Autumn 2026: Issue 07



West Gordon News

The Church of Scotland

West Gordon Parish Church

(Alford, Strathdon, Rhynie)



O For a day at the Hint o' Hairst,
With the craps weel in an' stackit,
When the farmer steps thro' the corn-yard,
An' counts a' the rucks he's thackit

The Hint O' Hairst (extract) by Charles Murray

The Church of Scotland

West Gordon Parish Church

(Alford, Strathdon, Rhynie)

Main Street

ALFORD AB33 8AD

www.westgordonparishchurch.org.uk

West Gordon Parish Church is a registered Scottish Charity No. SC007979

Minister:
Rev Jeliase Mutimbairi
Tel: 01975 210021 or 07546 953843
jmutimbairi@churchofscotland.org.uk

Parish Assistant:
Position Vacant

Session Clerk:
Mrs Somersal Shepley
Tel: 07501 154775
somersalshepley@outlook.com

Church Secretary:
Mrs Allison Overton
Tel: 019755 62829
secretary@westgordonparishchurch.org.uk

VISION

Rooted. Reaching. Renewing.

MISSION STATEMENT

We seek to be rooted in God's Word, reaching out with His love into our communities and renewing lives through the power of the Gospel, as we are led and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

As the Seasons Turn - Rev Jeliase Mutimbairi

There is something about autumn that reminds us that change is simply part of life. The leaves begin to turn, the evenings become shorter and before long we find ourselves wondering where the summer went! The jumpers come out, the heating goes on and we settle into a different rhythm. Yet for all the changes that autumn brings, there is something reassuring about it. The seasons change but they do so within the rhythm that God has established. As Ecclesiastes reminds us: ***"For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven."*** **Ecclesiastes 3:1**

As a parish, we too find ourselves in a season of change. Over the years, we have been blessed by the ministry, gifts and commitment of many people who have helped shape our life together. We give particular thanks for Simon and for all that he has contributed to the life and ministry of the parish over the years. His service has been valued and appreciated by many of you and we pray God's blessing upon him as he moves into the next chapter of his journey.

And now, we are on another chapter together. Every new ministry brings change. There will be new ideas, new relationships and perhaps some things that take time to settle. That is perfectly normal. Change can be exciting but it can also be unsettling, especially when we value the things that are familiar. There is something comforting about knowing what happens next but the Christian life has never really been about having everything mapped out in advance. It is about trusting the God who goes before us.

Through the prophet Isaiah, God says: ***"Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth; do you not perceive it?"*** **Isaiah 43:19**

A new chapter does not mean leaving everything behind. We carry with us the friendships, memories and experiences of the past, giving thanks for what God has already done while remaining open to what He wants to do next. As we move forward together, I am conscious that this is not simply about one person arriving and another leaving. The Church belongs to Christ. He is the one who builds His Church and He remains faithful through every season.

There will undoubtedly be things we need to work through together and we may not always agree on every detail. As with any family, we may not always agree on every detail and that is perfectly normal. What matters is that we give one another the space to speak and just as importantly, the willingness to listen. Through honest and gracious conversation, we can navigate the changes before us together, seeking to understand one another and keeping Christ at the centre of all that we do.

So, as the leaves change and the seasons turn, we can give thanks for what has been, embrace what is changing and look forward with hope to what God is doing next. The seasons change, circumstances change and ministries change but Christ remains faithful: ***"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."*** **Hebrews 13:8**

Let us enter this new season together with faith, hope and perhaps a little curiosity about what God has in store. We may not know exactly what lies ahead but we know the One who goes before us.

God is with us, God is faithful and God is not finished with us yet.

With every blessing, *Jeliase*

Fond Farewell

Rhynie Church, packed full of friends and familiar faces, was the venue to greet Rev Simon Crouch when he attended on 30th August to undertake his last Sunday Service before retirement. Simon reflected on the past three years since his appointment as Parish Assistant in West Gordon and mentioned each closed church with affection and respect. Members from these churches gave a special reading which had been used at the closing service of their Kirk. The service continued with a time of reflection and hope for the future development of the present parish. Simon concluded with the sacrament of Holy Communion after which speeches and presentations were made. Simon was presented with a beautiful hand-carved and engraved wooden bowl. Cards and good wishes were in abundance. Helen was thanked for her hard work in supporting Simon across all the parishes and presented with flowers.

Following the service, members of the congregation adjourned to Fourteen for an amazing potluck brunch. Over food, there was a time to catch up with friends and extend our personal thanks and best wishes to both Simon and Helen.

A huge THANK YOU is owed to so many members of the community who gave very generously of their time and resources; to the schools for their cards and artwork, to those who collected and offered donations towards Simon's farewell gift, to all those who baked, cooked, bought and served a wonderful meal and finally to all those who washed up afterwards - truly amazing! We wish Simon and Helen well for the future. May God bless them both as they go on to serve Him in the next steps of life's journey.

Fourteen, Rhynie

In our summer newsletter, we printed a brief but interesting history of Hamilton Hall in Kennethmont which had connections to the Church of Scotland. It was latterly used by the former Parish of Noth for its Kirk Session meetings more than 25 years ago. The hall had seen better days and was heated by wall mounted two-bar electric heaters which would not pass today's Health and Safety requirements. It was mainly tenanted with one room remaining for church use. When the tenant vacated and a proper inspection was made, it was decided that the kindest thing to do would be to sell it and use the funds to buy something in Rhynie.

Premises had recently become vacant in what is now Fourteen. The building had been a grocery shop, a water pump shop, a café/antique shop and during the past 100 years, so much more. With the proceeds of the sale of Hamilton Hall more than 15 years ago, Fourteen was purchased. Volunteers painted and furnished the site. Sue Whyte recalls painting the skirting boards, all of which now need a fresh coat of paint. The colour scheme, curtains, contents and flooring were all chosen in one fairly short meeting thanks to a couple of Argos catalogues and paint charts. George Beverly (Property), Jane Smith (Treasurer) and Sue Whyte (Session Clerk) had a wonderful meeting picking out all the things they thought the building could possibly need. Furniture was donated, the coffee table was a dining table with the legs cut off and the lights came from IKEA! All this was done in less than two hours but has lasted 15 years!

Members of the congregation of Noth Parish were asked to name the building - there were various options but Fourteen was picked; it is the address after all! Over the years it has been well used for Kirk Session meetings, fly cups after church, Messy Church, coffee mornings, funeral teas, play group, youth group, village meetings and so much more. In all the big storms it has served as a place of refuge and now has a large generator courtesy of the Rhynie Charitable Trust. The village relies heavily on Fourteen for its social functions; it is good to remind folk that it is church property and without the church in Rhynie, Fourteen would simply not exist.

Fourteen is available to hire and Phyllis Beverly is the contact. Both Phyllis and Margaret Shand, our cleaner, keep Fourteen open, clean and functioning doing so as volunteers. Much is owed to them for their services. The building is soon to have a facelift after a generous donation from the Windfarm funds - watch this space!

What would Mr Henderson think of today's building in The Square, Rhynie bought with money from the sale of Hamilton Hall in Kennethmont, his former home back in the late 19th century? Today, in the 21st century, his stern photograph looks down on the occupants of Fourteen - he might be forgotten but his legacy most certainly lives on!

Viva Espana



Congratulations go to Carol Thomson from Bridge of Alford who was the winner of the WGPC draw to pick the team lifting the 2026 FIFA World Cup. Carol, who has strong family connections with Strathdon, bought her winning ticket - SPAIN - at the Corgarff Picnic and Games which coincided with the start of the World Cup in June. On Sunday 19th July, Spain lifted the trophy, defeating Argentina 1 - 0.

On Saturday 22nd August, Carol, a former member of the Lonach Pipe Band, was back in Strathdon for the annual Lonach Gathering and Games and Lorna Eddie caught up with her at the Strathdon War Memorial, awaiting the march past of the Lonach Highlanders. Lorna presented Carol with her £30 winnings. The saying that "money is made round to go round" was certainly apt on this occasion. Carol kindly and promptly donated her winnings to Royal British Legion Scotland Upper Donside Branch. THANK YOU CAROL!

Prayer

ln today's world and to quote generally from the internet: **prayer is the act or words of speaking to God or a god to express thanks or ask for help or a set order of words used in praying.** Those who have worked with children and discussed the topic will know that the basic essence of prayer is usually a form of please, thank you or sorry.

Following the appointment of Rev Jeliase Mutimbairi as Minister in November 2025, prayer is gradually developing across the parish. Topics discussed include: What is prayer? Why should we pray together? When and how should we do it? Prayer is having a conversation with God which can be done in many ways and at many different times.

Sunday Morning - Pre-service Prayer at 9.30 am
A short time of prayer before worship in each of our buildings praying for the service, the ministry of God's Word and its impact on the congregation and our communities. Anyone who is willing, is welcome to lead and pray.

Tuesday Evening - Prayer Meeting from 6.45 pm to 7.25 pm
Held both in-person in the Alford Lounge and online via Zoom. This is a broader time of prayer covering everything from personal needs to national and international concerns. The Zoom link can be provided. Usually led by Paul Overton and/or Mike Webber.

Thursday Morning - Online Prayer at 9.00 am
A relaxed congregational prayer gathering on Zoom, beginning with a short Bible reading. The link is usually included in the weekly notices.

Monthly Prayer Breakfast - First Saturday of the Month at 9.00 am
An in-person gathering which rotates between our three church halls. A relaxed and reflective time of prayer, guided by Scripture, with prayers ranging from personal and local concerns to national and international needs and with a particular emphasis on mission. From time to time, we also welcome guests who share about their work and help us to broaden our prayers. Of course, we finish with a cuppa and a fine piece. Led by Alison Hunter. The next meetings are:

- 3rd October - Fourteen, The Square, Rhynie - Pamela Sloan from Scripture Union Prayer Hub will be joining us.
- 7th November - Alford Church Lounge.
- 5th December - Strathdon Church Hall (to be advised as Alford & Rhynie are more accessible for regular attendees).
- 2nd January - No meeting.

Monthly Praise & Prayer Evening - Last Sunday of the Month at 7.00 pm in Alford Church

Just as it says on the tin, an evening centred on praise and prayer. It is deliberately a collaborative service, giving people in the congregation an opportunity to explore and use their gifts, whilst the minister takes more of a back seat. We hope each evening will have its own character and be different from the previous one. Coordinated by Hugh and Jeliase.

Monthly Prayer Diary

This is prepared by Alison Hunter from Rhynie. Copies are available in each of our church buildings at Alford, Strathdon and Rhynie and a copy is posted to the West Gordon Parish Church website.

'Pray without ceasing' (1 Thessalonians 5:17)

Strathdon Church Hall



The Monday Coffee Club meets every second Monday of the month from 10.15 am to 12.15 pm and entry is by donation. It is a meeting place for people of all ages. Gatherings are low key with food and drink and people to talk to and have a laugh with. It is a great chance for new residents in the area to meet people. Come along and meet friends old and new for as much or as little time as you wish. For further information contact Helen Crouch on 07368 253555.

Tuesday 6th October – note change of date due to holidays
Monday 9th November
Monday 14th December
Monday 11th January

Fourteen, The Square, Rhynie

Coffee Mornings between 10.00 am and 12 noon

Saturday 31st October

Come along and enjoy meeting up with everyone over a cup of tea or coffee and a buttery and help raise funds for West Gordon Parish Church.

Treasurer Takes to Town



Regular readers of our spring and summer newsletters will be familiar with our Treasurer, Jennifer Bycroft's, journey as a volunteer Street Pastor in Aberdeen. After completing training in February, Jennifer has spent the past seven months working overnight in a team patrolling the streets of Aberdeen. The ethos of the Street Pastor is *Listening, Caring, Helping*.

Volunteers come from about 40 different churches in and around Aberdeen city and shire. They present a mix of ages, backgrounds, skills and experiences. In 2025, there were approximately 80 volunteers. Jennifer's team (Friday 4) is quite an inexperienced team compared to some; the longest serving member has done four years. A couple from the Scottish Episcopal Church in Alford left this team just as Jennifer started, both having completed 14 years!

During the summer months, Jennifer swapped to another group as she couldn't manage her regular Friday. This was interesting; members of this group were much more experienced and several have been street pastors for more than ten years. The driver had more experience too. They were joined by two observers who are considering becoming Street Pastors and both seemed quite keen.

Jennifer's latest escapades include encountering a performing dog and a performing male! One of the people who came to the bus for a hot drink had a dog that performed tricks for the group. Whilst out on patrol on Union Street, there was a young lad walking on his hands whilst being encouraged to do a back flip which he declined!

On a more serious note, another young lad visited the bus one night and wanted to chat about church and faith. He said he wasn't a church goer currently but was interested. After a long chat with the team, he went off with a Bible which the team had given him.

Finally, Jennifer reports that she's had a rewarding time so far on her Street Pastor journey. Even during quiet spells, it is beneficial chatting to other team members who have varied and different life experiences. Going forward, she is sure that there will be many more things happening in the future. We thank Jennifer for sharing her experiences, good and bad, with us this year; we keep her in our prayers and wish her all the best for the future.

What's On

(correct at time of going to press)

Sunday 4th October

- 10.00 am – Joint Harvest Thanksgiving Service – Alford Church

Tuesday 6th October (note change of date)

- 10.15 am – Monday Coffee Club – Strathdon Church Hall

Thursday 15th October

- 2.30 pm – Service in Hamewith Court, Alford

Saturday 24th October

- 10.00 am to 12 noon - Coffee Morning and Silent Auction – Alford Church Hall in aid of church funds

Sunday 25th October

- 2.00 pm – Harvest Service – Tullynessle Kirk
- 7.00 pm – 'Remembering' Service followed by refreshments – Alford Church

Saturday 31st October

- 10.00 am to 12 noon – Coffee Morning – Fourteen, Rhynie in aid of church funds

Sunday 1st November

- 10.00 am – Joint Service – Alford Church

Sunday 8th November (Remembrance Sunday)

- 9.30 am – Joint Ecumenical Service with St Andrew's Scottish Episcopal Church – Alford Church
- 10.00 am - Service in Strathdon Church Hall
- 10.30 am – Service in Rhynie Church
- Various times – Look locally for posters detailing Acts of Remembrance at War Memorials around the parish.

Monday 9th November

- 10.15 am – Monday Coffee Club – Strathdon Church Hall

Thursday 19th November

- 2.30 pm – Service in Hamewith Court, Alford

Sunday 29th November

- Alford Christmas Festival
- 10.00 am – First Sunday of Advent – Alford Church
- 5.30 pm – Carol Singalong - Alford Church

Sunday 6th December

- 10.00 am – Joint Service – Alford Church
- 6.30 pm – Annual Gift Service – Alford Church

All our Sunday morning services are held at 10.00 am with the minister preaching in one of the three churches on a rotational basis and live-streaming to the other two. Every week the service is live-streamed on the West Gordon Parish Church YouTube channel and the link posted on Facebook. Please note that, occasionally, changes may have to be made at short notice.



Coffee Morning and Silent Auction
at West Gordon Church, Main Street,
ALFORD, AB33 8AD
on Saturday 24th October 2026
from 10.00 am to 12 noon



Scottish Women's Institutes in the Parish



The Scottish Women's Institute (SWI) is a vibrant membership organisation and the largest women's movement in Scotland. Informally and fondly called 'the rural' after its original name, Scottish Women's Rural Institutes, it was launched in June 1917. Almost 100 years after being established, the SWRI underwent change/rebranding. In 2015, it became the SWI; education and friendship remain at its heart with the preservation of Scotland's traditional and rural heritage, particularly in household activities such as crafts, cooking and baking.

Giving women, wives and mothers a monthly night out, readers will have fond memories of numerous 'rurals' scattered around the parish. Monthly press reports appeared in local newspapers giving an insight into what went on 'Round the Rurals!'

Following the creation of huge parishes within the Church of Scotland, in West Gordon few churches survived with only three church buildings now in regular use. The SWI has fared no better with three 'rurals' also surviving in the parish; Rhynie, Tullynessle & Forbes and Alford. Congratulations to all the ladies who meet and continue to fly the flag for the SWI.

Rhynie SWI was founded 97 years ago for women. Currently there are 30 members but at one time, many years ago, there were round 60. Meetings are held in Fourteen, The Square, Rhynie at 7.30 p.m. on the second Thursday of each month apart from August. There is either a speaker or a demonstration, a raffle and a fly cup to round off the evening. Members are welcoming, friendly and cheery; it is a great way to meet people, make new friends and have an interesting evening out. Contact details: Phyllis Beverly (Secretary) mob. 07764 232209.

Tullynessle & Forbes SWI was also founded 97 years ago. There are 25 members who meet on the first Tuesday of the month at 7.30 pm in Tullynessle Hall. Contact details: Susan Hay (Secretary) mob. 07754 834591.

Alford SWI was founded in 1917 and celebrated its hundredth birthday with a dinner in the Haughton Arms Hotel. There are 22 members who meet in the Alford & District Men's Shed on the second Thursday of the month at 7.00 pm. Contact details: Maggie MacDonald mob. 07875 424710.

Alford and Tullynessle & Forbes SWIs currently collaborate to hold very popular all-day craft classes. These take place in Alford Church Hall on the third Saturday of the month, kick-started with a Daffodil Tea in April, in true SWI style!

A quick glance at the SWRI Aberdeenshire Federation handbook from 1966/67, tells us that matching the churches in every corner of our former parishes were also vibrant 'rurals' - Alford, Auchindoir, Cairncoullie/Towie, Clatt, Craigievar, Glenbuchat, Keig, Kennethmont, Kildrummy, Leochel Cushnie, Lonach, Muir of Alford, Rhynie, Tap O' Noth, Tough and Tullynessle & Forbes. Twenty years later, referring to the 1986/87 handbook only two, Auchindoir and Glenbuchat, had disbanded. Figures from 1988 show that some of the larger villages had over forty members, smaller areas were in the twenties whilst extremely rural areas were in the teens. Many women who were members of the 'rural' would no doubt have been members of their local church too. Sixty years on and ending on a positive note, the villages of Alford and Rhynie have managed to sustain a church, primary school and 'rural' and as the saying goes, 'the rest is history!'

The Bereavement Journey



Started on Thursday 20th August and running for seven weeks, *The Bereavement Journey is for anyone who has been bereaved at any time and in any way*. A group of six attendees supported each other to face and talk about their grief. Films are beautifully presented to help people to process the very difficult and painful feelings endured when we lose a loved one. It is hoped to run the course again in future.

A quiet and reflective 'Remembering' Service to remember and honour our loved ones will be held in Alford Church on Sunday 25th October at 7.00 pm. This is for anyone who has lost someone. Refreshments will be served afterwards.

Letter from Rev Simon Crouch

Welcome to the autumn newsletter. I hope and pray that you are all keeping safe and well and have enjoyed some periods of rest and relaxation over the summer. Whether you live locally or are visiting, it is good to share the parish and community news with you.



Autumn is well and truly with us now. The yellows and reds on the trees, the autumn winds which will carpet the ground with a spectacular display of colour, the early chill in the air; all are unmistakeable signs of the changing season. The 'season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,' as Keats put it, is also seen as a time of change. The passing of the old and preparing for the new, with the promise of spring ahead.

Many people use this time to declutter their homes, reimagine their gardens and clear away old plants to make way for new. Gardeners agree that autumn is a time of preparation - cutting and pruning the old and planting bulbs which will produce vibrant displays of colour in the spring.

For the Parish of West Gordon, and for me personally, the start of autumn is a time of change - sweeping away the old and bringing in the new; the changing of the guard!! The Joint Service held in Rhynie Church on Sunday 30th August was my final service as Parish Assistant in West Gordon and my last working day in the parish was 31st August. As you can imagine, the service was very emotional for me in so many ways.

In the service, we looked back over the past three years and remembered the four churches (Cushnie, Towie, Lumsden and Tough) which were closed as part of the original Presbytery Plan. We also honoured the generations of believers who have worshipped God within those beloved buildings and made us who we are today. I was so honoured and humbled to be able to share the Lord's Supper with all my friends from right across the parish and beyond for the final time.

Towards the end of the service, I was presented with a number of gifts and Helen with flowers. We are totally overwhelmed by your generosity. Thank you so much to everyone who contributed to the collection and for the number of personal gifts and cards with some beautiful and heartfelt messages. We do so very much appreciate everything.

Thank you very much to Sue, Lorna and Somersal for arranging the collection and to all the venues up and down the parish who acted as collection points. I would like to give a special thank you to Iain and Jean for the beautiful carved wooden bowl which is currently sitting proudly in the middle of our dining table at home. The bowl is inscribed - *To Simon with thanks and best wishes from the members of W.G.P.* - and I was delighted to be presented with it.

The service was followed by a potluck brunch served in Fourteen, Rhynie. It was lovely that so many people were able to stay behind and again many thanks to everyone who brought along delicious food and fine pieces which were so enjoyed. Special thanks must be given to Phyllis and her team for arranging the catering and making sure that we all had more than enough to eat and drink which we most certainly did!!

As the late 16th century saying goes, 'when one door closes, another one opens.' I am biding my time at the moment, waiting to see what opportunities our loving Father God will be putting my way. I will continue to serve the Lord in whatever way I can and wherever He may lead me. Helen and I are most definitely remaining in the area so there is no doubt that our paths will cross again at some point but in the meantime:

May the Love of God be the passion in our hearts

May the Joy of God be our strength when times are hard

May the Presence of God be a peace that overflows

May the Word of God be the seed that we might sow.

And may the Peace of God, which passes all human understanding, remain with us and all those who we love, this day and forever more.

God bless,

Simon

West Gordon Guild

The Guild in West Gordon meets in the Alford Church Hall at **2.00 p.m.** (note new time) on the third Monday of each month from September to April. The theme for the 2026/2027 syllabus is "Beyond the Walls", the last in a three-year programme.

- **Monday 19th October** - Crossreach Guild Project - "Playful Beginnings" - Ross Kirkwood.
- **Monday 16th November** - "Another Basket of Blethers" - Barbara Forbes.
- **Monday 21st December** - "Carols and Games at Christmas" - All Members.
- **Monday 18th January** - "Bibles for Bairns" - Sue Thomson, Scottish Bible Society - Guild Project.
- **Monday 15th February** - "Hearts and Flowers" - Jenny Kinnon.
- **Monday 15th March** - "Meditation on The Lord's Prayer" - Members.
- **Monday 19th April** - "My Walk on the Camino" - Somersal Shepley.
- **Saturday 15th May** - Coffee Morning for Christian Aid from 10.00 am to 12 noon.
- **Monday 21st June** - Guild Outing (to be arranged).

CLOSURE OF STRATHDON KIRK DURING WINTER 2026/27

At a Kirk Session meeting on Monday 5th October it was proposed and approved to close Strathdon Kirk during the above period. This is due to slate damage to the roof, water ingress for a great part of this year and failure to secure the services of appropriate work contractors. In the near future, the I.T. team from Alford will remove equipment from the building and relocate it to the Strathdon Church Hall where all services will then be held following the usual pattern. Strathdon Kirk will therefore no longer be available for use until matters are rectified.

Strathdon Heritage Group

Located in the west of the parish and started in spring 2025, the above group continues to develop a Heritage Hub at 'The Clubbie' in Bellabeg. A very successful Open Day in May and Midsummer in the Strath in June were followed by a Past Times event in collaboration with Art in the Buchat held in the Lonach Hall, Strathdon on Sunday 12th July.



People were encouraged to attend in vintage dress and there was an upcycled sewing competition! Those in attendance were treated to an impressive exhibition of costumes through the ages, an art sale, a de-stash of craft materials, a kids' workshop and posh afternoon teas!

During the forthcoming autumn and winter months; members of the group plan to reflect on what has been achieved this year, review historic information, check material and detail photographs received with a view to cohesively archiving everything. This covers an area from Corgarff down Donside as far as Kildrummy! If you have items of historic interest from the area, the group would love to hear from you. They have a Facebook page, are continually improving their website and can be contacted by emailing strathdonheritage@gmail.com or phoning Isobel Gilchrist on 07543 525127 and Lilian Hardie on 07855 044734.

Coming Soon – Christianity Explored

Ever wondered who Jesus really is and what difference He makes? Christianity Explored is a relaxed, informal seven-week course exploring the life, claims and message of Jesus through Mark's Gospel. No prior knowledge or church background is needed. Everyone is welcome. Look out for further details in early 2027.

Schools in the Parish by Rev Simon Crouch



It has been my absolute pleasure and honour to have acted as School Chaplain to most of our primary schools within the extended parish for a number of years; some schools for longer than others! I have been a regular visitor and a familiar face in Craigievar, Keig, Kennethmont, Lumsden, Rhynie, Strathdon, Tough and Towie Primary Schools, as well as Alford Academy, our local secondary school. I've joined in with all their social events, celebrated their achievements, spread the Word of God and sowed seeds of faith.

It would be fair to say that I have also been with the schools during many sad and difficult times; the listening ear, the helping hand, the shoulder to cry on. I have been in Alford Academy during difficult periods of tragedy and bereavement which affected both pupils and staff.

On the afternoon of 4th September, I was delighted to join the staff and pupils of Craigievar Primary School as they celebrated their 150th Anniversary - what an achievement and although windy, the weather was gorgeous!! We were welcomed onto the playground by some balloons (which eventually succumbed to the wind) and a number of pupils who warmly welcomed us and showed us to beautifully decorated marquees with seating and displays.

The event was very well organised; it was lovely to have the children involved in singing, sharing their memories and coming round to ensure that we all had enough to eat. There were stacks of sandwiches, sausage rolls, cake and a fly cup or two! It was interesting to see former pupils and former staff with us. Many people enjoyed looking through the books of old photographs trying to spot people they knew.

The school had commissioned a very special cake with the school logo on it. The oldest former pupil, Mary, who was able to share some vivid memories of the school some 70 odd years ago, together with the youngest new primary one pupil had the honour of cutting the cake. Pieces of delicious cake were then distributed to all. Many congratulations to Mrs Ewen and the other members of staff, together with some of the parents, who helped to set everything up and clear up, not forgetting of course the pupils of Craigievar School who had put such a lot of work into a very successful event. Very well done to all involved and here's to the next 150 years!!

West Gordon Community Choir

Following its very successful fundraising singathon in May, the choir goes from strength to strength. Members gather in the Meeting Room at Alford Church on Mondays from 7.00 pm to 8.30 pm. when the choir is in session and break for holiday periods. They are a friendly lot who are always looking for new members, especially male voices!

Members pay a small subscription to help with the cost of buying music. The group is simultaneously a church and community choir singing a variety of music to suit all tastes. As autumn sets in and up to Christmas, the choir is performing in Alford Church, Hamewith Court in Alford, Tough Community Church and the Alford Christmas Festival on 29th November. Interested in joining?

Come along at 6.50 pm on Mondays or email
secretary@westgordonparishchurch.org.uk for further details.

Website

We are presently updating the website. The outline of a website was created when the former four parishes came together to form West Gordon in September 2023. The ongoing joke within the Communication Team is that we could compare ourselves to the Scottish ferry fiasco – under construction, running late and over budget! Members of the team are working hard during the autumn and winter months to improve accuracy, expand content and generally upgrade the website.

Fundraising

Saturday 15th August saw a good crowd attend the annual Rhynie Gala amidst fine weather. Numerous groups from throughout the village, including volunteers from West Gordon Parish Church, held fundraising stalls. Later in the year, once expenses have been met, money raised will be shared between all participating organizations.

On the fourth Saturday of August each year, one of the church's major fundraising events takes place on the Lonach Stall at the annual Lonach Gathering and Games in Bellabeg, Strathdon. This year was no exception and a huge amount of teamwork before and on the day goes into raising money. Pictured below are Helen, Dorcas, Pauline, Yvonne and Rev Simon Crouch.



Residents from throughout the area provide an impressive array of home baking, tablet, preserves and pickles. Volunteers set up the stall on the Friday evening regardless of weather. Those manning the stall arrive early on the Saturday morning to display fresh produce ready for the sale to begin. Throughout the day, people constantly arrive with kind donations; the team are armed with labels and pens at the ready to price items! Some customers return every year! Preserves and pickles are especially popular and always sell out. We extend a big THANK YOU to all who donated and bought on the day, locals and visitors alike.

With the money finally in from the Lonach Highland & Friendly Society for selling Lonach Programmes on the stall, we are delighted to announce that an amazing £1075.00 was raised for church funds. A great day out indeed and hope to see you next year!