

NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2023/2024



ROSSKEEN
FREE CHURCH

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Photographs

1. Snowy path to the Averon River, Alness (cover)
2. Tree surrounded by the Northern Lights, Meigle
3. Randolph's Leap, Forres (rear cover)

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

By Rev Calum Macmillan



Happy New Year! OK, it's February by the time you read this, but it is the first Newsletter of 2024. Thank you to Mark for pulling things all together and to everyone who has contributed.

While thinking over what to say I felt it was best to repeat something rather than say anything new. At our New Year's Day service, we were thinking about words the Lord has put on

my heart for Rosskeen and I just wanted to repeat those - especially as not everyone was there.

You are the light of the World. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. (Matthew 5:14)

What do these words say to us?

Jesus doesn't tell us to BE something. He doesn't say we CAN be the light of the World, or that we OUGHT to be the light of the World. He says his Church IS the light of the World. This is what we are.

Jesus is saying to us to let our light shine. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Shine.

In the Old Testament days, Jerusalem was LITERALLY a city set on a hill. Was the place God had set his name, the place where his presence was concentrated most closely.

Jesus is saying to us as his Church WE are the place where God has put his name and where his presence is.

The presence of God is what we all need. What our Church needs. What our community needs. What our nation needs. What our World needs.

I asked us if we could covenant together for the year ahead to seek the presence of God. Ask God to be with us. Repent of sin. Desire him to meet with us.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if Rosskeen shone, not with the outside lights (nice though they are), but shone with the presence of the LORD? To be a beacon on the A9 where people can find the LORD.

Let's pray together that this will be the reality. May God be in our midst.

God bless you all.

FINANCE UPDATE

By Elizabeth McPhail

This year has been a year of real financial blessing. For the second year in a row our income has been higher than our expenses which has allowed us to balance most of the funds and see a healthy balance in the general fund. This does not mean that we have not spent money, however when we have invested in faith God has provided.

We have used the money, that you so generously give, to hold several outreach and discipleship events such as the Easter Experience, Christmas Unwrapped, YF Summer trip, Sunday School Trip, Carols by Candlelight, and The Puppet show. As well as making charitable donations to The Earthquake Appeal, Free Church Camps, WfM, The BIG Meal, Highland Foodbank Advent Appeal, and local primary schools.

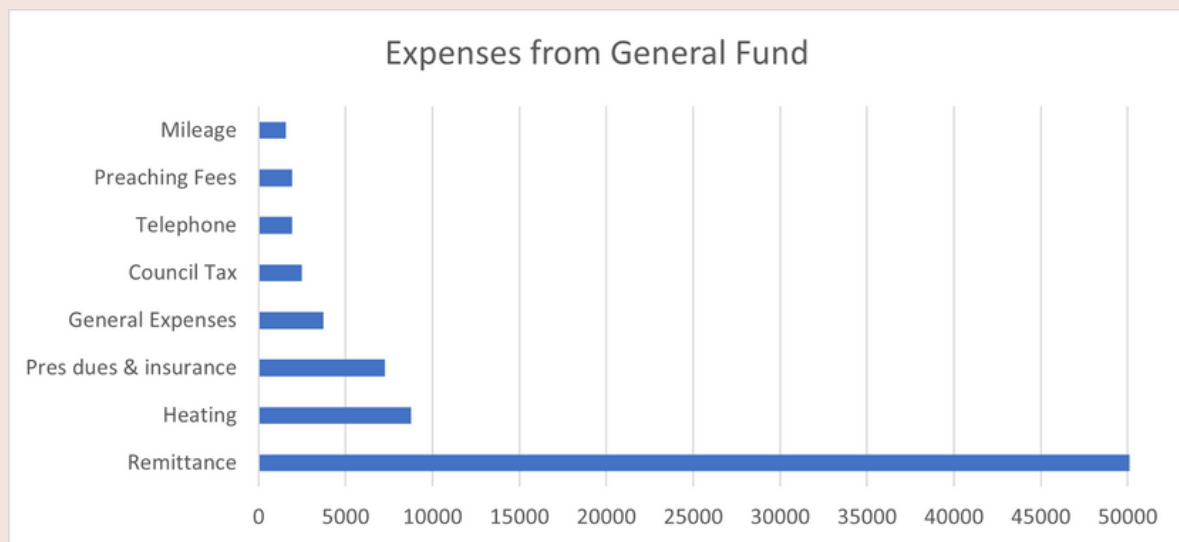
None of this would be possible without you so thank you so much. I will now outline each fund and the income and expenses. A little background – we have a pot of money that most expenses and income go into, called the General Fund. We also have smaller pots for specific things for example the Sunday School & Youth Fund. Some people choose to allocate a proportion of their giving to specific funds. This does not mean that you need to give more it just changes the pot that it goes into. With our plans for the building fund and plans for mission and outreach perhaps you can consider if you would like to allocate a proportion of your giving into a separate fund. If this is something that you would like to do, please come, and have a chat with me, and I would be happy to discuss it.

The General fund started 2023 at £32,998 and at the end of December, the balance was £43,668. This also doesn't include Q2, Q3, or Q4 gift aid income so the final total will be higher. It is fantastic that we have enough income to cover monthly expenses. Thank you so much for your sacrificial giving.

Our average monthly income has been £7,400 and our average monthly expenses has been £6,600 which means we have more than covered our expenses each month.



General Fund Income



The Restricted funds are as follows:

Building & Maintenance

Income £6,065

Expenses £1,005

The biggest expense this year has been new tables for the hall. Salt was purchased, keys were cut and fire extinguishers were serviced.

Total Remaining £46,794

Sunday School & Youth

Income £3,553

Expenses £3,127

Sunday school & YF materials have been purchased. We bought all the young people that were new to YF their own Bible. We went on a Sunday school and YF trip. We had an Easter egg hunt and the puppet show.

Total Remaining £8,536

Ministry & Discipleship & Wages

Income £5,000

Expenses £4,832

Books were purchased for the Purpose Driven Life bible study as well as up-dated pew bibles. Commentaries were purchased and Keith joined Rosskeen as Minister in Training.

Total Remaining £29,356

Communication & Magazine

Income £1,862

Expenses £4,757

A variety of tech equipment has been purchased including items to improve internet connectivity at the church. We also have regular direct debits for live streaming software and broadband.

Total Remaining £6,506

<u>Outreach & Mission</u> Income £2,158 Expenses £1,174 We have a regular standing order for the work of Mission International. As well as Carols by Candelight Total Remaining £5,664		<u>Mercy Ministries</u> Income £1,584 Expenses £1,650 Total Remaining £10,975
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Summary

It has been a good year financially. We have been able to hold several outreach events as well as invest in our young people through the Sunday school and youth fund. We have also used rental income to make some improvements to the Saltburn manse which we will continue to do in 2024.

We plan to decide, as a congregation, on mission partners that we can support and receive regular updates from. We currently give £70 per month to Mission International but we would like your thoughts as to who we partner with in the future. There will be more information regarding mission partners this year.

As you might have noticed, the communication fund is the only fund that does not currently balance. This is due to the high costs associated with tech equipment. If you would consider allocating part of your giving to the communication fund that would be helpful.

We are currently in discussions with the Melville Knox Christian School as they would like to use our halls as classrooms during the week. This would provide us with a small income each month which could be invested into church renovations. The church renovations will hopefully get underway in 2024 although a lot of work is happening behind the scenes.

So 2023 has been a good year and we look forward to 2024 and ask for God's blessing on the ministry at Rosskeen. If you have any questions or would like to chat about the church finances, please get in touch.

DEACONS' COURT REPORT

By Mark Stirling



Since the last newsletter, the Deacons' Court has continued to work in the background maintaining the church properties and assisting in aspects of church ministry.

Near the end of last year, the Court began the process of upgrading the Saltburn manse by replacing the downstairs hall carpet. The Court has asked Calum and Christina to identify things they would like done to the manse that would be of most help to them. This is

still an ongoing consultation, but the Court is grateful the congregation has the funds available now to do this work and we look forward to doing more upgrades as the year progresses.

Last year the Court was approached by Melville Knox School which requested the hire of the church hall and vestries for a school hub for around 15 home school pupils. Melville Knox is a Christian organization that teaches a curriculum from a Reformed Christian perspective. Its goal is to "provide the highest possible standard of education, suitable for the widest range of intellectual ability, in an environment which cares for each child as an individual". Melville Knox Schools are officially registered with Education Scotland and consequently are subject to external assessment and standards. The Court is keen to work with Melville Knox, but discussions are still in the early consultation stage, with no decisions yet reached.

As you have no doubt noticed there is a lot of audio tech being tested at the church. We are grateful to the congregation for its patience as we trial systems that will hopefully be included in the church's future renovations.

Last year the fire alarm control box at the church was damaged by a leak in the corridor roof outside the kitchen. This resulted in the control box sounding like a Geiger counter for a while which was quite unnerving! In the end, the control box needed a new circuit board, and this work has now been completed and the system is up and running properly again. There are still some outstanding jobs to be done regarding the fire escape lights but this will be completed soon.

The top vestry now has a set of very useful storage units to hold all the various items that have accumulated over the last year or so. Also, the hall door has now been fixed. The new church website is coming along well and should be ready to launch soon.

The MacCallum Centre has had several viewings over the last few months, however, it has not sold yet. One of the reasons for this is the centre's condition. Due to this, the Court decided to lower the selling price to £140,000. Since then, the centre has had another viewing. Please continue to pray about the centre's sale as that money is central to the church's renovations.



The Court would like to thank the congregation for its feedback on the architect's designs and the initial plans for the church renovations. These have been discussed with our architect, Duncan Macdonald, and we are now almost at the stage of getting the final figure for the project. However, due to the costs involved and the funds required, this will be a project that will happen in stages.

The Court has decided that the first stage should focus on the windows, and we have been looking at various options. One option is to incorporate new window coverings. This has been investigated and an initial quote of £58,000 has been received for replacing all the outside window coverings.

Soon there will be a need to create a fundraising team to bid for grants and funds from various charitable organizations. This will not be easy as the competition for these grants is very high. Thankfully, the Court has contact with other churches which have successfully gone through this process and their help and advice will be invaluable in the coming months.



Current architect plan for the back of the church

KIRK SESSION REPORT

By Derek McPhail



Once a month the Elders meet to discuss the spiritual health of our church, seek God's help, and make decisions on how best to move forward. We stay in regular contact as matters arise for prayer or action, and recently have had a growing sense of teamwork and of working well together. We believe this is a direct answer to your prayers - we value them and thank God for each of you.

Our main concerns are to follow God's ways for church leadership as explained in his Word, and to show in whatever ways we can that we care for each of you, because 'He cares for you' (1 Peter 5:7). We'd love for you all to feel more encouraged, to know that you're not alone in the challenges you face, and to be drawn closer to the Lord. To offer friendship in a world that seems to be losing the skills of friendship, and (where needed) direction from God's word. This is our primary calling - to care for God's people here and welcome new ones in as God builds his family.

Currently, we are seeking ways of improving this care, what we call 'pastoral care':

First, we ask you to pray against distractions, from too much energy being used up on wider issues that also need to be dealt with. For example, Calum and Jimmy have had to deal with many difficult issues in Northern Presbytery in the last year or more. Tasks like this need to be done, but regardless of anything else that's going on, we can't let things distract us from our primary calling. For the times we fail to show proper care for you we ask your forgiveness. And now we ask for your prayers to help us stay focused on pastoral care.

Secondly, we are looking for ways to organize ourselves so that everyone can be cared for appropriately and that new people can 'slot in' and find a place in the family. Nobody should be missed out. One idea is to organize the congregation into pastoral groups similar to what we had in lockdown. One elder would stay in regular contact with everyone in their group, and the elders could 'rotate' to a new group every 6 or 12 months so that you can get to know us better and, over time the elders get to know the whole congregation better. Would that be something you would welcome?

Thirdly, for a truly healthy church - to be a 'city on a hill' that shows God's love in this world - we would like to foster a culture of care throughout the church. To help each of you feel that you can take initiative and show care for others. Some of you have modelled this well for decades among church members and friends, and some of you pour your energy into caring for family members and children. We would like to honour your example by encouraging us all to be outward-looking and care for others. Perhaps you can speak to someone you've never spoken to before? That may be all the encouragement someone needs that week.

There are three more things we'd like to mention (among others but trying to keep this short and readable!):

Women's ministry and family work have been on the agenda for some time. We would dearly love to improve these aspects of our pastoral care. We are grappling with the question - would it be best to employ a female worker for this role? If you agree that it would, would you be willing to contribute funds for this role?

Three or four years ago there were many opportunities to discuss the Bible together, in various Bible studies and life groups. At the moment there is much less of this happening. We recognize this is not very healthy and are about to look for ways we can start healthy groups again. If you would benefit from a small group, or if you have ideas for one, please let us know.

Finally, if our food is God's Word, our life breath is connected with God in prayer. Please do join the prayer meeting on Wednesday evening if you can, but if you can't, have you thought about sharing prayer points so that you can participate in that way? You could send them to Calum or someone else who normally goes. Prayer is warfare and can be difficult, but that's all the more reason to join in. Remember the Zoom option is still available.

Thank you for reading. If you have any questions or would like to discuss anything with your team of elders, please approach us at any time.

NP CONNECT

By Rev Iain MacAskill



NP Connect began an outreach at the beginning of August in the Centre called Café Connect, which has proved very successful in our efforts to connect with the community. The highlight of the year was our Christmas Day dinner, which received wide coverage in the local press and through social media. Ross County FC and Dalmore Farm provided towards the catering and others from the community volunteered to help on the day- including a trained chef (who came to church

on Christmas Eve). Fifty adults and children were fed, and each was given a present and a gospel book.

Capstone Community Church Plant

We continue to be encouraged by the development of the proposed church plant. The year ended with more than seventy folks attending on consecutive Sundays. Our Christmas Eve Carol service was a full house and we were encouraged by the Rosskeen members who joined us.

The Core group currently meets once a week for a time of prayer and again we were encouraged by the number of people who joined us for prayer on the last day of the year. In 2024, we plan to develop house groups and other discipleship meetings for those who are now regulars at the Sunday morning service.

Personal

I would like to take this opportunity to thank members of Rosskeen who have contacted me and conveyed their condolences at the time of my sister's passing. At the end of the year, Ann and I celebrated 40 years of marriage together, we give thanks to God for his goodness to us throughout these years.

*"Thus far the Lord has helped us."
(2 Sam 7:12).*

CHRISTMAS UNWRAPPED

By Calum Macmillan

Well, Christmas is certainly 'wrapped up' for another year (the January blues are hopefully also past by the time you read this!) but what fun we had in early December sharing the Christmas message with some of our local schools.

We are always so thankful to be able to hold these events. A number of the teachers from the schools came to us to thank us for putting them on and how glad they were to be able to come. It is so humbling to hear that - we are so delighted the schools want to come! This year we welcomed children from Ardross, Newmore, Bridgend, and Coulhill Primaries - in the region of 170 children, praise the LORD!

Our theme this year was that Jesus was the hero who had come to save, to fix all the brokenness and badness in the World. In a first (for us) we had a new character - Eve. Eve explained to the children why there were bad things in the World (sin) and that God had promised her he would send a Saviour one day. We also had Mary and Joseph and a Shepherd as our characters in fancy dress.

If you are unfamiliar with Christmas Unwrapped it is a noisy, fun way to share the Christmas story with local children. When the children arrive we do a welcome and run over some safety notices then we do a song to get everyone energised. We then watched a video from the Scottish Bible Society explaining the Christmas story. The children then get split into groups and they have 5-7 minutes at each station then they move to the next in rotation until everyone has been at every station. Each character had a station and we also had a craft station, snack, games, and art stations. It was at the art station that the children made the beautiful stars that decorated the Church for our Carol Service which made it extra special. Once all back together we sing again, ask a few questions to make sure the main learning points have got across, and then say cheerio! Usually, the whole thing lasts about 1 hour and 15 minutes.

Thank you to our amazing team of helpers - Anne Campbell, Janice, Sheena, Murdo, Donald MacIver, Betty, Christina, Catriona, Wildon, Colin, Marie, Donald Stirling, Faith Buchanan, Maranne, Anne Sinclair, as well as Robert Adair, Phil & Claire Gunn and Ruth MacMillan for joining us to help. It takes a team to make any event happen and we want to thank, and honour, those who helped so cheerfully and willingly. It was a tiring two days but what better reason to be tired than sharing the good news about Jesus to our local children. Thank you LORD.

ROSSKEEN SUNDAY SCHOOL

By Claire Ross

To give you a flavour of what we've been doing in Sunday School, we asked the children 3 questions:

- 1) What is your favourite thing about Sunday school?
- 2) Why do you like Sunday school?
- 3) What have you been learning about at Sunday school recently?

Here are their wonderful responses.

"I like how we learn memory verses, and I like the worksheets. I have learnt about Psalm 1 and Psalm 19 and where to find things in the Bible. I like the songs and videos when we are altogether." (Jamie)

"I like making things in Sunday School. I have learnt about Jesus and God from the verses in the Bible." (Tom)

"I like art week at Sunday School when we make a big piece of art together. I like that we always colour in. I have learnt about Psalm 19 and the way of the righteous and the way of the wicked (Psalm 1). I like singing the songs and the videos." (Lucy)

"I like learning new things in the Bible. I like making new friends. I am learning about Psalm 1. Psalm 1 says that people who live a bad life will be blown away like chaff" (Kayla)

"I like learning about the stories in the bible. I like that it's welcoming and comforting and that everyone is welcome to come. I like learning about Psalms with Claire" (Charlie A)

“I like it when I get to read the passage or the sheet because you know me, I'm obsessed with books! I like watching the videos about the Bible story. We were learning about the path of the wicked and the path of the righteous.” (Ruairidh)

I don't know, just ask daddy!” (Eilidh)

“Watching the videos and learning. I liked making the sheep and I liked learning, and I liked making the star. I've been learning about the good tree and about the bad tree.” (Mairead)

“I like friends and singing because I like seeing my friends and singing. I like songs and God.” (Olly)

“We get to learn about Jesus. I get to learn about Jesus. How Jesus died on the cross. That the grain that's left behind gets blown away by the wind and the faithful are like a nice tree flooded by water.” (JJ)

“I liked making a sheep. I like the stories of baby Jesus. I liked finding stars. I like playing.” (Annalise)

“I like colouring in and doing worksheets. I get to learn new songs and bits about the bible. I learnt that bad people blow away like the chaff and the faithful are like the tree with fruit.” (Olive)

“I like meeting up with friends. I can learn more about God. I learnt Psalm 1 about the paths of the righteous and the wicked.” (Eden)

THE YOUTH FELLOWSHIP

By Elizabeth McPhail

2023 saw several changes to our YF, we now have 10 children coming along regularly. We bought bibles for each of the new YF members to allow them to deepen their relationships with God. The young people range in age from P7 age to S3 and many attend the other local churches which is great to have a connection with other churches in the area. For this reason, our Christmas social was a head-to-head with the ministers from the churches that the young people attend.

We played different rounds including gingerbread house building, toilet paper fashion show, donut eating race and many more. The most chaotic game was the toilet paper fashion show! The ministers decided to throw the toilet paper all over the kids and resulted in Robert Adair ripping a bag in half which was full of toilet paper. I definitely needed the help of Robert and Morven that night to keep the ministers in line! It was great fun and there were some sugar crashes at the end of the night.

What does 2024 hold for the YF?

We started the year by joining with other YFs for the Magnitude worship evening hosted by SU Scotland in Inverness. It was a great opportunity for the YF to meet with people their age.

Our plan is to continue using Youth for Christ materials and we have enjoyed having guest speakers such as Jen Robertson from the Scottish Bible Society so we will be asking for some guest speakers for the year ahead.

Thank you so much to Keith, Lizzie, Morven, Rob, David and Christina for stepping in to help out. Please continue to pray for the young people as they work through bullying, anxiety and trying to work out how they can have a relationship with God. If you have any questions or comments please let me know.





PSALM SINGING

By James Campbell

Towards the end of last year, Calum was appealing for precentors and musicians to help in leading the praise and I wanted to help. My problem was my voice. After many years of precenting my voice is unreliable and inconsistent, and I miss the consistency of a reliable voice.

So, is our singing really that important? Surely the sermon is the most important part of the service. The answer to that is that singing, prayer, and preaching are of equal importance. But the singing involves the audible participation of the whole congregation. It is an offering, an act of worship, and it comes from the soul and the heart. We are giving our act of worship to God. When offerings were brought before the Lord, only the best was good enough.

So, whether it's a singing group or a precentor, God is not looking for perfection, but he is looking for the best that we can give Him.

So how do we do that? Firstly, the precentor or group should understand the words and the mood. Secondly, the chosen tune and appropriate pitch and rhythm should reflect the mood of the psalm we are about to sing.

Can you as a congregation help in any way? The answer to that is yes. Respect the group or the precentor. You may think the leader is singing too fast or too slow. Please do not try to speed it up or try and drag it down. At the end of the day, it is heart worship that is paramount. The Leader is doing his/her best and the words we are singing are much more important than dwelling on the technicalities.

We could do with a few more, men and ladies to join the group. If you can help, I would be delighted to hear from you.

MINISTER IN TRAINING

By Keith Nicolson



I want to thank each of you for your prayers, grace, and support of my Minister in Training programme. It is an immense privilege to serve our King alongside you, learn from you and pray with you. Elizabeth and I love our church family here at Rosskeen, so thank you for your care.

The four-year programme is with the Free Church of Scotland, and as I am a Ministry Candidate for the Free Church, the programme has a blend of local church work and part-time study. But do not be misled by the words “Part-time”. Since starting, I have roughly tracked my hours for both work and studies for a couple of reasons. One would be to see what fills my time and how I am accountable for the 16 hours a week I am employed locally in Rosskeen – but it also makes it easier to jog my memory to write a piece like this!

I could have been better at tracking my hours, but on average, 34 hours a week have centred around my studies between September and December. Some weeks, it has been less, but other weeks, I also hit 50 hours of study before I factor in work at Rosskeen and everything else in life.

The programme's priority is my studies, and I have enjoyed every class. Since September, we have had a whistle-stop tour through 1500 years of Church History, and we have now started to investigate the Reformation. Greek has included memorising hundreds of words and tables and translating individual verses before we move on to studying 1st John in the coming weeks. Finally, my Practical Theology class has seen countless stimulating discussions in Christian Counselling and Global Christianity modules.

Every three weeks, I travel to Edinburgh and spend a week in person in my classes at the Edinburgh Theological Seminary. During the other weeks, I am based in the beautiful seaside resort, which is more commonly called Invergordon.

About once a month, you will have heard me preach locally, but since September, I have also preached at the Free Churches in Thurso and Dornoch. Thank you for every piece of feedback and insight from those of you who have completed a feedback form following one of the Sundays I have preached. It is immensely helpful, and I would say, don't slacken off! Calum is the one who reviews the feedback and, if necessary, can distil anything that is too hard-hitting.

Recently, I have had opportunities to present proposals to the Kirk Session, which has been an excellent opportunity to reflect on the mission and service of the church.

Looking beyond April, once my first year of studies has concluded, I am looking forward to being able to serve in Rosskeen more. With opportunities to preach, pray, visit, encourage, support, and learn with each of you about how we might love Jesus and love one another.

FERGUSON UPDATE

By David Ferguson



It's hard to believe, but that's me now in the final semester of my final year of studies.

We've been in Dunfermline now for about a year and a half and it's been a great opportunity to get to know people here and to get a wider range of experience. One new thing has been the difference between a church with multiple buildings to working in a church with none at all!

Back in the summer, life threw another curve ball at us, when Jeremy Ross - who was my supervisor and the minister here - announced that he was leaving to take up the post of CEO at Blythswood. That means that the congregation here at New City Church has been vacant since the beginning of September and I've been a minister in training in a congregation without a minister. In some ways, that's not ideal, but then working with non-ideal, unexpected situations is probably pretty good practice for ministry!

As well as continuing with Judo, Duncan has been going to Boy's Brigade and getting involved in the youth activities at the church, which he is enjoying. There's a good group of boys in church around his age, and Duncan has become very friendly with them.

Catherine is involved with a ladies' Bible study, as well as going to housegroup and taking on some of the admin work at NCC. The congregation here is also getting to know her baking! She is also in essay writing mode just now as she has signed up for the ETS Saturday course again (highly recommended!). On the days she goes to Edinburgh for lectures, Duncan and I have a boys day out, which includes visits to the Lego shop and Oink! (Also highly recommended).

My studies are going well so far. I have a few more essays to do and then I should sit my final exam at the end of April. All being well I'll be licensed towards the end of June.

At this stage, we have no idea where we will be going after that but are excited to see where God calls us next once he makes that clear. I've enjoyed my time at ETS and I think I'll miss it, but I'm also keen to get out there into ministry and start using what I've learned.

I've had the opportunity to preach in a few different places and will hopefully fit in a few more before my training finishes.

We want to thank you all for your continued interest and prayers and look forward to hearing the news from the north.

LEITH CHURCH PLANT

By Derek Lamont



It is nearly 23 years since we left the Manse in Achnagarron and responded to God's call to lead the rebuilding of a city centre congregation in Edinburgh – St Columba's. Our hearts were heavy when Catriona and I left with our three young'uns (Scott, Amy, and Joe), indeed a wee bit of our hearts remains there – to this day! We loved our 11 years in Rosskeen – so many good memories. It was a great privilege to serve alongside Kenny and Reta, and so many others, and be a part of an amazing church family – and share in the

worship, mission, joys, and sadness's of being part of a close-knit church family.

It was in these early days of ministry (how young and naïve I was!) that I learned so much about people, about grace and God's patience with me, and the desperate need I had for His wisdom. The congregation was forgiving and fun – and with any family, there were bumps along the way – all of which taught me much about ministry and God Himself.

Now I am getting old, and I recently rejoiced in applying for and receiving my free bus pass – woop woop! After more than two decades in St Columba's – which has been a blast – we both have strongly felt God calling us to one last formal ministry – to replant a Gospel work in Leith, in what was previously Elder Memorial Free Church.

We are grateful to God for our health, and the experiences and opportunities He has given us that provide a great foundation to starting a new work there. The church planting guru's often talk about planting being a young man's game - which is a fair comment - but we believe that what we lack in energy, by God's grace, we make up for with a deep experience of his guidance and grace in our lives.

It is as if Rosskeen and St C's have been very important chapters in our ministry walk that have prepared us for such a time as this in Leith. You all (well, at least those of you who were born and part of the church in Rosskeen!) have played a very critical role in being my teachers so I am ready for this great Kingdom opportunity. As a result, you still partner with us – that bond will never be broken.

I was inducted to the work on Sunday 28th January, and most of the first year will be spent fundraising for the refurbishment of the church building, finding a suitable manse, building a core team, and embedding ourselves in the community. It's a great adventure, and with God leading us, there is no better place we could be. It has been sad to leave our dear friends and our home in St C's – we owe them (as we owe you) so much – but we are assured of their love, support and prayers, just as we have enjoyed from our friends in Rosskeen. We often think of you all and the memories are very sweet. Do pray for us, as we seek to remember you in prayer. With much love, Derek, Catriona, Scott, Amy, Joe, and Ross.

BIRTHS



Abbie Elizabeth Gordon was born on the 30th of December 2023. Born to proud parents James and Kerry Gordon, Arabella.

Isla Ross McKenzie was born on the 22nd of January 2024 to Angela and Kenzie. Great-granddaughter for Liz Jackson.



BIRTHS



We'd like to say a huge thank you to all our friends and Christian family at Rosskeen Free Church for all their thoughts and prayers in what was a very difficult time. Samuel David Noah was born on 15th January 2024, and unfortunately had a few concerns from the doctors at Raigmore Hospital. This led to him being kept in for several days undergoing invasive tests. But Praise God that Samuel came through them all, and he and Jeni arrived home after 5 days in the SCBU unit. From each message that was sent, to the offer of practical help - this has shown us that there is a lot of Christian love shown throughout the congregation of Rosskeen Free Church. From David, Jeni, Faith, Hannah, Zoe, Elijah, and now Samuel.

David Buchanan



DEATHS

Robert “Big Rab” Smith

I was privileged to be asked to say a few words at the funeral of ‘Big Rab’ as we all affectionately knew him. The funeral, which took place at the Capstone, was led by Pastor Billy MacMaster from Calvary Alness, and thank you to all from the Church who came along. Mark asked me to share a tribute to Rab and I agreed to send him a few words.

“Billy asked me to share a few words about Rab this morning and, while I am so privileged to do so, standing here I feel very inadequate to the task. Rab’s passing came as such a shock, and we miss him. I know I felt his absence very much on Sunday night at our Church service - Rab never missed. Often, he would be the first here, some nights sitting on the wall outside waiting for the door to be unlocked. I know we also missed him at our lunch club last Wednesday, which was just not quite the same without him.

Rab was a character. There were times I would need to tell him off - Rab, you can’t say that! But he always took it well. We loved Rab here. I always enjoyed getting the craic with Rab. He loved a good (bad) joke (and that was something we had in common) - though don’t worry, I won’t share any just now. We chatted about life, about the football - whether it be Rangers, Auchinleck Talbot, or (whisper it, we are, after all, in Ross County territory) even Inverness Caley. Often too we would chat about the Bible as we had our soup.

What can I say about Rab? Let me say this - he was a man noted for his appetites. Famous for his appetite. What do I mean by that? I mean that Rab loved his food. He loved staying for a cuppa and a biscuit after church, coming to our lunch club - and we usually made sure he went home with a doggy bag as well. He loved his food (and there is nothing wrong with that).

But Rab had another appetite. He loved being in Church under the word of God. He couldn’t get enough of hearing the Bible taught and preached. He never missed a service - whether at Calvary in the morning or here at Capstone at night. Often first here. And what a witness he left in that regard. In recent months Rab’s health deteriorated markedly. COPD in particular meant walking was very difficult for him, and he had to repeatedly stop to rest. What ought to be a 5-10-minute walk to Capstone became for him a journey that could take up to 45-50 minutes - but he always came. However long it took him Rab was determined to be under the Lord’s Word. In that, he was an example to us all.

It strikes me standing here this morning that the hope that we have, that Rab is with the LORD he loved, means that both these appetites are now fulfilled.

Isaiah 25 tells us of a feast the LORD is going to prepare. A feast of the finest food and aged wines. A feast where all who love the LORD Jesus will be sat together to dine. Rab's appetite will be satisfied.

And more than that, his appetite for the word of God will be filled too. Rab trusted in the LORD. I love the fact that the picture on his order of service today is him being baptized in the River Ness. Jesus changed Rab's life. And now, we hope, Rab is in his presence, the eternal Word of God, and Rab is satisfied in the presence of the LORD.

As we said, we miss Rab. We loved him. But we do not grieve as those who have no hope, and we thank the LORD that Rab had hope and that we have hope that he is with him. Hope that Rab would want all of us to share in. Thank you."

Calum Macmillan



Photo from the Press and Journal

Jock MacKinnon

“John MacKinnon was born in Upper Knockbain, Munloch, on the 3rd of November 1941 to Bessie MacKinnon. He was the only son in the family, and he had 3 sisters. Being brought up on a croft in Beehive, he knew from an early age that he had to work.

Barbara was telling me he would work the holidays to get enough money together to get what he needed - such as clothes for school. The value of hard work would be a hallmark of Jock throughout his life, and values he sought to instil in the family.

Jock attended Knockbain Primary and then Avoch school, though, to quote Jock, he attended the school of hard knocks. The family was telling me that it might be fairer to say Jock was enrolled at the schools rather than attended as he was known for dodging school and more than once he would be found hiding from the truant officer.

Jock started his working career with the Forestry Commission at Blackstan as a woodcutter. The tools of his trade were a power saw (which had to be a Husqvarna - do excuse my pronunciation!), a bushman saw, and an axe which, it must be said, he was very good at wielding.

It was going to the Strath dances with his mates that Jock met Barbara and they were married in the Free Presbyterian Church in Dingwall on the 12th of August 1966. They began married life together in Mount High where Jock was then working as a woodcutter. It wasn't long before the family came along - first David, then Alistair, Lizzy, and the family was complete with the arrival of Trish.

The family first moved across the water to Firhill in Alness in 1973, Jock now working with British Aluminium at Invergordon. In 1980 they moved to Salvesen Crescent where Jock and Barbara are still today - they wanted to go back to a coal fire house! - and where they met people who would become life-long friends. A few years after moving to Salvesen they moved to number 50, still the family home.

Jock worked a couple of stints with BA in Invergordon before it closed. Then going back to the woods, then the pole factory at Fearn, then a stint in the construction industry before, finally, in Aquascot in the hygiene department before retiring.

When Jock retired, he then became a full-time grandad getting involved in several activities with the grandkids. One of the annual events was a trip with grandson Liam to the Christmas Panto in Eden Court which Jock loved. They would enjoy ice cream together at the interval, but as the years have rolled on the ice cream turned into a few brandys. Jock's last outing was at the Black Isle show with some of the grandkids. He would be telling them all about the livestock, the machinery, and the implements. He was on the dodgems at the age of 81. Bad leg and all he was determined and he managed, with some difficulty, to eventually manoeuvre himself in backwards, and get on the dodgems with the grandkids. That summed Jock up - he was determined. He would not be beaten.

Jock knew everyone and everyone knew him. He loved getting the craic with people. It has been striking how many people have commented on him stopping to chat when he was out for his daily walks or on the school run.

He was full of mischief. He loved a wind-up and the staff at Morrison's were regularly on the receiving end - and he would be in there 6 days out of 7!

Jock doted on his grandkids. They all had their different personalities but one thing in common was the love they had for their grandad and he for them. He was so good at connecting with them. Granda Jock loved being involved with them whatever the story. And they loved visiting Granny Barbs and Granda Jock's - as did the great-grandkids whom Jock also adored.

When Barbara's health declined in recent years, Jock did everything in his power to look after her. When Jock suffered his stroke on the 11th of September the grandkids, indeed maybe fair to say all the family, found a strength they didn't think they had. They rallied around Granny and were there at Granda's bedside expressing their love for him - as he had done for them over the years. Indeed, though his ability to communicate was severely limited, it was very clear the love he had for them and all the family as he responded to their care and presence. They were all very courageous young people there for their Granda Jock till the very end.

However we knew Jock, we believe that he is now at peace with the LORD. Barbara was a good influence on Jock in more ways than one and as they settled in this area, they attended the Church here. Jock professed faith in the LORD Jesus as his Saviour under the ministry of Rev Kenny Macdonald, getting baptised on the Saturday night before taking communion on the Sunday morning. Even in later years when they hadn't been able to be at Church, they would get the DVDs of the services and watch at home. I am told the night he took the stroke Jock was singing away to some of the psalms - and Barbara was getting him signed up for the Church Praise Group!

It is this that gives us hope and comfort today. The hope of Jesus speaks into the deepest realities of life and death. The Bible tells us that those who live trusting in Jesus never die. Their soul goes to Heaven to be with Jesus. And that he will one day be raised to life by Jesus to live forever.

Until that day we grieve but we do not grieve as those who have no hope. We commit the family whom Jock loved so fiercely to the care and keeping of Jesus, may YOU know his care, his tenderness, and his help. Until the day breaks and the shadows flee away".

Calum Macmillan

Christine Morison



“Christine’s death is one of those we may well think of as untimely, and of course, we all wish we might have had her longer, but Isaiah 57 reminds us that there may be another perspective – the Lord takes his people away sometimes that they might be spared much in this world, and that they might enter the blessedness of his rest in heaven sooner.

Christine was wise enough to know that her time here was running out, and in typical, practical style she got her affairs in order in good time – it’s almost a year since she asked me if I

would conduct her funeral when, realistically, I couldn’t see any reason why she should be asking such a thing then, and we were all just hoping and praying she would be spared for a long time yet. I think she would admit to being a bit of a pessimistic, glass-half-empty, type... sort of... but to her, it was just being realistic, and to me, she always had a glint and a wink in her eye that said she knew she was just being naughty and didn’t really believe that things were as bad as she liked to sound off about – she knew that the Lord was in control and that his plans and purposes always work out best in the end! With this, maybe she just sensed that time was short and that it was best to get things sorted – it was just the right thing to do!

Which, of course, was what she did in life – as a young woman she gave her life to the Lord, trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ to save her from her sins, which again she was wise enough to admit she had, and needed saving from. I know it was her deepest wish that all who are here today would discover and know what she did – the goodness, grace, and love of God in Jesus. Not just as a one-off saving event in her life, but a lifelong walk with him, enjoying him and serving him, as best as she would be enabled to.

The last time I saw her she was anxious to stress that most important and crucial point about her funeral – to God be the glory! I thought she maybe meant for us to sing the hymn of that name (today), but she meant that she wanted that to be the overriding theme. ‘Don’t even mention me’...as if! At least she conceded that maybe she would have to be mentioned, but not too much!

I first remember her as a schoolgirl, a teenager, coming down to Glasgow occasionally to visit Kath in her Uni days. She would appear at the St Vincent St Youth Club with cousins Calum and Peter, a bright, sunny wee thing! I don’t remember seeing her much after that, if at all, till I heard that Colin Morison had somehow landed himself a bonny young fiancé/bride... Colin, who I knew from the Christian book publishing industry, was with me at the Banner of Truth and him at Christian Focus. Good old Colin – punching above his weight there, or what, but it was indeed a marriage made in heaven, and a great blessing to many for over 34 years!

But it was when Maggie and I came to Nairn that we really began to know the Morisons. We had to worship somewhere the first Sunday we arrived in the north, so we went to Elgin where we got the ‘just another potato’ treatment. Take us as you find us, but the four of you are welcome to join us for some Spaghetti Bolognese if you like! So, we did, and exceedingly nice it was too!

But the best thing was that a friendship was begun that we came to treasure and value so much, looking forward eagerly to meeting up with Colin and Christine every few weeks for a catch-up. Our two congregations were so similar, even in size and in heritage (no Days of the Fathers in Nairn/Moray!) but a work to be got on with all the same, and many good folks to share it with along the way – we were the same kind of ages, same ages of kids, same kinds of ups and downs, of joys and struggles, of encouragements and discouragements... We could laugh together, cry, cheer each other up, moan, and laugh again – we thanked God for giving us such a gospel friendship and partnership in the work.

Our Order of Service refers to the opening words of Psalm 46 – how wonderful on a day like today to be able to find our refuge in God. In Raigmore, Christine spoke of the preciousness of that truth in troubled days, and she knew what it was to do what the Psalmist said, Be still and know that I am God. She was ready to go and to be with him, she said – ‘Desperate to be away’ were her actual words – words of complete resignation/trust/commitment to the grace, goodness, love, and hope she experienced in her soul. ‘God’s been good!’ she said.

The last thing she said to me was ‘Just go away!’ – charming! But it was only because I started crying at the thought of maybe not seeing her again as we said our farewells, and that started her off too when she was trying to be brave – Just go away, I know what she meant!

Maggie saw her a couple of days later when Christine was getting tired one afternoon. They parted as Maggie tucked her in with words of love, Christine succumbing to sleep with ‘Nighty, night, love you!’ One Bible character asks, Let me die the death of the righteous and let my end be like his – another says Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord. What a wonderful thing to be able to depart from this life in such relative peace, contentment, and reassurance – not in a wishful-thinking, hope for the best, fingers crossed, kind of way – but knowing the God into whose presence and comfort you are coming!

Isaiah 40:31 But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.

Romans 8 again, for those who love the Lord and wait upon him...

18 ...the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us... 31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?...

35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, sword?... 37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Those of you who knew Christine know what kind of a person she was – humble, gracious, kind-hearted, thoughtful, loving, caring, hard-working, hospitable, warm, funny, approachable, trustworthy, with an intuition for knowing what to say and when, mindful of things important to others, relatable, wise, encouraging... and so much more!

She was a pretty straight-shooter too, not afraid to call a spade a spade. Most who pride themselves on that turn out to be cold, insensitive, hurtful, and even cruel. But I never picked that up with Christine – she could be honest and direct, but not with any malice, and rather a bit of an apology and a laugh once it was said.

She loved her family, and her church family, and her friends – she loved Colin so deeply and told us to look after him when she was gone (seems she told everyone that – probably most of you here too!) Her kids, her grandson Harris (her new pride and joy – she didn't know if she would live to see him, but then she lived long enough to hear him speak some first little words!)

Praise God, the world's a better place for having folks like Colin and Christine in it – that's the best advert there is for the Christian faith, and it's a challenge to those of us who love the Lord to make sure we reflect something of his beauty to those around us that they might desire it for themselves.

She knew we would be gathering like this today, and that she wouldn't be here with us (still so hard to believe she's gone). We'd be singing God's praises here together, but she'd be singing them before his very throne and before his very face... and, as a person who loved music, she delighted that it would be in tune!

Remember Colin, Cailean, Sarah, Sam, Tori, Harris, Katie, Kath, and the others – pray for them, and tell them today how you remember Christine. Thank God for her and folk like her, and commit yourself to that same Lord Jesus, seek him, find him, and know him as your friend and Saviour. Every Christian here today would be willing to help you to come to him so that you might know his goodness, grace, glory, and love... as we have begun to do ourselves!"

NOTE OF THANKS

My family joins with me in expressing our great thankfulness to the Rosskeen congregation for the many expressions of kindness and care during Christine's illness and following her death. The warmth and hospitality we have been shown is a testament to the reality of the spirit of Christ in you and among us. We have been, and are, greatly comforted by your love.

Colin Morison

Time to Pray

I got up early one morning
and rushed right into the day;
I had so much to accomplish
that I didn't have time to pray.

Problems just tumbled about me,
and heavier came each task.
"Why doesn't God help me?" I wondered.
He answered, "You didn't ask".

I wanted to see joy and beauty,
but the day toiled on, grey and bleak;
I wondered why God didn't show me.
He said "But you didn't seek".

I tried to come into God's presence;
I used all my keys at the lock.
God gently and lovingly chided,
"My child, you didn't knock".

I woke up early this morning,
and paused before entering the day;
I had so much to accomplish
that I had to take time to pray.

(unknown author)

FROM THE ARCHIVE

By Mark Stirling

In this edition of the newsletter we go back to 1994 where the Rev. Hugh MacCallum (Mary Black's father) celebrated 25 years in ministry with an afternoon tea in the church hall. My thanks to Mary for providing these photographs. The photograph below, shows Rev Kenny Macdonald, Mary Black, Rev Derek Lamont as they present Rev Hugh MacCallum with his gift.



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