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Welcome to the December edition of the St Giles' News, much of which is dedicated to the work of the Neighbourhood Group, at this time of year when the plight of the neediest of our community is very much at the forefront of our minds. There is a featured article by The Rock Trust, for whom the Neighbourhood Group will undertake a street collection on Friday 17th and Saturday 18th December 2021. The necessary licence has been granted by the City of Edinburgh Council, and if you are able to volunteer as a collector for an hour, either on Princes Street or in the Old Town, please get in touch on neighbourhoodgroup@stgilescathedral.org.uk.

There's much more, too – details of this year's Advent Appeal; some important news about Christmas services and our services (plural) of Lessons and Carols for Advent and Christmas; a look ahead to the Burns and Beyond event in January; and a fireside chat with Sigrid Marten, our new Associate Minister.

We hope you enjoy reading it!



A letter from the Minister



Dear friends,

I do look forward to Advent.

That may sound kind of odd – looking forward to a time of looking forward (for is Advent not the season of looking forward to the arrival of Jesus?) True though.

I look forward to the Advent calendar countdown and the expectation rising as we near ‘the big day.’

I look forward to our Advent Carol services with the Cathedral Choir in fine voice (of which more in the article on Advent and Christmas services).

I look forward to singing my favorite hymn (okay, one of my favorite hymns!) “Comfort, Comfort You My People” with its rousing tune linking us to the roots of our tradition of Christianity in 16th-century Geneva and its message of hope for the future, paraphrasing the prophet Isaiah at chapter 40.

“Speak you to Jerusalem
Of the peace that waits for them”

The hymn is a word to those who live in exile and fear and estrangement; a call to God’s people to wait in hope for God’s coming.

I like what Simone Weil, the twentieth-century mystic once said:

“Waiting patiently in expectation is the foundation of the spiritual life.”

So thank you, Lord, for the waiting time.

A blessed Advent and Christmas season to you and yours from Missy, Maddy and myself.

Calum



Advent Appeal

This year's Advent Appeal is on behalf of three locally-based charities - the Edinburgh Food Project, the Edinburgh Clothing Store and Streetwork - which offer help to some of the poorest and most distressed in our community.

"Emergency food for local people in crisis" is the focus of the **Edinburgh Food Project**, which operates under the umbrella of the Trussell Trust. Are there really hungry people in our city? Yes. The food banks of the Edinburgh Food Project gave out almost 20,000 three-day emergency food parcels last year to people who have been referred by official care agencies. Some clients coming into the food bank seem inured to what has been happening in their lives; others are clearly uneasy about asking for help in such a public way: all of them express gratitude. As one said, looking back on earlier difficult times: "The food bank was there when I really needed it. It was an absolute lifeline."

The ancestor of the **Edinburgh Clothing Store** is the WRVS, set up to help those who had lost everything during the Blitz. In similar spirit, this local charity, run entirely by volunteers and with no funding from local or national government, provides a vital service, annually giving out donated clothes, footwear and bedding to as many as 1800 people who have been referred by a whole cross-section of care providers. The resilience, commitment and inventiveness of its volunteers are its capital resource, but overheads in the form of rent for its

premises and ever-rising utility bills are a constant financial worry.

Streetwork seeks to give people a safe place to live. Every day in the streets of Edinburgh, its staff and volunteers engage with people who are rough sleepers or who are in danger of becoming so. The street teams reach out to those from whom the rest of us distance ourselves. People are given the immediate help they need and, as soon as possible, a roof over their heads. Help is given to try to find a settled home and support is offered to try to help keep it.

Despite the financial difficulties St Giles' has had since the onset of the pandemic, it is surely still incumbent on us to look beyond ourselves, to acknowledge the social problems that are all around us in this city, to think of those who have so little. Through the agency of these three caring charities, we can do something to help. Each has a proven record of serving people in need, an infrastructure that has been developed to work effectively and practically; and operates with a minimal expenditure on administration, depending largely on volunteers. In a bleak world, they make a difference: let us help them to do so.

How to make a donation

In the cathedral are yellow envelopes in which donations, whether in cash or by cheque, can be enclosed. All donations should go to Suzanne Whitehead in the Finance Office.

Cheque: Pay St Giles' Cathedral, mark 'Advent Appeal' on the reverse of the cheque.

Bank transfers: St Giles' Cathedral: 80-02-24, a/c 01976128, reference Advent Appeal.



Rock Trust marks its 30th Anniversary

Andy Marks, Community Partnerships Officer

It was early in 1990 when several young people were discovered sleeping rough in the graveyard of St. Cuthbert's Church in Edinburgh. These young people had lost their homes and incomes as a result of the national recession and a change in policy which limited access to benefits for young people. Mobilised by this distressing discovery, the Council of West End Churches hosted an event bringing together local authority, third sector and community partners to plan for how young people at risk of homelessness could be better supported. A year later and with the help of an anonymous donation of £100,000, the Rock Trust was launched. The rest, as they say, is history.

Fast forward to 2021 and this year marks our 30th anniversary. Despite the dramatic changes and challenges that the past three decades have brought, Rock Trust's mission resolutely remains to end youth homelessness and to support young people to build better futures. We now provide a combination of education, emergency advice, housing and employability support services to more than 600 at-risk young people (aged 16-25) across Edinburgh, East Lothian, West Lothian, Fife, Perth and Glasgow. From our inception in 1991, the Rock Trust has gained a wealth of experience and understanding of both the causes of youth homelessness and how we can support young people to leave homelessness



Rock Trust then ...

behind for good. We believe that every young person in Scotland should have access to expert youth-specific services to assist them to avoid, survive and move on from homelessness.

Despite helping thousands of young people to leave homelessness behind for good over the past thirty years, homelessness tragically remains a reality for many young people in Scotland. Young people in particular have been some of the hardest hit by the fallout of the ongoing pandemic and this has increased their risk of becoming homeless. To put this in perspective, the number of young people receiving on-going support from our services has nearly doubled over the past year. This dramatic increase in demand has been met head-on by Rock Trust's services staff and we moved quickly in 2020 to reallocate our limited funds to deliver emergency provisions for young people (including hundreds of emergency food parcels, emergency funds for rent and bills, clothes and transport costs), digital resources (including sim cards, laptops,

(continued overleaf)



mobile phones and broadband packages) and health and wellbeing support (including art therapy, health and wellbeing groups, and art and wellness packs). This vital support has only been possible because of the kindness of our supporters who have generously championed our work over the past eighteen months.



... and Rock Trust now.

For Rock Trust's 30th anniversary, we want to celebrate the extraordinary successes of every young person that has left homelessness behind over the last thirty years. However, the ongoing pandemic has emphasised just how critical Rock Trust's services remain to the futures of the young people we support. With your help, we will continue to work to end youth homelessness in Scotland and a future where our services are no longer required.

Meeting Sigrid – an interview with our Associate Minister



You've arrived at St Giles' during unusual times for the whole world - how has lockdown been for you?

Like many people I missed my family and friends, but we found ways of staying in touch as well as we could. I felt very privileged because I spent that time in a big manse with a large garden, and sharing the house with my son. I was blessed with very committed office-bearers in my congregations who were cooperating with other groups in the villages to look after everyone in the community. I was also working with a wonderfully creative worship team in Balfour who were producing amazing online worship.

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You've been in Scotland for a while now – how did we drag you away from Hamburg?

It was more a case of how you couldn't keep me away! I grew up in a small village in the very North of Germany, near the Baltic Sea. When I was studying for the ministry in the Lutheran Church at Hamburg University, the opportunity arose to spend a year at Trinity College in Glasgow. During that time I also encountered the work of the Iona Community. I returned to Germany to finish my degree, but I came back to Scotland afterwards to test the idea that I might want to move to Scotland 'for good'.

Have you travelled around Scotland much? Do you have a favourite part of the country?

I have spent quite a few holidays in different parts of Scotland, but there is so much more still to explore. Having grown up at the seaside I tend to head for the coast, especially islands. So far, the Isle of Mull has been a great favourite for its remote beaches and varied landscapes.

Closer to home, have you had the chance to explore the building of St Giles'?

So far, I have had one 'official' tour with Robin McCaig, and we focused on the stained glass windows. That was a fascinating hour because the windows tell so much of the story of our faith and of Scotland, but it also confirmed my suspicion that it will take a long time before I will be confident that I 'know' the Cathedral.

What do you see as our biggest challenge just now, as a congregation?

It is too early for me to understand fully what challenges our congregation in particular will have to face. But I am convinced that we will have to wrestle with some fundamental issues that many congregations in Scotland are struggling with. Those obviously include financial concerns, but also questions around how to live as a Christian community in our ever-changing world, and how to share the Gospel with those around us. I am convinced that none of us can do this alone.

And some fun...

These long evenings call for curling up by the fire with a book and a glass of something – what's in the book, and what's in the glass?

Well, that depends... it could either be a mug of herbal tea or a glass of peaty island malt. Those might be paired with a biography or something by a good story teller like Isabel Allende or Maggie O'Farrell. Alternatively, I might just put on some music and get my knitting out.



Christmas services



We are looking forward to being able to welcome you to our Christmas services this year, when our worship will be nearly back to our customary Christmas schedule.

Covid still brings its challenges, and in order to retain safe distancing the capacity is still limited; in addition, as we continue our journey towards more normality we have decided that there will not be a Christmas Eve Watchnight Service this year. However, we will be holding our 5.15pm family Christmas service as usual, and there will our normal pattern of 9.30am Holy Communion and 11am Morning Service on both Christmas Day and Sunday 26th December.

In order to facilitate our Test and Protect procedures and deal with the reduced capacity we are very much encouraging everyone to register for attendance in advance – for the Christmas services on 24th, 25th and 26th December this should be done using www.eventbrite.co.uk where you will find a booking system in place. If you are unable to access the internet then please phone 0131 225 4363 on Wednesday or Friday between 11am and 1pm.

Once again this year our celebration of the season of Christmas in St Giles' will begin with the Lessons and Carols for Advent and Christmas, and it is very good to be able to return to this as a live event. This year there will be a difference in that we are going to be holding the service twice, to cope with demand, on Saturday 18th December and Sunday 19th December, at 6pm. As ever this service will be one which reflects in music and words on both Advent and Christmas, and the Cathedral Choir is looking forward to singing live once again for this.

For the two carol services on 18th and 19th December we are also asking that those wishing to attend book on www.eventbrite.co.uk and there is already a high demand, so early booking is very much encouraged.



The City Centre Cluster

Mark Batho, Session Clerk

Over the past year or so, St Giles' has been engaged in discussions with five other city centre churches (Canongate, Greenside, Greyfriars, St Andrew's and St George's, and St Cuthbert's) about our collective future. This is part of a national and Edinburgh-wide conversation that is driven by the General Assembly's concern that there will need in future to be a significant reduction in the number of Ministers.

Our city centre discussions have been very friendly and constructive and have helped us to develop a common understanding of how we all contribute to the church's many-faceted mission to everyone who lives in, works in, or visits central Edinburgh. We're still at an early stage of exploring how we could work with each other and also with other denominations and faiths, more effectively. What we want to do is to find ways that improve the impact and reach of all the things that each of us do so that even as resources come under pressure, we can end up strengthening the Church's mission.

Our discussions so far have involved just two or three representatives from each church - in the case of St Giles', Calum and myself.

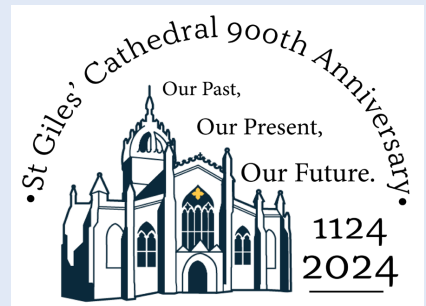
But all of us have recognised that if we are to be able to work with each other, we need to get to know each other better as congregations. That will take time. But we are thinking of ways to do this. This could, for example, see the Ministers of each of the churches undertaking an occasional pulpit exchange. Or we could invite each others' congregations to join in events that are happening at our churches - or indeed arrange events specifically to allow us to meet each other. For example we might at St Giles' be able to organise a tour of the Cathedral.

All of this is at an early stage. But we and all the city centre churches believe that we have to respond positively to the pressures which the church nationwide is facing. And we believe that in the particular context of the Capital's city centre, with its beautiful and historic churches which are nevertheless rooted in the centre's communities, we can do great work going forward.

There will, we hope, be much more to report over time but meanwhile, I hope this short piece gives you an insight into what has been happening so far.

St Giles' 900th update

Very many thanks to everyone who has contributed their ideas and suggestions for the 900th Anniversary celebrations of St Giles' Cathedral in 2024. The Committee will be looking carefully at all the suggestions and offers of support and we'll report more fully on how the plans are developing in early 2022.





Michael Harris - 25 again

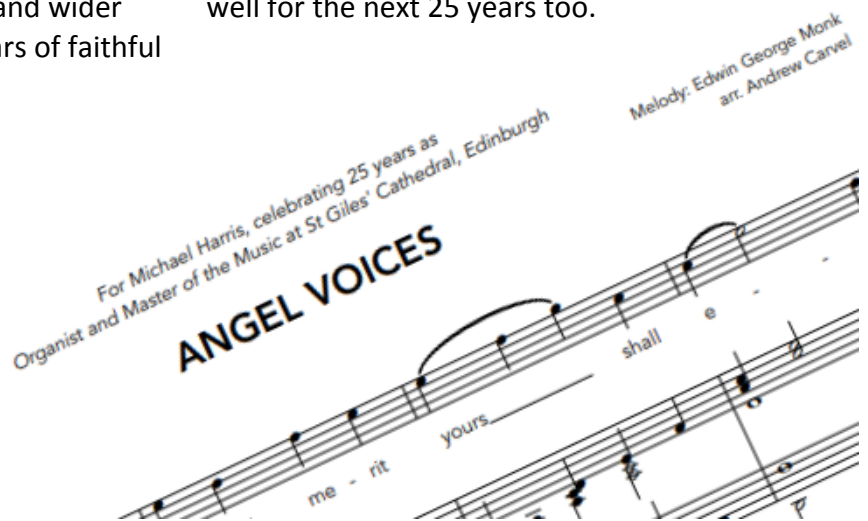


On 31st October, St Giles' celebrated the 25th anniversary of the first service at which Michael Harris fulfilled the role of Organist and Master of the Music.

The Minister offered these words of praise and thanks: "Music plays such a central role in the worship life of St Giles' and your commitment to that and the provision of high quality concerts and musical offerings is exemplary. Your openness to new music and compositions means that the music life of the Cathedral is never dull or in a rut. I personally am grateful for your creativity, skill and collegiality in the musical endeavours St Giles' undertakes. You have the gratitude of your colleagues in the choir and of the whole congregation and wider musical community for your years of faithful service here."

As well as a card, gifts and flowers, Michael was surprised by a new descant to the hymn tune "Angel Voices", written specially by Andrew Carvel for the occasion. Michael was only given the music to conduct once the choir had actually begun singing it – but coped admirably with the unexpected challenge!

While this is clearly a major milestone, Michael has also pointed out that his predecessor, the great Herrick Bunney, was in post for more than 50 years; which remarkable tenure helps make Michael only the fourth holder of the post of Organist and Master of the Music since the Reformation. So, we take this opportunity to wish Michael well for the next 25 years too.





Custodianship of an Ancient Building

John Andrew, General Committee Convenor

As we approach the 900th Anniversary of St Giles' Cathedral, this major historic building requires continual maintenance, improvement, and renewal to preserve it for future generations to worship, visit and enjoy. The Kirk Session, members of the congregation and staff are its current custodians and have an obligation to provide a place of worship for future generations.

The Cathedral's place in National and Civic life has been maintained throughout the centuries; its place as the birthplace of Presbyterianism is well known and attracts many visitors to experience its sense of peace and contemplation.

The work to maintain and improve the building has continued over the centuries and our predecessors will have encountered many of the similar problems we are experiencing as the building is required to provide a range of functions, mainly and importantly as a continuing place of worship.

From its inception the Cathedral has seen continuous change and adaptation both internally and externally. The building has gone through a number of major renewals:

the Burn restoration of 1826 when the structure was stabilised and the building encased in sandstone; the Chambers restoration of the interior completed in 1883; and the addition of the Thistle Chapel designed by Robert Lorimer was completed in 1911. The most recent renewal based on the Feilden report commenced in 1970 when the interior was cleaned, limestone floor laid, Lower Aisle constructed, and the interior reconfigured amongst other improvements that have been undertaken over the past 50 years. Other works have included the installation of the Rieger Organ, the Burns Window and construction of the improved access and porch at the West End of the Cathedral together with additional improvements such as the interior lighting and more recently new sound system.



© Peter Backhouse

(continued overleaf)



The renewal and cleaning of the interior together with the ongoing maintenance of the exterior fabric means that the building is well presented to all worshippers and visitors, and is undertaken on an annual basis to ensure that safety is never compromised. This was never more important than during the Covid pandemic when the building was closed for a period. During this time the Cathedral Architect undertook regular inspections to ensure the building was not deteriorating, and the Beadles carried out an extensive cleaning exercise such that the Cathedral now sparkles and is presented in as good a condition as it has been for many years. Our grateful thanks must go in particular to our Head Beadle David Hall, for his commitment to promoting the building's safety and security.

Following the disastrous fire that almost destroyed the Notre-Dame Cathedral in

Paris an extensive review of the Cathedral fire detection system was carried out, including significant work in the roof spaces, and improvements made to ensure that the system fully protects the historic structure.

The most recent work that has been undertaken has been the extensive cleaning and redecoration of the plaster ceilings and the gilding of the ceiling bosses, corbels and ribs. Funded by a significant restricted donation, this work now gives a wonderful highlight to the internal ceilings within the Cathedral.

St Giles' Cathedral may be an historic structure and approaching its 900th anniversary but it continues to provide a safe and peaceful space for all that are welcomed into it and a fully functional building that serves its local, civic and national responsibilities.

Communications Committee Membership

We thought we should introduce the new communications committee, and those mainly responsible for what you have been reading so far.

Convenor	Amanda Forsyth, amanda.forsyth@stgilescathedral.org.uk
General Committee	John Andrew
Business Committee	Marjory Lobban
Finance Committee	Victor Ashton
Neighbourhood Group	Lesley Elliot
St Giles' 900 Committee	Anne Whiteford
Music	Michael Harris
Heritage & Culture	Stephen Preston
Design	Hazel Frost
Layout	William Taylor

In addition, as with all Committees of the Kirk Session, the Minister, Session Clerk and Treasurer attend meetings ex officio.



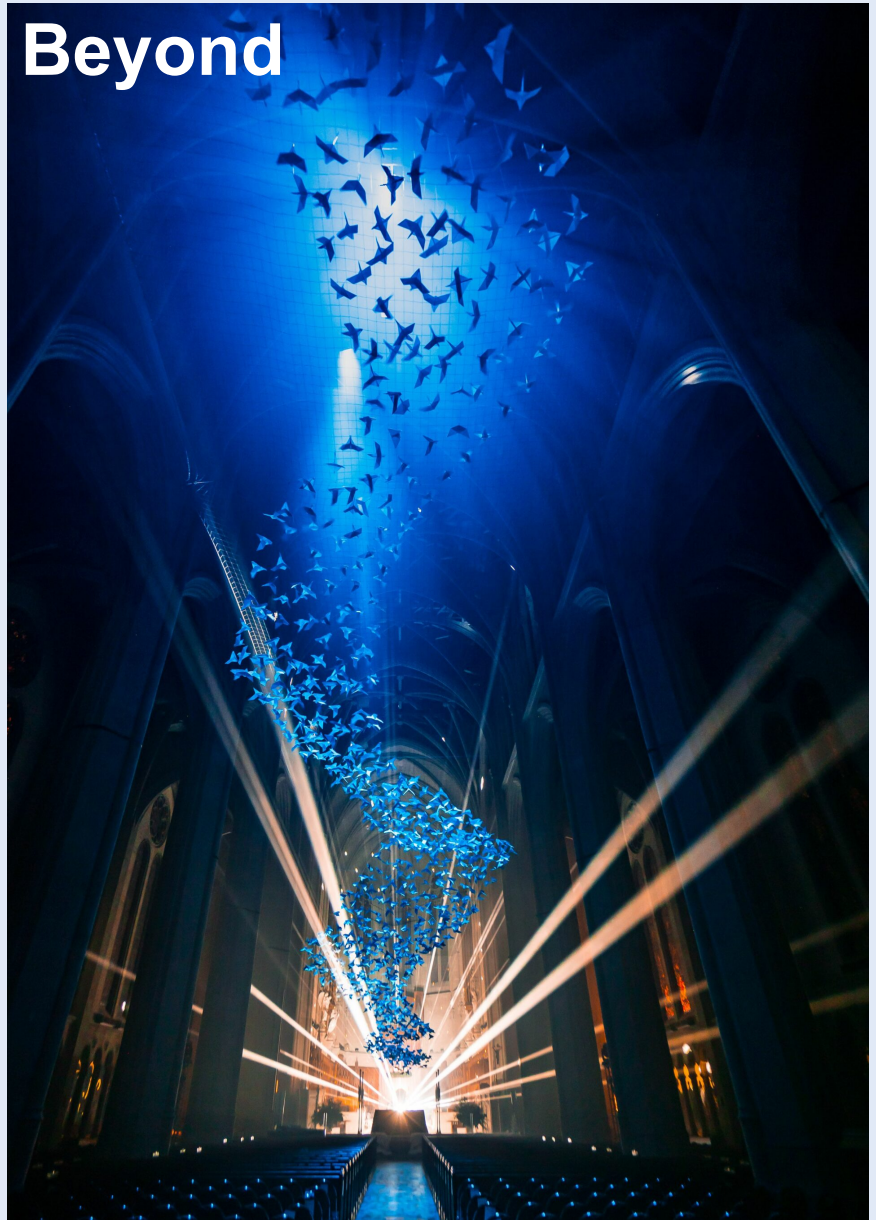
Burns and Beyond

Heritage and Culture

As part of the Edinburgh Burns Festival, St Giles' will be visited by a winding column of more than 2,500 origami paper doves – 'Les Colombes', by German artist Michael Pendry.

This stunning installation is arranged to give life to the Cathedral, embodying our resolve to be kind to our fellow humans, and to do our part in making a better tomorrow.

Les Colombes has previously appeared in Salisbury Cathedral; St. Martin-in-the-Fields in London; Mount Zion in Jerusalem; Heilig-Geist Viktualienmarkt in Munich, Grace Cathedral, San Francisco and most recently the National Cathedral, Washington.



Michael Pendry said: 'The Les Colombes installation has found homes of some of the world's most iconic sacred spaces, and now I'm thrilled to exhibit this piece in Edinburgh's St Giles' Cathedral, where it can challenge and engage new audiences, both in-person and virtually'.

We want as many people as possible to get involved in the creation of Les Colombes and to show the strength and power of Edinburgh as a community. You can create your own paper Dove to be flown as part of the installation, which will be in St Giles' between 22nd January and 5th February 2022. There will also be special evening viewings with illumination and soundscape, for which tickets at £5 may be booked through the Burns & Beyond website, www.burnsandbeyond.com



Eventbrite – easier than you might think

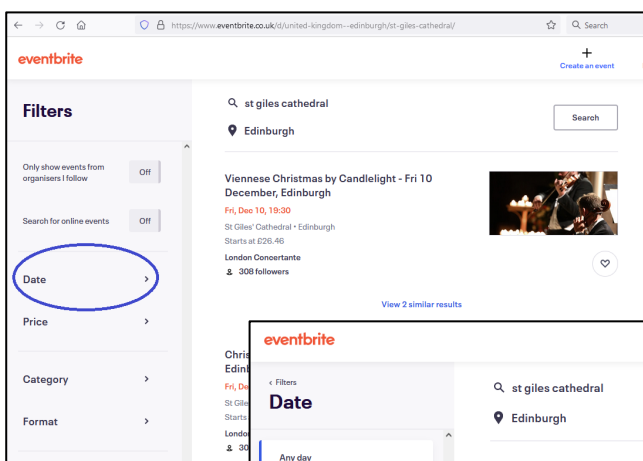
As we do our best to monitor safe levels of attendance at services and use staff time more efficiently, especially in the run up to Christmas, we have found the Eventbrite site tremendously helpful. Previously used chiefly for concerts and events at the Cathedral, we have begun rolling it out for the congregation to register attendance on a Sunday morning.

This route is the reservation system that's open the latest – up to 4pm on the Saturday prior to Sunday worship – so hopefully will allow plenty of opportunity to book up, and spare the worry of there being No Room At The Inn on Sunday morning!

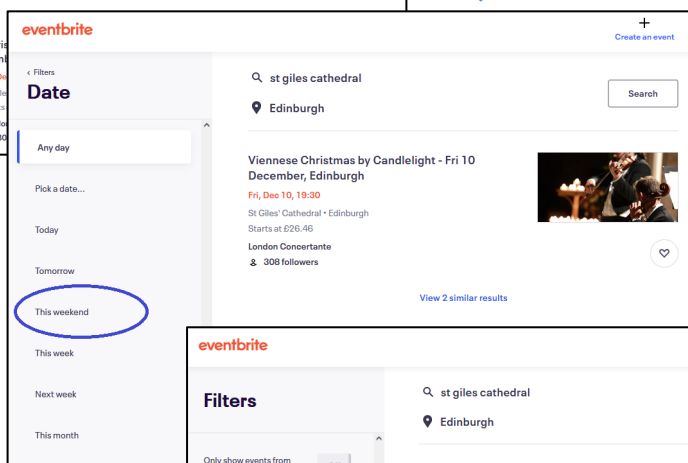
If you've not used it before, here are a couple of hints on how to go about it. If you are able to reserve your place by this route, we'll be very grateful!

When you go to the website www.eventbrite.co.uk type "St Giles Cathedral" into the search bar at the top. That then presents you with a dizzying array of events taking place in the Cathedral soon; usually concerts.

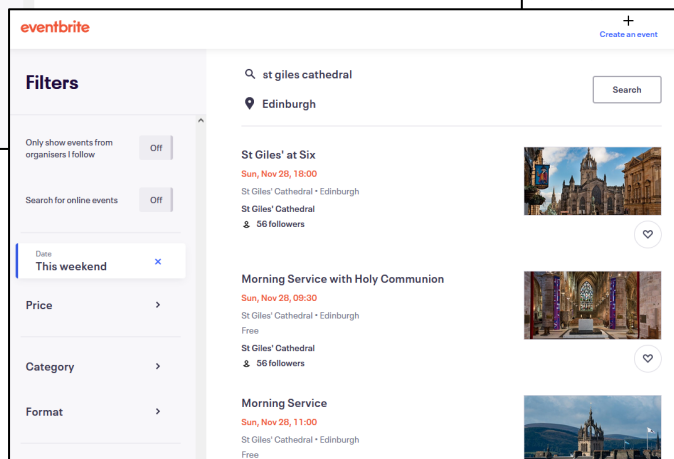
So, where to find Sunday service? An easy way is to select the date.



"This weekend" is an option in the dropdown menu on the left of the screen.



The resulting list of options is then much more manageable, and you should be able quickly and easily to reserve your place, giving us the necessary tracing details at the same time





Uniquely St Giles' - Christmas Cards and Gifts

At this time of year, when we are casting around for gift ideas for our nearest and dearest, it's worth remembering the cornucopia of lovely goods that can be obtained in the St Giles' shop. As well as the charming Christmas card with its reproduction of Ann Oram's painting "St Giles' at Night", there are some new items in store: a bespoke St Giles' ceramic tile; a card with a transfer of St Giles' stained

glass on the front; and a range of beautiful ceramic hangings. Put these alongside the existing range of the beautiful and the useful (and often both!) it is well worth setting aside some time to come and browse. Opening hours are Monday-Saturday 10am-5pm and Sunday 1-5pm – Irina and her team of volunteers look forward to welcoming you.



Building our teams

There is no shortage of ways that willing volunteers can help with the work of St Giles'. We have already made mention in the previous Newsletter of the need for more people to run the live streaming of Sunday services; it has been wonderful to see the response to that call, and if you've yet to let us know of your interest in that work, please don't hesitate to get in touch. As mentioned above, Irina would be pleased to hear from anyone who is able to help staff the shop; and in more general terms, the Stewarding teams are also seeking extra pairs of hands to deal with the running of Sunday services. So, if Streaming, Shopping or Stewarding are of interest, please let us know on comms@stgilescathedral.org.uk and we will put you in touch with the relevant team.



This fine image of the Cathedral was captured by Louise Macdonald. We thought it would be appreciated by all who know St Giles' and how it so regularly, and sometimes unexpectedly, appears on the Edinburgh skyline. If you have any photos of St Giles' you would like to share in the newsletter please send them to comms@stgilescathedral.org.uk



And finally...

We hope you have enjoyed reading this latest edition of the newsletter.

In the next issue we hope to have some more beautiful images of the 'Les Colombes' installation in St Giles'. We are also planning a further "guest" article from one of the charities benefitting from our Advent Appeal, as well as an update on funds raised.

If there is anything else you would like to see covered, please let us know! We really mean that - we are keen for this newsletter to represent St Giles as much as possible, so the greater the range of voices we hear from the better.

Contact information

The @stgilescathedral.org.uk address has been rolled out to certain of the key contacts at St Giles' – some examples are shown below:

The Minister	minister@stgilescathedral.org.uk
Sigrid Martin, Associate Minister	sigrid.marten@stgilescathedral.org.uk
Michael Harris, Master of the Music	michael.harris@stgilescathedral.org.uk
Mark Batho, Session Clerk	sessionclerk@stgilescathedral.org.uk
Niall Lothian, Treasurer	treasurer@stgilescathedral.org.uk

As Communications Convenor, Amanda Forsyth monitors the comms@stgilescathedral.org.uk address, and is generally able to forward queries to other members of the Kirk staff and Session.

Useful contacts:

The Minister's Secretary	0131 225 4363
Beadles' Office	0131 226 0672
Cathedral Shop	0131 226 0673, shop@stgilescathedral.org.uk
Finance Office	0131 225 8683

Picture credits

As ever, we wish to thank Peter Backhouse, who has provided his photographic skills for a number of the images in the Newsletter. We would also like to thank Ivar Struthers, who has kindly allowed us to use his image of St Giles' at sunset on the front cover.