

No 486 October 2020

# PRISM



**News & views from Craigmillar Park Church, Edinburgh**  
*A worshipping and caring community, following Jesus Christ*

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## **Letter from the minister** **Rev Alex McAspurren**

Dear friends,

Are you coming, or are you going? If you have been following the changing restrictions and freedoms in respect of COVID-19 then you may well find yourself unable to answer that question. Like some bizarre, and troubling, social dance we seem to be taking steps forward only to soon be taking steps back again. We may not be sure where we are going, yet we do know that we will only get there if we go together.

In planning for the future of the Kirk in Edinburgh we may find ourselves asking the same question, i.e. 'where are we going?' Presently we do not know where we are going but it is early days in the process. Whatever the destination, and by whatever route we take, the matter will be complex. As with the virus

we will only get to where we are going if we journey together.

In both situations it is growing and pulling together that will see us through. It is only by journeying together as one in hope that we will journey to our future together. In this we must allow ourselves to be carried by our faith. Note that it is not by 'my' faith but by 'our' faith that we must be carried. In the garden Jesus did not pray that his followers would journey onward as some loose collective; rather, He prayed that his followers would be 'one' just as He and the Father were one (John 17:11). May it be both our prayer and our practice in the coming months that we journey as Christ intended, as one.

Yours in Christ,

*Alex.*

# Mayfield Salisbury

We note with interest that our friends in Mayfield Salisbury Church are close to filling their vacancy; their sole nominee, the Rev Dr Sandy Forsyth, will preach there on Sunday 4 October. Sandy is presently T.F. Torrance Lecturer in Mission and Theology at New College, School of Divinity, University of Edinburgh. In ministry, his probation was served in Glasgow city centre at Renfield St

Stephens, preceded by three church placements in urban, rural and suburban settings. Since his ordination in 2009, Sandy has been Associate Minister at St David's Memorial Park Church, Kirkintilloch and then Bearsden Cross Parish Church.

We wish Mayfield Salisbury well and congratulate them on reaching this stage in their vacancy. They have our best wishes for the future.

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## Refugee integration programme extended for three months

A ground breaking project that has helped transform the lives of refugees seeking sanctuary in Scotland has been extended by three months. The New Scots Holiday Programme, which enables congregations to provide hospitality and friendship to people who have fled war-torn countries like Syria, was due to finish on September 30 when a £130,000 funding package awarded by the European Union in 2018 runs out. Thanks to a grant from the Scottish Refugee Council the project will now run until December 31.

Co-ordinated by Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees, a multi-faith partnership project hosted by the Church of Scotland, New Scots

Holidays provides a wonderful opportunity to build friendships across cultures and introduce people to new experiences beyond the



locality where they live.

Members of Strath and Sleat Parish Church on the Isle of Skye hosted a group of people last October and the visit, which included a ceilidh, was described as a "positive" experience

for everyone involved. Rev Barbara Ann Sweetin, minister of East and Old Parish Church in Forfar, Angus, and her husband Billy hosted a Syrian family for a weekend last October. They met members of the congregation and attended a Sunday morning service and spoke about their lives.

Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees coordinator, David Bradwell, said: "The Church's need and commitment to engage in multi-cultural and multi-faith dialogue, and be a light and example in this world has become even more evident. We are delighted to have received this extension and would like to thank the Scottish Refugee Council for their generosity and continued partnership and support for the Church's work with refugees. Welcoming the stranger and showing hospitality and the hand of friendship are at the heart of the Christian message. At times of crisis, racial injustice and political hard-heartedness, it is more important than ever that we recommit to our values of love and hope."

Sabir Zazai, chief executive officer of the Scottish Refugee Council, said, "This project allowed the opportunity to bring together our experiences with the faith values of hospitality to build bridges across differences but most importantly nurture our longstanding legacy of offering sanctuary to those who need our protection."

Strath and Slea Parish Church was the first congregation to take part in the project. Elder Jean Gillies, who

organised the visit, said their guests had all experienced very difficult times prior to fleeing their home countries.

"Most had spent time in camps in other countries before being granted refugee status and resettled in Scotland," she explained. "Some still have family living in Syria and are very concerned for their safety. Having had to flee their country of birth, it is very important to them to retain their culture and they were very keen to share aspects of that with us. For our part, I'm sure I speak for us all when I say that this experience was not only a positive one for our guests but also had a positive impact on all of us. For a brief time we had the opportunity to share Christ's love with fellow human beings whom we would not normally get the chance to meet, and we all felt the richer for it."

The feedback from refugees who have taken part in visits has been positive. One said "We have never been made to feel so welcome in our lives and been accepted for who we are." Another commented: "Our hosts were amazing - we were crying when we left them."

Asked what they liked best about the holiday, a child said: "Being with two people who are like my granny and grandpa."

The New Scots Integration Programme also includes an awareness raising project for local congregations on refugee issues. If you would like to find out more please contact Sabine Chalmers [schalmers@churchofscotland.org.uk](mailto:schalmers@churchofscotland.org.uk)

# Back from Furlough

## Michael McMullin, Mission Development Worker

Way back in early March, which seems so far away now, I was just getting my head around being asked to work from home. Like the rest of Scotland, indeed like the rest of the world, I couldn't have envisaged the stark, harsh, drama that was about to ensue. I had an understandable, if naïve, belief that this new mode of working would last a couple of weeks, maybe a month at a push. Yet before the end of that first week, the Church of Scotland, reacting to the fast unfolding events, had begun the process of putting the majority of its staff onto the newly announced Government furlough scheme. So, like most of the Mission Development Staff, along with millions of workers up and down the country, I found myself in a wholly new situation. One which was unnerving, yet to some degree still comforting.

Lockdown had begun for myself, and my family, like everyone else, with the surreal experience of panic buying, hoarding toilet rolls, and dusting down the bread making machine, even though we had no bread mix to put in it. We watched the TV news together as a family and began to be overwhelmed by what was unfolding. We tried to only watch the news during Government briefings and not become addicted to the endless news coverage. The village where I stay, Easthouses, was ghostly quiet,

so much so that, again like millions of others, I rediscovered the noise of nature, and felt slightly ashamed that I had been taking the wonder and beauty of our Lord's creation for granted for so long.

Let me return to why I say that the situation was unnerving, yet comforting. Unnerving because that's exactly how it felt for me. I felt, and for all practical purposes was, powerless in what was happening. My couple of weeks working from home had evolved into what would be over five months of being furloughed, during which I was stopped from doing anything at all related to my work. As time wound on, the natural, "I'm only human after all" worry began to grow into, "Would there be a job to come back to?" My wife and youngest son had been put on furlough from their work as well, and we all became experts at never mentioning this particularly worrying elephant in the room. I went through mass redundancies when I worked in the electronics industry in the 1990s and early noughties. The worst thing about it was not knowing what was happening, being stuck in limbo until something actually happened. So, I kept active in as many things as I could. Our garden has never had so much attention, repairs in the house were carried out, often to a level way exceeding my skills set, and I rediscovered my

love of reading, and walking. I also learned that sometimes you need time alone. Having family around is, of course, wonderful, but it doesn't mean you can't get frustrated, or a wee bit crabbit with each other at times.

I felt comfort because I was fortunate my employers, the Church of Scotland, were not only professional in how they administered the furlough scheme, they also behaved as though each of their staff members was a family member, a member of the Church Family. I was kept informed of developments, and was made to feel valued as a human being. They recognised, and were responding to, the anxious situation we found ourselves in, and how isolated and vulnerable we were beginning to feel. Isolation in our communities, exasperated by the Covid crisis, is a challenge which I was experiencing and witnessing first-hand, and it makes me even more determined that the Church, our church, your church, rises to this challenge and continues to make positive and practical differences in people's lives.

So, when it was agreed to bring me back from furlough at the start of September, I felt it even more vital that we continue focusing on the initiatives which we had agreed upon at the start of the year, and which were beginning to form before lockdown happened. The Listening Service, Dementia Focused Outreach, Recovery Café, Foodbank, they all tackle forms of isolation, and

the need for them has not diminished, indeed I believe it has multiplied.

Of course, the mode in which we engage in our initiatives has changed. Social distancing and all the other new restrictions have meant it is a completely new landscape in which we are now having to operate, but our mission hasn't changed. We just have to rethink how we do things, and be open to new ideas and see challenges as just that, a challenge, and not a restriction to stop us following God's vision. Training for the volunteers for the listening service shall now have to be done online rather than face to face, and many of our groups shall have to explore online gatherings as alternatives to meeting in person, as we did previously. We shall need to adapt, but if we remember we are all adapting, we are all having to change how we do things, then I hope it won't seem so daunting.

Finally, I'd like to say a big thank you to everyone across the Craigmillar Park, Priestfield and Reid Memorial congregations who kept the spirits up of myself and my family when I was furloughed. You shall really never know how uplifting those wee unexpected phone calls, texts and messages were. They always seemed to come at exactly the moment we needed them, but then why should that surprise me?

Take care and God bless,

Michael

## Exploring in a time of pandemic

I love exploring...in a small way. You don't need to go to Africa or the Arctic to be an explorer.

During lockdown and in the weeks of restrictions since, I've discovered so many local trails and by-ways. There are streets near my house that I've walked along for the first time, discovering new gardens, observing how the natives lived. The other day, I went on an expedition through the wheat fields to Liberton Tower and felt like an intrepid explorer out in the wild-west Prairies.

Scotland, of course, has always been a nation of explorers. Think of Sir John Ross from Galloway sailing through the icy seas of Antarctic, or Alexander Mackenzie from Stornoway exploring the rivers of Canada, or Francis Cadell from Cockenzie in the Australian outback or David Livingstone or Mungo Park out in Africa.

I came across a new one for me, while visiting a friend in Dumfriesshire, Joseph Thomson, the son of a stonemason in Penpont who, like Livingstone beat a trail through the grasslands of East Africa and made peace with the Masai people. He inspired Rider Haggard to write "King Solomon's Mines".

There are not many women listed among Scotland's top 100 explorers



(to be debated at another time). But there are three. Mary Livingstone, of course, who accompanied her husband on three of his expeditions. Isabella Christie from Cowden Castle near Stirling went travelling along the "silk road" to Tibet, Borneo and Japan in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Isobel Hutchison took long walks across Scotland from her home at Carlowrie Castle in West Lothian in the 1920s and ended up exploring the coasts of Iceland, Greenland and Alaska. And in the 1950s, a young medical student from Glasgow Evelyn McNicol went exploring in the un-mapped mountains of the Himalayas.

These explorers wrote books, painted pictures, which thrilled and inspired generations of home birds like me. And these days the tradition goes on in the form of travel writing and TV documentaries. There's something deep in our human spirit that makes us want to explore, to see what's over the horizon or round the next corner. It doesn't just apply to landscape but to time and our lives too. I, for one, am tired of the Covid restrictions, I want to break out, see what's on the other side. I hope I discover a new world...with the best bits of the old world still in it.

John Knox

# The Guild

The next session of the Guild 2020-21 has been cancelled until at least January. Hopefully, we may be able to meet in January, but if not, we will have to cancel the whole session. This is something I regret doing but I feel that we have no option in the present climate.

Julia Yarker, Guild President

	Reader	Church Officer
<b>Oct 2020</b>		
<b>11th</b>	Alison Leslie	Julia Yarker
<b>18th</b>	John Kelly	Gordon Braidwood
<b>25th</b>	Norman Weibye	Martin Given
<b>Nov 2020</b>		
<b>1st</b>	Linsay Given Black	Gordon Braidwood
<b>8th</b>	Christopher McLeod	Sam Breadon

## Stewarding

### October

**11th:** Gordon Braidwood (convener), Colin Aitken, John Humphrey, Ruth Longmuir, Pauline Weibye

**18th:** Christopher McLeod (convener), Kathleen Cockerell, Ruth Longmuir, Pauline Weibye, Julia Yarker

**25th:** Christopher McLeod (convener), Sam Breadon, Kathleen Cockerell, Ann Thanisch, Julia Yarker

### November

**1st:** Sheena Stenhouse (convener), Sam Breadon, John Kelly, Flora Paton, Ann Thanisch

**8th:** Sheena Stenhouse (convener), Colin Aitken, John Kelly, Alison Leslie, Flora Paton

## Who's who at Craigmillar Park Church

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The deadline for the next edition of *Prism* is Sunday 18 October.  
Please send items to Ruth —  
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