

## CHURCH FOCUS

# Inclusive and welcoming, with community at its core

*This week Church Focus visits Cregagh Presbyterian Church, a church characterised by love for God and love and concern for others*

### FEATURE

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**Cregagh Presbyterian Church, situated on the Cregagh Road in east Belfast, midway between a busy shopping area and a residential neighbourhood, is an active and family friendly congregation at the heart of the community.**

Founded at the beginning of the 20th century, the congregation opened its first building, an 'Iron Church', for worship in March 1902, the first services being conducted by the Reverend W.J. Fawcett of Bolton, Lancashire. At this stage the building was largely surrounded by open space, as streets such as Ardenlee Parade, Haddington Gardens and Onslow Gardens were only completed 20 years later. During those 20 years, through difficult times

of trouble in Belfast and the First World War, God blessed the fledgling congregation and, after a lot of work and faith, in 1928 the neo-gothic styled, red-bricked building that we know today, was completed, followed in 1929 by the Allen Hall.

From this place the congregation continues to be an inclusive, welcoming community of Christ's people of all ages seeking to be increasingly characterised by love for God and love and concern for others; committed to the Christian Gospel; and relevant to the people of today in East Belfast.

The first minister of the congregation, Rev David Stewart, from Saintfield Co Down, began his ministry in Cregagh Presbyterian on January 1, 1903. Forty years of fruitful ministry under God lay ahead for Mr Stewart, and to him and the early founders the present congregation owe a very real debt of gratitude.

Mr Stewart was succeeded by the Rev Arthur Barbour who was installed on January 17, 1944 and who went on to marry the youngest daughter of his predecessor on March 30, 1946! It was during Mr Bar-

bour's ministry, in 1963, that the church building was internally refurbished with works including the creation of a centre aisle, a new choral gallery, minister's room and session room.

The large Allen Hall was complemented in 1969 by the addition of two further church halls, all of which were visible signs of the numerical and spiritual growth in the congregation. On the retirement of Mr Barbour in 1975, he was succeeded by Rev Albert Sleith who ministered faithfully for 25 years. During this time, in 1989, a new youth centre was built. Rev Hastings McIntyre was installed as the fourth minister to the congregation in September 2001. During his ministry the decision was taken to refurbish the main church building. Mr McIntyre retired in August 2011 and presently is working with a missionary organisation in Cyprus.

Rev Paul Dalzell, who was installed as the fifth minister to the congregation in October 2012 says: "Before coming to be minister at the church, I was told that "there is always something happening in Cre-



Cregagh Presbyterian Church – photographs by Murray Dalzell BSc

gagh Presbyterian" and this most certainly is true. "I have discovered that Cregagh has been involved in 'bridge building' events for decades and

that this has led to a number of people joining the church and being followers of Jesus Christ. This season of the year especially provides us with

various opportunities to share the good news of Jesus Christ through the special services, outreach and help to others in different practical ways."

### CHRISTMAS AT CREGAGH

## Appeal goes out to all ages over this festive season

Christmas is always a busy time and this is no less true for the folk in Cregagh Presbyterian. Every age, from the youngest to the oldest, is involved in some way in the different special services and events.

Tomorrow, Sunday, December 15, is the Kidzone Service at 11am. This is a family service, which includes the special puppet ministry, 'Bert & Lucy', and the girls and boys (and adults) bring gifts of toys which are placed under the Christmas tree and then distributed to needy families throughout our city. The children of Kidzone will play

a very active part in the service. The congregation has also been encouraged to bring extra food parcels at this time of year for needy food banks.

On Monday evening, December 16, members of the congregation of all ages and the church choir are going carol singing in the streets around the church and giving their neighbours a small gift. Naturally, the evening will end back at one of the church halls with some mulled wine and light Christmas food! December 22 is the Handbell Choir Christmas Service at 11am. This is a very unique service of

worship in which traditional carols are accompanied by the handbells, as well as the handbell choir playing a number of special pieces for the congregation to listen to in worship.

In December 1964 the congregation initiated a service of nine lessons and carols by candlelight, possibly the first Presbyterian Congregation in Belfast to do so. The 50th service will be held on December 22 at 7pm. A service not to be missed! This and the Christmas Eve Service are probably the two most popular and well attended services of the entire year. The church is always full

to capacity as the Christmas story is presented in a traditional Christmas setting. The church choir and junior choir (a children's choir that was originally formed in 1961) provide carols, old and new. A Christmas supper is then served in the main church hall after the service.

Christmas Eve in Cregagh is a time that is easier to experience than to explain. At 11.30pm the congregation is joined by visitors from far and wide, many of whom are young people, to worship in the beautifully candlelit church. By faith God's people once again



Current minister Rev Paul Dalzell

welcome the Christ child who came to save his people from their sins. The service ends at approximately 12.15am.

CHRISTMAS MORNING! Amazingly, after a late-night service, many return to worship again at 9am along with young families whose children were tucked up in bed good and early the night before! This is not a long service but is another opportunity to give thanks for the birth of Christ, this time in a slightly less formal setting. The minister, elders and congregation wish you a very joyful Christmas and peaceful New Year.



The church choir

# Worshipping God through choral music and praise

Music plays a very important part in the life and witness of Cregagh Presbyterian Church. The church has both a traditional robed choir and a contemporary praise group which has excellent singers and musicians. Whatever the style of music the motivation is always to praise and worship God.

The choir, led by their choir master and church organist John Dallas, has been successful in many cross-channel musical festivals including the International Eisteddfod in Llangollen and has participated in a number of radio and television services. The members also consider it a privilege to be the appointed choir, since 2010, at the Royal British Legion Festival of Remembrance in the Waterfront Hall, to lead the hymn singing in the closing Service of Remembrance. At a time when many churches are deserting a traditional style of worship, it is the hope and prayer of both the minister and elders that this

high standard of choral music and worship style can be maintained for many, many years to come.

Arising out of a cross-community project in which young people learned the considerable skill of playing hand bells, Cregagh Presbyterian has been blessed to have a handbell choir for over six years. Naturally the handbell choir is much in demand at this time of year. Over this weekend they have travelled down by invitation to the Winterfest in Newcastle West, Co Limerick to perform at various venues. They have also been invited to record next weekend for a BBC Radio Ulster production which will be broadcast on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

Looking back to some of our summer activities and mission opportunities

'Starship Discovery' Bible Club for girls and boys saw well over 100 children attend for a week during August 2013.

With the help of Lunar Jim and the Watt family they journeyed across the solar system, boldly going where no-one had gone before. They explored God's many wonders and in particular learned about the Lord Jesus and one of his closest disciples, Peter. Thanks to the wonderful weather, games outside were enjoyed and vocal chords got plenty of exercise too with all the enthusiastic singing.

**STAC (Summer Time at Cregagh)** ran every Tuesday throughout the summer holidays. It was a great opportunity for the young people in the church and their friends to spend time together in a healthy social environment. Activities ranged from cinema trips, laser quest and crazy golf to treasure hunts and camera challenges.

Ramelton 2013. At the beginning of August a team of four leaders and five young people travelled to Ramelton, Co. Donegal to host events and activities with the young people of Ram-

elton Presbyterian Church and their friends. The team and the church at Ramelton were really encouraged by the contacts made with 25 young people and, along with activities and games during the day, the evenings were spent investigating themes such as 'Who am I' and 'Characteristics of a Christian'.

**PCI Summer Mission Teams.** For many years various members of the congregation have been involved with the Presbyterian Church in Ireland Mission teams. This year one member lead a section during a week spent working with young people and children in Ballyholme.

**Exploration trip to Paris.** As part of a Queens Guides Award a five day trip was organised to Paris during July 2013 for Senior Section Guides. The group of girls stayed about 40 minutes outside of the centre of the city and enjoyed many of the highlights of Paris. Enjoying wonderful weather, great

fun and fellowship, the trip was fully packed from start to finish.

Malawi, Cambodia and Romania. Individual members of the congregation continued the church's overseas interests and concerns as they visited, and brought help from the church, to orphanages in Malawi and Romania. One member of the congregation was also involved in a fact finding mission, on behalf of Tear Fund, to Cambodia.

**St Albans Church, Hindhead, Surrey.**

The congregation and minister were very encouraged when one of their young adults, Cherith Collins, received an invitation to work at St. Albans Church as youth and children's Worker. This followed a year in which Cherith had been working in mission in Romania and with a church in England. They are looking forward to seeing her when she comes home on Christmas Eve for a few days and to hearing all that God has been doing through her.

## ORGANISATIONS

### Services and events to spread the word

Like many churches, Cregagh Presbyterian has organisations and activities for all ages, full details of which can be viewed on their website [www.cregaghpresbyterian.org](http://www.cregaghpresbyterian.org).

There are of course the core activities of the teaching of God's Word, prayer, communion and fellowship.

Also throughout the year there are many special services and events.

Morning Worship, on the Lord's Day, is the most precious and special time for the congregation when all ages meet together as a family of God's people to offer worship to him.

Part way through the worship service, the girls and boys go to Kidzone where they enjoy a mixture of Bible stories, worksheets, quizzes, crafts and singing.

On September 1 this year, Kidzone celebrated its 10th birthday and naturally the girls and boys enjoyed the birthday cake and goodies.

The charity which Kidzone supports is 'Stand by Me', [www.standby.me](http://www.standby.me), and the girls and boys look forward to a visit from a representative of the charity at a special morning service on February 2, 2014 at which their gift to the charity will be presented.

Connect is a group within the church which continues to encourage the whole congregation to connect with the wider work of mission.

There is a monthly service with annual focuses on the work of Tear Fund, the Persecuted Church, the Leprosy Mission and the work of the Presbyterian Church overseas.

The congregation also hosts an annual Christian Aid Lunch and, during the weeks of Lent leading up to Easter, the elders host a weekly lunch in the Allen Hall that is open to all the community.