

# free

in Govan



The inspiring story of  
Govan Free Church,  
a growing church plant  
in Glasgow passionate  
about its community.



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# Foreword

Rev. Garry Brotherston, Minister of Bishopbriggs Free Church, shares his thoughts on *Free in Govan* and why Govan Free Church is an important part of its community.



Every now and then I come across something in the Kingdom of God that inspires, excites and blesses me. The content of this brochure fits right into that category. So what is it that causes me to give God praise for this work?

## 1. Location

As someone from a Glasgow housing scheme, I just love the fact that this church plant is rooted in Govan. Govan is rarely out of the news. The deployment of riot police locking the area down, murders, drug dealing and multiple deprivations create the impression of a housing scheme that is simply a no-go war zone. I know Govan, and a lot of the families from Govan, and my heart rejoices in what is happening through Govan Free Church.

## 2. Congregation

Walk into the worship services, the café, the church office or any other activity connected to this work and you meet locals with deep roots in the area. The ethos of the church is that of a spiritual family, where exactly the sort of people who were drawn to Jesus are welcome. A gentle, caring community, and a safe place to be, is something so incredibly

new to lots of folk here. To see people who have spent years addicted to drugs, and at times served long stretches in prison, gathering around the Word of God, bonding and praying together, is truly awesome.

## 3. Cross Bearing

In terms of the Christian life, the Cross represents sacrificial service, or a willingness to pay a price for the advance of the Gospel. Govan Free Church has not come into being by any other means. Everything that has happened here can be explained solely in terms of long, demanding hours in local streets and homes, building up relationships, understanding people's pain, sharing in their lives and establishing levels of trust. This is what earns us the right to share the Good News with people. The incarnation is the model for this ministry, and the Cross is the cost.

I pray you will be blessed and excited as you read this amazing story of how God has been at work in Govan Free Church.



# From the Minister



**One day, Jesus told the disciples a parable about a mustard seed.**

The truth he was unpacking on this occasion was about the Kingdom of God having small and seemingly insignificant beginnings, yet progressively experiencing incredible expansion and growth.

I guess you could call it the mustard seed conspiracy.

It's hard to imagine a church planting work with smaller beginnings than our own here in Govan, Glasgow. One family – no committed resources to speak of – in a housing scheme of multiple deprivations overrun with drugs, crime and trauma.

Today, seven years since our church planting proposal was endorsed by the church, we are beginning to experience something of the growth dynamic to which Jesus was drawing our attention in his parable.

We hope this magazine will capture in a nutshell how the prayers of so many are being answered on our behalf.

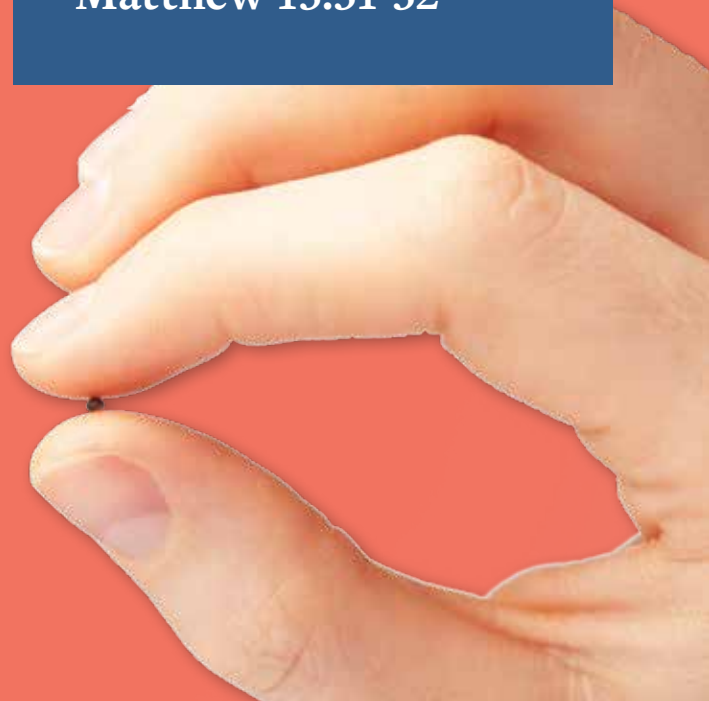
*Norman Mackay*

**Rev. Norman Mackay**

*M.A., B.D., M.Th., Dip.Th.,  
Dip. S.S., Dip. TEFL, Dip. Miss.*

**The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches.**

**Matthew 13:31-32**



# Principles

1



## New Believers

In the Acts of the Apostles new churches were established through converts to the faith. In Govan we took the decision not to commence any public meetings until local people were converted or in attendance. This held us to an authentic and biblical standard of church planting.

## Making Disciples

Church membership without discipleship is a huge problem in many congregations. Our goal is to produce disciples who are themselves able to hand down the teaching of God's Word to others, and this on the basis of proving God in their own life experience.

2



3



## Creating Community

As a church we endeavour to grow relationally as well as numerically. Creating a caring and loving community within which people feel safe is something we are passionate about. Many people in Govan have had negative experiences of church. We seek to cultivate a positive, family style fellowship.

## Cultural Sensitivity

The indigenous social culture dictates how we all relate together. For example, if local people dress casually as opposed to formally then that is fine by us. This is basic contextualisation. We want people to feel at home socially as well as spiritually.

4



5



## Mission Focus

As a fellowship we aspire to identify with God's wider purposes in his world. We use the 'Joshua Project' as a basis of prayer for people worldwide who have never heard the Christian message. We sponsor Thokala Moulendra, a young boy from Grace Children's Home, India, which means he is provided with food, clothing, health care and an education in a Christian environment. We hope this vision will continue to expand.

# Interaction

Alison Mackay, one of the original team members, explains how Govan Free Church is reaching out to and interacting with its community.



Since coming here our approach has been to love and engage with local people at every level. Generations of joblessness and chronic social conditions, mental health issues, addiction and family breakdown have created a community defined by feelings of worthlessness, complex and often traumatic life situations, suffering and pain. Yet people here have resilience, humour and an interest in discussing important life questions.

Our first desire is to see our community experience regeneration through salvation in Christ and secondly, through the benefits of that spiritual renewal, to see their lives move in a whole new direction.

Word travels fast in communities like Govan! GFC has gained a reputation for being a welcoming and caring fellowship where everyone is equally valued, as people made in the image of God. Local believers whose lives are being transformed are the best advertisement for the Gospel. They have natural contacts and friends in the area who are often drawn into the church through their testimony.

The next few pages illustrate some of the many ways we are interacting with this old Glasgow housing scheme that God has laid on our heart.

**Alison Mackay**





As someone born and raised in Govan I spent years searching for something to transform my life, break the cycle of addiction that had imprisoned me, and give me hope.

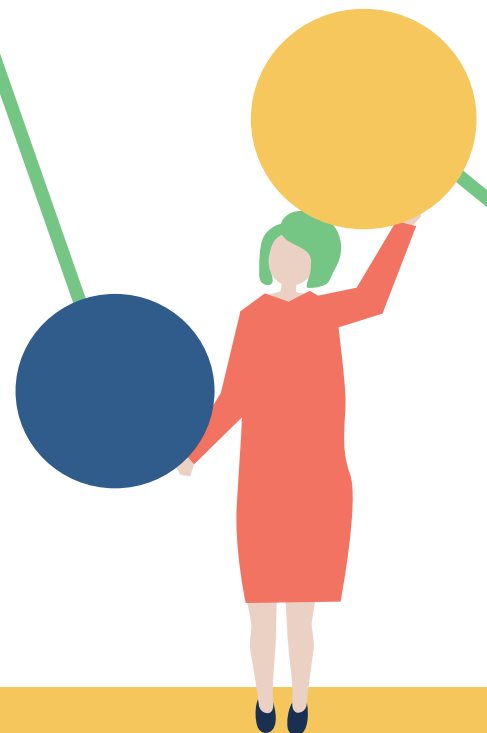
Like many others in Govan I now give thanks to the Lord for sending the Govan Free Church into the heart of our community to serve, care and tell us about Jesus.

Ordinary local people are talking about this church, and Jesus is being made known in the streets of Govan.

Stephen

The people who sat  
in darkness have seen  
**a great light.** And for  
those who lived in  
the land where death  
casts its shadow,  
**a light has dawned.**

Matthew 4:16





# Café

**Very often our first point of contact with people is through our free drop-in café on Govan Road.**



On average we have about 30-40 local friends drop in each Tuesday, many of whom are regulars, and some of whom have either come along to church or signed up for our Christianity Explored courses.

The café offers us the opportunity to build trust with people in a relaxed way, taking the necessary time to establish connections and friendships.





# Addiction

As a church we promote a Christ-centred recovery programme, under the counsel and direction of Hope for Glasgow, founded and pioneered by Terry McCutcheon (pictured).

Through this programme lives are being transformed, and lifelong cycles of addiction are being broken, through the power of the Holy Spirit harnessing the Word of God.

If someone is struggling with addiction, we commend a Christian understanding of addiction and recovery to them. We point people to Christ and provide fellowship groups to support those who are journeying to freedom.



**HOPE** *for*  

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**Glasgow**

Offering  
a Christ-  
centred road  
to recovery



# Trauma

Closely related to and intertwined with addiction is often the experience of underlying trauma. Emotional trauma impacts more than one in seven people

In the aftermath of human tragedy — war, famine, domestic violence, abuse, neglect — people lose hope. They feel trapped in a cycle of re-living the pain, and struggle to believe that God can heal or release them from the heart wounds that afflict us.

In order to engage with trauma 4 of our members have attended an extremely helpful trauma counselling course organized by the Trauma Healing Institute, and run in conjunction with the Scottish Bible Society.

It does not take too much to imagine how many people in this part of Glasgow experience such traumas. Suffering loss, bereavement, abandonment or betrayal can leave people wounded and in need of healing.

For these wounds to heal people need to express their pain to someone who listens without causing further harm. Only God can bring healing, but he often uses people and an understanding of how our emotions heal to do so.

But Trauma Healing does far more than simply help people deal in a biblical way with the losses they have endured: it develops a culture where the Bible is central, where God is invited to do his transforming work in the midst of pain and difficulty, and where people are empowered to play their part in supporting and helping others as a church.



## Please pray

Pray for Jim and Kirsty who have long years of medical experience, spiritual counselling and church leadership, as they seek to head up this work.



Speaking of why she completed the Trauma Healing Institute course, Kirsty shares:



When I heard about this course, I was immediately excited by the content. It involved Bible based trauma healing. I had done previous training through other organisations which was excellent, but it stopped short of including the healing power of Jesus and the Cross.

Many of us have or will have “heart wounds”, but knowing that within this community I love and serve many of these dear people have multiple “heart wounds” in their lives, I wanted to help without doing any more harm, and to bring the Word of God into each situation.

With our family history rooted in Govan I know something of the trials and pain facing many within this community.

Having listened carefully week by week to those who attend our free café and church fellowship we are trusting that we can serve and care for our friends even more by making these small group sessions available.

Jim is also excited to see God at work in the community.



**The Lord is near to those who are discouraged;  
he saves those who have lost all hope.**

**Psalm 34:18**



## Social engagement

As a fellowship we seek to be rooted in and committed to serving our community. We also want to learn from and understand the local culture of the area in which God has placed us. Contextualisation is a central principle of mission.

Like other housing schemes in Glasgow, Govan has a highly developed social culture of its own. As a church we want to integrate into the positive aspects of that culture, and not sit superficially on the surface. The production of a local community magazine has been one way of accomplishing this, as well as, for example, helping people refurbish their homes, or assisting with representation to official bodies, such as housing associations and medical centres.

Over the last few years our fellowship has gradually endeared itself to the local community by loving, caring for and learning from it.

We don't have an official social programme, but as a church we seek to exercise a social conscience and have a compassionate heart. When somebody comes to us in need of help or support we seek to provide that in whatever way we can. We ask for nothing in return, but simply try to love our neighbour as ourselves.



# Discipleship



One of the strengths of the fellowship here is our commitment to meeting together throughout the week. The office hub is a gathering place where everyone can come and go, and also take in some of the DVD sessions, including Christianity Explored materials for those enquiring about the faith.



Small fellowship groups are extremely helpful for our growth as Christians. People feel more secure, and are more likely to share something of their challenges and struggles.

Being a disciple in this part of Glasgow requires us all to support each other, and the non-threatening environment of small group studies helps towards this end.

Rev. Nick Mackison  
*Team Member*



# People's stories

Here are just a few of the many testimonies to God's grace here in Govan.



## Robert

Robert became a Christian after being introduced to the church guys here in Govan. Robert's background at that time was one of being 30 years addicted to street and prescription drugs, as well as alcohol and the buzz of housing scheme violence. Prison was often his home. He knew Govan well as the family home had been in Greenfield Street.

Robert was at the heart of our congregation for 4 years and throughout this time exercised a powerful influence on the lives of many. His testimony was a shining light both within Govan itself and also the wider Glasgow recovery groups. Through Robert's influence many people were drawn to our church-based activities.

Robert passed into the presence of the Lord during the Covid-19 pandemic, leaving behind a remarkable legacy for someone who was a committed Christian for only 4 years. He is sadly missed by us all, but there is a wonderful reunion awaiting.



## Annette

My name is Annette and I live in Govan. I just kind of stumbled across this Christian community one day and it changed my life.

From the moment we met I have felt loved, accepted and cared for, and I now look forward every week to all the church activities, whether Christianity Explored, the Free Café or the Sunday worship, or whatever else is happening. Our church is more like a family where we share in each others' lives.



## Maria

Maria came from Govan and was part of our church family for the final year of her life. She had just completed a Christianity Explored course run by the fellowship before passing away peacefully in her home while reading her Bible.

Maria was a real blessing to us all, and is sadly missed, but she is now with Christ in glory, which is far better. Through Maria's testimony we have a great reminder of how God can reserve his greatest blessings for the latter stages of our lives.

## Anne

My name is Anne and I have deep family roots in Govan. I came to faith through one of the first Christianity Explored courses run by Norman. Like many people in Govan, I had a religious attachment to a church but was searching for something more meaningful and personal. My son Liam had gone through the course and made a profession of faith. We are a first-generation church and I love being part of this spiritual family. What makes the difference is that I now have a personal relationship with Jesus, and not simply an attachment to a church.



## Ian

My name is Ian and I also have deep family roots in Govan. One of the blessings to me is that this church has a heart *for* the Govan community and is at the heart *of* the Govan community.

We try to be available and approachable, with nobody being turned away. People here don't just attend a church service, but rather join a family of friends, and one that is sensitive to and aware of the social challenges which everyone faces in the Govan community.



## Martin

My name is Martin and Govan is my home. My family is well known in Govan. For 30 years I was addicted to street and prescription drugs and fully expected to be just another casualty like so many others. My 3 brothers had died from drugs and I was simply heading that way too. Everything was black.

However somehow God kept me alive and has given a future to me. As a Christian I am now feeling increasingly free from my past and enjoying life as God intended me to. God is restoring the years the locust had eaten and through Govan Free Church provided me with a spiritual family who mean everything to me.

In the days of my addiction time just dragged. Now there are not enough minutes in the day to enjoy all that the Lord sets before me.



My name is James and I live in Govan. I stumbled across the church when I went into the outreach café on Govan Road and discovered an old friend who recently had become a born again Christian through the Govan Free Church.

I started to attend all the church groups and remain incredibly grateful for the advice, support and care that have been shown to me.

Like many others here my background was one of chaos, prison and addiction, with no real hope for the future. Now I see the only way to a better future is one that builds on the foundation of Jesus and his Word.



**James**



**Sharon**

My name is Sharon and I recall our first worship service here in Govan. There were only a few of us in a tiny room in the Pearce Institute. We had no church Bibles, resources, or songbooks, but it was all really exciting.

That excitement is still with us as we experience the faithfulness of God enlarging our sphere of influence, blessing us with answers to prayer, and seeing people come to faith and grow as Christians.

Govan Free Church is the remarkable story of God creating something out of nothing.

My name is Tracey and I first heard about the church here in Govan from a friend in the recovery community. I recently completed a Christianity Explored course.

I love coming to this fellowship. The people are so kind and accepting. Everyone has a sense of belonging.

The Bible seems to speak to me when I sit and listen to the messages that are brought to us.

Norman and Alison are people you can talk to about anything, and are approachable just like friends.



**Tracey**



God has brought me into a new season in my Christian life and I am both blessed and surprised. I just love our Free Café on the Govan Road. Every Tuesday local friends come in and we've become like a family. When I first talked to Norman I am sure he thought I was quite mad. What's an elderly lady like me doing joining this sort of work?

My eyes have been opened to the pain, difficulties and trauma many people in this community experience. I never fully appreciated that before. I've become a kind of 'gran' figure to the younger ones, and that's so endearing! We share our stories, and everyone is loved and cared for. My life has been enriched, and my horizons have been widened. You think as you get older there will be fewer opportunities to get involved. I've found the opposite. Here I can be someone who listens, shares, cares and prays for people whose lives have been blighted by addiction, crime and trauma. I love this church!



**Ann**

Neil and Jennie here. We first heard about Govan Free Church Plant while we were working in Uganda as missionary doctors. Many of the people in the church have very different backgrounds and circumstances to our own. However from the very first time we attended a meeting we've felt welcome and at home here. The people are so friendly and genuinely care about us. Most importantly the church is completely focused on spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ in the Govan community. Throughout our time in the church we have seen many people come to faith. It has also been a joy to us to have people come to their first prayer meeting and pray with faith and conviction.



**Neil & Jennie**

# Faith & finance

**Our church planting venture has witnessed the awesome provision of God in the area of finance.**

Within the Free Church of Scotland new church plants are expected to be self-financing. However for a church plant like ours in an area of multiple deprivation that presents a huge challenge.

How has it been possible for us to finance ourselves to the same extent as larger churches in more affluent areas with a more professional congregation? By the faithfulness of God, and the generosity of individual Christians and churches, the ministry in Govan has been provided for and sustained over the past seven years. Here are just a few of the wonderful workings of God on our behalf.



Through fund raising and our church offerings from 2013–2020 the minister's salary and expenses have been met every month. The Lord provided £30,000 to buy our church building outright, and a further £40,000 to refurbish it, as well as enough to cover all the annual utilities and insurance. Our office hub rental has been £5,000 per year and our community magazine has cost £10,000 per year.



We run a free café each week and have consistently invested significant amounts of finance into worthy causes here at a local level, including house refurbishments and local charities.



The church has been able to provide materially for families in need and repay those who have lost money through exploitation. We have contributed to the sponsorship of others who wished to pursue certificates or diplomas to advance their education and job prospects.



Despite the poverty all around, God has blessed us with enough finance not only to survive, but to expand and minister to others and share his goodness.

In this day and age of church planting, which we should all surely welcome, one of the greatest needs in our nation is to reach out to the many areas of Glasgow defined by generations of repeated multiple deprivation.

Within these housing schemes are precisely the kind of people that Jesus reached out to in compassion, and in whom he found a receptive response.

Our prayer is that the Holy Spirit would inspire and empower a whole new generation of men and women willing to grasp the wonderful opportunities to reach people for Jesus in and through new church planting ventures.

We wish to say a huge thanks to all the congregations and friends who have upheld our ministry through prayer and financial support. It is very humbling.



## Supporting the work

Anyone wishing to donate to the ongoing costs of the work in Govan, can do so through our Edinburgh office, designated for Govan Free Church or Govan Church Plant.

### Online:

**[freechurch.org/donate](https://freechurch.org/donate)**

Enter 'Govan Free Church' in the description box

### Send a cheque:

The Finance Office,  
Free Church of Scotland  
15 Northbank Street  
The Mound  
Edinburgh, EH1 2LS

[offices@freechurch.org](mailto:offices@freechurch.org)  
0131 226 5286

*Please use only the Edinburgh contact information for donations.  
Thank you!*

And finally a word from Betty, who is a Govan hero and who writes as a self-confessed atheist...



**Betty**

I am Betty and I've been in Govan most of my days. I am an atheist and don't believe in God. However I have watched the way the Free Church here have put so much love and care into this community and have to say that Govan is a much better place because of them. Norman and the others always have time for everybody, and never turn anybody away.



*Wish you were here!*

**We'd love to hear from you**

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