

Presbytery of Abernethy
Local Church Review
Abernethy Parish Church, Nethybridge
8th December 2014

Visiting Team:

Rev Alison Burnside

Rev Christine Ritchie

Mr Angus Fraser

Mr Peter MacKay

Abernethy Parish Church - overview

Abernethy Parish Church is in a rural village and is linked with Boat of Garten, Duthil and Kincardine.

This congregation is very active and it is impossible to report everything in a relatively short report. They are aware of those who live in the parish and try as best as they can to address the needs either as a congregation or as individuals.

They have two services on a Sunday. Tea and coffee is served after the earlier service.

They enable people to grow in their faith through 'solid Biblically based consecutive teaching', have discussion groups, a weekly Church Home Bible discussion group and a Ladies Bible Study Group and a weekly Church Prayer Meeting.

The Congregation are active in the community and are involved in Children's and Youth Ministry. They have a part-time Youth Work Intern funded partly by the Abernethy Trust and partly by various generous donations from regular church worshippers.

The congregation distributed the Penny Gospels and have a concern for the Persecuted Church.

They support the Foodbank in Aviemore, run the local Lunch Club and an annual charity shop, and are recognised as an Eco Congregation.

There is a Weekly Church Family News sheet, a Quarterly News Update magazine and Christmas Cards are distributed throughout the Parish.

The congregation has been twinned with Elmwood Presbyterian Church, Lisburn, Northern Ireland. There have been visits between the two congregations and they are working towards doing a joint mission.

The Church has its own website.

Meeting with Clergy

The Visiting Team (Team) met with Rev Mary Duncanson (OLM) and Rev Donald Walker at the Manse in Boat of Garten. Unfortunately Mrs Sheila Wallace (DCS) was unable to meet with us as she was not well at the time, however Alison Burnside spoke with her afterwards on the phone.

The Team met with Mary first, then with Donald. After a meal with Donald and Judith (his wife), which Mary also shared the meal. The Team met with the Kirk Session in Abernethy Parish Church, Nethybridge.

The Team enjoyed meeting with the ministry team and particularly enjoyed the lovely meal prepared for them. This was no mean feat for Judith and Donald as a couple of the team had dietary requirements that were well catered for. It was also nice for the Team to spend time with Donald, Judith and Mary in a more relaxed setting.

Donald, Sheila and Mary said that they felt part of a Ministerial Team. They have regular meetings and thought they worked well together.

Meeting with Donald Walker (Parish Minister)

Donald was inducted to the charge of Abernethy l/w Boat of Garten, Duthil and Kincardine in October 2013. He says he is finding it both a 'joy and a challenge'.

Donald values and appreciates the work that Sheila and Mary do. He is aware that both of them do far more hours than their given hours which concerns him. He feels he himself is not doing as much as he would like given the workload involved with the two Parishes. However this did not concern the Team as we feel he is indeed giving his congregations as much as he can and we would commend him for this.

It was noted that Donald is currently acting as Interim Moderator for the linked charge of Alvie and Insh linked with Rothiemurchus and Aviemore.

The Kirk Session are happy that Donald has come to be their minister. Donald is happy in the charge and looking forward to working with the congregation as they look at the challenges before them. A growing friendship, which includes occasional joint services, with the linked congregations of Boat of Garten, Duthil and Kincardine (BDK) is proving rewarding and encouraging.

Donald and Judith are very happy with the condition of the Manse.

Sheila Wallace (Deacon)

Sheila was employed by BDK as Locum during their vacancy. A fresh 3 year contract, jointly funded by Abernethy and BDK, from their own resources, was made with her for 21 hours per week as Parish Deacon from the time Donald arrived as Minister.

She had become aware that she was working more than her 21 hours and that this was affecting her health and that by rushing around trying to do too much she was not able to give her pastoral work as much time as she felt she should. In conjunction with the Minister and the Session Clerks, she has now adjusted her workload and cut down her hours trying to adhere to the 21 hours in her contract. Rather than spread herself thinly and go to everything that was on in all the parishes she now tries to concentrate on pastoral work and the church services, though she does other bits and pieces as well.

She has no major concerns and feels supported by Abernethy Parish Church.

Meeting with Mary Duncanson

Mary is employed as an MDS for 12 hours per week to which she has added the 10 hours she gives Presbytery as an OLM giving 22 hours per week which is divided between the charges of Abernethy l/w Boat of Garten, Duthil and Kincardine and Cromdale and Advie l/w Dulnain Bridge l/w Grantown-on-Spey.

Mary sometimes feels rushed when she gets to the service in Abernethy Parish Church depending on which church she has been to immediately before it. She feels they understand this and it is difficult to see how this could be remedied given that she covers a number of Parishes and changing service times would be difficult.

She feels that she has been doing too much, more than her 22 hours and has asked to have one Sunday off every two months. That she has been doing far more than she should was echoed by Donald. She feels she has the support of the Ministerial Team and the Congregation and says with conviction that she 'loves her job'.

The Kirk Session stated that they really appreciated all that Mary and Sheila do. They recognise that without Mary the 11:45 service would only be able to take place every fortnight unless the congregation were able to make alternative arrangements. They worry about what would happen across the linkage if they were to lose Mary and Sheila. This is a great concern as it would appear that should the congregation lose them the service which would suffer the most would be the 11:45 service which is the more traditional Church of Scotland service.

Kirk Session

Abernethy Parish Church operates under a Unitary Constitution.

There are 5 male Elders and 7 female Elders. The Kirk Session is a mixture of ages with Elders coming from both the 9:30 service and the 11:45 service. Two new Elders were added to the Kirk Session recently, although the other 9 who were asked felt that they could not commit to the Eldership at this time because of family and work commitments.

The Kirk Session divides into 9 working groups which are made up of Elders and members of the congregation. These groups are convened by Elders who report back to Kirk Session meetings. The groups are:

Finance – fundraising, managing bank accounts, work with treasurer etc

Property – care of all buildings, contracts with cleaner and grounds worker etc

Social/Fellowship – hospitality, working with the elderly, social evenings etc

9:30 Service – plan, prepare, implement the 9:30 schedule, coach readers/preachers etc

Youth and Children – support the children's and youth groups, train leaders etc

Pastoral – oversee district visitation scheme, train those doing pastoral visits etc

World Mission – monthly appeals for needs at home or abroad, Eco church, Persecuted Church and Twinning

Developing Faith – bible studies, special seminars, explore fresh initiatives etc

Admin/Communication – newsletters and website,

Worship

There are 2 services each Sunday – one at 9:30am and another at 11:45am.

While it could be argued that the two services create two separate congregations it could also be argued that it is one of their strengths as they seek to meet the differing needs of the people in the area who wish to attend worship. The two services offer two completely different styles of worship that enable more people to attend a church service that they feel comfortable in and feel that they get something from.

The first is at 9:30 and is planned by the 9:30 Working Group which includes the minister (see Kirk Session). It uses different media for exploring the subject matter and uses a variety of speakers. It is described as being 'open to innovation'. There is a Praise band and video projector at this service and among other things a variety of methods may be used to help the congregation explore the theme. A number of families with children come and 80/140 people will attend this service each week. Many have come from a tradition other than the Church of Scotland and may only be intending to be in the area for a limited time and so many do not choose to become members of the Church of Scotland, however they are fully committed and involved in the life of the local church in Nethybridge.

The second service is at 11:45. This is led by someone from the Ministerial Team though it is felt that if it is possible it should be on the same theme as decided by the Minister as proposed by the members of the 9:30 working group for the earlier service. 15/25 people will attend this service. It has an older age profile than the earlier service and there is a higher majority of Church of Scotland members.

There are occasional joint services but not all who attend the 9:30 or the 11:45 services are able to come to the joint services because it is hard to find a time that suits all.

They occasionally have a 6:30pm service on a Sunday, usually with a strong Youth emphasis.

Safeguarding

The congregation have a Safeguarding Officer.

There is a Safeguarding Panel in place. (It is commendable that having heard the concern of the Visitation Team that there was no Safeguarding Panel the Kirk Session appointed one at the Kirk Session meeting which immediately followed the meeting with the Team).

To date they have not followed Church of Scotland recruitment processes – with application forms, references, interviews etc – but it is hoped that now there is a Safeguarding Panel in place this will be remedied.

Children's and Youth Work

As mentioned above the Church has a part-time Youth Work Intern, supported by many of the Abernethy Trust staff, and a number of other volunteer helpers.

They run 'Rock Solid' for Primary Children which is on at church time (9:30am service); Chaos, a Sunday evening 'youth fellowship type' event for teenagers; and have mid-week groups with 7Up for 7 -11 year olds on a Tuesday evening and Fusion on a Friday evening for 1st to 6th years.

Finance

Although there is never enough money to do all that they would like to do there are no financial concerns at this time.

5-Year plan

A 5-year plan was developed in October and the Ministerial Team and Kirk Session are now implementing this. Congregation Action Plan is detailed in the Local Church Review Pack 1: Reports.

Recommendations

Those planning the 9:30 Service should continue to involve Donald and other members of the Ministerial Team in the planning of the worship and encourage Donald to continue having input into those who will do the address/'sermon slot'. Under Church of Scotland Law all matters affecting the actual conduct of public worship and the administering of the Sacraments lie outwith the control of the Kirk Session being the prerogative of the Minister.

The Kirk Session should continue to work at ways of bringing those who attend the different services together so building one family and encourage those attending the 9:30 service to see themselves as part of the wider Church of Scotland and encourage them to make a commitment to the Church of Scotland through membership – even if only for a short time – so they can more fully belong to the Church of Scotland family and play a more active role.

The Kirk Session should continue to support Donald, Sheila and Mary uphold them in prayer. Donald, Sheila and Mary value the support given.

The congregation should continue to seek ways of reaching out to the people of their parish.

Affirmation of Presbytery

Presbytery continues to support Abernethy Parish Church as they seek to enable as many as possible to attend Church on a Sunday and answer the spiritual needs of the many people from different Church backgrounds living in the area.

Presbytery is encouraged by the different methods used, particularly at the 9:30 service, to inspire those in the congregation on their spiritual journey. Remember that this is a Church of Scotland Congregation, Presbytery support the Kirk Session as they encourage those attending to become communicant members of the Church of Scotland and so be more fully able to participate in the life of the Parish Church and the National Church.

Presbytery commends the level of children's and youth work.

Presbytery affirms and values the contribution made to the life of the congregation and community by the staff of the Abernethy Trust.

Presbytery recognises, commends and supports the hard work of the Minister, the Ministerial Team and the Kirk Session, and encourages them to continue worshipping together, supporting each other and being active in their Parish as they live out the greatest commandment to 'love one another' while making their own faith journey.

Alison Burnside

Visiting Team Convenor