

Summary of Presbytery Discussion from 6th Feb 2019

Purpose

Following ordinary business, Presbytery met informally to discuss the result of the Local Church Reviews and discuss options for sustaining ministry into the future in Orkney. Presbytery decided to call an open meeting on March 16th inviting input from anyone on this topic. These notes are intended both as a record of some of the conversation on the Feb 6th and to inform discussion on March 16th.

Reflections on “Finding a Way Forward”

Common themes which came out of a number of reviews were isolation, discouragement, fatigue and lack of leadership. (This is a consequence of the vacancies, both long-term and more recent, which are a problem across the Church of Scotland with reducing numbers of ministers and increasing sizes of charges). To turn this around we need connection, encouragement, refreshment and inspiration.

A clear message that came across was “if the system inhibits us, change the system”. The Church of Scotland is actively experimenting with different models of ministry (different from “one minister, one charge”): a range of different models of “hub” or network are being tried where parish ministers work together with ministry development staff, support workers, youth workers, secretarial staff and volunteers to share out the work. Now is the time for us to think about what alternative models might work in Orkney. For example – employment of a Presbytery Children & Families worker and/or a Presbytery Treasurer shared across the county may be beneficial.

A major barrier which we cannot change, so have to bear in mind and work around, is transport. The current inter-island transport network critically divides island communities (ferries & barriers). Whatever model emerges from our discussion has to work with the current transport network and may have to change or adapt as transport changes.

Technology may play a role in sharing resources and helping congregations work together. The idea of video-linked services where truly shared worship could take place with readings, addresses and prayers being offered by each participating congregations (rather than one congregation just watching someone else’s service) was discussed. Presbytery could commission a feasibility study to see how much it would cost to set up the necessary communications technology.

The need for continued presence of and support from (and for) ordained ministers was stressed. Whilst local volunteers and worship groups can make some contributions, the training and skills of ordained ministers is still necessary and valued.

Several examples of “hub” groupings were discussed and the advantages and disadvantages of each discussed. It was discussed that each of these groupings present difficulties – transport among the North Isles being a major for all. Exploring shared resources and employing staff to serve across the Presbytery and exploring the use of technology to share worship

It should be remembered that these are *not proposals*, but the start of a discussion of how we can sustainably provide ministry across the county into the future with smaller number of ordained ministers. Grouping existing parishes together to share central resources and reduce administrative burden whilst continuing to provide ministry across the Isles should be the aim.

5 Hubs: At least one minister in each supported by Readers, a Children & Families worker and central administrative support. [Hubs: i) East Mainland, Burray & South Ronaldsay, ii) Stromness, Orphir, Stenness, Flotta, Hoy & Walls, iii) Kirkwall, Shapinsay & Stronsay, iv) Birsay, Harray, Sandwick, Firth, Rendall, Evie, Rousay, v) Westray, Papay, Eday, Sanday].

4 Hubs: [i) North Isles, ii) Kirkwall East, East Mainland, Burray & South Ronaldsay, ii) Stromness, Hoy & Flotta, iii) West Mainland]. Staffed according to population and needs.

3 Hubs: [North (Westray, Papay, Eday, Sanday, Stronsay), East (Kirkwall, Shapinsay, East Mainland & South Ronaldsay), West (Stromness, West Mainland, Rousay, Flotta, Hoy & Walls)]. Invest in technology to allow shared service, children & families worker based in Kirkwall, central Presbytery support.

MP 16-02-2019