

balerno



the magazine and newsletter of Balerno Parish Church; for the Church and for the Community

Blether

FREE!
BUT
donations
welcome!

Issue number 7

September 2021

It's good to be back, together, again!



It seems a long time since we've been able to meet up, chat, take tea or whatever and just be normal. And that's because it *has* been a long time since March 2020 and the start of the first lockdown. Much has happened since then and there will be time enough to reflect on everything. But for now just being back together again and able to be with friends, family and the world at large is something to be savoured, enjoyed and be thankful for. So here's the Guild showing us how to do it on a brilliant day in June in the Church Garden, following a successful morning out at Saughton Gardens. And just to show it wasn't a one-off, the Guild had another great outdoor meeting in July.

Morag Lyall said, 'This meeting format helps us keep in touch until hopefully we can commence our indoor programme in October.'

from the Blether Team

It's great to be back and able to talk to you through the pages of the Blether. And it's great for everybody to be able to meet up with each other whether in Church, or at the Mill or around the village. We all hope that lockdowns are now history but we all know that everyone has to continue to be very careful especially about continuing to wear masks and such like, as we know that we all will be.

Having had a month off since our last issue covered July and August there's a lot to catch up on, so we hope you enjoy this 7th issue of the Blether.

We hope that before long we may be able to have paper copies of the Blether available to pick up in the Mill, and we hope you might want to help to meet the costs of production by popping a donation into the collecting pot. We've still got to work out the unit costs. It may depend simply on photocopying costs; but 20p per issue might be about right. What do you think?

Please send letters to the Blether Editor by e-mail to bpc-admin@balernochurch.org.uk
or post to the Church Office at 2 Main Street, Balerno

From the Pews to the Mews

For the last couple of weeks, things have almost seemed normal again. The schools have reopened and a lot of Covid-19 restrictions have been lifted. It is once again "normal" to hug someone else or shake a hand.

In the past all these things were taken for granted by all of us, but maybe now we can appreciate the finer things of life more and concentrate on living our lives to the full. A wise Old Testament writer said a long time ago: "So I commend the enjoyment of life, because there is nothing better under the sun than for a person to eat and drink and be glad. Then joy will accompany them in their toil all the days of the life God has given them under the sun." (Ecclesiastes 8:15)

God has given us life and we should not take it for granted. Life is a big classroom with God as the perfect teacher, and

a message from the minister

our fellow pupils are our brothers and sisters in faith. In any school setting there is time to have sufficient breaks so that learners can socialise and learn from other pupils by engaging in conversation. But it also provides time for pupils to release some 'happy hormones' through laughing and relaxation - also a vital part of life. Fellowship in any form is vital for living life to the full - something that all of us missed the most during the Pandemic.

Although there are so many things that worry us both personally and spiritually, we know that God is with us and holds our lives in His hands. We know this because God saved us all - through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, our Lord and Saviour.

All my blessings, André

Differing perspectives

In July, amid a pandemic, the world gathered at the Olympic Games in Tokyo to celebrate sport and to support peace and international co-operation.

Represented by a team of five, Afghanistan was one of the 206 countries at the games, fielding a team of five athletes. A Refugee Olympic Team comprising 29 athletes from 11 countries and across 12 sports also competed at Tokyo.

6000 miles to the west of Tokyo, and as the Games continued, Afghanistan confronted an uncertain future as fighting persisted between government forces and Taliban insurgents. All the while negotiations between the Kabul Government and the Taliban continued in Doha. The Iranian government along with Russia also engaged, at discussions with the Taliban in Tehran, to fill the diplomatic vacuum opening up with the departure of western military forces from Afghanistan.

In the space of less than a week at the start of August the internationally recognised government of Afghanistan collapsed as Taliban insurgents swept across a terrified country.

According to a UN Refugee agency report of 9 July, and as we have since seen, tens of thousands of Afghan families were fleeing to escape the Taliban's rapid advance ahead of the 11 September deadline for withdrawal of all foreign troops from Afghanistan. On 13 July the UN reported that some 270,000 Afghans had been newly displaced inside Afghanistan since January 2021 bringing the then total uprooted population to 3.5 million. That figure is now said to be nearer or over 4 million, following the effective collapse of government in that country. Reports of 17 August say the UN estimates 80% of the 250,000 civilians who have fled their homes across the country since May are women and children. All the signs are now of a humanitarian catastrophe.

To be eligible to claim asylum in the UK a refugee must have left their country and be unable to go back because they fear persecution. The Taliban now effectively control Afghanistan. Many of those displaced within Afghanistan may be expected to try to make their way west seeking safety. Most refugees fleeing Afghanistan at this time would likely qualify as asylum seekers. By 28 July more than 1600 civilian deaths had been

reported for Afghanistan during 2021, a 47% increase on 2020. The record of the Taliban in terms of human rights violation is well documented.

On 23 July, in London, 7500 miles west from Kabul, the UK government introduced a Nationality and Borders Bill, which includes provisions providing the UK government with powers both to intercept small migrant and asylum seekers boats attempting to cross the Channel and, importantly, to take them to any place (on land or on water) in the UK or elsewhere. The bill would also make it a criminal offence punishable by up to four years in prison to knowingly arrive in the country without permission. While another provision would allow asylum claims to be processed outside the UK, no agreement has yet been reached with any third country to allow this to take place.

If passed, the Nationality and Borders Bill might be in breach of the UK's obligations under the 1951 Refugee Convention, which requires States to grant individuals access to asylum regardless of how they enter a country.

The UN Assistant High Commissioner for Protection Gillian Triggs said on 22 July that the UK proposals presented a 'profound threat' to the international protection system and were part of a trend towards the "externalisation" of responsibility for refugees by western, developed countries.

In May 2021 the Church of Scotland said 'Protecting human life and dignity must be at the heart of future UK asylum and refugee policies. Welcoming the stranger and loving your neighbour as yourself is at the core of the Christian message and ought to be extended to all those fleeing danger and seeking sanctuary in this country.'

The Church of Scotland is a member of the 'Together with Refugees' coalition which says that two in every three women and children whom the UK would accept as refugees now, would be turned away in future under the new rules.

Contributed

The Editor is keen to receive ideas and comments on articles published and on points which correspondents may want to raise. Please contact the editor.



Will Relief Scotland is a partnership of four Scottish charities which specialise in relief and development work around the world. For the **month of September**, participating solicitors are kindly waiving their fees to draw up or amend your Will. Instead, the solicitors will invite you to make a donation which is divided between four charities - Blythswood Care, EMMS International, MAF and Signpost International.

Mission Aviation Fellowship fly medical, relief and life-transforming help to vulnerable people in hard-to-reach places around the world, and they are associated and partnered with Will Relief Scotland for the month of September.

Bill and Margaret Black have a supply of leaflets available for anyone who would like to make use of this worthwhile opportunity and would encourage any reader to get in touch with them to find out more... we'd be happy to hear from you and give you a leaflet.

Our involvement with MAF over many years has been inspirational! Since 1945, MAF has used planes to transform the lives of the most isolated people in need. They work in many developing countries and are the world's largest humanitarian airline bringing help, hope and healing to thousands of communities.

If you have a computer please look up their website on - www.maf-uk.org



Every blessing - Bill and Margaret Black (449-6707) billblack@blueyonder.co.uk or mtblack@blueyonder.co.uk

St Joseph's Defibrillator details

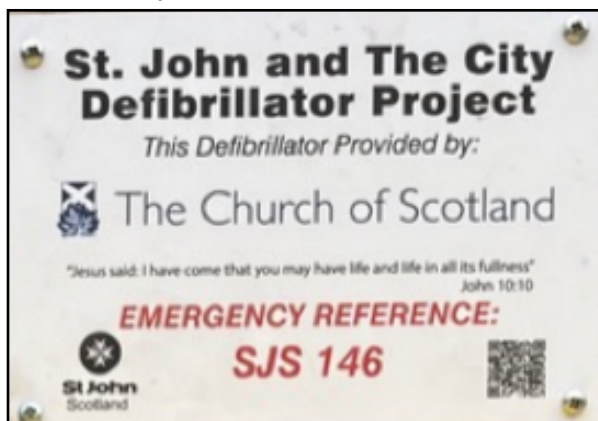
Visitors to St Joseph's Centre cannot fail to see the bright yellow defibrillator box attached to the front wall. This was installed just over a year ago and featured in a post on the Church's Facebook page on 14 August.

Towards the end of 2019 Edinburgh Presbytery embarked on an initiative to have defibrillators mounted on every Church of Scotland building across the City, thereby increasing local access to this piece of valuable life saving equipment.

The project, which was run in conjunction with the Edinburgh Committee of St John Scotland, agreed that a defibrillator be sited at Balerno Parish Church and accessible 24hrs per day.

The defibrillator is a Phillips HeartStart FRx model, designed to be simple to use by members of the public.

The equipment comes with single-use defibrillator pads and a key which enables the unit to work correctly if the victim of a cardiac arrest is a child. The storage cabinet is heated for winter protection and contains a basic First Aid pack. Quick access is by means of the combination lock and is authorised through a 999



call, quoting the emergency location code on the cabinet.

While the capital costs have been met by Church of Scotland, as recorded in one of two plaques put up in the spring of this year Balerno Parish Church is delighted to record again the assistance of Balerno Children's Gala Committee in meeting the cost of installation including provision of the power supply to the cabinet.



So, thank you Balerno Gala and thank you also to Jim Goodbrand, Ian Gidney, Jim West, Jennifer MacDonald and all those others involved in arranging for the installation of the defib and plaques.

Useful Contact Details

Minister; Dr Andre Groenewald

Agroenewald@churchofscotland.org.uk 0131 449 3830 or 07588845814

Church Administration; bpc-admin@balernochurch.org.uk 0131 449 7245

Balerno Blether; bpc-thebridge@balernochurch.org.uk

The Guild; Kay Coull; coullkay@hotmail.com; 0131 449 6151



We are privileged to live in a community with so many talented people. Please do drop in to The Mill for a refreshment or light lunch and view the latest exhibition.

The image shows three framed artworks displayed on a light-colored wall. The artwork on the left is a painting of a coastal scene with a small boat and a building, framed in a dark brown frame. The middle artwork is a small, dark, abstract painting, framed in a light brown frame. The artwork on the right is a large, detailed illustration of a bird of prey with spread wings, framed in a gold-colored frame.

A photograph of an art gallery wall displaying various framed and unframed artworks. The wall is light-colored and the pieces are arranged in a row. From left to right, the artworks include: a small framed painting of a figure, a small framed painting of a figure, a small framed painting of a landscape with white peaks, a large framed painting of a forest scene, a small framed abstract painting with red and blue, a small framed painting of a figure in a landscape, a tall vertical framed painting of a seascape with a red boat, a small framed painting of a landscape with a large rock, a small framed painting of a landscape with a large rock, a large framed painting of a seascape with a full moon, and a small framed painting of a landscape with a large building and a water tower. Each piece has a small white label below it.

The MUSIC FESTIVAL IS BACK !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

A photograph of a group of people, including children and adults, playing large drums in a room. A circular graphic with musical notes is overlaid on the bottom left, containing the text "Balerno Music Festival".

www.balernomusicfestival.org.uk

news

from
The Mill
at St Joseph's

The Mill Café continues to keep its doors open Tuesday to Friday 8am to 2pm and every second Saturday of the month for the Farmers Market between 9am and 1pm.

We have had our challenges to be open when restrictions have allowed. Life has become one long risk assessment for many places, and we would like to thank our community, customers, volunteers and staff for their continued support and patience. We are rewarded with seeing you all return and hearing your news.

We move into an easing of restrictions which sees us open without group numbers and social distancing restraints on tables. Although this has allowed us to add a few more tables, our priority to keep everyone safe continues with our hand sanitising units, track and trace, and heightened cleaning. We welcomed back our 'gents' and 'ladies' tables on Friday mornings, and the buzz is returning to our café!

Recently we have said goodbye to Martin Lyall who had been on the staff team for six and half years. Martin moved on to work in his field of study. We wish him all the best and thank him for all he has given to the café.



Our community café journey continues, and we are delighted to welcome two new staff members. Stephen Davies will be in the café on a Wednesday and Jackie Balfour will be in on a Friday. Please do stop by to say hello.

The Mill Café returned after the first lockdown with the addition of bacon rolls. These have been well received. Pancakes, bacon and maple syrup are a popular choice too, but I think the items missed the most when we were closed was our

coffee and freshly baked scones by our wonderful staff and volunteers.

We are excited to emerge from restrictions and move forward with our community, customers and friends. We always aspire to offer a place of safety and companionship where you are supported and heard. Not to mention a lovely cuppa and cake!

We look forward to welcoming you at the Mill!

For your diary!

We hope that Sunday worship can be back to normal in the Church from Sunday 3rd October. On the 10th of October there will be a service in St Joseph's at 9am focussed on children and young families.

Meanwhile services will follow the current pattern with live services in Church on the 1st and 3rd Sundays of the month at 10.00am. On other Sundays services are on line - see facebook or website for connection details.



Almost back inside!

We are hoping that Sunday 3rd October will see us getting back to normal on Sunday mornings.

Those who were in church for worship on the 15th were able to enjoy the return of singing as a good number of the choir returned and were able to sing unmasked – but distanced!

The church seats have been rearranged so that there is more space between the rows to meet social distancing requirements and so it is now looking almost like it did before the pandemic – but it is now easier to get along the rows when getting to a seat. At the moment, members of the congregation are still required to wear masks, but they can sing too even although they have to keep their masks on.

There will be normal Sunday services on Sunday 4th and Sunday 18th of September and streamed services on the other three Sundays which will be available on the church website.

This cautionary approach is being adopted in case there is any change in the infection rate which causes the authorities to tighten up on the restrictions again.

As another month will pass by before then, we hope that things will have continued to improve and that people will be confident about returning to worship. Perhaps we will all be able to sing without masks, but there will continue to be provision of hand sanitiser and we anticipate that it will still be necessary to take contact details. We hope that booking will not be necessary, but that remains a requirement at the time of writing and we shall have to see what develops.

Meanwhile watch out for updates!

Balerno Blether October publication dates

Copy by 17 Sept
Publication 26 Sept

Let us have your views! What do you want to read about?

Answers



July/August
crossword

E	X	H	I	B	I	T	I	O	N	I	S	M
R	I	I	I	A	N	I						
G	A	G		P	O	L	I	T	I	C	A	L
O	H	L	L	S	O	I						
T	E	E	N	A	G	E	R		O	M	I	T
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D	A	P	P	E	R		M	E	D	U	S	A
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Session Notes - Keeping up with the Radical Action Plan

The April Blether led with the headline 'Radical Action Plan Heralds Change'. Since then, things have been gathering pace.

The April article noted that 'Since the 1950s, the Church of Scotland has lost about 80% of its membership, and it is now half the size it was in 2000. Membership continues to decline at around 4% per annum and it is clear that in future there will be a smaller church with reduced resources.

The Radical Action Plan which was introduced to the General Assembly in 2019 drew attention to the pressing need to take some hard decisions about priorities and dispositions. This led directly to Edinburgh Presbytery embarking on preparation of its new Presbytery Mission Plan with the objective of maximising the use of resources and disposing of those which could not be accommodated in the plan. It was decided that the framework for future organisation and deployment of its reducing resources should be actively discussed between and within congregations. In 2020, that led to the Presbytery setting up Cluster Groups of congregations to explore future collaboration and with instructions to report urgently by March 2021. Like all timetables, that date slipped and we now report on progress on the ongoing work of the Water of Leith Cluster Group in a separate article in the Blether.

There is little point, however, in our church seeking to agree with partner bodies on how our joint future may best be shaped without ourselves having greater clarity about how we, as a church, see our own future. The Kirk Session agreed in June that, among other things, it needed to take urgent steps to try to clarify our church's priorities for the next few years. It was recognised that there was a need for some consultation before going further, and, if possible, establishing a clear consensus

which our representatives in the Cluster group discussions could present confidently.

In order to meet the pressing timescale set by the Presbytery, Kirk Session members were invited to respond to a survey of perceptions of what needed to be done across our congregation, with reference to vision, planning processes and priorities. The survey results were then debated at a special meeting of the Session on 18 August and were not thought to contain any surprises even though they showed a healthy measure of divergence of views on some issues and clear unanimity on others.

It was agreed that we needed:

- To have closer collaboration with other congregations.
- To engage with young families and new householders.
- To explore a wider range of opportunities for and styles of worship.
- To encourage the community to make more use of the resources offered by our campus.

There can be little doubt that there will an expectation of some response from the Steering Group as to how, mindful of the resources available, some of these issues might be addressed, and those issues are being looked at. It is of course comparatively easy to sit in a group and decide what actions need to be taken. The next steps which involve finding the resources in terms of the time and talents of people who can make these things happen, are inevitably a bit harder.



Do you have a minute, Lord?

It's about 'Sin' Lord. It's a little word but it was intended to cover a multitude of things. It's an old fashioned word that

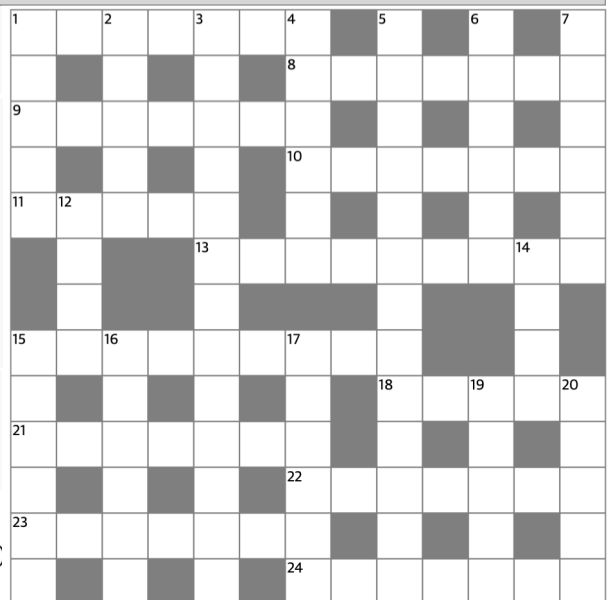
seems to put people off because of its connotations with righteous bygone generations who gave the impression that they felt that enjoying yourself was 'sinful' and was therefore to be discouraged. It seems to be a word that has been devalued and lacks relevance for so many people so that it has maybe become unhelpful. It's almost as if 'sin' is seen as simply applying to the personal indiscretions of people in the past.

'Truth' is another word which some people seem to be having a problem with. I'm getting a bit worried about truth; it seems to be in short supply in the modern world and to have become a bit 'inconvenient.' I was once corrected by someone whom I had accused of being too honest when she went back to a shopkeeper who had given her too much change. She said that she thought that you were either honest or you weren't and that there wasn't a half-way house.

Some people – even important ones - seem to think that it is legitimate to use alternative 'facts' and they don't get called out. How can that happen? Why aren't they challenged? Are too many of us just scared of standing up for what we believe and looking for a quiet life? That would be a sin, wouldn't it?

Contributed

Crossword corner



Down

- 1 Tiny spot (5)
- 2 Hard up (5)
- 3 Clear-cut (5,3,5)
- 4 French cake (6)
- 5 State of bliss (7,6)
- 6 Signal for soldiers to return to quarters – it gets under your skin (6)
- 7 Devoted (6)
- 12 Patch (4)
- 14 Transparent (4)
- 15 Lasso (6)
- 16 Daze – shock (6)
- 17 Gentle – offer (6)
- 19 Sidestep (5)
- 20 They come in flights (5)

Across

- 1 Form of flood defence (7)
- 8 So-so (7)
- 9 Graceful – refined (7)
- 10 Thrown out (7)
- 11 One-person canoe (5)
- 13 When one is fully grown (9)
- 15 Eleventh-hour (4-5)
- 18 Odds (5)
- 21 Grow coarse (7)
- 22 Turn aside (7)
- 23 Simon Peter or Judas Iscariot, say (7)
- 24 Plant stems growing along the ground (7)



Balerno Fairtrade Village Group - update August 2021

Our Group's activity this year has been different, but hasn't stopped. We couldn't in 2021 run, even with the Guild's help, our usual attended Fairtrade Fortnight event, but have continued to meet via 'zoom', used our 'C&B' column to the full, and thanks to Jo Khan have shared online news of Fairtrade and related Climate issues and happenings from around the world. Yes, the issues are certainly merging, with Fairtrade's recent focus on climate no accident. Why? Those already suffering unfair trading conditions have even more to cope with under extreme Climate conditions, let alone a pandemic, and/or political situations moving like lightning.

We've been greatly encouraged by continuing local support. Scotmid still carries a good stock of Fairtrade and fairly traded goods, Lorna Thompson continues to handle Traidcraft orders, BPC's reopened Mill remains as ever a welcoming Fairtrade beacon, and village traders kindly displayed 'World Fair Trade Day' posters in May. Balerno Village Trust's Gardeners generously allowed us to plant a 'FT logo' tub in Main Street. Carlyles' chef even produced and sold their customers a lovely 'Fairtrade Community' celebration cake (see below * for details of the award). Harmeny Athletic's Rigg Race, much changed by Covid, nonetheless featured a photogenic FT banana-runner; there have been FT Group photo-sessions, and a Balerno 'Wave of Hope' sent as part of a UK initiative to our politicians, urging support of Climate measures.

Harmeny School put lots of energy into a spring FT art competition, and at the time of writing we hope Balerno High School is doing the same via our FT/ Climate-themed writing competition, timed to help mark both the Fairtrade Foundation's September 'Great Big Green Week' and Scotland's hosting of the COP26 Climate Conference in November. Dean Park remains a Fairtrade School, and both Balerno Parish and St Mungo's Fairtrade Churches - all showing practical ways to help address an increasing need.

*What was the award Carlyles helped celebrate? Not something we'd applied for: but to our surprise, Balerno was nominated and awarded as the Fairtrade Foundation's Community of the month for June this year. With our politicians and City's Lord Provost most warmly onside, we hope it will encourage our whole community's continued commitment to a fairer deal for a much wider world.

And finally (for now) two dates for your diary. Our next meeting, still probably via zoom: 7.30 pm, 12 October 2021. And do you have 2022's diary yet? Please keep 10 am - 12 noon Saturday 5 March 2022 free for 'something', in our Church Halls - to celebrate Fairtrade Fortnight. Details are still to be worked out, but we do hope you'll be there! Thank you everyone for your vital continuing support.

Lesley Henderson for Balerno Fairtrade Village Group

A huge thank you to Jennifer!

Everybody, but everybody, knows Jennifer MacDonald; and everybody but everybody has reason to be immensely grateful to her for all that she has done for Balerno Parish Church while in charge of the church office.

Lesley Burt's admirable history of Balerno Parish Church notes that, 'Early in 2012 Eileen Chadwick had retired as Church Administrator and Jennifer MacDonald took over as we approached the countdown to the opening of the new Church campus including St Joseph's and the newly refurbished Church hall.'

Jennifer was therefore almost literally 'in with the bricks' on moving into the new Church Office when it was officially opened on 18th March 2012. Since then it and she were the hub around which much of

Church life evolved. Nothing has ever been too much trouble for Jennifer and much of the success of Balerno Parish Church since then has been down to her hard work, involvement and commitment.

Jennifer's job changed almost out of all recognition over her time with us and her flexibility of approach has been an absolute boon; we ask a lot of our administrator. She will, truly, be a very hard act to follow.

With Covid-19 seemingly ever present the past 18 months have been difficult for everybody, and like many people Jennifer has been working from home. That has been challenging but

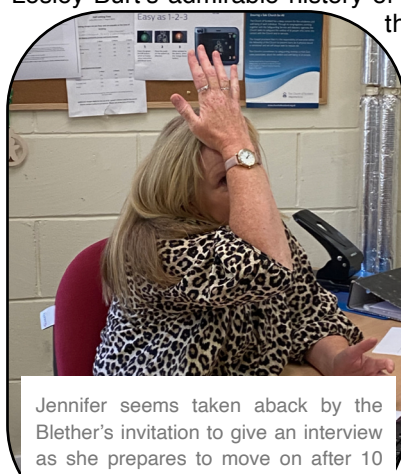
Jennifer's customary helpful self has been considerable in helping to plot a way through the red tape of Covid restrictions in order to try to help sustain as normal a life as possible across the church campus.

So what would Jennifer wish Balerno Parish Church might be in future. 'My hope is that we can all regain the energy and hope which we saw over the weekend of 22 August 2015 when everyone came together to celebrate Louise' life, with both thanks and hope. That was the high point of my time in the office, and as we come out of Covid I'd really like us to try to get that energy and community back again.'

contributed

Jennifer, you have been a colossal presence in the church family over the past ten years. We know you'll want a bit of a break from church involvement for a little while, so we'll not be pursuing you quite yet. However we'll all be delighted when you think it's the right time, and the Blether will be first in line to try to tempt you back. Best wishes!

Ed.



Jennifer seems taken aback by the Blether's invitation to give an interview as she prepares to move on after 10 years as the Parish Church's Secretary and Administrator.



Water of Leith Cluster Group



Balerno Parish Church along with Currie Kirk and Juniper Green Parish Church form the Water of Leith Cluster Group which is currently considering the scope for future arrangements for co-operation and development across the three congregations. The Group is working on a report to the Presbytery for the end of October.

However following a meeting of the Group on 19th August the Group is

also now looking beyond that first exercise and towards developing a vision and mission for the whole of the Upper Water of Leith area.



Currie Kirk

The Group are agreed that they share so much outside of 'church life' that we need to examine how we can also share within 'church life'.



The Group agreed to set up a Working Group specifically charged with determining a vision and mission for the Cluster Area. This Working Group would comprise nine members – three from each church and would be facilitated by Bill Black. It would report to the Water of Leith Cluster Group. Presbytery confirmed that the pattern of setting up working groups has been engaged in other cluster areas within the Presbytery.

Knowing who we are

Part of the process for Balerno Parish Church in responding to the Radical Action Plan is to know who we are and what we do. Every organisation has to take stock periodically and look at itself in the mirror and that's what we're doing.

We're looking at the range and scale of what we do and on a first pass on the subject we've counted over 40 separate projects and initiatives in which the church is involved; that's quite a lot. We're sure there are more and as we emerge from Covid many of those will spring back in to life.

And those activities of course don't necessarily give us figures for the numbers of all those volunteers who make those activities and initiatives happen. It takes a lot of people and effort to keep the show on the road.

There's a lot of hard evidence about the actual use of our premises and their importance across our community, and that will be increasingly important as we plan for our future.

And there are statistics from which informed guesses at the size not only of BPC's congregation in five or ten years time can be made, but also from which some forecast can be made of the likely demographic of the Balerno community. The delayed 2021 census now scheduled for 2022 will provide further useful data from which we will be able to make guesses at probable needs and demands.

All of this is valuable evidence on which decisions on our future planning can be made.

Article requested by Presbytery Strategy Team

'This year at the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, the sombre tone of some of the debates revealed the present state of the Church as an institution. The difficult but necessary decisions made will have very real consequences for the national Church, and also for the future of your own congregation.

This was recognised by the Church's magazine Life & Work, which took the step of producing immediately afterwards a special 4-page supplement sharing the outcomes. General Assembly 2021:

Special Supplement - Life and Work

Pre-COVID, the Church was already aware that to safeguard its future in "an increasingly secular society, something far-reaching needed to happen to the structures of the Church. Also, that there needed to be a renewed focus by the local and regional Church on its core values of mission and service, seeking to look outward and to proclaim with urgency and boldness its gospel message in word and deed. So, through the agreement of a Radical Action Plan, and by the appointment of Assembly Trustees and, through them, a Chief Executive, this major overhaul was initiated.

But then the pandemic struck, and while the Church supported the national effort to suppress the virus by closing its buildings, its impact affected the Church mostly financially. Local congregations learned quickly how to produce worship online, followed by the courts of the Church discovering how to conduct their business via online Zoom meeting, but nothing could block the significant loss of income the Church has endured. And it was this factor that required both a speeding up of the process for change, and the need to propose the dramatic steps to achieve stability.

So, at the General Assembly, the Assembly Trustees set out the problem: presently the Church is using £11million of reserves annually to meet its commitments. This cannot continue indefinitely. To live within its means, the Church could now afford only 600 ministry posts (parish ministers plus Ministries Development Staff),

plus maintain 60 vacancies (presently that number is over 200). To achieve this number the presbyteries across Scotland were allocated a number of posts, and instructed to achieve that number by 2025. For Edinburgh Presbytery that presently works with the number 78.2, the allocated number is now 48.5.

Two quotes from the conveners who presented these proposals are worth repeating here: The Very Rev Dr John Chalmers, Convener of the Assembly Trustees said,

'We are well aware that this is not an easy ask. Every one of us is a member or minister serving in parishes that will be affected by this. We know reshaping the Church around this will involve painful decisions. But in the goodness and grace of God we trust.'

The Rev Rosie Frew, Convener of the Faith Nurture Forum said, 'We are draining the resources of the Church – people, morale, finance – just to keep this broken system going. Without a radical treatment plan the Church of Scotland will not survive.'

In a few months' time, the Presbytery of Edinburgh will have its first look at the draft Plan that seeks to achieve not only the reduction in numbers, but also the reduction in the buildings being considered necessary, plus enabling the local church to fully engage in the Five Marks of Mission which is at the centre of national planning:

1. To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
2. To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
3. To respond to human need by loving service
4. To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation
5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

The Plan will outline the future of our own congregation in all these respects, and this article is to prepare all of us that change is likely, and to see how we creatively may respond to this changing time.'