

# the Saint Andrew



The series of stained glass windows at the entrance doorway of St Andrew's Scots Kirk Colombo, depicting the ascension of Jesus



## Church of Scotland – Presbyterian

For private circulation only





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## Letter from the Minister

### Dear friends at St Andrew's Scots Kirk,

After an extended period during which we depended on local ministers from various denominations to lead worship for us on Sunday mornings (often referred to as providing "pulpit supply") - for which we are eternally grateful! - St Andrew's Scots Kirk enjoyed very much the services of Rev. Bill Davnie who served as Locum Minister for some eight months before he returned to the USA recently. We are particularly grateful to Bill, and to his wife Charlotte, for their devoted services to St Andrew's during that period of time.

Charlotte's time in Colombo was, as most of you will know, somewhat cut short when she had to travel back to the USA to be with her daughter and grand-daughters who were evacuated (if I may use that word) from Sri Lanka following the devastating Easter Sunday bombings which hit Colombo and other places. I learned with distress of these attacks when I awoke on Easter Sunday morning (keep in mind there is a three and a half hour time difference between Sri Lanka and Switzerland, where I live) but also enormous relief that St Andrew's was not directly targeted - though I know that those of you who had gathered for worship on that special day both heard and felt the explosion in the Cinnamon Grand Hotel next door to the church. (I also recalled that, on Easter Sunday last year, it was I who led worship - and a Baptism and Confirmation and Communion - on a joyous occasion: a far cry from the turmoil of this latest Easter).

I want to pay tribute at this stage to the efforts that the Kirk Session of St Andrew's Scots Kirk, and others, have made to find ways of supporting those in the churches who were directly targeted by the Easter Sunday explosions. As I am sure you know - and no doubt will be reported in more detail in this magazine - funds were raised both in Sri Lanka and abroad to help support the members of Zion Church in Batticaloa, an independent church that did not benefit from wider institutional support structures as other congregations did. An amazing

amount of money was raised, largely through the efforts of the Rev. Dr Liam Fraser, a campus minister at the University of Edinburgh, but with additional support from other friends of St Andrew's Scots Kirk in Scotland and further afield, enabling St Andrew's Scots Kirk to provide really practical help to the victims of the bombings at Zion Church and their families. Many, many thanks to everyone who contributed to this effort!

As you know, Bill Davnie has now returned to the USA to be with his family. As I write this letter, in early July, you have with you for some weeks, as Locum Minister, Rev. Eric Foggitt and his wife Tineke. I hope and pray they too will bring their special gifts to St Andrew's Scots Kirk during their time with you.

And then you will have with you, as Locum Minister and for an extended period of time - up until Easter 2020 - Revd Ian Gilmour and his wife Donna. I trust their stay with you will be both enjoyable and fruitful - for them and for you!

In closing, my thoughts and prayers are with all of you, the congregation of St Andrew's Scots Kirk in Colombo and the whole population of Sri Lanka - of whatever faith or denomination - as you live out these post-Easter days. May God bless you all richly.



**(Revd) Jim Sharp**

Your Interim Moderator

# Report from the Session Clerk The General Assembly (GA) 18th to 24th May 2019

## Introduction

The General Assembly which meets in May each year is the highest court of the Church of Scotland (CoS). It meets at the Assembly Hall which is located in the New College of the University of Edinburgh, between Lawnmarket and the Mound in the historic capital of Scotland.

Following the disruption in the Church of Scotland in 1843, the emergent Free Church of Scotland urgently required a new theological college (New College) in Edinburgh, an Assembly Hall and a home for the Free High Church.

The United Presbyterian Church and a majority of the Free Church of Scotland united as the United Free Church of Scotland; the Assembly Hall was henceforth used by the newly united church.

In 1934, the Free High Church vacated its building, which was adapted to become the New College Library. The area overlooking the Moderator's chair, at the centre of the south gallery was adapted to become the "Throne Gallery" for the Lord High Commissioner.



Between 1999 and 2004, the Assembly Hall was the temporary debating chamber of the Scottish Parliament. The Scottish Parliament now meets at Holyrood Palace which was refurbished for this purpose.

The CoS has a flat governing structure, with three levels: Kirks, Presbyteries and the General Assembly. A Moderator is elected to the GA each year and this year it was the turn of Colin Sinclair.

## Opening Ceremony

The opening ceremony was held on the Saturday morning and upon entering the Hall, the commissioners were given a device to be used for voting on debatable issues.

There was much pomp and ceremony with the arrival of the Lord High Commissioner, who is the Queen's representative. The First lady of Scotland Nichola Sturgeon, was also present at the ceremonial opening of the GA.

Following the constitution of the assembly, service, consecration of the Moderator, reading of the Queen's message and the Lord High Commissioner's own message, the work of the GA began.

## The Discussions

There were four sessions a day with circulation breaks in-between. The Church of Scotland's central administration function comprises Councils, Commissions and Committees. Conveners of these bodies presented reports and sought the Assembly's approval for deliverances. A deliverance is usually a policy statement or an action.

Two major reports were presented: 1) Structural Reform and 2) The Radical Action Plan. These reports were triggered by the fact that the church as a whole, operates at a deficit each year. Numbers entering the ministry have declined to the point where there's a growing number of vacancies and the expectation that congregational giving will decline in the years to come. It is interesting to note that while numbers attending church have

## Report from the Session Clerk (cont...)



declined by two thirds since the 1950s, congregational giving has remained broadly the same or grown slightly. This is a reflection of the prosperity of the baby boomer generation. As that generation ages and declines in numbers, the church expects revenue to decline.

The reform envisaged a simplified administration structure with a consolidation of functions, a reduction in the number of presbyteries in Scotland and a drive to attract young people to church.

### **Ancillary matters**

It was good to meet one of Colombo's former

ministers: Roderick Campbell and his wife Sue. They are about to retire and were hoping to close on a house purchase in Argyll where they have been living for the past several years. They send their warm greetings to members of the Colombo congregation.

The next two locums due in Colombo: Eric Foggitt and Ian Gilmour were at the GA and it was a good opportunity to get to know them better. Also attending from the Colombo congregation was Buwanika Weerasinghe, who has shared her perspective in this newsletter.

- **Chandan de Silva**



# Report of the International Youth Presbytery



## What it means to be a Youth Representative from the International Presbytery

The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland (CoS) is held in Edinburgh each year. Over a 1000 people play different and varying roles throughout the week in order to make this very important event a success. More than 730 commissioners comprising elders, Kirk Session members and Pastors were present and 150 Ecumenical Relations Partners from all over the world too joined the event. In addition, there are at least another 150 individuals who ensure the general assembly proceeds smoothly. I was honoured to be selected as the International Presbytery Youth Representative for 2019 and the exposure and knowledge I received at this Assembly I will carry with me forever.



To be a Youth Representative means starting to prepare for the General Assembly even before you get to Edinburgh. Our youth leader Suzi emailed us a 540 page book of all the reports to be discussed and debated at the General Assembly and also a guide of how to go through the reports and understand the context. I started reading up two weeks ahead of my departure date and realised that the Church of Scotland is a large organisation. I could not finish my reading material and I continued my prep work on the 11 hour plane ride to London and 6 hour train ride to Edinburgh. If anyone is interested on reading any of the reports, these can be found on the Church of Scotland website. Download "**Blue Book**".

To be a Youth Rep also means very little sleep. As soon as we got to the hotel and introductions made, we were taught how the CoS operates. This was very helpful to me as this was my first time at the Assembly as it gave me an understanding of the foundation and hierarchy. We were all handed a time table starting from breakfast at 7.30 am till our last prep session every night at 10.30 pm. I am proud to say that the Youth Reps worked very hard and were present at every General assembly session. We would all prepare and discuss the topics that were interesting to us and the pinpoint the topics we wanted to make "a change" or debate about.



## Report of the International Youth Presbytery (cont ...)

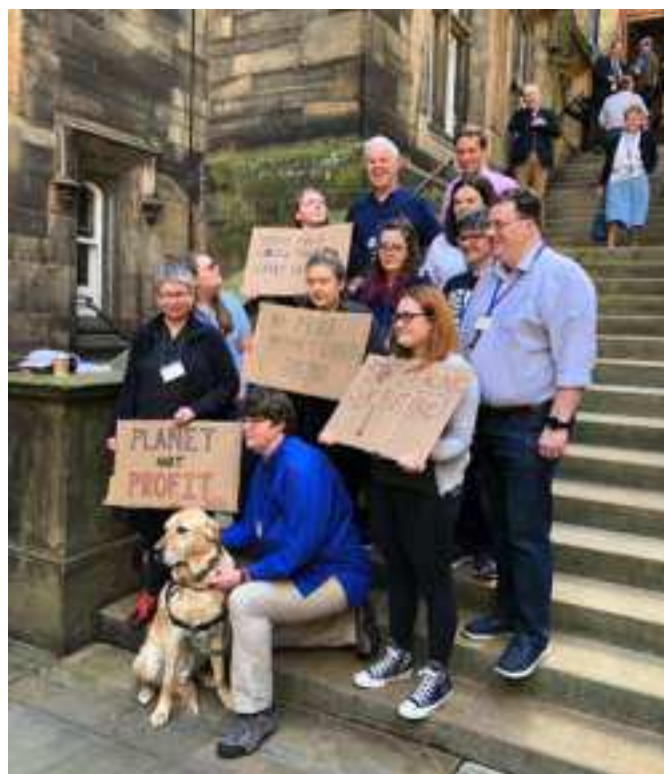


What was exciting about being a Youth Rep was that we also get through a lot of candy. Throughout the day, there is a continuous supply of sweets or "jelly babies" as the Scots like to call it, to keep the energy levels up and everyone is in a good mood. Even the head table comprising the Session Clerk and Moderator had bowls of sweets. So we were all simply following the light hearted protocol.

I was amazed by the passion of the youth representatives and enjoyed very much being a part of the group whose ages ranged from 20 to 35. Some were students of divinity or theology, others students of environmental conservation, some working for the various departments in the CoS, a few were social workers and some were doing regular jobs like me but all were passionate about the church.

### **There are two strong memories I cherish the most from my experience in Edinburgh:**

1. I was given the opportunity to be part of serving Communion. This was no easy or simple task. We were to serve 1000 people bread and wine. In order



to make sure it all happened smoothly, we had a rehearsal and even a map to navigate the various levels and decks of the General Assembly hall. I was in charge of a cup of wine and I felt very blessed on Sunday 19th May when we completed our service as a team. It was a unique experience.

2. The other was the debate on fossil fuel investments by the CoS. The youth were very passionate about this matter and urged the Council to invest in renewable energy sources rather than oil. The importance of conserving our planet and the frightening reality that our actions are going to be irreversible in ten years and permanent damage is just looming around the corner were highlighted. This debate was one of the highlights that went into an electronic vote and yet sadly, we lost with the decision to continue the investment. The youth reps were saddened by this outcome and engaged in a silent protest outside the church steps during circulation breaks. I am hopeful that at the next General assembly that a better outcome will follow and that we take on the urgent responsibility to preserve and protect this beautiful world God so lovingly created for us.



## Report of the International Youth Presbytery (cont...)



I met many people who were very concerned and offered prayers of support for the sad events that took place on Easter Sunday in Sri Lanka. On the 21st of May as a mark of respect for all Christians persecuted in the world, a moment of silence was observed. I felt touched to know that even though

we are so far away from Scotland, our CoS family cares and prays for us all.

This unforgettable journey has changed me and taught me so much. I am so proud to be part of the Church of Scotland family, a family full of love, prayer and caring.

- **Buwanika Weerasinha**







## God's World is a Small World



**“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for,  
the conviction of things not seen.”**

Hebrews Chapter 11

I have on my desk a copy of St Andrew's Scots Kirk magazine from seventy years ago - October 1949. It tells me the minister is the Revd A. Taylor MacKenzie. He is actually the father of a friend of mine in Edinburgh – Alistair MacKenzie. Alistair travelled with his parents to Ceylon in 1948 and only has fond memories of the congregation and country. Alistair and I served until recently as Trustees of Edinburgh City Centre Churches Together. Isn't it a small world in God's family? Alistair was able to tell me about Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip visiting during his father's tenure. He also said his father had thoroughly enjoyed the ministry at St Andrew's and the family had appreciated both the kindly people and the attractive island. Alistair's mother gave a talk to a Woman's Guild group in Scotland on her return in the mid-1950s. She phrased it this way,

**“The island is breathtaking in its beauty; it is one of the loveliest places on earth, fabulously fertile; rice grows there, all the tropical fruits you can imagine...and of course there is tea.”**

Donna, my wife and I are looking forward to serving alongside the members of St Andrew's Scots Kirk. We look forward to learning about your history and culture as well as encountering the flora and fauna of Sri Lanka.

Nine months may seem a short span in your long history, however I believe it is more than long enough to build strong friendships. I have been asked by your Interim Moderator, the Revd Jim Sharp to work with you to create a parish profile. This can serve as the equivalent of a curriculum vitae for the congregation and help in your quest to recruit a full time minister.

I am sure your representatives at the General Assembly will have reported that this period is one of transition for the whole church. It is important that we all look ahead in thoughtful and positive ways due to the specific challenges of this era. It seems a good time to clarify the hopes of the congregation for the coming years.

My prayer is that our work together will be a time of blessing for all. I leave with you one of my favourite prayers in a time of transition, known as the Serenity Prayer

**God grant me the serenity  
To accept the things I cannot change;  
Courage to change the things I can;  
And wisdom to know the difference.**

Jesus' words encourage me in all circumstances, “I am with you always”  
Every blessing,

**Revd. Ian Y Gilmour**

# Revd. Ian Gilmour

## - Short Takes!



I was born in Glasgow. I have two brothers, Jim and Stewart. I am married to Donna and we have two daughters Jennifer and Gillian, and three grandchildren Caitlin, Matthew and Alasdair, who all speak Gaelic. They will all visit St Andrew's Scots Kirk during our time with you.

I schooled in Lanarkshire and went to the University of Glasgow. I have Business Studies and Accounting Certificates, a Degree in Theology ( B.D.) and a post graduate qualification in Ecumenical Studies.

My career began at the Royal Bank of Scotland. From there it was on to the Finance Department at Strathclyde Regional Council followed by a small Chartered Accountants office in Glasgow, where I was a trainee auditor.

I served at Drylaw Parish Church for ten years, South Leith Parish Church for 16 Years and St Andrew's and St George's West for seven years. These churches were all located within Edinburgh Presbytery.

I enjoy reading, jazz, walking and sports (including cricket) and my biggest indulgence is an occasional glass of fine wine. I am more of a lark, than an owl, so mornings are best for me.

We are a close family with both grandmothers having stayed with us at one time or another and we enjoy having many friends.

I can't do without the outdoors. I like to walk every day and observe the natural world and like to keep up with the world through the radio and newspapers.

My favourite relaxation is having a really good conversation with someone, especially if I learn something new.

My favourite holiday destination so far, is the Isle of Iona in Scotland which has wonderful light and a fascinating Christian history. I do like islands.

My favourite foods are desserts. I have a sweet tooth but I am also looking forward to tasting the fruit in Sri Lanka.

Jazz is my favourite music but I have eclectic tastes and love to hear new things from any genre.

I list three major turning points in life. The first was a real challenge - the death of my father when I was a child, which was a major blow to me. The second, meeting and becoming engaged to Donna and the third, finding personal faith in Jesus, joining the church and growing in knowledge of God.

### - **Revd. Ian Gilmour**



## Reflecting on my time in Sri Lanka



**Bill with his granddaughters**

When I left Colombo in late June, one thing I was looking forward to in Minnesota was cooler temperatures. While we did become accustomed, gradually, to Sri Lanka's tropical warmth, we are Northern born and bred! Instead, I returned to the hottest summer in recent memory, with several days above 35C! Colombo would likely seem merely warm by comparison.

But I must have more substantial thoughts about my time at St. Andrew's Scots Kirk than just about the weather. I ponder many things, but a few stand out.

First, this is a faithful congregation. While modern travel schedules and teenagers'

activities do complicate life, I was and continue to be struck by the consistency of attendance, and the seriousness with which people take worship. Preaching is an ephemeral art form – words spoken once are likely never heard again, and can easily be missed in a moment's distraction. But it was clear that you listen thoughtfully to sermons and prayers, you respond to the selection of hymns, you remember ideas offered in previous weeks' worship. I wish I had been able to get a better sense of opportunities for creative worship, and to know more of what you want your minister to address from the pulpit. I hope the upcoming, longer locumsy of Rev. Gilmour will offer time for more of that.

## Reflecting on my time in Sri Lanka (cont ...)

Second, St. Andrew's gathers a wide range of worshippers, mostly Sri Lankan but from varied communities and backgrounds, and the international contingent from Asia as well as Western Europe (and the occasional American!). The variety is enriching, but also challenges the ability to gather as a community. Finding more ways to get to know one another as individuals is a challenge for a scattered congregation in a large city, but would strengthen the congregation's ability to manage difficult times and topics.

Third, SASK has a rich history of mission involvement – you know the four main projects, and the additional efforts such as support for the Scouts, making our building available for AA, and more. But much of the work is done by a small number of people. Broadening out participation and introducing newer members to these projects will be important for sustaining these efforts in years



**Bill in full Scottish regalia, escorting his daughter Liz to the Marine Ball**



**Bill and Charlotte**

to come. The projects need to be shared efforts of St. Andrew's, not separate projects of a few. And then, while it was not the dominant part of my work, my time was certainly affected by the tragic events of Easter Sunday. I must say how proud I was and am of the way this congregation responded that day and afterwards. We never closed our church, we welcomed Muslims the following Sunday after visiting them that first Friday to show support for peaceful Muslims, we continued all our mission projects, and then raised substantial funds to aid victims in Batticoloa. While many prayers were offered and concerns expressed in every church, I don't think any congregation in Sri Lanka responded in as many ways and as



## Reflecting on my time in Sri Lanka (cont ...)



constructively. You honored our Presbyterian heritage of constructive civil involvement and showed your faithful witness in helping the hurt and harmed.

There could be much more to say about how much Charlotte and I enjoyed our time with you, our involvement in the many projects and mission efforts, and how much we learned about the challenges of being a small minority religious community, something we American Christians don't know or grasp very well. But we want to encourage you to look not back but forward, to the opportunities this coming program year will bring and the search for a permanent minister.

You have much now, but I can see how much more you will be with longer term leadership, and pray that that leader will be found in the coming months.  
Grace and peace,



Getting up close and personal with the children at Sunday service



An active member of the Church choir



Bill (partly hidden) stands just behind the Bishop of Colombo and President of the Methodist Church at a silent protest highlighting police inaction after a Palm Sunday attack on the Methodist Worship Center in Anuradhapura. The protest brought together communities of multiple faiths

## In Solidarity with Sri Lanka

While the country reeled in shock after the Easter bombings and the extent of the catastrophe continued to mount, it was indeed heart warming that friends the world over sent in their messages of condolences. They stood by in solidarity with this little island nation that had never seen anything of this magnitude before, watching helplessly and in utter disbelief as human beings took the fate of the lives of others into their hands and instigated absolute carnage on innocent lives.

The Longniddry Parish Church and the Gladsmuir Parish Church in Scotland remembered Sri Lanka in their own special way as is depicted in these photographs. We are extremely touched by the wonderful gestures and realise that friendship even across the miles, remains tangible and very much a part of our lives.



**In Solidarity  
with Sri Lanka (cont ...)**



# Through the Lens

21/4 -  
When it all turned dark!



I was on duty on April 21st at Scots Kirk, Colombo and was busy organising the microphones and the order of service at 9 am ready to start the Easter Sunday service at 9.30 am. The Ladies from Netherlee Cottage had just arrived and there were about a dozen people near the Church door welcoming the early birds, when we heard what sounded like thunder. We all looked upwards to see a clear sky and at the same moment heard police sirens and thought, "That definitely wasn't thunder!" As more people began arriving and phones began buzzing, more clarity emerged about what was going on. A terrible tragedy had just happened.

Service began as usual but the congregation was restless as more news began pouring in. Some left

the service although most remained. Security was increased around the church perimeter and Rev. Bill Davnie continued with his Easter message, albeit fully cognisant of events unfolding around us.

We always plan a brunch in the Church Hall on Easter Sunday. Members of the congregation bring a dish to share and there is always enough to go around. We missed one particular family who had promised to bring "something special" for the brunch. That morning they were at one of the hotels which had suffered great tragedy and stayed back to help the victims. We learned subsequently from this family that 'something special' was to have been hot cross buns and Easter eggs.

Our Minister Rev Bill Davnie shared with the



# Through the Lens - Mission and events at St. Andrew's

21/4 -  
When it all turned dark!(cont ...)

congregation what we knew about the tragedy and said that we understood if members wanted to get home but also this may be a time when it helps to talk to someone. St Andrew's is next door to the Cinnamon Grand and a bomb had been detonated in their breakfast room, which was the explosion we heard and felt at St Andrew's. Security was so tight around the Church that even taxis were not allowed to come into the vicinity to collect members of the congregation. Our members pooled their resources and everyone got back to their homes, including the Netherlee ladies, safely.

It was only when we got to our homes that we realised the magnitude of the Easter bombings in Sri Lanka. The locations of the six coordinated attacks included three churches conducting Easter Sunday service and the main breakfast restaurants in three large hotels.

Our first task was to see how we could help and where that help was most needed. We concluded that the Zion Evangelical church in Batticaloa was in greatest need as they were not part of a major diocese that could give them support. A total of 28

people had died at this Church including 13 children, the youngest being just 18 months old. 58 people were injured. The bomb had exploded just outside the Church as the children were leaving Sunday School class. Apparently, the greatest need to help themselves in this very rural community was to replace their transport that had been damaged so they could return to work, to school, collect provisions and attend to relatives still in the hospital.

St Andrew's Scots Kirk would like to sincerely thank all those who contributed to the fund raising for this church. Donations were collected by Rev Liam Fraser through "Justgiving", Netherlee Parish Church in Glasgow, Fenwick Church in Scotland, numerous anonymous donations from friends of SASK, from Mission Projects of SASK and from our congregation.

SASK donated nine motorbikes to the people at the Zion Church to a value of LKR 2,138,570 and the balance is going towards a new van for the Zion Church.

- **Gillian Mailer**



# Through the Lens

## Remembrance – Concert by the Colombo Philharmonic Choir

### A Service of Choral Music and Readings commemorating the Easter Tragedy in Sri Lanka



The choir entered in silence and took their seats in the choir stalls. With Harin Amirthanathan conducting and Johann Peiris playing the organ, their voices raised with an Inriot, Holy is the True Light taken from the Salisbury Diurnal by G.H. Palmer.

Rev. Eric Foggitt welcomed over 100 attendees to the service. The congregation participated in such hymns as O God our help in ages past and I vow to thee, my country. Michelle, the wife of Pastor Roshan of the Zion Church joined the people of Scots Kirk for the service.

Readings, taken from Isaiah 53 and Romans 8 were read by members of the congregation. The choir

sang Anthems to the music of Sir Edward Elgar and John Rutter.

Prayers and a two minute silence for the victims of the tragedy were led by Rev. Eric Foggitt and the retiring offering was taken in aid of the people of the Zion Church in Batticaloa. This was an occasion when we all became “One” in our Remembrance.

Scots Kirk is the home of The Colombo Philharmonic Choir and we are very grateful for their very thoughtful contribution to the life of our Church.

Many members of the congregation enjoyed refreshments and fellowship in the Church Hall after the service.



# Through the Lens

Rev. Bill Davnie's farewell





# Through the Lens

## Revd. Bill Davnie's farewell (cont ...)



Besides being brilliantly articulate, Bill Davnie has the gift of magnetically drawing people together – with a simple smile, a kind word, a pat on the back or just by simply helping out. We at St Andrew's were truly fortunate to spend time with him, not just on Sundays. Charlotte and he made sure they were very much a part of everything the church did – whether it was mission work, the concerts held in the church for a good cause, adding some nuances to the choir and even gathering the children together for a five minute talk on whatever would be interesting to them. It was indeed with a heavy heart that we bade farewell to them both, Charlotte a tad earlier as she had to leave to the USA to be with her adorable granddaughters post the Easter bombs, and Bill some weeks later. SASK gathered its troupes for a church service and a brunch in the church hall thereafter, for some fellowship and fond words of farewell to this man who has was truly an integral part of SASK and will always be remembered as a true friend of St. Andrew's.



Photos by Graham De Kretser and Dushy Parakrama



# Through the Lens

Revd. Bill Davnie's farewell (cont ...)



# Through the Lens

## Netherlee Cottage News

The Netherlee Residents House Mothers and some of the management team have been learning sign language recently to help communicate and understand our residents who have difficulty hearing and speaking.

We have also renewed the connection with the Deaf & Blind School in Colombo and hope to enrol our past pupils in their association. This will help them to appreciate how their friends with similar impairments have learnt to cope with everyday living.

This work is to improve communication between the residents and staff, to help the residents express themselves and so alleviate their stress and maintain a calm demeanour in life.

The Netherlee Cottage residents enjoyed a visit to Waters Edge (Diyatha Park). They purchased plants for the Cottage and snacks with their pocket money.



# Through the Lens

## The Lunch Project

Every Thursday from 12.15 pm to 1 pm at the Church Hall



A project which commenced in October 2018 serving a wholesome meal to over 100 who engage primarily in casual labour including janitorial workers in the vicinity of SASK, since inception our meal suppliers have been Shabbir Taherally and Khuzaima Mansoor. The lunch provided has not only been cost effective but also been of exceptional quality and standard. The feedback received from those who participate in lunch every Thursday has always been positive and those coming through for second helpings prove that the flavor is never compromised.

The Easter blast as we are well aware, left community relations strained with suspicions abounding. Security was tightened and personnel were stationed outside churches across the city as well as mosques, the latter for different reasons. Rev. Bill Davnie felt it important that we engage

with our local Muslim community and some members of our church joined Rev. Davnie to attend Friday Jumma prayers at the Colpetty mosque, shortly after the tragedy. The gesture of solidarity was well received, and some members of the Muslim community also participated in a Sunday service at SASK.

It wasn't long after that Shabbir and Khuzaima asked SASK if they could be more proactive of a Thursday during lunch. As a gesture of goodwill, they provided an Eid lunch, while also serving and chatting with those who came that day.

Since then, we have been to their mosque and been hosted to a wonderful experience of bonhomie and fellowship.

- **Shalini Wickramasuriya**



# Through the Lens

## The Lunch Project (cont ...)







## The Story Behind the Hymn – It is well with my soul

A successful lawyer and businessman Horatio G. Spafford lived in Chicago with his wife Anna and five children. Unfortunately, his son died of pneumonia in 1871 and in the same year, much of his business succumbed to the great Chicago fire. The business however did rise from the ashes.

Two years later Anna and her four daughters were on board the French ocean liner Ville du Havre on their way to Europe. Horatio was joining them later. The ocean liner collided with the powerful iron-hulled Loch Earn and was in danger of sinking. In just 12 minutes, the Ville du Havre sank into the waters of the Atlantic taking with her 226 passengers including the Spafford family.




However all was not lost. A sailor in a small rowing boat spotted a woman floating on a piece of wreckage and pulled her into the boat. After she was safe on a larger vessel and landed in Cardiff, she wired her husband stating, "Saved alone. What shall I do?" Horatio is thought to have framed that telegram and kept it in his office.

Horatio booked his passage on the next available ship. Four days into his voyage, the captain told him they were sailing over the place where his children went down. Bertha, a daughter born after the tragedy says this was the time Horatio wrote, "It is well with my soul".

Three children were added to the Spafford family later, but one died to the dreaded pneumonia at the age of 4. In 1881, the family moved to Jerusalem and Horatio, when he died was buried in the Holy City.

The hymn is sung to the music composed by Philip Bliss who called the tune Ville du Havre, in remembrance of the ship that sank.



**Horatio  
Spafford**

### **It is well with my soul**

When peace like a river, attendeth my way,  
When sorrows like sea billows roll;  
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to know  
It is well, it is well, with my soul.

#### Refrain

It is well, (it is well),  
With my soul, (with my soul)  
It is well, it is well, with my soul.

Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,  
Let this blest assurance control,  
That Christ has regarded my helpless estate,  
And hath shed His own blood for my soul.

My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!  
My sin, not in part but the whole,  
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,  
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

For me, be it Christ, be it Christ hence to live:  
If Jordan above me shall roll,  
No pang shall be mine, for in death as in life,  
Thou wilt whisper Thy peace to my soul.

But Lord, 'tis for Thee, for Thy coming we wait,  
The sky, not the grave, is our goal;  
Oh, trump of the angel! Oh, voice of the Lord!  
Blessed hope, blessed rest of my soul.

And Lord, haste the day when the faith shall be sight,  
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll;  
The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend,  
A song in the night, oh my soul!

## Meet our congregation – Ten Qs for Shanthini and Deepal Ahangama



They are a couple who are zesty, vibrant and full of life. Their enthusiasm is infectious and their joy easily spread around.

Shanthini is the eldest of three girls and a boy, growing up in Mount Lavinia in a closely knit family. She attended Bishop's College and immediately after her schooling, pursued courses in Chartered Secretaries and Pitman's Diploma before joining the Air Lanka cabin crew, where she happily traversed the skies for nine years. Once firmly back on terra firma, there were spells at Hilton Colombo, Multiform Interlining, Huejay Interanional and British Airways, where she also completed her Post graduate Diploma in Marketing with CIM. She married the man of her dreams at St Andrew's and migrated to the UK, taking a leap of faith from the travel sector into finance, joining GE Business Finance and a few months at Bank of Australia as well.

Having completed a Masters in the UK, she also qualified as an NLP Practitioner and put all this into good use, when she launched Coconut Miracle Organics in the UK in 2010. A full time passion, the products went international to New Zealand, Hong Kong, USA and Sri Lanka. Shanthini spends as much time as she can in Hong Kong with her brother's triplets, a nephew and two nieces.


Deepal comes from a slightly larger family of five boys and a girl and an extended family living in close proximity adding much fun to his growing up years, where Scrabble, Bridge, 304 and chess plus two musical groups were always part of the household's itinerary. An alumni of S. Thomas' College Mount Lavinia, Deepal played every sport possible, gaining his School Colours for Athletics at 17. Venturing to the UK to study at eighteen, academics was placed on the backburner as cricket, rugby, table tennis, badminton and squash took over. He has played 12 years of Premier Cricket and 18 years of Championship Cricket and is an NCA and ECB qualified coach, having also served on the Sri Lanka Cricket Committee UK for two spells. His biggest laurel is getting one thousand wickets in club cricket in the UK – possibly the only Sri Lankan to achieve this. He is also a qualified Life Coach.

A qualified Independent Financial Consultant, he worked in the corporate rat race for awhile before setting up his own company in 1990. Seven years later, he established an independent mortgage and investment company. He calls marrying Shanthini in 2001 as being the smartest thing he ever did and is now semi-retired. He has one daughter Carlene, who lives in the UK.





# Meet our congregation – Ten Qs for Shanthini and Deepal Ahangama (cont ...)



## 1. What do you do for fun ?

**S:** Playing with my doggies Storm and Tank, meeting friends and fueling my love for the arts and theatre

**D:** Playing cricket for the Colombo Masters, watching cricket and rugby, writing on cricket and occasionally chilling with friends and our doggies

## 2. What's a typical day like for you?

**S:** Fun times with the Boyz (Deepal, Storm and Tank) while sipping my morning cuppa and then getting down to business. Gym is thrown in between. Lunch is a delicious homecooked meal at home, back to work, a tete a tete with Deepal if there's no sports on the television, quality time with the Boyz once more in the evening and socializing if and when able

**D:** Stretching and Qi Gong, strategizing on how to bring in investments into Sri Lanka, indulging in a sporadic urge to walk around the village at midday, have a homecooked lunch, write, read and do lots of Sudoku and crosswords

## 3. What's keeping you busy these days?

**S:** Too much travel, (what with World Cup cricket) and a few breaks thrown in...

**D:** Never busy. I stay chilled and relaxed. Gave up busy when I retired from the UK.

## 4. What's your favourite food?

**S:** Anything savoury. I love sausages, meat balls and fresh fruit juice

**D:** Anything sweet! Well almost anything. I like Indian food too.

## 5. How are you most comfortable?

**S:** I'm comfortable in any environment or company but I love staying home and tending to my plants or talking to the Boyz

**D:** With family and close friends.

## 6. What's your quirkiest habit?

**S:** Laughing at my own creative jokes or seeing a quirky side even at a serious play!

**D:** Washing vegetables in alkaline water

## 7. What's your biggest indulgence and your biggest weakness?

**S:** Shoes and plants; paying attention to detail (sometime too much detail)!

**D:** Indulgence is travel, weakness is sweets

## 8. What causes move you?

**S:** Animals, the homeless and elderly folk

**D:** The hungry (humans and animals), the homeless and the destitute elderly

## 9. What's on your bucket list?

**S:** Attending an open air Andre Rieu concert, going on a yoga retreat, participating in a community building project and seeing Ed Sheeran Live

**D:** Seeing Andre Rieu in concert in Austria, watch every Cricket World Cup final, set up a foundation to help the needy and write a novel.

## 10. How long have you worshipped at St. Andrews and how do you like it?

**S:** Since our return to Sri Lanka in 2013, we worshipped at many churches but we love everything about St. Andrew's – the church, the people, the service, the activities and the objectives. The sermons are specific, focused, contextualized, interesting and most importantly thought provoking. Was pleasantly surprised that nearly 50% of the congregation is connected either through family, SriLankan Airlines, the UK or Bishop's College. We feel very much a part of the St. Andrew's family.

**D:** I like the simplicity of the services. I find the sermons relevant and well delivered. The atmosphere is very comfortable and it helps that we have many friends who attend St. Andrew's.



## Back home for a brief sojourn



It feels great to be back in the Colombo sunshine after completing my first year of medical school in Bristol. It was my first real experience being away from home and it's been a year of ups and downs with achievements, new adventures and mistakes to learn from. I arrived in Bristol with my spirits high, full of excitement to start this new journey. I was eager to be independent and do things on my own but I soon realized that it was not all rainbows and butterflies.

different Bristol was to Colombo, I eventually found that being in a different environment was a good change of pace and breath of fresh air and towards the end of the year, Bristol started to feel like a second home.

I still can't wrap my head around the fact that I have completed a year of medical school. Despite being extremely challenging and me feeling like my head is going to burst from all the information, I am really



I felt very lonely and homesick. Going from a tropical island to gloominess and rain depressed me. Some days I didn't want to get out of bed. I was so excited to leave for university that it honestly shocked me to realise how much I missed my home and everything in it. It was hard adjusting to my new surroundings. I also missed Sunday Service at St. Andrew's and the youth group which I have been a part of for so long. I told myself to just take it day by day and soon enough, things were starting to get better.

Despite the gray skies and rain, I truly learned to love Bristol. I enjoyed the vibe of the city and taking long walks in Clifton. I loved how friendly everyone was and the variety of amazing food. The city was not too big but not too small and was busy yet calm at the same time. I ended up attending the student mass at the University Chapel and met some great people there. Although I didn't appreciate how

enjoying the course. I chose Bristol because of how varied their curriculum is and because they teach you clinical skills and let you see patients from the very beginning. I've learned so much already and I can't imagine how much more I will learn in the next four years. I was afraid that the environment would be competitive and cut-throat, with everyone trying to take first place but I love how the faculty consistently attempts to foster a team spirit and encourages us to work together and help each other out. I've met some amazing people and I feel that some of them will become my closest friends over the next few years.

I feel very blessed that I am on this journey and that I am able to study at a great university. I hope that I will make the most of this opportunity that God has given me and strive for success.

- **Sarah Arunakumar**

## Bidding adieu

They have both embellished our Sunday services abundantly with their beautiful music and we will surely miss them as they migrate to the UK. Sunday 4th August marked the last Sunday that Neluka and Ayush Seneviratne joined the congregation at a service at St. Andrew's. Ayush's musical talents has given him a scholarship to Merchant Taylors School located in Northwood, which since 1561 has nurtured poets, actors, authors, naturalists, sportsmen, academics and even three winners of the Victoria Cross. Ayush will be a part of the 1,100 student body in this prestigious independent private day school.

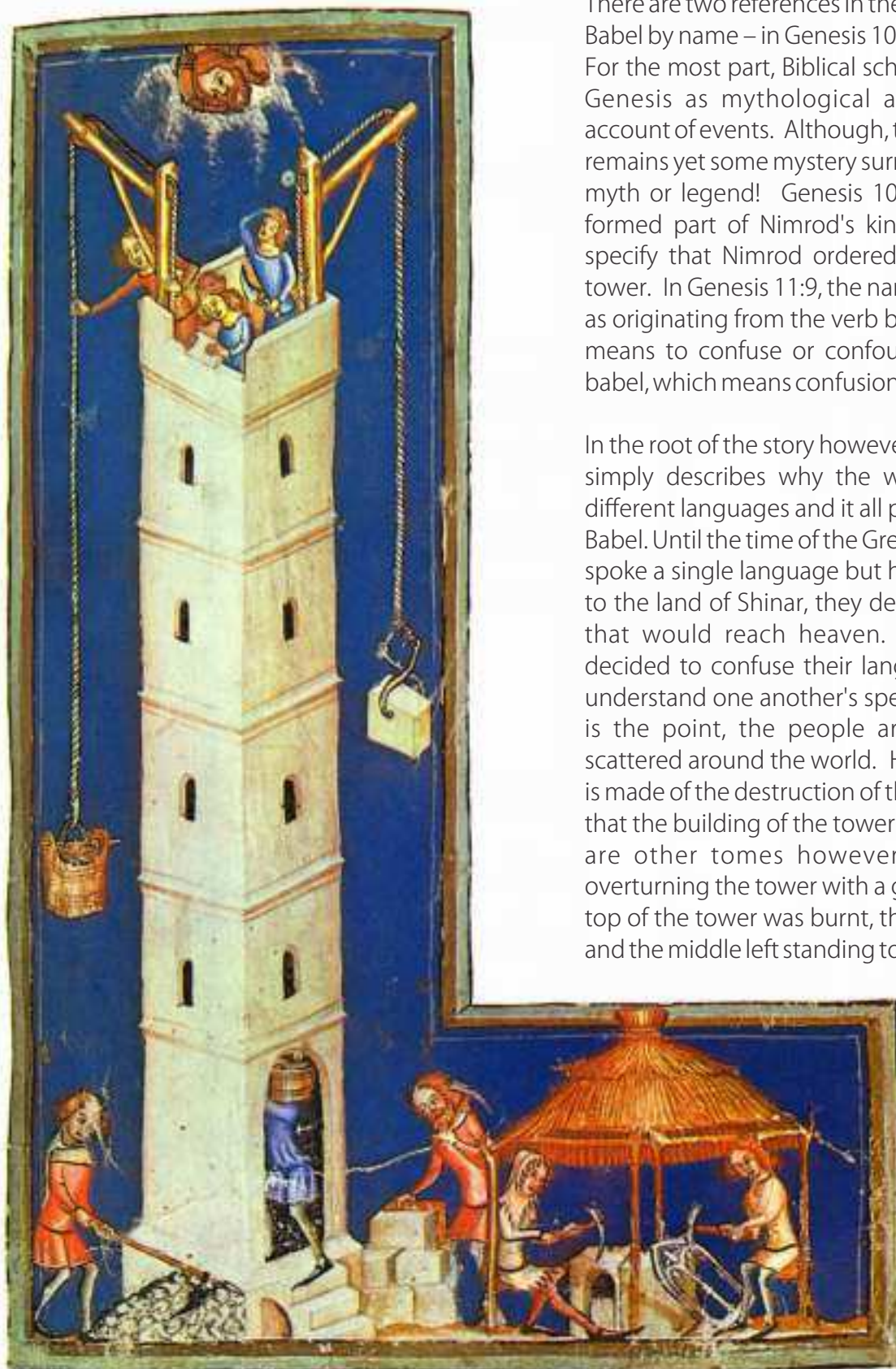
Ayush and Neluka have been contributing towards the St. Andrew's congregation not just through the music they share during service interludes, but also by being an integral part of congregational activities. Neluka, a music teacher, plays both the piano and the violin, while also being an active member of the choir. Ayush, following in his mother's footsteps also plays both instruments and sings. They have often played during Sunday service, adding much tuneful praise to the congregation's worship time.

Neluka and her husband Navin, an IT Engineer lived in the UK prior to Ayush being born and given that Navin works in the UK for most of the year, the country is not new or strange to them. However, as Neluka surmises, "This is not a holiday. This is a permanent move and it means packing up our house here which involves a lot of work. We're also sad to leave our dachshund Poppy, but she has found a good home with my mum." Ayush, who has been thus far studying at the British School in Colombo, sums up this new chapter opening in his life in one word: "Excited". And that it surely is.

We at St. Andrew's will surely miss them both. We wish them well and hope to see them back in Sri Lanka during holidays or whenever time permits, while also hoping to enjoy some of their infectious energy via their music, which they so selflessly spread around.



## What exactly is the Tower of Babel?



German Late Medieval (c. 1370s) depiction of the construction of the tower.

There are two references in the Bible to the Tower of Babel by name – in Genesis 10: 10 and Genesis 11: 9. For the most part, Biblical scholars see the Book of Genesis as mythological and not a historical account of events. Although, taken in context there remains yet some mystery surrounding the Tower – myth or legend! Genesis 10:10 states that Babel formed part of Nimrod's kingdom but does not specify that Nimrod ordered the building of the tower. In Genesis 11:9, the name Babel is explained as originating from the verb *balal* in Hebrew which means to confuse or confounded and the noun *babel*, which means confusion.

In the root of the story however, Genesis chapter 11 simply describes why the world's people speak different languages and it all points to the Tower of Babel. Until the time of the Great Flood, generations spoke a single language but having migrated west to the land of Shinar, they decide to build a tower that would reach heaven. God, not pleased, decided to confuse their language so they won't understand one another's speech (Gen. 11:7). This is the point, the people are believed to have scattered around the world. However, no mention is made of the destruction of the tower. It is posited that the building of the tower simply halted. There are other tomes however that narrate God overturning the tower with a great wind or that the top of the tower was burnt, the bottom swallowed and the middle left standing to erode.

## What exactly is the Tower of Babel? (cont ...)

However, there is no material proof that such a tower was ever built although modern scholars associate it with Etemenanki, a ziggurat built for god Marduk in Babylon. Then there is the tower Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta founded on a Sumerian myth where Enmerkar demanded precious metals from Aratta for its construction and there are connections to the Great Pyramid of Cholula in Mexico where giants in search of the sun constructed a tower to reach the sky but an angered Lord of the Heavens destroyed the tower and scattered its inhabitants. The historian Fernando de Alva Cortes Ixtlilxochiti states that following a great flood, men erected a tall zacuali (tower) to preserve themselves from a second onslaught. Once again, the subject of confounded languages dispersed them to all parts of the earth.

Variations similar to the Biblical narrative also exist in Islamic tradition, one of which is mentioned in the Quran. It's a story set in Egypt where the Pharaoh asks Haman to build him a stone tower which he could ascent to heaven and confront the God of Moses. An interesting footnote is brought in by 13th century Muslim historian Abu al-Fida who states that an ancestor of Abraham Eber, the patriarch of the clan was allowed to keep the original tongue, in this case Hebrew, because he did not partake in the building of the tower.

In Arizona, the Tohono O'odham people retell a tale of a great flood. The people became wicked and attempted to build a house that reach the heavens but the Great Spirit destroyed it with thunderbolts. India, Nepal and Africa (the latter as told by David



This 19th century illustration of the Hanging Gardens of Babylon depicts the Tower of Babel in the background

## What exactly is the Tower of Babel? (cont ...)

Livingstone), both detail similar stories of towers constructed after a flood in attempts to reach the sky and thereafter, the Gods destroying the tower.

David Livingstone's account of the tower is documented by Scottish anthropologist Sir James George Frazer in his book *Folklore in the Old Testament* where he compares Old Testament stories with those of indigenous legends. Similar tales to Livingstone's account are found in Lozi mythology where god Nyambe was pursued by wicked men building a tower of masts. The Kongo people stacked poles or trees in a failed attempt to reach the moon. In Assam, a similar tale exists of the Karbi and Kuku people. Showing clear Abrahamic influence, the Karen people of Myanmar relate a story where their ancestors migrated having abandoned a great pagoda in the land of Karenni, thirty generations from Adam. Languages were confused and the Karen separated from the Karenni. In the Admiralty islands, languages spoken by the people were confused following an attempt to build houses that reached heaven, failed.

To put the Tower in perspective, the Book of Genesis does not mention how tall the Tower was except to describe the tower as having its top in the sky. However, the Book of Jubilees measured its

height as being about 8,150 feet, roughly 1.6 miles high; about three times the height of the Burj Khalifa. But other documents have varying heights including the Third Apocalypse of Baruch mentioning that it reached about 695 ft, taller than any structure constructed until the Eiffel Tower was built. Historian Verstegan believed the tower as 4.7 miles high, but was wider than it was high and contained lodgings for workers and animals including fields for growing grain for the animals involved in the construction.

And the Tower has continued to have its day in the spotlight too. Anton Rubinstein wrote *Der Thurm zu Babel*, an opera based on the story. American choreographer Adam Darius' multilingual theatrical interpretation gained wide acclaim when staged at the ICA in London. The 1927 film, *Metropolis* used the Tower's story in a flashback, modeled after Pieter Brueghel's 1563 painting. In fact, Japanese television anime *Nadia: The Secret of Blue Water* has a resemblance to Brueghel's depiction as well. Authors Michael Oakeshott and A S Byatt told their tales about Babel, while sci-fi writer Ted Chiang also followed suit. Fantasy novelist Josiah Bancroft has a series titled *The Books of Babel* due to conclude with Book IV in 2020. The progressive band Soul Secret wrote a concept album called *BABEL*.



Pieter Brueghel's 1563 painting which was the inspiration for many a film



The painting by Lucas van Valckenborch, 1594 found in The Louvre





## A Church on our travels – St Nicholas Church, Poling West Sussex



This Church, which is within the Diocese of Chichester, is set on a site of an English tidal ford on an old Roman road within the village of Poling which comprises about 60 houses and 120 residents. 20% of them attend the Church of England services on a Sunday morning. The village which is close to the south coast of England remains nearly untouched by the 21st Century and comprises houses of local working and retired people. There are no shops and hence the Church becomes the focus of most activity within the village, being the location for village meetings and social functions.



The stone-built church has a Saxon Nave dating from about 800 A.D. It has some 12th and 14th century additions and a Victorian renovation. The Church uses an interesting mix of building materials: hard white chalk, Caen stone from France, Quarr stone for the Isle of Wight, honey coloured stone from Pulborough and bluish Sussex and Purbeck marbles used as floor slabs. The Nave seats about 40 people but 100 have crammed in for special services.



A listed pipe organ made locally in Arundel was gifted to the Church in 1843 and the Church bells date from 1617.

The Church has a part-time priest who lives in the next parish and much of the organisation of the Church is managed by two Church wardens. Unfortunately, the Church is not left open for visitors because some were found to be sleeping in the Church. But any of the villagers would locate a key for you to take a look when travelling in these parts.

We have visited this Church many times and I have even read the lesson and rung the bells for my niece's wedding. Several of my family from this village have joined us for services at St Andrew's Scots Kirk as well.



- **Gillian Mailer**



# What they say about The St Andrew

## @ What they say about The St Andrew

Many thanks for the newsletter. It is very interesting - all good news!!

When I was reading it, I saw my picture with visitors to the church. I was so happy with these kind words from them. Again many thanks for featuring me in the newsletter.

**Many blessings, Kumar.**

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@ Thank you Newsletter team for your time and dedication in providing such a beautiful issue.

**Anna**

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@ **Love it Gill,**

It is so nice reading about a church where we have attended a couple of services. I even recognise some of the people!!

It strikes me how international the church is - fantastic.

**Helen**

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@ I read the whole Newsletter. I think it is really super. From beginning to end, I was totally engrossed. Congratulations - it is a masterpiece!

I felt a bit bad reading it since all the articles were pretty serious, and just the article about me looked rather frivolous - which is entirely my doing! In fact Savithri ticked me off on receiving my responses to her questions and said "...do you realise that nothing you have said is printable...!". However, the final text has brilliantly tided over the extreme frivolity and brought in a semblance of respectability into it!!!!

Congratulations once again, and thank you for sharing it with me.

**Neranja De Silva**

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@ Very, very well done issue! Thank you very much. Peace,

**Bill**

@ **Dear Gillian** - wonderful to receive The St Andrew as it is a great read and keeps me personally in touch with what the Church is doing in Colombo.

**Alistair**

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@ **Dear Gillian,**

Great Newsletter, what a star, congratulations.

One point. I have attended many Easters round the world. However, arguably, the most beautiful Easter anywhere takes place in ancient Antigua, the sometime capital of Guatemala, where the routes/roads of the processions starting from several churches are most beautifully decorated with super floral arrangements.

By comparison, Salvador is very much second best!  
Warmly,

**Robin**

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@ **Dear Gillian and Savi**

I found the Easter edition of the St. Andrew's newsletter a joy to read and it gave me great pride to see all the good work going on at the church.

And to commend your editing skills, I have to say in complete honesty that I found the edited version of my article a better read than the original.

Thanks for the great work the two of you are doing on this front!

Cheers

**Chandan**

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@ **Another triumph, Gillian.**

I especially enjoyed the article on 'Crown Him with Many Crowns'.

The information on the deaths of the Saints was fascinating.

All the best for the future.

**May**

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@ Excellent newsletter

**Pelham Juriansz**

## Dates for your diary



Services at St Andrew's Scots Kirk are held every Sunday at 9.30 am. Communion services are held every first Sunday

### **Mission work**

The Thrift shop is open every Tuesday between 11 am and 1 pm.

Lunch is served for the needy in our neighbourhood in the Church Hall between 12.15 pm and 1.00 pm.

### **Volunteer servers are urgently needed each week.**

The monthly visit to Ward 8 at Mulleriyawa Hospital is on the third Wednesday of each month, leaving the Church at 9.30 am.

### **Events**

Saturday November 23rd The Annual Church Bazaar



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