

UPPER BRAES

PARISH CHURCH

CONNECT
SUMMER 2026



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Local Mission Church Leadership Team: contact the Minister

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Hall bookings: lets@upperbraes.org.uk

Our website is also full of resources and information, including a church calendar, hall booking forms, news updates and much more.

Congregational Roll Update

DEATHS:

- Mrs Grace Douglas — 08/11/2025
- Mrs Mabel Munro — 08/11/2025
- Mrs Margaret Mitchell — 23/11/2025
- Mrs Doreen Henderson — 25/11/2025
- Mr Willie Rankine — 16/12/2025
- Mr Joe Milne — 28/02/2026
- Mr Robert Paterson — 14/03/2026
- Mrs Marie McCormack — 31/03/2026
- Mrs Lydia Ramage — 16/03/2026
- Mr David Coats — 14/04/2026

NEW MEMBERS:

- Victoria Smith
- Sophie Primrose
- Ricky Alves
- Lorna Alves
- Norman Ainslie
- Carmel Ainslie
- Paul Oliver
- Bryce Bell
- Michelle Beagley

Pastoral Articles

Message from the Manse

BY SCOTT BURTON

As we approach the end of another busy session, with the summer holidays on the horizon, and hopefully better weather too, it is timely to take stock of the journey of the last year. In June 2025, the Kirk Session shared that the session to come would see us embark on a "season of change" with teaching, a church conference and a missional listening project — all with the intention of discerning where God might be leading us next in His purposes.

Over the year, plans adapted, new ideas arose, and schedules changed. Whilst we are still in the season of change, we now are talking about it as a season to "thrive" — individually, collectively and for our community too. So, we have held a number of Thrive Sundays to make space for conversation about this. We've also had two prayer weekends: 48 hours of uninterrupted prayer for our church and a host of issues and people close to our hearts, and those hours in the prayer room were precious and formative.

Whilst we are soon to come into a time of rest, with a change of pace for many, nonetheless, whilst we are

seeing some green shoots of God's renewing work — two baptisms by immersion, nine new members, increased participation of young people at Scripture Union groups, and more besides — we are still in the season which began last year.

If these and many other first fruits are to become something that thrives, then all of us need to play our part in the session ahead, and so I invite one and all to make some space across the summer months to spend time in prayer with God, conversation with one another and out in the community noticing and imagining possibilities — because as the gospel says, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). God didn't stay distant. God didn't turn inwards, away from the world. Instead, He came close, He served, He loved, He gave His life.

We remember all this as we celebrate the Sacrament of Holy Communion this June, and I pray that in this time together, we will receive His grace, affirmation and renewal to partner with Him in what He is doing in our day to see His Kingdom thrive among us, through us and around us, out into the community of the Upper Braes.

With love to one and all,
Scott

Pastoral Assistant's Message

BY MONICA
MACDONALD

Soon schools and colleges will be publishing results of exams, and as is customary — especially at Primary School level, there will be a prize-giving or awards ceremonies. And for those who are graduating there will be the reward of years of work wrapped up in a scroll on graduation day. Usually, parents and grandparents attend these events, taking photographs and showing their pride to everyone. Thankfully, rewards are not only for those in academia, because the Word of God teaches us, that as believers, we are all going to get a prize or a reward one day. While Christian reward is the gift of grace given us by the saving work of Jesus, the Bible also assures us that God will reward those who are willing to share His free grace with others. And the Bible mentions quite a few things that will bring reward.

Charity and caring for others — giving to those in need. Jesus said (Matt Ch 10 vs 42) "you can be sure that whoever gives even a drink of cold water to one of the least of my followers, will certainly receive a reward." In a sense God wants us to be part of His reward to others.

God also rewards those who act like Jesus towards others. How can we do this?

We can act like Jesus by forgiving others and by caring for those who are not like us, those who live on the edges of society. In Luke Ch 6 we hear Jesus saying: "Do for others just what you want them to do for you. If you love only the people who love you, why should you receive a blessing? Even sinners love those who love them! And if you do good only to those who do good to you, why should you receive a blessing? Even sinners do that! Do good... and expect nothing back. You will have a great reward, and you will be children of The Most High God." vs 31–35.

In 1 Peter Ch 5 vs 2, the apostle exhorts us to care for others from a real desire to serve, and he goes on to say that (vs 5) "when the Chief Shepherd appears you will receive the glorious crown which will never lose its brightness."

So, what are the rewards? The Scriptures don't give us every detail about these rewards, because our rewards are the spiritual blessings that we, as God's people, desire most. When we do things for our loved ones, the greatest reward is that they love us. When we do things that please God, we know that He loves us and that, in itself, is a reward!

Team Updates

In fact, the best of God's rewards are found in eternal things:

1. Life in abundance
2. Life where Jesus has gone to prepare a place for us (John Ch 14)
3. Life where everything is new — where there are no more tears or sorrow or death, no more hunger, no more thirst (Revelation Ch 7)
4. Life with the One who gives all these rewards

Jesus taught the importance of genuine caring, exhorting us to be kind and generous to those who cannot repay us (Luke 14 vs 13, 14). And, of course, we do not do good for rewards! We do charitable things because we have compassion and, as believers, we have faith and we have the Spirit of Jesus within us.

With so much pain and hardship, so much conflict in the world today, let us determine never to weary in doing good, sharing with others the abundance of God's grace given to us, wherever we may be. Our reward will be God's favour and His eternal blessing.

Monica

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Communications Team

BY JAMES FALCONER

In past editions of Connect I've provided an insight on the activities of the Communication Team at UBPC. As we find ourselves in a season of change, my focus is moving away from seeing communications as a 'business process' to how it can bring true life to our church family.

Clearly, exchanging and providing information is important; however, if we regard UBPC as simply a business organisation, we are in danger of excluding God and forgetting that we are part of the church of Jesus, a living part of the Kingdom.

We do have to ensure our 'business' is effective and in order — we need to comply with the laws of the land. However, I read recently that 'church needs to be built on worship, not business.'

The Kirk Session has provided us with Purpose and Values, and has asked us, individually and collectively, to lean into these, ensuring UBPC moves into a more fruitful future. Within the Comms Team we have started looking at what our Values — Connected with God; Equipped for life in the Kingdom; Belonging to God's family; Sent to partner with God — mean to our activities, where we promote and live out these values, and where we might consider more effective focus on them.

Like all of faith and discipleship, this is a journey we are embarking on that may take some time to fully develop as we discern God's will and Jesus' plan for His Church.

The Comms Team is dealing with some resource constraints that have led us to some difficult decisions.

Over recent months we have decided to cease some of our communication strands because we lack the resource and the demand for them has diminished. One such activity is the production of Sunday service CDs and DVDs. There are other ways by which people can access our services — for example, through our YouTube channel. If you have any concerns about the lack of CDs/DVDs, do get in touch with me by emailing communications@upperbraes.org.uk or Elspeth McCallum at pastoral@upperbraes.org.uk.

If you have any other comments or feedback on communications at UBPC, please also get in touch with me.

James Falconer
Communications Team Convener

Safeguarding

BY EILEEN HOPE

In the last 12 months there have been significant changes in the way that protections are put in place to safeguard vulnerable people, both children and adults. These changes have been implemented nationally and impact the way that, as a church, we need to manage our register of people approved to work with vulnerable groups.

The most significant change is that the holding of a PVG (Protection of Vulnerable Groups) clearance is now a legal requirement.

It is a criminal offence to work with a vulnerable group without having a PVG clearance. Within the church this means that after an individual has gone through the safer recruitment process for a particular role, I am responsible for informing Safeguarding at the Church of Scotland that the individual requires a PVG and guiding that person through the application process.

It is also a criminal offence to hold PVG clearance if you are no longer regularly active in a role that requires such clearance.

Within the church it is both the responsibility of an individual to ensure that they correctly hold a PVG and, in addition, the Kirk Session has a legal duty to ensure that the Congregational Safeguarding Register (CSR) is a true record of those holding PVGs for work within the congregation. I, as Safeguarding Coordinator, maintain the register on a day-to-day basis.

The above explains why over the past few months I and other members of the Safeguarding Panel have been pursuing people to ask them to sign an updated job description. We have been seeking to ensure that everyone on our CSR is still in an active role within our church.

Training is also important. Within 3 months of receiving PVG clearance, introductory safeguarding training should be completed. This can either be done in person or online. Some roles may require advanced or trustee training.

Refresher training must be done every 5 years, so it is a good idea to begin to look for a training session at around 4 years from previous training.

If you have any questions around or concerns about safeguarding and/or training, please speak to me or email safeguarding@upperbraes.org.uk.

Thanks for supporting me in my role.

Eileen Hope — Safeguarding Coordinator

Welcome team

BY LINDA GILLESPIE

It has been wonderful to welcome so many new people to our church family — even just since our last Connect. It was with my great thankfulness and relief to welcome Paula Jellicoe (and family) because Paula has taken on the collation, production and distribution of the rota.

There are now over thirty people on the "official" rota, including new members who are finding it a good way to meet more of the congregation.

The other really wonderful thing to see and hear has been how welcoming so many of the congregation are.

This shows the true spirit of a living church. Everyone is welcome here. Paula's email:

Paula.jellicoe@gmail.com

Community Outreach

BY CAMMY DICK

We held a successful litter pic(k)nic back in March when church members and the wider community collected litter in Brighton and then enjoyed refreshments in Brighton Ministry Centre provided by Sainsbury's, Brighton Station Road, and the Keystore at Brighton Cross. These are great opportunities to show that we care for God's creation and to easily invite neighbours, friends, family and people in our community to come along.

As part of our outreach to Polmont YOI, on Easter Sunday we gave all the inmates an Easter card and a crème egg each. The prison chaplain reported that "You don't quite understand what it means for the folk in their care to receive something. Not just the fact they get a little crème egg and a card, but the fact that people are thinking about them. It really means a lot to them, particularly those who don't actually have anyone". Thanks to those in our congregation who generously supported this outreach and helped to show our love and care to those at Polmont YOI. This is a great example of something small that can make a big difference.

The collection raised from the communion service in March went towards Martha's Pantry and, in the autumn, we will be asking people to donate non-perishable food items during the Harvest service and this will go towards Martha's Pantry as well.

Over the past year, we have held community missional listening sessions where we asked the community about their views on the community and their hopes and dreams for the community. At Thrive Sunday, we presented seven initiatives that we encourage the congregation to get involved in and reach out to our local community through these ministries.

If you would like to join us as we seek ways to reach out to our community, new committee members are always warmly welcome. Speak to Jamie or email outreach@upperbraes.org.uk.



Upper Braes News



The Guild

BY MARGARET SIM

The second half of our session began with Donald Meek entertaining us with an account of his school days, including slides, a very enjoyable afternoon. For our next afternoon the pupils of Wallacestone Primary entertained us with Scottish songs, dances and poems. We then had someone from SP Energy to talk to us about energy saving and what to do if there was a power cut and we had no heating or lighting.

The Guild project we are supporting this session is Playful Beginnings, part of CrossReach. "Working together for these 3 years, let's build a house that lays a strong foundation for vulnerable families. Together we will support families at our Daisy Chain service in Glasgow and Perinatal Services in Edinburgh and Glasgow."

"Research shows that parents who attend to their own emotional and psychological needs are in a better position to respond to their infants' cues and engage with them in positive ways. The Guild will support specialist perinatal therapy with crèche support. The team delivers Parent and Infant Relationship therapy. Parents can access their counselling sessions while leaving their baby in trusted hands."

We are grateful for the support of the congregation in all our projects. After our ABM, Caroline Whittit, our Youth Development Officer, spoke about all the work she has been doing and what she wants to accomplish with the young people in the church; we were all astounded at the amount of work that she has achieved so far.

Our final meeting was a fun afternoon in which our members played games and quizzes, which was a very enjoyable afternoon. During the business part of the meeting several members were presented with long-service certificates.

The Guild decorated the windows in the church for Palm Sunday, Holy Week and Easter Sunday.

The next session of the Guild will begin on 14th September. If you have been thinking of coming to the Guild, please do; you will be made most welcome.



Wednesday Book Group

BY NADIA COWAN

Every second Wednesday of the month, you'll find a dozen or so women meeting in the small hall discussing faith issues with the help of a Christian book. This past year we have STRUGGLED through What's So Amazing About Grace by Philip Yancey. There were sighs of relief when we finished it in April! Why was it such a difficult read?

It was a really challenging book. It encouraged us to show grace the way God has shown grace to us. How hard that can be in real-life situations, though. How can we show compassion to those who have really 'blown it', especially if it is something which affects us directly?

The author took us through various moral situations where God's amazing grace is still at work, and we found ourselves discussing gritty topics such as modern-day slavery and prostitution, abortion, homosexuality and racism, amongst others.

It reminded us of God's absolutely, abundantly outrageous love for all humanity in the face of terrible situations, yet it also helped us explore the place of justice, safety and the danger of being judgemental.

Although we were glad to be finished, there were many lessons we felt that we could take away from our reading and apply to our everyday lives.

For example:

- We are ALL fallen creatures, but God loves us anyway.
- Grace does not depend on what we do for God, but what God has done for us.
- In conflict situations, be the one to make the first move to put things right.
- "I really only love God as much as the person I love least", Dorothy Day. Ouch!
- In issues of morality, Christians should not be tempted to be judgemental, but should show the way by demonstrating the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.
- "My secret is that I need God, I am sick and can no longer make it alone", Douglas Coupland.
- If grace is so amazing, why don't Christians show more of it?

Lots to consider, as you can see! We have shared so much with each other, cried real tears and laughed out loud. Most of all, we have shared our faith stories and encouraged each other in our faith.

We will be starting a new book on June 10th, so if you wish to come and join us, speak to Nadia Cowan or Marion Graham.

Men's Book Group

BY JIM HOPE

Many popular articles and features report the benefits to their wellbeing of men talking together. The members of this group would agree with those findings. The book we are reading at any given time is of value in its own right, but at least as significant is the part it plays in opening up conversations, in which we can be both encouraged and challenged.

We are currently near to finishing a slim volume, *The Character of Christ*, subtitled *The Fruit of the Spirit in the Life of the Saviour*. Last year one of our group came across this in a second-hand bookshop and proposed it as our next read. Each "segment" of fruit (Galatians 5 v 22–23) is given a chapter to itself (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control), always with the understanding that the character traits listed are not given as a self-conscious attempt to "try and do better", but in order to help us see the person of Jesus more fully, and allow His life to permeate and change ours. I did say the conversations could be challenging.

Up to ten of us meet regularly each month — but there is room for more. I remember in the early days one of our members saying the group had helped him realise he needed to "dig deeper" into his understanding of faith, and that is really what we are about — encouraging each other to grow in confidence in our daily discipleship.

We'll be starting our next season in September and would love to see some new faces. The dates are always shown on the notice sheet, and if you want to know more, please have a word with me during the summer. Maybe you could even suggest a book for us all to read which you've found helpful!

Jim Hope

Friends of Jesus Group

BY RACHEL MEEK

We have continued to think about what God is like through songs and Scripture, and in mid May invited the congregations of Upper Braes to join us for an evening of song and praise when we shared something of what we have been learning. Thank you to all who joined us on that evening, and especial thanks go to Neil, Jamie and Richard for making the tech work, and to Ian for his splendid guitar playing. We were also delighted that the choir joined us. Our thanks to all who donated on the evening. The funds will be split between Prospects Across Scotland and our own group.

Earlier in the session we welcomed Jamie and Cammy from Scottish Love in Action to tell us something about their work helping to give children and young people in India opportunities to thrive. It was fun to learn a little about life in India. We were happy to be able to give them a financial gift

towards their work from the money the group have donated over the weeks for charities. This year nearly £200 has been donated by our friends.

We welcomed a new member this session, but sadly and very unexpectedly, we lost our dear friend Hazel Risk, who had attended faithfully from the very first meeting of the group 18 years ago. She brought so much to the group and had a very real trust in Jesus. We miss her humour and the way in which she kept us all on our toes.

Our session finished with a chippie tea — always a favourite with our friends.

We appreciate the continued support of the church and ask for your continued prayers as we plan ahead for the next session. New members and helpers will be very welcome.



OUR FRIEND HAZEL RISK

Martha's Pantry

BY JANICE

Our team of 22 volunteers work on a rota basis to support the provision of food to 145 households registered with us, and who live within communities of Slamannan and Limerigg, for a small payment of £2 per week.

We are now well settled into our new premises on the High Street, where our service users can pop in on a Wednesday to select food and other products on offer. Most importantly, they can interact with other service users over a cup of tea and a biscuit while they wait their turn to be served.

As a volunteer there is nothing more uplifting than hearing people having a chat and the sound of laughter coming from the waiting room. As volunteers we are aware that with the cost-of-living crisis, this may be the only interaction some folk have on a weekly basis.

I also serve on the Management Committee where we discuss how we might extend our services, for example by hosting organisations that can provide advice on the cost of living, energy saving and debt management for service users. At each meeting we discuss funding as we cannot provide food and other essential household items like cleaning materials and personal hygiene products without sufficient funding. Therefore, we are totally dependent on successful grant applications and donations of cash or produce from individuals.

Our volunteers come from different backgrounds and we have formed a positive support for our service users, being a listening ear where required, or signposting people further if necessary. I find volunteering a wonderful experience as it gives one a positive feeling, being able to give back into a community that is so appreciative of the service provided for them.

Footnote from Monica: Donations of non-perishable food, personal hygiene and household cleaning products can be handed in on any Sunday marked for Martha's Pantry. We already have folk contributing by cash directly into our bank account via standing order each month. If this is something you would like to consider, please get in touch for a chat:

marthaspantryfk1@gmail.com
07833102874

Prayer Weekend

BY NADIA COWAN AND
JAMES FALCONER

We had lots of positive feedback from our second Prayer Weekend (48 hours) that was held 6th–8th February. Many found it a peaceful and powerful experience.

We had a number of young people involved and we interviewed a couple of them for feedback.

10-year-old interview:

What made you decide to take part?

Last time I really enjoyed it, so I thought why not try it again? And it was great!

Why is a quiet/prayer space important?

It's better to pray in a quiet place where there are no distractions.

What was best?

I loved all of it but there were two bits that were best. The going back in time bit was good... although I didn't really have to go back in time! It was fun with the writing and the test. I also liked the writing in the sand... you could clear away what you wrote and God will take care of it.

Anything difficult?

No.

Sum up?

It was really great to be in a place with God being present. It was an amazing experience.

Would you do it again?

Yes, I definitely would.

Who would you recommend it to?

I'd say like 9-year-olds and over. I've already told some friends.

Anything else?

I did some door duty with Mum and it was fun too.

Teenager interview:

What made you decide?

Good opportunity to use a quiet space to connect with God.

Why is a quiet space important?

Allows reflection which is important.

Difficult to find space otherwise?

Not particularly. Welcomed invitation to prayer space in church.

Sum up?

Positively empowering!

Why empowering?

Felt connection with God through prayer.

What was particularly helpful?

Prayer prompts/stations; especially fragrance jars.

Would you do it again?

Resounding 'Yes!'

Who would you recommend it to?

Anyone who is busy and finds quiet time with God difficult.

These are really powerful testimonies from our young people.

We anticipate another Prayer Weekend event in Autumn 2026. Look out for further information on how to get involved.

Nadia Cowan / James Falconer

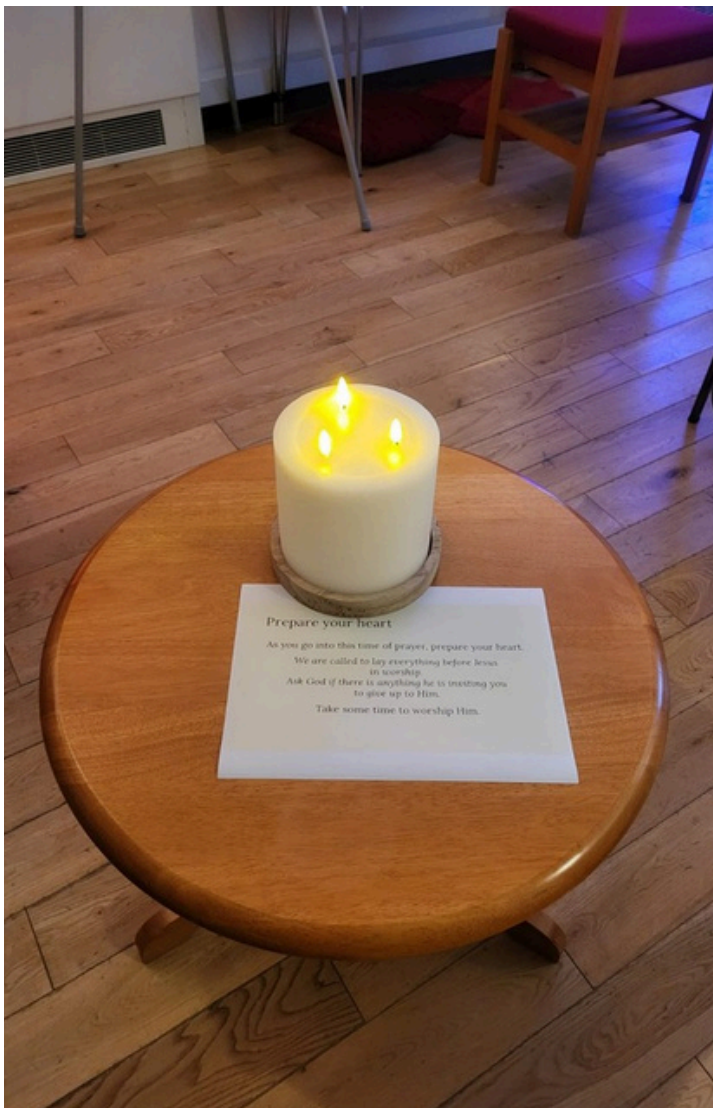




Report on the Duncans

BY RACHEL MEEK

Graham and Sandra Duncan have recently moved to a smaller property in South Africa to make life easier as they are now officially retired. Despite this, Graham continues to be involved in theological education, writing and preaching. A recent prayer letter is available to read on the corridor notice board outside the Heriot Hall. As a congregation, we chose to continue supporting their relief work among the poor and homeless of the township of Mamelodi after the withdrawal some years ago of their status as our assigned mission partners, that programme having been terminated by the Church of Scotland. They still try to support this outreach, enabling children to have uniforms and equipment so that they can attend school, as well as distributing food to needy people of all ages. Our thank-offering following communion in June will go to this outreach. Please give generously so that Sandra can continue to bless these needy folk in South Africa.



Prepare your heart

As you go into this time of prayer, prepare your heart.
We are called to lay everything before Jesus
in worship.
Ask God if there is anything he is inviting you
to give up to Him.
Take some time to worship Him.

Youth Church

FLAIM Youth Weekend Away

BY CAROLINE WHITTIT

In March, we had a youth weekend away with those who attend FLAIM, which is the Youth Church group for those who are secondary-school age. We stayed at Capperkirk, which is accommodation within a peaceful corner of the Scottish Borders, overlooking a beautiful loch and hills. Nine young people attended the weekend away along with four leaders — Caroline, Doug, Fraser and Gayle. A big thank you to Gayle who agreed to come and join us at the last minute — it was such a blessing to have you there!

We all met at the church on the Friday evening and headed to a supermarket to play a 'Supermarket Sweep' style game where the teens split into two groups, each had a shopping list to follow and then raced to the checkout! Not only was this great fun, but it also allowed the young people to choose their own food as well as getting the shopping done in record time. Everyone did a great job, we had plenty of food, so we then set off down the windy roads to Capperkirk.

It was evening when we arrived, and therefore dark, so those of us who hadn't been before had no idea that we were to wake up to such beautiful surroundings.

It was a sunny Saturday morning, the birds were singing and the views were breathtaking. The loch was just across the road, and the hills were beautiful all around. It was such a beautiful setting with which we were very blessed.

Some of the young people helped to make breakfast, whilst others got ready for the day ahead and then, after breakfast, we gathered in what we called the 'sun room' for our first session. The session gave us a great opportunity to open up and to give our opinions on various topics. We asked questions about our faith and listened to all the answers and left feeling listened to and inspired by what others were saying.

After lunch we went out on an adventure and walked up a hill called Grey Mare's Tail, which led up to a spectacular waterfall. When we came back in the afternoon we had another inspiring session, seeking to learn more about God's Word and specifically how we deal with guilt and shame in our lives. It helped to equip us in dealing with these ordinary challenges that everyone faces in life, so we left feeling encouraged and feeling a bit more confident and resilient. It is great how God's Word helps us and sustains us.

After burgers for dinner, we watched the King of Kings film with popcorn and ice cream — a well-deserved treat after a busy day. On Sunday morning, after our breakfast rolls, we had our final session. The young people then presented an Easter Passion Play for the leaders and they did spectacularly well. Each had a part to play, and everyone read their lines so well and clearly as well as acting out the scenes extremely dramatically. Very entertaining!

After a big clean-up it was time to leave Capperkirk. We all had such an amazing time and are looking forward to the next one already! We would like to say a big thank you to Brent and Heather and of course all the leaders and young people for making the weekend a great success!

Caroline Whittit
Youth Development Worker



Juniors Youth Church

BY ALISON CASSELLS
AND EDNA OLIVER

In Juniors we have a lively and enthusiastic group of children who are always keen to learn and participate in all our discussions, games and craft activities.

Over the past few months we have been learning about the Ten Commandments. We have looked at a new one every week and enjoyed great discussions about what they mean and how they show us the way we should live our lives. We all made a Ten Commandments book and each week we have added the new one to help us to remember them. Every week we have also been singing and signing a Ten Commandments song which has hand actions for each commandment to help us remember them in order. We hope to be able to sing this song and teach it to our church family at our end-of-term family service.

Many of our Juniors will soon be moving on up to Triple S and we wish them well in their new section. We also look forward to welcoming some new children from Beginners in the new term.

1st Polmont Girls' Brigade

Who can believe it that we have reached the end of another busy session! At the start of April we had our End of Session evening, with a good turnout of parents and families attending to see the girls showing some of the things they have learned throughout their time at Girls' Brigade and being presented with their awards. We were delighted that Maggy Dick came along to present the girls with their awards.

What follows is a brief résumé of what we have all been up to in each section:

Explorers

BY SANDRA BLAIR

This year at Explorers we have had around 13 girls attending each week, which has been a smaller amount than usual, but they have all been very enthusiastic in everything that we do. The theme that we were following for the session was Travelling Around the World.

Each week we start our evening with a Bible story. We have looked at stories about Creation, Noah, David & Goliath, Joseph, Harvest, Remembrance, The Good Samaritan, Advent, The Christmas Story, The Lost Sheep, Esther and Samson, to name just a few. Some weeks after we have listened to our story and chatted about it we might follow this with an action song.

Following our theme, we looked at a different country each week. We made suitcases and passports which we filled in each week.

During the year the girls have made several crafts, which always seems to be a favourite part of our programme. We started off by making aeroplanes, maracas, decorated Minnie Mouse biscuits, a picture of the Leaning Tower of Pisa with pasta, decorated cakes with St Andrew's Day toppers, a kangaroo picture, tulip bouquets, Chinese New Year pictures, and friendship bracelets, to name just a few.

In November we enjoyed a visit from the girls from Brazil and enjoyed learning a game they taught us called Hot Potato, which you will see tonight. At the end of November we attended the local pantomime again — Pinocchio at Larbert Dobbie Hall — and a great afternoon was had by Explorers, Juniors and Brigaders; there was lots of excitement and noise!

For our physical activities we have been playing various games, and one of the girls' favourites is corners. The girls also enjoyed playing curling when the Winter Olympics were on.

As part of our service badgework we collected food and donated it to Martha's Pantry.

We look forward to seeing them all back again next session, whether in the Juniors if they have moved up, or back at Explorers.

Juniors

BY CHRISTINA MASON

Another session has come to an end, and each year seems to go quicker than the last! We have had many girls returning for another year, as well as a large group starting for the first time. It's been a great year full of fun, laughter and learning.

We like to take the girls' suggestions on the focus for each section of badgework. This year, they decided to learn more about the books of the Old Testament for the Spiritual section. The girls are always keen to take turns reading aloud to the rest of the group and asking questions about what they've read to deepen their understanding.

For our Physical badgework, the girls wanted to take part in dance and gymnastics. We began by focusing on balance and working together to support one another. We then moved on to different styles of dance. The dance we'll show you tonight is one of the first routines we learned.

Throughout the session, we also explored a variety of styles, including Salsa, Bhangra, Scottish ceilidh dancing and Hula. We've even joined in with some Zumba routines to develop our fitness!

The girls chose to develop their knowledge of birds for the Educational section. We enjoyed looking for geese outside the church halls as they

migrated south and learned more about the huge variety of birds from around the world.

Our Juniors are always willing to help and care for those around them, which is why they chose People Who Help Us as the focus for the Service section of their badgework. They have shown great awareness of the people who support them, including family, friends, emergency services and teachers, as well as those who help others through local charities and food banks.

It's been a wonderful year with a fantastic group of girls.

Brigaders

We have had 11 girls attending most weeks and we enjoyed learning about Scotland, England, Ireland and Wales.

As part of our physical badgework we have enjoyed curling, unihoc and a number of new team-building games.

We enjoyed the visit we had back in November from the girls from Brazil. We enjoyed hearing about what they worked at in Brazil and some of their culture, and I think they enjoyed our evening too — it just so happened that on that night we were tasting different Scottish foods. I think everyone went home that night with a sugar rush after trying bite-size bits of Tunnock's Teacakes, Caramel Wafers, Tablet, Treacle Toffees, Shortbread, Empire Biscuits, Scottish cheese and oatcakes, washed down with Irn-Bru. Some were favourites and some were not liked at all! Since then, looking at England, we

learned about various places in England and tried scones with jam and cream — or did they put on cream and jam? The jury was out on that one!

We also learned some Gaelic from Isla Duke, one of our Brigaders. We had a fun time doing this.

At Christmas we went ten-pin bowling at Camelon and a fun night was had by all.

After Christmas we started by looking at Wales and had an evening making leek and potato soup — which I am sure came home still piping hot! — and one night decorating biscuits with daffodils made from icing.

In February we had a visit from Donald Meek, who came along to speak about their croft on Tiree, the lambing process and the other animals on the croft. We were all especially happy to hear about Wonky and see all the pictures. The girls were very interested and asked lots of questions. We look forward to a return visit to hear more of Donald's stories.

In March we started looking at Ireland. We decorated shamrock biscuits, tasted Irish soda bread with Irish butter (which was liked by a few girls) and also Irish soda farls (definitely not a hit with any of us as they were too floury).

It has been great learning all the different facts about these four countries — some which we already knew but some which we had never heard of — especially the longest place name in Wales:

Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrob
wlllantysiliogogoch!

We finished off our session painting stones relating to the Easter Story. We hope that Erin and Isla, who are leaving us this year, enjoy the new chapter in their lives as they move on to university, and we look forward to Lucy from Juniors joining us next session.

My thanks go to all the staff for their commitment and dedication each week and for making 1st Polmont Girls' Brigade enjoyable for all who come along.

Boys' Brigade Company Section

BY COLIN HEGGIE

It has been another very busy year for the Company Section boys, with everyone playing their part in the many different activities and competitions we have participated in. Although numbers are lower, every boy has shown great commitment and enthusiasm every Friday and during all the other activities we have been involved in.

We have had more great fundraising activities which both the Company and Junior Section have been involved in. We collected almost £500 at the Rotary Club Swimathon in Grangemouth Sports Complex in March, with the 9 boys completing 152 lengths in their allotted hour. Our Christmas card delivery service around the community also raised £350, with the boys delivering around 700 cards.

The boys have competed in several battalion competitions including badminton, volleyball, ten-pin bowling and 5-a-side football. Our Pulpit Fall spiritual competition team came second, narrowly losing out to 2nd Larbert after a very close competition, and our ten-pin bowling team won the competition which involved 14 teams.

The highlight of the year has been our performance in the drill competition. Every single boy in the Company was involved and worked very hard preparing for the competition, and I am extremely proud that we managed to win, narrowly beating 1st Grangemouth by only 2 points. Every boy played their part in this squad, and it was a true team effort.

The boys also competed in two national competitions this year. Our FIFA team has been outstanding and managed to reach the British final. The boys have beaten teams from Dunblane, Penicuik, Airdrie and two teams from Dundee, and we competed against teams from England and Northern Ireland in the final at the end of April at Carronvale in Larbert. This was a great experience for the boys and we finished 5th in the final — a great achievement from a competition of over 100 teams.

Our two Masterteam quiz teams also performed well, with one team progressing to the second round before finishing fourth in their round, narrowly missing out on a place in the Scottish final.

We have also had a different Christmas night out this year — a trip to a Virtual Reality 4D car racing simulator in Glasgow. This was a great night with a lot of competitive boys, and officers! We have also been delighted to welcome back a past member, the actor Grant Thomson, who has been giving the boys advice on how to create a promotional video which we will hopefully be completing soon.



The boys have also put in a lot of hard work this year as part of their badgework. Huge congratulations to Nathan McManus, Daniel Simpson, Scott Mackrell and Ryan Leckie, who have now completed their King's Badge and will be attending the King's Badge parade in Dundee at the end of May.



Anchor Boys' Display Night

BY SHEILA WILLIAMSON

Anchor Boys held their annual display night on 24th March 2026 with the following prize winners:

- Nioh Steel — Best New Recruit
- Elon Ikegwuonu — Sports Trophy
- Arran Bishop & Elon Ikegwuonu — Leadership Award
- Declan Gordon — Spiritual Cup
- Sam McIntosh — Best 3rd Year Boy, Ian Baillie Shield

We have had a fun year starting with our chippy night in September through to our party in October for best book character and our Christmas party in December with a visit from Santa.

We participated in the Big Garden Birdwatch and have planted tomato seeds, so I am hoping to see plenty of tomatoes when we return in August. We try to organise a range of fun crafts and activities throughout the year to encourage our young people to come along on a Tuesday night and hopefully tell their friends about Boys' Brigade.

We wish our Primary 3 boys moving up to Juniors great success and look forward to welcoming new and returning boys in August.



Reflections

We invited Rachel Gilmour, Jim Hope and Dixcee Spencer to reflect on how they felt about being called as an Elder, what this responsibility means to them personally, and where they sensed God is leading their focus as an Elder.

Reflections on Becoming an Elder

BY JIM HOPE

The request to consider whether I might be willing to serve as an elder did come as something of a surprise. After 40 years in our previous (Methodist) church in Yorkshire, I felt that after less than 2½ years in the Upper Braes parish we were still on a learning curve, or rather several curves all at the same time! However, the warmth and prayerfulness of the congregation, together with the privilege of being part of the preaching team, served to persuade me that I must take the invitation seriously, so after a time of reflection, conversation and prayer, I agreed that my name could go forward.

First of all I had to try to understand: what is the Kirk Session, and what is the role of an Elder? I discovered that the Kirk Session is "the lowest court of the Church of Scotland, consisting of the minister and ordained elders responsible for the spiritual oversight, pastoral care, and administration of a local parish. It acts as the local governing body, focusing on worship, mission, and the spiritual welfare of members". Most of that I could relate to, but two questions soon arose: (i) why a "court"? and (ii) why ordained? I



thought that that was only the minister!

So the learning curve got steeper, and even though further conversations with the minister and Session Clerk helped to clarify matters, a further complication soon arose in that there was a requirement for someone to serve as "Presbytery Elder". Other Kirk Session members already had various representative roles for the different teams within the church, so guess who would need to become Presbytery Elder?

So the learning continues, and is not likely to finish any time soon. But at the same time, I feel a great sense of privilege in being called to serve in this way. As both an Elder and a preacher, if I try to summarise my prayer into one sentence, it is that I might play a small part in encouraging our membership into a fuller engagement with Scripture, leading to a more confident whole-life discipleship.

Elder Reflection

BY RACHEL GILMOUR

My name is Rachel Gilmour and I've recently been called to be an Elder. I've been part of Brightons Parish Church, and now UBPC, since we arrived in the area in 2010. At that point I was heavily pregnant, and the church have been a wonderful support and family to me as our family have settled into the community. My husband, Douglas, and I, have worked with the teenagers in FLAIM for over a decade. We have three children — you'll see John in the band on bass guitar, and we also have Peter and Lydia.

When I was first asked about becoming an Elder, my immediate reaction was "no"! I didn't feel that I had the skills — I am useless at meetings and admin, and my life is very busy and hectic. My passion is for evangelism and youth and I didn't want to spend time looking inwards, as I saw it. However, I agreed to spend some time discerning what God wanted me to do.

The first hint came looking back to the night before I was asked — I'd had a long chat with a friend about how eldership worked in our church and I had looked up the procedures online.



This was the first time in 16 years that I'd investigated this, which was a bit of a coincidence. I then spent time reading about Eldership in the Bible, hoping that women were exempt (they're not!).

I also looked at the APEST model in Ephesians 4, and how those called to be evangelists are not just called to be outward-looking, but to build up the body of Christ. It is important that we have a balance of skills and passions amongst the Elders, so that together we can make wise decisions.

So, to cut to the chase, I felt that God wanted me to say yes, and I am now an Elder. Please pray for me as I serve, attend meetings (aaagh!) and try to help with wise decisions to lead the church.

Elder Reflection

BY DIXCEE SPENCER

When I received the invitation to become an Elder, I felt humbled that God would place my name on the hearts and minds of the Elders. But I immediately began to count the cost of saying 'yes', in particular whether I would be able to provide the time commitment required of such a role.

Luke 14:28–29 AMP

My 'cost list' included working full time, having a husband who travels to the States on a monthly basis for 7–10 days at a time, being a mother (and taxi driver) to our two children (both in secondary school), being leader of Triple S, and the list went on.

After reviewing those costs, I was prepared to respectfully decline the invitation. I was not comfortable that I could meet the time responsibilities that being an Elder required amongst a busy life. To me, Elders share the responsibility of spiritual oversight and pastoral care, provide leadership, engage in outreach and visit members. They also have administrative and governance duties — not light responsibilities.



After speaking with others about the role, I went back to praying. A devotion reminded me to trust God's plan and leading and not your own — i.e. "Not my will, but Yours be done." Luke 22:42

Once I let go of my own plans, stopped trying to figure out how I was going to organise everything, and 'let go and let God' do what He had planned, I realised that this was the role He was calling me to step into. He would take care of the time commitments.

I continue to seek the Lord's guidance on what my focus as an Elder should be. Isaiah 64:4. I expect it will all become very plain. In the meantime, I am enjoying working with my fellow Elders at Kirk Session and the wider church.

Get Involved

Upper Braes Parish Church was established on 1st November 2024, when four congregations in the Upper Braes area of Falkirk became one. The faithful of the parishes of Blackbraes and Shieldhill, Brightons, Muiravonside, and Slamannan, with the fortitude of their forebears, chose to stand firm in the faith and be united in His Name. Upper Braes Parish Church has two ministry centres, one in the village of Slamannan and one in the village of Brightons, and all are welcome to join us.

Below is a link and QR code to our welcome pack for more information about us.



upperbraes.org.uk/get-involved



Scan this QR code with your mobile camera or a QR code app to download the Upper Braes Parish Church welcome pack.

Volunteer

Every family works best when everyone chips in — and our church family at Upper Braes is no different. There are so many ways to contribute, and whether you have an hour a month or a little more to give, your contribution matters more than you know.

From welcoming people at the door and sharing a cuppa after the service, to supporting our Young Church, or helping with media and IT — there really is something for everyone.

Even just 1–2 hours can make a real difference. To find out more or express an interest, fill out a volunteer card the next time you visit us, or download and print your own volunteer card and hand it in to one of the team via the link or QR code below.



upperbraes.org.uk/get-involved



Scan this QR code with your mobile camera or a QR code app to download the volunteer card.

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