

# *Eagle Wing*



*The Magazine of Groomsport Presbyterian Church*

**Christmas 2016**

The *Eagle Wing* was the first emigrant ship to leave Ulster for America. She sailed from Groomsport in September 1636, carrying 140 Presbyterians in search of a life free from persecution in the New World. Fearful weather, however, forced them to return home after two months at sea. Although she did not reach her destination, the *Eagle Wing* became the inspiration for others to make their attempts and since those days, several million people have left our shores, taking with them their culture and traditions. These cultural links with America are celebrated each year at the North Down Eagle Wing Festival in July.

Our church magazine takes its title from this significant piece of local history. In 2002, Jennifer Hulme, a member of the congregation and well known local artist, created the cover design, which strikingly depicts the symbols of the wing, sail and cross.

*We seek to be a welcoming community of God's people*

*We believe our mission is to hear and share His Word and to reflect **God's unconditional love** - as we proclaim and celebrate the good news of Jesus Christ and strive to be a **welcoming, serving and reconciling community.**"*

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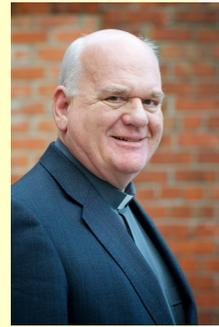
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Visit our website [www.groomsportpc.com](http://www.groomsportpc.com)

## A MESSAGE FROM THE VACANCY CONVENOR

As I write this, Advent is just about on us – four weeks to Christmas! I'm really looking forward to sharing this special time with you. It's all about preparation – preparing for Jesus coming to our world – so it's a time of joy, excitement, but also confidence. The birth of Jesus really does matter in a world where we seem to be falling over challenges of one kind or another. If we take time to reflect on the meaning of Christmas, and the message of Christ's coming, we need not fear, however fragmented the world may seem. This is God's world and He loves it so much that He sent Jesus to begin the work of re-creation. I hope you'll spend some time with us over the next few weeks as we enjoy the excitement and certainty of Christ's coming. There are many special services and events, or you may like to join in our Advent Bible Study on a Wednesday evening – you'll be very welcome at any time.



Of course, while we believe that ultimately God will restore His creation to peace and harmony, the reality for many people is that today's world is, for them, a cruel, confusing or perhaps dangerous place. Recent political shifts in our familiar world of western privilege have left many vulnerable people fearing for their future, while in the wider world wars and violence are a daily reality for many. That is why the annual World Development appeal of our Church is so important. Surely in all the overindulgence that marks Christmas for so many of us, God is asking that we give to those who live life on the edge and may not survive. Our World Development service will be on 4 December, but envelopes will be available right up to Christmas. Please be generous as we celebrate God's self-giving for all the world.

Christmas, unfortunately, may also for many people be a time of sad memories. Since I came to Groomspoint in August, and indeed earlier in the year, quite a number of families have known the pain of bereavement. I've been impressed by the care shown here by members for one another and I know that has been appreciated – but please remember those for whom this season is not an easy holiday. It's important that we're not too busy to think of those who would appreciate a quick call. Thanks to those who have been keeping me up to date with pastoral needs. It's always helpful if you phone direct on 02891450141 or 07802284126.

Since I last wrote, the vacancy has been progressing, actually quite quickly, although it may not seem that way! From the names which you submitted, or approaches made, a number of people have agreed to come for interview by Kirk Session – which should happen early in December. If all goes to plan, some of them will then be invited to preach in the new year. While to date this has been a fairly smooth process, that – I'm sure – is because many of you have been playing your part in surrounding it with prayer. Please continue to do so, believing that before long, the person of God's choice will emerge to lead His people here.

Finally, it's been great for Fiona and myself to get to know many of you better, or for the first time. We hope you all will have a blessed and meaningful Christmas.

Yours sincerely,

*Donald Watts.*

## CONGREGATIONAL RECORD



### BAPTISMS

30 October 2016      Ennis, son of Keith and Clare Williams

*“The promise is to you and to your children”*



### DEATHS

- 17 August 2016      Mr G Malcom, 6 Dixon Avenue (15)
- 23 September 2016      Miss V Nelson, 13 Donaghadee Road (7)
- 02 October 2016      Mrs P Sharpe, Abbey View Nursing Home (27)
- 24 October 2016      Mr J Young, 8 Springwell Place
- 29 October 2016      Mrs L Ekin, Ailsa Lodge (28)
- 30 October 2016      Mrs M Hackworth, 2 The Chase (3)
- 03 November 2016      Mrs I Emberson, Ballymacconnell Care Home (9)
- 13 November 2016      Mr H Wynne, 53 Barnhill (3)
- 20 November 2016      Mr K Ferris, Balloo House (5)
- 21 November 2016      Mrs P Coffey, Ailsa Loge, Killaire Avenue (27)

*“Blessed are they who die in the Lord”*

On the edge of a new year, Lord, teach us again  
to order our priorities and number our days and hours.  
And teach us to trust — life, history, one another, You.  
So that even in the grey and gloomy days, when the  
ceiling is low, we may trust the star  
that enabled wise men of old  
to live in hope and proclaim the divine promises  
which call us on in Jesus Christ. Amen.

### USEFUL CONTACT DETAILS

|                                |                                      |   |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|
| <b>Convenor of the Vacancy</b> | <b>Rev. Dr. Donald Watts</b>         | <b>9145 0141</b>                                  |
| <b>Assistant Minister</b>      | <b>Rev. Chris Miller</b>             | <b>9146 8377</b>                                  |
| <b>Church Office</b>           | <b>Tues, Wed &amp; Fri 9.00-1.00</b> | <b>9146 2552</b><br><b>gportpc@googlemail.com</b> |

# News from the Pews ...

The final total from the recent **Leprosy Mission** coffee morning was **£301.00**.

In addition, proceeds from the TLM shop on the day were **£136.95**.

Many thanks to all those who supported this event.

The Ekin family would like to thank all who called at the house, sent cards and letters of sympathy at the time of Lily's death, and attended the service of thanksgiving.

This support was, indeed, greatly valued.

*Many, many thanks to all those who helped me through my recent hip replacement.*

*Your prayers, gifts, cards and visits were all much appreciated.*

*Margaret Johnston*

Traditionally, the members of the extended Kirk family have taken part in the annual Boxing Day swim at Ballyholme Yacht Club, as part of their charity fund raising activities.

Last year, because of holidays, they changed their swim to Groomsport in early January, and several members of the congregation also became involved. This year they hope to do the same again and are, therefore, calling on all those intrepid swimmers who would like to brave the elements after church on Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> January 2017.



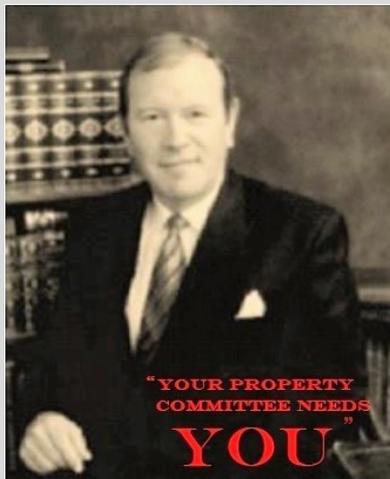
Just for the record – Boxing Day swim is still in the calendar too!!

For more details, contact Paula Montgomery 07767 271921.

## "WANTED"

The Property Committee is seeking someone who has some knowledge of Health and Safety matters.

We are also looking for a further member, who has an interest in



the various issues relating to our different properties.

Please contact

**LOWRY MANSON**

in the first instance to discuss these two opportunities, either by phone

**07808 812730 /028 9145 1621**

or email:

**lowrymanson@hotmail.com**



## EAGLE WING

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Church

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## EDITORIAL

*Eagle Wing* regularly reports on a wide range of people, activities and geographical locations, and this Christmas issue – although slightly shorter than usual – is no exception. Dr Watts speaks in his message of different aspects of the season – how they affect individuals, in the context of widespread uncertainty in our world, and closer to home in our church vacancy situation; he reminds us that God is ultimately in control, so we can have confidence in His purposes, while playing our own part in reaching out to others. We have two timely reminders about the essential work of Storehouse North Down, especially at Christmas. Sunday School teachers and children are looking forward to their Christmas events; Brownies and Rainbows have been having lots of fun, and the PW ladies also have a busy programme. There is information for you on a forthcoming project to adapt the former vestry into new crèche facilities, and the Property Committee needs new members. Wedding bells have been ringing in Brian McClelland's family; and a number of correspondents have been checking in with news from places as diverse as Aberdeen, Knysna, Russia, and several parts of America.

Once again, we are confronted in shops with mountains of gifts and special foodstuffs, not to mention the ever-growing array of Christmas jumpers! We're bombarded on television by the now highly competitive Christmas advertising campaigns; surrounded everywhere by piped songs about coming home for Christmas, having ourselves a merry little Christmas, or even lamenting the pain of a blue, blue Christmas. There is a real danger that, by the time Christmas actually arrives, we are thoroughly sick of the whole idea of it. For those facing changed circumstances this year, the festive season will, of course, sadly have 'blue' elements. But we can still become sucked into the maelstrom, because gone are the days of the last-minute dash to the shops – children must have the latest must-have item, and nowadays if you don't get it in October, you may not get it at all; so round and round goes the carousel of commercialism, consumerism and cynicism. Can we stop, get off and remember what it's supposed to be about? Spare a thought, some of our time maybe, a financial or practical donation, for those who will have little at Christmas in the way of family, fun, food, or presents? Psalm 16 speaks of the kind of gifts we should be searching for:

*You, Lord, are all I have, and you give me all I need; my future is in your hands. How wonderful are your gifts to me; how good they are!*

(vs 5-6, Good News version)

These gifts won't be found in any store, or even online; no amount of money can buy them; they are available all year round – but does everyone know about them? How is that marketing campaign going? The bottom line is that we are the ads – granted, the competition is fierce, but the gap in the market is wide open, demand certainly exists, the possibilities are endless, and the rewards are out of this world.

*Wishing all our readers  
a peaceful, happy Christmas season  
and a good New Year*



## Presbyterian Women

PW meets on the second and fourth Monday of each month, September to April, in the Archie Agnew Room. We had a very successful Coffee Morning in October, raising £280.00. Also in October, we had our Hospitality Night, when the Cregagh Bell Ringers entertained 100 invited ladies from PW groups.

We will once again be collecting for Storehouse North Down at our Christmas meeting and then in January, we will be packing supplies to send to the Mission Hospital in Ekwendeni, Malawi. We thank the congregation for their continued generosity each year for this work. A list of suggested items will be available in the church porch.

The programme for the next three months is as follows:

|                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| <b>9th January</b>   | <b>Beetle Drive</b>                                      |
| <b>23rd January</b>  | <b>Work Night for Ekwendeni</b>                          |
| <b>6th February</b>  | <b>No Meeting</b>  |
| <b>27th February</b> | <b>Bible Study with Rev Chris Miller</b>                 |
| <b>13th March</b>    | <b>Gardening at Mount Stewart<br/>with Head Gardener</b> |
| <b>27th March</b>    | <b>Praise and Pudding Night</b>                          |

We are also holding a **Spring Coffee Morning**  
on **Saturday 11th March**

**Please try to keep this date free and invite your friends, too!**

We look forward to your company - all new members are warmly welcomed.

**Secretary: Pat Millar (9146 1888)**  
**President (joint): Rinda Burnside (9188 9084)**  
**Margaret Caughey (9146 6303)**

## MAKING A PLACE FOR EVERYONE

by Chris Miller

I am very excited to share some news with you. After a number of years away, the Crèche at Groomsport Presbyterian Church has returned! Thanks to the leadership of several parents in the congregation, earlier this year a group of parents and their young children began meeting twice a month during morning worship. As this group has developed, it has become clear that a safe, designated space is necessary if we are to continue and expand this ministry.

After some consideration, a proposal was sent to the Kirk Session, Property Committee, and Congregational Committee to renovate the current vestry space and upstairs restrooms into a designated space for parents and young children. This proposal has been enthusiastically supported, and we are moving forward with the necessary work. This project will see the vestry cleaned out and refitted with comfortable seating

where parents may feed their child, a safe play area for young children, and a monitor to allow parents to see what is happening in the service, so they don't miss out on church while caring for their child. Additionally, the closest restroom



will be renovated and outfitted with the necessary equipment for safely changing a child's nappy. At the same time, we will be renovating the adjoining restroom for adult use and providing additional storage for our Children's Church supplies.

This is a huge step forward for Groomsport Presbyterian. When this space is completed, parents will have a safe, comfortable place to care for their children while attending events in the main church building. This space will be open for parents to use any time an event in the main building is going on. While our Crèche parents' group is currently meeting twice a month, we are hoping to expand this in the coming months, with the assistance of a Crèche Volunteer Team. Look for more details, soon, about how you can be involved in this exciting new project.



As I am writing this article, we are in the early stages of work. All being well, by the next time you are reading an *Eagle Wing*, there will be photos of the completed project for you to see. For now, here are some sketches of what it might look like. Enjoy!





By the time you are reading this, our Children's Gift Day Service will be over for another year and we would like to thank everyone who came along to this happy service, which always marks the beginning of our Christmas celebrations in Groomsport. Also, a huge thank you to everyone who gave the gifts that were placed under the Christmas tree; these are always most gratefully received by the Belfast Central Mission.

On Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> December, we will have our final meeting of Sunday School for 2016. This will take the form of a short Carol Service and will hopefully be followed by a visit from Santa Claus. There will also be tea, coffee and shortbread for parents and friends while the children enjoy activities, juice and biscuits.

There will be no Sunday School on 25<sup>th</sup> December - Christmas Day - but it would be great if you could join us for morning worship on that day. Also we will have a break on Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> January, New Year's Day. We will resume on Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> January, when we will be delighted to welcome any children from 3 years old to join the fun.

This is an advance notice of our effort to raise funds for the Sunday School Project next year. On Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> April 2017, we will be holding a Coffee and Games Morning. On this occasion our previous intern, Ryan Irmer, his wife, Amelia and their daughter, Alison, will be visiting - so it will be an opportunity to meet them all again. Do plan to join us.

May I thank the parents and children who have been so faithful and supportive, and we ask the congregation to uphold the work of our Sunday School in prayer.

On behalf of the Sunday School teachers and Bible Class, may I wish everyone a very happy Christmas and a peaceful, God-filled New Year.

Margaret McCreedy, Superintendent  
Tel 9146 4361

## The Talking Centipede

A single guy decided life would be much more fun if he got himself a pet. So he went to the pet store and told the owner that he wanted to buy an unusual pet. After some discussion, he finally bought a 'talking centipede', which came in a little white box to use as a house.

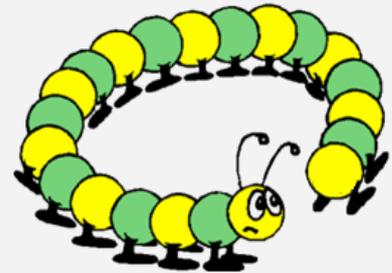
He took the box back home, found a good spot for the box, and decided he would start off by taking his new pet to church with him. So he asked the centipede in the box, "Would you like to go to church with me today? We will have a good time." But there was no answer from his new pet.

This bothered him a bit, but he waited a few minutes and then asked again, "How about going to church with me today to receive blessings?" But again, there was no answer from his new friend and pet. So he waited a few minutes more, thinking about the situation.

The guy decided to invite the centipede one last time. This time he put his face up against the centipede's house and shouted, "Hey, in there! Would you like to go to church with me and learn about God?"

This time, a little voice came out of the box:

"I heard you the first time! I'm putting my shoes on!"



Date for your 2017 Diary!!!

**Coffee & Games Morning**

**Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> April 2017**

In aid of the Sunday School Project

*Journeys of Promise*

and an opportunity to  
reconnect with the Irmer Family



## BROWNIES

by Elaine Carmichael

I am delighted to tell you that our three adult helpers (Laura Patton, Amy Billington and Nicola Patton) have all recently completed their leadership training and have been awarded their warrants. This is great news for our Brownies — and well deserved. All three of them were Brownies with us and have been an important part of our leadership for quite a few years now. They now have plans in place to complete their pack holiday licence and catering licence over the next year. Part one of this will be in December and as you will read later, the Brownies are looking forward to this weekend away.

We have had such an exciting year at Brownies and want to share some of it with you.

Rather than write an account of each event, I asked the Brownies to give me their comments.

### Annual pack holiday at Lorne



We went to the gift shop

*We had Dominos pizza*

We pushed our beds together & had a midnight feast

*We had a big bbq and found Tinkerbell*

We made posters for our bedroom doors

I went up really high and wasn't scared

*It was fun*

I was the only Brownie to get to the top of the jungle tower of rocks and reeds

*I loved racing Lily up and down*

That was a fun trip

### Clip 'n Climb



### Visit to Tesco

I made jam doughnuts *We got to taste different foods* We got snacks



### Hallowe'en



The Rainbows joined us for a party

*We played musical statues and had a lot of fun*

We made crafts and after we had chocolates, crisps, biscuits and juice

### New to Brownies



I have enjoyed Brownies so far and am excited for my enrolment and future trips

*My favourite thing is the shark game and ladders*

I've made new friends and learnt new games

*Learning our promise in the coffee bar was fun*

### Still to come – weekend at the Ranger cottage at Lorne

- ◆ I can't wait to go to the Ranger cottage because it will help Laura, Amy & Nicola ◆
- ◆ We'll have nice cosy bunk beds ◆ I am so excited to go on all the walks ◆ There will be lots of fun ◆
- ◆ I can't wait for all the lovely food ◆ I can't wait to roast marshmallows ◆ I want to help the young leaders get their licence so they can take us on trips without Heather & Elaine ◆

*PS: I really wanted to leave this last comment out - but I did ask! E.C.*

## RAINBOWS

We have had a great first few months back at 1<sup>st</sup> Groomspout Rainbows, with 10 new girls joining us this year — bringing our numbers to 20.

Unfortunately, a few leaders left due to university and other commitments but we have been pleased to welcome Deborah Goldie, Nicola Purce and Carrie Kinner to help us out, along with several young leaders from Senior Section in the Guides.



We always welcome additional help in the Rainbows so if you want a fun way to spend an hour a week, please let us know!

We have been busy introducing all our new members to the routines, and the games that we play in Rainbows, and have been getting creative with various crafts, baking and Promise activities.

The girls are looking forward to making their Promise in church in the next few weeks and very excited to get a nice shiny badge for their uniform!

A graphic with a dark blue background featuring a large, bright yellow star in the upper left corner. In the lower left corner, there is a silhouette of the Nativity scene, showing figures in a manger. A yellow rectangular box is positioned in the center-right, containing text.

How can we best keep Christmas?

- ◆ By following the star on an inward journey to Bethlehem to stand again in awe and wonder before the Babe in a manger.
- ◆ By rediscovering the faith and simplicity of a little child, for of such is the kingdom of heaven.
- ◆ By being still and listening to the angels sing within our hearts.
- ◆ By quietly evaluating our lives according to the Master's standards as set forth in the Sermon on the Mount.
- ◆ By resolving to give ourselves away to others in love, joy and devotion.

*Wilferd A. Peterson*

## STOREHOUSE NORTH DOWN



Helen Sloan has been running Storehouse North Down for four years now, having taken over food distribution from CAP. I had the privilege of visiting Helen recently, at her invitation, to see how things were done. She is situated in the vast building that was once the Oneida factory on Enterprise Road, just off the Bangor/Ards dual carriageway. Helen has some volunteers who turn up when they are needed, every week, especially when the Christmas hampers are being made up with your donations of food and Christmassy items. Recipients are referred to Helen by Social Services and other agencies such as St. Vincent de Paul, CAP, Trussle Trust and health centres. Workers from these agencies come and collect/deliver the food... But it doesn't stop there.

Helen and Brian, her husband, also manage the Kiltonga Christian Centre, where all sorts of household donations are received, enabling the charity to furnish homes that have been provided for people who need them. I am told that some of these people re-donate the items as soon as they can afford to buy their own bits and pieces. Nor does it stop here...

Helen has organised lessons every Thursday night in First Bangor for foreigners to learn English, so that they can obtain work to keep their families. I was invited there one night and there would usually be 15 – 30 people attending from all corners of the globe: Mexicans, Hungarians, Romanians, Chinese, Bangladeshi, Indians – the list is endless. Helen desperately needs a male teacher right now, so if you have time to spare on a Thursday night, she would love to see you.

Volunteers are also needed for Storehouse on Mondays and Thursdays to help pack the bags. Christmas is coming up soon and the need will be even greater then. Please think about it.

Do keep giving extra food to Storehouse, not just at Christmas, but all year round. Helen does not receive any funding for this project and relies on the goodness of people like us. For monetary donations, please contact Storehouse.

**[info@storehousenorthdown.com](mailto:info@storehousenorthdown.com)**  
**07526 541168**

To date, £46,000 worth of food has been distributed by Helen and her team – a truly fantastic effort by everyone. Thank you for all that you are doing.

*Mary Cargill*

*Opposite, Sheelagh Dalzell describes the work of Storehouse volunteers*

## STOREHOUSE - THE WORK OF THE VOLUNTEERS

Monday morning, I drive down to pick up gifts which you good people have placed in the trolley in the church porch – tins, jars, packets, both large and small. We are pleased to receive small sizes, as some of our ‘hampers’ go to single people, for whom a small tin of meat, fish, vegetables or fruit is more suitable than a large one.

I drive to Storehouse at the old Oneida factory, on Enterprise Road, where I unload into a trolley and wheel it to the room where our volunteers work, unpacking gifts, sorting, checking dates; this is most important, as it is against the law to pass on to the public out-of-date food – we must dump it.

The room has a long table all the way up the middle. There is a ‘path’ round the table and the walls are lined from floor to ceiling with shelves. All goods are sorted and placed on these shelves, like in a supermarket. Volunteers, usually a team of two (because it’s quicker) collect a list of items required to make up a hamper. You place your items together on the table, then fill your hamper. A ‘hamper’ is the number of strong plastic bags required to hold all the items on your list. You are given a number with your list and you write this number with a marker on each bag. Then you place your ‘hamper’ in a trolley, ready for delivery by a volunteer. The number on your bags tells the delivery person the address where the hamper is to be delivered. This address will not be near the area where the driver lives, and only s/he will know it.



Our shelves are reasonably full, due to donations from Harvest services in schools and churches, but the Christmas season brings extra stress, and each year our shelves are cleared. Last year, farmers were very good and we were able to put a bag of spuds and some fresh vegetables in each hamper at Christmas, along with a £10 voucher for meat, which could be used at participating butchers’ shops. We hope to do this again this year. It would be wonderful to know that everyone in North Down has a hot dinner, tea or coffee, a sweet or biscuits on Christmas Day. *With your help, we can do it!*

Storehouse partners many different agencies throughout North Down, helping people who can see no answer to their desperate situations. When personal crisis hits – like redundancy, illness, homelessness, separation – finding the next meal can be impossible. Storehouse exists to be an answer to those who have no safety net, no hope and no help. Social Services take 3-5 weeks to respond. Would you know how to apply? Storehouse can help you.



Are you interested in Storehouse? Would you like to come with me on Monday, see the set-up, meet the volunteers? Some come every Monday, like me, or occasionally; they and you are always welcome, it’s enjoyable, there’s a cup of tea, a biscuit and a chat in the kitchen about 3.00pm.

Give me a ring or speak to me at church. I can pick you up at church any Monday for a visit, you will be very welcome. Looking for dates on tins is not rocket science – but it is very useful! If you have questions about Storehouse, I will try to find answers for you.

*Sheelagh Dalzell 91472594*

<http://www.storehousenorthdown.com/>

## MY BEAUTIFUL BELL TOWER *by Brian McClelland*

*Editor's Note:*

*My late mother-in-law greatly enjoyed Brian's stories, and looked forward to the next one. I always passed this on to Brian, who would say jokingly that she was probably the only person who actually read them – a bit like Terry Wogan's 'listener'! Brian's latest article arrived with the following message:*

*I wrote the attached story with Lily in mind, as I did with most of my stories.  
I imagined she was my only reader and I was happy to receive word that she had enjoyed them.  
It would be fitting, perhaps, to dedicate this story to Lily.*

I climbed the never-ending, winding stairwell, fear mounting. The last platform, with the bell now in sight above me, was frightening. Narrow planks, thick with bird droppings, failed to cover the gaps. Upon seeing the ground far below me, I froze in fear. A pigeon, its solitude disturbed, flapped madly about me, seeking escape. A sideways shaft of light from a broken window struck my face, spotlighting my predicament. I inched backwards to the more solid ground of the stairs. A voice beneath me echoed in a rich Dublin brogue, "Are you alright up there, mate?" as I made my way down to street level and safety.

Such was my experience in Dublin's Abbey Presbyterian Church a few years ago when, in all innocence, I had asked the caretaker (or whoever he was) if I could visit the church's bell tower. What is it with me and bell towers, and where are 'Elf and Safety when you need them? Apart from its dodgy bell tower, Abbey, popularly known as 'Findlater's Church,' after the Dublin merchant who paid for its construction in the 1860s, has a spire 180 feet high – no wonder I had a touch of the vertigos up there!

I suppose my newly discovered fear of heights may be traced back to the time I fell through the bedroom ceiling of my home many years ago. I had been up in the roof space for some reason or other, when I slipped in between the rafters, crashed through the ceiling, narrowly missing a dressing table in my descent, to land unscathed on my feet! The funny bit, to take a positive out of the situation, was that the incident had been witnessed by my infant son, Gavin, from his highchair, positioned just outside the bedroom door. As I made my grand entrance, he clapped his hands and chortled happily, as only babies can do. His daddy was sooo cool!

Venice was my destination for a proper bell tower visit – or *campanile*, as they are called in Italy. Of course, I didn't go there for a campanile experience alone, as Venice has many more attractions for the casual visitor. A short *vaporetto* ride from the pier at St Mark's Square, on its own little island, is the church of San Giorgio Maggiori; its campanile offers the most photogenic view of Venice and its lagoon. You might just be lucky enough to hear the bells ringing on the hour. An added delight are the two superb Tintoretto paintings decorating the chancel – *Gathering of the Manna* and the other-worldly *Last Supper*, in which Jesus administers communion while servants occupy the centre of the scene, bustling to clear up the dishes.

Now, dear reader, at this juncture you might just be wondering why I am prattling on about Dublin bell towers, falling through ceilings and visiting Venetian campaniles. When will I come to the point of the story, if there is one? Let me be very clear – as local politicians might say when they are anything but – we have been on a journey and have now arrived, via Dublin and Venice, at the sleepily beautiful little parish church of St Mary's in the hamlet of Kilmoody, near Comber. My inner Quasimodo is about to be unleashed, and Esmeralda, my beautiful Esmeralda, will be saved from her gallows fate... (just read the book!\*)



It was a warm evening in September just past, an Indian summer sort of evening, when you might be tempted to sit out in the back garden with a glass of red wine (small) until twilight, and dreamily watch the red ball of the sun slide down the western sky. Except that at the time, I was in the bell tower of St Mary's, trying desperately to conceal my excitement at the prospect of RINGING THE BELL.

It was at the rehearsal of the wedding of my son, Philip, to the lovely Judith, to be held two days later. On my way out of St Mary's, and before I could stop myself, I had asked the Rector, Rev Stanley Gamble, if the church had a bell tower. Upon receiving an affirmative reply, I quickly asked him if the bell was ever rung at weddings. "Yes, sometimes", he answered, "if one of the ushers volunteers."

Now, among my varied duties as Father of the Groom, I was an usher! Before you could say 'The Hunchback of Notre Dame,' I plunged straight in: "Do you think I could give your bell a wee ring on the big day?" I enquired innocently. "Why not? Come up now - I'll give you a lesson," Stanley invited. It was a short climb to the bell and its intricate, gleaming mechanism. Soon, with a light touch on the rope, he had the bell ringing sweetly over the countryside at ten o'clock at night! I'm sure those within earshot must have wondered what on earth was happening – a royal birth, an alien invasion – or maybe the locals were used to Stanley's off-the-cuff bell ringing. He whispered a few instructions and thrust the rope into my hands. I took a deep breath and pulled. Oh, the thrill of it! The sheer pleasure of becoming a campanologer was as overwhelming as the realization that I would be doing it for real in two days' time.



And so it transpired that I rang the church bell at my son's wedding. It was a joyous and memorable occasion, a unique experience. At precisely five minutes to noon, I abandoned my ushering duties, ascended the bell tower of St Mary's and with a swelling heart, let the world know that this was a day of happiness, of love and great expectations. With each pull of the rope, I became lost in a reverie: "*Do you, Philip, take Judith...?*" +BONG...

*"Do you, Judith, take Philip...?"* BONG...

*"I now pronounce you..."* BONG... BONG... BONG...

All too soon the voice of my son, Michael, chimed in to interrupt my musing:

"Come down now, Dad, the bride has arrived."

Judith would walk up the aisle on the arm of her father, Brian, and make the return journey on the arm her husband, Philip. I had played my part and all was well with the world.

\* Victor Hugo, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, 1831



A bell's not a bell 'til you ring it,  
A song's not a song 'til you sing it,  
Love in your heart wasn't put there to stay,  
Love isn't love 'til you give it away!

*Oscar Hammerstein II*

## I've moved to Aberdeen!

I would like to let everyone in our church family know how grateful I am for your prayerful support for me, as I made the big move to Aberdeen in order to commence my Nursing studies here at Robert Gordon University.

Following my trip to Uganda in 2014, I knew that nothing would be able to stand in my way to become a nurse. I followed my dream, accepted my place here and moved within three weeks! It was a bit of a mad rush round shops to buy bed linen, pots and pans and everything that I could possibly need - that I didn't know how to use!

It was a really tough first two weeks after Mum, Dad and Andrew left, as I was homesick and trying to meet new people. I am now generally known as "Catherine from Ireland," and I have given up explaining exactly where I am from, so that will do! There is only one other person from Northern Ireland on my course so it has taken a while to learn all the different phrases used here!

I am in a flat with four other girls, one from England, others from Orkney, Dundee and Poland and it has been great getting to know them all. We have become great friends - but I admit, the messy kitchen most of the time does annoy me, dishes everywhere! I also have my own en suite, which I begged Mum for as I didn't want to be cleaning a shared toilet!

I am in University almost five days a week, 9 until 5 and it is a 40-50 minute bus journey in the morning. Mum will tell you how much I hate getting up in the mornings, so 7am isn't the best start to the day! I couldn't have loved somewhere I couldn't see the sea, so it's only a twenty-minute walk to the beach!

It is about a ten-minute walk onto the main Union Street, which is great, and only three minutes to walk to Morrisons, although I have had to create a skill of carrying my bags back from shopping myself - mostly in the rain!

I start my first placement in January, which I am incredibly excited about! We have the chance to go to Orkney and Shetland for some of our placements, which I would really enjoy. We should be finding out where our first placement should be in a few weeks. I have started my clinical skills - practising on lifelike dummies that are able to talk, blink and move! They are very scary!

I barely get any holidays compared to some other courses but I am glad that my placements are longer, as that will definitely keep me busy, along with piles of essays to do!



Aberdeen is a beautiful city and I would love to see anyone who has any reason to visit in the area. Make sure you bring your hat and gloves, though, as it's even colder than Northern Ireland!

May I also say a special thanks to all of you who write, email and text me, as it is really good to have people at home to update me on all that's going on. I have included my flat address for anyone who would like to keep in touch.

I look forward to seeing everyone at Christmas, when I am home for two weeks.

*Catherine Poxon*

[catherinep11@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:catherinep11@hotmail.co.uk)

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I am the new year. I am an unspoiled page in your book of time.

I am your next chance at the art of living.  
I am your opportunity to practise what you have learned about  
life during the last twelve months.

All you sought and didn't find is hidden in me,  
waiting for you to search it but with more determination.  
All the good you tried for and didn't achieve is mine to grant  
when you have fewer conflicting desires.

All you dreamed but didn't dare to do,  
all you hoped but did not will,  
all the faith you claimed but did not have —  
these slumber lightly, waiting to be awakened  
by the touch of a strong purpose.

I am your opportunity to renew your allegiance to him who said,  
"See, I am making all things new" (Revelation 21:5, NRSV).

*Author unknown*

**NEW LAWS IN RUSSIA** by Sheelagh Dalzell

One cold, wet PW Monday night in 1996, *Songs of Praise* was to be recorded at the Flagship Centre in Bangor. Mrs May Jamison, an elder in Whitehouse Presbyterian Church across the Lough, was coming to our PWA to give a talk on Russia. I had no interest in Russia. It was a 'bad' night, most of our members were also members of our church choir and were singing at the Flagship. There would be very few attending our meeting – so I went.

When I came home, I knew I was going to St Petersburg with Eschol Trust, founded and run by Rev Ronnie McCracken and his wonderful wife, Pat, to give Christian humanitarian aid to the people of St Petersburg. Russian people had suffered greatly for many years. Recently, things were beginning to improve but now are in reverse.

I am still in contact with friends in St Petersburg and Minsk, Belarus (near Chernobyl), and with Rev McCracken, with whom I have worked ever since, and from whom I received this letter – which I find very upsetting and have decided to share with you.

From Rev Ronnie McCracken, Eschol Ministries:

*President Vladimir Putin has signed into law new regulations concerning the church which will have far-reaching consequences. Passed as an anti-terrorism measure, the new law will affect the Christians and our ability to do outreach.*

*The church will be allowed to operate BUT only within the four walls of the registered building*

*It will NOT be allowed to invite non-believers to attend*

*It will be forbidden to end the service by inviting non-believers to come to Christ*

*It will not be allowed to speak to non-believers on public transport, etc, about faith*

*Evangelism outside the church will be forbidden*

*Foreigners will no longer be permitted to preach in the church without special government permission.*

*These are the most repressive laws in Russia since the time of Stalin, and basically make it impossible for the church to function properly. It remains to be seen how the law will be implemented locally in each area, but the believers are deeply concerned, with many churches spending days in prayer and fasting.*

*Perhaps this January will be our last opportunity to hold the Festival of Evangelical Culture in St Petersburg. Only the Lord knows what will be the final outcome. Of one thing we are sure: just as the Lord sustained His church during the terrible years of Communism, He will continue to build his church and the gates of Hell will not prevail against it!*

◆ URGENT PRAYER IS REQUESTED FOR THIS SITUATION, PLEASE ◆

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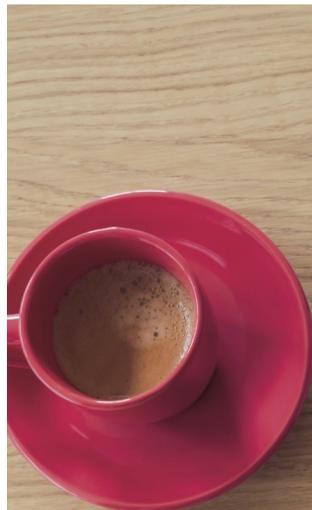
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### NEWS FROM FORMER INTERNS



Dear Friends,

It is always a joy to bring you greetings at Christmastime. In October, I celebrated the 25th anniversary of my Ordination as a minister. There was an official celebration on Sunday, 9 October - complete with my friend Rev. Lisanne Finston, preaching, (she preached at my Ordination), a hymn written in honor of the milestone, and friends and family from all over the country. It was a lovely day. Of course, you all played a large role in my journey toward Ordination, and I continue to give thanks to God for giving me the opportunity to be mentored by David Irwin and learn so much from all of you during my internship year.



May you have a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

Fondly,  
**Pam** psaturnia9@gmail.com



After a whirlwind six weeks of traveling around America by plane, train, car and bus visiting friends and family, we finally arrived in Edinburgh! We were quite exhausted, but are now settling in quite nicely. I am glad to get back to regular preaching and am grateful for this time to familiarize myself with Church of Scotland polity and their current issues and missions. Ramon has begun his job search and prayers for the right position to open up would be very much appreciated. We are adjusting to the cold and dark, but the church has been very lovely and welcoming. The Christmas Market is being set up in town, which was something I absolutely loved in Belfast, so we're very much looking forward to that!

Much love,  
**Tara** tara.porr@gmail.com

*Tara will be working in Portobello and Joppa Parish Church (St Philip's), a beautiful Georgian church on Brunstane Road North in Joppa, Portobello, about fifteen minutes' drive from Edinburgh city centre.*



***Greetings from the Nix Family:***

It seems that God is just pouring out the blessings. Elizabeth is full of joy and life. She loves preschool, church, and everyone she meets. She is growing into a wonderful girl and we are very proud of her. Steven is full of energy and mischief. He loves to climb everywhere and have kisses on his belly (which makes him laugh!) And the best news of all - Nix baby #3 is on the way! Our special blessing is due to arrive the end of June. Unfortunately, I am less than pleasant to be around (thanks to this awful morning sickness) but Eric has been Super Dad, and we take comfort in knowing that this illness can't last forever.

All of my coursework for my doctorate is complete, so now my sights turn to the dissertation. And the best surprise of all - we scraped enough pennies together that we are surprising the kids with a trip to Disney World for Christmas! Obviously I have to work Christmas Day, but I know they will be thrilled to hear that Santa is letting them travel on an airplane to go see all the princesses. Looks like I'm going to win the "Greatest Mum Ever" award again this year!

I hope everything is going well for you. Please continue to keep our family and our community in your prayers. This political election has been difficult and many close to me are struggling to find God in all the uncertainty. I know that God is bigger than any government, but I also know how difficult it is sometimes to stand up for God's truth when the world around you is full of chaos and fear.

We miss you all and wish you all the best this Christmas season.

Sincerely,

*The Nix Family*

rev.katie.nix@gmail.com



*News from Christa in Myrtle Beach:*

Happy Advent and Merry Christmas! Susan asked me if I would write a little bit about my, and my church's, experience with Hurricane Matthew that struck the East Coast of the US in early October.

Since it is possible to have several days of warning with a hurricane, the governor of our state issued both mandatory and voluntary evacuations four days before the storm. That evening, there was a run on petrol, and all of the water and canned foods in the grocery store, as people stocked up for what might be days without electricity. As our church was in the mandatory evacuation zone, my fellow staff members and I had to work to secure the building and protect all electrical equipment from potential water damage if the roof leaked, or if the wind blew in a window, followed by the rain getting in. While I live in an area that was marked for voluntary, and not mandatory, evacuation, I chose to evacuate to a friend's house in Charlotte, North Carolina - about a 3.5 hour drive inland from the coast.



Driving home after the storm was a bit surreal. There was flooding in many locations, and many, many large trees had been uprooted and toppled over. Billboards were bent, signs on business had blown away, and there were many other signs of wind damage. In the end, my house was OK. The retaining pond in the back came within about 10 feet of the house, after we had between 12-18 inches of rain over a few hours, but it did not flood the house. Our church was a bit more of a mess, with many trees uprooted and fallen branches littering the ground. We had some water damage from leaks in the roof and one of the windows in our steeple blew in and caused some rain damage inside. For a storm that came on land right in our city, we were fortunate to deal only with that.



While we were fortunate, many in our county were not. There was serious flooding in areas close to us, and at least one couple in our church ended up with a giant tree through their dining room - though that was not a unique experience for the area. Thankfully, power was restored to the area relatively quickly.

The clean-up after this storm will be long - here in the US and in countries like Haiti. Some people in our area had just started recovering from our 1000 year flood last year, only to be flooded again in the hurricane. The whole area could use prayer, and we as a church are doing what we can to aid in the recovery efforts.

But life also moves on and forward. As I write this, we are preparing for Thanksgiving this week, and then we are straight into Advent. I celebrate that this will be the first year in my pastoral ministry that I will celebrate Christmas with my family, as my parents are coming for a week at Christmas.

I think of you all and pray for you often. May you all have a wonderful Christmas.

Blessings,

*Christa*

**CBrewer@mbfpc.com**

## KNYSNA UPDATE

Stanley Megahey

Hazel and I have just returned on 3rd November from Knysna, Western Cape, South Africa. When you had the best of weather at home in September and October, we had the coldest weather we have ever experienced in Knysna. It's the end of spring, and summer had just started a few days before we left.

The weather plays a big part in Knysna life. The half-term holiday, which they don't all take at the same time, is big for accommodation places and restaurants. The strength of the Rand has brought more international visitors to the town. Knysna is on the Garden Route from Cape Town to Port Elizabeth and is, therefore, a tourist town for coach tours, etc.

The Heads is a must-see, where the tide flows in at 8 knots into the lagoon, waves breaking over the rocks at the entrance — only for the professional boatman. The East Heads Restaurant is a photo spot where the photographers come to get that memory. The breakfast may be another reason, with those lovely waitresses who greet us as friends!



We were taken to a new place, the Sunday before we left Knysna, for a barbecue — Jubilee Creek, named in honour of Queen Elizabeth's Jubilee. It was close to the dirt road to the old gold mine near Rheenendal. Ridges in the road caused by rain and a succession of 4 X 4s meant the shock absorbers got a good workout. We were in Tom's car, following him in front — normally we would be in a hired car and driving on dirt roads is excluded. The Creek, with the stream flowing and the children playing, was just beautiful. The group was made up of the minister, Wayne, and his family plus six others from the church. The trees surrounding the glen were 60-70 metres high. What beauty!

Knysna Presbyterian Church is in good heart. The weather played a big part in numbers, as the awful weather led to chest problems and many were laid low for weeks. The bring-a-friend Sunday was successful, as usual. Jill had her music students playing their stringed instruments. A cup of tea, and a table spread with home bakes, completed the day.

Olga and Ari Klootwyk have been elders and members for 30 years. They have decided to leave Knysna and go to an Africana Village complex two hours from Knysna at Brac River, on the road to Mossel Bay. Ari did the church maintenance and Olga did the rest. Olga was responsible for the outreach work. Cometh the hour, cometh the person. They will be sorely missed. Olga is originally from Belgium. A few years ago, we were talking about horse meat and who would eat such stuff; I was winding her up. Olga was sticking up for Belgium and the horse meat. When we met, our greeting was 'neigh,' then another 'neigh!' She was such fun. We will miss her but when we go to collect our garden signs at Brac River, we will keep in contact and stop off for her milk cake once again.



Maria at Rheenendal is in fine form. Ester, her daughter, is helping her brother at Eastern Cape. Maria misses her, especially at night, when she says she is lonely. Ester is full of humour and works well with the children. Rheenendal is facing its problems with drugs and home-made alcohol.

A new school extension is being built opposite Maria's home. The influx of people from Malawi and other parts of South Africa made the existing school unworkable. Maria is getting older and has less energy. A decision will have to be made on the future, as the demand will be greater and she will need paid support.

We spent a lot of time getting the Maranatha Pre-school fit for purpose — when we visited Maranatha in February, the building was certainly not. Maranatha was being guided by Knysna Educational Trust, whose object is to get pre-schools (46) fit for purpose. Margaret Campbell came on board with her bric-a-brac sale. When we visited the school, there was a big improvement. Floor covering, no broken windows, two working toilets and a warm building — all completed from Margaret's fund raising. Blankets and mattresses from the Margaret Campbell outreach money have made the children's rest-time sleep more comfortable.

Joanne Chestnutt, whose family have always been supportive, offered money she had collected for a trip to Africa, but had been unable to make. Joanne wanted the money to be used at Maranatha Pre-school for play equipment to stimulate these children. We managed to make contact with a company which makes professional equipment, i.e. fit for purpose. We got a see-saw as discount. The building had no kitchen. The rate of exchange was completed before Brexit. The kitchen cupboards were bought raw from Pennypinchers and Mervyn (Tom's friend), an ex-builder, assisted by the Irish Boy, installed the cupboards, saving a lot of Rands. Joanne's funds were able to do the play equipment, plus install a kitchen.



The building fence was fine for 60% of the perimeter. The neighbours' turkeys and dogs were coming into the school outside area and leaving 'presents'. The garden signs paid for 30 metres of 1.2 metre fencing, giving a strong, secure play area — with no longer a mess. Mervyn, Tom, Michael (Cynthia's owner husband), plus Irish boy, erected the 11 posts and 30 metre fence.

This is the fourth project Hazel and I have been involved with in Knysna. Every project was different but Maranatha, working through someone else, has its drawbacks. The project is only about the children and those lovely, happy faces when it's completed. That is all that matters.

Hazel and I wish to thank everyone for all the support we have received in the past from our friends in Groomsport.





## Carols by Candlelight Sunday 18th December at 7.00pm

### FORTHCOMING SERVICES

|                      |         |  |
|----------------------|---------|--|
| Sunday 25th December | 10.30am | Christmas Day Family Service<br>No Evening Service |
| Sunday 1st January   | 11.30am | New Year Communion Service<br>No Evening Service   |



### DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

|                         |                    |
|-------------------------|--------------------|
| Wednesday 25th January  | Friendship Lunch   |
| Wednesday 22nd February | Friendship Lunch   |
| Monday 6th March        | Congregational AGM |
| Saturday 11th March     | P W Coffee Morning |