

25<sup>th</sup> June 2020

Dear Friend,

**Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. *Philippians 4:6***

If ever there was a bible verse suitable for these days, it is Philippians 4:6. What a challenging and anxious 15 weeks we have just come through, as a congregation and as a community. God has indeed heard, and answered, our prayers and in many ways, we have also known His blessing in the midst of the uncertainty. A slower pace of life, more time to spend with loved ones at home or through various means of communication, a greater sense of community support and a deepening in our fellowship with one another and in our faith in God. May the lessons we have learnt not be easily lost as we begin to emerge from lockdown.

During the last 15 weeks of lockdown the office bearers have met on several occasions, over a computer software package called Zoom, to make decisions on behalf of the Kirk Session. Last night the whole Kirk Session met on Zoom to consider the implications for the congregation of the ease of lockdown measures. We would like to advise you of the following:

- 1) Church services will not recommence in the church building until September 2020 at the earliest. There is a significant amount of work to be done to prepare the building, and the congregation, for a safe return to weekly worship. Many people are understandably concerned about the impact of lockdown easements, especially those who have been shielding, and so we will continue to provide online services over the summer.
- 2) I will be on annual leave for the month of July and the weekly Moderator's Service will be made available on our website [www.firstomagh.com](http://www.firstomagh.com) and on our First Omagh Gathering Place Facebook group page and over our telephone service on 028 2502 2512. There will also be a link to the Rev Herron's audio service on the Trinity Facebook page.
- 3) During the month of July work will commence on improving disabled access to the front of the church building and our church car park will be closed whilst this work is undertaken.
- 4) If anyone requires Urgent Pastoral Care in July please contact Audrey Hodge in the first instance. Her contact numbers are landline 028 8224 4771 or mobile 07725 199258.
- 5) Weekly Offerings - Whilst we are grateful that some members have made online donations or posted cheques to Neville, others have been waiting patiently to hand in their envelopes. Our treasurer will be available to receive any donations at the church hall on Tuesday 30th June from 9:30 - 10:30am and from 6:30 - 7:30pm. If you cannot attend in person please only give your donation to someone you know, and trust, to hand it in for you!
- 6) Irwin Anthony and Emma Fleming's furlough will be extended until the 31st August but kept under close review.

Pastors Graham and Pamela McElhinney from Life Triumphant Church are very grateful to the congregation for your generous donations to the food bank. Donations of non-perishable food and toiletries can be put in the foodbank bin at the side entrance to the church hall over the summer.

Sadly, since my last letter, Mrs Rachel Logan passed away on the 15th May. Please remember her husband David and children Rebecca, Alice and Neil in your prayers at this sad time.

Please find enclosed a copy of the 2019 Financial Report. Unfortunately, it was not possible to hold a Congregational AGM and so the Office Bearers have provided written reports for your information. I am very grateful for their prayerful and practical support over 2019 and especially over the first six months of 2020!

I trust and pray that the summer months will provide opportunities for all of us to be refreshed and renewed after a very stressful Spring season and that you will experience the Lord's presence and His blessing with you at all times.

Stay safe and keep washing your hands! Love Jane.

## **2019 REPORT OF KIRK SESSION**

Session continued to meet bi-monthly during 2019. All Session meetings were well attended and the agenda has a number of standing items... report of our YFOW; draft minutes of Congregational Committee meetings; Child Protection issues; Presbytery updates; reports from the subcommittees of discipleship, fellowship, mission and worship; as well as notification of births, marriages, deaths and new families.

In May 2019, four young people were accepted into full Communicant membership of the congregation.

Members of Session, as well as members of the congregation and the wider community, were shocked and saddened by the sudden death of Harry Alexander on the 18th May 2019. Harry was a faithful member of Session from the date of his ordination in June 1983. He is greatly missed by everyone.

A major item under review by Session was the reorganisation of the Children's Ministry. Following many prayerful discussions within Session and with the leaders of Jigsaw and Blast, the decision was taken to move these activities into church time and to establish a Tots/Creche facility. Many volunteers offered to help on the rota basis. The new arrangement came into effect in September 2019 and was working very well until lockdown suspended all church based activities in March.

Weekly and monthly organisations continued to meet during 2019 with good attendance and an increased sense of fellowship. Thanks to all leaders and helpers of organisations for your commitment and leadership during 2019.

As Rev Jane was Moderator of Omagh Presbytery last year, we hosted a well-attended Presbytery Elders' Communion Service in October.

I extend thanks to everyone who assists in any way and also, on your behalf too, to Rev Jane for her continued and caring ministry.

Since lockdown was introduced on 23rd March this year, church services have moved online to First Omagh Gathering Place on Facebook and to a 'Reflections' section of the church website. A church service telephone line has been established and regular contact made with older members of the congregation by district elders, our volunteer visitor and by the Rev Jane. A dedicated Facebook group (First Omagh Youth and Families) has been created to support young families and the Bible Study continued via an online application called Zoom.

The office bearers have met on 3 occasions via Zoom, in order to conduct essential business and Kirk Session informed of decisions taken via email.

**Audrey Hodge**

**Clerk of Session**

## 2019 TREASURER'S REPORT

We in First Omagh have had another very busy year regarding our finances and thank you to all who have contributed to our various funds enabling us to continue our work and witness here in Omagh and beyond. The church finances are detailed and lengthy but can in the simplest terms be split into two categories... restricted and unrestricted funds.

Firstly, any money donated to restricted funds must be used specifically for that purpose, i.e. maintenance, united appeal, outreach or any other specified purpose or charitable or mission collection. Regarding restricted funds in 2019, we are so very grateful for all contributions which helped in many aspects of our work and mission at home and abroad:

- Various Religious & Charitable Purposes - 17 different charities received £11,159.10
- Outreach Fund - 3 different initiatives received £4,700.00 (Embangweni Mission Hospital, Scripture Union NI E3 Schools Worker and Harold McCauley Home)
- PCI (Council for Global Mission & Moderator's Appeal) - £3,240.05 raised and donated
- Embangweni Mission Trip - £14,829.49 in and £13,990.00 out (*leaving a closing balance in the Embangweni Fund of £7,469.24*)
- United Appeal - raising £8,674.25 we fell just short of our PCI target of honour of £10,463.49 (£1,789.24 subsidised from our FWO)
- FOPC Maintenance - £33,153.63 in and £8,941.97 out (*leaving a closing balance in the Maintenance Fund of £178,260.23*)

Secondly, regarding unrestricted funds, any money donated to our Freewill Offering or given as a donation to church funds without specifying its use is put into the pot to pay salaries, bills and expenses.

### **INCOME**

- Weekly FWO - a nett amount of £74,148.90 was down around £1,000.00 on 2018 - when Loose Collections and Gift Aid was added the amount raised was £90,720.47
- Other Income - £9,642.28 was generated from donations, rent, dividends, church organisations, events and activities
- Total Income - £100,362.75

### **EXPENDITURE**

- Staffing - £67,577.93 (stipend, ministerial expenses, YFOW and sexton)
- PCI Assembly Assessments - £19,536.50
- United Appeal - £1,789.24 (to supplement shortfall)
- Embangweni Mission Trip - £3,000.00 (FOPC member grants 5x600)
- General Expenses - £27,075.82 (e.g. utilities, pulpit/organist supply, rates, insurance, bank charges etc)
- Total Expenditure - £118,979.49

The unfortunate analysis of our 2019 income and expenditure is that we have overspent by £18,616.74. This shouldn't come as a shock to us as we knew employing an extra member of staff would put pressure on our finances in the short term. There was hope that the FWO contributions might rise slightly in 2019 but that has not happened – we are grateful however that they did remain much the same. We do not need to hit the panic button as we still have a healthy balance in the account of £93,477.85 but we do need to be mindful that this trend cannot go on too long.

We are living in difficult and unprecedented times of course and it is always hard to ask for money in such circumstances but it would be remiss of me as Treasurer if I did not remind members to review their givings on a regular basis and if at all possible make a small increase year on year to help cover the ever increasing outlay to keep our church functioning as it should.

In closing my thanks go to Flo Harper, Sam Hammond, Campbell Henderson and Brian Wilson who look after the weekly collections for me and to Jane, Audrey and Arthur for their ongoing help, advice and guidance.

**Neville Hagan**  
**Treasurer**

## **2019 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CONGREGATIONAL COMMITTEE**

The Committee met on five occasions during the year, and all meetings were well attended.

The Committee is directly accountable to the Kirk Session and has responsibility for maintaining and safeguarding the finances and physical property of the Congregation, including the Church building itself, the Halls, the Manse and the Sexton's House.

In last year's Report it was noted that extensive discussions had taken place about how best to improve disabled access to our church building in a way which would make it fully accessible to any members of the congregation and visitors with mobility issues, without detracting unduly from the fine physical appearance of the building itself. The Committee had agreed that the best approach would be to install a permanent ramp leading to the West Door of the Church, and congregational approval was given to this proposal at the Annual General meeting on 7th April 2019. Since then the proposal has progressed through several stages of approval, involving Presbytery, PCI's Architecture Panel and Linkage Commission, and finally Planning Approval. The Contract for the construction of the ramp has been awarded, and work is scheduled to begin in July.

The Committee has been conscious of the need to make a decision about the future of Mayne Hall, which has been disused for some years. To allow for this issue to be progressed it has been necessary to regularise the trusteeship of the property, which until now has rested in the names of 13 members of the congregation, all of whom are deceased. All necessary documentation has been assembled and passed to the Church solicitor, who will arrange for the property's trusteeship to be brought into line with all of the Church's other property, so that decisions can be taken regarding its future.

It has not been necessary to undertake any major maintenance projects this year, but some minor improvements have been put in place, including improved lighting in the hallway leading to the Rowan Hall. There continues to be concern about the discolouration of the roof beams in the Church, and tests have been carried out, inconclusively, to investigate possible ways of dealing with the problem. Arrangements to obtain detailed professional advice have had to be postponed due to the Coronavirus pandemic, but it has become clear that in order to achieve an acceptable long-term solution a major project would be required, involving substantial disruption and expense.

With reference to employment matters, a decision was taken to extend the contract of the Youth Family and Outreach Worker for a third, final year until February 2021. Unfortunately, in the unprecedented circumstances of the Coronavirus pandemic it has been necessary to designate both the Youth Family and Outreach Worker and the Sexton as 'furloughed' under the Government's Job Retention Scheme. At this stage the furlough period will extend until the end of August, but this period will be subject to review in the light of developing circumstances. Under the Job Retention Scheme both employees receive 80% of their normal wage, plus the associated Employer National Insurance contributions, and their payments are subject to the usual income tax and other deductions.

Much of the Committee's detailed work each year is carried on through its various Sub-Committees, namely Finance and Fundraising, Buildings Maintenance, Grounds Maintenance, Administration and Information Technology and Catering. Tribute is due to the members of each of these Sub-Committees, and in particular to their convenors, for their energy and commitment in looking after the material needs of our Church and its property, and in serving the congregation in so many ways.

**Arthur Rainey**

**Congregational Secretary**