



Blackford Parish Church

Local Church Review



In 2005 the Rev Dr. Stuart Picken was inducted and served the linked parishes until demitting in 2014. We were fortunate in that we had a retired minister, the Rev Iain Paton, in the village who became our Interim Moderator and Locum Minister; we are blessed that Iain and his family continue to support our church. The Rev Mairi Perkins was inducted in March 2016 just nine months after we elected a Nominating Committee.

1.1 Our story

An introduction

looking back over the
last 10 years

Celebrations – The church celebrated the 150th anniversary in our current building in 2009 with several events including a well-attended Summer Fayre in the gardens.

On Sunday 4th June 2017 we celebrated a return to our building after the February break-in and related damage. Pentecost Sunday was a significant and appropriate day in our regrouping and rebuilding process.

Achievements – In 2008 we set up a Bible Study group meeting in the home of church members Gordon & Jane Roy. This continues to develop and includes members from other congregations and denominations. In addition, in 2008/9 we started a youth club (Hot Chocolate) for secondary school children in the village. Membership has varied as the children move through their school years, however it is a joy seeing young people develop while trying to show them through Bible reading and other games a way to navigate through our secular world. These children have become active in supporting our Holiday Club (started 2006) for primary school children and their film making for our “Carols by Candlelight” Watchnight service is must see for church members. A fortnightly Bible Study Group for those in upper primary and early secondary was started in 2016 by Laura Peacock.

We run Sunday School led by Shona Stewart, for pre-school and primary aged children during term time. Attendance by children has led to wider support for our fundraising work for charity and church funds. This engagement with village families has we believe paid dividends after we suffered vandalism earlier this year.

Struggles – The break in at our church in February 2017 did give us a lot of work to do to get back on track. However, we were supported by our linked charge at Ardoch and by the wider community. This included the primary school and fundraising work by community groups. We have come through this period stronger and more determined than ever to be a distinctive Christian voice in our community. There has been a large change in the composition of our eldership over the last two years. This has led to some changes in roles and responsibilities within Kirk Session. Elders continue to guide and support the church according to their individual strengths.

Failures – We have not always been successful in engaging with families after they have had their children baptised. We are dealing with this by sending cards to the child on the anniversary of their baptism so they and their family know there is Good News to hear and a welcome for them in the church.

Dreams and Vision Statement – At the recent time of vacancy we reviewed a shared charge vision statement that had been rarely seen since the previous Parishes Profile of 2005. This statement is:

We're working to grow Christ's Kingdom in our parish through the active commitment of the church community. We do this by

- Gathering regularly to worship, to learn about and to share the Good News of God's Love.
- Reaching out to families, young people, the elderly and housebound.
- Providing a distinctive Christian voice within our community.
- Working together in parish activities and with other local groups.
- Stewarding and using resources effectively.

Reflections on current Church – We believe our church is doing well in the current climate. Our membership sits at around 105 with weekly attendance around 30-35; we believe our outreach work in the village will reap a harvest in future months and years.

The format of the services throughout the year are a mixture of standard and contemporary, formal and on occasions less formal. The theology and teaching delivered is that of a practical theology to be understood by all and easily applied to day to day life.

Services are held every Sunday morning 10.00am on even years and 11.30am on odd years with extra services during Holy Week and Advent.

The musical range varies between pipe organ, piano, guitar and musical CDs

The use of visual and audio equipment is limited at present to all age services and school services

Congregational members including the young ones participate with the weekly Bible readings and occasionally take the children's talk. Sunday School, Hot Chocolate and Holiday Club participants are involved in leading Christmas services and a summer "Holiday Club" service.

Since summer 2017, Rev Viv Inch has been asked to be available to pray with members of the congregation after Sunday services. This has been well received; various other members of the church are also willing to offer such prayer as appropriate.

1.2 Worship

The heart of what congregations do, coming from the shared experience of meeting God; we gather to express our need for God and to express our gratitude for all that God has done for us

1.3 Mission

The calling of every Christian is to be a witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is all the ways in which we share our Good News and bring others to the point of beginning their journey of faith

New residents to the village are visited by an elder and given details of the church and local groups. The school comes across to the church each month for an assembly plus end of term services. While these are delivered in accordance with Scottish Government "Religious Observance" policy and Church of Scotland Chaplains' Handbook, drawing on the "rich resources of our Christian heritage" gives great opportunity to illustrate the authority and relevance of the Christian faith to the wide range of ages present as parents and the wider community are invited and a large number do attend.

At certain times of the year local groups and events are given a focus within weekly worship and members and friends attend, e.g. Gala Queens deliver the Bible reading during Gala week.

During term time we run a Sunday School for nursery and pre-school children. This follows an all age address by the minister. The children learn Bible stories and take part in a nativity during an Advent church service.

We run a Holiday Club for primary school children during some school in service days and during the mornings of one of the summer holiday weeks. These are well attended and supported by church members and members of other churches. They tend to follow Scripture Union packaged material such as this summer's 'Mission Rescue' which looked at God's rescue of his people with Moses and used a spying theme for activities. As there was a relatively large intake to the school and community earlier this year, the children helped produce a flyer for the new children of the village to know about church activities and other community groups.

The Hot Chocolate youth club (currently led by Bruce Tarbet and Gordon & Jane Roy) meets once a month for a games night with pause for reflection and discussion on a Bible passage or theme. The youth club also carry out charity work normally for Christian Aid and assist with holiday club as helpers. We have also done bowling and kayaking trips with them.

One elder, Laura Peacock, has this year set up a Bible study group for older primary and secondary school children. They look at different passages of scripture to learn of the Good News. The church is supporting this by buying Bibles for the children and other material as necessary. These children have also had a film night of watching and learning the messages from 'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe' and other nights involving baking, circus skills and music. The minister has also attended and explained the meaning of communion. Church members are encouraged to work at one of these groups to support Laura.

We take the opportunities that Christmas and Easter afford to deliver greetings, invitations and explanations of the Christian message to all houses within Blackford and outlying farms. We lead carol singing around the village.

The Bible Study group initially began with Christianity Explored material offered within the church membership; perhaps it is time to revisit material like that, or ALPHA, with a wider constituency to directly engage more people with the Good News of Jesus Christ.

1.4 Service

The living out of our faith in practical ways. Jesus called us to be servants of all and this is shown to others as we care for our neighbours.

Pastoral care by our minister and elders is available for anyone in need of our support. We have designated elder districts with each elder calling at members' homes regularly throughout the year with communion invitations and our quarterly charge newsletter, The Link. If anyone is in need of a home visit then these are actioned. Members of our community who find themselves hospitalised are visited whether that be locally or further afield.

Our church is an important and integral part of our small, rural community. Many of our elders and members are actively involved in other community groups and village activities. Our Christian faith and service are expressed through this active involvement. Some local groups such as Blackford Sings, Blackford Historical Society and Blackford Bells choose to meet regularly in our building.

Special collections are organised for many different charity groups throughout the year. These include the annual Poppy Appeal, the Blythwood Shoebox Appeal and Christian Aid week. Our harvest service food gifts are distributed to "CATH" (Church Action for The Homeless) in Perth and we also donate Christmas gifts given by members of our congregation at our December gift service to CATH and the Perth Salvation Army.

We have very close links with our local primary school. Our minister is the school chaplain assisted by Gordon Roy of SU Scotland. As noted assemblies and end of term services take place in the church. The school Christmas concert takes place in the church with parents and family members attending in great numbers.

Our church will try to provide help to anyone in need of our support within the community. We are in a very fortunate position being in a small rural community where the vast majority of people actually know each other.

We are very excited that a Mission Partnership in the Czech Republic was recently established. We will be extending this special bond between our congregation and our mission partners, David and Mary Sinclair to find out more about their work and what help we can give.

Although this review is trying to put across what we do to help our community, it must be said that when we, Blackford Parish Church, needed a neighbour after our break-in, the community were there for us and responded with great love and support in many different ways. We will always remember their kindness.

With a varied age range attending a morning service, the material used and the way in which it is delivered is done in a very inclusive way, at a level which is appropriate often reflecting a need or event or tragedy in the world that is causing concern to see how Christ would have handled it.

Scripture is read aloud every week and the congregation are encouraged to follow along in the pew Bible to help them identify where a certain book comes in the Bible and also to see the Bible reading in context.

There is both an adult Bible study group held on a Tuesday evening and a young person Bible study group held every second Sunday evening

Private prayer, devotions, reflection and spending time with God is actively encouraged during the weekly sermon or prayers. Various resources have been used including Scripture Union, Spill the Beans, E100 and Pray Now.

A time for private prayer or reflection is available after every Sunday service led by a minister who is part of the church

Being part of a small but growing rural community, (currently around 450 homes) many members of our congregation are also long established close friends too! Visitors to our church are welcomed by elders or others "on duty" and, where possible, introduced personally to our minister. A Visitors' book is available for signing at our entrance door and a bookmark of "Blackford Parish Church welcomes you" given as a gift which contains extracts from scripture together with our website and minister contact details. After every joint service with Ardoch, refreshments are available in order to provide a time of fellowship and friendship. An early morning outdoor Easter Sunday service at the Old Kirk above the village encourages many to attend with breakfast available afterwards. Consideration for wheelchair users or prams has been actioned by modifying both sides of the centre pews to enable a feeling of integration instead of isolation. Our church has been very active with fund raising and social events such as Christmas Party, Burns Supper, Strawberry Tea hosted by David and Sheila MacDonald, carol singing, monthly coffee mornings, Whist Drive and handbag party all of which extend into the wider community. We owe a lot to the Ways and Means Committee previously led by Lexa McCallum.

We are going through a period of much change and some of our social and fundraising activities will require careful consideration on how we progress these in the future. Our hope and belief is that we can encourage more of our members and

1.5 Discipleship

The life of following Christ. It is about learning what it means to be a Christian as we experience life and question what we believe. The church should equip its members with 'practical guidance for expressing their faith in the world during the week.'

1.6 Fellowship

The opportunity of experiencing God's grace and love in and through God's people; this is about people really getting to know each other

friends in the community to get involved and be part of this exciting time in our church life.

We are the only congregation that meets within our parish and therefore recognise in our vision statements that we need to be the distinctive Christian voice in the village. That said we are supported by other Christians in the village in various activities of the church such as the Holiday Clubs and the Bible Study.

As a church we support Christian Aid Week, led by Jane Roy with a village house-to-house collection organised each year. A Toy Fair arranged by Bruce Tarbet and Laura Peacock for the end of Holiday Club raised funds for both the church and the Red Cross Syrian Appeal.

We support and promote the Blythswood Shoebox Appeal with the elder responsible, Shona Stewart, being a catalyst for other community groups and members getting involved alongside church members.

We access Scripture Union resources easily through Gordon Roy who is employed by SU Scotland. In turn, our materials and ideas have been used to support other Holiday Club programmes in this way too. The church has made an annual gift to SU Scotland in recent years.

We support the work of the Churches Action for the Homeless in Perth through our Harvest Thanksgiving (also contributed to by the school community) and also the Christmas Gift Service.

Various members of the church take *Life and Work* magazine.

We lead the community in an Act of Remembrance at the village War Memorial.

Our Presbytery elder, Jeannette Barr also sits on the Presbytery Finance Committee. We have appreciated support by Presbytery over the past year recognising that our communication and relationship with Presbytery is improving.

Mairi is now taking on ministry students for mentoring and placements.

As noted above, we are in the process of establishing a Mission Partnership with David and Mary Sinclair in the Czech Republic.

The ministry team comprises of the minister supported by elders and church members. Our Kirk Session committee programme focuses some of that responsibility through the Mission and Ministry Committee and it is also expressed through a C. of E. minister who is part of the congregation. These relationships work very well

At present all elders are going through the Learn Eldership book at the start of every Kirk Session meeting. This development, together with the strengthening of the Kirk Session

1.7 Wider Church

Your relationships and involvement with other denominations, overseas links, the World Church, non-denominational ministry links, Presbytery and Central Church structures.

1.8 Local Leadership and Support

People helping to make your mission statement a reality

through the introduction of five new elders in 2016 were both identified in the incomplete LCR process of 2015.

A formal stewardship programme has to be addressed and will be implemented.

Mission is always at the forefront of any team or any leadership strategies which we have

We do not have any locally paid staff but use the volunteers we have to maximise their gifts. As a 70% linked charge this is of particular significance for us. Our leadership has clearly changed significantly over the past two years and we look forward to a more settled period of leadership over the next few years.

The church's finances have been reasonably stable and healthy over recent years. Over the past 5 years, our total expenditure of £185,000 has almost been matched by our total income of £180,000 with the balance coming from reserves.

1.9 Money

Income, Reserves,
Stewardship etc.

We have managed this in the following ways:

1. Weekly or other regular giving through Freewill Offering Envelopes or the Open Plate with appropriate Gift Aid reclamation
2. Fund-raising through "Ways and Means" events such as regular coffee mornings, Burns Supper, Strawberry Tea etc as well as collections in the village from carol singing or the "Sunshine Bags" that many people in the village take and contribute copper coins every sunny day over the year!
3. Putting away funds on Church of Scotland investments in the years of surplus and drawing down interest when costs are higher in other years.
4. Access to the Consolidated Fabric Fund helps to meet larger bills such as repairs to the roof or boundary walls in recent years.
5. There is not a significant level of "hall let" income although we did benefit from the closure of the Moray Institute (Village Hall) in 2015/16 when several clubs relocated to church premises.

2017 has seen significant change throughout the church and this will be reflected in the finances. Although this year has had significant costs related to our break-in, these have generally been covered by the church insurance and we have also received considerable support from the local community and beyond. The greater implication for the church is how the effects of other challenges will be felt.

- At least 10 regular attenders and givers have either died or left the church over the course of the year.
- The Ways and Means Group has reduced considerably in size and impetus limiting the income derived from some of these sources.

As a church we need to look at a stewardship and giving campaign involving

- a) regular members and givers
- b) Non-attending members
- c) Other members of the community who while not attending or members see this as "their church" as they live in the village.

Being in a small village, Blackford Parish Church – as both a building and a body in Christ – is well placed within the community and communication is firstly in conversation at the school gates or village shop, in village clubs, at school and community events or within homes.

1.10 Communication Strategy

Tell us about your strategy/plan for communication including website and social media use.

Beyond that and to stimulate these discussions we use:

- A joint Parish newsletter (The Link) which is delivered to all members by their elder each quarter
- Our notice board and others in the village to put out news
- Mail drops to every house in the village as well as local farms at Christmas and Easter with cards and similar invitations
- The church grounds to communicate through banners, noticeboards, props and the planting of fruit trees (Rev 22v2) as part of a Holiday Club programme
- Our church website www.blackfordparishchurch.org
- Our Facebook page that was launched in spring of 2017 to augment communication about our location and progress following the break-in. Facebook including Messenger is the best way to communicate with members of our Hot Chocolate Youth Club as well as their parents
- Welcome leaflets (adult, secondary and primary versions) delivered by an elder, Jeannette Barr, to all new arrivals to the village
- A table at a recent Saturday morning “Freshers’ Fair” type event put on for the village. We joined the WRI, Gala, Blackford is Brighter and other groups for what was essentially a poorly attended event
- Communication of information on Holiday Clubs through the school who send out and receive back booking forms on our behalf
- Discussion over which members of the church and wider community should receive the church flowers as part of our pastoral support

The Nominating Committee of 2015 asked the joint sessions to accept revised visions statements for the linked charge and to use them more widely than those adopted in the previous vacancy of 2004/05. These are on our website and the top line is on our noticeboard and are quoted in the reporting in the annual accounts.

The loss of “Ways and Means” events has reduced opportunities for members to meet together; we need to address these events for reasons of communication and fellowship as well as finance.

Our building is just over 150 years old and stands prominently at the east end of the village. Our sanctuary is the focus of our building and activity with adjoining Session Room, kitchen, Minister’s Room and toilets.

1.11 Property

Have you any concerns or plans about the future use or development of your buildings?

We have a healthy respect for our building but are not bound by it. We are shaped by rather than controlled by our building.

Since 2007 we have refurbished our kitchen and toilet areas. We have also removed pews to create additional flexible space in both side aisles and to form wheelchair and pram spaces in the heart of the congregation.

The three faces of the steeple clock were returned to working order recently.

The leadership of the Property Committee has been quite fluid over the past few years including two periods when non-elders took on the Convenorship until resigning.

With the addition of new elders in autumn 2016, a new committee structure was introduced across Session and four elders were identified as the Property Committee. The circumstances of the past year have changed this Committee very significantly as two elders who left the church were on this group.

The remaining two members of the Committee put in a huge amount of sacrificial work in the aftermath of our break-in and particularly the discovery of asbestos. A significant amount of backfilling was also done on record keeping and servicing of the property. Now only the Convenor, Shona Stewart remains and also operates as the Health and Safety Officer; we need to look at how she is supported with the maintenance and development of property.

As the only Kirk Session to not respond to the Presbytery Plan back in 2012 and with a considerable turn over in the Session since then, it may be appropriate to consider some of the content of the Perth Presbytery Plan. We gave the Presbytery very little to work with and it concluded as follows:

1.12 Perth Presbytery Plan

How does the current Presbytery Plan work for you?

Having met with representatives from both Ardoch and Blackford the Appraisal Committee recommend that the Charge moves to 70% FTE. At the same time the Appraisal Committee would also recommend a new Union between the long-held linkage of these two parishes. (p21)

This past year would have been a real challenge for any full-time minister so the implications for Mairi on 70% have been significant. We all have to continue to work and serve together to settle down into new ministry and working patterns to allow the 70% charge to become more realistic; we are certainly not doing less than we were 10 years ago and the village continues to grow.

The topic of the Union (or a "Basis of Readjustment") has not been revisited with Presbytery since a meeting that struggled to identify the benefits of being a Union with two places of worship. While the two congregations are compatible and supportive, the communities involved are socially and geographically quite distinct in terms of travel, schooling, shopping and other amenities or services.

Having not submitted returns in 2012 there is no record of how we rated ourselves on the “six component dimensions of healthy churches” identified in the Plan, namely:

1. Worship
2. Discipleship
3. Evangelism
4. Fellowship
5. Service
6. Stewardship

It is likely though that we fitted the trend identified across the churches of “a Presbytery which enjoys the fellowship of worshipping together and does some good work in community service but which is failing to reach out with our Message to the wider world.” (p12)

We, like others need to work at Mission as the primary purpose of the Church; namely

to bring the Good News of salvation *in and through* Jesus Christ our Lord. This can be demonstrated by churches and congregations that are vibrant and dynamic – deploying all of our resources, human and other, clerical and laity, to support this mission. (p6)

We commit ourselves to doing this recognising, with Presbytery, that we need a wide focus on “Word and Work” to achieve this.

While the preaching of the Word remains the cornerstone of mission, there are other activities that bring the attention of the community to the love of God including the example set by those claiming to be Christians through their own lifestyles and the activities they offer in both church and parish communities. (p6)

As a congregation we are at a point of significant change and turnover, perhaps not as strong numerically or financially as we have been in the past but spiritually growing and ready to move on and out into a parish in need of Christ and appreciating the salt and light which Christ’s people bring to the community.

SECTION 2 - CONGREGATIONAL ACTION PLAN

We will adopt and work towards a new vision statement based on the Church of Scotland's vision

As part of the Church of Scotland we want to inspire the people of Blackford and beyond with the Good News of Jesus Christ through enthusiastic worshipping, witnessing, nurturing and serving of our community.

We will do this by focussing on the six components of healthy churches identified in the Presbytery Plan.

1. Worship

Enthusiastic worship will be accessible to our congregation and those yet to join our congregation, by

- identifying and using the gifts of our members to take part in worship
- making thoughtful use of technology such as podcasts, recording and distribution of services through online means

2. Discipleship

We will develop ways to nurture - teach, listen to and accompany - people on our shared faith journey as they become a Christian and grow as a Christian, by

- Our weekly activities offering practical guidance for Christ-like growth
- Identifying and delivering workshops, retreats, study days that encourage discipleship and train leaders and members to disciple others
- Being creative in making good quality Christian resources available

3. Evangelism

We will be deliberate in witnessing to the gospel of Jesus Christ through,

- our teaching and pastoral care of the congregation
- taking a wide range of opportunities to have the love of God and our Christian faith in the minds and ongoing conversations of our church and community

4. Fellowship

We want members and others to experience God's grace and love through God's people as we work and play together within our church and community.

We will use the National Stewardship Programme to identify members and others best placed to give of their time and talents to help with the work of our social and fund-raising activities.

5. Service

We will work to be known as a church that serves our community for its own sake and as a starting point for mission.

We will find ways to establish close congregational links and involvement with our new mission partners in the Czech Republic.

6. Stewardship

We will adopt the National Stewardship Programme to learn and encourage each other in the giving of our time, talents and money to maintain and resource the mission and ministry of our church and wider church.

These Action Plan statements above can be edited down for display as reminders to us and information for others in the following way:
We focus on:

- Worship**
Enthusiastic worship accessible to all
- Discipleship**
Practical guidance for Christian growth
- Evangelism**
Witnessing to the gospel of Jesus Christ
- Fellowship**
Experiencing God's grace and love through God's people
- Service**
Serving our community as a church
- Stewardship**
Giving of our time, talents and money

Section 3 Legal Questions

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|-----|--|-------------------------------------|
| 3.1 | Is the administration of the Sacrament of Baptism of infants in accordance with Act V, 2000? | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 3.2 | Are office bearers representative of the congregation and parish in terms of age and gender? They are representative of the congregation in terms of age and gender, perhaps not of the parish as a whole, where younger families are under-represented in the congregation. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 3.3 | Does the quod omnia constitution serve our mission? | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 3.4 | Does the employment status of members of staff, their working relationships and the prioritisation of their work serve effectively the congregation's mission? | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 3.5 | Is the church in compliance with Act XII 2007 regarding the provision and maintenance of manses? | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 3.6 | Have recent property survey findings and recommendations been implemented? All asbestos was removed from the building following a survey undertaken this spring. Other repairs and scheduled maintenance have been completed and recorded. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 3.7 | Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005 states that Charity trustees (or connected persons) cannot be remunerated unless certain conditions are met. If any Trustees or connected persons are in receipt of payments, have the correct processes (Law Department Circular) been followed? | N/A |
| 3.8 | Has your financial court adopted the General Assembly approved Bribery and Procurement Policy as instructed by the Presbytery? | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |