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#### Counting the Cost

Dear Friends,

As I think you nearly all know we have a new arrival in the Manse and this is proving to be quite an adjustment that we are having to deal with. There is somebody new to think about and so priorities have had to be reevaluated and routines have had to be altered. On Christmas Day I announced that we were about to take ownership of a Cocker Spaniel puppy called Honey.



Many of you in Railway Street have been really enjoying this and you will know this has been a long time coming. There has been no shortage of sly smiles and remarks like, "So you've finally relented." Because many of you know the clamour to get a dog started about the same time I told the family that we were moving to Lisburn. The opportunity to turn a rather big and unsettling move to self advantage quickly asserted itself and the question was asked, 'Can we get a dog?' to which the answer was firmly, 'No!' Yet Joanna and Emily have at many times over the last eight years continued to ask and plead for a dog. The answer has always remained, 'No. It's too big a commitment, it is too big a cost and it would be too much upheaval in a house that is already very busy.' Have you ever tried saying no to your children for eight years?

However after an unrelenting autumn campaign from Joanna and Emily, which finally Stephen also joined, they each presented the same single request for Christmas - 'We would like a puppy please.' So we finally relented and Honey is now part of the Manse family.

There was a lot to think about and to get done before she arrived. The cost had to be counted not just the cost of buying a puppy but also the cost of buying all the necessary equipment and then there was the cost of getting the Manse garden fully secured in order to keep her in. Andy McGrath did a great job on that front in what were often horrendous weather conditions!

Having counted the cost we committed to making the decision. Just as we were warned by many of you on Christmas morning I now know that everything I said at that service about the difference a baby makes to your life also applies to a puppy! It is really is like having a baby in the house. For the first few days especially we

were up with her several times a night. We are still seeking to get her fully house trained although I am happy to report she is making good progress. She is at times mischievous and naughty although most of the time not with deliberate intent. We have to remember that she is only a young puppy with a lot to learn about what is and what isn't acceptable behaviour both inside and outside the house.



However just over four weeks later (it feels like longer!) she is already a much loved and valued part of the Manse family. We know that there is a long way to go and there will be the need for hard work and much patience and perseverance to see that she becomes a well trained and obedient dog.

Jesus spoke to those who flocked to see him about the need to count the cost of becoming one of his disciples. They needed to understand this was not a temporary commitment but a life long decision that would involve a great deal of change and challenge



and so they needed to count the cost.

Jesus said in Luke 14, "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, saying, 'This person began to build and wasn't able to finish." (Luke 14:28-30)

You have to count the cost but when you make that commitment

to follow Jesus Christ you will discover that there is no one else worth following and nothing else worth doing.

Christian discipleship is a journey not a destination - we have a lot to learn, we remain in training for the rest of our lives. There are many times we get things wrong and have to live with the consequences of our poor choices but we also know that, having called and accepted us into His family, God will never ask us to leave. Jesus said, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand." (John 10:27-28) Paul wrote to the church in Rome, "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:38-39)

And he wrote to the Philippians saying that he was confident of this, "That he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Jesus Christ." (Philippians1:6)

Those of you reading this will be at different stages. Some of you are maybe still weighing up the cost of following Jesus. You still don't know him personally as your Lord and Saviour – but once again let me say that this is a decision you will not regret. To all such let me say "Please join with us on Sundays as we continue to make our way through Romans and learn about the tremendous good news of the gospel and the difference it makes to our lives."

Some of you have been on the road of discipleship for a little while and maybe you are ready to go deeper. Maybe you would like to take that step of becoming a



full member of RSPC and make a public profession of your faith in Jesus Christ. If so I would encourage you to sign up for the Full Membership classes that you can read about elsewhere in this bulletin.

Maybe you have been on this journey of discipleship for a long time and you are encouraged as you look back and see the difference that following Christ has made and you are eager to keep moving forward. If so you will not need encouragement to be with us on a Sunday because you will already understand why that needs to be a priority.

Maybe you are finding the road hard going at present. Your own personal circumstances are difficult and painful. Please remember that you are not alone on this journey - God never leaves us and Jesus understands our struggles because He has walked this road before us and He promises to give us the grace that we need to carry on. He has also very deliberately placed us in a church family with brothers and sisters in Christ to support and encourage us. But if we are to experience that encouragement then we need to ensure that we do not cut ourselves off from others and that we do not give up meeting together but that we encourage one another and all the more as we see the Day approaching.

As we continue to move further into 2024 let's continue to commit ourselves to meeting together, to encouraging one another and as we do that may we continue to grow in grace and in our knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ and see Him continuing to build His church in Railway Street.

Yours in His service, Michael Davidson

#### First Dromara Presbyterian Church Vacancy

As most of you will be aware our minister has been appointed by the Dromore Presbytery as the Convenor of the vacancy in

1st Dromara Presbyterian Church. He took up this position on 14th January.



This involves him organising preachers for

Dromara every Sunday morning and evening. Michael will also be going to lead worship in 1st Dromara himself once a month. He also has responsibility for dealing with any serious pastoral issues in the congregation. Finally it involves chairing the meetings of the Kirk Session, Congregational Committee and the Presbytery Vacancy Commission as they make their way through the process of identifying and calling a new minister.

Obviously there are still only the same of hours in the week and that means that some of those hours will be diverted towards those responsibilities that being a vacancy convenor entails.

You will be aware that this a challenging time in PCI with some 60 vacant congregations and a corresponding shortage of available ministers. Michael would appreciate your prayers for the congregation of 1st Dromara during this vacancy and for him as he seeks to balance his responsibilities as vacancy convenor with his responsibilities as minister of Railway Street.

#### **SERVICES FOR FEBRUARY**

Mornings: Romans - a Letter that Makes Sense of Life

**Evenings:** Songs to Chase the Winter Blues Away – the Psalms

#### 4th February

10:30am Mission Focus – SU E3 Schools Ministry

- Rebekah Armstrong

6.30pm Psalm 123 'Till He Shows Mercy' Michael Davidson

#### 11th February

10:30am Romans 2:1-16 'God's Perfect Judgement'

- Michael Davidson

6.30pm Praise & Prayer led by Alan Wall

#### 18th February

10:30am Romans 2:17-29 'The Heart of the Matter'

- Michael Davidson

6.30pm Psalm 126 'Those Were the Days'

- George McClelland

#### 25th Febuary

10:30am Ashley Parke (Union College Ministry Student)

6.30pm Psalm 124 But for the LORD' - Michael Davidson

(COMMUNION)





#### SERVICES FOR MARCH

Mornings: Romans - a Letter that Makes Sense of Life

**Evenings:** Micah – a Prophet for our Times

#### 3rd March

10:30am PW Service - Shirley McGonigle (International

Meeting Point)

6.30pm Micah 1:1-7 'A Tale of Two Cities' – Michael Davidson

#### 10th March

10:30am Romans 3:1-20 'We are All in the Same Boat'

Michael Davidson

6.30pm 'Weak Made Strong' Mission In Ireland Evening

featuring – Helen Freeburn (Galway Presbyterian Church) & Michael McCormick (RAF Chaplain)

#### 17th March

10:30am Ashley Parke (Union College Ministry Student)

6.30pm Micah 1:8-16 'Tell It Not in Gath' – Michael Davidson

#### 24th March

10:30am Romans 3:21-31 'Righteousness Revealed'

- Michael Davidson

6.30pm Sunday Evening Praise in the Link





#### **EASTER SERVICES 2023**

#### **Words from the Cross**

#### Wednesday 27th March at 7:30pm

**Speaker: Andrew Thompson** "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." Luke 23:34

#### Thursday 28th March at 7:30pm

**Speaker: Andrew Faulkner** "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise." Luke 23:43

#### Good Friday Communion Service 29th March at 7:00pm

**Speaker: Michael Davidson** "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" Mark 15:34

#### Sunday 31st March

6:30am Dawn Service at Wallace Park Band Stand

followed by breakfast in the Link

10:30am EASTER FAMILY SERVICE – Michael Davidson

#### **APRIL SERVICES**

#### 7th April

10:30am Leslie Addis

6:30pm Stephen Johnston





#### Bereavements

It is with sadness that we record the deaths of:

Mrs Elizabeth Rachel Howard, 28th November 2023

Mrs Mary (Marie) Hurst, 7th December 2023

Dr Joseph Robert Magill (Robin) Coulter, 29th December 2023

Mrs Elizabeth Jane (Jean) Crothers, 20th January 2024

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

## Full membership classes

There are two types of 'members' associated with Railway Street Presbyterian Church. There are those who attend services, who send their children to our youth organisations and who give financially to the church but who have not made a public profession of faith in Christ. They are described as adherents.

The other kind of member is a 'full' or 'communicant' member. They have come to faith in Christ and have made a public declaration of their faith.

Only those who have been received as full members have voting rights in the congregation.

It may be that you have only started attending Railway Street in recent times or you may have been coming along for many years but you have not yet taken the step of becoming a full member. Either way you might be interested in learning what this involves.

We are planning to commence Membership Classes later in February. These are open to those of all ages who would like to explore together the privileges and responsibilities of being a full member of Railway Street Presbyterian Church.

The course runs for 4 weeks and usually takes place in the Manse for an hour on a Sunday afternoon.

We look at the following topics:

- 1. A Church Member is Someone Who Believes
- 2. A Church Member is Someone Who Follows
- 3. A Church Member Is Someone Who Belongs
- 4. A Church Member is Someone Who is Committed

The only commitment you make at this point is to come along and learn what it means to be a full member. At the end of the classes you then make your own decision about whether you want to come forward for membership or not.

We invite anyone who would like to be part of these classes to speak directly to Michael Davidson or to contact him by phone or email.



**Become part of our church family** 

# Bible Discovery

We now meet on alternate Thursdays in the Minor Hall at

10.45am (or 10.30am in The Link for coffee)

We begin a new series on Philippians on Thursday 1 February - these studies are open to everyone

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Upcoming dates are: 1st & 15th February 7th & 21st March and 18th April

Photo by Sincerely Media on Unsplash

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

The first signs of spring are beginning to appear all around us, reminding us of God's promise of springtime and harvest. Our call to prayer this month is to give thanks for our bountiful world and the promise of a new heaven and a new earth.

Let us join together to pray and to worship our heavenly Father.

Prayer Focus will meet in the Link on Monday 19th February and Monday 18th March from 8-9.00pm



Join us for the Irish Men's Convention 2024 on **Saturday 2 March 2024** with speaker **Carl Matthei** from Sydney, Australia, as we study the book of Titus together.

It has been a few years since we have been able to get tickets for this (they sell out very fast!) but this year we have secured 14 tickets. Tickets are £19 but we are offering them to you for £15.

It begins at 10am and finishes at 3pm so you will still have a large part of your Saturday free. The plan would be to travel by train and book in somewhere for a light lunch.

Tickets availale from Ivan Woods or Stephen Johnston.



Carl is married to Jenny and they have four adult children. Carl loves teaching University students about Jesus and leads the campus ministry at UNSW in Sydney. Weekday mornings, Carl pretends he can keep up with the fast young cyclists in local pelotons and on Saturday he farms his suburban backyard with chooks, beehives, and lots of vegetables.

The Irish Men's Convention is organised by an interdenominational group of evangelical Christian men. Above all, we share the belief that "all Scripture is God breathed" and is "useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3: 16). Our prayer is to see men of all ages transformed by God's living word.

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#### All welcome

February 22nd - "There for all the Children"

- NSPCC Northern Ireland

March 28th - (Holy Week)

"Spring Awakening"

 Floristry and Easter Reflections by Keith Lindsay

Both meetings at 2.30pm in the Minor Hall, followed by refreshments in the Link. If you are free on these dates, you are most welcome to come along



#### Used stamps for RNIB

Please continue to keep any postal stamps and place them in the box on the vestibule table. RNIB benefit from funds recouped from the resale of these stamps. Thank you.



#### Sunday Evening Praise

# Sunday 24th March at 6.30pm in The Link

Everyone welcome for a time of worship led by keyboard, cello and flute as we consider together the wonder of the Easter Story.



Photo by Lorena Kelly on Unsplash



GB Week Monday 5th - Saturday 10th February 2024 is our annual GB week. We appreciate all donations towards this fundraising venture in support of GB funds as the girls seek to raise money to support the running of their programme. All contributions can be gift aided.



#### Railway Street's 3rd GB Display



Our display will take place on Thursday 21st March @ 6.30pm, in the main church hall. More information to follow later.

### Programme content

Our weekly programme contains 4 main elements – physical, educational, service and scripture. Our scripture theme this year has been 'Promises, Promises' and



all sections have been learning about God's many promises and how He has been faithful in keeping these.

Our Tiny Tots and Explorers enjoyed an energetic evening at High Rise, Altona on Thursday 18th January.

The various sections are hoping to learn a range of new skills over the coming weeks... art classes, self-defence training and music sessions.

#### Charity fundraising

Juniors, Seniors & Brigaders enjoyed an informative evening with Pete from Habitat for Humanity's Restore Shop, our nominated charity this year. They then undertook an upcycling challenge where the girls worked in their squads to restore 4 pieces of wooden furniture. Practical advice, support with technology and top tips were shared by Adam Baird (Railway Street's own Repair Shop Expert) over several weeks. Herald, our adopted church guide dog came along too, providing much needed therapy! The upcycled items were then auctioned at the BB/GB Christmas Market and are now taking pride of place in a number of homes.

The auctioned items, along with other crafts sold at the GB Craft stall have resulted in £100 being donated to Habitat. In addition, the girls were all so incredibly generous in donating many pre-loved toys to the Habitat Christmas shop. Numerous bootloads of toys were delivered to Habitat in early December for children to enjoy.



#### Contact

All girls aged 3-18 will always be welcome to come along. For more information about GB, contact Hilary Milligan (Captain) on 07899 896879.

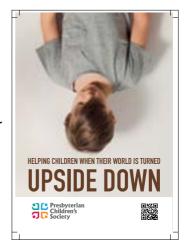


Railway Street PW meets on the 4th Monday of each month in the Minor Hall at 8.00pm. All ladies of the congregation are very welcome.

 Monday 26th February 'Giving Children a Future'

Jason Nicholson, the Executive Secretary of the Presbyterian Children's Society, will speak on how they help children when their world is turned upside down and how they bring hope to these children and their families.

 Monday 25 March 'Bringing Hope through Education'



Dickie and Janice Barr will bring us an update on Charlene's Project and the building of the new Secondary School in Uganda.





26-29TH MARCH

- · Games
- · Craft
- . & lots more fun!

FOR SCHOOL YEARS P2 - P7

MORE DETAILS TO FOLLOW IN COMING WEEKS

HANNAH@RAILWAYSTREET.ORG 07875161472

## Finance update

This time last year I highlighted that in the 2022 year, our Church's expenditure had exceeded our income by £31,000. This had pushed the Church's main bank account into the red by nearly £10,000 at year end. The appeal to the congregation of the urgent need to address the loss was well received with an immediate increased giving in the Spring and Summer of some £18,000 including the Gift Aid although it has been slightly disappointing that this slowed down in the latter part of the year. The draft accounts for the 2023 year show our Church's expenditure on our main bank account exceeded income by around £10,000 for the full year.

Whilst it is positive that the rate of loss has been materially reduced, the reality is that the finalised figures that will be presented to the Church Committee, when it meets in February, will show that our main account in the bank is currently overdrawn by almost £20,000. Although this represents a good improvement on where we where 12 months ago, a bit more of a push will be required to address the in-year position and start to improve this bank account balance in 2024.

On a positive note, Congregational giving for others remains strong with the Belfast City Mission Christmas Appeal benefitting by over  $\mathfrak{L}1,000$  along with some  $\mathfrak{L}13,623.50$  paid over to the PCI United Appeal and comfortably meeting our annual target again.

Also, repayments to the Link Loan Account continue to be met

from the bi-annual gift days despite monthly interest costs rising to £6,500. Once the final retention has been paid to the Contractor we will start to consider how we can begin to make additional capital repayments.

Your ongoing generosity is greatly appreciated as I am aware there are constant asks during these continuing difficult economic times. Our sincere thanks goes out to all who continue to respond so positively to the needs of our Church and of others.

Many Thanks Gordon Wallace BSPC Treasurer

# Belfast City Mission's Christmas Gift Appeal for Children and Teenagers 2023

It is most pleasing to report that, once again, there was an excellent response by our congregation to this annual appeal for gifts for needy young people.

The contributions received were as follows:

Gift Cards/Vouchers from Toy Stores 38
Selection Boxes 74
Large Tins/Packets of Sweet 10
Monetary Donations £1021

On behalf of the Governing Body of the City Mission, I wish to express sincere gratitude and appreciation to those members of our congregation who contributed with generosity to this most worthy appeal.

Roger Thompson (Vice President and Treasurer)

# Christ among The Traitors

# Connecting with Culture Entertainment

The Friday blog written by Dominic Palmer



for the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity (licc) which reflects on news, trends, innovation, and the arts, looking for what we can learn from, celebrate, and critique in culture and every area of life.

'He was a gentleman on whom I built an absolute trust.'

These words of wounded disappointment belong to King Duncan in Macbeth, but they could have come from an episode of The Traitors – the hit show about truth, suspicion, and betrayal – which concludes tonight.

The premise is simple: 22 contestants, one Highland castle, a series of challenges, and a potential shared prize of £120,000.

But there's a catch. Some contestants are out to eliminate the others and claim the money for themselves. These are 'the Traitors', and it's the job of 'the Faithful' to discover and vote them out.

With an aesthetic blend of Hogwarts, Downton, and Dante, rapid movement between combustible group scenes and one-on-one shots, and a Shakespearian reliance on dramatic irony (we know who the Traitors are, the Faithful don't), the show is compelling.

But could there be something deeper behind its pull?

We live in a world of social media bots and deepfakes, in a post-

Partygate political climate, and in the wake of harrowing abuse revelations in the Church. According to a 2023 study, public confidence in Parliament has halved since 1990, and only 13% of British people have confidence in the press. Suspicion is the norm and deception is assumed.

Who can we trust? That's the question behind The Traitors. And the show proves we aren't as good at lie detection as we think.

King David expressed the sting of treachery: 'Even my close friend, [...] one who shared my bread, has turned against me' (Psalm 41:9). His words foreshadow the betrayal of Jesus by Judas Iscariot, the archetypal traitor.

But unlike the contestants in The Traitors, Jesus knew which friend would betray him. Jesus chose to faithfully love his enemy, giving Judas chances to change until the end. And when from the cross he said, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing' (Luke 23:34), surely this prayer extended even to his treacherous disciple?

Who can we trust? The one who suffers for us and doesn't resent us for it.

We might also ask, how can we become trustworthy? Can we seek the good of others above self-interest, even when it hurts? Can we be part of restoring the broken bonds of trust in our society, starting in our day-to-day contexts?

There is a bit of Judas in each of us. But, as disciples of Jesus, we're called to trust and become like our Saviour, 'Faithful and True' (Revelation 19:11).

#### Dominic Palmer

Dominic Palmer lives in Manchester with his wife and their young son. Having been an English teacher for several years, he now works for the Antioch Network of church plants.

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	SUNDAYS AT RAILWAY STREET
	MORNING SERVICE 10.30am (live streamed)
	BEGINNERS - No. 31
	KIDS - Upper Room
	JUNIOR YOUTH - Minor Hall
	EVENING SERVICE 6.30pm
	SENIOR YOUTH - Upper Room
	BOYS' BRIGADE (Sept to April)
<b>D</b>	Monday - Company Section 7.30pm-9pm Tuesday - Anchor Boy Section 6.30pm-7.30pm &
	Junior Section 7pm-8.15pm
	GIRLS' BRIGADE (Sept to April)
	Thursdays: Tiny Tots & Explorers - 6pm-7pm
	Juniors, Seniors & Brigaders - 7.30pm-9pm
(0)	PRAYER FOCUS
	3rd Monday of each month 8pm-9pm in the Link
	BIBLE DISCOVERY (Sept - April)
S	1st & 3rd Thursday each month at 10.45am - Minor Hall
	DISCIPLESHIP GROUPS (Sept - June)
	Tues & Wed bi-monthly 8pm-9.30pm in various homes
CO	PRESBYTERIAN WOMEN (Sept - June)
	4th Monday of each month at 8pm - Minor Hall
	422 (Sept - June)
	4th Thursday of each month at 2.30pm - Minor Hall
	THE LINK UP
	Every Wednesday 10am - 12noon in the Link