Versicle

an e-letter from the Church Service Society

Active in the renewal of worship since 1865

August 22 2026 Feast of St Maelrhuba, No.28

The Church Service Society was founded in 1865 for the study of liturgy and to work for the reform and renewal of the worship of the Church of Scotland. Now ecumenical, it includes ministers, elders, organists, church members – in Scotland and beyond – who are all convinced that worship is the Church's fundamental task and privilege and wish more fully to explore its possibilities.

ANNUAL STUDY DAY 2026

A day about leading worship

In recent years in the Church of Scotland a new 'office' has been added to those of Minister, Deacon, and Reader, that of

Local Worship Leader

- elders and members who have recently had training, by presbyteries and universities, to conduct services when no other authorised person is available or who contribute and share in leadership. (Other denominations may have similar arrangements.) This day is especially for them …

but also it is for ministers and others who have experience to share, or questions to raise about the church's worship in these demanding times.

SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 26 – ST JOHN'S KIRK OF PERTH – 10.15am-4.00pm

The day is planned in conjunction with the Presbytery of Perth, but is open also to those in other presbyteries or dioceses. We ask:

Worship Today –

- what does the leader bring, what does the congregation offer, what is passed to us from our predecessors over the centuries, what does the Bible contribute?
- does worship need its own special language?
- are there limits to imagination and exploration?
- what can saints and seasonal festivals add?
- have hymn books had their day?
- what can art forms like poetry and drama add to acts of worship?

Morning symposium ***the shape, the history, the language of worship***
Principal Alison Jack, New College, University of Edinburgh
Professor Susan Hardman Moore, formerly New College
Rev Dr Liam Fraser, former Convener Theological Forum

A smorgasbord of afteroon workshops to choose from!

Enquiries / Register in advance with Douglas Galbraith: dgalbraith@churchofscotland.org.uk
or David Todd: davidwstodd1@gmail.com

Suggested contribution to defray costs £10 (pay on the day)

WHAT IS VERSICLE?

Versicle goes to members of the Church Service Society and also to many others known to be interested in, and creators of, worship and liturgy. Please tell us of others you think might be interested, including elders, vestries, lay leaders, and members of congregations. But do say if your inbox is already too full, and we will act accordingly. A brief 'no thanks' to the Compiler (see addresses at end of this letter) will be enough. (2/3 times p.a.)

WHO WAS MAELRUBHA?

This issue of Versicle is published on or around August 22 which is this west coast saint's alternative feast day. **Scott Brown** in *Saints of Scotland* (see item below) identifies him as an Irish monk from Bangor who was active in the latter part of the seventh century in Applecross where he founded a monastery, from which he established churches in Ross-shire and on the islands as far as Lewis. The footsteps of the saint are found in the name of Loch Maree and other landmarks. Like so many of his ilk, the saint made his mark by his 'long, persistent presence among the people'.

THE REVD CHARLES ROBERTSON MA LVO

The Canongate Kirk was full on Saturday July 25 to give thanks for the life of Charlie Robertson, past president of the Society. In his address, another former president, John Bell, documented the many spheres of social, cultural and religious life of the nation that he had inhabited: public bodies, charities, societies, committees, the military, liturgical gatherings, and national governance, book-ended by his congregations in Kiltearn and the Canongate. John remarked:

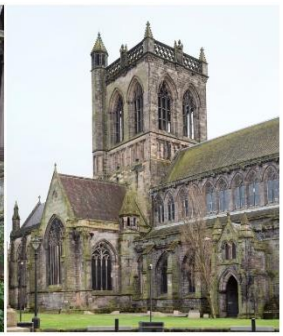
I cannot honestly think of anyone I have ever met who was so devoted to God and to his profession, yet was interested and knowledgeable in matters beyond the vocabularies of religion and theology, and so inclusive in the range of people whom he cared for, befriended and counselled.

Charlie (as he was always affectionately called by all and sundry), as well as President of the Society, had been both Secretary and Convener of the Panel on Worship of the General Assembly as well as chairing the Joint Liturgical Group of Great Britain. He will be remembered for many things: the striking refurbishment of the Canongate Kirk and the acquisition of one of the best organs of the city; the 1994 *Common Order* (which the recent General Assembly voted to leave untouched, albeit exploring other materials to use along with it); and the *Church Hymnary Fourth Edition* (of which he was Secretary) whose first item, his new metrical version of Psalm 1, was sung at his funeral service.

To have guided projects such as a mainstream Church's worship book as well as its current hymn book, which together define a Church's character and calling and guide its path in times to come, requires someone who has a large grasp of how things were, are, and shall be, here and hereafter, and Charlie was equal to this. John also acknowledged the direct contribution of Charlie's wife, Alison – also a member of the Society – in all of these projects and more: 'a great woman equal in intellect and complementary in skill … We owe inestimable gratitude to Alison who all their married life enabled Charlie to fulfill his potential, and whose care increased unfalteringly when he faced his last journey.

THE REVD ELSPETH MCKAY-SMITH LLB LLM PGCert BD

We were saddened to learn of the death, on July 25, of Elspeth McKay, valued member of Council and minister of Strathbogie Drumblade church in Huntly. Having been elected Secretary of the Church Service Society, she



had been unable to take this up fully due to the recurrence of previous illness. Elspeth served as minister first at Echt and Midmar in the north east, then at Cumbernauld Old followed by Paisley Abbey. Trained in law, she was appointed first Clerk of the new presbytery of the North East and Northern Isles and piloted its development before a call to Huntly. As well as being a lawyer, Elspeth was also a talented musician, in earlier years a member of Christ's College Chapel Choir in Cambridge and other ensembles. Her very high standards of quality and performance were a necessary reminder to the church that the weekly round of music-making always needed to be challenged by the continuous reach to find more searching sounds and sequences, penetrating even further into the vocabulary of this most expressive of media.

At the service of thanksgiving in her church, the current presbytery clerk, Stella Campbell, described Elspeth aptly as 'one of a kind – a wonderful combination of determination, intellect, creativity, humour, kindness and faithfulness'.

GET ME A MUSICIAN!
2 Kings 3:15

The additional and complex demands made on the churches' musicians in these times is well, if not alarmingly, captured in this advert from a London congregation:

We seek an exceptional and versatile organist and pianist open to all genres of music (classical, jazz, opera, musical theatre, pop) to work closely with the Director of Music, choral scholars and professional instrumentalists. Our liturgy is both traditional in structure, and creative and imaginative in the detail, and music plays an important role in this. The successful applicant will have musical flair and the ability to arrange music for orchestra and choir.

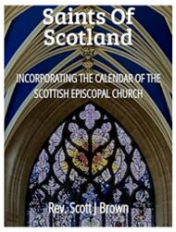
And while we are at it, here, from the Church of England, is a modern template for advertising virtually any position! –

Diocesan Programme Manager ... seeks a mission priest ... with a passion for change to establish, support and navigate the resource-intensive phase of strategic development.

Or alternatively, see Matthew 4:19?

SAINTS OF SCOTLAND

On the day following the Perth study day publicised in this issue of Versicle a member of the Church Service Society and currently a C of S minister, Scott J Brown CBE, is to be ordained priest– also in Perth! – in the Scottish Episcopal Church in St Ninian's Cathedral. Scott was Chaplain of the Fleet and an Honorary Chaplain to her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. Following retiral from the Royal Navy, Scott became minister at Buchlyvie with Gartmore.



A developing interest on his part has been the saints of the church, and this new volume, *Saints of Scotland*, gathers together those counted among the saints in the Scottish church, even where they have come from furth of Scotland. It also includes some 'should-be saints' such as George MacLeod and Lucy Menzies. Brown offers short descriptions of what is known of these saints' lives to serve as devotional aids for prayer as we travel through the Calendar of the church. Even though the material is tied most closely to the Scottish Episcopal Church Calendar, the compilation will be welcomed by any who follow the Revised Common Lectionary. Brown has helpfully added a collect for each entry. (Cost £9.99).

TOGETHER AGAIN

The Church Sevice Society (CSS) was founded in 1865. In 1892 a segment broke away to form the Scottish Church Society (SCS). The divorce was, as they say, amicable. The first edition of the book of worship *Euchologion* was 1867, with editions following every few years, culminating in 1905.

As time went on, differences grew more obvious, not so much with the liturgies themselves as the theological 'underlay'. Dogma, said some, was undesirable in the realm of devotion, that prayers of intercession should not be too 'church-centred' but be immediately accessible. Others disagreed, fearing that the church as a distinct society was being overlooked, the priestly office of Christ forgotten, the Lord's Supper no longer at the centre.

The annual conferences held by the new Scottish Society Society from 1893 on showed that the new (what we might call 'high church') group had a far wider interest than simply 'to defend and advance Catholic doctrine as set forth in the Ancient Creeds' (from their Constitution). These gatherings discussed church order and policy, the spiritual life, the study of social questions, the Christian Year, the training of clergy, weekday services, educating the young, work with emigrants / seamen / hospitals / paupers / prisoners, modern criticism of Scripture, church music and choirs, and church fabrics.

During 2025, the SCS, facing a downturn in membership, held a meeting in Canongate Kirk to review its future, with the CSS present (the latter previously having held a similar gathering). It was decided that the two Societies would pool their fortunes, more a 'linkage' than a 'union', each attending the other's events plus small groups, under the banner *Lex orandi lex credendi*, discussing aspects of liturgy and theology.

Note: the SCS hold their All Saints retreat in Paisley Abbey on Wednesday November 4; further information from Rev Gerald Jones, revwgj56@gmail.com.

LEX ORANDI LEX CREDENDI

What follows is quotation from one of the CSS journals, preserved on its website, and dating from 1973. It comes from an article entitled 'Prayer and the Study of Theology' written by the late Roland Walls, founder of the Community of Transfiguration at Roslin and lecturer at New College. He asks:

'How do we plot the relation of prayer to the study of theology? … Prayer is the place of void and emptiness where one can hear the Word that we study in theology. The relation between them is to be found directly in God's self in whom love and knowledge find their perfect relation. This makes it possible for our love to be a form of knowledge and our knowledge to be a form of love. *Liturgical Review* vol 3/1.

WORSHIP AND CONTEMPORARY VISUAL ARTS

Offered by the University of Glasgow in Trinity College, the course offers an exploration of the integration of contemporary visual arts in Christian liturgy and the worship environment. The course is open to learners of any background, with no prerequisite knowledge of art or liturgy, and is ideal for those who are seeking to develop the visual arts in their church or faith organisation. The course will engage theologically and artistically, and by the end of the course students will be equipped with practical and theoretical skills for developing creative visual arts practice in their own area.

Its tutor: **Dr Carol Marples** is the energy behind the long-established Scottish charity, the Soul Marks Trust. As well as this course, Soul Marks offers Art and Prayer workshops in a spread of locations – from a local church (St James SEC, Leith) to a Perthshire farm. Soul Marks also offers help to those who seek to develop their skills in drawing and painting.

For more information on the Glasgow course: https://www.trinitycollegeglasgow.co.uk/visual-art-and-worship?

Email trinitycollegeglasgow@gmail.com to register interest

For information about the autumn and winter courses offered by Soul Marks, ask Carol Marples to send you the current newsletter: carol@soulmarks.co.uk.

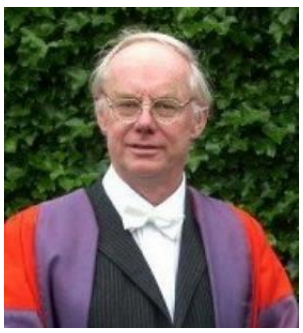
A PRAYER OF ST ANSELM

A current *Church Times* feature consists of a guest introducing a favourite prayer. Here is the former bishop of Worcester, Dr John Inge:

I sometimes felt I should just say this prayer … and then shut up, but didn't, because I would have offended those who feel that the more words are said the better the prayers will be. As T S Eliot reminds us, though, prayer 'is more than an order of words, the conscious occupation of the praying mind, or the sound of the voice praying.' For Inge, intercessory prayer pulls us into the tow of God's connectedness to everything. In it, we become part of the current that shows us that nothing is separated frrom anything else, nor from everyone else. We are in an ocean that flows under everything, and through everyone.

God of of love, whose compassion never fails,
we bring before you the trouble and perils
of people and nations:
the sighing of priosners and captives,
the sorrows of the bereaved,
the necessities of the stranger,
the helplessness of the weak,
the despondency of the weary,
the failing powers of the aged.
O Lord, draw near to each,
for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. (St Anslem)

SPRINGS, SPAS AND THE SPIRITUAL



The Society's most prolific writer is Ian Bradley, Emeritus Professor of Cultural and Spiritual History in the University of St Andrews. His authorial reach is wide, with themes directly to do with faith and spirit (such as Celtic Christianity, pilgrimage, and hymnology) but also widening to embrace 'secular' expressions of spirituality within human culture, from musicals to monarchy. In so doing, Bradley 'christens' the culture as a place where the Spirit and the spiritual play, awakening us to the work of the God who goes before the church.

In his new book, Ian sweeps across the many ways, throughout history, by which water is given meaning, the rituals attached, and the powers attributed to it for healing, new birth or, in modern time, well-being. *Water: a Spiritual History* (Bloomsbury 2026, 16.99).

FROM DOWN UNDER

Your Compiler was reminded of his years working in Brisbane, Australia half a century ago when he came across this item in the RC e-letter *Liturgy News (Brisbane)*. It makes for familiar reading.

It sometimes seems like a world away when we think that not 50 years ago, nearly every hill in Brisbane had a thriving Catholic parish church ministered to by often two or more priests. Now across Australia, Catholic parish communities are encountering a situation that has become increasingly familiar: Sundays when no priest is available to celebrate Mass.

In 1988, the Church explicitly provided for lay-led liturgical celebrations in the absence of a priest. These celebrations are not a second-best option, but an important expression of pastoral realism and ecclesial responsibility. … The Council also recovered a broader theology of Christ's presence: Christ is present in the proclaimed word and in the praying assembly.

Sometimes, a Liturgy of the Word may include communion from the tabernacle, but this does not make it equivalent to the sacrifice of the

Mass. … Lay leadership in Sunday prayer flows directly from this baptismal foundation, not just from a 'shortage mentality' or by clerical delegation alone.

In a Church shaped by vast distances, changing demographics and fewer ordained ministers, lay-led Sunday celebrations are not merely an emergency measure. They are a pastoral expression of communion, ensuring that the People of God continue to gather around the Word, to pray as the Church and to live Sunday as the heart of Christian life. We remain oriented toward the Eucharist, God's greatest gift to the Church.

A NEW PREACHING MANUAL

Those who have trained as Local Worship Leaders in the Church of Scotland and equivalents in other denominations may find help and assurance in Lucy Berry's new book on preaching. We all hope to be liked and believe it will help us 'get the message across'. Yet, preachers, she observes, 'more than anyone, live in the tightrope-tension of popularity versus challenge. It is their job to prompt people to wonder, regularly and deeply, about the Jesus story alongside their own lives, and to explore the duty of the church to its community. To manage this, one needs to be like-able enough that people listen, but challenging enough that they grow.'

On many of the theological and practical issues presented in the book this balancing act applies: of saying enough but not too much, of speaking for long enough but not too long, of digging deep enough but not so deep you lose the listeners.

It is helpful that the author has added questions to each section which open up further reflection. How apt that she ends each part with, 'What prayer are you prompted to pray about this?' The details are: Being a Preacher: Reflections and Practical Advice on Speaking to be Heard, Lucy Berry, DLT 12.99, 978 1 915492 34 8.

JOINING THE SOCIETY

The Society welcomes new members and the varied experience they bring. Contact the Secretary or Treasurer (details at the end of this letter).

A HIDDEN GEM

Angela Tilby's column in the *Church Times* is always worth attention. Recently, she shared part of a one of the proper prefaces in *Common Worship*, not very often used but which she hailed as one of the best pieces of liturgical writing in that volume.

A preface comes at the beginning of the eucharistic prayer, not because it 'comes before' but because it is a **proclamation** (Latin *praefatio*) of the mighty acts of God in creation and redemption.

From sunrise to sunset this day is holy,
for Christ has risen from the tomb
and scattered the darkness of death
with light that will not fade.
This day the risen Lord walks with your gathered people,
unfolds for us your word,
and makes himself known in the breaking of the bread.
And though the night will overtake this day
you summon us to live in endless light,
the never-ceasing sabbath of the Lord.

Common Worship p.294

CONTRIBUTIONS WELCOME

Please do share with us anything fresh that is happening in your own situation. It may not be anything radical, but something simple which has been effective.

The Church Service Society

President David Todd BEM
davidwstodd1@gmail.com

Secretary Rhona Dunphy
rdunphy@churchofscotland.org.uk

Compiler of Versicle
Douglas Galbraith 0778 810 3534
dgalbraith@churchofscotland.org.uk

Treasurer Iain May
jmay@churchofscotland.org.uk

Website address
www.churchservicesociety.org