

UNION WITH ST GEORGE'S

As many members of the Congregation already know, we have been in discussion about a possible union with St George's Tillydrone for some time. The Kirk Session have decided to support the move and the final decision will be taken by secret ballot of members to be held after morning worship on Sunday 12th June. Attached to this note is a letter which the Minister has sent out to all members. There is also attached a copy of the Basis of Union Agreement. Sarah's letter tries to address likely questions, and of course there will be an opportunity on 12th June to ask any further questions before the ballot takes place, but if anyone wishes to ask for any further information, they are encouraged to contact the Minister or the Session Clerk, Alan Grant.

Dear Friends,

Union with St George's Tillydrone: Meeting 12th June

Easter greetings to you all! It is good to be with you at St Machar's and already I feel very much at home with you all. I look forward to getting to know you all better in the months and years ahead.

As you will be aware from the Weekly News, as part of presbytery planning and the changes that are necessary to make the Church of Scotland more fit for purpose, we have been asked to consider a union with our neighbours at St George's Tillydrone.

Presbytery planning is only one reason that we have been asked to consider a union, another is whether we can help the members and elders at St George's find a new church home with us. But we have to consider too, whether God is inviting us to grow and learn to work not just with the good folks of Tillydrone, but with the wider Old Aberdeen grouping, which is currently proposed to include the parishes of St Mary's, St Stephen's, Oldmachar, St George's and ourselves.

This means as we consider a change in our make-up, that we also have the opportunity to consider how we work together as part of a wider community, serving God through mission together.

Our Kirk Session have thought hard about this matter and have voted to support the union, pending the vote by the wider membership. The proposal is now put to the membership and a meeting of the congregation has to be arranged and a ballot held. Here are some of the questions that arose in our discussions.

What is the position with the St George's building?

In the basis of union agreement, St Machar's would be the principal place of worship, and St George's would initially be retained and leased to the local community council. This cannot be a certainty, as discussed regarding the lease could not be furthered until a union is agreed. If for any reason, the prospective tenants were unable to fulfil their previous interest, it would be for the united Kirk Session to make a decision about what happens then.

What is the financial position at St George's?

To the best of our knowledge, there are no outstanding debts belonging to the congregation and the assets they hold, would include their church building and the proceeds from the sale of their manse.

What happens if we vote no? Is this being forced upon us?

If either congregation votes no, then the future would be remitted to the Presbytery Committee for Planning and Deployment. A decision could then be made as to the potential dissolution of St George's Tillydrone and the community of Tillydrone could be served by the change of boundaries, most usually by neighbouring congregations.

There is a big challenge of reducing the number of churches by a third in the immediate future, with an approved plan of action towards this needing to be agreed by presbyteries across the country by the end of this year. This is in recognition of a larger number of ministers retiring, than those coming in and a need to cut our cloth to fit the financial resources, as well as the human resources. So, although this is not being forced upon us, we should not assume to be untouched by these changes that will have a greater impact on some than others.

Will the increase in pastoral load be too much for our minister and session?

There is no question that there will be an increase in the pastoral work for both the minister and the session. But what we also have are opportunities to consider whether we fundraise locally to perhaps share an additional team member across our area grouping. A change can also be an opportunity, and it is for the session to make decisions about how to rise to a challenge that might mean a change in how we move forward.

Will this just be a takeover of the St George's congregation if the union goes ahead?

A union brings together two Kirk Sessions to become one new one and this means everyone should expect to change and grow to some level. The hope would be that we are able to learn from each other, and that we all have gifts to share that mean together we are changed and the better for it.

The decision is for us to make together. Please ask your elder or talk to myself or Alan Grant the Session Clerk if you have further questions that will help you to discern God's will in this decision. I found the words of Jeremiah 29:11-14 hugely helpful.

For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me, says the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.

Take some time to pray with this text, as you consider the decision regarding the union. Pray about how it will change St Machar's and how St George's might be feeling about this decision too.

The congregational vote will take place after worship on Sunday 12th June and the congregation at St George's will vote on the same day.

Yours in love,

Rev Sarah Brown

25th April 2022

PRESBYTERY OF ABERDEEN AND SHETLAND

DRAFT BASIS OF UNION

ABERDEEN: ST GEORGE'S TILLYDRONE AND ST MACHAR'S CATHEDRAL

The congregations of St George's Tillydrone Church of Scotland Aberdeen (SC024795) and St Machar's Cathedral Church of Scotland Aberdeen (SC008157) shall be united as from a date to be determined by the Presbytery of Aberdeen and Shetland, and on the following terms and conditions:

1. **Name:** The name of the united congregation shall be St Machar's Cathedral Parish Church of Scotland Aberdeen and Scottish Charity number SC008157 will be retained.
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:** The places of worship of the united congregation shall be at St Machar's Cathedral and the St George's Tillydrone church centre. There shall be weekly Sunday worship held at St Machar's Cathedral at 11.00am and a regular pattern of worship shall be established at the St George's building as determined by the Kirk Session of the united congregation and by arrangement with the intended Tenants of the St George's building under a proposed Lease of these premises on terms to be agreed by the Kirk Session and the Church of Scotland General Trustees.
4. **Territorial Responsibility:** The bounds to be served by the united charge shall be the bounds at present served by the congregations of St George's, Tillydrone and St Machar's Cathedral or as Presbytery shall determine.
5. **Kirk Session:** The elders of both 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:** The Rev Sarah Brown will be Minister of the united charge in terms of Section 8.2 of the Presbytery Mission Plan Act (Act VIII 2021).
8. **Manse:** The manse of St Machar's Cathedral shall be the manse of the united charge.
10. **Ministerial Support:** The stipend of the charge shall be paid in accordance with the terms of the National Stipend Scheme.
11. **Power to Readjust:** While these articles and terms shall form the Basis of Union for the two congregations now uniting, the united congregation shall be free, like other congregations, to adjust arrangements under the authority of Presbytery as need may arise.