

# GRAPEVINE

No 115

Spring 2018

THE MAGAZINE OF THE DIOCESE OF BRECHIN

## ***The Bishop of Edinburgh's Charge to the Brechin Diocesan Synod held on 10 March:***

This Synod takes place in the context of an Episcopal Election. As we know, the Preparatory Committee are now embarked on a second run through the process and we pray that this will produce a viable shortlist. Whatever happens, by this time next year there will be a new Bishop of Brechin, which means that my first appearance as President of this Synod is also my last.

Please allow me to record my thanks to those who have cared for the life of this diocese during these past seven months and will continue to do so until the new bishop is in post. You have already heard from and acknowledged some of them today as we have received their reports. On my behalf as well as yours I would also wish to mention our Chancellor, Gregor Mitchell, our Registrar, John Thom and our Treasurer, Alan Duffus. I am sure that you will understand why I also wish to offer a special 'thank you' to Sharon Loudon who has administered the office and election process so effectively and to our Dean. As a rather distant and distracted Interim Bishop I have relied enormously on Francis's wisdom and advice.

Reflecting on what we have heard today there is so much to be grateful for in the life of this diocese. We have received the reports of our various committees. We have heard, too, from Kerry Dixon of ongoing mission work which, although held up somewhat by personnel changes, offers a new bishop plenty to focus on. Fay Lamont has also encouraged us with news of Ordinands in training and others exploring their vocation. Whilst we should not delude ourselves that the coming years will be easy yet all I have seen today indicates that this is a diocese getting on with doing what a diocese is supposed to do. Your companion links with Swaziland and Iowa are especially impressive and would put many a larger diocese to shame. In your Diocesan Description you have

been very honest about the challenges you face – I simply want to note that you also have reasons to be optimistic.

When we consider the wider context of the Province there is much to encourage us there too. The Scottish Episcopal Institute is training a significant number of students for stipendiary ministry, including some in their twenties and thirties. Logistically this creates a challenge. We shall need to find up to 8 curacies for 2019 and possibly a further 5 for 2020. This is a matter the College of Bishops is pursuing with some urgency.

The training institute has just appointed its first Director of Mixed Mode Training, Richard Tiplady. He will help open up new pathways for contextual learning

and explore new possibilities both for ministry and for curacies in our church. This is exciting because it represents a significant way in which our church is addressing the challenges of mission in 2018.

It is also encouraging for clergy of my generation, those approaching retirement in the next ten years. It seems that God has plans to give us a future, for God is calling young women and men of high calibre to serve in and to lead the church. The message we must hear in all this is the same message Jesus repeated after his resurrection – do not be anxious, do not be afraid for God is with us.

We live in a world that clearly needs to hear the message we are charged to speak and to live out, a message of love, compassion and reconciliation. By our lives more than by our words we can demonstrate both the holiness of God and the closeness of God to those who are hurting and in need. Of course, to live with compassion and generosity is not just for the clergy but for us all, if our church is to have credibility. As the great Roman Catholic laywoman Dorothy Day put it half a century ago, we are all called to live in solidarity with the weakest in our society and we must learn to "live in such a way that one's life would not make sense if God did not exist." So, in the words of Hosea, "Let us press on to know the Lord; his appearing is as sure as the dawn; he will come to us like the showers, like the spring rains that water the earth." (Hosea 6.3)

Jesus tells a story of two men, a Pharisee and a Tax Collector. (Luke 18.9-14) Both come to the Temple to pray and both tell God honestly about how they see themselves. The Pharisee is full of gratitude that he is not as other

people, that far from being a spectacular sinner, a thief, a rogue, an adulterer or even, God forbid, a tax-collector, he is faithful in his religious observance – in this case his fasting and tithing. The tax collector, on the other hand, comes to God empty of self-regard and aware of his need of God and, because he is empty, he is able to receive what God gives.

The Pharisee is not a bad man – outwardly he is an example of what a devout person of faith should be – but he has come to believe that this outward appearance is sufficient, forgetting the more subtle sins that can ensnare a person, such as pride and condemnation of others. He is so full of himself there is no room for God.

This story challenges us as individuals, we who are devout people of faith and who, like the

Pharisee, seek to set an example of holy living. When we come to pray do we come full or empty? Are we able to receive God's grace or are we so preoccupied with ourselves that God can find no entry point?

The same challenge faces us as a church – as congregations, as a diocese and as a province. Prayer is not an exercise in self-justification or an opportunity to compare ourselves favourably with the worst in others any more than it should be an exercise in grovelling self-recrimination. In prayer we come like an empty vessel asking to be filled, knowing that we need God if we are to grow in holiness, ready to be surprised and transfigured by God's new life bubbling up in us, making us a people able to serve and to share, eager to exalt not ourselves but the God we know in Jesus.

I offer these thoughts as we travel together through Lent (and as we travel through the extended Lent of an interminable election process). For the story of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector offers us an invitation. The invitation is to come to receive what Christ is ready to offer us, a future filled with hope. Hope, not because we are successful and slick and have got everything right, but because we are burdened and heavy-laden and all too aware of our weakness. "Come to me," says Christ. "Come to me empty and let me fill you, refresh you, with springs of living water."



*Interim Bishop of Brechin*

---

---

## *Major Milestone in the St James' Stonehaven Building Project*

On Sunday, 26 November, the feast of Christ the King, the congregation of St James' Stonehaven celebrated the re-opening of the church after the extensive work on the roof, as well as marking the 140th anniversary of the original opening of the nave in the new St James'.

The work on the roof started from a small observation of 'mould' growing on the east-most roof truss. Investigation revealed it was dry rot, and the first estimate of the required work was over £14,000, and a further £30,000 for roof repairs – more than we would want to take out of our reserves. So we started to apply for grants – a long and laborious process – but eventually successful. The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) required us not only to eliminate the dry rot, but:

- repair the roof to stop it happening again (dry rot, curiously, is caused by the wood being kept too wet, usually from a leaking roof);
- undertaking all the repairs and improvements recommended in the church's Quinquennial survey – which in our case was quite a long list;
- doing something for the community – they are not keen on funding closed churches.



By the time all this had been worked up and costed, the project budget had risen to £165,000. The HLF granted £107,000, the province £20,000 and the rest came from other grant-funders.

The project so far has been a roller coaster. On the down-side, the dry rot had spread, requiring us to prop up the roof with steel girders (and it only dropped 9 mm!!) while the main roof beams were cut away and replaced. We also found that roof condition was poor, partly a result of poor workmanship in 2001. On the up-side, in the top of the bell tower, we found, and rescued, a bell dating back to 1788, still in fine condition. The steeplejack did some amazing acrobatics to examine the whole roof, and seal some old stonework which was allowing rainwater through.

Not surprisingly, after all this work, the church was covered in rubble and plaster dust, but an energetic squad from the congregation (with help from professional cleaners) made the church shine again in time for Christ the King.

Now all we have to do are the second and third sections of the project – which will take us until next autumn, but not involve closing the church for 5 months!

# Diocesan Synod, 10 March 2018

The annual Brechin Diocesan Synod took place at the Diocesan Centre, commencing with the Eucharist at which Bishop John Armes, the interim bishop, presided. The Charge that he later delivered to the Synod is printed on the front page of this edition of *Grapevine*.

As always there is a member of the General Synod present and this year it was John Stuart, Secretary General of the SEC. He made mention of two significant matters: a consultation on child poverty which will soon take place and new requirements of Data Protection Regulations which would come into force in May. Information will be sent out in due course.

Questions arose as to what had happened to two subjects which had been before Synod a year ago. With regard to the unanimously supported motion that the Faith and Order Board review the Canon on Offences and Trials (in the light of the distress experienced recently in the cathedral community) it was reported that the Board had indeed embarked on discussion and sought the views of the Committee on Canons. Secondly, the plan to take a Road Show around the diocese to explain the idea of having Mission Hubs grouping congregations had been delayed because of the bishop's resignation. It was also noted that this proposed strategy had not actually been voted upon by Synod.

There was some discussion about whether some of the sale proceeds of the former bishop's house might be used to assist the finances of struggling congregations but for various reasons this was ruled out. Otherwise the regular reports were received without much debate.

A letter had been received from Alan Scarfe, the Bishop of Iowa, who amongst other things expressed his gratitude for Pat Millar, Companion Dioceses

officer, having visited the Diocese of Iowa only shortly after returning from being involved in working projects in Swaziland. (There is an article about this on pages 4 & 5) Bishop Alan also drew attention to a website – [iowashare.org](http://iowashare.org) – which seeks to connect people around the Diocese of Iowa. This site is well worth a visit.

This led into a fascinating presentation by the Rev'd Steve Godfrey, who is both priest at St Andrew's Church, Des Moines and Missioner for Congregational Development and Transitions in the Diocese of Iowa.

He gave the background by saying that the diocese covered



56,000 square miles (roughly twice the area of Scotland) but with a population of 3 million – only 60% of Scotland. Significant distances separated communities and many congregations were small, half of them having less than 25 worshippers on a Sunday. There were 19 full-time clergy and 40 part-time, with 5 local ministry teams.

Without there being an established church the religious landscape was somewhat competitive, with Lutherans, Roman Catholics and Methodists all having a noticeable presence. The Episcopal Church has tended to emphasise tradition rather than mission, but immigration from other countries has brought in Anglicans from other countries with different perspectives.

Steve shared the findings of research by Kim Gee and Holly Scherff. This identified a variety of **Opportunities** such as seeing needs in the community and filling them; a list of **What Small Churches Do** – which was truly extensive not only in terms of worship but also of social action; and **Challenges**, which take account of those attitudes and aspects which inhibit church growth and congregational well-being.

During 2017 there had been a series of 40 Revival gatherings in the parishes which had seen some encouraging developments in many aspects. In 2018 there are to be many Saturday gatherings to help grow leaders in the diocese.

Steve's visit to both England and Scotland has been to discover first hand what vision there is for the future, varied life of the church and of the ways in which this can be implemented.

He then spoke of his own congregation in Des Moines, where there is shared leadership and the average Sunday attendance is 70. But St Andrew's Church is also used weekly by between 35 and 100 South Sudanese Christians who have settled in the locality and by over 100 Muslims who have also fled from persecution in the Sudan. With this context it is hardly surprising that there are various groups who meet on the premises to develop ideas and skills across ethnic, religious and social divides.

As usual a last item on the agenda was accepting the annual accounts and approving the budget. This was done with a few questions and comments. And to give time adequately to find replacements Mr Peter and the Rev'd Jane Nelson intimated that they would be retiring from all responsibilities concerned with the running of St Drostan's Lodge, Tarfside in 2020.

# *Yes, we'll gather at the river, the beautiful, the beautiful river*

Our Companion Link with Iowa and Swaziland is almost 30 years old and is more active and purposeful now than ever before.

In the early days contacts were few and mainly involved senior clergy travelling to share in special events. In more recent years, with international travel accessible to more of us, we have benefited from opportunities to come together more often, to learn about our varied cultures and church lives, to share in study and worship, and to build strong working networks and friendship groups.

As Companion Links Officer for the Diocese of Brechin for the past 11 years I have worked to strengthen support networks and friendship groups and to establish new ones. Iowa and Brechin have long been committed to supporting the Diocese of Swaziland in the many challenges faced by the church in that small and impoverished country. It has been my privilege to travel to Swaziland many times since 2007 and have come to feel that Swaziland is my second diocesan home.



Collecting the rubbish

Three of us from Brechin visited Swaziland in September 2017. This was planned to share in work projects identified by Bishop

Ellinah of Swaziland. We flew to Johannesburg, where we met up with a group of 12 from the Diocese of Iowa and we all travelled on together to Swaziland.

I want to focus on one of the work projects in which we were all involved – the river clean up task. This was our first task, a day after our arrival and was a wise choice on many levels.

The Anglican Diocese of Swaziland is proudly committed to the Green Anglican movement, which promotes all sorts of environmental conservation and development work across Southern Africa and the diocese has been recognised as a leader in that work. Diocesan staff and volunteers work tirelessly and in extremely challenges circumstances, especially since a long drought has devastated large areas of already vulnerable countryside.

Water conservation and improvement are priorities in their efforts to make a difference. They have very few resources and almost no money, but they have a firm belief in the importance of what they are trying to do. We were honoured to play a part in the river clean up task with them.

It was certainly 'real' work. The day was very hot and the designated area of river bank was very dirty – with every sort of rubbish imaginable. We were joined by Swazi Companions from the local parish and also by a group of Methodists who have joined the Anglicans in the Green Anglican movement. We were a group of around 20 workers.

We worked along the river bank and in the water, collecting dozens of large bags of rubbish, which were then lifted on to trucks and removed. It was hot work, physically hard and very dirty, but

we worked busily and happily, with time for conversation when a stop was needed for a drink or to ease aching backs. There was even some wonderful Swazi singing to help us keep up the momentum.

I think we were all already clear about the importance of having enough water for environmental wellbeing and of clean water for



The river clean up team with Bishop Ellinah

the local people, but that day reinforced our understanding of the centrality of water to everything in life.

The section of the riverbank we worked on is at a place where the river is directed through a very large culvert and the road crosses over above the culvert. The ground on each side of the crossing is flat and it was clear from the vast amount of plastic and discarded food and drink containers that it was a popular place for motorists to stop and enjoy a break or a picnic. Remains of open fires also indicated that it was a popular place to have a braai – a barbecue.

The other, more serious problem was that it was a convenient place for fly tipping. Some of this was domestic rubbish which was scattered about after animals had scavenged in the bags, but some had been dumped on a more organised basis –there was a large number of discarded and partially buried batteries and old bags of cement –all leaking on to the river bank. Animals range freely in Swaziland – there were goats and some cattle grazing close to us: such

toxic rubbish was dangerous for them.

While we worked, a woman was doing her laundry on flat stones in the river and collecting water in plastic containers for family use. It all created a vivid, cultural image of rural life, but environmentally and in terms of health it was of serious concern.

When we had finished, we enjoyed drinks and fruit brought by local Methodist parishioners. We assembled and stood under some tall trees close to the water on the now clean and green river bank for a Eucharist.

Bishop Ellinah presided and some Iowan Companions assisted. We were joined by a local priest who preached. We were all tired, hot, very dirty and so satisfied by our shared efforts. It was a memorable experience for everyone and the Eucharist we shared was both moving and powerful.

The local priest's sermon, lengthy by UK standards, was on the theme of water. He preached on how critical water is to all aspects of life. He spoke of water in baptism and our Christian 'journey of the baptised', he spoke of water as a force, of water as a cleansing element, of water for growth and of the challenges of drought for Swazi communities. He reminded us all of our Christian responsibility to be good

stewards and to look after this resource.

Following this, an Officer from Manzini Town Council, with responsibility for environmental conservation and development, spoke to us about the Town Council's environmental priorities and plans and a member of the Committee from the Green Anglicans' group spoke about their hopes and their commitment to spread their conservation message across the whole country. Despite the enormous challenges, they all spoke in positive terms and with a belief that things can and will improve.

We all benefit from exchanges like this. What we gain from these projects is summed up well by Bishop Ellinah of Swaziland, who said "Where the global and the local meet, wonderful things can happen."

*Pat Millar  
Diocesan Companion Links Officer*



A Eucharist by the river bank

## SECMA Lunch

The diocesan Branch of SECMA (Scottish Episcopal Church Mission Association) held a lunch on Wednesday, 7 March at St Mary Magdalene's Church in Dundee.

25 people enjoyed a lunch of soup, steak pie or haggis with tatties and 'neeps' followed by strawberry or chocolate gâteau.

Following the lunch, Dr Ian Barron, a Reader in Trauma Studies from the University of Dundee spoke to us about work that he has been involved in for the past 10 years.

He had spent one and a half years living in Palestine with his wife, who is a Church of Scotland minister, and working as an educational psychologist. Realising the trauma caused to children who have lived through war situations, seeing people killed or injured and facing destruction of their environment, he and others looked for ways to help these children face

the future. They were experiencing Post Traumatic Stress.

A project was set up in connection with the Dundee-Nablus group and Dundee University, and is to train school counsellors locally in Palestine and especially in the West Bank and Gaza to deliver psychological help to many children.

The children are taught 'Recovery Techniques' in groups of 10 with 2 leaders for 7 sessions. The school counsellors also have to be taught and supervised to ensure that standards are kept up. With Dr Abdallah, a colleague in Palestine, they have set up the International Centre for Child Trauma Prevention and Recovery and are developing trauma research projects across the world.

They have to find their own funding to continue this work and much comes from churches, charities, other universities and individuals. The work over these

past years has been very beneficial to the thousands of children who have been helped, but it is a long term programme that needs to continue.

The Central Committee of SECMA has recently agreed to send £750 to support this work and our Diocesan group will add a further £200 to that figure from donations made at our lunch and the proceeds from a Bring & Buy Sale.

Thank you to all who attended and donated.

*Judy Robinson*

.....

**Advertisements?**

**Wedding dress for sale. Worn once by mistake. Call Stephanie**

**On a church noticeboard:**

**Contact lens found in church.**

**See rector. If you can.**

.....

# SYRIA AND ASSAD

*Anglican priest, the Rev'd Andrew Ashdown, has been criticised by the UK Government for interfering in Syria. But Andrew is equally critical of the UK Government, of the BBC, Channel 4 and others for, he claims, deliberately misleading us as to the true state of affairs in Syria. Andrew has spent 14 years working in Syria, has seen death on numerous occasions and has come very close to it himself.*

*He preached in St Paul's Cathedral on 4 February – the Sunday after Candlemas. Here reproduced is a slightly abbreviated form of his address.*

Firstly I would like to thank Provost Jeremy for the invitation to preach here this morning. I am on a brief speaking tour, having made many visits to Syria in recent years, both independently undertaking Ph.D. Research into Christian-Muslim relations in the country; and as a leader and member of delegations. I have travelled widely in Syria and met with thousands of people including those in battle zones.

Today we mark the wonderful Feast of Candlemas; the day that Christ, himself the Saviour of the world, is presented in the Temple. Here, even as a vulnerable child, dependent on the care and nurture of his parents and community, he is recognised as the Messiah by a righteous and devout man whose life has been spent yearning for the consolation his people. But who also recognises the pain and suffering that would afflict the one who sought to redeem the world. And also by an elderly woman, a prophet, who had devoted her life in prayer and service, and who is the first to proclaim Jesus' identity to all who would hear her.

Yearning, discerning, praying, serving: these are all the qualities of those who are called to serve God, and of those who recognise Him in the most unlikely of places, and in their wisdom, know that his work often involves sharing in the pain and suffering of the world.

It is these ministries, of waiting, yearning even, but reaching out in healing and in love to live the good news, that I have witnessed in Syria from members of all communities in the past few years. And I would like to share some stories, that I hope witness, in a profound and powerful way, to this vocation that we all share, wherever God calls us to be.

In 2014, I stayed for three nights in a 5th century fortress monastery in the Syrian desert, founded originally for pilgrims heading to Jerusalem. When I visited, ISIS frontlines were only 1km away, and there was the sound of shells and gunfire through the night. The area had been totally occupied by ISIS for some months in 2013, and throughout it all, the monks and nuns had stayed at the monastery. Not only that, but for each service every day, they continued to ring the bells of the monastery, proclaiming loud and clear, that they were there and were to stay.

The monastery is situated near a joint Sunni/Christian village, and during the ISIS occupation, the ancient Churches were badly damaged, and education of children was forbidden. The monastery gave shelter to both Christians and Muslims whose lives were in danger, whilst, under the cover of darkness, local Sunni Muslims, risking death, brought food to the monastery. When the Syrian Army finally recaptured the area, the local community, Christian and Muslim, together restored the Churches in the village.

When I visited in 2014, the monastery was being protected by Shi'a Hezbollah soldiers who said they would give their lives to protect the Christian presence in the country. Thankfully, the area has now been completely liberated by the Syrian army, and people are free to get on with their lives in safety again. The monks and nuns remain. They were in very good heart when I stayed with them again last September.

Syria has always been a place of multiple communities, a crossroads for civilisations, and of course, Christianity was there from the beginning. St Paul himself came to persecute the Syrian Christian communities that were already there, and after his conversion, owed the development of his own faith to Syrian Christians. It was in Antioch in Syria, that Christians were first called Christians. It was also in Damascus Syria, during the 7th Century, after Islam had swept across the region, that the Ummayyad Caliphate was based, and that Christian-Muslim encounter flourished. Christians were administrators for the Caliphate and taught philosophy and language.

Syria is a land where Churches and mosques stand side by side, and where a number of Christian villages still speak Aramaic, the language of Jesus. For centuries, Christians and Muslims lived side by side in relative harmony, until the rise of extremist ideology emerged, not from Syria, but amongst our allies in Saudi Arabia and Egypt.

Christian villages were a key target of many of the 'rebel' groups, where those labelled 'moderate' by the west, mixed with the majority extreme Islamists, whose persecution of both Christians and Muslims who didn't adhere to their ideology was brutal. There are no Churches or Christians left in areas that are or were under 'rebel' control. They have been destroyed. The historic and beautiful village of Maaloula was very badly damaged when it was occupied by 'rebel' factions who kidnapped and killed local Christians and desecrated the ancient shrines that are so important to Christian history. In this village, three Christian men are remembered as martyrs. When armed militants came to their home, they were told one by one, to convert or die, and one by one, they were shot as they refused to do so. A relative, who was hiding inside and heard what

was going on, said she heard the first say:” I was born a Christian. I am a Christian. And I will die a Christian.” Since the liberation of the village by the Syrian Army, the shrines have already been restored.

Saidnaya, another village where Aramaic is still spoken, is home to one of Christianity’s most famous convents, where a holy icon has been for many centuries a place of pilgrimage for both Christians and Muslims, who continue to pray together at the shrine. For three months in 2013 the local population of Christians and Muslims joined the Syrian Army to fight back against the rebels, who were firing from the surrounding mountaintops. At one point, it was feared that the town would fall. One night, the women, children and elderly, gathered in the Churches to pray. And they made two promises. One, that whatever happened, they would not give up their faith. And two, that they would refuse to hate. Last year the Mother Superior said to me: “The world should come to Saidnaya, to thank the Christian and Muslim people of this town, for saving Christianity in Syria.”

In September 2016, I led the first English group to visit Aleppo whilst the battle for the east of the city was raging. Several churches had been destroyed, and hospitals and schools hit. We were guests of the Armenian Church and were hosted to a feast with their community in a restaurant, just 500 metres from the frontline, to the accompaniment of a string quartet and the sound of shells and gun battles nearby. At Church the next morning, we joined with Christian and Muslim leaders in the city and an Armenian said: “When the risen Lord appeared to Thomas, he told Thomas to put his hands in his side, and believe. And when he did, he believed, and was told to go and declare. The Armenian said to us, ‘You have come and put your hands in the wounds in our side. You have come and you have seen. Now go and tell the truth.’”

Last May, I had the privilege of returning to Aleppo. As I arrived in an area of East Aleppo to visit a

project run by the Greek Orthodox Church providing water tanks to the area, I was met by a local Sunni Sheikh. He beamed at me, came straight towards me and said: “Thank God you are here. You are welcome. We are brothers.” Throughout Aleppo, Christian and Muslim communities have set up numerous projects to help local people rebuild their homes, re-open their businesses and their schools, and improve medical provision. Meanwhile, the pace of restoration of basic infrastructure by the Syrian Government is remarkable.

A few days later, I visited the town of Daraa in the south of Syria, where the conflict began, and which is known to be home to many extremists. The frontline was 5kms away and the constant sound of battle could be heard. And there, hand in hand with the local Christian and Muslim clergy, we walked through the main street of the town, followed by hundreds of local people, to open a new Community Centre for all the people of the town whatever their background or faith.

Throughout Syria, the Christian communities that remain (it is estimated that half have left), are seeking to be vehicles of hope and reconciliation, restoring what has been lost, supporting people in multiple practical ways, and trying to regain trust. And even in areas where whole villages and their churches and mosques have been destroyed, Christians and Muslims are working together to rebuild them.

How do those who face such suffering respond? I asked the priest of a village where Christians had been executed for refusing to convert. He said: “By the grace of God, we are in this situation. We are called to be Christ, to live out his love and forgiveness..to witness to his grace in the world. We can learn from our suffering. We can think like Christ and try to follow his example.” A Bishop said to me: “Love is the cradle of faith. We are called to be Christians, not Crusaders. We play a crucial role in the process of bridge-building and reconciliation.”

The extremists are a minority. Most Muslims in Syria abhor the violence of the Islamists. And everywhere in Syria, Christian and Muslim leaders are working together to serve their communities and lead initiatives in reconciliation and understanding.

The consistent message I have heard in these past few years from members of all communities is threefold:

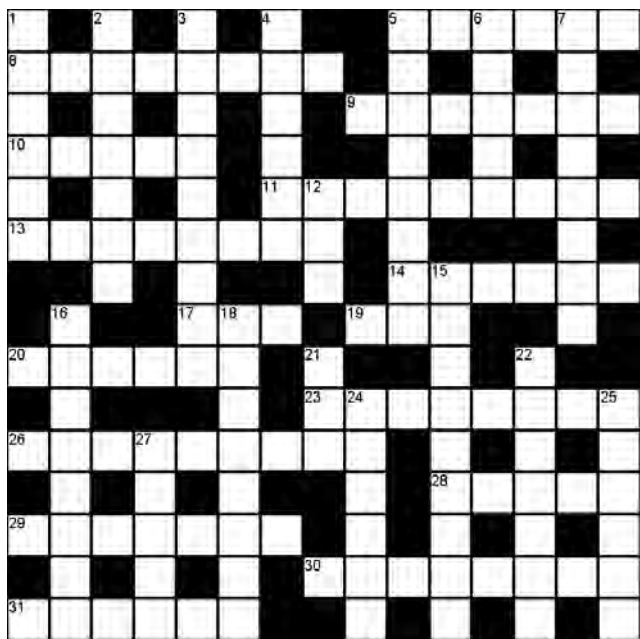
1. Stop supporting people of violence. Britain, America, and Europe have played an unconscionable role in prolonging the conflict in Syria.
2. End sanctions, which are having a crippling effect on the lives of ordinary people. A doctor said to me in November. “I cannot treat my patients properly. I cannot even give them the medicines they need. It is a crime against human civilisation.”
3. Let the people of Syria decide for themselves their own future. A woman whose home had been destroyed and whose whole family killed by the rebels said to me: “Don’t talk to us about freedom. We’ve had enough of your freedom.”

What I have shared may sound depressing. But actually, amidst it all is hope. Most Syrians are committed to a society where freedom of faith and identity is respected. And the faith of the Christians in Syria – and in Iraq – in the face of so much suffering, and their service to those around them, is a witness and example to us all. Pray for them.

These descendents of those first Christians who experienced the love, the service and the healing of Christ live in constant hope and faith. Like Simeon, who longed for the consolation of God’s people, our fellow Christians long for consolation and are playing a role in offering that consolation to the suffering people amongst whom they live. And in their actions, and in their faith, they are a profound witness to the humility, the love and the presence of God, even amidst such distress.

# CRYPTIC PRIZE CROSSWORD

Nine answers can be found in the words of the Easter hymn 'The Strife is O'er'. Send your entries to the editor at the address on the back page by Friday, 3 August.



- 28 Capital paid for with a coin I picked up (5)  
 29 The sovereign may have a joke in her (70)  
 30 Put down for a bad steed? (8)  
 31 Northern lad is surrounded by water (6)
- 5 Violent display by Tom on a bus tour (8)  
 6 A speedy apodiforme (5)  
 7 The last possible hour (8)  
 12 Review Greek letter (3)  
 15 It gets him to the top (9)  
 16 Get hold of Ray Woods' entrances (8)  
 18 The last ode I rewrote separately (8)  
 21 Brief reckoning (3)  
 22 The dude won but not without a scratch (7)  
 24 Original trick concocted by a moneylender (6)  
 25 See December out and quit (6)  
 27 Near a field of competition (5)

## CLUES DOWN:

## CLUES ACROSS:

- 5 Where the Queen's toys got their pearls? (6)  
 8 Domestics toil when the vans rest (8)  
 9 Press it into lines (7)  
 10 Frequently visit a northern hut (5)  
 11 A clue fits in university departments (9)  
 13 Help a bat to locate letters (8)
- 14 Feels pain at finding skill in a short message service (6)  
 17 Expose gaseous mixture (3)  
 19 Share newspaper catalogue (3)  
 20 Supernatural spirits become quietly worse (6)  
 23 Sion backs up ancient Ethiopia with supports (8)  
 26 No nightmare as a deer slams into a roundabout? (9)

Name .....

Address.....

## Scottish Episcopal Church Mission Association (SECMA)

The next 2 Diocesan events planned are:

Wednesday, 16 May  
 at St Martin's Church,  
 Derby Street, Dundee  
 from 2 p.m. – 4 p.m.

Wednesday, 15 August  
 at St Andrew's Church,  
 Brechin  
 from 10.45 a.m. - 2.15 p.m.

### A MUSICAL AFTERNOON

We shall be entertained by  
 "Total Recall"

This is a group of people with early dementia and their carers, who provide music to enjoy and join in with.

Tea and biscuits will be provided and there will be a Bring & Buy stall to raise money for mission projects.

### A TIME for REFLECTION and QUIET

led by Capt. Stuart Budden  
 Church Army Officer from St Luke's, Dundee

Please bring a packed lunch, but tea and coffee will be provided.

There is no fundraising at this Quiet day.

There is a suitable bus service from Dundee, changing at Forfar – details will be sent out to the Dundee churches nearer the time.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

### Resurrection Rock!

★ a rock musical on the ★  
 ★ Easter Story ★

★ Music workshops for ★  
 ★ young people aged 7 to 12 ★

★ Tuesday 3 to Friday 6 April ★  
 ★ 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. ★

★ Performance on ★  
 ★ Sunday 8 April at 11 a.m. ★

★ St Mary Magdalene's Church ★  
 ★ Dudhope Crescent Road ★  
 ★ DD1 5RR ★

★ For further information or to book a ★  
 ★ place please contact Sally Carus on ★  
 ★ 01382 775448 or ★  
 ★ sallycarus@hotmail.com ★

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★



## ***The cost of dying has outrun the cost of living in recent years***

Since 2004 the cost of dying has risen by 91% and costs are rising by 5% each year. The average cost of dying is £8,342 and the UK Funeral Poverty Debt in 2017 is £1.6million. 49% of people are reckoned to have not made enough provision.

The issue of funeral poverty has become huge and one which many different authorities and agencies are working hard to address.

	BURIAL	CREMATION	AVERAGE
DUNDEE	4,258	3,408	3,833
PERTH	4,155	3,158	3,657
FRIOCKHEIM	3,880	3,408	3,644

Led by Jacky Close of Faith in Community Dundee there has been a Funeral Poverty Action group at work for the last 2 years working in partnership with the churches, Dundee City Council and the Scottish Government.

In partnership with other churches we have produced a leaflet – *Moving on from this world* - which is being circulated in public places to help people discuss what they really need, what they would really like and how you can have a dignified and special send-off without it costing a fortune, before it comes to that dreaded day. (Copies are available from the Rev'd Canon Fay Lamont)

Dundee is committed to taking action on Funeral Poverty and the Diocese of Brechin is signed up to this. Aberdeenshire, Kincardine and Mearns and Perth and Kinross have also signed up to provide dignified funerals with clergy available as desired.

Having employed 2 workers under Stage 1 of the Social Innovation Fund we are now applying for Stage 2 of the Fund which will allow us to pilot a **One-stop shop advice/support brokerage service** to help people deal with the complexities of arranging funerals at an affordable rate. This will be fully supported by Dundee City Council and by Dundee Social Enterprise Network.

Dundee Social Enterprise Network will support this to get started but it will have an independent Board of Trustees once active. We are currently putting together a Board of Trustees and working on the legal aspects of registering with OSCR, etc.

Credit Unions are being encouraged to build and offer a Funeral Package to help people plan for the eventuality. The Discovery Credit Union are working with a grant they receive from Dundee City Council and will possibly develop a new package offering a lowcost loan to help cover funeral expenditure.

This is a very serious issue in our society so please think about it and spread the word.

---

---

## **RSCM Scotland Triennial Festival**

This is RSCM Scotland's glorious, three-yearly festival of praise. It will be celebrated in St Andrew's Cathedral, Nethergate, Dundee, DD1 4EA on Saturday, 2 June, and this is the first time it has been held in Dundee.

We are hoping to gather together a large choir and, for those who want to join in this, the singing rehearsal will start at 12.45 p.m. Registration is from 12 noon. There will be a short break (with refreshments) before the service itself at 4 p.m.

The service will be inspiring and will include some well known hymns. If you don't want to be in the choir everyone is welcome to join the congregation for the event. Bishop Stephen Robson will preside and preach.

The music will be led by Matthew Beetschen, who is Music Director at Dunfermline Abbey. Music will be taken from 'King of

Glory, King of Peace' (published by RSCM).

For those who would like to attend an extra rehearsal in advance of the event, these will be arranged in various locations, probably Glasgow, Edinburgh and the central belt (as well as in Dundee).

The cost of the music book is £5.25 for RSCM members (or £6.50 for non-members). This book contains a wide selection of hymns, songs and choral items (including 'extras' that will not be used at this service). You keep your music book after the service and will find it a treasure store for use on many occasions.

In addition to purchasing a music book, choir participants will be charged an entry fee of £3.

Under 18s are welcome to join the choir, but must be under the supervision of a responsible adult at all times.

The RSCM is a charity committed particularly to promoting the study, practice and improvement of music in Christian worship. It is an open, life-long learning organisation, offering face-to-face and distance education and training through its programmes, published resources, courses and activities. For more information, or to find out about membership, visit [www.rscm.com](http://www.rscm.com).

For further details, information about local area rehearsals, or if you wish to obtain a copy of the music book in advance of the event, contact:

[nicola@rscmscotland.org](mailto:nicola@rscmscotland.org).

It would help our planning if choirs registered in advance – please contact Nicola if you are organising for a group to attend.

We look forward to seeing you.

*Sally Carus*

---

# The Problem of Theism

I once sought to amuse an American bishop by suggesting facetiously that I was suffering from PTSD (Post-Theism Distress Syndrome)!

The reality, though, is hardly amusing, at least to my mind, for as I see it, Theism is no laughing matter.

## Theism Defined

According to *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, the term 'Theism', which is derived from the Greek word for 'God', arose originally to provide an opposite to 'atheism'. Only later did this title come to denote a specific theology in its own right.

The theology so embraced upholds the notion of a Creator Who intervenes in the world and, according to primitive scriptural narrative, has such human qualities as anger, jealousy and a capacity for revenge — see Psalm 7:11; Exodus 20:5; Jeremiah 15:15 (preferably in the King James Version) for some typical examples.

During the long historical period that gave us what are now our designated canonical scriptures, such distorted perceptions of the deity gradually evolved into a theology of God that is both more abstract and more compassionate. Thus towards the end of the New Testament, in The First Letter of John, we find two statements that one could really describe as "post-Theist": "God is light" (I John 1:5); and, supremely, "God is love" (I John 4:8,16).

To these references one might appropriately add a statement contributed by Paul Tillich (arguably the greatest theologian of the 20th century): in a famous quotation, Tillich referred to God as "the ground of all being".

Others have likened God to "Light Energy".

## Theism in Religion

Such abstract understandings of God have radical implications for the way we 'do' religion. Progressive Christian theologians have long ceased to believe in an

interventionist God; yet much popular belief seems to assume that God actively intervenes in the affairs of this world and our various prayers and liturgies clearly reflect this assumption.

And not without reason — after all, didn't Jesus urge his listeners to "ask" (Matthew 7:7, Luke 11:9)? And doesn't this imply that God is indeed interventionist — otherwise, who would we be "asking"? In fact, how else could Jesus teach, in what has come down to us as The Lord's Prayer, that we should ask our "Father" to provide us with our "daily bread" (Matthew 6:11; Luke 11:3)?

This is where we must take note of an important distinction that exists between a literalistic and metaphoric interpretation of scripture. While it seems right and proper to assume that what we call 'God' has a capacity and willingness to deal with our necessities, we need to realise that this truth can only be expressed in the form of metaphor. In fact, even the word "God" itself can be no more than a metaphor since it references an identity that is ultimately beyond our comprehension.

In the same way, we can speak of God as "Father" (as Jesus did) without making unwarranted assumptions about the deity's gender!

## Literalising the Metaphors

The problem with Theism is that in this system the metaphors we inevitably use for God have become so literalised.

What this means is that we leave ourselves open to the mistaken belief that we must somehow 'please' God, mainly through dutiful obedience to what are perceived to be His *[sic]* laws and demands.

And this in itself can open a massive can of worms, for so many people are prone to accept the demands of a God they have projected, often through a kind of mass hypnosis. And such a God will often seem to stop at nothing to get His way, even if it leads not

to peace, but a sword (cf. Matthew 10:34).

This kind of acceptance has fuelled many of the religious beliefs of the human race, often with toxic results as, for example, in Northern Ireland, India and, tragically, in the 'Holy Land' itself.

It's my contention that religion will only cease to be a negative force in these situations (and world-wide) when it moves beyond such crowd-inciting belief.

Whenever I refer to this subject, however, I like to impress on people the fact that ceasing to believe in an interventionist God need not suggest that there is no "intervention" — far from it! Indeed, if the metaphysicians are right, we are surrounded by very real angels and guides, and living in the midst of "engineered circumstances".

This reality becomes present for us in the liturgy, always upheld by the glorious (traditional) words of the part of the eucharist known as the *Sursum Corda*:

**Therefore with Angels and Archangels,  
and with all the company of Heaven,  
we laud and magnify  
Thy glorious Name ...**

For me, these exalted words present us with the highpoint of the liturgy.

In fact, do they not convey what we really go to church to acknowledge and proclaim in the first place (with no strings attached)?

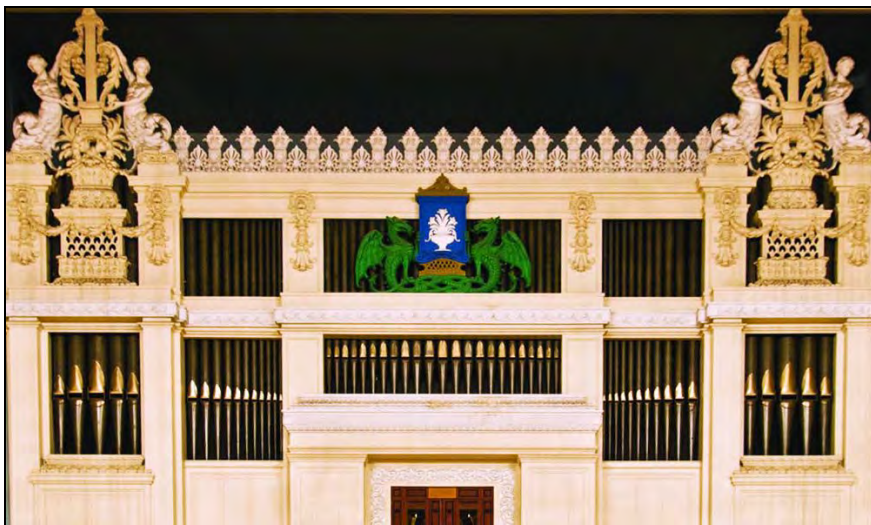
Canon Hugh Magee



# Scottish Federation of Organists Dundee Conference, 4 and 5 May

The annual Conference of the Scottish Federation of Organists will be held in Dundee on the evening of Friday, 4 May and all day on Saturday, 5 May. Sheriff Kevin Veal, (the organist at St Joseph's, Dundee,) who is the current President of the Scottish Federation, says that this Conference is a wonderful opportunity to hear music of the highest possible standard.

Chetham's School of Music and Downing College, Cambridge, Martin Baker thereafter held positions at Westminster and St Paul's Cathedrals in London. At the age of 24, he was appointed to Westminster Abbey, before returning in 2000 to Westminster Cathedral as Master of Music. In addition, he undertakes a busy schedule of concerts, tours, and recordings with the choir, as well



At 7.30 p.m. on the Friday evening, we are delighted that Gordon Stewart, the internationally renowned concert organist and a native of Dundee, will be sharing with the Alba Brass Consort in a concert of Organ and Brass music in St Mary Magdalene's Scottish Episcopal Church in Dundee. Tickets priced at £7 will be available for the general public at the door.

The highlight of the whole weekend will be the Celebrity Recital on the famous Harrison & Harrison organ in the Caird Hall at 2.30 p.m. on the afternoon of Saturday, 5 May. The recitalist is Martin Baker, the Master of Music at Westminster Cathedral, London, who is also the current President of the Royal College of Organists.

Having studied at the Royal Northern College of Music,

as frequently playing solo organ concerts in the United Kingdom and across the globe. This will be a performance of the highest possible calibre and the varied programme will include his improvising on a theme, which he will see for the first time just before he commences to play his improvisation.

Tickets for this concert, priced at £7, with concessions of £3 for students, can be purchased in advance from the Caird Hall Box Office and will be available at the door of the Caird Hall on the actual day.

We hope that many people will join us for one or both of these concerts. You will be most welcome.

*Sally Carus*

*(president of Tayside Organists' Society and leader of junior singers at St Mary Magdalene's Church)*

## Crossword

Drawn by the Diocesan Registrar (so the honesty can't be in question!) the winner of the last edition's Cryptic Crossword is Helen Sandeson of Auchenblae.

Unfortunately there were a couple of incorrect entries. The correct solution was:



## Riddles

A few people sent answers to the five riddles posed. No one got them all right first time.

The correct answers were:

1. The safest room is the third – the starving lions would have died long before the 3 years.
2. Everyone got the answer that the woman was taking and processing a photograph.
3. Again, everyone was correct in saying that coal is black when bought, red when burning and grey when turned to ash.
4. There were a few ingenious answers (and it was consecutive **days** not **dates** that were asked for). The solution I had in mind was "Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and Boxing Day" which avoided using Wednesday, Friday and Sunday.
5. Finally there was only one correct answer sent in to say what was unusual about that paragraph. Quite simply although 'e' is the most commonly used letter in the English language, it didn't appear at all in that paragraph.

No prizes, but hopefully folk enjoyed the challenge.

# David

In the first years of the 16th century the Italian artist Michelangelo sculpted his famous statue of David. This portrays him calmly preparing himself for his approaching fight with Goliath. Michelangelo seems to be asking us to sit and contemplate this 17 foot image of the incredible beauty of David, and through that contemplation of human beauty, which is God's greatest creation, we might come to know God.



One hundred and twenty years later in 1623 Gian Lorenzo Bernini accepted a commission from Cardinal Scipione Borghese, his patron, to sculpt a statue of David to be set in the grounds of his patron's Villa Borghese in Rome. In just 7 months the intricately detailed carving, pictured above, was finished. A realistic David stands life-size at 5 foot 7 inches.

Bernini's is a sculpture unlike any other of this biblical character. He stands alert, his brow creased with concentration. His mouth grimaces as his right arm reaches behind to put a stone in the sling held by his other hand. His deep-set eyes are fixed on the foe that, muscles taut, he stands poised to defeat. Although Goliath is not there as part of the sculpture, we know from the detailed concentration and total posture that he is close in front of David.

At David's feet is the armour he took off and his harp. The armour which King Saul had loaned him would have hampered David. It is depicted with scales

on it, rather like that of a snake – reminiscent of the Serpent in the Garden of Eden. This earthly armour would have encumbered David's ability to win what was a spiritual, as well as a physical, battle.

The harp is an icon for David which reminds us of who he was: a shepherd boy, tending sheep in a pasture, whom God lifted up, just as He had lifted up the nation of Israel. Later on, not only did David calm Saul's mental derangement with the melodies he played on the harp, but he also accompanied the many songs which he composed. David, who had been lifted up by God, lifts up his voice in the psalms and hymns with which he praises God and which tradition ascribe to him in the Book of Psalms.

The heart that sings praises to God is a pure heart, unfettered by anxieties, sins or worldly ambitions; and because David seeks to unite himself entirely to God, he can now completely focus and concentrate all his being on ending the life and threat even of the towering Goliath.

Michelangelo's David had been carved a dozen years before Martin Luther had published his 95 theses questioning some dogmas and practices of the Church. When Bernini made his David the religious landscape was very different – the Reformation with all its sometimes violent controversies was well established and the reaction of the Roman Church strong and aggressive.

Before he had started carving the statue of David Bernini had studied the Biblical passages regarding David and Goliath and one may conjecture that he had in mind, as he set to work, not only the confrontation in ancient Israel but also the conflict of his own day. From his perspective (and doubtless that of his patron) it needed the absolute focus, concentration and determination which is displayed by this sculptured figure in opposing the enemies of his own time, as he would have seen it, so as to defeat them.

We might also take from this remarkable statue the same meaning as a parable in facing the ills we encounter in our present day. Perhaps we can read here a message for the Church when it is tempted to rely on buildings, power structures and dogmatic authority and forget to trust in God's guidance. Perhaps the message is to each of us as we journey and find ourselves battling against the forces of injustice and darkness that seem so powerful. Then, when we feel weak, we must learn to trust in God and have faith that he will be with us, as David is here portrayed in stone which has come alive.

The next issue of **Grapevine** will be coming out for 26 August 2018.

All articles, letters, comments should be with the Editor by 6 August 2018.

Preferably articles should be no longer than 500 words.

The Editor of Grapevine, Beattie Lodge, Laurencekirk, Kincardineshire, AB30 1HJ  
(E-mail: <office@brechin.anglican.org> or <mjrturner@btinternet.com>)