

Fogo Parish Church

Annual Report

January to December, 2022



Before describing the achievements and the challenges which have faced us this year, we have to record our deep sadness at losing four of our most valued family members through death. Molly Hodges and Pete Gibbens were elders of our congregation, into everything that we did, sharing in leading our worship, making our plans for the future. Molly was our photographer and Pete our link with the Jeel al Amal School in Bethany. Both their losses were the harder to bear because they were so unexpected. Both will be remembered for all that they contributed to our Church family.

Trevor Howard came to join us a year or two ago but several of us had known him for much longer as we popped into his shop to buy the electrical bits and pieces we required for the upgrading of our building. He always had exactly what we needed; our difficulty was in persuading him to take our money. He was so generous to our congregation and from the moment he joined us he was an ever-present worshipper on Sundays and a constant encouragement to us all.

Alexander Trotter was the father of our congregation. There was no one more delighted when new life was breathed into the congregation and it began to grow again. There was no one more delighted as the building began to be improved and with his approval came encouragement and support. When the Fogo Parish Church Community Trust was formed there was no one else could have become its first chairman and Alexander spent many hours dreaming with us of all that might one day be.

We miss them all and appropriately there is a tree dedicated to each of them near to the church.



The Sunday morning stroll into Fogo Parish Church

Our congregation

Our congregation has grown during 2022. How could it not grow with someone new in church almost every Sunday of the year? It continues to be a joy to us that so many people come to visit and to share in our worship; some visit from time to time and some come and decide that we are their spiritual home.

In all we welcomed twenty-four new members during the year and our congregation increased, once deaths and those who moved home to other areas were taken into account, from seventy in 2021 to eighty-six today.

The bare statistics tell only part of the story. What they don't record, but which is much more important, is that every week we meet for lively worship in our beautiful church. We are disappointed if we have less than thirty folk present and pleased if we have more than forty. What is beyond doubt is that our numbers at worship seem to constantly increase.

The numbers of our congregation participating in leading worship constantly increase as well with getting on for twenty folk happy to take their turn at leading our Sunday worship along, of course, with others.



Laura at the Lectern

Of particular delight to us all is that one of our elders, Laura Smith, came to the realisation during this last year that God is calling her to ministry within the Church of Scotland.

At present she is working through her discernment process but she is going to make an excellent minister and we all hold her in our prayers as she journeys towards her goal.

At the other end of the scale, Alice, one of our young folk, is participating in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and is gaining her community service experience serving in our church, sometimes in the coffee bar but more often in the gallery helping to live-stream our services.

Our congregation is in good hands!

During this year, the practice of live-streaming, begun during covid, has become established. Our equipment is excellent and enables our team to stream a programme of real quality each Sunday – something which is appreciated by our housebound members as well as by people much further afield. Our equipment is excellent but, of course, without our skilled team who operate the equipment it would not amount to much – theirs is a ministry appreciated by all who join us online.

A recent visitor remarked, “You really are a singing congregation, aren't you.” We are, and we often have nine, ten or on occasions even more, musical items – something which is made possible by the wonderful music produced by our Musical Director for whom Sunday worship is the climax of a week of preparation. What is not seen by the congregation is the programme of slides each

containing the words of the verses of the songs we sing but also each on the background of an appropriate photograph or picture designed to make the experience of sharing online as good as it can possibly be.

There will be more written about worship when we discuss the building, for worship permeates everything we do.

A Building Interlude

We leave the worship report with so much unsaid, but before we can report further on what we do we need to explain the building changes which in some cases have made possible the new things we do.

Simple alterations can lead to massive change: here's an example. This year our streaming system really got up and running and the quality of our pictures is of a broadcast standard. We have three cameras each of which can be controlled remotely although each camera has its own area of influence. The camera at the bottom of the south aisle views the chancel, the communion table, the lecterns and the pulpit; the camera behind the pulpit views the south aisle, the front door area (for the entrance of a bride), the congregational area to the west of the chancel and the spot where the minister speaks with the children. The camera in the Harcarse loft views the lectern – now, it was this view which led to significant change in the church. You see the background to each of the other two camera was of beautiful parts of the church, but the background to the third camera was of the stone floor – it could almost have been in a warehouse! Of course, it's not a view which we ever had before, but because the camera was looking down from a height, it was the view online.

A solution was easily found and a curtain – a beautiful deep crimson curtain – was fitted below the gallery. Instantly the view changed on camera and instead of a utility view it became rich, plush and warm.

But that wasn't the end of the story: everyone really liked the curtain. It created a feeling of warmth and it drew the church inwards making everything more cosy and also more worshipful.

The result was that a similar curtain was installed at the east end of the church under the Harcarse loft. Again the result was felt to be pleasing and our worship area enhanced.

But that too is not the end of the story because we now had the areas behind the curtains which we could use in different ways. Under the Trotter loft one of the box pews was adapted to become a coffee bar with dedicated seating around it. This has proved to be a wonderful addition to our facilities and is well used for

coffees after worship, for a midweek coffee and chat session, and is at the centre of our warmth-sharing activities (of all of which more later in this report).

But even this is not the end of the story, for what is behind the curtain under the Harcarse loft?

What was there was the ancient vestry which we had been using as a coffee bar but which wasn't satisfactory because of access issues and because the vaulted ceiling made it difficult to hear when several voices were talking. This area is now in process of being transformed into a chapel which, once complete, will tell the story of St. Cuthbert and is already a beautiful sanctuary in which to meditate and pray.

The point of this foray into a building interlude is to underline the point that how we develop our building determines what we are able to do as a congregation and that, in this case, the decision to stream our services to the best of our ability has led to a more appropriate worship area, a coffee bar and a splendid chapel.



Our new Coffee Bar built into a box pew behind that curtain!

Back to our Congregation

Of course, we realise that that it's not the number of people attending Sunday worship that really matters: it's what we do to advance the Kingdom of God that really counts. But numbers are important as well, particularly when it is because we are bringing together people of so many church backgrounds (and none).

We have within our family people who belong to the Roman Catholic tradition, from the Anglican tradition, Episcopalians, Methodists, Brethren, Evangelicals, and from the Church of Scotland.

And here's the thing: we are not welcoming all these people into our tradition but becoming a family which shares all of our traditions – a truly interdenominational community. So the pulpit is important but around the walls you'll find the Stations of the Cross. You'll also find our children's paintings and a splendid and huge picture of our church painted by Jerry Calote, a Swiss artist in Lucerne, Switzerland.

We have a table which is central and around which all of our folk, from whatever tradition, gather and share in Holy Communion. In fact we celebrate the eucharist on the first Sunday of every month and follow it with a congregational meal. Sometimes the service is led by the minister, sometimes it is a service full of congregational participation and sometimes it is a celebration of communion set to music. Always it is special.



As a congregation we try to make a difference. We contribute to the Jeel al Amal School in Bethany. It's a Christian Arab School but it is a school which accepts everyone regardless of race or religion.

Many of our congregation visited the school during the pilgrimage to the Holy Land we made in the early days of 2020 and two other of our members visited the school this year and received a very warm welcome.



We support the work of Dr. Linus Malu in Malawi.

Linus works with broken families, often women with children, assisting them to set up small businesses which support them into the future.

So far we have funded the creation of at least a dozen such businesses and also contributed towards the education of many children.

This Christmas we have donated funds to a Roman Catholic partner and have provided a water supply for a third-world village, set up a village community farm, given a gift of agricultural tools, funded beekeeping equipment, provided a couple of goats, three chickens and significantly funded a project in South America which uses rugby to bring together youngsters who would otherwise become part of the local gang culture.

But making a difference isn't something which only happens overseas. Our church building is a constantly warm place, heated by a sophisticated air-to-air heating system. People in our communities are concerned about keeping warm and about the cost of heating. Our church is always open and everyone is welcome to come into church, help themselves to coffee and snacks from the coffee bar, watch a film, read a book or chat with a friend.



The South Aisle where soup and sandwich lunches are served

When the power goes off, as it does most years, we have a generator-based system capable of powering everything in the church, heating, coffee bar, lighting and equipment. On these occasions soup and sandwiches will be available at lunch time and there will be a film in the afternoon or books to read from our library. Importantly, we have a charging point for mobile phones – now that landlines use internet connections, a mobile is the only way to communicate once the power goes down. We also have internet access freely available.

But we don't only make a difference as a congregation – our congregation makes a difference as individuals and the friendship and assistance which they share with others contributes to so much happiness within our communities.

We also make a difference to each other. Many of us look forward to Wednesday mornings when we meet for coffee and a chat in our coffee bar, or to the discussion group which has met on Friday mornings to examine the ten chapters of a Church of England mission handbook entitled 'How Village Churches Thrive' – we've learned a great deal from talking together as we have from the Meditation evenings on a Thursday. We've plans to develop this, along with a regular Bible Study, during this new year.

And a Proper Look at our Property!

We are happy to report that our building is in good repair, in fine decoration, is warm, dry and extremely comfortable.

During the course of this year our streaming equipment has been upgraded from the initial couple of small cameras to a three-camera pan, tilt and zoom system, powered by a bird-dog desk and streamed by a Pearl 2 system with appropriate sound board and switch gear.

New curtains have been fitted which add significantly to the beauty of our worship space.

A coffee bar with five coffee machines has been established (we started with just a couple of machines but such is the demand that we now have five!)

Our new chapel has been wood-panelled by Dave: it looks great. Rachel is now in charge of painting the chapel – a Celtic theme with a prayer of St. Cuthbert and a number of pictures of scenes from his life. An appropriate window has also been commissioned.

In the churchyard a pilgrimage pathway has been created providing a walk around the graveyard with meditations and the story of St. Cuthbert on which to ponder.

... And What about our Finances?

Most of our members have a standing order to the Bank and the total of these covers the monthly costs of the congregation, allowing much of our other funds to be given away to one of our projects or used to fund our mission programme. Our overheads are low because no-one in our congregation receives financial remuneration whether that be for providing music, cleaning the church, leading worship or using talents to improve or repair our building. We understand the importance of communication whether through our church notice board, pictures in the local paper, our newsletter, our live-stream, web-site or the minister's Saturday email. We do a lot of printing. Every Sunday we provide a worship booklet with Bible passages and songs – having a booklet enables us to choose worship songs from many different sources and our excellent Musical Director ensures that we have music which enables us to learn new songs with ease and enjoyment. Our worship booklet always includes the passages of scripture and as these booklets are taken home they too contribute to our mission.

And so even our discussion on finance leads us back to worship – and that's appropriate because, whether we are worshipping in church, supporting our

projects, out in our community or welcoming new members, we are worshipping God and the family of Fogo Parish Church, empowered by prayer and by the Holy Spirit, provides the basis of the Christian family which is to us our Christian home.

Our Future

Looked at in human terms our future is uncertain but we are convinced that God has a place for us in his future plans. The latest round of Presbytery planning has identified ours as a building which should close – we are after all the smallest parish in the south of Scotland with, according to the most recently available census figures only 152 people living in it.

Back in 2016 when the previous minister retired, the Presbytery of Duns recommended that the building of Fogo Parish Church be transferred to a Community Trust. An appropriate trust has been created and we hope that this trust will have the opportunity of taking over the care of the building which has been looked after by our community through its heritors and members for at least eight hundred and fifty years.



It's always a pleasure to eat in our Churchyard.

Our congregation is, however, a strong one. Who would have thought that we started with a congregation in single figures, in a building riddled with damp and cold, with no resources and no money? In recent times we have shared in infant and adult baptism and profession of faith, have trained and ordained a dozen elders, have produced a candidate for the ministry, support financially a school in Bethany, provide assistance for our Mission Partner in Malawi, raise funds for the developing world in conjunction with SCIAF, provide emergency military first aid kits for soldiers in Ukraine, provide a warm and secure place for our community both in cold times and when there are power outages and welcome someone new into our church family almost every week. We need have no fear for the future. God will point us where we need to go and what we need to do and we will continue to praise him.



Fogo Parish Church
“where belonging matters”