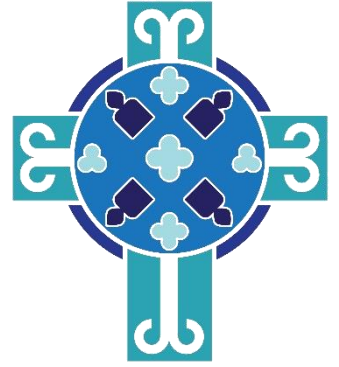


The Magazine of Inverurie West
Parish Church

DECEMBER 2023/JANUARY 2024



ENCOUNTER

For unto us
a child
is born,
to us
a son is given
Isaiah 9:6



Scottish Charity SC016907

Reflection

It is hard, this year, to feel festive with so much conflict in the world. *There is no peace on earth*, as the poet says. But we must have hope and believe that *God is not dead, nor doth He sleep ...* and that peace will prevail.

Christmas Bells

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

I heard the bells on Christmas Day
Their old, familiar carols play,
 And wild and sweet
 The words repeat
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

And thought how, as the day had come,
The belfries of all Christendom
 Had rolled along
 The unbroken song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

Till ringing, singing on its way,
The world revolved from night to day,
 A voice, a chime,
 A chant sublime
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!



...

And in despair I bowed my head;
"There is no peace on earth," I said;
 For hate is strong,
 And mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!"

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
"God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;
 The Wrong shall fail,
 The Right prevail,
With peace on earth, good-will to men."

Reproduced from:

<https://poets.org/poem/christmas-bells>

From the West Manse

As I sit typing I can see a rainbow outside my window. I suspect it will have vanished by the time I finish this letter. This November has been a good month for rainbows, even if that is about the only ‘good’ in a wet and chilly spell which has included at least two named storms, lots of icy wind, and during which my hands have felt permanently cold.



By the time Encounter is published it will be December. You might even be reading this double edition in January, by which time we could have another named storm or two under our belts and ‘*permanently cold*’ may feel like the norm.

Still, at this moment, right now, I can see a rainbow.

Psychologically, rainbows serve some of the same purpose as Christmas lights in the middle of winter. They are a kind of visual promise that the storm, or the dark, is not endless.

For poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (*see Reflection*) church bells, especially on Christmas Day, are an aural symbol of that promise: *‘I heard the bells on Christmas Day their old familiar carols play, and wild and sweet the words repeat of peace on earth, good-will to men!’*

The poem recognises the need for such symbols in a world where *‘hate is strong and mocks the song’*. But it ends with hope, *“God is not dead, nor doth He sleep”*. Part of our rôle as a church is to hold onto the belief that God is not dead. In fact we argue the opposite, that Christ has defeated death itself and there will one day be real and lasting peace on earth. We hold that hope not just for ourselves, but for others. We hold it for all who struggle to see the light.

We do so in a world where it sometimes feels as if storms and darkness - physical and figurative - are increasing, and there are

fewer signs of light, of colour, of calm. Looking at the news online even has a new name, *'doom scrolling'*.

Just as rainbows look particularly vivid and striking against a heavy grey background, and church bells are so clear and sonorous when they break the stillness, so should the faith and light, the peace and hope, the joy and love of Christmas be especially vivid in challenging times.

None of this makes Christmas easy. For many, it is a time of loneliness, painful absences, financial pressure and stressed relationships.

But it was dark in the stable too. As dark as Bethlehem will be this year, with the decision not to hang any Christmas lights.

I hope and pray that by the time Christmas rolls around there will be peace in Israel/Palestine. I hope and pray too that there will be peace in Ukraine. I pray that everywhere a peace as *'wild and sweet'* as Longfellow describes will break out.

In the meantime I hold onto the light, the radiant colour, the ringing cry of Christ born into a world of darkness. The promise of peace made flesh and blood.

"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light ... For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulder. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."
(Isaiah 9: 2, 6)

Meanwhile, as I expected, the rainbow has gone. But, unexpectedly, the sky is blue. It may not last, but I am grateful for the reminder that the light always returns.

Christ's blessing be with you all in this season of darkness and light.

Rhona



WEST CHURCH GUILD

We were **'By Ourselves'** for our November meeting when we focussed on remembrance and remembering. Perhaps most poignant was a clip from the Guild annual gathering when we heard Professor Jason Leitch speak **about 'Hope in the Time of Pandemic'**. This was balanced with a poem by Max Boyce remembering the time of the pandemic when **"Only the tide went out."** We shared memories and remembrances and fellowship - a



time to remember. Our final meeting of the year will be at **2 pm on Monday, 11th December** when we will share in a Christmas celebration with cheese and wine – amongst other goodies. **On Monday 8th**

January next year's meetings will begin with our annual quiz with Larry and Liz Young which is sure to be good fun -and don't forget the 'Bring & Buy' table!



'DECK THE HALLS ...' UPDATE

The Joint Halls team is continuing to look at what our options are regarding the long term future of the West Church hall and St Andrew's new hall. It was agreed at our joint session meeting earlier this year that disposing of both halls (by sale or otherwise) was the likely way forward. This is proving to be a complicated process which is likely to take some time. In the meantime, however, with soaring energy and maintenance costs, it is unfortunately impractical for us to keep the hall in use this winter. Accordingly, the Acorn Management Team and staff have been working on alternative options for the hall users. This has not been an easy decision, but with another deficit church budget projected for next year, and the hall impossible to heat economically or to keep maintained to an acceptable standard, we are having to be practical.



Rhona



THE ACORN CENTRE

As we head towards the end of another year, we reflect and are thankful for another busy and profitable 12 months at the centre. This year has been a difficult one with a number of personal challenges for the Acorn Centre team, and I am grateful for how we have all pulled together to cover the business. Next year we face an even bigger challenge as we say goodbye to Kenneth. It is impossible to quantify all the extra little touches that Kenneth has added to the life of the church and the Acorn Centre, and he will be very much missed, that is for sure!

Following on from the most recent session meeting, we have been able to rehouse many of our regular meetings within the church, but this will mean an increase in the number of Duty Officers required to man the centre in the evenings. If you or anyone you know may be interested in helping out then please get in touch.

We were delighted to welcome a new volunteer to the ranks with Karen Main carrying on the family tradition. She coped fantastically well despite her first day being one of the busiest Wednesdays we've ever had! We're always looking for new volunteers, so if you fancy giving it a go in the New Year then please let us know. **Flexible volunteering** means that you don't have to commit to certain times or shifts and allows folk to fit volunteering around busy lives. I'm sure many of our volunteers do so, just to enjoy the teatime treats and banter at the end of the day!



Festive treats are already beginning to make their way onto the menu, and the sweet smell of cinnamon and spices begins to fill the air in the kitchen. **Look out for our festive special offers over the next few weeks.**

The Centre will be closed from **3 pm Saturday 23rd December** and re-open at **10 am Thursday 4th January 2024**. Many thanks for your support this year - whether as a customer, volunteer, or team member.



A Happy Christmas to all and we look forward to welcoming you back in the New Year.

Mike & The Acorn Centre Team

VACANCY - With Kenneth retiring as Church Officer/Centre Co-ordinator we are going to be recruiting a new staff member. With an increasingly tight financial budget due to rising costs, the session, Acorn Centre Management Team and staff have been discussing how we might redistribute at least some of the work Kenneth has been doing. We are currently looking to start with a **part-time post of around twelve hours a week** to help cover the cleaning and centre assistant tasks, beginning with whichever duties we decide are most urgent.



Depending on how this works within our existing structures, we have the flexibility to use the remaining budgeted hours either to expand the existing post or to recruit another member of staff.

Meanwhile our volunteers, including an expanded duty officer or **'events' team** will be picking up on some of the church officer duties, such as assisting at funerals, weddings, school assemblies and so forth.

More details of the staff post will be advertised as soon as we have them. In the meantime, if you know someone who might be interested in such a post, please let us know.

Church Calendar/Ways of Connecting December 2023 – January 2024



If you are worshipping from home, you can connect as usual via the West church website and YouTube.

December 2023

Every Wednesday : 29 November - 20 December Advent bible study via Zoom. Contact Rhona for the link.

Saturday 2 December 11-2 '*Big Sing*' in the church led by Strathburn Primary School Choir (11-11.45 am). Other musicians as available. Drop by and listen to/sing some Christmas songs!



Sunday 3 December 11 am Advent Worship. Hospitality time after the service.

Thursday 7 December 7.30 pm Kirk Session.

Sunday 10 December 11 am Advent Worship. Hospitality time after the service.

Sunday 10 December 3 pm Quiet reflective '*Hope and light*' service.

Tuesday 12 December 7 pm Christian Education Advent Reflection evening. Tea and mince pies **from 6.30 pm**.

Saturday 16 December 4 pm IDCT Carol Service at Inverurie Academy. All welcome.



Sunday 17 December 11 am Advent Morning Worship with '*instant nativity*'. Hospitality time after the service with mince pies and mulled wine.

Sunday 24 December 11 am Christmas Eve Morning Worship.
Hospitality time after the service.



4 pm IDCT Christingle service at St Andrew's.



11.30 pm United Christmas Eve Watchnight service at the West (*Mince pies from 11 pm*).

Monday 25 December 10 am United Christmas Morning Worship at St Andrew's.



Sunday 31 December 11 am Morning Worship led by worship team. Hospitality time after the service.

January 2024

Sunday 7 January 11 am Morning Worship.
Hospitality time after the service.

Sunday 14 January 11 am Morning Worship.
Hospitality time after the service.



Tuesday 23 January 7.30 pm Kirk Session.

Sunday 28 January 11 am Morning Worship followed by Informal Communion.

Encounter If you have any material for Encounter email encounter@inveruriewestchurch.org by Wed 17 January.

The Prayer Group continues to meet regularly on a Thursday morning. Prayer requests can be sent to olive.duncan@hotmail.co.uk or duncan.linda1@btinternet.com

Our contact email address for those looking for help with collection/delivery of supplies or medication is help@inveruriewestchurch.org



UBUNTU NEWS

Another successful and enjoyable *Ubuntu Christmas Open Evening* this year. Thank you to all who came along and to the volunteers who helped on the night. Over **£800** worth of Fair Trade and eco-friendly goods were purchased.

We have more flavours of **Whitakers** Fair Trade chocolates – remember the classic Christmas treats which you either loved or hated - Chocolate Coated Stem Ginger and Rose and Violet Creams. Also new are Chocolate Capuccino Squares and Mint Honeycomb Crisps.

Joining the robin and owl wooden ornaments is the handcrafted and painted blackbird sitting on a tree trunk. Made in Bali using sustainable albesia wood, each one is unique.

Everyone loves giving or getting socks for Christmas - or do they? Have a look at the new patterns of Fair Trade bamboo socks. New amongst the *jute bags* are 'Hare Under a Moon' and 'Hedgehog in The Wood' designs. Also new are rustic-effect wooden freestanding photo frames with shutters, and heart-shaped cut-outs made from sustainable China fir wood.

True Origin (previously *Eswatini Kitchen*) marmalade is back in stock and there are Festive Flavours & Fruit Flavours duo gift sets.

It has been difficult sourcing **Zaytoun** products so I am pleased to say the much-requested **Zaytoun Olive Oil and Zaytoun Dates** will be back in stock next week – so do catch them when you can.

Whether it is a treat for yourself or a gift (small or large) for someone special, do have a browse in the shop. Check out the pictures in the online edition to see a selection of the items available in Ubuntu.

Thank you for continuing to purchase Fair Trade and Eco-friendly goods, your support does make a difference to the lives of the producers and artisans and is also assisting with protecting the planet.

Wishing you all a peaceful Christmas and Best Wishes for the New Year.

Anthea



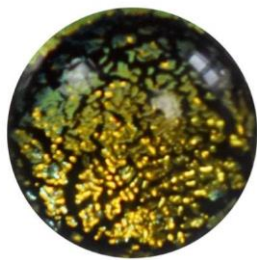
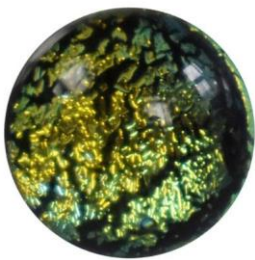
*West Church
Education Team
Advent Event*

Follow that Star!!

**Tuesday 12th December
Acorn Centre**

**Come along at 6.30 pm
for Tea and Mince Pies.
Discussion starts at 7 pm**







HOW TO REPLACE THE IRREPLACEABLE?

It's hard to imagine the Acorn Centre without Kenneth, our Church Officer/Centre Coordinator, who is taking a well-earned retirement at the end of December.



Kenneth was appointed as Church Officer at the Kirk Session meeting in October 2002 and took up the post on 1st December 2002. His Acorn Centre role started when the Centre opened.

Such a bare statement doesn't even begin to describe how central Kenneth has been or how many, many small unseen things he has done for the last 21 years. He has always done far more than his job description.

But even more important than what Kenneth has done, is how he has done it. Always kind, always thoughtful, with an attention to detail and to people that personifies what our Acorn Centre operation is about.

The only good thing about Kenneth's retirement is that he isn't actually leaving us, as he will still be an active church member and elder. However, we are all going to have to learn not to call on him at a moment's notice so that he can get some rest, some time off, and the chance to pursue his own interests.

In the meantime, all we can say is ***“Weel deen, ye gweed and faithu servant”! (Matthew 25:21)***

(If you would like to make a contribution towards a gift for Kenneth, please leave it in a clearly marked envelope in the offering plate at the Church door or at the Acorn Centre by Sunday, 10 December. Thank you)



INVERURIE CHRISTIAN AID GROUP

Don't forget the local Christmas Card Delivery service which this year runs between **9th and 17th December**. Boxes will be available in Tesco, Morrison's, J.G. Ross's at Highclere, Strachan's, and at St Andrew's Church and the Acorn Centre. The price this year will be 50p per card. This should be posted in an envelope along with the cards. Anyone who would like to get involved either in distributing the cards or sorting the cards into districts, please contact **Linda Young on 01467 621635** or **Sheila Rennie on 01467 623156**. *We would be particularly grateful to hear from anyone who would be willing to deliver in the ever-expanding Osprey Village.*



EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN BETHLEHEM APPEAL

Our friend and former serving elder Marc Falconer, who now works in the Holy Land and Jordan, contacted Rhona recently to draw our attention to an appeal on behalf of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bethlehem. Rhona discussed this with Session and it was agreed that supporting the local Christian presence in their emergency and hardship relief work at this incredibly difficult time was an appropriate choice of retiring offering for our Christmas Eve Watchnight service.



If you are not planning to attend the Watchnight service but would like to make a donation please put it in an envelope marked '**Bethlehem appeal**' and leave it with the staff at the Acorn Centre. More information about what the money would be used for is included in the letter from Pastor Tannous which is reproduced in the online version of Encounter.



كنيسة الإصلاح الإنجيلية اللوثرية - بيت جالا

The Evang. Luth. Church of Reformation – Beit Jala

Pastor's Note and Appeal

Dear sisters and brothers around the world,

Salaam and grace to you from the wounded Palestine. I hope this letter finds you all well, and that you are keeping us all in your thoughts and prayers. Since the 7th of October, the Holy Land has entered a period of grief, anger, anxiety, and fear. We as Christians never condone any violence. We pray for a just resolution in which human rights are granted to all of God's children.

To provide a small and honest update, since the 7th of October, myself and my congregation are living in what can only be described as ghettos. All Palestinian cities are separated from one another. All areas of the country have seen increased violence, and in Beit Jala we see the Israeli military enter every day.

Palestinians, even those holding permits, are not allowed to enter Israel for work or any other reason. Tourists and most international workers have fled the country. As the majority of Palestinians in Bethlehem require either entrance to Israel or the presence of tourists to make an income, our economy has all but flattened since October 7th. Though many see this new period as something with a concrete end once the violence stops, for us the lack of tourism and increased restrictions of movement will impact our local economy for years to come. Schools, in addition, have switched between online and in-person sessions, creating a very chaotic month of lessons for students. This will be a further destruction of an economy that was just starting to be rebuilt after the financial devastation we experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Church of Reformation in Beit Jala has done our best to provide emergency services to our community. We are using what little emergency funding we have to assist with crucial food, housing bills, and school fees for families directly impacted by loss of work.

Our Abraham's Tent program has remained open for students. We have prioritized making space for students to keep learning with support from the program even during times of strike or online learning. We saw the negative effect the COVID-19 pandemic had on our students' education and are doing everything we can to prevent this from happening again.

If you feel called to support us with donations, the Church of the Reformation would greatly appreciate any help. If this is in your capacity, please email me at ashraftannous@gmail.com. We are preparing for years of hardship following this war and can only pray we can assist our community during this time of need. If it is not in your ability to give, I humbly request you keep us in your prayers.

God bless you

Pastor Ashraf Tannous



The Prayer Group – Linda Duncan



I was thinking of signs of winter that are all around us. Golden leaves underfoot and noisy geese as they fly morning and night over my house to their feeding grounds.

Over 25 years ago God called us to pray weekly in the church with a sign "pray on the ground" and so the group was formed. Later as we began to find folks asking for prayer, we placed the Prayer Request Box on the counter at reception in the Acorn Centre. We have been privileged and encouraged to pray for folks we may never know but are known to God.



We continue to meet Thursday mornings **11.00 am to 12.30 pm** in the Acorn Centre and all are welcome to join us. As we wait to celebrate the birth of Jesus let's remember some of the signs God used.

*To wise men seeking a King you gave a star,
To shepherds on the hills you gave a voice and a choir,
To fishermen on the sea of Galilee you gave a greater work to do,
What is your sign for me, Lord?
Let me not be blind or deaf or resistant when you come.*

ABERDEENSHIRE NORTH FOODBANK

Please see the online Encounter for this year's **Reverse Advent Calendar**, which is a guide to putting together 24 days' worth of very much needed donations. If you can afford to donate, either individually or as part of a group, the Foodbank would be very grateful if goods could be dropped off as soon as possible, to allow distribution in time for Christmas. Other donations are, of course, always welcome!



REVERSE ADVENT CALENDAR



Please check with us to find out our opening times and any specific donations days around Christmas and to check if there is anything in particular we're running short of. Please use Facebook or our website for contact details for each Foodbank Centre. THANK YOU!

1 PKT DRIED NOODLES	2 SHOWER GEL/ SHAMPOO	3 BOX OF CEREAL BARS	4 DEODORANT	5 TINNED POTATOES	6 TINNED HOTDOGS
7 PKT INSTANT MASH	8 Long life FRUIT JUICE	9 TINNED MEAT	10 BISCUITS	11 TINNED FISH	12 JAR OF JAM
13 CHOCOLATE BAR	14 CUSTARD	15 TINNED TOMATOES	16 TINNED FRUIT	17 JAR OF PASTA SAUCE	18 TINNED VEGETABLES
19 UHT long-life MILK	20 TOILET ROLL	21 RICE PUDDING	22 BAG OF RICE	23 TINNED SPAGUETTI	24 JAR OF COFFEE



<https://aberdeenshirenorth.foodbank.org.uk/locations/>

Registered Charity in Scotland (SC045884)

WHO'S WHO AT THE WEST

Minister	Rev Rhona Cathcart r.cathcart@inveruriewestchurch.org	620285
Session Clerks	Mark and Gillian Paterson sessionclerk@inveruriewestchurch.org	625675
Church and Acorn Centre Administration	Judith Will admin@inveruriewestchurch.org	670850
Church Officer	Kenneth Gray (* until end 2023) kennethgray@hotmail.co.uk	620658
Rollkeeper	Chris Gardner rollkeeper@inveruriewestchurch.org	07791 630495
Life & Work	Irene Jamieson irenejamieson@live.co.uk	
Safeguarding Co-ordinators	Valerie Napier Gail Buchan	623279 622145
Transport Co-ordinator	Linda Mathers	622586
Acorn Centre Management Team	Laura Gray lauragray25@btinternet.com	620658
Environmental Matters Team	Joy Doorghen doorghens@hotmail.com	620823
Fabric Team	Jim Lyle jimlyle@hotmail.co.uk	624159
Finance Team	Alan Sharp sharp3@btinternet.com	
Treasurer	Alison Blair treasurer@inveruriewestchurch.org	620677
Committed Giving Envelopes	Cindy Farquhar Cindyfarquhar25@yahoo.com	
Gift Aid	Mandy Aitken mandyaitken@sky.com	07532 487788
Junior Church Team	Biff Barrow biff.barrow@tiscali.co.uk	623096
Pastoral Care Team	Rev Rhona Cathcart r.cathcart@inveruriewestchurch.org	620285
Social/Fundraising Team	Joyce Petrie joycepetrie21@hotmail.com	620932

CONGREGATIONAL ROLL

Funerals:

Mr William Duncan (District 38)

18th November 2023

Mrs Mary (Mamee) Simpson (District 35)

23rd November 2023

**Please advise the Roll Keeper of any change of address:
rollkeeper@inveruriewestchurch.org**

FLOWER CALENDAR - DECEMBER

CONVENER JOAN FELTHAM

 620872

Dec 3rd Margaret Gill

Dec 10th Susan Routledge

Dec 17th Joan Feltham

Dec 24th Laura and Kenneth Gray

Dec 31st Eleanor Mitchell



Thanks to all who donate, arrange, or deliver flowers.

ENCOUNTER ONLINE – Currently we are producing and distributing Encounter online and in print. If you have not already provided details of your e-mail and would like to ensure you receive the online version, please contact the Session Clerk (01467 625675).

