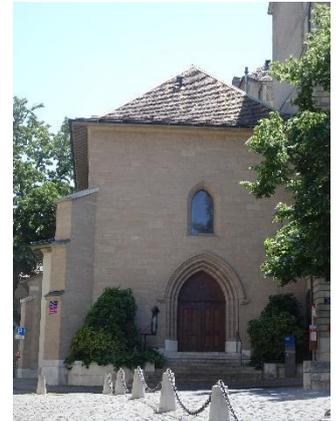


Christmas Newsletter

December 2021



LETTER FROM THE MINISTER.

How are you holding up?

That deserves some time to think over...

How are you holding up?

Over the last few weeks, I've spoken to a lot of colleagues from other congregations, at home and abroad, and to members of congregations at home and abroad, and the reality is that they are finding it tough!

Two factors are pressing hard on their peace of mind –

First, coping with the pandemic – the intrusive effect of it on their lives, their loves and their hopes and plans. From those pressures, there is no immunity!

And, second, the decisions that are being taken, at home and abroad, about the future of congregations, and the shape of the church – closures of buildings, forced unions of congregations, shared ministries where before no sharing was needed, are creating anxiety, disappointment and hurt.

People, people like us, are finding it hard, discouraging - undermining of their peace of mind and their capacity to be optimistic.

So, how are *you* holding up?

..

In the Church of Scotland, Geneva, we have managed to find encouragements in the midst of the blurry and confused emerging situations.

In spite of not being able to meet together for worship and fellowship over long months – on-line experiences of church life have been warm, meaningful - and sometimes profoundly moving. We have actually *seen* one another, talked with one another, prayed together, and listened for a word from the Lord, together.

And, on our return to in-person church life, we discovered the old bonds of Christian love were as strong as ever!



Loyal support for the life and work of the church has been demonstrated throughout that long and challenging period, and optimism that we will, on a purely practical level, weather the storm, is justified.

While, on a spiritual level, we have come to value, even more, this faith in which we stand together.

So, how are we holding up, as a Church?

Remarkably well, I think – and that is a grace and blessing grounded in the faithfulness of the members of the church, and their deep-rooted love for their Lord, his Church and his people.

And, of course, the Spirit of Christ in, with and under all we do or seek to do.

Below is the plan for our services over Christmas. It will be wonderful to celebrate this precious and sacred time together.

The politicians keep promising to do all that they can to “save Christmas”:

Listen, we will have Christmas come what may...for the carols, the story and the meaning transcend circumstance. They are deeper than the moment...more powerful than the crisis.

However “bleak the mid-winter” the truth still stands, the song still fills the heavens:

“Joy to the world, the Lord is come, let earth receive her King!”

Love as always,

Laurence.

DIARY DATES FOR THE CHRISTMAS PERIOD.

- **Sunday 19th DECEMBER 11-00 a.m. SERVICE OF NINE LESSONS AND CAROLS.**





- **FRIDAY CHRISTMAS EVE – ON-LINE ZOOM SERVICE 11.15 – MIDNIGHT**

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85428718759?pwd=b1BRUHNKWGptSW5GNXIMVFZ1ZGUyQT09>

Meeting ID: 854 2871 8759

Passcode: 277035

- **CHRISTMAS DAY 11-00 a.m.
Christmas Morning Family
Service.
In the Auditoire.**

Join the service via Zoom:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83884469724?pwd=QnZROUxWL0ZST1NNS1dPc1NiUWRNdz09>

Meeting ID: 838 8446 9724

Passcode: 580162

- **SUNDAY 26TH DECEMBER 11-00 Boxing
Day – Feast of St. Stephen.
In the Auditoire.**



St. Stephen's Day



In keeping with the tradition started by the late Jim Sharp, Laurence and I would like to offer a Christmas Lunch in the Salle after church on Christmas Day. To keep numbers manageable, this would be primarily for anyone in the congregation who would otherwise spend Christmas on their own, for those whose plans to return home may have fallen through or for visitors to the service who may have nowhere else to go. But basically, and as always, anyone is welcome.



With the help of some culinarily gifted elves, we would hope to offer as close to a traditional Christmas Lunch as possible i.e. turkey and trimmings as the main event, washed down with a fine wine or two from the Manse cellar!

I have already had some offers of help with preparation before the event, given that many people will be involved in family time on the day; and of course would be happy to have more.

If you would like to share this time with us, please let me know as soon as possible.

Manse number is:022788031 or email:
lindy.lynn1956@gmail.com



As with all plans at the moment, circumstances around Covid regulations may require us to alter or adapt, but we very much hope to make this happen.



Church of Scotland Geneva – Finance Update, October 2021

I'd like to provide a slightly different take on the Church finances as we approach the end of the year. This is because we're looking forward to a new, or at least expanded, approach to our flow of income, which I think needs to be explained to the Congregation. More of that in a moment though.

Provisional Status of Church Finances at 31 October 2021 (excluding Mission)

	Income	Expenditure	Surplus/Deficit
Budget	CHF 84,958	CHF 123,313	CHF (38,355)
Actual	CHF 109,243	CHF 113,253	CHF (4,010)

As you can see, at the end of October, things have been looking a lot better than they were projected to do. This is relatively good news for the Church, at least in the short term. I say, "relatively" since a deficit itself is never good news but a much smaller deficit than you were expecting is still quite a comfort. The Church is not on the brink of bankruptcy and will be moving ahead into 2022 without having to worry about how it will survive the next six months. That is, actually quite sadly, not necessarily the case for all Church of Scotland Congregations.

Nonetheless, there are a few points of caution to be noted:

1. The Church was not running any deficit since 2014 until 2020 so there is a long-term decline which needs to be reversed;
2. Much of the income in 2021 has been the result of a few, highly generous contributions, making the Church vulnerable to a sudden loss of only a few contributors;
3. The projections were very cautious ones and so the lower level of deficit is not quite as impressive as it might appear to be.

The point is not to play down the positives but rather to alert the Church to the fact that things are not going as badly as they might be in the COVID-19 environment in particular, and to the need to expand on the giving energy which is there to let it become sustainable and even expanding in the longer term.

Moving Forward

It's at this point where I would like to take a little time to let you know about some new approaches which are being or may be put in place to boost the Church's income, to let you know why we're doing this, and to try to explain why this is a good thing.

Looking to sustain the Church further in the longer-term, the Finance Sub-Committee took forward recommendations from the Annual Congregational Meeting and the Congregational Committee to come up with new ways to expand giving. The overall approach is a stewardship approach. This is not just a fundraising approach but involves expanding Church life as a whole, reaching out to new members, organizing events, and re-vamping our communications as well as increasing our income flow.

The Church is maintaining its communications (this piece included) about its financial needs and how people can make their offerings, even in the restricted environment of COVID-19. The messaging about Church needs has clearly worked as intended, going by the increased level of bank transfers received and the notes on them. This is what has saved the Church from the almost complete disappearance of cash offerings for over a year and a half. For better or worse, the word needs to be out there.

Based on consultations with other Churches, both in the Church of Scotland community and beyond, we are also looking to put in place plans to expand the possibilities of giving on our website and through other, electronic devices. We also hope to expand links with fundraising potentials in Scotland itself. These and other opportunities are being put into place or explored now, mainly for core Church needs but also with an eye as to how they could benefit Mission support in future too.

An important point to make clear is that nothing is planned to be replaced. All existing giving mechanisms will remain and nobody need change anything which works for them. The idea is simply to expand, which may well help with new members and visitors, as much as existing members.

The Value of Money

But should we be asking for funding like this at all ? Isn't it all a bit mercenary and at odds with our ethos ? Several may find the messaging about financial needs in Church communications somewhat distasteful, and their opinion is not without merit. Nonetheless, I would answer that actually, we do need these messages because we do need funding but that this isn't necessarily such a bad thing.

First of all, in some ways, it's just like an upgraded version of an offering plate. Indeed, the Church of England experimented quite successfully with what was labeled as a, "digital collection plate". The Church already asks for funds and has done since God first asked the Israelites to sacrifice agricultural produce to Him. These days, we prefer cash or bank transfers to slaughtering lambs on the altar but the principle is much the same. We're maybe just asking a little more directly. In the digital environment, there is little other option.

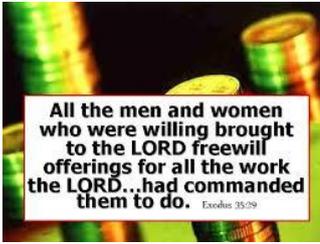
Second, I would claim that money is not a bad thing. To my mind, it's a real pity that Judas Iscariot was the traitor among the Disciples since he seems to have got Treasurers a bad name forever. Nonetheless, it's worth noting that the only designated office held among the Disciples was that of Treasurer. Even they needed one. It wasn't so much money per se to which Jesus objected, rather the effective worship of it over God. That doesn't mean that it wasn't useful for doing God's work. After all, if money were evil per se, why would Jesus have called on anyone to give it to the poor ? Wouldn't they have been better off without it ? The idea is rather that like all other resources – time, intelligence, musical ability, writing capacity and so forth – money has a value. The problem is when that value gains too much importance over others. That's not the same thing as saying that it has no value and that the Church really doesn't need any, nor that it can't do anything useful with it.

Last of all, we need to make proper use of the gifts we have. As mentioned above, the Church has seen an annual decline in income since 2014. Things may not have reached crisis point right now but like Noah, you don't wait until you're knee-deep in water before you start building your Ark. Financing is part of that because no money means no Minister, no Manse, no Auditoire rent and ultimately no Church as a legal entity in Switzerland. We need our money to survive, just as we need new members, more activities and an expanded life. What we have as a Congregation is excellent but that doesn't mean we shouldn't wish to do more. We need money as part of the package to get there, and not for its own sake, which is the critical point.

Conclusion

I hope this helps at least to set out the mindset for people as to what we're doing and why. Of course, as Treasurer, it's much easier to me to conceptualize Church life in terms of the income and expenditure levels. You will have your own perspectives on it and that's great. We're all part of the same body after all, simply exercising our various functions. I'll just do my best to avoid the track record of Mr Iscariot.

Ewart MacKenzie
Treasurer



Free Will Offering

Freewill Offering 2021/2022

Many thanks to all those who have given so generously through online means over the course of 2021, especially through the Freewill Offering (FWO) scheme. You have kept the whole Church going. We would like to take this opportunity to let you know about a few changes in the FWO scheme, how to claim your attestation for 2021 and how to continue your membership or join in 2022.

First of all, Makoto Ikeda (Mak) has generously agreed to take on the role of FWO Treasurer from Han Broere who was caretaking the role over the course of 2021 since the former FWO Treasurer, Tom Snow, moved back to the US from Geneva. Han's contribution has been critical in keeping everything running and we welcome Mak to his new role and thank him for contributing so generously.

Regarding 2021, please bear in mind that anyone resident in Geneva can claim an attestation of their giving to the Church for tax declaration purposes. This can be for contributions made through FWO, for Mission or as a single donation, provided that the contribution can be attributed to the giver and was received by the Church during 2021. Contributions can have been made either materially or electronically. However, attestations cannot form part of tax declarations for residents of either Vaud or France. Given the high number of contributions made online in 2021, it has become very hard to distinguish those made through FWO and those which have been single donations. Whether the contributors have been residents of Geneva or elsewhere has also not always been easy to ascertain. Therefore, we would be grateful if anyone requiring an attestation for 2021 would please contact the FWO Treasurer at fw.treasurer.cos.geneva@gmail.com, to request it.

In 2022, with physical Services now back in place (and, we hope, here to stay), we hope to re-launch the possibility of giving through envelopes in Church, either pink (FWO) or blue (Mission). Anyone subscribing to the FWO scheme can apply for a supply of envelopes for the year and can do so by writing to the FWO Treasurer at the same address as above. Please note that envelope supplies are not cheap and since none was used in 2021, the supplies for 2021 will be recycled in 2022. The confusing factor is that they will still be labeled as for 2021. However, they will be recognized fully as 2022 contributions.

As we look to build up giving to the Church, it would be great to expand the FWO commitments as far as possible and if you would like to join the scheme, please do not hesitate to contact the FWO Treasurer. Especially if you have been giving electronically over recent months but only through informal donations, if you would like to become a full FWO contributor, you will be very welcome, as will anyone else thinking of regularizing their commitments.

Local Givings 2021

Each year, our church donates a sum to a number of local charities, either through (virtual) Fair proceeds or from the Carol Service and Christmas Day offerings.

This year, we are supporting three very worthwhile Geneva charities:

- from Fair proceeds, “Au Coeur des Grottes”, a shelter for abused women in the Grottes district of Geneva, and the Centre Social des Pâquis, which provides facilities for homeless people and refugees in the heart of the Right Bank; and “Partage”, the Geneva food bank, who will also receive our offering from Christmas Day.

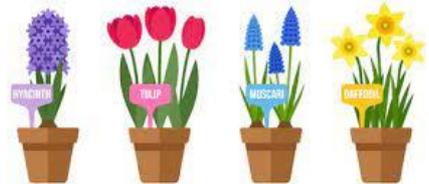
Thank you in advance for your generosity.

Revamp of the Auditoire entrance

With the prolonged absence from Church, the two beds in front of the Auditoire had become somewhat overrun and drastic action was required. Thanks to Christine and Miller Donaldson who chopped down the bushes



....and Scout Troop 130 who dedicated a whole morning in November to dig up the roots, prepare the ground and help plant over 200 bulbs. Their assistance was tremendous and we look forward to what, we hope, will be a mass of colour in the spring.



Mission News December 2021

It's wonderful to have Graeme and Meena Clugston back among us in the Auditoire, back in Switzerland for a much needed break.

Graeme sent a news piece around the other day showing how things are developing in Nepal and how our support helps. Here are some extracts:

Greetings and love from Meena and me! What a thrill - and a different world - to be back in Geneva and to see you at church....we got totally immersed in the lovely atmosphere, fellowship, love and worship in the Auditoire... Laurence's preaching, the lovely baptism, the hymn-singing with the organ and Rebecca's fab playing ... We have missed you all so awfully for the past 2.5 years in our different world of Nepal..

We can never say "Thankyou" enough for all your faithful support over the past 14 years - prayers, funding, encouragement and love - for the work at Lalgadh Leprosy Hospital. With your wonderful support the hospital has been transformed. For example our fabulous Siemens' ultrasound machine ("Janet") continues to be a life saver. Currently there are some 600 outpatients coming each day.



We promised to send you a "A little Supplement Newsletter... with more spectacular views of Kalika School high up in the remote mountains of Sindhuli District ", and how with your help, we have supported the very needy children there for the past 5 years and built a new school to replace their mud and rock school which was dangerously damaged by the massive earthquakes of 2015, but they kept using it. Well - we completed the new school and opened it just a few weeks ago (11 October). Couldn't have been done without you.

Here is a link to the Kalika story online:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1b93ne6vkrEs8x6Mv1u0B_H_gS86U4_9R/view?usp=sharing-

In Ekwendeni, Shupo Kumwenda and his teams of youth workers continue doing fantastic work both for the Youth Resource Centre as such and for "Nourishing Minds".

Shupo's net is spreading ever wider and more and more villages, families and vulnerable people are being helped through the work done by the youth of the Centre. Recently, with the help of other donors often based in Scotland, they have installed tubewells in many villages, distributed blankets and clothes for women and children and rebuilt damaged houses for poor people. The Youth Centre also has a strong link with the regional school for blind people, which has an active band.

One important feature of the youth work is sport: excitingly, seven of the young women from the Ekwendeni netball team have been selected to train with the national squad. And the young men's football team is among the top four in the Northern region.



It has been difficult these past two Covid-stricken years to keep close touch with our Mission project friends - like everywhere, we miss the human contact. Zoom, FaceBook and email are great modern resources but they only can tell part of the story!

Thank you all for the dedicated support you have given to our mission projects over the years - please remember them in your prayers, and in your donations. We provide a level of underlying support for both Ekwendeni and Lalgadh, and this is still very necessary.



A very happy Christmas to everyone from the Mission Committee.