

CONTACT

September 2022



The monthly magazine of
Annan United Reformed Church



September Services

04/09/2022		Revd. Nick Mark
11/09/2022	Service	Revd. Paul Whittle Scottish Synod Moderator
18/09/2022	Church Meeting	Lesley Richmond
25/09/2022	Harvest Service	Worship Group

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Items for the October Magazine should reach Judith by 17th September.

Interim Moderator's letter

Dear Friends,

Having just prepared at the time of writing this my Sermon on Luke 13 and the healing by Jesus of the crippled woman it seemed to me that there are far reaching implications way beyond a Sunday Sermon for us to reflect upon in the times we find ourselves. Here we are just beginning to recover from all that has happened with the Covid epidemic to find ourselves facing massive utility bills, increasing food bills, climate change, a change of Government leadership and so on. It is easy to say let us follow our self imposed rules and not get involved in the political upheavals here and in the wider world.

The problem of course is that we can't as Christians simply hide by saying let us simply put everything in God's hands and it will sort itself out. The conflict in Ukraine has had long term effects all over the world for many people far removed from the Ukraine. Covid has not gone away as a result of the vaccines devised by God inspired scientists. The worst effects have been reduced but people have felt constrained for too long and desperately want what they see as total freedom to get back to the old normal as they see it. Huge pay demands whilst natural can only exacerbate a deteriorating situation.

Faith tells us to pray and pray we do for peace and harmony and equality for all. In all the negativity about there is on the religious spectrum something positive afoot I feel. Church members are all affected by the world problems to a greater or lesser extent depending on their individual situation but one feature that faith and church attendance engenders is unaffected by outside influences and that is something that Jesus devoted his earthly ministry to namely creating community.

Our thoughts and prayers at this time I suggest can be best directed at how we can help those who see no hope of a way forward and how we achieve that is with God's guidance. It will involve no easy solution like simply writing out a cheque but rather sharing the things that we often take for granted in a church community with those outside. Society has changed dramatically because of our changing world and the result has been a real breakdown of local communities. Gone are the days when most people in a town worked locally and for that matter socialised locally. What a church community can offer is some kind of stability in an unstable world. Too often we allow the world despair to creep into our confidence in our belief in a caring God. God works through us and God I believe wants us to share our community principles with others so that our world can again be one which cares for each other and not denigrate into a situation where he who shouts loudest succeeds at the expense of others.

We may be small in number but the model of community we offer is worth looking at and although it suffered much constriction during lockdown there are now rays of light appearing to give us the opportunity to reopen and even expand our community activities to help people regain confidence and work together.

Nick Mark

New Horizons

With September we begin a new session of fundraising and involvement with the community. Will it be continuing the same things we have done in the past or are there ways in which outreach can be improved? If we make an effort to talk to folk coming to Soup and Sweet Lunches and if some of those who can't come on Sunday can come for a meal and a chat it would encourage those who provide and plan as we explore schemes for the future of this church and its buildings.

Everyone knows how living costs are increasing and it is the same for costs associated with churches and community activities. Vestry Day is on Saturday 10th September and with fewer members fundraising it is important so that the bills are paid, but our vital mission in the community is making the gospel more accessible and understandable. Conversation, friendship and welcome cost little but can mean much to those who are lonely, or folk who find life difficult and so perhaps our motto for this Autumn should be the hymn most of us learned in Sunday School – "This little Gospel light of mine I'm going to let it shine – all the time!

An initial meeting to consider how we can better communicate with the community was fruitful, and another meeting is on September 7th at 7pm and everyone is welcome to bring their views to the discussion. Why not come along so we can explore new horizons together?

Haydn Highton

CHURCH GARDENS WIN AGAIN

Congratulations to Irving Kerr for once again winning the commercial section of the Community Councils garden competition with the church gardens. Not only that but he was also awarded 2nd place for the gardens at the local surgery. We congratulate Irving on his repeated success and thank him for keeping our church garden looking so neat and tidy as well as colourful - it is much admired by the church congregation, local neighbours and passers-by. Well done, Irving.

Recently I had the pleasure of visiting Athens, Greece to attend the wedding of a friend. Like many couples this had been planned since 2020 but finally happened in July. It was lovely to witness the traditions of a Greek wedding and see the similarities to our weddings. The ceremony took place at the tiny Saint Gregory the Illuminator Armenian Church in Athens. My friends' parents were married here, and my friend had also been baptised here. The ceremony was conducted in Greek, but we followed on a translation sheet. During the ceremony it poured down outside, this is seen as a good luck symbol. It hadn't rained for many weeks in Greece!

After the ceremony we attended the reception and a five-course meal eating the main course at 12.35am! Due to the heat the ceremony didn't begin until 7pm. We were treated to lots of Greek dancing. The favours of coated almonds, an odd number, is a Greek tradition that the number cannot be divided by two just as the married couple cannot be divided.

The next day we enjoyed an eight-course meal in a traditional Greek Taverna which served amazing food. Food was a huge part of the weekend, and it was an honour to be invited to such a wonderfully happy occasion.

During our stay we also visited The Acropolis. The building has towered over Athens since the 5th century B.C. It was quite a climb but well worth it to visit a structure so old and steeped in history I will remember it for a long time.

Another visit was to a Greek Hospital as I managed to fall and break three bones in my foot. This was not on the itinerary but it adds to my Greek memories!

Fiona Glass.

SAMARITAN'S PURSE CHRISTMAS CHILD OPERATION

How are you getting on filling your shoeboxes? The report on last years appeal said "Amid challenging times we give thanks to God for the way he is working through Operation Christmas Child and local church partners to shine a light of hope into the lives of boys and girls around the world".

In Glasgow, Destiny Church was the processing centre for shoebox gifts from all over Scotland. They were delighted to process and send over 10,000 shoebox gifts to bless children in Bosnia. Operation Christmas Child is made possible by a multitude of volunteers and shoebox packers. It's their faithful prayers and support that keep the project moving forward year after year.

Our 2022 shoeboxes should be brought to church by the end of October. Meanwhile a copy of the 2021 Report is on the rack at the front of the church – to be read and for you to be inspired.

Haydn Higon

A Song of Harvest

O painter of the fruits and flowers!
We thank you for thy wise design
Whereby these human hands of ours
In nature's garden work with thine

And thanks that from our daily need
The joy of simple faith is born
That he who smites the summer weed,
May trust thee for the autumn corn

Give fools their gold, and knaves their power
Let fortune's bubbles rise and fall,
Who sows a field, or trains the flower
Or plant's a tree is more than all

For he who blesses most, is blest,
And God and man shall own his worth
Who toils to leave as his bequest
And added beauty to the earth

And soon or late, to all who sow
The time of harvest shall be given
The flower shall bloom, the fruit shall grow,
If not on earth, at last in heaven.

Church Gardener

YOUR ANNAN URC NEEDS YOU

Last Sunday I was speaking to Haydn and what he spoke about prompted me to put in writing my personal thoughts.

Haydn that afternoon was going to East Kilbride to see the final closure of another church.

I have tried to link our past with the future of our Annan URC. This deals with a letter received during the refurbishment of the church in September 2015 and items extracted from articles appearing in recent Contact magazines.

The letter 1st September 2015 speaks of the history of our church and its people, and the importance it has to someone outside our church.

Contact magazine items:

June magazine, Haydn mentions: - On one occasion in the past it was felt that our church might close, and the meeting to discuss closure drew so many people that every seat was taken, and folk were left standing. Is this a scenario to be repeated to persuade folk who have stopped attending during Covid to come more regularly?
A Church family with only a dozen people worshipping together is raising concerns.

July magazine, Nick mentions: - The idea of moving forward understandably formed a large topic for discussion at the AGM on 19th June and it was a real joy to serve in a church where there was a good and positive debate on what had been done during the time of the previous two ministers.
Unlike the Annan Central Hotel, we have beautifully manicured gardens and a building in great shape, but the point was made very firmly that the Church is the people and not the building.

August magazine, Haydn mentions: - In the June issue of this Newsletter our concern about the number of members who have not returned to worship with the church family was raised and has not improved. Why?

PLEASE RE-READ THEM as I believe it concerns most of you and if possible, make a comment to the Editor or Church Elders.

Linking the letter to the Contact Magazine articles I have made my personal observations that have taken place

The letter: - Refurbishment was completed using various companies and paid for by many personal/private donations, legacies. Donations received from trusts etc., through the hard and professional work of our last full-time minister (rev. Alan McGougan).

Magazine articles. Highlights what can happen if people like our/your selves do not get involved in the future.

Cont./....

What has been provided for us since the refurbishment: -

A new Kitchen installed by a past member and paid for by a local supporter.

New Hall floor with LED lighting and completely redecorated.

New Audio/visual system

New Water supply to church

New floor covering in front corridor (Lobby).

We have had a very difficult two and a half years but with the help of good people the church has thankfully survived. You will have noticed how even locally churches are struggling.

I believe with our involvement we will ensure the future of our church. Yes YOUR ANNAN URC NEEDS YOU.

Jimmie

This is a copy of the letter referred to by Jimmie.

United Reformed Church
Annan

1st September 2015

Dear Friends

I am so pleased to hear that you have voted to make your church building more usable for all. It will be really good to have a level floor with comfortable chairs, nice toilets and hot water for hand washing. All these are important for most people especially the not so able.

This proves to me that your Parents, Grandparents spirit still lives on in your church. In the past many of you have spoken of the pride these people had with their church and how they raised funds for many requirements, which must have been difficult when people were not so well off as some of you today.

I hope that all of you will talk with your partners, children and friends and give them the opportunity to donate to the church refurbishment so that they do not feel left out. History tells that your church was built over one hundred years ago and the final funds collected on the day of opening. Hope you achieve your target before completion of your new work.

My parents, Grandparents did not have any connection to your church, although I am not a member either, I wish to make this donation for the past friendship and to your future.

Yours faithfully
Anon

MOVING STORIES

Commitment
for **Life**

Life-giving Faith | Defiant Hope | Generous Love

Committed to supporting | our global partners | **BANGLADESH**

Reflection on Jubilee

In October, the United Reformed Church celebrates its Jubilee year – 50 years since it came into being in 1972.

Jubilee came into being with the rise of the early City-State empires in ancient Mesopotamia. Their recently discovered debt-based credit system made shifting wealth from freshly conquered territories hugely efficient. But it came with problems. Ordinary people fell into debt way too easily, and the system gave rise of a class of oligarchs, whose newly acquired wealth and influence threatened the power of the kings. To cope with this threat, the kings used to declare a regular '*amarga*' (lit. 'return to the mother') or Jubilee that reunited heavily indebted peasants to their lands and families.

It's worth noting that Jubilee was originally implemented to protect the hierarchical system of Empire rather than as a redistributive mechanism. Jubilee was picked up in ancient Israel as a means of protecting the people against this debt system, but soon the powerful found ways of subverting Jubilee – and here we are today.

It may well be time for us to leave behind debt as a basis for our economy, given how destructive it is – as Jesus fully understood...

Prayer for Jubilee

God of Abundance, help us find alternatives to debt. Give us the wisdom, means, courage to forgive debt, thereby subverting empire's economics for the sake of your kingdom..

We pray for Zimbabwe, Bangladesh, and Israel and Palestine; all are caught up in a web of debt that suffocates everyone, even the planet.

Amen.

AN EMERGING BANGLADESH DEBT CRISIS

Debt is strangling the poorest people in Bangladesh, and in any sane world would immediately be cancelled.

Debt servicing has become a rising concern for Bangladesh, its economy battered by Covid-19 and global economic instability due to the ongoing war in Ukraine. Government revenues are slipping and its debt service to revenue ratio has rocketed to 81%, up from 56% pre COVID. There is less available for priority spending lie health, education, and public investment. The IMF and World Bank encourages 'restructuring' or the privatisation of public assets to pay off debt, to the detriment of the poorest.

In fact, the global financial system beggars belief. Take the British foreign aid budget. The majority goes not to poor people but to a colonial-era investment firm called CDC that invests in luxury hotels, malls, and restaurant chains. In the end, only 3% of this aid goes to suppliers in the global south, with over 90% being paid to British firms. "This is the real scandal," says economist Jason Hickel. "Aid money is taken from the pockets of British taxpayers and sent straight into the already-gilded coffers of the British business elite. It's a shameful abuse of our most compassionate impulse," he concludes.

Together with Global Justice Now, Commitment for Life works to cancel the debt of the highly exploited nations like Bangladesh. Thank you for all you do to bring about justice in our world through effective debt cancellation.



