

Leaflet



Greenbank Parish Church
Braidburn Terrace, EH10 6ES
No 618 June-August 2012

Pulpit Diary

Jun 1 Friday

7.30pm Pre-Communion Service

Jun 3

9.00am Communion

10.30am Communion (Springboard and Spectrum meet as normal)

3.00pm Communion (Braid Room)

Jun 10

10.30am All Age Celebration and "Moving on Service" followed by congregational picnic

Jun 17

9.30am Family Worship

10.30am Morning Worship

5.30pm Worship with young people followed by meal

Jun 24 – Aug 5 inclusive

9.30am Family Worship led by Spectrum families and friends

10.30am Morning Worship (Creche and special activity for children)

Aug 12

10.30am All Age Worship with children from "On Your Marks" Holiday Club

Aug 19

10.30am -Morning Worship (Springboard and Spectrum start of first term)

Aug 26

10.30am -Morning Worship

Aug 31 Friday

7.30pm -Pre-Communion Service

Sept 2

9.00am Communion

10.30am Communion (Springboard and Spectrum meet as normal)

3.00pm Communion (Braid Room)

For information about church organisations, please contact the Church Office (Mon–Fri, 9.00am–12.00pm, 1.30pm–3.30pm):
Mrs Virginia Johnston
tel and fax: 0131 447 9969
e-mail: greenbankchurch@btconnect.com
The pastoral team can be contacted through the Church Office:
Rev Alison Swindells
tel and fax: 0131 447 4032
email: alisonswindells@blueyonder.co.uk
Rev W. Peter Graham
tel: 0131 445 5763

To make contact with any of the organisations described in this Leaflet, please use the telephone number given, if there is one; otherwise contact the Church Office.

Minister's Letter

Dear Friends

The Olympic Games are approaching fast. The athletes are training hard. The venues are being tested. Staff are being employed. Volunteers are being trained. Every day we hear in the news about some new development in the preparations. I know that some of you have been fortunate enough to purchase tickets for a particular event, while others have family or friends competing. Yet despite all this it sometimes seems as if London 2012 is very far away!

However it is about to come closer. The Olympic Torch has already begun its ten week mission from the slopes of Olympia to the stadium in London. The torch symbolises the connection between the Ancient Games, which began in 776BC and continued every four years for almost 1200 years, and the modern Games as we know them.

After a short tour of Greece, the torch will be handed over to Princess Anne who will bring it to the UK by plane. It will then begin its tour of the UK. The Torchbearers will carry the flame through more than 1000 cities, towns and villages from the Highlands and Islands of Scotland to the Channel Islands. The torch will pass through places of outstanding natural beauty as well as busy city streets. Eventually the final torch bearer will light the Cauldron at the Olympic Stadium in London to mark the start of the games.

The torch route has been planned in such a way that the torch should pass within one hour of 95% of the people in the UK, before it finally reaches its destination. As it does so, it is intended that it should bring to light the best that there is to see up and down this land. (although some of you might think



that the planners have slipped up – they have missed out Greenbank!!). Such an ambitious plan requires a huge team of torchbearers – 8000 in total – inspirational men and women, young and old, who have been specially chosen for this privilege. Each one of them has a part to play as together they carry the flame around the country.

Surely as we see these torchbearers carrying the light around the country, we have in front of us a wonderful metaphor for the Church. At Pentecost we celebrate the birth of the Church. We remember how the flame of God's love touched the hearts of Jesus' first followers and lit up their lives forever. It sent them out into the world ready to share the good news of God's love with all who would listen. And ever since then, down through the generations, the light of God's love has been carried by men and women, old and young, through the highways and byways of the world – a huge company of torchbearers lighting the way.

As members of that great fellowship, we too carry within us the flame of God's love. Wherever we go that love travels with us and is capable of bringing light to the darkest places. What a privilege and what a responsibility!

With warmest wishes

Alison I Swindells
Minister

P.S. On a lighter note - If you are away on holiday this summer please send us a postcard - we would like to see how many different places the Greenbank torch reaches!

Wanted

for SLA Summer Fair Coffee Morning on Sat 16th June 10-12 at Greenbank Church.....

small bric a brac
costume jewellery,
jam or any home produce
plants
CDs
DVDs
books (a few !)
prizes or pledges for a silent auction.....

or if you can bake just phone

Please leave items at the church office or phone Hazel Macaulay on 447 5360 if you can help in any way with the above donations. Thank you.

Hazel Macaulay

Bookstall

The new date for the summer Bookstall is Sunday 17th June in the main hall after the 10.30am service. We will have copies of *Fulfilling a Vision, the Contribution of the Church of Scotland to School Education 1772-1872* by John Stevenson available for purchase as well as titles that have been reviewed recently in the Leaflet. If you wish to see any particular books please contact us and we will try to obtain a copy for you from the Cornerstone Bookshop.

John and Joan Ritchie

Friendship Club



A bright, windless day augured well for our outing to Ratho. Around twenty five members boarded two of the canal boats for a leisurely cruise in the capable hands of members of the Seagull Trust.

Seated in comfortable observation cabins, we enjoyed the scenery and the abundance of wild flowers along the banks. We were accompanied now and then by ducks and their tiny ducklings. Coffee was served by crew members and our committee produced home made scones complete with jam and cream. The crew provided interesting and often amusing commentary along the way.

Our grand day out was rounded off by a delicious carvery meal at Ratho Park.



Autumn Lecture Series "Faith And...."

Sundays in September

Run jointly with Morningside Parish Church with the assistance of Edinburgh University School of Divinity at Morningside Parish Church 7.00pm. (The evening will commence with refreshments at 6.30pm.)

2nd: Alison Elliot – Faith and the City

9th: Ewan Brown – Faith and Politics

16th: Charles Munn – Faith and Money

23rd: David Fergusson – Faith and the Scottish Identity

30th: Jolyon Mitchell – Faith and the Theatre

These series have proved popular in the past and we look forward to welcoming you to this new series.

The Guild

As usual through the summer months the Guild will be holding a Coffee Morning each month. The dates are Tuesday June 12th, July 3rd, August 14th and September 4th.

Please note that the June and August Coffee mornings are on the second Tuesday of these months.

Come and join us at 10.30 am in the Main Hall for coffee (or tea) and a scone or a cake, and a chat - all welcome.

Ready, Steady, GOlympics

It is now just 50 or so days until the start of the London Olympics. As the excitement mounts, here is some news about the Torch Relay - local interest for Greenbank and how the churches are getting involved. The Olympic Torch comes to Edinburgh from St Andrews on 13th June, day 26 of its 70 day journey round the UK. The closest it gets to Greenbank is Holy Corner, sometime around 18.00 on the stage from Stenhouse (leaving at 17.45) to the Castle Esplanade where there will be evening celebrations. The next day it travels to Alnwick, passing through Penicuik around 10.45, where it will be carried by Neil Allan, who was married in Greenbank on Saturday 5th May and is the son of David and Janet. Neil has been chosen because of his passion for coaching young people in hockey and showing them how sport can give purpose to their lives as well as improve their health and fitness.

There is a Prayer Relay running (pardon the pun) alongside the Torch Relay. It has been organised by "More than Gold" (www.morethangold.org.uk), a broadly based inter-church organisation. The Prayer Relay, which tracks the same dates and route as the official Torch Relay, is a way for individuals and churches to pray for their communities, the Games and the nations taking part. Just as the Olympic Flame symbolises the creative ideals of the Games, so the Prayer Relay lets us follow the command of Jesus to "shine like lights" to bring other people to God. In the 70 towns where the Olympic torch is to stop overnight, church leaders from the previous town will bring prayers of blessing to share with leaders there. There is an open top bus with live worship bands associated with the Prayer Relay and travelling the route ahead of the Torch. Subject to final checking the Prayer Baton handover in Edinburgh will be at the Scottish Parliament at lunchtime on 13th June.

So, if you want to get involved ahead of the Games, you can see the Torch in Edinburgh on the 13th or 14th June, go to the evening event at the Esplanade on the 13th

and join in the Prayer Relay at lunchtime on the 13th at Holyrood. Look out for more details online or in the newspapers.

Valerie Macniven
Presbytery Elder

Leaflet

September Issue

This is the last issue of the Leaflet until September. We ask all continuing or incoming leaders of organisations to note the deadline for copy for the September Leaflet (12th/14th August). The September issue is delivered not only to members but to all homes in the Parish and provides an opportunity for organisations to showcase their activities. It is helpful if you can send us your entries well in advance of the deadline... We also welcome photographs of your groups in action – publication will however depend on the availability of space! Please remember that photographs of children require the permission of parents. With best wishes for the summer.

Editors,

greenbankleaflet@googlemail.com

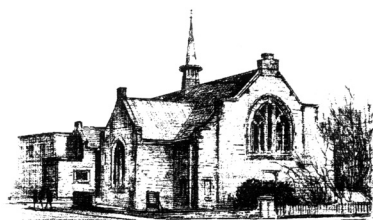


Date for your diary: please note that the next date for the fresh start collections is **June 10th**, at the Sunday service (table in main hall). This is the last collection until the autumn.

Thank you for your continued support in providing good quality items (some bought specially) for the starter pack scheme, to assist those who are moving into their own accommodation after being homeless. A full list of household goods wanted was in the May leaflet, and there is also a list on the wall near the church office.

Pick up a leaflet on a Fresh Start Sunday, see www.freshstartweb.org.uk to find out more about Fresh Start.

Alison Ambler



Join us this summer for
Holiday Club at Greenbank

Holiday Club

6th – 10th August 2012

Summer holidays will be here soon and once again we are planning to get together to have fun at Greenbank Holiday Club. If you are at primary school now or are starting in August come along and join the fun Monday to Friday 10.00 am till 12.00 noon 6th to 10th August. Bring a friend, bring lots of friends or come by yourself and meet lots of new friends! Everyone is welcome but book your name soon to be sure of a place.

For more information, or to book a place, contact the church office (447 9969) or look on the church website www.greenbankchurch.org.

Alison Reid

Protection of Vulnerable Groups (PVG)

I would be very grateful to have a note from all Spectrum and Springboard Leaders and other relevant persons of new staff members who will require to be disclosed under the new PVG scheme requirements for session 2012-13.

Hazel Macaulay

EDINBURGH GREENBANK PARISH CHURCH

PROVISIONAL PROGRAMME FOR SESSION 2012/13

2012

5 Aug (Sun)	09.30	Last of Summer Family Services
6-10 Aug (Mon-Fri)	10.00-12 noon	Holiday Club
12 Aug (Sun)	10.30	All Age Worship with Holiday Club
16 Aug (Thurs)		Pre-school – start of first term
19 Aug (Sun)	10.00	Springboard start of first term
	10.30	Spectrum start of first term
31 Aug (Fri)	19.30	Pre-Communion Service
	20.00	Pre-Communion Kirk Session Meeting
2 Sept (Sun)		Communion Services at 9.00, 10.30 and 15.00 Springboard and Spectrum meet as usual at 10.00 and 10.30
4 Sept (Tues)	19.30	Kirk Session Meeting
17 Sept (Mon)		Pre-school closed
18 Sept (Tues)	19.30	Congregational Board Meeting
21 Sept (Fri)	tbc	'Sing in the City' which is a choir of 60 people
30 Sept (Sun)	10.30	All Age Celebration for Harvest
7 Oct (Sun)	09.30	First Sunday Service led by Kirk Session
14 Oct (Sun)		No meeting of Spectrum/Springboard (Special activity for children)
15-22 Oct (Mon-Mon)		Pre-school closed.
3 Nov (Sat)		Charity Christmas Card Sale
4 Nov (Sun)	09.30	First Sunday Service led by The Guild
	15.00	Time to Remember – A service for the Bereaved
11 Nov (Sun)	10.50	Remembrance Service (Springboard meet as usual, Spectrum 2 & 3 begin as usual in church at 10.50, Spectrum 1 meet in Upper Hall at 10.45)
13 Nov (Tues)	19.30	Kirk Session Meeting
18-25 Nov (Sun-Sun)		Guild Week
30 Nov (Fri)	19.30	Pre-Communion Service
	20.00	Pre-Communion Kirk Session Meeting
2 Dec (Sun)		First Sunday in Advent Start of Christmas Offering for Christian Aid Communion Services at 9.00, 10.30 and 15.00 Springboard and Spectrum meet as usual at 10.00 and 10.30
4 Dec (Tues)	19.30	Congregational Board Meeting
9 Dec (Sun)	10.30	Second Sunday in Advent End of first term for Springboard and Spectrum

16 Dec (Sun)	10.30	Third Sunday in Advent All Age Gift Service
20 Dec (Thurs)		Pre-school – end of first term
23 Dec (Sun)		Fourth Sunday in Advent Lessons and Carols
24 Dec (Mon)	19.00	Christmas Eve Christmas Eve Family Service
	23.30	Christmas Eve Watchnight Service (Carol Singing from 23.10)
25 Dec (Tue)	10.30	Christmas Day Family Service for Christmas Day

2013

6 Jan (Sun)	10.00	Springboard start of second term
	10.30	Spectrum start of second term
8 Jan (Tues)		Pre-school – start of second term
15 Jan (Tues)	19.30	Kirk Session Meeting
22 Jan (Tues)	19.30	Congregational Board Meeting
3 Feb (Sun)	09.30	First Sunday Service led by Springboard
11 – 18 Feb (Mon-Mon)		Pre-school closed.
17 Feb (Sun)		First Sunday in Lent
19 Feb (Tues)		Guild Fund-raising event
24 Feb (Sun)	10.30	Second Sunday in Lent Uniformed Organisations Service (Spectrum 1 and Springboard meet as usual)
1 Mar (Fri)	19.30	World Day of Prayer Pre-Communion Service
	20.00	Pre-Communion Kirk Session Meeting Start of Lent/Easter offering
3 Mar (Sun)		Third Sunday in Lent Communion Services at 9.00, 10.30 and 15.00 Springboard and Spectrum meet as usual at 10.00 and 10.30
10 Mar (Sun)		Fourth Sunday in Lent
13 Mar (Wed)	19.00	Trustees Meeting
	19.30	Kirk Session Meeting
17 Mar (Sun)		Fifth Sunday in Lent Annual Business Meeting of Congregation during the 10.30 service
	12 noon	Spectrum 3 Project Lunch (after 10.30 service)
19 Mar (Tues)	19.30	End of second term for Springboard and Spectrum Congregational Board Meeting
21 Mar (Thurs)		Pre-school – end of second term

24 Mar (Sun)		Palm Sunday Special activity for children	19 May (Sun)	09.30	Pentecost Pentecost Communion Service
Mon 25 -Fri 29 Mar	19.30	Holy Week Services (Morningside Parish Church)		10.30	Pentecost Celebration
31 Mar (Sun)		Easter Day Communion	20-21 May (Mon/Tues)		Pre-school closed
	09.30	All Age Celebration (followed by egg rolling in Braidburn Valley Park)	31 May (Fri)	19.30	Pre-Communion Service
	10.30	Scout Jumble Sale		20.00	Pre-Communion Session Meeting
6 Apr (Sat)		First Sunday Service led by World Mission	2 Jun (Sun)		Communion Services at 9.00, 10.30 and 15.00 Springboard and Spectrum meet as usual at 10.00 and 10.30
7 Apr (Sun)	09.30	Springboard start of third term	4 Jun (Tues)	19.30	Congregational Board Meeting Moving on Service
	10.00	Spectrum start of third term	9 Jun (Sun)	10.30	End of term for Springboard and Spectrum Congregational Picnic
	10.30	Pre-school – start of third term.			Kirk Session Meeting
9 Apr (Tue)		Pre-school – Spring holiday	11 June (Tues)	19.30	First of Summer Family Services
15 Apr (Mon)		Kirk Session Meeting	16 Jun (Sun)	09.30	Pre-school – end of year
23 Apr (Tues)	19.30	First Sunday Service led by Help the Homeless	27 Jun (Thurs)		<i>NB Crèche and Children's Activity at 10.30 Service every Sunday.</i>
5 May (Sun)	09.30	Pre-school closed			
6 May (Mon)		Christian Aid Week			
14-19 May (Mon–Sun)					



Scottish Love in Action
Summer Fair + Coffee Morning
10-12 Sat.16th June
Greenbank Church Hall

£2.50 Adults £1 Children Under 2's free

Teas + coffees, baking, plants,
home produce, bric- a- brac, books, CD's, DVD's, face painting,
tombola, silent auction and more

COME ALONG !



June Issue

The Spiritual Heart of the Monarchy

As the nation celebrates the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, the Rev Dr Ian Bradley reflects on the spiritual influence of the Church of Scotland on the monarchy.

A Decade of Change

Ten years on from the publication of *Outside Verdict*, his controversial critique of the Church of Scotland, Harry Reid reflects on the church today and looks to the future.

Twenty Years of the Glasgow Gospel

It is 30 years since Jamie Stuart first conceived the Scots Gospel and 20 years since his Glaswegian version made him famous. Jamie and his friend Dr Donald Smith tell Thomas Baldwin how it all started.

A Time of Crisis and Opportunity

Michael Gunn reports on an uncertain future for Christians in Egypt.

Changing Church

A project in Dundee which is seeking to improve the lives of young parents and their children.

A Majestic Structure

John R Hume commends the 'soaring lightness' in the design of an Ayr church.

View from the Pew

Dr Anastasia Somerville-Wong highlights the importance of life-long learning for congregations.

Biblical Botanicals

Muriel Armstrong describes the biblical connections of the humble cucumber.

Worship for a New Age?

The Rev Bryan Kerr considers the role of interaction in worship.

Plus all the regular columnists, letters, reviews and crosswords – all for just £1.80

Life and Work needs you

Please send submissions for parish news, View from the Pew and The Big Picture to Life and Work, 121 George Street, Edinburgh EH2 4YN or magazine@lifeandwork.org

Congregational Register

*Omitted from the online
version of the Leaflet*

Welcome Teams

June

3rd

John Ritchie, Eric Brown, Stewart Coghill, Ralph Davidson, Susan Inch, Gill Sweetman, Ian Thomson, David Easton, Susan Jackman

10th

Stuart Sanders, Moira Davidson, Stuart Macmillan, John Murison, Rachel Cadell, Jenny Wright, Sandy Cameron, Sally Stephen

17th

Roger Bland, Eileen Campbell, Richard Dunbar, Clifford Hastings, Chris Horne, Doris Laing, Enid Mowat, Robert Nimmo, Keith Winton

24th **John Rutherford**, David Allan, Richard Denison, Kenneth Htet-Khin, Caroline Kehoe, Anne Kinnear, John Mowat, Jean Roynon-Jones, Colin Winchester

July 1st **Donald King**, Brian Barron, Walter Crosby, Donald MacLeod, Roderick Morrison, Mairi Stevenson, Jim Young, Kathryn Sangster

8th **Ian Thom**, Keith Clark, Ray Dely, Catherine Hardie, Elizabeth Htet-Khin, Anne Oxbrow, Isobel Thom, Kay Ellis, Charles Black, Greig Scott

15th **Rosemary McCulloch**, Rona Ferguson, Fiona Grant, Frank Hutson, Christina Morrow, Alison Murison, Malcolm Reid, Joan Ritchie, Peter Shannon

22nd **John George**, Kenneth Aitken, Alastair Hunter, Hazel Macaulay, Kathleen Patrick, Jill Powlett-Brown, Dorothy Whitehead, Tony Foster

29th **Alan Armit**, Edith Armit, Louise Coghill, Hugh Cowan, Iain Davidson, Michael Pearson, Malcolm Watters, Nora Kellock, Elizabeth Mackay

August 5th **John Ritchie**, Eric Brown, Stewart Coghill, Ralph Davidson, Susan Inch, Gill Sweetman, Ian Thomson, David Easton, Susan Jackman

12th **Donald King**, Brian Barron, Walter Crosby, Donald MacLeod, Roderick Morrison, Mairi Stevenson, Jim Young, Kathryn Sangster

19th **Stuart Sanders**, Moira Davidson, Stuart Macmillan, John Murison, Rachel Cadell, Jenny Wright, Sandy Cameron, Sally Stephen

26th **John Rutherford**, David Allan, Richard Denison, Kenneth Htet-Khin, Caroline Kehoe, Anne Kinnear, John Mowat, Jean Roynon-Jones, Colin Winchester

Sept 2nd **Ian Thom**, Keith Clark, Ray Dely, Catherine Hardie, Elizabeth Htet-Khin, Anne Oxbrow, Isobel Thom, Kay Ellis, Charles Black, Greig Scott

Coffee Rota

June 3rd Communion Sunday - No coffee
10th Jean Roynon-Jones
17th Hazel Macaulay
24th Joan and John Ritchie



July 1st Jill Powlett-Brown
8th Dorothy Whitehead and Caroline Kehoe
15th Helen and Kenneth Aitken
22nd Anne Oxbrow and Doris Laing
29th David Jack

August

5th Moira and Iain Davidson
12th Alison and Maurice Berrill
19th Rosemary McCulloch
26th Vivien Hutchison and Margot Fergusson

Creche Rota



June 3rd Christina Morrow Fenella Murray
10th Alison Ambler Liz Foster
17th Jenny Wright Grace Pollock
24th Eileen McKinnon Fenella Murray

July 1st Shona Murray Charlotte Tucker
8th Cathie McLennan Grace Pollock
15th Isobel Thom Fenella Murray
22nd Rosemary Collier Carrie Reid
29th Elaine Crummey Grace Pollock

August 5th Valerie Macniven Fenella Murray
12th Jill Mundy Liz Foster
19th Kathryn Shannon Grace Pollock
26th Sharon Hamilton Fenella Murray

Flower Rota

	provided by	delivered by
June 3rd	Weir Family	Charlotte Tucker
10th	Anne Oxbrow	Irene Horne
17th	Taylor/MacGregor Wedding	Dorothy Whitehead
24th	Malcolm Green	Doris Laing
July 1st	Jennie Johnson	Anne Morham
8th	Kathleen Patrick	Alison Murison
15th	Anne Mason	Margo Fraser
22nd	Dorothy Whitehead	Moira Davidson
29th	Rutherford Family	Cathie MacLennan
August 5th	Gina Millar	Kay Ellis
12th	Winton Family	Ishbel Clark
19th	Hutson Family	Anne Mason
26th	Hutchison Family	Isabel Hunter



Sept 2nd Ritchie Family Alison Ambler

Material for the September leaflet should be delivered to the Church Office or to the Editors' pigeon-hole in the Main Hall by Sunday 12th August or sent by e-mail by 9am on Tuesday 14th August to greenbankleaflet@googlemail.com

PEOPLE WHO PRAYED:

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON (1850-94)

Greenbank and its immediate neighbourhood have several links with Robert Louis Stevenson. At the southern end of Braidburn Valley Park there is a sign with the words “Robert Louis Stevenson’s Road to Swanston and the Pentlands”. Long before the church was built, Stevenson would make his way up Comiston Road and along the western edge of the Braidburn Valley to take the path known as Cockmylane up the hill to Swanston Road and from there to the family summer retreat at Swanston Cottage. Just over a mile south of Greenbank Church the Tusitala Restaurant and The Pavilion Bar commemorate Stevenson’s reputation as a storyteller: “Tusitala” was the nearest the people of Samoa could get to pronouncing “storyteller”, while a pavilion among the blowing sand hills of the east coast was the setting for his Scottish adventure, “A Pavilion on the Links”. And down the hill from Greenbank, in Morningside Cemetery, lie the mortal remains of Alison Cunningham, Stevenson’s beloved nanny “Cummy”. In later life she lived in a small flat at 23 Balcarres Street before moving in with a cousin at 1 Comiston Place, where she died in July 1913 aged 91.

Cummy was a formidable influence on the young Stevenson. Because his mother suffered poor health for many years, Cummy was like a second mother to him. In adulthood he wrote to her, saying “You have made much that there is in me, just as surely as if you had conceived me”. A fisherman’s daughter from Torryburn in Fife, she herself had been brought up on a diet of porridge, Presbyterianism and the Covenanters. Undoubtedly devoted and caring, at the same time she filled her charge’s impressionable and imaginative head with blood-curdling tales of the Covenanters, pumped him full of puritan morals, sang him psalms, made him fear the Devil and was in no short measure responsible for fuelling his guilt-ridden, sin soaked nightmares. However, her theatrical reciting of the Bible stories sowed in young Louis a passion for drama and the melodramatic that would never leave him.

Another formative influence must have been his maternal grandfather, after whom he had been named. The Reverend Lewis Balfour was minister of Colinton from 1823 to his death in 1860. Young Louis’ nursery games were often kirk-based. He would dress up as a minister in Cummy’s cloak, stick pieces of paper in his collar as clerical bands, stand on a chair and preach a sermon on hell-fire and damnation to anyone who would listen. Stevenson’s upbringing was on the north side of the city. Born at 8 Howard Place in Inverleith, he moved first of all across the road to Inverleith Terrace and then to 17 Heriot Row, from where he went to school. His father, Thomas, had hoped that Louis would follow the family tradition and become an engineer, but he gave up his engineering studies in favour of law. Louis the lawyer was never a serious proposition: what he really wanted to be was a writer, an artist and a free spirit. Stevenson spent several unhappy years at the University of Edinburgh, preferring to spend his time walking, talking and drinking. As well as adopting a relatively unconventional lifestyle, he further upset his father, an orthodox believer, his mother, a devout daughter of the manse,

and Cummy by his seeming agnosticism in doubting the existence of God.

It was not until the last years of his life that Stevenson returned to religion. Plagued by ill-health, he and his family had travelled widely in the United States and the islands of the Pacific in search of a climate which would suit his health and prolong his life. He eventually settled in Samoa, where he was to spend most of the last five years of his life. There the little boy who had played at being a minister and the young man who had fiercely opposed conventional bourgeois Christianity now in his early forties sought to develop a simple moral and religious code.

The result was family prayers at his new home, Vailima. In her introduction to a little collection of his prayers, published after his death, his wife Fanny described how Louis adopted the Samoan practice of closing the day with prayer and the singing of hymns. While for some it may have been no more than a duty fulfilled, she claimed that for her husband “prayer, the direct appeal, was a necessity. When he was happy he felt impelled to offer thanks for that undeserved joy; when in sorrow, or pain, to call for strength to bear what must be borne.”

This attitude is reflected in one of Stevenson’s prayers, sometimes called “The Happiness Prayer”:

*Grant to us, O Lord, the royalty of inward happiness,
and the serenity which comes from living close to thee.
Daily renew in us the sense of joy,
and let the eternal spirit of the Father dwell in our souls and bodies,
filling every corner of our hearts with light and grace;
so that, bearing about with us the infection of good courage,
we may be diffusers of life,
and may meet all ills and cross accidents
with gallant and high-hearted happiness,
giving thee thanks always for all things.*

Stevenson’s words help us to focus on what God might be doing through whatever circumstances surround us. “Living close to thee” might be defined in any number of ways: however the outcome of “living close to thee” is inward happiness and serenity, an unearned, undeserved gift of God, a royalty. The rest of the prayer asks God to use us for God’s purposes. That means surrendering our agenda in favour of God’s agenda. No one wants to get an infection, but in this prayer we pray for the infection of good courage, so that we can pass something on to others just by being near them. We pray that we may be “diffusers of life”. To diffuse is to spread or pour out widely. The light and grace of God that fill every corner of our hearts is what we will share as “diffusers of life”. How can we be a “diffuser of life” in the many places we find ourselves during the average week? How can we assist others to cope with whatever happens (“cross accidents” are those which cross our path, give us a cross to bear and make us cross)? Everyone will answer a bit differently. The point is to ask these questions of ourselves and let God direct us, so that with Stevenson and with St Paul we may “give thanks in all circumstances”.

For further reading:

There are many biographies of RLS available.

Prayers Written At Vailima may be read online at

http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/s/stevenson/robert_louis/s848vp/