**CONCLUSIONS FROM THE ‘FUTURE TRAVELLERS’ PROCESS TO DATE: September 2017**

Over the last year we have come to a shared understanding that we are a community of people who are trying to help each other to faithfully follow Jesus and continue the work of Jesus. We place a high value on the character and nature of our community life which including such things as it being a relatively small group with an emphasis on building strong relationships which focus on helping each other follow Jesus.

We understand that the place of the church in our society has changed dramatically over the last 50 years and that that has many and varied implications for us: many of which we are not fully aware of. However we want to live lives which are faithful to Jesus and bear witness to his Gospel in this society. We want to continue the work of Jesus in the world.

Primarily we want to develop communities which are similar to the current Community Centre and Stocket Grange Congregations. We want communities which, by the very way they organise themselves:

* help people faithfully follow Jesus;
* help people contine the work of Jesus;
* together bring the Gospel to the surrounding society.

There are four areas which we believe we need to concentrate on as a church with particular reference to the Community Centre Congregation;

* Doing what we do better:
* Discipleship
* Leadership Development
* Mission

Doing What We Do Better (in the Community Centre on a Sunday Morning)

We believe that the Community Centre Congregation has had a significant impact on our ability to faithfully follow Jesus and continue his work in the world. The size of the community and its character have contributed to this. But we recognise that we could do things better. By ‘doing things better’ we don’t mean making them more attractive or professional. For example, we are not aiming for better preaching as such, but for the fullness of gospel to be heard in life shaping ways by everybody in the congregation. Amongst the areas we need to consider are: worship, relationship/community building, care for one another beyond Sundays, accessibility to all etc.

Discipleship

We understand that we are called to bear witness to the love of God by following Jesus together. The best way to grow in our faithfulness to that calling is to be together in a community of mutual love and forgiveness with our focus on Jesus and united by the Holy Spirit. The Community Centre Congregation is the community in which that happens for us. But we have identified a need for more systematic and formal teaching and training to be part of our living together. All of us, from those who are encountering Jesus and the gospel for the first time through to those who have been Jesus followers for a long time, have much to learn about our faith and more to change about our lives. We therefore need to develop ways in which those who are new or not yet Christians can learn the basics and ways in which we all can all continue to grow and develop.

Leadership Development

There are those who are called to equip and enable the church to be all that it can be. We believe that there is an over-reliance on paid professional ministry in our church and in particular on Ian and Sarah. This is both a barrier to the development of the church and unsustainable in the future. The failure to properly recognise, develop and release others in leadership and equipping roles has led to a stunting of the church’s growth, development, mission and in the planting of new congregations. As a specific part of our ‘discipleship’ commitment we therefore need to find ways to identify, equip and commission those who can serve the church in leadership capacities.

Mission

Our primary focus, in terms of mission, as a church has been on encouraging people to continue the work of Jesus in their particular context. We have concentrated on encouraging individuals to see the particular people around them and the particular interests that they have as their ‘mission field’. We have encouraged each other to get involved with work outside of the church or to take a lead in developing mission projects. The phrases, “we are not an organisation that does things for its community, but a community which helps each other love our neighbours”, and “the vision of the church is in the hearts of the people”, have been central to that. , As a church, therefore, we have perhaps not had the positive impact on our local community which we could have and for some people in the church that is a frustration. Without wanting to lose the central understanding that we are a community of people helping one another to love our neighbours, we recognise a need to be more proactive in our corporate mission to our parish and the wider world.

We also recognise that the size and style of our congregation is a barrier to others becoming Christians and growing as Christians. We believe that the small size of our gatherings are central to their character, but this by definition excludes the thousands of people who live in our surrounding area. We also recognise that there are those who are excluded by the format and nature of our meetings. We therefore recognise a need to develop more and varied communities similar to the Community Centre Congregation but suited to the people who are or might be part of the new congregations. The Stocket Grange Congregation is a first attempt at this and we have much to learn from it.

There is a need, therefore, to

* be more intentional about how we live and serve *together* as a community (*Doing what we do better*),
* help people understand what it means to continue the work of Jesus (mission) as individuals and as a church, and to equip them for that (*Discipleship*)
* prepare and equip individuals and the church as a whole to develop new ways to reach the people of our community and to plant new congregations (*Leadership Development*)

**NEXT STEPS**

Over the last year there have been four different but overlapping groups of people involved in this process:

1. **The Kirk Session**: have been the instigators of the process and have had overall responsibility for it. Having set the process in motion they have given away almost all control over it. Their primary function has been to act as permission givers to Ian who has had the responsibility in leading the process and therefore the most power and influence in it. (To what extent the Kirk Session realised that this was the role they were playing is open to question)
2. The “**Larger Future Travellers Group**”. This group of around 15 people represented a cross section of the congregation. Four out of the six elders attended most of the meetings. It met 7 times over the course of 12 months. This was the primary group in the process. It reflected on materials presented by Ian with each meeting building on the last. Members of the group also did additional reading. The conclusions reached in this process emerged from the conversations of this group.
3. The “**Smaller Future Travellers Group”.** This is the group which attended 3 weekends in Glasgow run by Forge Scotland and did the reading associated with it. Six people went to each weekend but the 2 of the group changed following the first weekend. Whilst the weekends run by Forge proved to be unhelpful, the time spent together by the participants was valuable and their conversation often fed into the agenda for the larger group. As well as travelling together to Glasgow, the small group also met before and after each weekend.
4. The **Congregation**. Two Sunday afternoon ‘conferences’ were held for all members of the congregation. The first was to explain the reasoning behind and hopes for the process: this meeting was poorly attended. The second was in May and presented much of the material and insights that the larger group had been grappling with. This was a well-attended meeting and participants engaged well with it. The conversation at this meeting fed into the following larger group meetings. The congregation also engaged with the process through two sermon series and a fairly constant referring to the process on a Sunday morning and in informal conversations.

In order to engage as many people as possible in the ongoing process I propose that the Larger Group becomes open to all who want to attend with the hope that most, if not all, of those who have been attending will continue to do so.

The purpose of this group would be to keep thinking and talking about how the church develops, with particular attention being paid to the four areas of development outlined in the conclusions. There is a danger that it simply becomes a talking shop but the evidence of the past year is that it is from this group that changes and activity emerges and that as individuals are involved in the process they take personal responsibility for the development of the church.

There is a question about whether there is a need for a smaller steering group to enable the larger group to function or whether the Kirk Session can play this role.

There is a question about whether opening up the larger group to the whole congregation means that all those who want to be engaged in the process are, or whether there is still a need for something similar to the Sunday afternoon events.

**Practical Next Steps**

There have already been some positive small actions in response to the larger group discussions. For example, we have in the last few weeks focussed on helping people to engage with the Bible. We are also considering running the Fruitfulness on the Frontline programme as an introduction to the sort of ‘discipleship course’ which might be helpful to people. It also has the advantage of helping people with the issue of ‘sharing their faith’ which was flagged up as a need at the Congregational Conference.

These are small but significant steps which allow people to see some practical fruit from our conversations. But there is a need for more long term structural changes in all four of the identified areas. This is the next bit of work that needs done.

**Church Leadership**

Over the years I have often raised the question of the church being served by 2 part time paid staff as opposed to one full time minister. In reality a Minister cannot be ‘part-time’ or ‘full-time’ as they are not employees who are paid to do a set job for a set number of hours, but rather they are paid a stipend to allow them to be servants of the Church without having to work. My suggestion, therefore, has been that the church needs two ‘bi-vocational’ people serving it. This process has strengthened my sense that this would be good for the church for the following reasons:

* It helps the church move away from a minister centred approach
* It models collaborative ministry
* It helps move us away from the potentially unhealthy place that Ian and Sarah have within the church without throwing the baby out with the bath water.
* It provides more scope for developing new congregations
* It provides a more sustainable model of ministry
* It allows for more diverse gifts and skills: in particular I feel that I am lacking in the ability to implement the practical steps that are needed not least in the areas of discipleship and leadership development.

There are many challenges that would come with such a change, and it is possible that the Church of Scotland would not allow it, but I continue to believe that it is worth exploring.

**One More Thing….**

We can’t keep calling this process “Future Travellers” as we have now left the programme of that name run by Forge Scotland….