

## **IN MEMORIAM: JENNIFER MACRAE**

*Church Service Society AGM 2018*

Our much loved and valued member, Jennifer Macrae, died on Friday 2nd March at St Columba's hospice in Edinburgh following a courageous battle with cancer.

Many of you knew Jennifer for a long time; some of you from before she was part of the Church Service Society, of which she was treasurer for a number of years until she began to pass the baton to Iain at the beginning of this year. Some will have known Jennifer in "life before ministry," maybe as a primary school teacher, maybe as a mum to Elaine and Laura, and wife to Stewart. Maybe as a member of the congregation at Jordanhill Parish Church in Glasgow. Maybe as a probationer at Wellington Church with Leith Fisher as her supervisor. As an assistant at Netherlee, or as the Minister at Kelvinside Hillhead. Jennifer was known and loved by lots of people in lots of places, and that was really evident in the huge crowd that packed out the service of thanksgiving for her life on 10th March.

I only knew Jennifer for a short time, but had the great good fortune to be her probationer at Haddington St Mary's. For the first six months of my time there, I learned so much from seeing Jennifer's ministry in action, and hearing from people in the congregation and parish about the impact that she had on their lives. In Haddington, Jennifer had the happiest and most rewarding phase of her time as a minister. That was completely obvious from the first time that I went to scope-out St Mary's at Sunday worship. She had come into a troubled congregation, and had gradually been taken to their hearts and turned round a very uncertain situation into something that was strong and tender all at once. You see, Jennifer's ministry was a very human one; a relational one. Maybe that's just how it always should be, but is not always the case. Anyway, in St Mary's there was a "click" and Jennifer worked with the wonderful architectural inheritance of that beautiful building, tapped into the liturgical creativity of some of her predecessors, and brought her pastoral magic to bear.

She'd be the first to say that it wasn't rocket science. She had the skill, faith and insight to create beautiful and meaningful liturgy at the 11am service that folk could connect with, but also drew them beyond themselves to reach higher.

By contrast, the primary school teacher's love of younger children was obvious to me when I saw her in action at the weekly 9.30am family service. She was brilliant at coming up with ways of connecting with the wee ones, always had time for them, and loved the growing crowd of babies and toddlers on the rug at the front, and the unpredictable participation you'd get from the kids during her talks. Working with others in the St Mary's team, a real momentum has built up at that service, and there's a growing young church and a diverse all-age congregation which owed its strength to the inclusive way that Jennifer carried out her ministry there.

She and Stewart were hugely encouraging of music-making and both of them supported successive organists and choir directors and their work with the St Mary's junior choristers. In complicated times for the Church of Scotland, it's good to see that big, historic kirks like St Mary's can still thrive, with imagination, skill, grace and the love of God shared amongst us. In due course someone will inherit a great parish.

Jennifer took seriously her ordination vow to contribute to the national church as well as her local parish. One of her greatest loves was being able to work with trainee ministers of all kinds. Latterly, that included being convener of the ministry committee for Lothian presbytery, but more importantly taking on the great burden of supervising enquirers and trainees in the parish! Everyone I know who worked with her deeply appreciated what she did for them, even down to stepping in with grace at the last minute when one slept in when they were on duty for the 9.30am service! She spent so much time in weekly supervision, helping people find the shape of their vocation. In my case it was fuelled by the hospitality of coffee on tap, and she never seemed to grudge what could extend to three hours of deep, enjoyable, and inspiring conversation about ministry. Behind it all lay her own gratitude for what her probation supervisor at Wellington Church, Leith Fisher, gave to her.

She loved to help people to find their feet in ministry, bringing them alongside and then letting them walk the high-wire on their own. When she was sitting out in the congregation to observe, I could feel just how much she was rooting for me. That was her way: she wanted us to do well. She had a special way of helping us realise our mistakes, or what could be done better next time. Her approach was a subtle one. How did you feel that went? She never once started with: "that was a bit mince," although she could have justifiably done so, and

she patiently helped us to explore the issues, whilst sharing some of her own highs and lows in ministry. That made a real difference to realise that there are inevitably highs and lows: we're only human after all.

When it became clear that the cancer would not be beaten, Jennifer was obviously devastated, as we all were. She said "I've had a wonderful life, I just wish that it could have been a bit longer." We all wish that too, Jennifer, but you taught many of us so much, and made such an impact that you have left a big legacy.

She said something to me on a couple of occasions, which I think is a message for us in this Society. She loved liturgy and deep worship, but she could get frustrated with things that were too abstract or drily theoretical. Her pastoral heart said "why would I take a day out of the parish to come to this?" That question is perhaps a useful one for us. Maybe one of her legacies to us is to ask the Jennifer question as we shape our programme for the future: "How will this bring us closer to God and help us to be better pastors of whatever kind?"

**Martin Ritchie**