

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

WE believe that the day will come when the writer of such reports as this will be able to declare good news concerning the religious and moral state of our nation which will be as cold waters to a thirsty soul. Until the Lord will thus bring again Zion, those who thirst for the prosperity of Christ's cause in this day of small things must have "tears of sorrow given to them instead of bread to eat". It is becoming more and more apparent that the present generation is one of the most wicked since the days of great evil before the flood. One prevailing cause of this increasing evil is the abounding atheism which brings in its train all manner of ungodliness.

It has been observed by some notable divines that atheism only flourishes in nations once christianized. History bears out this observation since very few "intellectual" atheists ever existed among the heathen who invariably had their false deities and religions. There is a judicial aspect to this fact in as much as those nations which had the privilege of the gospel and later despised it are given over to the sin of atheism, one of the strong delusions which God sends upon those who received not the truth in the love of it. Atheism ever brings in its train a flood of iniquity, including the worst sins which corrupt human nature is capable of committing. The attempt to deny the existence of God, while never fully achieved, will in as far as it prevails in the minds of men, lead to the removal of the moral law as our code of conduct, and to the denial of a future final public judgment, and of the reality of eternal punishment in hell itself. Such "evil communications" will undoubtedly "corrupt good manners" and lead sinners to cast off the restraining influences which these doctrines possess. Such a day seems to have come over the world prior to the flood, when the visible church shrank to eight persons. Over half of our nation now identify themselves as having no religion, and when the number of practical atheists is taken into account, it seems reasonable to conclude that no era of the world's history, at least since the flood, had so much atheism and consequent wickedness as abounds in our day. Truly, we live in such "perilous days" as Scripture foretells (2 Tim 3:1).

That eminent man of God, Rev Neil Cameron, in preaching on Abraham's spiritual exercises (Gen 15:1-6) stressed the significance of his openly professing to the king of Sodom that he worshipped "the LORD, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth". He suggests that the reason for it was "that the most glaring sin of that people and of that day was that men forgot God, and buried themselves in sensuality. One reason for coming to this conclusion is that the true Church of God, in every generation, endeavoured to bear testimony for the truths that were most directly denied or forgotten in their day . . . therefore we conclude, and that not without direct scriptural

proof, that real atheism lay at the root of the sins of Sodom then, as it will continue to do till the end of the world” (*Memoir of the Rev Neil Cameron*, FP Publications, 1932, p. 208). To maintain an unflinching profession of the Most High God and of the whole testimony of His Word is surely no little part of the church’s duty in our day, as is the need to seek the spirit of personal and widespread repentance.

Considerable time and effort are given by those in authority to promoting sins such as Sodomy, and to legislating against those who condemn them. Meantime, the national wellbeing is being eroded partly through increasing violence, drug-use and suicide, and partly through economic judgments which have reduced the standards of living across the nation. We would do well to heed the threatening of the Most High to those nations who do evil in His sight, for He has said, “And at what instant, I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it: if it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them (Jer 18:9,10).

RELIGION

PRACTICAL ATHEISM AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Intellectual atheism is the disbelief or denial of the existence of God really and morally. Practical atheism involves the practice of the continual rejection of the reality of the existence of God by a godless life. The atheist languishes in a wicked state of heart-hatred toward Christ and His people, and which involves a vicious bias toward sin. According to some surveys, more than half of the UK population declare that they have no religion (National Centre for Social Research). A decreasing proportion identify themselves as belonging to Protestant Christianity. There is incontestable evidence that many of these have a mere form of godliness which denies the power thereof with increasingly few holding to the Calvinistic doctrines of Scripture, fewer to purity of worship, and fewer still to gospel holiness. It is reasonable to conclude from these exceedingly sad statistics, that the vast majority of the approximately sixty-nine million UK inhabitants are either intellectual or practical atheists. The UK is therefore presently plagued with abounding practical atheism, which is the root of much of its wickedness. With national judgments already abroad, the land is in desperate need of a revival of true religion in her midst and of the prayers of those most despised by these God-hating atheists.

One particular consequence of such a large prevalence of atheism is the susceptibility of men to embrace the popular views of the world, including an obsession with the claim that the world is endangered by the effects of worldwide environmental pollution. The fear of the possible effects of further climate change has recently led to calls to manage population growth levels worldwide since an increasing number of people would exacerbate the perceived problem. With extraordinary zeal, some young people in North

America have vowed not to have any children unless the worsening climate situation, as they perceive it, is stopped (CBC News). Should the perceived need to manage population growth gain momentum as part of the climate change agenda then sinister consequences could be envisaged in the sphere of unscriptural practices such as abortion, euthanasia, and contraception. Countries which combine high birth and high poverty rates would be the most vulnerable to such interference. Truly, we live in such “perilous times” as Scripture foretells (2 Tim 3:1).

THE ANTI-CHRISTIAN AGENDA

The openly anti-christian agenda of the State continues to cause alarm for those churches who are determined to uphold biblical truths against gross sins such as sodomy, adultery, fornication and gender perversion. Sadly, the national churches including the Church of Scotland have capitulated to the extent of having relinquished any witness against these sins, which is further evidence of their apostasy. It is notable that Rome itself, to which these churches are all tending, has given a very uncertain sound on these matters, which is no real surprise from the Antichrist. The most recent threat comes from the proposed “Conversion Therapy Ban” which the Scottish Government in particular is pursuing. They have established an advisory group loaded with those from, or in sympathy with, the “LGBT” community, and its remit is to “look carefully at the issues and advise on ways to end conversion practices that try to change a person’s sexual orientation or gender identity”. These “conversion practices” are described as “conversion therapy” and the term includes work by health care practitioners to assist those who desire to be freed from their LGBT orientation and addiction. We are not in a position to comment on the competence of these practitioners, but it is understood that the law already protects those being treated from any possible abuse by them. However, it is increasingly clear that those campaigning for a ban on “conversion therapy” really have the churches in their sights. Their aim is to criminalise any who would attempt to call such sinners to repentance through preaching, prayer, pastoral care, public statement and even by parental instruction in the home.

The capitulation of the increasingly apostate Church of Scotland to the LGBT agenda, strengthens the hand of the State in its apparent intention to impose such wicked laws upon the nation. Storm clouds appear to be gathering over us, and threatening persecution to any, in this day of His wrath, who shall be of a faithful heart in owning the cause of God and the interest of Jesus Christ.

While the UK Government presently appears to be excluding gender identity from its planned legislation in this area, the Scottish Government is proposing what appears to be the world’s most extreme legislation on this subject. It would criminalise anyone who would not affirm another’s claimed gender, including parents who would refuse to consent to their child undergoing a medical procedure to “change” their gender. Some legal experts believe that the legislation proposed for the end of 2023, will violate human rights law and curb the powers of the UK Government.

It is obvious that such legislation could be used to criminalise any sermon, prayer, article, or public criticism affirming the biblical doctrines which condemn the forementioned gross sins, and which uphold the natural distinction between male and female and the sanctity of marriage between one man and one woman. Storm clouds appear to be gathering over us, threatening persecution to any in this generation of His wrath who will faithfully own the cause of Christ.

FREEDOM OF SPEECH RESTRICTIONS

The Human Rights Act 1988 governs freedom of speech in the United Kingdom and facilitates such welcome liberties as the right to freedom of thought, belief and religion (Human Rights Act 1988 – Article 9); right to freedom of expression (Human Rights Act 1988 – Article 10); and the right to freedom of assembly and association (Human Rights Act 1988 – Article 11).

These enacted freedoms should mean that every Christian should have society's sanction in believing the gospel, in voicing that belief in public and in gathering, praying, singing and preaching as part of public worship, thus following the scriptural injunction to give “an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you . . .” (1 Peter 3:15) and to “preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2 Tim 4:2).

And yet there is increasing evidence that Christians in the United Kingdom are being denied the freedoms referred to above. The following are a few of the more recent examples:

- A pro-life activist was arrested for praying silently and peacefully outside an abortion clinic in Birmingham. The charges in this instance have been dropped for lack of evidence but not before prosecutors issued a threat that the legal procedures may well recommence should additional evidence come to light. The arrest was made on the basis that a public space protection order (PSPO), which prohibits prayer within the designated area around the abortion clinic, was contravened (ADF UK).
- A hotel owning couple in Liverpool were arrested after having calmly and politely asserted that Jesus is the Son of God rather than a “prophet” of Islam while discussing the subject with a Muslim lady at their hotel. The case was subsequently dismissed after a two-day hearing (www.christian.org.uk).
- A housing trust in Manchester demoted a manager and reduced his salary by 40% because he made a comment on his personal private Facebook page to the effect that “gay weddings” in churches would be a “an equality too far”. This was done in his own time and using his own computer. The High Court ruled in favour of the manager (www.christian.org.uk).

- A street preacher was arrested and detained for 6 hours in Kendal after one of his hearers objected to his preaching of the Christian gospel. The charges were dropped 6 months later and an out of court settlement in favour of the street preacher was arrived at (www.christian.org.uk).

While the Courts are, by and large, upholding the Christian freedoms referred to above, both government (national and local) and the police are exhibiting little restraint in curbing legitimate Christian witness. Notwithstanding the fact that the law is ultimately being upheld, we would concur with the observation of Legal Counsel in the case of the pro-life activist, “this is a clear instance of the process becoming the punishment, creating a chilling effect on free expression and freedom of thought, conscience and belief”.

Neither are the curbs on freedom of speech limited to the overt examples identified above. There are also more subtle ways in which Christian witness is curtailed such as: routinely labelling any attempt to assert biblical views on any subject as “hate speech”, denying funding, facilities or employment to those who assert biblical truths, marginalising those who hold Scriptural and common sense views on gender, censorship of social media participation and content, or something as subtle as only selecting as religious candidates for the expert panel on conversion therapy, those who already concur with the Government’s approach.

We would also contrast with dismay, the disparity in tolerance afforded those who hold Christian views and peacefully assert the Christian gospel *vis-a-vis* false religions such as Islam, as well as secular pressure groups such as Extinction Rebellion who actively and frequently disrupt society’s normal business and are by and large treated with impunity.

We have arrived at the time “. . . when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears, and they shall turn away their ears from the truth and shall be turned unto fables” (2 Tim 4:3-4). There is a great need for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit to reverse the “confusion of face” that is evident in society today.

THE STATE OF THE SCOTTISH CHURCHES

The declension from the truth among most churches in the land shows no sign of abating. The increasing capitulation of the Church of Scotland to the LGBT agenda is a most alarming example. On 23rd May 2021, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland approved a proposal to conduct same-sex marriages by 274 votes to 136, a majority of 138. Presbyteries had previously voted 29-12 in favour of the proposal. Proponents of the change argue from the corrupt principle that compassion to homosexual persons justifies toleration of their sin. Such forget that there is an infinite, eternal and unchangeable God who has an infinite hatred of sin and who will by no means clear the guilty without pardon and the repentance which follows. They also forget that He in His

infinite wisdom and goodness to man has decreed that marriage should be between one man and a woman Truly it can be said:

“They plot against the Lord, and His
Anointed, saying thus,
Let us asunder break their bands,
And cast their cords from us.”
(Ps 2:2-3, metrical)

It is notable that many of their church buildings are marked for sale, as some have observed for example in the North East of Scotland. The truth of the threatening contained in the following words will be seen to be true as time passes, “them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed” (1 Sam 2:30).

The Free Church is also following a markedly downward trajectory in terms of purity and reverence in worship. More than 30 years ago the Free Church in Lewis gave the outward impression of being more conservative than Free Churches elsewhere. Then it would scarcely have seemed credible that people in the Free Church congregation in Carloway could participate in a “Palm Sunday” procession along with others from the local Church of Scotland and the Stornoway congregation of the Scottish Episcopal Church. This ecumenical event took place on Sabbath 10th April 2022, involving people from the various congregations with palm leaves joining in a procession following donkeys to the respective churches in the centre of the village, in a supposed reminder of Christ’s entry to Jerusalem before His crucifixion. Their increasing emphasis on papal feasts such as Easter and Christmas is a measure of how far they are departing from the reformed faith. As with many churches today, the absence of the fear of God in the divine worship can be seen from the very appearance of the worshippers, where it is now common to find women without head-covering and wearing trousers. The rejection of exclusive Psalmody with the introduction of uninspired praise has been accompanied with an increasing worldly, rock-concert style worship, and the use of worldly entertainment in some congregations.

The foresight of our forefathers in resisting moves for union with the Free Church becomes all the more remarkable when we discover how far she has departed from the truth. There is need that we would be on our guard, in dependence upon divine grace, to resist these unfavourable trends in purity and reverence of worship.

THE INFLUENCE OF ROMANISM ON PROTESTANT CHURCHES

The Church of Rome continues to epitomise the Antichrist which Scripture calls “MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH”, Rome’s blood-thirsty history shows all too clearly that she is “drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus” (Rev 17:6). Her nature never changes and never will, though her tactics may.

The Pope of Rome continues to deceive the nations and ecclesiastical leaders too, as he lays fresh claim to the title of “Holy Father”, thus speaking great things and blasphemies (Rev 13:6). During this last year, he has pursued ecumenical ventures with those that profess the true religion. Following on from the recent declaration of friendship between the Church of Scotland and the Church of Rome, it was a sorry sight to see the Church of Scotland Moderator, Rev Iain Greenshields, fraternise with the Pope in a recent trip to Sudan where they held a joint press conference. It further saddens us to see credence given to the popish festival of Christmas within supposedly reformed circles, such as the Free Church of Scotland. Christmas services are now common place in that Church. Some congregations have introduced carols and musical instruments and descended to Sabbath desecrating activities such as distributing presents at these services. The Queen’s funeral provided further sad evidence of the Romanist influence in professedly Protestant churches. Whilst there was a veneer of Christian worship, there was much adulation of a dead corpse and little distinction made between the dead and the living. Our forefathers referred to Episcopacy as “the rotten limb of popery” and for good reason. Such treachery to Christ and the Reformed, Protestant faith is evidence that these churches are being given over to spiritual blindness: “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isa 8:20).

During this last year, we have also seen his deceptive efforts to be all things to all men. In August last year he referenced the “need to pass through Christ, to welcome Him and His Word”. These are deceptive words indeed from one who several months later during a mass blasphemously titled “Mass for the Solemnity of Mary” referred to her as “the mother of God” and further heretically stated “she hears our petitions; holding her Son in her arms, she blesses us and brings us the tender love of God made flesh”. Moreover, he has frequently made statements in favour of sodomites and how these are to be viewed as God’s children, while Rome’s official stance is to condemn these sins.

We make no apology for reasserting the sentiment of John Knox that popery is “abominable before God” and urge our people to pray for the demise of that system, so injurious to the finished work of the Redeemer.

MORALS

MARRIAGE, DIVORCE AND FAMILY LIFE

The secularisation of society and the decline of the influence of the Gospel has led to the devaluing of the Biblical family unit. Even in rural communities there are few families that follow the scriptural pattern. Where this is the case, economic pressures or in some cases covetousness are often pushing the mother out to work and leaving children under school age to be raised by the State in nurseries.

As individuals and a Church, we should be striving to maintain Scriptural principles and practices concerning marriage and family life. This should be

evident in our own lives and the actions of the Church in the various extensions of its witness in the world. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* 24:1, is quite clear that, “Marriage is to be between one man and one woman”. Same-sex unions and adulterous relationships are therefore clearly sinful and prohibited. “Marriage was ordained for the mutual help of husband and wife” (*WCF* 24:2), spiritually, physically, emotionally and to prevent uncleanness. Sexual relations outside of marriage are sinful and a leading contributor to the sin of abortion (child murder) as well as the spread of sexually transmitted infections, some of which can lead to lifelong infertility in both men and women. “Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness” (Gal 5:19).

Marriage is a creation ordinance and is not a hindrance in the service of God. Christians that marry should be seeking to marry others of a like religious mind to themselves. Those that “profess the true reformed religion” (*WCF* 24:3), should not be marrying those who are “notoriously wicked in their life, or maintain damnable heresies” (*WCF* 24:3), or any outside the bounds of the Reformed Faith. The seed of the Church is to be a holy seed and not corrupted by the filthy conversation of the wicked. The neglect of this is one reason for the decline of the Church in our day. A believer is to marry “only in the Lord” (*WCF* 24:3). The intermarrying of believers with those who are evidently strangers to true godliness, is prohibited, “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers” (2 Cor 6:14)

The worship of God should be at the very centre of family life. There should be every endeavour to train up children in the fear of God, for “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Prov 9:10). This is the particular responsibility of parents who are to be assisted by the Church, and not hindered or contradicted by the State as is increasingly the case.

A wife is to be a help meet for her husband in his Christian warfare and a spiritual as well as natural mother to her children. In extreme cases, necessity may force a wife and mother to work in order to help provide for the family, but they should not be doing so simply for worldly gain (Prov 31:10-31). Neither should a wife or mother given the gift of children imagine that she is not called to make them her primary responsibility. “Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward” (Psalm 127:3). “That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed” (Tit 2:4-5).

The only two Biblical reasons for divorce remain adultery and wilful desertion “as can no way be remedied by the Church, or civil magistrate” (*WCF* 24:6). It is lawful for the innocent party to seek a divorce, although they are not obliged to, and after the divorce to remarry “as if the offending party were dead” (*WCF* 24:4). “I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery; and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced, committeth adultery” (Matt 5:32).

“If the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases” (1 Cor 7:15).

TRENDS IN THE BREAKDOWN OF FAMILY LIFE

It is remarkable that in a day of such great religious and moral declension so many British families appear to function well in terms of nurturing children to become law abiding citizens. The nation owes much to restraining grace, and the natural benefits of the God-given institution of marriage between one man and one woman. However, sadly, a large number of families are fractured due to marriage breakdown and the non-traditional structure of the family. While those with liberal views may see the decline of the married family as a positive and liberating phenomenon, the reality is that the decline of the traditional family has serious negative consequences for all concerned, but especially for our young people.

The family is the nucleus designed by God for the formation of a God-fearing society. “Did not he [God] make one? . . . And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed” (Malachi 2:15). The family is where children learn the fundamental skills for life; physically, emotionally, and socially. It is the root and basis of a stable, healthy upbringing. In addition, for those within the visible church it is the place where children are to be nourished up in the doctrines of the Word of God, second only to the pulpit as the means for their religious instruction. Today, however, society is increasingly faced with the challenges of dysfunctional, fractured, or fatherless families. One of the most important factors causing poverty and what the world identifies as a “low sense of well-being” is the breakdown of families. Due to the liberal, godless ethos common today, politicians and other policy makers are reluctant to support marriage and the traditional family unit.

Family stability has been in continuous decline for many decades, a decline which mirrors that of religious observance at the national, family, and personal level. In 2021, 22% of couples who lived together were cohabiting rather than married or in a civil partnership. Statistically those who cohabit are more likely to separate than married couples. Statistics for 2019 show that 61.4% of families with dependent children were married or in civil partnerships, whereas single parent families accounted for 22.3% and cohabiting couples 16.3% of those with dependent children. Of course, civil partnerships themselves are unscriptural and cannot be expected to have the same advantages of marriage. The trend, overall, is away from marriage; between 2009 and 2019, the number of cohabiting couple families with dependent children has increased by more than a quarter.

Family breakdown, whether by divorce, dysfunction, or the absence of the father, has many effects, detrimental to the individuals involved, their wider family, and society at large. A YouGov survey showed that social problems were found to be more prevalent amongst those who had personal experience of family breakdown. Those not brought up by both parents were more likely to have experienced educational problems, drug addiction, alcohol problems,

serious debt, or unemployment. It is said that family breakdown is a contributor to poverty and other social problems. The Institute for Social and Economic Research states that after a marital split women are on average 18% financially worse off. Levels of anti-social behaviour and delinquency are higher in children from separated families than in those from intact families, and 70% of young offenders come from lone-parent families. One third of prisoners and more than half of all young offenders have been through the care system itself a function of family breakdown. Family breakdown is a problem because it negatively affects children and adults; it impacts on physical and mental health and can be correlated with child abuse and domestic violence. An NSPCC report into child maltreatment showed that children experiencing frequent changes in family structure were especially vulnerable to abuse. Those who had grown up in lone parent or broken families were between three to six times more likely to have suffered serious abuse.

Many studies have investigated the cause of the breakdown of families and married life and have suggested many reasons and remedies, but they very rarely, if ever, look to the root cause of man's sinful malaise. By casting off God and His law, and in particular the institution of marriage, the pillars of society are undermined. Sinful man has gone far astray here as elsewhere, and is suffering the sorry consequences predicted in the Word of God: "Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the LORD thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord GOD of hosts".

ABORTION AND SUICIDE

The sixth commandment, "Thou shalt not kill" (Exodus 20:13), is under sustained attack from the devil, the "murderer from the beginning". This commandment highlights our responsibility to preserve our own life and that of others. This commandment prohibits taking away our own life and whatsoever else tends to destroy life, as well as the taking away of the life of others.

Developments in Abortion

We are forbidden to take away the lives of others, but this very sin is committed in abortion. Since 1967 it is estimated that nearly 10 million unborn children have been slain in the womb in the United Kingdom. In our land any opposition to abortion from the Christian churches or "pro-life" campaigners is drowned out. However, on the 24th of June 2022 the US Supreme Court overturned its previous legislation in favour of abortion when an important ruling known as the 1973 "Roe vs Wade" case was overturned. The background to this historic case is as follows. Norma McCorvey, known in the court proceedings as Jane Roe, was a resident of Texas who became pregnant. She desired an abortion, but Texas law made it a criminal act to abort a foetus unless "*on medical advice for the purpose of saving the life of the mother*". Roe filed a suit against Henry Wade, the district attorney of Dallas County. She

argued that the law was unconstitutional because it violated the guarantee of personal liberty and the right to privacy implicitly guaranteed in US law. In deciding for Roe, the US Supreme Court invalidated all state laws prohibiting first-trimester abortions. This legal precedent has generally been understood to grant women in the United States the right to abort a child until the 24th week of pregnancy. However, in 2018, the state of Mississippi banned abortions after the 15th week of pregnancy. The only abortion clinic in Mississippi state challenged this ruling. Unfortunately, the Lower Courts of the Mississippi state would not enforce the law, so the case came to the Supreme Court, which ruled in 2022 that the right to abort was not enshrined in the American Constitution, thus overturning the precedent of the “Roe vs Wade” case. The effect of this ruling is that individual states are now allowed to decide whether to ban abortion. In early 2023 the *New York Times* stated that 14 US States had either introduced a total ban or a ban on abortion after six weeks.

The effect of this ruling has been felt throughout the world, and in the United Kingdom the devolved governments took measures to set up “buffer zones” around abortion clinics. These zones “*are areas around clinics where certain abortion-specific harassment such as displaying graphic, signs, following and filming women, and repeatedly approaching women and doctors are not allowed*”. A legal challenge was made to these measures as a breach of freedom of speech, but on the 7th of December 2022, the United Kingdom Supreme Court ruled that it was not a breach of freedom of speech. To illustrate the extent to which these buffer zones are enforced, there was a well-publicised instance in Birmingham of a woman who was arrested for bowing her head silently praying outside an abortion clinic while it was closed. She was charged with “protesting and engaging in an act that is intimidating to service users [mothers seeking abortion]”. However, the charges were subsequently dropped and she appeared to be vindicated of any wrongdoing.

Trends in suicide

We are also forbidden to take away our own life. In the last year, attention has been drawn to the influence of social media use on suicides. The suicide of Molly Russel, a fourteen-year-old from London, is a sad example of this influence. At an inquest into her death in 2022, a coroner stated that social media with websites and images that encouraged suicide and self-harm had been a significant factor leading to Molly’s suicide. In addition, a recent three-year research study by Cambridge University found that out of 595 deaths by suicide among young people aged between 10-19, 544 could be traced to suicide-related online content or interaction.

The prevalence of these sins is evidence of how far we have departed from the Lord as a nation. When the Law of God is thus disregarded, we cannot but think that the words of Solomon are valid concerning us, “Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people” (Prov 14:34).

ECONOMIC JUDGEMENTS

There have been signs in recent years of the instability of the economic system when subjected to shocks, such as the financial collapse of 2008, the Covid pandemic or the imposition of Russian sanctions. Governmental response to public cries of economic pain has in each case involved the incurring of ever larger sums of public debt, moving the burden onto future generations – the hope being that that generation will be in a better financial position to deal it. Previous generations got away with such an approach, and so it is felt why should not we? This is a massive gamble since what happens next is not something that can be determined – either there will be continued economic growth which will allow for repayment of debt, or the debt will prove such a burden as to cause economic slowdown and possibly even financial and economic collapse. We have seen this happen many times in irresponsibly managed economies, and there is no *a priori* reason to expect it will not happen in the UK and other western countries.

Rather than speculating about second causes though, it is more useful to consider the Lord's dealings in judgement with us as a nation. He deals with nations by correcting judgements through which He designs to bring that nation to repent, acknowledge sin, and turn to His Word and true worship. Since the middle of the 19th century, when we began in earnest as a nation to depart from His Word, He has sent many judgements upon us, the two world wars being perhaps the most notable. These have been sore strokes but have not been utterly desolating in the sense that there has subsequently been recovery. There comes a time however, when the measure of a nation's iniquity is filled up, when the correcting judgments become desolating judgments; for "he, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy" (Prov 29:1). Such was the case when the ten tribes were carried off by Assyria. "For the nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted" (Isa 60:12). We fear that our own nation is facing such desolating judgments since correcting judgments have had no discernibly positive affect upon us.

An almost unbroken rise in economic prosperity for the UK and other western nations over the past few centuries has led to a false confidence that, whatever temporary setbacks we face, this trend will inevitably continue. We have been greatly privileged with temporal blessings – economic prosperity, democracy, societal provision for health and other welfare benefits. These can be traced to our being at one time and in some measure, a righteous nation, a nation whose laws, and a great deal of whose ways, were founded on the Word of God. This is so very far from being the case now. Indeed, has there ever been a nation so wicked as ours is at present which so wholeheartedly despises the truth? Being in such a case, how can we expect anything other than our privileges to be removed one by one or all together? Spiritual judgments have come upon our nation so very sorely, that there is only a very small remnant who fear the Lord and maintain Biblical worship. Economic prosperity and

other temporal blessings we may expect to depart in due course also. We often hear people raging against the folly of governments, be they national or regional, against the wickedness of perceived enemies such as the Russians or the Chinese, against immigrants or some other cause of national trouble, but less often do we hear raging against our own national sins which have separated us from our God and are the root of all our troubles. May the Lord in mercy grant us a national repentance.

THE NHS AND THE MISUSE OF PUBLIC FUNDS

There are few that would not acknowledge the temporal blessing that a national health service has been for the UK. It is a matter of great concern then that the NHS has become a promoter of an anti-scriptural agenda. We fear that in the compulsory teaching of their staff that which is contrary to Scripture, the organisation will not prosper but will become less of a blessing and more of a curse on the nation. A report from the Conservative Way Forward think tank in December 2022 reported that the UK government spends £557 million annually to employ 10,000 Equality & Diversity Officers (which would be sufficient to fund 12,500 nurses). The NHS alone spends £40 million on “diversity”, much of which is used to promote the pernicious LGBT agenda, including transgenderism. Moreover, the NHS is directly involved in the vile practise of transgender surgery. The struggles of the NHS to provide a full and functional health service to patients during and after the Covid pandemic, indicate that it is no longer the blessing that it once was. May the Lord in mercy turn it back from the foolish path embarked on. In England the Health Minister, Steven Barclay, has made statements which might encourage that hope, but alas in Scotland the folly continues unabated, unchallenged in Holyrood.

MATERIALISM AND GREED

Christian principles extend to all areas of daily life, including how we accumulate and spend wealth. We can be certain that the £1,619 million (UK Government) spent in the United Kingdom on betting and gaming during the 6 months between April and September of 2022 (11% higher year on year) does not meet with God’s approbation. “Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? And your labour for that which satisfieth not?” (Isaiah 55:2). Gambling is a contravention of the tenth commandment, “Thou shalt not covet”. It is an expression of dissatisfaction with the Lord’s dealing with us and, in gambling, we seek to acquire a degree of wealth which the Lord in His providence has not seen fit to grant us. Further, it is seeking to acquire wealth in an illegitimate way – not through industry and application but through the forlorn hope that the laws of probability, which are heavily stacked against us, might somehow be suspended.

The following statistics are something of an eye opener:

- More than one in sixteen adults in Scotland are estimated to have, or be at risk of having, gambling problems. Seven percent of the British

population are estimated to be harmed by the gambling of another person (Scottish Parliament, SPICe Survey).

- Gambling harms have been estimated to cost up to £1.16 billion per year for Britain and up to £60 million for Scotland (Scottish Parliament, SPICe Survey).
- Gambling harms also disproportionately affect more deprived areas. The Scottish Health Survey 2021 found that an estimated 2% of people living in the least deprived areas have or are at risk of having gambling problems, compared to 11% of people living in the most deprived areas (Scottish Parliament, SPICe Survey).
- As at March 2020 there were in excess of 10,000 gambling premises – a number exceeding the 9,968 stores run by the eight largest supermarkets (abrdn Financial Fairness Trust).

Aside from the spiritual harm done to the individual as a consequence of engaging in this covetous activity, there are the undesirable practical consequences of gambling, to the individual, to his or her family and to society at large, which is largely left to foot the bill for this indulgence. Gambling is not merely a problem of just losing money – it leaves a trail of attendant evils such as higher suicide rates, greater prevalence of mental health issues, higher probabilities of alcoholism, homelessness and unemployment, increased criminal activity and relationship breakdown. It also gives rise to the need for society to disburse taxpayer funds to prop up those individuals and families negatively affected by gambling. While there are a myriad of studies attesting to the harm done by gambling – governments remain unwilling to “grasp the nettle” in outlawing gambling activity. They are happy to turn a blind eye to the evil, their collective conscience no doubt salved by the contributions made by gambling bodies to worthwhile causes.

The problem is not helped by the fact that the nation’s wealth is becoming increasingly polarised with the top 10% of households representing 43% of the nation’s wealth (the Equality Trust). This hoarding of resources by those not “rich towards God”, creates resentment in those finding it difficult to finance even a basic standard of living – leading to gambling as a form of financial escapism. The advice of Scripture to both hoarder and gambler is the same – “For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (1 Tim 6:7-10).

SABBATH OBSERVANCE COMMITTEE'S REPORT

Convener: Rev K M Watkins

ANOTHER year has gone by since the Committee last reported. Suffice it to say that respect for the Sabbath, the Lord's holy Day, has decreased yet further. Although the Creator and Judge of all the earth has given men six days of the week for their own employments and recreations, and challenges a special propriety for Himself in only one, the heart of fallen man manifests its inveterate rebellion against the Most High by casting off this yoke as if it were an intolerable burden. The remnant who call the Sabbath a holy delight is diminishing, and standards of Sabbath-keeping in the professing Church are sinking ever lower. With this dark backdrop the Committee has sought to raise a witness here and there.

A letter was sent in March 2023 to King Charles III, protesting against the appalling Sabbath desecration involved in the plans published on the Government's official website for the Coronation, which constituted an ominous and inauspicious beginning to the King's reign. The plans, called "a weekend of celebrations", included for the Sabbath "a spectacular Coronation Concert at Windsor Castle". It was promised that this "will showcase the country's diverse cultural heritage in music, theatre and dance. One of the highlights of the concert will be 'Lighting up the Nation', in which iconic locations across the UK will be lit up with projections, lasers, drone displays and illuminations." Not a few of these activities would be unlawful on any day of the week, but to do them on the Lord's Day aggravates the heinousness of the sin. The nation was promised, "The activities on Sunday [sic] will culminate in a fantastic evening of song and dance at the Coronation Concert at Windsor Castle, staged and broadcast by the BBC in front of an audience of several thousand members of the public, selected for free tickets via a public ballot".

The plans were outlined further: "Tens of thousands of Coronation Big Lunches and street parties will be held in the UK and Commonwealth on Sunday [sic] and across the weekend". The fact that these lunches were to raise funds for charities does nothing to lessen the sin of Sabbath-breaking involved, and this with the intention of involving the whole Commonwealth in this crime against God. This was described further: "The Coronation Big Lunch, at which neighbours and communities are invited to share food and fun together, will take place across the country on the same date". How directly opposite to the Lord's Sabbath command to "turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on My holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable; and shalt honour Him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words" (Isa 58:13).

A letter was also sent to Donald MacDonald, Executive Chairman of MacDonald Hotels, protesting against the Sabbath-breaking activities run by his chain of hotels. Whilst the Committee understands the difficulties involved in operating a hospitality business, especially in these ungodly days, it had to

witness against the altogether unnecessary and gratuitous promotion of numerous Sabbath events such as the Hogmanay Gala Ball, “Sunday [sic] lunches with Santa”, and “Mother’s Day” [sic] jazz lunches, as well as Saturday night “Tribute Nights” which ran into the early hours of Sabbath morning. It was pointed out that it is no surprise when men of the world engage in such Sabbath-breaking in the hotels they run and manage, but better standards ought to be expected of those who profess Christianity. The time is soon coming when we must all give our account at the Judgment seat of Christ, and for those of us to whom much has been given by way of Scriptural knowledge and example, much will be required.

Other letters were sent to the Camanachd Association protesting against its decision to hold shinty matches on the Sabbath, and to a shooting club in Skye against its recreation on the Sabbath.

The Bookroom manager reported that the book *The Day God Made* continued to sell well; indeed it was the Bookroom’s biggest seller for the year. The Committee is actively investigating other titles for publication.

The Committee longs for the day when the Sabbath will be remembered again and kept holy. An outpouring of the Holy Spirit is needed, so that a great turning to the Lord in repentance would follow. Then, when Christ is given His place as Saviour and Lord, He will be recognised as Lord of the Sabbath too, and the Sabbath will be given its rightful place.

“All ends of th’earth remember shall,
And turn the Lord unto;
All kindreds of the nations
To Him shall homage do.”
(Psalm 22:27, metrical)

JEWISH AND FOREIGN MISSIONS COMMITTEE’S REPORT

Convener: Rev Donald A Ross

IN the *Proceedings of Synod* for last year the reports about our work in Africa and Israel filled twenty-six pages. This year’s reports are an update of the work done in our institutions and congregations. They have, of course, a significant sameness from year to year.

The people of our Church at home and abroad value and welcome these reports, especially the gospel content in them. The commission to “preach the gospel”, continues to be carried out in all our Mission congregations. But also the gospel is at the heart of our other work, be it in Israel or Zimbabwe. Patients on our Zimbabwe Mission know full well about our care for the healing of their souls, and pupils about their need of spiritual teaching. Our

Saviour's ministry, providing for body and soul, was filled with gracious caring and spiritual teaching.

It is therefore a sheer joy for our missionaries, who work for the advancement of the Kingdom of Christ, when there are those, who due to contact with our institutions, be it as residents or employees, make the Free Presbyterian Church their spiritual home. This for believers is the highest reward of gospel work. One such person came through our Thembiso Children's Home to identify permanently with the Church and is now training for the ministry and will be employed, God willing, in promoting the gospel of God's grace.

Further, we are deeply thankful that, by the grace of God, we have not forsaken the gospel ethos as some church missions deplorably have done. It is all too easy to become entangled in the temporal needs of patients and pupils and lose sight of the greater purpose of Christian institutions: to communicate the spiritual benefits of the gospel. May the Lord ever preserve us from such dreadful backsliding.

Regarding our congregations and institutions, these are by no means insignificant, measured against our small beginnings. I suppose many of our people, not having visited our mission, will have difficulty appreciating its size and the amount of work done. Perhaps some concept of the extent of the mission can be gauged from the huge sums of money received in donations, the large amount of fees from some residents, and the government payments of salaries of many of the teachers and nurses.

The institutions referred to in our reports are the well-established Hospital at Mbuma and, of late, its three community clinics in the Mbuma district, the well-known John Tallach High School and the five Primary Schools throughout our Mission (with approximately 2,000 children attending). Then there is Thembiso Children's Home, which has been reduced to half its capacity since it was rearranged into family units with housemothers. Connected with Thembiso Children's Home is a large primary school with over 300 children drawn largely from Luveve township and the surrounding area. These children, as those in all our schools, are well taught in the Scriptures.

More than this we do not wish to say about our institutions as there are several full reports from heads of departments. Needless to say, the Committee is deeply appreciative of the hard work done by all the staff, particularly of those who leave their homeland and family for the sake of spreading the Word of God.

The greatest burden of responsibility falls on those who are in supervisory positions: Dr A Snoek at Mbuma Hospital; Mr B Ncube, John Tallach High School, Mr B Maphala, Thembiso Children's Home; the Mission Administrator, Mr T B Mpofu, and the Headmasters of our Primary Schools. There are also those who are responsible for the administration of the Thembiso Trust, which helps those who, having come of age, have to leave the Children's Home. A tremendous amount of work continues to fall on the

shoulders of our Mission Co-ordinator, Mr Hugh Mackenzie, and the General Treasurer, Mr W Campbell; both tirelessly attend to matters essential for the smooth running of our Mission. We are indebted to Rev J B Jardine who readily gave of his time from his congregation to visit our Mission, giving important input, including preaching and assisting at communions there.

On the congregational scene, there are six sanctioned charges but only two of these have a minister, Rev S Khumalo in Bulawayo and Rev T Mwedzi in New Canaan. Our hope is that the three African divinity students once qualified for the ministry will be, God willing, available for the vacant congregations. Altogether there are 44 places of worship where there are 32 elders, 15 deacons and 423 members on the communion roll and a large number of adherents. Some congregations are very small, others consist of hundreds. With the large numbers of patients and students attending our institutions, some congregations can reach nearly one thousand attendees.

The large number of congregations bring a tremendous burden on the two ministers. This includes directing the elders whose duty is to conduct worship in congregations in the absence of the minister. Elders of course are not regarded as having a call to the ministry nor do they regard themselves as such. Our *Manual of Practice* states, "Those Elders who do not exercise the pastoral Office are called Ruling elders. This designation describes their function as that of exercising spiritual oversight in the Church of Christ according to His Word."

Two African lay missionaries are employed, who are under the direction of the Presbytery, and are required to rotate their duties throughout these vacant congregations. There is also a number of catechists who go among the patients at the hospital and visit the homes in the area and methodically go through the *Shorter Catechism* in its question and answer form.

Expansion of the institutions is not the intention of the JFMC but rather the maintaining of the present activities. The Zimbabwe Presbytery of course has been adding to the number of the places of worship within its bounds and for this we are deeply thankful and trust that it arises from a genuine thirst for the truth of the gospel along with a humble cry to Christ, "Abide with us".

In January of this year a number of members of the JFMC were in attendance at one of the Mbumba Zending Committee (MZC) meetings in Holland. The MZC was provided with a detailed account of the projected work in our Mission for the year 2023, and thereby was informed of the use of their vast donation to the funds of our Mission. Questions and answers took place throughout the meeting. It proved to be a most helpful meeting for both the MZC and the JFMC. It had the effect also, I believe, of continuing to further strengthen the bond of our long friendship. We were deeply appreciative of their kind reception and hospitality during our two-day stay in Leerdam but especially of their cheerful giving the usual large sum of money for the material and spiritual work of the gospel in Zimbabwe. Truly the provision is of the Lord, who opens the hearts of so many people in Holland to provide,

and without which our mission in Africa could not possibly exist in its present extensive form.

Under the supervision of Rev J Goldby, our work in Israel continues. He writes as follows: “The work in Israel is progressing with the revision of the Delitzsch Hebrew New Testament. The revision aims to ensure that the Hebrew translation agrees with the Greek of the Textus Receptus. Israeli Jewish Christians for the most part are using the Israel Bible Society NT which is based on the Critical Text and have no knowledge of these important textual issues. This work receives financial support from the Trinitarian Bible Society and friends in Holland. Through the team members, we endeavour to inform Hebrew Christians of these issues.

“A flat is used as a base for our work in Israel. Here we store hundreds of TBS Hebrew publications and also copies of our Hebrew *Westminster Confession of Faith*. At present the flat is occupied by a retired Jewish Christian lady who looks after the property and assists with the storage of books as needed. This lady vacates the property whenever we may need the accommodation and contributes to the rent. Another Jewish lady who is also a team member looks after the flat for us and takes care of the banking and billing business.

“I meet with the revision team each week via Google. Owing to various health issues I have not been able to visit Israel in person over the past year. Once the Revised Hebrew New Testament is published, there will be much to do in promoting the New Testament amongst Israelis.”

Our hope and constant prayer is that all our Mission work will blossom more and more and be very fruitful among Jews and Gentiles worldwide.

“The whole earth let His glory fill.
Amen, so let it be.”

(Psalm 72:19, metrical)

ZIMBABWE MISSION REPORTS

BULAWAYO

Rev S Khumalo

AS we approached the year 2022, the Covid-19 restrictions were eased and finally lifted. We are very thankful to the Lord in His good Providence that all things returned to normal.

When we look at all the events that have befallen the world, may it be a wakeup call for all to hear and understand the voice of the Lord speaking in His Judgments and Providence. “The Lord’s voice crieth unto the city, and the man of wisdom shall see thy name: hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it” (Micah 6:9).

The year began with all the activities as it had been before Covid-19. The work of the gospel continued smoothly, with our communion held in June and December. Services are held in all of Bulawayo stations, namely Lobengula, Nkulumane, Mahatshula and Mguza, with prayer meetings held at Thembiso School on Tuesdays and Lobengula church on Fridays.

With me being interim Moderator of other vacant stations, I am very grateful to the elders who help to keep the doors open every Sabbath when I am away. Our prayer is that the Lord himself would bless the Word by His Holy Spirit, that the work done in weakness would bring fruit in abundance to the glory of His holy name and salvation to poor sinners.

As the year progressed, we lost through death some members of the congregation. Of those we lost was a God fearing lady – Mrs. Mzamo (MaKhumalo), wife to the late Rev Mzamo, who in her last moments was heard singing Psalm 23 as they observed the movement of her lips singing Psalm 23:4 up until she breathed her last breath.

The congregation has not been spared by the movement of young people to other cities in the country, across borders and overseas in search of better opportunities and furthering their education. We pray that wherever they are, the seed sown would be kept in their hearts and blessed by the Lord. We are also encouraged by some young people who are former John Tallach students, who continually attend the means of grace. I am grateful that they got places to study at the local university, which enables them to continue attending services. Another encouragement is of a young man, who had just finished his “O” Level exams at John Tallach School came forward during the communion in December seeking baptism and was accepted. In all this, we see the evidence of the Lord’s Spirit at work. If it is a great joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, how much should we also joy when we see the Lord working by His grace in turning sinners unto Himself.

We are living in perilous times which are written of in 2 Timothy 3 and the advice is given in verse 14, “But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of knowing of whom thou hast learned them. And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation, through faith which is in the Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Timothy 3:14-15).

In conclusion, we are thankful to the Most High in putting in the hearts of His people, here and abroad, the spirit of prayer and supplication for the prosperity of the work of the gospel of salvation through faith in the Divine Redeemer. And the grace of giving to the support of the work of the gospel and Mission field in Zimbabwe.

“For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Romans 10:12-13).

MBUMA
Rev S Khumalo

Mbuma has been vacant since the death of Reverend N Sibanda in 2020. There is a reason to thank the Lord in his good Providence that the work of the Gospel goes on.

There are several stations under Mbuma, the furthest one being Somakantana and Makhwatheni that are across Shangani River on the north; and on the southwest is Singeni along Gwampa river valley. In all these preaching stations, the doors are opened every Sabbath except a few that are open alternatively due to the shortage of labourers and transport. The communion is held twice a year in April and October and once in August at Somakantana, but no communion was held last year at Somakantana due to the damage of the church roof by termites. We hope when the roof is repaired, the communion services will resume.

There are spiritual activities at Mbuma led by catechists in collaboration with the hospital. The Bible classes for the young people at Mbuma itself and around its stations have proved to be fruitful. This has been evidenced by some young people who have appeared before the Kirk session seeking their baptism or membership of the full communion. In April during the communion among those that were accepted for the sacrament of baptism was a young boy Professor Moyo, 15 years old, and was baptized by Reverend Jardine. In October, there appeared before the session Babongile Dlamini, 14 years of age, seeking baptism and was accepted.

The story of Babongile Dlamini is as follows: He is one of the young people who attend the Bible studies conducted at Mbuma and around Mbuma stations and the community. I had an opportunity to join the children in the programme that was being conducted by the catechists and the Mbuma Primary School Bible Knowledge teacher. The basis of their study and quiz was on the book of Joshua chapters 1-7. During the October communion at Mbuma, Babongile came forward before the Kirk Session seeking baptism. On the questions put before him he proved to have a good knowledge of the Scripture and being asked what he understood about sin he said: "this is what I understand that God hates sin". On being asked further as where to he got that knowledge he said, "In the Word of God as we were studying the story of Achan in the Book of Joshua, that is where I came to know that God hates sin and the punishment".

I said to myself that to others it was just a short story but to Babongile it was more than a story, it was the truth revealed to him by God the Holy Spirit. This is our prayer that God blesses the teaching of His Word to our young people as it was of Samuel who said "speak Lord thy servant heareth". This was very striking to us all. Let it be our duty to teach our children (Psalm 78:5-7).

The fruit of the work of the preaching and teaching of the Word of God and its blessing is seen when there is unsettlement because of their condition and seeking the remedy which is the blood of Christ.

Furthermore on Sabbath after the services, there is a Bible study conducted by the catechists at the Hospital for all the people and expecting mothers. It is an open discussion for all and gives opportunity to understand how differently people understand the Scripture and gives the opportunity to draw people to the true doctrine of the Word of God. May the Lord bless our institutions that they may be means for the furtherance of the Gospel to the poor perishing sinners.

There is a good reason to thank the Lord for the work that is done at Mbumba, the Elders and professing men who keep the doors of the means of grace open on Sabbath and weekday prayer meetings. I would also like to thank all those that support the work of the gospel in prayer and materially here and abroad, particularly the JFMC, Mbumba Zending Committee, the Church and friends overseas. "Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord weep between the porch and the altar and let them say spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach that the heathen should rule over them; wherefore should they say among the people, Where is their God?" (Joel 2:17).

ZENKA

Rev S Khumalo

As we come to the end of the year and begin another year in time, we have reason to thank the Lord in that He hath been mindful of us. Zenka is one of the Mission stations which was opened after Nkayi. A number of God fearing men and women were associated with Zenka. The Gospel has been preached since then until today.

After some interruptions by the Covid-19 restrictions, the situation has stabilized. Services are held in all 5 preaching stations as follows: Zenka, Mabayi, Katasa, Fudu and in the farms. In all the 4 stations, services are held every Sabbath, only in the farms they are held alternatively due to transport problems. The communion is held twice per year in February and August. In both communions held in the year the attendance was very good and it composed of all ages young and old. It would remind me of the old days when there would be a communion, the whole community would feel that there was an unusual event happening. In the course of the year one elder and a deacon were ordained in the congregation to add to the 5 elders and 2 deacons. It is our prayer that the Lord would send a shepherd to minister in the Zenka congregation.

The cry is very loud, "come over into Macedonia and help us" (Acts 16:9).

NKAYI

Rev S Khumalo

In the 1920s people were moved from Induba near Ingwenya with their Chief Bhidisani Hlabangana to be settled at Nkayi which was known as Shangani Reserve. That movement was the planting of the seed of the gospel to the Dark

Forest. It was Chief Bhidisani who asked Rev John B Radasi for a church and school. It was then the beginning of Nkayi and the preaching of the gospel. Nkayi became the mother of all our preaching stations in the Shangani Reserve.

The preaching of the gospel has been preached since then. Nkayi has six preaching stations: Nkayi, Mathetshaneni, Manomano, Mathendele, Nkuba and Donsa. Services are held in all these preaching stations and communions are held at Nkayi in January and June and Donsa in May. There are 7 elders and 3 deacons and the concern is that most of these elders are old and unwell. We pray that the Lord will raise up young men in His vineyard.

I am thankful of the work done by the elders in keeping the doors of worship opened every Sabbath and most of the stations are supplied from Nkayi. Mr J B Mpofo is very helpful in seeing that everything is done in order but especially for his spiritual mindness and the zeal he has for the cause of Christ.

The other desire which has been expressed by the elders and community is to have Nkayi School brought under the church as the responsible authority. The desire is so loud that it comes out of the hearts that are concerned by false doctrine and teachings that have destroyed our children, especially when it is done in schools which were once fountains of Scriptural knowledge.

“Oh that thou would rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence” (Isaiah 64:1).

ZVISHAVANE

Rev T Mwedzi

We are nearly at the end of a year after my induction to the charge of Zvishavane New Canaan congregation. We pray for the Lord's mercy that we may sing the pilgrims' song of ascent; “If it had not been the Lord who was on our side” Psalm 124:1.

It has been a year mixed with joy and sorrows, a cry for the Lord's help and a thankful heart for His mercy. The state of the nation and the state of the visible Church may bring a sorrowful song because sin continues to abide and the Sabbath days continue to be despised. Young people continue to vanish from the true religion and false teachings continue to have many followers. Many churches which received sound doctrines from missionaries over a hundred years, are failing to resist the pressure from the devil and are bringing in strange false doctrines. It's all about money and a fight for large gatherings.

We are however, thankful that the light has not been completely blown out. The Lord has enabled us to continue preaching Christ crucified and observe sacraments commissioned by Christ our Head. Communions were held at Maware and Chiedza in June meaning we were enabled to hold all the five communions in our congregation. We are thankful that the Lord has drawn back a number of families which had stopped attending the means of grace for over eight years and some have been restored to their membership of the Lord's table. New families at Chiedza and Maware are also coming.

Preaching and exhorting the brethren is being upheld in our eleven preaching stations. Munaka has difficulties during the rainy season because elders cannot cross the Runde River to supply, so the Minister has to drive 130km. Gweru is a new preaching station and an average of 24 young people gather three times in a month. At New Canaan, the number of young people attending is deteriorating. Although it is partly due to migration, some have just lost interest in the church and that is breaking our hearts. In Zvishavane town, a number of young people are attending services with many of them coming from Chiedza and Maware. At Maware, Cephas Matara, our new catechist, has started catechising children from the age of four to the age of thirteen. The community and the teachers are very much thankful to the church for providing him to guide their children in the ways of the Lord. We received 6,000 Bibles from the Trinitarian Bible Society and I have distributed them at the School, within our church and throughout the country. The reception of the new translation of the Shona Bible in Zimbabwe is very encouraging. We have failed to supply all the need for the Shona Bible but we hope that the Lord will provide generous friends to contribute for the printing and shipping of more Bibles.

We are very thankful to the Foreign Missions Committee for the provision of a suitable vehicle. The roads are poor to some places like Munaka and are not there at all in other places like Gwemombe. Although the vehicle is in good condition, the maintenance costs remain high due to poor roads and high mileage which is between 5,000km and 6,000km in one month. The manse was refurbished to modern standards for which we are very thankful. Good security was also put in place.

I feel my report is not complete without mentioning the encouraging visits we had from our friends in Scotland. At the beginning of the year we were visited by Rev J B Jardine for the moderation of my call and my induction. Three times we were visited by the Mission co-ordinator Mr Hugh Mackenzie and he met with congregants at Chiedza, Maware and Zvishavane town. During the beginning of this year we were visited by Rev Somerset and his family. He preached at Chiedza and at New Canaan. We were also visited by Dr Angus Macleod and his daughter from the Aberdeen congregation. Such visits bring much joy and edification. It is a great wonder how the Lord has such a family with a bond of one faith.

Our desire and prayer unto the Lord is that He would uphold the truth and revive His worship upon the earth. "Wilt thou not revive us again; that thy people may rejoice in thee?" (Psalm 85:6).

INGWENYA

Rev S Khumalo

We have come to the end of another year in time and we have a reason to be thankful to the Most High for His preserving mercies. One could say "I am not worthy even for the least of thy mercies". The preaching of the Gospel began

at Ingwenya in 1905. Generations have come and gone but the Word of God is still preached even in our time. There were some setbacks in the year before in that the work of the Gospel was interrupted due to Covid-19 regulations. We are thankful that things have stabilised and that places of worship are open every Sabbath. There are 5 stations; that is: Ingwenya, Cameron, Inyathi and Insiza. Communions are held at Ingwenya in March and September and Cameron in July. Inyathi used to have a communion in November but due to the depletion of attendees and the Elder there was widowed and is now unwell, he was taken by his son to Mbembesi to take care of him. Services are still held for the few that are remaining and still able to walk to attend the services. In September two ladies were received for membership during the communion at Ingwenya and also in July, at Cameron, a young man was accepted to full membership.

During the school term the church is full of schoolchildren and adults and no one passes through the school without having the opportunity of being under the preaching and teaching of the Word of God. This has been evidenced by some of the former students, who from John Tallach have continued to attend services in Bulawayo. It has been through the School that the late Rev Mazvabo and Rev Sibanda came to the light of the truth and later the Lord called them to the ministry. It is our prayer that these young people may come to the same knowledge of Christ and that among them He may call some to the work of the ministry in His own time. It was due to the shortage of Elders at Ingwenya that the Presbytery appointed Mr B Ncube to be the assessor Elder of Ingwenya congregation, to add to the 3 local Elders who are active. I am very thankful to these men who have kept the doors open every Sabbath and weekday prayer meetings during my absence.

I would like to thank Rev Jardine, who helped in the revival of the Zimbabwe Presbytery and he also helped to supply Ingwenya, during the time when Rev T Mwedzi was ordained and inducted to the New Canaan congregation. We are very thankful to the Lord this has made it possible for communions to be held in all our main stations. I also would like to thank Rev D Somerset, who on his short visit managed to spare himself to supply Ingwenya. We pray that the word preached by our two ministers as deputy and visitor will be blessed by the Lord.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the JFMC and the Mbumba Zending Committee, the Church and friends overseas for their prayers, material and financial support for the Gospel and mission work in Zimbabwe.

“The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He will send forth labourers into His harvest” (Matthew 9:37-38).

JOHN TALLACH HIGH SCHOOL REPORT

Mr B Ncube, Headmaster

AFTER the 2 years of disruption caused by the Covid pandemic, there was a gradual return to a more normal working environment during 2022. However, some restrictions have remained in place in Zimbabwe right through to 2023: boarding schools have remained protected spaces and mask wearing has remained compulsory. All pupils were able to attend church services and Sabbath school again for which we were very thankful.

Teaching and learning throughout the school returned to normal and a major effort was made to cover some of the ground lost during the previous 2 years. The Bible Knowledge programme continued with all classes again following the prescribed syllabi for each year group. A major challenge was encountered in 2023 with the resignation of both Bible Knowledge teachers, Mr and Mrs Ndebele, who emigrated to Canada. As this coincided with Mrs Bartle's period of furlough, a very heavy burden has fallen on the remaining church staff to cover the programme until she is due to return in May. Urgent efforts are meanwhile being made to recruit suitable replacements for Mr and Mrs Ndebele. Difficulties have been experienced in extending Mrs Bartle's work permits: each renewal application so far has resulted in extended discussions with the Department of Immigration. The next renewal is due in April 2023, the application for an extension was submitted at the end of 2022 so we hope it will be successful. The school is experiencing difficulty in recruiting and retaining, via the Ministry of Education, qualified teachers in the fields of economics, mathematics and all the sciences at A Level. The parents' committee (FIM) has had to step in and employ temporary staff to fill these vacancies.

Miss MacLean, who had worked at the school since August 1993, retired in August 2022 after 29 years' service due to family needs in the UK. Miss MacLean had been deputy head of the school since the end of 1998. This was a heavy blow for myself particularly as she and I have worked together since June 2000 as head and deputy of the school and it was difficult for me to think of working with anyone else in that capacity after 22 years. However, we are all very pleased that Mr N Khumalo, the Senior Master at the school, is properly qualified to serve as deputy head. He is a former pupil of the school, has been teaching with us for several years now and is a deacon in the Bulawayo congregation. Mr Khumalo has been appointed as acting deputy head while we wait for the Ministry of Education to formally appoint him to the post. The parents' committee (FIM) hosted a very nice function at the school acknowledging Miss MacLean's dedicated service and wishing her well in her retirement.

Enrolment

Enrolment in Term 1 of 2023 was 562 learners: 286 girls and 276 boys. There are 19 day learners and 543 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.

These enrolment figures are significantly lower than in recent years. The reduction in numbers can be attributed to 4 main reasons: firstly, the deteriorating economic situation means that some families are unable to continue paying the fees, particularly in US dollars; secondly, a significant number of boarding pupils have left the country to join parents working abroad; thirdly, the Ministry of Education has insisted that boarding schools allow for more social distancing in the dormitories, and there are always some pupils who are unhappy with the curriculum which they are offered.

Examination Results

“O” Level ZIMSEC 2022

The overall pass rate was 92.86%. Sixteen subjects scored 80% or above, 8 of them with a 100% pass rate. 16 learners were awarded 5 or more “A” passes.

“A” Level ZIMSEC 2022

The overall pass rate (i.e., candidates who had at least 2 passes) was 100%. The lowest pass rate for any subject was 95.65%, 7 subjects scored 100%.

“O” Level CIE (Cambridge) 2022

Religious Studies: After the disappointing result post Covid in 2021, the Religious Studies results showed a pleasing recovery in 2022.

No of candidates: 112 Pass rate: 88.39% No of As: 21

The Bible Knowledge teachers worked very hard to restore the usual standard and credit is due to them for their efforts.

22 candidates registered for other subjects: Of the 13 subjects written, 10 had pass rates of over 80%, 6 of them with 100%. There were 40 individual A passes and 2 A*.

“A” Level CIE (Cambridge) 2022

20 candidates registered for the Cambridge “A” Level examinations in 2022: a total of 7 subjects were written with a 100% pass rate in each, but only one A* star.

Finance

The devaluation of the Zimbabwe dollar continued dramatically over the year: at this time last year the official exchange rate to the US dollar was \$130.15 but at the time of writing this year’s report it has collapsed to around \$1,000. This of course means that all costs have continued to rise and we attempt to ensure that fees are adjusted accordingly. However, this can be difficult as any increases to fees require the permission of the Ministry of Education. In term 1 of 2022 the average boarding fee was the equivalent of \$690 US per boarder

but the fees increase granted later in the year was only \$600 US which obviously did not meet the budget. Another attempt is being made at the time of writing to have the boarding fee restored to the equivalent of \$690 US. A positive development by mid 2022 was that permission was given to collect a percentage of the fees in US dollars.

All increases to school fees have to be agreed at a general meeting of parents before the request is presented to the Ministry of Education. We are in the happy position that our parents generally understand the economic pressures on the boarding school budget and are philosophical about the increases. Apart from financing the regular day-to-day operations of the school, the parents' committee (FIM) only had sufficient funds to assist with teachers' welfare. Teachers are still being paid in local currency and the spending power is reducing daily.

The Mission continues to pay for all security, and 2 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

The development programme for 2022 was limited:

1. Ingwenya Primary Classroom Block

Although this is not a John Tallach School project, it is facilitated by the JTHS Project Team. Construction started early in 2022 but the building, although nearing completion, is still not completed at the time of writing.

2. Miss C M M Macaulay Classroom Block

As an extra classroom block is needed at the Form 6 complex, it was decided to allocate the development funding for 2022 to this. The offer of further funding from the Executors of Miss Macaulay, who devoted her whole working life to the Mission in various capacities and notably for decades at John Tallach School, was very welcome. This classroom block is scheduled for construction in 2023.

Conclusion

One lesson to be learned from our experience of the Covid years is our complete dependence on the Most High for all the Scriptural privileges which He has so richly given to us in His holy providence. One year after another, in fact decades after each other, our access to the Word of God in church by the faithful preaching of the Word and in school by careful instruction of the children brought under our charge remained secure, only to be withdrawn it seemed in a moment. We need to be truly thankful that these privileges have been restored to us in the Lord's mercy, and we need to plead with the Most High that the Word will be blessed to the salvation in Christ Jesus of the souls of the children and all staff, teaching and non teaching, and that we

would all believe that, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

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

MBUMA MISSION HOSPITAL REPORT

Dr A Snoek

COMPARED with the previous, by the Covid-19 pandemic overshadowed years, 2022 was less eventful. However, the ever-increasing exodus of qualified and non-qualified staff caused a further deterioration of the already very frail health care system in Zimbabwe.

The reduction of our staff, together with the higher workload due to patients coming from other areas, where they could not access the needed care, made it another strenuous year for the hospital staff. And besides the physical concerns, we were much concerned about the ongoing, influential promotion of immoral behaviour in the country, funded by overseas donors. But the Lord sustained us and did exceeding abundantly above all that we asked or thought.

A happy event was the official opening of Simbo Rural Health Centre on the 18th of October 2022. The clinic had already being operational for eighteen months, but no official opening was done due to the Covid circumstances.

Mr R Moyo, the Minister of State and Provincial Affairs, was the guest of honour. Besides him, several representatives from the District and Provincial administration, Local leadership, Community Based Care workers, Donor organisations, Political parties and FP church members were present. Mr H Mackenzie, who stood at the cradle of the plans for the building of the clinics, was present as Mission Co-ordinator. Rev S Khumalo opened the meeting with a meditation on John 3 verse 14. He pointed out that we are thankful for the provisions for our physical ailments, but how much more should we find care for our souls and look upon the lifted Saviour.

During the opening it was asked when the mission is intending to build the next clinic. The JFMC already had decided to execute a review of the previous clinics first, before a decision will be made about the next clinic. Due to the work pressure in the hospital, the review was not yet done in 2022, but has been planned for 2023.

The increasing health care demands, economic decline and the related shortage of (human) resources, besides the great need in a wider community for the spreading of the gospel, made us to request the JFMC for a longer-term Mission Strategy. This was granted and will be executed in 2023, the Lord willing.

Administration and Finance

Compared with the previous Covid years, 2022 did not have many unexpected expenses. Economic activity slowed down in 2022, constrained by worsening agricultural conditions and price instability. The economic situation caused the rising of the cost of medicines and consumables. It, however, did not affect the ability of patients to pay the hospital fees. The income from hospital fees increased by nearly 200%. This greatly helped us to balance the Revenue expenditure accounts which exceeded their budget.

In February 2022 a container with donated goods from the Netherlands was received. Besides furniture and materials for the hospital, 12 boxes with stationery for the Primary schools were received, besides 1,500 books with Bible stories for children in Ndebele.

Maintenance and Capital projects

Due to limited resources, the number of capital projects remained few. To be able to maintain the current standard of care, capital investments however are needed.

Buildings

8 huts were re-roofed in New Makhaya. The staff house called Mahatshula was divided into 2 semi-detached houses to create a place for 2 families.

In Lutsha RHC all outstanding maintenance issues were addressed. Electrification was done of the staff houses in both Lutsha and Vova clinic and they were connected to the solar field. These solar fields were installed in 2021 by a donor project called SolarforHealth.

In Simbo RHC a 2nd staff house was built, besides a storm drain and bridge before the gate.

Transport

In February 2022 we received a new Toyota Landcruiser, which has been of great use for the community meetings, outreaches and the transportation of staff to and from Bulawayo.

Electricity and generators

In the first half of the year both of our generators continued to have problems and were sent for repair. Necessary spare parts however could not be sourced or were nearly as expensive as a new engine. Since mains electricity remained very unreliable, even after the raining season, and the solar field and storage has become too small to be able to last a whole night, a new engine was bought and installed.

Staffing

In the course of 2022 13 staff members left: they went for training, left the country or were transferred to other health facilities. Two Catechists became

divinity students and resigned. They continued where possible to assist with the work in and around the hospital, for which we are very thankful.

Very sadly we lost 1 of our staff members due to the complications of Covid-19. PCN F Nkomo had been working in Mbumba for nearly 15 years and died on the 21st of May 2022. His trust in the Lord and his endurance of the chronic pain from which he was suffering, left a witness and great gap among our staff members.

12 staff members were appointed: 7 were filling posts which had become vacant in the previous years, 3 Nurse Aides were added to the Mission payroll and 1 RGN was deployed by ZACH.

1 Global fund Date Clerk resigned and was re-employed as Nurse Aide.

The number of staff members for Hospital and Clinics at 31st December 2022 was as follows:

Payroll	Number of staff members	Payroll	Number of staff members
Government	71	ZACH	2
Mission	15	Global fund	1
		Total	89

During 2022 we enjoyed the company of the following visitors: In February and November Leonie Dieleman, a Dutch Social Worker, came. She trained hospital and clinic staff on Youth Life Skills, which proved to be very useful in counteracting the immoral teaching of other donors. In March Johan Verhaar and Wouter Stolk assisted with the IT systems in the hospital. Also Robert Beukhof, a nephew of Sr Willie, arrived in March. In April Rev B Jardine came to assist Rev Khumalo during the communion, for which we were very grateful. In June Clara Boer visited us, soon followed by Kees and Beppie van der Linden, relatives of Sr Willie. In July and August Maaiké Ligtenberg and Myrthe Holland together with Levine Sprengelmeijer and Rhode Meenwsen (medical students-to-be) and Heleen Geluk came to Mbumba. Heleen assisted the Sabbath school teachers during the Bible days. In September Henk and Helena van de Bruinhorst, relatives of Dr Snoek, together with their friend, Nelleke van de Hoom, came. At the end of September Gerald Exalto (Business Administration student), his friend Christian Geijtenbeek and Jacob van de Heuvel arrived. They were soon followed by the parents of Mr Janse. In December Annemarie Visser and Everdien Schalk came, together with Ronald Pieters, a nephew of Dr Snoek.

Hospital and Clinic services

The last Covid-19 wave happened in Zimbabwe in December 2021/January 2022. From April on the number of symptomatic Covid-19 infections among adults became next to nil.

During March/April however we lost 3 neonates due to Covid-19. The mothers of these neonates had an asymptomatic Covid-19 infection during the last two weeks of their pregnancy, but their babies became very ill soon after birth and developed a multisystem inflammatory syndrome.

Besides that we had 6 patients during the first 2 months of the year who needed an emergency operation for an Ectopic pregnancy. Normally we have 2 or 3 Ectopic pregnancies annually. Although we could not fully prove the relation with the Covid-19 wave in December/January, international reports confirm indeed that there has been an increase of Ectopic pregnancies since the Covid-19 pandemic.

Covid-19	2020	2021	2022
Number of patients/staff members tested for Covid-19	575	15833	3423
Number of patients tested positive for Covid-19	2	251	132
Number of patients admitted with severe Covid-19	2	121	16
Number of patients who died due to Covid-19	0	9	1
Number of staff members who tested positive for Covid-19	7	17	44
Number of staff members who died due to Covid-19	0	0	1

As mentioned above, the number of patients from outside our catchment area and outside the province (Gokwe, Kwekwe, Binga, Gwanda) is still increasing.

	2020	2021	2022
Admissions	1,548	1,860	1,936
General	553	775	871
Paediatrics	191	205	268
Maternity	736	833	802
Neonatal	68	47	50
Deaths	87	127	134
General	76	121	124
Paediatrics	9	4	4
Maternity	0	1	0
Early Neonatal	2	6	6

Out Patients Department	2021 All	2022 Mbuma	2022 Lutsha	2022 Vova	2022 Simbo	2022 All
New Clients	8,045	4,740	1,755	2,552	1,073	10,120
Repeat visit/ Chronic Clients	9,263	5,401	881	1,229	552	8,063
Total	17,308	10,141	2,636	3,481	1,625	18,183

Preventive services	2021 All	2022 Mbuma	2022 Lutsha	2022 Vova	2022 Simbo	2022 All
Antenatal/Postnatal Clinic attendances	2,217	1,237	733	700	453	3,123
Child Welfare Clinic attendances	9,573	3,350	2,646	2,953	584	9,533

Total Births	2021 Mbuma	2021 Lutsha	2021 Vova	2022 Mbuma	2022 Lutsha	2022 Vova	2022 Simbo
Live births	807	38	28	786	34	30	14
Still births	11	0	0	9	0	0	0

2022	Still birth			Early Neonatal Death			Maternal Death		
	Fresh (FSB)	Mace-rated	Total	<2.5kg	>2.5kg	Total	Hospital	Home	Total
Hospital	3	6	9	3	3	6	0	0	0
Clinics	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0

Theatre/Labour ward	2021	2022
Caesarean section	115	102
Other major operations	185	229

	2021	2022
Radiology services		
Number of X-rays taken	2,651	3,631
Number of Ultrasound Scans taken	841	918
Laboratory services		
Number of lab tests	23,041	16,707
Number of HIV tests	1,304	1,433
HIV incidence in ANC	1.75%	4.12%

OIC and TB services	Mbuma	Lutsha	Vova	Simbo	All
Total number of patients on ART	589	461	412	237	1,699
Total number of patients diagnosed with TB	471	3	3	0	477

Newly diagnosed Non Communicable diseases	2019	2020	2021	2022
Hypertension	25	26	37	39
Diabetes Mellitus	25	7	12	12
Cancer	49	41	57	73

The Lord in His mercy enabled us to go on with the work in and around the hospital and clinics. A patient, who had travelled over 200 km to reach Mbuma was asked why he had come so far. He answered: “Because you put God first and then you care for people”.

The work of the Catechists remains the backbone of the work. Mr G Nkiwane wrote: “More often than not, the work of Catechists at Mbuma is not only full of challenges, but very much contains some outright disappointment. Examples of these are when people being taught not only display their lack of interest in the matters of salvation, but at times are openly hostile to these. However at times the work yields such pleasing fruits and one cannot fail to see the arm of the Lord God at work. One such incident was witnessed in relation to a patient who got admitted at the male ward. The man in question was a very ‘satisfied Christian’. He was the pastor of a certain church. According to him his pastoral work had been hugely blessed. However, the Catechist with whom he talked, felt it somehow that the boasting lacked a solid biblical foundation. He therefore decided to visit the man more regularly and read and explain sin and salvation more often and biblically. As this was happening the physical condition of the pastor was deteriorating. The Catechist then noticed also a change in the confidence of the man in so far as his state of salvation was concerned. The man began to be evidently afraid of his coming death. His confidence was gone. The Catechist continued to offer the Lord Jesus Christ to him as the only hope for his soul. Some days before his end, the man was full of joy and confided to the Catechist in question that he had found Christ. He died, but it is humbly hoped that while his body returned to the dust, his spirit was joyfully received in the Father’s many mansions.”

THEMBISO CHILDREN'S HOME REPORT

B Maphala, Home Superintendent

Introduction

Time passes by swiftly and, before one realises, it is the end of yet another year. We are reminded of the scriptural truth in Ecclesiastes 3 verse 1: "To everything there is a season and a time to every purpose under the heaven". It is now time to submit a report yet again for the past year. We are however thankful to the Almighty for ushering us into the New Year still alive through His Mercies and benevolence. We also have to thank the responsible authority, JFMC, for its continued unwavering support to us that has seen us through these difficult times, not forgetting other supporters who came on board through their generous donations to keep the home afloat. May they continue to do so, DV.

The home/children

It has a total of 23 children in its quarters, six girls and seventeen boys. Three households are operational; i.e., youth house, family units four and five respectively. All our children are in good health, attending school at different levels and institutions of learning. At secondary level we have twelve children in total, eight boys and four girls. At primary level, we have 11 children in total, nine boys and two girls. The demographics are as outlined below .

Secondary Level:

	Boys	Girls
Form 1	2	0
Form 2	3	2
Form 3	3	1
Form 4	0	1

Primary Level:

	Boys	Girls
Grade 2	1	0
Grade 3	1	0
Grade 4	2	0
Grade 5	3	1
Grade 6	1	0
Grade 7	1	1

It is quite pleasing to note that most of our children are performing well in their respective grades and forms. Most of our children's fees are paid for by Higherlife Foundation save for two. We are really indebted to Higherlife Foundation. The home takes care of uniforms and books plus learning material required in schools at different capacities. We are really thankful to the Lord

in whom we trust and believe. The psalmist had this to say in Psalm 46:1: “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble”. The sky-rocketing fees and cost of living in our country are a real concern but this organisation helps to relieve that burden. It is imperative though to keep our children within the confines of our doctrine at all costs.

Worship

It is held on a daily basis, led by the Home Superintendent, in the morning and evenings. Scripture lessons are carried out on Sabbath day by house mothers following a laid down schedule from the Home Superintendent. This we do as mandated in the scripture, “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Prov 22:6). It is our duty to train children in a scriptural way, trusting in the Lord for a blessing.

Staff

We have a staff compliment of 16 employees at the moment, comprised of communicants and adherents. These are encouraged to attend church services all the time even if off duty. It is encouraging to note that most of them adhere to this without complaint.

Vocational Training Programme

Computer lessons are done once a week on Saturdays for all school-going children. Lessons are undertaken in the computer room by a computer professional. This has helped a lot towards their performance at school.

Conclusion

We appreciate all the efforts made in order to raise the disadvantaged in a proper way. However, the most important part is that they should be aware of their duties towards God. King Solomon summed it up in Ecclesiastes 12 verses 12-13: “And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh”; verse 13, “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man”. We must be ever aware of these scriptural truths lest we forget our responsibilities to those under our care.

ZIMBABWE MISSION ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT

Mr T B Mpofu

Introduction

We are most thankful to the Most High to have been allowed to see the end of another year and say with the Psalmist, "O give thanks unto the LORD, for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever" (Psalm 107:1).

The year 2022 saw some improvements in the general situation in the country. The Covid-19 pandemic eased and most of the restrictions were lifted. Schools returned to normal operations, and gathering for public worship was allowed without limit in the number of attendees.

Board Meetings

Regular meetings for the three boards, namely Ingwenya, Mbumba and Thembeiso, and the Head Office Committee continued throughout the year. Rev S Khumalo chaired the initial meetings, and continued to chair the Head Office Committee. With my appointment as Administrator, I chaired the meetings of the three Boards of Governors. Seven meetings were held by each of the boards, as well as the Head Office Committee.

Staffing

I was appointed as the Mission Administrator in February and continued as the Mission Education Officer. Whilst I am grateful for the support I continued to receive from Mr H Mackenzie, the Mission Co-ordinator and members of the Head Office Committee, as the year progressed it became clear that the workload of the two positions was such that one of the two could not be carried out effectively.

There are 33 people in the Head Office payroll, these include the Ministers, Home Missionaries, Head Office staff, administrative staff at Thembeiso Children's Home and Mbumba Mission Hospital, Bible Knowledge teachers, catechists and watchmen. We have not faced any challenges with labour relations in the Mission.

We are most thankful to the Lord of the harvest that Mr T Mwedzi, who had been a divinity student, was inducted and ordained in May, and took the pastoral charge of the New Canaan congregation. The Ingwenya, Mbumba, Nkjayi and Zenka charges remained vacant, with Rev Khumalo as the interim moderator for all these stations. With the induction of Rev Mwedzi the functionality of the Zimbabwe Presbytery was restored. Three men were accepted as divinity students, namely Messrs Keith Mpata, Khulekani Dube and Velani Moyo. Our prayers are that the Lord would add more workers in His vineyard.

Expatriate staff

Miss N B MacLean resigned for personal reasons, after nearly 30 years at John Tallach High School. She continues to work in an advisory capacity at the

request of the Ingwenya Board. Miss M Kerkhoff, the mathematics teacher, continued at John Tallach High School. She is currently awaiting renewal of her employment permit which expires in March 2023.

Dr A Snoek remained the Medical Superintendent at Mbumba, with Dr C Brobbel as a Medical Officer and Sr Geurtsen, Matron.

Deputies

We had two visits from Rev J B Jardine as a Deputy in 2022. During his May visit he presided over the induction and ordination of Rev Mwedzi. On his second visit he managed to get to all Mission Stations but spent most of the Sabbaths at Ingwenya. On both visits Rev Jardine conducted lessons with the Bible Knowledge teachers.

Finances

We continued to receive our monthly remittances from the General Treasurer. These being in USD 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 famine is a likelihood, and some food relief could be required later during the year.

Sustentation Fund

Overall, contributions to the fund went up by 6% from the previous year. There was, however, a decrease in contributions in Mbumba (9%) and Zenka (53%).

Below are the figures from the various stations:

Station	2020	2021
Ingwenya	\$2,315.86	\$2,382.17
Bulawayo	\$2,007.40	\$2,038.78
Mbumba	\$1,260.00	\$1,144.00
Nkayi	\$50.00	£174.00
Zenka	\$640.00	\$300.00
Zvishavane	\$360.00	\$1,018.00
Total	\$6,633.26	\$7,056.95

Schools

The situation at the schools returned to almost normal with the relaxation of some of the Covid-19 restrictions. However, the impact of the Covid-19 lockdowns and the learning time lost is still being felt at the schools. The learners are getting to Grade 7 without having covered the syllabus. Now the Grade 6 and 7 classes register with Zimbabwe Schools Examination Council

(ZIMSEC) for Continuous Assessment Learning Areas (CALA), which forms part of the Grade 7 examination mark.

The teaching of Scripture by our Bible Knowledge teachers as well as Bible studies for teachers continued in our schools, as a way of mitigating against the new curriculum which has introduced subjects that are against the Word of God. Monthly meetings were held with Bible Knowledge teachers. Lessons on the books of the Bible, the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and Church History continued with Rev Jardine via Teams. The divinity students have joined these lessons.

The Grade 7 results improved in all the schools, except Ingwenya, compared to the previous year. Ingwenya had the worst results out of the five schools. Zenka was the 2nd best in Nkayi District. Thembiso had the best results of the five schools once more, and had a 3% improvement on the previous year's results. Ingwenya had the poorest results.

Schools Statistics

			Grade 7 Results				
School	Enrolment	Staffing	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018
Ingwenya	336	11*	11%	50%	6%	59%	44%
Lutsha	625	20*	24%	13%	13%	8%	23%
Mbuma	673	22*	26%	12%	17%	46%	46%
Thembiso	469	18*	86%	83%	73%	96%	88%
Zenka	826	26*	50%	40%	58%	51%	72%

*This includes 2 Bible Knowledge teachers each, for Zenka and Mbuma, and 1 Bible Knowledge teacher each, for the other schools.

OVERSEAS COMMITTEE'S REPORT

Convener: Rev D A Ross

THE Overseas Committee is required to give a yearly report about our overseas congregations to the Synod. This report is also for the people throughout the Church for their ongoing concern and prayerful interest in the spiritual welfare of our overseas congregations. Also the Committee endeavours to assist overseas congregations by providing supply. However, with the fewness of ministers it is not easy to accomplish. Supply is a very important issue particularly for those congregation which do not have a pastor.

However, we are thankful to the Lord regarding the degree of success the Interim Moderators, Revs R MacLeod and D Campbell, have had in obtaining supply for the Chesley and Sante Fe congregations. They themselves give much of their time to these congregations, and their ministry is much

appreciated. Also these ministers, Rev K D MacLeod, Rev I D MacDonald, Rev A MacColl and Rev J Morrison, gave of their time and labour to the Chesley and the Sante Fe congregations which is deeply appreciated by these congregations and the Committee. If any of our ministers are minded to help overseas congregations, they are more than welcome to approach the Committee.

As was noted in our 2022 report, the Vancouver congregation no longer exists, nevertheless we continue to pray, if the Lord will, that the remnant of the Vancouver congregation will revive yet again. The demise of the Vancouver congregation is an example of the sad reality overtaking us in many parts of our Church. May we see in our own day a God-given awakening so that that these closed places may once again be houses of divine worship, with at least the two or three gathered in the name of the Lord and the Lord in their midst. There is, we are sure, no place in the whole world so well favoured as such a place.

The Committee requested Rev A MacColl, as Deputy to the Chesley and Santa Fe Congregations, to present a report to the Synod about his visit. However, he was unable to proceed to Sante Fe but will provide a report about the Chesley Congregation. Rev Caleb Hembd, along with his family, resided in the Sante Fe manse (during the purchase of a new manse in Gisborne) and supplied the Sante Fe Congregation for eight weeks, which we believe was much appreciated.

Rev J B Jardine was asked to supply the Singapore congregation in spring of 2023 and was set to do so, but due to a planned visit in early 2023 by a minister from the Asia Presbytery it was agreed that Mr Jardine go to Singapore in mid-summer. We are grateful for his willingness to supply the congregation and provide a report for the Synod; thereby adding to his already heavy travel schedule in connection with our Church in Africa. We are reminded that these visits to our congregations overseas are an important part of feeding the flock of God as directed by the Scriptures. It is a work required by the Master.

There are also reports for the Synod from the ministers of the Asian Presbytery summarized by the Clerk of the Presbytery and presented in one Presbytery report. These reports, in part, highlight the spiritually dark times they continue to work in; it is a darkness which faces all our congregations worldwide, but we have the assurance that it is not a darkness beyond the power of the gospel. With this assurance we, along with our friends in overseas congregations, confidently continue to labour, spreading the glorious gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. One matter we ought to wonder at, that is, the peace and liberty we have to preach, a stark difference to that of those who endanger their lives by merely mentioning Christ as their Saviour.

We see this from some extracts of a report from the Ukrainian Institute for Religious Freedom (IRF), “the Russian invasion of Ukraine has resulted in at least 494 religious buildings, theological institutions, and sacred places being damaged, looted or completely destroyed”. Many of these places are sadly

places of idolatry. However, there are a considerable number of groups which regard themselves as Evangelical, most of which are in the war zone. “The report also found the scale of destruction of Evangelical churches and prayer houses has been ‘immense’. . . . On many occasions, members of the looted churches found the burnt remains of Ukrainian Bibles, tracts and books. . . . In a speech during the IRF Summit, IRF executive director Dr. Maksym Vasin said Russian soldiers often target Ukrainian clergy and churchgoers, calling them ‘American spies’, ‘sectarians’, and ‘enemies of the Russian Orthodox people’.”

In all that dreadful chaos of war our people and property in Odessa have been preserved.

We have much need to be humbly thankful for the Lord’s preservation. Rev D Levytskyi’s report gives a small insight into the troubles connected with the war situation. Mr and Mrs Levytskyi and the extended family took the decision to flee from the city to the countryside, taking up residence in a place more distant from the danger of war. Nevertheless, with over an hour travel time by car they continue to have the services in the church in Odessa and at times are able to have a prayer meeting, also in the church. The elder, Mr Igor Zadorozhnyi, is minded to stay in his home which is a ten-minute walk from the church. Mr Levytskyi’s son and son-in-law have also remained in Odessa, occupying the Mission building, guarding the property from the ever present danger of thieves.

Mr Levytskyi’s report speaks for itself but we conclude this report by mentioning the wonder of being able to continue there as a Church, worshipping God and spreading sound gospel literature, especially in these places of imminent danger to life. For these blessings the name of the Lord is to be magnified. “For God heareth the poor, and despiseth not his prisoners” (Psalm 69:33).

ASIA PACIFIC REPORT

Rev C J Hembd

ON several occasions, the Apostle Paul states his desire to hear about the condition of congregations in other places, as well as his desire to inform the rest of the Church about his labours. For example, in writing to the Ephesians, he says, “But that ye also may know my affairs, and how I do, Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, shall make known to you all things: Whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that ye might know our affairs, and that he might comfort your hearts” (Eph 6:21-22; see also Col 4:7-8 and 1 Thess 3:5-7). After returning from their missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas gathered the whole Church in Antioch to tell them about all that God had done with them (Acts 14:27). We trust that the Synod reports about gospel work in other parts of the world are motivated by the same desire.

With the subsiding of the pandemic, the congregations of the Asia Pacific Presbytery were largely able to return to life as usual, with services, communions, and meetings of church courts taking place at the usual times. A youth conference was held in New Zealand in December 2022, with 15 people attending. Lectures were given on the Book of Genesis, Public Worship, the Book of Revelation, John Bunyan's Life and Writings, and the Benefit of Following Good Examples. We continue to have our encouragements, challenges, and disappointments, as the following sections show.

Singapore

Mr Bernard Yong, the congregation's sole elder, continues to hold most of the services, with about a dozen people attending each Sabbath. The interim moderator, Rev G G Hutton, reports that the acquirement of a permanent place of meeting has been "a huge step forward". He continues, "The congregation is now settled in a beautifully redesigned and renovated room, a credit to the dedication and hard work of those who have persevered in face of many challenges and disappointments in the history of the congregation. Although travel restrictions, due to Covid, have prevented ministerial supply until more recently, we are thankful that Rev. George Macdonald from Sydney was able to supply the congregation and administer the sacrament of the Lord's Supper in November. This was a source of encouragement to the few folks in Singapore, who are geographically so isolated."

Mr Yong and his wife have helped develop the Chinese version of the Free Presbyterian website, which we hope will not only spread the truths of the Word of God to many in Asia, but also make more people in the vast city-state of Singapore aware of our congregation there.

The Presbytery has agreed in principle that each of its ministers try to supply the congregation at least once per year, so that they will have at least four Sabbaths of supply. Now that travel restrictions have lifted, we hope to implement this plan in 2023, the Lord willing.

Grafton

In Grafton, Mr Hutton reports that despite the difficulties the congregation has experienced, it has received the upholding grace of God, and is able to testify at the end of another year, "Having therefore obtained help of God, I (we) continue unto this day". The numbers attending services continue to hold steady, with 50-60 people attending each Sabbath.

Like the apostle, the congregation's five elders and minister especially desire to see the congregation "filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that [they] might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God" (Col 1:9-10). They trust that they have seen some evidence of this.

Sydney

Rev G B Macdonald continues at his post in Western Sydney, where he began his ministry over 12 years ago. He writes:

“Though there is huge growth of population in our area, this has not translated to new people settling in the congregation this year. Whereas towns used to always have a church, sometimes more than one, nowadays large housing developments and new suburbs may have no church. Increasingly, it seems that Sydney and Australia are becoming more atheistic, and false religions are increasing due to immigrants bringing their beliefs with them.

“The love of entertainment, sport and general ease and wealth in Sydney leaves many seeking after the things of time and sense, caught up with the cares of the world. Cost of living pressures due to rising inflation, have led to some financial hardship in the city, but it is not outwardly noticeable.

“The congregation still has a number of young families. There was one child baptised in 2022. The usual two communions were held on the first Sabbath in March and the first Sabbath in September. No new communicants were added to the roll. One man met with the Kirk Session and was given the privilege of open communion in March.

“Over the course of the year, several people not in the congregation came occasionally to services. They tended to drop in, it seemed, out of curiosity or for other reasons. They usually came just the once on a Sabbath morning. We quite often do not see these people again, but hope that the Word preached, which they heard, might yet bear fruit in their lives.

“We also had some visitors from other FP congregations attend services when visiting family from overseas or coming to the communions. It is always encouraging to have these visitors, especially for their family members, who are especially glad to see them.

“The opening of international travel enabled me to travel to assist at communions in Auckland, Gisborne and Singapore and I also assisted in Grafton at the October communion. It was encouraging to do so after a long period during the pandemic when travel was not possible. It is helpful to the ties of fellowship in a Presbyterian church that ministers travel to assist their brethren at communions.

“The Sabbath school has two classes and in 2022 had eight students. The children learn by memory answers from the *Shorter Catechism* and verses from the metrical psalms.

“Mr J van Praag (elder) accompanied me on two visits to a man in Canberra, who has become convinced of exclusive psalmody in public worship and has expressed interest in the witness of the FPCoS. The Kirk Session decided that we seek to take a prayer meeting in his home once every two months, as he had desired some such regular visits. On each occasion only he attended but we hope that, if others are interested in the position of the FPCoS, over time, they may yet join with him for these services. We take encouragement from the example of the Saviour, who spoke to one woman by the well of Sychar

and through her witness, many others came to Jesus. Sadly, it appears, no church in the nation's capital city has the position of using psalms only in public worship.

"As ever, I would be glad of prayers for the success of the work of the gospel here in Sydney and now also in connection with the small work in Canberra."

Auckland

Rev J D Smith continues to labour in the largest city of New Zealand, where he was ordained to the ministry in 2010. He reports:

"In Auckland the beginning of the year saw our first and only postponing or cancelling of the January communion season, due to the restricted numbers in public gatherings required by the New Zealand government because of the Omicron outbreak. It had been hoped that the communion could take place within a couple of months, but circumstances were such that the next communion was held at the usual time, in July.

"Sadly, three communicants and their families transferred to different locations, so they are greatly missed. But on a more positive note, from the beginning of the year a new family of three started to attend the worship services in Auckland. One child was baptized, and three children were born into Congregation."

Tauranga

For years, the small congregation enjoyed the instruction and example of Mr Dick Vermuelen, an elder who laboured on our missions in Africa. The congregation has faced a number of challenges since his death in 2019. The interim moderator, Rev J D Smith, sought to provide regular supply and pastoral care, travelling monthly to visit the people and take prayer meetings. He reports:

"Sadly, the Tauranga Congregation has all but disappeared. While expressing their appreciation for the pulpit supply they had received monthly, the five remaining communicants left the Church, because of the isolation felt by their small number. It is hoped, however, that worship services can still be conducted in Tauranga from time to time. "O LORD, revive thy work in the midst of the years" (Hab 3:2)."

Gisborne

The numbers in Gisborne have been boosted by the arrival of a couple of families in the past few years. Around 25 people attend each Sabbath, with a few others being unable to attend due to increasing infirmity. One man from the community has begun attending on occasion. The congregation greatly appreciates the labours of the two assessor elders, Mr Hank Optland and Mr Alasdair Campbell, who try to attend every communion season, take services on occasion, and give advice on the spiritual and temporal matters of the congregation. Along with the congregation's treasurer, they gave significant

amounts of their time in getting the old manse sold and a new one purchased. The purchase would not have been possible without the assistance of the Finance Committee in Scotland. Their generosity is much appreciated.

Two members on the communion roll reside in Hastings, about 230 km south of Gisborne – Miss J Cox, and her nephew, Mr Peter Brown. Their prayerful support is also much appreciated.

Carterton

In this town of 6,000 people, and about 80 km northeast of the capital city of Wellington, about 27 people meet for worship on Sabbath days. Seventeen of these attendees are below the age of 18. The congregation regularly has a number of visitors. Services are conducted by the local elder, Mr Hank Optland, and also by the two deacons, Mr Jake van Praag, Jr. and Mr Justus Verheij, on occasion. The church building is located on the main street and is highly visible to the community.

The congregation greatly desires, and prays for, a faithful minister of the gospel. It is natural to think about the temporal needs that must be supplied before this can happen – such as the provision of a manse and the repayment of large loans on the church building. But a much greater need is for something that the wealthiest person on earth cannot supply: a soundly converted man who has been divinely called and equipped for the work of the ministry. All these needs are like great mountains, but “Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it” (Zech 4:7).

EASTERN EUROPE MISSION REPORT

Rev Dmytro Levytskyi

DURING the first months of Russian invasion the country was at a standstill. The deficit of everything was growing fast so that the prices on fuel, food and power supply grew extremely high. However, the strict 24 hours' curfew was reduced to six hours so we could visit soldiers at their stations and grant them Bibles and reformed literature as well as to help those who were in need. We purchased bottled water and food preserves for territorial defence personnel which we handed over with Bibles and other literature.

In addition, part of my family, my wife and daughter with two little children, had to move to the countryside to stay in a small cottage for safety. My son and son-in-law are staying in the Mission House to guard the property, along with Mr Zadorozhnyi during the day since he does not want to move from his home. As for me I have to drive each Sabbath and Thursday to the Church for the services which takes an hour's drive in each direction.

Also, in the country there were many volunteers helping people in the rear areas and soldiers in the frontline. At the present the statistics show that 16.3

million of Ukrainians left for Europe and about 8 million of citizens became temporarily displaced persons. Such demographic shift also affected our mission work since people became more concerned with their day-to-day survival in the new place where they had to move to. Nevertheless, the Most High blessed us and we have engaged in the following distribution work.

During the year 2022, Eastern Europe Mission sent to Ukrainian citizens, free of charge the following:

1. Family Bible (Ukrainian) –125 copies.
2. Family Bible (Russian) – 10 copies.
3. Sermons by Rev. D MacFarlane – 14 copies.
4. *WCF* (Russian) – 125 copies.
5. *WCF* (Ukrainian) – 39 copies.
6. *A Catechism of the History and Principles of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland* – 58 copies.
7. *An Exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith* by Robert Shaw – 21 copies.
8. *Line Upon Line* by F L Mortimer – 94 copies.
9. *Memoir and Remains of Rev. Donald MacDonald* – 58 copies.

Total amount of parcels sent with Christian literature – 2 kg – 68 pieces.

Total amount of parcels sent with Christian literature – 10 kg – 11 pieces.

The Mission Station has received donations from Ukrainians amounting to £108.71.

These donations were sufficient to pay for postage and running expenses such as purchasing of envelopes, postal stamps, paper for photo copier, pens and PO box rent. The balance of the year for postage as on 1st January 2023 is £475.60. The door Collection in 2022 was £427.84.

We heartily thank the Trinitarian Bible Society for supplying Bibles for distribution among Ukrainian people as well as to all those who donated to the cause of Christ in Ukraine. May the Lord bless them and grant them His grace and mercy in abundance.

Taking into consideration the war situation, we must humbly acknowledge that the Most High dealt with us mercifully. He preserved us during the darkest times of the past year. He blessed people within the Church and others from different countries and even continents to help us to survive. May His Name be blessed and praised still.

“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” (Lamentations 3:22-23).

TRAINING OF THE MINISTRY COMMITTEE'S REPORT

Convener: Rev D W B Somerset

THE training of the next generation of ministers is an important part of the ongoing work of the Christian Church, and almost from her inception, the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland has committed this work to tutors, under the immediate oversight of the Training of the Ministry Committee.

Students

The Church presently has four students for the ministry. Dr Alan McSeveney, a student under the Southern Presbytery, is just completing the second year of his Divinity course, on Hebrew and cognate subjects. His final year, of Systematic Theology under Rev. Roderick Macleod in Glasgow, is due to commence in September, DV.

Three Zimbabwe students, Mr Keith Mpata, Mr Khulekani Dube, and Mr Velani Moyo, were accepted by the Zimbabwe Presbytery on 14th April 2022. Two of them, Mr Mpata and Mr Dube, have now completed university degrees, and are studying preparatory Greek and Hebrew courses. It is hoped that they will join Dr McSeveney in Glasgow for the first year of their Divinity studies this September. Mr Moyo is presently studying a History A-level and an English Open University course in Bulawayo, along with preparatory Greek and Hebrew. It is anticipated that these preliminary studies will last for two years.

Theological Conferences

The 2022 Theological Conference was held in Inverness in October and passed off successfully although numbers were lower than the previous year, and some of the question times less lively. This year's Conference will be held in Inverness on 24th and 25th October, DV. The following speakers and subjects have been agreed.

1. Rev K M Watkins on "Augustine of Hippo and Pelagianism".
2. Rev C Hembd on "The word "world" in the writings of the Apostle John".
3. Rev A W MacColl on "Turretin on the Satisfaction of Christ".
4. Rev D W B Somerset on "The Book of Psalms".
5. Mr M A Vogan on "Samuel Rutherford and the Resolutioner controversy".

The Rev. Roderick MacLeod has agreed to act as Chairman.

We seek the prayers of the Lord's people for the work of the Committee and for the tutors and Divinity students in particular. "And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (2 Tim 2:2).

THEOLOGICAL TUTOR'S REPORT

Rev D W B Somerset

THE Theological Classes in Old Testament Hebrew and cognate subjects commenced on Tuesday 6th September 2022 and are due to continue to the end of March, DV, with final exams thereafter. The classes start at 9.30 am, Tuesday to Friday, and continue to about 12.30. At present the only student on the Divinity course is Dr Alan McSeveney who is in his second year. Initially Dr McSeveney came through to Aberdeen two days a week, but latterly most of the classes have been held by WebEx. This arrangement has worked well with just the one student. Dr McSeveney is hard-working and has a good knowledge of the Bible, and I have enjoyed discussing biblical, theological, and historical matters with him.

The subjects covered are Hebrew, Old Testament Criticism, Church History, Pastoral Theology, and Bible Instruction; and the syllabus has been similar to that followed in 2019-2020 but with a few changes. For the Hebrew, we have looked at parts of the Hebrew Bible (Gen 1-9; Ex 12 and 20; Lev 1, 2, and 16, Isaiah 52-55; Psalms 1, 2, 16, 22, 45; and Zech 1). We have also been through Robert Girdlestone's *Synonyms of the Old Testament*. For Old Testament studies we have read Walter Kaiser's *Old Testament Documents* (supplemented with handouts prepared by the tutor), Louis Berkhof's *Principles of Biblical Interpretation*, Gerhardus Vos's *Biblical Theology*, and large parts of Patrick Fairbairn's *Typology of Scripture* and his *Interpretation of Prophecy*.

For Church history, we have looked at Owen Chadwick on *The Reformation*, Thomas M'Crie (jr) on the *Story of the Scottish Church History*, and the *History of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, 1893-1970*. Dr McSeveney has also produced two essays, one comparing Luther and Calvin and the other discussing the rights and wrongs of the Secession of 1733. Two chapters of William Cunningham's *Historical Theology* (on Justification and the Atonement) have been studied to show the connection between Church history and the development of doctrine. Our study of Church history has been a little unusual in that Dr McSeveney already has a degree and a Ph.D. in the subject.

For Pastoral theology, we have looked at W G T Shedd's *Homiletics and Pastoral Theology*, Patrick Fairbairn's *Pastoral Theology*, and a part of Samuel Miller's *Thoughts on Public Prayer*. We have also been through the Westminster Assembly's "Directory of Public Worship" and the General Assembly's "Directory of Family Worship". Dr McSeveney has prepared a sermon outline each week on a prescribed text or suitable for a specified occasion. For Bible Instruction, he has been left to his own preparations because of constraints of time.

Dr McSeveney has assisted with supply in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Perth, Inverness, Dingwall & Beaulie, Dornoch & Bonar Bridge, and Scourie & Kinlochbervie, and has also conducted prayer meetings in Aberdeen. We are

thankful that the Lord has preserved our health thus far through the period of tuition, and we pray that He will add His blessings to these studies that they may be profitable in days to come.

WELFARE OF YOUTH COMMITTEE'S REPORT

Convener: Rev J B Jardine

THE work of the Committee continued in 2022 as in previous years. The Committee has much reason to thank the Most High for continued blessing.

The Scripture and Catechism exercises continue to be well received by parents. Although the UK numbers doing the exercises remains low, endeavours are being made to make completing the exercises easier by making it possible for the answers to be sent in electronically. The pupils at our five Primary Schools in Zimbabwe continue to do the exercises. The Mission's Bible Knowledge teachers and their voluntary assistants are to be commended for all their hard work. The Question-setters and markers in the UK are also to be thanked for their continued input, without which the work could not succeed. The efforts of the young people themselves, which remains at a high standard, should be acknowledged.

God willing, the 2023 Youth Conference, will have taken place at the Strathallan School between 11th and 13th April. The 2022 Conference was well attended with about 40 young people present. Feedback from the young people and the speakers was very positive. The venue itself also commended the good behaviour and friendliness of our young people. It is hoped this good attendance will become a trend and that the Conference will continue to be of some spiritual benefit to the young people who attend.

Finding accommodation for the Conference is becoming increasingly difficult. Although roughly 30 possible venues were considered for the 2023 conference none proved suitable. It was therefore agreed to return to the Strathallan School for the next three conferences, DV. This decision also allows us to take advantage of a discount provided by the school.

The Committee is open to suitable suggestions as to how its work could further assist the young people of the Church. "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them" (Ecc 12:1).

BALLIFEARY CARE HOME REPORT

Convener: Rev J R Tallach

THE Home has passed through another difficult year with Covid still a threat and the difficulties of staff recruitment and retention affecting Ballifeary as

they have done Care Homes at large. Yet again we are indebted to the Lord for His Providential care.

Occupancy

There were 8 admissions and 3 respite stays during 2022. Sadly there were 13 deaths over the same period in the Home.

Staffing

Our matron reports that “Retention of permanent staff was good, but finding suitable replacements for retirees was difficult. It was also a challenge to find reliable relief staff who were flexible. There continues to be a significant reliance on Agency staff. However, during a Covid outbreak, the Home was well supported by NHS bank staff from the Care Response team.

Kitchen and Domestic Staff

Kitchen staff vacancies were not easily filled. Domestic staff provision was much better.

New Administrator

A new administrator was appointed at the end of October 2022. He is settling in well and has relieved the Matron of some of her workload.

Covid outbreak

There was a minor Covid outbreak in January 2022 and a major one two months later in March.

January outbreak

7 staff members and 3 residents tested positive with one resident recording no symptoms and most staff members having no symptoms or very mild symptoms. This outbreak settled by 4th February.

March outbreak

A more serious outbreak occurred in March with both staff and residents being affected, including Matron. The Home was being run by a skeleton staff in the latter part of March and the first weeks of April. The skeleton staff worked long hours over many days to meet the shortfall. Kitchen staff were adversely affected with four out of the six kitchen staff being infected. We are indebted to the Home’s volunteers for helping us through this difficult period.

Staff training

Mandatory staff training was disrupted by the two Covid outbreaks noted above. It was decided to make use of on-line training and courses such as Basic Food Hygiene and Fire Extinguisher Training were successfully completed. Those in managerial, administrative and care roles received Fire Marshal Training.

Internal maintenance

The Care Inspectorate recommended an overhaul of the laundry and this delayed the refreshing of rooms left vacant after a resident passed away.

External bodies

Care Inspectorate

A new Care Inspector was appointed in 2022 and an unannounced inspection took place in August. The following ratings were given:

Support of people's well-being	5 – very good
Leadership	4 – good
Care & Support Planning	3 – adequate

Follow-up visit

A further unannounced visit was made in December to check that the required improvements had taken place. An extension to the time given to implement improvements was given until March 2023.

Fire services

An inspection by the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service on 17th February 2023 “did not give rise to any material areas for improvement”.

In common with other Care Homes, in the past few years Ballifeary has been passing through difficult times and our determination to maintain Christian standards for the elderly under our care in an increasingly secular day has not made things less difficult. We are glad to report that worship is held daily and that the preached Word is relayed on Sabbath and weekday. We are thankful to those from outside the Home who made this possible. We covet the prayers of the Lord's people for a blessing on the Word in the Home.

The Committee thanks the Matron and her team for their hard work throughout a stressful year.

“I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them” (Ezek 36:37).

LEVERBURGH CARE HOME REPORT

Convener: Rev J R Tallach

ALL providers of Care Home facilities for the elderly have passed through a difficult period in the past few years and Leverburgh Care Home has not been exempt. A question peculiar to the Church is whether the Church is justified in being involved in running Care Homes. The answer from the Committees charged with oversight of this area of the Church's work is categorically in the affirmative. Works of compassion towards the frail and elderly, done in the spirit of faith, commend themselves to every believer and the Church at large,

and the command to evangelise by the Word and prayer is particularly insistent where the individual's time on mercy's ground is manifestly drawing to a close. As spiritual darkness advances nationally our Homes provide that Word and worship which constitute a Gospel light in the darkness. Both staff and residents hear the Word read daily and expounded in the preaching.

Staff

The lack of young people in the islands and the high wages paid for looking after holiday homes, directly inhibits recruitment but a substantial wage increase earlier this year helped attract and retain staff. However, because of the challenging nature of the care work involved, only 15 of the 17 rooms available for residents are in use. This constrains income, and ways of returning the Home to a satisfactory financial state are currently being assessed.

Maintenance

During the last year the kitchen was upgraded and during that upgrade it was found that further significant electric and building work needed to be undertaken. This work has now been completed at a total cost of around £41,000. While this work was being done the Home was given the use of Leverburgh Village Hall kitchen facilities. We are indebted to those in charge of the Hall for their help and thank them for their kind co-operation.

Training

The training by distance learning in different areas of care work has continued over the past year. This training included Strategic Thinking, Adult Support and Protection, First Aid, Food Hygiene and SVQs 2 & 3.

Inspection

An inspection was carried out by the Care Inspectorate in March 2022 and the Home obtained a mixture of 4s (Good) and 5s (Very Good).

Finance

We acknowledge our debt to Mr W Campbell, General Treasurer, for his assistance with the financial aspects of the Home. Covid, the reduction to 15 beds, staff wages, the cost of provisions and the soaring electricity and fuel bills have combined to make the finances of the Home a matter of concern. Mr Campbell hopes to continue to work with us towards a return to stability in this area.

We thankfully acknowledge the long and stressful hours worked by Matron and her team in maintaining the commendable standard of the Home.

Above all we acknowledge the kindness of the Lord and covet His blessing on the Home.

“The Lord of us hath mindful been,
And He will bless us still.” (Psalm 115:12, metrical)

OUTREACH COMMITTEE'S REPORT

Convener: Rev D A Ross

WHEN we consider the total ban to spread the Word of God, put on Christians in many parts of the world, what a contrast, when in God's mercy we still have the liberty to continue spreading the Word of God. We are on occasions aware of the frown and caustic remarks of the world, which are a mere scratch in comparison to what some believers have to suffer for their brave enduring to spread the Word of God.

To reach out with the gospel is the duty of every believer. The well-known example of the woman of Samaria is often quoted to encourage believers to do likewise: "Come, see a man, which told me all things that I ever did: is not this the Christ?" (John 4:29).

To Israel as a nation, it was said by the Lord, "Ye are my witnesses" (Isa 43:10). One purpose was that others would know the God of Israel and eventually come to receive and rest on Him alone for salvation. Captain Naaman of Syria, a heathen, was brought to fear the Lord through the witness of the little maid a captive from Israel (2 Kings chapter 5). This is the main reason for the work of our Outreach Committee. It is also to encourage those who profess the Christian religion to fully embrace the Reformed Faith.

As we continue to send out the Word of God, we hope, constantly pray and have reason to believe that there is fruit arising from this essential work. The Saviour assures us from the Parable of the Sower, in spite of the disappointing occasions of no fruit, that there was success: "And these are they which are sown on good ground: such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirty-fold, some sixty, and some an hundred" (Mark 4:20). We are also assured, from many parts of the Scriptures that if there is no spreading of the Word of God, sinners will die in their sins. It is a never-ending duty of the Church to do so.

Rev J B Jardine, the Clerk of the Outreach Committee, reports that the offer of Bibles through the Church Website continues to bring results similar to previous years and are received with appreciation. Following the distribution of the Word of God we naturally hope that there would also be a desire to be taught the Scriptures more fully. While we do not know the outcome of having sent out the Word and may never know, we do know that God's Word will not return to Him fruitless.

The Outreach Committee offer of Jubilee Bibles to Schools in the Highlands and Islands for school leavers, met with a fair response. Head teachers were individually written to. A couple of paragraphs read, "This timeless translation, the most popular book of all time, brings together all needed spiritual and moral guidance and also serves a literary purpose, having been translated during what many see as the high point of the English language.

"Knowing that many pupils and students appreciate a gift on a special occasion, we would like to offer all your leavers a free copy of this commemorative Platinum Jubilee Bible. These could be provided for leavers

who would like a copy, either in May 2022 to coincide with the national commemoration, or in June 2022 to coincide with the end of term.”

While the Trinitarian Bible Society ran out of Jubilee Bible stock, we were nevertheless able to provide nearly 900 Bibles for school leavers. The TBS were set to print further copies but with the death of the Queen Elizabeth II the TBS could not proceed with a further print of the Jubilee Bible for distribution before the end of last year. Each Bible cost £4.71, and the total cost of the distribution was £4237.32, but we were not charged postage. The Bibles were sent to the Head Teacher of the schools and distribution done through them. We crave now the blessing of God on His Word as noted in the parable of the Sower. We are very much indebted to the Church Secretary, Miss Norma Morrison, for the amount of work she has done in connection with the distribution of these Bibles.

We are in a position this year to provide the normal edition of the Bible for Primary 7 leavers in a number of Highland Schools. We hope that this will be the start of a major annual distribution project, to be rolled out over the next few years as funding allows.

The book van, under the supervision of Messrs Edward Ross and Christopher Lamont, visited eight Agricultural Shows. We understand that the general response was not one of great encouragement. Nevertheless, the men met up with those professing the Christian Faith, but who had a rather limited understanding of the teachings of the Word of God. The *Shorter Catechism* was gladly received by these visitors and with God’s blessing will prove helpful to all such.

The men were glad to be in a position once again to do this work and thankful to meet with a great variety of people, to speak to them about the Word of God and give out literature. There were a number of books purchased which is always the case. Also, it was evident that many paused to read the Word of God in bold letters on the book van and posters. Mr Lamont speaks of the value of displaying the Word of God in places where it would not be known. We have the promise, “Cast thy bread upon the waters for thou shalt find it after many days” (Eccl 11 :1).

Some of our Congregations as well as many private persons belonging to our Congregations, distribute the TBS *Words of Life* calendars to thousands of homes. The Outreach Committee is looking at ways whereby the Committee will be able to assist smaller Congregations with limited manpower to engage in this kind of distribution of the Word of God. Smaller Congregations who would like assistance with this sort of Outreach should contact the Committee Convener or Clerk.

We conclude this report by noting that the prophet Elijah was known for his boldness in testifying against the false religion of Baal. Elijah’s successful testimony against the priests and worshippers of Baal brought the sentence of death from wicked king Ahab and Jezebel. Elijah fled in a very despondent frame of mind. However, as he fled God spoke to him, “What doest thou here, Elijah?” The result of this meeting encouraged Elijah to endure along with

others testifying on the side of the God of Israel (1 Kings chapter 19). From scenes like this we obtain encouragement to continue with the work of spreading the Word of God. At the same time we look constantly to the Lord to give the increase, “but God gave the increase” (1 Cor 3:6).

PUBLICATIONS AND BOOKROOM COMMITTEE’S REPORT

Convener: Rev. Kenneth 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, book reviews and review articles. The *Free Presbyterian Magazine* and the *Young People’s Magazine* continue to reprint important material from the past including a series by J. H. Merle d’Aubigne on “Luther and the Reformation” from the *History of the Reformation in the Sixteenth Century*, and a series on Felix Neff, the Pastor of the High Alps in the *Young People’s Magazine*. In addition, we have published for a wider audience several papers that were given at the Theological and Young People’s Conferences. The following two papers from the Theological Conference were published during the year in the *Free Presbyterian Magazine*:

- “Mysteries in the New Testament” by the Rev Douglas W B Somerset.
- “Union with Christ” by the Rev Iain D MacDonald.

The *Young People’s Magazine* has printed a paper given at the Young People’s Conference along with an interesting description of the conference tour:

- “Scriptural Teaching on the Family” by Matthew Vogan.
- “A Reformation Tour” by the Rev David Campbell.

The *Free Presbyterian Magazine* published in September 2022 a sermon of the Rev. Donald Beaton, taken down in shorthand by Mrs. Margaret Tallach of Glasgow, that had never previously been published. It is intended (DV) that further material from this source will be published in the future.

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 retained the same cover price of the Magazines for 2023 as they had been in 2022.

Publications

After the publication of *The Transfiguration* by Jonathan Ranken Anderson and the book drawn up by the Sabbath Observance Committee, *The Day God Made*, no more books have been published since the last meeting of Synod. However, sales of Free Presbyterian Publication titles have been encouraging and quite a number of our titles are now out of print. Dr M J Hyde is preparing a volume for the Committee of the *Collected Writings of Hugh Martin*. It is intended that this will be in effect a companion volume to *Christ Victorious: Selected Writings of Hugh Martin* published by the Banner of Truth Trust in 2019 of which he and his wife were the editors.

Bookroom

As we have stated on previous occasions, 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 2022 from the previous year by almost £7,500. 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 had an increased deficit for the year of almost £17,000.

Following the launch for public use of a website in June 2021 it is now possible to purchase books directly online. Of the total sales of £38,304 approximately 35% were purchased via the internet. This is the first full year of internet sales and the Publications Committee is very grateful to the efforts of those who made it possible to purchase books online from the Free Presbyterian Bookroom. The website address is www.fpbookroom.org. Whilst the Committee view the Bookroom as a ministry not only to Free Presbyterians but also to the wider church they are very concerned regarding the level of the on-going deficit.

As in previous years we urge prayer to the Lord for His blessing on the production of Magazines month by month and the publication and distribution of Christian literature.

WEBSITE COMMITTEE'S REPORT

Convener: Rev C J Hembd

OVER the past year, the website had about 30,000 page views each month, which was similar to previous years. In February of this year, we saw a surge to 40,000 views, but it is uncertain why. The Chinese website received 2,000 page views over the last year, a significant increase from the previous year.

We continue to receive a few inquiries each year – some requesting spiritual help, one on the frequency of administering the Lord's Supper, and another on whether the Solemn League and Covenant continues to be binding. We also receive emails from Christian groups in places such as Africa expressing interest in our Church's position. Sometimes they request literature and other times they express a desire to be affiliated with the Church. Serious inquiries are passed on to the Outreach Committee or to the Foreign Missions Committee.

As in previous years, the *Free Presbyterian* and *Young People's Magazines* were uploaded to the website one month after their publication. Some articles about current events were extracted from the Magazine and published to the website. Not as many sermons have been uploaded recently in comparison to previous years. The committee would like to see more sermons being uploaded regularly.

A sub-committee met in September of last year to review the content of the website. Some minor changes were made, and it was agreed that new articles should be published regularly. They also agreed an article on the Great Commission, which explains why the Church must teach every principle regarding doctrine, worship, and practice in Scripture. This was published earlier in the year.

The committee regrets that not more work was done in providing new material. Everyone is aware that people can find massive amounts of Reformed material on the internet. What the committee desires to do, therefore, is to provide material that fills a void. For example, it would be useful to include articles on legalism and antinomianism, as there is considerable confusion in Reformed circles about what legalism is, and disturbing indifference to obeying the law of God and applying it consistently to every part of life.

ARCHIVES COMMITTEE'S REPORT

Convener: Rev D Campbell

AS reported last year, the Committee has now come into possession of the then anticipated collection of letters belonging to Principal John MacLeod dating from the early days of the Free Presbyterian Church. It is with great pleasure

that we can now inform the Synod that these have been carefully catalogued and digitised and for this work we are deeply obliged to Miss Mary MacLeod, the daughter of the late Rev D B MacLeod, who was the former custodian of the letters. The cost of this was considerable and the work of digitising has been carried out to a professional standard and acts as a model for future work of the same kind. There have already been expressions of interest in the material from researchers. The Committee still intends to approach the Finance Committee for the funding of this work and for funding to secure a quality scanner and large storage capacity PC for archival purposes.

With the assistance of Mr Murdo MacLean, the Committee has obtained from Mr Andrew Tallach access to his mother's transcripts of sermons largely preached at St Jude's in the 1930s. The entire collection has been photocopied and is in process of being scanned. Mrs Margaret Tallach was a short-hand typist and took down many of the sermons she heard in shorthand and then typed them up in full. Two of this archive of sermons, one by the Rev Donald Macfarlane and one by the Rev Donald Beaton, have already been printed in the *Free Presbyterian Magazine*. The collection includes seventeen sermons by the Rev Neil Cameron that have never been published. The Publication Committee intend (DV) to publish these as a volume in the near future.

The Committee has not taken other aspects of its remit further in the past year due to other demands on the time of the members of the committee but is glad to have the willing help of interested parties in the Church whose contribution to archive work will be invaluable. Storage options remain undecided on and the archive of Church court records remains incomplete. We take this further opportunity to strongly advise all Clerks of Church courts to take steps towards digitising their records and securing the original documents in fire-proof safes.

REPORT OF DEPUTY TO ZIMBABWE

Rev J B Jardine

I WAS able to visit Zimbabwe as a deputy in both April and November 2022. It was extremely beneficial to visit the Mission on several occasions in a brief period of time.

During my first visit I assisted the Presbytery in the induction and ordination of the Rev. T Mwedzi. This has been reported elsewhere in the *Free Presbyterian Magazine*. It is a blessing for the church in Zimbabwe to have a young and active minister settled among them. It was also good to be present at the Presbytery when three students for the ministry were received. We hope and pray that the Lord will follow this with His own blessing.

Although I was based in Ingwenya in response to a specific request to provide supply there, I was able to visit a number of congregations and mission stations during my visit, including Mbuma, New Canaan, Zenka,

Nkayi and Inyathi. I was also able to view a number of mission stations like the one at Gadade. I was concerned at the poor state of many of the outlying Mission Station buildings. The general impression I received is that the Church in Zimbabwe faces the same difficulties as the Home Church with ageing congregations and declining numbers.

Given my own lack of experience of Zimbabwean life and culture I took the opportunity of these trips to visit non-mission institutions to gain an impression of the environment in which our work in Zimbabwe is conducted.

I was able to visit the Thembiso Children's Home on both occasions, and I also visited three non-mission Children's Homes: the Sandra Jones Children's Home specialising in abused children, the Khayelihle Children's Village, and the SOS Children's Village. The accommodation and general environment of Thembiso compared favourably with the other homes. However, I did notice that the agricultural land around Thembiso could be more effectively used to provide crops for the Home.

At one non-mission home I was informed of the Zimbabwe government's desire that all over 18-year-olds in further education should remain at their Children's Homes in their family units until they complete their studies. It is also likely that the government will want Children's Homes to provide some sort of support to past residents until they are 25 years of age. The Church will have to keep an eye on these possible developments.

I visited all of our own Primary schools at Lutsha, Zenka, Mbuma, Thembiso and Ingwenya. I was also able to visit some non-mission Primary schools at Daluka, Mtshatshane, David Livingstone, Nhlambaloyi and Madlelenyoni. At these schools I had an opportunity to meet with teaching staff and was able to address some of the pupils on spiritual matters.

I was welcomed at John Tallach Secondary by the Headmaster, Mr B Ncube. I had many profitable conversations with him during my two visits to the country. Again, I was also able to visit some non-mission Secondary Schools like the David Livingstone Secondary and the secondaries at Nhlambaloyi and Madlelenyoni.

I received requests from some of the non-mission schools for English Bibles, which I have sought to fulfil through the TBS. In speaking to staff there I found a genuine interest for the Word of God. The need for prayer is great. "The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest" (Luke 10:2).

I held several meetings with the Primary school Bible Knowledge Teachers and the Divinity Students during the two visits. It was good to meet with them face to face rather than by live streaming, which is the usual way we hold our monthly meetings. I was able to deliver papers on Jonah and Jacob, and a critique of Roman Catholicism. The discussions arising from the papers were both encouraging and profitable.

I travelled to Mbuma on both visits and assisted at one of the Communion services there. The hospital at Mbuma is busy and has a reputation within Zimbabwe

for clinical excellence. I visited some of the clinics associated with the main hospital. Again, I was able to visit some non-mission medical facilities, namely, St Luke's Hospital, a local authority clinic at Zenka and the Sesemba clinic. Being able to tour these facilities and question staff has enabled me to further appreciate the difficulties facing the medical sector in Zimbabwe and the level of commitment from all our staff at Mbuma.

I was shown great kindness wherever I went in Zimbabwe, and I would like to thank everyone who assisted and helped me during my stay, in particular the Revs. S Khumalo and T Mwedzi, Messrs T B Mpofo, B Ncube, Dr Snoek and Miss N Maclean.

Although I mention Miss N Maclean last, it is by no means least. Miss Maclean has served the mission faithfully for nearly 30 years and she will be deeply missed at the John Tallach High School and throughout the Mission. Wherever I went people spoke with profound respect for her Christian character and warm nature, most particularly those who worked with her at Ingwenya. I was able to attend the reception held at John Tallach School on her retiral and offered a few words of thanks on behalf of the Jewish and Foreign Mission Committee and the Home Church.

I am thankful to the Lord for journeying mercies and pray that His blessing may continue upon His work in Zimbabwe and look forward to returning in the near future. "There be many that say, Who will shew us any good? LORD, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us" (Psalm 4:6).

REPORT OF DEPUTY TO THE CHESLEY CONGREGATION

Rev A W MacColl

IN the kindness of the Most High, I was enabled to visit the Chesley congregation once again after having preached there for a few weeks during the summer of 2008. My wife and children were able to accompany me and it was a privilege for us to be among the people of the congregation for the period of five weeks from 28th March until 2nd May. During that time we were shown many expressions of generosity for which we are most grateful.

The period was occupied with a full schedule of ministerial duties including visiting the congregation in their own homes. The numbers in attendance from the Chesley congregation were generally in the region of 36. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper was observed on Sabbath 9th April and the full services of the communion season were held in connection with it. It was very gratifying to see the attendances augmented with considerably more than twenty visitors from various parts of North America gathering for the solemnities, including friends from the group who meet in Calgary, Alberta, and also from Wisconsin and Washington State in the USA. The Santa Fe congregation in Texas was

well represented also, with a number of visitors including two of the Texas elders, Mr Joseph Smith and Mr Jeshurun Hembd, accompanied by most of their family members. Mr Randy Winkels, an elder in the Grafton congregation but originally from Chesley, was also present with his wife and family.

It is an encouragement to the Chesley people to have others gather with them at these times once again. On subsequent Sabbaths a number of additional visitors appeared, one from Calgary and, during our last week, the family of Mr Mark Smith, a deacon in the Santa Fe congregation. That so many went to such efforts of time and expenditure to be present in Chesley when a minister was preaching the gospel shows the commendable diligence of our North American friends in attending the means of grace with their young families, notwithstanding the vast distances involved. It would be salutary for us in Scotland to follow this good example by endeavouring as much as possible to attend communion seasons in the more remote congregations.

On Friday 14th April, I conducted the marriage service of Miss Rachel Winkels, who grew up in the congregation, to Mr John Huide, who comes from a Mennonite background. We wish the newly-married couple the Lord's blessing. It was interesting to meet Mennonite folk at the wedding but more than one of our own people commented on what seemed to be a general disinterest manifested by some of the Mennonites during the actual marriage service. How sad to see an outwardly religious group, apparently separating from the world in an external manner, yet manifesting little reverence for the worship of God in a Reformed Church!

Two elders have been elected to office in the congregation since last year's Synod. These are Mr Hector Ross, who was previously an elder in the London congregation, and Mr Aashik Rao. On the first Saturday after we arrived in Chesley, a daughter was born to Mr and Mrs Rao. Thereafter, on Sabbath 30th April, the child, named Emilia Abigail, was solemnly admitted to the visible Church by the sacrament of baptism. May she and her siblings be wrought upon by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost and prove to be children of the covenant indeed.

I was enabled to give two lectures on Church Principles during my time as Deputy. The first lecture was on "Purity of Worship" and the second on "Biblical Church Government". There is a clear need for teaching the Biblical principles of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland to all of our people at home and abroad and there seems to be an intelligent appreciation of both Biblical constitutional principles and experimental spirituality among our people in Ontario. So much so that here we could see no evidence of the aversion which we have occasionally met with when lecturing on Church principles. The Apostle Paul was found both teaching and preaching in the course of his apostolic labours and, in these declining times, it would be good for us all to be well grounded in the Scriptural principles the Free Presbyterian Church was founded to preserve.

The congregation is very isolated geographically and is vulnerable in a number of ways. Some of these ways have been previously identified in the Report of the deputy to last year's Synod. The power that the adversary has to sow discord among brethren is a sad reality. Moreover, the prolonged period of thirty-six years without a pastor has been an additional and ongoing difficulty for our people in Chesley. We can only commend the congregation to the grace of the Head of the Church and the prayers of the Lord's people.

Another point that the Synod should be aware of, is that the settled consensus of opinion among our people in North America is that live streaming of Divine worship is neither necessary nor expedient. This position is noteworthy because, perhaps of all parts of our Church, it is the brethren in Canada and the USA who are most separated from access to ministers and, living at great distances from the home Church and from one another, might generally be expected to be in support of live links.

It was a solemn privilege to preach law and gospel to our North American friends during my five weeks among them. Their hunger for the Word preached is an encouragement and it should stir us up to pray that the Lord would raise up a true servant of Christ to labour in His vineyard in this part of Canada.

We departed from Chesley on the morning of Tuesday 2nd May and arrived back safely in Dingwall on the afternoon of the following day, having many reasons to be thankful to the Lord for His goodness throughout our period of absence from home.