

Report to Melrose and Peebles Presbytery

The Congregational Vote at Galashiels:Trinity, Galashiels:Old Parish and St Paul's and Galashiels:St John's

The acceptance of the Radical Action Plan and the Presbytery Plan for Melrose and Peebles Presbytery resulted in the Kirk Sessions of Galashiels:Trinity and Galashiels:Old Parish and St Paul's linked with Galashiels:St John's congregations agreeing to set up a Working Group to consider forming a Union of the three Galashiels congregations. Caddonfoot at that time linked with Galashiels:Trinity had embarked on a different path leading to a linking with Stow St Mary of Wedale and Heriot.

The Presbytery Planning Implementation Committee (PPIC) appointed Isobel Hunter and David Brackenridge to advise the congregations on the procedures to be followed to effect the union of the congregations involved.

The Working Group first met with Isobel Hunter representing the PPIC in January 2020, to discuss a potential Basis of Union although informal discussions under the Interim Moderatorship of Rev David Donaldson had already been held to set out everyone's expectations. The role of Kirk Sessions, Presbytery and the Presbytery Planning Task Group at 121 in the procedure to agree a Basis of Union leading to a congregational vote, was explained.

In February, 2020, Reverend Elspeth Harley, as minister of Galashiels:Trinity, gave written consent to the PPIC to hold discussions with herself, elders and other members of ministry teams regarding uniting the three Galashiels congregations. Any further in person meetings of the Working Group were cancelled from then on due to lockdown.

Further work on an acceptable Basis of Union took place by email leading to a Working Party meeting by Zoom on the 15th December 2020 at which the draft Basis of Union for the three Gala churches was unanimously agreed.

At the Old Parish and St Paul's Kirk Session meeting by Zoom on 13 January, the Kirk Session approved the draft Basis of Union and the use of the new protocol. At the St John's Kirk Session Meeting on 20th January, the Kirk Session approved the draft Basis of Union and the use of the new protocol, and finally at the Trinity Kirk Session Meeting on 26th January, the Kirk Session approved the draft Basis of Union and the use of the new protocol. David Brackenridge was in attendance at these meetings and led the parts of the meetings relevant to Presbytery business.

The letters of intimation regarding the voting process, the proposed Basis of Union and the opportunity to raise any questions or comments were sent out to the members and adherents of the three congregations on 14th February. An example of the letter is contained in the appendices. Any questions and comments required to be submitted to the Session Clerks by March 1st.

Based on the questions raised a Working Group meeting was held by Zoom on the 10th March for a preliminary discussion of a draft questions and answers document.

A draft was duly produced by the Working Group and the Presbytery representatives and presented in a Zoom meeting to the three Kirk Sessions on the 17th March which led to further discussion between the Kirk Sessions at a Zoom meeting on the 26th March. The questions and answers document was then finalised at a Working Group meeting attended by both Presbytery representatives and the three Session Clerks on the 9th April.

A second letter was sent out on 10th April with the questions and answers document along with the voting slips and a stamped addressed envelope. An example of the voting slip and the questions and answers document is contained in the appendices. Voting slips were required to be returned by 30th April.

The votes were counted by Isobel Hunter and David Brackenridge on the 30th April. The results are summarised in the following table:

<i>Congregation</i>	Yes	No	Abstentions	Papers sent out	Papers Returned	Percentage Response
<i>Galashiels: Trinity</i>	213	9	1	312	223	71.5
<i>Galashiels: Old Parish and St. Paul's</i>	127	14		200	141	70.5
<i>Galashiels: St John's</i>	89	8		150	97	65

Thanks are due to the hard work of the Working Group and the positive manner of all concerned.

Isobel Hunter

David Brackenridge

30th April 2021

Appendices:

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

1. Explanatory Letter

Old Parish & St Paul's Church of Scotland

Scottish Charity Number SC010389

[Address]

14th February 2021

Dear ...

I hope you are keeping well in these strange and testing times!

I am writing to let you know that voting on the proposed union of the three Church of Scotland churches in Galashiels - Old Parish and St Paul's, St John's, and Trinity - will be taking place soon.

Please find overleaf a letter from Rev. Dr David Donaldson, our Interim Moderator, which explains the process of this vote, as well as the enclosed 'Basis of Union', the written terms on which our union would take place. If there is anything about this that is not clear or that you would like to discuss then please do not hesitate to contact our Session Clerk, David Leckey, on 01896 757631, or by email (dl28133@aol.com). Alternatively, feel free to re-use the envelope this came in, with the attached address label, to write to David.

I'm sure you know by now that we share a weekly service that goes out on YouTube from 11.15 am every Sunday morning, for which we are most grateful to the Rev. Neil Combe and his team. If you are not already watching this, you can find it by searching YouTube for 'stjohnsgalashiels', or you can request an audio recording if you do not have access to the Internet.

There are other events still going on that you are welcome to engage with, if you are not already doing so, mostly through the digital platform, Zoom:

- Monday (fortnightly) Prayer meeting at 7 pm
- Tuesday morning Bible Study
- Tuesday Prayer Time at 7.30 pm (on WhatsApp, not Zoom): this also has ongoing prayer requests, Bible verses, songs and encouragements throughout the week.
- Thursday Gathering at 7 pm (open to all three of our Galashiels congregations) with a 'Getting to Know You' guest, a little Bible teaching and a time to chat.
If you are not connected to any of the above, but you would like to be, then please let me know. Also, here are some dates for your diary: 4th March – Annual Stated Meeting (via Zoom) at 7 pm
- 5th March – World Day of Prayer (also via Zoom) at 7 pm If you wish to join in these events, please let me know and I'll give you the links to them.

In the meantime, if there is anything I or the Church can do for you, then please do get in touch! With best wishes from your Elder.

2. Basis of Union

Basis of Union

The congregation of Galashiels: Trinity and the congregation of Galashiels St. John's and the congregation of Galashiels: Old Parish and St. Paul's shall be united from a date to be determined by Presbytery, and that on the following terms and conditions:

1. Name: The name of the united congregation shall be Galashiels Church of Scotland, and Scottish Charity Number SCO10389 (number of Old Parish and St. Paul's) will be retained, as will SCO01386 (number of Galashiels: Trinity) and SCO00281 (number of Galashiels: St. John's).
2. Transference of Property and Funds: The property and funds belonging to or held on behalf of each congregation shall belong to or be held on behalf of the united congregation and any transference necessary shall be duly effected.
3. Places of Worship: All buildings presently used by the three congregations shall be retained initially, but the Kirk Session shall bring to the Presbytery within two years of the date of union recommendations on long term building requirements for the united congregation. The united congregation shall have a commitment to retaining a church presence in Langlee.
4. Territorial Responsibility: The bounds to be served by the united charge shall be the bounds at present served by the three congregations or as the Presbytery shall determine.
5. Kirk Session: The elders of all three Kirk Sessions shall form with the minister the Kirk Session of the united congregation.
6. Congregational Management: The temporal affairs of the united congregation shall be administered by the Kirk Session in terms of the Unitary Constitution, the Delegation of Assembly being authorised to issue the appropriate Deed of Constitution to the said congregation.
7. Minister: All charges being vacant, the united charge shall proceed to the election of a minister.
8. Manse: The Manse of the Galashiels: Old Parish and St. Paul's congregation shall be the Manse of the united congregation. The Manse of the Galashiels: Trinity congregation shall be sold, subject to the titles on which it is held, and subject to the approval of the Presbytery, and, if necessary, of the General Trustees or the General Assembly. The free proceeds of any such sale shall (a) if falling within the scope of Act VII 1995, be credited to the benefit of the congregation in the Consolidated Fabric Fund or (b) if not falling within the scope of the said Act, be held and applied for fabric purposes in connection with the properties of the congregation.
9. Ministerial Support: The stipend of the charge shall be paid in accordance with the terms of the National Stipend Scheme.
10. Power to readjust: While the articles and terms shall form the Basis of Union for the three congregations now uniting, the united congregation shall be free like other congregations to adjust arrangements under the authority of Presbytery as need may arise.

3. Question & Answer Document

Galashiels Churches Basis of Union Question and Answers Document

From the letter intimating the arrangements for the congregational voting on the Basis of Union, a number of questions and comments were received. They are summarised as follows:

Q. What is happening to the buildings?

A. A feasibility study has been commissioned to look at the Church Buildings and recommend what might be done with them. The report on the feasibility study will be available shortly. The decision was taken previously that the priority was to establish the union and then consider what might be done with the buildings.

Q. Why is Langlee receiving special treatment?

A. The united congregation will serve the whole of Galashiels. The vision of the new congregation will be based on worship, bible study, and prayer, and will seek to serve the whole community. The congregation of St. John's was transported from the centre of Galashiels to Langlee in the 1970s because of the need in the Langlee area. That remains true, and so the new congregation will maintain a presence for outreach, worship (possibly during the week), and mission.

Q. Are we keeping the Girls Brigade?

A. We have already over 100 young people between the Girls' Brigade and Boys' Brigade Companies. Hopefully we shall build on that.

Q. What do the Kirk Sessions feel about the proposed union?

A. The three Kirk Sessions – that is, the Kirk Session of St. John's, the Kirk Session of Trinity, and the Kirk Session of Old Parish and St. Paul's – have voted to accept the Basis of Union and are resolved to support the union of the congregations in every possible way. The Kirk Sessions appointed representatives to serve on a Joint Working Group, to discuss all the issues involved in the union, and the Working Group unanimously recommends union.

4. Ballot Paper



PRESBYTERY OF MELROSE AND PEEBLES

Voting Form - Basis of Union

LOCATION: GALASHIELS OLD PARISH & ST PAUL'S CHURCH

Registered Member / Adherent Number: O-176

As a registered member / adherent of Galashiels: Old Parish & St Paul's Church of Scotland (SC010389), you are hereby requested to vote on the proposal to unite with Galashiels: St. John's Church of Scotland (SC011353) and Galashiels: Trinity Church of Scotland (SC001386).

We will elect one full time Minister with additional parish support. Please refer to the proposed Basis of Union document and accompanying letter from Rev. Dr David Donaldson (Interim Moderator) you received in February. Responses to any questions/comments raised are enclosed with this Voting Form.

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

We have included a stamped pre-addressed envelope for you to use to return this form with your vote.

Please put a cross in the statement below reflecting your view.

Either:

I **agree** to the Basis of Union for Old Parish & St Paul's with St John's and with Trinity Churches

Or:

I **do not agree** to the Basis of Union for Old Parish & St Paul's, with St John's and with Trinity Churches

Thank you for taking part in making this important decision!