

The Way Forward...



A Report on the Findings of the Congregational Consultation

Approximately 100 people took part in the discussion groups over the three weeks they were offered. There was a real buzz in the halls with everyone appearing to enjoy the opportunity to share their faith and their views on the way ahead for Greenbank with those well known to them, others whom they had probably seen for years but had never spoken to before and people who have joined us more recently. A significant number of people commented that they had valued this opportunity and would welcome similar opportunities in the future.

Initially we had two aims:

1. To give the Nominating Committee a clear understanding of members' views on what sort of person they should be looking for to become our next minister
2. To provide current information for the Parish profile which would go on our website and will therefore be available to people thinking of applying for the charge of Greenbank.

During the consultation process, having witnessed the congregation's involvement and enthusiasm, the Kirk Session agreed that the information gathered should also be used to help form the basis of a future development plan for the way forward, either during the vacancy or early in the new ministry.

117 questionnaires were filled in and returned. We also received a very thoughtful poem written by one of our regular worshippers (see Postscript) and a challenging newspaper article from someone else.

We analysed the information in the following ways. In questions in which people were asked to comment, we pulled together the various ways of expressing similar thoughts so we were not presenting you with a long list of words. The comments are presented with the most highly ranked first, going down to the least ranked of the options given.

In Question 3 respondents were asked to rank the possibilities 1–9, so we gave each 1st choice 9 points, each 2nd choice 8 points, ..., until a 9th choice scored 1. Similarly, in Question 8 respondents were asked to rank attributes 1–13 so we gave each 1st choice 13 points, each 2nd choice 12 points, ..., until a 13th choice scored 1.

Q1. What do you see as Greenbank’s current strengths?

Answers received

- A talented congregation with very committed office-bearers
- Strong youth work and a good Youth Associate
- Still a relatively large congregation
- A friendly supportive congregation
- A welcoming and inclusive congregation
- Good pastoral care of all ages
- Well maintained accommodation on a corner site
- The provision of good music, both traditional and modern, in our worship
- Serving as a community hub
- Good organisations.

Q2. What do you see as Greenbank’s current challenges?

Answers received

- Attracting more people, especially, but not exclusively, young families (this was the priority by a long way)
- The age profile of the congregation
- Falling attendances
- Communicating our faith effectively with the community, including our hall users
- Not overloading willing workers and getting more people sharing the responsibilities
- Using social media to communicate with a wide range of people from the housebound to the young
- Supporting change where beneficial
- Meeting the needs of an increasing number of older members.

Q3. Now a question about priorities for the Greenbank of the future. Please rank these items, separately for the Local Community and the Congregation.

Answers received

Local Community	
Outreach to young people and families	775
Practical help for disadvantaged groups	518
Outreach to adults of working age	484

Local Community	
Giving a lead on social and moral issues, such as peace and justice, ecological issues	384
Care of older members	270
Worship	228
World mission	174
Pastoral care of all members	169
Encouraging members to deepen their personal discipleship	117

Congregation	
Worship	718
Pastoral care of all members	640
Outreach to young people and families	516
Encouraging members to deepen their personal discipleship	480
Care of older members	393
Outreach to adults of working age	359
Giving a lead on social and moral issues, such as peace and justice, ecological issues	291
Practical help for disadvantaged groups	278
World mission	206

Comments and/or other priorities

(These are largely individual comments so we did not rank them in any way.)

- Volunteering for projects such as Open Door and finding as in the past new challenges facing society
- Keeping in closer touch with the way the church is moving nationally and being part of that
- Meeting new needs in the community e.g. immigrants/refugees, separated non-resident parents
- Listen to the congregation expressing ways to move forward
- Increase awareness of persecution of Christians in the Middle East and elsewhere and seek ways to help
- Consider more relevant topics for younger adults
- Create a system that ensures that members don't slip through the net if they are ill or in difficulty or drift away
- Ensure all who wish to can get to church

- Work to be at the centre of the community
- Our worship needs to be relevant and encourage action
- Greater involvement with care homes
- Open discussions on how we can ensure appropriate pastoral care of all members.

Q4. What words best describe to you an effective Church and Ministry?

Answers received

An effective Church is:

- Outgoing, active and serving
- Welcoming and friendly
- Caring, supportive and loving, meeting the needs of members
- Spiritual, encouraging of discipleship and teaching, and a place of faith
- An inclusive community where all are welcome and equally valued
- Gives a clear Christian message to worshippers and a loving Christian attitude to the community.

An effective Ministry is:

- Listening and caring for all, old and young alike
- A challenging preacher/teacher with a relevant message
- An inspiring leader
- Innovative and enthusiastic
- Willing to reach out to the community
- A team-builder able to delegate
- Inclusive and progressive.

Q5. If it became desirable to change the time of services, would you be prepared to attend worship

Answers received

	Yes	No
Early morning – from 9.30	75	27
Mid-morning – from 10.30	99	0
Later – after 17.00	32	56

Comments/personal reflections

- A variety of times to suit different people would be good
- A service directed at younger people, though not exclusively the young, on Sunday evenings
- Opportunity to attend smaller more intimate reflective services
- Opening the church through the week for personal reflection
- Different styles of worship, e.g. a café service.

Q6. If a minister were to provide mid-week bible studies, worship and other opportunities to develop your personal faith, would you be likely to attend them?

Answers received

Yes	No	Depends / no response
50	47	20

Comments included those suggesting that topics should focus on specific issues, and events could include younger people.

Q7. Worship – What features in our current worship do you (a) find helpful for your faith; (b) not helpful? What other features or types of service would you like to see? Some examples including what you may have experienced when visiting other churches are greater use of modern music; contemplative services; services focused on particular groups; a preaching series on books of the Bible

Answers received

The issues which attracted the most responses are listed below, with an indication of how many people listed each issue.

HELPFUL	
Music	58
Preaching and Sermons	55
Prayer and Reflection	38
Bible Reading	15
Communion	8
Children's Addresses	7

NOT HELPFUL	
Responses in prayers	22
Music (including old hymns; modern hymns; hymns and actions; length and difficulty of hymns)	20
Children's Address (including children reading from bits of paper and difficulty in involving all children in role play)	8
Intimations (reading from printed sheet)	6
Format of services (including length; formality)	4

There were, in addition, many responses which can be summarized as follows:

MUSIC The majority of comments related favourably to the type of music in church and, in particular, the roles of the organist, choir and praise band. Suggestions included more extensive use of tunes in CH4, the inclusion of younger members in the praise band, information about the music played by the organist, and hymn singing before the service to familiarise the congregation with the new hymns and praise band tunes. Several people commented on feeling uncomfortable when participating in "action" songs.

FORMAT AND CONTENT OF SERVICES Several people commented that they would like to see more involvement of young people in the service although comments were expressed that more preparation would be desirable. Others felt that there should be more participation by the congregation in general.

There appears to be relatively strong feeling about the use of responses during services – whilst some people find them helpful, a significant majority said that they find them unhelpful.

As far as the content of services is concerned, many favoured preaching a series of sermons, including on books of the Bible. There were a few comments commending the introduction to Bible readings by the Youth Associate. It was suggested that time be set aside before the service for greeting others seated throughout the church.

Apart from the main services, a variety of different types of service were suggested, ranging from contemplative services (favoured by quite a number of people), to more modern evening services aimed at youth, breakfast services at Easter and Pentecost, and some outdoor worship. There were suggestions for services serving the needs of the older members of the congregation – occasional afternoon services, and one where worshippers are seated at tables.

TECHNOLOGY Use of modern technology was commended, although ongoing review of its use was seen as necessary.

COMMUNION There were several comments on the matter of communion. Some felt that there should be more frequent celebration of communion. Others enjoyed the monthly communions introduced last year. The availability of communion services in both the morning and afternoons was supported, and one person commented on the significance to them of the "Great Entry" during the service.

MISCELLANEOUS MATTERS Other interesting feedback included a suggestion that sermons be made available on-line, that there be flexible seating in the church, that intimations include news and information about the congregation in addition to the information traditionally imparted. It was suggested that good deeds should be celebrated. Someone described the practice elsewhere of pairing new members of the congregation with established ones. There was a suggestion that members of the congregation might be encouraged to join a retreat. One respondent felt that Springboard was helpful to their faith. Another commended the beauty of the church.

Q 8. What qualities and characteristics do you believe the new Minister of Word and Sacrament should have? Please select which are most important to you and number your choices with 1 as the most important.

As with Question 3, values were given to the respondents' priorities, according to their ranking. The results below are self-explanatory.

Someone who...

...is a stimulating teacher	1290
...has good leadership skills	1032
...has good interpersonal skills	1222
...has good pastoral skills	983
...has a liberal, progressive theological outlook	950
...is a good listener	760
...shows willingness to make changes	684
...is proactive in community outreach	667
...is willing to delegate responsibilities	544
...will sometimes preach on a section of the Bible over several weeks	421
...is interested in national church developments	350
...has a traditional theological outlook	230
...preaches solely from the lectionary (as now i.e. Following the church year)	177

Other...

Suggestions here included someone who

- recognises their own strengths and weaknesses and takes steps to provide cover for weaknesses
- has a natural rapport with children and young people as well as adults
- appreciates music
- has a strong voice in the pulpit

- is energetic and enthusiastic
- is prepared to take us in a radically different direction
- has a ministry complemented by the gifts of others on Session and in the wider congregation
- can include all the congregation whether they can get to church or not.

Q9. If the Kirk Session were to vote in favour of allowing the congregation to call a minister who is in a civil partnership or a same sex marriage and if such a person was deemed by the Nominating Committee to be the best

	Yes	No	Undecided/ no comment
Would you be supportive of that decision?	98	12	7

Q10. Any Other Comments

These covered many subjects, including:

- Could each elder and visitor meet socially and informally every so often with their district members?
- Could we have a pre-church breakfast or lunch now and then?
- At coffee, could there be a special table for visitors, to meet with an elder or two?
- I hope the new minister will take time to make relationships with members of the congregation so that in times of trouble the participants feel they “know” each other.
- A suggestion that there is greater availability of recordings of sermons to be disseminated more widely, which could include people who no longer attend to listen to the Word and thus extend our outreach.
- Encourage the new minister to take study leave and share what s/he learns.
- New minister should be aware of importance of taking everyone with her/him, whatever her/his views.
- I think we should research successful formats offered by other churches and find other ways to connect with people.
- Maybe reaching out to non-Christians (including atheists) is a way forward?
- The merits/successes/shortcomings of the YACHT Project should be evaluated in terms of its impact on youth members and the wider community.
- There should be more involvement of children, for example, church family events like a quiz to raise funds for community projects.
- Greater visibility in the community, e.g. exhibition in Morningside Library about our “good work”.

Age of Questionnaire Respondents

Age	No	Age	No	Age	No
12-17	2	35-44	3	65-74	32
18-24	2	45-54	12	75-84	27
25-34	1	55-64	25	85+	12

Conclusion

Our three aims have been achieved, thanks to the very positive response of so many of our members. Once elected, the Nominating Committee will be given a copy of this report which, it is hoped, will clarify members' views and assist them in their search for our next minister.

Information from this report has been passed to the Session Clerk for inclusion in the Parish Profile. This will shortly be available on the church website or, by request, in hard copy for those who cannot access the web. The report will be used by the Kirk Session as part of its consideration of a development plan.

Having drawn all this information together in a usable format, we concluded that Greenbank was happy to engage in the process of selecting our next minister and finding the way ahead with him or her. We are in good heart and ready for the challenges that a new ministry will offer.

Julia Dunbar and Janet Allan
30 July 2017

Postscript

We leave you with a poem written by one of our regular worshippers, and submitted as part of the consultation.

What kind of church do we want to be?
The great cathedral, well-endowed,
Within the city, standing proud,
Its stain'd-glass windows all around
And with a mighty spire is crown'd;
Yet people passing to and fro
May seldom through its portals go.
The little chapel on the hill,
Through storm and strife it stands there still.
Its white-wash'd walls and toiling bell
Throughout the valley known so well;
Whose doors are open ev'ry day
To those who pass along that way.
Christ long ago unto his flock
Said build your house upon the rock,
And not upon the shifting sands;
That we might one day understand.
For churches are not made of stone,
Nor by builder's hand alone.
Foundations made of faith and pray'r
By steadfast should with loving care;
Theirs is a light that never fades –
Of such as these are churches made.