

The Herald

Castlehill Parish Church

Winter 2011



Editorial

As Christmas fast approaches, we are aware of the many voices bemoaning the extravagance of individuals and families, showering gifts on each other, sometimes beyond their means. Hopefully these gifts are tokens of love and affection and not representing one upmanship. Looking to God and Jesus we find they are unafraid of showing extravagance in showering gifts on us. Whatever your interpretation of the parable of the sower we can see that God was not averse to throwing seed with holy abandon on good and bad soil alike. In the parable of the Good Samaritan he went the extra mile, though he did not need to. The woman who poured the costly ointment over Jesus feet as an expression of love brought no rebuke from Jesus only that “it is a beautiful thing that she has done” His gifts are profuse, beyond what we need, and he did not stint on his greatest gift of all, giving his only Son to us, his erring people. Yes let us exchange gifts in love to one another but in receiving them let us recognise in this oncoming Christmas season the love behind the gifts.

Wellwood Grierson.

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Have your say

If you have any comments to make on the Magazine, please feel free to do so by letter or email to herald@castlehillchurch.org We are always pleased to consider any articles for the Magazine from members of the congregation, These can also be sent to the email address quoted.



From the Manse



Immanuel - God with us

The angels are gathering, the al fresco choir busy rehearsing for that great concert scheduled to announce the birth of the Son of God. The earth, hushed and dark is about to be flooded by light. And the sounds of a girning baby can be heard amidst the lowing of cattle. Stars are twinkling and visitors gather. Shepherds make their way from the hillside. Wise men are blundering around lost, seeking royalty in all the wrong places. These are just some of the images we have bestowed on that first Christmas. The reality was of course much less glamorous and of far greater import than we can ever conceive. And so we will enjoy singing carols and watching children's Nativity portrayals. We will enjoy decorating the tree and exchanging gifts. We will enjoy eating too much and catching up with family and friends. But, when we have the opportunity, we will take a break from all the festivity and quietly give thanks to God for choosing to dwell among us.

May you be touched by the warmth and the joy of a real Christmas this season.

Blessings

Liz Crumlish

www.liz-vicarofdibley.blogspot.com



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Advent and Christmas Services

Sundays

Sunday 27th November - All age worship for Advent - 11am
Christian Aid Advent worship - 6:30pm
Sunday 4th December - Communion -11am and 6:30pm
Sunday 11th December - Salvation Army Carol Service - 4pm
Sunday 18th December - Children's Nativity Presentation - 11am
Christmas Day - All age worship - 11am



Midweek

Wednesday 30th November - 7pm - Taize Service
Wednesday 7th December - 7pm - Quiet Christmas Service - for those missing loved ones
Wednesday 14th, 21st December - 7pm - Midweek worship for Advent

Christmas Eve

7pm - Family worship
11:30pm - Watchnight Service - hot soup will be served from 10:30pm

A musical note

“Sing to the Lord a new song” the Psalmist writes. Every Sunday a large part of our worship involves music in different forms, whether it be the singing of hymns, a meditation during the serving of communion or a rousing anthem by the choir. Music helps to set the mood of a service whether it is through the triumphal notes of a celebratory march on Easter Sunday or the gentle mellow tones of Abide with me on Remembrance Sunday. One of the most enjoyable parts about playing worship music on a Sunday is deciding how to interpret the mood of the hymn being sung. Sometimes the most simple accompaniment to a hymn allows the contemplation of the message contained within. Equally there is nothing more uplifting



than pulling all the stops out on the organ as rousing choruses are belted out by the congregation.

A wise person once asked “How many choirs does it take to change a lightbulb?” The reply came without hesitation “change, change don’t be so stupid!” Whilst there can be a great temptation to continue to always sing the same hymn tunes offering the justification of “it’s what I learnt in Sunday School” we have to continue to embrace new hymns and new tunes whilst still keeping a place for the ‘oldies’. We are very fortunate in Castlehill that we have excellent equipment such as the big screens which greatly improve the singing on a Sunday morning. The Organ has been reliably leading praise on a Sunday for over 50 years now and is in need of a face lift. Currently we have raised about £6,000 and so we are now over half way towards the £10,000 needed to complete the refurbishment works. All suggestions of how to raise the remaining money would be gratefully received.

The choir continue to expand the diverse range of pieces in their repertoire and are always keen for new members. At our Friday night practices our principal aim is for everyone to have fun and share in the mutually enjoyable past time of singing, (and telling the pianist to ‘tone it down’!). The choir are a very friendly bunch and would welcome any new face to our Friday sessions no matter how much musical knowledge you have. If interested please speak to myself or any member of the choir.

I consider it a great privilege to be a part of Castlehill Church and enjoy being able to contribute to worship on a Sunday. I look forward to continuing to play on a Sunday, and can assure all that I will not be getting quieter any time soon!

Best wishes
Christopher

The organ refurbishment fund currently stands at: £6,170

“Tell Me The Old Old Story”

As celebrations approach our thoughts focus on the birth of Our Lord Jesus Christ, but sometimes in the rush and noise of everyday life it becomes difficult to think. Happily though, in the midst of the clamour, we are able to see through and beyond the bright lights and tinsel and concentrate on the most amazing happening the world has ever seen – God revealing His love through the gift of His Son Jesus Christ. We are blessed because we know the whole story. Just as the Shepherds and Wise Men were led by the star to Bethlehem to witness, in awe and wonder the birth of the Christ child, so are we led to the foot of the Cross so that the light of love will fall on us, to enfold and uphold us each day.

No matter who we are or what our circumstances may be, this precious gift from God our Father, through the power and love given to Jesus, will give us strength, courage, comfort, joy and peace as we return, through the Christ child, our love, praise and gratitude.

May we all have a joyous and peaceful Christmas and remember to tell of,
“the Old Old Story of unseen things above,
Of Jesus and his Glory, of Jesus and his Love.”

Margaret Cairns,
From the Prayer Chain.

An Advent thought from Douglas Moore, Auxiliary Minister

“Jesus bids us shine like a pure clear light, like a little candle burning in the night.”
So goes the well known hymn.

If our cares or worries are getting us down, it can be hard to shine in this sometimes dark world we live in.

As Christians, we have a lot to shout about. God is so good to us and wants others to share in this as well. After all, God loves everyone in the world.

We Scots are naturally reserved about discussing our faith but God can help us with this too.

This poem “A return to love” was written by Marianne Williamson.

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, ‘Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous’? Actually, who are you not to be?

You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won’t feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It is not just in some of us; it is in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”

As we enter this time of advent, we look towards the coming of the Christ child, the light of the world.

This time of year is short on daylight. One of the symptoms of little daylight is that it can be a time when people feel down or sad. Having the light of Christ within us can help us through the gloomy times. Let us resolve to shine our little lights for others we are in contact with. “You in your small corner and I in mine.”

May the peace and love of God be with you and yours this Christmas.

Douglas



And from Mandy Hickman, Ordained Local Minister in Training

A big HELLO to everyone at Castlehill from Largs and thank you for the warm welcome I have received since joining the ministry team, as a trainee, in October. I have stayed in Largs for many years and worked previously in District Nursing and now in the Public Health Department of NHS Ayrshire and Arran as a Health Promotion Officer. I have two children aged 20 and 21 both at University Matthew down in Ayr studying music and April in Glasgow studying computing. My home church is St Johns in Largs where, when training allows, I am part of the Kirk Session and the Choir. I am in my final probationary year of training for Local Ordained Ministry, previously known as Auxiliary Ministry.

My journey started back in 2006 as an enquirer, investigating the call I felt to serve God and then onto assessment conference in May 2007. Having my call affirmed at assessment conference I then started ‘for real’ the new direction my life was to take in serving God. Since being accepted as a candidate for ministry I have been studying distance learning with Aberdeen University and will complete those studies, God willing, in May next year. How the tables have turned from helping my children with their homework to them teaching me how to structure and reference my essays! So for those thinking about taking on a new challenge, a new skill we are never too old to learn!

My previous placements have been at St Maurs Glencarin in Kilmaurs with the Rev John Urquhart and Clark Memorial Church in Largs with the Rev Stephen Smith. As I continue on my journey and as my final year of training progresses I look forward to sharing in faith and fellowship with everyone at Castlehill working together to serve the Lord, a community in Christ.

God Bless

Mandy Hickman



BB ROMANIAN VISIT

The 17th Ayr Boys' Brigade went to Romania in August to help the Rhema Foundation in Transylvania, an organisation which was set up in the wake of the Ceausescu regime. It was set up to help some of the abandoned children who suffered from HIV, a disease which they all got from infected blood transfusions. The children were kept in soulless wards tied to cots with no human comfort or love.

We have supported the charity for a number of years by donating the profits from our Friday night tuck shop. During the last year with the support of the congregation at Castlehill and of Wallacetown Nursery School we raised over £8,000 which helped fund the trip and provide funding for the Foundation.

While in Romania we helped at the Foundation's home by painting the perimeter fence, clearing storm damaged fallen trees, gardening, pool maintenance and resurfacing the 100 metre access road. We also used our money to support a Gypsy community in the town of Targu Mures. The Gypsies in Romania have no status, no education, no health care. They receive support from the Rhema Foundation which helps them with social issues including education, health and housing. We provided a lunch for all 200 young people in the community with the boys distributing the food themselves.

One of the main funding initiatives was to provide a house for a young Gypsy girl. Isabella has learning difficulties, is just 17, has an eighteen month old toddler and a one month old baby. She lives in a two roomed house with ten members of her extended family. For £1200 we were able to fund a one roomed house for her and her children. The biggest impact this will have for Isabella is that, having an address allows her to become registered with the government. This in turn allows her access to health care, something she has had no right to in her life so far.

We spent some time at another project funded by the Foundation - a day care centre for pre-school Gypsy children up to the age of seven. The Foundation bus the children to the centre, provide them with breakfast and lunch and provide them with a nursery education. The parents are not concerned about the education their children receive but they do approve of the food they receive. It is the norm that over the weekend the children get no food from their families because for the other five days they will get fed at the day care centre. The Foundation are achieving more success year on year with the education programme which provides support when the children enter mainstream education which results in their life choices improving through education. While we were there each of the two classes sang Romanian nursery songs to us. In return we sang "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star" and "Baa Baa Black Sheep" with actions.





We stayed at the Foundation in a house funded by Duncan Bannatyne, who is a major benefactor of the Foundation. Most of our time was spent at the Foundation doing the work listed above. While we were doing this we were interacting with the residents, the orphans, now in their early twenties. We learned about their stories. None of them were actually orphans, they had been abandoned by their parents when they were babies because they had HIV. They all have some form of developmental problems. They all

have underlying health issues and are kept alive by a cocktail of drugs. There are thirteen left in the Foundation and they will never be able to live independent lives and they are all lovely people. Of the twenty four who were originally in the orphanage three have married, a few have been able to live independently and a number of them have died. They all have a story. Like the girl who had her hip deliberately dislocated by her Gypsy mother when she was a baby so that she would earn more begging. That girl walked last year for the first time after the Foundation paid for her to go to Oxford to have corrective surgery. She now walks with the aid of a built up shoe and a calliper. Or the boy whose parents were found and who only became interested in their son when the government started paying an allowance to the HIV infected children. He moved back with them and they treated him in the most horrific manner. The week before we visited he moved back to the Foundation saying he had no reason to live, the fear is that any one of the five conditions he suffers from could take his life. It's unimaginable how one would feel having been abandoned once as an infant to effectively be abandoned again as a young adult.

It was a humbling experience associating with the "children", despite the issues in their lives they are in the main happy individuals who are blossoming in a very loving supportive Christian Foundation. Having spent ten days in their company they will never realise quite what they did for us but we know it was more than we did for them.

We all found the experience incredible and beyond any of our expectations. We each wrote a comment about our trip and these are representative of everyone's feelings: "The poverty I experienced has changed the way I look at things in life", "What I saw in Romania makes me think how fortunate a life I lead", "Life changing experience", "Friendships created will never be forgotten". Everyone wants to go back. The hope is the 17th Ayr will revisit the Foundation in the future.

It was a great surprise when we learned that two of the residents, Yonka and Aneka were part of a group from the Foundation who were going to be present at our annual dedication service. It was fantastic that we were able to make our presentation with them in the congregation. It has made us more determined to continue our relationship with the Romanians. To lay the foundations for this we are going to have a Soup & Sweet Lunch after our dedication service on an annual basis and use the proceeds to build a fund to help with another trip in the future.

Anyone who would like to contribute to the Boys' Brigade's work with the Foundation can contribute at www.justgiving.com/17thayrboysbrigade



BIBLE QUIZ

Where Mary and Joseph and Jesus fled
One of Noah's sons
Old Testament Book named after a girl
Village where Martha and Mary stayed
A Disciple who always doubted
Third book of the Old Testament
He was king when Jesus was born
He was found in a basket by the river
A garden where Adam and Eve lived



Rearrange the first letter of your answers and you find a well known place mentioned in the New Testament.

The Wonder of Christmas

The year swiftly draws to its close
Autumn is winter once more
And Christmas returns to the world
As it has done centuries before
We pause for a moment or two
Remembering all that it means
To hear the old story again
More lovely than ever it seems
The wonder of Bethlehem's star
And shepherds who stood in its light
Three wise men who came from the east
To welcome the Christ Child that night
The church bells' melodious chime
Ring their message of peace on earth
The wonderful love God has given
To all through that heavenly birth
May that love overflow in your heart
And the ones of those you hold dear
To bring you its peace and goodwill
Each day of the forthcoming year

Weekly Activities at Castlehill

Monday

Carpet Bowls, Craft Class, Dancing, Brownies, Guides

Tuesday

Coffee Club, Cosy Café, Jo Jingles, Dancing, Aerobics, Bridge, Brownies, Guides, Pilates, Anchor Boys

Wednesday

Zumba, Carpet Bowls, Rainbows, Music Makers, Midweek Worship, The Guild, Yoga

Thursday

Seniors Keep Fit, Tai-Ji, Weight Watchers

Friday

Zumba Spirals, Mothers and Toddlers, Choir, Boys Brigade - Junior and Company Sections

Spotlight

It is often said that an army marches on its stomach. I am convinced that Churches while based on the teaching of the Bible, also survive on teas and coffees. Castlehill is no exception. Our Tuesday Coffee Shop is almost as old as the Church itself, started by May Bell, Ann Hamilton, Nancy Queen and Joan Carson. The present team is made up of 12 ladies, three in each team every week for nine months of the year. Many have come and gone through the years all contributing to the enjoyment of Tuesday mornings. They also manage to have themed mornings at Easter, Halloween, St. Andrews Day, and Valentines Day. They provide the "goodies" themselves and ensure that everyone has a good time. Not only that, they also provide for the four meetings of the Seniors Afternoons, including their Christmas party. Some also find themselves providing tea and coffee on Sundays after the morning service.

These dedicated members of our Church are often overlooked, not only giving of their time, but raising in the region of £1,500 each year for Church funds. Extra help is needed on Sunday mornings and although there is an average attendance on Tuesday mornings of around 25, that seems a small number compared with the size of our congregation. Please think about coming along now and again, you will find a warm welcome. The venue is in the North Hall every Tuesday from 10.00am



An Easter Bonnet competition in 2009

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MURRAY GRIERSON

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Kilmarnock Standard 10th January 1945

A soldier serving in the Middle East writes home about having seen there a memorial to an army mule. And the epitaph on the memorial reads:- "In memory of Maggie, who in her time kicked two colonels, four majors, ten captains, 24 lieutenants, 42 sergeants, 486 privates – and one bomb.

Snippets

Castlehill Seniors Group

An enjoyable afternoon was had on the 11th October when the Taglin Singers provided the entertainment. The varied programme of song and verse was appreciated by an excellent turnout. Our thanks are again due to the ladies of the coffee shop who provided the teas. A collection of £38 was given to the singers who are supporting sufferers of leukaemia. We were pleased to welcome some new members and hope that they will come again.

A warm welcome is offered to any Church members and anyone within the Parish [and not necessarily a "Senior"] The next meeting will be our Christmas social held in the main hall at 10.30 on 13th December. Look forward to seeing everyone then. If transport is required please phone me on 285903 or the office and we will try to help.

Wellwood Grierson

Castlehill Bowling Club

A new session has started again and some new members have come along. By the time this reaches the Magazine readers we will be well into our competitions and thinking about our Christmas Party [already!] Anyone wishing to join is welcome to come along on a Monday or a Wednesday.

Saturday Men's Breakfast Club

This is now underway on the last Saturday in the month. While attendance is not high at present we hope that the promise of a bacon roll and some time to relax from the busy world we live in will entice a few more to come along. This is at 9.30 a.m. so the rest of the day can be yours. We look forward to your support.

You have to smile.

The local minister needed funds badly for his Church repairs. He was sure God would help. "God what does a million years mean to you" "Just a minute" God replied. The minister smiled, "and what does a million pounds mean to you". "Just a penny" was the reply. "Ah well" smiles the minister, "Do you think you could give me just a penny" There was a pause and God replied " Just give me a minute"

Castlehill Church of Scotland Guild

We have had a most enjoyable first half to our Session and are looking forward to the new year which begins on 11th January 2012, with a talk from our Minister, the Reverend Elizabeth Crumlish. We are holding a coffee evening with a Burns theme on Wednesday 25th January, where there will be a chance to catch up with old and new friends, and participate in a Burns Quiz and Scottish Bring n buy stall. Also in the pipeline are talks on a sail down the Portuguese coast, prison life and Yorkhill Hospital . Anyone is welcome to come along on a Wednesday evening at 7.30 pm. The Committee wish everyone a peaceful Christmas and happy New Year.



Orchard House

For some time, we have been holding a service of Communion at Orchard House just after we celebrate Communion at Castlehill. Recently the attendance at these services increased, so we asked the residents whether they might like a monthly service of worship. In October we held the first of these monthly services for the Sheltered Housing Complex situated within the Castlehill parish. The small group who attended from Castlehill were made most welcome and we shared in an uplifting worship time together led by our Minister. The ladies in attendance also put together a programme of favourite hymns for the forthcoming services and it is a privilege to be invited back on a regular basis. If you would like to join us at Orchard House in



our time of worship and fellowship the services will take place on the first Tuesday of the month at 2.15pm in the residents lounge and you will be made most welcome.

Church Flowers

As we approach the end of another year, I wish to thank so many people for their assistance in beautifying the Church throughout the year with their gifts of flowers commemorating an important occasion in their lives. However without the assistance of the team of arrangers we would not be able to fully appreciate their beauty from season to season: a special thank you to all those who spend time and care arranging the displays so thoughtfully and tastefully. Thereafter we are fortunate to have another team of willing helpers who deliver the flowers to members of the Parish to mark both happy and sad events in their family's life: many thanks to you all, your visits are greatly appreciated.

If you would be willing to help in any of these duties, please either contact me personally or by telephone at 01292 443213.

At present we would welcome help in any of the aspects of this service as many of our helpers have been "on duty" for some time now and deserve a break! Please do not be shy about enquiring as to what is involved. We will all be glad to help you – we all had to start at some point, and were very grateful to those who supported us

Trudy McLeod.



Journeying through the Bible

Advice from an anonymous poet quoted by Rev. Selwyn Hughes

If your lips would keep from slips

Five things observe with care:

Of whom you speak, to whom you speak,

And how and when and where.

It began on 1st January 2011 and will finish on 31st December 2011.

64 members responded to an appeal in church last year to purchase a Bible entitled "Everyday with Jesus" and read it throughout the year. I was one of them.

Selwyn Hughes, a Welsh minister, had arranged each day's readings in a way new to me- a passage from the Old Testament followed by verses from the Psalms, two or three verses of Proverbs plus a passage from the New Testament. In addition he wrote a daily devotion and finished each day's reading with a short prayer. Imagine the work and effort he put into organising this for 365 days.....

Depending on what part of the Bible I was reading, each daily reading took me from 10-20minutes.

So how did I get on? Well, I took time to adjust to this way of arranging the readings. Initially I wanted to read straight on and complete each chapter particularly the O.T. narratives but gradually I became used to 'Mr. Hughes' Bible'.

I did miss the poetry of the Authorised Version of Psalms and so found myself reading verses aloud to get the 'ring and feel' of the new translation.

Two Proverbs was the daily dose and this meant I really tuned into their wisdom. I smiled, chuckled or nodded in agreement at how relevant most are today.

One thing I did appreciate was the highlighting of Old Testament verses in **BOLD** print in New Testament chapters.

There were many examples of this showing clearly the link with the old and new.

The journeys of "The children of Israel" meant I searched at home for relevant maps to plot their travels and I found just what I was searching for in a long lost Concordance.

But the thing that really struck me was how many words of the O. T. were used by composers in oratorios and anthems which are still sung today in Churches and Concert Halls.

The thrill of singing *Messiah*, *Elijah*, *The Creation*, *Brahms Requiem*, *The Magnificat*, *Belshazzar's Feast* and *Israel in Egypt* (the latter two in Jerusalem) has never left me. The words read revived musical memories, long past but never forgotten!

In his commentary Mr Hughes often referred to deer and to one its characteristics. Evidently when a deer jumps or moves, its hind feet will always land on the imprint of the forefeet. You can imagine how the minister linked this with people both past and present- moving in God's footsteps.

Did I enjoy my year's reading? Yes! Was it a discipline? Of course! Did I learn much? Oh yes!

Did I discover how troubles in our world today (especially those in the Middle East) are similar to those in the O.T.? Without a doubt!

Did I get to grips with all that Paul wrote? Well... not always!

So perhaps that's my task for 2012- to reread the words of Paul and 'ponder them' in my heart.

Thank you Wellwood for recommending "Everyday with Jesus". Reading the Bible in this way started off as a challenge and sometimes it felt like a chore but I can see the finishing line now.....

To misquote a favourite quiz comment, "I started and I will finish."

Morven Petticrew

Alternative gifts

Don't know what to buy folks for Christmas this year?

Christmas is about giving and yes it's lovely to receive gifts.

But sometimes we get presents that we don't really need so what about a gift that goes on giving?

Ever thought about alternative Christmas gifts that would help those in poverty around the world?

Providing health checks

Save lives with mosquito nets

Reducing disease by providing safe water

Seeds to allow farmers to grow crops

Goats a source of food and income for families

School materials

Wormery – turns wasteland into fertile ground

And there are many more gifts that can make a difference this Christmas

Here are some of the organisations who are involved:

Oxfam – Oxfam unwrapped – www.oxfam.org.uk/shop/oxfam-unwrapped

World Vision – Must Have Gifts - www.musthavegifts.org

Christian Aid – Present Aid - www.presentaid.org

Go ahead check them out this Christmas – and you too might be getting a can of worms!!

Parish Register

Funerals

August

James Davis Hillfoot Road
Eileen Scott Prestwick

September

William Hunter Ellisland Square
James Dunlop Ellisland Place
Pamela Beattie Crofthead Caravan Park
Mary Ruthven Redford Nursing Home

October

Margo Kay Cunningham Place
Barbara Hunter Ellisland Sqaure
Margaret Orr Meadowpark Drive

November

Heather Britt Juniper Green



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FINANCE

Stewardship

In the current economic climate it can be hard to make ends meet, and that applies as much to the Church as it does to each of us. Our last Stewardship campaign was a huge success thanks to the commitment of everyone involved, however whilst it may seem like only yesterday it was actually 6 years ago in 2005.

For the last few years now we have seen our offerings erode - something that has also been happening to the Church of Scotland as a whole and all Congregations are being asked to hold a stewardship campaign in 2012. More details on what this will mean for Castlehill will be given in early 2012

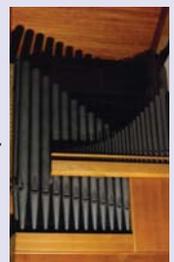
Fabric Appeal

We launched our 2011 fabric appeal with the September Communion and I am pleased to report that so far we have raised over £1,600.

A big thank you to everyone who has contributed. If you haven't donated as yet and would still like to then the envelopes can be dropped in the plate on any Sunday up to Christmas.

Organ Appeal

One of our financial success stories for 2011 has been the "sponsor a pipe" appeal towards repairing the organ. This has raised the magnificent sum of £3,000. We also received £700 proceeds from the Ayre Music Makers concert and an anonymous donation of £500. Together these bring the Organ fund to £6,170.



Thank you to everyone who has supported this.

May I wish you all a Merry Christmas and a peaceful new year.

Douglas Wilson
Treasurer

Where are they now?

Continuing our series on former student ministers who served at Castlehill. Rev Iain D Cunningham

Sometimes it feels as if it was just yesterday that Dawn and I arrived in Ayr (just before our first wedding anniversary) to begin our very happy two-years as part of Castlehill Church. But it *wasn't* yesterday: it was 1978!

A lot has changed since then—most notably my waistline. We now have four children (three of whom are married) and our first grandchild was born in York on 14th of October this year. I think it was the late Jonas Salk, the virologist who developed a vaccine for polio, who first suggested that the role of parents is to give to their children both roots and wings—in other words to give them a solid sense of belonging, balanced by a spirit of freedom that will enable them to fulfil their potential.

What is true for parents is surely also true for those who bear the responsibility of overseeing Probationer ministers and I am forever grateful that Michael Dickie achieved that balance as far as I was concerned. He gave me a solid foundation in parish ministry but also gave me freedom to be myself.

The inspiration, encouragement and very occasional (but always constructive) criticism I received from Michael during my time at Castlehill has often helped me through all the ups and downs of parish ministry since.

The memory of being warmly accepted by the Castlehill congregation has also played its part and I have never felt called to do anything other than continue in parish ministry, even though the challenges get harder year by year.

I have always felt that the opportunity to be ordained during my time as an assistant minister was particularly valuable, especially for someone like myself who was so young at the time. It meant that when I took up my first charge of Duntocher Trinity Church, in Dumbarton Presbytery, I had already gained some practical experience in conducting Weddings and Baptisms and Communion services, as well as chairing church meetings.

I wonder how many such meetings I have 'presided' over since then?

Or how many weddings and baptisms?

And I wonder how many hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of words I have churned out in the last 31 years for sermons and talks and reports?

From time to time over the years I've also been to known to put words together in the form of hymns and songs, some of which in recent years found their way into the 'new' Church Hymnary.

After seven years in Duntocher we moved to Kirkton Church, Carluke, and I've been here ever since.

The stability of a longer ministry has in a way given me the freedom to become involved in the wider work of the church both here and overseas. I was Clerk to the Presbytery of Lanark for ten years and I have been involved in many central church committees, boards and councils over the years.

One of the most interesting and exciting of these was the "Special Commission" that produced the report that came to be known as the 'Church Without Walls' report.

More recently, I was invited to serve on the World Mission Council and I am currently one of the Vice Conveners of that Council.

On their behalf I had the privilege of visiting Ghana earlier this year. Our own congregation here in Carluke has links with churches in Kenya and South Korea, and one of our daughters has lived in both Hong Kong and Beijing, so I've had plenty of opportunity to 'spread my wings.'

But I don't forget my roots... including those two very enjoyable and formative years in Castlehill Parish Church.

Iain D Cunningham



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