



Greyfriars Kirk & St Cuthbert's Parish Church Working Towards Union Newsletter: 8 March 2026

Thank you very much to those who responded to the survey circulated in February. We have had 73 responses. If you have not yet managed to complete it and would like to, you can find it online here: <https://forms.gle/MLL4FDTcJ7DYBMQ17>; or contact one of the church offices for a paper copy (contact info below). Further responses are welcome at this time.

This newsletter provides a summary of the survey responses, and addresses various comments and questions raised, some of which highlight similar themes. Hopefully those who submitted such points will recognise these themes, but if you feel something has not been acknowledged or addressed, please get in touch. Working Group representatives are happy to discuss matters, and raise things with the Working Group and/or Kirk Sessions as appropriate, to ensure all thoughts are taken into account.

Working Group representatives will talk about this newsletter, recent progress and host discussions after the Sunday services at each church on **22 March**. Please come and join in.

Summary of Survey Responses

The survey asked: *Once the two churches unite, are you happy for the Kirk Session to arrange for services to continue at both churches at 10:30 am?*

- 64 people answered “yes”.
- 5 people answered “no”.
- 4 people left it **unanswered**.

Three comments were made about the wording of this question:

Two people pointed out that it would have been better to say “If the two churches unite”, rather than “Once the two...”, the latter suggesting a foregone conclusion. The newsletter drafters apologise for this oversight and agree “If...” the better wording. The following section explains some key steps involved in the union process.

One person noted that the word “happy” could mean anything from “enthusiastic endorsement” to “not actively opposed”. Many comments accompanying answers to this question helped the Working Group assess the warmth of responses (or not). These included description of travel, personal/church commitments and other relevant information that informed choice, which provided helpful context. The proposal seems to have been warmly received by the majority, though with accompanying feedback (see "Points Raised - Patterns of Worship" below).

Feedback on wording will be taken into account in future communications, and is gratefully received. If you would like to volunteer to help produce future communications, please let one of the Working Group know.

Steps Toward Union – Recap, Key Documents, Votes

In April 2023, Edinburgh and West Lothian Presbytery agreed a Mission Plan (available here: www.presbyteryedinburghwestlothian.co.uk/resources/), which proposed the union of various congregations to help meet the challenges that the Church of Scotland faces today.

Under that Plan, Presbytery intends that The Parish Church of St Cuthbert's and Greyfriars Kirk unite. Thus, a joint Working Group was set up to "work toward union", with representatives of both churches.

Some key steps involved in a union process are:

A "**Basis of Union**" draft to be agreed – this is the document which, if approved by Presbytery once all the necessary steps are complete, would formally constitute the union.

A "**Basis of Reviewable Charge**" draft to be agreed – this, if approved by Presbytery, will enable the united congregation, if union occurs, to call a new minister to the united charge (a "charge" is the formal term for the unit comprising a viable congregation, served by a Minister of Word and Sacrament). It also sets out the criteria by which Presbytery will review the charge after five years, to determine whether it remains viable or not. This review is normal procedure, though the procedure has recently been reviewed to improve practise and seek to meet the context and challenges of the Church at this time.

The Working Group is presently preparing the two drafts of the above named documents, which involves considerable discussion, with assistance from Presbytery's Deployment Committee. The drafts will be presented to the two Kirk Sessions for approval; reviewed by representatives of Presbytery and the National Church; and shared with the wider congregations. Thus, further opportunity for feedback will occur and the process may be iterative.

Once the drafts are finalised, three formal steps will take place:

Kirk Session approval – a vote will be held by each of the two church's Kirk Session whereby the majority will decide whether the union should proceed, or not.

Congregational approval – a vote will be held by each of the two congregations whereby a majority will decide whether the union should proceed, or not.

If the above votes indicate the two Kirk Sessions and two congregations consent to the proposed union, the two documents will be presented for **Presbytery approval**.

While much of the Working Group's activities, joint worship services and congregational events, and opportunities for staff and volunteers to meet have brought people together and helped explore how a union could work, union is not a foregone conclusion. It will only proceed if the majority votes *for* union during the four votes detailed above, and Presbytery approves. However, it is worth noting that Presbytery representatives have been clear throughout the union process so far, in various discussions, that if any of the votes is *against* union it is highly unlikely that the two congregations would be left to "go it alone" i.e. church life would be very unlikely to continue as it does now, without significant change.

Who can vote, and when? The congregational votes will be planned to take place on a Sunday, after the usual worship service concludes. Church "Members" (on the Communion Roll) will have an automatic right to vote. Others, who are not Members in this sense but who regularly attend services and participate in church life ("Adherents") will be encouraged to join the Electoral Register for the vote. We plan to communicate with people on the lists of both Members and regular attenders in advance of the vote to explain in more detail what is

involved, for whom we have contact details. The Electoral Register for each congregation will be approved prior to the votes by the respective Kirk Session.

A formula will be read during two Sunday services prior to the date of the vote, as well as the above communications and a further newsletter(s), so that the date of the vote will be well publicised. If you'd like to check that you are on your church's contact list and/or your contact details are up to date, please get in touch with your church office.

Unfortunately only people who are at the church on the day that the vote occurs will be able to participate. It is not possible to vote by post, email, proxy or other alternative method. This is a matter of church law, and not something the Working Group can change. All feedback received on this matter is shared with Presbytery representatives.

Steps Toward Union – Direction

The documents described above contain only the information required for approval of the Union and the United Charge by Presbytery, i.e. they do not include all the nitty gritty details and matters involved in bringing two churches together. Ultimately, many of these matters will fall to the appropriate people or committees to take forward, working together.

The Working Group, with Deployment Committee assistance and knowledge of unions elsewhere, is working to identify other actions that particularly need to be addressed before the votes take place; and other actions that can or should be taken forward by the united Kirk Session if the union proceeds. This newsletter shares information on matters arising in survey responses. If there are other aspects of church life and management you would like to know more about, either how the churches are presently run or how they will be brought together for the proposed union, Working Group representatives will be happy to discuss or point you to the right person who can help with your query.

Ultimately, the **overall direction** of union discussions to date has reiterated the importance of making “the best of both worlds”, by retaining and involving the buildings, resources, initiatives and (not least) the wonderful people of the two present congregations, to continue a strong Christian presence as Church of Scotland in central Edinburgh. This involves a commitment to continued worship in both buildings, and mission and outreach activities from both churches serving the congregations, wider communities and visitors' needs, as long as this can be sustained – in terms of having people to lead and participate in these, and financial income and other resources required to enable these.

When the united congregation has permission to call a new minister, if the union proceeds, the united Kirk Session will produce two further key documents, a **Parish Profile** and a **Mission Action Plan**. These will form part of the documents available to prospective ministers and be publicly available. The Working Group and present Kirk Sessions may start working on preparatory drafts in anticipation. These will capture more detail of daily church life and articulate the vision, taking forward the overall direction through the leadership of the united Kirk Session. In the next newsletter, the Working Group will share an overview of the things that both churches presently value and do, which it is hoped will be combined and continued.

Points Raised – Patterns of Worship

Fourteen people raised particular points that questioned the proposed pattern for worship (described in the last newsletter). These relate to two themes:

Allowing the new minister to shape worship, with the united Kirk Session in due course.

A new minister will bring with them a particular vision and aspirations, and this is recognised as something to welcome; while balancing it alongside the ability to demonstrate to prospective ministers that some of the difficult decisions relating to union have been made, and the united congregation can articulate clear expectations. The pattern of worship agreed now is not set in stone; neither would patterns of worship be changed without much consideration, nor frequently. The aim is to ensure the right balance of clarity and room for future shaping together in the draft basis of union.

The importance of becoming a united congregation, through worshipping together.

Three suggestions were made for alternative patterns of worship to that proposed with this in mind: staggered service times every Sunday; alternating between the two church buildings each week (a service only in one church); and the opportunity for different worship styles. Equally, concerns were raised about: the difficulty of different service times for a gathered congregation in a city-centre based church (particularly earlier); people attending fewer services or attending elsewhere; and a love of the worship in both.

Considerable research and discussion has preceded the recent proposal, in which various options were explored. The last newsletter shared the main reasons for coming to the present proposal, for the particular context. While no solution is ideal for everyone, various further points considered speak to the points raised:

- Monthly communion will continue, encouraging people attending Sunday morning worship to make some additional effort (organising travel and commitments), to benefit from coming together (which staggered service patterns may not, so often).
- Our churches already recognise the strength in offering a variety of opportunities for worship, with the Gaelic congregation, Soul Space, Refugio, and midweek prayers – groups that do not always come together, with different people attending for different reasons, yet all making valuable, committed contribution to church life.
- The proposed pattern will invite wider involvement in leading worship, adding to the sustainability of church life, and creating opportunities for some individuals to develop and grow through participation in that way.
- Worship is not the only opportunity for the congregation to unite. Staff, members, volunteers and other participants will have opportunities to join together for social, outreach, mission and ongoing management of church life activities too.

Saying all that, it is yet to be seen whether this proposal will be acceptable to Presbytery, who are advised by representatives of the National Church too. So this may need to be revisited in due course. It was important to invite input into the development of the proposal from the two congregations, before initial feedback from those forums is sought. All further comments to Working Group representatives are welcome meantime.

Points Raised – Buildings, Management and Sustainability

Two people asked if thought had been given to the “minimum size of congregation” required, for continued worship in both church buildings to be viable. One person considered it “essential” for worship to continue in both. Another that retaining both creates “strain” on finances and minister. One person has asked if the union is a “takeover” by one church of the other. One person noted that church is “more than a place of worship”, playing a part in tackling social challenges too.

With regard to retaining the physical churches, i.e. the two buildings, it is important to note: Presbytery consider both “buildings of major importance” for various reasons, and both are rated “A”, which means that both buildings should be retained (Mission Plan 2023). Under church law, any proposal to release either building or significantly alter its use will require agreement of the Kirk Session, Presbytery and the Church of Scotland General Trustees (who have responsibility toward church properties).

After initial union discussions commenced, during which the two Kirk Sessions came together, the majority of each Kirk Sessions has been committed to continuing worship and church life in both buildings, provided that this can be done sustainably. In this context, “sustainably” is understood to mean primarily: having sufficient people in place to undertake all that is involved in delivering worship and other activities; and that the financial costs of maintaining a building and delivery can be sufficiently met through the income streams (e.g. congregation giving, visitor donations and lets) related to worship and activities in these buildings.

The question that the Working Group has explored, with the Kirk Sessions and others involved in management of the churches’ operations and finance, is how the buildings can best be used to enable an active church life that meets the needs of the congregation, community and visitors, and create opportunities for mission and outreach particularly to the vulnerable and others in need (in line with present activities and overall direction).

The two Kirk Sessions have agreed that if the union proceeds, the united Kirk Session should delegate aspects of daily church management to a Finance Management Group (FMG), and aspects of church life will be coordinated by a Congregational Life Group. At the start, both will include representatives of the two present congregations (the distinction expected to recede over time as the “two become one”).

The FMG model is one that Greyfriars currently employs for its day to day operations. Representatives from St Cuthbert’s have been part of the FMG for some time now, and this representation is being strengthened. St Cuthbert’s has also involved Greyfriars representatives in equivalent forums, including representatives for recruitment and finance discussions. Given that this will be a new way of working for St Cuthbert’s elders, the Working Group proposed that the united Kirk Session confirm a “statement of delegation” to describe the extent of the decision-making powers the FMG has in its remit, the drafting of which is currently being considered.

Considerable effort has been made bringing people who work in similar areas of the two churches together, including operational staff, finance representatives, and volunteers leading on various initiatives. This has enabled people from both churches to better

understand each other and contribute to the Working Group's developments and discussions. Reports with financial projections and plans, addressing key risks and management matters have been provided and discussed with Kirk Sessions.

If you would like to know more about how the operations and finance of either of the churches currently works, and how those will be brought together if the union proceeds, please contact one of the following by email or through the church offices:

St Cuthbert's: Scott Turnbull, Treasurer – treasurer@stcuthberts-edinburgh.uk

Christine McGuinness, Deputy Session Clerk – sessionclerk@stcuthberts-edinburgh.uk

Greyfriars: Jo Elliot, Session Clerk – sessionclerk@greyfriarskirk.com

Andrew Campbell, Finance Convener – financeconvener@greyfriarskirk.com

A future newsletter will seek to provide further information and answer any other questions that arise relating to these matters.

Offers of Involvement

Thank you to everyone who indicated that they are willing to help lead various aspects of worship services. This information will be collated and provided to those organising worship leadership in the months ahead.

Thank you to those who indicated interest in helping in other ways, your names will be passed on to those leading the appropriate aspects of worship or church life.

Many others confirmed the ways they are currently already involved, and some apologised for not wishing to get involved in worship. It is wholly recognised that we all have different time to give, talents and skills to use, and that each of us does what we can in different ways. Thank you everyone.

Other Points Raised

One person indicated a preference for one church's livestreaming, and hoped it would continue. It is intended that livestreaming will continue at both churches, provided there are volunteers willing to deliver this.

One person asked that information be clearly presented on church websites to indicate where the monthly communion service will take place. This has been put in place.

Many people provided a variety of comments to support their responses, which encouraged the Working Group and enabled more rounded discussion. We will keep providing updates in future newsletters leading to the union vote. If there is any topic you would particularly like to be addressed please do let one of us know, and keep the comments coming...

St Cuthbert's Working Group representatives – Christine McGuinness (Co- Chair), and Graham Maclagan, John Kirk, James McLean, Jeanette Barton, Scott Turnbull.

Greyfriars Working Group representatives – Gillian Couper (Co-Chair), and Catherine Alexander, Anne Bradbury, Maggie Cormack, Jo Elliot.

Get in touch! Church Office contact info:

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

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