

In Touch



*with St James the Less Church, Penicuik
& St Mungo's Church, West Linton*

**A quarterly magazine for all of us
Issue 25 - August 2026**

***Harvest - St Francis - All Saints -
Remembrance***



Reflections from the Rectory

You will be receiving your copy of *In Touch* towards the end of August, when I hope the weather has been good enough to spend plenty of time outside with the long hours of daylight.

In May and June, I read *A Big Enough God: Artful Theology*, by Sara Maitland. She rather playfully, but seriously, asks us to ponder what it means to have a big enough God, and the consequence of that. She states that whatever God's motives for making matter and becoming committed to the process of creation, it can't be to allow a few people to make rules about what is morally desirable. She goes on to say that we can understand the meaning of something without understanding all of its parts, so we don't need to know everything about the triune nature of God, and partial knowledge can make drawing conclusions from one particular aspect or activity of God tricky. We aren't the subjects of God's saving grace because of how much we know about God, luckily! So, how do we respond to, react to, the Big Enough God, in her revelation through creation? Sara Maitland suggest we should be in humbled awe of what God has done, and say something like "wow!" in joy and wonder. She invites the reader to take time to reflect on all of the wonders of God's creation, and if we find it hard to react as she suggests, to do the following exercise: draw up a list of things for which it would be insane to give thanks, but which are obviously extraordinary. Her three favourites were:

- Mayonnaise: how did someone end up inventing something so tasty out of eggs and olive oil? It had to be purposefully made, and took a lot of hard work before electric whisks were on the scene. It isn't like blue cheese, discovered through neglecting a piece of cheese.
- Triton: Neptune's giant moon is the only large moon in the solar system with a retrograde orbit, i.e. it orbits in the opposite direction to the planet's rotation. At least forty-seven moons (before Voyager spotted some more around Saturn fairly recently) in our solar system spin and orbit in the same direction.

- God so loved the world that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth, and we beheld that glory.

Sara Maitland says these things make her joyful. Did you know that the word *Joy* comes from the French for *Jewel*? How does that change our understanding of the buried treasure of great price? She says that we only can search and find 'joy' when we have an approach of gratitude and thanksgiving. *Joy* is also in the same cognate word group as the French verb, *Jouer*, to play. Does that also help us in understanding the word and what it means for us?

Paul tells us that the fruits of the Holy Spirit are; love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Joy is in this list, you will notice. So, how do we practice joy? Especially as it seems to come from God as a gift of grace? Sara Maitland suggests the following:

Prayer: ask God to make you joyful, it is a gift from God.

Happy is our default state: we may well have fallen out of practice, so start practising your happy state of mind. We are most like our true selves when we are happy.

Adoration: yes, how often do we pray, look to God, see God's work in the world, and give thanks? It requires us to forget about ourselves for a while, which can be a good thing!

Anti-individualism: We and the societies we live in are deeply harmed by the myth of individualism. Hebrew people and modern science confirms that we belong to each other, that *I am because we are* (the notion of *ubuntu*) is part of what sustains individuals, living in cooperation with others. As the old adage goes, *It takes a village to raise a child*.

Have more fun: Surely God's wish is for us to experience heaven on earth, and I am sure heaven will not be dull and boring.

Safety first?: This approach can dampen our enjoyment of life. There is a frisson of excitement when we try something for the first time, unsure how it will turn out. Creative acts often involve risk. Falling in love is risky. Being open-hearted and honest can be risky. The Bible is full of people taking risks, knowing that occasionally it won't end well, but in faith they went ahead anyway. We need an element of courage to step out of our comfort zone and grow, create, do new things. We cannot grow into what God wills us to be if we don't try new things.

Sensible consolations: a fancy way of saying we need to feel, to sense, emotions and have experiences that feed our souls. There are things which feel an indulgence, but feed us. It could be a quick chat with a friend, a walk on a blustery day, sitting in a caravan listening to rain, sitting down for twenty minutes to listen to a piece of music and really listening to it.

The second naivety: The Enlightenment wants science to explain everything. However, there are so many stories or myths in the Bible that speak of a deeper truth than any logical and dry story can ever conjure up. Telling stories and listening to stories is essential, with imagination and creativity weaving a tale with an important universal truth within it. We need to have wonderful naivety, not based in ignorance but with a playful open-mind seeking the beauty of God's world, through stories and dreams.

So, that is my imperfect summary of Sara Maitland's book. I don't agree with all her points, but I liked it because it did challenge me to reflect on my life and my faith. What have you read recently that invited you to do some personal reflection? What book might you read that takes you outside of your comfort zone, and maybe a *risk* for you to try?

A Big-enough God; Artful Theology, by Sara Maitland, published by Mowbray, ISBN 978-0-264-67331-8.

Nick Bowry

News from the Congregations

ALAN MURRAY AND FRIENDS IN CONCERT

Saturday 10th October, 2026, 7:30pm

- all proceeds to church funds -

Just when you breathed a sigh of relief that your month of guitar-only Sunday music (July) was over, here I am again....

I've been planning and talking about this for ages and decided that now was the time to put my guitar where my mouth is. I've sung to you in the church hall in a number of different contexts over the years, but never as "the main act" with guests. You will probably remember that I'm fundamentally a folkie with eclectic tastes who writes some songs, sings traditional folk songs and those of Tom Paxton, Dougie MacLean, Richard Thompson and many others. I also like reinterpreting "pop/rock" songs with my trusty acoustic guitar, so I've been known to sing songs by Bruce Springsteen, Paul McCartney, Guy Garvey of Elbow and ... wait for it ... Whitney Houston. I'll leave that last one out this time around, but *I Wanna Dance with Somebody* is actually a nice, tender song that doesn't need to be bellowed.

I'm aiming for this to be a relaxed evening in the folk-club format of two forty-five minute sets of music, with some nice food at the interval. I'll be sharing my love of my songwriting heroes with you, singing some of my own and encouraging you to sing along with some folk classics, including some of Rabbie Burns' finest. I'll be joined by members of my family and one or two musical friends. It's not a themed evening, so I'll be singing rousing songs, songs to make you laugh, songs to make your eyes leak and one protest song, co-written with my old pal, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (be afraid, Henry VIII/Donald Trump/Nigel Farage/Boris Johnson – I'm coming for you).

Here's the chorus of that one for you to practise: -

They Lie. We know they lie. They know we know they lie.

We know they know we know they lie. But still they lie ... but still they lie.

I hope you think this is good use of a Saturday evening and that you'll be happy to watch *Strictly* in catchup mode in order to join us in the church hall on the 10th October. Please bring friends and family. I'm hoping God will be with me as I sing, but I won't be talking or singing about Him/Her. This is an entirely secular evening and non-church audience will be quite safe from my faith and beliefs! Thanks for reading this.

Alan Murray

Tickets (£10) available soon from Alan Murray at 0783331592, alanmurray350@gmail.com or from Marion Mather.



Thank You!

From Penicuik Churches Together - A massive THANK YOU to everyone who helped provide cakes, sweets, biscuits, fruit and money for all the staff at Penicuik High School as a token of the churches appreciation of everything they do for the pupils throughout the year. Before finishing up for a well-earned rest on the last day of term, they were able to enjoy some amazing goodies and at the same time say goodbye to some of their colleagues who were also leaving that day.

By acts of kindness, we pray that the school will know that the churches in Penicuik are here to support them in any way we can through prayer and practical help.



Hello Rob and Caireen!

Rob Warren was Rector of St James the Less and St Mungo's from 2003 - 2012. He's currently Chaplain of All Saints' Church in Rome, in the Church of England Diocese in Europe. Rob and Nick Bowry agreed a Pulpit Swap for the end of July 2026, with Rob celebrating the Eucharist and preaching at St Mungo's on the 26th July and at St James the Less on the 2nd August. Rob and his wife, Caireen, generously invited folk to come and say hello, offering early evening drinks and nibbles at St James church hall on Tuesday 28th July. A goodly crowd from both churches came along and enjoyed catching up and reminiscing.



Dear Friends and Church Family at St James,

Thank you all for both the heartwarming farewell in May and for the very generous parting gift that John McCulloch has passed on to us. The service was lovely; special thanks to Nick for his very kind and flattering words and to David for indulging our musical wishes. Then at the lunch afterwards we really enjoyed seeing and chatting with many of all the friends we have made over the years at St James. The only pity was that not everyone could be there - we missed you. It was a typical St James occasion - hospitable and with plenty of good food; a very fitting memory for us to take away.

We won't pretend the actual move a couple of weeks ago was completely stress free, but it was achieved without major mishap. Yes, there was the statutory packing of waste bins still full of waste (a standing joke for removal guys, we have been told) and a shelf full of magazines labelled *NOT TO GO* were packed into a box and they had two goes at loading the box onto the van!

As for the generous monetary gift - no decisions yet, but it might well be plants for the garden. The windows at the back of the house look out onto a hedge which is pleasant enough, but could do with a bit of added interest and colour; so some roses perhaps. There are no roses in the garden at the moment.

Scone is not a very great distance from Penicuik, so no doubt we will be back visiting from time to time and we would love to see anyone who comes in the other direction to 3 Ashgrove, Scone, PH2 6NU. Beware if you are coming - there is an Ash Grove in Perth City, which can lead to some misdirection occasionally.

After some kind help from Charlotte Kemp and Georgina Phillips in consulting the archives, we have worked out exactly which Sunday we first attended a service at St James - 26th August 1979. That means that, until the farewell service in May, we had been members of the Church for forty six years and nine months.

We send you all our very best wishes and thanks for your friendship and sense of family over the years.

Brigitte and Ian Fuge

Happy birthday to Andreas, Ania and Maureen!

The St James church family joined Andreas Landesberger and Ania O'Rourke on the 19th July 2026 as they celebrated their sixtieth and fiftieth birthdays, respectively. Later in August, we were delighted that Maureen and Colin Chaplin came to church with their daughter, Christine, to celebrate Maureen's ninetieth birthday with their church friends.



Andreas and Ania shared a huge birthday cake with church friends after the service on 19th July!



Maureen Chaplin (centre) with her daughter Christine (left) and Marion Mather (right) - and her cake!



Celebrating ninety years on 11th August 2026 - Maureen Chaplin with husband Colin.

A Message from Tuesday Youth Bible Group (TYBG)

Run by Penicuik Trinity Community Church for High School students age 11-17, it meets most Tuesdays, 7 - 9pm.



A huge thank you to everyone for their continued support for the young folk attending TYBG. We've had a good year using Youth for Christ material which covers a lot of everyday topics that have a biblical perspective.

It's our prayer that we're able to equip the young folk with tools that will help them now but also in their adult lives. Whether you've supported the group financially or been part of the prayer support group or one of our amazing foodie people we thank you from the bottom of our heart for making each Tuesday possible as it's definitely a church team effort.

Sadly, we're losing Katy, Favour and Eric as they move onto University life but we hope they'll go into adulthood with a strong faith in Jesus and shine out to people they meet.

The young people who are still with us will hopefully continue to come, and we're praying we'll see more youngsters come along when the next session starts after the summer.

Please continue to pray for Isla, Adam, Noble, Nicanor, Ben, Lachlan, Samuel and Holly.



Thank You! Thank You! Thank You!

Home is the patient ...

Praise be, Richard is home from the Western General Hospital at last! Counting both stays, he's been there for over two months. He still has follow-up appointments, and although some symptoms have been settled, the doctors don't really know what triggered his illness. We are fortunate to have a care package in place. He is looking better, eating well, and striving to regain mobility.

Our family has been so very supportive, despite distance, and video calls have proved an invaluable means of keeping in touch. We have good neighbours too. However, we both have been overwhelmed by the kindness of our church family: cards and best wishes, offers of help with shopping and other errands, and especially the invaluable lifts into WGH to visit Richard. We are both very aware of the raft of prayer that has buoyed us up through a stressful time.

Unusually for me, I am lost for words to express our gratitude. God Bless you all.

Georgina & Richard Phillips

St James the Less Vestry Notes

Vestry met on 26th May and 23rd June 2026. The following matters were discussed:

- **Vestry Membership:** Mark Brand has been co-opted to Vestry following the retirement of Moira Rendall. Mark, supported by a small team, will assume the role of Fabric Convenor/Factor, left vacant after the retirement of Moira Morrison last year.
- **Church Heating Project:** Vestry will meet on 7 September 2026 to receive a presentation from the Church Heating Working Group. This will help inform decisions on future heating arrangements and progress towards Net Zero.
- **Roof Maintenance:** Craig Ogilvie has been appointed to clean gutters and remove moss from the roofs at an estimated cost of £1,500 plus VAT.
- **Tower Floodlighting:** Plans to upgrade the tower floodlighting to LED are progressing, although the work has been delayed pending access to a cherry picker.
- **Gift Day:** The Gift Day on 22nd August 2026 will support funding for fabric repairs identified in the Quinquennial Review.
- **Rector Succession Planning:** Vestry has begun considering arrangements for appointing a new Rector following Nick's retirement at Easter 2027. A timetable will be developed in partnership with St Mungo's Vestry. Vestry will also meet with Bishop Dagmar during her visit to St James' on 4th October 2026.
- **Doors Open Day:** St James' will participate in Midlothian Doors Open Day on 12th September 2026. Volunteers are sought to welcome visitors, provide refreshments, assist with baking, and help with clearing up.
- **Fellowship Lunch:** As the AGM, Fellowship Lunch and Christmas Coffee Morning were scheduled for the same weekend in December, the December Fellowship Lunch has been moved to Sunday 29th November 2026.

- **Safeguarding:** Recent safeguarding changes mean that more volunteers will require PVG certification. Nick Bowry and Katy Horton-Fawkes are managing the necessary actions to ensure compliance.
- **Eco-Congregation Scotland:** Vestry approved the renewal of St James' annual membership at a cost of £100.
- **Zoom System:** A new controller has been installed for the Zoom system, resolving the recurring problematic issue.

The next Vestry meeting is on Tuesday 25th August 2026

I hope this update provides a helpful overview of Vestry's work.

With my love,

Charlotte Kemp (Vestry Secretary)



Enjoy a holiday break and come along on 28th August 2026 at 7:30pm to Trinity Community Church Hall, Kirkhill Road, to enjoy some light hearted fun. We hope the churches will send a team (or two). If you don't have a team don't worry, just come along and we will make teams up on the night. There will be light refreshments and **entry is free**. Come along and enjoy the fun!

To join a team for St James the Less Church, contact Marion Mather
07795 033090.

John McCluskey RIP

John McCluskey was an occasional attender at St James the Less, always accompanied by his son, Steven. He died on 10th May 2026 soon after a diagnosis of lung cancer. At his funeral, Steven gave the most moving and honest eulogy for his dad, in which his coming to terms with a difficult relationship and his obvious love for his dad shone out in a caring and truthful light. Thank you, Steven, for agreeing to share the eulogy that you wrote for your dad. I hope it inspires and encourages others who are dealing with difficult family relationships.

Dad's Eulogy

First of all I'd like to thank you all for coming, or for tuning in on Zoom, like, share, subscribe, etc, YouTube humour. I'm sure if John was able to, he'd offer you all a dram of whisky, he may have been of Irish stock, but he had very good Scottish taste.

For those of you who don't know, I'm Steven, John's only son. I know we're here to remember and celebrate John's life, but I wanna be honest, me and dad didn't have the best relationship. For the longest time we were estranged, I was even a little scared of him. But somehow, despite the rough start and years of distance, it worked out between us, even though I'm not sure how, and I'm at the epicentre of it.

When I was born, just a few days old, I had a stroke, this meant a lot of things, but to boil it down and grossly simplify it, I wasn't a "normal" kid. Now to be fair, no parent wants to hear their child has problems, is different, or broken, or however you want to word it. But any decent parent will, yes be upset, but try to help the child. That's what my mum did, but dad, well he refused to acknowledge my disabilities, and history repeated when at age nine, I was officially diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome, (yes I know it's not PC terminology now, but it's what I was diagnosed with and what I'm sticking to), so yeah, not off to the best of starts.

When I was six years old, my parents divorced, and arranged that dad would have me on alternate weekends. He did that for a while, but then outside forces altered his priorities, to the point where I'd only see him five times a year, his birthday, my birthday, Easter, Father's Day and Christmas. Each meeting was mostly about ten to fifteen minutes, and the most damning thing is, we lived almost across the street from each other.

Now that sounds horrible, and it is, but believe it or not, I was one of the lucky ones. Again, outside forces caused dad to burn bridges with most of his family. His two daughters Wendy and Karis, from the marriage before my mum's, he hadn't seen or heard from them in years. His sister, Elaine, they had a falling out over something and haven't been in contact since, etc.

So I've not painted a very good picture of John at this point, but later in life a few things happened that started to change things. Enter 2013, when I came down with cancer, (I'm now in the clear and cancer free, fyi). I knew dad had to be told, and when he heard, I was glad to see he was genuinely concerned about me. Dad's bedside manner could've done with an upgrade, his first words to me after a massive ten hour surgery were, "*what're you doing in bed you lazy sod, get up*", but his heart was in the right place, and he visited many times. Dad, mum and I were on much better speaking terms from then on.

But then the biggest change of all, in 2021 his then current relationship ended, leaving him in a bit of an awkward situation. His stepdaughter Laura and her family helped him out to start with, but he then came to me for help, and I remember that day so clearly. On the phone I was calm, but inside me was turmoil, my head was yelling all he'd done wrong by me.

But my heart had only one quiet rebuttal, "*he's your dad, you can't hate him*".

So he came to stay, until eventually, a place became available at Heinsberg House where he'd spend the rest of his days.

He had a lovely, if scaldingly hot flat, and whilst organising his personal belongings to be returned to him, we got it furnished with some stuff donated by friends, one of whom, Moira, repaid a favour he did for her back in the 1980s (it just goes to show how far a good deed can go) and eventually made the flat a comfortable home. He made many friends there, including Betty Campbell and John Thompson. The two Johns formed a strong friendship. They'd go to the Royal Hotel every Friday for dinner together, and became so well-known there, the staff didn't need to take dad's order, just "*Hi John, the usual?*". Dad really opened up in Heinsberg. He became part of the community, helping residents with getting shopping among other things and became something of a hero to all there. *The Hero Of Heinsberg* as I dubbed him.

Our relationship strengthened in those years, as I was one of the few people left he could turn to, plus my proximity helped. I'd help him here and there, like with his phone when it confused him, which was often, and other stuff. Having him over for Father's Day, Birthday and Christmas dinners became the norm, and we attended church on special occasions, including Christmas, Easter and the first Sunday of the month with fellowship lunch after. We definitely broke our five times a year record, I don't know if we ever fully restored our father and son relationship, but I'd like to think if nothing else we got close.

And then this year, 2026, it was rough, he had a minor car accident in February, then in March he had a fall and spent time in A&E, which combined with the after effects of the car accident, dominoed a series of events that ended up with him being diagnosed with stage four lung cancer and cognitive impairment. Eventually he got a room at the Marie Curie Hospice for what we thought would be a short assessment, but ended up being where he spent the last ten days of his life. It was difficult for him at times, but I think he was mostly comfortable.

Even now, I'm still not sure how I feel about dad, am I too soft in the head, or do I just have a good heart?

For the longest time, I didn't think I'd be standing here saying nice things about dad, I guess I haven't that much. I thought I'd be re-enacting the scene from Fresh Prince Of Bel Air where Will's father comes back only to leave again, denouncing him. But that's not the case. I'm happy he's at peace, I'm sad he's gone, I'm angry I didn't get more time with him, I'm disappointed he never said he loved me, I could go on, let's just say, I'm ambivalent, look it up, it might help in your next game of scrabble.

But at the end of the day, I'm glad we ended the way we did, that I got some time with him, and I'm even proud of him. He gave up smoking for a good while, he had this cigarette next to him and was never tempted to light it. Even when he lapsed, he never touched it. You hear about these detox stories where people struggle, but dad just said, nope, I'm gonna stop, and even when he lapsed, he still kept himself down to only one after meals. He never even finished his last fag, amazing will power. I'm also proud of how he helped raise another family, I'm sure Laura will tell you herself, but he was a big part of her and her kid's lives. Some say being a grandparent is a way to make up for the past, a second chance to get it right, two granddaughters and a grandson, matches with his own two daughters and son, so I'm proud he got it right second time round.

So before I finish, I'd like to paraphrase a quote that I think sums up me and dad pretty well:

Parents aren't for telling their children who they're supposed to be, they're here to give us the tools to help us make fools of ourselves all on our own.

Our choices, our actions, that's what makes us who we are.

And I'd like to believe, if not hope, dad might've been proud of me.

Pa Kent – Superman 2025

Love you dad.

Steven McCluskey

Prayers to re-visit

O God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ in whom you chose us before the foundation of the world and destined us to be your own, help us to pray for all your children.

We pray for the life of the world, that your Peace may be known and may prevail - we see so much needless devastation, destruction and violence, so much misery for those innocent victims of war and famine; people being forced from their homes and countries.

We pray earnestly for your Peace, for your righteousness, justice and mercy in the many countries at war and we ask that you would change the hearts of those with the power to work towards peace and reconciliation. We pray for a de-escalation of hostilities between America and Iran.

Lord in your mercy - Hear our prayer.

We pray too for the victims of the terrifying wildfires and earthquakes.

We pray for those who fear for their lives and their livelihoods - give hope where there is despair - give strength and courage to all relief workers and humanitarian organisations and charities. Help us to share our resources and guide us in our prayers for those in these dire circumstances. Help us to remember what you require of us - to act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God.

Lord in your mercy - Hear our prayer.

We pray for all who exercise rule and authority that they may acknowledge your power and have integrity and boldness to stand for justice, compassion and mercy. We pray for all world leaders, and closer to home - for our King, for our Government and for every member of Parliament, especially at this time of change and new faces. We ask that you uphold them in their willingness to serve our country and that they ask for wisdom, as Solomon did.

Lord in your mercy - Hear our prayer.

We pray for the Church which is Christ's body on earth, that it may live for the praise of your glory. We pray that St James the Less may be a beacon of light in our community. May your word grow in us and may we live lives that bring you glory.

Lord in your mercy - Hear our prayer.

We pray for all who suffer mental or emotional anguish and for those who despair. We pray for those facing another day of pain, or anguish or uncertainty. We pray for those we know who are ill - for Richard, for Joy and others known to us.

We pray for unity and healing in our homes, families and marriages. For healing from pain, loss, hurt, rejection and suffering. We ask you to bind up the broken hearted and heal our wounds. We ask you to enfold us in your love.

Lord in your mercy - Hear our prayer.

We pray that you will gather into your eternal kingdom all who have come to the end of this earthly life and are separated from us by death. We remember those we know who have died recently or whose anniversaries occur at this time.

Lord in your mercy - Hear our prayer.

O God of Peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, make us perfect in all goodness to do your will and to be what you would have us be, through him to whom be glory for ever, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Faye Clerk
Prayers for 26th July 2026

Unforgiveable, by Stephen Cherry

Book Summary and Review



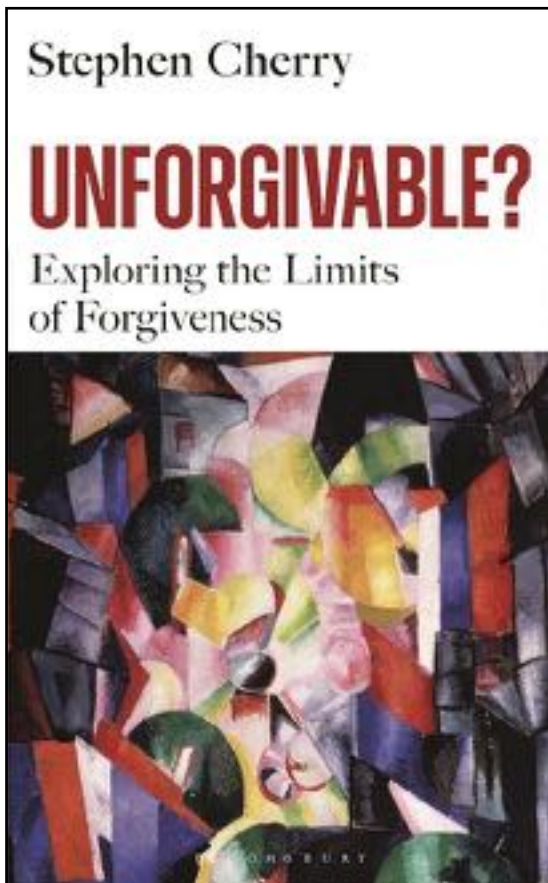
Stephen was, until recently, Dean of King's College, Cambridge. He's the face you saw in the clergy stalls during *Carols from King's College* on TV.

More importantly to us, however, Stephen is Philip and Sue Crosfield's son-in-law. Some of you heard his beautiful, heartfelt appreciation of Sue at her funeral. He was clearly very fond of Sue (who wasn't?). Stephen's academic subject is *Forgiveness* and he has written widely about it in the Christian context. Clearly, Christians are not the only people to forgive (or

not), so Stephen's earlier career as a psychologist comes to bear on his subject as well.

So, while his books are written from the perspective of a professional Christian theologian, they have a spine of science running down the middle.

C.S. Lewis famously described forgiveness as "*a lovely idea until you have something to forgive.*" He added, "*Even when we understand the importance of forgiving others, it can sometimes be very hard, and especially in difficult situations, may require repeated efforts and much prayer*". I'm a huge fan of CSL, but this leads to what Stephen refers to as "*an additional pressure and anxiety for those who have been harmed*".



In his latest book *Unforgivable? Exploring the Limits of Forgiveness*, Stephen sidesteps Desmond Tutu's unqualified insistence that "*without forgiveness there is no future*" and explores, realistically and with the New Testament in hand, why forced forgiveness can be difficult, sometimes impossible and occasionally dangerous.

He argues that forgiveness must be approached pragmatically, without faux-piety and must take account of the extent of the harm done to the victim and the hurt it caused. He also raises the possibility of *non-vengeful unforgiveness* ... an interesting concept.

I found this a real page-turner, which is unusual for me in a semi-theological book. It's not just the riveting case studies that Stephen chooses (some of which are horrific). It's more "*what's he going to say next?*" in challenging all my preconceptions about forgiveness and the headaches, angst and wasted time/effort that they have given me. He tackles the issue of unconditional forgiveness head-on and realistically. He addresses the fact that, for most situations, forgiveness requires movement (*repentance*, in the normal Christian terminology) on the part of the perpetrator of whatever hurt you're trying to forgive. He also explains that *sorry* isn't always terribly helpful, as it's what you say when you bump into someone on the street! In Christian terms, he challenges the simplistic view that the Bible tells us that we must forgive, "*because God did*". You'll have to read it to find out why. For me, he also raised a few new questions, which I have sent to Stephen, as he thinks about book number three.

None of this implies that forgiveness is a bad thing. It does, however, take the pressure off, so that some things can be forgiven and others not (yet). For many forms of hurt, that's good enough to restore a form of normality in relationships and an outbreak of peace, even if a few unforgivables are left on a high neural shelf, well out of the way (I'm using my own analogy for a way of dealing with things that can't just be sorted).

I recommend this as an interesting theoretical read at least and potentially as a self-help book if you're finding it difficult, impossible and possibly troublesome to forgive something or someone. It's calmed my brain down (on that front at least – it's still far too busy on other stuff!). It has the insight of a psychologist, theologian and philosopher and the down-to-earthness of a *how to* magazine article.

ISBN 9781399401326, pub March 2024.

Alan Murray



Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees (SFAR)

As some of you may know, I represent the Scottish Episcopal Church on SFAR, an inter-faith group that meets to discuss how we can best support refugees across the religions in Scotland. The secretariat for SFAR is based in the Church of Scotland HQ at 121 George Street. The Scottish Episcopal Church (SEC) contributes to the cost of running SFAR.

We tend to meet two or three times a year, in Edinburgh or in Glasgow and we normally have representatives from the three Abrahamic faiths, along with Bahai. It is a useful forum where ideas and initiatives are developed, and reports come back of what local faith communities are doing to support refugees and 'New Scots'.

Our Spring 2026 Policy Update included a briefing on significant changes to UK immigration and asylum policy, with reforms to settlement, family unity and daily living conditions for some of the most vulnerable people in society.

The Early Settlement reforms represent a major change in how *Indefinite Leave to Remain* (ILR) is granted in the UK. Most people get ILR status after working in the UK for five years with a Work Permit; i.e. an employer has employed someone from overseas in a category of work for which the UK government considers there to be a skill shortage in the UK. Under the new framework, settlement is now based on a ten year baseline, i.e. doubled in duration.

However, the time can be shortened for individuals who meet specific criteria, such as earning more than set thresholds, achieving high-level English language qualifications or demonstrating civic participation through volunteering. Some family connections may also shorten the time frame. For some high earners, settlement could be achieved in three years. The system also introduces severe penalties that can considerably extend the wait for settlement. For some people, including those in lower paid or lower skilled work this could mean waiting fifteen years as a starting point.

These changes to the Settlement Scheme make it something to be earned, privileging wealth and stability while embedding long-term insecurity for others, involving prolonged temporary status.

The scheme also creates a thirty month renewal system, so families are required to apply for renewal every two and a half years, at a cost of £3000 per application. This will add to the financial burdens on those who already face restrictions on the type of work they can do. The repeated applications mean repeated uncertainty, fear of refusal, disruption to family life, employment and well-being (emotional and physical). Instability negatively impacts on integration, making it harder for people to plan for the future, invest in education and careers, and generally making people feel less secure. These reforms will disproportionately benefit those on high incomes and stable employment histories, while refugees, those who arrive through irregular routes because there are no others, and those in the low-paid workforce face more than ten years of precarious living, and economic hardship to meet the renewal fees. For faith groups this raises profound questions of fairness, proportionality and the long-term consequences of embedding insecurity into the immigration system. It also impacts on our social welfare - it is mainly migrant workers who do the jobs most UK nationals do not want to do, and they are not well-paid jobs.

Asylum seekers and refugees face further barriers. There is a reduction from five years to thirty months in asylum protection grants, significantly reducing the period of time of stability for those granted refuge, i.e. whose case has been approved as being a genuine refugee. There are also going to be separate settlement assessments for dependants. This means that family members may not qualify for ILR at the same time. The ten year residency route to ILR has also been scrapped, so time spent on other visas no longer counts. In addition, new restrictions on access to public funds, even after settlement, further weaken the safety nets for low-income households.

In September 2025, the *Family Reunion* scheme was closed. It used to enable a safe route for refugees and those with humanitarian protection to be reunited with family members. The only remaining route for entry is through the standard family visa process. However, it includes a minimum income requirement of £29,000 pa, English language tests and fees of £1,938 per person. For many refugees and their dependants, this route is completely unattainable. There is considerable lobby by faith groups for a reversal for this decision.

In 2025, 100,625 people applied for asylum in the UK, including significant numbers from Afghanistan and Iran. The overall backlog of initial decisions has reduced. However the successful claims for asylum have reduced to 41%, down from 67%. The net effect is that the appeals system has received more cases, with about eighty thousand appeals pending by the end of 2025. Nearly a third of appeals were resolved by the Home Office, who withdrew their initial rejection of a case, and almost half of appeal judgements were successful. Not surprisingly, an audit of increasing the speed of initial decisions shows how poor those decisions have been. Asylum seekers have the added stress of going through an appeal process at a time when they don't need that in their lives.

The Scottish Government, after sustained campaigning, launched a pilot programme to give free bus travel to people seeking asylum. The scheme aimed to reduce isolation, improve access to services and enhance dignity and wellbeing. It ran until 31st March 2026. It is hoped the findings from this research project will result in this scheme being reintroduced.

We may have mixed views about refugees and asylum-seekers, partly because of how the media portray asylum-seekers. They seldom differentiate between them and those whose case has been approved by the Home Office and are then classed as refugees.

I have met several refugees, and I am struck by their desire to build a new life and find ways to integrate. However, I also have witnessed the emotional strain and the almost or actual PTSD that some refugees have.

I once helped a family on their travels. The father was educated to post-graduate level and held a senior position at a UK university, but he still found it hard to cope when plans became unstuck, such as being on a late train and not knowing if he would make his connection. I can understand that because of his personal history and experiences, he needed to feel in control and know what was happening and when. I cannot really comprehend how a refugee can cope under the policies now in place. These refugees have been through so much and they carry heavy burdens of trauma with them. The Christian response is surely to care for “*aliens in our land*”, not to lump them all together as untrustworthy. We need humane processes that do accurately filter the true refugee fleeing persecution and harm from economic migrants who can do it in a timely fashion. And for those given refugee status, they need appropriate support to enable them to integrate and flourish.

Nick Bowry

The Server's role at the Sunday morning Communion service

When an ordained priest is leading the Communion part of the service (Liturgy of the Sacrament), it's also usual to see a lay reader or a lay worship leader reading the prayers at the beginning of the service (Liturgy of the Word). There is also a silent figure in a white robe who helps at the altar during Communion. This is the server.

A server is a member of the congregation who is able and willing to support the Communion service in this particular way, and must be recommended by the priest to the Bishop for this role.

The server's job starts in the clergy vestry, about forty-five minutes before the service begins. At St James the clergy vestry is down those stone spiral stairs behind the organ. I will call the server "she" because at the moment, we have only female servers at St James, but any gender can do the job. In the clergy vestry, she (the server) first gathers the altar and credence table vessels. These are two *chalices* for the wine, (one is for gluten-free communicants), a *ciborium* for the wafers (metal container with lid), a *paten* (small metal plate) for the priest's wafer, a *cruet* for the wine (glass jug with stopper), a wooden *host* box for spare wafers, a small *cruet* for the water which ritually dilutes the wine, and a wee *lavabo set* (small jug of water with a dish).

The server pours wine into the wine cruet, and counts wafers into the ciborium and spare wafers into the host box. A large priest's wafer is placed on the paten.

Linen is also prepared: the *corporal* - the square linen cloth which is placed on the altar for the chalice and other Communion items to stand on; the *purificator* - to clean the chalice after each communicant has taken wine from the chalice; the *pall* - a stiffened square of linen placed over the chalice while it's on the altar; and the small linen hand towel - which the priest uses to dry his hands after the ritual handwashing before blessing the wafers and wine. All these items are brought up the stone stairs and placed in the required order and manner on the altar and the *credence table*.

The credence table is the little shelf on the right, just in front of the altar.

The cruet of wine and ciborium of wafers are taken to the bookcase at the back of the church ready for the offertory. The server must also remember to place gluten-free wafers on the altar - these are stored in the *aumbry*, which is the little cupboard in the wall by the altar.

The server can then do a few other checks - is the sanctuary candle burning or does it need replacing? This is the wee candle that hangs from the ceiling just in front of the altar, and should be lit whenever there are consecrated wafers and wine in the aumbry. The server can also check that service and hymn books are in place for the presiding priest, and that the candles on the altar don't need replacing before they are lit for the service. If the service is being taken by a visiting priest, the server can ask if they need anything and answer any questions about the way things are done at our church. Different priests often do things slightly differently at the altar, and the server needs to be prepared!

Ten minutes before the service starts, the server lights the altar candles, and also the Paschal candle during the Easter season.

During the service, the server's role is first to discreetly count the congregation. Then just before the offertory, the server goes into the Sanctuary with the priest, puts down the kneeler cushion and closes the altar rail gate. The server may then assist the priest with putting on the *chasuble* (the outer vestment whose colour varies with the season) and then stands at the altar rail to receive the offertory - the wafers and wine - and places them on the credence table. The server pours water from the lavabo onto the priest's fingertips, who does a brief ritual hand washing with a prayer. The excess water is caught in the wee lavabo bowl, and the server offers the linen towel to the priest for hand-drying. She then brings the wine and water and wafers to the priest - quietly telling the priest how many wafers are needed.

During the invitation to Communion, the priest may ask the server to elevate and show the chalice to the congregation. At St James, during Communion itself, the server holds the chalice of wine for intinction of the wafers which are offered by the priest to communicants.

When communicants prefer to take wine directly from the chalice, the server offers the wine after the priest has offered the wafer, saying the words "*The blood of Christ, shed for you*". After each communicant has sipped, the chalice is wiped with the linen purificator.

The server must keep alert in case any communicant indicates they are gluten-free, and be ready to hand the gluten free wafers to the priest, along with the gluten-free chalice.

Either before or after Communion has been offered to everyone, the priest offers the server Communion at the altar. Some priests then ask the server to offer them Communion.

The server is then on the alert with the cruet of water which the priest will use for the ritual cleansing of the chalice and paten. The server should remain alert at all times in case the priest needs to ask for anything during the Communion part of the service - perhaps they have left their service booklet on the lectern at the front of the congregation?!

On special days, there may be other duties for the server - baptisms are exciting with a few extra duties at the font, and there are other services where extra candles are needed or Mother's Day gifts need handing out etc.

At the end of the Communion service, during the first verse of the last hymn, the server extinguishes the candles, stands beside the priest in front of the altar and bows, and leads the way down to the back of the church for the final sending-out.

We're not done yet! While everyone goes into the hall for a cuppa and a chat, the server must clear the altar and the credence table, put any remaining consecrated wafers into the aumbry, take everything down to the clergy vestry, wash, dry and stow everything that has been used, put the used linen into the laundry bag (for Val, the Sacristan, to launder!) and generally tidy up and remember to return all keys to their special hiding place!

Why do servers wear a white robe ("alb")? Personally, I see it as symbolic *spiritual scrubs* - acknowledging and covering my imperfect self while assisting in the sacred space of Holy Communion.

But I didn't know the official reason, so I resorted to Google. I discovered that the server's white robe represents equality and humility: The robe emphasises that all servers, regardless of their daily clothes, are performing a special, equal act of service.

The serving role is a real privilege - there's a lot to remember, but it does become second nature relatively quickly. And there's always help at hand. Val McGavin, our sacristan and chief server is usually there early every Sunday and willing to help and gently remind the rest of us if we forget something. At the moment, the team of servers is Val McGavin, Sue Owen, and Dy Harvey. Ania O'Rourke is at the start of her training. Val's period of training is lost in the mists of time, and she has been serving for more years than she cares to remember! She has been sacristan since 2022. Sue started training about fifteen years ago during Rob Warren's stint as priest, and has served regularly ever since. Dy started her training at the beginning of 2024, and our latest recruit, Ania, celebrated her very first day training as a server on Sunday 20th April this year. We must also mention and celebrate Angela Sibley who served at St James the Less for many, many years, and was sacristan before Val took over. Angela retired from her serving role only last year due to failing health.

Servers today are part of nearly one hundred and fifty years of Scottish Episcopal worship tradition at St James the Less. I wonder in how many servers' footsteps we're treading?

Sue Owen



Image from <https://www.eden.co.uk/>

Remembering

On the 6th August we celebrate the feast day for the Transfiguration of the Lord. It is the day we remember the story of Jesus going up the mountain to pray and prepare for his journey towards Jerusalem. And there, he met with Moses and Elijah. Peter, James and John witnessed this encounter, and then they heard God saying “*This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!*” It marks the start of Jesus’ journey to the cross.

And the 6th August is also the anniversary of the dropping of the first atomic bomb, at 8.15am local time, on the unsuspecting city of Hiroshima in Japan. It detonated one thousand, nine hundred and sixty-eight feet above the city and instantly killed between seventy thousand and eighty thousand civilians. One hundred and twenty thousand were dead within the first four days. Tens of thousands more died from injuries of the blast and from radiation sickness over time. Another atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki three days later. Seventy-three thousand were killed that day, and many more died subsequently. The topography of Nagasaki reduced the numbers that were killed by the bomb, more powerful than the one that was dropped on Hiroshima. Luckily, these have remained the only two atomic bombs to have been detonated in war.

You will be reading this article at least three weeks after the anniversary of the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but please do reflect on the horrors of war and the particular horrors of weapons of mass destruction. As a Christian, and especially as a member of the Iona Community I oppose the existence of such weapons in our world.

The 14th August is a day when I also remember someone. His name is Nicolas Zelikovics. He died in Auschwitz, a victim of the holocaust, on 14th August 1942, at the age of nineteen years and ten months. He was born in Veliky Palad on 15th October 1922, just inside the Ukrainian border adjacent to Hungary, and had also lived just outside Warsaw for some time.

He was rounded up in France and was transported from Pithiviers Camp (about ninety kilometres south of Paris) to Auschwitz on 25 June 1942. He was only in the camp for about eight weeks. Of all the millions that I could choose to remember, I decided to seek someone with the same first name as myself. You can access the list of names on this website, and if you wish, you can search for a name or choose one from those listed, to remember yourself. See <https://www.yadvashem.org.uk/victims/>. This is a way of being able to contemplate the sheer numbers who were victims of the holocaust; by picking one name, and remembering them each year on Holocaust Memorial Day, on their birthday, and on the anniversary of their murder.

Jesus calls us to Stand Together: a litany

In the face of the classification of people as *other*, Jesus calls us to stand together.

In the face of people being singled out by labels, Jesus calls us to stand together.

In the face of discrimination, Jesus calls us to stand together.

In the face of human beings being treated as less than human, Jesus calls us to stand together.

In the face of extremism, Jesus calls us to stand together.

In the face of the polarisation of cultures with the intention of creating opposition, Jesus calls us to stand together .

In the face of incitement to hatred, Jesus calls us to stand together.

In the face of persecution, Jesus calls us to stand together.

In the face of genocide, Jesus calls us to stand together.

In the face of denial of such atrocities as the Holocaust, Jesus calls us to stand together.

We stand together with Jesus, who came into the world so that everyone might have life in all its fullness.

Amen.

Nick Bowry

Cats have a part in God's purposes



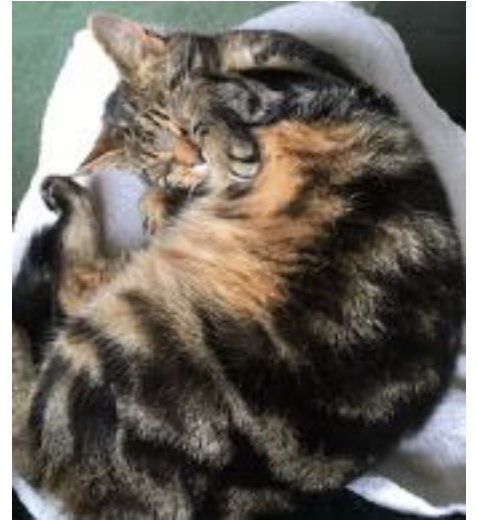
YOU would not know it from the Common Worship calendar, but 17th March is the feast day of St Gertrude of Nivelles, the daughter of a Frankish nobleman. Gertrude rejected several marriage proposals to found a Benedictine monastery. She was a great admirer of St Patrick and died on his feast day, venerated as a protector against disease-carrying mice. Recently, she has become the patron saint of cats.

I am sure that cats have a significant place in God's great design. Our household is still in mourning after the death of our 20-year-old tabby, Tiny. He had suffered in recent years from arthritis, a painful growth in his mouth, kidney problems, and deafness; but still he struggled up and down two flights of stairs, and was capable of terrifying magpies, seagulls, and even foxes who strayed into the garden.

We took him to the vet for the final time on 7 July, and buried him the next morning. I miss him every day. I'm not sure about the theology of pet funerals, but four of us, including our gardener, who used to converse with him in Italian, stood over his grave and sang the Benedicite to the threefold chants that Anglicans used to use at Sunday matins during Lent.

The Book of Felines, a biblical text not known to humans, makes it clear that cats are the exception to the commandment that humanity should have dominion over all living things. They remember that cats were worshipped in ancient Egypt, and they know that they should be in charge, reminding us with their uncanny blend of unsmiling stares and loving, if imperious, affection. Some cats aim high; think of Larry the Cat, Chief Mouser of 10 Downing Street, and Hodge at Southwark Cathedral (News, 11 August 2023).

Tiny was not particularly ambitious. I suspect that he was a closet conservative Evangelical, because he clearly did not believe in women's headship and generally showed more respect to men, especially those who disliked cats. As Victor Hugo once observed, "*God has made the cat to give man the pleasure of caressing the tiger. . .*" He was almost right.



When we buried Tiny, we put a terracotta lion (a garden piece brought back from a Sicilian holiday) over his grave, a reminder that Tiny was made in the image of the Lion of Judah.

A few days after Tiny's burial, I visited a friend whose feline companion is Cephas, a red tabby Balinese who has always seemed to me to be rather superior and detached. But, on this occasion, as soon as I arrived, Cephas came up to greet me and wrapped himself round my legs. When I sat down, he jumped up to sit in my lap: proof, if any were needed, that cats, even in their omniscience, possess true pastoral sensitivity.

Angela Tilby

Contributed by Angela Sibley

This article first appeared in the Church Times (13 March 2026) and is reproduced here by kind permission of the Editor.

www.churchtimes.co.uk

Photographs of Sue Owen's cat Megan replace the original images.

Last Word

Alongside reading Sara Maitland's book (see *Reflections from the Rectory*), I am (slowly) reading, *The Song of the Cell* by Siddhartha Mukherjee. This is the third book of his I am reading. It is an accessible factual account of the miracle and foundation of all life, the cell. I am only on page 75 of 377, but I am already struck by two things which the author mentions.

Firstly, the inexplicable fact that out of the elements that formed the earth, the single cell came into being (about four billion years ago, around seven hundred and fifty million years after the Earth was formed). Cells are the foundation of every living being. These single-cells developed into three distinct domains; (i) Bacteria, some good for us, and some definitely not good for us (bacteria are also called *prokaryotes* – meaning *before nuclei*). (ii) Eukaryotes, cells that have a nucleus which stores chromosomes. Humans, all other animals, fungi and plants are made of eukaryotic cells. (iii) Archaea, a little known domain, cells that lack the defining features of bacteria and eukaryotes! So, the question hanging in the air is, how did the first cell arise?

And secondly, the fact that eukaryotic cells “chose” to replicate, have differing functions and come together to form something greater and different from the individual cells. This novel form of cell, with an elaborate internal structure with thousands of new genes, emerged about two billion years ago, most likely from the Archaea cell form. Without this significant progression, no living animal, plant or fungi could exist. So, the question is, how did this development in eukaryotic cells and their ability to cooperate to create complex living organisms arise?

These are two things which, in terms of Sara Maitland's category, are *Wow* moments for me, where I feel in awe of our Big Enough God, with joy and wonder.

What do you ponder and gives rise to *Wow* moments for you?

Nick Bowry

Contact details



Revd Nick Bowry

The Rectory
23 Broomhill Road
Penicuik EH26 9EE

01968 678254

email: [rector.pandwl\[at\]gmail.com](mailto:rector.pandwl@gmail.com)

For donations to any of the causes mentioned in this issue, please contact the treasurer for St James the Less, John McCulloch ([treasurer\[at\]stjamesthelesspenicuik.org](mailto:treasurer[at]stjamesthelesspenicuik.org))

Websites

St Mungo's: <https://stmungoswestlinton.org/>

St James the Less: <https://stjamesthelesspenicuik.org/>

Next Deadline

Please send copy to Sue Owen at the email address below by
Sunday 1 November 2026

The next issue of *In Touch* will be distributed on
Sunday 22 November 2026

Email: [intouch\[at\]stjamesthelesspenicuik.org](mailto:intouch[at]stjamesthelesspenicuik.org)