

Presbytery Insight

Summer 2020

CONGREGATIONAL ROUND UP AND PRAYER DIARY

Dates have been inserted to encourage daily prayer

ABBEYGREEN, LESMAHAGOW Minister: Rev. David Carmichael [1st]

We here in Abbeygreen, in the village of Lesmahagow, have so much to be thankful to the Lord for in terms of the outworking of His providence in recent times. With His help, guidance and assurance, and this by means of the clear inspirational, directional and motivational leading of the Spirit, we were able to chart a smooth course out of the Church of Scotland. A rich blessing indeed.

In 1844 when Abbeygreen first opened its doors it did so as a Free Church of Scotland. In later years it became a United Free Church before in 1929 re-joining the Church of Scotland. And now by the grace of God, and in His perfect timing, it has returned home to the Free Church of Scotland. It has been an experience of spiritual and theological homecoming that has left the congregation and its minister and elders feeling overwhelmingly indebted to Almighty God for His act of rescue and the abundance of his merciful provision. We are deeply thankful that all of our spiritual and material needs were wonderfully met and indeed are continuing to be graciously met. Praise be to the Lord God Almighty.

We also want to give thanks for the Free Church and this very particularly in relation to its ministers and elders. In all of our dealings with them we were treated, during the application and acceptance process, with graciousness, respect and brotherly understanding. We praise the Lord for the warm and sincere welcome we have received into the denomination. As a congregation we want to acknowledge the goodness of God to the Free Church in placing it under the leadership of men of marked spiritual quality; men deserving of our prayerful support and praise to God for their commitment to the cause of Christ, their humble acceptance of the authority and integrity of Scripture and their keenness to make the Free Church a spiritual, theological and confessional force for good in the midst of secular and pagan Scotland, a nation desperately in need of the ministry of a national Presbyterian church worthy of the name.

We are thankful to the Lord that in the midst of lockdown the life and witness of our church here in Lesmahagow has known much blessing. By means of Zoom we have known evenings when over 70 people, of all ages, have been found gathering in their homes for our midweek Bible study and prayer meeting. During the week, groups within the church make use of Zoom for fellowship, Bible studies and other meetings, while on a Sunday evening our young people meet by means of Skype. On a Lord's Day morning we offer

Abbeygreen Fellowship Moments on YouTube. We want to thank the Lord for the gift of modern technology and the good use that true, Bible-believing churches can put it to for the sake of taking the gospel into all the world. And this, unto the exalting of Christ and the glorifying of our God.

We also thank our Sovereign God for the effortless way in which He has humbled our nation and our world. In the words of Amos 3:6, "When disaster comes to a city, has not the Lord caused it?"; an action that has revealed to men and women just how fearful of death they really are, and how much they are in need of a Saviour - One in whom can be found not only the forgiveness of sins but also the guaranteed promise of victory over death. We praise God for His goodness, His gospel and His glory.

AYR AND KILWINNING Interim Moderator: Rev. Kenny Boyd [2nd]

The month of March was certainly eventful for Ayr and Kilwinning. It began with the threat of Covid-19; then our minister and the family managed to leave just before lockdown. Also, we had to deal with the sale of the Ayr manse; thanks to God and the hard work of the Free Church solicitor the sale was finalised before everything was closed down.

Since then we have started weekly Prayer meetings and Sunday services on Zoom and we hope these will continue. We have also started up our Book Group and there are discussions about holding a fortnightly Bible study on Zoom as well.

Please pray for:

1. The Interim-Moderator and the Kirk Session as they deal with the vacancy and the additional problems that Covid-19 is causing.
2. Our two members who are working hard to get the Prayer meetings and Sunday services online with a minimum of technical problems.
3. Our elders who are having to bear the brunt of taking the Prayer meetings and Sunday services while we are without a minister.
4. Gillian Moyo, the Community Worker at Kilwinning, most of whose activities have had to be suspended because of the lockdown.

BISHOPRIGGS Minister: Rev Garry Brotherston [3rd]

As intimated in previous *Presbytery Insights* we have a number of groups that use our church hall during the week. These include Cocaine Anonymous (CA), Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Hope for Glasgow, a Bible based recovery group. The onset of the coronavirus pandemic has stopped all of these meetings at the church but they are still able to meet remotely, using video conference technology.

It is amazing how God provides for a need before you even know it is coming. We thank the Lord for sending us John MacLeod and his young family. They moved from City Free Church a couple of years ago. John, now an elder with us, has used his knowledge of technology to arrange for our church to be equipped

with the latest audio and video equipment. We were already able to live stream services before the pandemic, but when it actually came it meant that we were prepared for everyone being at home and still being able to hear the Sunday morning service. We praise God for His goodness and His providential care of us! It seems that around 200 people have been 'tuning in' to watch the services, whether live or the recording later. As you can probably guess we normally have a lot less than 200 people present on a normal Sunday morning!

As with many other organisations John MacLeod has organised for us to have our prayer meetings on Wednesday evenings using Zoom. This has been great as we can still fellowship and give thanks together and pray for each other, and for the needs of our church and our world at this time.

Points for prayer:

1. For the work of Hope for Glasgow, the AA and CA – this time of lockdown is an extremely difficult time for those who have addiction problems. Please pray that the Lord will protect these men and women and lead them to hunger and thirst only for the righteousness of God.
2. Give thanks that the Lord has blessed us in His providence by getting us prepared technologically, in advance of the current crisis.
3. We give thanks that so far no-one from the congregation has contracted the coronavirus.
4. We give thanks that the Christian Institute DVD series 'Living Christianity', that we held in February, was found to be useful by those who attended.

CAMPBELTOWN Minister: Rev. Dr Rodger Crooks [4th]

1. Praise God that everyone in the congregation has been kept safe from the virus.
2. Each week we broadcast on YouTube a Psalm of the Week and a Sunday 'Service'. While these are primarily aimed at our own congregation, we are aware that many others are watching. Pray that the Holy Spirit would use the Word to bring many to put their trust in Jesus.
3. Praise God for the invitation during lockdown to write articles for the local newspaper. Pray that God would give wisdom, clarity and boldness to make the gospel clear and accessible in these articles.
4. We hold a weekly Prayer Meeting using Zoom. Pray for greater competency in the use of this technology. Pray that the prayer life of the congregation would continue to develop in spite of the physical distancing nature of our Prayer Meeting.
5. Pray for wisdom in terms of the future – in terms of what shape post-lockdown ministry will take and how quickly we should move out of the lockdown restrictions on church life.
6. Pray for a movement of the Holy Spirit in the congregation and in the community as that is the only thing that can secure the future of the church in Kintyre.

CHRIST CHURCH GLASGOW (Church Plant) [5th]

Minister: Rev Jonathan de Groot

Praise:

1. Praise God for the wider reach we have been able to have through our Christ
2. Church Glasgow YouTube channel. We are grateful to God for the many more people who have been able to tune in to our pre-recorded services.
3. Praise God for the way we have managed to keep people connected with our
4. Live Sunday evening services for worship and our community groups for Bible study, prayer and fellowship.
3. Praise God for our new part-time, temporary (until September) administrator who has been a superb support and has tackled a number of necessary tasks with insight and enthusiasm.

Petitions:

1. Pray for wisdom in knowing how best to continue to meet together as lockdown eases. Ask that God would enable us to continue to pursue our vision for the church plant whatever the 'new normal' looks like.
2. Pray for our outreach as a church during this time. While we have found a good rhythm for church life, we are conscious that we want to create opportunities to share the gospel with unbelievers. We are currently in the early stages of planning a Christianity Explored course on Zoom. Please pray for our church family to be bold in inviting unbelieving friends to join.
3. Pray for the development of our church leadership to further the growth of our church. Our ministry apprentice (David Trimble) will begin theological studies this year to train for ministry in the Free Church of Scotland (4 years). We are currently looking for a new apprentice and would hope to equip them for some future ministry with us. Please pray that God would provide the right person for this.

COVENANT CHURCH NEWMILNS Minister: Rev. Benjamin Wilks [6th]

Back in February, I wrote "It's all very ordinary" with respect to our plans for the year, trusting that God would be faithful therein. How rapidly things changed. 'Ordinary' is probably one of the last words we would choose to describe the intervening months. Happily, God has **better** plans. In Isaiah 55 he declares "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways." What a comforting truth!

On the basis of that reality, verse 6 exhorts wicked people to 'seek the Lord while he may be found.' And this does indeed seem to be a day when the Lord may be readily found, and a day when many who were not doing so before are seeking Him.

In common with many other churches, we've been greatly encouraged to see names of people we don't know popping up 'liking' the Facebook live videos, and people who before had never been in person now coming to our online Sunday School. We continue to proclaim the good news of the gospel in all its fulness by whatever avenue is open to us, trusting that, in accordance with verse 11, God's Word as it goes out will surely accomplish what He desires and achieve the purpose for which He sends it.

Our prayer is that His purpose will include drawing many of those around who do not know Him into a knowledge and love of the Saviour. The question we're pondering is what we can do just now, and indeed as we contemplate a return to in-person meetings in the months ahead, to build on the connections we're establishing at the moment. Please pray for those organising the online Sunday School, for those involved in the Sunday services, for wisdom for the Kirk Session and others thinking through these questions, and most importantly, please pray that God would be at work in the hearts of those hearing His word for the first time.

CUMBERNUALD Minister: Rev. Andy Longwe [7th]

Give thanks to God for those within our church family who are using their gifts with technology, music, and children's ministry to serve our church family at this time.

Give thanks for all those with gifts of teaching the Bible and who are helping with Sunday services and with our midweek meetings.

Pray for those who are being reached by our Sunday morning service on our YouTube channel. Especially pray that those who are not yet Christians would be drawn by the irresistible grace to trust in our Lord and Saviour.

Pray for us as we spend time together as a church family on Sunday evenings on Zoom. Each Sunday night a different member or household shares a word of testimony. It has been really encouraging, edifying, and challenging to hear what God has done and what He is doing in the lives of our church family today.

Pray for our midweek Bible studies where different men give a devotion from the book of Ephesians. Pray that we would have rich and meaningful times of prayer as well.

Pray for our plans to have joint services with our sister congregation in Coatbridge, and our partner church in Lexington, Kentucky - Tates Creek Presbyterian Church.

CHRISTIAN WITNESS TO ISRAEL [8th]

The CWI prayer meeting is held by Zoom on the second Monday of each month from 7.30 pm. Anyone wanting to join online can get the necessary information from Ronnie Christie at randmc2512@gmail.com or, if anyone wishes to use landline for the meeting, by phoning 0141 561 6806. The next meetings, D.V., will be on 13th July, 10th August and 14th September. We will be very happy to have others join us.

DOWANVALE Minister: Rev. Kenny Macleod [9th]

Lockdown has had its problems for all, however our minister, with support over Easter weekend from Duncan Peters, has maintained services each Sunday morning and evening by live streaming on YouTube. Items of praise are from a backlog of recordings from the church and it is heartening to note that most mornings 170 computers log on with around 120 in the evening - a significant number. Wednesday evening prayer meetings are hosted on Zoom – log in details are available on the Church website.

Other activities include ongoing women's Bible studies, again hosted on Zoom; and Carina our youth worker has kept up with the international students with quiz evenings among other things.

Just prior to lockdown we were blessed to have Ruth Gilchrist join us as our family worker. We are thankful to our congregation who have gone to special efforts to keep donations flowing to the church. Total income has reduced but not significantly.

PAISLEY – a Presbytery Preaching Station [10th]
Interim Moderator: Rev. Dr Colin Dow

The last few months have seen some major changes in the life of the Paisley Preaching Station. A few weeks before the lockdown, following Downavale's decision to sell the premises, we had to vacate the church building in Silk Street where we have worshipped for the last 50 years. After an extensive search we secured the use of Paisley Abbey halls, for a token rent, just across the road from the building in Silk Street, allowing us to continue the work we started in the local community and maintaining our presence in the centre of town.

Shortly after this the lockdown came which has meant we have not fully settled in yet but hopefully it won't be long before we can worship together again in person; it seems strange that live streaming services pioneered in Paisley are now the norm!!

On the whole, the congregation remain well and in good form despite the frustrations of not getting out but we are thankful that the Lord continues to provide for us as a group and we look forward to developing the work in Paisley and the surrounding area.

DUMFRIES Minister: Rev. Trevor Kane [11th]

Our experience of the last months is common to all. It is a trial of faith; a taste, in a small measure, of the far greater trials of our persecuted brothers and sisters in Christ. We have done what is possible with regular ministry via the internet, interactive prayer meetings and phone contact. These are a help but can never be a substitute for meeting together for worship. And there are those who do not have the means of participating, not to mention some isolated in residential and nursing homes. There is the danger of slipping into a continuing neglect of meeting together by reliance on internet ministry.

Sadly too, the regular Drop-in and First Steps are discontinued. Amidst the uncertainty all use of the hall by external users has ceased; in one instance the severance is permanent as the NHS reviews its service delivery pattern. This too has an impact on incoming revenue.

By the time you will read this we anticipate that Rev. Trevor Kane and his family will have moved to Portadown in N Ireland. The starting date of his ministry there is currently uncertain; meanwhile for a time he will continue to provide weekly ministry for Sundays, and additionally the midweek prayer meeting by means of Zoom.

DUMBARTON Vacant - Interim Moderator: Rev Kenny Boyd [12th]

I'm sure what's being done here in Dumbarton in our present circumstances will look very similar to what's happening elsewhere. We have all the same restrictions and opportunities as other in terms of what we can't at present do and also what we *can* do. It's the 'can do' that has been the really interesting bit for us, and while we look forward to the day when we can attend on the means of grace again I think we have had a very fast learning curve regarding the new prospects now open to us. The key features of our current arrangements are these:

Sunday morning service: the morning of the Sabbath continues to be the highlight of our weekly activities, and we do this by way of a pre-recorded service which goes out on YouTube at or near the usual starting time of 11.15am, so that there is a sense of the congregation watching it together. This typically comprises an opening word from the Scriptures by Rev. Colin Buchanan, followed by prayer, singing and preaching, the last being either a shorter devotional from one of the Church leadership or from a guest speaker, or else a full sermon from Colin. For around four months Colin has been afflicted with a severe chest infection which has laid him low and had taken away his voice. He is doing better now but still needs prayer. He is underway with a series on Ephesians. The singing is usually duets of Psalms, with some hymns also, from various couples in the congregation.

Wednesday night: our prayer meeting and Bible study continues as a Zoom meeting, and we are working our way through 1st Samuel, led by Aaron Walker.

WhatsApp group: this has proved so popular we might describe it as 'hyperactive'! It keeps us up-to-date with all Church news and also socially. We have also started a Church Bulletin both online and available in print, and in addition we circulate a number of items such as the CWI Herald by mail in hard copy. The bulk of all these developments has been undertaken for us by Aaron and Sarah Walker.

Perhaps the key part of the 'learning curve' has been to realise something we have now heard from many sources. We are in fact reaching far more people online than we usually do in our normal services. For example, our first YouTube service had over 100 hits. We are a congregation of between 20 and 30, and as many watch it as couples or families it must be going places that we never

previously thought of. However, a big challenge is to maintain links with those in our congregation who use no technology beyond a landline. All of what we do can be found via our Dumbarton Free High Church Facebook page and our website.

DUNBLANE Minister: Rev Allan Shearer [13th]

Covid-19 sent shock waves through our fellowship presenting challenges unexpected three months ago. Forcibly reminded of life's uncertainty and frailty, the reality of our faith and fellowship has been tested and, we gratefully believe, not proved wanting.

The ban on meeting for worship and the individual isolation of most of the congregation has been met with Sunday and midweek services beamed into every home along with a weekly pastoral letter from the manse keeping us connected to the local and wider life of our denomination. This, together with constant email and phone contact throughout the fellowship, has bonded rather than scattered the flock. This meant much when the shadow of deeply felt bereavement touched us with the passing of Calum, 'the father of the congregation', and we shared the pain of others for whom current restrictions made a break in their family circle hard to bear. But alongside these we had the joy of knowing two victims of Covid-19 have recovered from their ordeal and of the safe arrival in the manse of baby Gregor James whose emailed picture adorns virtually every congregational home.

The older children are not forgotten as their weekly emailed Sunday school lessons arrive and, although the rejuvenate lunches are temporarily suspended, Zoom has allowed the men's prayer breakfast to continue unhindered. The complete renovation of the church kitchen and coffee bar coincided with lockdown's arrival so most of us have yet to see it! The Free Church *Record* is edited by John, one of our members and we know he covets prayer for this important part of the Church's witness. We pray our blessings will not dim our concern for others, but rather spur us on to faithful daily prayer and sharper missionary zeal for our lost and needy world.

WEST MAINS CHURCH, EAST KILBRIDE Minister: Rev. Iain Thomson [14th]

It would be good if we could say it's business as usual, but unfortunately it looks as if it could be quite a while before we will be able to say that again. We have tried to cope with the lockdown much the same as everybody else. We have kept in touch with people in the congregation by phone calls, emails and messages. The minister prepares a written sermon which he sends out to the congregation on a Saturday evening. Most of the congregation make use of the excellent choice of live stream services which are available throughout the church on Sunday. We have our mid-week Bible Study and Prayer Meeting through Zoom. More of our congregation are tuning in to this than would normally attend. We hear that this is the case throughout the church, so that's an encouragement for us all.

Our minister has continued his ministry in Kilmarnock Prison and has been more encouraged since the lockdown than prior to it. The services in prison have been suspended the same as everywhere else, but as a result more opportunity is available for one-to-one sessions which appear to prove very valuable. Some prisoners have been asking very good and thought-provoking questions and requesting prayer. More prisoners have been asking for Bibles and reading materials than ever before. So as we pray for the various new challenges which confront us as a result of the pandemic, please remember the ministry that is ongoing in our prisons.

GLASGOW CITY FREE CHURCH Minister: Rev. Dr Colin Dow [15th]

It's been a strange ten weeks. No services, two-metre separation at best and just seeming to be going along our own little tunnels, but there is light at the end. In fact, the light has never gone out. Like so many other groups we have been blessed with the benefits of Zoom, enabling almost everyone in the congregation to be 'in attendance', whether by laptop, tablet or phone. A simply huge age range participates, with senior citizens being almost as adept as their offsprings in handling the technology!

What has been happening? Sunday services continue at the normal times and attendances have been maintained and perhaps improved. In addition to our own folk, participants come regularly from several parts of the country. Phil Stogner takes bi-monthly Sunday services and weekly Bible studies in Hope Community Church Helensburgh. Our midweek meeting has seen a more than doubling in attendance, with those who are normally detained by work being able to participate. It's a two-way traffic, so that people can be invited to take part, particularly being invited to pray.

Colin, our minister, conducts a 15-minute devotional at 8.00 am Monday-Friday and Matthias, our youth worker, in the evenings. The ladies' Bible study continues. There is an informal chat time on Tuesday and Friday afternoons, where there is an enriching variety of contributions from a Poets' Corner to *Desert Island Discs* where we have been given an enriching insight into the varied music tastes of the participants.

There have been only two cases of Covid-19 in the congregation and happily both have made a full recovery. One of the loveliest things to have come out of the situation is the abundance of expressions of care for one another, particularly communication with older persons. We have much to be thankful for. It sets us all thinking. How will we 'do church' when it is all over? It's a challenging question!

GOVAN (Church Plant) Minister: Rev. Norman Mackay [16th]

We are excited about the **new website** we are about to launch. One of our local guys has great photography skills and is able to capture the spirit of Govan in his shots. We will be including these, and trust that many more local people will be drawn to the church through the website.

Our **Sunday Zoom services** continue to go well, with up to 40 people online with us to worship, pray and listen to God's Word. We have a great informal time of catching up and fellowship before and after the service. A number of Robert McGivern's family have been joining us. Pray for them as they mourn Robert's loss, that they will look to the Lord for His comfort and salvation.

Our Thursday evening **prayer meeting** is uplifting, and we continue to pray for an unreached people group every week, using the Joshua Project website. Pray our local converts will grow in grace, through the Word and prayer, and be established firmly in their new faith.

Govan is an area of multiple deprivation, substance abuse, violence, crime and trauma. Pray we will continue to be strengthened to bring light, love and hope through the Gospel, and that more people will find themselves burdened to join us in this amazing and humbling work.

GOVANHILL Minister: Rev. Kenny Boyd [17th]

Like congregations everywhere we have had to adapt to the new circumstances very quickly. What has been very encouraging is how many people have been able to learn new skills very quickly too. Some folks who had never read an email in their lives are now tuning into Zoom and YouTube every week! We thank the Lord that 'attendances' at services, prayer meetings and Bible studies have in general not decreased as a result of moving online, and in some instances have slightly increased with new people tuning in. It also has been encouraging to have many from the Ayr and Kilwinning church join with us regularly, although it is great they have managed in recent weeks to set up their own online service on a Sunday afternoon despite their current vacancy. We would not minimise the challenges the Coronavirus presents, however. The danger of people on the fringe of a congregation falling away, the inability to be physically present together in worship and service and the fact there are some who will never find a way to engage effectively with a 'virtual church' mean the longing for a restoration to real life is strong.

Please pray for those in our fellowship struggling to engage with this new way of being the church. Remember too those from the wider community who would have attended weekly activities in our church building who can no longer do so, and with whom we have to admit we now have very little contact. Pray also for those families struggling under mounting financial and social pressures in our area. We are cooperating with community organisations to provide food and essentials on a regular basis, but it can be hard to know how effective this is. Most of all, are there spiritual needs and concerns going unmet? May the Lord guide us to be of the most help where it is most needed.

GREENOCK Vacant - Interim Moderator: Rev. Alasdair MacDonald [18th]

Just days before the lock down our congregation enjoyed the excitement of seeing our Church almost completely decorated. The new chairs, carpets and windows looked fantastic. We feel truly humbled by what God has done for us. We wait in faith to see what the future holds for Greenock. We are thankful to all

who have supported us since the fire. Like other congregations our plans are on hold. Please continue to pray for us as our members face various difficulties. In particular Ruth Gollan and her sisters have had the heartbreak of not having been able to contact their mother for many weeks.

GRACE CHURCH KILMACOLM [19th]
A Preaching Station of Dowanvale

Lockdown has presented challenges for the fellowship in Kilmacolm as for everyone else. We have several folks with health issues, others with financial challenges and some with family members who have been ill with the virus. We have tried as we can to support each other and those around us. Our Grace Church WhatsApp prayer group has been very active and we have been humbled and thankful to see prayers answered as we have come together before the throne of grace. Some of our folks have been really good at regular phone calls to chat with others. Plants, jigsaws and shopping have been delivered with love.

We have been very thankful for the technology which allows most of us to share in the Dowanvale livestream services each week. We are grateful to Kenny Macleod for his weekly ministry and faithful preaching which teaches, challenges and encourages us. It is really nice to hear a discussion about Kenny's sermon in the queue outside the Co-op!

HOPE CHURCH COATBRIDGE Minister: Rev. Ivor MacDonald [20th]

We find ourselves in an unprecedented situation right now being cut off from our familiar church gatherings and the encouragement that we derive from face to face contact with fellow believers. Nevertheless, we believe that these are days of great opportunity. We are finding a new and larger "congregation" in the unseen crowd that visit our online services. We have placed a large banner outside the church with bright rainbows (isn't it great to be able to re-appropriate the covenant sign!) and a call to "Seek the Lord while he may be found". God is certainly speaking to the nation in these days and we are praying that for many it will be a time of new birth and new hope.

Attendance at our prayer and fellowship meetings is up on the normal and for some people Zoom meetings make it easier to attend for a wide variety of reasons. We have embarked on a disciple making training time before our prayer meeting and we will be encouraged to "pray for three, ask three and read (the Bible) with three". We hope to use the *Uncover* material for Mark's Gospel and also learn how to use *Just for Starters* for follow up.

We are discussing with our Memphis partners the possibility of delivering a Zoom-based holiday club although the likelihood is that it would be for only a couple of days. Finally, do continue to pray with us that God would lead us to a church planter for Chapelhall.

HOPE CHURCH (BLACKWOOD AND KIRKMUIRHILL) [21st]

Minister: Rev. Ian Watson

Like all other congregations we have been trying to stay connected during the lockdown though it's been made a little easier since we already had everyone's email addresses. So sending out our weekly prayer letter and intimations have continued as before. It's been a steep learning curve for our minister but he seems to have finally mastered not only recording but editing services. These go out on our YouTube channel (hopechurch b&k). During the week he has been taking us through the Westminster Confession of Faith. There is a short time of prayer every Sunday evening via Facebook (livelink). The elders have been actively keeping in touch with folks in their districts. Some of us have been involved in the local Resilience Group, shopping for those who are self-isolating, phoning the lonely, and litter-picking (the village has never been so clean!). Little touches such as a goody bag for the self-isolating and front-line workers have been appreciated. We are very blessed to live in a village surrounded by glorious countryside so that we don't need to break any rules to find pleasant places to exercise.

LENNOXTOWN Minister: Rev. Alex Stewart [22nd]

The last few months have been a time of adjustment, and indeed a learning curve for us all. Sadly, Covid-19 has affected our congregation with Iain Beaton's aunt succumbing to it recently and some in the congregation have neighbours who have lost loved ones.

We have been blessed by making the best use of the Zoom app in live services. We have found this a blessing in maintaining fellowship. However, we have experienced some issues with Zoom break in connection. We also have the blessing of other people joining us online, and we are looking at ways to develop this ministry.

We do have elderly people who do not have access to this technology, so we have started recording the services and prayer meetings and delivering DVDs weekly. We also maintain pastoral contact by telephone and Zoom. Some of our congregation are vulnerable, with underlying health issues, and are restricted from going out of their homes. Some elderly people connected with our congregation are very unwell. Dr Margaret Beaton is of course working. We also have folks in the congregation who have family members nursing. Others are working from home. Self-employed people in the congregation are being affected by the lockdown.

The East Dunbartonshire Foodbank has stopped operating from Lennoxton until the lockdown is over. Lennoxton Free Church is still operating the emergency **Harvest Basket Foodbank** on request. We have been able to deliver **100 Easter Gospels and Good newspapers** to the community abiding by the lockdown stipulations. We have started the online **Road to Recovery** linking up with other groups and it has proved a blessing. We try to get different people to speak each week. This has been one benefit of the lockdown. By

God's grace we also have begun our online Saturday morning prayer breakfast fellowship.

Prayer

Please give thanks to the Lord for:

- Answered prayer
- The Lord's protection and care over us .
- The online services
- The Easter Outreach

Please pray for:

- Continued blessing in the services, that the Word would be blessed to all, and that we would not have broken connections or intermittent drop-outs.
- Ways that we could develop online ministry.
- For the continued safety and protection of the congregation and loved ones, in particular the folks who are high risk, those who are unwell and those who are in high risk employment.
- For those who are sorrowing .
- Continued help in building bridges in the community
- Blessing in Road to Recovery
- Fruit from all the outreaches.

LOCHGILPHEAD Vacant – Interim Moderator: Rev. Dr Rodger Crooks [23rd]

1. Praise God that everyone in the congregation has been kept safe from the virus.
2. Pray for wisdom, guidance and faith in terms of the future. Pray for a movement of the Holy Spirit in the congregation and in the community as that is the only thing that can secure the future of the church in mid-Argyll.
3. Pray for the witness of the congregation in the community.

MULL & COLL Vacant – Interim Moderator: Rev. James Beaton [24th]

Our small congregation is mourning the loss of a faithful elderly couple, both in their 80s. The husband passed away in January and his wife died recently. Thankfully the day of the funeral was warm and sunny as a short service was held at the graveside taken by Rev. James Beaton. The nearby location of the cemetery carpark meant that a wider group of family and friends could be present. It did give an opportunity to catch up briefly in person which was welcome. Please pray that the Lord would bring others into the congregation. We continue to access worship services mainly from Stornoway Free Church. Contact is kept through email, phone and texting. A weekly devotional is also sent out by the Interim Moderator. Pray that the Word would be blessed as God has promised, whatever method is used. Pray for island communities like Mull to which access is limited to essential travel only on a curtailed ferry timetable. Pray that local believers would be strong in their faith in testing times.

TARBERT Vacant – Interim Moderator: Rev. Dr Rodger Crooks [25th]

1. Praise God that everyone in the congregation has been kept safe from the virus.
2. Pray for wisdom, guidance, commitment and faith in terms of the future. Pray for a movement of the Holy Spirit in the congregation and in the community as that is the only thing that can secure the future of the church in Kintyre.
3. Pray for the development of a culture of prayer in the congregation.

OBAN Minister: Rev. James Beaton [26th]

Like most congregations we are getting used to meeting online for our Sunday and midweek meetings. We are thankful for good support in terms of numbers accessing these services. Short devotionals are being distributed via email and used as material for brief addresses. Pastoral work continues via email group where folks have been sharing their 'lockdown' experiences, as well as contact by phone and text. Our town, so heavily dependent on tourism, is very quiet and the local economy has been significantly affected. Oban Christian charity *Hope Kitchen* has seen a huge increase in the number of food parcels delivered locally. Thankfully, the number of Covid-19 cases has been low, and the one or two connected to our fellowship have made good recoveries. Pray for the ongoing witness of local churches to bring gospel hope in uncertain times. Pray for greater openness to the good news of Jesus among the whole community.

PARTICK Vacant – Interim Moderator: Rev. Allan Shearer [27th]

To adapt the lines of a song from bygone days and one which will resonate with us as the Lord's people, "Lockdown is a word I seldom use without thinking." Lockdown has impacted us here in Partick in many ways. Quite a number of our folks are "Shielders," which means for them more than 12 weeks at home, with feelings of cabin fever and other attendant problems. However, in it all the Lord has been good and a source of strength to endure, even in the painful loss of two beloved, aged but faithful children of God.

Our folks have kept in touch by phone and have given support that way, as well of course as praying for each other. One shared point is how much they miss the worship services in Partick but importantly the fellowship of likeminded people. Some of us have gone online for services.

Our Interim Moderator, Rev Allan Shearer has provided a weekly Pastoral Newsletter, which helps the sense of togetherness and is of devotional help. Allan's ministry in this way has been appreciated by us and all the more since his wife Joanna had their baby boy Gregor James within those weeks.

Undoubtedly the weeks of lockdown has brought us nearer to God stimulating us both in reading His Word and in prayer to Him for congregation, denomination, the wider church, missions, our National and Westminster Governments not

forgetting the other nations struggling with the Covid-19 pandemic. We have learned to pray more for NHS and Care Home staff who have risked their lives for others. Whatever the future may hold for us, it is wonderful to know Who holds the future and to know we are to lean on Him and He will direct our path.

PRESBYTERY NEWS CLERK: Rev. Ian Watson [28th]

Congratulations to Allan and Joanna Shearer on the birth of Gregor James. At the March Commission of Assembly (just before lockdown) Rev. David Carmichael was admitted as a Free Church minister from the Church of Scotland, along with his congregation at Abbeygreen, Lesmahagow. David signed the Formula at one of the first meetings held by Zoom, with just two of us physically present (well separated) and the Moderator, Rodger Crooks, virtually present. An official welcoming service for Abbeygreen will be held when lockdown restrictions are lifted.

We are pleased that Rodger Crooks agreed to continue as Moderator for another year. His wise and prayerful guidance is always appreciated. We are sorry to say good-bye to Rev Trevor Kane (Dumfries) who has returned to Ireland to take up a post in the Presbyterian Church of Ireland. We are also sorry to say good-bye to Kenneth Ferguson (Stirling) and Innes Macleod (Dunblane) as Presbytery elders. Innes reckons he has served in that capacity for 20 years—so he deserves a break!

STIRLING Minister: Rev. Iain MacAskill [29th]

Lockdown has brought many opportunities for kingdom work. The congregation has been strengthened by holding 80 days of prayer together online, taking seriously the commands to pray continually and to pour out our hearts before Him. The benefits have been many: prayers answered; daily attendance vastly increased compared to a usual midweek time of prayer; fellowship and unity strengthened; love for one another deepened. In addition, having friends from across the world join with us in our daily time of prayer to inform us of practical needs in India, Kenya, Colombia and Peru has enabled us to not only pray more fervently but also to send financial help to our brothers and sisters in desperately worse situations than our own. Our services of worship online have seen increased attendances, as well as a worldwide congregation. Praise God!

As we move forward, there is much uncertainty about how we 'do' church, and what will be the most God-glorifying ways of sharing the gospel and discipling His people. Here in Stirling, please pray for us as we:

- Look to God's provision for a place to gather to worship and to undertake mercy ministries, as we have been evicted from our previous venue, The Barracks, and our lease on The Well came to an end;
- Seek God's guidance on the best ways to hold our various meetings for prayer, Bible study, etc. and outreach ministries to the needy in our community.
- Investigate ways to continue and develop student ministries (will there still be on-site teaching? will there be any international students? etc). It is a joy at our online Sunday services to have former students joining us from China,

Thailand, India, Kenya, Germany and France, as well as different parts of the UK. How can we continue to minister to them?

- Please pray too for our congregational worker, Cat Mahato, as her contract runs out this summer. We give thanks for all that has been achieved in God's name through her ministry.
- Please pray too for our minister in training, James Blackwell, who has now successfully completed his first year of study at ETS, and also has become a father to baby Thomas. Congratulations to James and Claire.

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Please pass on items for the next issue of Insight to Rev Kenneth Cameron
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