

INSPIRE

Presbyterian Women 
Living for Jesus

Spring 2024

MEET AMY

2024 KEYNOTE
SPEAKER

GROUP FOCUS

Cladymore PW

TEAMWORK
MAKES THE
DREAM WORK

PRAYING
FOR
SUFFERING
FRIENDS

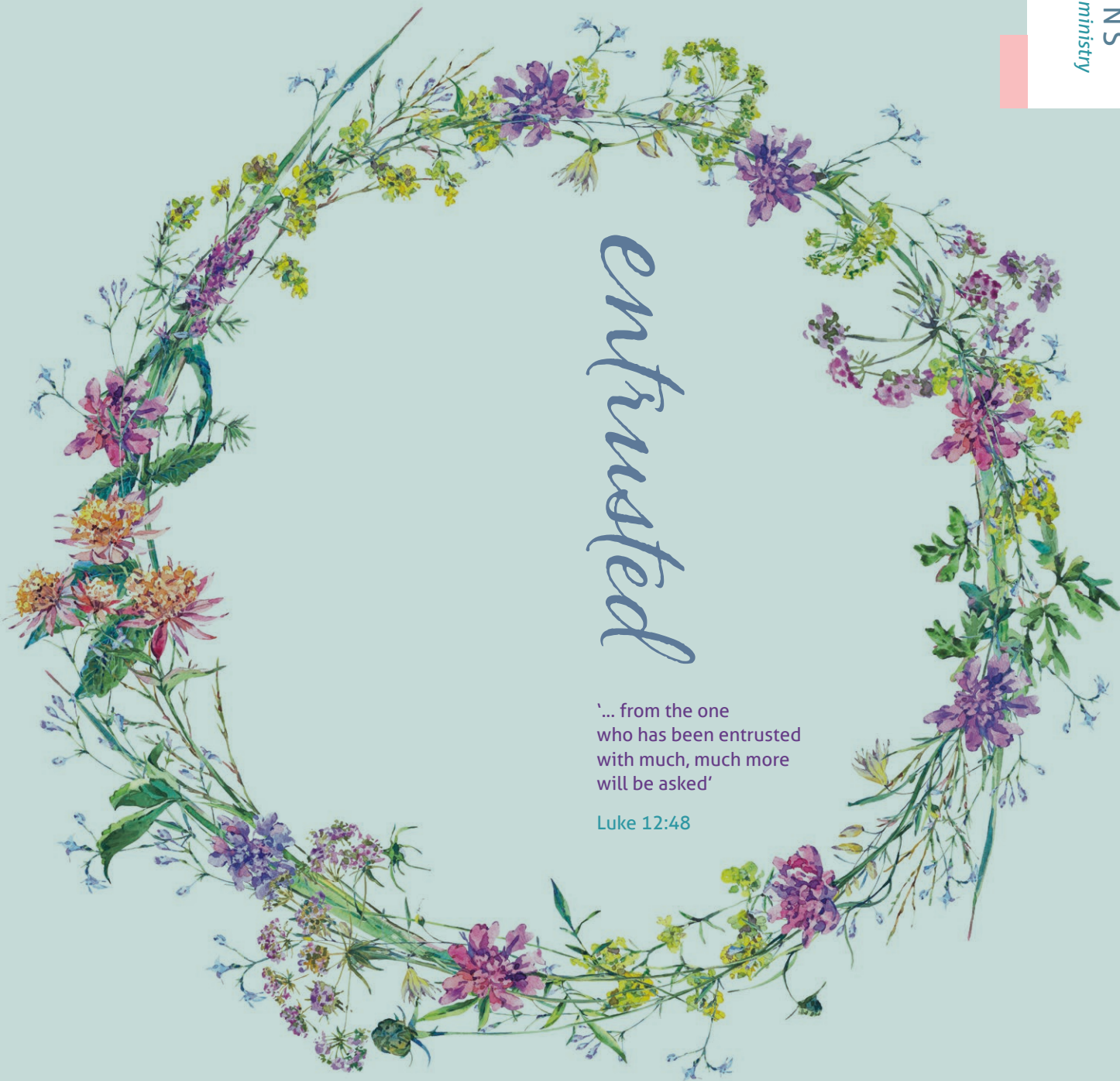
PLUS

DEVOTIONAL
SHE INSPIRES
GRATEFUL HEART
GLOBAL MISSION



Presbyterian
Women 
Living for Jesus


Presbyterian
CHURCH IN IRELAND



entrusted

'... from the one
who has been entrusted
with much, much more
will be asked'

Luke 12:48

Inspirations 2024/25
Women's Ministry Resource

This edition of *Inspirations* is full of ideas to help you plan for your women's ministry group within your congregation

Copies of *Inspirations* cost £8/€9 each

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WELCOME SPRING '24

FROM THE EDITOR

Rebecca McConnell



Welcome to the first ever edition of *Inspire*: the newly transformed magazine of *Presbyterian Women*. It is an honour and a privilege for me to write this introduction and to share the results of what so many people have been working on quietly over these past few months.

We owe Dave Galbraith from Made by Break a depth of gratitude for all his hard work and design flair for creating such a gorgeous magazine. He has faithfully designed magazines for *Presbyterian Women* since 2012 and we truly appreciate all he has done in styling the content we bring you in such an attractive and appealing manner.

From honest reports of pregnancy issues and the changes a woman's body makes in a lifetime, to how to support friends who are struggling, there is something for everyone in this first edition of *Inspire*. Thank you to all our contributors for sharing their experiences so openly. We believe in the power of story and we also believe in the best story of all, which God invites us to be part of, his story of love and redemption of his people.

You will recognise some familiar features but we also bring you some new ones all which showcase female followers of Jesus past and present. Our reflection poem is written by a member of Hill Street Presbyterian Church in Lurgan and we bring you the story of a courageous woman who lived as a slave in America in our new She Inspires section. We also find out about a revived Presbyterian witness in West Belfast.

We introduce you to the speaker for the Annual Conference in May, Amy Orr-Ewing, our cover star, and hope you can join us in May to worship God and learn together as the new theme for 2024/25 is launched.

This is an exciting new chapter in the history of *Presbyterian Women* and so we want to share it with as many women to inspire them to keep going in the hard days, to rejoice in the good days and to seek God at all times. Just like we are to do with our faith in Jesus, I would like you to 'pass it on' and encourage other women by sharing your copy and the stories within.

And, finally, we humbly ask for your prayers - for the Holy Spirit to be at work in the pages of the magazine as they are read and shared as we build each other up as the *Presbyterian Women* motto states - to live for Jesus.

Contact: Presbyterian Women, Congregational Life & Witness Department, Presbyterian Church in Ireland, Assembly Buildings, 2-10 Fisherwick Place, Belfast, BT1 6DW.

Email: pw@presbyterianireland.org

Web: www.presbyterianireland.org/pw

Tel: +44 (0)28 9041 7257

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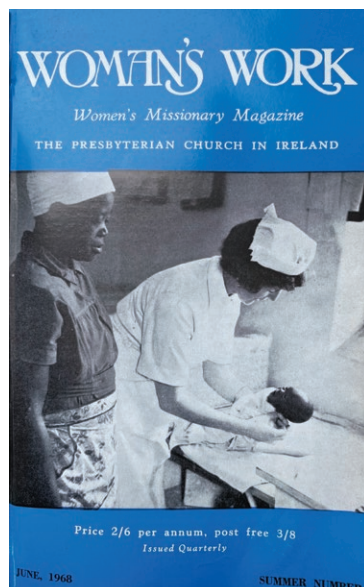
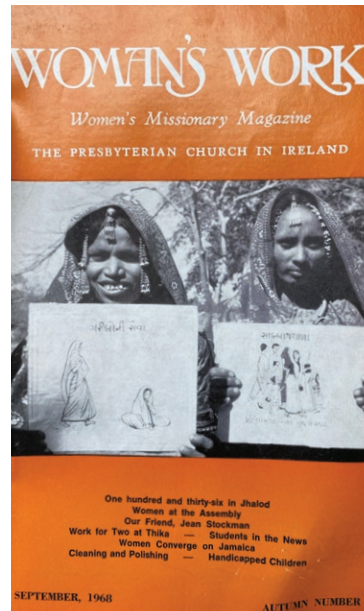
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The Editor reserves the right to accept, reject or edit contributions. Opinions expressed in *INSPIRE* are not necessarily those of PCI, *Presbyterian Women* or the Editor.

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THE LEGACY LIVES ON



It is only fitting in the first edition of *Inspire*, that we take time to look back and give thanks for the rich history of *Presbyterian Women's* magazines over three centuries. The editor has been delving through the archives to examine their legacy.

The continuing transformation of a magazine is essential when seeking to best communicate with members over time with technological and other advances. When you think the *Pink Paper* was first published in 1877, then *Presbyterian Women* certainly has a legacy of passing on the faith for over 140 years via a magazine for their members. Back then, there were no TVs never mind the internet or smartphones! In fact, it was only a year previous in 1876 that Alexander Graham Bell had a patent granted for the telephone.

In 1886, *Woman's Work* took over the mantle and, over a century later, in 1988, it was rebranded to *Wider World*.

In that space of time, the magazine evolved to be in colour, with more and more pictures included, website links in the form of QR codes crept in and its shape became A4.

Now, in 2024, with the launch of *Inspire*, we align with *Presbyterian Women's* other publication, *Inspirations*, to help more and more women in their journey of faith with a new name and a redesign - but the same faith based content to encourage women to live for Jesus.

We hope you like the first edition of *Inspire* and that you will 'pass it on' to other women to encourage them in their walk with the Lord. Use the magazine to pray for the people and situations that you read about. Send in your news for the Grateful Heart section - these often inspire other Groups with ideas for events and speakers.

Whilst going through the archive copies to choose a selection of front covers, there was

an article entitled, *Have we a sense of mission about our magazine?* It went on to challenge readers by asking, *How many of our readers have tried to find a new reader during the last year?* Do seek out others who may benefit from a subscription - and if they prefer to read on their digital

"We hope you like the first edition of Inspire and that you will 'pass it on' to other women to encourage them in their walk with the Lord."

device, point them to the Issuu link. Being a new magazine gives us an opportunity in particular to reach younger women in particular.

If the definition of 'legacy' is 'something that is passed on', then we continue to want to pass on, through the pages of this edition and future editions, our steadfast faith in Jesus, who remains the same yesterday, today and forever.

And to God be all the glory!





CHANGING SEASONS

2024 FEBRUARY FORUM



Helen Morrow was the keynote speaker at the *Changing Seasons* February Forum held in Kilfennan Presbyterian Church. Helen works as the Assistant Pastor for women and young people in Holy Trinity Church, West Bromwich, on the outskirts of Birmingham. Here she outlines a little of her seminar message around the changing season of menopause and how we can approach it biblically.

The Bible teaches us that we are body and soul (1 Corinthians 6:12-20), that it matters what we do with our bodies, and that we are part of Christ's body, the church (Romans 12:4-5). Therefore, we need to consider and look for how God intends to continue his transforming work in us both personally and corporately, as we offer our bodies, with all the bodily changes of menopause, as living sacrifices holy and pleasing to God; not conforming to the pattern of this world with it's expectations of who you are meant to be, what you should and shouldn't do as you journey through this inevitable season of your life. Menopause reminds us of our body having limits. Yet we can in God's mercy understand afresh that his grace is sufficient for us, for his power is made perfect in our weakness.

Whilst you won't read the word menopause in the Bible, we read of Sarah who laughed at the news she would have a son because she was past the age of childbearing (Genesis 18:10-12), and so too Elizabeth, who, like Sarah, had not even conceived a child in her younger years, her husband had accepted now she was too old to bear a child (Luke 1:8-18). This shows us that women who have reached menopause and beyond are still important to God in the building of his kingdom. He may not ever ask us to bear a child, but we are all to bear fruit and to do this Jesus said we are to remain in him and he in us, apart from him we can do nothing.

Jeremiah 17:7-8 puts it this way, 'Blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him. They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.' Whether or not we experience the heat of hot flushes or night sweats, the woman rooted in the Lord and trusting him is blessed.

“Menopause reminds us of our body having limits. Yet we can in God's mercy understand afresh that his grace is sufficient for us, for his power is made perfect in our weakness.”

The average age of menopause is 51, there will be those who are much younger and others who are older. For some women menopause is a result of surgery. Awareness of the various signs and symptoms of menopause that can begin years before (perimenopause) and continue on afterwards, can help us recognise this season in our lives. Around 5% of women will experience symptoms between the ages of 40-45, with the majority between the ages of 45-55. If you're under 45 years of age your GP will confirm perimenopause with a blood test. Being Christian doesn't exempt us from experiencing different physical and/or emotional symptoms of menopause. Each of us will need to explore and review the options available to us for help with various symptoms and it is good for us to thank God for the gift of medical help.

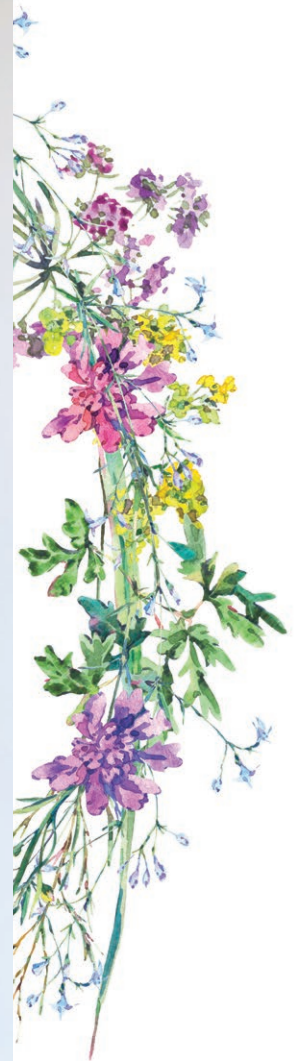
Your GP may advise lifestyle changes or offer you HRT or other medications to help manage symptoms. Some symptoms overlap with other conditions, so it's worth a conversation with your GP or pharmacist. Equally, if your GP has diagnosed you with something else, but you think it could be menopause, speak to them again, or ask to speak to another GP.

In addition to speaking with medical professionals, talk to your family and friends. Talk to your sisters and brothers in church, how can we help one another? It's not that everybody needs to know everything! But consider, part of God's transforming work in our lives is done as we live life together, rejoicing with those who rejoice and mourning with those who mourn. We are to live in harmony with one another. This doesn't happen when we carry burdens alone.



MEET AMY

Ahead of *Presbyterian Women's* Conference on 11 May 2024, we find out more about the keynote speaker Amy Orr-Ewing.



Dr Amy Orr-Ewing is an international author, speaker and theologian who addresses the deep questions of our day with meaningful answers found in the Christian Faith. She is the author of multiple books including *‘Where is God in All the Suffering?’* and bestselling, *‘Why Trust the Bible?’*

Over the last twenty years, Amy has given talks and answered questions on university campuses around the world. She has also addressed Parliamentarians in the Speakers Rooms and Chapel at the UK Parliament and staffers on Capitol Hill, and at the West Wing of The White House. She regularly responds to invitations to speak in banks, businesses, and consultancy firms as well as churches and conferences and enjoys broadcasting in the media and giving public lectures.

Amy is interested in the intersection of questions of meaning and faith within the marketplace, education and policymaking. Amy holds a doctorate (DPhil.) in Theology from the University of Oxford, and serves as Honorary Lecturer in Divinity at the University of Aberdeen.

In June 2023, she spoke at The National Prayer Breakfast in Parliament addressing the theme of ‘The Power of Forgiveness in Public Life’. In addition, Amy was hosted at the US Senate by Chaplain Barry Black.

“I hope and expect a divine encounter as we gather together and unite around the Word of God.”

We’re delighted you are coming to join us in Belfast Amy. Tell us a little about your journey of faith?

I have been a theologian and speaker for 25 years and have ministered and spoken in 40 nations. I became a Christian as a young child after my parents’ radical conversion to faith. My journey of faith has involved lots of questions including while studying theology at university. I have found that the Christian faith stood up to the scrutiny thrown at it. I married my husband Frog and we have three wonderful boys and we live in Oxford. Frog has served as a Pastor for over 25 years and is now serving in Anglican and Missional leadership development.

What led you to go into apologetics? Why are you so passionate about it?

At university, I began to be asked to give talks about the Christian faith and whilst pursuing postgraduate studies further opportunities to speak opened up. I believe in the importance of taking peoples questions and doubts seriously and have seen the Lord draw people to faith through their questions. The power of the Word of God proclaimed is a beautiful thing – apologetics just means connecting the beauty and truth of the gospel with the ache of the human heart and the questions around life and meaning that we will all be faced with. I found that doing any evangelism at all required apologetics. For a number of years I served at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford and at OCCA, The Oxford Centre for Christian Apologetics.

The new Presbyterian Women’s theme for 2024/2025 is *Entrusted* - what do you hope to tease out at the conference? What are your main thoughts on this theme?

I am so looking forward to joining everyone at the *Presbyterian Women’s* Conference. I believe the Lord has a wonderful word for us within the conference theme of having been entrusted with much in the gospel. He is calling us onwards and upwards, to go deeper with him and to go further for him. To fulfil the potential and promise of our lives, and to receive the riches of his love poured into our hearts.

What are your hopes for Presbyterian Women’s conference in May?

It is wonderful to experience the presence of God with other believers. I hope and expect a divine encounter as we gather

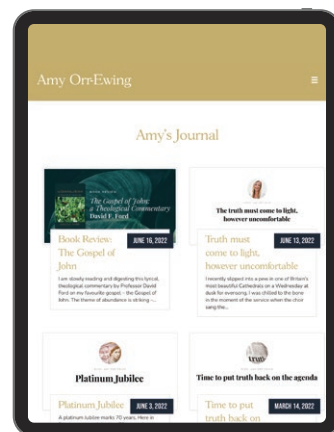
together and unite around the Word of God. I am looking forward to sharing fellowship with the women gathering and seeing him heal and encourage our hearts, strengthening us for the service he has called us all to.

How can we pray for you in the lead up to the conference?

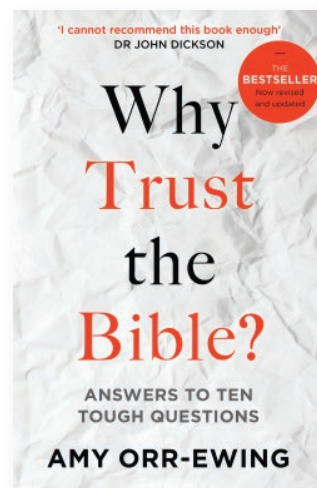
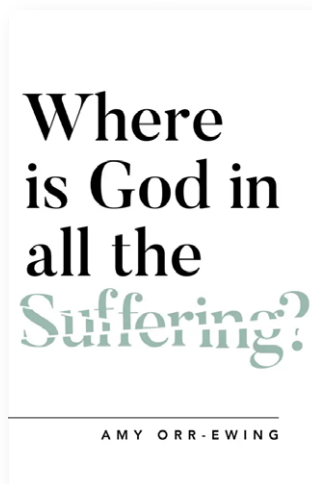
Please pray for my family – for protection and grace. My son is recovering from an overtook and my other ones have big exams this year. Please also pray for my future events around the world this coming year for fruitfulness and for journey mercies in all the travel.

Thank you so much Amy. We will indeed be praying for you in the lead up to our conference.

For regular articles see Amy’s Journal on www.amyorr-ewing.com/blog



RECOMMENDED READS





TEAMWORK

Sonya Anderson takes some time to reflect on her work as a Deaconess in Shore Street Presbyterian in Donaghadee.

Over the past few years, I have realised that one of my favourite parts of being a Deaconess is teamwork. I really enjoy working alongside people and seeing them use their talents and gifts to serve God. I try to encourage people when I see them taking steps to grow in their faith or when they step out to try something that they have never done before. It delights me to see people serving in the places that bring them joy.

As I look around our church, I see so many people who are generous with their time and their gifting. I know people who have served our church family in many capacities for over 60 years of their lives. They have been faithful and have developed gifts and talents as they've stepped into different roles throughout their church life.

I have been in Shore Street for over 16 years and have led and facilitated quite a few different teams, ranging from women's Bible study, to Alpha, to coffee mornings to kids ministry. I have also been part of a team when others have headed up a ministry or mission project. Working together is rewarding, challenging, stretching and encouraging.

One team that I have facilitated for many years is our parent and toddlers group which we call 'Coffee With Kids' and a wide variety of people serve in various capacities. For example, I have a husband and wife who join me at 9pm on a Tuesday night to set up the hall for the following day.





Above - Our Monday morning Cuppa and Chat Group
 Left - Sonya with some of the team from our Coffee With Kids toddler group

WORK MAKES THE DREAM WORK

As well as setting up, they prepare craft activities for the group. We take time to pray over the hall and all those who will come, as well as supporting one another in prayer when needed.

The rest of the team arrive on Wednesday morning before the doors open. The bakers leave their freshly prepared goodies in

“Whether you are a ‘people person’ or someone who likes to work behind the scenes, God will use you and be glorified through you when you say ‘yes’ to serving him.”

the hall, while the ‘kitchen team’ begin to prepare the refreshments needed. The Coffee With Kids team includes a ‘door lady’, ‘music man’, ‘smiley lady’, ‘play-doh lady’, as well as ‘floor team’. We have bonded over the years and as we gather to pray, we not only remember the folks who come along to toddlers group, but we pray for anyone who may be sick or struggling.

This is one of the many reasons that I love working in teams. Not only are we there to serve others, but as we work alongside one another, we develop relationships that care and offer support for each other.

Each member plays their part to make the morning happen and then pulls together at the end of the session to tidy up and clear away. As we finish, there is a sense of joy because we all have enjoyed serving together and we share in our love of Jesus, and our heart to see others come to know him.

When I think about our team, I am reminded of 1 Corinthians, when Paul talked about gifts and serving. 1 Corinthians 12:4-7, 27 says, “There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good... Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.” God has gifted us all and he wants us to use our gifts to serve him. All of us have something to offer, and all of us are needed.

Whether you are a ‘people person’ or someone who likes to work behind the scenes, God will use you and be glorified through you when you say ‘yes’ to serving him.

The church certainly functions best when everyone plays a part. There is a place for everyone to serve and grow in the gifting that God has placed within them. There is always a team to join in any church family! Some teams will be big, while others will be small, perhaps just you and another person serving somewhere together..

One smaller group that I am part of is our Monday morning Cuppa and Chat. This group was created when Covid-19 restrictions were lifting and we were allowed to meet.

Continues...



We felt that loneliness and isolation was rife and that there was a need to gather people to rebuild friendships. It varies in number - between 6 and 12 people drop in for a cuppa. Its main purpose is for friendship. The group chat ranges from discussing the Sunday sermon, to health issues, to recommendations on a kitchen gadget or two. There is usually laughter and craic, but sometimes tears and vulnerability are shown. This is where the friendship grows and support is shown. One of the group will close in prayer - asking God's blessing on the week ahead, and praying for any specific need that had been disclosed.

At times, we have wondered whether this little group is still worth doing because it is small in number. But God used one of our regulars to settle that question in our mind when she shared with us that this group was a lifeline to her and that she feels so much support from it. A reminder to me to never underestimate the small things that are done, even with a small team of people.

Whatever team God has called you to be a part of in your church, whether it is for a big ministry or a small one, may you know his presence with you, his delight in you, and may you grow in grace and love as you serve him.



Above - Getting ready for the toddler group 'Coffee with kids'



Above - Celebrations for the 200th anniversary of Shore Street Presbyterian Church

Left - Children's ministry during the 2023 Easter Bible Club





As I have reflected on my role as a deaconess, I can break it down into 3 P's - **Programmes, People and Presence.**

Programmes

Church life is filled with programmes - programmes for adults, youth and kids. Over my sixteen years in Shore Street, I have been involved in many different programmes. These have ranged from Summer Kids Clubs to Youth Fellowship; from Alpha courses to Coffee Mornings. I have led and facilitated programmes that have run throughout the year, as well as one off events. Often, I am part of a team where we all work together.

Programmes run best when there is purpose, planning and preparation. We need to know why we are running an event and then adequate planning and preparation is key. When the team knows the purpose and the role that they play, then there is a wonderful opportunity for growth and development. When I have facilitated a programme such as Kids Club or Toddler group, I have loved seeing people work together, using their gifts to deliver something that is really good for those who attend. I have seen individual team members grow as they have served. The team dynamic can 'make or break' a programme and so willingness to have grace and be patient is key to being involved in a team.

Programmes are beneficial to church life. So many children benefit from Sunday School and Kids clubs. Families benefit from toddlers groups, social get-togethers and home groups.

Adults benefit from Bible studies, women's/men's groups and discipleship courses. Programmes can also reach a wide range of people who would never come along to a church service but will willingly participate in an Alpha Course or Fun Day.

Programmes are certainly part of my ministry in Shore Street and I see how important they are in all that we do. But planning and delivering programmes is not the main focus of what I feel called to do.

People

The second P is People. Whereas programmes are measurable, ministry with people is not. I may be able to speak about the programmes and events that we have successfully run and talk about team building and team dynamic, but work with people is different altogether.

Much of my role is on a one to one basis with people. I have the privilege of journeying alongside people and praying with them through the stresses, decisions and difficulties of life.

As we all know, life is filled with ups and downs. There are times when everything is going well and we haven't a care in the world. At other times, our world is turned upside down, and we are shaken to the core. There are times when health problems dominate our lives and times when grief closes in around us. Sometimes the stress of bringing up children or work demands is the thing that brings us literally to our knees in desperation. There are times when trauma and past experiences affect how we cope with everyday life. Sometimes, it is a faith crisis that we go through, when our beliefs are challenged and we are left unsettled.

God has given me the privilege of sitting with people through some of these times in their lives. For me, it is the ministry of listening and just being present. As Galatians 6:2 says, "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."

It is reminding people that Jesus is real, that he cares and that he never abandons his people, even when they are feeling the opposite. It is being there for the long-haul, even when there is no change or improvement in circumstances. It is standing with people, loving them, and praying for them. All the while trusting that God sees the big picture and is working his purposes in their lives.

Lastly, the most important P of all...

Presence

Whether running a programme or sitting with an individual, the presence of God is key.

In the book of Exodus, Moses was trying to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt. They were a stubborn and disobedient people. And Moses recognised that he couldn't do it in his own strength, it just wasn't going to work. As he talks with God, as Exodus 33 verses 14-17 tells us: "The Lord replied, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."

Then Moses said to him, "If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?" And the Lord said to Moses, "I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name."

"We need God's presence with us in all that we do. God has promised to be present with us."

We need God's presence with us in all that we do. God has promised to be present with us. In fact, God's Spirit lives within all those who believe in him (John 14:23ff). Through Christ, we are his children, known and called by name. We don't need to go anywhere special to seek his presence. He calls us to worship him and be guided by him in everything that we do.

When we run a programme, our desire is that people will encounter Jesus, that they will sense his presence in the room. When I sit with an individual, I trust he is already present, both in the room and in me. As I listen, I pray that his presence will shape the atmosphere and direct the conversation. I trust that he will accomplish his purposes in all that happens.

His presence is crucial in all that we do. May you know, and carry, his beautiful presence into the places that he has called you to be and all the things he has called you to do.

THE WAY AHEAD

Shelley Spiers is a Primary school teacher who enjoys writing poetry and music in her spare time. She attends Hill Street Presbyterian Church in Lurgan and is an officer in the Girls' Brigade. She has used her writing gift for GBNI, Boys Brigade NI & CEF resources and she recently wrote a Christmas nativity script, *The Light*, that was recorded and broadcast across the UK on Premier Radio.





I cannot see the way ahead
But this, I know, is true;
All that lies ahead of me
is fully known by You.

For You are sovereign over all
In both the joy and pain.
With every step, I trust your plan
For faithful You remain.

I cannot see the way ahead
But I know You'll walk beside.
Through every season, You remain
a constant friend and guide.

For You are God and You are good
And when I do not understand,
I'll lift my eyes, though dark the night
and trust your loving hand.

I cannot see the way ahead
But your light will guide my way.
In times of joy and sorrow too,
beside me You will stay.

And even when the shadows fall
And I find it hard to see;
My joy and hope are found in You.
You're holding onto me!

I cannot see the way ahead
But You can
And in that,
I rejoice.

Written by Shelley Spiers © 2022
Photography by Gabriel McCallin

ROMANS

Thank you to everyone who participated in the January Reading challenge exploring the book of Romans. We hope you didn't find it too overwhelming. Take comfort knowing that these are some of the most complicated theological passages in scripture. As someone said, "If the New Testament were the Himalayas, then Romans would be Mount Everest".

The idea behind our January reading challenge wasn't just about reading through another book in the Bible, but to read in such a way that helps us make sense of the life God has given us. We hope you found the weekly Facebook reminders helpful.

Pauline Kennedy, PCI Women's Ministry and Presbyterian Women Development Officer, explained the cultural context in which Paul was writing:

The ancient world was built on Roman hierarchy, where wealth was power and was restricted to those at the top of the social structure. Many people were poor and vulnerable and remained at the bottom of the pecking order, while over half of the population were slaves and women were considered less than second class citizens.

It was into this oppressive, hierarchical society that Christianity came and despite the many religious practices, cults and philosophies that would have existed, Paul's message of Jesus was groundbreaking news and had serious implications for every area of life in this ancient world order. In this first century context, Paul needed to establish the truth among the believers that, before God, all have sinned no matter what their status, rich or poor, Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female.

Paul takes time to make sure everyone understands that it is only the gospel of Jesus Christ that brings salvation to everyone who believes. Paul argues '...all humanity is by nature in a hopeless predicament. Sin is a social leveller' (Ollerton, 2020). To suggest that everyone was on the same level as far as sin was concerned was shocking news for this society!

There was no room for man's good works, his law keeping or anything else that focused on what man had done for God! Not one person had the right to set themselves above another which was the polar opposite world view of Roman Society! This transforming truth turned this world upside down! A new thing was happening.



Further to the success of last year's Reading Challenge, which so many of you took part in, we have designed another one to kick start your 2024.

Given our theme verse for *Being Transformed*, we have decided to explore Paul's letter to the Romans in depth. We have laid out a plan to explore all 16 chapters over the month of January, starting off with the last few chapters of Acts which describe the travels Paul and others took as they spread the gospel. At the time of Paul's writing, Rome was not just the base of the Roman empire but it was considered the base of civilization itself.

The city was New York, Los Angeles, London and Paris rolled into one. Politics and paganism freely merged in the capital city. By writing to the Romans, Paul hoped to see his readers' world turned upside down for the sake of God's Kingdom. We pray this study will help us continue to renew our minds as, with God's grace, we enter a new year together.

We are grateful to Alison Soye for once again producing beautiful illustrations to help us focus on our literary travels.

Make sure to follow the *Presbyterian Women* page on Facebook to get reminders and some helpful insights into this amazing New Testament book.

Presbyterian Women's Overseas Vice President, Linda Beattie reflected:

Chapters 7 and 8 stood out for me. Paul talks about the relationship between the law and sin. He talks about wanting to do good but finding himself sinful instead, '...although I want to do good, evil is right there with me.' (Romans 7:21).

Who of us doesn't struggle with this, when we find at the end of the day, we are on our knees asking God's forgiveness – again! Even though we have been freed from our sins we often find the influence of sin hard to completely overcome.

Respond

As you look back, what have you appreciated most about reading the Book of Romans? As you look ahead, do you feel more confident about sharing the gospel and what is your next step towards sharing the gospel with someone God is nudging you towards?



January

Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
1 Acts 27:1-20	2 Acts 27:21-44	3 Acts 28:1-16	4 Acts 28:17-31	5 Romans 1:1-17	6 Romans 1:18-32	7 Romans 2:1-16
8 Romans 2:17-29	9 Romans 3:1-20	10 Romans 3:21-30	11 Romans 4:1-25	12 Romans 5:1-11	13 Romans 5:12-21	14 Romans 6:1-23
15 Romans 7:1-25	16 Romans 8:1-17	17 Romans 8:18-39	18 Romans 9:1-16	19 Romans 9:17-33	20 Romans 10:1-21	21 Romans 11:1-24
22 Romans 11:25-36	23 Romans 12:1-8	24 Romans 12:9-21	25 Romans 13:1-14	26 Romans 14:1-23	27 Romans 15:1-22	28 Romans 15:23-33
29 Romans 16:1-16	30 Romans 16:17-27	31 Romans 12:1-2				



In Romans 8, Paul speaks of the Holy Spirit and living with the Holy Spirit: Romans 8:13, 'if we live according to the flesh we will die, but if we live by the Spirit, we will truly live.'

So, what is it like to truly live? It sounds amazing, and when we live by the Spirit, who guides us, it is such a joyous feeling, a sense of safety and security, like we are right there in the palm of his hand. Yes, we will have suffering, but that will not be forever, and the Spirit will help us when we are weak as Paul reminds us, '...in all things God works for the good of those who love him' (Romans 8:28) and in verse 35 we read these wonderful words, '...nothing can separate us from God's love.'

"Paul's message of Jesus was groundbreaking news and had serious implications for every area of life in this ancient world order."

Presbyterian Women's Home Vice President, Ellen Hillen also shared:

I wonder, like me, do you constantly question what God's will is for your life? What role does he want you to play in growing his kingdom? When he calls you to take on a role within your Church or community do you welcome the opportunity or put-up obstacles? There is no doubt that serving can be challenging at times, but God promises to equip us and as Paul says, we can know his good pleasing and perfect will in different areas of our lives.

Paul tells us that we must be 'living sacrifices' (Romans 12:1), giving of our talents, using our time and resources for the benefit of others – yielding our lives to God. We are to serve God with humility, not thinking of ourselves as better than others, or more worthy of God's love and grace. We should seek to reach out to those who are broken as well as those who are different – we should love our neighbour in the same way God loves us. We will be more effective in sharing the gospel when we do so with love, respect and humility.

Our final reflection came from Presbyterian Women's President Ann Wilson:

Romans is a book which has certainly challenged my thinking! It has covered all the main, and often difficult doctrines of our faith: sin, salvation, sanctification, sovereignty, service. Now that I have read through Romans in this way, I feel that I need to read it again and concentrate on parts that perhaps I skimmed over too quickly. It is a letter which is even more relevant than ever before as we live in a world where Christian truths are challenged.

We deliberately finished our challenge going back to the key verse for our theme of Being Transformed. We are reminded that this transformation involves giving ourselves over to God completely, i.e., our bodies, our minds and our wills. We have to want to be transformed and to allow ourselves to be transformed from the inside out by the power of the Holy Spirit. The world wants to squeeze us into its mould, but we must guard our minds so that we are able to yield to God as he shapes us into who he wants us to be. That is a daily battle for us all, but we can ask God each day to allow him to shape our thinking as we mature in our faith.



QUICK QUESTIONS WITH ...TONI BASSETT

Welcome to this new regular *Inspire* feature. Reflecting on the words of 1 Thessalonians 5:11, “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing”. In each edition, we will sit down for a cuppa with a different person working for PCI to find out more about their particular ministry and to encourage them in their work through prayer.



“God is at work in our new friends’ lives. He has brought them to safety in this country where we are free to share the good news of Jesus Christ.”



What has been your biggest encouragement to date since you started?

One of my biggest encouragements was when some of these friends came along to a carol service held in the area in early December. As we continue to build friendships please pray we might have opportunities to share the hope that we have.

Acts 17:26-28: “From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. ‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’”



How can we pray for you in your role?

Give thanks to God for the Bible study and pray that people of all nationalities who call this area ‘home’ will feel welcome to come along.

Pray that the Holy Spirit will be at work in all our hearts, teaching and drawing us to himself.

Pray for further opportunities to connect with and encourage refugees and asylum seekers.



What is the most challenging part of your role?

During the week, I volunteer at a homework club, tutoring mostly Chemistry and Physics to post-primary pupils from different countries. I also help to teach a women’s English conversation class, introducing language on various topics and sometimes leading craft sessions. These provide opportunities to get to know both young people and their families from all over the world who now call West Belfast their home. Some connections have led to visiting families and being blessed by their abundant hospitality.

It is such a privilege to be made welcome and enjoy chatting over tasty home cooked dishes. We talk about everything from Northern Ireland culture, the school system, getting an appointment with the doctor and how to apply for jobs and university places. We laugh about different language faux pas and cry over the heartache many have experienced in their journeys to seek asylum.

I find this aspect of the role very challenging at times because there’s no easy ‘fix’. With more wars and persecution we are seeing increasing numbers of people arriving and the system in place is not adequate to cope with these challenges. On the news there are many statistics about asylum seekers and it’s easy to write people off but each one of these individuals is a person created in God’s image who deserves to be treated with dignity and respect. In listening to their stories and helping these dear people negotiate the never ending paperwork that goes with settling into life here, it could seem like an impossible situation. Yet we know that in everything God is working out his purposes and with him, nothing is impossible.



Where do you find God at work?

God is at work in our new friends’ lives. He has brought them to safety in this country where we are free to share the good news of Jesus Christ. Many have not heard in their home lands so it is a privilege to share who he is and how he changes lives. We are thankful for questions being asked and interest shown.



Hi Toni, thanks for being the first person to take part in this new feature. When did you start working in the West Belfast Project and what does your role involve?

September 2023 saw the beginning of a new adventure as I stepped into the role of community outreach worker for PCI’s West Belfast Special Project. Over the previous seven years, I had volunteered with refugees and asylum seekers in various roles, from tutoring Chemistry to Syrian teenagers to teaching English to those who had newly arrived on our shores. I love getting to know new people so when God opened the door for a new role in West Belfast with refugees and asylum seekers through PCI it was a real answer to prayer.

A year earlier, David and Elaine Moore had undertaken the leadership of the West Belfast Special Project with the aim to serve that community, an area without a Presbyterian Church for many years. Over the last year they have been warmly welcomed by people from across the community. Along with Andrew Thompson, David, Elaine and I form the core group of An Tionólann, (Irish for ‘a gathering’) meeting weekly in the area to study Mark’s gospel. A group of interested local people faithfully attend to read and discuss God’s Word over a cuppa on a Thursday night.



Above - David and Elaine Moore
Left - Andrew, Robert, Toni, David and Elaine

BEING TRANSFORMED— CHANGING BEHAVIOUR

This is an adapted version of Section 3 from the *Inspirations* resource for 2022/2023. If your PW Group hasn't used this material in your session, consider it for use in your own quiet time with God.

Aim:

to help women understand that the transformation of our minds and hearts is expressed in our behaviour.

Outcome:

that women will intentionally encourage one another to grow in Christlike behaviour.

Changing Behaviour – The Starting Point

Think of the people God has used to influence you in your life so far. How did they influence you by what they said? How did they influence you by the example of their behaviour? Write them down in a journal and give thanks to God for them.

What kind of people does God use to influence others in this way? Ordinary people like you and me! All God's people start at the same point by trusting in Jesus for salvation. Then we all have to walk the path of ongoing, gradual transformation as his indwelling Spirit empowers us to become more like Jesus, renewing our mind through his Word.

We are reminded in John 15:4-5 that 'apart from [Christ] we can do nothing'. Christ produces the fruit, and we bear it. Let's continually look to him to grow the fruit of the Spirit in our lives so that we are being transformed ever more into his likeness in our character and in our behaviour.



Pause for thought: II

*What gives you confidence that transformed behaviour is possible?
Who are you depending on for change?*

Changing Behaviour – The Motivation

In Colossians chapter 3, Paul gives instructions about Christian behaviour but he begins by reminding the Colossians about their position in Christ in verses 1-4. Those who have believed have been raised with Christ, their life is hidden with Christ in God, and they can look forward to appearing with Christ in glory.

Those facts should stir their hearts and motivate them to respond to Paul's call in verses 5-8 to change their behaviour, and to make a decisive break from the sinful tendencies they continue to have.

Christians today have the same problem with sin and the same motivation to change. As the Holy Spirit speaks to us through God's Word and shows us our sin, we too need to respond by putting to death our wrong desires and behaviours.

Pause for thought: II

*How does your position in Christ motivate you to consider how you live out your Christian life?
How can you be intentional about being transformed in your behaviour?*

Pause for Prayer: II

Father in heaven,
You are holy, and we are sinful people. Thank you that Jesus made it possible for us to come before you, clothed in his perfection. Help us to be open to the prompting of your Holy Spirit as we read your Word. Give us a willingness to admit to behaviour in our lives that needs to be put to death and help us to be determined to change as we rely on the power of your Holy Spirit. We pray in the name of Jesus, Amen

Changing Behaviour – The Goal

Our transformation will not be complete until we get to heaven. Until then, everyone will struggle with sin. We will always have a need to put to death sinful desires or behaviours. We will become aware of them as God works through his Word by his Spirit to gradually transform us into the likeness of Jesus.

That's only half the story though. Paul compares the process of transformation to taking off and putting on clothing in Colossians 3:9&10. Yes, we need to take off what is wrong, but we also need to put on what is right. We need to put to death the things that characterise a life without Christ but also to put on things that are characteristic of new life in Christ. God will make us aware of these things through his Word and his Holy Spirit will enable us to change our behaviour. The transformation will work its way from the inside to become visible on the outside as we grow more and more like Jesus.

Pause for thought: II

Make a list of Christlike characteristics that God's children need to 'put on'. As well as Colossians 3:5-17, consider Galatians 5:22-23.

Changing Behaviour – Helping one Another

As the body of Christ, we are to come alongside one another with support and encouragement in our journey of transformation. Paul describes one way of doing this in Colossians 3:16, 'Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom...'. In other words, as we fill our own minds and our hearts with the Word of God and then live it out, we can become a help and encouragement to others.

'Admonish' isn't a word we use every day. It can mean 'rebuke' but it also means 'to advise or urge someone earnestly to do the right thing.' Let's face it, we all need to be turned from a wrong path from time to time or to be urged to go down a right path, but being 'put right' is not something we enjoy. If someone rang you up to say they were planning to call round in half an hour to admonish you, your answer probably wouldn't be, 'That's great, I'll put the kettle on!' We're not talking here about pointed fingers, judgmental words, and raised voices. We are talking about lovingly urging someone to behave in a way that is in obedience to God's Word.

When we take time to think about the love, grace, mercy and forgiveness that God has shown to us, our hearts are warmed, enabling us to speak to others with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. As we do this, we are showing Christlikeness, which gives evidence of God's transforming work in our own lives!

Pause for thought: II

What would it look like if someone put Colossians 3:16 into practice and did it well?

Changing Behaviour – Ready for Action

Read: Romans 12:2

Our theme verse for the year reminds us that God begins his work of transformation in our minds and, from there, the changes in our thinking flow to our hearts, influencing our desires and directing our behaviour. What practical steps can we take to align ourselves with the work God is doing in us?

In general terms, we can feed our minds well by studying his Word (privately, and corporately as a church family or in small groups), spending time in prayer, and seeking wise counsel.

When meeting with Christian friends, practise bringing conversations around to spiritual things, having conversations which will help both of you in your spiritual growth. Having 'rosebud' conversations can help with this. Talk about:

- A rose = something that is going well for you
- A bud = something you are looking forward to
- A thorn = something that is difficult for you at the moment

Changing Behaviour – The Journey Ahead

Is there one thing you will do as a result of what we have looked at? Let's pray and encourage one another as we journey together in becoming more like Jesus.

EMBRACING TRANSFORMATION

CLADYMORE PW

Janet Moffett, the PW Group Leader in Cladymore Presbyterian in County Armagh, shares about their Group programme as well as her involvement with the Armagh LINK.

Our PW Group has changed over the past number of years in how we do things, how we meet together, and the types of meetings we now have. However, what has not changed is our steadfast love and concern for one another. Cladymore PW may be small in number but we are still very active. Each year, our committee meets to plan for the year ahead and provide a varied programme.

We started our PW year with a Continental Breakfast on a Sunday morning before church in early September – where we had women of all ages from 8 years to over 80 years attending. We really went to town enjoying lots of fresh pancakes, croissants, yoghurts, fruit and coffee and the chatter amongst everyone was just lovely to hear. We used this as an opportunity to not only have fellowship with our members but also to connect with other ladies within our church who had not yet come to our PW meetings. We were also thankful for the support of our elders who came along to serve and help wash up.

This year we have embraced the theme of *Being Transformed*, and organised two Saturday mornings of ‘transforming’ furniture. A group of women travelled to Pomeroy Resource Centre to transform old unwanted pieces of furniture into something new and wanted – isn’t this a picture of how Christ can transform our lives when we trust him? This was really good fun and I think we surprised ourselves at how well everything turned out. The laughter, conversations and friendship of those mornings were priceless.

Building relationships with one another, working together side by side and sharing time with each other is so important. This is how we really get to know each other, so that, when difficult times come, we can provide support and care which is effective and meaningful.

We have also started a new Bible Focus Group for women this year, which is meeting on the first and third Tuesday of each month. The current PW theme *Being Transformed* is based on Romans 12:2:

‘Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.’

How do we renew our minds? Well, by studying and meditating on God’s Word. These meetings have been a real blessing and encouragement to each other, as we have read, pondered and shared together over God’s Word. We are currently studying the book of Exodus and we have been encouraged, blessed and challenged as we learn more about God who is the ‘I am’.

We are a very welcoming group and our meetings are open to all women and we have others who come along that are members of other churches, which is also fantastic as we get to share ideas and connect with other church families, which provides us with a real sense of church community.



Below - Armagh Presbytery PW LINK Planning Team – Spring Conference 2023



“Women’s ministry isn’t about any one person but as a collective body of women we come together to support and encourage one another. To challenge and disciple each other to live our lives for Jesus.”

In November, we had Valerie Murphy come along who spoke on *Being Transformed*. It was evident, especially among some younger women, that there is a hunger to know God more. Valerie will be returning to share with us again in March when she plans to share some tools to help us on how to study God’s Word. Please do pray for these meetings.

Each year on the Saturday before Easter we also host

our Women’s Ministry Spring Conference held in First Portadown Presbyterian Church. These have been hugely successful with women from all over the province coming along for a morning of teaching, worship and fellowship. We always have a mission focus at the conference and this year we were delighted to have Alan Cousins from SAT-7 share with us. We also have the Good Book Company and other Christian stalls so attendees can browse during a welcome coffee break.

Women’s ministry isn’t about any one person but as a collective body of women we come together to support and encourage one another. To challenge and disciple each other to live our lives for Jesus. I would really encourage all women in our congregations to go along to their PW Groups, as not only will it encourage the women that already go, but they too will be encouraged and blessed in the process. I know for me personally I have found deep and meaningful friendships through PW which I may not have experienced otherwise in church. And for that, I am most grateful.



Above - ‘Furniture Transformation mornings’ – great fun and chat

Left - Catering at Sunday School Christmas breakfast – Alison Wilson, PW Treasurer and Janet Moffett, PW Leader

Below - Spring Conference 2023, over 200 women attended

Each year we also have our annual Gospel Service which is held on the third Sunday in November at 3.30pm. We host this in our church hall and all are seated around tables set up for afternoon tea. We have found these services to be a great way of connecting with other Ladies groups in our area, not just PW Groups but other denominations as well. We are always prayerful for this service and anxious that the Gospel message is shared. Other notable things organised for this PW year is a visitor’s night on 23 April with Asia Link and also a coffee morning on 22 June in aid of Breast Cancer UK and the PW Mission Fund.

Connecting with other women across our Presbytery is important to us and we are actively involved within the LINK for Armagh Presbytery. We have found the LINK to be a great support and resource over the years – a number of years ago the LINK had a speaker from 24/7 Prayer and this meeting was instrumental to us setting up our own women’s prayer group which has been meeting regularly every month since then to pray for our church, our community and each other.

I have been the secretary for Armagh Presbytery LINK for over 6 years now and it has been a real blessing to me. LINK provides the opportunity to connect with other groups, to hear what they are doing, share ideas and to encourage one another. Armagh Presbytery LINK has evolved over these past few years. We hold meetings on the first Monday of November and March and this year we have decided to ask different PW Groups to host each night so that we can reach as many as possible across the Presbytery.



PRAYING FOR SUFFERING FRIENDS



Helen Thorne is the Director of Training and Resources at Biblical Counselling UK who joined us last year for our *Caring Together* event in Assembly Buildings. She is married to Nick and is an experienced speaker and the author of a range of books including: *Mental Health and Your Church*, *Hope in an Anxious World* and *5 Things to Pray for your City*. Here she tells us about her new book due out this Spring and how it might help us when praying for friends who are suffering.

It was a typical end to a meeting; with God's Word ringing in our ears, we turned to a time of prayer. We shared requests – we were all keen to hear how we could pray for those around us – that's part of what love looks like in a local church. One person spoke of bereavement, another of unemployment, still others of anxiety, financial woes, parenting struggles, doubt, depression and ill-health. This world is fallen and we all feel its pain. We prayed for each other there and then – and we promised to keep praying as the week went on. We really did mean to keep praying – but every one of us got stuck ... the desire to pray was there, but the discipline and the words escaped us. At best, most of us fumbled a quick, "please heal – help them, Lord – your will be done."

I suspect many of us can relate to stories like that. Most of us know the importance of prayer – the privilege it is to talk to the Lord of all things about the good and the hard of

other people's lives. Prayer is awe-inspiring, relationship-building and life-changing. It does not always come naturally, though. Often we regret our prayerlessness. Sometimes we get frustrated that we cannot find the words.

Many of us benefit from a gentle structure and a reminder of the rich ways in which Scripture can fuel our prayers. It was for just such reasons that the idea for *5 Things to Pray for a Suffering Friend* was born. Part of a long-established series from The Good Book Company, it is now a resource designed to help us pray – and keep praying – for those facing hard times.

Praying through passages

5 Things to Pray for a Suffering Friend is a book containing 21 short chapters, each setting out 5 ways to pray for someone who is facing deep pain. That's over 100 ways to pray for those in difficulty! And each is rooted in a passage of God's Word. It is not a case of 5 things to pray for those with depression and 5 things to pray for those with anxiety but a whole host of ways to pray for anyone who is finding life hard.

In the book, there are biblical spurs to ask God to help our friends:

- Speak out their pain in lament
- Look up to see the goodness and purposes of their Heavenly Father
- Soak in the Lord's comfort and provision
- Press on in perseverance and hope

Some of the passages are well-known, others less so, but there is truth and hope in abundance.

Of course, not every prayer idea is going to be suitable for every person, but by giving

such a range of possibilities, it is hoped the book will encourage us to pray more biblically, more diversely and with more nuance. Using it will help us avoid getting stuck in a prayer-rut. And help us all remember that the purposes of the Lord run deep. In addition to asking God to remove our friends' pain, we can ask him to grow something beautiful within it.

Praying with perseverance

As well as encouraging us to pray biblically and widely, the layout of the book contains space for us all to write more personal notes, maybe popping in the initials of people we want to lift up to the Lord. In so doing, it gives us an aide memoire – a way to remember to pray and not give up (Luke 18:1).

People's pain often goes on for far longer than our prayers. Chronic illness, bereavement, the heartbreak of singleness or infertility can last many years – many decades – but it's rare for our prayers to keep pace. By having a book that we can come back to time and again, it is hoped that we will all grow in remembering and persevering in prayer.

It is a short book – an accessible book – certainly not everything you could possibly need to know about prayer! But with chapters on asking God to help our friends lament, trust, receive comfort and hope, rest, build community, grasp their identity in Christ, engage in spiritual warfare, grow, witness, forgive, persevere and so much more, there is plenty within its pages to keep us praying through 2024 and beyond. It is my hope (and prayer!) that the Lord will use it to his glory – to build his church and help us to "devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful" (Colossians 4:2), confident that God hears and acts in the ways he knows to be best.

5 Things to Pray for a Suffering Friend is available from The Good Book Company or any local Christian bookshop.

Scan the QR code below...



"Helen Thorne's heartfelt prayers are considered and sensitive. Already, I have known their powerful effectiveness as I have prayed through them for those I know who are suffering from grief, anxiety and depression. My only negative is that this little book wasn't written sooner. May it be used not only to touch lives but to bring healing and wholeness."

Pauline Kennedy, PCI Women's Ministry and PW Development Officer

HARRIET TUBMAN

THE MOSES OF HER PEOPLE



Welcome to this new feature - she INSPIRES. A look back at remarkable women of faith. Each edition, we will bring you the biography of a female who you may or may not have heard of before.

We hope you enjoy finding out how their Christian faith motivated and inspired them to do great things with God at their side.

Many of the people of faith that have gone before us can inspire us by the words they leave behind in books. We get a feel for their heart, the trials they faced and their unwavering faith in God as we read pages and pages about their journey. Harriet Tubman never wrote books. In fact, she could neither read nor write, she was illiterate. Yet it is her actions during the course of her 90 odd years of life on earth that make her a remarkable woman of faith.

One of nine children, Araminta 'Minty' Ross was born around 1820 in Maryland in the United States, a state which is a two hour drive from New York City. It was not a normal childhood, rather than go to school, she was born enslaved, something quite hard for us to imagine in 2024.

Around the age of six, Minty was separated from both her parents and was made to work as a housemaid. That early separation, understandably, brought an emotional pain, subsequently leading her to take risks in order to be united with her family again.

She later changed her name to Harriet, her mother's name. During her years in slavery, Harriet resisted. However, when she finally got her freedom, the thought of her fellow family and others stuck in slavery motivated her to go back and try and release them, often at great personal danger. The idea that if you are saved, you should save others, as we know spiritually, obviously meant a lot to Harriet too.

"If a person would send another into bondage, he would, it appears to me, be bad enough to send him into hell if he could."

"My home, after all, was down in Maryland, because my father, my mother, my brothers, and sisters, and friends were there. But I was free, and they should be free."

Harriet's faith came from being a part of a dynamic church culture that gave her a firm faith in Christ:

"God's time is always near. He set the North Star in the heavens; He gave me the strength in my limbs; He meant I should be free."

She often had vivid dreams and these were her feelings when she first escaped slavery:

"When I found I had crossed that line, I looked at my hands to see if I was the same person. There was such a glory over everything; the sun came like gold through trees, and over the fields, and I felt like I was in Heaven."

Quotes that we have from Harriet speak of the heart of her prayers for others and of her unquenching faith that God was with her as she made dangerous and long journeys on foot, to free others.

"I said to the Lord, I'm going to hold steady on to you, and I know you will see me through and I prayed to God to make me strong and able to fight, and that's what I've always prayed for ever since."

"Oh, Lord! You've been with me in six troubles, don't desert me in the seventh!"

Harriet was widely known in America. Her main legacy is as a conductor of the Underground Railroad. Now before you think of a London tube style railway line - think again!

The Underground Railroad was not located underground nor was it a railroad - it was a loosely organised network of connections with no clear defined routes. They provided safehouses and transportation to aid slaves to freedom.

There were code words and people were known as passengers. Harriet was never caught and never lost a "passenger." It is estimated that she saved around 300 people from slavery making around 19 trips south over a period of 11 years.

"We was the fools, and they was the wise men; but we wasn't fools enough to go down the high road in the broad daylight."

A movie released in 2019, *Harriet*, sometimes available on the BBC iPlayer, is worth watching to give you a fuller flavour of Harriet as an incredibly courageous woman - and of her unique accent. So read these quotes aloud and no, we haven't made any spelling mistakes -

"From Christmas till March I worked as I could, and I prayed through all the long nights - I groaned and prayed for ole master: 'Oh Lord, convert master!' 'Oh Lord, change dat man's heart!' 'Pears like I prayed all the time'."

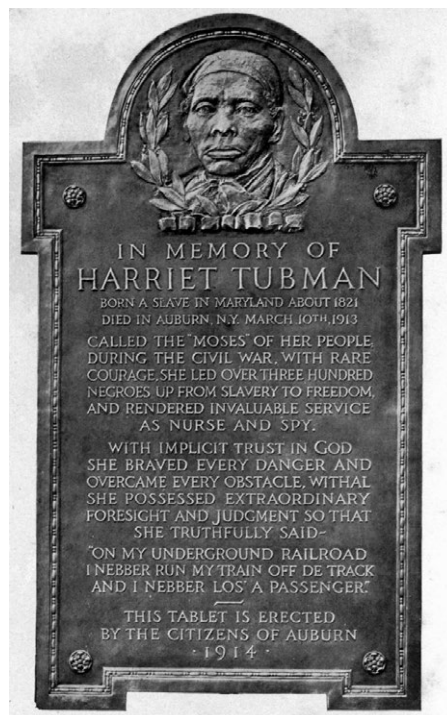
"Why, the language down there in the far South is just as different from ours in Maryland as you think. They laughed when they heard me talk and I couldn't understand them no how."

She was given an affectionate nickname, Moses, for being 'the Moses of her people' bringing them to the Promised 'free' land.

In Ann Petry's book, *Harriet Tubman*, we find a remarkable skill Harriet possessed that showed her intelligence:

"It was as the storyteller, the bard, that Harriet's active years came to a close. She had never learned to read and write. She compensated for this by developing a memory on which was indelibly stamped everything she had ever heard or seen or experienced. She had a highly developed sense of the dramatic, a sense of the comic, and because in her early years she had memorised verses from the Bible, word for word, the surge and sway of the majestic rhythm of the King James version of the Bible was an integral part of her speech. It was these qualities that made her a superb storyteller."

Harriet died in March 1913 and was buried with military honours at Fort Hill Cemetery in Auburn, New York. From being full of faith in God, to triumphing over extraordinary difficulties with an immense amount of courage, Harriet is indeed someone that can inspire us in the 21st century to resist hate and love our neighbour, just as Jesus commands us to do.



"I said to the Lord, I'm going to hold steady on to you, and I know you will see me through and I prayed to God to make me strong and able to fight, and that's what I've always prayed for ever since."

GENTLY WORKING TOWARDS HEALING

As our PW Special Home Project for 2020-2022, so many of our Groups embraced the local organisation, CARE NI. As an update to this collaboration, Rebecca Richards, a consultant with OPEN NI, an initiative of CARE NI, shares with us how and why she got involved and also confirms some upcoming retreats.

Often life doesn't take us where we think it will, and sometimes the most unexpected and less than ideal situations can be a gift of grace to move us forward to where we need to be. The journey leading up to my being involved with CARE has been one spanning several years, and I'll briefly share a little of my own story by way of introduction.

I was raised in a Christian environment and have followed Jesus from a young age. Throughout university and into my working life as a teacher I continued to be fully involved in my church community, until, after some unwise choices, I found myself in a crisis pregnancy situation at the age of 30. But God is gracious and in the summer of 2019 my daughter was born.

The Covid-19 pandemic hit shortly after her birth and I remember one evening, quite out of the blue, thinking - 'I'm not going to let my experience go to waste. I know God can, and will use this.'



I believe God can use whatever circumstances we find ourselves in for his glory and to draw us back to himself. Life events or crises that we would have perhaps never written into our story can be such an act of his grace, such proof of his love, even if not apparent at the time. God had been calling me to decide, either I choose him, and the abundance of life that he gives, or I continue to choose the temporary 'life' that the world offers, but I could no longer have both. So, on a January evening during the second Covid-19 lockdown, I acknowledged afresh that my life and circumstances were God's to use in whichever way he planned. I then googled 'crisis pregnancy organisations' and almost straight away found myself volunteering with Pregnancy Crisis Helpline (PCH).

PCH is a UK-wide organisation offering a non-directive space where women and men can be listened to before reaching a decision regarding an unplanned pregnancy and where they can find support if they are struggling after an abortion. I know for some, choosing abortion seems like a quick fix but, sadly, terminating a pregnancy can so often be quite the opposite and it is the pain and grief that I heard behind so many of the post-abortion conversations that led me to undertake further training and get more involved in this work.

I have had the privilege of being part of CARE (care.org.uk), and bringing their initiative OPEN (weareopen.org.uk) to Northern Ireland, since Summer 2023. OPEN offers a pastoral response to crisis pregnancy and baby loss. We seek to create an environment where crisis pregnancy, post-abortion, and miscarriage concerns can be shared openly within the church and without fear of judgement. We long for the church to be a safe place for women (and men) who find themselves in these situations, and somewhere that there will be people who are well resourced to walk alongside and support them. I think often of the people in my church who stood alongside me and truly became family throughout my pregnancy and indeed continue to walk this journey with me. I am convinced of the need for the church to engage in this area, in compassion, in love and in grace.

"I believe God can use whatever circumstances we find ourselves in for his glory and to draw us back to himself."

OPEN offers pastoral training events for church leaders, pastoral workers and those who wish to be better equipped to walk alongside members of their community who have been affected by baby loss or a crisis pregnancy situation. We also hold 'OPEN' post-abortion healing retreat weekends and 'Loved' miscarriage healing retreat days.

We are looking forward to our next 'Loved' retreat day which will take place in Murlough House in County Down on 13 April 2024. These are days where those who come have the space to reflect and find peace and understanding; to

share with those who have also known the pain of miscarriage, and to acknowledge together that both they and these precious babies are loved.

Our 'OPEN' post-abortion healing retreat weekends offer the opportunity to gently work through a healing programme in a small group setting. Those who find the incredible courage to attend are always rewarded by finding a measure of peace, forgiveness and healing, enabling them to embrace what has happened and to move forward with hope and trust for the future. Our next OPEN retreat will take place in Enniskillen from Friday 14 June to Sunday 16 June. The weekend will be delivered from a Christian faith basis, but all are welcome.

In Psalm 138:8 we read: "The LORD will fulfil his purpose for me; your steadfast love O LORD, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands". God offers us a hope that will not disappoint, and he will not abandon the work that he has begun in us. What a hope that can be to those who are experiencing the deep pain and grief of pregnancy loss or those facing the turmoil of a crisis pregnancy.

For more information about OPEN or the events below, please visit weareopen.org.uk or email Rebecca via rebecca.richards@care.org.uk



Miscarriage Healing Retreat Day
13th April 2024, 9am - 4pm
Murlough House, Newcastle

A day to reflect and share with others who have known the pain of baby loss, and to acknowledge that we and our babies are loved. Cost £25 to include lunch and refreshments.



Abortion Healing Retreat Weekend
Friday 14th - Sunday 16th June 2024
The Well, Enniskillen

There will be sensitive teaching in a small and confidential group setting, and the opportunity for attendees to gently work through their experience with up to 5 other participants.

GRATEFUL HEART SPRING'24

What a beautiful thing, God, to give thanks, to sing an anthem to you, the High God! – Psalm 92:1 (Msg)

SECOND DUNBOE



The ladies of Second Dunboe *Presbyterian Women* met together in October in their church hall to enjoy a night of fellowship, food and thankfulness to God for 90 years of PW in their church.

The President, Georgina Henry, welcomed everyone and gave an especially warm welcome to the guests for the evening, Heather Lyle, former President of Second Dunboe PW and Ann Wilson, President of *Presbyterian Women*. She also made a special mention of our oldest member present, Martie Henry, who has been a member for over 70 years.

After a delicious meal, provided by Jennifer Creelman, Ann spoke on the theme for the year, *Being Transformed* and everyone listening was challenged and encouraged by what she said. Photographs were taken and a special cake, baked by Anne Millen and decorated by Georgina Henry, was cut. A good night was had by all! Pictured (bottom right) cutting the cake are the Past Presidents/Leaders Iris Carmichael, Marina Martin, Gladys Henry and Heather Lyle with the current Leader, Georgina Henry.

Also pictured (top right) is the oldest member, Martie Henry, with the Leader who is also her daughter-in-law, Georgina Henry.



TELL YOUR STORIES

Have you a good-news story to tell us about your PW Group or women's ministry project? Is there something you are grateful for that you would like to express to our readers? Please email up to 150 words and attach to the email any relevant photographs to pw@presbyterianireland.org



BROOKVALE

Brookvale Presbyterian Women in County Down recently celebrated their 60th Anniversary with a meal with members.

CASTLEREAGH

In September, the ladies of Castlereagh Presbyterian Women enjoyed an evening of 'All things Royal' to mark the coronation of King Charles III and Queen Camilla. PW member Lorraine Frame shared her experience of this special day and provided a wonderful account of her day in London. Many photographs had been taken as Lorraine had a birds eye view from her place in The Mall. The evening was rounded off by an excellent supper and a look at the memorabilia that Lorraine has collected from the many royal events she has attended over the years. Her talents are most definitely in abundance as she knitted the jacket that she wore on the day. A lovely evening was enjoyed by all who attended.

Pictured are Lorraine Frame, Castlereagh Presbyterian Women member and Liz McCullough, Group Leader.



SECOND CASTLEDERG



Second Castlederg *Presbyterian Women* recently celebrated their 70th Anniversary by having a special Thanksgiving Service and refreshments served afterwards in the church hall. The guest speaker was Eleanor Drysdale, Deaconess, Wellington Presbyterian Church in Ballymena. We were joined by ladies from our local churches and neighbouring PW Groups.

Pictured (above) is Eleanor Drysdale, Deaconess, Wellington Presbyterian Church, Ballymena and 96 year old Iris Adams.

Missing from the photo of Second Castlederg PW (top right) are Joy Greer, Stella Burnside, Rosemary Clarke and Joyce Galbraith.

The Anniversary Cake was cut by 96 year old Iris Adams and Sandra Thompson, the current Group Leader (bottom right).

MUCKAMORE



The ladies of Muckamore *Presbyterian Women* spent a lovely evening at Parliament Buildings, Stormont. After enjoying a delicious meal, Gordon Lyons gave them a guided tour and history of the building.

Also, the committee of Muckamore *Presbyterian Women* recently visited the South Belfast International Meeting Point on the Lisburn Road, where they cooked a meal for 130 people.

DOWN LINK

'Sharing Our Story' was an interactive event hosted by Down LINK. Women had an opportunity in Part One to reflect on their PW story, sharing memories of how their PW Group had blessed an individual or the church. The speaker, Donna Jennings, encouraged us to look forward and envisage our Women's Ministry in three years and discuss three actions we might take to bring the change we would like to see.

In Part Two, we silently reflected on our personal faith journey. Donna spoke of the ripple effect of sharing just a small part of our personal story to help connect with other women in a deeper way, and help them flourish in Christ through our women's ministry. Donna said, "Our Stories are sowing seeds to bring about change."



SLIGO PRESBYTERIAN

Fiona Simpson writes, "The Active Retirement ladies meet in the church hall in the morning and, Haven, our group for refugees and asylum seekers meet directly afterwards so I got both groups to collaborate on a little project to make Twiddlemuffs for the local care home. Everyone works at their own pace, some knitting, some sewing on buttons, etc and somewhere in between all find time to chat, laugh and have a light lunch which is provided by volunteers from the church! The ladies find it therapeutic and worthwhile as they are contributing to the local community."

CAIRNALBANA

Cairnalbana Presbyterian Women celebrated their 75th Anniversary in 2023 with a meal at Oranmore, Ballymena. The work within the congregation started out as the Ladies Guild in 1948. Margaret Wright (Treasurer), Helen Rea (Assistant Leader), Julie Hall (Leader) and Christina Robinson (founder member) cutting the cake as part of the celebrations.



GLOBAL MISSION



OVERSEAS NEWS

Personnel News

James and Heather Cochrane visited Portugal at the end of February to preach at Pedras Vivas and to make practical arrangements having decided that their ministry in Portugal has reached a conclusion, at least for the foreseeable future. Please pray for James and Heather, now on final home assignment and sabbatical, as they take time to reflect and seek God's guidance for the future. Pray also for the Pedras Vivas Congregation as they seek to call a new minister.

Gary and Mary Reid, PCI global mission workers in Kenya, returned to Ireland on home assignment just before Christmas and have been engaged in a programme of deputation. Please pray that they would enjoy quality time with their family and get some rest and refreshment before returning to Kenya at the beginning of April for a further two-year period of service with the Presbyterian Church of East Africa, Acacia Grove Mission.

Steve and Rosie Kennedy give thanks for the fruitfulness and blessings of God during the past three years of ministry and for a refreshing break over Christmas. They continue with a range of ministry opportunities in Cluj-Napoca now that their time of service in the Tóköz Reformed Church Congregation has concluded. Please pray that they would know God's guidance and encouragement as, together with the Council for Global Mission, they prepare to return to Northern Ireland and consider the future, seeking God's way forward.

Csaba and Ilona Veres moved in January to work with the Transtibiscan District of the Reformed Church in Hungary to serve with the Hajdúböszövény – Calvin Square Congregation in their ministry amongst the Roma community in Bodaszölő. They will have a range of responsibilities in relation to church planting, family ministry and helping to organise evangelism, Bible teaching, community events and children's ministry. Pray for Csaba and Ilona as they settle into this new chapter of missionary service.

Derek and Jane French continue in their wide-ranging mission engagement in Bilbao, Spain. Please pray for them as Derek comes to Ireland for deputation from 19 – 30 April 2024, while Jane, together with Gabriela and Luka, remain in Bilbao during this time. Remember also the Leadership in BIC and Sarriko, that God would provide the right people for the team in both churches.

Overseas Visits

PCI's World Development Appeal Agent, **Rev Liam Rutherford** and videographer Chris Nelson, together with representatives of Tearfund Northern Ireland, are visiting Tearfund projects run by their local partners in Southern Rwanda from 6 – 13 March 2024. This visit is in relation to preparations for the World Development Appeal 2024 which will focus on the provision of food security for some of the world's poorest communities.

Information included in Global Mission News is supplied by the PCI Mission Department. While it is correct at the time of writing, which is normally some weeks before publication, readers should be aware that some details may subsequently change.

Up-to-date news and information are available online at:
www.presbyterianireland.org/mission.

Mission Department, Presbyterian Church in Ireland,
Assembly Buildings, 2-10 Fisherwick Place, Belfast, BT1 6DW
Tel: **+44 (0)28 9041 7263**
Email: mission@presbyterianireland.org
Website: www.presbyterianireland.org/mission

GLOBAL PRAYER DIARY



STEVEN AND ANGELINA COWAN

Tuum, Kenya
Mission: Church-based community development & outreach

A recent attack in the area north of Maralal has once again created much fear throughout the community. A food lorry was ransacked, a security guard killed, a young girl raped and several people injured. Rumours abound as to the reason for the unrest - some involving land demarcation issues - but it's clear that foremost is a complete lack of 'Fear of the Lord'. Pray for safety on the roads and for those families grieving the pain and loss of the latest attacks.

A few days ago, the 'wazee' (elders) from the community met to discuss change and the way forward. With rapidly changing environmental conditions throughout the northern parts of Kenya, controlled grazing by local cattle is becoming more essential. However, the unknowns of demarcation and cultivation bring unease. As is often the case, misunderstanding and miscommunication are increased by poor literacy.

Pray that many of the 'wazee' will take up the invitation to attend the monthly seminar where issues can be discussed and progress agreed within the framework of the wisdom of God's Word.

Give thanks for the recent camps and for the young people who took their first steps towards a greater understanding of the 'Fear of God.'



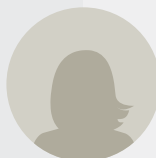
DEREK AND JANE FRENCH

Bilbao, Spain
Mission: Student ministry

Bilbao International Church is thankful to God for the many international students that have been joining our community this academic year. In January, three of BIC's faithful students' time with the church came to an end as they moved on to their next stage of studies. It was a joy to pray for these young people (A from Zimbabwe moving on to Hungary, S from India moving on to France and M from Germany moving on to Denmark) and to experience so visually, the command of "Go into all the world and preach the gospel..." as the church prayed for God to lead them and use them for his glory in their new sphere of influence. Continue to pray for the ministry amongst the students in BIC.

Pray for both BIC and Sarriko leadership as they make important decisions concerning the life of the church. Pray for wisdom, grace, guidance and clarity and that the decisions would further help to extend God's kingdom in Bilbao. Derek and Jane have been praying for a team for many years and God is moving in the hearts of various people in answer to this request. Praise God for how things are moving forward and pray that he will bring the right people at the right time to join the team.

GLOBAL MISSION WORKERS




Naomi Keefe
Brazil
Da Caixa Postal 73
Codigo da agencia 32300018
AC Central Recife
Avenida Guararapes 250
CEP 50010970
Brazil




Csaba & Ilona Veres
Hungary
Vörösmärty Mihály u. 18
Hajdúbosszörmény
4220
Hungary




Stephen & Angelina Cowan
Kenya
PCEA Tuum
PO Box 13
Baragoi
via Maralal 20601
Kenya




Naomi & Thomas Leremore
Kenya
PO Box 23450-00100
Nairobi (GPO)
Kenya




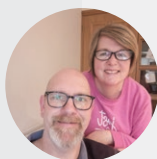

Gary & Mary Reid
Kenya
PO Box 846-20500
Narok
Kenya




Valker & JinHyeog Glissmann
Malawi
PO Box 30048
Chichiri
Blantyre 3
Malawi





James & Heather Cochrane
Portugal
c/o Assembly Buildings


Steve and Rosie Kennedy
Romania
Str. Sanatoriului 29
Cluj-Napoca 400000
Jud Cluj
Romania





Derek & Jane French
Spain
Calle Lekueder 9, 4A
48940 Leioa
Spain




Diane Cusick
Zambia
The Church of Central Africa
Presbyterian (CCAP)
PO Box 320261
Woodlands
Lusaka 10101
Zambia




Edwin & Anne Kibathi
**Partner Church Mission
Workers - England**
167 Wickhay
Basildon
Essex
SS15 5AQ





entrusted

'... from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.'

Luke 12:48

Presbyterian Women's Annual Conference

Saturday 11th May 2024 in Assembly Buildings, Belfast

Guest Speaker | Dr Amy Orr-Ewing

Morning Session | 10.30am – 12.15pm

Afternoon Celebration | 2.00pm – 3.45pm

Praise led by Emma Smyth and band

Join with women from across Ireland as we come together to worship and celebrate all that God is doing in our lives and through his church. We come expectant to encounter him afresh and take his blessing and hope back to our local churches and communities.

We are delighted that **Dr Amy Orr-Ewing** will be joining with us as guest speaker. Amy is an international author, speaker and theologian who addresses the deep questions of our day with meaningful answers found in the Christian Faith. Travelling internationally, Amy is a regular speaker across university campuses, businesses, parliaments, churches and conferences as well as on TV and radio. She is the author of multiple books including *'Where is God in all the Suffering?'* and bestselling, *'Why Trust the Bible?'*



Guest Speaker
Dr Amy Orr-Ewing