NESS BANK CHURCH

Congregational Newsletter

Winter 2026/27 - No 1032



Congregation Formed 1787

Present Church Opened 1901

True and Better



Ness Bank Church has a long history, stretching back to 1901 (the Building), 1787 (the Congregation) or around 30 AD (Pentecost!) We hope and pray it also has a great future, and that as we are blessed today, we can also contribute something to what lies ahead. These three time frames – past, present and future – are involved in all the choices we make, and the hopes and fears we have.

There is a great line in the hymn, "Be still, my soul":

… your God does undertake
To guide the future as he has the past.
Your hope, your confidence, let nothing shake;
All now mysterious shall be bright at last.

We don't need to know what will happen next, or have confidence that our own preparations and resources will be sufficient. We simply need to know that God has never let his people down, and is going to be with us for ever.

But things do get clearer as time passes. That is why the history of Ness Bank does not even really start in 30 AD (Pentecost), but long before, in Old Testament times. Jesus himself was Jewish, and what we call the "Old" Testament were the only Scriptures he ever read. He attended Synagogue services and Temple festivals, recited Psalms and quoted Prophets. He was the Messiah the Jews had been waiting for.

Of course, we know that many of his fellow Israelites did not welcome him: "He came to his own country, but his own people did not receive him" (John 1.11). Meanwhile others were more receptive: "Some, however, did receive him and believed in him, so he gave them the right to become God's children" (John 1.12). But we are not to think of God abandoning his plans and changing direction. Instead, he continues through the Church all that he began centuries earlier. In Chapter 11 of his Letter to the Romans, Paul pictures the people of God as a single tree: the trunk consists of Israel in the Old Testament; on to it are grafted all the different branches of the church today.

For a few weeks this Autumn we looked on Sunday morning at Old Testament characters – Adam, Isaac, Moses and David – not as moral examples to follow, or people from whose mistakes we can learn, but as pointers towards Jesus. He repeats what they did, but does

more of it, and does it better. By returning to these ancient stories, we get a clearer picture of what Jesus is doing in us today as we continue to receive his gift of eternal life.

That is not just a task for a few weeks. It is a whole lifestyle of understanding the Bible: the people of Israel become the church; the promised land is replaced by heaven; the Passover lamb and other sacrifices point towards Christ's death on the cross; King David is superseded by King Jesus; and the Exodus from slavery and return from Exile in Babylon prepare the way for our freedom from sin and return to Jesus to enter his Kingdom.

The past is a great place, full of exciting and inspiring Bible stories. But the future is like nothing on earth – bigger and better than we can imagine. And God is using all of his Word, by the power of his Spirit, to stretch our minds to grasp by faith what he is doing!

Blessings,
Stuart

Congregational Register

Deaths
Eva Aitken – 2nd August 2026
Mary Smith – 24th August 2026
Wendy Ross – 13th Sep 2026
Kathy Sutherland – 1st October 2026
Sheena Budge – 16th October 2026

Team thanks and notice of Next Issue

I am very grateful to the team which produces this newsletter, and want to take this opportunity to share their names with you all. Mary, whose mastery of the printing machine is complete; Esther who creates the Communion Invitations; and Helen, Sheila and Heather, who compile and label bundles for District Visitors to facilitate distribution. Contributions for the Spring 2027 Newsletter can be sent to me at any time, but no later than Monday 17th January 2027. The Newsletter will be available for collection by Elders and Visitors on Sunday 7th February 2027.

Elspeth Smith
Email: nessbmagazine@gmail.com

Ness Bank Church – a busy place; how does it work?

Our Session Clerk has taken some time to outline the structure of our congregation, and it is great to see how well-organised things are! We give thanks for these people, and pray for them to have wisdom, perseverance and to be able to fulfil their various roles gladly as they serve the Lord at Ness Bank.

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Congregations are at the heart of the Church of Scotland. They are local communities where people gather for worship, prayer, pastoral care, service and mission. The congregation at Ness Bank is led by our minister, working with elders who serve on the **kirk session**. The kirk session is responsible for the spiritual life and local leadership of the congregation. Its work may include worship, pastoral care, membership, mission, safeguarding, local outreach, financial oversight and supervision of the use of church buildings.

Directly below the kirk session lies the **Leaders Group** which has responsibility for ensuring that the day-to-day work at NBC is carried out efficiently and in accordance with the rules and regulations of the Church of Scotland. The Leaders Group includes:

- The Minister, Session Clerk and the Deputy Session Clerk.
- Shelia Proudfoot looks after pastoral issues.
- Barry Gilbert leads on property issues.
- Geoff Thomson has responsibility for communications and technical matters.
- Lillian Gilbert looks after our outreach programme.
- Joyce Muir leads on financial matters, representing the Finance Team.
- Margaret Livingstone looks after Safeguarding.
- Mary Thomson, who is our Administrator.

Ness Bank Church's vision is to be a church without walls reaching out in faith to our parish and beyond with the light, the love, the hope and the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ and we have a number of groups/teams/individuals within in the church providing various functions and doing so much to achieve this particular aim.

District Visitors – are an integral part of the pastoral care offered to members of our congregation. Typically, each visitor will visit designated church members once a quarter and deliver Communion invitations and the Newsletter, but also offer a time to chat or help where it is needed. Keeping the minister and pastoral care leader updated is an important part of their work.

The Sanctuary Project – As you know, the plan is that Ness Bank Church will be redeveloped into a more accessible and welcoming space for daily visitors, events and community gatherings. The sanctuary will be redesigned to include a café and heritage displays, giving visitors the opportunity to learn more about the church's history, beliefs and work in the local community. The project will improve the church's long-term sustainability by allowing it to host more events and exhibitions, and create additional income to help secure the future of the building.

To help achieve our aims a number of people are working hard to raise the funds needed, support the development and oversee the various processes.

- **Funding** Group – Stuart Smith, Barry and Lillian Gilbert, Malcolm MacBean, Geoff Thomson, Joyce Muir
- **Buildings** Group – Stuart Smith, Barry Gilbert, Malcolm MacBean, Ian Livingstone, Heather MacDonald, Billy Thompson
- **Mission** Group – Stuart Smith, Lilian Gilbert, Roddy and Janis Mathieson, Jane Wilson, Billy Irvine, Anne Sutherland, Stuart Black

Malcolm MacBean, Session Clerk

Harvest Foodbank appeal

This letter follows the Ness Bank donation to the Harvest appeal at the Highland Foodbank – your contributions have been noted and appreciated!

Dear Mary,

I wanted to write personally to thank you to Ness Bank Church for your generous Harvest donation to Highland Foodbank. We have been blown away by the support we've received from churches across the Highlands. We've received almost 2600kg of food donations for Harvest this year! Your congregation's generosity is part of that story, and we are so grateful for the practical difference your donation will make.

Between January – August 2026, we have supported almost 3000 people, helping individuals and families across the Highlands who have found themselves struggling to afford the essentials. Behind every food parcel is a person facing a difficult season, and your Harvest gifts help ensure we can continue to respond when people need us most.

As food and financial donations have arrived over recent weeks, we've been reminded of what Harvest is really about: communities coming together to care for one another. Seeing local churches rally around this work has been incredibly encouraging for our team, particularly as this is our first Harvest season under the New Start Highland banner.

Please pass on our thanks to everyone involved in organising your Harvest collection and to all those who contributed so generously. Whether they donated a single item or filled a bag, every gift will help bring practical support and hope to local people. We've attached a certificate to acknowledge your donation.

Thank you for standing alongside us and helping us care for our neighbours across the Highlands.

Kind regards,
Bexi Poole, *Foodbank Manager: 07730 208840; newstarthighland.org*

Inverness Foodstuff appeal

As you know, this organisation, which operates out of our church hall, depends largely upon volunteers to function – whether in the kitchen, front of house, collecting surplus food, or whatever! Although there are over 80 people currently registered as volunteers, we are still experiencing significant shortages of personnel week by week, and would love to welcome fresh faces across the range of volunteer opportunities.

If you know someone who has some spare time, and reasonable fitness, please do encourage them to contact the administrator, or the manager of the project, and find out how they can get involved. Contact them at: **invernessfoodstuff@gmail.com**

The Guild at Ness Bank

Our Guild session started on 20th September, with our Guild rededication service followed by the first evening meeting on 22nd September when Rev Stuart Smith gave us food for thought, as well as a catch up on the changes that we can expect in our church building over the next few months.

We have an interesting and varied syllabus which is available on the wall of the vestibule and would love to welcome anyone from the congregation to join us for any of the meetings that might be of interest. The project we are supporting this session is Bear Necessities, Build my Church. This is a partnership between the Church of Scotland Guild and Bear Necessities for Bulgaria, working to plant a church in the city of Sliven and reach those who have never experienced the good news of Jesus Christ before, by serving the community and meeting their needs with love and living out the blessings of the Holy Spirit. There is a leaflet on the wall of the vestibule with further details and the money from the soup and sandwich lunch on the 1st November will go towards this project.

Please come along to any of the meetings or contact Anne Sutherland to find out more.

The **Work Party of the Guild** continues to meet on every second Wednesday between the Guild dates in the small hall in the church at 10am. We are especially looking for knitters and wool will be supplied!

Baby & Toddler GROUP

The Baby and Toddler group continues on a Wednesday 0930 - 1130 and we have welcomed some new families since August. We have room for more though, so again, just come along or contact Anne Sutherland (contact number is on the back of this newsletter).

SAFEGUARDING in the Church of Scotland explained….

Why bother with Safeguarding - is it really necessary?
Though we might think that Ness Bank Church hardly requires all the red tape incurred by following safeguarding practices, the Church of Scotland has made it mandatory for all churches to follow a code of conduct that protects all vulnerable groups. To avoid people becoming hurt or abused within and outwith its walls, the practice of safeguarding is overseen by the Trustees, a Coordinator and a consultative panel.

What areas does it deal with?
It's primary focus is on keeping children safe in our care and also protecting the welfare of vulnerable adults in church, in their homes and in care homes. Other issues such as reporting domestic abuse and finding a safe way to reintroduce sex offenders to our church services are less common issues yet there is a procedure for both cases.

Is training involved?
Having read these statements you will realise that safeguarding is a serious matter. Yes, it does require training for members who are engaged in running groups but prior to that, disclosure checks have to be made. Once approved, volunteers are engaged in training sessions every three years. They often say that the training is both engaging and useful as it is designed to pose situations that are specific within our national church.

How do I know that information given over is in safe hands?
I hope you know that the Safeguarding Coordinator can be approached about any concern you have noticed that affects our members' welfare. This is handled on a strictly confidential basis. The underlining values of showing grace, integrity and respect for all parties concerned must be observed and a great deal of professionalism is required when collaborating with outside agencies.

On a personal note, I am by no means an expert in these areas, just someone trying to carry out the requirements set out by the Church of Scotland and I'm certainly not attracted to all the protocol! However, the abridged words of the songwriter Graham Kendrick chime with me when he says, "In our worship we should be looking around us and if there is need, we should show compassion in action."

Margaret Livingstone
Safeguarding Coordinator

We are required to display contact details and our safeguarding policy clearly on the premises, and in addition to the details on the back page of the newsletter, you can find them on the noticeboard outside the large hall.

Familiar Faces in Ness Bank

This month, we hear from Finella Thomson – also known as The Flower lady!

I was born at Bothyhill Farm, Allanfearn, in 1931, about 3 miles from Inverness, the 6th daughter to Jessie Anne and Donald Maclean, and grew up in the countryside – latterly at Dunain – immersed in the seasonal labours of farming, and family life. I learned early to love the open spaces, and the flowers and produce which grew on the land, and which we foraged from the woods and thickets. I was named for a redoubtable aunt, a sister of my father, who was the first woman in Inverness to drive!

I took to hairdressing as my trade after leaving school, and went into a salon in Inverness, where I met Leslie Thomson, whom I subsequently married in 1951! The business which Leslie later established became very successful, and between the long hours which he put in there, and my work in raising our 3 boys, we were very happily occupied for many years.

It was our marriage which brought me to Ness Bank, where I have been ever since – now 75 years – and where we became part of the church family, involving the boys in BB and Sunday School, when we weren't pursuing the wide range of sporting activities which we all loved – golf, curling, swimming etc – or spending time at the caravan at Mellon Udrigle.

Early in my married life, I took to attending the Inverness Floral Art Club, and continue to do so – now with 74 years under my belt! I love the creativity of working with flowers to combine colour and form, to prompt joy in those who see the arrangements, and this passion has brought me many happy hours – alone in the church, and elsewhere – and great satisfaction. I think I have been responsible for flower displays in almost every church in Inverness! But there were also 23 years of arrangements for the Golf Club, and 15 years for the Highland Hospice. The latter was a very special ministry, bringing me into the private rooms of people in the last days of their lives, to share beauty and a quiet word – it was a privilege to do this.

'Doing the flowers' at Ness Bank has been my pleasure for over 55 years, and as convenor of the Flower committee since 1992. I am grateful to those who pay for flowers – since, contrary to popular opinion, the church doesn't fund that purchase! I have a great team around me, and appreciate sharing the work, especially the ministry of delivering bunches around the city after we dismantle the arrangement on Sunday morning. It is getting harder and very expensive to obtain both quality flowers and the materials we need, but we manage somehow, and I am so thankful to be able to still create displays for weekly services, funerals, weddings and other special occasions.

In addition to personal flower arranging, and attending demonstrations at the Floral Art club, I have enjoyed trips to national and even international shows – one particularly memorable one to Japan was a revelation! I was so impressed with the 'Bullet trains' and hugely enjoyed the beautiful gardens which we visited in addition to attending the

International Show event itself. Another world flower show took place in Barbados – and of course, I enjoyed that trip too!

The Ness Bank walking group – organised and hosted for many years by John and Aithne Barron – was always an enjoyable occasion, creating opportunities to enjoy one another's company as well as the beauty of our countryside. I have also had the pleasure of creating cakes for many special occasions down the years, from baptisms, to Golden and even Diamond wedding cakes. It is good to have friends to make beautiful things for!

My life has been a quiet one, always near or in Inverness and I still live in the family home – managing somehow to keep growing and harvesting my potatoes, leeks, onions and fruit, and of course to grow flowers! I am thankful for the presence of our extended family close by, having lost Leslie in 2003, and for the health which enables me to live independently, to swim every day, and drive and generally keep busy and happy at home and in the garden. I have enjoyed some terrific holidays abroad – Rhine Cruises, visits to Vienna, Rome and Madrid with family to celebrate birthdays – and also revisiting Seamill Hydro to revive memories of family holidays from years ago. Good friends have come alongside me over the years, and I remember with thankfulness those who have died and gone before me.

I am so thankful for my parents, and the start I had in life; for Leslie and all that we had together; and for the communities where I still belong – my swimming friends, my fellow floral artists, my family (there are now great-grandchildren on the scene!), and my precious Ness Bank family, many of whom have shared decades of life with me.



[Editor's note: when I persuaded Finella to share something of her story with me, she protested that hers had been a 'quiet life' – at which point, this verse from the letter of Paul to the church in Thessalonika came to mind! I think we can all agree that a 'quiet life' has much to commend it, and that Finella is a good example of how to do it!]

Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody. (1 Thess 4.11&12)

BEETLE DRIVE



A great social night was held in September. We had a Beetle Drive which some folk knew how to play, others had never played and some made up the rules as they went along!



If you can throw a dice, draw a vague circle and draw a line, you had the skills to play. Moving tables after each game, provided everyone to get a chance to mix and chat with people they maybe knew by face, but perhaps hadn't blethered to before. And refreshments at half time provided a chance to enjoy fabulous home baking and another wee blether.

Watoto update

You may recall the visit of Watoto Children's Choir last summer, when the church was filled with energy, music, and hope as we shared the joy of faith in our living God, and his power to change lives. We have received a warm letter of thanks, celebrating the offering of over £2,000, the signing up of new sponsors, merchandise sales raising over £800, and people committing themselves to Jesus as Lord of their lives.

It is good to know that these events not only raise vital funds for the work in Uganda and South Sudan, but also bear fruit for people here in Inverness, and we pray that those who came to faith during the UK tour of the choir will have been supported and be growing in their love for Jesus, and seeing their lives changed.

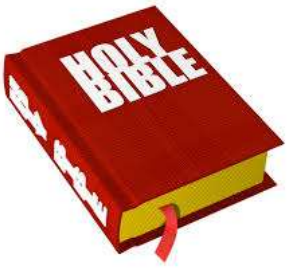
We are also delighted to know that the choir will return in late spring of 2027, probably on a Saturday afternoon this time, and will be hosted by the Free North Church as our sanctuary space will – we trust – be in the throes of redecoration!

Blythswood *SHOE BOXES*

Many thanks to everyone who helped with this year's appeal. From wrapping boxes, filling boxes, bags of donations, money in the tub and transporting them to the depot, it will be very much appreciated. Everything has now been dropped off at the Blythswood depot in Longman Road, each box will now be checked and then sent on the journey to reach recipients for Christmas. They bring so much joy to those that receive them. It is wonderful the support we are able to give to this appeal.



Ness Bank Church Bible Readings and Prayer Prompts for Winter 2026/27



This mini-booklet is designed for you to pull out of the church newsletter and keep, so that you can use it in the coming weeks to assist you in bible reading and in prayer.

There's nothing like the written word of God for showing you the way to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. Every part of scripture is God-breathed and useful one way or another – showing us truth, exposing our rebellion, correcting our mistakes, training us to live God's way. Through the word we are put together and shaped up for the tasks God has for us.

(2 Timothy 3.15-17, the Message paraphrase)

'Here's what I want you to do: Find a quiet, secluded place so you won't be tempted to role-play before God. Just be there as simply and honestly as you can manage. The focus will shift from you to God, and you will begin to sense his grace.

The world is full of so-called prayer warriors who are prayer-ignorant. They're full of formulas and programmes and advice, peddling techniques for getting what you want from God. Don't fall for that nonsense. This is your Father you are dealing with, and he knows better than you what you need.

With a God like this loving you, you can pray very simply. Like this:

Our Father in heaven, reveal who you are, set the world right; do what's best – as above, so below. Keep us alive with three square meals. Keep us forgiven with you and forgiving others. Keep us safe from ourselves and the Devil. You're in charge: You can do anything You want! You're ablaze in beauty!

(Matthew 6.6-13, the Message paraphrase)

December 2026

1st Matthew 23:13-24
2nd Matthew 23:25-36
3rd Matthew 23:37-24:2
4th Matthew 24:3-14
5th Matthew 24:15-25

6th Psalm 115
7th Matthew 24:26-35
8th Matthew 24:36-44
9th Matthew 24:45-51
10th Matthew 25:1-13
11th Matthew 25:14-30
12th Matthew 25:31-46

13th Psalm 116
14th Malachi 1:1-5
15th Malachi 1:6-14
16th Malachi 2:17-3:5
17th Malachi 3: 6-12
18th Malachi 3:13-18
19th Malachi 4:1-6

20th Psalm 117
21st Luke 1:1-25
22nd Luke 1:26-38
23rd Luke 1:39-56
24th Luke 1:57-80
25th Luke 2:1-21
26th Luke 2:22-40

27th Isaiah 60:1-6
28th Luke 2:41-52
29th Luke 3:1-6
30th Luke 3:7-20
31st Luke 3:21-38

Make the book live to me, O Lord, Show me Yourself within Your word,
Show me myself, and show me my Saviour, And make the book live to me.
(H.Pope, 1879-1967)

January 2027

1st Ecclesiastes 1:1-18
2nd Ecclesiastes 2:1-26

3rd Psalm 119:1-24
4th Ecclesiastes 3:1-22
5th Ecclesiastes 5:1-20
6th Ecclesiastes 9:1-12
7th Ecclesiastes 9:13-10:15
8th Ecclesiastes 11:1-10
9th Ecclesiastes 12:1-14

10th Psalm 119:25-48
11th Luke 4:1-13
12th Luke 4:14-21
13th Luke 4:22:30
14th Luke 4:31-37
15th Luke 5:17-26
16th Luke 5:27-39

17th Psalm 119:49-72
18th Luke 6:1-11
19th Luke 6:12-16
20th Luke 6:17-26
21st Luke 6:27-35
22nd Luke 6:37-42
23rd Luke 6:43-49

24th Psalm 119:73-96
25th Deuteronomy 1:1-16
26th Deuteronomy 1:19-40
27th Deuteronomy 4:1-14,32-40
28th Deuteronomy 5:1-22
29th Deuteronomy 6:1-25
30th Deuteronomy 7:1-11

31st Psalm 119:97-112

These daily readings are a programme designed by Scripture Union. SU publishes explanatory notes to accompany the readings – called Daily Bread – or you can sign up to the Word Live service to receive the notes and readings online each day at:- www.scriptureunion.org.uk

February 2027

1st 1 Peter 1:1-12
2nd 1 Peter 1:13-21
3rd 1 Peter 1:22-2:3
4th 1 Peter 2:4-10
5th 1 Peter 2:11-17
6th 1 Peter 2:18-25

7th Psalm 119:113-128
8th 1 Peter 3:1-7
9th 1 Peter 3:8-22
10th 1 Peter 4:1-11
11th 1 Peter 4:12-19
12th 1 Peter 5:1-7
13th 1 Peter 5:8-14

14th Psalm 119:153-176
15th Lamentations 1:1-22
16th Lamentations 2:1-22
17th Lamentations 3:1-33
18th Lamentations 3:34-66
19th Lamentations 4:1-22
20th Lamentations 5:1-22

21st Psalm 119:153-176
22nd Revelation 1:1-8
23rd Revelation 1:9-20
24th Revelation 2:1-11
25th Revelation 2:12-29
26th Revelation 3:1-13
27th Revelation 3:14-22

28th Psalm 120

There are other sources for bible reading programmes, such as the Lectio 365 app, which takes users through readings, prayers and prompts for meditation each day.

Praying for ourselves, our community, our world – and for God's kingdom to come!

O Thou the reflection of whose transcendent glory did once appear unbroken in the face of Jesus Christ, give me today a heart like His – a brave heart, a true heart, a tender heart, a heart with great room in it, a heart fixed on Thyself; for His name's sake.
Amen.
(John Baillie: A diary of private prayer, OUP London, 1972)

These headings and suggestions are to help you pray for our church, our family, our world, and above all, to pray that God will build his kingdom. Please use them in any way that suits.

O God of Bethel! by whose hand thy people still are fed;
Who through this weary pilgrimage hast all our fathers led:

You may well recognise these words as they are the opening verse of a paraphrase of words from the book of Genesis 28. We have been singing them in Scotland like this since 1781, and although the language is a little stilted and dated, yet the truth which they convey is unchanging. Praying through familiar hymns can be a very helpful way of focusing our thoughts and hearts, the words come easily, but we can take time to make them personal.
This opening verse is an invitation to remember God's faithfulness to his people in the past, and to affirm our trust in his continued presence in and provision for our own lives. We proclaim our connection with previous generations, and affirm our complete dependence on God in our own turn. He has promised, and he will not fail. As we come in prayer, we recall God's faithfulness in our own lives, and give thanks.

Our vows, our prayers we now present before thy throne of grace:
God of our fathers! be the God of their succeeding race.

We come because we trust that God is present, and has plans and purposes for us in building his kingdom. This verse reminds us that we have free access to God – to the creator and sustainer of all things, the only true and holy one, the all-powerful who will one day make all things new – this is the one who welcomes us into his presence. What a privilege and a relief it is to come as beloved children to share all our joys and sorrows, our problems and our celebrations with our loving Father. Come wearily, come eagerly, come in sorrow or in joy – only come!

Through each perplexing path of life our wandering footsteps guide;
Give us each day our daily bread, and raiment fit provide.

I think we can all relate to that phrase, "each perplexing path" as we journey through life, often feeling buffeted by circumstances and the decisions and actions of other people. The words of this verse are an invitation to reflect on how the people of Israel wandered in the desert, complaining, rebelling, suffering and yet receiving God's provision and finally arriving at the destination which was promised. We can live in humble trust that our loving God knows where we are going, and that as we live each day for and with him, he will bear with us and keep us close to himself. The journey may go down unexpected paths, but we are never alone, and never without the guiding of God – through his word, through the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. We are encouraged to pray for today's rations of strength, patience, faith, hope and perseverance, and courage to trust our guide even though we may fear the path down which he is leading us.

O spread thy covering wings around, till all our wanderings cease,
And at our Father's loved abode our souls arrive in peace.

As followers of Jesus, we believe that we are already safely at home with him and beyond the power of sin and death to harm us – nothing can take us from our Father's side now that Jesus has died for us. But, we also know that until the glorious day of God's making all things new, we will live in a world and in bodies which are bearing the consequences of sin, with death a present reality and suffering and loss inextricably mixed with joy and blessings. And so we pray for God's protection of our minds, our hearts and our bodies – so that we might walk by faith and bear the trials of this world as those who know that there is so much more to come! Whatever life may hold for us, we can pray for this covering, this sheltering from God – because to know his presence with us is like a shield protecting us from doubt, despair, hopelessness and fear. Nothing that happens to us can separate us from God's love for us in Jesus, and in that lies our ultimate peace.

Such blessings from thy gracious hand our humble prayers implore;
And thou shalt be our chosen God and portion evermore.

We ask in the same way that Jesus encouraged us to ask; we ask like children coming to a loving Father who delights to hear and respond to our requests, but who also knows so much better than we do just what is best.
So we close our prayers with a request to our Father to fulfil his plans for us, since they are for our good and his glory. We ask – like Jesus – that God's will should be done in our lives and in the world. And we affirm that whatever the outcome of our prayers, we shall

continue to trust in and depend upon God, who has made us his own through Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord.

Prayer prompts

A few years ago, a friend shared a very helpful little prayer 'reminder' tool with me, which I want in turn to share with you, as an easy way to think about praying for the many situations in our lives and our world which burden and distress us.
Hold up your hand; then think about the significance of each finger in these ways:-

Index finger – we use it to point don't we?! So we pray for those who point the way – people with wisdom; Christian leaders and teachers; those whose actions and investments can change the direction in which society is moving.
As you think about a war zone for example; pray for those who are trying to negotiate peace between the parties; pray for the invisible but powerful influences which can make or break a deal.
As you look at our society, which has many troubles but also many good things, pray for those who think deeply and influence the way that policies develop – thorough research and serious wrestling with deep problems needs to be done before wise decisions can be made.

Middle finger – which usually stretches out beyond all the others, and invites us to pray for those who are noticeable in leadership – in politics, in business, in entertainment and social media.
As you think about our country, pray for those who have the responsibility to make decisions which impact our lives. It is a huge and demanding job, and we want our leaders to be people who know their weaknesses, and who respect others, and who truly desire to serve us. Give thanks for those in leadership who set an example of integrity, generosity, compassion and a clear commitment to the greater good. Pray for a responsible exercise of power, and pray against exploitation. Pray especially for Christians in leadership – in politics, in business, in entertainment – that they will be wise, will be protected from folly and temptation traps, and will be able to inspire others in their faith in the public realm.

Ring finger – where we wear wedding rings, and we think of those whom we love, family and friends whose wellbeing is particularly important to us. While the wider world situation may not directly impact our loved ones, we can certainly pray for those it does! Pray for the families of service men and women, who have to deal with separation, deep anxiety and the consequences of conflict on mental and physical health. Pray for the families of those who are overseas sharing in God's work in other countries, and parted from parents, siblings and friends, isolated and sometimes in danger.
And we can always pray for our loved ones, since we know that all human loves are merely an echo of the great Love with which God loves us. Our griefs and sorrows are

understood by our Father; he knows how we yearn over estranged family members, how we grieve over long-term suffering and the heavy burdens which our loved ones bear. All of these things we bring to our Father in confidence, and let him carry us as we love them in his name.

Little finger – the least and weakest of our fingers, an invitation to pray for the weak, the vulnerable, the least and the forgotten. It is not hard to think how this one works out – look around the town and see the folk on our streets whose lives are in chaos because of addiction; remember the population in the care homes, and the invisible isolated elderly at home alone for days on end with no one to share life with. Pray for policies and people which can make a real difference to these precious folk, who are not forgotten by God. Pray for the little children growing up in our community, exposed to so much that threatens them, and yet so full of potential – ask God to strengthen their families, protect them from harm, and bring them to adulthood to flourish and to know and love him.

Thumb – last but not least, we use our thumbs to indicate that everything is okay, or that it is good – a reminder to consider just how much we have to be grateful for. Our thumbs are the only ones which can point back toward us, and we can pray for ourselves too!

There are many things shared in the newsletter for which to give thanks, over and above our personal lives – the work of Inverness Street Pastors, Inverness Foodstuff, and the global ministry of L'Arche. Take time to be grateful, to notice and celebrate God's goodness, the beauty of creation, and the gift of each new day.

Finally, we do take time to pray for ourselves, to bring our burdens to God in confidence and – with his help – not to pick them up again! We remember his goodness to us, and commit ourselves to trust him for the future; we ask him to go on working in our lives, to make us more like Jesus, channels of love in a world in need.

As we have prayed using our hands, we pray also for our hands – to be instruments for good, for love, for help and for God's glory in our world. We have only one life, a few years to give to God, let's make the most of them and be ready to take every opportunity to do good for Jesus' sake!

Delight yourselves in the Lord, yes, find your joy in him at all times. Have a reputation for gentleness, and never forget the nearness of your Lord.
Don't worry over anything whatever; tell God every detail of your needs in earnest and thankful prayer, and the peace of God, which transcends human understanding, will keep constant guard over your hearts and minds as they rest in Christ Jesus.
(Philippians 4.4-7; JB Phillips translation)

Ness Bank Church – Summer Open days – August 2026

From Monday 3rd until Friday 28th August 2026, Ness Bank opened 4 hours each day, and 42 members signed up to help show people around (twice as many as in 2025, thank you all very much for responding to the invitation!). Many members covered two or more sessions, and we recorded 2073 visitors over the period.

Many visitors stuck red dots on the maps to show their place of origin, and over 400 signed the Visitors' book, allowing us to get an idea of how far folk travel to visit Scotland, and in particular, Inverness.

European visitors came from 26 different countries - from Norway in the north, Italy in the south, Ireland in the west and Latvia/Romania in the east. 9 African countries were recorded from Algeria in the north and South Africa in the south, and including both the Canary Islands and the island of Mauritius.

7 countries from the Americas were noted, including many different States of the USA, Hawaii, The Bahamas, Columbia, Brazil, Argentina and Chile. 7 countries from Asia, India, Pakistan, China were recorded, including Hong Kong, South Korea, Japan, Indonesia and Sri Lanka. And of course, some came from Australia and New Zealand.

The highest number of visitors was on Monday, 10th, when 167 visited Ness Bank and the least number was on the Friday, 28th, when 47 came to see our Church, however this was due to a funeral in the earlier part of the morning session.

164 notes and messages were left on the Prayer Tree, in various languages including English, German, French, Spanish and Italian, and we received £641 in donations.

Due to the Sanctuary Redevelopment project, it is unlikely that a Ness Bank Open Church will take place in the summer of 2027. I'd like to thank all those members of the congregation who gave their time and talents for this event, and encourage others to consider doing so in the future! It is very easy and you will enjoy introducing your Ness Bank Church, to many people visiting Scotland, and in particular, Inverness.

Barry Gilbert

CHRISTMAS FAYRE



We hope you've got Saturday 28 November (10am-12noon) in your diary. There will be tea & coffee with mince pies and shortbread. The usual stalls will be there for you to peruse. We plan to have the 'card reader' available for payment by card and will also take cash. The hall will be available to set up from 2-4pm & 6-8pm the day before, when items can also be handed in. Please hand in donations for the stalls, home baking, hamper prizes etc. We still need volunteers before / during & after the fayre. Please get in touch with the Church office if you can help in any way.

Update from Inverness Street Pastors

Last month one of our teams spoke to a young lad who was out with his mates on a Saturday night; we'll call him Ritch. They were a good-natured bunch and intent on enjoying what the night had to offer. Ritch was more reserved and as the conversation developed, he shared that he could see no good in the world. His mates, keen for some fun, headed off.

The team listened. They asked questions to explore his thinking, and made suggestions as to how in the midst of the vilest of situations there are endless examples of good, often underpinned by faith in God. One of the team shared their favourite verse where Joseph tells his brothers that while they intended to harm him, God intended it for good (Genesis 50:20a). Ritch looked thoughtful, nodded and said, "That helps". He then ran into the night to catch up with his mates at Foxes.

It is understandable that we can lose sight of all the good in the world when we are bombarded with negative news and toxicity. In the past weeks, around Inverness, we have been blessed with the sight of fields with heavy-headed grain ready for harvest. This is the culmination of the farmer's skill, time and favourable growing conditions. Whatever our situation, when we put our trust in God's word, with His grace we will develop a deep-rooted lasting faith, which will in turn produce fruit and a sense of His peace.



A rich field of barley doesn't just reassure us of provision for the winter ahead, but it reminds us of many scripture metaphors centred around seeds, growth and harvest. Not everyone who hears the word will respond in the same way (Mark 4:1-20).

Flip-flop Appeal

A pair of flip-flops can make a huge difference to someone on a night-out. Not only may they prevent a nasty cut but they are also often an opening for a conversation or for someone to reflect on acts of love. Inverness Taxis on Church Street are kindly collecting donations of new, unused flip-flops for us.

Points for Prayer:

- *Please give thanks for the team that has formed to coordinate the work of Ness Pastors. We are grateful for the willing commitment and camaraderie that has developed. May the Lord give them the wisdom, energy and vision they need to support the growing mission.*

- *We are grateful to the recently joined volunteers both on the streets and in prayer. We hear from door-staff and other front line workers that they notice when we are not present. We would dearly like to cover every weekend, and to grow our daytime patrols. Please pray for people to be curious, and to step forwards into an enriching experience of serving our community in Jesus' name.*

- *Pray for all the young people represented by Ritch, who, when bombarded by relentless negative social media are apt to lose sight of the truth that there is more good than evil in the world. Pray that they will ask insightful questions, and not take refuge in distractions, or the oblivion of drugs and alcohol. May they come to see that our God desires to know and love them, and they can find hope.*

- *Please continue to pray for the ongoing and generous support which we receive from food outlets, providing both physical and social sustenance for our volunteers.*

2027 Flower Calendar

The 2027 Flower Calendar will be on the noticeboard in the vestibule from Sunday 13th December. If you wish to donate flowers to the Church, please add your name to the date of your choice. Our sincere thanks to all who donated flowers to the 2026 calendar, and brought such pleasure to those who subsequently received them.
This ministry is funded entirely by contributions, not from general church funds, and we are always glad to receive donations, or for people to sign up to fund the flowers on a particular day.
Anyone interested in joining our Flower Group will be most welcome. If you would like to help, please contact me via the Church Office (details on back page of newsletter).

Finella Thomson

Copies of the Newsletter are available in the vestibule.
Ness Bank church is online at www.nessbankchurch.org.uk
Follow Ness Bank Church on Facebook
Ness Bank Church of Scotland, Inverness, Charity No. SCO10870, is a Registered Charity

Into the unknown with Operation Mobilisation.

Three intrepid 22 year-old girls from the Western Isles met me at Victoria Station in London in early July of 1973. We had been student friends of an inspirational guy who spoke to us about working with (Operation Mobilisation) so here we were, all set on a mission: we had offered to spend a month of our summer break 'somewhere in Europe'. Getting there was no mean feat for girls who were mostly accustomed to wild landscapes, single track roads and scattered townships, so the onus was on me to lead the way…. One thing they were used to was travelling by ferry and to my amazement, they sought out unused cabins for us to use during the crossing from Dover to Ostend in Belgium.

On arriving in Ostend, we appeared to be stranded. There was no sign of the promised pick up transport to take us to the OM conference centre at Zaventem – over 100km away! (these were the days before the internet after all). After grappling with instructions that appeared to be in Dutch, I managed to make a phone call from a public box and before too long, an OM vehicle came to our rescue.

In the next few days we spent time with 1,000 volunteers who had applied, like us, to go wherever we would be sent, a work force from many nations but mainly young people from America and Europe. We listened to inspirational talks by George Verwer, the American whose vision was to boldly go where no visible church fellowships existed. Excitement was rising - where would we be sent, who with and in what vehicle? The four of us ended up in completely different teams - France, Spain, Austria and I was allocated to a team going the furthest, to Puglia and Basilicata in the 'boot' of Italy in the far south.

We travelled to Italy in convoy with a battered old van while our team had the 'luxury' of a VW Transporter. This was our home for several days as we navigated through Luxemburg, France, Switzerland and Italy. During the day, by virtue of having a driving licence, I was allocated to sit up front with the driver, ostensibly to navigate! We chatted to keep from feeling drowsy except when there were crazy Italian drivers to look out for on roundabouts. I remember the three nights - one spent under the stars, one sleeping in the van waking up to the blistering and suffocating, continental heat and our third night in an empty house that was made available to us. We were all young and enthusiastic, undaunted, ready for a anything.

I was part of a team of five - two Swedish girls, an American team leader, a Spanish girl and myself. Our accommodation in Italy was a dis-used room above a village house and the householders' hens ran free range through our property. It goes without saying that we spent the first day cleaning and tidying! As a team we had been issued a strict code of conduct on how to dress, what to carry with us and mainly what not to bring with us. Two of our team ignored the rules and woke up during the night to see their secret supply of chocolate being eaten by rats. I was not amused neither was the team leader.

In the cooler parts of the day we undertook our mission to distribute Christian literature to villages that had been sketched out for us on a rough map. Systematically over two and a half weeks we knocked on doors, spluttering out our party line in pigeon Italian. "Siamo di Operazione Mobilitazione. Non siami Testimony di Geova ne Mormoni" (translates as, 'We are from Operation Mobilisation. We are not Mormons, or Jehovah's Witnesses). In general, the men were more willing to listen. A number of them had picked up German during the war and that made communication a lot easier.

Strangely, I don't remember anything about the return journey to Zaventem apart from the frustration of our American convoy driver as we passed the road sign for L'Abri in Switzerland. Keeping to the rules, we did not deviate from our route even although the famous Francis Schaeffer, an American theologian and philosopher, held residence in this Christian community/study centre where open questions are taken seriously. I felt sorry for the driver but admired his integrity.

And then the debriefing in Zaventem…
We detailed the names of the villages we had time to work in and named the people who had helped us in one way or another. The team members were individually assessed for their performance and resilience. I was asked to lead a team in the future, an opportunity I didn't pursue.

Arriving home I questioned the validity of the mission. What did it achieve? What good could come from our broken conversations in Italian and German? Was our mission just a widespread distribution of small booklets that might have been burnt, binned or blown away?

Over fifty years have passed since that summer. I thought my story ended there.

If you have followed the story to the end, you may like to look out for the sequel which will be in the next newsletter!

Margaret Livingstone

Operation Mobilisation was founded in 1961, and continues to work globally to bring God's kingdom to the least and the lowest, the remotest and the overlooked. Their work and opportunities to support it are described at: om.org/eng/home

OM Guiding Values

We imitate Jesus and participate in holistic, Kingdom transformation of all life and creation as we cultivate a biblically just and diverse community; with strategic innovation in our ministries, we remain in mutual commitment to the cause of Christ and care for people.

Sanctuary Development

It seems like a long time since we started talking about plans to improve access to the Sanctuary and open it regularly to visitors – with a lot more talk than action since! Our three planning teams – Funding, Building and Mission – have all been beavering away behind the scenes. Now the time has come to… wait!

There are two things to wait for. At the start of October our Architects completed their design and billing work and sent a Tender package out to five local contractors. They are now visiting the building with plans in hand to prepare their costs for the work. These will be returned by the middle of November, after which our Quantity Surveyor will review and compare the submissions, and make a recommendation.

Meanwhile in mid-September, with the help of a professional fundraiser and a heritage consultant, we submitted a funding bid to the National Lottery Heritage Fund. This has the potential to complete our funding for the estimated cost of the project, with a result expected around the end of November.

So by the start of December – perhaps around the time you read this – we should know how much the work will cost and how much money we have to spend. If the two sums match, we can seek final approval from the General Trustees of the Church of Scotland in January 2027, and start work soon after. And if they don't, we will need to stop, think and pray!

So please pray now for the Tender process and Funding decisions, asking that God will continue to bless the plans that have been coming together over recent months.

The work done for us by Ann Tweedie of "Heritage Interpretation" has been helpful in shaping our plans for welcoming visitors. She has encouraged us to think of a "Big Picture":

> *"Ness Bank Church stands not only as a place of Christian worship but as a testament to the congregation's enduring presence in Inverness since 1787 and its commitment to serving the wider community"* –

with two sub themes:

> *"Building Faith"*, and
> *"Local Links – a Church of and for Inverness".*

Based around these we can display information about our building, windows, banners, memorials, history and artefacts, while also exhibiting our current activities and sharing something of who we are and why we do what we do. That means visitors to Inverness and Ness Bank will get a clear insight into the life, work and faith of a Christian congregation.

As the building progresses, we plan to fill out this Big Idea and these themes with more information gathered from friends and members of the congregation. So if you are a part of Ness Bank, we will want to hear from you!

L' Arche, Ukraine Update

In 2022, our congregation donated £2,535 to an appeal on behalf of the work of L' Arche in Ukraine. We have received an update on the work there, from which these extracts are taken for your interest and ongoing prayers.

In times of war, the vulnerabilities of people with intellectual disabilities are further exacerbated. Often there are unjust social beliefs about intellectual disability that leave people isolated, and at risk of abuse of many kinds. But L'Arche imagines the world differently. L'Arche communities are havens of kindness, friendship, and belonging which are actively working to empower people with disabilities to live life to the fullest, and by doing so, touch many lives and effectively bring about real change in society.

The two L'Arche communities in Lviv and Ternopil, Ukraine are good examples of this. They are daily engaged in the profound work of building peace, amidst an ongoing war. It costs about 10 Euro/day for L'Arche to welcome a core member into community life, and under the current circumstances, each Community is able to find 30% of that locally. Through the support of other international partners, we have raised the other 7 Euros/person/day needed to sustain these two Communities in a time of war.

Vadym is one of the people whom your support reaches in Lviv..

"My name is Vadym. I'm from the beautiful and picturesque city of Kharkiv. Because of the war, I was forced to leave with my mother and brother and move to a safer place. I chose Lviv because I knew there was a L'Arche community there, and I wanted to be part of it.

"L'Arche, for me, is not just about work therapy — it's primarily about relationships that I can build with my friends. I enjoy cooking lunch for everyone because it's a way of caring for each member of the community.

"L'Arche helps me to expand my circle of friends. I always feel that people here care about me, worry about me, and make me feel important — and that's what true friendship means to me.

"I went back to Kharkiv for a visit and deeply felt the lack of community and the friends I had left behind in Lviv. After returning, I realized that I want to stay here forever because here, I'm not alone — I'm always surrounded by my friends."

tearfund

Big Quiz Night 2026

On Saturday 21st November, at around 7pm, Ness Bank will host our own Tear Fund Big Quiz night, joining with people all round the UK to raise funds for Tear Fund, have fun and learn more about the work which is done through the money we raise. Come along and join in, bring your friends and family and make up a table in a good cause!

Giving and Sharing: Thank You, and Please!!!!

You will remember the stewardship campaign entitled 'Giving and Sharing' during the summer of 2025 which resulted in a significant increase in our offerings. At that time excellent donations and pledges for the Phase 4 (Sanctuary) Project were also received.

Thank you: On 30 August 2026, our Minister preached again on Giving and Sharing, and we wish to thank those members who kindly increased the amount of their standing order. We are also grateful to members who set up a new standing order together with a gift aid declaration which means we can claim an extra 25% on what you give.

Please: Standing Order forms and Gift Aid Declaration forms are available in the vestibule and we would earnestly ask members and friends to consider moving to this form of giving. All that is needed is to complete the form and hand it in to the bank and you can also do it online if you use mobile banking. The Gift Aid form can be completed and given to either Bill Paterson, Joyce Muir or Mary Thomson for processing. Payment by the open plate cannot be gift aided and this is another reason to consider moving to standing order.

From November 2026 the Bank of Scotland will start charging us for all our transactions and this will include depositing notes and coins. It is likely we will require to pay charges of between £20 and £30 each month to cover the transactions – this is another very good reason to consider changing to a standing order.

The Finance Team are preparing the budget for 2027 and there is no doubt that we need to continually review our income – in other words the offerings from the congregation. Can you please review the amount you are able to give to Ness Bank and, if possible, increase this to cover the cost of the rate of inflation which is currently 3.1%. For example, if you give £20 per month this would mean an increase of 62p, if you give £60 per month this would mean an increase of £1.86, and if you give £100 per month this would mean an extra £3. An increase in our income would really help to offset the expenditure such as heating and lighting, maintenance of the building and all the necessary costs incurred in the operation of Ness Bank.

The Kirk Session, Team Leaders and Finance Team are continually reviewing our income and expenditure but these are challenging times for all churches, hence the reason for looking at ways we can increase our offerings.

We give thanks for the generosity of the Ness Bank congregation and so appreciate your support.

Finance Team

"Just Giving" Online Donations

"Just Giving" is an online donation scheme which allows people to donate to charities. In Ness Bank we have now joined Just Giving and have a charity page which will accept donations using a debit/credit card, Apple Pay, Google Pay, PayPal and bank transfer. It is a very easy system to access, especially if the QR code below is used:

All that is needed is to follow these straightforward instructions:

Point your mobile phone camera on the QR code and click on the Just Giving box which will transfer you to the Ness Bank Church charity page.
Click on Give Now and you will be asked to enter the amount of your donation, agree and confirm to continue.
The system also supports Gift Aid and if your postcode is entered then Just Giving will automatically collect this.
You can donate anonymously so that your name will not be included.
When you are ready just click on donate and enter your card details, or follow the instructions for other payment methods.

Why don't you try it in the comfort of your home?

The Ness Bank website now has a 'Donate' facility and again this is very easy to use – just access **nessbankchurch.org.uk** and click on Donate, you will then be transferred to our charity page. The Order of Service and the Magazine will include the QR code which will also appear on other leaflets and publicity.

This is a great way of donating to Ness Bank not just for members but for friends, including those who access our services on the livestream and recordings. Also people attending events in the church can donate if they wish to do so. Please advertise this new facility as widely as possible. Many thanks.

Finance Team

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