

Introduction

St. Andrew's is a friendly and very international congregation that has seen many changes since the first Presbyterian minister arrived in Rome over 150 years ago. Throughout its presence in the Eternal City, St. Andrew's has offered a spiritual home to Christians from all over the world.

History of St. Andrew's, Rome

Worship began as an experiment in the Apostolic manner in a "hired house" in January 1862, with a minister sent from Scotland, meeting with a small group of mainly Scots and Americans for clandestine worship. The first permanent minister, Dr. James Lewis, was appointed in 1864. Upon being warned by the British Consul of the risk of continuing in what was then an illegal act of worship within the walls of Rome, Dr. Lewis moved worship service outside the city walls, first into a hired room and then into a properly built church in Via Flaminia. This was not an adequate solution, however and by 1881, the newly appointed permanent minister, Dr. J. Gordon Gray, had taken the important step of launching an appeal for funds to acquire a site and erect a church in a modern, central part of the city.



The present building was opened on 21 January 1885, and was finally cleared of debt in 1904. Dr. Gray died in 1920 and was succeeded by the Rev. Dr. Albert McKinnon,

who served the congregation from 1923 to 1935. The wartime years saw the forced departure of the minister, and only in 1948 did normal worship begin again.

In the 1950s, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, FAO, moved its headquarters to Rome, resulting in an increased number of Americans attending the church. Tourists also came to visit Rome all year round. Rev. A. J. Maclean was minister from 1956 to 1975, and during that time the congregation grew in number and strength. Starting in the mid-1950s and until 2013, part of the church premises was rented out to the Ministry of Defence, generating an important source of income. The last two ministers at St. Andrew's, Rev. David Huie and Rev. William McCulloch, served for extended periods of eleven and fourteen years, respectively, from 1990-2001 and 2002-2016. Since then, the church has had a series of Locum Ministers.

Community profile of the congregation

Over the last few decades, St. Andrew's has become more and more a truly international congregation. A longstanding relationship with the Korean Protestant community in Rome has led to regular use of the church by them, both for worship and concerts.

We are a congregation that loves to sing, and our membership has been enriched by the increasing numbers of people coming to Rome from Africa, Asia and other parts of the world, who have found a spiritual home and make an important contribution to the life and vitality of the congregation. The fact that for many years now again we have had a Sunday Club, and the recent confirmation of five young people, all of African origin, whom we have seen grow up in our congregation, bear witness to this vitality, and give us hope for further growth in the years to come.

Worship Life

Worship is weekly on Sundays at 11.00 a.m. with the celebration of Holy Communion on the first Sunday of every month. We have

a congregation of approximately 75 people. The average attendance is around 60 – 70 and up to 100 – 120 on special Sundays. Some of our members have been living in Rome for many years, others moved here more recently. Members have widely varied backgrounds, including workers of all types, students and retirees. The church family also has many people who are on holiday in Italy, some of whom are repeat visitors for whom St Andrew's is "their church" when in Rome. Visitors regularly praise our sense of openness and welcoming, especially during the time for fellowship during refreshments after the service, which with good weather (a fairly regular occurrence in Rome) is located on our roof terrace overlooking the centre of the city.

Very few of our members live in or close to the centre of Rome. Many travel one or two hours to get into town. Some of our members also work on Saturday. Because of this, most of our church activities are concentrated on a Sunday. Following the recent departure of two of our elders from Italy due to work reasons, there currently are seven elders on the Kirk Session. In January 2019, we will ordain four new elders from our active members in order to reinforce our Kirk Session. We have a small group of children attending Sunday Club. At the end of March, five of our young people were confirmed. We are blessed to have young people who are committed to the church and we aim to make use of their talents and to involve them in church life and governance in the years to come.

For many years now, we have had a Korean organist who provides the musical elements in our service. She also leads our choir whose members practise every Sunday prior to the service and sing a hymn during the service. We have an organ and also a piano.

Pastoral Care

We have a few elderly members who receive a visit from the minister on a regular basis. Other pastoral care happens automatically among members, in some cases by phone since most of our members are dispersed over Rome and the surrounding areas.

Christian Education

Some of our locum ministers have offered bible study. This has proved to be popular, and we believe we should offer bible study on a regular basis again in the future as a constant element to provide growth in faith. These bible studies are best scheduled on a Sunday afternoon immediately following refreshments to make sure that as many of our members as possible can participate.



Ecumenical Context

We are a member of the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy (FCEI). The majority of Italians are Roman Catholic, but there are numerous Protestant churches as well, including Waldensian, Methodist, Salvation Army, Baptist and Pentecostal. We are also part of a group called Churches Together in Rome (CTiR) that is made up of non-Italian speaking congregations, whether Protestant or not. Churches Together in Rome meets once a month. The minister and one of our elders attend the meetings.

World Church

St. Andrew's also has tapped into its global connections. We have had close links with the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, especially through a twinning with Osu North Church in Accra which we visited in 2010. A return visit to Rome took place in 2012. We had a vibrant twinning as well with North Motherwell Parish Church.

Embassies

Given the centrality of the city of Rome to Europe, Christianity as a whole and Catholicism in particular, St. Andrew's maintains relationships with a variety of embassies to Italy and to the Holy See, including the British Embassy to the Holy See, the British Embassy to Italy and the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the United Nations. Fostering these relationships is an important part of the outreach of St. Andrew's.



Outreach

The loss of a regular rental income following the termination of the leasehold of two floors of the church building premises has meant that we do less outreach. We are very keen to expand this again and are looking for a minister who can help us do this. To give an idea of what can be done in this area, we used to be involved in a wide range of outreach activities, such as:

- a scheme of packed lunches (around

150-200, one–three times a week);

- providing a group of 20-30 homeless people who sleep in a nearby chapel with breakfast once a week and sometimes dinner; and

- helping at refugee centre called Bo-abab close to a central train station.

The outreach that we managed to continue are the three gift services (Epiphany, Pentecost, Harvest) for Tor Bella Monaca, a poor neighbourhood in the eastern outskirts of Rome. The Missionaries of Charity run a home for young mothers there and distribute food and clothes among the needy in the area. We bring them food items that keep, toiletries and women's and children's clothes. We provide our church vehicle for the Salvation Army's 'Soccorso Invernale', a winter (November - April) feeding programme for the homeless in the centre of Rome. Added to these practical ways of helping those in need, we participate in an annual Rice Bowl Lenten collection for Churches Together in Rome, which identifies a charity every year, and we organize activities to raise money, such as a Quiz Night traditionally held at the British Embassy in Rome and a Sponsored Walk held in a nearby park.

Use of building

Passive outreach activities involve allowing numerous community groups to make use of our church premises, principally in rooms in the basement area. These groups include Alcoholics Anonymous, Co Dependents Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, Italian chamber music choir, Scottish country dancing, International folk dancing, a course in domestic training for refugee women run by the Waldensian Church, the Ghana Association, the Korean Church, a church group from San Lorenzo. Different music groups use our church as well for occasional concerts.

Stewardship and Finance

Our main income has for many decades come from renting out two floors of our building.

Austerity cuts by the Italian Government led to our losing our long-term tenants. We are at an advanced stage in negotiations to sign a contract with new tenants. We have been well supported by grants from the Salvesen Trust. We hope these will not be required in the near future. We have an ongoing pledge programme and are looking to increase the income from this. All expenditures are closely monitored. However, there is an outreach of mission which supports ongoing projects locally and international outreach.

Staffing

Because of our lack of a regular income, we do not have staff on the pay roll at the moment. We used to have a full-time caretaker and cleaning staff. At the moment, the work is done through limited part-time assignments and church volunteers. Administrative activities are supported by a church member who comes to the church office in the Manse once or twice per week.

Church, Manse and Halls

The church building is located on a busy street in the heart of Rome, not far from the presidential palace (Quirinale) and within walking distance of many of Rome's main attractions, as well as a large park (Villa Borghese) and both the British and U.S. embassies. The building is comprised of four floors, plus a basement and roof top terrace. The first three floors, including the Manse, are connected by an elevator. There is a garden / parking area in front of the church. The church sanctuary is on the ground floor and accommodates up to 120 persons. The sanctuary is in good condition. The two floors above the church were for many years rented out to the Ministry of Defence. We are currently looking for new tenants for the space.

The manse is located on the third floor. It is 160 square meters and fully furnished, with three bedrooms (one of which is currently used as an office), two bathrooms, connected living and dining space and a closed kitchen. The Manse has no outdoor space, but has large windows offering beautiful panoramic views

of Rome. There is air conditioning throughout and gas heating.

Web links for further information

Church website:

www.presbyterianchurchrome.org

Informal enquiries can be made to interim moderator Rev. Willie Strachan on 0044 7432 513375 or wstrachan@churchofscotland.org.uk.

