

**FAIRMILEHEAD PARISH CHURCH
THE TOWARDS 2025 GROUP - DRAFT REPORT V2**

BACKGROUND

The Towards 2025 Group was established by the Kirk Session in the autumn of 2016 and the Group set to work in late December 2016. The membership of the Group is:

Towards 2025 Group Members		
Scott Arthur	Malcolm Cutt	Amanda Meldrum
Pamela Black	Helen Grant	Duncan Wilson (Convenor)
Maureen Carter	Neil Grant	
Lara Coyle	Andy Lippok	

REMIT OF THE GROUP

The remit of the Group was to review where the Group believed Fairmilehead was at the present time on its journey of faith and proclamation of the Gospel. It has kept in mind the vision of the Towards 2000 Group and tried to discern what God is doing in the world today. What he is calling Fairmilehead Parish Church and its members and adherents to do now, and in the next few years particularly under the leadership of a new Minister, who will be called on the demission of our current minister the Rev John Munro, BD.

ASSESSMENT

The Group in following its remit has not been principally concerned about who the next minister might or should be. Rather it has been keen to ensure that the Kirk Session and congregation, the “people of God”, the “followers of Christ” in Fairmilehead, who are the regular worshipping community have a clear and shared vision for the Christian faith here in Fairmilehead and beyond and what that “collective” ministry and mission needs to do in order to increase the Church family.

The Group first of all reflected on the work of the Towards 2000 Group which had looked at 4 main areas: Spiritual Leadership and Organisation, Communications, Premises and Finance. The Towards 2000 Group was the focus which God used to inspire the congregation to undertake the major refurbishment of our halls and overall improvement of our fabric under the energetic leadership of our Minister. The Towards 2000 Group had had a view of faith and Christian action guided by a text from Hebrews, Chapter 13 verse 14,

“For there is no permanent city for us here on earth; we are looking for the city which is to come”.

The Towards 2025 Group has also kept this text in mind in the sense that wherever Fairmilehead Parish Church and its people are at present, and whatever has been achieved by it and them to date, is only a staging post on the journey towards that city which is yet to come. This should help us to avoid thinking that we have reached our goals and that we can rest easy. The Group in trying to find a future or new direction looked in various places and at the findings and comment from numerous sources and these are recorded in this report from (A) onwards. The Group believes that the principles covered in the Group’s conclusions and recommendations need to be prayerfully considered first by the Kirk Session and then by all members and adherents of the congregation in order to put in place action which will achieve those recommendations.

A summary of the Group’s conclusions and recommendations are listed in the table below.

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Towards 2025 Group concludes and recommends that:

a) **LEADERSHIP**

The Minister and Kirk Session together must offer strong leadership to achieve a focused and inclusive outward looking ministry which visibly demonstrates our Christian faith in action by FPC and its members and adherents serving the community and all who come within its reach.

b) **EFFECTIVE PROGRAMME/METHOD OF EVANGILISM**

In considering these conclusions and recommendations the Minister and Kirk Session must as a matter of priority put in place an effective programme/method for members to take the message of the Gospel to all the people of Fairmilehead in order to bring them to the Christian faith and to join the Church family.

c) **MORE ACTIVE ROLE IN THE WIDER CHURCH**

That FPC should play an active part in the work of the Church of Scotland through the Presbytery of Edinburgh and the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. It must also foster mutually beneficial relationships with other local parish churches.

d) **ADAPTABLE TO THE NEEDS OF PEOPLE**

As the community of believers and followers of Christ, that is 'Fairmilehead Parish Church', it must be adaptable to the needs of people in order to encourage all those individuals on their own faith journeys and none including being receptive to changing how we as a community do church.

e) **GROWING THE CHURCH FAMILY THROUGH FAITH IN ACTION**

All members and adherents should be encouraged and supported to show their individual 'faith in action' as a means of growing the church family through their example and thereby welcome new people into the church family;

f) **MAKE AVAILABLE TIME AND TALENTS**

All members and adherents should be encouraged to use their time and talents in building up the church family – through an organised programme of 'time and talents'. In considering time and talents the Group considered St Paul's letter to the Romans – Chapter 12 in which he encourages all to use our different gifts in accordance with the grace that God has given us;

g) **SERVING THE NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY**

All members and adherents should be encouraged to have a pronounced outward looking focus aimed at serving the needs in the community of Fairmilehead and beyond. The Pop-Up Cafe is a small example of how we as a church community and family can serve the needs of those living and working in our midst;

h) **BE WELCOMING AND OPEN TO ALL**

Fairmilehead Parish Church and **all** its members and adherents by the example of their individual 'faith in action' should be seen as representative of an inclusive church community which is open to **all**. That all with whom FPC is associated with and with whom it comes into contact must receive a genuine and warm welcome. That the Kirk Session should recognise the everyday opportunity to engage with **all** users of our halls and to encourage them to the Christian faith whether ultimately attending worship in Fairmilehead or elsewhere.

Material considered by the Group in coming to its conclusions and recommendations is reproduced below.

A. **THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH**

First the “Great Commission” of Jesus to us to go and make disciples of all nations; All **four** Gospels stress the desire of Jesus that those who follow Him (church members and adherents) should call others to follow as well. See below extracts from all four Gospels taken from the NIV translation of the bible:

- **Matthew – Chapter 28 verses 19 & 20**

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you”.

- **Mark - Chapter 16 verse 15**

“He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to all creation”.

- **Luke - Chapter 24 verse 47**

“And repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem”.

- **John - Chapter 20 verses 21-22**

“Again Jesus said, ‘Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you. And with that he breathed on them and said, receive the Holy Spirit”.

B. **MISSION - A DEFINITION**

Equals God’s work of reconciling the whole of creation to himself, in which we are called to participate. Practical caring for those in need, and working to transform unjust structures that hold back the weakest in society are very much part of mission, and need to be recognised and affirmed as such. A theology of mission that sees all movement towards greater wholeness and flourishing as God’s work will inspire and encourage undervalued Christians. Christians need an awareness that they are indeed doing the work of the kingdom.

(“Evangelism – which way now” Mike Booker and Mark Ireland)

C. **EVANGELISM - A DEFINITION**

Evangelism is the process by which people become disciples of Jesus Christ. Evangelism is not a quick fix for falling numbers as it can take a long time for evangelism to bear fruit in the sense of greater numbers in the church building for worship. There is a need to prioritise children’s and youth work. There is a case for accepting that “new wine” is better in “new wineskins” – i.e. new disciples may want and need new forms of church life to facilitate their continued faith journey.

(“Evangelism – which way now” Mike Booker and Mark Ireland)

D. **CHURCH OF SCOTLAND – LOCAL CHURCH REVIEW**

The key areas of the Church of Scotland’s “Local Church Review” are:

- Worship,
- Evangelism,
- Service,
- Discipleship, and
- Fellowship.

The Local Church Review (LCR) replaces the previous system of quinquennial superintendence. It is an opportunity for a congregation to write a story which will tell the Presbytery about “church life” in our parish including the five key areas of worship, evangelism, service, discipleship and fellowship. It takes forward the idea of the previous quinquennial system operated by the Presbytery of Edinburgh that “Unless the Lord builds the house”; they labour in vain who build it; (Psalm 127). LCR is a mechanism for encouraging Kirk Sessions and congregations to strive to find out and do what God is calling them to do in the world and to build on what He wants us to do.

E. THE SEVEN MARKS OF A HEALTHY CHURCH

The Kirk Session in recent years studied “The Healthy Churches’ Hand book (by Robert Warren) with its seven marks of a healthy church –

1. **Energised by Faith**
(rather than just keeping things going or trying to survive)
2. **Outward-Looking Focus**
(with a ‘whole life’ rather than a ‘church life’ concern)
3. **Seeks to find out what God wants**
(discerning the Spirit’s leading rather than trying to please everyone)
4. **Faces the cost of change and growth**
(rather than resisting change and fearing failure)
5. **Operates as a community**
(rather than functioning as a club or religious organisation)
6. **Makes room for all**
(being inclusive rather than exclusive)
7. **Does a few things and does them well**
(focused rather than frenetic)

The Group believes that few will disagree with these 7 marks of a healthy church but while they can help make our Church community be healthier in the sense of doing what God’s wants us to do it takes commitment and focus of **ALL** to become a healthier church. The conclusions and recommendations of the Group reflect the seven marks of a healthy church family.

F. THE MINISTRIES COUNCIL’S REPORT TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2016;

The Council’s Report is concerned about the future of Ministry and through a series of Road Shows the Council aims to develop the ideas in its Report and to listen to the experience of others. It will report its further views to the 2017 General Assembly. The Council recognises the need for a variety of models of ministry working in a changing culture and to explore various practical proposals and a legal framework for Hub-style Ministry.

The Group believes that we should not feel constrained by how things have always been done but rather be open to new ways of worshipping God and following Jesus Christ which include the content and style of worship services and how we share our Christian faith.

G. THE FINDINGS OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND’S RESEARCH PROGRAMME “FROM ANECDOTE TO EVIDENCE”;

The Group noted that the researchers associated to this programme had concluded that while there is no single recipe for overall growth in numbers there are common ingredients strongly associated with growth in churches of any size, place or context.

- Good leadership;
- A clear mission and purpose;
- Willingness to self-reflect, to change and adapt according to context;
- Involvement of lay members;
- Being intentional in prioritising growth;
- Being intentional in chosen style of worship;
- Being intentional in nurturing disciples:

The conclusions and recommendations of the Group reflect these findings.

H. WHAT THEN IS THE PURPOSE OF THE OF THE CHURCH;

David Devenish in his book “What on Earth is the Church for?” writes about the Kingdom as follows:

“Firstly Jesus was sent to announce and bring the Kingdom of God.....The Kingdom... is a much bigger concept than my personal salvation. It is a broader concept even than the church. The church is the agent to

bring the Kingdom of God into this world through a commitment to Jesus' manifesto.....So being sent as Jesus was sent will mean a Kingdom perspective. It will affect how we relate to the world, and what we bring to it:

- How we relate to the poor;
- How we conduct ourselves in the world of work and business;
- How we work for justice;
- How we show compassion for street children and drug addicts;
- How we see the oppressed set free:

I. **THE RESULTS OF THE (3)THREE CONVERSATIONS**

The Group in reflecting on the current challenges for Fairmilehead Parish Church as well as 'what kind of church our members want to be' held (3) three conversations. The results from the "conversations" held within the Group, the Kirk Session and members of the congregation produced the following themes. The two tables below record a mixture of views from the 3 conversations.

What are our Challenges?		
Reaching out to our neighbours/community	Attracting & Keeping young people in church	Links with the global church
Increasing/decreasing numbers	Putting faith into action	Attracting the best new minister/leader
Keeping the congregation together	Lack of funds to do what is needed	Encourage young to participate in the church community
Pastoral support for all ages	How to grow	Be more friendly
Aging demographic	Seeing the big picture	Offering something for everyone
Generational gaps	Unity	Welcome to the secular society
Look for young people and families to join	Declining income and current income is spent locally and nationally by the CoS.	Serving the needs of the community

What kind of Church do we want to be?		
Be more inclusive	Faith in action and being visible	Outward looking
Connect with all hall users.	Action & commitment from all church members - old members and new members.	Relevant, focussed and inclusive ministries.
Strong leadership going forward	Reaching out to all people locally and globally.	Church for Everyone
Inclusiveness including one single service on a Sunday morning	More user friendly and thought provoking services	More Evangelical
Welcoming	Be adaptable to change – try change and evaluate its effects.	

J. **'PATH OF RENEWAL'**

An increasing number of Church of Scotland congregations are following a journey entitled 'Path of Renewal' as something which is more meaningful and much more exciting than the "tired old notion of membership". The Presbytery of Edinburgh received a presentation on the "Path of Renewal" at its February 2017 meeting.

The “Path of Renewal” is about developing a different mindset and way of thinking about what being a Christian is all about. As one congregation following the path of Renewal states *“it is about Doing and Telling. Proclaiming the good news of the kingdom in word and action. Experimenting, not from the safety of our sanctuaries in words and rituals we’ve practised and honed to attract but with tools less familiar and beyond our comfort and expertise. Becoming Missional seems like a slow process involving us laying down what we think we know to catch up with the new thing God is about – Finding connections we might not have envisaged and living with unpredictability of what the Spirit reveals of God’s activity in our neighbourhoods”*. (www.pathfrenewal.blogspot.co.uk)

It is not about better teaching or preaching but about reintroducing practices and habits that recreate a Christian identity. It is about:

- A focus on the needs of all.
- Sending people out.
- The Minister enabling others.
- Personal faith openly spoken of.
- Developing a deep trust in God.
- It is about recognising the need to change and to do things differently.

It is about learning from Jesus by initially enabling a small number of people to move forward on a path of renewal and then to expand into ever greater numbers in an incremental way until all those in the parish are reached.

K. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Group has reflected on and discussed all of the above. It has tried to be realistic in approaching the much talked about difficulties of the institutional church coming to terms with “declining” numbers of members and how to take the message of the Gospel to the people in order to bring them to the Christian faith.

Pope Benedict XVI since retiring from the papacy states in his latest book (Last Testament) that *“the true problems of the Church lie not in a dwindling membership but in dwindling faith”*. *Today we live in a positivistic and agnostic culture, which shows itself more and more intolerant of Christianity. In that sense, Western society, or Europe in any case, will no longer simply be a Christian society. Believers will have to strive all the more to continue to form and to bear the awareness of values and the awareness of life. A resolute faith among individual congregations and local churches will be important. The responsibility is greater”*.

We believe that we need to do more than talk about being welcoming and inclusive but to demonstrate by our actions, our ‘faith in action’, that we are welcoming and inclusive of all. The church has to be seen to and be for everyone. Over the years the Kirk Session has had many conversations about connecting with the numerous hall users who use our hall premises on a regular basis for their activities. We must see that as an everyday opportunity to engage with all hall users and to encourage and invite them to the Christian faith whether to here in Fairmilehead or elsewhere.

It is clear that the Church Community must be welcoming. Steve Aisthorpe in his book the Invisible Church quotes from a middle aged woman who is living a life outside of the Christian faith and who says simply that *“the Church has got to learn to love again- that is it, that-is-it. It needs to be more inclusive not a club but a community of believers, followers of Christ who care for each other sharing in all that life brings. The church must be for everyone”*.

We believe we need a Minister and Kirk Session together which offers strong leadership to achieve focused and inclusive outward looking ministry which encourages us all to demonstrate our faith in action by serving the community and all who come within our reach and that of FPC. It also needs the commitment and action of **all** members and adherents to support and play their full part in that ministry to ensure that it happens and is not only talked about. We believe that as a community of believers and followers of Christ

that we must be adaptable to the needs of people and to encourage them on their own individual faith journeys and to be adaptable in how we do church.

That means being willing:

- To consider the style and content of worship – more thought provoking and user friendly and in which all attending on a Sunday morning can participate.
- To encourage action and commitment from **all** church members to the aims and objectives of the FPC and the wider church.
- To be adaptable to change and be willing to evaluate the impact of that change.
- To be outward looking and focussed.
- To actively proclaim the Gospel to **all**.

All of the above and more must be the focus for this community of believers and followers of Christ on what we might term the Path to Renewal.

The Towards 2025 Group present their Report for the consideration of the Kirk Session and congregation and urge it to take forward these conclusions and recommendations with a sense of urgency and purpose.

References:

- 1) “Evangelism – which way now”? Mike Booker and Mark Ireland – published by Church House Publishing
- 2) “The Healthy Churches’ Handbook” – Robert Warren - published by Church House Publishing
- 3) “Last Testament” – Benedict XVI in his own words with Peter Seewald – Bloomsbury Publishing plc
- 4) “The Invisible Church (Learning from the experiences of churchless Christians)” – Steve Aisthorpe -St Andrew Press
- 5) “Path of Renewal” - www.pathofrenewal.blogspot.co.uk