

Presbytery of Edinburgh
Deployment of Resources Committee
PREPARING A PRESBYTERY PLAN
Interim Report, June 2005

Why?

Although the Presbytery of Edinburgh has had a series of Plans and as recently as 2000/2001 held a widespread consultation with Kirk Sessions, the current process is being undertaken in obedience to an instruction of the General Assembly.

Act VII 2003, section 2 states:

All Presbyteries shall within three years of the passing of this Act prepare a Presbytery Plan as defined in sections 3 to 5 of this Act, after consultation with each congregation. [The Parish Appraisal Committee has advised Presbyteries that consultation with office bearers of congregations would be adequate to fulfil this requirement.]

The 2003 Act states that the Plan should be for not less than ten years with an annual update and should indicate the number, nature and pattern of charges and all other appointments which the Presbytery considers necessary at the end of the ten years:

The Act also gives as the possible outcomes of the process:

- (a) That no adjustment is foreseen during the lifetime of the plan.
- (b) That adjustment shall be effected immediately.
- (c) That adjustment shall be effected when the charge next falls vacant.
- (d) That adjustment shall be necessary, but shall not be effected until after the next vacancy: the Presbytery may combine this decision with a decision to seek an Interim Ministry appointment when the charge next falls vacant.
- (e) That appraisal, and the determination of any adjustment, shall be deferred until the charge next falls vacant.

Who?

The Presbytery of Edinburgh has to prepare a Plan and submit it to the General Assembly's Committee on Parish Appraisal no later than the spring of 2006. The task of preparing a Plan and engaging in the necessary consultation process has been remitted to the Deployment of Resources Committee, which in turn has appointed from its membership a Presbytery Plan Team which is working on the details of the Plan.

How?

At the beginning of September 2004 the Presbytery Clerk sent to all Session Clerks a discussion document for Kirk Sessions to consider. This discussion document listed all parishes arranged in groups on a geographical basis, with the most recently available numbers for parish population and Communion Roll given for each. The number of ordained ministers currently working within each group and the projected number were also given. Responses to the proposals and in particular to six specific questions were invited and the majority of Kirk Sessions gave careful and considered responses.

These responses were taken into account when preparing the next draft of the Presbytery Plan, which was sent out to Session Clerks at the beginning of March 2005.

The subsequent set of responses is now being examined by the Presbytery Plan Team, with a view to a full report being submitted to the Deployment of Resources Committee in September or October and to the Presbytery by the end of 2005. However, if it proves difficult to resolve all outstanding issues, the Presbytery will be asked to approve a Plan for those areas where there is a consensus so that the congregations in these areas may continue to plan, worship, work and witness together in the communities they seek to serve.

Comments

In the meantime the following observations may assist in dispelling ignorance, misunderstanding and misapprehension.

- 1 There has been a very high level of response from Kirk Sessions. Replies have been received from the vast majority, in most cases submitting a unilateral reply but in some instances after consultation with their neighbours (as was suggested) and in others with a single reply on behalf of all the Kirk Sessions within the group.
- 2 There has been a high level of acceptance of the proposals. Of the 85 Kirk Sessions consulted [Gilmerton New Charge does not yet have a Kirk Session], at least 75 concur with the Committee's understanding of their natural affinities with their neighbours and at least 35, belonging to eight separate groups, accept the number of ministers proposed for their area by 2015.
- 3 The Presbytery Plan Team acknowledges the potential for confusion arising from the use of the term "group", especially when the Presbytery has discussed the concept of Parish Groupings and has agreed to the establishment of four Parish Groupings. Congregations can be grouped together for a variety of purposes and may sometimes find themselves in different groups for different purposes. Such groups allow for cooperation and the sharing of resources but there is no formal structure connecting them. A Parish Grouping, on the other hand, is a recognised form of adjustment and requires the formal approval of the congregations involved, the Presbytery of the bounds and the Committee on Parish Appraisal.
- 4 For the avoidance of doubt it is proposed that in future documents concerning the Presbytery Plan groups will be referred to as "Areas", thereby indicating that the charges in each section of the Plan are located in the same geographical area or are at least adjacent to the others listed.
- 5 Kirk Sessions have asked interesting questions which the Committee will attempt to answer in due course.

However, two may require an immediate response: what is the methodology underlying the proposed Plan and is this not simply managing decline?

- 6 The Presbytery Plan Team did not seek to establish a methodology which could then be applied indiscriminately to every situation, not least because it acknowledges the difficulty, if not impossibility, of planning for so long a period as ten years, but also because the relationships between and among congregations were at different stages in different areas and it would be a mistake to treat all as if they were identical.
- 7 For many years there has been a decline in the numbers recorded on Communion Rolls and attending public worship. The Deployment of Resources Committee believes that if there is to be growth, then growth must build on existing strengths and that such strengths may be developed in collaboration, not only on the part of individuals but also on the part of congregations. Hence the current attempts to encourage congregations to engage in collaborative ministry with their neighbours. Whether experiencing growth or decline we cannot abdicate responsibility for managing change.
- 8 The question regarding the reduction in the number of ministers at a time when recruitment to ordained ministry is increasing is often raised in congregational responses. This is a large question, involving trends, blips, and gauging the future. However, indications given to the Planning Team are that, one way or another (through financial restraint, or through the increase being short-term, or through future General Assembly legislation) the number of parish ministers in Edinburgh Presbytery in 2015 put forward in the Proposed Plan would be a realistic one.
- 9 Although Presbyteries, Committees and Kirk Sessions are obliged to obey instructions of the General Assembly, more than grudging obedience is required if any Presbytery Plan is to be accepted and implemented. It is for the Deployment of Resources Committee to seek and ensure support from Kirk Sessions. The extent and

manner of Kirk Sessions' responses positively reflect such support.