

THE SCOTS KIRK PARIS

Report to the International Presbytery October 2019 - March 2020

Since our last meeting in October, we in the city of Paris have had a rather interesting and challenging time, especially at the end of the year! The *gilets jaunes* were still demonstrating, albeit in smaller numbers, but as before, all the metro stations around the church were closed since we are very close to the Elysée Palace and a number of government buildings. Added to that, a national strike against pension reform was called in early December and as a result the transport system in and around Paris was virtually paralysed until the end of January.

This meant that many of our regulars could not get into the city and a number of the weekly activities and meetings taking place in the church were put on hold. However, attendance held up on Sunday mornings thanks to those who drive, cycle and walk to church and of course we continued to welcome a fair amount of visitors who either walked or were close enough to automated metro line 1. Things are back to normal now but who knows when it might all flare up again!

Despite this, there is plenty good news to report!

New elder



At the end of November one of our French members, Erwan Kucharski, was ordained as an elder for a period of two years. Erwan is by far the youngest member of Session and is brimming over with ideas for the SKP. We appreciate his fresh input and are grateful for his contribution to our community.

Dedication and baptism

Two little babies were welcomed into the SKP family in December and January. Little Nnanna is the son of a Nigerian couple and baby Faith the daughter of a Senagalese mother and Nigerian father. On both occasions we were treated to some beautiful African outfits!



Finance

Like many congregations we are constantly looking at ways to improve our finances. At the end of the year we held a brief stewardship campaign in which we detailed our weekly expenses (cleaner, lift maintenance, electricity, etc., etc.) and compared them to our weekly offerings. The congregation was given the figures through our newsletter and the result is that 13 people are now contributing by direct debit, up from 8 in 2018. This is most encouraging.

Helping others

We continue our work with the *Missionnaires de la Charité* through our weekly contributions of food and toiletries; it is hoped that some of our members might feel able to help out physically on a regular basis since volunteers are also needed to serve meals and reach out to the homeless on the streets.

Incumbents Board

We are pleased to announce that one of our members has kindly offered to pay for an incumbents board which we plan to hang on the landing next to the large wooden cross. A decision will be taken very shortly as to lettering and layout and we hope to have the board on display by April.

Donald Caskie

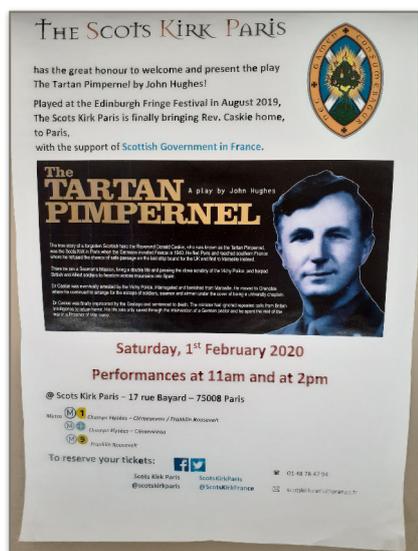
One of the highlights of the last six months must surely be *The Tartan Pimpernel*, a play by John Hughes, which was performed twice in the church on 1st February. After a successful run at the Edinburgh fringe, the cast of just three agreed to play for us in Paris free of charge. Our extensive advertising paid off and we had a very sizable turnout at the morning and afternoon performances, raising over €1000 euros for church funds. Our thanks go to Scottish Government in France for subsidizing the event and helping to make it such a success.

When you were in Paris last March you may have noticed a piece of sheet music in the Donald Caskie display cabinet. Mme Ginette Dalleré, who knew Donald Caskie personally, explains how it came to be there: "When I was a student, I spent 2 years in Scotland, one in Aberdeen and one in Edinburgh. While in Aberdeen, I started Scottish Country Dancing and it has played a large part in my life.

It was thanks to Scottish Country Dancing that I met Dr Caskie. It was in 1959. I was back in France and I knew that there was Scottish Country Dancing at the Scots Kirk in Paris on Friday evenings. So, I wrote to Dr Caskie to ask if I could come and join in the dancing on Fridays. He answered by return of post that I would be welcome and that he would "vouch" for me! I danced at the Kirk for nearly two years. Dr Caskie was there every Friday and that is how I came to know him well. I realize how privileged I was to have met him. He was kind and welcoming to everybody, always greeting you with a smile and full of humour.

When he left Paris in 1961, I decided to do something that would give French people the opportunity to discover the Tartan Pimpernel. I started researching into his life, work and personality, before, during and after the War in order to give lectures in French about this “*homme de Foi et héros de l’Ombre*”. I went to the National Library of Scotland in Edinburgh to study all the documents they had concerning him. One day, I made an unexpected discovery: a piece of sheet music on which there was the tune of a strathspey dedicated to the Rev. Caskie, a treasure for me, all the more so as I was allowed to have a photocopy of the precious score. This photocopy is now part of the Donald Caskie exhibit in the Scots Kirk.

Years later, in 2009, two friends of mine kindly played and recorded the tune for me. The fiddler is Keith Smith, one of the best contemporary Scottish fiddlers and the pianist, James Gray, is highly appreciated by country dancers. It was a privilege to hear this lovely tune at the unveiling of the showcase dedicated to Dr Caskie on the 7th of April 2019. It was a fitting and moving tribute to him who enjoyed Scottish Country Dancing so much and particularly strathspeys which are slow dances full of elegance, gracefulness and poise, typically Scottish, unique in traditional dancing.



The tune, “The Reverend Dr Caskie”, subtitled ‘The Tartan Pimpernel’, is perfectly in keeping with Dr Caskie’s love of strathspey tunes”.

Mme Dalleré was not the only person in the audience to have met Donald Caskie in person and it was fascinating to hear the many first-hand accounts of this little-known war hero.

Youth Presbytery

The Scots Kirk Paris hosted the International Youth Presbytery on February 21-23. A group of 15 young people met several times during the weekend: first to get to know each other, then to discuss various issues and organise the church service for the Sunday. Dana Buchholtz (the IP Youth Representative) will present the questions, answers, discussions and conclusions of the debates at the IP meeting in Gibraltar.

“As an elder of the Paris congregation and a young participant in this event, I can safely say that this weekend will be seen as the foundation stone and starting point for further important reflections on how to better involve young people in church life and how to organise and develop local groups dedicated to the younger generations. It was clear throughout the weekend that everyone was very enthusiastic about this event and about what they were learning during it. The two participants from Amsterdam for example gave us a few ideas about how to create a better group routine for our respective young adult groups. The diversity of the participants, who came from various countries (e.g. Cameroon, Canada, England, France, Germany, Kenya, The Netherlands, Scotland, etc.), gave this event an international stature and a consistent value. Now back in our

respective congregations across Europe, we are looking forward to the next time we meet and are all already thinking about other international events we might create and organise to give young people the place they deserve in our beloved church!

Erwan Kucharski, Elder of the Scots Kirk Paris"

