

# PATHHEAD AND WEST END CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

A way forward

## OVERVIEW

For the past 150 years both churches have worked in their respective parts of the town. Sometimes they have worked together, at other times there has been little contact between the two. Over this past year a significant step was taken as both churches settled into a new situation of sharing a minister. Feedback suggests that this is working reasonably well. The majority of folk have adjusted for example, to the new times for services, and shared services and activities have been well received. However over this past year the challenge of shrinking congregations in both churches has become increasingly apparent.

Over the past few years both churches have witnessed a small number of new people coming along and becoming involved in church life, but these very welcome additions are small in number when compared to the numbers who are no longer part of the churches' lives whether through infirmity or passing away or leaving the church. On the current trajectories of both churches it is just a matter of time before one, and then the other reaches a stage where it is no longer viable to keep things going.

This could be viewed very negatively, and some are quite discouraged by this situation. Keeping both churches going for as long as possible seems to be the only option that some might have considered. It is certainly one option, but clearly not a long term answer.

## The Objective

*“Continuing a theologically open and progressive Congregational presence in Kirkcaldy”*

The leaders of both churches have begun to give the matter some consideration. There is a realism which accepts that without taking action now it is likely that both churches will close by time, and agreement that simply leaving the situation as it is, is not an option. The overarching objective at this time has to be to discern a way forward which could ensure that the type of church we seek to be – namely open, tolerant and progressive in theology – can continue into the future.

There are many different expressions of the Christian faith in the town, but we feel that we have a unique expression of faith to offer which is very relevant in today's fragmented society.

## Seeking a Solution

Following some initial discussion by the individual church leaderships, it is proposed that we begin to explore the possibility of the churches coming together more closely over the next 2-3 years.

**This is not a proposal that the churches merge immediately, but by time this will be the likely outcome.**

There would be two distinct “phases” proposed.

1. Phase 1 would see the churches coming together “administratively”. This means that there would be a single church, with a shared membership, shared leadership and shared resources. There is already shared ministry. However initially both buildings would continue to be used for worship each Sunday and for other activities as now.

There are many different aspects which would need to be worked through, including:

- a. Developing a new constitution;
- b. Agreeing how existing members and leaders would merge into a new single body;
- c. Developing new policies and financial systems;
- d. Agreeing our denominational affiliation (if any);
- e. Seeking agreement of the Charity Regulator etc.

Such a process would itself take time, perhaps 12-18 months. During this time both churches would largely continue to function as they currently do.

The outcome of Phase 1 would be a single Congregational Church serving Kirkcaldy, but still using both buildings.

2. Phase 2 would begin the process of considering the future use of the buildings. It is understood that folk in both churches are very attached to their respective buildings. A range of options would have to be considered, including:
  - a. the condition of each building;
  - b. the location of each building;
  - c. the costs of maintaining/ developing one or other of the buildings;
  - d. Potential alternative uses, marketability etc.

These are considerations for the future, perhaps 18 -24 months hence, and even beyond this if disposal of buildings was to be considered. External help may be sought to support us through these issues.

## Moving Forward

With the agreement of both Church meetings, it is anticipated that the leadership of both churches will meet over the period August – October 2016, with a view to considering the phases outlined above, and in particular looking at the implications of Phase 1. Following these discussions, a formal proposal would be brought to both church meetings in November 2016 that we actively work towards union.

If, then both churches agree to the proposal brought forward, we would then work through Phase 1.

## Timeline

Time frame for Phase 1	
August - October 2016	Leaders from both churches meet together Initial discussion about the timescales and priorities going forward Initial scoping of the “tasks” that need to be undertaken (e.g. writing new constitution, bringing admin, finance, people etc. together)
November 2016	Report and proposal to both Church Meetings
Winter 2016 – Spring 2017	If agreed, work progresses to deal with the different elements of Phase 1
March 2017	Report to both Churches AGM's
Spring – Autumn 2017	Progress towards bringing the churches together, reports to Church meetings in July 2017 and proposal by November 2017 for forming a single Church
Winter 2017-2018	If there is agreement, the new Church would be formally constituted