

BALLYSILLAN PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

**MISSION PLAN
2014 - 2017**

Ballysillan Presbyterian Church – Mission Plan 2014 - 2017

Introduction.

In 2010 we were required by a resolution of the General Assembly, along with every other congregation, to produce a mission plan for approval by presbytery. We did so, and four years on we believe that it is both appropriate and necessary to review and revise that plan.

There are several reasons for this review:

(a) Since the original plan was largely a requirement of the General Assembly, the process of writing it had insufficient ownership and no working precedent to follow. Inevitably this meant that it was more aspirational than realistic.

(b) However, four years on, there is a current plan on which to reflect and a better basis for realism into the future. We believe that this revised plan does have much more ownership and is much more realistic.

(c) Change is part and parcel of both congregational, community and personal life – and this must be reflected in an ongoing way in our thinking and planning. For example, since the last mission plan, there have been significant changes in congregational membership, younger leaders have left in search of education and careers, and our minister has indicated that he wishes to retire in the not too distant future.

This revised plan therefore seeks to be realistic, yet enable us to keep *'in step with the Spirit'* wherever and in whatever direction He will lead us. It raises some difficult questions, and we would welcome *'light from any quarter'* as to how they might be addressed.

Ballysillan Presbyterian Church Kirk Session
January 2014

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1. As set out on page 21 of the North Belfast Presbytery (NBP) mission plan **we are required** to:
 - a) Give regard to the serious statistical Presbyterian decline since 1967
 - b) Become aware of the demography of our parish area
 - c) Be willing to build bridges - and then cross them!
 - d) Commit in practice to the truth that mission is something for all God's people
 - e) Develop an increasingly identifiable mission heart, including a commitment to do new things
 - f) Initiate and develop partnerships with other churches, congregations and agencies where mission can be better done together
 - g) Engage constructively, radically and at times where necessary, structurally with the local community.
 2. We have been aware of much of this for some time, and welcome the explicit encouragement of Presbytery to travel much further down these routes.

3. Some general comments on Para 1a - 1g above

- 3.1. There are significant societal changes at all levels within our parish area, with massive forces battling for loyalties (evidenced for example in the parading and flag protests right through 2013).
- 3.2. Amongst younger people social networking is hugely more important than 'loyalty' or 'commitment' to any institution or organisation. Even for committed Christians personal choice in virtually every area of life is hugely important and that includes the churches they attend. Younger Christians are increasingly disciples by conviction, for their parental generation is often theologically and Biblically illiterate. We are under no illusions as to what we are facing. Yet we are committed to face these challenges with confidence that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation, and that God's plans are to build His church in this, our local 'parish' area.
- 3.3. We are fully signed up to the truth that mission is for all God's people. We are encouraged and motivated by John Stott's approach in his book *Christian Mission in the Modern World* in which he states that "*Social action is a partner of evangelism. As partners, the two belong to each other and yet are independent of each other. Each stands on its own feet in its own right alongside the other. For each is an end in itself. Both are expressions of unfeigned love.*" (page 27) Building the capacity and confidence of a congregation to carry through into practice this broad view of mission, is a huge and long term cross generational calling.
- 3.4. We are willing to build bridges and cross them with both our wider community and other churches, as well as do new things. If we can find sustainable partnerships and the needed resources, so that there would be real mutual benefit, we will be very open to them.
- 3.5. However, it is evident that things outside our control directly militate against building such sustainable partnerships. Such as:
 - a) The continuing community unrest, even violence, in the area sets a tone of dis-engagement in all sectors of local society as almost the only way to live peaceably. Whatever the political developments, the legacy of very poor community relationships will be with us for years to come, and
 - b) Building bridges into either or both of the local communities involves some extremely difficult ethical and practical issues with limited assurance that those bridges will stand over the long term. In addition, there is every likelihood that crossing some bridges may prove to be one way traffic only.
- 3.6. The background reality is that the parish area has borne the brunt of some of the worst violence of 'The Troubles'. North Belfast generally has seen about 25% of the murders, with countless thousands moving out of the area - mainly those with a Protestant background to suburban North Belfast and out as far as Antrim.
- 3.7. Inevitably this meant that the traditional base of our parish area has become older in its demographic makeup, and this has been the largest single factor in the statistical changes seen since 1967. In so far as the statistical material provided in the *Presbytery Plan* can be relied on historically, the bare facts tell a clear story.

In 1967 Ballysillan had 812 families claiming connection with 2343 people giving an average 'family' size of 2.88. By 2008 the figures were 450 families and 770 people - giving an average 'family' size of 1.71. More of our older people are living alone and there have been fewer younger families connected with the congregation... though this is now visibly changing, and our Sunday morning

'mix' is often very much better than in recent years – evidence of the effect of long term plans and ministry.

- 3.8 There is a wealth of detailed information available about our immediate and adjoining areas, and in terms of Christian witness it makes for very unhappy reading.

In North Belfast generally a massive 20% of the population have no stated religious affiliation at all, according to the 2011 census.

In the 2001 census there were 5461 people defining themselves as Protestant in the Ballysillan ward and 286 stated no religious affiliation. Those numbers jumped in the latest 2011 census to 4047 Protestants and 1257 with no religious affiliation stated.

The picture in the Legoniel ward is equally stark. In 2001 there were 3273 Protestants and 156 with no stated religious affiliation. In the 2011 census there were 2170 Protestants and 1177 with no stated religious affiliation.

It is clear that there is a massive public rejection of religion currently under way in our local area.

- 3.9 These stark figures, taken along with the demographic changes that we are have been experiencing for many years have major implications for both **what** we do in church and **how** we do it. However, they also provide a huge opportunity for us to experiment boldly, and to do little or nothing that is new, seems akin to a decision to drift into virtual oblivion.

4. **Reflections on current congregational life**

- 4.1. With these and many other factors continuing to affect us, we are profoundly grateful to God for the developments in the life of Ballysillan in the last few years. The Lord has been good to us. In a recent exercise, it became clear that a very large proportion of those who are coming into the centre of the congregation's life are relatively new to the church. As indicated above our demographic mix has changed greatly, so that it is now much more 'normal' across the generations. Our finances have been steady, though not spectacular, in the past few years.
- 4.2. It is our conviction that those in the community who do know us will give us good standing, but we have not yet either purposefully sought to or actually penetrated deeply into the fabric of our local area. Nor are we finding it straightforward to turn our new and committed members into communicant members of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.
- 4.3. The NBP mission plan along with our own original mission plan is a welcome step to review and revise our work and witness, and the rest of this paper sets out our current thinking on the rationale and shape of our mission plan here in Ballysillan.

Ballysillan Presbyterian Church Mission Plan 2014 - 2017



5. Our mission statement

- 5.1. This has been reworked and simplified, and is visually stated in the diagram above. We believe the core message is both easily understood and easily remembered - 'Serving Christ and Serving Others - Home and Away' (a combination of the two great commandments and the Great Commission). It incorporates much of paragraph 5.2 below, alongside prayer and fellowship.
- 5.2. This leads us to actively embrace all the challenges in Section 2a of the NBP mission plan:
- Christ centered vibrant worship;
 - Evangelism;
 - Seeking to do new things as the opportunities present themselves right across the whole life of our church;
 - Assess ongoing activity sensitively and properly;
 - Building a heart for God's world, and
 - Better use of good premises for the welfare of the local community.

The following paragraphs set out our current response to these in more detail.

6. Christ centred vibrant worship

- 6.1. This is an ongoing process with both congregation and worship team (which has 5 worship leaders and around 15 musicians and singers working in various combinations, plus an audio visual technical team).

6.2. In the next few years we envisage:

- a) Ongoing training of vocalists and worship leaders;
- b) Ongoing introduction of suitable new worship material;
- c) Minor improvements to performance area and technical support (The major work indicated in the previous plan has been completed, along with the planned installation of new screens at various points in the church to ensure that all those present have excellent visibility),
- d) Special worship events and prayer gatherings in the context of worship.

7. Evangelism

7.1. Given the local history over 40 years, the ongoing community unrest, and our steadily changing demography, effective evangelism is unquestionably a significant challenge for the church. Every issue mentioned in the NBP mission plan connects with evangelism, and we do not want to, nor will we put evangelism in a stand alone silo. We do want to be faithful to the Biblical command to be witnesses to Christ in our own area, as well as 'to the ends of the earth'.

7.2. We are embedding some key events in our annual calendar such as the Summer Kidz outreach and Community Fete in July and the Christmas Fair at the end of the year. We see the community elements as part and parcel of long term wider evangelistic enterprise – not only because they are inherently worthwhile in their own right, but are also important for the public perception of us as a local church, and by extension make the building of worthwhile relationships more straightforward. We are seeking to build in more regular events with a simple friendship / social basis to further build personal relationships. We have established a small 'Mission Forum' to help ensure that these outreach events are built into our medium and longer term planning.

7.3. However, there are some specifics to help us in our evangelism:

- a) Christianity Explored type course on a regular basis – the most recent in Spring 2013;
- b) Further development of our recent Sunday evening initiative on substantial teaching, to build confidence amongst Christians in Christ himself and the gospel in their places of work, colleges, family circles and social settings. In a word, to move Christian faith out of the purely 'private' setting to a much more 'public' setting for all believers. This is a challenge within the Christian church generally, which makes it all the more important.

It has proven impossible in practice to reach our previously stated aim of building the core attendance of our Sunday evening teaching meetings to 75 people. We are unclear as to why this is so, given the huge enthusiasm of many members for congregational life in Ballysillan. Whilst we have some thoughts on this, we would welcome experience of this matter from Presbytery and the wider church.

- c) There are big evangelistic opportunities within existing church groups - eg our Uniformed organisations / Ozone / Parents and toddlers / Youth Club. Realising these opportunities is a long term engagement. Research suggests a 10 year timescale for some people from first contact with them to a profession of faith in Christ.
- d) We are also aware of the contribution that can be made by an explicit pre-evangelistic or evangelistic content in the big 'set piece' services such as BB and Guides annual services; Christmas carol services etc. We are committed to developing such opportunities properly.

- e) All of these opportunities bring with them increasing demands in terms of leadership, not only in the numbers of leaders that are needed, but in the sense of calling and in the skills required. This is specially demanding in youth and children's work, which is becoming increasingly professionalised generally in wider society.
- f) With about 150 children / young people coming through our doors on a regular weekly basis, there is a very large 'unreached' - even 'unchurched' - constituency of parents and guardians, who, at the very least, are motivated to have their family connected with us as a congregation. There is every reason to suggest that will be a key group for us to work with over the coming years.

It is our aim as a total church family to build meaningful relationships with fringe and unchurched families on an ongoing basis each year – and see what the Lord brings from that.

- 7.4. Whatever the programmes that can be run, or opportunities created, the outcomes will remain weak unless and until Christ's people actually play their part on a day to day basis by ongoing witness, both in lifestyle and verbally. We will continue to work on changing the mind set that sees evangelism as something 'church' does, or that is to be left to others who 'can do it'. We wish to emphasise increasingly that every Christian has both the capacity and opportunity to articulate in their own way what it means to be a follower of Christ. We would counsel both ourselves and the Presbytery against an over emphasis on 'structured activity' as being synonymous with evangelism.
- 7.5. Increasingly we are of the view that the mentoring of those en route to faith and those who are young in the faith is becoming a new norm, and we are very conscious that this is highly resource intensive on a limited number of mature Christians.

8. **Seeking to do new things as the opportunities present themselves right across the whole life of our church**

- 8.1. The key issue here is not the opportunity to do new things, but the resourcing and sustainability of them. This is an absolutely core issue, for the demands of commitment are very high and potentially very costly to those with great passion and love for the Lord. Initiatives in the past 3 years have included Ozone, summer outreach teams, Sunday night teach-ins, Sunday morning prayer gatherings, 24/1 and 24/2 prayer events, creative Christmas events, and Christianity Explored.
- 8.2. The biggest area for further initiative (over and above 7.2 above) is in connecting directly into and with the needs of the local community - which is itself quite fractured and increasingly under resourced. We are open to both formal and informal partnerships, provided that there is adequate mutual benefit in those relationships. A key criterion must be that new work builds on the core strengths that a church can bring, such as commitment over the long term and people who have love for others (esp the vulnerable) at the core of what we do and why we do it.
- 8.3. We have identified some potential areas of ministry and are exploring what such ministry might entail.
 - (a) **'Mercy ministries'** such as involvement with Social Services and Christians against Poverty
 - (b) **'Family Ministries'** to help build healthy marriages and families (including parenting)
 - (c) **'Volunteering Ministries'** outside normal congregational activities – eg: the Blue Houses / NI Hospice / Corkey House residential home

All of these bring additional demands on our members, and a key question for us is to identify as clearly as possible exactly who we can properly serve in the wider community in the next few years.

- 8.4. Given that virtually every Christian congregation and 'meeting house' operates on an 'ourselves alone' basis, and that many agencies have a similar mindset, we see an urgent Biblical and practical need to find ways of working with others of like mind and persuasion on any given common cause in the area. Such partnerships must also be of mutual value, and must avoid any suggestion that the rationale is to bolster up a particular agenda in a particular group. In our original mission plan we were not in a position to identify any such long term partnerships, not least because their very creation is so resource intensive. However, given that we have had a very good experience at Christmas 2012 and 2013 with food hampers for those in real need (via Social Services), we are open to doing this type of ministry in partnership with others. It is also likely that local churches will be specifically asked by the Department of Social Development to nominate members of potential new local partnership boards, and we would be very open to that possibility as a common project for 'the welfare of the city' with other local churches.

We are open to these discussions with other churches and agencies as the opportunities arise.

- 8.5. Given the theology of creation, there is a further area that is almost completely unexplored in much of North Belfast – that of the arts. There is a long and substantial history of having and doing 'art' everywhere in church – for example in music, singing, banner making, craft work with children and even the architecture of our buildings. It is also important to recognise that art has a well-established therapeutic effect. We are therefore open to exploring the development of the application of the arts as a ministry both for the community at large and for the church.

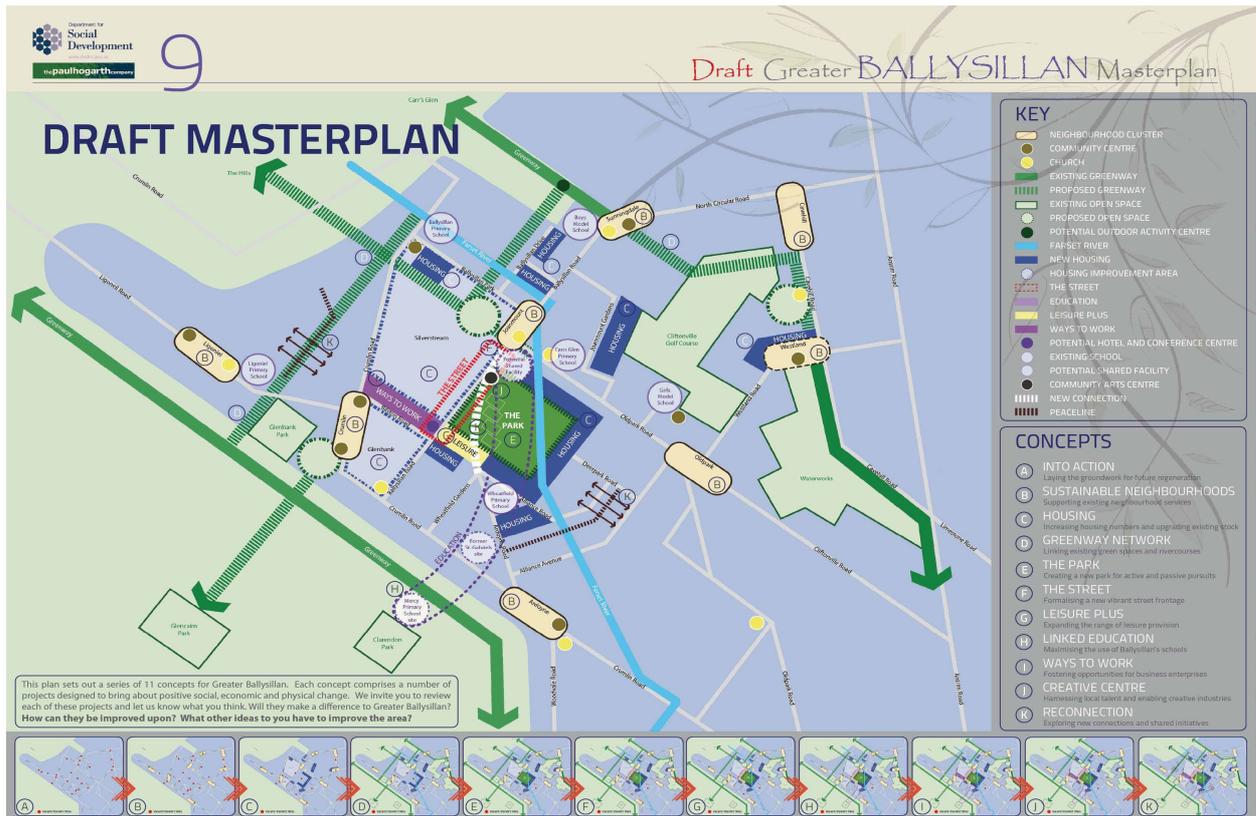
We have made some progress on this – as evidenced in the highly successful public concert with Stuart Townend in 2011 and the Worship Team workshop with Paul Balloch in 2012. It is clear that there is much potential in this type of ministry, and we will aim to promote at least one major event of this nature each year.

In addition, we have experimented with Summer and Christmas Fairs/ Fetes, and have been delighted at the local and wider community response. Crafts are an important part of these, and we are committed to furthering our witness by these events each year.

- 8.6. The approaches suggested in 8.2 – 8.5 above also have great potential to help rebuild community relations in the area which have been, and still are in a very poor state. Real needs are equally shared across the whole of society, and know no borders.
- 8.7. They will also provide us with increasing opportunity to connect with and minister to those from other backgrounds (both religious and ethnic) whom we welcome and who increasingly live around us and among us. We also want to learn from others how to be successful in such ministry, and with little current experience to draw on we have had some worthwhile and mutually helpful contact / involvement with 'The Living Room' church plant on the Cliftonville Road, and the 174 Trust in Duncairn, both led by Presbyterian ministers. The challenges of local ministry will increase steadily as the traditionally Nationalist / Roman Catholic population of our immediate neighbourhood grows.
- 8.8. We are very pleased that there are major plans to regenerate our local area over a 20 year period - outlined in the draft Ballysillan Masterplan published in October 2013. The key elements of that draft are reproduced below. If even half of this visionary regeneration plan were to materialise, our parish area would be transformed physically and socially, and it is clear from the draft that there is a great

deal of interest in actively involving the local churches. We welcome the many new opportunities that this could bring. We are aware that this is only a draft Masterplan and that much remains to be done to finalise it and deliver it over the 20 year period. However, we do think that the 8 main aims and objectives (outlined on page 2 of the draft) do represent a viable and biblically acceptable basis for us as a congregation to work in and with our local community.

[These are that Ballysillan should be connected to the wider city and region; that it should be a healthy, diverse, vibrant and welcoming place; that its natural resources should be protected and enhanced; that local business and educational achievement should be supported and encouraged; that it should be a sustainable area in terms of population, employment opportunities and good housing.]



8.9. We are also conscious of the role that is being worked out by many members of our congregation in the life of our community, both locally and wider afield. In addition to that, there is a huge need to properly value and explicitly support the teachers, social workers, home helps, nurses, school governors, emergency service personnel, and all who are already working in our area for the common good. And we are mindful of the need to support Christian people from other churches who are working in our area.

8.10 This wide ministry of encouragement and support is not one that can be done by one congregation alone, and must be the subject of inter church dialogue and action. Nonetheless, we will try to support our own members and Christian people of all backgrounds working in our community by prayer and contact, and to generally support those groups on whom the welfare of the wider community depends.

8.11 We also wish to extend whatever support we can to local community leadership both public and privately. This needs to be talked / worked through with them on an ongoing basis.

9. **Assess ongoing activity sensitively and properly**

- 9.1. This issue is rarely off our agenda in one form or another. We are continuing to develop, bit by bit, a coherent youth and children's strategy, covering all our groups and organisations working with children and young people up to age 25.
- 9.2. This strategy is not just about the ministry to groups and organisations, but crucially is also about the holistic development of our current and next generation of younger leaders – esp those in the 18 – 25 age group. We are committing ourselves to a medium term programme of spiritual and personal development so that they can not only be effective youth leaders, but are also much better prepared for serving Christ effectively and confidently at college, at work, in future family life and wherever they may be.
- 9.3. A key part of our response to these changing circumstances has been to bring a highly gifted assistant minister (David Currie) to work with us until (probably) January 2016, with a specific remit to focus on the work with young people and with younger families. We are confident that there will be a focussed and coherent youth strategy in place over the next few years.
- 9.4. A theme that has emerged already is how to ensure that our children acquire a good understanding of the Bible before they reach the age of 11. There is much more to this than simply knowing key or familiar Bible stories, and our current thinking is to try to embed an understanding of what the Bible teaches in our children's work right across the board. We have embarked on a medium term programme to do this, and to embed it on a regular basis into our morning services where the children and young people can actively contribute. An important benefit of this approach is that parents and the wider congregation are not only fully aware of what is being taught to a younger generation, but learn from it themselves.
- 9.5. The second big area is how to deliver personal support and pastoral care properly right across the generations and with new and sometimes very complex situations arising with greater frequency. There is already much that we do – the Evergreen's Club each week, and the Parent and Toddlers Club being two examples. In addition, a great deal of support is provided 'under the radar' by staff, leaders and members in a wide variety of situations, some of them very challenging indeed.
- 9.6. But we want to do more of this and to do it better, not least because the opportunities and needs are rising. We are uncertain as to how to do this, for both experience and research suggest that this is done most effectively in small fellowship groups, yet the prevailing culture both in wider society as well as in much church life, is highly resistant to this way of working.
- 9.7. ***We invited the creative input of Presbytery on the effective delivery of pastoral care across the generations. Whilst this was not forthcoming, we are grateful for the material published by the General Assembly on this matter, and are seeking to shape their suggestions to our specific circumstances. However, this remains a very significant issue for us in terms of the right people with the right skills who are both willing and available for this ministry, and we do not at yet see our way clearly through this.***
- 9.8. The third area of need is the ongoing mentoring and discipling of Christian people of all ages either on a one-to-one basis or in energetic fellowship groups. In particular, the discipling of men is a new and stable initiative, alongside two parallel bible study / fellowship groups for women. The remit of our new assistant minister is also of real help here.

10. **Building a heart for God's world**

- 10.1. We are aware that this is an area that could be strengthened in our current ministry, even though we have hosted summer teams from the USA 3 times in recent years, and individual members have themselves been on both local and overseas mission trips, both with PCI and other mission agencies.
- 10.2. We aspire to:
- a) Encourage involvement in PCI summer teams in Ireland, whilst advertising overseas possibilities;
 - b) Increase awareness of world development needs and support them, and
 - c) Regularly refer to and pray for the church overseas during Sunday services (this is now an established part of our regular worship services). This will be stimulated and helped by the appointment of representatives from within the congregation on a thematic basis – such as for the persecuted church or Christian relief agencies.

Once again we see this as something for the long haul, with no quick fixes.

It is still our aim to have people on PCI summer teams each year.

11. **Better use of good premises for the welfare of the local community**

- 11.1. For some years this has been a big issue for us – not least the fact that there are already a number of high quality, publicly funded community facilities in the immediate area. We do not wish to be 'competitors' with other local groups. There are also other church premises in the area of high standard.
- 11.2. With this said, we have recognised that there are potentially big opportunities to reshape existing ministries and develop new ministry related projects which utilise the strengths that churches bring. We do see a direct connection between the suitability of the buildings and the effectiveness of the work being done. We undertook a major review of our premises in 2010/11, which led to our being able to do a major refurbishment scheme on our main church hall, along with some other minor works and these were completed in November 2013.

12. **Prayer**

- 12.1. This is central to the blessing of God – yet there is a constant challenge as to how to embed it in the corporate life of the congregation. We are building in regular (though not yet frequent) Prayer and Praise evenings on Sunday evenings; have experimented with 'Prayer Watch' during the summer months on a Sunday evening; have a small prayer gathering on a Sunday before the morning service; and encourage every group and organisation to include prayer as a normative part of meeting. We recognise however, that there is still much to be done to ensure that prayer is at the heart of all we do all the time.
- 12.2. We are committed to work purposefully on this, and both develop the understanding for the need of prayer in our individual day to day lives and in the life of the Church. We have sought and received some assistance during 2013 from outside the congregation as to how we might renew and refresh both personal and corporate prayer life, and see this as an ongoing matter of great importance.

13. **Staffing and Leadership**

- 13.1. In our previous mission plan we referred to the difficulty of resourcing both existing ministry and new opportunities. We were satisfied that these could not be progressed satisfactorily without additional staff.
- 13.2. Given that we received 5% of the assets from the closure of the Oldpark congregation, we saw ourselves in the position of being more able than hitherto to face the financial costs of extra staffing over the next five years, and that prudent investment in paid staffing could substantially assist in the delivery and success of the Mission Plan.
- 13.3. We were delighted to have been allocated an assistant minister in Summer 2012 of the calibre of David Currie (who was licensed in June 2013), and who we expect to be with us until January 2016. As indicated above, his work seems central to the ministry of the congregation over the next few years, and we are deeply grateful to him and for him.
- 13.4. The Kirk Session is committed to building a leadership that is consensual and is representative of the whole congregation. Accordingly, we asked for and received permission from Presbytery in March 2013 to elect new elders, and we ordained three new elders in November 2013.
- 13.5. As part of the induction of our new elders, we will consider what training or development is needed for the Kirk Session as a whole over the next few years.

January 2014