

SCOTTISH CHURCHES DISABILITY GROUP NEWSLETTER

May 2021



Message from SCDG Chairman

During this wee while I have been again turning for my own reflections to the book of the prophet Ezekiel. I refer you to the first 13 verses of chapter 47.

I was reminded how much we take water for granted, although we need it to continue to grow and maintain life. In verse 11 even the swamps and marshes have their use and become salt. I know we all must be careful about how much salt we use and I am afraid I am as bad as ever and put far too much salt on my fish and chips.

Towards the end of that passage (verses 12 and 13) the fruit from the trees each month brings new and good fruit and the leaves of the trees are for healing. I am reminded how God will never let us down, nothing in his creation is unnecessary and he continues to care for us and our needs each day.

As we move into fewer restrictions many of our folk will need care and certainly healing. This is not for somebody else to do, but it lies with all of us to support each other in these difficult times.

In 1969 Neil Armstrong walked on the surface of the moon and I sat up all night to watch. My family thought me to be completely mad, but even then there was speculation about whether there was water on the moon and if so, was there life.

As restrictions ease, I wish you all God's richest blessings. Do please look after yourselves and, of course, each other.

David Nicholson DCS – Chairman



We hope to hold an AGM this year, though no details are yet available. Some vacancies will arise on the Committee, which conducts much of its business remotely. This is your opportunity to be involved in shaping SCDG's future. If you are interested, please contact Paul Goode, Vice Chairman, at pgoode@btinternet.com or Tel.: 07712650610.

A message from your vice-chair, Paul Goode

To all my friends and members of the Scottish Churches Disability Group.
How are you all and how have you coped with restrictions in the last fifteen months?

Peter began to speak: "I now realise that it is true that God treats everyone on the same basis. Whoever worships him and does what is right is acceptable to him, no matter what race he belongs to." Acts Chapter 10 verses 34/35

From time to time I post on the SCDG facebook page the short Sunday service that Katriona, my wife, Matthew, my 24-year-old son, and I broadcast every Sunday.

In March 2020 we realised that as my son and wife would be "Isolating" at home, we could not attend Church. Matthew has affirmed his faith and is a full adult member of the Church. To continue worshipping on Sundays, we decided to do a 30-minute service along the same lines as the one we had been used to. Little did we know that after 15 months we would still not be able to worship fully in Church. We have not missed a Sunday and on Facebook we average over 100 views each week. It has been our way for Matthew to understand worship and that "Church" has not been cancelled due to COVID.

As many of you are acutely aware, isolation has been hard and we have seen in this country wonderful examples of kindness and ministry to many. For us we have found the period very lonely and isolating and we have realised who our true friends are.

Our Church opened in the summer, closed in the Autumn under lock-down and has now re-opened for Sunday worship. It is with great sadness that, to date, not one member of our church has contacted us to talk about how Matthew and my wife can return to worship in church again. We feel cut off from the congregation. However, this all sounds negative, but we have found other ways to feel part of the "Church".

Sanctuary First on-line Christian Group has been a great find, daily prayers at 7 am; Monday evening Community Prayers; daily reflections; Friday afternoon Music Jam Sessions; Friday evening reflections; Sunday afternoon Services. Plus, much more.

SCDG strives to include and help ALL to come to worship and deepen their faith. We believe everyone is equal and loved individually by God, as he formed us in his own image. As Peter came to realise it is irrelevant to God who you are so long as you worship Him and try to carry out works that are acceptable to him.



Update on Appletree by Kate Sainsbury

The Appletree Community, a residential community for people with special needs near Auchterarder, is moving on towards opening in late summer, all threads now coming together. Louis, my son, is the first resident, followed by Ewan once Louis and the staff team have settled. Then we'll look for a third person.

Here's a photo of the core staff team, who were inspired on their first visit to Appletree recently. They loved the feel of the place, could see how the spaciousness of the site will support those they care for and themselves in daily life.



Building works are progressing: now main building alterations are done, it's the exciting part of watching paint go up. Louis chose autistic-friendly colours that are calm, sludgy greens, blues, neutrals; outside, the sensory courtyard is taking shape; the swing that we fundraised for is awaiting installation; there is to be topsoil, bark and crushed shell. There is something monastic about this enclosed south-facing space with its giant standing stones.

Crucial to progress in the transition is the confidence that Scottish Autism staff team are gaining. The core team are getting to know Louis in hospital and Ewan at his family home. Louis became happier when he moved to a different learning disability unit at Strathmartine Hospital before Easter. Allied health professions are now liaising over support plans to transfer into community.

Each Monday I host an online prayer meeting at 6pm, praying for Appletree and wider concerns. Another small group is reflecting on the spirituality of Appletree, as an inclusive place of hospitality and healing; we are exploring how we relate to other communities: Benedictine, Iona Community, Camphill and l'Arche, embodying the values of Scottish Autism and best practice in secular life.

We families are getting to know each other and building relationships with the care team: there is a great energy flowing through us. Relationships are at the core of this community: circles of overlapping energy, all contributing through different gifts to the central purpose of enabling each person to live well and to flourish.

A gift has just arrived that embodies all the support we have received so far. It is an etching called 'Fore-runners of Fruit', by Anna Airy, (1882 - 1964). The bees buzz around the blossom, fertilising fruit yet to come. It is a picture of great hope and promise, from the other side of the world.

Thank you to you all for your prayers and support that brought us to this place.



Helping Churches to be More Inclusive

A few months ago Barbara Urquhart told us that the Presbytery of Irvine and Kilmarnock would appoint six Pioneer Ministry workers and that one of these would have a focus on enabling disabled people to participate more fully in all aspects of church life. Katrona Templeton has now been appointed to lead this project.

Recently, Katrona and the other Pioneer Ministry workers led a session for the full Presbytery on the Five Marks of Mission. This concept was created by the Church of England to ensure that the mission of churches is aligned to the mission of Christ. The following message is taken from Katrona's presentation.

Mission Mark 4: To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation

Mark 4 of mission is quite a big ask. There is a lot of discrimination, poverty and hate in the world. How do we fulfil this mark? Do we storm Parliament protesting injustices? Take to the streets in demonstrations against wars and violence? Hold peace conferences and negotiations?

That can be part of it, but are we just treating the symptoms rather than the root cause? Everyone has bias, conscious or unconscious, caused by influences which are not from God. By taking a closer look at ourselves and our churches we can identify these biases, and re-educate ourselves.

One of the inclusion project's core values is **the recognition of the equality of all individuals in the sight of God.**

We hope to achieve this in three ways:

- by education and opening up discussion within churches, to raise awareness of what disability inclusion means in practice;
- by reaching out to our wider communities to show disabled people of all ages and their families that churches genuinely extend a welcome to all people;
- by providing opportunities for non-traditional worship formats for disabled people who are best served by alternative settings and styles of worship.

When it comes to disability inclusion in our churches, it is small changes that make all the difference. Most churches now have hearing loops, ramps and accessible toilets, but how welcome do people with disabilities feel in the church? In Scotland one in five adults are reckoned to have a disability - is that reflected in our church numbers?

The main change needed is not to the physical layout of the building of the church, but a change of the thinking of the people inside church. Within some parts of the church the religious model of disability is still prevalent. This views disability as an Act of God, a punishment for sin committed by the disabled person or their family.

This thinking and similar thinking around other minorities can still be seen in our churches nowadays. It manifests itself as “acts of kindness”, such as people praying for disabilities to be cured, asking God to make others whole again.

If a disabled person sees their disability as part of who they are, as what makes them unique and as part of how God made them, by asking God to change part of them you are actually saying, “You are not good enough, there is something wrong with you. God needs to make you better before you are welcomed here”.

What would you think if a teenager sat in the pew beside you with headphones on and reading an iPad? Are they being disrespectful or are they autistic, with ear defenders and are using the iPad to better access the Bible and hymns?

What will make a wider, larger change?

- Stopping, thinking and examining ourselves to confront our unconscious bias.
- Making those small differences and listening to what people want and need.
- Planting small seeds at a grass roots level so that we will see a wider, larger change.

This will benefit all aspects of our church, not just disability inclusion.

- What support do you provide for those with disabilities to fully participate in church life, to engage with leadership roles within the congregation?
- Could you imagine someone with a speech impediment or a learning difficulty helping to lead your service?

It is our hope that we can support congregations to help make this happen.

<p style="text-align: center;">How to make virtual church engaging and inclusive By a dyslexic member of SCDG</p>

Online church services leave me cold.

Since last April, my church has been pre-recording services on video and putting them on YouTube each Sunday. I tried watching them at the start, but I found that they made me feel more cut off than connected. I couldn't take this on top of social distancing. So I stopped watching them.

Interactive, participatory church activities engage me.

By contrast, I've taken part in some Bible study sessions and Roofbreaker meetings over the last year. These have happened on Zoom and I've found them stimulating and uplifting. I've felt the warmth of community at them, which has surprised me given the clunkiness of remote meetings.

They have also been interactive and participatory. For example, at Bible study I've discussed the Bible with people from my church. And at Roofbreakers I've given a Bible reflection and led a prayer.

In-person church services also engage me.

I found in-person church services engaging enough pre-Covid. I think that is because there are no distractions, and I am in the presence of other people. This focuses my mind on whatever is happening. All the sensory aspects make it vivid, like feeling the pew at my back, and seeing people.

Virtual church is potentially more disability-friendly.

Remote church activities are *potentially* more inclusive of disabled people than physical ones. For example, one wheelchair user can take part in his church fellowship group for the first time over lockdown because it has gone remote. So he hasn't had to go up any flights of stairs to attend it.

People with other disabilities can also benefit from virtual church. For example, someone who struggles to go out because of anxiety, agoraphobia or mobility difficulties. Or someone who needs to watch a church service more than once because of memory or attentional difficulties.



Keep doing online church services.

I think that we should keep offering remote church services because it lets people take part who can't take part in physical services. (Not only disabled people, but also other people: for example, people whose caring or work commitments prevent them from attending physical church).

I need online services to be interactive and participatory.

I'm sure others do too. So here are 3 things that would make online church services interactive and participatory for me.

1) Having a virtual chat after the virtual service

- for anyone who wishes to discuss the service, e.g. share responses to the sermon or Bible reading. These might work best in random break-out groups, so that people don't feel exposed in front of the whole group, and so that people can meet each other and have a shared experience.

2) Having church services by Zoom, real-time, rather than pre-recorded videos

This lets more people take part, e.g. read a lesson or contribute a prayer, because people might be happy to do this in a Zoom call but not in a pre-recorded service that will go online. It also lets people see who else is 'there'.

3) Giving a week's notice of the Bible reading

- e.g. on the church Facebook page, so that people know a week in advance what it will be. This lets people interact with it during the week running up to the service, e.g. read it in their preferred translation, and look for something on it such as a commentary, sermon or reflection.

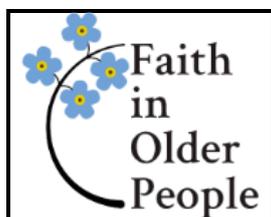
Prospects Across Scotland

The May newsletter of Prospects Across Scotland can be seen at https://www.prospectsacrossscotland.org.uk/assets/uploads/docs/No_37_Newsletter.pdf. This includes a link to a film of their Easter Celebration.

The Resources section of this group's website has a great deal of useful information including a Church Accessibility Leaflet and helpful symbols for orders of service. Find out more at <https://www.prospectsacrossscotland.org.uk/resources> For more details of Prospects Across Scotland activities, contact Ivy Blair at ivy.blair@prospectsacrossscotland.org.uk or tel. **07827 939 520**.

Roofbreakers

Edinburgh and Lothians Roofbreakers group provides a forum for people interested in making church accessible to everyone. To find out more about the group's activities, look at their Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/pg/ELDMnMNetwork/> .



This charity's aim is "***to enable a better understanding of the importance of the spiritual dimension to the well-being of older people***". It offers a listening service to care home and care at home staff to help them to ensure the well-being of those for whom they care and for themselves. For further details, please see <https://www.faithinolderpeople.org.uk/listening-service/> .

There is also a link to courses in the **Spiritual Care Matters** series for all staff and volunteers working in care homes, health and other care settings. These include:

- **Supporting the Spiritual Needs of Older People**
- **Looking after your own Spiritual Wellbeing**

Information on how to join these free online courses can be found at <https://spiritualcarematters.com/> .



Bipolar Disorder (formerly known as manic depression) is a mental illness characterised by significant mood swings, including manic highs and depressive lows. Most people with bipolar disorder experience alternating episodes of mania and depression and between 2-3% of Scotland's population (100,000-150,000 people) live with bipolar disorder, though not all have been diagnosed.

Bipolar Disorder can affect people of any age or background. Symptoms can first occur and then recur when work, studies, family or emotional pressures are at their greatest. Women may be affected by childbirth or during the menopause.

The key to coping with bipolar disorder is early diagnosis, accepting the illness and adapting a lifestyle to enhance control over the symptoms. The illness can be managed through a blend of medication, psychological therapies and self-management. Everyone must find the balance of treatments and therapies that works for them.

Bipolar Scotland charity is for everyone who lives with bipolar disorder and those who care for them. Its aims are to:

- challenge stigma and discrimination while representing the views of people who live with bipolar to politicians and health professionals;
- run self-help groups throughout Scotland;
- provide training on how to self-manage bipolar conditions;
- give information on everything to do with bipolar disorder.

For information on the charity's resources and how to find a self-help group:

- check the website at <https://www.bipolarscotland.org.uk/>
- phone 0141 560 2050
- send an e-mail to info@bipolarscotland.org.uk

Inspiring thoughts



A real friend is one who overlooks your broken down gate and admires the flowers in your garden.
(Author Unknown)

Friendship's Flowers

Life is a garden,
Good friends are the flowers,
And time spent together,
Life's happiest hours.
For friendship, like flowers,
Bloom ever more fair
When carefully tended
By dear friends who care;
And life's lovely garden
Would be sweeter by far
If all who passed through it
Were as nice as you are.

(Helen Steiner Rice)

Sharing our news

We have had good feedback about helpful articles in our newsletter, especially from clergy about an article on inserting captions in video clips of worship services. This increased sharing of our news has come about partly due to our readers passing on newsletters or extracts from them in their church magazines and to their wider circle of contacts. For example, each issue is now circulated by the Clerk of the Presbytery of Irvine and Kilmarnock to all members of this Presbytery. Could other Presbyteries, Dioceses or other networks of churches adopt this approach?

Can you can raise SCDG's profile by passing on our newsletter to anyone who may be interested? Your help will be greatly appreciated.

How to contact SCDG

Please send your news and articles to the Newsletter Editor, Barbara Graham:
barbara.graham74@btinternet.com or Tel. 01563-522108.

To contribute to our website, contact Ian Boe at website.editor@scdg.org.uk.
Check <http://scdg.org.uk> for updates, including videos of hymns, some with BSL and Makaton signing. [List of hymns](#) [List of hymns with signing or Makaton](#)

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