

to glorify God ... to proclaim Christ ... and to serve others

AUGUST 2020

No. 821



**To plant a garden
is to believe in
tomorrow**

Audrey Hepburn

Minister

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Session Clerk

Mr Eddie Thorn
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Church Garden Team

Thank you to all the volunteers who have helped to tidy up the Church garden which had become extremely overgrown. We have worked for the last few weeks and thanks to a generous anonymous donation we are able to carry on with the big tidy up and get rid of all the debris.

By the time we are back in our Church the garden will be a pleasure to visit.

Frances Douglas
07795204646



Any spare
gardening tools
looking for a new
home will be
gratefully
received.



From the Minister



Greetings Friends,

As I write to you this month, we are beginning to see some real progress in reaching the 'new normal' that is gradually emerging following the 'lockdown' necessitated by the coronavirus pandemic. More and more shops are being permitted to open, even though we now have to wear a face mask in them, and there is certainly more traffic and business about the streets.

One of the signs that we are beginning to return to normal was, earlier this month, the resumption of work in our Sanctuary. Although this is a positive sign, we cannot yet confirm when exactly the work will finish or when, depending on Covid-19 regulations, we shall be able to return to worship in a format that is familiar and recognisable to us all.

One of the things that the pandemic has reinforced is that our buildings are not essential for us to either worship God or continue as a church community. Many people have adapted to our new way of worship with relative ease and it is amazing that many of the changes that have been forced upon us have now become what we are used to. I believe there is a lesson for us all in that. Whilst these changes were forced upon us, we have adapted and even been able to see benefits in how we worship currently.

Although I have said our buildings are not essential for us to continue to worship God, it does not mean that they are not important. Far from it. Although we can worship God anywhere, in many different ways, our buildings are vital to allowing us to come together as a community, a community that enjoys fellowship and fun as well as celebrating together our relationship with God. With this in mind, it is important that we should plan to mark the return to our Sanctuary, when it comes, in a suitable way.

An entirely appropriate way of recognising the importance of the work that has been done in the Sanctuary is a commemorative plaque. The Kirk Session has met and, following discussion, has agreed that a plaque is to be created with the following inscription:

This building was rededicated to God's purpose in (month)...2020 following extensive refurbishment generously funded by the congregation.

"Let them construct a Sanctuary for me, that I may dwell among them" Exodus 25:8

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From the Minister continued

The font size will be different and, obviously, we still need to learn the exact month which is to be inserted but this creation of the plaque is another sign that we are progressing and that the completion of the Sanctuary is in sight.

Much thought has been given to the wording of the plaque which I think is elegant. With regard to the scriptural quotation, whilst we understand God to be omnipresent and not confined to any buildings, we recognise that God will only dwell in an individual who has turned their heart, mind and soul over to Him and that each person who loves the Lord is the Sanctuary in whom he dwells. I, therefore, have no issue with the idea that the building where we, who are of like minds, gather 'to Glorify God...Proclaim Christ...and Serve Others' should be regarded as a Sanctuary where the Lord may dwell amongst us and anyone who joins us. Although I understand God to be everywhere, I have met, in my former occupation, many individuals who have rejected God and, in addition, I have been to many places where God is not welcome. Clearly, whilst God is everywhere, He does not dwell where He is not welcome.

The very definition of a sanctuary is 'refuge or safety from pursuit, persecution, or other danger'. I pray that our Sanctuary will be a place of refuge and safety where all people can escape from their worries and concerns by bringing their issues and problems to God and giving them over to Him. I pray our Sanctuary is a place where people will meet God through fellowship with other believers in a way that they cannot do elsewhere. In this world of ours today, it is a fact that God is not welcome everywhere. I rejoice that, in Blackhall, we have a building that is at the heart of the community where anyone who is lost and seeking God can come and find Him dwelling there amongst the congregation.

God bless,

Fergus

*'All are welcome
in this place'*



A Message from Shona - the Minister's Wife

Normally, when I am trying to get to know someone new, being quite sociable, I would invite them round for a cup of tea or we would go to a local cafe for a chat but, for obvious reasons, I haven't been able to do that and, in any event, it would be difficult to do that with each and every member of Blackhall St. Columba's Church on an individual basis! So, I have been asked to introduce myself in a written message which is far more formal than I would like but strange times call for strange measures.

I arrived back in Edinburgh (I was born here) just before lockdown with my husband Fergus, the new minister, leaving my three daughters, Catriona (21), Heather (20) and Lori (18) back in Waterfoot, just outside Glasgow where we have the family home. Our intention had been to bring some of our clothes and personal belongings to start with and then we could gradually bring the rest of our things on our weekly visits to Glasgow to see our girls, Fergus' Mum and our friends. Work on the manse kitchen had only just started and no soft furnishings had been sourced, when lockdown came into effect and we found ourselves separated from our girls and without the means to progress the move. There was nothing for it but to try to cope as best we could and, for me, that has meant falling back on the things I like to do in as much as that was possible.

At the moment, I am very fortunate not to be restricted by any paid employment. I studied the law at Glasgow University and was a Procurator Fiscal in Paisley and then Glasgow for many years. I have also worked as a carer which proved very flexible and allowed me to concentrate on my most important role of mum to three daughters who are now a newly qualified primary teacher, a child development officer and a student at Edinburgh College, Granton (studying Acting and Theatre Performance).

So what have I been doing? During lockdown, I have tried to become familiar with my new surroundings by walking everywhere. I have enjoyed exploring the neighbourhood and have delighted in the fact that many places are so close to the manse. I have walked many times now up Corstorphine Hill, to Cramond and along the River Almond walkway, into the city centre to the castle and the Royal Mile, to Lauriston Castle

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Shona Cook (the Minister's Wife) continued

and everywhere in between taking photographs as I went which I have gathered together in a special "Edinburgh Lockdown '20" album so that I shall always have a record of my first three months in Blackhall walking in what was usually splendid sunshine. There is no better way to see somewhere and keep fit at the same time. The gym is shut and so I have walked! Every cloud has a silver lining.

I enjoy the theatre and the cinema and have taken part in many amateur dramatic musicals and plays but that has all been put on hold for the time being. I like a bit of fun with friends and was very involved in our old church with the organising of a wide variety of social evenings and excursions. I hope to be able to help with that kind of thing here as well. It is quite exciting to think that we are returning to those things being a possibility again. It has been very hard to meet people in the usual ways and so I have established a coffee and chat Zoom meeting every Thursday at 3pm (details for joining are on the church website) and it has been great getting to know people that way.

I really enjoy reading and have set up the Blackhall St. Columba's Bookclub which meets on Zoom at the moment about once a month (details are again on the website).

I love baking and cooking also. A friend organised what he called "The Kensington Bake-Off" during lockdown to amuse his mum who lives there and a few of us took part by creating four different bakes with creative twists over an eight week period culminating in a showstopper cake. It was a lot of fun and I was thrilled when I was declared the winner. (see page 7)

Another passion of mine is crafting. I discovered this a few years ago when I was helping my youngest daughter raise funds for a trip with World Challenge and I got hooked. I mainly work with felt and most of my creations are Christmas decorations of one sort or another but I also cross-stitch and am trying to complete a Winnie-the-Pooh alphabet which I had hoped originally to have done for my oldest daughter's nursery. Twenty-one years later and it takes a lockdown to get it finished!

Of course, Fergus and I have started to make progress in the manse now and look forward to all that Blackhall has to offer. As more restrictions are removed and the ability to meet people face to face returns, I hope to get to meet many of the congregation and welcome them to the manse. After all, now that you know a bit about me, it's only fair that I get to know you too.

Best wishes

Shona



Shona's Showstopper Cake

Shona's blog, called "The Wife of the Minister", can be found at:-

<https://shonacook505.wixsite.com/website>

Well, after nearly 14 weeks of inactivity, it's great to see some busyness back in the Sanctuary! Our contractors, John Dennis, have restarted work, although, with the Covid protection guidelines still in place, things are looking a bit different.



Rightly so, there are careful precautions, and I had to read and sign a comprehensive risk assessment document before being allowed on site. There are fewer people on site at any one time to ensure distancing can be observed. That does bring a few challenges and impacts the time it will take to complete the remaining work.

So what's still to happen? The list of activities remaining includes (but is not limited to):

- Installation of the light fittings
- Installation of the new doors
- Completion of the decoration
- Completion of the AV installations
- Cleaning
- Commissioning of all new equipment
- Training

The sequencing of these activities is important, for example, the doors can't be fitted until the spider crane required to install the lights and clean the ceiling has been removed from the Sanctuary. John Dennis are currently looking at how they can do the high level works in the crane safely within the Covid guidelines, so that piece of work becomes key on the critical path to completion.

We are currently working on a proposed handover of the Sanctuary from John Dennis in mid-September, although that is very heavily dependent on the Covid plans not changing adversely.

While this is going on, there is a lot of other activity underway. Pat Macleod and Lynn Bunney are sewing frantically to cover the cushions for the Apse and communion chairs. Our chairs for the Sanctuary are being manufactured, and we have a design for a commemorative plaque agreed.

We also have a plan developed for the other work we, as a congregation, have to complete before the building is ready for use. That plan starts a week before the handover with familiarisation and training for key people who will use and manage the new equipment. /continued

Building for the Future continued

We then have to relocate the church office, get all of our belongings back from storage, cleaned and relocated where they will go in the new Sanctuary. We also need to look at the activities we do within our various teams and rotas, and make sure they are fit for purpose going forward. All of this work is being done in consultation with the team who are looking at reopening our premises in line with Covid advice. (If you'd like to help with any of this please let me know.)

A very busy period coming up but, with a fair wind, the Sanctuary should be ready for use by the end of the October school holiday. How and for what we are able to use it depends on guidance from both the Scottish Government, and the Church of Scotland.

Fay Stirling
Project Manager

Call to the
Creative

Church Timeline

The Building for the Future Team is keen for a historic timeline of Blackhall St.Columba's to be devised and created for display in the Sanctuary. A small team has met briefly to work on this led by Shona Cook.

We appreciate that there will be a wealth of creative talent within the congregation and would like to tap into that to ensure we can produce an installation that is informative, attractive and is also a piece of art which is of the people of Blackhall St.Columba's and by the people of Blackhall St.Columba's. The timeline will be made up of separate panels each covering twenty years in the life of our church and will be in the form of tapestry/cross-stitch/felting/quilting and the like.

If you feel that you could offer your help with any ideas, information, design ability or crafting talent however great or small, [please contact Shona at the manse](#). We look forward to pooling our collective talents and producing an additional striking feature for our newly refurbished Sanctuary.

Kirk Session Report

The Kirk Session met on Tuesday 19 May and Tuesday 23 June 2020. These were virtual meetings conducted via the Zoom conferencing facility as are permitted by the Commission of the General Assembly.

Building for the Future

It has been agreed that a commemorative plaque will be attached to an internal wall of the Sanctuary. For agreed wording see 'From the Minister' pages 3 and 4.

Correspondence

An acknowledgement was received from Fresh Start for the donation of £150 which was the outgoing gift to Dr Barr for his service as Interim Moderator and which he had asked to be given to Fresh Start.

A note of thanks had also been received from YMCA in respect of the £192.20 sent to them following the retiring offering at the February Communion Services.

Elders' Conference

It was agreed that an Elders' Conference be held once normality returns. It is also planned to have a Congregation Conference thereafter.

Finance

At the May Kirk Session meeting the Congregational Treasurer outlined the forecast deficit for the year, namely £24,000. It was explained that much of this deficit was due to one-off expenditure to the manse which accounted for circa £17,000 coupled with the loss of hall rental income and drop off in ordinary offerings due to the lockdown. Following discussion it was agreed that:-

1. There will be a Congregational wide appeal for a one-off donation following our return to the Sanctuary.
2. This will be led by the Kirk Session with immediate effect who will also consider an increase to their regular giving.
3. All this will be carried out in a way that acknowledges that the financial circumstances of members may well have changed.

Pastoral Assistant

The Moderator informed Session of Rev Gordon Farquharson's decision to retire from this role while at the same time indicating his willingness to help out when required. The Moderator had accepted Gordon's decision and the Clerk undertook to write to Gordon thanking him for his unstinting and faithful work with the Congregation including his period as Locum Minister.

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Kirk Session Report continued

Presbytery Plan

The General Assembly of 2019 approved a Radical Action Plan to achieve much needed reform within The Church of Scotland. Presbyteries were instructed to challenge themselves in their Presbytery Plans to be robust, imaginative and courageous in reducing the number of charges (in terms of the allocation ministries / posts there is a 20% advisory reduction – the reduction may become compulsory - at present there are 78.2 posts in Edinburgh Presbytery), creating ministry hubs, and enabling new pioneer and new church planting opportunities.

A Presbytery Conference had been organised for 14 March but was regrettably cancelled when the first indications for the need for social distancing became apparent. The purpose of the Conference was basically to outline the plan to take account of the variety of issues and factors facing the Presbytery, and the Church of Scotland as a whole, by formulating it around a framework of clusters of congregations. As a consequence present parish boundaries would be dissolved in favour of cluster boundaries.

The initial proposal is that The Presbytery of Edinburgh (currently 73 parishes) would consist of 18 congregational groups with the West City Group made up of Blackhall St Columba's, Murrayfield, Palmerston Place and (possibly) St Andrew's Clermiston.

What is apparent is that, as with all sectors of society, the interruption of regular life by the lockdown offers the Church the opportunity to take a view of the future through a different lens. For such a transformation to take place, however, it is also necessary that the Church – its ministers, Kirk Sessions, and congregations – looks beyond what is local to the wider needs of the City, its surrounds, and to the Church at a national level. Going forward there will be engagement with congregations and it will be the case that no one congregation will be exempt from some form of change.

Current circumstances may dictate that the new Presbytery Plan may have to be more radical than would have previously been considered.

Reopening Churches

Guidance from the national Church offices following the Scottish Government's decisions is, as you would expect, one of continual change as we move through the recovery phases from the Lockdown. By the time you read this edition of Kirk News, where we are in the journey to normality will no doubt have changed.

As at 19 April the Scottish Government has allowed churches to open for communal worship. /continued

Kirk Session Report continued

However at this time the Presbytery Covid-19 Group has not had sufficient time to digest the latest Guidance and therefore no permissions to open have been granted. Applications by congregations to open for worship are required to be accompanied by updated risk assessments, checklists, plans with photographic evidence before permission can be granted.

It is important to emphasise that while there is now Government permission to open in quite limited and restricted ways for worship, there is no pressure from the church at national or Presbytery level to do so. For many congregations the restrictions on numbers; a maximum of 50 regardless of the size of the building, the 2m distance restriction, the need to wear face coverings, and the fact that singing is not permitted, all mean that greater freedom, participation, and flexibility in worship may well be offered by continuing online for a time, or seeking to offer a mix of the two. It is important for Kirk Sessions to have time to reflect on the experience of lockdown and to prepare carefully for the future.

Eddie Thorn
Session Clerk

Request for volunteers to operate the Audio Visual (AV) Desk in the Sanctuary

Dear Members of the Congregation

As part of the preparation of moving back into the Sanctuary there will be training for the A V team who will operate the new desk. Unfortunately we lost a couple of team members following the move into the Large Hall and we need replacements.

Therefore this is an urgent appeal to anyone from the Congregation who would be interested in such a role to join the rota for the A V team.

Anyone interested should contact:-

Adrian Johnston johnstonam54@gmail.com

Please give this your serious consideration - you would get excellent training and full support - and you would be carrying out an important role in the life of the Congregation.

Eddie Thorn
Session Clerk

Family News

Deaths

April

10 Robert C Osborne
29 Ronald Smith

May

9 George Russell
9 Patrick Lane
12 Gordon Harrower
20 Grace H White
Michael W Livingstone



Congratulations

During this time of lockdown many celebrations have been cancelled, put on hold or have had to become virtual events. To those of our members named here we offer congratulations and best wishes. However you marked the occasion we hope it was a happy one.

Helen Hunter

21st Birthday

Moira Russell

90th Birthday

Violet Troup

80th Birthday

Linnette & Sandy Aitken

Golden Wedding

Ross Hunter

Graduated in
Medicine
from Dundee
University

Betty & Alex Blackford

Diamond Wedding

There will be others we haven't known about and so are not included here.

Congratulations and best wishes to you all.

“Gran School”

"Life in Lockdown" has been a milestone for each of us, in our journey through 2020. For me, it became four months of returning to the role I used to love so much - as a teacher.

In fact, the change happened a week before the schools actually closed down. My daughter in Blackhall shared with us the unexpected, but delightful, news that she was going to have a baby in September - and, due to escalating concern in the UK about the virus that had affected the health of those in other countries, they wanted to take their two children out of school right away. Because of the unknown potential effects on the twelve-week-old pregnancy, the family would self-isolate from that day - and I was asked to join them.

Thus began two terms of “Gran School”.....daily teaching for my grandson in P2 and my granddaughter in P4, allowing their parents to work from home and giving me the benefit of daily company in our self-isolated family. Most important of all, it allowed the family to protect themselves and their little one, at a time when being pregnant in mid-life was filled with more than the usual stresses and concerns.

I learned so much! I always knew God had planned my new life in Edinburgh, including my very warm welcome into the Blackhall church family, but suddenly that life had a new purpose. While I had busied myself with church meetings, country dancing, choral singing and city exploring, I had missed working with young people.

With my usual activities out of bounds, I was so blessed to be able to spend every day with my two eager pupils, who put their whole hearts into everything we tackled together.

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“Gran School” continued

Their proudest achievements? My grandson wrote lots of stories, mastered small, neat cursive writing and continued to develop his love of construction and mental maths; my granddaughter learned the skill of note-taking, discovered that mind maps make every written task easier and produced some very informative keynote presentations on the systems of the human body. Together, they completed "science" experiments; tackled spelling and multiplication challenges; and each day was punctuated with impromptu dance or obstacle courses on their garden gym set.

My lasting memories? Realising my methods for numeracy were long out-dated (!!); having the opportunity to share the Easter story, Noah, David and Goliath; discovering the key role of my amygdalae and my corpus callosum; teaching both children to sing a French song and accompany it with TWO beaters on my glock; and having an unexpectedly fun time with a bowl of cornflour and cold water!!!! (creating a non-Newtonian fluid, that will roll into a sausage if you scoop it up and squeeze it, but immediately liquifies and flows back into the bowl as soon as you release the pressure !!!)

Together, we created a new "learning wall" each month, with poems and rainbows an ever-present theme. More importantly, however, I had the unexpected opportunity to share a unique time in their family life, not just with Gran-schooling but with preparing for the autumn, when we will be joined by their little brother, born into a world that will never be quite the same as theirs has been this year.

Muriel Stenhouse

Praise Gathering Virtual Choir

While we couldn't meet in person to enjoy singing together, many of us have taken part in online choirs, rehearsing music both spiritual and secular.

Four of us joined with Christians across Scotland from April to June in the Praise Gathering Choir, even recording one of our pieces, 'No Other Name', for YouTube. Truly a nerve-racking experience, but the combined sound is actually quite reasonable. You can find it with the following link -

<https://youtu.be/nf0nKpCwbv0>

See if you can spot us on the massed screen-shots :

Amy Donaldson in lilac, Libby Cameron in blue, Marge Whiteside in pink, Muriel in yellow.

Muriel Stenhouse

Knit and Natter Trauma Teddies

No social distancing here in this bright and colourful collection of 38 'Trauma Teddies' waiting to be cuddled.



Meet the class of 2020. I received a request after a member of the community had read about Knit and Natter in the Blackhall Bulletin asking if we could possibly help her out by knitting some Trauma Teddies. They were for children in another area of the city who were in need of extra hugs and comfort to help them through difficult times. After contacting as many members as I could, here are the 38 teddies which were produced in just under three weeks. She was absolutely delighted and had not expected nearly so many. We were just pleased to do something to help and bring a smile to lots of little faces.

Lilian Cockburn

Midweek Services

These will not restart until the New Year at the earliest so this may be an opportunity to rethink. It would be good to get some feedback from regular attenders as to what they would like both for speakers' topics and for food.

Wednesday lunchtimes are provisionally booked through until May as usual.

You can email me on :- elspethwilliamson@gmail.com

or phone 336 2600 or 07946 531619.



Tuesday Topics

In these uncertain times it is very difficult to say when Tuesday Topics is likely to resume. We have booked the Small Hall for the end of November and beginning of December onwards but it is doubtful if the hall is large enough to allow Social Distancing. We will contact all members once we know what is happening! It is also very difficult to contact Speakers until then. Rest assured we will resume our meetings as soon as we can.

In the absence of an AGM the Committee remains unchanged at present.

The good news is that the group raised around £185 from our Smartie tubes and with £90 from the funds we can give around £275 to our chosen charity, The Chest, Heart and Stroke Assoc.

Very best wishes to all our members and friends.

Eleanor Lowrie, President
Jacky Cowie, Secretary

As we have all become aware after a quiet period during lockdown things now seem to be changing on an almost daily basis. So too with Fresh Start. During lockdown they worked with other charities in the area helping provide emergency food, cleaning and toiletry packs. By the start of July they had distributed 4,016 food packs, 891 cleaning packs, 852 toiletry packs to households in need and 912 starter packs to Bethany.



Fresh Start
helping people make a home for themselves



Fresh Start Pantry which will provide weekly shopping for a fixed sum to members is now open and 102 of the 150 memberships were taken in 4 weeks. The Pantry will be run by members of the community for the community. It is hoped that the Fresh Start shop which was supposed to be opening at the end of

March will open in October. The decision has been made not to sell clothes but to focus on the theme of “home”, selling homewares such as soft furnishings, items which cannot go into starter packs and electrical items.

Fresh Start opened on a limited basis to accept food and hard goods at the start of July. Within a fortnight they were inundated with goods and so have had to stop taking goods for the time being.

To find out when they will be able to accept donations of starter pack goods again please keep looking at the Fresh Start website -

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

or go to their Facebook page @fresh.start.edinburgh

Fiona Cooke, Coordinator



Since Fergus has been talking about seeds and sowing, I found some poppy seeds in a small tub in the cellar. I hadn't realised that I have single, double flowers and also red and purple. Enjoy.



Fiona



BLACKHALL
ST. COLUMBA'S
CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

'Although our buildings are shut, the Church is not a building! The Church is the worshipping community and we are as strong as we were before this crisis began'
..... Fergus Cook, Minister

Keep up with news of
the Blackhall St Columba's Church community,
our online services
and the various Zoom meetings
by regularly checking
our website
www.blackhallstcolumba.org.uk

our Facebook page -
search for 'Blackhall St Columba's Church'

and

Follow us on



@BstCC_EH

Deadline for the October Kirk News has been given below in the usual way but please check online for updates.

DEADLINES

Kirk News - Sunday 20 September

Please send all items to the Editor:
Christine Denham c/o Church Office
Home tel: 336 5943 or email
kirknews@blackhallstcolumba.org.uk

Blackhall Bulletin - deadline was Sunday 26 July

All items, including advertising enquiries, should be sent to the Editor, Barbara Wilson
c/o Church Office
Home tel: 312 6035 or email
bulletin@blackhallstcolumba.org.uk

