

# **Appendix to Parish Profile**

## Most Recent Local Congregational Review

### **The Presbytery of Angus Local Congregational Review The West Kirk, Arbroath April 2014**

The visiting team comprised Rev Dougal Edwards, Mr David May and Mrs Celia Gray. The team met on Tuesday, 1st April firstly with Rev Alasdair Graham at 7pm followed by a meeting with the office bearers at 7.45pm.

#### **The Big Picture**

The team's immediate impression was of that of a welcoming church in very good heart under the very secure leadership of Rev Alasdair Graham. Alasdair's vision, dedication and energy underpinned his answers to various questions about life at The West Kirk. The same enthusiasm was evident at the meeting with the office bearers with no shortage of honest, positive comments.

#### **• Welcoming and Inclusive**

The team agreed that the congregation were friendly, welcoming and inclusive and cater for all ages " from 3 - 93". The whole congregation has at its core the desire to make everyone welcome and not just on a Sunday. The superb church complex serves as a well-used centre for a host of activities and groups which are advertised in the monthly magazine.

#### **• Community Hub**

The West Kirk folk are delighted to have a close relationship with the residents of the nearby St Vigeans Residential Home some of whom come to Sunday worship where they are met with warmth and genuine Christian hospitality. Close bonds are also enjoyed with St Thomas

RC Church and this was most evident at the time of the death of Monsignor Ben Donnachie when The West Kirk were invited to attend the Memorial Services. This good relationship works well in the sharing of the chaplaincy of Arbroath High School and Christian Unity Week witness.

- **Vibrant and Optimistic**

Although very aware of the challenges faced by the Kirk both locally and nationally, all were very upbeat about the congregation being in good heart. They felt very much part of a family who care very much for each other. Many spoke of the sense of vibrancy that infuses the life of the congregation springing directly from their minister who they clearly love and admire. The team sensed a very well organised and happy atmosphere with refreshing optimism, zest and commitment.

- **Age Issues....bridging the gap**

Although young at heart, it would be fair to say that the majority of the congregation are of the mid - mature vintage. Much has been attempted to attract a greater proportion of young people. Currently, 45 7-12 year old attend the weekly Youth Club with regular invitations and flyers being circulated throughout primary schools. A previous venture called Lighthouse, a Sunday evening discussion group aimed at teenagers, is no longer running. Alasdair and his team are determined to consider new avenues in reaching out to the younger folk. Alasdair's natural style is enjoyed by the small group of children who sit with him on the chancel steps on a Sunday; "banter" is the keyword and it seems the organist and choir take more than their fair share! In their defence, at least one office bearer singled out singing as her answer to what brings worship in The West Kirk to life.

- **Worship**

Minister and office bearers share a passion to make the Good News relevant to all ages and to this end, a huge variety of styles, times and modes of worship have been offered sometimes for a trial period followed by appraisal. A card communion is in place 3 times a year, supplemented by informal celebrations after selected Sunday morning services and at Adam Cargill Court. Home communions attended by the district elder are a priority to those unable to attend. Twelve people regularly attend a weekly Bible Study. There is a small, but very dedicated Prayer Group with an organised prayer box/email system. This group undertake to intercede privately at 11pm every night. The Guild boasts 47 members who, as well as supporting their own church, look forward and enjoy meeting other Guild members at regional and national gatherings.

- **Pastoral Care**

Pastoral care is high on the list of the priorities of The West Kirk. Alasdair is an all action/all visiting pastor who takes time and spends time with people. This is most evident in hospital where everyone, not only members, get a cheery wee word. The opportunity for contact is also taken by the monthly magazine deliverers who can liaise with Alasdair if a need presents itself. Similarly regular visits by elders keep church and parishioners in touch. He is a regular presence in Timmergreens and Muirfield Primary schools where he is chaplain. The forming of a pastoral visiting team has failed to start, as potential members have a lack of confidence of being asked to pray. As such a group would be of great benefit to reducing the minister's workload, consideration could be given to invite the pastoral visitors to the prayer group. They could also attend a Presbytery training course. The Flower group,

arrange and deliver the Sunday flowers, and an elder sends cards to all who sign the Visitor's Book. One office bearer remarked at how much this caring act was appreciated by a relative from Buckie. The 1.8 Ministry status is daunting. The congregation are concerned that Alasdair "never stops". The services of Rev Andrew Begg and Mr Tom Maplesden are very much appreciated as are those of Mrs Graham whose secretarial talents are vital to the smooth running of her husband's packed diary. Sadly funerals do feature heavily in this diary: it is Alasdair's choice to be there with families at such times; indeed he counts it a privilege and out of these contacts, several families have been brought into the Church family. A number of people from the congregation have attended training courses run by Angus Presbytery on how to conduct funerals; perhaps they could be encouraged to develop these skills.

- **Presbytery Support**

In response to the workload issues, the team broached the prospect of ministerial support perhaps in the future with appointment of an Ordained Local Minister.

Concerns of how this would work, how much supervision, how to delegate the work etc., had been considered.

Under the current minister, there would seem not to be a difficulty. The team were reassured that Alasdair prioritises Wednesday as his day off and takes his full quota of holidays away from home. He sees no problem..." I just get on with it". The team wonder how a subsequent minister would cope and see this as an area worthy of long term consideration.

- **Mission**

Here is a congregation which doesn't think of mission as an activity that the church does from time to time, rather

as an all-encompassing description of who they are. Their understanding of mission is, therefore, very much expressed in their efforts to ensure that they are welcoming and inclusive and that caring relationships are the hallmark of all they do.

### • **Finances and Fabric**

In 2013, a Stewardship Programme was carried out details of which are presented in a highly professional booklet which was issued to the visiting team prior to their visit. Future plans include a five year building maintenance programme of essential repairs to stonework and windows which will cost around £250,000. The booklet gave a comprehensive account of how income was generated and spent in a totally user friendly style. Encouragement was given to Gift Aid where appropriate, again all illustrated with easily understood graphs and pie charts. It has to be noted that the subject of money was discussed very briefly which, for the team, was a refreshing change from the norm!

### **Deliverances**

Presbytery:

1. Notes that Arbroath, West Kirk, was visited in terms of Act 9 2011, in April of 2014.
2. Resolves to find the congregation of West Kirk to be in good heart and commends minister, office bearers and members for the continuing of caring and effective ministry and mission to congregation and community alike.
3. Urges that the Kirk Session will consider starting a pastoral visiting group.
4. Suggests that the Kirk Session encourage those who have undergone training to utilise these skills.

5. Suggests that potential pastoral visitors join the prayer group in the church to overcome the uncertainty of being able to pray.
6. Invites the Office Bearers to consider the long term and imagine the Congregation in 10, 15 and 20 years' time.
7. Instructs the Superintendence Group to contact the congregation of Arbroath West Kirk in twelve months to monitor progress with their proposed developments.