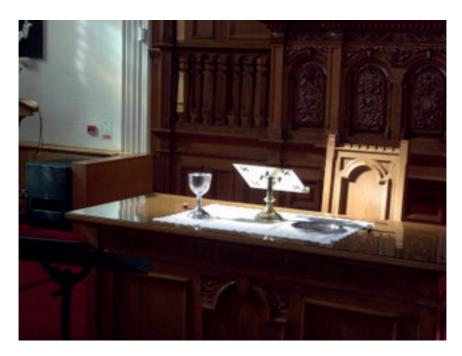


www.railwaystreet.org NI CHARITY NO: 105157

May 2021



THIS CUP IS THE NEW COVENANT IN MY BLOOD

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

Contact: 028 9260 2766

office@railwaystreet.org

FOLLOWING CHRIST SERVING THE COMMUNITY



We worship and serve a God who is our creator and incredibly creative, a God who does not change in terms of His character and attributes and yet who delights in doing new things.

This is seen very clearly in the Easter story. The events on the cross on Good Friday looked like the end of Jesus' story, it seemed final. But on Easter Sunday God did a new thing in fulfillment of His Old Testament promises. The resurrection of Jesus demonstrated a real break with the old way of life:

- it signified that a new era had dawned sin had been atoned for, death had been conquered.
- a new covenant has been established through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- those who accept the gospel message become a new creation.
- a new community has been established the church of Jesus Christ.
- those who belong to the church have been given a new commandment to love one another as Christ has loved us.
- through the church God is working out His plans and purposes culminating in the establishment of a new heaven and a new earth.

Our God delights in doing new things and those who worship and follow that God and serve in His church always need to be open to the new things that God wants to do in our midst. The Gospel message and our commission to share it does not change - the gospel remains the 'old, old story' but it is a story that remains relevant and true for every generation and in every place because humanity's fundamental problem remains the same – the problem of sin that separates us from God. The remedy for this problem remains the same - forgiveness for sin through faith in Jesus Christ. But sometimes the means by which that story is shared and communicated does need to change.

At present we are at a crossroads in RSPC. It is a time when a whole range of old things are ending or changing and a whole range of new things and opportunities are opening up:

- During the last year we have had to find a new way of 'doing Church' while we lived with the restrictions of lockdown that meant we were unable to meet together in person. We are now able to live stream our service every Sunday and we have increased our ability to communicate with our church family using different mediums. Happily, we are back to meeting together on a Sunday but many of these changes are, no doubt, here to stay in one form or another.
- There are a number of our senior elders who have either stood down or are standing down but happily we have just elected six new elders who will bring new blood and new thinking to our Kirk Session.
- We are on the verge of a new development. God wiling work on the new Link will commence this summer. The present Link Building has had its day, it is old and dated but it will be giving way to the new Link with facilities that will greatly enhance the life and witness of our church.
- For some in our church family there are new chapters and new challenges about to begin. In particular we congratulate Steven Woods who has been recommended as a student for Ministry in PCI. Steven will begin his studies at Union Theological College in September. This will mean that as a church family we will be losing a very committed and gifted Youth & Family Worker and that in turn will probably mean a search for a new staff member to carry on that work.

• Finally, as we continue to come out of lookdown and restrictions ease the work of the church will slowly begin to open up again, especially in terms of the opportunity to meet physically. This will bring new challenges and opportunities. The Kirk Session will need to ask the question, 'Do we simply go back to doing all the old things we were doing before Covid?' Or will we be open to the possibility that certain things have maybe had their day and will not restart? We will give thanks to God for what He has done through them, but we will want to be open to hear what new things God wants us to do in terms of our worship, work and witness.

So, we look back and give thanks for all that God has done in the past and we continue to trust in Him as our Sovereign God and the Lord of the church, who will continue to guide our path in the present and who will also provide what we need for the future as He continues to do new things in our midst.

Yours in His service,

Michael Davidson



At a short congregational meeting following the service on 25th April the following six names were agreed by voting members to serve as new elders in Railway Street:

Diarmid Finnegan

Charlie Hadjiev

John McCleary

Daniel Nelson

Alan Wall

Adam Woods

The Kirk Session wants to thank all those who took seriously the privileges and responsibilities of church membership and who prayed, engaged with the Biblical teaching on the eldership, and who then sought to identify and nominate appropriate individuals to serve in this office.

Over the course of the next number of weeks the six elders elect will be undergoing a time of training and preparation. We then plan, God willing, to have a service of Ordination on **Sunday 20**th **June at 6:30pm.**

We would ask you to continue to pray for God's blessings and guidance for the remainder of this process and to pray that God would prepare, equip and enthuse our new elders as they join our Kirk Session.

New Teaching Series For May



Judges takes us to a lawless time filled with murder and massacre, immorality and unfaithfulness. It is the Bible book that makes 'Game of Thrones' look tame by comparison. It is the story of some of the Bible's most familiar "heroes": Samson, Gideon, Deborah; as well as some of its more unsung ones like Othniel and Ehud. It tells of how Israel's "judges" saved the people over and over again from the cruel oppression of the nations around them. Yet as the history unfolds, these "heroes" become increasingly flawed and failing. They do many appalling things, and the efforts bring about less and less good. Really, they are hardly heroes at all. So as we read it, we will be led to ask, repeatedly: What in the world is this doing in the Bible? And the answer is crucial. In it we find the gospel.

Judges is not a book of virtues; it is not a series of inspirational stories to imitate; it will not present us with a moral code. Rather it is about the God of mercy and long-suffering, who continually works in and through and for his people; and who does so despite his people's constant resistance to his purposes, both then and now. Ultimately it points us to the only hero who can truly save us and that is Jesus Christ.

'The Good, The Bad And the Ugly' Studies in the Book of Judges

2nd May

10:30am Judges 1:1-36 - Michael Davidson

9th May

10:30am Judges 2:1-15 - Michael Davidson

16th May

10:30am Judges 2:16-3:11 - Charlie Hadjiev

23rd May

10:30am Judges 3:12-30 - Michael Davidson

30th May

10:30am - Communion Judges 4:1-24 - Michael Davidson

Do please remember if you are planning to attend it is vital that you remember to register at

attend.railwaystreet.org

Watch online at www.railwaystreet.org

ANNOUNCEMENTS

KIRK SESSION MEETING: The next business meeting will be held using Zoom on **Monday, 10th May** at 7.30 pm.

Please note - the next **Congregational Committee Meeting** has been brought forward and will be held on **Monday 17**th **May at 8pm** on zoom. All members are encouraged to attend. Thank-you.

PRAYER FOCUS

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

Prayer Focus is for everyone who loves the Lord Jesus. It is not an exclusive club. We encourage you to come along to our next meeting which takes place on **Monday 24**th **May** from 8 – 9pm on Zoom.

PRESBYTERIAN WOMEN PW Service

We would like to say a big thank you to all who contributed to the PW Mission Fund following the PW Service. A sum of over £4000, including gift aid, has been raised and will be forwarded to PW Headquarters before the end of June. This is an amazing sum, particularly at a time when we could not meet for public worship.

PW Newsletter

A second newsletter with a variety of topics is being compiled and will be circulated by the third week in May.

A Stroll in the Park

We are looking forward to having another "Stroll in the Park" in June. The exact date and time will be announced through the Church Service and by other digital means.

The PW Committee send best wishes to all members of the congregation and hope that you are enjoying the warmer Spring weather.

This year CHRISTIAN AID WEEK runs from Monday 10th May to Saturday 15th May.

Although we no longer participate in undertaking house to house collections, as a congregation, we continue to support Christian Aid financially through donations from our members. To this end Christian Aid envelopes for your donation will be delivered to your home by your district elder. If you wish to have your contribution gift-aided you need to complete the details requested on the form that is part of the envelope. Your entire envelope, with the donation inside, can be placed on the offering plate in the church on either 9th or 16th May or, alternatively, be sent to Edith McConnell or Stephen Johnston.

For further information, there are other methods by which donations can be given to Christian Aid and these include through street collections, sending cheques by post, on the telephone by using a credit card, or online using their website. Contributions are most welcome and greatly appreciated at any time of the year.

G21 SUMMER CAMP

This year we have a booking for Ganaway Activity Centre from **18-23rd July**. While it is currently looking unlikely that we will be able to have our usual overnight camp here, our G21 team are planning for all possibilities. If restrictions lift and open up the possibility of our usual overnight residential camp at Ganaway Activity Centre, we have some fantastic ideas and plans for this.

However, if restrictions do not allow us to facilitate an overnight residential camp, we are planning three days of local events and activities in the Lisburn area from 21st – 23rd July. This will likely include morning and evening activities and is sure to be lots of fun.

More details will follow of how you can register for this. We will try to keep you updated with our plans as we get more information about what restrictions will look like during the summer.

STAMPS are still being collected for the Leprosy Mission. Please leave them on the vestibule table or they can be given to Edith or Heather. Thank you.



Link Redevelopment Update



We are happy to report further significant developments in regards to the Link Redevelopment:

- All the architectural, structural, mechanical and electrical drawing packages are now complete, also the measurement works and bill of quantities have been completed.
- On the 13th April the project went out to tender, to the approved list of 7 suitable contractors who had supplied all the requested documentation.
- The tenders are to be returned by 12 noon on the 10th May and a small team will then meet @ 2pm to open the tenders.
- Our Quantity Surveyor will then prepare a tender report and the Congregational Committee plan to meet on 17th May to review and hopefully approve the selected tender.

If everything goes according to plan, it is hoped that work can begin on site by early June.

This is exciting news that we are finally on the verge of seeing this work commence.

We are grateful to all who are continuing to give regularly to the Link Redevelopment Fund. In order to seek to give a significant financial boost, ahead of construction work beginning, we are also making plans to have another Gift Day in early June. Special envelopes will be made available for this.







Further Easing of Lockdown Restrictions on Churches

As from Saturday 17th April 2021, the following additional activities are now permissible in all Presbyterian congregations within Northern Ireland:

1. In person meetings on Church premises for the purpose of prayer and/or **Bible study**

A mid-week meeting for prayer and/or Bible study is deemed to be 'an informal service of worship where participatory prayer and Bible study will take place'. This enables these important gatherings to resume meeting inperson in an appropriately large and well ventilated room on church property. This easing of restrictions also enables youth groups to meet for the purposes of prayer and/or Bible study.

All appropriate measures that are in place for more formal services of worship apply both to such adult or youth gatherings for prayer or Bible study. These include the following:

- Ensuring that numbers attending will be limited to the number determined by the risk assessment for the particular room.
- Ensuring that hand sanitiser is available.
- Ensuring that there is, as far as possible, good ventilation.
- Ensuring that 2 metre social distancing is strictly adhered to, with 4 metres between anyone leading from the front and the first occupied row in the congregation.
- Ensuring that face-coverings are worn on entry and exit and during the entire time (unless exempted and for those leading from the front) - this is mandatory in law.

- Ensuring that people chatting together inside, or indeed outside before or after meetings, should maintain 2 metre social distancing and to wear face-coverings inside and ideally outside e.g. in the carpark.
- Ensuring that no catering of any kind takes place, though obviously people can bring their own individual refreshments.

2. Resumption of limited activities for any youth organisation which is formally registered with the Education Authority

The Department of Education has permitted a phased return to face to face youth provision for certain youth groups and activities. This applies only to youth groups which are formally registered with the Education Authority which happily our organisations in RSPC are.

3. Permission for in-person meetings of Kirk Session

While Kirk Session meetings should continue to be held on-line where possible, where deemed important and necessary, in-person meetings of Kirk Session can be held on church premises. These should be as short as possible and ensure all the normal measures are followed.

Meetings of Congregational Committee should remain on-line only at present, though if the Kirk Session deem an in-person meeting to be essential, this could take place on a one-off basis by Kirk Session decision.

Some important additional points to continue to note:

- 1. Church organisations, apart from those referred to above, are still not permitted to meet at present, either on church premises or outside.
- 2. Catering on church premises is still not permitted at present in any form, including the serving of tea and coffee after services of worship.
- Provision of separate Sunday morning children's and young people's
 ministry during all or part of the main service, as an alternative to
 children staying in worship, can take place with social distancing and
 other mitigations being followed.

We are delighted to see this gradual reopening of church life in RSPC and we hope and pray that this will lead to a more normal resumption of our ministries and activities in the autumn.

Any group who wish to avail of the opportunity to meet should ensure that they communicate their intentions of when and where they plan to meet to Michael Davidson and Elizabeth Bridgett the Congregational Committee Secretary.

The Challenges Around 'Conversion Therapy'



At Westminster, in Scotland and in Northern Ireland there are plans to enact a law to ban what is called 'conversion therapy.' This is an incredibly sensitive issue and it is important that everyone is clear about exactly what is being proposed within such a ban. There are very genuine concerns it could inadvertently or deliberately criminalise teaching and support relating to an orthodox biblical understanding of marriage. Medical professionals have also raised concerns that therapies to help young people explore their perceived gender identity before making life-altering decisions about so called sexreassignment surgery could fall foul of such legislation.

Below is a helpful article from The Evangelical Alliance about the issues involved.

Why is the Evangelical Alliance opposing proposals to end conversion therapy?

The Government's 2018 LGBT Action Plan set out its intention to end conversion therapy in the UK. Proposals on how the Government will do this are now imminent.

In the four-year action plan, and in recent parliamentary statements, the Government has sought to reassure churches and other faith groups that such a policy would not restrict people from being able to seek spiritual support. We are engaging with the policy to ensure that this aspect is sustained and that, in banning conversion therapy, religious freedom is not compromised. Some campaigners, most notably Ban Conversion Therapy, have argued for a wide-ranging and expansive definition of conversion therapy. They say:

"Any form of counselling or persuading someone to change their sexual orientation or behaviour so as to conform with a heteronormative lifestyle or their gender identity should be illegal, no matter the reason, religious or otherwise – whatever the person's age".

We consider that such a definition poses a substantial threat to the freedom of Christians to practise everyday aspects of their faith. It puts ministers in jeopardy when they preach, and church members at risk when they pray for each other. New laws based on a definition as above put Christians at risk of prosecution for preaching an orthodox position on sexuality and for praying for a fellow church member.

But isn't conversion therapy about forcing someone to change their sexuality?

There are many practices that are a shameful aspect of our history, and Christians should express profound regret for any part they have played in perpetuating the stigma, discrimination and harm towards people because of their sexuality. Some of the stories that have been shared about the abuse

people have experienced because of their sexuality and efforts to change it are horrific, and we thoroughly support moves to stamp out any such practices. We believe that in most cases these are already covered by the criminal law, and if not, we support measures to clarify and strengthen legislation.

However, those who want conversion therapy practices banned are not solely motivated by accounts of forced electroshock treatment or corrective rape. Recent debates in parliament and media comment make clear that efforts to promote or encourage an orthodox approach to marriage and sexuality would be in scope of such a ban, and religious settings would be explicitly targeted.

We oppose all coercive efforts regarding sexual activity, and this includes forced conversion therapy activities. However, where an individual chooses to seek pastoral and prayer support, we believe that the best approach is to allow them the support they want to respond to their sexual orientation and desires in a way they choose. For Christians, this means that they are able to live in accordance with their beliefs.

Second, we see in the proposals a direct threat to Christian teaching and practice regarding marriage and sexuality. Suggestions have been made that policies to end conversion therapy should cover activity that represses or supresses someone's sexuality or gender identity. This poses a very real threat to church teaching, discipleship activities and prayer ministry; even a conversation between two friends could fall foul of such a law. Anything that is viewed as persuading someone not to act on same-sex attraction – i.e. promoting chastity outside of heterosexual marriage and fidelity within – is at risk.

What is the Evangelical Alliance doing?

We have written to the Prime Minister and other relevant government departments to raise our concerns, reiterating our opposition to abusive and coercive practices but cautioning against policy proposals that will affect the religious liberty of churches and individual Christians, and the freedom of those who experience same-sex attraction to respond in a way that they choose.

We are anticipating that the Government will shortly set out their policy plans in this area and at that point we will engage more specifically with what is being suggested. We will endeavour to stand clearly for the freedom of Christians to continue to practise our faith. We will also respond with compassion and recognition of where our engagement has harmed rather than helped.

What can I do?

We would encourage you to contact your MP and share your concerns about the effect that plans to address conversion therapy could have on the everyday practices of Christians and churches.

Please pray for those affected by abusive practices, that they will experience healing and restoration. Pray for those struggling with and looking for help and support to live in accordance with their beliefs. Pray for Christians worried about how to faithfully and graciously love and care for people around them as Jesus calls them to.

As more details around this policy area emerge, we will produce further resources and information to support you and encourage you to engage with government on this issue.



Danny Webster

Danny joined the Evangelical Alliance in 2008 and has held a range of roles in the advocacy team. He currently leads the advocacy team's work across the UK including public policy work an engagement with the parliaments and

assemblies, and respective governments. Before working for the Evangelical Alliance, Danny, who has degrees in politics and political philosophy, worked in parliament for an MP. Danny is passionate about encouraging Christians to integrate their faith with all areas of their life, especially when it comes to helping them take on leadership outside the church, and helped initiate the Evangelical Alliance's Public Leadership programme. He frequently provides comment on current political issues, both in Evangelical Alliance publications and to the press.

SUNDAYS AT RAILWAY STREET PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

MORNING SERVICE @10.30am to attend please register at: www.railwaystreet.org
Service will be live streamed.

There are no week day activities at present.

Please note change to church office email: office@railwaystreet.org