



METHLICK PARISH CHURCH

(Methlick Parish Church of Scotland SC016542)

Minister: Rev. Dr. William Stalder

Letter to Methlick Parish Church

Announcement of Leaving

17 July 2022

“Green Pastures”

Those are the words that Rev. Dr. Paul McKeown used to describe Methlick to me as I applied and prayerfully considered being the minister of Methlick Parish Church.

“Green Pastures.”

Those words have proved true these last 8 and a half years.

I often commented to Courtney and others that we would never think about leaving Methlick unless we were called elsewhere.

Why leave “Green Pastures?”

For the last number of years, there has been a growing sense that God might be calling us elsewhere.

Like Peter who saw Jesus walking on water and asked, “Lord, if it is you, tell me to come to you across the water,” so I’ve asked the Lord countless times, is this you, Lord, are you calling us to leave green pastures to venture out into the unknown, the deep and uncertain?

It breaks our hearts to say that we believe God is calling us to leave Methlick. For this place, and you the people, have truly been “green pastures.”

As Paul says in Philippians 1:3-5, I will always say of Methlick, "I thank my God whenever I think of you; and every time I pray for all of you, I pray with joy, remembering how you have helped to spread the Good News from the day you first heart it right up to the present. I am quite certain that the One who began this good work in you will see that it is finished when the Day of Christ Jesus comes."

It truly breaks our hearts to say that we are leaving...

Leaving, not fleeing

We are leaving because of call that started before the Pandemic and eventually got louder and louder to the point we couldn't ignore it...

Leaving, not fleeing.

Following a call rather than running away.

It's an important distinction, which I think warrants explanation.

We are leaving NOT because of the Church of Scotland

We are leaving NOT because of Presbytery

We are leaving NOT because of the challenges that we face in trying to do ministry differently

We are leaving for reasons deeper, more sacred and personal

We are leaving because of a growing sense of a call to become Catholic.

Fit? :). What did you say, Will?

We are leaving because of a growing sense of a call to become Catholic.

This has been a long and unexpected journey, one fraught with countless questions and riddled with innumerable uncertainties.

For example:

How in the world am I going to support the family?

What can I do to put a roof over my family's head?

I don't have a day job, a previous career I can fall back on.

My life has been about ministry and mission since I was a teenager....

Not to mention the biblical, historical and theological questions we've had to wrestle with. But these are all questions and explanations for another time.

The main thing is this:

Although the Church of Scotland and the Catholic Church in Scotland have signed the St. Margaret's Declaration, which is a remarkable step forward between the two traditions, a sign of growing friendship and fraternity, becoming Catholic necessitates that I must demit and leave Methlick. I can no longer be a minister in the Church of Scotland.

We came to Scotland in 2004, 18 years ago!

The Church of Scotland has been a wonderful spiritual home for us, and as I quoted Philippians 1 above, I will always thank God for those I've met in Scotland, in Glasgow, Aberdeen, Dyce, Orkney, across Scotland and of course in Methlick. I will always thank God for the privilege of being one of its ministers, and of your minister in particular.

But, we have to leave...

And although the decision has been hard, God has been so good to us, so kind to us, as we have tried to follow his call.

There are still a lot of questions, but our immediate future is as follows:

In September, we are going to return to the USA for a few months, to have a sabbatical and spend time with family.

In January 2023, we will be moving to Germany. I will be doing intensive language study for 6-8 months and then begin theological studies at the University of Freiburg and prayerfully discern what God might be calling us to do: teaching? priesthood? Some other type of ministry? We'll be living somewhere near Freiburg and under care of the Catholic Archdiocese of Freiburg.

Who knows... one day we might come back to Scotland...

What I do know is this:

I am sad to say we are leaving Methlick, but I am confident of this, as Paul said to the Philippians, so I say to you,

"He who began a good work in you will be faithful to carry out to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

I know the road ahead is uncertain.

It's uncertain for you. It's uncertain for us... but if we put our hands in the hand of God, it will be a better and safer than the known way

One of my favourite blessings is from King George VI's Christmas Day broadcast in which he quoted the poem by Minnie Louise Haskins, which Princess Elizabeth, then 13 years of age, gave to her father because she thought it might lift the spirits of a nation, riddled with fear and uncertainty having just declared war on Germany.

The poem?

You know the words.

I hope you might find it true now and in the years ahead

"I said to the man who stood at the Gate of the Year, "Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown." And he replied, "Go out into the darkness, and put your hand into the hand of God. That shall be to you better than light, and safer than a known way."

Methlick! We love you!

Put your hand in the hand of God

Keep listening

Keep following

He won't let you down!

Rev. Dr. Will Stalder

17 July 2022