



# The Greeting

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## **LIVING BY FAITH AND NOT BY SIGHT**

It is Saturday night at around 10.30pm and a familiar signature tune to a TV programme announces the start of *Match of the Day*, the BBC's long-running football show. Regular viewers of *MOTD* know that they are not going to see every pass completed, every tackle made, every foul committed and every save made during that day's Premiership matches. Instead what they will see is the highlights of each game. The way the Old Testament records the history of God's people is similar to watching *MOTD* – only the memorable moments are written down, and not a blow-by-blow of everything that went on.

In Numbers 13-14, we come across one of those highlight moments – the Kadesh Barnea Fiasco. The Israelites are camped at Kadesh Barnea on the southern border of Canaan, the land God had promised to them. They know that God's game plan is for them to launch an invasion of Canaan, using Kadesh Barnea as their jumping-off point. Before the assault on Canaan takes place, Moses picks 12 men, one from each Israelite tribe, to go on a reconnaissance mission.

After 40 years of exploring the length and breadth of Canaan, they return to Kadesh Barnea, and the whole community gathers to hear their findings.

The members of the reconnaissance mission are divided. Ten thought that Canaan would be a brilliant place to live and bring up a family, but its inhabitants were numerically larger, militarily stronger, more experienced fighters and lived in well fortified cities. The invasion should be put on hold due to the military superiority of Canaan's inhabitants.

But Joshua and Caleb brought a minority report. Yes, everything the others had said was true and the assignment would be tough, but God was on the Israelites' side, and that was all that mattered. If God had helped them turn over the Egyptian army, then he would help them defeat the Canaanite armies and conquer the land.

The Israelites were faced with a choice between obedience to God's Word – invade Canaan – or disobedience to God's Word – park all invasion plans. Would they obey God, rely on God's promises, live by faith and invade, or would they

disobey God, be controlled by their fears, live by sight and put the invasion on hold? We know what happened. They disobeyed God and pressed the pause button on any invasion of Canaan. When the rest of the Old Testament recalls the events at Kadesh Barnea, it does not have one positive thing to say about it. The Israelites had balked at the giant size of their enemies, but their real problem was that they were going on what their eyes saw and not living by faith in God and relying on the massive promises he had made to them.

On a personal level, on a congregational level, on a denominational level, on a national level and on a global level, none of us knows what lies ahead. Pundits can make their predictions, but at best they are best guesses. The Bible calls on us to live by faith on the promises of God, and not to live by sight. The choice we face every moment of every day is simple: are we going to live by faith or by sight? Our calling as Christians is to live by faith and not by sight. One day in heaven, faith will not be needed any more because it will step aside and give way to sight as we see Jesus face to face. However, we are not yet in heaven and until "the race is finished and the work is done, we'll walk by faith and not by sight".

RODGER CROOKS  
Vacancy Convenor

## ANNUAL BUSINESS MEETING

Notice is hereby given that the annual business meeting of May Street Presbyterian Church will take place in the lecture hall at 7.45pm on Tuesday February 12. Notification of this meeting has already been given by means of the Sunday service intimations.

Most of the reports which will be presented are printed in this copy of The Greeting. They will not be read out at the ABM but members of the congregation will have an opportunity to ask questions and raise matters of concern.

An election was held in 2011, and the existing committee elected for a three-year term. As a result, no election will be held this year.

The agenda for the meeting is printed below. Copies of the accounts will be distributed to all present. Please make every attempt to be present at this important meeting.

## AGENDA

- 1 - Opening Prayer
- 2 - Apologies
- 3 - Adoption of minutes of 2012 ABM (already circulated by means of publication in The Greeting); (proposer and seconder required)
- 4 - Matters arising
- 5 - Report of Kirk Session for year ending December 31, 2012 (Arthur Acheson)
- 6 - Report of Congregational Committee (Robin Morton)
- 7 - Report of Weekly Freewill Offering (Barry Bell)
- 8 - Report of Finance Committee and presentation of accounts (Andrew Acheson)
- 9 - Appointment of auditors
- 10 - Adoption of main reports (proposer and seconder required)
- 11 - Reports from congregational organisations:  
The Choir  
Tuesday Circle  
Peace Agent
- 12 - Proposal to approve plan for upgrade of schoolroom and basement.
- 13 - What Next?...Again – A discussion on the mind of the congregation on the three May Street principles (see article in this magazine)
- 14 - Any other business
- 15 - Closing prayers

ROBIN MORTON  
Congregational Secretary

## MAY STREET KIRK SESSION

REPORT FOR YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2012.

I am delighted on behalf of Kirk Session that Congregational Committee can report such excellent progress on the cafe's new company, Urban Soul CIC, and the basement projects including the important and evolving work with young people who make up the Underground with the Rev Lee Eagleson.

An inconclusive meeting was held between Kirk Session and the Vacancy Commission at Belvoir Presbyterian Church on the evening of November 1, convened by vacancy convenor Dr Rodger

Crooks whom we thank warmly for his continuing involvement with May Street.

Following the meeting between Kirk Session and the Vacancy Commission, a Congregational Meeting was held on December 9 in the sanctuary after morning service and members were asked to prayerfully consider the principles for the future of May Street which were put forward by the Kirk Session to the Vacancy Commission:

- May Street should promote Presbyterian Sunday Worship in the city centre;
- Urban Soul is a good outreach facility and should be supported;
- May Street should be innovative and open to new ideas.

These principles will be considered as part of the business at the Annual Business Meeting on February 12.

We continue to attract increasing numbers of people to May Street events and activities - religious, social and cultural. Before the development of Urban Soul, I estimated the number of visits to the church to be around 13,000 per year. A tally of numbers of visits last year indicates closer to 25,000, now that we are open seven days, most weeks of the year. About 1,500 of these annual visits are to the Sunday service of public worship, with an average attendance of about 30 members and visitors.

While the average numbers attending Sunday worship have fallen during the vacancy, we are reminded that the Presbyterian Church in Ireland has urged us to be "more than a Sunday Service". The many, varied and increasing activities in this city centre church contrast with the declining attendance at traditional Sunday morning worship. The wider church understands that each congregation is called to different activities in response to its location and its statistical returns have to be sufficiently responsive to enable congregations to report accordingly, to give an accurate picture of the value of each church in its societal context.

The wide range of activities and events are all important, they change from week to week and are summarised in the report of Congregational Committee.

The Greeting, edited by Congregational Secretary, Robin Morton, keeps us up to date and Robin also provides regular e-mails to members and friends of May Street. Anyone who would like to be added to the e-mailing list, please ask Robin to put your address on our list.

Our Hon Treasurer, Andrew Acheson and our Weekly Freewill Offering convenor, Barry Bell, keep us regularly updated. Our auditor, Gordon Kirkpatrick, is always willing to provide advice. Fellow elders and committee members (we generally meet jointly) along with members and friends of the Urban Soul community, all continue to faithfully and creatively contribute.

The Rev Niall Bayly's long association with pastoral care in May Street ended its formal phase this summer when Dr Crooks took over this role. Mr Bayly was warmly thanked for his role and continues to visit members on an informal basis.

We give thanks for the lives of two longstanding May Street members who died during the year and hold their families and friends in our prayers.

Edna Hamilton March 31, 2012

Sheila Barr October 5, 2012

There is constant change in a city centre church and May Street responds and innovates to serve the people who live and work near the church as well as members and visitors who travel from farther afield.

It is particularly heart-warming to know that May Street gives practical support by way of storage of equipment and regular use of the cafe and lecture hall for meeting and prayer before going out onto the streets at night to care, listen and help.

To know also that in May Street this year, some thirty homeless and lonely people were served a traditional lunch with all the trimmings, cooked on our premises, on Christmas Day itself and that May Street members assisted with its organisation is surely a clear indication that God's presence is real and meaningful in this city centre.

The lunch went so well that the organisers have asked about a regular Sunday lunch in May Street, under the name of "Feed the Soul".

ARTHUR ACHESON  
Clerk of Session

## REPORT OF CONGREGATIONAL COMMITTEE

The past year has been something of a roller coaster ride for the congregational committee but I am pleased to report that there have been more ups than downs. Urban Soul Cafe, whose future was under threat following the withdrawal of external funding, remains open and vibrant, and provides a continuing outreach in Belfast city centre. Our thanks are due to cafe manageress Avril Gracey and her staff for all their hard work, and also to the Urban Soul committee for its involvement, in particular David McAuley and Ruby Hutchinson. But more than anything, our thanks are due to numerous individuals who gave of their time and money to secure the future of Urban Soul. The show is still on the road, and we look forward to 2013 with confidence.

The change in funding arrangements also prompted a review of management structures. Plans are well advanced to set up a Community Interest Company (a company limited by guarantee) which will take responsibility for the cafe. The cafe will still be May Street's primary means of outreach with the community, but its day to day running will devolve to the CIC. The CIC will be run by a board on which May Street and the existing Urban Soul committee will be represented. Chief among many benefits will be the opportunity for the CIC to apply for funding from bodies which do not give direct grants to churches.

Urban Soul does a steady trade during the week but it relies on the income from catering for groups, usually with the support of members of the congregation. In addition, the cafe opens in the evening when concerts are taking place in the sanctuary, and this is useful for in terms of cash generation and in raising the profile of the cafe.

Plans are afoot for a series of musical evenings under the label Urban Soul Live, and these will be targeted at the 18-25 age group. Already, a successful pilot scheme has been run involving Youth for Christ and this is a concept which has huge potential in terms of providing a safe night-time venue for young people and in promoting the Christian message. Our thanks go to cafe supporter Paul Boyd who has rigged up a sound and light system which would be the envy of many venues. We gratefully acknowledge funding of £2,000 from South Belfast Presbytery's Mission

Talent scheme, which we hope to channel into this programme.

This venture, however, could just be the precursor of a much greater initiative. On December 11, Belfast Lord Mayor Alderman Gavin Robinson visited Urban Soul for breakfast – and also to announce that Belfast City Council is making available funding of £200,000 for a major scheme to regenerate the rest of the basement and turn it into an alcohol-free night-time and daytime venue for young people. Architect's drawings are on display in the church. The challenge for May Street is to source match funding of £50,000 and to this end an application for support has been made to the Strategic Investment Fund, an initiative run by the Office of First Minister and Deputy First Minister. Provided we are successful in raising the match funding – and more - we could be looking at a major investment in the basement. This would allow a complete revamp of the schoolroom, new flooring, a new heating system, new electrics, replacement and relocation of the boiler and so on. Crucially, it would mean that we would qualify for an entertainments licence.

For years we have recognised that our location – in a neutral area in the heart of the city – was a major plus and a scheme such as this would cement our position and enable May Street to achieve its goal of becoming a Christian resource centre. We are grateful to all those who have been involved in the negotiations and look forward to the second phase – the raising of match funding. It will be a major challenge but with the support of the congregation and outside funding bodies we believe this is achievable. The first brick has been set in place, with Belfast City Council pledging its support, and now we must seek to leverage the rest of the funding.

The advantages of May Street's location have not been lost on other people, either. Belfast Community Gospel Choir uses our lecture hall for its rehearsals. On Friday and Saturday nights the Street Pastors, an inter-denominational Christian organisation, uses the cafe as a rendezvous point and command centre for its volunteers who go to various nightspots with the aim of offering protection to young people who may be at risk. The cafe is also used on Sunday nights for The Underground, an informal gathering for the under-40 age group which is run by the Rev Lee Eagleson. The committee is pleased to facilitate

all these organisations and we see this as a key part of our operation.

Music Theatre for Youth, (MT4Uth) the charity which aims to develop musical and acting talent among young people, continues to use our church premises as its administrative and operational base. The staff are based in our Parlour room while weekend Academies and rehearsals are held in the lecture hall, the schoolroom and sometimes in the sanctuary itself. The sanctuary hosted a memorable night in December when MT4Uth presented Carols in the City, a concert which was later broadcast on Downtown Radio.

MT4Uth was to have used the sanctuary in October for its annual musical. But problems with staging meant that Little Shop of Horrors was relocated elsewhere. Unfortunately, the absence of a stage also led to the loss of a concert by Brian Houston and a Belfast Festival event. We are now exploring the possibility of a lower level stage which would be easier to install and dismantle.

Our sanctuary was used earlier in the year as one of the venues for the annual Belfast Nashville Songwriting Festival, and in the autumn it saw service as a location for a film on the history of Presbyterianism which is being made for the BBC. In October May Street was used for a meeting of the Irish Women's Convention. But perhaps the biggest event of the year was an evening in August with American evangelist Dr Tony Campolo, who describes himself as "speaker, author, sociologist, social activist, pastor and passionate follower of Jesus". He attracted a full house of more than 500 people, including many young people. It was an inspirational evening.

Events such as these are valuable in their own right, but they also provide much-needed income for May Street. Thanks to the efforts of committee down the years, the fabric of our building is fundamentally sound, but there are ongoing and increasing maintenance and upkeep costs. Our insurance, water, electricity and gas bills all have to be paid, and costs are rising at a time when the congregation is slowly shrinking. And then there are the unexpected items – for example, in the summer our basement suffered flooding damage during a period of sustained rain.

As everyone knows, 2012 marked two important events in the Decade of Centenaries – the sinking

of Titanic and the signing of the Ulster Covenant. May Street was one of the churches at which a memorial service was held in 1912 for those who lost their lives when Titanic went down and in April we marked the anniversary with a tasteful service. May Street was also one of the centres at which signatures were collected in September 1912 for the Ulster Covenant. This link with the past was marked by a broadcast on UTV from our church by presenter Paul Clark, whose grandfather, a member of the congregation, was one of those who signed up.

Another link with the past was created during the year by the North of Ireland Family History Society which diligently transcribed the handwritten contents of May Street's dusty record books. A database was created and it contains in total the details of some 3,375 baptisms and 4,348 marriages which took place at May Street between 1835 and 1930. These records are now presented in alphabetical order and in the years to come this will be an invaluable source for anyone tracing their roots. Most poignantly, the researchers traced the stories of the 40 May Street members who were killed in action during World War One. Our thanks to Charlotte Murtagh and Edith Tucky from the Family History Society for all their hard work.

This work adds a new dimension to the memorial to those who fell in World War One, which is to be found in the vestibule. The tablet is one of the many points of interest in May Street which are pointed out to visitors attracted to our premises each September for European Heritage Open Day. The event takes place in September and over the weekend around 175 visitors made a point of coming to see the church.

Regular readers of the Belfast Telegraph will have noticed that May Street is no longer included in the so-called Presbyterian box on the churches page. Committee decided the money would be more effectively spent on an upgrade of the May Street website, which is in progress. Already there is evidence of tourists locating the church and attending our Sunday service as a result of "googling" us on the internet. The upgrade will make the website more attractive and lively, and easier to navigate too.

Committee has remained unchanged during the year, although we accepted with regret the

resignation of Valerie Hoyle. I should like to express thanks to my fellow members of committee for their support and encouragement. During the year we discussed some 233 agenda items so there was plenty to concentrate the mind. I should also like to pay tribute to the leadership provided by our Clerk of Session Arthur Acheson and our Vacancy Convenor, Dr Rodger Crooks, as well as our treasurer, Andrew Acheson, WFO co-ordinator Barry Bell, auditor Gordon Kirkpatrick and the members of the finance committee.

As ever, May Street faces threats but also grasps opportunities and the proposed development of our basement is perhaps the biggest opportunity we have had for some years. While the fabric of the building is important, it is however the people who make any church. We are blessed to have so many people with varying talents who are willing to give of their time. The spheres of activity range from looking after bookings for our premises, providing catering for the BB officers, playing the organ, taking up the collection, running the Tuesday Circle, visiting the shut-ins, running the Christmas postbox, stewarding various events, and welcoming worshippers on a Sunday morning. To one and all, I say thanks.

We embrace the future with some trepidation but also with confidence, but all the time we seek to discern God's purpose for our congregation and our premises. Although our numbers are small, we believe that we have the potential, in partnership with other organisations, to make a real difference in the city centre, and to promote Christian outreach to the community. We pray that God's hand will continue to guide us as the roller-coaster carries us through another year.

ROBIN MORTON  
Congregational Secretary

## **TREASURER'S REPORT**

Accounts for the year ended 31st December 2012.

This report has been prepared without final figures for Urban Soul Cafe as they were still being finalised at the time of writing. Unfortunately, our cafe manager's computer was stolen in December, and it contained all the figures for cafe for the year. Figures are being prepared from back-up paper records and are due to be finalised in time to be included in our audited accounts which will be

presented to the Annual Business Meeting.

Provisional figures for the main church account are as follows:

Income exceeded expenditure by £18,536, but it should be noted that a gift of £20,000 was received by the church, so without this we would have had a deficit of £1,464.

It was decided by committee that we should repay our withheld Assembly Assessments from 2011 and thus the figure for 2012 includes some monies withheld during 2011. Full repayment will be made by the second quarter of 2013. We have also an outstanding bill from Northern Ireland Water for £3,604 due to the leak under the kitchen floor and have agreed with NI Water to pay this off over the next three years.

Our opening balance was £21,134 (2011: £14,667), receipts £82,320 (2011: £57,145), payments £63,784 (2011: £50,677) leaving a closing balance of £39,671 (2010: £21,134).

It is the intention to establish a Community Interest Company (or CIC) to manage Urban Soul Cafe during 2013, and we will consider carefully how to present the accounts for next year once the CIC is operational.

### *A note on future Assembly Assessments*

Up to this year, the money paid by each Presbyterian Church to the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (Church House) was assessed using the stipend paid to their minister, the thinking being that the more income a church had, the more it would pay its minister, and thus the more it could afford to pay to Church House.

From 2013 onwards, this system is changing. We must now pay a proportion of "Assessable Income". "Assessable Income" is all of our income that the donor has given without, known as "Unrestricted Funds". This includes WFO, Sabbath Collection, manse rental income and any other donations to May Street that are given without any restriction.

All donations that are given are, and a proportion does go to Church House. Examples of this are donations to Urban Soul, Fabric Fund, Flower Fund and ALL donations that the donor tells us what the money is to be used for. If you specify the purpose to which your donation is to

be put, we must respect your wishes and use it for that purpose. This means that Church House cannot “assess” it.

Finally, may I take this opportunity to thank our Honorary Auditor, Gordon Kirkpatrick, for his continued oversight to ensure that the accounts present a true and fair view of the financial position of May Street Church. May I also thank the other members of the finance committee, our Weekly Freewill Offering convenor, Barry Bell, and our Clerk of Session, Arthur Acheson.

ANDREW ACHESON  
Honorary Treasurer

## WEEKLY FREEWILL OFFERING

The Congregation continues to subscribe generously to our WFO although some members have diverted their WFO givings to Urban Soul as the cafe becomes ever more important to our outreach mission.

There was a small decrease in our WFO of £1,418 to £14,656.50 (£16,074.50 in 2011), still a very respectable amount considering our reduced numbers.

Urban Soul, United Appeal, World Development and Flower Fund are all requiring of support in the future.

BARRY BELL  
WFO Convenor

## TUESDAY CIRCLE

Unfortunately this past year has been dominated by cancellations. Our meetings in December 2012 and January 2013 were cancelled as a result of the traffic disruption caused by protests on the arterial routes into the city centre.

In September our season started with the now annual outing to Dundonald Ice Bowl where we took part in our bowling competition. It is great fun and not taken too seriously or is it? Betty McKeown has now been the winner on two occasions and we are thinking of giving her a handicap, as in golf!!! A good night of fun was had by all, finishing with a cup of tea and biscuits which was very welcome giving us a chance to

chat and discuss the near misses and successes of the evening

Jim O'Hagan was the speaker in October and his subject was the history of the May St area which of course was of great interest to us all. This included a story of a rather intelligent duck named Eric which unfortunately met a sad end as a result of a road accident. In days gone by there was a wealth of characters living round the Markets area and Mr O'Hagan had stories about a lot of them. He told us that he also has a lot of stories about the Smithfield area so we hope to have him back at a future date.

The subject of November's meeting was more serious. David Hull told us about his battle with alcoholism, and it was a most moving account.

We had planned to have our usual Christmas party at the beginning of December but as a result of the street protests we decided to cancel the event. We hoped that when January came all would be calmer but the protests were ongoing and then the weather decided to play its part. Snow affected many roads, so again we decided to postpone the meeting.

At the time of writing we are hoping to be able to hold the February meeting when The Street Pastors are going to tell us of their important night-time work in our city centre – at a time when the rest of us are tucked up in bed.

In March we plan to have a mini sale which we held last year and found it was a good fund raiser so we plan to repeat it this year hoping for the same result.

In August, one of our members, Peggy Farley, passed away after a period of illness. Several Tuesday Circle members attended her funeral in St Donard's Parish Church at Bloomfield. We send sincere sympathy to Peggy's son and family. She is sadly missed from our meetings.

Also in our thoughts and prayers is our member Vera Lemon who is unable to come to our meetings any more and has recently been ill.

Our meetings are held on the fourth Tuesday of each month and a warm welcome would be given to anyone wishing to join us.

ENA KIRKPATRICK  
Secretary

## THE CHOIR

As in previous years, choir attendance has been excellent over the past 12 months, with a 100% turn-out of members on most Sundays. We continue to lead the praise at May Street Sunday by Sunday and also at special services in the church calendar – Christmas, Easter and Harvest Thanksgiving.

Two memorable services took place in April. On April 8 our Easter service was extra special because it featured the baptism of Arthur and Elizabeth Acheson's two new grandchildren – twins Bethanie and Isabelle Acheson from Edinburgh. The entire congregation was given a lift by the occasion – and we all enjoyed tea and christening cake in the lecture hall after the service.

Then on April 22 we marked the centenary of the loss of Titanic with appropriate items of praise during the Sunday morning service. May Street was one of the churches in which a memorial service was held in 1912, so there was a real sense of history about the service. We were all aware of May Street's links with the past as we remembered those who lost their lives in this tragedy.

In addition to their contribution to the choir, it is notable that many of our members are involved in a range of aspects of church life at May Street, ranging from providing coffee before the morning service, organising floral arrangements on a weekly basis, volunteering to help the staff at Urban Soul, and even compiling a pamphlet outlining the history of the congregation – not only are they tuneful but they are talented as well!

In closing I would like to thank Colin Johnston, our faithful organist, to whom we are indebted week by week for his selection of praise and for keeping us in tune. Many visiting ministers comment on Colin's spontaneous choice of music to play while the collection is being lifted and at the end of the service – very often the pieces are linked to the theme of the minister's address. We also acknowledge the assistance of Robin Hewitt, who stands in for Colin on the piano when he is on holiday. And finally, sincere thanks to Charles Maginnis for the valuable support he gives May Street by playing the venerable Binns organ week by week at the Thursday services. It is great to have his support.

Next year marks the centenary of our famous Binns organ so we are looking forward to holding an extra special 100<sup>th</sup> birthday party for the organ. It promises to be an occasion of note!

VALERIE MORTON  
Secretary

## PEACE AGENT

In October, Fr Michael McGinnity, the parish priest at St Malachy's church, kindly invited the inter agency group members of St George's Parish Church in High Street, Belmont, Fitzroy and May Street Presbyterian Churches to Alfred Street for an informal evening with dinner served. We are most grateful for this hospitality and hope to be able to return this and make meals together a regular occasion. There may be opportunities - with the wide range of catering skills available and being developed in May Street – to expand this fellowship.

Belmont Presbyterian Church invited members of the other churches to a Remembrance Sunday evening service.

In January, as part of Church Unity Week, St Malachy's Church hosted a service of quiet prayer around the cross. With candlelight and a solo voice accompanied by an acoustic guitar, the atmosphere was calm and inspiring. These gatherings are becoming very popular and seem likely to continue to develop active friendships across a traditional divide.

I invite all May Street members and friends to suggest opportunities for joint events.

ARTHUR ACHESON  
Peace Agent

## “WHAT NEXT?”.....AGAIN

*Minutes of a meeting of the congregation held in the sanctuary on Sunday December 9, 2012.*

Dr Rodger Crooks, vacancy convenor, presided, and 25 members were present. Dr Crooks welcomed everyone to the meeting and opened proceedings with prayers.

He said that if May Street was a huge congregation, with thousands of members and hundreds of young people and children, people

might not ask the congregation “What Next?” But the reality was that May Street was not huge, so they did ask.

He said that before and during its most recent discussion with the Presbytery Vacancy Commission, Kirk Session had discussed the following three principles:

- May Street should promote Presbyterian Sunday Worship in the city centre;
- Urban Soul is a good outreach facility and should be supported;
- May Street should be innovative and open to new ideas.

Before the Kirk Session promoted these principles more actively, Arthur Acheson said it was important to know the mind of the congregation. He said the short paper, which had been circulated to all present, and which would be included in The Greeting, was intended to give the congregation time for thought and prayer before the matter was discussed again at the May Street Annual Business Meeting, which was due to be held on the evening of February 12, 2013.

**May Street’s future:** Clerk of Session Arthur Acheson circulated copies of a short document which he said he had entitled: “What Next?... Again”. He said that four years ago, in December 2008, and again in January 2009, the congregation had asked itself “What Next?” He said the same question now had to be posed.

The clerk of session asked those present to mull over the contents of the paper and give them prayerful consideration. In answer to Chris Hewitt, he said he would welcome feedback from members of the congregation, ideally by letter or email. Valerie Morton asked if South Belfast Presbytery would be consulted, and if they had any views on the future role of May Street Church.

Arthur Acheson said that so far, there had been no firm proposals from South Belfast Presbytery. V Morton recalled that South Belfast Presbytery had been keen to promote outreach in the city centre, and wondered if May Street might play a part in this proposal. Arthur Acheson said that so far, South Belfast Presbytery had not firmed up its thinking. Dr Crooks said the Vacancy Commission was keeping South Belfast Presbytery informed about the situation at May Street. He said that the message from Presbytery seemed to be that May Street should continue to chart its own course at

present, but that it was interested to hear what the views of the congregation were about the future.

There being no further business, the meeting was closed with prayer.

ROBIN MORTON  
Congregational Secretary

## FUNDING BOOST FOR MAY STREET

*A Press release issued by May Street Church in December*

An historic city centre church which opens its doors seven days a week has received a £200,000 cash boost from Belfast City Council which will help it to develop an alcohol-free night-time venue for young people.

The grant to May Street Presbyterian Church has been ratified by the full council following a proposal from the all-party Area Working Group.

It is conditional on the church securing match funding, and it is designed to help the church upgrade its basement area in order to accommodate activities such as chat, music and dance.



**Planning ahead:** *Announcing a funding boost from Belfast City Council for May Street Church is the Lord Mayor, Alderman Gavin Robinson, with (from left), Dr Rodger Crooks, vacancy convenor, David McAuley, chairman of the Urban Soul management committee, and Arthur Acheson, May Street clerk of session. They are pictured in the basement which is set to be transformed into a night time venue for young people, thanks to the grant aid.*

The announcement of the award was made by the Lord Mayor, Alderman Gavin Robinson, during a breakfast visit to the church’s Urban Soul Cafe with his chaplain, the Rev Albin Rankin of Stormont Presbyterian Church.

The Lord Mayor said: "I am delighted to be able to announce the granting of this award which I hope will lead to the church being able to realise its vision of a new future for the building. The council is pledging that assistance of up to £200,000 is available and we will work with the church as it seeks to source match funding."

Alderman Robinson added: "I am much impressed by both the physical and the spiritual aspects of this project and I think this proposed new facility will be a valuable asset to Belfast city centre. The idea of a new night-time amenity which will provide an exciting attraction for young people but also a safe environment caught the imagination of local politicians on Belfast City Council."



**Welcome guest:** *During his visit to May Street Church the Lord Mayor of Belfast, Alderman Gavin Robinson, took time to have breakfast at the church's Urban Soul Cafe and heard more about our initiatives from Avril Gracey, cafe manageress and (right) Ruby Hutchinson of the Urban Soul management committee.*

Alderman Christopher Stalford, chairman of the City Hall Development Committee, said: "I am delighted that we have taken this important first step in this exciting and innovative project.

"Ever since the folks from May Street contacted me, I was determined to push this project through to completion. As a student of Presbyterian history, May Street Presbyterian Church has a special place in my heart and I am very enthusiastic about the plans for its renewal and redevelopment."

Alderman Stalford went on: "I hope that the church purpose-built for Dr Henry Cooke will once again be packed with people enjoying all it has to offer. Not only will the project breathe new life into a hallowed old building, but it will significantly add to the cultural capacity of our city."

Arthur Acheson, Clerk of Session at May Street, welcomed the support from the City Hall, and said it was a major step forward.

He said: "Since our church opened in 1829, when it was on the very edge of the small town of Belfast, our strategy has been to minister to the ever-changing needs of the place and its people. Although our congregation has shrunk in recent decades, we are convinced of the need to make the most of our pivotal position right in the heart of the city by creating a Christian resource centre."

Mr Acheson added: "We are blessed by having a neutral location and we believe we can help to respond to the needs of young people who are attracted to the city centre at night and at weekends. Our proposal is to secure an entertainment licence and open a buzzing night time facility which will offer young people the opportunity to relax, unwind and socialise in a secure setting. We are already in process of approaching other funding bodies to build on this much appreciated pledge of support from Belfast City Council."

The proposed upgrade will include improved facilities for disabled people which will enable the church and café to meet their obligations under disability access legislation.

ROBIN MORTON

## COMMUNION

Communion services will take place in May Street on Sunday April 28, Sunday June 16 and Sunday September 29.

## COMMITTEE MEETING

A meeting of Kirk Session and Congregational Committee will be held at 7.30pm on Tuesday March 19.

## FEED THE SOUL

On Christmas Day May Street Church's lecture hall was the venue for a new venture – a Christmas lunch for homeless people. The event was organised by Damien Smith and his "Feed the Soul" Christian outreach team catered for some 30 guests. They were treated to a full Christmas

lunch and the function helped to sustain them in terms of both body and soul. Damien was pleased with how the venue worked and his team tidied up the hall and the kitchen after the event, and locked up the premises.

This was a tremendous example of how May Street was able to offer the use of its facilities for outreach and was able to meet a need in the community. May Street is delighted to be able to co-operate with Damien and his team in facilitating this event and we hope it may be the forerunner of other similar ventures.

Damien said: "It was with the words of the song: 'Feed the World, let them know it's Christmas time' ringing in our ears and a desire to share God's love through practical action that we set out not to feed the world but to feed a vulnerable section of our own community.

"God provided encouragement and on the Sunday evening before Christmas answered our prayers through the words of Isaiah 58 vv 9/10: 'Then you will call and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help and he will say: Here am I. If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you spend yourselves on behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.'



**Christmas spirit:** Arthur Acheson, May Street clerk of session, welcomes Feed the Soul organisers (from left) Gemma Bennett, Damien Smith and Margaret Gallagher as they finalise arrangements in the lecture hall for the Christmas lunch for the homeless on December 25. ROBIN MORTON

"True to God's promise and thanks to the generosity of May Street Presbyterian Church, we secured the city centre venue that would be key

to our plans for providing Christmas dinner for the homeless. Traditional Christmas dinner was on the menu – vegetable soup, turkey and ham, fresh cream gateau, and mince pies were served to almost 30 men and women, young and old. They are people who were without the support of their families at this time due to a variety of circumstances.

"Having originally targeted the homeless we were surprised to find others on the streets of Belfast city centre on Christmas Day who were in need and accepted the food, shelter and company on offer. Among them were 10 homeless men, 12 young foreign nationals and two young Dutch women who were visiting Belfast, along with six young male and female volunteer workers from Belfast YMCA.

"Each person left with a package containing thermal socks, gloves and a hat etc to help fight against the seasonal cold, all provided by Jesus. It was a simple meal and a warm welcome, as we sought to reach out to our fellow human beings in what we hoped was a practical demonstration of Christ's message of unconditional love for all.

"My thanks to the team who gave of their time on Christmas Day for this venture – Stephen, Gail, Molly, Margaret, Gemma, Jacqueline and Martin."

## YOUTH FOR CHRIST

May Street's Urban Soul cafe was buzzing on the evening of Thursday December 6. Around 50 young people (17-20 age group) had a great night of music, chat and crack. The gathering was organised by Youth for Christ and there was brisk trade in hot chocolate and biscuits as the young people enjoyed a live band - making use of the new sound system and lighting installed by Paul Boyd. There was a lovely atmosphere, and a real feelgood factor. This was a taster for a series of Christian band nights which are hopefully being organised in Urban Soul in the New Year. It all augurs well!

## CAROLS IN THE CITY

May Street sanctuary was the venue on the evening of Friday December 7 for a new venture - Carols in the City which was run by Music

Theatre for Youth, in aid of the Cash for Kids charity. The concert was introduced by two DJ's from Downtown Radio and recorded for broadcast on Downtown on Christmas Day. Non-alcoholic mulled wine and mince pies were served to members of the audience as they arrived in the vestibule. The 160 people present were treated to a super hour of seasonal music and readings, with a little bit of acting thrown in.



**In tune:** Tinkling the ivories on the piano in May Street sanctuary during a rehearsal for the Carols in the City concert are Olivia Davidson, Clodagh Coulter, Ross McHugh and Eoin McGuinness. **KELVIN BOYES/PRESSEYE**

As well as the main choir and some superb soloists, the performers included a junior choir for the under 10 age group - some of them being just six or seven - and they sang so well. Musical items were provided by traditional Irish group McPeake, and also a string quartet and flautist from the Ulster Youth Orchestra. All credit to MT4Uth musical director Phillip Hammond for devising a programme which ran so seamlessly.

## CHRISTMAS THANKS

Thanks to all those who helped to decorate May Street sanctuary so tastefully for Christmas – and for taking down and putting into store all the decorations after the Christmas season was over.

And once again, many thanks to Elizabeth Doran

for running the May Street Christmas post office. All the cards were safely delivered – and they all reached their recipients in time for Christmas. Well done, Elizabeth, and thanks to those members of the congregation who made a donation of the May Street Flower Fund in lieu of postage costs.

## CHRISTMAS GIFT SERVICE

May Street's Gift service was held, as usual, on the first Sunday of December, and we were most grateful to everyone who donated presents. This year the recipient was again Alexandra Woodford, who is chaplain to the Salvation Army's Thorndale Family Centre at Duncairn Avenue in north Belfast.

The gifts and toys which were brought up to the Christmas tree on December 9 went to help needy families at Christmas time. Up to 38 families live in Thorndale and there they receive help, housing and counselling.

As usual the members of the congregation were extremely generous. The response to our appeal was overwhelming and Alex was delighted. Her car was completely packed with wonderful gifts for families in need. Alex spoke for a few minutes about the real need for help in Thorndale. Certainly on that Sunday our members rose to the occasion.



**Remembering Others:** Gathered around the Christmas tree at May Street on Gift Day are (from left) Matthew Wilson, Jenny Wilson, Sophie Booker, Harry Booker, Ben Acheson, Charlotte Acheson and Alex Woodford. **STEPHEN WILSON**

We were very pleased that some of our members' children and grand-children were able to be there and they received a gift as well.

This is a very important part of our ministry and outreach and once again many, many thanks.

JENNY WILSON

## COLLECTORS

**Feb:** Gordon Kirkpatrick, Brian Gourley, Valerie Condy, Clive Gilmour.

**Mar:** Kathleen Rea, Alan McCrum, Barry Bell, Robin Hewitt.

**Apr:** Kathleen Rea, Robin Morton, Jenny Wilson, Arthur Fannin.

## IRISH LADIES CONVENTION



**Warm welcome:** Ruby Fannin from May Street welcomes delegates from the Irish Ladies Convention who were arriving for their conference in the sanctuary on October 20.



**Catering team:** The Urban Soul catering team, which provided coffee and scones for 400 delegates and then a sit-down lunch for 100 at the Irish Ladies Convention. ARTHUR FANNIN



**Piano man:** George, one of the volunteers at Urban Soul, provides the background music for delegates from the Irish Ladies Convention during their lunch on October 20.

## FRIENDSHIP HOUSE



**Helping hand:** May Street committee member Chris Hewitt visited South Belfast Friendship House in Sandy Row on November 18 to lead a craft class for the ladies. She brought greetings from May Street to Friendship House. CHARLOTTE MURTAGH

## WORSHIP SCHEDULE

During the ongoing vacancy at May Street, the now familiar rotation of visiting preachers for Sunday services week by week has been established and is working well. Details are printed below. The Sunday morning service runs from 11am until 12 midday.

Dr Rodger Crooks, convenor of the vacancy, is continuing to handle the Thursday services, which run week by week from 1.05pm to 1.30pm.

### **Sunday services (11am)**

10 February - Dr Rodger Crooks  
17 February - Rev Drew Abernethy  
24 February - Rev Alistair Kennedy  
3 March - Rev Lee Eagleson  
10 March - Dr Harry Uprichard  
17 March - Rev Alistair Kennedy  
24 March - Dr Godfrey Brown  
31 March (Easter Sunday) - Rev Drew Abernethy

### **YES MINISTER**



**Ministerial Meeting:** Environment Minister Alex Attwood and his daughter meet May Street members Jenny Wilson (left) and Valerie Condry during a reception organised by the Department at Belfast City Hall on November 23 to thank representatives of various organisations which opened their premises for the European Heritage Open Day event in September. GAIL POLLOCK

### **I WAS A STRANGER...**

May Street will again be playing host to the annual World Women's Day of Prayer service, which takes place at 11am on Friday March 1. This year the theme is "I was a stranger and you welcomed me" and the services have been planned and written by the Christian women of France.

It is now more than 70 years since the first World Women's Day of Prayer service was held at May Street and we are delighted to again be providing the venue. Everyone is welcome to what should be a very meaningful service.

### **A QUESTION OF FAITH**

*In September the Belfast Telegraph Question of Faith column featured Valerie Morton, secretary of the May Street choir. Here is how the interview with Telegraph churches correspondent Alf McCreary went:*



***In the hot seat:***  
*Valerie Morton.*

#### **1. Your idea of Heaven?**

Boating on Sheephaven Bay, Co Donegal (on a sunny and calm day!) with Muckish as a backdrop. A chance to admire the majesty of creation in terms of the grandeur of the scenery, the headlands, the bays and the beautiful beaches.

#### **2. Eternity, would it not be boring?**

We have been given so many wonderful things to do and enjoy here on Earth so why should eternity be boring?

#### **3. Could God be a woman?**

I think of God as a father and a Holy Spirit, who transcends differences of gender.

#### **4. Your finest moment of spiritual enlightenment?**

When singing hymns as part of a congregation, because the words and music trigger so many different emotions. Look at Gareth Malone's inspiring programme The Choir on television to see what a buzz people can get out of raising their voices together.

#### **5. The person alive today you most admire and why?**

Having last year been on a Tearfund trip to Uganda and Rwanda I would nominate not just one person but all those involved in the work of the charity at home and overseas. Thanks to their vision, faith and willingness to link in with local partners, they demonstrate day by day how Christian witness and human commitment can transform lives.

#### **6. If you had just one question to ask God face to face, what would it be?**

Why do bad things happen to good people? I

know there is a scriptural response but it is one element of God's wonderful world that I struggle to come to terms with.

### 7. Your favourite book/music/film?

I have just read *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett, which is a moving insight into the damage which racism can do to society, but how ultimately, good will always triumph. My favourite film is *African Queen*, which is a splendid period piece. Katharine Hepburn is a super actress. Music wise give me *Strip the Willow* because it transports me to my weekly Scottish dancing class.

### DEADLINE

The deadline for all contributions to the next issue of *The Greeting* is Sunday March 10.



**Saying it with flowers:** Dr Rodger Crooks, vacancy convener at May Street, presents a bouquet of flowers to Charlotte Murtagh of the North of Ireland Family History Society in a ceremony after church on October 14 to mark the congregation's appreciation of the work carried out by the Society into creating a database of the May Street records. **ROBIN MORTON**

### URBAN SOUL CAFE

Christmas was a busy time in the cafe with customers coming in over lunchtime and groups calling in the evening. Our team of Martin, Kathy, Amy, Hannah and Kat are the angels who keep Urban Soul cafe customers smiling.

The Woodlands PW ladies were down at the Christmas markets and arranged to meet up for supper in the cafe. It was a first experience for a lot of the ladies so thanks to their organiser Caroline

Hawthorne who runs the PW office in Assembly Buildings.

The PCI Young Adults group ran an acoustic evening in the cafe and a selection of artists entertained a group of around 40 before and after supper.

A similar evening was planned by Youth for Christ for their friends and it showed them how well suited the cafe was for Urban Soul Live.

We hosted an 18th birthday party just before New Year and the young people really enjoyed their evening with a DJ and supper.

We have more regular customers and always welcome new ones and some share their delight at discovering a treasure. One customer reported back to a church friend: "I've recently discovered Urban Soul. Nice place to have lunch with lovely coffee and friendly folk. It's good to see a church reaching out - especially a city centre one." Unsolicited praise is always much appreciated.

Looking forward to the next few months, we are ready to launch Urban Soul Live on the first Saturday of February for young adults and our friendship with PCI and Youth for Christ and Summer Madness will help promote the event. The Nashville Songwriters festival will bring more new people through our doors and we look forward to the Gransha ladies and the Woman's World Day of Prayer.

Cafe manageress Avril Gracey suffered another misfortune just before Christmas when some cafe items were stolen. She appreciates all the encouragement and support given to her and the cafe in the run-up to Christmas.

Finally, don't forget our new opening hours – 9am to 3pm Monday through Saturday. Pay us a visit and experience that unique Urban Soul atmosphere.

RUBY HUTCHINSON  
Urban Soul committee

### WELL DONE, JENNY

Congratulations to Jenny Cooke, CEO of Music Theatre for Youth, who was awarded the OBE in the New Year Honours list for her work with the charity. Jenny, who works in a voluntary capacity for MT4Uth is very deserving of this accolade.



## MAKING THE BREAK

Our paths in life at times divide,  
 And separate ways we go.  
 A new road you'll now travel,  
 And I'm wanting you to know  
 That I wish you all good fortune  
 In the days that are to be,  
 And thank you for the happiness  
 That knowing you gave me.  
 We've been the best of friends  
 And many lovely times we had,  
 But now we have to make the break,  
 That makes me feel so sad.  
 But there is a special memory  
 That will always remain,  
 That someday in the future,  
 Well....perhaps we'll meet again.

**Take One:** Former moderator Dr John Dunlop faces the camera during an interview at May Street with series producer Fiona Keane from TV production company Below The Radar which used the sanctuary as one of its locations for filming a series on the history of Presbyterianism for the BBC. KATHLEEN REA

## REGRETS

Sometimes it's too late to say the thing you meant to say.  
 Too late to say you're sorry or some kindness to repay.  
 Too late to speak the loving word or lend the helping hand.  
 To show appreciation or to give the gift you planned.  
 Thus we pile up vain regrets that haunt the years ahead –  
 Memories of all the things we might of done or said.

## AT SET OF SUN

If you sit down at set of sun  
 And count the acts that you have done,  
 And, counting find  
 One self-denying deed, one word  
 That eased the heart of one who heard -  
 One glance most kind,  
 That fell like sunshine where it went -  
 Then you may count that day well spent.

But if through all the livelong day,  
 You cheered no heart, by year or nay –  
 If through it all  
 You've nothing done that you can trace  
 That brought the sunshine to one face -  
 No act most small  
 That helped some soul and nothing cost,  
 Then count that day as worst than lost.

## REMEMBER

Remember me, When I am away.  
 Gone far away into the silent land;  
 When you can no more hold me by the hand,  
 Nor I, half turn to go, yet turning stay.  
 Remember me, when, no more day by day,  
 You tell me of our future that you planned;  
 Only remember me;  
 You understand, it will be late  
 To counsel then or pray.  
 Yet if you should forget me for a while,  
 And afterwards remember, do not grieve;  
 For if the darkness and corruption leave  
 A vestige of the thoughts that once I had,  
 Better by far you should forget and smile,  
 Than that you should remember  
 And be sad.

## ONE DAY

One day when heaven was filled with his praises.  
 One day when sin was as black as could be.  
 Jesus came forth to be born of a virgin.  
 Dwelt amongst men, my redeemer is he.  
 Living: He loved me.  
 Dying: He saved me.  
 Buried: He carried my sins far away.  
 Rising: He justified freely forever.  
 One day: He's coming.  
 Oh glorious day!

Poems Contributed by Elizabeth Doran