



## **Introduction**

Alexandra, by the grace of God, continues to be an outreaching, welcoming and vibrant community of Christ in an inner city area.

## **The Parish**

Our local Secondary School, Castle High, closed recently and our parish Primary School, Grove Primary has just now formally closed. The area immediately adjacent to our building had been razed to the ground and due to the current economic climate, plans for redevelopment of the site have yet to be finalized by the Housing Executive. The community we serve for Christ is ageing and has high levels of social need. Many elderly people live alone, many of whom are confined to their homes after dark. There is also a strong paramilitary influence in the area, with high levels of drug, alcohol and substance abuse.

There is also a fledgling immigrant community that we are seeking additional ways to reach out to. Where appropriate, through "Love in a Box", we have supplied food, clothes and financial support as well as having a word from our God with them.

We are also aware of the potential for reaching out to an expanding 'business community' operating within the old Jennymount Industrial complex just across the York Road from our church building, and at our new local leisure and wellbeing complex .

All of this has impacted Alexandra in many ways, yet we believe that the family of Alexandra is relatively strong and that we have much to contribute for good and for God to the life of our community. Indeed, Alexandra continues, and seeks new ways, to be a light in this darkness.

## **Mindset**

Some 10 years ago, Kirk Session agreed a strategy based on Luke 2:52 "And Jesus grew in ... favour with God and Man" and on this basis our mindset in Alexandra has been to "Grow Up and Go Out". "Grow up" in favour with God, to equip our people to "Go out" in favour with Man.

You will see from our returns that we have a full and active programme of activities through which we seek to achieve this. Furthermore, a number of our people are actively involved in community life, as Parent Governors, members of Police Liaison Committee, etc.

## **Grow up**

### **Prayer**

We continually seek new ways to help our people pray in fresh and informed ways, as we believe that this is the foundation stone on which all of our work is based. For example during our summer

mid-week prayer times, we have a parish 'prayer drive', when we go to various locations in the parish area and pray for those specific areas.

Our Elder's Prayer Chain enables us to support and pray for specific needs and situations in an informed way.

From the start of our vacancy we have had a Prayer Covenant, seeking God's blessing as we seek a new minister. Our elders meet regularly to pray for our people during this time.

## **Worship**

Our public worship is preceded by prayer. We give thanks for a long heritage of faithful evangelical expository ministries, most recently with Clifford Wright. Our praise is a blend of modern and traditional, as we endeavour to ensure that older members find comfort in familiarity, without being stuck in the past. Clifford regularly encouraged innovation and change to keep our worship fresh, and it is fair to say that our services have developed significantly over the last 10 years. Our Sunday School was recently re-launched as Kids For Christ, and together with our crèche and Bible 4 Teens seeks to engage with and teach all ages in a relevant manner. We are a welcoming church, as visiting speakers prior to and throughout the vacancy have attested, and after the services people linger to speak with 'strangers' and each other. Indeed speakers often leave before many of the congregation!

## **Teaching**

Our Alexandra Missionary Fellowship and TEAR Fund representative enable us to look beyond ourselves and see how God is working in His world.

Our Midweek meeting enables our people to grow in the knowledge and love of the Lord, and is complemented by Home Bible Study groups which we restarted a couple of years ago.

## **Fellowship**

We have a solid PW with a varied programme which is also a first step into the family of Alexandra. Two years ago, 'Girls Allowed' was formed to provide an opportunity for ladies of all ages to meet together for fellowship 4 times a year. Indeed many of the ladies who would normally be unwilling to venture out in the evenings look forward to these events. This activity was showcased in the most recent edition of Reach Out.

ToTTs, (an organisation for young families) enables families to spend time together and to support and encourage each other.

## **Go Out**

Through our programme of activities, we seek to both "go out" and "bring in" so that the sound of the gospel is heard in many different ways.

## **Organisations**

For example, while we have the traditional uniformed organisations, these open real opportunities for mission. Most of the children and young people attending do not otherwise come under the sound of the Gospel. We also seek to strengthen these links into families, for example last year we

undertook an outreach led by our BB Captain into the homes of the boys. BB Enrolment and Girl Guide Thinking Day are 2 key services when we have many visitors. An example of this was when an elder was approached by a work colleague who said how much they had enjoyed a Thinking Day service, commenting that “Church” had changed a lot since she was a girl.

## Community

Increasingly, Alexandra is becoming reintegrated into the core of community life, as we seek to enable the community to make use of our facilities. 'Time 4 U' is a crafts and support group of local ladies, most of whom have no active church connection, and just last month a local art club asked to use our halls. The first chairman of the Lower North Belfast Community Council was a member of our Congregational Committee, and LNBCC has held forums and exhibitions in our halls. We welcomed the first Community Carol Service to Alexandra and encouraged the rotation of this event to neighbouring churches.

Over the past summer, we did not falter in the Work. We offered 3 weeks of Summer Scheme to over 70 Children, culminating on the last Friday with a “Buttie and Brew” followed by a service for parents, grandparents, siblings, etc. We also offered 2 weeks of Summer Scheme to 30 teenagers, 2 weeks of table tennis (coached by 3 members of the Northern Ireland Commonwealth Games team), and held a World Cup Outreach to 130+ P7 children.

Our Good News Club, is attended by approximately 25 children, and for the majority, this is their primary contact with the sound of the gospel.

When there is redevelopment in the area, we will visit the homes, welcoming the family to the area, inviting them to join us, and leaving information about the family of Alexandra.

Perhaps a highlight of our going out into the community is our Nite Lite outreach in local clubs and bars, and we have been encouraged by the commendation of BMI in their report to the General Assembly, and by a grant from the Urban Mission fund which enabled us to buy a caravan for the work. Indeed, a Student for the Ministry was so struck by this work that he left us to seed a similar work in his home congregation. This key work has also evolved over recent years in that members of other local fellowships have joined the Nite Lite team.

## Other Fellowships

Alexandra is not a standalone fellowship. 15 months ago, a community prayer meeting was held in Alexandra, with attendees from at least 10 other local fellowships, and this is continuing on a quarterly basis in different locations. We are also exploring the possibility of a joint “Christianity Explored” series with a neighbouring congregation, and the potential to hold joint evening services with another neighbour.

For decades we have joined with our neighbours in Seaview on Good Friday and in Jennymount Methodist at New Year.

In addition, we have many family links and ties with our Presbyterian neighbours in both Newington and Seaview Congregations.

## **Aspirations**

In Alexandra, we recognise that the fragmentation of Christian witness weakens our cause and diminishes our capability to serve our community for Christ. Moreover, we do appreciate that across PCI there are more congregations than could or should be sustained. Therefore we are seeking ways, that are non-threatening, to enable congregations to work more closely together, so that when there are opportunities to encourage one another and appropriately share resources, there are bridges which will make it easier for people to come together.

We give thanks to God that in practical terms, Alexandra is relatively strong, and that over the last 10 years we have been able to renovate and refurbish our halls and Meeting House, the debt for which has been cleared. We also note that we have been placed in a strategic position.

We fully agree with the Moderator that we must seek the good of the city and not withdraw from it, and believe that the centre of the “polo mint of Presbyterian witness in the city” must not be allowed to enlarge. When leaving the city by the arterial York Road / Shore Road, Alexandra is the first Presbyterian meeting house. We put a lot of work into our wayside pulpit because it is seen by many and is used of God. This was evidenced by the fact that on one occasion we found a photograph of it in the Irish News and on another occasion when advertising the screening of “The Passion of the Christ”, a local SDLP Alderman said that he noticed it and so came along.

## **Future Ministry**

As evidenced, we are a forward looking, outreaching, welcoming and vibrant community of Christ, seeking a Minister who will lead us, pastor us, and work alongside us.

We believe that we are in a strategic position for ministry in a needy area, and therefore ask that the Union Commission look positively on our request as an urgent priority.

We seek leave to call an evangelical minister who is committed to the Ministry of the Word and Sacrament, remembering that it is by the foolishness of preaching that men are saved, so that we as the Body of Christ can work together in the future ministry of Alexandra.