

# Baptist Union of Scotland

## Connect May 2020

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### How is God leading us?

By Martin Hodson

A sentence in Joshua 3 has been going round in my mind:

*Then you will know which way to go,  
since you have never been this way before. (Joshua 3:4)*

The second phrase resonates with our experience of living in the present crisis. We want to be God's people faithfully in these times, but we have never been this way before. We are beginning to settle into new ways of connecting and gathering, but where is all this leading?

The Israelites hear these words by the River Jordan, as they are about to cross into a new land. When they see the ark of the covenant moving (the symbol of God's presence among his people), then they will know which way to go. In other words, *God will lead them* and they will *move ahead together*.



This edition of Connect is a small contribution to considering both these ideas, as we navigate through the Coronavirus period. By sharing stories of how we are glimpsing God at work in and through our churches, we are hoping to help each other discern how God is leading us. The question we face is not simply what works? Or what do we enjoy? It is, *how is God leading us?* And since God has called us to be a fellowship of

churches, a community of communities journeying with him as partners, we can expect to learn from one another, so we *move ahead together* into the new things he is revealing in these strange times. Moving ahead together does not mean we all end up in exactly the same place (the twelve tribes ended up spread far and wide, with many differences), but they supported and encouraged each other on the journey and learned from God together.

### Peter & Nicola McFarlane – Baptisms and Transformations

*We continue our series of stories of transformation in the lives of people from within our churches who have come to a saving faith in Jesus and have publicly acknowledged this through baptism.*

*This month, husband and wife team, Peter and Nicola McFarlane from Tiree Baptist Church have given us their permission to share their stories of coming to faith and being baptised.*

*These baptisms have taken place within the last year or so and prior to the social distancing measures that have been put in place.*

### **Nicola**

I wasn't brought up in a Christian home, but I had Christian friends who seemed so peaceful and contented, and I really longed for that myself. Although I read the Bible and prayed sometimes, I wasn't confident enough to disclose my faith to anyone. Eventually, I developed such an aching hunger for God and I realised that I needed a believers' baptism. For me, it was the ultimate public expression of commitment to Jesus which I'd previously hidden from. Since my baptism I'm finding that He is gently showing me areas of my life which need improvement and with His strength I'm able to make these changes which is bringing me the contentment and peace that I longed for all those years ago.



### **Peter**

I'd been baptised as a baby because it was the done thing at that time, but it had no personal significance to me. As a youngster I'd gone to church because my pals were there and although I'd continued to attend church in adulthood I was never very involved. I started to think about believer's baptism when my wife mentioned it. I remember thinking about 1 Peter 3:21 and realised that I had not personally made a commitment to God. Since being baptised, I feel part of the church family and play in the praise band each week. I feel a greater sense of peace and am more willing to take a leap of faith as I gradually become transformed by His will.

## **From Orkney to Oban: Churches adapting to lockdown**

### **Seeking to be Good Neighbours in Orkney**

*By Tim Proudlove, Minister of Kirkwall Baptist Church*



Orkney hasn't had many confirmed cases of the virus, but many people have self-isolated with possible symptoms, and we are locked-down with the rest of the country.

In terms of our 'gathered' church activities, we have switched to live-streamed services, daily podcasts involving different people each day, recording of CDs, home Sunday school, young people zoom calls and videos, zoom book group, Facebook connect groups, Whatsapp small groups, zoom fellowship times, and remote prayer meetings. In particular, we are encouraging our church family to be on the phone regularly, making and keeping connections with each other.

In terms of our 'scattered' church activities, we are primarily seeking simply to be good neighbours in our families, workplaces, and communities, and some folk are part of the Orkney-wide mutual aid group. In terms of ministries that we are involved in, we have moved to a socially-distanced food bank, zoom vital talk counselling, telephone Orkney Christian healing, remote 24/7 prayer, post and telephone memory cafe, and Easter story videos for local schools. One particular problem up here is that it is difficult for people to travel from south for burials, and therefore we have been asked to help provide volunteer pall-bearers to assist the local funeral director.



As with most churches, we find ourselves acutely aware that folk who don't normally attend our services are 'tuning in' on-line. We are therefore working to make our services seeker-friendly, creating testimony videos from folk in our congregation, continuing Christianity Explored through zoom, and testing on-line Alpha. While this is a difficult time, we are very excited to have seen a couple of people come to faith in Jesus and request to be baptised when we start meeting together again - thank you God.

### **Looking for Ways to Bless Ellon**

*By William Butchart, Minister of Ellon Baptist, Aberdeenshire*

As a church we have sought to ensure that we can still encourage one another in our relationship with God and with each other and hope we can share the hope of Jesus with those around us in these uncertain times. We have adjusted everything to try and help this happen. We have moved our morning service to Facebook as a live broadcast and plans are in place for a Sunday evening study on Philippians. We have altered our house groups and prayer meetings from alternating weeks to weekly to give opportunity for prayer but also social contact and encouragement and are using Skype and other video services to make these happen.



The aim behind these is to remind one another of the hope of Jesus in these unusual times and also address as best we can the social disconnect that is occurring alongside increased vulnerability that people struggle alone. We are looking to use Skype and zoom for various opportunities to further connect together too. Our church building is currently being used

as a distribution centre for the Foodbank which we are working with to do deliveries to people in need. We continue to look for ways to bless and encourage the community and share the hope of Jesus with those around us.

## **Growing As A Community Of Faith**

*By Eder Goncalves, Minister at Leith Baptist Church*

Greetings from Leith Baptist Church to all the Scottish Baptist Family and beyond. It has been an incredibly challenging time for us, however, it is also a time of great opportunity for us to grow as a community of faith.

The first weeks were reactive and rushed. Our main objectives were to find our feet in these new and uncharted waters and ways to keep our people digitally and relationally connected. After exploring different ways to make sure the most vulnerable in our fellowship could be supported, we looked for a way to express who we are in an online platform.

The church is re-organised into several small groups called "HUBS", virtual house groups. The word hub was chosen because it speaks of our mission and purpose which is "to be a hub filled with the presence of God". Some hubs are meeting on Zoom once a week, and we have a whole church weekly Zoom virtual prayer meeting. Attendance is very encouraging.



"Mornings of Grace" is a live morning devotional which takes place weekdays at 8 am. We have online support, for parents and carers who come to our weekly toddler group. Over 50 crafts bags with Christian material were distributed to families around our church. A table placed outside the church has bibles, Christian books, CDs and flyers so people can help themselves. It is incredible how quickly the material needs to be replenished!

Our pre-service church prayer meeting continues at 9:30 am live on Zoom and has more than doubled its attendance. Engagement with our pre-recorded church services has been very encouraging. Afterwards, we have live fellowship, followed by kids' church both through Zoom. All is going well!

Lastly, we are starting a series of live interviews on Facebook and YouTube to promote hope! "Hope for today channel". We are now moving from reactive and survival to planning and thriving.

## **Everyone Has A Part To Play**

*By Stuart Lawson, Minister of Oban Baptist Church*



Whilst the COVID-19 situation has undoubtedly placed pressure on how we 'do' church, it has also been such an encouraging and innovative time for the OBC family. Technology has played its part, moving our Sunday AM services online, comprising of worship (which was filmed specially for this time the night before the lockdown was introduced!), prayer and teaching. We've invited the congregation, both young and old, to film specific Scripture readings which are then edited into the

iMovie Sunday Service, and different families are introducing the service each week via video from their smartphones. We've also become much more intentional in our daily engagement, posting daily devotionals to Facebook and disseminating them through our email list.

By the grace of God, we distributed the new church directory to the OBC family just before this all unfolded, and so along with picking up the phone to each other we've invited everyone to pray for the next five people below them on the list – we've heard many encouraging stories of how much this has meant to people, knowing that they are being covered in prayer during this challenging time. We canvassed the local neighbourhoods just before the lockdown with an emergency contact number, offering support to anyone who might need it over the weeks ahead, and through this we've been able to serve isolated people in the community with shopping and prayer.

We've also entered the final year of our three-year (one chapter a day) journey through the Bible, and as of the 13<sup>th</sup> April begun our journey through the New Testament. This has become the focus for our daily devotional on Facebook, with everyone able to add an observation from what they have read, using one of the five questions central to Big Life Discipleship. We hope to progress to Zoom prayer meetings in the coming week, and we're constantly looking to other churches for inspiration!

## **From Cornton to Castlemilk: Churches adapting to lockdown part 2**

### **New Skills and Practical Support in Cornton**

*By Hamish Wishart, Minister at Cornton Baptist Church*

Here in Cornton, Stirling we are drawing ever closer to the Lord and leaning on him during this time. We are missing being together but are keeping in touch with video devotionals on Ephesians (Tuesday and Thursday) and Psalms (Sundays - which also includes prayer and several songs). These are published on YouTube and on our Facebook page (new skills being learned by the pastor!). These are being passed on to family and friends and a growing number tune in. Our youth worker is producing resources for our children and young people each Sunday as well. Our prayer meeting is online using Zoom on a Thursday and the attendance has greatly increased, and our women's ministry "Cultivate" is meeting twice a month using Zoom as well. The church leaders are meeting each week via zoom and praying for the church family and our community.

The church leaflet-dropped the entire Cornton area (1,000 homes) offering support in any way needed: shopping, prescriptions, or simply a phone call. Several people have called and are being supported - two of whom came through referrals from Stirling Council and Stirling Voluntary Enterprise, so we are pleased at the links we have build up over time and the reputation the church has locally. An Easter pack (Easter storybook, Easter activity book, colouring pencils and chocolate eggs) was delivered to all the children who attend our weekly kids club (mainly non-church kids) and after Easter we started "CBC Kids Club @ home" on a Wednesday evening using YouTube. We are also partnering with the local Primary School to identify potential financial and practical needs with vulnerable families where we could step in and support.



## Maintaining a Strong Sense of Family

*By Mark Pexton, Pastor of Westwood Baptist, East Kilbride*

Like every church we are trying to adapt to try and maintain a strong sense of family. We have worked hard at seeking to maintain focal points for the church family to gather around together (albeit remotely):

- regular video reflections and messages
- Kids Zone Videos on weekday mornings - a song, activity, and reflection for all the family.
- regular news updates and devotionals emailed out to our church mailing list.
- all of the above also put on our open church Facebook page.
- Home Groups, Youth Club, Church Prayer Meetings continuing on online conferencing platforms
- an online communion time together on Easter Sunday.
- trying to maintain a sense of togetherness and socialising through quiz nights, church parties etc. on online conferencing platforms.



However, what has also become clear is that through the online posts and videos the church is currently reaching much wider than we did when we gathered in our building (something for us all, as churches, to be reflecting on when things return to 'normal').

Having said all the above – there are people (mainly elderly) who are not online – who must feel most isolated during this period. With them particularly in mind, we have set up a system whereby everyone in the church will be phoned regularly in order to check in on them. That having been said, a really encouraging thing when phoning people is to hear that many in the church have been keeping in touch with them anyway!

## Zoom Church in High Blantyre

*By Steve Younger, Minister of High Blantyre Baptist Church*

Here in High Blantyre we have embraced Zoom Church. Even though not everyone can access it, it has been invaluable in maintaining our sense of fellowship. Through our weekly Zoom midweek and Church service we worship together, study together and pray for one another. We are getting quite creative and had a Church Family Quiz on Easter Saturday that went really well. We are also making good use of the Church's Facebook page. One of our simplest and most effective witnesses there has been to post a daily prayer extracted from the Carmina Gaelica (the collection of Gaelic prayers and poems translated into English) matched to my photos from the Western and Northern Isles.



We have 19 members but these simple prayer posts are reaching several hundred people each day and leading to some lovely online contacts. And the good old-fashioned ways have come back into their own: a weekly pastoral letter and card sent out to everyone (either online or by post) and a round of regular phone calls. Pastoral visiting is still possible though it takes the form of shouted

conversations from garden gate to doorstep. It certainly keeps the neighbours entertained. And we praise God for the Hospital Chaplains who so readily take messages for us to relay to those in Hospital while visiting is restricted.

### **Staying Connected at QPBC**

*By Brodie McGregor, Pastor for Pastoral Care and Small Groups at Queen's Park Baptist Church*

We have looked to respond to the COVID19 crisis by asking three questions: (1) How do we as church stay connected and, in particular, look out for and connect with those who are on their own or are vulnerable within our church, (2) what do we do on a Sunday, and (3) how can we love and serve the wider community?

The response to the first question has been a mix of using old and new technology. Having accurate and GDPR compliant records for those who connect with us at QP has been invaluable, as has having ministry teams. Our response has not fallen on one person but rather has been a case of empowering and redeploying existing teams. Caz and her team have been connecting with our Youth on a Sunday and through the week via Zoom. Mairi has been phoning, emailing, messaging families. Iain and Brodie, along with our pastoral visiting team, have been phoning other people in our congregations, but with a focus on those who are older / alone. We have all found that people in the church are also phoning each other, expressing love and care, as they "look out" for each other. The net result of this is that we are in more regular contact with people than normal.



Early on we recognised that this is be a marathon and not a sprint, so with regards to what we did on a Sunday this, and what equipment we had available, framed our response. We also recognised that the "form" shapes what you do, so doing a church service on the internet needed to be different from in-real-life. This has been a steep learning curve, and we have changed and developed things as we go along. So, a Sunday is a live stream to YouTube we've called #QPLive, and is a mixture of bible readings, prayer and reflection on a passage. We've now added sung worship prior to QP Live.

How we serve the wider community when we are in lock-down has been vexing. Existing relationships with community groups means we've been able to get at least some of a picture of what is happening and where we can help. The church responded fantastically to an appeal to help fund food Glasgow City Mission is distributing and we are currently in conversation with other groups to see what helping and supporting would look like with them.

### **Connecting Families in Castlemilk**

*By Eileen Baxendale, Outreach Project Leader, Castlemilk Community Church*

When we went into lockdown at Castlemilk Community Church we didn't know what to do. We wanted to keep in touch with and help our volunteers and our asylum seeker young parents.

So, we set up a helpline operated by two staff who are local mums. We publicised our phone numbers and in week one we got three enquiries!

Castlemilk has a brilliant food parcel system in place so we weren't sure what our role was. But God had a plan for us.

"How's Carla\*\* doing?" I asked her Mum, who was on helpline duty with Carla, age 8, at home with her.

"Oh, she's fine. She's in her room playing games online with Ashley\*\* (*daughter of the other helpline worker*) on her Tablet. They've set up a chat group with some of their school friends."

It was a light bulb moment. One concern at lockdown was for Brisa\*\*. After six months as an asylum seeker in Castlemilk she and her four young children had become part of the Church. We rejoiced with her when she got refugee status and prayed for them to stay near us. However, she was moved to a high flat on the other side of Glasgow where they knew nobody, with little chance of getting to know anyone during lockdown.

So, we used our helpline start up grant to help Brisa. Taking expert advice from Carla's mum, we bought seven Amazon Fire Tablets for Brisa's four children and their close friends, another African family in Castlemilk. As soon as the gifts were delivered the phone started to ring "the children want to talk to you. They are so happy". Even better was Brisa's phone call two days later: "the children have all been using the Tablets. They played happily all day yesterday."

This was definitely a good idea, but rather expensive. However, God's timing is perfect. Two Christian funders offered grants specifically for churches reaching out to help people during lockdown. We asked, and they gave. We got grants for tablet computers and activity packs for asylum seeker/refugee families. Again, the phone rings on a Friday morning with the same message, "The children are very happy".



We've given tablet computers to 21 children and arts and crafts activity packs to many more. As lock down continues with Carla and Ashley's mums' phoning round, a need for food support is emerging from our asylum seeker volunteers and service users. We've started to help with this for families living just outside Castlemilk.

We went into this with no idea what we were doing. We're content that God showed us the way.

\*\* Names have been changed