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A word from our minister

Two buzzards wheel overhead. What do they see? What do we look like to them from their lofty perspective? A bird's eye view, a wider view, a fresh take?

Annual reports throw up highlights, and help us to read between the lines, get the sense of travel, remind us of journeys made. Here are some of my highlights and reflections on the year since our last annual report.

Holy Week

It's never easy to walk the road to Calvary and sense the history and the rhythm of Holy Week – but for those who did, lunchtime Holy Week services on Zoom, Good Friday services and Easter morning celebrations – breakfast included – made for a moving and affirming time, a time when we learned why we are part of it all and how much we are loved by the Christ who died for us.

General Assembly

We try to keep our eye on the bigger picture – we are a Presbyterian church after all – not an independent congregation, with only ourselves to think about. This wider perspective gives us a chance to share in all the wonderful work being done in Scotland and the whole world in the name of Christ and his gospel – and we are privileged and delighted to be part of that wider reach. Supporting weak and struggling congregations, providing resources of ministry and witness that would otherwise not be available to deprived areas – and a whole network of caring ministries to the elderly, the homeless, the addicted, and those who are struggling to cope – is a proud connection and of the very essence of our Christian commitment. Session clerk Christine Buhler and I will be attending this May.

The fact that the General Assembly has challenged all congregations to look at their commitment levels has been a useful spur to us all to think about how we can be a better and stronger church. The demands and rethinks required by the Presbytery plan have been searching and tough. We are still in the process of finalizing arrangements for our linkage with Lausanne and how we will make that work creatively and effectively – but the will is there all round, to make it a resource, not just a requirement.

Worship

This, for me as minister, continues to be the highlight of our life together in the church – as, with many wonderful people, we gather to praise God, to find fellowship and sharing, to be alongside one another in trouble, and to hear announced the good news of God's love and grace. Lively singing, from the heart, and big truths to challenge us make for a potent and meaningful combination and an experience of worship that is relevant and contemporary, without ever neglecting the long and wonderful heritage of Christian thought and music.

We are hugely indebted to those who lead our praise, to Rebecca, our outstanding and committed principal organist, and to Páraic and his band of brothers and sisters, who work so hard to enhance and enrich our experience of worship – and especially to all of you who come to praise – and to share in making worship a happening event.

Outreach

This is our business as a church: to serve and witness to those who have no connection with the Christian faith and to enable them to find out what it can mean for them.

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We do this in many ways: in the first place simply by being there, our Christian presence and commitment a robust expression of what we are about and what we believe.

In Geneva there will always be new people who need to be introduced to the church and the message we proclaim. In the Church of Scotland, Geneva, we are always eager to find ways of reaching out in welcome and invitation, providing a website with information and samples of congregational life, so that people are not isolated or forgotten but can feel very much part of who we are and what we are doing and can focus their prayers and support in an informed and connected way.

The return of monthly Sunday lunches has proved a brilliant way of connecting with new people, and offering hospitality to the visitor.

We greatly appreciate all those who work to make these important resources available and effective. They are certainly valued by all those who use them. and we do all that we can to make sure people feel included, valued and loved.

It's always a delight as new people become more and more part of the life of our congregation, until the time comes when we can't ever remember them *not* being an integral element in our shared life and ministry. Their presence is a blessing and a joy. We do all we can to encourage folks to feel welcome and feel at home very quickly.

I am, as always, indebted to the precious friends who share the ministry here: session clerks, treasurer, elders, congregational committee members, Sunday school teachers, safeguarding representatives: all the brave and good people with whom I make the journey. Your love and prayers sustain me, humble me and warm my heart.

Without Lindy, where would I be?? It's as simple as that! Her love, her loyalty, her energy, her patience, and her laughter are immensely sustaining. I would be lost without her support and encouragement.

Son John, in Moscow with his lovely wife Chloe continues with his interesting life. He hopes to visit us over the summer. He is in our prayers every day. Sara, in Ireland, savours the joys of motherhood and looking after two children and one husband...tiring, but wonderful. They plan to visit us over the summer. And big sister Mary, with her husband Neil, works hard and takes every chance to enjoy the delights of the great city of Glasgow. They will be with us soon, too.

Family far away – but always in our heart. Many of you know that feeling well.

If I never knew it before, I've learned it these last few years, that life is complex and demanding in our modern world...and faith has to be wrought in the midst of all the kinds of pressures people deal with every day...money, health, family, growing older. Challenges aplenty, which faith must address and respect.

My time as moderator of the Presbytery gave me a real insight into the kinds of churches there are out there among the International charges. It made me appreciate all the more the wonderful generous love of the people of the Church of Scotland, Geneva. It gave me, too, an awareness of the patience and tolerance we all have to show – for we have a church that won't tick every box for everyone but will, I hope, continue to be broad, grace-filled and thoughtful.

Given the astonishingly wide range of church styles our very international congregation includes, the fact that we are together, committed to Christ and his gospel, and compassionate in service of others, is a strength and a wonder.

As to my ministry, which I have simply had to accept will not please all the people all the time – why did I ever think it would? – I hope people find, among the questions and the inadequacies, someone who has thought a bit more deeply than in his youth about life and faith; who still believes with a fierce passion in the love and grace and salvation that are Christ's gifts – but who is maybe now more aware that we are much more learners and pilgrims, searchers and stumblers, than bearers of unquestionable certainties or providers of pat answers to life's complex questions.

With thanks deep and sincere and much love,
Laurence

Laurence Twaddle (churchofscotlandgeneva@gmail.com)

Worship

Ushers

Ushers are normally the first people newcomers and visitors meet when entering the church, and the warmth of their welcome has a big impact on newcomers' first impressions. Thank you to all involved in serving the church in this way

We restarted regular church services in the Auditoire in 2021 as the threat from Covid diminished. During 2022, our operation has returned to nearly normal. The re-establishment of this normal operation has not been without its challenges, and sincerest thanks go to both ushers and elders for their flexibility and unstinting help in overcoming the difficulties.

During the period of online services, many ushers moved away. Others for different reasons were unable to continue ushering. This reduced the number of people on the roster and significantly increased the frequency of ushering for those remaining. As we worked to increase the number of people ushering, our elders agreed to help out with ushering duties over six months. The number of ushers is now manageable, but any others willing to serve the church in this way will be very welcome.

The usher's role involves greeting those attending church each week and carrying out other tasks during the service to ensure its smooth-running. These include making hymnbooks available and collecting the offering. The roster for the following six months is published twice a year, in April and October. We aim to have enough people so that each usher serves once every three months rather than the current two. If you would be interested in serving the church in this way, please speak to me or drop me an email.

Arthur Griffith (griffith@bluewin.ch)

Bible readers

With the passing of the months since the height of Covid, things have started to pick up fairly well and we have more live attendance at the Auditoire. My sincere thanks to those who have been constant throughout in their offers to read our Bible lessons at Sunday services and, I'm pleased to report, we have the odd new recruit.

If you would like to join the readers group please get in touch with me. It's a very rewarding experience.

Nicola Hollyman (nicolahollyman@hotmail.com)

Music

For much of the first half of 2022, our small but perfectly formed choir hid in the pews, hoping no one would notice. In June, we made a first, faltering start at getting back to normal by emerging from the pews to sing three introits. And then we broke for the summer.

In September, we made a second faltering start at getting back to normal. We were still few in number but growing slowly. We added songs for communion to our introits. At the end of November, we joined forces with the UN choir, under the capable baton of Kirsty Griffiths, to lead an Advent Carol Service that was much appreciated.

Today, we are a choir in the low teens, although not everyone can show up every Sunday. We are back in our proper place in the choir seats in the chancel, underneath the stained glass windows. To the introits and communion songs, we have added a monthly anthem (or, to be strictly accurate, what the European Union would doubtless require us to call "anthem-type"). We hope before we break for the summer to sing one or more "real" anthems.

We are a "no stress, no guilt" choir. We rehearse on Sunday mornings before the service, and, in a future step towards normality, we now rehearse the choral music for the coming month for a couple of hours after the congregational lunch on the last Sunday of the month.

It's pretty painless, so why not think of giving it a shot? Men are always welcome, and women even more welcome!

Warm thanks are due to Rebecca MacDonald for all she does to help us from falling flat on our faces, quite aside from her unflagging work as principal organist and pianist, and as coordinator of those who occasionally replace her.

Páraic Réamonn (paraic.reamonn@gmail.com)

Sunday school

Our Sunday school is attended by children aged five to twelve. On Sunday May 15, day of the annual Geneva marathon, children attended Sunday school outdoors in the Parc la Grange next to the marathon lakeside route. The discussion focussed on athletics and related lessons for our Christian life, taking inspiration from the apostle Paul. The children were able to see top marathon runners from Africa pass directly afterwards.

Another highlight of the year was the family service presented by our minister on 26 June 2022. Children joined adults and co-read the Bible dialogue, participated in a Bible quiz, and read the closing blessing. At the end of the year, children again prepared a Christmas carol video for the Christmas Eve service held online on December 24 2022. They sang "O come, all ye faithful", with piano accompaniment by Rebecca MacDonald. The recording was dedicated to the late Alice Tulloch, who was a loved and longstanding member of the Sunday school team.

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

Zoom worship connection

We continue to offer Zoom connections for remote participation during most Sunday worship services, and we typically get roughly 20 connections (so perhaps 30 people) connecting in that way, both from international locations and from some of those closer to home who find it difficult to attend in person.

We have also continued the Wednesday lunchtime services, entirely on Zoom, at which we usually get 15 or so connections. These services are short (12:30– 13:00) and quite informal with an opportunity for fellowship and chatter before and after, something that is harder for the Sunday Zoom congregations.

We have “trained” a couple more Zoom operators who can help out sometimes when I have not been available in recent months, but more volunteers are very much welcome to have a go.

Mark Jeffrey (mark.jeffrey@microsoft.com)

Congregational life

Kirk session

The session has met six times since the last AGM. Matters of importance in the life of the church are regularly discussed. Highlights from these meetings are as follows:

The ordination of two new elders, Alex Craye and Mak Ikedo, took place in early June. Since then we have lost three elders. Sadly, Alice Tulloch died in December; Joan Reilly resigned from the session after many years of faithful service; and Isobel Phiri returned to Malawi. We are now in the process of sounding out new elders.

The presbytery plan for a formal linkage with Lausanne has been approved. It will involve the recruitment of one Church of Scotland minister who will have overall responsibility for the two congregations but will be assisted by a non-Church of Scotland minister. How this will work out in practice has yet to be ascertained. We are continuing discussions with presbytery and Lausanne.

A local church review took place in November, ably led by Joanne Evans-Boiten. The review can be accessed on the church website. No major issues were identified.

Three people in our congregation – Ewart Mackenzie, Jane MacKenzie and Youngean Yang – have followed the worship leader course developed in conjunction with the University of Aberdeen. This consists of a twelve week series of online sessions, with the objective of building a team of people who can help in leading worship. Ewart and Yougean have also completed a preaching course.

Safeguarding is an important issue for the church, and a safeguarding officer has been appointed.

Session members (as of May 2023)

Elders

Lyndsey Bochaton, Christine Buhler, Alex Craeye, Graeme Clugston, Jane Broere, Mary Couper, Ailsa Craig, Laurent Djamen, Nicola Hollyman, Mak Ikeda, Jane McKenzie, Cornis Van Der Lugt, Rosaleen Walker

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Ministers

Laurence Twaddle, Matthew Ross, Páraic Réamonn

Mary Couper (coupermar@gmail.com)

Jane Broere (jane.broere@gmail.com)

Christine Buhler (buhlerchristine@hotmail.com)

Congregational committee

The committee met five times during 2022. As the year commenced the committee decided to continue meeting by Zoom. All committee members supported this idea, having become very at ease with Zoom and its practical advantages during the pandemic restrictions.

The committee had energetic discussions throughout the year on a variety of topics related to the temporal affairs of the church. Regular items on the agenda were the treasurer's report, finance, mission, fabric and the Auditoire and the coordination of the St Andrew's fair. Discussion also centred on stewardship and creating longer term strategies to expand our income through innovation and modernized communication techniques.

Other topics included the Installation of a defibrillator in the church premises and exploring the plan to improve church access for people with disabilities.

The annual congregational meeting (ACM) took place on Wednesday June 15 2022 by Zoom.

The first part of the Meeting covered business items as follows:

- Approval of the 2021 accounts
- Adoption of the 2022 budget
- Appointment of auditors for the 2022 accounts
- Reception of the 2021 annual congregational report
- Election of committee members to serve where required.

The idea of holding a financial retreat was explored.

The discussion topic at the ACM was "The future of church life in light of the recent discussion with the International Presbytery". Central to the discussion was the current lack of ministers in the Church of Scotland both in Scotland and Internationally and the impact this will have on the Church of Scotland in the future, including the possibility of linkages between congregations. Further clarification on the topic would be gained in due course, once the international presbytery had issued guidance and directives on the subject.

Committee members during 2022

ACM 2019 to 2022

Grace Ansah, Sherree Atkinson-Bret, Marinda Kuhn, Fiona Parrott

ACM 2020 to 2023

Christine Bunn, David Hogg, Mwai Makota, Peter Tulloch

ACM 2021 to 2024

Nan Braunschweiger, Han Broere, Ewart MacKenzie, Douglas Murray-Jones

Two committee members decided not to stand for re-election at the ACM due to external commitments and the committee secretary indicated that after now completing a very rewarding three-year term in office she would be looking for a replacement over the course of the coming fourth year.

The committee is therefore, looking for two new members and a secretary as we continue to carry out this very fulfilling work at the heart of our congregation's temporal affairs.

Sherree Atkinson-Bret (sherreeatkinsonbret@gmail.com)

Caring for others

An international congregation such as our is very different from a parish church in Scotland. And that brings particular blessings but definitely throws up some special challenges.

Not the least being, how do we build belonging? How do we get beyond a genuine smile of welcome, and a friendly hello at the door, to really feeling part of things?

Perhaps even more important, how do we make sure everyone feels included because they are included, everyone feels they matter because they do matter, everyone feels cared for because they are cared for!

We want to make sure that, although we are widely scattered and dispersed – some high in the mountains, some in France voisine – that when trouble calls, need arises, crisis comes crashing through our window, our congregation will know about it, support us through it, pray for us in our difficulties?

The Caring for Others group was set up, many years ago, to make sure that no one slips through the cracks of our compassion and concern. It seeks, with discretion and care, to listen out for the cry for help, to be aware of who might be struggling with isolation or other needs, and as far as possible to address those situations.

We do not attempt to replace existing resources of state support, Swiss or French. But sometimes what people need is simply a simple phone call, a card, a bunch of flowers, a conversation, a reassuring hug: time spent, interest shown, love offered.

The Caring for Others group wants to be as generous in its embrace as possible. Obviously, their help depends on word reaching them. Once a need has been identified, they will do their best to respond, in whatever way they can.

Currently, the group has a small number of people within its caring embrace. If you know of anyone else or are yourself someone who would benefit from the group's support, please contact Jane Broere, the group convenor (*jane.broere@gmail.com*) or let me know.

Laurence Twaddle (churchofscotlandgeneva@gmail.com)

Fabric sub-committee

The Auditoire de Calvin is the property of the local Swiss church, the Église protestante de Genève (EPG), which kindly allows us to use it for worship – much as John Calvin and his colleagues placed it at the disposal of English-speaking refugees in the 16th century.

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Actions taken relating to the building in 2022 have been:

- a) The lift to the Salle underwent a full service, with some small repairs;
- b) A permanent internet was installed;
- c) The installation of a defibrillator in the Auditoire was proposed to the Auditoire committee of the EPG, but this was declined;
- d) Annual reports regarding the condition and installations of the Auditoire, Salle and manse were submitted to the Church of Scotland in Edinburgh;
- e) Small maintenance and repair works were undertaken to the building by members of the congregation. The help with these jobs was very much appreciated;
- f) External funding opportunities for some capital building costs may be available from the Church of Scotland in Edinburgh with regards to impact, building improvement grants and historic environment scheme. We have been in touch with the grants manager, Church of Scotland Assembly Trustees, for advice about this may apply to our church in Geneva;
- g) A revised keys schedule is in preparation: members of the congregation (and others) who are currently in possession of keys to the Auditoire and Salle should report or confirm this to Arthur Askew or me soonest, so that we can finalize the schedule;
- h) Proposed longer term works for the church:
 - a. A study on the acoustics of the Auditoire will be carried out under EPG approval;
 - b. A new lift to be installed to the Salle – recommended by the lift contractor;
 - c. Wheelchair access lift at the front doors of the Auditoire: Architect drawings and plans have already been completed. Finalizing the funding is the next step by the EPG and this may take two years or longer;

It is time consuming to submit opinions or proposals for approval to the Auditoire committee or the EPG. The Auditoire committee does not meet, and the EPG has yet to appoint a new president.

The Church of Scotland fire safety advisor has recommended that we appoint a 'fire safety duty holder'. If you are interested in volunteering for this, please contact me.

Douglas Murray-Jones (dmurrayjones@aol.com)

Eco-Congregation

On Sunday October 30 the annual harvest thanksgiving service was dedicated to the environmental challenge and our stewardship of the planet.

Congregation members were also referred to an online sermon by the eco-congregation chaplain on the theme "sustainable harvest versus single use manna" - see www.ecocongregationscotland.org.

Mindful of the UN Climate Convention Conference (COP27) to be held in Egypt, November 2022, members were invited to attend a climate webinar on the theme of trees and were pointed to a climate change-related "Net Zero prayer" (www.ecocongregationscotland.org/net-zero-prayer/).

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

Coffee and tea

A big thank you to all the volunteers who help prepare and serve coffee and tea each Sunday after church. It is very much appreciated, as it provides an opportunity to meet other members of the congregation and also to welcome newcomers and visitors.

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We are always happy to add new names to our list. If you would like to join this team of volunteers, please contact either of us, and we will add your name to the next rota. It is a wonderful opportunity to get to know the congregation and also to meet visitors.

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

Sunday lunches

Lunches on the last Sunday of the month started again towards the end of 2022. Usually around 25 people stay on for lunch after the service, and it gives a welcome opportunity to spend time together, especially after the Covid pandemic.

We have gone back to the lunch's original menu, a choice of soups with bread and cheese, facilitating the task for the group of dedicated volunteers who provide the food.

Should you wish to help out with the food, or setting and clearing up, please let Lindy Twaddle or me know. Thank you!

Christine Buhler (buhlerchristine@hotmail.com)

St Andrew's Fair

It was good to be back in the Salle in Grand-Saconnex, after an absence of 3 years. There were fewer stalls, mainly because of time, effort and energy, but numbers were up and the feedback was extremely positive. Our usual attractions still bring in folk, including the Pipes and Drums of Geneva, and a staggering 60 portions of haggis sold at lunch! All of which contributed to the final outcome of the day (including the cèilidh) of over CHF15'000. Well done!

The cèilidh continues to be popular with many from the local community, as well as our own congregation. We should like to thank the Loch Lemman Band, the Geneva Pipes and Drums, and Troop 77 of the Geneva scouts, all of whom generously gave their time and talents towards making the day such a success.

See you in Grand-Saconnex on Saturday November 18 2023!

Christine Buhler (buhlerchristine@hotmail.com)

Craft group



We continued to meet during the past year and plan for the Fair in November. We were pleased to have a variety of items for sale in 2022 – humorous framed quotations and a gardening corner with plants and colourful planters, full of spring bulbs and pansies, amongst other handmade items. It was a successful day for us, and hopefully we can continue to come up with innovative ideas for 2023.

We are around 10 members in the group. Should anyone wish to join, please don't be put off by the "craft" title, some of us just come to watch! Everyone is welcome.

Christine Buhler (buhlerchristine@hotmail.com)

Outreach

Mission partnerships

In 2022, the mission committee continued its support for the church's two mission programmes in Ekwendeni, Malawi, and Lalgadh, Nepal.

This support is principally financial - supporting the basic running expenses of the Ekwendeni HIV-AIDS Youth Counselling Centre and the salaries of a doctor and nurse in Lalgadh. As important as the financial support, however, is the contact maintained with the two centres by church members, mainly via Han and Jane Broere for Ekwendeni and via Graeme and Meena Clugston for Lalgadh, through email and Facebook contact, prayers and encouragement.

In 2022, church members supported the two programmes generously, allowing us to provide the "normal" level of support and also to cope with extra needs. Figures from the overall financial report to the congregation show healthy trends in mission income, for which we are grateful.

In addition, members gave generously early in the year for the repair and upgrading of the basketball court in Ekwendeni, and further funds to support the youth centre during Han and Jane's visit to Malawi in October. These donations meant that the youth centre could complete the sports upgrading, replace outdated equipment, maintain their vehicle (essential for outreach), and install solar panels and lighting (which mean that the centre can be used in the evenings).

Han and Jane reported to the congregation after a service in January 2023 and their report will be placed on the church website.

We were shocked and saddened to hear that during 2022, Graeme Clugston was diagnosed with multiple myeloma. He and Meena returned to Canberra for cancer treatment. The latest news is that the treatment has been successful to date; Graeme and Meena have been taking part in the Zoom link to Sunday services from mid-April. For the time being, they remain in Australia. Please pray for Graeme's continued remission and for Meena's good health as his supporter and carer. During Graeme's period of treatment, we have been in contact with Lalgadh through Dr Krishna Tamang, deputy medical director.

As noted in the main financial report, the mission committee also makes recommendations to the congregational committee concerning local giving to causes in the Geneva area. In 2022, we donated overall CHF 5,000 locally: CHF 2,000 to Alzheimer's Geneva from a donation made in 2021, and CHF 1,000 each, from Fair funds, to Fondation Partage, Fondation « Au Coeur des Grottes », and the Centre Social Protestant.

Thank you warmly for your support for our mission programmes. We hope you find they are doing God's work.

Peter Tulloch (tulloch.peter1@gmail.com)

Ecumenical links

Our congregation has always been very ecumenically minded.

In recent times, our main links have been with the Rassemblement des Eglises et Communautés Chrétiennes de Genève (RECG, recg.ch), with Témoigner ensemble à Genève/Witnessing together

in Geneva (*TEAG: johnknox.ch/programme/temoigner*) and with the Ecumenical Cursillo in Geneva. Our church is currently searching for someone who will be willing to maintain our links with RECG and TEAWG. The dates for the next Cursillo weekend, held at Le Cénacle centre, are November 9 to 12 2023.

Arthur Askew (arthuraskewge@bluewin.ch)

International Presbytery

The Church of Scotland, Geneva is one of 12 congregations in what is known to the Kirk's database as the Presbytery of International Charges but to everyone else as the International Presbytery.

We are one of what is likely to be 13 presbyteries in the Kirk: 10 in Scotland, along with the Presbytery of England and the Channel Islands, the Presbytery of Jerusalem, and ourselves.

Kirk sessions are largely concerned with the life and worship of their local congregations. The General Assembly is the supreme court of the church in matters of church law, doctrine and practice.

In between comes the presbytery, which is responsible for supporting and overseeing its congregations and for determining how the mission of the church (which is, of course, the mission of the gospel) is to be pursued within the presbytery – and within the limits of the number of ministers allocated to us by the General Assembly.

Please don't think of presbytery as some sort of amorphous body imposed over congregations like Geneva! It is composed of ministers and elders drawn from all the congregations in the presbytery, meeting, discussing, and deciding together.

We work with a system of standing committees, covering the main areas of the church's work: education, training & safeguarding; fabric; finance; mission; mission plan; and superintendence or oversight. We also have a technical support team, responsible for the presbytery website, electronic storage of documents, online meeting facilities and general IT functions.

Our most significant task in 2022 was developing by consensus a new presbytery mission plan, within an allocation of only 5 full-time equivalent (FTE) ministers from the Church of Scotland. Our aim, obviously, was to retain as many of our congregations as possible,

Sadly, we had to accept the loss of two small congregations (Costa del Sol and Gibraltar). Twelve congregations will remain, albeit with a number of changes.

One of these, as you know, is the future linking of Geneva with Lausanne, which we think will work to the benefit of both. This is also the case with Brussels and Paris. Both Budapest and Rome are to be served by mission partners, 50% of whose work will be to minister to the local congregation. Amsterdam will call a new minister from outwith the Church of Scotland.

We are well aware that we need improved communication between presbytery and our congregations. Hopefully, once our new website is up and running this can be more easily achieved.

Derek Lawson, presbytery clerk (International@churchofscotland.org.uk)

Finance

Treasurer's report

This report on our finances in 2022 has been prepared on the basis of pre-audited accounts.

Congregational finances

Since 2020 and the COVID-19 lockdown, our congregation has reached a somewhat stable financial level. While budget and expenditure levels have been largely constant, 2020, 2021 and 2022 would all have seen a deficit in the range of CHF 20,000, had it not been for a generous one-off donation in 2021 that bucked that trend, with 2021 therefore breaking more or less even.

A CHF 20,000 deficit is not to be taken lightly. Our net assets are around CHF 235,000. That means that the overall loss in 2022 was 10.1% of our net worth. Assuming that expenditure and income remain essentially consistent, that gives about a decade until we are bankrupt. Under Swiss law, however, we need to have assets of at least one year's running costs. With these approaching over CHF 150,000 per annum, we have roughly five years before running into serious trouble.

In the short-term, we are getting by. Unlike some congregations in the International Presbytery, we don't face a immediate financial crisis.

It can be tempting to assume that in the end things will work out fine. Certainly, there have been things to be pleased about during 2022, the exceptional performance of the Church Fair being probably the easiest to identify. Nonetheless, the church can, should and probably must become a bit more strategic about its overall financial approach. It needs to take ownership of where it is going, not simply to keep itself afloat but to make its financial situation work for it, not drive it.

The Church of Scotland's stewardship team supports income generation and investment, rather than financial management and policy. It talks of a "transformational" as opposed to "transactional" approach to finances. This means talking about money in a way that turns it into a part of discipleship and community, inviting people not simply to give to but to *invest* in the congregation, and to build a thriving church where money follows vision and not vice versa.

What does all this mean in practice ? It means that we need to pick up where we left off in 2022 and transform it into something new and forward-looking, where we ourselves decide the way forward.

This may sound like the introduction to a sermon, but this is still a financial report, so the facts and figures follow.

Facts and figures

2022 saw overall income of CHF 128,230 and expenditure of CHF 152,013, resulting in a net deficit of CHF 23,783. Income was essentially in line with what had been planned for. Freewill offering and donations levels were slightly lower than expected, but the levels of cash donations and the Church Fair were higher, effectively offsetting this. In the case of the cash donations, this may largely be a substitution effect, where those coming to church in person have made higher donations in cash instead of contributing online. Since services restarted in the Auditoire in mid-2021 after the Covid-19 lockdown, this is a trend which was predicted but whose extent was hard to predict accurately.

Expenditure was largely as planned. Employment costs increased due to higher Swiss taxation and social security rates, plus increases in health insurance levels but these were offset to a degree by a

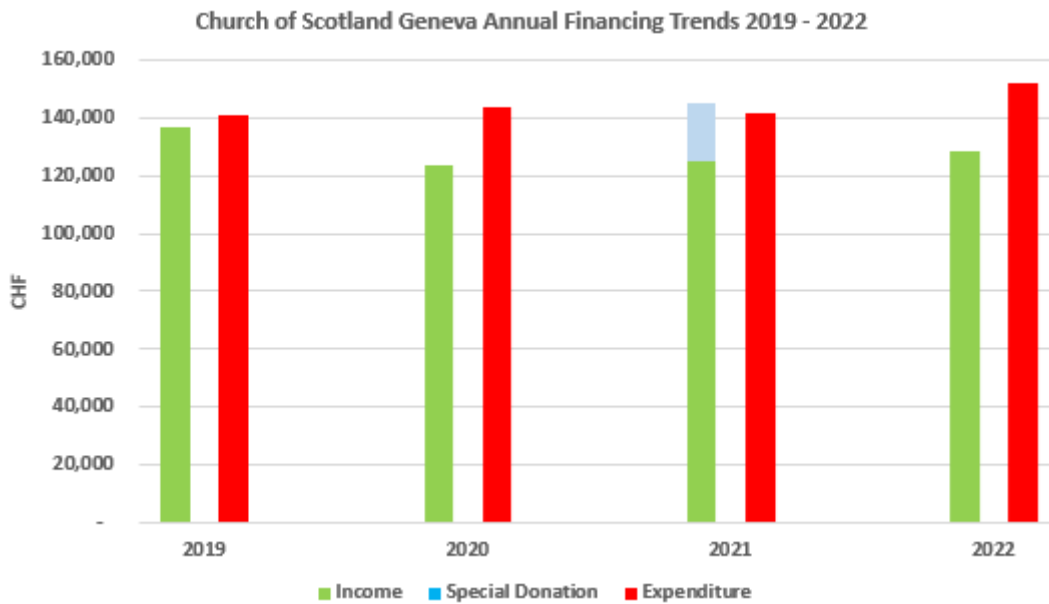
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reduction in other expenses planned for, mainly in terms of a lower than anticipated level of Church of Scotland Mission and Renewal costs.¹ Otherwise, Minister’s stipend costs, manse rent and costs, Auditoire and Salle rent and charges and local giving were all very close to what had been planned.

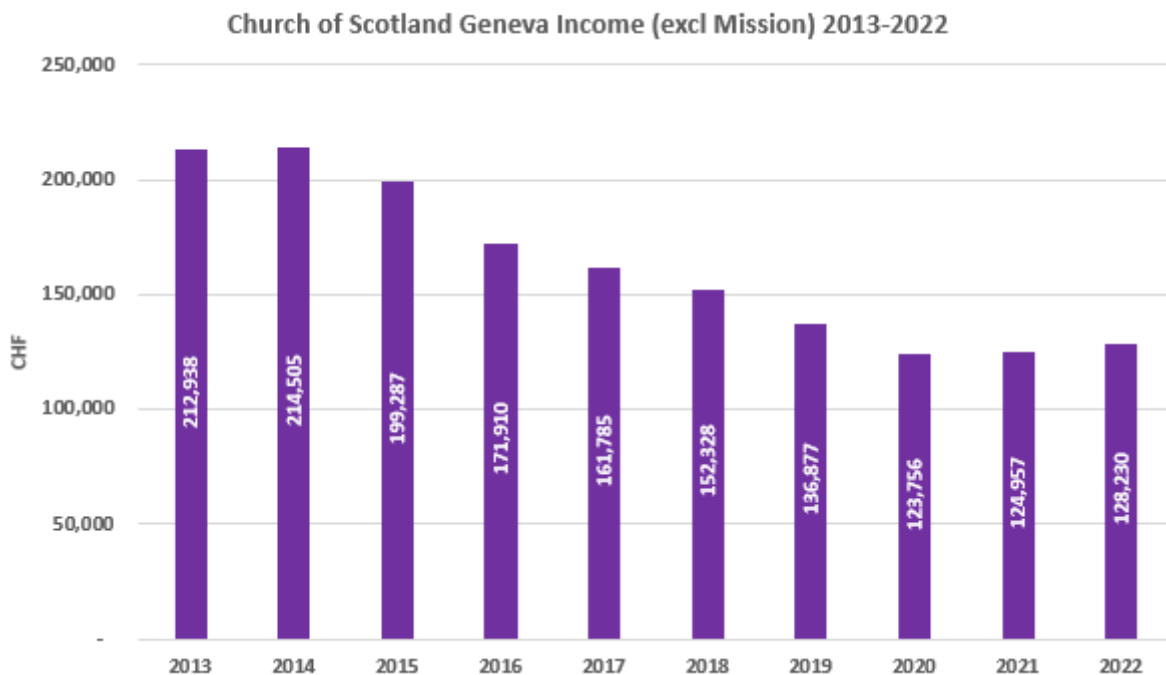
What is significant was that we had planned for an overall deficit of CHF 22,975. This ended up as CHF 23,783, so we got, more or less, the bad result we had expected.

Trends

This broader significance is easier to see from a comparison over time.



Without the special donation in 2021, our income has stabilized at around CHF 125,000 per year (the small increase in 2022 being due mainly to the Church Fair) and income has been roughly CHF 20,000 less than expenditure. This remained relatively constant until 2022 but has already started to grow with additional pressures from utility bills and employment costs.



¹ Mission and Renewal costs are levied on all congregations by the Church of Scotland in Edinburgh.

The longer term picture is also less than encouraging. The most encouraging factor here is that since 2020, income levels seem to have plateaued rather than keep declining.

Addressing the core

The business of the church is not to make money but to preach the gospel. The bottom line, spiritually, is not the same as the bottom line in an accounting sense. That does not mean that the two are unrelated.

If we're just about paying the bills, then we are using our resources to and get by. Are we doing anything beyond that? What are we doing to build a thriving congregation where money follows vision and not vice versa (see above, pp.12-13), so that we can have a firm place from which to exercise our fundamental role as God's church in God's world?

This isn't about asking everyone to give more. Our congregation is already very generous with its resources. Simply holding out a begging hand, an offering plate, or a Freewill Offering envelope is not, in any case, a sustainable strategy. The question is whether we are looking to use our resources to build a congregation that can grow, achieve results, and demonstrate why anyone should want to contribute to it in the first place.

The Church of Scotland promotes Giving to Grow (technically the replacement for Mission and Renewal, but the philosophy is more wide-ranging). It encourages us to put money and energy into an expanded online presence, linking with businesses, launching ventures with other congregations (of any denomination), large-scale events that may even combine mission and regular church fundraising, responsible but productive financial investments, and so on.

Some ideas might work better for Geneva than others but the important point is that our congregation can come together around a vision and a shared strategy. It needs to be one which builds it as an entity, even acknowledging quite openly and with no embarrassment that it is an entity with a bank account.

Recent movements have seen some encouraging, new energy as the minister and the congregational committee have reached out to members of the church with experience in finance, marketing, creative arts and other skills, or even just enthusiasm, to pool their ideas and come up with a dynamic solution to the church's needs.

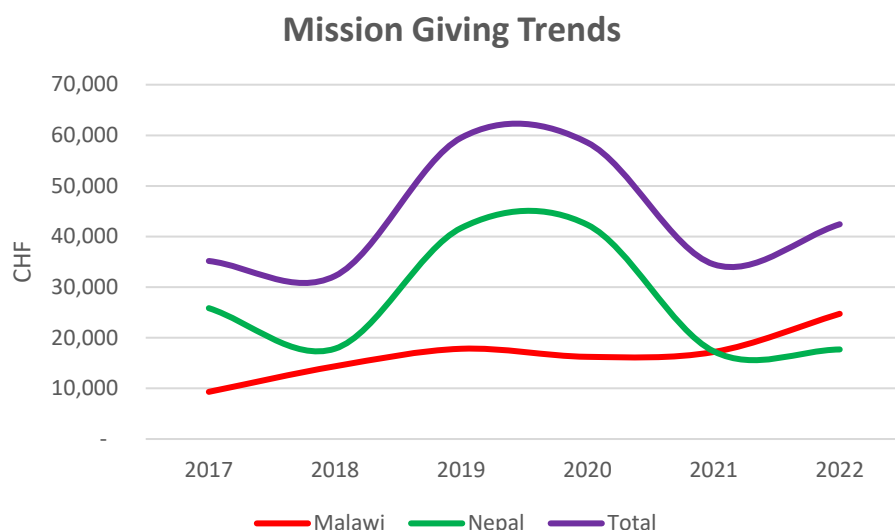
This is what our congregation clearly needs. The financial report is a gentle, yet firm wake-up call that our congregation has to take full account of the lessons of 2022 and move ahead from there. We can get by at the moment (just), but we need to grow.

Mission finances

What was achieved by the church's mission work is reported above (pp.10-11).

Financially, 2022 saw a total income of CHF 42,430. This was higher than the CHF 34,520 received in 2021, not least due to an exceptional donation of CHF 4,000 for the special Malawi appeal, which was distributed "on the ground" during the visit by Han and Jane Broere to Ekwendeni in October 2022. The difference otherwise between 2021 and 2022 was an increase of CHF 3,400.

The income was split at approximately CHF 17,700 for work in Nepal and CHF 20,200 for work in Malawi (excluding the special Malawi donation). The increase in mission income during 2022 was almost all directed to Malawi. Nepal remained relatively constant from 2021 to 2022.



In recent years, giving levels for Nepal have been much less stable than those for Malawi although this was particularly marked in 2019 and 2020 due to a couple of exceptional one-time donations for special purposes.

By contrast, the support for Malawi has tended to be mainly for core mission work there supported by the congregation although in 2022 this changed to a degree with the special Malawi donation. Even allowing for this, however, the long-term growth in support for Malawi is notable.

The net effect is that the church retains sufficient resources to keep supporting the key functions in both projects for which it has met long-term needs. This continues to be the case for Nepal although the growth in income for Malawi has provided some potential for increased investment there, even beyond the scope of the special Malawi donation.

Sustainability, or at least shock resistance, remains a concern for both projects since the bulk of their income comes from a small number of donors, who provide significant amounts. Hence, there is considerable vulnerability to sudden change.

Mission finances, like the rest of our finances, are recorded on an accrual basis, where income received during one year is considered expensed in the same year. This is achieved through the use of accounts payable which essentially records the funds unpaid at the end of each year as expensed but not yet disbursed. In practice, this gives a cash balance.

The cash situation of mission projects can thus be summarized as follows for 2022:

Mission finances summary as at 31 December 2022 (CHF)				
	Combined	Nepal	Malawi	Total
Opening Balance	-	7,990	11,789	19,779
Income to Date	6,807	14,290	21,333	42,430
Expenditure to Date	-	12,500	20,412	32,912
Balance Remaining	6,807	9,780	12,710	29,297
Balance Remaining (90%)	6,126	8,802	11,439	26,367

Finally, it is worth noting that the mission committee was involved in recommending the allocation by the church, through the congregational committee, of the 2022 local giving donations. These are not recorded as mission funds but are donated by the congregation from its core finances. Based on the mission committee's recommendation, the church donated CHF 1,000 to each of the following:

- Centre Social Protestant
- Fondation « au Coeur des Grottes »
- Fondation Partage

Note of appreciation

Following the generous assistance provided to the church during 2021 on financial and tax matters, Peter Rupf of SOFAD SA and his colleagues have continued to provide this guidance pro bono over the course of 2022. This has included the provision of payroll calculations and documents, and extremely helpful guidance with respect to an evolving taxation situation. The church is extremely grateful and would like to thank Mr Rupf and SOFAD SA once more for all the expertise and advice they have provided in such a professional and kind manner.

Ewart MacKenzie (mackenzieje@hotmail.com)

Freewill offering (FWO) scheme

2022 has been a year of consolidation for the Freewill Offering scheme as members recommitted their support by contributing CHF 68,000 to the general congregational funds and CHF 30,000 to the mission funds. For comparison, in 2021 CHF 74,000 CHF was contributed to the congregational funds and CHF 34,000 to the mission funds.

What may appear to be a drop in the amount donated in 2022 is actually somewhat misleading. The difference can largely be attributed to an exceptional and large donation made to the general church funds in 2021 as well as a special anonymous donation made to the mission funds.

Most of the 29 members of the FWO contributed by bank transfer, but we still have six members who faithfully contribute using the pink and blue envelopes. In either case, their contributions are very much appreciated.

Finally, 27 donors requested attestations for their tax declarations.

New for 2023 is that we modified the definition of how we account for donations to the FWO. Previously, we had donors who were not part of the FWO but contributed regularly to both the general funds and the mission funds.

Historically, the contributions to missions were counted as part of the FWO, but the contributions to the general congregational funds were simply counted as independent donations. For 2023 going forward, we will count these donations to the congregational funds as part of the FWO.

In this way we can obtain a more accurate estimate of the amount the congregation will receive in 2023.

Makoto Ikeda (fw.treasurer.cos.geneva@gmail.com)

Church of Scotland, Geneva

Our congregation draws people from many countries and many denominational backgrounds, and no one should feel a stranger or an outsider. We are always keen to welcome people into our community and fellowship.

We share Communion on the first Sunday of each month, a sacrament that is open to all who are part of Christ's church.

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 Christine Buhler (buhlerchristine@hotmail.com)