

Leaflet



Greenbank Parish Church
Braidburn Terrace, EH10 6ES
No 640 February 2015

Pulpit Diary

Feb 1

9.30am First Sunday Service led by Kirk Session

10.30am Morning Worship

Feb 8

10.30am Morning Worship led by Uniformed Organisations

Feb 15

10.30am Morning Worship

Feb 22 First Sunday in Lent

10.30am Morning Worship

Feb 27 (Friday)

7.30pm Pre-communion Service

Mar 1 Second Sunday in Lent

9.00am Communion

10.30am Communion (Creche, Spectrum and Springboard meet as usual)

3.00pm Communion (Braid Room)

For information about church organisations, please contact the Church Office (Mon–Fri, 9.00am–12.00 noon, 1.30pm–3.30pm):

Mrs Virginia Johnston

tel and fax: 0131 447 9969

e-mail: greenbankchurch@btconnect.com

The pastoral team can be contacted through the Church Office:

Rev Alison Swindells

tel and fax: 0131 447 4032

email: alisonswindells@blueyonder.co.uk

Rev W. Peter Graham

tel: 0131 445 5763

Youth Minister: Rev Bill Stone

tel: 07883 815 598

email: billstoneiii@gmail.com

To make contact with any of the organisations described in this Leaflet, please use the telephone number given, if there is one. Otherwise please contact the Church Office.

Website: www.greenbankchurch.org



Everyone knows that the Scout movement was founded by Baden-Powell more than a century ago. It was instantly popular – and is today the UK's biggest youth organisation. For more than 75 years, since 1933, Scouts have played a big part in the life of Greenbank. There are over 125 members of the four groups – Beavers, Cubs, Scouts and Explorers – (which may explain the amount of noise they make) with most groups full and some having waiting lists.

Scouting is a religious though not specifically a Christian movement. At Greenbank, though, there has always been a close link between the Church and the Scouts. Several members of the Kirk Session are former Scouts and several of the leaders are active members of

O God our Father
To whom we owe the gift of life
Help us to discover your will
To trust in your love
And to rejoice in your service
That your light may shine through us to
those in need
Through Jesus Christ our Lord AMEN

the congregation – including Group Scout Leader Kenny Htet-Khin, and Stuart Sanders who is the secretary of the Group Executive Committee. The Queen's Birthday honours list included an MBE for Greenbank member Charles Black for his voluntary work, including his work for the Scout Group. The Scouts repeat weekly the prayer in the box above,

Continued overleaf



We have around 135 girls taking part in the weekly activities of the five Girlguiding groups at Greenbank – one Rainbow unit, two Brownie packs and two Guide units. There are also around 20 adult volunteers and nine Young Leaders aged 14 to 18. The longest established group, 162nd City of Edinburgh Guide unit, is now almost 87 years old, having started on 2nd March 1928. Girlguiding itself celebrated its centenary in 2010, but hopefully past members would still recognise the organisation, although many changes have been made to keep up to date and remain relevant for today's girls and young women.

One of the biggest changes over the past year has been in the Guide Promise. Following extensive member consultation, the new promise was introduced in 2013.

*I promise that I will do my best:
To be true to myself and develop my beliefs,
To serve the Queen and my community,
To help other people, and
To keep the (Brownie) Guide Law.*

By changing the wording it was hoped that guiding could be made more inclusive, but still commit to the principles of spirituality, citizenship and helping others. It is intended to encompass both those within a faith community and also those who are not part of a formalised faith. The Rainbow promise

Continued overleaf



Uniformed Organisations' Service

Scouting continued

which was composed by a former member of the Troop – so long ago that not even Harley Milne can remember who it was.

The secret of the movement's timeless success is informal education with an emphasis on practical and outdoor activities, including camping, woodcraft, hiking and watersports. So, in the



Explorers bag-packing at Waitrose

past few months, the Explorers (aged 15-18) have walked the Lairig Ghru, gone on a ghost tour and been to Alton Towers – as well as packing bags at Waitrose to raise funds. The Scouts (10½-14) have spent a week under canvas in Perthshire and spent the autumn earning the Creative Challenge badge including creating their own worship. The junior sections are the Cubs (8-10½) and the Beavers (6-8). Looking forwards, in July, 34 Explorers



Campfire's burning!

and 6 leaders are going to an international Jamborette at Haarlem in the Netherlands and in February Scouts are going ski-ing at Glenshee (or skating at Murrayfield for non-skiers).

As you can imagine, there's quite a lot of work to do all that, safely – and leaders commit a lot of time and nervous energy to making it all happen, including spending holiday weeks at camp! The key to leadership is having a team of helpers, rather than relying on a couple of folk. So we can always do with more pairs of hands, parents or not – and we're used to moulding roles to fit in with people's busy lives. There are more details on the Scout website www.scouts.org.uk/get-involved/, and you could email 4th.morningside.scouts@gmail.com if you're interested in helping. The leaders get a lot out of it, too – as Elaine Jones, who combines leading the Explorers with being a teacher at South Morningside and mother of three children under 8, explains:

"I get a huge amount of enjoyment from running the unit – part of a team of leaders that as well as providing some fantastic experiences for young people also enjoys a lot of laughter and friendship. The unit has grown considerably in the last few years with numbers now at 50 so it is time-consuming but hugely rewarding."

The support that the congregation of Greenbank gives to its Scouts is vital. Aside from providing volunteers to run the sections, the congregation helps by making the Halls available for meetings and by supporting the Jumble Sale in April each year – which raises around £8,000 ("from the sale of junk" as Rev Ian Scott used to say, slightly inaccurately), a crucial contribution to funding an organisation, which costs around £37,000 per year to run. Despite the annual success of the Jumble Sale, funding can be a problem. This year, we have had to increase the annual subscription by over 40% (after several years without an increase) and we are looking for a new fundraising opportunity. As funds permit, the Group makes a donation (in 2013, £1,000) to defray some of the costs and we have played an energetic part in the congregation's special fundraising campaigns – most recently at the YACHT Fair.

Despite the competing activities available to young people today, Scouting remains popular, successful – and exciting.

Duncan Macniven

Girlguiding continued

is a simplified version, and all three branches of the organisation regularly have activities in the programme to remind the girls about the Guide promise.

We have asked the leaders of all the groups to send in some information about recent and planned activities.

Rainbows (age 5-7)

In the autumn term the Rainbows have been busy working on the new "All About Me" Roundabout Badge which requires the girls to choose 4 activities to complete. The girls decided to do a describing/drawing game, create a book all about themselves, have a pamper evening with hand massages and new hair do's and also to make a Rainbow Promise mobile.

In addition to this the girls have enjoyed a Halloween party, a Dogs Trust evening and have had lots of running around doing some indoor Parachute games, and they went to see *Aladdin*, the Panto at the Kings Theatre.

In 2015 they will choose a new Roundabout Badge to complete and are looking forward to learning a song for the Uniformed Organisations' Service in February. They are also hoping to take part along with other local Rainbows in an annual trip to North Berwick by train in June.

Brownies (age 7-10)

Wednesday Brownies completed a special Commonwealth Games Challenge badge thanks to a grant from the Big Lottery Fund, and they were able to try lots of different sports and activities including fencing, climbing, horse riding, ballroom dancing and hula hooping. They also used their brand new sports

Minister's Letter

Dear Friends

First of all I would like to wish you all a Happy New Year! You will notice some changes in the formatting of this *Leaflet*. This month the Uniformed Organisations feature significantly. Most evenings when you enter our buildings you are greeted by the sight (and sound!) of children. Their energy and enthusiasm are tangible. But it is not only on week day evenings that the units are active. Jumble sales, pack holidays and camps contribute to the self-confidence of the young people and increase their ability to cope with new surroundings and new challenges. Much of this is due to the dedication and commitment of the leadership. I'm sure that I echo the support of parents when I say how grateful we are to them for all their efforts.

But there is another way in which the Uniformed Organisations are active in the life of the Church. For the last two years on Christmas Eve the Scouts have brought to the congregation the gift of their Peace Light. This is a flame lit at Bethlehem, then passed on and kept alive by Scouts all around the world – a prayer for peace in a troubled world. This flame has been used to light our Advent Candles at the early service when all ages gather to welcome the birth of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace. Even the youngest children seem to sense the significance of that prayer as they watch the candles being lit. And as I write this we are looking forward to the participation of the Organisations, with the support of our Youth Minister, in our morning worship on



Sunday 8th February. I believe these activities are also important to the development and well-being of our children and young people.

As human beings we not only have physical and emotional needs but we also have spiritual needs as well. The Church seeks to support and provide opportunities for people of all ages to grow and develop in their spiritual lives. During the early part of this year we are planning here at Greenbank to provide two new opportunities for people to explore their faith. The first will be a course, *The God Question*, which will run before Easter on Monday evenings. During that course we will look at some of the challenges which new scientific discoveries present to faith and what these

have to teach us about God. You can find more details of this course elsewhere in the *Leaflet*.

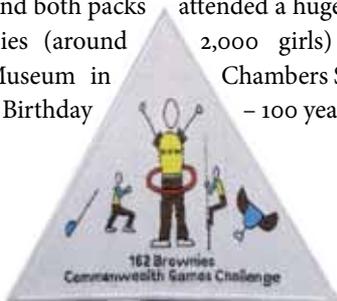
After Easter, on Wednesday evenings during April and May, we will be using some of the Alpha material to think more specifically about different aspects of the Christian faith – more about this at a later date. In the meantime I would encourage you to mark out these evenings in your diary and make 2015 a year when you will reflect more on the spiritual dimension of life.

With warmest wishes,

**Alison I Swindells
Minister**

Girlguiding continued

equipment to hold a special sports day in August with long jump, shot-put, hurdles and javelin. Later in the year they had a "Great Brownie Bake-Off" themed sleepover, and have now started work on a World Guiding badge which they will focus on in the spring. Thursday Brownies had a pack holiday at Stanemuir Brownie House in May, and both packs attended a huge event for all Edinburgh Brownies (around 2,000 girls) last March in the National Museum in Chambers Street to celebrate the Big Brownie Birthday – 100 years of Brownies.



Guides (age 10–14)

Both Guide units visited the Gang Show in November and four of our Guides were in the cast. Apart from that we have had a busy term – we celebrated US Thanksgiving and we made our own versions of the Tower of London poppies for Remembrance Day; we baked, we did some acting, we discussed image myths in the media, had a visit from some student archaeologists and

finished the term with each unit singing carols in different local nursing homes.

In summer 2015 a few of our girls will be part of an Edinburgh Guide contingent going to the Haarlem Jamborette in the Netherlands, and they may meet up with the Greenbank Explorers among the thousands of young people planning to attend.

Leaders

Around half our adult leaders live in the immediate locality and have connections with Greenbank. Apart from that we rely heavily on the recruitment efforts of Girlguiding Edinburgh to find and place new adult volunteers. This can lead to a bit of turnover as many of the volunteers are young women who are students or are working in Edinburgh temporarily and have little community connection, often travelling from another part of the city.

We are always looking for additional adult volunteers to sustain our groups, all of which have waiting lists due to the popularity of the organisation, and the energy and enthusiasm of our leaders.

Anyone wishing to find out more can contact our District Commissioner – girlguidingcomiston@gmail.com.

Fiona Watt



Please note that the next dates for Fresh Start collections are **1st February and 8th March** before and after the 10.30am Sunday Service (table in Main Hall).

There is a continuing need for good quality items for the starter pack scheme, and cleaning things such as jay cloths, dish cloths and yellow dusters are in short supply. *See the October 2014 Leaflet for a full list of household goods wanted.*

Thank you to everyone who donated items in good condition or indeed new items, last month.

To find out more about Fresh Start, pick up a leaflet on a Fresh Start Sunday, see www.freshstartweb.org.uk or telephone 476 7741.

Alison Ambler

World Mission Committee

The Rev Páraic Réamonn, the Minister of St Andrews Church of Scotland, Jerusalem, is our new missionary partner. You may remember him as an assistant in Greenbank (1981–82).

He writes in the December/January 2015 issue of *WM* (The magazine of the Church of Scotland's World Mission Council) about the situation in Jerusalem:

“Hope is in short supply here today, as Jerusalem and the West Bank simmer and often boil over, Arab citizens of Jerusalem are seen by many as the enemy within, and the people of Gaza mourn their dead.

“Pray for the peace of Jerusalem; pray for justice here, or as much justice as is possible in an unjust world; pray for an end to the ‘moral double bookkeeping’ defining the same action as wrong in the neighbour but right for oneself that is the curse of modern nationalism, pray that the Lord may take from the eyes of people here of every faith and political persuasion the specks and logs that stop us seeing one another, and treating one another as human beings, flesh of our flesh and bone of our bone.”

One World Stall

The next One World Stall selling fairly traded goods will be after the 10.30am Service on 22nd February.

John Ritchie

Bookstall (22nd March)

After the 10.30am Service on **22nd March** the Bookstall will be open with a selection of books from The Cornerstone with a special focus on books that might help you on your faith journey or expand your knowledge of Christian history, doctrine or the Bible. If you would like to order a copy of *Look well to this day*, reviewed elsewhere in this *Leaflet*, please contact us before 8th March.

The Cornerstone stocks books, cards, candles, church supplies and olivewood products from the Holy Land. Please call in and visit them under St John's Episcopal Church at the West End of Princes Street to see their wider stock.

John and Joan Ritchie

Guild

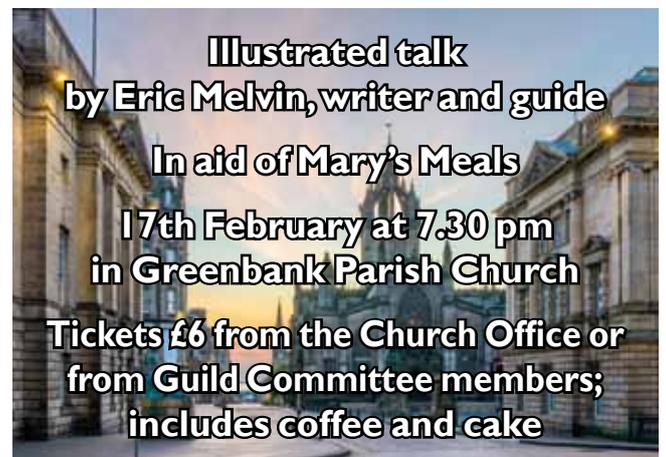
At our December afternoon meeting Anne Mulligan gave us an enthralling insight into *Pastoral and spiritual care within the NHS*.

Our first coffee morning of the year on 6th January was a lively social occasion with an excellent attendance. At our afternoon meeting on **20th January** we shall learn more about our project – *Mary's Meals* – to which the proceeds of our *fundraising evening on 17th February* will be transferred. Due to circumstances beyond our control Firrhill School is no longer able to provide the concert originally scheduled for that evening. Instead we are delighted that Eric Melvin has agreed to give an illustrated talk about the *Royal Mile*. He is a qualified Edinburgh Festival Voluntary Guide taking groups of visitors on walks in Edinburgh's Old and New Towns, an author of several Scottish history books and an excellent speaker and so we look forward to an enjoyable and informative evening. The event, which will be held in Greenbank Church, is open to all members of the congregation and friends and we hope that many of you reading this will join us. Tickets cost £6 and can be purchased from Guild members or the church office or at the door on the night. Tea, coffee, cakes and shortbread will be served after the talk.

Earlier in the month, on **3rd February at 7.30pm** in the Braid Room, Rose Pipes will tell us about the *Edinburgh Colonies*.

Kathleen Patrick

Aspects of the Royal Mile



Work Party

2014 has been a successful year for the Work Party. We gave over 40 hats to *Bethany* for the homeless, a sackful of baby clothes to *Simpsons Prem Baby Unit*, a load of children's jumpers to *Children 1st*, knee rugs to the *Hospice* and jumpers and cot blankets to *Edinburgh Clothing Store*.

Many thanks to the members of the congregation who knitted squares, sewed them together and donated machine-washable yarn, you made a big difference.

As always new members are very welcome to join us. February meetings will be on **Thursdays 5th and 19th at 2.30pm**.

Anne Oxbrow

Some of the Work Party's output →

Christian Aid Collection 10–16 May

Christian Aid continues to be well supported at Greenbank but we need to sustain this momentum as our thoughts turn to this year's house-to-house collection in May.

Last year's total for the house-to-house collection amounted to **£3,802**. Although Christian Aid week seems some time away, preparation work is starting now and, as always, we need a team of collectors to cover all the streets in the parish. Thank you again to those who collected last year and I hope that most of you will be able to collect again. I shall be contacting you over the next few weeks but for anyone who is thinking of retiring and/or has already booked a holiday for the above dates I would be glad if you could "ask a friend" to take over your houses, preferably before I speak to you!

Inevitably I will need some new collectors to share the load. Please contact me if you would like to play a part in this important mission. It takes up to about an hour to deliver the envelopes and about 3 hours collection time through the week. Most people do this over 2 early evening slots and sometimes couples take on an area between them. There is a Collector's Guide with plenty of useful information given to every collector.

I am also looking for administrative help nearer the time to assist me in preparing the envelopes for collectors and also for counting up at the end.

Last year we had a follow-up 'party' to share our experiences and as a thank you for helping out – a massive additional incentive!

Pam Jack (Email pamelajacko6@gmail.com)

Friendship Club

Did you know that in 1886, Edinburgh had a "Great Exhibition" occupying at least two thirds of the present Meadows and on a par with the one at Crystal Palace in 1851? We learned all about it at our opening meeting of the year from Graeme Sutherland, our enthusiastic speaker; amazing and fascinating.

But now we look forward to our February meetings. On the 4th Ewan Hastings will enlighten us about the **Eric Liddell Centre** – its beginnings and ongoings. Kathleen's musical afternoon on the 11th, **Voices**, will surely feature solo and choral works, then on the 18th we're off to **Newhaven** with John Hackland.

Val Smart



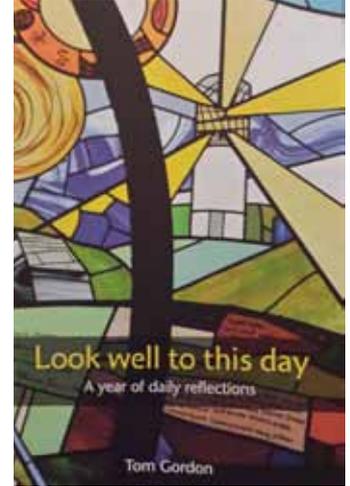
Book Review

Look well to this day: A year of daily reflections

By Tom Gordon

Wild Goose Publications (£13.50) ISBN 9781849523011

Having read Tom Gordon's previous books I was intrigued to discover his latest offering, a volume of insights and inspiration with a page to be read each day. Each page has a subject and a quotation, then a story and finishes with a thought, poem or quotation for reflection. Some of the stories are humorous and make one chuckle – or laugh out loud; others are more serious contemporary tales. Many are reminders that one is not alone in dealing with difficulties. Some of his reflections come from his personal experiences or from his years as a parish minister, others from fables or historical incidents. Throughout the book you are prompted to "look well" to the insights and inspiration you might need to get through a difficult day. Tom's wisdom and thoughtfulness provide a rich anthology of meaningful illustrations, and thoughts to carry with you.



The title of the book comes from a poem, "*Look to this day for it is life, the very life of life*", attributed both to the writings of Rabindranath Tagore, the Bengali poet who won the Nobel prize for literature in 1913, and to Kalidasa, a 5th century Sanskrit writer. Tom includes the full poem in his introduction, and at the end of the book an index by subject which certainly helps find especially meaningful stories so you can read them again.

Tom's stories are so well written, easy to read and thought-provoking that I have no hesitation in recommending this volume.

Joan Ritchie

World Day of Prayer

Friday 6th March 2015

Every year on the first Friday in March, Christians around the world gather in small groups and large congregations to use the same basic form of worship, written by women of a different country each year on a theme chosen by the World Day of Prayer International Committee. This year the World Day of Prayer is on **Friday 6th March**: a service will be held in **St Peter's Roman Catholic Church at 10.30am**. This service has been prepared by the women of the Bahamas and the theme is "*Do you know what I have done to you?*"

There are two Bible studies in preparation which will be held in 121 George Street at **10.30am**. The dates for these are **Friday 13th February** and **Friday 27th February**. There will be a preparation service on **Friday 6th February**. A poster with these dates and details of the speakers will be on the notice board outside the church office. There will also be details of services taking place elsewhere in the city at different times.

Everyone is very welcome to come to the Bible studies and especially to the service itself on Friday 6th March 2015.

Margaret Barrowman

The God Question

Five weeks to explore the relationship between faith and science



Monday 23rd February to Monday 23rd March, 7.30pm–9pm
Refreshments served from 7pm
Braid Room, Greenbank Church Halls

It has been suggested that the beginning of the 21st Century has seen a rise, especially in Western Culture, in cynicism about God and contempt for those who profess belief. Frequently, science is deployed by atheists as their chief weapon. There is an underlying assumption here that what is real needs to be established by science alone. But is this a valid assumption?

- What is the evidence for the existence of God?
- How do we understand the relationship between God and science?
- What can creation, evolution and the human mind teach us about God?

The God Question is a series of programmes, originally developed for broadcast and since refined for personal and group studies, which aims to give a unique opportunity to think through the important evidence for God's existence. World renowned contributors to the debate introduce and unpack the key issues. The ultimate aim of the series is to provide information and reasoning on which we can base our own judgements about God's existence.

The first evening, on **Monday 23rd February**, will be led by the Rev Professor David Fergusson, Principal of New College, who will also be preaching in Greenbank on **Sunday 22nd February** when he will introduce the theme under discussion.

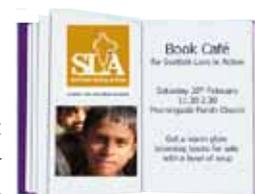
Interested? If so, come along, watch the programmes, share in the discussion – or just come along and listen.

Support materials for the series of programmes can be found at www.thegodquestion.tv/explore.

Material for the March *Leaflet* should be delivered to the Church Office or to the Editors' pigeon-hole in the Main Hall by **Sunday 8th February** or sent by e-mail by **9am on Tuesday 10th February** to greenbankleaflet@googlemail.com

Book Café for Scottish Love in Action

Lunch for a Good Cause



There will be a Book Café to support Scottish Love in Action on Saturday 28th February from 11.30am–2.30pm at Morningside Parish Church, Cluny Gardens.

Come and get a warm glow while browsing our book sale with a bowl of soup for a good cause.

Tickets are £6, which includes soup and bread and tokens for two books.

Tickets are available in advance:

- from the Scottish Love in Action website shop at <http://www.sla-india.org/book-cafe.aspx>
- or by emailing slabookcafe@googlemail.com
- or by leaving a telephone message (0131 447 4694)

De-clutter for a good cause! If you would like to contribute books to the sale, we will collect them from you. Please email slabookcafe@googlemail.com or telephone to arrange for collection. **We would like fiction and non-fiction, adult and children's books, DVDs and CDs.**

We look forward to seeing you and your friends for an enjoyable afternoon.

Fun Bridge Drive

A fundraising event in aid of Scottish Love in Action will take place on **Thursday 12th March** in Mortonhall Golf Club.

This will take the form of a Fun Bridge Drive. There will be a maximum of 24 tables, each table costing £40. Afternoon tea will be served (included in the cost) and a raffle will be available.

It is expected to start at 1pm for 1.30pm and finish at 4.30pm.

Tables will be available but, for those taking part, please bring a table cloth and cards for your table.

If you would like a ticket, please contact **Keith Clark**.

Spectrum and Springboard

Offerings in 2014

The Offerings collected at Spectrum and Springboard during 2014 totalled **£558**. As is the custom, the members of Springboard and Spectrum 3 were asked how they wanted the money to be used.

This year, Spectrum 3 again chose to sponsor a child through **Plan International** and then nominated that the balance go to support the **UNICEF Ebola Appeal**. Springboard chose to allocate amounts to **Sightsavers**, **Sick Kids** and **Toilet Twinning**.

£12 per month has been paid to Plan International, £111 to UNICEF, £140 to Sightsavers, £40 to Sick Kids and £123 to Toilet Twinning.

In addition, the Spectrum 3 Lunch held in March 2014 raised **£700** which was donated to **St Catherine's Convent** to support their work with the homeless.

Thus, in total our young members must be congratulated for having raised **£1,258** for charities during 2014.

Ian Thomson

Congregational Register

Omitted from the Online

version of the Leaflet

Welcome Teams

February

- 1 **John George**, Rhian Ferguson, Tony Foster, Alastair Hunter, Hazel Macaulay, Kathleen Patrick, Dorothy Whitehead
- 8 **Ian Thom**, Charles Black, Keith Clark, Ray Dely, Kay Ellis, Catherine Hardie, Elizabeth Htet-Khin, Anne Oxbrow, Greig Scott, Isobel Thom
- 15 **John Rutherford**, David Allan, Richard Denison, Caroline Kehoe, Anne Kinnear, John Mowat, Jean Roynon-Jones
- 22 **Donald King**, Brian Barron, Walter Crosby, Donald MacLeod, Roderick Morrison, Kathryn Sangster, Mairi Stevenson, Jim Young

March

- 1 **Rosemary McCulloch**, Rona Ferguson, Fiona Grant, Christina Morrow, Alison Murison, Malcolm Reid, Joan Ritchie, Alastair Ross, Toby Tucker

Coffee Rota

February

- 1 Edith Armit (D12A)
- 8 SLA
- 15 Joan (D27/D45) & John Ritchie (D5)
- 22 Moira Davidson (D31B)

March

- 1 Communion



Crèche Rota

February

- | | | |
|----|------------------|-----------------|
| 1 | Jenny Wright | Hazel McLachlan |
| 8 | Lucy Teall | Sharon Hamilton |
| 15 | Rosemary Collier | Shona Murray |
| 22 | Liz Foster | Isobel Thom |

March

- | | | |
|---|-------------|--------------|
| 1 | Carrie Reid | Jenny Wright |
|---|-------------|--------------|



Flower Rota

Provided by

Delivered by

February

- | | | |
|----|------------------|----------------|
| 1 | Innes Family | Janet Edwards |
| 8 | Sheila Macdonald | Katy Maguire |
| 15 | Ishbel Emery | Caroline Kehoe |
| 22 | Jean Dely | Helen Aitken |

March

- | | | |
|---|------------------|--------------|
| 1 | Isobel Aitchison | Fiona Connal |
|---|------------------|--------------|



Greenbank YACHT Campaign

For the last few weeks postcard size information on how to make a donation to the YACHT Campaign when making purchases online has been available in the pews. The information on how to make a donation this way is repeated below. Now the Christmas rush is over it may be that you are thinking of well earned holidays and breaks. If so then don't forget that many holidays, flights, trains, ferries as well as travel insurance can be booked through the [easyfundraising](http://easyfundraising.org.uk) site and a donation made to the YACHT campaign at no cost to yourself.

Just take the following steps:

- go to easyfundraising.org.uk
- click on "support a good cause" and find **Greenbank YACHT Project**
- create a personal account (first time only)
- click to the retailer website of your choice
- order travel or goods as normal

It sounds simple and painless – and it is!

Jim Young

FAMILY TIES

“Who do you think you are?” is a very popular television programme. In over one hundred episodes it has traced the ancestry of a variety of celebrities, very often discovering secrets and revealing surprises from their pasts. It has encouraged many people to research their own family history, to find out more about previous generations and to construct a family tree. To assist them in their quest there are now many resources available, both in print and online. And the commemoration of the outbreak of The Great War has prompted many people to investigate afresh their connections with the men and women most affected by it.

According to the Gospels Jesus once asked a question about his family: *Who are my mother and my brothers?* Taken out of context, this sounds very like the kind of enquiry family researchers might make, especially if for some reason or another they have been separated from their birth-family at an early stage in life. However, on the lips of Jesus it is a completely different kind of question. It is not the kind which simply seeks information but raises issues and extends understanding.

This question was asked when Jesus was facing mounting opposition to his work. He had called his disciples and had begun his public ministry. He had received an overwhelmingly positive response from the crowds, but at the same time the religious leaders had become increasingly critical of his words and actions. Even at this relatively early stage they were determined to get rid of a man whom they regarded as a holy innovator. As if this was not bad enough, Jesus had to cope with disbelief within his own family.

We know very little about the family of Jesus. Did the Gospel writers have some information about Jesus’ family? Even if they did, they may not have felt that domestic details of this kind would be of great interest to readers a generation after the crucifixion. Nowadays we eagerly grasp at any crumbs of information which may shed more light on the sketchy outline of the life of Jesus which the Gospels provide. Joseph of Nazareth is not mentioned in the incident which led to Jesus asking about his true family. Perhaps he was already dead by this time. Elsewhere the brothers of Jesus are named as James, Joses, Judas and Simon. And sisters are also mentioned, but not named. Surprisingly, since the fourth and fifth centuries some theologians have claimed that Mary had no children other than Jesus and that these siblings of Jesus were either children of Joseph by a previous marriage or cousins. This belief, although contrary to common sense and the Scriptures, reflected a resistance to the belief that Jesus was fully and totally a human being and sought to preserve the uniqueness of Jesus by emphasising the perpetual virginity of his mother. The Gospels, however, show us Jesus as part of a human family, who came looking for Jesus when he had returned to his home town.

This was not a social call. Jesus’ family were not so much concerned about his well-being as embarrassed by his actions and claims. Because Jesus was surrounded by so many people, the family could not get near him. Jesus was told, *Your mother*

and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you. They were indeed outside. They were outsiders. Jesus has become a stranger to his own mother and his own brothers and sisters. We are not told whether he met them or what passed between them if he did. Instead he replied, *Who are my mother and my brothers?* And then we can picture Jesus throwing his arms wide as he gathered his mother and brothers and sisters together with all the people sitting and standing around him to give the astonishing, indeed shocking, answer to his own question: *Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.*

Who are my mother and my brothers? To some this may sound disrespectful, as if Jesus had disowned his mother and brothers, as if he were rejecting the family that was once his whole world, but that is not the case. There was undoubtedly tension between the family and the one member of the household who had left home and embarked on the unsettled life of an itinerant preacher and healer. But Jesus did not belittle his family ties. Nor was he against loving one’s family (after all, he spoke of loving one’s enemies!) He did not ask this question to disown his mother and brothers, but rather to set the stage for expanding the concept of family. And he expanded it to include all those who do the will of God.

This does not mean the end of families as we know them. Even in a society where marriage seems to be increasingly less popular, children will continue to be born into families. The family is not intrinsically evil. It is a powerful force in most lives, defining us from our earliest moments. It shapes our hopes and aspirations and helps us to pursue them. It teaches us how to live with others and influences our expectations of all future relationships. But family life, even at its very best, is not perfect. In common with all human institutions and relationships, the family is created by God and so is intended to be holy and just and good; however, in common with all human institutions and relationships it is still a work in progress and requires the transforming grace of God to become a true partnership of love. Only so can we speak of human families and God’s family in the same breath.

Jesus loves everyone. As he began to understand more fully his God-given mission to heal the broken, to reconcile everyone, to save humanity, his heart widened to embrace the whole human race. He has compassion on everyone. He wants all of us to do God’s will by hearing God’s word to us and to our times and by acting on it, by sharing that compassion, by being compassionate as God is compassionate. He wants us to live as sisters and brothers, children of his loving Father and so to become his faithful, trusting, loving relatives. It is an enormous responsibility, a tremendous calling, a great blessing. We are empowered not only to do God’s will but to be Jesus’ own intimate family. So who do you think you are?

To read this question in context see St Mark chapter 3 (also found at St Matthew 12:46-50). The brothers and sisters of Jesus are mentioned in St Mark 6:1-6.