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NEWSLETTER  
*Easter*



**GILNAHIRK PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

**Vacancy Convener: Rev. Stuart McCrea**  
**(Tel 07528366668)**  
**stuart.mccrea@gmail.com**

**Pastoral & Preaching Support: Rev. Roy Mackay**  
**(Tel 07519018429)**  
**roymackay.5@gmail.com**

**Youth & Family Worker: Laura Hutcheson-Magee**  
**(Tel 07927724198)**  
**ljhutcheson@hotmail.com**

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**Registered Charity in Northern Ireland: NIC 104474**

Thanks to all those who contributed articles and items for this edition. Articles for the Easter Newsletter should be with the Newsletter Committee or the Church Office Secretary not later than Sunday 10th May. Items received after 10th May will not be included until the following issue. **Please observe this deadline.**

The Newsletter Committee:

Judith Morrow (Convener)	Mark Blundell	Thelma Jackson
Margaret Campbell	Brian Campbell	Rachel Toland
Roberta Patterson	Martin Childs	Janet Cooper
Geraldine Whyte	Alison Kennedy	Stephen Brown
Ivan Noble	Valerie Myles	

## **Greetings from our Vacancy Convenor**

In the final episode of the hit American sitcom FRIENDS, the apartment's living room, which has been the scene for so much of the story, has been cleared out as the occupants prepare to move. One of the main characters looks around in surprise and asks, "Have the walls ALWAYS been purple?!" Sometimes we can be blind to things that surround us all the time - either because they are so familiar we've stopped noticing them, or because our focus is more easily drawn to things and situations immediately before us. It can happen in any context - including our church fellowship and even our own journey of faith.

The season of Lent is a valuable cure for the 'blindness' that can so easily creep into our lives - calling us to slow down, choose to pause, look beyond the immediate, and perhaps move some things aside to help us do that. Lent helps us be ready, attentive, and more fully aware for Easter - the celebration of rescue and restoration through Jesus, our Redeemer. It seems crazy that we could be 'blind' to this amazing truth - but just like the purple walls of the FRIENDS apartment - even this can get lost in the background of everyday life.

As we approach this Easter, we want to encourage one another to slow down, pause, be attentive, and aware of all that God has done, and is doing around us and within us - perhaps what He is calling us away from or towards. The Lent Challenge has been helping lots of church members engage with this season of preparation. Thank you to those who brought their creativity and care to that initiative. Our Changemaker events are another fantastic use of creative gifting to praise and point to the One whose creative love is the very reason for our existence, the true purpose of our lives, and the secure hope of our eternity.

I pray that through these and the many other ways that God is at work in and through the GPC church family, you will be blessed and encouraged.

May we each take time to pause in prayer, prepare our hearts, and praise the Lord this Easter, fully aware of the truth in which we have new life!

'Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy, he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. (1 Peter 1:3)

Grace and peace be yours in abundance.

# Church Diary

## March

**Sunday 29th 11am Palm Sunday Communion Service** led by Rev Roy Mackay  
4.30pm Gilnahirk & Braniel Churches Palm Sunday Prayer Walk (meet at Braniel Community Church, finishing with refreshments at Gilnahirk Baptist)  
7pm United Evening Service @ Gilnahirk Baptist Church

## April

Wednesday 1st 7pm United Holy Week Service @ Braniel Church  
Thursday 2nd 7pm United Holy Week Service @ St Dorothea's  
**Friday 3rd 7pm Good Friday Service** led by Rev Stuart McCrea @ GPC

**Sunday 5th 11am Easter Sunday All Age Service** Rev Roy Mackay followed by refreshments (please note NO evening service)

Sunday 12th 11am Rev Roy Mackay

Sunday 19th 11am Rev Derek McKelvey  
7pm Louise Davidson (Deaconess, Friendship House)

Sunday 26th 11am Rev Stuart McCrea

## May

Sunday 3rd 11am Rev Roy Mackay & 7pm Rev Stuart McCrea

Sunday 10th 11am Christian Aid Sunday followed by refreshments

Sunday 17th 11am & 7pm Rev Stuart McCrea

Sunday 24th 11am Rev Roy Mackay

Sunday 31st 11am Martin Hampton (Elder, Strand Presbyterian)

## June

Sunday 7th 11am Sacrament of the Lord's Supper Rev Roy Mackay

Sunday 14th 11am Young Gilnahirk Service

## **Thoughts on a Vacancy**

I am sure some of you were hoping to open this newsletter and read that a new Minister had been appointed to Gilnahirk Presbyterian Church to replace Rev Stephen Moore, who retired in September 2025. You may be disappointed to hear this is not the case and will now be wondering what on earth we have been up to.

I want to reassure you that behind the scenes we have been very busy! Unlike commercial recruitment, the process to appoint a Minister in PCI moves exceedingly slowly. Detailed information on all aspects of Church life must be submitted for careful consideration by a variety of Committees and Commissions..... the Presbytery Reconfiguration Panel, Presbytery Missions Panel, Vacancy Commission, East Belfast Presbytery and finally, Linkage Commission. This final body is the one with ultimate authority to grant a congregation permission to call and requires representatives from the congregation to attend to make their case in person and answer any questions.

With our paperwork having been approved by all the previous groups, we were invited to appear before the Linkage Commission on Tuesday 24th February 2026. You were represented by me (Clerk of Session), Laura Hutcheson-Magee (Elder and Youth and Family worker), Colin McRoberts (Elder and Congregational Representative Elder at Presbytery), and Rev Stuart McCrea (our Vacancy Convener). After a nerve-racking afternoon, I am delighted to be able to report that Gilnahirk Presbyterian Church was granted unrestricted leave to call a minister!

In the words of Winston Churchill, “Now this is not the end. .... But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning.”

We now move into the next phase of expressions of interest and applications; shortlisting and interviews; hearings and finally, a decision! This process will also take time and it is important to note that we cannot assume any definite deadline for appointing a new minister, but late Autumn would be the earliest we could hope for. However, we are not about doing a quick job, but doing a good job and identifying the person whom God has chosen to be our new Minister and to lead us into GPC's next chapter.

Perhaps like me, you rolled your eyes at the length of time this will all take, but can I share a few things I have learnt so far? A Vacancy is not a gap in the life of a congregation but a very important opportunity for development. I am so impressed with everyone who has stepped up and got involved, quietly undertaking extra jobs, sometimes for the first time, to keep GPC on the road. I have seen how we have pulled together, and this can only strengthen the bonds between us. Your ongoing support has been so encouraging. Can I say a big THANK YOU to you all.

Over the next few months, we will complete the Lent Challenge, perform Changemaker, celebrate Easter, hold the Spring Plant Sale and Craft Fair, resume our monthly Prayer walks, not to mention all the regular events. Can I ask you to continue this journey with us? Most importantly, I want to encourage you all to continue in your commitment to prayer for this next step along the road.

“Let us run with endurance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus.” Hebrews v 12 1-2

**Heather Taylor**  
**Clerk of Session**

# SPRING PLANT SALE & CRAFT FAIR

GILNAHIRK PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

SATURDAY 9TH MAY

10AM-12NOON

**Buy your plants for the garden or  
bring your own baskets and pots to be filled**

**Handmade crafts  
and homemade cakes for sale**

**Tea, coffee & scones**



## Update from our Safeguarding Leads

PCI's announcement in November alerting the public to our central governance's failures has obviously created massive concerns for all those involved in the Presbyterian Church. Mark Smyth, PCI's press and media officer, said "we can't unthinkingly behave as if it is business as usual".

This is particularly important in the field of Safeguarding and I am glad to report that changes are already happening. Assembly Buildings has now 7 employees in the Safeguarding Department (previously 2!). They come from a wide range of backgrounds including health, education and PSNI. They are working at both child and adult safeguarding, updating the policies and procedures, training EVERYONE involved - including all elders, and making sure PCI policies are clear and totally open to public scrutiny via the website. This work had started before the crisis but it is now imperative.

Patricia Gowdy and I, Judith Morrow, are the safeguarding personnel for Gilnahirk Presbyterian Church together with our Designated Person Martha Campbell. We have held these roles for a number of years and we have endeavoured to make our congregation as open, welcoming and safe as is "humanly" possible. Our team ensures that all volunteer training is up-to-date and appropriate policies and procedures are in place.

We would also like to stress that safeguarding is everyone's concern. As a congregation we care for each other. Jesus taught us to look after the vulnerable in our society - it is a directive to all of us, not just those in authority. So please contact us if you have any concerns, whether current or historic. You can speak to myself, Patricia or Martha; to the Minister or a member of Kirk Session. You can also contact the PSNI, Social Services or the Safeguarding team at PCI:

PCI Safeguarding Office

Email: [safeguarding@presbyterianireland.org](mailto:safeguarding@presbyterianireland.org)

Tel: +44 (0)28 9041 7234 (Mon to Fri 9.30am-4.30pm)

[www.presbyterianireland.org](http://www.presbyterianireland.org)

PSNI : [PClenquiry@psni.police.uk](mailto:PClenquiry@psni.police.uk) ; Phone 101

Victim Support NI : 90230205

**Judith Morrow, GPC Adult Safeguarding Lead**

# BE SAFE BE HEARD HAVE FUN

Everyone should be safe and should know that they are safe.  
Tell your leader if you are frightened or have worries.  
Or speak to one of these people below.



**MARTHA CAMPBELL**  
**07884 430461**



**PATRICIA GOWDY**  
**07900 665693**



**JUDITH MORROW**  
**07711 832441**

# *Easter Services*

**Please join us to celebrate this special season and the Good News of Easter!**

Sunday 29th March: Palm Sunday

Communion @11am

United Gilnahirk & Braniel Palm Sunday Prayer Walk

@ 4.30pm

United Gilnahirk & Braniel Churches Palm Sunday  
Evening Service - Gilnahirk Baptist Service @7pm

Holy Week Services

Wednesday 1 April 7pm @ Braniel Church

Thursday 2 April 7pm @ St Dorothea's Church

Good Friday Service 7pm @ GPC

Easter Sunday

All Age Easter Morning Celebration @ 11am

(followed by refreshments in Styne Brae Upper Hall)





## CLEMATIS MONTANA

It clung unnoticed to the giant fir  
Until at last one glorious sunny day  
Volcano-like erupting high and making flow  
A lava stream of glorious glowing pink  
Towards the foliage growing low below.

I know that it will stay a little while  
And glow for me  
Kissing my garage roof  
Supported by its sturdy dark green friend

Presenting one more proof  
(Although not needed!)  
That the cycle will not end.

Who could not love a scene like this?

*By Rosemary Williamson*



# The Big Splash 2026



On Sunday 8th March, around 50 keen (and less keen) swimmers/paddlers from GPC came along to our annual 'Big Splash' event. This year we changed venue and used Bangor Aurora Aquatic and Leisureplex, meaning that the children, teens and parents could enjoy both an Aqua Challenge Inflatable pool, and a leisure pool with slides, wave machine, and toddler area. We don't think any adults managed to avail of the jacuzzi!

After a fantastic time in the water, we gathered in our own private Party Room for some yummy food and refreshments. Everyone had worked up a good appetite (even those of us who simply watched from the viewing deck and drank coffee) and safe to say there was not a chip, a sausage or a chicken nugget left over...

The Big Splash was a great opportunity for younger families to spend quality time together outside of a Sunday morning, and get to know each other better. It was a very busy but very blessed afternoon. We are already looking forward to next year's Big Splash, to enjoy the guaranteed fun, bond further and make





A few of us even had energy for the gym after the swim!!!





We enjoyed learning about Moses and the 10 Commandments at our February Messy Church. The JB Hall was full of fun as young families played themed games, listened carefully to our Bible Story, made beautiful take-home crafts and savoured hot dogs prepared by the Messy Church chefs (once declared as “the best chefs ever”!).

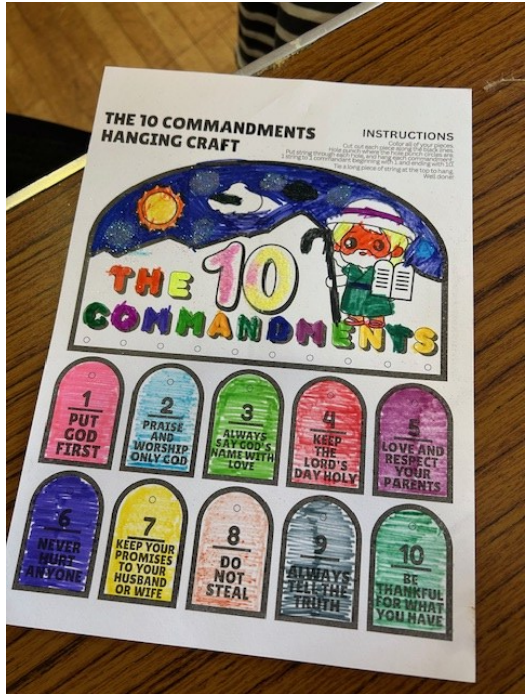
We learned what each commandment really means, in language that we could all understand a little better than what we sometimes read. We found it helpful to be reminded that the first three commandments are about LOVING GOD, and the next seven are about LOVING OUR NEIGHBOUR.

JESUS REPLIED: “LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH, THIS IS THE FIRST AND GREATEST COMMANDMENT. AND THE SECOND IS LIKE IT: LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.”  
MATTHEW 22:37-39



Creative story-time with Judith is always a highlight

A few of the boys just couldn't get close enough to our re-created Mount Sinai in the desert!



We turned these sheets into colourful hanging mobiles to put up at home to help us remember the 10 commandments each day

In February GPC Youth Club hosted a football Tournament in the JB Halls. Teams from Knock Youth Club and Bloomfield Youth Club were invited to play, and we hope that this will become an annual event. After an exciting and competitive tournament, one of the Gilnahirk teams emerged victorious, and now owns the highly coveted bragging rights (not that we will gloat!).



Big well done to everyone who played but especially to the winners Joah, Adam, Oscar, Christopher, Harry R and Oliver.



## Celebrating Easter with young children

Here are a few creative ideas you may want to use as parent, carer, grandparent or family friend, in order to help little ones celebrate Easter this year!

### **Easter egg story hunt**

Split the Easter story into sections, and write each part on a strip of paper. You could use hollow eggs and hide the paper inside, or use chocolate eggs and tape the section to the eggs. Once the children have found all the eggs, have them put the story in order. This could become something you do every year!

### **Jelly beans (or other colourful fruits or sweets)**

These can be a visual way to talk about the Easter story with your children:

Red – Is for the blood Jesus gave. Mark 14:24

Purple – Is for the robe the soldiers made Jesus wear. John 19:5

Black – Is for the dark tomb Jesus was in. Matthew 27:58-60

White – Reminds us of the angels that rolled the stone away.

Yellow – Is for the morning he rose to make all things right.

Green – Is for the garden where Mary saw Jesus had risen. John 20:14-17

Pink – Is to remind us that we are never alone.

### **Easter Puzzle**

Print off or draw a picture that represents Easter. Then stick the picture onto some card and cut it into puzzle shapes. You could hide these pieces as part of an egg hunt around the house, or write a treasure hunt. They can enjoy putting together the puzzle once they have all the pieces.

### **Easter Story Stones**

Get some flat stones and paints, then you and the children can paint different images to tell the Easter story on the stones. These make lovely keepsakes to get out every year or give as gifts.

### **Easter garden**

Collect items together with the children on walks or in your garden, and make an Easter scene. Use rocks or stones to make the tomb with the stone rolled away, and tie sticks together with string to make the cross! Let your children have fun with it, and maybe even keep it in the garden.

### **Hot Cross Buns**

Learn to make hot cross buns together and when you are making the cross on the top you can reflect together on what Jesus gave for us. You could even share the buns with a neighbour, and share what Easter means to you. And then enjoy eating them together of course!

*Adapted from an article by The Kitchen Table Project, An Initiative of Care for The Family*



Forge East' is an exciting pilot project taking place over Holy Week 1-3rd April. The goal is to forge new young leaders and new partnerships within East Belfast Presbytery. Young people aged 15-18 from congregations in East Belfast were invited to apply, in order to 'learn, serve, lead' together, in the hope of then returning to their home congregations with new leadership skills, increased confidence, and an even deeper desire to serve God. Over 30 young people have signed up, along with 8 young adult leaders. We have had two gatherings in advance of the project, to get to know each other and to go through some basic training.

During Forge East itself, we will meet for worship and leadership training seminars each morning, before splitting into teams for the afternoon to go and serve in one of three projects, based in local congregations. The three partner congregations are Strand, McQuiston and Garnerville. The teams will deliver a programme relevant to an ongoing ministry (for example children's work, community outreach work, lunch clubs). Laura is involved as part of the Forge East Co-ordinating team, while Ben Chambers has signed up as a Team Member and will be serving in McQuiston each day. Here is what Ben had to say:

*"I found out about Forge when I went to the MAD East weekend which I really enjoyed as I met new people, learnt a lot and generally had a great time so I thought Forge would be more of the same! As well as having a bit of craic, I am looking forward to learning about leadership, working with more children, helping other churches outreach and taking every opportunity to have fellowship with other people."*

**Please do pray for us and the whole Forge East project from 1st-3rd April!**

## A BIG THANK YOU ON BEHALF OF PW

We had a very successful annual PW Coffee Morning on Saturday 24th January in the SBC upper hall and wish to thank the Congregation, Friends and Park Runners for their wonderful support, raising £720 towards our funds and charity giving. We looked forward to our PW Service with Paula Burrows (Deaconess) from Ballygrainey PC on 22nd March. Look out for further information in the Sunday Announcements about meetings in March and April and come along.

Hilary Gowdy

PW Leader

Alan Magee reported to the Committee that the defibrillator outside the Jack Britton Hall has already been useful to the community as two requests for its use have been made. This little lifesaving box is a visual and practical reminder to the people around us that Gilnahirk PC has both their physical and spiritual interests at heart. Instructions are to ring 999, tell the operator where you are and they will give you a code to open the box. We also have a defibrillator inside the Styne Brae. It's always best if we don't ever have to use it - but it's good to know it's there.





## World Day of Prayer 2026



World Day of Prayer has been an annual Christian event since the 1920s. It began in USA when Christian women began founding boards for foreign and home mission, working specifically with women and children. It has grown greatly since then, and today around 120 countries take part.

Each year's service is written by Christian women from selected countries and translated into more than 90 languages, each theme planned well in advance, so for instance, 2028's is being written by women in Costa Rica with the theme of "Leading the way in Grace"; 2029 is "Compassion brings healing" from Italy.

Everyone in the world can be involved as services are held in almost every neighbourhood or district. We are one of approximately 20 churches in Belfast East 2 district and were delighted to host this year's service in Gilnahirk with the theme "I will give you rest, come" prepared by Christian women from Nigeria.

The Communion table and pulpit were decorated as suggested with richly coloured textiles representing lush land and agricultural wealth, and black mourning cloth representing the burden of marginalisation experienced by Nigerian widows.

School books represented the burden of religious persecution that some children face while grains of rice symbolised the interconnected burdens of poverty and despair, highlighting the relationship between economic hardship and mental health struggles.

A pile of stones symbolised burdens carried, like poverty, oppression and injustice, and a bottle of oil is a reference to Nigeria's complex history with crude oil - potential prosperity v global exploitation. And there are always candles, symbolising hope in the face of despair and light at the end of the tunnel.

Approximately 45 people gathered in our church. Eight members of various churches in the district read parts representing service leaders, readers and 4 "Nigerian" women.

It's good to be reminded of the simple things. In Matthew 11: 28-30 Jesus tells us that all we have to do is to come. We don't have to work, or put effort into this. There's nothing we can do to earn it. Our entitlement is no different from anyone else's. How encouraging! How refreshing! Just rock up and receive... - REST!

I would like to thank all who helped the smooth running of the service - Alf, Heather, Laura, Alan, Colin, Ricky, Susan, Patricia, Hilary, Simon; the participants - Caroline, Ingrid, Olivia, Ruth, Mildred, Hilary, and all who were involved in the refreshments afterwards - making, baking, pouring, serving, smiling, clearing, washing, drying and tidying up. This list is not exclusive... I heard many compliments.

**Rachel Toland**





These proud artists are delighted with their work colouring in Paul Gray's design. It will feature in the church decorations for our 'Changemaker' production on the 27th and 28th March.

GILNAHIRK PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH INVITES YOU TO

# CHANGEMAKER

A creative production centred on the Easter Story,  
woven alongside the work of Christian Aid,  
told in drama, word & song

FRIDAY 27TH MARCH &  
SATURDAY 28TH MARCH  
@ 7PM

Free Tickets available from GPC Church Office,  
Lorna Thompson or Carol Noble  
Donations on the night to Christian Aid

Refreshments to follow



## Vestibule Reception Rota

March	11.00am	David McDonald* Judith Morrow Barbara Anderson
	7.00pm	Patricia Gowdy
April	11.00am	Jill Kerry* Carol Anderson Richard Montgomery
	7.00pm	Ivan Noble
May	11.00am	Stephen Brown Hilary Gowdy Trevor Gilliland*
	7.00pm	Carol Noble
June	11.00am	Richard Patterson Roberta Patterson Gillian Hamill*
	7.00pm	Janet Cooper

\* Indicates reception duties at Styre Brae Centre, the security of premises and plate collection.

Evening services will be on the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 3<sup>rd</sup> of the month

Those lifting the collection in the centre rows are to always start with the Choir.



General reminder to all members on vestibule duty of the new regulations regarding Fire/Health & Safety. Each member should ensure they know where all emergency fire exits & fire extinguishers are located and they will act as Fire Marshalls in the event should it become necessary.

Members on duty should have the church doors open no later than 30 minutes before the commencement of each service.

It is the responsibility of those rostered to arrange for Session/Committee deputies if unable to attend.

## SACRAMENTS

### New Communicants

Nicola Wilson (on transfer)

## CONGREGATIONAL REGISTER

### Deaths

6 January Tonya McWilliams

### New Member

Nicola Wilson



This year's donation to the Presbyterian Children's Society was £1480, which was collected before Christmas.

(Gift Aid is yet to be added to this total which will increase the final amount). Thank you to everyone who contributed. These funds will help to alleviate financial hardship for children and families in individual congregations across Ireland.

More information about the work of the society can be found at: [www.presbyterianchildrenssociety.org](http://www.presbyterianchildrenssociety.org)

**The  
Bible  
Course**  
NEW EDITION

Do you want to explore  
how to apply the Bible to  
your daily life?

**Our Discipleship Groups are running  
The Bible Course and YOU are invited to join!**

**Next Session: Exodus- The Story of Freedom**

**Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> April @ 8pm**

**or**

**Friday 17<sup>th</sup> April @ 11.30am**

Meet in Stye Brae Centre // Refreshments served on arrival

[biblesociety.org.uk/thebiblecourse](http://biblesociety.org.uk/thebiblecourse)





**Gilnahirk Presbyterian Church exists to show the love of God in Christ Jesus, proclaim the Gospel and enable people to find its healing power, encourage members to worship and learn together and grow in faith, and apply the faith in practical concern and help to others.**

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SERVICES  
ONLINE



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