

# Uist and Barra Parish Profile

A Ministry Opportunity



The Church of Scotland



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# Failte - Welcome

Thank you for taking the time to read our parish profile. We hope the document gives a flavour of our congregation and the Parish we serve. If further information is required please do not hesitate to contact our Interim Moderator,  
Rev Ann Inglis [revainglis@gmail.com](mailto:revainglis@gmail.com)

Our recently united parish, in the beautiful southern area of the Outer Hebrides, is seeking to call a full-time Minister of Word and Sacrament (MWS), to minister with us as we worship God and seek the growth of His Kingdom, serving one another and the community around us.



The background features a light grey gradient with decorative elements: a large red circle in the upper left, stylized grey coral branching across the left and bottom, and several grey seashell illustrations scattered throughout. A large, white, wavy-edged oval frame encloses the central text.

## ACTS 16 V 9.

A man of Macedonia was standing there,  
urging him and saying,  
“Come over to Macedonia and help us”

# Failte - Welcome



We are seeking a leader with vision and a sense of call, who is able to help establish a team ministry, to build and strengthen God's work in the islands. You should be ready and able to conduct worship in a variety of styles. Although you will not be obliged to learn Gaelic, you should be sympathetic to the Hebridean environment and respectful and supportive of Gaelic culture and heritage. You will be supported by an encouraging congregation and a dedicated team of volunteers.

Are you the person who can discern God's call to minister to and with us, as we share challenges and exciting opportunities offered by our new parish?

A warm Hebridean welcome awaits you.

# Ar misean - Our Mission

*Tha sinn a' gealltainn gun dèan sinn adhradh, gun dèan sinn fianais agus gun dèan sinn seirbheis, ag aithneachadh gur ann bhon Tighearna Iosa Crìosd a tha ar gairm.*

We pledge ourselves to worship, witness and service, recognising that our calling comes from our Lord Jesus Christ.

# Our Parish and Congregation

Uist and Barra Congregation was established in January 2025 within the Presbytery of Cleir Eilean I (Highlands and Hebrides) as a union of the former congregations of Barra, South Uist, Benbecula and Carinish. The elders and congregation have been working together, demonstrating a warmth and willingness to change, grow and develop.

Uist and Barra Parish is geographically large, extending from approximately 4 miles north of the village of Clachan on the west side of North Uist south through the inhabited islands of Grimsay, Benbecula, South Uist, Eriskay and Barra to Vatersay, an approximate distance of 55 miles, which includes a 45 minute ferry journey between Eriskay and Barra.



# Our Parish and Congregation

The Uist and Barra congregation has a unitary constitution, with 23 elders and 272 members and adherents.

The Kirk Session meets on a regular basis and those unable to attend in person can participate online. Most elders are of post-retirement age. There is a good balance of female and male elders.

We are thankful for the many volunteers who are involved in a range of functions such as groundwork, cleaning, hospitality, welcome, and reading.

There are five church buildings in use: at Cuidhir on Barra; Daliburgh and Howmore on South Uist; Griminish on Benbecula; and Clachan on North Uist.



# Support

You will in due course be joined by two 0.5fte Ministries Development Staff (MDS). Their remit will be developed by you and the Kirk Session, with support from Presbytery.

The Kirk Session has appointed a Session Clerk, Treasurer, working groups for Property, Finance, Mission and Safeguarding.

There is no paid administrative support for the minister.



# The Area and Community Profile

The parish of Uist and Barra comprises islands situated off the north west coast of Scotland, in the southern part of the Outer Hebrides.

This is a beautiful part of Scotland with a variety of landscapes. Rocky coastlines, hills and long sandy beaches fringed by machair, offer a wide range of activities and interests.



# The Area and Community Profile

The area contains a wide range of designations reflecting its unusually rich natural and historic environment.

It provides habitats of international importance for birds and there are two RSPB nature reserves; one at Balranald (North Uist) and one at Loch Druidibeg (South Uist).

There is also a wide variety of marine life in the waters around Uist and Barra, including many types of cetaceans.

The Monach Isles (Heisgeir), to the west of Benbecula, hosts one of the largest breeding colonies of grey seals in the world.



# The Area and Community Profile

There are many scheduled monuments throughout Uist and Barra, such as chambered cairns and stone circles.

South Uist has a particularly dense collection of Iron Age wheelhouses. The iconic Kisimul Castle in Castle Bay, Barra, is in state ownership and managed by Historic Environment Scotland.

There has been a Christian presence in Uist and Barra for at least 1400 years. In the fourteenth century ecclesiastical centres at Howmore and Carinish had an international reputation as places of learning.



# The Area and Community Profile

The islands from Berneray to Eriskay are joined by causeways, and the Isle of Barra is served by a regular daily car ferry service from the Isle of Eriskay.

There are three mainland ferry ports: Lochmaddy on North Uist with a ferry service to Uig on the Isle of Skye; Lochboisdale on South Uist with sailings to Oban or Mallaig; and Castlebay on the Isle of Barra with a service to Oban, all operated by Caledonian MacBrayne.



# The Area and Community Profile

Benbecula Airport in Balivanich has a direct daily flight from and to Glasgow and regular inter-island flights from and to Stornoway on the Isle of Lewis.

Barra also has a direct daily flight from and to Glasgow where planes land on and take off from the cockle strand.

Balivanich, on Benbecula, is the main centre of population and administrative centre for Uist with access to local council services, bank, post office, hospital, a variety of shops, garage and petrol station, riding school, food bank and community hall. Castlebay offers similar services in Barra.



# The Area and Community Profile

The socio-economic profile of North Uist, Benbecula, South Uist, and Barra is characterised by a reliance on a mix of primary industries like fishing (including white fish, shellfish and fish farming) and agriculture (predominantly crofting).

Fish is exported by local companies such as Barratlantic and Kallin Shellfish and, following local processing, by Salar Salmon and Hebridean Smokehouse.

Kilbride Shellfish, based in South Uist, is a company focused on improving the shellfish industry in the Outer Hebrides. Livestock markets are held roughly twice a year at Lochboisdale and at Lochmaddy.



# The Area and Community Profile

There is a range of small craft enterprises including, within the parish, Shoreline Pottery (Locheport, North Uist) and Hebridean Jewellery (Eochar, South Uist). Three distilleries have been established recently: Isle of Barra Distillers, Benbecula Distillery and North Uist Distillery. There is a growing hospitality and tourism sector.

Public sector employment (notably Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (the local council), and Western Isles Health Board) is relatively large.

Some areas are particularly reliant on specific industries, such as fisheries in Barra and the QinetiQ range in Uist, which is officially known as the MOD Hebrides Range. This is a Ministry of Defence facility located on the islands of South Uist, Benbecula, and St Kilda and is a controlled environment used for testing and evaluating a wide range of weapons systems, and for training exercises for land, air, and sea.



# The Area and Community Profile

Social Enterprises represent a significant sector of the economy in Uist and Barra. They deliver a wide range of services including preschool at Cothrom Òg in South Uist; social care across the whole of Uist delivered by Tagsa, which also delivers community transport and a horticultural project in Balivanich; Uist Community Riding School in Balivanich; Bùth Bharraigh community shop in Castlebay, Barra and Gàradh a' Bhàgh a'Tuath in Northbay, Barra, which is a horticultural-based project.



# The Area and Community Profile

Uist and Barra have a strong Gaelic culture and various individuals and groups are working on social and economic regeneration, particularly in sectors utilising natural and cultural resources. There are active local history, nature and arts trusts which help preserve and interpret local heritage and which run centres throughout Uist and Barra. A recent significant development has been Cnoc Soilleir, a Gaelic cultural centre on land adjacent to our church at Daliburgh.

This centre hosts the Ceolas summer school, which attracts over two hundred people, and also delivers a range of symposia and year-round courses. Ceolas shares the building with UHI (University of the Highlands and Islands). Taigh Chearsabhagh in Lochmaddy, North Uist also delivers UHI art courses.



# The Area and Community Profile



The remoteness of Uist and Barra and small population pose challenges to service delivery, diversification and economic growth. Low-lying areas, especially in Uist, are vulnerable to sea-level rise and storms, which can impact key sectors like crofting, tourism, housing and fishing.

Uist and Barra have experienced population decline, particularly among younger age groups, due to factors like out-migration and low birth rates.

In 2022, North Uist had 1,574 residents (down from 1,815 in 1991); Benbecula had 1,286 (down from 1,803 in 1991); South Uist had 1,806 (down from 2,285 in 1991); and Barra & Vatersay had 1,300 (slightly down from 1,316 in 1991).

The population of Uist and Barra is aging, with a rising percentage of those aged 75 and over, and a corresponding decrease in the working-age population.



# The Area and Community Profile

There are nevertheless indicators specific to Uist and Barra which are worth noting. In the 2022 census, Barra and Vatersay were the only islands in the Outer Hebrides to experience growth, with a 3% increase in the resident population. This is the second consecutive census showing a growth in Barra and Vatersay's population.

Uist and Barra have also seen the greatest number of young adults returning over all the other Scottish islands (Scottish Government published data 2024). However, for some, the lack of available affordable housing can be a challenge.



# The Area and Community Profile

South Uist, Benbecula, and Barra are predominantly Catholic, while North Uist is largely Protestant, particularly affiliated with the Church of Scotland and the Free Church of Scotland.

There are very few affiliated to other faiths, but the 2022 census records a decline in religious affiliation overall, with a rise in those reporting "no religion".



# The Area and Community Profile

Primary and Nursery education, including Gaelic Medium, is provided on Benbecula, North and South Uist and Barra.

Secondary School education, for Uist, is provided at Sgoil Lionacleit, a Community School, approximately 5 miles south of Balivanich. The school serves the islands from Berneray to Eriskay. Castlebay Community School provides Secondary education for the young people on Barra.

Sgoil Lionacleit and Castlebay School have facilities open to the public such as swimming pool, games hall, library and playing fields.

UHI delivers a range of courses from Cnoc Soilleir, Daliburgh; adjacent to Sgoil Lionacleit, Benbecula; and Taigh Chearsabhagh, Lochmaddy. Ministers have traditionally participated with other local clergy in a schools' chaplaincy team.



# The Area and Community Profile

Health care needs in Uist and Barra are served by a GP led community hospital in Balivanich which includes an Accident and Emergency department, with links to the Western Isles Hospital in Stornoway and mainland hospitals.

The hospital also has dental, physiotherapy and podiatry clinics. There are GP surgeries in Lochmaddy (North Uist), Griminish (Benbecula) Daliburgh (South Uist) and Castlebay (Barra).

There are care homes on North Uist, South Uist and Barra, where clergy are welcome for visiting and to conduct worship on a rota basis.



# The Area and Community Profile

Within Uist and Barra Parish there are community centres at Claddach Kirkibost (North Uist) and Ceann na h-Àirigh (Grimsay) and community halls at Carinish on North Uist; Balivanich on Benbecula; Eochar, Stoneybridge and Daliburgh on South Uist; Eriskay; Northbay and Castlebay on Barra; and on Vatersay.

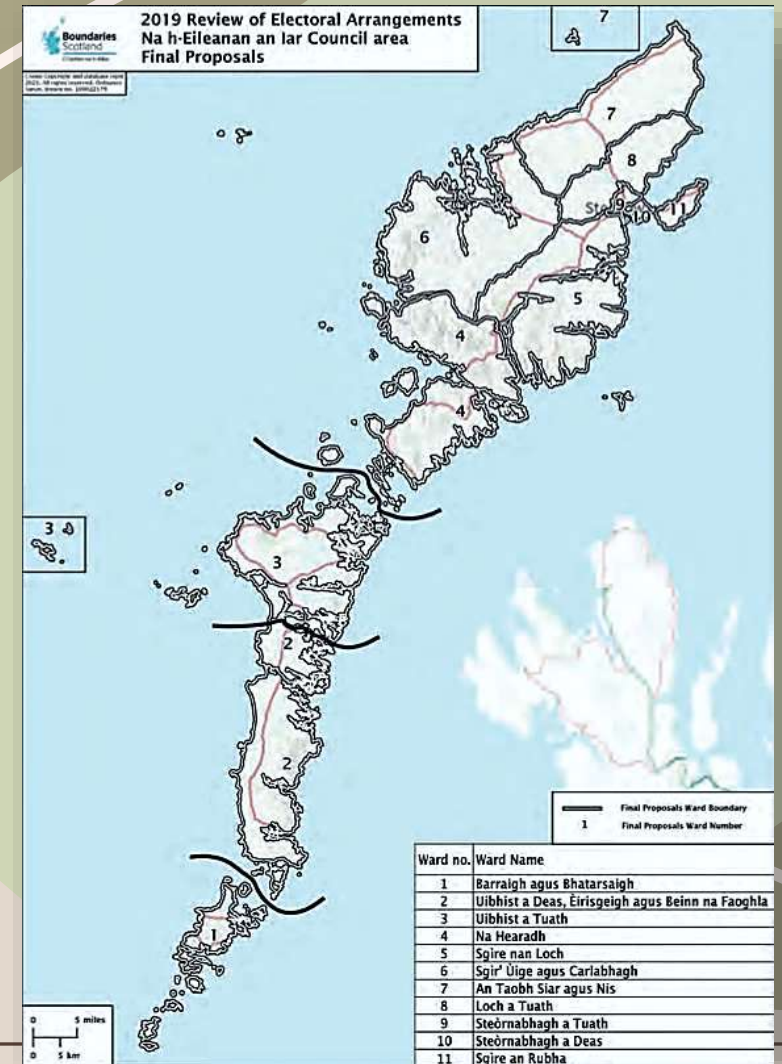


# The Area and Community Profile

The Outer Hebrides has been represented in the UK Parliament for many years and throughout its life in the Scottish Parliament by MPs and MSPs from the Labour and Scottish National Party. The present MP, Torcuil Chrichton, is Labour and the MSP, Alasdair Allan, is SNP.

The local council, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, is politically independent. It has 11 wards of which three cover the parish of Uist and Barra:

- Barraigh agus Bhatarsaigh (Barra and Vatersay)  
2 Councillors
- Uibhist a Deas, Èirisgeigh agus Beinn na Faoghla (South Uist, Eriskay and Benbecula)  
3 Councillors
- Uibhist a Tuath (North Uist)  
2 Councillors



# The Area and Community Profile

Most of North Uist is privately owned by North Uist Estate Trust.

The north of Benbecula and Barra and Vatersay are owned by the Scottish Government and the south of Benbecula, South Uist and Eriskay are owned mainly by Stòras Uibhist, a community-owned company formed following the largest community buyout in Scotland's history in 2006.

Significant developments by Storas include a wind farm in the north of South Uist and a marina at Lochboisdale.



# Worship

Sunday worship is presently conducted weekly at Cuidhir and every other week at Daliburgh (10am) + Griminish (12noon) then the following week at Howmore (10am) + Clachan (12noon).

Average Sunday service attendance at Cuidhir is 15; at Howmore/Daliburgh 35; and at Clachan/Griminish 50.

At present our Locum Minister conducts worship mostly in Uist, but also once a month in Barra.

Worship is presently conducted in Barra mainly by a retired Anglican minister who resides in Barra.

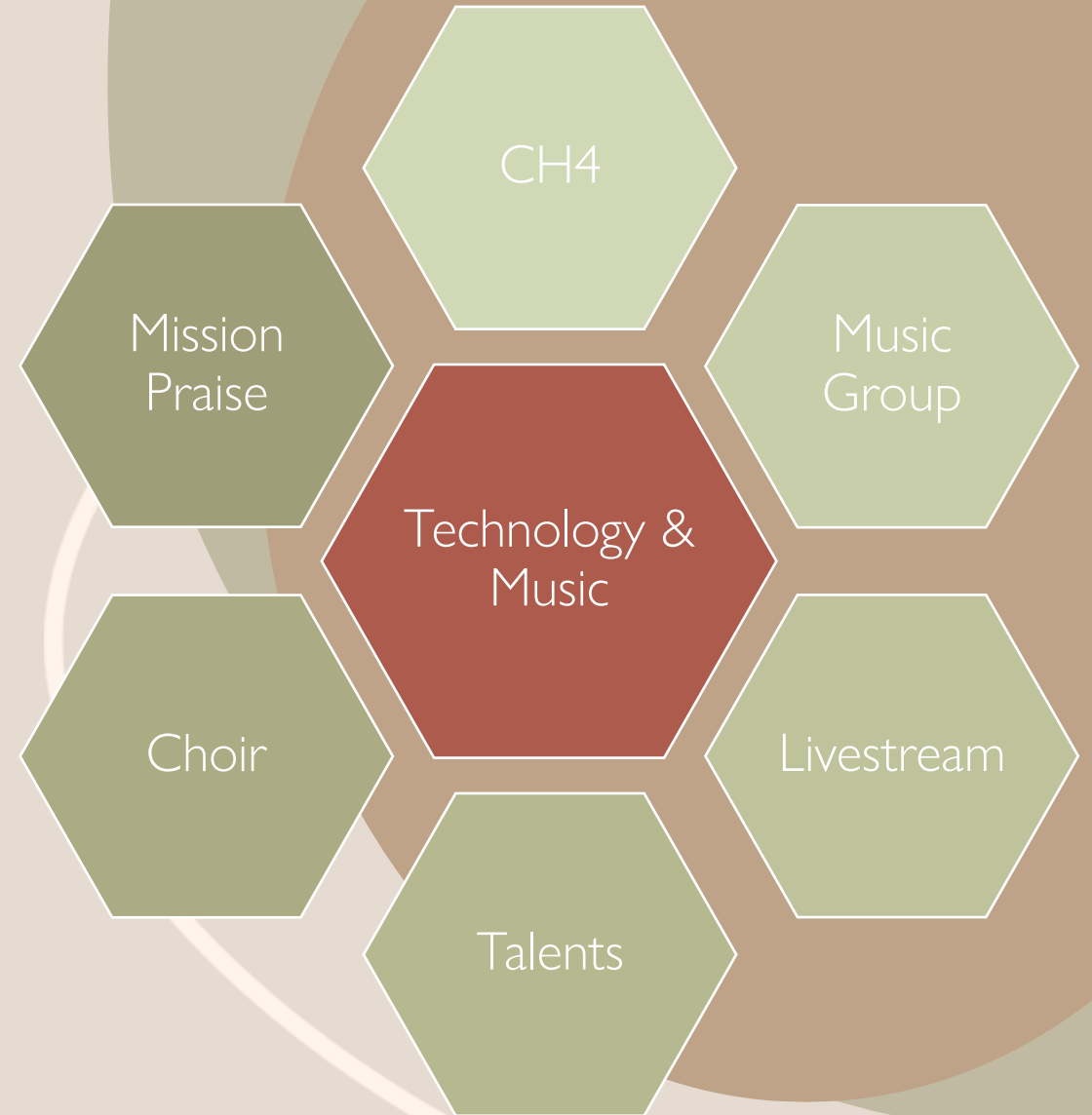


# Worship

Whilst recognising each church's uniqueness, services in the parish follow a mainly traditional pattern of worship, including use of the Church Hymnary, CH4 and some modern songs.

There are variations in access to technology. There is usually a live stream and recording of the Sunday service at Clachan and a recording of the Sunday service at Griminish which can be accessed via YouTube.

There is an enthusiastic and musically gifted praise group at Clachan and an informal choir group at Griminish. Musical accompaniment is usually available in all the churches. Members of the congregation participate in reading Scripture and, from time to time, conduct worship.



# Worship

Sunday Clubs/Creche/ Baby & Tots/Youth Club/Scripture Union have, until recently, been active across churches. Since the Covid pandemic these activities have shrunk and attendance at Sunday School (usually at the same time as the Sunday service) has diminished considerably, often to no attendance at all. An outreach to families and young people remains a priority. Fellowship with refreshments is enjoyed after Sunday worship in all our churches.

Communion services are held roughly quarterly in both Uist and Barra. Opportunity is taken for those in Uist to gather for a single service at 11am, rotated around the Uist churches. Home communion is arranged for housebound people who request it.

Bible Study and Prayer Meetings are held weekly in Griminish and Clachan.



# Worship

We enjoy excellent and co-operative working relationships with the Roman Catholic and Free Churches across the islands. For example, we join together for World Day of Prayer, Christmas Carol Services, Remembrance Day and the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

Other special services across the parish include, Harvest thanksgiving, Summer Songs of Praise, Christmas Watchnight services and Easter services.

We provide weekly bulletin sheets and occasional newsletters. We are developing communication further across the parish, including a Uist and Barra website and FaceBook page.

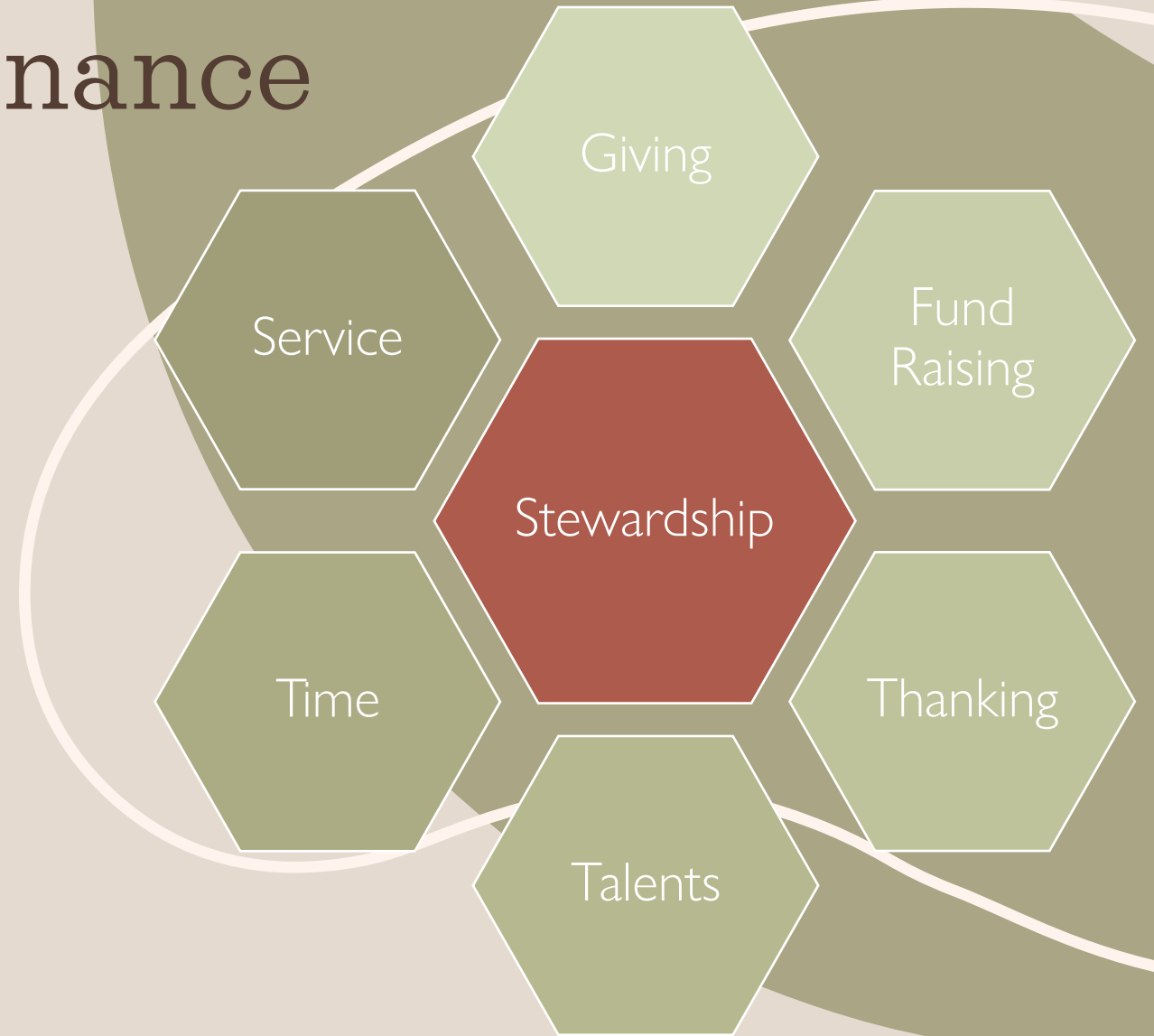
[www.facebook.com/benbeculachurchofscotland.org](http://www.facebook.com/benbeculachurchofscotland.org)



# Stewardship and Finance

Each of the former congregations which united to form the present congregation had its own way of recording finance and keeping accounts. During the last six months we have been reviewing our situation and establishing a new way of working.

From a revenue position each congregation has in recent years broken even. Income and expenditure have been balanced with no substantial surpluses generated. All dues to the end of 2024 have been paid i.e. Giving to Grow and Presbytery Dues.



# Stewardship and Finance

Each congregation was aware of its longer-term development needs and has been gathering resources for them.

At the end of June, our cash in Bank was £147,000 of which £91,000 is allocated to capital expenditure. We also have £200,000 in the Investors' Trust and £286,000 in the Consolidated Fabric Fund.

Our allocated Giving to Grow contribution requirement for 2025 is £68,000.

The Congregation has not participated in the National Stewardship Campaign.

We have not had an environmental audit, nor participated in the Eco-congregation programme.



# Our Activities

A wide range of activities are available across the Parish. Taigh Ceilidh (over 60s), is an opportunity to meet together in Grinish, twice monthly, for activities, tea and fellowship.

Since 2010, the former linked congregations of Benbecula and Carinish have been involved in a very successful twinning with Jerusha Kanyua Memorial Church in Chuka, Kenya. This has continued following the establishment of the Uist and Barra congregation, but is under review.

A Flower Festival is held in Grinish each August. Congregational lunches are enjoyed on special occasions. We promote Fairtrade in using products for after Church Fellowship.



# Our Activities

We collect food items to support the local Foodbank in Balivanich.

Purple Club, for bereaved people, meet for fellowship and support every second month.

Knit and Natter groups meet at Clachan and Howmore.

At Howmore church, a series of Afternoon Talks followed by tea and cake take place through the winter months.

There are monthly drop-ins for coffee and fellowship on Saturday mornings at Cuidhir.

Tearfund, Christian Aid and Blythswood are examples of some of the charities that we support.



# Pastoral Care

Elders and volunteers conduct pastoral visits, maintaining contact with the house-bound, the sick, the elderly and infirm and others associated with the church.

The pastoral visitors are well-placed to keep the Minister informed of any urgent needs within the area.

Across the parish there are informal arrangements to support members of the congregation who do not attend regular Sunday worship, including visits to those in hospital and care homes.

We organise a rota for, and take our turn in, delivering a Sunday service in the Trianaid care home in Carinish, North Uist.



# Buildings



Clachan

- North Uist



Griminish

- Benbecula



Howmore

- South Uist



Daliburgh

- South Uist



Cuidhir

- Barra

# Clachan - North Uist

The church was built in 1889 and has been well-maintained. It is not a listed building.

Adjoining the church is a spacious hall, built in 2004, complete with modern kitchen facilities and storerooms.

It has underfloor heating and both church and hall have disabled access and toilet facilities.

It is used by various local organisations, including Dochas Dancers for dance lessons and Caraidean Uibhist, a local befriending group.

Adjacent to the church is the former manse which is still owned by the congregation.



[Google Maps Link](#)



# Griminish - Benbecula

The church is located in the centre of Benbecula. It was built in 1886. It is a Category C listed building. It comprises a sanctuary, vestry and hall with a newly fitted kitchen. It has wheelchair access, accessible toilets and Loop system.

A wind turbine on adjacent land generates over 55 kilowatt hours of electricity, supplementing church funds by approximately £5000 per year. A tithe of 10% of the income goes to various charities, both in the UK and overseas.

The church hall is used by various local organisations, including the Uist and Benbecula Accordion and Fiddle Club.

The former manse adjacent to the church was sold in 2020. The church has a few maintenance issues commensurate with age.



[Google Maps Link](#)



# Howmore - South Uist

Howmore church, built in the 1840s, was recently renovated and is in very good condition.

The church is of historical significance and has an enclosed central communion table which is still used. It is a Category B listed building.

The church has an adjoining hall with kitchen, toilet facilities and disabled access.



[Google Maps Link](#)



# Daliburgh - South Uist

Daliburgh church, built in 1863, is in need of major improvements. It is a Category B listed building.

Plans have been drafted to renovate and develop the church building, the adjacent former manse and surrounding land. The project has presently been paused.

A building on the main road side of the site is used as a thrift shop.



[Google Maps Link](#)



# Cuidhir - Barra

Built in 1834, Cuidhir church is the only Protestant church on Barra. It is a Category C listed building.

The church has accessible worship area, dedicated wheelchair space and accessible toilet.

The former manse on adjacent land to the west has recently been vacated.

A building in Castlebay owned by the church is used as a thrift shop.



[Google Maps Link](#)



# The Manse - Benbecula

The manse is a modern detached building bought by the Church of Scotland in 2020 located 2 miles south of Balivanich.



# The Manse - Benbecula

The property comprises 186m<sup>2</sup> (2,000 sq ft) of internal accommodation over split level ground floor and first floor areas comprising:-

- Living room
- Dining room
- Kitchen/diner
- 4 bedrooms
- Study
- 3 bathrooms/shower rooms
- 1 WC
- Utility room
- Entrance vestibule
- Floored attic
- Oil-fired boiler for hot water and central heating with radiators.
- Large driveway with a garden shed.



[Google Maps Link](#)

The manse has recently been surveyed and improvements identified are being addressed.



[Uist & Barra Church of Scotland at Benbecula Facebook](#)

[The Church of Scotland in the Highlands and Hebrides Presbytery Site](#)

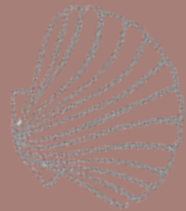
[Uist Beò: a Local Community-Run Website](#)

[Uist Beò Facebook](#)

[Benbecula and Carinish Church of Scotland YouTube](#)

[Music from the islands played by one of our Church musicians](#)

# Web Links





Uist and Barra – islands of moor and crofts...



...beaches and hills...

# ...and people!

## We'd love to hear from you

If you have chosen to read this Parish Profile, most likely you have already felt some prompting by the Holy Spirit to consider ministering in this Parish.

Now that you have read it, and thought about it and prayed about it, then, if you feel an affirmation of that prompting, we would be delighted to receive an application from you.

If you would like an informal chat before taking that step, our Interim Moderator, Rev. Ann Inglis would be happy to hear from you.

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Culla Bay - Benbecula