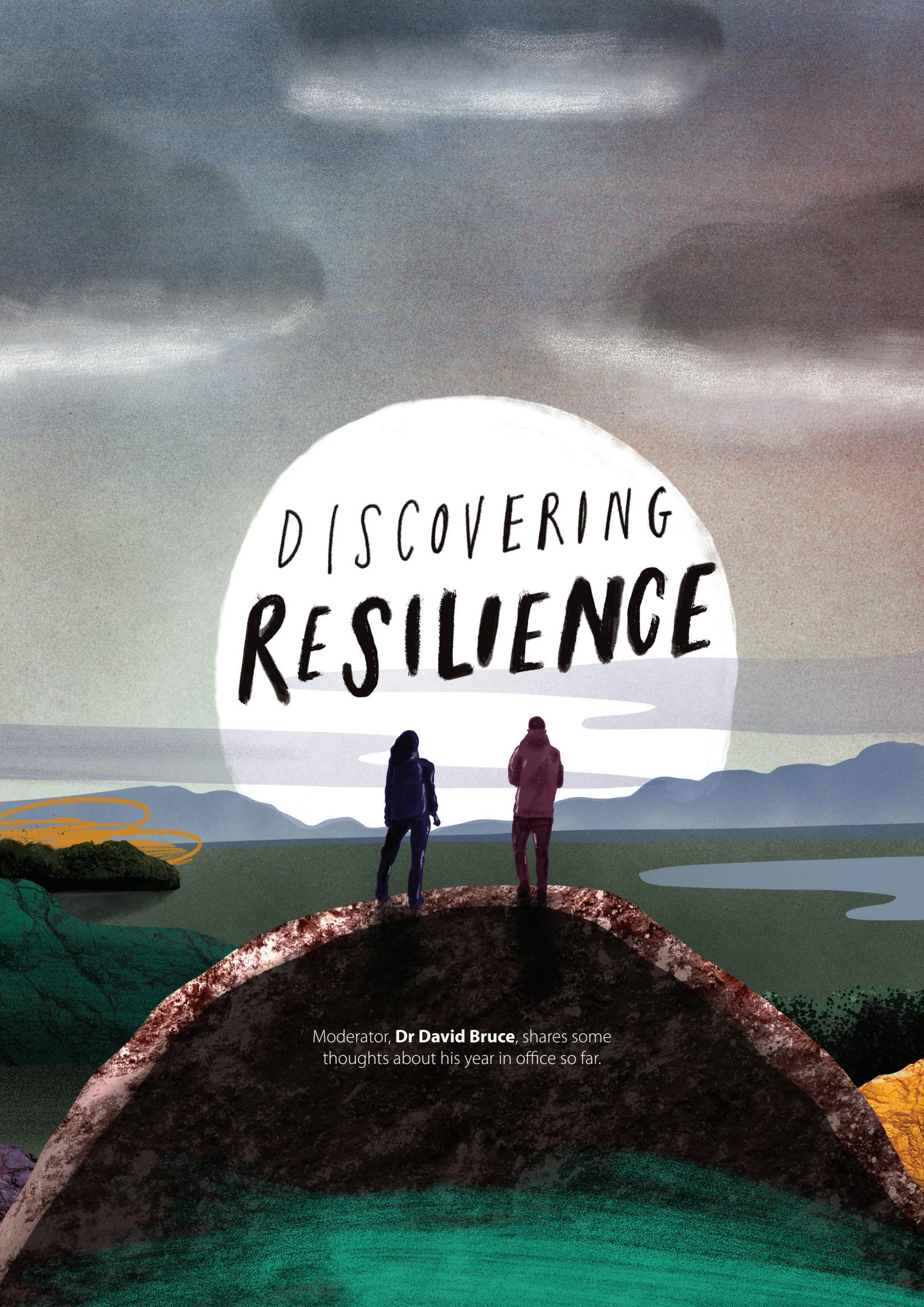
Most of the miles were completed on a static bike in his garage, topped up by circuits along the roads near his home in Dunadry. He was generously supported by the members of Muckamore church, raising £2,000 to support Christian Aid's work.

Gareth, who sits on Christian Aid Ireland's board of trustees, completed the challenge throughout May, covering around 75 miles per week. He said afterwards: "I hope to do the MizMal cycle for real one day but this was a good way to stay fit and raise funds for Christian Aid during the lockdown."

To support Christian Aid, please telephone 028 9064 8133 (Belfast) or 01 496 7040 (Dublin) or visit [www.caid.ie/donate](http://www.caid.ie/donate)

Lisa Fagan is Christian Aid Ireland's communications officer.





# DISCOVERING RESILIENCE

Moderator, **Dr David Bruce**, shares some thoughts about his year in office so far.

**P**revious Moderators told me to be ready for anything during my year of office, and how right they were!

The issues thrown up for comment and response by a Moderator in the course of a year are hard to predict. I was elected on Tuesday 4 February 2020, and to prepare for press and media interviews I was given a lengthy and helpful briefing document containing summaries of the big issues of the day. At that time, Covid-19 was a distant story, focused on China. A few stories were emerging of infections in northern Italy, but the first case of the virus in Ireland would not be confirmed until the end of February. In fact, in all my interviews with the media after my election, Covid-19 was not mentioned at all.

How things changed, when just after St Patrick's Day we took the decision to suspend worship in our churches, and by 23 March, the UK was in lockdown. My predecessor in office, Dr William Henry led the way in an initial response by leading a weekly service of worship online. He also phoned all of our serving ministers to assure them of his prayers and support. It was clear that the church (like everyone else) was having to adapt rapidly to a completely new way of doing its work, sharing space, and relating to each other.

In February, most of us thought 'Zoom' was a noise made by a child racing a toy car across the carpet. As the weeks went by we found ourselves with a whole new world of words and phrases to use, such as 'furlough', 'herd immunity', 'bubble', 'contact-tracing', 'social distancing', 'R number' and 'face-coverings'. The weeks became months, and it was obvious that we would not be able to meet for General Assembly at the start of June. I was installed to my new role in a live streamed ceremony with only 12 people in the Assembly Hall.

### **A resilient life**

As your Moderator, I have travelled less, but listened more in the first six months of my year of office. Along with all the new words and phrases mentioned above, there is another word which has emerged, which will prove to be increasingly important. It is the word 'resilience'. The dictionary says that resilience

## **Resilience may be found when we stand firm together. The armour of God takes on a new quality when it is worn by a battalion.**

is "the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties". It is the ability to bounce back. It is inner-toughness. As well as being a word with a strong stake-holding in psychology and therapeutic practice, it is an idea with deep biblical roots. Where does resilience come from, and how can it be found? Is there something for us to heed as a Church about our own capacity to bounce back, to recover, to emerge stronger?

### **Resilience comes from our stance**

During the summer months, I preached through Ephesians in a series of online services. In chapter 6, Paul offers a strong picture of life as a spiritual battle. He teaches that we can be resilient in the thick of conflict. We have an enemy, the devil, and he attacks us when we are weakened, downhearted, discouraged and compromised. But in one of his best-known passages in all the letters, Paul describes the armour of God we must learn to wear if we are to prevail. Tucked in to the start of this description is an important insight regarding our stance. "Therefore, put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything to stand. Stand firm then..." (Ephesians 6:13-14).

Standing is our stance. If we adopt any other stance we will be weakened. To be resilient, we don't run away, turn tail, give in, fall over or capitulate. We stand. This

is easy to say of course, but how do we do this when life has fallen apart around us? The key is to see that this letter was written to a church, not an individual. Standing is something we must do together – indeed something we may only do if we act together. If we attempt to face such trials and stand alone, we will (in all probability) fall over exhausted and defeated when our personal resources expire. Resilience may be found when we stand firm together. The armour of God takes on a new quality when it is worn by a battalion. This is why it is so important for us to find ways to keep in touch with each other, praying for each other and propping each other up with cards, emails, phone calls and plenty of encouragement. Ministers and elders, who is propping you up? Find someone. Find many.

### **Resilience comes from our location**

Psalms 71 tells the story of a person in trouble. He is facing the ancient equivalent of being trolled on Twitter. His enemies "speak against him" (verses 10-11) accuse him and want to harm him (13). When people oppose us in these destructive ways and do so in public, it can be distressing and even affect our mental health. So, how can we avoid the despair which might easily follow such activities by opponents?

The writer of Psalm 71 relocates to a new place – not physically, but spiritually. They travel to a refuge for the bruised and battered – a place which is open 24/7, and which is completely impregnable to the worst of the trolls. "In you Lord, I have taken refuge" (1). "Be my rock of refuge to which I can always go" (3). But it is what they do when they arrive in the refuge which is the key to their resilience. They "tell of your righteous deeds" (15); "proclaim your mighty acts" (16); and they root these "tellings" of God's activities in their own lived experience – "You have been my hope, Sovereign Lord, my confidence since my youth" (5).

The vital fuel for the building of resilience is the retelling of God's story in our lives so far. The refuge is the place where this is done, because there we can be deeply private and intimate with God. Tell your own testimony to yourself and to him.



Make it your prayer. By counting our blessings in this intentional way while in the safety of the refuge, we stand against the naysayers, silence our accusers and gather confidence again to go out to serve Christ in the world. The outcome is deep resilience, which is summed up in verse 14: “But I will hope continually, and will yet praise thee more and more.”

### Resilience comes from following

Volunteering in service to Christ is essential to the life of our churches. We depend upon volunteers serving faithfully to achieve most of what we do. But when our programmes become the reason for our busyness, they can become dispiriting, draining and demotivating. So how do we avoid our activity becoming the very thing which empties us, leaving us unwell, depleted and disillusioned?

There is an important difference between being an activist and a disciple. An activist will do what they do because they are driven to complete the list of tasks before them. An activist’s busyness flows from being driven. A disciple will do what they do because they are called to do so by the one they follow, and will want to honour and serve him out of love. A disciple’s busyness flows from Christ’s

## Is there something for us to heed as a Church about our own capacity to bounce back, to recover, to emerge stronger?

call. An activist and a disciple may both do precisely the same job, do it equally well and be congratulated for their work at the end. One will ultimately be drained by the experience, the other energised by it. One will finally stop, spent and burned out. The other will grow, develop and be hungry for more.

In John 15, Jesus teaches about the importance of bearing fruit. He states clearly that we cannot bear fruit unless we remain in him (verse 4). It may be that in a culture of activism (which is all-too-easily perpetuated in church) we have mistaken fruit *bearing* in Jesus’ name for fruit *production* in our own name. Jesus is firm about this. “Apart from me, you can do nothing” (5). In fact, fruit bearing in Jesus’ name is a sure sign that we are his disciples, not mere activists, doing our own thing (8).

The Presbyterian Church which will emerge from the disruption of Covid-19 will not be the same as the Church which entered it in March of 2020. It may be that some segments of our Church and its activities will disappear completely. But I am sure that other parts will grow and flourish in ways we couldn’t anticipate. My prayer for us as a people is that we would be so focused on the one who calls us to serve that we will be willing to set aside some cherished things from the past in order to follow closely after Jesus. I pray that we will heed his leading and gather the resilience to serve him with gladness and great joy. I pray that we will not be burdened by this, but blessed by it. I pray that with such resilience, we will bounce back, recover and move on to the next chapter of our story – because ultimately it is his story in which we are privileged to participate.



## Overseas Covid-19 appeal

In response to the devastating effect of the coronavirus pandemic on some of the poorest communities on the planet, PCI Moderator Dr David Bruce launched a special Christmas Appeal to provide support to people in fragile, vulnerable countries.

Explaining the reasoning behind the initiative, which replaces the Church’s World Development Appeal, Dr Bruce said, “For the last four decades or more, Presbyterians the length and breadth of the country have given prayerfully, generously and sacrificially to support sustainable life-changing projects around the globe through our World Development Appeal. As the worst global pandemic in a century wreaks havoc and undoes decades of development work in so many parts of the world, this year we needed to do something different.”

He continued, “The effect of Covid-19 on the economies of the more fragile, low-income nations of the world is multiplied. Of course, it

has had a major impact here on our island home, and I know at first hand the unprecedented demands that it has also placed on our congregations and on our members. Yet, I believe Presbyterians are a people who have been shaped over the years by faithful prayer, deep compassion and practical concern for those in need, as well as sacrificial giving when faced by emergencies, which come before us, and will respond as they have done before.”

Funds donated to the Moderator’s Christmas Appeal will be distributed between PCI’s relief and development partners, Christian Aid and Tearfund, who are already engaged on the ground in longer term sustainable development work amongst those most affected by Covid-19. They will also go to churches with which PCI partners



directly to support relief efforts in seven countries on three continents – South Sudan, Malawi, Indonesia, Nepal, Lebanon, Syria and Romania.

For further information on the types of projects that will be supported, or to donate online, please go to [www.presbyterianireland.org/appeals](http://www.presbyterianireland.org/appeals)



## At Home for Christmas?

MODERATOR’S CHRISTMAS APPEAL 2020

# A pastor's plea

*Rev Dave Leach*



I have become increasingly uneasy at the kind of language and rhetoric used by many Christians on both sides of the pandemic debate.

There are those within our church fellowships who vehemently deny the existence of the pandemic and who continue to circulate video posts that rail against the increased government restrictions imposed. Then there are others who tread cautiously and are advocates of mask-wearing and protecting the vulnerable at all costs, willing to forgo our liberties for 'the greater good'.

None of us, as ministers, have pastored during a pandemic before and I also said during my last sermon pre-lockdown that "we need to be careful not to take our wisdom from Donna in Donaghadee or Ricky in Randalstown."

Months on and there is a swirl of noise 'out there' that is hard to avoid, but one of the features of so many of these posts/vlogs is that they sound very pious and appear very wise but carry no biblical background or spiritual weight. I believe that much of it comes down to the fact that we have been a privileged people for so long, blessed beyond measure and few of us have really known what suffering is. So, we feel entitled and when any of that is removed, we become embittered, even angry and often emotional.

One of my favourite Bible characters and books is Daniel. As a teenager he was transported from Jerusalem (amongst the privileged and entitled noble class) to Babylon. He was exiled from home, given a different name (in fact a pagan name), separated from his family, stripped of all that was familiar, unable to join in corporate worship at the Temple and often left marginalised because of his beliefs in the only living and true God.

Whilst in Babylon, he served under successive governments and fearsome, dictatorial kings. Yet, never once do we hear Daniel complain. Never once do we see Daniel compromise his faith in Yahweh. He is happy to receive the training of the Babylonian noblemen but not eat the food offered to idols. He interprets dreams honestly but serves each king wholeheartedly.

The only time we hear anything negative from Daniel is when he confesses his own sin and the sins of his people (Daniel 9). In other words, he sees all that has happened to Jerusalem and his exile as a result of his nation's pride.

In his changing circumstances, in unsettling times, under governments and dictatorships that we would have despised, Daniel does not start anti-Nebuchadnezzar rallies, or down-with-Darius discussion forums, nor doubt the authenticity of their

powers. Instead, he prays, three times, every day. Daniel prays.

Daniel had his eyes firmly fixed beyond Belshazzar, Darius, Nebuchadnezzar, even the den of lions. He had his eyes firmly fixed on the Most High, "whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, [where] all rulers will worship and obey him" (Daniel 7:27).

Through these unsettling days and troubling times, in the confusion and chaos, Daniel looked beyond Westminster, Stormont, the Dáil, Babylon or Jerusalem to the 'Son of Man' whose kingdom cannot be destroyed.

In the latter half of Daniel, we read that he dreamed great dreams of future events, prophecies that have been and continue to be fulfilled. In every dream that took troubling turns and appeared to cause universal upheaval, there was always the fixed

point – an image of God, the Ancient of Days, of Jesus Christ, the small stone that grew to become an immovable Rock. Even the times, dates and days listed (and much debated) pointed to the fact there

was a start and an end, a beginning and a conclusion to wars and regimes, plagues and pandemics, because God is in control, glorious, overall and seated on his throne.

The last verse of Daniel encourages me most as the Lord speaks to Daniel in his closing dream saying: "As for you, go your way till the end" (Daniel 12:13). In *The Message* it reads: "And you? Go about your business without fretting or worrying."

God reveals this to him in response to his question: "What will the outcome be?" (Daniel 12:8). Daniel is told, now as an old man (maybe 50 or 60 years later), to basically 'get on with it'.

"Go your way" is a reminder to Daniel, and to all of us as believers, that this earthly life is to be lived for God until the very end. Under changing circumstances, under governments and leaderships we may or may not like, in pandemics and post-pandemics, in lockdown or freedom, at home, in church, shielding or mingling, mask-wearing or anti-masking, are we doing it for God and his glory alone?

Instead of posting – let's pray! Rather than fretting – see the Lord, seated on his throne.

Let us not be consumed with fear on our minds or with anger in our hearts, but have our eyes filled with the glory of Christ.

Christian friend – keep on...

*(This article is adapted from a Facebook post Mr Leach wrote in September 2020.)*

*Rev David Leach is minister of Lecumpher and Union Road, Magherafelt churches.*

**Instead of posting – let's pray!**

# Taking stock

The *Herald* talks to a variety of Presbyterians about their experiences of the pandemic and the lessons they've learned from it.

## Heather Gracey

Secondary school  
English teacher,  
Greenisland  
Presbyterian Church

School had been very busy coming up to lockdown as we began moving lots of resources online and recording material. I felt discouraged that schools probably were going to be closed until September, and I was concerned for the examination classes.

Now we are back in school, pupils and teachers are generally much happier. It's hard to keep some pupils motivated at a distance. Teaching works best in person! To quote a friend: "Online teaching is all the stress and none of the fun of real teaching."

Teaching is a very collegial profession and when you are in school there is a lot of camaraderie amongst staff, and the extra-curricular activities in school really build relationships among pupils. We tried hard to maintain a sense of the school family by having online assemblies, quizzes, musical events and online sports activities.

Faith needs exercised; it's important in circumstances which can lower your mood to maintain spiritual disciplines. Not being able to attend church in person shows the extent to which you can take something for granted, but it probably gives valuable insights into how the church in other parts of the world exists all the time. I learnt the wisdom of the Bible's injunctions on so many subjects! I had decided at the start of the lockdown, when some friends were baking sourdough or learning Portuguese, I was going to invest in my spiritual life.

I found hope in the belief in the resurrection. My brother died suddenly after a short illness in June; he had his 61st birthday while in the ICU. Had I



not had the "sure and certain hope of the resurrection from the dead" I don't know how I would have dealt with the situation. I'm not sure I found joy, but I did find a sense of peace in circumstances I could never have foreseen; there definitely is a "peace that passes understanding".

A friend sent me a link to the song *Press On* by

Selah. It resonated because of its central message that when things are hard, we need to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus and press on in his strength, not our own, which will fail us.

During a period which has been traumatic both personally and professionally, I have been heartened to see how the church has stepped up to support the needy and to build community. God is at work. On a personal level I am grateful for books, songs, messages and visits which arrived at the right moment.

## Julia McAnespie

Supermarket customer service assistant,  
Banside Presbyterian Church

At the start of the pandemic, I felt scared and worried at work. There were so many people in the shop, and there was no social distancing and no one-way system. We didn't have screens to sit behind until later, and some customers would come and stand right in front of you with no mask on. Sometimes people were cross, which could be stressful.

It's different now and feels much safer. Everybody's got used to the routine and we just get on with the new ways

**People were frightened back in March. One time, an older woman cried at the till.**

of doing things. And there's no panic buying! People are more patient and relaxed and not as cross as they were. People were frightened back in March. One time, an older woman cried at the till. She said she was scared about what would happen if she got Covid. Her husband had died some time ago. This was hard because I wasn't able to give her a hug the way I might have done earlier.

As a young person, it has been hard for me not to see my friends. I wonder if my social skills have gone down! I don't like talking on the phone so mainly I have just been texting my friends. I would have gone to the gym a lot as well, so that's been another big change for me.

I didn't think the pandemic would have gone on as long as it has. I have passed the time by walking with my mum every day. We try to at least go different routes to make a change. I was worried at the start about my nanny, and I missed being able to hug her. We had lots of garden visits, but I haven't been able to see my brother in Dublin. We missed a big family holiday to South Africa, and I didn't get to go away for my birthday this year.

But I just got on with things and realised that I could do what I had to do. I realised how important my work is. Many people thank me for being there. I have found hope in God, and I have found joy in

nature and its beauty. I've been surprised at the goodness of others and how people are working together to help each other.

I look forward to going for coffee, going on holiday and getting back to in-person church when things return to normal. I've missed singing together and



## I've been learning to recentre myself around Jesus...

saying the Lord's Prayer. Listening to *Mary Did You Know* has meant a lot to me during lockdown. Mum plays it often because it makes her happy and I love the beautiful, special words.

### **Richard McCombe** Café manager, Hamilton Road Presbyterian Church

I have worked in the hospitality industry for 25 years and now manage a small family-run café.

The café closed, like the rest of the country, for the national lockdown in March. Initially I felt excited as I knew I was off work and getting paid for it under the government's furlough scheme. However, after 8–10 weeks I started to get worried for my

job as there was a chance the owner might not reopen. My main challenges during lockdown were keeping my mind busy, walking every day to keep active, shopping for my parents and friends who were housebound and making dinner for my wife, who was still working as an occupational therapist in the NHS.

During lockdown, I was saddened to hear that churches had to close. This signalled the untimely end of the sessions for Boys' Brigade, of which I have been an officer for 26 years. I miss seeing the officers and boys on a Monday night and hope that this will return in early 2021. I enjoy watching the online services each Sunday morning and am deeply thankful to the church ministerial team and elders who have worked tirelessly to make this a success. Knowing that the church is still active gives me hope for the future, but I do believe that God is in control and has a plan for each and every one of us and the church as a whole. I enjoy singing at home, reading the Bible and listening to a sermon each week – at least this is one common factor in life that has not



changed. I really do miss meeting church friends, going to the church building and meeting as a congregation each Sunday and all the other church activities during the week.

The café reopened in July with many changes in practices implemented. Tables spaced out, staff temperatures taken daily, masks and visors worn, track and trace telephone numbers taken, hand sanitiser stations round the shop, limited customer numbers and everyone now more conscientious and aware of their responsibilities. We closed for a second wave in October and at the time of writing, have not reopened yet. We hope to reopen for the weeks leading up to Christmas.

2020 has been one of the strangest years in my life, but I do believe that God is in total control and one day we will look back at this year and understand why it happened.

### **Suzanne McCombe** Specialist occupational therapist, Hamilton Road Presbyterian Church

I work as a specialist occupational therapist in mental health services in the NHS; at the beginning of the pandemic there was much anxiety and stress as every day there was a barrage of news and frequent changes to our practices. It was worrying to know how our services would cope. There was concern that I might be redeployed, as many other allied health professionals were moved into other roles; I was fortunate that this was not the case.

Work changed overnight. I went from having freedom to take my patients out of the unit to being restricted to the ward environment only. Deep cleaning of all surfaces began, and this took extra time. I was used to wearing my 'capsule wardrobe' and now was presented with a

uniform, which I hadn't worn in years. This is one change that I have grown to enjoy – not having to worry about what shirt and jumper combo to wear every day! Surgical facial masks became the

new norm; I now only recognise people by their eyes. As for our staff friendships, we went from gathering around the tea table to spreading out around various rooms and at times the car even became a makeshift kitchen! This has been the hardest thing to adapt to, as our work friendships are sometimes what get us through the day. Face-to-face meetings moved to new media platforms, which was a swift learning curve and were sometimes not as beneficial as first hoped.

I had a great fear of bringing the virus home to my family. But praise God, he has kept myself and our team safe. I have been able to adapt quickly when required, and this flexibility has helped me find innovative ways to continue to deliver the service to my patients. I look forward to a time when I can return to taking patients out from the unit to enjoy walks in the local forests as well as beaches.

During the height of the pandemic, it was comforting to have the consistent draw of weekly church services online. As the captain of our Girls' Brigade, it was hard to bring our organisation to an abrupt end; however, there has been great joy in maintaining it online. Seeing the girls getting involved and setting them weekly challenges has been rewarding. The pandemic has afforded me the opportunity to connect with GB companies around the world; taking part in webinars has been a great blessing, and I've been able to connect with these leaders around the world, to pray for their



## While we experienced anticipation and adrenalin in April, this has now largely been replaced by fatigue and resignation.

companies and to share ideas from the Bahamas, to South Africa to Malaysia!

Throughout this uncertain time; a piece of Scripture I've found helpful is Isaiah 41:10: "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." How wonderful to know that we don't have to be afraid, even in the midst of a pandemic. We do not know the outcome of what we are going through, but the Lord certainly does and holds us fast. One praise song that I have returned to throughout this pandemic has been *Sovereign Over Us* by Michael W. Smith. The chorus reminds us that God has not forgotten us and will be faithful forever.

How amazing to see God at work even in this pandemic. We have been able to slow down, to enjoy the wonderful world he has given us and to connect with those around us.

### David Dunwoody

#### Family member of Adelaide House resident

No one has escaped this pandemic, one way or another. My mother, now 95, is a resident of Adelaide House in south Belfast, one of PCI's residential care homes.

In January 2020 mum moved from a first-floor bedroom to a ground-floor room.

All was fine and visits to her by our daughters, who now live in London, were great – personal and warm. However, early in March 2020 management,

correctly as it turned out, put the home in total lockdown.

We were fortunate because we could call and see her through the window, not ideal, but compared to others who were unable to visit or see their loved one, we, as a family, were lucky and very thankful.

Although mum has been in Adelaide House for three years it was not until the pandemic 'kicked in' did our family realise how much care the residents were receiving. It was quite obvious that over the weeks and months from March 2020 that it was taking its toll on staff, but they remained unbelievably strong and positive 24/7.

Since the beginning of this virus our two daughters and a new grandson (mum's first great-grandson) have cherished those short visits and have shared the good news that twins have now arrived, which has also pleased the staff, our extended family.

I must admit that since March 2020 we all have left that window in tears and laughter. It is so reassuring that mum is being well cared for.

Our family would like to publicly thank the manager, Norma Picking, and all the staff at Adelaide House (carers, chefs, cleaners, ground staff etc.) who have been wonderful in caring for all the residents in Adelaide House over these extremely difficult times.

Life is all about timing and I'm glad we took that 'window of opportunity'. As I write this, the first vaccine has been administered – we live in hope!

### Rev Alistair Rosborough

#### Minister of Ballyarnett and Knowhead Presbyterian churches

Ministering to two congregations, one worshipping in the Irish Republic and the other in Northern Ireland, in times of Covid-19 presents its challenges, particularly whenever the regulations in both jurisdictions differ. Different travel restrictions, for example, often much tighter in the Irish Republic. Thankfully, the sight of a clerical collar reassures the

Garda officer on duty that this driver is surely legitimate!

When it comes to funerals, with the family home in one jurisdiction and the

place of committal in the other, care has to be taken that there is no inadvertent breach of the law, where what might be permissible on one side of the border is not on the other. There is the need to be adaptable in the conduct of worship, moving over these past months from an initial joint live online service to then being able to meet physically in both locations (with a pre-recorded service for those unable to attend either) to (at the time of writing) holding one live online service for one congregation before moving to leading a service in the meetinghouse of the other.

With members of both congregations spread over the two sides of the border, even when their church building is open it is not always possible for them to attend because of where they live! Prayers are therefore regularly offered for both Queen and President, both Taoiseach and Tanaiste and First Minister and Deputy First Minister, both Assembly and Oireachtas for the decisions that must be made affecting all of the membership. This means following two sets of news headlines and consulting two government websites. Both places of worship do have their respective Covid-19 protocols in place, so any resumption of public worship can be promptly facilitated should restrictions on meeting be relaxed, and thankfully these protocols are very similar.

In a way, this situation is a microcosm of PCI as a whole, for while there may be two legal entities in which we operate there is but one church and one Lord over all. As the old hymn says, "In Christ



## ...I do believe that God is in total control and one day we will look back at this year and understand why it happened.

there is no east or west, in him no south or north.”

### Grace McClune

Anaesthetist, Ulster Hospital, Saintfield Road Presbyterian

As someone who lives on their own, I found a lot of lockdown quite lonely and isolating. There was suddenly a lot of empty space in my life that I wasn't used to. Keeping connected to people became a real challenge. I noticed that staying connected was harder in the second lockdown because there was a level of activity we hadn't had first time around, with everyone having more work commitments and school schedules.

In church I was involved in the preparation of worship music for online services; we recorded a lot of music and off the back of that we produced a CD for members of the congregation, which we are hoping will raise some money for charity.

Workwise, in March there was a lot of intense activity to get ready for something and we weren't quite sure what. There were lots of changes to what we did and the way we did it, which was all very sudden. We found ourselves somewhere in between fear and anticipation. Then from May, we were trying to figure out how to make the rest of what needed to happen in our hospital work again. We needed extra staff, extra time and extra precautions to do the things we'd been doing before Covid-19 struck. It was hard to achieve our goals and to be efficient. All the while recognising that this wasn't going away any time soon and we would have to live and rest in that space without becoming frustrated.

Over the last few months things have ramped up again for us. I oversee our

junior anaesthetic staff and so one of my challenges has been trying to ensure that they are still getting the right level of training and to look out for their wellbeing. While we experienced anticipation and adrenalin in April, this has now largely been replaced by fatigue and resignation in terms of morale

and that is harder. I certainly sense that much more amongst the nurses at this point; our theatre and recovery staff, when being pulled into ICU, are doing jobs that they are not used to doing and they're feeling under pressure.

Another thing that I have noticed in this season is the difference in my prayer life. During the first few months of lockdown, it was heightened. Our discipleship group started to meet weekly as opposed to fortnightly, and that was purely for prayer. I also had opportunities to pray with work colleagues – the hospital church was largely not in use so we were able to set it up for socially distanced prayer early in the mornings. We prayed a lot about the Covid situation, about the hospital, decisions that were being taken, patients that were coming in and for one another and we saw answers to those prayers. I think the challenge now is how we keep a hold of that desire to pray more both individually and corporately.

In this time, I've learnt an openness and a dependence on prayer that I hadn't known before. I've also learned how to better recognise the answers to prayer in the everyday. We repeatedly saw God working in and through situations. I feel that this pandemic has taught me to hold on to the promises of God and to remember that whatever is changing around us, and whenever our sense of security and comfort is rocked, God is unchanging. I've learnt to trust him in the knowledge that he's got this.



However long it may take, God is in control. He's got this and he's got me.

### Lara MacClean

Education welfare officer, Orangefield Presbyterian Church

I am married to Gareth, the minister of Orangefield Presbyterian Church, and we have three children: Karis (11), Archie (10) and Lily (8).

Initially, as things were building towards school closure, things were tight and felt quite anxious. The school closure came at a time when I was still studying – I was doing my social work degree which I had been doing part-time for five years already. The kids were then all at home, and we were trying to do home schooling.

Archie attends Torr Bank Special School and he had experienced an abrupt end to his routine, which he so needs, much more than the girls. That was



difficult – we were trying to entertain them, do a bit of home schooling, I was finishing off my degree and Gareth was still trying to do ministry, which changed overnight. Suddenly everything related to church had to go online – the decisions involved in this were stressful for many.

While Gareth was physically in the house much more, which was lovely, he wasn't really present because he needed to be on Zoom a lot to coordinate church life. The Orangefield building has amazing facilities so people usually would have met Gareth at the church, but suddenly everything was brought

## I've been very much drawn to the psalms throughout this experience, I have clung to many of them when it has felt difficult.

into our home in a sense, which I found a challenge at the start. We had to set up the dining room as a classroom and make office space for Gareth whilst trying to keep Archie entertained in the midst of it, so it all felt quite chaotic.

School is Archie's happy place. His behaviour is so much more positive when he has had his day at school – it is a fairly strict routine and he knows exactly who he is going to see and what order things come in. For all of that to be taken away overnight, without any explanation, was hard for him. With the girls I could explain to an extent what was happening, but for Archie there was no way of communicating that the bus wasn't coming tomorrow and you're not going to see your teacher for 'I don't know' how long. It was also common for our children to see their grandparents regularly. For Archie, with his particular needs, doing Zoom instead was very difficult and challenging.

We got to a point where we enjoyed some of our lockdown, in that we adjusted to a pattern of home schooling, and we put enough things in place for Archie to manage him throughout the day. Gareth got into more of a flow with church and we got into a lovely rhythm of making sure we did our daily walk. With the challenges of Gareth working in ministry, he has always worked anti-social hours; I've also worked unusual hours. So in our marriage and in our family time, this was the most time that we had ever been gifted. Somewhere in the middle of lockdown we realised how lovely that was.

In stripping everything back in 2020, the busyness, the need for productivity and efficiency in work and family life, I certainly believe God has been saying, "Be in relationship with me. Stop and be still. Know who I am first and then the rest will come." I've been very much drawn to the psalms throughout this experience, I have clung to many of them when it has felt difficult. I've been learning to recentre myself around Jesus,

fixing my eyes on him once again and not filling my life with things that are good but maybe not all of which is important. My prayer is that we do not miss or forget what God has been saying to us as individuals and as the church in this season.

### Ruth Barr

#### Psychiatrist, Bloomfield Presbyterian Church

Like so many I struggled to adjust to all the changes in those early weeks and months of the pandemic. I learned some new things about myself. Certainly, with the introduction of home schooling, I quickly learned that I would have been an absolutely dreadful primary school teacher.

At a time when public worship and meeting in church was suspended, I also struggled to adjust to that change. But I found I had a little bit more time to read and I began to read a book called *Olney Hymns*, written by John Newton and William Cowper. It's a book of old hymns written in the 18th century. I'd read it during a period of illness several years ago and I'd always been fascinated by the lives of both of those men. William Cowper was a renowned poet; he was a great hymn writer and he also suffered greatly for a number of years with severe and recurrent mental illness. He attempted suicide a number of times; he experienced psychosis and spent prolonged periods in an asylum. He has vividly described those periods of intense hopelessness and despair. For a number of years, he took great comfort from his friend, the clergyman and abolitionist John Newton. I think John Newton provides us with a really great example of how Christians and the church can respond in supporting people when they experience mental illness. John Newton stayed by

William Cowper's side; he persevered and he supported him for many years. He didn't abandon him, even when he doubted and fell into long periods of despair. And he didn't try to argue or criticise Cowper's experience. He gave frequently of his time, prayed and was present during those periods of illness. And after Cowper's brother died in 1770, Newton asked him to help him in compiling a book of hymns, which have become known as *Olney Hymns*.

I like to think that John Newton served as a constant reminder to William Cowper – that God would not let him go and that nothing could separate him from God's love, no matter what his emotions were or how intense his despair was. In my work I frequently come across intense hopelessness and despair and sometimes it can feel as though God has given up on the situation and that it is without hope. But I've been reminded regularly in recent months of the life of William Cowper and how he suffered and yet through all of that the truth of God's constant mercy and faithfulness in the midst of that despair.

And I've also been reminded of the value of friendship – that God is in the midst of suffering and that he brings comfort through friends and has made sense of our lives in ways that we may never fully comprehend in our lifetime.

The last hymn Cowper wrote was called *Light Shining Out of Darkness* and reminds us so well of God's great sovereignty and grace. "Judge not the Lord by feeble sense

Trust him for his grace./ Behind a frowning providence/ He hides a smiling face."





# A global perspective on Covid-19

**Pip Florit** takes a look at how the coronavirus has affected PCI's partner churches around the world.

It's safe to say that life in the past year has been nothing like any of us anticipated it would be. None of us pictured the new routines, changes to how we work, different ways of doing church and school, adapting to wearing face coverings and the contradiction of appreciating how Zoom connects us, while at the same time dreading the next time we have to use it.

This pandemic has truly been a global event and our global mission partners have been dealing with the same questions of how to adapt to a new normal. For many of them, there has been no such thing as a furlough scheme, health care has not always been adequate, and unreliable or absent internet has given them fewer options for staying connected. Yet, they have carried on faithfully and have seen God's faithfulness to them.

**Church of Central Africa  
Presbyterian, Livingstonia  
Synod Health Department,  
Malawi**

On paper, Covid-19 has not affected Malawi excessively – as of November

2020, under 6,000 cases had been reported, compared with 1.2 million in the UK. However, a shortage of testing kits and a difficulty in reporting to hospitals make it likely that this figure is much higher. In reality, the effect of the pandemic in the country has been extensive, not least the effect on the economy, which had been showing signs of improvement in 2019. Many Malawians have now lost their means of income as jobs have been lost and businesses struggle. These losses have had a knock-on effect on many other aspects of society, including churches, schools and health care.

The Health Department of Livingstonia Synod covers 15 health facilities, including three major hospitals in the Livingstonia region. Mphatso

**More than anything else...  
the realisation that God is  
in control has helped  
people to face challenges  
and stand firm.**

Nguluwe is the health director for the Synod and has been working hard over the past year to meet both physical and spiritual needs. She says, "There has always been this question of, 'Where is God at this moment?'...non-believers would come and say, 'Tell your God to save you from this pandemic!' It was hard."

Cultural stigma, staff shortages and financial deficits have placed significant strain on the health department. There is a sense of fear in the communities – the hospitals are viewed as the places where Covid-19 dwells, so the sick do not want to go there. For those who do get tested, there is a fear that if the test is positive, they will face discrimination, even after they have fully recovered. Many hospital staff have been infected and the resulting quarantine has decreased the available workforce significantly. The running of the department is further affected as it relies on overseas contributions and with many regular donors facing their own financial difficulties, donations have reduced.

Restrictions, cancelled plans and vast uncertainty – these have been a dominant



One of the GMIH congregations taking care of her corns that are ready to be harvested



Rev Simeu and her church members are harvesting peanuts



Rev Kabarei is planting corns in his back yard

theme in the past year, but Mphatso says, “I thank God that he is ever present to calm down the storm of emotions.” She has been encouraged by the support that she has seen from people who are in difficulties themselves – people and groups who, in spite of their suffering and loss still say, “How can I help your situation?” The hospital staff have come together, going out of their way to serve their communities. “[The difficulty] drew us close to God because we knew that he is alive and he sees and that he will meet us at our point of need.”

### Evangelical Christian Church of Halmahera, Indonesia

The Evangelical Christian Church of Halmahera (GMIH) covers an area of Indonesia that consists of 781 islands. Many of these islands are isolated, with irregular sea transport making them difficult to reach. The area has seen just over 2000 cases of Covid-19, a small proportion of the 441,000 cases in the whole of Indonesia, but has still been subject to strict restrictions in most areas of life, including church and education.

### ...churches are not disaster-proof. Yet the church is alive and shaped from disaster to disaster.

The impact of the virus on the population, both within and outside of the Church, has been far-reaching. As opportunities to work have decreased, personal finances have become strained, in turn, affecting Church finances. Rev Demianus Ice, general chairman of GMIH, reports that Church members are experiencing heavy struggles, particularly where there have been Covid-19 deaths and the normal funeral services haven’t been able to take place. In the wider community, domestic violence has increased during the period of restrictions, particularly against children. The number of Indonesians living in poverty has increased by more than one million, compared with the previous year. The already isolated islands have become even more so as public sea transportation

has been stopped or limited. In this context, the Church continues its ministry.

In 1985, PCI provided a boat to GMIH, allowing them to reach the islands to meet the practical and spiritual needs of their residents. Thirty-five years on, the boat is in dire need of replacement to allow the mission of the Church to continue. GMIH have been praying and working for a number of years to be able to provide this essential tool for ministry. Recently, a combination of a crowdfunding appeal and a PCI grant have allowed them to reach their target.

He says, “One of the things we have learned during the pandemic is... churches are not disaster-proof. Yet the church is alive and shaped from disaster to disaster.”

Despite the trials and frustrations, the Church has seen positive events: people are spending more time with their families, praying and playing; they are adopting healthier lifestyles; and many members of congregations have developed gardens in their homes,

### Rev Anderson Juma, Church of Central Africa Presbyterian, Blantyre Synod

Rev Anderson Juma arrived in Sheffield in September 2019 to start a master’s degree in Social Research, supported by PCI. He didn’t expect that, halfway through his course, a global pandemic would cause a national lockdown.

He had travelled to Sheffield with his wife, Cynthia, while their two children remained in Malawi. In January, Cynthia took ill and doctors advised that she have an operation to remove some cysts. The operation took place in the middle of March, shortly before the UK’s first lockdown. At that stage, Anderson had been contemplating deferring his studies in order to be able to care for his wife. However, because of the lockdown, he was able to continue his studies as well as helping Cynthia through her recovery.

“I found respite in the online studies that came about due to the lockdown, a situation that allowed me to continue with my studies as if I wasn’t going through a hard time. I praise God for turning what was generally considered to be a bad thing into something positive for me.”

The period was not without its worries. The Jumas’ two children, 18 and 15 years old, were still in Malawi – who would look after them if they got ill and would the Malawian health services be able to cope? At the beginning of the pandemic particularly, they had so much uncertainty and so many unanswered questions, their only choice was to rely on a God who is always faithful. Their children stayed safe during the first wave of infection in Malawi and the country has not experienced a second wave with low numbers of cases continuing throughout October and November.

He is awaiting the results of his master’s degree, with the hope of pursuing a PhD before going on to teach at one of Malawi’s theological institutes.



which they have used to grow crops of vegetables, turmeric and beans. The addition of the speedboat now allows them to emerge from the pandemic, looking forward to the future in the hope of developing their mission and ministry.

### **Gujarat United School of Theology, India**

With nearly nine million cases (as of mid-November 2020), India is one of the countries worst affected by Covid-19. In the initial response to rising cases, there was a complete, nationwide lockdown between March and May, with a phased reopening from June.

PCI has a longstanding partnership with the Church of North India Gujarat Diocese, in recent years supporting several students from the Gujarat United School of Theology (GUST). GUST closed just before the nationwide lockdown came into force and students were sent back to their homes. The college remains closed physically, with classes conducted online – not a simple option for GUST, as many students do not have access to internet at home and the college had not yet developed online learning. This caused financial strain on the already depleted resources of the college, which relies on donations to run.

Sanjay Malaviya, principal of GUST, has seen the huge psychological impact of the pandemic. “Phobia, depression, anxiety, stress, suicidal attitude, frustration...It has challenged many spiritually...some have questioned the



**We are connected by a powerful God...who sees each of us where we are, who knows what we need, and who is our hope.**

presence of God in the midst of chaos and death.”

There have been many challenges for the Church: motivating people who are facing economical and psychological stress, providing financial, medical, pastoral and spiritual help, along with managing the diocese and college with reduced income. It has been a great time of difficulty.

In the midst of that difficulty, Sanjay says, “More than anything else, according to my experience, the realisation that God is in control has helped people to

face challenges and stand firm. Prayers and assurance of God’s unfailing love through his Word has brought healing to broken hearts.”

He talks about “real heroes” who have emerged from the Christian community in the midst of the most demanding and seemingly hopeless situations. Among these ‘heroes’ are nurses who would pray with patients, individuals who provided relief packages for people who had been left without a daily wage, a caterer who delivers food to those who have been quarantined and a group of young people who distributed food packages to 300 people.

The crisis is not over for India and both the Church and college have a long way to go before getting back to normal, but in the pain, there is hope in knowing that God has it all in his hands.

Many of our global partners’ experiences are not all that different from ours. Uncertainty about when it will all end, frustration at more restrictions, fear of the physical and economic impact – we’re not strangers to these feelings, but we’re united by much more than that. We are connected by a powerful God who is in control, who sees each of us where we are, who knows what we need, and who is our hope.

### **Zaw Lar, Presbyterian Church of Myanmar**

Zaw Lar is currently in his third year of a master’s degree in Music at Silliman University in the Philippines, supported by a PCI scholarship. He has played a significant role in music in the Presbyterian Church in Myanmar and plans to take on a teaching role at the Church’s theological college in Tahan.

Zaw was preparing for his end of second year exams when the extent of the Covid-19 pandemic in the Philippines became apparent. The university cancelled all end of year exams to allow students to return home, however, this came too late for Zaw as Myanmar had suspended the arrival of international flights. Zaw had to remain in the Philippines, carrying on with his studies online. This was a significant change for his studies and meant that he needed “a desk, books, internet, a laptop, piano, guitars...and supportive parents!”

Zaw managed to get access to the things he needed to continue his study and quickly adapted to attending classes on Zoom and using online social networks to keep connected to people, both around the university and back in Myanmar. It hasn’t been easy – the loneliness has been difficult to overcome but Zaw is continuing to focus on his studies, buoyed by the support from his home Church. “It is my prayer that I’ll complete my Master of Music on time and teach the students of Tahan Theological College and the youth members of the Presbyterian Church of Myanmar.”





# A church *for the future*

**Alan Meban** considers how church might change going forward in 2021.

**C**hange can be exhausting, particularly if the change is unexpected, unwelcome or unplanned. That's the message I've heard loud and clear while remotely recording and editing episodes of the *These Three Remain* and *Refined* podcasts since the start of lockdown. If you haven't been listening to the podcasts, you can find the back catalogue of episodes at [www.presbyterianireland.org/refined](http://www.presbyterianireland.org/refined)

The pandemic that began last winter has disrupted every part of our lives: at home, at work, and at church. What was gathered became scattered. What was traditional had to be reimagined. What was familiar was replaced by the new and unfamiliar.

A graph of the emotional cycle of change is often drawn starting with uninformed optimism, dropping into informed pessimism, reaching the lowest point in the valley of despair, before lifting through hopeful realism to informed optimism, and eventually reaching success and fulfilment. That cycle is accompanied by feelings of denial, anger, bargaining, depression, testing and acceptance: a neat summation of 2020.

It's been a privilege to sit in the background and listen to podcast reflections from a diverse set of ordained and lay leaders from across this denomination. As well as sharing emerging best practice, they have been honest and admitted old shortcomings that have been exposed in the light of the pandemic.

Some congregations' initial reaction to lockdown was to do nothing, putting the clutch down and taking their foot off the accelerator to coast along for a while, believing that it would all blow over quickly.

Others longed for everything to return to the way it had been, and in the meantime found ingenious ways to keep as much familiar activity going as possible. The effort they expended was often exhausting and proved unsustainable.

I've also met a smaller number of people who very quickly saw an opportunity to reset what they were doing. This was a God-sent opportunity to do things differently. The pandemic

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was a positive wake-up call to simplify their congregation and build it back up from the basics.



Many of these reformers faced resistance from others in their congregation who were unwilling to countenance change.

To be successful, the cycle of change requires tact, clear communication and a deliberate attempt to discuss, listen and adapt rather than steamroller or decree. There is also a place for conflict: working through disagreement properly, and prayerfully, can achieve change without destruction.

Intentional change can be exhilarating and energising rather than exhausting. If we are *Ecclesia semper reformanda est* ('always to be reformed', words from St Augustine that were popularised by Karl Barth) then there are many lessons that we can learn from lockdown, personally and collectively.

As we start 2021, I've collated some suggestions for New Year's resolutions that congregations might consider.

### Put others first

The number of churches that led, or joined in, community efforts to help those who were shielding in their communities last spring was very encouraging. Much of the work was silent and done without attracting publicity... as I discovered to my frustration while trying to find four stories every week to highlight in a regular slot on BBC Radio Ulster's *Sunday Sequence* during the spring months. It wasn't easy!

English theologian William Temple is credited with saying, "The Church exists primarily for the sake of those who are still outside it." Lockdown has reconnected many churches with



## Intentional change can be exhilarating and energising rather than exhausting.

their local communities, becoming the backbone of foodbanks and prescription delivery services. Let's build on those relationships rather than let them wither. Let's ask local communities how we can champion and support them. Rather than just being *in* the community, let's offer our buildings and facilities to be places *for* the community, serving parishes and becoming centres of worship seven days a week.



I've been disappointed to hear about a minority of people in a minority of congregations who chose not to comply with the rules around face-coverings

on the grounds of 'conscientious objection' rather than medical reasons. While churches and businesses may be frustrated at the lack of transparency around the rationale for the unfolding rules, refusing to go along with a simple act that puts other people's welfare first is discouraging some people from returning to church while the virus is still circulating. And it could be seen as a poor witness of the self-giving Christ who laid down his life for others – us – to live.

### The church is not a building

Despite our misplaced love of churchianity, while buildings can be closed, church definitely cannot. It is good and necessary to meet regularly to worship, but is it the be all and end all? Sometimes what we say smacks of idolising place over kingdom, a loyalty towards buildings that goes far beyond our faithfulness to be present together to worship. Perhaps it's time to revisit our ecclesiology? And our theology of worship? Sometimes our worship of God is best expressed in a radical love for outsiders.



When congregations, ministers and members have spoken out over the last nine months to challenge government legislation and guidelines, the messages have often appeared self-centred, complaining about governments' interference with the freedom to worship rather than campaigning on behalf of others in society who were facing hardship. Rarely have statements decrying church building closure been accompanied with lobbying and lament on behalf of Christians in countries around the world where a lack of respect, oppression and persecution is the norm.

## Don't leave anyone behind

There always were people in congregations who could not attend church. When the majority joined the minority in not being able to be present at services of worship in the church building, a new wave of possibilities was suddenly unlocked. Services were streamed online, not merely distributed later in the week on CD or DVD. The text of sermons was printed out and dropped through letterboxes. All of this was possible – but rarely prioritised – pre-pandemic.

I heard one minister explain his surprise at a conversation with someone who had got in touch after watching an online service. The member had previously been consigned to a list of 'shut-ins' and largely ignored, deemed to be neither interested in attendance nor faith. But it turned out they had a very good medical reason not to be comfortable attending on a Sunday and continued to explore their faith despite being written off by their congregation. Having reconnected with people the church has accidentally (or systemically) abandoned, it would be wrong to disengage when regular face-to-face worship resumes.

There are difficult decisions ahead, particularly around whether to continue to live stream services when the majority can once again gather safely, rather than make them available afterwards. Fear of missing out (FOMO) is a great way of encouraging people not to fall into the lazy habit of 'sofa church'. Yet the innovations during 2020 have allowed more people than ever to be part of the church community even when shift patterns, health or disability work against attendance. And it's never been easier to check out what happens behind the closed doors of church buildings.

## Small is good

The culture of judging success by the number of people attending an event has surely been broken by the continuing need for social distancing. Large scale events stroke our egos, but even Billy Graham evangelistic rallies that were held in enormous stadiums finished with individuals stepping forward and being spoken to by a single person who could connect them with a local church.

The system of making an elder responsible for regularly checking in with a list of members in many congregations has injected vigour into a pastoral care system that was quickly becoming 'by exception only' in some parishes.

Conferencing solutions like Zoom are at their most effective when a screenful of people get together. It's a house group or prayer meeting without needing to book a babysitter and leave your home. Suddenly, people who previously couldn't participate are able to join in. If



your mid-week meeting returns, might it alternate between meeting up and going online to keep these people involved?

The gospel changes one person at a time. Youth leaders and ministers discovered that going for a purposeful walk was a great way of

## Where you invest your time and energy is where your priorities lie.

mentoring and discipling while also caring for people's mental wellbeing. It can be intergenerational, and it recognises that coming to faith is only the start of the journey. Small scale discipleship is surely the way forward over large scale events. Doing less, but doing it in more depth.

## Question everything

Ministry to older people has been particularly disrupted due to shielding and health vulnerabilities. So too has children's and youth work which is often hands on and doesn't translate well to these socially distanced times.

PCI's Children's Development Officer, Ruth Bromley, explained in a November podcast that youth leaders in her congregation had come together and talked about their aims, and what they were trying to achieve when their organisations were running. In these new circumstances they asked what they could do together that would serve and nurture children and families in the congregation, even if it no longer looked like their traditional organisational approach.



That's an example of real leadership. Setting aside tradition and loyalty to organisations in order to think afresh about what is possible and what is desirable as we help people see God.

## Focus your energy

Where you invest your time and energy is where your priorities lie. That was the message from the Moderator preaching in Abbey Presbyterian Church in Monkstown for the first Sunday in Advent. Dr David Bruce suggested that congregations should concentrate on the DEFs (Discipleship, Evangelism and Fellowship) rather than the ABCs (Attendance, Buildings and Cash) that tended to preoccupy kirk sessions.

Adjusting to church in a time of pandemic has allowed people with different skills to come to the fore to help deliver new programmes. People who can quietly edit video have never been in such high demand. It's also been a time when some leaders have chosen to step down. Needing to make decisions around the health and safety – rather than the spiritual direction – of congregations has led some elders to retire. When kirk sessions are refreshed with elections of new elders, what skills and leadership qualities are required?

None of these resolutions is new. But perhaps the pandemic will help focus our minds to prayerfully make some intentional changes that will help better build God's kingdom.

God commissions Joshua with these words: "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:9).

As Joshua implored the assembled tribes (24:15), "Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve." For if we are to serve the God of Joshua, won't we be given new structures and patterns for entering into new and less familiar territory?

# Mission *Connect*



Trusting in God's timing

## PCI mission news from around Ireland and the world.



Every aspect of our Church's mission depends to some extent on United Appeal. Hundreds of projects and programmes at home and overseas are helping to advance God's kingdom, showing God's love in action to hundreds of thousands of people.

### Overview of global mission

*Uel Marrs*

### Overview of home mission

*Christine Craig*

### Overview of social witness

*Lindsay Conway*

*Including winter prayer diary*

## The Covid-19 learning curve



**Uel Marrs** gives an overview of how PCI's global mission workers have been coping in these difficult days.

**B**eing a PCI global mission worker called to serve overseas, to grapple with a new language and culture, not to mention the crises that may come along the way, is a steep learning curve at the best of times, no matter how much training and orientation has been received. In the past year, however, many of PCI's 27 global mission workers have seen that learning experience accelerated by Covid-19, whether they remained overseas or temporarily relocated back to Ireland.

While much of Europe has been shored up by some form of government support, in many countries in the global south, no such safety net exists. Global mission workers serving in more fragile, vulnerable countries, have witnessed Covid-19 having a disproportionate impact on the economy, especially where it has been mixed in with a cocktail of other crises.

Take Zambia, very vulnerable to the virus, yet cases appear to be fewer relative to Western countries. Nonetheless, due to Covid-19, tourism has all but ceased, the currency has been rapidly losing value, businesses are collapsing, and the government is not well placed to step in with financial support.

As the numbers of flights in and out diminished and Zambia closed its borders, Diane Cusick, PCI's global mission worker there since 2016, found herself housebound and very isolated. Diane works in early childhood development with the Zambia Synod of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian, but for several months she couldn't get on with delivering teacher training, visiting schools, never mind just having time with the children in their play. In such circumstances, there is really only so much planning for the future a person can do.

Thankfully, Diane took much comfort in chatting with friends over Zoom and found she had a

good choice of online services from PCI congregations. There was also some relief when the lockdown eased and schools reopened, even if it was difficult to sanitise the children's hands when the school had run out of soap and water!

Diane has shared how church members, with little or nothing to put in the offering plate, would bring chickens for their ministers so they would have eggs or meat, even if they hadn't been paid in months. Likewise, at the Synod's theological college at Chasefu, the staff receive little by way of allowances, but the principal kept working and staff continued to teach, with food for the college being supplied with bags of maize and beans from local Christians, and vegetables being cultivated in local gardens. As one minister said to Diane, "God will provide enough!" Throughout this crisis, global mission workers like Diane have been humbled by the resilience and determination of their local colleagues, providing them with timely lessons on their Covid-19 learning curve.

In Bilbao, northern Spain, where Derek and Jane French have been serving for the past 20 years, along with their children, Gabriela and Luka, they have experienced some of the longest, strictest lockdowns, being housebound other than for essential shopping and short socially distanced walks.

Add to this the demanding regimes of home schooling from that day when their children arrived home with all their books, expecting mum or dad to take over as teacher; the sheer intensity of constant, virtual meetings to take forward the many facets of

their work; the disappointment that travel restrictions meant a much-anticipated visit to Ireland to see family and for deputation had to be cancelled; and some protracted health issues. Yet throughout they have found new ways to connect and provide pastoral support for close friends and colleagues who

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were enduring so much grief, pain and loss due to Covid-19. Derek and Jane have been amazed at the new, unanticipated opportunities for ministry. Indeed, the most recent Christianity Explored course has seen a number of new faces coming along to church, including four young men from various religious backgrounds, with a keen interest in Christianity. They testify to the goodness of an unchanging God, who has been inspiring creativity and adaptability despite all the challenge and change faced on their Covid-19 learning curve.

Peter and Jayne Fleming have been serving in Nepal since 2017. When Covid-19 hit, Peter remained in Kathmandu, continuing his work as an integral development adviser by video-conferencing. He observed how a wave of poverty swept over the country. There were tens of thousands of Nepali migrant workers stranded and struggling to get home, the tourism industry was decimated, and millions of daily wage earners found themselves unemployed. Despite this, grassroots Nepali congregations maintained a 'salt and light' witness to Jesus Christ, forming community support groups and raising funds for much-needed hospital equipment.

The time came when it was right for Jayne to return to their family home in Coleraine, from where she embarked on a tough regime of teaching her classes by Zoom at the Kathmandu International Study Centre. To allow for the time difference, Jayne's day often began around 3am in order to be ready for the first class. On occasions she had to deal with power cuts, poor quality Wi-Fi, and helping small children struggling to operate their laptops. It was more intense than face-to-face teaching, involving much video preparation, the marking and returning of work, not to mention long-distance communication with parents.

In the past year, whether located in Ireland or overseas, some global mission workers have seen God advance his kingdom purposes in wonderful ways, while others have adapted and grown through uncertainty and change. Looking back, it seems very clear that the God who has been working through their lives,

advancing the mission of Christ and his kingdom, has also been working deeply within them. Sometimes they felt they were just about coping, other times humbled by invaluable life lessons from colleagues, at all times on that Covid-19 learning curve, on a journey towards greater maturity in Christ.

*Rev Uel Marrs is Secretary of the Council for Global Mission.*

#### Please pray:

- Pray for each PCI global mission worker as they work either overseas or temporarily from Ireland. Pray that each of them will continue to mature in their faith as they serve in different and challenging times and as they continue on the Covid-19 learning curve. Pray too for their health, safety, stamina and encouragement.
- Pray for countries around the world dealing with the health and economic consequences of Covid-19. Pray especially for people who live in more fragile, vulnerable countries, whose governments are less capable of providing financial assistance and good healthcare for their citizens.
- Praise God for the support global mission workers have received from colleagues and people where they are serving and also from PCI congregations and members in Ireland.
- Give thanks and pray for those in Zambia who gave what they had and who had faith that 'God will provide enough.'
- Give thanks and pray for the new people attending the Christianity Explored course and the church in Bilbao, Spain which Derek and Jane French are involved in.
- Give thanks and pray for congregations in Nepal who formed community support groups and raised funds for much-needed hospital equipment.
- Pray for the continued advancement of the mission of Christ and his kingdom throughout the world during this time of uncertainty and change.



## Trusting in God's timing



**Christine Craig** shares stories of mission across Ireland over the past 10 months.

It is good to reflect back and take stock of what has been a very extraordinary year for everyone, including PCI's deaconesses, home mission ministers and mission workers.

In March, when the lockdown was announced, church leadership teams very quickly had to change their Sunday rhythm, and church life, as a whole, took on a new form. Eleanor Drysdale, deaconess in Wellington congregation, reflects: "On 15 March 2020, I had taken our morning service, the church had upwards of 600 people present; on the morning of 21 March there were five of us in the church as we did our first live stream service."

This stark contrast, certainly not unique to Wellington, illustrates how different life became in such a short time. Many ministries and organisations within churches moved online, with Zoom becoming a regular feature in order to be able to connect with people. Life was, and in many ways still is, done at a distance. Pastoral ministry took place via phone calls and the inability to be present with people who were suffering, particularly during times of distress and bereavement, was felt all the more painfully.

As congregations considered how to assist those who found themselves in need during the pandemic, community initiatives were then quickly established. Initiatives like that of the 'Craigavon Cares' team or the 'Together for Ballyclare' project. Michelle Purdy, deaconess in Ballyclare congregation, explains, "From my office I was able to help coordinate the 'Together for Ballyclare' phone line and volunteers and this was definitely a highlight of those months. 'Together for Ballyclare' increased cooperation between the different congregations and denominations in the Ballyclare area and also increased our

partnership with local businesses and community groups."

Rev Lachlan Webster reflects that following the set up of the 'Craigavon Cares' initiative, "Little did I realise that myself and my family would be the first on the receiving end of this help!" Lachlan benefited from the kindness of his congregation during a period of illness. He says, "Broken physically and struggling mentally and spiritually, I went from ministering to my church family to being richly ministered to by my church family. While I couldn't read my Bible, they read the Bible to me each day, with videos of different members reading Scripture posted on Facebook and WhatsApp. In my weakness, when I could not work, God was still very much at work."

During this time, one of Lachlan's daily Bible readings was 2 Corinthians 12:19: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Lachlan comments, "His power was indeed made perfect in weakness and his grace was indeed more than sufficient for me! This was a painful lesson to learn but one which gives me great optimism for the uncertain future we face. Why? Because we are weak, but Jesus is strong."

Rev David Clarke in Sligo outlines how he was encouraged by the kindness of his congregation as they sought to stay connected and care for each other during lockdown, and how he had been the recipient of lots of kind treats and parcels left on the manse doorstep (including a slice of cake during his lockdown birthday!). He was also encouraged by the way people engaged with the online Bible studies and services, highlighting that more people are joining in with the online Bible studies than would have been able to in person.

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Rev Richie Cronin from Cork and Aghada highlights that Zoom prayer meetings facilitated some people getting to know each other who hadn't previously. Richie also shares some of the challenges he faced, one of these being the set up of a video for a Sunday morning which takes a significant amount of time to edit and upload. He comments, "Many of my folks have reported to me a real sense of loss by not being able to worship together" and that "the virtual is in no way a substitute for the real." There is an acknowledgement that meeting together in person to worship is the desired approach and people are longing for the day when we can do so again, without restrictions.

In this time of challenge, Richie reflects on how he has seen people driven to Jesus and his Word and how people have testified that their faith in the Lord Jesus has helped them during this time.

Planning is another challenge many are facing, as circumstances change on a regular basis. Michelle Purdy comments: "At the moment I am only planning a day or a week ahead as I learn to trust in God's timing and not to run too far ahead with my ideas."

The work of the International Meeting Point in Belfast has been dramatically impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. When lockdown commenced in March, the drop-in centre on the Lisburn Road had to close, as did the OP Shop on Carlisle Circus. Prior to this, the ministry had been thriving. From April to June, together with Windsor Presbyterian Church, food was distributed to those who needed it most. The Bible study in Farsi continued during this time via Zoom. Lockdown was particularly difficult for asylum seekers and refugees as it brought even more uncertainty into their lives. Processing asylum claims was put on hold for some months and accessing the normal support for housing and benefits etc. was much more difficult.

During this time, just seeing a familiar face brought much comfort and assurance. God's timing was evident, enabling help

to be brought to people who really needed it. During lockdown, relationships established through the mum and tots group in north Belfast were maintained through phone calls and delivering food hampers.

In August, the shop was able to reopen in north Belfast and Bible studies resumed on the Lisburn Road with good social distancing rules in place. The first day that the OP Shop reopened one lady was waiting at the door. As a result of previous conversations and times of prayer, she has requested that the staff study the Bible with her and her husband. It was such a joy to see people engage again and to be able to help people with individual needs. While the ministries have been in constant flux, God continues to work in people's lives, deepening their faith and drawing them closer to himself.

*Christine Craig is PA to the Secretary for the Council of Mission in Ireland.*

#### Please pray:

- Pray for home mission ministers as they seek to minister to their congregations and care for their communities in these challenging times.
- Pray for deaconesses in their pastoral work and as they seek to reach those in need in their congregation and community.
- Pray for Irish mission workers and community outreach workers as they consider how to reach out in constantly changing circumstances.
- Pray for the International Meeting Point whose work is much more difficult at a distance and over technology. Pray for opportunities to do Bible studies and help people in a socially distanced way.

## A time like no other



**Lindsay Conway** outlines how staff and residents of PCI's residential homes have coped through the Covid-19 crisis.

**T**he health and social care sector has been constantly in the headlines since March 2020. Much of the early focus was on hospitals and the overall impact on health care. By mid-summer it was acknowledged that the residential and nursing homes were bearing the brunt of infections and a reported 54% of deaths.

Never in my 40 plus years in social work have I experienced so many challenges on a daily, sometimes hourly basis.

Never in the history of Social Witness, has our Church dealt with such an acute issue as the coronavirus.

Never have nursing and care staff had to put their own lives at risk to care for residents.

Never have residents and tenants been denied a visit or a hug from a loved one.

Never have I been more conscious of the responsibility that we as a care provider are protecting and saving lives on a daily basis.

Never have I witnessed the dedication of so many.

Never have I experienced so many guidelines and instructions – many too late – many contradicting each other.

Never have I experienced the levels of exhaustion amongst staff.

Never have we had a situation that continued to have more questions than answers – more problems than solutions.

Never have I been so conscious of my responsibility in looking after hundreds of residents and staff.

Never have I put so much pressure on the senior staff.

What a journey we have all been on over the past nine months.

Initially we were pacing ourselves, with the expectation that it would all be back to normal in two or three months, but this has not proved to be the case. In those early days we had to meet the challenges

of lockdown and personal protection equipment (PPE), then the restrictions of visiting, the stresses of resident and staff testing and now new hope in the vaccines. We have witnessed the best – in the generosity of people – and also the worst in the behaviour of those who fail to accept the restrictions placed on us by new procedures and government guidance, thus continually placing our services under added pressure.

Residents have been so accepting of their new normal and have adjusted well to new routines. Many have missed out on significant birthdays and family events – family weddings, graduations – marooned in their homes, like never before. Families and friends have been very supportive, with few exceptions. But without doubt our staff have been the heroes of the Covid-19 crisis. As we enter a new year, they have now worked flat out for over nine months, working long hours to a point of exhaustion, experiencing PPE fatigue and of dealing with new situations – ever conscious that there is no rehearsal, this is it.

One staff member writes: "It is our job to try to brighten up their days by organising activities and our activity coordinator tries to come up with new and different ideas and new ways to entertain. We have had visiting guests leading times of worship from the car park. Different skills are coming to the fore... rollers, blow dries are all being added to tasks carried out by staff as residents are really missing a hairdresser. We have to continue to look for the blessings during this time. We are so privileged; we have a beautiful garden and the weather has been glorious so residents have been able to get out to enjoy the sunshine."

The biggest frustration throughout this Covid-19 crisis has been the frequent issuing of guidelines from the Department of Health and Health and Social Care trusts, often at short notice, with levels

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of inconsistency in the advice given. For example, the Minister of Health announced that: "Families can now visit their granny in residential and nursing care" – without going into the details. That simple statement resulted in homes being inundated with requests for visits and staff being placed under considerable pressure to explain the lengthy process to enable visits.

We have greatly appreciated the support from all our colleagues in the trusts, at so many levels, especially at the times of a Covid-19 outbreak in particular homes. I commend the contribution of Minister of Health Robin Swann and the chief medical officer, chief nursing officer and chief social worker. There has been no rehearsal for this pandemic – we are all learning as we go. Local communities have embraced our work, with treats, music and prayer. We gave all our staff Easter eggs, 'hero' water bottles over the summer and vouchers at Christmas to show our appreciation for their dedication. In July we placed a banner outside all our homes and units saying:

"The Covid-19 crisis has been a testing time for us all. We would like to thank our residents, tenants, families and friends for their understanding and patience. A special thank you to our staff who have dedicated themselves to looking after all those in their care – you have been our heroes. Thanks to all in this community who have been so generous with your gifts and treats – your music, good wishes and prayers. Together we are making a difference."

As I conclude this article, we are entering another period of lockdown and vaccines are our priority. The Council for Social Witness staff are exhausted and have simply worked flat out since March of last year. Residents have been denied their visits and hugs for too long and families are running out of patience. The encouragement and prayers of many have sustained us and enabled us to do great things. We have been so blessed in our work and have remained Covid-19 free for lengthy periods. Sadly, we have lost residents to Covid and have managed a few spikes of the infection; we have had both residents and staff test positive. But whatever comes our way, we are safe in the knowledge that

"whatever we do in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Colossians 3:17).

*Lindsay Conway is PCI's Director of Social Services.*

#### **Please pray:**

- *Pray for the residents and tenants of all our homes and units as they continue to adjust to new routines – that they may find comfort and the peace of God as they come to terms with not meeting family and friends.*
- *Pray for all staff in our homes and units and for all working in the health and care sector – that they may continue to sustain good health and strength to work on during these challenging days. Give thanks for the dedication of staff, many of whom have worked to exhaustion to look after those in their care.*
- *Pray for all family and friends as they come to terms with not being able to visit their loved ones who are in residential or nursing care.*
- *Pray for all professionals who visit the homes, who give medical, nursing and personal care.*
- *Pray for the senior team within the Council for Social Witness as they manage the daily challenges of a service provider.*
- *Give thanks for the scientists and doctors who have worked tirelessly to develop a vaccine in record time.*
- *Give thanks for the Ministers of Health, Robin Swann and Stephen Donnelly, and their officials as they guide and support the health and social care sector.*
- *Give thanks for the support of Council and committees and the wider church as we journey together during these difficult and stressful days.*

## Overseas

Pray for each PCI global mission worker as they carry out their ministry in their context; overseas or at home in Ireland on a temporary basis. As the presence of Covid-19 presents new and unexpected challenges, pray for encouragement, fresh insight and renewed energy.

For many countries across the world which already had precarious health care systems, pray for those health care workers on the frontline trying to battle the impact of Covid-19 with limited resources. Pray for PCI's partner churches as they minister in their local context – that they would have strength and wisdom for all the challenges they face.

## Home

Give thanks for the new opportunities that this past year has provided for ministers, deaconesses, outreach workers and congregational ministry teams to draw alongside individuals in their own congregations but also those in the community, in new and imaginative ways.

In these challenging times, and in particular as the situation can change at such a rapid pace, pray that ministers and other congregational staff are able to respond and adapt effectively. Pray for strength and energy, and that they will see blessings upon their work which will serve as an encouragement.

Pray too for our Forces chaplains as they support and minister to those serving in the army, navy and RAF.

## Children and young people

Throughout 2020 and also in 2021, the school life of our children and young people has been greatly disrupted. Pray for them as they face the uncertainty of what this new school term will bring, as they worry about the effect on their education and future prospects.

### Digital Dispatches

Today we are able to communicate with others from across the world like never before, and with technology at our fingertips, we as followers of Jesus are now able to be global disciples. With that in mind, Digital Dispatches was created – a series of short and long film clips from PCI global mission workers. To enable us to play a part in what God is doing near and far, these clips help to raise awareness, provide insight to the work being carried out by each of the workers and to guide our prayers. The longer 10–15 minute clips of individual workers also include an overview of their context and some stories from their ministry, along with a section of Bible teaching and prayer requests.

Visit [www.presbyterianireland.org/digitaldispatches](http://www.presbyterianireland.org/digitaldispatches) to view the videos and start your global journey.

**Digital Dispatches**  
FROM PCI GLOBAL MISSION WORKERS



## Let's Pray

Let's Pray is a weekly email resource, providing prayer topics and requests for the coming week running from Sunday to Saturday. It features prayers and requests concerning all aspects of the life and work of the Church, with a major emphasis on global mission and mission in Ireland. By signing up to the weekly Let's Pray email, which arrives in your inbox on Thursday mornings, you will discover prayer requests from the personnel serving our Church. This could include a community outreach worker who is coming alongside a young person from their youth club, a Forces chaplain supporting a person serving in the armed forces, or a global mission worker involved in writing theological materials to support the church in Kenya. Whatever the need or request, your prayerful support is a vital aspect to the work being carried out in God's name. Be encouraged and blessed by what God is doing through PCI in Ireland and overseas and join others in prayer. You can subscribe to Let's Pray here: [www.presbyterianireland.org/letspray](http://www.presbyterianireland.org/letspray)



Give thanks for the new ways of learning which have been created and for the ability of children and young people to accept the current situation and make the best of it. Pray for teachers as they adapt to the educational changes and seek to provide meaningful learning opportunities for pupils.

Pray too that churches will be able to find new ways to maintain contact with our youth and that faith can still grow and be nourished despite challenging circumstances.

Pray for young adults as they face uncertainty in their further education or chosen careers and for our university chaplains as they support students in these times.

## Older people

As we commence a new year, pray especially for the older people in our congregations and communities. This past year has been particularly difficult for them, many have been isolated from friends and family for long periods of time and have missed that warm hug or hand held. Pray for those in care homes now receiving vaccines for Covid-19, and give thanks for the medical expertise that has enabled this.

## Give thanks

As we acknowledge the pain and great challenge that 2020 has been for many, be that job loss, ill health, loneliness, anxiety and despair, we also acknowledge and give thanks that we have a God who knows all things and is in control. May we rest safe in the arms of our Lord and Saviour, as David wrote in Psalm 31:14–15: "I trust in thee, O Lord; my times are in thy hand."



# Lessons from Covid

**Norman Hamilton** shares some thoughts on what he's learned from the pandemic so far, and reflects on what we should focus on in 2021.

**W**e all learned quite a lot in 2020! We learned about lockdowns, circuit breakers, social distancing, and spikes on the surface of the virus Covid-19. But as a new year begins, I have found it really important and equally valuable to reflect on what the Lord has been teaching me throughout the past year in the light of the health pandemic. Let me share with you the outworking of one particular sermon on the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5) which impacted me quite a lot. It was a sermon on 'kindness'. This is an area of Christian living that links so well with the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10, where a legal expert asks Jesus a question: What must I *do* to inherit eternal life?

The sequence of the responses of Jesus is crucial both to a proper understanding of this parable, and of Paul's call in Galatians to live a life of kindness. The sequence is clear: "Love the Lord fully; love your neighbour well, and do as the Samaritan did... and you will live."

Many of us have found 2020 to be really quite demanding, and almost certainly 2021 will be quite tough too. So what will it look like for Norman Hamilton to live this life of kindness as an outworking of what Jesus said to the legal expert?

I have found that this boils down to the need to be increasingly aware of people and their needs, hopes and fears, and working out how best to support and encourage them. Asking the Spirit of God to help me think well about what people are facing. This is *not* about having 'high falutin' profound thoughts, or trying to work out complicated ideas. It is about the 'quality' and 'range' of thought, and from that seeking to discern how best to serve the Lord and other people. There are so many to whom real tragedy has come, and so many more for whom these are really difficult and testing times – and this goes right across all age groups.

For example, it is relatively easy to think about family and some friends – people with whom I have ongoing contact. But how does the Lord want me to relate to the friend with whom I haven't been in touch for some time, or who lives some considerable distance away; the person I don't know very well, but whom I bump into or see fairly regularly; the work colleague with whom I rarely have a worthwhile conversation; the people next door; the families in need where death or serious illness or unemployment has struck; the family with children who are particularly demanding; the single person living on their own (whatever their age). The list seems endless. The Lord has been teaching me that these are some of the

people with whom he might well want me to try to build better contact and better relationships, though I am well aware this might not always be possible, for whatever reason.

And crucially, this leads me away from random contact with people (when I remember), to much more orderly contact with them. Living a life of kindness includes my deliberately and consciously building a list of individuals and families to whom the Spirit of God might want me to be a blessing. Some will be in a good place; others will not. Some will want to share their joys – others to share their struggles, frustrations and disappointments. Some might well benefit from encouragement and/or prayer support on a consistent basis. For some, a regular

phone call would be best; but for others I should and could send a card – or even a text or email. For others, the delivery of a bunch of flowers or the delivery of a fruit basket would be a great uplift and source of blessing. And the more I think about it, the wider the range of possibilities for giving support opens up.

My prayers are like this: "Lord, help me to think energetically and well about how I can be of help and encouragement to a wider range of people. Lord, how might

I show kindness in a way that uplifts the people whom you are bringing into my life?"

This is just a little of what the Lord has been teaching me recently. What has he been teaching you? Does your story need to be updated/refreshed/renewed? As this new year begins with the certainty of more uncertainties, challenges and blessings, I suggest that it would be very worthwhile to reflect on what the Lord has been teaching you in the past year – and to face 2021 with new God-given wisdom as a result of what you have learned.

Are you up for that?

**Living a life of kindness includes my deliberately... building a list of individuals... to whom the Spirit of God might want me to be a blessing.**

*Rev Dr Norman Hamilton*

*Very Rev Dr Norman Hamilton is a former Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.*





# The digital human

Ruth Sanderson looks at how the pandemic has shaped our virtual lives.

I sent my first email 20 years ago. It said, “Hi. Let me know if this works, Ruth x”. Moments later my landline rang and an excited friend confirmed that, yes! She had just received my email... her first. She then told me that she was going to reply and I should wait by the computer. I watched the (empty) inbox of my newly formed Hotmail account, and nearly jumped out of my skin when up pinged an email reply.

Electronic mail had arrived.

How could I have conceived back then what advances in technology would be made over the next two decades? How could any of us envisage how technology would become integrated into our everyday lives?

No one, of course, could have foreseen the Covid-19 pandemic.

Last December, I wrote an article for the *Herald* with the hope that we had put the turbulence of the twenty-teens behind us. I re-read it recently and laughed aloud. Only a matter of weeks

after it was published, we were facing a global crisis on a scale none of us had ever experienced.

Coronavirus has changed everything about our lives: how we work; the people we see; how we socialise. It has put inconceivable restraints on how we live in the day-to-day. Globally, millions face unemployment, long-term illness, grief and isolation. The virus preys on the elderly, ethnic minorities and the poor. It is a catastrophe which will take decades to recover from. It will also take that amount of time for historians to decipher and unpack what happened. Where the failings were. It'll take longer still to see

**...staring at someone on a screen isn't the same as picking up on the nuances of their expression...**

the full ramifications that 2020 had on a wider global society.

The early days of national togetherness, loo roll stockpiling, relentless handwashing and home schooling seem a long way behind us. Even with the prospect of a vaccine on the horizon, it feels as though life as we know it, has changed forever.

Church has been transformed – first into virtual togetherness, then to socially distanced, often ticketed events.

For those of us who have been able to work from home, the kitchen table has become an office. Zoom, MS Teams and Google Meet have replaced conference rooms and water cooler chats. During the pandemic, Zoom's share price rose by 635%. It's also estimated that Jeff Bezos, the owner of Amazon, amassed over five billion extra dollars in 2020 as the online retailer's stock price ballooned and people relied on home deliveries.

2020 was odder still for me as we welcomed our first child – she was born

five weeks before lockdown began. While my daughter was lucky enough to meet both sets of grandparents, there are still aunts and uncles she hasn't met. It also meant that I couldn't use maternity leave to go to baby groups, meet other mums and get out of the house. It was an intense, exhausting time, and in those early months it felt like no one outside of her father and I existed.

For me, at that stage, technology was a saving grace. A small group of girls from an antenatal class, all of us strangers, all of us destined, under normal circumstances, never to see each other again, began WhatsApping each other. Sitting at home with our new babies during lockdown, we sought each other out for support. We soon moved on to Zoom. This was our version of mums and tots.

Each week, for 45 minutes this band of strangers became better acquainted, as we opened up, sharing our struggles and worries. Yet it was only when lockdown eased and we could meet, socially distanced and in person, that we really got to know each other and I would say, became friends.

The thing is, staring at someone on a screen isn't the same as picking up on the nuances of their expression, the way they hold themselves or interact with those around them. It taught me a valuable lesson – that connection is about more than just being... connected. It's something physical, tangible, real.

I miss social closeness. I miss crowded restaurants. I miss being on a bus and overhearing conversation. I miss people picking up an accidentally dropped item in the street. I miss seeing the expression on a shop assistant's face. I miss the casual togetherness which we all took for granted until it was no longer there. Yet that was the world BC (before Covid-19). I don't think that we will ever be back to the world we knew.

The reliance we have all had on technology has become a double-edged sword. It has compromised our privacy – think of every item bought online, each web page browsed, each use of our mobile phone, each time we appear on a meeting platform. Sometimes without thinking, we submit all our personal details and location. All information is out there, it is stored – even the most benign of data (shopping for cardigans) is fed into algorithms which tailor what we watch,

## I believe that the impact of this technological boom will be increased isolation.

what we buy, and who we follow on Twitter and Facebook. The digital world squeezes and manipulates us with every click, and most of the time we think, 'Oh how convenient'.

The problem with loss of privacy, is that it's very hard to get it back. I think of stories of notable people in the past who burned their letters and diaries before their deaths, retaining control and keeping information hidden. It's virtually impossible to do that now.

More and more of us are working from home. Yet now that the thoughts of 'How lucky I have broadband,' have faded, a new picture is beginning to emerge. Work and home are beginning to merge into one. As anyone who works from home knows, it's incredibly difficult to separate. Just one more email... just a quick office update over breakfast or a meeting invite sent at bedtime. The office door does not close quite so easily when it's in your living room.

There is a question too over the ramifications this will have for workers. It is those working from home who are taking the financial hit. Suddenly the heating is on during the day, the phone and electricity bills have risen. Whereby employers can benefit from 'downsizing' the office, and often sizeable inner-city rents, the workers are expected to pick up the bill. I suspect that many will continue to work from home long after the virus has died down.

Despite being able to keep families and friends in touch over lockdown, I believe that the impact of this technological boom will be increased isolation. A video call is no substitute for being in a room with someone, having a cup of tea, sharing a laugh, or even sharing a tear. This week I attended my uncle's 'virtual funeral'. I watched as the service was carried out – his widow and children in their masks. It was heart-breaking to see it unfold on a screen, and oddly detaching, as though seeing someone's funeral on television. It didn't feel real.

Those who have lost loved ones often talk about the solace of the funeral – who was there, the words of support, whispers

of encouragement, hand squeezes and embraces. Yet last week, I sat numbly watching, unable to lend my physical presence to my aunt or cousins. I just sat and looked at the back of their heads, in a crematorium with immediate family only. An odd, jarringly sad experience.

Apart from funerals and weddings, there are big question marks about how churches will be able to bounce back. The fear is that this may be a pivotal point for many attendees who were on the periphery. Those who were only occasional churchgoers, perhaps didn't log in each week to follow the whole service online. The chances are, they may simply drift away from the habitual nature of church attendance and any family connection may soon be lost.

Fewer congregation members in the pews not only has an impact on the overall figures but also creates a financial problem as numbers fall. Will all churches be able to afford to reopen?

Yet there is no substitute for a body of believers being together. God is a relational God. I believe he works in those interpersonal moments. How many of us can think of times when he has revealed himself to us in a kind word, a hand on the shoulder in prayer, an embrace which gives a glimmer of light in the darkness? Like Moses and the burning bush, he whispers to us in a still small voice.

Now is the moment of choice. Do we fall into the new interpersonal normal which 2020 has forced upon us? Or do we resolve to be even more interconnected? Do we make more of an effort, to give more of our time to real people, in real circumstances, with real meaning? And in doing so, do we see the real value in life together?





# Dealing *with* death

**Professor Max Watson** looks at the issues surrounding the Dying with Dignity Bill, currently under review by the Parliament in Dublin.

**A**cross the community of Presbyterians in Ireland, there are different views around Physician Assisted Suicide (PAS) and Physician-Administered Euthanasia (PAE). These views have been arrived at from moral, theological, cultural, ethical and real-life experiences which guide how each of us will respond to the Dying with Dignity Bill, which is currently under review by the Parliament in Dublin.

The sixth commandment to not kill is clear and has been enshrined as a cornerstone of judicial systems across the world. For those who like black and white clarity, the discussion around changing the law to allow PAS (where a doctor supplies lethal drugs to an

individual in order to end their own life) or PAE (where a doctor administers lethal drugs directly) may end there. For others, the advance of modern medicine has created a more complex ethical spectrum in which not every life-preserving treatment available may be appropriate.

The law in the United Kingdom makes clear that doctors are not allowed deliberately to shorten the life of patients.

**The sixth commandment to not kill...has been enshrined as a cornerstone of judicial systems across the world.**

Equally, however, doctors may accede to a patient's request to discontinue life-extending treatment and may themselves withhold treatments which they consider futile. The Westminster Parliament has repeatedly rejected changing the law for England and Wales by sizeable majorities. The Scottish Parliament has also rejected similar proposals. These legislatures have not been persuaded that there is clear evidence that the current law is in need of change or the proposed safeguards in the bills that have been put forward would be effective in protecting vulnerable people from harm.

The specialty of palliative care exists to help support patients who have conditions which cannot be cured and who need help in managing their

physical, emotional or spiritual symptoms. The current law in Northern Ireland, which is the same as that in England and Wales, sets out the ethical boundaries in which the work of palliative care can be carried out and allows for the palliation and support of the vast majority of patients and families who access our services.

Across the UK the palliative care community has been one of the most adamant of the medical specialties opposing a change in the current law. There are those who take a very different view arguing that it is cruel and heartless for patients not to be allowed assistance to die in order to end unbearable suffering.

Ethically it is a conflict between autonomy, the individual's right to choose, and the potential harm that a change in the law could cause to a much larger population who could be vulnerable to depression or coercion or manipulation to end their lives prematurely.

Where most of us can agree is that for an individual to arrive at a point where they believe there is no other option but to seek to end their life suggests considerable emotional, physical or spiritual suffering. As such, the movement to change the law in Ireland and to provide access to PAS and PAE for anyone who has been living anywhere on the island for more than 12 months could perhaps be seen as an indictment of the services to support those who are nearing the end of their lives.

My own biases make me question how a caring secular society would not want to ensure that well equipped and easily accessible services which can help alleviate such suffering are first made available to patients before making PAS and PAE available.

In relation to the Dying with Dignity Bill, which is going through its consultative stage in Dublin, the Bill itself is a cause of real concern regardless of one's views on the underlying issues. These can be summarised into four categories.

### **Safeguarding**

The Bill uses broadly-worded phrases (a settled wish to die, a voluntary request



free from pressure, mental capacity) to describe those eligible to avail themselves of PAS/PAE. It does not mandate what minimum and specific actions a doctor faced with a request must take in order to establish, beyond reasonable doubt, that those conditions have been met. This makes the Bill open to relying on subjective opinion. As such, it does not provide adequate safeguard against abuse.

### **Euthanasia**

The Bill allows for Physician-Administered Euthanasia (PAE) as well as Physician Assisted Suicide (PAS). Across the world, in those countries

## **...the Dying with Dignity Bill...is a cause of real concern regardless of one's views on the underlying issues.**

where PAE has been legalised, it has been shown to result in 10 times more deaths than PAS. In Holland and Canada where both are legalised, 96% of hastened deaths are due to PAE. PAE has the comforting appearance of health care – intravenous injections by doctors – and it lacks the resolution that self-administration of drugs (PAS) requires.

### **Doctors as judges**

The Bill places doctors at the heart of implementing the system, not just in prescribing or administering drugs but making judgments about matters beyond their professional competence, e.g. whether a request to die represents a settled wish and what family dynamics might be at work in the background of a request. If a society wants to make PAE/

PAS available, this process surely needs to be administered and these judgments made by the courts. Doctors may have a role to play as professional advisers on strictly medical aspects of a request, but, if they are made the judges in such matters, this will fundamentally change the doctor-patient relationship.

### **Jurisdictional confusion**

The Bill seeks to make PAS/PAE available for all on the island of Ireland carried out within the Republic of Ireland. This creates the risk of major judicial, administrative and clinical confusion, as under UK law participation in such practices is illegal. The laws surrounding mental capacity are also different from those in the Republic of Ireland and the practicalities of providing medical information in such a context is a minefield, which will undermine still further the few safeguards that the Bill contains for patients from Northern Ireland. This is not a Bill that the people in Northern Ireland have voted or prepared for but, if passed in its current form, it has the potential to cause real distress and confusion for patients, families and health care staff struggling to understand their ethical, legal and professional responsibilities.

If Irish society is committed to passing such a law, then care must be given to ensuring that the Bill is as safe and thought-through as possible. The Dying with Dignity Bill is not that law.

While we can express our concern about this Bill to the powers that be in both jurisdictions, our words will carry more weight if we also seek to improve our care, support and concern for individuals whose degree of suffering and distress leaves them feeling that ending their life is their best option.

*Professor Max Watson is director of Project ECHO, Hospice UK.*



# America: *One nation under God?*

**Graeme Kennedy** reflects on the complex culture of modern America.

In the summer of 2019, back when international travel was still a relatively easy thing to do, our family touched down in JFK Airport, New York, for the beginning of the holiday of a lifetime. We were going to travel south from New York City by rail and road all the way to Selma, Alabama, the setting of the 1965 Voting Rights marches, where we have good friends. Along the way we would spend time in New York, Washington DC, Philadelphia and Nashville. We would get to see a lot of the interstate system and would lose count of the number of McDonalds, Wendys and Chick-Fil-A diners we would pass along the way.

Ever since meeting our friends from Selma, we have developed a real love for the USA and, in particular, the South. However, we also recognise that it is a very different culture and country to our own – one which seems to grow ever more difficult to understand for those of us looking on from this side of ‘the pond’.

In the globally chaotic year of 2020, the level of chaos in the USA seemed to reach new levels. On the news we saw reports of chaos on the streets and chaotic leadership in the White House and in Congress. Covid-19, the Black Lives Matter movement and the presidential election (which, as I write at the end of November, has still not

been formally conceded) have all given the impression of America as a country in turmoil. The seemingly unshakable devotion of some US evangelicals to the cause of Donald Trump seems hard for many of us over here to fathom and gives the impression that evangelical Christianity in America has lost its way and is losing its witness.

So how are we to view what is going on in America and particularly what is going on in American evangelicalism? I do not claim to be an expert on either America or its evangelicals but, having got to know a little about both over the last few years, I want to share a couple of perspectives.

## **Race**

If you want to have any hope of understanding what is going on in contemporary America, you have to confront the issue of race. The Black Lives Matter campaign is not something that just sprang up out of nowhere in 2020 after the brutal killing of George Floyd on the streets of Minneapolis. It

**In the globally chaotic year of 2020, the level of chaos in the USA seemed to reach new levels.**

is the product of generations of injustice stretching back to the founding of the United States as a nation and still being experienced by black Americans across the nation to this day.

During another visit to Alabama, we had the opportunity to visit the National Memorial for Peace and Justice and the Legacy Museum in Montgomery. These were the idea of Bryan Stevenson, the founder of the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI), an organisation offering free legal support to prisoners who cannot afford it. His story and the story of the EJI is told in the book and movie *Just Mercy*.

Both the museum and the memorial focus on the injustices experienced by black people in America from the days of slavery through emancipation, the horrific lynchings of the late 19th and early 20th centuries and the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. But the story doesn't end with Martin Luther King and Malcolm X and that generation. It continues today in the disproportionate numbers of African Americans in the prison system and on death row. It continues in the reality that in many cities across the United States, you are much more likely to be stopped and arrested by police if you are black than if you are white. It continues in the reality (confirmed to me by a white defence attorney living in Selma) that you are still

much more likely to be convicted and imprisoned if you are black.

So how does all this impact on the church? It has often been said that the most segregated time in the American week is Sunday morning. Black people worship in their church buildings and white people in theirs. Whole denominations in the United States have, in recent years, had to publicly repent of the sin of racism to which they have turned a blind eye, allowed to fester or, at times, positively supported.

However, as is often the case, the story on the ground can be different. In June 2015, a white supremacist entered the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church in Charleston, South Carolina. They welcomed him in and he sat down and listened to the whole Bible study. When they joined hands to pray, he took out his handgun and murdered nine black worshippers. Forty-eight hours later, members of the church and relatives of the victims turned up at an initial hearing for the killer and publicly forgave him.

In the summer of 2020 in Selma, at the height of the Black Lives Matter protests, a white man who happened to be a missionary with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC), home on furlough, was out for a jog when he was approached by a black man who shot him in the leg. The black man, who had a number of mental health issues, was arrested later that day. The following Sunday the shooter's mother turned up in Cornerstone EPC, Selma to meet with and apologise to the family of the man her son had shot. They surrounded her, hugged her and continue to support her and her son.

These are small pinpoints of light in what can often be seen as a bleak and endless cycle of racial injustice in America. They will not, by themselves, solve America's race problem, but they are not to be dismissed. There are places where, life by life, community by community, God's gospel of grace is making a difference to America's most intractable problem.

## Politics

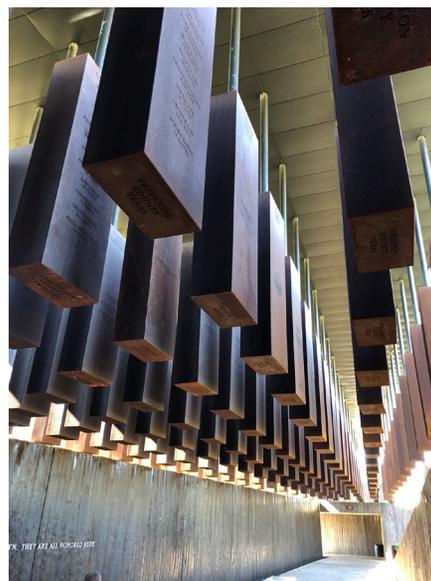
The Black Lives Matter protests sprang into life in the middle of the most bitter



## It has often been said that the most segregated time in the American week is Sunday morning.

and divisive presidential election in living memory. American politics has become much more divisive in the 21st century. It didn't just start with Donald Trump, although he has undoubtedly turned divisiveness from being an unfortunate by-product of partisan politics to being an intentional and effective strategy.

One of the things that many Christians over here find difficult to understand is Trump's continuing appeal to many American evangelicals (particularly white evangelicals). Indeed there are literally millions of professing evangelical Christians across America who firmly believe that, despite his all too public character flaws and apparent lack of actual Christian practice or worship, Donald Trump is 'God's man'. Consequently, some of them just as firmly believe that Joe Biden, a practising



Catholic, who regularly quotes Scripture and has been married to the same woman for over 40 years is a communist sympathiser who is anti-Christian.

Much of the support for Donald Trump among evangelicals arose from his commitment in 2016 to appoint more conservative judges to federal courts in general and to the Supreme Court in particular.

In a country where abortion is a major partisan issue, this was a crucial commitment and one on which he has followed through. However, there are quite a number of prominent evangelicals for whom this commitment did not and does not make up for Trump's apparent lack of respect for women, for minorities and for the office of president itself.

Scripture is pretty clear when it comes to our attitude to human authorities. While it encourages us to respect and pray for those in authority over us, it also reminds us not to put our trust in princes and certainly not to elevate them to such a position that they become the only hope for our nation. Similarly, wrapping the Bible in a flag and placing nationalism on a par with Christ is idolatry, pure and simple and it is not a sin with which we in this part of the world are unfamiliar.

I genuinely love America. The ideal of America as a nation of equals is one of the most truly revolutionary ideas in history and chimes with the gospel where there is no longer slave or free, male or female, Jew or Gentile but all are one in Christ Jesus. I genuinely love Americans. The people I have had the opportunity to meet there – Republican and Democrat, black and white – have been warm, welcoming and generous. I have enjoyed worshipping and praying with my American brothers and sisters and I hope to get the opportunity to do so again when travel becomes possible. In the meantime I pray for America and those I know and love there. The times in America, they are a-changin' once again and God's people there need our prayerful support perhaps more than ever before.

*Rev Graeme Kennedy is minister of Ballygrainey Presbyterian Church.*

# Showing a *living gospel*

**Alan Meban** talks to Rev Najla Kassab, a minister in the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon, about the situation the Church is facing there.



Originally spoke with Rev Najla Kassab just after St Patrick's Day for an article planned for publication in the May 2020 edition of the *Herald*. Lockdown had already begun in the Republic of Ireland, and the first Covid-19 death was confirmed later that day in Northern Ireland. Beirut was experiencing similar changes, with schools and workplaces forced to close. Then on 4 August, Beirut was devastated by a huge explosion in the port area. Najla and I caught up again recently to bring her story and the situation in Beirut up to date.

Our interview forms part of a short series, talking to Presbyterian ministers working in different situations around the world, asking what being reformed means in their contexts. You can still read the first conversation with Rev Bruce Reyes-Chow (Palo Alto, San Francisco) in the online April 2020 edition of the *Herald*, available to download at [www.presbyterianireland.org/herald](http://www.presbyterianireland.org/herald)

Najla is the president of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) and an ordained minister in

the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon (NESSL). The Synod has historically served and connected the two neighbouring countries. She's married to Rev Joseph Kassab, General Secretary of NESSL, and they have three children.

## **What's the situation in Beirut?**

On top of the economic crisis, on top of coronavirus, the blast killed 204 people and injured 6,500, some of whom are still in hospital. It destroyed 85,000 homes and left 300,000 people homeless. Only 7,000 have been renovated and we're coming into winter.

We are all still shocked. I've lived in war, most of my childhood, but what happened this time was unacceptable. It was too much. We still don't know the cause of the blast. Parents who lost children still don't know why this

**It wasn't enough to preach: we had to do something that showed a living gospel.**

happened. A few seconds changed people's lives. In those areas, many of them were middle class, had established businesses, and in a few seconds their homes were blown away, and they had no job. Unfortunately, some people with dual citizenship are leaving in order to start afresh in another country.

We used to be known as 'the hospital of the Middle East' because we had a good standard of medical services. The blast affected four big hospitals in Beirut and it could be another two years before they are fully functional. At a time when coronavirus patient numbers are increasing, we need every single bed.

The economic crisis has added to all the pain and the challenges that we are facing. The devaluation of our currency means we cannot withdraw money from banks. Lots of people have lost their jobs, and of those who kept them, half are on 50% salary.

## **How has the Church responded?**

As a Church, some in our congregations were affected because they lived in that area. Individuals were torn between their



situation in the majority of Syria is better now, relatively peaceful. But there are areas that still have lots of killing and lots of pain. As a Synod we have a policy that we don't encourage people to leave Syria. If you stay in Syria,

we will try to help you. Unfortunately, some young people cannot wait for the war to finish. Syria is facing an incredible economic crisis. Probably 80% of the people are under the poverty line.

### **Syria is facing an incredible economic crisis. Probably 80% of the people are under the poverty line.**

We still have bombed churches that we cannot worship in. In Aleppo, our church was bombed. The building was hit but the body of Christ was not damaged and it is now a lively congregation in the city. People who come to our Church are helped and loved and taken care of no matter who they are.

The Church I believe is better now in Syria than it was before the Syrian war. It has a stronger spirit and the war taught us to be the Church beyond the walls of the regular building. We discovered that if we aren't a Church that really meets the people on the streets, we lose our role as a Church. So now, for example, in Aleppo we have a ministry with a small dispensary providing medical services for people. And we have a school.

### **Describe growing up and coming to faith.**

I'm a fourth generation Presbyterian. My father was an elder in the Church; my mother's family is originally from the Maronite Catholic Church, but she grew up as Presbyterian. I was raised

and schooled in the town of Zahlé and continued my studies in Beirut.

I was a youth leader and I was involved in all kinds of ministry. I wanted to study theology to serve in the Church, but at that time I wasn't clear of how and where.

I moved to the US, where I completed my master's degree in Princeton Seminary. Spending two summers working in the same congregation, God opened me up to see how he was using me and using my talents. That congregation is also where I got married to Joseph!

### **And what about your journey towards ordination?**

At that time, people at Princeton said, "Najla, you can easily get ordained here." And I said, "No – If I'm ever to be ordained, I want my people to ordain me. I'll go back, start the journey in my Church because every Church has its own journey, its own challenges, its own way of sensing how God is using us, not for the sake of women, but for the sake of building the Church."

I returned to Lebanon in 1990 and started to work with the Christian education department of the Synod, working at the grassroots, training teachers. At that time, there were no women yet ordained in our Church. In

1993, I was the first to be given a preaching licence, a critical moment for the Church.

I never thought that I would end up being a theologian because I felt like the place of women in the Church was not well received by the leadership. But experiencing how God was using women

in the Church really made me more committed to serve. In 2017, we had the first ordination of women in our denomination, with Rev Rola Sleiman and then myself.

This is who I am. There's a statement I'm known for: the ordination of women is not an act of sympathy towards women, it's an act of integrity of the Church. It's the love that we talk about and to me, what builds the church is the most important part. It's a gospel issue.

personal safety, taking care of themselves, and reaching out to others because we have people on the streets in need. And the government cannot help much.

We thank God that as a Church we started the Compassion Protestant Society (CPS) back in 2018. We support 1,000 Syrian refugee children across four education centres, preparing children whose education is lagging behind for the move into formal school once they become six.

When I talked to you last March, we were preparing hygiene kits for the needy at the start of the lockdown. And we were thinking about how we could help people keep food on their table, which we'd never had as much of an issue before.

The NGO has had a bigger role since the August blast and we have discovered the value of it. We are running a food security project, providing vouchers so people can go to supermarkets and buy their basic needs. We also have a project to help rebuild 1,000 homes, giving around \$1,000 per family to help them put glass back in, fix up doors, and make repairs.

This diaconal arm of the Church is able to move and help on the ground. It wasn't enough to preach: we had to do something that showed a living gospel. Sometimes when you stand in front of people's pain, you fall silent. We still have preaching. God will always speak with us. But we have discovered we cannot only preach; we need to be a helping hand on the ground sharing the pain of the people.

NEESL covers both Syria and Lebanon, with 4,500 communicant members and serving 15,000 people across the region.

The Church in Syria has been struggling since 2011. Thank God the



## I've been asking each interviewee what it means to be reformed in their context?

The reformed church has been very enriching to the Middle East. For example, it was the first to help educate women in this part of the region. Before then, it was shameful for women to go to school. But our Church brought women – the wives of the missionaries – into their homes, taught them to read and write, and then numbers grew and we were able to change the mind of a nation. Now, it's shameful for women not to go to school. I believe the reformed church played a great part in that.

We've also contributed by our way of ecclesiastical structure. In the Middle East, many churches are hierarchical and lay people are not part of the decision-making process; there can be a mentality that those in positions of power are not held accountable. We're a minority Church, but we set a new model for the Middle East with everyone held accountable. The centrality of the Bible is another contribution from reformers.

I think one thing that I bring to my leadership of WCRC is to really cling to our reformed identity. It's rich, but many times we have compromised it. We like what happened in the past, and we are reluctant to continue reforming. We don't want to ask the difficult questions that are in the church today.

So I share this identity with other people. I have excellent ecumenical relations, and I believe that ecumenism

isn't about compromise. It's sharing our identity in humbleness in the presence of God who is still shaping us on the way. We should work together and continue to reform, because other churches also need to continue their reform.

## You've mentioned that you are the WCRC president. What has that organisation been able to do this year?

We have developed a new plan, called 'Covid-19 and Beyond'. This virus has highlighted injustices in the world, so the WCRC decided to direct our partnership

## ...we can be overwhelmed by problems, and then we risk becoming indifferent.

fund towards helping churches struggling with the pandemic to lessen that pressure in very practical ways around basic hygiene, awareness, masks, and with programmes.

Connecting with our churches is also very important. We're taking a



regional approach, helping churches come together and work on projects, pray together, and deal with this crisis together.

We can be overwhelmed by problems, and then we risk becoming indifferent. It happens when everyone has their own pain that focuses us inward and stops us focusing on coming together. That's against the spirit of the Communion. So we need to pray, not just about our own pain, but remembering other people's pain as well. And we need to focus on mission and bringing justice to so many situations that still exist, even though coronavirus is kidnapping all the attention. And we need to remain one at this time.



You can find out more about the work of the Compassion Protestant Society and support financially via their website <http://compassionps.org>

## Helping hands...infusing hope

*Rev Uel Marrs, Secretary of the Council for Global Mission, outlines PCI's response after the Beirut explosion.*

The Beirut explosion came at a time when Lebanon was already reeling from multiple crises, with refugees in overwhelming numbers, political upheaval, financial collapse, growing poverty and Covid-19. It was not just homes that were devastated that day, people were left feeling utterly hopeless.

While not formally launching an appeal at the time of the explosion, PCI's Moderator, Dr David Bruce wrote to all ministers to encourage that we show prayerful and practical support for PCI's partners on the ground in Beirut. These include NESSL, working through their relief and development wing, the Compassion Protestant Society; the Near East School of Theology; SAT-7; and the Lebanese Society for Educational and Social Development.

Within a matter of weeks PCI congregations and individuals had contributed a very generous £21,000 towards these emergency initiatives, largely focused on providing food aid, shelter for the homeless, and psycho-social support. All the funds have now been sent out to Beirut and those who have benefited have expressed deep appreciation to those who prayerfully and practically stepped into their pain and suffering, not just giving a helping hand but infusing them with fresh hope.



# All we need is (agape) love

*Andrew Conway*



Isn't it clear that we all need love? That we need love that is consistent, dependable and able to make a practical difference? The situation regarding Covid-19 is so fast moving that things may have changed substantially between my writing this and your reading it, but the pandemic has already highlighted our need for love, and however it all develops in this new year, that need for love will be every bit as real. Aren't there many who have found strength to face these uncertain days through the love they have received? Aren't there many, alas, whose lack of experience of such love has made the whole situation so much harder?

Pause to think about the word 'love' though, and you can't help but notice how wide a variety of meanings it has. You could legitimately say that you love your family, that you love nothing more than a good cup of tea, that you love Man United (pity your wit!) and that you love standing at the coast watching the waves. While doubtless there is something of a common thread, the word 'love' clearly has a different meaning in each instance. Add in the fact that the word 'love' is often misused and you can see there is a clear need to think about just what we mean when we talk about needing love.

Over a series of four columns this year, my hope is to explore the theme of love, reflecting on the fact that our English word 'love' is used in place of four Greek words. We begin with the love that is absolutely central to the New Testament – agape. To describe this as sacrificial love is a good place to start. It's the love that compels someone to go out of their way, even at great cost, for others. By its very nature it tends to make a practical difference. It's the love which Christian people are called to live in toward each other and the world at large. It's the love of Paul's celebrated 13th chapter in 1st Corinthians.

While this calling to live in such love is a vital one that the church always needs to heed (pandemic or no pandemic), the New Testament is not just a summons to live in agape love. Rather it is first and foremost the revelation of God's agape love for his people, which in turn shapes them to live in love for him, each other, and people at large. What we need first and foremost is to see afresh the agape love of God and to let it change us according to his will.

Consider Paul's mighty statement in Romans 5:8: "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still

sinners, Christ died for us." What a stunning sacrifice God has made for us! What a breathtaking wonder, that Christ the Lord should love us so much as to die for us.

This supreme agape love has enormous practical significance. All who come to Christ in a genuine repentance and faith have all their sins fully and freely forgiven. They are made right with God and welcomed into his family. As his children, they are remade in his likeness from the inside out and thus enabled to live in agape love – seeking to honour their father with their whole lives, and to make a difference for the better in the lives of others.

What we need more than anything else as we seek to navigate these unusual and deeply upsetting times is to freshly encounter the agape love of God in Christ Jesus. That, more than anything else, is what can help us manage the situation well. That, more than anything else, can help us make a positive difference in the lives of others – whether it will be expressed by keeping our distance, leaving a package at the door, lifting the phone or however it may be.

We do indeed need love, and if we have much love in us it will lead us to see that others need love too and to try and play our part in helping them. However 2021 develops, that will still be the case, and the agape love of God revealed in Jesus will still be the answer. See afresh the great love manifested in the gospel. Embrace anew the Saviour whose agape love changes lives. Thus, live in love for him and love for others, even in these perilous times.

*Rev Andrew Conway is minister of Clonduff and Hilltown Presbyterian churches.*

**What we need more than anything else as we seek to navigate these unusual and deeply upsetting times is to freshly encounter the agape love of God in Christ Jesus.**

# A restricted grief



**Renée Finnegan** highlights the extra burden Covid-19 has placed on bereaved families.

**R**egardless of where in the world we may find ourselves, no doubt, Covid-19 has inundated our lives. With an unfamiliar Christmas behind us, contending with a new norm for most of the past year has involved enduring distinct societal changes. Everything from daily routines to life-transforming events have required unprecedented adjustment.

Thinking of those I know who are in need of God's comfort and compassion, in one way or another, I consider countless people experiencing losses in differing ways and to differing degrees. Yet, for many, there can be few things more challenging than coming to terms with bereavement during this pandemic. Especially in relation to the journey of grief and mourning which is central to enabling mental, emotional and spiritual wellbeing.

Bereavement is an aspect of life that transcends whatever else may differentiate us. For it is safe to say that, irrespective of who we are, death is unavoidable – a part of life in this fallen world. Grief is normal, but we've been in a not-so-normal setting, so mourning has been intensified by the necessary practical restrictions. A prime example is social distancing to prevent super spreading of the virus. This is particularly poignant to funeral services which are pivotal to the grieving process. These services are more than a customary social and personal practice, for they provide support and comfort. Rev Kathryn Viner, minister of Malone Road Presbyterian Church in Belfast, says, "An important part of grieving is coming

together to publicly pay tribute to God for someone who is significant to others."

## Context and culture

As we would expect, the culture of grief and mourning corresponds to its context. Traditions and ceremonies differ from one place to the next. Being from an Indian culture – born in South Africa – and having established home in Northern Ireland, I understand the diverse expressions of mourning. For me, bereavement, like all other aspects of Indian culture, is shared as a tightly knit community. This includes eating together as a way to bond while we remember the person.

Weighing up what the culture looks like here, among Presbyterian congregations, Kathryn tells us that in her urban context funerals "involve a service of thanksgiving and church family extending God's hospitality by consoling the bereaved through catering." Across the border, Rev Andrew Watson's experience of ministry in Dunfanaghy and Carrigart Presbyterian churches includes an aspect familiar to rural settings: "A Donegal wake is quite a phenomenon...with home gatherings featuring as centre stage for reminiscing about the deceased."

**...there can be few things more challenging than coming to terms with bereavement during this pandemic.**

Another cultural expression of mourning relates to our emotions – for some, grief is shown in a dignified and quiet manner. For others, like my Indian culture, a public display of raw feelings can be expected. This is often depicted as we read through the Old Testament references of lamenting, mourning and funeral songs. We also know that Jesus, being well acquainted with grief, openly wept in a public display of emotion at the death of his friend Lazarus.

## Crisis and care

The devastation and distress throughout the pandemic has been an overwhelming experience. Many have unexpectedly become bereaved after losing relatives, friends and neighbours. Both Kathryn and Andrew agree that the mourning culture, north and south, has been greatly affected during this crisis. Andrew reflects on the absence of "the whole community lining the roads as the hearse passes by... with family and community members taking turns to carry their loved one... the meeting house and graveyard both being packed." All these acts of mutual engagement are vital to help alleviate the anxieties we are prone to when bereaved. If people cannot attend, this integral part of our mourning process is direly missed.

Kathryn says, "The primary loss has been the opportunity to demonstrate collective pastoral care, of every member ministry, in practical ways." As God's first responders we have been limited by this crisis in providing love and support to others dealing with increased levels of isolation, loneliness and depression.

Andrew agrees: “The last thing we want is people grieving alone and isolated.”

The restrictions have also made the end of life process an even more painful time for families. Kathryn says, “Even prior to a loved one dying, not having the opportunity to visit in a nursing home or hospital ward has compounded the grief with a sense of regret and guilt.” Ordinarily, such situations would be eased by the helping acts of pastoral care. Whatever form it takes, the presence of people with us in our time of grief is an expectation we are accustomed to. It serves to strengthen and encourage us in the shock and pain – among other emotions – often accompanied by a sense of unreality about the death. This was certainly true for me after my parents passed away when I lived thousands of miles from them.

Different generations, from different walks of life and at different stages of grief, have all been thrust into the throes of bereavement during the pandemic. Beth Faulkner, a member of Sloan Street Presbyterian Church, is part of the future generation of the church. At 16, she suffered the trauma of losing her best friend who passed away unexpectedly from myocarditis just a few days into the lockdown in March. Even though Beth’s bereavement was not caused directly by the coronavirus, she says the associated restrictions impacted her both “negatively and positively”.

The main challenge she and her peers faced was in communicating their sorrow through the use of technology. She says, “It was difficult to talk to my friends over a screen, and be open...I found it hard to interpret others’ feelings – and express my own – through typed messages.”

Grief for Beth was amplified by missing the funeral. “It felt wrong – as I wanted to share my pain and comfort others.” With this in mind, understanding the differences in grief experienced by different age groups is important for

## The primary loss has been the opportunity to demonstrate collective pastoral care, of every member ministry, in practical ways.

helping us support each generation effectively. No matter what stage of life we are in, it is vital that we are able to express our feelings and deal with our loss. Despite this, Beth very helpfully shares, “Not having to face normal life without her straight away...I didn’t have the pressure of time, so I wasn’t forced to move on...the restrictions gave me time to process and pray.”

### Comfort and hope

In a pandemic there is very little which is certain. However, being a faith community means we are assured of knowing God’s compassion and comfort, independent of prevailing circumstances.

The lack of tangible comfort for those who are hurting in this crisis, which Kathryn speaks of, helps us identify our need for God’s solace that comes from him being with us. Likewise, in the midst of dealing with the emptiness and adjustments experienced in grieving, God’s comfort is to be embraced, knowing that Jesus suffered – and continues to suffer with us today.

Scripture, and the Holy Spirit, enable us to be riveted to God’s promises in Christ. Promises of his comforting presence sustain us in our bereavement, and in all adversities. The words of 2 Corinthians 1:3–4 provides us with a robust reminder of Paul’s experience of “the God of all comfort”. Identifying God as the source of our comfort after enduring deadly peril and despair, Paul sees the benefit in those sufferings: “That we can comfort those...

with the comfort we ourselves received”.

Andrew asserts, “While the fear of the coronavirus has robbed us of much of the outward freedom we took for granted, it cannot take away a Christian’s inner life in Christ; it cannot take the faith, hope, love, joy, peace, patience and long suffering we are promised through the Holy Spirit.” As we are summoned to share the comfort we find in Christ, Andrew believes that “a strong community or fellowship can come through” the trials of this time. “If love is there, we’ll find a way – friends can still phone or visit even if we have to maintain a distance.”

Beth describes how sharing grief in community comforted her: “I had a weekly Zoom gathering with five friends and we then became closer. Later, as restrictions were lifted, we were able to sit together at the grave, meet outside for picnics and visit our friend’s parents to talk about memories.” As well, she adds, “The school community put together a tribute book with photos and messages, so I got to write about our memories.”

A further comfort, and what Beth refers to as the “biggest” lies in her “knowing the hope I have that my friend is with her Saviour and Creator in heaven.” It is this dimension of hope that underpins our comfort from God. Our hope of eternal life anchors us firmly and securely in the depth of every storm raging against us in this life. Andrew says, “The assurance of heaven and pandemic-free resurrection in the coming age has not changed.”

For me, healing after being bereaved, continues to be rooted unequivocally in the comfort, and living hope, of the resurrection power of Jesus. Andrew encourages us in this “new normal” by reminding us that we trust in the same Saviour and Lord as the apostles who faced cruel challenges in the first century. “This gives us the strongest base for resilience and continued wellbeing, mental and spiritual, in our present struggles.”



Kathryn Viner



Beth Faulkner



Andrew Watson

# Sharing good news in difficult times



**Lindsay Shaw** highlights the work of SAT-7 amongst women in the Middle East.

**“W**e are 160 million Arab women with 160 million dreams.” So began a promotional clip for one of SAT-7’s longest running women’s programmes, *Needle and New Thread*.

“Our needs have nothing to do with big slogans,” it continued. “We want to be happy, to go out, to be free to laugh without being told nice girls don’t laugh like that. We want our opinions to count; we want simply to live.”

As a Christian broadcaster to the millions of men, women and children of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), SAT-7 exists to be a channel of the fullness of life that Jesus wants for all people. The diverse programmes on its Arabic, Persian and Turkish-language channels seek to pass on life-changing and life-enhancing messages. They help people to know and deepen their relationship with God through Christ. They share Christian values for living, and they act as an open window into the worship and witness of the church. During times of crisis, from church bombings to the coronavirus, they are a vital tool for the region’s churches to offer biblical perspectives and hope.

From its beginnings 25 years ago, SAT-7 identified particular audiences

as priorities. One is children. Children under 15 comprise 30% of the MENA population, and 15 million of them are out of school. SAT-7’s young Arabic viewers have their own channel of Christian programmes and supplementary schools shows. Its Persian and Turkish channels also air both recorded and live children’s programmes.

Emerging Christian leaders who for various reasons cannot receive formal training are another priority group. Especially in closed countries like Iran they benefit enormously from SAT-7’s tailor-made Christian programming provided by leading biblical teachers from the region.

## Limited expectations

The list of groups SAT-7 seeks to prioritise is long, but one of the most essential is women. In some circles, they are confined to the home and go out only under male supervision. For others, the long list of family responsibilities and limited opportunities leave them

**SAT-7’s strategy for women is to...assure them of their value and of God’s love and power.**

isolated. Many are expected to sacrifice their education opportunities for the sake of male siblings who are seen as future breadwinners.

In another sense women are put on a pedestal as upholders of family reputation. But this comes at a cost. Maggie Morgan, the Egyptian producer of *Needle and New Thread*, says that in her culture, “Loving people means stifling them...covering them up. Loving people means that you don’t let them reach their potential.”

This view of women also makes them vulnerable to violence when family ‘honour’ is thought to have been damaged. For example, in Turkey in 2019, 474 women were murdered by men, including 114 who wanted a divorce, had rejected relationship proposals or wanted to make a decision about their own lives.

## Opening new horizons

SAT-7’s strategy for women is firstly to make the gospel available to them and assure them of their value and of God’s love and power. Secondly, it provides biblically-based wisdom, advice and inspiration for their lives, typically through many lively topical conversation shows. These span everything from exploring biblical role models and Jesus’ valuing of women, practical discussions

on marriage and family life, and mental and physical health, to 'off-limits' topics like domestic abuse, FGM (female genital mutilation) or simply a woman's freedom to make her own choices.

Programmes are made from multiple countries to ensure that the women on screen are 'people like us' for their viewers. In Egypt, counselling show *Speak Up* features recorded case studies and gives viewers the opportunity to discuss topics on air with a guest counsellor. From Algeria, SAT-7's *Free Souls* programme spotlights many women who share the transformation in their lives when they and their husbands find new life in Christ.

Jordanian talk show *Start From Here* helps women to build a strong identity as women in Christ. From SAT-7's Lebanon studio the live show *From Heart to Heart* helps couples build communication skills, trust and mutuality in a loving relationship.

SAT-7's Persian channel also offers a feast of programmes for women. *Insiders* is another live talk show. The two presenters address everything from freedom of religion to family and personal health. The first half of the show tackles a variety of current topics in brief before diving into the main topic with the aid of a guest expert and a



psychologist. Viewers – the real 'insiders' – join the programme by calling or messaging in live on air.

Across in Turkey, the flagship women's programme is *Homemade*. This is a daily live show that mixes interviews, cookery and crafts, and personal testimony. Hosted by TV actress Şemsa, it is building an appreciative audience in a country where Christians are few in number and viewed with mistrust by a wide section of society. And Şemsa is always eager to weave her faith into

**...in Turkey in 2019, 474 women were murdered by men, including 114 who wanted a divorce, had rejected relationship proposals or wanted to make a decision about their own lives.**

the discussion. "When the guest comes on set, we also introduce how to solve the problem with the help of Jesus," she explains.

From the thousands of responses received by individual programmes and by the channel as a whole, it's clear that the programmes are hitting the mark. "I'm a 65-year-old Jordanian who watches your programmes," wrote one viewer. "*From Heart to Heart* has wonderful topics articulated in a great way that we, as women, need to hear. May the Lord give you joy and enlarge your ministry."

In a region where women's voices often go unheard, the presence of on-screen female presenters itself speaks volumes. Back in 1996, Rita El-Mounayer was the first presenter ever to appear on SAT-7. When she took over as the network's international chief executive in 2019, she made clear SAT-7's continuing commitment to inspire the women of the region: "It is my hope and prayer that, as SAT-7's first female CEO, I can encourage and support women and girls as they passionately pursue their future and God-given potential."

*Lindsay Shaw is SAT-7's press and communications officer in the UK.*

## Lifeline in a pandemic

When the world awoke to the threat of Covid-19 last March, SAT-7 quickly mobilised as a source of practical and spiritual support for its Middle East viewers.

"We are making every effort to ensure our live programmes continue, our Audience Relations teams can respond to our viewers and that whatever happens over the coming weeks and months, SAT-7 will continue its ministry," shared Rita El-Mounayer, SAT-7's International CEO.

SAT-7's five studios – in Egypt, Lebanon, Turkey, Cyprus and the UK – all resolved to maintain as full a schedule as possible of live programmes, rather than rely more on pre-recorded series. Studios worked with smaller production crews, made some shows from home and took special measures when some team members were infected. At the same time, they stepped up programming to address the needs of viewers.

A new show from Lebanon shared the stories both of people suffering the social and financial effects of the virus and those who were supporting them. A new peak-time evening of worship with musicians and singers gave spiritual and emotional encouragement and took live calls for prayer. New children's shows were launched with some of the channel's most popular children's hosts.

SAT-7's education programming grew too. Live tutorials by teachers on social media helped out-of-school children and

parenting programmes guided mums and dads as they stepped in to become surrogate teachers. Talk shows advised families on coping with lockdown pressures and building stronger relationships with children and spouses. Theological shows targeted the difficult question of why God was allowing the crisis. Then in August SAT-7 made special programmes for Lebanon when an explosion devastated large areas of Beirut, especially affecting Christian districts.

A surge in the number of viewers making contact during the year showed how many were turning to SAT-7 for help. Between January and September, the numbers soared by 30% more than the previous year. A peak came as the virus spread across the region in May, with the network receiving some 48,700 messages or calls.

As SAT-7 looks ahead to its 25th anniversary of being on air this May and as the year 2021 begins with an air of uncertainty, SAT-7 continues in the knowledge that, under God, its bond with viewers has deepened and the goal of sharing his love and care through faith-filled programmes remains – whatever the future holds.

Find out more about SAT-7's ministry in the Middle East and North Africa at [www.sat7uk.org](http://www.sat7uk.org)



# Learning *to* lament

Colin Burcombe considers how prayers of lament are an appropriate response in this season of uncertainty.



**O**n our church WhatsApp group, I asked how the coronavirus and all the restrictions it has brought into our lives makes people feel. People shared experiences during the pandemic and reactions to them. Some gave voice to reasons we can be thankful, recording instances of kindness and thoughtfulness, and times they have been inspired by others. The more dominant notes in the conversation were of being uneasy, apprehensive, overwhelmed, isolated, frustrated, stressed, fearful about the behaviour of others, and even traumatised.

Alongside those feelings, the indecision of politicians, the lack of nursing staff, the risks of being in a job which entails close

contact with colleagues and members of the public, and the devastating impact of masks on the social interaction of people in the deaf community, were highlighted as areas of concern.

There is no doubt it was helpful to share these things in our group and it was

**...the very act of telling God of the darkness includes turning to him and trusting in him – those actions...keep the darkness from overwhelming us.**

good to hear from others and to know we are not alone in what we feel. But is that all we can do as Christians to process distressing emotions and experiences?

As a young Christian, I was taught to pray using the acronym ACTS, structuring my prayers with Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving and Supplication. But where do these fearful feelings and this prolonged pandemic fit into that neat outline? Perhaps there are times when we (wrongly) feel guilty about our feelings and so they are part of our confession. At other times, we pray that God would intervene and turn the situation around but how does that simplistic supplication endure through all the months of restrictions we have already faced? I have come to learn that I

need to expand my thinking about how I pray, so that I can include lament.

All of us probably express lament instinctively in our prayers at times, but in God's Word we can find examples of lament prayers which can teach us to pray prayers of lament which are biblically rooted and emotionally honest. Rather than confessing our anger or frustration, expressing it and the reasons for it in a prayer of lament is the path of trust and the path to worship. Lament is also an appropriate response to sin – the penitential psalms (6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143) are a subset of the psalms of lament.

Did you know that over one third of the psalms are psalms of lament? An entire book of the Old Testament is given over to lament – Lamentations. In addition, many of the prophets lament but lest you think this is just an Old Testament phenomenon, the Lord Jesus laments in Gethsemane and at the cross. There is even lamenting in heaven while the saints wait for the persecution of believers to end and judgment to come (Revelation 6:10). Lament will continue until the Lord Jesus returns and all the things which cause us to lament will be no more (Revelation 21:4). But for now, along with our Saviour and his people, we lament.

As we slowly read the biblical laments, we will see that the Lord is our refuge when we are anxious, fearful, confused, lonely or angry. We will discover that we do not need to deny or suppress our feelings when we come to the Lord in prayer. We will learn to rehearse what he has done for us in the past when it seems like he is doing nothing for us in the present. We will be taught to recall his goodness and faithfulness, even when we feel like he has forgotten us or abandoned us. In this way we will come to a place of trust or peace or even worship, whatever we are experiencing.

Scholars have identified a structure in the psalms of lament, but there is no neat three-step process to move from lamentation to praise. Many of the psalms alternate between these and there is one, Psalm 88, which seems to settle in sorrow rather than journeying to joy. Still, the very act of telling God of the darkness includes turning to him and trusting in him – those actions in themselves keep the darkness from

overwhelming us. Though there is some variance, the standard direction of travel through the path of lament to the place of praise shows us the transformative nature of praying prayers of lament. They often begin with questions and end with confidence.

Consider Psalm 10 which commences, "Why, O Lord, do you stand far away? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?" It concludes, "O Lord, you hear the desire of the afflicted; you will strengthen their heart." Or notice Psalm 13 which begins with a series of questions, "How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?" It ends, "I will sing to the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with me."

## Come as you are, say what you feel, ask what you need, and trust him.

Most psalms of lament include five elements which can be remembered using the acronym ALTAR. This can be illustrated from the first psalm of lament, Psalm 3, though there can be overlap and interchange between the five aspects. In this psalm, David is on the run and there are enemies all around. While these things are not part of our lives in a literal sense, in the pressures we face we sometimes share the emotions he experienced, and we can learn to respond with trust as he did. This psalm also illustrates that lament is a process. The meaning of the word *selah* which occurs three times has been debated endlessly by scholars, but was understood in ancient times to indicate an instrumental interlude, a time to reflect on the words which have been said or sung so that their significance can be considered. It takes time to move from lamentation to praise.

**Approach** – where we turn to the Lord in the midst of our troubles.

"O Lord, how many are my foes!"

**Lament** – where we describe what we are going through. For David, it is opposition and mockery.

"Many are rising against me; many are saying of my soul, there is no salvation for him in God. *Selah*."

**Trust** – where we remember what God has done in the past, or remind ourselves of his character and promises, or express our continued trust in the midst of our struggles.

"But you, O Lord, are a shield about me, my glory, and the lifter of my head. I cried aloud to the Lord, and he answered me from his holy hill. *Selah*. I lay down and slept; I woke again, for the Lord sustained me. I will not be afraid of many thousands of people who have set themselves against me all around."

**Ask** – where we put our request to God for deliverance.

"Arise, O Lord! Save me, O my God! For you strike all my enemies on the cheek; you break the teeth of the wicked."

**Rest** – where we express how the process of pouring out the pain has led to peace.

"Salvation belongs to the Lord; your blessing be on your people! *Selah*."

This is just one example of a psalm of lament and, while it may not resonate with your experience at the moment, it has been truly said that 'for every sigh there is a psalm'.

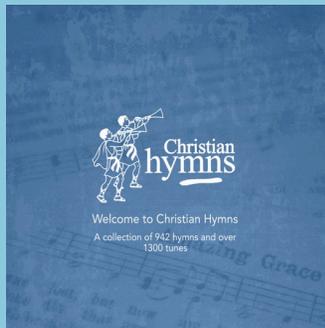
Recently in church, we sang a version of psalms 42 and 43 to the tune of *There is a Higher Throne*. Afterwards someone expressed how glad they were we sang it because it fitted so well with where they were emotionally and spiritually right now. I have also found psalms 57, 61, 77, 86, 142 and 143 useful during the pandemic because aspects of them resonated with what I have been experiencing.

Some people will find it helpful to compose their own prayers of lament using ALTAR as a guide. Nonetheless, it is really useful to learn to pray alongside the psalmists, taking the words they use and connecting them with our own experiences as we pour out our hearts to the Lord. How do we lament to the Lord? Come as you are, say what you feel, ask what you need, and trust him.

*Dr Colin Burcombe is minister of Mersey Street Presbyterian Church in Belfast.*

## REVIEWS

Unless otherwise stated all resources are available from your local Faith Mission Bookshop or online [www.fmbookshops.com](http://www.fmbookshops.com)



### Christian Hymns App (for IOS and Android)

*10ofthose.com*

Free to download



*Christian Hymns*, a hymnbook first published in 1977, has now been produced in app form. It provides access to 942 hymns and over 1300 tunes (MIDI and MP3 files), giving you both the words and the tunes in one place.

Features include downloads of MP3 files, as well as the ability to save hymns to a favourites section and create playlists. For more accomplished musicians the app allows you to play and edit tunes by adjusting the tempo and pitch as required. While many within our denomination will continue to use the *Irish Presbyterian Hymnbook*, this app offers access to the complete Psalter with accompanying tunes, and allows you to search for music by author, in alphabetical order, or indeed by using words or phrases. You can also search for thematic music according to biblical references.

For congregations who struggle to find musical accompaniment, the app includes full recordings of every hymn to help you sing. Whilst the app is free, this only applies to hymns and tunes that are out of copyright; for access to copyrighted music the user must pay a fee.

One advantage of this app is that it allows users to change the font, letter size and colour of words, which can help if small type is an issue. I suspect that many would still prefer to use a hardcopy hymnbook or follow along on a big screen over using a device. So, whilst the theory behind this app is good, within our own context it may be some years before apps like this are fully exploited for worship purposes.

LS



### Maud Kells: Fearless in the forest

*Jean Gibson*

CHRISTIAN FOCUS PUBLICATIONS

£5.99



This is the story of Maud Kells and how she started out living on a farm in Cookstown, then became a nurse in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

I found this book very inspirational because it shows you that Maud Kells did not want to be in an everyday job and how God used her in it. There were plenty of times when she was protected by God – like when she was driving a jeep and had to cross a very unstable bridge. She took her hands off the wheel and closed her eyes and said a short prayer to the Lord. Whenever she opened her eyes and put her hands back on the wheel, she was over the bridge safely.

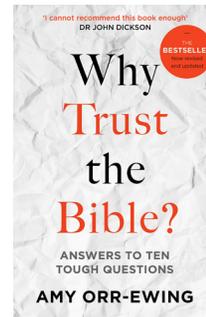
Another amazing story was – one night she was sleeping when a mysterious man told her there was an emergency at the hospital, but when she got there, she realised there was no emergency. So she rushed back to her house to find two men trying to burgle her. One ended up shooting her with a gun before they ran off. In this moment God was with her and I believe he did not let her die as he knew her job in the Congo was not done.

I would recommend this book to other children as it is quite short and is filled with good stories about God's protection.

NH

### Editor's note...

*Fearless in the Forest* is Maud Kells' story written for children (aimed at 8–14-year-olds). Jean Gibson also tells Maud's story for an adult audience in *An Open Door: a true story of courage in Congo*, published by 10Publishing.



### Why Trust the Bible?

*Dr Amy Orr-Ewing*

INTER-VARSITY PRESS

£9.99



The title is a prelude to what can be expected from this book which sees the author defend the "intellectual credibility of the Bible".

As an evangelist and apologist, Amy Orr-Ewing has grappled with scepticism about Christian faith. Out of her experience, she has produced a resource that helps both unbelievers, and believers alike, to visualise how difficult passages fit into the overall story of the Bible. An updated version of a truthful, insightful confrontation of 10 tough questions often based on disbelief or doubt, this book tackles the accuracy, authenticity and reliability of Scripture.

Initially the book appears to be pitched at those with higher education as it is teeming with fairly academic language. However, in persevering, it becomes clear that this specific language is necessary. The author's intention is to avert a "simple-faced reading" that hinders "truly sufficient understanding of the Bible".

The trustworthiness of Scripture is openly examined to show that the biblical "nature of language, translation, contextualisation and communication are so important." Her research features eyewitness evidence of historical, geographical and cultural facts which form the premise of her work. Apt examples of this are laid out in the questions of 'Is the Bible sexist?' and 'What about the other holy books?'

In and amongst her aptitude for academic handling of the "grace-filled message of the overarching narrative of the Bible," the author warmly shares a glimpse of her heart to see people on the fringes come to faith in Jesus.

RF

## REVIEWERS

**AH – Avril Heenan** is a solicitor and PCI accredited preacher.

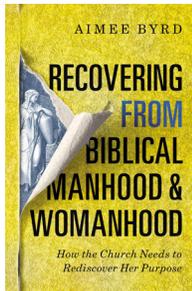
**SEH – Suzanne Hamilton** is an administrative officer for the *Herald*.

**LI – Louise Irwin** is part of the worship team at Kirkpatrick Memorial.

**LS – Lisa Skinner** is an administrative officer for the *Presbyterian Herald*.

**RF – Renée Finnegan** is a PCI accredited preacher and a member of Sloan Street.

**NH – Nevin Harding** is 12 years old and attends West Presbyterian Church, Bangor



## Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood

*Aimee Byrd*

ZONDERVAN

£12.99



**Aimee Byrd's book has caused considerable waves in the reformed community in USA, and resulted in her being the target of personal abuse over social media. Yet, Byrd is confessional, and supports male only ordination, so whatever her book is, it is not to advocate for female ordination or eldership!**

It was written by Byrd to, in her words, highlight how she considers that a contemporary movement has damaged the way that we both disciple men and women in the church, and the way we read Scripture. That contemporary movement, the Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, which can be described as 'complementarian' argues that it is an ontological creational norm that women are subordinate to men, with the debate expanded to that of the Trinity, arguing that the Son is eternally subordinate to the Father.

Through taking a 'gynocentric' look at Scripture, Byrd highlights the contributions of several women we meet in Scripture, and invites us to move from rigidly focusing on roles, authority and submission, to considering siblingship. She reminds us that Paul didn't merely 'let' women participate in worship, but that their participation was vital to the telos of the church. She comments on the irony that the way our reformed culture is framed today ensures that women do less in the church today than they did in the early church.

AH



## Hush

*Joanne Hogg and Phil Hart*

JO HOGG MUSIC

£7.99 (digital)



**This album of lullabies was written over 20 years ago by Phil Hart in a collaboration with Joanne Hogg, who is lead singer and songwriter of the Iona musical group and a regular participant in New Irish Arts activities.**

Hart began writing lullabies for his children, but the collection never made it past a demo version and he set it aside for many years. During the first lockdown the duo decided to release

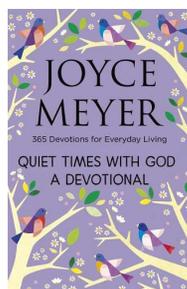
their original demo version of the lullabies as a salve for these anxiety-filled days. Hart says the lullabies are for adults and children alike – it sounds like something we could all do with.

The songs themselves are, unsurprisingly, simple and soothing – both in terms of melody and lyrics. If you have small children and you would like to be singing truth over them and helping them settle at the same time then these could be a beautiful way to do that.

Equally, for adults who are seeking an opportunity for calm reflection and connection with God in a quiet moment – this is a lovely album. The songs all centre around the idea of God's protection and rest, with a simple piano accompaniment for most. Joanne Hogg's lilting voice carries the lullabies well and, with the occasional input of the tin whistle, this album has a distinctive Irish feel to it.

At the end of a long day this album could help you and your little ones find the rest you need in God's strong and safe arms.

LI



## Quiet Times with God

*Joyce Meyer*

HODDER & STOUGHTON

£14.99



**Bestselling author Joyce Meyer's latest offering is a 365-day devotional, providing an opportunity to take time out every day just to sit and contemplate what it means to be a Christian in a busy and uncertain world.**

'The power of mercy', 'Look up', 'The battle within' and 'The importance of waiting well' are among the themes considered in this well thought out book.

I particularly enjoyed the devotion for 1 February, 'Be yourself'. Meyer says, "You must ask yourself, am I a people-pleaser or a God-pleaser? Real peace and joy in life come when we focus on pleasing God, not man." In a world where image is important to so many, I think this is an important message for Christians to remember and hold dear.

Like many of its ilk, each day contains a Bible passage and message for contemplation. What I liked about Meyer's devotional is that it caters for both the busy and relaxed days. It contains a daily 'Today's thought' to take away for those days when everything is rushed and it's hard to fully concentrate on a long passage. It also contains Bible references for when things are calmer and there is time to dig deeper into God's Word.

I found it encouraging and easy to understand, and I am sure it will be a devotional I will use year after year.

SEH

## LIFE IN PCI

### PCI's newest church celebrates 10th birthday

**Members of Donabate Presbyterian Church, the youngest of PCI's 534 congregations, came together virtually for a special online Sunday service to celebrate its 10th birthday.**

"This isn't quite what we had planned when we began to think of how we could celebrate our 10th birthday, but given all that has gone on this year, it was still an important moment for us in our journey together," explained Rev Andy Carroll, minister of the Co Dublin church.

Among those taking part was PCI Moderator Dr David Bruce. The Zoom service also featured a recorded message from Australia from Dr Gary Millar, who was the minister of Howth and Malahide from 2000 to 2012.

"Gary had the vision for Donabate initially and worked with me when I arrived. Things were getting a bit overcrowded in Malahide, as the congregation was experiencing a lot of growth in the early 2000s, which was great to see. Instead of looking to extend the church and build physically, after much thought and prayer it was decided to build in a very different way and start a new expression of God's church in Donabate, where five of Malahide's families were already travelling from each Sunday," Mr Carroll explained.

"Each Sunday, when we met in the community centre, or now via our Zoom services, it is wonderful to see people that have become a community."

Mr Carroll also said that it was a journey that was far from over. As the church continues to grow, they are looking to build a permanent home in the town. At the same time, Donabate members have begun to plant a new church in Balbriggan. "Malahide had a vision and a hope for Donabate and we are taking that same vision and hope 10 or so miles up the road," he said.

Please be aware that some of these photographs may have been taken before the introduction of government restrictions.



Top left: Bláithín O'Donnell, one of the first members of Donabate Presbyterian, talks about her early involvement in the church.



Top right: Dr Gary Millar speaking in a recorded message from Queensland, Australia. Dr Millar was the minister in Howth and Malahide Presbyterian at the time the Donabate church plant was initiated.



Right: Ingrid Harley reads reflections sent in from Nadine Gray in the Cayman Islands. Nadine was from Donabate and attended Malahide Presbyterian and was part of the team that started the new church in her home town.



Bottom left: PCI Moderator Dr David Bruce giving his pre-recorded sermon.

Bottom right: Rev Andy Carroll, minister of Donabate Presbyterian Church.



### Dundonald church marks 50 years

**The 50th anniversary of the inaugural service in Christ Church Presbyterian in Dundonald has been marked with a visit by the PCI Moderator Dr David Bruce.**

While the golden anniversary celebrations had to be scaled back, due to the current pandemic, Rev Richard McIlhatton, who has been Christ Church's minister since 2009 and the congregation's sixth, explained that the services were in some ways reminiscent of how it all began. "Five years before it was built, the congregation began to meet in wooden huts, which required two services on a Sunday, so everyone could take part. Today, with the social distancing measures that we have had to introduce to keep ourselves safe, we have reverted to two services to fit in those who want to come!"

In Dundonald, Christ Church started life as the Ballybeen estate was being built. As people began to move out of Belfast in the mid-1960s, a move exacerbated by the onset of the Troubles at the end of the decade, nearly 20 new Presbyterian churches were started between then and the end of the 70s.

Speaking about Christ Church's special anniversary, Mr McIlhatton said, "Over these 50 years, many significant moments have happened within these walls as people have committed their lives to Christ, been baptised, got married and given thanks for the lives of loved ones.

"As well as these milestones, there has been the regular and faithful ministry of God's Word week-by-week. In more recent years, the building has been opened up further to the community and we want to thank God for all of these things, as well as seeking his guidance and blessing for the future."

Made up of 230 families, of over 500 people, during the pandemic the church has been a part of the 'BT16 Covid Response' community partnership, that has helped to deliver around 1000 food parcels and prescriptions.



Top: Mary Penman, the church's minister Rev Richard McIlhatton, Kerry Gilmore with one of her sons, Rubin, Zoë Bruce, PCI Moderator Dr David Bruce, and Evelyn and Jack Cooper, who were at the official opening in 1970.

Bottom: PCI Moderator Dr David Bruce preaches at a special socially distanced service to mark the 50th anniversary of the first service to be held in Christ Church Presbyterian Church, Dundonald. The new building was opened on 19 September 1970.



To share good news stories from your congregation please send your photographs and details to [herald@presbyterianireland.org](mailto:herald@presbyterianireland.org)



### Katesbridge retirement

Katesbridge Presbyterian in Co Down marked the retirement of Billy Cochrane as the congregational treasurer after 53 years of faithful service. Billy was loyally supported in this role by his wife, May. Pictured are Rev Nigel Kane, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Cochrane and new treasurer Robert McElroy.



### Ballynahatty and Creevan PW

Michelle Murray (acting home manager of Harold McCauley House) gratefully receives a donation of £600 from Ruth Kyle, representing Ballynahatty and Creevan PW. The PW group had a special fundraising collection at a morning service in the Co Tyrone church, when Jackie Heaney, on behalf of the Omagh nursing home, gave a comprehensive overview of the plans and progress of the proposed new specialist dementia unit, when she stressed the ever-increasing need for this type of secure accommodation in the area.



### Anniversary in Eglisish

Over recent months, Eglisish Presbyterian Church has been celebrating 250 years. At a thanksgiving service, a presentation was made to Jim Long to acknowledge his retirement after 58 years of faithful service as congregational treasurer. Eakin Kyle, who was unable to attend the service, also received a gift to mark his time as clerk of session. Mr Long is pictured with Dr Charles McMullen (former PCI Moderator) and Rev Mark Dodds (minister of the Co Tyrone church).



### Long service marked in Magherally

Magherally congregation has marked the long and diligent service of William Adams as congregational treasurer, and of his wife Elizabeth, who faithfully supported him in his role. The Co Down congregation is truly grateful to the couple for all the work they did for over 20 years, and for the help they have given to the new treasurer, Norman Thompson. Pictured are: Rev Nigel Kane, Mr Adams, Mrs Adams and Mr Thompson.



### Installation in Co Down

The linked congregations of Carrowdore & Ballyfrenis and Ballyblack recently installed Rev Andras Gilicze as their new minister. The service was held in Ballyblack Presbyterian Church in compliance with Covid-19 restrictions. Pictured are: Rev John Flaherty (clerk of Ards Presbytery), Herbie Robinson (Carrowdore & Ballyfrenis session clerk), Mariann Gilicze, Mr Gilicze, Alex Warden (Ballyblack session clerk) and Rev Jeff McWatters (vacancy convener).

## LIFE IN PCI

Please be aware that some of these photographs may have been taken before the introduction of government restrictions.



### Anniversary marked in First Dromara

Rev Ronnie Wilson marked 60 years of ordained ministry by returning to First Dromara, the church where he was ordained and installed as minister in 1960. During the service, he shared with the children about his life in Kinallen manse, and read from the Scriptures. He is pictured with Ian McCullagh (session clerk of the Co Down congregation) and Rev S.W. Moore (the current minister of First Dromara).



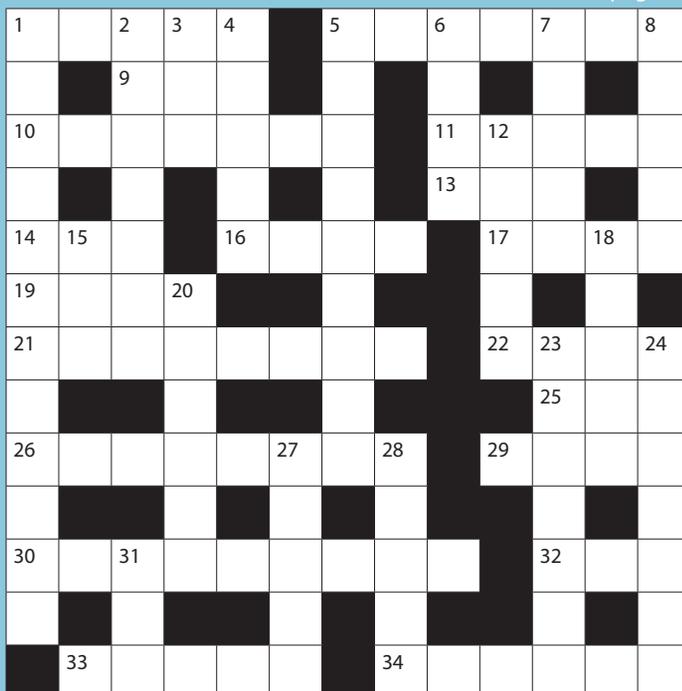
### Moneydig presentation

Rev Stuart Morrow (right) is pictured presenting a Bible to Ronald Torrens, who has retired as freewill offering secretary in Moneydig Presbyterian Church after 18 years of service.

## CROSSWORD

Puzzle no 261

solution on page 63



### ACROSS

- 1 This preceded the rainbow (5)
- 5 To support (7)
- 9 Definitely not a Madam (3)
- 10 A stag's glory (7)
- 11 What is it worth? (5)
- 13 The first lady (3)
- 14 Japanese ornamental fish (3)
- 16 To encounter (4)
- 17 Duty or responsibility (4)
- 19 Twelve make up a foot (4)
- 21 O.T. hero (8)
- 22 Largest continent (4)
- 25 Type of lettuce (3)
- 26 To judge an amount (8)
- 29 WW1 battle (4)
- 30 Underwater vessel (9)
- 32 Type of tree (3)
- 33 Jesus described himself as this (5)
- 34 A girl's name (6)

### DOWN

- 1 One of the Magi's gifts (12)
- 2 Large African bird (7)
- 3 Liquid gold? (3)
- 4 This seems to happen to men called Joseph (5)
- 5 Whoopi's film (6, 3)
- 6 Spanish golfer's first name (4)
- 7 Dave, the Irish joker (5)
- 8 Jesus can meet all of these (5)
- 12 A beautiful Irish valley (5)
- 15 First number (3)
- 18 A joining together (5)
- 20 Funny gas (6)
- 23 Mocker (7)
- 24 One of Israel's ancient foes (7)
- 27 Sharp and bitter taste (5)
- 28 This girl is upside down (5)
- 31 On a football pitch there is a cross one! (3)

compiled by Harry Douglas

# Rooted in love

*Betsy Cameron*



**W**ell, now... where were we? It's been a while! Did we realise way back last February that we were standing on the very edge of calamity? That our lives would be changed beyond recognition? I certainly didn't, but it's probably just as well. I'm not sure I would have believed it. It's been a testing time, to be sure, one in which we've faced our fears, navigated our way through unknown terrain and appreciated more deeply the things that truly matter.

As if a global pandemic wasn't quite enough to cope with, I have also survived a very tumultuous US election and celebrated a very big birthday. And, oh yeah, my nest emptied. Did you hear all that? After having all of my big children at home during the months of lockdown, we then watched them leave, one by one, in the order they came to us way back at the very beginning, to resume their interrupted lives. My youngest left last. I always said, once all my children left me, I would get a dog. Turns out, I was wrong. I got a garden instead.

It started small. Clean up a long-neglected border around a long-neglected working yard and put out a few chairs and a table for al fresco socially distanced visiting. Simple, right? But before long, I learned the first, and probably only, rule of gardening: you're never done. One thing leads to another and soon we were relocating gas cylinders, putting up trellises and planning raised beds. Then someone (me) got the bright idea to build pallet furniture as a family lockdown project, which was actually a lot of fun – when we weren't on the verge of killing each other.

By late summer, with the help of a very talented landscape gardener and a very generous birthday gift from our wonderful church friends, our little Cinderella garden was ready to go to the ball in all her colourful finery: rambling and climbing rose bushes, majestic lupins, dramatic dahlias. The garden was an oasis of loveliness and tranquillity, my saving grace over the long, anxiety-churning months of lockdown. I loved going out and watching it all grow, encouraging little shoots, delighting in the blooms, marvelling that the life force within a tiny seed could yield such an incredible display of beauty and diversity.

It was the slowness of it all that interested me, the small daily changes that happened so incrementally you could almost miss them, the attention I learned to pay. In my watching

and musing, I would often sing to my plants (please tell me you do the same) and one song that often came to mind was, appropriately enough, *The Garden Song*. If you were a young thing in the 70s, you might remember it. It's a children's song, a folk song, and the refrain goes, "Inch by inch and row by row, gonna make this garden grow". For me, this song really captures the persistent, hopeful enterprise of gardening and the many rewards that it brings. It is also a meaningful metaphor for the way we live our lives and tend the things that really matter.

This song and I go way back. We would sometimes sing it during worship at the Open Door Community in Atlanta, where I had the privilege of working for a time. Murphy Davis, Presbyterian minister and co-founder of the Open Door, would lead us in singing as she strummed her guitar or played the piano, and I remember the sound of her warm, rich voice like it was yesterday.

The Open Door was an amazingly diverse Christian community with a commitment to supporting and loving the marginalised, the homeless and those in prison, particularly those on death row.

Murphy was one of my faith heroes, an inspirational woman who truly lived a life of love for the "least of these": drug addicts, rough sleepers, prisoners – all those who were without hope and who were sure they were beyond the love of God.

She died in October of this past momentous year, after a 25-year battle with lymphoma. We went to the online homegoing service to grieve and to celebrate her remarkable hope-filled, justice-seeking, grace-drenched life, all the more amazing when you consider how unendingly difficult her work was and what dark places it took her to. She wrote once, "It is not always an easy task to affirm that even a murderer is a child of God, but we know that it is true. There is no act, no matter how vicious, that entirely blots out that identity." Those challenging words were the bedrock of her faith.

Like gardening, her work was never done but she kept on, inch by inch and row by row, with slow, hopeful persistence, feeding the hungry, visiting those in prison, seeking racial and economic justice. What kept her going so long? She observed, "Our only hope...for the poor and marginalised is in a relentless practice of sharing, solidarity, resistance, compassion: a revolution rooted in love." Yes, love must always be the root.

**Our only hope...is in a relentless practice of sharing, solidarity, resistance, compassion: a revolution rooted in love.**

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## CHURCH RECORD

### VACANT CONGREGATIONS, MODERATORS AND CLERKS OF KIRK SESSIONS

(Information supplied by Clerks of Presbyteries, Conveners of Assembly Commissions and Councils).

#### 1. LEAVE TO CALL GRANTED

##### **ANAHILT AND DRUMLOUGH:**

REV L.A. PATTERSON: (Anahilt) Mr Laurence Hook, 10 Spirehill Road, Hillsborough, BT26 6LU. (Drumlough) Mr David Gibson, 56 Drumaknockan Road, Hillsborough, BT26 6EU.

##### **BALLYHOBRIDGE, CLONES, NEWBLISS and STONEBRIDGE: (Part Time 50%, Reviewable Tenure – 7 years)**

REV STEPHEN McNIE: (Ballyhobridge) Mr David Jordan, Drumboghmagh, Newtownbutler, BT92 8LL. (Clones) Mr Tom Elliott, Bellmount, Newtownbutler, BT92 6LT. (Newbliss) Mr Thomas McConkey, Killyfuddy, Newbliss, Co Monaghan. (Stonebridge) Mr Gerald Mackarel, Roughfort, Clones, Co Monaghan.

##### **BALLYKELLY:**

REV J.L. BLAIR: Mrs Doreen Nicholl, Shackleton Lodge, 8 Dukes Lane, Ballykelly, BT49 9JT.

##### **DONEGORE, SECOND: (Part-time 70%, Reviewable Tenure – 5 years)**

REV JONATHAN BOYD: Mr Samuel Gawn, 120 Parkgate Road, Kells, Ballymena, BT42 3PQ.

##### **CHURCHTOWN: (Reviewable Tenure – 7 years)**

REV J.T. BLUE: Mr C Rowe, 1 Churchfield, Tamlaght O Crilly, Maghera, Co Londonderry, BT46 5XP.

##### **CLOGHERNEY and SIXMILECROSS:**

REV R.G. McELNEA: (Clogherney) Miss Ruth Kerr, 2 Georgian Villas, Omagh, BT79 0AT. (Sixmilecross) Mr Alan Gibson, 1 Dreenan Road, Beragh, Omagh, BT79 0SH.

##### **COAGH, BALLYGONEY and SALTERSLAND:**

REV G.J. JORDAN: (Coagh) Mrs Amy Allingham, 17 Coagh Road, Cookstown, BT80 8RL. (Ballygoney) Rev David Leach (temporary Clerk of Session), 36 Hospital Road, Magherafelt, BT45 5DG. (Saltersland) Andrew Johnston, 25 Mulderg Road, Magherafelt, BT45 6NN.

##### **CUNINGHAM MEMORIAL, CULLYBACKEY:**

REV A.A.P. BAXTER: Mr L. Wiseman, 1 Shellinghill Lane, Cullybackey, BT42 1FX.

##### **DERVOCK: (Reviewable Tenure – 5 years)**

REV R.M. MOODY: Mr John Surgenor, 82 Toberdoney Road, Dervock, Ballymoney, BT53 8DH.

##### **FISHERWICK:**

REV D.J. GRAY: Mrs Linda Little, 9 Rosepark South, Belfast, BT5 7RJ.

##### **GILFORD and TULLYLISH: (Reviewable Tenure – 7 years)**

REV T.A. CONWAY: (Gilford) Mr Paul Cochrane, Stramore Road, Gilford, Craigavon. (Tullylish) Mr John McCullagh, 2 Old Bann Road, Gilford, Craigavon, BT63 6DZ.

##### **KILFENNAN:**

REV GRAEME ORR: Mr Will Doran, 2 Moulton Park, Eglinton, BT47 3XP.

##### **KILKENNY:**

REV S.D. CONKEY: Mr John Ellis, Annamult, Stoneyford, Co Kilkenny.

##### **PORTSTEWART:**

REV R.J. COLLINS: Mr Peter O'Neill, 3 Henry O'Neill Heights, Portstewart, BT55 7UD.

##### **TOBERMORE & DRAPERSTOWN: (Part-time 50%, Reviewable Tenure – 5 years)**

REV DR J.A. CURRY: Mr Gordon Dickson Jnr, 7 Strawmore Road, Draperstown, BT45 7JE.

#### 2 LEAVE TO CALL DEFERRED

##### **BALLYGOMARTIN:**

REV I.K. McDONALD: Mr Raymond Cummings, 43A Lyndhurst Gardens, Belfast, BT13 3PH.

##### **GORTNESSY:**

REV J.S. McCREA: Mr Ross Hyndman, 32 Temple Road, Strathfoyle, Londonderry, BT47 6UB.

##### **RICHVIEW:**

REV N.S. HARRISON: Mr Victor Garland, 25 Abingdon Drive, Belfast, BT12 5PX.

#### SETTLED STATED SUPPLY APPOINTED

##### **BALLINDERRY:**

RT REV DR W.J. HENRY, Minister of Maze

##### **BOVEEDY:**

REV DR T.J. McCORMICK, Minister of First Kilrea

##### **CAHIR:**

REV WILLIAM MONTGOMERY, Minister of Fermoy

##### **KATESBRIDGE:**

REV N.J. KANE, Minister of Magherally

##### **KILREA, SECOND:**

REV S.A. MORROW, Minister of Moneydig

##### **TYRONE'S DITCHES:**

REV J.K.A. McINTYRE, Minister of Bessbrook

#### 3 DECLARED VACANT

##### **BALLYCROCHAN**

REV COLIN MEGAW: Mr Billy Hyndman, 24 Knightsbridge Court, Bangor, BT19 6SD.

##### **BALLYSILLAN**

REV DR S.E. HUGHES: Mr Gervais Henderson, 94 Tudor Park, Mallusk, Co Antrim BT36 4WL.

##### **BELVOIR:**

REV B.J. McCROSKERY: Mr Brian Dunwoody, 19 Drumart Drive, Belfast, BT8 7ET.

##### **BURT:**

REV JAMES LAMONT: Mr James Buchanan, Heathfield, Speenoge, Burt, Co Donegal, F93 W3K6.

##### **CARNLOUGH & CUSHENDALL and NEWTOWNCROMMELIN:**

REV R.J. WATT: (Carnlough & Cushendall) Mr Norman McMullan, 91 Ballymena Road, Carnlough, Ballymena, BT44 0LA. (Newtowncrommelin) Mr James Gillan, 67 Gracefield, Ballymena, BT42 2RP.

##### **CLAGGAN & ORRITOR:**

REV MARK DODDS: (Claggan) Mr Tom Bell, 100 Lough Fea Road, Cookstown, BT80 9SS. (Orritor) Mr Stewart Black, 98 Morgans Hill Road, Cookstown, BT80 8BW.

##### **COMBER, SECOND:**

REV A.T. JOHNSTON: Mr Gary Dalzell, 10 Carnesure Heights, Comber, BT23 5RN.

##### **CRUMLIN ROAD:**

VERY REV DR T.N. HAMILTON: Mr James Coleman, 2 Abbeydale Parade, Belfast, BT14 7HJ.

##### **DONEMANA:**

VERY REV DR R.L. CRAIG: Mr Derek Gamble, 20 Longlands Road, Donemana, Strabane, BT82 OPQ.

##### **DRUMACHOSE and DERRAMORE:**

REV T.A.S. GRAHAM: (Drumachose) Mr Sam McGregor, 15 Meadowvale Park, Limavady, BT49 0NU. (Derramore) Mr Sam Kelly, 220 Windyhill Road, Coleraine, BT51 4JL.

##### **DUNBOE, FIRST:**

REV M.E. DONALD: Mr Peter Kirk, 5 Liffock Court, Castlerock, Coleraine, BT51 4DQ.

##### **DUNFANAGHY & CARRIGART**

REV B. BROWN: (Dunfanaghy) Mrs Ethel Montgomery, 'Millrace', Marble Hill Road, Dunfanaghy, Co Donegal, F92 N2WO. (Carrigart) Mrs Joy Buchanan, Figart, Carrigart, Co Donegal, F92 N2WO.

##### **FAHAN and WATERSIDE:**

REV G.A. McCracken: (Fahan) Mr James Lamberton, 1 Deanfield, Limavady Road, Londonderry, BT47 6HY. (Waterside) Mr William McIlwaine, 19 Glenaden Hill, Altnagelvin Park, Londonderry, BT47 2LJ.

##### **FIRST DERRY (incl. CLAREMONT) and MONREAGH:**

REV DR T.R. BUICK: (First Derry) Mr Billy Kyle, 74 Dunboyne Park, Eglinton, Londonderry, BT47 3YJ. (Monreagh) Mr John Vance, Cross, Carrigans, Lifford, Co Donegal, F93 PXT0.

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**Clerks of presbytery please note:** Only material received by the General Secretary's Department by the first Friday of the month can be included in the Church Record.

**GLASTRY and KIRKCUBBIN:**

REV N.W. McAULEY: (Glastry): Mr Will Taylor, 43 Manse Road, Kirrcubbin, Newtownards, BT22 1DR; (Kirkcubbin).

**GRANGE with CRAIGMORE:**

REV B.A. SMYTH: Mr J Harris, 32 Portglenone Road, Randalstown, BT41 3BE.

**INCH:**

REV JAMES LAMONT: Mr James Buchanan, Heathfield, Speenoge, Burt, Co Donegal, F93 W3K6.

**KELLS: (Home Mission)**

REV ALAN McQUADE: Ms Ruth McCartney, Shancarnan, Moynalty, Kells, Co Meath, A82 PF60.

**KILCOOLEY:**

REV T.J. McCONAGHIE: Mrs Sylvia Ferguson, 4 Dermott Road, Comber, BT23 5LG.

**FIRST and SECOND KILLYLEAGH:**

REV A.S. SMYTH: (First Killyleagh) Mr G. Furey, 75 Comber Road, Tove, Killyleagh, BT30 9PA. (Second Killyleagh) Miss Z. McAllister, 11 High Street, Killyleagh, BT30 9QF.

**LIMERICK, CHRIST CHURCH:**

REV W.J. HAYES: Mr Brian Park, 19 Aylesbury, Clonmacken, Ennis Road, Limerick.

**NEW MOSSLEY:**

REV DR W.J.M. PARKER: Mr Howard Keery, 16 Earlford Heights, Mossley, Newtownabbey, BT36 5WZ.

**NEWINGTON:**

REV DR I.D. NEISH: Mr John Lynass, 8 Bushfoot Park, Portballintrae, BT57 8YX.

**NEWTOWNARDS – REGENT STREET:**

REV P.T. DALZELL: Mr Ian MacDonald, 11 Stanvilla Road, Newtownards, BT23 8HE.

**NEWTOWNSTEWART and GORTIN:**

REV R.B. THOMPSON: (Newtownstewart) Mr James Baxter, 22 Strabane Road, Newtownstewart, Omagh, BT78 4BD. (Gortin) Mr Adrian Adams, 32 Lisnaharney Road, Lislap, Omagh, BT79 7UE.

**PORTAVOGIE:**

REV G.J. SIMPSON: Mr Trevor Kennedy, 1 Cairndore Road, Newtownards, BT23 8RD.

**RALOO and MAGHERAMORNE:**

REV DR C.A. GRANT: (Raloo) Mr Geoff McBride, 72 Raloo Road, Larne, BT40 3DU. (Magheramorne) Mr Morris Gardner, 89 Ballypollard Road, Magheramorne, Larne, BT40 3JG.

**TOBERKEIGH:**

REV JOHN STANBRIDGE: Mr Jim Kane, 67A Ballinlea Road, Ballinlea Upper, Ballycastle, BT54 6NN.

**VINECASH:**

REV P.W.A. McCLELLAND: Mr Thomas Graham, 38 Richmount, Portadown, BT62 4JQ.

**TEMPORARY STATED SUPPLY ARRANGEMENT**

**ARMOY and RAMOAN:**

REV NOEL McCLEAN: (Armoey) Mrs Ann Campbell, 77B Bregagh Road, Armoey, Ballymoney, BT53 8TP. (Ramoan) Mr Robert Getty, 23 Carrowcroey Road, Armoey, Ballymoney, BT53 8UH.

**BALLYCAIRN:**

REV WILLIAM HARKNESS: Mr Brian Milligan, 19 Glenariff Drive, Dunmurry, BT17 9AZ.

**BELLVILLE:**

REV D.S. HENRY: Mr Mervyn King, 29 Ardmore Road, Derryadd, Lurgan, BT66 6QP.

**RYANS and BROOKVALE:**

REV F.J. GIBSON: (Ryans) Miss Nora Hamilton, Rathfriland Manor Nursing Home, Rosconor Terrace, Rathfriland, BT34 5DJ. (Brookvale) Mr Norman McCrum, 49 Ballynamagna Road, Rathfriland, Newry, BT34 5PA.

**WARRENPOINT and ROSTREVOR:**

REV S.S. JOHNSTON: (Warrenpoint) Mr Denis Brady, 28 Seaview, Warrenpoint, Newry, BT34 3NJ. (Rostrevor) Mr Terry O'Flynn, 15 Aurora Na Mara, Shore Road, Rostrevor, BT34 3UP.

**THE ELDERSHIP**

**Died:**

ANTRIM, FIRST: Bertie Strange  
BAILIEBOROUGH, TRINITY: Thomas Williamson  
BALLINA: George Petrie  
BALLYLOUGHAN: Alan Crawford  
BALLYMONEY, FIRST: Dr John E. Johnston  
BALLYMENA, FIRST: Matthew Moore  
BANNSIDE: Doreen Mayne  
BELMONT: Robert Watts, Ned Dyers, Carrie Barkley, Noel Nesbitt, Robin Kinkead  
BESSBROOK: Earl Smyth  
BROUGHSHANE, FIRST: Robert Millar  
BUSHMILLS: Kathleen Richmond  
CAIRNCASTLE: Alan Campbell Tweed  
CASTLEBLAYNEY, FIRST: Lexi Oliver, Bertie Adair  
CLONDUFF: Walter Henning  
COAGH: Thomas Watson  
COMBER, FIRST: Robin Shields  
COMBER, SECOND: Patricia McCracken, Robert William (Bert) Harris  
COOKSTOWN, FIRST: George Crooks  
CRUMLIN ROAD: Roy Purdy  
CULNADY: Robert Kyle  
DOUGLAS: Roy Kee, Roy McElrea  
DRUMACHOSE: John Alexander (Jack) Rankin, William David McAuley  
DRUMREAGH: Cecil Cousley MBE  
DUNGANNON: Ronald Forbes  
EGLINTON: Roy Godden  
FISHERWICK: Arthur Barton Young  
FOURTOWNS: Andrew Johnston  
GILFORD: William (Billy) Trimble  
GILLYGOOLEY: William Alexander King  
GILNAHIRK: Ted Ross  
HARRYVILLE, BALLYMENA: David Millar  
HILLSBOROUGH: Hilary Jess  
HILLTOWN: Alexander (Alex) McCauley  
HYDEPARK: Derek Robinson  
IMMANUEL: Ed Crawford  
KELLS (Co Antrim): William McDonald  
KELLS (Co Meath): Alan McCartney, Matilda (Tillie) White  
KILMORE: James Charles (Jim) Nixon  
LARGY: Forgrave Cochrane  
LARNE, FIRST: Robert Johnston, Victor McDowell  
LOUGHBRICKLAND: John Edward (Ian) Hawthorne  
LURGAN, FIRST: Walter Cousins  
MARKETHILL, FIRST & SECOND: Edwin McWilliams  
MAZE: Andrew Logan  
McCRACKEN MEMORIAL: Dame Ingrid Allen  
MOIRA: Bert Cooper  
MOLESWORTH, COOKSTOWN: Tom Scott  
MONAGHAN, FIRST: Mervyn Jackson  
NEWMILLS, IVEAGH: Joseph Chambers, William Sergeant  
NEWMILLS, TYRONE: Ernest Carroll  
NEWRY, FIRST: Jackie Chambers  
NEWTOWNBREDA: Stanley Cairns  
OMAGH, FIRST: Clarke Campbell  
PORTADOWN, FIRST: Arnold Sleator, Tommie Abraham  
PORTSTEWART: Stanley Wallace  
RATHCOOLE: Bill Boyd  
ROSEMARY: Kathleen Gill  
SAINTFIELD, FIRST: Norman Jackson  
SALTERSLAND: Matthew Hyndman  
SCARVA STREET, BANBRIDGE: Joseph (Joe) McComb  
ST ANDREW'S, BELFAST: John Henry  
UPPER CLONANESE: Alexander Condy  
WARRENPOINT: Gordon Rea, William Morris  
WELLINGTON, BALLYMENA: Thomas McAuley  
WEST CHURCH, BALLYMENA: Alec McKee  
WEST KIRK: Cecil Kane  
WESTBOURNE: Minnie Tinney  
WHITEABBEY: Eric Kildea  
WHITEHEAD: James Cecil Stewart, John Monteith  
WHITEHOUSE: Derek Hall  
WINDSOR: Angela Corkey, Herbie Harvey

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## CHURCH RECORD

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### Ordained and Installed:

BALLYSILLAN: Lorraine Anderson  
COLERAINE, FIRST: Liz Dowey, Jonathan Hamill, Norman Hamill, Carol McCaw  
MAIN STREET, GARVAGH: Stephen Dinsmore, Brian Farlow, Trevor Wright  
KILLAIG: Douglas Morrow, Kenneth McIntyre, Gary Watson  
KILREA, FIRST: Nigel Toye  
MONEYDIG: Alan McAleese  
STORMONT: Frona Clarke, Brian Millar, Alison Wilson  
WHITEABBEY: Caroline Chambers, Gareth Dalzell, Rodney Ferguson, Ann McClelland, Rosemary McNicol, Elaine Russell, Christine Swarbrick, Alan Taylor

### Installed:

WHITEABBEY: Alan McCreedy, Sadie McCullough

### Died:

John Mann, Minister Emeritus of Ballina, Killala and Ballymote on 4 April 2020  
Charles Ivan McKnight, Minister without charge (Retired) on 6 April 2020  
Desmond Shaw, Minister Emeritus of Edenderry and Seskinore on 10 April 2020  
John McConnell Auld, Minister Emeritus on 28 April 2020  
John Craig Teeney, Minister without Charge on 28 April 2020  
Robert Gilbert Johnston, Minister Emeritus of Saintfield, First on 13 July 2020  
William Warren Porter, Minister Emeritus of Moneydig on 2 August 2020  
James Briggs, Minister Emeritus of Scarva Street, Banbridge, on 7 August 2020  
David Johnston, Minister Emeritus of Newtownards, First on 4 September 2020  
Robert Noel Agnew, Minister Emeritus of West Kirk, Belfast on 30 September 2020  
Frank Russell, Minister Emeritus of Castlerock on 19 October 2020  
Norman Duncan, Missionary (Retired) on 24 October 2020  
David Bailie, Minister Emeritus of Bangor West on 13 November 2020

## THE MINISTRY

### Installed:

Michael John Oswald Currie, as Minister of Cookstown, First on 20 March 2020  
Alan Thomas Frederick Johnston, as Minister of Killinchy on 27 March 2020  
Reuben Edward McCormick, as Minister of Glengormley on 17 June 2020  
Andras Gilicze, as Minister of Carrowdore & Ballyfrenis and Ballyblack on 23 November 2020  
Stuart McCrea, as Minister of Holywood, First on 25 November 2020  
Andrew Watson, as Minister of Cairncastle on 13 December 2020

### Ordained and Installed:

John Ussher Torrens, as Minister of Saintfield, Second on 18 June 2020  
Richard Tregaskis, as Minister of Ramelton and Kilmacrennan on 26 November 2020

### Inducted:

Zachary John Cole, as Lecturer in Biblical Studies on 20 August 2020  
Colin Jones as Chaplain to the Forces on 12 September 2020

### Resigned:

John Alexander Peacock, as Minister without Charge on 4 February 2020  
David Alexander Edgar, as Minister without Charge (Retired) on 4 February 2020  
Kenneth George Patterson, as Minister without Charge on 4 February 2020  
Michael John Oswald Currie, as Minister of Churchtown on 19 March 2020  
Alan Thomas Frederick Johnston, as Associate Minister of Holywood, First on 26 March 2020  
Reuben Edward McCormick, as Minister of Ballysillan on 16 June 2020  
David Colin Millar, released from his charge as Minister of Grange with Craigmore on grounds of medical incapacity on 30 June 2020  
Zachary John Cole, as Moderator's Assistant in Maze, on 31 July 2020  
Colin Jones, as Minister of Regent Street, Newtownards on 11 September 2020  
Peter Douglas, as Minister of Toberkeigh on 30 September 2020  
Matthew Simpson, as Minister of Claggan & Orritor on 2 October 2020  
Lesley-Ann Wilson, as Minister of Ballycrochan, Bangor on 31 October  
Andras Gilicze, as Transferring Minister of Stormont on 22 November 2020  
Stuart McCrea, as Minister of Donemana on 24 November 2020  
Andrew Watson, as Minister of Dunfanaghy and Carrigart on 12 December 2020

### Retired:

William Hiram Higgins, from First and Second Killyleagh on 31 March 2020  
William George Cameron, from Kirkcubbin and Glastry on 30 April 2020  
David Alexander Murphy, from Cuninghame Memorial, Cullybackey on 4 June 2020  
James Campbell, from Newtownards, First on 31 October 2020  
Roy Mackay, from Comber, Second on 30 November 2020

### Licensed:

John McCracken, by the Presbytery of North Belfast on 27 September 2020  
Philip Boyd, by the Presbytery of East Belfast on 30 September 2020  
Richard Hill, by the Presbytery of Armagh on 9 October 2020  
James O'Neill, by the Presbytery of Coleraine and Limavady on 4 November 2020

## CLASSIFIEDS

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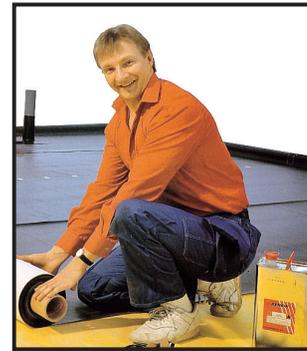
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