

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

JANUARY 2021

No. 824



Minister

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Session Clerk

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Mrs Joy McGonigal-Paget
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**Back
in the
Sanctuary
for
Advent**



**And
how did
it feel?**

**See pages
8 & 9**



From the Minister



Greetings friends,

I hope that the letter from the manse finds you well and that you have been able to enjoy this festive period, despite the imposition of more severe COVID -19 restrictions, reducing further the opportunities to meet with family and friends.

As you know, I came through to join you here in Edinburgh from the West. As the Very Rev Russell Barr said when I preached as sole nominee, I was called to Blackhall St Columba's Church to do missionary work in the East. We should probably note that Russell too is from the West. I was ordained and inducted on 22 March 2020, the day before lockdown. It was a strange introduction to my new life as a minister. A new life which, owing to the wonderful reception I have had, has been as rewarding and fulfilling as it has been busy and hectic.

I wonder if you remember back to the days of the full lockdown. Nothing was open except for essential shops. Churches, gyms, golf clubs etc. and all the other venues and activities which we enjoyed visiting or doing were shut or unavailable. There were no visitors allowed and no one was allowed to even leave their house except for essential shopping and for one hour's exercise a day. It was while I was out on a walk that I came across a sign in the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art (Modern Two). It is a large sign on a scaffolding support six metres high. In text illuminated through neon lighting tubes it declares loudly "THERE WILL BE NO MIRACLES HERE".



I have to say, when I first came across this sign I was somewhat perplexed. Perhaps, given its prominent position in the nation's capital, Russell had been right in his joke about missionary work to the East!

I felt compelled to find out a little more. It transpires, according to the National Galleries, that the sign is an outdoor work by the artist Nathan Coley. The work originates from a project about which they write '*Coley posted a series of public announcements around the town of Stirling. One included these words.*

/ continued

From the Minister continued

Coley's work is based in an interest in public space, and how systems of personal, social, religious and political belief structure our towns and cities, and thereby ourselves.'

What I found particularly interesting about this piece of art was the origin of the phrase itself. The expression is taken from a seventeenth-century royal proclamation which was made with the intention of curtailing a stream of pilgrims to the French village of Mosdeine. The village of Mosdeine had laid claim to frequent miracles and, in the interest of public order, these claims were to stop by order of the King.

So, in fact, a phrase which would appear, at first glance, to suggest a lack of faith or a lack of belief in miracles was coined because of an over abundance of faith and the ability to see miracles as a regular occurrence.

If we look at the dictionary definition of a miracle, we find a range of definitions from; "an extraordinary and welcome event that is not explicable by natural or scientific laws and is therefore attributed to a divine agency" to "a remarkable event or development that brings very welcome consequences".

I wonder if we have been too inured by science and the modern world to be receptive to the miracles that happen around us on a daily basis. The scientist Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727) used the thumb print as evidence of the existence of God because each person has an individual and unique thumb print. He argued that this pointed to a designer rather than random chance.

On a personal note, I think the evidence of life on earth is a miracle, all life but, in particular, sentient life with an awareness that there is more to the universe than itself. Who, for instance, has not looked at a newly born infant and not thought about the wonder, the miracle, of new life? As a species, our ability to progress and overcome adversity is another example of what I perceive to be miraculous. As I write this message, we have just begun the vaccination process against COVID-19. Whilst the creation of this and other vaccines is of human origin, I believe that our abilities, our desires, intelligence and ingenuity are divine gifts. We may not yet know the full outcome of the vaccination programme and its effect on our society but I still see the vaccines' production as nothing short of a miracle.

I also believe, if we open our eyes, our ears and our hearts, we shall be able to see miracles continue to happen, as they have done over the years, regardless of any sign that tells us anything to the contrary.

God bless all,

Fergus

A visit from the Right Rev Dr Martin Fair, Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland



In the week preceding the third Sunday in Advent the Right Rev Dr Martin Fair, Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, paid a visit to Blackhall St Columba's Church. Because we are operating under the restrictions necessitated by the Covid virus he took part not in a normal service but in the pre-recording of the following Sunday's online service.

In his recorded message he congratulated the congregation on the 'stunning' refurbishment of the Sanctuary and conveyed the good wishes of the General Assembly to the congregation. His message was relayed to the limited number of members allowed to attend the service in Church on Sunday 13 December by means of the new technology installed during the refurbishment and to the whole congregation in the online service that Sunday.



Our new technology in use

Kirk Session Report

The Kirk Session met on Tuesday 20 October and Tuesday 10 November 2020. These were virtual meetings conducted via the Zoom conferencing facility as permitted by the Commission of the General Assembly.

Building for the Future

The Moderator thanked Fay Stirling for all her work as Project Manager and Jim Bishop, who had also contributed a great deal of time and expertise. The contribution of the other members of the Steering Group was also acknowledged. All these people were commended for completing an excellent project which managed to come in under the original budget despite over 200 variations to the original Instructions. The Moderator advised that once our Services are back up and running as normal, formal recognition of the work undertaken will be acknowledged in front of the Congregation.

Kirk Session agreed to:-

- formally wind up the BFTF Steering group with thanks to all for all their work and commitment to the Project.
- to discuss at the February 2021 meeting the level of work to be included in Phase 2. One of the issues that need to be considered as a matter of urgency relates to the disabled toilet.
- ring fence the remaining funds from donations received to date and going forward as a restricted fund and retain the present BFTF Bank account to receive the Gift Aid from donations which will not be received until April/May next year.

Correspondence

A Note of Thanks has been received from NE Edinburgh Foodbank for items from the Harvest Thanksgiving collection.

Emeritus Elders

It was noted that a list of Emeritus Elders would be maintained to record the names of Elders who were still members of the Congregation and who had retired from an active role and therefore as a trustee.

Mission

The Moderator advised that mission work was ongoing. Much of what he would want to undertake is restricted by the current COVID-19 restrictions. However, he has prepared a video for the Primary 7 pupils at Blackhall Primary School and has managed to organise the uniform groups presently back and meeting to consider our "Pebble Poppy" project. In addition he has offered his services as Scout Chaplain.

The Moderator has had more involvement with Strachan House but these are restricted by the current regulations. /continued

Kirk Session Report continued

It was noted that Fiona Cook and Lilian Cockburn are putting together “Knitivity” where those involved with Knit & Natter will knit Nativity items and arrange to have them displayed in local shop windows with the possibility of having a “Kid’s Trail” event nearer the Festive period.

Reopening the Sanctuary

The Moderator advised that the reopening was subject to receiving Presbytery approval for the way we intend to meet both Presbytery and Scottish Government guidelines and regulations. Until our new AV system will be fully operational to allow live streaming the Moderator intends to provide the current normal details of the Services on line. Kirk Session approved that a small working group consisting of the Moderator, Session Clerk and Ian Templeton, Hall Convener, be given authority to make such decisions as were required by Presbytery to facilitate the opening.

Waste Disposal

It was acknowledged that our Secretary, Joy McGonigal-Paget, had been influential in saving the Congregation money (c £1,700 p.a.) in connection with our Waste Disposal requirements.

Youth Worker

It was agreed to engage a Youth Worker (who has been identified) initially on the basis of up to 10 hours per week once allowed by Covid-19 regulations. The appointment would be for an initial period of one year.

Presbytery Plan

The Moderator advised that after further discussion it had been agreed that we would move into the West Forth Group of Churches (Cramond, Davidson’s Mains, Blackhall St Columba’s, Drylaw, Old Kirk Muirhouse and Granton).

Fortnightly meetings are anticipated with all the church representatives from this Group. The representatives are Rev Fergus Cook, Jim Logan, Dianne Fulton and Eddie Thorn.

It was great to re-open our refurbished Sanctuary on 29 November for worship and it was especially good for our Minister to at last, after some eight months, be in front of a real live Congregation after serving us so well through the medium of You Tube and the written Service details.

The booking arrangements are not ideal but in all the circumstances we have considered these to be the fairest and most practical way of accommodating the limited number of members allowed.

In the meantime, on behalf of the Kirk Session, I would thank you all for your patience and understanding during this challenging time for us all.

Eddie Thorn, Session Clerk

First Sunday back in Church, First Sunday in Advent Sunday 29 November 2020 - Memorable in many ways

Well, it's finally here, our first live service in the refurbished Sanctuary..... and Fergus's first opportunity to preach in person to some of his congregation.



Many people have a high degree of anticipation, some wanting to see the inside of the church for the first time, some wanting to see it for real, instead of just in photographs, some hoping that all of the preparations for Covid secure worship work as they should, and me..... I just want to soak up the atmosphere, get a sense of people's feelings and enjoy being in the church for worship, rather than as my workplace as it has effectively been for the last 18 months.

It was nice to take care about what I was wearing this morning, rather than marching in with a hard hat, hi-viz jacket and steel reinforced site boots! It is also nice not to have a 'to do' list in my hand that I just keep adding things to! More about that later...

Careful consideration has been given, and much time dedicated to keeping people safe in the midst of the pandemic. Close liaison with Presbytery has ensured we comply with all that is required of us. That does mean that, instead of a packed church, we have 50 people in total. It is sad in some ways to see the serried ranks of stacked chairs that we can't use, but that time will come.

As people arrive there is lots of interest in the changes, the lightness of the interior, the warmth and the comfort of the new chairs. People are not clear why they have to be given specific seats, and not able to sit by friends, but this is hopefully a temporary situation while Covid rules are in place. /continued

First Sunday Back in Church continued

Before we know it, the Bible is carried in and the minister takes his place. So pleased that some of his family are here to share this moment with him. I look up and catch the three stained glass windows, perfectly framed by one of our new halo lights...and I feel the peace of the place.

The service for the first Sunday in Advent, is special, and the organ music reflects both that, and the celebration of being back in the church. There is a palpable feeling of wanting to sing...but for now we can't. Lots of toes tapping along though, and the words projected for us all to meditate on.

As the service continues, there is a sense of intimacy, although we are seated far apart, and there are so few of us. With masks on, we are able to join with The Lord's Prayer, in a quiet murmur instead of the more normal level when the church is full. But it is no less meaningful.

The decorations, Christmas Tree and Advent Wreath add to the sense of light and warmth in the building at this special time of year.

I allow myself a few minutes of reflection...I've managed many projects before and always want the "first day of go live" to be perfect...you'd think I'd have learned by now that it never is. There are always a few unexpected hitches. Today, Fergus's microphone is a bit temperamental....but that is easily remedied. My mental to do list has a note added to check a light I notice isn't on...again easily sorted. There will be a few more things over the coming weeks I'm sure. However, I am more than delighted to see this wonderful space being used for its primary purpose again, and hope that it continues to be so for a long time to come.



Fay Stirling

Family News

We welcome to our fellowship by Certificate of Transference:
Rev and Mrs Fergus Cook, The Manse

Death

27 November
Mr William (Bill) Murray



Introducing Kevin Russell, our new Church Officer



Blackhall St Columba's is delighted to welcome Kevin Russell as our new part-time Church Officer to work with Dorothea.

Dorothea will be there in the mornings from 8.30am till 12.30pm and Kevin from 12 noon till 4pm.

Picture Frames

It is still possible to purchase a picture frame made from our oak pews that were removed in 2018.

If you are interested, please contact Ruth Laidlaw for details.

ruthlaidlaw@gmail.com or 07513 967974

Knit and Natter

Although we are unable to meet up on Monday evenings everyone has still been very busy knitting a variety of beautiful items. We were able to deliver two big bags to the Early Years Centre at the Fort and a further two bags plus another of toys to Pregnancy Counselling and Care who we are now supporting. They are based in Leith and help families across this side of the city.

Lilian Cockburn



Cast of the Knit-ivity Trail

The price for Life and Work is unchanged for 2021 and is £30.60 for the whole year.

For those of you who do not get this magazine, it is an interesting read about the work of the Church of Scotland and the people who do it. Blackhall has figured in it over the years when we have had photos and articles about our life in the Church. If you would like to receive copies please get in touch, either by email or a call to the Church Office.



For those of you who do receive it, I apologise for the snail's pace delivery this year and will try to ensure you have all had this year's copies by now.

I shall not start the 2021 January delivery until the New Year and it will have an envelope attached for you to return your subscription as usual. Please could you get these envelopes back to the Church office for my attention, by post or hand delivery. Cheques should be made out to Blackhall St Columba's Parish Church.

One day I hope we will be able to return to the delivery by your Elder or Church Visitor but for now the ad hoc system will stay in place.

Good reading to you all.

Alison (rajahewat1@btinternet.com)

Tuesday Topics

Unfortunately we have no good news regarding a starting date for Tuesday Topics.

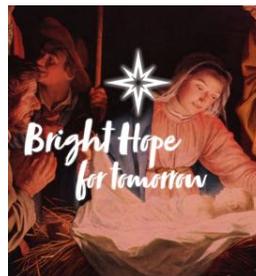
All we can do is send our members and friends our Very Best Wishes for 2021.

We will notify all members of a starting date but this seems unlikely in the near future.

We do hope you are all well and coping with the current restrictions.

Eleanor Lowrie, President
Jacky Cowie, Secretary

**To mark the fourth day of Advent,
the Very Rev Dr John Chalmers, convener of the
Church of Scotland's Assembly Trustees, wrote a
reflection on 'Bright Hope For Tomorrow'**



On Monday 14 June next year Scotland will line up in the European Championships at Hampden Park against the Czech Republic. It will have been 23 years since Scotland played in a major international tournament, but throughout that time Scotland fans have never stopped *hoping*.

Now, as we await the roll-out of a vaccine against this confounded coronavirus, there is the *hope* that Scotland's fans will be able to populate the stadium. Beyond that there is the *hope* that the team will win their first match.

In one way or another you can be sure that people know the meaning of *hope*; indeed people know that living in *hope* is one of the great motivators in life and that without *hope* lies the road to despair and even depression.

The late and lamented Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks believed that it was the ancient Hebrew people who invented the concept of hope. He once said that while the Greeks had given us the narrative concept of tragedy it was the Jews who gave us the narrative concept of hope.

Tragedies are those stories which leave us bereft because they end in death and defeat, but the ancient stories of Abraham's descendants, who endured slavery, exile and separation, are stories whose ending is still in the future. Their narrative points to a time when Messiah will come, the lion will lie down with the lamb and peace will reign.

It is this ancient Hebrew narrative of hope that gives birth to the season of Advent - a time for looking forward in the expectation that the best is yet to come.

Looking back over this past year it would be easy to conclude that the narrative of 2020 has been one of tragedy. For those who have lost loved ones to Covid-19 it has been tragic. For those who scan the political horizon it may seem as though, once again, truth has been the victim of our times. And we have never known such difficult times in our Church life as we adhere to social distancing and public health restrictions.

Perhaps, since the end of the Second World War there has never been a more poignant time for God's people to look forward with *hope*.

But when we speak of *hope* in this way we are speaking of something more than an expression of mere optimism.

In *Bread for the Journey*, Henri Nouwen says: "*Hope is trust that God will fulfil God's promises to us in a way that leads us to true freedom. The optimist speaks about concrete changes in the future. The person of hope lives in the moment with the knowledge and trust that all of life is in good hands.*"

Of course, there is optimism that there is a vaccine just around the corner, that social contact will be restored and that our churches will be properly opened. However, the bedrock of our Advent *hope* is that the grace, mercy and peace of God will reign over our hearts and in our communities.

2020 was a very different year in terms of what we could do to support Fresh Start. With the regulations in place we were unable and are still unable to receive donations of goods for Fresh Start starter packs on a Friday morning. Thanks are due to all those who managed to take items directly to the warehouse as regulations relaxed slightly. Let me again thank all who donated to the harvest appeal which helped Fresh Start provide food packs.



While, at the time of writing, you can still take items directly to Fresh Start's warehouse on Ferry Road Drive by appointment, they have also opened an online shop.

The shop gives you the opportunity to donate via Fresh Start's website to buy all kinds of items from food for the Pantry to pots and pans for a starter pack. You can pick whatever you wish to purchase for someone moving into their new home.

Fresh Start say: Shopping with us is a little different, you leave without what you have purchased and instead pay it forward for someone in our community. Whilst you might be leaving empty handed, every order comes with our sincere gratitude and helps to give someone a fresh start in their new tenancy. From all of us at Fresh Start and all those that we support, thank you.

Information about the shop can be found at -

[Shop - Fresh Start \(freshstartweb.org.uk\)](https://www.freshstartweb.org.uk)

while Fresh Start's website will provide up to date information about taking goods to the warehouse -

[Helping People Make A Home For Themselves - Fresh Start \(freshstartweb.org.uk\)](https://www.freshstartweb.org.uk)

I thought you might be interested in the video below which I received from Fresh Start explaining The Pantry which they opened during lockdown. Initially the idea had been to open a thrift shop in March and the Pantry in the summer. Covid events changed priorities and helped where there was most need. It is good to see that there is now a pantry in Pennywell which has just opened recently.

<https://youtu.be/G8G8D03eGDM>

Enjoy
Fiona Cooke.

Push UP for CrossReach

In April 2020, as part of the UK-wide 2.6 Challenge (inspired by the 26 mile London Marathon which had been cancelled) former Moderator, the Very Rev Colin Sinclair challenged people to raise money for the Church of Scotland's social care arm, CrossReach. The response to that appeal was amazing, and humbling, as it drew in over £275,000 to keep CrossReach services open and their staff and clients connected and protected.

With winter, demand for CrossReach's services increases and this year, the need for care, counselling, special education, and practical measures to support the most vulnerable in our community are all exacerbated by Covid-19. So CrossReach has launched their Winter Appeal - **Push UP for CrossReach** - to ask for your support to keep CrossReach staff and clients protected and connected through this winter.

The Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, Rt Rev Dr Martin Fair, said -

"I'm delighted to encourage support for Crossreach's Winter Appeal. Having had the opportunity to get a close-up look at some of their projects, I'm even more in awe of the vital, frontline work that is done through CrossReach in the name of the Church. It's work at the sharp end, where need is greatest. It's love extended in the name of Christ, without condition. It's inspirational work and deserving of all possible support.

"And might I take the opportunity to thank every single person who works for, or volunteers for, CrossReach. It's been an incredibly tough year and your commitment to keep services going in the face of severe impediments has been nothing short of remarkable.

"I know we're not out of the woods but for you, especially, I'm glad that there's light at the end of the tunnel. Joy and peace to you all."

Do you fancy taking on the 'Push UP for CrossReach' challenge?

The challenge: Start on a number of push ups you are comfortable with and add an extra one each day for four weeks.

Build your strength both mentally and physically over a four week period. Ask your friends to join or support you and get stronger together.

To take on the challenge or donate to the 'Push UP for CrossReach' Winter Appeal check out the CrossReach website.

<https://www.crossreach.org.uk/events>





**BLACKHALL
ST. COLUMBA'S**
CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

'Although our buildings were 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 February Kirk News has been given below in the usual way but please check online for possible updates.

DEADLINES

Kirk News - 24 January

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 - 31 January

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