

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

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A SPECIAL TREAT – A MESSAGE FROM BISHOP IAN

To be a Pilgrim

Advent and Christmas is the season of hope, it is a journey of faith towards a destination, the fulfilment of God's promise. That's where the hope lies, as we recall other journeys of hope - the shepherds to the stable, the magi following the star, the holy family fleeing danger, and Jesus coming to be born for us. It's a time of literal journeying too, as families and friends come together, and churches gather in worship, even when the journeying sometimes has via zoom.

This is a way of saying that Advent and Christmas are a Pilgrimage. A Pilgrimage is a journey with a purpose, made in hope, made in faith, a journey on which we discover more about ourselves, about God, and God's purpose for us. In fact, being a Pilgrim is a good way of describing what it means to be a Christian, a disciple of the Son of Man 'who had nowhere to lay his head.'

Throughout the Bible, God's People are on a journey nearer to God, journeying to the Promised Land, into Exile, and returning again. Jesus journeys from Galilee to Jerusalem, and the Apostles journey to the corners of the ancient world. That theme has continued in Christian tradition, as many medieval Christians made Pilgrimages, journeys of hope, to holy places near and far. The Reformation led to the loss of those traditions, yet one of its most popular works was about Pilgrimage - 'The Pilgrim's Progress' by John Bunyan.

Today, Pilgrimage is undergoing a revival. In Scotland some of the old pilgrim routes have now been re-opened for walkers - the St Cuthbert Way to Lindisfarne, the Fife Pilgrim Way and the Three Saints Way, both of them to St Andrews. We live amongst landscapes of faith. In our Diocese congregations and groups are making local pilgrimage as journeys of hope in their community, and joining them whenever I can I am making a 'Pilgrim's Progress' around the Diocese.

Although places such as St Andrews or Jerusalem are traditional pilgrimage places, the true pilgrim path is located within us. It invites us to follow the path of our

own lives as a journey of hope, like Advent and Christmas. We come from God, and we journey back to God, and on the journey we can discover more and more about what that means, and who we are really called to be on this Pilgrimage, so that when we reach its destination we are more ready than we were when we started.

With warmest good wishes for a holy Advent pilgrimage and a happy Christmas arrival,

+Ian

AND FROM OUR PRESIDENT SARAH

Dear friends

As I write this we are in the season of Advent and our annual campaign for raising awareness of the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence and Abuse too. It is a busy time of year anyway with preparations for Christmas, children and grandchildren getting super excited, maybe already begging for the Christmas decorations to go up, school nativity plays to see as well as present buying and all the other things we seem to need to do. But it is important to stop and take the a few minutes to pray using the excellent prayers and reflections I hope you have all received. This was originally produced by All Ireland MU but now MSH sends it out to all members and it is a helpful tool to help us focus.

This year for many families Christmas will be, perhaps, be a time of dread as well. No parent wants to disappoint their child, but money doesn't "grow on trees" as some seem to think and so there is less to spend on "luxuries". For many just having enough to feed their family and keep warm is impossible. Being expected to live on £350 a month is very hard but for some this is the reality.

The stress caused by hardship can increase the tensions already present and the reports of Domestic violence to police and refuges increase at Christmas and New Year so the Mothers' Union helping to campaign against it is so important. For those of you who weren't at Council I reported that in England the Mothers' Union has joined with Women's Aid to work against it and offer support. Here in Scotland a small committee is working very hard to raise awareness too and have plans going forwards to continue this work.

But it is not all doom and gloom. It is a time of great joy too as we prepare to celebrate the real message of Christmas. Will it be a white Christmas? They are predicting a hard winter and my grandchildren who will all be with us this year are certainly hoping for snow. Although for many it is felt to be a nuisance, I find it wonderful and awe inspiring to draw the curtains when I get up and see a white wonderland; the trees bent over with the weight of snow and maybe some small footprints in the snow of a bird, deer or fox and the sun glistening on the whiteness. It is the same if there has been a really hard frost and the trees are all covered in hoar. Nature can be so amazing and beautiful as well as sometimes incredibly cruel. But so is life.

As we prepare to celebrate the coming of our Lord as a tiny baby, we remember that he wasn't born into riches in an opulent palace but rather to poor parents who were travel weary and the only place they could find to rest was a stable shared with other animals. But there was great rejoicing from the angels and shepherds and wise men so let us rejoice too with them for the greatest gift of all.

I wish you all a very happy and blessed Christmas and I hope a very peaceful New Year throughout the world

With my love and prayers

Sarah

SIXTEEN DAYS OF ACTIVISM



What a good Prayer Diary the MU produced this year, and well done to Isabelle Pottinger and the committee for our own daily prayers accessible thro the web.

Christine Berry along with many others attended a Reclaim the Night March in Dundee. This is a growing movement which started in 1976 and aims to highlight the night

time violence which women experience walking through streets at night. Some 28,000 took part last year on the London march.

And Isabelle writes about a training session she's recently attended....

As a member of the Mothers' Union Scotland Domestic Abuse Strategy Committee, recently, I received an invitation from Scottish Woman's Aid, inviting me to join their experienced staff on a Zoom training session entitle 'An International Lens on Domestic Abuse Killings: An Agenda for Scotland'. In this session, a variety of speakers from across the world, reported experiences, data or outcome of research, in the expectation that the delegates in Scotland might reflect on these to move on their understanding of abuse by an intimate partner or that agencies might use them to change policy and practice relating to domestic abuse cases.

The first speaker was a Scottish mother, telling the story of her daughter, a 17-year old female student in her first year of study in a Scottish university and living on campus in university accommodation. The daughter quickly gained a boyfriend, also a first-year student, but somewhat older than she. He, too, lived on campus nearby and introduced his partner to sexual practices. Were I to put the words 'handcuffs', 'near-asphyxiation of his female partner' and 'sexual blackmail' into the same sentence, you would appreciate that the young man's sexual interests were somewhat extreme and that he went to considerable lengths to stop his female partner from breaking off the relationship.

The mother continued her story, telling how her previously sexually-naive daughter, unsure of what was 'normal' sexual practice yet reluctant to ask anyone, especially her own mother, became increasingly concerned by her partner's sexual appetite, especially as the near-asphyxiation happened a second time. Would the young woman survive a third encounter? Eventually, the stress from the coercive control by the young man, the risk of death by asphyxiation and the sense of there being no way out became too much for the young woman: she took her own life.

This mother's account was harrowing. Having spent much of my career in higher education, teaching and supporting students, had a student presented to me a small snapshot of the crisis she was facing, whilst refusing to tell the whole story, would I have recognised her trauma? Would I have known how to handle her situation?

Another presentation was from a senior researcher, investigating cases of domestic abuse. For the most recent year for which there were figures, she produced a chart showing the number of female deaths in England and Wales due to domestic abuse. She then went on to explain that before a person could be charged with a

death, police had to believe that there were suspicious circumstances, had to protect the crime scene, and then to collect evidence. She then produced a graph of 'suspicious' (as judged by the woman's relatives or friends) female deaths, a graph 30% higher than the first one. But even that graph only told part of the story. It has been recognised by researchers that some women, fearing that there is no way out of domestic abuse, commit suicide. So finally a graph was shown, not of all female suicides for that year, but only of those where it was believed that the woman had committed suicide to escape domestic abuse: that graph was four times the height of the first one. When all three sets of figures are added together, it would appear that in any one year, over six times as many women die as a consequence of domestic abuse than are recorded in official police statistics. Surely those statistics should drive changes to current UK domestic abuse policy and practice?

Excellent speaker followed excellent speaker throughout the three hours of presentations. Yet I had heard so much, some of it traumatic, that it will take time to fully process this information, to reflect on how I might use this new knowledge.

How would I sum up this training session? It was so enlightening! I learned so much! I very much hope that Scottish Woman's Aid invites me to further training sessions.

Isabelle Pottinger

DATES FOR YOUR DIARIES

Cathedral Prayers happens on the second Tuesday of each month unless notified to the contrary. It is a quiet half hour of prayers, readings and intercessions led by various members, and even though we can no longer gather in St Ninian's, the service is sent out on line, so we can still gather together and pray and reflect as a corporate body. Join us and see!

Tues Dec 14th 11.30am led by the Rev'd Kim

Tues Jan 10th.2023 11.30



This year's Mary Sumner House Christmas Appeal is raising money for our Mothers' Union Literacy and Trauma Healing programme in South Sudan. Sadly, South

Sudan has seen years of conflict and violence which have devastated communities and forced millions of people to leave their homes. Over half of the refugees are children and are desperately in need of peace and a better future. Based on over 20 years of experience working in the country, our



Literacy and Trauma Healing programme provides a safe space for women to learn essential skills like literacy, trauma healing and peace building

Bishop James at the Lambeth Conference (2022)

Bishop James from our link diocese of Sittwe, Myanmar attended the Lambeth Conference this year and was accompanied by his wife. He sent us two photos of them both, taken whilst they were there.

He also asked if they could come to visit us (as is customary when Lambeth is held) but after consulting both the Diocesan Trustees and the MU Provincial President, Deborah Munday, his request was declined. This decision was based on the statement issued by the Scottish Bishops that there would be no invitations to overseas bishops this time (ie church-linked diocesan bishops, not just MU-linked bishops). This was because at the time there had been increased covid cases and the risk to both the bishops and the hosts would have been too much. This decision also concurred with that of the Archbishop of Canterbury who had also stated that visiting bishops should go straight home after Lambeth.

Personally I was relieved by these decisions as I felt it was too late to arrange a visit and the covid risk was a serious consideration both to the bishop (and wife) and to the hosts – assuming we could have had any volunteers to host them. I have to confess I was somewhat surprised to find that Bishop James did go visiting to his church-linked diocese in England.

At the General Synod meeting in June I took the opportunity to talk to the Chair of the Overseas Mission

Committee who told me he had known Bishop James for many years as the church had supported them on several occasions in the past, especially with food supplies. He offered to help me decline Bishop James's most recent request for money and he wrote to him on our behalf – an unexpected plus to my first attendance at the General Synod!

After Christmas I will continue to follow up some suggestions (from Elizabeth and Marjorie) for contacting some of our other overseas links.

SOMETHING TO PONDER DURING ADVENT ON FROM OUR CHAPLAIN

Are you someone who doesn't know what an antiphon is? Perhaps you already know? I hope you don't mind if I take a little time to describe them and then take on an Advent journey.

An antiphon, from the Latin antiphona, meaning sounding against, was a repeated line of scripture used as bookends to the psalms in daily prayer and the Eucharist. The antiphon was a prayer "sound-bite," capturing the most important aspect of the reading, helping those gathered remember through repetition. Many churches use them weekly as responses to the Psalm reading.

The Great O Antiphons are those said/sung before and after the Magnificat at Evening Prayer on the seven days before Christmas. The texts are of unknown origin and date at least from the sixth century. Each antiphon begins with 'O' and highlights one title of the Messiah, building up a picture of the one who was to come and heightening our longing for the Day of the Lord.

I think they give a really good point for reflection in the run-up to Christmas. Perhaps we can take 5 minutes out each day, in the week running up to Christmas and use these as a way to reflect?

O Sapientia – Wisdom (Isa. 11:2-3) think about whom in your life offers godly & wise counsel. Say thank you to them.

O Adonai – Lord (Isa 33:22) take time to ask God how he wants to be the Lord of your life. Then take time to listen.

O Radix Jesse – Key of David (Rev. 3:7) what door of your life do you need God to open & bring grace? God has the key to every door.

O Clavis David – Root of Jesse (Isa 11:10) A Jesse Tree remembers God's faithfulness. Write memories of God's

faithfulness on paper ornaments & hang them on the tree.

O Oriens – Morning Star (Isa 9:2) as the sun rises today, pray for God's light to shine in a place or situation that is breaking your heart.

O Rex Gentium – King of Nations (Isa 9:6) Listen to Handel's Messiah: "For Unto us a Child is Born" What does it mean to you for Christ to come again?

O Emmanuel – Emmanuel (Isa 7:14) in what ways is God with you? How are you God's presence to others? Listen to the hymn "O Come, O Come Emmanuel"

When read from bottom to top the first letter of each word in Latin spells out **ERO CRAS**. This actually means "I come tomorrow". It brings a clear message that leads us to join in the rejoicing, the celebration of Christmas Day.

The O Antiphons are still prayed in many churches—as they have been for more than 1500 years—from December 17 to December 23. It is wonderful to see how our faith is built on those who came before us and how with these prayers, we can be drawn into worship, the worship of our loving Emmanuel, God with us, particularly at this time of year.

If you are interested in more information about this, please feel free to contact me for a copy of a small booklet on the O Antiphons that includes Bible readings, reflections and prayers.

The Rev'd Kim

APOLOGIES

My apologies for the late delivery of the MU News but I tripped in the house one evening after I'd locked up, and fell and broke my hip. All great excitement as the house had to be broken in to rescue me! But I was so impressed by the speed with which I was rescued and the care of all the staff concerned, and even more so by the wonderful love prayers and visits from MU friends. Thank you, one and all.

Elizabeth



*A HAPPY CHRISTMAS TO ALL
OUR MEMBERS*

**Christian Concern for Families
World-wide through**

**PRAYING – ENABLEING
– CAMPAIGNING**

**It's how the Mothers' Union
works best**