

Paisley Abbey



Abbey Herald

June 2025

Summer is nearly here, already! I can hardly believe it. Past months have flown mainly, I suspect, because they were just so busy with services to prepare (nine sermons Holy Week alone!) people to visit at home or in hospital, funerals to conduct and meetings to attend. Ah, those meetings just seem to be endless in their number. And this is what it is like working ‘part-time’ at the Abbey!

My time working with you at the Abbey has proved of much longer duration than ever I expected. This has been occasioned by the unfortunate brevity of the last ministry and the fact that the varied problems created by shutdown during Covid proved so serious that Presbytery deemed it inappropriate for the Abbey to call a new ministry. These problems continue though, our thanks to God, are of a less threatening nature to the Abbey’s continued existence than they once were. I have therefore tried to fulfil the responsibilities of the transition ministry the Presbytery wished for the Abbey. Whatever benefits my experience and work may have brought over the past few years, it’s been my privilege so to do. The huge progress that has been made could only have been achieved by minister and office-bearers working as one with the co-operation and support of the congregation.

Perhaps the most gratifying and encouraging fact has been to witness a growing congregation at worship. A steady but undeniable increase in the attending congregation has taken place over the months, particularly among younger adults in the twenty and thirty year old range. This is not just the result of some fluke or chance. National statistics, recently published by the Bible Society of Scotland, indicate this trend is shared among the cathedral churches. Why should this be?

I think this is partly because the cathedrals, like the Abbey, offer worship at its best. Music is generally of a much higher standard than other churches can hope to offer. At the Abbey, it is undisputed that the music is of the highest possible standard. People are also looking for worship which has substance and authenticity at its heart. Prayers and preaching that speak to people about life in reality. After all, when life is proving tough and sore and people are wondering if there is any way through their difficulties, a sermon that asks people to fill in colouring books is not an option. People need to hear about forgiveness. They need to hear about acceptance. They need to hear about a love that is deep and embracing enough to offer a fresh start. They also need space to be alone with God. Cathedral buildings offer this possibility without people immediately confronting visitors and making them feel discomfort or embarrassment.

Worship is the engine of the Church.
Forgiveness and acceptance lies at its core.
Love is its heartbeat.

Jesus never said any of these things are necessarily easy. In fact, when love was most purely demonstrated, Jesus was crucified.

In light of this, it never fails to amaze me that, in spite of all the difficulties we face at the Abbey (*the Abbey is no different from any other church in this regard*) so many people: members, attendees, supporters and volunteers are prepared to give so much of their time and efforts to bring our (Transition) Plan of Action into reality. We are only two years into the five year programme but the progress made is astounding. Once again, I record my heartfelt thanks not only to the Abbey office-bearers but, also, to the many volunteers and supporters who give the work of the Abbey their time and input.

Our third 'Back to Church Sunday' will be held on Sunday, June 22nd immediately following morning worship. Please do come. This is an opportunity the Kirk Session takes to meet with members of the congregation and to explain how we are progressing bringing the Plan of Action into life. I very much hope there will be the usual good attendance and people will feel free to ask any question that is relevant. So please do take this opportunity to further or, renew, your participation in the worship and life of the congregation. It's a great time to come back to worship if you have not been present for a while.

Over and above this occasion of course, my letter in the monthly Herald normally carries further information about all that is happening in and around the church and congregation. Kirk Session Minutes are made public, on the noticeboard at the south door of the church, for all to read. In short, there are few more transparent and 'open' churches than Paisley Abbey.

The good news is that Paisley Abbey is full of faith-filled souls offering their very best in the service of their God and the Church. They deserve all the support possible. For as long as my ministry may continue here, I am determined they will have it.

Enjoy your summer.

Kindest regards
Jim Gibson
Minister at the Abbey.

DEATH OF HIS HOLYNESS, POPE FRANCIS

Following the letter of condolence sent by our Minister to Bishop John Keenan of the Paisley Diocese, the letter below has been received.

DIOCESE OF PAISLEY

Bishop John Keenan
Diocesan Centre Cathedral Precincts
Incle Street, Paisley
PA1 1HR
Tel: 0141 847 6130
Fax: 0141 847 6140

Rev Jim Gibson
Interim Minister Paisley Abbey
Abbey Close
PA1 1JG

May 2025

Rev Rev Gibson

Thank you sincerely for sharing your condolences on the occasion of the death of the Holy Father, Pope Francis. It was a most thoughtful gesture which I personally appreciate and which will be valued by the clergy and faithful of our diocesan family.

We are particularly grateful for your reflection on the inspiration you found from Pope Francis around his ethical guidance, his service of peace, his outreach to those on the margins and his reform of the Church in its tone and structure.

The Catholic community in the diocese of Paisley and across Scotland has been moved by the outpouring of goodwill from our fellow Christians whose closeness and prayers have been a great strength to us at this time of mourning and *sede vacante*.

We are full of hope that this unity in heart and charity which is now so palpable among us, not least in these times, will presage ever greater communion in the LORD Jesus and our shared mission in the proclamation of His Kingdom.

With kind regards and assurance of prayers as always,

John Keenan

Bishop of Paisley



Scottish Charity No. SC013514 bishopjohn@rcdop.org.uk

BACK TO CHURCH SUNDAY

This is the third such event being held this year on Sunday, June 22nd. Immediately after the end of morning worship an opportunity is given by the Minister and Office-bearers to receive news of progress made and challenges being faced concerning the life, worship outreach of our church and congregation. Questions to the minister are welcomed. Do come and take part. Tea/coffee served.

ELDER DUTY TEAMS

June - Michael McGill's Team
July - Marion Sommerville's Team
August - David Davidson's Team

PARISH REGISTER - MAY

Baptism
Dolcie Jane Fry

Transference from another Church
Wilma Taylor

Funeral
Margaret McGhie
Jean McFarlane

CHRISTIAN AID

Thank you to all who supported Christian Aid week. Your donations give people hope, funding tools and training to help communities escape hunger. This year we collected £368.82, after gift aid donations this will rise to approximately £425.

“Thank You“ for giving to the Abbey's 2025 Lent Appeal

This year, the Abbey congregation has smashed our target with around £13,000 donated to the Lent Appeal and with tax recovery through the Gift Aid scheme will give a figure exceeding £15,000.

This has been a magnificent effort by the congregation and other supporters of the Abbey.....*a big Thank You to everyone who helped.*

Once again, you have responded generously to the Appeal and this reflects the love that our congregation has for our wonderful church - its services, ministry, pastoral care, music and the buildings. The money raised will go towards our commitment to the Church of Scotland and to running and maintaining our wonderful medieval church buildings.

No one has ever said it is easy to run a building like the Abbey and it only because of the hard work and dedication of the Abbey's volunteers and staff that visitor numbers are increasing and our wonderful suite of buildings continue to be popular venue for concerts, recitals and meetings.

The Abbey has a great future, but it needs everyone to pull together to take us forward for future generations. Therefore, many thanks for your generous giving towards our Lent Appeal 2025.

Stewart McDougall
Treasurer

THANK YOU TO COATS CHORAL

Coats Choral recently had a very well attended concert in the Abbey in March and have very kindly donated £1000 of their ticket sales towards the Abbey's building maintenance fund. This is in addition to their hire charge. We look forward to welcoming them back next March which they have already booked!!

ALLOVUS

The first full season of activities came to an end on Wednesday, May 21st when thirty-seven members gathered within St Mirin's Cathedral for a guided tour by Brian a deacon in training.

The cathedral is such an open, spacious, worshipful building dressed with Carrara marble with a beautiful altar and truly stunning stone pulpit. It was built in 1931 in the neo-Romanesque style. All around are the Stations of the Cross and doors leading into confessionals. It has been the cathedral of the diocese of Paisley since 1948.

After the visit, the group retired to the Place of Paisley for a well-deserved end-of-session party with fish and chips being served, and very much enjoyed.

The next season of Allovus activities is under planning and will commence on Wednesday, 10th September at 1.30pm. The group meetings are open to everybody who may wish to come and join in the fun.



St Mirin Cathedral



Everyone enjoying their Fish & Chips

RENFREWSHIRE FOODBANK

The congregation of Paisley Abbey generously supports the Foodbank set up to serve our local community in Paisley. By doing so we are trying to assist the most vulnerable people for whom life can prove the most difficult. The Foodbank distributes to those for whom the need is most urgent. If you would like to contribute, please bring along your donations to the Abbey on the last Sunday of the month. Anything you may be able to donate will be much appreciated.

In the last year the Abbey congregation have donated over £700 in cash much of which is gift aided which adds an extra 25p to every pound you give. Thank you to all who faithfully donate each month and to those who now give support. Your donations show the community that the congregation of the Abbey care for others and actively contribute to the wellbeing of all.

DR GEORGE McPHEE MBE

Two recent articles that appeared in the Strathclyde Telegraph and the Choir & Organ Magazine on Dr George McPhee, Director of Music at the Abbey. (articles available by following the links below).

Strathclyde Telegraph on 'Life with Paisley Abbey Choir'
written by Julia Braun Raven

strathclydetelegraph.com/2025/04/24/geo...pic.x.com/WIH3T506gF

Choir and Organ Magazine Summer 2025
David Smith meets the famed organist of Paisley Abbey
since 1963, George McPhee'

[Choir & Organ: explore recent issues of the magazine | Gramophone](#)



WANTED HATS AND HANDBAGS!

What a good chance to have a Spring clear out, we are looking for any new or pre - loved hats and handbags which are in good condition for a stall on Saturday 6 July for Sma' Shot Day. Donations can be handed in during June.

Margaret Sharp



SOCIETY OF FRIENDS OF PAISLEY ABBEY

The exceptional service to the Society of Friends of Paisley Abbey given by past Vice Chairman Walter Reid was recognised with the presentation to him of a Paisley Abbey quach, engraved with *"for many years of faithful service to the Friends of Paisley Abbey"*.

Walter (left) is pictured here receiving his quach from Chairman of the Society, Gordon Masterton OBE DL. Costs were covered by donations from Council Members. The Chairman said "We'd have liked to have specified the number of years that Walter had freely given to the Society, but it was so long that it predated our accessible records. We will miss his legal knowledge and sage advice. His impact on the Society has been hugely beneficial."

More information about the Society of Friends and how to join can be found on the Abbey website - www.paisleyabbey.org.uk



FLOWERS AND FIZZ AFTERNOON

We would like to extend our sincere thanks to everyone who contributed to the success of our floral demonstration and afternoon tea event in the Abbey on Saturday, 31st May.

The event was held in aid of Abbey funds, and we are thrilled to have had such a good turnout of attendees who enjoyed the wonderful floral arrangements, all of which were won as raffle prizes.

A huge thank you goes to Jane Gordon for showcasing her exceptional skills during the demonstration and for the entertaining way she talked throughout.

We are also deeply grateful to the team of helpers who worked tirelessly to provide delicious treats, set up the venue, serve afternoon tea, and ensure the church was cleared and ready for the Sunday service the next day.

The funds raised from this event will enable continued provision of beautiful fresh flowers in the church throughout the year.

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to everyone who helped in any way, whether behind the scenes or in front of the audience, and to our wonderful audience for their support.

Irene Doole



Jane Gordon with some of the beautiful flowers



Some of the beautiful floral displays



Everyone enjoying their Afternoon Tea & Fizz!

EVENTS AT THE ABBEY

ORGAN RECITAL - *Steven McIntyre*
St Mary's (Scottish Episcopal)Cathedral, Glasgow

Sunday 15 June at 3 pm

Admission is £10 payable at the door

LUNCHTIME CONCERT - *Douglas Lawrence (violin)*

Saturday 21 June at 12.30 pm

Admission is £5 payable at the door

CITY MUSIC PROMOTIONS

Vivaldi's Four Seasons by Candlelight

Saturday 21 June at 7.30 pm

Tickets from £19 available from www.classicaltickets

ORGAN RECITAL - *Mark Browne*

Assistant Organist, Paisley Abbey

Sunday 22 June at 3 pm

Admission is £10 payable at the door

CANDLELIGHT CONCERTS

A Night at the Opera by Candlelight

Sunday 29 June at 7.30 pm

Tickets from £29 available from www.anightattheopera.co.uk

ORGAN RECITAL - *Andrew Forbes*

Glasgow Cathedral

Sunday 6 July at 3 pm

Admission is £10 payable at the door



MUSIC FOR JUNE

1 June 11 am Introit Te Deum Anthem	Sunday after Ascension Day Morning Service Psallite Domino O clap your hands	<i>Byrd</i> <i>Howells (Collegium Regale)</i> <i>Gibbons</i>
8 June 11 am Introit Te Deum Anthem	Pentecost Morning Service If ye love me O Lord, give thy Holy Spirit	<i>Tallis</i> <i>Walton ('Coronation')</i> <i>Tallis</i>
4 pm Responses Psalm 36: 5-10 Canticles Anthem	Choral Evensong Come Holy Ghost	<i>Byrd</i> <i>Murrill in E</i> <i>Thorpe Davie</i>
15 June 11 am Introit Te Deum Anthem	Trinity Sunday Morning Service Let all mortal flesh keep silence Tibi Laus	<i>Bairstow</i> <i>Vaughan Williams in G</i> <i>Philips</i>
22 June 11 am Jubilate Deo Anthem	Trinity 2 Morning Service My soul, there is a country	<i>Walton</i> <i>Parry</i>
29 June 11 am Communion Setting Anthem	Trinity 3 Holy Communion Sing a new Song	<i>Vierne (Messe Solennelle)</i> <i>MacMillan</i>

PAISLEY ABBEY ~ A TEMPLE OF HOPE?

*Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young,
but set an example for the believers
in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity.*

1 Timothy 4:12

The article "Paisley Abbey ~ A Temple of Conciliation" in the May edition of the Abbey Herald described the transformation that overtook our ancient church in the later part of the Nineteenth Century. It began with the eighteen-year ministry of Dr James Cameron Lees.

Lees, readers will recall, had been appointed minister of the Second Charge of Paisley Abbey in 1859 at the age of just twenty-five and translated to the First Charge in 1865. When he saw the Abbey for the first time, as he later recalled in his history, "The church was in a deplorable state . . . a more dreary place of worship could scarcely be conceived." When he translated to St Giles' Cathedral, Edinburgh, in 1877, "many people were greatly surprised at his leaving his beautifully-restored sanctuary for what west-country critics described as "a hole of a place in the Edinburgh High Street." Paisley Abbey had become home to a thriving congregation that had good reason to feel a sense of pride in its newfound appreciation of the church's history and architecture, enhanced by the introduction of furnishings, stained-glass, and a fine organ, that until lately would have been regarded as abominations by previous puritanically-minded generations.

As has been illustrated, James Cameron Lees was not alone in bringing change to churches in Scotland. He was part of a movement that was imbued with a new and, many would agree, more worthy spirit that was associated with the recognition of the need for reform and refreshment of aspects of the practice of religion relating to worship, liturgy, and church architecture. Through the final quarter of the century, the resulting "abominations" and "dangerous innovations," as older reactionary and conservative colleagues considered the changes, became increasingly commonplace and eventually the norm, epitomised not least by the widespread installation of church organs that supported congregational hymn-singing.

The coming of Lees to Paisley happened to coincide with the arrival in Scotland of a sense of Christian awakening that had begun in America in 1858 and had spread firstly to the north of Ireland and thence to Scotland. Drummond and Bulloch in *The Church in Victorian Scotland* describe how "the Revival of 1859 stirred the life of Victorian Scotland," and "did most to stimulate the demand for hymns, not merely by introducing so many emotional hymns in the 'pop' idiom of the day at its crowded meetings, but by encouraging the laity to take a lead in witness." As the authors point out, "the greatest impact was made on the United Presbyterian Church, where Sunday attendances doubled."

The United Presbyterian Church had its roots in the original Secession Church, whose formation in the 1730s was the first significant schism in the Established Church of Scotland to have arisen out of its Evangelical wing's principled opposition to Patronage. Founders and most prominent leaders of the Secession Church, the Erskine brothers, invited George Whitfield to visit Scotland during the "First Great Awakening," leading to the "Cambuslang Wark" when, in 1742, some 30,000 people gathered on the "preaching braes" to hear the English evangelist.

(Perhaps some of our readers will be able to remember Abbey Close Church before it was demolished sixty years ago. An earlier building on the site housed one of the first Secession congregations in Paisley, established in 1765. It was typical of Secession churches in being built adjacent to or, as in this case, directly opposite the Established Church – in physical as well as political opposition!)

Stretching memories a decade further back, to 1955, there will be a few who will recall Billy Graham leading the "All Scotland Crusade" which ran in Glasgow over a six-week period. Some may have been amongst the 830,670 who attended events hosted variously at the Kelvin Hall, and Ibrox and Hampden stadiums. There may even be a few who belong to the 19,835 who responded to his "altar call," especially as a significant proportion of these were children and young people. A recent paper "Reconsidering the impact of the All Scotland Crusade of 1955 upon Children and Young People" by Kenneth Jeffrey, writing in *Scottish Church History* (2024) acknowledges the difficulties in assessing short-term outcomes and still greater challenges in measuring long-term results of the crusades. It has become commonly accepted that their success in arresting decline in church attendance, which was restored to almost pre-war levels, was only temporary. Jeffrey, however, contends that "the lives of many children and young people were radically transformed through their experience of the All Scotland Crusade in 1955. They had been 'born again' and were changed. They had received a new aim, direction and purpose in life."

Jeffrey's analysis, admittedly nuanced, is more positive than the generality of assessments of evangelical revival in Scotland's history. The recognition that emotional responses bordering on, if not actually crossing into hysteria, characterised mass conversions, and the observation that most new converts were children and young people, often from the lower strata of society, have resulted in high levels of scepticism that it was indeed the result of "an outpouring of the Holy Ghost" that was being witnessed. In the conclusion to his paper, Jeffrey quotes the words of Tom Allan: "in the last resort the real results can never be put down on paper or caught between the pages of a book. Only eternity will reveal them."

A recently published study by The Bible Society is prefaced with the following sentence. "For many decades now, the general assumption has been that Christianity, and in particular churchgoing, is in irreversible decline." The study was conducted in England and Wales only, and extrapolating the findings to Scotland must be done with caution, but nevertheless it would seem likely that the trends reported, and the analysis made, would be similar and that they can be safely used as a surrogate for Scotland.

The preface continues: "from the sociological insistence in the 1960s that secularisation was inevitable and the new atheism of the 2000s, through to the more recent findings from the 2021 census showing the evident collapse of Christian identity, the story seems clear – Christianity, particularly active Christianity is on the way out."

For many readers, these words will ring true to their beliefs and understanding. Many churchgoers have adopted a siege mentality, convinced of the hopelessness of the church's future, despairing and despondent in the face of irreversible decline and looming oblivion. Looking around a church on a Sunday, the "faithful few" seem to be becoming fewer . . . and older. Attempts at outreach and endeavours to encourage new, especially younger churchgoers, seem all to have failed.

If any readers are at this point seized by the paralysis of pessimism and so prevented from reading on, pray God they recover the power to proceed. The Bible Society summarises the study's findings as follows: "In churches across society something amazing is happening, challenging long-held predictions about the future of Christianity in the twenty-first century. Where once we saw ageing congregations and a steady decline in attendance, we see dramatic growth, led by the young. Where once we saw apathy or even hostility to Christianity and the Bible, we see increased openness, again among the young. You may have heard the rumblings and rumours emerging over the past few years, you may even have noticed it in your own community, or it might have passed you by entirely - but this data shows that it is real. This is the *Quiet Revival*. For the first time, this is not just anecdote but is demonstrated in the latest results of a large, robust and nationally representative study that has tracked the religious attitudes and behaviours of our population since 2018.

We found that the Church is in a period of rapid growth, driven by young adults and in particular young men. Along with this, the Church demonstrates greater ethnic diversity than ever before. Both within and outside the Church, young adults are more spiritually engaged than any other living generation, with Bible reading and belief in God on the rise. But we also see that active engagement with a church has a significant impact on the lives of attenders, with a high increase in mental and general life wellbeing - again particularly among young adults, a generation in the midst of a mental health crisis. It is also changing communities, with churchgoers more likely to feel a connection to their local area and get involved in social engagement activities. Challenges remain for the Church and civic society in responding to this *Quiet Revival*, but its reality can no longer be denied."

In Paisley Abbey, it has been noticeable that a number of younger people have been joining our congregation. Now we have reason to suppose that this might be more than a local anomaly. The Bible Society's study offers some possible explanations, but they are tentative at best. What can be done to encourage and consolidate the trend? We try to be a welcoming church, looking out especially for visitors and newcomers. Perhaps we should do more, but there is a fear that we might seem patronising and risk smothering the green shoots of our own *Quiet Revival*. Maybe the younger churchgoers will speak up for themselves and tell us what we can do for them? We're ready to listen.

One of the study's findings is that younger churchgoers read the Bible more often than older churchgoers. In response to that, Paisley Abbey's shop will be stocking more bibles for sale, including editions designed for youth and younger adults to read, and there will be a special promotion of these. Maybe you know someone who would like to receive one . . . with faith, hope, and love?

David C Davidson

UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST OF SCOTLAND GRADUATIONS

The Abbey will be closed to visitors from Monday 7th until Friday 11th July for University Graduations.

The café will be take away only and the shop will remain open.

*There will be no Abbey Herald in July & August
The next edition will be in September.*

ABBEY CONTACTS

Minister:	Revd. Jim Gibson
Director of Music:	Dr. George McPhee
Church Manager:	Linda Barrett
Church Secretary:	Karen Kerr
Session Clerk:	Marion Sommerville
Depute Session Clerk:	Dr David Davidson
Treasurer:	Stewart McDougall
Abbey Herald:	Karen Kerr

The Abbey office can be contacted on 0141 889 7654 or by email at -
info@paisleyabbey.org.uk

***The Abbey, shop & café are normally open
Monday to Saturday from 10 am - 4 pm with last entry at 3.30 pm
Tuesday & Thursday tours are at 2 pm.***

*Abbey website - www.paisleyabbey.org.uk
Facebook - @paisleyabbey
Instagram - @paisleyabbeyofficial
X (formerly Twitter) - @paisley_abbey*

