



FREE CHURCH of SCOTLAND

Portree and Bracadale Newsletter 3

Contributions to PortreeandBracadaleNewsletter@outlook.com

Congratulations!

We were all delighted to hear the recent news of the safe arrival of Calum Angus MacDonald to Stuart and Eilidh MacDonald.

Calum was born on 4th December 2021 at Raigmore Hospital and is the first grandchild to Donnie G and Debbie and to Eilidh's parents John and Alison Smith.



We took the opportunity to catch up with Stuart and Eilidh to find out what life is like in Thurso.

Firstly, they confirmed the important news that Donnie G will now hold the official title of Papa whilst Debbie takes on the role of Granny.

Stuart and Eilidh have now been living in Thurso for over four years following Eilidh having moved up for work in 2016 in her role as a Vet. Despite the cold and wind of Caithness they both feel settled and at home there. Although they accept the scenery may not quite be on a par with Skye they enjoy a stunning view from their home towards Orkney and the Old Man of Hoy. They both like to admire the ever changing sunlight and the effect this has on the views of Orkney.



Eilidh is of course a well-known TV personality having appeared on the BBC show The Highland Vet but is currently enjoying some maternity leave with Calum ahead of a busy lambing schedule in the Spring.

Stuart is working as a Quality Engineer for AMTE Power helping to develop next generation batteries for a wide variety of industry. Although he enjoys the work immensely he describes the best part of his job as being the half day on a Friday when he gets home to spend more time with Calum and Eilidh.

Stuart and Eilidh attend Thurso and North Coast Free Church where Stuart has served as a Deacon for the past two years. Despite being without a full time minister the small congregation of around twenty people are very encouraged about the possibilities that are

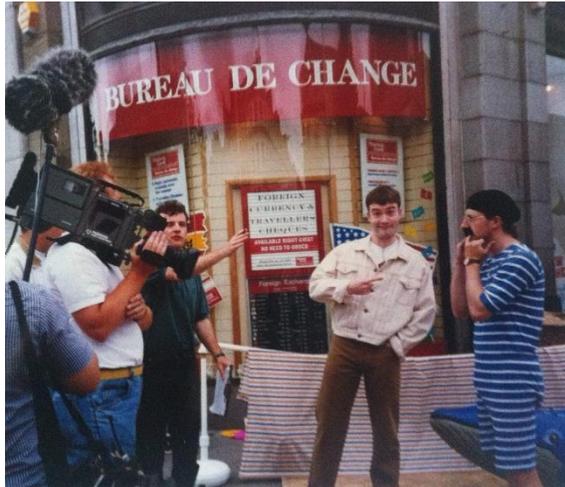
ahead of them and they trust God to guide them to a new minister. They have also recently completed a five year development plan that focused their attention on how the church can move forward and grow.

More good news followed Callum's arrival with him being the first baby born into the congregation for many years so there was great excitement at the prospect of welcoming him into the church.

Stuart and Eilidh both look forward to seeing Calum grow up with a loving and supportive Christian family both in Thurso and Skye.

The Boy from the Bays

It's the early 1990's on Byers Road, Glasgow and a young man from Harris is striding down the road listening intently to music on his yellow Sony Walkman. Over the beat of the rhythm he hears shouting from across the road and recognises a fellow islander calling him over.



A young John Urquhart, at this time a BBC Gaelic radio presenter, did all he could to avoid catching this man's eye but alas felt compelled by politeness to speak to him. His reasons for not wishing to engage? The other man was a Christian of course.

It was this strained meeting that changed John's life. Having been invited to Church and reluctantly agreed to do so it took him five weeks to actually fulfil his promise but when he did he quickly experienced the power of the word of God. John was hooked and having dusted off an old Bible in his flat he set about learning more and more – astounded by the fact that Jesus died....for him!



Grudgingly born in Stornoway but a proud product of the Borsham area of Harris John enjoyed a loving childhood. Despite the loss of his dad at a tragically young age, the bond he had with his mother in particular was such that no matter what challenge he faced in life she instilled a belief in him to achieve his dreams. Without

running water, electricity or even a road to his house until the age of 17 John's childhood was immersed in old fashioned community spirit where neighbours cared and provided for each other.

Admittedly not academically minded John recalls getting the belt in just his first week of school for the heinous crime of putting too many books in his desk in competition with a friend. Had it not been for the inspiration of future teachers to encourage John to follow his dreams that young man from Harris may never have gone on to study Industrial and Furniture Design at Glasgow School of Art in 1984.

Towards the end of his studies and in search of a job he sent off a portfolio of work to his most admired designer, Tim Stead in the Borders. Many months however passed without a reply.

John was later interviewed by BBC Radio at Café Gandolfi surrounded by Stead's work to tell his story of a young man from Harris graduating in Glasgow. His ability behind the mic shone through despite his natural shyness and he was quickly offered a role with the BBC as a presenter.

Ironically, the day before he was due to start with the BBC he was offered an apprenticeship with Tim Stead. Although torn at the two opportunities provided to him John remembered the advice of his mother to always stand by his word and a career in broadcasting began.

In 1993 John felt the call to enter the ministry and with some fervour set about seeking opportunities ultimately gaining entry to Aberdeen University. During this time he attended Bon Accord Free Church where he recalls being well looked after (and fed) by the congregation.

Following completion of his studies John was inspired by seeing reports of the Queen visiting a church in America and was struck by the enthusiastic preaching and participation of

those present. The next logical choice was a spell in Africa with Action Partners in Nigeria to learn and share theological knowledge and also earn the nickname Casper.

It was upon his return from Africa that he met his future wife Muriel and postings to Chryston Parish Church, Barra Church of Scotland and then latterly at Strath and Sleat on Skye followed. The couple were joined on their journey by children Mairead, Eoin and Sileas.



The family settled in Achachork and thanks to the good decision making skills of the

children started to attend our very own congregation.

Seeking a new challenge John was grateful to be asked by the BBC to front *Beag Air Bheag*, a programme designed to help Gaelic learners. Six years of this led to him becoming a presenter of the largest Gaelic learning project the country has ever seen – *Speak Gaelic*. A worldwide audience on TV, YouTube, podcast, radio and taught classes are now hearing and learning Gaelic thanks to the work of John, his co-presenters and his team of researchers. As we said in the last edition of the newsletter it's never too late to learn new skills and if it's not a theology course you fancy then how about learning Gaelic (or get together with John and do both!).

John continues to serve the church and has recently been hosting the midweek prayer meeting with others. We give our thanks to John for spending time with us for this article.



Getting to know the team

Each edition we are going to get to know a member of the church team. First up it's Gillie.

John Angus Gillies is married to Anne and has two lovely children, John and Laura.



John Angus spent the first two years of his life on Raasay with his parents Alistair and Mary and his sister Dolina. He had a fun and active young life enjoying all kinds of sport.

He had a strong Christian influence in his early life and believes this is the key to his love for Christian fellowship and his heart for people. At 20 he took an interest in the Gospel and was dramatically converted in January 1989 (Ed – future article sorted).

He enjoyed leading and helping at youth camps and became a Deacon in 1998 before taking on the role of Elder in 2002. In his time he has been involved in the fund raising committee and even cooked the odd curry or two.

Although Covid has brought changes to the way we meet and worship the blessing of this has been in the introduction of pastoral teams which he is very passionate about.

Gillie loves the church family and has a real heart and passion for people both in the church and wider community.

“O taste and see that God is good”

Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill 2021 – What to make of it?

The above Bill will be debated in the Scottish Parliament within the next few months. Parliamentary debates often seem very far removed from our day-to-day lives, but be in no doubt that this one will have a troubling impact on all of us if the Bill succeeds.

This bill seeks to legalise physician-assisted suicide in patients who ask for the procedure and who have a terminal illness and with less than 6 months to live.

Why is this happening? Well, some politicians feel that the time is long overdue for *'terminally ill adults to access safe and compassionate dying if they choose, rather than face a prolonged and painful death'* (Liam MacArthur MSP).

Yes – Compassion is a powerful argument, and it leads some Christians to support these Bills. There is also the very powerful idea of Autonomy, in other words, my right to choose for myself – surely it is my personal right to choose the time of my death and my own way of dying?

But be careful. If this Bill became law, there are disturbing consequences:

- Vulnerability. In this country you don't need to give a reason for continuing to live, no matter your personal situation. But in the dark days of end-of-life illness, how easily we might request, or be persuaded to request, assisted dying
- Dignity and worthwhileness. If you have terminal illness and the topic of assisted dying is raised, does it mean that your life has now reached the stage of being valueless, unworthy, long past its 'use by' date?
How fearful disabled and dependent people will be if the law is changed.
- Doctor-patient trust. What would you make of your doctors in that setting?

- Beware the slippery slope. In some countries, the 6-months-to-live limit has been extended to 12 months. There is no resting place on a slippery slope.

Is there not a better way? – yes, indeed there is. It is part of the God-ordained 'most excellent way' (1 Cor 12:31):

- God has made us in his image, and made us as part of society. Therefore, we have absolute significance, absolute dignity, and not a selfish autonomy but dependence on one another. So we honour the sanctity of life, the dignity of being human, and the vital role of society
- In the brokenness of this world, we have no illusions about the reality of disease and death. But God has given us the blessing of palliative care - this allows clinicians to practice the best of symptom control, whilst honouring the sanctity of life. In this way, we are 'our brother's keeper', caring for one another to the natural end of life, rather than seeking to end it
- Palliative care in this country ensures excellent symptom control and recognises the natural end of life, without seeking to shorten or extend it. It honours the ill person with compassion, it gives them the sense of their worthwhileness to the end and true dignity in their dying. *'There is no need to kill the patient in order to kill the pain'* (Dr Cicely Saunders, pioneer of palliative care).

Can we do anything about this issue? Yes – pray that the Bill will fail. And contact our MSP's – ask them to vote against this Bill for the above reasons, and also ask them to leave the law as it is. You'll find their details at www.parliament.scot, or simply write to them at 'The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh EH99 1SP'.

Dr Charles L Crichton

Emmaus Road Running Club

Emmaus Road is a group formed on Skye at the end of 2021. We are a running group who have a passion for Jesus, for wellbeing and for running. We know the benefits of running are many, especially for physical and mental health.

The group was instigated by Gary Wilson and Robert MacDonald on one of their runs together. Anne Phipps was approached to join which she did immediately and started the Facebook page for the group where all information can be found.

We chose our name from the Gospel of Luke Ch24, where the resurrected Jesus walked alongside two of his followers as they travelled from Jerusalem to Emmaus. They had left Jerusalem despondent but by the time they arrived in Emmaus and recognised who the stranger was, their lives were transformed.

We hope to meet once a month in locations all over Skye. Our aim is to run 10K or whatever distance each runner is able to do and is open to all level of runners as a fellowship run with no racing involved.

All are welcome to join us, one doesn't need to be a Christian. Before each run there will be a short Christian devotional message and prayer. We are excited about this group and ask that you remember us in your prayers as we reach out into the community.

Robert A MacDonald.



Runners pictured before the first group run at Skeabost

Fundraising Updates

What do New York and Finland have in common? The answer is that these are just two of the destinations that the 2022 fundraising calendar created by Dr Crichton has been sent to.

At time of writing the income from sales sits between £4500 and £5000 with funds still coming in. Over 500 calendars have been sold with proceeds going to the new building fund.

Well done to Dr Crichton for such a great success and to Gillie and Anne for their role in the logistics of delivering these items.

In addition to the above a huge well done and thank you must go to Lachie and Isobel MacLeod for the donation to the new build fund following their Golden Wedding Anniversary featured in the last edition.

Lachie and Isobel would like to thank everyone who donated and are delighted to report that the sum of £5000 was raised.

David's Devotional in (exactly)

100 words

Dear friends

Jesus said, 'I am the bread of life.' Bread is a word which covers all food and that's something which we all need.



Have you ever starved? What a difference it would make if we were starving for Jesus. Can you imagine the atmosphere in Portree Free Church as starving people queued up to receive the finest of bread?

May we be wholly tired of only churchy things!

If we have that passion and desire then Jesus promises an end to spiritual hunger if we feed on him.

Make Sundays at Portree a big feast day!
Warmest, David.

Six in Sixty with...Mairi Evans

- **What subject did you enjoy most at school?** PE –

I really wanted to be a PE teacher so spent my final year either doing

PE or helping Mr Edgar, Mrs MacRuary and Miss Deplano with the younger classes.



- **Favourite holiday destination?** Cairns, Queensland – lots of sunshine, the rainforests, bush land and the Barrier Reef all in one location – not too keen on the crocs, bugs and snakes though.
- **Who is your favourite person in the Bible?** Jesus – it's all about Jesus. It's amazing how no matter how long or short a time you have been reading the Bible for, you can always be struck in some way by how the characters God inspired the writers of the Bible to describe, were so human with the same challenges, faults and failings as we have just in a very different setting. Stephen has always been one that stood out for me – so brave and fearless and concise in how he presented the gospel to those who sought to kill him and instead of showing fear, appearing as bright as the face of an angel.
- **How many languages can you speak?** 4- to my shame, Gaelic isn't one of them...
- **The best piece of advice that you have been given?** Before I left home I was given a handmade bookmark by an Irish gospel singer who had come to sing at

one of the Snizort praise weekends. On one side she had written "If Christ is the centre, the circumference will take care of itself".

One of the great things about the Bible is that it is so timeless and has advice within it that transcends every time, generation, fad or whatever so I firmly believe that whatever situation you find yourself in the advice you need is contained within God's Word. You just have to ask for His help to seek it out. As a parent, I love the instruction of Deuteronomy 6 v 7. Our young people are coming across so many challenges that are so different to those we came across that making them trust in God's Word from an early age and make Christ their centre will give them all the advice they will ever need.

- **Haddock or Cod?** Controversial answer for a Scot, but for me it's cod

Donations from the Congregation

The Deacon's Court report that the following donations have been made to some very worthwhile causes on behalf of the congregation in December 2021.

- Church's Child Protection Advisory Service - £150
- Coatbridge Free Church New Building Project - £250
- Crossroads Care (Skye) - £200
- Young Carers (Skye) – £200
- OMF and Rev Martin Paterson - £200
- Minginish Community Minibus - £200
- Skye Radio £100

The Big Meal – Fundraising Update

The Portree and Bracadale congregation raised a total of £1931 for the Big Meal 2021. At £3 per meal it's clear that there were many full tummies at Christmas across the world thanks to your generosity, Mission International are very grateful for the donation.