

FREE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

**REPORTS OF
STANDING
COMMITTEES
OF SYNOD**

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**REPORT OF THE RELIGION AND
MORALS COMMITTEE
Convener: Rev I D MacDonald**

INTRODUCTION

THE rapid decline in the moral character of our beloved nation continues despite our having been visited with plague, one of God's sore judgments, in the form of the Covid virus. The optimistic views of some that this judgment was beginning to bear fruit in a spirit of repentance have so far been dashed by the grim reality of a nation returning with greater greediness to its lusts and idols. Nationally, the only gleam of fresh light in the nigh-midnight moral darkness has been early and sporadic reports of an increased interest in the Word of God among some children of secondary school age. At the same time, the Lord's preservation of a small remnant of His believing people is a great mercy not to be overlooked, and without which "we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah" (Isa 1:9) in our judgments as well as in our sins.

The Scriptural relation between religion and morals has long been recognized in these reports. It should be no surprise that as the extent and power of true religion declines in a nation, the moral standards become more and more degraded. While true evangelical holiness flowing from saving faith in Christ is what the Lord requires of man under the gospel, the prosperity of true religion will also have an effect in restraining sin and maintaining moral standards in society. The backsliding, gospel-despising, Christ-rejecting nation sows the wind of irreligion and will reap the whirlwind of immorality with all its misery and sorrow. Therefore, with no satisfactory evidence of any revival of true religion in our land, it is no wonder that the moral unravelling of society continues apace. The national churches in our land, along with numerous others, continue to capitulate to the liberal and antichristian agenda of the world – sodomy and gender perversion not excluded. The power and influence of true Christianity has dwindled to small pockets here and there, so that the position of true godliness in the land is like that predicted in Isaiah's day where only "gleaning grapes shall be left in it, as the shaking of an olive tree, two or three berries in the top of the uppermost bough, four or five in the outmost fruitful branches thereof" (Isa 17:6). Actions by the State in attempting to enforce Covid-related rules and lockdowns on the church of Christ, and the churches' own responses to the virus, appear to have brought widespread division across many churches. The Lord appears to be chastising His church if He is breaking the bands of brotherly love among the professing people of God: "Then I cut asunder Mine other staff, even Bands, that I might break the brotherhood between Judah and Israel". There seem to be few left who have spiritual "understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do" (1 Chr 12:32), and who sigh and cry for the abominations in the land and over the afflictions of Joseph.

The instances of violent crime in a nation are one barometer of the moral climate. The year 2021 saw record numbers of teenage deaths due to knife crime. Statistics for last year show that the rate for violence and sexual offences rose to a new high of 32 per 1000 residents, amounting to 1,945,174 reports for these crimes, an increase of 7% from 2020 (Brighton Analytics Limited). Knife crime is up 29% from 2011 (the Ben Kinsella Trust), the vast majority among young males. These figures are further evidence that the pillars of society in the United Kingdom are crumbling as violence fills the earth. Drunkenness and the revelling which inevitably accompanies it in a social setting are still common place. The closure of bars and nightclubs for extended periods of time during the Covid lockdowns is now a memory as the devotees of pleasure flock back to these haunts. The national obsession with professional sports, football in particular, continues unabated. These soul-destroying idols captivate the hearts of poor sinners with a force comparable to that of a false religion. From these and many other lusts and idols the hearts of men must be turned if they are to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.

Such a widespread spirit of repentance must be the desire and prayer of those who long for the honour of Christ in the coming of His Kingdom, and who yearn for the salvation of their fellow-sinners. It is to be feared that darker days are on the horizon for the faithful Church of Christ. It is true that our firm expectation is that the morning of promised world-wide gospel prosperity is coming, but while the morning cometh so also the night which precedes it (Isa 21:11,12).

RELIGION

THE STATE OF RELIGION IN SCOTLAND AND THE UK

The past year proved no exception to preceding years so far as the religious and moral state of the nation is concerned unless it be by increased backsliding from God. The flood of irreligion and defiance of God's law so apparent in previous years has continued unabated. Surely the Lord is speaking to us in His Word: "Shall I not visit for these things? saith the Lord: shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?" (Jer 5:9,29). It cannot but grieve all who love the Lord that true religion is so little countenanced today and that sin is finding such a place in the life of the nation. Knowing the offensiveness of sin to God they cannot but mourn the blindness which has overtaken men today with regard to the Divine glory and the claims of the Divine law. This blindness says little for the boasted enlightenment of the age: "If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness" (Matt 6:23).

The above paragraph was written for the May 1969 Synod by the Convener of the Religion and Morals Committee, the late Rev D B MacLeod. It was that year that the Church of Scotland ordained and inducted its first female "Minister" and now, 53 years later, 25% of the said ministry are female. How

can they expect their church to prosper when they are going contrary to the law of God, which says “But I suffer not a woman to teach nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence” (1 Tim 2:12)?

What is heard from the pulpits of the national church is a social gospel of doing good works, many denying the eternal Sonship of Jesus as the Son of God, many not accepting His virgin birth. A Free Church in Skye had a so-called “Christmas tree” in the church in December 2020 and a line of illuminated fairy lights from the manse to the church. Funeral services in both these churches are frequently not the worship of God but a celebration of the deceased’s life, with no mention of sin or salvation.

The Church of England is no witness for truth, and from time to time both clergy and members apply for acceptance into Roman Catholicism. Many of the LGBT persuasion are members in the national churches, despite denying that God made man male and female, and they are easily recognisable as such. At university we were taught by eminent professors that each cell in the baby had male XY chromosomes or female YY chromosomes. Modern day screening of expectant mothers reveals before birth the sex of the child while still in the womb. Parents if they wish are told the sex of the child, some disclosing it to relatives and friends while others keep the secret to themselves.

LGBT activists by promoting their agenda make God a liar, contradicting His holy Word, and likewise brand their professors of biology and their successors as liars for having taught what is scientifically correct.

If the writer in 1969 was deploring the low state of religion and morals, it is many times worse at the present time. What a need there is that God would bring about another Reformation throughout the UK. The Covid plague is not recognised as God’s judgement upon us as individuals and a nation. “O Lord, revive Thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy” (Hab 3:2).

CAUSES OF THE LORD’S WRATH AGAINST SCOTLAND

Scotland is presently guilty of manifold gross sins which are greatly provoking the Lord’s wrath against it. These sins have caused the Holy Ghost largely to depart, and have rendered the nation desolate. The land has been forsaken by the Lord as to its previous light and truth to a great extent, and is fast becoming the habitation of devils (Rev 18:2).

There are no doubt numerous causes of God’s anger against our land, and some of the main causes are:

The almost universal rejection of Christ’s sweet offer of friendship to all sorts of sinners, including the chief: “Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Mat 11:28). This is the principal sin in the land, and sadly, more than half the population have no religion at all (58% according to a recent BBC report).

The fearful consequences of the spiritual decline in the land include graceless ministers like wolves in sheep’s clothing infesting the ministry, an absence of public repentance, the neglect of church discipline, and the

pollution of the sacraments involving the admission of the ignorant and the profane. Thus, the ordinances of God are profaned and rendered barren as to any spiritual fruit where these sins prevail. The practice of daily family worship, morning and evening, is exceedingly rare, with heads of families almost universally neglecting the duty, it is feared even within the visible church.

Rampant atheism and ignorance of God in His works of providence toward His cause and in redemption, and neglect of the Holy Scripture, are found in almost all of the people, so that the way of salvation and other crucial truths are unknown to the vast majority in the visible church in this land, and we fear that only a very small remnant have saving grace. Multitudes in this situation claim a hope for eternal life in a false profession, but are spiritually dead and blind. Of those professing any religion in Scotland, 24% are in the apostatising Church of Scotland and 14% in the abomination of Popery (*The Scotsman*, 2020).

This desperate state of religion has made way for the wicked behaviour of multitudes who freely break the commandments of God in both tables of the law, thus making the land one of the most sinful world-wide. The following details confirm this: in 2020 there were 53 murders, 13,815 abortions (murder of the unborn child), 803 suicides (self-murder and its fearful consequences). A Scottish member of parliament is currently endeavouring to have euthanasia (another form of self-murder) legalised. There were in addition 10,433 deaths from the pestilence of Covid, and 1,839 drug deaths (Scotland has Europe's highest *per capita* rate of drug-deaths, 3.5 times more than the rest of the United Kingdom). Also, there were 2,298 rapes, and 7,883 divorces (in 2019) in a nation that rarely grants such on Scriptural grounds. As well, it boasts about how it leads Europe in promoting LGBT "rights" including its promotion of "inclusive" education throughout the school curriculum. This wicked movement is also striving to abolish "conversion therapy" (as they call it) nationally. The sodomite lobby essentially defines it as "any physical, psychological, religious, cultural or counselling practice aimed at the changing of a person's sexual orientation or the suppression of a person's gender identity". They have persuaded the Government to have a national consultation as to whether or not to introduce this ban. If this evil group succeed in making it illegal, it may lead to the persecution of the true ministers of the gospel and the rest of the truly godly. Additionally, the Government is determined to implement the surgical procedure of gender reassignment by 2024, despite the solemn warning of its opponents that it may cause death or serious injury.

A spirit of persecution has come to a certain extent towards the true religion and vital godliness. There is a widespread loathing and hating of the power and life of true religion and godliness, and a malice toward those desirous of following Christ fully. Those who hold that the Word of God condemns abortion, euthanasia, sodomy, and transgenderism, and that it calls on sinners to repent and believe (true "conversion therapy") and to obey Christ's commands, are liable to endure reproach for righteousness' sake. Such

advocates of true religion are reproached, reviled, and accused of ignorance, bigotry, narrow-mindedness, and hate-speech so-called.

Scotland was previously richly blessed with two national Reformations through an abundant outpouring of the Holy Ghost. But now it is ensnared by the devil, who has it in a strangle-hold. The land is soaked in wickedness, and increasingly plagued with tokens of the Lord's indignation. The wrath of the Lord is against us, the Holy Ghost has largely gone, and the desolation is palpable. We are before the Lord as the mire of the streets (Mic 7:10). We daily wax worse and worse, and sin more and more. If the Spirit stays away for much longer, we will become a greater company of devils and desperate atheists. There is a dire need for another like John Knox whose desire was "Lord, give me Scotland or I die". "If My people, which are called by My name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land" (2 Chr 7:14).

THE PAPACY

Poperly arrogantly boasts that it is the only true Church of Jesus Christ, and that there is no possibility of salvation outside of its jurisdiction. However, in reality it is not even a Church because it is utterly devoid of any of the marks of a true Church, including the preaching of the whole counsel of God, the right administration of the sacraments, and biblical Church discipline. The Papacy is instead Satan's masterpiece, dominated by that wicked, vicious, antichrist, the Pope of Rome (2 Thess 2:3,4,7-10), who is idolised and followed by just over one billion people, who give evidence of being of their father the devil, as many of the Jews were in the Saviour's day (Jn 8:41,44).

Romanism remains a particularly evil institution, which harbours a murderous and malicious spirit which is to be seen in its relentless bent to destroy the cause of Christ. It still continues as a scourge nationally with about 800,000 devotees, and is predicted to become the largest religious organisation in Scotland by 2024.

MORALS

THE "RIGHT TO DIE"?

The "Right to Die" is the belief that people have a right to die, whether through various forms of suicide, euthanasia, or refusing lifesaving medical treatment. Euthanasia is the act of giving a patient a drug that they do not otherwise require, with the sole purpose of ending their life. It is often referred to as a "mercy killing", where a person who is unable to take their own life has their life ended for them, to prevent them from experiencing further suffering.

Euthanasia can be either with or without consent. There are three types of euthanasia: voluntary, non-voluntary, and involuntary. Voluntary euthanasia is where a person makes a conscious decision to ask someone to end their life.

Non-voluntary euthanasia is where a person is unable to give their consent and another person makes the decision to end their life for them. Involuntary euthanasia is killing a person who does not want to die or who is incapable of giving their consent, and whose consent has not been asked for. This is the same as the crime of murder.

Assisted suicide is the deliberate act of materially assisting a person to kill themselves by providing drugs, tools or equipment. The term assisted suicide is often used when speaking about Physician-Assisted Suicide (PAS), where a doctor or other medical practitioner knowingly and intentionally provides a person with the knowledge or means (or both) to commit suicide. This includes counselling about lethal doses of drugs, prescribing lethal doses or supplying the drugs. Trying to kill oneself is not a criminal act in the eyes of the law but helping someone do so is. Currently both euthanasia and assisted suicide remain illegal in the UK although there are continual attempts to decriminalise them. "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: a time to be born and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up" (Ecc 3:1-3).

People who support legalising PAS want the individuals who assist in a voluntary death to be exempt from criminal prosecution for manslaughter or similar crimes. What they are blinded to see and understand is that God in heaven sees and beholds, and will bring every deed into judgment. "For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" (Ecc 12:14).

There is also the concept of Assisted Dying whose advocates strongly oppose the use of the terms Assisted Suicide and Suicide when referring to PAS. Their desire is to distance the debate from the suicides commonly performed by those not terminally ill. They feel that those cases have impacted the word suicide to the point that it bears no relation to the situation where someone who is suffering without remedy seeks a peaceful death. But "there is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death: and there is no discharge in that war, neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it" (Ecc 8:8). It is also held by some that suicidal people are discriminated against when they are not given the avenue for satisfying their wish. But, "Be not over much wicked, neither be thou foolish: why shouldest thou die before thy time?" (Ecc 7:17).

The main arguments for assisted suicide and euthanasia include respect for patient autonomy, equal treatment of terminally ill patients on and off life support, compassion, personal liberty, transparency, ethics and responsibility. However, pain is reported as the primary motivation for people choosing assisted suicide. This is opposite to the clear teaching of Scripture. Such arguments have no concept of the dreadful woe of a lost eternity which cannot compare to any earthly suffering. "And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that

he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame” (Luke 16:23,24). The greatest need for those nearing the end of their lives in this world is that they would be found trusting in Christ the Saviour of sinners, and then by grace they can face death at the appointed time. “And He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong” (2 Cor 12:9,10).

The main Christian arguments against suicide and assisted suicide are: that they are against the Sixth Commandment of God, “Thou shalt not kill”; that God, as the Creator of life is also to be the Judge who decides when that life is to end; and that the premature end of a life brings added grief and sorrow to those left behind.

The medical alternative is the practice of good end-of-life care: the ethical position that when you are approaching the last stage of your life, you have a right to high quality, personalised end-of-life care. That helps people to live in bodily comfort as much as possible until they die. This may involve palliative care in the treatment of pain as well as psychological and spiritual counselling. “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him” (James 1:12).

ABORTION

Genocide is in part defined as “the deliberate killing of a large number of people”. With the mass destruction of the unborn we are living in the middle of a genocide-like event clearly forbidden in the Word of God, “Thou shalt not kill” (Ex 20:13). It is happening with people either ignorant of the implications of it, or worse, actively supporting it.

Many people today are voicing the view, “Her Body, Her Choice”. This “Pro-choice” view is becoming a huge movement across the globe and abortion is increasingly being viewed as the personal choice of the woman. However, the Pro-life movement is also gaining a stronger voice. Today, many people are blind to the true horrors of abortion and are too quickly jumping in to “defend pro-choice rights” without actually knowing what they are campaigning for. “This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection” (2 Tim 3:1-3).

Since the passing of the Abortion Act in 1967, over 9 million unborn children have been murdered by abortion in the UK. In 2020 there were 209,917 abortions for women resident in England and Wales, the highest number since the Abortion Act was introduced. In most parts of the UK a woman can get a walk-in abortion for any reason, up to the 24-week stage, by

which time the baby is well formed and babies born at 24 weeks have survived. “For Thou hast possessed my reins: Thou hast covered me in my mother’s womb. I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are Thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from Thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth” (Ps 139:13-15).

During the Covid pandemic, new “DIY abortion pills” became available for women to take at home. Some women have died as a result of taking the pills and at least one baby is believed to have been born alive despite its mother taking a pill. Mothers have described their experiences as traumatic.

Many people see abortions as acceptable because they believe that the baby is not yet a living person. Therefore, ending a pregnancy is not killing a living person: “It’s just a lump of cells” is what many people say. But the heart of the baby begins to beat at 22 days in the womb and, by 9 weeks, the arms and legs are clearly formed, with ears, nose and other features beginning to develop. By 12 weeks, the baby is advanced enough to suck his or her thumb and, by 22 weeks, the baby is able to recognise voices from outside the womb. “Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations” (Jer 1:5). A whole person, body and soul, is in the womb. By ending a pregnancy at any time or any stage, they are taking away a developing life. A baby may, depending on the type of abortion, have its head crushed while being vacuumed out of the womb. This is clearly murder.

Abortion is illegal in only three countries worldwide, with some countries having tighter regulations than others. Women can justify their right to obtain an abortion by citing health issues in either mother or baby, financial hardship, rape, incest, accidental pregnancy and not wanting a baby. Abortions can lead to very serious mental health issues for women and, in 2019, a study showed that having an abortion raises the chance of depression by 63%. There is also a direct link between abortions and increased attempts at suicide.

What people today fail to see is that, although the baby is in the mother’s body, that life is not her body; it is another body in her body, therefore it is not hers to destroy. In a number of countries, when a pregnant woman is murdered, the charge against the culprit is “double homicide”, meaning that two people were killed and that the embryo is seen as a legal victim. If the embryo is recognised as a person in a court of law, why not in an abortion clinic?

Since abortion practitioners ask few questions and no background checks are required, it leads to the dangerous situation where human trafficking and sex-slave organisations can force their victims to have abortions if they become pregnant while under their control, and these situations go undetected. A description of abortion procedures is so filled with horror that it is not suitable for publication. Surely only a morally bankrupt and depraved society would allow something so barbaric? “These six things doth the Lord hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto Him: a proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, an heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that

be swift in running to mischief, a false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren” (Prov 6:16-19).

When a society legalises the killing of the unborn, then there is a serious problem with that society. God’s judgment is clearly on our nation: “Samaria shall become desolate; for she hath rebelled against her God: they shall fall by the sword: their infants shall be dashed in pieces, and their women with child shall be ripped up” (Hos 13:16); “Thus saith the Lord; For three transgressions of the children of Ammon, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they have ripped up the women with child of Gilead, that they might enlarge their border” (Amos 1:13); “Hazeal said, Why weepeth my lord? And he answered, Because I know the evil that thou wilt do unto the children of Israel: their strong holds wilt thou set on fire, and their young men wilt thou slay with the sword, and wilt dash their children, and rip up their women with child. And Hazeal said, But what, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing? And Elisha answered, The Lord hath shewed me that thou shalt be king over Syria” (2 Kings 8:12,13). Even the heathen Hazeal considered it an insult to suggest he would be guilty of such horrors.

There are numerous examples of abortions being harmful to the physical and mental health of the mother, as well as murdering the baby. Protests take place around the world to ensure that we have basic human rights. Surely the right to life for everyone is the most important right of all? The underlying but unwritten message of abortion is that a person’s value depends on how much they are wanted. If a baby is wanted and dies, it is a tragedy, but if an unborn baby is unwanted and is killed, it is a “right”. In the views of Scripture, all lives matter and all lives should be valued. “Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is His reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate” (Ps 127:3-5).

THE COVID PANDEMIC

At the time of writing, although it is still a matter of some concern, the Covid outbreak is nowhere near as dangerous as it was in the previous year. In this respect it has followed the path of historic pandemics such as the 1918-19 Spanish Flu. Although vaccines had a crucial role in lessening the death and suffering that would otherwise have occurred, it was the replacement of the Delta variant with the highly contagious, but less deadly, Omicron variant, that largely brought about this result. Various experts have expressed the opinion that there was no particular natural reason why the Omicron variant should have been less pathogenic than its predecessor. If it had been as deadly or worse than the Delta variant, the death rates from the pandemic would have multiplied rather than diminished. No public acknowledgement of the Lord’s gracious providence has been heard in this country. Words and phrases like “luck” and “evolution” have been used in regard to this turn of events, but the unbroken practical atheism of the public voice will not mention God. Dr Ivan

Muchecha, from a Covid treatment centre in Uganda, being interviewed on the YouTube channel of the medical education expert, Dr John Campbell, expressed the great concern and expectation that the health care facilities in Uganda would be wholly inadequate to deal with the expected Delta variant outbreak. That did not happen when the Delta was replaced by the Omicron variant. He said: “The Omicron variant is the vaccine that we did not make. . . . I am also Christian; I do not disallow the hand of God [in this].” Would there were more Christian experts and medical practitioners in the so-called developed world that would thus publicly acknowledge the goodness of God in the events of providence. “For them that honour Me I will honour, and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed” (1 Sam 2:30).

GOVERNMENT USE OF FEAR

So-called nudge tactics drawn from behavioural science have become more prominent in recent years. They assume that people are non-rational and that their behaviour should be influenced in a covert way that bypasses rational arguments. In January 2022 a group of 40 psychologists wrote a letter criticising the Government’s behavioural-science tactic of inflating fear amongst the population in response to Covid as “grossly unethical”. The letter said that it was “highly questionable whether a civilised society should knowingly increase the emotional discomfort of its citizens as a means of gaining their compliance”. It is a technique used in other aspects of Government policy also, and some have called for an independent enquiry. The Scientific Pandemic Insights Group on Behaviour (SPI-B), a Sage subgroup, was tasked with advising Government about how to maximise the impact of its pandemic communications strategy. On 22nd March 2020, it advised: “The perceived level of personal threat needs to be increased among those who are complacent, using hard-hitting emotional messaging”.

Former Government minister Lord Frost commented, “Politicians’ job is to have ideas and persuade people of them, not to try and trick people into doing things that they think are in their interests, because who says it’s in their interest? You are imposing your value judgements on others, and you shouldn’t do that without debate, out in the open.”

Scripture speaks of being transformed by the renewing of our mind not the bypassing of it. Such strategies of behavioural control fail to treat people according to the rational moral faculty with which they have been created. The impact of heightened fear on mental health disorder and increased anxiety amongst all ages has been widely acknowledged as the silent pandemic. It has been estimated that up to 300,000 people in the UK are facing heart-related illnesses due to post-pandemic stress disorder (PPSD).

No doubt the absence of belief in and a clear articulation of eternal realities has had its impact on these levels of fear. It is a precious thing to be able to say, “Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; He also is become my salvation” (Isa 12:2).

THE PROGRESS OF CENSORSHIP

The past two years have witnessed unusual precedents and also accelerated certain trends in society. One feature has been the growth of censorship, particularly online. During 2020 the government set up the Counter Disinformation Cell which had the task of scouring social media platforms and then working with the companies to censor information. Google, Facebook and Twitter have been working with US and UK governments to counter any data and any evidenced and reasoned arguments that question the official narrative. This has spawned much “fact checking”, which is arguably subjective. Things now well evidenced and accepted, such as the origin of the coronavirus, the questionable efficacy of lockdowns and cloth masks, were censored as conspiracy theories for a considerable period of time. More disturbingly, “peer-reviewed” scientific papers have been withdrawn from scientific journals solely on the basis that they did not fit the official narrative.

The current Online Safety Bill seeks to prohibit harmful content defined as having “a significant adverse physical or psychological impact on an adult of ordinary sensibilities”. The Bill gives the Secretary of State powers to designate categories of content that do not even meet this vague broad definition of “harm”.

Absolutely unrestricted freedom of speech is not ethical, but it seems that the restrictions on freedom of expression are not likely to be according to God’s law but rather to politically correct and convenient trends. It does not take too much latitude of thinking to envisage Biblical truth and morality falling under new definitions of “harmful” content. “He that speaketh truth sheweth forth righteousness: but a false witness deceit” (Prov 12:17).

CONSPIRACY THEORIES AND THE NECESSITY OF SOUND PRIVATE JUDGMENT

Many people have turned to alternative news sources as the reliability of official and mainstream sources of information becomes more questionable. There is a huge variation in the quality of internet sources, ranging from those which display integrity and appropriate expertise, through to those that are dishonest and entirely ignorant, motivated as they often are by fame or greed. Judgement is therefore required as to the value of any information we come across on a matter that concerns us. Sadly, such judgment is often lacking. The term “conspiracy theory” has been evoked to describe the propagation of an unverified, and often unverifiable, explanation for a happening or circumstance – a well-known example is the ridiculous notion that the earth is flat. During the Covid pandemic, conspiracy theories have been rife (such as that the virus was caused by 5G transmission masts) and may have had tragic consequences among those who were misled by false information. The confusion created by conspiracy theories is further exacerbated by the term being falsely and mischievously applied to reasonable and legitimate ideas. For example, the theory that the Covid virus arose through an escape of an experimental virus from a laboratory in Wuhan, China, was termed a

conspiracy theory by officialdom and relayed by the mainstream press; despite, as it was afterwards revealed, those same officials privately believing the plausibility of the theory, but denying it for political expediency. Indeed, the complexity of information concerning the pandemic has been a challenge for everyone.

What appears to have driven many to conspiracy theories is a deeply felt distrust of conventional sources of information. Daily there is deceit, very often quite subtle, practised by the mainstream media in promoting their favourite ideologies, and denigrating those whom they despise. Moreover, they typically promote immoral lifestyles and ideas, and are vehemently opposed to Biblical Christianity. Government ministers and officials practise hypocrisy in requiring the population to do that which they do not do themselves in secret; they engineer the release of information to suit their own purposes, and moreover display a manifest lack of humility in refusing to confess when they have been wrong, and to apologise for past damaging actions. These and other factors have led some entirely to reject them as a source of reliable information, including when all that they are doing is relaying reasonable and helpful information. This leaves a void that is often filled by errorists, whose deceits are typically anything but subtle. Common sense in all this is required to detect it, but often it appears to be lacking. A vital aspect of a child's education is for it to be of sufficient depth and breadth that such common sense is developed and nourished early in life. This is now more needful than ever. Our enemy's enemy is not necessarily, or even usually, our friend, as Jehoshaphat was brought to realise. Our friends are those who hold to the Word of God. We are bidden to "prove all things". Obviously, the more important the matter, the more we ought to be concerned to do so, but all things that concern us are to be proved. There are potentially very bad consequences, both spiritual and temporal, of neglecting sound private judgment. For example, the terrible consequences of persistent delusions are shown by those autocratic rulers who have the power to destroy lives under such delusions. At the very least there is the danger of bringing shame on ourselves, or even on the body of Christ, if we are seen to be promoters of falsehood.

CLIMATE CHANGE

In recent years the attention of the world has been directed to the perceived danger posed by climate change. Environmentalist pressure groups especially have succeeded in forcing the topic of climate change on to the mainstream political agenda in the West. In 2021, Glasgow hosted the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26), bringing together many heads of state, climate "experts" and campaigners to discuss how best to tackle climate change. The campaigners present the risks of climate change as cataclysmic, and promote the fear, especially among younger people, that there is now a threat to the world's continued existence. Their belief is that man-made pollution in the form of carbon emissions, in particular from the use of fossil fuels as a form of energy, is responsible for these changes to the climate. As a

consequence, man-made solutions which reduce these emissions are sought in order to prevent climate change. While good stewardship of the earth which God created and gave to the children of men (Psa 115:16) is a Scriptural principle, there is much about the climate change movement which is distinctly unhealthy from a Christian perspective.

First, evolutionary and atheistic beliefs with regard to the duration of the world must influence their assumptions. Believing the world to be millions of years old, they assume it is intended to last for a similar period of time. It is therefore likely that their attempts to measure the current rate of climate change, and their forecasts into the future are inaccurate. From Scripture we know that the earth is around 6000 years old, and although the precise time of its final destruction by God is not revealed, it can be deduced that now in the “last days” it will not be on a time scale vastly different to its present age. Even if the temperature of the earth has been increasing in recent years, it is not certain that this is the consequence of man’s action, nor that the effects of such a change will be destructive of life on earth.

Secondly, the same atheistic outlook ignores the fact that the Creator of the earth is also its Preserver and Governor in His works of Providence. Indeed, the climate change movement assumes to itself the power of God in believing that man can control the climate of the earth. Here is another example of man believing the devil’s lie, “Ye shall be as gods”. If it could be proven that there was a potentially deadly man-made climate change under way, our duty would be to turn to the Lord who controls all things to intervene for our deliverance. Of course, in that scenario man would have a duty to make any possible changes which would prevent climate change, but he would also be under obligation to seek the Lord’s guidance in and blessing upon these actions. Certainly, the disruptive and often destructive protests by groups such as Extinction Rebellion are clearly unscriptural methods. Surely God has not left it in the power of man to so alter the climate that the end of the world could come about as a result. Scripture teaches that the weather systems are entirely in the power of God who makes the sun to shine and the rain to fall where He will. It is entirely consistent with this view to acknowledge that man-made pollutions can be seriously detrimental to health and well-being at a local level.

Thirdly, the express promises of Scripture for the continuation of the world in a habitable state until God Himself will bring it to an end are completely disregarded by the climate change movement. God did bring a weather-riven cataclysmic destruction upon the old world in the form of the flood, but then He promised in covenant with Noah that He would never again “smite any more every thing living, as I have done. While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease” (Gen 8:21,22). God ought to be trusted to fulfil His promise, and it seems certain that the hysteria of the climate change movement concerning the catastrophic effects of climate change is in part the result of unbelief.

Fourthly, the popularity of the movement has taken on the nature of an almost religious belief in its assumptions and worth. Those who for scientific, economic, as well as religious reasons, question its validity are increasingly viewed as immoral and extreme, in much the same way as those who stand against clearly sinful practices such as homosexuality are treated. That the liberal, irreligious world has so zealously latched onto the climate change movement is itself a reason to be suspicious of its true nature. With some elements of the movement there is an apparent idolising of the earth itself, and these would make the earth as the place of man's habitation to be more valuable than men themselves.

Instead of an excessive fear of the effects of climate change, men would do well to fear the God who has threatened to destroy the earth by His own power, and who will come at last "in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power" (2 Thess 1:8,9).

HOMOSEXUAL "MARRIAGE" AND SAME SEX "BLESSINGS"

The perversion of homosexuality continues to blight our nation with many of the professedly Christian Churches taking further steps to accommodate this sin by permitting the performance of homosexual "marriages" and same sex "blessings".

The Church of Wales, the Methodist Church and the Episcopal Church of Scotland now perform same sex "marriages" and the Church of England is considering the introduction of services of "blessing" for same sex couples. It was announced in January, 2022, that the Archbishops of Canterbury and York have appointed Mr Stephen Knott, who entered into a same-sex "marriage" in July 2021 in a Scottish Episcopal Church, as their Secretary for Appointments. Mr Knott will oversee the process for selecting senior appointments in the Church. There has not been a conservative evangelical appointment to a diocesan or suffragan bishop position for years. Mr Knott's appointment is an indication that the archbishops are determined to follow and even promote the downward trend and have no intention of swimming against the current. In May 2021 the Church of Scotland's General Assembly voted 319 to 217 to approve draft legislation that would allow ministers and deacons to "marry" same sex couples if they wish. The legislation was then passed to presbyteries under the Barrier Act and a report will be submitted to the 2022 Assembly.

Outside of Protestantism, the Roman Catholic Church's Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith has said that it is impossible for God to bless sin. In line with traditional Romanist teaching, it noted erroneously that marriage between a man and a woman is a "sacrament" and therefore blessings cannot be extended to same sex couples: "For this reason, it is not licit to impart a blessing on relationships, or partnerships, even stable, that involve sexual activity outside of marriage (outside the indissoluble union of a man and a woman open in itself to the transmission of life), as is the case of the unions

between persons of the same sex". It is difficult to see how these sentiments can reconcile with the Pope's expressed support for same sex civil unions.

The world in its spiritual blindness sees homosexual "marriage" as a perfectly reasonable progression in this "enlightened" day. Anyone daring to express reservations or concerns about these sinful developments is labelled homophobic or abusive, and those who hold to a Biblical view are regarded as bigoted. The Scriptural position that homosexuality is sin is very clear. When the Pharisees questioned the Saviour about divorce, He replied, "Have ye not read, that He which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this a man shall leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?" (Mat 19:4,5). Part of the purpose of marriage is the procreation of children, something that is impossible for same sex couples. The Bible declares homosexual activity (along with any sexual intimacy outside marriage) to be sinful. There was very little evidence of homosexuality in Jewish society at the time of the Saviour's coming into the world and so we hear little of it in the gospels. However, when the apostles went out into the Gentile world, they came amongst cultures which tolerated homosexuality and therefore had to address it (Romans 1:26,27, 1 Cor 6:9-11, 1 Tim 1:10 and Jude 7).

Only a twisted exegesis can interpret the Scriptures differently. Why is it then that so many church leaders are prepared to embrace same sex "marriage" and same sex "blessings"? It is a sad fact that many of them do not regard the Bible as authoritative on this matter. They say that it is a book of its times, some of whose teachings are not appropriate for the 21st century. There is a lack of law and gospel preaching in the visible church. The Holy Spirit, who makes us to trust and love the Word of God, has been grieved away and a spirit of unbelief prevails. Others teach that the Holy Spirit leads mankind into new "truths". But, the Word of God assures us that nothing is to be taken from or added to the Canon of Scripture: "I am the Lord, I change not" (Mal 3:6); "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today and forever" (Heb 13:8); "If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book" (Rev 22:18,19).

The fear of man also appears to be bringing a snare to them. They fear that the rejection of homosexuality will incur labels of homophobia, bigotry and hate crime. Churchmen fear that taking a firm stance will drive people away. Regardless of the world's pressure, we must be faithful to the Lord and stand firm, and the world will take notice. Peter exhorts the professing Church in his day, "Having your conversation honest amongst the Gentiles: that whereas they speak against you as evil doers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation" (1 Pet 2:12). The church risks the fowler's snare by condoning sin and appealing to worldly tastes and fashions in its endeavours to swell congregations. Erring Church leaders may attempt to justify these compromises by twisting those Scriptures which direct

men to live peaceably with one another. But Christ did not come to send peace between His Church and sin (Luke 12:51). His Word is the supreme judge on this matter: “Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the Kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind [terms descriptive of homosexuality], nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the Kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor 6:9-11).

DEPRAVED TRENDS IN EDUCATION

Controversy recently erupted about a Scottish Government Health and Wellbeing Census for pupils in S4 (age 14) and above containing questions on sex, relationships and drugs. Some of the questions relating to sexual experience and activity are very detailed and explicit and have been widely quoted. There are more questions on sexual health than any other topic in the survey, nine out of a total of about sixty.

It had been delayed for two years due to concerns. Parents’ organisations and even the Children’s Commissioner have urged it to be withdrawn, but the Government has refused, saying it is voluntary for authorities, schools, parents and pupils. Around ten councils have withdrawn it and two are amending it, while some are undecided. Clearly it does not fulfil the objective of a census. The government justifies it as necessary because young people are engaging in such activity and the authorities need to know so as to provide the right guidance and support.

Some object that the questions are too intimate; others that pupils are personally identifiable, and therefore it is not entirely confidential and so in potential breach of human rights. Others consider that it makes young people who tick “No” feel that they are missing out and should be curious about such experiences.

The irony is, however, that the RSHP (Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood) resource (www.rshp.scot) used in schools is much more explicit and detailed from a younger age and promotes pornography and every kind of sexual activity as well as other agendas. Yet very few protests have been raised in connection with this even though it continues to be rolled out virtually wholesale across Scotland. Viewed from one perspective, the survey is only gaining an understanding of whether the RSHP teaching is being put into practice. Content in English schools is frequently objectionable in the same way. Analyses of various RSE (Relationships and Sex Education) resources are available on <http://www.rsereview.org>

In the autumn of 2021, an LGBT Inclusive Education curriculum was launched for all schools through a phased implementation approach. The group Time for Inclusive Education has been funded to manage this on behalf of the Government. This enables schools to embed LGBT and equalities themes across the curriculum and not just in health and wellbeing courses. It

provides resources for primary and secondary schools. This is being heavily promoted in February LGBT History month as well as June Pride month through films and videos. These resources glorify the movement to campaign for “LGBT rights”. The resources and the pressure to implement them can only be expected to grow over time. What a solemn obligation lies on us to give the young people of this generation right knowledge as well as to warn them against the wicked counsel that is everywhere pressed on them.

“When wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul; discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee: to deliver thee from the way of the evil man, from the man that speaketh froward things; who leave the paths of uprightness, to walk in the ways of darkness; who rejoice to do evil, and delight in the frowardness of the wicked; whose ways are crooked, and they froward in their paths” (Prov 2:10-15).

YOUNG PEOPLE AND PORNOGRAPHY

Breaches of the Seventh Commandment are among the crying sins of the age in which we live. The widespread availability of unclean images, especially via the internet and social media, have provided an awful avenue for sins against the Seventh Commandment in bringing men “not only to do the same, but [to] have pleasure in them that do them” (Rom 1:32). According to various reports the providers of these unclean materials earn around 97 billion US dollars per annum. Truly, God made man upright but he has sought out many inventions. The issue of young people having ready access to such degrading material clearly needs to be addressed, but with young people having ready access to the internet and social media, it appears to be difficult for the authorities to implement effective restrictions. While it is not illegal for children and young people under 18 to watch pornography, it is against the law to show anyone under the age of 16 pornographic material or give them access to it. It is also illegal for anyone under 18 to share explicit images or films of themselves or another young person, even if it was shared with their permission. Young people have almost unlimited access to the internet; most have smart phones and many have tablets or laptops, some of which have been provided for educational purposes by their schools.

A further cause of deep concern is the huge amount of indecent images involving children which are currently in circulation. Simon Bailey, Chief Constable of Norfolk, said there were 7000 such online images in the 1990s in the early days of the internet, but he believes that now a conservative estimate would be 100 million. After terrorism, sexual abuse is the most critical issue affecting the police. “There has been an 80% increase in cases in the last three years, with police carrying out 70,000 child sexual abuse investigations last year,” Mr Bailey said.

He did not believe that there were necessarily more would-be abusers in this generation, but that they had more opportunities. Given the accelerating decline of true religion and the growing power of sin, it would not be surprising if both the number of abusers and the avenues for them to sin had

increased. He believes that the behaviour is driven by pornography: “Over 85% of 14-year-olds have access to a smart device. Put in porn, 3 clicks, and you’re accessing in a way that you simply never used to. Children grow up watching pornography thinking it is normal.” Technology companies could help the situation. It is not possible to gamble on Betfair (an online gambling company) unless you can demonstrate you are 18. Why cannot this same test be applied to companies that provide access to pornographic material?

John Brown, head of tackling child sexual abuse at the NSPCC (National Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children), said, “The extent of sexual harassment, inappropriate sexual behaviour and in the worst cases violence by children is extremely concerning. Exposure to extreme, sometimes sexually violent and degrading material, is now only a few clicks away and this can warp young people’s views of what is normal and acceptable sexual behaviour. Sexting (sending sexual text messages) is now the norm for many young people who may find once they start sending explicit pictures of themselves the situation spirals out of control.” The world’s solution to these problems is fundamentally flawed when it refuses to recognise sin as the root cause, and in as far as remedies such as “sex education” are advocated. Children’s charities have implored the government to bring in age verification. It is true that tech-savvy 16-year-olds may get round any barrier. However, many youngsters are first exposed to porn unintentionally, so it may stop a small child from blundering across grossly inappropriate materials.

There is no coherent government policy, nor any mature recognition that this material is bad for you, and it is particularly repugnant that children are being corrupted. There is no excuse or reason for this material to be available. Software which blocks copyright infringing content, depending on the method used, can block up to 95% of such content from the UK. It is surely not beyond the wit of the authorities to find ways of blocking this degrading material. One may question whether it is more the will that is lacking rather than the means.

PUBERTY BLOCKERS AND ASSOCIATED ISSUES

The confusion and delusion regarding sex and gender has continued in Scotland. The Court of Session ruled that the bizarre guidance in the Scottish census, allowing people to declare their sex contrary to their birth certificate, was not illegal; but in a separate ruling the Court declared that the legal definitions of men and women remain biological. Following the ruling, the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) has been asked to investigate the appointment of Mridul Wadhwa – a man who “identifies” as female – as chief executive of Edinburgh Rape Crisis Centre. The job had been advertised, naturally enough, for a woman.

A bill banning so-called “conversion therapy” is likely in the Scottish Parliament but the campaign has run into trouble because the notion of conversion therapy has been extended from trying to help homosexuals revert to normality to trying to help “transgender” people back to reality. While the feminists and others are more than happy to ban the former (especially

Christian attempts to warn homosexuals and to pray for them), they are not happy that ordinary attempts to counsel children with “gender dysphoria” might run foul of the law. The ungodly opposition to sexual morality remains as strong as ever, but the voice of common sense regarding the distinction between the sexes is welcome.

In September 2021, sad to say, the UK Appeal Court overturned a judicial review which had required the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust “Gender Identity Development Service” to stop giving puberty blockers to children under 16. It is to be hoped, however, that the adverse exposure and publicity has put some check on the reckless and evil activities of the Trust.

SABBATH OBSERVANCE COMMITTEE’S REPORT

Convener: Rev R MacLeod

THE Christian Sabbath is the Lord’s Day. God rested on the seventh day of creation and hallowed it. There would be no day so momentously important in the history of time as the day God rested from all His work of creation; that is, there would be no event so momentous until the day when Christ rose again from the dead, having accomplished the redemption of His people and achieving the ends of His coming into the world to save sinners. “This is the Day that God has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it” (Psalm 118:24). In 2022, Her Majesty the Queen will become the first British Monarch to celebrate a Platinum Jubilee after 70 years of service. For this we have much reason to be thankful to the Most High and we wish gratefully to celebrate this unique event. But it is with deep sadness that we learn that public festivities to mark this event in June this year, will be held on a number of consecutive days which include the Lord’s Day (5th June 2022). A letter expressing the sadness felt by the Lord’s people was sent to the Queen. No reply has been received.

The Sabbath Day is a day when we have opportunity, protected by the divine law of our Maker and Saviour, to pay the revenue of praise that is due Him. In the last Report to the Synod we said that the Committee was preparing letters to send to the leaders of the retail industry regarding the requirements of the divine law summarily comprehended in the Fourth Commandment. The opening for business again, as the Covid restrictions on commerce were being relaxed, seemed an opportune moment to exhort this industry to change its ways in respect of Sabbath commerce. Among other things, the letter made the following points: that the revenue of the retail industry is blighted by crimes such as shop-lifting; that they who buy and sell on the Lord’s Day are themselves robbing God of His revenue of praise in worship on that day. The letter reminded them that the losses sustained during the pandemic ought to show them that God our Creator and Redeemer has a holy jealousy for His Day. We pointed out that for the good of their industry and the people of the United Kingdom, they should use the present resumption of business as an

opportunity to cease Sabbath trading. This letter was sent to the following organisations: the Scottish Retail Consortium; the Independent Retailers Confederation; and the British Retail Consortium (BRC). These organisations represent thousands of retailers. An acknowledgment of our letter was received from the BRC only. The letter was also sent to the Livingstone Designer Outlet, which is the largest retail mall in Scotland; Buchanan Galleries (Glasgow); and the Chief Executive Officer at John Lewis and Partners. We also wrote in the same terms to the Union for Shop, Distributive, and Allied Workers; to Mulberry Media which publishes “news and market intel for UK retailers and industry watchers”. The Scottish Government’s Minister for Business, Fair Work & Skills was also a recipient of our letter which called for the cessation of commerce on the Sabbath Day. An official letter was received from the Scottish Government, largely justifying Sabbath working.

It seems inevitable to us that this Government and this Industry will bring more wrath on our cities for a general principle of God’s government is expressed in the words of the Apostle Paul: “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting” (Gal 6:7,8). It should not surprise us if we find that the empty shelves seen in our grocery stores in the past year were a warning to us from the voice of God in Providence, calling on this industry, this Government and this nation to repentance for the desecration of the Sabbath Day, lest a worse thing come upon us. “I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said unto them, What evil thing is this that ye do, and profane the Sabbath day? Did not your fathers thus, and did not our God bring all this evil upon us, and upon this city? yet ye bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the Sabbath” (Neh 13:17,18).

The Committee complained to Ebay regarding their provocative advertising slogan “Sundays are for money-makers”; and to the company running the Glenelg to Skye Ferry which began carrying fee paying passengers on the Sabbath for the first time; and assisted in the written protest to the Ross County Football Club regarding Sabbath matches.

The Bookroom manager reported that there have now been three printings of the newly published book, *The Day God Made*, totalling 371 copies, and that so far 206 copies have been sold. Mr Smith said that “the book has proved very popular with an American distributor which has ordered a significant portion of those sold so far”. He said that the “feedback has been positive”, commenting finally that, “it is seen as a very useful book particularly for younger readers”. There were a couple of typographical errors in the first printing which have since been corrected.

The Committee met in February to discuss future projects for the defence of the Sabbath. We have reason to be thankful to the Most High for the continuing love for God’s day in our denomination, and how that is reflected in the zeal and energy brought by its members to the Sabbath Observance Committee.

JEWISH AND FOREIGN MISSIONS COMMITTEE'S REPORT

Convener: Rev D A Ross

OUR Church's work in Africa in 2022 continues in the same spirit it began, seeking to discharge Christ's commission, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature". It was not by chance that the Free Presbyterian Church came in contact with Mr John Radasi, an African who himself had come under the power of the gospel and was deeply anxious to be an instrument in the hand of God in bringing the everlasting gospel to his homeland. After being trained by our Church for the ministry, he settled in Africa in a little known country area named Ngwenya, which lay about 30 miles from Bulawayo in Matabeleland, a vast expanse of land in what was then Rhodesia and where the Matabele people dwelt.

Rev John Radasi's gospel labours among sinners immersed in heathenish ideas and practices began to bear fruit. By the blessing of the Holy Spirit the desires of a number of them began to settle on Christ Jesus the Saviour and they were led to receive and rest on Him alone for pardon and peace with God their Creator, Lawgiver and Judge. Thus there was the beginning of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland in Africa.

From these small beginnings we have, as is well known, not only many congregations but also large institutions of education and medical care. But the more important result of these small beginnings is the continuance in Africa of the gospel of Christ originally preached by Rev J B Radasi.

This is not to say that our Church in Zimbabwe was without fiery trials, attacks on the truth and the need to take disciplinary action in church courts. There will be no doubt trials of this sort in the church of Christ to the end of time, but despite these troubles, God's directions as to worship, doctrine and practice continue to be followed by our Church in Zimbabwe by the mercy and grace of God.

Also, while in the providence of God our mission institutions are excellent handmaids to assist the work of the gospel, if for any reason these institutions had to discontinue, this would not in any way bring about the cessation of the work of the gospel on our mission. There is a core of believers there who are determined to continue with the preaching and spreading of the gospel of God's grace. With God's blessing this will ensure the enduring of the gospel there. "If ye walk in My statutes, and keep My commandments, and do them; I will set My tabernacle among you" (Lev 26:3,11).

As a Mission, and over the years of our existence in Africa, we have experienced many times the arrival and departure of personnel – ministers, doctors, nurses, teachers, administrators and tradesmen. The Mission is faced again with the loss of a greatly valued mission worker, Miss Norma MacLean, Deputy Head of John Tallach High School, Ingwenya, for 30 years. Due to pressing family commitments she has had to resign. It was with a heavy heart

that the Committee accepted her resignation. Her skills were much valued not only in teaching in the departments of the school but also in carrying out numerous duties throughout the mission. Our good wishes and prayerful desires for Miss MacLean follow her as she undertakes her new engagements, and we assure her that the good Lord will, as always, supply all her needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. Miss Maclean's position as Deputy Head will be now taken by a local person, Mr N Khumalo, who is proving suitable for the post.

Sadly, we lost by death our Mission Administrator, Mr Melusi Mpofo. He suffered from a variety of illnesses, which limited his work, but in the end it was the Covid infection which ushered him, and others connected with our Mission, into the eternal world. Mr Mpofo had a great ability for organisational action which benefited all the departments of the Mission. The Foreign Missions Committee has expressed its deep sympathy with his family in their great loss. This vacant post of Mission Administrator has been readily filled with a highly qualified person, Mr T B Mpofo, who is proving able for the broad field of administration work.

There is of course, a large workforce of local workers on the Mission, from skilled labourers to highly qualified employees such as the Headmaster of the Ingwenya High School, Mr B Ncube, and the Superintendent of the Thembeiso Children's Home, Mr B Maphala, and many others in different administrative posts and a variety of other demanding positions. The financial cost of the workforce proves to be by far the largest outlay, approximately two thirds of all expenditure.

We must never forget the extraordinary, kind providence of the Lord over many years in supplying our financial needs. It has taken millions of pounds to establish our mission institutions and churches, and this through the giving of our Church people at home and abroad and on the Mission, and of many friends outwith the Church. However, of late decades, this work has been financed mainly by the giving of our friends in Holland through their Mbuma Zending Board, which of course respects our autonomy on our Mission, listens attentively to the presentation of our needs, makes inquiries concerning our activities, and makes appropriate suggestions where they see fit, which is valued by the Foreign Missions Committee.

It is with a great degree of amazement that we look back over many years to their unflinching help in keeping our Mission afloat and expanding; and at times it was not easy for them to rise to our needs. In fact, at this time, it is the givings of our Dutch friends which mainly sustain the Mission financially. Thanks be to God for this wonderful gift.

The extent of our work in Africa is best grasped from Mission reports compiled by ministers of congregations and the heads of mission departments. The work of the gospel there is deeply appreciated by those who know the value of their immortal souls, but the contribution made by the institutions for the well being of pupils and patients is also much valued, not only by those who immediately benefit, but by local communities and government officials.

Indeed, by communicating the Christian religion by these means a valuable contribution is made to the whole nation, especially when even one person comes to a saving knowledge of Christ; this is truly a great asset to any nation.

It is cause for thankfulness that religious education is compulsory in schools. However, when there are many shades of religious views circulating this can bring problems from government departments, but so far we have been able in the good providence of God to hold by the teachings of the Word of God. We are aware that in some Christian institutions in Africa it was expected of employees to excuse homosexual views, leaving certain Christians with no other option than to cease being employed by these erring institutions.

Our Church profoundly appreciates the presence and work of overseas mission workers, such as Dr A Snoek, Sister W Guersten and since 2020, Doctor C Janse, all from Holland; also Miss Kerkhoff from Canada who teaches mathematics and other subjects in the High School. From time to time Miss M MacAskill and Miss P Beukers, past members of staff, visit Thembiso Children's Home for a period and administer the Thembiso Trust for those pupils who have completed their stay in the Home and are faced with having to leave and settle elsewhere to make their livelihood. The Trust finds suitable work and living quarters for them, and encourages them to keep in contact with the Church and live by their Christian upbringing in the Home. This work has not been in vain; some do indeed keep in contact with the Church, like some who have left our other institutions. It is gratifying to see them make the Church their spiritual abode.

There is also cause for thankfulness for the harmonious relationship between the home Committee and the committees on the mission field and the resulting progression of mission commitments. We appreciate the labours and diligence of all personnel, especially the enormous input and planning of our Mission Co-ordinator, Mr Hugh MacKenzie, and also of the General Treasurer, Mr W Campbell, who has to deal with the financial complexities which arise from a highly unstable economy.

After an existence of over 100 years, the Mission has been fully functional for some time now with ministers, elders, deacons, members and adherents and a Presbytery. It is with a sense of indebtedness to the Most High that we now see Mr T Mwedzi licensed to preach the gospel. On the occasion, Committee member Rev J B Jardine was able to be present in difficult circumstances, thus making the Zimbabwe Presbytery once again quorate. We are grateful to him for all his work there and on his return.

Due principally to the presence of school pupils, some of our congregations can be in the region of 1000 persons. These large numbers being exposed to the gospel is a blessing indeed; however, we need something more, and ever will, and that is the work of the Holy Spirit. Christ said, "No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him" (John 6:44).

We are also appreciative of the main ongoing work in Israel – the all important revision of the Delitzsch New Testament, which is nearing completion. Rev J L Goldby is the lead person in the project, which is

supervised by the Trinitarian Bible Society. It is by no means a small work and is also costly, as all Bible translations and revisions tend to be. But the end result is a faithful version of the Book of books, ready to be sent out to a lost world, that sinners may have eternal life in Christ. Also the translation of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* into Hebrew is now completed and the *Shorter Catechism* is expected to follow shortly. Thankfully Mr Goldby managed, after a long absence, to go to Israel in early March. He has been granted a visa for another two years, which he could not have obtained had he not gone to Israel.

We are much indebted to the Trinitarian Bible Society for the vast amount of work they do to forward the gospel in Africa and which is highly beneficial to our Mission. Already they have produced an Ndebele Bible and hope to print a second edition. Also they have completed a new translation of the Shona Bible, and have published it. The Trinitarian Bible Society writes, "Shona is one of three major languages spoken in Zimbabwe and is the language predominantly spoken by 70% of its 16 million inhabitants. The Shona people mainly live in an area of Zimbabwe known as Mashonaland. . . . When mission work was begun in that area by the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland in Zimbabwe in 1981, a reliable Shona Bible was still needed. In 2009 the TBS began a project in conjunction with the FPCS to translate the Word of God into Shona from the Hebrew Masoretic and Greek Received Texts, with reference to the Shona Union Bible. A New Testament was published in 2014 and was well received. We pray that the Lord will continue to bless His Word as it goes forth, now in its entirety."

In view of all these gospel activities by our Church's Jewish and Foreign Missions, with the valued input of others, how appropriate is this truth: "The Lord gave the word: great was the company of those that published it" (Psalm 68:11).

ZIMBABWE MISSION REPORTS

Rev S Khumalo

BULAWAYO REPORT

When 2021 began, we had a reason to say as we began another year in time that: Hitherto hath the Lord helped us. In January 2021, the Covid-19 infections had risen and a strict lockdown was announced and effected by the authorities. This affected church gatherings and this was to the people of God "as the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God" (Psa 42:1). It was a tormenting time to thirsty souls, but our comfort was that the Lord who was with Joseph in prison shall ever be with His people, and we were praying to be kept under the Lord's protection, under His wings.

On 2nd March, the lockdown was relaxed, allowing for Church gatherings of up to 50 people and abiding by Covid-19 protocols. It was a great relief to

at least resume services. As time passed, a further relaxation of regulations was announced, allowing up to 50% of building capacity, with a vaccination mandate. It was a great relief as we were now in a position to make preparations for our December communion, which we had not held for almost two years. We utilised whatever opportunity arose for the resumption of services and we are thankful that the Lord has opened the door for us to gather for worship uninterrupted up to the present moment.

We continue to have services in all our Bulawayo stations: Lobengula, Nkulumane, Mahatshula, Mguza and Thembiso. We held our communion in December for the first time in two years and that was during the rise of a new wave of Omicron Covid variant infections. We were thus worried that the communion might be called off, but thankfully worship gatherings were not affected by the announced regulations. However we were limited to only one service per day as a precaution. The communion was held successfully in December although we had some from the congregation who were down with Covid. In May we had a kirk session meeting, where one man was accepted for membership and a child for the sacrament of baptism. In December, two men were accepted for the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. In spite of all these difficulties we are going through, our encouragement is in the Lord. The congregation was not spared by death as two of our members, Mr M Sibanda and Mr A Bhebhe, were removed from among us and called to eternity. This left a big void in the congregation, but also it reminds us of how soon we all pass in this world to eternity.

In conclusion, we are thankful for the prayers and material support we receive from the JMFC, the Mbumba Zending Committee, the Lord's people and the church at large. May the Lord prosper His cause even in the darkest of times. "Have respect unto the covenant: for the dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty" (Psa 74:20).

INGWENYA MISSION REPORT

As we look back to the past year, we have a reason to be thankful to the Most High. "O give thanks unto the Lord: for He is good, for His mercy endureth for ever" (Psa 107:1). From the death of Rev N Sibanda and the travel restrictions brought about as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Zimbabwe Presbytery became defunct. We were thankful when the Lord by His Providence opened a way for Rev J B Jardine to come to Zimbabwe, to enable the revival of the Presbytery. This was done at a meeting at Ingwenya, with the following Presbytery meeting held in Bulawayo at Lobengula church. The appointment of the following ordinary meeting was at Thembiso church, where Mr T Mwedzi, a divinity student who had finished his studies, was licensed. We are now awaiting his Ordination and Induction in April, God willing. During this time, Rev Jardine was based at Ingwenya and he was supplying Ingwenya, Cameron and Insiza. He also visited Mbumba, Zenka, Nkayi, Lobengula and Mahatshula.

Ingwenya has five stations: Ingwenya, Cameron, Gadade, Insiza and Inyathi. Ingwenya was not spared from the restrictions and challenges induced by the Covid-19 pandemic. We are thankful that the services progressed well in all the preaching stations. The biggest challenge we have is the shortage of labourers. The Lord said, “Pray ye therefore to the Lord of the harvest that he will send forth labourers into his harvest” (Mat 9:38).

Ingwenya had not held a communion for two years following the outbreak of Covid-19 and the subsequent restrictions imposed. We are praying and hoping to have it in March 2022, DV. This longing has been expressed by the Lord’s people in the congregation: “When shall I come and appear before God?” (Psa 42:2). It was the same situation in July at Cameron, when they were in the midst of preparing for their communion and further lockdown restrictions were announced and the communion was cancelled. We are hopeful that should the present situation continue, we will have the communion in July, DV. At Inyathi, the communion is held in November.

As time passes, we continue to notice the losses in the congregations through death. At Ingwenya we lost Mr Sikhosana, and at Cameron we lost Mr Mkomazi, a deacon. May the Lord raise up men and women who will fill the vacant pews in our places of worship, but not just that; may people be effectually called by His grace. At Inyathi, the elder who was there was widowed and thereafter fell ill, staying alone. He was then taken to Mbembesi to be taken care of by his son. We are thankful there is a professing man who keeps the doors of the house of the Lord open. I occasionally supply Inyathi from Bulawayo.

I would like to thank the men who keep the doors of the house of God open for weekday prayer meetings and on the Lord’s Day. It is in the Lord that we put our trust. “For who hath despised the day of small things? For they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the Lord, which run to and fro through the whole earth” (Zec 4:10).

MBUMA MISSION REPORT

As I write this report, I am drawn to look and think about the opportunities and privileges laid before us in abundance by God’s Providence in the gospel. One is reminded of the time when the Lord made an awakening warning to the Pharisees, saying, “The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgement with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here” (Mat 12:41). This is the message proclaimed in all our institutions and places of worship every day when the work of the day is begun at the hospital and clinics, and wherever that opportunity is availed.

Mbuma has 15 stations: Mbuma, Lutsha, Mpakama, Magazi, Singeni, Lukampa, Mthoniselwa, Singangombe, Simbo, Gampakalala, Makhwatheni, Somakantana, Sikhaleni, Vova and Bhubhu. The doors of the houses of worship in these places are mostly kept open, though services are alternated in

a few due to shortage of labourers. As interim moderator, I am thankful to the office bearers and catechists, who help to keep the doors open on weekdays and Sabbaths.

The work of the catechists in the hospital, clinics and the community is commendable. For no one passes through our hospital and clinics without hearing of the great disease of the soul and the remedy for it, which is the blood of Christ. It is also so in our church-run schools, where the Word of God is taught to children who come from different backgrounds by teachers employed for that purpose. May the Lord bless all these endeavours for the souls of young and old.

In the good Providence of God, Mbumba had its two communions last year, in April and October. In April, we had to split the gathering into two groups. The first attended services in the morning and the second group attended the afternoon service. In October, lockdown restrictions were relaxed and we had two services per day and it all went well without any incidence of infection during the communion. I am very thankful to Dr Snoek and her staff at the hospital, who gave advice on the health issues and worked tirelessly to see to it that all was done to protect from Covid-19 infection everyone that came for the services. Three males and one female were accepted for the sacrament of the Lord's Supper and one male was accepted for the sacrament of Baptism. It is very encouraging when the Lord shows forth His work in these dark days. "While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light" (John 12:36).

NKAYI REPORT

No history of the church in the Shangani reserve can be complete without including the beginning of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland in Nkayi. It started at Ingwenya, then moved to Nkayi, then to the rest of the Shangani reserve and parts of Kwekwe district. Churches under Nkayi are as follows: Nkayi, Mathetshaneni, Mathendele, Manomano, Donsa and Nkaba. In all these stations, services are held every Sabbath. Communions are held at Nkayi in January and June and Donsa in May. Nkayi, like Mbumba, had its communion in June 2021 and January 2022. In June, the announcement for a lockdown was made on the Saturday of the communion, coming into effect on the Monday. Thankfully, we finished the communion without any incidents. In both communions, there was no camping. Of particular mention is Manomano, a congregation of mostly ladies who have gathered their resources and built their place of worship with the help of Nkayi Deacons' Court. Rev Jardine visited the church during his visit here. Nkuba also built their church themselves. I hope these congregations will be an encouragement to others.

I am very thankful to the elders, who show love and faithfulness in their duties. Of special note is Mr J B Mpofu who, from his experience in the knowledge of doctrine and practice of the church, helps and guides the smooth supply of all these stations, with his willingness to give advice whenever it is needed. He has however lost his eyesight, but his memory is still good and he

still takes services. “Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing” (Psa 92:13,14). Three deacons were added in the congregations from Mathetshaneni, Nkayi and Nkuba. “His name shall endure for ever: His name shall be continued as long as the sun: and men shall be blessed in Him: all nations shall call Him blessed” (Psa 72:17).

ZENKA MISSION REPORT

Zenka was one of the first Mission stations after Nkayi. It has a rich history in the expansion of the gospel and church-run schools in what used to be Shangani Reserve. Many God-fearing men and women were from Zenka, and the witness of the church still continues there to the present day. Like all our mission and preaching stations, Zenka was not spared from the trying and difficult times of the Covid-19 pandemic. Zenka has five preaching stations. The furthest is in the farms and is not supplied regularly because of the distance and transport challenges.

Mr M A Mpfu, who was an elder of the congregation, passed away in July 2021. It was a great loss to the Mission as he was Mission Administrator as well as Elder at the Zenka congregation. He left a big gap as he used to supply the farm station regularly and use his own transport. I am thankful to the elders and professing men, who help to keep the doors of worship open.

Zenka, like other stations, had not held its communion for two years until recently. At the end of February 2022, the communion was held and well attended by a crowd of about 300 people on Sabbath. What was even more remarkable was that all ages were present, especially children. It reminded us of the old days when the days of a communion season had an impact in the communities. What we pray for and need the most is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The Zenka charge is currently vacant and I am Interim Moderator. The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few. It is our prayer that the Lord will, in His own time raise up faithful young men to enter into the work of the ministry. “O Lord, revive Thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy” (Hab 3:2).

NEW CANAAN REPORT

The interruptions of Covid-19 and lockdowns did not spare our congregations in Zvishavane and the neighbouring districts where our places of worship are scattered. We have reason to be thankful to the Most High that He did hide His people under the shadow of His wings in that we have been enabled to pass through to another year in time. Disruptions brought about by Covid-19 and restrictions were the order of things in the past year, but during the last half of the year, things improved and restrictions were relaxed to enable services to be held in all our preaching stations, albeit under strict Covid protocol observance. It is pleasing to note that normality is returning.

A communion was held in Chiedza after almost two years without having one. It was a great joy to the people of God to remember the Lord's death as He has commanded in His Word. A communion was also held in New Canaan in January 2022. We were very thankful when Mr T Mwedzi finished his studies and was licensed to preach the everlasting gospel. We are waiting eagerly and prayerfully for that time when he will be ordained to the congregation wherever the Lord will direct him. I personally thank the Lord for His good Providence that the coming of Rev Mwedzi has been of a great assistance at a time when communions have resumed. It will also be a great relief to me when his ordination and induction takes place, as I am presently the Interim Moderator of all stations in Zimbabwe. Above all, I am thankful to the Lord that He has kept me by His grace in strength and health to enable me to perform these duties bestowed upon me. The elders and professing men have been helpful in faithfully keeping the doors to the houses of worship open on weekday prayer meetings and on the Lord's day. Rev Mwedzi helps a lot in supplying Zvishavane town church, New Canaan and other stations whenever he can.

“Arise shine, for thy light is come and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For behold the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall rise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee” (Isaiah 60:1-2).

JOHN TALLACH HIGH SCHOOL REPORT

Miss Norma B MacLean

DURING 2021, for the second year running, normal activities at the school were disrupted by the continuing impact of the coronavirus pandemic: only one full term of face-to-face learning was possible at school in 2020; in 2021 it was possible to have two terms of learning at school for the non-examination classes. As one of these terms was an examination term, the examination classes were only able to have one full term of teaching at school during the year.

An attempt was made to conduct online lessons during the Term 2 lockdown but this had mixed success. Many children did not have access to suitable devices and, as data is expensive, many failed to keep up with the lessons. WhatsApp was the most accessible method for most but far from ideal for teaching purposes. Teachers are to be commended for their diligence and inventiveness in trying to keep learning going in these difficult circumstances.

The Bible Knowledge programme obviously had to be adjusted to fit the reduced school year and this will carry forward into 2022 which it is hoped will be a more normal year allowing an opportunity to catch up. The Ministry of Education introduced stringent regulations about the movement of children and how they were allowed to be mixed. These regulations meant that,

apart from those who were vaccinated, it was not possible to mix the children with the congregation for church services, so attendance had to be limited to a few of the Form 6 learners. It was also not possible to gather the children together for full-school assemblies. These restrictions have been slightly relaxed in Term 1 of 2022, so that it is now possible to have half of the school at each church service on Sabbath. Sabbath School classes were able to resume, however, so the Scripture memory and Catechism programme could resume.

As in previous years, Form 1 pupils study the Books of Genesis and Exodus up to the deliverance from Egypt. Form 2 pupils have been studying the Gospel of Mark but there are plans to change this to a broader study of Scripture. Form 3 and 4 pupils study the Gospel of Matthew and the Acts of the Apostles for the Cambridge examination. Lower 6 pupils study the Gospel of John and Upper 6 pupils the Epistle to the Romans; these groups also study the *Westminster Confession of Faith*.

It is a cause for great thankfulness that there was no coronavirus outbreak at the school during 2021. Several members of staff were ill with Covid, some of them seriously, during the Term 2 national lockdown, but all recovered and returned to duty when schools reopened for Term 3.

Enrolment

Enrolment in Term 1 of 2022 was 586 learners: 301 girls and 285 boys. There are 35 day learners and 551 boarders. Three boys and one girl with varying degrees of low vision benefit from the services of the VH specialist teacher and the facilities of the Resource Room. Due to the delay in issuing the 2021 'O' Level examination results, the Lower Six classes have not yet enrolled.

Examination Results

ZIMSEC

After a second year of disruption to education because of restrictions imposed in an attempt to control the coronavirus pandemic, ZIMSEC, the national examinations board, again delayed the timetable for the 'O' and 'A' Level examinations. The 2021 examinations began later in the year than normal and carried over into January/February 2022. The results have not yet been published.

ZIMSEC results for 2020 were of a surprisingly high standard despite the challenges of conducting the teaching/learning process during the first lockdowns:

'O' Level ZIMSEC 2020

The overall pass rate was 94.89%, with no individual subject scoring less than 75%. Twelve subjects scored 90% or above, 4 of them scoring 100%. 58 learners were awarded at least five 'A' passes. However, the number of learners awarded at least nine 'A's was not as stellar as normal, as was to be expected given the circumstances: nine candidates were awarded nine 'A's and three were awarded ten 'A's.

'A' Level ZIMSEC 2020

The overall pass rate (i.e. candidates who passed two or more subjects) was again 100%. The lowest pass rate for any subject was 94.12%; seven subjects scored 100%.

Cambridge International Examinations (CIE)

These proceeded as normal. However, due to the financial challenges which the majority of parents now face, there was a significant reduction in the number of candidates enrolling for both the 'O' and 'A' Level examinations.

'O' Level CIE Results

Religious Studies: The Religious Studies results in 2021 were extremely disappointing but this was undoubtedly due to the effect of the cumulative lockdowns in 2020-2021: candidates only had face-to-face learning in school in two out of five terms. It was also clear that many candidates, faced with this situation in all of their registered subjects, decided to concentrate on what they perceived to be their core subjects.

No of candidates: 149 Pass rate: 51% No of 'A's: 10

This result was very disappointing for the Bible Knowledge teachers who worked very hard to maintain the usual standard and credit is due to them for their efforts.

Eighteen candidates registered for other subjects:

*No of subjects written: 93 Pass rate: 87% No of 'A*s': 13 No of 'A's: 16*

'A' Level Results

Eight candidates registered for the Cambridge 'A' Level examinations in 2021: a total of 22 subjects were written, with a 100% pass rate.

Finance

Hyper-inflation and the decline of the Zimbabwe dollar both still march on relentlessly: the official rate of exchange to the US dollar was \$17.35 at the beginning of 2021; at the time of writing it is \$130.15. This of course means that all costs are rising rapidly and fees have to be adjusted accordingly. The full boarding fee in Term 1 of 2021 was \$27,800 per boarder. This has spiralled to an average of \$82,225 per boarder in term 1 of 2022.

Almost all parents understand the economic pressures on the boarding school budget and are philosophical about the increases. The fees collected from the parents pay for a significant proportion of the day-to-day operational expenses in the school including 20 members of staff. 30 teachers are paid for by the Ministry of Education, but there are five vacancies which the Ministry is currently unable to fill. Miss Kerkhoff is therefore helping to cover the 'A' Level Mathematics vacancy. The Mission pays for six security staff, and two Bible Knowledge teachers. In addition, the Mission assists with electricity,

water, fuel payments, all reticulation, generator and water engine expenses, solar needs, any emergency issues and major developments.

Developments

In 2021 it was possible to restart the maintenance and development programmes.

1. New house for the Matron

This was the main development project for 2021. The house is very comfortable and the addition of the sick bay is much appreciated. Matron moved in during Term 3 and work then started on renovating her old house for lady teachers.

2. Solar installation

Solar power for lighting and fridges was installed in the permanent resident housing, i.e. the housing occupied all year round, including during school holidays. Mainline electricity outages are regular, and often extended occurrences, so having solar backup for lighting and fridges makes life much easier. It also means that during school holidays the need for generator power is much reduced.

3. New borehole

A new borehole was successfully drilled and this has helped to stabilise the water situation, as one of the old boreholes is now only producing water during the rainy season.

4. Ingwenya Primary Classroom Block

Although this is not a John Tallach School project, it is facilitated by the JTHS Project Team. Once Matron's new house was completed, work was able to start on appointing the contractors for this classroom block. Construction started early in 2022.

5. Reconditioned School Bus

The parents are entirely responsible for the School's vehicle fleet and in 2021 organised the purchase of a reconditioned 65 seater bus for use on tar roads.

Conclusion

After two very challenging years, we are all longing for a return to normality so that the Scripture programme and the children's attendance at all church services can fully resume. This is the foundation and the centre of all the work done at the school, "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

As always we wish to record our thanks for the continued generous support of the Jewish and Foreign Missions Committee and Mbuma Zending.

MBUMA MISSION HOSPITAL REPORT

Dr A Snoek

THE year 2021 has been one full of challenges, but it is in the Lord's mercy that the banner of the gospel remained lifted high in Mbuma and its surroundings and that we were enabled to continue with the care for the sick and needy.

Zimbabwe experienced much heavier waves of Covid-19 in 2021 than in 2020. In January mostly urban areas were affected, but in July even rural areas had high numbers of infections and increasing deaths.

Worldwide there has been an outcry from health workers about the extra burden the Covid pandemic brought, but among other African countries, Zimbabwe was unequally heavy laden by the leaving of thousands of health workers (over 2,200 nurses and doctors, according to Zimbabwe's Health Services Board) in search of better wages, leaving the public health systems even more crippled.

Providentially in June 2021 Mr Sjoerd and Dr Carolien Janse arrived in Mbuma. After Dr Janse had finished 3 months of orientation in Mpilo Hospital in Bulawayo, she came to Mbuma just at the beginning of the most heavy Covid wave and she has been of huge help since then. Her kind and skilled way of dealing with patients has proved to be of great value to the hospital.

Joy however was followed by great sadness when on 23 July we received the message that Mr M A Mpofu had passed away. His advice, guidance and proficiency as Administrator, Health Centre Committee chairman and Project manager of the clinics, has been of great influence and importance for Mbuma Mission Hospital and the community. Besides that he never left a meeting without pointing the attendees to the spiritual needs of their souls. Eternity will reveal the fruits of his many labours.

In June 2021 Simbo clinic opened its doors and became operational. The official opening is expected to be held in 2022.

Administration and Finance

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic we grossly overspent our annual budget. Besides the direct Covid-19 expenses, a large part of the excess expenses were caused by factors indirectly related to Corona: extra wear and tear due to the increased use of the lorry and ambulances to collect oxygen from Bulawayo, lockdowns reducing the availability of trustworthy service deliverers, and a tendency of profiteering on the part of suppliers of medicines due to the much higher demand for medical supplies.

The Lord however opened hearts and hands. We received several very generous donations, which allowed us to continue to deliver the necessary services.

Local NGOs (World Vision, ZACH, World Food Programme, CHAI and Caritas) donated infection control materials and food. From individual persons

in Zimbabwe and overseas we received protective clothing, oxygen concentrators and funds for medicines and oxygen.

The JFMC greatly assisted with an extra donation of \$57,770.71 and the Government delivered large amounts of protective clothing and infection control material with an estimated value of \$88,823.88.

A container from the Netherlands, received in May, brought us three quad bikes (for use in the clinics), besides disposables, curtains and bedding for hospital use.

Maintenance and Capital projects

Buildings

Some of the grass roofed houses in New Makhaya continued to be attacked by woodworm, wherefore it was decided to replace the roofs with zinc sheets in phases. 8 of the 36 houses so far have been replaced. In the clinics in Lutsha and Vova extra toilets and bathrooms were built for the waiting mothers' shelters. The buildings of the new clinic in Simbo were completed, except for the second staff dormitory. The borehole was drilled and piped water installed. A large storm drain was constructed along the fence to divert water away from the compound.

Transport

The absence of reliable public transport during the greater part of the year continued to put an extra strain on our fleet, since staff members had to be transported from town to work and vice versa. Extra costs on the cars were incurred due to the fact that the bulk fuel supplier, which we had contracted, mixed the fuel with water, resulting in some form of engine damage to all our cars and generators.

Electricity and generators

Mains electricity provided by ZESA was not available during more than half of the days of the year. The hospital had to assist with its own transport 36 times to transport ZESA staff and materials to ensure at least some days with electricity. The absence of mains electricity put a heavy strain on the generators, its condition worsened by an increasing unavailability of spare parts and trustworthy expertise. The solar field continued to be of great use, but due to the addition of oxygen concentrators, which were and are daily in use, the capacity became insufficient. The electricity situation did not add so much to our expenses, but particularly increased the need for patience and endurance.

Staffing

Although not affected as much as neighbouring health facilities, even in Mbumba we experienced the increased brain drain among health workers. And every leaving staff member caused a heavier strain on the remaining workers.

6 staff members resigned, 5 transferred out and 1 absconded. 2 Nurse Aides were newly appointed on a temporary contract. 1 Counsellor and 1 Global Fund Clerk resigned and were re-employed as Catechist and Nurse Aide respectively. ZACH deployed 4 cadres, transferred 4 cadres out and stopped the contract for another 3 staff members. The number of staff members for Hospital and Clinics at 31st December 2021 was as follows:

Payroll	Number of staff members	Payroll	Number of staff members
Government	79	ZACH	4
Mission	15	Global fund	1
		Total	99

With the lifting of some of the travel restrictions during the second half of the year, the following visitors came: Beppie Geurtsen, Clara Boer, the parents of Dr Janse, Caroline de Koster, Gerda Ruijgrok and Nienke Hak. Rev B Jardine visited us on 22nd and 23rd November on behalf of the JFMC.

Hospital and Clinic services

Thanks to the continuous support from local and overseas donors and the admirable spirit of perseverance and patient-centred care among the staff, all necessary hospital services could be rendered throughout the year.

Covid-19	2020	2021
Number of patients/staff members tested for Covid-19	575	15833
Number of patients tested positive for Covid-19	2	251
Number of patients admitted with severe Covid-19	2	121
Number of patients who died due to Covid-19	0	9
Number of staff members who tested positive for Covid-19	7	17
Number of staff members who died due to Covid-19	0	0

As expected, the lifting of the lockdown measures resulted in the increase of the number of in- and out-patients (20%).

	2019	2020	2021
Admissions	2,010	1,548	1,860
General	898	553	775
Paediatrics	211	191	205
Maternity	837	736	833
Neonatal	64	68	47

	2019	2020	2021
Deaths	129	87	127
General	122	76	121
Paediatrics	1	9	4
Maternity	0	0	1
Early Neonatal	8	2	1

Out Patients Department	2020 All	2021 Mbuma	2021 Lutsha	2021 Vova	2021 Simbo	2021 All
New Clients	7,178	4,151	1,693	1,370	831	8,045
Repeat visit/ Chronic Clients	6,831	4,983	2,565	1,652	63	9,263
Total	14,009	9,134	4,258	3,022	894	17,308

Preventive services	2020 All	2021 Mbuma	2021 Lutsha	2021 Vova	2021 Simbo	2021 All
Antenatal/Postnatal Clinic attendances	2,418	1,118	627	412	60	2,217
Child Welfare Clinic attendances	9,657	3,989	2,762	2,743	79	9,573

Total Births	2020 Mbuma	2020 Lutsha	2020 Vova	2021 Mbuma	2021 Lutsha	2021 Vova
Live births	720	48	29	807	38	28
Still births	8	0	0	11	0	0

2021	Still births			Early Neonatal Death			Maternal Death		
	Fresh (FSB)	Mace-rated	Total	<2.5kg	>2.5kg	Total	Hospital	Home	Total
Hospital	4	7	11	2	4	6	0	0	0
Clinics	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Theatre/Labour ward	2020	2021
Caesarean section	118	115
Other major operations	91	185

Due to the presence of Dr Janse, a very skilled surgeon, the number of operations doubled. 7% were emergency operations and 50% of the patients came from outside the catchment area.

	2020	2021
Radiology services		
Number of X-rays taken	2,034	2,651
Number of Ultrasound Scans taken	728	841
Laboratory services		
Number of lab tests	10,500	23,041
Number of HIV tests	1,805	1,304
HIV incidence in ANC	1.3%	1.75%

OIC and TB services	Mbuma	Lutsha	Vova	Simbo	All
Total number of patients on ART	615	463	428	214	1,720
Total number of patients diagnosed with TB	307	3	4	0	314

Newly diagnosed Non Communicable diseases	2018	2019	2020	2021
Hypertension	45	25	26	37
Diabetes Mellitus	18	25	7	12
Cancer	22	49	41	57

Although the donations from large international donors helped Zimbabwe much during the Covid pandemic, very sad developments went along with these donations. The donations came with named conditions. And these conditions were the promotion and active implementation of homosexuality and abortion. Zimbabwe fell for the big money and a wave of immorality swept over the country.

To arm the members of the church against these developments, a congregational day was held in Mbuma in November under the guidance of Rev S Khumalo. The very clear paper on homosexuality written by Rev Jardine was used for the lessons, besides other materials. After this day the Catechists continued with the same lessons during outreaches, community meetings and CHAT meetings.

In June 2021 Mr B Dube was appointed as Catechist for Simbo clinic, while Mr S Ncube moved to Vova clinic. Mr G Nkiwane and Mr K Mpata continued in Mbuma. The post of Catechist in Lutsha clinic is still vacant. All of them faithfully laboured for the spiritual good of the patients and community.

The following was recorded by one of the Catechists:

Towards the end of the year 2021, Mbuma Mission Hospital received an elderly sick male patient into its care. Accompanying and assisting him was his eldest son and they came all the way from a village which is situated in Gokwe deep in Mashonaland, 136 km away from Mbuma

Mission Hospital. In the Lord's all wise Providence, the suffering ordained in the lives of this father and his son were used by the Lord for good to bring them into contact with the everlasting Gospel message. They came to Mbumba seeking physical healing but their spiritual senses were awakened by their contact with the Word of God.

The patient's deteriorating condition . . . was a heavy trial for his son who initially had no hope for his father's survival or any hope regarding the difficulties of life. In reality he did not have any spiritual comfort for his soul which would give him hope in God and in the purposes of God which come through suffering. His church, the Roman Catholic Church, seemed to have never taught him about suffering or point him to the God of Comfort. But in the Lord's wisdom, the period of time in which the men arrived into our premises were a period in which the sermons and Bible classes seemingly were focused on this area of life. The Lord's Day Bible class which is open to all within Mbumba was focused on the second coming of the Lord and how through suffering God draws His people closer to Himself and opens the eyes of those outside His Kingdom to see that there is no other hope of salvation but Him through faith in Christ. . . .

After some weeks the patient's condition had much improved and he was discharged from hospital. However, what was so peculiar now about their departure was that they no longer wanted to leave, especially the son, because in his own words in Shona he said: "There is so much teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ here, it is so very different from my Church which points to Mary, here you talk about the King, King Jesus, that He alone is the way of salvation and it makes me feel at peace here".

The Psalmist expressed it well, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn Thy statutes" (Psalm 119:71).

THEMBISO CHILDREN'S HOME REPORT

B. Maphala, Home Superintendent

THE issues and expectations of the year 2021 have come and gone. We have been ushered into the new year with yet some expectations and goals in sight. We have to thank the Lord for His grace and mercies bequeathed unto us freely, given our sins. We are obliged therefore, as alluded to in Psalm 103:2, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits". We are really indebted to Him for keeping us safe and sound throughout this ravaging pandemic sweeping across the globe. As an institution, we lost some of our staff members this past year. The will of God was done and life goes on. Our

turn is in the offing, it is therefore prudent for each and everyone still alive to prepare for eternity, by seeking the Lord now. The prophet Isaiah had this to say: “Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near” (Isa 55:6). We are indeed blessed that the Word of God is amongst us and is proclaimed on a daily basis. God is in His Word, we believe.

The Home

It has a capacity of 54 children with five family units. Now it has been reduced to two family units and one youth house due to the JFMC directive in October 2017 and confirmed in November 2021. Any retirees are no longer replaced and the home is no longer admitting any new recruits due to financial constraints. As a home we are constantly under siege from the ministry for not taking in new children. They demand a time frame for a way forward.

Children

At the moment we have a total of 24 children, 17 boys and 7 girls. All of them are going to school. Nine are at secondary school and the rest at primary level. Higherlife Foundation assists a lot in paying school fees for our children. As a family institution we continually strive to raise our children by the Word of God. It is prudent to teach children the Word of God at a tender age, so that they remember it when they come of age, wherever they might be. There is a family worship structure that is followed by all in the home on a daily basis, i.e. family worship in the mornings and evenings led by the head of the family, in this case the Superintendent. Our children attend to the means of grace consistently, not occasionally. They do not partake in ill-conceived worldly vain things. This is in line with the Word of God, as the Psalmist said, “Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of the sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful” (Psa 1:1). Raising children in a spiritual way will cut across the barrier of the scornful and save our children from the vain scorers who are in abundance these days.

Staff

We have a staff complement of 13, six males and seven females. Of the males, there are four guards, a gateman and a gardener. In the female contingent, these are five housemothers and two relievers. All the staff members are encouraged to attend to the means of grace all the time. During the year, we lost two male members of our staff through death, Mr J Ndlovu the driver and Mr C Nkiwane the watchman. Mrs S Nkala, one of the housemothers, retired. Mrs S Hlabangana was retrenched due to the closure of house 3. All the above were not replaced due to restructuring taking place at the home.

Projectlons

Since the home is no longer enrolling new children whilst those who come of age leave, the future of the home is bleak. We continuously pray, that the Lord will come to its rescue and return it to its origin, in due course. Proverbs 22:28

states: "Remove not the ancient land mark, which thy fathers have set". The Word of God will always prevail. Everything has a season to succeed or fail. It is for a reason destined from above, beyond man's control.

Conclusion

We thank the donors and well wishers, who have been contributing towards the existence of the home. Above all, we thank and praise God for His marvellous work shown to the home. We are where we are, just because of His grace and love.

ZIMBABWE MISSION ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT

Mr T B Mpofu

As we look back at the year 2021 with all gratitude, the words of comfort to Israel seem most relevant, "This I recall to my mind; therefore, have I hope. It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is Thy faithfulness" (Lam 3:21-23). The year was a difficult one. The Covid-19 outbreak continued and lockdowns adversely affected services. The sudden passing away of Mr M A Mpofu in July was the darkest cloud in the year. That necessitated my appointment as the Interim Administrator, with no chance of a handover.

Board meetings

The three boards, namely Ingwenya, Mbuma and Thembiso, and the Head Office Committee continued to meet regularly. With the passing on of Mr M A Mpofu, who was chairman of the three boards, Rev S Khumalo took over the chair, and continued to chair the Head Office Committee. During 2021 Ingwenya and Mbuma Boards held eight meetings each, Thembiso Board held six and the Head Office Committee held seven.

Staffing

With the passing on of Mr M A Mpofu, I was appointed as the Interim Administrator and continue as the Mission Education Officer. This, coming suddenly, presented a challenge. I am very thankful for the confidence that was shown in letting me take on such a crucial role in the Mission. I received a lot of support and guidance from Mr H Mackenzie, the Mission Co-ordinator, and members of the Head Office Committee, especially Miss N B MacLean. All thanks to the Most High, who governs all the affairs of man, so we have been able to carry on the work smoothly.

Currently Head Office payroll has 35 people, including Head Office staff, administrative staff at Thembiso Children's Home and Mbuma Mission Hospital, Bible Knowledge teachers, catechists and watchmen. The labour relations in the Mission remained good.

The Ingwenya, Mbuma, Zenka and Zvishavane charges remained vacant, with Rev Khumalo as the Interim Moderator for all these stations, as the sole minister in Zimbabwe. This has affected the function of the Zimbabwe Presbytery. We are most thankful that Mr T Mwedzi, who has been a divinity student, was licensed in October, and Lord willing, will be inducted and ordained shortly. It is our prayer that more men would be called to work in the Lord's vineyard.

Expatriate staff

Miss N B MacLean went to Scotland on furlough and has had to delay her return to Zimbabwe due to personal reasons, which have prompted her to take a momentous decision to resign and serve six months' notice, after nearly 30 years at John Tallach High School. Miss M Kerkhoff, the mathematics teacher, continued at John Tallach High School. Her qualifications have been accredited with the Zimbabwean qualifications authority, and she is awaiting renewal of her employment permit. Her current permit expires in March 2022. At Mbuma, Dr A Snoek, Medical superintendent, has been joined by Dr C Brobbel, and Sister Geurtsen remains Matron.

Deputies

Rev J B Jardine visited Zimbabwe as a Deputy in 2021, his second visit as a Deputy. During his visit he managed to get to all Mission Stations and was able to preach to a number of congregations.

Finances

We continued to receive our monthly remittances from the General Treasurer. These being in US dollars is helpful in the current economic environment where the local currency is unstable. The buying power for the Mission and staff thereby remains less affected. Though the last planting season was fair, currently Zimbabwe seems to be experiencing a poor rain season, consequently a famine is a likelihood, and some food relief could be required later during the year.

Sustentation Fund

Contributions to the fund went down by 23% from the previous year. This is mainly due to the depressed economy compounded by the effects of the Covid-19 outbreak with its lockdowns.

Below are the figures from the various stations:

Station	2020	2021
Ingwenya	\$2,192.80	\$2,315.86
Bulawayo	\$3,065.92	\$2,007.40
Mbuma	\$1,672.95	\$1,260.00
Nkayi	\$112.00	\$50.00
Zenka	\$1,209.55	\$640.00
Zvishavane	\$390.00	\$360.00
Total	\$8,643.22	\$6,633.26

Schools

Learning was seriously disrupted by the Covid-19 lockdowns. There were only two terms instead of three, resulting in reduced learning time, and inadequate preparations for the examinations. This was further adversely affected by teachers' industrial action at the beginning of each term. The 2021 Grade 7 class was the first to have Continuous Assessment Learning Areas (CALA) form part of their examination mark.

With the recently introduced school curriculum, the need to teach the children the Word of God has become even more apparent, to counter the effects of Family, Religious and Moral Education, and Visual and Performing Arts. The former has introduced an emphasis on false religions, and the latter has brought in a lot of worldly activities, such as music and dance to the schools. The teaching of Scripture by our Bible Knowledge teachers as well as Bible studies for teachers in our schools are a way of mitigating against these.

The Grade 7 results for Mbuma and Zenka were poorer than the previous year, with Mbuma having the worst results out of the five schools. Zenka remained in the top ten schools in Nkayi District, being in the fifth position. Ingwenya had the biggest improvement. Thembiso, once again, had the best results of the five schools, with a 10% improvement on the previous year's results.

Schools statistics

School	Enrolment	Staffing	Grade 7 Results	
			2021	2020
Ingwenya	324	11*	50.00%	6.00%
Lutsha	572	17*	13.16%	12.73%
Mbuma	686	20*	12.50%	16.87%
Thembiso	469	18*	83.00%	73.00%
Zenka	722	26*	39.54%	57.89%

*This includes two Bible Knowledge teachers each, for Zenka and Mbuma, and one Bible Knowledge teacher each, for the other schools.

OVERSEAS COMMITTEE'S REPORT

Convener: Rev D A Ross

ONLY four months from our last report, presented to the October Synod, our small congregation in Odessa, Ukraine, witnessed the invasion of their country by foreign troops; an invasion of great magnitude which has brought fear and distress to the rest of the world lest it escalate to a third world war. It is hard to imagine the fear and terror of the Ukrainian people. However, it is of immense comfort to know that Psalm 93, when written some thousands of years ago, is as relevant today as then. Verses 3 and 4 read, "The floods have lifted up, O Lord, the floods have lifted up their voice; the floods lift up their waves. The Lord on high is mightier than the noise of many waters, yea, than the mighty waves of the sea." We need grace to rest wisely here at all times, especially when the floods threaten to destroy the righteous and seem to exalt the wicked. It is reported by one Christian media outlet that Ukrainian Christians, in some quarters at least, derive comfort from Psalm 31. What better? The pity is that world leaders in their fear of another world war depend on their own wisdom; we seldom hear them mention the name of the Almighty God as the absolute refuge. Nevertheless, may God visit the nations in mercy at this critical time.

At the time of the Synod, it is reckoned that there are 7 million displaced people within Ukraine, while 3.7 million have fled to other countries. Thankfully, there are many people from various parts of the world accepting the refugees, as well as supporting the displaced people determined to stay on in their homeland. Some persons loosely connected with our congregation have been able to flee to other countries. In the early days of the invasion, Rev D Levytskyi and his family and others in our congregation remained in Odessa. However, the women in his family had to flee the horrific danger of the war, obtaining a flight to Romania at the end of April and arriving safely in Scotland through the skilful and persistent organising of a friend in this country. Numerous people have kindly offered to help by offering their property as accommodation, others by giving temporary accommodation in their own home, but most by donating money. There were some very large donations. For example, the Grafton Free Presbyterian Congregation donated £4,654. A private person gave £3,000. These and other donations, large and small, are deeply appreciated in this their hour of need. Phebe was "a succourer of many" (Romans 16:1), and that spirit of kindness continues with us, for which we seek to thank the Lord, the Giver of all good.

We do remind ourselves that the gospel of God's grace requires not only proclaiming of benefits for the soul of man but also helping those who have bodily needs arising from oppression. A remarkable degree of provision has been made for our own people in Odessa, but they and we think also of their distressed neighbours – they too need our help. Rev D Levytskyi gives such help from the Mission from the donations received.

There is also an opportunity for us to provide Bibles for people fleeing the country and for those remaining. At the moment we are organising the preparation and uplifting of a large quantity of Bibles, with the assistance of the Trinitarian Bible Society, for delivery to the north of Hungary bordering Ukraine. This consignment includes Bibles and printed portions of the Bible in Russian, Hungarian and Romanian as well as Ukrainian. Thereafter, smaller quantities will be sent into Ukraine and elsewhere. May the good Lord go before us.

The Asia Pacific Report is at hand and gives our people an encouraging update of the work of the ministers and elders in the Presbytery, despite trying times. One particular development is the kind providence whereby the Singapore congregation have at last, after many years of struggle and saving, obtained a place of worship.

It is expected that two of the Asia Pacific Presbytery ministers and also elders from that Presbytery and the congregations in Canada and Texas will be able, God willing, to attend our Synod.

With regard to the pastoral care of our congregations in Canada and Texas, we are deeply thankful to the Interim Moderators, Rev R MacLeod and Rev D Campbell, who during the period of difficulties of travel have made a number of visits to these congregations. Rev R MacLeod has kindly provided a full report of our Chesley congregation which will be appreciated by our people. We also appreciate the work of the elders in these congregations and elsewhere who so tirelessly keep the places of worship open, engaging in the difficult task of directing public worship Sabbath by Sabbath and at prayer meetings. It is deeply disappointing that our small gathering of believers in Vancouver has disbanded.

Our Committee's contribution to the work of our overseas congregations is small, especially when we were not in a position to send deputies, so much desired by these congregations. We trust however that we will be better positioned in the future – at least to help financially. We feel it is worthwhile that the reports sent to us highlight the gospel relationship between our Church in the United Kingdom and our overseas congregations. Indeed, the reports contribute to the strengthening of gospel bonds between us, as expressed in Psalm 122, a wish also expressed in the Asia Pacific report. We hope that the Committee report, as well as the Asia Pacific report, will indeed contribute towards fostering such a brotherly spirit.

In this report I especially highlighted the dark clouds over Ukraine where our small congregation in Odessa labours for the spreading of the Word of God in Ukraine and beyond. What deep sorrow many will have if the ongoing mission work in Odessa is brought to an end by the war. We have need to pray more earnestly. "Wherefore lift up thy prayer for the remnant that are left" (2 Kings 19:4).

ASIA PACIFIC REPORT

Rev G B Macdonald

Our congregations in the Asia Pacific Presbytery are scattered far and wide over three different countries. This has proved a huge challenge during the Covid-19 pandemic, where severe travel restrictions have been in place for lengthy periods. We have felt cut off, even from one another in the one Presbytery, for over two years. All of this is in the providence of God and should make us more thankful that, while brethren may be separated from each other, yet the Lord is always with His people wherever they are and in whatever circumstances they may be. Thankfully, whilst not able to meet very readily, we have been able to remember one another in prayer.

In 2021, as in 2020, the Presbytery was unable to meet with a sufficient quorum for one of its planned ordinary meetings. It took some time before the Presbytery could be revived again in the constitutional manner. At the time of writing, it is hoped that the Presbytery will meet in Auckland on 28th January 2022, the Lord willing. However, as travel restrictions remain, only the members based in New Zealand will be able to attend. We trust the wider church will sympathise with the particular difficulties faced by the Asia Pacific Presbytery and its congregations in this region of the world.

During 2021, congregations in the Presbytery were again adversely affected by lockdowns and several places of worship closed for lengthy periods. In Sydney, the government enacted severe restrictions, to the extent that in the local government area, where both the church and manse are situated, there was a curfew from 9pm to 5am for a number of weeks, with no movement allowed beyond the home during these hours, with the exception of very specific reasons. How a remembrance of such times should give us to realise that we took such basic liberties for granted and should teach us to pray for Christians in lands where they face restrictions on their civil liberties and persecution on an ongoing basis.

In Grafton, Rev George Hutton continues his work ministering to the congregation week by week. There are a number of young people and families who attend, together with several older experienced Christians. The Clarence Valley has long been blessed with a reformed witness and the place of worship is well located near the centre of town. Two men, Mr James Kidd and Mr Randy Winkels (formerly of Chesley, Canada), have been elected to the office of elder in the congregation and it is expected they will be ordained on the first Sabbath in February DV. Mr Kidd's father, Geoff Kidd, is an elder in the congregation and his grandfather was the late Ron Kidd, who for many years served as an elder alongside his brother Ritchie. We trust the Kirk Session and congregation will be encouraged by this development.

In Sydney, the work continues in Riverstone in Western Sydney. We are thankful that during the pandemic those in employment have been maintained and supported in their work. The Lord has been very merciful in upholding the

minister, and congregation during 2021, which proved a trying year. Like many congregations, there are those suffering chronic sickness and who have need of much prayerful support. We are also mindful of those who care for loved ones day by day and likewise, such are found here and there, throughout the wider church. We are thankful for their labour of love and care, which is itself a good Christian witness. The congregation was greatly saddened when we suffered the sudden death in November 2021 of a respected adherent in the congregation, Mr Peter Shaw, who was a son of the late elder, Mr Alistair Shaw, and brother to Mr Richard Shaw.

Sadly, the writer has been unable to resume taking worship services at the local nursing home in the Blue Mountains since the last lockdown, due to Covid-19 restrictions and the resultant difficulty accessing the premises. It remains to be seen if this work will restart. It is a solemn reminder of how even such a brief fortnightly opportunity for those who were in attendance to hear the gospel has been removed from them. It reminds us all never to presume on always having access to ministry even into old age. To the young and healthy who read this report we say, "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon" (Isaiah 55:6-7).

There are those in other places who listen to sermons recorded and later uploaded from Sydney and, no doubt, from the Grafton and New Zealand congregations. A few people in Adelaide, South Australia, are very attentive and supportive. We value these encouragements in this dark day. Recently a lady in the Southern Snowy Mountains near Victoria contacted the writer. She had a copy of the *Free Presbyterian Magazine* but did not remember exactly how she had come by it. For many years she had been in a cult but had escaped that fearful spiritual bondage and was seeking the truth. One book/pamphlet on the Reformed Faith which she mentioned having read was, what she described as, *The Five Points of Calvinism* by D Beaton, which the writer considered was perhaps written by the late Rev Donald Beaton, a minister of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland. May such a case encourage all those who publish sound literature, be it the church magazines or other titles, that the Lord can direct such material to those who are seeking the truth of the Reformed Faith, even in remote places.

In New Zealand, Rev Jett Smith in Auckland and Rev Caleb Hembd in Gisborne, continue their work. Mr Smith reached the milestone of ten years in the ministry in 2021. One concludes that most ministers come to realise that the ministry is a calling of sorrow and joy. We are told that such as sow in tears shall reap in joy. In New Zealand, the government has put in place heavy border restrictions in an effort to keep Covid-19 out of the country but the virus has circumvented even these efforts of men. In Auckland, the congregation was affected by a lengthy lockdown from August to December. The Kirk Session and congregation were, however, encouraged that there were

two new communicant members at a communion in 2021. There was one baptism in February 2021.

The city of Gisborne has long had a congregation connected with the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland. Since 2015 Rev Caleb Hembd has ministered to the congregation. In early 2022, his youngest child, Cassia Rose, was baptised when Rev Jett Smith was able to visit. A few have moved to live near Gisborne in recent years and this has added to the numbers attending. The current manse, which was built for Rev William Maclean, is somewhat small for the Hembd family and consideration is being given to the possible purchase of a larger manse, but as yet, the way has not opened up in providence.

Mr Hembd is able to make several visits a year to Carterton as interim moderator of that congregation's Kirk Session, and he usually calls in to visit those who are connected with the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland in Hastings, on his way to or from Carterton. Steps are being taken in Carterton to secure a block of land for the building of a manse, now that they have a very suitable place of worship in a converted bank building, which is prominently located on the central road through the town where much North-South traffic passes, on its way to the nation's capital in Wellington. A Manse Fund has been established and had grown to \$54,000NZD by the end of 2021. Mr Hank Optland is the ruling elder resident in Carterton and Mr Jacob J van Praag and Mr Justus Verheij are deacons.

The Tauranga congregation is currently looking to rent a place for public worship and restrictions and requirements in relation to matters connected with Covid-19 are proving a challenge. This highlights the difficulties faced by congregations who are renting a place of worship in these times. The loss of Mr Dick Vermeulen, whose Synod tribute was read last year, and who was such a help to them, is still felt.

We were greatly encouraged by the news that the Singapore congregation now has its own place of worship after renting various rooms for years. On New Year's Day, the first service of worship was held in the new place of worship, which has been very suitably fitted out for the purposes of a meeting place for the congregation. Mr Bernard Yong continues to bear the responsibility of attending to the duties of a ruling elder in the congregation. We are thankful he has conducted this role for many years. Doubtless the difficulties of recent years have made the congregation feel more isolated, but the Lord has sustained them and preserved a witness for the truth in Singapore.

In January 2022 a huge volcanic eruption off the coast of Tonga devastated large parts of these Pacific islands. There are many professing Christians and Churches on the Tongan islands. With few exceptions, all shops are closed on Sabbath. The Tongan Constitution states: "The Sabbath Day shall be kept holy in Tonga and no person shall practice his trade or profession or conduct any commercial undertaking on the Sabbath Day except according to law; and any agreement made or witnessed on that day shall be null and void and of no legal effect". We pray they may be helped through such a trial. Sadly, it is also known as the most Mormon nation on earth, having the highest per capita

number of Mormons for any nation. One headline on the BBC news website, announced, “Tonga volcano: Biblical disaster shakes most Mormon nation in the world”. Interestingly when disasters strike they are at times referenced as “biblical”, revealing a consciousness that the Bible speaks of solemn and catastrophic events, but no mention is then made of sin or divine judgment, which is the true biblical context. The Lord can use such calamities to awaken the careless and make sinners to know that sudden destruction can come. So shall it be at the end of the world and the Lord Jesus Christ cautions in Luke 12:40: “Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not”.

Those who, by the grace of God, and the work of the Holy Spirit, have come by faith to Christ and found forgiveness and spiritual rest in Him, and His sin-atonement sacrifice, can be comforted by the words of the Divine Saviour in John 6:37: “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out”.

EASTERN EUROPE MISSION REPORT

Rev Dmytro Levytskyi

THE beginning of 2021 in Ukraine was marked by the continuing of the Covid-19 pandemic. The questions of the previous year regarding lack of vaccines for the population were answered with a widespread supply of vaccines of different types. The only problem was a lack of medical staff to give the vaccinations. Many doctors, for example, have resigned because of the long hours that they must work, an insufficient number of protective suits and their wages being far from adequate.

The frequently changing pandemic zones in the city and country made the work of the Eastern Europe Mission more difficult and did not help with preaching to a wider audience. Also, due to the high probability that the Kremlin may launch a new full-scale invasion into Ukraine, with the occupation of Kiev, Odessa, and cities of southeast and southwest of Ukraine, the people generally are in a state of alarm. However, throughout the year the Most High granted us opportunities to distribute Bibles and confessional documents to various groups of people all over Ukraine.

The Odessa congregation is still worshipping regularly under various restrictions issued by the authorities. Also, we continue to use the required protective measures within the place of worship. Members and adherents of our congregation all became infected by the Covid virus infection, some of them very severely; sadly one of them died in hospital. We are thankful to the Lord that He, in His kind providence, has preserved the rest of us and that we are still able to perform our duties (apart from Mr Zadorozhnyi who has not fully recovered at the time of writing).

During the year, our mission work was hindered by the number of lockdowns. Therefore, our use of the internet was most convenient and necessary since most of the requests are now coming through social media. Among the recipients of our literature were mainly people who live in rural areas and attend different Churches; also officers and chaplains of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, as well as ministers of different denominations. We are still co-operating with army chaplains and in compliance with their request we have sent copies of small Bibles to soldiers on the frontline and in hospitals.

In the summertime, we visited the department of border guards, which is about 40 kilometres from Odessa. We helped them to organise a room for worship and presented them with five Bibles, Russian and Ukrainian versions, as well as confessional documents of the Reformation.

During the past years an interest in the reformed faith was noticed among Ukrainian youth of different denominations. Recently, we sent 30 sets of various books to a Bible School which is run by Pentecostals in the city of Poltava. We hope that this literature will help them to withdraw from Pentecostal erroneous teaching.

The many people, countrywide, who asked our Mission for Bibles and literature were sent the following items free of charge: 436 large Bibles (most of them in Ukrainian and 31 in Russian); 18 copies of *Sermons* by D MacFarlane; 200 of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (most of them in Russian and 48 Ukrainian); 115 of a *Catechism of the History and Principles of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland*; 133 of *An Exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith* by Robert Shaw; 147 of *Line Upon Line* by F L Mortimer; 94 of *Memoir and Remains of Rev Donald MacDonald*. We also distributed 2315 *Words of Life* calendars (in Russian and Ukrainian); and 138 *Golden Thoughts* calendars. We are most grateful to the Trinitarian Bible Society, London, for its grant of calendars. We are also thankful to have received £100.70 in donations from Ukrainians, which was sufficient to cover distribution expenses for postages, stationery and the fee for the Post Office box.

Recently, we received this request from someone in the city of Kharkiv:

Peace be to you! My name is Roman, I am from Kharkiv Presbyterian Church. We are at present studying the *Westminster Larger Catechism* in the Church. I and other four sisters want to purchase the book, the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. I have asked our Pastor, Sergey Sudakov: where we can buy this book and he told us that we can ask you to help. We also have heard that you have helped many with obtaining of this book. So, he gave us your email address. Therefore, we want to ask you if you could send us five copies of *WCF* (one for me and four for sisters). Thank you very much, for your ministry. I would be thankful for your answer.

The following letter of thanks came from a missionary in Donbass:

Regarding your tracts *Law and Gospel* and *The Unknown God*, if you have any connection with the author, please transmit thankfulness from ministers of our Congregation and tell him that during the past years we use only these tracts. The language that they are written with is very clear, simple and persuasive. And may the name of Christ be praised by the distribution of these tracts and that the Holy Spirit would turn many sinners to salvation.

These various activities of the Eastern Europe Mission would not be possible without the Lord's blessing on those who support the Mission with their free giving and prayers, for which we are thankful indeed.

“Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain” (James 5:7).

REPORT OF DEPUTY TO ZIMBABWE

Rev J B Jardine

At the Synod in October 2021, I was appointed a temporary Assessor to the Zimbabwe Presbytery. I left for Zimbabwe on Wednesday 3rd November and stayed overnight in Glasgow where I received the necessary PCR test before travelling. I flew from Heathrow to Bulawayo via Johannesburg on Thursday 4th November. My itinerary for the visit was as follows.

I arrived at Bulawayo airport on Friday 5th November and was met by Rev S Khumalo and his wife, along with Mr T B Mpofo, temporary Mission Administrator at the time. After picking up groceries in Bulawayo, I was driven to the Ingwenya Mission by Miss M Kerkhof. On arriving at Ingwenya Mission, I was met by Miss N MacLean and settled into the manse. During my stay at Ingwenya, my main meal each day was provided by the John Tallach School kitchens and brought to the manse by some of the senior boys.

Saturday 6th was spent preparing for the Sabbath while having dinner in the evening with Mr B Ncube (Headmaster), Miss N MacLean, Miss M Kerkhof and Sister W Geurtsen, who was visiting from Mbumba with two Dutch students.

The headmaster interpreted at the morning service on Sabbath 7th when I spoke on Revelation 3:17-18. Due to Covid regulations, the congregation was smaller than normal. About 30 were present from the local congregation and the same number of students from John Tallach. I had dinner at Miss MacLean's house with the same guests as the evening before. I endeavoured to speak in the evening on Hebrews 11:1-3 to a congregation of about 300 John Tallach students.

On Monday 8th, the morning was spent studying. At 2.00pm I attended the *pro re nata* meeting of the Zimbabwe Presbytery at the Ingwenya Church.

On Tuesday 9th, after studying in the morning, I took the car that had been provided for my stay for a test drive to the main Bulawayo-Harare Road. I was able to do more driving during this visit than on my previous visit. In the afternoon some senior pupils called at the manse to invite me to take part in a tour of the school as part of a project they were doing on the impact of the school on the local environment. We visited the pigsties, hens, generators and kitchens. This tour provided an opportunity for some of the students to ask me questions of a spiritual nature in an informal setting. Mr N Khumalo, senior teacher, and Miss M Kerkhof came for a visit in the evening.

On Wednesday 10th I drove to the Presbytery at the Lobengula church guided by Mr P Mzamo, elder. After lunch and a short meeting at the Head Office with Mr T B Mpofu, I drove back to Ingwenya where I had some time to prepare for the prayer meeting.

The prayer meeting was at 8.00am on Thursday 11th. I endeavoured to speak on Ps 147:5 to a congregation of about 50, which included teaching staff from the two schools. I spent the rest of the day studying.

On Friday 12th I drove to the Head Office with Mr S Mpofu, Bible Knowledge teacher, as passenger. I met with the Primary School Bible Knowledge teachers and presented a paper on Samson. The discussion and question time afterwards proved very beneficial to all present. I drove home after spending a short time shopping in Bulawayo. On the way back an artic lorry immediately in front suffered a blowout of its back tyre and the back roads were particularly tricky to drive due to being waterlogged in parts.

Saturday 13th was spent preparing for the Sabbath. I had dinner in the evening with the Headmaster, Miss N MacLean, Miss M Kerkhof and also Miss M Macaskill who was visiting for the weekend.

On Sabbath 14th I tried to speak on Exodus 33:20-23 to a congregation of about 50. I took the service in Cameron in the early afternoon and tried to speak on John 16:33 to a small congregation of about 10. I had dinner at Miss MacLean's in the late afternoon. In the evening I preached at Ingwenya on Genesis 3:8-10 to a congregation of about 300.

I travelled to Mbuma on Monday 15th with Mr T B Mpofu. Mr Mpofu took me on an inspection of some of the staff accommodation at Mbuma which is in need of substantial repairs, refurbishment and improvement. We had dinner in the evening with Dr Snoek, Sister Geurtsen, Dr Janse and her husband, Mr G Nkiwane (Catechist) and the two Dutch students who had visited Ingwenya.

On Tuesday 16th I travelled to Zenka and took the prayer meeting there. I sought to speak on a portion of Revelation 4:8 to a congregation of over 300, including school children. After breakfast with some of the staff I took a tour of the school. The school is well presented and maintained. Of particular interest was a chicken run where the school raises its own chickens for sale and slaughter. I had tasted some of the chicken at breakfast. The school stands in need of Information Technology. I also visited the vacant manse which was infested with rats, causing damage to the property and its contents. I travelled to Nkayi at mid-day and took the prayer meeting. I spoke briefly on the

beginning of Romans 10:14. The congregation was larger than expected. It was a privilege to meet the Mpofo brothers whose family has been an essential part of the Nkayi congregation from its beginning and who have themselves served the Mission in various capacities. After the prayer meeting, I was invited to take an informal tour of the Nkayi Primary School and met with both the Headmaster and Deputy Head. The school has over 700 pupils and successfully gathers in a large percentage of its school fees. The parents of the school want the school to be administered by the Free Presbyterian Church. They want the Bible to be taught in the school and the children to receive proper instruction in Christian morals. I hope that this will be possible in the near future. We travelled back to Mbumba via the Simbo clinic. I toured the Simbo clinic where I met the new catechist, Mr Ncube. The clinic looked good but there was no patient activity at the time I visited. We had dinner on returning to Mbumba at which I met the Hospital Administrator, Mr M Ndlovu.

On Wednesday 17th I took the morning prayer meeting with a congregation of about 300, including school children. I sought to speak on Malachi 3:6. After the prayer meeting, I met with Mrs Nkiwane, Head Teacher, and inspected the school buildings, paying particular attention to the Bible Knowledge classroom. We travelled back to Bulawayo in the early afternoon and on arriving in Bulawayo, I received word that my mother had had a bad stroke and was in a critical condition.

On Thursday 18th I took the morning prayer meeting, at which Rev S Khumalo was present, plus a congregation of over 50. I endeavoured to speak on Romans 10:13. Afterwards I attended the Ingwenya Board Meeting in my capacity as Deputy. I then travelled in the early afternoon to Insiza with the Rev Khumalo where I preached to a congregation of 15.

On Friday 19th I travelled to Head Office to attend the Primary School Development Committee of which I am an associate member. The Committee is made up of all the Primary Head Teachers and their deputies. It was an interesting and profitable meeting. I returned to Ingwenya after having lunch and purchasing some groceries.

Saturday 20th was spent preparing for the Sabbath. I had dinner in the evening with the Headmaster, Miss MacLean and Miss Kerkhof.

On Sabbath 21st I was driven to Lobengula church via the Farm Road to avoid the road tolls and preached on Hebrews 11:5-6 to a congregation of about 50. Straight after I travelled to Mahatshula where I preached a sermon on Luke 17:26-27 to a congregation of about 20. After returning to Ingwenya and having dinner, I took the evening service. I spoke on Matthew 3:1-6 to a congregation of about 300.

Monday 22nd began by attending the Thembiso Board Meeting by Skype. In the afternoon I gave my Samson paper to the "A" level students. An opportunity was given for questions and discussion. In the afternoon Mr N Khumalo took me for an inspection of the matron's newly built house. After the inspection we discussed further likely capital expenditure projects at the school.

I attended the Presbytery at Thembiso on Tuesday 23rd. Mr Mwedzi successfully passed his trials for licensing at this Presbytery. I took a tour of the Primary School after the Presbytery and had a short meeting with the headmaster. I returned to Ingwenya after lunch.

On Wednesday 24th I returned to Head Office and gave a paper on Heaven and Hell to the Primary School Bible Knowledge teachers. Again, there was a time of profitable discussion afterwards. I met Miss N MacLean for lunch at Cattleman's restaurant. On returning to Ingwenya, I gave the same paper to a large group of students. Again, we had a profitable question and answer session after the paper.

I took the morning prayer meeting on Thursday 25th at 8.00am. I tried to speak on the second half of Matthew 28:18 to a congregation of about 40. After the prayer meeting, I took some of the "A" level students for a Bible Knowledge class. I tried to give them some instruction on how to study the Bible and how to interpret texts as well as answer any general questions that they had.

I spent Friday 26th organising for my return home in view of the travel restrictions being imposed due to the Omicron variant. This was made difficult due to a very poor internet connection.

I spent Saturday 27th preparing for the Sabbath. The Janse family visited Ingwenya in the evening. I had dinner at Miss MacLean's with the Headmaster, Mrs Ncube, Miss Kerkhof and the Janse family.

On Sabbath 28th I preached in the morning on John 1:19 to a congregation of about 50. I had lunch at Miss MacLean's and preached in the evening on Revelation 3:18-20 to a congregation of about 300.

On Monday 29th I visited the Ingwenya Primary School. Mr S Mpofu was able to gather many of the pupils together and I spoke briefly to them about the Bible Knowledge classes and Scripture and Catechism exercises. I was also able to say my farewells to several of the Secondary staff. I was invited in the evening to have dinner at Miss MacLean's with those members of staff who were Free Presbyterians.

I had a PCR test early on Tuesday 30th and flew to Johannesburg in the afternoon. After a night in Johannesburg, I flew back to Heathrow on 1st December and spent 10 days in a quarantine hotel. I finally returned home to my family and my own congregation on Monday 13th December.

I would like to thank my family and congregation for their support while carrying out my duties in Zimbabwe as well as those that supplied in North Harris in my absence. I would also like to thank everyone in Zimbabwe who showed me great kindness and assisted me in my duties there. And to the Most High for continued health and strength to perform my duties, for safety in travelling and the measure of health restored to my mother.

REPORT OF DEPUTY TO CHESLEY

Rev R MacLeod

INTERNATIONAL travel, even when it is available, has become more difficult to arrange during the Covid crisis. But in the kindness of the Most High, my documents were accepted and my journey to Chesley Ontario began at 6.30am on the morning of 2nd November 2021. I arrived safely at the Free Presbyterian manse in Chesley on the evening of the same day. The consideration and kindness of those who prepared the manse was evident from the moment I arrived and continued until my departure. The practice in Chesley, by mutual consent, is that the deputy stays in the manse but has a meal each day in one of the homes until all of the homes are visited. This arrangement is a most agreeable one, and I feel that thereby the bond between our loyal people there and the home church is strengthened.

The sacrament of the Lord's Supper was administered while I was there. Mr Mark du Preez from Calgary met with the Session seeking to be received as a member in full communion. The local elders, Messrs David Kuiper and Hector Ross have been in contact with Mr du Preez for some time. They have also visited him in his home in Calgary on several occasions, taking services there. Mr du Preez was received as a member in full communion.

Mr du Preez conducts services, sometimes in his own home but mostly in a hired hall in the city, with several other people joining with them. I have been in his home twice: once on a previous visit and again on this occasion. On this occasion, Mr Chang, one of those who meet with Mr du Preez for public worship, had his youngest child baptised. Our friends in Calgary hope that at some time in the future it will be possible to have a Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland congregation in Calgary again. They ask that until that is possible that we would send ministers and elders to conduct public worship amongst them. The elders and I arrived in Calgary on 16th November and returned to Chesley on the 18th.

A letter was received from Mr Spratt (Vancouver), on his own and Mrs Spratt's behalf, who are members on the Chesley Session roll, stating ecclesiastical and theological grounds for terminating their connection with our church. Many attempts had been made to expound the position of the church more perfectly, with little success. As a result of this separation, there are presently no FP services in Vancouver. Mr and Mrs Spratt laboured assiduously in Vancouver. This was especially noticeable at communion seasons when they generously entertained those who gathered. The Chesley Kirk Session had arranged monthly visits by the elders while that was possible. We feel that if the circumstances had been different, and if distances had been shorter, the outcome would have been better.

It seems that during the pandemic a trend emerged simultaneously in many of the evangelical and reformed churches in North America. It manifests as a breakdown in trust of national institutions such as the government, medical institutions, and the media. My understanding is that the emergence and

popularity of this trend has been accelerated by the belief that the 2020 US election was stolen by foreign actors electronically changing vote counts and the belief that Covid either is not real or that the virus was intentionally released – created by governments to increase the power of the state. It seems that a considerable portion of the evangelical churches in North America have been overtaken by a cult-like mentality, which is more defined by a political ideology than by a biblical creed. Those who have studied the emergence of this movement speak of people being self-radicalised. By this they mean that some North American evangelicals are heavily influenced by “Alternative Media” on the internet. These “Alternative Media” sources tend to be their primary interpreters of current affairs. If someone within a community dissents from these alternative theories, they may be viewed as “uneducated”, blindly following the liberal mainstream media and following the indoctrination of the “Deep State”. These alternative media sources are typically right-wing shows, hosted by people who openly embrace conspiracy theories. It became clear on arriving in Chesley that this or something similar to this has the potential to create a division among our dear people there. Throughout my stay, I received nothing but kindness and more kindness and my understanding is that the potential for division was in some degree repaired when we prepared together for the giving and receiving of bread and wine in the remembrance of the Lord and Saviour’s death in the administration of the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. It cannot sufficiently be stressed that our Church must send a regular supply of deputies. “But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd” (Matthew 9:36). In the mercy of the good-doing God, I arrived back home on Tuesday 23rd November.

TRAINING OF THE MINISTRY COMMITTEE’S REPORT

Convener: Rev J R Tallach

THE work of the Church in general and the Training of the Ministry Committee in particular bears many resemblances to the parable of the seed growing “he knoweth not how” (Mark 4:27) in the world. The Word taught and studied bears fruit sovereignly over the subsequent years of ministry in the Lord’s vineyard.

Students

Messrs John Campbell, John Morrison and Trycot Mwedzi, the three students, completed their studies in 2021.

Dr Alan McSeveney, a member of the London congregation and working in the Ministry of Defence, was accepted as a student for the ministry in 2021. He passed the entrance exams in August 2021 and began the first year of the

theology course under Rev A MacColl in September that year. This first year of study includes Greek, New Testament Criticism, Catechetics, Church Law and Bible Instruction. Rev MacColl, as tutor, will give his own report on the year's work.

The Committee discussed the manner by which the work of a tutor might be alleviated through the year. It was agreed that one of the other tutors could take over a section of the curriculum being taught and teach that subject on-line. It was also agreed that the Convener would draw this arrangement to the attention of the Synod when presenting his report.

Theological Conferences

The 2021 Theological Conference met in Inverness. Papers were informative and useful discussion followed all of them. It was gratifying that, in addition to those immediately present, there were a number who listened in by live-streaming during the day and in the evenings the number of connections rose to around 70. This year's Conference will again be in Inverness on 25th-26th October, God willing, with the following speakers and subjects proposed.

- Adoption*** Rev R MacLeod
- Theology of the Apostle Peter*** Rev W Weale
- Justification*** Rev D Campbell
- The Reformation in Italy*** Rev K D MacLeod
- Thomas Boston*** Mr F Daubney

Chairman: Rev D Somerset.

The papers will not necessarily be presented in the above order.

We seek the prayers of the Lord's people for the work of the Committee and all coming under tuition that there might appear "first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear" (Mark 4:28), "fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life" (Romans 6:22).

THEOLOGICAL TUTOR'S REPORT

Rev A W MacColl

THE theological classes in New Testament Greek and cognate subjects have been held this session in Dingwall with the Church's sole current Divinity student, Dr Alan McSeveney, in attendance. The first class was held on Tuesday 7th September 2021 and our usual meetings have taken place four times a week, beginning at 10am.

The course followed has been more or less the same as that followed in previous years, embracing New Testament translation and exegesis, and some wider areas of New Testament studies where we attempt to give a brief overview of Introduction, Canon and Inspiration, Hermeneutics and Textual

Criticism. The portions translated and discussed have been taken from all four Gospels along with chapters 3-8 of the Epistle to the Romans, the whole of the Epistle to the Philippians and some passages in the Book of Revelation. J. Duff's *Elements of New Testament Greek* has been comprehensively revised over the session to help consolidate knowledge of basic Greek grammar. Each week the student has produced a short introduction to the various books of the New Testament to provide some consideration of the wider historical and literary context of the inspired text and also to discuss the general structure and content of each New Testament book. An essay is prescribed in the first semester dealing with the importance of language studies in Scripture interpretation and a fuller exegetical paper with more scope for discussion of the material is set during the second semester.

The course in Catechetics involves the study of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and we have paid particular attention to the Scripture proof texts supporting the positions set forth in our subordinate standard. Robert Shaw's *Commentary* has been consulted throughout. In Church Law and Polity we looked at the doctrine of the Church with the help of the late Rev H M Cartwright's lectures. The Church's *Manual of Practice* was also considered and we also studied a number of chapters in James Durham's *Treatise on Scandal*. The whole New Testament is covered for the student's examination in the English Bible and a number of passages were also selected for memorisation.

Dr McSeveney has worked diligently and ably throughout the extensive course of studies we have sought to cover. It would be greatly to the aid of Divinity students in general if they were spared the arduous labour of having to prepare for Presbytery examinations at the same time as undertaking the work required for their theological classes, and Presbyteries should seek to schedule the timing of their exams so as to avoid, as much as possible, setting exams during term time. Dr McSeveney regularly conducted services in my own congregation for which both I and the congregation are grateful indeed. On a few occasions he preached in some of the vacant congregations which lie nearest to Dingwall and Beaully. I listened to his conducting of public worship several times and sought to give appropriate comment where necessary.

We must acknowledge the goodness of the Lord in carrying us through the period of our time together. I trust that the student will be helped to pass his exit examinations due at the end of April DV and that the work covered will be helpful in time to come for the preaching of the everlasting gospel with a view to the glory of God, the good of Zion and the ingathering of perishing sinners to Christ.

WELFARE OF YOUTH COMMITTEE'S REPORT

Convener: Rev J B Jardine

It is the remit of the Committee to promote the spiritual interests of the young people of the Church. This is particularly necessary but also increasingly difficult in a society that is becoming more and more secular in its outlook.

The main aspect of the Committee's work is to oversee the setting and marking of the Scripture and Catechism Exercises. This continued in 2021 both in the UK and overseas. Although the Mission Schools in Zimbabwe struggled with lengthy periods of lockdown, the Primary Schools were able to complete all of the exercises. However, it was not possible for the John Tallach High School to complete all the exercises as in previous years. We would take this opportunity to thank those who set and mark the Scripture and Catechism Exercises in the UK and Zimbabwe and overseas. The time and effort that they put into the work is greatly appreciated. "Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures, then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God" (Proverbs 2:3-5).

A second aspect of the Committee's work is the annual Youth Conference. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown, the Conference for 2021 had to be cancelled. However, the Committee was able to bring two papers to the young people via WebEx. The papers on "Hewitson and Kalley of Madeira" by the Rev K D Macleod and "Scripture Teaching on Family" by Mr M Vogan, were well received. This involved developing online Safeguarding policies and protocols for the Committee's future use.

It is hoped, God willing, that the Conference will be go ahead this year at Strathallan from 5th to 7th April with the following papers:

<i>The Law of God – The Difference between Right and Wrong</i>	Rev K M Watkins
<i>David Livingstone – Why He Deserves to Be Remembered</i>	Rev D W B Somerset
<i>George Wishart – Preacher, Reformer, Martyr....</i>	Rev D Campbell
<i>Historical Tour to St Andrews – Scotland's Early Reformers</i>	conducted by Rev D Campbell
<i>The Zimbabwe Mission Today – A Visual Introduction</i>	Rev J B Jardine
<i>Lessons from the Life of Jacob – His Relevance for Today</i>	Rev J B Jardine

The Committee would encourage the young people of the Church to come forward with any ideas that they might have to make the Conference more beneficial to themselves, including ideas of topics for future papers.

"Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6).

BALLIFEARY CARE HOME REPORT

Convener: Rev J R Tallach

THESE have been difficult days for care homes and Ballifeary has not escaped the stresses and strains of caring for the elderly and infirm through the coronavirus pandemic. We acknowledge the kindness of the Lord through these long days.

Occupancy

During 2021, five residents sadly passed away. There were five admissions and one transfer to another Home. Two residents were admitted for respite care.

Staffing

Recruiting permanent staff continues to be difficult and in many areas of the workforce the use of agency staff, NHS bank staff and relief staff have raised staffing costs. A new Matron was appointed in May 2021 and is settling in well to a challenging job at a challenging time. We are thankful to have her in post. Two senior carers were appointed, one in January and the other in June. A relief administrative assistant was appointed in January and took up full-time duties in July. Two of the three nightshift workers are being supported by sleepovers from senior members of the team. Finding qualified staff to work in the kitchen has been difficult and this has had to be made up with students and agency staff. The domestic staff were put under pressure by the Covid-19 Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) measures put in place. Again, students were used for holiday cover during the summer.

Most of the required staff training has been completed, although the Covid-19 outbreak and the Home closure for isolation meant postponement of some training sessions. Infection Prevention, Emergency First Aid, Moving & Handling and Fire Prevention have been completed by most of the staff.

We remember the good work done by our late Matron and trust that our new matron will find a blessing in her work. We also acknowledge our debt to the Assistant Matron and staff generally for their loyal work through Covid days and difficulties of recruitment.

Maintenance

The 5-year electrical testing work continues, though pressure of work on the electrician meant that this will not be completed until late 2022. Painting and decorating has been ongoing within the Home. A new phone system was installed in December 2021. This provides full Wi-Fi coverage throughout the Home, the ability for staff to make internal calls between departments and to receive and make up to three calls at any one time.

Care Inspectorate

A new Care Inspectorate has been appointed to the Home. No visit by the Care Inspectorate took place in 2021. The main focus for improvement, as a result

of the last Inspector's report in 2019, is Care Planning in relation to residents' outcomes.

NHS Highland

An audit on the Home was conducted by NHS Highland in March 2021 by their Health Protection Team. A visit was made to the Home and the report was helpful and very satisfactory. There were no areas of concern. The NHS Health Protection team have been very supportive during the pandemic, giving advice and supporting infection control.

"The Lord is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and He knoweth them that trust in Him" (Nahum 1:7).

LEVERBURGH CARE HOME REPORT

Convener: Rev J R Tallach

"THE past year in Leverburgh Care Home has been very challenging." This was written by the Matron of the Home with reference to 2021 and is vouched for by the Committee.

We are sorry to report three deaths in the past year. There have also been three admissions.

Staff

Our administrator had a sudden and serious medical event and this had an immediate and major impact on the Home. We are glad to report that she has recently returned to work part-time. A local lady with financial experience has been employed and appears to have settled in well. The Committee is indebted to Mr William Campbell, General Treasurer, for the close interest he has taken in the finances of the Home during this difficult period. The difficulties of recruiting and retaining care workers locally have been reported in the past and continue to make maintenance of the Home difficult. The staff work long hours to maintain their high standard of care of the residents.

Building maintenance

The Care Home is now 34 years old and this gives rise to a number of issues with equipment. The passenger lift is an essential item which is due for major work in the near future.

Care Inspectors

The Home is awaiting an inspection by the Care Inspectorate at any time. No such inspection has been carried out for the past two years though the Inspectorate has remained close to the situation throughout.

Covid

Providentially, Covid has been kept out of the Home, though a few of the staff were infected. Lateral Flow Tests were used on any coming into the Home.

We are, as ever, thankful to the staff for the level of care provided and for the long hours worked. We are also indebted to the ministers and elders who have kept daily worship in the Home throughout the year.

“For great to us-ward ever are
His loving-kindnesses:
His truth endures for evermore.
The Lord O do ye bless.”
(Psalm 117:2, metrical version)

OUTREACH COMMITTEE’S REPORT

Convener: Rev D A Ross

WE are yet in the aftermath of the depressing Covid restrictions. However, we have been busy preparing for bookvan work. As already reported, our well-used bookvan had run its course and we were professionally advised that further repairs were not viable. This set us on a search for a new bookvan. Having researched and examined the vans of every make available we finally chose a long wheelbase Fiat. The company from which it was purchased, Donald Mackenzie Ltd, Inverness, was able also to refurbish the interior as a bookvan by lining the inside, installing a heater and ventilation for preserving the books, strengthening the suspension to bear the heavy weight of books, and fitting access steps for people visiting the van.

Another company, Fraser Signs, did the signwriting. This includes four Bible texts, a text on each side of the van and two at the back. This is the best form of advertising because the Word of God, entirely different from the words of men, ever bears the authority of our God; which word we are assured, “is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword . . . and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb 4:12). This same Word has come to multitudes of sinners “in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance” (1 Thess 1:5) and became to them the Word of God in truth. May God grant this, our desired blessing for all, to the many who will read His Word thus displayed.

The total cost of the van and all the necessary additions was £26,485.80; a large sum of money as we suppose but if one soul through this outreach is brought to search and find a place in the kingdom of heaven, no value can be put on that. “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Mark 8:36).

The pandemic has hindered our work and continues to do so. However, the distribution of tracts continues but not in such volumes as in the past. We are

also in process of further advertising our stock, which does bring positive results. The venues where we formerly had stands for our Christian literature work are opening up again and organisers have offered us our former stances, at a cost of course but very reasonable in most instances. An exception is one stand offered at £420 for two days. However, when we think that one TBS poster placed in a railway station for a few months costs £450, it puts a different slant on what seems to us a high cost.

The flow of sending free Bibles in answer to requests fluctuates but the distribution is ongoing. A number of Bibles were sent to a Highland High School at the request of senior pupils.

This report of our outreach work to Synod, and thereafter to our Church and beyond, is necessarily repetitive, as is all other Gospel work. The aim is always the same: the salvation of sinners and the glory of God. The clarion call of the Bible remains, "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Gal 6:9). We need grace and strength to continue.

One of the biographers of the missionary, Robert Moffat, tells a story which cheers us, especially those of us who tend to weary in well doing. Moffat and his companions, in one of his mission journeys in South Africa to spread the gospel of God's grace, was hoping for refuge that night in a heathen village from the cold and wild animals, and to have their need of food and water supplied, but they were constantly rebuffed by the suspicious villagers. Having spent yet another night in cold and hunger, they saw in the early morning a lone figure from beyond the village approach them with a bundle of wood on her head and a utensil of milk. Without a word she laid down her burden near them and departed. She returned, this time with a burden of meat and water, again never saying a word. Thereafter she proceeded to make a meal for the weary missionaries. Yet never a word would she speak in reply to Moffat's questions. Eventually, as the writer tells, "The solitary tear stole down her sable cheek, when she replied, 'I love Him whose servant you are, and surely it is my duty to give you a cup of cold water in His name. My heart is full, therefore I cannot speak the joy I feel to see you in this out-of-the-world place.'" On learning a little of her history, and that she was a solitary light in a dark place, Moffat asked her how she kept up the life of God in her soul in the entire absence of the communion of saints. She produced a copy of the Dutch New Testament, which she had received some years previously, before she had been compelled by her relatives to retire to her present seclusion. "This," she said, "is the fountain from which I drink; this is the oil which makes my lamp burn." Moffat adds, "I looked on the precious relic, printed by the British and Foreign Bible Society, and the reader may conceive how I felt, and my believing companions with me, when we met with this disciple, and mingled sympathies and prayers together at the throne of our heavenly Father." "So shall My word be that goeth forth out of My mouth: it shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it" (Isa 55:11).

PUBLICATIONS AND BOOKROOM COMMITTEE'S REPORT

Convener: Rev K D Macleod

THE format of the report is the same as in previous years and focuses on the three areas of the Committee's activities.

Magazines

Both the *Free Presbyterian Magazine* and the *Young People's Magazine* have continued to be issued each month for which we are thankful to the Lord. The Committee appreciate the help given over the past year by all those who have contributed articles and reviews. The *Free Presbyterian Magazine* and the *Young People's Magazine* continued to publish original material for a wider audience in the form of serialised papers that were given at the Theological and Young People's Conferences. During the year the *Free Presbyterian Magazine* published the following paper:

- "‘Mysteries’ in the New Testament" by the Rev Douglas W B Somerset.

In addition, the *Young People's Magazine* has printed three papers during the year that were given at the Young People's Conference in Scotland and Australia:

- "The Covenanters: What they Teach us?" by the Rev Caleb Hembd,
- "Assurance of being saved" by the Rev George Macdonald,
- "William Hewitson and Madeira" by the Rev Kenneth D. Macleod.

The *Free Presbyterian Magazine* published during the year a sermon of Peter MacBride, the Free Church minister of Rothesay, that had never previously been published.

As in previous years the Editor is very appreciative of the contributions provided by members of the Editorial Board of the *Free Presbyterian Magazine*. The Editor, the Editorial Board, and the Committee seek, by God's grace, to maintain the standard set by previous editors with respect to the spiritual character and thoughtful content of the Church's Magazines. The Committee has to report that the cover price of the Magazines had to be increased from January 2022 by 10% due to increased paper and postage costs. Prior to this increase the cost of the magazines have been at the same level since January 2013.

Publications

The Committee have published two books during the year. The first is a book on *The Transfiguration* by Jonathan Ranken Anderson. It is the first reprint of this valuable treatise since its original publication almost a decade after Anderson's death in 1859. The transfiguration witnessed by the disciples is

referred to in Scripture as a heaven-given seal to the Divinity and Mission of the Lord Jesus Christ. Its importance as a foundation on which the grace of faith rests can hardly be over-estimated. The book has been re-typeset and contains a new forty-page biographical account of Anderson's life.

The second volume that has been published during the year is one that has been drawn up by the Sabbath Observance Committee titled, *The Day God Made*. The book contains anecdotes that vividly describe how the Sabbath day was once loved and kept from the Highlands of Scotland to the islands of the South Pacific, and from the cities of New York State to the kraals of Zimbabwe. At a time when Sabbath keeping is largely forgotten and even despised, it is hoped that this book will be used to kindle a love to the Saviour and to His Day so that young and old would once more "remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy" (Exodus 20:8). Both the Committee and the Sabbath Observance Committee are pleased to report the volume has been reprinted twice since its publication in September 2021 due to significant sales in America.

Bookroom

As we have stated previously, the Free Presbyterian Church is the only denomination in Scotland that continues to operate its own bookshop and it is one of the very few Christian Bookshops still operating in the United Kingdom that is devoted entirely to distributing Reformed literature to various parts of the world.

The Bookroom sales increased during 2021 from the previous year by over £11,000. However, 2020 sales were heavily affected by the lockdown resulting from the pandemic. The level of congregational contributions and donations to the Bookroom have been maintained and the Committee are thankful for the continued support of the people of the Church. Though these factors are encouraging, the Bookroom still had a deficit for the year of over £14,000.

Following a great deal of work by a working group comprised of members from both the Committee and the Website Committee, the Bookroom website was launched for public use on 1st June 2021. The Publications Committee is very grateful to the efforts of the working group and it is their hope that now it is possible to purchase books on-line from the Free Presbyterian Bookroom that its deficit may begin to reduce. The website address is www.fpbookroom.org.

The Committee view the Bookroom as a ministry not only to Free Presbyterians but to the wider church and urge prayer to the Lord for His blessing on every part of the production of Magazines month by month and the publication and distribution of Christian literature.

WEBSITE COMMITTEE'S REPORT

Convener: Rev C J Hembd

AT the time of writing, approximately 140,000 users visited the website over the previous 12 months, with nearly 370,000 page views. This is a small decrease from last year, which had 407,000 page views, but still ahead of the page views in 2019. At one point the website was receiving 13,000 visits per month from Indonesia. The website continues to feature new FP publications, special offers on new books, church information, and timely articles. Recently preached sermons are regularly uploaded.

The Chinese version of our website has been fully operational for nearly a year. Bernard Yong, elder in the Singapore congregation, reports that there is “still quite a bit of work in maintaining and keeping it updated with [the] latest articles – selecting appropriate portions from the English website, translating into Chinese, proofreading, etc.” Since its launch, the website draws approximately 30-40 visitors per month.

The Church website is hosted by an American company known as Five More Talents, and the Bookroom website is hosted by Sellerdeck. The Bookroom website is managed by the Publications Committee, but members of the Website Committee naturally work with them on occasion. For example, Committee members have been looking for ways to make the FP Bookroom more visible to web users looking for sound Christian literature.

We look to the Lord alone to bless our endeavours to disseminate the Biblical doctrine, worship, and practice which our Church seeks to assert, maintain, and defend. Just as sinners must first be inclined to attend the preaching of the gospel and then enabled to embrace Christ freely offered in it, so people must be given a desire to study the biblical content on our website and then enabled to embrace it and put it into practice. As with all evangelistic endeavours, God must give the increase, and for this we must pray unceasingly. “For Zion’s sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth” (Isa 62:1).

ARCHIVES COMMITTEE'S REPORT

Convener: Rev D Campbell

SINCE the last report to the Synod the anticipated documents from the library of the late Rev D B MacLeod have come into the possession of the Convener. They include a large quantity of original manuscripts of lectures, magazine articles and sermons by Rev Malcolm MacSween and Rev John Colquhoun together with letters and other documents from Rev John Nicolson. Of additional interest is material used by Mr MacSween in his time as a Divinity Tutor showing the meticulous care he gave to this work and his detailed

knowledge of Hebrew. There is also a complete catalogue of Mr Colquhoun's articles in the *Free Presbyterian Magazine* which he contributed over several decades. These would be well worth publishing in a collection and number nearly 200 on a wide range of important and interesting subjects.

Of further interest is a near complete collection of audio tape recordings of the Edinburgh ministry of the late Rev D B MacLeod. It would be a worthy project to have these digitised and made available to a wider public for spiritual profit. The Committee awaits with particular interest a collection of letters belonging to Principal John MacLeod and dating from the early days of the Free Presbyterian Church. These, and the other historically valuable documents passed on will require to be carefully catalogued and digitised and safely stored. The Committee intends to approach the Finance Committee for funding to secure a quality scanner and large storage capacity PC for archival purposes which could be housed in the new Edinburgh church library. This would make the control of digitised material more manageable and avoid any insecure accessing by other methods. A full archive catalogue could be made more widely available once completed.