

Cathedral News

A photograph of the interior of a large cathedral, likely during a service. The view is from the back of the nave, looking towards the altar. A large, ornate wooden cross stands on a raised platform in the center. The altar is illuminated with many candles. The architecture features high, vaulted ceilings with exposed wooden beams and large stone pillars. A congregation of people is seated in the foreground, facing the altar. The lighting is warm, coming from the candles and some overhead lights.

February 2026

Who's Who at the Cathedral...

...and who is the contact for what

Provost	The Very Rev'd Dr Stephen Holmes	07584 091870
Manager	Chris Ahern	manager@perthcathedral.co.uk
Vestry Deputy Chairman	John Wright	jdww17514@hotmail.com



From Father Ross...

Dear friends,

I am writing this welcome piece for the current edition of the cathedral magazine on behalf of our Provost, who is presently on compassionate leave. It is a privilege to do so, and I hope these words carry something of the warmth, encouragement, and gratitude that so often shape his own reflections.



As I write, I am still carrying a deep sense of thankfulness from our recent annual general meeting. It was a joy to gather and to reflect together on the life of the cathedral over the past year. Hearing all that has taken place in and through St Ninian's was genuinely heart-warming. So much faithfulness, generosity, creativity, and quiet dedication was named. It was a powerful reminder that the life of the cathedral is always a shared endeavour – a true team effort – guided and held together under the steady leadership of our Provost, Fr Stephen. We

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are deeply grateful for the energy, vision, and care that he and his family have brought to the cathedral over this past year, and for all that lies ahead.

At the AGM, the Provost (whose words were wonderfully presented by John) also spoke with gratitude of the retirement from ministry of our Vocational Deacon, the Rev'd Peter. We give thanks for all that Peter has brought to this cathedral during his years of ministry – his faithfulness, service, and quiet commitment. Our prayers and warmest good wishes go with him as he enters this new season of life, and we hope he is able to make the most of his well-earned retirement.

Last week, in our worship, we heard the Gospel story of Jesus calling his first disciples. Jesus meets ordinary people in the midst of their everyday lives and simply says, 'Follow me.' They are not called because they have all the answers, but because they are willing to respond. That call still echoes in the life of the cathedral today – in the ways we offer our time, our skills, and our resources. Whether through volunteering in the many aspects of our cathedral life, or by giving financially to support the ongoing care and upkeep of this beautiful building and its ministry, each response matters. If you would like to explore how you might serve or give – perhaps through a standing order or another means – please speak with a member of the ministry team or the Vestry. That Gospel story feels especially resonant after an AGM, reminding us that the Church is not simply an institution, but a community of people continually being called – again and again – to walk together in faith, service, and love.

As we look ahead, there is much to be joyful about and much to anticipate in the months to come. The journey through this year will lead us, in time, to the great depth and drama of Holy Week – the very heart of our Christian story – and it is never too early to begin preparing ourselves inwardly for that sacred time.

Outside the Church, the world already seems eager to rush ahead. Supermarkets are quick to tell us that Easter has arrived, shelves full of eggs and chocolate long before the season itself. Yet the Church invites us to a different rhythm. Our liturgical calendar gently resists haste and calls us instead to attentiveness, patience, and depth.

As we approach Lent, we are invited to journey together – not as a grim endurance test, but as a season of grace. Lent gives us space to reflect, to pray, to

let go of what weighs us down, and to open ourselves more fully to God's transforming love. It prepares us not for chocolate, but for resurrection; not for consumption, but for a renewed turning of the heart towards God.

In all of this, we do not walk alone. We walk together as a cathedral community – worshipping, serving, praying, and responding to Christ's call in our own time and place. It is a privilege to share in this journey with you, and I look forward with hope and thanksgiving to all that lies ahead.

With every blessing,

Fr Ross

Assistant Curate

Readings and Collects for February

Candlemas (The Presentation of the Lord) - 1 February

Collect: Almighty and Everlasting God: as your only-begotten Son was presented and received in the temple, so may we welcome and proclaim him as the light of the nations and the glory of your people; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end. Amen.

Readings: Malachi 3.1-4, Psalm 84.1-7, 2 Hebrews 2.14-18, Luke 2.22-40

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany - 8 February

Collect: O Lord, watch over your household with constant love: that, supported by you alone, we may always stand firm in your protection; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end. Amen.

Readings: Isaiah 58.1-9a, Psalm 112.1-9, 1 Corinthians 2.1-12, Matthew 5.13-20

Sunday next before Lent - 15 February

Collect: Almighty God, whose Son, Jesus Christ, was wonderfully transfigured before chosen witnesses upon the holy mountain, and spoke of the exodus he would accomplish at Jerusalem: give us strength so to hear his voice and bear our cross, that, in the world to come, we may see him as he is; through the same

Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end. Amen.

Readings: Sirach 15.15-20, Psalm 119.1-8, 1 Corinthians 3.1-9, Matthew 17.1-9

First Sunday of Lent - 22 February

Collect: Almighty God, whose Son fasted forty days in the wilderness, and was tempted as we are, yet did not sin: give us grace to discipline ourselves in submission to your Spirit, that, as you know our weakness, so we may know your power to save; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end. Amen.

Readings: Genesis 2.15-17, 3.1-7, Psalm 32, Romans 5.12-19, Matthew 4.1-11

Forthcoming Events and Services

Sunday 1 February, Candlemas, at 11.00am: Sung Mass and Procession with choristers from Ardvreck School

Sunday 15 February at 4.00pm: Choral Evensong with Lucernarium

Ash Wednesday 18 February - the Beginning of Lent

11.00am: Mass with imposition of Ashes

7.00pm: Sung Mass with imposition of Ashes

Sunday 22 February, Lent 1, at 11am: Litany Procession and Sung Mass

Every Thursday in Lent at 6.10pm: Lent Talk followed at 6.30 by Sung Compline

Sunday 15 March, Laetare Sunday, at 4.00pm: Choral Evensong with Lucernarium

Wednesday 25 March, Annunciation: 11.00am Mass and 7.00pm Sung Mass

Remembering Departed Loved Ones

The cathedral's Lady Chapel is a place of powerful spirituality where Jesus is present in the Sacrament, where we gather to pray, and where prayers are

answered. In it a candle burns day and night to remind us of the loving presence of Jesus. It costs about £20 to keep the flame burning for a month and your donation can be given to the treasurer or Provost or made by bank transfer (subject - Lamp). You are invited to sponsor the flame for a month in memory of your loved ones. You can add their name to the sheet in the Cloister or contact Provost Stephen on provost.perth@gmail.com or Chris our treasurer on treasurer@perthcathedral.co.uk .

In February the flame will burn in memory of **Alison Ballantyne**.

From the Registers

Deaths

Funeral for Dorothy Riley - 8 January

...And From Provost Stephen

Two for the price of one this month! The Editor had erroneously assumed that the Provost would be unable to write his normal monthly piece and therefore asked Father Ross if he could write something at short notice. Editorial thanks to both gentlemen!

Dear friends,

This month we enter into the great journey of Lent. We sing 'forty days and forty nights' and join Jesus on his journey to Easter. At St Ninian's Cathedral we can pray, give more time to God and go to one of our weekday services, including Sung Compline by candlelight on every Thursday in Lent at 6.30pm. We can explore the essential Christian discipline of fasting (long-ignored instructions are found on page 13). We can explore the mystery of our faith, details of our Lent groups have gone up on the notice board and there will be short Lenten talks before Compline on Thursdays. We can take up an extra way of helping others and give time and money to a good cause.



When Jesus began his ministry he said, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand' (Matthew 4.17). The English word 'repent' makes us think of being sorry for something but that is not what Jesus said: the Greek is from the word '*metanoia*' which means a total change of life and mind. Lent gives us a chance for a real change for the better!

A Christian Lent, with its fasting and worship, is a communal activity. My report at the AGM (see page 15) revealed us as a vibrant and growing Christian community, though we are also fragile in various ways as befits the followers of a crucified God. I saw the strength of our community last month when my father died on 18 January. I was able to go and be with him and my mother in his last days, and help my mother with all the things you have to do after someone dies, a form of admin sometimes called 'deadadmin'. This was possible because of the proactive support of our ministry team and vestry, who ran things here so I could perform my Christian and filial duties, and they did a fantastic job at the AGM. Welcome to our new Vestry members and thanks to those who have retired.

I have accompanied many in their last days and many families through bereavement, but it is a different thing when those involved are your parents. It was a real privilege to bring the last Sacraments to my Dad and pray with his body after his soul had departed. During this time many of you, and also Bishop Ian and Mother Carrie, were good friends to Izzy and our daughters. Thank you all. My father's funeral is at 11.00am on Monday 9 February at Holy Trinity, Haddington; please pray for him and us, especially for me as I will be leading the service.

Izzy and I feel privileged to be part of this wonderful cathedral community. May you all have a happy and holy Lent.

With love,



The Very Revd Dr Stephen Homes, Provost



What's Been Going On?

Christmas at the Cathedral

If success can be measured by numbers attending services over the Advent and Christmas seasons then the cathedral is doing a pretty good job. The Advent Carol Service was well attended, as was the Midnight Mass, but the great success story was the Christingle service which has gone from strength to strength in the last few years. This year well over 200 people came to the service on the afternoon of Christmas Eve. Our superb cathedral choir was in fine form and many visitors will have come to hear them singing the well-known carols and Christmas music. Many thanks to Lis, Izzy and Ross for the following photos.



Two cathedral services by candlelight. Above, the Advent carol service on Advent Sunday, and, below, the candlelit community carol service of music and readings.





Above, the nativity scene in the north aisle, watched over, below, by the three kings, standing on the windowsill. On the opposite page, top, the choir (and servers) before one of the big services and, below, relaxing at their well-deserved Christmas lunch in the Royal George Hotel. Thanks to Annebelle for the selfie!







After the service on Epiphany Sunday members of the clergy and congregation walked down a snowy High Street for a short service on the viewing platform to bless the waters of the Tay. Note that Gandalf the wizard on the right seems to have infiltrated the procession!



Fasting in Lent

It may be a surprise to know that the Scottish Episcopal Church has rules for fasting. It doesn't seem to feature in the life of the Church today and many see it as a purely personal choice (which means that no one does it). But throughout the history of Christianity fasting has been seen as essential for real Christian life; Jesus did it, Matthew 4:1-4, and he wants us to do it, Matthew 6:16-18; 9:14-15. What is special is that Jesus wants fasting to go together with a loving heart.

The 1991 teaching of the Scottish Episcopalian Bishops on fasting says:

- that Fasting be observed by partaking of only one solid meal in the day; other meals to be of a light character.
- that Abstinence be observed by abstaining from some form of food or drink which is normally enjoyed. [For Christians, abstinence normally means giving up meat and/or fish and dairy products, but the Bishops in 1991 had a weird idea that we couldn't live without meat - today such abstinence is seen as healthy and good for the planet]
- that Ash Wednesday and good Friday are to be regarded by members of the Church as of obligation; and as days of Fasting and Abstinence.
- the Days of Fasting are the Vigils of Christmas, Easter, and Whitsun; the Fridays in the four Ember Season; one of the Rogation Days.
- the Days of Abstinence are all other Fridays throughout the year, except Christmas Day, Epiphany and the Fridays in the Octaves of Christmas, Easter and the Ascension of our Lord.
- the whole of Lent, except the Sundays, is a time for special self-denial, which should find expression in Prayer, Fasting and Almsgiving. It is also a time for abstinence.

Fasting is a communal activity which the whole Church should do together. It reminds us that we are part of creation and brings us closer to God. Lent is a good time to start.

Provost Stephen

Annual General Meeting 2026

The cathedral's annual general meeting was held in the Chapter House after the service on Sunday 18 January. Around 30 members of the congregation attended. Owing to Provost Stephen's absence on account of his father's failing health, the meeting was chaired by John Wright, deputy chairman of the cathedral vestry.

The meeting began in the usual way, with apologies for absence and with a reading of the names of our members who had died in the previous year. John then proceeded to read Provost Stephen's annual report which was detailed, informative and upbeat about the future of the cathedral. The report was illustrated with photos and graphs projected onto the back wall. The graphs in particular showed a significant upturn in our membership. The first half of the report - unfortunately minus the illustrations - follows this brief summary of the meeting. The second part will appear next month.

Our treasurer and manager, Chris Ahern, then presented his two reports, and pointed out that while the accounts show a deficit of approximately £34,000 we do have investments of almost £500,000. He encouraged those amongst us who pay income tax to sign up for Gift Aid. The credit/debit card tap machine by the entrance to the cathedral seems to have been an excellent purchase, judging by the use made of it by summer visitors. He also thanked Liz Gardiner, our previous treasurer, for all her assistance with the accounts. Speaking as cathedral manager he said that the recently acquired Hive system, which allows our heating to be controlled remotely, has resulted in a significant reduction in heating costs.

Emma Clayes, Toby Moschard and Annabelle O'Connell were welcomed as new members of the Vestry, and following a show of hands Wendy Duncan was re-elected as lay representative. Emmanuel Patterson has stood down as alternate lay representative and been replaced in that role by John Wright. Maureen Wright and Chris Ahern continue in their busy jobs as vestry secretary and cathedral treasurer respectively. Full details of the composition of the new Vestry will be given next month.

John drew the meeting to a close with the saying of the Grace, and was thanked with a warm round of applause from the gathering.

The Provost's Report (Part 1)

This is my first full year as Provost of St Ninian's Cathedral and it has been a good year. This is a long report because so much has been done. I enjoy being Provost, Izzy noting that at Easter and Christmas I bounced back quickly after the last service, whereas in previous charges I'd usually take a few days afterwards to recover. I put this down to you, the congregation and my colleagues in the vestry, staff and ministry team. I can trust you, and I hope you can trust me. If I'm not around, like now, things still happen. We believe in 'service not self' and we all want our cathedral to flourish. Thank you. I am going to thank various people but it is not an exhaustive list. My first thanks are to you all.

I started here with the question 'what is a cathedral'? Is it anything more than a parish with a big church that takes a lot of money to look after? Yes. It has more Christian responsibility for the wider city and diocese and needs to be a centre of worship and mission. I'm a historian and have been reading about the early days of St Ninian's and we find our founders defining their purpose as: 1) the revival of authentic Christian worship; 2) Christian service of the poor; and 3) the work of Christian education.

With these in mind, I'm going to look at our life over the past year in three sections based on Jesus' great commandment of love: 'love God and love your neighbour as yourself'.

Love of God

This is worship and prayer but also liturgical music and culture. There has been much development and growth this year but this is against the background of the decline of Christianity in Scotland, as seen in the closure of so many Church of Scotland churches. This affects us too. In our culture today, there are also signs of what is called a 'quiet revival' in Christianity: young people exploring Christianity; a 134% increase in Bible sales last year (Perth Waterstones have noted a rise in buying Christian books); and people returning to Church, especially on great Feasts. Are we ready for this revival and have we seen signs here?

Average Sunday attendance has stayed static, which is itself a positive as the trend for the last decade has been a decline, but the increase in the number of children last year has remained at an average of eight each Sunday which makes

us unusual. The most significant growth has been in Christmas attendance over the five main services which went up 85% in 2024, from 381 to 635, and again by 22% this year, from 635 to 722. The service registers show this was the highest Christmas attendance since 1979, apart from 2012. This year Christingle was the largest it has been; the Community Carols maintained the doubling of numbers last year; Advent Carols, with its new format, increased by 50%; and the Christmas Day Carol Mass doubled in attendance and was the largest it has been since the mid-90s. This is more than a 'post-covid bounce' as numbers are often higher than before the pandemic, and this was also true of Easter.

So thanks to our choir, ministry team, children's ministry team, sacristans and all others who contributed to this. Honesty is good and it is important to speak about growth when it happens, not to make us look good but to show that the gospel is still attractive, even in a society which rejects it. On the other hand, to be negative and emphasise decline, for example saying 'we're all old and there are fewer people this week' is not only dubious - old people bring wisdom and we need more of them - but it is also destructive and corrosive of community.

One of my priorities is to keep the cathedral open as much as possible, which enables people to come in and pray. Thanks to John and our volunteers who provide a welcome in the summer. The quiet revival is also happening largely in two types of churches, Pentecostal/charismatic and traditional Catholic/Orthodox/Anglican. We are in the second group, and we also offer an inclusive welcome to everyone. Our aim is to emphasise our distinctive liturgy to help people encounter the Mystery of God. The past year has seen an increase in services here; we now have a weekly healing Mass, an early Communion on Sundays, a Tuesday rosary group and regular morning and evening prayer. I'd like to thank all who contributed to the questionnaire on all aspects of our life, which shaped our priorities in developing our liturgy. One is to emphasise the seasons of the Church's year, for example the full, powerful Holy Week services, the Corpus Christi procession and benediction with choristers from Strathallan School and the Candlemas procession with the choristers of Ardvreck School. Our unity with Creation was emphasised by a successful pet blessing and we have had more candlelit services and that has gone together with an increase in attendance at our monthly Choral Evensong.

The ministry team - Fr Philip, Fr Ross and our Lay Reader Lis - have played a full

part in these developments. I'm particularly grateful for Philip's contribution which involves a long journey from Kinloch Rannoch; a reliable, experienced and wise assistant priest is a blessing. Lis has been a rock of wisdom and welcoming presence here, quietly visiting, teaching and welcoming people with a mug in her hand. After a sabbatical agreed with the Bishop and me, Deacon Peter Higson has decided to retire from all active ministry and I want to record my thanks to him for all he has done here, including his chaplaincy at our primary school. He is a humble and prayerful man and I wasn't surprised when he declined my offer to come back so that we could thank him properly. Our team has been greatly enriched this year by Maihri Greenwood who has started training for the priesthood at the Scottish Episcopal Institute and been reinvented here as a 'contextual ordinand'. Maihri has crammed as many things as possible into the last year, completing her PhD, getting married to James in a splendid cathedral wedding, starting her priestly formation and getting pregnant. But, even with her recent illness, Maihri has made an impressive transition into her new role, quickly making an impact in chaplaincy at St Ninian's School. This brings me to Fr Ross, who is still here. His priestly ordination here was a great event last year. He is doing wonders at St Columba's Stanley, being recognised by the Council which gave him a Community Champion award, and he has made an impact here too - not least in the fantastic quiz night for his beloved Arunima Hospice. A curate is in training, but I have come to see Ross more as a valued colleague and it has been a joy to see him grow into priesthood. I hope we will see even more of him here this year.

Liturgy is not something clergy do and everyone else watches, we all have our roles. Thanks go to our servers and sacristans who serve our worship in a distinctive way and it is good to see both teams grow over the last year, thanks to their leaders Erica and Margaret respectively. There is room for others to join them. Chris Ahern was admitted to the Scottish Guild of Servers (SGS) last year and we look forward to the admission of Alexander, Eilidh and Avinu later this year. I was also pleased to lead a national SGS retreat here in November. In the sacristy we rediscovered and used our 18th century Spanish vestments and Bishop Wilkinson's fine cope, and I'd like to thank Mrs Prue King of Aberdeen who restored this cope at no charge. If we are serious about the worship of God we need to offer the best we have. Readers, welcomers and intercessors contribute to our worship and I'd like to say thanks to Jennifer Irving who has

stepped back from organising part of this to concentrate on building up her health. Thanks to Margot and Maihri who have taken on these roles.

The quiet revival is only happening in churches who know who they are and what they believe. Celebrating our Scottish saints and our distinctive Scottish Episcopalian identity is part of this because our identity, and the cathedral itself, is the product of a fruitful union between the Catholic revival in Anglicanism and the native Scottish Episcopalian tradition. In October we had the second celebration of the 1637 Scottish Liturgy in honour of the Perth Episcopalian martyr Robert Lyon and received the book in which he wrote his last message before his execution in 1746. Many joined us for St Ninian's Day and we commissioned a new icon of St Ninian by Aidan Hart in memory of Canon Celia Matthews which is being funded by her family. Pilgrimage is getting more popular and we went to St Fillan's cave in Pittenweem and the Episcopalians of Pittenweem made a return pilgrimage on St Ninian's day. Saints bring people together like this, and it was lovely to have Canon Christine Fraser back to celebrate St Margaret. The local St William of Perth has been neglected but we celebrated him this year. He is a patron of mental health and Bishop Ian hopes to present an icon of him to the cathedral next year which we hope to be a centre of prayer and mental health awareness. An essential part of our Scottish Episcopalian identity is praying for the dead; our All Souls service has grown and there has been a very positive response to having our sanctuary lamp burn in memory of our departed loved ones.

At the heart of our worship, and many of the services I have mentioned, is music. A cathedral should be a centre of musical excellence and I want to thank our choir and Geoff, Alistair and Emmanuel for all they contribute to our life. It has been a challenging year for the choir and they often produce fabulous music with limited resources. I'd also like to thank Robert Gower for the generous donation of his fine electronic organ which arrived just in time to cover while our pipe organ is out of action. Another generous donor has given us an excellent new piano. Chansons Chamber Choir, who rehearse here, helped us obtain it and are doing a fund-raising concert for our organ later this year. This shows how important partnerships are in our musical life. I have already mentioned our musical links with Strathallan and Ardvreck, and we also hosted the splendid RSCM Scottish Voices Advent Carols, Christmas concerts by the High School and

our own St Ninian's Primary, and a number of other concerts during the year including one by Eilidh Owen and Ailsa Cochrane from one of our cathedral families. A highlight of our cultural life was hosting the Perth Festival of the Arts performance of Puccini's opera *Suor Angelica*. The cathedral made a fine convent and there was not a dry eye in the house. I'm glad that the Festival is coming back this year with a Welsh male voice choir. Our musical life, especially the organ, costs money but as well as the immense spiritual and cultural benefit, it also brings in revenue.

Part 2 of the Provost's report will be in the next issue.

A Visit to the Arunima Hospice – Diocese of Calcutta

Last November marked my fourth visit to Arunima Hospice and ten years of supporting this remarkable ministry. The children, staff, and volunteers have become like family, and returning was a profound joy. I am grateful to the Provincial Global Partnerships Committee for funding my travel, and to all who supported recent fundraising events at St Columba's, Perth Cathedral, and the Stanley and District Women's Institute along with many family and friends. Together, an amazing £3,500 was raised. This enabled refurbishment of the communal area, a new water tank, an electric moped for university students, six bicycles, clothing, toiletries, essential food, a day trip to Nicco Amusement Park,



support for the Geonkhali cultivation project, and fifteen textbooks.

A particular joy this year was celebrating five older teenagers securing university places in subjects including nursing, social work, and fashion design. I also had the privilege of speaking on queer theology at Bishop's College, engaging with more than 30 postgraduate students. Conversations there have opened the possibility of funding future theological study for Arunima students.

I was warmly welcomed by the new Moderator of the Church of North India to concelebrate at St Peter's, and later visited Arunima's outreach among sex workers in South Kolkata – an experience both challenging and deeply moving.

For groups wishing to hear more, I would be delighted to visit mid-week or for special events. Contact: revd.ross@hotmail.com / 07947 321687.

Fr Ross

From Survival to Advocacy: A Priest's Calling Beyond Cancer

You usually encounter your assistant curate in worship or pastoral settings, but some of the work of priesthood happens out of sight. This is a story of how my own cancer journey, my faith, and my vocation have led me into national advocacy for better care for those living during and beyond stem cell transplantation.

My involvement with Anthony Nolan as a policy insights panel member grew not only out of my personal experience of cancer, but out of my calling as a priest. While my diagnosis placed me firmly in the role of patient, it never removed my vocation to walk alongside others – particularly those navigating fear, uncertainty, and vulnerability.

During my own treatment and recovery, I became increasingly aware that survival is often assumed to be the end of the story. Yet for many stem cell transplant patients, the real struggle begins once treatment finishes. Physical recovery is only part of the journey; the psychological and emotional impact can be profound, disorientating, and deeply lonely. As both priest and patient, I found myself asking not only how do we survive, but who walks with us afterwards?



It was this question that led me to become involved with Anthony Nolan. Advocacy, I believe, is a form of pastoral care. Late last year, this work took me to Holyrood, where I joined others in lobbying MSPs for greater investment in specialist psychological support for stem cell transplant patients. In January, I will continue this work at Westminster, meeting with MPs to press for improved provision across the UK.

Throughout my cancer journey, prayer became less about answers and more about companionship. Out of that experience came my first book, *Prayer: A Companion for the Cancer Journey*, written by a priest who has walked this road. It's just been published so if you'd like to find out more, just ask next time you see me!

Fr Ross

The Ministry of Presence

Chaplaincy with Asylum Seekers in Perth

Chaplaincy has always been a central part of my ministry. At its heart lies something deeply Christian and profoundly simple: the art of being present and of listening. In a world that often rushes to fix, explain, or judge, the quiet work of accompaniment remains one of the Church's most faithful callings.

After many weeks of emails and phone calls to negotiate entry, I was grateful to



be able to help establish a new chaplaincy service for asylum seekers here in the city of Perth. Since November, alongside Fr Philip and Br Andrew-Thomas, we have been visiting residents once a week, offering little more – and nothing less – than a listening ear. I'm grateful to our Provost, Fr Stephen, for entrusting me to follow on this as a cathedral initiative.

What began with listening has naturally grown into offering support in practical ways, often through signposting and liaising with third-party organisations on individuals' behalf. The stories we hear are frequently traumatic and harrowing.

The levels of fear, loss, and distress people have endured – and escaped from – are almost beyond imagining.

This work is not a political stance, nor a commentary on immigration policy or border control. It is, quite simply, an expression of the Gospel. We are seeking to follow Christ's commandment to love our neighbour – especially those who are far from home, living with uncertainty, and longing to be heard.

As the main contact for this chaplaincy service, I would be very glad to speak with anyone who may wish to offer support. This could take many forms: donating personal items via a box in the cathedral office, adding to it week by week, or offering handmade knitted items as simple gestures of care and dignity. Small acts, offered faithfully, can speak volumes.

Thanks for reading!

Fr Ross

Cover Photo

Many thanks to Lis for sending in this atmospheric shot of one of our busy services by candlelight. The next Evensong by candlelight will be on 15 February and, for yet more candles, come along to Sung Compline by candlelight on Thursday evenings at 6.30 during Lent!

Perth Cathedral St Ninians



PANCAKE



Party

**Free to attend,
donations are
welcome.
All are
Welcome!**

TUESDAY 17TH FEBRUARY

17:30-18:30

Perth Cathedral, North Methven Street, Perth,
PH1 5PP

Come and join our party

**GAMES
& RACES**

**PANCAKES WITH
FAVOURITE
TOPPINGS**

**HOT AND
COLD
DRINKS**

for more information contact
office@perthcathedral.co.uk



Lent Group 2026

Angels

Mondays 10.30am
In the Lady Chapel

In our Lent discussion group this year we shall share our thoughts and ideas about angels. Who, or what, are they? What do we know about them and why are they depicted all around our cathedral? There are five weekly sessions in total, starting at 10.30am on Monday 23 February and ending on Monday 23 March, again at 10.30am. If you wish to take part, please add your name to the sign-up sheet in the cloister.

Lis Burke

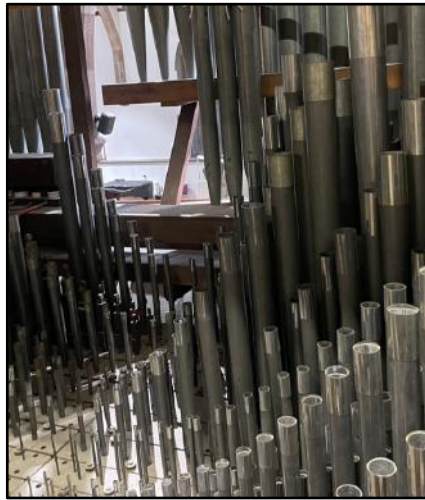
The Miracle of the Flaming Coat

Following Heather Brand's article in the previous edition, in which she recounted how her coat caught fire while lighting a candle, it can be reported that there are now fire blankets beside the votive candle stands.



Photo Gallery

On the opposite page, a few snaps of cathedral life - many thanks to all the photographers! From the top, the Holmes ladies, a rhapsody in red; the winter warm space in full swing in the Chapter House, with Raymond playing his guitar; a view from inside the organ loft towards the new piano; the unpleasant mess around the bins which neighbour the cathedral, a category A-listed building and tourist attraction; and Bess's pictures of the servers and of the clergy at the altar.



A Moment in Time

Just before Christmas 2025, I was trawling eBay to try to find more photographs to enlarge my already huge collection of railway photography. Somewhere along the line between Alyth Junction and Newtyle to be precise, and for no obvious reason, up popped the attached photograph. Intrigued, I put in a bid to purchase it and was successful in acquiring it.



When it dropped through the letter box, I discovered a message on the back of the print. It had been sent by an 'ABB' at Christmas 1950 and from 7 Melville Street, Perth. Although In 1950, I was a very young member of an Episcopal Sunday School elsewhere, I now know that the ABB, residing at 7 Melville Street, was one of our previous bishops, Arnold Brian Burrowes OBE, MA, DD. He hailed from a military background, had distinguished military service in both World Wars and his clerical career was very much academic. He retired in 1955.

My photograph was taken on the occasion of his Consecration and Enthronement on 25 January 1950. Footprints in the snow suggest a cold day. Given that cassocks and cottas are not swirling out of control and the new bishop is not holding on to his mitre, the day seems to have been calm enough.

But who, besides Bishop Burrowes, feature in the photograph? The procession is led by the cathedral verger with wand and three servers (a crucifer flanked by two others) and the bishop is followed by two chaplains. I set about my research by asking members of the congregation and comparing the people in the photograph with other old photos in my collection. Next, I checked the servers' rota register for that date. Unfortunately, although this book is extant, for some reason there is no record for the period between 1949 and 1956. Consequently, I am only confident that the crucifer is the late Willie Gammage and the server to his right may be Fraser Whyte. The rest remain unknown.

It is sad that in the space of only 75 years people are forgotten. Hopefully, however, some of you who may have also enjoyed looking at the photo, might have had their memories jogged and can add a positive identification.

Barry Nisbet

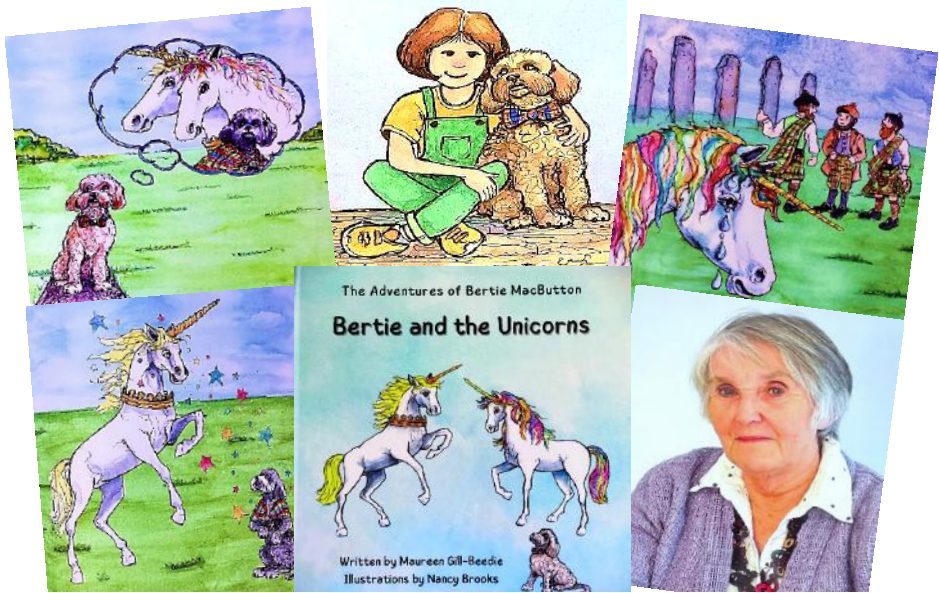
A Septuagenarian Challenge!

Now well into my seventies I did not expect to be starting a new career as a children's book illustrator!

How did it all start? Last summer I was approached by an author friend of a relative, looking for someone to illustrate a children's book. I at that point was looking for some artistic inspiration and on meeting up with Maureen, the author, decided to give it a go. My thinking was that it would be a nice legacy to leave for my family: "Mother/Grandma had Illustrated a book." Mmm.....yes, that sounded quite good!

I had Illustrated the front cover of the cathedral magazine for a good number of years so this project I assumed would not be too daunting. However, it has been quite a valuable learning curve, with regard to the process of book production and illustration; from initially coming up with visual ideas and rough sketches to final artwork and the eventual printing of the book. I was fortunate that both the author and myself have been 'singing from the same hymn sheet', so to speak! This obviously made my task of visually interpreting the written word so very much easier.

The story is based on the Isle of Lewis and relates how a dog called Bertie



MacButton got his magical powers.

The author has already got Bertie's next adventure in the pipeline so I'm sharpening my pencils and getting my paints ready for his next adventure!

Bertie and the Unicorns, with a reading age of 5-8, is available in both hardback and paperback and can be ordered through the Bertie MacButton website, Amazon or from myself. It is also available in various bookshops.

Nancy Brooks

Deacon Peter's Retiral

We bid a sad farewell to the Rev'd Peter Higson, our vocational deacon, who, following his recent sabbatical, has decided to retire from the ministry. We are sorry indeed to see him go and wish him and his family well as he starts a new stage of life. Ever modest, as Provost Stephen says in his annual report, he declined an invitation to come back so he could be properly thanked. So, from us all, Peter, thank you for your years of service to the cathedral - we shall miss you!



Cathedral Heating

It has been cold in the cathedral this winter, as we may possibly have noticed, and the reason is not just the frosty temperatures we have had in January, but an attempt to reduce somewhat the high cost of heating such a large building. So please do wrap warmly before you come to church, and make use of the blankets available at the end of each row of seats. To help matters, the length of the Sunday service has been temporarily cut to about an hour, by omitting the Psalm and a reading, and there is always a warming cup of coffee in the Chapter House at the end. On a more practical level, we are getting close to installing a couple of experimental destratification fans in the Lady Chapel and the Chapter House which should help to push the warmer air at the very top of those areas - we are assured it is there! - down to people level. If that works we can look at installing them in the cathedral itself. Work is also proceeding on the installation of solar panels on the roof above the south aisle. It's a slow business, though, as there are so many obstacles to navigate when dealing with a Category A-listed building, not least of them listed building consent and the requirements of the SEC's Canon 35. But we shall get there and hopefully by next winter, if not before, we should have slightly warmer surroundings in which to worship and socialise!

Net Zero Roadshow

The diocese is holding its net zero roadshow in the cathedral on Saturday 31 January, between 10.00am and 3.30pm. If you wish to attend, please register via the diocesan website. With the theme 'Sowing Seeds of Hope', the event will comprise a number of talks and various workshops, ranging from one run by Heat Project Scotland and one on good church maintenance by the National Churches Trust, to the director of HeatHack who will talk and advise on how to get church heating right, with various others in between. It should be an interesting day, particularly in view of the article at the top of this page!

The March Issue

No, this is not an obscure debate about how to play 2/4 time on the organ; rather it is about the next magazine which will be issued either a little earlier or a little later than usual, depending on holidays amongst the editorial staff.

From the Farquhar Diaries

16 February 1926. Now, just when I am about to enter my 69th year there seems to be a crisis, or at least a turning point in my life to be approaching. As former entries will have made clear I myself have been growing less and less fit for active work for some years; and indeed, since the beginning of December 1924, I began paying back at the rate of £100 a year of my income so as to make it possible for the Rev. M. Vischer to be engaged as Chaplain to release me from the regular visitation of the Congregation. So since then the amount of work, which I have been doing for the Cathedral, has been on a very much reduced scale. That has been due to the coming on of old age plus a continuous, asthmatic shortness of breath. I have been like a steam engine with only half the necessary supply of steam. Meantime not only was I enabling the Cathedral to employ a Chaplain and doing a certain reduced amount of work but N. [*Farquhar's wife, Nellie*] was also energetically contributing a very great deal of valuable work, and work which especially appealed to the Provost. Besides a great deal else, she was the driving-rod of the voluntary '9am Choir' and its Organist. She kept the girls together in the most wonderful way; took practices, along with the Provost; looked after their veils and the surplices of a mixed body of untrained men & boys, whom the Provost had gathered together; practised diligently on the Organ and in winter got up and was the soul of dances and hurled herself with the most unsparing enthusiasm into it all. Indeed, I do not think the Provost could have got the '9am' Celebration thoroughly established without her. And it is the darling scheme of his life. Well, but now she has come to the conclusion, seemingly final, that it is all too much for her. Instead of being an enthusiastic delight to her, it has transformed itself into an overpowering responsibility, which she can no longer face...Moreover, whereas I used to help her to keep the garden, for at least two years past I have no longer been able to do so and she has redoubled her efforts there. But now that also is beginning to be too heavy for her. After all she is 62. The upshot is that she is seized with an intense desire to retire from active work, which is growing too much for her. Since, therefore, I am already nearly down and out and she is ready to welcome the same fate, complete resignation and retiral to St Andrews for the evening of life seems now to lie before me, if I can be assured of enough to live upon. But I am sure that both the Bishop and the Provost will do all they can to oppose so drastic a step. Still, I feel that, if I do not lay down my arms now, I shall have to do it very soon. May God guide us.

Eddie the Eagle says...

I'm not at all sure about these plans to install destratification fans in the cathedral. After a hard day keeping an eye on things and keeping extremely still, I do get rather cold. But when I'm off duty - which of course is when no one is in the building - I nip up to my eyrie at the very top where it is lovely and warm. You may well think that spending hundreds of pounds a month (if not more) on heating is perhaps money that could be better spent, but I assure you that up at the top I appreciate it very much!



Times of Services etc

A warm welcome to everyone who comes to our services!

Sunday	Said Eucharist 9.30am; Sung Eucharist 11.00am Sunday Club 12.15-ish, after the end of 11.00 service in term time, for primary age children Choral Evensong 4.00pm on the third Sunday of the month
Tuesday	Morning Prayer 9.30; Rosary Group 1.00; Evening Prayer 5.30
Wednesday	Morning Prayer 9.30; Said Eucharist 11.00; Evening Prayer 5.30
Thursday	Morning Prayer 9.30, Evening Prayer 5.30 Sung Compline 6.30 (during Lent only) Toddler Church 10.30-12.00 in term time (for ages 0-5)
Friday	Morning Prayer 9.30 Said Eucharist 11.00am, with anointing and prayers for healing

And finally...

Please pass any contributions for the magazine to the editor, Jeremy Duncan, or email them to cathedralmagazine@gmail.com. The closing date for inclusion in the March magazine is **15 February**. Thank you!

The background of the entire page is a photograph of St Ninian's Cathedral in Perth. The cathedral is a large, historic stone building with a prominent central spire and Gothic architectural features like pointed arch windows and buttresses. The sky is a clear, pale blue.

**St Ninian's Cathedral
of the Scottish Episcopal Church in the
Diocese of St Andrews, Dunkeld and Dunblane.**

We are one of the family of Anglican churches throughout the world.

The cathedral is served by a clergy and lay team:

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Assisting Clergy

The Rev'd Philip Francis

The Rev'd Ross Stirling-Young

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