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A WORD FROM OUR MINISTER

It used to be quite the thing... a SWOT analysis... when a group, an organization, a couple, or a church, would look at its life, and check out the *Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats* (SWOT), in the hope that such an overview would provide direction, clarify priorities, stir up enthusiasm, and head-off trouble “at the pass”.

In a way, we have been doing this at our *Future Focus* gatherings, and we hope to find that clear direction, clarify those priorities, stir up that enthusiasm, and head off those potential troubles “at the pass” as we move towards our third conversation (a few days away as I write).

I suppose my reflection would be an emotional one:

- the moments, and the experiences, the people and the events that have brought delight and a real sense of privilege – as I have, over the last 12 months or so, been blessed to share in the life of the congregation, and the lives of the people whose friendship, faith and love have been a blessing, both unexpected and profound
- times when worship has been full of meaning and feeling...precious truths celebrated, challenging truth faced, a real sense of shared journeying -where we don't have all the answers to all the questions, but that matters less than the shared journey
- and always the singing!

Sadly, not everyone has felt that way, and that is a source of regret and sorrow.

I like the way we seem to keep faith alive and real, while managing to engage with the world as it is and appreciating the countless opportunities to find beauty, companionship, fun, and surprise: a life-embracing expression of the Christian faith, so very different from the dour, joyless, critical, judgmental version – unfortunately, often thought by those outside the church to be what it is all about.

Those happy experiences do not, I hope, make us complacent or insensitive to the realities for other people, and our obligations towards them...that, it seems to me, has never been the way things are seen, or done, in the Church of Scotland, Geneva!

When it comes to weaknesses... I thought it told its own story, that, when alerted to the financial pressures bearing down on the congregation and putting question marks over how the future would look, so many people responded in positive, mature, and creative ways, to stop the rot...and endeavour to bring our church finances into a more realistic shape...and to make sure this committed response was not just a one-off, that would leave us in the same position as before...but could serve as a springboard to a renewed vision of our role, our purpose and our mission.

We are also aware of how important it is to keep our eyes open and our hearts sensitive to the needs of those people who don't have a structure of support around them...family far away, old friends hard to keep in touch with...the church a key resource of warmth, hospitality and welcome. This is definitely one of the opportunities that present themselves to us and hint at our unique calling in this unique context in which we find ourselves.

Certainly, hospitality has been a large feature of my life over these last 12 months, with visitors returning to pre-Covid levels, and the responsibility strongly felt to include and enfold those who need it.

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In this I am inspired, encouraged and supported by Lindy... with her big heart, her tireless energy, and her deep respect for people. Without her, much of the idealism would melt into mere good intentions, rather than being cashed out in meals prepared, invitations offered, second miles walked. We all owe her every appreciation for the willingness she shows to be involved and to express the ministry of care and compassion.

There have been particular opportunities for service within the life of the wider church that have been presented to me over the last 12 months.

Interim moderator for Paris seems to be the never-ending story, as they have seen the goal-posts shift on a number of occasions, with hard decisions needing to be made...and no clear resolution to their prolonged vacancy yet being found. This has all been a distraction and a pressure point, and taken up more time and involved more travel than I ever envisaged. And it still rumbles on...

Seeing how the congregation in Rotterdam functioned and the challenges it faces was a salutary and a moving experience...and to return there for my report of that local congregational review was a special moment.

One opportunity for service now no longer mine to enjoy is membership of the business committee of presbytery – with a finger on many pulses. My time as Superintendence committee convener coming to a close meant an end to that long and interesting connection with the business committee. The back benches for me!

Our linkage with Lausanne, deferred but coming before too long...continues to evolve and once a ministerial appointment has been made there...things and timings will be much clearer. Simply because it is new territory for everyone involved, sorting out the detail has been time-consuming, and at times frustrating...but the spirit has always been one of cooperation and good will, and that is sustaining, and smooths the potential rough spots on the road.

Over the last year, circumstances have meant family has been a key element in our life, our thinking, our spending and our praying... A son in Moscow with his wife of two years. A daughter with a new son...with us for his baptism... And our eldest, Mary, who would love to see more of us... Missing out on our annual holiday with her and her husband in Scotland, because of a change to the normal presbytery timing was a big disappointment... These things matter, and it is important to find a balance between responsibilities towards them and the needs of the people here, whom we love and respect so much.

One thing I have learned or, perhaps, re-learned this year, is that no minister – and I mean, no minister – is every going to please everyone all the time! Much as most of us would like to... And it is always sad to think of those who have not had their needs met, their wishes fulfilled...their expectations matched by what actually happened.

For some, it has been a full, astonishing, colourful, rich, and blessed year. For some it has been a year of challenge, pain, loss, and anxiety.

But in this church, there is much love for one another...much kindness shown, much appreciation expressed. It is not perfect. But it is precious.

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!

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 rota for the following six months is published twice a year, in May and November. Each usher is on duty once every two or three months. We are constantly looking for additional volunteers to usher. 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

During the past year things seem to have moved towards something that feels more 'normal'. We have more live attendance at worship in the Auditoire than immediately after Covid. We are certainly managing to organize readers every Sunday with relative ease. We even have yet another recruit.

Although we used to have the luxury of two readers every Sunday some time ago, the dedicated group of readers on whom we call at present make things work extremely well, and I would like to thank them all most sincerely.

If you would like to figure among our number do please contact me by email or simply let me know in person one Sunday. We would be delighted for you to share in this very rewarding experience

Nicola Hollyman (nicolahollyman@hotmail.com)

Music

Once again, musical accompaniment has been provided for every service, usually on the organ but sometimes on piano. In our service, this means playing a prelude to prepare the congregation for worship, offering music as a musical interlude halfway through the service, and a postlude to round off worship with uplifting music, as well as music for reflection during communion. It also entails accompanying the choir for introits and anthems, rehearsing with it every Sunday morning from 10:00 till 10:40, and practising with it once a month on a Sunday afternoon to prepare for the next month. Of course, musicians are also called upon to accompany the five (sometimes six!) hymns chosen for each service.

I have been lucky to be part of a group of volunteer musicians for services – Peter Billington, Linda Revkin, Peter Tulloch and Páraic Réamonn for organ/piano, Makoto Ikeda for clarinet and cantata arrangements, Judith Peacock for flute, Kathryn Watson for bassoon and bagpipes, as well as her son Ruben on the violin and her daughter Elsa on the viola, and Lindy Twaddle on the guitar. One organist from outside the congregation, Beatrice Jornot, has also played. In addition, we've had the privilege of hearing Vivien Liu and Yumi Hoshiyama sing accompanied by Mak and myself in the anthem slot. And of hearing Nicola Hollyman and Vivien sing solo

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verses of carols in our service of nine lessons and carols. Thanks to all for their beautiful contributions to worship!

Rebecca MacDonald (rebdirks@gmail.com)

Our choir is still not back to pre-Covid levels. Then we quite often hit the dizzy height of sixteen singers; now we are lucky if we get to ten. Noticeable, however, is that even when few in number, the choir sings with growing confidence. (Occasionally, I push them too hard; but they're a forgiving lot.)

Aside from the summer break, we sing an introit every Sunday; on the first Sunday of the month, we sing an extra piece during communion, and on the last Sunday, we have a stab at an anthem or "anthem-type" piece. For the December carol service, we again joined forces with the UN choir, under the able baton of Kirsty Griffiths.

New members are always welcome. There is no expectation that you show up every Sunday: only Lily Geissbuhler does that! We rehearse from 10am before the Sunday service; and after the congregational lunch at the end of the month, we go down to the Auditoire again to run through the choral music for the coming month. All you need is enthusiasm and a good pair of shoes.

Páraic Réamonn (paraic.reamonn@gmail.com)

Flowers

We are still looking for someone to coordinate the church flower rota. Unfortunately, since Covid, we have not gone back to posting a rota and inviting members to sign up for specific Sundays. We know there are many who like to remember special dates, linked to loved ones, with flowers and sadly we are no longer giving them the opportunity to do so. Please speak to Hazel Griffith should you be willing to take on this role. Thank you!

Christine Buhler (buhlerchristine@hotmail.com)

Printed order of service

"What is the use of an order of service," thought Alice, "without pictures or illustrations?" Following discussion in the kirk session, in October 2023 we began to print a more elaborate order of service, with notices of upcoming events, recognition of all those taking part in the service – and pictures and illustrations. Lewis Carroll would be pleased!

The order has developed organically over the months since but seems now to have settled into an established form. We have the beginnings of a rota of six eager and willing volunteers to take turns in printing the order, but we should like to grow our numbers: with a rota of eight, or ten, or more volunteers, it becomes very much less burdensome. If you would like to join our gang, all you need is a computer of some kind and a colour printer.

Páraic Réamonn (paraic.reamonn@gmail.com)

Sunday school

The Sunday school continued to run with a group on average of six to seven children. At the end of the school term on June 25, the Sunday school children were engaged at the family service and joined the church choir in singing, in particular, "One more step along the world I go". Parents of the children made contributions for the toys & games table at the St Andrew's Fair

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held on November 18. During Advent the children joined with the choir on December 10 in singing “O Little Town of Bethlehem”. They sang the same carol in a video recording prepared for and played during the Christmas eve service online.

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

Zoom worship connection

Our church started using Zoom during the difficulties of the pandemic lockdown in 2020. This continues to this day.

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 worship in person.

We have also continued the Wednesday lunchtime services, entirely on Zoom, at which we usually get 15 or so connections, so typically 20-25 people worldwide. These services are always 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. Wednesday also gives us an opportunity to enjoy different kinds of music selected from YouTube.

The minister has arranged alternative short Zoom services on those Sunday mornings when there is a visiting minister in the Auditoire, so that they don't have to deal with any technical complexity. These alternative services generally follow the same pattern as the Wednesday worship.

While some may feel that Zoom splits the congregation and reduces the motivation for people to attend church in person, it also allows us to welcome those who cannot attend physically due to health, distance, transport, or other issues. We are aware of this tension.

Despite the years of use, we do still run into technical difficulties of one kind or another. Connections can fail, sound may not be picked up properly, or human error can always creep in. Rarely does a whole service go by without *some* minor mistake or problem occurring, but we try to give the best experience we can within our limitations.

While we now have a few people who can run a Zoom session, more volunteers are very much welcome to have a go.

Mark Jeffrey (mark.jeffrey@microsoft.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.

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 (hazelandarthurgiffith@gmail.com)*

CONGREGATION

Kirk session

The session has met six times since the last ACM. Matters of importance in the life of the church are regularly discussed.

Christine Colliar and Mark Jeffrey were ordained elders in October and November. We still need to ordain at least two more elders. This is an ongoing process.

Christine Buhler accompanied our minister to the General Assembly in May. Jane Broere was appointed presbytery elder.

A series of three *Future Focus* meetings took place earlier this year. The first two meetings were coordinated by an outside facilitator, Rob Rawson, and the final one was mainly facilitated by Páraic Réamonn. A full schedule of activities was proposed and should be started in the Autumn.

The presbytery plan for a deferred linkage with the Scots Kirk, Lausanne, has been approved and we are looking forward to working more closely with Lausanne, who are currently in the process of forming a nominating committee (consisting of seven people from Lausanne and six from Geneva) to seek a minister to be based in Lausanne. Our electoral register has been updated, as there will be a need to vote on this and other critical issues in the near future.

Safeguarding – protecting our children and others in our congregation who are vulnerable – is important in our church life. Christine Colliar has been appointed safeguarding coordinator. She is ensuring that all elders, Sunday school teachers and those in the Caring for One Another group are following the appropriate safeguarding courses.

Session members (as of May 2024)

Elders

Lyndsey Bochaton, Christine Buhler, Christine Colliar, Alex Craeye, Jane Broere, Mary Couper, Ailsa Craig, Laurent Djamén, Mark Jeffrey, Nicola Hollyman, Mak Ikeda, Jane McKenzie, Cornis Van Der Lugt, Rosaleen Walker

Ministers

Laurence Twaddle, Páraic Réamonn

Mary Couper (coupermar@gmail.com)

Jane Broere (jane.broere@gmail.com)

Christine Buhler (buhlerchristine@hotmail.com)

joint session clerks

Congregational committee

The committee met five times during 2023, mostly by Zoom with one in-person meeting in September.

The committee had robust 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, relations with the Auditoire committee, and the coordination of the St Andrew's Fair.

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Other discussions focused on stewardship and income generation, the church website, coordination of activities in the Salle, *Partage* collections and the consultation on the church's future.

The annual congregational meeting (ACM) took place on Tuesday May 30 by Zoom. The first part of the meeting covered the obligatory business items:

- Approval of the minutes of the 2022 ACM
- Report on the 2022 accounts
- Adoption of the 2023 budget
- Revision of the constitution (to allow for an independent examination of accounts rather than an audit)
- Appointment an independent auditor for the 2023 accounts
- Reception of the 2021 annual congregational report
- Election of members to the congregational committee.

The meeting also discussed priorities and areas of interest for our church life and received updates on mission and the prospective connection with the Scots Kirk, Lausanne.

Sherree Atkinson-Bret stood down as secretary of the committee after four years of service and was succeeded by Nan Braunschweiger. Christine Bunn and Peter Tulloch resigned, David Hogg and Mwai Makoka were re-elected to serve after their three-year term of office had ended, and Jason Leger joined as a new member.

As of December 2023, the committee members were:

From 2021 to 2024

Nan Braunschweiger

Han Broere

Ewart MacKenzie

Douglas Murray-Jones

From 2022 to 2025

Grace Ansah

Fiona Parrot

Sherree Atkinson-Bret

From 2023 to 2026

David Hogg

Jason Leger

Mwai Makoka

Sherree Atkinson-Bret (sherreeatkinsonbret@gmail.com)

Nan Braunschweiger (ntbraunsch@bluemail.ch)

Bible study and prayer

I lead morning prayers online every Tuesday at 8am and facilitate a weekly Bible study for the International Presbytery on Tuesday afternoons on Zoom. If you are interested in joining either of these, please contact me!

Christine Colliar (ccolliar@churchofscotland.org.uk)

Caring for One Another

The Caring for One Another group is led by Jane Broere and currently has 12 members. The aim of the group is to enable everyone to feel included in our church family, loved and supported in times of need.

The group keeps in touch regularly by email and meets in person, when possible, to share news on members of the congregation who need support and prayer. In a multicultural church community that is geographically dispersed, the group uses a variety of communication methods to keep in regular contact with members of the congregation, such as visits, phone calls and sending cards.

Members of the congregation are encouraged to pass on to the minister or a member of the caring group any specific care concerns of which you may be aware. Confidentiality is always respected.

Caring for One Another group members: Jane Broere, Sandy Cunningham, Hazel Griffith, Sherree Atkinson-Bret, Jean Murray, Lindy Twaddle, Mary Couper, Christine Buhler, Christine Sutton, Jenny Rietbergen, Lyndsey Bochaton and Rosaleen Walker

Lyndsey Bochaton (lyndsey.bochaton@gmail.com)

Church recovery plan

The critical lesson from the financial crisis in late 2023 was not ultimately financial. The analysis from the finance sub-committee concluded that the underlying problem was a falling stream of numbers and activities in the congregation. The awesome response to the October financial appeal demonstrated just what the congregation could achieve in terms of generosity and the value it placed on itself as a church community. However, what was needed was a reliable increase in numbers. A congregation with a healthy number of members does not tend to go broke. The underexpenditure on outreach and contingency funding, noted in the report on finances below, suggested that apart from the church services and the St Andrew's Fair, the congregation was not investing as much time, effort and resources as needed to reach out to the wider world and to sustain or grow itself for the future.

The October financial appeal was one half of the response. The second was the church recovery plan. The success of the appeal has already had an effect beyond Geneva, where the positive energy, generosity and commitment of the congregation in the face of serious crisis has been noted with respect by other churches in the International Presbytery. Many of our counterparts there provided valuable help and guidance when the scale of Geneva's issues became known widely towards the end of 2023. The key now is for the same energy and commitment to be sustained both financially and in continually building, renewing and expanding the congregation's life and outreach.

The recovery plan was put together on some basic premises:

- The congregation needs to sustain its life, of which finances are only a part
- Responses to the financial appeal were often one-time and therefore not a sustainable basis for forward planning
- Responses to the financial appeal from within the congregation are only effective so long as there is a sustainable congregation

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- The church recovery plan is a long-term investment, of time, effort and funds, that has itself to be sustained
- The congregation does not want to end up in the same situation again as in 2020-2022 and the first three quarters of 2023 and needs to take corrective action immediately and to keep working on that basis

The initial design was based on identifying as many obvious opportunities as possible and seeing how and where we could put these into effect. The idea was to get the congregation to commit as much time and energy as they felt appropriate, to come together as a community and to build genuine outreach. The Church of Scotland, Geneva has a niche in the expatriate community in Geneva as the source of English-language worship in the Reformed and Presbyterian tradition. Enough people are looking for English-language services but many, it seems, have not even heard of our congregation. Some may also be looking for opportunities simply to meet others and to engage in a community where they can use English. An open church community should be able to reach out to many types of people and, bit by bit, build itself up. Initial success in attracting others should also lead to some of them bringing in more people too. The initial ideas put forward were as follows:

Activity	Description
Revenue Generation – set up groups	<p>Set up groups that the Church could run to serve and help those in the local community who might appreciate Christian community, e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daytime social group for non-working expats • Something for lonely people • Parents and children group • Book club • Language groups
Revenue Generation – Seeds to Grow Fund	New fund managed by the CofS in Edinburgh. this is particularly for projects targeted at under-40s but not exclusively so: other ideas are still welcome for consideration. Needs project ideas to apply for funding.
Revenue Generation – digital giving	Overhaul and expand our current "giving" platforms in line with modern digitized options.
Communication – digital presence	Review the Church's online presence with best practice recommendations. Expand our outreach towards the English-speaking community – complements setting up groups and expat outreach efforts.
Communication – traditional and media	Coordinate and distribute flyers towards hotels & international organizations, international schools and anywhere else appropriate. Contact local newspapers and radio to explore possibilities.
Communication – expat awareness	Ensure that the expat community and those who serve it are fully aware of the religious services that the Church can offer to anyone in need: e.g. weddings, baptisms, funerals. Outreach can be made through contacts with expat networks, undertakers and others.

The initial response was encouraging in terms of the interest it generated, although levels of commitment were mixed.

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Communication saw probably the biggest step forward. The communications committee undertook work to overhaul the congregational website and build up the congregation's online presence. A strategy was worked out to ensure that the congregation was heard of in international organizations and schools. The minister broadcast an interview on local radio. Various hotels were leafleted.

December saw a Bring-a-Friend Christmas Quiz night in the Salle. Although only lightly attended, it saw members of the congregation invite some relative newcomers, and a good time was certainly had by all who came along. An important lesson here was that even a simple event can be organized by anyone with a little effort and can build up a real feeling of community and draw in others. The enthusiasm for another quiz night at a later date showed this nicely.



Arguably the most important result to date was the decision by the kirk session in late 2023 to invest in the *Future Focus* afternoons provided by Rob Rawson from the Church of Scotland in Edinburgh. Intended to help congregations decide themselves how they should be taking themselves forward, these were held during 2024, but planned for as part of the response to the recovery plan.

The question for the church recovery plan in 2024 is whether it will be able to gain and sustain enough momentum to let it achieve what it was designed to do or whether the interest may flutter with the passing (even if only temporarily) of a financial crisis. If everyone in the congregation were to contribute just half an hour each week to making something happen, the effects might be quite extraordinary. The biblical narrative is often not to consider how we will ever reach the final goal, or even to have to have that goal made clear, but to take the next step in moving towards it. If each of us can look for that, then we may find much more than we anticipated.

Ewart MacKenzie (mackenzieje@hotmail.com)

Eco-congregation

The Harvest Thanksgiving service held on Sunday September 17 included special reference to the environment agenda and our stewardship responsibility as caretakers of nature. Advent materials made available online by the Eco-congregation were used in December as input to our service on the First Sunday of Advent.

The December church newsletter included an article on "Climate Change: Small steps on our road to Damascus". Members were reminded of climate convention events, including a morning prayer meeting held by the Eco-congregation on November 30 as the COP28 climate conference opened in Dubai and the COP28 Global Day of Action in Scotland on December 9.

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

Safeguarding

The Church of Scotland website explains safeguarding like this:

“Safeguarding is about preventing harm and abuse and making a timely and appropriate response if it occurs.

Harm or abuse of children and adults at risk can happen anywhere – even in church communities. We have a duty to ensure a safe church for all. This means protecting children and adults at risk.

The church aims to minimize the risk of harm occurring. If harm or abuse does occur, with appropriate support and training, it will be recognized and reported. If it occurs we will work with the police and social work services if appropriate.

Safeguarding – protecting children and adults at risk from harm – is a permanent and necessary part of church life. The needs of the child, adult at risk, or survivor come first. This is also called the paramountcy principle.

Our key safeguarding message is a simple one for current and historical abuse:

If harm or abuse is suspected or witnessed, or is reported to you, you must immediately report it to your safeguarding coordinator or safeguarding panel.”

We have made good progress over the last year in implementing the safeguarding requirements.

Everyone working with children and vulnerable adults has to take a safeguarding training course. They have all been given a list of online courses available with the new trainers in the International Presbytery: Aaron Stevens in Budapest and Betsi Thane in Malta.

Elders and congregational committee members are also required to take a course and have been asked to sign up online.

We now have to follow a recruitment process with a job description. This is in place for Sunday school teachers. The job description for the *Caring for Others* pastoral care group is being prepared.

A safeguarding panel is in place. Members can talk to anyone on the panel about issues concerning safeguarding:

Christine Colliar, coordinator (ccolliar@churchofscotland.org.uk)

Marianne Lewis

Cornis Van der Lugt (cofsgsundayschool@gmail.com)

Laurence Twaddle (churchofscotlandgeneva@gmail.com)

The Church of Scotland safeguarding service is found here:
churchofscotland.org.uk/about-us/safeguarding-service

Christine Colliar (ccolliar@churchofscotland.org.uk)

Fabric sub-committee

a) Minor maintenance replacements and repair works have been carried out during the year. Smaller maintenance works have been undertaken to the building by a fabric focus group from the congregation. As the Auditoire de Calvin is the property of the Église Protestante de Genève (EPG), the local cantonal church, the EPG covers most of the costs of the repairs.

b) Annual reports regarding the condition and installations of Auditoire, Salle and Manse were submitted to the Church of Scotland Trustees in Edinburgh.

c) An updated key schedule (who has keys for what) has been prepared by Arthur Askew with input from Nan Brunschweiger and myself as fabric convener.

d) Proposed longer term works for the Auditoire:

- A study on the acoustics of the Auditoire will be carried out under EPG approval;
- A new lift to be installed to the Salle, recommended by the lift contractor (repairs were again carried out during the year to the door and frame).
- Wheelchair access lift at the front main 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 some time.
- Sound system: a study with professionals will be carried out in order to upgrade from the present loop system to Bluetooth.

e) Safety:

The Church of Scotland General Trustees recommend that

- activated safety alarms be installed in the Manse; these alarms should be provided by the landlord;
- a safety duty holder be appointed.

Advice and assistance support has been obtained from the fabric focus group. This has been much appreciated.

Douglas Murray-Jones (dmurrayjones@aol.com)

COMMUNITY

Sunday lunches

Sunday Lunches in the Salle, usually held on the last Sunday in the month, continued to thrive in 2023. The lunch menu consisting of a variety of lovely homemade soups and a selection of cheeses and bread offered by a hard-working volunteer group is much appreciated by members of the congregation and visitors alike.

A steady number ranging from around 15-25 people usually stay for lunch. This number can swell considerably, as demonstrated one delightful Sunday when members of the visiting Geneva Gospel Choir were invited to stay for lunch and afterwards relayed how much they had enjoyed the experience.

Another notable moment among many was the Hogmanay Service in the Auditoire and the ensuing celebratory lunch in the Salle, which was well attended, with everyone voicing their appreciation for the excellent food and the good fellowship.

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Members and visitors speak warmly about the conviviality and moments of friendship experienced at the lunches, so make a note of the dates and don't miss out! All are welcome. Should you wish to help with the food, or setting the tables and clearing up, please let Jane Broere, Christine Buhler or Lindy Twaddle know. You will be welcomed enthusiastically to the team. Thank you!

Sherree Atkinson-Bret (sherreeatkinsonbret@gmail.com)



Burns Supper

Around 50 people joined a successful Burns night in the Salle on January 21 2023. Proceeds were split between our mission projects and congregational funds. We plan to have the next one in 2025.

St Andrew's Fair

It was the "go-to" event of 2023. It had everything and everybody! There were hand-made craft items, plants and garden accessories, interesting items worthy of the Antiques Roadshow, Christmas gifts and decorations, toys, CDs and DVDs, jams, marmalades and preserves, Scottish treasures, and home baking to die for. You could have coffee, Irish coffee, champagne and smoked salmon, African dishes, and traditional

Scottish fare, including our old friend the haggis (free-range, of course!). And you could reel and set the night away with the Léman Cèilidh band while snacking on some delicious finger food or soup – featuring Cullen Skink – which tastes better than it sounds!

But the most precious items there were: commitment, dedication, fellowship and friendship, hard work, achievement, fun, laughter, great conversations, and amazingly, we made upwards of a fabulous CHF 15,000. If you missed it, poor you! But there will be a chance to join in the fun of our next annual fair and cèilidh on Saturday November 2 2024.

A huge thank you to all those involved. It's a lot of work, but fun too. If you would like to be part of the organization for this important church social and fundraising event, please let me know.

Christine Buhler (buhlerchristine@hotmail.com)



Creations (craft group)

Rebranded we may be, but we continued to meet during 2023, planning and producing interesting items for our stall at the annual St Andrew's Fair.

We hope our new name better reflects what we have on our stand – not only beautiful handmade crafted items, but colourful spring planters (much sought after by returning customers), gardening items, hampers and humorous framed quotations.

New members are always welcome!

Christine Buhler (buhlerchristine@hotmail.com)

MISSION AND UNITY

Mission here

Partage

The church began supporting *Partage* (the Geneva Food Bank, partage.ch/en) at the Harvest Service in September 2023 when a collection of food and other necessities was made, filling seven of the orange-coloured boxes that we have become familiar with.



Given this success, and as the initiative gives us an immediate connection with the realities of the local Geneva community, it was decided to continue having collections. These focus on the first Sunday of each month when we have our communion service. On average, we collect two *Partage* boxes full each month, for which the organization expresses its heartfelt gratitude.

They tell us: “As one crisis follows another and inflation increasingly affects households, the *Fondation Partage* continues to supply more than 50 social institutions in the canton of Geneva with food and hygiene products. Precariousness continues to grow and the Geneva Food Bank continues to mobilize its teams and volunteers to help people in the most fragile situations. This is why your support is precious to us, it allows us to carry out our triple mission: fight against precariousness, fight against food waste, and help with professional reintegration.”

Their 2023 report states that the equivalent of 3.9 million meals were distributed throughout the year, supporting more than 15,300 adults and children in precarious situations each week. This helps us to understand the levels of need in Geneva to which our congregation generously responds.

Nan Braunschweiger (ntbraunsch@bluemail.ch)
Jane Broere (jane.broere@gmail.com)

End-of-year giving

Our third Gospel tells us that Christ was born in a stable because “there was no room in the inn” (Luke 2:7). Accordingly, it has been our custom is to allocate our collection on Christmas Day and part of the proceeds of our St Andrew’s Fair to local charities. This, too, connects us with local realities in the Geneva area.

In March this year, the congregational committee agreed to top up the 2023 Christmas collection and allocate CHF 1,000 each to

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- Cancer Support Switzerland (*cancersupport.ch*), providing support for those with cancer and those who care for them
- Carrefour Rue (*carrefour-rue.ch*), providing help for the poor and homeless
- La Maison de Tara (*lamaisondetara.ch*), the palliative care hospice, with which some in our congregation are involved as volunteers

Four other local causes were suggested but failed to make the final cut. They will be considered in this or future years.

Mission elsewhere

Your mission committee is ever grateful for the continuing, generous support that members give us, both in financial terms and through congregational events, to support our two mission partnerships in Lalgadh, Nepal and in Ekwendeni, Malawi. Each of these in its own way goes to support very needy people.

In Lalgadh this is through essential medical and social work in an area still deeply affected not only by leprosy, but also other diseases related to poverty and destitution. In Ekwendeni we support young people resisting or living with HIV/AIDS and at the same time creating positive lives through sport, crafts and many other activities.

We are also grateful to the leaders of the programmes we support. Our friends Graeme and Meena Clugston are now back in Nepal after Graeme's serious brush with cancer, involving a long period of treatment in Australia, and may from time to time be seen worshipping with us remotely on Zoom. Shupo Kumwenda and his team continue to be the inspiration behind the numerous activities of the Ekwendeni youth support centre – in 2023, notably through sports. We are richly blessed in having such wonderful leadership “on the ground”.

In 2023, despite the financial crisis faced by the congregation, we were able to continue the regular level of support to both partnerships. Thanks to generous support, and to a highly successful concert organized by Vivien Liu, we were able to give additional sponsorship to the Ekwendeni netball team, who reached the national finals in October. Members of the Ekwendeni girls' team have also been selected for Malawi's national under-23 squad.

The financial figures for “mission elsewhere” are contained in the treasurer's report. All income to the mission committee is disbursed and does not enter into the main congregational accounting balance. The level of support from members remains high; thank you warmly and bless you for all your efforts.

Stop press: *Rebecca Dirks Macdonald, our organist, is organizing a special concert in favour of our mission outreach on Sunday June 16, in company with a quartet of singers and a group of Ukrainian musicians. Please mark this in your diaries and give it your support!*

*Jenny Rietbergen (jennifer.rietbergen@wanadoo.fr)
Peter Tulloch (tulloch.peter1@gmail.com)*

Communication

A congregational website is always a work in progress (or sometimes, not in progress). A consultation early in 2023 with Darwin Digital, who designed our website, allowed us to get to

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grips with the calendar function and navigate other tricky corners of the site, and since then we haven't looked back. The calendar is populated with events, the home page is active, sometimes even hyperactive, and we have used the site, inter alia, to explain what is happening (or occasionally, not happening) with our pending linkage with our sister congregation in Lausanne. There is still much room for improvement, and constructive suggestions are most welcome.

Four issues of the congregational newsletter were produced in 2023, edited, designed, and partly written by the indefatigable Lindy Twaddle. Recently, these have been supplemented by the occasional "news extra", emailed from the manse.

Páraic Réamonn (paraic.reamonn@gmail.com)

Ecumenical links

Our congregation has always been very ecumenically minded.

In recent times, our main links have been with

- the *Rassemblement des Églises et Communautés Chrétiennes de Genève* (RECG, recg.ch),
- *Témoigner ensemble à Genève/Witnessing together in Geneva* (TEAG: johnknox.ch/programme/temoigner) and
- the ecumenical Cursillo community in Geneva (genevacursillo.org/wordpress)

Our congregation is still looking for someone to maintain our links with RECG and TEAG. The dates for the next Cursillo weekend, held at Le Cénacle centre, are November 7 to 10 2024.

Arthur Askew (arthuraskewge@bluewin.ch)

INTERNATIONAL PRESBYTERY

The Church of Scotland International Presbytery has over 2023 been seeking to implement the terms of its approved mission plan, under which we have only five full-time equivalent (FTE) Church of Scotland ministers allocated to the presbytery. Our plan required a bit of imagination in order to secure the retention of ministries in our 12 congregations – 10 in Europe, plus Bermuda and Colombo, Sri Lanka.

That implementation has involved the congregation in Amsterdam seeking a minister from outwith the Church of Scotland – a process that is, hopefully, now entering its final stages. It has also involved the congregations in both Rome and Budapest being served not by a full-time minister but by a mission partner, 50% of whose role is as the minister of the local congregation. The congregation in Malta is a local ecumenical partnership (LEP) with the Methodist Church, where the minister usually alternates between the two denominations every five years. Two of our congregations – Lisbon and Colombo – are under the "guardianship" of presbytery, which means they can't call a minister but are served by an interim moderator, who arranges a supply of locums.

That leaves six congregations but only four FTE ministries as the LEP in Malta counts as 0.5 FTE and the two guardianships as 0.25 FTE each.

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The plan provided for Bermuda and Rotterdam each continuing with a full-time minister, while Brussels and Paris would be linked, as would Geneva and Lausanne, as you well know. However, the Brussels congregation is also a member congregation of the United Protestant Church in Belgium, which would not agree to the Brussels minister's responsibilities extending beyond Belgium; and the presbytery's mission plan committee has had to re-think how to provide ongoing ministry in Paris – a dilemma yet to be resolved.

The situation in Switzerland is, of course, familiar to you, with progress being made in the implementation of a deferred linking of your congregation in Geneva with the Scots Kirk, Lausanne. This has taken some time; but, hopefully, it should soon be possible for a joint nominating committee to be appointed and a new minister sought for the deferred linking. Initially, that minister will serve the congregation in Lausanne but, when your minister retires, he or she will be the minister of the linked charge. An associate minister will be appointed with prime responsibility for the life and worship of the Geneva congregation.

Presbytery's other main concern has been to pursue registration as a charity with the office of the Scottish Charity Regulator – a process we hope to complete later this year.

One final item that I hope is of interest to you is the recent appointment of a new interim moderator in the guardianship of St Andrew's Scots Kirk, Colombo: Rev Páraic Réamonn. I'm sure you will join me in wishing him well as that congregation seeks to move forward in its relationship with the Church of Scotland and our presbytery.

With best wishes to all in the Geneva congregation.

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

FINANCE

Treasurer's report

This report on our finances in 2023 has been prepared on the basis of pre-audited accounts.

Congregational finances

2023 was not a typical year for the congregation's finances. It started off by continuing a longer-term trend, which had been observed for several years, of decreasing amounts of income, coupled with expenditure levels that were increasing at a modest but steady rate. This meant a trend towards deficits that, put very crudely, meant that the congregation was spending more than it was earning. In the long term, this leads to bankruptcy.

The key statistic in each statement of accounts is what is termed "net assets." This represents what the congregation is worth, financially. It takes whatever funds are held at the end of the year, adds any additional assets such as property, vehicles, or investments, and deducts any liabilities, meaning outstanding bills, debts to be paid or the like. In our case, this is not complicated since we don't own any fixed assets or investments, nor do we owe any debts. So it is basically a cash balance with a few unpaid bills deducted.

The extremely worrying trend by 2023 was the decline in net assets. These were predicted to be almost CHF 60,000 lower by the end of 2023 than they were at the previous high in 2018. The effects of Covid were not enough to explain this away, and the projection was that by 2029 or 2030 the congregation would end up with lower net assets than the amount it would need to

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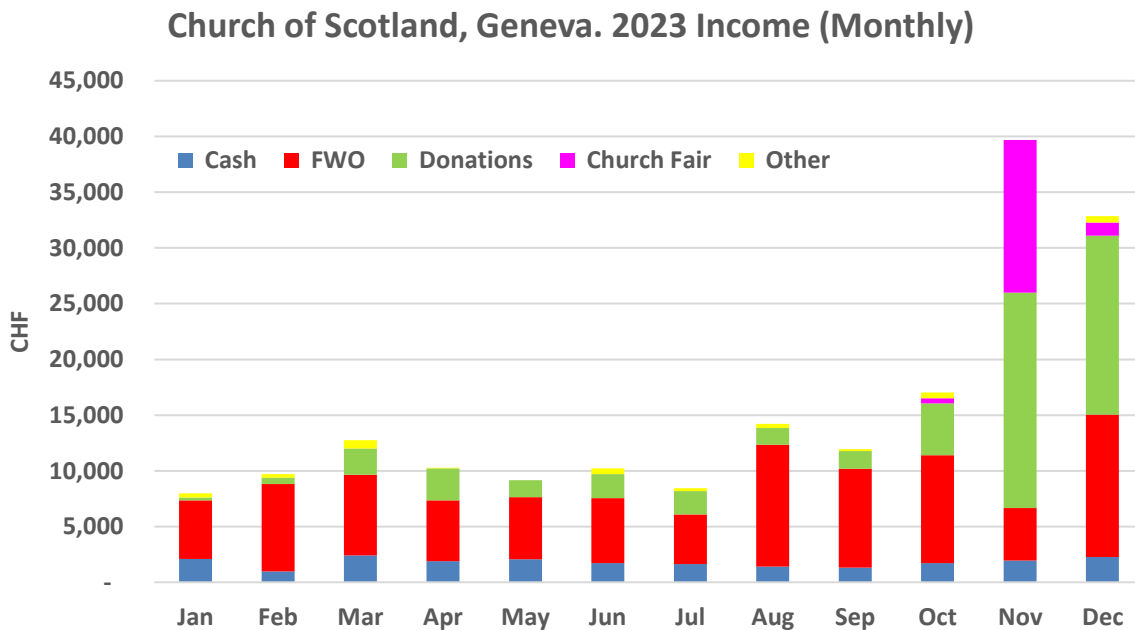
operate for a full year. In the Canton of Geneva, that is one step away from effective bankruptcy and the prospect of our being shut down for good within the decade was starting to loom large. This was presented to the kirk session in August 2023 and an extraordinary meeting of the congregation was held in October. At that point, the developing financial story took a new twist. It was recognized that the underlying problem was not so much less money but fewer people. Members of the congregation were no less generous than ever before but there were just fewer of us. An appeal went out to the congregation to boost finances and to boost church life. The latter would take longer and was addressed separately (see the report above on the church recovery plan), but the former was achieved quite spectacularly.

Combined with the effect of the St Andrew's Fair, almost 40% of the 2023 income was received in the two months of November and December. The average income per month over January to October was CHF 11,200. In November it was CHF 39,700, in December CHF 32,900. Discounting the statistical effect of the St Andrew's Fair in November, that means that the average giving in December hit an extraordinary high.

We ended up with a surplus of CHF 37,600, returning our net assets to around the pre-Covid levels seen in 2019. This was a quite surprising but very positive end to an eventful year, The congregation had much to be proud of, but it still has much more to achieve.

Facts and figures

The congregation's monthly income resembled the classic "hockey stick" pattern over the course of the year, starting off and continuing at a quite steady, average rate, with a sudden and marked upturn at the end.



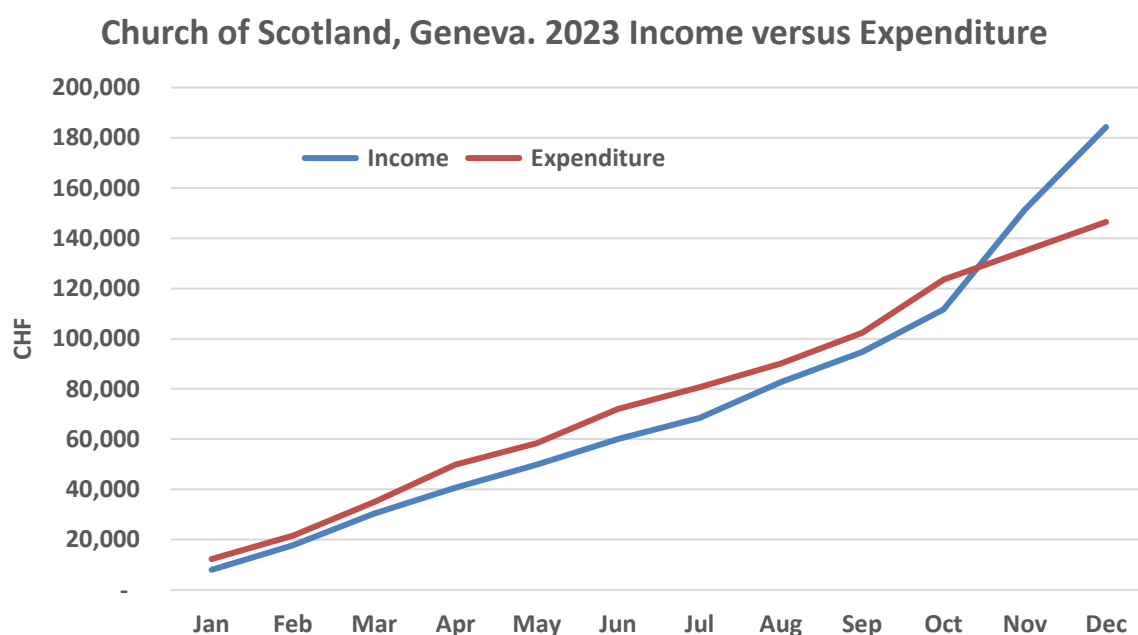
The main driver of income was the Freewill Offering scheme. Cash donations remained low across the year. These have never recovered their pre-Covid levels, although increased online giving has compensated to a significant extent for that. Freewill Offerings represent the most predictable and sustainable form of congregational financing and are very much encouraged. Their particular growth in December shows how one of the key responses to the October appeal was likely a commitment to increase Freewill giving. In the longer term, this is the most

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valuable way for members of the congregation to provide support. The huge increase in donations during November and December was due to the October appeal and showed a significant generosity in response. This pushed the congregation from a looming deficit to a large and unforeseen surplus. However, such donations were mainly one-time only and while the generosity and its value should not be under-appreciated, we cannot rely on annual appeals of such a nature as a long-term financing strategy.

Particular recognition should go to the St Andrew's Fair. This brought in slightly more than had been planned under an already ambitious target (CHF 15,300k, versus a target of CHF 15,000) and was a key component of the annual income. It also continued to serve as a good way to bring the congregation together in something that served a core purpose and outreach and all could enjoy as a community.

Expenditure over 2023 was much more constant, even allowing for one-time expenditures such as the Auditoire rent, taxation charges, or Church of Scotland dues. Most figures planned were realized in practice (employment costs, rental, insurance etc) while savings were achieved against targets for utilities and other expenses. Utilities were not as high due to the relatively lower inflation than expected in Switzerland. Other expenses were less than budgeted mainly because of the Church of Scotland keeping dues lower than usual since Covid (a trend expected to end in 2024, however), low investment in outreach activities and a non-utilization of the contingency funding budgeted for. Whether the latter two items constituted a good thing might be open to debate.



The overall trends are easy to see. Expenditure increased at a relatively steady rate and was quite clearly on track to exceed income right up until that turned sharply upwards at the end of the year. Before the special appeal, the projected deficit was somewhere between CHF 20,000 and CHF 25,000. The scale of the jump by the end of the year therefore constituted a difference in the region of CHF 50,000 to CHF 60,000.

Looking forward

So was it all really just a false alarm? Was the congregation, to an unnecessary extent, put onto an emergency footing in October 2023?

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There are several reasons to believe that this was a genuine alarm:

1. The projection was clear that a deficit was inevitable at the current rate of income up to September 2023, even allowing for the St Andrew's Fair.
2. The key value of the net assets could not keep taking hits indefinitely. Another deficit in 2023 would have been the sixth and quite possibly largest over the past decade. It would have wiped out around another 10% of our net worth. Imminent bankruptcy within a decade (possibly sooner) was a very real threat.
3. Our net worth still only returned to around its 2019 level (what's more, without adjusting for inflation). Simply breaking even is not good enough in the long run and the Church needed to do better to ensure its long-term survival.
4. This was part of a longer-term trend. It was key to stop the snowball effect of declining income early before it became an avalanche.
5. Most importantly, the congregation's financial situation is a barometer of its health. We are not here to make money. Our mission is to serve and follow God, to praise and worship, and to bring others to faith, all by loving God and loving others as ourselves. We do, however, need a certain level of financial equity to exist whether we like it or not.

The turnaround in late 2023 demonstrated what the congregation was and remains capable of. Our challenge now is to build up a congregation that sustains itself in all respects. The experience of 2023 showed that the congregation cares about itself as the Church of Scotland, Geneva, and is prepared to take the necessary action to preserve itself. The question, moving forward, is how successfully it can do so.

Mission finances

What was achieved by the congregation's mission work is reported above. Financially speaking, 2023 saw a total income of CHF 30,027. This was lower than the total seen in 2022 of CHF 42,400, which did include some CHF 4,500 for the Special Malawi Appeal. Apart from the concert in October 2023, there was relatively little fundraising for mission income during the year, which would explain part of the difference. Mission, in any case, usually sees its total level driven by a handful of very generous donors and so can prove quite volatile.

Mission Finances. Summary as at December 31 2023 (CHF)				
	Combined	Nepal	Malawi	Total
Opening Balance	-	13,183	16,113	29,296
Income	21,937	4,270	3,820	30,027
Expenditure	-	13,000	15,247	28,247
End of Year Transfer	-21,937	10,969	10,968	0
Balance Remaining	0	15,422	15,655	31,077
Balance Remaining (90%)¹		13,880	14,080	27,960

A curious trend in 2023 compared with previous years was the much higher ratio of giving to combined mission projects compared to giving for work either in Nepal or in Malawi. Many individual contributions were for either one or other of the projects, but their amounts were usually quite small. Mission funding, if not specified, is split equally between the two projects.

¹ The 90% total represents the amount delegated to the mission committee up to which it can authorize expenditure without express approval of the congregational committee.

Expenditure levels did not exceed the opening balance. The expenditure of mission support in 2023 was essentially the expenditure of the balance of such support from 2022. This left the congregation in a strong position to continue funding mission projects immediately in 2024.

Note of appreciation

Following the generous assistance provided to the Church since 2021 on financial and tax matters, Peter Rupf of SOFAD SA and his colleagues have continued to provide such support *pro bono* over the course of 2023. This has included the provision of payroll calculations and documents, as well as key assistance in the handling of complex tax matters, liaison with the authorities and even final submissions. The congregation remains extremely grateful and would like to thank Mr Rupf and SOFAD SA again for all the professional expertise and advice they have provided in such a generous manner.

The role of treasurer

On a personal level, I would like to ask if any member of the congregation might consider taking on the role of treasurer in the Church of Scotland Geneva in the near future. Having been in the role since 2013, it is one I enjoy and where I certainly feel that I can contribute to the life and work of the congregation. However, it is rarely healthy in an organization for the same individual to retain the same office for too long. It reduces the level of expertise, potentially limits helpful innovation, and runs the risk of making it hard to replace someone quickly in unforeseen circumstances. The congregation routinely changes offices such as session clerk, congregational committee secretary and Freewill Offering treasurer. I wonder if it might be time for the same to happen with the role of treasurer.

I am in no particular hurry to leave, and I would be very happy to provide mentoring and guidance for a year or two to any new incumbent. It was by virtue of such strong support from Jürg Strittmatter that I was originally able to take on the role myself. (Returning to the role after a few years is also something I would be quite willing to consider since that is the sort of rotation that I believe works well and that builds up the experience the congregation should have.)

If anyone might be interested in the role, please do not hesitate to get in touch and I will be very happy to discuss and provide more details as to what it involves.

Ewart MacKenzie (mackenzieje@hotmail.com), treasurer

Freewill offering (FWO) scheme

The Freewill Offering scheme had 50 members at the end of 2023. The majority of the members (39) contributed by bank transfer, but a small number (11) still preferred to donate using envelopes placed in the weekly offering plate. In either case, the donations were very much welcomed. Due largely to the response to the special appeal in October as mentioned in the treasurer's report, we were able to achieve an excellent result of CHF 89,000 added to the general church funds and CHF 30,000 to the work of the mission committee. We look forward to expanding the membership of the FWO scheme in 2024.

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

Church of Scotland, Geneva

A lively international congregation, gathering people of many backgrounds and all ages for worship in the Reformed tradition. We are always keen to welcome new people into our community and fellowship.

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

What can I do to help?

All some folk want from a congregation is a place they can come to worship in, and that's fine. Look back through this report, however, and you will quickly appreciate that a congregation doesn't just happen. If you would like to lend a hand, here's a list of things you could volunteer for:

- Ushering
- Reading the Bible in worship
- Singing in the choir
- Playing an instrument or singing in church
- Running, or contributing to, the flower rota
- Helping print the order of service
- Teaching or helping in the Sunday school
- Helping to Zoom services
- Preparing and serving coffee and tea
- Serving on the kirk session if asked
- Serving on the congregational committee if elected
- Looking out for others in the Caring for One Another group
- Helping with Sunday lunches
- Helping with the St Andrew's Fair or other social activities
- Making creations in the craft group
- Working on the mission committee to help those in distant lands
- Representing our congregation in ecumenical organizations (see page 17)
- Helping with our finances

If one or more of these take your fancy, email Christine Buhler (buhlerchristine@hotmail.com)

Minister

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Keep in touch!

Our kirk session maintains a confidential *roll* of members and others connected to our congregation: name, address, telephone, email. This also serves as an *electoral register* on those occasions when the congregation needs to voice its opinion by voting.

If any of your contact details have changed recently, please update them. Email Christine Buhler (buhlerchristine@hotmail.com)