



Church of Scotland Presbytery of Edinburgh & West Lothian

Resources Committee Deployment Group (DG)

Dear All,

25 May 2022

With the visits to congregations in the Presbytery of Edinburgh and West Lothian proceeding apace, and following requests from congregations for regular updates, it seems a good time to provide a summary of the process of creating a Presbytery Mission Plan. The information below will then be supplemented with further information and discussion at the Presbytery meeting on 21 June.

What has happened thus far?

Since 1 January 2022, the Deployment Group (DG) have met seven times and have also participated in an evening of training in order to ensure that our conversations with congregations are as fruitful as possible. The letter sent to congregations in February of 2022, requesting considered feedback to the Edinburgh consultative document and the West Lothian draft plan, provided valuable and detailed insight into the thoughts and concerns of congregations. The DG then initiated an extensive round of visits to congregations in order to listen, clarify, understand and explain. Thus far, over 50 congregations have been visited. Thank you to every congregation for taking part in this initiative, and thanks too to the members of the DG for undertaking this task. Each visit requires many hours of work per DG representative and significant input from the people involved in every congregation. The scale of the task for the entirety of Presbytery thus becomes more apparent.

What has been heard and seen?

Each conversation with each congregation is unique. Yet, broader themes have arisen consistently that may be worth sharing.

AMBA Reports: Virtually every congregation has asked when the reports will be available. At the time of writing, reports have been submitted and summary scores have been provided. The Resources Committee (RC), which includes conveners and vice-conveners from DG, Finance and Property, have met twice to examine that which has been received. The numbers sometimes reflect previous knowledge of properties. Sometimes, however, the numbers have been unexpected and thus further examination has been required. This has typically been a matter of looking at the report in some detail. Another meeting of the RC is scheduled and a meeting with the General Trustees (GTs) too is scheduled. Two points may be worth sharing. Firstly, the AMBA reports are not final or definitive when it comes to proposing a designation of 'A' (retain) or 'B' (release) of a building. Many factors will contribute and not least of these is mission as articulated in a mission narrative (please see below).

Secondly, it is planned that further information will be made available to Presbytery as soon as possible after 6 June and before Presbytery meets on 21 June. The Resources Committee meet at the end of May and then again at the beginning of June with the General Trustees, and afterwards additional insights can be provided. A means by which Presbytery will be able to discuss the AMBA reports in more detail is being considered.

Staffing and Capacity: Nearly every congregation has expressed concern about staffing. In order to do mission, people are required. This point has been duly noted and will be discussed in more detail as visits continue. However, we cannot provide resources that are simply not available. It might be worth offering a number of points: there is at present no latitude with regards to the 65.5 nationally funded ministries posts for Edinburgh and West Lothian; we recognise that significant new housing is being built and yet the numbers are not yet formally reflected in the statistics provided by the national church; reaching out to new housing and the priority to the poor is labour intensive; and the secondary principles of Presbytery planning encourage the use of all the gifts of God's people. In essence, in order to do effective mission, focus and priorities will be needed. Once the Presbytery Plan is approved, further thought will need to be given to the deployment of Ordained Local Ministers, Readers and others, alongside the possibility of Pioneer Ministry. Whilst there is no national funding included for new posts, Presbytery itself, through its funds, may consider funding. There is also the question of locally funded (i.e., congregational funded) posts. Much of this work lies in the period after the plan has been approved and we begin to move into implementation. It will be an evolving matter over the next five years.

Pastoral Care: This issue has been highlighted several times. As mentioned previously, it is hoped that the visits and ongoing conversations have allowed voices to be heard. The DG have continued to liaise with Presbytery's Faith Nurture Committee in order to keep the lines of communication open, recognising that this is a difficult time for all involved in this process, but particularly those ministers in reviewable charges.

Mission Districts: This relatively new concept has drawn many comments. Some have been favourable, seeing wider cooperation as a means to facilitate mission. Others have been less favourable, seeing another layer of bureaucracy and meetings. Presbyters are encouraged to read the recent paper provided by Gordon Jamieson in order to envision the means by which wider teamwork could be beneficial. It provides some helpful ideas as a starting point.

Unions only? The Edinburgh consultative document focusses on unions and the draft West Lothian plan includes within it many proposed unions. Unions encourage a focus on mission by one kirk session and one group of people. The national church does not encourage linkages because of the duplication of meetings and the drain on resources. The Presbytery Mission Plan Act offers other means for current congregations to work together, such as Team Ministry, and the DG are aware of the many tools in the toolkit. Yet, when it comes to congregations working together, a concentrated focus on mission will be vital no matter what the structure. Moreover, the DG have clearly heard the plea to support congregations as closer relationships develop and as formal structures are considered.

Wider conversations? Many congregations have asked if they can initiate and/or participate in conversations with other congregations not specifically paired with them in the proposals thus far. This is potentially helpful but please do remember some important caveats: there are clear limitations on nationally paid ministries posts and an alteration in one area may have significant ripple effects in other areas, especially those close by. An awareness of the wider context within which the Presbytery is working is crucial.

The DG has seen ideas mooted for adjustments that will improve the plan and, in recognising the contours on the ground, will encourage greater buy-in from those involved.

Differences in size: Smaller congregations have asked how they can join with larger congregations and not be swallowed up. Larger congregations have expressed concerns about responsibilities, whether they be fabric or finance. Partnership is critical in the way ahead. Many of those who might be smaller have manifested the Five Marks of Mission (5MM) in humbling, inspirational and self-sacrificial manners. Those who are larger have mobilized their resources to support mission in a myriad of ways. The DG strongly encourage congregations to seek the means to work together in a locality and world yearning for healing and hope. When discussing a basis for union or team ministry or other form of cooperation, for example, all parties involved can strive for understanding and parity in representation.

Differences in approach: Some congregations might gravitate towards one approach to worship, mission, evangelism and church life, and some might gravitate in another direction. A common focus on mission, and perhaps unifying mission projects, is one means to use the variety of gifts and approaches. Some new unions or team ministries may retain more than one worship space: herein rests a possibility for different types of worship. Imaginative ideas founded on the 5MM can create unity in purpose.

Pioneer Ministry: Many comments have been made about Pioneer Ministry. Some have been sceptical, wondering what precisely this idea is and how effective it is. Would not more parish ministers, rooted in a community, be desirable? Others have noted that imagination and energy can be unlocked when a pioneer minister is freed from many of the constrictions that limit relationship building and ingenuity. Conversations will continue, as noted above.

Mission Narratives: These will be of great importance in the road ahead and some congregations have asked for more details. In essence, a mission narrative for the Presbytery will reference the 5MM and the secondary principles, and then mission narratives for mission districts or new congregations will describe how the adjustments suggested in the mission plan will help to further mission in a particular area of the Presbytery. These are to be broad brush strokes rather than detailed descriptions and Presbytery are responsible ultimately for the mission narratives. While much information will contribute to the narratives, such as AMBA scores, statistics and demographics, the mission narrative will point the way forward with regards to mission in a particular area. Recent conversations will contribute significantly. Further information is being sought that can be shared with Presbytery.

What will be happening next?

Visits: These will continue during the month of June. It is hoped that every congregation, where possible, will be visited by 30 June, in keeping with the timeline. Reports from the visiting DG reps will be shared with the entirety of the team in order to provide an overview. An away day for DG is planned for the third week of June to begin the process of sorting and assessment.

Timeline for approving the Presbytery Mission Plan: A timeline running from 1 July to 31 December 2022 is currently under discussion. It is planned that a timeline will be brought to Presbytery on 21 June for discussion. Broadly speaking, discussions between the DG, congregations and mission districts will continue. It is proposed that Presbytery meetings will be arranged so that Presbyters will have an opportunity to discuss ideas, proposals and/or broad

themes. Using the visits currently underway as a springboard, everything that *can* be done within the limits of time and capacity will be done to ensure the involvement of Presbytery in this process.

Buildings: The process regarding AMBA was mentioned above. The RC and DG are aware that this sensitive issue will require time, effort and conversations. These will continue where needed.

Communication has been highlighted as a key factor in the successful creation and implementation of a Presbytery Plan. We hope that the information above is of some assistance in providing a view into the state of play at the moment. The Presbytery meeting on 21 June will also allow further dialogue and conversation. Whilst the work undertaken thus far will be shared it will be too early to put forward even a tentative draft: not every congregation will necessarily have been visited. This is, and will be, an ongoing process. The DG would like to thank Presbyters and congregations for their time, energy, insight and patience as all of us work towards a plan and more fruitful mission.

Should you have any thoughts or questions, please do get in touch.

Sincerely yours,

Stewart G. Weaver

Convener - Deployment Group