

Columba News

October
2026
No. 269



Time to remember



Our annual Remembrance Service will be held in the church at the morning service on Sunday, November 8 at 10.30am. The photographs were taken at Cinq Rues British Cemetery near Hazebrouck, in northern France.

Waiting to welcome you

Sundays

October 4

October 11

October 18

October 25

November 1

November 8

November 15

November 22

November 29

Team

Team 11

Team 1

Team 2

Team 3

Team 4

Team 5

Team 6

Team 7

Team 8

Leader

Gavin Gemmell

Graeme Savage

Sandra Wylie

Bob Bartholomew

Yvonne Russell

Gordon McKinlay

Michael Whiteford

Janet McKnight

Ron Currie



From the Interim Moderator

Dear Friends,

On a recent Sunday after church I visited one of our members in the assessment wards in Ayr Hospital. It is a bit of a maze to get in and out of if you're not used to the layout. After my visit, as I stared above my head looking for the way out sign, a young nurse saw my confusion and asked if she could help.

She read my response and offered to walk along the corridor with me to the exit - whether because she judged me an elderly man or out of respect for my clerical collar I wasn't sure!

However, as we walked along she began to open up about herself and a recent major event in her life, it occurred to me perhaps that was the reason for her original helpfulness for we talked for ten minutes or more.

On parting I gave her a small fun-sized packet of Maltesers, I happened to have in my pocket, to have on her afternoon coffee break. By her reaction you'd think I'd given her a much more valuable gift!

I think there are two things that are constants in that encounter: people are always overwhelmed by even the smallest act of kindness; and, there are few places in today's busy world where you can express what's troubling you without making yourself vulnerable.

Was it serendipity that put that nurse that afternoon in my way? Serendipity, suggests finding good things by chance and absolute luck, especially when you are not looking for them. Or is there still in our competitive culture such a thing as the purposes of God?

Have you ever sat on a park bench on a sunny day and someone has sat beside you? They've started a conversation, by asking you the time, and slowly began 'flying their kite' - telling you something that is deeply personal, knowing that when this anonymous encounter was over they would leave, having unburdened themselves and would be 'safe' by never seeing you again! When they get up to go you notice they are wearing a watch on their wrist! Does this just happen to me? Or do such events happen to us because we are sensitive to other people? Are these two constants always present in everyday life? What we might call happens chance - a chance



event which takes place unexpectedly?

There is a lot of bad in our world but also a great deal of good. The late Desmond Tutu, Bishop of South African, said: “do your little bit of good where you are; it’s those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world”. The 19 century American diplomat famously said: “the healing of the world is in its nameless saints. Each separate star seems nothing, but a myriad of scattered stars break up the night and make it beautiful.”

We meet as a church family for our October Communion and I hope to see you then.

Warmest good wishes,

John
(Interim Moderator)

Catch a coffee at Oasis

The popular Oasis cafe is back in full swing and is ready to welcome new and old customers back to enjoy home baking, coffee and teas and lots of chat.

The cafe's October dates will be 1st, 15th and 29th and in November it will be open on 12th and 26th.

Cinema trip planned for The Nutcracker

On Tuesday 1st December a trip to the Astoria cinema to see “The Nutcracker” ballet at 7.15pm with a meal in the Tudor beforehand.
Details from Muriel Wilson.

**The Business Committee's next meetings will be on
Tuesday, September 29 and November 24 at 7pm**

**The copy deadline for the Christmas issue of Columba
News will be Sunday, November 15**



Sacrament of Holy Communion

Jesus said, "I am the Bread of life. He who believes in Me will never hunger."

This is your invitation to be present at the Lord's Table on Sunday, October 25 at our Morning Service at 10.30am, when we will participate in the greatest act of Christian worship, sharing in Christ's Body and Blood with His people around His Table.

Time to bin the bins



The Wednesday team are pictured assembling new bin stores for the manse at Bute Way. Where the bins are situated at the manse the winter winds send them flying. Slabs have been laid and the shelters secured to the wall.

Back to business for the Monday Fellowship

Now that summer has officially ended (remember it?) we look forward to our meetings which start on Monday, October 5, at 2pm in the Midton Hall when the Revd. Kenneth Elliott will open our session by talking about his life in the Ministry.

All our subsequent meetings are on a Monday at 2pm in the Hall and all are assured of a warm welcome, a range of speakers and topics, followed by a bit of chat with refreshments.

The programme running up to December is as follows:

Oct 5th *Revd. K. Elliott - My life in the Ministry*

Oct 19th *Douglas Fraser - The history of the RHS*

Nov 2nd *Allan Mackintosh - Prestwick Airport since 1913*

Nov 16th *Jon Herd - Santiago de Compostela*

Nov 30th *Wendy Sinclair-Gieben (Chief Inspector of Prisons) - Scottish Prisons; The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*

Dec 14th *Ron Ireland - Alloway Railway Tunnel*

We look forward to greeting all members, returning or new.

John Ferguson

Secretary

All the Kirk Session news

Meetings of the Kirk Session were held on 14th April 2026 and on 8th September 2026, moderated by Revd John Matthews. A summary of issues discussed at these meetings is given below:

Vacancy: The Moderator said that the Nominating Committee had a clear strategy and were considering the merits of a number of potential candidates. It was planned that members would visit to see some of these individuals in action.

Stewardship: *The Stewardship Campaign had been successfully launched on 22nd March. The Moderator stressed that we were not taking a heavy approach and the campaign would take its course over time.*



Mr George Park reported that Presbytery had indicated that congregations would be required to produce Mission Action Plans covering certain areas of church life.

The Clerk said that the Kirk Session were required to nominate an Elder to act as Presbytery Elder for the coming year. Mr George Park had indicated that he was prepared to continue in the role if this was the wish of Session. The re-appointment of Mr Park was warmly approved.

The Clerk said that he had received a number of requests to change the normal starting time of Kirk Session meetings to 7.00pm. After discussion it was agreed that future meetings of the Kirk Session would normally commence at 7.00pm.

Ms Muriel Wilson informed Elders that the trip to the Hindu Temple would take place on Thursday 14th May.

Mr Keith Fullerton reported that the Sunday School children had raised £343.00 through their Easter card project. He thanked all who had supported this. The proceeds would be donated to the Barnardo Charity.

The Clerk said that members of the Nominating Committee had spoken informally with some potential candidates and a question which had arisen was "How open are your Kirk Session for change?" Elders accepted that change was inevitable when a new Minister was appointed, but much would depend on the nature and the extent of change being proposed. No Elder expressed the view that the Kirk Session was not open for change.

The Clerk said that Presbytery were seeking members to serve on a newly formed Information Technology and Communication Committee. They were looking for people with skills or experience or a strong interest in technology, media, communications, digital content or audio-visual support. Anyone interested was asked to contact the Clerk for more details.

Our former Minister, the Revd Dr Scott McKenna, has accepted a call to St Mary's Kirk in Haddington. The Clerk had written on behalf of Session to congratulate him and Dr McKenna had replied to express his gratitude and to say that our congratulations meant a great deal to him. He informed the Clerk that his wife, Shelagh, was planning to retire and they were both looking forward to being closer to their son, Murdo.

All our Church records were attested by Presbytery on 6th May this year and the Clerk was pleased to report that all were deemed entirely satisfactory. The Clerk expressed thanks to our Roll Convenor Margaret Doncaster for the Communion Roll, to John Stewart for the Property Register

and the Manse Condition Schedule, to Irene Bartholomew for the Baptismal Register, to Millie McNish for Safeguarding records and also to George Park who had looked after our interests as the Attestation took place.

A report prepared by Ms Wilson was distributed to Elders ahead of the meeting. The details included:

- a) Abbas Rest coffee morning on Saturday 21st November.*
- b) It is hoped to hold a Christmas wreath making day. Details still to be sorted out.*
- c) A trip to Glasgow Cathedral in the spring of 2027 is being arranged.*
- d) It is hoped to arrange a congregational outing next summer to St Andrews or Kirkcudbright or another suitable destination. Sheets will be put out in the vestibule asking for preferences and suggestions from the congregation.*
- e) It is intended to organise a Pilgrimage to Iona in 2028.*

There is a new format for Sunday School which takes into account the other activities in which the children are involved. Dates of Sundays when all of the children can attend have been circulated to Irene and ministry team. The children will be busy with a project for the Abbas Rest Coffee Morning.

R A Bartholomew, Session Clerk

Get organised for Christmas

A workshop to create your own Christmas Wreath on Sunday 6th December at 1.30pm. Cost £25.

Led by Christine Logan and other members of the Ayr Floral Art Club.

Another day retreat planned

A day retreat at the home of Ian and Mandy Stirling is planned for Saturday, November 28 and facilitated by Revd. Liz Crumlish.

**The Kirk Session will hold its next meeting on
Tuesday, October 13 at 7pm**



Seniors Christmas Party



*Join us on Saturday, December 12
from 1.30pm until 4pm*

*Enjoy a festive afternoon with good company,
afternoon tea, music and best of all Santa*

*The entertainment will be provided by
Isobell Montgomerie and the Rural Revellers*

*It's guaranteed to start those toes tapping
ready for Christmas*

If you would like to join the festivities, please
complete the form below and return it to the office
or the posting box in the Carrick Park corridor

Seniors' Christmas Party

Please reserve.....a place
at the Seniors' Christmas party on Saturday, December 12



*Abba's Rest empowering
orphan girls in Malawi*

ABBA'S REST COFFEE MORNING

**AYR ST COLUMBA CHURCH
SATURDAY 21st NOVEMBER 2026**

*Any baking, bottles, houseplants, bric a brac and
raffle donations gratefully received*



With the money we raised at last year's coffee morning, we supported our orphaned school children with fees, uniforms and learning materials, and supplied likuni phala food for pre-school children and maize for orphans and carers.

Please help us do the same this year!



Busy time at the Presbytery

*Note of the Presbytery Meeting of the South West which was held in the
Howards Centre, Kilmarnock on 12 September 2026*

National Assessment Process

Mr Andrew Shuttleworth outlined the role of National Assessors for the Church of Scotland who are tasked with assisting in making final determinations on whether an applicant is ready to proceed as a candidate in training for ministries. The Church of Scotland is appealing for ministers, elders and others in the Church family to become National Assessors. Assessors should have an open mind, be faith based, be able to read and interpret complex information, be flexible, perceptive and be able to work as part of a team. Assessors have a 6 year commitment and further information is available from the Faith Action Team at 121 George Street.

Mission Presentation

The Rev Katrina Templeton delivered a presentation on the Created to Belong Programme which celebrates disability in the image of God. Many congregations still struggle with inclusion and a recent conference in Kilmarnock with over 100 attendees outlined practical tools for accessibility to enable congregations to embrace disability inclusion. Every person is created in the image of God and should be encouraged to attend church.

Mission Practice Tracker Pilot

A Mission Practice Tracker has been developed as an interactive activity to enable 12 churches the opportunity to explore their approach to mission. 22 congregations including Alloway and Fisherton; Ballantrae and St Colmon; Mauchline and Sorn; Monton and Prestwick Trinity; Prestwick St Nicholas have expressed an interest. The 12 selected congregations will be announced in late November at the conclusion of related workshop events.

Mission Action Plans

The Mission Committee has finalised the documents for all aspects of rolling out an integrated approach to enable congregations to complete their Mission Action Plan.

Documentation is being circulated to all Session Clerks and each congregation is required to submit their MAP to Presbytery on or before the annual attestation of records, the next being May 2027.

It is highlighted that Kirk Sessions should begin their deliberations with immediate effect so that the MAP is developed with prayerful consideration. The Mission Committee is keen to receive feedback on the approach and materials.

The MAP template is a guide and the focus is on the mission a congregation is called to do, not the administrative form.

Mission Toolkit

The first draft of a Mission Toolkit is available on the Presbytery website. This is intended to inspire and support Mission by providing ideas and links to different approaches to mission.

Developing Twinning Activities

If any church or group of churches is interested in twinning as part of their church's mission and discipleship, support is available from the Mission Committee.

Faith Action Programme Leadership Team

On Saturday 31 October 2026, congregations across the Church of Scotland are invited in a day of prayer for the Church and communities of Scotland. The theme is 'Light in the darkness ' drawing on John 1:5.

Property

South East Ayrshire - New Cumnock pew removal

Presbytery approved the removal of 5 pews which are close to the heating and causing health and safety concerns.

North Ayr - sale of Ayr St James Church and manse

The General Trustees have authorised the sale of Ayr St James Church and manse with funds from the sales being credited for the benefit of the congregation in the Consolidated Fabric Fund.

Doon Valley - sale of Patna Waterside Church

The General Trustees have authorised the sale of Patna Waterslide Church with funds from the sales being credited for the benefit of the congregation in the Consolidated Fabric Fund.

Doon Valley - Damellington

Presbytery approved repairs to the church and manse amounting to £28,000.

Drongan and Ochiltree AV systems

Presbytery approved the installation of audio visual systems for both Drongan and Ochiltree churches amounting to £35,013.

Monkton and Prestwick Trinity

Presbytery approved the cost of upgrade works to the manse amounting to £54,288.

North Ayr - Newton Wallacetown Church

Presbytery approved the removal of central pews at Newton Wallacetown Church to be replaced with free standing chairs. The pew removal will incur no costs to the congregation or Session.

North Ayr - Dalmilling Church Building



Presbytery approved the disposal/sale of the North Ayr Parish, Dalmilling Church Building and to await the determination of the General Trustees.

Scotland Places of Worship Fund

The listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme, which allows churches throughout the UK to reclaim VAT on construction and conservation projects ended on 31 March 2026. A pilot scheme has been developed : The Scotland Places of Worship Fund which is expected to open for applications in autumn 2026, supporting eligible listed Places of Worship across Scotland to recover VAT costs associated with repair work. The Fund will operate as a standalone scheme until the end of March 2027 with £1 million made available through the existing Historic Environment Scotland Grants budget. Funding will be allocated on a first-come, first served basis to eligible applicants.

The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings

Kirk Sessions are asked to direct Kirk Session Fabric Teams to the SPAB 'Faith in Maintenance ' calendar. This is an annual routine of maintenance and checks which Sessions would be wise to implement. This should be applied to churches, halls and manses where appropriate. Regular maintenance will prevent minor issues from becoming larger ones, if addressed early and well.

Troon Old Church

A dry rot infestation has been discovered in Troon Old Church presently in the process of being sold. The costs will exceed the Presbytery limit of £5,000 for CatB buildings and Presbytery approved the rot eradication works to proceed with costs estimated circa £40,000, being met from church funds.

Finance

Presbytery instructs all congregations to comply with the deadlines for submission of annual accounts (31 March to the Stewardship and Finance Department and to the Presbytery Finance Committee and 30 September to OSCR following review by Presbytery) and in the event that a deadline is not met, to advise the Presbytery Treasurer within 14 days providing the reasons for the delay.

The Finance Committee are recommending maintaining Presbytery dues at the 2% rate.

Presbytery Mission Plan - 2026 Review

Presbytery adopted the Presbytery Mission Plan 2006 as a consolidation of the 6 legacy Presbyteries Mission Plans.

Upon union of the 6 legacy Presbyteries, there were 166 congregations

corresponding to 119 Charges. Presbytery was allocated a total of 78 posts for Ministers of Word and Sacrament and Mission Development Staff.

Through implementation of each legacy Mission Plans, Presbytery now has 94 congregations corresponding to 77 Charges covering a population of approx 511,000 people.

Of the 78 FTE allocated posts, there are currently 62 incumbents - 47 Ministers; 2 Transitional Ministers, 8 Mission Development Staff; 5 pioneer ministry (including farming ministry).

Across Presbytery, there is a clear recognition that the number of stipending ministers is reducing significantly and that Mission deployment must therefore become more collaborative, priorities Mission rather than the maintenance of historical structures or traditional parish arrangements. Therefore Presbytery has a strong movement towards - team ministries; linked or united charges; wider parish groupings and shared ministry models.

There is an increasing expectation that ministers will act not only as providers of worship and pastoral care, but as facilitators of Mission, enablers of discipleship, trainers of local leaders and collaborators within wider ministry teams. With the increased use of Parish Groupings, particular emphasis is placed on flexibility, adaptability and collaborative working.

Mission has, and Mission must, shape Presbytery's decisions about ministry, congregations and buildings not the other way round. Buildings are viewed not as ends in themselves but as 'tools' demonstrating their capacity to support worship, discipleship, outreach and community engagement.

Within the current Presbytery Mission Plan, the following information relates to Ayr St Columba:

Population - 6,116

Roll at 31 December 2025 - 771 compared to 801 on 31 December 2024.

The Auld Kirk of Ayr, St Andrew's Parish and Ayr St Columba have an outstanding adjustment which is oversubscribed by 2 FTE Ministers (until retirement). The Presbytery Mission Plan ministerial is 1 FTE MWS. Dissolution of St Andrew's Parish Church with Ayr St Columba having a vacancy for 1 FTE MWS on a 5 year reviewable charge.

Vacancy Procedure Committee

Presbytery noted that there are currently 10 vacant charges with 6 being advertised on the Church of Scotland website.

Former Ayr St Columba Minister The Rev Fraser Aitken has been appointed as Interim Moderator of Stewarton's St Columba with effect from 1 October 2026.

George Park Presbytery Elder



Time for a knit and natter

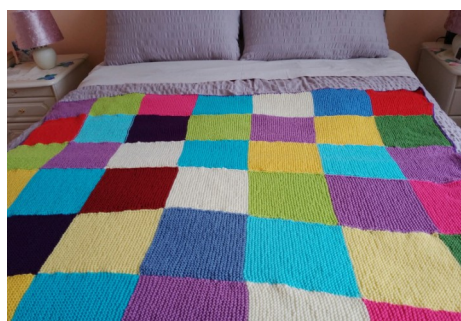
Our Knit and Natter group continued over the summer this year with an average attendance of about 16 each week.

In July we were treated to a visit from two local children looking to learn to knit. As you can see below we cater to everyone from 7 to 90+

We meet every Tuesday from 10 till noon in the Struthers Room. Come along, have a coffee and a laugh with us.

At the end of August we lost one of our longstanding members, Beryl.

Beryl was a much loved member of our group who, despite her hearing difficulty, took a full part in our group, knitting many blankets for our charity, Hamlin Fistula.



Troon was the walkers' target



The Walkers

*We set off on this lovely July day.
Thankfully, the rain stayed at bay!
All met up by the golf course in
Troon,
Avoiding the balls hit by the players.
Even the weather didn't betray us!
Azure skies and fleecy clouds,
Bushes laden with fruit and flowers,
Gardens ablaze in many hues,
As we ambled along the way.
Cyclists and joggers, canine friends
too,
Then a friendly walker stopped
And photographed our little group.
Trains too went trundling by
The heart it gave a happy sigh
Was a happy, well-spent day.
By Agnes Fisher 2026*



Marjorie and family say thanks



Marjorie Macdonald would like to thank everyone who sent messages of support in the form of the many letters, cards, flowers and calls. She, Lucy and Richard, found these kind and thoughtful gestures helped immensely at the sad time of Peter's passing.

The collection at Peter's funeral service raised an incredible £1500 for our local Paramedics benevolent fund in South Ayrshire and we received this acknowledgement letter from Scottish Ambulance Service.

Marjorie appreciates greatly the love and care she has received from her St. Columba family.

Ready to turn the pages

Read and Chatter meets every 4th Friday in the Struthers Room.

Our reading material, chosen by a different member each time, is very eclectic.

Before the summer break we read *The Silence in Between* by Josie Ferguson, a harrowing story of life on both sides of the Berlin wall.

Followed by *Horse* by Geraldine Brooks, about a famous American horse and how black jockeys and trainers were treated in 19th century.

On October 2 we will discuss *Mija* by Mark Atkinson.

Read the book, come along and share your thoughts over a cup of coffee.



Tribute to ordained elder Peter Guy Macdonald

Peter G Macdonald was one of those folk whom it was very easy to like – his bright, cheery personality was always in evidence no matter where and when you met him, and that is why, over the many years I was his Minister, I so relished all that he brought to our Church's life. His sincerity was as clear as the day. There was nothing sham or false about him.

Peter's connection to Ayr was not simply a matter that he was born in the Nursing Home on Inverkar Road, the youngest of James and Isobel Macdonald's family – being an "honest man" was part of who he was. He was immensely proud to belong to this royal burgh, the many folk he knew down through the years, its history, its community spirit, and it grieved him hugely to see so much the faded splendour that he had known in growing up in the family home, initially for a few years with Granny Percy on St Leonard's Road until, when he was four years old, along with his older brother and sister, Alistair and Jennifer, the Macdonald family moved to 23 Dongola Road, a lovely home where he was to live during his formative years and to which he would return in the autumn of 1986.

A pupil at Miss Janey's Limond Kindergarten on Carrick Road, Peter then attended Ayr Academy from age 4 to his sixth year.

It was at that time that he set eyes on the very attractive Marjorie Paterson when she was taking part in a school production of Shakespeare's "As you like it". Peter had a Norwegian Seal skin badge on his blazer and Marjorie and her friends referred to him as "the boy with the moose on his chest."

Instinctively when I met Peter all those years ago, I knew that we had much in common – like me in my secondary school days, Peter loathed Mathematics – we could never see the point of Geometry and Algebra and Trig, and, of course, PE. French, however, was a totally different story and we both excelled there.

When his formal education was complete, Peter's first foray into the world of employment, and here again, we had something in common, was with the great Paisley Threadmakers, J and P Coats, as a boy apprentice. When Peter started there, my own father, was the Paymaster in the Anchor Mills,

J and P Coats sent all their new starts to an outward bound course – known for evermore as "The Spewy Louis". This awful experience im-



pacted Peter's future life decisions in that he would never ever sail around Scotland in a small craft; he would never walk up or climb mountains and he would only be happy under canvas if it was a trip to Billy Smart's Circus!

For three months, Peter was based in Leicester and then returned to the Anchor Mills in Paisley and spent the next fifteen years moving between the Head Office in Bothwell Street and the Quality Control Department in Anchor. And all the while my Dad's office would be making up his salary!

It was on the 2nd September 1971, when the rain continued non stop the whole day, that Peter married his beloved Marjorie in Coylton Parish Church, a union of the deepest love and devotion for 55 years. Their years of "walking out" together were very special – Marjorie would get the bus from Coylton to meet Peter in Ayr. There were occasions when the telephone would ring at 23, Dongola Road, and Dad Macdonald would shout, "Peter, Marjorie has missed the bus from Bumpkinland AGAIN!" Marjorie eagerly awaited the day Peter might propose, and though she felt that was long in coming, one night, on a walk on the back road in Coylton, he popped the question.

They were made for each other, as we all know only too well.

In all the years I have known them, I have always so treasured being in their company as Peter and Marjorie were great story tellers, regaling the company with amusing anecdotes and tales of family life, of travels, of incidents that they had encountered along the way, and evoking gales of laughter in the process. To me, they were a modern version of Gracie Clark and Colin Murray – now, only those of you above a certain age will know those names who thrilled audiences over the years in Scottish theatres.

And it was Peter, old romantic that he was, who carried Marjorie over the threshold of their first home at 33 Chalmers Road.

In due course, Lucy was born on 23rd July 1976, and Richard arrived on 23rd October 1978. The gentleman's family indeed.

Both Lucy and Richard were so fortunate to have been brought up in such a caring and loving family home. Nothing that Peter and Marjorie could do for them was counted a sacrifice.

Within the four walls of home, he loved reading, writing letters, listening to his music

It was in early 1976 that the move came to Kyle and Carrick District Council Parks Department as the Office Manager at 30 Miller Road, moving to Burns House and latterly the Social Work Department at Holmston House after enduring several council reshuffles.

Peter could recall very vividly the first weekly meeting in the Parks Department Office and made him realise how different it was from his days in Paisley. The four topics on the agenda that morning, under the direction of the late Parks Department Head, David Roy, were a new photocopier for the office, urns for Masonhill Crematorium, (for making tea, that is!), dung for the gardens and parks and finally, tights for the Gaiety Theatre!

As in all that he did, Peter threw himself into the life of the Department – and he always felt it was a great team who worked together taking care of the town's green spaces, the sports facilities of the golf courses, the tennis courts, the swimming pool; the entertainment for visitors and holiday makers of the Crazy Golf, the mini train that travelled along the Prom; the Civic and Gaiety Theatres, the Burns Centre at Alloway, and of course, the spectacular Annual Flower Show.

It is not an exaggeration when I say that all that Peter undertook, in his family life, in his working life, in his leisure pursuits, in his Church commitment, was done with military precision.

We all know how he immersed himself in so many facets of Ayr's life, contributing his time, his energy and his enthusiasm wherever he could.

Peter believed in making a difference where and when he could.

Ayr was undoubtedly his home and he gave much of himself to it.

And folk like myself knew that if Peter was involved, the job would be done properly.

He liked things organised, planned, and carried through to the highest standard – nothing was to be left to chance. Yet behind that precision, as I witnessed when he was our Gift Aid Convenor, and looked after all the monies for Mary's Meals, there was never harshness or rigidity. It was rooted in pride and care and the joy of doing the job well.

Peter's work with the Ayrshire Echo is meritorious to say the least – for the past twenty six years, he has been the chairman of this wonderful organisation which provided recordings for the blind and partially sighted folk in our community. He would spend hours recording articles from newspapers and magazines, then copy the recordings and distribute them, dropping the tapes off and latterly, memory sticks, at the Post Office. It was due in no small measure to Peter's warmth and enthusiasm that the teams of readers all became good friends.

Like me, Peter was a great supporter of the Monarchy. A few years ago, he and Marjorie presented me with the most beautiful coffee table book of the diamonds of Her Late Majesty The Queen. He could have written it himself, if the truth be told !

Marjorie recalls that when they were very fortunate to have been invited



to the Royal Garden Party at the Palace of Holyroodhouse, the Queen appeared, and as she mingled with the guests on the lawn, Peter proclaimed in Peter's unmistakably loud tones – "Ah, I see today that Her Majesty I wearing the Williamson pink.", referring to a particular diamond in her brooch!

Marjorie also remembers how she banned Lucy and Richard giving their father hard back editions of books as they often fell on to Marjorie and woke her from her slumbers as Peter drifted off whilst reading.

Peter was a man of wide interest and deep passions. Music brought him enormous joy throughout this life. Whether it was opera, musicals, a treasured recording, taking part in an Ayr Amateur Production on the Gaiety stage, Peter's love of music was enduring and infectious.

He was a devoted theatre goer, so much so that he amassed not one but two tea chests full of theatre programmes – a wonderful testament to the countless performances he attended and enjoyed over the years. Each programme represents not just a show, but an experience, a memory, and another chapter in a life long love affair with music and the arts.

The big question that the family ask today is why Peter should have retained parking receipts from the town, in order of date and time, dating back over several years, and all held together with a bulldog clip and put in a drawer in the sitting room?

At home in Dongola Road, Peter's care and attention were evident in another of his great passions that he undertook with Marjorie – their stunning garden. It was nurtured with patience, dedication and pride. Of course, it reflected his character perfectly – welcoming, colourful, full of life.

To those of us who knew him best, we also knew that beneath the disciplined exterior was a warm and caring family man with a wonderful sense of fun.

He enjoyed good company, good conversation and sharing a laugh with family and friends, the gift that he had of making folk feel welcome and valued.

In, through and above all else, Peter was devoted to those nearest and dearest to him.

They were the centre of his world and the source of his greatest pride.

His love was shown not only in words but in countless acts of kindness and support, and his steadfast presence. He was always there when needed, helping these past years with the grandchildren's activities, offering encouragement, practical help and, of course, unconditional love.

I know that example that Peter set – of integrity, loyalty, hard work,

kindness and care for others , will continue to inspire all the family.

Though he has met ill health since his heart attack and had his triple by-pass when he was 59, then his cardiac arrest, Peter never felt sorry for himself and just got on living life to the full each day. How grateful he was for all that the family did, and all that Stacey, the fairy godmother of Number 23, brought these past 30 years.

For a man who was squeamish watching any medical programme on tv and flinched on a visit to the dentist or getting eye drops put in, he faced up to every procedure with a quiet fortitude and a deep thankfulness to the professionals looking after him.

These past months, the nurses and auxiliaries at Ayr were all so fond of him.

Yes, there are tears today, but lots of smiles too, and though we feel deeply the space he leaves behind, we also celebrate the rich legacy of sparkling memories, which, like diamonds, will shine for ever in the lives of all who have been blessed in coming within the sphere of this remarkable individual.

Peter, dear friend, rest in peace till, in God's mercy, we meet again.

The Revd Fraser R Aitken DL, MA, BD, GCSJ

Minister Emeritus, Ayr : St Columba Church.

Tribute to ordained elder Margaret Grier 1936 – 2026

When Denis died at the end of June, I was honoured that Margaret invited me to conduct his funeral service as I had known them both very well for 35 years when I was their Minister in St Columba Church here in the town.

Like me, each of you was shocked that Margaret's passing should come less than two months later. She had borne Denis' death with her typical stoical demeanour – deeply sad at the loss of her life's partner, but determined not to wallow in self-pity and regrets.

Perhaps that resilience can be traced back to her formative years growing up in Paisley, the eldest child James and Grace McLachlan, older sister to David and Elizabeth. Her father had served King and Country in the Royal Corps of Engineers during the hostilities of World War II and had been part of the D Day Plus One Operations.



At the tender age of 14, whilst a pupil at the town's John Neilson Institution, Margaret's Mum died and at a such a young age, and to avoid the family being split up, Margaret took on the responsibility of helping to care for her two younger siblings. That experience in itself says so much about the person Margaret would become – dependable, loving, selfless and always putting the needs of others before herself.

When her school days were over, her first foray into the world of work was as a bookkeeper in a local firm – she had always been good with numbers, but at the age of 20, her career took a very different route when she followed in her grandfather's footsteps and joined Paisley Burgh Police. As one of the town's first female police officers, she trod the beat for the princely sum of £7 a week, before promotion to the CID came her way. There she worked in serious crime, often involving children.

Margaret looked back on those 6 years of service as a police officer as the happiest of her working life, but it was not difficult to leave that life behind when she met the young Denis Grier from Prestwick at a party in Partick in 1960. The romance blossomed and they were married in St John's Church on Paisley's Oakshaw in March 1962, a union of deepest love and devotion until Denis' passing. How proud they were to receive the Congratulations Card from Her Majesty The Queen on their Diamond Wedding Anniversary, a card which was framed and hangs on the lounge wall in that house that was their home for over 60 years.

As Jennifer, Susan and Elizabeth arrived, Margaret fulfilled her role as a loving and caring Mum to each of them, and Number 26, Holmston Avenue became the centre of family life, filled with love, memories and those everyday small moments that make a house a home. Her daughters knew a mother's unwavering love and wise advice. And I am sure that Denis was quietly outnumbered on many occasions but he would take it all in good grace.

The girls can readily recall their Mum's delicious mushroom soup, the best in the neighbourhood, and of course, her knitting needles were never idle, fashioning many items, a skill which passed on to Lizzie with tremendous pride.

By and by, Margaret ventured back into the workplace, firstly in a coffee shop in the town called The Sandpiper, then taking on the role of bookkeeper in various places, including British Replin, then finally in the office of a local solicitor.

Retirement for Margaret was not regarded as the time to put her feet up and watch the world go by – she was a keen member of the church badminton club which met on a Monday evening in the Cathcart Street Hall,

and she gained a great deal of pleasure when she took up bowling, enjoying the camaraderie of the green at Ayr Bowling Club and forging friendships there, as well as acting as their Treasurer for several years. Bowling gave Margaret tremendous satisfaction and such was her skill that she won several trophies over the years.

In addition to her role as a District Elder in St Columba Congregation, and I, for one, was sad when she decided to retire from the Kirk Session a few years ago – “I am getting on, Fraser,” she said when I asked her to think again, Margaret was a volunteer at the Hospice for several years, helping with the administration, and in her capacity as volunteer at Ayr Hospital, she was happy to give relative and patients a warm smile and a cup of tea to lift their day.

Margaret had a host of friends, including the late Jean Kennedy and Isabel and David Higgen.

When we look back over Margaret’s ninety years, we see a life of service – to her family, to her Church, to her community and to those who needed a helping hand.

She had known sadness and loss from an early age, but rather than allowing it to harden her, it seems to have deepened her capacity to care. She was strong without needing to be noticed for her strength, generous without seeking thanks, and loving in a way that made all who came within the sphere of her friendship felt safe and cared for – and none more so than the family who were her greatest treasure.

Margaret leaves behind not only the sadness of her passing, but also an extraordinary legacy of love, family, faith, and friendship.

There is one final image of Margaret that captures her love so beautifully. As she lay on her hospital bed, her earthly life drawing to a close, she wore around her neck a chain on which was Denis’ wedding ring. As she left this world, she grasped that ring tightly in her fingers. That ring represented 64 years of marriage, a lifetime of memories, and the bond she shared with Denis. Even at the final moments, she held on to that symbol of love.

That gesture seems to say everything that our words cannot – that their love endured to the end.

She will be deeply missed because she too was greatly loved.

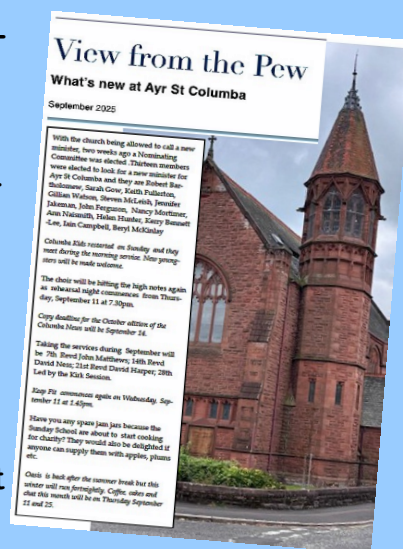
But in our Christian faith, how wonderful, through the tears of parting, to have that faith that she and Denis are together once more.

The Revd Fraser R Aitken DL, MA, BD, GCSJ
Minister Emeritus, Ayr : St Columba Church.



Are you enjoying our monthly publication?

Hope you are all enjoying our extra newsletter that comes at the beginning of every month. The email publication *View from the Pew* has all the latest news from Ayr St Columba. If you haven't signed up for church emails then a number of printed copies are available at the church door.



TAKING AN ECO LOOK by Andrew Muirhead

The story of Mona Khalil

As a girl, Mona often visited her Grandmother who had a small house by the sea. The sand was white and the climate lovely. Holidays from school in Beirut were special and the little house on Mansouri beach became very important to her.

Mona was born in Nigeria (then under British rule) to a Lebanese Christian family. She was sent to school in Beirut and later moved to the Netherlands during the civil war where she was employed by a museum for 10 years, to restore porcelain. Soon after she returned to Lebanon, her Grandmother died and left the seaside house to her. She did marry, but her 10

year old son died in an accident and the marriage did not survive, as is common after such a bereavement.

So far her life was not extraordinary. What came next was very unusual! She walked near Mansouri beach one day and someone started throwing sand at her. When she looked round, she saw a giant turtle digging her nest. Loggerhead and Green sea turtles nested there. It turned out, this was a rare beach where these endangered species lay their eggs. There was no protection provided by locals for the turtles because it is only 12 km from the boarder with Israel and has been intermittently occupied by Israeli forces. The nearest city to the north is Tyre.

The war ensured that her house was unoccupied from 1980 to 2000, and so it was in poor condition. She restored the house with her partner and painted it orange, in honour of her time in Holland. They both went on courses to learn about turtles and started their B&B in The Orange House. The house was open from May to October. Visitors were expected to help look after turtle nests and keep dogs, people and litter away from them. This eco-tourism proved popular with foreigners, but not locals. The locals were short of jobs and money and concentrated on the threat posed by Israel. Mona conducted research and presented it at meetings in Crete. Her perspective and lifestyle was very different from her neighbours.

She became famous for her interest. Eventually, the local Hezbollah administration declared the beach “Hima” or protected. The locals saw her as an eccentric, but internationally her courage and commitment became legendary.

Before dawn, Mona and her volunteers began work on the shore. The locals did not support her. “No this, no that” were her constant refrain. Eventually, the fishermen did stop using dynamite for fishing. She stopped cars from driving on the beach and beach parties in the nesting season. In 2006, she asked Hizbullah fighters to leave the beach, they did, but set up rockets behind her house which was damaged by retaliatory Israeli fire. She persuaded the UN peacekeepers not to throw their rubbish into the sea. With war and no work, the locals might be forgiven for putting ecology to the back of their minds.

During the 2024 war, she left for Beirut and regretted it when she found her home damaged. She resolved not to leave again. In June 2026, she was seriously injured when her house was shelled. She was taken to various hospitals but died of her injuries two weeks later, aged 76. Her partner survived. I read Mona’s obituary in the Economist newspaper, a rather surprising place, as her story had nothing to do with economics. Obituaries



were also written in a wide range of other papers and journals.

What should we make of this tale? Her experience is so different from our own after all. My reading of her life story is that her background was unconventional with several discrete chapters that connected very little with each other. After losing her family, one might expect her to become introverted and stop engaging with the world, but no, it was a spur to do something different.

She belonged to a religious minority and had lived abroad. She was probably as different from her neighbours as we are from David Livingstone, but she was still a local Lebanese lady. Mona Khalil's instinct was to connect with nature and that led her to adopt a different lifestyle.

What will we do when we are obliged to begin a new chapter of our lives?

Andrew Muirhead

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Copy Deadline

**The copy
deadline for the
Christmas issue of
Columba News will
be Sunday, Nov 15**

Congregation and Parish Register



June– September

NEW MEMBERS

Pearl Combe
Helen Findlay
Margaret Phinn

DEATHS

“I am with you always to the end of the age” *Matthew 28:20*

Dugald Macneil
Evelyn Nelson
Margery Swinn
Denis Grier
Harry Carson
David Aitchison
Margaret Grier
Ian Rae
Jane Henderson
Beryl McGinty
Nancy Murray



Who to contact

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Tel:- 269524 Office hours: 9am-noon, Mon,
Tues, Thurs and Fri

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10.30am - Morning Worship;
10.30am Sunday School,

Webmaster: Iain Bartholomew,
email: website@ayrstcolumba.co.uk.
www.ayrstcolumba.co.uk

What's on in the halls

MONDAY

5.30pm **RAINBOW BROWNIES**
Aynsley Bell, 07914 842118
2pm: **MONDAY FELLOWSHIP**
(fortnightly):
Mr T. R. Swinn, 441896

TUESDAY

10am: Knit and Natter
Carol Morrison, 07999444200

WEDNESDAY

2pm: **FITNESS with FRIENDS:**
Mrs Margaret Doncaster, 477381
5.45pm: **9th AYR BROWNIES,**
Sally Bentham 07817169436

THURSDAY

10am-noon: **OASIS CAFE**
Mrs M. Doncaster 477381 Mrs P. Naylor
570020
6.30pm: **CUB SCOUTS:**
James 07966233002
7.15pm: **SENIOR CHOIR:**
Matthew Hynes, 870449

FRIDAY

6pm: **BEAVER SCOUTS:**
Fiona Wilson, 290414
7.30pm: **SCOUTS:**
James, 07966233002

Abbas Rest Coffee Morning

Saturday 21st November
10-noon

There will be teas and coffees and
stalls.

Your bric a brac will be welcome and
donations for the bottle stall and
raffle!

*This is a wonderful opportunity to raise
money for the Orphans and Vulnerable
Children in Malawi!*