



St Ronan's Presbyterian Church
Eastbourne

Record

DECEMBER 2025/JANUARY 2026

Services

7 November	Shared service with the Anglicans at St Ronan's <i>Rev Leanne Munro, Rev Sue Brown</i>	9:30am
14 December	Informal worship (BYO ¹)	9:30am
25 December	Christmas family service <i>Reg & Diane Weeks</i>	9:30am
28 December	Combined ² Fellowship lunch at St Ronan's	12:00pm
4 January	Combined ² Presbyterian Communion at St Ronan's <i>Rev Reg Weeks</i>	9.30am
11 January	Combined ² Anglican Communion at San Antonio <i>Rev Sue Brown</i>	9:30am
³ 17 January	Combined ² Catholic Mass at San Antonio <i>Father Akuila</i>	5.30pm
25 January	Informal worship (BYO ¹)	9.30am
1 February	Shared service with the Anglicans at San Antonio <i>Rev Sue Brown, Rev Reg Weeks</i>	9.30am

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¹ Each brings to share a song, reading, poem, prayer etc - or just listens...
² Combined means Catholics+Anglicans+Presbyterians
³ Saturday evening

Mary said 'yes...'

We are approaching the season of Advent when, over the four Sundays before Christmas, the bible readings lead us on a journey toward the celebration of the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. We have the choirs of angels, the shepherds, and the far-too-early arrival of the wise ones from the east, all set out for us in nativity scenes and Christmas cards. And there, close to the manger, the figure of Mary looking fondly at her new-born son.



Nothing in that familiar scene conveys the courage and faith of this extraordinary young woman. A simple village girl, yet her faith-filled and courageous response to the invitation presented to her became the veritable hinge of Western, if not human history; the beginning of what is now called the Common Era.

There are so many things that Mary could not have known would flow from her courageous 'yes'.

When she took her new-born to the temple to perform the customary rites, it was old Simeon who told her that hers was a child of destiny. 'And a sword will pierce your own soul too,' he said. Nothing of the Christmas story could have happened without Mary's willingness to place her trust, and her life, in the hands of her God. Yet so little of this is conveyed by the figure of the young mother attentive to her child lying in a feed box.

John Bell⁴, a prolific song writer and worship resource person from the Iona Community in Scotland, has penned a hymn which in my view goes some way to make the point that this was her free decision and God's eternal purposes waited on her consent:

v1 *No wind at the window, no knock on the door; no light from the lampstand, no foot on the floor; no dream born of tiredness, no ghost raised by fear: just an angel and a woman and a voice in her ear.*

v2 *'O Mary, O Mary, don't hide from my face. Be glad that you're favoured and filled with God's grace. The time for redeeming the world has begun; and you are requested to mother God's son.'*

v3 *'This child must be born that the Kingdom might come: salvation for many, destruction for some; both end and beginning, both message and sign; both victor and victim, both yours and divine.'*

⁴ In the late '90s, while visiting Wellington, the Rev John Bell led a most interesting seminar on creative worship at St Ronan's. He led the committee which produced the Church of Scotland's hymnal, *Church Hymnary (4th ed)*, known simply as CH4.

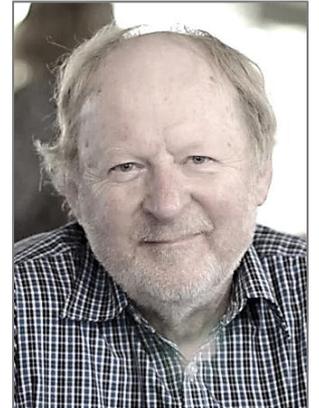
v4 *No payment was promised, no promises made; no wedding was dated, no blueprint displayed. Yet Mary, consenting to what none could guess, replied with conviction, 'Tell God I say "yes".'*

When we speak of faith, we are usually talking about believing in something, but it takes it to a whole new level when your understanding of what God is calling you to do requires you to step out in trust toward an unknown future. Mary's response to God's call was 'yes'; what's yours?

Reg Weeks

Clerk's corner...

\$\$\$\$\$: We're now about halfway through our July to June financial year and you'll be glad to hear we are tracking along pretty well. We have a highly able team looking after things for us - both our treasurer and our bookkeeper are chartered accountants...! I wonder how rural parishes cope in this financially and legally complex age without such fiscally able individuals running things for them...?



Power: And talking of money – both ours and others – we are about to change our power provider. Not that there's anything particularly 'wrong' with the company we currently use but that there is something particularly 'right' about the one we are moving to. See my article a bit later this issue...

CPP: And talking about legal complexity, we have recently had police checks done on those working with our smallest, most-vulnerable people (we are obliged to do this – and 'yes' they've all passed). And we are currently engaged in writing a Child Protection Policy (we are obliged to do this too). We are trying to construct one that ticks all the many boxes it should tick but does not run into too many pages.

AV: The audio-visual system in the church is always needing bits fixed or updated. Reg and I are each attending to intermittent problems associated with different bits of this system.

Wear & Tear: One of the problems with St Ronan's being a very busy community hub is the wear and tear (most of it fair). Simon recently replaced a couple of blown lightbulbs and fixed a dance-rail that had come adrift. I recently fixed a door retainer that had lost a screw and replaced a table whose folding legs had been terminally folded the wrong way.

And so, life goes on, in the exciting world of parish councilling...! 😊

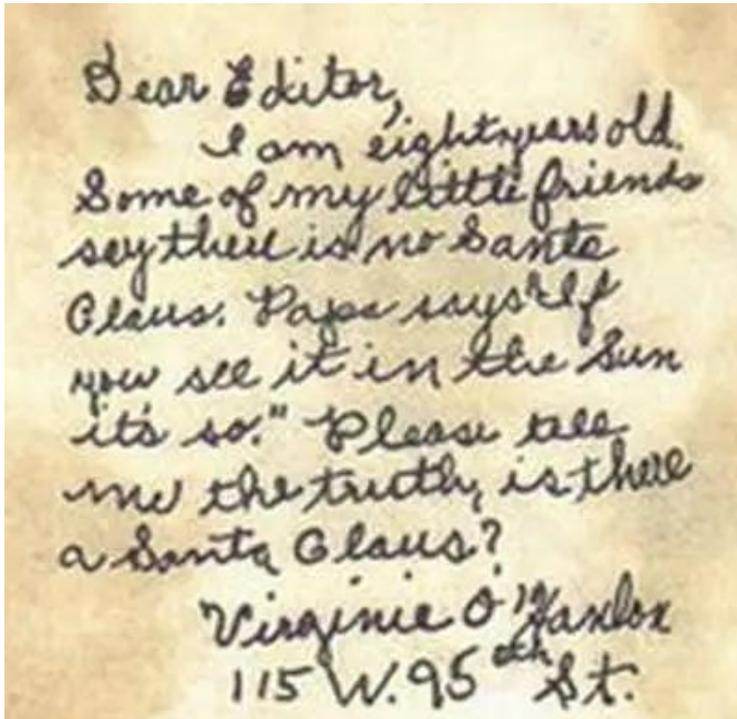
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Sandy Lang
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Rood screen – Dear Virginia...

In 1897 (well over a hundred years ago) a little girl wrote this letter to the Editor of the *New York Sun* newspaper. It resulted in one of the most beautiful responses I have ever read. It remains as true today as it did then...



Dear Editor,
I am eight years old.
Some of my little friends
say there is no Santa
Claus. Papa says if
you see it in the Sun
it's so." Please tell
me the truth, is there
a Santa Claus?
Virginia O'Harbor
115 W. 95th St.



Virginia, your little friends are wrong. They have been affected by the skepticism of a skeptical age. They do not believe except they see. They think that nothing can be which is not comprehensible by their little minds. All minds, Virginia, whether they be men's or children's, are little. In this great universe of ours, man is a mere insect, an ant, in his intellect as compared with the boundless world about him, as measured by the intelligence capable of grasping the whole of truth and knowledge.

Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus. He exists as certainly as love and generosity and devotion exist, and you know that they abound and give to your life its highest beauty and joy. Alas! How dreary would be the world if there were no Santa Claus! It would be as dreary as if there were no Virginias. There would be no childlike faith then, no poetry, no romance to make tolerable this existence. We should have no enjoyment, except in sense and sight. The eternal light with which childhood fills the world would be extinguished.

Not believe in Santa Claus! You might as well not believe in fairies. You might get your papa to hire men to watch in all the chimneys on Christmas eve to catch Santa Claus, but even if you did not see Santa Claus coming down, what would that prove? Nobody sees



Santa Claus, but that is no sign that there is no Santa Claus. The most real things in the world are those that neither children nor men can see. Did you ever see fairies dancing on the lawn? Of course not, but that's no proof that they are not there. Nobody can conceive or imagine all the wonders there are unseen and unseeable in the world.



As Virginia might have imagined Santa Claus
"Merry Old Santa Claus" by Thomas Nast from the
January 1, 1881 edition of *Harper's Weekly*

You tear apart the baby's rattle and see what makes the noise inside, but there is a veil covering the unseen world which not the strongest man, nor even the united strength of all the strongest men that ever lived could tear apart. Only faith, poetry, love, romance, can push aside that curtain and view and picture the supernal beauty and glory beyond. Is it all real? Ah, Virginia, in all this world there is nothing else real and abiding.

No Santa Claus! Thank God! he lives and lives forever. A thousand years from now, Virginia, nay 10 times 10,000 years from now, he will continue to make glad the heart of childhood.

Francis B. Church
Editor of the *New York Sun* 1897



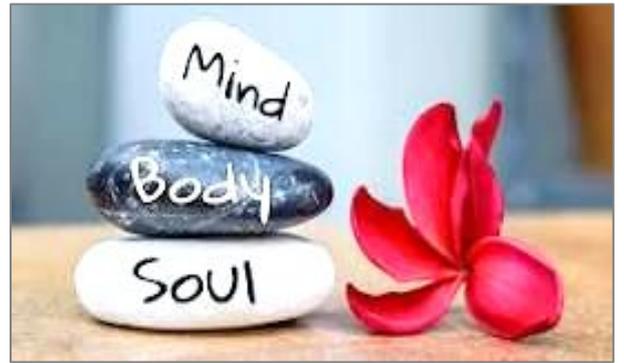
This Christmas, I wish for you and yours, every good sentiment that is in these letters.

John Harris



Surrender...

Christianity has many 'loosing' strategies⁵ and the practice of 'surrender' is surely one of them. I refer to the paradox spoken by Francis of Assisi: *For it is in dying to ourselves, that we are born to Eternal life.* In examining the concept of surrender, both generally and spiritually, I'd also like to explore developments in science that demonstrate what happens in our brains when we practise or experience surrendering.



Neuroscience constantly confirms new understandings of the interconnectedness of our bodies and our minds and our soul/spirit (here meant as the focus of our spiritual selves). Within this field of study is work on our ability to have control over our unhelpful obsessions and worries by (somewhat paradoxically) giving up control of them.⁶ We can define surrender as the act or intention of letting go of control over something or some outcome. Trust is a congruent concept. AI defines Christian trust as - intentionally handing over control of one's plans or worries to God. This act acknowledges and submits to His superior wisdom, love and authority.

Proverbs 3:5-6 (NIV) says *Trust in the Lord in all his ways and lean not unto your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths.*

Knowing our God as the 'Great Physician' and 'Wonderful Counsellor', we should not be surprised to discover that our Creator has embedded in us the innate ability to heal and move towards more well-ordered lives...

Surprising perhaps, but both experience and the scientific literature show that surrender can lead to a sense of greater control and peace. This is because we have actively *chosen* to surrender, rather than to get carried away by our impulses.

My intent is not to minimise or to fail to acknowledge, the Divine power and intervention that we Christians may experience when we trust in God through faith. The experience of having the Creator of the universe, the Shepherd of our lives, direct our paths, is a beautiful gift of affirmation which can transform our sense of worth and purpose.

The act of surrender can be learnt, and by practice it can become a habit. Science tells us this repeated habit alters the pathways of our brains, so we

⁵ These run counter to today's wisdom.

⁶ The Benefits of Surrender. When struggling with issues we can't control, surrender may be the best option. *Psychology Today*. Nov 7, 2024.

learn to respond more adaptably and easily to adverse events and stressful situations as we encounter them. A common saying about brain connectivity and change is - *neurons that fire together, wire together*⁷ - analogous perhaps to the paths, animals form in a forest when they walk repeatedly through the same area.



I am intrigued that the science of psychology confirms measurable and observable positive effects within our brains when we experience what it is to surrender. There is a part of our brain that is engaged when we repeatedly 'over think' or try to process the same information - such as with negative ruminations or replaying an argument over and over again, and getting nowhere.⁸

It is this part of us that is involved when we monitor our performance - it calculates, critiques and judges. PET scans can show the 'overuse' that happens in the part of the brain where more obsessive and stalled thinking can happen. It is also the brain area associated with some persistent aspects of depression, with OCD, and with various other mental illnesses. Available online⁹ are podcasts which help in learning how to change these patterns.

I wonder whether what Paul talks about in Romans 7:18b-19, might help us understand the allure of addictive behaviours and stuck thinking? *For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.* In the act of surrender, however, a shift can be observed from dominance of that part of the brain toward another part that's linked to intuition, imagination and emotional insight.¹⁰ Neuroscientists have observed this shift in brain activity when people engage in activities of prayer and meditation from PET scans of the brain.

The brain can be changed or its pathways grown, by frequent patterns such as surrender, to a more resilient, flexible present-orientated state. This is demonstrated by increased heart-rate variability and decreased muscle tension - both markers of health and resilience.

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hebbian_theory

⁸ This is called the default mode network (DMN).

⁹ You Tube: Forrest Hanson. Ruminations: How to Disrupt Obsessive Thought? Being Well Podcast: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U2tnf8q7GMk>

¹⁰ The Neuroscience of Surrender: Why Letting Go Is a High-Performance Strategy, Not a Weakness. By Natalie Walker Published on Medium, 2025. Introduction: The Paradox of Letting Go.

Neuroscientifically speaking, 'letting go' (that much-feared act that feels like failure) is one of the most efficient routes to creativity, healing and clarity. Walker states that the latest brain research is proving it.¹⁰ This scientific confirmation is not necessary for us to experience the spiritual benefits - but isn't it nice to know?

Twelve-step programmes for all types of addiction (e.g. Alcohol Anonymous) are based on the premise of surrender, where the participant chooses to hand over control to God or a higher power. This is still a leading and successful treatment for various powerful addictions.¹¹

Buddhist practices of mindfulness and meditation are used in mainstream psychology treatments. I think it's useful to note that Christian meditation and practices like 'centring prayer' have been part of Christian practice for thousands of years.

Let me share a personal example of surrender...

Waking in the morning, my sluggish and scattered mind is often drawn to my phone, for distraction, stimulation and entertainment. This is like going down a compelling 'rabbit hole' of time-wasting that leaves me feeling less than the others I see on the screen, and certainly not feeling better equipped to face any challenges my day may throw up.



If instead, I turn my attention to God, perhaps through a guided reading and prayer, I find myself being refocused to ask and, more importantly, leave time to listen to God:

*God, what is your view of what this day holds for me in challenges or highlights?
What do You want from me today, or need me to pay attention to?
Handing over concerns, my focus opens to others: What might they need?
What potential role do I have for them, or not?
Through gratitude for Your love, I trust things to Your hands, this day.*

Now, rather than feeling overwhelmed, in surrender posture, I feel upheld, equipped, and more focussed. I notice on those days I am more receptive to noticing God's voice, and to experiencing His loving care. Paradoxically that prayer may be facilitated by an app on my phone. Apps such as *Lectio 365*, or

¹¹ The Inner Journey: Surrender as a Pathway to Addiction Recovery
<https://www.therecoveryfiles.com/new-page-52-1>

Bible in One Year. These are two apps I habitually enjoy because they help and shape my focus.

I'm a relative newbie to regular meditation but I'm convinced of the benefits of quietening my mind, to be a powerfully transforming process that I need. There is truly, *nothing new under the sun* (Eccl 1:9) as is demonstrated by this 4th century prayer of the Greek Bishop, Basil-the-Great 330-379AD.

Oh Lord our God... Steer the ship of our life to yourself, the quiet harbour of all storm-stressed souls. Show us the course which we are to take. Renew in us the spirit of docility. Let your Spirit curb our fickleness; guide and strengthen us to perform what is for our own good, to keep your commandments and ever to rejoice in your glorious and vivifying presence. Yours is the glory and praise for all eternity.

Sheryl Selwyn

[Sheryl is a member of St Ronan's, Eastbourne. Her interest in psychology and its intersection with her faith, is fashioned from an earlier career in nursing, and social work in foster care. These led to her working as a psychotherapist in Canada after completing an MA in Counselling and Spirituality at St Paul University, Ottawa, Canada.]

Power Hour – A stirring time...!

I revelled at the goodness of our Power Hour children who brought with them cooking skills, at their tender ages, and eagerly worked together (23 November) to make our annual St Ronan's Christmas cake! For example, they (pictured left to right, Emma, Blake, Jacob & Jonas) expertly cracked an egg into a bowl! I also rejoiced at their parents who take the time and effort to teach them to cook, such a basic but vital life skill which leads to expansive opportunities.

Through cooking they learn to care, not only for themselves, but also for others; in itself another important life skill. God bless our Power Hour





Jane and Colin help stir the cake

children and their parents! Such is the Christian spirit of caring, sharing and fostering peace.

Following on, at the church morning tea, the children loved pushing the trolley (with the cake mixing bowl) into the Fellowship room and inviting everyone to 'stir the cake'. Now, the whole church made our St Ronan's Christmas cake for Advent celebration!

Next, we are all looking forward to sharing our cake at this year's December Shared Service with St Alban's on the Second Advent Sunday.

Indeed, our stirred Christmas cake takes on a grand merry life of its own in a wonderful spirit of peace and care and celebration of Jesus in our lives!!

Susan Connell

Power Hour Term 4 2025 ends 14 December 9:30am

Power Hour Term 1 2026 begins 15 February 9:30am

Around the world in 60 days...

Seven countries, five airlines, one float plane, 27 beds, seven British Rail journeys, and several coach and bus rides – that's one way of summarising my two-month travel adventure in September/October.

My aim was to visit places I had never been before. So I began in Vancouver, Canada, then continued into Slovenia and Croatia with an Intrepid tour. One of the three weeks in England I spent walking in the Lake District. My old London flatmate, Kerry, and I stayed in a country house in the village of Portinscale, near the market town of Keswick, arriving in the teeth of Storm Amy. Sadly, the high winds prevented us from ascending all but the lower fells, with most of the walks taking us through wooded areas, farmland and charming villages. Occasionally the clouds broke and we got great views of Derwentwater, Grasmere and Ullswater. It's a stunning area.

Equally stunning was my eight-day tour of Portugal, from Lisbon to Porto. Due to Portugal's long history of Christianity – introduced sometime in the third century – visiting monasteries, cathedrals and churches is a prime activity. However, although 88 per cent of the population consider themselves Catholic, and no doubt continue to be baptised and married in the church, only 19 per cent attend Mass regularly. The most famous Catholic site is in Fátima, north of Porto, where three shepherd children experienced Marian apparitions in 1917.

Some of the cathedrals and churches we visited might seem quite austere on the outside, but inside the amount of gold and Baroque or Rococo exuberance could eventually overwhelm. Then there were the extra-large statues of Jesus, Mary and other Biblical figures that are paraded outside the churches on various feast days.

Even stranger for most Protestants are the cases of religious relics and reliquaries on display – often the bones, fingers, even skulls of saints. Having a collection of such treasures was certainly one way of making your church a place of pilgrimage. We discovered a particularly impressive (and gruesome) collection in Lisbon’s Church of Sao Roque, a Jesuit church and the only one to have survived the 1755 earthquake tsunami and multi-day fire. Lisbon is also the birthplace of one of the world’s most popular saints, St Anthony of Padua.



Inside Sao Roque Church

Equally impressive were some of the church organs we saw, one in the 12th century Monastery of Santa Cruz in the university town of Coimbra, once the medieval capital of Portugal. Built in the Baroque style between 1719 and 1724, using older pipework and Japanese artwork, the organ has 4000 pipes and has been restored many times. It is notable for being one of the world’s largest one-manual organ. Only problem is, only four people in the world know how to play it.



The church is also notable for its beautiful (though poorly manufactured) blue and white tiles (Azulejos) that line the walls, depicting key events in Portugal’s history. Fittingly, the country’s first two kings are buried there.

And where after Portugal? Home via Beijing, but that’s a whole other story.

Anne Manchester

Toast Electric...

Someone recently introduced me to *Toast Electric*. This is a small, not-for-profit electricity retailer powered by *Sustainability Trust*.



The coverage: Toast Electric services homes and small businesses in Wellington, Porirua and the Hutt Valley (their coverage also extends to Kāpiti, Horowhenua, Wairarapa, Christchurch and mid-Canterbury. And is expanding). Their mission is to reduce energy hardship in New Zealand.



The Pricing: Toast Electric's pricing is comparable with that of the big power retailers. If you send them your recent power bill, they will give you an estimate of how much you would save each year by changing to Toast Electric. Anne and I did this and found we'd save about \$5 /year. Of course you'll say, "Well that's not very exciting, is it...?!" But that's not my point...

The Profits: Rather than going to shareholders, Toast Electric's company profits are re-invested in providing support to low-income households. These sometimes have to make the hard choice between heating and eating.

The Model: Toast Electric has one low-income customer for every four regular customers. This allows the 4% profit they make from each regular customer to be applied as a 16% discount for the low-income customer. In this way, Toast Electric helps their low-income customers out of energy hardship.

The Alsos: Toast's side benefits for their low-income customers include free home energy checks and advice. And interventions such as free curtains, lightbulbs and heaters. And Toast works closely with financial mentors to provide wraparound support.

The Maths: To ease the arithmetic for you, let's assume your average annual power spend is \$2000, then the 4% profit is worth \$80. When combined with that of three other regular customers it grows to 16% and so funds a \$320 discount to the low-income customer who pays only \$1680 for \$2000 worth of power.

The Admin: Toast Electric will do all the admin for your provider change - you just have to ask them to do it for you.

So, for you, the cost and bother of changing your power provider is nil (you might even gain a bit in cheaper power) but the benefit to some low-income family is significant. So, what are you waiting for...?!

Sandy Lang

Held...

*She doesn't talk about it much.
Not the room,
not the silence,
not the way her body still remembers
what her mind wrapped in thick fog.*

*Years passed.
A Lighthouse pastor called her strong.
She called it surviving.*

*But sometimes
on the floor of her flat
or walking through the streets
on her way to Wellbeing Wednesday
when she isn't trying to be brave—
she feels the presence of the dove.*

*The Spirit.
The Paraclete.
Not a ghost,
not a glare in the sky,
but the One who kneels beside her
like breath,
like ache,
like kindness that doesn't flinch.*

*The Holy Spirit—
a seal,
a promise,
the personal presence of Jesus
made manifest in her pain.*

*She once read what Jesus said—
'I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Comforter,
to be with you forever...
I will not leave you as an orphan.
I will come to you.'*

*And she wept.
Because she knew what it was
to be left.*

*But not by this One.
This One stayed.
Even in the years when she had no words.
Even when prayer meant nothing but tears.*



*And she heard what Paul wrote—
'The Spirit helps us in our weakness...
intercedes for us through wordless groans.'*

*That made sense to her.
The groaning.
The kind of prayer the body prays
when the soul is too tired to speak.*

*She does not need to perform healing.
She only needs to breathe.
Because when she cannot come to God,
God comes to her.*

*The Dove holds the pain—
and also holds the promise:
that one day,
in the renewal of all things,
every tear will be wiped away.
And she will be made whole.*

*Until then,
the Spirit stays.
And holds.
And keeps vigil
until the dawn.*

*There is not a hurt
He will not heal.*

Rev Jon Swales

This poem was contributed by **Diane Gilliam-Weeks**.
*Jon Swales is an ordained priest in the Church of England. He heads up
Lighthouse in West Yorkshire, a fresh expression of church for adults battered
and bruised by the storms of life.*

Phil's photo...



Robert Jahnke's Spinning Top sculpture is located at the top of Woodward St. The street once included a vehicle turntable that enabling cars to rotate 180 degrees, and drive safely back down the very narrow street to Lambton Quay. Jahnke also references the traditional Māori pastime of pōtaka (top spinning).

Phil Bengé

Education for Ministry

Education for Ministry (EfM) is an education programme aimed at lay people seeking to explore their faith, go deeper in understanding the Bible and Christian tradition AND how people can worship the same God but see things so differently.

EfM was birthed at a university in Tennessee. It has been running in Aotearoa NZ since 1979. A taster evening was held on 2 December at St Peter's on Willis Street in Wellington. Participants over the last forty years have found EfM a powerful way to grow their faith, to develop their ability to recognise God's presence in the world around them, and to be part of a group who travel the faith journey deeply together.

While initially a four-year course, with people only signing up for a year at a time, EfM has developed various short courses over the years. There are even two short courses specific to Aotearoa NZ. For more information contact:
Mike Crawford-Butler 021-246-0672 EducationforMinistryNZ@outlook.com
Jean Malcolm 021-294-2122 jean@stpeteronwillis.org.nz
Rev Leanne Munro (chair of EfM [NZ] Trust Board) 022-65-28502



Our God calls us to worship and grow together and to show the love of Christ through serving our community.

Directory

St Ronan's Presbyterian Church,
234 Muritai Road, Eastbourne, Lower Hutt, 5013

Children

Power Hour	Sundays 9:30-10:30am	Susan Connell (04) 568 5747
Mainly Music Play Group	Thursdays 9:15-11:15am	Lauren Taylor 021 0247 1433

Pastoral care

Please contact one of the Local Shared Ministry Team

Local Shared Ministry Team

Reg Weeks	027 491 5947	third.age@outlook.co.nz
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Simon Shaw	(04) 562 8772	simonjshaw@xtra.co.nz
Colin Dalziel	(04) 562 7238	colinjdalziel@gmail.com

Parish Clerk Sandy Lang 021 222 0383 slang@xtra.co.nz

- Hall bookings
- Information & general correspondence

The Record

- Contributions to the Record are welcome
- Request monthly delivery of the Record to your mailbox
- Note: *The views expressed in the Record are those of the authors - they don't necessarily represent those of St Ronan's Church*

Deadline for the February Record is Sunday 25 January 2026