AUTUMN 2026
Issue 5

LinAvon LINK



ST MICHAEL'S, LINLITHGOW



ST NINIAN'S CRAIGMAILEN



TORPHICHEN KIRK



AVONBRIDGE CHURCH



The Journal of Linlithgow and Avon Valley Church

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens. — ECCLESIASTES Ch3 v1

LINLITHGOW AND AVON VALLEY
CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

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Quarterly Communion Services

Sunday, 29th November 2026
St Michael's
10am in the church*
3pm in the Kirk Hall
*livestreamed on St Michael's website and Facebook
Available to view later on YouTube
St Ninian's Craigmailen
11am in the Longcroft Hall

Sunday, 6th November 2026
Avonbridge
10am in the Church Hall
Torphichen Kirk
11.15 am in the Kirk

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The deadline for the February 2027 issue is 1st January 2027.

After serving for over twenty-one years as editor of the St Michael's quarterly magazine 'Crosswind' and then launching 'LinAvon Link' for the new extended parish, Myra Lawson is taking well-earned retirement. Our new editor is Iain Harrison whose contact details are: iain_alan@hotmail.co.uk

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The views expressed within this magazine by the Editor or any contributor do not necessarily express the views of the Ministers or Kirk Session. Editorial comment and articles do not necessarily contain the official views of the Church of Scotland, which can be laid down only by the General Assembly. Any contributions to the magazine can be submitted to the Editor through the Church Office or to the Editor at myralawson144@btinternet.com

View from the Manse



Chris Long

by Rev Dr Liam Fraser



This is a time of year when the seasons change dramatically. Light fades, temperatures drop, and the weather turns inclement.

We are living through a similar season in our Parish. While there is much to celebrate, and many encouraging signs of life, we have been forced to make difficult decisions about our places of worship. This is something we would never have chosen, but which has been forced upon us due to unforeseen repairs, financial pressures, and the changing priorities of Presbytery and the General Assembly.

We have to acknowledge the real heartache and worry that comes with these changes. Most of the buildings we own have centuries of history and tradition attached to them. People have worshipped, celebrated, mourned, socialised, and inhabited these spaces for generations. They are anchors of the soul, and landmarks in the imaginations of people who would never typically venture into a Church.

While the image of church buildings looms large in our psyches, Scripture uses many images and phrases to describe the Church as the people of God. Among them are body, living stones, branches and fruit, temple and royal priesthood. Some of these are static – as static as an aged monument – while some are active and dynamic. Some focus on strength and stability while others on suppleness and movement, – even – joy. Among the most helpful for the season we find ourselves in, however, is that of *a tree*.

In the 1st Psalm we read this:

Happy are those
who do not follow the advice of the wicked,
or take the path that sinners tread,
or sit in the seat of scoffers;
but their delight is in the law of the Lord,
and on his law they meditate day and night.
They are like trees
planted by streams of water,
which yield their fruit in its season,
and their leaves do not wither.
In all that they do, they prosper.



The image is of a healthy tree, fed by living waters, sometimes putting out fruit and sometimes not, but always alive. Instead of fruit-bearing trees like this we might also think of the many trees we see across Linlithgow and West Lothian. They shed their leaves in Autumn, and might appear to be dead. Yet they are not. They are alive, and after their leaves have long past fallen they will put forth new leaves come Spring.

This is the image I would encourage us to have in this changing season. Not the image of a church building laden with costly repairs or boarded up but instead a great tree, which while appearing to pass away is only changing. That is because the great oak of the Church is planted in Christ himself, and cannot die. It does so only if those who are in him prefer to root themselves somewhere else, whether it be in wealth or property or worldly success. The challenge for all of us, whether we think of buildings or of our own lives, is to ensure that we are rooted in the rich ground of our Lord, no matter how rich or enticing other spots might look.

Whatever season of life you find yourself in, may you abide in the Lord and he in you, that being planted in him, and fed by his Word, you might bear fruit in season and out of season.

May God bless you,

Liam

The Prayer Chain evolves into the Prayer Wheel

by Maureen Blake

Twenty-five years ago Ruth Middleton introduced St Michael's to the concept of a Prayer Chain. A message asking for prayer in many situations such as medical emergencies and treatments, difficulties in relationships, thanksgiving for blessings received and many other subjects were relayed in strict confidence by phone from one member of the Chain to the next. Because nearly everyone in the Chain was using a landline, it could take a couple of days before the message reached the last link. Ruth has now retired as the main contact although she is still a member of this ministry. With the change of organizer it was also decided by the group to make some changes to the way we work.

As most people today have access to more modern forms of communication, the Chain is becoming a Wheel. I receive the requests for prayer either directly from the person asking for it or from an intermediary, perhaps a family member or a friend, who has confirmed that the subject is willing for the prayer request to be made. No name or just a Christian name can be used if people are more comfortable with that as we can be sure that God knows the situation intimately already.



The messages are now being sent simultaneously by email from me (the hub) to all the prayer partners like the spokes of a wheel so that all can pray for the recipient of the prayer request more quickly. All requests are still strictly confidential and no member of the wheel will do anything other than pray as directed.

We do not always get to hear how our prayers have been answered but we pray in confidence knowing that we are heard by our loving Father who will respond as his wisdom directs. We do know that many people over the years have felt strengthened and comforted in their time of need.

I know that a similar prayer group already exists within the St Ninian's Craigmailen congregation and this continues to serve as it always has done. Anyone from the wider parish, whether a church member or not, who is experiencing a situation that they would like prayer for is welcome to contact me, Maureen Blake on 01506 822603 or 07890 010243 or by email at sandmblake@gmail.com

Starting and Re-starting

by Rev Dr Stewart Gillan



Rev Dr Stewart Gillan and Archbishop Hosam Naoum

Grace and peace to you in Jesus' name.

Last October I observed the 40th anniversary of my ordination – on the rooftop of St George's College in East Jerusalem, a gathering of friends and colleagues considering our respective 'getting started stories,' whenever that might have been. A year on, I have joined the ranks of former Ministers of St Andrew's Jerusalem and Tiberias, and of Mission Partners Jerusalem. My getting started story has become a getting restarted story here in Scotland.

Not for the first time – I became minister of Linlithgow St Michael's in May of 2004, for example, following ministries in South Africa and Toronto. There is no getting used to it, however. It is a moment alive with reunion and what next, family and questions related to my forward journey in ministry.

At lunch this week with Norman Shanks, who preached at my Commissioning service in St Michael's in November 2022, we spoke of how a person comes home from ministry abroad when the people to whom they have been called are living through a time of deep trauma and grief, in the face of existential threats, brutal in their force and intent, to their lives, homes, culture and presence in the land. You come home in stages. When Norman asked, 'What is staying with you?' I answered in terms of ongoing worship online with the congregation, and of colleagues and friends with whom I had worked. And more specifically, of a research project I have been conducting into the way in which our partners in Palestine and Israel are reading the parable of the Good Samaritan in this time.

The parable has played a seminal role in the spiritual formation, social mission and culture of hospitality of the Churches of the Holy Land for centuries, and received prophetic readings from Palestinian Christian theologians on the West Bank and in Israel for decades. Diverse readings and modes of obedience in a wide variety of settings bear witness to the perpetual relevance of the parable – not least because, inspired though we might be, we have had great difficulty heeding its call to a life-saving practice of mercy across the lines of human division.



To cite a recent facing of this difficulty, the Palestinian Lutheran theologian Munther Isaac devotes three chapters to the parable in his book, *The Other Side of the Wall*, seeking in 2022 to answer the question, 'Who is my Neighbour?' with regard to his Christian, Jewish and Muslim neighbours in Palestine and Israel. 'What would happen,' he asks, 'if we began to shift not only how we interpret these stories, but how we tell them today?' Does the story become one of a Sheikh rescuing a Christian, a Palestinian rescuing an Israeli, an Israeli rescuing a Palestinian? Have we the moral courage to reimagine our world through the eyes of this parable? To break the chains of binary and ternary enmity, overcoming our fears with faith in the life-authoring God whose image we bear, whose laws of love and life are our joint inheritance?

The attacks by Hamas and others on Israelis on 7 October 2023, and the declaration by Israel two days later of a total siege on Gaza, lent yet greater urgency and gravity to the parable's famous treatment of questions of life, law and mercy. As in the parable, in which the man attacked by robbers is left naked and half dead, the lives of the people of Gaza have hovered night and day between life and death, subjected to bombardment, blockade, forced displacement, and extreme human need.

The parable is uncompromising, offering a prophetic reading by Jesus of the great commandments in the Law to love God and neighbour, calling his hearers to sacrificial service of a brutalised humanity. It is a challenge that comes to us undiminished by the intervening centuries, to embrace without restriction people who are in need of our care and provision, regardless of their identity vis à vis our own, working to reverse the lethal trajectory of life-threatening violence. Taking the risk and paying the cost.

Acts of mercy undertaken across lines of hostility are subversive of any status quo that relies upon dehumanisation and the manipulation of fear to perpetuate itself. They propose a world in which people take a different approach to difference, one that affirms the dignity of all persons by virtue of their being human. For many people of faith, human diversity is seen as a gift of God, an expression of the inner life and imagination of God, conferring sanctity on all human life. The practice of mercy rejects the supremacy and violence of racism, and proclaims a commitment to act in compassion towards all who are extremists, regardless of their identity. It seeks constructive ways to manage fear of the other, and of one's own people who view with suspicion those who practise mercy across lines of human division.

Differently put, the parable bleeds. Before it heals it bleeds, and we must face it. For all is not well. It was not in Jesus' time, and is not today.

Christmas Tree Festival 2026

by Margaret Johnston



Once Upon a Time… the Festival of Christmas Trees Returns!

Where has the last year gone? It hardly seems possible that we are already thinking about Christmas and, of course, the return of St Michael's Festival of Christmas Trees, taking place from 4th to 6th December 2026.

This year, getting the event off the ground has been a little bit of a story in itself. Following some potential issues within the building, there was a time when we weren't sure whether the Festival would be able to go ahead at all. Thankfully, with a few changes, plenty of careful planning and a lot of determination, we are delighted that the doors will once again open and the Festival will go ahead, almost as normal. And what an event it is shaping up to be!

Interest in taking part has already exceeded our expectations, and we are looking forward to another spectacular weekend, with St Michael's filled with beautifully decorated Christmas trees, twinkling lights and the wonderful atmosphere that has become such a special part of the event. Our theme for 2026 is 'Once Upon a Time – Stories and Fairytales', and we cannot wait to see how the many organisations taking part bring their favourite stories, characters and magical worlds to life through their Christmas trees.

Last year, we welcomed an incredible 80 decorated trees into the church, with more than 3,400 visitors joining us throughout the weekend. With the theme Christmas Through the Ages, the creativity on display was quite remarkable, with organisations choosing different years and eras to inspire their designs. Thanks to the generosity of everyone who visited, donated, decorated a tree or helped make the weekend happen, we raised a phenomenal £14,357.22. This was shared equally between our three chosen charities: Youth Space, The Shed and First Responders.



This year, following the uncertainty around whether the Festival could take place at all, we have decided that all money raised will go towards the Aspire 600 project, helping to support the future of our church and its work in the community. As always, we will be joined throughout the weekend by some fantastic choirs. Their music adds something truly special to the event, filling the church with Christmas spirit and creating an atmosphere that is difficult to describe until you have experienced it for yourself.



We will also once again be offering our Quiet Hour on Saturday 5 December, from 10am–11am. During this special hour, the church lights will be on, but there will be no twinkling lights or music. It is an opportunity for anyone who finds busy, noisy environments overwhelming to enjoy the Festival in a calmer and more peaceful setting.

And, of course, no Christmas story would be complete without a visit from Mr and Mrs Claus! Santa and Mrs Claus will be making a special appearance on Saturday 5 and Sunday 6 December. Keep your eyes peeled, you might even catch a glimpse of them in the windows of Cross House!

Whether you come to admire the trees, listen to the music, soak up the Christmas atmosphere, or simply enjoy a little festive magic, we cannot wait to welcome you back to St Michael's.



So, 'Once Upon a time…' 4th to 6th December 2026. The trees will be decorated, the church will be transformed, the music will play, Santa will be watching from the windows, and another Christmas time will begin.

We look forward to welcoming you to the Festival of Christmas Trees.



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Joyful Generosity Update

by Sarah Young



Thank you for your prayerful, considered and continuing response to the invitation to reflect on the Abundant Generosity of God, whatever form that has taken.

Our Season of Stewardship with a Focus on Finance earlier this year has been successful and abundantly so.

Thank you for your active response and commitment which is enabling not only the maintenance of the many worship, outreach and fellowship opportunities but also development of new ways to meet the needs of our Parish.

There has been a strong and significant increase in all aspects of giving which is likely to continue.

There have been a number of new standing orders, new gift aid declarations, an overall uplift of about 14% in our regular giving as well as a number of one-off donations.

Our spread of financial risk has improved but that does not mean there are not tough decisions to be made as we prayerfully review priorities based on Mission, outreach and discipleship across the Parish.

Another positive outcome has been the impact on the Communities which make up this Parish; with renewed interest in all aspects of church life. Outcomes can be difficult to measure but include new people coming to events and services, greater willingness to become actively involved and more widespread conversations about how we can meet the needs of the whole Parish.

Living Generously is not for a season but a way of life that reflects the love of God to all creation.

Our ability to extend extraordinary hospitality stems from the love, grace and compassion of God.

'*So then, just as you have received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives rooted and built up in him, strengthened in faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness*'. Colossians 2:6-7

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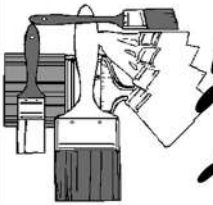
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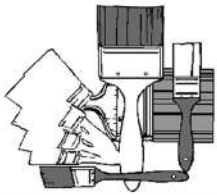
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Golden Charter
Funeral Plans

Linlithgow Food Revolution

by Sally Douglas

Linlithgow Food Revolution succeeds with the support of our fantastic team of volunteers who come from all walks of life. We carefully sort and present our produce to the environmentally conscious Linlithgow Community.



Produce is varied, there's no point entering the shop with a shopping list. It's full of the usual, plus all sorts of interesting and sometimes exotic surprises. Beautiful flowers and plants can always be found.

We freeze food on collection, this can be anything from sea bass to bagels, cheesecakes to bao buns or pizzas to mashed potatoes. On the shelves is ambient produce, soup, coffee flavourings, sauces, biscuits, sometimes boxes of exotic chocolates, eggs and nuts. All usable fruit and vegetables, bread, cakes, pastries and cookies are collected and then attractively presented prior to the shop opening as bells toll at 10am on a Monday and Saturday morning.



Our general rule is to help yourself to six products from across the range. Items are from the fridge, freezers or the shelves. For these there's a suggested donation of £4 which can be paid in cash or by card. The bread and vegetables are free, help yourself to what your family can use within the next day or so. Flowers and plants have a small extra charge.

Produce comes from a variety of sources, all committed to reducing the waste of good quality products. We at 1st Step have taken up this challenge and love being able to redistribute it with integrity back into our Linlithgow Community.

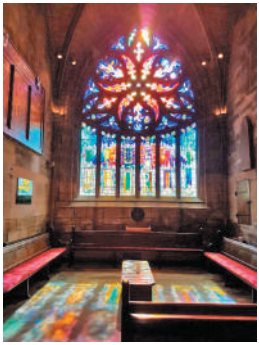
St Michael's and the Battle of Linlithgow Bridge



by Bruce Jamieson

Since its inception in the 12th century, St Michael's Church has been at the forefront of numerous incidents in Scottish history. It has, over the centuries, been: requisitioned by English King Edward 1st and used as a military warehouse; damaged by fire following the return from captivity of King James Ist; the baptismal setting for King James V and Mary Queen of Scots; the recipient of wanton destruction during the 16th-century Reformation and used as a stable by Cromwellian troops.

Perhaps its most famous 'historical' incident was the appearance in St Katherine's Aisle of a 'ghostly figure' who tried, unsuccessfully, to warn King James IV not to go to war against England. James IV's subsequent death at Flodden meant that Scotland was ruled by his 17-month-old son, James V.



St Katherine's Aisle with its 1992 stained glass



Modern day sword-play on the Peel

Recently, the church figured prominently in the town's commemoration of the Battle of Linlithgow Bridge, an event with which St Michael's was very involved. The kirk looked down on the Peel, in January 1526, as an army of 5000 men, under the command of the Earl of Arran, gathered in an attempt to remove the then 14-year-old King James V from the clutches of his step-father, the Earl of Angus, and return him to his mother, Margaret (Tudor).

On that occasion no fighting took place – Angus, arriving with the young monarch at the head of his 7000 strong army, causing the opposing force to think twice about committing treason against their sovereign. Inside the centuries old church, several nobles, including the Earls of Angus, Lennox and Argyll, gathered to thank God for his assistance in causing the 'rebels' to flee.

Down on the Peel, the celebrations went on into the night. It is recorded that amidst much carousing, mock jousting and "horse play", the teenage monarch galloped round the Peel on his steed and then rode it into the loch where the poor beast drowned!

The next occasion when an armed militia met on the Peel was just eight months later when another summons to arms went out into the royal burgh. Hundreds of local men, in fealty to their overlords, were summoned to appear at the Wappenschaw (a 'show' of weapons) by the ringing of the bells of St Michael's – including two which still hang in the bell tower – Alma Maria and Santo Michael Angelo.



The bells of St Michael's

The Linlithgow locals who answered the call came armed with whatever they possessed: pikes, swords, agricultural implements; not really knowing who their enemies might be. In actual fact, their opponents could be members of their own families or neighbours or friends for this was a civil war.



St Michael, the Heavenly Warrior, at the Low Port

In the shadow of the church, many men offered their prayers to Saint Michael, the Heavenly Warrior, invoked as the ultimate protector and 'prince of the heavenly host' with the famous plea: 'Blessed Michael, archangel, defend us in the hour of conflict; Be our safeguard against the wickedness of our foes.' To this day Michael is still the patron saint of soldiers.

Adding to the state of mind of those 16th-century combatants were the uncertainties of the situation. Did they look up at the recently constructed stone crown on their Roman Catholic place of worship and mutter this silent prayer? 'Lord, help me through this day; give me the strength to smite someone I might know; forgive me for whatever ill deed I do; assist me in protecting my home, my property, my wife, my children, my township.'

Battle commenced the next day – September 4th, 1526 – an event recently commemorated in the town. Three thousand men lost their lives in the conflict, fought along the River Avon near Linlithgow Bridge. The mourning in the town was heart-felt and St Michael's heard the lamentations that echoed throughout the burgh and no doubt prayers for the wounded and for the souls of the departed were made at the church's High Altar - the Altar of St Michael.

And the fighting was all in vain. The king remained a captive of the Earl of Angus and James was further saddened on hearing the news that his failed liberator, the Earl of Lennox, had been brutally assassinated by James Hamilton of Finnart. Within St Michael's, the young monarch prayed for the soul of his friend and father-figure.

Not until May 1528 did James manage to escape from his captivity in Tantallon Castle, near North Berwick. Riding to Linlithgow he met his mother, Margaret, and some of her loyal retinue in St Michael's where prayers were offered for the king's safe return.



The orders of chivalry on the Kirkgate Arch

Ruling on his own, the young monarch continued to have an abiding interest in the church – paying for 'kirk werk' and making sure that the masons got their 'drinksilver'. He may have instructed the installation of a throne and seating for the Knights Companion of the Thistle whose insignia James had carved on his new entrance gateway to the Palace along with the Orders of The Garter, St Michael and The Golden Fleece.

Parish Register

WEDDINGS

July
Jenny Young to Paul McFadden
Katherine Campbell to Riccardo Amicosante
Nicole Parlett to Jack McDowell

September
Ruth Bryant to Kevin Henderson

October
Fiona Kennedy to Paul Janes



BAPTISMS



July
Emily Pryde, Edinburgh

August
Aubrey Brodie-Reid, Whitburn
Knox Imrie, Bothwell
Finlay Thomson, Linlithgow Bridge
Rory Bennie

September
Simon Preston, Linlithgow
Cormac Tighe, Bathgate

October
Oscar Janes, Linlithgow
Harris Janes, Linlithgow



FUNERALS



July
Margaret Aitken, Linlithgow

August
Niven Grant, Linlithgow
Robert Ramage, Linlithgow
David Johnstone, Linlithgow
Joyce Shanks, Linlithgow

September
Nora Lambie, Linlithgow
Myra Cunningham, Linlithgow
Peggy Dowie, Linlithgow
Isobel Park, Linlithgow

October
Jozannah (Jozie) Muggleton, Linlithgow
Sheila Lewis, Linlithgow
Joyce Sneddon, Polmont



Ministry on the Margins

by Graeme Shaw

As leader of the Outreach and Mission Team for Linlithgow and Avon Valley Church, I spend a lot of time thinking about what mission looks like in practice. If we are honest, it is incredibly easy to make our faith comfortable.

Here in the parish, we are blessed with strong communities, welcoming churches and people who genuinely care for one another. Yet our faith can become neat and predictable: familiar routines, familiar faces and little reason to leave our comfort zones. Then we open the Gospel and encounter Jesus.

Jesus had a habit of going where other people didn't. He moved towards people others moved away from. He spent time with the outcast, the broken, the sick and those pushed to the edges of society. In Matthew 25:40, Jesus says: 'Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

We sometimes imagine mission as taking Jesus into places where He is absent. But Jesus turns that idea on its head: He is already in the prison, the care home, the struggling family and beside the person sitting alone. Our task is to go there and join Him in what He is already doing.

That has become deeply personal for me. The BBC documentary *Inside Barlinnie* offers an unfiltered look at life inside Scotland's largest prison. For me, however, Barlinnie is more than something seen on a television screen.

My dad was there when I was a wee boy, and I remember visiting him. Those visits brought a paralysing terror that stayed with me for years. Prison represented shame and trauma: somewhere I wanted to leave behind and never imagined I would one day work.

Prison Fellowship SCOTLAND

Yet God never wastes our pain. This year, I became Communications Lead with Prison Fellowship Scotland. The walls that terrified me as a boy are now part of my work. A place of fear and shame has become somewhere I encounter grace, and the story I once wanted to hide now shapes how deeply I care about what happens inside our prisons.

The margins are not somewhere else; they are here in Scotland. People in prison often carry trauma, addiction, poverty and poor mental health.

When the prison door opens, those challenges remain, and many return to communities without stable housing, work, relationships or support.

The impact reaches beyond the cell. When a parent goes to prison, children can face shame, financial pressure, loneliness and the absence of someone they love. These are not simply statistics; they are our neighbours.

That is why Prison Fellowship Scotland matters. Working alongside prison chaplains, our volunteers enter prisons every week to run fellowship groups, listen to people's stories and offer something powerful: relationship, hope and the possibility of restoration.

Society can reduce someone to their offence. But as Christians we are reminded that before anything else, they are human beings made in the image of God.

Dignity does not mean ignoring harm or pretending that consequences do not matter. It means refusing to believe that the worst thing a person has done is the whole truth about them. Christian hope holds together accountability and mercy, creating space for repentance, changed lives and repaired relationships wherever that becomes possible.

Sycamore Tree Project



This does not remove responsibility or minimise the impact on victims. True restoration requires honesty. The Sycamore Tree programme helps people in custody explore how crime affects victims, families and communities. A Time to Write connects volunteers with people who have little outside contact, while Angel Tree enables parents in prison to give Christmas presents to their children. These acts do not solve everything, but they tell people they have not been forgotten.

ANGEL TREE

The challenge returns to us. If we take Jesus seriously, mission cannot be only about improving church life for those already through our doors. We must ask: who is missing, lonely, struggling or overlooked?



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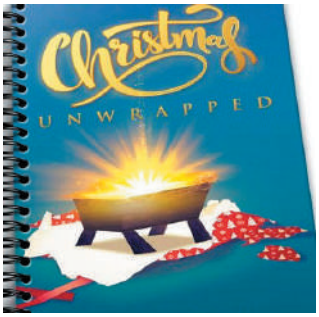
are pleased to support the work of Linlithgow and Avon Valley Parish Church and LinAvon Link

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LinAvon Valley Church
Christmas Unwrapped

by Steve Chaffee



We are gearing up for our next Christmas Unwrapped! Now that we know we can use the Kirk itself, we are full steam ahead with reaching out to a record number of local and less local primary schools for their attendance at Christmas Unwrapped this year. Our team of excellent volunteers have honed their skills over several years of involvement with Christmas Unwrapped.

After a wee introduction and Christmas quiz the children from the primary schools (in total, numbering over 150!) will be sent off to a variety of bases around the church featuring different elements of the Christian traditions about Christmas. There is a base where they get to hear from 'Mary' about her time carrying and raising Jesus; and a base about Melchior, Balthazar, and Caspar, their gifts, and the special import of them. There's a base too where they see a Lego version of the Nativity story, and my favourite: a bathroom tile craft where they affix smaller glass tiles on in different shapes to represent candles, a Christmas tree, the manger, and more.

To vary up the offerings, there's also a wee snack base for the children to take a moment and soak up the atmosphere of St Michael's (it also includes coffee/tea/biscuits for the teachers and parent helpers). Finally, when all is said and done the children come back together for a final part of the assembly. There, they have a chance to tell us what they liked best and learned the most about. We also then get a chance to share with them how important the story of Jesus' birth is and why it is so central to the Christian tradition.

As alluded to above, after the union our parish increased. This means two additional primary schools will be coming along. We are so very glad to have them joining us and that their schools and teachers know we are committed to supporting them in their Religious, Moral and Phlosophical Studies offerings as well. As the future of Christmas Unwrapped shapes up, it may be that we start delivering it out at those schools too. Finally, this year we are planning to increase the distribution of Christingle Kits so that they are a parting gift we can give to each and every child as they leave Christmas Unwrapped.



Faith, Friends and Fizz

by Fiona McCracken

Faith, Friends and Fizz is an informal group for ladies, and we meet on the last Thursday of the month in the Adam Room of Cross House, from 7.30pm until 9pm.

'Therefore, if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.' Colossians 3v1

We began almost two years ago and spent a year following 'The Bible Course' by the Bible Society. It was a very interesting course that made us all think and taught us all something about the Bible. The course consisted of videos and discussions and took us through the Bible's big story from Genesis through to Revelation. It was very accessible, and we would highly recommend the course to everyone!

Following this, we decided to take a more in depth look at the gospels – with help from Ashley Wilson, Simon Curran and Graeme Shaw we have enjoyed looking afresh at these books of the Bible. Studying the gospels gave us a fuller picture of Jesus, his life, teachings, death and resurrection. Each book highlighted a different side of Jesus and his message.

Both of these programmes have helped us all to grow in faith, learn how to live a good life, and understand God's love. Everyone has contributed to the discussions, as the friendly atmosphere of the group has enabled everyone to feel confident and we have all learned from each other, regardless of where we are in our faith journey.



We also have some social events – we had a potluck supper and painted glasses, and we have had a couple of quiz nights too.

One of the main aims of the group was to provide a smaller group setting for people to get to know each other better, build friendships, connections and support within our Church.

So far, we have got to know each other's opinions, values, aspirations and life experiences. We have talked about what's important to us and enjoyed praying together at the end of our meetings. Going forward, we will continue to build meaningful relationships through deeper conversations and connections, through other books of the bible or other Christian writing, and also a few more social events along the way. We are considering running an event for younger women who attend Jolly Babies and Toddlers – watch this space for that one!!

If you need more information, please contact Fiona McCracken on fionamccracken@me.com or Agnes Martin on bobo_boggins@hotmail.com

Avonbridge Board Games and Blether

by Heather Stephens



We started Board Games and Blether on 24th April 2026. The idea behind it was to give the older generation something else to do during the week. We already have the Lunch Club on a Wednesday, so we wanted to offer another opportunity for people to gather, socialise and enjoy some company during the daytime. Most importantly, we wanted the community to know that we cared and that the Church was here for them. Due to our own time constraints, we meet fortnightly rather than every week.

For the first few weeks, it was really just a blether and no games were needed. We got to know different people and chatted about life in Avonbridge, including the challenges of living in a village that can sometimes feel quite isolated. As the weeks went on, conversations began to turn to the proposed closure of the church building. Those discussions sparked something within the community.

Before long, neighbours of our regular attendees started to come along, and there was a growing feeling that we could not simply let this happen. It was something that we had been concerned about for years, but suddenly the wider village began to recognise the importance of keeping the church building. People did not want to lose another valuable community asset.

We may only have around five regular attendees, but those five love coming along. There is lots of hilarity and friendly competition over the dominoes, but most importantly, it is through this group that we have achieved genuine community engagement. As a result, on Wednesday 16th September there was a community meeting to explore forming a committee and beginning the process of a community buy-out or asset transfer.

Perhaps five regular attendees does not sound like a lot, and some may question whether it is worthwhile. The answer is a resounding **yes**. Through this small group, we have seen people begin to believe that the church building matters, not only to the congregation but to the wider community. Board Games and Blether has shown that sometimes small beginnings can lead to significant change.

This celebrates the social side of the group while showing how something as simple as a fortnightly gathering can strengthen community spirit and support the future of the church building.

The Original Project 600

by Brian Lightbody

Project 600 is our current fundraising campaign, raising money for the necessary repairs and restoration of the roof, ceiling, stonework and drainage at St Michael's, a building in which we have the privilege of worshiping each Sunday, a building that one architecture professor has called 'possibly the finest parish church in Scotland'. But how was the building funded originally, 600 years ago?

There had been a church on the site from around 1140, formally consecrated by the Bishop of St Andrews in 1242. However a major fire in the town in 1424 badly damaged the town, church and Palace. The town decided that a new grander church was required as a reflection of the increasing wealth of the town, a statement of civic pride, and a physical expression of their faith in God. They weren't alone in their ambition. What have been called the five great burgh churches of Scotland – Perth St John, Stirling Holy Rood, Haddington St Mary, Edinburgh St Giles and St Michael's Linlithgow, were all built around the same time and broadly for the same reasons.

The king, James I, helped fund the project initially and provided a royal master mason, John French, to design and supervise the construction. However it is very unlikely that the parishioners were aware that the king and queen had a plan to build not a parish church, but a royal collegiate church, a religious institution in honour of the king, Furthermore they intended it to be dedicated to John the Baptist, not St Michael. In 1430 they wrote to the Pope asking for his permission and seeking his support for the scheme. The King had already ordered his secretary, John Bening, to start siphoning off money from other churches as far away as Old Kirkpatrick and the Kirk of Calder to fund the project.



Pope Nicholas V

There is no record of any reply from the Pope before James was assassinated in Perth in 1437 and his grand collegiate church plan died with him. His son James II was only six years old when he ascended the throne and the queen was taken up with exacting vengeance on the nobles who had killed her husband. The parishioners were therefore left with the problem of funding John French's ambitious design and soon realised that it was beyond their resources, despite some very innovative ways of raising money such as taxing chimney fires. They also wrote to the Pope asking for help for a project they described as a 'very sumptuous and marvellous new restoration' Unlike the king, in November 1447,

they got a reply from Pope Nicholas granting the church permission to offer indulgencies of two years less in purgatory for those who gave enough to the fabric fund. So our Presbyterian church was partly funded by the very indulgences the Reformation condemned! This certainly appears to have done the trick because the first phase – the nave, crossing and bell tower, was completed with the placing of the bell 'Blessed Mary' in the bell tower in 1490. The mason, John French, had died in 1489 and was buried under the north aisle in what has always been considered his greatest work.

The second phase of the project, the chancel and apse, were areas reserved solely for the clergy and were the financial responsibility of the Bishop and Canons of St Andrews. However they weren't coming up with the money. The townsfolk were pressing them to rebuild these areas to the same quality as the nave or they said they would undertake it themselves. In 1497 an agreement was finally reached that the Canons would pay the town enough money to relieve themselves of the responsibility. John French's son Thomas, also a royal master mason, was appointed to finish the building, largely completed by 1533. There were some diversions along the way. George Crichton was the vicar of Linlithgow from 1520 –1522 and seemed proud of the fact that, despite his high standing in the church, he had never bothered to read the old nor the new testament. For some unspecified misdemeanour when in Linlithgow his punishment was to pay for the apse and the roof of the chancel. It appears he did so but insisted that his coat of arms was displayed on the ceiling.

The final contributor to the project was James V. Towards the end of construction he realised that the church could be the last line of defence of the Palace on the south and if anyone took the church, they could fire on him. So he paid personally for the construction of the extended defensive parapet we see on the south side of the roof. He insisted that there should be no such parapet on the north side for assailants to hide behind.



James V

Aspire Linlithgow
Project 600

So St Michael's has had a history of very varied and imaginative funding sources, not all available to us! It is our hope that, 600 years later, we can continue to support a building that is not just a masterpiece of gothic architecture but a building that enriches our worship of God.

Light in the Darkness

by Rev Rhona Dunphy



After enjoying the glorious long evenings of summer, the nights are now well and truly 'drawing in'.

Where I lived in Regensburg in Bavaria for 23 years, November is often referred to as the 'gloomy month'. Not only were we conscious of the ever-lengthening nights, but that part of the Danube valley is often enshrouded by fog for weeks in the late autumn. Then there are the various festivals of that month.

Being protestant in a predominantly Roman Catholic city, they all had their place: first comes All Saints Day on 1st November, when family graves are tended and visited, with the priests' and pastors' earnest words being boomed out over loudspeaker; on the 9th November, there is the commemoration of Kristallnacht, that terrible night of vicious riots against the Jewish population in 1938. On the second Wednesday before the first Sunday of Advent – a calendar calculation which would surely be understood by Lithgae folk – there is Buss-und-Bettag: the Lutheran day of prayer and repentance. Volkstrauertag, the German equivalent of Remembrance Day, follows on the second Sunday before Advent; and the following Sunday is Ewigkeitssonntag – 'eternity Sunday', the last Sunday of the Lutheran church year, when all those who had died in that church year are remembered by name in prayer in their home congregations. Many of these commemorations are 'stille Tage'– 'quiet days', when public entertainment, loud music and dancing are legally restricted, all of which contributes to that mood of solemnity and sadness.

As Christians, we recognise, of course, that there is indeed a 'time for mourning" as the writer of Ecclesiastes tells us. But in the midst of mourning, sadness, darkness and gloom, we can never lose sight of the Christian message of hope and light. This year, the 'gloomy month' ends with the first Sunday of Advent – the first Sunday of the new Church year, and the first Sunday of the Christian 'countdown' to Christmas. (The commercial one seemed to begin somewhere around July or August!) We will light the first candle on Advent wreaths and turn our thoughts to celebrating Christ's bringing light into our world that first Christmas, as well as looking forward in hope and expectation to his coming again. As we do so, may the light of Christ fill all our hearts and lives.

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