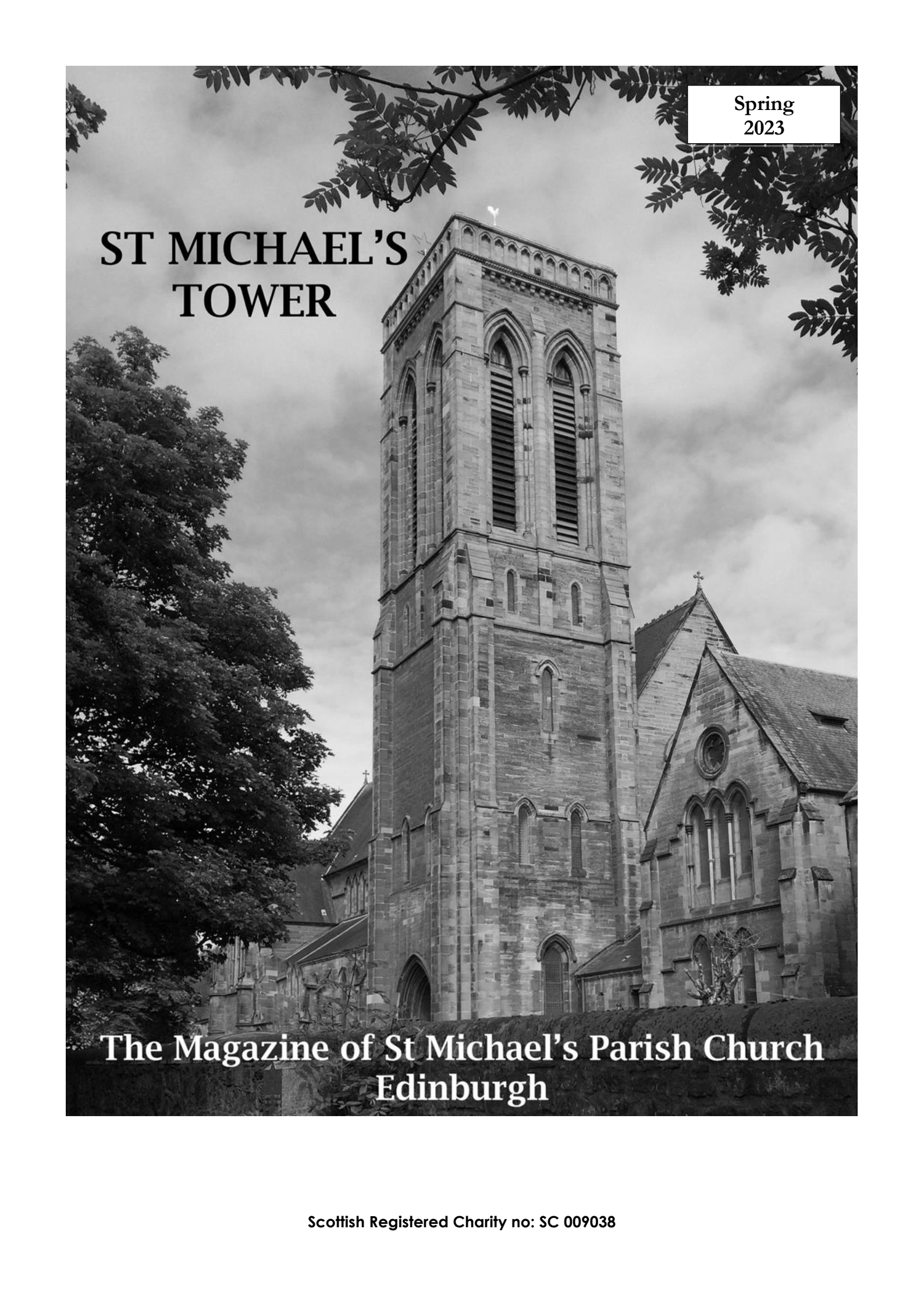




Spring
2023

ST MICHAEL'S TOWER

The Magazine of St Michael's Parish Church
Edinburgh

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Dear Friends and Members of St Michael's,

The Christmas trees are taken down, decorations stored away for another year. The new year has long begun and I hope you have had a good start to 2023.

In Church over the past weeks we have followed again the Christ child growing from childhood into adult ministry. Every year I marvel at the old stories still having new things to teach and tell in modern times.

A poet (Ann Lewin) described it like this:

Christ the tree

*Deep-rooted in the
Love of God the Father,
Moving, responding to
The Spirit's power;
Drawing all people
By your ageless
Wisdom, giving
To all who come
Healing and strength;*

*Life bursting forth,
Disturbing, powerful;
Cut down,
But bearing fruit.*

*Here I will rest,
And wait until sap rises,
Your life in mine,
My resurrection.*

So here is good news, new strength for daily living in and out of the love of God. Another season of Lent and Easter approaches, the time when the days lengthen (hence the name Lent). During Lent we are invited to reflect on our faith and draw closer to God, to grow in faith, hope and love as we reflect on Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection.

I hope you will be able to join some of our meetings and services and find them helpful for you to rest and be inspired to live more fully and joyfully.

God bless you and all you love.

Be sure to give me a call if you would like a visit or a chat.

Andrea, the minister

EASTER EGGS

REAL EASTER EGGS – if you want to support cocoa farmers and their families and want your young ones to know why we celebrate Easter then book and buy the Real Easter Egg from Sheila Bremner. For £4.50 you will get a Fairtrade milk chocolate egg and find inside a booklet with the Easter story.

EASTER EGGS FOR THE SICK KIDS HOSPITAL – Alex Anderson is, again, collecting Easter Eggs to take to the children in hospital on Easter Sunday. Please give him any eggs by Palm Sunday or Easter Sunday.

LENT MEETINGS IN MARCH

1. **Wednesdays:** you have the option of meeting with our friends from St Martin of Tours and their priest, John Vincent, and Andrea to think about ***“FAILURE: what Jesus said about sin, mistakes and messing things up.”***

1 March	Failure: What is it?	St Martin's	7.30pm
8 March	Sinning as well as we can	St Michael's	7.30pm
15 March	Failure and the Church	St Martin's	7.30pm
22 March	The greatest Failure of all	St Michael's	7.30pm
29 March	How to fail really well	St Martin's	7.30pm

2. **Thursdays:** you can meet with Fiona Kennedy and folk from all four congregations from our grouping to explore:

“Following Jesus – Holy Habits found in the life and passion of Jesus”.

Where: Polwarth Church

When Thursdays 2, 9, 16, 23 and 30 March

Time: 1.30pm to 2.30pm

3. **Tuesdays:** Fiona Kennedy will offer her meeting on Zoom. Contact her for a link on fionakolm@gmail.com

When: Tuesday 28 February, 7, 14, 21 and 28 March

Time: 7pm to 8pm

HOLY WEEK

2 April **Palm Sunday**

Film Club: Man Dancin' at 7pm

6 April **Maundy Thursday**

Eucharist and washing of feet. St Martin's at 7.30pm

Supper and Communion. Polwarth Church from 7.30pm to 9pm

7 April **Good Friday**

Walk of Witness: Starting at Barclay Viewforth we will walk with a cross to St Michael's, then to Polwarth and will end up at Craiglockhart. We will stop briefly for worship at each Church.

START: 10am starting with Worship at Barclay Viewforth

END: 12.15 at Craiglockhart followed by refreshments

For those finding walking difficult the bus routes may help to get from one place to another.

Meditation and veneration of the Cross

St Martin's from 1.30pm to 3pm

Service of Tenebrae: remembering Jesus' final week and passion
St Michaels from 7.30pm

9 April **Easter Sunday**

Service in St Michael's Garden from 7am followed by breakfast in the Hall

Service on Craiglockhart Hill at 7.30 am

Meet with the other grouping congregations

Where: Leave from Craiglockhart Church

Easter Early Morning Service at 9am at Polwarth Church

Easter Communion at St Michael's from 11am (NB the other three churches will also have their usual Services)

Presbytery Mission Plan - Update

Many of you will have seen the articles in the newspapers about the plans for the future of congregations and churches in Edinburgh and West Lothian. It is a worrying and far from clear picture.

Before Christmas a plan was agreed by Presbytery and submitted to the Faith Nurture Committee at 121 George Street and the General Trustees.

We have now heard that they broadly agree with the draft plan, but are objecting to one part of it – the plans made for the Corstorphine area.

Our grouping of Barclay Viewforth, Craiglockhart, Polwarth and St Michael's congregations are lucky to have Fiona Kennedy, OLM. She is giving us an extra pair of hands and will be visiting all four congregations in rotation. She is also taking the lead in certain projects to help us work more closely and better together.

In the coming year we are planning to undertake pulpit exchanges between the ministers. On Sunday 5 March Rev David Clarkson will preach at St Michael's and Andrea at Barclay Viewforth, and on Sunday 23 April

Rev Gordon Kennedy will preach at St Michael's and Andrea will be at Craiglockhart.

Later this year Rev Jack Holt will retire leaving Polwarth vacant but supported by an Interim Moderator appointed by Presbytery.

For the coming season of Lent and Easter we are planning some joint activities and hope you will support these as well as our own activities.

Congregations who are active, supporting each other, reaching out to invite neighbours old and new, have the best chance to continue in the future.

So never say 'they' have closed my church. Church has always grown from two or three coming together in Christ's name to **be** church in their place and time.

Let us rejoice and be glad for all the gifts God has given us, homes and family, stories of faith and love to share and His presence in the Holy Spirit to keep going even, and especially, through difficult times.

Other dates for your diaries

Annual Stated Meeting	26 March after the Sunday Service
Coronation Sunday	7 May. Service followed by a celebration lunch
Christian Aid Week	14 to 20 May
General Assembly 2023	20 to 26 May. The Minister and Bill Bremner will be commissioners this year
Pentecost	Sunday 28 May – a celebration of God's Holy Spirit

Lent Appeal 2023

This year's Lent Appeal will support **CrossReach**, the social care arm of the Church of Scotland. CrossReach helps adults, children and older people. Mental health, substance use, care and education for children with special learning/physical needs and older people living with dementia and advanced age are among the life issues being addressed by professional, caring staff. Please be generous and support this wonderful work showing our belief in Christ who wants everyone to live life to the full.

Warm Space – Open Space – New Times

Since last November we have been opening our Halls for people to come along to share some company and warmth whilst being faced with the cost of living crisis.

A great **Thank You** must go to all the volunteers who have given up their time to date to ensure the Hall has been open and welcoming for others.

The uptake from the general public however has been very limited indeed. As a result we have decided to reduce the opening hours.

From **7 March** onwards we will open from **10 am to 2pm** for anyone, young or old, to come and have a chat with the Minister, or others present, over a cup of coffee.

For young children we shall have toys available. Bring your joys and concerns, a game or craft project and share some fun.

And, as the weather gets better, we will soon be able to start gardening again in the Church garden. Join us if you can.

Hymn Memories

I have been trying for some time to write a list of hymn tunes for Stuart Montgomery to put together as a medley but, somehow, a list just didn't come – even though I'm a list sort of person! So I began to jot down why these hymns had memories and meaning for me and this is what I came up with ...

The earliest hymn I remember being sung to me by my Gran McLean was 'When he cometh, when he cometh to make up his jewels'. I didn't understand a word at the time but grew to like the idea of being a jewel!

The earliest hymn I remember singing myself at home was 'Jesus bids us shine'. My first choir performance was at The Edinburgh Competitive Festival with Fairmilehead Parish Church Junior Choir, led by Ella Lamb, and we sang 'Ye Servants of god'. As the newest and youngest choir member I was chosen to receive the cup we had won. I think we may have been the only entry but it was a good start for me.

Two hymns I associate with my mum are 'O Lord my god when I in awesome wonder' and 'Going Home' from The New World Symphony by Dvorak. Sadly we couldn't sing them at her funeral due to Covid restrictions but I could still hear them in my head.

My dad loved music, especially operetta and Jazz and Blues. When we visited his family there was often a singalong and 'The Jeely Piece' song and 'Katie Bairdie had a coo' seemed to feature regularly but nothing that could appear in a hymn medley!

When Alasdair and I got married the hymns we chose were 'For the Beauty of the Earth' and 'Holy Spirit Truth Divine' and they are still strong favourites.

Hymns I associate strongly with St Michael's Parish Church include 'By cool siloams shady rill' which was the baptismal hymn for both of our children. 'Will your anchor hold' always makes me think of Alasdair, Niall and the 50th Boys Brigade Company. When our daughter Eilidh joined the Church Stuart played 'Jesu Joy of Man's Desiring' which was so very moving.

I enjoy the hymns written and/or arranged by John Bell and, in particular, I associate Abba Father with Margaret Forrester. I seem to remember singing it a lot.

The John Rutter arrangement of 'All Things Bright and Beautiful' and the 'Gaelic Blessing' are also very close to my heart and hold many happy memories.

Stuart, thank you so much for agreeing to put together a medley of some of these memories. I am really looking forward to hearing it and hope that everyone else enjoys it too.

By Babs Webster

Coronation Lunch

To help celebrate the Coronation of King Charles III we are planning to have a Bring and Share lunch on Sunday 7 May 2023 following the Service.

We might be fortunate and be able to have a Picnic in the Garden. Bring something to the table and share food, fun and fellowship.

St Michael's Unitary Constitution

At the Annual Stated Meeting last March we voted to move to a Unitary Constitution, meaning that we no longer needed a Congregational Board. Following the approval of the Presbytery of Edinburgh and West Lothian and Delegation of Assembly the Unitary Constitution was adopted on 1 January 2023.

St Michael's currently has 20 active Elders. The work of the Church should be shared out evenly between them. Dr Weatherhead, former Principal Clerk of the General Assembly, described the responsibilities of a Session as 'leadership, nurturing the spirituality of the congregation and its members, caring for the spiritual welfare of the parish and parishioners, encouraging members to participate in the worship and life of the congregation and promoting mission and evangelism in the parish.'

The Kirk Session should meet no more than five times per year (February, April, June, September and November).

Session's tasks are to lead, and:

- Oversee the congregation in all matters spiritual and temporal
- Receive minutes of the Committees which meet in the intervening months and who report on their work regularly
- Work with the Minister in providing worship through the seasons
- Set the dates for the sacraments
- Ensure the spiritual care and education of young and old
- Reach out to the community to support their needs and encourage their interest in Christianity

We have created four Committees:

Worship and Teaching

Fabric and Finance Committee

Pastoral Committee

Outreach Committee

Each Committee has Elders and powers to co-opt members of the congregation with special skills or interest to help.

No Elder should serve on more than one committee, though their input may, on occasion, be requested by another.

Committee members serve for three years at which point they may change Committee.

Committee responsibilities

Each Committee will have a remit, which will be reviewed once a year in the September Session meeting.

Committees are to report to Session meetings on their work in writing. Reports are to be sent a week in advance of Session meetings (ideally by email) to allow other Elders to think about proposals and activities before the meeting. Reports do not need to be lengthy.

Committee remits:

Worship and Teaching Committee

- Co-operate in shaping worship with the Minister
- Discuss and plan Christian learning opportunities (for example bible studies, training courses, confirmation classes)
- Plan special services
- Plan special worship and Christian education for young people
- Deal with the recording and uploading of worship on social media platforms

Pastoral Committee

- Oversee visiting or contact with housebound or sick members of the congregation
- Support the bereaved
- Liaise with the minister for special visits
- Organise training for pastoral visitors
- Encourage members to request support or visits
- Deal with staffing issues when need arises (Personnel Committee)
- Support the Safeguarding Officer and the Safeguarding Team when need arises (Safeguarding Committee)

Fabric and Finance Committee

- Care for the fabric of the church building/halls and the manse
- Investigate and organise repairs of the fabric
- Explore and suggest developments of the buildings
- Keep the property register up to date and submit to Presbytery
- Support the Treasurer
- Ensure the preparation of the annual accounts
- Ensure the administration of giving under Gift Aid and make the necessary claims
- Annually review charges for halls and church hire

Outreach Committee

- Plan and organise events for fellowship and community interaction (for example coffee mornings, fairs, gardening, Burns Supper, annual outings)
- Respond to needs in the Parish (for example supporting parents or people living with dementia)
- Liaise with the Eco Officer (Pamela Couper) and support her in caring for the planet
- Promote work of chosen charities (for example Fairtrade, Christian Aid, Fresh Start, Amnesty International, HIV/AIDS).
- Publicise the Committee's work by informing those responsible for posters, social media platforms and website

We encourage you to consider if you have talents that would help these committees deliver their remits, if so please speak to the Minister or Douglas Bannantyne.

by Douglas Bannantyne

St Michael's Friendship Club

On 25 January we like to celebrate the birthday of our beloved poet, Robert Burns. St Michael's Burns Supper was a joyous occasion. I sometimes wonder how many Scots remember the birthdays of some of our other great writers, for instance Sir Walter Scott or Robert Louis Stevenson?

I heard a story about a drama company that was staging 'Treasure Island'. They decided that it would be authentic to cast a real parrot to perch on 'Long John Silver's' shoulder. They advertised for parrots to audition for the part. Surprisingly a lot of people turned up with their pet parrots. The parrot had one line to say, 'Pieces of Eight'. All through the rehearsals the bird performed brilliantly. However, on the opening night, the bright lights, special sound effects and audience frightened the parrot, who was struck dumb. He gripped the actor's tunic so tightly that 'Long John Silver' was getting a sore shoulder. People thought that the parrot was stuffed as he appeared so rigid. As the play was nearing the end of its tour the parrot seemed to be 'thawing out' a little and, under his breath, the actor was cajoling him gently whispering 'Pieces of Eight' into his ear. Suddenly, during a quiet moment in the play the parrot spoke and loudly announced his name, address and 'phone number!

Animals are unpredictable. Robert Louis Stevenson's great characters are so vivid and his tale of sea-faring folk so entertaining that we feel we have a personal connection with them and the seas they sailed.

We heard tales of sailing around our coasts on 14 November. Mr David Simpson showed the Friendship Club colourful slides of our beautiful coastline when he told us of his adventures canoeing around Scotland. He was a very lively and entertaining speaker. Obviously he is also a brave and skillful canoeist. Navigating around rocky shores and inlets looked absolutely hair-raising! We could hear the wind and almost taste the salty sea spray.

When I was announcing that, at our next meeting, we had arranged for a Scottish Fiddler to entertain us, Mr Simpson announced 'That's my sister!' He decided there and then that he would come along and accompany her on the piano. He then brought along a 12 string guitar and the two of them delighted us with a medley of Scottish music and songs. His sister, Sheila, was an excellent violinist and everybody agreed they were an amazing couple (a real 'Dream Team'). It was a super afternoon of lively toe-tapping music. Two ladies were inspired to get up and dance. It was all great fun.

As usual we had our Christmas party in December, complete with mince pies and cakes.

The New Year kicked off in a celebratory manner. One of our members, Grace Russell, brought three of her pals – George, Anne and June – to entertain us with Scottish songs and poems. Unfortunately something had gone wrong with the heating but, although it was cold in the hall, the entertainers warmed us all up with their enthusiastic performances of well-loved songs and with Anne's quirky original poems. It was all very appropriate so close to Burns night.

Even closer to Burns Night, on 23 January, 'Live Music Now' sent us a Russian pianist, Nikita Lukinov. He brought along a few well-chosen Burns songs to play for us. He was a wonderful pianist with a formidable Russian technique. I think that the word 'great' is overused these days – some 'numpty' chucks a lump of steak in a pan and the television presenter calls him a GREAT chef! – however Nikita Lukinov truly IS a great pianist. He played a beautiful nocturne by Grieg and 'Meditation Op. 72 No. 5 by Tchaikovsky. To hear a Russian pianist playing Tchaikovsky was a revelation! I have never heard that piece played better and I doubt if I ever shall again. I decided to attend Nikita's Usher Hall recital the following week, where he gave a visionary performance of Liszt's Sonata in B Minor.

Nikita also played the Chopin Etude Op. 25 No. 10 which displayed his enviable octave technique. Of course he has long, agile fingers which does help.

On 6 February every member of the Club presented their hands to Pamela Couper, a Reflexologist who gave us all an insight into the mysteries of that craft. I was very impressed that she knew I had a stiff neck just by pressing my hands with her thumb. She gave us a demonstration of her skills courtesy of Sybil Bateman's feet. Sybil (a brave volunteer!) was also impressed by how much better she felt after the treatment.

On 20 February our very own Stuart Montgomery gave a performance to the Club and other guests. He brought along with him another artist, Mr John Sampson, who plays the trumpet and recorder amongst other instruments. The concert was well attended, there was good banter in between the songs and an impressive singalong to 'Daisy Daisy', We had a lively tea/coffee session thereafter.

We have had top quality people, including speakers and entertainers, at this Session of the Friendship Club and it's not over yet ...

On 6 March, we are hosting another health professional to discuss health and wellbeing. On 20 March our guest is bringing a 'Therapet' and will be discussing her work.

We have so much to look forward to and I do hope that many of you will be able to join us. A warm welcome is guaranteed.

Submitted by Ruth Andrews

Fresh Start

Once again many, many thanks to everyone who has donated to Fresh Start recently. The 'Cookers for Christmas Appeal' was very generously supported and we have already taken several car loads of household donations to their warehouse this year.

Please do continue to think of Fresh Start when doing your Spring Cleaning! If you are unsure what they are looking for, or would like us to collect your donation from your home, then please telephone us on 0131 441 1328 or email babs.webster@hotmail.co.uk.

Alasdair and Babs Webster

St Colm's @ St Michael's Guild

The Guild began its Spring Session with a talk and film from our Church member, John Wilson, on Swifts – marvellous birds who visit our shores from May onwards before migrating to warmer climes much further south in the Autumn. We were fascinated to see that they inhabit the Western Wall (or Wailing Wall) in Jerusalem and it was good to see a film of devout Jews praying at the Wall whilst, at the same time, bird watchers scanned the sky for the return of swifts! All thoughts on what comes to us from the sky.

We had an inspirational afternoon with the Rev Tom Gordon, no stranger to our Guild. He relayed, with gusto, various stories from his ministry, names changed to protect the innocent! Tom's book – 'Look well to this day' – describes a stone wall with the big stones being of no use on their own. They need the little stones in between them to make the wall strong. I could add to let the birds, like swifts, find a space to nest in. The thoughts that can come out of a Guild meeting ...!

At our Disbursement of Funds meeting in November 2022 we sent money to the Church and to our project 'Starchild'. At this meeting we held a table sale in aid of 'Starchild' from which we raised £235. The Guild then topped this up with a further £100 from its funds. This will help to fight the stigma associated with vulnerable and disabled children in Uganda. Other monies went to Christian Aid, the Colinton Tunnel and trees for Malawi. The Guild has been very fortunate in receiving an anonymous donation of £1,000. There will be more about how this will be utilised in the Summer Tower issue. We have a great deal to be thankful for.

We had a fascinating chat from Maureen and Tom Kelly who regaled us with some Jacobite tales. We look forward to meetings about the Northern Lighthouse Board, hearing dogs for the deaf and then to our business meeting which is to be held on 12 April.

I have now received confirmation regarding the theme for the third and final year of our strategy 'Look forward in Faith'. The theme is 'New Wine, New Wineskins'. In the Gospel of Mark 2.22 we read '... and no one pours new wine into old wineskins, otherwise the wine will burst the skins, both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No they pour new wine into new wineskins.'

We look forward to exploring this theme in our Autumn session. No doubt this will involve change as we look into new ways of running the Guild. Not new ways for the sake of new ways but new ways because the Guild, like

the Church, is in a period of necessary change. Guild themes are certainly set to challenge us.

Meetings are open to all and all are made welcome whether as members or visitors. The Guild wishes to thank Jim Gray and Bill Bremner, plus the Session and, of course, Andrea our Minister, for all the help in arranging the hall for meetings and for the practical and spiritual support given.

The Guild wish all a Blessed Eastertide.

Fay Anderson, Co-convenor Guild

Amnesty International

Many thanks to all who signed cards and contributed cash for postage in the 'Write for Rights' campaign in December. Please let me know if you're fortunate enough to receive a reply from a recipient.

The award-winning Iranian film maker **Jafar Panahi** has been released from jail on bail, two days after he went on hunger strike over his imprisonment. He was the director of *Offside*, the Film Club film in December 2022. He was seen hugging supporters and being driven away from Tehran's notorious Evin prison at the beginning of February 2023. There is no word of **Vahid Afkari**, also in Iran, to whom we sent many cards, in the knowledge that he might never see them but in order to make the authorities aware that he is known. While the situation in Iran is dangerously volatile we can hope and pray.

There is no word yet on any of the people to whom we sent letters of support. Amnesty International UK will keep us updated. There is a video appeal on YouTube for **Dorgelesse Nguessan**, arrested on her first protest in Cameroon; it provides a visual background to the case.

https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=Q4M1hOxhU_o&cbrd=1

The other cases were: Zineb Redouane (France) victim of police brutality. Luis Manuel Otero Alcantara (Cuba) artist and defender of free speech. Aleksandra Skochilenko (Russia) cat-loving protestor of the war in Ukraine.

Submitted by Derek Wilson

World of Prayer Day – 3 March 2023

This year the service has been written by the women of Taiwan with the theme 'I have heard about your Faith' based on Ephesians 1:15-19. At the moment of writing the nearest service for this area is to be held at Colinton Mains St John's Parish Church at 10.30 am on Friday 3 March 2023. Other services on 3 March in Edinburgh will be held at Inverleith St Serfs at 2pm and Duddingston Kirk at 11am.

Submitted by Fay Anderson

Fairtrade @ St Michael's

Sadly, after over 40 years of pioneering and championing the cause of trade justice, Traidcraft PLC has gone into administration and is no longer trading. They are working hard to rescue at least some parts of the business but what this will look like and when/if it will happen is uncertain. Please remember them in your prayers.

Transform Trade (formerly known as Traidcraft Exchange) will, however, continue. They are a global community of workers, farmers, collectives, supporters and campaigners who are continuing the fight to transform trade so that everyone benefits. Their belief is that when trade values people over profit that the world becomes a vastly different place. However, right now, the trade system that we all use is full of exploitation and creates environmental damage and huge inequality.

It is vitally important, therefore, that we continue to support the principles of Fairtrade and we are very keen to keep our little stall going at St Michael's. Some items will, of course, no longer be available as they were Traidcraft-branded products, but I am managing to find other websites to source many of your favourites – such as coffee and peanut butter. Keep a close eye on the stall for new products over the coming weeks and months.

Any profits that the stall makes will be donated to Transform Trade.

Date for Diary: Fairtrade Fortnight – 27 February to 12 March 2023.

Submitted by Sheila Bremner

“The Artist Asks”

After completing his tasks,
The Artist asks,

Is white a colour,
Or an absence of colour?

Is the darkest night
Only an absence of light?

Did God send his son
To give light to everyone?

Does the darkened soul
Turn from the light that is right?

The answer's not black or white
It's just an absence of light.

Submitted by Ruth Andrews.

Gardening under the Tower Chapter 7 – A time for every purpose under heaven

‘Everything that happens in this world happens at a time God chooses. He sets the time for birth and for death, the time for planting and the time for pulling up ... the time for saving and the time for throwing away ... he has set the right time for everything

(Selected verses from Ecclesiastes 3:1-11 Good News Bible)

It is January 29th as I am writing this piece, and I have just come in past the communal raised bed outside our flat. In the summer it was a riot of colour with geraniums and French marigolds, petunias and some perennials like thrift, nemesia and Canterbury bells – and until the heavy frosts of recent weeks it has still looked in relatively good order. Even the geraniums still had some green leaf on them. Occasionally a brave little flower bud appeared after a few warmish days – but too often the potential flowers were quite literally nipped in the bud by yet another sudden frost. The natural world simply can't keep up with our changing climate and the

extremes of temperature, wind and rainfall with which it has to contend. I feel painfully ashamed when I see a bud trying to open at a time when the plant should be dormant, and when sleepy bees are enticed from winter hibernation by a warm day, and there is nothing to provide the immediate energy they need to survive. I feel ashamed for I have contributed to this situation. I am very committed to trying to reduce my carbon footprint but I haven't got things completely right and I still haven't managed to pare down my contribution to the various greenhouse gases to the least that it can possibly be. So the garden constantly speaks to me both of the beauty of the created world and God's love for it, and also my part in its decline.

So let's have a look at the state of our gardens at the moment and at what we can learn from them. The raised bed that was so beautiful in the summer is now looking bedraggled and dull and rather depressed – if a garden can be depressed! But it won't look much different from many other gardens.

There is a dwarf evergreen azalea looking fine, a primula coming into flower and some small cushions of perennial ground cover plants like creeping saxifrage – but apart from that everything looks pretty dead. Indeed some things **are** dead because, for them, it is 'the time for death'. Two years ago I planted bedding out geraniums – intended only as an annual planting, but because last winter was mild they survived to flower their socks off for a second year. However, this year's heavy frosts have defeated them. So for them it is 'the time for pulling up' and 'throwing away' – well almost. The roots of every plant that has been in the ground for a while will have joined the mycorrhizal fungal network within the soil; this is sometimes also called the soil food web, because the network links plants and makes sure that they get the nutrients they need when they need them – and also helps to warn of pest attacks so that individual plants can deploy their own chemical defence system. If we actually pull out dead plants – roots and all – we break the mycorrhizal network which then takes a while to re-establish. So when you need to remove small plants that have died, cut off the top growth and throw it away (or preferably compost it) but leave the roots in place. They will eventually rot down and contribute to the valuable organic matter in the soil, but not before the network has managed to make additional links to plants that are still alive.

Of course there are plants that die down in winter and return again in the spring. We call these herbaceous perennials. They flower in the spring and summer and in autumn they start to die back. When I was younger I was taught by my grandparents, who were very tidy gardeners, to cut off the

old flower heads and stems as soon as flowering was dwindling but we know better now. The dead flower heads contain seed that will feed the birds in the winter and they also protect the growing point of the plant at ground level from damage by frost. Don't cut down last year's old stems until all danger of frost has passed. So this is still 'a time to save' for them.

On the other hand, there are plants that flower in the winter and die down in the spring and summer. I had put in some cyclamen plants in the autumn. They flowered wonderfully until the frosts came and now there is scarcely any evidence that they were ever there. But, for these plants, it is also 'a time for saving' because they become dormant in the late winter, spring and summer to give them time to build up their strength by feeding the corm from which they grow – in just the same way that bulbs need to regenerate during their dormancy period in summer, autumn and early winter. Don't cut their top growth off – leave it to feed back into the corm or bulb. So the message here is that we need to know our plants and how they grow and not to dig up and throw away a dead-looking corm or bulb that is full of the promise of new life in a different season!

Indeed Ecclesiastes speaks of a time for birth – and I would like to extend the analogy here to include rebirth as well. Throughout the raised bed there are signs of spring coming. There are the bright green leaves of dwarf daffodils and there are tiny crocus leaves just beginning to push through the earth. Someone planted a single crocus bulb in the bed last year and there is now a whole patch of crocus leaves coming through. New life indeed; we leave the soil in this bed alone, so tiny seeds can rest and germinate undisturbed. On the azalea, in every rosette of leaves, nestles a pinkish bud; in a week or so it will be a glorious cushion of pink beauty that will withstand all normal weather conditions for this time of year because, like the crocuses and daffodils, its time has come in God's plan.

So what can we learn from our gardens? That God is generous. That God shows his love for us and all of his creation in the way each plant has its function and its time in his plan. That things only go wrong when we intervene in the perfect balance God created. That we need to immerse ourselves in the detail of the natural world so that we understand how plants grow, what their needs are and what we can expect of them. We also learn that, in the way we garden, we can help to mitigate against climate change and re-establish the balance of nature that was once so perfect and beautiful, when everything happened at the time God chose and planned. But most of all we learn that there is still – and always will be – hope.

Camellias

It was a dark spring, cold,
with the news hammering home
saying don't hold too close
to the hope that you've known.

Bur the camellias didn't care.
They staged a coup in the night
and by morning had raised their flags
of bright pink hallelujahs.

(Gideon Heugh – in Devastating Beauty – Amazon Puiblications)

Church House Chatter

The hard work of the Gardening Club has been paying off with the snowdrops pictured below poking their heads out to say hello. It won't be long before the Canal Path is bordered by cheery daffodils and I defy anyone not to feel just a bit brighter when they see them.



A focus group meeting was held in the Church earlier this month to discuss what deters folk from heading out and about. Now that the better weather is (hopefully) on its way and the local roadworks are coming to an end it might be a good time for anyone that fancies a break from home to pop in to the Church Hall on a Tuesday when the Warm Space is running or to dig out their gardening gloves in preparation for an tidy up of the gardens.

Fiona Lunn, Editor

A warm welcome is given to all at St Michael's



Nikita Lukinov's concert at The Friendship Club



Spot the Difference?



Changes to the Church Family

Deaths: Zena Bell, November 2022
Margaret Alexander, January 2023
Amy Milligan, January 2023

And our Congratulations go to:

John and Christine Thomson (nee Dargo) who celebrate their Diamond Wedding anniversary on 9 March 2023. It is extra special for St Michael's as they were married here on that day in 1963. All the very best for your day of celebrations.

The Easter Cross

