

KILMACOLM OLD KIRK

MISSION AUDIT

Introduction

The Vision Statement of Kilmacolm Old Kirk concludes with these words – “We are committed to being a worshipping congregation, a welcoming congregation and a working congregation”. We have tried to remain true to these ideals over what has been a very difficult and challenging time. The congregation has now been vacant for more than twenty-seven months. During this period, we have had the services of two different locums, and times when we had no locum. At the outset of the vacancy, the Kirk Session unanimously agreed to Presbytery’s proposal that the two Kilmacolm congregations should unite, but negotiations have dragged on, only now nearing a conclusion and, of course, the Covid-19 pandemic, with its prolonged periods of lockdown, has necessarily curtailed many of the missional activities on which we had embarked.

The Community

The village of Kilmacolm lies on the northern slope of the Gryffe Valley, 7½ miles southeast of Greenock and around 15 miles west of the city of Glasgow. It has a population of just over 4,000 and post-union will have a large parish area, touching the parish boundaries in Largs at its southern most extent, comprising large areas which are rural with a strong farming community contained therein. This combination of village and rural life gives Kilmacolm a distinctive character, leading it to be voted one of the top ten places to live in Scotland in a recent survey. There are two local primary schools in the village (one private) and one private secondary school.

The origins of Kilmacolm can be traced back to the time of St Columba in the 6th century. It is probable that there has been Christian worship on our site for almost fifteen hundred years, and a church building here can be dated back to Norman times in the 13th century, the present church building dating from 1831. This is therefore one of the oldest Christian sites in Scotland.

Apart from the present two Church of Scotland congregations, the village also has a Scottish Episcopal church (St Fillans) – with whom we have a good relationship and regular shared ecumenical services – a Roman Catholic church (St Colms), and a smaller worshipping community (Grace Church) which is affiliated to the Free Church.

Recent Missional Planning

In September 2008, the Kirk Session held a special conference, from which evolved a five year plan, an exercise to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to life and witness in the Old Kirk, with a view to establishing concrete goals and targets in the short, medium and long-term. Arising from this was an exercise entitled “The Big Conversation”, in which elders visited every member with a questionnaire covering all

aspects of congregational life. The responses formed the basis for our subsequent missional activity.

In October 2013, the plan was reviewed in advance of an impending Presbytery Local Church Review, which subsequently took place in March 2014.

The plan was again reviewed in February 2018, subsequent to which three congregational gatherings were held during the month of May 2018, giving members of the congregation the opportunity to reflect on what we were currently doing and to make suggestions on possible changes, the responses then being summarised and considered at a subsequent Kirk Session meeting.

What Does Our Church Do ?

As a parish church of the Church of Scotland, Kilmacolm Old Kirk participates in the distinctive call to serve the people of its parish in the name of Jesus Christ. This involves worship, the proclamation of the gospel, Christian education and practical service to those in need – all by way of advancing the Kingdom of God.

Since 2005, the congregation has operated under the Unitary Constitution with nine teams reporting directly to the Kirk Session through their convener. These teams comprise elders and non-elders and cover all aspects of congregational life, as undernoted –

- Christian Education
- IT & Communications
- Justice, Peace and World Concerns
- Community Issues
- Pastoral Care
- Worship
- Property
- Social
- Stewardship & Finance

The team structure has evolved since it was first introduced. Initially, there had been a separate “Mission & Outreach” team, which evolved into a “Mission Outreach & Community Issues” team. However, in September 2012, the Kirk Session agreed that since Mission was such an integral part of all team activities, each team should, as part of its planning, consider the missional effect of their activities and that Mission should appear as an agenda item at each Session meeting.

The village and its environs are divided into districts, with an elder allocated to each district for Pastoral Care.

The Old Kirk has always been outward-looking. We have a twinning agreement with St Peter’s Church in Gweru, Zimbabwe, and a collection of produce is ingathered weekly for the Church Angels Foodbank operated by Port Glasgow United Reformed Church. Fundraising events held throughout the year are often for the benefit of outside charities and, in particular, Christmas gifts have been ingathered and distributed to Crossreach,

Inverclyde Children & Family team, and Inverclyde Women's Aid. Offerings at our Christmas services have been given to Glasgow Presbytery's Lodging House Mission. As well as reaching out, a priority for the Kirk Session has been to encourage people to visit our premises and see the facilities on offer. To this end, an OUTLOOK Fellowship & Friendship Group meets in the Kidston Hall twice a month, a SOLAS Bereavement Drop-in Group for support in the community meets monthly, as does a Good Book Group. In 2019, we had started a monthly film night in church which proved extremely popular and other social events were held on a regular basis, such as Burns' Supper and quiz nights.

Arising from the congregational consultation exercise, we launched a completely innovative project, an "OK Fest of music and drama" to be held over the first weekend in March each year. Again, this proved very successful. Unfortunately, the second event had to be cancelled because of extreme weather conditions, although it was possible for some of the postponed events to be held later in the year, and the Covid-19 pandemic has put paid to the more recent festivals.

Apart from the church buildings themselves, the manse is seen as a considerable resource for the congregation. Standing in grounds of around four acres, mainly woodland or under grass with a burn running through them, the grounds have been used for activities such as summer fetes, barbecues, Junior Church outings, and other social events. In 2015, it was agreed to develop part of the manse woodland and stream to create a Pilgrim Pathway, with points for meditation and stillness focusing upon Celtic spirituality and the restoration of creation, building on the long history of the parish and its association with St Columba. The project has necessarily been halted because of the pandemic but, post-union, it is hoped to resume this, involving local schools and community organisations, and developing the project still further, including possibly the creation of an orchard, and a memorial area for those who have suffered loss.

What Does Our Church Do Well ?

Until 1929, the Old Kirk was the parish church for the whole village of Kilmacolm and there is still a sense today that villagers with no church connection regard the Old Kirk as "their" church. For this reason, social gatherings and fundraising events are well supported by the whole community, largely because the Old Kirk is seen as a "welcoming" space.

During the pandemic, when many buildings were in complete lockdown, as soon as it was legally permitted, the Old Kirk opened its Murray Chapel for two hours each day for private prayer and reflection and many people, members and non-members alike, appreciated this facility being available. This daily opening of our premises, with an elder always in attendance, will resume once winter is past.

We are also happy to make our hall available for community use. The Kidston Hall was completely refurbished to a high standard in 1989 and comprises a main hall with stage and changing areas and two separate meeting rooms, plus ancillary facilities. It is currently used for two weeks each year by the Kilmacolm Dramatic Society for their

productions with rehearsals, held during the year. Other groups using the hall regularly range from a dance class, to Greenock Morton FC for pre-school training, West Renfrewshire Young Farmers and a weekly Keep Fit Group. Many organisations use the hall for annual coffee mornings. The hall is also available for private functions and, on occasion, for the provision of refreshments after funeral services. Post-union, we would hope to be able to accommodate all of the groups presently using the St Columba Hall, such as Bridge of Weir Choral Society, and Kilmacolm Playgroup.

What Should Our Church Stop Doing and What Could Our Church Be Doing ?

As stated previously, the last several months have been very difficult and a great deal of time was spent in negotiating the basis of union. Without knowing which set of buildings would be retained, it was not possible to embark upon any long-term planning. It having been determined by arbitration that the Old Kirk buildings are the ones to be retained, planning for the future can now begin. The union of the two congregations will present new challenges as we seek to integrate our separate activities into a new Kilmacolm Parish Church.

These two questions are therefore questions to be addressed by the new united congregation, working together, and it would seem inappropriate at this point in time to comment solely from an Old Kirk perspective.

What Is The Most Exciting Thing That Has Happened in the Last Five Years ?

It would be fair to say that Kilmacolm Old Kirk is a fairly traditional congregation of the Church of Scotland, but the congregational conversations in which we have engaged show that there is a willingness to change and to embrace modern technology and, on occasion, different styles of worship. Three particular things stand out in developments in our congregational life over the last five years :

- The Pilgrim Pathway Project in the manse grounds, which has attracted interest and support from outwith the congregation, and which offers tremendous missional potential going forward
- The annual OK Fest of music and drama, something completely different, which again attracted a wide measure of interest from outwith the congregation
- The development and regular use of our AV facilities in Sunday worship. The one positive to come out of the Covid-19 lockdown was the fact that our Sunday services are now live-streamed and a recorded version made available on our church website. This has been greatly appreciated by many members of the congregation unable to attend worship in person and also makes our worship available to a much wider audience

What Would You Most Like To Happen Over The Next Five Years ?

The priority has to be to effect a successful and harmonious union of the two congregations, and to appoint our first minister to lead us forward into a new and exciting future. The potential for Kilmacolm Parish Church to be a driving force for Mission and to influence people's lives for good is tremendous.

We want to continue to develop the relationships we have with community organisations, and our overseas partnership, and we have recently entered into discussions with Inverclyde Council's newly appointed community worker for the area to explore avenues of mutual working.

We would also see development of our presence on various social media platforms as an important means of communicating our activities, complementing our existing church website.

Basic Data Required

- Kilmacolm Old Kirk at present has no chaplaincy arrangements in place. At one time, our minister was chaplain to St Columba's School, but this arrangement was terminated when there was a change of rector. The school does however have a close relationship with St Columba Church, using their premises on a regular basis, and we would hope to foster and develop this relationship post-union.
- There are presently twenty children enrolled in Junior Church, with an average attendance of between five and ten on a Sunday morning. Much larger numbers participate in events such as Messy Church, held periodically throughout the year.

There is no Youth Fellowship. Organisations making use of the hall for youth activities are a children's dance class and Greenock Morton FC for pre-school training. The village playgroup presently meets in St Columba hall, but we would envisage them transferring to us post-union.

To date, we have been fortunate in managing to find leaders for all groups.

- All of our office bearer roles are currently filled, although we would acknowledge that it may be increasingly difficult to fill key position in the future.
- We did employ a church officer until his untimely death in September and we currently employ a church cleaner. The only other paid individual is our organist, who is self-employed
- Other than the church and hall buildings and the manse, we do not own or rent any other property

Conclusion

At the beginning of a new year, we in Kilmacolm Old Kirk look forward to working with our friends in St Columba Church to ensure the long-awaited union of our two congregations is a success. In saying this, however, we are acutely aware that the way forward for the new Kilmacolm Parish Church is not just to merge together its two component parts, but to strive to attract new members, particularly younger members and their families, so that we can grow a real community of faith in our village, using as our guideline the five marks of mission identified by the General Assembly.

Approved by the Kirk Session of Kilmacolm Old Kirk

Leon Marshall
Session Clerk

January 2022

Note : The five marks of mission are :

- To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
- To teach, baptise, and nurture new believers
- To respond to human need by loving service
- To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation
- To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth