

AGM Report

25/6/17

The purpose of this report is to offer some reflection on the life of the congregation to 31st December of the preceding year, or normally that would be the case. Unlike the accounts, which are closed at 31st December a Trustees Report has a little more discretion on where to start and stop.

In October of 2016 the congregation voted to adopt the Unitary Constitution and with the concurrence of both Kirk Session and Congregational Board, the matter was processed through Hamilton Presbytery at its November meeting and passed to the Law Department of the Church of Scotland. Westwood Parish Church was issued with the Unitary Constitution, which came into effect on 1st January 2017.

The time frame between October and November 2016 gave the opportunity to hone some ideas about how to restructure Westwood Church, as it was obvious that having many committees was going to be cumbersome and that we didn't have the people to be chairpersons of lots of committees. Some form of group structure was required that would bring related aspects of church life together. The Kirk Session reflected on some possibilities at its December 2016 meeting and held over its decision to the January 2017 meeting when it agreed to a series of Teams each led by a coordinator.

A Finance Team would do exactly what you expect it to do. A Building Management Team led by Raymond Burns, incorporates the Hall Management Committee, Hall Lets Convener, Property Committee and Safe Buildings Team. A Line Management Team would provide a system of day-to-day management for employees of the congregation and help keep us compliant with employment law especially if, God forbid, we find ourselves in a grievance or disciplinary process; Morag Kokott, Jan Clydesdale and the Minister make up the Line Management Team. A Communications

Team would be led by Lachlan McLachlan and focus on all aspects of internal and external communications like website, email, facebook, local press, intimations and church magazine. A Community Development Team lead by Janet McKay would help coordinate activity within the church as well as develop relationships with community bodies. Spiritual Development embraces Outreach, expressions of faith through worship, alternative patterns of worship. Justice and Equality brings us into the ways we support charities like Christian Aid, Loaves and Fishes and how we highlight and promote within the life of our church issues of justice and equality that the Christian faith speaks to.

Not all of these groups are yet functional and those which do exist like Building Management, Line Management and Communications are still reflecting on their tasks and working out the most effective way to operate. We have faced unavoidable delays in bringing forward some of these matters so that it becomes easy to lose momentum and direction. We cannot afford to leave our church betwixt and between, a foot in the old and a foot in the new. It will take effort to keep ourselves moving forward

in the hope that whatever structures we give ourselves to work within they allow our church to run smoothly and effectively and importantly afford us time to address the bigger question facing all churches – that of decline. More often than not these teams require a type of input from church members that they have not had to give to their church previously. It is a learning curve for many of us and cannot be rushed. Across the summer we hope to make some progress with the Community Development Team so that if by the autumn we have four of our six teams functioning we will have done quite well.

At the beginning of April we employed Mrs Susan Taylor on an eight-hour per week contract for cleaning the church halls. Mrs Margaret McEwen continued in her employment as Church Cleaner with duties related to the sanctuary and hall of fellowship. That process of discussing change began in late January 2016 and therefore took over a year to complete. Drafting out contracts of employment proved to be a painstaking task that involved many hours of conversation, editing, refining and checking with the Law Department of the Church of Scotland as well as researching with the

Inland Revenue as we explored the implications of pension provision, holiday and sick pay entitlement. It was not easy but we got there in the end. Thanks are due to Alex Herd for his dedication to the task and determination to see it through to the end and to Morag Kokott whose professional experience in Human Resources was invaluable. I like to think that the Unitary Constitution has provided a platform upon which the skills and experience of church members, graciously offered, is helping to build a better church, more aware of its legal responsibilities and responding to them. We still have employment contracts to update as contracts which were issued 20 years ago no longer reflect current employment law on matters like holiday entitlement and have been described by a church solicitor as “unsafe.”

Into the mix of new contributions Mark Williams our Session Clerk bravely took on a Worship Leaders Course arranged by Hamilton Presbytery. In the not so distant future Mark will lead Sunday morning worship in our church in the presence of assessors. I hope you will give him your fullest support. At the end of the process Mark will be an accredited leader able to

conduct worship within Westwood Church. I know Mark is already encouraging others to explore that training course. This isn't just good for me so that it is easy to find cover during my holidays it is good for Westwood church. Where growth is happening in churches is where worship is led by people other than the minister in informal settings often with meals and eating together being part of that experience. We are just beginning to plant the seeds for something new.

Today our intimation sheet contained news of another big change to patterns of church life. The familiar pattern of summer services at 10.30am will commence next Sunday 2nd July and continue as the regular pattern from that time. The overriding factor in this decision is numbers at church on Sunday mornings. In making the change we will lose in some ways and gain in others and at the same time hope that the familiarity of summer service allows for a smooth transition. News of this change in church life has been posted to the church website as well as being sent out to church members by email and will appear on our facebook page. The Church magazine will carry this news in its next issue.

Already this report is longer than a sermon so I think it is time for me to stop. It has been a demanding year with a lot to get through in terms of transition at Westwood and the additional workload of Presbytery. I am indebted to those who have helped share that burden – Mark Williams Session Clerk, Raymond Thomson Depute Clerk, Bill Lennie, Treasurer who first indicated his intention to retire a year ago but has graciously continued in post to allow the upcoming treasurer some very important family time. There are others who have borne the burden of change not least of all my wife Lynn who has endured the “grumpy me” more often than she should ever have to. I am grateful to you all for your time and patience as we feel our way forward. The summer break is looking very good indeed and I hope you all enjoy it as much as I intend to!!!