St Columba's Scottish Episcopal Church

WINTER EDITION 2026

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WORLD PREMIÈRE IN LARGS

On Sunday the first of November, All Saints Day, a veritable multitude of people met at 5.00 pm for a most beatific service of sung Evensong, in St Columba's SEC Church, to celebrate the 150th Anniversary of when the church was originally built back in 1876.

As always, evensong is an especially peaceful service, time for reflection at the close of the day. The music throughout the service was led most proficiently by Colleen Anderson on the organ, which was in fine fettle following its extensive repair and renovation back in the summer. The St Columba's church choir was augmented and almost doubled in number by friends and singers from around the area, and they were very grateful for the support given by Alistair Chisholm, who conducted the choir singing the hauntingly beautiful Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis as well as the responses to Priest in Charge Sean McEwans crystal clear sung preces, psalm, Lord's Prayer.

However, the pièce de resistance must surely go to the final anthem that was most graciously composed by Sir James MacMillan for the choir in honour of the 150th Anniversary, and this world première performance was conducted by the composer himself. All in the church agreed it was a most magnificent end to a wonderful evening. Sherry, soft drinks and shortbread were served after the service.

Sir James Macallam "I was delighted and very



honoured to have been asked to write a piece of music like this for such an important event for the community, the parish and the Episcopal Church here in Largs. I remember coming down and singing with you in preparation for this, and I heard what you did, what your strengths were. It is a nice full sound that you made with the organ accompaniment, so I am delighted how it worked out, with the choir and the way that you had prepared. Colleen has done a wonderful job."

Iain McLarty, Director of the Royal School of Church Music in Glasgow. "It's great to hear new pieces written for local churches, which is what Sir James MacMillan does so well. It came across really vibrantly, a beautiful reflection of the text. A really gritty performance, and you could tell that everyone had worked very hard by their energy and enthusiasm. You all knew it very well."



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Father Sean writes



When the last edition of our magazine was published, I was just beginning my ministry among you at St Columba's. Since then, these first months have been a time of getting to know one another, discovering more of our life as a parish, and beginning to look towards the future God is calling us to share.

I am grateful for the warmth of your welcome, for the stories you have shared with me about this church and its place in the life of Largs, and for the many quiet acts of faithfulness that sustain our common life. Visiting parishioners, sharing in pastoral care, preparing and celebrating worship, and working alongside the Vestry and our musicians have all helped me begin to understand what makes St Columba's distinctive. I am especially thankful to everyone who has helped make this transition a time of continuity, generosity, and renewed possibility.

There is much to be grateful for, and much still beginning. The life of a parish is not measured only by what happens on a Sunday morning, but also by the care we offer one another, the friendships that grow, the prayers offered in quietness, and the ways we serve our neighbours. I believe there are marks of new life already among us. Our task is to notice them, nurture them, and remain open to where the Holy Spirit may lead us next.

As I write, we are approaching Advent and the celebration of Christmas. Advent invites us to slow down, to wait, and to pay attention to the God who comes among us—not only in the child of Bethlehem, but in the life of the world around us today. In a season that can so easily become crowded with preparations and expectations, the Church offers us space to listen, to hope, and to make room for Christ.

I hope that the coming weeks will be an opportunity for us to gather together in worship, to welcome friends and neighbours, and to share the joy and wonder of this season with our wider community. Whether you have been part of St Columba's for many years, have joined us more recently, or are simply curious about the life of the Church, there is a place for you here. I look forward to continuing this journey with you: learning together, praying together, and discovering how God is calling us to be a church for everyone in Largs. May the coming season renew our hope, deepen our love for God and one another, and prepare us to welcome Christ anew.

Abundant blessings,
Father Sean+

A note from the editor

I welcome any articles, news items, information or poems that are important or special to you. The **COPY DEADLINE** for the Spring edition of the church magazine is **15th February 2027**.

Robin Spencer, Editor

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What's on – future issues

A member of the congregation suggested that it would be interesting to learn how different people met their partner. A think this is a great idea. To Lead the way, I will recount how I met Joanna in Italy and I am looking for a further 4-5 more stories to fill a page. **Please participate, if you wish to**!

I shall also be researching St Valentine and writing an article on him to complement the above stories, for inclusion in the Spring edition of our church magazine! **Do get in touch if you have any relevant info about the life of St Valentine**.

The God Who Comes



An Advent article by The Reverend Sean McEwen

Advent begins in the darkness. The days are short, the nights are long, and the Church gives us four weeks in which to wait. We light candles one by one, not because a single flame can banish the darkness, but because even a small light reminds us that darkness does not have the final word.

The word Advent comes from the Latin adventus, meaning "coming" or "arrival." At the heart of these weeks is a simple and profound proclamation: God comes. We remember the God who came among us in Jesus Christ. We look forward to the coming of Christ in glory, when God's purposes for creation will be fulfilled. And in between those two great horizons, we learn to recognise the ways Christ comes among us now: in Scripture and prayer, in neighbour and stranger, in acts of mercy and reconciliation, and in the unexpected places where God's presence makes itself known.

This is why Advent is about more than counting the days until Christmas. Our culture is remarkably good at getting ahead of itself. By the time Advent arrives, much of the world has already moved on to Christmas. We are encouraged to hurry, to purchase, to plan, to decorate, to consume. Yet the Church says: Wait. Watch. Pay attention.

There is something deeply countercultural about waiting. We often experience it as wasted time, something to be endured until the thing we want finally arrives. But biblical waiting is different. It is not passive. It is an attentive waiting—a readiness to notice what God is doing even when we cannot yet see the whole picture. And that is where Advent hope begins. Christian hope is not the same thing as optimism. Optimism tells us that everything will probably work out. Hope is deeper. Hope can look honestly at the darkness and still trust that God is at work within it. Hope does not require us to pretend that the world is brighter than it is. Instead, hope teaches us to look for the light that is already shining.

The Advent candles make this visible. Each week another small flame appears. The darkness remains, but so does the light. We are reminded that God's coming does not depend upon our ability to create the light ourselves. We are learning to receive it, recognise it, and bear witness to it. Perhaps this is what it means to become Advent people.

We become people who know how to wait without despair; people who remain attentive to the presence of God; people who can hold hope even when the answers are not yet clear. We prepare the way of the Lord not simply with words, but through lives shaped by mercy, justice, generosity, forgiveness and welcome. And this is something we can practice together as a parish. During these weeks, we might make a little more room for silence and prayer. We might notice someone carrying loneliness or grief during a season that can be difficult for many. We might welcome a neighbour who has never crossed the threshold of St Columba's. We might offer our time, generosity, or simply our attention to someone who needs it. We might ask, each day, not only "What do I need to get done?", but also "Where is Christ already coming among us?"

To be an Advent people is to become a community that keeps watch for Christ, and then makes room for him when he comes. It means looking beyond our own walls and learning to recognise the signs of God's love already present in Largs and in the lives of our neighbours. It means being ready not simply to wait for what God will do, but to join in what God is already doing. Advent therefore asks something more of us than simply preparing for Christmas. It asks us to become attentive to the God who comes.

The God who came among us in Christ is still coming. The light is already shining in the darkness. So this Advent, let us keep watch together waiting, hoping, welcoming, and learning to recognise the One who is coming to meet us.

A message from Bishop Nick



The first signs of a thaw

"Always winter and never Christmas." It is one of the most haunting lines in C. S. Lewis's The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe. When Lucy steps through the wardrobe into Narnia, she discovers a country held in the grip of the White Witch. The snow lies deep, and nobody can remember when the winter began. Nothing seems likely to change. Then word begins to spread. Aslan is coming. Before the children meet the great lion, there are signs that something is happening. The Witch's hold is weakening. Father Christmas arrives at last. The snow begins to melt, and the sound of running water returns to the woods. A world that seemed frozen for ever is stirring into life.

Lewis gives us an image that speaks to something many of us recognise. There are seasons in our lives when it is difficult to imagine anything changing. Grief can feel like that. So can loneliness, or the weariness of carrying a worry for a long time. We keep going, but we find ourselves wondering if there will ever be a thaw. Christmas brings the extraordinary news that God has come to share our life. The child in the manger enters a world with plenty of darkness of its own. He is vulnerable, dependent on the love and care of others. Yet here, in this small beginning, is the presence of God, and a hope that will carry us even through death. I wonder where you have noticed the first signs of a thaw this year?

At St Columba's, there has been the arrival of Fr Sean: the beginning of a new relationship between priest and people, with all that you will discover together. Often it is through quite ordinary encounters we become aware of Christ's presence. Someone listens carefully. A visit helps us feel less alone and find courage to take a next step.

And what a remarkable gift to have received a new piece of music written especially for St Columba's by Sir James MacMillan. Blessed are Ye gives fresh voice to words of Jesus that the Church has treasured for centuries. Your choir has had to stretch itself to sing it. There is something hopeful in that too: discovering together that you can do something you have never done before.

Perhaps this Christmas you will feel full of expectation. Perhaps it will be a difficult one. Either way, Christ comes to you. His coming does not depend on your ability to feel festive. Listen for the running water beneath the snow. Look for the small places where love is making life possible again. God is with us, and even now there is hope. With my love and prayers for Father Sean and everyone at St Columba's this Christmas.
+ Nick

Autumn Holiday Club



On Saturday 17th October, 12 children attended the Autumn Holiday Club at St Columba's Church. Father Sean had them spell-bound recounting the bounty of God's earth, with actions of things that grow in the earth, that inhabit the sea and the air. We then had great fun from rounders outside to walking the labyrinth which Father Sean explained. The children also coloured and built lanterns, sowed seeds in jam jars and decorated them with colourful ribbons. We went into church and the two teams of children had to find answers to a quiz - a lot of fun and also finding out what areas of the church are for. The day was a great success and thanks go to all the adults involved from leading singing and games to preparing snacks, lunch and refreshments for the parents at collection time.

Laura May Bryce – *"Thank you all for providing a great day for the children".* **Nicki Wilson** – *"Leah had a lovely time, thank you".* **Karen Sweeney** – "*Thanks again for putting on a superb day*".

BLAST FROM THE PAST 1965

The following extract is an abridged version of **a** letter written in **the July 1965 church magazine by Gordon J H Pont**, who was the newly appointed rector of St Columba's SEC at the time.

My dear friends

Although I am writing this from Motherwell, by the time you read this, I will have been instituted as your new Rector. First reactions to this are deep gratitude for inviting me to come to Largs, and joy at the prospect. All that I heard from Fr. Sladden about you is being proved true, and we have been deeply impressed by the kindness we have already received from members of the congregation.

Our new house is very pleasant, and so nicely situated. We lived in a flat in Dunfermline when we first got married, so in a sense it will be our first real home. Largs itself is an attractive place, and as my wife and I do not know it at all, we are looking forward to exploring the town and its surroundings. I look forward to meeting you all as soon as possible, but if I do not reach your house during the first week, please remember that even rectors can only be in once place at a time.

While one's first reaction to such as prospect is a happy one, when I think more deeply about all that is involved in being Rector in a congregation . . . . . the task before us is not an easy one. However, St Paul is a source of encouragement, claiming God told him "*My grace is sufficient for you*", and (sic I learnt) '*Grace is help from God*'.

While that help comes in many ways, it comes in two particularly. Firstly, by prayer. Do please remember your new Rector often in your prayers – I shall certainly pray for you. Secondly, grace comes through the sacraments. I know from personal experience that the grace of orders has strengthened me to do things I could not have done on my own. For all of us, sacraments bring general or particular help through life.

My wife and I are greatly looking forward to coming to Largs, and we know that we are going to be happy living and working among you

God bless you all, Yours very sincerely,
Gordon J. H. Pont, *July 1965*

Lifelines

By Linda Whitby

Have you heard of "Lifelines"? It is an organisation that supports and befriends prisoners on death row in the US through letter writing. It is not a religious, political or campaigning organisation, though respectful of the varied individual beliefs and values of its members.

Lifelines began in 1988 when its founder Jan Arriens watched the BBC documentary "Fourteen Days in May". Jan was so moved by the words of the condemned prisoners who were interviewed and by the dignity of the man to be executed that he wrote to three of the prisoners. All replied saying how much his letter had meant to them and how pleased they were to have their voices heard beyond the prison walls. Lifelines then spread by word of mouth and extensive media coverage,

We have conferences twice a year in London where guest speakers with expert or first-hand knowledge of issues related to the death penalty tell of issues they have encountered. Sometimes we have someone who has experienced and survived DR speak to us. There are also regional groups that get together on line meeting two or three times a year. My own experience with the people I have written to has been mixed. My first pen pal was very illiterate and his handwriting terrible. Sorry to say that correspondence didn't last long! My current gentleman is a lot chattier and uses email, a lot easier all round. I write to him about every two months, depending on how quickly he gets back to me.

If anyone is interested in writing to these prisoners and would like more information, I have a small book "A Quick Guide to Death Row, Polunsky Unit" (Texas) reportedly one of the worse prisons. Ten DR inmates have come together to answer dozens of questions about DR that come up again and again but which no one really dares to ask directly. They talk about their daily lives, their desires and their fears, showing a humanity rarely seen or heard. They do not defend themselves but guide us through the hell that is their life.

Not a very happy article to read, but writing to these people is a very good, kind thing to do. Finally a quote from Kenneth in Polunsky "My heart is filled with immense levels of gratitude for the compassion I've been shown, for without that from you there'd be no me today.".

‘Christmas tide’ in 0 AD

December 0 AD

A time of dread for the ancient peoples, especially in northern lands such as Great Britain, as they saw the days getting shorter and colder. This time of year is very cold and dismally bleak, which is probably why celebrations were probably needed to raise spirits and help people survive another winter. Great rituals were used to ‘revert the course of the sun’, and sure enough, the next day the Sun began to move higher into the sky, showing that it had been reborn. It is significant that many civilisations welcomed their Solar Gods at the time of greatest darkness – including Mithras (the bull-headed Warrior God) and the Egyptian God Horus, as well as Jesus Christ.

IO SATURNALIA



So, how did people in 0 AD celebrate ‘Christmas-tide’ at the time when Jesus was born. Well of course they didn’t actually celebrate Christmas, because Jesus was bawling away in his swaddling clothes, . But they did have big midwinter festivals in December that looked a lot like Yuletide, and those traditions got woven into Christmas over time. This article will compare customs and activities at this time in four different areas.

PALESTINE

In 0 AD, Jews in Judea weren't celebrating anything special around 25th December. That date didn't exist for them, and nothing major in Judaism falls on it, or even in December. The main Jewish observance was Chanukah, sometimes referred to as the "Festival of Lights", which fell anywhere from late Nov to late Dec. It was a relatively minor holiday, commemorating the Maccabees and Temple rededication from 165 BCE, and merely involved lighting oil lamps for 8 nights, prayers of praise, reading Torah, maybe some fried foods.

The other festival was the 10th of Tevet, commemorating the start of Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Jerusalem, which sometimes fell near December and observant Jews would fast. Jews in Judea / Palestine were under Roman rule and kept themselves separate. Some would have seen Saturnalia happening around them, but Jewish law forbade participating in pagan festivals. December for Jewish people in Palestine was probably just winter, Shabbat, and waiting for the rains.

ROME AND ITS EMPIRE

The Romans had big midwinter festivals in December that are remarkedly similar to Yuletide, and some of those traditions eventually got woven into Christmas over time, especially after the Roman Empire adopted Christianity as its main religion in the mid 300’s AD.



Romans celebrated three important festivals in December. The most important was Saturnalia, from 17th to 23rd December. It was a major festival for Saturnus, the god of agriculture and wealth, and involved feasting, drinking, gambling, and giving gifts. Homes were decorated with greenery including holly, ivy and other evergreen branches to celebrate the returning sun. Most households enjoyed a total role reversal, where masters served the slaves and people wore the pilleus, or liberty cap.



The 24th to 25th December, Romans celebrated Juvenalia, involving games and entertainments – especially for younger people, and gave gifts, often small tokens called Sigillaria, such as small terracotta figurines, sweets and candles. The week of celebration culminated on 25th December – the Dies Natalis Solis Invicti, i.e. the Birthday of the Unconquered Sun.

The whole festival was timed around the mid winter solstice, when the sun 'returns' and days start getting longer. Temples were lit, sacrifices were made, and it was a public holiday for all.

BRITAIN

In 0 AD, "Britain" was mostly Celtic tribes, not "British" yet — the Romans didn't invade until 43 AD. It was inhabited mostly by Celtic tribes: the Brigantes, Catuvellauni, Iceni, etc. They had their own religion, druids, and their calendar was based on the sun and moon.



Celts tracked the solstices and the winter solstice was huge because it meant the days would start getting longer. The big winter festival took place round 21st December, called Alban Arthan or Midwinter, and celebrated the "rebirth of the sun". The shortest, darkest day of the year was past, and people could now hope to survive yet another winter. The celebrations involved lighting bonfires, to help the sun regain strength and to ward off evil spirits in the long nights. Holly, ivy and other evergreen boughs were brought inside, because they remained green all winter and therefore symbolized life. They also celebrated with feasting on meat from animals slaughtered before winter, and drinking plentiful mead or ale.

Mistletoe was sacred to druids, who cut it with a golden sickle, and used it for healing and protection. The celebration also involved ancestor remembrance, with offerings to ancestors and nature spirits because it was a belief that the veil between worlds was thin around the time of the winter solstice. When the Romans came in 43 AD they brought Saturnalia, and the nature of the celebrations changed.

GAUL (France)

in 0 AD, It was a very different midwinter world just across the Channel from Britain. Gaul had been a Roman province for over 50 years after Julius Caesar. Cities like Lugdunum (Lyon) were Roman. As part of the Roman Empire, many Gauls celebrated the main Roman festivals mentioned earlier, Saturnalia and Dies Natalis Solis Invicti. Some Gauls may have continued to privately observe the pagan customs that their Celtic chums were celebrating across the channel, but it is not clear how many.

December 2026

Today, over 2,000 years later, it is remarkable that so many ancient customs are woven into our modern Christmas celebration. Although we no longer 'dread' winter, many people suffer from Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). Christmas is time to celebrate not only the arrival of Jesus, but also the arrival of the winter solstice, when days start to lengthen again. A time to joyfully await the coming of spring in a just few weeks.

Treasurer's tales

The Car Boot Sale at St Columba's on Saturday August 22nd, was attended by 435 people and raised a net profit of **£1,773.56!**

The four car boot sales in 2026 have together raised a total of **£6,171.92!!**

BRAVO and thank you to all involved!

Christmas Quiz



1. Who did Gabriel tell that his wife was going to have a son John?
2. What was the name of the mother of Jesus?
3. How many generations were there from Abraham to Jesus?
4. How many gospels have the Nativity story?
5. Who told Mary that she was going to have a baby?
6. Who was the first person she told?
7. What did her cousin feel when she was told?
8. What song did May sing then?
9. John's father lost the power of speech until he did what
10. Where did John live as he grew up?
11. Who was the governor of Syria when Jesus was born?
12. Who was the King of Judaea?
13. How did Mary travel to Bethlehem?
14. What was Jesus' first bed?
15. How many angels gave the good news to the shepherds?
16. How did the shepherds recognise Jesus?
17. Why did Joseph & Mary travel to Jerusalem with the baby?
18. Who told Mary that she would be pierced to the heart?
19. How old was the prophetess Anna?
20. How many gospels have the story of the Wise Men?
21. How many Wise Men were there?
22. What did Herod ask them?
23. What did Herod tell them to do?
24. What were their gifts?
25. Why did they not do what Herod told them to do?
26. What was Joseph told to do in a dream?
27. What did Herod do in a rage?
28. How did Joseph know it was safe to return from Egypt?
29. Where did the family settle?
30. What were the names of Jesus' brothers?

Answers on page 15

Christmas bible knowledge



Below you will find ten people mentioned in the nativity story according to St. Matthew. Can you put them in the order in which they are first mentioned in his Gospel?

Jeremiah the prophet; Joseph; John the Baptist; Herod; Archelaus; Mary; David; Jacob; Abraham; Jesus Christ;

1. . . . . .
2. . . . . .
3. . . . . .
4. . . . . .
5. . . . . .
6. . . . . .
7. . . . . .
8. . . . . .
9. . . . . .
10. . . . . .

Below there are ten people mentioned in the gospel according to St. Luke. Can you put them in the order in which they are first mentioned?

Jesus; David; Gabriel; Jacob; Mary; Joseph; Elizabeth; Herod; Elijah; Theophilus;

1. . . . . .
2. . . . . .
3. . . . . .
4. . . . . .
5. . . . . .
6. . . . . .
7. . . . . .
8. . . . . .
9. . . . . .
10. . . . . .

Answers on page 14

Old Jack Dillon's Choir

An irreverent ode sung to the tune of (you guessed it) 'Old MacDonald had a Farm'!

Old Jack Dillon had a Choir
Eeyeye, eeyeye, oh
And in that choir he had sopranos
Eeyeye, eeyeye, oh
With a bless you here and a bless you there
Here a bless, there a bless, everyone is blessèd
Old Jack Dillon had a Choir
Fluffy bunny oh

Old Jack Dillon had a Choir
Eeyeye, eeyeye, oh
And in that choir he had some altos
Eeyeye, eeyeye, oh
With a peace maker here and a peacemaker there
Here a peace, there a peace, everywhere a bit of peace
Old Jack Dillon had a Choir
Fluffy bunny oh

Old Jack Dillon had a Choir
Eeyeye, eeyeye, oh
And in that choir he had some baritones
Eeyeye, eeyeye, oh
With a persecuted here and a persecuted there
He was false, she was false, everyone for God's sake
Old Jack Dillon had a Choir
Fluffy bunny oh

Old Jack Dillon had a Choir
Eeyeye, eeyeye, oh
And in that choir he had a Choir Mistress
Eeyeye, eeyeye, oh
With a high note here and low note there
Here a note, there a note, everywhere a sound note
Old Jack Dillon had a Choir
Fluffy bunny oh

Now, Old Jack Dillon had a Choir
Eeyeye, eeyeye, oh
And for that choir he wrote a song
Eeyeye, eeyeye, oh
Six sopranos here and four altos there
Here a barri, there a barri, everywhere bonny barri
Old Jack Dillon loved his Choir
His fluffy bunnies, **oh**!

Words taken from the sermon on the Dung heap.

Compline services - 2027



Advent Sunday, 29th November, will see the last of our Taizé Meditations for a while as we change in the New Year to Compline.

The tradition of saying or singing Compline goes back to at least the 6th Century or even earlier. The early Church observed the practice of praying seven times a day. The Rule of St. Benedict introduced Compline as an additional final 'hour' for prayer, fixing the number of 'offices' or 'hours' observed in the monastic tradition at eight. After the Reformation, the Book of Common Prayer reduced the eight canonical 'hours' to two: Morning Prayer and Evensong.

Over the last century perhaps owing to its reflective and introspective nature, there has been an increased interest in Compline within the Anglican Church. It is a service of quiet contemplation and the structure is: a blessing, prayers of penitence, the ancient hymn "Before the ending of the day" followed by three psalms, a scripture reading, the Nunc Dimittis, the Collect of the day, the Lord's Prayer and finally – "The Lord bless us and watch over us, the Lord make his face to shine upon us and be gracious to us, the Lord look kindly on us and give us peace."

In monastic tradition Compline marks the beginning of the "Great Silence" during which monks and nuns remain silent until the first service the following day. So, it is traditional to leave the service in silence. I'm not suggesting we do this as we value fellowship with each other too much!

The **first Compline service at St Columba's SEC** in 2027 will be on **Sunday 3rd January at 5pm** and thereafter the first Sunday in the month (though it does move to the second one occasionally!).

Harvest Festival



Sunday 4th October, we celebrated the Harvest Festival, a wonderful service including uplifting anthems of thanksgiving. An impressive mountain of gifts were donated by congregation members to be given to people in need of them.



After the service, we all enjoyed a delectable and sociable harvest lunch together in the church hall.

Blessing of Animals Service



Later that afternoon, several people brought their beloved pets into church for the Blessing of the Animals service, which was a great celebration for all creatures great and small.

The church WhatsApp group

St Columba's Episcopal Church has a very active social media group on WhatsApp, where we share reminders, raise and answer queries, and broadcast information (such as progress on the church hall repairs).

If you wish to join the WhatsApp group, please message Hilary Moran on **07989 693410**

The Sesquicentennial quiz



On Saturday 10th October, over 60 members of St Columba's Church and friends met in the church hall for a truly excellent evening's entertainment.

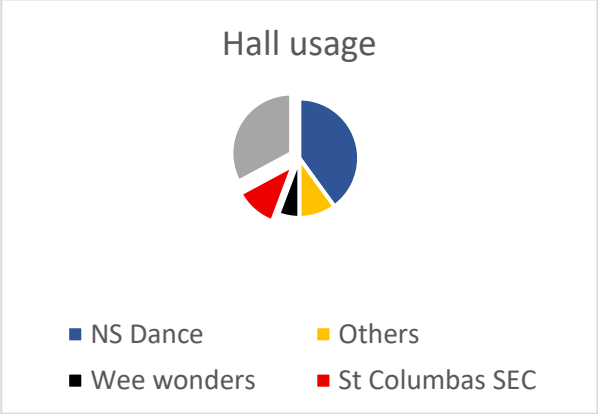
The annual quiz, brilliantly prepared by Gib FitzGibbon, had a new format which included some 'special features'. The were 6 rounds of 10 questions, with each round comprising of one question in ten different categories (such as sport, history, etc). Each round also had one question for which the answer was "150". There was one special question asking for the name for 'a period of 150 years', and although it was printed on every answer sheet, only some participants noticed!

There were 16 teams comprising mostly of 4 people, a few with only 3 contestants.

The evening started with the first 3 rounds of the quiz. Then everyone partook of a delicious meal of various cheeses and wines to complement the food, after which battle recommenced with the remaining 3 rounds of questions. The atmosphere was very intense as the scores were calculated.

The winning team, "Thistle Do", was led by Jacqueline FitzGibbon, seen above proudly accepting the "Golden Cockerel" trophy presented to her by Father Sean, with her fellow team members, Alan and Alison Ward. All three winners also received a beautiful mug with the image of the prize Cockerel printed on it.

Who uses our hall?



St Columba's church hall is a valuable asset to the church and brings in around £5,000 income each year. But who uses our hall? North Star Dance studio is our biggest user, hiring it for 28 hours a week, about 40% of the available capacity. The church itself uses around 15% of capacity, and five other organisations (Wee Wonders, Scottish Country Dancing, OIR Keyboard, OIR Pilates, and the Gaelic Choir), use it from 1 to 4 hours a week. In theory, there is still a fair bit of available time for users, but in practice there is maybe about 10-15% still available, to allow for change overs, etc.

A chat with Sarah Craigmile



I bought the Karen Aitchison School of Dancing about a year ago in 2025 from Karen Aitchison when she retired last year. She had run this ballet school in Largs for over 50 years, and it has a fabulous history and reputation. Karen had run the classes at St Columba's Nelson Street for many years, before moving the classes to St Columba's SEC church hall. When I took over the dance school, we held lessons at Willow Bank, because the church hall was damaged after the big storm in 2025. We started dancing again at St Columba's Church hall again earlier this year.

We teach several dance styles – ballet (which I teach), tap & jazz, lyrical and Highland dancing, which are taken by three other teachers. I am registered with the Royal Academy of Dance, and two of my teachers are also highly qualified, one with the International Dance Teachers Association (tap & jazz), and one with the British Association of Teachers of Dancing (highland).



We have over 150 pupils from the age of 2 to over 70, mostly females, plus 1 man and one boy. We teach several dance styles, with many pupils participating in two to three different dance styles. They come mostly for the love of dancing, the exercise and the friendship with other dancers, but a handful of the younger pupils are considering dancing as a future profession, as performers or as teachers. We have exams two times a year, for those that want to be tested. We also have an annual show – the next one is based on the Tales of Beatrix Potter, on February 19th / 20th at Barrfields Theatre in Largs. **Do come along and support our dancers.**

What I really like about the hall is its great size, obviously, and the nice facilities, such as the toilets and changing facilities, Its upkeep is done well and it is always nicely cleaned. It's in an excellent location which is very popular, especially for the parents, who love the easy parking available. Also, Linda is always very helpful if I need anything, such as extra times, etc.

I am always looking for more pupils, anyone that wants to learn to dance for the first time or try dancing again – all ages, all genders, all ability levels are welcome. We aim to be very inclusive. New pupils are always welcome, just come along for a free trial class, to make sure you actually like dancing, and if you do, we can talk about signing you on for series of lessons. So, anyone (you, your spouse, your children) who wants to learn to dance or to try dancing again after a break, to learn new techniques, to improve physical or mental strengths, or simply for exercise, fun and friendship, please get in touch either by email sarah@northstardancestudio.com or call me, Sarah Craigmile on 07811 922273.

Introducing - Joan Hutton



I was born in Helensburgh in the 1940's and lived there until I was 7 years old. My father worked for the Post Office, so we moved around a lot. His parents were from Dennyloanhead, near Falkirk, and his father, my great grandfather, worked as a tailor. My mother's father was from Scunthorpe and Grandfather was a baker from Chadsmoor near Cannock in Staffordshire. Interestingly, these grandparents moved up to Skelmorlie in 1907, my uncle Walter, mum's brother, was born in 1910 and he was baptised in St Columba's SEC Largs church!

In 1949 we moved to Lochgilphead, and when I was 11 years old we moved to the Outer Hebrides, which is when my love affair with the Outer Hebrides began – I've returned there so many times, it is always so, so beautiful. I went to the 'local', school on the other side of the island, an hour bus ride away. I didn't mind at all, as the scenery was so beautiful. All the island children spoke Gaelic as their first language and chattered away in Gaelic, often telling jokes. They all spoke English and though I had learnt some Gaelic (lessons were in English, except Gaelic classes), I had to ask them what the joke was - unsurprisingly, it was never funny translated into English!

My father's job took him all over the islands, and I often went with him, which was wonderful. We had no electricity, so no TV either. There are lots of lochs on all the islands, and my father loved to go trout fishing, so we often had trout for supper. I also remember that once a year the Bishop of Argyll and Ayr would come over to the island, and he, my mother and I would partake in holy communion, in our front room, my father not participating, being strict Church of Scotland. When I was 15, we moved to Lanark, and I went to Lanark Grammar School, a big shock after my wee island school, and when I was 17, I sat the Civil Service Entrance Exam, and joined the Inland Revenue as a Tax Officer. I used to take the train to Glasgow to met some of my Island friends at University or working in Glasgow, and we went ceilidh dancing at the Highlander Institute. It was at these dances I met John, when I was 21 years old and we got married in 1967.

Our first home was in Dumfries, but only for one year, as John's job with Gallaher's Tobacco meant we moved to Edinburgh. We had two children, Bruce and Ailsa, when we moved to Airdrie. In 1978 we moved to Callander in the Trossachs, and lived there until 1992. It was a lovely, quiet, rural place with a good school. It was also a safe place, where you could pack the children off for the day with a picnic and wouldn't see them again until 5 o'clock. John loved sailing, and we had a boat which we sailed on loch Arran and loch Lomond.

In 1992 we moved to Wemyss Bay, the children left home and we bought a bigger boat, which we initially kept at Rhu, later moving the boat to Largs Marina. It was at that time that I joined St Columba's Episcopal church in Largs, partly because I preferred it to the Episcopal church in Gourock and partly because I was doing lots of social activities in Largs. Sadly, John died in 2000, and in 2004, I moved to this flat in Largs, where I have been for the last 22 years, the longest period I have lived at one place in all my life! I have four grandchildren – Amy, Ewan, Lorna and Callum.

In Callander I had joined the Women's League of Health and Beauty for exercise classes, later renamed FL Exercise. It used to organise big rallies at the Royal Albert Hall in London, and I would travel to London with my friends, to perform our dance routines. A very colourful show and performing was nerve wracking yet thrilling at the same time. We had a great time.

I was involved with Christian Aid for 25 years, I was a volunteer for the Citizens Advice Bureau in Largs for 15 years, and I joined OIR Hill Walking group after John died. We went out walking every Saturday. I liked walking so much I started going on 'Walking Holidays, walking in Majorca, Cambodia, the Rockies, Vietnam, Peru (Lima, Machu Pichu and the Amazon Jungle – wonderful but exhausting) and several European countries.

The AGM 15th November 2026



The following extracts are from St Columba's SEC AGM, which was held in the Church Hall on Sunday 15th November 2026.

Lay Representative's report

- A summary of Bishop Nick's aim and proposals how to make the Scottish Episcopal Church a church for everyone.
- A summary of the work carried out by the vestry, a key one being the identification and appointment of Sean McEwen, from Tennessee, USA, as new Minister in Charge.

Treasurer's report

- The treasurer indicated that although the church's financial position is sound, two big expenditures dominate the accounts:

  £363,601 property expenses, of which £319,387 was for repairs to the church hall after storm Eowen in January 2025.

  £20,225 for Music, £15,875 being for repairs and refurbishment of the church organ.

  In addition, income from hiring out the hall fell by £9,093 as the hall was closed.

- These expenditures were partly offset by £53,000 insurance claims for the hall repairs and £13,308 collected from the organ refurbishment fund.
- The net result is that the total reserves have fallen from £229,393 in August 2025 to £105,503 in August 2026, a reduction of £123,890 (-54%).
- The Treasurer also introduced 2 items for discussion for those in attendance:

  The plate – The Vestry had proposed to re-introduce the passing of the plate (or a bag) during our services in order to return to our traditional ways, it is less confusing for visitors and is a constant reminder of the needs for the church. After a short discussion, it was agreed for this to take place.

  Financial donations – Vestry is encouraging members to increase their giving, by whatever means, by £10 a month if possible, in order to re-establish a more stable level of reserves.

- Chris Evans reiterated his intention to retire as Treasurer, and it is now an urgent imperative to find a replacement. The whole church is extremely grateful and appreciative of the hard work Chris has put in over many years. **Thank you Chris!**

Other (selected) reports

- Rector's Warden Report – we successfully addressed two major challenges – the church hall repair and finding / appointing a new Priest in charge. Well done!
- Director of Music – We are lucky to enjoy the dedication of our choir with steady numbers plus the newly appointed Revd McEwen's music knowledge.
- Church Flowers – well done for the fresh flowers in church each week and for the many special services throughout the year.
- Safeguarding and PVG Co-ordinator – PVG responsibilities are a high priority to ensure St Columba's SEC is a safe and inclusive environment for all.
- Services and pastoral support – Grateful thanks to Sandy Montgomerie and Martin Sofield for their support until a new Priest in Charge was appointed.
- Social / Fundraising – Socialising in the church hall resumed after Easter. Big thank you to the core people that adapted. Car boot sales continued to raise good profits.
- Social media / website – 3 core Facebook pages used and St Columba's SEC page.
- Christian aid – church members across Largs met regularly. New ideas welcome.
- Sunday refreshments – refreshments after church now back in the hall. Many thanks to all volunteers, more always welcome.

Life at St Columba's

Priest-in-Charge
Father Sean McEwen 07951 181827

Director of Music
Colleen Anderson 07967 114624

Property Convenor
Mark Yeomans 01475 520296

Fundraising Committee
Hilary Moran 01475 686213

Protection of Vulnerable Groups Co-ordinator
Victoria Johnston 07961 762973

Mother's Union
Hilary Moran 01475 686213

Church Hall Convenor
Linda Young 01475 686241

Church Flowers
Joan Hutton 01475 672927

Sidesmen
Alice MacDonald 07833 120400
Jennifer FitzGibbon 01294-823992

Christian Aid
Alice MacDonald 07833 120400
Rep on inter-church Christian Aid Committee

Intercessions Rota
Frances Robertson 01475 686947

Altar Servers
Alice MacDonald 07833 120400

Readers Rota
Gib FitzGibbon 01294 823992

Coffee Rota
Jennifer FitzGibbon 01294-823992

Press Officer
Hilary Moran 01475 686213

Magazine Editor
Robin Spencer 07818 035789

Health and Safety Officer
Alice MacDonald 07833 120400

Baptism, Wedding, Funeral, Confession by arrangement with the Rector

Largs & District Churches Together Reps
Alice MacDonald 07833 120400
Armorel Allen 07734 888980

Pastoral Visitors in the congregation
Sean McEwen, Alice MacDonald, Linda Whitby and Armorel Allen

Key diary dates for 2027

December : Christmas Day

January : Congregational New Year Lunch.

February : Lent lunches

POETS CORNER

FATHER FORGIVE

By Dorothy Lyons

Christ's arms repentant sinners hold
And brings then back within the fold
There God's great glory to behold
And praise his name.

Held firmly on the rock of Grace
They look into their Master's face
Then at his feet they take their place
And praise His name.

Christ holds this trembling soul of mine
May it be only ever Thine
That firmly fastened to the Vine
I'll praise your name

May faith increase and love grow strong
Within that fold where we belong
Turned to the right, away from wrong
We'll praise Your name

Matthew's peeps (answers)

1. *Jesus Christ (ch1 v1)*
2. *David (ch1 v1)*
3. *Abraham (ch1 v1)*
4. *Jacob (ch1 v2)*
5. *Joseph (ch1 v16)*
6. *Mary (ch1 v16)*
7. *Herod (ch2 v1)*
8. *Jeremiah the prophet (ch2 v17)*
9. *Archelaus (ch2 v22)*
10. *John the Baptist (ch3 v1)*

Luke's peeps (answers)

1. *Theophilus (ch1 v3)*
2. *Herod (ch1 v5)*
3. *Elizabeth (ch1 v5)*
4. *Elijah (ch1 v17)*
5. *Gabriel (ch1 v19)*
6. *Joseph (ch1 v00)*
7. *Mary (ch1 v00)*
8. *Jesus (ch1 v00)*
9. *David (ch1 v00)*
10. *Jacob (ch1 v00)*

SERVICES & FUTURE EVENTS

Weekly Services

Sunday

8.00 am	Holy Communion
11.00 am	Sung Eucharist

Wednesday

10.00 am	Holy Communion

December

6th December	5pm Nine lessons and carols
24th December	5pm Family Christingle service
24th December	11pm Midnight Mass

January

10th January	Congregational Lunch, Willowbank H.
31st January	Candlemas service

February

2nd February	Vestry Awayday
10th February	Ash Wednesday: 10 am and 7 pm
10th – 24th Feb	Lent lunch 12-1.30 and study groups
15th February	Spring Magazine - copy deadline

Quiz answers

1. Zechariah (Luke 1:13); 2. Mary (Luke 1:27); 3. 42 (Matthew 1:17); 4. Two (Matthew & Luke); 5. The angel Gabriel (Luke 1:28); 6. Elizabeth (Luke 1: 39); 7. "The babe leapt in my womb" (Luke 1:44); 8. The Magnificat (Luke 1:46); 9. Wrote on a tablet "his name is John" (Luke 1:63); 10. In the desert (or wilds) (Luke 1:80); 11. Quirinius (Luke 2:2); 12. Herod (Matthew 2:1); 13. Made her way" (probably walked) (Luke 2:3); 14. A manger (Luke 2:7); 15. One (Luke 2:9); 16. Because he was lying in a manger (Luke 2:16); 17. To present Jesus in the Temple (Luke 2:22); 18. Simeon (Luke 2: 35); 19. Eighty four (Luke 2:37); 20. One (Matthew 2); 21. Not known (Matthew 2:2); 22. What time the star appeared (Matthew 2:7); 23. To return to him when they had found the child (Matthew 2:8); 24. Gold, frankincense and myrrh (Matthew 2:11); 25. They were warned in a dream (Matthew 2:12); 26. Go to Egypt (Matthew 2 : 14); 27. Massacred all children under 2 in Bethlehem (Matthew 2: 16); 28. Angel told him in a dream (Matthew 2:20); 29. Nazareth (Matthew 2:23); 30. James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon. (Mark 6:3).

The Scottish Episcopal Church

The Scottish Episcopal Church is a self-governing province of the world-wide Anglican Communion.

This is a family of over 70 million Christians in more than 160 countries. Our nearest relations are the Church of England, the Church of Wales and the Church of Ireland. Through the Porvoo agreement we are also in full communion with many other branches of the Church.

St. Columba's in Largs, is one of over 60 Episcopal congregations that work and worship within the Diocese of Glasgow and Galloway. We are part of Ayrshire Region and our neighbours include congregations in Ardrossan, Dalry, Troon, Kilmarnock, Prestwick, Ayr and Maybole.

The area covered by St. Columba's includes Largs, Skelmorlie, Fairlie and West Kilbride. Ecumenically we play a very active part in Largs and District Churches together. We welcome all regardless of any defining characteristic that may otherwise be used as the basis for discrimination.

Church Rotas

If you would like to join one of the church rotas (Readers Rota, Intercessions Rota, Sidesman Rota or the Coffee Rota), please contact :

Readers Rota – Gib FitzGibbon 01294 823992
Intercessions– Frances Robertson 01475 686947
Sidesmen – Alice MacDonald 07833 120400
Coffee - Jennifer FitzGibbon 01294 823992
Email – i2fg@aol.com

St. Columba's Episcopal Church

Aubrey Crescent, Largs
Priest in Charge : Father Sean McEwen
St. Columba's Church, Largs
Telephone - 07951 181827

The Vestry

The vestry members are elected by the congregation to work with the Rector for the administration of the church. It meets in January, March, September, November and as required.

Chair – Father Sean McEwen
Secretary – Ray Young
Treasurer – Chris Evans
Lay Representative – Gib Fitzgibbon
Alternate Lay Rep – Alice MacDonald
Rector's Warden – Linda Young
PVG Co-ordinator - Victoria Johnston
People's Warden – Alice MacDonald
Property Convenor – Mark Yeomans
IT Services - Gregor Anderson
Members - Linda Whitby, Jane McCance and Maurine Muir

Scottish Charity Number – SC004796

Quietly laid to rest in peace



A short, quiet, dignified service was held outside the church around the Remembrance Garden after the All Saints Day service, as Father Sean McEwan laid to rest the ashes of Dorothy Lyons who was born in 1922 and died recently at the grand age of 104. Rest in peace Dorothy, together again with your friends, bathed in the sun drenched warmth of St Columba's Church stonework.

Diocese of Glasgow and Galloway

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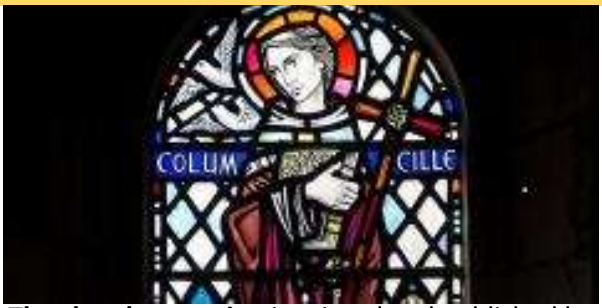
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Happy New Year to all



The church magazine is printed and published by St. Columba's Episcopal Church, Aubrey Crescent, Largs, KA30 8PR. Views expressed in this magazine are not necessarily those of the Priest in Charge or the Vestry. If you know of anyone who cannot access the online version at https://largs-church.co.uk/magazines or collect it from church, we can arrange to send a copy.