

THE SCOTS KIRK PARIS



How are you?

As you probably know by now, we have been worshipping again in rue Bayard since the lockdown was lifted in May. Numbers were small at the beginning but we have picked up momentum and are delighted to welcome an average of around 25 people on Sunday mornings. All the necessary precautions have been taken to keep everyone safe.

We are, of course, well aware that some of you might not feel ready to come into Paris or church just yet and we do hope that you watch our services on Youtube. We are happy to report that we now livestream on a Sunday morning as well.

The SKP WhatsApp group created by our minister at the start of the lockdown back in March is alive and kicking. If you would like to join, simply give Jan your mobile number and he will add you to the group.

Whatever your situation, be assured that we are thinking of you and keeping you in our prayers.

Hope to see you again soon!



Letter from the minister

A Strange Year

Dear Friends

The year 2020 has really turned out to be a very strange one!

I believe this year will be remembered as an

unprecedented, unexpected and unforeseen year – for all of us! And I am sure you would be able to add even more profound adjectives to the strangeness of this year. But let me start by saying "Thank you!" to all of you who participated in online services, who responded to these services or who did readings and sermons. A big word of thanks to members of the Board and Elders who encouraged and still support in many ways.

The outbreak of the pandemic has certainly not only influenced the church – locally and worldwide – but for the sake of this letter, let us focus on the church for a moment.

Ministers all around the world were challenged, and are still being challenged, by the newness of the pandemic. Suddenly we had to do sermons and services online. According to international polls, most ministers still do not feel trained for this type of ministry and the challenges that come with it. Although not all the Scots Kirk Paris viewers watch from beginning to end or even tune in on a weekly basis, we regularly have more than 100 people attending our services. This is more than double or even treble the number we would be able to welcome in rue Bayard. Some viewers are as far away as Australia, South Africa and the United States. You received a letter from our treasurer saying that the pandemic had put a lot of strain on our finances. And we are certainly not alone in that predicament. But the financial support has been overwhelming and we are grateful for that.

One of the strange "gifts" of the pandemic is the reality that *every day is new*. We are constantly confronted with and challenged by a changed situation. Now, this is not easy. But perhaps we learn the practical implications of believing in God, Father, Son and Spirit who is with us today and every day.

The more difficult realities of this year were things like social distancing, cancelled visits and loneliness. Every time you meet someone you would like to hug or shake hands with, it seems a strange experience not to be able to. Many of us had to cancel visits to friends and family. Although it is only a slight comfort, it does help to know that no-one is in this boat alone. Strange as it might sound, it does help to know that we all bear this



Church finances

We have a happy treasurer!

Our accounts were presented at the Annual General Meeting on 27th September.

Despite the pandemic, our finances are holding up reasonably well. The loss of income from other church users who have suspended their activities due to Covid has been offset by an increase in the number of members giving regularly by direct debit. We have also received a number of generous donations for which we are extremely grateful.

As always, we ask you to consider switching to direct debit as this gives the treasurer more visibility and helps us plan for building maintenance and the like.

We will have a couple of major items of expenditure at the end of the year (stipend and local rates for the church) but we should be able to start 2021 on a fairly even keel. However, we must keep up our efforts and consider our giving as we are heavily reliant on a grant from the Church of Scotland which is decreasing steadily every year.

Thank you sincerely for supporting the SKP financially during this difficult time.

Name of SKP account:
Assoc Church of Scotland

BIC: BNPAFRPPXXX

**IBAN: FR76 3000 4015 3300
0100 9031 587**

burden together.

The pandemic has certainly put some strain on our mental and spiritual health. The isolation of the lockdown confronted all of us with *ourselves* in a new way. I am sure you too had moments of realizing that being in the company of Yourself is not always the best social gathering or "party" possible. Many of us refrained from using the internet (Zoom, Skype) and social apps as a means of contact with others. But we did discover that one could actually have meaningful relationships online. Some of you will remember our Sunday Zoom coffee meetings during the peak of the lockdown. Maybe we should restart these Zoom coffee meetings???

One of the most difficult things to do, concerning our own mental health, is to ask for help. Shame and pride continue to lock us in. But please remember that I, as your minister, the elders of the Scots Kirk and your friends are always available for a chat or meeting.

In about 10 weeks it will be Christmas...hmmm! No! Let's not talk about the "future". May TODAY, may this moment, bring a smile to your face and lightness to your heart. God (and many others too!) love you.

Love
Jan Steyn

*His mercies are
new every morning;
Great is thy
faithfulness
-Lamentations 3:23*

Incumbents board

The Incumbents Board is now hanging on the landing on the way down to the sanctuary. Our thanks go to Elizabeth Sevo for researching our past ministers, Erwan Kucharski for having the board made and Ewan Clark for putting it up. This is a much-appreciated gift from Stan Blacklock in remembrance of Rev. Donald Caskie whom he met in Paris in the 1950s while working as an Army nursing orderly. Donald Caskie introduced Stan to the Scots Kirk and he has been a faithful friend ever since.



On-line international presbytery meeting

The International Presbytery held its first ever on-line plenary meeting on 9th and 10th October. Hats off to the Business Committee for managing to draw up a schedule which suited everyone in the four time zones represented within the presbytery!



We should have been meeting in Budapest and we still hope to be able to go there in October 2021!

The meeting (over 40 attendees) was very straightforward, with the reports from the various committees having been sent out well in advance. There was no-one from Church of Scotland headquarters in Edinburgh and therefore no presentations. We moved effortlessly through the agenda, limiting our breaks to around 10 minutes (as opposed to 30 minutes sometimes when we meet in person).

While we all realize that this is a perfectly feasible way of doing business, we did miss catching up in person. Forty people can't all speak at the same time! Some of the spouses managed to chat on Zoom as well, with or without their customary glass of wine!

Presbytery noted with appreciation that SKP elder Scott Macsween has recently begun the discernment process with a view to training for the ministry. We join Presbytery in wishing him well for the long road ahead.

If you would like more information about our discussions, contact presbytery elder Valerie Prieur (valerieprieur@wanadoo.fr).

Poppy appeal

The Royal British Legion in France has launched its annual Poppy Appeal. There will be a box for donations in the SKP as usual but if you are unable to come to church you can send your donation to The Royal British Legion, 28 rue des Acacias, 75017 Paris. Cheques should be made out to RBL. Please indicate that you are donating to the SKP appeal and don't forget to ask for a tax receipt if you pay tax in France.

Visit rblfrance.org for more information on where else you can buy poppies and the invaluable work being done by the RBL.



Getting to know you



In this issue we talk to Elizabeth Sevo for whom the SKP kitchen holds no secrets!

Elizabeth, can you tell us something about yourself?

I and my Croatian husband, Ivan, have been living in France for 49 years and we have two children. We spent two three-year spells in Greenville, South Carolina then Clermont-Ferrand. Born in Aberdeenshire to a farming family I went to school and university in Aberdeen, where I studied Geography before training as a cartographer Glasgow. I worked with George Philips, the atlas makers, in London before coming to Paris to work as an editor with the Michelin Green Guides. I was privileged to write the first Green Guide to

Scotland, a unique chance to discover my home country. In the US we covered the whole country in two guides – a mammoth task. Back in Clermont it was disruptive innovation with a move to the communications department. The environment was my main brief and hence I had the chance to participate in Michelin Challenge Bibendum, a sustainable mobility event.

When and why did you start coming to the Scots Kirk Paris?

I attended the Scots Kirk in Pont Street when in London and it was the minister there who told me about the Scots Kirk Paris. I only became a regular member here in Paris once I retired.

Do you have any hobbies?

I was once an enthusiastic tennis player but now enjoy more sedate pursuits. I try to keep up with sustainability issues which encourages the avid note-taker – a failing from my working days – in me. Since lockdown I have been doing my family tree, another excuse for even more notes. I am a feisty member of the British European Movement France in the face of the ongoing Brexit saga.

What is your vision for our congregation?

Recent years have had their share of turmoil and tragedy and this pandemic year has engendered a raft of uncertainties and stress. People are feeling the need for a safe haven and solace, where they can be reassured and reassure. Oddly at the very time that churches have been closed and the very necessity of their existence queried, there is a clamour for community and the church has a wonderful role to play. It is heartening to see how Jan Steyn's friendly and welcoming online services have reached far beyond the *boulevard périphérique* to far flung corners of the world. Whatever form it takes, I believe there is a role for our congregation if we are willing to adapt and accompany the changing world we live in. One recent example is the rural Scottish parish which organized the Harvest Thanksgiving service in a barn with attendees, in wellie boots, seated on suitable distanced bales. We can do it.

Business as usual

Despite the rather different arrangements in place on Sunday mornings, the everyday running of the church continues. There are still bills to be paid, maintenance to be carried out and spiritual matters to be seen to. The Kirk Session, which comprises the elders and the minister, is responsible for the care, encouragement and spiritual guidance of members whereas the Board (Session + elected members) deals with financial and property matters. Two new Board members were elected at the AGM in September – we are delighted to welcome Fabienne Bonin-Bree and Ewan Clark and look forward to working with them and receiving their valuable input. All Board and Session meetings are now being held by Zoom.



Close to death

SKP elder Derek Bonin-Bree teaches history in the British section of the Collège Watteau in Nogent-sur-Marne. This year, for the third time, the school took part in the 6th edition of the "Bulles de Mémoire" comic strip competition, organized by the French National Office for Veterans and War Victims (ONACVG).

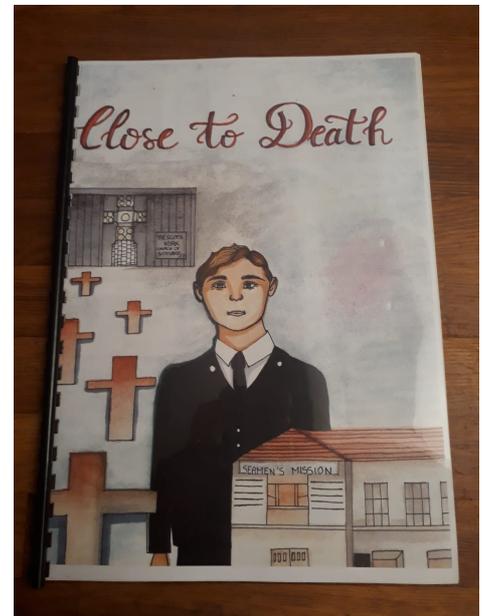
The theme of this year's competition was "S'engager pour la République" (Commitment to the Republic). Derek and his 3ème class (the equivalent of our S4 in Scotland) decided to tell the true story of Rev. Donald Caskie in a comic strip entitled "Close to Death".

The text was written by the pupils based on the the play "The Tartan Pimpernel" which they watched in English at the SKP in February of last year. The more artistic among them produced the illustrations and the project as a whole enabled the entire class to work not only on their history but also on their English and French (and a little geography!).

In telling the story of of this unpretentious, forgotten hero of WWII the pupils were better able to understand the past and the sacrifices made for our freedom today.

They have also helped to keep Donald Caskie's memory alive in an easily-accessible format which is popular the world over.

Congratulations to Derek and his pupils for taking home the 3rd prize in the competition.



Upcoming concert



We welcome our new pianist, Jan Hugo, and his wife Clara to the SKP.

Jan is organizing a concert on 24th October at 6 pm. This is a special early performance to allow you to get home before the start of the curfew at 9 pm. Numbers are limited in line with government guidelines so please don't forget to book in advance. Reservations at janhugoandfriends@gmail.com.

Please do come along and support him. You will be supporting church funds at the same time!

And don't forget your mask of course!

A prayer as I put on my mask

Creator God,

as I prepare to go into the world,
help me to see the sacrament
in the wearing of this cloth -
let it be "an outward sign
of an inward grace" -
a tangible and visible way of living
love for my neighbours,
as I love myself.

Christ, the Son,

since my lips will be covered,
uncover my heart,
that people would see my smile
in the crinkles around my eyes.
Since my voice may be muffled,
help me to speak clearly,
not only with my words
but with my actions.

Holy Spirit,

as the elastic touches my ears,
remind me to listen carefully -
and full of care -
to all those I meet.
May this simple piece of cloth be
shield and banner,
and each breath that it holds,
be filled with your love.
In your Triune Name and
in that love,
I pray.

May it be so.

May it be so.

*Rev. Dr. Richard Bott,
moderator of the United Church of Canada (adapted)*

(with thanks to Hannah Wolfenden in Germany for sharing this prayer with the SKP WhatsApp group)

