

Presbytery of Hamilton - Local Church Review

Name of congregation: Strathaven Avendale and Drumclog

LCR team: Margaret Clarkson, Roberta Hutton

Main meeting: Tuesday 29th January 2019

Section 1 – Looking at the present

1.1 Brief overview

Meeting was opened with prayer and Bible Reading and was attended by Rev Alan Telfer and members of the Kirk Session and congregation. The team was made very welcome. Strathaven Avendale and Drumclog is a charge with two places of worship. They follow the model deed of constitution. Attendance at the Drumclog service of worship is mainly by older members and as a result is very traditional. Families on the whole attend the Avendale service. The sanctuary at Avendale has just recently been refurbished and is a welcoming and flexible space which they hope will allow them to open up their facilities to the community.

Significant challenges

The most significant challenge which they themselves acknowledged is the need to improve their pastoral care of the congregation which they feel has been lacking in recent years due to a number of circumstances. They are already taking steps to remedy this but recognize that they have a way to go. After working closely with other congregations in Strathaven in the past, especially in holding community wide events they would like to hold similar events again.

1.2 What innovations, celebrations and learning are the congregation experiencing?

The refurbishment of the sanctuary at Avendale means that the minister and Kirk Session are exploring ways of opening up the building to the community and they are holding a concert there this month (February). They have also installed a media system which will allow them to video the service for the benefit of their housebound members and will in time allow streaming.

The congregation participated in a “Weekend@home” organized by the Mission and Discipleship Work Group and this was very successful in building fellowship through social activities and an opportunity to pray and explore their faith.

They have held successful monthly sessions of Messy Church.

The Mission and Discipleship Work Group organized a Christmas visitation and delivered gift bags to 500 homes within their parish. This was very well received as witnessed by the flurry of activity in social media. They hope to repeat this at Easter.

The monthly Sunday evening Café Church is led by members of the Mission and Discipleship Group.

1.3 What good practice is there to share with others?

The “Weekend@home” retreat is a good example of fellowship, building relationships and developing personal faith.

Bethany group is exclusively for women who are on their own due to bereavement.

Joint venture with Strathaven Trinity of Bubblegum and Fluff with local primary schools.

Joint events with Strathaven Evangelical Church.

1.4 Are there any issues around compliance with Acts of the General Assembly and/or Safeguarding?

Everything seems to be in order.

Section 2 – Looking forward

2.1 Priorities

- Offer an increased range of different opportunities to allow people to engage with God
- Increase the levels of engagement within the congregation and improve communication channels and methods.
- Increase the reach of the congregation into its community.
- Explore joint ventures with other churches in the town.
- Ensure there is an adequate number of appropriately trained elders.
- Review Pastoral Care strategy and provision.

2.2 Why have they chosen to prioritise these?

- To engage with and become an essential part of the life local community to share faith and their resources of people and buildings.
- To develop personal faith and talents within the congregation.
- To improve and rediscover ecumenical relationships and share worship
- To support the life and mission of the church
- To ensure that the congregation’s pastoral needs are adequately met and to better improve communication within the congregation.

2.3 What challenges do they foresee and how might they look to overcome them?

- Recruiting volunteers to take forward the plans: by sharing the vision, offering training where needed and building on existing successful initiatives.
- Revitalise those working in the congregation who feel they have become fatigued or stale.
- Finding ways to make new contacts and foster existing links amongst fellow congregations. Seek ways and opportunities of worshipping together.
- Find ways and recruit people to nurture pastoral links and deliver care within the congregation.
- Seeking ways to offer the asset of their refurbished building as a resource to the community.
- Make use of the MEDDO.

Section 3 - Visiting Team comment

The Session were very realistic about the challenges they face and are keen to address them, particularly the challenge of rebuilding pastoral links within the congregation. They are also keen to find out about an area of new housing and where that lies in regard to parish boundaries because they feel they have much to offer in terms of visitation and reaching out to these homes.

Section 4 - Congregation comment

As office-bearers and members of the congregation we would like to begin by thanking the LCR team for their visit, their time and their input when we met together on Tuesday 29th January 2019.

On the night we felt the meeting went well and that we were able to honestly report upon our past activities and to comment upon the challenges we saw ahead of us. We were aware the team had taken time to read our submitted material and came well prepared to encourage discussion and to listen.

On reflection we believe we could have had our current situation and our future plans probed more searchingly and robustly to help stimulate deeper reflection and direction setting. Perhaps the engagement was too kindly and comfortable. Perhaps the LCR team could have been more directive and proactive in identifying and pursuing in discussion some more priorities we should be identifying and addressing. This is not a personal comment upon, or criticism of this particular team, but more an observation of the LCR process, and the need for congregations to be helped and prompted to be more searching in their reflection and planning.

There are one or two inaccurate statements in the report that we wish to draw attention to and amend for the purpose of record. Under 1.2 The Weekend@Home event was organized by the Mission and Discipleship Work Group. Messy Church is also a regular, monthly event rather than the implied occasional venture.

Under 1.3 we do not have membership of the Community Council through a congregation member, only an idea of trying to have a more frequent observer at meetings. Also for clarification it should be noted that the Bethany Group is exclusively for women who are on their own due to bereavement.

Maybe we have a wrong expectation of the Report, but there was the feeling that it's recording of the congregation's life was a bit too general and vague, and that some matters discussed, and issues raised, during the visit were not noted or commented upon. While the focus is rightly upon the future ahead, and that it is our responsibility as a congregation to set priorities and to create vision, there could have been a little bit more detail on some of our innovations and concerns.

We also want to record our thanks to Linda Walker (MEDDO) for the help she provided in advance of our submission of our profile, for, despite the processes recent positive honing and adaptation, it is not an easy one for a full office-bearer team to engage with.

The challenge for us now is to engage with the priorities and challenges we have identified.

Thank you again to the team and to the Presbytery Committee behind it for starting us along the road.