

Thistle Epistle

January 2009.

Greetings from Scotland! As I write, snow has again covered Dundee in a white blanket and transport in England has been virtually halted in some areas. However roads remain clear here in the Dundee area and we are grateful for all of God's blessings and benefits.

Attendances:

Despite some pretty inhospitable weather conditions and the breakdown of our heating system in the meeting place we still have been having some good attendances. Our heating broke down in November and there have been times when you could see your breath in the meeting place. However after a considerable delay we finally managed to get some heating engineers from the council to come out two weeks ago and fix the heating system. Spare parts required..... believe it or not..... three AA batteries which operate a control box. Since then we have been blessed with very comfortable temperatures for our meetings. Attendances in the past few weeks have been:

28 Dec	48 (4)
4 Jan	28 (1)
11 Jan	39 (2)
18 Jan	36 (3)
25 Jan	44 (4)
1 Feb	43 (4)

Average attendance = 40 with on average 3 non Christians per service.

Church Family Retreat:

We had a marvellous church family retreat to the Windmill Christian Centre in Arbroath, which is about 12 miles from Dundee. (You can look this up on its website and see what a wonderful place it is.) 33 came out to share a time of fellowship and bible study together. I led the group in a study of the book of Galatians and the congregation had a wonderful time together. We ate traditional East of Scotland food (Stovies) and had a marvellous time together. I led the church in five lesson periods studying the vigorous defence that Paul made of the gospel he preached and hit the highlights of the theology of the new covenant, looking at what I referred to as the theology of contrasts; New Israel vs Old Israel, Flesh vs Spirit, Life vs Death etc.



Christians gathering together in the lounge for singing and Bible study.



Sheila Mackay (centre) is being studied with weekly. Shauni (right) brought her friend Michelle to the weekend. Michelle attends church every Sunday now.



Alastair above leads a discussion group.

Time was spent in formal Bible classes, in discussion groups as well as recreationally walking by the sea shore where the thundering waves of the North Sea were crashing against the shore and wending our way through some of the quaint shops in Arbroath High Street.

Whenever there was work to be done in serving one another, volunteers magically appeared and served willingly. This included both young and old. In the above pictures are Shauni Jones and her young friend Michelle... and Shauni was never out of the kitchen offering service the whole weekend. Alan and Patrick shouldered most of the cooking and when I volunteered for kitchen duty I was given the prize job of peeling and chopping onions.... Perhaps this is poetic justice as my preaching drives people to tears (not saying whether of boredom or otherwise) most weeks.

The verdict of the church on our special weekend.... When can we do this again? The Windmill Christian centre can accommodate up to 50 people, so maybe next time we shall fill it.

Meeting Place:

It would appear that most Sundays we are having attendances around the mid 40's, in a meeting place which will accommodate only 50 people. And so the case for a larger meeting place is now a matter of urgency. As reported last time we have been made an offer of our current meeting place in a long term lease of 18years with management of the facility switching to ourselves. We would have to offer other groups in the community use of the facility but under our management and at our discretion. Two weeks ago we called in an architect and I described to him some proposals I had about extending the main worship room to accommodate more people. He has now produced drawings of this and had suggested that these alterations could achieve a meeting place which would seat 100. He is now calling in the services of a structural engineer to report on the feasibility of taking down the walls I suggested. Once we know this we can begin to estimate the costs of the alterations. It is exciting to think that we could be only a few weeks away from having a workable plan that could meet the needs of this growing congregation over the next 10 years. I covet your prayers on this matter.

Current studies:

A large number of people are being studied with on an ongoing basis as the gospel is taught both publicly and from house to house. During the past few weeks has seen me able to resume one study which had been in obedience for a number of months and gain agreement to begin a new study. Those I am studying with personally at this time are:

Non Christians: Bill Garty, Agnes Garty, Sheila MacKay, David Gauld, Fiona Gauld, Eleanor Lowden, Sandy Elrick, Alan Pollock, Irene Pollock, Gladys Smith. (10 precious souls)

Members: Stephen McDonald, David Cormack, Donald Hunt, Carol Whittet.

Prayers are requested for each one.

New Greeters in Operation:

We recently implemented a plan to have official greeters in the foyer of the meeting place each Sunday, welcoming regular members and assisting visitors to find a seat and supply them with a hymn book and church bulletin. This has allowed involvement of a large number of our members and I have heard lots of good comments about the new system. An effort has been made to have mixed age groups involved and everyone has this feeling of being personally welcomed. What a great system! Why did it take us so long to figure this need out and meet it?

Stateside Trip:

It would appear that on our Stateside trip during Sept-Oct time Linda and I spent one month in the US making reports and visiting congregations where there may be interest in helping with our work in Scotland. We drove around 3000 miles on the wrong side of the road and so kept a very hectic schedule making presentations and speaking in Mississippi, Tennessee, Kentucky and Georgia. We received a wonderfully warm welcome wherever we went and asked for

prayers and assistance with our support. It would appear that we were able to raise at least \$500 per month of our lost support and we are waiting to hear from one fine congregation whether the remainder of what we had lost is going to be supplied or not. We are grateful to God and our brethren for their love extended towards us and their love of the lost in seeking to help us to reach the lost here in Dundee, Scotland.

Health Matters:

Recent months have not been without challenges in terms of health. I previously reported that I had to seek medical attention last year for a heart problem that had developed (Atrial Fibrillation). I am delighted to report that last week I was discharged from the cardiac clinic at Ninewells Hospital. Professor Lang (the cardiologist specialist) is now satisfied that my condition is under control and managed effectively by tablets. He is now satisfied that the condition is now so controlled that I no longer need to consult him and just get on with the job of living. Professor Lang was previously on a heart transplant team at Vanderbilt Hospital in Nashville, Tn. and is a world class heart specialist.

Linda has been in hospital in the past week. About ten days ago we received the results of some blood tests which informed us of renal failure. Linda was admitted into hospital for an ultrasound scan which confirmed that there was a marked deterioration in her kidney function. On Monday of this week she was admitted back into hospital for a scheduled kidney biopsy. However after waiting several hours we were informed that the hospital had run out of biopsy needles- they had two needles and three patients waiting for biopsies. (The other two were kidney transplant patients and so took precedence.) Needles were being sent up by taxi cab from Glasgow. However the biopsy was rescheduled for Thursday this week. Linda was admitted again at 9am on Thursday morning. Biopsy was carried out at 11am and Linda was released again at 7pm. She is to have complete rest until Tuesday when the results will be revealed to us by the consultant renologist. We will feel better when we know exactly what we are dealing with. They did tell us that part of the biopsy results were marked as urgent and they would be available to them on Friday and if this revealed anything requiring immediate attention they would phone us. We received no phone calls on Friday so that was good. We request prayers on Linda's behalf.

We are thankful to the Lord for all of His blessings in this year... a year in which we have seen the church grow in number and in spirit. We have several growth opportunities planned for the year that lies ahead which should see the growth continue in this new year.

We now have a congregation which numbers in the mid 40's, something that would not have been easy to imagine just seven years ago. We have optimism that in this coming year we shall secure a suitable meeting place in Barnhill, a meeting place that can seat 100. We pray that several who are currently being studied with should become Christians and the church should grow from strength to strength.

We appreciate you in the Lord.

Alastair