

Kintore Parish Church of Scotland

SC001406 Registered Scottish Charity

Easter 2018

Dear friends,

Our second Strategic Planning Conference Session was held on Tuesday, 20th March, in the church hall. 35 folk from Kintore attended and the meeting was very ably facilitated by Rev Heather Mikelson, the Gordon Presbytery Mission and Discipleship Development Worker. The theme of the meeting was: “**Clarifying Vision:** Describing the future church to which we aspire and are called.”

Heather led us through an exercise in which we were challenged to describe Kintore church in the past and the present and then to dream of how we hope the church of the future might look. We celebrated the church of the past which had been a confident church at the centre of the community in which the whole family (all ages) found a home. We also noted that it was also not without fault, tending to be male dominated and minister-focussed. The church of the present was noted as being somewhat emptier, particularly missing certain generations, and subject to a range of external pressures. Positively though, we also mentioned that there are a number of positive changes already underway in the congregation.

When it came to imagining the future, we were challenged to suggest words or phrases to describe the church for which we longed but also to suggest an image or set of images that might evoke further thinking to lead us forward. Themes that emerged as we collected the words and phrases included the following:

Welcoming / Hospitality / Alongside
Outward looking & Outward going / Community-centred / Justice
Refreshing / New ideas
Less formal / Integration / Including all ages
Confident disciples / Growing / Spiritual / Education-focussed.

Several images presented themselves as possible ways to evoke thoughts about the future. These included the image of a Ceilidh dance, a hill to climb, a maze to navigate and a flag or banner bearing the name of Christ. Some of our thoughts and discussion circled back to the image of a Ceilidh dance and I'll say more about that in a moment. But first let me say something about the use of images in general.

Strategic planning in the past (especially in the 1980's and 1990's) tended to swivel around having a neat, pithy vision statement – a short sentence that encapsulated all the aspects of a group or organisation's aspirations. Such vision statements could be very powerful as they were often easy to remember and useful as tools against which to measure progress. Their shortcomings were that they were too often static (i.e. the organisation might very soon move on from the environment in which the vision statement emerged) and that their very “wordiness” did not always appeal to everyone. We are hoping that an image might be more dynamic, open to interpretation, reinterpretation and development, appealing to visual thinkers as well as verbal thinkers but, most of all, that an image would be evocative – calling us out or forward towards a shared vision for the future. The image I'll describe below is not final, it is only intended to be a start. It is tentative and may change several times as we move ahead. As with all metaphors, it cannot be all-encompassing. Even the best metaphors break down at some point and it will be helpful both to point out where the metaphor fails and to guard against stretching the metaphor beyond its usefulness.

The Ceilidh Dance

Imagine church as a ceilidh dance. At a ceilidh there are certain traditional tunes and dances as well as some new ones we're only just learning – the Gay Gordons, the Dashing White Sergeant, Strip the Willow and so on. In the church the music may be that of fellowship, justice, care, compassion or evangelism. Anyway, we haven't come as an audience to watch these dances performed – we've been invited to dance them ourselves!

So the music starts and we're up to dance. Now unlike the ballet where experts dance and we only watch, or a ballroom dancing studio where an instructor goes through each step with us methodically until we've got it perfect, a ceilidh is somewhat more chaotic. There is a caller, for sure, who explains the dance, but after that

we all step in. Experts (those who've danced before) and novices dance together. We try out steps, we get them wrong, we help each other, we try again. Young and old, newcomers and old-hands figure it out together. We learn the steps by dancing.

Now imagine Christian faith like that. Everybody steps up. There are callers (minister/elders/leaders) who help to teach us what the "dance" is about, but after that we all step in. Experts (those who've been disciples for some time) and novices dance together. We try various ways to show compassion, to welcome strangers, to work for justice, to help the poor, to spread the Gospel. We get it wrong, we help each other, we try again. Young and old, newcomers and old-hands figure it out together. We learn the steps by dancing.

One group suggested a prayer to accompany this vision:

May the Lord of the Dance lead us to welcome, love and reach out to our community as we grow as his disciples.

Does this image help you? Perhaps it leaves you cold – you don't like dancing anyway. Perhaps it's all a bit too abstract for you. Or perhaps this image is like a lightbulb – you finally *get* what your Christian faith is all about. Or maybe you need to sit with this image for a while – ponder it, let it sink in and then evaluate it later. Whatever your initial reaction, may I ask you to give this image some thought – can you see its possibilities to draw us forward, or recognise its shortcomings as a metaphor? Does it raise any questions in your mind? I would value your feedback, either by letter (28 Oakhill Road, Kintore, AB51 0FH), or by email (nmeyer@churchofscotland.org.uk).

At our next Strategic Planning Conference Session on Tuesday, 17 April, at 7:00pm in the church hall, we will get down to some of the nuts and bolts of the way forward. The theme will be "**Goal-setting/Year-plan:** Reviewing our Year-plan and setting goals in the light of the vision agreed." We will measure all we do as a church against the three "legs" of missional churches – Hospitality, Mission and Discipleship – and against the vision we are developing above. We will consider what new things to take on and whether there are some things we can let go. I would love you to be part of the conversation so please feel free to come along.

I look forward to your ongoing participation and prayer.

With much love,

Rev Neil Meyer