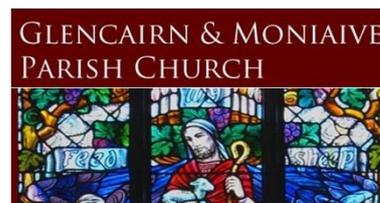




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June 2021

Greetings from the middle of the Cairn Valley.

As we approach the promised end of lockdown I, for one, am looking forward to being able to freely meet in person, in groups, and in church! I hope you share that sense of anticipation. I write to reflect on what we have been through and look forward to what happens next in our congregations and parish as we work together in God's service.

Love

The COVID pandemic has challenged us in many ways – personal isolation, extended shielding for health, physical restrictions on contact and travel. As churches we have had to re-think how we show God's Love, and lockdown has certainly reminded us of the need to work at 'staying in touch'. We have seen and experienced the power of a short telephone call, a friendly (if distant) wave, and a willingness to help our neighbours. This is a timely reminder of how we can make a difference by sharing God's Love and being Good News for each other and our neighbours. As lockdown eases, we should not ease off in our practical expressions of love to each other and our community. Keep up the good work!

Money

On the finance front I must thank those of you who have continued to give regularly through Standing Order and those who have taken advantage of the various online giving options through the websites and Facebook. However, as you can imagine, the finances of both congregations have been dramatically affected by the lockdown ban on gathering together. Fund-raising efforts by both congregations have continued as far as possible given the restrictions of COVID. We do have some reserves, but I would like to ask you to consider your giving to the work of the church as we re-activate and regular bills rise again. Please consider Standing Order and Gift Aid options – the treasurers can give details of these effective and efficient methods of contributing to the Mission of sharing the Good News of Jesus.

Worship

Not being able to gather together has not been easy. Throughout lockdown we have used Zoom online conferencing facilities to 'meet' as joint congregations every Sunday (apart from one Sunday when we 'broke' the internet!) and recordings of those Sunday services have been uploaded to YouTube each week, allowing many to watch 'on demand' and at their leisure! This online activity has reached many who never attend our church services, within the parish and beyond – Lubuto and South Africa included. The Connect Bible Study Group has continued to meet weekly via Zoom – all are welcome to join the discussions. More recently we have been able to use our buildings for Prayer and Reflection again – a chance to experience an atmosphere of quiet and thoughtful prayer both in St Ninian's and Dunscore Churches. We have continued with the mixture of worship styles and materials in use before lockdown and have added new aspects too.

PTO >>>

In our joint services we experience a wide variety of worship styles and approaches and this has enriched our time together and made us reflect on our faith and how we express it, in church, in our lives, and in the world. Much that we have tried during lockdown will become part of our future ministry in the Cairn Valley – e.g. ‘live’ streaming (broadcasting) of worship onto the internet, use of materials from the wider church, less formal forms and styles of worship which may be more accessible to people across the parish.

As Sunday services return to our buildings, I intend to work to include this variety of worship alongside our established patterns. Over the Summer we will return to two morning services (10am in St Ninian’s and 11.45am in Dunscore Church) with regular broadcasting and I anticipate developing other ‘occasional’ events for worship, prayer, and reflection together. Watch your CFNs!

Some of you are not connected to the internet, or struggle with the technology or the quality and reliability of broadband signal. You may feel you have missed out. You may even feel you have been ignored - I assure you this is not the case. I have been very conscious of those who are isolating, shielding, or simply out of touch. I am painfully aware that I have not managed to speak personally with all of you during lockdown. Please make sure your Elder has your correct telephone number so you can be kept in touch and ‘join in’ where possible as we approach ‘normality’.

HELP PLEASE

It would help me to know your thoughts on the shape of our churches into the future.

There may be things you have learned during your experience of lockdown – please share them.

There may be things that you have struggled with – please tell us.

There may be things which have helped you, whether things we have tried, or things you have seen elsewhere – please share them with us.

As we continue to seek to keep our worship and church-life fresh, inviting, and relevant we need to encourage each other in this journey. You all have something to offer. Don’t hold back.

PRAY PLEASE:

for our Kirk Sessions and the Elders who serve on them;

for our Boards and Fabric teams;

for wisdom in how we move into the future, God’s future, for us.

THANKS TO:

those whose technical skills and boldness has enabled us to ‘Zoom’ so successfully;

our musicians who have adapted to playing from home;

the Dunscore Messy Church Team for their input and imagination;

our Elders for their ongoing work in maintaining contact with their districts;

Board members and Fabric teams for dealing with the COVID checks and rules;

those who have continued to fund-raise despite the restrictions we face;

those who have been willing to try ‘new’ things;

Rev Tim Harmer, our Associate Minister and general encourager.

It is a privilege to serve as your Minister at this exciting time and I look forward to what God has for us in the uncertain weeks and months ahead. I thank you for your partnership in the Gospel.

May God Bless you,

Mark RS Smith

