

**THE PRESBYTERY of MELROSE and PEEBLES: PRESBYTERY MISSION PLAN
INITIAL DRAFT FEBRUARY 2022**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The enacting of the Presbytery Mission Plan Act (Act VIII 2021) by the General Assembly of 2021 resulted in the redundancy of the Melrose and Peebles Presbytery Plan 2019. The new Act, together with understandable restrictions to the life and work of the church due to Covid 19, gave reason for limited opportunity by Melrose and Peebles Presbytery to work towards cluster ministries.
- 1.2 The 2019 Plan provided a sound basis for the preparation of the new Mission Plan and proved fortunate for some churches/charges without a Minister of Word and Sacrament. Certain congregations were permitted by decision of Presbytery to call a parish minister in line with the 2019 Plan. For most ministers there is still a sense of call to a place. This occurred in four of the eleven charges currently within the bounds. The reduced allocation by the central church to 9 ministries where at least 10 were required, offered little room for manoeuvre. A transitional plan may well be required where local Mission remains the lead purpose, but organisational structure evolves from parish to cluster groupings.
- 1.3 Add to the present position (1) the demise of Melrose and Peebles Presbytery by December 2022, when a new Presbytery for Lothian and The Borders may be formed and (2) until very recently current Presbyteries continued to flesh out their own Presbytery Mission Plan without discussion. However, a recent agreement could see an exchange of information between presbyteries as plans evolve.
- 1.4 Describing the problem faced by the Church of Scotland as one of fast diminishing membership with the resultant negative impact on finances and the number of students training for Ministry of Word and Sacrament belies the real problem - the retreat from faith across Scotland. Church attendance has all but collapsed in many of our parishes. Was that exacerbated by a Church ill-prepared to meet the challenges of an ever-changing society? Was the culture of the Church such that central control seemed at odds with enabling leadership and accommodating initiative?
- 1.5 The presentation to the 2021 General Assembly by the Convener of the Church of Scotland Nurture Forum provides detail on the current position for the number of ministries and the need for planned local mission.
- 1.6 However, we are where we are. Our Church is bruised but not broken. We will survive but only if we (yes 'we') address the real problems which led to a need for radical change across the Church of Scotland and placed the reduction in resources alongside new ways of serving God through the Five Marks of Mission in the 21st Century! (1.1i)
- 1.7 Any form of strategic or operational planning requires, from the outset, a detailed consideration of 'the problem'. A fuller opinion on 'the problem' is available from the Convener on request. References () to the appropriate section of the [Mission Plan Act](#) are shown at the end of certain paragraphs.

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2. OUR VISION

It is important that our Plan is predicated on the overall vision and then how to achieve it.

Our Vision is one of a vibrant, visible church which engages with worshipers and those of no faith within and out with church buildings. Our vision centres on active, participatory local and cluster mission; team ministries leading worship, outreach, pastoral support, and evangelism within and out with church buildings and in securing and the necessary resources in support of our strategy in action.

3. OUR MISSION STATEMENT (2.1)

- 3.1 The church active in every community, living in that community, loving that community, serving that community, praying for that community, providing suitable places and spaces for worship within that community. Whilst mission may seem aspirational it can be achieved through building confidence and promoting vision.
- 3.2 As current members of the church become less active and numbers continue to diminish in the medium to short term, widespread mission seems impossible. Currently, many congregations practice interesting examples of both outreach and local mission work much of which stands the test of time. Examples of such good practice, driven by local initiative and vision, will appear as part of future drafts. However, the moment seems opportune to test new and perhaps untried forms of worship, mission and discipleship leading to a Gospel Plan. Reaching out does not come easily but outreach, particularly through elders' membership of local groups, might lead to helping those in need and underline the gospel imperative of priority to the poor.
- 3.3 Examples of local mission are appended to this report together with thoughts on new ideas, some addressing the perceived negative image of the church by non-church goers. The arrival of ministry teams, enabled by a Minister of Word and Sacrament and the development of interests, energy and talents, offers much to ease the workload of full-time ministry when supporting more people across larger geographical areas or clusters.
- 3.4 The image of 'church' is often associated with buildings. There needs to be a determination which moves to create vibrant ecclesiastical buildings which reflect and accommodate the expectations of those born in the 21st Century. Areas for worship and sanctuary need to be spacious and encourage reflection and prayer; offer a warm welcome and personal comfort; open to all when they seek access; family friendly worship times and room for informal social community gatherings.
- 3.5 How do we know the needs of those to whom we seek to serve? How do we identify them? What is relevant today? Simple ---- Ask Them!!

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- 3.6 There needs to be further discussion on the meaning of 'cluster' as referred to in the 2019 Presbytery Plan; how clusters relate to communities and an agreed transition from where we are now to 'cluster ministry'. Perhaps cluster should be seen initially as town or area, not necessarily based on a secondary school catchment area. Where clusters form naturally so should resources follow in support. However, in due course, formalised 'cluster ministry' should align with school catchments areas where opportunity for outreach may be possible. (2.4.3)
- 3.7 This mirrors current work in merging presbyteries to form a larger presbytery. Whilst the larger presbytery may be the regional church within that area a smaller gathering of churches may continue to develop its own brand of local mission.
- 3.8 We should not hide from the fact that the future of our church depends on more people seeking spiritual comfort and a desire to worship however that might manifest itself. The church today is seen simply to be doing its own thing inside closed the closed doors of very old mysterious buildings at a time when the work of the church should be clearly visible and available where people are, not where we want them to be.
- 3.9 What is an ideal church service? Soulful mediocre music played between periods of being talked at? We could learn so much from engaging with young people on music for worship, and with their teachers on how learning takes place.
- 3.10 Much is said, mostly behind closed doors, in criticising the controlling culture of Presbyterian bureaucracy!! We need less office – bearers and committees, more delegation with powers, more technology less paper newsletters but more Instagram, Facebook, TikTok and WhatsApp; with greater trust in those pursuing delegated duties. Perhaps we should ignore formal structures and organisational design whilst transforming and concentrate on mission through uplifting services for the 21st Century, accommodation, voluntary ministry teams and local outreach.
- 3.11 Local ecumenical work seems so much easier within an area/district/cluster approach – no more re-inventing the wheel. Continue to provide the more traditional service for older members and others who seek to worship in this way. Transform weekly services through new ways, days and places for worshipping.
- 3.12 The visibility of the church in the past as demonstrated mainly through the presence of a parish minister and a church building has changed unfortunately. What is clear, within a transformational mix of parish, area and cluster ministry, alongside new and traditional services, expectations may need to be managed to reveal the eye - catching signs of a living vibrant visible church – but what are they?

4. STRATEGY and OBJECTIVES

- 4.1 The medium to long term aim of this initial 5 year, annually reviewed, Mission Plan is to move towards then establish cluster ministries which enable:
- active, participatory local mission based solidly on the Five Marks of Mission leading to sustainable outreach and pastoral support within and out with church buildings;
 - and to champion efforts to refresh the time, place and content of church based and on-line services.
 - the securing of necessary resources in support of this strategic plan from within and out with the Church, including from inactive members of parish churches.
- 4.2 Objectives
- To move steadily towards the establishment of Cluster Ministry within each of the four secondary school clusters across the Presbytery of Melrose and Peebles over the five-year period of this plan.
 - To ensure all four cluster groupings are in place by December 2024 and fully established as Cluster Ministries/Teams by December 2027. (10)
 - To recognise that the 'state of readiness' to move towards cluster ministry will be determined by the General Assembly, congregations and Kirk Sessions involved. The will of Presbytery is to develop Selkirk followed by Galashiels then Earlston and Peebles, in that order. (2.4.3)
 - The nature and signs of progress towards Cluster Ministry, whilst serving associated parishes, to be achieved through consultation with and the cooperation of current parish ministers in accordance with various provisions within The Act.
 - To help establish cluster ministries each to set up a mission project to be delivered across the cluster with an emphasis on work with young people which might connect with staff, students and parents.
 - To revisit Local Church Reviews as reported to Presbytery during 2018, 2019 and 2020 with a view to monitoring actions taken as advised in the review. (2.1.1)
 - To instruct the Mission and Service Committee, or its successor, to provide clusters with a toolkit on local mission and outreach by June 2023.
 - To establish a ministry team in each cluster to lead and serve worship, communion, baptism, weddings, funerals and spiritual occasions across the churches and charges within that cluster.
 - To appoint a part time Ministry Development Officer in support of the implementation of the foregoing, funded from the ministry allocation to Melrose and Peebles Presbytery or through Presbytery or a combination of both plus other funding sources. (5.3)
 - To instruct the Property and Stewardship Committee to determine the costs across each individual church/charge required for the upkeep of each ecclesiastical building by December 2022.
 - To instruct the Property and Stewardship Committee, or its successor, to gather information from churches on buildings, as requested in the recent mission questionnaire, then move to seek approval from Presbytery for the disposal of certain buildings determined by Presbytery as category (b) by December 2022 then, within the five year life of the Plan and, in accordance with the requirements of the Church of Scotland Asset Management Building Audit, action the disposal of buildings approved as in category (b).

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5. STRUCTURE and GOVERNANCE

- 5.1 Given the lack of clarity at this time on the role and purpose of the new presbytery, which may include charges and churches across Melrose and Peebles Presbytery, it is suggested that Structure and Governance beyond the Presbytery of Melrose and Peebles be left until the first annual review of this plan.
- 5.2 However, it is suggested that: (7)
all current linkages should look towards establishing unions; (2.4)
all churches be invited to send two elders together with their Minister of Word and Sacrament to form informal cluster groupings which could move to cluster ministries within 5 years; (8)
all churches/charges consider Kirk Sessions to consist of no more than twelve elders with an Elder Emeritus role for those who wish to step down from their role as elder. Wider delegation of responsibilities to follow.

6. RESOURCES

PEOPLE: PLACES: PRICE

Ministers of Word and Sacrament

- 6.1 Nine posts of Minister of Word and Sacrament have been allocated to the Presbytery of Melrose and Peebles. Of the 11 current charges two are in vacancy but due to link (Channelkirk and Lauder with Earlston); one is about to become vacant (Ashkirk linked with Ettrick and Yarrow linked with Selkirk); three enjoy unrestricted charges (1. Bowden linked Melrose and 2. St Andrews Leckie: Peebles linked with Lyne and Manor and 3. Dryburgh District); four enjoy recent callings on a reviewable tenure (1. Innerleithen, Walkerburn and Traquair; 2. Eddleston with Peebles Old linked and Stobo and Drumelzier, 3. Galashiels, 4. West Tweeddale). Clarity on the length of reviewable tenure for Stow and Heriot with Caddonfoot will be sought in time for the next edition of the draft plan.
- 6.2 The revised pattern of ministries across Presbytery requires a total of 10 but only 9 have been allocated to Melrose and Peebles. It is noted that an interim ministry has been approved for Channelkirk and Lauder (for two years) but no appointment to Earlston. Any bid to the central church for an additional minister, beyond the two years interim ministry, may be considered unlikely to succeed but remains the preferred option of congregations. (5.1 : 5.2)
- 6.3 In accordance with Section 5 of The Act every effort should be made to seek a five-year reviewable tenure for the united churches of Channelkirk and Lauder with Earlston from 2024. Thereby setting the more appropriate allocation of ministers at 10.
- 6.4 In terms of cluster grouping Selkirk is the smallest and Earlston or Peebles the largest. Ministers within clusters are: - Selkirk 1; Earlston 2 plus a vacancy: Galashiels 2: Peebles 4. In simple terms - Peebles should be reduced by one to three but such a move is not possible meantime.

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- 6.5 There is no reason to suggest that Ashkirk with Ettrick and Yarrow with Selkirk should lose their only minister as they move into vacancy; in fact, with the work already undertaken within that cluster there is a very strong argument in support of further developments. However, all vacancies and other proposed spends on resourcing ministry should be measured against this plan before deciding on replacement or new posts. (5)
- 6.6 It is recommended therefore that the allocation and distribution of Ministers of Word and Sacrament be re- considered by the Nurture Forum in accordance with The Act. Should this fail to find support then, at the first review of the Mission Plan, Presbytery should consider reducing the number of ministers in the Peebles cluster by one and transferring that post to the Earlston area. (5.1 + 8 + 9 + 10)

Ministry Development Staff

- 6.7 There is no current allocation of Ministry Development Staff to Melrose and Peebles.
- 6.8 It is recommended that such a post be created to work across Presbytery reporting directly to the Business Committee or its successor, and to Presbytery every six months, with the remit to support the implementation of mission objectives and recommendations within this plan. Funding for such a post could be secured through various funding sources including, perhaps, the successor to Ministry and Mission allocations. (12)
- 6.9 Consideration should be given to the roles for Reader and Ordained Local Ministers in furthering the implementation of the Plan.

Ecumenical Relationships

- 6.10 By most accounts there would appear to be good ecumenical relationships within clusters at times driven by joint working in schools and across neighbouring traditions. It is recommended that the calling of a minister to Selkirk should include a requirement to work within the Selkirk and Galashiels clusters to create a model that could be implanted or phased into other clusters or simply offered as an example of good practice. (2.1.1ii)

Finance (2.1.1)

- 6.11 As a full understanding of the Ministry and Mission fund, and its successor, remains somewhat unclear; further work on the costs of implementing this plan to be considered by the Property and Stewardship Committee during 2022.

Buildings (2.1.1)

- 6.12 In accordance with The Act (2.1.2 – 2.1.5) Presbytery is required to categorise each ecclesiastical building as either (a) to be retained beyond the five years of the Mission Plan or (b) to be sold, let or otherwise disposed of by a specific date within the five years of the Plan.

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- 6.13 An initial indication from churches of their view on category should offer a guide to (a) or (b) in the view of the church. These should be with Presbytery by the end of March. However, it will be the duty of Presbytery to finalise categorisation and ensure action is taken where disposal of a building is determined and actioned within the five years of the Plan.
- 6.14 Churches across the bounds of Melrose and Peebles number some 35 buildings plus halls and church centres in some places. If, as suggested elsewhere in this plan, churches are considered for closure where there is another church within five miles and the number of regular worshippers less than 15, 16 church buildings might close. Such a position would be examined more closely as the findings of the Asset Management Building Audit unfold.
- 6.15 The Church described itself as a “substantial” landowner in a report to Scottish Government on land reform last year - and also a “unique” one given that its buildings and land directly benefit the communities it serves.
- 6.16 However, we could argue that where less than fifteen worship on a Sunday, with the building unused throughout the rest of the week, and another church within the cluster available within five miles then the underused building should be closed or bought by the community from the Church of Scotland.
- 6.17 Money raised from the sale of redundant properties goes to help congregations keep their existing churches and halls going. Trustees get a 10 per cent levy on sale proceeds from church property, a portion of which is paid into the Central Fabric Fund which distributes grants and loans to churches in need of repair and improvement. Properties can be selected for sale for several reasons. For example, selling an energy inefficient manse to buy a new energy efficient one or a church with services moved to the community hall. Some sales will be because congregations have united. The proceeds of sales should be retained for the benefit of the local congregation.

7. INFORMATION FLOW

Reports to Presbytery began with a verbal report in November 2019 followed by a progress report in December 2019 after which a questionnaire was sent to Session Clerks for completion and return to the Planning Committee by the end of March 2022. The Initial Draft Plan was introduced to Presbytery in February 2022 before being sent to Kirk Session for their response by mid May 2022.

The Final Draft Plan is to be placed before Presbytery in June 2022 then the Approved Draft Plan sent to the General Trustees and the Faith Nurture Forum for final approval or otherwise. The Presbytery Conference in October 2022 will provide opportunity for discussion on the implementation of The Presbytery Plan.

In addition to consultation through members of the Planning Group, members of Presbytery have been invited to comment at each stage of the consultation process. Conveners of Presbytery Standing Committees and members of the Business Committee have been consulted regularly; a questionnaire sent to congregations and the Initial Draft Presbytery Mission Plan sent to congregations for their comment.

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8. REWARD

A vibrant, very visible church which engages with an increasing number of worshipers and those of no faith within and out with church buildings; guided by team ministries leading worship, outreach, pastoral support and evangelism within and out with church buildings having secured the necessary resources in support of The Plan in action.

(References and Examples of Mission in practice to be added to the final draft.)