



# Christmas Chronicle Newsletter December 2020/January 2021

**St Mary's-Greyfriars' Parish Church  
Locum Minister: Rev Douglas Irving**

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**[www.stmarysgreyfriars.org.uk](http://www.stmarysgreyfriars.org.uk)  
Scottish charity no. SC00943**



## From the Locum Minister

Christmas celebrations will not be the same this year, with not all the family able to travel on account of COVID-19 measures. That will be the situation facing most families. There won't be a full church this year on Christmas Eve at Caerlaverock either, with Caerlaverock Kirk Session having made the decision to postpone reopening meantime, with numbers attending church services being severely capped at the moment anyway. No Christmas Eve or Christmas Day service either at St Mary's-Greyfriars'. Right enough, we've not been used to this anyway in recent years as services on 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> December have not been part of SMG's regular church calendar.

I write, however, just before St Mary's Greyfriars' sanctuary opens again for worship this weekend for the first Sunday of Advent, the beginning of a new Christian year. The service has already been "fully booked" by a prescribed full complement of 40 worshippers, with the sacraments of infant baptism and Communion scheduled to be celebrated on 6<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> December 2020 respectively. We are in debt to our Session Clerk, Anne Mackie, and her team for getting the church ready for opening again, meeting the COVID-19 Scottish Government regulations in place.

Dalbeattie and Kirkgunzeon Church, of which Hilary and I are members, has been open for some weeks, affording us opportunity to attend "live" Sunday worship led by our Minister, Fiona Wilson, also our Interim Moderator here, "streamed live" on Facebook, too. Our son Roan, who worshipped with us last Sunday, was able to glimpse on Facebook on his mobile as he sat in the pew, the service broadcast being filmed on mobile camera only metres away from us. Such is modern technology which the Church is making use of and will require to utilise in its mission to Scotland during future times yet afforded humanity.

It has been a privilege, a steep learning curve and a new experience for me, since March 2020, to broadcast weekly Sunday YouTube Services to you and others listening in. To our son Roan, who makes it all possible, huge thanks are due for his time and unfailing energy

expended. He tells me there have been 3,900 video views from our members and others listening in, with 34 videos to date. Is this not our SMG and Caerlaverock congregations, the latter with not inconsiderable assistance from Caerlaverock Community Association on its website, engaged in mission?

Church-wise, though everything is being “slimmed down”, with SMG’s organisations and house fellowshipping closed down, of necessity we continue with simpler congregational life in the family of the Church until vaccination, hopefully, kicks in to counter the pandemic’s incursions. Keep praying! One of the masks I am wearing these days is made from military camouflage gear, a pointer to warring “in the Spirit” against the enemy’s viral assaults. The mask is worn with the biblical promise, perfect love casts out fear! The full biblical quote, incidentally, from 1 John 4. 18 reads: “There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.”

In the world we are called to serve, things are far from the normal as regards what we have taken for granted. Serious economic downturn, national debt increasing alarmingly, industries, retail outlets, businesses closing down, perhaps never to reopen. Unemployment on the rise, a big shift from shop outlets to online shopping. The streets of Edinburgh were very noticeably quieter the other day when we were there. Scaled-down Christmas street lighting, the few shops we were in bereft of customers, with reduced available stock. Life for us all has its own sizeable down-scaling at the moment, the down-scaling of the turkey size on order only one example. We are all called to simpler living. Will this Christmas be less hectic?

On the national church front at the moment there is a sizeable scaling down with many 121 church staff on furlough.

I have been looking at a Discussion Paper tabled before Dumfries & Kirkcudbright the other night about the new Presbytery of South West Scotland to be formed through the merging of our own present Presbytery of Dumfries & Kirkcudbright with the present Annandale &

Eskdale, Ardrossan, Ayr, Irvine & Kilmarnock and Wigtown & Stranraer Presbyteries.

Three priorities for the new Presbytery have been identified by the working group, (1) focus on mission, (2) full inclusiveness and involvement of members of Presbytery at both regional and local levels and (3) reduced administration and bureaucracy. The new Presbytery would meet four times a year, with Kilmarnock identified as a central meeting point in terms of both geography and transport links and suitable meeting venues, with two of the four annual meetings to be held in June, September, November and March to be held online.

The emphasis in the prioritising of mission is right and puts mission at the heart of Presbytery's agenda as it should be both in Presbytery's and in every Kirk Session's. Mission is often side-lined in the church's introspection. The call is to move with Christ out of the known comfort zone to the territory of the unknown, where the grace of Christ supplies every need, to be proven by us, each one. An ageing Abraham shows that age is no barrier. There is always need to "look out of the box" and to the future. To see others engaged. The church member, in his/her calling of Christ, often needs to die to self, to desist from safe over-introspection, to let his perfect indwelling love of the Holy Spirit's indwelling in us cast out fear, enable us to ditch the "I can't notion" and to simply, in His power supplied, do Christ's bidding. The Church, and you and I, her members, need often to die to the oft crippling self, to embrace Christ in all things and live for the other sent our way, both in worship and service.

At Presbytery level, a full-time mission development officer is to encourage and support congregations to so engage in Mission and Discipleship and provide Training and Resources. We must pray even now for the appointment of a "Kingdom" person to this role, inspired by the promises in Scripture of our Lord.

May we, called to support the servant of God, also do what is required of us in terms of what we are enabled to do and say. May we be recipients of Holy Spirit initiative and inspiration, in the new thing we trust is God's doing. To hear God's speaking to us too into these

times. To keep in focus for all and to share, Jesus' coming to us as man in Palestine and to His promised coming again as glorified Christ at the close of humankind's age.

We spoke of the gift of Holy Spirit imagination. Could He be behind some newspaper cartoons which have highlighted, albeit unsuspectingly, the fact that the birth of Jesus should be at the heart of national Christmas celebrations, the "Reason for the Season", as it has been put. First was the cartoon showing the three Kings portrayed offering the babe Jesus milk, pasta and toilet roll with the caption "the non-essential shops were closed!" A second, portraying the three Kings queuing up outside Jesus's birthplace observing social distancing, two metre ground markings, with an angel at the entrance taking their temperatures."

May we exercise similar Jesus references in our daily talk! In simpler celebration, devoid of excess, share the true meaning of Christmas in the person Jesus and on into the New Year 2021, to which the accompanying Edinburgh store Harvey Nichols' dressed window beckons. Keep intercessory going and service too in Jesus' Name!

A joyful Christmas to you and yours and all sent your way - and a New Year truly fulfilling in Christ's Kingdom's cause.

Your Locum Minister and friend,

Douglas



## **From the Session Clerk**

First Sunday in Advent, what an auspicious time to reopen our church for Sunday worship.

As you can imagine, there has been a lot of hard work behind the scenes to get us ready. The Church of Scotland have issued very strict guidance on how safely we go about worship, and our local Presbytery has had to be satisfied that we are complying fully with updated guidance. All of that has been completed and we are open for business. A huge thank you to all who have helped us get this far. Not quite as usual, the service will be 40 minutes instead of an hour, there will be recorded hymns, and Robert will be playing the organ, so that we will have music, even if we cannot sing. A word of thanks to our Locum Minister, Rev. Douglas Irving, who has worked hard during lockdown, pastoral visiting, conducting funerals, and contacting those who are ill or bereaved. I know his work has been much appreciated by many of you.

Everyone has to decide how confident they feel about coming back, which is why Session sent out a health check to every member. Thank you to all those who took the trouble to reply to our letter. Your comments are valuable to us in shaping the future of our church. If and when you feel able to return, you will be made most welcome.

God bless us all over the coming months.

Anne Mackie  
Session Clerk

The photos below were taken at the service on 29<sup>th</sup> November. The congregation were all seated according to the social distancing rules.



And Dick Geddes laid a poppy wreath at the war memorial at the beginning of the service.



## **Church Register**

Please let me know of any changes of address: **Marion Bennett**, 2  
Wolfgill Drive Dumfries DG1 4XY. Tel: 263106

### **Deaths**

Mrs L Kirkham on 22/9/20  
Mr R McWhan on 2/10/20  
Mr S Tanner on 10/10/20  
Mrs V Tweedie on 18/10/20  
Mrs N Carruthers on 18/10/20  
Miss S Smith on 8/11/20  
Miss M Lorimer on 13/11/20

### **From the Editor**

Although our church has now re-opened for Sunday worship, we are still unable to produce and, more importantly, distribute printed copies of our newsletter. We appreciate that not all our members will be able to access these online-only editions but we would urge you to let others know they are available and how they can see them.

### **Fairtrade**

Second Nature (the former Baptist Church in Newall Terrace) is going to be open some Fridays leading up to Christmas – selling fairly-traded goods and the remains of Traidcraft stock from St John's e.g. socks, filter coffee, tea, sugar, peanut butter etc. and cards. Check on Facebook for opening time.

### **Congratulations**

To Ian and Margaret Dalrymple on the birth of their first grandchild, Breigh Katrina, on 20<sup>th</sup> November.

## **Thanks**

From Isabel Wright for the floral gift received on her birthday at the beginning of October.

## **And farewell!**

Tom and Kathryn Bretherton have now moved away from Dumfries and Tommy Jardine wrote these words of farewell. “In these everchanging times I’d like to pass on to the church family the news that Kathryn and Tom Bretherton have left Dumfries for Linlithgow to be closer to family, which is lovely but creates a small vacuum in our own church family, where the couple always played an integral but faithful role. Kathryn thought nothing of walking the lengthy distance from Suffolkhill Avenue to church and join with Tom in the car coming home. The couple were disappointed that they were unable to say a meaningful goodbye to friends in person but do look forward to new friends in a church in Linlithgow.”

## Used stamps

Just a reminder that any used postage stamps you have can be given to Liz Tanner to pass on to World Mission. The stamps can either be brought to church or else you can contact Liz on 01387 261486 and she will arrange to collect them. No doubt we will all receive lots of Christmas cards this year, so there will be plenty of stamps for Liz.

The Church of Scotland

**STAMP  
2020  
APPEAL**

**Start collecting stamps now to support The Women's Development Centre (WDC) in Kandy, Sri Lanka.**

Your used stamps can help the WDC support women and girls who have survived rape, sexual violence and family rejection, returning them to education or learning skills that will allow them to make a living

**HOW TO CONTRIBUTE:**  
Post your stamps to World Mission Stamp Project, PO Box 9191, Wishaw, Lanarkshire, ML2 0Y  
For other options and more information visit: [www.churchofscotland.org.uk/stamps](http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/stamps)

## Shoe Box Appeal 2020 for Blythswood

We give thanks that, despite the different circumstances this year, we had a wonderful response from members and friends, with boxes coming from as far afield as Dalbeattie!! We were able to deliver to the lorry on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 86 boxes, 3 large bags of additional items and monetary donations of £195, thus ensuring that many men, women and children are not forgotten at Christmas.

Thanks to all who supported the effort in ANY WAY.



## **From the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland**

The following is part of a message sent by the Moderator to Ministers, OLMs and Auxiliaries, Interim Moderators and Locums, Readers, the Diaconate, Ministry Candidates and Probationers & Session Clerks. We thought it might be of interest to our members.

“Might I also mention the ‘Scented Lament’ project to you. You’ve probably read about it on the Church of Scotland website or social media platforms and you can find all the details here: <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/news-and-events/news/2020/Moderator-invites-contributions-to-end-of-year-art-installation>

But I wanted to make absolutely sure that this didn’t escape your attention. To my mind, it offers a wonderful opportunity for us to make a collective response to the losses and sadness of this last year - and to do it in such a way as to be accessible to the whole country (not just the Church). I’m grateful to Peter and Heidi Gardner, the creative minds behind the installation, and to BBC Scotland (and David Strachan, Tern Television) for being willing to feature it in the short piece that will air on New Year’s Day (when folks south of the border will be viewing a message from the Archbishop of Canterbury).

Can you participate by sending in your own piece of rosemary? Can you encourage the folk in your congregation to do so and use your community networks to advertise it more widely? Peter and Heidi may be the artists but they intend that the wreath will belong to us all - a visual and scented expression of what we’ve been through and, at New Year, of our ‘bright hope for tomorrow’.

Finally, and with further reference to BBC Scotland, we’ve been glad that they’ve recognised the value of televised worship services throughout the period of the pandemic - a ‘God-send’ particularly for those who had no access to digital technology. The good news is that’s been continuing with ‘The Service’, and a second series of

'Reflections from the Quay' will run from Advent to Easter. Of course the Church of Scotland has no monopoly on that programming but we've worked to make sure that a good number of our own ministers have featured, along with representatives of our ecumenical partners and other faith communities. I'm humbled to have been asked to preach at 'The Service' that will go out from St Giles' Cathedral on Christmas Day. I mention this in case there will be people who are not able to attend a Christmas Day service - whether because there isn't one happening locally or through lack of digital access.

Let me finish by assuring you of my ongoing prayers for you and for your congregations. In what will be a very different Christmas season - almost unthinkable that we won't be raising the roof with 'O come, all ye faithful' - my prayer is that, nonetheless, the joy and peace of the season will be known to you and to the people of our communities.

He came down that we might have love.  
He came down that we might have peace.  
He came down that we might have joy.

With every blessing,"

**Rt Revd Dr W Martin Fair**  
**Moderator**  
**General Assembly of the Church of Scotland**

### **Next newsletter**

The deadline for our February/March issue is **Sunday** 24<sup>th</sup> January 2021. Many thanks as always.

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## **For reflection**

We cannot sing in church just now but can enjoy singing these Advent and Christmas songs.

**C**ome Thou long expected Jesus  
**H**ark the herald angels sing  
**R**ejoice and be merry in songs and in mirth  
**I**n the bleak midwinter  
**S**ee amid the winter snow  
**T**he first Nowell, the angel did say  
**M**asters in this hall, Hear ye news today  
**A**s Joseph was a walking, he heard an angel say  
**S**ilent Night, Holy Night

Lord Jesus, Be with us all as we celebrate your birth. This year our celebrations are different but we know that you are with us wherever we are and whatever our circumstances. Bless and comfort those for whom this time is difficult for whatever reason. Let us not forget that you Jesus are the reason for the Season. Amen

## **Useful contacts**

### **Minister**

Rev Douglas Irving: 01556 610156 or 07592 530161

### **Session Clerk**

Anne Mackie: 266186

### **Treasurer, Gift Aid and freewill offering envelopes**

Rod Williamson: 251876