

Dear Friends,

When I look at the calendar, I find it hard to believe that we are already half way through the month of November. This has, without doubt, been a very strange year! In many ways it feels as if life has ground to a halt with all the usual summertime activities curtailed by the COVID 19 Pandemic. Never in our wildest dreams did any of us see this coming. And yet, here we are. Autumn is mostly gone and winter is just around the corner. In two weeks', the Season of Advent will commence. In normal circumstances the programme of activities at St Stephen's would be well underway, but the times we are living in have a "new normal". We are having to adapt to different ways of being church! **Please take time to read these pages so that you know what's happening and how to get involved!**

While life has found a new pace, it goes on just the same. The Presbytery Plan for St Stephen's Church means that we will now begin to join with St George's Tillydrone, St Mary's King Street, and St Machar Cathedral to form a Parish Grouping. The plan will gradually be implemented over the next 10 years – with the first phase being a union of the congregations of St Mary's and St George's. It is important for the congregation of St Stephen's that we engage fully in this process in order to ensure we have a say in shaping our future. With this in mind, we are looking for people to become involved in the discussions re the aforementioned union, as well as in the search for a new Minister for St Machar. We require one person to join each of two newly formed committees. Is this something you might consider getting involved in? It is most likely that meetings will take place on Zoom for the foreseeable future – and this can be accessed by either computer/ i-pad or a telephone connection. I cannot stress enough just how vital it is to have our congregation represented in these talks and actions. If you are a full-member of the congregation and willing to get involved, please contact me as soon as possible.

ONLINE WORSHIP. We are truly blessed to have among our number people who

have the skills and the resources to enable us to continue to provide worship online on a weekly basis. There can be no doubt that our Church Organist has made this his ministry during the pandemic. It was Callum who dragged us all, kicking and screaming, into the 21st Century with his first "Songs of Praise", and he's kept us going ever since. We owe him a huge debt of gratitude for many, many hours of work to keep us online.

FOR THOSE WITHOUT ACCESS TO THE INTERNET – Of course, there are many of you who do not have access to our Sunday Services online. To enable you to join in worship we have now introduced a new **PHONELINE WORSHIP**. By calling **01224 002500** you can now listen in to Sunday Worship from St Stephen's Church Online in the comfort of your own home. The latest Service will be available to you at any time for the price of a local call. This may vary according to which tariff you are on, but you can check out what it means for you by contacting BT (or check your last bill for information.) Simply dial up and listen in. If you have a "speaker" button on your handset you'll be able to share the service with others at home.

PRAYER TIMES IN CHURCH – Our prayer times continue on -
Weds 18th Nov, 2nd Dec and 16th Dec 2.00 -2.30 pm. Private prayer
Sat 28th Nov and 26th Dec 11.00 – 11.30am. Short reflection & private prayer.
Places are limited & **must be pre-booked** for each Prayer Time Please call **Ian Sutherland on 01224 323064 to register**. **Facemasks must be worn** and guidelines adhered to as published by the Scottish Government & the Church of Scotland.

ADVENT SERVICES AND ACTIVITIES – I hope you had an opportunity to see our Remembrance Display on the Doorstep at St Stephen's, either by visiting the church or by viewing the photographs and video during our online worship, and on Facebook or the church website www.st-stephens.co.uk We hope to follow this with a Christmas Display in December. We will be looking for more painted stones – this time with characters from the Nativity story – and, of course, drawings, colourings of Nativity pictures to display on the railings. It's something that everyone can join in.

Preparations are already underway for some of our Advent Services to be available both online and by the phonline service. We will keep you updated about the timings of these later. One such Service will be our **"Time to Reflect and Remember"**, where we take time near the beginning of the Advent Season to acknowledge the losses we have experienced and to recognise that not everyone is "looking forward to Christmas". 2020 has been a particularly difficult year for all who have been bereaved or suffered the loss of their job or the breakdown of relationships. This service sets aside time to reflect quietly on the thoughts and feeling which result from loss – recent or from years gone by. If you, or someone you know wants to participate in this service please get in touch either by email or by phoning me on 01224 635694 or 07719664293. Please share news of this Service with family and friends.

We are looking forward to our much-loved **9 Lessons and Carols by Candlelight Service** too. Although we cannot gather in church for this, we can still enjoy hearing the Christmas story and join in the singing either online or by phonline. The good news is that you'll be able to join in these Services at a time that suits you, as they will be available for longer than just one day!

Even our Christmas Craft and Christingle is going ahead online this year!!

Ruthie has been busy for weeks putting together “**Crafty Carriers**” – bags of fun for the young and not so young craft enthusiasts among us. There is loads of stuff for the kids to do – and each pack will contain full instructions. Instructions will also be available via our very own videos on our You Tube channel. There will be a smaller pack of simple craft for adults too – nothing too complicated! If you, your children, grandchildren, or your friends would like to join in please give me a call/ email to book a bag!

We hope to have a wee **Christmas Fayre Fundraiser** too. So, if you have been knitting, sewing, painting etc during lockdown and you would like to donate some of the things you have made to our “stall” – we will display photos on the church website, our Facebook Page, and hopefully have a wee “catalogue” for those not online. There will be a chance to purchase small items of jewellery, Christmas decorations, a limited number of Christmas cakes, and other gift ideas. We may even be able to sell “Baking Pledges” – if some of our bakers are willing to take “orders”. Can you help? Please remember, we’re trying these things for the first time – so be patient with us!

FOODBANK COLLECTION FOR SOMEBODY CARES – following the extremely successful food collection at the end of October, we have decided to continue this on a monthly basis. The next collection will be outside the church on **SATURDAY 28TH NOVEMBER 2.00 – 3.00 PM. Please remember to wear a face mask if you are coming along – it’s our church family we are protecting!**

FREE WILL OFFERING ENVELOPES – **A number of people have been in touch to ask what to do with their Sunday Offerings.** We have therefore decided to have an “Offering Bucket” for St Stephen’s outside the church at the same time as the Foodbank Collection. Simply drop your FWO envelopes into the bucket and, after a suitable time of quarantine has lapsed, the offering will be counted and banked in the usual way. We hope to do this on a monthly basis too. Do not forget, you can make your offering by setting up a Standing Order through your bank account. Just ask us!

I hope you will agree that it is heartening to know that St Stephen’s Church is alive and kicking! We may not be able to meet in the same ways, but we can still be Church. we are still the same “Church Family”. I know that Elders are doing all they can to keep in touch with those in their Districts. Remember, I am only a phone call away and it’s OK to “bother the Minister” – I am always happy to hear from you! You don’t have to wait for a crisis – give me a call with your news!

Jesus has called us to love one another – and we all need to feel loved, particularly in these unfamiliar days. I always feel greatly encouraged by the Christian Fellowship that

is shared by those associated with the St Stephen's Church Family. If you feel there is more you need then just let me know – all reasonable requests will be considered! Please be assured that you are all in my prayers, and I thank God for you every day.

Yours in His Service,
Maggie



Donation -Somebody Cares Foodbank



Remembrance Rocks



Such talent!



We will remember them



Many contributions from all ages!