

March 2019

Dear friends,

*Unless the LORD builds the house, the builders labour in vain.
Unless the LORD watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain. Psalm 127:1 (NIV)*

This letter was initially intended to be for members of the Ardeer congregation, but the context is wider than just Ardeer, taking into account issues with Livingstone Church and the manse.

Friday 22nd February 2019 was a horrible day as I had to take action to close the Ardeer church building. That morning, significant fire safety risks were identified regarding the fire alarm system. The closure was reported to Presbytery and the General Trustees. This initial closure was for a week to enable a fire risk assessment to be completed but that identified further issues which meant that the building was to remain closed and an inspection with the General Trustees and Presbytery was arranged for Tuesday 12th March. At a Kirk Session meeting on Sunday 17th March, the elders were given as much information as there was available and it was agreed that I should write to inform all members of what was happening.

I know that this turn of events has caused considerable upset and uncertainty and that there has been some misunderstanding of the situation. It's also clear that there needs to be healing of that brokenness. After people, buildings are probably the church's best asset, but the time is here when we have to accept that we cannot continue to hold on to every church building just because its been here for hundred or more years.

We need to waken up NOW and deal with the challenges that are before us. As a church family, we need to be alert to change and to the reality of our own situation. We are dwindling congregations with financial difficulties and buildings which require attention. We're in a position where, if we don't co-operate and pull together and do something, we'll watch everything disappear.

I'm not saying anything I've not said before but maybe I'm being louder about it because I think we don't believe it. I've appended an extract from my letter to the congregations in September 2018 which has a bit more background. I am not doing an impersonation of Private Fraser from Dad's Army saying "we're doomed": I am saying that there's another way of being church – being disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ by making Jesus the main thing. Psalm 127 above sums it up for me and I sense God speaking into our situation.

So what happens now? The General Trustees will give Ardeer Parish Church a grant to sort out the fire safety issues and to deal with remedial work in the building. This will bring the Ardeer building up to being wind and water proof and legal in terms of current legislation. I would also add that both church buildings would need significant work to turn them into multi-functional spaces, adaptable for a variety of uses and users in the 21st Century.

Stevenston Ardeer Parish Church
linked with

Stevenston Livingstone Parish Church

The identified work will hopefully go ahead in the next week or so and then we can move to a date to re-open Ardeer, potentially in May. I'm also looking for information from the General Trustees in terms of necessary work at Livingstone and I hope to get that soon.

Lastly, your continued prayers for both Kirk Sessions, our Community Mission Worker and I are greatly appreciated. May God bless you and yours

Dave

From Newsletter September 2018

"But here's the reality; the Church of Scotland is struggling – it is in decline – a reality that we have closed our eyes to for decades. I could quote statistics but I don't think there is any point – all you have to do on a Sunday morning is look around you in the church, or maybe look at the list of vacant charges on the Church of Scotland website.

There aren't enough ministers and that number will fall rapidly over the next 5 to 10 years. The answer is not "to get more ministers" because they're NOT there. The number of members is declining rapidly and has been for years but society has changed and the focus of the Sunday morning worship is on its last legs.

The General Assembly in May this year threw out a strategic plan for growth on the basis that it was looking over the next 10 years. Instead there was a call and agreement that next year the General Assembly would see something looking at the next 3 years. There was talk of radical, creative, imaginative, robust, restructuring, fit for purpose: there was talk of radical and fundamental change of an institution which "aye does it this way". These are difficult and changing times for us.

If you're picking up a sense of urgency, then you're getting the picture. However, if you think that we've talked like this before and survived then, sorry, we won't survive because nobody did anything that last time. The Church without Walls is a prime example talking about change, about being missional, about not focusing on building but people and we missed it. WE HAVE NOT BEEN HERE BEFORE!!

The decline I haven't mentioned yet is the financial one. The national church doesn't have the financial resources to continue as we are. We can't afford the buildings and we certainly can't afford to be sentimental about our buildings because they are being swept away now. The call from the chairman of the General Trustees in May was for "well equipped spaces in the right places". Churches need to be multi-functional, in use throughout the week – the whole building and not just the halls. We need to lose buildings and look at Mission and not Heritage. If you're still not convinced, have you read the Treasurers' reports, as 2 congregations linked together and looking at union – we are in massive difficulties, buildings, finance and people. If you think that that's not so, then continue to do so and watch it all disappear. I should also add that no Church of Scotland building is safe.

For too many years, too many members have thought that the Church will "see them out" and that's added to the decline. What would have happened if too many people of previous generations thought that? What is it that we're leaving for our younger generations and why aren't they in church anyway?

We need to change and we need to change now!

I don't believe that God is finished with His people and that we will continue to worship God but how we do that, where we do that and what we do will be different. It should have started years ago but we need to do that now.

I believe that the house built on the Word of the One True God will survive, I believe that God is calling His people, you and I, to Him and to change – we are of a reformed and reforming tradition. I believe that there is still a need for Church – but not as we know it.