

Black Isle Charge Profile

Almighty God, you know the needs of your Church in every place. Look graciously upon us, the people of the Scottish Episcopal Church on the Black Isle and grant us the guidance of your Holy Spirit as we seek a new Rector for this Charge. Give us discernment, wisdom, and confidence in your timing. All this we ask as we walk in your ways to the glory of your name. Amen

The following seeks to introduce prospective candidates for the role to the Joint Black Isle Charge, the churches and congregations that make up the Charge and provide a flavour of the characteristics of each individual church. The congregations collaborated and produced the document.

Who and what we are:

The Black Isle Charge is part of the Scottish Episcopal Church (SEC) and comprises three churches within the United Diocese of Moray, Ross and Caithness, each self-sufficient in terms of managing week-by-week issues. The churches could be seen as having small, functioning congregations that thrive and grow through participation and are keen to work with the priest.

Where we are:

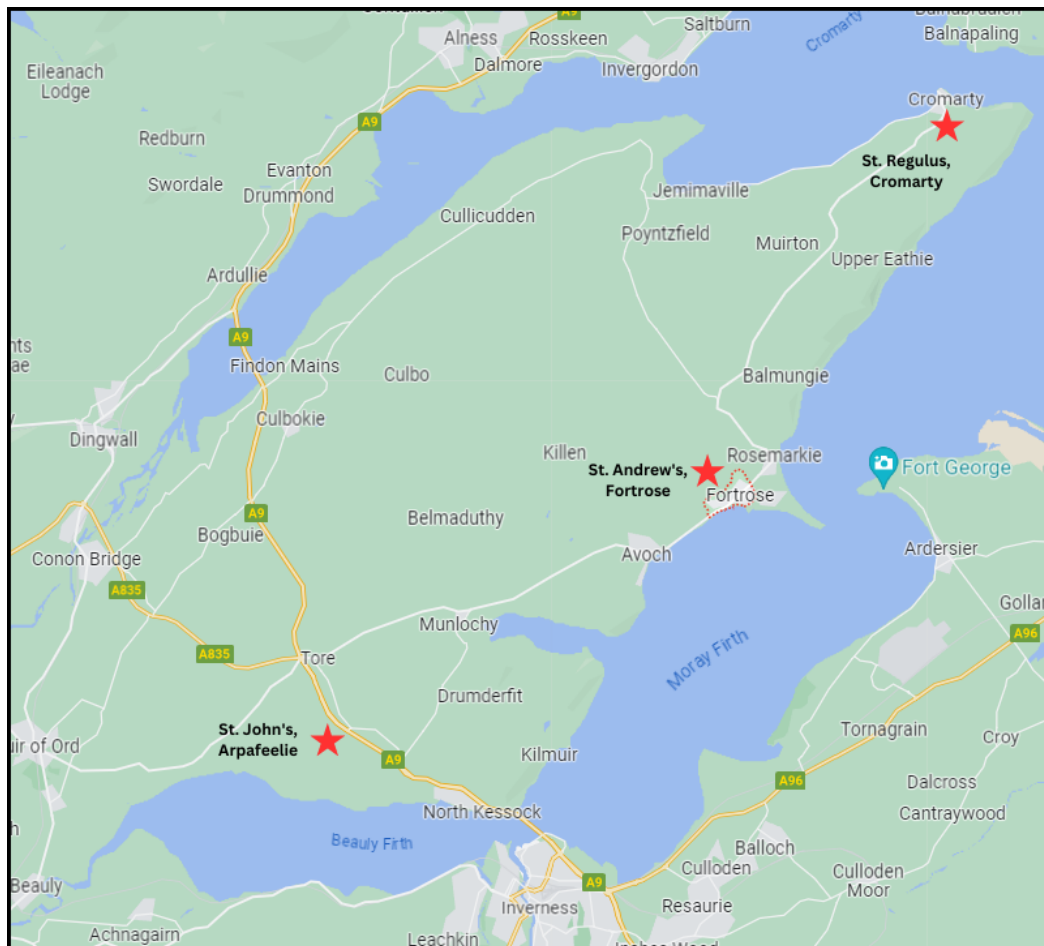
Despite its name, the Black Isle is a peninsula and is not an island, so has excellent road links to it from the A9 north and south and also throughout the parish itself. It is bounded by the Moray Firth and the Cromarty Firth and boasts stunning vistas of rolling hills, lush farmland, and picturesque coastal villages. Its idyllic countryside is adorned with heather-covered moorlands, dense woodlands and rivers.

Steeped in history, the Black Isle reveals its secrets through its historic sites and ruins. From the atmospheric ruins of the medieval fortification, Redcastle, to the enigmatic standing stones of Rosemarkie, echoes of the past resonate throughout the land. The ruins of Fortrose Cathedral still stand in the centre of the village and some of the stone was used to build local houses.

For nature lovers, the Black Isle is a haven of wildlife. The Moray Firth is home to a resident population of bottlenose dolphins, often seen leaping through the

waves while colonies of seals bask on the shores. Birdwatchers are rewarded with sightings of ospreys, elusive otters, and a rich variety of seabirds.

It is a place where beauty, history, and the spirit of Scotland intertwine, leaving an indelible mark on all who come here.



The three SEC churches are situated in the Highlands of Scotland, just north of Inverness on a peninsula. They are at St John's Church, Arpafeelie, on the extreme south-west of the Black Isle, St Andrew's Church in Fortrose in the centre of the Black Isle to the east and St Regulus' Church, Cromarty at the northernmost tip of the peninsula.

From Fortrose, either of the other churches are less than a 30 minute drive and this goes for any other part of the parish itself. The individual church profiles follow, and thereafter a description of the joint charge.

St John the Evangelist, Arpafeelie

We, the congregation of St John the Evangelist, Arpafeelie, are a small but vibrant, active and cohesive group of people. We all get along, help each other and are open and inclusive. We are a true church family – togetherness is our strength.

The Church of St John the Evangelist is the oldest church in the Diocese of Moray, Ross and Caithness, built in 1816, though the original chapel of St John, now a ruin a few miles to the east, was built in the 13th Century by the Knights Templar. Our church has a fine hammer beam roof and a wonderful stained glass window above a beautiful old carved, raised, wooden altar with Gaelic inscriptions – it was once the chief centre of the Gaelic-speaking church people of the Black Isle. It seats up to 120 in the fixed pews. There is a small kitchen and toilet on the east end and a newly tarmacked road leads all the way up from the A9.



As a rural church we are not situated within a town or village like the other churches in the charge, but rather pull in congregation members from the outer reaches of the Black Isle, from as far as Kiltarlity, Muir of Ord, Resolis, Dingwall and North Kessock. This makes for a different dynamic; as a smaller church we join with the joint charge for many of the church activities such as bible studies, whilst embracing our own wider community with more local activities.



We have a regular congregation of 12-15 each Sunday, with more at Christmas and Easter; and maybe 1 or 2 weddings and 2 or 3 christenings a year. Members of the congregation are active in various community welfare projects, such as street pastoring, the food bank, the church charity shop, community driver scheme and the Blythswood shoe box appeal. Undoubtedly the church has an age demographic loaded towards the top end with a good number of the congregation having retired. We have a broad ecumenical outlook with a range of worshippers,

perhaps more leaning to the relaxed than the high. Quite a few have a presbyterian background but enjoy worship at St John's.

There is no regular organist at the moment, though our electric organ is used for weddings, and we also have a piano, which is kept tuned. We often have musical contributions from the congregation, and our music group also provides music at the annual community carol service.

At Present the Rector leads the service twice a month, and two retired priests take one monthly service each. Members of the congregation are trained servers and four are currently training to be Eucharistic ministers. We do not have a regular Sunday School at present: some children come occasionally with a family who are "dancing on the edge"; the Sunday School has been taken in the church kitchen. More children come at Christmas and various young adults visit with their families when they are home. There is a youth fellowship at the Rectory around once a month, which is very valuable and much appreciated by the families involved.

We are happy to enjoy a good relationship with the local Church of Scotland and partake in various joint activities, including an annual walk and joint service with Killearnan church during the week of Christian Unity. We organise a community carol service in the North Kessock hall, providing the music, readings and refreshments, and the Church of Scotland joins us for this; it has been very popular. Our presence is welcomed at the local community market 3 or 4 times a year where we have a stall with home baking and craft and provide an opportunity for folk to chat with us and get to know who we are.



As a congregation we are independent and capable of looking after the day to day running of the church and its building, which we all hold dear; however we also have a very good working relationship with the Rector and enjoy the balance of these two aspects of being part of a joint charge. We all share the duties of running the church, from the cleaning, flowers, and maintenance, to readings, intercessions, and teas. No one person feels they bear all the weight of each of these things, however every member of the congregation steps forward to help willingly, if someone is away or ill or unable to fulfil their role. We are a team – we very much look out for each other.

In writing this profile we asked our members to think of words that describe us as a congregation – the qualities that reflect our strong sense of community. The words and phrases that we feel best sum us up are “Harmonious’, ‘Inclusive’, ‘Happy & positive’, ‘The congregation all get on’, ‘We’re a family’, ‘We support each other’, ‘Caring and helpful to older members of the congregation’.



We were sent a testimonial by Rev Canon John Riches of the Scottish Episcopal Church, who visits our church occasionally from Glasgow St Mary’s Cathedral, which we also feel might help a prospective candidate get a sense of what the congregation is about:

“I’ve been an occasional visitor to St John’s now for over twenty years. It seems to me a model of what a small, healthy congregation can and should be. It’s always welcoming. The congregation are confident and easy with each other, and enjoying a very good relationship with the Rector and the other priests who come and take services. There are often new faces there and always a good crowd at the major festivals. I always look forward to worshipping there. It’s a lively, thoughtful and supportive community”

St Andrew's Church, Fortrose

St Andrew's seeks to nurture a living tradition of praise and prayer in a beautiful nineteenth-century building, situated a stone's throw from Fortrose's ruined medieval cathedral.

Past

Our congregation can trace its history back to 1688, the year of 'Glorious Revolution'. We are privileged to meet in a distinctive Category 'B'-listed building, built in the 1820s and extended at various stages throughout the late nineteenth and early



twentieth centuries. A small section of stained glass contained within one of its magnificent Baptistry windows is believed to originate from nearby Fortrose Cathedral, providing a tangible link to this area's rich ecclesiastical heritage.

Fortrose's many layers of rich history, centred on its ancient cathedral, are perhaps best captured by much-loved local writer Elizabeth Sutherland:

In the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries Fortrose must have been a very busy town full of canons, vicars choral, chaplains, choristers, vergers, masons and a multitude of servants including their relatives and families ... Today on a summer's evening, the old red sandstone ruins glow against the carefully tended Green guarded by dark sentinel yews. It does not take too much imagination to see the great building as it once was in all its medieval magnificence and to hear, once again, the ghostly voices of long gone choristers.

It's good occasionally to look back with thanksgiving and humility on the ladder of time and realise we are not at the top nor indeed the bottom but somewhere half way up. Deo Gratias.

Present

Who we are: ours is a genuinely welcoming, warm and growing congregation, mostly comprising middle-aged and older people, although all age groups are represented. We take traditional liturgy seriously, as well as hospitality. Outreach and visibility are important to us; we value good relations with the local community. We embrace diversity and strive to be a fully inclusive church.

Sunday worship defines us, as our central activity – we seek to meet with God, first and foremost. We assemble weekly at 11:30am for a service of Sung Eucharist, with parts of the 1982 Scottish Liturgy distinctively set to various traditional Scottish melodies. We enjoy traditional hymns and contemporary praise from a wide range of sources. Worship is ably accompanied by a fine digitally-enhanced organ, which was introduced in 2008, enhanced by a choir which offers a Communion anthem. Congregation members actively participate in reading Scripture, leading prayers and assisting the Celebrant. Tea/coffee, home baking and warm fellowship is available following each service.

Where we are: St Andrew's is sited on a scenic clifftop in Fortrose, a former Royal burgh with a population of approximately 1700 residents. It benefits from a pre-school and secondary academy, community library and leisure centre, a good retail offer (including a pharmacy and Post Office) as well as a range of other local services. The city of Inverness is within easy reach, within around 30 minutes' journey time. Fortrose's origins date to Neolithic times, although the town flourished during medieval times; in the thirteenth century a new cathedral church was built as a seat for the Bishop of Ross. Parts of this handsome building remain and are of considerable interest. Chanonry Point is a major draw, as it offers an unrivalled opportunity to view bottlenose dolphins.

What we do: we are acutely aware of a responsibility to meet both spiritual and physical needs within our local community; we therefore seek to be salt and light to our beloved friends, following Christ's example. In addition to main Sunday worship, a mid-week Eucharist and monthly healing service, our community is sustained and looks outward through a wide range of activities, on both a single congregation and Joint Charge basis. These are introduced below in turn:

Study Group

Study Group is held weekly in the Rectory, led by the Rector. All are welcome, but generally there is about a dozen who attend when they are able.

Subject matter is chosen by the Rector, or suggested by the group, e.g. a book from the Bible or a relevant film, or the use of the SEI Lent course, considering the Lord's Prayer, phrase by phrase. It is an informal group, all are encouraged to

speak if they so wish, which can lead to interesting meanderings down various paths of discussion. It is a valuable opportunity to clarify thoughts, share opinions, and occasionally receive support in a safe space.

Merry Widows

This is a new idea of people who live alone gathering once every second month for Sunday lunch. The first such luncheon took place on 11th June 2023. Lunch is open to all in the community; it is not restricted to church members.

Choir

St Andrew's has a small but dedicated church choir of seven ladies. They sing the communion hymn/anthem a cappella every week, usually in unison. However, for special occasions, they will sing soprano and alto, sometimes inviting non-members to join them adding tenor and bass parts. The choir surpassed itself in 2019 by singing Pergolesi's 'Stabat Mater' to a packed audience. The choir itself very often chooses unknown modern anthems, providing the congregation with a new musical experience.

Blythswood Care Shoebox Appeal (Coffeebox)

Our Blythswood Shoebox campaign is supported by all three churches; St Andrew's, St Regulus' and St John's. We meet monthly to wrap as many shoeboxes as we can! Then later on in the year we meet weekly to have 'filling stations' and beautiful gifts as well as the essentials are placed inside to make a wonderful, loving present. Our first year we sent 171 to Eastern Europe, last year 441! This year we hope to do more.

Out of the need for filling the boxes, we started a monthly fundraising coffee morning, called 'Coffeebox'. Each Friday in Lent there is a soup and sandwich lunch, also to raise funds.

Also, out of the need to fill the boxes on a grand scale, we have a Monday craft group where we have made scarves, hats, sewing kits, face-cloths, notebooks and bracelets! Our boxes also go to war-torn Ukraine as well as the poorest countries in Eastern Europe. Our Faith in Action.

The Friendship Club

St Andrew's Church has been at the forefront of the Friendship Club since at least the 1970's, and it is their members who administer its operation. The Club meets fortnightly in the Seaforth Lodge in Fortrose. All are welcome and those without transport are collected. Average attendance is 12 - 14. Afternoon tea is provided followed by a small raffle, a quiz and possibly a speaker. Sometimes a local choir will entertain. Usually in June there is a coach outing and we try to have a meal

together every quarter. Members find us by word of mouth, coming from Fortrose and Rosemarkie, but also further afield. These members often support other church fundraising events such as Coffee Mornings, Car Boot Sales, Flower Shows etc. Members pay a token amount to cover costs and clearly enjoy the benefits of coming together and making friends.

Food Bank

All three churches serve as collection points for donations to the Highland Foodbank, which is run by Blythwood Care, a local Christian charity. Non-perishable items given by the congregations and members of the wider community and are regularly transported by volunteers to the Foodbank premises in Inverness.

Future

Bishop Mark recently charged each congregation in the Moray, Ross and Caithness Diocese with the task of compiling a courageous and imaginative Five-Year Mission Plan. As a Joint Charge, we have identified four Pillars to frame this:

- Prayer;
- Social Justice and Care of Creation;
- Unity and Collaboration; and
- Visibility.

These four Pillars are to be underpinned by foundations of deep prayer, respect for tradition and a requirement for outcomes to be fit for the current post-pandemic time of climate emergency.

We also hope to establish a small crèche area, making it available for young families during Sunday services – we pray that this facility will gradually attract other families to worship and grow alongside us in the coming years.

St Regulus' Church, Cromarty

St Regulus' Church is situated in the centre of the historic town of Cromarty. It is a beautiful space in which to worship and to provide welcome. As a congregation we are committed to each other and enjoy working together. We embrace new initiatives as we adapt to changes in circumstances. The Church is committed to a Eucharistic service at the same time every week and this is lay led when a priest cannot be present. Indeed, there is a tradition of strong, empowered lay leadership both liturgically and more broadly. The congregation embraces different styles of worship. We worship 'in the round' to foster a sense of belonging and music and singing play an important role in this.

Coffee after the service on a Sunday morning is a very important time for catching up and discussing plans for our church life. We place great importance on being welcoming and in having the church open daily throughout the year for visitors and for private prayer and meditation. Polish and Ukrainian residents come to St Regulus' often to light a candle and are glad to use the church for their own private prayers.



Community Involvement

The congregation is involved in many community events, both as representatives of the church and as individuals themselves. The list of events at the church ranges from hosting the town's annual community 'Christmas Carols by Candlelight', a led event by that for the past 15 years has provided the inspiration for the start of Christmas, to the provision of space for a shared congregational Maundy Thursday meal as well as involving itself in more diverse events such as involvement in the town's regatta week. We provide storage for the community food larder. Some of our number are part of the Cromarty Care Project, a support network for those needing care with the objective of improving social isolation and general well-being. Others are involved with 'Men's Shed', the Classic Film Club, the Community Council, Transition Black Isle and the Cromarty Peace Group which uses St Regulus' Church as a hub.

Mission Plan

St Regulus has taken forward the action pillar of the Mission Plan, developed by the Joint Charge in response to the Bishop's call for a five year mission plan, in the following ways:

The action priority was to promote both social and environmental action. As well as the many local organisations our church members support, we initiated a "Cosy Cromarty" initiative in response to the increase in fuel bills over the last winter in collaboration with Cromarty Library, Cromarty Arts Trust and the Fishertown Inn.

We joined Eco-Congregation and were successful in getting a Green Plan fund from Changex to develop our environmental response. In collaboration with the Church of Scotland, Cromarty Primary School, Cromarty Courthouse, Transition Black Isle and Black Isle Repair Cafe, we are delivering ten activities with the funding. The main focus of this plan has been to offer an after-school club "Garden Fridays" to turn the neglected back garden of the church into a wildlife garden. This has provided an opportunity to make positive relationships with children and families and make them feel welcome in the church space and grounds. Recently, a Family Service has been held successfully encouraging young people (through the Garden Fridays scheme) to join the congregation and bring their parents along.



Other Church Activities

There was extensive youth work from 2017 to 2022. A team of volunteers ran a Sunday Club for local children almost every month (even throughout much of the pandemic when all other children's activities came to a hold) in conjunction with the local Church of Scotland congregation. 5 to 10 participants would usually turn up (with up to 25 on some summer events). Sunday Club also paved the way for other Cromarty events like the Advent Window Trail or the Children's Wishes Flags.

Other activities include a weekly Zoom session of Celtic Morning Prayer. There are also discussion groups set up such as those for Lent and Advent, open to anyone and not just members of the congregation.

Cromarty

The town itself is situated on the north-eastern tip of the Black Isle and stands as a testament to Scotland's rich heritage and timeless charm and is a home for around 750 residents.

One of Cromarty's most endearing and enduring qualities is its strong sense of community. The town hosts various cultural events and festivals from traditional music concerts, classical concerts through to art exhibitions and the annual Cromarty Film Festival and Crime and Thrillers Weekend and there is always something happening that showcases the village's vibrant spirit and creativity. The Open Gardens weekend is hugely popular and dovetails with an Art and Flowers exhibition and Open Studios event.

It is this creativity that binds many of the residents together. Cromarty is home to a thriving arts and crafts scene. The village's creative atmosphere is a testament to its ability to inspire and nurture artistic talent.

The Joint Charge

What we do together

It is a harmonious charge with three discrete congregations but ones that know and speak to each other through joint ventures that include a joint Vestry committee and other sub-committees such as a joint Mission and Ministry Group and a Fabric Committee. The congregations interreact through, for example, a 5th Sunday joint service held in one of the churches on a rotating basis. We work together in discharging a joint 5 year plan, commissioned by the Bishop, for the charge.

There is also a Charity Shop situated in the old church hall in Fortrose, just along from St Andrew's Church. It provides much needed extra income for the Black Isle Charge and is also a meeting place for the community. The shop is run by volunteers (from both church and community) on a rota, who work for three hours on a Wednesday and Saturday morning, 10am till 1pm.

The customers are regularly delighted with their purchases which are inexpensive; this encourages them to return on a regular basis.

People will often ask what the money is used for. When they understand it is for the church, they are happy to know they are contributing in a small way.

The stock in the shop is donated by local people, and when the takings amount to £1000, a sum of £100 is donated to a local charity.

A new monthly Joint Charge Prayer meeting began on 5th June 2023. It will be a quiet time together, no intercessions, just sitting quietly. Whoever is leading it will either say a prayer, and/or read a poem and/or play some music, then the group will sit peacefully for perhaps twenty minutes or so, after which, the leader will bring us out of the silence gently. This will be followed by tea or coffee.

There is joy and enthusiasm generated by a cohesive energy when the three congregations work together towards common goals. For example, a tranche of new Eucharistic Lay Ministers is currently in training together to provide support at each church.

Black Isle Charge 5 year Mission Process

The development of this model was central to how the Charge moves forward over the coming years. Founded on the principles of Prayer, Social Justice and Care of Creation, Unity and Collaboration and Visibility, much joint effort has gone into this very practical and useful tool. Our joint charge will develop and put into practice these principles over the coming months and years and indeed has already started in earnest around the churches.

General issues

We seek to encourage worship which is inclusive of all ages and traditions and keep an open table at communion for all who have been baptised. This is a time of great change outwith the SEC, particularly within the Church of Scotland where restructuring is taking place, and this provides a climate in which the SEC can be seen to be inclusive and supportive. The coming months and years will bring many challenges and opportunities in this respect.

Conclusion - what we are looking for in our new priest

We hope to find someone enthusiastic to the challenges and also the pleasures of working with such an interesting and participative group of congregations, someone who can understand and enjoy the different needs of the three individual congregations, embracing different styles of worship to appeal to a broad spectrum of worship styles from the more liturgical to an evangelical approach. As the motto of the Episcopal Church states "Evangelical Truth and Apostolic Order".

Ideally, our new priest would be involved in all the different communities of the Black Isle, be particularly able to work with the young and be able to build on existing initiatives. We seek a teacher and leader who is flexible and cooperative as well as humble, empathic and happy to delegate.

We pray for a priest who will minister to each and all of our communities, gain strength from our unity in diversity, and prayerfully lead us in Word and Sacrament, someone who can build upon our strengths, feed our spiritual growth, help us to grow together in Christ and reach out with us into our

communities and the wider world. For our part, we will welcome you, support you and pray for you. We thank you for taking time to read this.