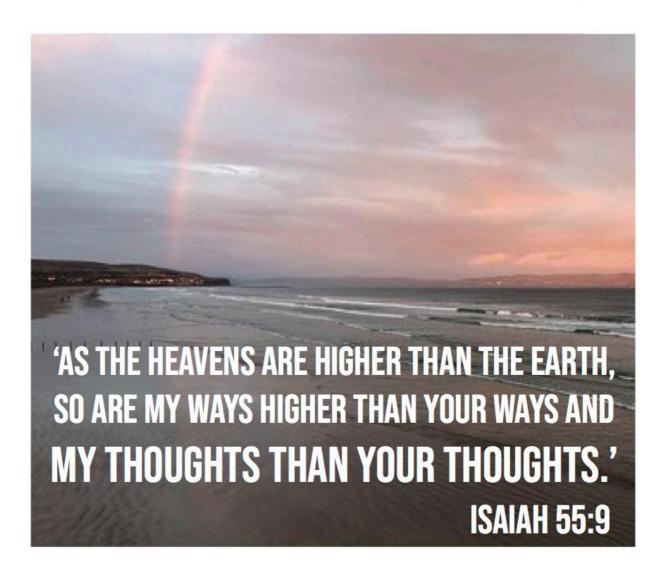


www.railwaystreet.org NI CHARITY NO: 105157

February 2021



Minister: Rev Michael Davidson t: 02892 667010

Deaconess: Heidi England
Youth Worker: Steven Woods
Student Youth Wkr: Shannen Symth

Church Office

Closed to the public at present

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FOLLOWING CHRIST SERVING THE COMMUNITY

'Strength for the Weary'

Back in March when the first lockdown was announced, like many of you I felt shock and fear. This was unprecedented and highlighted the seriousness of what we were facing, we were going into uncharted territory. In November when the Executive announced the two week circuit breaker lockdown I was angry as, without any consultation (in what I considered to be an example of State overreach), the Stormont Executive ordered the closure of churches.

When the most recent lockdown was announced in December it wasn't, in my case, accompanied this time by a feeling of fear or anger, it was rather simply a feeling of resignation and weariness. We could all see it coming and it seemed inevitable to me that if the churches didn't voluntarily decide to suspend public worship then once again we would be ordered to, and I think we took the right and only decision we could.

We are all weary, we are all fed up. Working and learning from home is difficult and draining! We all really miss being able to see and visit family and friends. It doesn't help that it is January and the days are short, and the temperatures in recent days have been, as they say in Belfast, 'Baltic!'

How do we deal with that feeling of weariness? It is easy to retreat within ourselves, shut up as many of us are in our homes, and to cut ourselves of from contact with others. Those of us who use Zoom or Microsoft Teams - while grateful for the technology itself - are weary of using it. Some of us struggle with online services because we find it hard to concentrate, surrounded as we are at home with distractions, and it is no substitute for being able to meet together.

It is important to remember that the Lord Jesus knows how we are made. He knows and understands our weaknesses, He knows that we can feel down and weary. He was flesh and blood just like us and subject to the same range of emotions and experiences that we are. He knew what it was to feel physically and emotionally weary.

I think the key to addressing our weariness of body, mind or spirit at present is to be honest about it with ourselves, then to be honest about it before God and then seek the help and resources He promises to us in His Word. Whether we are struggling with physical, emotional, or spiritual weariness, the answer is always the same. It is to stop leaning on our own resources and instead to lean on God. As I said two Sundays ago as we began our series on Colossians, when John Gibson Paton the Scottish missionary to the New Hebrides Islands of the South Pacific was translating the Bible into the native language he was searching for the right word to translate 'believe'. He found it in a word in the native language that meant to "lean your whole weight upon." That's

what saving faith is — leaning your whole weight upon Jesus Christ. We need in these wearying times to lean upon Jesus and to remember that He is able to supply strength and peace from Himself.

As Isaiah said, "The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength." (Isaiah 40:28-31)

Jesus of course said something similar in Matthew's gospel, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28)

Now stop and go back and read those words again .. slowly ... and take in the vital and wonderful truths contained in them. Now take time to thank God for the assurance of His love and concern for you and the power and rest He promises to you. And ask Him to renew your strength, whether of body, mind or spirit and commit your anxieties and needs to Him and lean your whole weight upon Him.

It is easy to be become disconnected from others during this time and we can feel disconnected from God. In recent days, as Heidi and I have been speaking to different members of the congregation by phone, one of the things we are both hearing is that people are really missing the opportunity to meet together especially for Bible study and prayer. I think that absence of togetherness and physical fellowship can increase our sense of weariness and remoteness from each other and from the Lord.

Could I suggest that instead of waiting for the phone to ring why not ring or video call someone yourself. Please, please, feel free to ring myself or Heidi, or your elder. Don't worry about disturbing us or interfering with our other tasks because one of our chief tasks is to be available to those who need us. So please feel free to call us if we haven't got round to calling you.

We are also working on increasing the opportunities to meet together for Bible study and prayer online in the coming weeks.

The other really vital thing is that we continue to engage with online services on the Lord's Day, live, if at all possible. It is very easy when we know the service is online and we can watch or listen anytime to lie in longer, or to watch in our pyjamas while eating our breakfast (yes that can happen in the Manse too!) or to say we will watch it later and then never get round to doing it and that then becomes a habit and so we cut ourselves off from worship and from the teaching of God's Word and that only increases our sense of disconnectedness and weariness.

It was with good reason the writer of Hebrews in the New Testament said, 'Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching." (Hebrews 10:25)

The Christians he was writing to were also weary and under pressure and though (unlike us at the present) they were free to meet together some had given up doing this and were becoming disconnected from the fellowship of believers. If this continues over time new patterns of behaviour emerge and become established that are very unhealthy for followers of Jesus Christ.

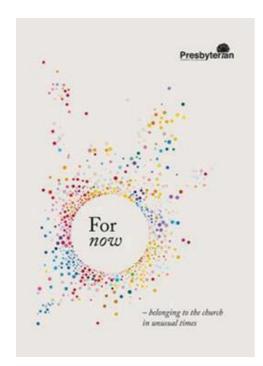
Could I encourage you to consciously prioritise joining with us live as individuals or as families at 10:30am. Get up in good time, get dressed and have your breakfast before 10:30am. Then sit down to watch the service with your Bible in front of you, why not take notes as you listen, this will really help your concentration, and remember to use the application questions. Please **do not** try to do other things while listening like washing the dishes or peeling the spuds (yes that can also happen in the Manse!) Worship always requires effort and self-discipline, especially at home. We need to discipline ourselves to consciously focus on worship and meeting with God and others through praise and prayer and engaging with God's Word. If you do all this you will notice a difference and you will derive much more benefit and know more of God's strength and peace.

Then let us consider how to encourage one another by joining us in our Zoom coffee time after the service – we break this down into groups of no more than four or five. Or if this is not your thing phone someone in the church after the service and encourage each other. Could I ask you to please remember to encourage those who are facilitating our services week by week. They are not doing it to receive praise but we all need encouragement and to know we are appreciated and that people are joining with us. You can do that in the comments section of the webpage or 'liking' us on Facebook or posting a message on the WhatsApp group chat.

So let's make sure that:

- we are leaning our whole weight upon Jesus Christ, that we are hoping in Him and in so doing finding the strength and grace to overcome our weariness.
- we are committed to worshipping together and receiving encouragement and strength through hearing and engaging with God's Word.
- and let us consider how we can encourage and spur one another on in these challenging days.

Our denomination as a whole is also very conscious of the challenges of belonging to the church in challenging times. Realising that the need to maintain connection among members has never been more challenging they have produced a church-wide initiative. One element of this is the production of the booklet, 'For Now'-being supplied free of charge to every PCI family. The aim of this booklet is to provide a way for congregations to simply and safely retain connection with every family while restrictions continue to curtail normal church activities. It contains: a message from the Moderator, a devotional message and prayer; suggested readings from the Psalms and practical suggestions and encouragement to every family to maintain connection with their congregation while regular worship and rhythms of church life continue to experience disruption. It will be delivered to every family along with copies of this bulletin. It will also be added to the resources section of the website.



One more time let's read and reflect again on God's Word to those who are weary,

"He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength."

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

"Lt us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the Day approaching."

May you know God's strength and rest as you lean your whole weight upon Him.

Yours in His service,

Michael Davidson



Here is the most recent statement from the Moderator and Clerk of the General Assembly sent to all ministers last week.



Dear Colleagues,

As you will be aware the Northern Ireland Executive have taken the unanimous decision to extend the current Covid-19 restrictions until Friday 5th March 2021. This decision was based on the strong recommendation of the Chief Medical Officer and the Chief Scientific Advisor, as a result of the continued extremely high level of transmission of the Covid-19 virus throughout the community (which over these last four weeks had not reduced to the level that had been hoped for), along with the increasing numbers in hospital and intensive care.

In the light of this decision, and on the basis of the clear and unequivocal public health advice that people should continue to *stay at home*, the General Council Standing Committee, acting with the delegated authority of the General Council and General Assembly, has directed that all in person Sunday gatherings for worship, along with all other in person church gatherings, should remain suspended in all PCI congregations in Northern Ireland until Friday 5th March 2021 - with the exception of weddings, funerals, arrangements for recording and/or live-streaming, drive-in services and private prayer (as permitted by regulations). We welcome that this same step is also

being taken today by the Methodist Church, the Church of Ireland and the Roman Catholic Church.

While we acknowledge that there is both cost and disappointment in this for many, we see this decision as part of our response to the command of Jesus to love our neighbours. We therefore continue to encourage as many people as possible to *stay at home* for the sake of health, life and the Common Good.

Ultimately, as followers of Jesus, we are people of hope. As we journey through these dark and difficult days, we live in that hope, looking to the light that we find in Jesus.

Yours in His Service,

Rt Rev Dr David Bruce (Moderator or the General Assembly)

Rev Trevor Gribben (Clerk of the General Assembly)

June 1/ July

SERVICES IN FEBRUARY 2021

Studies in Amos – Dr Charlie Hadjiev

Studies in Colossians – Rev Michael Davidson

7th **February** 10:30am - **Amos 9** '*Judgement & Salvation*' Charlie Hadjiev

14th February 10:30am - *'The Greatest Love'* - Family Service Michael Davidson

21st February 10:30am - Colossians 1:15-23 'The Supremacy of Christ' Michael Davidson

28th February 10:30am - Colossians 1:24-2:3 'The Slog of Gospel Ministry' Michael Davidson

> **7**th **March** 10:30am - **PW Service -** Heidi England

Please note that in person services currently remain suspended until at least 5th March.

Watch online at www.railwaystreet.org

Telephone Line Service – 028 92448979

DEATHS

It is with sadness we record the deaths of:
Mrs Olive Glass who died on 8th December 2020
Mrs Myrtle Henderson on 18th December 2020.
We extend our sympathy and prayers to both families.

PW SERVICE SUNDAY 7th MARCH

The speaker will be our Deaconess Heidi England. Those wishing to contribute to the PW Special Projects can put their offering into an envelope with their FWO number on it. Mark it **PW Projects** and send your contribution to either Edith McConnell or Stephen Johnston. Alternatively use the Church Direct Debit facility already set up and please clearly mark contribution for PW.

PRAYER FOCUS

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

Last February we planned for our next Prayer Focus as normal, not knowing what lay ahead. Little did any of us expect that an invisible virus would literally bring the world to a halt! We read of such things in the Bible but somehow do not expect them in real life.

Isn't that something like our prayers? Let's be honest. Don't we sometimes go through the motions not really believing that prayers will be answered? In the Bible God tells us over and over again that if we come to Him expecting that our prayers will be answered then they will.

Are you prepared to meet with God in prayer this month? Do you have the faith that God will heal and restore our broken world? Please join us as we bring our prayers to God. Once more we will be joining together using zoom and we would be greatly encouraged if many more of you would get involved.

Prayer Focus takes place on Monday 15th February from 8.00-9.00pm.

FLOWER MINISTRY

The flower ministry came to an abrupt end in March 2020 as the coronavirus took hold of everything. Church as we knew it changed in so many ways as we adapted to a strange new world.

Sincere thanks to all who provided flowers during the early part of the year and those who were willing to be part of this ministry. Since March, with a greatly reduced congregation, we have been using artificial flowers each Sunday instead of fresh flowers.

It is our prayer that, once the vaccine rollout is completed, life will gradually return to something closer to normal and we will return to church to worship together once more.

We would like to take this opportunity to revise the flower rota. Perhaps some of you might want to opt out of this ministry while others might wish to become involved for the first time.

Most people let their flowers be taken to members of our church family who are recovering from illness or have had a family bereavement. They are always much appreciated.

Please contact Elma Lindsay if you wish to continue with or become part of this flower ministry, by emailing hello@railwaystreet.org

Many thanks.

CAR PARK

Thank you to all those who have paid and returned their forms. If you have not paid the car park fee your fob will become obsolete and the fob should be returned. If you wish to continue using the car park please contact Ian Barron by emailing hello@railwaystreet.org and he will organise a new form to be sent to you. If you have paid but have not returned the form please return it to one of the addresses on the back of the form so records can be updated. Thank you.



The new Winter edition of the Presbyterian Herald is now available to view free of charge as a PDF copy on our website (https://bit.ly/3iunXgB) and also as a digital copy which can be accessed at issuu.com/presbyterianireland

Featured in this edition...

- Discovering resilience The Moderator reflects back on an unpredictable year
- The digital human The transformation of our virtual lives
- Showing a living gospel Hearing from the church in Syria and Lebanon
- Learning to lament Praying in a pandemic

UPDATE ON THE ZOLD FAMILY IN BUDAPEST – JANUARY 2021

I send our warm greetings to all of you with the leading Bible verse for 2021 of our family:

My mouth shall speak the praise of the Lord: and let all flesh bless his holy name for ever and ever. Psalm 145:21

Good start for a new year *speak the praise of the Lord*. Such a blessing is if you see the reasons why to praise Him, not only knowing theoretically, but look around, up and praise. Jewish people consider, this psalm is a medicine. You must have daily this medicine; religious Jews are praying this psalm three times every day. Psalm of praise there is no words about enemies, wars, dissatisfied people, persecution, suffering, epidemic. If we read the Hebrew text, we realize a background picture like, the caring father supplying the family with the daily bread. The children in the family can be happy and sing the song of praise. It is my prayer if God shall give this mercy to me to be able to praise Him.

The last three months were special for our family as well.

The school life was the same for Kata, Áron and Dóra, the same school with the same teachers. The restrictions of the covid limited the afterschool activities but we are privileged that the primary schools were not closed. Vera started the conservatorium in September and her classmates are very friendly. They became a good community in a short time. They were from morning until late afternoon in the school practicing on the instruments, having lunch together, choir and orchestra rehearsal etc. So, they became very disappointed when the school director announced in November that the school will be closed, they continue to study online.

Noémi enjoyed very much teaching in the school. She was respected by her colleagues and children as well. She was not very well at the beginning of December, her covid test became positive on Dec 2. We live in a strange time: if you are a faithful teacher you might be crowned even with a virus as well. She was ill and weak for more than 8 days. I wrote a short email to my Jewish friends about the situation. The feedback was unexpected: some of them provided food for the family, we got many emails and phone calls etc. I had many chances to talk to them on the phone.

Noemi started to be better after 10 days and I could not decide to be disappointed or happy because I see in the news the hospital staff are dressed as aliens or UFOs (I did not see ufos) to avoid any contact with infected people. I live in a house and sleep in one bed with an infected woman and nothing happens. I was thinking if I am not even able to get the virus or be happy that my immune system is so strong. Shortly after the symptoms of the covid appeared. The quick test was negative, but the PCR test became positive. Two weeks quarantine for the whole family. I was asked to preach on Christmas Day in the church but we had to spend Christmas in quarantine as well. The covid was not very difficult for me. Again, praise the Lord.

Let me write you a story about my work.

I attend a prayer meeting group in the local church in Budapest. Some of the members of this prayer meeting group are the pillar persons of the Bethany Group (Bethany Group is a revival movement in Hungary, same movement in Romania, Transylvania is called CE (Christ and Ecclesia). Evangelism among the Jewish people was always important for the CE movement. The leaders of CE are encouraging the members to pray every day for the chosen people of God, and we pray regularly on Monday afternoon for my ministry as well.

Heni (not real name) was coming to me at the prayer meeting and gave me a book which was published by Koinonia Edition House. You can read in the book 70 stories of Visky Ferenc, Hungarian Reformed Pastor, who was persecuted in the time of communism in Romania. He was in prison with Richard Wurmbrand who was Jewish but became a Lutheran pastor, suffering a lot for Christ. Heni said I pray for your work and I would like to give this book to you, maybe you can give it to one of your Jewish friends. I was reading the book the next day and realised it will be a big help for me.

I met with Ildi (not real name) the next day. I know about her that she is very sensitive to all kinds of stories about the suffering of innocent people, she lost her family in Auschwitz. I said, look I have a book about how Christians were living in the prison. I was not mentioning Wurmbrand was Jewish. She called a few days later, asked me to come to her house to talk about some points of the book. I was hesitating to come because now is COVID time, it might be dangerous to visit somebody who is in age over 70. She was really determined, please come. When I arrived in her house, I saw the book was open on a table full of small yellow paper notes. She was deeply touched by the message of the stories, especially that Wurmbrand was Jewish who was in prison because of his faith in Christ. We started to talk about the notes she had in the book. It was amazing to see how open and receptive she was. Since that time, we meet every week for two hours to have Bible study together. Pray for her.

So wonderful to see the circle *how ... his paths beyond tracing out* (Romans 11:33). The pastors mentioned above had big eagerness for the salvation of the Jewish people, but they already passed away. A God-fearing lady who is praying for Jews in Budapest, reads a book, God launches her to give the book to me, I give it to my Jewish friend and by these stories God opens many possibilities for evangelism, and she is very open for the Gospel. I am just surprised that different generations, different countries, different nations, people who did not know each other before are coming together in a mysterious way for one sake of evangelism. He is on the throne!

I encourage you to stay steadily in the way of God. Praying for each other.

Greetings,

Imre, Noemi, Vera, Dóra, Áron, Kata



Election of New Elders - February Update

The current restrictions have consequences for all areas of church life, not least how we go about electing new elders when we cannot even meet in person. However, the Kirk Session have decided that despite the challenges we need to proceed with this process. Why? Well let me remind you of what I said back on 25th October:

"We have looked at the Biblical reason for having elders - we finish by looking at the human and practical reason why we need to elect new elders in Railway Street. I am conscious you may well be asking why now? Surely in the middle of a global pandemic is not really the right time to think about this? Could this not wait? The truth is we have already delayed - the elders agreed in principle some time ago that we should move to an election of elders, but Covid-19 has delayed the start of this process. However, several factors have caused me to realise we need to move ahead. When we were studying Haggai we saw the people were making excuses for not getting on with the Lord's work and I shared this quote from the Bible teacher, John Mackay, "There is never a right time for engaging in the Lord's work if we are waiting for a time without problems." We can always find a reason to delay doing certain things, there are always issues and challenges in society or the world, or in the church itself but the Lord's work needs to continue. If the church is going to be effective it must be well led and our Kirk Session needs augmented.

Our eldership has been shrinking in numbers over the last number of years as a result of several factors:

- a number of our senior elders asking to be released from their duties,
- two elders who have resigned
- other elders have passed away in recent years.

We are now down to 23 active ruling elders. In addition, now that we are planning an election of new elders, some of our long serving elders have said they would like to step down from their duties. So we really do need to augment our numbers.

We also need to inject some fresh blood. It is not insulting our elders to say that the majority of them are of post retirement age and of the remainder there is only one who is under 50. It would be a mistake to say that because they are called 'elders' they are meant to be old men or women! It is not physical age so much as spiritual maturity that is the crucial factor. We need some fresh and hopefully younger blood in our Kirk Session.'

At the end of the year three of our elders, **Edith McConnell, Norma Coggins and Billy Tease** retired from active duties and now hold the office of Elder Emeritus. We want to pay tribute to them and thank them for their many years of dedicated service. In addition we have a couple of other elders who also wish to retire from active duties but who are waiting until we have new elders in place. All this means that we do not wish to delay this process any longer than necessary and despite the challenges involved we need to move the process forward.

The next stage is that we have updated and printed the **Voters' List** in this month's bulletin. This lists all those who are entitled to vote in this election.

Those eligible to vote in an election of elders must be both communicants and those who are recorded as having contributed to the Free Will Offering in the last year.

We would ask you to look at the Voters' List and should any member of the congregation who claims to be a voting member desire to make an objection regarding any name on the list, or omitted from the list, you are asked to lodge your objections, with your reasons, in writing by **Sunday 21**st **February**.

Following the ratification of the Voters' List we will (D.V.) move to the actual election process on Sunday 28th February.

The Laws of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland then sets out the method we will be following:

"on two successive Sundays the congregation shall be informed that an election of ruling elders is to take place and voting members invited to propose, in writing, for the consideration of the Session, any member or members qualified for the office.

The Session, having considered the proposals received and having obtained the consent of those approved, shall list the names of those to be presented to the congregation."

(The Code of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland Paragraph 178)

A copy of the nomination paper is included in this bulletin. Additional copies will be available to download from the resources section of the church website by the end of February - www.railwaystreet.org.

The Code of the Presbyterian Church Paragraph 31 says:

"To be chosen for the office of the eldership in a congregation a person must be a voting member of that congregation and a regular attendant on its ordinances. He should be circumspect and exemplary in his conduct, both in the church and in the

world, of acknowledged piety, endeavouring to maintain the worship of God in his family and held in esteem by the people."

"Women shall be eligible for election on the same conditions as men."

- 1. You are invited to propose up to 6 individuals to serve as new Elders. You do not have to nominate 6 but 6 is the maximum number you can nominate.
- 2. **Do NOT propose the names of existing elders.** Existing Elders do not need to be re-elected.
- 3. **Do not forget to sign the paper.** Papers without the signature of a voting member will have to be disregarded.

The Kirk Session hopes that all voting members will consider it their prayerful duty to exercise their privilege and responsibility in proposing the names of suitable candidates for ordination to the office of ruling elder.

- 1. Continue to pray for God's sovereign will to be done.
- 2. Make sure you have listened to all the messages on the biblical teaching on the eldership available here: www.railwaystreet.org
- 3. Read the leaflet, 'Choosing New Elders' this is also available in the resources section of the website.

Prayer

Heavenly father, I ask for your help and guidance as I make my choice of those who are to be our Elders. May your glory and the spread of your kingdom be my first concern. May those chosen lead wisely, serve gladly, and witness always for You, by life and word. Give me grace so to work together with them that our congregation may be richly blessed and united in proclaiming Christ. For His name's sake. Amen.

SUNDAYS AT RAILWAY STREET PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

10.30am LIVE STREAM SERVICE

There are no week day activities at present.

Please not change to church office email: office@railwaystreet.org