

# Park Pages

the magazine of Uddingston: Park United Free Church of Scotland



## Pastoral Letter

Summer 2020

Dear Friends,

*"Most of us like to make plans, whether it be as mundane as to what we are going to have for our tea tonight, right through to plans for holidays, retirement or even our death! We have our holiday plans for the coming year....and yet even already, for a number of reasons, some of them are up in the air. For instance, who of us would want to visit northern Italy if the coronavirus outbreak in that part of the country cannot be contained? One might come back from holiday with more than a suntan!"*

So began my pastoral letter for March 2020. Few of us then were expecting the seismic changes and shock that our country, and the bulk of the western world, have been through since then. New words and phrases have appeared in our vocabulary such as Lockdown, social distancing, self-isolating and PPE. It is not likely they will disappear anytime soon.



In one sense, there have been benefits from all that has happened. The air is a lot clearer and cleaner as pollution levels have dramatically dropped. We have got a taste, or certainly a smell, for how things could be if car and plane usage decreased. Many of us have appreciated the season of Spring in a way that, in normal busy days, we haven't. Blessed with good weather, we have been able to exercise more and for those of us with gardens, we have been able to work in them and enjoy them more. Quality family time spent with our children, or with our partners, has been invaluable. Time has been available to take stock of what our priorities are and what really is important in life. Living in leafy and roomy Douglas Gardens has its advantages!



Of course, that has not been the case for us all or for everyone within the wider society. For those working within our NHS, or providing our vital public services from light and gas to dustbin collection, or for the many in food retail, the lockdown has been a time of increased workload and pressure. The general public has not always been as appreciative as it should have been. For many on furlough, the very real prospect of unemployment lies before them. What appeared to initially draw us together as a nation, has revealed the already pre-existent social, economic and environmental divisions that exist within wider society. Even within our own community, there have been cases of very real and practical needs but thankfully these have been met in new and innovative ways. Under the pressure of the enforced quarantine, other serious health and social issues have occurred. There were those who almost religiously followed the guidelines and rarely ventured out, and those who took a more *liberal* approach to them....differences and potential areas for division have been created.



Prior to the advent of lockdown, both governments in Edinburgh and London made some attempt to consider the costs and benefits of such a policy. However, medical, scientific and political pressure for “something to be done” meant that such a process of reflection was curtailed. Now we are discovering that getting into lockdown was easier than getting out of it. The social, economic and educational impacts are now being realised. At the time, STAY AT HOME, PROTECT THE NHS, SAVE LIVES was the mantra which ALL of us sheltered behind.

If only the future challenges could so easily be explained to an increasingly sceptical and wearied public. Sudden responses to needs may appear to meet the circumstances of the time but can lead to even more problems later on.

How we need to heed the apostle Paul’s exhortation that:

“...petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people—for kings and those in authority that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.” 1 Timothy 2 v 1, 2

The Church of Jesus Christ has not been exempt from the problems that covid-19, and our response to it, has caused. While some pre-empted the government by effectively locking down their churches and worshipping life a fortnight before the restrictions were brought in, others of us felt that the churches should have argued far more forcefully for the right to be allowed to remain open for private prayer during the whole of this period. Within our congregation, those of us who have accessed Zoom on a Sunday morning have found the experience helpful and encouraging but I am aware of fellow regular worshippers who will not, do not or cannot access it.

Within the United Free Church, the issue of celebrating online communion has led to some quite contentious discussions and resulted in a very helpful but—for the UF—strong statement from the Panel of Doctrine and the Principal Clerks which has instructed all ministers NOT to celebrate it. The main and foundational reasoning behind this ruling is that Holy Communion should be undertaken within a physically corporate Worship and Word based setting. **“When you come together”** as a manifestation of the **“body of Christ”** a profoundly spiritual and supernatural encounter takes place with the Lord, hence the warning that, **“those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves”**. See 1 Corinthians Ch 11. I will be happy to pass on a copy of the full report if anyone wishes to see it.



At the beginning of this process, I, along with many of my colleagues, sought to work out a Theological and Ecclesiological response to lockdown and its impact on congregational life and witness. Time was not on our side, and I am still working through that. It was for those reasons, and not any phobia about technology per se, that gave me cause for hesitation at the beginning of this journey. In many ways, those hesitations remain with me.

I would not want to take away from the benefits of being able to “virtually” meet together. I know it has been a spiritual lifeline for many. It has allowed Karen to continue to nurture the spiritual life of our church families as well as engage with some others that we have connections with. We thank Karen and her team who run Park Kids. Others, outwith our immediate church fellowship, have accessed the spoken Word and have benefitted from that. Our managers are busy securing fast and secure internet access for the church buildings to allow us to undertake live streaming of services and events, as well as continuing a Zoom ministry, from the Sanctuary. This will allow those who may have to continue in lockdown longer, the ability to meet in a corporate but socially distanced way.

Our Fellowship and Prayer Groups have continued. Some more successfully than others. While not all have found this easy, others have been able to access them more readily than before. Karen has been able to restart her Younger Women in the Word group. Connect continues on a Monday evening and the young people who access that find it very helpful. We thank Karen, Elizabeth, Gregor and James who lead this. This is all very encouraging. In an era where social distancing was already a reality for many who conduct much of their retail and social life online, it is vital, that as a church, we have a quality presence in that domain. We thank Graeme for his leadership of the Zoom service and Gregor for his recording and uploading of the reflection to YouTube. Gregor has also updated the website. All of these ventures I heartily commend.

And yet...?! Whilst being thankful to God for the use of technology that has allowed congregational life to continue during this period, I am not the only Minister of Word and Sacrament who has questions, and yes, concerns, about how church life will be modelled and determined by the present realities. While the issue of celebrating Holy Communion is only one aspect of our life together, it does raise questions within my own mind and heart about what constitutes corporate worship and our calling to:

“...consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. “

Hebrews 10 v 24, 25

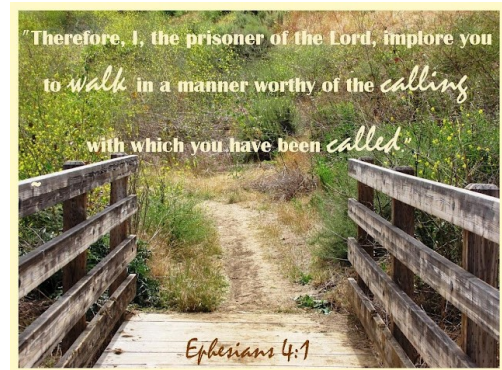


At the beginning of this present lockdown, a good ministerial friend sent me a helpful article entitled, *Are you weeping over our empty churches?* from Reformation Scotland. I would be happy to pass on the details to anyone who wishes. One of its central themes is that in the Old Testament, when the places for corporate worship were “closed”, it was not a sign of the Lord’s favour but of His displeasure with His people. While one can argue that the present health crisis *does* warrant the closure of church buildings for a season, we must guard against a lockdown mentality impacting on how we should understand the corporate and physical importance of gathering publicly together in worship before the Lord, not just on a Sunday, but in particular on that day.

My own conscience would not allow me to see the doors and gates to our Sanctuary closed at Easter, or on a Sunday morning, and as you know, we have ensured that this did not and does not happen. While the God of Heaven and Earth is not restricted by a building or setting, worship of God has continued Sunday by Sunday in our church sanctuary, enabled by the sound of the Praise Gathering choir from previous celebrations. On a few occasions, individuals have come in to pray privately or with myself.

I appreciate that some of us will not really understand why this should have been so important to me. Indeed for others, many of the issues I have sought to explore in this letter might well seem irrelevant in the present setting. Time will tell if that is the case. My deep prayer is that as we move into the next phase of this crisis, as a nation and as a church, we will heed God’s Word to us, given through the apostle Paul in Ephesians Ch 4 v 1-6:

As a prisoner of the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.



We thank [Helen Ooi](#) for her excellent work in keeping us in touch with what is going on within our church and [Ian](#) for his prayer email which helps us focus on prayer points for the week ahead. Details about the church being re-opened for private prayer, then for small gatherings and finally for some form of public worship will be given as and when it is appropriate.

In the meantime, I trust we will all be looking forward to the day when we can identify with the psalmist and say:

I rejoiced with those who said to me,  
Let us go to the house of the Lord. Psalm 122 v 1

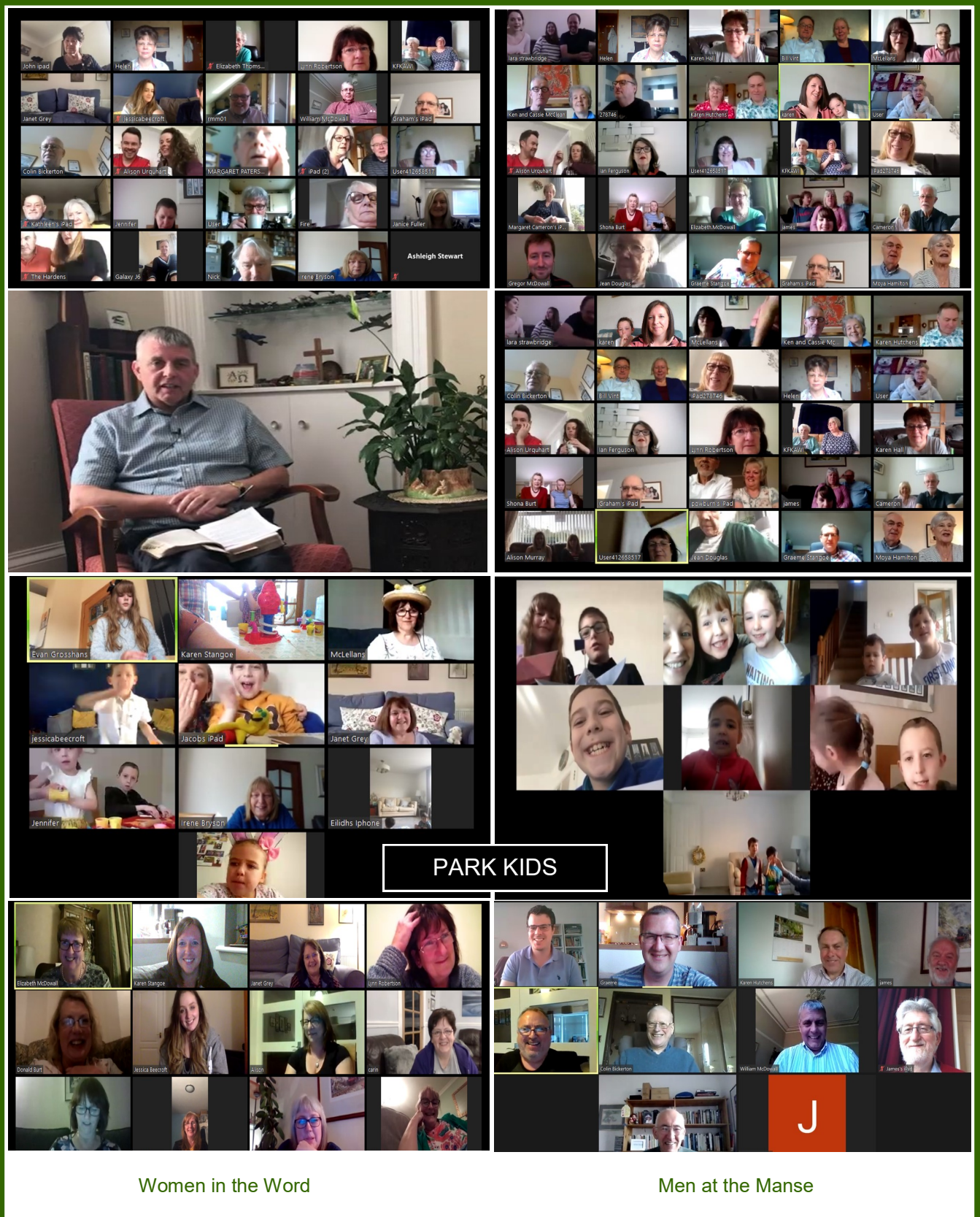
With my love and prayers

Your friend and minister

# Editorial Comment

Helen Ooi

This edition of Park Pages is predominantly dominated by the impact that COVID-19 (coronavirus) has had on our lives since lockdown on 23 March 2020. I make no apology for this as I feel it is important that future generations in our church can learn about how this virus impacted us, both as individuals, and as a church. Thank you to everyone who has contributed. Your stories and insights are important. This pandemic is a vital part of our country's history. On a lighter note, please enjoy these pictures of our weekly Zoom meetings. Most of us had never heard of Zoom until March; now it is part of our everyday lives! How quickly things change!



# Blessed to be a Blessing

Elizabeth McDowall

Over the past few years we have been collecting foodstuffs in the green bin at the front door of the church. Huge thanks to those who have been regularly putting in bags full of tins that will help those in need! At points the bin has been overflowing and bags have been taken in to the Glasgow City Mission, or given out to families in the community. As lockdown started, and knowing the Mission was shut, the bin was emptied and delivered to the four families with children we sponsor to attend SU Holidays. They were gratefully received.

Thanks to the very generous gift of Tesco vouchers from some folks, I have been able to keep visiting and supporting one family in particular who is more in need than the rest. Part of this has involved dropping off a weekly bag of fresh fruit and vegetables, and something for a decent dinner. The family is aware the support comes from the church, and I was texted this message to pass on:

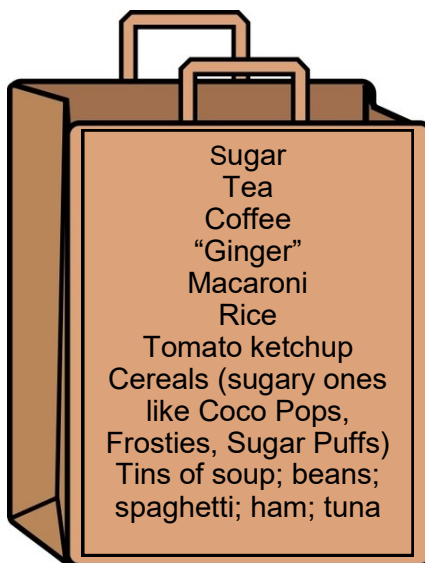
*"Just to say a huge thank you for the help and support, don't know what I'd do without the help."*

Wider needs have become apparent, and along with Karen and Margaret Miller, we have been able to address some of these - again with the generous help of folks at Park. We are aware of the danger of dependency; however, it is a biblical principle that when we have been blessed with so much, it is only right that we should use from our overflow to bless others. For the receiver, just knowing there are people who love and care is hugely transformative - and a visible sign of the overflowing love and grace of God. I now know the family well and see a huge change in terms of welcome, outlook, friendship and openness to God. All signs of God at work.

Some of you have been asking Bruce what to do about the bin, and the Kirk Session decided that donations could still be accepted. If you would like to support this ministry, just gather one or two things from the items listed in the bags below and phone the manse on 01698 817256 or email [eliz\\_mcd@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:eliz_mcd@yahoo.co.uk). We will arrange to have them uplifted if you leave them at your front door.

These are some everyday essentials that would be a great help to a struggling family:

## For the Store Cupboard



## Cleaning Materials and Toiletries



One final thing: if anyone has any fold-up or plastic garden chairs they don't need or want, these would be well received!



**Many thanks again for your generosity.**

Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord, and He will repay Him for his deed.

Proverbs 19 v 17

It is May again, and with it comes the beauty of creation bursting back into life; lighter, warmer days, and an opportunity to pause once again and reflect on what God has been doing in the Children and Families' Ministry in the past year.

Amidst the familiar signs of Spring, we are finishing week eight of lockdown due to the coronavirus pandemic. Schools are closed, my own children are sitting at the dining room table doing their home learning, and there is a stark reality that on looking back, our last year now seems disjointed; we have the 'what was' and the 'what is now'. Yet through it all, God remains steadfast and true; He is at work, and we must pause to give thanks for who He is and all that He is doing.

*Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker; for He is our God and we are the people of His pasture, the flock under His care. Psalm 95 v 6-7*



In August, Park Kids began a series looking at the Armour of God in Ephesians 6. Each week they considered a different piece of the armour and created a life-size Roman soldier, adding each piece of armour as they went. Our soldier stands proudly on the wall in the Park Kids' room under the banner: **Be strong in the Lord and under His mighty power.** It's also been a year of learning for the team, as we've spent time on training, and on exploring new ways of doing things in the hope that we can continue to grow as a team and ensure that Park Kids remains a comfortable space for all of the children to grow in their knowledge and love of God.

For now, Park Kids continues to meet online each Sunday, with all of the regular children being there every week! Meeting in this way has its challenges and restrictions; however, there is a lot to give thanks for. It's heart-warming to see that a number of the children log on early so that they can have some time to chat and to show each other their toys before we get started. We have also had two new children join us online, and we thank God for them, and for the fact that they are beginning to have enough confidence to join in and chat with the others.

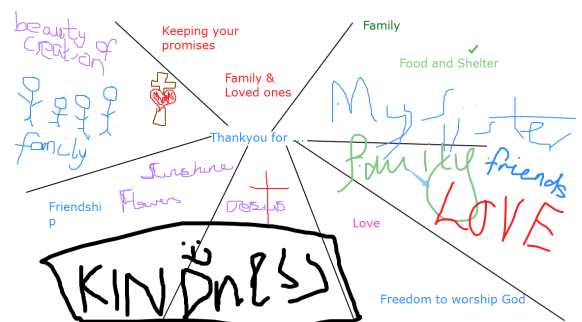


Another huge source of thankfulness is the very obvious bond of love the Park Kids team feel for the children in our congregation; I know so many of you also share that love and miss the children at this time. Praise God for the bonds of love that are rooted in Him and flow out into His family of believers.



In 2019, SU Scotland and the Scottish Bible Society teamed up to produce a new edition of Luke's Gospel and the Book of Acts combined called *Dear Theo*. In August we gifted each of the young people at Connect with one of these and used them for our Bible studies for the first term. We encouraged the young people to read through the book at home as well as bring it to Connect each week. One of the young people enjoyed reading it so much she began taking it to school with her. At least two others read the whole book during that time.

In March, the week before lockdown started, I took a small group of young people from Connect to the SU prayer event, **Encounter**, which we go to annually. Each year I find this trip to be one of the most encouraging and poignant things we do with the young people as God uses it to build them up, to strengthen young faith and to give us opportunities for deeper conversations as we spend the whole day together. This year at the event I saw answered prayer, as I had prayed for an opportunity to speak with one of the young people who has been struggling with doubts but who I believe God is preparing for ministry of some sort. As we ate dinner together at the event, God prompted our conversation and the 14-year-old boy was able to share the heavy weight God has placed on his heart for those who don't yet know God. Please pray that God would strengthen him and equip him for all that He has planned for him. We also saw signs of young people stepping forward in faith, moving away from shared faith with their families to their own living relationship with Jesus.



Since our trip to Encounter, we have moved to having Connect online. Most of the young people continue to meet each Monday night, and we thank God that as time goes on, they are becoming more comfortable with meeting in this way to study the Bible together. Please give thanks for this opportunity, and also pray for those who feel uncomfortable meeting in this way and have stepped back from Connect for the moment. Pray that they would continue to know God's love and His presence at home and that they would continue to grow in Him.



MEGA has seen the biggest change this year (prior to Lockdown) as we recreated its structure, keeping the 'best bits' from what had gone before and merging them with fresh ideas to create something new. In September we launched the new and improved MEGA and as a team were all thrilled with how it went. The new structure provides lots of different activities for the children to do, it caters to the needs of all ages from P1 to P7, and it provides a space for the parents to mingle before collecting the children at the end.

We also praise God for the increased number of children we have seen coming to MEGA this year and the enthusiastic way they have approached it. One child when listening to the Bible story being told, couldn't help but respond out loud by saying, "Wow! That's amazing!"

MEGA was due to meet at the end of May, but that cannot happen as we had originally planned it. However, God has provided us with such a creative and innovative team that we are going to venture out and try an online version. Children will receive an activity pack in advance and then those who wish to can log on for a shorter, simplified version of MEGA at home. Please join us in praying for MEGA Online on Saturday 30 May.



Until Lockdown began, our schools' ministry continued, with both Muiredge and Uddingston Grammar SU groups meeting weekly. It has been a tough year with the Primary school group; due to low numbers, a couple of 'large characters', as well as a change of location. However, we were meeting with a few enthusiastic P6s and our prayer is that when we return to school next year, we may see them again along with a new group of children who will be moving into P6.

The SU group at Uddingston Grammar, by comparison, has been very encouraging with a good number of first year young people coming along – primarily those who came to SU at Muiredge, along with a few others. This has been an amazing opportunity to develop relationships and to build upon their Bible knowledge for the third year in a row. God also provided an amazing opportunity for two of the S3 young people to share their testimonies with the group. It was encouraging to hear one tell of how God met him in a dream and called him to follow; and the other to testify that she used to hate God, but through reading the Bible has come to love Him and follow Him like the Apostle Paul. Praise God for the way He works in people's lives and for the opportunities He gives to speak of His great work.



In January, I was involved in heading up a Parenting Course called Parentalk, as part of the Cinnamon group, made up of members from the local churches. Numerically, the course was poorly attended, particularly given the research it was based on and the warm way it had been received by key figures in the community. In reflection we have key questions to ask as to why, and how we could have done things differently; sadly we have not yet had the opportunity to do this due to Lockdown. Although the course did not reach as many as we would have liked, it was very beneficial for those who did attend, and we did see answered prayer through it. Whilst

small, it was a very warm and welcoming environment for those who came, and it provided a safe space for parents to talk openly and grow together. This even began happening outwith the weekly slot of Parentalk; parents would greet me outside the school and tell me how Parentalk had equipped them to cope in a more productive way with things that had happened during the day.

For now, Parentalk and other plans are on hold, until a time when they are possible again. However, one thing I have been reflecting on, and praying through over the last few weeks, is the incredible opportunity God is giving us to grow in our faith and trust in Him. When all else stops, when distraction and external influences are quiet, what an opportunity we have to fix our eyes on Him, individually and collectively. We cannot meet in person, but praise God He has made it possible for us to continue to meet and to disciple our children and young people online, through this strange season.

## Stories from Lockdown

On 23 March 2020, the UK went into lockdown as Covid-19 began to spread exponentially through the whole country. We listened to daily briefings from the government telling us to **STAY AT HOME, SAVE THE NHS and SAVE LIVES**. We were only to go out for essential shopping or medical supplies and were allowed out once a day to exercise in our local area. Never before had we been subject to such draconian restrictions on our liberty but this was an unknown enemy and we did not have a vaccine or cure. Our only defence was to practise social distancing, to stay two metres apart from anyone we met, and to stay in our own households. Life had changed overnight. Here a few members of the congregation share how they dealt with this new way of living.

### Working through Covid-19

Carol Murray

Covid-19 radically changed my working environment. As a Health Visitor, I went from working in a busy Health Centre within a team of 24, to working on my own from home.

Covid-19 has brought about many changes and challenges for families and staff. The Government guidelines restricted visits by Health Visitors from a minimum of 11 face-to-face visits to two in the first year of a child's life; all other contact was to be made by telephone. This was the first challenge as families change telephone numbers frequently or don't answer unknown numbers. Vulnerable families still required regular support visits and telephone reviews weekly.

Prior to visiting, I phone ahead and screen households for any Covid-19 symptoms; if there are none, I visit, wearing a mask, which caused my glasses to steam up, further impairing my vision, visor, apron and gloves. This made it hard when meeting mums for the first time, with my eyes being the only visible part of my face. I felt rather conspicuous walking the streets of Easterhouse wearing PPE, with my apron flapping in the wind! Families have been very accepting of my PPE and children have not appeared phased by it. Some families though have been afraid to let me into their homes, so contact has been done with social distancing on the doorstep.

I've found it a challenge to stay focused while working from home; supporting families by phone, and dealing with an IT connection that is intermittent and frequently lost. I initially thought of these challenges as negatives but I came to realise that by working from home I was being protected, and my phone and laptop, despite their limitations, enabled me to continue to work and support families.

Meetings which would normally have been face-to-face, changed to telephone conferences or on Microsoft Teams. I am very fortunate that my work colleagues are an amazing, supportive and caring group of people; we created a Whatsapp group named *Hoose Ladies*, which provided a forum to ask questions and discuss problems. I had to be careful when posting messages in the group as the Sunday night Women in the Word bible study has a Whatsapp group called *Manse Hoosgroup!*

I have been encouraged by two verses in Ecclesiastes Chapter 3.

v5: *A time to embrace and a time to refrain*. As a nurse it was hard for me not to be able to provide a comforting touch when clients were upset; this verse reassured me this is only for a time and not forever.

v7: *A time to be silent and a time to speak*. - This highlighted the importance of listening to clients and reminds me to describe the emotion I am trying to convey as facial expressions are covered by a mask.

Whatsapp and Zoom have helped me continue with church services and bible study groups, and to have contact with my family. This has provided me with a degree of normality in everyday life. IT has gone from being the bane of my life to being a key component of working from home, and keeping in touch with my own and my church family. I may have to embrace IT as my new friend!





We are enjoying spending time together as a family and, although we are missing grandparents and our circle of friends, we feel blessed to have technology to be able to keep in regular contact. We celebrated Grampa's birthday via Facetime and we had a cake so our children could blow out the candles. We also celebrated David's 40th birthday. Our friends sent video messages and some even cycled to sing Happy Birthday at the end of our driveway. This lockdown has certainly made us appreciate how talented and thoughtful our friends are.

We have been very careful not to do "home school". We call it home learning because Jacob is very clear that home and school are two very different places. So, we have been learning lots at home using Google Classroom and various online resources. As a teacher, that has been challenging for us! We have had to learn many new skills overnight with limited time and resources. It has been stressful.

One day, I had to walk away and hide away from everyone. I had just had enough! Enough of computers, enough of my kids shouting 'Mum!' for the millionth time and enough of being stuck at home. It all felt stressful, overwhelming and sad. I turned to my Bible, flicking through to read passages I have marked and which bring me comfort and calm. This found me; Philippians 4:6-7



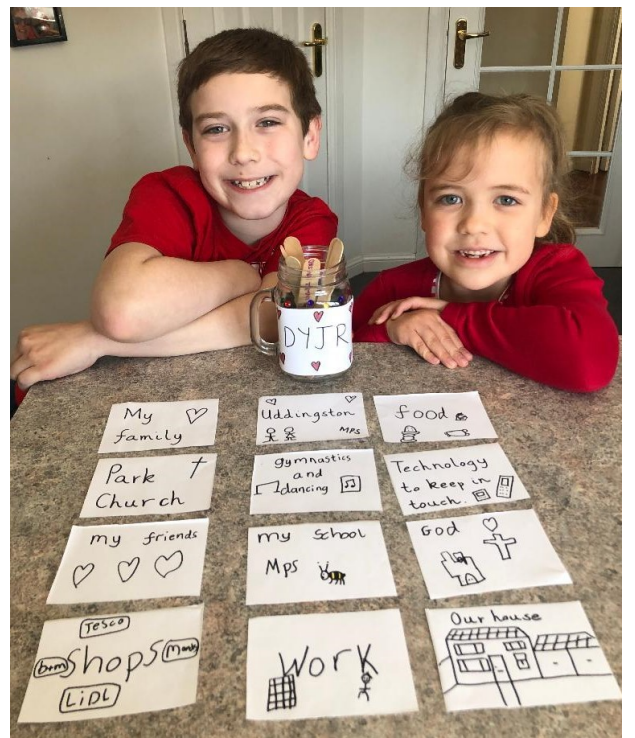
**Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the Peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.**

I just needed to read that; do not be anxious about anything. Back in March, I was worried that my elderly parents were not taking this Covid-19 threat seriously enough but my Dad explained that age, experience and faith just make you accept that all will work out ok. It might not work out exactly how YOU want things to go, but it will all work out according to God's plan.

With this in mind, I have tried to focus on the positives and make sure my children have happy memories of this time rather than remember the scary and sad bits.

We have made a Lockdown 2020 photo album of our memories. Jacob and Rebecca made a prayer jar which contains things they are thankful for. They both wrote church, family, friends and God.

**We are thankful to be part of the Park Church Family and pray we can all worship together again one day in our beautiful building.**



## At Home with the Strawbridges

Janet Strawbridge

Our lockdown started like many others' who will be reading this – a non-hugging Mother's Day; we are very fortunate that we have the majority of our family within walking distance so the garden is proving to be a good meeting place.

We have with great sadness attended two funerals and experienced the awful situation that awaits families at Daldowie Crematorium; no interaction with others, no singing and only being allowed to sit in every third row to allow for social distancing.

Zoom has opened up new opportunities for us and we are very much enjoying the service on a Sunday morning and the recent addition of the Chat Rooms. Some of our friends have also got Zoom which has allowed us to keep in touch.

With family nearby, we have been able to do 'Home Baking Swaps'; it's always nice to get a parcel of goodies on your doorstep. As we didn't have rainbows in our windows, I made Rainbow Eggs – to support the NHS and distributed them to the family.

We have celebrated two birthdays with Zoom chats where we were able to see all the family together which was lovely. Birthday cake was distributed beforehand so we could all sing Happy Birthday and then eat cake together.

John is doing a 'Phone Ministry' with the Glasgow City Mission twice a week; the volunteers have been allocated a certain number of guests to keep in touch with which seems to be working well.

We both enjoy working in the garden and that, coupled with the lovely weather, has been great; we have noticed how quiet and still it is with hardly any noise of traffic or planes flying overhead. Everything is going at a much slower pace and we have all been forced to slow down and given time to reflect. We are venturing out once a week for shopping, and although there is a queuing system to get into the shops, with the two metre social distancing rule, life at a slower pace is giving people time for others.

We were due to go on holiday Saturday 2 May but, given the circumstances, that was cancelled. I'm not sure when, or if, we will return to travel the way we have previously known – only time will tell.

We give thanks and are both very grateful that we are managing to stay healthy; we continue to pray for the day when we will all be able to meet and socialise once more. Until then -

**Be bold, be strong, for the Lord your God is with you. (MP 49)**

## My Life has been turned upside down

May Mitchell

The unfamiliar world in which we find ourselves is very alien to anything we have ever faced in our lives before. Everyone copes differently and some cope better than others. At the beginning, I found the information from the government to be reasonable, although the life I had once enjoyed would be taken away and I would have to get used to the changes. My immediate future was looking quite different.

I tried to have some kind of daily routine but that didn't happen as I received a notification from the government informing me I was classed as a "vulnerable person" and would need to self-isolate for 12 weeks. That was quite a shock to my system and I wondered how I would cope. I then received a letter from the management company of the sheltered housing I live in, notifying me of further limitations to my day-to-day living. By this time, I felt my life was turned upside down and I did not know how I would cope with these unprecedented changes to my circumstances.

My aim now was to keep in touch with the world as best I could. I had a list of people to phone, I used Facetime and it was very comforting to be able to keep in contact via Zoom for our Sunday morning reflections. I also appreciated getting Refresh on a Wednesday via Zoom again; this gives me a bit of normality and I feel in my comfort zone.



My birthday was on Saturday 25 April; this was going to be a strange day and I would not be able to share birthday cake and celebrations with friends as normal. I would be entirely on my own. I knew it would be difficult but I prayed that God would be close to me and that He would ease my anxiety and help me through the day. On the Friday before my birthday, I decided to speak to the person who is my contact during these challenging times. I put my hand out to lift up the phone but it rang before I could reach it. When I answered, the person asked me whether I was OK. I cannot explain how I felt at that moment. The person told me I had come into his mind, and he felt he had to phone me straightaway to see if I was OK. We had a lengthy conversation and when I came off the phone, I felt calmer and less agitated. My birthday was as good as it could be and I spent most of the day taking phone calls from friends; it was very touching to be remembered.

The time is passing. I have lost count of the weeks since 23 March. In fact, I have to check the calendar to see what day of the week it is! Some day it will end but I feel it will be quite a while before we see the light. We have to keep believing that, although we do now know when God will bring it to an end, and although life will change in many ways, God will remain the God we have always known and loved.

## Sewing for the NHS

Having recently retired from the NHS, where I worked as a scientist, and not being able to look after three of my grandchildren, I was at a loose end. I did receive an emergency registration number to return to work, but after discussion with colleagues and prayer, I decided it wasn't what I should do. The work I had been doing in Infertility and Pathology was reduced. My husband is also in the "at risk" group.

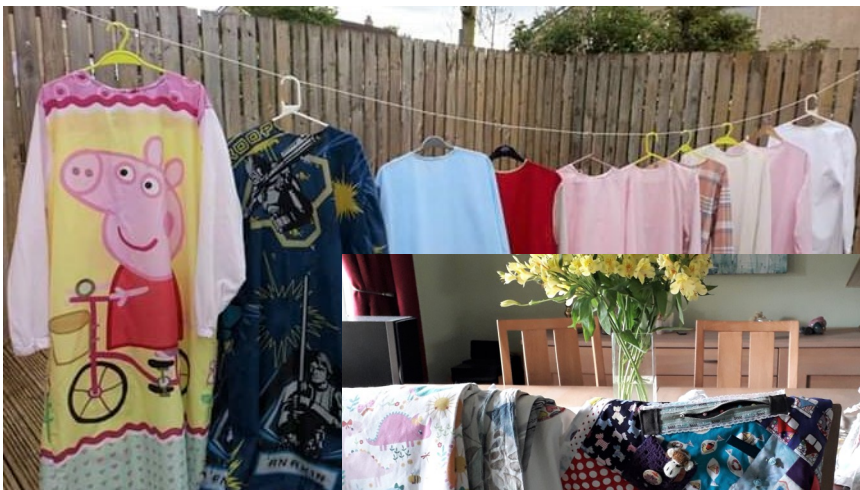
I have always sewed and made quilts for Project Linus and raised funds for Kilbryde Hospice, so I started making scrub bags for nurse friends and ear savers and masks. I found it peaceful to sit and sew, while listening to a Christian radio program, UCB. It helped me focus on what really mattered, and that God is still in control. Ps 46 v10, [Stop your striving and recognise that I am God](#). I have more time for reading the Bible, prayer and keeping a journal. Less hustle, more Jesus. This for me is very apt, and has kept me going. My day is more God-focused.

I came across a Covid-19 sewing response group on Facebook, coordinated by Timea Kelly in Hamilton. The group is supplying Health Centres, Care Homes, and anyone else in need, with gowns, scrubs, masks, bags and also dementia fiddle mats. They bring bin bags with sheets and duvet covers to the door to be sewn into whatever has been requested. The demand is great. They are a very supportive group, and even delivered afternoon tea one day!

I have learned to rest in God every day, no matter how busy I am. Matthew 11 v 30, [Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly](#) (The Message). We can have peace in God's presence in this worrying time.

I can't wait to hug my Mum, kids and grandchildren again!

## Jennifer Harwood



## Living and Working in Splendid Isolation

Colin Bickerton

I arrived home alone from a lovely holiday at Boat of Garten, near Aviemore, with my “significant other” (as Bruce would say) on the evening of 7 March, having dropped Ruth off at her home in Banton. We had made a last-minute change to our holiday plans as the country abroad we were booked to travel to was already a Covid-19 hot spot.



Due to the large number of people I meet on a daily basis at work, in an office which often has over 500 people, we had decided not to risk the possibility of me contracting the virus, passing it on to Ruth who could in turn pass it on to her parents, so had decided to avoid meeting in person until the Covid-19 situation eased. That was ten weeks ago.

Two weeks after my return from holiday, I left work on Friday 20 March with a laptop, keyboard, mouse and headset as I was selected as one of the first batch of our staff to start working from home as the Covid-19 situation here escalated. By this time, British Gas engineers were only visiting our customers’ homes to carry out essential repairs, and it was obvious that life would be different for everybody in the UK and many parts of the world for some time to come. Over the following month, all British Gas office staff began to work from home. Not long after that, the lockdown came into force meaning that we are currently not able to worship together as a family in our church home.

So, what are my thoughts on being at home and not being able to see Ruth at the moment, go to my normal place of work and importantly not being able to meet together as a church family?

- Firstly, blessed that as Ruth and I have got to know each other so well, and that we both have a strong faith, we are able to cope with the situation. We are both praying for people who each other know who have been unwell over these past weeks. Ruth has persuaded me to use WhatsApp for our daily telephone calls so we can see each other. I did get a very short visit from Ruth to deliver some gluten-free cakes she had baked. My neighbours must have found it amusing as we pretended to hug each other from approximately ten feet apart, standing on my driveway. We give thanks to God for bringing us together and for all our “God connections” which some of you will be aware of.
- From a work point of view, I am quite happy working from home. I already have a room in my house which I use as an office; it is much more relaxing, especially of a morning prior to going to work; the noise level in an office of 500 plus people is high and as I live alone, I am accustomed to spending large amounts of time on my own. I am aware that some of my friends and colleagues at work are not comfortable with home working for various reasons. I thank God that both Ruth and I are both still working; we pray for those who have lost their jobs, whose income is reduced and for those who are not included in the various schemes the government has put in place, at huge cost, to help people at this time.
- As a church family, it is great that we can hold a Sunday service on Zoom and I give thanks for Graeme and Gregor for looking after the technical side, also for Helen for all she doing to keep us connected with encouraging emails, prayers, songs and hymns. As we worship on a Sunday morning, I also give thanks Bruce as it must be strange for him preaching to an empty room. How encouraging it is that so many are joining together on a Sunday morning and at other times. I also give thanks for Karen and everyone else involved in continuing to ensure that the youngsters in our care hear about Jesus.

On a personal note many things have not changed; I am still able to walk my dog and it is always nice when we meet people we know when out and about. Possibly like many people at present, my mind is very active with lots of thoughts about many things.

It is good to have an overall picture and understanding of God’s plan of salvation for His people, fulfilled by His Son and our Saviour, Jesus.

To sum up, He gives me contentment in security.



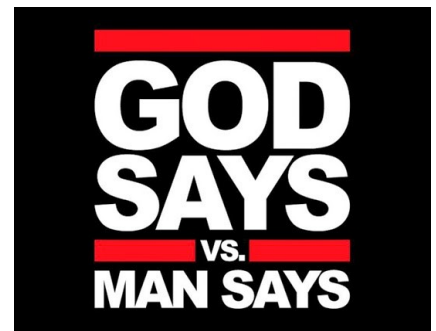
**Don't believe everything you read in the papers, listen to on the radio, watch on television or download from the internet!**



We all use media in one format or another throughout our daily lives. Even as we talk to one another, we are a form of media; the tone of our voice, the expression on our face and our body language all help us to convey the message we want to pass on.

In any form of communication, whether that be news, entertainment, gossip etc there is always an agenda; whether that be a political point of view, a moral opinion, to sell us something or to help people gain control over others for evil reasons, as has so often been brought to our attention over the years. I have an agenda in writing this article.

Over the last couple of decades, with the growth of internet usage, smart phones and social media, we have instant access to 24 hour-a-day news. That can be news from the traditional sources or on social media sites and we must discern what is correct and beneficial. It is easy for someone to pass themselves off as an expert after reading an article on the internet, and then challenge the knowledge of someone who has spent years studying and working in a particular field. In the current Covid-19 crisis we must keep this in mind as we are bombarded with news, figures, opinions and possible solutions to the crisis. Listening or reading the same bad news for hours on end is not good for us.



The Bible is a form of media. It is one of God's methods of communicating with us. In the early days, following creation, God walked in the Garden of Eden, talking to Adam and Eve in the cool of the day. Adam and Eve destroyed the goodness of that creation and their relationship with God by listening to an alternative source of media. The consequence of their actions is that our human bodies will return to dust. Much of what we read, see and hear at the moment in the media ignores this fact and implies that we should live forever, and that we should have total control over everything. By saying this I am not trying to downplay the seriousness of the Covid-19 crisis.

The media will eventually move on from the Covid-19 and focus on another story which becomes more headline-grabbing. We hear little of Brexit, Harry and Meghan, global warming etc at the moment. Both now, and when the media have moved on, many people will be left with broken lives which only Jesus can heal. By focusing on God's media, we can put ourselves in a position to be used by Him in this healing.

Thankfully God has a plan which is much ignored by the mass media. This plan was fulfilled through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross on Good Friday, when He took our sin upon Him, and His rising from the dead on that first Easter Sunday so that those who believe in Him will live eternally with Him in glory. We are often reticent about speaking out about this *Good News* which is available to all.



**Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as He was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?"**

**Genesis 3 v8-9**

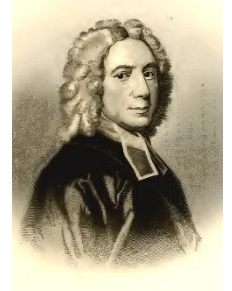
# Come let us sing for joy to the Lord!

The theme of both songs is the same. God is with us in every moment of our lives, the joyous times, but more importantly, when we find ourselves in the storms of life. We can depend on Him and can trust Him with our past, present and future. He has been our refuge from one generation to another and this will not change.



## O God our Help in Ages Past

This hymn is by Isaac Watts who is known as the Father of English Hymnody, writing over 600 hymns in his lifetime. He had demonstrated a poetic ability from a young age and when he expressed his disdain at the psalm tunes sung in his church, his father challenged him to do better! He wrote this hymn in 1714 and included it in his published poetic collection of all 150 psalms in 1719. This hymn, which is a paraphrase of Psalm 90, describes the shortness of the human life and the smallness of human beings compared to the timeless greatness of God. God has been our help in the past and He is our hope for the future.



The hymn delivers a message of assurance, promise and hope. We are reminded in the first verses that whatever our circumstances, God is there in the midst of them as He has been throughout history. He is dependable, trustworthy and sure. God does not stop troubles coming our way, like the coronavirus at present, but He hears our cries for help amidst the “stormy blast” and gives us shelter. Our God is bigger than any storm.

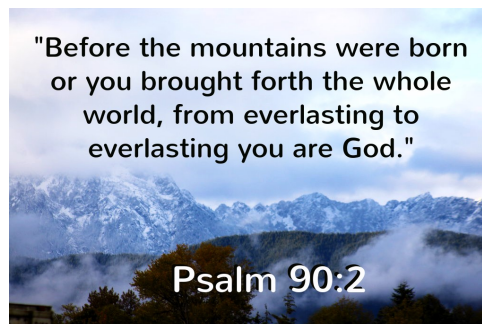
**1 O God our help in ages past,  
Our hope for years to come,  
Our shelter from the stormy blast,  
And our eternal home.**

**2 Beneath the shadows of thy throne,  
Thy saints have dwelt secure,  
Sufficient is thine arm alone,  
And our defence is sure.**

In writing this hymn, Watt reminds his readers that God takes a long view of time while humans get caught up in the here and now and the trials and tribulations facing us today. This reminds us of our society today where the virus has caused fear and panic amongst so many. As we read in 2 Peter 3 v 8,

**With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.**

**3 Before the hills in order stood,  
Or earth received her frame,  
From everlasting thou art God,  
To endless years the same.**



**4 A thousand ages in thy sight  
Are like an evening gone;  
Short as the watch that ends the night  
Before the rising sun.**

**5 Time, like an ever rolling stream  
Bears all its sons away  
They fly, forgotten, as a dream  
Dies at the opening day**

**6 O God our help in ages past,  
Our hope for years to come  
Be thou our guide while troubles last  
And our eternal home.**

This has always been a popular hymn and has been sung at many different occasions. It was the last hymn to be sung at a church service on the Titanic in April 1912 before it sank, it was sung at Winston Churchill's funeral and Bing Crosby included it in his album entitled *Beloved Hymns* in 1951.

To listen to the hymn click [here](#).

## Here with Me

This song was written as a collaboration between Tim Hughes, Phil Wickham and Nick Herbert in 2015. It was inspired by the old hymn *Abide with Me*, especially the last line of that hymn,

### **In life, in death, O Lord , abide with me.**

Tim Hughes is best known by many of us for his song, *Here I am to Worship*, which he wrote when he was worship leader at Holy Trinity Brompton in London. After studying for the ministry, he moved to Birmingham in 2015 to head up an HTB church plant in Gas Street. He faced the challenge of overseeing the renovation and consecration of an old derelict warehouse; St Luke's Gas Street finally opened for worship on 5 February 2016. During this period, when he had left the comfort of his church family and friends in London, and moved his family to Birmingham, he sometimes felt quite overwhelmed, stripped of all his securities, and faced uncertainty and fears. Many times he felt like praying, "God, just be here with me", and so this song was born.

**1 When darkness deepens  
The path unsure  
The sun is hidden by the storms  
I look to heaven  
And cry to thee  
Oh God be here with me**

The first two verses encompass all the uncertainties we might be feeling just now with Covid-19, but they also speak of feelings we experience through many different situations in our lives. Our life journey is filled with both joyful and happy events but at other times we face hardships and sorrows, financial worries, health scares, death of loved ones and we feel totally helpless.

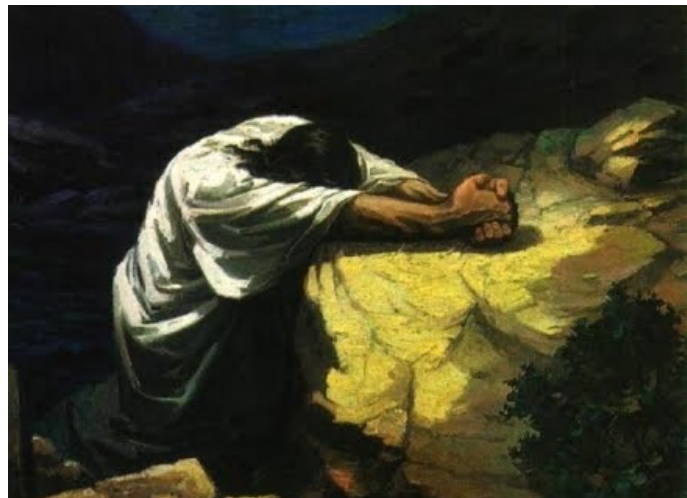
**2 When faith is shaken  
When fears surround  
My feet will stand on solid ground  
In every season  
My song will be  
Oh God be here with me**

Our hope and longing expressed in the chorus of this song is that God would be at our side every step of the way and that He would never leave us. We pray He would be with us right through to eternity.

#### **Chorus**

**In every breath  
Every joy and tear  
Every passing hour  
Let me know You're near  
In life, in death  
For eternity  
Oh God be here with me**

**3 And in that moment  
We're face-to-face  
I will not need these eyes of faith  
Forever after, God I will see  
That You've always been with me  
You've always been with me**



The last verse speaks of that moment when we enter eternity and finally see Jesus face-to-face. We no longer need to rely on our eyes of faith, He is there before us in all His glory. We will look back on all the moments of our life, the times of happiness but also those times of real hardship and sorrow, and realise that God was with us in every single moment.

So let us be encouraged by this song as we face the uncertainty of the future and the implications of living with Covid-19; whatever happens, whatever difficulties and restrictions to normal living we face, God is with us and we should put our faith in Him. He is our rock and we find our security and peace in Him alone.

To listen to the song, click [here](#).



# Closed but still Connected

Two other ministers of the UF Church, Nathan Owens from Kilmaurs in Ayrshire and David Miller from Millerston in Glasgow, share how they have kept their congregations connected during lockdown. They both stepped into the virtual world but took different routes demonstrating that God has opened up many new ways to get the Good News out to the nation during lockdown.

## Eat Pray Love

by Nathan Owens

Let's get the caveats out of the way; issues of long-term isolation, lockdown and changes to society because of COVID-19 are complex. This article does not answer a large majority of them; instead I want to mention a few things we have been grappling with that I hope will encourage you.

We at Maxwell Church in Kilmaurs, and The Tin Kirk (in Ardeer), are trying our best to love and care for each other but some/many of us are struggling in a variety of ways like everyone else, because this is not normal. However, part of our response should actually be to recognise that and respond accordingly. Our response has been to focus on the following triad:

### EAT: PRAY: LOVE

- We want to make sure we are eating, by which we don't mean food, but being fed from the Word, because Jesus is the Bread of Life and His Word is a light to our feet and a lamp to our path.
- We are also exploring ways of praying together and praying for each other.
- Finally, we want to love one another as needed, whether that's picking up a phone or organising for shopping to be done.

In light of the above triad, we've organised a **Pastoral Team** which has the responsibility of contacting the whole church once a week, to see how they're doing and to read and pray with them. We've also organised a **Practical Team** whose job it is to take care of any practical issues like food, medicine or dog walking. We continue to have our midweek **Growth Group** via Zoom, and have found that to be a very encouraging time with new people joining us. We are profoundly aware that the pressures of COVID-19 are making people think about life, death and God so we are running an online **Christianity Explored** course, because why not...?



All of this is great but none of it makes up for what we miss—gathering together in fellowship and relationship. Although around 75% of our church are able to access online materials, 25% cannot. For them we do a mixture of things—pastoral calls, a monthly pastoral letter sent to every household and we also have a dedicated phone line that anyone can phone and hear a recording of the service (which is live streamed on Facebook and YouTube) - no computer needed! Every little helps!

But ultimately we long for fellowship again. And we know this won't last forever. Until then, we remember the words of Paul, reminding us that if we are united to Christ, we are also united to each other, and that whatever situation we find ourselves in, we can have peace.



**Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you. 2 Cor. 13 v 11**



## A Steep Learning Curve

by David Miller

When physical distancing restrictions began to be announced, and it became clear that we were not going to be able to meet in person for the foreseeable future, like many other churches we in Millerston wondered what we should do. I found myself saying, "Thank you, Lord, for the potential of the internet". In particular, I thanked God for the invention of, and for my discovery of, Zoom, an online platform which enables video conferencing and meeting – seeing people face to face, hearing them and connecting together with them.



On the Wednesday of the week that lockdown began, I was blessed to see Zoom in action in two different contexts – one was a prayer course that Jeanette has been involved in, and the other was a commissioning service for friends about to return to engage in mission in Japan that had to be hastily arranged so that they could get a flight out the next day. Zoom seemed to offer the chance for interaction and connection in a way that YouTube or Facebook Live, our other options, didn't, so we opted for Zoom. Over the next few days, we did lots of phoning, emailing and texting people to explain what we were going to try, along with some Zoom practice runs, and by the Sunday we were able to hold our first service, and we've continued to do that.

After a bit of encouragement, even those in our congregation who are nervous about technology, have managed to work out how to connect. I reckon about 75-80% of our members have internet access and by week three of lockdown they were all on board—so we had "herd connectivity". We've also managed to get the members who don't have internet access to connect as well. Some phone in to Zoom (and in fact anybody who has a phone line can connect that way and hear) and with the others we use a kind of relay service, whereby someone who is on Zoom phones the other person and leaves the connection open through the service so they can hear what's going on. It's a bit rough and ready, but it works.



Most people connect in some way most weeks, and our attendances are higher now than before the lockdown. It doesn't always work smoothly and we've learned from our mistakes along the way.

- We sing, but we discovered that the slight time lag between broadcasting the music, and people hearing it, meant that trying to sing together sounded like a drunken rammy! So now we use recorded tracks of people singing and mute the congregation, so folk can sing along in their own homes.
- We make the services shorter – online interaction is tiring – but it gives us the scope for sharing prayer requests, and we've also had a couple of missionaries we support join us live to share about their work, in Spain and Ghana.
- From the start, we also had a midweek get-together, just for a blether. We've also restarted the Bible study, and are running [The God Question](#) course, and in both cases folk who didn't come to these things when they were in the church are connecting. In other words, we're just doing what we would normally do, but in a new form for this new time we're in, but finding folk seem to really appreciate it.



**Bible Study**



There's a genuine sense of togetherness. We haven't experienced the phenomenon of lots of non-church attenders anonymously checking out an online service, as that's not so easy on Zoom (though when I posted some Easter reflections on YouTube in Holy Week they did get far more views than we have members). But overall, Zoom's been great for us in this strange time.

And what of the future? Well, nobody apart from God knows. The discovery of a vaccine that works, meaning that we can all get back to the old normal would be nice, but it may be a long time before that happens. So we face the prospect of many months having to continue with online worship and church life, perhaps with a kind of mixed-mode worship as some folk join us in the church building and others remain at home, continuing to isolate. The Holy Spirit is not bound, and so He is the One who keeps us connected, with the Father and the Son, and with each other – but we're also grateful for the technology which makes this easier.



You can check out David's Easter series on YouTube [here](#))

## Uddingston Pride Update

Given the present difficulties, it is not easy to make plans for this coming summer. However, we are hoping to have the planters along the Main Street in place and planted out in early June. We will not be able to get assistance from the Council Payback Team but our contractor has agreed to deliver and install the planters under the contract, always adhering to the current regulations. South Lanarkshire Council has agreed to put up the hanging baskets and hopefully the Main Street will look colourful again. The group will be on hand to assist with the locating of the displays whilst keeping the required social distancing.



Scotrail will not permit anyone onto the platforms who is not an essential key worker or traveller, so we are prevented from providing the usual displays at the station. This is a major disappointment to us all as the station is usually such a feature of the summer in Uddingston, greatly enjoyed by locals and travellers passing through.

Some of the ladies from Park Church have been busy collecting litter from around the village during their daily walks and have managed to fill a lot of bags with rubbish. We are most grateful to them for their efforts on behalf of the community. It's great to have such support.



Best wishes to all from all of us here at Uddingston Pride. Stay safe and keep well.

**Sandy Robertson**

## A Prayer for the Church



We believe in life before death

Christian Aid Week was from 10-16 May during the pandemic and lockdown. Many helpful prayers were posted on their site reminding us that **Love never fails**. **Coronavirus impacts all of us**. **But love unites us all**. Our love encompasses our neighbours here but also our global neighbours in far off lands. We may be facing hardship and fear through the coronavirus, but many in the world also face drought, famine, injustice and poverty. May the church here continue to show compassion and love to others.

**May your love that never fails**

**Strengthen the weak**

**Encourage the fearful**

**Calm the anxious**

**Heal the sick**

**Through your church—**

**Your washed hands**

**And feet on earth -**

**Distant but still present**

**Virtual but still connected**

**Apart but still helping.**

**God in your mercy,**

**Hear our prayer.**

**Amen**





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