

**To all members of Congregations and Kirk Sessions of the Presbyteries of St Andrews, Kirkcaldy and Dunfermline**

Dear Colleagues,

Some of you may be aware that there are discussions taking place around the development of a union of the Presbyteries of Dunfermline, Kirkcaldy and St Andrews to form a Presbytery of Fife. Others will have no idea that this is going on, so this is the first of what may be a series of communications. There is a time scale set for the enactment of a union by the date of the General Assembly of May 2020.

Often in the Church there is fear of change and some will no doubt believe that any change in the system is going to be difficult. All change involves loss, and while this is acknowledged, it is important that we do not lose what is valuable and important in the operation of Presbyteries in the service of the mission of congregations.

Therefore the Steering Group appointed by the three Presbyteries to bring forward detailed plans for the union is embarking on a series of varied forms of consultation. These are designed to ensure that the people of the parishes and those affected by any change are heard and their concerns recognised, and, as far as possible, are dealt with creatively and sensitively.

It is important to emphasise that this is not about creating a larger version of what each Presbytery is doing at present or increasing bureaucracy. Instead it must be an opportunity, in line with the Radical Action Plan and the Report of the Special Commission on the Governance of the Church to be discussed at the General Assembly of 2019, to devolve resources to presbyteries which are structured to be able to use money and personnel in the service of the congregations of this geographical area.

It is the intention of the Steering Group to bring forward proposed structures and processes with options for discussion. Part of the changes, it is hoped, will reduce the burdens of safeguarding, property maintenance, financial management and data protection, from local congregations, and allow the congregations to be focused more on their mission and witness to their communities.

Alongside this is a concern to ensure that the local is not lost and that we use effective means of administration and collaboration to reach decisions and provide a service that is supportive and helpful to individual congregations and groups of parishes. This means that a lot of work will be done in trying to accommodate and include suggestions which come from the members of congregations and the existing Presbyteries.

In all of this, the focus is that of mission. The Church exists for mission, and all the adaptations and alterations of any structure of support and care which the Presbyterian system is designed to offer must enable and take the message of mission as its priority.

After the listening exercise is completed, some proposals will be offered for you to discuss in Kirk Session and congregational meetings. The hope is that, by the grace of God, we will all be guided to find appropriate means of moving forward. In a time of fear and challenging change, it is difficult to be courageous and leave fear behind, but we can rely on the fact that in everything God is with us and in God's guidance we are able to trust.

On behalf of the Fife Presbytery Steering Group

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