

September/October 2023

THE bulletin



‘But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.’

(2 Peter 3:18)

Photo by Georg Eiermann on Unsplash

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Dear Friends,

Welcome back after the summer break! I hope July & August provided opportunities for many of you to find rest and refreshment, even despite the nature of the weather if you were holidaying at home. I certainly needed and enjoyed the opportunity to set down the burden of pastoral oversight of Railway Street for a time and I am happy to say that for three weeks I didn't hear a thing from RSPC!

But we all know the summer quickly passes and we now find ourselves at the beginning of a new church programme with many exciting opportunities to grasp and challenges to face and overcome, dependent as always, on God's grace.

As I write, those of you who work in our schools are already back to work. All of you who are teachers will have had the experience of being called into a staff meeting when the principal gravely announces that, "We have an Inspection coming."



Photo by CDC on Unsplash

That is something that is guaranteed to raise the anxiety levels among the staff of a local school for it means that the Education Authority will be sending in inspectors to observe and assess the quality and delivery of education in that school. The ultimate purpose of an inspection is intended to be positive and to result in an improvement of the educational provision but it will inevitably mean considerable extra work and stress for the school staff as they prepare for that inspection and as they seek to implement the recommendations that the final report brings. No teacher enjoys an inspection!

In the church we have something similar, although I am happy to say that it is no longer anything like as long and intrusive as it once was, but Presbyterian Congregations can expect a Presbytery Consultation roughly once every ten years.

What is a Presbytery Consultation?

It is one of those things that reminds us that Railway Street is not simply a congregation of local believers but that we are part of something much bigger. We are a congregation of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and Railway Street is part of the Presbytery of Dromore which consists of 22 individual congregations. The Presbytery exercises an important oversight role in the life of a local congregation. When a congregation seeks to call a new minister or to elect new elders it is the Presbytery who guide and oversee that process in partnership with Kirk Session.



A Consultation is a process by which Presbytery enquires into the life of a local congregation. Its purpose is threefold:

1. **To encourage.** The Presbytery Consultation primarily want to hear of encouragements that edify the congregation and that also inspire the rest of the Presbytery.
2. **To identify the challenges** faced by the congregation, so that Kirk Session can be directed and equipped to deal with the most pressing issues.
3. **To address any concerns** that Kirk Session may be struggling to deal with, requiring the intervention of Presbytery.

This Presbytery Consultation will be under the chairmanship of Rev Paul Jamieson, minister of Hillhall Presbyterian.

Our Kirk Session have already done the preliminary work of completing the detailed questionnaires supplied by the Presbytery and as always we are indebted to our Clerk of Session Stephen Johnston for the diligent and meticulous way in which he has finalised those questionnaires.

The next stage will be a face to face meeting between the Consultation Panel and members of Railway Street. Kirk Session are in the final stages of appointing a group of Congregational Representatives which is broadly representative of the congregation. It will meet with the Consultation Team to discuss the answers provided by Kirk Session. The reason for meeting with this group is to get a more detailed picture of the area of particular interest from a wider range of voices than just the Kirk Session.

This will be a group of eight people consisting of:

- four ruling elders,
- at least two young people (no older than 25)
- a balance of genders.

We will inform you who these representatives are in the very near future. The minister is not part of this group. The Consultation Panel will meet separately with myself.

Based on this, the Consultation Team produces a Consultation Report for Presbytery summarising aspects of congregational life which can be celebrated, challenges faced by the congregation and, if necessary, any concerns for Presbytery to deal with. The report will recommend some issues for the Kirk Session to work on over the course of the next year.

In reality were it not for me informing you of this, most members of the congregation would be unaware that it is taking place. None the less this is an important event in the life of our congregation and the results of this Consultation and in particular its recommendations will be shared with the whole congregation at the end of the process.

I would ask you to pray for this process for the members of both the Presbytery Consultation Panel and the Railway Street Congregational Representatives and myself as we meet in the coming weeks. Please pray that the final report will be encouraging for us as a congregation and for the Presbytery and that it will identify challenges that we have maybe not even considered and that the end result will be to enable us to become ever more effective in our primary purpose of, **'Following Christ and Serving the Community.'**

Alongside this as a congregation we will seek to continue to implement our **Congregational Mission Plan** focusing on those dual priorities of:

- seeking to develop all age discipleship
- engaging in intentional focused evangelism.

Sunday worship morning and evening will continue to provide the foundation for addressing these challenges. Alongside that the relaunch of Discipleship Groups will also help us to grow as disciples of Jesus Christ. If you have not already signed up to be part of a discipleship group we would encourage you to do that by making contact with Stephen Johnston or myself.

On Sunday mornings between now and December we'll be thinking about **Gospel Shaped Outreach**. This series will hopefully remind us of both the priority of evangelism for our church and to see the role that everyone can play in reaching out to those who are



outside the church.

This series won't offer quick fixes or evangelism 'gimmicks'. But by continually pointing us back to the gospel, it should give us the proper motivation to work together as a church to share the gospel message with

those who are lost without Christ.

As always I invite all of you to join us on the journey,

Yours in His service,

Michael

Kirk Session News

The next stated meeting of **Kirk Session** will be on Monday 11th September in the Upper Room at 7:30pm

Kirk Session **Prayer Meetings** will take place on Monday 4th September and 2nd October at 8:00pm in the Link

The **Sacrament of the Lord's Supper** will take place on Sunday 24th September and Sunday 26th November at 10:30am.

Congregational Committee will meet on Monday 9th October at 8:00pm in the Upper Room.

Finance and Property Sub Committees will both meet prior to this meeting at 7:00pm

Bereavements

It is with sadness that we record the deaths of:

Mr Edward (**Eddie**) Armour died 29th July 2023

Mrs **Olga** Woods Patterson died 13th August 2023

The congregation extends their heartfelt sympathy and prayers to their families at this time of loss.

Finance update

Following on from the previous update which had indicated a strong start to filling the £30,000 “hole” in the church finances in 2022, I am pleased to say this has continued in the last three quieter months over the summer period.

Comparing the offering in June, July & August of 2023 to the same period last year, shows an increase of some 25% over the summer period; sustaining this into the final quarter of the year should put our church finances close to break-even for the year.

As previously indicated, repayments to the Link Loan Account are covered by the bi-annual gift days, and PCI United Appeal offering remains marginally up on last year’s level and should meet the congregational target of just over £13,000 by the end of the year.

Your ongoing generosity is greatly appreciated during these difficult economic times and rising costs in running the church and our sincere thanks goes to all who have responded so positively.

Many thanks

Gordon Wallace (RSPC Treasurer)



SERVICES FOR SEPTEMBER

Sunday Mornings - Gospel Shaped Outreach

Sunday Evenings - What Matters Most? Studies in 2 Peter

3rd September

10:30am 'Be Strong & Brave' - Back To School With God

6:30pm 2 Peter 1:1-2 'The Genuine Article'
Michael Davidson

10th September

10:30am Gospel Shaped Outreach 1 - How Are We Doing?
Michael Davidson

17th September

10:30am There & Back Again - Summer Reports

6:30pm 2 Peter 1:3-11 'Make Your Calling Sure'
Michael Davidson

24th September

10:30am Gospel Shaped Outreach 2 - Who is Jesus?
Michael Davidson

COMMUNION



Watch online at
www.railwaystreet.org



Telephone Line Service
028 9244 8979

SERVICES FOR OCTOBER

1st October

- 10:30am Boys Brigade Service of Enrolment
- 6:30pm 2 Peter 1:12-21 'Eye Witness To His Majesty'
Michael Davidson

8th October

- 10:30pm Harvest Thanksgiving - Graeme Read
(Assistant Minister in Elmwood Presbyterian)
- 6:30pm Mission Focus: TearFund
Chris Thompson

15th October

- 10:30am Gospel Shaped Outreach 3 - Who Are We?
Michael Davidson
- 6:30pm 2 Peter 2:1-10 'The Fifth Column'
Michael Davidson

22nd October

- 10:30am Girls Brigade Service of Enrolment
- 6:30pm Tackling The Tough Issues 1:
The Government's RSE Agenda

29th October

- 10:30am Gospel Shaped Outreach 4 - Who Are We
Reaching? Michael Davidson
- 6:30pm 2 Peter 2:11-22 'The Profile of a Deadly Minister'
Michael Davidson



5 THINGS TO PRAY FOR YOUR CHURCH

We long for God to be working in our church fellowship, and we know we're meant to be praying for our church. But often when it comes to it, we don't quite know what to ask for. Or we feel our requests to God are shallow, repetitive and stuck in a rut.

That's where this excellent little book by Rachel Jones is designed to help. It will equip us to pray powerful prayers for our church family - prayers that really change things, because they're based on God's word. Each spread takes a passage of Scripture and suggests 5 things to pray for an aspect of church life. Because when we pray in line with God's priorities as found in his word, our prayers are powerful and effective (James 5 v16) - and that's a truly thrilling prospect.

We made use of this book several years ago in RSPC and we want to do that again So we would ask you to look out your own copy from last time. We will also be making available free copies for those who don't have this. From Monday 11th September we want to encourage people to begin using this book together as we pray for God to work powerfully in our church family.

Railway Street PW meets on the 4th Monday of each month in the Minor Hall at 8.00pm. All ladies of the congregation are very welcome.

- Monday September 25th **‘Making a difference’**

Reflections from the ladies of the Romanian work team.
A ‘Welcome Back’ supper will be served.



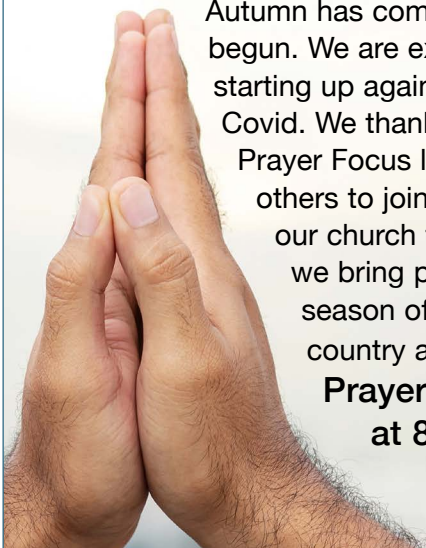
- Monday October 23rd

‘Changing lives in the Philippines’

The speaker will be Ian Campbell from ‘Ten Foundations’.
We will have the opportunity to purchase bags made in the Philippines.

Prayer Focus

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



Autumn has come and a new church year has begun. We are excited to see Discipleship Groups starting up again after the disruption caused by Covid. We thank everyone who came along to Prayer Focus last year and we would encourage others to join us as we seek God's plans for our church family here in Railway Street and we bring prayers for others. May this be a season of great blessing to our church, our country and the whole world.

**Prayer Focus meets in the Link
at 8pm on Monday 13th
September and Monday
16th October**

The following items are no longer needed and are available to anyone who might have a use for them:

40 x plastic stackable chairs

2 x large wooden trestle tables

2 x dart boards and darts

6 x snooker cues (available in 2 different sizes)

If anyone is interested in any of these items please speak to Peter Blackman





Section	Time	Section Leader
Tiny Tots (3 yrs to P1)	6 - 7pm	Rebecca Woods
Explorers (P2, P3 & P4)	6 - 7pm	Jess Nelson
Juniors (P5, P6 & P7)	7.30 - 9pm	Linda Davidson
Seniors (Yrs 8, 9 & 10)	7.30 - 9pm	Samantha McGrath
Brigaders (Yrs 11 - 14)	7.30 - 9pm	



GB registration started on Thursday 31st August and new girls can join us, at any stage of the year, by coming along to the church hall on Thursday evenings.

This year our Scripture course for all sections focuses on 'The Promises of God.'

Looking Ahead

GB Enrolment Service - Sunday 22nd October

BB/GB Christmas Market - Saturday 2nd December

Open Bible Award Badge

This will be awarded to all girls who have at least 22 church attendances during the GB year (Sept to end of March)

For further information about GB, speak to one of the section leaders or to our GB Captain Hilary Milligan (07899 896879)

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All welcome

Thursday 28th September
at 2.30pm in the Minor Hall

Captive Audience

Thursday 26th October
at 2.30pm in the Minor Hall

Care & Support

Photo by de-an-sun on Unsplash

Bible Discovery

The new session of Bible Discovery will begin on
Thursday 21 September at 10.45 in No 31

This term's theme 'In God's Hands' will run on alternate Thursday mornings until 14 December. There is no need to register. Everyone is welcome.



Photo by Aaron Burden on Unsplash

Northern Ireland: Relationships and Sexuality Education is changing – here's how you can respond

David Smyth, head of the Evangelical Alliance NI, provides an update on changes to the law and the curriculum, and shares how parents, teachers and church leaders can respond

The teaching of relationships and sexuality education (RSE) in schools is not a new issue, but it has become increasingly contested across the UK over the past few years.

Disturbing stories have emerged about teaching on issues such as gender identities or graphic and sometimes dangerous sexual practices. As a result, many parents, of different faiths and none, have expressed concerns about the methods and content of some lessons. So, the teaching of RSE is being reviewed and challenged in various ways across the UK and the Republic of Ireland. However, there have been some specific and recent changes in Northern Ireland.

Recent developments in Northern Ireland

In April 2023, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) produced a report called [The preventative curriculum in schools and education other than school centres](#) in Northern Ireland.

This wide-ranging report found many positive examples of good pastoral care and practice but also stated, “Too many schools/centres avoid completely, or cover with insufficient depth and progression, many of the more sensitive aspects of the RSE aspect of the preventative curriculum. These include teaching on: gender and sexual identity; LGBTQ+; sexual abuse; child sexual exploitation (CSE); domestic abuse/violence; and menstrual wellbeing.”

In June 2023, the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission released a report called [Relationships and Sexuality Education in post-primary schools in Northern Ireland: a compelling case for reform](#). This report resulted from an investigation into the provision of RSE in Northern Ireland. Among many other things, the Commission recommended that the Curriculum minimum content order (NI) 2007 be changed to “make age-appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights a compulsory component of the curriculum for adolescents, covering prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion.”

Some churches and Christian organisations raised concerns about this report, including the framing of different views on gender and sexuality as being inherently problematic. Positive examples of RSE provision, for example, Love for Life (which delivers RSE to more than 30,000 young people annually in Northern Ireland), were not included in any meaningful way. It is also worth noting that the report’s recommendations, in and of themselves, are not legally binding and that the NIHRC did not speak to teachers, students, governors, or parents or observe the teaching of RSE in the classroom.

Yet, despite the concerns of churches, there is no doubt that this remains an influential report. Coinciding with its release in June 2023, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland [introduced legislation](#) which brought the above key recommendation into effect. Here’s what we know so far:

Change in the law

- As part of the changes to the law on abortion in 2019, the Secretary of State was under a duty to implement recommendation 86(d) of the Report of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination of Women (CEDAW).

- As such, the law has now changed. The new regulations “will make age-appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, covering prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion, a compulsory component of the curriculum for adolescents.”
- The Secretary of State has indicated that “this should be done in a factual way that does not advocate, nor oppose, a particular view on the moral and ethical considerations of abortion or contraception”.

Guidance to be issued

- The Department of Education has a legal duty to issue guidance on the content and delivery of the education to be provided by 1 January 2024.
- There will be a duty on the board of governors and principal of every grant-aided school (most schools) to have regard to the guidance.
- The Department of Education will also be under a statutory duty to make regulations about the circumstances in which, at the request of a parent, a pupil may be excused from receiving that education or specified elements of that education. At the moment, there is no automatic right for parents to withdraw children from RSE, but requests are considered on an individual basis.
- While the legislation changes are limited to teaching contraception and access to abortion, the reports from the ETI and NIHRC are much broader in their recommendations regarding teaching gender identity and sexuality etc. How much the guidance will cover the teaching of these wider issues is unclear.

Consultation

- Consultation with parents on Relationship and Sexuality Education is already common practice in Northern Ireland; the Department of Education is to ensure schools afford parents the opportunity to review relevant materials.
- We expect a public consultation on the guidance and possibly the regulations this autumn.
- The regulations, in practice, “will result in educating adolescents on issues such as how to prevent a pregnancy, the legal right to an abortion in Northern Ireland, and how relevant services may be accessed.”
- Until now, when it comes to RSE, schools have had a wide degree of discretion on what materials to use and how these issues should be taught within their ethos. We will advocate that school ethos continues to be respected and protected when teaching sensitive and often pastoral issues.

How might we respond?

There is already quite a lot of confusing information out there. This is a deeply worrying development, and there are already elements preying on parents’ understandable fears and concerns.

Perhaps it’s tempting to simply oppose all forms of RSE in schools. However, [research from 2021](#) shows that 58% of 8 to 11-year-olds and 93% of 12 to 15-year-olds have their own smartphone. So regardless of what is taught in the classroom we need to consider what is going on in the playground. Children and young people still need to be equipped to navigate these kinds of issues safely, using their faith and values.

An approach of complete opposition and withdrawal also neglects the role of Christianity in education and in the ethos of many

schools. In its broadest sense, we believe that the gospel is good news regarding pregnancy, relationships, gender and sexuality. We aren't in the business of forcing Christianity or our views and beliefs on anyone. However, we believe a Christian understanding of respect, equality, consent, human life and dignity, bodies and sexual behaviour properly understood and communicated is no threat to anyone. In fact, it is foundational to the worldview our society and laws was built on when it comes to our fundamental understanding of human rights, equality and the protection of women and girls. Good teaching on RSE provides space and respect for young people to test what they are taught with their own beliefs and values.

So, while fears are understandable, consider the amazing opportunities to help children and young people form a good and healthy understanding of identity, relationships and sex. This is about discipleship – helping our children follow Jesus in today's rapidly changing culture. This is also about mission – modelling the good, true and beautiful story that has changed our lives and the world.

Practically here are a few things you can do today as a parent, teacher, governor, youth leader or church leader:

1. Check out Time to Talk – a new resource from the Evangelical Alliance to help parents and carers have better conversations about RSE with their children and school. It will also be of interest to those who teach, work or volunteer in education and to church and youth leaders. [It is free to download here](#). Hard copies can also be ordered, and the team are willing to provide training to parents and youth leaders on the resource. Contact I.curry@eauk.org for more information.
2. Write to your local politician – contact your local MP or MLA to express your concerns and/or opposition to the law change,

while advocating for safeguards when it comes to what exactly is taught and how in the guidance. In particular you could ask that pupils' and teachers' freedom of conscience and beliefs be protected. Also, include any hopes or positive suggestions around what better RSE provision could look like. You can [find your elected representative's details here](#).

3. Come along to one of our Time to Talk evenings - in September and October, we are planning at least two in-person events and one online webinar for parents, carers, teachers, and church and youth leaders in Northern Ireland. We will walk through our Time to Talk resource and help guide you when responding to any consultation on the legislative changes and associated guidance. Keep an eye on our social media for dates and locations to be confirmed shortly, meanwhile you can email Lisa now to register your interest at l.curry@eauk.org

RSE response event in Bloomfield Presbyterian Church

Join Evangelical Alliance for an RSE response event to equip you to respond to the changes and challenges happening in this area.

Bloomfield Presbyterian Church
Beersbridge Road, BT5 5DW
Thursday 14 September at 8pm

You can sign up here: [RSE response event in Bloomfield Presbyterian Church - Evangelical Alliance \(eauk.org\)](#)
or contact Michael directly and he will register you for this.

What's happening?

SUNDAYS AT RAILWAY STREET

MORNING SERVICE 10.30am

BEGINNERS' CHURCH - No. 31

KIDS CHURCH' - Upper Room

YOUTH CHURCH - Minor Hall

Service will be live streamed

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BOYS' BRIGADE (Sept to April)

Monday - Company Section 7.30pm-9.00pm

Tuesday - Anchor Boy Section 6.30pm-7.30pm &

Junior Section 7.00pm-8.15pm

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GIRLS' BRIGADE (Sept to April)

Thursday

Tiny Tots & Explorers - 6.00pm-7.00pm

Juniors, Seniors & Brigaders - 7.30pm-9.00pm

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PRAYER FOCUS

3rd Monday of each month 8.00pm-9.00pm

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PRESBYTERIAN WOMEN (Sept - June)

4th Monday of each month

Main Hall at 8.00pm

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422 (Sept - June)

4th Thursday of each month at 2.30pm

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BIBLE DISCOVERY (Sept - April)

1st & 3rd Thursday of each month at 10.45am