

PRESBYTERY OF MELROSE AND PEEBLES

The Presbytery will meet **BY ZOOM** on Tuesday 23 March 2021 at 7pm for the purpose of Presbytery Plan implementation matters only.

Victoria Linford, Clerk

BUSINESS

1. Constitute
2. Sederunt and Apologies
3. Order of Business
4. Presbytery Planning Implementation Committee (*to follow*)
5. Basis of Adjustment (pp2-9)
6. Vacancy Procedure Committee (*to follow*)
7. Adjournment

Selkirk High School Cluster Linkage Report to Melrose and Peebles Presbytery

The acceptance of the Radical Action Plan and the Presbytery Plan for Melrose and Peebles Presbytery resulted in the Kirk Sessions of Ashkirk, Ettrick & Yarrow and Selkirk congregations agreeing to set up a Working Group to consider forming a linkage of the three congregations within the Cluster.

The Presbytery Planning Implementation Committee (PPIC) appointed Keith Simpson and Robert Turnbull to advise the congregations in the Cluster on the procedures to be followed to effect the Linkage of the congregations involved.

The PPIC representatives were invited to attend a meeting of the Selkirk Cluster Working Group held in Selkirk Manse on Sunday 8th March 2020. Also in attendance were Rev Margaret Steele – Minister of Ashkirk linked with Selkirk Parish Churches and Rev Elspeth Harley – Interim Moderator of Ettrick and Yarrow Parish Church. (Rev Steele was subsequently appointed Interim Moderator of Ettrick & Yarrow on the retirement of Rev Harley). Keith Simpson was unable to be present.

A useful discussion was held over various aspects which needed to be considered for producing a draft Basis of Linking Document, and an explanation of the steps to be taken by the Kirk Sessions and the Congregations. Also discussed were proposals to come to a workable arrangement for timing of church services in the charge. A major difficulty is allowing sufficient travelling time between the valley churches and Selkirk or Ashkirk if the services at the extremities are conducted by the same person. The onset of Covid19 lockdown restrictions has hampered progress, but an achievable solution will be found using Minister, pulpit supply, members of worship teams and even technology to ensure services will take place regularly and consistently at three sites each Sunday.

In November 2020 the PPIC representatives met the respective Kirk Sessions by Zoom. The meeting at Ashkirk was held on 8th November, Selkirk on 9th November and Ettrick & Yarrow on the 10th November. The meetings were chaired by Robert Turnbull supported with advice from Keith Simpson. All three meetings followed the same format. Opportunity was given to the Sessions to ask questions about the Basis of Linking before a vote was taken. Ashkirk and Selkirk Kirk Sessions both accepted the Basis unanimously. Ettrick & Yarrow Kirk Session gave eight votes for with two abstentions but no votes against.

The Protocol to be followed, as set out by the special General Assembly held on 2nd and 3rd October 2020, for conducting the subsequent vote by the congregations was explained and discussed with each Kirk Session before a vote was taken. Ashkirk and Selkirk Kirk Sessions unanimously accepted the Protocol and Ettrick & Yarrow accepted it with nine votes for with one abstention and no votes against.

The representatives of the PPIC also confirmed their acceptance of the Basis of Linking and the Protocol. The next steps were explained to the Kirk Sessions and all agreed that postal ballots be used for the congregational voting. The Rev Margaret Steele was advised of the outcome of the Session vote and undertook to submit her letter of acceptance to Presbytery.

Edicts announcing the preparation of the Congregations' Electoral Registers were read in the online services held on 13th and 20th December 2020, with the 3rd January 2021 being given as the deadline for submission of application to be added to the Register. The Kirk Sessions met in early January to approve the Registers. On the 18th January a copy of the Basis of Linking and a letter of explanation which invited questions were sent to everyone on the Registers by post, email, the church website and a laminated copy was displayed on the church noticeboards. Written questions were to be submitted to the Session Clerks by 2nd February. The PPIC representatives met by Zoom with members of the Working Group on 7th February to discuss and approve the Question and Answer Document. It was agreed it be sent to all voters even though no questions were submitted by Ashkirk and Selkirk.

The Voting Papers and the Q&A Document were posted to the voters on 15th February with a stamped addressed envelope provided for this purpose; with Selkirk votes being sent to Keith Simpson and Ashkirk and Ettrick & Yarrow votes being sent to Robert Turnbull. The voting papers are identical for all three congregations with the exception of the location and the Electoral Registration number of each registrant.

The Presbytery representatives were provided with a copy of the Electoral Registers to enable them to verify the legitimacy of the votes cast.

The PPIC representatives met at Earlston on the 5th March to open and count the votes.

The votes cast by each congregation are as follows:-

In **Agreement** for the Linking of Ashkirk, Ettrick & Yarrow and Selkirk

| | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Ashkirk | 27 | |
| Ettrick & Yarrow | 87 | |
| Selkirk | | 200 |
| TOTAL FOR LINKING | | 314 |

Against the Linking of Ashkirk, Ettrick & Yarrow and Selkirk

| | | |
|------------------------------|----------|----------|
| Ashkirk | 1 | |
| Ettrick & Yarrow | 3 | |
| Selkirk | | 3 |
| TOTAL AGAINST LINKING | | 7 |

| | Ashkirk | Ettrick & Yarrow | Selkirk |
|------------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------------|----------------|
| Total Voting Slips received | 28 | 90 | 205 |
| Voting Slips deemed invalid | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Total Votes cast | 28 | 90 | 203 |

ELECTORAL ROLL NUMBERS and % RESPONSE

| | Ashkirk | Ettrick & Yarrow | Selkirk |
|-------------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------------|----------------|
| Number on Register | 35 | 144 | 319 |
| Returned (including invalid) | 28 | 90 | 205 |
| % Return | 80% | 62.5% | 64.3% |

All votes have been counted and the result conveyed to the congregations concerned.

Church of Scotland law does not prevent the right to appeal the outcome of the vote. The appeal can be intimated at a Presbytery meeting by a member of Presbytery or by a Kirk Session where the Kirk Session has approved the raising of an appeal. The appeal can be raised on the following grounds: a) an error in Church law b) breach of the principles of natural justice or material irregularity of process c) decision influenced by incorrect material fact d) the severity of any sanction imposed.

The views of the congregations regarding the linkage of Ashkirk, Ettrick & Yarrow and Selkirk have been recorded and will be placed before the Presbytery of Melrose and Peebles on 23rd March 2021.

The PPIC representatives thank the three Kirk Sessions concerned for the warmth of their welcome and co-operation throughout the process. Thanks are also due to other members of the PPIC for their advice and encouragement.

Keith Simpson and Robert Turnbull

Appendices:

- 1. Basis of Linking**
- 2. Explanatory Letter**
- 3. Ballot Form**
- 4. Q&A Document**

Appendix 1 – Basis of Linking

BASIS OF LINKING

The congregation of Ashkirk (ID:040251, charity number SC010768) and the congregation of Ettrick and Yarrow (ID:040263, charity number SC034662) and the congregation of Selkirk (ID:040295, charity number SC014883) shall be linked as from the _____ day of _____, and that on the following terms and conditions:

1. **Transference of Property and Funds:** The property and funds belonging to or held on behalf of each congregation shall remain the property and funds of each congregation as at present.
2. **Places of Worship:** All 5 church buildings (Ashkirk Parish Church, Ettrick Kirk, Kirkhope Church, Selkirk Parish Church and Yarrow Kirk) at present used and occupied by the congregations shall be the places of worship of the linked congregations. A service will be held in each of the three parishes every week, led by an appropriate worship leader at times to be decided by the minister and the Kirk Sessions, subject to the approval of the Presbytery.
3. **Territorial Responsibility:** The bounds to be served by the linked charge shall be the parishes of Ashkirk, Ettrick and Yarrow, and Selkirk.
4. **Kirk Session:** The Minister of the linked charge shall be the Moderator of each Kirk Session. The Kirk Sessions may meet together, as they deem it desirable.
5. **Congregational Management:** The temporal affairs of each congregation shall be administered as at present, namely: Ashkirk – Unitary Constitution; Ettrick and Yarrow – Unitary Constitution; Selkirk – Model Constitution.

The office-bearers of the congregations shall decide on their portion of contributions towards listed expenses and maintenance of the manse, and other shared expenses, and these may be reviewed from time to time. The initial apportionment will be as follows: Ashkirk 9.2%, Ettrick and Yarrow 37.6%, Selkirk 53.2%.

6. **Minister:** The Rev. Margaret Steele, presently Minister of Ashkirk linked with Selkirk, shall be the Minister of the linked charge in terms of Section 11 (1) (b) of Act VII, 2003
7. **Manse:** The manse of Selkirk Parish Church shall be the manse of the linked congregations. The ownership of the manse will remain with Selkirk Parish Church. Maintenance and upkeep costs will be shared between the congregations on the basis of the apportionment in clause 5.
8. **Power to Readjust:** While these articles and terms shall form the Basis of Linking for the congregations now linking, the linked congregations shall be free like other congregations, to adjust arrangements under the authority of Presbytery as need may arise.

Appendix 2 - Explanatory Letter

Selkirk Parish Church

Charity No SC014883

Website <http://selkirkparish.church/>

Facebook www.facebook.com/Selkirkparishchurch

Minister: Rev. Margaret Steele

Manse: 01750 23308 Office: 01750 20078

e-mail: MSteele@churchofscotland.org.uk or office@selkirkparish.church



Looking to the future

Letter to all members and adherents of Ashkirk and Selkirk

18th January 2021

About two years ago, the linked congregations of Ashkirk and Selkirk started a conversation with the congregation of Ettrick and Yarrow about how we might work together to bring stability and strength, enabling us to be effective witnesses to Christ's love in our three parishes. This local conversation has taken place in the context of the Church of Scotland's overall 'Radical Plan' which considers the future shape, size, structure and resources of the Church in the future. This was discussed by our Kirk Sessions and at congregational meetings.

A draft "basis of linking" has been drawn up by representatives of each congregation, agreed by all three Kirk Sessions and presented to Presbytery. This document (attached) outlines how our three parishes could work together sharing one minister.

The key points of the draft "basis of linking" are:

- Each congregation retains ownership of its own church building(s) and responsibility for all associated maintenance and upkeep costs.
- Each congregation retains its own Kirk Session
- There will be one full-time Minister for the linked churches with additional parish support anticipated – all congregations share the Ministerial costs based on an agreed apportionment.
- Selkirk congregation retains ownership of its manse where the Minister lives and all congregations share the cost of manse maintenance and upkeep based on an agreed apportionment.
- Each congregation is free to make changes to the linking agreement in the future as agreed by Presbytery

If you have any questions about this draft "basis of linking" please notify Mr David Bethune by 2nd February 2021. All questions must be in writing via The Church Office, High Street, Selkirk TD7 4JX or via email david@dbethune.com

The Kirk Session will consider any questions raised and prepare a document with answers to the questions. This document, along with your unique voting slip and a stamped addressed envelope for your completed voting slip will be posted to you around mid-February 2021.

The completed voting papers will be posted direct to nominated representatives of Presbytery who will count the votes (to ensure fairness and anonymity) and we will be informed of the result. If the vote is in favour, the "linking" will then be ratified by Presbytery and then by 121. Then Presbytery will set a formal date of linking, probably in summer/autumn of 2021.

Please pray that God will guide us through this time of change, so that we can know and follow His way ahead.

Session Clerk for Selkirk Kirk Session

Appendix 3 - Ballot Form



PRESBYTERY OF MELROSE AND PEEBLES

Location: Selkirk

Voting Form: Basis of Linking

Electoral Register Number.....

The Kirk Sessions of Ashkirk and Selkirk (already linked) seek your vote to link further with Ettrick & Yarrow.

Please refer to the Basis of Linking document and Introduction you received earlier.

This vote does not preclude your further opportunities to appeal this process as per Church of Scotland law.

You must return your vote to the Presbytery representative in the S.A.E. provided.

Your votes must be received by 2nd March 2021.

Please put a cross in the statement reflecting your view.

I agree with the Linking.....

I do not agree with the Linking.....

Appendix 4 - Q&A Document

Questions arising from the 'Basis of Linking' consultation

- Q1. *The listed expenses & maintenance of the manse plus other shared expenses - what would the other shared expenses be?*
- A1. Examples include manse alarm maintenance, council tax, insurances, minister travel and fuel, general maintenance repairs and upkeep, minister computer, phone and printing costs etc.
- Q2. *As the manse is to remain the property of the Selkirk Parish, should the costs of the manse not continue to be funded by Selkirk Parish?*
- A2. The costs of the manse are considered in the same way as the ministerial costs and it is proposed that these should be shared. All the treasurers and the Kirk Sessions have agreed that this is a fair and reasonable way of apportioning and covering these costs. For Ettrick & Yarrow (who it is proposed would be joining the existing cluster of Ashkirk & Selkirk) this represents a sizable reduction in future costs compared to when they were wholly responsible for 100% of any Ettrick and Yarrow manse costs.
- Q3. *How do E&Y's finances look at the moment? Based on the proposal and previous years costs at Selkirk plus the increased costs of the larger congregational population/geographical spread will E&Y have the funds to meet these new costs? Is support provided by 121/presbytery to assist in the 'linking of our Parishes'? What effect does the linking of the Congregations have on the contribution made to 121?*
- A3. Under the proposed linking arrangement, the actual cost position for Ettrick and Yarrow is significantly improved by an average of several thousand pounds per year (an average saving estimated over the last few years accounts). It means E&Y no longer must 100% fund a separate minister and 100% of any E&Y manse costs on its own. Additionally, there is financial support from Presbytery by the funding of a new part-time 'Pastoral Assistant' role – see A5 below. The contribution to 121 is unaffected by the proposed linking.
- Q4. *How is the percentage of contribution from each parish calculated? is it on number of members, average congregations or what?*
- A4. The percentages contributions are based on the average income base of each congregation. This is calculated annually by 121 and is the average of the gross income for the previous 3 years. i.e., 2021 income base will be calculated on the average gross income for the period 2018-2020.
- Q5. *What does "additional parish support anticipated" mean?*
- A5. We have now had confirmation from Presbytery that they will support funding for a part-time 'Pastoral Assistant' resource to assist across Ashkirk, Ettrick & Yarrow and Selkirk. This is extremely good news and very welcome and was only confirmed after the initial 'basis of linking' letters had been sent out which is why they only referenced the 'anticipated' additional support, The role of the new 'Pastoral Assistant' will be to work with the Minister in developing and sustaining pastoral ministry throughout the three parishes. Their main duties will include being involved in the life and worship of the congregations; sharing in hospital and pastoral visits; supporting bereaved families and where appropriate, assisting with funerals and sharing in services within local care homes.

- Q6. *Reference is made to a 'unique voting slip'...should I assume my vote is not anonymous?*
- A6. Everyone has a unique, numbered voting slip to allow the independent counting and validation of votes by the presbytery representatives. The Minister and Kirk Sessions do not know how individuals have cast their votes. This is the approved voting process as laid down by 121 for such votes.
- Q7. *Who are the 'nominated representative of Presbytery' and who will count the votes? Please name them.*
- A7. The nominated representatives of Presbytery who have been assigned to support the proposed linking and voting process are Robert Turnbull, Session Clerk Earliston and Keith Simpson, elder Old & St Paul's Galashiels. They have been supporting each Kirk Session through this linking process and are responsible for independently counting and verifying the votes in line with the process as laid down by 121.
- Q8. *What are 'temporal affairs'?*
- A8. The temporal affairs of a church relate to the practical matters of property and finance.
- Q9. *What is a 'Unitary Constitution'?*
- A9. Churches with a 'Unitary Deed of Constitution' allow the single body of the Kirk Session and its constituent committees to oversee both the practical and spiritual issues, i.e. from property to pastoral care and from finance to vision for the future.
- Q10. *What is a 'Model Constitution'?*
- A10. Churches with a 'Model Deed of Constitution' represents the separation of spiritual and practical: the Kirk Session dealing with the former and Congregational Board with the latter.
- Q11. *Apportionment of expenses...how exactly have the figures been arrived at?*
- A11. Please see A4 above.
- Q12. *Whatever happened to the idea of a 'cluster'?*
- A12. The Church of Scotland does not formally recognise the terminology or organisation of a 'cluster'. A 'linkage' is the closest model to a 'cluster' and really means the same thing i.e., it is formal partnership arrangement with rules and procedures for governing this partnership. Under the 'linkage' each congregation remains independent however congregations and Kirk Sessions may meet together from time to time This is different from a full 'union' and forming a union is not what the Kirk Sessions are proposing.

**Each Kirk Session is supportive of the 'Linking' of Ashkirk and Selkirk
(already linked) with Etrick and Yarrow.**