

CONTACT

JULY 2023



The monthly magazine of
Annan United Reformed Church



Services July 2023

Date	Event	Leader
02/07/2023	Service	Mrs Marilyn Parkes-Seddon
09/07/2023	Service	Revd., Neil Campbell
16/07/2023	Service	Revd., Neil Campbell
23/07/2023	Service	Revd., Nick Mark
30/07/2023	Holiday club	

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Items for the August Magazine should reach Ruth by Wednesday 19th July 2023

After this addition of Contact I am stepping down from the roll as editor and Ruth has kindly agreed to take up the reins as editor her contact details are shown above.

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

**THE WORLD ASKS, "WHAT DOES A MAN OWN".
CHRIST ASKS, "HOW DOES HE USE IT".**

Dear Friends,

The Strawberry Lunch event last month was a successful venture in many ways and especially in the way it attracted not just regulars but some new folk. Strawberries also remind one that the Wimbledon Season is upon us. Do you like Sport? Are you obsessed with Sport yourself? If you can't abide sport in any shape or form, then at this time of year you have to go into a retreat house or a deserted Scottish island to avoid it. With modern communications we have football, cricket and Wimbledon on offer and no longer are they the preserve of the male of the species for Wimbledon led the way with women and men and now there is both women's cricket and women's football to add to the list. Modern topflight sport seems to bring out two extremes. The best performances of truly dedicated people on the one hand. On the other hand it can expose the worst of human nature with greed overcoming sportsmanship in the bribery and fixing of matches.

Why the obsession with sport? Well if we think about our Bible, sport is an important element in the ethos of what we should be doing as Christians. Sport has been important throughout history and was indeed important at the time Jesus was here on earth. We can look back even further than that to Psalm 19 where we find the day breaking sun as an athlete racing to the tape. That's how God's Word vaults across the skies from sunrise to sunset, melting ice, scorching deserts and warming hearts to faith.

When it comes to sport though, in the Bible the past master at using sporting analogies has to be Paul. In the Letter to the Hebrews chapter 12 and verse 1 we find this guidance: ***"We must run the race that lies in front of us, and we must run it patiently. We must look ahead, to Jesus. He is the one who carved out the path for faith, and he's the one who brought it to completion."***

The twenty first century Christian Church finds itself in a very competitive world. A world that challenges so many of the things that we hold dear, and sometimes we are guilty of losing sight of Jesus ahead of us on the path of Faith.

Last month we celebrated Trinity Sunday. More and more we are realising as Christians how much we need to involve the Trinity in all its facets, in how we function as individual Christians, how we function as a Church and, most important of all, how we function collectively as Christians in general. People are realising the need for denominations to work together in unity. That is the real race in the sense of the need to run against the competition of doctrinal differences. Jesus had an understanding of how hard it was for people to come to acceptance of his ministry. God in three forms is there to keep us on the route.

The beginning of next month signifies the 109th anniversary of the beginning of the 1st World war when Germany began hostilities against France. That has a great deal to do with Faith because it marked the beginning of a massive decline in Church attendance in this Country. That commemoration is an opportunity for Christians to show that God was there suffering on both sides and certainly had not abandoned humanity. It's appropriate to let Paul have the last words which we find in 1 Corinthians 9 verses 25 to 27: ***"Everyone who goes in for athletics exercises self-discipline in everything. They do it to gain a crown that perishes; we do it for an imperishable one. Well then: don't run in an aimless fashion. I don't box in like someone punching in the air! No: I give my body rough treatment, and make it my slave, in case, after announcing the message to others, I myself should end up being disqualified."***

With every blessing,

Nick Mark

Worship Group notes on the responses to the 2023 survey of the congregation regarding church attendance and style of worship.

The Worship Group received a comprehensive and detailed analysis of the survey responses prepared by the Revd Nick Mark. This was discussed at its meeting on the 2nd of March and then discussed at Elders before being presented at the Church AGM.

The following is a summary of the key points from the discussion at Worship Group:

Service Times

The majority of those responding favoured an 11 am Sunday service with a small group suggesting 10:30 might be better. One consideration may be that to encourage wider attendance a 10:30 service frees more of the day for other activity.

There was little support for regular services at other times or on other days however some felt that there is scope for one off well publicised special services when opportunities arise (such as back to church Sunday).

Style of Services

The majority responding wanted no change although a number felt the need to change to meet changing needs. The responses highlighted the contradiction between only using familiar hymns / tunes and introducing new more modern material.

Service Frequency

There was almost unanimous rejection of reducing the frequency of services.

A large majority responded NO to the suggestion that we should leave things as they are. There is a key contradiction between a desire to keep the services as they are using old, familiar material and the recognition of the need to change in some way.

Communion Frequency

The congregation is split on the issue of frequency of communion between those who feel it is too frequent and those who feel that the current practice is acceptable. **Overall, there is a small majority in favour of the status quo.**

Constructive Thoughts

Opportunities for change

While there was almost unanimous rejection of the 'do nothing' option there was little constructive feedback on what opportunities could be explored to raise the visibility of the church through engagement with its local community and with the users of the premises. Given the rejection of the 'do nothing option' this will require further engagement with the congregation.

Music

With a smaller congregation, hymns and tunes need to be familiar and singable but then it is difficult to move forward. Others feel the need to introduce more modern hymns / songs and that it would help to have a singer / musician, perhaps monthly.

Services

There is support for occasional less formal services – perhaps as a development of fellowship services on a monthly basis and the use of songs of praise services.

Action Points arising from Discussion.

- **Retain the 11:00 service but discuss again the option to widen access by starting at 10:30.**
- **Retain monthly communion.**
- **Introduce more modern hymns.** Use the piano in church occasionally to introduce and lead the introduction of new material as one item during worship would be a good way forward. It is also possible to use recorded worship material for the congregation to listen, reflect on and possibly sing along too.
- **Use fellowship service to introduce changes of style and music.**
- **Consider changes to the layout of the coffee area at rear of church for flexibility and ease of serving.**
- **Explore grant to replace outer doors with glass.**
- **Consider holding a 'back to church' event.**
- **Consider special social events and services for specific occasions – focus on parents of children attending groups using the hall.**
- **Consider Sunday afternoon summer services followed by tea or BBQ,**
- **Engage the congregation on suggested alternatives to the 'do nothing' option.**

50th Anniversary

In 1973 the major Protestant churches in Europe signed an agreement in which they recognised each other's baptism and ordination, and stated they were able to celebrate the Lord's Supper together. It was a commitment to common witness and service in Europe.

Since then over 100 denominations have signed the Agreement which the general secretary of the World Council of Churches described as an important step in our common quest for visible unity expressed in worship and common life in Christ, through witness and service to the world and to advance towards that unity in order that the world may believe.

Fifty years on why do we still find difficulty in cooperating and supporting Fellow Christians in our local neighbourhoods? Would it improve our efforts to witness for the Christ we profess?

Haydn Higton

The recent beautiful summer weather, although sometimes a little too hot makes us appreciate all the beautiful things that we have all around us.

The Louis Armstrong song, Wonderful World speaks of trees of green, skies of blue and clouds of white.

In our gardens we have kaleidoscope of colour as shrubs and flowerpots burst into colour and the trees are covered in vibrant green leaves.

The garden birds have nested and raised their young and they are all now fledging their nests as we have watched them peck at the bird feeders and the young with open mouths are fed. The joy of being able to be outdoors more and the long light nights is a wonderful thing after the harsh cold winter we experienced. Nature is a wonderful thing and after the winter we appreciate the season that is now summer.

Fiona Glass.

MID SUMMER MEDITATION

COME WITH ME FOR A LITTLE WHILE,
AND LEAVE YOUR TROUBLED THOUGHTS BEHIND,
THEN STEPPING GENTLY DOWN THE PATH
DISCOVER HEALING PEACE OF MIND,

THE PATH LEADS ON THROUGH SILENT WOODS,
YET NATURE SPEAKS AND TOUCHES SOULS,
AND FAR AWAY THE RIVER SINGS
AS DISTANTLY THE CHURCH BELL TOLLS.

COME SIT AWHILE BENEATH THE TREES,
AND WATCH THE INSECTS HOVER ROUND,
THEN AS THE BREEZE BEGINS TO STIR,
BE MORE AWARE OF SIGHT AND SOUND,

A GENTLY RUSTLING IN THE TREES,
THE BIRDS ARE SINGING IN THE LEAVES,
SMALL CREATURES MOVING IN THE GRASS,
A BUSY SPIDER SPINS AND WEAVES.

TOO SOON THE SUN FALLS IN THE WEST,
OUR HOMEWARD JOURNEY MUST BEGIN,
BUT TRANQUIL THOUGHTS WILL STILL REMAIN,
AND KEEP THE SUMMER DEEP WITHIN.

CHURCH GARDENER

WHAT'S YOUR WEATHER LIKE?

We are experiencing very dry weather and as this is written we haven't had significant rain for several weeks. Plants are withering, bushes are going brown but roses are blooming earlier than usual. Our comments about the weather start many a conversation but do we think how the weather effects other countries too.

Families in eastern Africa are suffering one of the most severe droughts on record – 3 years without saving rain and the media has shown us how youngsters walk several miles to the nearest river only to bring back contaminated water which is unsafe to drink. At least 5.4 million people in Kenya are expected to face extreme hunger this year and about a million children will suffer from acute malnutrition in 2023.

In Bangladesh the country is often hit with severe storms which bring flooding and homes washed away. In Syria and Turkey devastating earthquakes have left many people homeless and unable to provide for their needs, as water sources and dams are broken.

Many people are affected by natural events that threaten health and life. Perhaps as we struggle with the heat and dryness we could also plan increased efforts for Commitment for Life – the U.R.C's campaign supporting Christian Aid twelve months each year trying to alleviate want and suffering.

Could we, with our reduced numbers attending, raise £1,000 this year for Commitment for Life?

Haydn Highton



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