

Session Report - 2021

The session report for First Presbyterian Portadown could be entitled in 2021 : The Lord Provides.

Once again, our faithful God has given us everything we need and much more. In surely one of the most unusual years in our church history, when at times we were prevented from meeting together in person due to the continuing pandemic, we have been greatly blessed in many ways.

Firstly, we are grateful for the Lord's provision in the faithful ministry of Rev. Robin Brown. In Robin we have a minister who is able to adapt to each new challenge and has the technical skills and willingness to work long hours to ensure clear teaching in a helpful worship service was available at all times, even when it had to be provided online.

Trevor Kane and his family have also been such a welcome addition to our church community. We have benefited massively from having an experienced preacher with a heart for people join us in the role of assistant minister. Sadly, we will probably not be able to keep Trevor for much longer, but the Kane family will be a great blessing to whatever church he is called to.

The thanks of session and the wider church family also go to Andrew Frizzell and the members of the music team and technical team who have continued by so many different means to help us to engage in meaningful worship. Their generous work has not gone unnoticed and was a source of deep comfort and encouragement for many.

It was with deep appreciation during the year that we were able to present a gift from the congregation to Margaret Hynds to recognise the faithful work that she has carried out over many years within our church family. Her friendship and spiritual support has been a source of comfort to many ladies. Dennis Flanagan has also chosen to step aside from an active role in session after 44 years of service and move to elder emeritus, while continuing to provide an essential service to the wider church, where his preaching has been valued in many congregations.

So many of our congregation also stepped up to the mark in providing support and care for our congregation including Kirsty-Lee Finlay who was willing to take on the role of pastorally supporting some of the women in our church family for a period of time alongside her office work.

The Lord has also provided incredibly with our building project. It was wonderful to have been able to continue with the project with very little delay due to the pandemic and to be able to have an amazing new facility opened in time for socially distanced meeting to recommence. Special thanks must go to Clifford Clyde, Sam Preston and Nigel McClelland whose time and expertise over many years have driven this project. It was a great delight to welcome the moderator, Rt Rev Dr David Bruce to join us in celebration of the opening of our refurbished church building, new rooms and coffee area.

In the middle of much thanksgiving, it is also essential that we recognise that for many families 2021 also brought great challenge and loss. The loss within the congregation was reflected in session with the death of our dearly loved brothers in the Lord, Billy Calvert and Jimmy Boyd during the year and they will be greatly missed. Often however, it is in these times that we are reminded of the truth of God's faithfulness in the present and hope for the future. Many of our members have echoed the sentiment of the words of the

modern hymn “Who holds our faith when fears arise? Who stands above the stormy trial? Now and ever we confess, Christ our hope in life and death.”

Many questions were asked about how churches would return after restrictions began to lift. We have been so grateful that many families have engaged online throughout lockdown and are now enjoying being back worshipping the Lord together. The number of babies and young children in our midst is a wonderful blessing, and also a great encouragement for session to progress the work of God’s kingdom so that First Portadown continues to be a place where God’s name is lifted high for the next 200 years!

Over the course of the next year plans have been made to give thanks for 200 years of ministry here and we also pray that the events in place to mark this anniversary will be a wonderful opportunity to point many towards our Saviour.

The Lord has also provided this year with the encouragement of a number of new members joining us as well as with many members having a renewed desire to share their faith and have a positive impact in many ways in our community. A good number of the congregation took part in an evangelism course entitled Living and Telling and others benefitted from an online outreach course lead by Avisai and Jude Suarez which focused on outreach to people in our community from a different faith background. It has also been a pleasure to host the Food Bank from our new premises with our own members getting actively involved in this essential work.

The new year will bring new opportunities to advance the gospel and we ask that as a congregation you would pray for Robert Dowey and Brian McGuire as they take on their new roles as Session Clerk and Deputy Clerk.

John Finlay