



CARLOPS CHURCH

In the community, for the community

Newsletter

Volume 16, Number 3; March 2022

Services, March 2022

Services held in church and available via Zoom
Request link from sessionclerk@carlopschurch.org

27 February 10am: Rev Chris Levison
6 March 10am: Rev Dr Tony Foley
13 March 10am: Steven Whalley
20 March 10am: Kevin Scott
27 March 10am: Rev Dr Tony Foley
3 April 10am: Colin Herd

Join us, in the church, or in other activities

We promise you a warm welcome

www.carlopschurch.org



Our Minister

In praise of holes

Is a hole something, or nothing? Looking into a hole, one is often tempted to wonder why they became nothing instead of something. The truth is that holes, although empty, can be full of potential insights – just ask an archaeologist. For example, archaeologists use soil analysis to identify the postholes that marked the boundaries of ancient settlements. Archaeologists know that empty spaces often enable us, not only to project backwards in time, but sometimes forwards in time. In other words, empty holes can contain the answers to the questions of what once was and what might yet be.

The paradox of an empty hole is that absence often points to importance. The poet William Pope.L makes this observation in a poem about holes ...

*Hole theory presupposes
That there is possibility
Even in the face of nothing ...*

The Economist magazine recently carried an article entitled *Religious fervour is migrating into politics*. The article noted that while contemporary society continues to reject the role of religious institutions, it still maintains an innate religious urge. There is, it seems, an inherent yearning in human society for moral certainty and communal identity. The writer's observation reminded me of a quote by the French philosopher Blaise Pascal in his book *Pensées* ...

*There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every human being
which cannot be filled by any created thing,
but only by God, the Creator, made known through Jesus.*

Now *there* is a “hole” to look into and wonder about what once was, and what might yet be.

Peace

Tony Foley

News



Join the Lent conversations on Zoom

Lent will soon be upon us and as a group of churches, we will again be hosting Zoom faith conversations centred around two books (cited below) over a six-to-seven-week period. I would like to take this opportunity to invite you to join in the conversation. Our studies are intended to be grace spaces where you get an opportunity to explore not only the story of the crucifixion but also to talk your own understanding of the Christian faith in an unfiltered open context.

The books are *The Nail* and *The Things he did*, both by Stephen Cottrell. Each includes six stories told in the first person from the perspective of those who were there, in Jerusalem or Calvary, that week of the first Easter. You can find the books on Amazon, direct links immediately below.

The Things he did

https://www.amazon.co.uk/Things-He-Did-Story-Holy/dp/0281076235/ref=sr_l_5?crid=2L7B8OI29VATG&keywords=stephen+cottrell+books&qid=1643737302&s

The Nail

https://www.amazon.co.uk/Nail-Being-part-Passion/dp/0281066353/ref=sr_l_11?crid=2L7B8OI29VATG&keywords=stephen+cottrell+books&qid=1643737750&s

We will be hosting these studies / conversations on separate nights. Each study is built around one of the chapters of a book and will last approximately 45 minutes. If you wish, you are welcome to join us for one session, just to sample what they are like. You can also drop in and out as your schedule allows. Or you can stick around for the “whole nine yards”.

These studies are designed with the hope that they will be of use to you. So why not give it a try. If you are interested, please get in touch with me or your Session Clerk (our contact details are at the end of this issue); we will answer all your questions and queries about times, etc.

Tony Foley

From Carlops Kirk Session 3 February 2022, via Zoom

The Kirk Session welcomed Rev Dr Tony Foley to Carlops Church and to his first meeting as our minister; Session members look forward to working with Tony and benefiting from his guidance. Tony spoke briefly about his philosophy as a minister and his view of linkage. Some key points: encourage expression of talents; serve local needs; work together and help each other; but preserve

the character of the individual churches too. Each church should be supported, not constrained, by being in the linkage. He planned to explore these issues further at a General Kirk Session meeting. See *next article, Ed*

Tony expects to establish a central office for the linkage: *a linkage go-to place*, in his words. This is likely to be in West Linton, where accommodation may be available. He hopes to obtain support in the form of a part-time administrator, who will be independent of existing linkage people, groups and structures; funding and employment arrangements are being explored. These matters have been discussed with and have the support of the linkage Session Clerks.

Session attested to the accuracy of several documents: communion roll; property register; safeguarding register. Session received and approved the annual report and accounts for calendar year 2021, which shows Carlops Church to be in good health and with sound finances. After review by an auditor, the report will be presented to the Stated Annual Meeting; thereafter, it will be available on our website at www.carlopschurch.org/reports-and-procedures/ or from Mary McElroy.

Gill Gold reported on her work to investigate supplementary glazing of the church windows. This could further safeguard and enhance the fabric of the building: reduce heat loss and solar glare; improve energy use; improve natural light in the church; enhance conditions for viewing projected images. Session welcomed the approach and looked forward to specific implementation proposals.

Anna Woolverton reported on the work of the Eco Group and welcomed the emergence of *Sustainable West Linton*, an eco-focussed body whose interests parallel those of the Eco Group; it led recent developments in the Rock Field. Nan Buchan reported that she had obtained the agreement of Judith McLeod (Eco-congregation Scotland) to speak at a face-to-face event in Carlops Church in the spring (assuming it proves possible to host such an event); her theme would be tackling climate change post-COP26. *Sadly, see below for a note on the withdrawal of this event Ed*

From West Tweeddale General Kirk Session

8 February 2022, in Carlops Church and via Zoom

Members of the Kirk Sessions of the six West Tweeddale churches met together as a General Kirk Session for the first time in a blended meeting, attended in-person in Carlops Church and via Zoom; in total, 35 people participated. Rev Dr Tony Foley convened the meeting and with everyone's agreement, used it to explain in broad terms, his ministerial philosophy, and his view of the key roles of a church in its community and of linkage as an organisational construct. This report is not a minute of the meeting, but represents one person's understanding of its principal content.

Linkage

Our linkage may be likened to a garden, each of the six churches being a raised bed. The beds are of different sizes and contain different plants, grown for slightly different purposes, using varied gardening techniques. This is natural and proper. But it is the whole that constitutes the garden; that garden is diminished by the loss of any bed, or by any bed being hindered from growing what it can produce best. The ultimate purpose of any garden or linkage is to produce those flowers, fruit, vegetables and other produce that may thrive in the environment where the garden and its beds are set, and thus nourish that environment and the people who live there.

Working groups

Tony has set up three working groups: *Pastoral care*, *Communication*, *Worship* (which last, he prefers to think of as *Teaching*).

The broad remit of the working groups is to suggest activities and models which may help us establish a clear identity for the linkage as *church in our district*; an identity that shows us to be open, welcoming and supportive; a resource of comfort and assistance for everyone who lives in West Tweeddale, both core congregation and wider community. The groups will try to clarify our key messages and consider how these might be expressed to communicate most effectively with the several sectors of the community. They will seek too, to identify gifts and propose ways of releasing them to serve our communities.

The working groups and future practice in our linkage will not attempt to replace or constrain the current activities of individual churches; these will be respected, encouraged, and sustained. We are thinking primarily *as well*, not *instead*.

Church in community

Tony postulated four elements which together constitute a church's being: governance, mission, theology, worship. He sees Mission as the most important of these. It is the *why*; the others are the *how* and/or the *what*; they should serve mission, not constrain it. Above all, governance should not be allowed (or used) to prevent people from doing the right thing. Being church is primarily a people business. We should organise ourselves for contribution, helping people, and growth, not for control. Culture and attitude should precede fixed policy and structure. Rather than control things "top-down", we should empower able, interested people and teams to pursue activities and targets over the medium- to longer-term, without being expected to seek approval for every step.

Initial informal reactions

Tony asked members to listen and think on this occasion, and to reserve questions for later occasions, when they would have had more time to reflect upon what he said. In informal conversation after the meeting, several people remarked that they were glad that Tony had made this perhaps unusual request and expressed broad satisfaction with the tenor of his views.

Rennie McElroy *Editor*

Proposed Carlops eco meeting withdrawn

Organisers of the proposed face-to-face, cross-linkage eco meeting in Carlops Church, have decided to withdraw the event. Conceived as a follow-up to COP26, with the further aim of helping people from the West Tweeddale churches to get to know each other, the meeting was first scheduled for January, but postponed as omicron spread. Organisers hoped to re-schedule in April, but a recent review of all factors involved indicated cancellation, or at least a second, indefinite postponement.

Carlops Church will surely organise face-to-face events again, but careful analysis and straw polls both suggested that this proposal, which would have involved small discussion groups as well as speakers, was a step too far, too soon. Apologies to those whose hopes were raised, then dashed.

World Day of Prayer

The World Day of Prayer is Friday 4 March 2022. A service will be held in Broughton village hall at 2.30pm, using material composed by the committee of England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The theme of the service will be *I know the plans I have for you*. All are welcome to this international prayer gathering.

The Column



A “Swiftness” of Stoats

During my many years of living in Silverburn I have been fortunate enough to enjoy very occasional sightings of stoats. I think they live under my garden hut, but that is only a guess. Each sighting takes me by surprise; sometimes it is only a glimpse of one flashing across the grass, almost too fast to see, but occasionally it can be a long and thrilling experience.

One dreich dark wintry day, Bob and I watched a stoat, with a fur coat that had turned brilliantly white, progress slowly along the top of the garden wall, onto the wall that borders the field below the house and continue for 150 metres in full view. Its white coat was certainly no camouflage that dark day – in fact it was quite the opposite and made the little animal highly visible to any predators. It must have been longing for snow!

About five years ago, while sitting reading in the conservatory, I became aware of a stoat “playing” round the flowerpots on my patio. After a few minutes it leapt onto the water feature, stood up on its hind legs, giving a wonderful view of its white chest, and peered through the window, looking at me for about twenty seconds. It gave no indication that it was frightened and returned to exploring the flowerpots before speeding away into the bushes. My most recent sighting was of one stoat, or perhaps it was two stoats – I cannot be sure – racing in circles round and round some shrubs. If it was one stoat then I am sure it broke the stoat speed record, but if it were two animals playing chase, I never caught sight of them both together again – the mystery remains!

A previous neighbour had an even more exciting encounter. He watched a stoat trying to climb his garden wall while dragging a dead rabbit with it. A buzzard swooped and seized the rabbit. As the bird soared away with its prize, the stoat hung on to its prey until it was about six feet off the ground, then released its grip and fell back to earth, seemingly unhurt. An amazing experience!

The stoat, *Mustela Erminea*, also called an ermine, especially when its coat has turned white in winter, has a life span of two to five years. Its tail is half the length of its body and ends in a black bushy tip; this distinguishes it from another mustelid, the weasel, which is a bit smaller and has a short stubby tail with no black tip. Stoats can prey on rabbits twice their own size, and also eat rodents and birds. They are vicious if cornered but may themselves be taken by foxes and birds of prey.

Nan Buchan

Diary



Forthcoming events

None scheduled

Contacts

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Cultural and social events:

Position vacant; expressions of interest invited: contact Murray Campbell, Mary McElroy or Rennie McElroy

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Material for next issue

To Rennie McElroy by Monday 21 March 2022