

Website

I appreciate the kind comments, suggestions, and constructive criticisms that I have received regarding our parish website. I am always open to new ideas, and if there is anything that you would like to see, or feel that we are not including on our website, please do let me know. How about a page for our youngsters, written by them? Or a special page(s) for the members of our Syro-Malabar, Filipino, and Central European communities? Just come and speak to me about it!

St Columba's: a truly 'catholic' community

I would particularly appreciate any input from members of these afore-mentioned parish communities. If there is anything that I can do for you, please do let me know. Thank you for your contribution to, and your support of, the parish. Your prayerful presence brings so much to St Columba's, reminds us of the universal nature of the Church, and makes St Columba's a truly catholic place of worship.

Parish House Project

A lot of time and effort has gone into this project, and I am immensely grateful to John McGlade, Colin Peteranna, and Ewen Macdonald, for their great support and expertise, both past and present, in the project. As you know, we are financing the construction of the proposed Parish House through the sale of land, located to the north of the car park. We have recently submitted Planning Applications for three plots – one of these will be a children's nursery, and the other two will be house plots. Much work has gone into this project – please pray for a successful outcome.

Building usage

It is good to see St Columba's being used so well – not just for our liturgies (Sunday and mid-week), but for a host of other events, such as children's sacramental preparation, marriage preparation, meetings of the Secular Franciscan Order, the Friends in Retirement Group, the Iona Group, Day Workshops, Evenings of Recollection, our popular monthly fund-raising Bingo, and our Faith in Film movie nights. On occasion, we have seen three different groups using the building at the same time! May this continue, as we seek to build up the life of the Parish together!

In the meantime, let me conclude this Parish Newsletter by offering you every joy and happiness in this holy and grace-filled season. May the Risen Christ reign in your hearts! With prayers and blessings,

Fr Domenico.

(RC Diocese of Aberdeen. A registered Scottish Charity, number SC 005122)

St. Columba's, Culloden

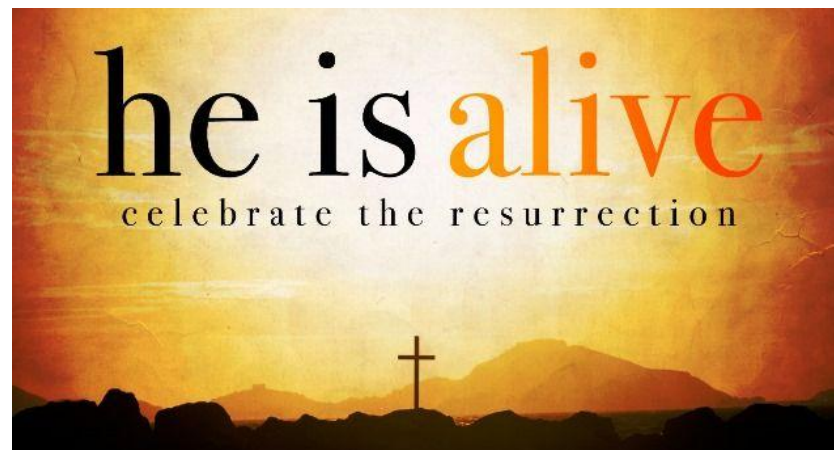
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Easter 2016 Parish Newsletter

"May the light of Christ, rising in glory, dispel the darkness of our hearts and minds". So sings the Priest or Deacon, as the Paschal candle is light at the very beginning of the Easter Vigil. These are very appropriate sentiments for each one of us to reflect upon, as we bask in the radiance of the Resurrection. This is indeed a privileged time for us, a grace-filled season, a wonderful opportunity for spiritual renewal, for re-dedicating ourselves to Jesus. He is Risen! Alleluia!!

Year of Mercy

"Jesus of Nazareth, by his words, his actions, and his entire person reveals the mercy of God." (*Misericordiae Vultus*, Bull of Indiction for the Year of Mercy, 1)
Here at St Columba's, our spiritual focus has been on the Jubilee Year of Mercy, instituted by Pope Francis on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception last year. We've already had a number of different events to celebrate this Jubilee Year, and to enter more deeply into its significance. These initiatives included several Evenings of Reflections in Advent and Christmastide ('An Introduction to the Year

of Mercy'; 'Pope Francis: the Pontiff of Mercy'; and 'Conversion: Beginning Our Journey of Mercy'). These evenings, which concluded with Eucharistic Adoration, devotions, and Benediction, have been well attended, and – to judge from people's comments – gratefully received. So too was our Day of Recollection at Stratherrick on 8 December, dedicated to 'Mary, Mother of Mercy'. This was followed in Lent with a Day Workshop on 'Confession: The Sacrament of Mercy'. It was gratifying to see so many – over 50 people came along, from different parishes throughout the Highland Deanery and beyond – and I would like to thank everyone once again for their generosity in providing food to share with each other during lunch. We began our spiritual preparations for Holy Week with a Retreat at St Mary's, Beaulieu, entitled 'Thirsting for Mercy: Journeying with Christ Through Holy Week'. Again, the numbers in attendance were very good (over 40 people, from different parishes, participated in this event).

There is clearly a thirst (no pun intended!) for further faith formation, and we will be continuing with these initiatives at St Columba's during the Easter Season and beyond. I will also be introducing an award-winning multi-media course later on this year, which explores different facets of our Catholic faith. More about this later! Before this, there will be opportunities to consider the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy; and we'll conclude the Year of Mercy with our Parish Pilgrimage to the island of Iona, spiritual home of our patron, St Columba: "The practice of pilgrimage has a special place in the Holy Year, because it represents the journey each of us makes in this life." (MV, 14)

Sacramental Life at St Columba's

There are numerous signs of sacramental vitality and growth in our parish. From a personal perspective, it has been most gratifying to see an increase in the number of parishioners who are availing themselves of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. People are coming to make their Confessions at St Columba's from various parishes in the Deanery. The Day Workshop on the Sacrament may have helped – in a very modest way – to underline both the importance and the beauty of this healing Sacrament in our spiritual lives as Catholics. Much more influential, though, has been the teaching of Pope Francis in this regard. As he said in his recent message for World Youth Day 2016, *"We keep looking for God, but God is there before us, always looking for us, and he finds us first. Maybe one of you feels something weighing on your heart. You are thinking: I did this, I did that.... Do not be afraid! God is waiting for you! God is a Father and he is always waiting for us! It is so wonderful to feel the merciful embrace of the Father in the sacrament of Reconciliation, to discover that the confessional is a place of mercy, and to allow ourselves to be touched by the merciful love of the Lord who always forgives us!"*

Speaking of youth, our new programme for Sacramental Preparation is going very well, and I am sincerely grateful to our dedicated Catechists for their hard work in instructing our children in the Faith. The following seven children are currently preparing to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation and Holy Communion: Anna Kelly, Alison Macmillan, Jessica Mitchell, Fionnula Parker, Sophie-Maree Rusk, Cameron Wilson, and Jamie Wilson. Meanwhile, we have another five who will soon be receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation; they are: Erin Kelly, Morven MacAulay, Matt MacFarlane, Calum McDaid, Louis Peteranna. Please do keep these children in your thoughts and prayers at this time. It is a great consolation for us to be able to support them in their spiritual journeys; in this way, we truly grow as a community of faith.

I would also ask your prayers for Paul Rusk and Kathryn Duthie, who will be married by Canon Peter Barry at St Sylvester's, Elgin, on 16 July 2016. Paul and Kathryn attend Sunday Mass here at St Columba's, and I'm sure you'll join with me in wishing them every joy and happiness in their new life together.

Young People

Our first meeting of the Iona Group for teenagers went very well, with attendance in double figures, and this was followed up by a second meeting recently. One of our parishioners – Ruairidh Macdonald – is in Lourdes this week, working as a Helper with the Handicapped Children's Pilgrimage Trust. Meanwhile, another of our younger members of the parish, Frankie Grout, is preparing to attend the forthcoming World Youth Day in Krakow, Poland, in July. This was following our very successful 'World Youth Day in Culloden' last September. Can we do more to support our young people in their various endeavours? On Saturday 11 June (11.00am-6.00pm), the Dominican Sisters have organised a "Power of Grace" Day Retreat for Teenagers aged 12-16. I will be involved in the Retreat, and I'm hoping that some of our own teenagers from St Columba's will come along to this great event – dear parents, please do encourage them to think about attending.

Our younger parishioners are involved in various ways in our parish liturgies: as readers at Sunday Mass, Hospitality, and Altar-Serving. A special 'thank you' to our two Altar Servers, Jobe and Logan, who have been such a huge help to me in our Sunday Masses, our Christmas liturgies, and especially over the Triduum. We are grateful for their contribution to the life of the Parish. However, we are always keen to welcome more budding young Servers! In this regard, can I remind parents that any child who has made their First Holy Communion can come forward and offer themselves as Altar Servers? Full training will be given, and they will support Jobe and Logan in their work. It would be good to develop a team of Parish Servers!