



together

From a Manse | Who's Who - Robert Askey | A Parish Outing

A Parish Outing to Stronsay, August 2nd

We are planning an outing to worship together and to celebrate our parish-wide community. We are heading to Stronsay, to the Moncur Memorial Church, and a warm welcome from the Stronsay congregation. The ferry leaves the Kirkwall Pier at 08.40, returning about 19.40. Please fill a car from your church, or book as foot passengers - the community mini-bus is ours for the day for getting people between the ferry and the Kirk.

We'd love to know how many might join us - please email with your numbers planning to come along and questions: rosemarymoon@mac.com. I will reply with more details about ferry costs, the programme for the day and any other information. We are planning a Songs of Praise in the afternoon - musicians welcome!

Please pray for

- the people of Orphir church
- the Parish vacancies
- all young people facing the pressures of today's world

From a Manse

At Westray Kirk we've recently completed major roof repairs and a full lime washing of the external walls. It was a stressful period due to the roof damage being more extensive and costly than initially anticipated and a resulting extension of the time-scale. But we're delighted that it's done and hope it will last for many years. The Westray Kirk is in a very prominent location, built on top of a hill beside the main road and is something of a landmark, visible for miles. The downside of that is that it's fully exposed to the vagaries of Orkney weather.

We all surely know that what goes on *inside* our buildings is of far more significance than how they look but it's equally true that a building which stands prominently as a statement of decay and neglect sends out a very negative signal – a poor advert. It suggests that we don't care and that deterioration is acceptable. Isn't that something akin to how we are as people? What we're seen to be really does matter. I don't mean our hairstyle or fashion sense – these things are immaterial - but the perception people have of us as Christians is based upon what we're seen to do and the kind of folk we are: how we relate to others, how we engage with the communities we serve, how we get alongside to encourage, support and love.

Jesus was clear that the extent of our love is the measure of discipleship – it's by love that people will see that we're His followers – this from the one who constantly got alongside the poorest, saddest and most broken, pouring out His love.

As a Church in local communities, throughout Orkney and further afield, we show that love by casting off the airs and graces, rolling our sleeves up, loving and being seen to love. **We** are His adverts, much more so than our buildings, and if we're to truly let that light shine, it's up to every single one of us to show it by our love ... daily.

Iain MacDonald, Team Minister Westray and Papa Westray.

Who's Who in the Parish - Robert Askey

Robert Askey is an Elder at the Moncur Memorial Church in Stronsay and leads worship once a month during the current vacancy. He is a barrister with a degree in film making.

Robert, has the church always been important in your life?

"I was born in North Staffordshire and baptised into the Church of England. I went to church all through my childhood and teenage years but I wouldn't say that I was a committed Christian at that stage. I studied law at University in Aberystwyth and on my very first day there I met a fellow freshman and we went to church together, to an Elim Pentecostal church. It was way outside anything that I had experienced before and yes, you could say that I was converted that first term at Uni to active faith."

Tell us a little about your career.

"As a barrister I worked in the Crown Courts both prosecuting and defending, though my main work was civil and commercial litigation. I eventually set up my own chambers specialising in historical sexual abuse cases, employment tribunals and business and property law. I am still practising, working mainly on cases of financial mis-selling, but I am able to do most of my work remotely from home here in Stronsay, where I have lived for the last eight years."

How did you end up in Stronsay?

"I came here from the US, from Seattle, where I had been studying for a degree in film making. While in Seattle I saw a BBC news article about a remote Scottish island called Stronsay which was looking to develop tourism and attract new residents. I contacted Dianne Riley of Visit Stronsay and came for a look about. Dianne gave me a tour and that was that. I bought part of a large farm and have been building my house ever since I moved here, though I finally finished the building work just recently. I sadly lost my first wife to MS when she was only forty. I am now in a very happy new relationship with a Stronsay lass who has lived here all her life. I have three grown up daughters, two of whom live in England and one in Texas, USA, and seven grandchildren from my first marriage."

Robert, the Moncur Memorial Kirk is enormous - how do you feel about it?

"I love the building, but of course a church is the people in it and it is a very warm and loving community. When I arrived I very much sat at the back and got acclimatised to worship in the Church of Scotland tradition here. The congregation is from a wide variety of church and faith backgrounds. The church has grown in character and loving relationships if not in numbers and coffee and biscuits after the services has certainly helped with that."

What is your role within the church now?

"When David Locke, our last minister, was about to retire he asked Roger Neville-Smith and I to become ordained as Elders. This means we represent Stronsay on the Kirk Session and beyond, and help with leading services, which I do once a month. I definitely think that my legal experience in court helps me with my delivery of the message and I do very strongly believe in the emphasis in church being on practical Christianity rather than complicated theology. I always felt that if I couldn't explain clearly at home in ten minutes what I was going to be doing and arguing in court that day, that the day wouldn't go well."



That's the rule for my services too. Perhaps going back to my Pentecostal days, I pray for inspiration and to hear what God wants me to talk about. With my interest in cinema I often use a clip from a film to illustrate the message. My only experience of the Church of Scotland is here in Stronsay and at St Magnus Cathedral when I am on Mainland. I find Rev Nicky Gumbel, the developer of the Alpha Course, a great inspiration, and also the American preacher Ray Stedman."

How big a challenge do you think keeping the church relevant to life today is?

I think that, looking at the Christian church world-wide in its many different traditions, many of its practices and outlooks are too removed from everyday life. Life for so many people is very hard with problems of abuse, addiction, unemployment, exploitation and feeling worthless among many issues confronted on a daily basis. Life is hard - we need to be kind. The Greek Orthodox teaching that our Christian faith is a 'hospital for the soul' is an incredible thought. Ours is a Gospel of Grace - it's not meant to be complicated theology, rules and threats. God's love and grace is sufficient for us all. That, surely, is relevant to all, inside and outwith our buildings, and in our wider communities."

The lure of Orkney and helping with worship

The Very Rev Susan Brown and Rev Derek Brown return to Orkney for July.

It is brilliant to be back with you for July for my third term as locum at St Magnus Cathedral - it will be lovely to see Orkney in the daylight, in the Simmer Dim, instead of the short, dark days of Advent and Christmas. Derek will be Locum in Stromness and Orphir.

The islands have a wonderful draw which I think is part history, part natural beauty and partly the combination of people, **plus** the atmosphere generated by all the above! Not to mention all the creativity on every level the islands seem to engender. When we left at the end of January, Alison had just arrived at East Mainland with Sanday and North Ronaldsay, and I genuinely felt St Magnus would soon have a minister. Now the islands have even more vacancies to cope with, as well as the Cathedral. I am still certain that God has plans for Orkney and has people in mind who will bring those plans to fruition. In the meantime, this is not a hiatus in the life of the Island parish. It's not the parish that's vacant – God's still around and calling us all to continue to reach out, to build bridges and to welcome in. We're still to care for our communities and the natural and wider world too – and still to worship God every way we can.

If it all sounds a bit intimidating, then just think of the day of Pentecost when the disciples took to the streets to tell people about Jesus! Think of Peter's very first sermon, when 3000 people came to faith on that one day alone! We keep saying *With God all things are possible*. Let's believe it! So... if you are asked to help with worship, please don't say 'no': give it a go. And remember, you're never alone. There are ministers and readers, to ask for advice or to run things by. And there are resources available too - weekly worship on the Church of Scotland website for example, with hymn suggestions and prayers and starters for talks. Or if you'd like full scripts, why not look up www.abvcosworship.com? It has PowerPoints, hymns with or without music, films of reflections (a young me...), prayers and so on for tech and for no tech. It's a resource being used the length and breadth of Scotland and in Orkney. If you want to talk about any of these things, please do get in touch. Any time. We are so looking forward to being with you for July. Susan and Derek.

susan.brown@churchofscotland.org.uk

The Armed Forces Champions and their work

Every Presbytery in the Church has appointed an Armed Forces Champion, whose role is to link the Presbytery with the Armed Forces Community, local military and cadet chaplains, and the General Assembly's Committee on Chaplains to HM Forces. The Champion can help to make connections for you when a pastoral issue arises that involves a Forces family living in your parish area, or find out where to ask about support available from military charities, or point ministers in the right direction to find out more about serving as Regular, Reservist or Cadet chaplains.

NENI's Champion is Rev Dr Marjory MacLean, one of the team ministers in Orkney. She can be contacted on mmaclean@churchofscotland.org.uk or on 07837 784893; please don't hesitate to give her a shout if you think she can help with anything. Champions are normally people with personal experience within the Armed Forces community. Marjory served for twelve years in the Royal Naval Reserve, in both shore establishment and deployed roles; her current non-parish commitments include the Honorary Secretaryship of the Scottish Naval Military and Air Force Bible Society.

Perhaps the most important task of the Champions is to promote and encourage prayer for our Armed Forces, their personnel, chaplains, families and veterans. Since it is easier to pray when you have a little understanding of someone's situation, here is the first of two short articles, provided by one Regular and one Reservist chaplain serving within our Presbytery area. In August we shall hear from Andrew at RAF Lossiemouth, but now it's the turn of Michael in the Army Reserve.

"Reservists are (usually) normal, everyday people. They are civilians whose military service is undertaken in addition and alongside their jobs and family life. Across the North East of Scotland, you will find your colleagues and neighbours serving in military settings which include as communication specialists, infanters, mounted, and medical roles. Other than a 16-day continuous annual training package, training is kept to evenings and weekends to fit into family and work life. While it can sometimes be a challenge to balance the demands of reserve service, most reservists find that the collegiality and comradeship they find in their units mean that they stay involved for years.

Service as a reservist sees people given training to ensure that they have the basic skills to augment those in the regular forces if required, including physical fitness training and coaching, and can see voluntary deployment on operations around the world. In addition, adventure training is regularly put on to develop skills and enhance team building within units. Reservists are often called up when local needs are most pressing under what is known as MACA operations (Military Aid to Civilian Authorities). This occurs when local councils request the aid of the military in responding to a particular crisis. Recent MACA taskings have included the response to the COVID pandemic, as well as more localised assignments during flooding, and extreme weather. As local people, reservists bring their local knowledge as well as their training and access to specialised equipment to ensure quick and successful outcomes.

There are currently only around 5,320 reservists in Scotland. Please remember all of them in your prayers.

Padre Michael Mair, Army Reserve"