

Notes from a Parish Council Awayday held October 3rd 2009

In our opening session:

Martin Bethell led us in worship.

We engaged in a playful group exercise thanks to Eddie McGarrity.

Looked at elements of working in groups and the need for team working in the leadership of the church: (not just the staff): a desirable goal that the whole parish functions as a team.

Some strains between being representative of all parties and functional—effective in mission.

The reality that we arrive in meetings with several different loyalties, and sometimes a strain between them. We also need to find ways in which people can find their voice, express dissent, and we can work constructively with difference and grow in the process in wisdom and faith.

Ron Greig reminded us that every charity is required to demonstrate where responsibility and accountability lies. That Parish Council are the trustees, which means they exercise oversight of all corners of parish life and are accountable for good management. OSCAR—the charity overseer requires particular forms of accounts and written reports. Charity status is important to us and we need to be aware of our responsibility and accountability.

Suggestion that we address issues of being a trustee from time to time in our Parish Council meetings, have a form of induction for new members of Parish Council, and follow up on certain questions raised in discussion.

Here are the questions where we ran out of time before we discussed!

In 3s and 4s: what loyalties can you identify in yourself that come into play when you come to a parish meeting?

How can we help each other as fellow Christians balance conflicting loyalties:

Dissent

Have there been times when you have been shy of saying you disagree?

Can you tell any good stories, good examples of handling dissent in church life?

Where and how can an individual make their voice heard in our life as one parish?

After Coffee we discussed Mission strategies

Possible strategies for mission (as mentioned in the past)

1.

Focus on neighbourhoods—Keep the local church presence and do it better—quality of worship and better communication: logic look at map, see cluster round centres and say need to plant churches where no worshippers

2

Opposite extreme—one prominent purpose built church in the town and get everyone together (close other centres)

3

Modifications—replace St Paul's and St Columba's with one new building (where?) and retain other 4 centres

4

Rationalise to three worship centres—north, middle and south

5

Rationalise to two worship centres—one north and one south of river

6

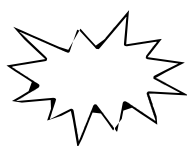
Aim for a cell church model—large gatherings not the basic unit—wholistic groups where worship, learning, prayer, social network and pastoral care with less frequency large gatherings for praise and worship

7

“The King's bus” - a bus equipped as both a small worship centre and for youth activity is driven from place to place bringing church to the people

Exercise—to do a SWOT analysis on each model (Strengths, Weaknesses. Opportunities and Threats)

No model is ideal, but need to weigh the advantages and snags of different approaches, identify which ones we want to explore in more depth, so that in the end an informed decision can be made.



Stars indicate weight of votes in favour

1. Existing pattern on neighbourhood focus

Strengths

Local and convenient

Access for everyone



Presence in community



Visible

Able to tailor to needs



Roots in community

Attracts lapsed members

Weaknesses

Spread out

more volunteers required

Numbers not always viable

Small congregations

Duplication—reinventing the wheel

Overall higher financial costs

Unwilling to take on ideas

Costs when legislation changes and has to be applied in six places

Opportunities

Able to tailor to needs



Engage directly with community



Connections with local schools allow school visits



To attract people who are there in locality

Actively involved in immediate community

Threats

Become inward looking

Difficult to get a church council

Spread too thin and doing too much

Focus becomes on maintenance—not enough focus on mission






Too attached to local building/structure/ fellowship

Impact on ministry team

2. Centralise to one purpose built prominent building





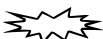



Strengths


- More/bigger worshipping numbers 
- Larger manpower (i.e pastoral care) 
- Share responsibility 
- Minister resources (less Sunday work) 
- Finance (Building upkeep) 
- Not tied to building/owner

Weaknesses

- Transport (Elderly people need help)
- Unwillingness to transport
- Risk of reduced numbers if people will not travel to worship
- Current building agreements tie us down

Opportunities

- Own building design (Eco) 
- New members 
- High profile! (seen) 
- Provide groups space (e.g. Rosebury Centre) 
- Drop in centre (church café) 
- Fund raising—Charity giving
- Youth (Rock/Praise band) 

- Ministry (On a Sunday one minister in service and one with children) 

Threats

- Loss of local identity
- Reduced members with those who decline to travel
- Loss of local school interaction
- Loss of volunteers (due to transport issues)

3. New build in place of St Columba and St Paul, otherwise unchanged

Strengths

Rationalise resources



Up to date building (warm,
light and welcoming)



Vision

Community

Acceptance of change

Weaknesses

Losing local presence

Finance!!! (finding it)

‘Aye been’

Opportunities

Re-invention of ‘church’



Create multi-purpose facility



Mover forward

Learn from the past



Community (involved in planning,
etc.)

Threats

Losing local identity

Loss of members

Community


Change


Reduction in staffing?


(Also in terms of volunteer
involvement—re-think
requirements)

4 and 5—reducing worship centres to either 2 or 3 across the town

Strengths

Visible in community (if new building) 


Own building we can use for community 

Potentially bigger congregations 

Less money on maintenance

More money on mission

Less admin

Less stretch on ministers 

Weaknesses

Buildings take energy and finance

2 or 3 separate communities

Need for people to travel

Where would you put them and how pay for them

Potential for north/south divide

The more centres the smaller each dynamic group within a felowship

Opportunities

Stronger churches

More opportunities to bring people in

Revisit time/frequency of worship and activities 

Buildings open more of the time 

Playgroup ministries as base for mission

Free up ministers to do other things

Greater team working

Develop lay ministry 

Better ecumenism 

Siting buildings well—that is church where need is 

Threats

Winners and losers for local communities

Maintenance of building

Lose people and local connections

Would we lose ministers

Give out message that church is contracting

Convincing Sponsors' Council (would they see us as contracting?)


Internal wrangling in Parish—takes energy

6. Cell church – mission focussed using wholistic groups

Strengths

Getting rid of some financial burdens—buildings/ ministers?

Smaller groups can diversify in worship

Pastoral concerns are more apparent (an absence quickly noted) 

Weaknesses

Leadership commitments demanding

No central guidance/ structure

Lack of communication to parish

Risk of tendency to clique

Overall fellowship would diminish

Opportunities

Might work better in a rural setting (but used in cities)

Opportunity for local growth 

Threats

Losing identity of the church

Church would fall (affecting numbers and ?charitable status)

People prefer “structure”

Support for leaders

Buying into the concept

7 King's Bus

Strengths

Outreach



Flexibility of worship

Weaknesses

Wouldn't work as a church

Can't be in different areas at the same time e.g. watch night service

Financial burden

Storage—security

Green issues

Access for elderly people

(and disabled people)

Opportunities

Diversify with population growth

Mobility to external events/
outreach



Threats

Breakdown

Lack of qualified drivers?

After Lunch—we concentrated on the word “Ecumenical”

Hope you’ve had some discussion about this in local setting
Recognise some of you will have missed out on this
Groups from different worship centres. Listen to what that part of town has thought about the issue. So we know not just what we think but what others think. In the end, not deciding a name, but whether this is a subject we want to pursue further, or just stick with what we have. The underlying discussion about being truly ecumenical has to go on regardless, but this is more about whether that particular word is to be worn with pride or we journey to seek another that communicates more widely what we stand for. Being an ecumenical parish is in many ways a destination, not somewhere we have arrived. This is a recurring issue, on the agenda at this time because the constitution has to be changed soon, and that is an appropriate time to seize if we want a change

(Please note there is an equally important though different conversation—how do we live up to the aim of living ecumenically and what should we do to live that better, and honour the treasures of all our traditions; today’s conversation is about the impact of the word on people outwith the church. It is not a retraction of our commitment to live ecumenically.)

Comments recorded *

Not the right time to change name

“Ecumenical” a word from a bygone age

“Ecumenical” can be a barrier

“parish” is helpful link to denominations (clue to composition)

Too much change?

“Livingston United Parish” - (problem with football links?)

Name is barrier to outreach so needs to change

Desire for change

Name isn’t why people go to church– not connected to it (but can be barrier to others

“Livingston 4 U Parish Church” (4 denominations U-nited)

Need a good alternative! Able to vote on it—not change for change’s sake

Try marketing possibilities—see what they mean to Joe public

Conclusion—we need to persevere with this issue and ask the Parish Council Officers to consider this further before November’s meeting and suggest a way forward.

*** there was also a suggested logo with denominational initials around a cross**

Input on Healthy Churches

Marks of Healthy Churches

1. Energised by faith

rather than – just keeping things going or trying to survive

1. Outward looking focus

with a ‘whole life’ rather than a ‘church life’ concern

2. Seeks to find out what God wants

discerning the Spirit’s leading rather than trying to please everybody.

3. Faces the cost of change and growth

rather than resisting change and fearing failure

4. Operates as a community

rather than functioning as a club or religious organisation

6. Makes room for all

being inclusive rather than exclusive

6. Does a few things and does them well

focused rather than frenetic

Exercise

Discuss which mark you would most want to address in your home congregation
listen to each other

Post its: three ideas of what might be tried locally or across the parish, each on
separate post it

Responses on next page

Energised by faith	Need to act as a church community together	Drop in café and links to help organisations	Different expressions of what it is to be church
Seek to find out what God wants	Working more together Welcome all types to church Do less but have time to do better	Lunch clubs Care church Open doors	With God's guidance let us lead to the future
Reenergise in faith—move people to experience God's love	United, communicating more effectively Prayer	LEPC to choose a charity to support annually	Seeks to find out what God wants We need to slow down and take time to contemplate/discern where God is leading us
Church Services which reactivate and strengthen personal faith in the congregations	Makes room for all—create a sense of belonging for all ages/backgrounds etc.	Set achievable mission goals (10 areas is 2(+) much!)	Show support on local issues
Need to establish a 2020 vision	Small groups gathering people with something in common (eg age, interest)	Acceptance of limited resources (Mark 5) Community Support for each other	Facing the cost of change and growth
Listen to what God wants—living out the faith	Outward looking church	Concentrate on doing a few things well	Face the cost of change and growth—positive experience
Operate as a community	Outward looking focus	Not to be afraid to try new things	Nurture children and young people through Sunday school Youth ministry

Need to stop dancing and start deciding	Energised buy faith— “move people to experience the love of God”	Different Sunday service formats (weekly change)	Look at quality of music in church and encourage Praise Bands (possibly involving local schools)
Cut down on meetings, not making it a burden on people	More visual as Christians in communities	Dramatised worship	Get musicians together to discuss new forms of music and seen how to get a Praise band for town wide services
Operate as a community– at all levels from sponsors’ council where each denomination has a view to local parish where each worship centre does its own thing	Faces the cost of change—we need to be realistic as current resources must be used to grow our membership before we face melt-down with reduced resources and income	Energised by faith—we need to encourage new/ younger members— many have served us well in th3e past but cannot continue at same pace— sustainability is a huge issue	Praise Bands
More aware of newcomers on Sunday Service	Use the 7 marks as a series themes in services across the parish—then	Small groups (right across the parish) to discuss 7 marks	Rock Praise bands
Preaching series across parish looking at 7 marks of healthy churches	Small groups across the parish to discuss the seven marks	Following series of small groups have a Parish wide consultation	
Information cards for newcomers	Parish wide consultation on the 7 marks		

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