

Dear Friends,

Welcome back to the first Railway Street bulletin since the start of March – seven months ago!

If I had written back at the start of March and told you about the huge changes we would all be facing in our personal, work and church lives I don't think any of you would have believed me. I don't think I would have believed it myself!

The level of change that most of us have faced in the last six months has been immense. Social distancing, face masks, and hand sanitising have become normal. Home working, online meetings together with the use of social media, have grown exponentially. Expressions like 'furloughed' and 'please press unmute' have become part of our everyday vocabulary. Outings to the garden centre or the recycling centre have caused a level of excitement unthinkable a year ago. Alongside these have been more distressing changes: bereavement, business collapse, job loss, postponed weddings or other celebrations, and isolation.

Yet as Christians we should actually be best placed to cope with the level of disruption that has resulted from the pandemic. We know we are called to an unpredictable life but we also know that at every stage of this unpredictable life we do not journey alone.

I shared the weekly devotional from the London Institute of Contemporary Christianity at our online Prayer Focus last Monday. I think it is very helpful in addressing the disorientation that we have felt and continue to feel and it ties in very neatly with what we have been learning in Haggai.

The LORD replied, 'My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.' Then Moses said to him, 'If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?' EXODUS 33:14-16

Have you ever been at sea, with no land in sight? A seemingly endless expanse of water stretches before you and behind. It is easy to lose your bearings.

The third phase of transition, disorientation, is like that. It has the potential to be both difficult and fruitful. The familiar landmarks have

gone, and the new ones are not clearly in focus. Our inner questions show our longing for certainty and control: 'How long?', 'Where is it all leading?', 'How do I plan?', or 'Why am I feeling like this?' During the current pandemic, these questions are echoed in the media and reverberate in conversations with friends and colleagues.

God does not commit to answer our questions, but instead he promises us his presence. Aside from anything else, this promise marks us out as his people and orientates us in a time of disorientation. As Moses led the Israelites through the wilderness, God's presence, visible as the pillar of cloud and fire, determined the route and the pace.

As believers we are marked with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13). As the cloud and fire guaranteed God's presence with the people in the wilderness, so the Spirit is the powerful, personal presence of the living God with us. By his Spirit, God guides, comforts, strengthens, and equips us. That guidance is rarely a detailed map with a marked route - it is more often a lamp to our feet (Psalm 119:105), showing us the next step. Obedience to that step then leads to a further step or pause.

Prayer, together with regular reading of the Scriptures, is vital if we are to discern the prompting of the Holy Spirit. God wants to guide us. Following him is not meant to be a guessing game! His intention is that we should hear his voice; our part is to make the time and space to listen. Prayer practices, such as when we prayerfully reflect on the past day or week, can be very helpful. Looking in the rear-view mirror allows us to acknowledge God's presence with us.

Gradually, as we are guided through this phase of disorientation, we notice our focus shifting from arrival at a destination to how we journey; from achievement to purpose; from status to identity. As Henri Nouwen notes, "Our lives are not problems to be solved but journeys to be taken with Jesus, our friend and finest guide. And so, let our confidence be in the one who journeys with us."

I hope you find this month's bulletin encouraging and informative. It shows how we as a church are seeking to reorientate ourselves to face the challenges of the present realities and how we are seeking to take small incremental steps forward in terms of our worship, work and witness. I have been surprised at just how much material we had to include. It is great to be able to include some items of good news such as progress on 'The Link'

Redevelopment, the very generous giving of God's people in challenging times and the imminent arrival of Heidi England as Railway Street's first Deaconess.

Heidi's Commissioning Service will be taking place (DV) on **Wednesday 30th September at 7:30pm** in our meeting house. You can register to attend that service on our website. I hope that a good number from Railway Street will do that to encourage and support Heidi on this very significant occasion for her. The service will also be live streamed at www.railwaystreet.org

So let's continue to find encouragement as we remember the one who journeys with us through these days of change and let us also recommit ourselves like the people of Haggai's day to rebuilding the House of the Lord or as we know it better in our day - the church of Jesus Christ

Yours in His service

Michael Davidson

Introducing Heidi England

Greetings to you all.

It's been quite a while since your elders first began looking for a deaconess. The world seemed almost to have ground to a halt since the interview in March. So, after all this time, I cannot tell you how pleased and thankful I am to have been called to serve in your congregation. I'm really looking forward to getting to know you at last, and to joining in your fellowship.



In the past few months I've been eavesdropping in on your Sunday worship, following your studies in Mark's gospel, in James, in the Psalms and now in Haggai. More recently, I've had the very great pleasure of meeting some of the ladies in person. Thank you, ladies, for being so warm and welcoming.

The role of a deaconess is one of service – serving the Lord and serving his people. As I think about what it means to serve God, I am reminded of the words of the apostle Paul to the men of Athens:

²⁴ The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands.

²⁵ And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else.

Acts 17:24-25

Paul reminds us of the honour and privilege it is to be called of God – not because He needs us, but because He has chosen to include us in His work of building His church. Even in serving we are utterly dependent on him.

John reveals to us that serving God is our high calling, not only in this age but also in the age to come.

*¹⁰ You have made them to be a kingdom
and priests to serve our God,
and they will reign on the earth.*

Revelation 5:10

What a wonderful prospect! It is my prayer that together we will serve God in this place, as he builds his spiritual temple, in which each believer is a living stone, and whose cornerstone is our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Looking forward to serving alongside you,

Heidi England

Back on 17th June we recorded an interview with Heidi which you can still watch at www.railwaystreet.org/weAre/weAre.html or listen to it on the telephone line 028 92448979



HARVEST 2020. Our Harvest Service will take place on **Sunday 11th October**. Due to the restrictions this year we will be limiting decorations to the front of our Meeting House. Many of the homes for elderly members are not accepting gifts of flowers so this reduces demand. John Robinson once again will be providing flowers.

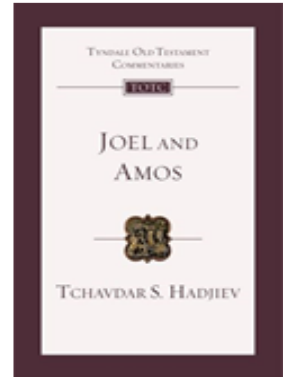
Gifts of money will not be required but the Food Bank would greatly appreciate some, so if you wish to contribute to this please put your gift in an envelope marked Food Bank and leave it on the plate at the door. Envelopes will also be available for the Harvest Gift which is shared between Tear Fund and Christian Aid.

Services for October 2020

New Teaching Series for this Autumn

1. Amos – Dr. Charlie Hadjiev

Charlie has quite literally just written a book on Joel & Amos. His Tyndale Old Testamentary Commentary is due to be published by Inter Varsity Press on 15th October. Michael has asked Charlie to take us through the largely unknown book of Amos over the winter months.



2. The Eldership – Rev. Michael Davidson

While Charlie takes us through Amos, Michael will begin a series looking at the role and calling of the Eldership as Railway Street prepares for an election of new elders in the New Year.

4th October

10:30am - Haggai 2:20-23 '*A Whole New World*'
Rev Michael Davidson

11th October

10:30am - Harvest Thanksgiving Family Service

18th October

10:30am - Amos 1-2: '*The Identity of the People of God*'
Dr Charlie Hadjiev

25th October

10:30am – '*New Elders – Why?*' – Rev Michael Davidson

**Do please remember if you are planning to attend to register by
Friday evening at attend.railwaystreet.org
Watch online at www.railwaystreet.org
Telephone Line Service – 028 92448979**

Treasurer's Financial Update – September 2020



Over the course of the last few months, I have received a number of calls and emails asking about the state of our church's finances so I thought that it would be helpful to set out a summary of where we are at the moment in respect to our general income and expenditure. Details of the current financial position in respect to the Link project are provided in a separate article in the Bulletin.

In common with many other organisations, the church's income did suffer a material shock in March when lockdown was announced. As you may recall our members of our church family were encouraged to give by direct transfer to the church's bank account and we are very grateful to everyone who has been able to respond in this way. We are also very grateful to those who have given their envelopes through the contingency arrangements we set up in April and also to those who have brought their offering along to give at the "in person" morning services since these began on 19 July.

At time of writing, **our FWO (Freewill Offering) giving is only £650 down on the comparable time last year (less than 1%). At the end of June the FWO total was down around £12,000 compared to the first 6 months of 2019** so I am very grateful to all those who have made giving to the work of our church a priority over the last 3 months to put our finances more or less where they would have been had we not suffered the pandemic. Your generosity to the work of God's kingdom despite the circumstance around us is highly commendable. That said, I am aware that there are some within our church family whose finances have been adversely affected by Covid and we understand that you are not able to give as you would normally like to.

Our main item of expenditure remains salaries and I am pleased to advise that we have remained in a position to pay these in full. In a normal year, our expenditure is much lighter in the April to September period and the warmer weather has helped reduce our heat and light costs over the period. We do, however, face the period of the year from mid-October to late November where there is the greatest strain on our cashflow with several annual bills to be paid and we will need to be careful through this period to ensure that we

have the appropriate level of funds in our account to meet our commitments on the date they fall due.

If you have not been able to bring your FWO contributions for the year up to date, and are in a position to do so, I would be very grateful if you could do this during the first half of October. To help with this, if you have any FWO envelopes that need to be collected, please get in touch with me directly and I can make arrangements for this to be done. Many congregations are experiencing financial difficulties at present and the generosity of our church family over the pandemic crisis has helped to ensure that this has not happened to Railway Street.

I am also pleased to advise that our United Appeal giving to date is on target and has been paid over to the central United Appeal fund. In a year when very few congregations are likely to meet their target of honour, it is especially encouraging that we are currently projected to meet our target in full.

Although our Harvest service will be very different this year, we do intend to take up a Harvest offering which will be divided equally between Christian Aid and Tear Fund as usual. If you would like to contribute to the Harvest offering please either transfer your gift to the church bank account including the word "Harvest" as the reference. Alternatively, please put your gift in an envelope marked "Harvest" and your FWO number and return this as you would your normal FWO envelopes.

Thank you for your ongoing financial support for the work of our church and further afield. Your generosity is greatly appreciated.

Stephen Johnston
Treasurer

Thank You
FOR
GIVING
...
GENEROUSLY

Link Development Update

It's always good to be able to begin an update on a positive note. At last our plans for the Link have been approved by the relevant authorities and we can now progress at our own pace. We did lose almost a year for two reasons: firstly, the fact that our buildings are 'listed' and therefore any proposed changes were subject to strict limitations, and secondly, of course, COVID 19! However, we now have the green light, so how do we plan to proceed?

Stephen Johnston, our treasurer, has reported that we now have £226,000 earmarked for the Link project and, since April, an average of £2,000 has been donated per month. So, Stephen feels that, if we continue to be generous with our contributions, we should be able to aim for beginning the work in the summer of 2021.

So that is our aspiration. There is, of course, a considerable amount of detailed planning still to be finalised leading up to 'going out to tender', but we are keen to get on with it!

At this stage I am happy to be able to hand over the reins of coordinating the project and I am delighted that Ivan Woods has agreed to take on that role.

What a difference a developed Link will make to the life of our congregation....let's do it!

Maurice

ANNOUNCEMENTS

DEATHS:

It is with sadness we record the deaths of:

Mr David Curragh on 12th March

Mrs Elizabeth Morgan on 15th April

Mr James Erskine on 27th May and

Mr Terence Crawford on 28th May.

We extend our sympathy and prayers to all the families.

KIRK SESSION

The next business meeting will be held using 'Zoom' on **Monday 5th October** at 7.30pm and details for joining it will be circulated to elders nearer the time.



PRAYER FOCUS

Luke 11:1 "Lord, teach us to pray."

Our next prayer focus is due to take place on **Monday 12th October from 8.00-9.00 pm**. Once more we will meet through "zoom." Details of how to join will be made available in due course. Should you not be able to connect through zoom please spend this hour in prayer from your home, praying that we might know God's will as we take our next steps into the future.



Subject to Kirk Session approval, PW are planning to have our first inhouse meeting on:

Thursday 22nd October 2020 in the Minor Hall at **8pm**. Together Again - **Side by Side**. We hope to see you there! Numbers will be restricted therefore booking is essential. Details to follow.

HELPING HANDS

Ladies from the Helping Hands Group have been busy over the period of lockdown and beyond. Recently we were able to donate hand-made blankets to four of our local Care Homes, lots of woolly hats and chest warmers to Colin Jenkins of the Seamen's Christian Friends Society and several other items to Project Romania.

In the meantime, Helping Hands will not be meeting as a group but we trust the work will go on! If any member of the congregation would like to donate wool or indeed to begin knitting, please make contact with either Edith McConnell or Heather Henry.



For the foreseeable future, regrettably **422** will not be meeting on Thursday afternoons. The 422 Committee is keeping the situation constantly under review and will advise the starting date as soon as it seems feasible to resume.

This also applies to ***Sundays Out for Lunch*** and to ***Out and About*** activities.

The **Bible Discovery Group** will meet, subject to Kirk Session approval, in the Minor Hall at 10.30am on **Thursday 15th October** to explore possibilities for future meetings.



CHRISTIAN VISION FOR MEN

Every November CVM gather in their hundreds, but 2020 offers an opportunity to do something different and unique. In 2020 it is coming to us as CVM are launching their DNA Pack which will allow us to have our own men's group conference in a smaller gathering whilst adhering to the current government guidelines.

If you would be interested in supporting this event, or would be prepared to help with organising it, please speak to Ivan Woods Mobile 07718929272 or Email ivanwoods01@gmail.com

Update from the Zold Family on their life in Budapest September 2020

The COVID quarantine was very unexpected in the first wave. The beginning was shocking to see that the borders are completely closed and our nearly 70 years old parents are living in a country where we cannot enter. God was good to us and everybody in the family passed this period in good health without any special problems. The digital learning was working well in Hungary, the life was even busier in this time as in the normal life. All our children had good results at the end of school year.



The summer was much better after number of restrictions were finished and the life was coming back to the normal way. We visited our parents for a short time in Transylvania it was a blessing to meet with friends as well.

The school started at 1 September and it is a milestone in our family life as well. Noémi got a job as a teacher, so after nearly 20 years' time she started to work in the school nearby our house where our 3 younger children are going too. I think no need to explain to you, the family life had to be reorganised completely and find the right way how to continue. It is a special challenge for me but good to see Noemi has joy to work as a teacher. She is teaching children age 12.

Vera finished her primary school last year and now she started the conservatorium, special music school in Budapest. She is playing on bassoon. She was the number one student at the entrance exam having 97% points. We are thankful to God for this result and of course good feedback for the last years hard work of Vera. Good to see our work as parents was not in waste starting from Culpui, travelling every day to school to Tg Mures. Thank you very much your faithful prayers and support. This fruit are partly yours as well. Dóra, Áron and Kata started the new school year in the same school as last year. We are glad to see they are motivated to learn and go every day to

school. Kata started the piano lessons too. We are happy, even the second wave of COVID seems to be arrived, the schools are still open. They have very strong restrictions and we pray if they could continue the school year in this way.

On the day 1 September I went to the school with the children. It was not allowed for the parents to enter to the school building just up to the gate. So shortly after it I arrived home, the house was empty. I was remembering one year ago I started a completely new period in my life. On that morning at the beginning I could not decide if now I should celebrate or grieve? It was a great gift to be a minister in Transylvania. I loved to be minister I love the mountains, the lakes in my native homeland. In that morning I was missing all this gifts but shortly after it, I was reminded myself now here is my place and I am fully convinced it is the will of God.

I think I was not really prepared for so many unexpected negative changes what are related to the COVID. Our life was very overwhelmed last year until Christmas time with completing the moving process of 6 people. The administration work for our family: having the Identity Cards, school, health insurance, housing etc was long and difficult work.

The start of the year 2020 was full of plans, visits, conferences etc. I was very happy to start my family therapy study as well. We were planning to have several good programs with Jewish friends. I was invited to preach in different congregations. But everything was cancelled. The churches were closed we remained in the capital without friends' meetings just online or mobile. It was not easy for me to accept but the benefit of this time was to be with the family. I really appreciated your emails or calls in this time as well.

Now, I look to the future with hope and wait when can I continue all my studies and work and be ready to give enough support in needs for the family and friends too. Give thanks, more and more Jewish people are open for the Gospel. I have again many meetings with them. Pray for us.

Sending our warm greetings to all of you by the Word of God what we read today: "Great are your purposes and mighty are your deeds. Your eyes are open to all the ways of men." Jer 32, 19. *Family Zold*

Rev David Thompson, Secretary of the Council for Congregational Life and Witness, reflects on the motto and symbol of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and what it might teach us about this period of refinement in our church life.

Revisiting Our Identity



In our world of soundbite and instantly recognisable branding, mottos and logos have become increasingly important in encapsulating values and vision. Irish Presbyterians readily identify with our motto *Ardens sed Virens* – ‘burning but flourishing’ – which usually appears accompanied by our denominational symbol, the burning bush. Of course, both are drawn from Exodus chapters 3 and 4, the account of God’s calling of Moses to become his agent in leading the Israelites out of their lockdown in Egypt.

It may be that returning to the values and vision that emerge from this story and its place in our denominational DNA has a lot to say to us at this time in which we find ourselves in a medium to long term struggle with the effects of our Covid-19 lockdown on congregational life and witness.

Awareness

I will go over and see this strange sight (Exodus 3:3)

Moses’ taking notice of the strange occurrence in the wilderness of a bush that was on fire yet not burning up, became the occasion for a life transforming encounter with God.

We too are living through strange times, seeing things that we never thought we would see and that often make little sense to us in the moment. In all our feelings of unease and disorientation, might this be a season in which we need to set ourselves to become even more aware of God’s presence than usual?

Listening

God called to him from the bush (Exodus 3:4)

Do we hear God speaking to us in these days as we read and reflect on his Word, and seek the illumination of the Spirit to apply it faithfully to our present circumstances? We won't unless, among all the other voices raised to fever pitch with their opinions and commentary, we set ourselves to listen to him.

What is God saying? We rightly listen for his words of comfort, peace and reassurance, but might we also hear from him a word of challenge like Moses did at the burning bush – a fresh call to step out of our wilderness experience into a new, future expression of our life in his plan of redemption accomplished in Christ?

Inactivity

Take off your sandals (Exodus 3:5)

The first instruction God gives to Moses is not to come any closer and to take off his sandals. Of course this signifies he is standing on holy ground before the otherness of God.

Recent months have been a period characterised by much inactivity in congregational life and witness. There have been lots of things we haven't been able to do. It has been a season in which we haven't had our laces tied ready for action, rather it has felt that we have been barefoot and immobilised. That has been very uncomfortable for what is usually a very activist denomination. We have experienced another side to being God's people while doing a lot less in his service.

However, maybe this period of inactivity is a particular lesson about place and pace. Our place is to participate in what God is doing in Christ, it is not to do his work for him. And the pace at which that moves is up to him. Activity does not always equal fruitfulness in the work of the kingdom. Inactivity can bring greater focus and clarity to where God is calling us to join with him in his ongoing work of redemption.

Incredulity

Who am I? (Exodus 3:11)

When Moses hears what the next season of life is to bring for him in facing down Pharaoh and leading God's people out of their captivity in Egypt, he is filled with

incredulity. 'Who me, God? Seriously? Are you sure you've got the right person? I'm not sure I'm up to this. Isn't there somebody else?'

Who among us has not wished that we might have been spared living and leading through this present season of life and ministry? However, like Moses, we can only step into what God has set before us. We do so with our moments of fear, but also knowing that God also says to us, 'I will be with you', and looking for the signs of his promised presence and power along the way (Exodus 3:12).

Obedience

Then Moses went... (Exodus 4:18)

After lengthy conversation with God, we read Moses responded obediently to God's call. Although short on the detail of how everything would pan out, Moses was faced with the choice of whether to push on trusting God, or retreat into a shell of unbelief.

Time and time again, that stark choice faces us too as we find ourselves muddling through a messy period of life and ministry. It requires constant walking by faith not sight, but as we do so God sheds his light and gradually reveals the next step.

Reforming and refining as we go forward

Another motto at the heart of who we are as Irish Presbyterians is the phrase 'ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda', meaning 'the church reformed, always reforming.' This idea, dating back to our roots in the Reformation of the sixteenth century, acknowledges that the church on earth is never the finished product. Anchored firmly in the core unchanging doctrines of Scripture, we should nevertheless expect ongoing refinements to how we understand and express our life together and witness to the world.

As we continue this journey together, let's do so asking how does God want to reform his church and how is he refining us as his people through the present experience of life as we have never known it before?

Burning but flourishing

It may feel like we are being scorched and seared by the present moment. That is part of God's refining process. But if we are burning, we can also be flourishing. That is part of the mystery of our identity as Christ's church. We are on fire, but not burned up (Exodus 3:2). It's a strange thing to watch, but also God's way of revealing himself to the world through the life of his people.