



# CRAIGOWL CHURCH

Loving Jesus • Loving our community

## Magazine: December 2025



### Hope Renewed at Christmas and the New Year

As Christmas approaches, we celebrate the light of Christ shining into our world. His birth reminds us that God is with us, bringing peace and hope.

Looking back on the year at Craigowl Church, we may have encountered both joys and challenges. Undoubtedly, we have a lot to be thankful for – a new and enthusiastic minister and manse family, and as we read in this magazine, groups of people who meet and offer fellowship, encouragement, prayerful pastoral support and a great deal of practical help here in our congregation, and across our community and the wider world. We give thanks for all that is taking place and for God's faithfulness.

The birth of Christ is not only a celebration of what happened in Bethlehem long ago—it is a living promise that God is with us today and always. As we step into a new year, we trust His promise: *"For I know the plans I have for you... plans to give you hope and a future"* (Jeremiah 29:11). As we reflect on all that has taken place over these past months and engage with all that Craigowl Church has to offer over this Christmas period, may this season renew our faith, strengthen our fellowship, and remind us that Emmanuel—God with us—is the greatest gift of all.

**JOIN US FOR COMMUNION  
ON  
SUNDAY  
7TH DECEMBER 2025  
AT 11AM**

### Christmas @ Craigowl Church

★ **Advent Sundays at 11am**

30 Nov.	The Promise of the King
7 Dec.	The Herald of the King
14 Dec.	The Humility of the King
21 Dec.	The Song of the King

★ **Christmas Family Morning  
Saturday 6 December: 10am – 12**  
Festive games, crafts, cinema and refreshments  
Children must be accompanied by an adult

★ **Christmas Eve at 6.30pm**  
The Arrival of the King

**Christmas Day at 10.30am**  
Celebrating the birthday of Jesus

## Briefly...

### SIDLAW HOUSE – CHRISTMAS EVENT

This event takes place at the Sidlaw House Complex, Turnberry Avenue, Dundee on Sunday 7 December 2-3pm. Each household within the complex is invited to attend and all receive a Christmas gift bag prepared by our youngsters. The event, held in the Residents Lounge, will be led by Chris and as in previous years there will be carols, bells, keyboard and xylophones with some signed in BSL to convey the joy of the Christmas message of God's unconditional love for each person.

### LADIES BIBLE STUDY

This group meets weekly via Zoom and continues to be an encouragement to many women as they study God's word together. Have you every thought about joining in? Maybe you can't understand how 'Zoom' works..... don't let this put you off. It's relatively straight forward and there are plenty folk who would be able to get alongside you and show you how it all works. If you would like to explore becoming part of this group, speak with Catherine Coull. The final meeting of 2025 is 9<sup>th</sup> December with the group restarting in the new year on 6<sup>th</sup> January. Make it your new years resolution to join up!

### WELCOME GROUP/BLYTHSWOOD SHOEBOX APPEAL

The Welcome Group coordinated this years Shoebox Appeal with 101 boxes being packed and on their way to Ukraine with £320 to cover the cost of transportation. Huge thanks to all who contributed in different ways - handing in empty shoeboxes, covering them, gifts for boxes and money - all on display on our Shoebox Sunday Service on 2 November. This was a great team effort. Thanks also to those who bought items needed with money generously donated, to those packing and closing boxes and to those delivering to the local Depot.



The Christmas Celebration Party at the Welcome Group is on Wednesday 10 December with restart of weekly meetings in the new year on Wednesday 7 January at 2pm.



**The Leprosy  
Mission**  
Scotland

*Healing & Justice since 1874*

Catalogue orders were organised by Val Stewart with over £1,730 of cards and gifts ordered including 36 'Gifts for Life'. Many thanks to all involved for their orders which will be life-transforming for many people as the Leprosy Mission continues Jesus' work of extending healing and love to those with leprosy.

### FRIENDSHIP GROUP

Over the past weeks, the group has enjoyed a craft session and interesting talks. The last meeting of this year is on Monday 1st December when William Beckers will talk about The Men's Shed. At the first meeting of the new year on 12th January, Carrie Varjavandi's talk is "Faith and Belief". Everyone is welcome.

### BOWLING CLUB

The club 's last day of this session is Tuesday 16th December, beginning again on Tuesday 6th January.

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## A 'GIVING' CHRISTMAS TREE



As we did last year, a Christmas tree will be placed in the Hall of Friendship. As an alternative to buying and sharing cards with others in the congregation, we encourage you to hang a card with your Christmas greeting on this tree. The money which you save in terms of purchasing the cards and maybe even posting them, could be gifted to CrossReach. We hope that you might support this initiative. Below is a brief introduction to CrossReach. Further information can be had by [CLICKING HERE](#) or by picking up one of the CrossReach regular magazines which are available from Barbara Chalmers.

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## CROSSREACH

Care you can put your faith in

CrossReach offer loving care to people of all ages who need a helping hand, supporting them to live life to the full whatever their

circumstances. They have been at the forefront of high-quality social care for over 155 years. During that time, they have worked hard to understand the needs of the people who turn to them for help and with them have been at the forefront of pioneering services which have literally changed thousands of lives for the better.

Today, CrossReach is one of the largest care providers in Scotland, with experience across a broad range of services. They are still growing, learning and improving, thanks to the incredible people they have had the privilege to support, and all those who support them in their work. They state, "We aim to show the practical side of our Christian faith by reflecting Christian love to those we support, through our leadership, management and working relationships."

The Church of Scotland Social Care Council is accountable for the work of CrossReach. Its remit is to provide social care services and specialist resources in Christ's name to further the caring work of the Church to people in challenging circumstances. It also helps to identify areas of need and guides the Church in new approaches to relevant problems in society as well as responding on issues arising in the Council's areas of concern.

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## FLOWERS



We thank all who week by week gift money which is used to provide flowers for the church. In addition to enhancing the beauty of the sanctuary, the flowers are much appreciated by those to whom they are distributed following each of the morning services.

If you would like to gift flowers, the 2026 Flower Calendar is now on the noticeboard. Determine the date on which you would like the flowers to be placed in church, write your name against the relevant date and a couple of weeks before the selected date, give your donation to Susan Robertson who

arranges the purchase and placing of the flowers.

We thank Susan for all the work that she does in purchasing, setting out and arranging distribution.



## FROM THE MINISTER'S DESK

To our friends at Craigowl Church,

As I sit down to write for our magazine, my heart is full of so many emotions. I feel joy, gratitude, grief, and an overwhelming sense of God's presence through it all. I want to start by saying thank you. Thank you for the incredible welcome you have given both Marion and I since we arrived at Craigowl. Thank you for your kindness, your love and your prayers. You have blessed us beyond measure.

These first few weeks as your minister have been everything I had hoped they would be and so much more. Getting to know you, worshipping together and sharing in the life of this community has been such a joy. I am so excited about what God has in store for us at Craigowl Church and I feel truly blessed to be serving here alongside you all.

However, as many of you know, these past few weeks have also brought the deepest sorrow. On 3<sup>rd</sup> November my big brother Ally died suddenly, and our world was turned upside down. In the midst of such unexpected tragedy and heartbreak, you have surrounded us with love and support in ways I will never forget. Your prayers have carried us through the darkest moments, and your care has been a real reminder of God's love when we needed it most.

I cannot thank you enough for the way you have reached out to us during this time. You have shown us such grace and compassion. You have given us space to grieve, whilst also holding us up in prayer. In you, Marion and I have seen the body of Christ at work, and we are so deeply grateful.

As we move through this season of Advent and look forward to Christmas, we are reminded that our faith holds space for both joy and sorrow. We celebrate the coming of our Saviour into a broken world, and we trust that God is with us in every season of life. In times of celebration and in times of grief.

Your faithfulness to us in these early weeks has shown to me what a special community this is, and I give God thanks for bringing us together. Please know how blessed I feel to be your minister. I praise God that He has called me to Craigowl and we can clearly see His hand at work. Thank you for making us feel so welcome. Thank you for your prayers and thank you for all that you do to make Craigowl Church such a special place.

With much love and gratitude,

Chris

*"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God." (2 Corinthians 1:3-4)*





## GIVING TO THE WORK OF THE CHURCH

The work of the church in spreading the good news of the Gospel is entirely dependent on the generosity of its members, who contribute with their time and financially. The elders are very aware of how the cost of living is affecting everyone and are very grateful to those who give as they are able.

Some choose to give regularly to the work of the church using **Freewill Offering Envelopes**. If you already do this, you will automatically be provided with a set of envelopes for 2026. These will be available for collection on Sunday 7 December. If you have given this way in the past, but do not want envelopes for 2026, or if you have not used envelopes in the past and would like to, please speak to Gail Alexander as soon as possible.

Many choose to give by Standing Order directly from their bank to the church bank account. This is a very convenient method both for the giver and for the church as it saves the giver sorting out cash, and the Treasurer's team counting it. If you would like to use this method and have not already set it up, please speak to Gail or to our Treasurer, John Ralfe, to find out more. A standing order can be changed or cancelled only by you at any time.

*giftaid it*

Please remember also that if you are a taxpayer, the HMRC **Gift Aid Scheme** allows us to claim back 25 pence for every pound you give. This makes a huge difference to our income. Speak to Gail if you would like to find out more. All giving is treated confidentially with only the Treasurer, John, and the Gift Aid Convenor, Gail, knowing the amount you give.

Perhaps a less familiar way to consider giving is to think about incorporating a gift to the church in your Will. The work of the local Church has been assisted greatly by several generous gifts in the Wills of members, adherents and supporters. Such gifts serve as a lasting legacy, often allowing work to be taken forward that might otherwise be unaffordable. If you think this might be worthy of consideration, we encourage you to discuss this with your family and seek the help of a solicitor to ensure that your wishes are clearly drafted in accordance with the law.

*Lasting legacy*

## BSL (British Sign Language) GROUP

The group has been delighted to welcome children from St Fergus and Ardler Primary Schools to their Friday morning sessions to practise signing carols for the 'Turning on of the Lights in Ardler' which took place on 27 November.

BSL members continue to try to become more aware of the needs of those with hearing impairment and whenever possible make contact with those using BSL, whom they meet, always resulting in very positive encounters. The Group has bought "The Gift of Sight" for someone with Leprosy. The last fortnightly session is on December 5th restarting in the new year on Friday 16th January at 9.30 am.



## FINANCE

*A report from our treasurer, John Ralfe*



We are now not very far away from the end of Craigowl Church's first full financial year.

When we look at our day-to-day finances through 2025 to date, we find ourselves operating our General Fund with a deficit of around £15k. However, our overall position at the moment is sound due to the prudent accumulation of reserve funds, availability of monies spread across various designated accounts and the receipt of funds for the benefit of Craigowl Church following the sale of the Strathmartine Church complex

Much has changed in the past ten months, but I am still of the firm view that we have a Kirk Session who are very cost conscious and keep a close eye on our finances. We can all be confident that our resources are in safe hands. Going forward, as we develop our plans and monitor the financial impact of such plans, it will be ever more important for us to keep firm control over finances. As always, I will endeavour to keep you all up to date with where we are.

The amalgamation of accounts following the Union was an unavoidable time-consuming process, thankfully, this task is complete, and we have been able to ensure that all statutory obligations were met in terms of submitting audited accounts to both Perth Presbytery and the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR). All was found to be in order!

We are not complacent and recognise that as our expenditure rises and new mission and outreach opportunities arise, we all need to reflect on our giving in order to ensure that God's work is taken forward as He has planned. However, we go forward giving thanks for all that God has provided over the course of this past year.





## A HEART FOR EMPOWERMENT AND MINISTRY

*By Marion Barlas*

As Chris and I begin this new chapter at Craigowl Church, my heart overflows with gratitude for God's faithfulness and the opportunity to serve this wonderful community.

I am Marion Barlas and I'm deeply blessed to walk alongside my husband in his ministry, as we answer God's call together. As Scripture reminds us, "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labour" (Ecclesiastes 4:9). God has called me to support Chris's pastoral leadership, using the gifts He has given me to serve our community.

Throughout my career as a Leadership Coach with DXC Technology's Global HR Learning and Development Team, I've discovered that my professional calling and spiritual calling are beautifully connected. Every day, I have the privilege of helping leaders discover their potential, develop their gifts and grow in confidence. A work that mirrors the heart of Jesus, who saw possibility in every person He encountered and empowered them to become all they were created to be.

My faith has never been separate from my work. In corporate settings, I've led Christian groups, prayed with colleagues facing challenges and integrated Christ-centred leadership principles into everything I do. I've witnessed firsthand how the values of servant leadership, compassion and authentic encouragement, can transform individuals and teams. These aren't just professional strategies; they are expressions of God's love in action.

As we settle into our new community, I'm excited to bring these same gifts into ministry at Craigowl Church. My heart is particularly drawn to mentoring, small groups, women's ministry and community outreach. I believe God has equipped each of us with unique gifts, and my passion is helping others recognise and step into their God-given potential. Whether through one-on-one conversations, gathering in homes for fellowship and study or reaching out to our neighbours, I long to create spaces where people feel seen, valued, and empowered to live out their calling.

Jesus invested in people. He listened, encouraged, challenged and believed in them, even when they couldn't see it themselves. That's the model I aspire to follow, both in my professional work and in ministry.

I can't wait to see how God will use us both at Craigowl Church. If you're interested in connecting, whether for mentoring, joining a small group, or exploring ways to serve our community together, please don't hesitate to reach out. I'm here, ready to serve and eager to witness all that God has in store for us.

Grace and peace,

*Marion*



## SUNDAY MORNING BIBLE READINGS AND PRAYERS



Most Sunday mornings bible readings and prayers for others are given by people from the congregation. We have posted on the notice board a rota covering the next few weeks. However, please don't worry if you see your name on it but find that you are not available on the Sunday allocated. Just let Chris know or arrange a swap with someone else on the list. If swapping, please just drop Chris an email or text message to let him know.

The present list was compiled using people who read and prayed over the period of the vacancy. If you would be keen to be involved with this and willing to have your name added to this list of those available, please speak with Chris.



A fantastic response to our Big Quiz Afternoon. Twelve teams participated and everyone who came along seemed to enjoy the afternoon. The 'Ezekial Rockets' emerged as winners but the biggest success was the sum of £470 which was donated to Tearfund's 'Transforming Communities' project. As well as thanking all who came along and donated, we want to say 'thank



*Craigowl Church Quiz Champs*

you' to those who donated the tray bakes and to all who helped with the practical organisation of this event.

If you would like to know more about the 'Transforming Communities' project, [CLICK HERE](#).



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### Baptism

On Sunday 23rd November it was a delight to be able to welcome the Anderson family for the baptism of baby, Noah Ted Anderson.