

# **A Church without Walls**

## **Presbytery of Irvine and Kilmarnock**

### **2004 (Year 3) Congregational Structures: Commendation I**

#### ***Introduction (Report A.3, A.3.1.)***

“Local and relational” has been a catch phrase in the Commission. As we have tried to reach behind the complaints about “the structures”, we have seldom discovered legal obstacles to action. Instead, it has usually been a frustration that our church environment does little to encourage relationships— with God or with each other.

In a culture that is increasingly at ease with the language of spirituality, it is strange that conversations about our spiritual development are avoided by many church members, elders and even ministers. One issue for us in these times of spiritual openness is how much God actually matters to us. Belief in God is common. Belief that God matters is distinctive. Kirk Sessions can be formal and formidable. Presbyteries have become administrative units for servicing the system of committees and regulations rather than a fellowship of mutual encouragement and inspiration.

The Central Committees are viewed with suspicion from the parishes and are often impersonal for those who attend. The General Assembly has its moments, but is hardly the best forum for major decision-making. There are many Christian people who are still committed to following Jesus, but they will not or cannot express that commitment within the context of the local church. This is not the fall out of individualism and consumerism. Quite the opposite is true. These are people in search of authentic community. We recommend that the church recover the lost art of Christian friendship. This lost art is not about being a “friendly church”, but being a church that makes friends beyond “those that salute you”. Once again our thinking is shaped as we follow Jesus into the Upper Room and reflect on his words: “I no longer call you servants but friends ” (John 15:15). Here friendship is about commitment to each other (“No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends”) and openness with each other (“I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have heard from my Father”).

If we follow Jesus in that kind of friendship, it will transform our approach to children and young people, our relationships as church members, our understanding of team ministry, our mission in our communities, our inter-church relationships and our international viewpoint.

Think of each of these areas as areas to share friendship as Jesus describes it: in covenant commitment and transparent openness. They are no longer the issues of the few enthusiasts. They are the responsibility of all and within the competence of every Christian.

Do we have a best friend at church? How would we assess the spirit of hospitality in the congregation? How well do we handle conflict? In a society that is riddled with conflict, is the local church known as the model of mediation – friends of the crucified Mediator? Grand schemes of church renewal fail at the simplest level of an ungracious word, a dismissive look or an unforgiving heart. Human nature seems to require different dimensions of belonging: the small group for support and intimacy, the medium sized group to share in tasks, and larger gatherings for inspiration and celebration. Some of the church growth literature describes these as: cell + congregation + celebration.

The typical Church of Scotland way has been to focus on the congregation as the basic unit: often to the exclusion of cell and celebration. The research of the German Institute of Church Development among 1000 growing churches across the world discovered that the one factor, which stood out among all others, was the “multiplication of small groups”.

The insights of the Cell Church movement have shown that when we begin small and go deep with a few, then, in time the Gospel spreads. It follows Jesus’ own pattern of investment in the Twelve.

The Commission has noted significant developments based on this intensive investment, both in Whiteinch, where a New Charge has been grown from a small, focused approach to discipleship; and in Gillespie Memorial: Dunfermline, where a group of twelve have been nurtured to lead worship, support pastoral care and encourage the wider ministry of the congregation in mission.

Likewise, as a Church, we often fail to offer occasions of celebration and inspiration. Congregations would be encouraged by regular shared gatherings. The tradition of the Highland Communion Season was a time of families and friends gathering from around the area, to be called afresh to worship God and receive the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Many rural congregations would benefit from the reinvention of that tradition for the 21st century.

#### ***Commendation 1 (Deliverance C5)***

Urge congregations to consider how the cell, congregation and celebration dimensions of being the church might be applied locally.

***Summary***      Could our structures be - more flexible?

**A Church without Walls**  
Presbytery of Irvine and Kilmarnock  
2004 (Year 3) Congregational Structures: Commendation 2

***Introduction (Report A.3.6)***

Friendship with other churches. People have knee-jerk reactions to Ecumenism— for it or against it. Perhaps it is time to forget the word and learn the art of friendship— building trust and transparency. In some communities the church is a scandal to the Gospel because of the inability of Christian congregations to be friends together. Such situations are a counter sign of the Kingdom. Planned cooperation among groups of churches would release great potential for the Kingdom.

The Commission is aware of the ecumenical debates around the proposals of the Scottish Churches Initiative for Union, and has not taken a view on the issue of future Union. This debate has its own forum and process for discussion and ultimate decision. However, we welcome the many local initiatives, and the examples of cooperation in the areas of worship, education mission and national consultations.

In recommending increased local cooperation we have heard of partnerships in Barrhead, Carlisle, Drumchapel and Paisley, to name a few. We repeat our concern that the Church of Scotland live up to the “charism of the big heart” and be sensitive to needs and gifts of other churches in the area. The effectiveness of such cooperation may be helped by the appointment of a person whose role is, in part at least, to facilitate these partnerships.

***Commendation 2 (Deliverance C10)***

Urge congregations to form groupings according to their natural communities to explore shared mission and mutual ministry, with other churches in the area.

***Summary*** Could our structures be - more cooperative?

**A Church without Walls**  
Presbytery of Irvine and Kilmarnock  
2004 (Year 3) Congregational Structures: Commendation 3

***Introduction (Report A.3.7)***

We stand accountable to the poorest people of the land. If our reshaping of the church does not give our God of love and justice a local face, then we have not touched the heart of God's covenant love. The prophetic voices of Scripture used the care of the poor as a touchstone by which to judge the religious establishment. The Reformation missionary mandate explicitly included the care of the poor. In our consultations with the Urban Priority Areas, we were reminded, "Public policy is to be judged by its effectiveness at the point of delivery of service."

That is a test for every policy of the church beginning with the poorest in the local parish. Jesus challenged his contemporaries to align their priorities about resources around the core issues of "justice mercy and faith" (Matthew 23:23). Many congregations in our poorest areas have to struggle against immense odds with minimal resources. And yet these congregations have often by necessity faced hard issues of mission, worship and leadership styles ahead of the rest of the church.

The Church is called by God to care for the poor, to address the causes of poverty and learn more of Christ from being alongside the poor. The "Jubilee 2000" campaign to release the world's poorest countries from international debt is one example of the political complexity of dealing with these issues. The church is called to more than occasional charity. We are called to a determined stance. That determination is not yet reflected across the Church, and we need to help each other sustain our obedience.

We recommend partnerships and friendships that will allow an exchange of resources between congregations of different social backgrounds. Examples of these partnerships reveal relationships that are mutually enriching: one congregation offering people, skills and financial support, the other offering new insights into worship, mission, spirituality and much more.

***Commendation 3 (Deliverance C11)***

Urge congregations to establish links with other congregations in a different social context as a partnership of mutual ministry.

***Summary***    Could our structures be - less parochial?

**A Church without Walls**  
Presbytery of Irvine and Kilmarnock  
2004 (Year 3) Congregational Structures: Commendation 4

***Introduction (Report A.4.3)***

We need leadership. We need elders with vision and flexibility. In our Presbyterian church the role of elders is crucial. In the role of the elder the “one size fits all” pattern of districts is prevalent, but that does not give room for variety of abilities to be exercised. There needs to be an honest appraisal of the gifts and callings of our elders, and to recognise that not all elders are gifted in leadership, nor are all gifted in pastoral care. We recommend that all elders who have not undertaken training in the past three years be required to attend a short course on the current role and expectations of an elder in the Church of Scotland.

If younger people are to be elders, then “whole life” commitment may be an impediment. This does not mean that their commitment will not be genuine, but that shorter term commitments will allow them to decide priorities and focus their energy. At a time when elders have increasing demands on time, and when the church needs to be flexible and responsive to changing situations, we encourage Kirk Sessions to develop a pattern of “terms of service” (each Session can determine the appropriate length of the term) with regular sabbaticals. These will be times for elders to step back and see things from a new angle, taking advantage of the in-service courses so freely accessible in the church today.

In some congregations, the Kirk Session is perceived as remote from the congregation. There is little access to the decision-making and the business is not communicated to the congregation clearly or regularly. As Presbytery is a public meeting unless it needs to meet in private, we recommend that the Kirk Session makes its meetings as open as possible, and develops ways of maintaining good communication links between Session and congregation. This is in line with the recommendations of the Board of Practice and Procedure on freedom of information. As congregations explore different ways of releasing the gifts of their members, they may come to realise that the “model constitution” (which requires a two-tier decision making process) is too cumbersome and inflexible, and often ties people into administrative structures and meetings rather than releasing them for active service.

***Commendation 4 (Deliverance C17)***

Urge Kirk Sessions to develop appropriate open styles of meeting and processes of communication.

***Summary***    Could our structures be - more open?

**A Church without Walls**  
Presbytery of Irvine and Kilmarnock  
2004 (Year 3) Congregational Structures: Commendation 5

***Introduction (Report III.5)***

We are aware that many people find change daunting. We would encourage people to see it as exciting. Anxiety and excitement are both a kind of fear. One expects a negative outcome and the other expects a positive outcome. As people of the Resurrection, we face change with hope, not fear.

However, we are aware that there is often low morale among congregations and among ministers. We believe that the way to face change is in the company of others who can travel with us through change. We commend the wisdom and experience of the many advisers and consultants in the employ of the Church e.g. in Parish Education, National Mission, Social Responsibility, and Stewardship and Finance.

The heart of the “local and relational” theme is to be worked out in the formation of local groupings. We recommend the formation of networks of common interest or common context to share struggles and ideas. Around the church there are churches that are strugglers, survivors, searchers and signposts. We encourage joining hands to move across the pain threshold of change. It is only as friendships form and trust builds that other decisions of cooperation may follow. The story of the Commission has been recorded in Appendix 7 of the Report. This story emphasises the journey of trust that has been travelled together. It takes time. It takes commitment and openness. It is our conviction that the renewal of the church will begin when leaders of local congregations take time out together in retreat, to reflect prayerfully and honestly on the Gospel and our mission.

Only communities of trust will sustain the process of local reform that emerges. The experience of the Commission cannot be passed on. The process of the Commission can be offered as one way of creating the new environment of trust. Interdependence is key to our future. That applies in every area of the church. We welcome the development of new relationships among Boards and Committees through the Coordinating Forum, but recognise the imbalance of power based on budgets. It is essential that the larger Boards do not develop a “Premier League” that leaves the low budget committees in second place. The Gospel principle of the strong being at the service of the weak applies in this dynamic.

We recognise the importance of people fulfilling the remits of their area of work, but that creates its own tunnel vision. We recommend that the Coordinating Forum, representing all Boards and Committees, continue to develop their residential times to ensure that the constituent parts are set within a vision of the bigger picture. Celebration is one dimension of inspiring one another for the future. As the church moves into a new shape in the coming years, we recommend that celebration be built into these movements as milestones on the way.

We recommend that a “stakeholders’ conference” be planned for 2005 as a national celebration, representing the churches around Scotland and partners from across the world, and with representation from various areas of national life. This will be an opportunity to celebrate our faith and life together, a point of accountability of progress and a time to pledge ourselves to moving forward together into God’s future

***Commendation 5 (Deliverance C30)***

Urge congregational leadership teams to form networks focused on a shared context or a shared concern in order to build trusting relationships as the basis of future cooperation.

***Summary***    Could our structures be - more practical?

**A Church without Walls**  
Presbytery of Irvine and Kilmarnock  
2004 (Year 3) Congregational Structures: Instruction I

***Introduction (Report III.4)***

In every situation there are levers for change and limits to change. On some estimates, the levers for change may be found in “the 15% rule”: 15% effort in the right place produces 85% of the results.

Change in the church will not be the result of people following through a long list of recommendations. Change will come where people take the time to discover the one area that might make a difference for them and then they do it. We are part of a complex system of relationships and structures. We have suggested issues that may give you a handle on a lever for change. Find your lever and pull it.

There are limits to growth. In *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organisation*, Peter Senge claims that in our complex world we need to practice the art of being a “learning organisation”. If we keep pushing at the good idea, it will eventually slow down or burn out because it triggers the “balancing system” of resistance. Behind the resistance is a “limiting factor”. Once we discover the “limiting factor”, we release the good for growth. Once again, we have suggested some limiting factors. We pray that people may find the relevant one and have the courage to address it. We do not claim to have identified more than a few potential levers and limits, but we offer them as potential leads to those that matter in the local situation.

Presbyteries can assist here. They can build this into a process of one to one visits or Quinquennial Visits to identify areas for growth or limits to growth. The Presbytery then builds up a “gap analysis” identifying where congregations need resources of people, training or finance. From that they create a “regional needs plan” to meet it. Presbytery will then be keyed into supporting the local congregation on its way to becoming a worshipping community sharing in Christ’s mission.

***Deliverance (C29)***

Instruct Kirk Sessions and Presbyteries to study the report as a stimulus to identifying the levers for change and the limits to growth in the local situation; Kirk Sessions to establish a "local needs" plan and Presbytery to establish a "regional needs" plan of support, with special reference to deliverance sections C1-17 and C26-30; and to apply, where appropriate, to the Community and Parish Development Fund.

***Summary***

What practical needs have arisen?

---

[www.irvinekilmarnockpresbytery.org.uk](http://www.irvinekilmarnockpresbytery.org.uk)

**A Church without Walls**  
Presbytery of Irvine and Kilmarnock  
2004 (Year 3) Congregational Structures: Instruction 2

***Introduction (Report A.3.4, A.3.5)***

Friendship with the community. Partnerships are blossoming around the country as the church in its mission comes alongside the community for the common good of everyone. The church has moved from being the centre of the community with certain rights in local politics, through a time of being ignored and marginalized, to a time when the church is welcomed as a partner in community welfare, education, health and politics. Partnership and friendship are the models of relationship.

One community worker indicated that she gave 70% of her time to the community and 30% to the congregation. If every congregation in the land budgeted 70% of its time and efforts on being in and for the community, the church would begin to find her role again. These relationships are the foundation of authentic worship and witness of the Incarnate Christ among his people.

Elders have written pleading for more teamwork between elders and ministers. Ministers speak of isolation and overload. To follow Jesus is to work closely with other leaders – investing intensively in few over a period of time to build the team. “Jesus worked with 12 Jews for three years in order to win all Americans”! There are numerous examples of ministry teams around the country: elders’ teams, pastoral teams, teams of ministers with deacons or readers or youth workers, and occasional teams from different denominations. We recommend that congregations work towards breaking the isolation of the “one person ministry” by forming ministry teams according to their needs and resources. Breaking the mould of the “one person ministry” eases isolation and releases a synergy of creativity.

***Deliverance (C9)***

Instruct Kirk Sessions to review the leadership structure, consider what ministry team is needed for current needs and determine how it might be developed in the next five years.

***Summary***    What ministry needs have arisen?