

CROSSWIND

The Journal of St Michael's Parish Church

*You are my hiding place and my shield;
I put my hope in Your word.*

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**February 2021
Vol 23:2**

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SUNDAY SERVICES



Communion

Sunday 28th February

**Streamed live via the St Michael's website at 11.45am
Have bread and wine/grape juice ready at home.**

Weekly Services

**Every Sunday at 11am on Facebook and YouTube
or listen by phoning 01506 306036**

Services in the Kirk

Due to Covid restrictions, it is not possible to hold any services in the church at present.

Look out for announcements in the regular newsletters, the local press and on social media when the current rules are relaxed.

Cover: Harbingers of Spring
Courtesy of Stephen Blake

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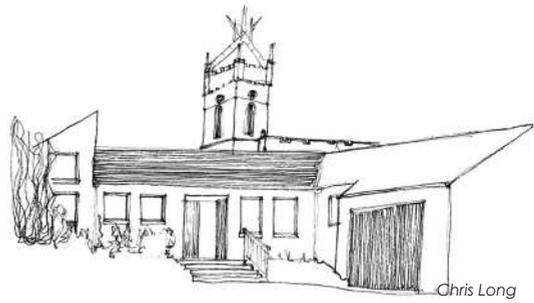
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The deadline for the May 2021 issue is 3rd April 2021.

VIEW FROM THE MANSE



by Rev Dr Liam Fraser

On Tuesday 16th February 1909, two explosions erupted at West Stanley Colliery in the Durham Coalfield. From the surface, it looked as if no one could have survived the blasts. Yet, remarkably, a group of men and boys remained alive, deposited in a hollow left unscathed by exploding gas and falling rock. In the unsearchable darkness, one man began to hum an old hymn tune by John Henry Newman, 'Lead, kindly light, amid the encircling gloom. Lead thou me on'. That single man's tune soon turned into a full chorus, as men and boys sang to keep their hopes alive, and after 14 hours of waiting, the miners were finally rescued.



Perhaps you've felt a little like those miners over the past year: isolated, fearful, bored, more 'existing' than truly living. Yet as those miners realised, there is a light that shines in the darkness, one that the darkness cannot overcome. That light may begin as a single flame – something weak, insubstantial, hopelessly small – yet, by God's grace, can be fanned into the full light of day.

Following a meeting in December, the Kirk Session of St Michael's formally adopted its 2030 Vision, a Vision you can read in full on our website and in summary later in this magazine. The 2030 Vision is a reflection of some of the things that Jesus said about light: that no one lights a candle to hide it under a bushel, and that a city built on a hill cannot be hidden, for its light is seen far and wide.

In the rebuilding that will take place after COVID, we in the Church have light to share, light which – due to common perceptions about the Church, or us overlooking our own potential – is not always being seen by the people of Linlithgow.

The 2030 Vision is an attempt to let the light out, to throw open the doors of our Church and bless our town with the facilities and initiatives needed to enable community and care and wonder to flourish. Yet when we open our doors and windows to let the light out, our neighbours bring their own light in. That is why, at the heart of the 2030 Vision, is *partnership*: looking at how – while preserving our own identity and traditions – we might share our buildings and work with other churches and groups to bless Linlithgow and, like that chorus of miners, brighten the darkness together.

It is possible to take another view, of course. It might be thought that, at a time of *crisis*, the best thing to do is to horde our resources, cease unnecessary activity, and preserve what we have. Rather than singing in the dark like those miners, why not conserve our oxygen? Yet that is to forget the original meaning of the word 'crisis'. For in Greek, 'crisis' not only meant a time of dangerous uncertainty, but a *time of decision*. It was a time when *choices* had to be made, choices that would

determine whether the time of challenge and uncertainty would issue in ruin or a better future. Ours is not a time for burying our heads in the sand, but responding to the need and potential of our neighbours in new and creative ways, working together with people of good will in Linlithgow and beyond to make our community the best it can be.

No one lights a candle and puts it under a bushel, and a city, built on a hill, cannot be hidden. If we can realise our 2030 Vision, I believe God's light will shine ever more brightly in Linlithgow, and our own, and our neighbours' darkness, will be brightened.



A FINANCIAL UPDATE

by Anne Law

I'm sure that I am like most people and glad to see the back of 2020. As I write this note at the start of January, we are once again in lockdown with the government instruction to stay at home – very sound advice. There is light at the end of the tunnel however and the vaccine roll out has started for which I am sure we are all very grateful. It cannot come quickly enough. It will be good to see friends and colleagues again in the hopefully not too distant future.

It is too close to the end of the financial year of 31st December to be able to present you with any firm figures on the state of our finances. Tim Brown in our team, who does a terrific job preparing all the monthly income and expenditure figures and dealing with the budgets, has a draft end of year figure, which shows us in deficit, but the figure is not nearly as bad as we had anticipated and could be around £10,000 but we will make the true figure available in due course. There was a point when we thought the deficit could be more than £30,000.

This is a quite remarkable achievement.

Behind the figure, we have seen income drop by more than £40,000 from last year with the main reductions being in cash offerings, weddings and Cross House rentals. The Fabric Box in the church is a serious source of income to the tune of some £10,000 and that has not been available to us due to the closure of our beautiful building.

At the same time we have seen costs drop, fortunately. We have not incurred some of the costs that we anticipated – such as photocopying and the rental for Springfield school – since there have been no regular Sunday services. The main savings have been in property costs as the Property team did not continue with our planned maintenance programme but that can only be put on hold temporarily.

The final accounts for 2020 will be presented to Kirk Session in March 2021 and then made available to the congregation after that, normally at the annual meeting of the congregation.

I must close however by thanking all those who have continued to give so generously and regularly, whether by standing order or by sending in your FWO envelopes. A number of members have changed from FWO to standing order and that has been an immense help in maintaining regular income – we are very grateful to you for doing that. The giving from our congregation contributes to the work of the church locally and nationally and that work has continued throughout this pandemic. The light will always shine in the darkness. Thank you.

INTRODUCING MYSELF

by Lorraine Orr



After the much-awaited PVG check, I now have a start date of the 11th January and the excitement for me is starting to build. Much like a child at Christmas, I am full of anticipation, expectancy and a sense of adventure!

A bit about me... when I left school, I did not foresee that I would be working for the church that I grew up in. I worked for BP Grangemouth before moving to work for Bank of Scotland. I worked through the bank and ended my 16-year career as Customer Manager in Edinburgh branches. Redundancies were announced and I happily accepted! It was

then that I moved to work for Fresh Expressions in the Church of Scotland Central Office.

After Katie was born, the opportunity to work for St John's Church arose and I jumped at the chance. To be able to work back in my home town has been a dream come true. Working as Children and Families worker for St John's has given me a strong foundation for outreach work within Linlithgow. I have built up relationships with the local Health Visitors and Mental Health teams which I am keen to keep building on.

As a family, moving back to Linlithgow has been an adventure that we never thought we would embark on. It is a joy to be able to walk everywhere and meet people en route. Chris and Katie can't understand how it takes me an hour to get to Tesco. However, for the role of Pioneer Community Outreach worker it is so important that I am visible in the town and in the community, so here we are living in the heart of Linlithgow. Katie is especially delighted to be living in Cross House as, in her words, this is where the Marches start!

Initially I will be taking some time to see what is already happening within the church and in Linlithgow. I will be putting together a community audit to find out what the community and the church family are wanting/ needing. Being brought up in Linlithgow has helped me know the history

of the town and the background of many of the community groups that are already established. I'm keen to keep and build on the relationships that are already there.

Whilst waiting on my PVG coming through I've been doing a bit of research on Forest Church.



What is Forest Church I hear you say? The easiest way to describe it is a group of people, outside, connecting with nature and worshipping God. Forest Church is a fresh expression of church drawing on much older traditions, when sacred places and practices were always outside – but it is also drawing on contemporary research that highlights the benefits of spending time in the great outdoors. Forest Church is about getting back into nature and appreciating the world that God created. It's about acts of worship outdoors. It's about an individual act of outdoor worship. It's about worshipping outdoors together. It doesn't have to be in a forest – it can be around the loch. Watch this space!

If anyone would like to meet up for a chat or to find out more, please email me on:

LORr@churchofscotland.org.uk



A 2030 VISION FOR ST MICHAEL'S

This paper, which sets out a vision for how St Michael's should go forward over the next 10 years, has been approved in principle by Kirk Session. You can find a fuller exploration of the themes of the vision in two discussion papers available on the church website: one on the 2030 vision generally, and the other on improvements to the sanctuary.

St Michael's has a long and distinguished history. Yet this heritage cannot shelter it from the effects of our rapidly changing society. Church attendance here and across Scotland has plummeted, and many of our neighbours – feeling that they cannot turn to the Church – are more isolated and anxious than ever. To address this changing context, we must return to the reason why God created our church: to meet the material, emotional and spiritual needs of all people, whether they are churchgoers or not. If the practical and spiritual needs of our neighbours are not met, St Michael's will struggle to survive. Yet God wants us to survive and thrive, and to regain our place as the spiritual heart of our town.

The 150 participants in our '2030: Our Story' workshops identified a number of key themes: new forms of relevant worship, a greater range of events and improved visitor experience in the Sanctuary (church building), and new forms of hospitality and service for our neighbours in Cross House. These themes form the basis of our 2030 Vision. The Vision is of an ancient community animated by a living hope, that becomes a blessing for our town through its service, facilities and witness.

The four principles that underpin the vision are welcome, welfare, wonder and worship. Because each person is loved by God, we **welcome** all with loving hospitality, and seek to look after their **welfare**. For those who find themselves **wondering** if there is more to life, we provide accessible and engaging **worship**.

What Will This Involve?

- **Cross House** will be transformed into a centre for community and wellbeing. It will have a beautiful social space at its heart, around which many other activities will take place. Alongside our own initiatives such as the Sunshine Sing-Along and the new St Michael's Listening Service, we will partner with professional services and other groups to develop Cross House into a vibrant community. It will be a place of care and connection, where we can welcome and mingle with guests, and signpost them to all that St Michael's does in both Cross House and the Sanctuary.

- The church **Sanctuary** will host a greater range of worship along with other events. More flexible seating in the body of the building would facilitate, for instance, seating in the round for Communion, or setting up prayer stations. Our visitor experience will also be enhanced, both in person and online, to explain more clearly the spiritual significance of the Sanctuary. All of this will enable us, in this remarkable space, to engage neighbours and visitors alike with the Christian faith.
- Alongside traditional worship – and spearheaded by our new Pioneer – we will create **new forms of worship** that are relevant and attractive to our neighbours.
- We will deepen our emphasis on **discipleship** (Knowing Christ Better). Part of this discipleship will involve **training** to develop the wonderful gifts of welcome, teaching, evangelism and service that our members and elders have been given.
- We will continue to develop our expanding **online presence** to help us engage, organise and communicate effectively.

How Do We Start?

We will soon develop a more detailed plan for the first 3 years of the 10-year Vision period. The key strands of the plan are likely to include:

- Developing new partnerships with groups in Linlithgow to facilitate greater community at Cross House;
- Generating new and creative forms of Church, led by our Pioneer Worker and a group of trained members;
- Refurbishing and transforming Cross House in a 3-year development programme;
- Addressing structural issues in the church Sanctuary, including the Crown of Thorns, roof issues and damp penetration;
- Planning enhancements to the church Sanctuary, including a modern and sustainable heating system and high-quality and appropriate seating;
- Undertaking a major, professionally-supported fundraising campaign.

An ancient community of faith responding to the changed Scotland of today with welcome, welfare, wonder, and worship. An accessible, flexible, and beautiful Sanctuary, along with a vibrant community centre full of every generation, group, and type of person. This is the heart of our 2030 Vision.

While this is, at points, a challenging and costly Vision, the price of doing nothing is even greater. These proposals give us the opportunity to bless Linlithgow, share our tradition and treasures with even more people, and – alongside traditional worship – meet the spiritual needs of our neighbours in new and exciting ways.

35 THE GARDENER'S BIRTHDAY

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COVID-COVER CHOIR

by Isobel Reid

At 7.30pm on Thursday evenings, the choir meet in a well-heated church for rehearsal. Purple hymn books are distributed, sheet music propped up in the choir stalls, greetings exchanged, news distributed, hats and coats piled up at pew ends until the infamous 'jeely jar' is placed on top of the grand piano (believe it or not, we pay to practise!) then singing begins. Voices soar in the empty church, with eyes on the last rays of light from the stained glass West Window.

Fast forward to 2020 rehearsals



'I'll mute you all' – an essential tool in our new Zoom choir rehearsals. Although socially isolated, we still manage time for essential catch-up conversation (often accompanied by frantic gesticulations and numerous computer glitches). It is a vital time to keep in touch, although we do miss meeting as a full choir. However, we continue to learn new music and enjoy working virtually, with the church band and solo instrumentalists. Well known hymns, modern music and some popular Christmas music all feature in our singing. We are delighted to welcome two new members and look forward to singing some of Carver's glorious music back in St Michael's.

Solo singing and recording at home is a real challenge for most of us. We miss a conductor, the camaraderie of others and, above all, the wonderful acoustic of St Michael's.

Should I record in the lounge? Roadworks, delivery vans and dogs barking interrupt. Perhaps the bedroom? Soft furnishings deaden the sound. Would ceramic acoustics in the bathroom enhance descant singing? Oh no!

Let's hit the mute button!

Recording on a mobile phone can be tricky. A massive amount of work goes on behind the scenes to ensure we have music for our weekly digital service. Special thank you to our busy 'secretary' for keeping us updated, and Alison and the technical team who spend hours blending tracks for the digital services. Thanks to them for ensuring music continues at this challenging time.



Sing a new song to the Lord.

Ye choirs of new Jerusalem!

HOW HARD CAN IT BE?

by Stephen Marshall and John Macartney

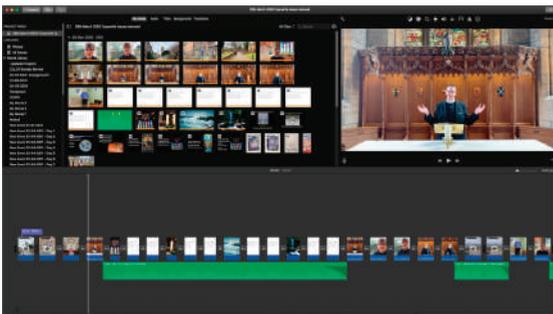
I published my first video to YouTube in 2007 and I've been using Apple Macs for over 30 years – it seemed like a sensible option to volunteer for a few weeks of editing online services. It seems crazy now but I can remember thinking that this will perhaps only be for a month!

Fast forward nine months and we find ourselves in much the same position but thankfully with an end in sight. As we approach a year out of the church building it's worth thinking about what we've learnt, both digitally and spiritually. We often talk about 'the church is not a building' but we've actually had to live this in the last year.

Initially Liam and I did a bit of testing and chatted through options on Zoom – there's so much to think about re lighting, camera angles, backgrounds and sound. It was clear from early on that Liam was going to be a natural in front of the camera. He comes up with the different shots and backgrounds, which gives the videos variety and quality.

Each week kicks off with an email from whoever is doing the service on Sunday, outlining ideas and running order. This goes out to about 8 people, from Readings Co-ordinator to the Music Team and often Thom on prayers. (I wonder how often Tigger has appeared in Thom's section?) Everyone works on their own section independently. The Music Team has put in a fantastic amount of work – mixing music remotely is tricky and time-consuming and something that John and I steer clear of!

John and I then have the job of stitching the different parts of the service together. As the week progresses bits of the service are sent across to us – Dropbox, WeTransfer, WhatsApp, Messenger, Maildrop and email are the various ways people use to send material. As we approach the 6pm deadline on the Friday we copy it all into a folder, checking each off against the running order.



Once all of the material is collated John or I (we split it week about) sit down and drag all of the media into the editor. I'll spare you all of the detail but it will take us somewhere from 2 hours to 8 hours to pull it all together and get all of the timings correct. To date we've created and edited our way through more than 300 gigabyte of data. A digital version of the Bible is about 5 megabytes so that's 60,000 copies of the Bible worth of data!

The software we use is called iMovie, on an Apple Mac; it's a simple software of its type and does just about enough to meet our requirements.

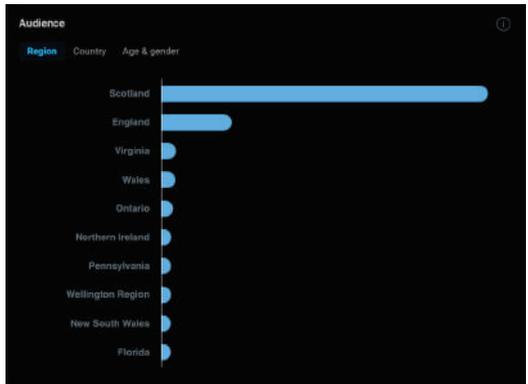
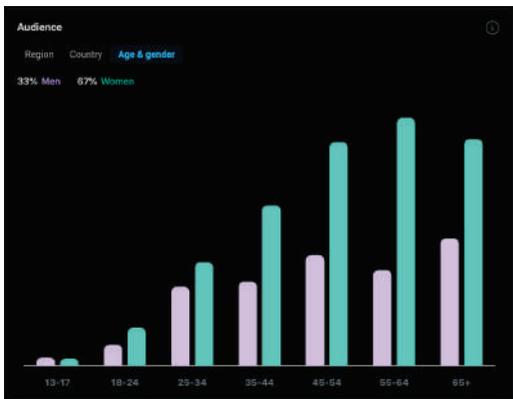
Video is very data hungry, which helps to explain why compiling the videos (saving them to the right format for Facebook and YouTube) can take the computer up to 2 hours of processing time.

When the video has been put together we ask someone to look it through and proof things.

We then save the audio and send it across to Chris or Ken, who create the CDs and upload to the telephone service. Finally it is ready to upload to Facebook and YouTube.

We publish the service in a 'Premiere' format so that subscribers are notified of the upcoming event. It's always a bit nerve-wracking as there are quite a lot of features to enable and technology can have its moments. We often have 100-150 connections watching live and this of course could be approaching 300 people depending on shared devices etc.

Here are some interaction statistics from one of our services, from Facebook alone:



Before Covid19 our Church YouTube page had only a few videos on it with a handful of views. We now have published over 100 videos and in total have had over 18,000 views. There is a great opportunity to continue to build on what we've achieved so far.

Through editing and publishing the services I have seen just how much hard work goes on behind the scenes. A large number of people give their time and skills to make church services happen.

We've learnt a lot over the last 9 months. Who would have thought a year ago that we'd be using Zoom to have a coffee after the service? Being automatically allocated to a room to talk to 3 or 4 others, meeting new people online and sharing experiences.

Thank you for the privilege (most of the time) of helping St Michael's to continue to worship together and to broadcast to a wider audience.

THINKING ABOUT GIVING SOMETHING UP FOR LENT?

by Paul Davidson for the Education Team

That's certainly my first thought about Lent – it's a time to **give up** something I like. But what is Lent, and why do we celebrate it anyway?

Lent is the period of 40 days which leads up to Easter. It begins on Ash Wednesday and is a time of reflection and preparation before the celebrations of Easter. By observing Lent, Christians replicate Jesus Christ's sacrifice and withdrawal into the desert for 40 days. It is marked by fasting, both from food and festivities. Whereas Easter celebrates the resurrection of Jesus after his death on the cross, Lent recalls the events leading up to and including Jesus' crucifixion.

Nowadays, not many people would think of fasting for the whole of Lent. It is much more common now to give up something we enjoy, the sacrifice then being a reflection of Jesus' time in the wilderness, and a test of our self-discipline. When we then think about whatever it might be we are abstaining from, we can think about Jesus and His much greater sacrifice for us.

This year, why not try something a little different at Lent? Instead of giving up something like chocolate, wine or coffee for 40 days, why not give up 10 minutes of your time every day to read a passage from the Gospel of John? What better way to spend the run up to Easter, than by reading systematically through the Gospel story?

John's is a little different from the three other Gospels – a brief introduction is included below, which hopefully you will find helpful. And if you don't have access to a copy of John's Gospel, then please let us know and we can certainly supply you with one.

Introduction to the Gospel of John, taken from Bible Gateway

John presents Jesus as the Word, the Messiah and the incarnate Son of God, who has come to reveal the Father and bring eternal life to all who believe in him.

It's clear from the first paragraphs of this Gospel that the disciple John broke sharply from the styles of the other Gospel writers – Matthew, Mark and Luke. They focused on events, following Jesus through the bustling marketplaces and villages. Unlike them, John assumed that readers knew the basic facts about Jesus. Instead, he mulled over the profound meaning of what Jesus had said and done. The NIV Student Bible says the book of John reads as if it were written under a great shade tree by an author who had lots of time for reflection. In his first sentence, John highlights Christ's nature. John's book tells the story of the eternal Word who became flesh and dwelt with humanity. People often turn to the Gospel of John because it spells out so clearly the basics of the Christian faith. Jesus proves who he is, diagnoses humanity's problems, and bluntly describes what is necessary for everlasting life.



February

Ash Wednesday	1: 1-28
Thursday 18th	1: 29-51
Friday 19th	2: 1-23
Saturday 20th	3: 1-21
Sunday 21st	Rest
Monday 22nd	3: 22-36
Tuesday 23rd	4: 1-42
Wednesday 24th	4: 43-54
Thursday 25th	5: 1-29
Friday 26th	5: 30-47
Saturday 27th	6: 1-22
Sunday 28th	Rest

March

Monday 1st	6: 22-59
Tuesday 2nd	6: 60-71
Wednesday 3rd	7: 1-31
Thursday 4th	7: 32-52
Friday 5th	8: 1-30
Saturday 6th	8: 31-59
Sunday 7th	Rest
Monday 8th	9: 1-41
Tuesday 9th	10: 1-21
Wednesday 10th	10: 22-42
Thursday 11th	11: 1-27
Friday 12th	11: 28-57
Saturday 13th	12: 1-26
Sunday 14th	Rest
Monday 15th	12: 27-50

Tuesday 16th	13: 1-20
Wednesday 17th	13: 21-38
Thursday 18th	14: 1-14
Friday 19th	14: 15-31
Saturday 20th	15: 1-17
Sunday 21st	Rest
Monday 22nd	15: 18-27
Tuesday 23rd	16: 1-15
Wednesday 24th	16: 16-33
Thursday 25th	17: 1-26
Friday 26th	18: 1-24
Saturday 27th	18: 25-40
Sunday 28th	Rest
Monday 29th	19: 1-27
Tuesday 30th	19: 28-42
Wednesday 31st	20: 1-18

April

Thursday 1st	20: 19-30
Friday 2nd	21: 1-14
Saturday 3rd	21: 15-25
Sunday 4th	Easter Day



COVENANT PRAYER

from Covenant Service, Sunday, 10th January 2021

I am no longer my own, but yours.
Your will, not mine, be done in all things,
Wherever you may place me.
In all that I do
And in all that I may endure;
When there is work for me
And when there is none;
When I am troubled
And when I am at peace.

Your will be done
When I am valued
And when I am disregarded;
When I find fulfilment
And when it is lacking;
When I have all things,
And when I have nothing.

I willingly offer
All I have and am
To serve you,
As and where you choose.

Glorious and Blessed God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
You are mine and I am Yours.
May it be so forever.
Let this covenant now made on Earth
Be fulfilled in Heaven. Amen



PARISH REGISTER

BAPTISMS

Let the children come to me

October

Harvey Heering, Edinburgh

FUNERALS

I am the resurrection and the life

October

John Oliver, Deanburn Park

November

Harold Goodwin, Lennox Gardens

Roy Dilkes, Kinloch View

Alastair McMurray, Friars Loan

Linda Hanley, Hill House Farm

George Duguid, Deacon's Court

Michael (Mike) Reynolds, Brightons



December

Donald Williamson, Falkirk

January 2021

Marion (Minnie) Russell, Tippet Hill Nursing Home

William Williamson, Bo'ness

Elizabeth Drake, Madderfield Mews

www.stmichaelsparish.org.uk – See Crosswind in full colour! Also find podcasts of sermons, current intimations, details of upcoming events and all other church activities.

www.helpcentre.org.uk – For information on support available for most situations.

#BBatHOME

by Lisa Callaghan

I am sure we can all agree that 2020 was a very different year for us all.

We all missed out on so many things.

Boys' Brigade Headquarters announced on 23rd March that all activities were to stop with immediate effect. (Normally our session would end in the middle of May).

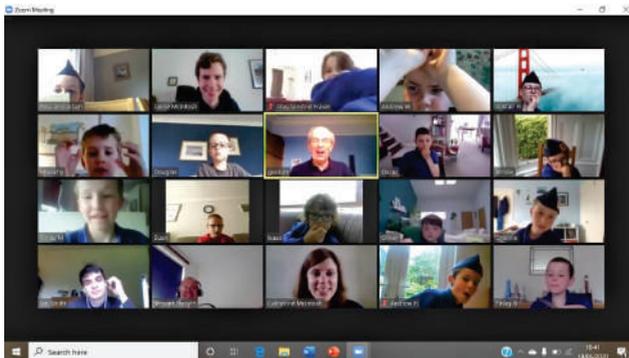
Our main concern was, of course, our members. We knew that some of them would have been struggling with the lack of structure that school and community organisations would normally provide.

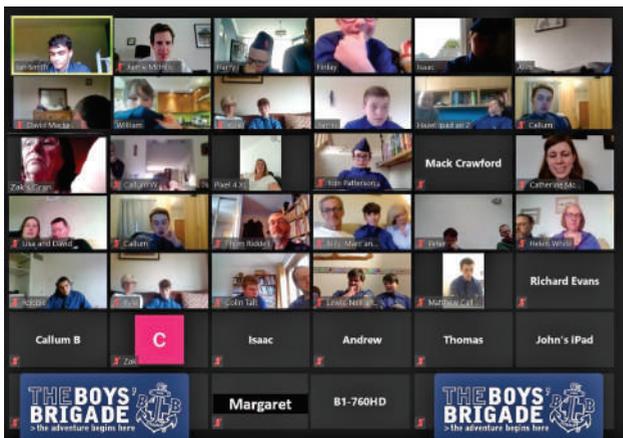


Within a week, Head Office had put together a 'BBathome' programme. There was an age appropriate programme for each Section – Anchors 5-8 years, Juniors 8-11 years, Company/Seniors 11-18 years.

We sent this out to the boys on a weekly basis. This provided them with several activities that they could take part in. They could then send in pictures that we posted to our Facebook page. You may have already seen some of the fab pictures that we received.

Each section also took part in Zoom calls. The Anchor Boys completed their badge work just before December. When we asked the boys what games they would like to play on Zoom up until the Christmas break, 'hide and seek' and 'tig' were suggested!





By providing the 'BBatHome' programme and Zoom sessions, we managed to engage with as many boys as we could. But nothing quite beats the real thing.

All leaders and helpers have worked hard behind the scenes to ensure that we are ready to resume face to face activities whenever it is safe to do so; we have even managed to recruit two new helpers.

In amongst all the uncertainty there was some good news. Callum White, Matthew Callaghan and Peter Molloy were all awarded their Queen's Badge. The Queen's Badge is the highest award that can be gained by a member of the Boys' Brigade. A young person wishing to work towards their Queen's Badge must first have completed their President's Badge.

The Queen's Badge offers the chance to engage with the local community, take on responsibility, set personal goals, build self-confidence and experience a sense of achievement. A huge amount of work goes into achieving this award and we are very proud of you boys.

We believe that the work we do with young people is vital. It wouldn't be possible without the help of so many leaders and helpers; and, of course, parents, and the boys themselves. Thank you for all your support throughout 2020.

Let's hope 2021 allows us to get back to some kind of normality.

Best Wishes to you all.



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All Aboard!

Val Davidson writes about Luke Davidson's journey to join the OM Logos Hope.



When Luke was asked to write this article he was just about to play a casualty in a muster drill on board the OM Logos Hope, after working an extra long shift in the galley, and was preparing to go ashore on the Abaco Islands to help in the eye clinic. This initiative was part of a programme offered alongside dental clinics, food distribution and rebuilding of hurricane-damaged homes and public buildings on these islands in the Bahamas.

When speaking, he had mentioned that one mentor on board had told him to say no to some of what was asked of him, as 'creative types' are in high demand on board ship. I can't explain ALL the things he was asked to do that day, but it included leading a group involved in juggling and being a shepherd in a nativity. I offered to help out. I can write but I am nowhere near as funny, so you are getting a Mum's perspective about how Luke ended up on board a mercy ship in September 2020.

We are very fortunate in Scotland to have an education system which enables children to go through stages of changing their minds of what they want to be 'when they grow up'. As well as receiving a broad education, Linlithgow Academy pupils get careers advice and suggestions for gap years. Luke often talked about a gap year after sampling cakes on offer at fundraising coffee mornings in Cross House. His desire to spend a year with an organisation with a Christian ethos stemmed from an event called 'Strictly Come Praying' run by Scripture Union, where the main speaker at the event challenged them with the idea of making their time and talents count for God. I can't recount all the career ideas (and the reasons behind them) that were discussed round the table in our house over the years, but let us just say the day he announced that he thought to join the Navy was a significant turning point.

It was completely different from anything else ever suggested by ANYONE ever. His experience of ships was mainly limited to ferry trips back and forth to Northern Ireland for family visits, researching the Titanic for a primary school project and reading about pirates. We knew that he didn't get seasick and he always paid attention to where muster stations were in case of emergencies! Therefore the idea was not dismissed, but instead of committing to a naval contract we suggested he found a way to sample life at sea, coupling it with his passion for acting and his desire for a gap year.

Therefore it was just a case of researching organisations and working out how to fund the experience. He applied for lots of jobs and was successful in getting a paid internship the summer after leaving school; this coupled with odd jobs enabled him to start his fund successfully. Kat Mowat who lived beside the Palace provided further inspiration and information at a feedback session from her experiences on Logos Hope, which she returned from in 2019.



Luke was still keen on applying for it, even when he heard that the ship was due back to the UK for a couple of months with initial port stops in London, Liverpool, Edinburgh and Belfast! (We later found out this tour was to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the first OM ship ministries.)

I'm not absolutely sure of the sequence of the events or all the conversations with people that followed, but I heard chat of email exchanges, planned selection weekend conferences in Wales and joining the ship in Holland in the autumn of 2020, amidst beginning a one year acting course in Edinburgh. The college course did happen, however lockdown hit and the ship stayed over the other side of the Atlantic.

St. Michael's minister, Liam, encouraged Luke to put together a film as part of one of the summer services and we were overwhelmed by the prayer and financial support offered in response to this by church family and friends locally and further afield.

There were interesting logistics involved preparing to join the ship on another continent, when there were still international travel restrictions in place. There was relief when we successfully dropped him off at the airport on Sunday 30th August. After quarantining in Nassau, he successfully boarded the virus free ship. In his first prayer letter home he quoted a Bible verse from Colossians ch3 which reads 'Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord and not for men...'

We know this is what motivates him as he serves alongside others on a ship which seeks to bring knowledge, help and hope to communities throughout the world.

SPONSORSHIP OF A CLINICAL OFFICER AT MULANJE MISSION HOSPITAL

by Fiona Duke

For many years St Michael's has supported Mulanje Mission Hospital, Malawi, where Dr Shakespeare worked before she retired. It has medical, surgical, maternity and paediatric beds as well as a busy Outpatients Department and nursing and midwifery college. There is also outreach into the community through various village clinics. It has evolved to meet the changing health needs of the population. The hospital was founded by Church of Scotland missionaries and has retained a strong connection with the Church of Scotland. It became a fully established hospital in 1999.



Mulanje Hospital has seen an increasing number of non-communicable diseases recently including patients with asthma, hypertension, and diabetes. This increase in these diseases has led them to consider the need for clinical staff with improved skills in this area.

Since 2019 West Lothian Presbytery has sponsored a trained doctor working at Mulanje Hospital to complete a three-year programme of further medical education to widen medical skills and enhance the services they provide. St Michael's supported this project financially, along with other churches in the Presbytery.

The hospital appointed one of their staff, Mickson Kambalanje, to be seconded to Blantyre Medical School for this further training. Unfortunately, we heard early in 2020 that Mickson had taken seriously ill and had to withdraw from the programme. The Hospital would like to send another candidate on the course and several churches in West Lothian have agreed to sponsor another candidate.

Mulanje Hospital has identified a longstanding member of staff, Felix Tembo, to complete this extra training. Felix has been instrumental in setting up the hypertension and diabetes programmes that the hospital runs at present. He will start his course in late January 2021 at Blantyre Medical School, Covid permitting. In the most recent newsletter from the hospital Felix Tembo has written a short case history of a child who had many problems trying to control his diabetes and who developed cataracts in both eyes as the result of the poorly controlled diabetes, illustrating the complex problems these non-communicable diseases show in poor, malnourished patients. The newsletter is available online at

<http://www.mmh.mw/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/MMH-Newsletter-December-2020.pdf>



The International Team at St Michael's would like to join the other West Lothian churches in supporting Felix through the training, as we did Mickson. We are still exploring how to collect donations, as we cannot have a retiring collection as we did in 2019. Keep an eye out for details of how you can support this project, if you wish!

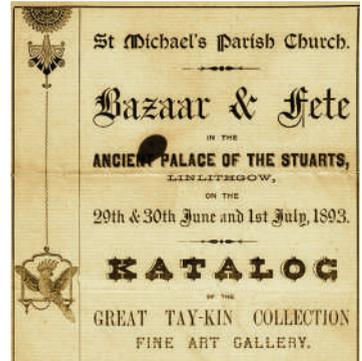
RESEATING ST MICHAEL'S

by Bruce Jamieson

In 1895, St Michael's underwent a massive restoration programme, financed by subscriptions, donations, legacies and proceeds of a Grand Bazaar held in Linlithgow Palace along with an art exhibition and sale of paintings organised by the Young Men's Guild. The 'Katalog' for this is remarkable for its humour – unusual for a Victorian Church event. It states, for example, 'visitors and prospective buyers are requested to deal tenderly with the attendant and desired not to offer gratuities as they will be immediately accepted.'



Adverts for the Bazaar and Art Exhibition



With a total sum of £7300 (almost £1 million today) work began. Amongst changes made was the removal of all old pews and galleries.

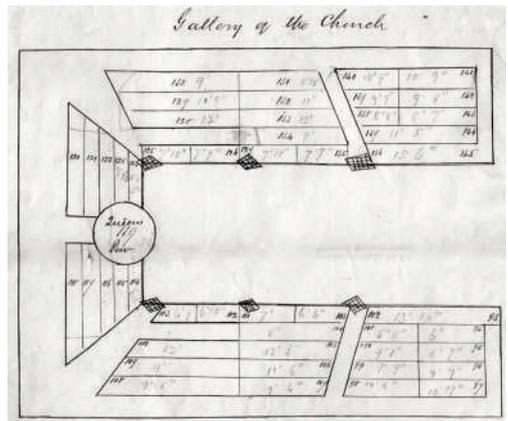


The galleries before demolition; the Royal Pew in the rear centre.

After the restoration was complete, a new seating arrangement was required. In the 19th century it was the practice to allocate seats (for a fee) to individuals or families. They were jealously guarded and the Committee in charge of seat reallocation knew they would have a difficult job ahead of them.

The removal of the galleries alone required 250 new places to be created in the nave. Those ousted from their elevated position included local luminaries such as the Earl of Rosebery, the Earl of Hopetoun, Sir Alexander Seton and Lord Blair of Avontoun. Also evicted from their traditional loft were the Fraternity of Gardeners, the Incorporation of Wrights and the Fraternity of Dyers, all of whom had to be allocated seats in the reconfigured church.

The Reallocation Committee met frequently and, bearing in mind the Minister's preference, decided to experiment with the use of individual, moveable seats. Having borrowed some, they proceeded, over several weeks, to change the arrangement. The trials were not a success primarily because the acoustics of the building were negatively affected. The decision was made to go with oak pews which, as a sop to Rev Ferguson, would not be fixed but could be moved 'to ease cleaning'! The minister reported, 'they are not unseemly and do provide seating in an elegant and suitable manner.'



An 1870 diagram of seating in the old galleries.

Attempts were made to discover everyone who had purchased a pew in the 'old' church and a list drawn up after the 1813 restoration was duly examined. It contained entries such as, 'the minister, Dr Dobie, is allocated pew 38 consisting of 9 bottoms', '24 bottoms for the Band of Choristers' and '10 bottoms reserved for The Keeper of the Palace'.



The new seating installed

By 1895 there **was** no keeper of the Palace. The last, Sir Thomas Livingston, had died in 1853 and the Commissioners of Woods and Forests now held custody of the building. There were also other problems. Many of the Town Council pews had been sold at auction to help pay off the huge debt occasioned by their losing a law suit against the Edinburgh to Glasgow Railway Company. This meant that pews were sold to people living in places such as Cumberland, Penicuik, Glasgow, Stirling, Falkirk, Edinburgh and Grangemouth. Many pews had been sold on to new owners

while some purchasers had died without passing on ownership.

Valiant efforts were made to trace all those entitled to a pew and surveyor David Campbell was hired to 'equate the bottom measurements made in 1813 to feet and inches along the new pews.'

The Committee assured all pew-holders that they would receive 'a just equivalent for their former sittings' and appointed the Sheriff Depute as sole arbiter in the event of a dispute. Inevitably, once people were informed of their new allocations, complaints were lodged.

Local chemist, Alexander Spence, argued that his 'former 8-seater pew commanded a view of the pulpit and now the minister cannot be seen from any part of the new seating.'

Solicitor Robert Stewart, writing from his chambers in Hanover Street, argued that David Gibb had inherited a pew from his grandfather who had bought it 80 years previously, but he had not been allocated a pew.

Alex Morison represented James Dawson regarding pew 116, in the 'front loft' which had been purchased from the town by his father. The argument went on for seven years until the Rev Ferguson calmed the troubled waters by pointing out to the Kirk Session that the Dawson family had provided the stained glass in the window of St Katherine's Aisle. Two split sittings of 5 seats each were



allocated on the understanding that if they were not all used on a Sunday the church officer and bellringer could sit there!

There were many more objections but fortunately none came from Queen Victoria whose official stated that she was pleased to accept her allocation on the north side of the church – where a Hanoverian Coat of arms still indicates the Royal Pew.



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WELCOME TO OUR NEW ELDERS

On Sunday, 22nd November, history was made when five new elders were admitted to the Kirk Session of St Michael's during a live-streamed service. There was no congregation present but members could follow the proceedings via the church's website. Social distancing and all other Covid precautions were practised throughout.



Ashley Johnston



John Macartney



Brian Rhind

John Macartney, Ashley Johnston and Brian Rhind were ordained as Elders and they, along with Ken Duerden and Robin Watson, who had been ordained in their previous churches, were admitted to the Kirk Session of St Michael's.



Ken Duerden



Robin Watson

Can you find 10 differences between these pictures?



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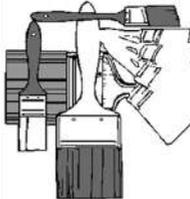
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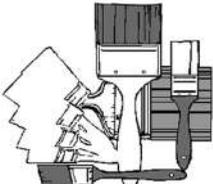
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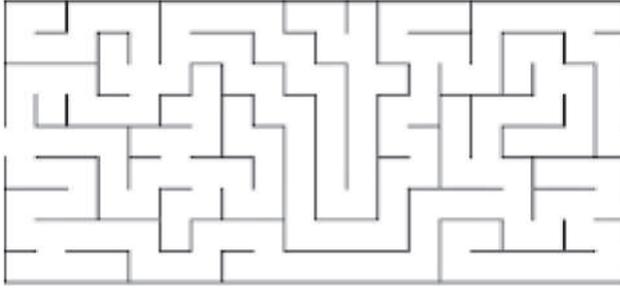
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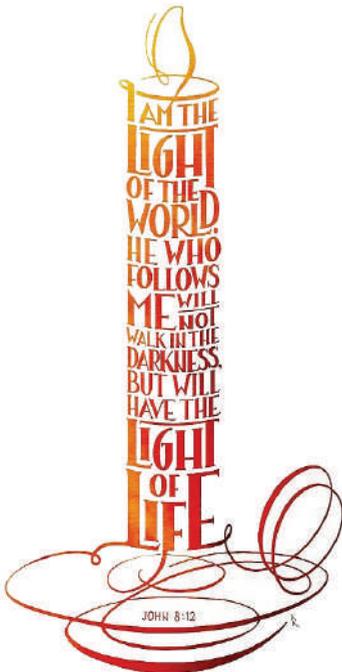
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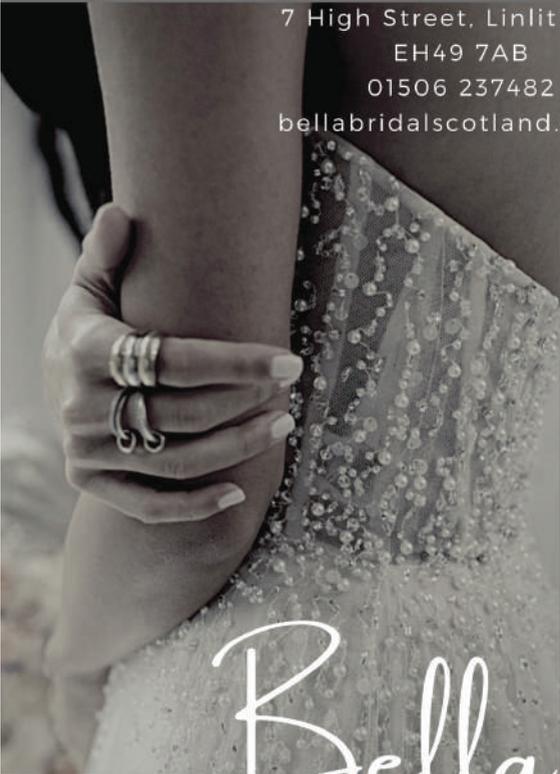


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NEWS FROM JAPAN

by Lorna Ferguson

Happy New Year from Japan!



I am grateful that Matthew (24) and Calum (20) were allowed back into Japan for the winter holidays. Matthew is currently studying for his Diploma in Legal Practice at Glasgow University, though his course is fully online. He also has an online job teaching English. Calum is in his second year at University in Florida. He is there on a football scholarship, but their season was cancelled

last semester. Alistair (17) still lives at home and will soon go into his last year of Japanese high school, so needs to be making decisions about what and where next. Daniel (26) is in London working for Parliament in the field of employment law, so this has been a very busy year for him. He no longer has a visa for Japan, so spent Christmas on his own, but Zoomed in to our family dinner here.

Early in 2020, I was in Scotland for a period of home assignment, finishing up just as the coronavirus started to spread – seems a very long time ago now! I made it back to Japan just in time before the Government here brought in border restrictions and then a State of Emergency, similar to a lockdown.

It has been interesting to see the different approaches to the pandemic. The Japanese Government is not allowed to force businesses to close, or tell people they cannot leave their houses. Rather they rely on 'strong requests'. Consideration of others is an important value in Japan and most people have a high level of self-restraint. This means that most people will follow the Government advice and recommendations.

Although rising at the moment, the number of coronavirus cases and deaths in Japan is considerably lower than the UK, for which we are grateful. However, the suicide rate, which had been declining for several years, is increasing again. In fact, more people died by suicide in the month of October than had died from COVID in the whole year up to that point. In particular there was a large increase in the number of women in their 20s and 40s who committed suicide. This is perhaps due to a combination of domestic violence and women working in sectors where the economy has been worst hit.



Churches here moved to online services during the State of Emergency but have been open again since June. Each church worked out how best to follow local guidelines. My church moved to 2 shorter, socially-distanced services where everyone wears masks, with an additional online option.

When I came back from Scotland, I had planned to get more involved in my local church. I was thinking about something like a children's club or parenting class. With the

coronavirus of course, all of that became impossible. However, the minister decided it would be helpful to email daily Bible devotions to church members during the pandemic, and I was asked to write one a week. Writing in Japanese is much harder than speaking, so it has been challenging to write a short devotion each week since April. However, it has meant that I have got to know church members better, since many of them are kind enough to come up and say thank you for the devotions. So I sense that God was answering my prayers, just in a different way from how I had expected it.

One thing we were able to do during this year was to produce a new prayer booklet for Japan, called *Beneath the Surface*. We worked on this together with missionaries from different organisations and with Japanese Christian leaders too. The hope is to share the needs of Japan in a way that helps people to pray for the people of this country, over 99% of whom do not know the hope that we have in Jesus.

As we all face times of uncertainty, I'd like to end by quoting something David wrote four years ago when he was about to have his stem cell transplant during his treatment for lymphoma: '...trusting in our unchangeable and faithful God is the only place to go if we want real certainty. Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see'. As a follower of Jesus, there may well be many things in our lives we don't understand or for which there don't seem to be answers but as we lift our eyes to our God and fix our eyes on the unseen things, we find a certainty which will never fail us.'

Thank you for all your support. Please keep praying for the people of Japan to know this same hope and certainty.



MOBILE CHRISTIANS

by Rev Thom Riddell



The past year has been difficult and challenging. None of us could have been prepared for the impact of the Covid pandemic on our lives. We have had to learn how to wash our hands properly, and the concept of social distancing has become part of our daily experience. Many people have been confined to their own homes, or at least the local area, and will feel uncertain about venturing further afield.

One thing which has changed, possibly for the better, is how we communicate with each other. We have learned new skills in using Skype, Zoom and FaceTime and the computer and the mobile phone have become indispensable. The days of relying on a landline are in the past.

This can also apply to our faith, and how we live it and share it. Many of us can be landline Christians, only living our faith confidently within the vicinity of our own homes, sharing it sparingly. The mobile phone goes everywhere we go, and we can use it to connect with others in many different ways. We can use it at home, when we go out to work, or shop, wherever we happen to be. We can be mobile Christians, sharing our faith far and wide.

Jesus did not limit himself to his own town or neighbourhood when he went out to proclaim the good news of the coming of God's kingdom. He travelled widely to teach and to encourage people to love one another. If he had remained in one location, his message would not have reached those who most needed to hear it. His commission to us as his followers is to do the same; to be mobile and share our faith with everyone, everywhere.

As the Covid vaccine is rolled out, and the limitations on our travel begin to be eased, may we all be inspired to be mobile Christians, to spread the news of God's love and grace.

Prayer

Loving God, we thank you for the technology which enables us to communicate with others. Help us to have the confidence to share our faith wherever we are, with whoever we meet. Amen



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