

Mission Plan

St. Columba Gaelic Church

Church, Glasgow



St. Columba Gaelic Church of Scotland, Glasgow - Registered Scottish Charity No. SC006342

Established: 1770

Mission Plan for St. Columba Gaelic Church, Glasgow

History and Context

The 2011 census of Scotland showed that a total of 57,375 people (1.1% of the Scottish population aged over three years old) in Scotland could speak Gaelic at that time, with the Outer Hebrides being the main stronghold of the language. The census results indicate a decline of 1,275 Gaelic speakers from 2001. A total of 87,056 people in 2011 reported having some facility with Gaelic compared to 93,282 people in 2001, a decline of 6,226. Despite this decline, revival efforts exist and according to Government statistics (2013) the number of speakers of the language under age 20 has increased. The number of speakers in Glasgow is recorded at 5,726, or 1% of the population.

Over the years, the churches in Scotland have offered worship services and pastoral care in Gaelic wherever there was the need. During the decades of the 19th and 20th centuries when there was a continuing mass influx of people from the Highlands to the major cities, it was common to find churches specifically designated as Highland or Gaelic congregations. Glasgow experienced the largest immigration of Gaelic speakers. The Church of Scotland established its first Gaelic congregation as far back as 1770. This was the precursor of the present-day St Columba Gaelic Church, the present building in St. Vincent Street having been dedicated in 1904. This congregation has an unbroken record of holding weekly worship in Gaelic until the present day. It is currently the only church left in West / Central Scotland to do so.

The current challenge facing Gaelic language ministry is considerable, and it is nationwide. It is understood there are now only seven Church of Scotland ministers who can conduct worship in Gaelic. All are men.

Current Provision

The Church of Scotland currently makes provision for the Gaelic community in a number of ways. Presbyteries designate certain charges as “Gaelic Essential”, “Gaelic Desirable”, or “Gaelic Worship”. They do this when they agree their Presbytery Plan in terms of Act VII.2003 (Appraisal and Adjustment). There are seven Gaelic Essential charges in the Church of Scotland, one of which is St. Columba Gaelic Church, Glasgow. (Technically, St. Columba had its designation suspended when the Plan was suspended in 2015, however that was for buildings reasons; the suspension of the Gaelic designation was an unintended consequence). There are 27 Gaelic Desirable charges, and an additional number of Gaelic Worship churches. The Church’s magazine ‘Life and Work’ has produced a Gaelic Supplement since 1880. 1000 copies are printed monthly and 700 copies are sent out to churches, Gaelic colleges and single subscribers who have requested it. The number of supplements sent out to Glasgow churches is around 80 and the order for St Columba Gaelic Church is currently twelve each month. The Supplement is now available online. Congregations which are neither GE nor GD charges, offer occasional Gaelic services. For example, Crown Court, London, holds quarterly Gaelic services and Oban Parish Church and Inverness East Church have monthly services.

Meeting current and future needs

While there are more ministers than seven who can speak Gaelic, either fluently or as learners, they are sometimes unwilling to conduct Gaelic worship. One reason for this is that current Gaelic speaking ministers were not taught the language in school. Thus their ability to read and write in Gaelic is often limited. This may mean they cannot rely on a script when preaching. Another suggested reason is a lack of

confidence based upon a perceived gap between conversational Gaelic and ecclesiastical Gaelic. The existence of such a gap (while English language worship is virtually the same as the spoken language) is symptomatic of a growing cultural gap between the lives of ordinary Gaelic speakers and the spirituality and ecclesiology of much of the Gaelic speaking Church. If Gaelic is perceived by at least some as distant from the everyday concerns of Gaelic speakers, Gaelic worship will struggle to fulfil spiritual needs and provide guidance for the wider moral and ethical issues people face today. Clearly, such a credibility gap is not peculiar to the Gaelic speaking church. There exists a growing divide between the Church and every society in the developed world, regardless of language. However, the concern is that the growing gap between Gaelic church and community, both linguistic and cultural, is larger than in other cultures, and when other factors are added in, such as the small number of speakers and the peripheral geography of the Gaelic heartlands, a crisis point is being reached. While Gaelic culture is thriving, the church that serves the language is now so small that its very existence, even in the short term, is under threat.

The interface of Gaelic and English

The situation is complicated by the fact that Gaelic speakers are all bilingual. Gaelic speaking churchgoers can perfectly well attend their local English speaking church, and many do. All churches which have Gaelic services also offer worship in English. Gaelic culture bridges the linguistic divide. The sense of belonging to that culture derives as much from community and geography than from the spoken language. Thus within the community some are more comfortable in the Gaelic medium, and others more comfortable with English. However while many people who identify closely with Gaelic culture prefer the English language, and while it would be possible for the church to serve the entire Gaelic community with a solely English speaking ministry, the importance of language must not be lost sight of. While not the only factor at play, language must be seen as a key element, the lack of which would severely compromise the Church's ministry and mission to that community. Furthermore, attitudes among Gaelic speakers vary widely. While many Gaelic speakers are ambivalent about the decline of the language, and are content to worship in English, there are others who feel more strongly, and see provision of worship in Gaelic, especially if it is their first language, as a basic human right. Comparison can be drawn with other places, e.g. Wales, Ireland, Catalonia, where language may not be the only, nor even the main cultural distinguisher, but is nevertheless iconic of the national or regional identity.

It should be recognised that the need for Gaelic language ministry is not just in the provision of worship, but also, and just as importantly, in pastoral care. While Gaelic speakers are universally bilingual, there is a significant proportion of them that regard Gaelic as their first language. It is the language they learned as babies in the family home, and it is the language generally spoken at home. Thus their thought processes tend naturally to be in Gaelic. Therefore, at times of stress, bereavement, etc., it is a tremendous comfort to receive spiritual care in one's native tongue. This is the reason why English expatriate communities around the world establish English language churches. It has been said that however fluent a person becomes in their adopted country's language, even speaking it at home with their children, there are two main things that they could not do except in their native language; one was to dream, the other, to pray.

A Consideration of Conservative and Progressive Attitudes and Theologies

It is likely that the issues described above are not manifest to the same degree over the whole Gàidhealtachd (Scottish Gaelic-speaking area). The culture of Lewis, for instance, is rather more homogenous than that of cosmopolitan Edinburgh or Glasgow. However, there is evidence that shows that the Church within the Gaelic heartland is more traditional in outlook and conservative in theology than churches in the cities. Illustrating this are the recent results from Barrier Act procedure on the issue

of ministers in same-sex relationships, also the number of Kirk Sessions in the Highlands and Islands that still have no female members, showing a deep conservatism. St Columba Gaelic in Glasgow on the other hand has had female elders for many years. At the same time, while some of the aspects of church life in St. Columba's display a liberal attitude, seen in a progressive and open stance on many matters, other features could be described as traditional, for example the centrality of Sunday worship, and the reluctance of many members to be other than passive participants in the life of the congregation. Thus it could be said that while St Columba's is theologically liberal, it is socially conservative. The fact that the ancillary accommodation of St Columba's has remained largely unchanged since 1907 is perhaps an obvious example of this social conservatism, suggesting building modernisation may have been low on the list of priorities until very recently.

The Suitability of Facilities and Location of the Current Building to meet Current Needs

The failure of the fabric of St Columba's to keep pace with modern expectations of comfort may however have a more practical reason. While wealthy suburban churches were removing their pews, laying carpets and installing state of the art multimedia and stainless steel kitchens, St Columba's was haemorrhaging members and income as people moved away from the city centre, while the area was transformed into Glasgow's commercial and business zone. Against this huge demographic shift the declining congregation has done well to keep its large and ageing suite of property wind and watertight. However, its actions in conserving the fabric have been wholly reactive. The Session has reflected on the suitability of the location from time to time. The centrality of the building is on the whole considered advantageous for a gathered congregation, especially one with the unique story of St Columba's. The consequent need to maintain the building has never really been in doubt; however a building of this age and type requires constant expenditure. The absence of a residential neighbourhood and the very different needs of a commuter population coming in to work during the week present big challenges.

With a determination to keep its witness in central Glasgow alive for the future, along with a will to be open and welcoming to all, there is complete agreement on the ethos of the church among its leaders. The Church's biggest challenge everywhere today is how to bring the unchangeable truths of the Bible and particularly the Gospel of Christ to an ever changing world. The office bearers of St Columba's have expressed themselves to be up for the challenge, but where God will lead them in this endeavour, and how Mission principles must change and develop to encompass the vision, remain open questions.

In Glasgow there is a thriving Gaelic / Celtic culture. Gaelic medium education is well established and growing. Glasgow is home to *Celtic Connections*, an annual cultural festival attracting people from all over the world. BBC Alba, based in Glasgow, is a well-established TV channel which makes most of its content in Scotland. Until recently it was the only one. The launch of BBC Scotland in Feb 2019 confirms the broadcaster's commitment to Scottish culture and current affairs. Like BBC Alba, its production and broadcast base is Glasgow. The city is also home to several thriving Gaelic choirs who attain high performance standards through competing in the National Mòd and other music festivals. The congregation is proud to recall that St Columba's was the birthplace of the Mòd and of the Gaelic cultural revival of the 19th century that surrounded its inception. There are several Highland Societies catering for cultural and recreational needs. Glasgow is home to a world renowned School of Piping. Yet Gaelic worship (including worship conducted in English for the Gaelic community) is in decline. The congregation is faced with the constant challenge of what can be done to turn that around. What can be done to ensure that St Columba Gaelic Church takes its rightful place going forward in the current Gaelic renaissance we see happening around us?

The Church's Support of Ethnic Diversity.

Any Mission Plan must be grounded in the mission of Jesus Christ, who said, "Go and make disciples of all the nations." Jesus himself did not restrict his ministry to any one group, rather he made every effort to bridge the cultural and ethnic divides of his own time. One obvious example of this was his encounter with the Samaritan woman. Following this, the ministry of the early Church was largely determined by the teaching of St. Paul who fought hard to show that all people were included in God's plan for salvation, not just the Jews.

For these reasons, it is important that our Church should minister in a sympathetic and meaningful way to all ethnic and cultural groups who look to us for Christian pastoral care. When the Church of Scotland framed its Declaratory Articles, it did so in the context of a monoethnic nation. It is therefore not surprising that our church's "constitution" focuses on a geographic rather than a people-centred commitment. (*The Church of Scotland "acknowledges its distinctive call and duty to bring the ordinances of religion to the people in every parish of Scotland through a territorial ministry."*) The Church's recently reaffirmed adherence to this 3rd Declaratory Article upholds its commitment to the whole of Scotland. While this commitment is to a territorial rather than an ethnic diversity, the Gaelic language and culture has been, and remains, a significant component of a large part of that territory.

The Church's Commitment to Linguistic Diversity.

The Church has historically recognised the particular needs of different language groups. One longstanding example of this is its close working with the Bible Societies. This commitment is also scripturally grounded. The Gospels were written in Greek, however they indicate at various points that the native language of Jesus and his associates was Aramaic. It is significant that certain words used by Jesus were not translated. Those words that are preserved in their Aramaic form tend to appear at those times when Jesus was speaking in an intimate way to his heavenly Father – either with great tenderness; "Abba", or with great anguish; "Eloi, eloi, lema sabachthani". These instances remind us that when anyone is at their closest to God, they tend to think, pray, and express themselves in their first language.

In any church standing in the traditions of the Reformation, the importance of communicating to people in their native language was, and is, fundamental. The Reformation emphasised the need to present the Bible to people in their own tongue. Luminaries such as Luther, Wycliffe and Tyndale translated the Scriptures into their native languages. The Westminster Confession of Faith explains the motivation. The second half of WCF 1.8 reads, "*Because these original tongues are not known to all the people of God, who have right unto, and interest in the Scriptures, and are commanded, in the fear of God, to read and search them, therefore they are to be translated into the vulgar language of every nation unto which they come, that, the Word of God dwelling plentifully in all, they may worship him in an acceptable manner; and, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, may have hope.*" John Knox and the other Scots Reformers, in recognising a need to communicate with the people in their *lingua franca*, chose to do so in standard English. Both Scots and Gaelic were suppressed. While the Westminster Divines took a more inclusive view, Scots and Gaelic for different reasons suffered a steady decline in status. Only in relatively recent times has our nation's linguistic diversity come to be seen as important once again. The vicissitudes of history should not mask the Church's basic and longstanding commitment to serve its people in a language they can understand, even though that principle was for long interpreted over narrowly both by Church and State.

Language and ethnicity are closely related. The existence of Gaelic as a significant minority language in Scotland, identifying closely with the rich Celtic culture centring on the Highlands and Islands of Scotland and reaching out to the wider family of Celtic peoples, points to a responsibility on the Church to cater for

Gaelic speakers in their own language. Moreover, minority language speakers consider it a basic human right to have their language expressed in the infrastructure of their community. Bilingual road-signs and more recent examples such as bilingual branding of Police vehicles illustrate the way the secular authorities have come to recognise this. Access to the ordinances of religion in people's first language, the language which comes to them more naturally than that of the predominant culture, is also crucial. Significantly however, the Church of Scotland has not kept pace. While the Scottish Government will issue all its documents in Gaelic on request as part of its recognition of linguistic diversity, the Church has made no such commitment. The recent adoption of a new Unitary Constitution by the congregation in 2019 resulted in the issue of the original hard copy in English, with no alternative available.

The Church's Bias Towards the Socially Disadvantaged.

The Church has historically had a bias to the poor, the dispossessed and those whose place in society is at the margins. This is well grounded in scripture. In the Church of Scotland today there are designated Priority Areas comprising the poorest communities identified by Government statistics, where extra resources are directed. Gaelic speakers were historically among the most socially disadvantaged people in Scotland. The biggest driver of migration from the 18th to the 20th century from the Highlands to the cities was poverty. The Church to its credit did much to combat the plight of the poor, and outstanding among church leaders in this field was the Rev. Norman MacLeod, DD, minister of St Columba's from 1835-62. According to the Dictionary of National Biography, "Besides attaining some eminence as a popular preacher, especially to Gaelic audiences, he interested himself in schemes for the welfare of the Highlands. It was through his action, in directing attention to the insufficient provision for elementary education in the Highlands and Islands, that the church was induced to form its education scheme; and during a period of exceptional distress in the Highlands he made a very successful visit to England to collect subscriptions." For these efforts he was accorded the title *Caraid nan Gàidheal* (Friend of the Gael). MacLeod was fighting an uphill battle. The poverty and low social status suffered by Gaels was closely linked to the language they spoke. Gaelic culture was routinely dismissed, parodied, and held as inferior. For many years in Scotland, and well within living memory, the state actively discouraged the use of minority languages and dialects. Gaelic was not taught in schools and children were punished for using it. Its adult speakers were routinely the object of ridicule and discrimination. During those times, to its great credit, the Church was the only national institution that encouraged Gaelic, and met the needs of its speakers, through the provision of worship and pastoral care in Gaelic.

It is perplexing that in the present day, when Gaelic culture is thriving, when public money is being pumped into safeguarding the future of the language, and when Gaelic medium schools, not just in the heartland of Gaeldom but in the big cities are struggling to find enough qualified teachers to meet the demand for education in the language, that the Church appears to be on the point of abandoning its Gaelic ministry and outreach.

The Church's Record in keeping pace with Developments in the Gaelic Culture and Language.

In recent years, the General Assembly has appointed a Gaelic Group under the auspices of its Assembly Council. Its remit is:

1. To coordinate the Church's contribution to the development and promotion of Gaelic within the Church.
2. To explore ways in which Gaelic can continue to make its distinctive contribution to the religious life of Scotland and the Church of Scotland.

3. To promote the use of Gaelic both in the context of traditional worship services and in imaginative ways that take account of the developing needs of the Gaelic-speaking and Gaelic-learning communities in Scotland.
4. To monitor and report progress among Councils in relation to Gaelic worship and ministry.
5. To maintain contact with the London Gaelic Service, supporting its efforts to ensure an ongoing provision of Gaelic medium worship.
6. To develop and implement a Gaelic Language Plan for the use of Gaelic in the Church.
7. To coordinate with Life and Work on the production and future development of Na Duilleagan Gàidhlig.

The Group reported “significant progress” to the 2018 General Assembly. A major outcome of the Group’s work was to facilitate the appointment of a Gaelic Development Officer from October 2019. The challenges remain considerable. Where worship in Gaelic survives, the language used tends to be traditional and archaic, having grown distant from the Gaelic spoken in the streets, and presenting clear barriers, especially for Gaelic learners. Moreover, the declining number of Ministers who are able to conduct worship in Gaelic are predominantly male, and there has to be a question over the extent to which women may feel excluded from this particular area of ministry. The Church needs to send out a much clearer message that its mission to the Gaelic culture has an equal place for women in positions of leadership.

The Mission of St. Columba Gaelic Church

The mission of St Columba’s Church places its relationship with the Gaelic language and the Highland culture at the centre. Without its ministry to this community, there would be little to distinguish the congregation from other city centre congregations. While the congregation must be open to be led wherever the Holy Spirit may direct, one obvious focus will be its mission to its unique ‘niche’ clientele. Whatever the commitment of the National Church to the Gaelic language and culture, the people of St. Columba’s see this as a primary *raison d’être*. There are however other distinguishing features which will also be important as the congregation faces the future and defines and refines its mission priorities.

St Columba’s (unusually in the Gaelic speaking church), proclaims itself as standing in the “Moderate” tradition. This identity has deep historic roots. There is not absolute clarity on what this means today. Is it a theological / doctrinal statement? Or does it affect how the congregation reacts to the rapidly changing social mores of the 21st century? The term “moderate” dates back to the 18th century, and drew on the acceptance of Enlightenment ideas. In the 19th century, Moderatism influenced church politics in debates whose significance has long since faded away. Its meaning does not automatically translate into “liberal”, “radical” or “progressive”, terms which although commonly used in the modern church are themselves notoriously difficult to pin down, not least because they are used as often pejoratively as positively. So what does it mean to be “moderate” in today’s church? This is a question that the people of St. Columba’s has considered carefully as they seek to work out their mission in today’s world. The Highland identity, as in most rural areas, naturally involves a certain conservatism. Moreover, the history of the Highlands has resulted in long memories for the injustices of the past. However, there should be no doubt that Glasgow Gaels can be as cosmopolitan, progressive and outward looking as anybody else living in a large, international city. These qualities feature strongly in the people of St. Columba’s. In practice, the Kirk Session has agreed recognise that “moderate” in the 21st century should mean openness to diversity, a

non-judgmental acceptance of all people, and a way of understanding the teaching of the Bible that places the loving and reconciling nature of God, revealed in Jesus Christ, at the centre. This is reflected in St Columba's Mission Plan's action points – perhaps to an extent that will be surprising to some who have a more stereotypical understanding of the Highland Church as a deeply conservative institution.

St. Columba's and its Wider Context

Many of the issues discussed above call for a coordinated and national response. The problems of Gaelic churches and the challenges of Gaelic worship and ministry cannot be solved by any one congregation in isolation. The Presbytery and the General Assembly, particularly its Gaelic Group, are essential allies. Always, it is important for any congregation considering or redefining its mission to base such consideration upon the real issues that face us, mindful of the demands both of our Lord whose love inspires us to minister in his name, and the multifaceted culture and diverse needs of the country that is our home.

The Presbytery Plan

The National Guidelines approved by the Assembly 2005 were the Church's first attempt to use national Census data in a consistent way across the country. Taking seriously the implications of the Third Article Declaratory, they encouraged the church to apply a uniform numerical model to developing Presbytery Plans. The Church has since refined and developed the principles it uses to drive Presbytery planning. While population will remain a key element in Planning, it is evident that there are other factors that need to be taken into account. Thus a set of principles has been adopted that will inform the Church's planning. The "primary principle" is Mission.

No doubt mindful of this, the Appeal Committee of the Commission of Assembly that considered St Columba Gaelic Church's appeal against Glasgow Presbytery's Plan as it affected it, in upholding the congregation's Appeal in April 2015, provided that a new section of the Plan be negotiated, and that this should be "based on a **mission plan** for the congregation which will address the future of buildings."

Among a list of "secondary principles" used in formulating Presbytery Plans, those that most closely relate to the position of St. Columba's are "Communities" (as opposed to congregations), "Congregations" (identifying and prioritising those that are developing an "outward looking focus"), and "Buildings" where it is stated, "Presbyteries will want to consider which buildings are essential and useful for the mission they envisage."

Prior to its suspension in 2015, the Presbytery Plan envisaged St Columba's moving from its current "Vacant" status to Guardianship. This part of the Plan was accepted by the congregation, however the "Buildings" part of the Plan which was added later, gave a Category 3 status to the church, (undecided). The clear intention in the longer term, indicated verbally, involved the congregation relocating to another building, most likely shared with another congregation. To lose the minister under Guardianship status and then to lose the building amounted to a loss of identity too great for the congregation to accept. This triggered the 2015 appeal.

It should also be noted that St. Columba Gaelic Church has for many years been designated "GE" – a charge in which it is "essential that the minister conduct regular worship in Gaelic". Since 2003, such designation requires to be incorporated in the Presbytery Plan, in terms of the Appraisal and Adjustment Act (VII, 2003).

Renegotiating the Presbytery Plan will involve a complex balancing act between the Gaelic Essential designation, the provision of an appropriate ministry, and the city centre location, all of which seem to the congregation to lie at the heart of their identity, and all of which are integral to their Mission Plan.

The Local Church Review (2016)

It was agreed that the best way to devise a Mission Plan for St. Columba's was to undergo the Local Church Review (LCR) process. The LCR is distinctively mission focussed. Much thought and planning has already been done to bring the LCR process to its present format, taking the starting point of Act 1, 2011 and tailoring it to the distinct needs of the Presbytery of Glasgow. LCR teams have already gained much valuable experience in the time the scheme has been in operation. All parties were in agreement that there was no better way to fulfil the remit of the Appeal Committee of the Commission of Assembly than to draw on the planning and experience of the LCR teams.

While this process could have resulted simply in the formation of the Mission Plan, it was agreed that St Columba's place in the LCR rota should be brought forward to 2016 in order to complete the requirements of Act 1, 2011. Thus the LCR for St. Columba's was presented to the June 2016 meeting of the Presbytery of Glasgow. The report was passed unanimously, without debate.

Notwithstanding the satisfactory outcome of the Local Church Review, it was recognised that the purpose of the LCR and that of the Mission Plan are not the same. The Kirk Session agreed that while the basis of the Mission Plan should be the Action Points contained in Section 2 of the LCR, those Action Points needed to be fleshed out by placing them in a wider perspective.

This review thus helps to locate the Action Points of the LCR in an appropriate context.

Refining the Mission Plan

At a meeting which included the Convener of the Presbytery Property Committee and the Strategy Officer it was agreed that the Mission Plan needed to be developed to specify aims, objectives, actions and expected outcomes. This was desirable both to focus the congregation's aspirations within an agreed timescale for each point of the Plan, and to present the Plan in a format that was not only most efficacious for church purposes, but most likely to contain the data required by potential grant-giving bodies, if the option of retaining and restoring the current building became the agreed option. Finally, it is clear that no Mission Plan can be static. Some of the Action Points may prove to be fruitful, others not. New Action Points will likely emerge as short term goals are achieved, and practical circumstances evolve and change.

Conclusion

This Mission Plan takes its place in the development of the life of St. Columba Gaelic Church Glasgow, as a resource which will be used as a planning tool, as well as a record of where we find ourselves at this point in time for future interest. While in some senses this report is introspective, the aim is to enable the congregation and its partners to be precisely the opposite, by enabling a better and fuller understanding of who they are. This review on St Columba's past and present are meant to feed into creating a viable, sustainable and constantly evolving plan for the future. Standing alongside this Plan are the Property Report of Austin Smith Lord (2018) and a Business Plan yet to evolve as the future of the present church building is debated, and as potential funding partners are identified. The action points contained in the Local Church Review (appendix) are also crucial and whilst always subject to amendment, form an integral part of the Plan.

Appendix 1: Presbytery of Glasgow - Local Church Review

Name of congregation:	Saint Columba Gaelic
The LCR Team:	Andrew Wale, Marion Macleod; Hilary McDougall (attending)
Initial group meeting:	[See below]
Main Meeting:	9th March 2016

Section 1 – Looking at the present

Brief overview

St Columba's was originally founded in 1770 as a Gaelic Chapel and given a special non-parochial constitution in 1851 (although it now uses the model constitution). The present building dates from 1904. Two services are conducted each Sunday morning, one in English and one in Gaelic.

The charge is vacant, and the Presbytery Plan is currently suspended. Discussions on the future of the congregation, which include the creation of a mission plan and costed and funded proposals for the repair and upkeep of the buildings are taking place between the congregation and Presbytery. The Local Church Review team did not enter into detailed discussions about the building.

What are the values that the congregation consider as shaping and directing the life of their church?

The congregation has three principal aims: to provide reformed worship in Gaelic; to be a gathered church in greater Glasgow for Gaelic and non-Gaelic speakers from the Highlands and Islands (including the descendants of earlier migrants); and to give a welcome to any others who wish to join in their fellowship. The congregation describe themselves as being in the mainstream "moderate" tradition. Over half the congregation are Gaelic speakers.

Innovations, celebrations and learnings

The congregation are proud of their heritage as part of the Gaelic diaspora, and are aware of the affection with which their witness and building are held by people all over the world. They work hard at maintaining their links with other Gaelic/Highland organisations in the greater Glasgow area, particularly the Gaelic School and 'Lodge the Gael', and have recently been able to use YouTube to make services available globally.

Are there any significant challenges facing this congregation and how are they working to overcome them?

The future of the building and the loss of a minister of word and sacrament (particularly one able to conduct baptisms, wedding and Holy Communion in Gaelic) are major challenges. The uncertainty currently experienced because of the ongoing discussions with Presbytery is unavoidable but demoralising. They are currently finalising the mission plan required by the Commission of Assembly decision (see below) and look forward to fruitful discussions about the way forward. During our meetings, there was some discussion about the viability of "pulpit Gaelic" as medium for worship in Gaelic for younger people learning Gaelic in a secular context. It was encouraging to hear that there are discussions going on at a national level about the future of Gaelic worship, and St Columba wish to take a full part in these.

Is there anything to note around compliance with Church Law and General Assembly Deliverances?

There are no problems in compliance with Church Law. Under the terms of the decision of the Commission of Assembly, the section of the Presbytery Plan relating to St Columba Gaelic is currently suspended to allow the creation of a mission plan which will address the future of the building.

Section 2 - Looking forward

What key area(s) does this church wish to move forward with in the next 5 years?

Future Planning, Worship, Community, Mission, Belonging

How do they look to achieve this?

To what key area does this action relate?	What actions will you take to move forward in this area?	Aim to start by	Aim to complete by	Who will be the key people responsible for taking this forward?	Who will provide support from the wider church? <i>(NB the LCR team can help with this column)</i>
Future Planning	Complete mission plan as required by Commission of Assembly	Ongoing	30 July 2016	Session, Board, Congregation	Presbytery
Future Planning	Work with Presbytery to agree conditions for revised Presbytery Plan.	August 2016	December 2016	Session, Interim Moderator	Strategic Planning Committee
Future Planning	Develop project(s) for submission to funding agencies to advance extension of Gaelic worship. This might be part of any nationwide initiative which might emerge from national discussions	January 2017	December 2017	Session with input from congregation	Go for it!, Central Church initiatives
Worship	Re-start Sunday evening service, with emphasis on use of informal Gaelic	11/16	Ongoing	Locum minister, Session, Board+Members, adherents	
Worship	Develop mid-week Bible study and prayer; plan new Alpha course	September 2016	Ongoing	Locum minister, existing Bible Study group	
Worship	Increase special services including Gaelic School services	Started		Interim Moderator and Locum	
Community	Develop LGBTI group for Gaelic speakers and learners	Started		Interim Moderator	
Community	Improve garden area for public use	Started	11/16	Congregational Board, with members, adherents	
Mission	Further develop existing Facebook site and YouTube coverage	Ongoing		Clerk to the Board	Mhairi MacKechnie and Strategy Officer
Mission	Become Foodbank store and satellite distribution point	7/16		Session Clerk	Trussel Trust
Mission	Develop plans to create week-day cafe	12/16		Session Clerk	Work with established charity provider, taking advice from

					agencies such as Socialbite, Wild Olive Tree or The Spoon Café (Unity Enterprise).
Belonging	Update data protection in order to engage with members and adherents	8/16		Data Committee and Kirk Session	
Belonging	Survey existing links with local Highland communities and investigate other similar communities with which links might be formed; devise appropriate forms of service which might be offered.	September 2016	December 2017	Session Clerk and whole church	
Belonging	Develop further Church Open Days	Ongoing		Session and Board Clerks	

What additional help or resources will the congregation need?

The congregation will need substantial advice and support in the second half of 2016 as they complete their mission plan and work through its implications with the Presbytery. This will come, in the first instance, from the Interim Moderator and Presbytery officials and committees.

How does the Presbytery Plan fit with these action points?

The Presbytery Plan is currently suspended for St Columba Gaelic following a decision from the Commission of Assembly. Discussions currently being held between the congregation and Presbytery are to lead to a mission plan for the congregation which will address the future of the building.

The mission plan and its implications were touched on during discussions between the team and the congregation. They were not made a matter for detailed discussion and the Local Church Review team took the view that it should not enter into the substance of the mission plan. The action plan therefore contains a mixture of short term aims (including the completion of the mission plan) and longer-term intentions, which assume the successful completion of negotiations.

Visiting Team - recommendations and advice

The visiting team were made very aware of the difficulties which the congregation currently face. It was not our remit to enter into detailed discussion of matters to be considered under the Mission Plan, and therefore our interaction with St Columba Gaelic related in some sense to a hypothetical situation when the current problems have been addressed. We applaud their intention to renew and extend their links with the Highland community in the Greater Glasgow area, and in particular to form links with those, particularly Gaelic speakers, who may attend other churches, but who might value additional contact with St Columba. We also encourage them to extend the existing links with the Gaelic School.

It was clear throughout the two meetings that the congregation regard the retention of the existing building as central to their identity. For them to succeed in this, we would urge them to look even more urgently than they are doing at present at new and innovative uses for the building, perhaps with other partners, for example non-profit-making groups such as those who provide drop-in café facilities, or even other Christian groups who may be looking for accommodation in the city centre.

Are there any specific points for the Superintendence committee to note?

None

Congregation comment

None

June 2016, Rev. Nov 2019.