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A word from the minister

The past is another country – and I can't remember much about it!

Especially at this time, with the future so unclear, it is hard to focus on 2019 – though it is good to recall high points, successes, developments, and creative to recall mistakes in order, if possible, not to repeat them.

One thing our online Zoom services have done is to reveal to me with a sharp clarity how precious people have become to me in my time as minister at the Church of Scotland, Geneva – and how absolutely wonderful it is to be “together” even in a virtual way, with those folk of all ages who have won my heart and my love. Immensely moving and humbling, it is a privilege to share worship, faith and the pilgrim journey with you all.

As it was last year.

Lovely worship services, profound conversations, tasks completed, meals shared, a bonding congregational boat trip, visiting choirs, hospitals visited, books read, visiting students for ministry mentored, mourners comforted, couples married, great Christian festivals rejoiced over, new colleagues inducted, general assembly attended, fabulous concerts enjoyed, successful church fairs and cèilidhs done and dusted, new people welcomed into our fellowship, our website revitalized – and so many other reasons to be grateful and glad.

Sometimes, “Thank you” seems too small a word!

Love, as always,

Laurence Twaddle (laurence.twaddle@gmail.com)

Worship

Ushers

Ushers are normally the first people newcomers and visitors meet when entering the church. The warmth of the initial welcome has a big impact on their first impression. Many positive comments have been received regarding these initial interactions, and hopefully we are regarded as a welcoming church.

With the move to a virtual service, thanks to the coronavirus, we can consider either that we no longer have ushers – or that we have all become ushers (my view!)

The usher's role involves greeting those attending church each week and carrying out a number of other tasks during the service to ensure its smooth running. These include making books available and collecting the offering. We typically have around 30 ushers.

With two serving each Sunday, this means that each usher is on duty around once per quarter. The roster for the following six months is published twice a year, in April and October.

We will not issue a new usher rota until we again have the pleasure of meeting each other in person on a Sunday, a pleasure that we will probably appreciate even more in the future. If you think you might be interested in serving our church as an usher, however, please speak to me or email me.

Thank you to all involved in serving the church in this way, and for the continuing warm welcome to regulars and visitors attending the Church of Scotland, Geneva.

Arthur Griffith (griffith@bluewin.ch)

Bible readers

Once again, I extend my heartfelt thanks to our loyal and willing band of regular and occasional readers who enrich our Sunday services by bringing God's word to life.

I should also like to thank, most sincerely, all those who contributed to the purchase of our bespoke lectern which was installed in the *Auditoire* last year. The lectern was beautifully designed and crafted by Alex Craeye and Jérémie Bijasson and was very warmly received. I hope everyone has enjoyed using it and will continue to do so when we get back to our normal congregational life.

Since the pandemic, we have been getting used to a new style of worship online, but we still include the reading of our Bible passages. For as long as we have to continue in this way, I would like to invite everyone in the wider congregation who think they might like to read in our virtual services to get in touch with me. Perhaps reading from the comfort of your own home may seem a little less daunting than getting up in front of people in church!

However you look at it, if you'd like to give it a try I'd be delighted to hear from you.

Nicola Hollyman (nicolahollyman@hotmail.com)

Flowers

Thank you to everyone who contributed flowers throughout 2019. They not only embellish the *Auditoire*, they reflect the seasons and occasions during the church year.

Should you wish to contribute flowers – once we are back in church! – please do add your name to the list, which is to be found beneath the notice board in the Salle. Should you prefer that someone else purchase and arrange the flowers for you, then please speak to any one of us below.

Thank you for your continuing support!

Christine Buhler (buhlerchristine@hotmail.com)

Alice Tulloch (alicetulloch@gmail.com)

Christine Donaldson (christine@donaldson.ch)

Music

Music plays (or can play!) a leading role in worship that takes us out of the ordinary and everyday into the realm of the divine, refreshes our souls, and renews us for the service of God's kingdom.

Central, for most if not all of us, is congregational singing. We are, after all, a congregation. Not to be overlooked is the excellence of our organ and organists. Warm thanks to principal organist Rebecca MacDonald and to her colleagues: Peter Billington, Oscar Colliar, Kim Millius, Linda Revkin, François Widrig, and Alan Woodbridge.

Then there is the choir. In January 2019, we began a new pattern – or revived an old pattern – of “choir-and-soloists”.

Sunday by Sunday, the choir led the congregational hymns and sang an introit. In addition, it sang a communion song on, well, Communion Sunday, and an anthem on the last Sunday of the month. On the other Sundays, music for reflection was provided by vocal or instrumental soloists, most from within our talented congregation, and coordinated by Vivien (*vivienliu.chan@gmail.com*).

A choir should be pleasure, not purgatory. So we adopted an easy-care pattern for practice, with the established 10am rehearsal on Sunday supplemented by a run-through, after the congregational lunch, of the choral music for coming month.

To oversee all of the above, we created an easy-care “music in worship” team.

The choir was greatly helped in the spring by Mikie Roberts, a Moravian minister from Antigua, who took up a position in February with the World Council of Churches. He joined our congregation and choir and agreed cheerfully to conduct us whenever he was in town. Unfortunately, over the summer he left us again, to help his wife Winelle – also a pastor – revive the Moravian congregation in Geneva. We thank him for all he did to encourage and improve us.

In December, for the second year running, our choir joined with that of the Swiss-German Reformed parish of Geneva to lead carol services for both congregations. Twice makes it a tradition. Do it three times, and it becomes “but we always do that”.

Your eager and willing musicians ended 2019, not complacent, but quietly satisfied.

And then the pandemic struck.

Music in worship team

Nicola Hollyman, Vivien Liu, Rebecca MacDonald, Páraic Réamonn, and Laurence Twaddle

Páraic Réamonn (paraic.reamonn@gmail.com)

Crèche

The crèche is greatly appreciated by parents, as it allows them to join in worship, provides a break from parental duties, and offers an opportunity to meet other members of the congregation. It is also helps children to integrate into the life of the church from a young age.

All children under four are welcome to attend.

In 2019, attendance at the crèche remained steady, possibly helped by the increase in the number of families attending Sunday School on a regular basis. The number of crèche helpers decreased however, meaning that the same parents were required to volunteer more frequently and also that on some Sundays, we were unable to offer a crèche service.

We continued to work closely with our Sunday School colleagues to ease the transition of the children from crèche to Sunday School and to enable the crèche children to be involved in events organized by the Sunday School.

Lyndsey Bochaton (lyndseyb.hamilton@talk21.com)

Sunday School

Between the crèche and the youth group, children from five to twelve attend Sunday School. As of 2019, a newly trained team took over responsibility for the school, supported in a transition by Freda Craeye and Starr Benyon. The team is coordinated by Cornis van der Lugt. Its story tellers are Arthur Askew, Lyndsey Bochaton, and Gerald and Marianne Lewis. The doorkeepers are Georgina Cofie, Suzan Meier-Ewert, Andrew McCallum, John Buckingham and Alice Tulloch.

Activities in 2019 continued to revolve around Godly Play lessons presented to kids while applying the Montessori method. This involves sessions during which children are told stories from the Bible with the use of natural materials and art works. The children were taken through foundational sessions covering for example creation, the prophets, Advent, the parables, Easter and Pentecost.

Highlights of our year included two family services: On June 23, the service was followed by a Sunday School picnic in the Parc des Bastions, in which we were joined by Rev Laurence Twaddle. On December 15, our Sunday School children led the singing of *Silent Night* in a special family service for Christmas.

Cornis Van der Lugt (cornis.lugt@gmail.com)

Congregational life

Kirk session

Two stalwart elders, Janet Askew and Felix Allender, passed away in 2019. The session and congregation were saddened by their loss. We give thanks for their life and conspicuous witness.

During the year, we added four elders to the session: Jane Broere, Ailsa Craig, Tom Snow and Cornis Van der Lugt; and we are already benefitting from their commitment and fresh ideas.

The International Presbytery (*internationalpresbytery.net*), of which we are a member, meets over a weekend twice yearly, hosted by one of its European congregations. In October 2019, it was our turn. Visitors arrived from all over Europe, as well as Bermuda and Sri Lanka. Logistics involved hotel accommodation, catering, and meeting space. Our visitors were grateful for all our efforts, and they had a chance to meet our congregation at Sunday worship and the lunch which followed.

The Church of Scotland (*churchofscotland.org.uk*) has been facing a dramatic shortage of ministers and each presbytery is asked to produce a plan to reduce the total number of ministers required. This is clearly a major challenge in our presbytery, where churches are spread across many different countries and continents. In February 2019 we met with the kirk session of Lausanne to talk about how we might respond, including possibilities of joint or team ministry.

Other matters that occupied the session in 2019 included the difficulty of attending worship on three consecutive Sundays in Advent, due to the Escalade race and the Escalade itself.

Our new church website (*churchofscotlandgeneva.ch*) is now up and running, although more work remains to be done. The new site includes much information on the history of our congregation.

Session members

Elders

Alice Tulloch (session clerk), Lyndsey Bochaton, Christine Buhler, Graeme Clugston, Jane Broere, Mary Couper, Ailsa Craig, Laurent Djamen, Nicola Hollyman, Isabel Phiri, Joan Reilly, Tom Snow, Cornis Van der Lugt, Rosaleen Walker

Ministers

Laurence Twaddle, Jim Sharp, Matthew Ross, Páraic Réamonn

Alice Tulloch (alicetulloch@gmail.com)

Congregational committee

The congregational committee met five times in 2019 and covered a wide range of topics related to the temporal affairs of the church. Regular agenda items were finance, fabric, mission and fundraising. Other topics included access for people with disabilities, acoustics in the *Auditoire*, selection of a provider and launching of the process for a new church website, the possibility of a congregational trip to Scotland in 2020, arrangements for sharing the church premises with the Swiss Reformed German-speaking congregation, practical arrangements in relation to hosting the International Presbytery in October, coordinating the church fair, and the new lectern in the *Auditoire*.

Annual Congregational Report 2019

The annual congregational meeting (ACM) took place on Tuesday May 28. The evening began with fellowship over a light supper. The first part of the meeting covered the business items:

- approval of the 2018 accounts
- adoption of the 2019 budget
- appointment of auditors for the 2019 accounts
- reception of the 2018 annual congregational report
- election of committee members to serve until the ACM in 2022

After serving two three-year terms of office (2013-2019), Nan Braunschweiger stood down as secretary of the committee. The meeting unanimously appointed Sherree Atkinson-Bret to serve as the new secretary for the next three years.

How do we see ourselves?

The minister then reported on diverse areas of church life and led a lively and thought-provoking discussion on priorities and areas of interest, introduced by the question “How do we see ourselves?” This led to exploration of such issues as how much of our past plays a role now; the importance of our connection as a congregation with Scotland; our role, identity and mission in Geneva; as well as our character and sense of purpose.

All in all, 2019 was a very busy and exciting year for the congregational committee and, we trust, an interesting, fulfilling and enjoyable one for all its members.

Committee members

ACM 2017 to 2020

Christine Bunn, David Hogg, Christine Buhler, Peter Tulloch

ACM 2018 to 2021

Nan Braunschweiger (retiring secretary), Ewart MacKenzie, Han Broere, Douglas Murray-Jones

ACM 2019 to 2022

Fiona Parrot, Cornis Van der Lugt, Sherree Atkinson-Bret (secretary), Grace Ansah

Nan Braunschweiger (ntbraunsch@bluemail.ch)

Sherree Atkinson-Bret (sherreeatkinsonbret@gmail.com)

Fabric sub-committee

Small informal meetings were held when required. The main items considered were:

Heating: The Salle heating was non-operational at the beginning of the year – the delay to the repair was due to awaiting delivery of a spare part.

Health and Safety

- Handicapped access - this issue has been passed on to the Architect for the *Auditoire*. There is the possibility of launching a feasibility study.
- Emergency external exit push bar from the inside at the vestry area will be carried out.
- Installation of fire extinguishers in the *Auditoire*.

Annual Congregational Report 2019

Church keys: Arthur Askew and I will update the 'keyholder schedule' last completed in 2014. This list will be shared with the *Auditoire* committee, including serial numbers as available.

Auditoire acoustics: This has been discussed with the *Fondation pour la conservation des temples genevois construits avant 1907* and the congregational committee. During the services, the acoustics have improved over the last year, so for now this item is still under consideration.

Minor renovation or refurbishment works planned in the Auditoire

- Synchronization of light switches in the alcoves
- External ventilation and filling in the gaps around the pipes in the toilet by the vestry area.
- Oiling the *Auditoire* door locks

Annual property report and manse schedules

In June 2019, these were sent off, with photos of the church and manse, to the presbytery fabric convener for onward transmission to the Church of Scotland Trust in Edinburgh.

Coronavirus update

On March 1 2020, a note on precautions was included with the service sheets. March 15 was our last service in church, since when we have worshipped together on Zoom.

As fabric convener, I am currently following a training webinar on cleaning and disinfecting church buildings presented by the assistant secretary (safe buildings) in the general trustees department, Church of Scotland, Edinburgh. Once the slides and notes have been downloaded, the materials will be distributed appropriately.

Douglas Murray-Jones (dmurrayjones@aol.com)

Eco-congregation

On January 23 2019, a Big Conversation event was held on climate change. The eco-congregation coordinator gave a presentation on "climate change: the greatest test for Christian understanding?"

This provided an overview of global climate change, the science and latest developments, initiatives taken by governments and various stakeholder groups, and church initiatives. Participants reflected on how we Christians can respond as citizens and consumers, as well as members of the church.

On March 17, Páraic Réamonn focused on global climate change in a sermon on how we humans are bound together in a solidarity of grace and salvation. He held up the example of Greta Thunberg and, on a weekend when more than a million students skipped school to stage more than 2,000 climate protests in 125 countries, underlined our intergenerational responsibility.

Cornis van der Lugt (cornis.lugt@gmail.com)

Youth group

The youth group, for young people aged 11 to 16, meets every Sunday except during the school holidays and on the first Sunday of the month, when they remain in church and participate in the communion service.

Annual Congregational Report 2019

Attendance at the youth group in 2019 varied from week to week. We do not have an answer to that, but we do believe that where two or three are gathered in the name of Jesus, he is there among us, so we go ahead regardless.

We did not follow a fixed programme but instead talked about subjects that were important to the young people attending. We also tried to involve them a bit more by inviting them to share their personal experience related to the topic discussed, when they felt comfortable with that.

The two of us have led the youth group since 2018, we have been the group leaders. This can cause a problem, as we are both doctors, and our irregular professional schedules may require us to work on a Sunday—sometimes the same Sunday!

We should be delighted to welcome anyone interested in joining the leadership team, whether regularly or occasionally. Just get in touch!

Ailsa Craig (ailsa.crg@gmail.com)
Antoinette Djamen (antoinette.djamen@bluewin.ch)

Women's group

In 2019, we met on the first Monday of the month in the World Council of Churches, enjoying lunch together in the canteen. A Pancake Day brunch attracted a full house, with stimulating conversation. In the summer, we had a very happy day in Champéry with lunch and afternoon tea.

All women in the congregation are welcome to be part of our group. If you wish to join, please phone (022 732 15 89) or email me.

The pandemic has pulled the rug from under this year's plans, but hopefully in the not too distant future we will be able to meet again, and this will be communicated through the usual channels.

Christine Bunn (bunnc@bluewin.ch)

Caring for one another

Our current approach to pastoral care in our congregation, with "caring for one another" as a *leitmotiv*, has been running since 2005 – now 15 years ago!

The key underlying concept is no less valid today than it was 15 years ago: caring for one another – pastoral care – is the responsibility not only of the minister or elders or a designated small group, but of *everyone* who professes love for Christ: "Love your neighbour as yourself" (Mark 12.31).

From time to time, we need to review and renew our organizational approach to providing this care. The caring for one another core group has asked the kirk session to seek a fresh approach that will bring a renewed focus to pastoral care within our congregation.

A joint conference was planned with our friends in the Scots Kirk, Lausanne, in early 2020, to try to discover together new possibilities in pastoral care. Unfortunately, that meeting was yet another casualty of the pandemic. But the day will come when we will be able to meet, share ideas, and hopefully find a new way to move forward.

Meantime, we know of many examples of how members of our congregation are still “caring for one another”. Please continue to do that! Especially when it is difficult or impossible to visit others in person, please do use your phone to call and say "Hello, how are you?" Or try to help a needy neighbour in practical ways if you can, while keeping the right social distance.

Together, caring for one another in whatever ways are possible for you, we will get through this period of pandemic uncertainty and also come out the other end with a renewed Christian commitment to caring for one another.

On behalf of the caring for one another core group,

Jim Sharp (jim.sharp@churchofscotland.org.uk)

Lenten studies

Our Lenten studies in 2019 attracted a relatively small number of people. Work, distance and geography always make doing extra things within the life of our congregation extremely challenging, and the Motor Show falling in the middle of the series disrupted our arrangements. But those who took part found the experience creative and very much worth their effort.

Our discussions were enriched by the involvement of others in running the programme. I'm grateful to Jim Sharp and Páraic Réamonn for lending a hand in leading the groups, in a variety of venues. The conversations helped us all move towards Easter in a purposeful search for truth and understanding, and both the evening and afternoon sessions enabled those who came “to see more clearly, love more dearly, follow more nearly”.

Laurence Twaddle (laurence.twaddle@gmail.com)

Book and gift stall

Say it as perhaps one shouldn't, our stall continued in 2019 to serve as a focal point for a chat while also browsing our wide selection of donated books in splendid alphabetical order (thank you, Lily) and a variety of gift and souvenir items that won't break your piggy bank.

However, we did break with a long-established tradition by relinquishing the herculean transportation of hundreds of books to and from the Fair in Grand-Saconnex. Instead, we had a book sale in December in the Salle where folk could discover our wares while also enjoying a cup of tea or coffee and the shortbread and other home-made delicacies for which our congregation's chefs are justly renowned.

The proceeds brought in a tidy sum for the church coffers so – the coronavirus permitting – we shall probably repeat the venture, perhaps at an earlier date to avoid the Old Town's already crowded calendar of events in December. A pre-Fair book sale might also attract newcomers to renew our acquaintance at Grand-Saconnex in November.

For now, our thanks to everyone for their support and fellowship, which we shall be delighted to renew once the pandemic allows. Meantime, take care and stay safe, and warm greetings from Mary (our Head Girl) and the team: Antonina, Claire, Joan, Lily and me.

Ritchie Pannetti (r.pannetti@bluewin.ch)

Coffee and tea

A big thank you to all the volunteers who helped prepare and serve coffee and tea each Sunday after church in 2019. This is much appreciated by regulars and visitors and gives us all a chance to make new friends and catch up with old ones. If you would like to join the team of volunteers who each serve coffee a few times a year, please contact either of us, and we will add your name to the next rota once church resumes.

*Rosaleen Walker (rmwalker@bluewin.ch)
Hazel Griffith (hazelandarthurgiffith@gmail.com)*

Congregational lunches

On the last Sunday of each month lunch is served in the Salle for any who would like to stay and enjoy a meal in the company of others. The number attending varies between 20 and 40 and the suggested donation of CHF 12 per head has the side benefit of helping church funds. The two-course meal is generally provided by Alice Tulloch and Lindy Twaddle with help from others.

Thanks to all who provide food, help serve the meal and most importantly, clear up after the meal! We look forward to the day when once again we can meet in person and enjoy a meal together after worship.

Alice Tulloch (alicetulloch@gmail.com)

Church fair and cèilidh

Our fair and cèilidh took place on November 16. What a great day! We had the usual delicious choice of food and drink, cakes galore, Scottish and Christmas goods, arts and crafts, church items, jam and preserves, jewellery and accessories, interesting items, toys and soothing scents. Absolutely something for everyone –and anyone who was anyone was there! There was a great feeling in the Salle all day and many local people turned up. The Geneva Pipes and Drums did us proud both inside the hall and out in the yard.

The cèilidh (and curry) in the evening was also a huge success, and there were kilts and tartan galore!

As well as marking our presence in the local community and providing a hugely entertaining day out for many, many people, we did also make some money: a magnificent CHF 14,600!! Huge thanks to everyone involved!

CHF 3,000 of the proceeds used for our “year-end” offering and went to the following charities:

- *Centre d’action sociale des Pâquis (hospicegeneral.ch/fr/centre-daction-sociale-des-paquis)*, a day centre for the homeless and refugees
- *ESCA Cancer Suppors*, which provides support in English for people affected by cancer in Geneva, Vaud and neighbouring France
- *Glory Reborn (gloryreborn.org)*, which offers care to marginalized mothers and babies in Cebu, the Philippines.

Lindy Twaddle (lindy.lynn1956@gmail.com)

Craft group

A group of like-minded crafters reunited in 2018 with a view to preparing and selling their creations at the Church Fair. Two Fairs later, and a diverse range of articles have been made and successfully sold. The group has grown in numbers and meets monthly to craft, laugh and share a moment of fellowship. Among the many talents are knitters, painters, crocheters, sewers, gardeners. New members are always welcome. Plans are afoot to hold a small Spring sale in 2021.

Christine Buhler (buhlerchristine@hotmail.com)

Outreach

Mission partnerships

Our grateful thanks to all who support our mission partnerships by regular givings, by individual donations, or by holding or performing in concerts. Your great generosity has enabled Christian work to flourish and grow in two extremely poor communities. These are not just “projects” but active relationships with people we know and love.

The details of our increased mission funding in 2019 can be found in the Financial Report.

Ekwendeni, Malawi

In 2019, the highlights of our relationship with the Youth Resource Centre in Ekwendeni were a three-week visit to the centre by Han and Jane Broere, and a return three-week visit by Blessings and Janet, two of the dynamic young people associated with the Centre.

We remain the sole source of financial support for the Youth Resource Centre, paying the salaries of the supervisor, Shupo Kumwenda, a caretaker and a night-watchman.

Bringing up to date: In January 2020, a violent storm destroyed part of the main Youth Centre building, cut the power and put the Centre out of action. A magnificent response by our congregation to an emergency appeal raised more than sufficient funds for the repairs to the centre and the rebuilding of the “Summer Hut” where the youth meet under cover in the open air.

Lalgadh, Nepal

The work of Lalgadh Leprosy Hospital continues through the strong Christian commitment of our elder, Dr Graeme Clugston, and his Nepali wife, Meena. Lalgadh is one of the busiest leprosy hospitals in the world, as well as a major general hospital for south-east Nepal and for patients crossing from India. Leprosy patients are all treated free of charge.

Our general support goes to pay the salaries of a doctor and a nurse.

As well as general support from the congregation, Lalgadh was able to obtain a new ultrasound machine in 2019 thanks to a very generous individual donation from Geneva.

The common threat: coronavirus

Coronavirus, or the threat of it, is currently affecting both programmes. Malawi is not in lockdown, and has so far relatively few cases of COVID-19. However, schools are closed and the challenge remains to feed and provide resources for poor families and children.

Annual Congregational Report 2019

In Nepal, Lalghadh has been designated as a COVID-19 isolation centre, and is running a quarantine service and a COVID patient treatment centre, on government request, in addition to its very busy regular work. Staff from the hospital are able to go out into the country to provide their much-needed services.

Please pray for our mission partners in these difficult circumstances.

Donating

You may contribute to our mission partnerships by direct transfer to the Church of Scotland, Geneva bank account. If you transfer funds on line, please ensure that the payment is marked as being for mission work – including which project, should you wish to prioritize one.

Peter Tulloch (tulloch.peter1@gmail.com)

Ecumenical links

The very composition of our congregation means that the Church of Scotland in Geneva is itself ecumenical in nature.

Throughout 2019 we maintained links with the *Rassemblement des Eglises et Communautés Chrétiennes de Genève* (RECG, recg.ch) and *Témoigner ensemble à Genève*/Witnessing together in Geneva (TEAG, johnknox.ch/programme/temoigner), although both were less active in 2019 than in the past.

In September 2018, on the occasion of the *Jeûne genevois*, we participated in a day of worship and discussion organized by TEAG. As such events are organized only every two years, the next is being planned for September 10 2020, Covid-19 permitting.

Geneva Cursillo

Cursillos #71 and #72 were held in May and November 2019 respectively and involved a number of our church members. Cursillo #73 was scheduled for May 2020 but in view of the pandemic has been postponed to November 5-8 2020. For further information, speak to me or visit the website of the Geneva English Cursillo Community (genevacursillo.org/wordpress)

Arthur Askew (arthuraskewge@bluewin.ch)

Communication

During 2019 the decision was taken, and funds approved, to revamp the church website. Darwin Digital was selected for the development and design and the kirk session mandated a new communication committee to provide content. The new website will hopefully give a modern visual representation of our church, congregation and community. It went live on April 3 2020 (churchofscotlandgeneva.ch) The church newsletter, edited by Lindy Twaddle (lindy.lynn1956@gmail.com), continues to be issued quarterly. Articles are always welcome.

Communication committee

Christine Buhler, Páraic Réamonn, Lindy Twaddle

Christine Buhler (buhlerchristine@hotmail.com)

Finance

Treasurer's report

This report on our finances in 2019 has been prepared on the basis of pre-audited accounts.

The big picture

Broadly speaking, in 2019 the congregation broke even. Technically speaking, it registered a deficit of CHF 704, but against a budgeted operating scale of CHF 168k, this is not hugely significant. The 2019 budget foresaw a deficit of CHF 12,175, so this represents a significantly better result than expected.

For non-mission resources, both income and expenditure were significantly lower than their budgeted levels and also lower than the levels observed in 2018. 2019 saw a decrease of CHF 14,918 in expenditure levels and CHF 15,451 in income. This was not encouraging since concern was raised already in 2018 that the declining levels of both could indicate a possible decline in the life of the church. Of course, the congregation is not simply about making or spending money, but about the community of worship which it is and the people it serves. Nonetheless, most of what happens does need something to be spent. After all, even just opening the *Auditoire* on a Sunday usually needs electricity for lighting, heating (depending on the season) and for the after-Service coffee. This is all pretty mundane and obvious but the point is that very little comes for free, so the financials do give a rough indicator of the level of church life. That is why lower levels, even if pretty much balanced, are not an altogether encouraging result.

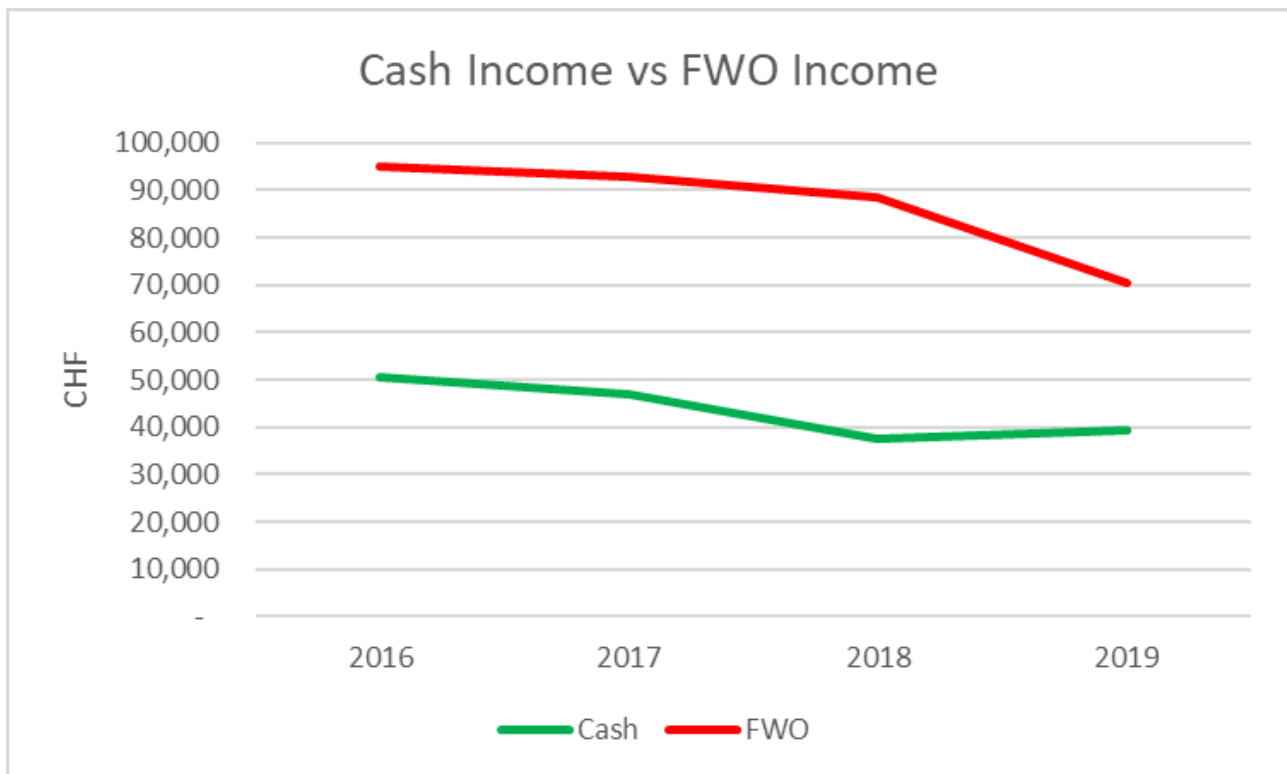
More positively, it is certainly good that the church, at least in the short term, can live within its means. Balancing income and expenditure is better than significant over-spending. Nonetheless, without a whole lot more income there isn't much room for manoeuvre or growth. The church's reserve funds are not huge, and it is not a good idea to rely on them to bail out a crisis when they are rarely added to. The church needs to be fully aware of its limits and also of its vulnerability to any crisis that would reduce income¹ or require a sudden, unforeseen outlay. Neither circumstance has been unknown in recent years.

It feels a little hypocritical to point this out without suggesting a reasonable solution, but no solution is immediately obvious. The church needs to stay aware and see how it can build on its life and what it does to sustain itself in every sense, including financially. One-off fund-raising events are good for the life of the church community but, with the exception of the church fair, do not typically raise significant levels of income. A more consistent solution is required.

Income

- The most important sources of income were freewill offerings (52%), cash offerings (29%) and the church fair (11%).
- Cash offerings came in almost at the budgeted level (CHF 40k) and the church fair exceeded its budgeted amount (CHF 14.6k vs CHF 12.5k). However freewill offerings were significantly lower than expected (CHF 70.5k vs CHF 90k). Together with nearly CHF 6k less in individual donations, this saw a lower income total of CHF 18.7k relative to budget.

¹Although not relevant to 2019, at the time of writing in early 2020, the temporary closure of the *Auditoire* due to the coronavirus crisis represents a potentially serious loss of income through the loss of cash offerings on Sundays. In 2019, these represented 29% of non-mission income.



- Freewill offering remains the most significant source of church income but has declined more rapidly since 2016 than cash (a decline of approximately CHF 25k for FWO vs CHF 10k for cash). If, very crudely, FWO can be taken as indicative of longer-term membership while cash can be viewed as broadly indicative of visitors and short-term attendees on a Sunday morning, then the principal vulnerability to the church lies in sustaining a long-term, committed base in consistent or growing numbers.
- This raises a rather difficult question, namely how to grow that base. It is difficult because it is unlikely that this will be achieved without some sort of focus and investment in church life. Obviously, such a question lies outside the remit of a financial analysis but there are some signs of how funds can stimulate congregational life. For example, the project to provide a new lectern raised CHF 3,940 in funds over a four-month period in 2019,² equivalent to around 10% of the annual cash income. Mission work is well-known for its capacity to raise funds in response to specific appeals for emergencies and disasters. While these elements differ in their appeal from the ongoing, regular work of the church, it is important to realise that without a fully sustainable church, there can be no special projects. If the church can thus provide specific projects to motivate engagement and donations, what is good for the community might also be good for its sustainability.
- In an immediate and practical sense, it is also worth noting that the church did live within its means and thus did not receive external benefits such as support from the Salvesen Fund, which supports congregations outside Scotland. Salvesen Fund support has not been needed nor received since 2015 but does represent a potential lifeline in case income should fail to increase during 2020 – especially since expenditure is likely to do so regardless, in view of payments due to the Church of Scotland in Edinburgh (see below on expenditure).

Expenditure

² The total raised for the lectern was actually CHF 4,440, but this included CHF 500 recorded as income in 2018.

- The highest sources of expenditure were minister stipend and employment costs (57%), manse costs (18%) and Salle/*Auditoire* costs (17%).
- Total expenditure was CHF 30,194 under budget. Employment costs were around CHF 7k under budget but the main saving came from a re-calculation of what are termed ministry and renewal costs, which represent the assessment of a church's financial situation, which is then recovered to support central costs in the Church of Scotland. Due to a different methodology applied by the Church of Scotland in 2019, for Geneva this was reduced to zero! However, this was only a temporary event in a fluid situation and at the end of 2019 a more stable basis for calculation was agreed between the central church and the international presbytery. This would spread the basis for the burden of assessments in a fair manner across all congregations in the international presbytery, which is a good concept although it does mean that our expenditure in 2020 is almost guaranteed to increase.
- Other expenses were essentially under control. The main challenge, as ever, whether in 2019 or at other times, remained their inflexibility. There is no way to reduce significantly what are fixed costs. Employment costs, rental costs, utility costs and similar cannot be reduced by a decision of the church since they are at a level where this would require the elimination of a minister, the manse or the use of the *Auditoire*/Salle. Without these, there would be basically no church³. With a couple of exceptions such as end of year donations, there were virtually no discretionary outlays. Even the lectern project could not be considered a discretionary use of existing resources since it was self-financed.
- Control of expenditure in 2019 was good. However, it was reduced to essentials only and saved from exceeding income to a significant degree only by virtue of the re-calculation of ministry and renewal costs. Without an increase in income, it will not be sustainable in future.

Mission finances

The congregation's mission work is reported elsewhere (see above). From a financial perspective, 2018 saw a total income of CHF 59,525. This was split at approximately CHF 42k for work in Nepal and CHF 18k for work in Malawi. The figure for Nepal included a special donation of CHF 22k for an ultrasound machine in Lalgadh Hospital. Without this, the total mission income was CHF 37,525.

This represented an increase over the levels of mission giving seen in 2018 (CHF 32,212 in total). Extensive support was provided to both projects, since the income received for mission work in one year is considered fully expensed in the same year, as the funds received already carry an effective commitment made that year to be made payable in future. This means that the cash flow of mission funds can remain high enough to sustain operations from one year to the next, subject to the absolute levels in question.

The high level of support provided to Malawi meant that the cash balance still available at the end of 2019 was only CHF 1,457 for that project. The cash balance for Nepal was larger at CHF 12,951. This was a good outcome since it showed extensive commitment by the church to both projects. On the other hand, it did represent something more of an immediate risk to the work in Malawi, which has far fewer donors in total and is highly reliant on support from the Church of Scotland, Geneva to maintain its cash flow. Nevertheless, this was sustained over the course of 2019 which

³ In theory, the church can survive without a minister over a short period, using locum services, as happened during 2016, but this is only a temporary solution to cover the period between ministers. It is not a viable, longer-term strategy.

gave sufficient reason to believe that it would continue to do so in future. Efforts to raise mission resources on various levels were largely successful, and it should be hoped that this can sustain the ability of the congregation to provide its traditional levels of support.

Conclusion

From a purely accounting perspective, a conclusion could be drawn that the congregation ended 2019 in quite good shape. It almost balanced its income versus expenditure, there was no indication of fraud or misdemeanours, a clean audit was received for the previous year, and bills and taxes were paid as necessary.

It is worth noting the difference between a financial audit and a management audit. The former is legally required and carried out each year. This has come out clean for several years. Management audits are not legally required but advise on how an entity might improve its business model. None has been carried out in recent times but from such a perspective a closer examination of the church's financial statements might reveal a serious problem, and that is the question of risk management.

As noted above, the congregation has very little in-built resilience to a serious shock or a sudden drop in income. Income has been falling in recent years but this has been covered by the fact that expenditure has as well. In 2019 this was due more to luck than judgment (essentially the unforeseen saving on mission and renewal costs) and up to now, has been due otherwise to savings on costs which are not fixed. A quick survey of the 2019 statements will show, however, that the vast bulk of costs now recorded comes from fixed costs. The room for savings has almost run out. As a result, the room to accommodate further falls in income simply isn't there any longer.

From a management audit perspective, criticism might be levelled at the church for a failure to address this risk. Strategies to build income have been discussed but little has so far been put strongly into place. Outlays have been made without much consideration for commercial alternatives (a diluted form of the "competitive bidding" on which the church's UN neighbours in Geneva insist so strongly) and ideas have been taken forward without proper study of their cost implications. Nevertheless, it is worth remembering that there is more than a management audit perspective to take into account. This is, after all, a church, not a business or a multilateral secretariat. Its life is what makes it viable, not its balance sheet. The real question is probably not, how can we cut costs, or even how can we boost income. Rather it needs to be one of how can we best use the resources we have to achieve a church life which not only represents something of great value to our existing congregation, but which can inspire and interest other people to come to it and join it. The church still has sufficient funding to exist and function as a church. What it needs to do is choose wisely what avenues it will take to do as such.

As treasurer, I feel a shade guilty presenting such a picture, especially since I can easily enough describe the problem but have more difficulty in coming up with a solution. I could propose a few, high level ideas: looking into how existing church loyalty could be translated into a higher level of commitment to FWO, investing in effective communications to the outside world, a costed plan for the year, involving both the congregational committee and the kirk session (because it should be as much about what the church wants to achieve as to how it will manage it) and so on. However, I don't have a strategy as such. That is what I would like to suggest that the church consider at all levels. The kirk session, the congregational committee, the various sub-committees, even entities one step removed from the strategic picture (e.g. the choir, the bookstall, the Sunday School and others) all have a concern here and could all be part of it.

If anyone would like to ask further questions or discuss ideas concerning the church finances, please feel free to get in touch. I can't always promise to respond the same day, but I'll do my best to get back to any points or issues as soon as I can.

Ewart MacKenzie, treasurer (mackenzieje@hotmail.com)

Free will offering (FWO) scheme

2019 Overview

In 2019, the Free Will Offering scheme generated CHF 76'385 in income,⁴ 13'615 (15%) lower than budgeted donations for the year, and 15.5% lower than 2018. The bulk of this variance was due to the departure of one donor, who accounted for more than CHF 14'000 in free will offerings in 2018. The total number of donors participating in the FWO scheme decreased from 51 in 2018 to 45 in 2019. The average annual donation per donor was CHF 1'697 in 2019, down from CHF 1'771 in 2018.

2020 Estimate

For 2020, FWO income is estimated at CHF 75'000, based on pledges and estimates based on giving in 2019. This estimate does not consider the potential impact of COVID-19 and the resulting cancellations of live services.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to serve the Church as FWO/MP Treasurer. If you have any questions or suggestions for improvements, please don't hesitate to get in touch with me by phone (076 396 89 64) or email.

Tom Snow (sneaux@gmail.com)

Minister

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Keep in touch!

Our kirk session maintains a confidential *contact list* of all those connected to our congregation: name, address, telephone, email.

If any of your contact details have changed in the last year or so, please update them by emailing Arthur Askew: *arthuraskewge@bluwin.ch*

⁴ This figure includes giving through the FWO scheme to support both the life of the congregation and its mission work.