

Looking Forward in Faith

is an excellent description of the purpose of the Liaison Team composed of representatives of the four sessions and congregations (Avonbridge, Linlithgow: St Ninian's Craigmalen, Linlithgow: St Michael's and Torphichen) to be united in one congregation in accordance with the Presbytery Plan.

The team has had further constructive discussions regarding how best to support and smooth the transition to one body. Our meetings open with welcome and prayer by one of the members. To date we have met at St Michaels and St Ninians Craigmalen and hope to visit everywhere in the coming months. Many opportunities for sharing among the congregations and many challenges needing to be addressed have been identified. It was interesting to hear different experiences of church in a village where even non-members are asking what is happening – the church being an important focal point for the community, compared with town where most folk appear less interested in what the churches are doing. We are encouraged by the wide varieties of activities happening around our churches today. We hope and pray that the spirit of open friendliness which has developed in the meetings will also influence the congregations.

Our aim is to support the development of a new organisation fit for purpose for years ahead yet flexible enough to adapt to changes in circumstance which may arise. To help achieve this, we plan to produce a document detailing baseline measures of e.g. joint roll, attendance, demographics, and activities such as weddings and funerals. We plan, with appropriate permission, to collate this information from returns already submitted to Presbytery by the individual churches earlier this year.

We have started to develop a workplan under the five headings: Outreach/Vision; Worship Services; Staff; Estate; Management, administration and finance. An initial consideration of each area in turn has identified many issues which will need to be addressed. We intend to develop the plan further to suggest solutions in a systematic fashion in order to support all the churches in transitioning to one congregation. The plan will detail proposed actions, timescale and whether there are training implications. We are investigating advice available from the Kirk centrally, facilitators from presbytery are due to visit us as a group and we are aware some areas may benefit from expertise available within our congregations.

The purpose of our team is not to make any decisions but to spend time identifying issues which will arise and to suggest potential solutions to enable our four churches to come together in one congregation as smoothly as possible. We have produced this update to keep the sessions informed about our work and we are happy to accept constructive comments. It can also be shared with congregations. We plan to have another update in 2-3 months' time.

It is a significant undertaking for all of us to transition to one congregation by Presbytery's identified date of **1.1.25**. We ask for your ongoing prayer and encouragement.

Let us **walk humbly with God and trust his future plan.**