

CARLOPS PARISH CHURCH

FORWARD PLAN



2023

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FOREWORD

Carlops Kirk Session approved this *Forward Plan* for implementation on 28th November 2023, and agreed that it should be published and distributed widely in Carlops. This is Carlops Church's third such plan, the successor to those of 2007 and 2016. It is designed to build on previous work and to help us to continue to be a space for whatever our community needs: friendship, warmth, a spiritual space, a place of acceptance, a place of reflection.

We have consulted widely in preparing the plan. It reflects the views of a cross-section of Carlops people. In accordance with their advice, the objectives we work towards, the policies we pursue and the activities in which we engage are similar to those expressed in previous plans, but have been fine-tuned to reflect current circumstances.

There is a short update to begin. Then, under a series of headings, we review performance since 2016 (when the previous plan was published), explain our objectives and policies, and propose future activities. The plan is meant to encourage activity, not control it. It is a template for what we wish to achieve, a menu of options, not a list of things that must be done. There is no question of rejecting some desirable activity in future because it is not included here.

We are making the plan readily accessible and freely available to everyone because we wish to engage with everyone, serve everyone. Hopefully, the plan will be of interest and encourage you to get involved. We hope that you may attend some of our services, and/or the coffee mornings, lunches, talks, recitals and charity events that we host throughout the year. Just turn up; we promise a warm welcome!

We welcome new involvement and feedback. If what you read prompts you to consider helping to run activities, as well as attending them, or if you have questions or suggestions, please get in touch; you needn't wait to be approached. Talk to the editors (see below), or to any of our supporters, or email us at info@carlopschurch.org. If you would like a free copy of the plan, request it by email at the same address. We'll be glad to hear from you.

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November 2023

UPDATE AND SUMMARY

Update: Our operating context, 2016-23

After Rev Dr Linda Dunbar left, we benefitted from the interim ministry of Rev Stewart Macpherson, 2018-20, who helped the churches of our linkage to work together more effectively. We welcomed Rev Dr Tony Foley as our permanent minister in 2021 and enjoy working with him.

The Church of Scotland is restructuring to address declining membership and a shortage of ministers. Carlops is in a new, six-church linkage of West Tweeddale: Carlops; Kirkurd & Newlands; St Andrew's West Linton; the United Churches of Upper Tweeddale – Broughton, Skirling and Tweedsmuir. The churches share a minister and collaborate on several activities, but each is free to pursue its own goals in response to the needs and wishes of its local community. We are touched by changes in the national church, but do not feel constrained by them. Our Session Clerk is closely involved in local and national church business and ensures that issues with potential to influence Carlops Church directly are discussed freely and purposefully.

In 2016-18, we completed a joint project with Carlops Village Centre to re-landscape the ground between our buildings. The resulting patio-garden enhances Carlops by providing an integrated, visually pleasing space hospitable to several community and family activities.

We worked through the coronavirus pandemic successfully, retaining existing supporters and attracting new ones. We invested in technology to offer services and other events over the internet during lockdown, then developed blended events (in church and online) as constraints eased. Carlops Church is well equipped with audiovisual and information technology, able to present material to actual and virtual audiences. Many pre-pandemic activities have been reinstated; the rest will be addressed soon.

Summary: The principal elements of this *Forward Plan*

Mission and objectives

We aim to reach and serve the whole community and to be as active and effective throughout the community from Monday to Saturday, as in the church on Sunday.

Our supporters

Carlops Church bucks the national trend of declining numbers, but age profile presents a challenge. We have a healthy balance of Sunday congregation and Monday to Saturday supporters. We need more people to help organise events, as well as attend; we invite everyone to join in this.

The church building

Is in excellent condition, comfortable and well equipped, with the technical capacity to broadcast services and events online. It is often described as serene and welcoming.

Finance

Our finances are stable, but a high proportion of donations come from a small number of people. We aim to increase giving while preserving our supporters' enthusiasm, goodwill, and financial capacity.

Services

Our services are led by the minister or any one of a linkage team of twelve (five of them from Carlops). The range of voices and views this affords is engaging and thought-provoking.

Serving the community

Our first priority: we view being a church as a people business and do not wish there to be any barrier between the church and the community; we are not a group apart. We offer a range of cultural and social events to attract and interest people throughout our community.

Caring for the environment

Our Eco-group engages in activities with local groups and provides support to the national charity, Eco-congregation Scotland.

Supporting charities

We prefer to support charities who provide practical help to those in need. We seek a new project to engage the whole community and will host open discussions to identify it.

MISSION AND OBJECTIVES

Carlops Church seeks to enhance the 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 regard being a church as a people business and seek to be as active and effective throughout the community from Monday to Saturday, as in the church on Sunday. Our church is inclusive and affirming. We welcome everyone regardless of age, colour, culture, faith, gender, orientation, or any other distinction which may be used to divide humankind. We celebrate the gifts of life and good fellowship through services and efforts to serve the whole community.

In that context, the particular objectives of Carlops Church are ...

- To provide a focus for Christian worship and witness in the parish of Carlops
- To serve the whole community of Carlops, responding to expressed and perceived needs
- To attract people into the life of our church, and encourage them to contribute according to their own choices and skills
- To demonstrate that we are an active, caring organisation which offers a warm welcome, intellectual and spiritual nourishment, and a range of activities in which all may participate
- To collaborate with our linkage partner churches in worship and a range of outreach activities
- To promote our work actively and inform the whole community about our character, policies and activities, and how to become involved

The Church of Scotland has identified five *Marks of Mission* to guide churches in their work. Our objectives align readily with these, as this paraphrase shows ...

Tell

To tell people what our church does and why: explaining about Christianity and Jesus; Sunday services; and work throughout the community, Monday – Saturday

Teach

To encourage those we encounter and provide a comfortable space for open discussions

Tend

To reach out to others through our actions, serving their needs and providing a welcoming face and space

Transform

To champion peace and equity by striving to change anything that permits injustice, poverty, violence and war

Treasure

To treasure our Earth, make ourselves and others aware of humankind's impact upon it, and promote changes that may sustain and renew our environment

OUR SUPPORTERS

Where we are now

Carlops Church bucks the national trend of declining numbers. The number of people engaging in our services and activities has increased gently over the last two decades. We attribute this partly to our commitment to whole-community outreach work, partly to the strength of community identity in Carlops. We have a healthy balance of Sunday congregation and what we term “Monday to Saturday supporters”, who participate in several of our activities but choose not to attend services.

Carlops' Sunday congregation is small, but energetic and outward-looking. Sunday attendance averages thirty; in total about seventy different people attend services. There are forty-six people on the Communion Roll, of whom twenty-three are active currently. There are twenty on the Register of Adherents, all of whom are active. Twenty-five more people attend services regularly.

In addition, forty-five Monday to Saturday supporters participate regularly in our projects and the cultural and social events we organise; fifty more do so occasionally. We regard all participation as support; the event supported is secondary. We value our Monday to Saturday supporters and our Sunday congregation equally; we could not do our work without any of them.

From time to time some supporters, even the experienced, say that they feel uncertain about their role and how they should pursue it. As rural communities change and some public services are reduced, we are aware of the need to maintain people-focussed, outward-looking attitudes, with supporters who are confident about how they care and work for the whole community.

The age profile of our supporters begins to pose problems. Their average age is around seventy, and it is becoming difficult for some to maintain their customary level of physical input. For the last thirty years, renewal has come largely from the forty to fifty-five age group; that pattern continues.

We value the sustained contribution of supporters who organise and run events, but much of that workload falls on a very few people, who express a need for it to be spread more widely. In addition to attracting new supporters, the challenge is to help existing supporters to enhance what they do, for example by progressing from attending events, to helping to organise activities.

Currently, four children attend Carlops Church regularly; some are already at school, the rest start soon. We intend to restart a regular Sunday School during 2024. Children are an integral part of our church and bring a smile to many faces. We encourage their participation in all events in Carlops Church; their enthusiasm and vigour are never unwelcome.

Objectives and policies

To develop and grow supporters in all areas of activity, to serve the community of Carlops and to secure the future of Carlops Church

To match supporters' energy and skills to work that serves the community and helps care for people

To maintain harmony amongst ourselves and embrace all our differences as opportunities to learn and grow

Activities proposed

Start a regular Sunday School again. Involve parents of children who attend church in its planning

Address issues presented by our supporters' numbers and age profile. Actions could include ...

- Encourage supporters to progress from attending events, to organising and running them
- Make particular effort to encourage people from outwith the Sunday congregation to do this
- Promote a "can do" ethos and encourage people to translate their ideas into action, eg
 - Minimise the process of getting agreement to run events
 - Provide simple guidelines for running activities, so that anyone can act as organiser
- Audit regular activities to ensure that they serve a purpose and are not repeated out of habit
- Host a discussion to identify ways of engaging more, younger people

Prepare guidelines to clarify roles and make them explicit, to develop people's confidence and skills in pursuing them. For example ...

- Devise and discuss informally a “job description” for the active Carlops Church and community supporter
- Outline proposals for a workshop on the caring congregation and community. This might be offered as a cross-linkage event

THE CHURCH BUILDING

Where we are now

Carlops Church opened in 1850 and was last refurbished in 2009. 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. A grant has helped us to instal equipment for broadcasting services and other events online, and for displaying presentations in the church.

The building is serene, welcoming, comfortable, and has a good acoustic. In addition to housing worship, it is readily hospitable to our community and charitable activities and is essential to them. It looks cared for and is perceived as a desirable location by all who visit it.

People attending events via Zoom say they occasionally experience difficulty with sound.

Objectives and policies

To maintain the building in good condition, balancing expenditure between operational need and enhancement

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

Activities proposed

Ensure that the church remains accessible and comfortable for everyone using it

Maintain provision of audiovisual and information technology equipment and continue to develop it in line with need and as opportunity presents

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

Continue to maintain the patio-garden between the church and Carlops Village Centre to the current high standard; green-fingered helpers welcome!

Repeat checks undertaken in 2018 on audiovisual equipment, including microphones (and the skills of using them), to ensure that the technology caters for everyone, including those with hearing difficulties

Extend these checks to verify that the listening and watching experiences are satisfactory in church, and for people “Zooming” from home or elsewhere

FINANCE

Where we are now

The years 2016-22 were atypical, including two changes of minister and the coronavirus pandemic. Both of these affected income and expenditure. The patterns in Carlops Church's finances are consistent with those exhibited in previous years however, so we believe the following analysis is reliable.

In most years, the accounts show a small surplus of income over expenditure, but only because Gift Aid increases donated income. Occasionally, there is a deficit which must be met from reserves. These reserves exist to provide a financial safeguard against a catastrophe which could threaten Carlops Church's existence, not to meet shortfalls in income against everyday expenditure.

Donations are adequate to needs, but the pattern gives cause for concern. In 2022, 50% of general income (ie, excluding donations made at social and other events) was donated by six people. This is an undesirably narrow base; losing any one of these donors could cause a financial problem. The age profile of our supporters makes that possibility realistic.

Analysis of expenditure shows that 69% of income was devoted to Carlops' share of the cost of having a minister, and of manse and linkage expenses. A further 25% was consumed by church maintenance, heating, lighting and insurance. Thus, 94% of income is applied to fixed and semi-fixed costs; discretionary income to apply to projects we choose is limited.

The restraints that this pattern could impose are countered by our record of successful, targeted fund-raising when some specific need is identified. The challenge is to increase and broaden the base of giving, while preserving our supporters' enthusiasm, goodwill and financial capacity.

Objectives and policies

To observe the accounting and financial requirements of the Church of Scotland, HM Customs and Revenue, and the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (Carlops Church is a registered charity)

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 supporters informed of the church's financial status and policies

To increase or, at least, maintain income, and to broaden the base of giving

A detailed expression of financial policy is on our website at www.carlopschurch.org/finance/.

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 maintain the real value of reserves at their present level, despite inflation

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

Continue to engage the Sunday congregation and other supporters in occasional discussions about the church's financial status, policies and activities

Explore electronic giving and payment, including the option of a *Just Giving* page, with a view to implementing some facility during 2024

Fund-raise by means of appeals and special events when specific need is identified, and imbue it with a sense of enjoyment

Review the balance of fund-raising activity for the church and for other charities, and consider increasing support for the former

SERVICES AND WORSHIP

Where we are now

Our Sunday morning service may be taken by our minister or by any one of twelve service leaders (five of them from Carlops) from our six linkage churches. Carlops' congregation finds this variety of service leaders beneficial. It is engaging and thought-provoking, bringing people of different background and experience to expound the same core message. People respond differently to varying ways of presenting and communicating: some prefer a linear story; some, attempts at humour; for others, historical background and theological reference is the key to give context and understanding; others again seek an interpretation that has emotional and spiritual appeal. We are fortunate to have a range of voices that can deliver all of these.

Carlops' style of worship is broadly traditional, but format and content may vary according to leader. Such traditional elements as The Lord's Prayer are normally included; challenging views may be explored; humour is not unusual. Our services include contributions from members of the congregation, who perform a reading or offer a prayer. Our Session Clerk welcomes additional volunteers for these roles.

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.

The coronavirus pandemic prompted us to consider how we could worship together without being together; an indefinite period without meeting physically or virtually was unthinkable. The appropriate equipment was acquired, and we have made our services available live, via Zoom, ever since. We have also broadcast some other events in this way. This offers a welcome option for those unable to attend church in person through illness, or infirmity, or simply some unavoidable demand of life.

Our supporters share common values, but we rarely meet to discuss thoughts on faith, what we believe, or what we've read or heard in church. Several people expressed interest in doing this.

Our minister, Rev Dr Tony Foley, has been in post since October 2021, but, with six churches to oversee, his time is limited. Some supporters would like opportunity to get to know him better.

Coffee is served after our services and the accompanying friendly chat is a weekly social highlight. Anyone is welcome to drop by; pre-attendance at the service is welcome but not mandatory!

Objectives and policies

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

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

To provide informal opportunity to discuss and reflect upon matters of belief and understanding

Activities proposed

Host occasional meetings of an informal, open discussion group to explore philosophical and spiritual issues. This would offer an extension to the reflection element of Sunday services and provide an alternative for supporters who prefer not to attend services. The group might address ...

- Modern theological scholarship: what are its key questions and findings?
- 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
- Practical Christianity

It behoves us to help both minister and supporters by exploring how to make best use of the minister's time and offering him more opportunities to meet people. For example ...

- Arrange for the minister to stay in church longer after some services to meet people informally and become better known
- If necessary, consider a further review of service times to assist this
- Arrange and publicise some other time(s) and place(s) when the minister would be available
- Invite the minister to specific Carlops Church cultural and social events

SERVING OUR COMMUNITY

Where we are now

Carlops Church aims to serve the whole community, welcoming everyone in a non-judgmental spirit. This is our priority. We are a church that is in the people business first and foremost. We believe that it is better to engage people in something, than in nothing. We wish no barrier between church and community; we are not a group apart.

We organise a range of cultural and social events in the church and welcome all to take part. These are a valued part of community life, supported by a wide cross-section from Carlops and further afield, including many who choose not to attend services. We enjoy coffee after our services and invite everyone to drop by.

Our monthly soup lunches autumn-to-spring, monthly Saturday coffee mornings, and the weekly Thursday afternoon *Cuppa and company* introduced in 2022, are all well received. Those who attend and volunteer there all find enjoyment and support. Our Friday evening talks and recitals were interrupted by the pandemic. We intend to re-introduce these soon.

Pastoral work is undertaken quietly and effectively by several people, as well as the minister. It is well received, but anecdotal evidence indicates some shortcomings, including some lack of direct contact during the pandemic.

Several of our supporters also contribute to Carlops' life by providing assistance and leadership to activities organised by other groups in the community.

Objectives and policies

To invite and welcome everyone to join in all our activities; we value all help and contributions

To demonstrate that the church is focussed on caring for others and promote its activities as a way-of-life choice, as much about helping people, as about religious belief

To be available when people need help

To welcome suggestions for new activities and better ways of working

To ensure that everyone with an idea for supporting our work feels empowered to take it forward without a complex approval process

Activities proposed

Maintain small-seeming actions that actually have a considerable impact, eg: sending cards to mark an occasion in someone's life; paying brief informal visits; making a telephone call

Enhance pastoral visiting and other support mechanisms ...

- Extend visits to all in the community who may benefit from support
- Contact, visit and listen to former attendees of the church to learn and to offer support
- Visit those new to the parish to welcome them and explain the church's activities
- Use an information pack to support this: welcome leaflet, key contacts, *Newsletter*, this plan
- Encourage any good communicator to be a visitor, not just elders. Follow the skills!

Ask one person to co-ordinate (not manage or control!) this work, receiving information from anyone aware of an issue and relaying it to pastoral visitors and the minister.

Organise cultural, social and spiritual activities in which all may participate

Arrange occasional discussion groups and “debate meetings” (see *Services and worship*)

Reinstate Friday evening talks, recitals, etc. Possibilities include ...

- Eco-Warriors? Environmental campaigners: aims, tactics, politics, science
- Rewilding: what it is; how to do it; how to control it
- Community pharmacy: combining health, community service and business
- What else? We invite ideas for talks and speakers.

Experiment with occasional, informal craft activities: drawing, painting, floral art, etc. These could be standalone or offered alongside other social events.

Provide brief guidelines and FAQs to help those organising events; emphasise that ...

- We encourage everyone to help to plan and organise events
- You needn't do the whole job alone; we can provide help with practicalities, technology, etc

Review our regular social events to explore whether a similar level of service to people could be achieved more simply. Consider for example ...

- Day of week, frequency and distribution of events, possible duplication or overload
- Option of holding fewer events, but making them more "special"
- Improved publicity

CARING FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

Where we are now

Carlops has been a practising eco-congregation for some twenty years and has gained several awards for good practice. In 2018, Carlops became the first church in Scotland to gain a gold award from Eco-congregation Scotland.

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

We have links with local eco-activities, eg Sustainable West Linton and District group. Some supporters are involved in the Carlops Community Garden project which has seen planters, a gardening activity shed and a successful apiary installed in the Rock Field.

The challenges are to maintain performance and activity, and to develop new areas.

Objectives and policies

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

To promote good individual and collective environmental practice throughout the community

Activities proposed

Help develop a net zero strategy and plan for Carlops Church and its supporters. Form a working group to draft a plan. Involve both the Eco Group and the Property Committee in this initiative.

Start a broad biodiversity action line; options include ...

- How biodiverse is Carlops? a local biodiversity walk, with short talk and question session
- Invasive species trawl in Carlops and immediate surroundings

Undertake and promote lobbying and related action to protect the environment

Promote and share practical guidelines on sustainable living practices and other everyday environmental issues

Continue to organise eco-ventures locally, eg litter-picks, workshops, talks, Earth Hour celebration

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

Explore options to mentor linkage partner churches who may wish to develop as eco-congregations

SUPPORTING CHARITIES

Where we are now

Carlops Church has a strong record of supporting charities and good causes. The Carlops community looks to the church to provide a lead in this area.

Success may be ascribed to three broad reasons: choosing practically focused charities where the impact of our contributions is clear; the natural generosity of Carlops people; hard work by supporters leading this work.

Most of our cultural and social events support third party charities, not Carlops Church itself. We should keep the balance of support provided under review.

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 the impact of Carlops' donations can be discerned readily, and which exhibit the lowest running costs, enabling them to deliver a greater proportion of total income to their core charitable projects.

To so organise charitable work that people find it enjoyable and satisfying

Activities proposed

Review the charities we support and invite suggestions about new beneficiaries, both additional and replacement

Consider whether to move on from some charities once a significant contribution has been made, to maintain enthusiasm and enable Carlops to support new areas

Host a Carlops-wide discussion to identify a new project to engage the whole community – a successor to the Carlops Kitchen and patio-garden projects

Reinvigorate Carlops Church's links with Malawi by extending this search for a project to include potential beneficiaries there and in other countries

Organise fund-raising and other support work for the charities so identified

IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN

The purpose of this plan is to encourage activity, not control it. The plan is a sample menu of desirable objectives and activities, not an agenda that must be pursued to the exclusion of anything else. Additional suggestions that meet the objectives set out here are welcome. There is no question of not pursuing some desirable activity in future because it is not included in this plan.

Some of the *Proposed activities* in each section will be organised, starting in 2024. Everyone is invited to participate. If any of the *Proposed activities* appeal to you, please help by organising some event to take it forward.

Some sections are clearly associated with existing groups in Carlops Church: *Church building* with the Property Committee; *Caring for the environment* with the Eco Group; *Services and worship* with linkage service leaders. We ask these groups to lead implementation in “their” area (convenors and group members please note), and to invite contributions from others.

In addition, we encourage everyone to generate ideas, then help organise whatever activity they imply. We earnestly invite *you* to translate *your* ideas into action. Any activity that contributes to the objectives listed in this plan will be welcomed by Carlops Church and needs no special approval. “Everyone” means everyone, not just Carlops’ Sunday congregation.

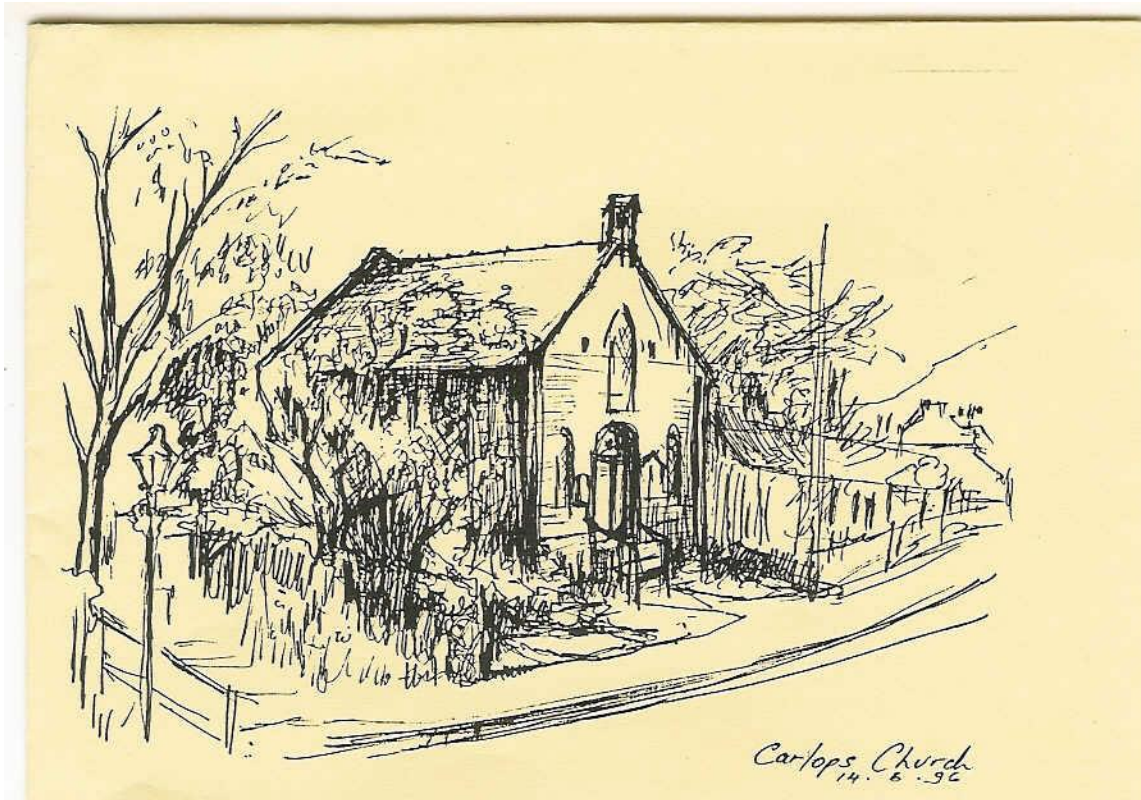
We ask only that would-be organisers inform the plan’s editors, so that duplication can be avoided and access to the church building scheduled. The editors will put organisers in touch with people who can provide any additional assistance required and will consult Kirk Session colleagues if they believe that more formal permission may be required (eg, for safety reasons).

From time to time, the editors will provide progress reports about the plan’s implementation to the Kirk Session, so that it may monitor progress and suggest any action it deems appropriate. Updates will also be published in Carlops Church’s monthly *Newsletter*.

Julie Gamble and Rennie McElroy
Editors, for Carlops Kirk Session

CARLOPS PARISH CHURCH

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