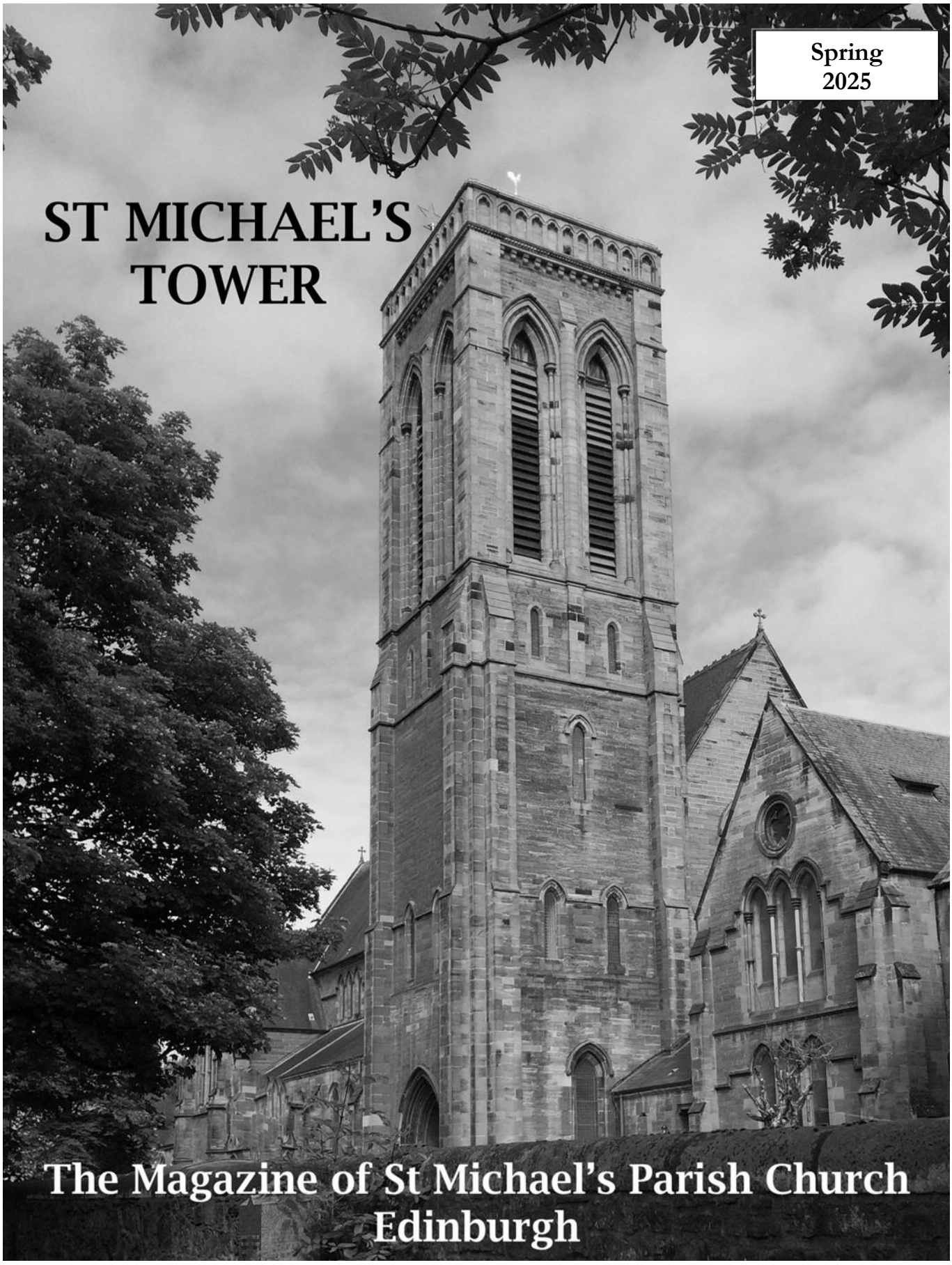

Spring
2025

ST MICHAEL'S TOWER

The Magazine of St Michael's Parish Church Edinburgh

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Dear Members and Friends of St Michael's

Minister's Reflection

A woman dreamt she walked into a brand-new shop in the marketplace and, to her surprise, found God behind the counter. 'What do you sell here?' she asked. 'Everything your heart desires', said God. Hardly daring to believe what she was hearing the woman decided to ask for the best things a human could wish for. 'I want peace of mind and love and happiness and wisdom and freedom from fear' she said. Then, as an afterthought, she added 'Not just for me. For everyone on earth'. God smiled. 'I think you've got me wrong, my dear' he said. 'We don't sell fruits here. Only seeds.'

Gardeners among you will be getting ready to buy seeds and soon sow them in trays ready for germination on windowsills or greenhouses. It is just wonderful what some of you can achieve starting from small seeds and a wee bit of dirt and soil. What pleasure to walk past gardens bursting with colour and watching bees and all kinds of insect and bird life living amongst it later in the year.

The sore back and knees, the patience needed to prick out seedlings, the worry about cold or heat, wind or weather are little thought of by those passing by but well-known to all gardeners.

And yet the rewards are sheer beauty refreshing the soul, fruits and vegetables to harvest and to enjoy yourselves and with others. And soon all the discomfort and effort is forgotten in the sheer pleasure of it.

Jesus often used the ordinary tasks of farming and gardening to explain growing and tending growth in our lives. God the great gardener wants to plant seeds of love and wisdom in our hearts and minds which will lead to the beauty of lives well-lived, lived kindly and generously with each other.

Yet, in our times, there is more interest in 'things' and dazzling, flashy experiences rather than the contentment of the ordinary. How can we get people nowadays interested in God's seeds of peace, love and happiness?

For a while 'fast food' was all the rage. And then people began to notice that with the speed of production, the shortcuts and substitutes involved and the additives and E-numbers (all safe of course!) we lose a lot of flavour and textures, variety of dishes and techniques. And so 'slow food' was rediscovered to be far preferable.

As our society is discovering that not everything coming from the internet and social media is good and true, that too much use of all our computer screens (whatever size) shall diminish our ability to think for ourselves, find solutions and make connections with each other and the real world then maybe, just maybe, we shall discover/rediscover that 'slow living' is good for us – more wholesome and full of flavor like 'slow food'.

So, take time this Spring to enjoy God's creation on your walks in parks and gardens. Take time in prayer and reflection to let God's seeds germinate and take root in your heart and soul. Take time this Spring for God's springtime in Lent, when we will reflect on Jesus' journey to the Cross, his suffering and death which, astonishingly, was not the end of it all but a whole new beginning.

As the poet and environmentalist, Gideon Heugh, wrote:

Devastating Beauty

On Friday, my hope died.
The sky wept itself dark
the ground broke apart
and all creation cried
for the bloodied innocence
hammered into a tree.

There were whispers
of a torn curtain
but they didn't reach my ears
or mend my mangled heart
or stem the bitter tears
as we took
the body
down.

On Saturday we grieved,
hiding from the troops
whom we once believed
would be overthrown
by the carpenter's boy,
who had preached
and fed and healed
and was now dead.

…

But then on Sunday –
the devastating beauty
of that Sunday –
when time and space
were blown out of shape
and angels wrapped in electric grace
rolled the impossible away,

he is not here
they proclaimed
for glory had risen
our failings were forgiven
and the rules of life and death
were rewritten
as an empty tomb declared:
Love is alive.

Lent Study 2025 – 'Christ and the Chocolaterie'

Please join us this year to think about something irresistible – for me anyway: chocolate! If you have the film '*Chocolat'* please watch it again and come prepared to think with others about the topics of life and our faith that it raises.

There are five meetings, each beginning at 7.30pm. Those of you who have no chance to watch the film at home or in the cinema beforehand may want to come to our Film Club on Sunday 2 March to watch it.

The dates of the meetings are:

1 Tuesday 11 March*
2 Wednesday 19 March (this shall take place in the Sanctuary)
3 Tuesday 25 March*
4 Wednesday 2 April
5 Tuesday 8 April*

*** Please note that there is a Pilates Class in the Hall each Tuesday until 7pm so try not to arrive too early for the meeting.**

'Christ and the Chocolaterie' takes events from the film and relates them to key Bible messages of Lent. Recognising Lent as a chance to embrace change and renewal the meditations of Hilary Brand, the author, lead into group discussion around the daily challenge of growing, giving and 'getting real' with life.

Lent Appeal – Children's Hospices Around Scotland (CHAS)

Every year during Lent we collect for a charity, alternating a local one with one abroad. This year we are hoping you will support us in our Lent Appeal for Children's Hospices Around Scotland ('CHAS').

CHAS is a children's charity providing unwavering care for children who may die young and for their families. They offer personalised care in hospice, hospital and home with care and compassion and try to make it possible for them to have the freedom to be themselves, play outside, laugh, sparkle, smile and have treasured moments of joy.

CHAS is also to hand when needed most – in the really tough days, at end of life and after a child has died to make sure that no-one has to face the death of their child alone.

It supports children and families in life, death and beyond, from the moment they learn the devastating news that their child is seriously ill and may die young.

It helps families to live well given the complexity and uncertainty of medical treatments and outcomes. And they are there to help families say a meaningful goodbye and to cope with their grief.

Please be generous in your support for our Lent appeal for CHAS. You can give any donation in a marked envelope to our Treasurer, Moira Gray, or bring it to Church and place it in the Collection Box.

Lent and Easter Services Diary – God's Spring Time

Wednesday 5 March	Ash Wednesday
Friday 7 March	World Day of Prayer Service, St Michael's at 2pm We welcome many other congregations to pray with women from the Cook Islands
Sunday 6 April	Annual Stated Meeting after the Service
Sunday 13 April	Palm Sunday
HOLY WEEK	
Thursday 17 April	Maundy Thursday Supper with all 4 Churches in Barclay Viewforth or Craiglockhart Church (tbc)
Friday 18 April	Good Friday Tenebrae Service at 7.30pm
Sunday 20 April	Easter Sunday 7am Garden Communion followed by breakfast in the Church Hall 11am Easter Communion

Name for the new congregation

As the number of worshippers within the Church of Scotland continues to decline congregations all over the country are being forced to unite.

St Michael's congregation is to unite with those of Barclay Viewforth, Polwarth and Craiglockhart. In preparation the Implementation Team, with representatives from all four congregations, has facilitated finding a new name for the united Parish. This new name shall not impact on the current names of each building but shall instead be the name of the new combined Parish unit.

After asking for suggestions from all four congregations, sifting through the responses, putting these to a vote and then receiving subsequent approval of the four Sessions we can now reveal that the new name is proposed as:

Edinburgh: Merchiston and Canalside Church of Scotland

This proposal shall now go to the Legal Department of the Church for approval and, finally, shall be voted on by the Sessions and all members of the four congregations as part of the 'Basis of Union' document. All being well this may well happen during the second half of this year.

4 Churches Conversations at St John's, Oxgangs

On Saturday 17 January 17 attendees from St Michael's congregation met with others from the three congregations we are to unite with to share what we each treasure about our worship and our work as individual congregations.

David Clarkson, Minister of Barclay Viewforth, wrote an excellent summary of the morning. I thought it might help us all to read this and understand better what is happening.

Four church conversation update

Thank you to everyone who came to the four churches event last Saturday. We had over 100 adults and seven children which was amazing . Each congregation was represented, and it was good to hear how people are feeling about the union and what should happen as we move forward. In the circumstances we face it is understandable that people have questions and feel unsettled or angry, however, there was a generally positive response on the day. There are many similarities in our congregations e.g. all of us support organisations like Bethany Christian Trust, Fresh Start and the foodbank and that will continue. Of course, there were difficult questions, some of which have no answer yet, and some things were stated as 'facts' which are simply not true, or not yet agreed. Every congregation will find that there are changes. One congregation will have significantly more change than the others due to the loss of a building, but things will not be the same anywhere. The new Kirk Session will have to decide on where and when public worship will take place – and it may not be 10.30 or 11 am on Sunday morning in every building – even these basic things have still to be worked through and agreed.

Each Kirk Session (and the congregation of St Michael's) has agreed the new name to be Edinburgh: Merchiston and Canalside and this will be added to the proposed Basis of Union. However, that still has to be agreed by Presbytery, and central committees, before going to a vote of each congregation. We are waiting for a response from the panel which is reviewing Presbytery's decision that St Michael's building should be disposed of. Once we have a final decision on that we can move forward. When the time to vote arrives, each congregation will vote on the Basis of Union, then the Basis of Team Ministry (how the team is made up and the responsibilities

of team members), and then for Gordon Kennedy and I as the current ministers of the charges. If every congregation votes yes to each part, we move forward with a date for the union to happen. If a congregation votes no to any part, we will need to meet with Presbytery to work out the next steps. It is a complicated and time-consuming process, and I would ask you to continue to pray for the Implementation Team as they meet to work through it.

David

The Implementation Team has attempted to present the vast amount of information received on the day in the form of Word Clouds. These pictures take the words from the responses and show the most repeated words in larger/thicker text. This, hopefully, gives a snapshot of the responses and indicates the main themes and issues as perceived by the church representatives.

worship
services
different
music
welcoming
prayer
sermon
communion
church
congregation
bible
relevant
others
friendly
styles
people
scripture
evening
minister
teaching
reflection
fellowship
café
praise
service
variety
discussion
times
outside
one
style
building
members
readings
hymns
learning
midweek
morning
easter christmas
uplifting
club
hearing
flexible
processing
community
ways
messy
monthly
walks
guild
organ
sermons
involvement
bereavement
students
participation
word
centred
communal
places
less
across
psalms
christmas
jesus
ministers
hour
formal
food
age
time
week
group
labyrinth
diversity
message
buildings
songs
pub
accessible
small
reading
inclusive
groups
gowned
singing
holiday
traditional
modern
days
good
closer
every
study
types
talents
whatever
growing
christ-centred
participate
pilgrimage
worshipping
approachable
increased
mixture
explanation
quietest
online
outdoors
prayer-talks
non-judgemental
appropriate
touching
thoughtful
consideration
contribution
language
various
stimulating
carols
drama
witness
genuine
world
together
vibrant
young
valued
esp
using
hill
theme
know
follow
like
youth
talent
presence
parents
vibrancy
everyones
ideas
kids
contemporary
connection
unique
vision
month
inspiring
menu
teams
tired
supported
calendar
type
events
guitar
parish
joyful
meditation
equals
staff
blended
new
outdoor
quarterly
tending
ability
meeting
band
meal
warmth
help
structure
canal
craigdackhart
housegroupscongregation
communication
prayerpoints
blackford
sifting
rotate
jam
abuse
life
satisfy
needs
somewhere
liturgy
easter
extreme
faith
child
involve
views
just
dads
concerns
strengthen
prayers
appearance
content
may
focus
special
discussions
enjoyable
dramatized
quiet
afternoon
travel
spirituality
dementia
attend
worshippers
sometimes
contribute
gathered
choirs
include
outreach
lectionary
exciting
childrens
participative
available
invited
selectivequestions
attendance
worship
sunday
meals
groups opportunities prayer
pattern
talks/all
relevance
frequent
difference
symbols
space
meets
change
chill
guide
individualhearing
sensitivity
theme
realistic
conversation
lament
soul
poetry
choir
boat
interactive
lighting
inserting
approaches
speakers
inviting
passage/different
reflection
encourage
sketches
eges
tired
energy
elements
calendar
events
parish
joyful
meditation
equals
staff
blended

Buildings Appeal

NEWS: Our Appeal has been rejected:

Earlier on in 2024, Edinburgh and West Lothian Presbytery decided to categorise St Michael's Church building as 'B'. This means it is to be '***released'***, most likely sold, at the end of 2026. This also means that the other three church buildings of the future united charge are classed as 'A' – ***to be retained***. They shall be able to invest in their buildings, undertake repairs and upgrade as required. Expenditure by St Michael's is now limited to ensuring that the building is kept wind and watertight and in good condition for a sale.

The members of our active congregation and session were very upset at this decision. Session decided to object and launched an appeal. Church law did not allow us to appeal the decision, only the process by which the decision was reached.

We submitted papers along with our reasoning behind the objection. Presbytery too had to submit further documentation. All this was then sent on to a panel of three in another Presbytery. They had three months in which to reply and have now come back to us rejecting our appeal. By church law we can now do no more for our building.

What are we to do now as a congregation, as people and as a family of faith? Walk on in faith.

Let us co-operate as best we can with the other three congregations to prepare for the union of the four congregations. We have already decided that this new congregation shall likely be called '*Edinburgh: Merchiston and Canalside, Church of Scotland*'.

Which of the three remaining buildings shall be used for regular worship and what they may be called will have to be decided in the future.

All members and adherents shall be allowed to vote for or against the union and for or against the two ministers continuing. David Clarkson and Gordon Kennedy, whose charges are full tenure charges, will be the ministers continuing should they agree to this increased workload and new calling.

The voting process may happen at some point in late May. There is a joint service of all four congregations planned on Sunday 11 May in Polwarth Church and this shall be followed by a picnic in their gardens.

Change for us shall be great and is unavoidable. But the other three congregations, and indeed all the Church of Scotland, are facing great change. There are just not enough younger people coming forward to keep all congregations going. This is just the start and we at St Michael's feel the changes most acutely and early on.

Martin Luther, the great 16th century church reformer, was once asked 'What would you do if you knew the end of the world was coming tomorrow?' Martin Luther answered 'I would go out today to plant an apple tree!'

The shape of our church may change greatly. But God loves us and wants to sustain us throughout it all.

So, hold on to your faith, in that love which wants to bring about life to the full. Take the seeds of God's love and plant them in any way you can.

Annual Stated Meeting 2025

On **Sunday 6 April 2025** we will meet after the service over a cup of coffee in the Hall to hold our Annual Stated Meeting (ASM). In the past this was an occasion for many to go home as quickly as possible in case they were 'nabbed' for a job on a Committee. This will not happen, worry not!

However, given the times we are living through of Presbytery Planning, the plans regarding a union with three other congregations and the 'release' of our building, this year's ASM will be an opportunity to get updates, ask questions and voice your opinions about the future of our congregation.

So, please make time to come to this year's ASM if at all possible. Many thanks.

Thank you – From Gifts for Prisoners' Children

We received this lovely letter from Colin O'Flaherty who co-ordinated the Christmas Gifts again this year.

Dearest Friends,

I hope you and yours had a wonderful Christmas and New Year.

Thank you, for your support for the Edinburgh prison Christmas gift collection.

Your kindness and generosity made sure that two hundred and twenty-three children had Christmas presents to open on Christmas morning.

The gifts were given out at the six Christmas parties organised between the family contact officers and the Barnardo's staff from the visitor's centre. The Christmas parties took place in the visit room in the prison allowing the children's parent or guardian to take part. Gifts were also given out directly from the visitors, collected by the parent or guardian of the children.

The number of children that received gifts was down on last year's wonderful achievement. This was because the number of children that passed through the visitor's centre was down on last year. We achieved our aim, which is to ensure that every child that visited the visitors centre received Christmas presents.

We did receive some media interest the Scotsman and the BBC did an article about the gift collection. The Justice Minister Angela Constance when she heard about the gift collection, took time out of her schedule to visit the visitors' centre and helped with wrapping of some of the gifts.

My thanks as always go to you. Without your support the Edinburgh prison Christmas gift collection have stopped a long time ago.

My thanks also go to the Barnardo's staff in the visitors' centre Shona, Patrizia and Ann all played an important part in making it a success.

My thanks also go to the senior managers of the prison for supporting me and allowing me to organise the gift collection.

I am already looking forward to this year's 2025 Christmas gift collection. It will be the fortieth year in a row that the gift collection started by Rev John Murie will have taken place.

Thank you again.

Colin

Thank you – From Poppy Scotland

We also received a thank you from the Scottish Poppy Appeal Organiser as noted below.

Thank you for your generous donation of £222.65 which was received with thanks in January 2025. We are so very grateful for your support. Our life changing work would simply not be possible without the ongoing generosity and support of people and organisations in Scotland. On behalf of all those who will benefit from our services and care, thank you for continuing to support Poppyscotland and the Scottish Poppy Appeal. Your donation will continue to play a vital role in supporting our Armed Forces community living in Scotland.
Thank you!
Kindest Regards
Jessica Clarke
Scottish Poppy Appeal Organiser (East of Scotland)

Blessings to all of you and yours.

Andrea, Your minister at St Michael's Church

First Saturday of the Month Winter Coffee Mornings

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

Saturdays: 1 March and 5 April 2025

World Day of Prayer (WDP)

This is a reminder that the WDP Service is being held in St Michael's on **Friday 7 March 2025 at 2pm**. The Winter Tower gave more information on this service which has been prepared by the Christian women of the Cook Islands with the theme 'I made you Wonderful' taken from Psalm 139.

Members from St Michael's, St Cuthbert's RC Church, Gorgie and Palmerston Place Church, St Martin of Tours Scottish Episcopal and St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral are leading the service and it would be great to have a good attendance to support those taking active parts. It is hoped that many from city centre churches will attend but this service is open to all.

Tea/coffee will be served in the hall after the Service along with cakes with a coconut theme - given it's the fruit of the South Sea Islands! St Michael's held a fun craft afternoon to make flowers and decide on the decoration for the Church. Flowers, especially Gardenias, are a huge part of Island life as are shells, quilting and canoes.

The main issue is to ensure a good attendance at this ecumenical Service, all welcome – Friday 7 March at 2pm. In the words of the Cook Islanders – Kia Orana – May you live long, May you live well, May you shine like the sun, May you dance with the waves.

Such a good greeting in the midst of our long cold winter.

Fay Anderson

Thank you from Stuart Montgomery, St Michael's Organist

I was so moved at the beautiful service which you gave me for my 32nd anniversary, on Sunday the 19th of January. Margaret Forrester's address was a lovely surprise, and quite wonderful (there were several things I didn't know about my predecessors!) and you were all so kind, in praise. I have been truly blessed by having three of the best and nicest ministers I could ever have dreamed of: Margaret, James Aitken and our dear Andrea.

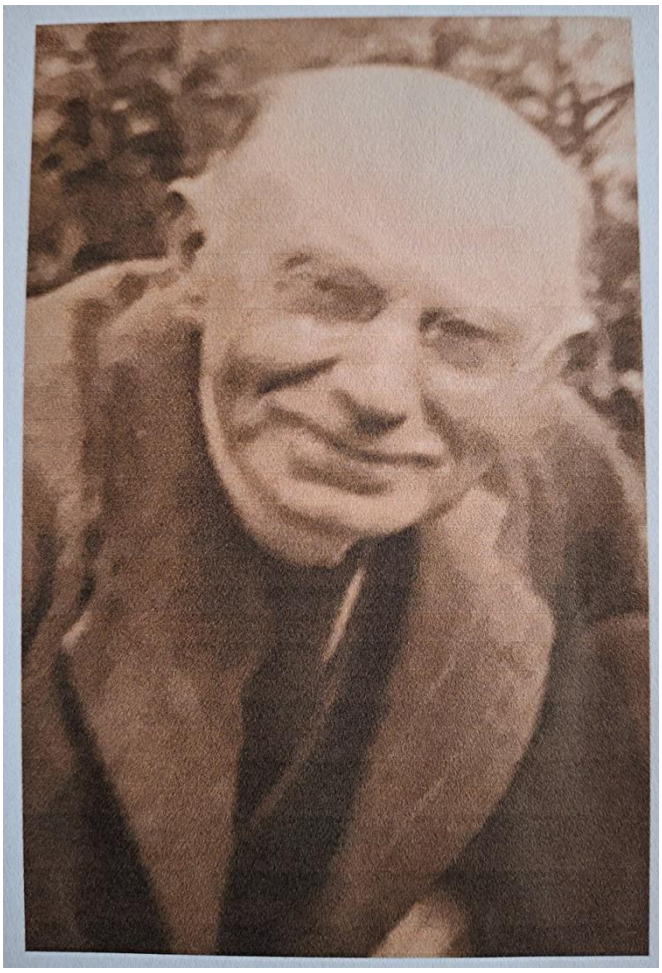
The luncheon afterwards was magnificent and completely delicious. St Michael's at its best, as usual. Our guests really felt at home, and several of them commented on the warmth and affection they experienced, during the service and afterwards in the hall. It was especially nice to have Marjorie Crozier, the grand-daughter of David Paterson, from 1917 to 1949;

she told us that she was baptised in St Michael's in the 1940s, and her grandfather played for the service.

The enormous bottle of Highland Park malt whisky was a hugely generous gift and I am delighting in consuming it from the silver (engraved) quaich you gave me in 2017 for my 25th anniversary. Thank you so much.

For so many people St Michael's is a 'second home' and we really are a special family; that was the sentiment I picked up when I deputised in the late 1980s; I always felt St Michael's was unique and different from everywhere else, and the feeling has never gone away – I think we are more special together now, more than ever.

With every good wish
Stuart



David Paterson, St Michael's organist from 1917 to 1949

St Michael's Film Club 2025

March

We've swapped films around from our original programme so that we can use '***Chocolat'*** to prepare for the Lent study classes.

Lent is when, in the film, Vianne, played deliciously by Juliet Binoche, opens a chocolate shop in a small and rather repressed French village. The mayor, played by Alfred Molina, is to say the least, not impressed. What ensues is a battle of wills and an entertaining presentation of village life with all its varied beliefs, fears, foibles and humanity. It's a beautiful film to see and hear (soundtrack by Rachel Portman with Ellington, Rheinhardt and Satie) and a starry cast including Johnny Depp and Judi Dench. Watch the film and sign up for Andrea's class in Lent!

Sunday 2 March at 7.00pm.

April

'*The Windermere Children'* is a 2020 British/German production telling the story of a group of young survivors of the Holocaust brought to a camp of huts in the Lake District in 1945. Part of a wider scheme which aimed to rehabilitate some 700 young people, it is a very moving tale of individuals and a community learning and healing from the inhumanity of their lives in the death camps of Nazi Europe.

The young people are played by actors from Poland giving the film an immediate authenticity. In October 2020, *The Windermere Children* won the Best European TV Movie of the Year prize at Prix Europa. A jury member commented 'This story gives hope, told with a twinkle in the eye, making the children's stories, their traumas and their losses manageable for the viewer.'

We screen the film on Sunday 6 April at 7.00pm.

May

The season ends with '**The Young Woman and the Sea'** (USA 2024) the uplifting life of Gertrude Ederle, champion swimmer, the first woman to successfully swim the English Channel, in 1926.

Sunday 4 May at 7.00pm

Derek Wilson

Easter Egg Collection 2025

Alex Anderson has very kindly offered to collect any Easter Egg donations again this year and to deliver them to the Sick Kids and to the Barnardo's Visitor Centre at Edinburgh Prison where they will be handed out to visiting children.

To this end it would be really appreciated if you could pop an extra Easter Egg in your shopping basket and bring this along to the Church by **Sunday 13 April** so deliveries can be made in good time for Easter Sunday.

Fresh Start

Fresh Start say thank you for your support over the Christmas period of 2024.

Their Christmas campaigns could not have happened without the incredible generosity of their volunteers, donors and supporters like you. Together we've made a huge difference for individuals and families in their community.

Festive Food Hampers

With your help from donations of festive food items they delivered 190 hampers filled with essential items and Christmas treats, ensuring families could enjoy a festive meal over the holidays.

Cookers for Christmas

Through donations, and their Just Giving page, Cookers for Christmas has reached almost £6.5k which will be used to purchase white goods such as cookers, fridge freezers and washing machines to those in need, enabling them to prepare warm, home-cooked meals and wash clothes at home – not just for Christmas but beyond.

Your support has truly transformed lives and reminded us all of the power of community. As we step in to 2025 Fresh Start looks forward to continuing the journey with you. Thank you for believing in Fresh Start's mission and making all of this possible.

Thank you again for all your ongoing support. If you would like further information on their services, or would like to volunteer, please contact them on admin@freshstartweb.org.uk

On Sunday 12 January, Songs of Praise came to Edinburgh and featured support given to homelessness. This included a snippet about Fresh Start and is available on BBC iPlayer if you wish to watch it.

As ever if you have items you would like to donate to Fresh Start and need us to collect them from you then please get in touch on 0131 441 1328.

Otherwise please bring them to the Church vestibule as usual.

Many, many thanks.

Alasdair and Babs Webster

Stuart Montgomery and Music in St. Michael's

Celebrating thirty-two years of music-making in St. Michael's gave me some food for thought, apropos what we have achieved together in music, during these past decades.

At my anniversary service, on Sunday the 19th of January, which equalled David Paterson's thirty-two years between 1917 and 1949, Margaret Forrester reported, so eloquently, so diplomatically, about the various organists and musical directors during her twenty-two year reign as minister of our church. I listened, and I learned much about my predecessors!

Margaret made reference to St. Michael's not having a choir for several years (now it's my turn to be diplomatic!), and when I was interviewed for the job (incidentally in the church kitchen), I asked about the choir. I can still remember the shuffling of feet, notably from George McArthur, Jean Yeoman and a few others, quite clearly. I had asked something that nobody wanted to talk about. But then someone did say "oh, well your predecessor didn't want us". To which I replied, "what nonsense, we shall start rehearsals immediately".

That was in January 1993, and for twenty years thereafter, the St. Michael's Choir performed anthems, oh on around thirty weeks every year. For many years, the choir was renowned and had won competitions, for which there are certificates to behold. There were about fourteen of us and we worked hard. I always chose pieces that would be appealing to the congregation, and not too demanding for the choir. We learned a myriad of repertoire, ranging from unaccompanied anthems by Purcell, Wesley, Goss, Bach and others to modern arrangements by Bell, Kendrick and more which I created; writing vocal parts, incorporating 'samba band' type percussion instruments, clapping and all kinds of visual methods which had even the most seriously minded in the pews smiling!

Sadly, many choir members became less able, and died. The choir ceased around twelve years ago, and we then created two *Music for Reflection*

slots for each service; these would be filled mainly by instrumentalists and singers coming in, but in recent years I have played two pieces on the piano. It has always been my intention to perform music that will be appealing, as well as feeling reflective and appropriate. St. Michael's loves film music and anything from the shows always goes down a treat. I have played many modern theme arrangements which originated as classical compositions, and on the occasions when I play the famous Polovtsian dance, by Borodin, I am usually met with smiles from several corners saying "Oh how I love *Stranger in Paradise*". Our congregation has taught me many things, but on one occasion I almost caught them out by playing my own arrangement of a popular Rod Stewart song. I had decided that the lyrics of the song were quite unsuitable for a church service, and so I played what is a rock number, but as a cradle song, slow and reflective — I also changed its name, from *Maggie May* to *Rose of Peace*. I swear I could have heard tapping on mobile telephones as people tried to look up the best known Rod Stewart songs….a few worked it out, and we all laughed.

It was joyous when our choir teamed up with Longniddry Church, in East Lothian, with minister Robin Hill inviting us to take part in a Songs of Praise with their choir. And we did the same at Gladsmuir Kirk, in a special evening service.

But the nicest occasion was when a bridal couple asked specifically for our choir to sing a couple of anthems at their wedding. One of the pieces we did was my own arrangement of 'It's me, It's me oh Lord, standing in the need of Prayer'; they loved it and we performed with great aplomb. The couple gave us £200, and I decided we would all go for Afternoon Tea, thereafter, at the Sheraton Hotel, and this was just super.

During James Aitken's ministry I introduced a new recital series called St. Michael's at Six. This would comprise a concert of around 60 minutes, once a month, on Sundays. We had eleven each year for six years. I always wanted to learn about music administration, and this was a big task. We had every style of music, everything. From metallic-pop to Country and Western, to 'Dark Matter', Schubert lieder recitals, to choirs, to string ensembles, to organ recitals, piano recitals, quartets, to harp and clarsach soirees with poetry, and also concerts for brass and percussion. Most of the performers were local, and we gave the opportunity for people to come and perform in a formal atmosphere. Admission was by donation, and hundreds of people came to St. Michael's for the first time. We publicised each concert, recording them on Compact Disc, and we opened our doors wide — we became a proper music venue.

In recent years, St. Michael's runs concerts during the Edinburgh Festival, and Neil Price has masterminded a great series of recitals with performers from all over the UK, and beyond. There really is a most special atmosphere during these weeks, and I love to see the railings outside covered in concert posters, promoting each one day after day, in August. Neil has a great love for organ music and I enjoy when he, and any of the congregation come up to the organ, and sit alongside to watch me playing. In the last two or three years, Neil has been giving me gifts of new and wonderful organ pieces, expanding my repertoire nicely. Each one has been a treat to learn and perform, in services and recitals.

Somebody asked me recently was there a particular reason I have stayed at St. Michael's for so long? I have never had any doubts about this. We have a beautiful church, which is actually a little cathedral. We have the most awesome acoustics (I used to joke with the choir when they would perform unaccompanied, with me conducting at the front, that when there were difficulties with tuning and articulation not to worry too much….the fine acoustics would cover up any problems!). St. Michael's is also blessed with a beautiful organ and, since 2000, a fine grand piano.

It has always been a pleasure to have my music for the services publicised, on our website, in and around the church, and on the Order of Service each Sunday. I create 'music menus' for the month ahead and this keeps me on my toes — when you do this you have to practise to make sure everything is of a high standard. After all, it's going on to Youtube so it needs to be good!

But really, it's the people of St. Michael's who are the most special. In the 1980s, I enjoyed deputising in many churches in and around Edinburgh, often for more than 40 weeks in the year. Occasionally, I would be invited to stand-in at St. Michael's, and I always felt there was something different here. I have no hesitation in saying I have never encountered a nicer, warmer group of people anywhere. And that hasn't changed.

We are a very special 'family', and I have been honoured and privileged to belong to St. Michael's for thirty-two years.

My celebratory service was magnificent, for members and guests alike. I felt thoroughly humbled and spoiled at the words, gifts, cards and messages, and the tremendous luncheon in the hall afterwards.

Thank-you to everyone, you are all so very dear to me.

Leading the World ..

The following quote seems just as applicable to some of our World Leaders now as much as those who resisted Adolf Hitler over 80 years ago.

Stupidity is worse than malice. Some leaders have no morality, no sense of history, will flaunt international law … and worse, due to stupidity and greed. The great theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who resisted Hitler, wrote this in the 1940s:

'Stupidity is a more dangerous enemy of the good than malice. One may protest against evil; it can be exposed and, if need be, prevented by the use of force. Evil always carries within itself the germ of its own subversion in that it leaves behind, in human beings at least, a sense of unease. Against stupidity we are defenceless. Neither protest nor the use of force accomplish anything here; reason falls on deaf ears; facts that contradict one's prejudgement simply need not be believed – in such moments the stupid person even becomes critical – and when facts are irrefutable they are just pushed aside as inconsequential, as incidental. In all this the stupid person, in contrast to the malicious one, is utterly self-satisfied and, being easily irritated, becomes dangerous by going on the attack. For that reason, greater caution is called for when dealing with a stupid person than with a malicious one. Never again will we try to persuade the stupid person with reasons, for it is senseless and dangerous.'

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison

Allan Gordon

Who Am I

I can be still
I can run wild
You pay my bill
I'll name your child

I'll stroke your face
Then flee from you
You say a Grace
And bless me too

I soothe your pain
I drown your sorrow
With me you gain
A new tomorrow

I can be friend
I can be foe
Your life will end
When I do go

I'm in your home
I'm in the street
You make me boil
You make me sweet

You ask me why
I run so fast
Because you die
If I don't last

I'm not your son
I'm not your daughter
I'm never done
I am pure water

Ruth Andrews

St Michael's Friendship Club

Edinburgh is a city that can boast about having many lovely parks and gardens which are second to none; therefore, it was with sad hearts we learned about the devastation caused by storm Eowyn on Friday, 24th January.

On February 3rd we invited Shiona Mackie, a representative of the Royal Botanic Gardens, to talk to the Friendship Club about the Garden and she showed films depicting the devastation. Shiona was quite upbeat about the recovery programme and she was enthusiastic about all the new plans, which were already being activated, to reconstruct and not only to make good the damage caused, but to improve the green houses and make visits to the Garden a better experience for visitors.

It is uplifting when a speaker can articulate their enthusiasm in a way that inspires people. Another speaker that came to the club on January 20th, showed us all how to make a medieval coin and club members brave enough to yield a heavy hammer, made a replica of a Medieval Scottish silver penny, which they took home to admire and treasure!

We all share good memories of the Friendship Club. We remembered David Simpson's wonderful talks and the fun afternoons we had when he accompanied his violinist sister, playing lively Scottish music. "Live Music Now" has also given us memorable afternoons of excellent music making. I will never forget how amazing it was to hear the Theorbo played for the first time!

We also owe a debt of gratitude to Juliet Wilson, who told us how cemeteries were havens for wild life and endangered plants, and we remember Pamela Cooper who gave us all a free demonstration of her talents. So many talented people have given their free time to entertain our Friendship Club. Mr. Stuart Montgomery's many memorable Concerts have delighted us every year when he has offered varied and beautifully played music.

The list of contributors to our Friendship Club seems endless and includes the police, who advised us how to avoid scams and we have received valuable information from "CHANGEWORKS" on how to save electricity, very important knowledge for the cold winter months! We now have Spring and Summer to look forward to and whatever happens in the future, Shiona from the Royal Botanic Gardens has shown us how important it is to retain a positive attitude through ever changing times.

Ruth Andrews, President

St Colm's @ St Michael's Guild

The Guild started the first meeting of 2025 hearing about the Renegade Monk and the Runaway Nun. It was, as Andrea had thought, about Martin Luther and his wife Katharina von Bora – the nun he rescued from her nunnery in a fish basket. They married and she bore him six children. Many of us thought that we knew all about Martin Luther and the reformation but it turned out we didn't! The speaker, Kath Hay, brought their story to life with a film showing all the places of interest, lovely German towns with areas still looking as they might have done in the 16th century. Somehow the strict reformer we envisaged enjoyed a happy married home life. Fortunately she shared his ideals.

We recently heard about the new Crossreach project 'Playful Beginnings'. This project, working together with Guild for the next three years, takes the Guild theme, 'let us build a house, to help to lay strong foundation for vulnerable families'. The speaker explained, with the aid of a film, how together we will support families at Sunflower Garden in Edinburgh and Daisy Chain in Glasgow. This is a very worthwhile project as are all of the four new projects planned for the next three years. We are to hear of another project in March 'Operation Hope – Egypt'. Egypt is home to the largest Christian minority in the Middle East with around 10 – 12% of the population professing faith in Jesus. We look forward to hearing of the plans to address discrimination, poverty and lack of education – especially in the more rural areas of Upper Egypt. Other projects being supported by the Guild are the Scottish Bible Society's 'Bibles for Bairns' and 'Build my Church' inspired by the work of the tiny Scottish Charity 'Bear Necessities for Bulgaria'.

Plenty of good work is being done by the Guild and we hope to hear of progress – probably during the Autumn Season.

At the time of writing we are looking forward to our 26 February meeting – 'Eavesdropping on Victoria's Balmoral'. We finish this programme on 9 April with our business meeting but all are welcome to our remaining meetings – 12 March – 'Travels with my Pillow' and 26 March – 'Operation Hope'. Our summer meetings are still to be arranged but, no doubt, shall include an afternoon tea!

The Guild hope is that the coming Spring and the message of Eastertide bring new hope to us all.

Whose we are and Whom we Serve

Fay Anderson, Co-Convener

Amnesty International

Many thanks to all who took part in the Write for Rights campaign before Christmas. In the service on 15 December we heard of the cases we were involved with this time: Mariya Kalesnikava in Belarus; Oqba Hashad, imprisoned in Egypt because of his brother's protests and, in Hungary, a defender of human rights, Professor Korur Fincanci for whom Stuart played a beautiful adaptation of 'Moonlight Sonata', her favourite piece of music. After the service, we signed and sent messages of hope to six different cases across the world.

We also heard of Ana da Silva Miguel, a singer/performer known as Neth Nahara, jailed in Angola for insulting its President and sent her our support. A few weeks ago we were delighted to learn of her release following the Amnesty International campaign.

You may remember a case from 2022 from Cameroon. After more than four years of detention for peacefully protesting, Dorgelesse Nguessan has been released. She can now join her loved ones after more than four years wrongly imprisoned solely for peacefully exercising her human rights.

We sent nearly 200 cards to brave men and women threatened or imprisoned for defending human rights. Even when there is no immediate change of mind from those in authority, they are made aware of international concern. Thanks again to all who wrote the cards and contributed.

Derek Wilson

Changes to the Church Family

New Adherents

Michelle Mapp
Estimated Umana
Olukwu N Waoriseh
Began Chris Babu

Deaths

Ian Fraser (December 2024)
Robert (Bob) Donald (January 2025)
Edward Gausden (January 2025)
John Lyall (January 2025)
David Cross (January 2025)
Alexander (Alex) Reid (January 2025)

Church House Chatter

I was listening to John Lennon's 'Beautiful Boy (Darling Boy') the other evening and the line – though not attributed to John himself – '*Life is what happens when you're busy making other plans*' resonated with my recent thoughts.

It does feel that too many of us have started off this year with a 'plan' for life and those plans have been, often cruelly, disrupted without warning. It highlights how fragile life is and how little control we actually have over events. But it also highlights the inherent strength of character within us all to be able to cope and to adapt accordingly.

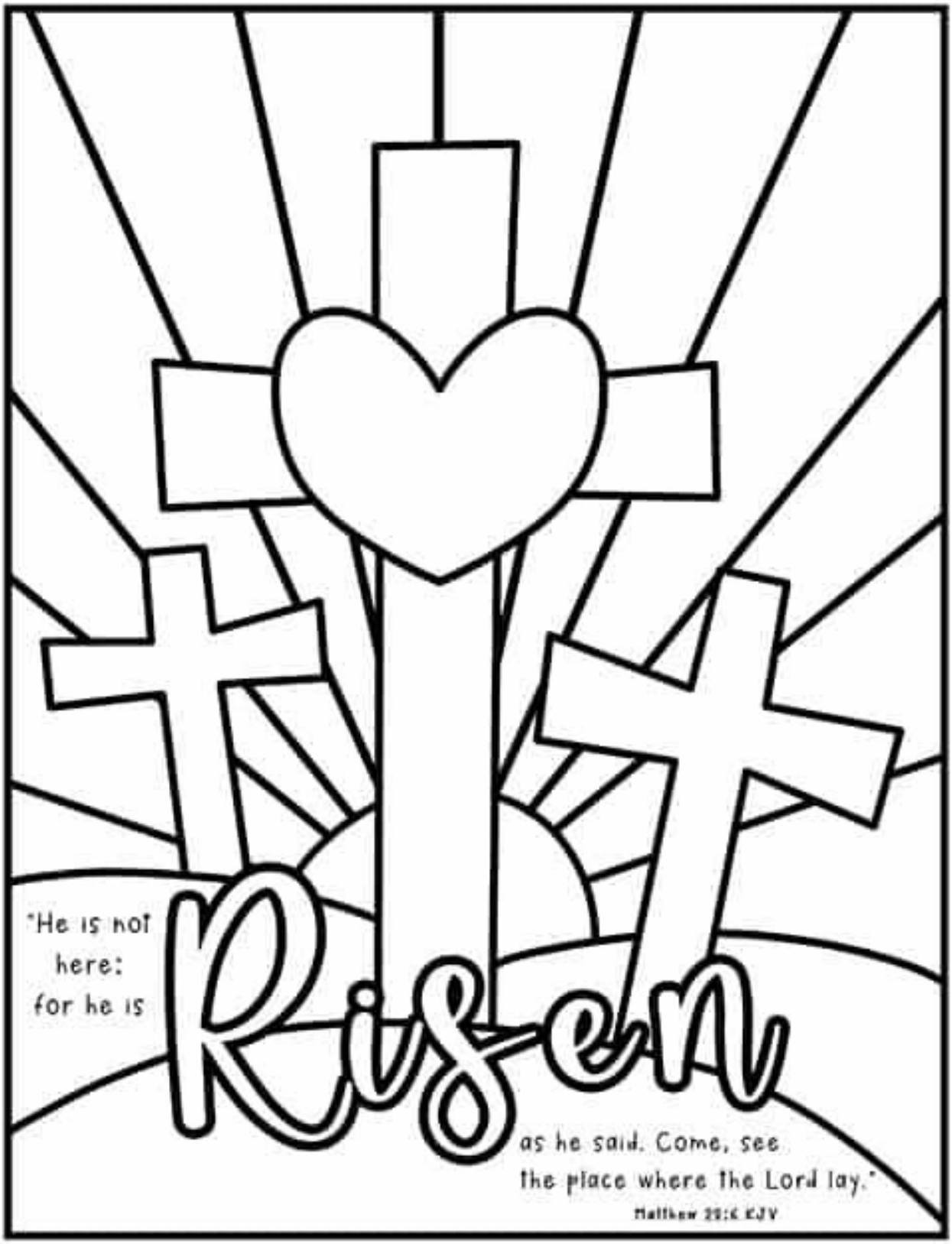
Albert Camus wrote:

'In the depths of winter, I finally learned that within me there lay an invincible summer.'

On a more positive note there are signs of Spring approaching – the snow drops are out in the Church grounds, the days are getting longer and it won't be long before we might be able to sit out in our gardens and local parks – albeit still with a scarf, hat and gloves close by. Not only shall the Spring sunshine make us feel more positive we shall also be topping up our Vitamin D – crucial for strong bones and to boost our immunity.

Happy Easter to you all when it comes.

Fiona Lunn, Editor


"He is not
here:
for he is
Risen
as he said. Come, see
the place where the Lord lay."
Matthew 28:6 KJV

kids activities .com
Spring is here