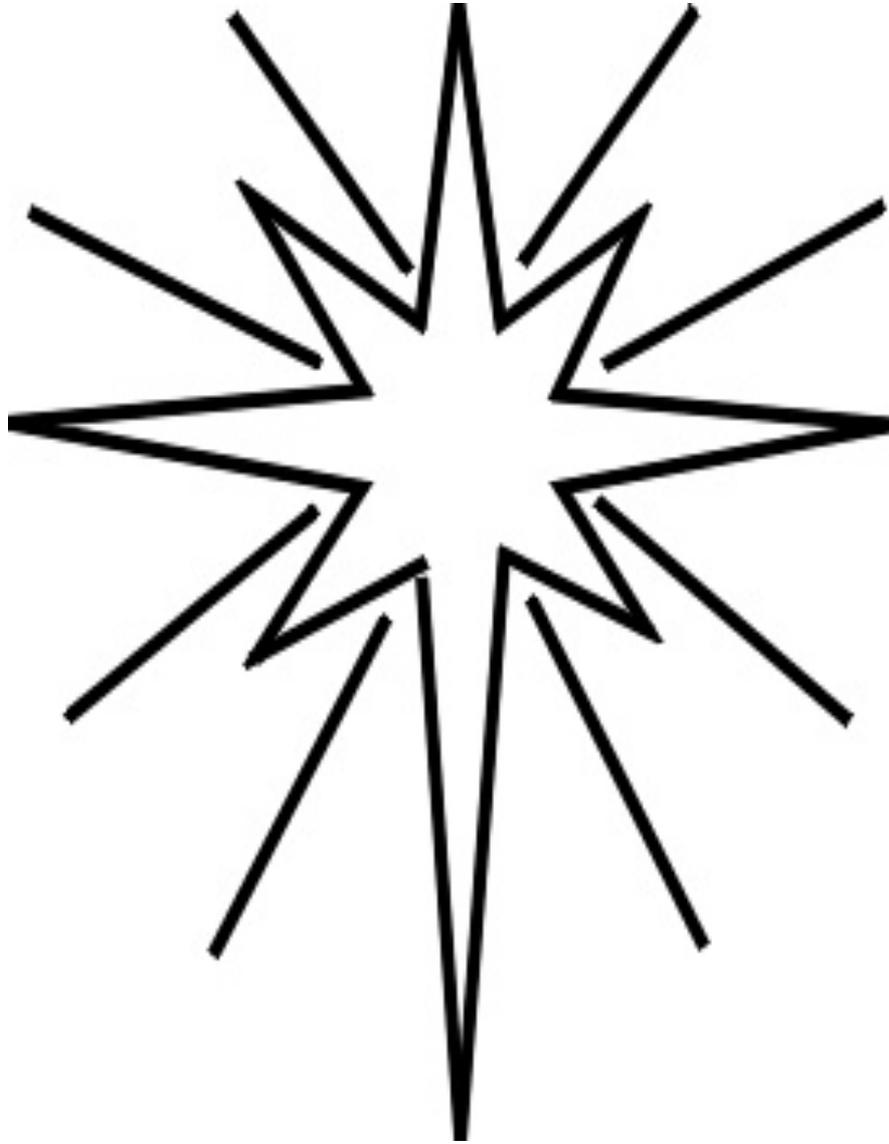


Clachan Church Newsletter



Christmas
2017

Message from our Minister

How quickly a year passes and we now find ourselves in the midst of Advent...the anticipated coming of the Christ and the celebrations of his birth. Already this year I have heard a good number of conversations regarding the detrimental commercialisation marking one of the most amazing days in history. Other conversations have been about the pressures associated with the run up to Christmas...the full calendars, financial woes, family commitments, school and community events and of course church services. For our household the Christmas season is a busy one as you can imagine and it is also a greatly anticipated holiday. We love it...for the fun, for the hospitality, for the family focus, for the reminder that the ultimate gift to creation is Jesus and his name that tells us 'God saves'. It is a time of year when we see the positive side of humanity and realise the potential to love and bless that is in us all.

The longer I minister the more I become aware that Christmas can also be a difficult time for many for various reasons. Christmas can have an intensifying effect on our lives, bringing to the surface both the joy and the pain. Highlighting for us the blessings and loss that surround us. I wonder if the same is true of our Heavenly Father? At the onset of advent I take time to still myself before the busy season. The years have taught me to be intentional about how I engage with the season. Not so many years ago I found that I did not really enjoy a particular Christmas season. It felt long and busy and remarkably devoid of joy and peace, at least within me it seemed. In the days following Christmas I became aware that despite ministering throughout the season I somehow managed to fail to celebrate Christmas. So now before the 'madness' begins I sit down and reflect upon the sort of Christmas I would like to have. To pray and ask the Lord to bring to mind the things that should matter, to add some perspective, that I might not get lost or lose focus on what matters. It is after all to be a joyous season celebrating God coming to live among us. That is truly amazing.

John the Baptist was part of the advent of Jesus' incarnation, but before John there was Isaiah who gave us some insight of what and who was to come...
Isaiah 9.6 ⁶ *For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.*

Isaiah 7.14 ¹⁴ Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

We see through these familiar verses that Jesus is the 'Prince of Peace' and 'Immanuel', which means God with us. His gift of salvation is one of peace and presence, available to all who but ask and call upon him. So perhaps it would be of benefit to ask what sort of Christmas season you would like to have this year? Take some time to reflect upon what truly matters and why we celebrate being sure to include Jesus, inquiring of him how he would best like you to mark his birth.

Our wish for you from the manse is that this Christmas season may be a blessing to you and yours and that you may all know His peace and His presence throughout the Advent and Christmas season.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

Rev Andrew Kuzma and family

Mwende`s reflections on Kenya – third time round.

I've had the great privilege of having been to Chuka three times now!! The traditional Kenyan welcome was as boisterous as ever - loving and open. In Chuka, we (the "Msungu"), were in the minority, and the small children are all still fascinated by our white skin – always touching our arms and hands, and at trying to gently scrape and look for dark skin underneath.

They have a swimming pool in the village now, not luxurious like ours here, but still a delight to Viktoria and I, on a much needed rest day near the end of our stay.

I was delighted to find the children in the church school (Ndangani Children`s centre), much more healthy looking now than the first time I was there first in 2013. What money we send really has made a difference there.

Now I'll explain, in Uist I am Donna. In Chuka people in the village previously called me "Ida`s white daughter", because they had seen me around so often with my "Kenyan family". On this twinning trip the JKMC congregation gave me an African name. I became known as Donna Mwende (the one who is loved, and to be loved.)!!

We missed Wilson so much, but we planted fruit trees there in his memory. And, yes, the animals are still AMAZING. *Donna x*

Tarbert Evening 17th November 2017.

In October 2106, representatives of Lewis and Uist presbyteries agreed to the Tarbert Declaration which states:

The presbyteries of Lewis and Uist undertake to strengthen the fellowship between both presbyteries and to develop opportunities between the two presbyteries and work together in common areas of interest, utilising the skills present in both presbyteries.

This was signed in December 2016. Rev. Ishie MacDonald was tasked with arranging an event in Harris to further the existing accord that this declaration initiated. It was agreed that a praise evening would be held in Tarbert.

On Friday 17th, a group from the Uist churches set off for Tarbert. We were joined on the evening by people from congregations in Lewis and Harris.

Rev David Donaldson began the evening by welcoming everyone and reminding us that the late Wilson McKinlay was instrumental in launching this initiative, and that fellowship could only ever be beneficial to all involved. He asked God's blessing on the evening and following grace we enjoyed a wonderful buffet supper prepared and served by the ladies of Tarbert congregation. Everything was delicious and we owe them a huge thank you.

The evening then continued with bible readings by Drew and Ishie and Donnie led the praise. We sang a variety of traditional, well known and new hymns and psalms. Donnie and Drew led the singing on guitars and Cajon, accompanied by Fiona and Marion from Tarbert on keyboard and precenting. Everyone was certainly in good voice.

Rev. Ben Johnstone led us in prayer, remembering the McKinlay family, and seeking God's blessing on all our endeavours.

The intention is to meet once or twice per year with a clear focus on fellowship and spiritual nourishment. I enjoyed very much meeting with old, and making some new friends.

Rev Ishie MacDonald closed proceedings with prayer and the benediction, and we all departed to our various hosts.

We hope to get together next year in Uist and will let everyone know what our plans are as they evolve.

Sincere thanks to all who were involved or contributed in any way to this significant event.

Tina Wakeling.

Purple Club

We have a new group started meeting together this year in our churches. The Purple Club is the result of a need which I've been aware of for quite some time.

Having lost my own husband seven years ago, I became all too aware of the sadness and `gap` which we carry thereafter.

Regular ministry involves conducting regular funerals. However, personal experience makes one aware of the way in which, after losing someone, life just `carries on`. It has to, of course, but there are so many issues to be resolved and `lived with` thereafter. Not everyone left on their own, has the support of close family on a day to day basis.

So we meet now to share conversations, experiences, and helpful ideas. The Purple Club are all ladies who have dealt with, or encountered the `everyday` issues. They now support those most recently bereaved, and vice versa. We're all different, all with different ways, but that is what makes our group helpful and interesting, and hopefully supportive of each other.

Purple is often called the `new black` in fashion terms. We don't all wear that colour but we face life, as we carry our `gap`. We look back and remember, and look forward with hope. We are glad that we can "bear each other's burdens", and lighten the load when we do it together, and encourage others also.

Although there are dozens of `Purple club eligible` ladies, between our two congregations, the gatherings are mostly in single figures, because everyone has different commitments of home and family, and a smaller group enables better conversation. We have met three times since this autumn, and each has been special – meaningful, and useful. Purple club plans to meet every couple of months or so. Gatherings are usually in one or other church halls for now, on a Thursday at 12 m.d., but may move to people's homes at times if that feels right. We usually chat before having bowl of soup, and a snack. This month we've been invited to Pat Holtham's for Christmas lunch.

If you would like to come along each time, or on an occasion, please contact me, or anyone who may already be coming, and lifts can be shared.

Several men have asked me about starting a similar group for them, and this is something which I think might be possible in the future – do keep talking to me about it.

Peace and blessings to you all for this Christmas,

Rev. Ishie Macdonald .OLM

Have you ever wondered why God allows bad things to happen?

Years ago, when I was a church elder in Germany, our minister asked me if I would be willing to deliver a sermon at one of the next Sunday services. She took me completely by surprise, and without even thinking, still stunned, I replied I would. Like many people, I have had to walk through a few dark valleys in my life, and beside my faith in our Lord, it has always been Psalm 23 which kept me going over the years. It therefore seemed almost natural to ask our minister if I could speak about Psalm 23. Luckily, she agreed!

Later, alone in my study, it hit home. Not that I couldn't talk in front of other people, but what on earth would I say? Would I be able to do what a minister does before the congregation? And did people expect that from me at all? I sat down at my desk, staring at an empty sheet of paper. After taking a deep breath, I closed my eyes and prayed. And then, all of a sudden, I grabbed a pen and started writing...

A shepherd had been looking after his sheep for many years. There was always enough to eat for them... well, most of the time anyway, and from time to time they would move a mile or two to another place with ample grass. Winter could be hard at times with lots of snow and low temperatures, and the sun didn't seem to have too much mercy in summer either, but the sheep trusted their shepherd - he would make sure that they would be safe and as comfortable as possible.

One day in spring, the shepherd started shifting the sheep again. There was still plenty grass to feed them for a good while and the weather was pretty pleasant as well, so the older animals looked at each other in disbelief, but eventually they began to move. Surely their shepherd knew what he was doing.

It didn't take long when they reached the foot of a mountain which formed part of a mountain range. Especially to the younger sheep, these mountains seemed like a huge wall. Can you imagine their puzzled looks when the shepherd told them to follow him uphill? It was only a small path, and the sheep were rather reluctant to move.

But what choice did they really have? So, they went after their shepherd. It got colder the higher they climbed and, even worse, there wasn't as much grass as in the green valley they had left behind a few hours ago. Some of the sheep started worrying about their food supply and, because there wasn't any grass

on the rocky path, some sharp stones cut and hurt their feet. And still, the only way was up.

At this point, the younger sheep asked their parents desperately “How far do we have to go? When will we reach?” But the parents, of course, didn’t know themselves. Therefore, they just kept bleating “Soon.” The young ones quickly started to cry, and the older sheep who had never had to go through anything like this before became fearful and angry at the same time. It didn’t take long and there was only one question: “Why?” Why did they have to suffer like this? Or, to be more precise, why did their shepherd make them suffer?

There was no answer. None of the sheep had an answer and had you been there, you would have probably felt really sorry for the poor sheep.

When they had almost reached the summit, the shepherd allowed them a short rest. The oldest sheep took this opportunity, turned towards the others and said “Our situation is getting desperate, and I mean REALLY desperate. However, while I cannot tell you the intentions of our shepherd, I do know that he has always cared about us. I trust him, and so should all of you.” At this stage, the sheep were too exhausted to start arguing, they seemed resigned to their fate.

Soon after, the shepherd started moving again and finally... the path began to lead downhill. At last!! The young sheep who had appeared so tired a wee while ago started to run and jump, almost boisterous, and even overtook the shepherd. This fresh spirit soon grabbed hold of the older animals and they all started running downhill. And when they eventually reached the sunny valley on the other side of the mountain range they could not believe what they saw: Pastures greener and lusher than anything they had ever put their hooves on before. Fresh, clear water in abundance. And bright and warm sunshine that made them feel cosy and energetic at the same time.

They lacked nothing for the rest of their lives.

This is the story I received following my prayer and which I passed on to the congregation that Sunday morning many years ago. Yes, for my sermon I did add some personal experiences afterwards, some thoughts I had on Psalm 23. But it seems to have been the powerful story about the shepherd and his sheep that made members of our congregation get up that day and come to the altar where we simply hugged each other without saying anything.

I do not know why bad things happen. Like the sheep, I cannot see beyond the mountains in front of me. But I firmly trust that our Lord loves us and cares about us like nobody else and that there will be peace and eternal goodness waiting for us behind those mountains!

*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters.
He restores my soul.
He leads me in paths of righteousness
for his name's sake.
Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*

Volker Labitzke

What a Waste (from the autumn Tearfund prayer diary)

All around the world Christians pray “Give us today our daily bread” yet while we pray, a third of the all the food produced is never eaten. Lift up those people whose prayer for daily bread takes on a literal meaning as they struggle to feed their families. This wasteful grow and throw cycle has a devastating carbon footprint, making climate change worse and leading to more extreme weather such as floods and droughts. This makes it harder for people in poverty to feed themselves. As you say grace today, thank God for his provision and pray for people impacted by climate change.

When Jesus generously fed the crowd of 5,000 the lesson didn't end there. When they had all had enough to eat, Jesus said to his disciples, “Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted” – John 6:12. The leftovers were a vital part of the story. Reflect on this and consider how all of us can work to gather the pieces and ensure nothing is wasted.

Thirty per cent of vegetable crops are not harvested due to their failure to meet retailers' exacting cosmetic standards. Our supermarkets have a role to play in reducing food waste as they influence the food chain from farm to fork. Pray for supermarkets to make wise decisions to consider how they will halve their food waste by 2030.

Ask God to give you wisdom on how you can avoid buying more than you need, reduce the amount that goes into landfill and share tips with others.

A prayer from Latin America:-

“O God, for those who have hunger, give bread, and to those of us who have bread, give a hunger for justice, Amen”.

Scottish Bible Society

In mid-October we enjoyed a vintage coffee morning in aid of one of the many projects supported by the Scottish Bible Society. The amount raised was in excess of £600 and this was sent to the SCB to be distributed to help those in the Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan.

Thanks to all who came along to the coffee morning and supported in any way – the baking/ confectionery superb; from setting the tables in the morning to sweeping up at the end of the day a good team effort.

*Taken from the Scottish Bible Society leaflet - Read & Pray around the World:
The Scottish Bible Society seeks, under God, to put the Bible into people's hands and hearts. We work so that all people can have the Bible in a language they understand, a form that they can access and at an affordable price, to aid genuine encounters with God.*

Our vision is to see individuals, communities and cultures transformed as people encounter God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) in the Bible.

Christmas Anagrams

Can you solve these anagrams of Christmas Carols?

LARGE HANDWRITING SHELTER

SHINGLE TINT

DEFILES SAD TIE

SWEET GHERKIN

WE JOLT TO HYDRO

WEARY MAN AGAIN

EFFECTUALLY HAIL MOO

HI INTERLINKED WEB MAT

HELP AUTHENTICATING DORM MICE

Church Office Bearers

Minister:

Rev Drew Kuzma

Ordained Local Minister (OLM):

Rev Ishie Macdonald.

Elders serving on the Kirk Session:

Alastair Banks (Session Clerk); Donnie Johnson; Alasdair MacDonald; Roddy Macleod; Peter Matheson; Robin Wallace; Colin Rankin; John MacDonald; Tina Wakeling and Sarah Banks.

Elder retired from the Kirk Session:

John Macdonald (Sidinish).

Members of the Congregational Board:

Flora Matheson; Katherine Macleod; Donalda Haxby; Charlie Matheson; Alistair MacQuarrie; Margaret MacDonald; Anne Quarm; Christine Marshall and Ruth Owenson.

Sunday School Superintendent and Church Safeguarding Officer:

Karen Maclain

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Session Clerk, Alastair Banks: 01876580219 banks@madasafish.com

Benbecula linked with Carinish Church of Scotland

We wish you and yours a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year! May the joy, peace and presence of Christ be with you this festive season.

Benbecula Parish Services – Griminish

Dec 17 – Family Service 11am

Dec. 24 – Morning Service 11am

Watchnight Service 11.15pm

Dec. 25 – Christmas Day Service 11am

Community Carol Service

Dec. 17 – Balivanich School 6pm

Carinish Parish Services – Clachan

Dec 17 – Family Service 11am

Dec. 24 – Morning Service 11am

Watchnight Service 11.30pm

Dec. 25 – Christmas Day Service 11am

Benbecula Church of Scotland – Scottish Charity no. SC002191

Carinish Church of Scotland - Scottish charity no. SC016461