

St. Andrew's Scots Kirk, Colombo

Congregational report – October 2018 to February 2019

Ministry

The interim Moderator, Rev. Jim Sharp visited Colombo in November '18 and took two services, including the 100th year Remembrance service and an early St. Andrew's Day service.

During his visit, he undertook Elder training, chaired a Kirk Session meeting in person for a change – he usually does them by Skype – and overlapped for a few days with Rev. Bill Davnie (PCUSA), who came over from Twin Cities Minnesota to take up a locum.

Since then, Rev. Bill has been taking Sunday services. Encouragingly Sunday offerings have seen an increase as Rev. Bill reminds the congregation each Sunday of the service that SASK provides to the community through its four mission projects. More details on the mission work are described below.

Following the departure of SASK's Musical Director last August, the church has been working on a rota with four organists. A music committee made up of four elders has been assisting the minister in this regard.

As a further measure to cover a complete absence of organists, SASK purchased a MiDi recorder for the Makin organ in October '18 and obtained the services of one of the most talented church organists in Sri Lanka to record the most common hymn tunes. Being a perfectionist, progress is slow; nonetheless thirty tunes (out of about one hundred) have been recorded to date. On one or two occasions when he was the organist on duty, he played some of the hymn tunes through the recorder, and no one knew the difference!

The leader of the Prayer group left Sri Lanka a few months ago due to her work commitments shifting to Cambodia, and SASK has yet not found someone to give leadership to this area of church worship.

A Bible Study under the direction of Rev. Bill, has been held weekly. His approach has been to study the New Testament Bible passage for the upcoming Sunday.

Looking ahead, I am pleased to report that SASK will have continuity in worship through the good offices of Rev. Eric Foggitt and Rev. Ian Gilmour. Eric will take over from Bill in the third week in June and Ian will take over from Eric in mid-August. Ian has committed to be the Locum until Easter 2020.

I am grateful to Eric for his interest in serving in Colombo and flexibility in fitting in with the schedules of the other two ministers, as this has ensured no gaps. I am also appreciative of Jim's effort to attract Ian to serve in Colombo.

The presence of all three Locums will be immensely useful in guiding the Nominating committee, which was formed in February.

Congregation

The weekly numbers attending service has grown a little to between 65 and 75.

During the Christmas period, the church was the venue for a 200th year celebration of the original Silent Night music. The music was brought to us by an Austrian lady – who had moved to Sri Lanka a few months earlier and is now one of the four regular organists at SASK– and who was from the same town as the composer of the music. The music was sung in Latin by a renowned Sri Lankan choir. This same choir recorded their own rendition of Silent Night and used SASK as the backdrop for the video footage that accompanied the music. The church was lit up for the recordings, as they were made after sundown, and the church looked absolutely stunning in the video.

There was a nativity play by the Sunday School and a carol service directed by one of the organists whom we call upon to play on a Sunday. Three services were held from the 23rd to the 25th. We are very appreciative of our Locum, who was not only up to the task but took it all in his stride.

The congregational numbers during this period were higher than usual.

A new initiative is the “Senior Friends Fellowship”, which has been held once a month (since September '18) at the church hall. Games such as quizzes, memory games, Scrabble, Patience are played together with a song-along with Lakshmi, the leader of this initiative, at the piano.

Anywhere between six and ten people attend and is a much looked forward to morning.

Church Property & Finance

SASK bade goodbye to its Property convener, Barry Walker, who accompanied his wife Rathini (an Elder and former Prayer group leader) to Cambodia. We are fortunate that Stanley Gooneratne accepted our invitation to give leadership to the Property committee and together with Elders Anna Brochard and Shewantha Rodrigo, are continuing the good work begun by Barry.

As the church is located less than 500 metres from the sea, there is a need for constant vigilance to maintain and replace items susceptible to corrosion.

Huge progress was made in reducing the M&R fee for 2017. Gillian Mailler, who is Convener of the Colombo Finance committee, met Lisa Erskine at 121 and persuaded her that the allowance for the use of the church by outside agencies should be applied to Colombo for wedding donations received from couples outside the church membership. This is an aspect of SASK, which is unusual compared to the practice of some of the more traditional (and conservative) churches. These couples are often a source of new membership for SASK. In essence, SASK permits couples of different Christian denominations to be blessed at our church.

Returning to the M&R fee....., this and some other hard won applications of the Regulations reduced the originally assessed fee by over 50%.

Mission projects

The monthly visits to Ward 8 Mulleriyawa mental hospital have been carried out regularly providing the ladies with a special lunch, provisions and toiletries. There is now a need to attend to some of the deteriorating aspects of the infrastructure at this ward, with mold and cracks and the consequent invasion of insects. This mission team was very pleased to learn that the International Presbytery had decided to make this project its fund raising project in 2019.

Netherlee Cottage, which provides a “half-way house” continues to support up to 6 ladies and has been successful in improving the skill levels of the older residents living there and moving on those able to live a normal life.

Helping Hands provides subsistence level financial assistance to women in need in the immediate vicinity of the church.

To augment support to the needy in the vicinity of the church, a Thursday lunch initiative was launched in October '18. On average 120 people are served lunch. These are typically people living or working nearby, and there are usually 4-6 volunteers from the church who serve the lunch. The food is sourced from an outside agency and the cost of this initiative has so far been covered through donations from the congregation. This has been an uplifting experience to all those involved with this initiative as well as those who have witnessed the impact of it.

Sunday School (SS) and Youth Group (YG)

There has been an increase in the numbers of SS children and their parents. An increased sense of enthusiasm has been injected to this aspect of worship by the SS leaders, the Locum minister and his wife.

In contrast, YG numbers have declined. This is a somewhat cyclical phenomenon exacerbated by the growing trend for extra tuition (including on a Sunday) for children taking ‘O’ and ‘A’ level exams.

On the other hand, we were delighted that one of the YG leaders, who is a former YG member attended Youth Presbytery in Rotterdam and gave a presentation of her experience to the congregation on her return.

Presbytery of Lanka (POL)

Two members of the KS actively support the POL. The next meeting is in mid-March.

Kirk Session (KS)

The Kirk Session continues to grow in unity and maturity. It has not shied away from discussing shortcomings and we are seeing members’ respond and elevate their contribution when and where necessary.

Attention is being focused in one or two areas, where allegiance to SASK and responsibility as an Elder are in question.

In the meantime, the Session is undergoing training on Pastoral Care on a monthly basis, under the guidance of the Locum minister. A potential new Elder is receiving training on Eldership on a weekly basis and I am hopeful that he will be ready to answer the call in a month or two.

Chandan de Silva
Session Clerk
11th March 2019