



From our interim moderator

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Greetings from the Scots International Church Rotterdam! May you know God's blessings during this time of vacancy which has just began for you, after Laurence took well deserved retirement.

We give thanks to God for his and Lindy's service to the community of faith that gathers Sunday by Sunday in the Auditoire de Calvin.



It was a joy to be with you at the beginning of June as I preached you vacant. I was warmly welcomed and encouraged by the love and support you have for one another. As interim moderator during your vacancy, I am here to help you find your way forward. If you have any questions of any kind, please email me on GAustin@churchofscotland.org.uk.

During the vacancy, I shall moderate the kirk session, ably supported by your session clerks, Christine and Jane, and the other elders. I shall also be responsible for finding pulpit supply, which will be a mixture of local talent and locums. From July to September, Rev Páraic Réamonn will be your locum.

A little while ago, my wife, Dee, and I went to the cinema to see *A Man Named Otto* – an English remake of a Swedish film based on Fredrik Backman's book *A Man Called Ove*. It is a feel-good story that will tug at your heart strings.

Otto is an angry man, and as you watch the film, you see there are good reasons for his attitude. But whenever he is called on to help a neighbour, even in his anger he does so. As a result, people are changed, and he also is changed. His life is further affected by the arrival of a young family who turn his world upside down. As the credits roll at the end of the film, there is a tag line: "Take action for yourself and be there for others."

Otto needed to see how his attitude (understandable as it was) was alienating him from the people around him, even his old friends; but as he responds to the needs of others, he begins to find meaning and renewed purpose for his life. The tag line is a variation of the golden rule, as Jesus puts it in Matthew 7:12, "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you, for this is the Law and the Prophets."

There can be little doubt that, as we look outside ourselves to the needs of others, we ourselves are changed and renewed. To serve, to be there for the other person, transforms them, but it also has a beneficial effect on our own lives mentally, emotionally and spiritually.

My prayer is that each of us will love and serve one another, especially in this time of vacancy.

Rev Graham Austin

Farewell for Laurence and Lindy

After a few challenges in finding a date when Geneva old town would not be hijacked by sporting events, we held our goodbye party for Laurence and Lindy on Sunday May 25.

It was quite a party! The Salle Théodore de Bèze was fully decorated with bunting and balloons, peonies and photos; and the 70-odd people (please note the hyphen!) who attended were treated to a sumptuous feast, courtesy of the very generous potluck contributions.

Mark Jeffrey as Master of Ceremonies kept things moving smoothly, no mean feat given the full programme and the full room!

After my limerick kicked things off, Cornis gave a heartfelt speech for Laurence, before Laurence took to the floor to share his reflections of his time with us all over the last 8.5 years.

He recalled, for example, being surprised, during his first experience of an event in the Salle, to hear three words he had never before heard in a Church of Scotland setting: “Red or white?”!

Next up was Jean, who recited a fast-paced and very Scottish summary of the plot of Hamlet to great delight. Then Christine and Jane co-presented a humorous and touching speech for Lindy, to which Lindy responded with a delightful poem of her own. A recurring theme here was Lindy’s sense of fun, and Laurence’s frequent reminders of “Boundaries, darling, boundaries!”

During a pause in the proceedings, Rebecca presented Laurence and Lindy with an amazing, and delicious, cake that had a large photograph of the pair of them in icing form!

Rebecca then accompanied Nicola who sang one of Laurence’s favourite songs – *In my life* by the Beatles. Was that a tear Laurence was seen to wipe away? Then came an international moment as moving goodbye wishes were expressed by a group of eight members of the congregation in 10 different languages.

Back came Christine and Jane, this time to present Laurence and Lindy with goodbye gifts on behalf of the whole congregation. These included a traditional Swiss cowbell with their names engraved on it, vouchers for a hotel stay and for a vintage Swiss poster, a book of photos of Swiss mountains, a bouquet of flowers, a photobook of Laurence and Lindy’s time with our congregation, and a gift voucher to spend as they wish.

All that was left then was for Mark to lead us in a final toast to Laurence and Lindy, and for Kathryn to bring out her bagpipes, accompanied by Rebecca, to round off the afternoon with *Auld Lang Syne*. The whole of the Old Town must have heard us!

To sum up, the party was a precious afternoon full of fun and laughter and with just the right amount, and right kinds, of tears.

It was wonderful to see some members of the congregation there who haven’t been able to attend church recently. Special mention must be made of Douglas Murray-Jones and family and Mary Couper.

A huge thanks to everyone who helped organize the event, contributed to the potluck and the entertainment, and helped make the clean-up so efficient and painless. And special thanks to Emmerentia for the photos of the day!

Jenny Rietbergen



A fond farewell

Jenny Rietbergen

We're all going to feel broken-hearted
When Laurence and Lindy've departed.
So to ease our self-pity
I've written this ditty
To remind us of how it all started.

Their move to our church was by chance,
As Laurence had happened to glance
At the ad for our vacancy
With its convenient adjacency
To their beloved country of France.

Laurence convinced his new wife to acquiesce.
Don't know how but we can only guess
That Lindy's primary requirement
For postponing retirement
Was "Can Treacle come?" Phew, we said yes!

So their plans to retire went on hold
And they came to this city of old
The Rev and Mrs Twaddle
Worked fast, didn't dawdle,
To bring blessings as precious as gold.

Laurence's powerful preaching and prayer
Come with his flair for pastoral care.
He's reached many in need
With his personal creed
To share burdens too heavy to bear.

Lindy's a powerhouse fuelled by fun.
She's the one who makes sure things get done.
She hosts all the folks
And tells the best jokes
And bakes shortbread each day by the ton.

It's not all been a walk in the park.
There's been times when things looked quite dark.
We've had losses and grief
And Covid came like a thief
Trying to snatch away ev'ry last spark.

But you got us through Covid and more
With fresh thinking and ideas galore.
Using Zoomy technology
We now share the doxology
With people on many's a shore.

As we offer our final goodbyes
We're smiling through tears in our eyes
Now enjoy each new Sunday
In tranquil Burgundy
And try on retirement for size!

We do hope you'll visit again,
It's not adieu but à la prochaine,
So all laddies and lasses
Please lift up your glasses
To close off with three cheers and Amen!

And another...

Jane Broere & Christine Buhler



What's the new minister like then, they asked?

Well, he was interviewed, preached to us, discussions were held, and the choice was made. And he's done good!

But some of us asked what's the new minister's *wife* like, then?

Well, there were no interviews, she didn't get to preach to us (not *then*), and we didn't get to choose her. There she was, newly married, new to being a minister's wife, newly retired, and about to move to a new country.

Did she do good? Well, she totally smashed it!

Here we are – gathered to say farewell to a woman who has filled this church, and probably half of Geneva, with laughter, kindness... and a truly dangerous amount of shortbread.

But seriously, Lindy, where do we start to enumerate everything you have done for us over the past eight years. We are going to miss you very, very much. Not only for your fierce honesty and your unwavering support but also because you made our church and the manse so welcoming. Even for us old-timers, it has been a much-appreciated boost to our church life. Whether it was welcoming newcomers, running the best, continuously booked, hotel in Grand Saconnex, giving supper to folk, apprehending what needed to be done to make Sunday service go smoothly (which was not in your remit), genuinely caring for folk, the list goes on. But you did everything always with enthusiasm, generosity, cheeky good humour, grace and quite often a little bit of holy mischief! You quite simply embraced everything thrown at you.

Now, normally we all know that behind every great man, and a Minister to boot, is a woman rolling her eyes—but in this case it's been role reversal, with Laurence rolling *his* eyes at Lindy's antics, and he has been heard to mumble on many an occasion – “Boundaries darling, boundaries.” Mega eye rolling was often seen when Lindy would offer to do *all* the desserts for the Sunday lunches. “All of them, darling?” Laurence was heard to say with stupefaction. The good news, Lindy, is that from now on your boundaries have been removed and you are free!

You've been more than just the minister's wife – you've been a friend, a confidante, a walking Scottish welcome committee. You've shown us what it means to serve with heart, humour, and humility – and maybe just a wee bit of sass too. Although, you have been a bit of a manipulator on the side, twiddling your iPads and knobs on a regular basis.

We'll miss the sound of your laugh, the smell of your baking, and the way you always know when someone needs a quiet word and a strong cup of tea. But we're grateful – so grateful – that we've had you with us.

Now, let's be honest – saying goodbye is never easy. But saying goodbye to someone who has fed you, cheered you up, kept your secrets, and still remembered how you take your tea? That's a tragedy. Lindy, you've been a force of nature in this congregation. The kind of person who could show up with a tray of baking and somehow solve three pastoral crises and rehome a lost dog in the same afternoon.

And the baking. Oh, the baking. Your shortbread alone should be on the UNESCO list of intangible cultural heritage. Frankly, we're still not sure what you put in it – butter, sugar, magic?

On a personal note, Jane and I will never forget our house hunting escapades in Burgundy, amongst others. What fun we had, and the laugh out loud moments like when we discovered that the *pas de vis-à-vis* in the house description had been translated to “no screwing”. The excellent choice we made for your new home, and the wonderful girlie weekends we had, only marred by newly acquired water mad Fergus, who spent over two hours in the pool once with you trying to fish him out! Our relaxing break in Loèche les Bains after the exhaustion of the St Andrew's Fair. Trying to perch on bar stools submerged in the swimming pool, drinking wine, comes to mind. Wonderful, precious memories.

There were a lot of new things for you when you came, and now you leave with other newly acquired skills – amazing baking, skiing – the only minister's wife who can pour communion wine in the morning and do a black piste in the afternoon,

Thank you for everything. And don't worry – we'll try to carry on your legacy. But let's be honest: nobody's shortbread will ever compare. Lindy, we love you very much – and talking of legacy, it's worth mentioning that we have not spoken to one person who had anything negative to say about you, a truly fitting legacy for a wonderful woman and friend.

In thanksgiving: David Manson



At the end of May, our congregation was shocked to learn of the sudden – and absurdly early – death of David Manson, youngest son of our former minister Ian Manson and his wife Roberta. David was 32. He grew up in this congregation, and we loved him dearly. We had, of course, no idea then of what he would grow up to become and to accomplish.

On June 3, a service of thanksgiving for David's life was held in Inch Parish Church, in Aberdeenshire, Scotland. Roberta read the familiar words of 1 Corinthians 13, and Ian delivered one of many tributes.

Here is an abbreviated version of what Ian said:

It all happened so quickly.

David was with us for a few weeks, figuring out his next move, when he got the call—an incredible job with MSC Cruises. Based in his beloved Geneva, he'd travel the world overseeing theatrical teams across their fleet. It was a dream job, tailor-made for him. He spent a week excitedly planning.

Then, in the early hours of Saturday May 27, he was suddenly and violently ill. An ambulance was called. Within hours, doctors diagnosed acute myeloid leukaemia. Chemotherapy was started almost immediately and many transfusions given—yet just three days later, his body could no longer fight, and he slipped away.

David's early years weren't the easiest. We uprooted him and his brothers from Glasgow when he was eight, moving them to a place where they didn't understand a word of the language. It was a tough time, but it shaped them into the strong men they became. His charm was evident early on. At his primary school's end-of-term show, though he couldn't yet speak the language, he walked on stage carrying a glowing red heart, captivating the audience with just his gestures. It was clear he had something special.

I don't want to give the impression that he was some kind of wonder child. A favourite memory of the young David is of him being frustrated at losing against his older brothers on the basketball court, when he slammed the ball down, only for it to bounce back and hit him full in the face. His subsequent tears were met with our uncontrollable laughter—it became a story we loved reminding him of, especially during his more pompous moments.

In his teens, he embraced theatre, particularly with the Geneva Amateur Operatic Society—first performing, then producing shows, thriving on the acclaim. School work was rarely a strong point for David, particularly as theatre became his focus. Then he found out about a course at Rose Bruford College and discovered that they interviewed everyone who applied—so, naturally, he booked flights. Of course, he got in, and of course, he graduated with first-class honours in lighting design.

David worked for a wide variety of companies, building friendships everywhere. He toured widely with the Vienna Festival Ballet, then made Scottish Opera his home, managing their Opera Highlights tour, developing an encyclopaedic knowledge of roads and ferry routes. Twice, last-minute changes to travel plans led to calls home: "Mum, can you feed me and seven colleagues?" A tour bus and a dining room full of opera singers might seem an usual event, but you grew to expect such things when David was around. He hung in with Scottish Opera during the difficult Covid years and emerged as their production manager. Cruise ships became his latest passion, and he beamed with pride showing us around "his ship", the Cunard Queen Elizabeth, introducing us to new friends and colleagues. He visited many ports in many

parts of the world and quickly thrived in that environment. So it seems like an appropriate tribute to read, with permission, some words sent to me by Stephanie Jansen, the Creative Director of MSC Cruises, with whom he was so excited to start working.



“Though I only had the privilege of speaking with David a few times, it was immediately clear how bright, thoughtful, and passionate he was. His excitement about joining us was matched only by our own, and we were genuinely looking forward to welcoming him to the team. I can assure you that he had already made a lasting impression here.”

I have deep regrets about the future that David will not now enjoy and the future with him we will now miss, but I have no regrets about the past. David lived his life to full, always keen to have us share in his international life, rarely holding anything back, and throwing himself fully into everything he took on. He packed an incredible amount into his 32 years, and although he was generally too Scottish to allow himself to show it, we all knew that he loved the life he led and was deeply proud of all that he achieved.

Our annual congregational meeting

The meeting was held on June 1 in the Auditoire, with Rev Graham Austin as moderator and 32 participants.

Ewart Mackenzie presented his treasurer’s report and the revised 2025 and 2026 budgets, all of which were duly approved by those present.

Páraic Réamonn was thanked for compiling the annual congregational report. In 2024, we decided in future to highlight some of the congregational activities outlined in the report. So Hazel Griffith and Sherree Atkinson gave presentations of their two neighbourhood groups and activities held so far.

The moderator initiated a discussion on what we were looking for in an associate minister of the newly linked charge, to be based in Geneva. Some of the points mentioned were:

- Age is not a factor, we have had many a lively older minister in Geneva
- Someone who would be willing to connect with the local Protestant churches
- Importance of someone with an international and ecumenical perspective, a narrow view does not go down well in our circles
- The person should be tolerant and inclusive and open to new ideas
- Would need to be a team player, given our being linked with Lausanne

The moderator concluded the discussion by inviting anyone who had yet to give their input to mail him at GAustin@churchofscotland.org.uk

Any other business

- Arthur Askew requested that someone kindly take over his place on Rassemblement des Eglises et Communautés Chrésiennes de Genève (recg.ch)
- Jane Broere asked for feedback on the new Zoom setup for Sunday services

- Christine Buhler informed the meeting of a new EPG project with Geneva Tourisme and Chiavi della cultura (chiavicultura.ch/en/about-us) giving access to the Auditoire (and other Geneva churches) by means of registering online and using a code to open the door. The EPG, whilst owners of the Auditoire, have consulted with us from the beginning and are sensitive to our requirements. In parallel there are plans for an Avatar visual aid for the Auditoire.

Christine Buhler

Strengthening bonds

The journeys of our neighbourhood groups

Neighbourhood groups were one of new – or not-so-new – ideas to come out of last year's Future Focus meetings. They aim to bring members of the congregation members closer together. Here are updates from three of the groups. More updates in future newsletters!

Group 1

Rebecca, Arthur and I were asked to co-ordinate this group. We have 20+ people.

Geographically, we have members from Divonne, La Côte, Lausanne... and even Mark in Valais! In fact, our group even includes Graeme and Meena in Nepal!

Our first event was in December 2024 – a visit to a Jazz Club in Nyon, with 10 people attending. A second event, an afternoon tea in Nyon, proved even more successful, with 15 people attending.

Feedback has been good. People appreciate these informal groups and have enjoyed the time to talk together.

Hazel Griffith

Group 3

We are busy people. We travel. Some of us work. Like other groups, we struggle to find dates that suit everyone and are forced to settle for dates that suit most.



Our second get-together was a monster BBQ hosted in June by Amy and Jason Leger in their home and garden in Vernier, complete with a monster BBQ engine, and eight of the group attending.

The forecast for the day was so bad that we almost called the whole thing off, but we crossed our fingers and made a leap of faith, and although we feasted under threatening skies, we even had some spots of sunshine.

We hope to have at least one more group get-together this summer.

Páraic Réamonn

Group 2

Our Grand Saconnex group has met twice so far, and I am delighted to share that the gatherings have had a positive impact on all of us.

It was important for us to ensure that everyone could participate comfortably. Arrangements for transportation were made so that anyone with mobility issues could attend without worry – whether by coordinating pick-ups, providing information about bus routes, or ensuring that there was adequate parking.

Last month, Arthur Askew hosted us for afternoon tea at his beautiful home in Chambésy. It was a warm – in all senses of the word, as temperatures soared – and enjoyable occasion, bringing together around 12 members (plus a couple of visitors) out of a total group of 18.

Looking ahead, we are excited about such future activities as group walks, cinema outings, and a communal lunch at a local restaurant. We all agree that these events foster social connections, create lasting memories, and offer us the chance to move beyond simple greetings to connect on a deeper level.

We urge everyone in the congregation to join in the neighbourhood groups and experience the joy of community.

Sherree Atkinson

Through the looking-glass

In the second chapter of Lewis Carroll's famous book, Alice and the Red Queen are running.

And they went so fast that at last they seemed to skim through the air, hardly touching the ground with their feet, till suddenly, just as Alice was getting quite exhausted, they stopped, and she found herself sitting on the ground, breathless and giddy.

The Queen propped her up against a tree, and said kindly, "You may rest a little now."

Alice looked round her in great surprise. "Why, I do believe we've been under this tree the whole time! Everything's just as it was!"

"Of course it is," said the Queen, "what would you have it?"

"Well, in our country," said Alice, still panting a little, "you'd generally get to somewhere else—if you ran very fast for a long time, as we've been doing."

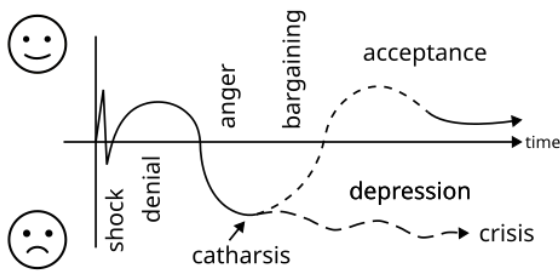
"A slow sort of country!" said the Queen. "Now, here, you see, it takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that!"

A vacancy is a little like the Red Queen's race. When we lose a minister, we need to run very fast if our congregation is just to stay where we are and not go into a decline. If we want to *improve* on where we are, we need to run faster still.

*

Losing a minister is a little like a death in the family. Whether the deceased is a beloved great-aunt or, on the other hand, the black sheep of the family, Uncle Jimmy, a rascal and a rascalion, we inevitably find ourselves mourning (although in the case of Uncle Jimmy, perhaps not too much).

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (1926–2004), the Swiss writer on death and dying, describes mourning as a complex process that may involve denial, anger, bargaining, or depression, but eventually, if all goes well, leads to acceptance.



In the weeks since Laurence and Lindy left, we may find ourselves mourning their departure. But we need to accept that they have gone and eventually, like them, move on.

*

We can use the coming months to mark time while we wait to call a new minister, but that would not be a good use of time.

Better to use these months to reflect on where we have come to, where we should like to go from here, and what kind of minister will in, say, the next five years help us to get there. Better, if you like, to have another iteration of last year's *Future Focus* process.

If we run “at least twice as fast”, we should find ourselves in a good place to welcome a new minister and to work with him or her in serving the kingdom of God in this corner of Switzerland.

During my three months as locum minister, from July to September, I should like to meet with each of our neighbourhood groups to canvass your views on (1) what kind of minister would best serve us in the years to come and (2) how our neighbourhood groups can play a role in caring for one another in the congregation.

Páraic Réamonn

Worship

Sunday services in June were led by Graham Austin (who also moderated the annual congregational meeting), Ewart Mackenzie, Mark Jeffrey, and Páraic Réamonn. The same pattern will continue for the next three months, with Wesley Ariarajah leading at least one service, and (we hope) Christine Colliar returning from the Scots Kirk, Lausanne also to lead at least one.

As locum minister, Páraic will lead the lion's share of the services until mid-September, after which he will swap places with Graham, who will serve as locum in our sister congregation in Lausanne in September. Graham will lead services in Geneva on the last two Sundays in September, while Páraic will do the same in Lausanne.

Laurence's demission at the end of May left us scrambling to continue the Wednesday services on Zoom that he first introduced during Covid, but we are happy to have succeeded in doing that. We now have a joint Zoom service together with our sister congregation in the Scots Kirk and a rota of ministers and other worship leaders to lead it. Christine Colliar is coordinating these services, which begin with a time of fellowship at 12 noon, followed by worship at 12:30.

Caring for one another

Jean Murray has taken over responsibility for coordinating the Caring for One Another group created by the late Jim Sharp, and Jane Broere has stepped down from that role. Our thanks to Jane for what she has done, and to Jean for what she has begun to do! The group is “involved in keeping in touch with and supporting members of our congregation in these uncertain times”.

As locum minister until September, Páraic will be responsible for pastoral care. He can be contacted by phone or WhatsApp at 079 151 91 43 or by email at paraic.reamonn@gmail.com

Book club

Our Church of Scotland book club has met five times so far. We have enjoyed our discussions.

There are 10 people on the list of participants, and attendance varies from 3 to 6 people. Given their binationality, or even plurinationality, it is to be expected that members are often absent from Geneva.

The club can still function if people confirm their expected presence and make suggestions for books they would like to discuss in the future. New members are always welcome. An ideal would be to have 4 to 8 people present for each meeting.

The modalities of the meetings are also open for discussion. At present we meet at 14h in the Café Papon, Rue Henri-Fazy 1, behind the Hôtel de Ville.

We have promised ourselves that by September, we shall have read – and finished – the novel *Bleak House* by Charles Dickens.

Gillian Friedli

St Andrew's Fair & Cèilidh



This year's annual Fair will be held on Saturday November 22, from 9h30 to 15h. It's a day to come together, rekindle old friendships, and forge new connections.

This year, we will also enter a new chapter, as Christine Buhler is stepping down as director after many years of extraordinary service, and a rookie (gulp, me!) will be attempting to fill some very big shoes. We thank Christine for leading the charge, and we'll endeavour to make this year's Fair a success she will be proud of! It will certainly take a tremendous effort by everyone involved to achieve this.

A good number of loyal and long-standing stallholders have signed up already. To stallholders who have yet to confirm – please let me know

at your earliest convenience if you will again host your stall this year: by phone at (41) 79 392 07 78 or via email at Leger_74@hotmail.com

From those who will be travelling to the UK over the summer: Scottish and Christmas items would be most welcome. Calendars, Christmas cards and tartan scarves, amongst others, are hugely popular with our returning customers. Every contribution you make, be it through purchases or donations, will support essential projects and initiatives.

Posters will be available nearer the time, but please talk to your friends, families, colleagues, everyone, to spread the word now. It's never too early to ask folks to save the date!

If you have any questions or wish to discover opportunities for participation—like volunteering during the event (there's plenty to engage with) or assisting behind the scenes in the days prior to the Fair—please reach out to me.

And not to forget our very popular Cèilidh in the evening from 19h to 22h, with plenty of dancing, food and guaranteed fun. Tickets are CHF35 each (children under 12, free) and can be ordered at ceilidhchurchofscotlandgeneva@gmail.com

Jason Leger

All hands on deck!

A vacant congregation has an interim moderator to keep it in order and locum ministers to carry on the most essential ministerial tasks during the vacancy: organizing worship, offering pastoral care.

For the rest, we are thrown on our own resources. And here, frankly, we could do with some help!

Most of the work of the congregation is done by a relatively small group of members, who are involved in absolutely everything. But much of this could easily be shared by other members, who might even enjoy it!

So we ask each and all of our members to take a moment. Consider which of the following activities in our congregational life *you* could lend a hand with:

- Reading in worship
- Leading prayers in worship (a new idea we are floating this summer)
- Ushering on Sundays (greeting worshippers as they enter the church and seeing them out later)
- Helping with the printed order of service (we are very short-handed)
- Singing in the choir
- Serving on the coffee and tea rota after worship
- Helping with the monthly congregational lunches
- Serving on working groups to oversee and strengthen different aspects of our work

No one has to do *all* of these things (although some of us are daft enough to try). But if more of us join in doing *some* of them – according to our ability and availability, of course – we shall go forward into the future a stronger and more confident congregation.

Session clerks

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