Having just celebrated forty-five years in one parish, I have been reflecting on the great encouragements of a long ministry. I value most the trust of my people who have allowed me to share their joys and sorrows. ........
Working ecumenically, along with our neighbouring Catholic congregation, St Mahew’s, within ACTS, on the General Synod of the Church of England, and editing material for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity both in the United Kingdom and the International Preparatory Group. All have been enriching to the local situation, and helpful in a progressive approach to worship.

But the key emphasis has been helping the Church to be at the centre of the local community. We are a discrete community, mid-way between two larger towns and presenting obvious opportunities. We have excellent halls which in recent years we have upgraded and extended with new build and made available as the centre of the community. They are home to a range of community organisations: an excellently run Playgroup, Mother and Toddler Group, Lunch Club, Drop in Coffee Club, Senior Citizens Club, local Trust, School Parent Council and School discos, Art Class and annual exhibition, Fiddlers Club, Dance Class, WRI Recreational Clubs, the local Gala Day and increasingly birthday parties and family celebrations, including a Muslim wedding because the host felt so at home and welcome in the local community.

Most of what happens in the community is Church based. Recently a group of American visitors dropped in on hearing ceilidh music, only to find themselves part of a 21st birthday party!

As Minister I have naturally felt this central to my work. Apart from caring for members of the congregation I have sought to minister to the entire community, responding to requests for baptism, marriage, funerals or pastoral support from any people, whether members or parishioners, I have made time and given priority to community work. I have been a member of the Community Council since its inception, Chairman for twenty-five years, Executive member of the Association of Scottish Community Councils and President for a term, affording good opportunities of contact with the Scottish Government and their policies regarding communities. Since Community Councils have statutory rights of consultation on all planning matters, we are able to have a say in the shaping of our community.

The congregation has followed this pattern:
Every newcomer who moves into a house in the parish receives a visitor with a welcome pack, and at Easter and Christmas we deliver to every household in the community greetings from the Churches with a note of seasonal services. I assume this is the way a parish church should operate, but perhaps it does not happen everywhere.

Our church has been able to commission a number of artistic works and significantly our embroidered panels by Hannah Frew Paterson and engraved glass windows by John Lawrie feature local scenes – so that the congregation Sunday upon Sunday is reminded visually of our commitment to serve the local community. We are fortunate to have good and fruitful contacts with our local primary school where religious observance is strongly encouraged, and good liaison with our secondary school and the Chaplains’ team.

I recently shared a wedding service with a colleague, Neil Galbraith in Cathcart Old Parish Church in Glasgow and was hugely encouraged to discover that in a very different city setting his congregation was providing for the whole community, highlighting “Glasgow, the caring city.”

From long experience I have been reinforced in the view that the job of the Church is to be there for people in every possible life situation, both in congregation and in the community, and to make available the resources of the gospel to meet every need. Even though many people and their families may not be present to hear God’s word on a Sunday, the body language of the Church, expressed through commitment to the whole community still hopefully tells a Gospel message. It is not that you can dance or fiddle your way into the kingdom of heaven. Yet if the Church is to be leaven in our land again it will be above all through the embodiment of the gospel in concern for the good of local communities.

Revd Andrew Scobie

Looking Towards 21 Years for ACTS

Action of Churches Together in Scotland, or as we more often know it ‘ACTS’ will be 21 next year. The occasion is to be marked by a celebration on Saturday 17 September 2011 in Dunblane. A planning group will work to prepare the day’s event.
Pilgrimage Walks: ACTS
Scottish Churches’ Rural Group are currently exploring the possibilities of working with the Scottish Government and outside agencies in re-introducing pilgrimage walks throughout Scotland. If you have already taken part in such a walk ACTS would love to hear about your experience. Please email Shona Paterson on shonapaterson@acts-scotland.org Telephone 01259 222362 or write using the address at the front of this newsletter. Thank you

Poverty & Homelessness Action Week 2011 - WHO COUNTS?

Poverty & Homelessness Action Week 2011 runs from 29 January to 6 February. In the year of census, the theme will be ‘Who Counts?’ The 2011 census will try to list all of the people who live in the country – but there are many it won’t include - such as the ‘hidden homeless’ and destitute asylum-seekers.

God’s own son was born into poverty in a stable, in the year of a great census. Scripture tells us that in God’s kingdom, “the least shall be the first”. Does the way we live bear witness to this truth? Are we living in true solidarity with people who are poor, homeless and excluded?

More details from www.actionweek.org.uk

Housing Bill:
Scottish Churches Housing Action - along with Shelter and many other bodies - believes that support needs as well as accommodation should be assessed when the local authority carries out a homelessness interview. We want to see this included in the current Housing Bill. The Scottish Parliament approved Stage 1 of the Bill at the end of June.

The support proposal is not included, but a meeting with the Minister, Alex Neil MSP, helped to make the case. He asked us to come up with evidence that this proposal would make a difference. So, over the summer we need to collect further evidence to highlight where local authorities are not carrying out support for homeless people as well as any further information on the cost benefits of support.

If your organisation has any information on this, please email: Alastair Cameron at Scottish Churches Housing Action - alastair@churches-housing.org or telephone 0131 477 4500 for more details.
The Dream that inspired the Bible. By Chris Sunderland

Chris Sunderland succeeds in inviting us to re-connect with the earth. Just as Jeremiah called the society of his day to ‘amend your ways and your actions’ Chris suggests that the heart of God’s message to us today is that we too should shift towards a life-style more in tune with the earth.

Faith in Old Testament terms was wrapped up in creation - the natural world was the source of healing. The garden was the picture given to us of great peace, the harmony that people of every age have dreamt of, with the natural fruitfulness of the earth, a harmony of relations with animals and nature all at peace with one another.

*In spite of our lack of care for the earth in today’s world Chris gives us a vision of hope for all creation and a future that respects the God’s gift to us all.*

Martin Robb - Carroglen

Climate Change: Spiritual Causes, Moral Consequences and Ethical Dilemmas.

Can politics alone conquer this most challenging dilemma of our time? Exploring the unjust effects of climate change which sees those who have contributed least to global warming are at the most risk of damaging outcomes. This event examines who should respond. The event is on 19th August from 11am at the Scottish Parliament. It is free but ticketed so please call 0131 473 2000 to book a place. Speakers include Kathy Galloway, Alastair McIntosh and Michael Northcott.

An Appeal from Church Action on Poverty. The impact of the recent Government’s Emergency Budget is being felt most by those who are already living in poverty and struggling to make ends meet. Church Action on Poverty is encouraging everyone to have the courage to speak up to protect the poorest and most vulnerable through the difficult times ahead. If you would like to make a donation to this cause please send to: FREEPOST RSHB-TUGR-RAGU, Church Action on Poverty, Dale House, 35 Dale Street, Manchester M1 2HF (no stamp required)
We live in a world where everyone's budgets are being squeezed. Some individuals and organisations can take that in their stride, with a little bit of belt-tightening here and there, and they might even benefit from the enforced slimming diet. But there are many other groups whose projects are very hard-hit, and who desperately need help and encouragement. The Claremont Trust exists to help some of the latter. It is a small, ecumenical body with limited financial resources, which seeks to help constructive and radical projects in Scotland and abroad, both within and outside the Church, as well as in the field of inter-faith activity.

This year, for example, it has given grants to a range of groups. One of them is the Chisswell House Creative Activities Focus Group, a group which supports drama workshops at HMP Greenock and which seeks address such issues as drug misuse, aggression and sectarianism, for example, through such plays as “I'm no a Billy, he's a Tim”.

Faith in Older People is a totally different group yet again. It is an organisation which seeks to enhance the quality of life and well-being of older people throughout Scotland by working with those providing practical, pastoral, or spiritual care.

/....... Continued on page 7
Some of the grants go abroad, and a good example would be the New Earth Team in Trichirappalli, Tamil Nadu, India where the project is to educate tribal women in four Indian villages on their rights to their land, on farming, and on livelihood issues. This is done through puppetry shows, exposure to “pioneer” women leaders, and intensive training.

(For further information or a grant application form please contact the Secretary, Mrs Judith Fairley, 15 The Row, Letham, Fife, KY15 7RS. To contribute to the Claremont Trust contact the Treasurer, Mr Norman Kerr, 57 Raeswood Gardens, Crookston, Glasgow, G53 7LD.)

Grasping Nettles - Reconciliation: the sting in the tale -- searching for reconciliation

1 September 5:30pm - 9:00pm
Scottish Churches House, Dunblane - Bishop David Chillingworth, Primus, Scottish Episcopal Church

+David’s ministry in N Ireland focused on issues of conflict and reconciliation, particularly in relation to sectarianism.
Does his learning apply to any situation of conflict?

Cost £15.00
Including light evening meal

Reservations for events at Scottish Churches House
Email: reservations@scottishchurcheshouse.org or call 01786 823588

Trust and Authority - pre-Pope Visit Theological Seminar
30 August 2010 - 9:30am - 1 September 2010 - 5:30pm
at Scottish Churches House, Dunblane

A conversation [in his absence!] with Pope Benedict.

We inhabit a world where some believe in absolute universal truths, others live in the flux of postmodernity. How do Christians live creatively in such a space and time?

Elizabeth Templeton will facilitate as ecumenical speakers grapple with what is at stake about how we understand belief, religious language and culture. Advance reading will be available. **Cost £130.**
Scotland prepares to welcome
Pope Benedict XVI

Pope Benedict XVI arrives in Edinburgh on the 16th of September to begin a four day visit which will take him immediately to the Royal Palace of Holyrood House where he will have an historic meeting with Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, members of government, parliamentarians and other invited guests from Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

We in Scotland feel immensely proud to be able to welcome the Holy Father at the beginning of his visit, on a day when he will join with us in celebrating the Feast of St. Ninian of Galloway. Tradition recounts how Ninian travelled from Rome where he had been ordained a bishop, and arrived in Scotland more than fifteen hundred years ago in 397 AD. He established a small Christian community on the southernmost tip of South West Scotland which he named Candida Casa in Latin, translated into English as the White House and now known as Whithorn, possibly Scotland’s earliest town.

Although the constraints of time in a very busy schedule mean that Pope Benedict will not be able to visit Whithorn, St. Ninian will not be far away during the course of the day. While the Pope is in Holyrood Palace a parade to mark Ninian’s feast day will take place in the centre of Edinburgh, involving children from schools across Scotland and an historic pageant; and what Scottish occasion would be complete without pipes and drums? After driving through Edinburgh in the famous Popemobile and an early afternoon pause in his programme, Pope Benedict will travel to Glasgow where he will again be driven through the crowd at Bellahouston park in the Popemobile, before celebrating Mass in front of a congregation numbering more than 100,000 who will be joined by millions of others around the world watching on television or over the internet.

The massed choirs of several hundred singers, along with accompanying musicians, will support the congregation in a prayerful and unforgettable celebration of Mass on the Feast of St. Ninian. We look forward with anticipation to hear the words the Holy Father will address to us in his homily. We have no doubt that what he says will have a relevance which will touch the hearts and minds of men and women of goodwill, here in Scotland, across the United Kingdom and to the ends of the earth.

Rev. Paul M. Conroy, General Secretary
Bishops’ Conference of Scotland