

Extracts from Rosie Frew's address to the June 2019 Presbytery Conference.

These are difficult days, no question. Across the Presbytery and across the land congregations are being challenged to think prayerfully about their ministry, their mission, their vision, the adequacy of their buildings, the duplication of work and effort, the gaps, the opportunities...

What is clear:

- The status quo is not an option – new ways of doing and being church are inevitable.
- There are no one size fits all answers.
- There will be far fewer full time ministers of word and sacrament. It's reckoned that by 2023 our share of ministers will be between 9 and 10 and that includes 70 'built in' vacancies. That's what we have to plan for.
- Our ministers will have to be deployed differently, possibly as part of an area team or hub or cluster. There will need to be more sharing of resources. We will need OLMs, Readers, retired ministers, worship groups, worship leaders to work together. Ministry Teams – along with other more specialist appointments.
- We cannot ignore the ecumenical dimension. Now, as never before, is the time for churches to work together and show strength and unity. Again, that will mean different things in different places.

Wherever we are in Scotland there are some things we have to face up to openly and realistically.

We have to be honest about our finances. Nationally the C of S had a 4 million pound overspend last year and a similar deficit is projected for this year. Like the national church many congregations are dependent on their reserves for survival. Many don't have the safety net of reserves and are really struggling to make ends meet. And that's some in our Presbytery...

Recently every Session Clerk will have received a letter from Stewardship and Finance about their congregation's Ministries and Mission contribution. In short, the cost of a parish minister is £42,912 – stipend plus all the additional costs for pension, National Insurance etc. And then there are the local costs – Council tax, listed expenses that cover travel, phone, pulpit supply etc. And that's just paying a minister, nothing else, no local mission or running costs..... We all have to look realistically at our church finances.

We have to think honestly about numbers. Think about Sunday morning worship where you are – is it sustainable as it is, is it a real struggle just to keep the show on the road, is there a better way of coming together to worship, what demands are being placed on ministers and worship leaders and organists and music groups?

We have to think honestly about our buildings.

(From the General Trustees Report to the General Assembly 2019:

What is meant by 'well equipped spaces in the right places'?

In looking to define 'well equipped', the following questions have been raised across the Church. The crucial question is 'well equipped for what?' Form should follow function.

What does the building say to others about what it means to be a Christian congregation?

How open and welcoming is it to the parish and community it serves?

How do the Church's sanctuaries and halls, most of which are open to the public to a greater or lesser extent, compare to other public buildings?

Does the state of decoration tell of people who are proud to share their congregational 'home' with other people?

Is it too expensive for its missional needs?

Is it good Christian stewardship to have a small congregation rattling around in a huge building?

Is it sufficient that the church (or sanctuary within a church complex) is only used for a short time each week as a worship space?

What is the purpose of the building? Is it needed?

And what is meant by 'in the right places'?

Is the location of the building where it is best needed?

How does it relate to the wider community?

Should congregations be encouraged to ask the question - 'what kind of Christian witness could we give if we didn't have this building? And what does this currently say about the kind of Christian witness given?

How close to other Church of Scotland or other Christian denominations buildings is it? Can the locality sensibly support as many churches over the next 10-15 years?

Many people have suggested that the Church would benefit from having a definition of what is a 'well equipped space'. The proposal is that the General Assembly should adopt a minimum standard that would apply to all church buildings in the same way that there is a minimum standard for manses. And in a similar way, in special circumstances, derogations from the standard would be possible when approved by the Presbytery. This minimum standard could include:

- (a) Access for all through the main entrance door
- (b) Flexible spaces - that can be used throughout the week
- (c) A welcoming space
- (d) Regular use for worship (weekly or fortnightly?)
- (e) All health and safety requirements met
- (f) Modern toilet facilities that take account of the numbers of people using the building (e.g. if building to be use for conferences, more facilities might be required)
- (g) Facilities for hospitality – a kitchen that meets catering standards
- (h) Realistic and affordable maintenance costs and management
- (i) A minimum amount of time during the week that the building is used (e.g. more than one hour per week?)
- (j) A minimum energy efficiency standard)

The challenge before all of us

No one size fits all, however what is the same for every congregation -

- We all have to change
- We all have to look at our own situation honestly and realistically. What is sustainable?
- We are all being challenged to prayerfully seek God's vision – to be imaginative, practical, good stewards of the resources entrusted to us.
- New things will have to be tried
- Perhaps we're being called to serve in a new way
- Perhaps we are being dragged out of our comfort zone
- Sacrifices will have to be made, some things will have to end
- We'll have to share, we'll have to do more things together
- Perhaps sometimes we'll have to travel more
- Perhaps we have to be less tied to our buildings and the way it has aye been.
- We all have to change