Advent greetings, brothers and sisters in Christ!

It is with great joy that we share this Advent and Christmas newsletter with you, accompanied by a programme of services and events taking place across our parish. Each gathering offers an opportunity for fellowship, encouragement and, above all, to worship Jesus Christ, Emmanuel, God with us.

Since taking up my role as Urban Team Minister, I have been genuinely encouraged by the remarkable amount of service, generosity and commitment across West Moray. Whether you serve as an elder, volunteer your time, offer hospitality, care for others or quietly uphold people in prayer, please know how thankful I am. Much of what you do happens without recognition, but none of it is insignificant. Everything offered in love for Christ and His Church matters.

Recently, a number of our elders gathered to pray, reflect and begin discerning something of God's vision for West Moray. Together we read Luke 10:1–24, where Jesus sends out seventy-two of His followers, instructing them to bring peace, heal the sick and proclaim:

"The kingdom of God has come near to you." (Luke 10:9)
Those words have stayed with me. Over the past two months, I have been privileged to hear something of your stories, both within the church and across our communities. Stories of joy and gratitude, sadness and loss, uncertainty and hope. As I have reflected and prayed for you, I keep returning to that same wonderful truth:

The kingdom of God has come near.
Ecclesiastes reminds us that there is a time for everything and a season for every activity under heaven (3:1). Our lives contain seasons of celebration and sorrow, confidence and uncertainty. Yet through them all, the good news remains unchanged. God's kingdom is not some distant possibility, beyond our reach. In Jesus Christ, God Himself has come to us.

The kingdom is near because the King has come.
Not a king who rules through fear, but One who comes in humility, welcomes the overlooked, heals the broken and gives His life for our salvation. Through His resurrection, Jesus has conquered death, and He reigns today. Advent invites us to remember the King who has come, rejoice in His presence with us now, and look forward to His coming again.

As we look towards 2027, I am encouraged by what God might have in store for us. We have begun important conversations about our shared life, our care for one another, our children and young people, our communities, and what it means to grow together as disciples of Jesus. We do not have all the answers, but perhaps we begin simply by drawing nearer to Christ, listening to His Word and learning to follow wherever He leads.

Every member has a place. Every disciple has a part. And none of us is sent alone.
As you look through our Christmas programme, I encourage you to join us whenever you can in worship and in fellowship. Perhaps invite a friend to join you or reach out to someone who might otherwise be alone. My prayer is that you would know the peace, hope and presence of Jesus Christ. For the King who came at Bethlehem is the King who walks with us today, and the King who will one day restore all things.

The kingdom of God has come near.
May that wonderful truth fill us with hope this Advent, joy this Christmas, and renewed purpose as we step together into a new year.
With every blessing and my prayers for you all,

Rev Stuart Finlayson
Urban Team Minister
West Moray Church of Scotland