

Our Lighthouse

How difficult has life been since the start of the pandemic (COVID 19) in 2020! We have struggled to find ways to communicate: the online world has been fine for some,



but for those who don't do computers, we have found it hard to know how to keep in touch. I suspect we were hoping that lockdown might have gone away quickly, but I think we all understand now that COVID will be with us, in one way or another, for some time yet and we must learn to live with it.

How do we navigate our way through troubled waters? That's a big question for us. Some have found that easier than others, but it has been a difficult time for all of us.

If you visit Scotland's coast you will not be far from a lighthouse. On almost every dangerous rock, there is a lighthouse warning ships to be careful or to stay away. There is a new song that uses the notion of God as the lighthouse. Here are some of the words:

*"In my wrestling and in my doubts
In my failures You won't walk out
Your great love will lead me through
You are the peace in my troubled sea."*

The writer then calls God **"my lighthouse"** as the One who guides him safe to shore, as he trusts in God's promises; he finds peace and hope with God. You can listen to the whole song by following the link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AaTuO4jvCMU>

At a time when all the usual sources of support and contact have been taken away from us, I have been reminded time and again that we should trust God, who is our refuge and strength (Psalm 46). Jesus is at the centre of everything, and we should keep our eyes fixed on Him (Hebrews 12:2). For some, this has been a time when even that faith has been tried and tested by the sheer volume of concern that has been heaped on us; faith has not been easy. Whatever life has been like, I want you to remember that God's love is unfailing.

We have no idea when the pandemic will be over, but we have a God who **"knows the end of things from the beginning"**, so we

Did you know?

From the church website you can access our:

- ⇒ weekly pastoral letter
- ⇒ monthly prayer diary
- ⇒ daily reflections
- ⇒ audio and video recordings of morning worship
- ⇒ daily Bible verse
- and much more including:
- ⇒ worship resources
- ⇒ links to other Christian materials.

<https://www.blairgowrieparishchurch.org.uk>

Mary's Meals

This marvelous world-wide organisation which started in Scotland ensures that children who attend school will be given one square meal a day.



In Blairgowrie, a very enthusiastic group headed up by Margaret Young, raises thousands of pounds to support a school in Malawi. For a details, please contact Margaret on **01250 875086**

can trust Him to help us make wise choices for ourselves and for our community. Sometimes the guidance coming from government is confusing and the behaviour of other people has been unsettling; God hasn't walked out on us but is our peace in that troubled sea of mixed messages and disturbing behaviour. He promises to guide us and sustain us when we walk along unfamiliar paths!

Some of us find our reassurance in the regular pattern of church life, with events that we enjoy and with people we meet when we go there. It took me some time in March 2020 to unpick almost the whole life of the congregation when everything we normally do had to be stopped. It was profoundly sad; we have worked to create that church family life and to see it vanish so suddenly upset me enormously.

At that stage, we were simply aware of all that we lost. We lost the pattern of church life almost immediately. We lost contact with other people and many people struggled with that loss. We lost face-to-face contact with family and friends. All contacts and activities that we take for granted were gone and we missed it all. The sense of lament for a lost community was profound and entirely appropriate.

However, we are now beginning to see a glimmer of normal life and a sense that our Church life and worship services are returning. As a Christian community, we must avail ourselves of the blessing which there is in being together; both in fellowship to worship God and to encourage one another. We have a responsibility to one another to seek being together and to witness to our community that we are here for them and for each other. This, I believe is the will of God for us!

"Do not neglect to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." (Hebrews 10:25)

Let us remember that God has not gone away. The picture of God as **"my lighthouse"** is one that I find a really comforting picture as we try to find our way into the future as His people and as a Church. When all around us is uncertain, two verses from Scripture have stayed with me:

"I trust in God's unfailing love"
(Psalm 13:5)

"Let us fix our eyes on Jesus"
(Hebrews 12:2)

May the grace, love and the peace of our Lord be with you. Looking forward to see you in Church and worship and fellowship together.

In Him, **Benjamin**

Bible Study

If you'd like to join our autumn Bible Study Group, please let David Howat know so he can keep you informed of dates and times.

Photo by madeleine ragsdale on Unsplash

Property Update

It's been a VERY busy few months on the property front! At the last Board meeting, our Chartered Surveyor spoke about the flat roof options. Either a felt or a single ply PVC layer would be acceptable and we chose to go for the felting system. The expected life of this is 30-35 years, with a guarantee of 20 years. Planning permission is required for the replacement of the upstairs windows with consent expected to take around 8 weeks. Four tenders for this work were considered, and one accepted. It is hoped that the work will commence in September.

Emergency Lighting work is completed in both halls, the kitchen, toilets and Session Room. Work should start soon on the Sanctuary when scaffolding will be required.

The lock on the entrance to the lower hall is to be replaced with a keypad lock which is acceptable to our insurers. We require to know who has access for insurance and safeguarding purposes and a new register of 'code holders' will be maintained. A donation covers the cost of this work.

Other property matters include checking the drains and the lightning conductor at the Clock Tower, and the need to upgrade our fire alarm system at some point.

For the Manse, water ingress from the adjacent field is being investigated and volunteers recently upgraded the driveway with new gravel.

The Board thanks the Property Team for the diligence shown in addressing these matters.

The Guild

Throughout the pandemic, the Guild Committee has worked very effectively to keep in touch with its members. Our thanks go to the team for this.

Leadership Changes

Mary Dow has retired from the Leadership Team. We thank Mary for her dedicated service to the Guild over many years.

Two new members are welcomed to the team—Kathryn Webster and Colleen Joslin. Together with Mary Macdonald and Margaret Conroy they will lead the Guild during the 2021/22 session.

Jean Gibb has stepped down as Treasurer and sincere thanks are given for her many years of service. As Colleen takes over this post, Jean is thanked for supporting the changeover.

Ethel Dow has retired as organiser of the Church Boxes. With Ken's support she has ensured, on behalf of the Guild, many successful distribution and counting sessions. Ethel is warmly thanked for this work.

Guild Format

COVID protections permitting, Guild meetings will be held on:

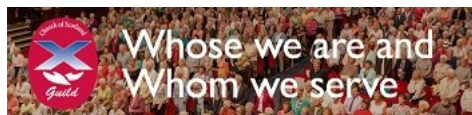
Monday 4th October at 2pm,

Monday 1st November at 7pm, and

Monday 6th December at 2pm

All meetings will be led by The Leadership Team, with the 2022 situation being reviewed in December.

The **Guild Dedication Service** will be held in the church on **Sunday 3rd October** when The Leadership Team will support the worship.



Knitted Goods

One of the hidden gems which is run by the Church of Scotland is called Crossreach.



Crossreach is responsible for a vast number of caring organisations, such as Care Homes for the elderly, Parents of Drug Users, Postnatal depression, Counselling and Support, and Family Centres situated in prisons, where the families of prisoners can be cared for during visits to relations who are in prison. The last one in the list is one which was originally funded by a Guild project many years ago in Perth Prison. It is a comfortable, cheerful lounge area, staffed by delightful caring people. While a partner or wife is visiting her loved one in custody, the family are entertained by the staff. They also get advice on benefits, travel, cookery and health. Often there are children in need of warm clothes. In our Church, a faithful band of knitters supplies a great variety of baby clothes, toddlers' jumpers, cosy hats, and pram or cot blankets. The staff in the Family Centre distributes these where appropriate; thus demonstrating the most important commandment of all - "to love one another..." Love can be manifested in so many ways - a hug, an understanding smile, a cup of coffee, or warm cheery clothes knitted by a stranger.

If all the goods which my husband and I deliver regularly to the Prison are not used there, Crossreach is always delighted to share them in their other enterprises, so everything is greatly valued.

Please give me a ring if you have some knitting and we can arrange to collect it. It is such a privilege to witness the joy on a young mother's face when she is given a hand knitted jacket for her baby.

Moira Somerville - Tel. 01250 875 240

Church Garden

As many of you will know, Ross Davidson has, with help from a few others, looked after our church garden for more years than he cares to remember! He has now decided that it's time to hand on his dahlias and weeding duties to others. So, it was with some trepidation that I collected the tubers in the spring and planted them out. For several weeks of being planted out, nothing happened. However, I am delighted to say that they are now flowering. Our thanks go to both Ross for his quiet diligence and the new team of volunteers who have risen so well to the task of tending the front grounds. It looks great! **Clifford**



Treasurer's Thoughts

I start by saying a huge thanks to all our donors. I also appreciate that many of you make sacrifices to fund the contributions you make. I also appreciate that many are generous with their time and talents and perform tasks that would otherwise result in costs.

The reality is that over the past several years, as a Congregation, we have been spending more than we receive. Included in that spending is the contribution we make to the Church of Scotland centrally. This amounts to over £60,000 a year some of which of course is used to pay the Minister's stipend. For many years now stipends have been handled centrally so as to ensure accuracy with Tax, National Insurance and Pension arrangements. Incidentally Ministers' stipends are very modest and have been frozen because of current financial constraints. I mention all this to emphasise that we are not inward looking. We contribute to the work of the Church of Scotland and in so doing assist congregations and others much less fortunate than us.

But it is not just us in Blairgowrie who struggle to make ends meet. Many congregations are in a similar position as is the Church of Scotland as a whole.

The Church of Scotland will embark on a financial support campaign later this year. One of the highlights is a National Gift Day with the opportunity to donate centrally but the donation being forwarded to a nominated congregation. A variety of tools are now available for such donations. However, your Treasurer is a 75 year old who has shied away from facilities such as Just Giving on the basis that the most efficient way to donate is to give by Standing Order, Free Will Offering envelopes or in more normal times donations in the open plate. Sometimes a member will make a surprise "one off" gift by cheque, often with the bonus of Gift Aid tax relief. Many of the newer fancier ways of giving have costs which I am keen to avoid. But I am open to suggestions so if you are aware of ways of giving that we should adopt, please let me know. I am not such a stuck in the mud that I favour no changes but I do not want to add to our costs by introducing new facilities that will cost more than they bring in. So, please get back to me!

I have been a member of our Congregation for

Guild Projects

The Guild is looking forward with new projects for the next three years. The strategy is "**Look Forward in Faith**" with the annual themes:

2021-22 'Lights and Bushels'

2022-23 'Wee Seeds, Big Trees'

2023-24 'New wine, New Wine Skins'

The new projects are:

'Blether with BEAT' - addressing issues around eating disorders.

'Home for Good—Scotland' - finding homes for vulnerable children; working on awareness training and foster care.

'Pioneers—Chocolate Heaven' - supporting farmers in the development of Fair Trade chocolate on an island in South East Asia.

'Starchild' - supporting children with additional needs, and their families, in Uganda.

'The Vine Trust – the Kazunzu Village of Hope in Tanzania' - building and supporting a village on the shores of Lake Tanzania.

Each of the six projects will receive financial and prayerful support from the Guild until the end of the fundraising cycle in 2024.

Final figures for 2018-21 projects

Crossreach	£98,665.39
Sailors' Society	£74,623.70
Boys' Brigade, Scotland	£90,778.11
World Mission Council	£76,623.70
Malawi Fruits	£82,187.36
Free to Live Trust	£92,941.05

almost 50 years. I can only recall Treasurers asking for more!. If your circumstances have changed and you now cannot afford what you once did, then of course you must reduce your giving. Previous stewardship campaigns have emphasised that point. However some of us could perhaps increase our contributions. That would be marvellous. Please seek my help as needed.

Thanks for considering these matters and do get back to me with any useful thoughts you might have.
Alasdair Shaw



Used Stamps

Every time I buy stamps to attach to the occasion envelope for 'snail mail', I get a shock at the price, which is usually increased. However, World Mission run an excellent appeal for used stamps which are in great demand still. They fund differing projects in the name of furthering the word of God through action.

The past two years have been giving support to the Women's Development Centre in Kandy, Sri Lanka (WDC)

The WDC supports women and girls who have survived rape, sexual violence and family rejection, returning them to education or learning skills that will allow them to earn a living. Please put your used stamps in an envelope in my pigeonhole in the Lower hall. Many thanks, **Moir Somerville**



Hall Lets

Our gratitude and thanks go to Elspeth Dunlop who has managed the role of Hall Lets Conven-

or very effectively for many years. Since she demitted the role earlier this year it has now fallen to me to try to emulate her efficiency and organisation. It will, however, take me some time to learn enough to reach any similar standard so please bear with me as I settle in and get to grips with the task.

I can be contacted by email at colleenajoslin@gmail.com or on 01250 873701.

Colleen Joslin

Editor's Note: If you have not already done so, can church organisations please contact Colleen to discuss any booking requirements for the autumn?



Collection of Church Money Boxes

The Guild is aware that many of the boxes issued prior to lockdown are now overflowing! Over the next few weeks, arrangements will be made to collect these boxes. New boxes will be issued once the Guild has had the opportunity to review how best to continue this valuable work. A big 'thank you' to those who continue to fill these boxes.

For the Presbytery of Meigle and Dunkeld this means a reduction of almost 5 ministers in the next 4 years. Presbyteries have to have their plans approved by the end of next year. In the meantime, our Presbytery is working towards uniting with others to form a larger governing body. This is a national requirement.

As of now, no Presbytery can grant permission to call in a vacancy, without the agreement of The Faith Nurture Forum in Edinburgh. For charges where permission has been granted, the process can continue but if a nominee has not peached by the close of this year, the vacancy process ceases.

Assembly Trustees state that the Church should be reconfigured and reshaped for mission and service around fewer buildings and fewer charges. Each presbytery is therefore expected to make best use of the posts to develop the Church's mission.

Rev Rosie Frew, Convenor of the Faith Nurture Group was blunt. "Without a radical treatment plan, the Church of Scotland will not survive. Our report offers the whole Church a chance to thrive — to lay down burdens which have been exhausting us all."

A Presbytery Report is now a standing item on the Session agenda so that Presbytery Elder, Alisdair Drummond, can keep us regularly informed of developments.

Clifford

Presbytery Planning & Reappraisal

This year's General Assembly agreed far-reaching proposals for changes to Presbytery Planning which will affect us all.

Presbytery Plans will be based around 600 full-time equivalent ministries with no more than 60 vacancies at any one time. The Church notes, "It represents a reduction of around 200 posts but takes account of the fact that 40% of all current full-time ministers of Word and Sacrament are over the age of 60 with significant numbers, perhaps as high as 60%, projected to retire over the next 10 years."

What does it mean for congregations?

P.D.B.C.—what?

It seems so long ago now, but it was the weekend just before the first lockdown that I started as Session Clerk. Little did I know...

As Benjamin says in his pastoral letter, all the usual methods of contact and support vanished, literally overnight. We've had to find new ways of ensuring that our congregation and worship continued in some form or another.

You might think that the various lockdowns would mean that there was little to do. Session and Board members would tell you otherwise! Session matters and congregational decisions continued to be discussed and addressed throughout the 17 months. Session and Board meeting took place online, many emails bounced back and forth and the church website took on new significance as a means of keeping the membership and wider community informed. Along with the continued production of CDs, the website became the access point for worship recordings.

Since then we've had to respond to national legislation and church guidance each time protection levels have changed. It's been quite a rollercoaster for the significant number of volunteers who have helped make sure we could offer worship over this time.


We started off with Benjamin producing a weekly pastoral letter and coming into an empty church to record his sermon. Then we were able to open for private prayer—once we had undertaken risk assessments and reorganisation of pew seating. That ran for some months, stopped and started again until we were permitted to open for twenty then fifty people. The volunteers got going again to get this going and keep it running and risk assessments were revised and submitted to Presbytery for approval.

More recently, we were permitted to assess how many our church could hold using the two metre distancing requirement. That's where another new phrase came into our COVID vocabulary—PDBC. No, it's not a medical condition! It's now a legal requirement that buildings display their capacity for any current restrictions.

With a maximum of fifty four, we had to introduce an online and phone 'booking system' to manage numbers and record attendance for "Test and Protect" purposes.

Recently, at the request of the national church and Session, Risk Assessments were further revised to enable us to move to one metre distancing throughout the building. Volunteers set to once more...

The exciting aspect of this latest relaxation is that we can now accommodate a far larger number of



BLAIRGOWRIE
PARISH CHURCH
Registered Scottish Charity No. SC235757

**Physically Distanced Based
Capacity (PDBC) 22nd July 2021**

The PDBC for each area of this building is calculated to be:

- Sanctuary 83—132 seated (including 10 in the 'choir stall')
- Gallery: 9 seating areas for 18—21 persons
- Upper Hall, including kitchen access: 56 seated or standing
- Lower Hall: 8 standing
- Choir Room: 12 seated or standing
- Creche Room: 5 adults plus under 5s
- Session Room: 20 seated

worshippers from the 1st of August.

Are things back to normal? No. However, we are now in the position of being able to gather each Sunday morning in numbers more like our normal. We can sing and be led by a 'small group' choir.

Face coverings are still mandatory, the cleaning regimes go on after and between each service and "Test and Protect" continues.

People can 'book' four weeks in advance *and* we can now accommodate those who attend 'as and when' they are able—without having to make a reservation.

My sincere thanks go to the all the volunteers who have worked away in the background to make worship possible—from the Sound to the Door Teams. It is appreciated, I'm sure, by those who have been attending.

If you haven't yet felt safe enough to return to communal worship, please let us know what more we can do to help make it happen.

Pastoral Care Group

Our thanks go to the small group of dedicated volunteers who ran this in the past.

We would like to re-establish this group to support these who would find it of benefit.

If you would like to join the list of volunteers, please let Benjamin know.

Clifford