

# Soundings

Portobello & Joppa Parish  
Church Magazine

June, July & August 2023



# *Portobello and Joppa Parish Church*

## ***From the editor***



Talking about changes and what we can do to make things better (as Stewart does in his letter to us), I've been polishing up my French and German on the computer via Duolingo, in an effort to fend off deterioration in my elderly brain. My German was never very good, because I was too idle to learn it properly (all those word endings). My French is better, though – thoughtlessly – both countries have invented new words for things that didn't exist when I was at school, such as keyboards and mobile phones.

We had a visit from a bilingual two-and-a-half-year-old today, and while I can confidently assert that my *English* is better than his, I'm wondering when his grasp of French will overtake mine. I'm thinking... not long.

We're very lucky in the children we have in our congregation and in this edition you can read about their contributions to Christian Aid at the baked potato lunch and their excellent acting in Junior Drama. Michelle gives us news about the holiday club and asks for help with it. And you can find out which young person *really* likes rabbits.

There's a report on March's Annual Stated Meeting and you're invited to a Special Conference on June 11 – before which you can fill in a questionnaire about the future direction of PJPC, if you haven't already done so. And there's also news about the timings of summer services.

Thanks as ever to George and Alison for their regular contributions.



**Pam**



## ***From the minister***

Dear Friends and Neighbours,

'Gradual' is a book written by Greg Berman and Aubrey Fox, two American criminal-justice reformers. They argue that cautious change is often more effective: 'gradualists know how little they know.' As one newspaper commented on reforms within a city, change was made through 'a thousand small sanities'.

PJPC has been undertaking a number of experiments in worship and Sunday mornings over the past year or more. It has taken some time.

There have been two services that echoed what we offered pre-Covid. There have been two services in which one was a blended service that attempted to offer elements within it that spoke to those of different ages and those who approached worship and faith differently. There have been three services too, which again strove to cater to the different manner in which people prefer to gather with each other and with God. There have been the Celebration Services, one service in which all are made welcome.

Underpinning all of these experiments has been the café. Thanks to a group of dedicated and indefatigable volunteers, tea and coffee have been provided in the main hall from 9.30am to 12.30pm. Those who have assisted have noted the ebb and flow of people coming in and out, catching up with one another, staying for hours (yes, a good natter is, er, good!) and making connections where none were made before.

In the midst of all of these experiments have been surveys and tinkering and conversations and acknowledgments of negatives alongside positives. It's not perfect. What is? Who is?

Why? Why all of these experiments, the attempt to pursue changes in a considered, studied and gradual manner?

The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland is currently meeting.

And the Church of Scotland is in a difficult position.

Here are some statistics that are important to share. They appeared in the Report of the Assembly Trustees of the Church of Scotland, as well as the Supplementary Report of the General Trustees (see links below):

- at Dec. 2022, there were 270,300 members of the C of S, a fall of 4.7% from 2021 (note: the rate of decrease is increasing... this number will only get larger);
- since 2012, the number of members has fallen by 35%;
- membership is approximately half of what it was in 2000;
- 430 professions of faith (compared to 40,000 per year at the peak in the 1930s);
- 60,000 people, out of a total membership of 283,000, worship in person on a Sunday;
- this 60,000 compares to 88,000 pre-covid;
- most ministers are over 50 and 40-50% could retire in the next 10 years.

The typical congregation looks like this:

- 5 children are associated with the congregation and none receive communion;
- 45 people worship in the church with 5 worshipping online;
- 0 professions of faith;
- 8 funerals, 1 baptism and no weddings;
- 17 elders.

The future of the national church as it currently exists and in its present incarnation is perilous. Indeed, it is said that the General Fund, which helps pay for ministers, may run out in approximately three years.

So, why experiment?

Is there any choice?

And in our choices, what are the criteria?

Is it our own personal preference or the call of Christ to make new disciples and draw all people into the economy of God's grace? Be honest.

Is it a hearkening back to those halcyon days of old or is it a stepping forward faithfully into an uncertain future?

Is it a comparison of where we are now with those older days, or a comparison between where we are now with the many, many congregations that are struggling? Don't compare apples with oranges.

Is it a comparison between impressive numbers from days of yore and current numbers, or a comparison between the richness of life we have all experienced in the church and life in a comprehensively post-Christian world in which so many struggle with purpose, meaning and isolation?

These experiments have not been universally popular. That is acknowledged.

There are concerns about capacity. There are concerns about dividing the congregation. There are articulations that people want to see the children.

If capacity is a concern, please do volunteer or agree to help when approached.

If a divided congregation is a concern, please do remember that the 9.30am service at St. Philip's drew the same criticism when it began and yet also drew many new people into the fold.

If you would like to see the children, you are most welcome to join the 10.30 service or, better yet, there is a chance to interact rather than see them by volunteering to help the Family Ministry. Or, come along to the cafe and sit with some of the families.

At every stage along this process we have paused, listened, considered and adapted.

But a time of choice is coming.

At a recent Session meeting we remembered that, at a Session conference in which the spiritual and faith leadership of Elders was emphasised, the story of Jesus washing the disciples' feet exemplified this type of leadership.

Do you remember what Jesus *said*? Perhaps or perhaps not.

Do you remember what Jesus *did*? Undoubtedly.

Will people remember us talking about growth and getting new people into the church, or for going backwards, comfortable in that which had been?

Or, will people remember us for reflecting, discerning, praying, experimenting and moving forward not into *our* future but *God's* future?

There is no assumption that we who minister, we who are elders, we who are members or we who attend know the right answers. Hence the gradual approach.

But, there are new faces in the church now. We have new members. Our roll now is exactly the same as it was a year ago despite the loss of members through moving or death.

Something is happening. It's indefinable, it's uplifting, it's inspiring, it's exciting, it's mysterious and it's fragile.

We have a conference on 11 June and elders are planning to meet in August. We have some choices to make.

Not me but thee, Lord. Thy will be done, not mine.

**Stewart**

Reports to the General Assembly:

<https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/about-us/general-assembly/2023/reports-and-additional-documents>

**Stewart**

## Baked Potato Sunday

Many thanks to those who contributed to the Christian Aid baked potato lunch, either by cooking, serving, washing up or just eating. Well done to our older children, who worked hard laying the tables and serving. It was a lovely occasion which raised well over £300 in cash alone, with more contributed on the day in Christian Aid envelopes. These will be counted in with the other envelopes in due course.



**Cupcake Sunday** is coming soon, on June 4, and all funds from that will go to Fresh Start.

## Special Conference on 11 June

After worship on Sunday 11 June, we will be hosting a special conference to allow members an opportunity for input to the future direction of PJPC. This is in response to the experiments and different initiatives that we've been trialling over the past couple of years. All are welcome to participate.

If you have yet to do so, you can still provide your views by completing a short online survey which can be found at the link below:

<https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/D5HYQ5/>

Please take the time to prayerfully consider the questions and respond based upon what you think is the right answer for PJPC to continue to play a meaningful role in the local community over the medium term.

**Michael**



# ***Worship***



## **Sunday 4 June**

- 9.30** Quiet and reflective
- 10.30** Interactive and intergenerational
- 11.15** Traditional

NB: Cupcake Sunday! Cupcakes available from 10.00am onwards!

## **Sunday 11 June**

- 10.30** Celebration Service (Promotion Sunday)
- ca. 11.30** Conference on Rolling Sundays (Main Hall)

## **Sunday 18 June**

- 9.30** Quiet and reflective
- 10.30** Interactive and intergenerational
- 11.15** Traditional

## **Saturday 24 June**

- 3.30pm** Messy Church

## **Sunday 25 June**

- 9.30** Quiet and reflective
- 10.30** Interactive and intergenerational
- 11.15** Traditional

## **Sundays 2 July-Sunday 27 August**

- 9.30** Content to be decided after 11 June conference and meeting of Worship Team.
- 10.30** Content to be decided.

# ***Summer Worship Times***

During July and August, we will be offering two worship services at 9.30am and 10.30am. Please keep an eye on the e-newsletter for details. The rolling café will continue to be available between 9.30am and 12 noon. We look forward to sharing in worship and fellowship with you.

## ***Annual Stated Meeting***

This year's ASM was held on Sunday 26 March after worship. Michael Craig (Session Clerk) provided an update on some of the key financial metrics for 2022. In summary, PJPC was able to report a stable set of financial results for the year. Michael thanked the congregation for their generous giving throughout the year which, with Gift Aid, covered approximately 80% of the church's annual running costs. He also acknowledged the stewardship of the church's finances by David Stocks (Honorary Treasurer), Adrian Smith (Finance Convener) and Anne Russell (Church Administrator and Bookkeeper). Michael also presented a summary of the maintenance and enhancements to the church's property complex that Jamie McDonald (Property Convener) and Derek Drummond (Church Caretaker) plan to take forward over the coming months.

Stewart Weaver then reflected on the challenges, new initiatives and experiments of the past twelve months. He acknowledged that the past few years have been difficult for many of us. He also acknowledged that concerns have been voiced regarding some of the recent experiments, including the implications for resources and a possible fragmentation of the congregation. These have been heard and the congregation will have the opportunity to contribute further to the next series of experiments at a special conference in June. Stewart also noted there were also signs that something positive is afoot. For example, PJPC's numbers on the congregational roll are roughly the same as last year because of the people who have joined. Furthermore, a number of regular worshippers have expressed an interest in joining PJPC over the next few months. While not knowing the future direction for our church, we hope to continue to move forward in a spirit of humility and receptiveness to different viewpoints and opinions. Stewart concluded by expressing his sincere thanks to everyone who contributes so much to the life and spiritual wellbeing of PJPC.

**Michael, Session Clerk**

## ***Portobello Holiday Club 2023***



Our sixth Portobello Holiday Club will finally take place on 17-21 July 2023 from 9am to 12:45pm here at Portobello and Joppa Parish Church and at St Mark's Scottish Episcopal Church. Five local churches are working together to bring a fun filled week of games, crafts, science, Bible study, music, storytelling, baking and much more for children going into P1-P7. We are inviting secondary students to be involved as youth helpers. It will be a wonderful week and we would love for your family to be there.

If you are interested in volunteering, we could use help with leading activities, playing in the band, helping with snack, setting up, decorating, working with groups, being support for children attending with additional support needs, prepping crafts, helping with activities and various other roles. You can volunteer for a day, a couple of days or the full week. Speak with Michelle to volunteer, or email her.

Registration information and flyers will be out to the churches in March, but for now – save the dates! You can also send **Michelle** a note of interest to be added to the email list for first opportunity to register for holiday club. Hope to see you there this year!

**Michelle**

## ***Junior Drama***



Junior Drama recently put on an excellent show, “The Lost Monster of Scotland”, under the splendid directorship of Charlotte.

The young cast were all very good, the main part of Katie Albright being acted in fine style by Rosa, supported by star turns from everyone else. Maisy distinguished herself by being Child 1, Agnes *and* Nessie herself – truly versatile – but there were comic acts, American accents, impressive disguises, astonishing reveals and lots of tuneful singing from the rest of the very enthusiastic cast.

Congratulations to all concerned, and particular thanks to the adults who gave up so much of their time for the children – Charlotte, of course, and the producer, Jamie, as well as Musical Director, Fiona. Thanks also to those who helped with lighting and sound, costumes and make-up, choreography and stage management.

I hope they have a restful summer!

**Pam**



## ***The word for today***

### ***Feeling less alone***

*“Turn to me and have mercy, for I am alone and in deep distress”, Psalm 25, 16.*

When we feel alone, distancing ourselves from God doesn't make sense. If we get involved with some aspect of ministry, we'll get to know others and let them get to know us.

When we spend time around people who care for us, loneliness ceases to be such an issue.

Winston Churchill said, “We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.” Victory comes by reaching out to those in need; by giving of ourselves, praying for them, loving and serving them.

Isolating ourselves when we're hurt just leads to bitterness. Forgive, turn it over to God, let Him deal with things and just get on with your life.

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***Gardening with George*** – More plant lore  
from George, horticulturist and star of the small  
screen.



We are now well into the warmer, frost-free weather that hails the start of summer.

The long-term weather trend is for late May and early June to be a dry sunny period. This is the time also when most of us plant up our pots and containers with hardy and half-hardy annuals to give us summer colour: geraniums, lobelia, petunias, verbenas, pansies and lots more.



Many of the plants used in our summer displays are descendants of species native to Australia, South Africa, Central America and the warm Mediterranean areas of the world. They are often plants which take only one season to grow, flower and seed before they eventually die. Bedecked with myriads of brightly coloured flowers, their sole aim in life is to grow quickly and attract as many insect pollinators as possible so that they can set copious quantities of seed before the onset of winter.

In the wild, the seeds are shed and lie dormant in the soil until they are triggered into growth the following spring by rainfall and the onset of warmer temperatures. The magical flowerings of the Atacama, Australian and Namibian desert areas are classic examples. Plant seeds are incredible in their ability to survive long periods of dormancy. Seeds of the Lotus *Nelumbo nucifera* found in the mud deposits of an ancient lake germinated and grew to produce perfect plants after having lain dormant for over 1000 years.



In the unheated glasshouse at home, the tomatoes have been planted. This year I am trying three varieties, San Marzano, Pink Tiger and Inca. I grew San Marzano last year but Inca and Pink Tiger are new to me so it will be interesting to see how they perform. At the allotment, potatoes, French beans, lettuce, spinach, onions, cabbage, carrots and parsnip are all sown or planted and doing well. I am growing Yacon once again, (an Andean relative of the dahlia, which produces large edible tubers) Ocha, the New Zealand Yam and for the first time I am trying Sweet Potatoes. The plants have arrived already

and are growing on in the glasshouse but will soon be planted out under a layer of horticultural fleece to keep them warm and humid. They are a crop from the warmer regions of the world and need a long growing season, so I hope for a long hot 'Indian Summer'.

This is a magical time of year, full of promise, hope and expectations. Wherever you garden and whatever the size of the plot you tend, enjoy the fresh air and don't forget to smell the roses.

Stay safe and happy gardening.  
**George**

*“To own a bit of ground, to scratch it with a hoe, to plant seeds and watch their renewal of life – that is the commonest delight of the race, the most satisfactory thing a man can do.” Charles Dudley Warner.*

*“To every thing there is a season... a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted.” Proverbs 3.*

## Brain-teaser



Just to embarrass Stewart again, I've decided to use the phrase **TWENTY YEARS** for this month's puzzle.

The first letters of the answers to the anagrams below spell out those words.

**T** \_\_\_\_\_ We are **FUNKLATH** for Stewart's ministry with us.

**W** \_\_\_\_\_ We **ROW SHIP** together on Sundays.

**E** \_\_\_\_\_ Joseph was taken to **PGYET**.

**N** \_\_\_\_\_ Jesus of **HE TARZAN??**

**T** \_\_\_\_\_ We read the old and new **STATEMENT**.

**Y** \_\_\_\_\_ Stewart has been with us for twenty **AYERS**.

**Y** \_\_\_\_\_ **HAW HEY** – another name for God in the Bible.

**E** \_\_\_\_\_ The sub-**TRIODE** of the newsletter is a dog...

**A** \_\_\_\_\_ ... whereas a book of the New Testament is **CATS**.

**R** \_\_\_\_\_ "Do this in **BRACE MERMEN** of me."

**S** \_\_\_\_\_ **SWATTER** – we all know this chap.

**Alison**





## **Getting to know you – Ava.** Ava says:

*Hi! My name is Ava and I am 9 years old. I used to go to Towerbank Primary but I now go to St George's School – I have been there a year and I love it. It is a girls' school and my Mummy works there. I have 2 rabbits called Daisy and Jack who I love very much. They are indoor bunnies and they are 2 years old. When I come to church it is with my Mummy and Gran.*

**Q. What is a favourite hymn, and why?**

*A. Shine Jesus Shine – My Mummy has played it to me since I was a baby and it helps me go to sleep.*

**Q. What's your earliest memory?**

*A. I don't know, probably seeing my Mummy or Gran.*

**Q. What job might you like to do in the future?**

*A. Either a paediatrician (that is a baby / children's doctor) or an actress or maybe both.*

**Q. What are you reading at the moment?**

*A. Babysitters Club Series – they are by Ann M Martin and my Mummy used to love them too at my age. I also love Malory Towers but I am watching that as a TV series just now – series 4*

**Q. What is your most prized possession?**

*A. Daisy and Jack - the bunnies.*



**Q. Tell us something that not many people know about you.**

*A. That I also love horses as well as rabbits.*



**Q. What luxury would you take to a desert island?**

*A. Daisy and Jack, my rabbits.*

**Q. What do you do to relax?**

*A. Yoga – and meditate – we do this at school with my teacher Mrs May, and also listen to the birds.*

**Q. Where would you go in a time machine and why?**

*A. I would go back to when the rabbits were born to have them as very small babies.*

**Q. What is a favourite quotation?**

*A. We have a quote in our living room, painted on our wall, that I like – it is “Be the change you wish to see in the world”. It is by a person called Mahatma Gandhi and it means that if you want things in life to change, you have to actually do that change and set a good example.*

**Q. What kind of music do you listen to?**

*A. One Direction and the Spice Girls.*

**Q. What do you think will be good (or bad!) about being an adult?**

*A. Good – having children.  
Bad – working in a job.*

**Q. What gets you up in the morning (apart from your alarm clock)?**

*A. Mummy, and to feed the rabbits and get a cuddle from them before I go to school.*



**Q. Where would you like to be right now?**

*A. Just where I am, at home, cuddling my rabbits.*

**Q. If not yourself, who might you like to be?**

*A. A rabbit.*

**Q. What makes you happy?**

*A. My rabbits, my family and my friends .*



## ***Remembering***

**17 April**

**Christine (Anne) Thomson** of Portobello

**27 April**

**Henry Russell** of Portobello

**13 May**

**Catriona Hepburn** of Portobello

## ***LIFE AND WORK June 2023***

**‘Knowledge Feeds Our Souls’** Interview with Brother Guy, one of the Papal Astronomers



**Letter from the Holy Land** In the start of a regular series from the Church of Scotland’s ministers in the Holy Land, the Rev Muriel Pearson reports on an event bringing together bereaved Israeli and Palestinian families

**Assembly 2023** Four pages of reports to the Assembly

**The Procurator and Service** The outgoing Procurator to the General Assembly, Laura Dunlop KC, reflects on her 18 years in the role

**View from the Pulpit** The Rev Dr Marjory MacLean reflects on what two and a half years in Orkney have taught her about the things that matter in worship.

**Playlist for Life at 10** A milestone anniversary for the dementia charity supported by many churches

**Regulars**

- The Rev Dr Martin Johnstone on leadership
- The Very Rev Albert Bogle on digital church
- John L Bell on worship
- Reflection by the Rev Dr Richard Frazer
- Bible Study by Ruth Harvey

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## ***MAGAZINE/DIARY DEADLINES***

September 2023

October 2023

November 2023

Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> August 2023

Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> September 2023

Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2023

***Scottish Charity Number : SCO11728***

Portobello & Joppa



Parish Church

Photography by Kim Kjaerside

