

Diocese of St Andrews, Dunkeld and Dunblane with Diocese of Brechin

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Dear friends

The snow has almost gone although our pond is still white with a thick layer of ice taking its time to melt. It has been so beautiful and it has been fun watching our red squirrels taking a short cut across the ice on the pond and staying upright. And just generally watching their antics. They definitely have a pecking order when it comes to feeding at our peanut boxes by the house and many squabbles take place with one or other fleeing to the nearby birch tree to then pursue each other round and round it. Andrew and I can watch them for hours. We have about 6 that regularly come to feed.

At last, maybe some light at the end of this long time of keeping apart. Many of us have been vaccinated and as I write this, we wait to see what pronouncements will be made by our leaders next week about the beginnings of life as we knew it, albeit slowly, resuming.

I am sure there will be some anxiety in many of us about this and maybe some have re-evaluated how they live their lives and intend to move forwards making changes, and this is no bad thing. Stopping to consider what we busy ourselves with and praying about whether this is what we should continue with is good and this last year has given us that time for reflection and maybe more time to spend with God.

Zoom, U Tube and Facebook have kept many of us connected and my 98yr old mother has just been given an I-pad by one of her grandchildren to help them keep in touch as they live in Australia. It's never too late to start learning new things! I have just received my first e-mail from her.

Have you learnt any new skills during this last year? – I confess I have not but rather re-visited old ones and taken delight in having more time to put them into practice.

I hope the "Coming Together" project may have whetted your appetite to revisit some old hobbies or even take up new ones. I am really looking forward to seeing the finished "squares" I am sure there will be a wide variety of items reflecting our diversity of thoughts and abilities, but nonetheless making up one whole.

Have you started making any plans for this year – It's hard to know what to do isn't it? I am certainly hoping to be able to drive down to Oxford area to see our daughter's new home and see the grandchildren as well as catching up with our "Scottish" grandchildren. The Trustees have been thinking about what we might be able to plan this year and

hope we will be able to have some sort of celebration for Mary Sumner Day, but sadly we think Lady Day is too soon to be able to plan anything for. I am sure there will be something to join with from MSH. They have many plans to keep us all in touch including webinars with speakers.

Midday prayers is also a lovely way of being together. You can watch them every day Mon – Saturday live on the MU Facebook page at 12.00noon, led by someone different each day. You do not have to join Facebook to do this as for the 10 minutes or so it is an open stream anyone can watch. I have joined in on several occasions and found them very helpful and uplifting.

Once the weather warms up - and dries up - maybe we will be able to meet up outside at least soon. In the meantime, please look after yourselves, pray for each other and stay safe and well.

With my love and prayers for each of you

Sarah

TO MAKE YOU THINK....

Katharine Kilgour whom some of you have met, is a member from Glasgow and where this autumn will be hosting the international conference on climate change – COP 26. She has written the following for us to read and meditate on.

'Rebuilding hope and confidence' is our Mothers' Union theme

Hope and confidence in God's Word

The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands for ever.

Your word, O Lord, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens

Isaiah 40:8; Psalm 119:89

These words from scripture and our Mothers' Union reflection this month, remind us of the temporary nature of life in our natural habitat, whilst also reinforcing for us, the message, that the word of God is eternal.

As Christians living in community, we are called to bear witness to the word of God and like others in our world, we are being called to respond to issues relating to climate change and the impact on our environment, from our way of life.

The 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference, (also known as COP26), is scheduled to be held in

Glasgow, 1 to 12 November 2021. 'Nature' is a core COP 26 theme for both adapting to and mitigating the effects of climate change, supporting lives and livelihoods. The way we relate to each other and our environments require sensitive management to maintain balance and stability.

In Scotland, Glasgow has set a target for carbon neutrality by 2030, and aims to be one of the greenest cities in Europe through its Sustainable Glasgow campaign, and is 4th in the world in the Global Destination Sustainability Index. (<https://ukcop26.org/the-conference>).

Nature Scot (Scotland's nature agency) describe public goods as all the things we enjoy and value in life, but we cannot buy the way we do with other goods, such as clean air, water, and green public spaces. Many human activities have an impact on public goods, therefore each of us have the choice to make decisions that will deliver the greatest benefits for society as a whole. COP26 in Glasgow offers faith communities and the people in Scotland a realistic opportunity to get to grips with what it means to join in making day to day decisions to lessen carbon footprint to make a collaborative impact on achieving the carbon neutral target for 2030.

Organisations such as Mothers' Union Scotland have until 17:00 GMT on Friday 5 March 2021, if they wish to express and interest in becoming involved in the UK government COP26 managed spaces within both the Blue and Green Zones. (<https://ukcop26.org/the-conference/get-involved>).

Creative Earth is an art competition for people aged 16 and under from across the UK, run by the UN COP26 Climate Change Conference in collaboration with WWF. All entries must be submitted by 11.59pm on Monday 5th April 2021. (<https://together-for-our-planet.ukcop26.org/creative-earth>)

Eco-Congregation Scotland has produced 'Let's talk about the climate emergency' – a pack of resources with monthly themes to help share stories and learn together how to take simple actions to sustain healthier ecosystems, which will benefit us all. Eco-Congregation Scotland have also created a space on their website and their social media to post pictures and stories about the kind of actions Mothers' Union members have been able to take to decrease their carbon footprint.

What choices we make and how to make decisions in our daily life can be confusing amid the myriad of different messages to support carbon neutral targets. Mothers Union members, through their commitment and support for one another in their communities locally and globally, are well placed to influence and inspire others in taking positive action to lessen their carbon footprint and also to educate and encourage others to also make a difference.



eco
congregation Scotland

Monthly Prayer Gathering

- Pray – for the upcoming COP26 conference
- Hear – updates on activity around the conference
- Share – what's happening in your church and local area

Join us on Thursday 4 March 2021 from 4-5pm

For more information, or to get the link to the meeting, contact Judith on coordinator@ecocongregationscotland.org or Maggie on rev.mcternan@gmail.com

References:

<https://ukcop26.org/the-conference/get-involved>

<https://www.ecocongregationscotland.org/>

<https://www.nature.scot/about-naturescot>

<https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/land-and-sea-management/managing-land/agriculture-and-land-use-policy-development>

file:///C:/Users/Kathspc/Downloads/Prayer%20gathering%20flyer.pdf

<https://together-for-our-planet.ukcop26.org/creative-earth/>

TogetherForOurPlanet@cabinetoffice.gov.uk

Katharine Kilgour

A PRAYER OF HOPE

This prayer was written by Thomas Merton, a RC monk who sought to find God in solitude and spent many years as a hermit priest in America. He was a gifted spiritual writer and his wisdom lives on.

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore will I trust you always, though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.

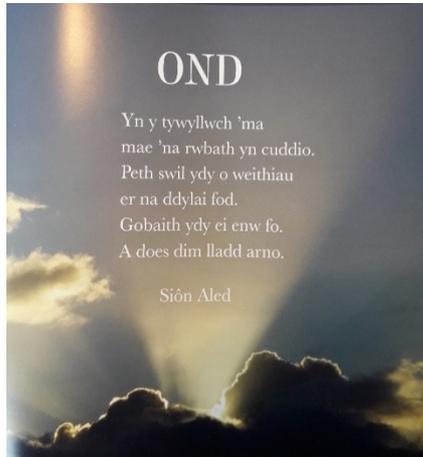
And as a contrast.....

NERYS WRITES

Last week I came across this little poem on the cover of a Welsh poetry magazine I subscribe to. It made

such an impression on me that I decided to attempt a translation.

I catch myself saying 'but' quite often these days in phone conversations with friends and church members and even in my brief exchanges with those I meet on my daily walks. In fact, I have found that questioning the negative attitudes of others has



OND

Yn y tywyllwch 'ma
mae 'na rwbath yn cuddio.
Peth swil ydy o weithiau
er na ddylai fod.
Gobaith ydy ei enw fo.
A does dim lladd arno.

Sïón Aled

But

In this darkness

Something is hiding

*Sometimes a shy
thing*

*Although it shouldn't
be*

Hope is its name

And it can't be killed

become an important part of my day-to-day ministry. Challenging people's thinking is not something that comes naturally to me. I had always found it easier to respond with a resigned shrug or a vague smile but the pandemic has changed that. Engulfed by the darkness of so much fear, loss and grief, it is so easy for us to become fatalistic or cynical or judgmental of others. It's easy to disregard the many blessings that we enjoy every day and all we have to be thankful for. It's easy to blame and criticise others, forgetting to put ourselves for a moment in their shoes. And it's especially easy to lose sight of the rays of hope which can lighten the darkness and transform it.

As a child I always enjoyed looking for signs of the coming of spring in the hedgerows on my way to school. I learnt where to find the first snowdrops, the primroses, violets and lesser celandine, catkins, frogspawn and birds' eggs. Now as I listen to the news and explore social media, I look with the same eye for signs of hope for the future. Hope is often a shy thing, hiding behind the headlines in stories of the selfless service of front-line workers, in the amazing co-operation between pharmaceutical companies, in the ingenuity of organisations seeking to support those in need, in the efforts of thousands of volunteers and fundraisers, in countless small acts of kindness and generosity, in a renewed sense of community in streets up and down the land.

A famous preacher once said that hope is like a star. Stars are amazing but we can only see them in the dark. The darker the sky, the brighter they shine. Often people only discover hope when they are facing suffering, when they feel overwhelmed by the darkness of loneliness, grief, depression, anger or anxiety. Sometimes they need our help to see the light of hope and to be reminded that it can dispel any darkness. As I child who was scared of the dark, I loved the idea in Psalm 139 that even the darkness

is not dark to God, 'the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you'.

My prayer is that this Lent, as we walk in the footsteps of Jesus towards the cross and the empty tomb, we may be bringers of God's light of hope into the lives of all who cross our path.

Nerys

NEWS OF OUR LINKS

You will be aware of the media coverage given to the Coup in Myanmar resulting in demonstrations and the deaths of many people protesting peacefully. We have been sending messages to Bishop James but nothing seems. To be getting through. Sittwe doesn't seem to have had a mention, but the situation in Rakhine State, in which Sittwe is situated is always delicate.

This is the last email we had from Bishop James – keep on remembering them there.

Greetings from Sittwer Diocese.

Thank you very much for your email and information of your Church activities. By the grace of God we are on going well safety in this pandemic time. We are very glad to hear about your have planned holiday with your husband in Malta. We are praying for that. In this time, we could not any special programme as well as Mother Union because civil wars and covid-19. But the MU is still trying to meet small prayer group with who living at IDP camp every Friday, they worship and prayer together, share together at Church. It was a very effective for their spiritual life when ever they faced hard situation. The MU gave encourage and look after member of MU who lived in the IDP camp in Diocesan compound.

In this year, we cannot chance to get mass Christmas service and celebrate in the Church. But some churches will have to celebrate in their parish where remote areas. Some areas they did worship and meeting by online but no more effect for all of people as well as Church members.

Every year, I am going to visit parishes with my staffs and Bible School students but now all programme is cancelled.

I wishes a Happy Christmas and new Year.

Blessings,
+James

Marjorie also keeps in touch with Esther, wife of the Bishop of Cyanangu and this is her latest email sent just before Christmas.

Dear Marjorie,

I am happy to hear from you, your family and M.U as well.

We too in Rwanda are doing well although the pandemic has been claiming lives here too but we thank God who is still keeping us up to this time.

Last week I had a trip to Uganda to visit my family and have just returned infact now reading and replying emails.

Mother's union office managed to do some few things this year. When the pandemic started some chance tmass Christmas service and celebrate in they did worship and people were in need especially those who feed their families on what they earn daily.

So M.U and the Diocese we managed to buy and give some people daily necessities when we were stil in total lockdown.

When things eased abit we also started groups of the disadvantaged people teaching them the word of God and helping them on how to get themselves doing something that brings them an income and also helping single mothers to live a purposeful life.

I thank God for what we are learning in these difficult days and asking Him to help us take away this disease (covid 19) and give us peace again.

We wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

God bless you.

Lots of love to you and yours.

Esther

Please remember our links especially in your prayers = especially the Church in Myanmar where it is becoming more difficult to practice Christianity. There are devastating floods in South Sudan where Renk Diocese, another of our links is, but sadly no new from them, but pray for them anyway.

Marjorie Smith

AND WHEN IT COMES.....



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Christian Concern for Families

World-wide through

PRAYING – ENABLEING

– CAMPAIGNING

It's how the Mothers' Union works best