



## The Burning Bush - Online article archive

### The first Free Presbyterian Church



**Crossgar Free Presbyterian Church**

Crossgar Free Presbyterian Church is the first Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster and the congregation out of which the worldwide Free Presbyterian movement originated. It came into being on 17th March 1951 out of evangelistic fervour, which brought it into conflict with the liberal agenda that was gaining ground in many denominations.

Early in 1950, the Committee of the Crossgar Mission Hall approached the 24 year old Rev. Ian Paisley to determine whether he would conduct a Gospel Campaign in the town. After careful consideration and prayer, the date was fixed for February 1951. The Campaign Committee, the majority of whom were office-bearers or members of Lissara Presbyterian Church, feeling that the Mission Hall would be too small, decided to ask their Kirk Session for the use of the local Presbyterian Church hall for the campaign. This was unanimously granted at a meeting of Session.

However in what local people came to interpret as evidence of the liberal agenda that was becoming increasingly evident in their church, the Down Presbytery meeting on Monday January 8th 1951 ruled that the mission should not go ahead in Lissara Church hall. There is considerable doubt as to whether the local elders were ever properly informed of this because the plans for the mission continued. Certainly the ordinary members knew nothing about the ruling.

Matters were drawn sharply to a head when on the evening of Saturday 3rd February 1951, just 90 minutes prior to a planned Saturday night march of witness to advertise the mission, Down Presbytery held a special meeting to which Lissara's Church Session were summoned. At this meeting the Moderator of Down Presbytery demanded that the Lissara Session reverse their decision to grant the use of the church hall to the missionaries.

The evangelicals, who had already been battling against liberalism in their own congregation, saw these moves as further evidence of the downward trend in their denomination. They could not believe that the Presbytery would ban a gospel mission in their own church hall. For two of the elders, Hugh James Adams and George K. Gibson the highhandedness of the Presbytery was too much. They refused what they saw as an anti-gospel demand by Presbytery officers to immediately cancel the gospel campaign. For this they were suspended.

These events were as yet unknown to those who were at that time gathered for a March of Witness which was making its way to Lissara Church Hall only to discover that the Down Presbytery had closed the doors of the hall to the preaching of the gospel and to them. One of the abiding memories of those who were on that March of Witness is having to shelter from torrential rain in the porch of their own church hall from which they had been locked out.

The Mission however, went on in the Killyleagh Street Mission Hall and was blessed of God in the salvation of 94 precious souls. Dr. Paisley speaking at Crossgar Church in 1997 said, "My memory of those meetings was not the packed house that we had overflowing each evening, the great spirit of blessing and the joy of leading precious souls to Christ but it was of the continued sessions of prayer one on Tuesday night and one on Friday night when we went on past midnight and past two o'clock in earnest intercessions before God. For a crisis would arise at the end of the campaign-back to the Church that put out the light of the gospel



## The Burning Bush - Online article archive

or outside the camp to bear reproach for the Lord Jesus Christ. That was the decision and choice that had to be made.”



**Rev. Gordon Dane**

The decision was made that a new Presbyterian denomination should be formed. But that decision was not just about a local dispute. There was an atmosphere of great disquiet among evangelicals at the time about the direction the main denominations were going in. They felt the ban on a gospel mission was symptomatic of a wider problem of modernistic theology. The decision to form a new church was adopted by five of the seven man Session of Lissara together with all of the Sunday School teachers and some 60 of the congregation. Dr. Paisley speaking in 1997 said, “After much prayer and heart-searching the elders who had seceded were joined by Mr. William Emerson and they together gave the lead and the Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster was born.” Within seven months three more congregations in different parts of the province including Rev Paisley’s church in Ravenhill joined the Crossgar people in the new Free Presbyterian Church. More congregations followed later.

Rev. Gordon Dane the present minister states, “From its beginning Crossgar Free Presbyterian Church has sought to be a Christ exalting and gospel preaching church and while the church was born in controversy the founding members of the church all emphasise that they came out of their old church for the sake of the gospel. Our motto has been “But we preach Christ crucified.”

### An Outward Vision

The Free Presbyterian Church in Crossgar has always had a wider vision and has played its part in supporting Free Presbyterian and other missionaries across the world. For many years the church has been involved in sending out French gospel literature to French speaking African countries. The Children’s meeting and Youth Fellowship sponsor an African child in Kenya in association with, “Friends of Africa Missionary Endeavour.” Two members of the congregation are directors in this Ulster mission, which runs orphan homes, and medical facilities in Kenya. Kyalo Muli is a young Kenyan whose mother died in 2004 and whose father has disappeared. For a number of years Crossgar FPC youth meetings have provided funds to help him.

The Ladies Fellowship of the congregation has also started to raise money for Isaac Thapa the son of the Moderator of the new Free Presbyterian Church of Nepal. Rev. Paul Thapa, the Moderator of the Nepal church has opened his home in Kathmandu to orphans and ow has adopted twenty children from all parts of Nepal. Isaac and Sarah are Mr. Thapa’s natural children and both hope to be medical doctors. The Ladies fellowship is raising money to help with their education.

### Plans for the Future

Crossgar Free Presbyterian Church has an extensive children’s and youth programme. The children and youth meetings have around 150 members on the roll. They meet in three groups on Wednesday night. The Children’s meeting is for ages three to eleven, the Junior Youth Fellowship is for ages 12 to 16 and the Youth Fellowship is for ages 16 and over. There is also an annual Holiday Bible Club with around 100 in attendance. Every year the members of the church run the Holiday Bible Club, which involves three meetings going on at once. This takes a tremendous number of volunteers but Rev. Dane paid tribute to how the congregation always rises to the challenge.

With the amount of young people to be catered for the church is currently in the process of getting plans for a new church hall. A new extension to the main 1957 building with a gallery was opened in 1997 during the ministry of Rev. Fred Greenfield with some youth facilities but the need has been felt for a purpose built hall. Plans are being finalised for this and it is hoped that progress can be made on this in the near future.



## The Burning Bush - Online article archive

### Outreach in the Community

The Church is involved in constant outreach into the community. In recent years the Youth Fellowship has organised youth sports for the community and this has enabled them to get to know some of the young folks in the community that would not normally come to church. Football and Volleyball and other games are organised on the village Green. At the end of the evening there is always a short epilogue message and food.

In the last two years the church felt a burden for the town of Downpatrick and paid for and distributed copies of the booklet "No longer hoping", which is the testimony of Dick Keogh from Tipperary to all homes in the town. This year one of the members of the church Jonny Rice has written and produced a very colourful and useful little booklet called "The Six Days of Creation'. The Church hopes to distribute these free of charge around the homes of Crossgar and surrounding areas in the next few months. The church also broadcasts its sermons over the internet on **[www.sermonaudio.com](http://www.sermonaudio.com)**.

At Christmas time the church was able to take part in the first Christmas fair that was held in Crossgar and gave out free tea and shortbread as well as packs of gospel literature. The minister of the Church Rev. Gordon Dane said, "The Lord Jesus told his disciples to go into all the world and preach the gospel and we want to discharge our responsibility in our own area. We are an open and welcoming church, which seek to worship God as the Bible directs and reach out to meet the needs of the people around us. The deepest need is to know Christ and have the sin that mars lives dealt with in salvation."