

Presbytery Planning Review Group September 2020 Report

National Update

The group met early in lockdown to discuss next steps for presbytery planning. The pandemic made it very difficult to progress with the steps that we had put in place. We appreciated that some congregations were not in a position to continue conversations with others and we agreed that it was important to alleviate the pressure faced by churches during this challenging season. It was necessary to extend the sisting of the Presbytery Plan and this was agreed by Presbytery and the PPTG (Presbytery Planning Task Group – which is the centralised committee which handles all Presbytery Planning issues and queries within the Church of Scotland).

However, the group is aware that some congregations have continued in their discussions and have made progress in building relationships in their groupings, for which they are to be commended. In addition, a very clear message has been received from the PPTG that presbytery planning should be continuing apace. We have been encouraged to explore conversations with the other North-East presbyteries around planning.

It is evident that the pandemic has changed the context in which we are now working, both nationally and locally. For some, there are questions around reopening buildings or finances. For others, there are changes in circumstances because of retirement or vacancy procedures. For all of us, the time we have to move forward on planning and face up to current challenges has been foreshortened.

We will need every congregation to engage fully with the planning process in the coming 6 months, to ensure that we have a plan that is both sustainable and meaningful. We expect that this will include moving some congregations into guardianship and ensuring that every congregation has clear sight of the direction of travel in the years to come.

Timetable

The Presbytery Plan for Gordon is currently sisted until January 2021. It is the intention of our group to prepare and present a new Presbytery Plan in January. This plan would be voted on during our March 2021 Presbytery meeting. This will require a further extension of the sisting, and this will be brought to the November 2021 meeting.

Groupings

We are asking every congregation to confirm by the end of September the grouping that they wish to proceed with. We know that some of these have changed during lockdown. We will be in touch with those congregations that have not engaged with this to date during September. The questions they may need to ask themselves, are how can they contribute into the wider work of Presbytery e.g by being a technology hub or is it appropriate for them to seek to build relationships beyond the current

Presbytery boundaries. It may be helpful for individuals to look at the Aberdeen Presbytery Plan to see how every congregation finds itself in a grouping:

<https://www.aberdeenshetlandpresbytery.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Website-Approved-Presbytery-Plan-for-July-4th-2020-1.pdf>

Buildings

We are now in a position where it will be necessary to consider the future of the buildings in our Presbytery as part of the new plan. Therefore, every Kirk Session will be asked to diligently review the places of worship in their parish and provide information on how those buildings should be dealt with going forward by the end of October 2020.

The review will build on the question that was asked as part of the Presbytery Plan Review consultation in the autumn of 2019. It will use as its baseline the General Trustees' report – Well Equipped Spaces in the Right Places. It will take into account changes that have happened as a result of Covid-19 and it will also ask Kirk Sessions to consider how technology may play a part in future planning.

Documentation

The questionnaire will be circulated as soon as possible and clear guidance will be issued to ensure that every congregation knows what they are being asked to do and by when. We would ask ministers and interim moderators, together with Presbytery Elders, to ensure that the necessary work is undertaken and deadlines are met. We would recommend an extraordinary meeting of Kirk Sessions to enable the time/space for this work to be done.

Building relationships in your grouping

Once a grouping has been set, it is the responsibility of each congregation within that grouping to work towards building your relationship and determining parameters for working together.

It is envisaged that the October 2020 Presbytery meeting will focus on Presbytery Planning but in particular it will be about giving time and space to the groupings to have discussions and to agree on next steps.

Building through consensus

It is the overwhelming desire of the Presbytery Planning Review group to create a plan that we can, as a Presbytery, agree up, and which will set our course for the coming years. However, we need your help and commitment to do this. We will work with you and provide as much support as we can. But if we are going to meet our objective, each congregation needs to step up and play its part in this process.

Deliverances

1. Presbytery receives the report
2. Presbytery instructs Kirk Sessions to complete the necessary questionnaires by the appropriate deadlines.