

Blackbraes and Shieldhill
Parish Church
linked with
Muiravonside Parish Church
Summer 2014



Blackbraes and Shieldhill
1864 - 2014

www.bsandm-church.org.uk
Tel 01324 717757
louise.mcclements@virgin.net

**From the Manse
May 2014**



*Then Jesus came to them and said,
'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to
me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the
name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and teaching them everything I have
commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'*
Matthew Ch28, v18-20

Dear friends,

As I write this letter, the General Assembly has started and this afternoon there is a celebratory event organised by the church called 'Heart and Soul' in Princes Street Gardens. Some of our members are attending and it promises to be an afternoon of fun, fellowship, new ideas, inspiration but most importantly hope. Hope for the church now and in the future.

At the moment all we hear in the press and media is that the church is in decline, membership is in decline, finances are in decline. If that's not enough then we hear about a lack of ministers, a lack of people coming forward for ministry, a lack of young people. We are told that within the next decade there will be several hundred churches without a minister. Before long there is a danger that we in the church become like a character we used to laugh at each Hogmanay on TV, none other than the **Rev I.M. Jolly** himself!!!

But when we feel ourselves losing hope, we need to remind ourselves that when Jesus lived on this earth, he lived in one of the most violent and desperate periods in human history. Jesus and his people lived under Roman rule and the Romans were not renowned for their kindness and compassion. Their favourite form of punishment was crucifixion, one of the most cruel forms of torture which ensures a slow and prolonged death. As Jesus walked the streets of Palestine, he came into contact with people who were poor, sick, marginalised, treated as outcasts. With no social services or benefit system many had to beg on the streets. Jesus message of God's love for all enraged those in power and despite Jesus being God in flesh - he only managed to muster up twelve followers together with a few women.

Yet hope was manifested in the simple acts of kindness and compassion which he showed to the leper, the prostitute, the tax-

collector, the outcast, the sick and the bereaved. Wherever Jesus went, he spread God's love, turning darkness into light, despair into hope, fear into joy. Jesus ministered for just three years, and had no wealthy mega church where people, young and old, queued up on a Sunday to get a good seat. That's the world's view of success, not God's....Rather Jesus preached to a few folk who gathered around him on a hill, many of whom he would never see again. He slept under the stars, and ate around a fire. He didn't spend time worrying about numbers and statistics- he just got on with helping folks and telling them that God loved them, and he knew that God would take care of the rest.

When we reflect upon the state of the church today through the eyes of Jesus there is so much hope. Within our own churches we have Amanda our probation minister, and we have the privilege of supervising and equipping Amanda for her own ministry in the fifteen months she is with us. Amanda will leave us at the end of November and she will go out and minister in Jesus name, touching people with his love, bringing hope where there is despair, telling people about God's love for them- is this not something for us to rejoice in?

Should we not rejoice in being able to attend worship on a Sunday without fear of persecution? Should we not rejoice in all the hidden, small, unseen acts of kindness and compassion carried out by our members and elders each week in the name of Jesus Christ? Should we not rejoice in the parents who wish their children to be baptised, the couple who wish a church wedding, the family who want a Christian funeral for their loved one? Should we not rejoice in the young adults and children who come to worship, who enrich us with their presence?

We as a church have so much to rejoice in much of which can never be measured by numbers or statistics. And so in contrast to the Rev I.M. Jolly who preaches his message of doom and gloom- I would challenge the Rev I.M.Jolly by saying '**let us rejoice**' for we have much to celebrate within the church today and there is great hope for the future.

***Have a blessing filled summer,
Your minister and friend,
Louise***

Baptisms

'Whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name, welcomes me.'

Blackbraes and Shieldhill Parish

Amelia Grace Agnes McNelly
daughter of Laura and Gordon McNelly

Ivor James Davidson
son of Ruth and Ross Davidson

Lily Louise Bell
daughter of Karen and Martin Bell

Lucy Christine Davidson Brown
daughter of Nicky and Julie Brown

Muiravonside Parish

Mr Steven Ramage

Funerals

'The Lord will protect you as you come and go, both now and forevermore'.

Blackbraes and Shieldhill Parish

Mrs Janet Davidson

Mrs Mary McLeod

Muiravonside Parish

Mr Robert Jack
and Mrs Helen Jack

Mrs Margaret Gray

Mr Scott Harrower

Mrs Helen Burden

Weddings

'Meanwhile these three remain - faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.'

Blackbraes and Shieldhill Parish

Cheryl White and Derek Sheppard
on the 18th of April 2014

Tea, coffee and a chat are always available in the hall after services. Please stay if you can.



Muiravonside Parish Church Shoe Box Ministry

Rita Braes and Moira Sharp are going to fill shoe boxes for the Blytheswood Trust. As this is our first time we are aiming for twenty boxes. Each box should contain woollen hat, scarf and gloves, toothbrush tooth paste, personal toiletries and for children a little toy or book and pencils.

We would anticipate 5 adult gents, 5 adult female, 5 boys and 5 girls. If you wish to donate please advise Rita or Moira.

We are also looking for shoe boxes and oddments of Christmas paper so next time you purchase your Jimmy Choos, Christian Louboutin or Manolo Blahnik shoes, please keep the boxes and hand them to either of us.

**Thanks
Moira and Rita**

**The Big
Night Out
The Three
Kings
7 November
Tickets
available
soon**

I would like to thank all members of the congregation who sent me the lovely cards on my recent stay in hospital, and also Louise, Amanda and the members who visited me in hospital.

I would also like to say thank you to the church for the lovely flowers I received on returning home.

All your good wishes and kind thoughts are very much appreciated.

Helen McKinnon



South Africa Link

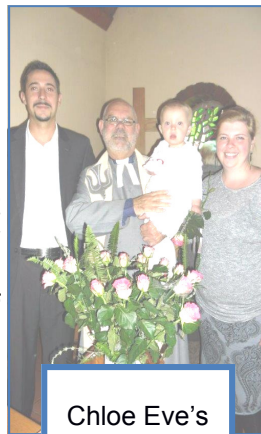


Dear Friends,

A great deal has happened since we last wrote. The most significant thing was the long expected death of Nelson Mandela. The nation was well prepared and celebrated this exceptional and distinguished life with a quiet yet joyful sense of gratitude to God. Graham was interviewed by a national newspaper, the *Mail and Guardian*, and was able to make his own tribute. Memorial services were held all over the country. Just before this we were reminded that we live in Africa. You may remember that Graham was preparing to go and lecture in one of our linked colleges in Cameroon. He had to cancel because some of the documentation from the Cameroonian side did not arrive in time. When he went to collect his passport afterwards the visa was waiting for him signed by the Consul General who had recognised him from his photograph as 'his minister at church'! That cost the faculty a cancelled flight ticket! However, the Dean says he may go this year.

As Christmas approached, so did celebrations. On Saturday 30 November we had a congregational lunch at our Highveld congregation, and the same evening a dinner to celebrate the Dean of Faculty's sixtieth Birthday. The next morning we had our Christmas lunch at St Andrew's with our choir in good voice. Graham celebrated communion in a service into which the lunch was also integrated. As usual, Graham acted as Dean of Faculty over Christmas. We had one of our extraordinary professors in Church Law, Mark Hill from London, with us over the holiday period. We were able to have a week's holiday at a game reserve on the border of Botswana. Then it was back to work to prepare for the first year students' orientation programme which Graham heads up.

In February, Graham was reappointed minister at Highveld for another year and we are now preparing for our autumn congregational lunch. As you will see there is a great sense of congregational solidarity in this small congregation. In the midst of all of this, Sandra has continued busy with proof-reading and preparing for and hosting guests. Our son, David and Chris



Chloe Eve's baptism at Highveld

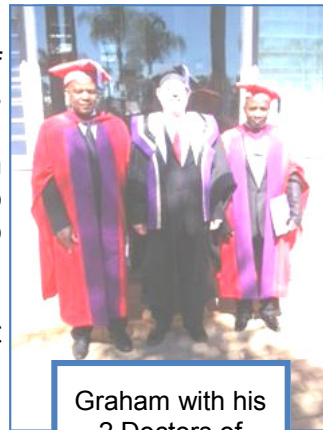
visited us for the rest of January with four friends – hectic to say the least, including a trip to Cape Town to stay with our friend of many years, Prof Thembeke Ntusi, who is nearing the end of her training to become an Anglican deacon in her retirement.

Joyce and Dougie Bell, from the Alva congregation in Stirling Presbytery, arrived at the end of March, along with one of our Zambian ministers, Godfrey Msiska, who is studying for his doctorate with Graham. Then Peter and Pat Bell (going back to our Aberdeen College of Education days in 1967) arrived. We spent a restful week with them in the Drakensberg mountains and were reminded constantly of the beauty of God's creation. They were with us at church on Palm Sunday and joined us that same afternoon for a performance of Handel's *Messiah*, a very fitting approach to Holy Week.

Graham took Easter weekend off and we travelled south to the coast at Plettenberg Bay with friends, Neil the church organist at St Andrew's and Chris, the choirmaster. Neil's mother hosted us for a week. Easter Day was spent with the Anglicans as Graham has a contact with the priest there, Mark Marais. Again we were mesmerised by the beauty of the Garden Route.

In the meantime, our General Secretary and President of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, Prof Jerry Pillay has been appointed as Presbyterian lecturer in the Church History department from September. Graham has been appointed to take responsibility for the preparations to celebrate the faculty's centenary in 2017.

Last week, we had one of our largest graduation ceremonies ever. Among ten doctors, Graham promoted two: Sifiso Mpofo (Zimbabwe) and Julio Vilanculos (Mozambique). He also had seven Honours graduates, three of whom gained distinctions. One of our doctoral graduates was 85 years old, so it is never too late...!



Graham with his 2 Doctors of Philosophy: Sifiso Mpofo (Zimbabwe) and Julio Vilanculos (Mozambique)



Drew's
view

Well Worth the Journey

I know I must be in a minority of practically one, but I love visiting the dentist!

At this moment, you're probably thinking, "Oh, no!"

Or more specifically, "Arrrrgh!"

Or maybe something stronger!

But every six months, when the long awaited day comes around, I relish the trip. Whilst everyone around me is probably putting the visit off as long as possible, I boldly go in with a skip in my step. I have often theorised about where this fearlessness comes from. Give me a dentist's chair and I'll gladly sit there for hours, daydreaming and idly thinking about what I'll have for tea while the drill shrieks like a banshee and rattles away.

I don't, however possess the same "John Wayne" sense of bravado when it comes to hospitals. I dread going for appointments which involve any kind of medical procedure being carried out! Even something as simple as sticking out my tongue and saying "Ahhhhh!" always seems to backfire and the word that does eventually come out, sounds more like a strangled form of "Arrrrgh!"

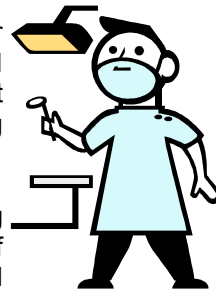
I have a theory though about why I feel so comfortable about visiting the dentist. I had a very good one! I was also lucky enough to have the same dentist for more than thirty years, right from early childhood until well into adulthood. He was a kindly, avuncular man and as a child, the trip every six months to see him turned into an adventure. I was fascinated by the large chair and the fact that when he pressed some sort of hidden pedal, it could go up and down as if by magic! It was like visiting the funfair for free!

Soon it came to the stage when my baby teeth were being taken out and he used to call them "The Wee Nuisances."

"We'll soon have The Wee Nuisances out!" he would say with an air of confidence that was infectious. This was good news for me, not because my teeth were especially sore, but for the wonderful reason that I knew when they were placed under my pillow that evening, money would magically appear overnight. So as far as I was concerned, he could take out all "The Wee Nuisances" that he wanted!

But even more exciting was the day I visited my trusty dentist and went into orbit! On that particular visit, my dentist announced he was going to give me something really magical called laughing gas! Even as a child, I had seen some those old comedy movies where people would roll about the floor laughing after being exposed to seemingly just a few whiffs of this magical stuff. I couldn't wait to try it out and I imagined that soon both the dentist and I would be rolling about the floor, laughing our heads off whilst taking turns to breathe in this great substance.

The mask looked really cool - just like the ones that fighter pilots in World War Two movies used to wear. Eagerly, I breathed in large gulps of the stuff. What happened next was that I didn't burst out laughing. Instead, something amazing happened.



The dental surgery faded away and suddenly I was looking down at the Earth. It was just like how you would see it if you were in an orbiting spacecraft. I could see the land which was a green and sometimes dusty brown colour. It was covered here and there with armadas of clouds, as well as vivid blue seas. What really struck me though was how bright it was. The colours were so vibrant and there was a beauty that was just breathtaking. If you were an adult it would bring tears to your eyes. As a child I simply kept saying, "Wow!" Even though I was so young, I knew I was looking down on something very special and I would never see such beauty again.

All too quickly, the vision of the Earth faded away and gradually I heard a very patient and gentle voice urging me to wake up. I was back in the dentist's chair again and he laughed as he told me that "The Wee Nuisances" were now away, but as each one was being taken out, he heard me repeatedly mumbling something which sounded like "Wow!" I told him what I saw and he said, "Ah yes, that would be the gas. It gives you very good dreams!"

Looking back on all this as an adult, I knew of course that it was all a dream. At the time, the Apollo space program had been running and as a little boy, I watched the broadcasts avidly. The Apollo 11 spaceship had been orbiting the Earth that very day, just before reaching the point where it would leave Earth's orbit and head for its historic landing on the moon. I had probably been thinking about that at the time.

I never thought much more about this until about twenty years later. One of the astronauts, who took part in the Apollo Program, was being interviewed about his experiences. The interviewer happened to ask him what the highlight of his epic trip was. He immediately replied how he loved looking at

the Earth and described how awesomely bright it was, as well as how he was totally moved by its beauty. I stopped in my tracks and looked at the tv astounded. It was just as how I'd seen it.

I wondered then if for a few moments anyway, the Apollo 11 spaceship all those years ago, had an eight year old stowaway on board!

I continued to visit my dentist for the next twenty years. He was so good at his job and made anyone who visited him feel at ease. On one visit, he told me he was going to move to Edinburgh to set up a large practice there. He thanked me for all the times I'd gone to see him. He also looked really sad that he wouldn't see all his patients here in Falkirk who had become friends. Without any hesitation I said I would travel to Edinburgh to visit him, if he would have me as a patient. He looked astonished and really moved. I went on to tell him that even if he had decided to set up practice in Millport, I would simply travel there every six months and have a wee holiday as well!

The reason of course that I would go to such lengths, was I had great faith in him as a dentist and knew I was going to see one of the best. As a result, it was well worth the journey. It got me thinking as well that in order to see a very special person, no journey would be too long.

I often think about people in the Bible who travelled to see Jesus when he preached on this Earth and wondered what was the farthest someone travelled to see him? There are people who must have walked for days on end just to catch a glimpse of him. News would have spread that there was this man. A very special man. A man like no other they had met before who could perform miracles and heal the sick. Not only that, he spoke with such wisdom and was a friend to people that no one loved - the poor, the sick, the outcasts – people with no hope.

Just to talk to him, to touch him, could change a life forever. Who wouldn't want to go and see a man like this?

The best documented long distance visitors who came to see Jesus visited him as an infant and were of course the Three Wise Men or Magi. Scholars have been debating about the issue of how far they travelled for a long time. The consensus is that with them "Coming from the East," that they may have travelled all the way from Persia, or what is known nowadays as Iran - a distance of approximately 850 miles. There is also speculation they could have come from Arabia, Babylon or even India.

There are so many other people though that saw Jesus as he preached during his Ministry. The poorest would have walked along miles of dusty road. Their excitement in going to see this most special of men would make their weary footsteps seem so much lighter. They would also have been

blessed by a tremendous feeling that something absolutely remarkable was going to take place. Imagine how they felt as they turned a corner, already able to hear the excited murmur of voices. Then their journey would come to an end and there was Jesus walking amongst the crowds, talking to them. They would witness him gently touching a blind man who could then see. Another time they would observe him healing a lame man who could immediately walk. A woman timidly touching his cloak would be freed from years of suffering.

All people who had been forgotten and shunned by their society.

It must have been so wonderful and well worth the journey.

National Stewardship Programme

Here are the latest free will offerings for Blackbraes and Shieldhill Parish Church:

	2013	2014
Jan	£1313	£1380
Feb	£1575	£1472
Mar	£1802	£1928

Ministries and Mission for 2014 is £1694.50 per month.

Christine Jones



Website

Our magazines are now available on our website www.bsandm-church.org.uk. If anyone would prefer to access them this way, instead of paper format, please let your Church Elder know.

As well as saving paper, and trees, an advantage of using the internet is that you would receive the magazine in colour. It could also be enlarged if you need to see it in large print.

65 Years as a Member of a Gospel Male Voice Choir

During this time, I was a member of three male voice choirs. I am still a member of two of these choirs, The McRoberts Male Voice Choir and The West of Scotland Male Voice Choir. My other choir was the Ballymena Male Voice Choir, of which I was a foundation member.

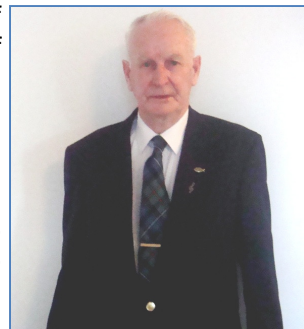
It was founded in 1949 by Walter Leetch, who had just become the manager of the Ulster Bank before coming to Ballymena. He was the conductor of the Dublin YMCA Male Voice Choir. Walter was not only a great conductor, but he was a great composer of gospel music. His music is sung by male voice choirs all over the world. I loved my time in the choir. We sang regularly at Male Voice Festivals and also in nursing homes, hospitals and various gospel missions.

I was very sad to have to give up the choir, as I was moving to Scotland in 1967. Once in Lenzie, I went to the Gospel Male Voice Festival in Glasgow. I spoke to the conductor of the McRoberts Male Voice Choir. When I told how I had been a member of the Ballymena Gospel Male Voice Choir, I was invited to join their choir. After many years, I am still in the choir and enjoying the fellowship that being a member brings. The set up was different from Ballymena, in that the choir met in the homes of the members. Each choir practice was started by the member of whose home we were visiting, passing on a word from the Bible.

This is followed by a time of prayer, normally lasting about an hour. All members participate in this time of prayer. This is followed by a time of practice. We are given supper by our hostess. When we take on an engagement, our soul aim is to seek to win souls for Christ.

My time in the choir has allowed me to sing in England, Scotland, Wales, N.Ireland and Southern Ireland. I have been privileged to sing in St David's Home in Cardiff, The Royal Concert Hall in Glasgow, The Town Hall in Bolton, The Water Front Concert Hall in Belfast and St Anne's Church in Dublin. Every piece of music we sing is preceded by a verse or verses of Scripture.

Where permitted, each engagement would include a message from the Bible and a time of keyboard playing by our excellent pianist, Heather. Recently, the choir made 2 CDs - one of the choir and the second made by Heather. These CDs have gone all over the world.



It was our pleasure recently to visit the Haining Home. We had a lovely time there and were well received by the residents who joined with us in singing the old gospel pieces, especially those composed by Moody and Shankey.

The choir was happy to give several copies of the choir CD and also Heather's CD, so that the residents could enjoy the choir and the keyboard playing, long after the choir had gone. The choir was pleased to be invited back by Sandra and look forward to a return visit.

Robert S Thompson.

Spring Harvest – 2014

In April, I took my first ever trip to Spring Harvest. What a fantastic experience it has been!

I set myself the challenge before I went, to return home with the answer to the questions "What is Spring Harvest like?" A question which seems so simple and yet is difficult for people to explain. Yet, when you say you have been, it is the first question everyone asks. And secondly, "Why is it so difficult to describe?" So I want to tell you a little bit about it.

As our little group from Blackbraes & Shieldhill and Muiravonside, we attended a daily morning service and an evening celebration service together. These were absolutely brilliant. To be in a big top tent, with thousands of people, in itself is something very special to witness and be part of. In our group, we met up throughout the days and ate together. A great time to discuss what we had seen and heard. Apart from this, and importantly, we each did our own things that we wanted to do, whether that was alone or in smaller groups or altogether. The atmosphere is so relaxed and you are never alone or lonely.

When we first arrived, I got a programme planner to see all the activities and events which were happening. The planner listed what was on, when, where it was and what each item was about. There were multiple events on at the same time in the various locations. It's kind of like a school timetable, except there are no bad subjects or teachers which you desperately want to avoid! I then chose what I most wanted to do. It really was that simple. Every event was recorded, so I got CD versions of seminars I wanted to attend but couldn't because I was away doing something else. I felt like I missed nothing! And I spent time in the prayer house which was a very spiritual and uplifting experience. This was open throughout the day for anyone to pop in.

The whole Spring Harvest break is as busy as you want to make it. You could be on the go all day, moving from one event to another. However you can take a much slower approach and choose to do much less. Personally I chose a few things that I wanted to do, but I also enjoyed some time to myself for reflection on what I had heard and just to relax from the stresses of my busy life back home. With CD's readily available you certainly don't miss out.

I mustn't forget the Butlins site itself too, with an Ice Cream parlour which we just had to go to! Well I did ... with Alice and Alastairwho I found out was my dad – hope that's not a secret father! This parenting bit is not true, but this is one of the many silly stories I could tell you about.

My experience was incredible. The seminars and events I chose to go to, were personal to me and I gained so much from them. The daily morning service and evening celebrations were fantastic. My faith developed and grew in ways I never imagined possible. The fun I had with everyone else who went, and the funny stories and memories I now have, I will treasure for always. There are so many highlights I could write much more and then more again – but then those who know me, know I like to talk.

So with this small insight into my experience, I have tried to answer my original questions, but as I do I smile. Why is Spring Harvest so difficult to describe? I think the reason it is hard to describe is because everyone will have a different experience and journey. No two accounts of the activities people do at Spring Harvest would be the same.

And finally, what is Spring Harvest like? Spring Harvest is a celebration of



faith, thought-provoking, educational, comforting, joyful, and above all great fun! I would encourage anyone who has ever thought of going or is considering it now, to sign up for next year.

Go on!!

By Nicola Hay

The Banner Group

For a change from the usual Garden News, I thought that, as new banners have appeared in both churches, some news from the Banner Group would be a welcome change.

A few years ago Janet Hunter had a twinkling of an idea. She thought that a banner would be a good thing to create. Time passed.

Lorna Coulter is our church representative on the presbyterial council and, as a result, a group of us-including Janet-attend some of the council's events. These events are held in different churches within the district and it just so happened that some of these churches have banners. Just like Topsy, the idea grew and within both churches a buzz became a rumbling and a Banner Group meeting was arranged. We met for the first time on Friday 23 August 2013. Ladies from both churches attended. We bought a book and Louise put us in touch with a lady from St Helens Church, Bonnybridge who came to one of our early meetings and spoke to us about banner making. She also brought some of the banners that had been made by members of her own church

During the General Assembly 2013, Lorna and I attended Heart and Soul that is held in Princes Street Gardens on the first Sunday of The Assembly. Some ladies from a Dunfermline Church had a stall there. On their stall they had prayer blankets. These blankets can be knitted or crocheted and are usually worked in double knitting-wool. They use a three stitch pattern-this represents The Trinity and this is the pattern on their paper pattern-Lorna and I both have a copy that can be photocopied. Knitters are of course free to choose another stitch pattern if they wish. The blankets are given to people who are in need of a cuddle and would be comforted by a prayer.

Lorna and I were fired up by this idea and we told our friends in the Banner Group about these blankets. The knitters and crocheters leapt into action and soon we had quite a supply of blankets. Other people heard about this. We were given wool, people out with the Banner Group, out with the two churches, knitted shawls. We are humbled by the joy our shawls give. The love of Jesus is woven into the fibers of this blanket and His warmth is wrapped around the needy person. To date, we have delivered over 100 prayer shawls. They have gone to England, Northern Ireland, Canada and Israel

Whilst at The Guild Gathering in the Caird Hall in Dundee, 2013, Lorna, Janet and I saw a presentation by ladies from Dunfermline about prayer shawls. They had a variety of different sized shawls on show. Some were small squares in blue and green. These they give to members of the forces.

They can put them under their helmets. We now knit knee shawls and tiny shawls for premature babies. These wee shawls are great for new knitters and crocheters to practice on.

We also knit wee jumpers for The Chip Shop children. Chip Shop Children- their mothers wrap them in paper to keep them warm.

Alice had a pattern that she shared and soon the first bag of thirty jumpers was ready to be delivered the The Blytheswood Trust van.

Busy knitters like knitting these jumpers. They are small enough to be knitted in a night and are great for using up small amounts of wool. Once again, people out with our church membership knit these jumpers and give us wool. Recently I wrote a small thank you note to one of Nan Morton's friends. This lady has provided wool very regularly - in fact the sparks are flashing off the ends of Nan's knitting needles as she turns this wool into wee jumpers.

Janey is Alice's sister and she is a regular at the Banner Group. Janey works at The Falkirk Food Bank and so is our contact for there. She also has a contact in the baby unit at Forth Valley Hospital. You may have guessed-we knit for them too- baby jackets and hats. Tiny jackets, hats and bootees have been passed on to Janey's friend Once more, 100 or more small things have been knitted by members of the group-and others. They have also received a few small shawls knitted and Nora's crocheted ones.



I just do not know how far into the district this crafting has stretched because so much wool and knitting is done by friends and acquaintances and by folk who have heard about us.

Then a pattern turned up-from Alice I think -for a beany hat for the homeless people. Again this project uses up small amounts of wool and the scope is there to knit pretty ones for the homeless ladies-some hats have been knitted.

Both churches have cross-stitch pictures that were embroidered by Mary and Nicola from Muiravonside church- both banner group members.

The banners form the core of our Friday group meetings and both churches got an Easter banner. The in thing just now is "up cycling" and up cycled our banners most certainly are. We relied on discarded curtains for the background to the present banners. The Shieldhill one has a thin, well-washed blanket giving the banner weight and is lined with curtain lining that had come to the end of its days at a window. We are new to banner making

and learn something new with each new banner. They will be executed more skillfully each new one that we create.



Last August I did not dream how our craft group would flourish and just how far its fingers would spread. All of these knitted things that are happily given to those who have a need-the desire to comfort-to love.

The Banner Group meets on a Friday afternoon, 2pm to 4pm, in Shieldhill Church Hall. There is coffee and tea and cakes as well as lively chat and much laughter. If you wish you can bring knitting, crocheting or needle work. The opportunity is there to learn a new skill and make new friends.

All are welcome in this place - as that well loved hymn says.

This prayer shawl ministry stretches out with the church walls; taking the word of Jesus into the community.

Eco Congregations

Some people took part in the RSPB Big Garden Bird Count during the last weekend of January. People took part in this count all over the country and the results are in. You can get more details from their web site: rspb.org.uk.

1. House Sparrow
2. Blue Tit
3. Starling
4. Blackbird
5. Wood pigeon
6. Chaffinch
7. Goldfinch
8. Great Tit
9. Collared Dove
10. Robin

If you enjoyed counting the birds that weekend the British Trust for Ornithology organise a garden bird count every week-from Sunday to Saturday. Their results are slightly different to those of the RSPB as they look at the whole over a longer period of time. They issue a list for each season and so the Spring and Summer ones show the summer visitors.

A Trip to Peterhead

Recently, I had the pleasure of visiting one of my favourite childhood places in the blustery north east of Scotland, Peterhead. Today it was very different from the bustling fishing town I had known. Although there was a busy central town square, many of the surrounding shops were empty. Many buildings had a tired look. As I wandered along the High Street, even some of the conversations sounded strange but I was still able to enjoy a coffee and a tasty buttery in a local café. In a side street the colourful window display in the craft shop was inviting. I stepped inside. A contented baby girl lay sleeping in her pram near the counter and a family pet in a basket lifted his head and looked before resuming his position with his paw over his nose. It was a delight to hear the “Buchan Claik” as was spoken by the owner. The Doric was still alive. I was inspired and had taken a step back in time.

After tea in a local church, I attended the Male Voice Praise Festival. Seventy men from along the Moray Coast with a contingent from Glasgow joined to present an evening of praise. The commitment and enthusiasm of the choir men, conductors and the two accompanists were plain for all to see. The fun, fellowship and banter throughout the performance were captivating.

Just before the offering, a short unassuming lady rose from a seat and made her way to the front. She wore blue Jeans and a paler blue T- shirt with the bold words “ Street Pastor “ on the back. As she climbed the steps to the pulpit, the chair person announced that she would give a short talk. She must have had to stand on a step to give her talk because she could hardly be seen over the top of the pulpit. In a quiet voice, she began. She had noted several incidents at the weekends in her hometown and decided that the problems had to be tackled. As she continued, a hush came over the company. The audience hung on her every word as they listened intently. She believed that she had been called to do this special task and God walked with her as she patrolled the Peterhead streets on Saturday evenings.

She explained that she had trained in Aberdeen before beginning her work in November 2013. She did not criticise people but was only too happy to care, listen, talk and offer practical assistance to those she met in the Peterhead streets on Saturday evenings. Street Pastor Projects in some areas have led to a decrease in crime and she was pleased that they seemed to be making a difference in her hometown. Since the pastors in Peterhead could only man the streets on Saturday evenings, she was praying that more volunteers would come forward so that Friday evenings could be included. After she had finished, the offering raised the generous sum of £969 pounds which would help to fund a minibus for their work.

Her parting words were. “ We identified a need in our community. As Christians we are working together to bring care and comfort to the people we meet. God has a job for us all. Go to it.”

I really enjoyed the visit to Peterhead despite all the changes. The bonus was that the weather was excellent. Perhaps I should visit the town again before too long!

Lorna Coulter

Poetry Corner

Summer Joy

Singing songs of praise
Under summer skies.
Marvelling at God’s love
Meeting in his presence.
Enjoying wonderful fellowship
Rejoicing that He is with us.

Join us as we give thanks to
Our Lord who loves you all.
You will always be welcome.

By Drew Robertson

Make your Voice Heard

The Church is urging all members to oppose plans by the Scottish Parliament to scrap a legal obligation on local authorities to have religious representatives on education committees.

At present each local authority has 3 religious representatives on its education committees with full voting rights. The Presbytery nominates the

Church of Scotland representative to the Council. This entitlement comes from the time when the Church gave its schools to the State under the 1872 Education (Scotland) Act. Church reformers in the 19th Century had a passion for education as they believed it gave people the tools by which they could understand and improve themselves. It also meant they could better understand the bible teaching and this was such a key element of the reformed tradition in Scotland.

However now a private members Bill before the Parliament is seeking to remove that right because in the words of the independent MSP John Finnie who is promoting the Bill local authorities need to become more accountable and transparent to the electorate. The proposals have been backed by the Edinburgh Secular Society which has lodged a petition seeking the removal of any Church input in the education committees. This is however a very narrow and outdated view of what democratic decision-making is all about.

I would encourage you to write to your MSP either by letter or e-mail asking them to indicate how they may vote and asking them to oppose the proposal.

David McClements

A short sample letter follows which can be adapted by you:-

Dear (MSP),

I am a member of the Church of Scotland and am concerned to note that a private members Bill is to be introduced seeking to remove Church representatives from education committees.

I do not support such a proposal and would ask you to oppose such a change if it is introduced to the Parliament. Religious education and awareness is an important part of the curriculum and it is important in curriculum decision – making that the input from church and religious bodies is maintained. It is also very much part of our especially Scottish education system so it is important that this remains the case.

It is not undemocratic as some may say because these church representatives sit on these committees as members of their community having been nominated from their respective church bodies.

Please take my view as one of your constituents into account as you make your decision on this very important issue.

Yours faithfully