

REVIEW OF THE PRESBYTERY PLAN:

STIRLING ST. MARK'S

The kirk session discussed the review of the presbytery plan at its meeting in January 2017, and wishes to convey the following points so as to feed in to the review of the presbytery plan.

The congregation of St Mark's has been part of its community since the late 1930s, both serving it and worshipping within it. The parish includes the whole of Raploch and the western part of Cornton, so is split by the River Forth and joined at the Old Brig. We are part of Stirling. The parish also includes business areas including Castle Business Park, the Prudential and other financial companies at Craigforth, Sainsbury's and the Back o' Hill industrial estate. Areas of housing have been demolished in the last 15 years, and there has also been significant new house-building in both Raploch and Cornton by the public and private sectors. Our parish is changing. So is Stirling, and so are we.

Raploch continues to be identified in the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation as among the 5% most deprived parts of Scotland. As such, our congregation is included as one of the Church of Scotland's 65 'priority areas', qualifying for an additional member of staff, with support from the Priority Areas team in Glasgow. This has helped to provide us with a focus for our mission within our parish.

Over the last five years St Mark's has been one of the Priority Areas' 'Chance to Thrive' congregations. Along with originally seven other congregations, and now ten, and with support from a mentor and from a panel of volunteers, we have been exploring how we can serve our community more effectively and share our Christianity through actions as well as words.

So far, our Chance to Thrive journey has helped to re-invigorate the life of the congregation, with a range of short to medium term projects helping to strengthen our commitment and mission, along with more permanent features, such as St Mark's@Sainsbury's and five new elders coming forward to serve the congregation.

These ventures have ranged from a social history project, to a five year Fruit Barra, an open space clean-up and celebration, bringing the Bible World lorry to Stirling for our primary schools, a monthly family service, and an annual Christmas project bringing support to the homeless, to young carers, and to women and teenagers in Women's Aid refuges. We are well known to our community now, not just as a worshipping presence at its heart, but also as local Christians who are more active and visible within our community.

Our attention has recently been focusing on how we can adapt our buildings and spaces to allow them to be more effective for us and our community. This has involved working with the General Trustees of the Church along with Architects Page and Park as they led us through a future use study, which came to completion towards the end of 2016. This document is now being used to take the next steps in terms of a business plan and fundraising.

We have taken strength and inspiration from our links with the seven other Chance to Thrive congregations. We have been accepted for the next phase of Chance to Thrive, which has been joined by another six congregations. We look forward to sharing our experience, not only with them, but with other congregations in the presbytery and elsewhere. So far, we have told our story in Dundee, Dunfermline, Alloa, Cranhill, Carnwadric, Langside, Castlemilk, Neilston, Bellshill, Bearsden and Bridge of Allan!

We know that we are a small congregation, lacking in many of the resources enjoyed in others. But we benefit from and welcome co-operation with fellow Christians and neighbouring congregations, and look forward to doing so even more in the future. Our annual Summer Holiday Club depends on us getting help from outside the congregation, and we value working with Stirling Kirks Together especially for its support for our elders. We also know that many of those who come to help us also get encouragement from sharing our work.

We also know that we struggle to find those with the relevant qualifications and gifts to be property conveners, treasurers and safeguarding co-ordinators, and that this could be a risk to the future viability of the congregation. So we really welcomed the recent consultation from 121 about this, and hope that the presbytery can be active in securing support in these areas for congregations like ours.

We are delighted to see a range of new developments in our parish, with extensive private and social rented house-building now underway. This will strengthen the community and bring people who are new to the area into our parish. So we know that we will be adapting to welcome them, to reflect their needs, and to harness their faith and talents too.

In short, we see St Mark's further building on our Christian witness in our parish, with the continued support of the Church of Scotland and Stirling Presbytery for our role within a Priority Area, while welcoming support from outside but also contributing actively to the wider work of the presbytery and the national church.

February 2017