



Hello - What a great opportunity to introduce myself and to thank everyone in Presbytery for making me very welcome.

I am a member of The Auld Kirk of Ayr and have worked in the Church Office there for a number of years.

I am blessed with a wonderful husband (Gary) and five children who are supporting my extended working hours (although a bit more effort from the children in the household chores wouldn't go amiss).

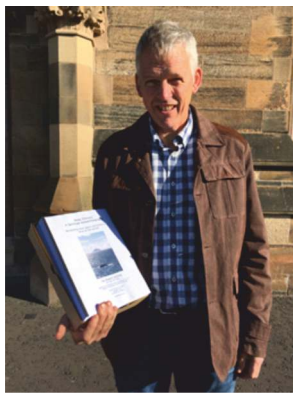
I am an avid reader and have been following my fellow church member, Mrs Pat Young's journey on becoming an Author and enjoyed her 3 publications (especially her last book, One Perfect Witness, which is set in Ayrshire). My GoTo place for reflection and healing is Maidens Beach .. happy childhood memories and in adulthood, treasured memories with my much missed mum at her caravan.

I am thoroughly enjoying my position in the Presbytery Office and look forward over the coming months to hopefully get a chance to speak (if not meet) with as many of you as possible.

Sharon Caldwell

Presbytery Office Hours

- Monday 9.30am - 4.30pm
- Wednesday 9.30am - 4.30pm
- Friday 11.30am - 4.30pm



Articles put together by Ian Stirling

This edition of Presbytery Newslines was designed and printed by Jamie at Minuteman Press Ayr.



The guided walk is approximately 7mile / 11.5 km and it will be starting from Kirkoswald Parish Church (NS 23964 07382) KA19 8HZ and conclude at the Stumpy Tower in Girvan (NX 18533 98062)

The walk crosses over the Chapleton Burn as it head towards Dipple then it follows the Ayrshire Coastal Path south to Girvan.

This walk is part of the programme of Guided Walks being organised by the Scottish Pilgrim Routes Forum and it is a walk open to both the charities members and any interested walker. It will showcase one section of the Whithorn Way route linking Glasgow Cathedral with Whithorn Priory.

Interested walkers need to register as numbers may have to be restricted. The walk will be led by members of the Whithorn Way steering group.

To register send an e-mail to john.g.henderson@btinternet.com providing your name and contact details, and prior to the date of the walk you will receive an acknowledgement confirming your place on the walk.

Guided Walk on the Whithorn Way
Wednesday 22nd May 2019
Kirkoswald to Girvan
Starting at 10.30 am

For fuller details on this and other guided walks link to www.sprf.org.uk



Thy Kingdom Come Global Prayer Initiative:
Ascension Day to Pentecost Sunday 2019
(30 May - 9 June)

Since its launch in 2016 Thy Kingdom Come has grown into a worldwide movement of prayer in which, between Ascension Day and Pentecost, Christians everywhere have been encouraged to pray for the empowerment of the Holy Spirit so that we can be effective in our witness and for people to come to faith in Jesus Christ.

In 2019, Thy Kingdom Come takes place from Ascension Day to Pentecost Sunday: 30 May - 9 June. In anticipation of this, can I ask you to consider signing up to "Pledge2Pray" as an individual and as a church in order that together we will see God's Kingdom Come: <https://www.thykingdomcome.global/#Pledge2PrayCounter>

if you are considering organising an event can I encourage you to sign up: <https://www.thykingdomcome.global/events>

Josza M. Brown



The Church of Scotland
Presbytery of Ayr

NEWSLINES EASTER 2019

Dear friends,

The original Easter story takes its participants on a journey through three different days, which complexify rather than simplify Easter faith.

Good Friday, Easter Saturday and Easter Sunday.
Despair, silence and deep joy.

The contrasting emotions of each day enrich our understandings of faith and enhance its capacity to support us in times of sorrow, of joy, and of when we just sit in a silence of unknowing. Easter is a discovery of a God who is present in the ecstasy of living and in the pain of sufferings, in equal measure. Present in the past, the present and the future.



The way of the Cross Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem

First, the Easter story carries us from dark harrowing betrayals in the garden of Gethsemane, to haunting scenes full of flagrant injustices, with Pilates washing his hands, and the fickle crowds turning on Jesus, to public shame, the carrying of rough timber to a desolate place outwith a city wall, and the sounds of hammered nails, a crown of thorns then words of abandonment in the last throes of death.

There then follows a day of wondering, and silences. When time stands still. Where the followers of Jesus wrestled with shattered hopes. Were their dreams of a new way of being, of the kingdom of life and love coming close in the life of Jesus, mere fancy. A day of uncertainty and unknowns.

And then beggaring belief, emerging softly like a new dawn breaking across a faint horizon, from these two days, of darkness and silence, comes the day of illumination. Where shards of light renew hope in the hearts of the men and women who were closest to Jesus. A day of strengthening hearts and hands and beliefs.

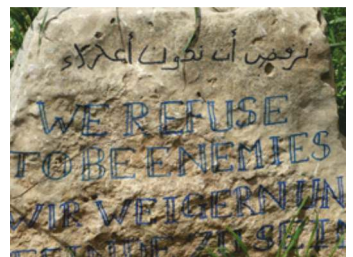


Jesus appears to Peter on the shore, the sea of Galilee

Easter is a journey, which embraces all three experiences sorrowful darkness, unknowing silences and hopeful illumination. Easter holds them in a critical tension. And what the eyes of faith begins to see is traces of God's presence in the shadows and the light. This is hugely significant to embrace a faith that strengthens us in both times of joy and sorrow. In blue skies and when dark storm clouds loom.

How relevant this is to us in our day to delight in the presences of God in the griefs and gifts of life. If only we have the eyes of faith to see.

I have just returned from a visit to the Holyland and been inspired above all by the Nassar family, who live in a small farm, the Tent of Nations, in the West Bank. Daoud Nassar, his brothers George and Daher, and sister Amal against all odds refuse to be enemies with those who would illegally evict them from their land. Rather they strive for peace. And when asked about the source of their resilience said their hope comes from their faith. A resurrection hope.



Tent of Nations: we refuse to be enemies.

As we journey through the Easter week I hope that we can all be strengthened by the risen Christ who bring hope into the light and the shadows.
Ian Stirling

Moderators Reflections

Dear Friends,
Like all of us, I'm very grateful to Rev Ian Stirling for agreeing to be the Editor of Newslines for the time being. And it was Ian who suggested to me that I might write a brief note about three significant things in my tenure as Moderator thus far! So, here's what you might call my 3-point 'sermon.'

1. I'm really enjoying making my visits to congregations in the Presbytery. It's a helpful point of contact between the Presbytery and the folks in the pews. It's about making positive connections, and, in a time of declining numbers, the need to make positive connections must grow accordingly.

2. Two particular highlights have been the induction at Maybole, (linked with Crosshill), and the ordination at Dundonald. These were inspiring nights of celebration for Robert and Lynsey, and their congregations - and a reminder that our God is the God of new beginnings.

3. Through comments some people have made to me, I have learned that appearances definitely are deceptive. Some people have called me 'relaxed' during Presbytery meetings, but, take it from me, that's all on the surface. I'm just like the swan ... calm on the surface, yet paddling away furiously under the water! And I rely heavily on the people around me who increase my sense of calm ... being Moderator, (and being a Presbyterian), means being a team-player!

In conclusion, I'd like to thank the Presbytery for the trust they have placed in me to complete a second year. I will do my best to repay your trust. And, as I wrote in June last year, so I repeat ... like all of us, I am still a 'work in progress', but, more importantly, "By the grace of God I am what I am," (1st Corinthians 15:10)

Sincerely
Brian

In some of my congregational visits as Moderator, I've used the following piece as a reflection. I first saw it on the Coventry Cathedral Facebook page. Consequently, I contacted the cathedral and asked their permission to reproduce it in my own congregations. They admitted that the piece didn't originate with them; indeed they didn't seem to know its origins at all, but they were happy for me to use it as and when!

The words are inspiring, but surely more important is the willingness of each congregation to practise the words ... to make them real! We sometimes sing, "All are welcome in this place," but do we genuinely mean what we sing?

I'll leave that question with you!"



A few words of welcome ...

We extend a special welcome to those who are single, married, divorced, widowed, gay, confused, filthy rich, comfortable, or dirt poor.

We extend a special welcome to wailing babies and excited toddlers.

We welcome you whether you can sing like Pavarotti or just growl quietly to yourself. You're welcome here if you're 'just browsing', just woken up or just got out of prison, We don't care if you're more Christian than the Archbishop of Canterbury, or haven't been to church since Christmas 10 years ago.

We extend a special welcome to those who are over 60 but not grown up yet, and to teenagers who are growing up too fast. We welcome keep-fit mums, football dads, starving artists, tree-huggers, latte-sippers, vegetarians, junk-food eaters. We welcome those who are in recovery or still addicted. We welcome you if you're having problems, are down in the dumps or don't like "organised religion". (We're not that keen on it either!)

We offer a welcome to those who think the earth is flat, work too hard, don't work, can't spell, or are here because granny is visiting and wanted to go to the church.

We welcome those who are inked, pierced, both or neither. We offer a special welcome to those who could use a prayer right now; had religion shoved down their throat as kids or got lost in the town centre and wound up here by mistake.

We welcome pilgrims, tourists, seekers, doubters ... and you!

**Tribute to Reverend Bill Johnston
(01/05/48 - 04/03/19)**

It is impossible to sum up Bill Johnston in a way that reveals how much he meant to all those who knew him. Bill Johnston was a man of many parts - perhaps the most significant in how it affected his life is that he grew to know and love God as a youngster, eventually giving up much in human terms to train to serve God in a full and demanding Ministry within the church and its people. However, he was first of all a son, a brother and a loving husband, father and grandfather. He truly was a family man.

Dare I say he wasn't perfect? Well, in truth, we know he wasn't - for who is? He discovered the truth of love - And love is the greatest thing; he could admonish when required - but with wisdom and with grace. ; he was patient, wise and kind with his children; he was attentive to Ann; and he humbly admitted that he could never have achieved what he did without her loving support. Mind you, Bill never did master modern technology such as mobile phones and emails.

As a result of suffering a heart attack while still a young man, Bill Johnston devoted his life in thanksgiving to service for God. He was a member of Castlehill Church at the time and with the encouragement of Reverend Michael Dickie, his church congregation, and total support from his wife, Ann, he gave up his work as a butcher and decided to train for the Ministry. He achieved his Divinity degree but his call was severely tried and tested before he was accepted - and many people thank God that he was.

Castlehill Church was his spiritual home throughout his studying and he honoured their faithful support by choosing to give all that he could back to them in return during his three years of retirement. However, he owed me nothing, but gave me more than I deserved during the time I have been locum here. I really do thank God for Bill Johnston.

A life-long passion for Bill was the Boys' Brigade. He started himself in the Lifeboys, eventually going in to the Boys' Brigade. He loved it, and kept his uniform in tip-top condition with all the appropriate parts polished and shining. Naturally, he continued on to become a leader where his unique blend of fun and firm discipline made him not just well-respected but much loved. He trained the boys in marching skills to a high standard and his creative fun meant that displays were a joyous occasion for everyone.

He served with various companies, always getting involved wherever he was and was Captain here in Ayr 17th at Castlehill. Bill Johnston played a huge part for good in the lives of many adolescents.

Bill counted it a privilege to serve God as a Minister, first of all in Ardrossan and then in Stair and Ochiltree before retiring three years ago back into Castlehill Church - where he quickly donned the mantle of service once

again in a variety of ways. That he was greatly loved and respected wherever he served was shown in the number who journeyed to his funeral service from his various congregations.

I learned very quickly that Bill was loved and respected by all in Castlehill Church and in the wider community where he had previously lived for many years. He had made many true and loyal friends throughout his life. His was never just a ministry from the pulpit; he lived his message. He was a man who gave generously of himself in service to others - as a true disciple of his Saviour, Lord and Friend, Jesus Christ. We know he is at rest and peace now with his Lord, but in the meantime he will be greatly missed by many. Let us continue to remember his wife, Ann, and the family in our prayers.



**Hearty congratulations to the Revd Fraser R Aitken,
G.C.S.J., M.A., B.D., on your retirement.
Well done good and faithful servant.**

Fraser Aitken: Minister at Ayr St Columba Church; 21st August 1991 to 31st March 2019.

At a recent Presbytery meeting Bob Bartholomew, session clerk at St Columba, spoke of the high esteem that Fraser is held in. And the deep gratitude for all that he has done for the church community. Bob highlighted how Fraser arrived with his own style and character and with qualities which struck a chord with the whole Church community and resulted in him being accepted, admired and loved to an extent which now makes it difficult to imagine the Church without him.

"Fraser, our Church and our community will not be the same without you. You have achieved more than my words can convey and you mean more to each one of us than I can describe. In your preaching and in your praying, in your eulogies and in your singing, in your comforting and in your laughter, in your company and in your faithfulness you have brought the joy of living and the joy of belonging to us all. You have allowed the great wonder of working, living and worshipping in a Christian community to manifest itself in a way which has affected us all for the better. You leave with our admiration and our gratitude and you will be missed. It is my hope that your path and those of the people you have served so well will cross often in the future and I know that each crossed path will become a precious memory."



New Cumnock Parish Church held their annual Songs of Praise on Sunday 24th March 2019. Our theme was based around our farming community and we were delighted that Rev Chris Blackshaw was able to join us. Chris and our Boys' Brigade Captain, a local famer's wife, chose a hymn each and spoke about the reason for the choice. It was no surprise that Chris chose "We plough the fields and scatter"!

The joint choir which included members from Auchinleck Parish, Cumnock Congregational, Old Cumnock Old, Cumnock Trinity, St.John's Church, Cumnock and New Cumnock Parish led praise accompanied by Sanquhar & District Silver Band. The choir sang All in the April Evening and The Cross is Still There as anthems while Chris Blackshaw sang The Old Rugged Cross as a solo and our accompanist for these was Mr David Sullivan, organist at Cumnock Congregational Church.

Rev John Paterson presided over the evening and our retiring offering of £281.50 was donated to RSABI, the Royal Scottish Agricultural Benevolent Institution, which provides emotional, practical and financial support to individuals and their families across the agricultural sector including farming, crofting and growing.

Tea, coffee and goodies were enjoyed by all afterwards. An uplifting evening of joy and praise!



The picture is of Karen Butler, HT APS, Ernest Chirwa, HT Bandawe Girls School, Me, Francis Juma HT Bandawe PS and Caroline Connell HT DPS.

Alloway Parish Church has recently enjoyed the most wonderful visit of their two partner Head Teachers to Scotland. The visit took place between the 6th - 19th March. A very full itinerary was enjoyed including visits to Alloway and Doonfoot Primary Schools, Wellington School and Belmont Academy, to Dumfries House, Robert Burns Birthplace Museum and Culzean Castle. The congregation organised a Scottish Night which included Ceilidh dancing and performances by the many talented young people of Scots verse, songs, instrumental pieces and sword dancing.

The gentlemen were welcomed at worship, and attended a funeral of a long serving Elder of the church.

They were invited to a meeting of Alloway Rotary at the Horizon Hotel, which was enjoyed by all who were present. Socially many activities were provided, eg ten pin bowling, crazy golf, curling etc.

Mr Ernest Chirwa said of the visit. "Highlights of the trip for me would be, travelling in new cars, sleeping in very neat, very good homes of hotel standard beddings, the nice food we were served and ate on beautiful tables, using nice dishes are just a few to mention out of so many good things. However the best I can clearly spell out was the cheerfulness of the faces of the people of Scotland. We will never forget all we have seen and heard here. We will not take for granted the partnership we enjoy with Alloway Parish Church and we thank the members whole heartedly for their generosity and commitment in bringing us here to enliven our friendship.

God has spoken to me here. He has directed me to live in glory of Him. I have been shown that although there is much materially here, there are problems in spiritual lives. Young people suffer from loneliness and depression and we heard of many issues with mental health and suicide is common place. I will pray for the church here, as we heard of many changes to come in the organisation and worship of congregations. To God be the Glory! Amen!"



The Perfect Storm Presbytery Conference

A warm welcome, a tasty bacon roll, and a real buzz of anticipation.

Graeme Duffin, keynote speaker, at our recent Presbytery conference, used the metaphor of 'the perfect storm' to describe the current state of affairs in the church.

I contend that the storm buffeting the churches is very serious indeed. Much more serious than we have admitted to ourselves, and much more serious than our leaders have yet comprehended. The problems are not minor, calling for adjustments or corrections. They are problems that go to the roots of our institutions themselves.

Graeme quoted the famous words of Bob Dylan, 'the times they are a changing' to argue that the church is set within a wider culture characterized by changes that are not going to go away. Changes such as

- Mistrust of authority
- A rejection of absolute truth
- Move towards informality
- Religious pluralism
- Valuing of diversity not conformity
- Rampant atheism

The challenge for the church is to resist trying to turn the clock back but rather learn how to cope with the storm. Or how do we chart a way forward? This is where Graeme led the conference. And rather than facing doom and gloom, imagining - a future of faith, hope, and love. For this to happen requires innovation. "the answer lies neither in simply closing a building nor in seeking to maintain a shadow of the traditional style." Rowan Williams

The new insights that Graeme shared came from first change theory, in which people need to see the problem before they can engage in striving for a fix. Therefore, congregations need to be aware of the decline and the missing generations, before they will buy in to any innovative change.

And the second insight came from organizational renewal, as illustrated below. And the task is to ask where are we in the cycle of renewal? Are we dreaming? Or launching a venture? Are we organizing something and making it happen, or are we trying something new once more. Change is all around us and will never disappear, so let's embrace it with confidence.

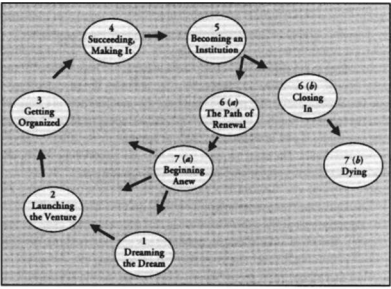


Figure 6.2 Organizational renewal.

The challenge of renewal also revolves around whether we see the problems facing the church as either

- Simple with a quick fix
- Complicated, which requires an expert to be called in
- Complex which requires imaginative problem solving
- Or chaotic which requires stability before any fix is possible

The conference's immediate response to Graeme was to see the challenges facing the church as being complex, which if so, requires an approach of relying on God. **For complex problems, he argued, there isn't an external expert who will do it for us. Rather**

Experiment: Look at what's going on, the opportunities there & try something

Hone & develop: Pick up those with promise & develop them .. let go of others

Embed: Make the "new" part of the rhythm of church life

It is not always possible to show people the future. It might not exist. You might not even be able to envision it yourself [& yet ..] confidence in the future is crucial in the face of inevitable counter-pressures for those who will doggedly cling to the present. Heifetz & Linsky

At the end of the day the conference was invited to take away positives. To carry ideas forward, following his encouraging words: How can people make the journey?

Stage 1
Share thoughts about the future
Create open-ness to trying new things go deep with a few who get this - they will be your trail blazers

Stage 2
Start to get everyone on board
Build ownership & help to get things embeddedThen going wider



Neil McNaught Convener of the Review and Reform Committee commented "It was an inspiring morning and good to enjoy breakfast together as presbyters. I am sure all those in attendance came away challenged. As Review and Reform Convener I do feel meetings like this prove that for the future life of presbytery , conference meetings are just as important as ordinary business meetings of the court "

New Faces: Robert Pickles
Crosshill linked with Maybole

Early morning, walking into the Carrick Centre in Maybole I sense the buzz of a community coming to life. Mothers and children, hand in hand, going to playgroups; administration staff beavering away, sorting out the latest booking from the health and social care strategic group, the chink of china; conversations over a cuppa. Bright, light, clean. I wander over, past the splendid sanctuary, and sneak a gaze into the minister's office. I knock, and entering see Robert surrounded by a library of books and finishing off some work on the computer. Just arriving in the Carrick Centre makes me wonder about the interface of church and community. And it makes me think how Robert Pickles is settling in to his new charge of Crosshill linked with Maybole.

Robert greets me, arranges for a coffee, and then we head over to the quiet room.

This is a first for me. Thumb worn pages of a thousand theology books, some of which I recognise from my student days, conveys that this is a place of critical encounter and engagement. But it's the stillness, the peace of candles and morning prayer that attracts me. A sacred space in the hustle and bustle of life. Robert is a spiritual artist. I like it and perhaps this focus emerges from his association with the Northumbria Community.

We soon find ourselves blethering about the importance to us of the freedom of ministry, 'if we are not free, they will not be free'. The importance of modelling the spiritual journey lies at the heart of his ministry. Then we shift to the unique nature and diversity of ministry which is 'an offering of life to the community'. A nice way of putting it.

Robert Pickles has been around a bit and offered a lot to the communities he's been involved in. Academically astute, he has accumulated numerous qualifications; a Dip Theol , Birmingham, BD Hons London, MPhil Wales and a THD Trinity Theological College USA, and perhaps this explains why he has an insatiable curiosity for faith, and for learning. Indeed, it's in his DNA. This is evidenced by his time as Director of Pastoral Studies, in Birmingham Bible Institute, and later Principle. He also has enjoyed being chaplain and head of RE at Strathallan School, in Perthshire. Life-long learning. 'I love to see people growing, expanding consciousness ... I teach people to think'

Robert is also ecclesiastically diverse, setting out as a youth pastor at 21 years of age, over the years Robert has been a pastor of a congregational church, before coming into the Church of Scotland in 2003 as minister of Orwell and Portmoak Parish. Thereafter serving Fearn Abbey and Nigg with Tarbat in Rossshire. I think to myself, it's this breadth of diversity which allows Robert the freedom to allow people and churches to find their own path in faith.

Here Robert draws on the thinking of Richard Foster's book Streams of Living Water. 'Everything I do is stolen', he says. So, for some the contemplative tradition in the church is key, whereas others verge towards peace and justice, some welcome the sacramental tradition, where they see traces of God in everything; others still focus on holy living, whereas others emphasise the preaching of the word and sharing of the gospel, and some lean towards relying on the charismatic power of the spirit. It seems that there is room for many expressions of faith in Robert's outlook and his task he says is to create wells of water, and wait for people to drink from them

Robert's openness allows people and churches to find their way, and not to have things imposed upon them. 'I offer people options, this or that, ways to walk'.

For a while our conversation moved to the renewed energy of his flock at Crosshill, looking for the way ahead, people rolling up their sleeves, upgrading kitchen and hall to serve the community. And then to the challenges of identity, of expressing a faith in the public square of Maybole. And then we returned to a more spiritual ethos - the gift of being allowed to live a life in faith, trusting in grace.

We talked family for a while, and touched on Roberts interests, music, history, architecture, Bonsai, and swimming before I left him. As I walked back through the Carrick Centre I carried in my hand a gift and a minding from our time together

The Creed of the Beloved

I am not what I do
I am not what I have
I am not what people say about me
I am the beloved of God
It is who I am
No one can take it from me
I do not have to worry
I do not have to hurry
I can trust my friend Jesus
And share his love with the world.

As a Presbytery I am sure that there is much more to discover about Robert and that his flock will drink deeply of the streams of living waters that he is bringing to this little corner of Carrick.



Deep Silences: Reclaiming inner space and silence as a locus of the sacred, by Ian Stirling

Late last year I sat nervously in Trinity room, in the University of Glasgow. It was my viva voce. I was waiting to be examined by Doug Gay and David Lyall, on my thesis Deep Silences, which I had recently submitted towards my Professional Doctorate in Practical Theology. I had been awaiting this day of reckoning for over six years. And I was nervous because these distinguished scholars were now assessing whether my studies offered something new and original to the field of practical theology. And sitting there in the room, before these theological giants, I was very much thinking 'the more you know, the more you know you don't know!' However thankfully I offered them at least three original insights I had gleaned. First, I referred to the inscription on a standing stone at Lecht Summit, over-looking the Cairngorm mountains:

Take a moment to behold, As still skies or storms unfold In sun rain sleet or snow, Warm your soul before you go. This inscription captures, I said, the waiting, and the expectancy, of either still skies or storms, within hospice care. What is not original in my thesis is that at the beginning of the day chaplains rarely know what lies in store for them. How true that is for so many professionals in life. **My discovery is that rather than living with certainties** chaplains engage with the complexity of end of life care by embracing spiritual artistry. Like poets, novelists and creative artists they are imaginative, creative, innovative and always moving into new horizons. Pastoral care is spiritual artistry.

Second, conscious of the vast array of literature which explores issues around death, dying and bereavement, I said, 'What is not original in my thesis is that many people strive to make sense of what's happening to them, to make the most of their last days. The issue is what happens when words fail and silences encroach. Equally what is not original is the widespread lament of the loss of the original vision of hospice care. Cicely Saunders concepts of 'just being there', of 'you matter because you are you' and of 'healing connections'. The originality in my thesis is that, in addition to meaning-making and to healing connections, **people facing their mortality long for spiritual awakenings.** Sacred moments, that often emerge in times of silence. Deep silences are where and when the sacred breaks in'.

Finally I nodded to the original way in which I researched deep silences. I had already spent many years researching spiritual care, to various degrees of success, but I felt strongly that I had to find a way to come up close to the silences I encountered daily as a hospice chaplain. Traumatic silences; shameful silences; broken silences; grieving silences; communicative silences; threshold silences and sacred silences. So the new method - spiritual autoethnography - allows me to research deep silences through my own lens.

The conclusion of my thesis includes these words I have found a new vision, of spiritual awakenings and reclaiming inner space and deep silence as the locus of the sacred. I hope that spiritual artistry, founded on poetics, will enable people: to inhabit inner space and deep silences, to say the unsayable, and to delight in the gifts that accompany griefs. I trust that this new understanding of the role of the hospice chaplain, and of the delivery of spiritual care, will benefit those confronting their mortality and their grief.

So how did I fare in my viva voce? Thankfully Doug Gay and David Lyall awarded me my doctorate. I was speechless and not a little emotional. It's been a long journey. Over six years of constant study and reflection. The DPT took me to my limits. I am not the same person now that I was when I started out. And that is no bad thing. My delight is of re-imagining spiritual care, and to discover the sacred in shadows and in light of living and dying.



The Kirk Session in Alloway Parish Church has made a commitment to invest in the two Primary Schools in our Parish, Alloway and Doonfoot Primary Schools. We have a wonderful relationship with staff, parents and pupils, who are equally as enthusiastic about our partnership working.

We have always made a financial investment into projects, for example, we arranged for the Scottish Bible Society to bring their "Bibleworld" trailer, previously a project called the "Tree of Life" was jointly co-ordinated with staff from Christian Aid, we work closely with our links at partner schools in Malawi and co-ordinate the work of the pupils through the Rights Respecting Schools Weeks and Malawi Day for the community, etc. The weeks have been tremendously successful.

Recently POP UK is a highlight in our programme. The Charitable Trust is based in Manchester and provide a project which will bring together churches, schools and communities, providing exciting music, religious education and citizenship lessons. It provides pupils with life long memories.

For three days the school pupils were taught seven catchy, fun and "poppy", life affirming songs; songs about creation, family, friendship, love, citizenship, etc. On the fourth day a professional mobile recording studio is brought to both schools, and the pupils are recorded. The discs are then taken back to Manchester to be digitally mastered, edited and mixed, and a CD was produced.

The team then returned to rehearse the children, and then two concerts were held in the church for parents, congregation, local business people and members of the whole community. 250 pupils entertained the audience in the two concerts, and we celebrated the children's achievements. An offering was taken to raise money for Bandawe Primary School in Malawi. This is the school that both Alloway and Doonfoot have a partnership with; to improve the education facilities and learning environment of pupils there, and also to establish relationships and friendships. The money will be used to upgrade the overnight hostel used by many of the pupils there who simply have too far to walk home each day.

Following the concerts, the pupils will have an opportunity to buy their CD, which no doubt will become a treasured keepsake.

Ploughing on Group cuts a first Straight Furrow of Friendship



On 8th March 2019 months of collaborative working between Ayr Farming Support, the Royal Scottish Agricultural Benevolent Institution and the National Farmers Union Scotland, came to a fruitful climax as around 35 retired and semi-retired farmers met up for the very first Ploughing On meeting.

Rev Chris Blackshaw said "This is a group that helps retired and semi-retired farmers meet up three times in the year for a social time together, focused around something of a farming interest. The first inaugural meeting took place at Moriston Farm, Maidens, home of Lord David Kennedy. Lord David gave the group an insight into his farming life. The group were then given a tour of his farm buildings, where he showed how he stored and dried his grain crops. There were several massive tractors on display and implements of equal size to match. Lord David explained how he harvests and stores his crops and the importance of having the right temperature to prevent the crop going off. He then gave the group a guided tour of his recently refurbished museum where he stores his collection of vintage and classic cars and motor cycles.

The group then retired back to Kirkoswald Church Hall where they were treated to a lunch sponsored by NFUS and provided by the Coo Shed.

Christine Cuthbertson from NFUS said "We are delighted that people wanted to come along today to be part of this group. We wanted to do something for the retired and semi-retired farmers and they seem to have really enjoyed themselves so it has been a great success." The next meeting of Ploughing on will be in the autumn on a date yet to be fixed.



Pioneer Ministry By Chris Blackshaw

We are pleased to welcome Rev Barry Osborne to lead our next Rural Conference.

Barry is an experienced rural mission enabler and published author. His understanding of rural communities and their needs is second to none. Barry will help us to explore new ideas and ways of connecting with our communities and engaging with them, from car and tractor washing on Maundy Thursday to a clothes exchange. These ideas will also work in many urban contexts.

**10am - 3pm 4th May, 2019
Carrick Centre, Culzean Road, Maybole KA19 7DE**

Booking is essential as lunch will be available to purchase. Please contact:

**Rev Chris Blackshaw preferably by email:
cblackshaw@churchofscotland.org.uk
07980 975062**



Congratulations to Ian McLachlan, and the church community in Dailly who have successfully carried out essential conservation repairs to their church, which lies at the heart of the village, so that the church building is retained and can be passed on to future generations.

The interior redecoration has made a great improvement and many people have already commented on it. We are looking forward to welcoming visitors, to encourage local couples to enjoy their wedding in the church and are looking to engage with the local community and school in future events.

Dailly has also created a website to record the history of Dailly Parish Church and produced a little brochure to inform visitors about the heritage.. There was a service of re-dedicated on 24th February

New Faces: Lynsey Brennan Dundonald

Sinking into the leather chairs in The Auchen in the heart of Dundonald, waiting and watching, I see a figure pass the window, then make her way through the door. In breezes Lynsey Brennan with as bright a welcome as her fashion sense. 'Sorry I'm a wee bit late, I've just been settling Malachi down ... he's only two'. It's a time of adjustment and of finding a new balance for the whole Brennan family. It's Stephen's first day in the manse looking after the children and cooking tea. It's also a time of new beginnings for Dundonald Kirk. 'I am the first woman minister to be here!' What I loved at St Paul's, Milngavie was the way Fergus Buchanan and the congregation gave me the freedom to just be me ... it was liberating.'

As the new minister of the parish she is making herself known. Not only is The Auchen becoming her local, 'the manse is just across the street and we're enjoying coming in here quite often now'; Lynsey is also catching up with other parents at the school gates 'it's been lovely having the time to allow my children to settle in to the school, even before I start out'. And I pick up that she has been visiting all afternoon, getting to know her folk, already imagining a hopeful future for the church and parish. 'You see that back room, it's a fantastic space and I fancy having a men's group in there ... A Pie, A Pint and A Parable. I like it, and she certainly reminds me of a younger version of me.

That already, even in her first week, she is becoming a visible presence is evident by the interruptions to our conversation over a smoked salmon salad; as first one then another group call out to her and say hello. Here to me is an image of rural, village ministry which comes from walking the streets, knocking on doors, and taking the time to stop and listen. 'Everyone wants to talk and I am keen to share my faith'. I suspect sharing her faith is going to be a key factor in her evolving ministry.

Lynsey reflects on how her faith became central in her life, triggered by a caring friendship offered in a time of need, which led to her attending St Silas Church in Glasgow and then devour the texts offered in their Alpha course. 'They were amazed that I read every book that they recommended, ... What's so Amazing about Grace? by Philip Yancey. Lynsey is clearly fired up by her faith and in the ensuing years she has kept it vital and growing through immersing herself in many relationships, spiritual direction, pastoral supervision, support groups who keep her sense of faith strong. She highly values the support of the Church of Scotland Ministries department whose Ascend project is so innovative in the value it places on ministers.

So our conversation shifts to her sense of vocation and call. As a speech and language therapist, working away in palliative care teams in Glasgow, Lynsey had found herself spending more and more time offering spiritual

care to patients. 'Once I reached my limits of offering therapeutic care I found they were just interested in me and my faith'.

She tells of a pivotal moment with one lady patient whose cancerous growth had become so distressing to staff that they were reluctant to spend time with her. In amidst of what was a distressing situation Lynsey found herself compelled just to go into the room and stay with her. Conscious of being unable to fix anything, she just sat and shared the love of Christ. And this after all, is what so many people in our communities long for. A listening, compassionate, and attentive presence. Soon after the patient died but Lynsey received a card from her family to say that 'of all the staff she was the one who truly listened and cared'. Such experiences, and the gift in palliative care of being able to linger long with patients, and offer safe spaces for safe conversations made Lynsey think about becoming a deacon, or a hospital chaplain. But somehow circumstances worked against that avenue and to her amazement it was the talk on Word and Sacrament at a Vocations Conference that lured her in. And here she is now.

Much has happened since then, and Lynsey, Stephen and her family are all making significant adjustments in their life to allow her to follow her calling into the ministry. Early days. Exciting days.

And what is clear is Lynsey's trust in God who will opens horizons
- the joy of the Lord is your strength' Nehemiah 8:10.

As her wider family in Ayr presbytery we are delighted that Lynsey has chosen to make her home in Dundonald and we wish her every blessing and a regular time of relaxation walking the beach at Troon.



Come and See: Go and Tell.

World Mission Council Behind the Wall study tour,
by Dr Amanda Stirling.



Overlooking the Sea of Galilee from the Golan Heights

My first impressions of Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), before Ian and I, joined up with the Behind the Wall study tour was the tranquility of the Sea of Galilee. Staying with our mission partner Kate McDonald in Tiberias, Ian and I visited the sacred sites in the north. It was only on meeting a Druze family, way up on the Golan Heights, who shared their barbeque with us - grilled lamb, salads, flatbreads, labneh - that the first seeds of doubt that all is calm entered my mind. Their land was not free.



All are welcome

On our second day, I visited the world heritage Site of the Bahai gardens in Haifa, then my first mosque and first synagogue in Accre. Fascinating. And yet beneath the surface I felt growing tensions, and seeds of conflict. Which meant that the sign of welcome at the entrance of the Fattoush café caught my eye. Ian wondered how faiths and religions can ever come to respect each other. For me food, such as hummus, unites cultures.

We then travelled south via Nazareth, to Jerusalem to meet up with the rest of the group in St Andrew's Church and Guest House, where John McCulloch is mission partner. It happened to be the Jewish festival of Purim, where everyone, dressed up and put on fancy clothing to mark an escape from genocide, as described in the book of Esther. We felt quite boring in comparison. But fancy hats or not, standing at the Wailing Wall, where young girls sat on their mother's knees reading the Torah was a very emotional moment for us both.



The Wailing wall at night



Prayers during the Purim festival

Over the next ten days the plight of the Palestinian people and the countless ways in which Israel is flaunting international law gradually became evident. Checkpoints. Illegal Settlements. Abuse of human rights. The wall. And these facts are not merely my opinion, but something which we heard from the British Consul and the UN humanitarian centre for Gaza. Facts widely known but somehow because of fear of being described as anti-Semitic, are hard to be shared. One former Israeli diplomat, Ilan Baruch, didn't hold back with his description of the 'apartheid wall' which has almost made of Bethlehem a ghetto.



A group of Palestinian children learning their history in the abandoned village of Lifta.



Tensions in the West bank where even the youngest on both sides of the conflict learn resistance and fear.



Jesus our brother
As we dare to follow in the steps you trod
Be our companion on the way.

May our eyes see not only the stones that saw you
But the people who walk with you now;

May our feet tread not only the path of your pain
But the streets of living cities, towns and villages;

May our prayers embrace not only the memory of your presence
But the flesh and blood who jostle us today.

Bless us, with them, and make us long to do justice, to love mercy,
and to walk humbly with our God.
Amen



'Our Mission in the Occupied Palestinian Territories: To advance the United Kingdom's security and prosperity through a just peace between a stable democratic Palestinian State and Israel, based on 1967 borders, ending the Occupation by agreement. To strengthen ties of friendship between the Palestinian and British People'. British Consulate Jerusalem.



But the world over children at play, in the alleys of Hebron and in the Bedouin village of Al Khan Alahmar, which is under threat of demolition



Keys of family homes are kept safe in the hope that one day Palestinians can return to their homes and villages which they lost in 1948



A cookery school in Aida Refugee camp, Bethlehem, whose proceeds support a school for children with learning needs..



Stations of the cross in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre
Barbed wire at dawn, Bethlehem
Entrance to the church of the Nativity



The Behind the Wall Tour made clear how beautiful the land is. How sacred. How the people long for peace. And just how complex it will be to heal the ancient rifts between faiths and cultures. My hope is that just as the cherry blossom colours each new spring, so one day peace may come. The one message that the local Palestinian Christians asked of us, is to come and see, go and tell.



Overlooking the ancient walls of Jerusalem
Cherry blossom
St Andrew's church, Jerusalem.

Interested in learning more? Here are some links to some impressive organisations Military Court Watch, Tent of Nations, The Parents Circle and Hebron

<http://www.militarycourtwatch.org/>

www.tentofnations.org

http://theparentscircle.org/en/about_eng/

<https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2015/jun/29/hebron-old-city-west-bank-palestinian-ghost-city-revived-transformation>