



To Open Or Not To Open?

Those of you who have been keeping up with the news will have noticed that in the last round of lockdown-easing, the First Minister announced that places of worship could open for private prayer. In due course, as easing continues, more options will become available to us.

The National Church is offering helpful guidance based on their weekly briefings with the Scottish Government, but it is still up to congregations to apply that guidance as they see fit.

The Kirk Session met on Tuesday 30th June and took the decision that we do not move to opening at this time. This is in line with the vast majority of Church of Scotland congregations (though some other denominations are taking a slightly different approach).

The reasoning behind this recommendation can be split into three parts.

- 1. The health and well-being of our members.** The virus is still out there and though the rate of transmission has dropped considerably since the height of the crisis, until there is a vaccine it cannot be said that we are over it. Given that many of our members are in the more senior age category or have underlying health conditions, it seems to us to be foolhardy to be pressing ahead with opening at this stage.
- 2. The practicalities involved.** A quick glance through the Church of Scotland's guidelines (which flow out of the Government's phased plans) make it abundantly clear that opening our buildings, even for private prayer, would involve a considerable amount of work in terms of cleaning regimes and stewarding. After any individual had come into our buildings, we would need to ensure that all surfaces were thoroughly cleaned etc. Stewards would need to closely regulate those coming in, asking them if they had experienced any COVID symptoms, and then monitoring that person's movements within the sanctuary. These guidelines run to over thirty pages and bring into question the merits of opening at this stage. Beyond that, it is questionable if we can reasonably ask stewards to undertake these onerous responsibilities.
- 3. Our reformed theology.** While it is quite clear that many of us love our sanctuary and find it to be a place of peace and comfort, within the reformed tradition we have never emphasised 'holy places,' believing instead that God is present everywhere and can, therefore, be found everywhere. This is to say that private prayer can be engaged in just as easily in our houses, or in outdoor spaces, than in any sanctuary. In suggesting otherwise, we imply that God is present in one place but not the other. Or, to put it another way, we'd want to insist that though the doors of the church building are closed, the ears of heaven are not. The point of the sanctuary is that it functions as a house for corporate worship.

Taken together, it seems to us that we need not feel any undue pressure to rush towards an early opening date. If that would allow for the whole congregation to gather again in ways that it was used to before lockdown, we'd perhaps see things a little differently. But unfortunately normal gathering remains some way off and so we need to continue to exercise a degree of patience.

Our final thought; it is for the Church to set a good example in terms of working our way through the crisis. Sadly, we've seen some examples from other countries where churches have opted for an early return (perhaps operating with a flawed theology that Christians would be exempt from the virus) and, as a result of which, tens and even hundreds of people have been infected. We want no part of that.

We all look forward to the opening of our buildings and when the time is right, we'll go back rejoicing: 'I rejoiced when they said to me, Let us go up to the house of the Lord.' Psalm 122.

Martin
Minister

Joan
Session Clerk

(Note—Although further changes were announced on 8th July, the view expressed above remains the same for the moment and the Kirk Session will review again when appropriate.)

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Quest@arbroathstandrews.org.uk**ST. ANDREW'S ARBROATH****Member Records****June 2020****Baptisms and Blessings** - None**Weddings** - None**Funerals** - Violet Mathewson

Martin and Ian, our pastoral assistant, conducted other funerals though none were of members of our congregation. Nonetheless, we remember the bereaved families in our prayers.

IMPORTANT DATES**SEPTEMBER EDITION (NO AUGUST)**

Word Processed files, as attachments, should be sent directly to the Editor at quest@arbroathstandrews.org.uk

Please **DO NOT** embed articles in an email as these then need additional formatting work.

Monday 24th August (Word-Processed file)**THANK YOU**

I would like to thank my church friends for the flowers, cards, phone calls and visits after my accident. They were greatly appreciated. Glad to report I am now on the mend. Bless you all.

Jean Beattie

Message from your Session Clerk

Remember Sunday 1st March 2020 - this is a day we will always remember. A special day in the life of St Andrew's Church, Arbroath, as our Minister, Martin, was to become the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland and he was bidding farewell to us all for over a year. It was a day of rejoicing in worship, a day of sharing the Sacrament of Holy Communion together and then sharing lunch together.

A short time later we began to hear about Coronavirus and then lockdown and Martin's diary for his year as Moderator was cleared. He returned to Arbroath and the programme which we had prepared and organised for his time away was put into abeyance. Martin was installed as Moderator on 16th May and at that time he felt he would be able to be our Minister and at the same time carry out the role of Moderator.

The work of the General Assembly and the national church continues and the workload of the Moderator has changed from being physically present to being digitally present. Martin now feels that he has reached the point when he cannot carry out his principle role for this time as Moderator and combine it with being our minister.

Therefore, with effect from 1st July, Martin will revert fully to his role as Moderator of the General Assembly and the arrangements which were put in place prior to 1st March for the ongoing work of the church will resume. Ian McLean will be our Interim Moderator and Ian Gray will be our Locum.

Easing of lockdown restrictions are taking place, but our church buildings are still closed. Guidance is regularly received from the Church of Scotland with regard to the reopening of church buildings.

The Holy Spirit has guided, strengthened and loved us during these past three months and will be amongst us to lead his church forward in the days to come.

Uphold Martin in prayer as he fulfils his role as Moderator in these challenging times and uphold and support Elaine and their family in the days and months ahead.

I pray God's blessing on Martin and Elaine and the whole of our church family.

Yours in Christ,

Joan
Session Clerk

PS. One of Martin's thoughts from his letter in March –

"Be willing to follow where the Spirit leads – I don't expect to find things the same when I return to you!"

Ask Theophilus

Question : I have been reading through the Gospels again and the other day was reminded of a comment from a building contractor regarding one of the parables of Jesus. 'He was wrong about building on the sand,' he said. 'The church you are in just now was built on sand and it's still standing after 160 years!'

Theophilus answers : He was referring to the parable in Matthew 7:24-27 and Luke 6:46-49. The conclusion and punch line of the parable, in its form in Matthew, is that the foolish man was the one who did not heed Christ's words, but built on sand and in the storm his house fell down and became a ruin. So, who was right—the building contractor or Jesus?

The two scenarios are completely different. Jesus was referring to a house built without any foundation. The first course of bricks was simply laid on top of the sand. Luke makes

that clear: 'But the man who hears [my words] and does not do them is like a man who built his house upon the ground without a foundation.' (Luke 6:49.)

The contractor, however, knew perfectly well that the foundations of the Larbert Kirk went deep into the ground (geologically, 'a raised beach'). Sand is extremely heavy and now (in 2020, after 180 years) the building stands secure with not any sign of sinkage or cracking; the magnificent Georgian structure is as sound as the day it was completed.

The solution to the apparent dilemma is all in the words 'without a foundation'. So many today build their lives and their attitudes straight on to a flat, unproven set of opinions—just the latest trend or fashion. Shifting sand indeed! Those whose faith goes deep into the Lord's words and life and ministry and redemptive work can be sure that in life's trials and storms, 'all will be well'.

David Searle

Guild News

Further to our last letter in the Quest we have received good news from Guild Office that there will be an online Annual Gathering on 5th September at 11 a.m. with a DVD coming out shortly after for those unable to watch the online version.

Over the last few weeks the Guild members have been busy with the little gifts that we've been delivering. We were given a sunflower seed to grow.....with varying degrees of success! (See photos on back page.)

We think Margaret probably has grown the tallest sunflower at the moment, Bill nurturing the plant by talking to it.

Meantime Jean is still waiting patiently.

We chose the sunflower as it always turns its face to the sun, so if the sunflower moves itself to a position in front of

the sun so that it's exposed to the sun's rays, so it reminds us that we need to place ourselves in a position in front of God's Son so we are exposed to God's love. Just as the sunflower will thrive in the sun, so our faith will thrive in God's Son.

A couple of weeks ago we received a postcard with an Arbroath scene and a postage stamp. It seems nowadays the average household receives only one personal letter every seven weeks, so when something arrives in the post with handwriting on the envelope, it's a pleasant surprise. So we needed to decide who we were going to send our postcards to. So far I've heard that one was sent to a church member, another to a friend in Wales, a friend in London, a friend in Ellon, friend in Carnoustie, family in Canada and a relative in a Care Home. One postcard has been sent to a relative in Australia and she will then probably send it on to her brother in America as a reminder of their days in Arbroath. So that particular postcard may well be the furthest travelled, so although Jean's sunflower isn't moving, her postcard certainly is!

Dalitso Update

The last 3 months have been spent closely monitoring the situation with Covid-19 in Malawi. Malawi was one of the last countries globally to confirm cases and although numbers are rising every day, the number of deaths, as a result of the disease, is still low. Please pray for the situation in Malawi and for the hospitals and medical centres that were already under pressure as they work hard to keep the virus under control. At present there are no confirmed cases in the immediate area of the Dochas Medical Centre and we pray that this continues and are thankful that despite a national shortage of PPE, we have managed to source appropriate kit if a situation was to occur.

Due to the circumstances our centres have closed in line with the governments closing of schools, colleges and universities. This has proved challenging for our families as although this is just after harvest, people are already struggling. We are so thankful for our staff teams led by Kiri and Charles as they continue the lifesaving work of the Maize Relief and Infant Rescue. They are also regularly visiting our children and responding quickly to situations they come across. They are demonstrating good behaviour in the com-

munity with the wearing of masks and the following of the social distancing rules. Please do pray for their safety as they travel and for our children as they stay at home.

For the team here, our work has not stopped. The trustees and management team are meeting online. We meet weekly for prayers about the situation in Malawi. We continue to be extremely grateful for the monthly giving through the sponsor child programme and other donations as this has allowed us to have the necessary money available for our normal expenditure. Our other fundraising has had to be put on hold. As detailed at our AGM, fundraisers are essential to the work so we are looking at other ways to raise money. We are currently running a Virtual Cuppie Across Scotland for Malawi. People are saving up £2 coins, often the price of a coffee with friends and family that we cannot do at the moment, to support the work. The sheets total £50, the cost to feed 1 person for the rest of this year. If you would like a sheet please do get in touch.

As always, thank you for your continued support and prayers.

Charis

After-service Coffee

A feature of our 'normal' church life that so many appreciate, is the opportunity for coffee and chat after the service. It's one of the key points in our week when we can share in fellowship.

And perhaps it's fellowship that we have missed most during lockdown - simply meeting face to face to share news, to chat about life and support one another in all kinds of ways.

The good news is that those of you who are online still have such an opportunity! We meet on Zoom every Sunday after

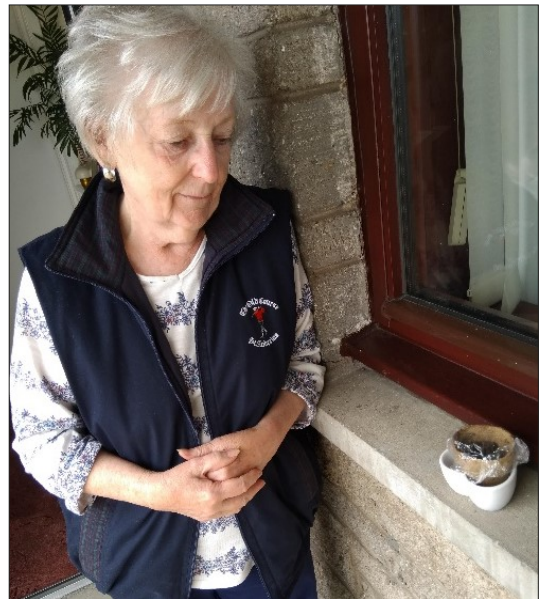
our service has gone out on our website or on Facebook. Most recently, we welcomed Scarlett Marr - the toddling youngest - and Sheila Stewart - the most venerable of our number. And of course lots of people in between! It was wonderful to see everyone's faces and to catch up on the news and to pray.

Lots more of you are online and it would be lovely to see you joining in - we're missing you. It might be that you don't feel it's important for you. But it certainly is important for lots of others and your presence for virtual after-service coffee might just be a blessing for someone else.

Remember; bring your own coffee!



Margaret and Bill are having great success with their sunflower seed, while Jean still waits patiently!



**Captions on a postcard (email, that is) to the editor, for inclusion in the next Quest!
Put your thinking caps on please, and here is a starter -
"No, it was just the Moderator!"**