

**Saltcoats North Parish Church Record – February 2010**  
**MINISTER'S LETTER**

Dear Friends,

Have you noticed that the title of this magazine is “The Parish Record”? No doubt it was called that because it records what has been happening in the congregation and parish. However the name fulfils its double meaning on those occasions when what is happening happens to be a record breaking achievement!

At the risk of being “a stuck record” let me record yet another record: In 2009 we ended the year with more members than we started! We are a growing congregation! This is because we had less deaths than in an average year and because we had lots of new members by Resolution of the Kirk Session. This is something to celebrate and something to think more deeply about. Consider: how many other congregations in Western Europe are currently growing? The general picture is decline in numbers. Consider: when was the last time you remember our congregation growing statistically? In my 28 years as a minister and half a century of a lifetime, this is the first time I have experienced being part of a growing congregation! Isn't this awesome? So we should thank God and not take it for granted.

I am worried that we are taking some things for granted. So, let me raise with you one or two worries at this point, in the middle of celebrating records, rather than wait till we are back in decline (not that decline is ever far away).

In an average year we lose about 16 members by death, so we have to gain that amount to “stand still”. That is quite a challenge. However we are not in the business of keeping numbers up for statistical satisfaction. We are in the business of pointing people toward Jesus and in that way helping to enrich their lives and build up the Body of Christ, the family of God, the Kingdom of God, however you prefer to describe it. It is about souls, not statistics. But we can take souls for granted as much as take statistics for granted. Do you see the urgency in seeking to draw people to Jesus? It is not to look good on our statistical return; it is so that they can know Jesus and enjoy Him forever.

Do you take seriously your vocation to be a “fisher of men and women”? What do you do in this regard? Do you ever invite people to come with you to Church? Do you speak to friends, neighbours, anyone about matters of faith? Do you participate in adult Christian education so that you will know more about your own faith and have more to say when asked good questions? Do you pray for people you know that they may come into the fold of the Good Shepherd? Do you pray together with other members? The Manse Groups which we hold from time to time and the half hour Prayer Meeting every Thursday at 10.30 am. are meant for every single member of the congregation and anyone else in the parish. They are not specialist, group activities for a select few. Only by praying together and by learning together as well as worshipping together and serving together, will we be the Church as Jesus intends it to be.

Jesus wants us to personally grow in our faith and to grow closer together as a congregation so please come to Sunday worship, the Prayer meeting, adult Christian education, and congregational events such as the annual Elders and Congregation Day Together in Mansefield Trinity Church, Kilwinning on Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> March. More than this, Jesus wants our piece of the jig-saw to fit in with the bigger picture of the Christian Church, so He wants us to play a full part in the Church of Scotland and ecumenically with other congregations. Would you please consider attending joint services such as the Fraternal's one on Christian Unity Week and the World Day of Prayer Service on the 5<sup>th</sup> of March (11am) here in the North Church? Will you walk on the Walk of Witness on Good Friday alongside other Christians to show the town that we are united in Jesus?

In life, any great success comes from lots of little decisions and little contributions, so please keep giving your time, talents, money and whole lives and from them Jesus will produce ever

greater miracles. But never feel that what we have to give is too insignificant and never take anything for granted. Jesus needs our picnic lunches!

God Bless,

*Alex B Noble*

### **SPECIAL ITEM**

You may know that every year Saltcoats North Parish Church raises about £2,500 for Christian Aid through our Palm Sunday Soup and Sweet Lunch (£250), our Harvest Retiral Offering (£250) and the Christian Aid Week Door to Door Collection in the North Parish area (£2,000). You may also know that every year Saltcoats town raises about £5,500 for Christian Aid (half of which is our £2,500).

Now Christian Aid has asked us if we would like to be one of only six groups in Scotland to take part in a very special deal. The deal is this: if we in Saltcoats can raise £5,000 for a particular Christian Aid project (to do with HIV/Aids in Malawi), then the Scottish Parliament has agreed to top it up to **£50,000!!!** We would have until June 2011 to raise the money...i.e. a year and a half instead of the usual year. Christian Aid have asked us not to neglect the on-going projects while all attention is on this project, so we have to keep the C.Aid Week Door to Door Collection for normal Christian Aid projects. We have already decided to put the Soup and Sweet and Harvest monies to this special project.

Mary Stewart, the local C.Aid Organiser has managed to get even more congregations, groups and individuals to join with us on this special project. It should be quite easy to raise £5,000 in a year and a half between all these:-

Saltcoats North Parish Church; New Trinity Parish Church; St.Cuthbert's Parish Church; Stevenston High Kirk; Ardeer Parish Church; Livingstone Parish Church; Mansefield Trinity Parish Church; Kilwinning Old Parish Church; West Kilbride Parish Church; the Park Church; St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church; St.Andrew's Episcopal Church; Adelaide College; South Beach Home; plus individuals and groups.

Mary Stewart is asking for any books which you might contribute to a Christian Aid Bookstall, which will be run every Saturday in May and June in Dockhead Street. You can hand them in, any time from now on, to our office or to Mary's house at 5 High Road, Saltcoats. Thank you.

**SALTCOATS NORTH PARISH CHURCH**  
**PARISH RECORD – MARCH 2010**  
**MINISTER’S LETTER**

Dear Friends,

You might have heard that Saltcoats North Parish Church and its Minister were given the great honour of addressing our leaders in the Scottish Parliament. Every Wednesday at 2.30 pm there is a “Time for Reflection” before the Parliamentary business gets under way. Each MSP gets to nominate someone to conduct this thought for the week. Kenneth Gibson our MSP asked me as the SNPC Minister to do it on Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> February.

These brief reflections are from different faiths and none. Quite often they are given to a half empty chamber. However, as God would have it, (not luck), I found the Parliament absolutely packed to capacity both downstairs with MSPs and upstairs in the gallery. There was also a heightened state of excitement – because the first item of business after the Time for Reflection was Nicola Sturgeon, the Health Minister and Deputy First Minister’s, statement to Parliament about why she wrote a letter in support of a convicted benefits’ fraudster. The TV cameras circled her like vultures, the other parties scented a possible resignation and blood! In that charged atmosphere I tried to give a prophetic word from the Lord to our national leaders. I thought you might like to read what I said, so this is my verbatim script:

Thank you Mr Fergusson for inviting me to speak today. It is a great honour and privilege. Thanks also to my MSP Kenneth Gibson for nominating me...and for the lovely lunch!

If I were to speak like this...with my head down in my notes...you would rightly feel:

“How boring! For goodness sake, look at us when you are speaking to us!”

It comes across so much better when the person talking looks up from themselves and outwards to the listeners. We engage...have dialogue...get feedback...connect!

Now this whole parliament seeks to address the whole nation...starting with the nation’s representatives in the gallery....engaging the public, dialoguing, connecting, rather than looking introspectively navel gazing.

So let’s look up from ourselves...and look outwards to others.

Lord Northcliffe, a famous politician in his time, feared he was going blind. However the optician reassured him:

“You are not going blind. You have been reading too much small print for too long. All you need to do is go outside and look up at the moon and stars...stretch your vision!”

So let’s look outwards and upwards.

In the Bible, the huge Syrian army, overnight, surrounded the city of Dothan to capture Israel’s prophet Elisha. Next morning Elisha looked out and saw the Syrians...and panicked! Elisha was perfectly calm, pronouncing:

“Those who are on our side are more than those on theirs.”

Elisha was wearing the bi-focal spectacles of faith: he could see his big problem in the foreground, but he could also see God’s greater Heavenly army in the background.

In the New Testament, Peter could walk on water so long as he looked to Jesus rather than focussing on himself and the surrounding storm.

We all need to get our bearings in life – individually, as a parliament and as a nation.

When we are all at sea, we get a point of reference on the horizon and a point up in the sky – i.e. horizontal and vertical dimensions.

So let’s always look outwards to others and upwards to God.

Thank you...and may God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, give you vision and wisdom and moral courage in all your endeavours.

**SALTCOATS NORTH PARISH CHURCH**  
**PARISH RECORD – MAY 2010**

**MINISTER’S LETTER**

Dear Friends,

This month is dominated by the General Election. I am writing this long before the Election but you are probably reading it just after it. Whoever wins, we hope that it will not be “the blind leading the blind” as Jesus once said! We pray that they will seek God’s wisdom and help in all things. Thinking about elections gave me the following “Thought for the Day” which was broadcast on 3TFM our local radio station just two days prior to the General Election. I thought you might like a copy.

<CDs available in church ; electronic copy available on [www.revalexnboble.com](http://www.revalexnboble.com)>

**MINISTER'S LETTER**

Dear Friends,

This summer is dominated by the World Cup in South Africa – the first ever World Cup on the continent of Africa. Thousands will be attending the matches live while millions will be glued to their TV screens all round the globe. Probably one in every three people will watch some of the World Cup and when the final comes there will probably be an audience of about 2,000,000,000 (2 billion). Imagine playing in front of that crowd! You would be excused a little nervousness!

Have you ever stopped to consider that this short life is in many respects like football? For one thing we are being watched all the time....not just by CCTV cameras....but by God and the heavenly host, angels and those who have left the pitch to take their seats in the grandstand. God is forever taking off players with tired legs and substituting new people with fresh legs. After they have played the game of their lives, they go into the grandstand and cheer their successors on in this continuous team game of life. (See Hebrews 12 v 1,2 for that thought).

Have you noticed that football is becoming a new kind of religion? Crowds worship and bow down to their heroes, they idolise them, they call them “gods”, they sing hymns of praise on the terracings. There is plenty of emotion, devotion, passion and finger-nail biting and prayer in the course of a match! Depending on the result, God is thanked or sworn at. As Bill Shankley the manager of Liverpool famously said:

“Some people think football is a matter of life and death;  
...but it is far more important than that!”

Would that all Church members were as vocal and passionate about their devotion to Jesus, as football fans are towards their “gods”.

Football and life have so much in common. There are in both: glory moments when we score a goal or win the cup; when we achieve our goals and fulfil our ambitions. There are also of course tragic moments when we score an own goal or lose the final on penalties; when we make mistakes and pay very dearly as a consequence. There are also painful moments when we get injured or when we injure other players; when we get set backs and knocks in life and when we hurt the ones we love. In both football and life we face opposition blocking our way to achieving our goals – sometimes human sometimes superhuman opposition. And all too soon, even with extra time, the game is over. (I used to hate the final whistle – I never wanted the game to end).

The secret – the open, obvious secret of football and life – is that we need to work hard at the necessary skills. Footballers practice their dribbling, heading, tackling, shooting skills; we practice loving, caring, trusting, forgiving, praying, listening, serving. St Paul coached Timothy saying (I Tim. 4.7f):

“Keep yourself in training for a godly life. Physical exercise has some value, but spiritual exercise is valuable in every way, because it promises life both for the present and for the future. Be an example for the believers in your speech, your conduct, your love, faith and purity. Do not neglect the spiritual gift that is in you.”

A team is only as good as the individual players playing in it. But it is also true that good individual players won't win anything till they play as a team with good teamwork. So individual Christians need the Church and the Church needs good individual Christians. Then on top of all that, winning teams need a will to win, a sense of purpose and urgency, determination and zeal. They also need a good manager and captain.

In the end, successful footballers win matches and cups, money and fame. In life we win personal satisfaction at a life well lived, the respect of others and above all God's “well done, good and faithful servant”. That is worth far more than the golden World Cup!

**SALTCOATS NORTH PARISH CHURCH RECORD – AUGUST 2010**  
**Minister's Letter**

Dear Friends,

Did you know that August is the peak month for suicides in Scotland? Now there is a cheery thought! It is a strange thing too is it not? August is the summer, with holidays and light nights, so what is the problem? Well it is back to school month and back to work month after the holidays...and it seems like a long wait till the next holiday! There is some stress in coming home from holiday and in facing the kick-off to a new season of autumn activities.

However, it all depends upon how you look at things. If you think life is one long holiday, sitting on a deck chair on the beach, then everything which distracts from that is seen as a negative thing and is grudged. If however you get bored of holidays and long to get your teeth into particular jobs and projects which you enjoy, you find yourself even on holiday starting to make plans about what you are going to do when you really get going again. Even school children will admit that they get bored with holidays after a while and look forward to school and after-school activities.

What is life all about? Is it work, work, work?...or is it about looking forward to the next holiday?...or about the rhythm of work and play in balance? What are we here on planet Earth to do? To amuse ourselves? To be entertained? To work hard? To help folk? To serve God? To develop and grow? The Good News is that these things are not mutually exclusive. They are not in competition with each other. In fact they all run together. We are happiest when what we are doing is such fun that we can hardly call it "work" and when we are pleasing God by helping others and growing in the process.

So how about adopting a positive outlook towards life, to August, to work, and to involvement in Church life too? Worship in Church can be seen as a burdensome duty but it can also be seen as the joy of sitting at Jesus' feet. Christian service can be seen as sacrificial and costly but it can also be a sheer delight to be a Good Samaritan and help somebody as we pass along. Telling others about Jesus and our faith in Him can be seen as being an embarrassing exercise but it can also be seen as the privilege of being Jesus' partner in saving souls from Hell and for Heaven.

Christian Education too is often seen as a personally threatening and undesirable thing, but it can be seen in a much more positive light. It is our privilege and pleasure to find out all we can about the God who loves us enough to create us, sustain us and even die for us. It is a natural and healthy curiosity which wants to learn all we can about God, about Life, about our faith and about ourselves. Learning is a lifelong thing. Indeed the moment we stop learning, we die inside. It should be the most natural thing in the world and our greatest pleasure to learn and grow and develop ourselves and together with others. So I want to invite you to read your Bible privately yourself and chew over what you read and put it into practice. More than that, meet up with other learners and learn together, indeed learn from each other, read the Bible together, discuss it together, put it into practice together and so build up the Body of Christ in this place.

Please then come to Manse Groups as and when you can. We have fun and fellowship as we learn together. We hold them in the Manse (25 Longfield Avenue) because it is more cosy and informal and relaxed in my living room rather than in a hall. Nothing is forced on anyone and people get the pleasant discovery that Christian education can be really enjoyable and helpful. We meet for just five weeks at a time then start a new series on a different day to give other people a chance to come. This way we have had 30 series and 80 different people all able to come and enjoy it. Learning is for every single person so I am praying that every single member (plus many non-members) will come. Yes there is room for everyone and all are most welcome. We start the first series on Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> August 7-9pm for five Thursdays; the second series being Wednesday evenings starting from Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> October. *Alex.B.Noble*

## PRAYERS FOR THE MONTH

**Sunday** - “Lord God, we worship you and give thanks that we are allowed to worship in your Church without persecution. We pray for all missionaries today. Amen.”

Read: Psalm 150 v 6.

**Monday** - “Lord, we thank you for youth leaders and community care workers. Thank you for the care they give to families and the love and support they provide. Thank you for the many sacrifices they make. May they continue to help the vulnerable and those who need support so that “Thy will be done”. Amen.”

Read: Matthew 6 v 10-14

**Tuesday** - “Gracious Heavenly Father, we pray for all who are unwell at this time. Please bless them with strength and healing. Thank you for all who give diligent care in all caring situations. Amen.”

Read: Luke 2 v 2-10

**Wednesday** - “Heavenly Father, please reach out to all who are disabled, housebound or in pain at this time. Bless all their loved ones who care for them. Encourage them through the help of carers. Give peace of mind to those in nursing homes and may they know your blessing. Amen.”

Read: Psalm 28 v 7

**Thursday** - “Heavenly Father, we pray that the leaders of the nations will act wisely for the good of their people; that the countries of the world will work toward peace and harmony; that travel will lead toward an acceptance of the different world cultures and an understanding that major events in sports are friendly. Amen.”

Read: Joshua 1 v 7; Hebrews 13 v 1-2

**Friday** - “Loving, eternal God, we pray today for all who are bereaved. We ask for your guidance, peace and comfort for all who are sad. Please grant hope to all those who are lonely and distressed. Amen.”

Read: Isaiah 61 v 1

**Saturday** - “May God give you.....for every storm a rainbow  
for every tear a smile  
for every care a promise  
and a blessing in each trial.

For every problem life sends  
a faithful friend to share  
For every sigh a sweet song  
and an answer for each prayer.”

**SALTCOATS NORTH PARISH CHURCH RECORD – SEPTEMBER 2010**

**MINISTER'S LETTER**

Dear Friends,

People often ask themselves and others: “What’s wrong with us?” It often stimulates excited debate. Everyone has their theories. Here’s my contribution to the on-going debate:

As our population ages, it becomes infantilised.

As adults become infantilised, so children become premature adults.

Single parents, who are usually women, look on their children as friends as well as children.

Boys of single parent mums who attend female staffed primary schools lack male role models.

Men have become more feminised, women more masculine.

Families have become more fragmented.

Community has been superseded by individualism.

Sunday Schools, Church, youth organisations, school teams have been undervalued.

Technology has de-humanised us all.

God has been forsaken.

The Bible has been dismissed.

Preaching has become a bad word.

Parents ask children what they want.

Absolutes are relativised.

Political correctness has taken over.

Consumerism and materialism abound.

Instant gratification is demanded.

Self-sacrifice, hard work and loyalty are out of fashion.

We have record debt levels.

We have record gambling levels.

Escapisms abound – we consume huge amounts of food, alcohol, cigarettes and drugs.

Philosophical thinking is conspicuously absent.

Morality has been relativised. God, and even others, hardly matter in moral debates and decisions.

We forget history and are condemned to repeat the mistakes of the past.

Our leaders lack ability, moral courage and vision. The blind lead the blind.

Leaders and people both believe that it is the job of leaders to give the people what they want.

We have empowered the punter.

The media is an irresponsible loose cannon undermining everything.

Money rules.

People know the price of everything and the value of nothing.

Stupidity is on epic proportions everywhere we turn.

In rejecting divinity we have lost humanity.

But fear not, there is Good News!

God knows what we are like.

And He still loves us!

Enough to die on a Cross for us!

He forgives us.

He wants us.

He can change us for the better.

He can turn us and the world around.

He puts us right with Himself.

Though we lose sight of Him, He never takes His eyes off us.

No matter how wrong we are, He can put us right.

*Alex B Noble*



MINISTER'S LETTER

Dear Friends,

How many eyes have you? That's not such a daft question as it may sound!

We have all got more than two eyes! We have extra eyes.

We each have different extra eyes of course. For instance, some people have....

- the artist's eye.....they can see far more than the rest of us.
- the comedian's eye.....they can always see the funny side of everything.
- the carer's eye.....they have the ability to detect how we really are feeling, even after we have given the standard reply "fine".
- the philosopher's eye.....they seem to be able to see through problems which confuse the rest of us.
- the preacher's eye.....they can see a sermon illustration in everything and work out deeper spiritual interpretations.
- the journalist's eye.....they can spot a story a mile off.
- the poet's eye.....they can perceive a poem and a profundity in unlikely things.
- the lover's eye.....they can see right into their loved one's soul (but not always the on-coming lamp-post.
- the Christian's eye.....seeing things with Jesus' eyes, as He would see them.

Of course there are negative eyes also. We can see the world through selfish eyes, greedy eyes, envious eyes, jealous eyes, bitter eyes, drugged eyes, grieving eyes, depressed eyes.

If our eyes are going bad, we usually get them checked out and often have to get spectacles. It is very important to get the right pair of spectacles for if we wear pink specs the world will look pink and if we get blue specs the world will look blue. With positive specs things look positive and with negative specs things look negative.

What we really need are the bi-focal spectacles of faith by which we can see our presenting problems in the foreground and at the same time be able to see God's over-arching providence in the background. Best of all is to see the world through Jesus' eyes.

God bless,

*Rev. Alex B Noble*

**Saltcoats North Parish Church**

**PARISH RECORD – NOVEMBER 2010**

**Minister's Letter**

Dear Friends,

This month we are all very conscious of Remembrance Sunday and Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> November. We think of World War I and World War II plus all the other wars and continuing warfare in Afghanistan and Iraq and many other places today. It helps us to get an understanding and be better able to remember when we can see things in a personal way, so the following poem and prayer may be of such a help. It was found on the body of an American soldier killed in Italy during the Second World War.

“Look God, I have never spoken to You –  
But now – I want to say, “How do You do?”  
You see God, they told me You didn't exist –  
And like a fool – I believed all of this.

Last night from a shell hole I saw Your sky,  
I figured right then they had told me a lie.  
Had I taken the time to see things You made,  
I'd have known they weren't calling a spade a spade.

I wonder God if You'd shake my hand  
Somehow – I feel that you will understand.  
Funny – I had to come to this hellish place  
Before I had time to see Your Face.

Well I guess there isn't much more to say  
But I'm sure glad, God, I met you today.  
I guess the zero hour will soon be here,  
But I'm not afraid since I know You're near.

The signal! Well God I'll have to go.  
I like You lots – This I want You to know.  
Look, now – this will be a horrible fight. –  
Who knows – I may come to Your House tonight –

Though I wasn't friendly with You before  
I wonder, God – if You'd wait at Your door. –  
Look, I'm crying, me – shedding tears.  
I wish I had known You these many years. –  
Well, I will have to go now, God, goodbye.

Strange – since I met You – I'm not afraid to die.”

God Bless,

*Alex B Noble*

**MINISTER'S LETTER**

Dear Friends,

Orchestras are funny things – the main person, the conductor, never makes a sound! He or she, just stands there wagging an arm with a wee stick, and yet from those silent gestures comes all kinds of loud or soft, happy or sad, inspiring and moving music. It is so strange that the key person, the one in the central role, the one who is really orchestrating everything, is the silent, stationary one.

Have you noticed that it is the same thing with Christmas? The star of the show on centre-stage, the central figure, the one organising the whole event from before time began, is the baby lying gurgling in the manger, passively doing nothing while all around is frantic activity. Caesar Augustus with his census is making tens of thousands of people scurry criss-cross all over the country to get back to their home towns. Mary and Joseph are making a mad dash for Bethlehem hoping to make it before she goes into labour. The citizens of Bethlehem are too preoccupied with their own hustle and bustle to notice a couple of migrants. The overworked Innkeeper is running around like a headless chicken, scratching his head trying to think of something and find room when he has no room. Angels are sweeping across the skies to announce the Good News of the answer to the world's problems. Shepherds are hurrying up to Bethlehem during their night shift to catch a glimpse of the Saviour of the world – and hoping to get back before the gaffer notices they have skipped off with the dubious excuse that angels told them to go and see the Heavenly One in a feeding trough in a stable. Wise men are frantically seeking the solution to their long standing mystery quest. They have travelled far and wide, up hill and down vale, over desert and across wilderness, night and day fighting off physical fatigue and psychological doubts as to whether it was all in vain. King Herod is greatly agitated at the news of a potential rival to his authority and rule. He is rousing researchers to get to the bottom of what is going on and despatching squads of soldiers to put an immediate stop to it. Meanwhile "Away in a manger...the little Lord Jesus lay down His sweet head...no crying He makes".

Interestingly it is the same at Calvary Hill when Jesus is at the centre of all that is going on, but He Himself is very passive. He just hangs there limply. Like a lamb before its shearers is dumb, so He opens not His mouth. All the time He is on the cross, He hardly says a thing. He doesn't seem to be doing anything, while all around is frantic activity. The crowd shout and swear and taunt Him; some spit on Him, some throw things at Him. The Roman soldiers are busy hammering nails into His hands and feet and raising up three wooden crosses, and when not doing that, they are busy gambling for the perks of the job, the criminals' clothes. The Pharisees are jumping for self-righteous, smug joy. The women are highly agitated, turning to and from the gruesome scene of cruelty, attracted and repelled like moths to a fatal light. The disciples are sneaking closer and running away as their courage ebbs and flows. In all this mayhem, in the midst of the swirling winds of hate and violence, buffeted by endless waves of animosity, hangs Jesus, the light of this dark world and the Rock of Ages. The waves will beat against the Rock and dash themselves to pieces.

The truth is that when Jesus lay in the manger, and when Jesus hung on the Cross, He was not so passive as it first appears. He is the eternal Lord of Glory who planned His venture into time and space from all eternity. He was God on a mission. He was entering into the human predicament, taking on our humanity, embracing our life – actively and willingly. He freely chose to become the lightning rod conductor receiving all our worship and all our hate... whatever life threw at Him. He received our love and affection and devotion; and He accepted all our sin and guilt and bitterness. However He is also a lightning rod conductor of the human orchestra in reverse – He today is silent and invisible, but when He wags His baton, He brings His powerful love and loving power mightily into play making harmonious music in our lives and in the life of the whole world. We celebrate this every Christmas, and indeed every day. Merry Christmas!