

Black Isle East Church of Scotland

Newsletter 1

April 2024

Spring - preparing for growth

As the Church of Scotland, nationally and locally, sets out to rebuild an inter-generational church community it seems appropriate to have 8 year old Ava Simpson's Easter drawing on the front page as a reminder of her greeting to the congregation on Easter Sunday morning.

Alongside Ava on the front page we have 'Uncle Dannie' Reid who, at the age of 99, contributed a memorable Desert Islands Discs



piece to an earlier run of newsletters, culminating in: My final disc is the lovely hymn 'There's a land that is fairer than day' anticipating the joy of Heaven. Sadly, Dan Reid passed away in December a few weeks short of his 100th birthday but his life is beautifully summed up here in the final two paragraphs of a eulogy delivered by his daughter, Alison.



Dan Reid was unique, a complete one-off, the likes of which we probably won't see again. He was one of life's enthusiasts and often heard saying, 'This the best....plate of broth, fruit loaf, performance of Mahler that I have ever experienced.' He embraced every technological advance loving his iMac computer, his 66-inch OLED and YouTube premium. He said to me once: 'Do you think I'm unusual doing online banking at 95 years of age?' Yes, Dad! Uncomplaining and deeply grateful for every blessing in his life he was a joy to be around. When you have lived in the warm sunshine of the love of a devoted father, who

100% has your back through your life, then when he isn't there the world can seem a chillier place. To tell you the truth we wanted him to live forever!

Dad knew better. He said to me last month that I should not presume that he would make his 100th birthday. He knew that, ultimately, his times were not in his hands. Jim has talked of Dad's faith. When I was helping Dad with his Desert Islands Discs, he chose the hymn that we have just sung – his favourite as it anticipated the joy of heaven. So, while he knew that his life here would end, he knew that there would one day for all Christians be a reunion when we meet on that beautiful shore.



Black Isle East Church of Scotland

Looking backwards and forwards to 2050

The first Sunday in January saw a new era in our church life, as we moved forward into 2024 with a transformed identity: our church was now Black Isle East Church of Scotland. A few weeks later, on the last Saturday in February, Stroma and I marked the five-year anniversary of our time in the Highlands with an “Open Manse”.

It would be natural at such a time to look backwards and forwards - we are in a liminal moment – “the old has gone the new is here” applied not just to individual Christian life but to our collective experience. As such, it represents a time to reflect.

At the risk of over-simplifying, these events can be viewed through the following lens:

1821 - 2021 → two hundred years of history in the Rosemarkie Church building (19th and 20th century expressions of Scottish Reformed Christianity reaching the end of an era in the Covid pandemic);

2021 – 2024 → a four-year period of transition overlapping with my time as minister and changes in the wider Presbytery and national Church of Scotland;

2025 – 2050 → our church moves decisively into a new transformed 21st century identity ...; with the hope that the twenty-five year period of steeling ourselves for change since 2000, helps us to be decisive.

We know the old joke: “How many Lutherans does it take to change a light bulb?”

The punchline was: “Change? Did someone say **CHANGE?**”

In the months that come, we would expect that a renewed identity for the congregation will be accompanied by other changes: in our routines and timings, by new activities, and by new approaches to how we present ourselves to the wider world. Even our physical context has altered as we are now in one central church building in Rosemarkie, though retaining the use of the Avoch Hall.

The new Mission Plan for 2024 - confirmed by the central Faith Action Programme Leadership Team and the new Presbytery - certainly encourages space for fresh approaches setting out its agenda around the five marks of mission which can be summarised under three headings: Building the Church, Serving Society and Creation Care. We can usefully view these through four lenses: faithfulness, flexibility, faith and oomph-ffff (my coined word does end in “f”).

“Sunday Worship is the focus of the church’s mission around the preaching of the good news of the kingdom.” This is where faithfulness comes in and we’re encouraged by how a good body of people attend church regularly “come hail or shine” at our new time of 10:30 a.m. from all three communities which form **Black Isle East Church of Scotland**.

To be a church moving on from 2025, when the Mission Plans is definitively implemented, flexibility is needed at various levels. “The integration of contemporary elements is seen in screens and powerpoint and changes to the ethos of worship around music, the arts and participation.” The Church of Scotland also has a slogan, “well-equipped spaces in the right places”: the policy implications of that will place further demands on our parish in the near future.

The Mission Plan goes on to note that “Further innovations in church culture will promote ‘relational approaches to church’ with a focus on smaller, participatory groups meeting in a range of locations.” Whilst such approaches are commonplace across the United Kingdom and even the Highlands - and have been part of the church’s global life since the book of Acts (see Acts 2:42-47) - for some rural pockets of the Church of Scotland they are less familiar. However, 21st century church life in a wider society that is now often situated beyond the church, puts a premium on the ability to talk about and dialogue around our faith – in short, we need to develop flexibility about how we express Christianity and engage with others.

This is also where a renewed focus on Christian faith comes into play. The good news of the kingdom points us to faith in Christ Jesus: "By entering through faith into what God has always wanted to do for us—set us right with him, make us fit for him—we have it all together with God because of our Master Jesus." (Romans 5:1-2 The Message). Setting our compass afresh will help us to see where we are going.

The current mission plan ends like this: “It is envisaged that these directions ... will allow the charge to carry out its planned mission to the three communities in which it is situated in a contemporary, flexible and dynamic manner into the late 2020s and beyond.”

These three final adjectives - contemporary, flexible and dynamic - may seem a little unnerving at first, but the New Testament clearly promises resources for our journey – these will help with the necessary *oomph-ffff* that will be needed on the way, as we can't possibly do this in our own strength: “... we’re never left feeling short-changed. Quite the contrary—we can’t round up enough containers to hold everything God generously pours into our lives through the Holy Spirit!” (Romans 5:4-5 The Message)

The years ahead to 2050 – the arc envisaged by the Mission Plan and its successors - give us plenty of time to develop these four qualities, faithfulness, flexibility, faith and oomph-ffff, and to put them into practice. Though, I don’t expect to be checking on progress up to April 2050 (personally), it will be exciting to see the first-fruits of that process in 2025 and beyond.

Warren

More information on the Church of Scotland’s Faith Action Plan and Faith Action Programme Leadership Team (FAPLT) with Rev Tommy MacNeil (right) Martin’s Memorial Church, Stornoway as Convener can be found at www.churchofscotland.org.uk





Let Us Pray for Our New Parish

Our Father, thank you that you are in heaven and that we can come to you through your Son Jesus Christ and that you accept us as we are. We praise you Lord for the good news of Jesus, for your love for us and the fact that you delight in us.

Thank you for your blessings and your daily provision. We marvel afresh as we look around us at the beauty of your creation in spring and see the new life coming into blossom after the long winter. It shows us again that in everything there is always a renewal divinely planned, flawlessly perfect, the work of God's hand.

Thank you for the many ways we see and hear evidences of your loving care in the sounds of nature. We welcome the sweet sounds of birdsong, the bleating of the new born lambs and the buzz of the bees as they seek nectar in the blossoms.

As we come into this new season of our united congregations of Black Isle East, we give you thanks and praise for your guidance, strength and direction, particularly through these transitional times of Avoch and Cromarty church closures.

We are reminded of your Word in Isaiah that "You are doing a new thing" and you will go before us in the challenges of all we seek to do together in your service. Equip us Lord and give us grace and strength to be faithful, loving others as you have first loved us. Thank you for the great example which Jesus taught us.

We thank you for our brothers and sisters who have joined us and rejoice that they are part of our fellowship. As the new BIE, use us in mission

as we reach out into our communities. Help us to be aware of the different needs in all the villages.

We pray too that you would be with Warren, Stroma and the leadership team in all of their deliberations.

We thank you for the Pastoral Care Team and all they do in the community. Bless them and minister to them as they reach out into the different communities.

We pray for families and young people in our villages that you would be a protection over their lives. We think of the rising cost of the economy and the struggle to make ends meet for the average family.

We pray for those who are unwell and going through times of anxiety for themselves or for family who need the touch of your healing.

Be very close to those who are elderly, tired and who feel their own frailties. Surround them with your loving care, Heavenly Father.

Draw close to those who grieve and we pray for your loving comfort and peace over them. Lord, be near to those who struggle to cope with disappointments and life's difficult circumstances. Would you encourage them and give them your hope.

We may not always understand what you are doing Lord when we hurt so deeply but we can trust that you have each one of us in the palm of your hand.

We know you will never leave us or forsake us.

Amen

Catherine Kernahan

Black Isle East Congregation – Our Future As I See it.

The Black Isle East congregation has been in existence for a few months now and from my perspective we have integrated well. The initial steps now having been taken it is natural to look to the future.

In my view the Church of Scotland has been stagnating for a good few years and consequently we have a significant amount of ground to make up having lost virtually two generations. A daunting task but if God wills it we can do it!

Until recently things were done in Church pretty much as when I was a boy.

To draw a parallel when I went to sea in 1957 ships communicated sending the morse code by Aldiss lamp. A few lines of poetry come to mind.

Ships that pass in the night and the signal goes winking across the sea.

*What ship's that and you learn her name
whither she's bound and whence she came.*

Actually, the lines are a paraphrase of a verses in *The Theologian's Tale* by Hendry Wadsworth Longfellow.

Just before I retired a new radar surveillance system was installed to cover the Orkney Harbours Area and approaches which automatically identified most ships transiting the Pentland Firth.

The end result is the same, the ships are identified but by a different method. So, with the church the message is the same, but we have to find contemporary ways to communicate it.



I'm generally encouraged and am a lot more optimistic now than twelve months ago. I sense a greater vibrancy within the congregation and Warren's initiatives are well received. We also need to show unity of purpose and actively support any future innovations he may introduce. I was moved on Sunday 7th. April when Ava Simpson sent us all an Easter card, demonstrating I think that she felt with us.

Change is exciting and personally I look forward to a challenge. Our biggest immediate challenge will be to find our next generation of office bearers. It won't be easy, worthwhile things never are, but I go forward in faith keeping the chorus of the hymn "I do not know what lies ahead," in mind.

*I know who holds the future,
and he'll guide me with his hand.
With God things don't just happen;
everything by him is planned.
So as I face tomorrow
with its problems large and small,
I'll trust the God of miracles,
give to him my all.*

Bob Moore



© Lisa Wood Assembly, 'Share the Word: Moses' Gifts: Faith / Hope for Haiti /
Share the Word in Times of Conflict / The Bible Society Inc.

Bibles for Bairns

It's well known that reading to babies and young children helps them learn and grow. Specifically, it helps them to feel safe and loved. It builds self-esteem, vocabulary, imagination and even improves sleeping patterns.

What if the stories read to babies and young children at these crucial moments were stories from the Bible: stories that told children they were safe and loved by a God who made them, and who will always be with them as they learn and grow?

The Scottish Bible Society has a statistic that almost 3 in 10 children don't know that the story of Jesus's birth is from the Bible. They have set up a scheme to address this and we all can be involved.

If you have a baby born in 2024, or have the permission of the parent or carer of a child born this year, you can register at www.scottishbiblesociety.org and enrol via the Homepage.

Once a child has been signed up, they'll receive the **Share a Story Bible** on their first birthday.

On their second, third and fourth birthdays they will receive birthday cards and fun resources to encourage the whole family to keep engaging with the Bible.

On their fifth birthday, they'll be given a **Children's Bible** to start to read themselves and to explore with the adults in the family.

Or if you simply want to support fund this worthwhile initiative, donations can be made via the website - www.scottishbiblesociety.org.



God spoke: "Let there be animals
that can swim and fly."
Fish splashed in the sea and birds swooped
in the sky. Sounds filled the earth.



God spoke: "Let there be animals on land."
Beetles scuttled and lizards bathed in the sun,
frogs leaped and horses galloped,
monkeys chattered and lions roared.

Ask
Call
Obey
Report
Notice



Lord,
today,
is there someone
You
want me
to connect with
outside
the church?

'How are you?'

We now have a small group of Acorns in the church which we hope will grow into a sturdy young oak tree in the coming months.

The Acorn idea is being implemented in churches across the country and is very simple-members of the group offer up a 10 second prayer each day “ Lord, show me someone I should get in touch with.” If a person pops into your mind you make contact with that person to ask “How are you?”

If God has put that person into your mind then who knows how your initial contact will develop?

Should something positive or interesting occur your story can be shared amongst the other Acorns to encourage them to keep praying.

If, on the other hand, your daily 10 second prayer remains unanswered then you just keep asking!

What have you got to lose?

Please feel free to speak to Douglas Simpson if you'd like to become an Acorn or if you'd just like to know more.



Special Moments with a Portrait!

How do we talk easily about our faith? It's the greatest news in all the world but somehow it's always a bit of a struggle talking about it!

As Douglas has reminded us on the previous page, Paul Haringman showed us a simple way how to share our faith in normal everyday situations by using ACORN. Imagine my surprise when, a few days later, Paul rang me up to ask if I could help him with a couple of Ukrainian refugees called Petro and Kateryna*



Of course the answer was 'Yes,' But then I thought what on earth could I do to help? Petro has an interest in art so we agreed to meet in my studio while Paul would take his dog for a walk – and leave us to it. Help! But what do I do?



I'm not sure if that was a prayer – or what – but back came the thought: do Petro's portrait and chat while you do so! Crazy idea but that's what we did. It took just a bit over an hour but to my great relief it worked! His partner Kateryna suggested a few final tweaks and then we had a really good chat.

They'd been in Scotland for six months with a host family some distance from the Black Isle. For host-family reasons they were having to move out soon, so were needing somewhere to live. They also needed to improve their English and make some money. A lot to ask!

Just before they left, Paul suggested having a prayer about it all, which we did. Somehow that moved into a discussion about God and how to know him personally.

What an amazing time! Paul and I both felt this was very genuine and very personal for Petro and Kateryna.

We packed up the painting in a specially constructed card-board box as they were taking the bus next day and did not want to get oil-paint over everything.

Is this something any of us can do? Yes! OK, doing a portrait is not everybody's cup-of-tea but it is mine. All of us are different but we are all special and we can all trust the Holy Spirit to guide us with different people at different times, in different ways. On this occasion God used the way of a portrait to help make connections, create trust and move into a faith commitment.

If he can use me like this he can use you too – in a way that is right and easy for you. Trust him to open doors!

Will I ever see them again? I don't know. I'm certainly praying for them and if you can too, who knows what God will do!

*not real names

William Mather

Daily Devotions

The United Reformed Church will drop an interesting, thought provoking Daily Devotion into your inbox every morning - typically a reading, a reflection and a prayer. This from April 8th.

White Crucifixion is the first in Marc Chagall's series of compositions that feature Jesus as a Jewish martyr and dramatically call attention to the persecution and suffering of Jews in 1930s Germany at the hands of the Nazis. The work is startling as the crucifixion, often seen by the Jewish people as a symbol of oppression, is instead being used to represent their suffering. Chagall stressed Jesus' religious identity by depicting him and the biblical figures above him in traditional Jewish garments.



The surrounding images show the devastation of pogroms, violent attacks against Jewish communities often organised or sanctioned by local governments. Combining the Crucifixion with contemporary events, Chagall's painting links the martyred Jesus with the Jewish people being persecuted across Europe and implicitly compares the Nazis with Jesus's tormentors.

Reading: Isaiah 52: 13 - 15

Reflection: Christians are sometimes surprised when they realise Jewish people don't read Jesus into Isaiah's Suffering Servant poems. Jewish commentators have seen the Suffering Servant as Isaiah himself, Jeremiah, the Messiah who is yet to come, or as a representation of the Jewish people.

We are similarly surprised when we look at Marc Chagall's *White Crucifixion*. Chagall was raised as an Orthodox Jew, knew his Bible, and chose to portray Jesus as one persecuted Jew amongst many. Jesus' modesty is preserved with a tallith - a Jewish prayer shawl; a menorah is placed at his feet, a head cloth, not a crown of thorns, on his head. Biblical figures weep instead of angels and, instead of disciples watching on helplessly, Chagall surrounds the Cross with images of pogrom and persecution. Painting this in the aftermath of the German State's wrecking of Jewish businesses in 1938, Chagall was all too well aware of the power of hatred - the hatred that sent Jesus to the Cross and millions of Jews to the gas chambers.

Here the Cross is seen as what it was - an instrument of torture and oppression designed to instil fear and compliance into subjugated people. A punishment too cruel and agonising to use on Roman citizens, a method designed to prolong the agony of death, and to ensure the conquered didn't rise up. What we are accustomed to see as a symbol of victory (or to ignore in favour of an empty Cross) is, in fact, a symbol of imperial violence.

I was once asked what is beautiful about the Cross and struggled to answer seeing it only as a symbol of hatred, degradation, torture, and oppression. Yet I'm drawn to crucifixes and images of crucifixion as they remind me of what the powers that seek to rule this world will do to those who oppose them. Beauty and victory are found in the empty tomb; the Cross reminds us of battles still to be won even if the final victory is assured.

Prayer: *Lord by your Cross and Resurrection, you have set us free. Help us to free others. Amen.*

www.urc.org.uk for link to Daily Devotions

Treasuring the Silence

‘Silence is golden’ was one of those sayings beloved of an earlier age. It was the kind of thing found in old-fashioned, classroom copy books, perhaps remembered by the older in our congregational ranks (dare I say oldest?) for practising neat handwriting. Likening it to gold, it suggested that silence was of extremely high value - better keep quiet if you’ve nothing valuable to say. Cue Ecclesiastes: *A time to be silent and a time to speak*. I confess I’ve come to appreciate silence more and in a world of constant sound, some of it quite intrusive, though absolute silence would be really hard to find – and quite unnerving, I would have thought.



Perhaps I’ve been using the wrong term here: lack of distracting sounds might be a better way of putting it but ‘silence’ is much shorter. I recall being high on a mountain ridge on a fine day years ago, in the company of a climbing companion. After the hard slog up, the thought of a short while sitting on a convenient rock seemed appealing. My friend seemed slightly taken aback when I said ‘Let’s sit for a while longer and just listen to the silence.’ How can you listen to silence?

But after the grinding sound of boots on rock and gravel had ceased, silence did indeed seem to have fallen and yet the more we listened, the more we could hear. Above all, there was a muted but constant backcloth: the muffled sound of a distant, cascading hill burn that faded and returned as the breeze came and went. And sometimes there was the calling of unseen hill birds: the close-by ‘burping’ of a ptarmigan, well-camouflaged in its grey and brown summer plumage among the rocks, and the far-off, plaintive piping of a golden plover. The birds had been there all the time. It’s just that they’d been lost in the jarring sound created by ourselves as we traversed the rocks along the ridge.

I’ve a particular recollection of an evening at Easter when my wife and I were in that part of southern France known as the Hautes Alpes (right). It was Maundy Thursday and we’d gone with a friend to a striking, stone-built, convent abbey for the service. Outside, the grassy surrounds were studded yellow with primroses, new green leaves were fresh on the tree branches and, as the abbey bell tolled, a chaffinch added his cheery song. It was an idyllic spring evening; one we’d both long remember.



By contrast, the inside of the building was so much quieter, as the nuns in black and white habits took their places, almost soundlessly, along the row of wooden stalls. Then, the silence became even more intense, focussed on the movements of the Mother Superior. With water jug, basin and towel, she knelt in front of the small group of sisters, proceeding, one by one, to

wash their feet. The humility in Christ's act for his disciples long ago was there now, in the scene being enacted in the intensely meaningful quiet of the place.

Down at ground level, the Black Isle included, we're part of a world of intrusive noise and bustle. To catch even the faintest trace of the Biblical 'still, small voice' might seem challenging at times. In recent times, the creation of our new Black Isle East has brought us together from different places, in a shared point of worship that is Rosemarkie Church. As a congregation, we thank God for the gift of such a beautiful place and setting and offer our 21st Century gratitude for those who built a centre of worship here, in this present building and in the ones that preceded it centuries back. It is our place of peace, our Christian inheritance from the past, to be treasured in the present far-from-quiet age.

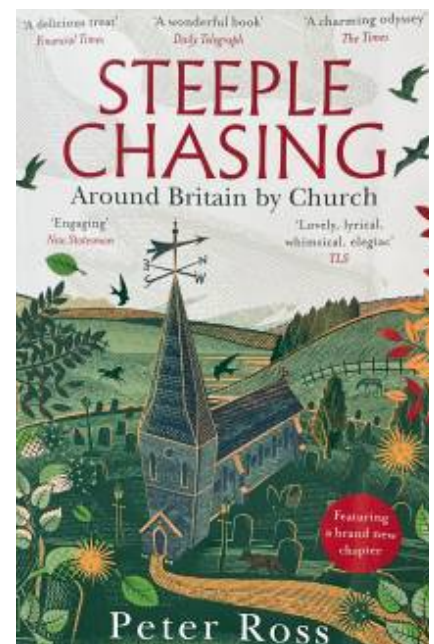
Douglas Willis

In Praise of Churches

*It was the hour of the owl, the hour of the men who wear the cowl,
and the church was in deep winter dark.*

*A monk ghosted in, a white shape in the blackness; a shape that took
on greater definition as he lit the tall candles on the altar. His hood
was up, his face shadowed, but his quick precise movements
suggested that this was the young brother novice Brother Edmond.
Bells rang out with an urgent clang, which meant that two other
monks - out of sight in the north transept - were pulling long ropes
that disappeared up into the tower, calling their brethren to praise.*

*It was six in the morning on 8 December 2020.....the day of the first
Covid vaccination - a moment, it seemed, of answered prayers*



These atmospheric opening words fairly draw the reader in to daily life at Pluscarden Abbey in Moray, Peter Ross's first engagement on a zig-zag tour of places of Christian worship across the UK. He takes his time, listens intently to those he meets and displays a compassionate empathy for those struggling to keep their places of worship open.

Churches outlive people he observes at one point before adding, A human lifespan, to a church, must seem a passing season. Yet just as the seasons provide markers and definition in our lives, so do these lives mark and define the churches they attend.

For the paperback version he has added a chapter where he attends evensong in Westminster Abbey between the time of the Queen's funeral and the King's coronation. *This is my feeling about old churches: that the stones have absorbed the love and sorrow of many generations, so that what we sense as we enter, especially if alone, is the accumulated ache of centuries of human experience. An old church offers, therefore, a strong impression of continuity and resilience. More than that: solidarity and reassurance, something neighbourly. It is an arm around the shoulder, a murmured word in the ear: everything is going to be alright.*

The book is a great read. And it's in the Rosemarkie Church Library for you to borrow. 😊

A New Day

Slowly the black velvety curtain of night rises
to the overture of the dawn chorus
A red sky is peppered with frothy grey clouds
The stage is set for the birth of a new day

The dimmer switch is turned up
Red sky turns to orange
as the golden globe of the sun appears
to warm the atmosphere

The garden gradually awakens
Lush green grass carpets the ground
Shards of light dimple the pond
where orange and yellow koi swim

A sea of snowdrops dance in the breeze
Colourful crocuses carpet the ground
Tête-a-tête daffodils nod to each other
and tulips stand straight and tall

Primroses nestle in the leaves
Grape hyacinths gently wave
The scent of magnolia fills the air
Birdsong is all around

The blue sky darkens
Thunder peals, lightning flashes
Hailstones bounce
and no birds sing.

The sky brightens
The storm has passed
A glorious rainbow appears
And the concerto resumes.

Maggie Wynton

Phoenix India Update

Following the wonderfully enjoyable and successful Curry Evening organised by the Hossack family last November in aid of Phoenix India, this update begins with very sad news indeed.

In January, we were deeply saddened to hear of the passing of Phoenix India Vice President, Roshan David, who died suddenly and unexpectedly on 4th January 2024 as a result of a massive heart attack. Roshan was only 33 years old and left a wife, Shradha, and three year old son, Ryan. Roshan was the grandson of the Comprehensive Rural Tribal Development Programme (CRTDP) founder, Rev. Karim David, and was highly regarded and loved by all who knew him.



Roshan with son Ryan and CRTDP President, Vimal Jadhav

He was the person with whom I communicated most, often several times a week, and was a most likely future Director of CRTDP. His premature death is a great loss to everyone associated with him. Phoenix India had planned to bring Roshan over to the UK in September as part of our 30th anniversary celebrations and his presence will be greatly missed during this period. His father, Iqbal, who previously worked with CRTDP, has agreed to take on Roshan's communication role and I have been liaising closely with Iqbal since Roshan's passing. It has been a most difficult time for Roshan's family and friends, and we continue to pray for them during this extremely challenging period.

Nagazari village continues to be the rural headquarters of CRTDP, where it first started its work in 1980. CRTDP has a registered office, guest house, community hall and medical dispensary, which has been served by several community nurses over the years. Tailoring classes continue to be conducted there by one of CRTDP's longest serving employees, Mrs. Manorama Bhoge, who has undertaken this role for 30 years. As well as funding these projects, Phoenix India is keen to resurrect some of the other rural projects previously undertaken in Nagazari, which have included poultry farming, goat rearing, cultivation of tree saplings for watershed projects and the community nurse initiative. These projects have been curtailed due to a lack of funding, but Phoenix India will continue to support these village projects as much as possible going forward.

CRTDP have provided proposals for various new projects. These include a new women's counselling centre, tailoring courses for young village women and a government subsidised basic nursing course, all of which will be a great benefit to the young women and their communities. These proposals are currently being reviewed by Phoenix India to determine affordability and we hope to be able to provide funding in the coming months for one or more of these projects.

In December, CRTDP distributed blankets to the poorest and most needy people in the rural areas surrounding Nagpur. The programme provided 250 blankets to the elderly and vulnerable in various villages including Nagazari, Mandwa, Katangdhara and Kanholibara. The blankets were donated by Churches Auxiliary for Social Action (CASA), which has had a long association with CRTDP in this endeavour. During the colder winter nights, a blanket can make a huge difference in the lives of some of Nagpur's higher risk groups.



Blanket distribution in Kanholibara village

The Khaparkheda Mahila Cell (women's support group) continues to provide support for so many women and their children. Phoenix India has been supporting this amazing project since 2008. Khaparkheda is a busy and developing industrial area approximately 25km north of Nagpur. The cell is located in a building within the compound of the Rural Police Headquarters, who are very supportive to DWCDI and assist with exerting pressure on uncooperative family members. Phoenix India has agreed to continue supporting this tremendous project for the year ahead.

Ken Hossack

A Fund for Education in Malawi in Memory of Linda Nelson 1954 – 2006

Mount Mulanje, Malawi

Linda's Fund was set up in 2006 in memory of Fortrose Academy teacher, Linda Nelson, to improve educational provision for over 600 pupils of Mulanje Mission Community Day Secondary School in Malawi, through bursaries and school projects. Girls and boys have equal access to the funds. Mulanje School is partnered with Fortrose Academy.

After a quiet year and lack of funds, following the pandemic years, there were sufficient resources to support two students in 2023 and a further two or three will be supported in 2024. Since the start of Linda's Fund in 2006, 36 students have been awarded bursaries for 12 different courses ranging from tailoring to teaching. More info at www.lindasfund.org.uk



School celebrations at Fortrose Hall



Completed teachers' houses



‘Out of the strong came forth sweetness’

When Tate & Lyle recently decided to change the logo on their new Lyle’s syrup plastic bottles, they couldn’t have anticipated the ‘stushie’ that followed. The green and gold colours were still there but the dead lion and the swarm of bees were replaced by a modern representation of a lion’s head accompanied by a single bee!

It’s a brave person who tampers with the world’s oldest unchanged brand packaging introduced by Abram Lyle more than 150 years ago and acknowledged by the Guinness Book of Records. But for traditionalists the good news is that the distinctive Lyle’s syrup tin remains unchanged – green and yellow depicting a dead lion with a swarm of bees and the words, *Out of the strong came forth sweetness*.



Abram Lyle was a man of deep faith. At the end of the 19th century, when the brand was launched, it is likely that many more people would have known the story of the Samson’s fight with the lion, the carcass becoming a home for bees and the riddle he set for his wedding guests. If you don’t know the story, head to Judges Ch14. An extract from *The Message* to whet your appetite.

5-6 Samson went down to Timnah with his father and mother. When he got to the vineyards of Timnah, a young lion came at him, roaring. The Spirit of God came on him powerfully and he ripped it open barehanded, like tearing a young goat. But he didn’t tell his parents what he had done. 7 Then he went down to speak to the woman. In Samson’s eyes she was the one.

8-9 Some days later when he came back to get her, he made a little detour to look at what was left of the lion. And there a wonder: a swarm of bees in the lion’s carcass – and honey! He scooped it up in his hands and kept going, eating as he went. He re-joined his father and mother and gave some to them and they ate. But he didn’t tell them that he had scooped it out from the lion’s carcass.

10-11 His father went down to make arrangements with the woman, while Samson prepared a feast there.....Because the people were wary of him, they arranged for 30 young friends to mingle with him.

12 -13 Samson said to them: “Let me put a riddle to you. If you can figure it out during the 7 days of the feast, I’ll give you 30 linen garments and 30 changes of fine clothing. But if you can’t figure it out then you’ll give me 30 linen garments and 30 changes of fine clothing.”

13-14 They said, “Put your riddle. Let’s hear it. So he said:

From the eater came something to eat

From the strong came something sweet

Can they possibly solve it? Pick up the story at Judges Ch 14 verse 15.

Travels in the West Bank

Trips to the Holy Land organised by the Church of Scotland in recent years have struck a balance between visiting holy sites and meeting the people who currently live in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. As Douglas Simpson explains, it is the stories of the remarkable people met that live longest in the memory.

Daoud (right) is a farmer. His family have farmed in the rolling hills near Bethlehem for generations. But his farm is now surrounded by illegal Israeli colonies and is constantly under threat, both legal and physical. Despite having all the necessary title deeds Daoud is constantly under threat of eviction by the Israeli authorities; the roads to his farm have been blocked by piles of rubble; outbuildings have been declared illegal and demolished; access to water has been denied; his precious olive groves have been repeatedly damaged.



But Daoud is nothing if not resilient and versatile. He has dug wells, excavated caves, created new access routes to the farm and diversified into different farm products, including bees to produce honey.



He has also gone public. Designating the farm 'Tent of Nations', he has opened it to the public attracting thousands of visitors from all round the world to hear his story or to work on the farm. The visitors also provide a degree of protection from settler attacks and other forms of persecution. From time to time visiting parties include inquisitive Israelis. One group was so impressed they built new toilets to replace the ones which had been demolished. Others replanted olive trees which had been destroyed by settlers. Daoud is a Christian. Despite the constant persecution he renounces violence. A sign on a rock at the entrance to the farm states: *We refuse to be enemies.*



Bassam Aramin and Rami Elhanan (left) should not be friends. But they are. Indeed, they refer to themselves as brothers. Rami is a Jew and a former soldier while Bassam is a Palestinian who from the age of 17 spent seven years in an Israeli jail. They were both heroes in the eyes of their people and should be sworn enemies. It was tragedy of the worst imaginable kind that brought them together. Rami's 14 year old daughter Smadar was murdered by a Palestinian suicide bomber in 1997. Bassam's daughter Abir was born that year but lost her life, murdered ten years later by an Israeli policeman.

Despite expressing the deepest of reservations, both were persuaded to attend a meeting of The Parents Circle Family Forum, a grassroots organisation for Palestinian and Israeli families who have lost an immediate family member due to the conflict. They met, talked, wept together and forgave, and have since dedicated their lives to the promotion of a peaceful, non violent end to the occupation. We were privileged to meet Rami and Bassam in person. They were utterly inspiring and have taken their message of reconciliation all over the world, beacons of hope in an otherwise bleak situation. They, too, refuse to be enemies.

World Day of Prayer March 2024

World Day of Prayer

Prepared by the WDP Committee of Palestine
March 1st, 2024

"I Beg You... Bear With One Another in Love."



Worship Service

The local venue for this year's World Day of Prayer service was the beautiful surroundings of St Regulus Church in Cromarty.

The materials were produced by the WDP Committee of Palestine long before the appalling atrocities of 7th October and the absolute catastrophe that has been visited on the Palestinians in Gaza and indeed in parts of the West Bank since.



Amongst the hymns, prayers and Bible readings, there were personal pieces, none so poignant as **A Story of Truth Telling**, the reflections of Lina whose Aunt Shireen, more widely known as Shireen Abu Akleh, a well known tv journalist, killed in Jenin in 2022. Here is Lina's story.



For me, Aunt Shireen was like the branch of an olive tree, resisting the strong winds that threatened to erase the truth of Palestinian experience.

When Aunt Sireen died, Palestine lost a legend and a famous Al Jazeera journalist. But, for me, she was an aunt, a godmother at baptism, my best friend and, for as long as I can remember, my role model. She was also a role model to many young Palestinian women. I cherish all the moments I spent with her, talking about art, politics and life.

For 25 years my Aunt Shireen dedicated her life to telling the stories of Palestinian experience, and to being a voice of truth. She entered every house in Palestine and the Arab world through the TV screen. The presence of 500 people on the day of her funeral was proof that she had also entered their hearts.

Many people did not know that my aunt was a Palestinian Christian. Shireen's faith led her to bear with all in love, despite differences in faith traditions. She stood with all who were being harmed. She campaigned for both Christians and Muslims to have access to the holy sites in Jerusalem. Her truth telling was even a way of bearing with the occupiers in love.

Although Shireen, like a branch of the olive tree, was cut down too soon, her legacy lives on. Her memory now nourishes the earth, from which we will gain strength to continue telling the truth and working towards reconciliation.

Lina



Christ in the Rubble

A Liturgy of Lament



There are many sermons freely available online but few go viral in the way that Rev Munther Isaac's 'Christ in the Rubble' sermon from Bethlehem did last December. Rev Isaac was born in Bethlehem and still lives there as pastor of Christmas Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bethlehem and Academic Dean at Bethlehem Bible College in Palestine. The following extracts give a flavour of what he said.

We are angry... We are broken... This should have been a time of joy; instead, we are mourning. We are fearful. 20,000 killed. Thousands under the rubble still. Close to 9,000 children killed in the most brutal ways. Day after day after day. 1.9 million displaced! Hundreds of thousands of homes were destroyed. Gaza as we know it no longer exists. This is an annihilation. A genocide....

We are tormented by the silence of the world. Leaders of the so-called "free" lined up one after the other to give the green light for this genocide against a captive population. They gave the cover. Not only did they make sure to pay the bill in advance, they veiled the truth and context, providing political cover. And, yet another layer has been added: the theological cover with the Western Church stepping into the spotlight.....

The full sermon is a hard watch, or read, but worth it. By the time of his Easter sermon, Christ was still in the rubble. The following two extracts capture the essence of the sermon but, again, worth accessing the full version online.

We have kept this rubble in our church since birth, because Gaza is still under rubble, because our people in Gaza and our children are still getting hauled from under rubble. Who would have thought that Easter would come and Gaza would still be destroyed in such a horrible way? Today we entered a new phase of the extermination war, in which we are killed by hunger, thirst and disease. I was very hurt today from the cruel scene of a child under the rubble, who miraculously survived the bombing, and while being freed he was saying, "Where is the water, I am thirsty."

On the cross Jesus cried: 'I am thirsty.' He stands in solidarity with all the victims of the wars and famines, caused by the oppressive and authoritarian regimes in our world. It is the cry of every oppressed of the injustice of humanity, its silence and inability to put an end to tyranny and injustice.

And while Jesus was hanging on the cross, they ridiculed him, cursed him, and challenged him to come down from the cross, as they mock today and show us scenes of their murmuring, as they tear Gaza neighbourhood after neighbourhood, house after house, and child after child.....

Let's face our reality with the faith of the resurrection, and that sorrow and death in Christ are only our way to Sunday dawn, where there is no oppression, no occupation, no racism, no war, no hunger, no thirst, no disease, no cancer, no tears, no poverty, no oppression... But a life with God. In the cross, love conquered death. In the cross love conquered death. Amen.

A Poem, a Letter and a Prayer

From the April edition of 'Life and Work'

As an elder of the Church of Scotland for over 40 years and a frequent visitor to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories over the past ten, I am saddened and dismayed at the Church's lack of any real public expression of outrage at the continuing suffering of the civilian population of Gaza.

What relevance has the new Mark of Mission which purports 'to transform unjust structures of society and challenge violence' when two million Gazans, mainly women and children, are indiscriminately bombed and denied food, water, medicines and shelter and yet the Church fails to express publicly its utter condemnation?

This is in stark contrast to the unequivocal stance of organisations such as the Jewish Voice for Peace Rabbinical council in their recent open letter of rebuke to President Biden.

I believe the lack of such moral clarity will forever be a stain on the Church of which I have until now been a proud member.

Douglas Simpson, Fortrose, Ross-shire

A prayer written to mark six months since October 7, 2023.

Dear Christ

We have heard of you as Christ in the manger. Born into a world of soldiers and poverty. Born of Mary, her beloved one. Born to seek and to save the lost. Christ in the manger, we have heard how God so loved the world

We have heard of you as Christ on the cross. Dying at the hands of cruel men, staggering to your cross under the weight of the world's pain, dying with a word of forgiveness on your lips. Christ on the cross, we have heard that you loved us and gave yourself for us.

Now we hear of you as Christ in the rubble. Christmas is your presence with those who suffer. Where else would you be born today other than in the rubble of Gaza, where else but in the operating theatre.. Christ in the rubble, we pray for those with you in the rubble, with you in the blood, with you in the tears.

And now we hear of you again as the risen Christ, the Christ of Easter. Show us your wounded hands. May your risen, wounded hands bring healing to your wounded, broken world.

We pray in your name for your people of Gaza, using your Easter words "Peace be with you." Let there be peace. Let it be now.

The Very Rev Andrew McLellan, Friends of St Andrew's Jerusalem and Tiberias

It is still dark in hell.

I am awake.

I am not dead yet.

Cold, hungry, paralysed
with the unending terror.

My family sleeps on
but not my dad.

He lies elsewhere this morning
under the rubble.

He went to find food.

It is quiet
save the drone of fitful slumber
from surrounding tents.

I listen for the buzz
of the deadly insect
which hovers high above
watching.

For the scream of the sudden jet
gone before I'm deafened
and cowering.

For the ground quaking thump
as another mosque or school
disintegrates.

I lie on
scared to rise
from the hard ground.
But get up I must.

I think of before.
Three floors of laughter and love
despite our imprisonment
reduced to toy-strewn shrapnel.
Lives shattered, bombed and
starved.

I'm only 8
but I must have been so bad
to deserve this.

Someone said:
"Millions round the world protest
and weep
at this injustice."

And somehow that thought
brings hope to my tears.

And I rise up to face another day.

Douglas Simpson

Remembering Rena

17th November 1925 to 9th November 2023

Alexandrina (Rena) Gillies was born in Kirkintilloch in 1925, the eighth of nine children born to Donald and Mary Gillies. Donald hailed from the long-deserted crofting township of Umachan at the north of end of the Isle of Raasay. Mary was from North Uist and in common with many Gaels both headed south to find work and in so doing found each other.



Rena was brought up in a Christian home, 'The Book' being read morning and evening in the home. In Kirkintilloch Mary attended the local Gospel Hall and the children all went to Sunday School there while Donald walked the 8 miles to Glasgow to attend a Free Presbyterian Church. Rena became a believer aged 15, an event recorded in the Bible she used at the time. It was a decision that shaped the rest of her life. In 1943 her brother Neil was killed aboard his ship in the Eastern Mediterranean. A further sadness for her mother who had lost a brother at Battle of the Somme.

After school, Rena trained as a nurse at Stobhill Hospital and made many new friends at the Nurses Christian Fellowship, in particular two sisters from Gardenstown who had a brother, John, a fisherman. Love blossomed between Rena and John who left the sea, gained the qualifications necessary to study medicine, graduated as a doctor in Aberdeen and married Rena. They worshipped at a lively church, Hebron Hall (now Hebron Evangelical Church) where they made many lifelong friends.

In 1970 they moved to the Isle of Harris where John took over a busy, single – handed practice, based in Tarbert covering the whole of North Harris including the islands of Scarp and Scalpay and the village of Rhenigidale only accessible by sea or across a four-mile hillside track. Rena helped John in the dispensary, the office and answering phone calls. No mobile phones then and not even many landlines so contacting John in an emergency could be tricky



Rena and John on Harris

Rena also became fully involved in the North Harris community, joining the SWRI, becoming Brown Owl in the Brownie pack and, of course, joining the local Church of Scotland, particularly enjoying the weekly Bible Study. She loved cooking and travelled with friends to the Cordon Bleu School in London for inspiration and expert tuition with John being the main beneficiary of her new skills at the end of long days visiting patients. These patients regularly showed their appreciation of the services provided to the community with legs of lamb, plentiful fish and eggs. John also had several drawers of hand-knitted woollen socks from grateful patients – far more than could be worn in a lifetime!

In 1992, Rena and John retired to Kincurdie House in Rosemarkie. John loved the view of the sea and Rena the trees, the gentler landscape reflected in the changing seasons and in the house lost herself in crosswords, books, murder mysteries on tv and playing the piano, mostly hymns for herself and John to sing. Both became a much-loved couple within the Fortrose

and Rosemarkie Church of Scotland community, taking an active part in church life for as long as they could.

Latterly they ‘wintered’ with family in York before John passed away in 2016 at the grand age of 92. Ten weeks later Rena suffered a stroke which affected her eyesight, cognitive function and mobility. She had, of course, to give up driving but it took some persuasion from the physio for her to use a zimmer rather than ‘furniture surfing’ through the house! She continued to watch her favourite programme, ‘Songs of Praise’, happily spent all day reading the P&J or church newsletter and was grateful to friends who continued to visit despite her deafness and failing memory.

Rena’s daughters looked after her for 8 years until she died peacefully in her bed at Kincurdie House, Rosemarkie. She knew she was going to heaven after death and told the ladies who helped look after her that she was ready to meet Jesus face to face. **John 11:25-26**. She is greatly missed by family and all who were privileged to meet her.

Gillian Robertson

Brenda Kerr

5 January 1936 to 7 January 2024

If Brenda was ever asked what was most important to her, she would always say ‘my family’ - a truth captured beautifully in her daughter Fenella’s tribute delivered at her funeral.



No man is an island. So wrote the poet John Donne, promoting the idea that we are all connected in some way or another and it is this that keeps us invested in humanity. Or perhaps, more simply that community is everything” - something my darling Mum, Brenda, was passionate about her whole life.

We arrived in Fortrose during the heat wave of 1976, fresh from the Orkney Islands. Not knowing anyone Mum encouraged us to get out and explore. “Go down to the beach and see who’s there,” she said. We did and were welcomed straight away, soon making friends and finding our place. That in it self doesn’t seem remarkable except that - without us knowing it – Mum was introducing us to every aspect of community from the close knit support of her own family, extending beyond it to the lives of others.

Whilst we were making friends Mum was finding out what she could do for the village. She very quickly offered her services – including helping out at the school, the Scottish country dancing group, the history group and, of course, this church. She was a committed member, serving on the Board and joining the Kirk Session as an elder. She was always going to a meeting for this group and serving on that committee, putting in the hours quietly without fuss but always with kindness and a sense of humour, something that never left her.

Many of you will have benefitted from Mum’s generosity and care. She was ready to lend a helping hand, a listening ear or offer a comforting word. She may have mended your trousers, or baked you a cake, served you a cup of tea, sat with you and enjoyed a joke and a laugh. Her

willingness to invest time and energy in communal endeavours demonstrated to us that our collective strength lies in our shared experiences and collaborative efforts.

She knew so many people and they knew her. She loved nothing more than nipping out to the Co-op and coming home to tell us who she had met and what the latest news was. There would usually follow a conversation such as “I bumped into so and so. You know, the man who lives up the hill, the one married to the lady who used to live down by the beach. No, not that one, the other one with the wee dog.”

Mum and Dad loved Fortrose, as did we, and still do. Mum always said, “You need a project” and this meant moving house. Having travelled the length and breadth of the UK we were glad they decided to keep their moving to Fortrose. First, Flowerburn Cottage then off to the beach at Waters Edge. Up to Feddon Hill. Down to the High Street before finally building their dream home in Station Road. Every move meant a new set of neighbours resulting in lifelong friends.

Mum understood that the true measure of a life well lived is the relationships we forge, the connections we make and the impact left on a community. In living that life by example, each of us, her children, has inherited that very same lesson. We have all been inspired to become part of our own communities and each of us volunteers or works with local projects in one form or another.

When Mum went to live in Ballifeary House it seemed at first that her community involvement would stop but this was not the case. Once a week she and I would walk along to the Highland Hospice and enjoy an afternoon of crafting, tea and of course cake. I loved that she was part of a group outside her home, still making connections and still sharing her beautiful spirit.

You may be wondering why I am wearing this rather splendid coat. Well it’s because my Mum helped to create it. I thought it might be fun to run an art session at the home for Mum and her fellow residents. Together we spent a morning producing these unique patterns, which were then turned into beautiful napkins, one for each resident. And the spare fabric was used for my coat. When the napkins were ready, the staff at Ballifeary threw a grand party. I was so proud of Mum being part of this art group and I have this coat to remember the special time we spent together.



When we die we all hope to leave something behind. Mum’s legacy will be one of unity, compassion and a belief that together we can build something that is greater than ourselves. We will celebrate Mum’s wonderful life by cherishing our own families, creating bonds that make life’s journey worthwhile and above all strengthen our communities.

It is fitting that whilst no man is an island, it is this very “Isle” which gave Mum a life truly well lived.

Happy Memories of Betty Maciver

18 / 11 / 27 to 7 / 2 / 24

Rachel Elizabeth MacIver (Betty) was born on the 18th November 1927, to Alexanderina (Ina) and Murdo MacKay. She had a happy childhood, growing up on their croft in Strathconon with her siblings, Duncan, Nannie, Violet, and the late, John and Roddy. They got the nickname 'The Flaps' due to their stylish hats that covered their ears!



These were happy days, but hard times and certainly no fancy holidays. Maybe this was the reason, when the Postie arrived one chilly day, that Betty hopped into his warm van, found a blanket and crept behind the driver seat. Once the Postie finished his rounds, he headed back to Muir of Ord, only for a very frightened Betty to come out of hiding and startling the Postie. No mobile phones in these days, so the poor Postie headed to Strathconon to find a huge search going on along the banks of the River Conon.

At a moment in time, Murdo's life was tragically cut short, and the family had to move to Burnfarm, Killen. This is where Betty met her best friend Sybil and went on to marry the latter's brother George, at which point Sybil then married John, Betty's brother!

Betty and George started their married life on the farm at Easter Blairfoid, bringing up their family, Alec, Murd, Anita, Andy, Ooshie, Eileen, and the late Lorna, tragically lost at the age of 29. Betty embraced farming life, but occasionally she would annoy George by having the animals as pets. One pet sheep who answered to Bede-Bede never did make the trip to the Dingwall Mart sheep sales! Betty and George retired from farming and moved to North Kessock. A new career beckoned for Betty as a cook at The Redcliffe Hotel.

A surprising visit from one Brian Webster unearthed a new family of Canadian cousins to the fold – it was like a scene straight out of 'Long Lost Families'! Betty enjoyed her days out, a wee visit to her dear sister Nannie, then on to Murd's Croft - her eyes always lit up when her bairns were there, with cuddles galore. Occasionally, you would find Betty having a wee spin on the quad bike. It wasn't long before she got her very own four-wheeled mobility scooter, often seen hurtling along the shore road in Avoch.

Betty celebrated her 90th Birthday on the "Fred Olsen" week-long-cruise to the Norwegian Fjords - by the end of the week, she was called Granny by many of the guests and crew!

Christmas was always a fun time for Betty when she was busy wrapping gifts for the family, leaving the name tags to last. Her bairns never knew what their present would be! One year her daughter-in-law Janet got a car wash kit, and Ooshie a blouse ... The blouse didn't fit (!) and Janet didn't even have a car at the time!

Betty leaves a wonderful legacy through all her bairns. She touched hearts of so many people, everyone's Aunty Betty, and much-loved Granny. A wonderful lady who blessed us with many with memories that will be cherished forever.

Craft Group

The Craft Group have been busy over the winter months on our latest project.

Firstly, the ladies selected a view or an image and faintly drew an online on to the backing. A selection of very small pieces of varying fabrics were applied and secured with a range of sewing stitches.

As you can see the designs are all, colourful, detailed and eye-catching. Thanks as always to Sylvia for her expert tuition and constant encouragement.



Church Library

Our library is at the front left of the church as we come in to the building.

It is more of a book exchange than a library. Please feel to browse and take a book away to read or keep. Also feel free to add books to the collection. You might even want to recommend a book to read via the next newsletter!



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Sincere thanks to everyone who contributed to this first newsletter in the new run. The newsletter belongs to the whole congregation - so please feel free to contribute articles or suggestions for articles.

We'd hope to have the next newsletter out over the summer. Please send any articles or suggestions for articles to: calummacsween76@gmail.com by **Friday 28 June** - earlier if possible! Thank you.