

Connect

SUMMER 2023

**THE JOINT MAGAZINE OF
BRIGHTONS, BLACKBRAES &
SHIELDHILL AND MUIRAVONSIDE
PARISH CHURCHES**

Contents

Message from the Manse.....	1	Girls' Brigade.....	24
Pastoral Assistant's Message.....	2	<i>Explorers</i>	
Brightons Contacts.....	4	<i>Juniors</i>	25
<i>Congregational Roll Update</i>		<i>Brigaders</i>	26
Team Updates at Brightons.....	5	Boys' Brigade.....	27
<i>Discipleship, Community Outreach</i>		<i>Anchor Boys</i>	
<i>Pastoral Care</i>	7	<i>Juniors</i>	29
<i>Communications</i>	8	<i>Company</i>	30
<i>Property H&S</i>	9	Presbytery Mission Plan Update.....	32
<i>Finance</i>	10	<i>General Assembly Update</i>	
Brightons News.....	11	Blackbraes and Shieldhill lw	
<i>The Guild</i>		Muiravonside.....	35
<i>Info on Hall Lets, CAP</i>	12	<i>Locum Minister</i>	
<i>Fellowship Groups,</i>	14	<i>News from the World Churches</i>	36
<i>Friends of Jesus</i>	15	<i>The Walk of Faith</i>	37
<i>Wednesday Book Group</i>		<i>Coincidence or God's Providence</i>	41
<i>Praise Band</i>	16	<i>The Greatest Price Ever Paid</i>	42
<i>Interviews with...Dixee Spencer</i>	17	Slamannan News.....	43
<i>Church Golf Outing</i>	19	<i>Martha's Pantry</i>	
Sunday School.....	20	WordSearch.....	45
<i>Beginners</i>		Events and Services.....	Back Page
<i>Juniors, Triple S, Flaim</i>	21		
<i>WFI, Israel & Palestine Trip</i>	22		



Communion Sunday - 4th June 2023 **at all three congregations**

"Do this in remembrance of me"

As a member of the Church of Jesus Christ, we welcome you to accept our Lord's invitation to share in the Sacrament of Holy Communion.

Brightons

Message from the Manse

BY SCOTT BURTON

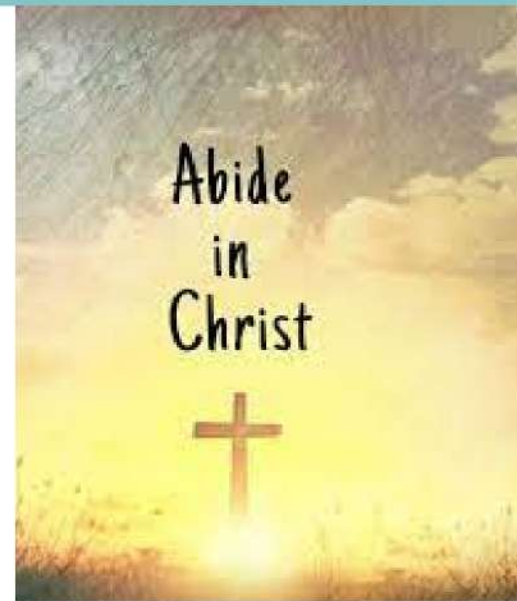
As I write this message, I'm just getting over a nasty bug that went through the whole manse family, particularly affecting both Gill and myself, such that our energy levels are still very low a week after symptoms began. And by the time you read this, it will be near the end of May and we'll all be looking ahead to June's Communion service and anticipating the summer months of rest and sunshine (hopefully!).

With these events in mind, I've been mulling over the need for rest, for changing our plans, and for allowing space for others and God to play a greater part. This past week, we couldn't have got through it without family rallying around us to give us rest – but we had to be vulnerable enough to

ask for help, which is so hard in a society that makes us feel like we just need to keep on keeping on.

I was also looking forward to preaching on the next part of Joel, chapter 2, but that was replaced by a Testimony Sunday at Brightons – and wow, what a Sunday! So much encouragement and all the hymns fitted perfectly, like they were meant to be for that service anyway, and all tying in with the theme of our journeys with the Lord. If you missed it, it's worth listening back to Sunday 23rd April on YouTube or our website.

So, as we approach another summer, let's make space for rest and vulnerability, and time with family and the Lord. Let's abide in Him (John 15 – worth reading that again!) and in the good things He has given us to enjoy. Because from that place of rest, abiding, vulnerability, savouring



we can then become the fruitful disciples He calls us to be in the months ahead.

For let us not forget, the year ahead is going to bring massive change, predominantly in the form of the Upper Braes Churches becoming a single congregation sometime in 2024. That is going to bring a measure of grief to some of us, challenge and change to all, but hopefully a new sense of purpose and togetherness as well. To be ready for this, we need to take time to rest, to grow closer to the Lord and to allow His Spirit and creation

to restore us for the journey ahead. He also gives us Communion for these very purposes, that in the sharing of the Sacrament we receive grace, His power, to uphold our faith and see us through to those quiet waters and green pastures where He refreshes our very souls (Psalm 23:1-3; again worth re-reading).

May we all know a close walk with the Lord this summer and His refreshing hand upon us.

Love to one and all,
Scott



Pastoral Assistant's Message

BY IAN BAILLIE



What Did Jesus Mean by 'Take Care of My Sheep'?

After Jesus' resurrection, he met with his disciples on the shore of the Sea of Galilee and had a meal with them. Afterward, he took Peter aside and three times asked Peter if he loved him. Three times Peter answered in the affirmative. And all three times Jesus responded with some variation of the command to care for his sheep.

Shepherding sheep is an unfamiliar practice to many of us in more industrialised parts of the world. Yet the picture of shepherds and sheep is tightly woven into the Scriptures. Probably the most familiar of the psalms is Psalm 23, a psalm picturing a shepherd leading his sheep and providing for them.

A shepherd's role is to provide the needed care for a flock of sheep. The shepherd will protect his flock from predators and thieves. He will ensure that they have access to food and water. And he will tend to them when they are sick or have strayed from the flock. The shepherd's life is tightly bound to his sheep. And the sheep are dependent on the shepherd to care for them. There are many different species of domesticated sheep, but what they all have in common is that they need human intervention to thrive. Jesus was fond of using analogies that would be familiar to those he spoke to. And the people of his day and place were very familiar with shepherds and sheep. So, using them as an example of his relationship with his followers would be very illustrative. Much more so than it is now in a

time and place where shepherding is much less common. Jesus' most extensive use of this analogy of shepherd and sheep comes in John 10: 1-18. Here Jesus identifies himself as "the good shepherd". A shepherd who is known and trusted by his sheep. Who provides them with pasture and all they need for their wellbeing. And the shepherd will protect them from harm, to the point of laying down his life for them.

Jesus' sheep in this illustration are those who know and trust him. Those who listen to his voice. And who follow him where he leads.

In John 10, Peter was one of the sheep that Jesus, as the good shepherd, was caring for. But Jesus was leaving. And some of those sheep he had cared for would need to take on the role of shepherd. The analogy of shepherd and sheep breaks down here because real sheep never become shepherds. But it is still a useful illustration.

What was it Peter was tasked with doing? It was to feed Jesus' lambs the little ones who needed the most care. It was to take care of his sheep, providing for their needs and protection. And it was to feed his sheep, making sure they had a steady diet of good grass and water.

In essence, Jesus was commissioning Peter to take on the role that Jesus himself had been filling for the past three years. Peter was not expected to fully step

into Jesus' place; that was the role of the Holy Spirit. And the sheep did not become Peter's flock, they remained Jesus' sheep. But Peter was called to take care of those sheep for Jesus.

Jesus, when he said, "Take care of My sheep" didn't say "It's the Minister's job". He made it a job for all of us to do, visiting, sending a card, picking up the phone, delivering flowers, helping where we can. For ideas please contact me.



Brightons Contacts

Minister - Rev Scott Burton
Session Clerk - Judith Norton
Depute Session Clerk - Jean Meek
Pastoral Assistant - Ian Baillie
Clerk to Deacons' Court - Malcolm Lewis

scott.burton@churchofscotland.org.uk
sessionclerk@brightonschurch.org.uk
deputeclerk@brightonschurch.org.uk
ianb@brightonschurch.org.uk
clerk@brightonschurch.org.uk

Communications Team
currently Minister
communications@brightonschurch.org.uk

Community Outreach Team
Maralyn Stirling and Roy Graham
outreach@brightonschurch.org.uk

Discipleship Team
currently Minister
discipleship@brightonschurch.org.uk

Pastoral Care Team
Sandra Anderson
pastoral@brightonschurch.org.uk

Property Team
Gordon Scott
property@brightonschurch.org.uk

Up & Coming Team
Carolyn McEwan and Keith Wansbrough
upandcoming@brightonschurch.org.uk

Finance Team
Convener - Pat Paterson / Treasurer - Sharon Glass: treasurer@brightonschurch.org.uk

Church Office: 01324 713855

General Enquires: info@brightonschurch.org.uk

Hall bookings: lets@brightonschurch.org.uk

Our website is also full of resources and information, including a church calendar, hall booking forms, news updates and much more.

Congregational Roll Update



NEW MEMBERS

January

Jamie McIntosh
Catherine McIntosh

DEATHS

December 2022

Peter Lees
Tom Isdale

February 2023

Jean Macrae

March

Mary Arneil
Netta Oliver

April

Margaret Henderson

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms...if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."

Team Updates at Brightons

Discipleship

BY SCOTT BURTON

Our team's purpose is: "To assist the congregation in developing their Christian life through praying, learning and expressing faith in action."

We continue to support behind the scenes in a variety of ways, with an Alpha course being run last year followed by Grace course, which saw some young men really grow in their faith in the Lord Jesus, and it's a delight to see them around church. We hope to see many in the church family draw alongside them to encourage them week by week.

At present, we are trialling a new resource called Safar, which comes from the Iranian Church. There are 12-14 people involved and all are finding benefit in it, both for themselves and for future discipleship.

We do plan to revise the material very slightly then make it more widely available.

The 2021 and 2022 Huddles are now meeting for combined follow-up meetings, where we can support one another in answering the questions: "what is God saying to you?" and "what will you do about it?" We hope to see a new Huddle start sometime later this year.

As well as the above, there is the ongoing work of the various other groups, like Fellowship Groups, the Guild, Friends of Jesus, Friendship Plus, Gender Based Violence Team, some of whom have reported in this issue. There are also the various avenues for support for prayer and Bible reading. For all the leaders and volunteers involved in these

ministries we are greatly thankful.

We look forward to Heather McManus taking over as Convener in the coming months and to where God will lead us in the year ahead.

Community Outreach

BY MARALYN STIRLING AND ROY GRAHAM

Mission Jar Fund

The balance as at 23 March stands at £252.69. Once again, we are grateful to everyone who collects their loose change and so supports our current beneficiary *Camphill, Blairdrummond*.

Belong/Friends of Quarry Park (FoQP)

The Easter Fun Day, which took place on 25th March proved to be a great success.

BELONG, partnered

with Friends of Quarry Park, provided lots of activities in the park and also in the church premises. Brightons church offered refreshments, free of charge, to all who attended this worthwhile, joint community outreach venture.

FoQP intend to hold a Community Fete on 19th August in Quarry Park and Community Outreach will be involved in this event. More details to follow later.

Thursday Coffee Morning

This takes place from 10am – 11.30am in the Rankine Hall. Great chat - refreshments excellent too! Why not come along, you will be made very welcome.

Small groups of children from Wallacestone Primary School Nursery visit with their teachers. They always enjoy chatting to the “older ones”! These visits prove popular with the children and the staff.

The staff at the Nursery gave an open invitation to folks to visit the nursery on a Tuesday from 1pm – 2pm. It is amazing to see the range of activities available. Great fun too for visitors! If you would like to volunteer, please speak to Maralyn Stirling, Roy Graham or Margaret Scott.

Pre-Fives

This group meets every Tuesday during term time – morning sessions 9.30am -11am and afternoons from 1pm until 2.30pm. Mums, Dads, Grannies, Grandpas come along with their babies/toddlers and have fun and fellowship. Around 40 families attend. Again, volunteers to join the team will always be made very welcome.

CrossReach

At Brightons Parish Church we support the work of CrossReach primarily at Christmas, when we sell cards and calendars and gifts via the CrossReach shop.

However, like lots of other worthwhile charities, CrossReach is entering a time of crisis with less funding. An Emergency Appeal for their life-changing Daisy Chain Service has been launched. Robbie's Journey may be viewed online at www.crossreach.org.uk/robbies-journey Robbie, 9, has a difficult home life, with his Dad in prison and Mum struggling with alcoholism. He has also witnessed a lot of violence and drug use but none of it is his fault. The CrossReach Outdoor Nurture Group has been able to offer Robbie support, structure and development opportunities to guide him through a really tough period of his life. Continuing to support the work of CrossReach could turn around a life like Robbie's. This article is to raise awareness of the fantastic work of CrossReach (Church of Scotland – Social Care Council). Further information available on notice board in rear vestibule.

Community Litter Pick

On Saturday 1st April approximately 20 people (Church and Community participants) gave an hour of their time to clean up Quarry Park and the surrounding streets. Over 20 bags of litter were collected for pick up by Falkirk Council Waste Department on the following Monday. The clean-up was publicised on "The Keep Scotland Beautiful" web site as well as on "Friends of Quarry Park" Facebook page.

If you have any ideas of areas near you that could do with a spring clean, please get in touch with Roy Graham or Maralyn Stirling. Or even better why not borrow a litter picker and bag and take it with you on your favourite walk.

Next Litter Pick possibly August.

Christians Against Poverty (CAP)

Fund Raising. Request for help from Fiona at FV CAP.

Helen and Mark Laing, from Stirling Baptist Church, are walking the West Highland Way next month and are using it to raise funds for CAP Forth Valley.

Most of our funding comes from partner churches and individual donors but that doesn't quite cover all of our costs, so this type of fundraiser is very welcome. The link is:

www.justgiving.com/page/helen-laing-1681664935700

Volunteering

Currently Brightons Church has 3 CAP volunteers providing befriending and prayer help. If interested in helping please contact Roy Graham.



Pastoral Care Team

BY IAN BAILLIE

The team has been around for many years in our church and is presently convened by Sandra Anderson and consists of her husband John, Robert and Jean Callahan, Sheila MacLennan and our Pastoral Assistant, Ian Baillie. They meet regularly and have responsibility for the Annual Bereavement

Service and Book of Remembrance and co-ordinating the Visitors Team, cards and flowers being sent in good times and bad, care home contact and Christmas and Easter cards to our members in care and other situations.

Many of our elderly, infirm and housebound benefit from a one-to-one visitor from Church to be their contact when then cannot get along to join us in the sanctuary. The team is assisted by others who arrange the flower distribution and co-ordinate the flowers being placed in Church and the recording and distribution of service DVDs and CDs.

We are very grateful for the many volunteers who deliver flowers, make and send out cards and provide regular visits to many of our congregation. We would be grateful to hear from anyone else interested in helping with these and other congregational pastoral matters and in the first instance please contact Sandra Anderson.

Jesus said “take care of my sheep” and the flocks are only going to get bigger as more of our members become aged and housebound and also with the proposed union within the upper braes churches there is much to be done in Christ’s name within our Pastoral Care.



Communications

BY JAMES FALCONER

A definition of communication: the imparting or exchanging of information by speaking, writing, or using some other medium, and Ephesians 4:29 (NIV) says ‘Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.’ What about communication at Brightons?

Well, our Communications Team comprises 13 members covering 16 communications areas. We have recently had someone from Blackbraes & Shieldhill join the team. Rev.Scott is Interim Convener for the Communications Team and would dearly love to find someone to take on that role – if you fancy the job, go speak to him. We meet about 4 times per year.

So, we cover a wide range of communication areas, as I have said, imparting or exchanging information which we believe is helpful for building up according to (different) needs. Much of the communication happens without any fuss and requires a lot of backroom organisation.

Here’s the full list: Sunday Newssheet, Service Streaming, Service CD/DVD, Sermon Uploads, Sermon Podcast, Website, Social Media, Google Calendar, Hall



Lets, Connect magazine, Communion Card, Easter/Christmas Cards, Welcome Pack, Internal Notice Boards, External Notice Boards and Banners, Office Technology

Maybe that extensive list surprises you. Maybe you do not access the full range of communications. Maybe there's something you'd like to take a closer look at. Maybe there's something missing (let us know if there is).

What we've done recently:

- you'll have seen our church magazine change name as we start to work with other churches in Upper Braes
- we've got over 220 Sunday sermons on our website as videos and audio podcasts – a vast library of teaching

- Sunday newssheet: we've been trying out different formats
- our Website changes regularly – front page has topical photo and Bible text; daily news updates (from our social media posts) and prayers from Prayer for the Braes Facebook page; the church calendar is always kept up to date
- new welcome pack has been produced
- banners in front of the church highlighting our events.

As we move into ever more changing times for our church, and as the nature of 'doing church' changes, communication is critical. Please pray for the Communications Team that we continue to find effective ways of engaging congregation and community, and that, in so doing, people may be drawn to learn more about Jesus Christ.

Property and Health & Safety

BY GORDON SCOTT

The congregation's properties continue to remain in a Category D status. This means we can only do works to ensure the integrity and safety of buildings. This requires the regular inspection and testing of firefighting/alarm systems, fire doors, emergency lighting etc. Ongoing maintenance of church grounds also continue behind the scenes, and I am truly grateful for the efforts of many to make it all happen.

The biggest change since last issue is the purchase of a new manse, home for Scott and the family. Its location has moved the minister into the community, and with more surrounding properties with families should be better for the younger manse family members too. If you want to get involved in supporting the team, please get in touch with me.

Finance Team

BY PAT PATERSON

In January of this year we convened a new Finance Team. We will meet four times a year to discuss ongoing financial matters in our Church. Our main role is the support of our very busy Treasurer, Sharon Glass.

We are still in the position of only being able to carry out essential property work on our building due to constraints relating to the Presbytery Mission Plan, however, funds are available when work can commence on various building issues.

Our Annual Business Meeting is still to be confirmed, once the accounts have passed through the various stages of being checked. At this meeting our Annual Accounts will be available for viewing by the congregation. These accounts will then be lodged with the Church of

Scotland and OSCR.

We are aware that the cost-of-living crisis is still very much of great concern for many people and would like to thank everyone for their continued support and generosity at this time.



Brightons News

The Guild

BY ANNE SMITH

We have just completed session 2022/2023 and a very interesting session it proved to be. We did not know how many members would come back after a two year absence. However, although our numbers were down this year, we still had enough in attendance to create the same feeling of friendship and fellowship that we have always enjoyed within the Guild. Guild week this year will commence on 19 November when you will hear about our Projects for this year. BEAT is an eating disorders charity in this country, supporting people with an eating disorder pget the treatment they need and deserve. STARCHILD working in Uganda believes that every child deserves to be loved, cared for, clothed, fed and educated.

This Easter we decided to try something new and organised a fundraising event to make some money for Guild funds and also to decorate the church for Easter. The congregation supported us in donating to the purchase of plants; members of the Guild purchased the plants and decorated the church. The plants were on show between Palm Sunday and Easter Day (Holy Week) and were much appreciated by all who came to worship in our sanctuary. On Easter Sunday those who had donated to the display, if they so wished, collected a plant and the remainder (25) were distributed to members of the congregation. This proved very successful and was enjoyed by all.

Our theme for this year is New Wine, New Wineskins. Mark 2:22 tells us: *'And no one pours new wine into old wineskins, otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins.'*

The Guild, like the church is in a period of necessary change. It is so hard to accept the changes in our churches. However, here is the good news, our Guild may be fewer in numbers but we still believe in what the Guild stands for and in the work we are doing both locally and worldwide. As with the wineskins, the old cannot survive in the new and we look forward to the many challenges ahead and with God's guidance we believe we can still make a difference. Our new session commences on Monday 11 September 2023 at 2pm in the Rankine Hall when you will be made very welcome.



NEW WINE,
NEW WINESKINS



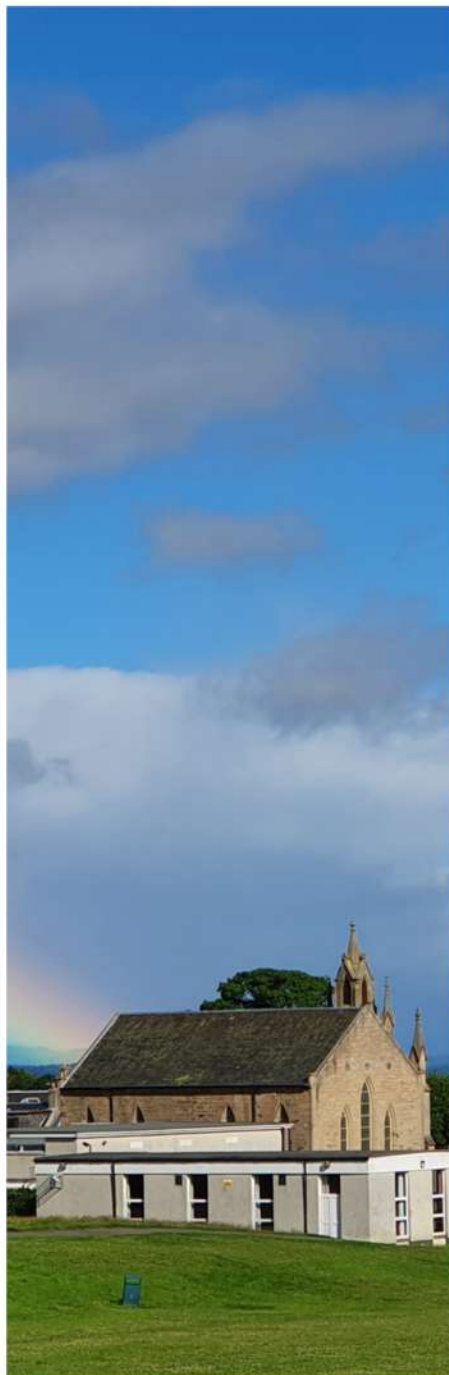
Information for Hall Lets

BY JIM DICK

We now have a dedicated church email address for all enquiries for the use of the church halls:

lets@brightonschurch.org.uk.

I would encourage everyone to use this new address when contacting me.



Christians Against Poverty

BY FIONA WELSH
FORTH VALLEY
DEBT CENTRE

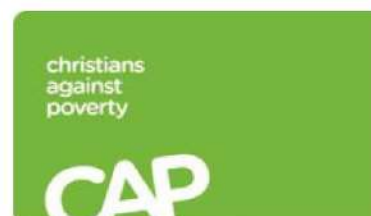
From our Spring Newsletter

Hi everyone,

As I write, we are celebrating 4 years of the Forth Valley CAP Debt Centre! In that time we have seen 100 people and 23 of them have already gone debt free through working with CAP.

In the last year we have seen more people than in previous years and we've given out a lot more emergency aid.

We've also seen people with more complex needs and have been able to help in a number of different ways, some of which are detailed below. Thank you for all your support that enables us to provide this free service.



www.capscotland.org

Peter* came to us for support almost a year ago. The 3 visits were hard, as it was apparent that Peter's income wasn't enough to cover all of his basic costs. That meant that even if Peter went debt free, that he wouldn't be able to remain debt free.

He decided to delay things until he could increase his income. Day to day life was hard, with creditors bombarding him with emails and phone calls and he was eventually evicted from his rented home and housed in temporary accommodation.

On a number of occasions we helped Peter with emergency aid and prayed for him, and God is good! Not only has he provided a job, but in Peter's words, "It's the job I wanted". Because of this Peter can now deal with his debt and stay out of debt. He thanked us for being there for him and is looking forward to a fresh start. *name changed to protect identity.

Practical ways that we have helped:

We've provided:

Supermarket vouchers
Utility vouchers
Help to delay eviction
Help to budget

We've referred people to:

The Employability and Training Unit Social Inclusion Worker

We've Signposted people to:

Citizens Advice
Social Security
Counselling
Wellbeing cafes
Community Larders
Other church-based services

NEWS

Since our last Newsletter another 4 people have gone Debt Free! We celebrate with them at reaching this milestone and pray that they will be able to manage tight budgets during the cost-of-living crisis.

We meet for prayer on Zoom one Saturday each month between 9.45-10.30am.

We now have a presence at The Haven (Stirling), the Jobcentre Plus (Falkirk) and the Tilly Larder (Clacks). This gives people using these facilities the opportunity to talk to one of us about our service.

VOLUNTEER VACANCIES

Debt coach - 8 hrs per week. Own transport required to visit clients across the Forth Valley area. Training provided.

Community Link Worker

2 hrs per week in Stirling or Clacks to help generate new referrals. Training is provided.

Please contact **Fiona Welsh** for more information. Email: fionawelsh@capuk.org
Tel: 07395 281788



Appointments
currently
available in
May

Call 0800 328 0006
to make an appointment



Fellowship Groups

BY TOM NIMMO

Our Fellowship Groups are now in the run-up to the summer break – although it's never too late to join.

These Groups meet every two weeks – either in someone's home or in the small hall at Brightons Church.

We also have a Group that meets via Zoom, the computer-based programme that came to the fore at the height of the Covid Pandemic.

The format may vary from group to group – sometimes studying a book of the Bible or a particular topic – sometimes using small study booklets and, in recent years, the various DVD presentations that are available.

One of the benefits of these Fellowship Groups is that everyone has a contribution to make – no matter whether a new

Christian or someone more mature in the Faith.

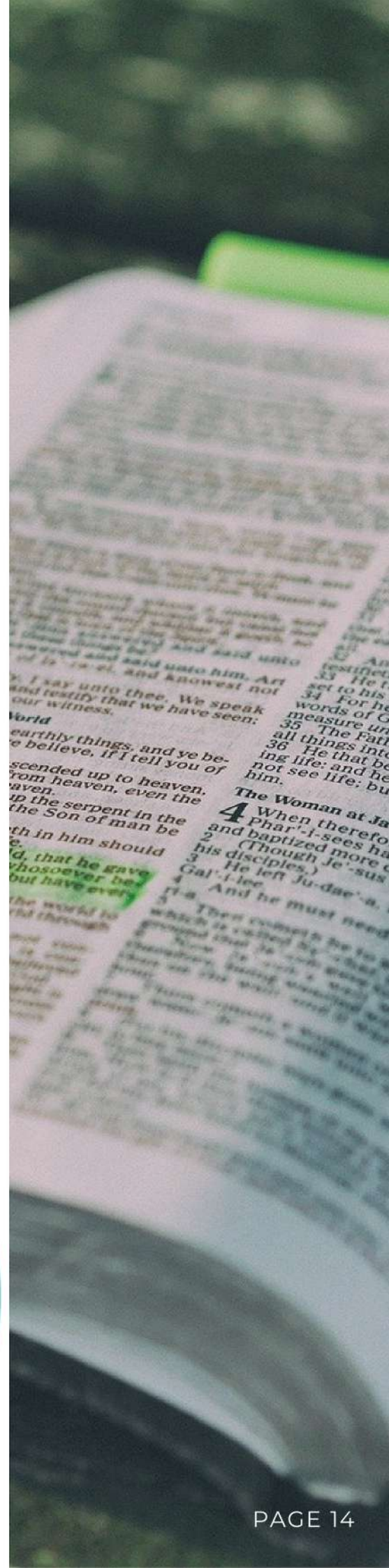
Tea or coffee is normally provided and folks have the opportunity to share any blessings they may have received from the Lord – any answers to prayer – and also to share any problems – and to receive prayer for these problems if they so wish.

More information can be obtained by phoning or emailing myself via the office.



We can make our plans, but the Lord determines our steps.

Proverbs 16:9 NLT



Friends of Jesus

BY WENDY DICK

We have been continuing our theme of 'Friends of God' and been learning about Abraham, Moses, Noah and Nehemiah this session.

Each meeting we collect loose change in jar for a charity. As we had collected £100, our Friends voted on which charity to give the money to. Prospects (PAS) won their vote and we handed over £100 to Jennifer Maden, Prospects Administrative Assistant. We are now collecting our change for 'The Salvation Army'.

On Saturday 22nd April we held a Tartan Tea fundraiser to raise money for Prospects Across Scotland. We were delighted with the huge support from everyone and are very thankful to all who came along to support us and for all those who baked and donated items for our stall. To date we have raised

£1000.00 which is an amazing amount and will help further the good work of Prospects supporting, training and resourcing church groups for adults with learning difficulties like our Friends of Jesus Group.

As a group we were very touched by the kindness of Dorothy McAdoo, who took a keen interest in our Friends of Jesus Group. Recently at her funeral they had a collection and Dorothy's wishes were that the amount raised would be donated to benefit her 'Friends'. Her son, John kindly donated a total of £550 in memory of his dear Mum, Dorothy. We are very grateful for this generous gift. Please continue to pray for this special group of people.



Wednesday Book Group

BY MARION GRAHAM

We are approaching the end of our first year of study of 'faith books'.

Following our first book 'Digging for Diamonds' we moved on to 'How to Pray' by Pete Greig of 24/7 Prayer.

We meet on the second Wednesday of the month and commit to reading a chapter or two for discussion at the next meeting. It is a great way to dig deeper into our faith and develop friendships on the way.

We will be taking a break during July but plan to restart in August.

If you are interested and want to find out more then contact Nadia Cowan via the church office.

Nadia will fill you in on the details.

You will be made most welcome.

Praise Band

BY JAMES FALCONER

So, you'll see and hear us most Sundays leading worship. We are very blessed at Brightons with a wide range of people with musical talents, including organists and choir.

The Praise Band have a wide taste in worship music styles, and we are always looking for new songs to enhance our service – Rev Scott also often comes up with new ones that he feels will work well even though they may challenge us musically.

We are also fortunate to have a number of people who can fulfil different band roles, especially those involved in the keyboard rota. In recent months we have been able to have a band lead worship at Brightons and at Slamannan at the same time – two bands for the price of one!

We try to practise on a Wednesday evening including the worship



items for the following Sunday and trying out new songs that we have come across or that Scott has challenged us with. We also take time to run through some of our own favourites. We are always conscious that we come together, not primarily for our pleasure, but to serve in leading worship that is directed to the Lord – perhaps summed up in 2 songs 'Jesus be the centre' and "When the music fades (heart of worship)'.

There is always space for others to get involved so if you or anyone you know would like to find out more about the band and maybe get involved then please speak to one of us, even if it's just coming along on a Wednesday evening to 'practise' with us. As we try to expand our numbers, we are especially looking for vocalists so, if you like singing, come and have a word with us.

Interviews with.....

BY EDNA OLIVER

A new magazine deserves a new series, and this is the first of a series of interviews which I hope to carry out across the joint churches.

We are starting with Brightons, and my interviewee is Dixcee Spencer - known to most of us at Brightons as the leader of the Senior Sunday School (Triple S).

You don't have to converse long with Dixcee to realise that she is not Scottish! She is from North Dakota US but has been in this country for 20 years. Before we look into why she came to Scotland, can I first give a plea on her behalf about Triple S. Dixcee does receive fantastic help with this from Sharon Glass and Marion and Roy Graham, but she would greatly value more helpers and/or leader who can commit to being available once or twice a month. At the moment, Dixcee is

required at Triple S nearly every week that Sunday School is on. She wants to tell you that they are a great bunch of kids, and also that there is material to follow – so it's not so hard!

But why did Dixcee leave North America in 2002 to come to live in Scotland? We have to go back to the fact that she went to law school at William Mitchell College of Law in St Paul, Minnesota and her brother was doing his doctorate at the University of Minnesota. Through her brother she met Doug, who came from Coventry in England to do a post-doctorate in inorganic Chemistry. They were both in their mid-20s and had similar interests such as climbing (both indoor and outdoor). To cut a long story short they became a couple and when it was time for Doug to go back to England Dixcee was

ready to be called to the bar (i.e. start to practice law), and a decision had to be made. This was obviously quite a turning point for Dixcee and her family, who all prayed about the decision and as we know she decided to come to this country and to marry Doug. So why Scotland? Dixcee and Doug came to Scotland when Doug became employed as a Senior Development Chemist with Avecia in Grangemouth which is now Fujifilm Imaging Colorants. Doug now leads the Production Technology Group.



As a couple, they travelled extensively- Peru, New Zealand, Europe and all over the States. About nine years later, Zoe came along (now 11) and then Archie (9). As a family they love the outdoors, being keen hillwalkers, campers, mountain bikers and paddle boarders. Dixcee had developed a love of travelling from an early age, as she and her brother (and their mother when she was able) often accompanied their father on work trips, not just in the US but all over.

But to go back to Dixcee's work life- yes she is a lawyer but her job is quite specific. She is a partner at Anderson Strathern in Edinburgh and is a leading lawyer on real estate matters in relation to clean energy projects (including wind, solar, wave and tidal) from both the developer and landowner perspective. An interesting and important job indeed. At first living in Linlithgow then

Polmont, they have lived in Maddiston for 9 years and that is the length of time they have been coming to Brightons Church. Dixcee gained from her family not only a love of travelling and a love of the outdoors but also a personal Christian faith and feels that both her parents were great role models in this regard.

Whenever there were big decisions to be made, or crises to be dealt with, the answer was always to 'pray about it'. Prayer in the family was natural: every meal time and at lots of other times too there were family prayers.

When Dixcee was 4, her family moved from the village of Langdon, North Dakota to Minot North Dakota, her dad's job was on the other side of the state, and he had to rent an apartment, seeing the family only at weekends. This lasted for 7 years but rather than separating the

family it seemed to bring them even closer. There were daily phone calls and weekends became very special as were the work trips when they travelled as a family. Her mum worked as a teacher, but Dixcee never felt any lack of family life, in fact it was the opposite. Sadly, Dixcee's dad passed away in May 2019, from cancer caused by asbestos exposure (mesothelioma).

It came on very suddenly, right after a wonderful 4 week family holiday in the States, a holiday which is very precious to remember, as her dad died nine months later. Then Covid hit, and it was of course difficult to meet up with her mum, but Dixcee managed to go over in October 2021 and her mum travelled over herself for Christmas 2022, which was a special time. Dixcee says that she depends on God for all aspects of her life.

When she worked for her previous firm, her boss suggested she went over to the States and work from there, which was a wonderful opportunity, and one she sees as a God-given holiday before her dad became ill in 2019.

Dixcee's parents both attended a Mennonite Church as did Dixcee till she was 4, when they moved to Minot and attended a Baptist Church. A Mennonite church is not like a Mennonite community where women all wear a special cap and dress very plainly. In fact, Dixcee says the opposite is true- everyone wears their Sunday best!

Church has always been a positive part of Dixcee's life, and she says that the services in Brightons are not so different from the Mennonite services. Of course, in the US there are many very large churches with hundreds attending, but she was never used to that, although her brother now attends

such a church and enjoys it.

The family manage to see Dixcee's mum twice a year, and these are precious times, but Dixcee and Doug are settled here in Scotland.

If, like me, you didn't know too much about Dixcee or Doug, then I hope this article has helped. I had a lovely visit, and I was very blessed to hear their story!

Church Golf Outing

BY BILLY RANKINE

The next golf outing to the 12 hole course at Gogarburn golf club will be held on Friday 23rd June 2023. In recent years this has usually involved players from Polmont Old and Brightons but with the changes taking place in the Braes area, it seems logical to open it up to anyone with a connection to any of the local churches who fancies a game

of golf where the chat is as important as the standard of play. We usually play in teams of 3 or 4 and there are prizes for the best team Stableford score, best individual net score, nearest the pin and longest drive.

The cost will be around £32 including coffee and a filled roll before play and a 2 course lunch served after the golf.

Please contact Billy Rankine via the church office by Sunday 4th June if you're interested in playing or just looking for more information about the golf.



Sunday School

BY ALIE DRACKFORD

SUNDAY SCHOOL COORDINATOR

Hi this is Alie Drackford, and I am the Sunday School coordinator at Brightons. We are extremely blessed at Brightons to have 6 Sunday school groups that run from birth right up until our young people leave school. We have a creche where our parents can still watch the service on line while their little ones play, Beginners for nursery and P1 ages, Juniors for P2-P4, Triple S (Senior Sunday School) for P5-7, FLAIM (Forever living alive in me) for S1-3 and Wait for It for our senior aged youth (S4-6). However, if your young person doesn't sit snugly within these categories then we will always accommodate to suit their needs.

Our aim is to teach and guide our young people through the many stages of their faith and become mature disciples. Each group has leaders and helpers who assist in this process. We are always looking for more people to come and join in even if it is just once a month to give some of our regulars a much-needed break it would always be welcome. If you have any questions regarding Sunday school, please come and speak to me or email at sundayschool@brightonschurch.org.uk.

Here is what each group has been up to:

Beginners (age 3 to P1)

BY MAGGY DICK

At Beginners we have had fun hearing about Easter and what Jesus did for us all.

We have a regular number between 6-8 each Sunday morning with 12 on the register.

All children from the age of 3 years are welcome to join us in Beginners.

Since then, we have been learning about stories Jesus told and miracles He performed. We are finishing with 'God loves it when I sing', so expect lots of noise on that Sunday Morning.

We have six moving up to Juniors after the summer holidays.

We are looking forward to seeing everyone at the BBQ next month.



Juniors (P2-P4)

BY JUDITH NORTON

At Juniors, this session we have started using a new online resource, 'Energize', from Urban Saints. We have found that it offers a good choice of age-appropriate teaching materials and related games and crafts.

We have started with the series 'Encounters with Jesus' which explores the stories of people who encountered Jesus face-to-face or in person. So far, we have learned about John the Baptist, Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, Mary and Martha, Judas and Pilate.

On our wall in the Rankine Hall, we have made a road entitled 'On The Road With Jesus' and every week we attach a picture as a record of that week's story. Do have a look at it one Sunday when you come in for tea/coffee after the morning service.



Triple S (P5-P7)

BY DIXCEE SPENCER

At Triple S over the last few months, we have been learning about the life of Jesus. We talked about what Jesus' life growing up was like. We have also continued to learn how to look up scriptures in our bibles, learn the books of the New Testament and we have also looked at different versions of the Bible to see how the same verse can be phrased differently but the same. We have also discovered Diary of a Disciple: Luke. It is the book of Luke in the same style as Diary of a Wimpy Kid, a popular book series for kids. We're all enjoying these different versions and new ways of learning God's word!

FLAIM

Forever Living Alive In Me
(S1-S3)

BY DOUG AND
RACHEL GILMOUR

Since Christmas at FLAIM we've been studying the Life of Jesus, studying stories of the New Testament and covering not just core topics of Salvation and Prayer, but also asking "Why?". Why did Jesus perform miracles of healing, raising the dead, with food & drink, and in nature? Of course, God had Jesus perform miracles to show his character, demonstrate his power and authority over all things, even death itself, demonstrated at Easter. Flaimers participated in Buddy Sunday in February and supported the Belong Easter Fun Day at the end of March. Two of them also joined the Israel Palestine trip! Thanks to them and their parents for their continued commitment to FLAIM! In the coming summer term, as well as welcoming three new young people to our group, we intend to

look at the Easter events, the whys and what they mean for us as Jesus' followers today. And we plan some social events making use of the nice weather! Please pray for the group and the leaders as we try to communicate the gospel in meaningful and relevant ways. If you are aware of other young people connected with or among the Braes Churches who would like to join FLAIM please do get in touch via

flaim@brightonschurch.org.uk.

Wait For It (S4+)

BY KEITH WANSBROUGH AND CAROLYN MCEWAN
Wait for it are currently waiting for exams to finish to plan their next meet up. We hold them all in our prayers at this challenging and demanding time in their lives.

Much love and Blessings from all of the Sunday School Leaders and Helpers

Israel & Palestine Trip Review

BY THE TEAM

In February this year, a group of six young people from Brightons Parish Church embarked on a trip to Israel and Palestine after three and a half years of preparation and fundraising. The trip was organised to help us develop our Christian faith by visiting this special place, as well as to help us understand more about the current culture and what is being done by the Church of Scotland and its partners. It was an amazing opportunity and we would thoroughly recommend it to anyone! Here are some of our reflections on what we brought home from the trip.

Megan, S6 – The most memorable experience for me was visiting Capernaum. The foundations of the synagogue Jesus preached in still remain, and being so physically close to a place where Jesus spent lots of his time was immensely special. As a whole this



trip has encouraged me to be more open in sharing my faith with others.

Ruth, S6 – I especially enjoyed visiting the Church of the Primacy of Saint Peter where Jesus called two of his disciples, Peter and Simon. We sat beside the church, looking out onto the Sea of Galilee. This was an opportunity to stop and reflect on this story, which really helped to deepen my faith.

Leonie, S6 – My most lasting memory was the time we spent at the Tent of Nations, a Christian family-run farm in Palestine. For the last 31 years the Israeli State have been trying to take the Nassar's family land away from them but despite the difficult circumstances the family

have been using their experience to inspire others to achieve a possible outcome through active, non-violent resistance, refusing to be anyone's enemies. I would encourage everyone reading to look up their website and be inspired.

Iona, S5 – My favourite part of our trip was visiting the Sea of Galilee. We spent some time sitting by the water, which was very peaceful, and a good time to reflect that we were in the place where Jesus had walked on water and fed the 5000. Overall, I think the trip helped to develop and strengthen my faith, and it's an experience which I will never forget!

Matthew, S4 – The trip was jam-packed, full of new information which made it difficult to take everything in. I learned many lessons after visiting numerous impactful sites, one of which was to take the time to stop and think of the things the group and I had experienced together. Now I

incorporate time daily for God and am so grateful for the opportunity, it has been life changing.

Isla, S3 – What stood out to me the most about the trip was getting to go to the Garden Tomb because most of the time in bibles and books you don't get a proper image of what things were like and often have to imagine. But seeing the tomb in person helped me realise that it's not anything like in the illustrations we often see. Seeing all the

places like that really helped me understand the life of Jesus in more depth.

We'd like to say a big thank you to our church family for their generosity, as well as to those in the Church of Scotland nationally and in Israel and Palestine who supported us and gave of their time.



Girls' Brigade

BY SANDRA BLAIR

1ST POLMONT GIRLS' BRIGADE CAPTAIN

Explorers (P1-P3)

Since our last article we have continued to follow the theme "The Jungle & The Rainforest"

Each week we start our evenings learning about Jesus by listening to various stories from the Bible. Over the weeks we learned about Creation, Noah and The Ark, Jonah & Whale, The Good Samaritan, Parable of Lost Sheep, Moses, Daniel In Lions' Den, Joseph, The Christmas and Easter story to name just a few.

The girls have iced biscuits, made Lions using fruit and pancakes, created various animals to go on our Jungle frieze in the hall, learned about the Rainforest and

the various layers within it and facts about some of the animals that live in jungle and the rainforest, decorated rainsticks, made binoculars and decorated jungle hats which they wore on parents evening whilst singing and dancing. They also learned about where chocolate comes from and how it is made. We had a taste test and it goes without saying that milk and white chocolate were the favourites, some enjoyed dark chocolate but most did not like tasting cocoa powder!! We also learned about Fairtrade and all the different products and it was great to hear girls coming back the following week saying

Lion Pancakes



Our Rainsticks



Monkey Door Hangers

they had seen some of these items in shops/supermarkets. New action and dance songs have been enjoyed throughout the session and the girls enjoyed participating in jungle animal yoga one evening. We have had lots of fun over the year following this theme.



Sheep Biscuits



Chocolate tasting

Juniors (P4-P7)

BY CHRISTINA MASON



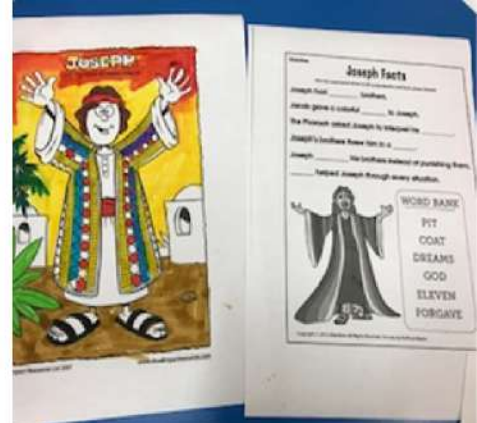
Coffee Evening

Each week we start our evening off by going round our group of girls finding out what they had been up to that week and it is great hearing all their stories and news. The girls chose to look at young people in the Bible for our spiritual section, climate change and how we can help save bumblebees for our educational section. The girls made endangered animals from recycled items they were

Tasting Various Honeys



provided with and it was amazing what they came up with, wrote pledges on what they could do to help with climate change, planted wild flowers in pots to put out in their gardens to attract bees, learned a poem about bumblebees and performed this as a rap at parents evening. Dancing was chosen for their physical badgework and the girls have learned various types of dance throughout the session and it was great to see them working together making up their own dances to several pieces of music they were provided with. In January we held a coffee evening with the Brigaders. The girls were so happy to be involved and really liked selling quizzes and cards they had made for Valentines Day and Easter, (and topping up the cake trays on each table!). As it was Burns Day, that evening some of the girls entertained our visitors at our coffee evening by reciting some of the poems they had been learning at school. Some of the money we collected throughout the session is being donated to Bumblebee Trust for our Service badgework.



Learning About Joseph



Recycled Endangered Animals



Brigaders (S1-S6)

BY MAGGY DICK

We have been exploring different countries this year as part of our Educational badge work. We have looked at Greenland, Greece, Spain and Turkey finding out different facts about them and cooking a meal from each country. Some of the meals we made were Icelandic pancakes, paella, Greek vegetables and potato and it was great preparing these and getting to taste something different.

We heard from two visitors Marion and Nadia what their favourite hymn is and why, we have also spoken about our favourite hymns and chose the Introits for our opening and closing services and we enjoyed joining with the church choir to sing these. The girls also learned a stick drama which was performed at parents' evening.



Greek Vegetables & Potato



Paella

Our physical this year has been playing different games and enjoying time to socialise with each other. Our Christmas night was held at Nandos in Falkirk and January saw us hosting our Coffee Evening along with the Junior girls. It was a great success and we raised over £400. Our thanks go to Rena Kennedy and Graham Bell for putting together our Burns Quiz. It was amazing to see how many words people could make out of the words Robert Burns.



Coffee Evening

Craft



Cross Craft



Boys' Brigade

Anchor Boys (P1-P3)

BY IAN BAILLIE

Another Session has come and gone and the usual activities took place throughout the year including the annual pancake making night where pancakes were topped with all sorts of strange combinations. And after making pancakes for 30 years it was time at our Annual Display to say a fond farewell to the section.



I started as Officer in Charge when taking my son, Christopher to join in 1993 and finished in 2023 with my grandson, Caleb and nephews

Lewis and Ross all involved in the section. At our Display we welcomed along Anne Smith, from whom I took over the Anchor Boys and Jessie Wallace as guests for the evening and Helen MacLeod came along to welcome the boys moving up to the Junior Section.

Mrs Smith presented the boys with their well earned badges and Mrs Wallace presented our special awards to the boys.



Caleb Tripney &
Daniel Dickson (Best Boy)

At the Annual closing parade for GB and BB the church also acknowledged my service with a lovely gift and flowers for Lesley. I can only express my grateful thanks to Sheila Williamson, who will now take over from me and Lillian Wilson (pictured with the boys) who has served with me in the section for 28 years of my 30 years.



Matthew Fyall & Lucas Aitken(Spiritual)



Heath Rehill (Sports Trophy)



Best Group



Juniors (P4-P6)

BY HELEN MACLEOD

The boys have been very busy this term practising their marching.

Unfortunately, they didn't get to the marching competition this year as with so few boys we struggled to get a team together, however, I am sure they would have done extremely well had they attended. We have had some great themed nights – for example, on Shrove Tuesday we had a pancake night (of course!). As well as topping their own pancakes with chocolates and bananas, pancaked themed games they also learned about Lent. We had some really interesting discussions about giving up things we enjoy and take for granted and use the time to reflect on Jesus. We always start off our night with an 'opening service' where we share a message or discuss a passage from the Bible with the boys, making it as relevant as possible to

them to help in their understanding. This term we took advantage of the small hall and used videos from You Tube 'Saddleback Kids'. The boys really enjoyed these videos which are simple and fun. We even acted out 'Jesus heals a man born blind'.

Unfortunately, we missed our parents' night due to me having covid, however we have re-arranged for 12th May as that is an evening everyone can manage. It may not be as polished with the break from before Easter, but I'm really looking forward to presenting the badges to the boys and showing off their achievements to the Parents. This year we are losing Jack Mackrell, Peter Gilmour and Luke Clydesdale to Company Section. We'll really miss them but know they will enjoy Company Section. We are looking forward to welcoming 5 boys from Anchor boys next session. As always, I rely on the support of other officers. This session we were joined by William Wilson

and I would personally like to thank him for his support, company and enthusiasm this session. I'd also like to thank Mr Rankine and Mr Huntley and the officers in the company section who kept Juniors going after Christmas in my absence and of course Lauren Hunter, a young leader, who has been taking the boys through their marching steps.

However, we are going into next session with only one officer over 18 years of age (myself!) and I'm sure you will all understand that this is not sustainable. I am concerned that without some commitment from others to come and join me on a Friday night we will not be able to keep Junior Section going. At the moment this is a very real possibility and therefore I would ask that you give this your prayer and consideration. Being an officer in 1st Polmont BB is an absolute honour and I would encourage anyone who thinks they could contribute in any way to get in touch, I would love to hear from you.



Burns Supper

Company (P7-S6)

BY COLIN HEGGIE

It has certainly been a busy year for the company section! We have continued to have a varied programme for the boys and have included some fun events as well. Before Christmas the boys enjoyed a visit to Asda Distribution Centre in Grangemouth and many thanks to Graeme Taylor for organising and leading this event for us.

We also had our Christmas night out at the Ten Pin Bowling in Camelon before the boys returned to the church to collect the Christmas cards which they delivered throughout the community. Thank you to everyone for helping us raise £280 which was split equally between

company funds and the Falkirk Foodbank.

Before the Easter holidays, the boys were invited to a Falkirk Fury Basketball game which they all really enjoyed. Other highlights of the session included the return of our traditional Burns Supper with Mr Barnes piping in the haggis; the seniors takeover night when the boys planned and organised the full programme; and the battalion turnaBBout event which we attended at Zetland Church in March. We were also visited by two brilliant Krav Maga instructors who taught the boys and staff some Israeli Marshall Arts self-defence moves.

We also completed our 18-hour games marathon in March with two boys continually on

exercise bikes for the event whilst everyone else played sports and games. We covered a total of 570 miles during the event and have raised an amazing £1920. This has helped reduce the cost of our end of session weekend away to The Compass Christian Centre in Glenshee at the end of May. A huge thank you to everyone who has supported us in our fundraising this year.



Games Marathon



The boys have continued to work hard all year with their efforts to gain their badges which are being presented on 19th of May at our display night. Congratulations to Alastair Gough who has now completed his President's Badge and especially to Callum Higgins, Owen Gough and Kai Taylor who have all completed their Queen's Badge. Very well done to all the boys and to the seven boys currently working towards their Queen's Badge.

It has also been a very busy year regarding both battalion and National competitions. Both our National Masterteam quiz teams performed really well with the A team progressing to round 2 after winning their heat but losing out on a place in the Scottish final by 4 points. Our two FIFA video game teams both won their first games and our B team managed to reach the Scottish Quarter finals before losing out to West Linton. Well

done also to Harris Drackford who travelled to Buckie for the National Cross-Country championships. We have had some success in battalion competitions with the company section team winning the 5-a-side football competition after a penalty shoot out in the final! The senior team were runners up in their event. We also reached the semi finals in both company and senior basketball events and were runners up in the company section volleyball and third in the senior event. We also competed in the badminton competitions but lost out in the group stages in both events.

I am also delighted to report that we won the

Pulpit Fall bible study competition with the team of Owen Gough, Alastair Gough and John Gilmour winning the event by 12 points. The final competition of the year saw us compete in the battalion drill and it was brilliant to see all the boys' hard work over the year paying off as we lifted the trophy and the battalion colours for the first time in forty years. A fantastic achievement!

It really has been a great session for the company and many thanks to all staff and boys for the hard work they have all put in throughout the year.



Drill Squad

Presbytery Mission Plan & G.A. Updates

BY SCOTT BURTON

In November we gave an update on the Presbytery Mission Planning process, sharing that a new team was being established by Presbytery and we were awaiting their input.

Since then, the new Mission Planning Task Group have formed and sought further information from Kirk Sessions. In the Upper Braes, reps from each Kirk Session met with the Minister and Interim Moderators over February and March 2023 to complete another proforma, within which we sought to review the body of work carried out across the four congregations, noting similarities and differences, and outlining what was required to take forward the mission of Jesus Christ in this area, within the restrictions given to us: namely, some buildings must close and we would only

have 2 full-time equivalent members of “staff”.

This task was completed and submitted to Kirk Sessions for agreement, and having been agreed by all Kirk Sessions, it has been submitted to Presbytery – but no feedback has been received at the time of writing this article (late April). As such, no details beyond the above are being shared locally as we do not know if what was proposed is acceptable to Presbytery or the other bodies which must agree to the Mission Plan as a whole.

We still hope to see a plan agreed by the summer, so that work towards a Union of the Upper Braes Churches can begin thereafter and help us reach our future shared life together, a future I hope which will bring encouragement and support after so much uncertainty, frustration and hard work,

especially for those more likely to face closure.

Please keep one another and this process in your prayers.

General Assembly Update

BY SCOTT BURTON

Over Saturday 20 May until Thursday 25 May the Church of Scotland meets in General Assembly with Ministers and Elders from across the country gathering to wrestle with a great many issues. You can read the various reports on the CofS website: www.churchofscotland.org.uk/about-us/general-assembly/2023

There are too many issues to name here in this short article, but I wanted to note some of the material from the Assembly Trustees (who are different from the General Trustees, who steward our buildings). In the AT report, they share the following

information about our denomination, thus highlighting why we need to change both our structures and our practices:

- We now have 283,600 members. This is a figure that has been declining year on year since the highs of over 1.3 million in the late 1950s. The 2021 number was a 4.6% reduction compared to 2020 – similar falls in previous years and same expected in 2022.
- We had 1,280 baptisms, that is an average of just over 1 per congregation compared to 50,000 per year in the late 1950s.
- 430 professions of faith – a small number of new members compared to around a 10,000 reduction in our membership numbers each year. There were over 40,000 professions per year at the peak of new members in the 1930s. Whilst membership

numbers are not a true reflection of our full attendance you only need to look around many of our Churches to see the decline in numbers.

- Around 60,000 people (in comparison with our 283,600 members) worship in person on a Sunday (pre-pandemic this figure was 88,000). We have well over 1,000 church buildings to cater for this number of people which is simply untenable and unsustainable.
- The average age of those attending church is 62 years old – so the trends of decline are not likely to change without us taking positive action and addressing the demographic profile.
- The vast majority of our ministers are over the age of 50 and it is estimated that 40-50% of them could retire in the next 10 years. At our current rate of securing new ministers (20-30 per year including the admission

programme) we will have more vacancies than ever before – this isn't about money it is about the practicalities of managing with less people. Prior to the start of mission planning we already had over 320 vacancies – the vacancy gap has been growing unaddressed from year to year putting lots of pressure on our existing ministers to cover vacant charges in addition to their own Churches. Over one in three congregations is now in vacancy.

- We still love our buildings – at the end of 2021, acknowledging that it is very difficult to have an accurate number in what is a moving target with many locally vested properties, we had somewhere in the range of 4,500 to 5,000 buildings to maintain and pay for. As a shrinking Church in terms of numbers this really has to be addressed.

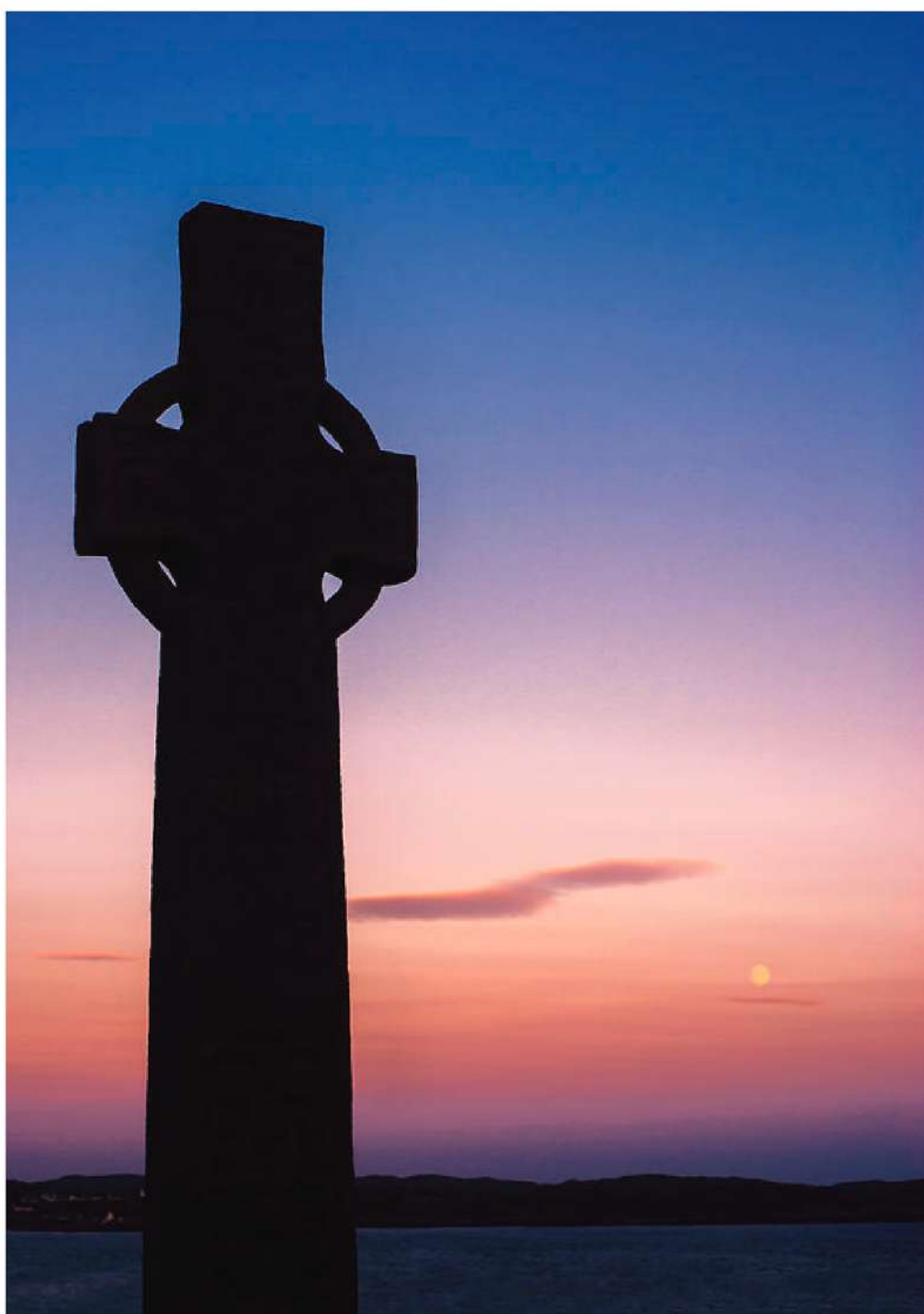
- The Church's main source of funding comes from its congregations. If congregational income falls off as quickly as is currently predicted, then the only means of paying ministers stipends and staff salaries will be from the Church's General Fund. Based on our estimates, the General Fund will be extinguished by 2026-2027 depending upon the assumptions used.

In light of the above, the Assembly Trustees are proposing that the following areas become our priorities:

1. the growth and development of the Church through the new Presbyteries working closely with the local congregations;
2. the work of the national Church on local needs with a particular emphasis on recruiting and equipping our future leaders in ministries of the Church and

3. the modernisation and simplification of our governance structure

There will be much more debated across a number of reports covering a wide variety of issues and needs, but the above may give some context to why the Church of Scotland is going – and must go – through seismic change at this time.



Blackbraes and Shieldhill linked with Muiravonside

Locum Minister

BY SANDRA MATHERS

Hello everyone,

*What is this life, if full
of care*

*We have no time to
stand and stare?
(WH Davies)*

These words from Davies' well-known poem came to me as I looked at a row of cherry trees in full blossom – what indeed is life if we can't take time to stand and stare at the marvel of God's handiwork all around us in this glorious season of spring. I'm sure most if not all of you have taken that time to stare whether admiring the daffodils, tulips, blossom and so much more in your own gardens or indeed all around us in our public places. Spring is indeed a feast for the eyes and all the senses.

Life, new life, year by year, with no input from humanity,

whether it's in the garden or the fields where new lambs have been frisking in all their enviable energy and each morning the dawn chorus is in full swing – yet this is exactly what God promised in Genesis 8:22 – “As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease.”

But is that all there is to life - beautiful and amazing as so much of nature is? Is it just living out our days from childhood to old age and if you're lucky you have a fairly healthy, well educated comfortable life – largely dependent on where you're born of course – and then that's it?

I read a recent article by a well known journalist called David Baddiel who describes himself as a Jewish atheist. He doesn't believe in God but finds comfort in the traditions, culture, and ritual of his religion. He went on to say that he

believes all Jews are atheists, and believes many 'Christians' are too – perhaps because many professing Christians live in ways that deny the reality and power of their faith. He also admitted that there is a 'God shaped hole' in each one of us which only faith can fill, but reckons humanity today has found that 'faith' in things like football. What a barren type of faith – a faith dependent on a good game on a Saturday!

Yet the God of the Bible – both Old and New Testaments – has so much more in mind for us. In both the Jewish and the Christian religions God's plan and hope for each one of us is that we'll enjoy a personal, loving fellowship with Him, for He is our loving God who made us for Himself – and not just for the years of our life on earth, but for eternity too.

Jesus Himself gives us that assurance during His conversation with

Nicodemus when in John 3:16 He said that whoever believes in Him “shall not perish but have eternal life” – that is life without end. Life without end on this planet could leave us pleading for an end to it, but life without end in God’s loving presence – what a prospect.

However, God’s plans for us go beyond merely looking forward to death – He plans that our life on earth should be pretty special too, for in John 10:10 Jesus tells us that - “I have come that they (ie, we) may have life, and have it to the full.” In some translations the word is translated as ‘abundant’ life, which really does convey the absolute fullness and wonder of God’s will for us.

I think for most of us whenever we’re offered a ‘free’ gift by a salesperson of some sort, our antennae rise immediately – what’s this going to cost me? We’re highly sceptical – and rightly so – when anyone promises

something ‘free’ – there are always Ts & Cs - ‘terms and conditions’ - to go with it, yet this eternal life that God promises is a ‘free gift’ – Romans 6:23 – “The wages of sin is death – BUT the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Recently we celebrated Easter and it was on what we call Good Friday that Jesus paid the price of our salvation when He died for us on the cross – He paid the penalty of our sin enabling us to enter into that eternal life and abundant life that is God’s will for us, and it comes to us absolutely free when we surrender ourselves to Christ and trust Him for our salvation. That is the only way that “God shaped hole in humanity” can be filled.

Life – we all hope to have a life that’s fulfilling, a happy life and a life that we can look back on knowing that we’ve made a positive impact on our family and even on society as a whole. The way to ensure that that is our legacy is to surrender our lives to the

One who could say “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life” and allow Him to guide us into that fulness of life that is God’s will for us.

God bless you all.

News from the World Church

Nigeria:

Pray for comfort for the family and congregation of Father Achi who was killed when Boko Haram burnt down his church in Pakoro. Fr Achi had previously been shot, kidnapped and survived another church bombing, but had refused to give up serving God’s people. Praise God for his courageous faith and pray that his witness will bear much fruit in the life of his community.



China:

China is leading attempts to redefine human rights with a focus more on 'stability' and 'security' than value and dignity. It represents a dangerous move towards global authoritarianism, with regimes exerting greater control over their people. Pray that these plans will be frustrated.

Colombia:

The persecution of Christians in Colombia is worsening, largely due to an increase in violence, including murders. Pray the words of Psalm 5:11 over believers who are exposed to danger for their faith: "Spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may rejoice in you."



The Walk of Faith

BY DREW ROBERTSON

I'm not too good with heights. It's not that I've got a full-blown phobia with them or anything like that. After all, I do live in a village which is five hundred feet above sea level! It's just that I'm a little bit uncomfortable with them if I am in a very high building with a steep drop. This can be a bit frustrating sometimes because the irony of all this is that I actually love looking at photos of views and vistas taken from these very high buildings and aeroplanes. I seem to have no problem with this if it is just a photograph.

I used to visit Blackpool quite a lot about twenty years ago and there is one landmark that I always loved looking at, but at the same time with a certain sense of trepidation. That was, of course, Blackpool Tower. On certain days, if I felt brave enough, I would snatch a quick glance upwards to the observation deck at the

top and marvel at how high it was. I would then just as hastily look back down! I would think on how fantastic the view must be. I had heard that on certain days, when the visibility is very good that it is even possible to see the Isle of Man, sixty miles away.

On one occasion back in the Spring of 2002, I spent a few days in Blackpool. The weather was just perfect, with crystal clear sunny days that were not hot enough to allow a haze to shimmer on the horizon, but still pleasant enough to enjoy the gentle warmth that a Spring Day like this can offer. I stole a quick look up at the tower which was looking down at me this time very benevolently in the bright morning sunshine and said to myself, "This is it! I'm going for it!"

What spurred me on as well was that I had just bought a brand-new digital camera which

had some fantastic features on it. It was ideal for taking panorama type photos - the ones that you can join together to create an almost three-dimensional, 360 degree view. It had a really good zoom as well, so the temptation to use all of these features was irresistible!

I also thought I had nothing to lose, because the Tower building has so many other entertainments at ground level, and as a result, my admission fee wouldn't be wasted if I chickened out at the last moment! I had also heard that recently, a brand-new express lift had been fitted that would whisk me to the top in a matter of minutes, so I imagined the lift would be one of these totally closed in lifts that are standard in office blocks and high flats. What could be easier?

Without further hesitation, I headed straight up to the lift which was situated on the top floor, bypassing all the many features and attractions that the Tower has to offer – I could see them later! The

The lift was there, the doors were open, and they were taking on passengers, so no time to think! I stepped hastily on board and thought, this isn't so bad. It's a normal lift. This will be a piece of cake! The doors closed and up we went. I looked around to one side, saw movement and looked just in time to see us shooting up through the roof of the building very rapidly.

Yes...you've guessed it. One side of the lift was transparent glass!

Yikes!

So I shut my eyes, gritted my teeth and waited until they said we were at the top. When I felt the lift slowing down to a stop and the long-awaited whoosh of the doors opening, I opened my eyes and found a really solid and safe observation deck which was totally enclosed as I knew it would be.

The observation deck was very nice with souvenirs for sale and lots of novelty items, but I must admit, after stealing a few quick glances out of the windows, I still didn't like the height much.

However, I found that working the camera took my mind off it a bit and I just concentrated, taking photos from every side and looking through the viewfinder, which made the view look small and manageable rather than looking out the windows.

Anyway, I knew I would have lots of great photos to look at later down in the safety of good old terra firma, where I could look at the stunning view from every angle. Once I'd taken photos from every conceivable angle, I was right back down as fast as the lift would take me and beat a retreat to the cafeteria for a strong coffee, feeling rather pleased with myself.

During my brief stay at the top, there was an ingenious little feature I saw that totally fascinated me, although I didn't linger to look at it or contemplate it for too long while I was up there. I saw a square of glass on the floor. (They now of course

have a very large area of the floor in glass, as well as floor to ceiling windows which they call the "Blackpool Eye." – "Wow!" says I, secretly rather glad that it wasn't there at the time I made my "ascent!")

Back then however much to my relief, the square of glass was much smaller. It was also very easy to locate, due to the loud gasps of people as they encountered this little modification to the Tower's architecture. There were three types of gasp. One type was absolute pleasure and a sense of a thrilling discovery. The other type was a gasp of horror which sounded a bit strangled. The third type was a combination of the first two.

This very clever enhancement to the Tower's architecture was at that time called "The Walk of Faith." I can understand why. It was about five feet wide and visitors were invited to walk across it. If you happened to look down (and people who are scared of heights might be best to skip the next few sentences,) you could

PAGE 39

observe little matchstick figures walking along the street, 380 feet below. I didn't look down, but overheard this little gem of information from a braver soul than I who was standing right on the centre of the glass and peering down in wonder! It seemed too that the buses and cars looked like little toys. The modernized and enhanced version that is in the Tower nowadays would of course give a much better feeling of the great height, but even back then, the little glass square still gave a perfect sensation that you were suspended in mid air, 380 feet above these tiny buses, cars and people.

Many brave souls have taken this "Walk of Faith" and even the Tower authorities at the time seemed to think that this was really something, as it was possible to obtain a commemorative certificate for anyone who walked across the glass. On the day I visited though, there were lots of certificates still available, so I don't think many had been issued on that day!

I once read somewhere that the glass is so thick that you could quite

safely park a car on it. I'm not sure if this is true or just another of these urban myths that you hear. I would need to look that one up, but for some reason and this is just me, but I very wrongly always have visions of a rather flattened looking Morris Minor at the bottom of the Tower with the little car still sitting on a large, although now rather cracked piece of glass!

The "Walk of Faith" touched me greatly back then and even to this day, has left a lasting impression in a way that the Tower management had probably not intended. It made me think that so often in life, we have to put our trust in other people. To have faith in them. To know in our hearts that they won't let us down. We do this each and every day.

We also have faith in objects as well, like the piece of glass that is so skilfully fitted in the floor of Blackpool Tower to thrill the

visitors there. We know that it has been designed by top engineers and fitted by expert craftsmen. It is probably the safest piece of glass in the world. But because the glass appears invisible to us, we have to take that “walk of faith” and walk across it to get to the other side.

It is so often like that in our relationship with the God as well. He is as the famous hymn “Immortal, Invisible, God only Wise” describes “hid from our eyes” and to reach out to him requires a walk of faith. Even when Jesus was with us and in full view, one of the disciples who was closest to him had to take this walk. In Matthew chapter 14, verses 25-32, from their boat, the disciples see Jesus walking across the water to them. Initially they think they are seeing a ghost and when Jesus reassures them it is him, Peter cries out,

“Lord if it’s you, tell me to come to you on the water,” (verse 28 NIV)

And of course Jesus tells Peter to walk towards him.

It is easy to imagine how Peter must have felt as he took his first tentative steps across the rough water. This was the ultimate “walk of faith.” He must have felt fear at first. Trepidation. But after this initial doubt, his overriding faith in Jesus, whom he loved and trusted implicitly convinced him just to relax, entrust himself to the Lord and take that first step across the water. He knew that Jesus would never allow him to drown. It was only when he became frightened and his faith faltered that he began to sink. He cried out for Jesus to save him. And of course, Jesus reached out his arms and caught him. John Ortberg wrote a wonderful book about this walk of faith that Peter had made called “If You Want to Walk on Water, You Have to get out of the Boat.” He discusses the various emotions that went through Peter’s mind as he saw Jesus walking across the water. I think the title of his book is so apt, because sometimes we have to be a bit daring like Peter. We cannot of course, walk on water or anything as thrilling (or terrifying perhaps!) as that.

Peter had a special invitation. However, we often need just as much courage and the faith that Peter had as he stepped out of the boat, to embark on our walk across the narrow and fragile path of glass that makes up our lives.

It is such a comfort to know that we are not walking alone if we have faith to seek out the Lord, pray to him, entrust ourselves to him and ask for his guidance. Our fear and vulnerability vanishes when we reach our hands out to him for his support. We then can feel his presence without any shadow of a doubt.

He is walking across the glass with us.

He always has and always will.

He will never let us fall.



COINCIDENCE or GOD'S PROVIDENCE?

BY JAMES CURRIE



The search for ancestors throws up some mysteries, coincidence or divine intervention. None more so than the search for the residence of Elizabeth Greig Currie in Inverkeithing. It was known as Providence House and stood in the Main Street opposite the bank. My cousins were over from Canada and wished to visit and photograph the house.

Up and down the high street we searched but there was no sight of that elusive building. About to give up Cousin Carol asked to get her photograph taken before leaving the high street. Standing outside this building against a window recess I noticed above her head an

inscription on the lintel: *"16 Gods Providence is my Inheritance 88"*. The doorway had been replaced by a window.



To her left above her head on the adjacent building was a small, enameled plaque to Sir Samuel Greig, placed there by a Russian / Scots society. Sir Samuel Greig was her sister's husband's brother, noted as being the founder of the Russian navy. There is a gold medallion about 10 inches in diameter in Inverkeithing museum, presented to him by Catherine the Great. So much in such a short time and space, we didn't walk away. I had travelled only a few miles, my cousins had travelled 2,000 miles and it was by Gods Providence that Elizabeth Greig Currie's story came to life

This church in Grahams Road, Falkirk was to be demolished as part of the retail park development.

Prior to its demolition I was invited to survey the property, passing through the vestibule there were a few bibles scattered about, I lifted one up off the floor and inscribed on the inside cover was written James Currie. I understood at that time that the surname was not common to the area. After some research it was found to be a church member who had passed away and his daughter stayed in a street off Carron Road. The bible was returned to his daughter and gratefully received. Carrying out surveys was often full of surprises, none more so when it is an attic, where items have been stored and long forgotten. When carrying out a survey of a roof space in a house in Falkirk there was among other



things a stack of old newspapers. The lady of the house had asked for them to be handed down as she was going to dispose of them. After asking permission to scan through them I came across a Falkirk Mail Annual, Xmas 1934. Upon opening it up I was astonished to find a photo of my mother when she was crowned Falkirk Children's Festival Queen on the 4th Aug 1934.

I had been told about it but never seen it in print. The next day that Annual would have been in the skip, some would say I was fortunate, I know it was Gods Providence, it is written in stone.

Reaction to this message has been no more poignant than when discussing God's Providence with a friend in America. She told me to look at John 14:18 *"when the day comes, you will know that I am in my father and that you are in me, just as I am in you."*

The following Sunday this message was mulling about in my head, I couldn't remember the exact wording so I picked up a pew bible and highlighted in pencil was this passage. I could have picked up any pew bible, this message unlike many others will not fade away with time.



THE GREATEST PRICE EVER PAID

BY DREW ROBERTSON

What was the greatest price ever paid?
 Not for the largest diamond ever found.
 Not for the finest gold dust ever assayed.
 Not for the best footballer ever around.
 Not for the most expensive car ever made.
 Not for the greatest mind ever renowned.

No, the answer when all is surveyed.
 Presents a solution completely sound.
 Even with all the theories portrayed.
 The plain facts just resound and resound.
 Jesus died on a cross for us to be saved.
 So from sin we could be unbound.
 That was the greatest price ever paid.



Slamannan News

Martha's Pantry

BY REV MONICA
MACDONALD

It has been a bit of a roller-coaster ride since we opened Martha's Pantry just before Christmas 2022. None of us thought that we would be so humbled. None of us thought that we would find ourselves in tears time and time again. None of us had a real understanding of how people were suffering – struggling to make ends meet. Thankfully God knew.

More than six months ago God prompted me to find ways in which we as the Church in Slamannan can reach out. He prompted me so hard I could not stand back and do nothing! And... (I know I shouldn't be...) but I have been amazed at how this prompting has led to so many people coming forward saying God has spoken to them too, and they want to help!

At the moment Martha's Pantry is supporting 77



families and we expect this number to rise. And, while we are thankful for the support of non-perishable food items and personal hygiene products already offered by our members at Slamannan and by members from Brightons Church – it is important that we keep our shelves full so that we do not ever have to turn anyone away. If you are able to bring just two or three items it will help keep our shelves stocked. We are thankful also for end-of-day donations from one supermarket and one wholesaler and we are working hard to expand this to other supermarkets which all work through organisations such as

Neighbourly or Fareshare. Thus far we have managed to successfully apply and receive a grant from Foundation Scotland and the Pantry has benefitted from a number of cash donations.

Martha's Pantry is open a few hours on one day a week but we really need to be open more hours. For this we need more volunteers. As you read this, is God prompting you to volunteer? If so, please get in touch with me or with Iris O'Neill at Brightons Church so that we can chat with you. There are already several folk from Brightons volunteering alongside Slamannan folk. We are thankful

for each one and for the work they do in supporting this outreach ministry in Slamannan. It is quite possible that the service that Martha's Pantry offers is going to be needed for some time yet. And while many believe that the government should be doing more to help, it is not apparent that they will. We believe that the Church of Jesus Christ in Slamannan is called to serve its community. This is a call that cannot remain unanswered. And as always, Jesus is our example:

The only miracle of Jesus recorded in all four of the Gospels, is the feeding of the hungry. Jesus did not ask if they could afford to buy food; he didn't teach them to fish, or offer them tough love. No – Jesus saw people in need and He helped them. And in Mark's Gospel Jesus says: "The poor you will always have with you and you can help them any time you want" Mark 14 vs 7

I believe that it is essential to remember always that there are always folk less fortunate than ourselves even though they may not be

considered to be poor. For a variety of reasons people fall on hard times. As Christ's helpers in the world around us, it is our duty to reach out to people such as these.

Contact details: email:
marthaspantryFK1@gmail.com

Telephone Number:
07833 102874

*I asked for a flower-
He gave me a garden
I asked for a friend –
He gave me Jesus*



Let's start at the very beginning.....

Day one brought heaven, earth and light,
It must have been so very bright.
Day two God made the clear blue sky,
A place for many birds to fly.
Day three brought land apart from seas,
With all the plants, grass and trees.
Day four shone forth moon, stars and sun,
The work of God was not yet done.
Day five we see the fish and birds.
God did that with just his words.
Day six God formed all beasts and man,
To finish His creation plan.
Day seven was especially blessed,
A day for worship and for rest.

When did you last pick up and read the most popular book in the world – The Bible - such wonderful stories I dare you to try – you will be enthralled. It's not A-Z... it's G-R.

Let's start at the very beginning.....
it's a very good place to start.

Word Search

Bible Word Search

C T A B I T 1 P L E P 2 J N W G C
A C T S J S C S Z A 1 1 G A D S O
N P C W E O U W L L V K 1 H B G L
E R T 1 R N O 2 Z U I I V U N B O
S O 2 C E G E C J K T B V M H S S
T V K H M S R H K E H E B R E W S
H E I R I O G R N E H E M I A H I
E R N O A F E O M A R K Z W F C A
R B G N H S Z N R R O M A N S K N
O S S I E O R I F J A I B R D H S
T H V C M L A C N O T T J O E L M
M 2 M L M O H L K H P I I W G P A
G Z M E Z M 2 E Z N F T U J J M T
I 1 I S G O B S O 2 1 U U I A L T
U D C G L N K I I A I S E C M Z H
U V A A M O S U F 2 D A N I E L E
F U H L O 1 G J O B V E N J S H W

Hebrews

Romans

Micah

Songs of Solomon

Nehemiah

2 Kings

Matthew

James

Acts

Amos

Proverbs

Ezra

John

Titus

Daniel

Joel

Job

2 Chronicles

Luke

Colossians

Nahum

Jeremiah

Esther

1 Chronicles

Mark

Events and Services

Brightons

Saturday 20th May

Sunday 4th June 11.00am

Sunday 25th June 6.30pm

Thursday 29th June 11.30am

Sunday 2nd July - 13th August

Sunday 27th August 6.30pm

Thursday 31st August 11.30am

Summer BBQ at Beecraigs

Communion Service

Evening Service

Half-hour Service

Summer services:

*All Age Summer Service 9.30am
and Morning Service 11.00am
(no Sunday School groups)*

Evening Service

Half-hour Service

Blackbraes and Shieldhill

Sunday 4th June 10.00am

Communion Service

Muiravonside

Sunday 4th June 11.30am

Communion Service



REGISTERED SCOTTISH CHARITIES
BRIGHTONS | SC001385
BLACKBRAES & SHIELDHILL | SC002512
MUIRAVONSIDE | SC007571