

# stedfast

THE MAGAZINE OF THE UNITED FREE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

AUG/SEPT 2020

## The Cathcart Youth Ministry Partnership

Pages 12/13



## Personal Reflections on church during lockdown

Pages 14/16



## Overseas Committee Two new projects on the horizon

Pages - 6/7/8



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## Editorial

At a recent lunchtime Bible club, a child announced that God could not love him. When asked why, he went on, 'because God hates left-handed people'. How easily the truth can be twisted when we are lost in the shadows and not yet found in the Light. Shortly after this, an incident occurred that reminded me of what the child had said. While watching a mother wrestling with a baby in her left hand while enthusiastically engaging with her phone with her right, it struck me that if the baby were at her right hand then there would have been less of a struggle for mum's attention. The Psalmist (Ps 16:8-11) proclaims, 'I have set the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken... in your presence is fulness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.' (ESV)

In this edition of the magazine, the benefits of the technologies that many are increasingly using in the church environment are clear to see. However, over the past months, the world has changed dramatically and reliance on the internet in many walks of life has

drastically increased. Our high streets are becoming largely deserted, with even cafés and other popular meeting places struggling. The social media and online shopping giants are reshaping this world, with virtual gatherings and same-day delivery becoming the new norm.

It is now generally recognised that unhealthy relationships with technology can cause unintended destructive consequences; physically, psychologically and, worst of all, spiritually, as the time we have to spend online becomes harder to regulate. So, while 'All things are lawful... (we should) not be dominated by anything' (1 Cor 6:12)

As we reflect in the pages of Stedfast on our personal lock-down experiences and give thanks to God for the technologies that have allowed many of us to continue to 'meet' together, let us also pray for the self-control and perseverance to have Jesus Christ always at our right hand, that we may ever be found at His.

**Alastair Wright** | Stedfast Secretary



# Dunblane

- EVENT UNLOCKED -

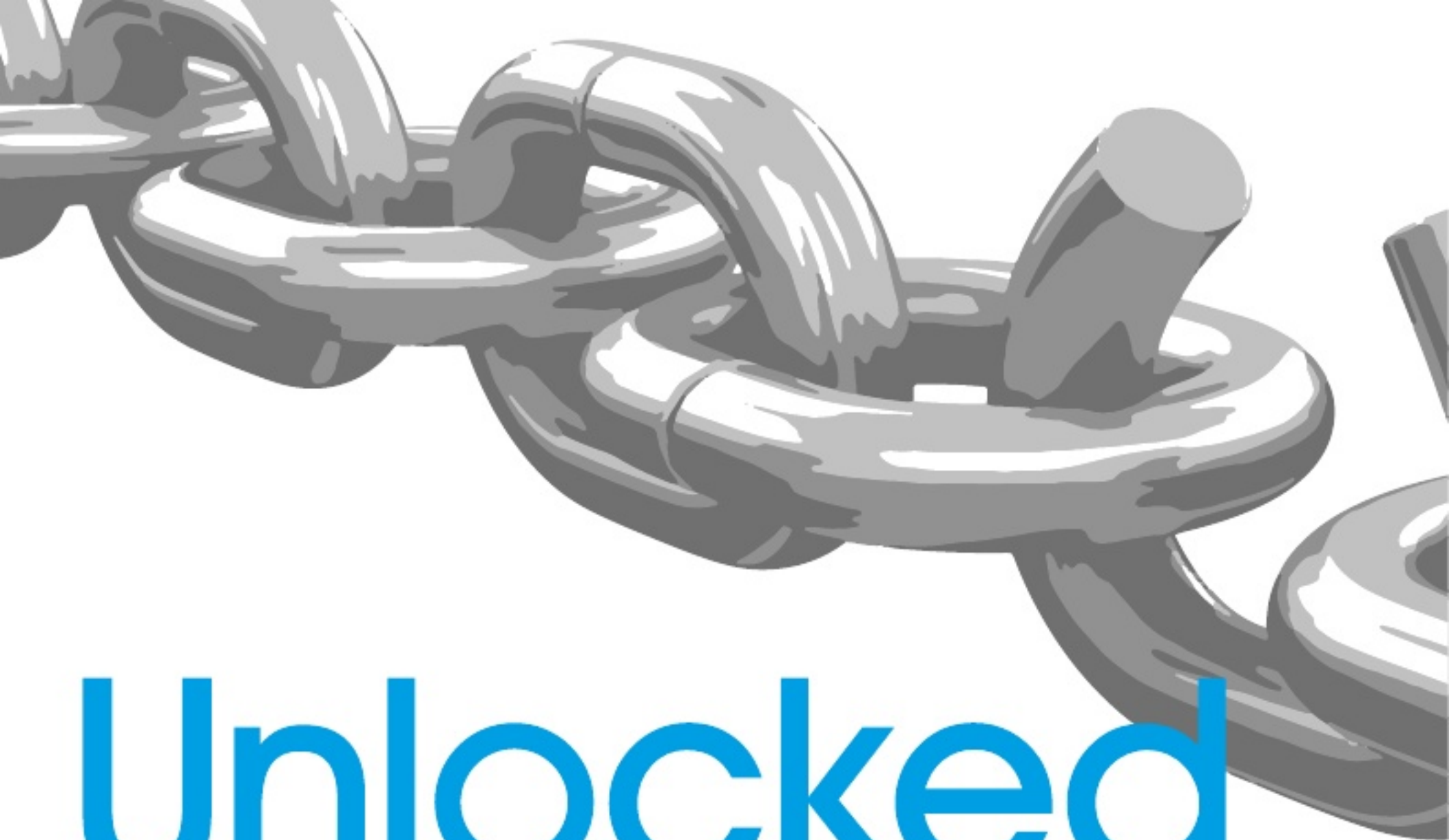
## OUR ANNUAL DUNBLANE EVENT IS CANCELLED BUT WE HAVE SOMETHING NEW TO LOOK FORWARD TO!

Due to the ongoing restrictions on public gatherings, it is with great regret that the decision has been taken to cancel the annual denominational event due to be held in Dunblane High School on 29 August. Many people from across the United Free Church and beyond, look forward to this gathering for fellowship, worship and teaching so plans are already being made for Dunblane 2021.

Good news, however, you don't need to wait until 2021 for anything to happen. There will be an online event for worship and sharing together on 29 August from 10.30am - 12noon. Please make a note in your diary and watch out for more details being posted in the next few weeks. You can read a bit more about the event on the following pages.

**ONLINE - 29TH AUGUST / 10.30AM - 12NOON**





# Unlocked

Each year the **Oxford English Dictionary** chooses its word of the year. This is a word or phrase which has burst into the **public consciousness** and common use in a particular year. It looks as if 2020 will give us plenty to choose from - **pandemic**, **coronavirus**, **COVID**, and the list could go on. One word which is a strong contender is “**lockdown**”.

**As I write this article, Scotland is just beginning to emerge from nearly 4 months of restrictions on travel and movement, and even from meeting up with people, in a bid to bring the potentially deadly coronavirus under control. It's been a strange and difficult time. For some it's been a time of sadness, and for many it's been a time of fear and loss.**

It's also been a time when churches have not been able to meet face to face. Perhaps one of the biggest losses has been that fellowship which comes from meeting and worshipping in the same building. We've also missed those chances to gather across the denomination, at the General Assembly for example. Even though, at time of writing, restrictions on communal gatherings are being eased, there are still limits on both numbers who meet and what they can do - physical distancing is still necessary, and singing

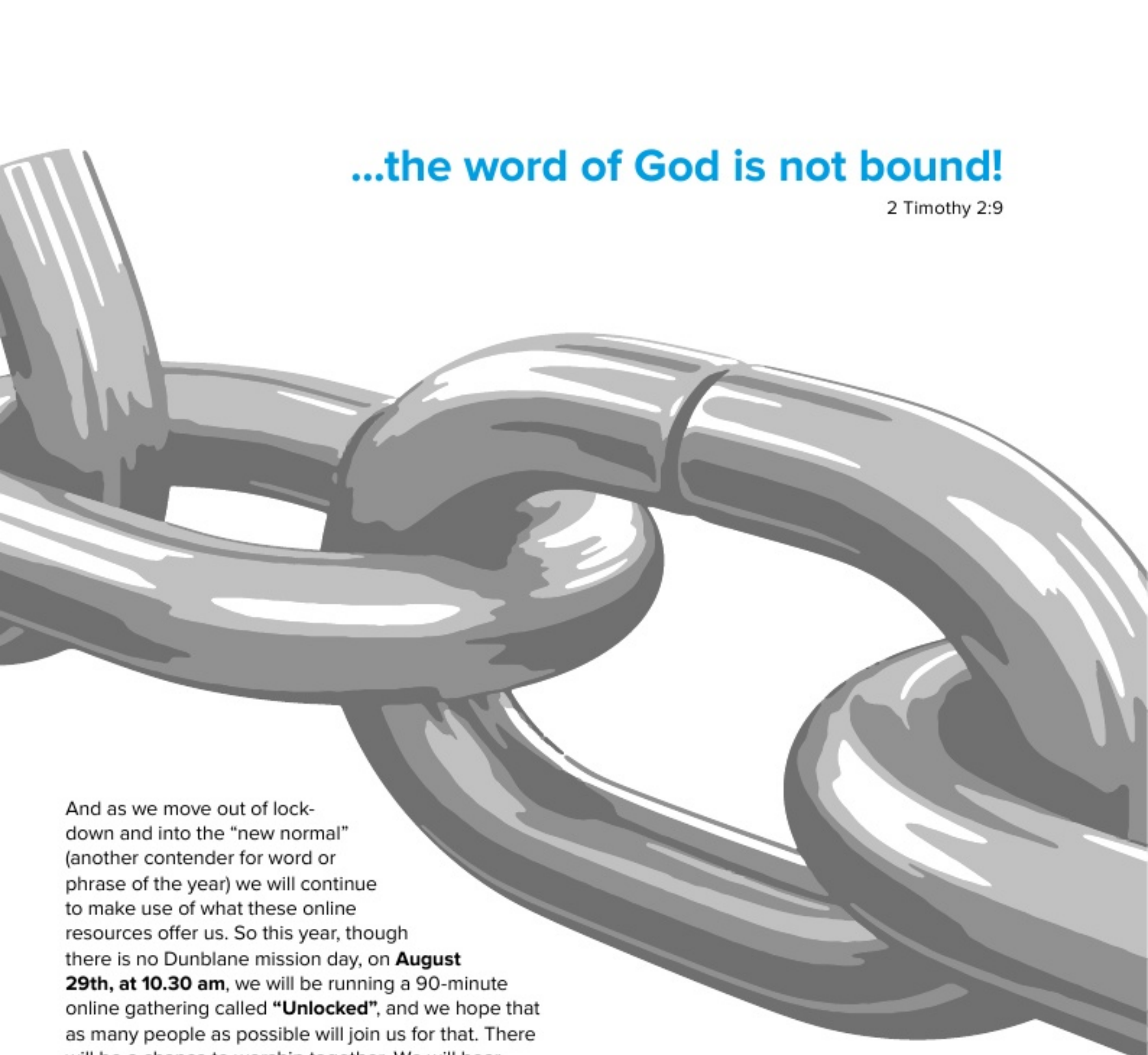
is not permitted. So, it's no surprise that, along with the General Assembly, our annual Dunblane mission day has also had to be cancelled for 2020.

But thank You God for the internet. That's not a prayer which many of us would have considered praying before the lockdown. However, for many congregations, the internet has provided tools, whether it be Zoom, Facebook or YouTube, to continue to worship and to have fellowship together. It's not ideal, and it has been hard for people unable to access online resources, but it has meant that many churches have been able to maintain their congregational life. It has also offered opportunities to try new things, and to expand the reach of our churches. Though for some of us it feels as if we have been dragged kicking and screaming, nevertheless, we have taken tentative steps into the digital age.



# ...the word of God is not bound!

2 Timothy 2:9



And as we move out of lockdown and into the “new normal” (another contender for word or phrase of the year) we will continue to make use of what these online resources offer us. So this year, though there is no Dunblane mission day, on **August 29th, at 10.30 am**, we will be running a 90-minute online gathering called “**Unlocked**”, and we hope that as many people as possible will join us for that. There will be a chance to worship together. We will hear from a number of key Scottish Christian leaders sharing their thoughts on how we lament the things we have lost, and how we identify and meet the challenges which face us, both in our churches and in our nation.

We will also hear from some of our own congregations about how they have responded to the challenges which lockdown presented. And together we will seek the Lord as we consider how to worship and witness faithfully and fruitfully in this new stage in our life. And there will be a time when we can meet up in small groups with others from different congregations.

2000 years ago, Paul experienced a much more restrictive lockdown than we are experiencing. In the midst of that, he wrote these words: “Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not

bound! Therefore, I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory”. (2 Timothy 2: 8 - 10)

“Unlocked” will be a free event, and we will be circulating details of how to sign up for it over the next few weeks. One of the great advantages of meeting online is that geography is no longer a barrier, so we hope that we will have people gathering from right across Scotland, and maybe even further afield.

See you there, as we consider together how God is leading us, that we too will experience the unlocking of the word of God into people’s lives and into our communities.

By Rev Dr David Miller



# Overseas Committee

## Two New Projects on the Horizon

In the coming months, the Overseas Committee is hoping to receive Denominational approval of, and support for, two new pieces of work with Flying Mission Care Botswana and Flying Mission Zambia. By way of background, we thought it may be interesting to remind ourselves of our history with Flying Mission.



by Rev Patricia A. Johnston

**The United Free Church of Scotland has enjoyed a long and constructive relationship with Flying Mission Services (FMS) since its foundation, in 1977, by Dr Malcolm McArthur. The original vision was, through aviation, to ease the burden of transportation for medical and mission work in the remote areas of Botswana, so bringing physical and spiritual help to as many people as possible.**

It has always been an inspirational vision of service, witnessing to the Good News of Jesus Christ in such a vital role and we give thanks for Dr McArthur's faith and commitment.

It has been a privilege and a pleasure to watch how FMS' services have continued to grow and change over the years in response to the changing needs





of the people of Botswana. This willingness to grow and evolve was never more needed than in the 1990s when HIV/AIDS became a serious issue in the country. In order to reach out to individuals and families affected by the disease, FMS, in 1999, set up an HIV/AIDS department which later became Flying Mission Care (FMC).

Continuing the Flying Mission vision of bringing God into the centre of daily life and decision-making, FMC's focus is on restored, healthy relationships – 'with God, with me, with my neighbour, and with the environment'. This commitment is carried out through working in partnership with individuals, churches and Non-Governmental Organisations, whose work has a primary focus on projects that address issues of discipleship, poverty alleviation and empowerment. Through collaborative working, the goal is to build a model that will enable their partners to realise their visions and objectives with a focus on, ultimately, becoming self-sustaining. This may be achieved by mobilising the local community, networking, channelling donations made to FMC, providing training (e.g. governance, proposal writing, and specialist training) and the placement of short-term volunteers.

With the continued development of Botswana, including the building of a more extensive road and ground transport system, remote areas were now more easily reached, so decreasing the need for Flying Mission core activities. That was not the case in neighbouring Zambia, where remote communities often had little access to medical (and spiritual) care. Again, led by a desire to bring God into the centre

of people's lives and communities, Flying Mission Zambia (FMZ) was born.

Throughout the years the Overseas Committee has sought to accompany Flying Mission, FMC and FMZ in its work. In 2019 we asked Damaris, in FMC, and Matthias, in FMZ if there were any particular projects they would like us to consider for support. This is how we came to know about LEBOGANG and the Airplane Instrument Replacement Project.

## **LEBOGANG**

A survey, conducted in 2015 by the Botswana Department of Social and Community Development in Bontleng and Old Naledi, revealed that 90% of orphaned or vulnerable children do not qualify for tertiary education. Even when vulnerable youngsters are entitled to tertiary education, early school dropout is common, and this has a significant impact on their prospects of economic independence. Often future income then depends upon them becoming part of the Government Programme 'Ipelegeng', a programme for unemployed Batswana. Lack of prospects often leads to unhealthy behaviours such as alcoholism, drug abuse, risky sexual behaviour (which can lead to teenage pregnancy; developing HIV/AIDS; STDs.). The majority of the Kgatelopele participants' families are struggling with one or more of the challenges listed above.

Besides the general challenges faced by families in their daily lives, there are additional issues for the extended family when they take on responsibility







for an orphaned or vulnerable child. Although the Botswana Government supports orphaned or vulnerable children (and their foster families) financially and with food baskets, it is barely enough to get through the month. Further research by African Havens identified 'economic disadvantage' as a major issue.

Female heads of families, who foster an orphaned or vulnerable child, are often the main breadwinner. LEOGANG, therefore, focusses on the empowerment and development of the skills of the female heads of families of Kgatelopele participants.

Participants will attend a day's training for 20 weeks where they will develop practical skills (e.g. craft making, book-keeping, market research and other topics related to setting up a small business) and discover their own creativity. In addition, sessions will focus on developing a healthy sense of identity and building healthy relationships - with God, self, neighbour, and the environment. Through these sessions the women will be empowered and given many tools to help them change their economic situation and improve the living standards of their families.

## THE AIRPLANE INSTRUMENT REPLACEMENT PROJECT

Flying Mission Zambia meets a variety of transportation needs in a country, three times the size of the UK, that has little road infrastructure. Medical staff, mission partners and NGOs rely on safe air transportation to travel to the most remote areas of Zambia. For this purpose, FMZ operates 3 Cessna aircraft.

A new and reliable GPS receiver is crucial for navigating safely to isolated airstrips, especially in conditions of



The **Garmin Artificial Horizon G5** is cost effective and saves maintenance costs

heavy haze and smoke that are prevalent from May to October. The current GPS receivers, designed in 1997, are no longer supported by the manufacturer. By replacing the old systems with new digital ones, not only will maintenance and repair costs be substantially reduced but pilots and outreach staff will be working in a much safer and more productive environment.

The Overseas Committee is excited about supporting FMC and FMZ in the development of these projects. Both projects will require substantial financial support - a grant of £1,800 has already been secured from the Pollock Memorial Missionary Trust for LEOGANG. In the coming months we will be sending out further information on how congregations and individuals can become involved in supporting these very worthwhile pieces of work. In the meantime, we would encourage the prayerful support of all the staff and clients of both FMC and FMZ.

We also produce bi-monthly newsletters where you will find up to date information on all projects and Mission Partners. The next edition will be available mid-August. Current and back editions are available on our website - [www.ufcos.org.uk](http://www.ufcos.org.uk)



**United Free Church Website**

# ufcos.org.uk

**Have you discovered our website?  
Are you making use of it? This is a  
valuable resource for both members  
and non-members of the church.**

The front page explains who we are and has a sliding display of news posts that you can click on for more information. Clicking on the options on the top menu will allow you to access information about our congregations, mission, youth and general assembly. You can even access the 'Blue Book' online. The website is set up to display on a computer screen, a tablet or a smartphone allowing you to access it wherever you might be.

We need your help because our website will work best if it is regularly updated with relevant information and images to keep it fresh so that visitors are more likely to return.

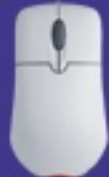
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Do you have any news from your congregation that you might want to share on our website?

Please email: [webmaster@ufcos.org.uk](mailto:webmaster@ufcos.org.uk)







# New Technologies & the Church

By Rev Dr Rob Barlow

On the **23rd March 2020**, the First Minister called for an immediate **stop to public gatherings** of more than two people in Scotland. As a result, the **corporate model** of church we have known for centuries **simply stopped** and we have been trying to adapt ever since. **Overnight** we were confronted with the unknown, the unimaginable reality that all gatherings for **worship, prayer, Bible study and fellowship** were simply not going to happen.

**The initial reaction seemed to be one of shock and grief, particularly amongst ministers. Hardly surprising, since we have never been this way before (Joshua 3:4), and we were not trained as film production, internet, and social media experts. Neither has our performance in front of a camera been evaluated! Yet by all accounts it seems that ministers, elders and members have risen remarkably to the unprecedented challenge that faced the church.**

Fortunately, the arrival of lockdown was anticipated, and by 18th March the UFC Re-Shaping for Mission Facebook Group was already discussing possible responses. Of immediate concern was how to continue to connect and support our members when face to face meetings were prohibited? The response has been energetic, creative, diverse, and very much directed at trying to keep connected. No single model has emerged, but the formal models of pastoral care via minister and elders suddenly took on a fresh importance. Beyond that, the informal networks of relationships were also energised with the desire to see that no-one would become fundamentally isolated during the lockdown. For the most part, these efforts appear to have been successful, though some members have certainly suffered from the lack of physical contact, meetings, and the regular pattern of church life.

The possibility of more extensive use of technology in Lockdown was also immediately obvious. Some ministers readily took advantage of streaming media services from church, office, or front room. Others used Facebook and/or YouTube, but everyone had to first take an inventory of their technology... camera, microphone, video editing software, etc. The technology inventory affects what can be done and how good the results are. Some churches had folk who could team up and deliver the necessary online services and meetings, others simply did not. However, it seems that whilst the challenge of producing video material was largely overcome, and well done, there remained the concern about fellowship. The problem with lockdown was not just how can we pastor from a distance but how can we have fellowship whilst separated?

Relationships of the type that we are used to cannot be developed or maintained for any length of time via an online experience, but it is clear that online technology is a powerful new means of keeping folk together. Lockdown has seen churches using familiar means of connecting i.e. via letters, phone calls, transcripts of sermons and prayers, daily reading notes, etc. which can be used by all, but the use of online technology enhances the possibilities dramatically. Provided the church has the technological means, it can produce



sound or video material for use via CDs, DVDs, podcasts, website, Facebook, and YouTube, either as static material or streamed live at advertised times. For those who have been able to gain online access, this material has been well received, and those producing it have been greatly encouraged.

However, it seems that the real success story of the day has been the use of Zoom. For those as yet uninitiated, Zoom allows one to host an online meeting where all the participants can see each other and contribute to the meeting. All the feedback I have had has been full of surprise and praise at its value. Whilst our Lord prefers us to be physically together, there is no doubt that even when we gather online in his name, he is there. Several ministers have also reported that they see new faces at the Zoom Service on Sunday, or at the prayer meeting and Bible Study. Clearly, online efforts have been fruitful, either in just keeping people together or in seeing new avenues of connection and fruitfulness.

Lockdown has caused us to have great concern particularly for those who are offline but, bearing in mind the pastoral networks that have been put in place, in general, they seem to have managed well. Perhaps we should not be surprised because they have lived offline all their lives and so they know how to manage. Nonetheless, what they do miss, and will continue to miss, is the opportunity to meet in church for corporate worship. Perhaps their loss is more acute than those who are online because the area where we ministers/pastors have had most opportunity to have an effect is online.

What has been a most interesting observation is that those who are used to being online have used online opportunities extensively, and generally seem to want more. Not only are they wanting to use the online opportunities, they are often willing to contribute too. It is this latter tendency which I have seen ministers most excited and challenged about. Not surprising really, since our revitalisation efforts are often largely directed at getting away from a minister led model of church to a more team led, or body of Christ approach to church life. I cannot help but think it likely that by virtue of being 'forced' online, we have rather serendipitously discovered, and gained access to, a collective energy that we need to take account of.

Lockdown has then caused the UFC to be online in a new way, and one must wonder whether we will look back at this time as being a tremendous stimulus to the church? In Isaiah 54:2 where the Lord speaks to the barren woman, he says *"Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide, do not hold back; lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes."* Overall, I am excited by what is happening to us. Until now the churches have been largely silent online, but now we are, for the most part, all online with new material each week. Perhaps we will look back and realise that in 2020 (if you have 2020 vision that's good by the way!) we started a mixed-mode of operations i.e. offline and online. The latter will not, nor should it, replace offline meetings because we are a relational people, but I quite like the idea that we might become known as media missionaries. Now there's a thought!

**Enlarge the place of your tent, and let them stretch out the curtains of your habitations: don't spare: lengthen your cords, and strengthen your stakes.** Isaiah 54:2







Cara Wightman

# the cathcart youth ministry partnership (cymmp)

Cathcart Youth Ministry Partnership (CYMP) dates from 2007 and is the joint youth ministry of Cathcart Baptist Church, Cathcart Trinity Church of Scotland and Cathcart United Free Church.

Cara Wightman has worked for CYMP since it began. In December 2005, she was appointed as the Youth Worker at Cathcart Baptist Church. In the Summer of 2006 and 2007, she was part of Cathcart Trinity's holiday club team. This relationship prompted conversations about partnership working and CYMP was created. CYMP's board of trustees is made up of nine people, three from each partnership church.

Cara's job changed in December 2007 when she became the Youth Worker for CYMP ahead of it gaining charity status in March 2008. Cara's job title changed to senior development worker in 2010 in the hope of expanding the staff team.

In March 2012 Craig Morris joined the CYMP team as a part-time Youth Worker and proved an excellent addition to the team. He complemented the existing activities and developed Lightspeed: Sports for All. After the summer of 2015, he moved on to become full-time Youth Worker at New Prestwick Baptist Church and is now the Glasgow Regional worker for Scripture Union Scotland. Craig is still in contact with CYMP and ran the Lightspeed programme during our summer holiday club week in 2019.

From October 2015 to April 2019 Andrew Brown was the part-time Youth Worker and continued Craig's passion for sports ministry. In Andrew's time with CYMP we saw him grow in confidence as he was given several opportunities to preach and to host holiday clubs. He also helped us develop valuable ministry links with Darnley United Free Church. The CYMP team was not surprised and hugely supportive when he left to pursue full-time church ministry.

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CYMP has an incredible team of volunteers of all ages. The best example of this is our summer holiday club. Because of size, diversity and skill set of the team in our holiday club week we are able to provide:

- **Five mornings - a holiday club with a café for parents/carers.**
  - **Three afternoons: - Lightspeed - Sports for All.**
  - **Four evenings - Youth Café.**
  - **Friday evening celebration - a varied programme which is hugely appreciated by all involved.**
- 

Since September 2019 Philip has been a trainee Children and Youth Worker through the INVEST programme run by the Baptist Union of Scotland. Philip has been involved with CYMP since primary school and is energetic, full of enthusiasm and loves music. His enthusiasm has really helped, especially when ministry moved online.

In March 2020, the weekend before lockdown, Murdo started as our part-time Children and Youth worker. Being tech-savvy with a love of science, he has been a fantastic help as we moved online.

On Tuesday 17th March CYMP became an online ministry. This new way of working continues to be a steep learning curve and we are encouraged by the young people who have chosen to stay connected. We have often had to think on our feet, but we are thankful we moved online as quickly as we did.



As the weeks progress, we have created a rhythm and the most popular activities are Zoom related:

- **Sunday morning - Fusion joint Bible class**
- **Tuesday evening - Illuminate and Kaio discipleship group**
- **Thursday evening - Kahoot! Quiz**
- **Friday lunchtime - Meet and Eat virtual get together**

These activities allow young people and their families to stay connected. Our Tuesday evenings have prompted big questions as we have been studying the book of Daniel.

Some significant encouragements through Lockdown have been the faithful attendance to our online groups, the delivery of our monthly goodie bags to the connected young people, and receiving nice cards and messages from people within the partnership congregations.

We are looking forward to our summer programme, especially our first ever online holiday club. CYMP are providing weekly goodie bags and a weekly Zoom call for the young people who register. We will also use the Wonder Zone online videos from Scripture Union Scotland.



**Murdo McTear**

Our weekly youth programme will continue during the Summer and we are encouraged by the young people's enthusiasm.

Ministry online has reminded us how much CYMP is committed to young people and their families. Online platforms have enabled us to remain connected and our monthly goodie bags have been a blessing.





# Personal reflections on church during lockdown

Introduction by Rev Colin Brown

**Back in March, when suddenly, we were no longer able to meet together in our Church Buildings, many of us wondered how we could still be Church when we were all confined to our homes. We could not meet or worship together - not even outdoors - yet over these last few months, different congregations have adapted to the new situation and been able to maintain a sense of being Church.**



We are still the people of God and His love for us has not changed nor has His Spirit left us. The truth of Jesus and what He has done for us is unchanging and God has not been limited by lockdown restrictions! And so we have continued to share and worship and experience His blessings. Some people have loved the new technology. It turns out that we can still worship God without having to go out in the rain and if you don't have your camera on or have a recorded service, you might not have to worry about what to

wear or even if you had combed your hair. You could make a cup of coffee, sit back and enjoy the worship. People who are usually busy with all the tasks that need to be done on Sunday morning to prepare for worship have enjoyed being able to just concentrate on the service. No need to worry about the people we need to speak to or the things we need to arrange. Others, however, have felt differently. For some people, it has only made them more conscious of being separated from others, increased their sense of isolation and some who are digitally excluded perhaps have been left feeling as if they are no longer part of the Church fellowship. Our experiences have all been different as has been our reaction to the situation but we have asked one or two people from different congregations to share with us their experiences and feelings about Church during the lockdown. Not everyone can relate to the positive feelings but perhaps the most important thing is that many of us have been reminded of what Church is actually about and what really matters.





### **Alison Scott - Murrayfield, Bannockburn**

Being a church organist, Sundays can sometimes feel like more of an obligation than a choice. That is why I have enjoyed the novelty of choosing my own Sunday morning routine during lockdown. I can get up at a leisurely pace, write out my daily verses into a journal, and then watch Murrayfield's service on YouTube with a cup of tea from the comfort of my own living room. The freedom of this set up has also allowed me to dip into services further afield, and to watch Sunday morning TV, so that I have gained a more diverse range of worship with which to satisfy my spiritual hunger.

My experience of church during lockdown hasn't only been as that of a viewer. When my 72-year-old Dad set up a YouTube channel for my church, I decided I would have to upskill myself if I was to keep up with him! I have been recording hymns, leading services, and putting together the videos that appear on our channel. I also seem to have acquired the role of 'Zoom Facilitator' for our virtual afternoon teas and fortnightly bible study group. I have enjoyed the opportunity to be involved in the life of the church in these different ways despite the fact that the doors to our building remain closed.

It has led me to reflect on how the church connects, not only at this time but beyond lockdown as well. As Christians, we often focus on how to bring more people into our church buildings and we commiserate over the falling numbers in our congregations. Yet what this time has taught me is that we may have been focusing on the wrong part of mission this whole time. We have reached far more people on YouTube and Facebook than we ever would have from our building in Main Street, Bannockburn. Perhaps that is because we have reached out to where other people are. We do not need to be shouting the gospel with a Murrayfield banner to connect to others. A quiet and consistent presence may be just as, if not more, powerful. God has shown me that His reach is big and mighty enough to overcome even a worldwide pandemic.

### **Adrian Rootes - Cathcart**

These past few months have felt quite strange not least in terms of meeting together as Christians. I remember many years ago as a student working in a summer camp in America and not being able to attend church for some 10 weeks; when I finally got to a church service I was so happy I wanted to eat the pews! Meeting together in Cathcart is still someways off but I'm so thankful for video technology which enables us not only to meet together for worship on a Sunday morning but also for prayer meetings, Kirk Session meetings, and for social events such as quizzes. We are very blessed in that we have an elder who is an IT manager and he heads up the team which facilitates our use of the technology. I find that the video technology provides so much more of a personal feel to meetings than would be the case if we just operated using telephone conference calls, though it does mean that you have to ensure the room in which you've got your laptop camera on is reasonably tidy!

Eventually, we will all be meeting together again in church but I think that in some ways this lockdown is a blessing in disguise for us all. The world in which we live is increasingly conducted on-line. That's not to say that people don't want to physically meet and interact but we need to be aware of these changes and take the opportunities for the Gospel that are presented to us; in the same way that Paul took advantage of the transport links created by the Roman Empire. This time of lockdown has also shown that video technology can be a great blessing to those who are housebound and can't physically attend church. We need to think of what we can continue to offer to them once our church doors open again.

Our God is one who is always calling us forward, wanting to move us on; let's not be locked away in an upper room somewhere but rather let us be engaged in taking the Gospel out there in the marketplace, whether actual or virtual.



## Mhairi McNaughton - Maxwell, Kilmaurs

My experience of church in lockdown is probably very similar to lots of others! The first Sunday of live-streamed church from the comfort of my couch, in my pyjamas with a cup of tea - just what we had always dreamed of! It turns out that we can still do lots of church activities while not in the church building. We can still read the Bible. We can still listen to ministers preach sermons. We can still pray. We can still sing songs of worship. We can even still have Bible studies (thanks to Zoom). We can still keep in touch with each other week to week through phone calls and texts. We have much to be thankful to God for in this time.

However, it has not all been easy! As someone who hates communicating through phone calls, emails, text (or even worse video calls!), it has been a challenge to enjoy fellowship with others. I have certainly missed the after-church chat over coffee with my church family. I'm sure I'm not the only one who prefers to talk face to face and maybe even offer a hug of friendship. There is something not quite the same about having conversations over the phone!

Despite this, I can't hide my amazement at how the church has learned to communicate in so many new and creative ways. Every Sunday (and at various times through the week) my social media pages have been full of churches promoting their different events and services. God has been at work through his people. Through ministers preaching to empty rooms with a camera. Through each and every person sharing a weekly church service on their social media. Through every person praying quietly at home.

Through every encouraging text or phone call. The church buildings may have been in lockdown. But the Church is very much alive. And so is our God.

## Rev Gordon Mackenzie - Lossiemouth

The news of lockdown brought the frantic rush to find a new way to 'do church' (for us that was services on CD and a Zoom Bible study) and then slowly the settling into a new weekly pattern. I have to admit to being slightly apprehensive of how things would work out, and being concerned for the wellbeing of the congregation, but people have shown their resilience and depth of faith through this time. Phone calls instead of visits became the norm, but just weren't the same as meeting people in their own homes, and standing in a cupboard recording without the congregation took some getting used to. However, even with all the strangeness of the situation, blessings became apparent. The services were now available to those in the congregation that were either housebound or didn't regularly attend, and we began to hear that the discs were being passed to others outwith the congregation. It is strange to think, and a testament to God's faithfulness, that his Word is reaching more people with the current restrictions than on a regular Sunday morning. Our story is not unique, as we have heard similar stories from others, and we give thanks that God is clearly using this time and experience to bless His Kingdom.

## Jenny Stirling - Cornerstone, St Andrews

- Church goes online
- Our home groups start meeting over Zoom
- Running every day on the empty golf courses
- Navigating unfamiliar technological challenges
- Early days saw me desperate to help, but how?
- Rediscovering spending time with the family
- Supporting those who were stranded on their own
- Taking on shopping for elderly in the town
- Observing the nation looking for answers
- New normal starts forming

- Every day in May is so glorious
- Student semester ends without any usual markers
- Time marches on and it's June already
- Advising Jared to take a break from Sunday leading
- Now able to walk outside with real human beings
- Deciding how, when & where to spend time with x
- Rain drenches golfers, walkers, cyclists, runners
- Easing out of lockdown almost harder to plan for
- When will my son be able to marry?
- Summer holidays are upon us...







# Post-Covid Church

By Rev John Fulton

**What will church look like following the Covid 19 crisis?**

**How different will it be to the church before the crisis?**

I have been asked to reflect on the **'Post Covid Church'** and how it might be - not that I'm a prophet! I should say I am writing this at the end of June, conscious that much may well have changed before you read it in August.

**Change is possible**

The church can change - and can do so quite radically in a remarkably short time! Do you believe that? Just look at what happened back in March when Lockdown was announced and within a matter of days, many churches had reviewed how they did things and introduced significant changes, both in terms of what we do on a Sunday and in how we carry out pastoral care. Some went further and were able also to develop new ways of engaging with their local community. It is a very long time since we have seen so much creativity and innovation within the church. Why did this happen? Obviously, the Government

announcement meant that, like many other activities, meeting together in church was no longer possible. However, we felt it was very important that people should be able to continue to worship - so we developed a whole range of options. Change within the church often takes months, if not years, but this happened in days! It soon became clear that we were in touch with many more people through these approaches than we normally saw in our buildings on a Sunday.

In the same way, churches reviewed how they did pastoral care and were concerned no one should



be missed. It may have been a while since we had stopped to think about how pastoral care could be done most effectively. Additionally, there was a recognition that there were people in our local communities who had to stay at home and needed practical help with shopping etc. Schemes were set up, sometimes organised by churches, but often organised by others and with Christians getting involved - we don't need to run everything and partnership can be good.

A great deal happened in a remarkably short time. Perhaps it was a blessing that it was not an option to keep on doing things the way we had always done them? There was no choice, we either had to do things differently or not at all. One of the challenges moving forward is that it is possible to try to go back to doing things the way we have always done them - and I suspect that will be a real temptation within the church!



## **What might Post Covid Church look like?**

It is premature to speak of 'Post Covid' because the virus will be around for a while yet and we don't know what its full impact will be. At least, for the time being, we will need to change the way we do things, but what about the longer term? Our world has changed - or been changed - as have communities, families and individuals, and the whole experience has been tough for many. It would be absurd for the church to try to be immune from all that - so what is God saying to us and asking of us? Don't get me wrong, I am not suggesting that everything should change beyond all recognition, but it would be a wasted opportunity if we didn't take time to think about what we do as we learn from this period of lockdown and consider the lessons God has been teaching us.

Are there things we shouldn't bother taking up again? Are there new things we should be doing or things we should at least change in some way?

I found the following questions helpful.

## **LOOKING BACK ON LOCKDOWN:**

1. What did we miss most about church?
2. Were there any things we felt relieved to stop doing, things that we wouldn't miss?
3. What kinds of support and activities were we offering in-person and online, and why?
4. Were there advantages to doing things in this way?

## **BEYOND LOCKDOWN:**

1. Are there things we were doing before lockdown that should not be restarted?
2. Are there things we have started doing in lockdown that should continue?
3. Are there new things that God is calling us to start?
4. Many people are now familiar with connecting online - how can we best use this new way of meeting in all areas of church life?
5. What may be the enduring pastoral needs caused by lockdown - economic, emotional, spiritual, medical - that we will need to respond to, and how will we do that?
6. How can we share the gospel with people in this new context?

*(Questions from 'Hope 15:13', part of the Baptist Union of England & Wales)*





**I'm giving more questions than answers because there is no one answer for all of us; each situation is different, so we all need to prayerfully consider what God is saying to us locally.**

We have missed being able to meet together in our church buildings but we have survived outside our buildings and continued to worship and care for folk. Do we need all our buildings? Are they fit for purpose in enabling us to do the things we believe God wants us to do? Should we consider reconfiguring them in some way? Are there things which would be better done online or at least away from the building? When lockdown came, we moved out of our buildings; as lockdown comes to an end, it would be a tragedy if we retreated back behind the church walls.

As well as thinking about the people in our congregation, even more, we need to think about people in our community and the impact the virus has had on them. Some will have lost loved ones and others have been seriously ill; people's mental health has suffered through this time; relationships have been strained and even broken; some face an uncertain future because they have lost their jobs and others have financial difficulties. How can we offer help, support, encouragement and hope to such folk?

How can we help them discover God's love for them and the difference he can make in their situation?

This can be a time of opportunity for the church, but it is also a time of challenge. As we begin to meet together

again, we may be aware of people who are no longer able to meet with us and aware of others who have been through a difficult time. Some congregations will have fewer people to do things and may face financial challenges because of a loss of income, putting their futures in jeopardy. Being aware that the virus has not gone away causes uncertainty about what might happen over the coming year. The next few months could be tough for some congregations and help may be needed from the wider church.

On a positive note, it has been encouraging through lockdown to hear of many people turning to prayer and it has been encouraging to have many different churches across Scotland uniting in a Call to Prayer every Sunday evening. This is not a time for us to stop praying, nor is it a time to stop doing things together. We need God and we need one another - and we need to pray, perhaps even more. Not least within the church we need to be open to what God is saying to us, and be willing to step out in faith with him as he leads us forward. Is that not what we did as lockdown came? We need to do that even more as we move on from lockdown!

No one knows what the future will look like for the church or any other part of our society. As Christians, we can have hope in our faithful God who loves the world, and to whom each person is precious. That's why it matters that the church is where people are and seeking to share Jesus with them through words and actions.



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# Tribute

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## Alex. Marshall

Drumchapel UF

Alex Marshall was originally from the East End of Glasgow and had made a commitment to follow Christ at the Billy Graham Crusade of 1955. He and his wife, Helen, soon found fellowship with a small group meeting in a school in Drumchapel. His faith grew and this small group became part of the United Free Church of Scotland.

He became the Session Clerk early in the life of Drumchapel UF. As the congregation grew, so also did the need for a building. In faith, they set out to erect a Church building and Alex, along with another Elder, Mr Bobby Hollinsworth, led the building work and the church was opened in 1964. Their trust in the Lord was rewarded time after time and there are many accounts of how God provided the finance and people with skills - all in His perfect timing!

Alex had a passion for the Gospel and for others not only to know of the grace of the Lord but to experience it. He and Helen often invited the young folk up to their home (in the grounds of Dalnottar Crematorium where he was the Superintendent). This home became a place of fellowship and encouragement and enormous lasting impact for many young people as they explored their Christian faith and received answers from the Word of God.

His love for Christ always shone through his prayers, his life and his conversation. Paul says we have this treasure in earthly vessels, we are people of clay and Alex had his failings but was a man of solid faith and true to the Word of God. He was always very supportive and encouraging to those in Ministry

and it was a great thrill to him when his son, Alex, entered the Ministry of the UF Church.

He showed his faith in many practical ways, one of which was in helping to petition for the establishment of 'Clare House' in Dunblane (which provides care for people with Prader Willi syndrome).

All who served and worked with him over the years can give thanks to the Lord for a man with a clear vision of Christ, a passion for the Body of Christ, and a desire for the lost to come to Christ.

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## Editorial Policy

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All Editorial Correspondence should be addressed to:

The Office - United Free Church of Scotland,  
11 Newton Place, Glasgow G3 7PR  
Telephone: 0141-332-3435  
Email: [Stedfast@ufcos.org.uk](mailto:Stedfast@ufcos.org.uk)  
Website: [www.ufcos.org.uk](http://www.ufcos.org.uk)

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