

Seeds

September 2021

encourage - inspire - challenge

Augustine
United Church

God in all of creation

Revd Fiona
Bennett



Monday, 4 October is the Feast of St Francis of Assisi. Francis is often depicted as a monk who liked animals, which I am sure he did, but Francis's sense of connection to nature went well "beyond the bird bath", as the Franciscan writer Richard Rohr commented.

Francis understood that the whole of the interconnected creation (including humans) was a revelation of God / the Holy One – the first incarnation. Francis also understood that to discover God / Holiness we need to open our perception to discovering God / Holiness in the ordinary – which means everything. God is not far off or remote, but breathtakingly close, everywhere.

This God is of the nature and character which Jesus showed us, but is also wild, diverse, interdependent and beyond our control, as is the natural world, yet always moving forward through seasons to birth new life.

This Creationtide (which began in September and ends on the Feast of St Francis) comes significantly in the advent to COP 26 and in the context of floods and fires rooted in global warming. As we harm the life and balances of the earth, we are destroying a masterpiece and cutting ourselves off from God.

But there is hope; there is hope in God's gift of human creativity and collaboration. There is hope in God's nature reflected in creation and in Jesus' resurrection, that new life will be born, even out of despair, injustice and death.

"There is hope that new life will be born, even out of despair, injustice and death"

May this Creationtide be a time to revel in God's presence / Holiness which is breathtakingly close, within us and beyond us at all times. May it also be a time when we act to stop destroying God's masterpiece, and discover in the changes and costs which this will inevitably bring a new and abundant life for all.

TREE OF LIFE REQUEST

I am hoping through the autumn to build a Tree of Life. This is a tree of stories; stories which are full of hope for our planet. Stories of new technologies, different ways of doing things, inventiveness and wisdom which offer a healthy future for all life on planet earth.

If you come across stories which fill you with hope for our planet, please email them to me and I will add them to our Tree of Life.

This Month

CONVERSION THERAPY

A personal experience of one woman's painful journey



YOU'VE GOT A FRIEND

Combating Loneliness with the AUC pastoral care team



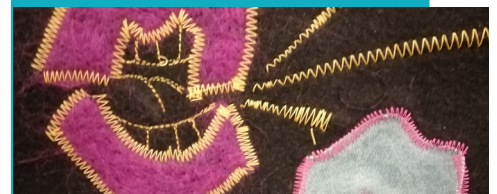
LIVING PLASTIC-FREE

Katrina Tweedie on what she learnt during July



PENTECOSTAL ART

Celebrating Pentecost with new artwork for worship in church





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Getting Involved

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LOCAL COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERING

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AUC Roundup

News from around Augustine United Church

FIONA IS NEXT URC MODERATOR

Congratulations to our minister, the Revd Fiona Bennett, who has been elected to serve as the Moderator of the United Reformed Church General Assembly from 2022 to 2023.



Fiona is the first person from the Scotland Synod to have been elected to the role, and she told the final session of the 2021 Assembly that “I look forward to seeing what the Spirit will create with us in this gift of liminal time.” We look forward to venturing forward with Fiona and supporting her, as we also discover what her appointment means for us as a congregation.



FUNDRAISING PICNIC A GREAT SUCCESS

The ‘Trussell Trust Tea’ picnic on Sunday 18th July was a lovely social event. We made £135.17 on the day, with other donations being made directly to the Trussell Trust. Huge thanks to Pat Tweedie for providing the specially created picnic meals, and to the team that organised the afternoon.

PLASTIC-FREE CONVERSATIONS

Katrina Tweedie writes: At 8am on 1 July, keenly aware that it was now Plastic-Free July, I headed over to buy bread from my local bakery. I was handed a loaf of bread tightly wrapped in a big plastic bag. The shop assistant said that because of Covid she wasn’t allowed to sell me bread any other way. . . Ah! But she could slice it and then. . . She duly brought the bread back in a different bag that was half paper and only half plastic! So, not a great start.



One concerned plastic-avoider wonders whether he’s taking Morrison’s request to “Use me again and again and again and again” a bit too far!

On the other hand, we had a really good discussion about plastic, in which it quickly became obvious that she is every bit as worried about plastic as I am. Now, instead of talking about the weather we exchange tips about how to reduce plastic. And perhaps that has been the main gain for me of this July – starting conversations, sharing worries and ideas of how to help our planet and our communities.

Where I have found plastic very hard to avoid has been yoghurt containers, strawberries and raspberries, bin bags. . . and locally produced bread! How did you get on? Can we as a church support each other to become kinder to our planet and therefore ultimately to ourselves and each other?

HOMELESSNESS CHARITY CLOSES

National homelessness charity Scottish Churches Housing Action (SCHA) has taken the decision to close following a “challenging” few years.

Scottish Churches Housing Action



no room for homelessness!

Over nearly three decades, the charity has brought together 12 Christian denominations and organisations in Scotland to pursue a shared commitment to ending homelessness.

In a statement, SCHA said: “We are not closing because the need for churches to support people experiencing homelessness has ended – far from it. The need is still great; and it remains our hope and prayer that churches will play a part in responding to homelessness locally and nationally.”

PRAYING WITH PRETZELS

In Junior Church, our children talked about the Bread of Life, and made pretzels – a reminder of how Italian people used to cross their arms to pray.



CELEBRATING PENTECOST THROUGH ART

In the season following Pentecost, a set of new banners has been hung in front of the AUC communion table, specially created for us by Megan Moir. Here, she shares her inspiration for her work.



It was truly pleasurable creating the Pentecost banners for worship, knowing they would be enjoyed by many.

The four core banners represented languages, fire, wind and energy. I used a combination of needle felting and appliqué to produce a richness in colour and texture. Mixed media is something I have always enjoyed as I feel it gives real depth and tactility to artworks.



Needle felting really lent itself to creating a sense of movement, which was important as the banners are to change over time and so need to look

harmonious, no matter how they are ordered.

The flickers of the flames and the wisps of wind became more alive and organic as I pushed the wool fibres into the cloth and watched how they chose to sit and pull on each other. Then I used the appliqué to add pops of colour and boldness so that they appear clear to everyone sharing in the service in the building and online.

TAKING TO THE STREETS FOR DOORS OPEN

Our building will be opening again this year for Edinburgh Doors Open weekend, 25-26 September.

We plan to be open on the Saturday, and on Sunday afternoon. If you're interested in being a volunteer guide, contact Laurence Wareing at laurence.wareing@augustine.org.uk.



We are also offering the opportunity take our brand-new urban pilgrimage, "Herstory". It explores the streets around Augustine and includes pauses for social and biblical reflection inspired by extraordinary women, past and present. Pilgrimages will be spread across the weekend, each lasting about 1 ½ hours. Spaces per tour are limited. Book via Eventbrite.

TOWARDS APPRECIATING NEURODIVERSITY IN THE URC

A new initiative is inviting any neurodiverse adult or young person associated with the United Reformed Church (URC) to take part in an initial

gathering to explore how we might celebrate neurodiversity in the URC.

The event takes place on Monday, 27 September 2021, from 7 pm to 8:30



pm via Zoom.

Matt Baines says: "We will be sharing stories and experiences, as well as hopes and dreams for how the URC might be more inclusive and support a celebration of neurodiversity."

The event will use mixed verbal, text, and image-based communication. If there is anything that we can do to make this event more accessible to you, please contact Matt.

Book **Towards Appreciating Neurodiversity in the URC** on Eventbrite.

Hello, baby Lewis! (No – you're not such a baby now!) It was a joy to see him in church as we begin returning to in-person worship.



You've got a friend

Pastoral welfare lead Anne MacKenzie reminds us of different ways we can work to combat loneliness at AUC.



Photo by Josue Escoto on Unsplash

The Pastoral Church Life Ministry Team (CLMT) is one of eight CLMTs overseeing the life and work of AUC, each headed up by an elder.

Its function is "to facilitate a web of care throughout AUC, through social events, pastoral support, and education events, to promote good mental and emotional health". The Pastoral CLMT currently consists of six members, including Fiona and Maxwell. We meet regularly to discuss support for folk who are housebound, and any friends who are unwell. We also think about the church lunches, special events, and ongoing programmes of support such as the 'Walk and Talk' programme.

That is what it was like pre-pandemic! Since the lockdowns, many daily life patterns have changed, and more and different pastoral support has been needed. Many folk have been 'home alone', and without their usual activities and personal contacts the days have felt bleak. This is expressed in this poem, written by Doris's neighbour, Jim.

*'Ahm no gannae wash ma face, Ah
willnae brush ma hair
I just hang about the place, there's
naebody who cares.
The only one tha's here is me, Mah
heart is full of stone.
Oh God, it's Hell to be Alone, Alone,
Alone.
(Jim Johnstone, 26 June 2021)*

Thank goodness there are lots of caring folk in AUC, in our communities, and around the world, who try to relieve such agony. For us at AUC, meeting for worship on the webinar

has bound us all together, and the social time has helped us to remember what we all look like and given us the opportunity to chat with friends old and new, near and far! Times of chat on a Wednesday lunch time, before church meetings and at Our Tribe gatherings have also kept us in touch.

We have to be thankful for the technology, and those who can make it work, but some of our friends are excluded because they do not have access. How good it is to receive a letter or card on your doormat! Something to handle, to read and re-read, with words and pictures of inspiration and encouragement from the minister, binding us together.

Then, there is the telephone. That is accessible to each one of us, and in these lockdown days the human voice was a comfort, particularly for those who live alone. Whether the chat is long or short there is an opportunity to share concerns and often laughter, which is a great blessing. We have all been supporting each other with these calls, not only the Pastoral CLMT.

Perhaps there are more 'normal' days ahead, but life will never be quite the same again. We have come to understand the blessings of keeping in touch in a new way, and many of us have deepened friendships during these days. There will always be folk like Jim, very alone, and other folk who are not able to come to worship at AUC for one reason or another, so hopefully we can keep these phone calls going and continue our loving concern for each other in this way.

But how good it will be to shake hands on the foyer, when we can! See you there!

Happy birthday – to Oliver on 4 August and, in September: Miriam, Caleb and Joseph. We hope you have great fun celebrating!



Photo by Morgan Lane on Unsplash

Conversion *noun*

The process of changing or causing something to change from one form to another.

As the Scottish Parliament 's Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee considers outlawing conversion therapy practices, AUC member Christine Rarity-Middleton shares her own experience.

I know who I am. And I know who I've always been. To even entertain the notion that one's identity and sense of self can be erased to make way for something else is ludicrous. Sadly, those who encourage and practice Conversion Therapy believe this to be true.

I grew up in a small village west of Edinburgh during the 80's and 90's. Knowing from a very early age that I was lesbian simply meant that I harboured a constant, painful secret. By the age of 14, the pain and the shame were pushed down deep, and a decade of alcohol and substance abuse beckoned until only two choices presented themselves: stay on this path and likely self-destruct, or give God a chance.

My sister encountered an old school friend who was a member at a local

Evangelical church. One thing led to another and we both decided to become members. Folks were lovely. Some of the biggest hearts I'd ever encountered. And that's what makes this story so difficult to share.

There were things I heard on repeat during the first few months of my journey – things like "God loves the sinner but hates the sin". But isn't God love? Where does the hate fit in? During those first few months, I began counselling with my pastors in their home. In many ways, it was quite helpful – as it was the first time I'd ever sat down to talk about my life. But we'd linger on my relationships with my mum and dad, and on my sexual abuse by a stranger when I was eight. These things, I was told, likely played a huge part in my 'choice' to be same sex attracted.

Regular prayer at the front of the church started around this time too. Well-meaning people would join my pastors to shout at my demons and command they release their grip on me. I would stand in the brightest and most shame illuminating spotlight I'd ever known.

All these experiences are versions of Conversion Therapy, by those who hold a position in church ministry but don't necessarily hold any qualification in counselling, psychology, psychiatry or equivalent.

But there are those who do. . . I headed to Oxford for a conference where a team would support me over three days with two-on-one counselling, healing prayer ministry – and, of course, the casting out of evil spirits. As ghastly as that was, the thing that damaged me most was the train ride to Oxford. The persistent loneliness and internalised self-rejection; and then the return journey with no accompanying success story. All I brought home was a sense of failure and unworthiness.

At a manor in the English countryside; with a small organisation in Inverness ... Always: fellowship, eating, worship, counselling and ministry. And repeat.



The thing that damaged me most was the train ride (photo by Abigail on Unsplash)



New paths of self-awareness, discovery and free thinking ... helped me emerge out of the destructive situation (photo by Alex Wigan on Unsplash)

What was my relationship like with my mum? Might I have judged her? Could that be the reason I'd rejected my femininity? And my dad? He was a war baby and couldn't convey his emotion well. Because of that image, had I ignored any attraction to men and chosen same sex attraction instead?

In fact, my dad was awesome. He was kind, generous and hugely hilarious. I miss him every day.

And finally – had sexual abuse at the age of eight by a stranger made me gay? I was taken through a guided meditation – a reimagining of the entire event, but with Jesus inserted into the scene. Because Jesus is everywhere, isn't he?

"Jesus was with you the whole time", I was told.

All I could picture, was a helpless eight-year-old – during one of the cruellest human atrocities – reaching out to Jesus who was standing on the sidelines. Doing nothing.

By the age of 24, I had become so desperately unhappy, and so ashamed to even attempt to live my

truest self, that I gave up my right to think for myself. For years, I wrestled with myself, with God and with the opinions and views of others. For years, I was a disappointment to myself, to God and to everyone who was attempting to 'fix' me.

“there are far too many who have been, or still are, in a similar, painful and dangerous situation “

Yet, in every prayer session, every counselling session, every conference, every conversation with friends and every attempt to commune with God, I knew at my core that I was already who I was meant to be. It was a constant whisper that grew louder as I worked on myself and my own core values.

New paths of self-awareness, discovery and free thinking in my work situation helped me emerge out of the destructive situation and back out of the closet. (Again!)

My experience is unique to me, but there are far too many who have been, or still are, in a similar, painful and dangerous situation.

Globally, governments are being petitioned to end this nonsense. Everyone can do their bit by continuing to sign the petitions and to march with those who take a stand against injustice and inequality. And we can choose never to minimise or erase anyone's story simply because it doesn't fit with our own world paradigm.

These days, I'm still a seeker of truth and knowledge and humanity's connection to the Divine – but in a much more inclusive, universal and enjoyable way.

An exclusive belief system that sets itself above all others, demands uniformity of thought and rejects difference? Sorry, I'm out.

What's On?

Most of our gatherings and resources are currently online. You can find out details on our website www.augustine.org.uk.

STAYING IN TOUCH

If you wish to receive weekly updates of AUC events please register to receive the Friday email by contacting our Centre Manager (centre.manager@augustine.org.uk).

Find us on 

Check our daily posts on the AUC Facebook page.

Looking ahead...

Climate Sunday

SUNDAY 26 SEPTEMBER

An ecumenical initiative to help us prepare for the COP26 gathering in November. The Revd David Coleman (Eco Congregation Scotland Chaplain) will preach. After the service, there will be an opportunity to hear Alex Peden speaking about Climate Chaos.

Harvest Festival

SUNDAY 4 OCTOBER

Worship

SUNDAYS, 11AM

Join services online every Sunday through the zoom link (see Friday emails), AUC website or Facebook page.

Join services in the building for worship on the first and third Sunday of the month. (No booking is required but track and trace will happen on the door and masks are required to be worn whilst inside. These will be services with communion where bread and wine/juice will be provided, but feel welcome to bring your own if that is more comfortable for you.) Junior Church will also happen in the building on the first and third Sundays of the month and every Sunday there is an activity sheet on the website.

Sunday Social Time

The Post Service Social Time online is a valuable way of keeping in touch with each other 11.45 – 12.30pm and will continue each Sunday. Link in the Friday email. On the third Sunday of the month in-building there will be post-service coffee which people are welcome to take and walk round the meadows with others from AUC; or if the weather is poor or you are less mobile, to have seated in the sanctuary. We would like to encourage you to bring your own cup / travel mug, but there will be compostable paper cups available if you forget.

TLC Youth

SUNDAYS, 1.30 - C.3.00PM

Inclusive youth group for all young people from S1 up. Email Matt for more information. (See pg. 9)

Our Tribe

FIRST THURSDAY OF THE MONTH, 7.30 – 9.00PM

LGBTQI+ ministry at Augustine United Church.

Contextual Bible Studies

TUESDAY 12-1PM, WEDNESDAY 7.30-8.30PM, THURSDAY 12-1PM

Email our minister, Fiona, to join in.

Midweek Social Time

WEDNESDAYS, 1-2PM

Drop in and chat for 10 mins or the hour. Link in the Friday email.

Church dates in September

Tuesday 7 – Church Council, 7:30pm

Sundays 5 & 19 – Blended worship (online & in-building)

Tuesday 14 – Church Meeting, 7.45-9pm (social time from 7:15pm)

Seeds deadline

Seeds is published on the Sunday prior to the beginning of each month. The copy deadline for the September edition is **Friday 17 September**.