

# Northern Light

News from the Scottish Episcopal Church - Diocese of Aberdeen & Orkney

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**Easter Edition**



## **A MESSAGE FROM †MARK STRANGE, BISHOP OF MORAY, ROSS AND CAITHNESS** and our Interim Bishop

My Dear Friends in my old home Diocese,

Can I start by thanking you all for your welcome to me at the various events I have attended across the diocese in these past few months. I have found many things happening which bring back childhood memories, not least the emotion generated in my chest as I was led to the Bishop's Throne for the Advent Carol Service. A little Aberdeen choir boy who is now Interim Bishop!

It is always an interesting task, being Interim Bishop, as I am not part of the electoral process but I am acutely aware of it going on around me. The question has been asked "Why are you not involved in the election?". The reason is so that I can give my time to the diocese without being compromised if asked questions about what is happening.

What I can tell you is that many people within the Diocese and within the wider Province are working very hard to progress along the route of Canon 4. It is hoped that as that process continues and by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the right Bishop for this Diocese will emerge. Please pray for all those involved in the process. It is a complicated and at times exhausting journey and the spiritual support of the diocese is vital at this time.

As Interim Bishop I try to bridge the gap between the loss of a well loved Christian Leader and the arrival of the fresh new face, keeping the Episcopal life going while enabling others to share in the ministry of preparation. It is a privilege that I am thoroughly enjoying, so for that, once again my thanks.

Blessings, †Mark

Almighty God,  
you have given your Holy Spirit to the Church to lead us into all truth:  
bless us with the Spirit's grace and presence  
as we discern and choose the new Bishop for our Diocese.  
Keep us steadfast in faith and united in love that we may seek your will and hear your voice.  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



## A MEMBER OF THE MIDDLE CLASS COMFY BRIGADE

*In December 2016 Dr Julia House (Lay Representative, St Devenick's, Bielside) spent a week helping in a refugee camp in Greece*

As a paid up member of the Middle Class comfy brigade I have been following the Refugee Crisis from my sofa, so it was a surprise when my friend Paulina, home on a break from a Greek Refugee Camp, responded to my 'but I'm only a GP, you wouldn't want someone like me' with 'But you're exactly the kind of person we need'!

I have been a GP in Aberdeen since we came here in 1998, with a brief break for a posting to SE Asia with my husband. We have raised a family who are now grown up and away from home. We have always supported projects all over the world financially by donations through our church and with registered charities and have watched with frustration the decisions of the government regarding refugees. To go and actually do something felt exciting and scary.

I only went for a week, but even that was worthwhile. I was struck by the generous attitude of Greeks as I travelled from Athens to Oinofyta as well as the run down appearance of rural Greece. It was amazing how quickly it seemed normal to me for families to live in a tent or small room in the warehouse with only cold water at central taps and shared portaloos. Even in my week it became clear that this was such a mix of people, just like here. People looked so much older than their age, life was boring and repetitive, but safe and secure. For these Afghanis the lure of people smugglers was only a text away and during my visit news came of a family who had disappeared a couple of weeks before, now imprisoned in Albania.

The medical complaints were superficially simple, but with underlying anxiety, stress and communication always a difficulty. While I was there we managed to get together the pregnant ladies in the camp and start some basic antenatal care. Many had no idea of when they last had a period as they had been stressed and malnourished as they travelled. Their daily hot meal and safety meant they fell pregnant more easily, but are still at high risk of foetal and maternal complications due to poor nutrition and so on. Life for these families is hard for the simplest of things, but the presence of children in the camp was one of its joys.

I left Oinofyta aware of the complexity and ongoing needs both of refugees and their hosts. I can see the difficulties for both those who flee and the country they arrive in, but, as a fellow human being, it really seemed that individual acts of kindness are hugely worthwhile and without them all is lost. So much of what happens in our life is decided by the many small acts which

eventually tip the balance, and I was glad to have been part of a process that offers hope and kindness rather than playing into the hands of smugglers and fear. I would encourage you to go and volunteer with those less fortunate than yourselves at home or far away depending on your skills and situation as you will find it an enriching and rewarding experience.

Not everyone can do what I did, but our support for those who are able to go and work directly with refugees is of huge value. Alternatively, spreading our wealth by going on holiday to countries where refugee support is so much more significant than in the UK is another way you too can 'get off your sofa'. There are lots of things we can all do, big and small, but doing nothing is the action to be avoided.

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## NEWS FROM THE IT OFFICER



### A NEW WEBSITE:

This spring, I will be building a new diocesan website to better meet our developing communication needs, and to provide a more effective communication tool to encourage the mission strategies and other initiatives of the diocese. I am due to start the main phase of the build in Easter week, and it is hoped (if we don't have too many delays) to launch the new site by Pentecost.

As I will be working a significant amount of overtime, I will also be taking a period of time back over the summer months. All this will have a significant impact on my availability for other areas of my work, and there will be many normal tasks that I and my volunteers are unable to complete. Please bear with me, and allow me, as is appropriate, to pick up these tasks in the autumn. If you know of any support you might need during this time, it would be helpful if you could contact me before Easter.

### SEEKING HELP:

I am always on the lookout for individuals who might be able to help share the ever-increasing workload in our Diocesan Communications work, and it is hoped that with the help of volunteers, some of my regular workload will continue during the build of the new website.

At the moment, I am specifically and actively looking for one or two volunteers who can take responsibility, and help drive our presence on Facebook, working with me to develop our use of this media tool, taking responsibility for many of the regular posts that go out in the name of the Diocese. If you, or anyone in your congregations, might be interested in helping out, please do contact me at [itofficer@aberdeen.anglican.org](mailto:itofficer@aberdeen.anglican.org)



## We need more children and youth!

by Henna Cundill



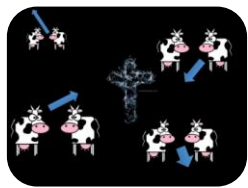
No we don't. No we absolutely don't. We already have enough children and youth to work with. God has given us exactly the right amount.

Now, before I get sacked, let me explain myself...

The only question I ever seemed to get asked about the various youth groups in our diocese is "How many young people do they have?" Oh, I'm so sick of that question, I could scream. In fact, sometimes I do scream...

Imagine you are a farmer, and someone asks you how many cows you have. You go out and look at your field, and the number of cows within the fence is the number you have, right? Now imagine you are a youth worker and the young people you work with are cows. Your Church community is your field. How many of those cows are in your field?

Much harder to count, isn't it? How do we define where the 'perimeter wall' or 'fence' of our Church community lies? Who's in and who's out? Is attendance at Sunday morning worship the true litmus test?



If so, does it count if our young people are being dragged to Church on a Sunday by parents, but would rather be at home? And what about the lone teen who turns up for one

of our youth groups every single week even though he has no faith, never comes to Sunday worship, and claims he only comes to youth group for the food? Do we count him?

Recently I was told that if you ask a farmer in Zimbabwe how many cows he has, he would not give you a number. He would not talk about a field either. Instead, he will tell you where his well is, where each group of cows is in relation to the well, and in what direction they are travelling. I find this is a really helpful model for thinking about our work with young people. What are our numbers based on this model? Perhaps they are better than we thought. Perhaps we have enough young people to be getting on with after all.

But we're not off the hook yet - because we don't get away with glibly thinking that the 'well' here is Jesus, our numbers are better than we thought, and so that's the end of that. Of course, the well *is* Jesus, but what are we? We are the way to the well. We are the Zimbabwean farmer who stands at the well and calls, or goes out to lead back those cows who are wandering in the wrong direction looking for water.

Everybody in your Church knows a young person somehow: through Church, through work, through

being a parent or grandparent. It's really unlikely that anyone reading this doesn't know a single person under the age of 25. You included.

So, when you think of a young person in your life, what would you say to these questions:

1. Do they know where to find 'the well'?
2. Where are they in relation to the well?
3. In which direction are they travelling?
4. What's your role in calling or leading them to the well?

The well, of course, is **not** Sunday Morning Worship. The well is Jesus Christ himself, reflected through each of us; reflected through all the Christians in that young person's life.

My point? You are a children and youth worker (whether you like it or not!). All Christians are children and youth workers. We can hire trendy young youth workers, or cosy and mumsy children's workers to put up front and centre, and they will do great work, but that doesn't take away from the rest of us the duty to be consciously, pro-actively and passionately leading children and young people to Christ.

When we have fulfilled that duty, when every child and young person with whom we have contact is safely gathered at the well, then and only then can we say, "We need more children and young people."

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## The Diocesan 5-a-side Football Tournament will now take place on Sunday 30 April

This is an opportunity for Churches who have few or no young people to start building relationships with the families in your local schools and communities.

Each Church can enter up to two teams of players, aged 9-13, (or P5-S2), girls and boys mixed.

Entry is £25 per TEAM, to include refreshments and goody-bag.

The event is hosted by the Beach Leisure Centre Aberdeen; it starts at 1:30pm, and will be finished no later than 4:00pm.

Most importantly- your players DO NOT need to be Church attenders! The point of this event is outreach, i.e. that by recruiting players, your Church can make links with young people in your area.

If you manage to recruit one or two players, but really can't get a full team of 5 together, contact me and I will link you up with other Churches in the same position so that you can form joint teams.

Please don't hesitate to get in touch if you have any questions.

Henna Cundill - Diocesan Children, Families and Youth Officer - tel: 07890 795 097,

email: [youthandchildren@aberdeen.anglican.org](mailto:youthandchildren@aberdeen.anglican.org)







.....A MESSAGE FROM THE DEAN,  
THE VERY REVEREND  
A. EMSLEY NIMMO

I love cinema but unfortunately don't get as much opportunity to go as I would like.

However, I did at the beginning of the year see the film 'Silence', which was about the story of the Jesuits in 17<sup>th</sup> century Japan. It was pretty riveting stuff and challenging to one's faith and belief. It left me pondering upon what it is that makes us followers of Jesus Christ and His Gospel. In fact as a priest the drama took one to the heart of one's vocation.

When I came home that night I went searching and found in my bookshelves Simone Weil's 'Letter to a Priest'. I came across these incisive words ... "The Church is only perfect under one aspect; when considered as guardian of the sacraments. What is perfect is not the Church; it is the body and blood of Christ upon the altars".

As we are now firmly in Passiontide, a time that takes us to the heart of our religion, let us reflect upon that one eternal sacrifice of Christ which is the message of hope to a beleaguered world and to each and every single one of us. In the eucharist we believe Christ to be truly present. He is present on the altar as we in liturgy represent that one eternal sacrifice before God. He is present in our hearts and minds and in our community of faith. That is why we can confidently preach the Gospel of Peace, Love and Reconciliation.

When I was in Shetland recently I did have opportunity to read a very challenging publication by Mark Whittall, the nephew of John Whittall, our Diocesan secretary. Mark is a priest in Canada and he had been given the tough challenge by the Bishop to revive an empty church in Ottawa. The publication is called 'Reinvention: Stories from an Urban Church' and is an interesting and challenging read. I give you some of his argument where he asked the question: "Where is your altar in the world? Where is the place in your life from which you speak a compassionate word and offer a healing hand? Where in life do you do justice and witness to the love of God?"

"For the mom or dad, maybe *your* altar is the kitchen table. Maybe that's the place where you dispense wisdom, heal broken hearts, and nourish our next generation.

For the businessperson, maybe *your* altar in the world is your desk. Perhaps *that's* the place which you seek justice in the management of the resources that are under your control, and strive to create a healthy work environment for your colleagues and employees.

For you lawyers, maybe *your* altar in the world is the law court itself, the place where you defend the weak and stand in solidarity with the oppressed, and free the captive from prison.

For you teachers, maybe *your* altar is the blackboard or the whiteboard, upon which, day by day, you transform the ordinary materials of chalk and dry-erase ink into pearls of wisdom in the sacrament of learning.

For you who are homeless, perhaps *your* altar is the street, the place from which you can bear witness to your identity and my identity as God's beloved children, even in the midst of all the chaos and suffering of life.

Maybe there are *many* altars in your world. Perhaps your altar in the world is as portable as your own body, the place from which you have arms that hug and eyes that cry and a mouth that speaks to receive love, and to be humble and vulnerable and faithful".

In Holy Week we remember Christ who sacrificed Himself on the altar of the Cross for the sin of the world, for the love of you and the love of me.

Where is your altar in the world?

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## NEWS ABOUT PEOPLE

**The Rev Dr John Tsukada** left the post of Honorary Assistant Curate at St Ninian's, King Street, Aberdeen on 25 January, to return to serve in the Diocese of Tokyo.

**The Rev Andrew Tucker** left the post of Rector of St John the Evangelist, Crown Terrace, Aberdeen on 12 February to become an RAF Chaplain.

**The Rev Catherine (Kate) Gibson** was licensed as Rector of St Andrew's, Brechin on Saturday 25 February. Kate has been serving as a supernumerary priest in our Diocese.

### **QUIET DAYS** organised by the **EPIPHANY GROUP**

#### **Understanding the pain of migrants today**

Saturday 6 May 10.00am to 3.30pm

Cults Church Centre, North Deeside Road, Cults, Aberdeen - Led by Carmel Byrne.

#### **Ripening into Spiritual Elderhood**

Saturday 24 June 10.00am to 3.30pm

Finzean Church, Finzean, Banchory AB31 6PB

Led by Nancy Adams.

For details of these Quiet Days contact: Carole Phelan, email: [carole.phelan@talk21.com](mailto:carole.phelan@talk21.com)

**Copy deadline** for the next (Summer) edition is  
**21<sup>st</sup> April 2017**

The email address is: [office@aberdeen.anglican.org](mailto:office@aberdeen.anglican.org) or by post to Diocesan Office, St Clements Church House, Mastrick Drive, Aberdeen, AB16 6UF





## COMMISSIONED AS A CHURCH ARMY EVANGELIST FOR ABERDEEN

A few months ago, Jo Bowyer from Aberdeen was commissioned as a Church Army Evangelist for the Diocese of Aberdeen and Orkney, joining her husband Gerry in the work of planting fresh expression Churches in the North East. Her commissioning service was held at the Church Army headquarters at the Wilson Carlisle Centre in Sheffield, a significant location for both Jo and Gerry as it was the place where they both felt the call to serve the Lord in Scotland well over 10 years before. The service was presided over by the Anglican Bishop of Aston, the Right Reverend Anne Hollinghurst, Church Army Chief Executive and Community Leader Canon Mark Russell and our own Bishop of Aberdeen and Orkney, the Right Reverend Bob Gillies. The commissioning was attended by Jo's family and friends, members of the Church Army, who all came to support both the commissioning of Jo, and the new trainees joining the Church Army community.

Commencing on a bright and sunny afternoon in the Chapel of the Wilson Carlisle Centre, Jo gave a presentation outlining her journey to accept the call to be an Evangelist, beginning with her attendance at a Fresh Expressions conference in Derbyshire in 2011. At that time, Jo was working as a coffee shop manager in Aberdeen, a position which, while it gave her a rewarding opportunity to lead and mentor staff, she felt that she wanted to invest more time in people. This led to her resign her paid job to work full time in schools as a School Pastor coordinator. Seeing the opportunity to gain further training with Church Army, an Order of Mission within the Anglican Church, Jo saw that her work could be a source of theological reflection within the organization's training programme and it seemed that God was bringing the two together for her at this time.

After 2 years of training with Church Army and her 15 years of ministry work and life, the time had come for Jo to be formally recognized and commissioned for her spiritual role as an Evangelist in Aberdeen.



With her husband Gerry, who had been commissioned in a similar role and who is now an ordained priest in the Scottish Episcopal Church, Jo currently focuses her ministry in the Caf4e (Carpenter's Arms Fellowship for Everyone) community in the Bridge of Don area in Aberdeen, a fresh expressions Church planted two years ago. The Caf4e missional community has grown from Gerry and Jo alone to a family of 15-20 people who meet together on Sundays and during the week to be discipled and to reach out to others in their sphere of influence. With a purpose of building Christian disciples out of the unchurched and creating a community that reflects the needs of people in the new millennium, Jo has found her niche in God's Kingdom – sharing her faith through meeting people in a Caf4e context rather than a more traditional Church setting.

## AFTER THE FLOOD...

The waters went down, leaving a trail of destruction after them. The press and cameras went away. The weekly flood bulletins trailed off.



After the flooding in December 2015/January 2016, the community here in Ballater picked itself up and dusted itself down. A year on from that time, life is not yet 'back to normal' here in Upper Deeside.

Many of those flooded have managed to move back in to their own homes, but not all. For those who have moved back, the process has frequently proved more traumatic than anticipated. While the house is still theirs, the familiar furniture and objects have gone. Home is no longer home. There is an unspoken guilt in being unhappy when others are still in temporary accommodation. Insurance covered most of the costs – if you had a good insurance company – but there is still a shortfall for many on moving back in. Things like having to restock the kitchen cupboards and larder add up. But at least they are home, and able to begin rebuilding normal life. This isn't the case for those who are still in temporary accommodation – about a quarter of those who were flooded are still out of their own homes.

While many of the businesses have reopened, others have not yet got to that stage. And yet more will not be reopening, in their old form. Other shops have found that the effects of the flooding, combined with the loss of the Old Station, and the downturn in the oil industry, have made it impossible to continue and have closed. Local charities have likewise found this last year difficult.

The last year has not been a year of doom and gloom, despite the above. Together we have sung and danced, laughed and loved. From giant inflatable duck racing on the river, to parties on the green, from scarecrows to farmers markets, this community has worked and played as the rebuilding goes on. We have rejoiced as people move back into their homes, and celebrated as businesses reopen. We know that we are with each other. We belong to each other and recognise that we cannot stand alone. The events have worked to bring an already strong community closer together.

In my article last year I wrote: 'The local churches have been and will continue to be in this community as we move from rescue to relief, to restoration and rebuilding. We are there for each other and with each other, in joy and sorrow, laughter and tears. This community is our family, to which we belong and which are proud to serve. The job of reviving, restoring, rebuilding, continues is not going to be a quick or easy, but we will be there as it happens.' All of this still holds true. Please continue to remember us all in your prayers over the coming months.





## THE PROVOST PONDERES FROM OUR CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF ST ANDREW

Dear Friends,

May I thank you and pray God bless you, the Diocesan family, who made the Diocesan Synod Eucharist on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of March, and the Global Mothering Sunday celebration on the 26<sup>th</sup> of March, a real blessing, for the Diocese and its Cathedral Church. The vibrancy in the Diocese and its Cathedral is made possible through our prayerful witness to the Good News of Christ Jesus, during the Christmas season and throughout Lent. Here are some signs of hope and new life, made possible by your prayerful encouragement.

### Faith and the City

The three main Cathedral Choral events of the Advent Carols, the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols and the Epiphany Carols were well received with markedly increased participation. The Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols doubled as a civic event when the Lord Provost addressed the gathering as we celebrated the partnership between the churches in Aberdeen and the Aberdeen City Council in welcoming the New Scots from Syria. In welcoming the guests, I said, 'God can do without us but God won't do without us and hence God gave Jesus, the only Begotten in whom all things are made possible. The city suffers from the impact of the economic downturn but with this emerging new partnership of 'Faith and the City', we can face the future with hope and confidence'. The Lord Provost thanked the Cathedral for this message of hope.

### Lent 2017

The theme of Lent 2017, following the theme of 'Partnership' at Christmas, was 'Wholeness in Christ.' Fasting and prayers on Fridays at the Cathedral, with a touch of Christian Social Enterprise was observed as a way of encouragement towards this theme. The idea was to observe some form of fasting on Fridays and gather in the Cathedral for prayers and breakfast. The evening began with a short reflective time of prayer with Taize chants led by the new member of our Diocesan family, Nick Bowry from St Clement's, in Mastrick. We then had soup and bread at 6.30pm to break the fast. But this was a breakfast with a purpose.

### Christian Social Enterprise this Lent

On Friday evenings a group of women and men gather in the John Skinner Centre kitchen for preparing and sharing food. This is an Alcohol and Drugs Action (ADA) project run by Anne MacAlister with people on recovery from dependency, through creative social events to support and encourage one another. The Cathedral took the initiative to incorporate their

gatherings into its social events, like Burns Supper and St Andrew's Day celebrations and invited them to cater for the event. On each occasion it proved to be both mutually beneficial and most enjoyable. This Lent, the ADA team worked together with those observing Lenten fast, and celebrated the joy of making our journeys together towards 'Wholeness in Christ'. Did the Lord mean social enterprise when he said, 'I will make you fish for people?'

Over these 'breakfast' events, some of our young people explored their 'Journeys of Faith' from the perspective of art, music, architecture, health and education. The choice of these themes helped us to map the local network of Charities and Council services around the Cathedral. Please pray that our Cathedral would be the hub to link these local services to bring about God's kingdom of Shalom. In addition to Friday prayer breakfast events, on Sundays at the 6.30pm Choral Evensong, a series of Lenten Meditations were led by people from the Diocese.



### Holy Week and Easter 2017

The Holy Week this year will incorporate Maundy Thursday (April 13) Chrism Eucharist at 11.00am; Good Friday (April 14) Devotions led by Prof Tom Greggs of Aberdeen University from 12noon to 3.00pm and Tenebrae at 7.30pm; on the Holy Saturday Easter Acclamations at 8.30pm. The Easter Choral Evensong (April 16) will also mark the 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday of our former Bishop, Fred Darwent. We hope to make this a real celebration with finger buffet and wine.

We look forward with joy and confidence to journey with the One who calls us in love during this coming season of Holy Week, Easter and beyond. It is a time of prayerful discernment in the Diocese, as we seek our next bishop. The challenges ahead require someone who is fully committed to and in deep communion with the Lord and would love and lead the people of God as the Lord did. God is moving one more time in our diocese and let us pray that God will help us to see and be glad in it.



Bishop Laura Aherns - Bishop Suffragan of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut with Rev Joan Lyon, Canon John Walker and Dean Emsley Nimmo after the Cathedral's Nine Lessons and Carols







## ***"Woe to you, Lawyers!"***

**By Peter Murray, LLB (Hons) DipLP, NP  
- Diocesan Registrar**

"Woe to you, lawyers" says Luke 11:52. On first reading you might conclude my profession was a disreputable one. Why then, you might ask, does our Diocese's constitution provide for us having two "in-house" lawyers? Alongside Graham Robertson, our Chancellor, I have been your Diocesan Registrar for the past 9 years. Before I describe the role of Registrar allow me to put the "woe unto you" quote into context. The "lawyers" Jesus was referring to were those who, through their interpretation of the Gospel, hindered others from receiving it. I am consulted on a multitude of matters but thankfully Biblical interpretation is not usually one of them.

So what do I advise on? Synod representatives will have seen me sitting next to Bishop Bob providing advice on the Diocese's constitution. The "Registrar" title comes from the fact that I also maintain registers for the Diocese in accordance with the Canons of the Scottish Episcopal Church. Those "Canons" are rules to which our churches, diocese and clergy are all subject. I am also a custodian, looking after most of our churches' title deeds and constitutions. It is often for this reason that vestry members contact me. When title deeds are "missing" sooner or later somebody thinks to ask me. Thankfully, more often than not, I have the titles and can provide a copy. There are also times when the Diocese and its churches call upon me in my capacity as a solicitor. I am a partner in the law firm Ledingham Chalmers where my colleagues and I provide advice on property, employment law and contracts of all kinds.

As your Registrar I am an ex-officio member of the Diocese Standing Committee and the Finance and Property Committee. I am also currently Assessor to the Preparatory Committee (the committee charged with helping identify candidates for becoming our new Bishop). As an unelected officer (I serve at the pleasure of the Bishop) I am particularly conscious of the privilege and responsibility these roles give me.

Now for the technical bit you might find useful. The Registrar is nominee for holding property for churches in the Diocese and a trustee for the Diocese itself. The difference between them often causes confusion and

occasionally mistrust. The title to your church building is likely to be held by certain diocese office holders, including me as the Registrar. However those office holders are acting as nominees on behalf of your church. Your church building is not "owned" by the Diocese. Your church's constitution will set this out, as well as the relationship of us "diocese trustees" to your vestry. This arrangement has arisen partly because unincorporated associations, such as our churches and the diocese itself, cannot hold property in their own names. In contrast, I am also an ex officio trustee and nominee for the Diocese's own property. The trustees of the Diocese have collective responsibility for managing the Diocese's own property in the same way as your vestry has responsibility for managing your church's building. You can see the room for confusion!

If all this sounds a little dry, I can assure you that working with the Diocese community has been a great blessing (even fun) so far. I look forward to the appointment and arrival of our new Bishop, and trust that God has a great plan for the next chapter of our life together in the Diocese of Aberdeen & Orkney.

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**(left) Children  
being creative at a  
Christingle  
Service  
in St Colman's,  
Burrae**

**Pictured (right) The  
people from  
All Saints Buckie  
enjoying a Burns  
Lunch on Sunday  
22nd January**



**The Tsukada family - John, Anna, Tokiwa, Sho, Ruri  
and Matthew with the congregation at St Ninians on  
their last Sunday in Aberdeen**



## BEING CHURCH IN SOCIETY



*by Richard Murray, Lay Reader,  
St Anne's, Kemnay.*

Many people are saying that they feel overwhelmed by the state of the world today. With this feeling they have a sense of powerlessness, that the situation is too complex. What can I do? How can I make a difference?

Global and technological changes are hollowing out skilled jobs, threatening identity and self-worth. Neoliberalism and competitive individualism are distorting our economics, creating inequality. Our place in the "Goldilocks zone" of the natural world, with just enough but not too much warmth or rainfall, is under threat because human induced climate change is affecting food supply and the supply of safe drinking water.

It's very upsetting to see what is happening at home and abroad; the rise of terrorism fuelled by a distorted vision of Islam, the march of the far right, fear of the stranger and so on. Fear breeds fear, a fear made contagious in the virtual world of social media gossip and ill-informed stories.

Nevertheless, as Jonathan Sacks, the former Chief Rabbi, said recently, "A politics of hope is within our reach. But to create it we will have to find ways of strengthening families and communities, building a culture of collective responsibility and insisting on an economics of the common good."

Our church is a community of disciples where spiritual food is shared and a communion happens that is holy and healing. When we are sent out to love and serve the Lord what then? What then might be to commit to doing one small good thing every day, becoming an active citizen, a principled person, and an ethical consumer. Jesus calls us to love one's neighbour as oneself, and describes such a situation as 'blessed'. Being 'blessed' does not mean being blessed with "holiness"; still less it does it mean being "happy" in the sense of being in a good mood. It affirms a quality that already exists, when we live a poverty better than the world's wealth; endure a hunger preferable to the world's greed; and embrace a foolishness in reconciled relationships, instead of being meshed in a vortex of conflict.

This is not a counsel of perfection - we are self-limited by our context - but rather a suggestion about stimulating growth in our discipleship: the good things we do each day will transform our actions into something grace-filled, stronger and more powerful than we can imagine. Whilst actions speak louder than words, words are important too. But somehow the promiscuous collection of memes, hashtags and emoji, shared and retweeted on the social media with barely a second thought, are largely ineffective.

What did Jesus write in the sand when defending the adulterous woman from the religious authorities' rhetoric, before uttering the dramatic statement, "Let the sinless one among you throw the first stone"? Having assessed a volatile situation, did Jesus decide that an unhurried moment was needed to enter into a communion with God and thereby find the right words? If we can find the right words, framed after prayerful thought, we can challenge the fake news, alternative facts, fuelling the hostile environment of sexism, racism, and xenophobia. And like our Saviour, we will leave the enemies of God's grace, justice, truth and peace speechless.

So how do we do that? How do we make love, justice, truth and peace the core attributes of our actions in society? Mother Theresa said, "Be faithful in small things because it is in them that your strength lies." This is a start.

But you say, I do small things, I donate to good causes and so on, but it doesn't seem to amount to much. Except that, as part of the body of Christ, the hands and feet of Christ in the world, we have brothers and sisters who are also doing these things and more, acting as healers, reconcilers, seekers of justice, lighting beacons of hope.

Political order is not an exclusive product of secular society but developed out of religious values which evolved over centuries. It's worth repeating this because it is often ignored or denied. We are not claiming privilege for a particular religious worldview but maintaining and promoting these values, accepting co-responsibility for determining what justice and the common good require - being church in society.



***Due to copyright complications we are not able to publish the usual article from the Archives in this edition of Northern Light. There will be one in the next edition.***

