

Greyfriars Kirk & St Cuthbert's Parish Church

Working Towards Union Newsletter: 26 April 2026

It was good to see people at the gatherings after services in both churches on 22 March, with good questions raised and useful discussion had. If you were unable to attend that but you would like to have a chat about anything in the last or this newsletter, or you have any questions about the proposed union, please get in touch with one of the Working Group representatives. Representatives will usually be available over coffee after church services on Sundays, or the church offices can put you in touch (contact details provided below).

Key Documents

The Working Group, with assistance from Presbytery's Deployment Committee, has developed drafts of the proposed "Basis of Union" and "Basis of Reviewable Charge" documents. These two documents, if approved by our Kirk Sessions, Congregations and Presbytery, will constitute the union and are the first steps to gaining Presbytery's consent to call a Minister. These drafts will shortly be reviewed by our Kirk Sessions. If approved they will be made available to our congregations in a further newsletter and online here:

<https://greyfriarskirk.com/greyfriars-st-cuthberts-union/>

<https://www.stcuthberts-edinburgh.uk/news/greyfriars-st-cuthberts-union-update>

Proposed Dates

The following dates are proposed, for the various necessary steps to take place. Please note these dates are provisional, in that each step must be completed satisfactorily before the next step can take place. Each step involves considerable organisation and administration too. If dates do need to be adjusted for any reason, an updated timeline will be published in a further newsletter. So please keep an eye out for these after services and online (as above).

Kirk Session votes, for union or not according to the Basis of Union **5 May**

Congregation votes, for union or not according to the Basis of Union **31 May**

Presbytery approval sought for Basis of Union, if all votes are for union **16 June**

Date of Union – if it is to proceed **1 August**

The votes are overseen by Deployment Committee representatives and decided by majority. There is a formula for citation during two services in the lead up to the congregational vote (aim: 17 and 24 May), and a further formula for citation during two services in the lead up to seeking Presbytery approval (aim: 7 and 14 June).

Presbytery approval of the Basis of Reviewable Charge approved by the two Kirk Sessions will be sought at the same time as the Basis of Union.

Regarding the proposed date for union, 1 August is the earliest date thought possible if the above timetable is achieved and the votes are for union. It is worth noting that Greyfriars and St Cuthbert's are currently each served by a Locum Minister funded by the National Church. We were advised late 2025 that this funding would be withdrawn, unless Permission to Call had been granted by Presbytery. We are of course, not yet in that position. The decisions to withdraw funding was challenged, on the basis of good progress

made in working toward union votes, and funding was extended to the end of July 2026 for both Locum posts. After this date, the posts will need to be wholly locally funded. In the event that union occurs, the united congregation will be served by one Locum, which will continue to be locally funded, until 'Permission to Call' has been granted by Presbytery when the post will be funded instead by the National Church. The Locum will serve until a new Minister to the United Charge is appointed. An earlier date of union will ensure support toward the funding of ministry positions as soon as possible.

Church Life – Direction and Governance

In the last newsletter, we explained that the overall direction of union discussions has reiterated the importance of making “the best of both worlds”, and the view that the united congregation will combine efforts and resources to continue a strong Christian presence as Church of Scotland in central Edinburgh through worship, mission and outreach. The following provides an overview of things that the churches *presently* do and value, which would provide the foundation for church life under the leadership and development of the united Kirk Session and new Minister to the United Charge if union proceeds.

Primarily, both churches seek to offer opportunities for worship, pastoral care, fellowship and coming together for activities and events, to congregation members, regular attenders, neighbours and visitors from all walks of life, and enable those who are vulnerable or on the edges of society to find support and participate in church and community life.

Traditions of worship: both churches hold Sunday services that are enriched by choirs, organ music and liturgical elements, and offer other diverse forms of regular worship too. These include monthly early, reflective communion services (both), monthly Soul Space (St Cuthbert's), weekly Gaelic services, monthly Refugio, and weekly midweek prayers (Greyfriars). There are also many seasonal services at both churches throughout the year.

Celebrate the Christian story: St Cuthbert's traces its roots back to the 12th century saint; Greyfriars is so-called after the previous 15th century Franciscan monastery onsite; eventful histories and many rich stories have developed over time, associated with the two historic church buildings that host much of today's church life.

Ecumenical outlook: both churches are members of the HeartEdge movement, Edinburgh Interfaith Association, and have valued ecumenical partners: St Johns Episcopal and The New Town Church (St Cuthbert's); Augustine United Church and St Columba's by the Castle (Greyfriars).

Commitment to community: both congregations are deeply committed to participating in and serving their wider local communities. This is done through vital partnerships including the Grassmarket Community Project and the Greyfriars Charteris Centre (Greyfriars), links with the Ukrainian community in Edinburgh and Fresh Start (St Cuthbert's). Until recently, St Cuthbert's also partnered with Steps to Hope, and it is hoped further such initiatives will be developed. Volunteering creates opportunities for many in the community to participate in church life throughout the week too.

Art, culture and learning: both churches provide unique spaces for all types of events, with good acoustics and facilities, and a friendly service provided by staff and volunteers. Events include concerts, exhibitions and talks organised by third parties, and both congregations

are committed to using church space creatively, to celebrate art, music, life events and learning as expressions of our faith and avenues for community connection, making our churches vibrant cultural hubs in Edinburgh.

The above is a *very* brief summary of all that goes on! You can find out more from current websites and newsletters: www.greyfriarskirk.com; www.stcuthberts-edinburgh.uk.

The united Kirk Session would comprise the serving elders who form the two separate Kirk Sessions at the point at which the union is constituted. Some might see this as an appropriate time to step down; they would remain an ordained elder to the united congregation but would not serve on the Kirk Session or act as a charity trustee. It might be an opportunity to consider seeking new ordained elders too. The two present Kirk Sessions will consider relevant matters and make plans to seek appropriate representation of the two congregations, and the various groups that make up church life, for the initial formation of the united Kirk Session as the two become one.

As noted in the last newsletter, a statement of delegation is being drafted by the Finance Management Group (FMG), to be proposed for the united Kirk Session to consider, and if satisfied adopt, once the united Kirk Session is in place. This details the extent to which day to day operational and HR matters are delegated by the Kirk Session to the FMG, to enable the efficient running of Outreach activities and aspects of church life. Development of this statement has involved representatives from St Cuthbert's who are part of FMG and others with relevant experience relating to operational governance.

Greyfriars employs an Operations Manager, Mark Harrison, to manage the Outreach activities of the Kirk. This includes managing bookings and duty managers, for events held in the church, and supporting some operational aspects of Sunday services and other church events. St Cuthbert's are currently exploring the employment of an Operations Manager. If the union proceeds, the two Operations Managers will work together as a team, running "Greyfriars St Cuthberts Outreach". Both will report to the FMG, and will be line managed by the Session Clerk on behalf of the Kirk Session. It will be important that the two churches are presented, run and feel like physical locations for the united congregation's shared church life. This will require changes to websites, letter headings, and other materials used for displays, communications etc, which will take time. If anyone is interested in volunteering to help with these developments, please let a working group rep know.

If there are any aspects of church governance you would like to know more about, Working Group representatives will be happy to discuss or point you to the right person who can help with your query.

Get in touch! Working Group Representatives and Contact Info:

St Cuthbert's Reps: Christine McGuinness (Co- Chair), Graham Maclagan, John Kirk, James McLean, Jeanette Barton, Scott Turnbull.

St Cuthbert's Church Office: tel. 0131 229 1142; email office@stcuthberts-edinburgh.uk.

Greyfriars Reps: Gillian Couper (Co-Chair), Catherine Alexander, Anne Bradbury, Maggie Cormack, Jo Elliot.

Greyfriars Church Office: tel 0131 225 1900; email contact@greyfriarskirk.com.