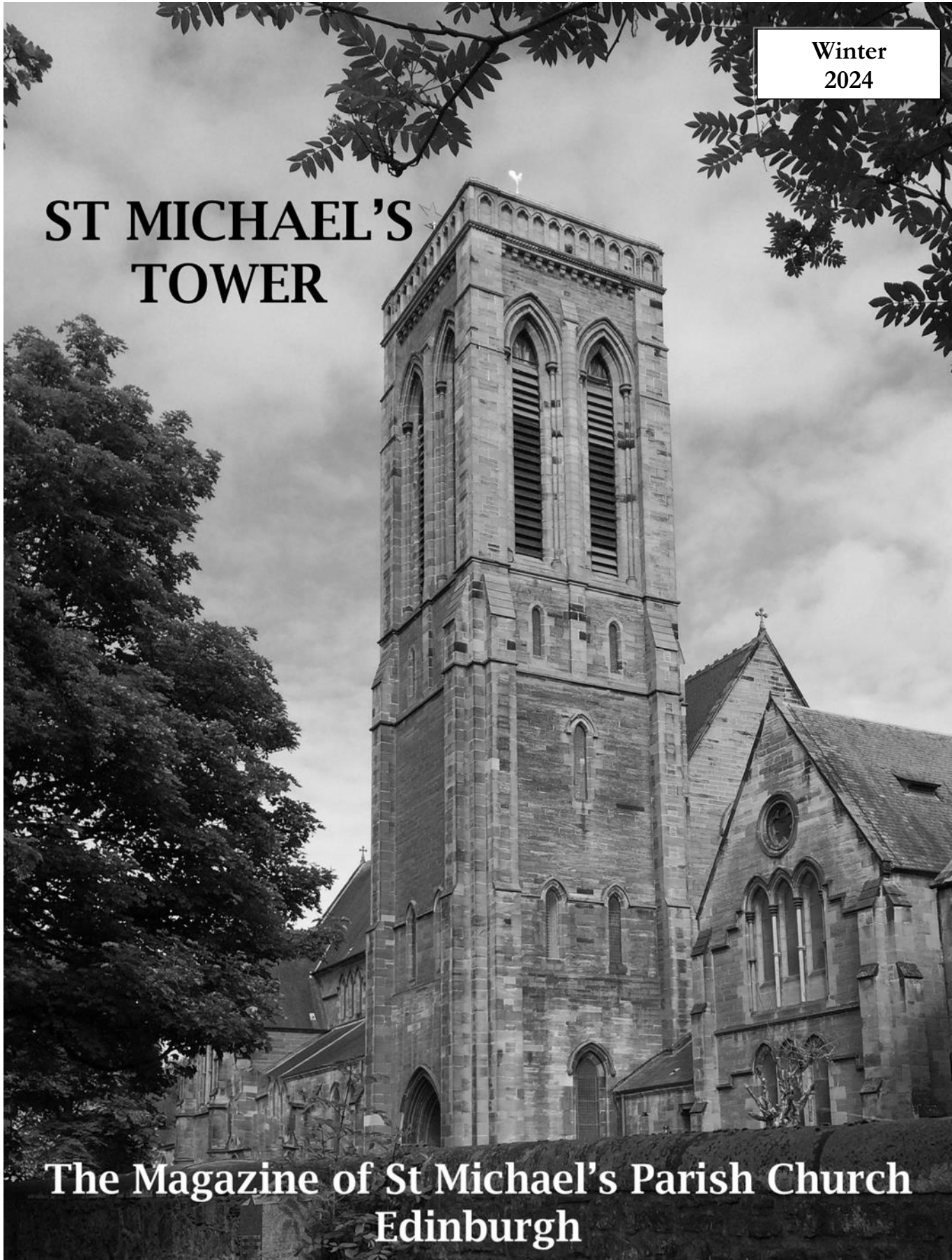




Winter
2024

ST MICHAEL'S TOWER

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Edinburgh

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Dear Members and Friends of St Michael's

Have you begun to think about Christmas? Have you ordered your Christmas tree or looked out decorations from the attic? In recent years shops have been earlier and earlier in putting up Christmas decorations and displaying products. This year some of you spotted Advent calendars and Christmas sweets in some shops soon after the summer holidays!

When I was little, in Germany, the tree was only put up the night before Watchnight. The sitting room was out of bounds all day on the 24th. We children tried to look through the keyhole to spy something but the curtains were closed and the lights off. My mother said that the Christ Child was busy bringing gifts - if we had been good.

Santa, or St Nicholas, had already been and gone on 6 December. If children had been good they received, on the morning of the 6th, sweets, fruit and nuts in their freshly cleaned shoe, placed outside their bedroom.

The Christmas tree was introduced to this country from Germany by Prince Albert, Queen Victoria's consort, and, from there, conquered the whole world.

The poet U A Fanthorpe wrote this poem about the Christmas Tree:

The Tree

*In the wood I am one of many.
I am felled, sold, chosen
to be sole tree of a house.
I am throned in a gold bucket.
Light is sewn through my branches,
precious gifts wrapped in silver
depend from my twigs. Star-crowned,
I am adored by children, cordially hated
by Hoovering housewives, distrusted
by Health & Safety Officers, who name me
Fire Hazard. I reign for 12 days,
then am sacrificed among rubbish,
where I wither, age, decay.*

*But every year I rise again indoors,
hazardous fire of love.*

My mother-in-law would have agreed with this as she worried every year about the real candles on my tree. In older times the fir tree with its evergreen needles was a symbol of life. In the darkest days of the year its green foliage, lovely smell, and the lights and decorations were an encouragement not to lose hope, to remember that the lighter days would return.

Often the Christmas tree had, under its lowest branches and along with the presents, a nativity scene - telling the Christmas story in visual form: Mary and Joseph and their new born child, the angel Gabriel, shepherds and wise men approaching.

The tree above, with its star or angel on top, functions as a signpost to this event, the birth of Christ, the coming of God into our world with the 'fire of his love' shown us in Jesus of Nazareth.

We live in a world still troubled and torn by disputes, hatred and wars. Our world has shrunk to such an extent that when a butterfly flaps its wings in Brazil we shall feel it eventually in Europe. When someone throws a hand grenade or a stone at a soldier in the Middle-East it has consequences all over the world.

Thank God for coming among us with his hazardous fire of love. We need to be reminded that we are not alone in this universe, abandoned to brutal forces of power, but loved and cherished by God, our Heavenly Father. We need to be taught and learn that power and evil will not have the last word but, instead, the justice, peace and love of God.

Jesus taught a new way of living in the face of violence, hatred and power from within and outwith. Jesus was, thus, called the Prince of Peace, the light of the world and we call him our Lord.

So come and join us this Advent and Christmas season, the beginning of the new Church year. Come to remember the story of our faith again, from the story of a birth in straitened circumstances to the revolutionary teachings of a young carpenter which, ultimately, led to his persecution, execution and rising to new life at Easter.

Come and be gladdened by God's hazardous fire of love and celebrate a light and peaceful Christmas with your family and friends.

Blessings to all of you and yours.

Andrea, Your minister at St Michael's Church

Advent .. Christmas – What's the difference?

Advent was the season before Christmas and lasted originally for six weeks though now for only four. Orthodox churches still celebrate Advent over a six week period and, thus, start Advent in mid-November.

The word 'Advent' comes from the Latin and means 'coming' or 'arrival'. It is a time of preparation for the coming of the Lord Jesus at Christmas and is also a foreshadow of the expected Second Coming of Christ at the end of time. In the Middle Ages the Church emphasised the wrath of god at all that was wrong in the world – making it a penitential time like Lent. Nowadays we emphasise more the joyful anticipation of God's love coming among us.

The Advent wreath helps us light one more candle each week until we light the central candle at Christmas – the central candle representing Christ, the light of the world. Christmas is a word from Middle English referring to the festival mass of Christ. The first Christmas was only celebrated sometime in the middle of the Second century. The Church wanted to

emphasise that Jesus was a real human being - not just 'appearing' to be human as some heretical groups, called the 'Gnostics', were claiming.

The date of 25 December was only fixed in the fourth century as the date of the Winter solstice when people used to celebrate a winter festival for the rebirth of the sun. The Church celebrates the birth of the light of lights, the true sun. In the East, the date was fixed as 6 January, a date which we celebrate as Epiphany, in remembrance of the visit of the Wise Men.

This year we offer two Carol services – an Advent Carol Service and a Family Carol Service. The Advent Carol Service will be slightly more thoughtful and darker, while the Family Carol Service will be very much looking forward to the joy of Christmas. Do come to one, or both, if you can.

Long Service of Elders

On 1 December 2024, the first Sunday of the new Church year, we shall celebrate the long service of some of our Elders. Five have given to St Michael's 40 years of service and two nearly as many years, at 38 and 37 years respectively. They have given their time, energy and talents generously and with great dedication.

They are modest and will not want to be dragged to the front of the Church – I will try though! However the day shapes up we will say a great big **THANK YOU** for all they have done during the service and we shall then celebrate together over a joint lunch. Please also congratulate and thank them yourselves.

They are: Jim and Moira Gray, Sheila and Bill Bremner, Alasdair Webster – all of whom were ordained in September 1984; Judith Merten, who was ordained in 1986 and Babs Webster, ordained in 1987.

I met with some of them and asked them what they found hardest ... and What they enjoyed most ...

Christmas Gifts for Children of Prisoners

Over the past years we have supported the families of prisoners in Saughton Prison. Children with a parent in prison are liable to experience much grief due to their family situation. This is the letter from Colin, who is organising the collection of presents for the children.

I have once again sought and been granted permission to organise the Edinburgh Prison Christmas gift collection for 2024.

For the past 39 years it has been the privilege for an officer from HM Prison Edinburgh to arrange the Christmas gift collection. Richard, six times, Alex, nine times and myself for the remainder. All three of us recognised how important the Christmas gift collection was. We were also, as part of our duties, librarians, a role that made us an ideal choice to carry out the Christmas gift collection. Although the library role has long passed to Edinburgh City Libraries responsibility for the Christmas gift collection has always been retained by a Prison Officer.

In 2016 the number of children that received gifts was 140. There had been a population change in the prison which resulted in a lot of prisoners with dependents transferring to other establishments so lower than normal numbers.

*It was also the year that I began a partnership with **Barnardo's** who manage the visitors' centre at the prison. This partnership has developed over the intervening years and Christmas 2023 saw us achieve these amazing figures:*

Last year 328 children from 126 families had a Christmas present to open on Christmas morning due to your kindness and generosity. Every child, where possible, received a toy, an activity gift and book and, of course, something nice. More than a thousand gifts were given out.

It is impossible to measure the difference that your kindness and generosity made to these children.

On this positive note I would, once again, like to seek your support in organising this year's Christmas gift collection – the 39th.

Kindest regards

*Colin O'Flaherty
Prison Officer
HM Prison
Edinburgh*

PLEASE NOTE THAT COLIN HAS AGREED WITH THE CHURCH OFFICE TO COLLECT ALL GIFTS ON TUESDAY 17 DECEMBER. IF YOU COULD BRING ANY DONATIONS TO THE CHURCH BY SUNDAY 15 DECEMBER THAT WOULD BE VERY MUCH APPRECIATED

Carolling in Care Homes

On Saturday 21 December we plan to visit some of our most senior members, who live in care homes, and do some carol singing - bringing them Christmas greetings from St Michael's.

Do you like singing carols? Do join us after the services on 1st, 8th and 15th December for a carolling practice, lasting about an hour, and then join us with the other carollers on the 21st. We would love to see you.

Dates for your Diary

Sun 1 December	1 Advent The Peaceful Kingdom. Elders' Long Service Celebrations/Lunch. Followed by Carolling Practice (1 hour)
Sun 8 December	2 Advent John the Proclaimer. Soup Sunday, Followed by Carolling Practice (1 hour)
Frid 13 December	Family Carol Service 7pm in St Michael's
Sun 15 December	3 Advent The Holy Way, Gifts for Prisoners' Children, Amnesty Letter Writing. Followed by Carolling Practice (1 hour)
Sat 21 December	Carolling in Care Homes 2pm to 5.30pm
Sun 22 December	4 Advent Mary Meets an Angel/the gift of love
Tues 24 December	Watchnight Service 11.30pm at St Michael's
Wed 25 December	Christmas Day Communion at 11am in St Michael's
Sun 29 December	Celebrating God's love come/John 1
Sun 5 December	New Year Service

Presbytery Planning – Update

In our last issue I told you that we had lodged an appeal questioning the process used to determine which of the buildings of our proposed new uniting four churches should be released/sold. Our main point was that no existing church should be made to offer the sale of its building at the moment; it should be the new united congregation which decides which buildings they can afford and want to keep going.

The good news is that this appeal has not been thrown out but is now being considered. The relevant Presbytery and 121 George Street Committees had been asked for their submission in response to our appeal by 5 October. Now a group of people, not connected with our Presbytery, are looking at the paperwork and are tasked to respond within three months. So we can expect to hear their views some time in the New Year.

In the meantime we need to keep going and attempt to draft the 'Basis for Union' of the four congregations and the 'Basis of Team Ministry'.

Once these documents have been drafted Elders of all four sessions will be asked to vote to approve them. They will vote on:

1. The 'Basis of Union' of the four congregations.
2. The Ministers continuing (Rev David Clarkson and Rev Gordon Kennedy).
3. The 'Basis of Reviewable Tenure', which gives Presbytery the right to review the charge after a certain period.

All members will also be asked to vote on the same points. This may happen sometime next Summer but there is much to discuss in the meantime. Please pray for all who have been asked to take part in the meetings to discuss and progress the future of our Church.

Four Churches Conversations: Look Forward in Faith

The New Year will bring the proposed union of the four congregations ever closer and the Implementation Team feel it is time to invite the thoughts and inputs of Members and Elders of all four congregations.

To this end we are planning a morning of conversations:

When: Saturday 18 January 2025
Venue: St John's Colinton Mains Church
Time: 10 – 12 Noon. Coffee/Tea/pastries available from 9.45 am

The aim is to set aside a time to discuss what a new united congregation might look like.

After worship we shall go to café-style tables to talk and gather thoughts around the themes of Worship, Work and Witness of the new congregation. There will be a host at each table (a member of the Implementation Team) to help guide and facilitate the discussion - a topic and some suggested notes shall be provided. After about 10 to 15 minutes group members shall split up and move to different tables and topics.

There shall be an opportunity to have tea/coffee and have a look at the ideas/thoughts which have been added to each Topic Sheet.

This shall be followed up by a plenary session where the hosts will reflect back from their groups and, finally, we shall then close with a time of worship.

After the event ideas shall be collated and reviewed by the Implementation Team. This information could then be used to feed into the discussions of the Vision, Mission and Outreach Team and, ultimately, to the new united Kirk Session in setting out its Mission Statement and Vision for the new congregation and in agreeing priorities for the first year or so.

It is important to note that this day is not a decision-making day, rather a chance to come together, to reflect and to imagine what might be possible for a new united congregation with multiple buildings and more than one Minister.

Andrea Price/Douglas Bannantyne

Discipleship Meetings

These shall continue to take place in St Michael's Church Annex Room on the first Thursday of the month at 7.30pm. We use Eric Liddell's book '*The Discipline of the Christian Life*' to start off our own thoughts and discussion about what it means to be Christians in the 21st Century.

First Saturday of the Month Winter Coffee Mornings

Our **Saturday Coffee Mornings** are proving to be very popular and these shall be continuing over the next few months in the Church Hall. All are welcome to come along between 10.30 and 12 on the dates noted below:

Saturdays: 7 December 2024, 4 January, 1 February, 1 March and 5 April 2025

World Day of Prayer (WDP)

March 2025 may seem a long time away but once the Christmas worship and festivities and New Year celebrations are over suddenly we are nearing Springtime.

World Day of Prayer (WDP) is an ecumenical prayer movement bringing millions from over 100 countries to pray, worship and learn each year. The WDP Service is always held worldwide on the first Friday in March. Next year St Michael's is to host the service for city centre churches on Friday 7 March 2025 at 2pm.

The Church of Scotland grouping of Churches in Edinburgh differs from the WDP grouping given the ecumenical ethos of this movement. Whether you are local, city centre or otherwise all are welcome to attend this service which has been written by Christian women of the Cook Islands.

The Cook Islands are made up of a group of 15 islands between the Tonga and Samoan Islands to the west and the Society Islands to the east in the centre of the Polynesian Triangle - Rarotonga being the largest island. They are east of the International Date Line so a day behind the UK. Our Service may take place the day before their service begins timewise. They are among the last countries to celebrate the WDP each year. Their enthusiasm for this prayer movement shines through in the Service they have prepared with the theme of 'I made you Wonderful' from Psalm 139.v13-18. Their greeting of 'Kia Orana' meaning 'May you live long and may you live well. May you shine like the sun. May you dance with the waves' invites us all to participate with them, regardless of the time difference, on the **7th March at 2pm here in St Michael's**.

Fay Anderson

Fundraising Donations

At the Kirk Session meeting in September, we discussed our Fundraising donations. It was agreed that donations from our coffee mornings would continue to support St Michael's and money raised from our Soup Sundays would go to outside charities.

Below is a list of our coffee morning donations to date and a list of our Soup Sunday donations and to where that money shall be sent:

Coffee Mornings for St Michael's

January	£188
February	£405
March	£495
April	£323
September	£380
October	£546
November	£536

Soup Sundays

February	£112 St. Michael's
March	£117 St. Michael's
April	£109 St. Michael's
October	£143 Bethany Christian Trust
November	£147 Poppy Scotland
December	Fresh Start Cookers for Christmas
January	C of S HIV Project
February	C of S Crossreach
March	CHAS Lent Appeal
April	Medical Aid for Palestine
May	Christian Aid

There is a great buzz around these two regular fundraisers and that reflects in the donations. Thank you to all who help make these events so successful and to those who support us.

Moir Gray, Treasurer

Pious Pints Ruminations ...

After a conversation we had at Pious Pints regarding where certain 'sayings' originated, I thought it might be worthwhile to do a bit of research. Here are a few things I thought people might find interesting:-

Bless You – it was thought at one time that, when sneezing, a person's spirit could be expelled from their body, leaving them vulnerable to the devil or

to evil spirits. So, people said 'Bless You' to ensure that your soul wasn't captured by the devil and that it jumped safely back into your body.

Getting the Sack – if you are 'let go' from your job, it is often referred to as 'Getting the Sack'. Many years ago a man would have to save up to buy the tools needed to do his job. He would carry them around in a sack. When he got a job he would hand his sack of tools over to his employer to look after. Therefore, if he was dismissed from his job, his sack was returned.

Not Enough Room to Swing a Cat – this saying, apparently, goes back to the days of sailing ships and refers to the 'cat o' nine tails' (a whip which was used to discipline sailors). As the cabins and the crews' quarters below deck were very small there was not enough room to swing the 'cat o' nine tails' and so the sailors were whipped up on deck.

Sound as a Bell – anything which is perfect for its use is said to be 'sound as a bell'. The phrase dates back to the 17th century and originates from the fact that a cracked bell will not ring a note and is, therefore, of no use. If an object is deemed to be as 'sound as a bell' it means it's perfect.

Sheila Bremner

Fresh Start Winter 2024

Fresh Start has been helping people make a home for themselves for 25 years marking quite a significant milestone. They offer a range of services to support new tenants and offer a great opportunity for anyone to volunteer.

At St Michael's we regularly support their starter packs, the Pantry and Cookers for Christmas Appeal.

Starter Packs

A starter pack is more than just essential items. It offers the comfort of a warm bed, a home-cooked meal and the simple pleasure of a cup of tea. These packs include essentials like cleaning supplies, kitchenware, bedding and toiletries – mostly donated by churches, businesses, schools, community groups and individuals. Volunteers help the warehouse team to manage the collection and distribution of the packs. By repurposing these donations, Fresh Start diverted 65 tonnes of goods from landfill.

'You guys are wonderful, continue with the good work you are doing, you may not know the impact you have. But you are alleviating suffering. Thank you'

White Goods

This service provides new tenants with access to essential white goods such as cookers, washing machines and fridge freezers, which are costly and often difficult to obtain through other means. This helps to establish and maintain a stable home environment.

'If it wasn't for Fresh Start I don't know what I would have done. The Starter packs were brilliant – it saved me. I can eat and store food without worrying. I feel comfortable in my home and feel content that I didn't have to worry about finding money for these things. You have no idea the impact the help has had on my mental health. Thank you.'

Pantry/Shop

The community Pantry offers low-cost food to North Edinburgh residents facing financial difficulties and food insecurities. It provides a membership-based system, allowing people to shop with dignity.

The Pantry is stocked through membership fees, donations, Fareshare partnerships and occasional purchases. Run by trained local volunteers it is designed to be small, local and sustainable, helping to address food poverty that threatens residents' health, wellbeing and housing stability.

Many, many thanks to everyone at St Michael's for their consistent support. As you can tell it is a service which is very much needed by so many people.

Please do continue to bring your donations to St Michael's or, if you need us to come and collect your donation from your home, then please contact us on 0131 441 1328 or email babs.webster@hotmail.co.uk

Alasdair and Babs Webster

St Michael's Film Club 2024/25

All our films screen in the Hall at 7pm with no charge (though donations are welcomed).

'Hidden Figures' (USA 2016) is our next movie. It tells the story of remarkable women whose stories remained unknown to the wide world until recently. They were African-American women working for NASA at the time of the 'Space Race' between the USSR and the USA in the 1960s. Their roles as computers, mathematicians and engineers were officially recognised with Congressional Gold Medals this year. The film, produced in 2016, was based on a book by Margot Shetterley which revealed many stories, capsulated in the film by superb actors and a fine screenplay. We screen it on **Sunday 1 December**.

Orkney has been in the film news recently with 'Outrun'. Back in 1989 it was the 1955 setting for **'Venus Peter'** a film of Christopher Rush's novel 'A Twelvemonth and a Day'. At heart a tale of a boy growing up and the relationship with his fisherman grandfather, it finds another level of mysticism amid the harsh reality of village life and the declining fishing industry. **Sunday 5 January**.

'Till' (USA 2022) is based on the real story of Mamie Till-Mobley, mother of Emmet Till, a 14 year old African-American infamously murdered in 1955, an event that was hugely influential in the movement for civil rights. Emmett, who lived with his family in Chicago, visited relatives in Mississippi but fell foul of the unwritten code between blacks and whites and 'disrespected' a young white woman. Her relatives, some nights later, abducted Emmett, cruelly murdered him and dumped his body in the Tallahatchie River. His killers were acquitted by an all-male, all-white jury. Danielle Deadwyler portrays Mamie's indomitable courage in the face of this unimaginable horror. It is not an easy watch but carries a powerful message. **Sunday 2 February**.

Derek Wilson

Prayer

The following Prayer, for ourselves and others, was said at the Guild dedication service in October. Members of the Guild were asked to contribute to the prayer and this Prayer reflects their wishes.

We prayed for the hurricane that hit America at the time so I have changed that part to pray for the current devastation in Spain. You can, of course, add your own special prayers as you read this.

'Loving Heavenly Father, as we look to you, our sure foundation, we thank you for all the blessings you have bestowed upon us, we pray for all those who have sustained us throughout our faith journey and supported us as we stepped out in faith to service you in our communities. Lord, guide and encourage all those here in St Michael's who have been called to serve you, we particularly thank you for our Minister, Andrea, our organist, Stuart, all who serve in Session and Board and the many volunteers in our congregation who serve you in so many ways, in the Guild, the Friendship Club, attend to coffee mornings and, today, make and serve our Second Sunday soup lunch, Surround all here with your never ending love.

Dear Lord we ask that you comfort those whom we know to be ill at home or in hospital, those who are anxious about loved ones and the bereaved. We thank you for health and for the care given to the sick and to us by all in the NHS and we pray for all who work in the NHS in whatever capacity as they try to conquer illnesses often without much public gratitude. Lord renew their commitment and lift their spirits.

Father we pray for our world in places where there is hardship, social inequality, poverty and natural disasters. In places too where the Guild has projects to help alleviate such deprivation and suffering by providing jobs, health care, buildings and making sure that basic needs such as everyone having access to fresh, clean water are met.

We pray for those caught up in the rainstorms and floods in Spain as they struggle to come to terms with the devastation such extreme weather has wrought. We seek your blessing on those who plan and implement emergency relief programmes to help those who have no homes left to go to.

Lord, in this world which seems to be broken, we earnestly pray for peace, peace in the Middle East to end all suffering of all peoples, in all places there. Lord we pray for restraint in leaders of lands at war, for dialogue, for

a positive and active desire to live together in equality, fairness and tolerance of differences. Hear our prayer for ordinary people and for those in power over them. For all world leaders, Lord we pray that wisdom, along with justice and basic kindness, takes the place of self-interest and hunger for power. Help nations to work together, to cure the ills of the world. Lord lift up your countenance upon all and give us peace in Jesus' name.'

Amen

Fay Anderson

St Michael's Friendship Club

The suggestive power of words can never be underestimated. The Actor, Sir John Gielgud, told a story (which I heard on the radio) about when he was a young Actor, going around schools, trying to get them interested in Shakespeare. He was reciting King Lear's famous speech;

“Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks!
Rage! Blow,
You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout,
‘Till you have drench’d our steeples!”

It was a beautiful day in the school sports ground, and a little girl, sitting in the front row, rummaged in her school-bag, brought out her Burberry coat and put it on! Shakespeare's depiction of stormy weather persuaded her to wrap up in order to keep dry and warm!

The persuasive power of Shakespeare's language was conveyed in a dramatic fashion to everyone in the Friendship Club during our opening meeting. Danielle Farrow, a Shakespearian actress, spoke eloquently about acting Shakespeare, telling us about the various roles she had played. It's amazing. How an Actress can slip off a costume and assume another character in minutes!

It is not often that a large building can take on a new identity. On September 30th our Minister Andrea Price told us about a steel works in Germany which changed to be a community Centre for leisure and hosted numerous activities. People could learn to climb up a side of the high building in preparation for their holidays in the Alps. Cycling was encouraged and big halls were repurposed for films, plays, art installations and many other activities. Andrea showed us “Before” and “After” slides and it was a very interesting and informative afternoon.

On October 14th, we hosted our talented friends Sheila Sapcota, violinist and her brother David, pianist and percussionist Dave, who played Scottish, Irish and Scandinavian tunes. As usual, they were a lively and entertaining trio. Unfortunately, something went wrong with our microphones (in the middle of a song), but they just carried on unfazed! (Showing great professional acumen)! And a joyful afternoon was enjoyed by everyone. Two weeks later, "Live Music Now" sent along a Violinist, accompanied by a Harpist. Although they also played some Scottish songs their approach to the music was very different. I was surprised when they played an Elvis number, "I can't help falling in love with you"! They were charming and they played and sang together beautifully. The young lady playing the Clarsach confessed to me that she had been a bit nervous at the beginning of their Concert. I was secretly grateful that nothing went wrong, because they did not have the experience to be unfazed! They warmed up when they realised we were a kindly and appreciative audience and yet another afternoon of happy music making was enjoyed by everyone.

Christmas is nearly upon us and it is time to look out the Christmas Carol books. It is so nice, just like meeting up with old friends. Christmas just wouldn't be the same without the awesome wonder of "Silent Night", or the unbridled joy of "Joy to the World"!

Everyone in St Michael's Friendship Club would like to wish everyone, everywhere, a very Happy Christmas and every good wish for the year ahead.

Ruth Andrews, President

St Colm's @ St Michael's Guild

The Guild has enjoyed a very full session since September. We have heard from Andrea speaking on Sure Foundations, our theme for this year, and our dedication service in Church attracted many members. It was, for me, very moving to see Guild members dedicate themselves to the aims of the Guild.

The current Guild projects finish at the end of this year and, to date, over £500,000 has been raised for such good causes. We look forward to supporting new projects in the New Year. During this session we have heard from the Rev Tim Turley about the work of the Mission to Seafarers, and from Ruth Box about the work The Pioneers are carrying out in the

Guild Project 'Chocolate Heaven' - we also sampled the chocolates, produced on a tiny island in the Indian Ocean.

Our meetings are lively and informative – from local community choirs to street fashion in Edinburgh (Victorian times to date) along with those topics already mentioned. We are to visit the theatre on 30 November to see a production of 'Treasure Island' with a real Scottish flavour.

Our meetings average an attendance of over 20 and we have welcomed new members this session. Members also enjoyed a joint meeting with Craiglockhart Guild to hear our ex national convener, Rae Lind, speak on her passion (her words) with the Rev Archibald Charteris, who started the 'Woman's Guild', as it was known then. I like to think that he would be pleased to see how his vision has spawned an organisation doing such good work in the community and beyond. All are welcome to come to Guild – men as well as women. We have an exciting programme ahead beginning on 15 January where we hear of 'Renegade Monk and Runaway Nun'. The title alone should bring you along! Do come, you will be made most welcome.

The Guild wish everyone a Happy Christmas and 'a Guid New Year'.

Fay Anderson, Co-Convener

Write for Rights

Amnesty International campaigns to protect the rights of individuals across the world who are at risk due to their activism. You can take action to support their cases and send messages of solidarity.

We will be signing cards after the service on Sunday 15 December. This year only one of the cases requests religious cards. She is **Ana da Silva Miguel**, also known as **Neth Nahara** – arrested at her home in Luanda on 13 August 2023 after broadcasting a live video on TikTok criticising President Joal Lourenco.

The next day a court convicted her of an 'outrage against the state, its symbols and bodies'. She was sentenced to six months in prison. Later her sentence was extended to two years following an appeal by the public prosecutor. While imprisoned she was denied her medication. It is clear that the Angolan authorities are abusing their penal code to silence peaceful dissent.

You may send a religious card to:

Ana da Silva Miguel (Neth Nahara)
Estabelecimento prisional feminino de Vana
Avenida 11 de Novembro
Rua Nzinga Mbande
Luanda
Angola

Suggested message: a lot of strength Neth. I wish you get out of prison as soon as possible. You were strong for exercising your right to freedom of expression and I wish you to continue expressing yourself without fear.

You could also draw a microphone to represent her passion for singing.

.....

We have another five cases from Turkey, Belarus, Canada, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, none of whom wish religious cards. The people featured in previous campaigns say that the most powerful messages they receive are the personalised, handwritten cards from people around the world. To that end, to express our solidarity, we will be looking for postcards featuring:

Nature, water, land, animals

Red hearts, lipstick (please bring a lipstick to write messages for Maryia in Belarus!)

Dumbbells, fitness equipment, exercise

If you have any specific or general postcards to donate please bring them to church on **Sunday 8 December** so we can sort them and add the address labels.

Some good news! You may remember from 2022 **Sasha Skochilenko** (some of us drew cats on her cards) jailed for replacing price tags in shops with information about Russia's invasion of Ukraine. She was freed in an historic prisoner swap in August this year. "I want to say thank you to Amnesty International. It's hard to put my gratitude into words, because, to a certain extent, I am here thanks to you." Aleksandra Skochilenko

From last year's campaign you may also remember **Rita Karasartova** in Kyrgyzstan who was arrested with 26 others for opposing an agreement affecting a freshwater reservoir. Charged with attempting to 'violently overthrow the government' with a possible 15-year sentence. On 14 June this year, Rita and 21 other defendants were acquitted. "Your timely actions, these letters, petitions, signatures, and the huge number of letters

that went to the court, that went to the prosecutor's office... were very empowering to us all.... I thank you."

Let's do this again on Sunday 15 December.

Derek Wilson

Changes to the Church Family

New	Ellasaid Zoe Woodhouse (By Certificate) Aleksandra Porsin (Adherent)
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Baptisms	Amie Jane Meichan Michael James Pearson
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Left by Certificate of transference:	Alexandra Docherty Cora Docherty
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Church House Chatter

This has been a busy year for the office. It was sad to have to say goodbye to a few long-standing Hall Renters but we have welcomed some new faces and hope that they too may end up as regular bookers. I have met some really pleasant and interesting people when they have come in to look around the premises and pick up keys.

We've been really lucky to have hosted quite a variety of concerts in the Church this year – mostly due to the hard work of Neil Price - but a couple of groups have approached us directly and this has been welcome.

We have also been busy with the usual maintenance required to make sure that boilers are working efficiently, electrical supply and electrical implements are safe, and, of course, there's been a big roof repair this year. Although the future of St Michael's remains uncertain we continue to ensure that the building remains safe and in good condition.

Remembrance Sunday got me thinking and one evening I decided to surf the internet for interesting local photographs. I came across this one dated 30 September 1938. The men were digging a 125 yard long trench for a public air raid (Anderson) shelter. You will recognise this as being Harrison Park with Polwarth Church in the background. The photograph helped give me confidence that, whatever happens in this unpredictable world,

Church buildings will remain standing tall and proud as a symbol of hope and comfort.



Added by [Capital Collections](#) Attributed to: L P Bain

I'd like to add my thanks to those for the long-standing Elders who have been consistently kind enough to help me respond to some of the more 'random' queries that come my way. Enjoy your well-deserved celebrations.

Let's hope that this cold spell moves through quickly - I have been surfing the net again – this time for thermal gloves/scarves and electric blankets ... Who could not love Scotland in Winter.

Please accept my very best wishes for a Merry Christmas and, as always, let's look forward to a Healthy and Happy New Year.

Fiona Lunn, Editor



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JINGLE BELLS



St Michael's Parish Church



Saturday Morning Coffee

During

Autumn/Winter

On the first Saturday of the
month from

10.30AM to 12 Noon

ALL WELCOME