

EDINBURGH PRESBYTERY MISSION PLAN QUESTION & ANSWER SESSION

On Tuesday, 3 May 2022 Cramond Kirk Session met with representatives of Edinburgh Presbytery's Deployment Group. The questions raised by members of Session and the answers given by the representatives are noted below -

Questions

Why was Cramond Kirk not allowed to call a minister and why was Edinburgh Presbytery refusing to allow the appointment of new ministers when other presbyteries across Scotland were?

Why was the Kirk being asked to form a union with the Old Kirk & Muirhouse Parish Church and with Drylaw Church when demographically such a union could not work when there was no suitable public transport link between Cramond and the other two churches. Cramond Kirk had worked closely and successfully with both the Old Kirk & Muirhouse and with Drylaw for over 40 years. Could this arrangement not still continue without forming a union?

What was the reason for wishing to sell all three manses? Cramond Kirk was at the centre of the local community, the Kirk Hall was full to capacity and it would make far more sense to retain the Manse and use the additional space for the benefit of the community or for much needed rental income.

Responses

Unlike other presbyteries across Scotland, the General Assembly of 2021 had imposed a 40% cut in ministerial posts for Edinburgh Presbytery and it was therefore decided to restrict the appointment of any new ministers. There is an exceptional right to call which will help congregations in vacancy but it is not an easy route and still requires those churches in vacancy to form unions.

While public transport links from the Old Kirk & Muirhouse and Drylaw to Cramond were not easy, it was pointed out that these were two-way unions and perhaps travelling for the Cramond congregation to the Old Kirk & Muirhouse and Drylaw would be an easier option.

Session was reminded of the 5 Marks of Mission and the fact that the Church of Scotland was very strong in prioritising the needs of the poor. Therefore when drawing up the proposed unions, collaboration between stronger and weaker churches had been paramount so that the strong could give support to the weak. All congregations were being asked to look at the wider mission of the Church and what they could offer.

Questions

Looking at the bigger picture, the whole process appeared to be going round in circles. The General Assembly had made very difficult choices but were ministers and elders the right people to take the Mission Plan forward? People need to be informed, listened to and understood and there was anxiety about the practicalities of implementing the Plan. There was also concern that in any union of weak and strong churches, the stronger churches would dominate the weaker ones.

It was unclear with whom the Old Kirk & Muirhouse and Drylaw would wish to unite and would it be possible to form a mission district between the 5 congregations instead of union.

Responses

Many Church elders are also business people with experience in all areas of running a business and therefore this is an opportunity to use the skills and talents of the Church community in finding a way forward for the Church. The Deployment Group was working on a time line up to June 2022 and from then to the end of December 2022. However the process was a moving target and there were no definite dates for the Plan to be implemented.

Before any decisions could be made, feedback was needed from all 5 congregations as to their views on union.

Questions

Cramond Kirk has a long history of collaborating with and helping the Old Kirk & Muirhouse and Drylaw and as part of North West Churches Together had proposed a union between the churches a good number of years ago but this had been turned down by Presbytery at the time. As part of the Mission Plan discussions, the three churches had expressed a willingness to continue discussions around forming a union but this had not been helped by the suggestion that there was a "Plan B" with Davidsons Mains Parish Church wishing to form a union with the Old Kirk & Muirhouse and Blackhall St Columba's Church with Drylaw. If these other options were now on the table, who would make the final choice as to which churches would form unions?

Why sell the manses? The Old Kirk & Muirhouse Manse was part owned by McTaggart & Mickel so half the proceeds from any sale would go back to McTaggart & Mickel, not to the Church.

Was there a property plan and if so, who was permitted to see it?

What would Cramond Kirk have to do to set up a Nominating Committee because it was difficult to see when this would be possible?

The Mission Plan requires 50 deacons but where would they come from given there was a shortage of deacons?

Responses

While unions were built on historical or pre-existing ties, they would also be more focussed on mission and moving forward. As far as the Deployment Group were concerned, there was no “Plan B”. The suggestions were coming from the churches themselves, the Mission Plan was a consultation document and if it were found that changes needed to be made, that could happen. However, it was equally the case that if Cramond wished to enter into union with the Old Kirk & Muirhouse and with Drylaw then discussions between the 3 churches should continue.

As far as selling manses was concerned, when looking at each church’s property toolkit, it became obvious there was a lot of capital tied up in the manses. While Cramond Kirk has considered options for its manse in great detail, other churches have not.

The Property Plan was being drawn up. All the churches in Edinburgh Presbytery have been visited and the completed forms are coming back in but not all have been received yet. Once they have, the Property Plan can be completed.

Ministers are a gift of Presbytery. Presbytery would need to know which congregations would be served by a new minister before allowing any church to call a minister. The Nominating Committee would need to be made up of representatives from each of the congregations so that each congregation had a say in choosing their minister. Session was reminded that Cramond Kirk is a strong congregation and all its members are “ministers”. A church did not rely on one person. A church with a strong congregation could move forward, be active and engaged without having a minister.

Where deacons were in short supply, it might be better to look at appointing an MDS (Ministries Development Staff) who can be an ordained minister.

Questions

What needs to be done in order to move forward and ultimately call a minister.

What would happen if the Old Kirk & Muirhouse and Drylaw did not want to form a union with Cramond?

Why was the number of members per congregation considered irrelevant when looking at ministry posts.

Responses

While no churches in Edinburgh Presbytery were currently permitted to call a minister, there was an exceptional right to call a minister but there would have to be a lot of clarity as to whom they would be working with. No church would be able to call a minister as a congregation on its own so Cramond Kirk would need to meet together with its proposed partner church(es) and produce a draft basis of union to put to Presbytery.

If the Old Kirk & Muirhouse and Drylaw did not want to form a union with Cramond, then Cramond would need to find another church or churches to work with, possibly as part of a mission district.

The Church of Scotland was committed to territorial ministry with the number of ministry posts based on the geographical parish and then on the number of members per congregation. The Presbytery of Edinburgh & West Lothian has a total population of approximately 550,000 so roughly 10,000 – 11,000 people per ministry post. However a small parish in one of the poorer areas of the city would probably be more labour intensive for the church and minister than a larger parish elsewhere.

Questions

Do we need to revisit our links with the Old Kirk & Muirhouse and Drylaw or look at alternatives?

Do opportunities exist for a mission district around the new housing development at Cammo Meadows?

Responses

All three Kirk Sessions (Cramond, the Old Kirk & Muirhouse and Drylaw) had met and discussed the Presbytery Plan and both the Old Kirk & Muirhouse and Drylaw had endorsed the Plan. Once the Deployment Group had met with all the congregations and all the reports had been submitted, it would be clear what the feeling of each congregation was. If the Old Kirk & Muirhouse and Drylaw have had conversations with Davidsons Mains or Blackhall St Columba’s this would be included in the reports.

Mission districts were not meant to be seen as an alternative to forming unions. The mission districts were about cooperation between churches on a larger scale.

Questions

Why was there no question of closures for failing churches with a deficit budget?

Responses

What exactly is a failing church. Do we want the Church of Scotland to become a middle class enclave? The poorest churches in financial terms are often the most active and inspiring in terms of outreach and helping those in most need.