



Link *The Magazine of*

Morningside United Church



December 2020

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. Isaiah 9 v 2

Dear Friend

Advent and Christmas approaches quickly and this year above all others we are presented with the greatest of challenges. The pandemic of 2020 has eroded so much hope for people everywhere. I wonder if you are like me and that you sense a real weariness permeating life. I know that as you read this many of you will be wondering if life will ever return to normal or even more pragmatically, we wonder if we shall see our loved ones this Christmas at all. That thought alone can feed so much anxiety. I suspect that it is not the fuss of Christmases past that we are looking for, but just the opportunity to see those we love and with whom we want to celebrate the gift of life itself. We just want to see family and close friends. As one of the congregation said to me, "I just want to see all my grandchildren in the same room". Is even this too much to hope for?

Well, as we hear news about Covid-19 it seems something else is stirring. Names like Pfizer, Moderna and Astra Zeneca are emerging in our consciousness as positive news about vaccines hitting the media. This, together with the myriad of experiences people have as friends connect, and neighbours and the isolated are cared for, points to a deeper meaning in our experiences of life. Notice still that our bins are emptied, that schools remain open, that care homes and the NHS operate at times heroically even when overstretched. Light is emerging in darkness and the prophecy of Isaiah is ringing true, "on those living in the land of darkness a light has shone". Our dark days will pass.

There is little doubt that in an era of Covid and secularism, when even our churches are closed, we can perhaps be regarded as rather eccentric when we whisper words of faith. But we do have a faith to proclaim and it is no private, personal thing, and because we are citizens of the kingdom of God we would want to love and care for those around us for Christ's sake. We want to let the world know that through Advent we look forward to Christmas because we are remembering the coming of Jesus as the greatest gift to the world.

Advent sets our sights on the miracle of Christ's birth, that God came to us as a helpless child. This vulnerable God walks with us, transforms our

humanity and gives us the hope of resurrected life in a new heaven and a new earth.

In weeks that lie ahead, we can quietly take a few minutes each day in holy preparation. We can keep Christmas by speaking the whispers of faith that come through loving service of those around us; by taking a minute to say a prayer for those we love and who may be far from us; we can share what we have with those who are needy and by cherishing our own. We can remember charities that have lost so much income and give to them from our surpluses. We can write to those we love, or those we have not seen, and bring a glimmer of hope in our caring contact. We can remember those for whom Christmas will be hard, particularly those thousands who have lost love ones through Covid. We can give thanks for all whose work allows us to carry on each day.

And you know if we do this, if we take a couple of minutes each day to remember the baby who is King, then I know our lives will seem different and our hearts will find the hope that never ends and the love that never fails. We will discover truth of the prophesy of Isaiah that:

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.

Have a blessed Advent and Happy Christmas

Church services have begun again

As of 29 November we have begun to hold Sunday Church services again. There are strict guidance measures in place, If you would like information on these please email the office or see the website.

Recorded services every Sunday morning

Every week there is a recorded church service being provided by Rev Manders and Max our organist. You can view this via Facebook or through the church website www.morningsideunitedchurch.org. Alternatively, if you would like this to be sent to you each week please email Churchoffice.muc@gmail.com.

Lothian Gaelic Choir – Singing Through Lockdown

On a Friday afternoon in October a choir of thirty-five singers line up on a stage, bright studio lights all but obscuring the audience before them from view. Television cameras, lenses as focused as the singers themselves, are ready to record. The choir is about to compete in the final competition of the day.

They are introduced in the tongue of the Gaels, Còisir Ghàidhlig Lodainn, and this is when the magic begins. Standing shoulder to shoulder, singing pieces that have long since been committed to memory, all eyes on the conductor; the choir sings as one.

For the singers on that stage there is no feeling quite like it. This is the Royal National Mòd, Scotland's annual festival of Gaelic culture and music, and for Lothian Gaelic Choir it is the culmination of a year of hard work that began the previous winter at Morningside United Church.

The words above could describe any of the thirty-five years in the choir's history. Any except this one, that is. Since its formation in 1985 Lothian Gaelic Choir has performed at the National Mòd every year and has won the Mòd's most coveted prize – The Lovat & Tullibardine Shield – twice in that time, most recently in 2018.

For the choir, 2020 began like any other year. We reconvened our weekly rehearsals after a Christmas break and got to work on new pieces, under the expert guidance of our Conductors and Gaelic tutors, in preparation for a concert in the Usher Hall in March.

Then everything changed.

The concert was cancelled. Smaller local Mòds were cancelled. The National Mòd was cancelled. And, of course, our weekly gatherings had to be cancelled.

As the nation closed its doors our rehearsals quickly moved online, keeping us very much together while physically apart. For all of us this was an

entirely new way of working and one that required some adjustment. But this year has not been without its opportunities. With no concerts, performances or competitions to prepare for, we were able to revise and extend our repertoire and to continue improving our Gaelic pronunciation. The very few events that we were able to participate in were also now online, which widened our reach, allowing people to take part from anywhere that had an internet connection.

Most of our members live in the Edinburgh area, but they hail from all across Scotland (and further afield), brought together by a shared love for Gaelic music and culture. Our repertoire includes the full range of Gaelic song, from laments and love songs to puirt-a-beul (mouth music) and traditional waulking songs. Our members have a range of Gaelic knowledge; some are in the early stages of learning while others are fluent or native speakers of the language.

The choir is often described as being like a family and if we are a family then Morningside United Church is our home. We have rehearsed in the church hall since 2013 and for all that our focus is on our public performances and the competitions that we take part in, the church is where we spend the majority of our time together. From cold, dark evenings in February to the (sometimes) sweltering heat of summer, we all make the weekly pilgrimage to Holy Corner to spend an evening side by side, singing, chatting, laughing.

2020 has been one of the choir's most challenging years, being unable to sing as we usually do. A year ago we could never have predicted what lay ahead, just as none of us can say for certain how the next twelve months will unfold. If the current promises of a vaccine prove fruitful then 2021 may see us back on that stage, under the lights and in front of the cameras. But more importantly the next year may see us together in person, singing to a real audience rather than a virtual one.

This is something we look forward to, just as we look forward to our eventual return to rehearsals in Morningside United Church, whenever that may be.

In the meantime, we in Lothian Gaelic Choir would like to wish all of you a Merry Christmas and our very best wishes for 2021.

Allan MacFadyen

Update on Cornerstone

The upgraded Old Schoolhouse building for our friends from Cornerstone is now taking shape opposite Waitrose. Work started there at the end of June once construction was allowed out of lockdown. The project information boards at the front always seem to have interested readers any time I have passed. It was hoped to be finished mid-November, allowing time for preparing and opening for Christmas – that may now be a little optimistic. The Council pavement schemes have made life more difficult to deliver items to the site. Taking big lorries along Cuddy Lane is not a good option. The large zig zag brick faced column in the photo was sneaked in early last Sunday with removal of the bollards. Glass will soon fill the space at the front to give a welcoming entrance.



Photos courtesy of Cornerstone's Architect, Nick Mills of Mills McCulloch

Renovation Update

The Kirk Session have taken the opportunity of Covid lockdown to renovate the large hall. We will have photographs available in the next Link for all to see (it is looking wonderful).

We Say Goodbye

Unfortunately, earlier this year we lost our good friend Rev Peter Mackenzie. Peter was a much-loved member of this congregation and we very much think of his wife Betty and his daughters at this time. An article about Peter's life and ministry will appear in the next Link. He was a true gentleman and a very fine Pastor.

Covid Times

We heard the birds singing, enjoyed clearer skies and quietness in April and May. Were rather sorry when the rules were relaxed a bit and the traffic picked up and town noise was heard again.

Missed friends, activities at first then found ways of meeting, learning, enjoying through Zoom, Collaborate, Team ...quizzes, lectures, courses, concerts. Found exercise routines through regular walks and cycles, Keep Fit online or self-directed Yoga and Pilates.

Pastimes long neglected came to the fore, reading, writing, jigsaws, knitting and sewing, DIY. Conversations at first nearly always reverted to food and where one could find this or that. Large amounts of yeast arrived from Bulgaria courtesy of Ebay, and recipes were swapped to deal with whatever might have arrived.

For some, living alone, it has been very hard and for those who could not see children and grandchildren. For some there has been a strengthening of community at social distance, for others increased loneliness.

Maybe it's also been time to reflect, take stock. Had mankind come to see itself as all powerful instead of a part of a multi-faceted universe teaming with plants, animals, bacteria, fungi, viruses, phages etc all interdependent of one another? All to be respected.

Maggie McKenzie

Donations

Our thanks to all those who have continued to give while the church has been closed for worship.

There are a variety of ways that you can donate if you would like to. If you use online banking and would like to donate to our Church, the details are as follows:

Morningside United Church Sort Code: 80-02-85 Account No: 00551871

An alternative is to fill out a standing order form, which can be handed into your bank. If you are not able to do any of the above but would like to make an individual donation, a cheque payable to

Morningside United Church posted to the church is another possibility.

Anyone that pays income tax on earnings or pension can sign a Gift Aid declaration, increasing the donation by 25% from the Government. If you are eligible and have not yet signed a declaration, please ask for the very simple form.

Any queries or requests for forms mentioned above, please contact churhoffice.muc@gmail.com or you can call 0131 447 3152.

Charity Update

Usually we have various charity collections and fundraising events during the year - in 2019 we gave over £3000. Not surprisingly this will be less in 2020. We gave a donation directly from our restricted Education fund of £1000 to support the work of Napier University Chaplaincy which our Ministers is involved with. For special collections in the early part of the year, £267 was given to the Eric Liddell Centre's Dementia Day Care project. Most of this was raised through a vocal concert arranged by our organist Max. Finally, £160 was raised for the Fair Trade Foundation from a stall arranged by Elizabeth and Maggie during Fair Trade fortnight.

The usual Lent collection had only just started before lockdown. The collection was originally intended to be split between the Salvation Army Foodbank in Gorgie, and the Raaklam Educational Trust in India. We will add this year's Lent money to any donations received at Christmas to make a more worthwhile donation to the foodbank. When things have returned to more "normal", we can look at helping the Raaklam Trust again.

Thank you again for your continued support through this difficult year. It is very much appreciated.

Christmas Service

At this precise moment, we do not know what the regulations are going to be for Christmas with regards how we can hold services. We will put up notices outside on the board and provide information on Facebook and on our website as soon as we are able to.