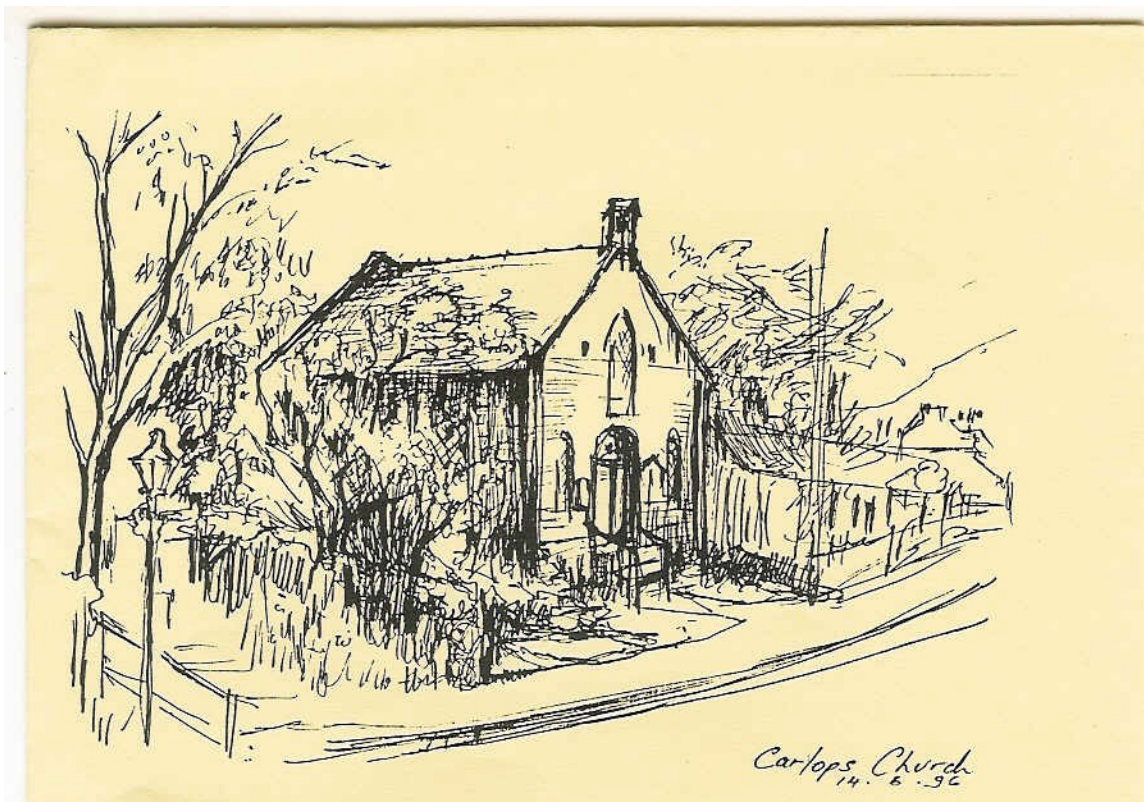


CARLOPS PARISH CHURCH

FORWARD PLAN



2016

FOREWORD

This is Carlops Church's *Forward plan*: the objectives we work towards, the policies we pursue and the activities in which we engage. The plan is being distributed widely because Carlops Church tries to be relevant to everyone, not just those who come to the church on Sunday. In addition to services, we organise talks, concerts, lunches, coffee mornings and charity work. We welcome everyone to join in any or all of these.

We consulted many people about what should feature in this plan; it reflects the views of a cross-section of Carlops people.

Please take a few moments to read the plan; we believe it may interest you. If it prompts you to consider taking part in some of our activities, contact us by email at info@carlopschurch.org or speak to any of those named at the end of the plan. We promise a warm welcome, no preaching and no pressure to do more than you wish.

Rennie McElroy
Editor, for Carlops Kirk Session
February 2016

CONTENTS

Carlops Church plans, 2007 and 2016

Mission and objectives

The congregation

The church building

Finance

Services

Serving the community

Caring for the environment

Supporting charities

Implementing the plan

CARLOPS CHURCH PLANS, 2007 AND 2016

Carlops Church adopted a *Development plan* in 2007. The plan sought to encourage action by clarifying policies and views which, though held implicitly by Kirk Session and congregation, had not been written down for everyone to understand and enact with confidence. It made objectives explicit and proposed activities that would help achieve them; the Kirk Session and members of the congregation then chose which to implement, so the plan guided activity, but did not dictate it.

This approach succeeded; achievements since 2007 include ...

1. Clarifying the church's objectives and policies and putting them in the public domain
2. Increasing the confidence of the congregation to initiate action
3. Involving more people in the church's work and enabling them to make contributions with which they feel comfortable
4. Raising the church's profile and winning support across the community
5. Refurbishing the church and creating a welcoming, flexible space for the whole community, suited to services and to cultural and social events
6. Organising cultural and social events which engage the whole community and underpin our charitable work. Each year, some thirty events generate about £2,000 for various charities.
7. Leading two community-wide projects: first, to support Mary's Meals, funding two "Carlops Kitchens" in Malawi and raising over £21,000 since 2011; second, to research and publish *Living in Carlops*, a directory of activities and organisations in and around Carlops
8. Leading services in all the churches in our linkage. Five members of our congregation engage in this, delivering about thirty services each year, and our Eco Group designs and delivers an annual service on an environmental theme.
9. Gaining four awards for good environmental practice from Eco-congregation Scotland. Carlops is only the third church in Scotland to achieve a post-third level *Continuing award*.

Carlops Church enjoys a reputation for caring for people and acting effectively. The challenges are to maintain that reputation and to continue to improve. The 2007 plan has been reviewed and this new *Forward plan* created to recognise the needs and wishes of congregation and community and to address opportunities and strengths available to us. The new plan has been written in consultation with members of Carlops community, the congregation and the Kirk Session. Like its predecessor, this plan is a menu of options, not a list of things which must be done; equally, there is no question of rejecting some desirable activity in future because it is not in the plan. The *Forward plan* was approved and adopted by Carlops Kirk Session on 18th February 2016.

MISSION AND OBJECTIVES

Carlops Church seeks to enhance quality of life by offering cultural, social and spiritual activities in which all may engage, and by providing comfort and practical help wherever required.

We celebrate the gifts of life and good fellowship through our services and our efforts to serve the whole community, as well as the congregation. We welcome everyone to any or all activities, irrespective of their beliefs. We work by deed and example, rather than pronouncement, and aim to be as effectively active throughout the community from Monday to Saturday, as in the church on Sunday. This reflects the will of both congregation and community, and exemplifies the Christian ethos of caring for others and doing right.

Our over-arching objectives are ...

- To attract people into the life of the church, to services and other activities which benefit individuals and the community
- To serve the community and demonstrate that the church is an active, caring organisation which offers a warm welcome, practical, intellectual and spiritual support and a variety of activities in which all may participate

THE CONGREGATION

Situation analysis

Carlops' congregation is small, but energetic and outward-looking. There are fifty people on the communion roll, of whom twenty-four are active, and thirty additional supporters; several reside outwith the parish. Sunday attendance averages twenty-five (about fifty attend in total); attendance at other events in the church averages thirty-five (about eighty regular supporters). The average age of the congregation is approximately seventy; few are under fifty. Renewal comes consistently from the forty-five to fifty-five age group. A similar pattern has obtained for over thirty years, but there has been no diminution of energy; in the last decade, activity has increased.

Currently, no children attend services regularly, though some do so occasionally. Sunday School has met about ten times in the last year. Other events that we organise for children are well supported. We lack a pool of younger people to advise and lead in this area.

We may seem ambivalent and rather inactive about recruitment, but experience and the testimony of some supporters teach that even gentle pressure to attend services may result in people who support other church activities ceasing to do so. This is discussed in *Serving the community*, below.

The size and age profile of the congregation pose problems. Several people help with activities, but imaginative, self-starting leaders are few. Age is making it difficult for some to maintain their customary level of physical input.

Pastoral work is undertaken quietly and effectively by several of the congregation, as well as the minister. It is well received, but anecdotal evidence indicates some shortcomings, including lack of follow-up of people who stop attending services.

Several people, including some elders, feel that they lack a full understanding of their role and the activities that may be expected of them. Many profess not to know enough about the policies, business and processes of the wider church.

Objectives and policies

To match the congregation's skills and energy to work that serves the community and demonstrates care for people

To maintain a viable, energetic congregation to secure the future of Carlops Church

Activities proposed

Address issues presented by the congregation's size and age profile. Actions should include ...

- Invite some supporters to play a more active role and move into additional areas
- Promote some helpers to organisers, including people from outwith the congregation
- Review who does what in the congregation and try to identify a back-up to the leader for each area
- Audit regular activities to ensure that they still serve a purpose and are not repeated out of habit
- Talk to individuals who work with young people to learn how we might improve performance

Enhance pastoral visiting and support mechanisms ...

- Extend visits to all in the community who may benefit from support
- Visit those who stop attending church to offer support and to learn
- Visit those new to the parish to welcome them and explain the church's activities
- Encourage any good communicator to be a visitor, not just elders
- Ask one person to co-ordinate this work, receiving information from anyone aware of an issue and relaying it to visitors and the minister. There are implications for confidentiality, but sensitive handling of an issue is better than well-meaning avoidance of it.

Organise a workshop on the characteristics of the caring congregation

Write a job description for elders and others involved in the church's work, expressed in everyday, practice-focused language

Inform people about issues and initiatives in the wider church; brief people about General Assembly and Presbytery business and encourage them to express views to those representing us in these fora

THE CHURCH BUILDING

Situation analysis

Carlops Church opened in 1850 and was last refurbished in 2009. We received community-wide moral and financial support for refurbishment and created a flexible space to serve the whole community.

The building is dignified, welcoming, comfortable, hospitable to many activities and has a good acoustic. In addition to housing worship, it is central to our community and charitable work. It looks cared for and is perceived as a desirable location. It behoves us to preserve the ambience and finish sought by congregation and community, and delivered by the 2009 refurbishment.

The building was listed in 2010. It needs regular maintenance to keep it in good condition and occasional enhancement to stay abreast of evolving standards and expectations.

Objectives and policies

To maintain the building in good condition, concentrating expenditure on operational need, rather than enhancement for its own sake

To keep under review options for enhancing (as distinct from maintaining) the building

To fund regular maintenance from annual income and enhancements from funds raised for the purpose, not from reserves

Activities proposed

Review the church's audiovisual equipment, with special reference to those with hearing difficulties, and act to ensure its effectiveness

Identify maintenance (as distinct from repairs) beyond monthly cleaning that can be expected to be required over a decade; cost it roughly and create a flexible rolling programme to assist cash flow

Help to implement a design to enhance the space between the church and Carlops Village Centre, hopefully with completion in 2017, giving this priority over other property enhancement projects

Investigate longer-term enhancement of the windows (technical options, relative costs and benefits, impact on other activities) and consider whether or when and how to proceed

Investigate the installation of solar panels (technical options, relative costs and benefits, impact on other activities) and consider whether or when and how to proceed

Host a community discussion to identify infrastructure projects that might benefit Carlops eg, path in the Rock Field from the car park to the bridge, pedestrian safety rails along stretches of pavement

FINANCE

Situation analysis

In most years, the accounts show a small excess of income over expenditure, but only because Gift Aid increases donated income. Occasionally, there is a deficit which must be met from reserves.

The pattern and level of donations give cause for concern. In 2015, 50% of regular income (Sunday collection plus standing orders) was donated by eight people, all by standing order; nine more gave 12%, also by standing order; a further twenty-three donated 36%; several occasional donors gave 2%. Standing orders are mentioned because they deliver guaranteed income evenly across the year. Seventeen people providing 62% of regular income is an undesirably narrow donor base; losing any one of the eight donors first mentioned would pose a financial problem. The age profile of the congregation has contributed to us losing three major financial supporters since 2007.

Several people donate when in church but don't make up for "missed Sundays". Only a minority revise their level of giving regularly. There is little evidence that the congregation is gravely concerned about the church's relative financial fragility; they may not have been made adequately aware of it.

Analysis of 2015 expenditure shows that 61% of income was devoted to our share of the cost of the minister and of providing additional people to lead services. A further 28% was consumed by church maintenance, heating, lighting and insurance, and our share of manse Council Tax, insurance and maintenance. Thus, 89% of income is applied to fixed and semi-fixed costs; discretionary income to apply to projects we choose is limited.

The challenge is to increase income consistently while preserving our supporters' enthusiasm, good will and financial capacity.

The purposes of the reserves are to fund essential work that cannot be met out of income and to provide a safeguard against some uninsured catastrophe which might require the church to cease operating; they should not be used to meet shortfalls in income against everyday expenditure. The value of the reserves drifts up and down with market forces, but only down with inflation. They earn interest, but rates are low and are likely to remain so for some years. Only one significant addition has been made to reserves since 1995 (£6,300 in 2009, from a post-refurbishment auction); their real value has declined significantly.

Objectives and policies

To manage funds rigorously and apply them to agreed priorities ...

- To avoid deficits in other than exceptional circumstances
- To maintain the real value of reserves at a little over two-and-one-half times one year's turnover
- To prioritise projects requiring special funding and normally, to engage in only one such project at a time

To keep the congregation informed of the church's financial status and policies

To increase income, broaden the base of giving and raise the average level of donation, while moderating the financial impact upon donors

Activities proposed

Agree financial targets and ask people to help meet them. Proposed targets ...

- To attract such a level of income as to balance income and expenditure before Gift Aid
- To increase the real value of reserves by 10% by the end of 2021 and to maintain that real value thereafter

Ask those leading activity areas to estimate the financial implications of their plans each year and obtain the approval of the Treasurer and the Kirk Session

Publish a summary of our medium- to longer-term financial status and policies

Engage the congregation in discussion about the church's financial status and policies, the strategies adopted to address them and the overall levels of contribution desirable; repeat this approximately every five years

Increase fund-raising via appeals and special events and imbue it with a sense of enjoyment

Review the balance of fund-raising activity for the church and for other charities, with a view to increasing support for the former

Observe the accounting and financial requirements of the Church of Scotland, HM Customs and Revenue and the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator

SERVICES

Situation analysis

Concerns about services noted in the 2007 plan have been largely resolved, not least by having more congregation members lead services frequently. The challenge is to maintain that improvement and move forward.

Carlops congregation does not challenge the minister's role or the value of professional education, but it does regard variety of service leaders as a benefit, bringing people of different background and experience to expound the same core message. It considers that having both congregation members and ministers lead services is preferable to having either group work alone. It also reduces loading on the parish minister and supports her in her work.

We believe that variety in services is desirable. Variety may be structural (changing the order or range of items in a service) or contextual (adopting an unusual theme, or a new approach to a familiar theme). Both are valid; the latter may present greater challenge to both leader and listener. Variety is desirable, but should be used sparingly. People notice even a small change to a familiar pattern and this prompts them to think, but impact is lost if change and the unusual become the norm; the familiar and traditional must have a place. The degree of structure and formality that people prefer in a service varies; the overall pattern of provision should reflect this.

If variety is sought, it is desirable for people to be familiar with the norm from which any variation departs: what services are, the purposes they serve and the approach to service design that has evolved over time. This may help people to appreciate better both the traditional and such variations as may be introduced.

Satisfaction with services notwithstanding, only a small increase in attendance is evident since 2007, though numbers lost for all reasons have been offset by new supporters.

Our minister came to Carlops relatively recently; some say that they would like more opportunity to get to know her better.

The pulpit engenders a respect that tends to inhibit even constructive criticism, but service leaders need to know how they are perceived if they are to perform well, and congregation members are entitled to express sincere views. We have no mechanism to facilitate such feedback. It is undesirable for people to stifle expression, mutter behind cupped hands, or leave the church.

Music is enjoyed in Carlops Church. Hymns are sung with verve and recitals greeted with enthusiasm. We are indebted to an excellent organist playing an excellent organ.

Objectives and policies

To provide variety and challenge in services, balancing new and familiar content and patterns

To have members of the linkage congregations deliver services frequently

To keep music to the fore, balancing the new and familiar

Activities proposed

Explore different models of service, perhaps including ...

- Led discussion on a pre-announced theme in place of a sermon
- Brief individual expressions of experience on a common theme, followed by a summing up
- Baptismal roll service
- Other models, proposed by the congregation, perhaps with contributions from the proposers

Explore less common content and approaches in some services, perhaps including ...

- Balancing positive exposition of Christianity and the Bible with more critical consideration
- Interpreting the presence together in the Bible of the literal and the figurative
- Considering some Old Testament advice in the context of present-day moral norms
- Considering the gospels as history in the light of the standards of ancient times and those of the present day

Organise a tutorial on service structure and content, aimed at the congregation and at service leaders

Devise a way of enabling people to provide feedback to service leaders, while observing proper confidentiality and respecting service leaders' freedom to choose themes and approaches

Invite the congregation to propose hymns. It may be usual for hymns to support a theme, but it is possible to choose hymns for their own sake, the theme being enjoyment of words and music.

Publicise the themes of some services in advance

Arrange for the minister to stay in church longer after some services to meet people informally and become better known

Encourage people to accept invitations to events at the manse

SERVING THE COMMUNITY

Situation analysis

Carlops Church aims to serve the whole community, welcoming everyone and adopting a firmly practical approach. We organise a range of cultural and social events in the church and invite all to participate; these are a valued aspect of Carlops life. Many who choose not to attend services support the church's endeavours with effort, time and money.

We believe that it is better to engage people in anything, than in nothing. We count it a success if people come to lunches, recitals or talks, or engage in charitable work, even if they do not attend services. Cultural and social events are not second best to services; all are valued equally; all constitute supporting the church. We seek to persuade by example, believing that it is better to do the right thing than merely to say it.

Three groups of evidence testify to the success of this approach ...

1. Many people contribute to church activities who do not attend services
2. Expressions of approval from such supporters ...
 - “I don't attend church but there's nothing wrong with any organisation that does this sort of thing.”
 - “I don't think of myself as Christian but I support the things you do.”
 - “You make it easy for people to join in without putting pressure on them – another thing to love Carlops for.”
3. In the 2009 church refurbishment and the Mary's Meals projects, 65% of monies donated came from outwith the congregation.

The boundaries between religion, spirituality and life-philosophy overlap and are not sharply defined. Some people attend services and embrace Christian beliefs. Others have limited awareness of the nature of church services and beliefs, and apply a narrow stereotype. Others again have thought carefully about religion and concluded that they do not believe. People from all three categories support our activities and our work for individuals and the community. Few doubt the merit of caring for others and trying to do right; put broadly, almost everyone accepts the attitudes and lifestyle reflected in Jesus' teaching. We value all sincere approaches, however much they differ; all contributions are welcome, whether accompanied by religious belief or not.

Language and imagery matter; many people, not just those who choose not to attend services, find the traditional vocabulary of the church unhelpful and react against it. We should phrase all our communication in everyday terms. Language apart, other aspects of our communications may need improvement; taking steps to communicate does not guarantee effective communication!

This has implications for how we interact with people. A person who shares our concern for people, attends a talk in church, or supports a charity project, may not welcome an approach about religion or being urged to attend services; without careful handling, that person may be lost to all church activity in future. For good reason, we do not press religious belief, but explain when invited.

Audience members at events in the church report that some speakers do not make themselves heard clearly and use audiovisual aids poorly, and that some who host such events should be more assertive in managing time, handling questions and urging support for beneficiary charities.

Objectives and policies

To welcome everyone to join in all or any of our activities

To position the church as an organisation primarily concerned with caring for others and promote its activities as a pragmatic, way-of-life choice, as much about helping people as about religious belief

To value contribution before belief unaccompanied by action, and adopt broad definitions of “church” and “attending” to eliminate any distinction between “congregation” and “others”

To communicate clearly and explain what we believe in all its variety, using everyday language

Activities proposed

Continue to provide cultural and social events and increase opportunity for people to interact and converse, as well as listen ...

- Include more opportunity for discussion at some events
- Experiment with debates and panel discussions
- Host a panel discussion about religion, spirituality and life-philosophy, to illustrate the nature and variety of belief within the church and to attract some who might not attend a service

Institute a “Friends of Carlops Church” concept, to designate without formality all who support or engage in any of our activities. Use this to parallel and extend the communion roll in our communications, including those to Church of Scotland bodies

As opportunity offers, and erring on the side of caution, encourage receptive supporters to take part in services as well as other activities

Extend our range of communication activities, perhaps including ...

- Consider distributing throughout the community ...
 - This *Forward plan*
 - Every issue of the *Newsletter*
 - A new welcome leaflet summarising our activities and beliefs
 - An annual report on all aspects of the church's activity
- Increasing the scope of the church's website
- Investigating the use of social media

Open the church on mid-week occasions to provide a greeting and a place for contemplation

Maintain small-seeming actions that actually make a considerable impact eg, sending cards to mark an occasion in someone's life

Develop guidelines about managing meetings, speaking in public and using audiovisual equipment and make them available to speakers and chairmen

CARING FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

Situation analysis

Carlops is an eco-congregation and has gained four awards for good practice. In 2015, it became only the third church in Scotland to gain a post-third level *Continuing award*.

Our Eco Group's activities go beyond caring for the environment in the narrow sense and include organising community-wide events in Carlops, local and international re-cycling, and supporting Eco-congregation Scotland and local eco-congregations.

The challenge is to maintain performance and develop further.

Objectives and policies

To be environmentally responsible within constraints imposed by our building and finances

To promote good environmental practice throughout the community

Activities proposed

Explore joint “green” ventures with other community organisations, perhaps including ...

- Film show with Pentlands Film Society
- Concert with Carlops Jazz Band, Carlops Orchestra and/or Linton Singers
- Activity weekend with Carlops Village Centre eg, litter-pick, nature walk, workshop, talk and discussion, concert, community lunch and supper
- Events with school and other youth organisations eg, celebrate Earth Hour with West Linton School, plant-growing competition for Brownies
- Involve Carlops gardening group in organising our flower festival
- Award an annual prize in an environmental category at Carlops Rural Products Show

Consider re-launching the Eco Group as a whole-community eco-organisation

Accept responsibility for maintaining planting in the space between church and Carlops Village Centre, once the design to enhance it has been implemented

Publish practical guidelines on everyday environmental issues

Make leading community eco-awareness the theme of our next Eco-congregation award application

Revisit Eco-congregation Scotland's check-list for new eco-congregations and seek fresh advice about an energy strategy for Carlops Church as we prepare to apply for our fifth eco-award (by which time it will be over twelve years since we first explored these matters)

Support Eco-congregation Scotland by acting as mentors and assessors to other eco-congregations and by contributing to its educational events and working groups

SUPPORTING CHARITIES

Situation analysis

Carlops Church has a strong record of supporting charities and good causes. In recent years, an average of £2,000 per annum has been donated to charities, local, national and international. In addition, sustained community-wide activity has raised over £21,000 for Mary's Meals since 2011 and more than £2,000 has been donated to Presbytery-led projects in Malawi. The community looks to the church to provide a lead in this area.

Success may be ascribed to three broad reasons: the natural generosity of Carlops people; choosing practically focused charities where the impact of contributions is readily apparent; hard work by members of the congregation leading this activity.

Objectives and policies

To demonstrate leadership in identifying causes deserving community-wide support and in securing funds and contributions in kind for them

To favour charities where Carlops' impact is readily apparent and which exhibit a low ratio of running costs to income

To so organise charitable work that people derive satisfaction from it

Activities proposed

Continue to support practically focused charities, especially by re-cycling domestic and personal goods

Establish good relationships with organisations we support so that we may understand their needs better and support them more effectively

Discuss whether and how to move on from some charities once a significant contribution has been made, to avoid the risk of staleness, regenerate enthusiasm and enable Carlops to support new areas

Host a community discussion to identify new charities which we might support and to consider ways of raising funds

Encourage supporters from the wider community to lead some projects

IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN

The following team will guide implementation of the *Forward plan* ...

The congregation	Chris Levison and Rennie McElroy
The church building	Gill Gold
Finance	Mary McElroy
Services	Chris Levison
Serving the community	Jo Blackburn and Rennie McElroy
Caring for the environment	Nan Buchan
Supporting charities	Marlyn McKenzie
Convenor and co-ordinator	Rennie McElroy

The team will prioritise proposals, convert them into tasks, set targets for completion and monitor progress. It will report to the Kirk Session and the congregation and will continue in being until satisfied that progress will continue without intervention, after which it may adopt a watching brief.

The team will welcome assistance from everyone. If you would like to be involved, speak to any team member, or contact Rennie McElroy, Marfield View, Kitleyknowe, Carlops EH26 9NJ; email rennie.mcelroy@btinternet.com; telephone 01968 661 042. And if you wish to comment on any aspect of the *Forward plan*, contact Rennie McElroy.

End