



SUTHERLAND PRESBYTERY PLAN

CONSULTATION DOCUMENT



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INTRODUCTION

“ Sutherland encompasses a large part of the northern Highlands and has some of the most striking and beautiful beaches and landscapes in the country. The area stretches north from Dornoch in the east, sharing a boundary with Caithness, and in the west stretches from Lochinver north to Durness and Cape Wrath.¹

With a land mass of over 2000 square miles, Sutherland (5 times the size of Orkney) has a total population of around 13,000 and as most of the densely populated areas are on the East Coast, much of the area is sparsely inhabited in smaller villages.

Sutherland is a remote area, falling within the Scottish Government's definition of 'remoteness'.

“ *Andrew Copus of the Hutton Institute was recently asked by the Scottish Government to draw up a map of Scotland's remote areas using this approach to remoteness. He recommended a definition that classed as remote those areas that couldn't access 10,000 people within a 30- minute journey. Based on this calculation, the resulting map shows clearly that Sutherland – not the islands - is the most remote part of Scotland. Only the south-east corner, with easy access to towns in Ross-shire is not classed as remote under Andrew's definition.*²

Poverty is a problem within Sutherland, with limited employment opportunities, many workers take on several jobs to make ends meet and with increasing costs, usage of food banks and larders is increasing significantly. Despite the remoteness of Sutherland, it receives 60% less government funding than remote islands³ and a Sutherland Fuel Poverty report from November 2021 outlines the significant challenges for households living in the area.

“ *The latest Scottish Government figures show that 33% of all households living in the 'remote rural' areas of Scotland – like Sutherland – are living in extreme fuel poverty with a further 9% living in ordinary fuel poverty. A total of 42% fuel poor households. These figures compare with 11% and 13% respectively for 'the rest of Scotland' – 24% in total.*⁴

Like the rest of the Highland Council area, Sutherland is experiencing population decline due to an aging population and the lack of job opportunities, which means that many young people migrate to Inverness and other cities for better employment prospects. The beauty of the area is desirable as a retirement location for many, and this has increased the price of properties, making them inaccessible to first time buyers, which also encourages migration. Several third sector charities are seeking to address this issue by building affordable housing on available

¹ <https://www.hspc.co.uk/explore-highlands.asp?county=6> accessed (04/07/22)

² <https://www.northern-times.co.uk/news/long-read-the-challenges-sutherland-faces-are-formidable-236193/> (accessed 05/07/22)

³ *ibid*

⁴ highlandcpp.org.uk/uploads/9/5/2/0/95206114/sutherland_fuel_poverty_report_november_2021_final.pdf (accessed 05/07/22)

land. One recent example was the sale of the Lochinver glebe to the Assynt Development Trust, who are actively working to secure funding to build new affordable housing in the area.

THE CURRENT SITUATION IN THE PRESBYTERY OF SUTHERLAND

There are presently five full-time ministers in post within Sutherland Presbytery, along with one OLM and one Auxiliary Minister; two Readers and two Locums (one of whom is the Auxiliary minister). Of the full-time ministers, two are located within six miles of each other and one is in reviewable tenure.

Sunday services are being conducted in thirteen congregations across the presbytery and additional pulpit supply is being required each week. Most congregations are made up of elderly members, with the majority over seventy and there are few young people actively involved in church life. Poor public transport infrastructure and large road distances between congregations stretches resources but wholesale closure of churches would more rapidly increase decline.

An aging membership has a financial impact and demands more resources in terms of pastoral care and funeral services. Some congregations due to being in areas of natural beauty have a larger number of weddings but across the presbytery, baptisms are few and far between. In the past in the rural communities of Sutherland, church attendance was a feature of life every Sunday but with so many competing activities and the increasing secularisation of society church attendance has fallen dramatically over the years. Covid lockdowns introduced congregations to the live streaming of services and for some elderly members this has become the way they now attend church as they have remaining concerns over their health and safety.

The lack of those under forty attending the church presents the greatest challenge to the future of the church in Sutherland and addressing this must be the top priority for the planning process.

The presbytery has operated with stretched resources for some years now however the move to a much larger presbytery in 2023 has now been approved. This will include a number of full time positions at Presbytery level that is hoped will ease some of the administrative burdens at the local level.

This is the context within which the Church of Scotland in Sutherland operates and with ministry allocation reductions from seven full time equivalent posts to four, an overture at the General Assembly of 2022 gave voice to some of the concerns of the presbytery to these reductions.

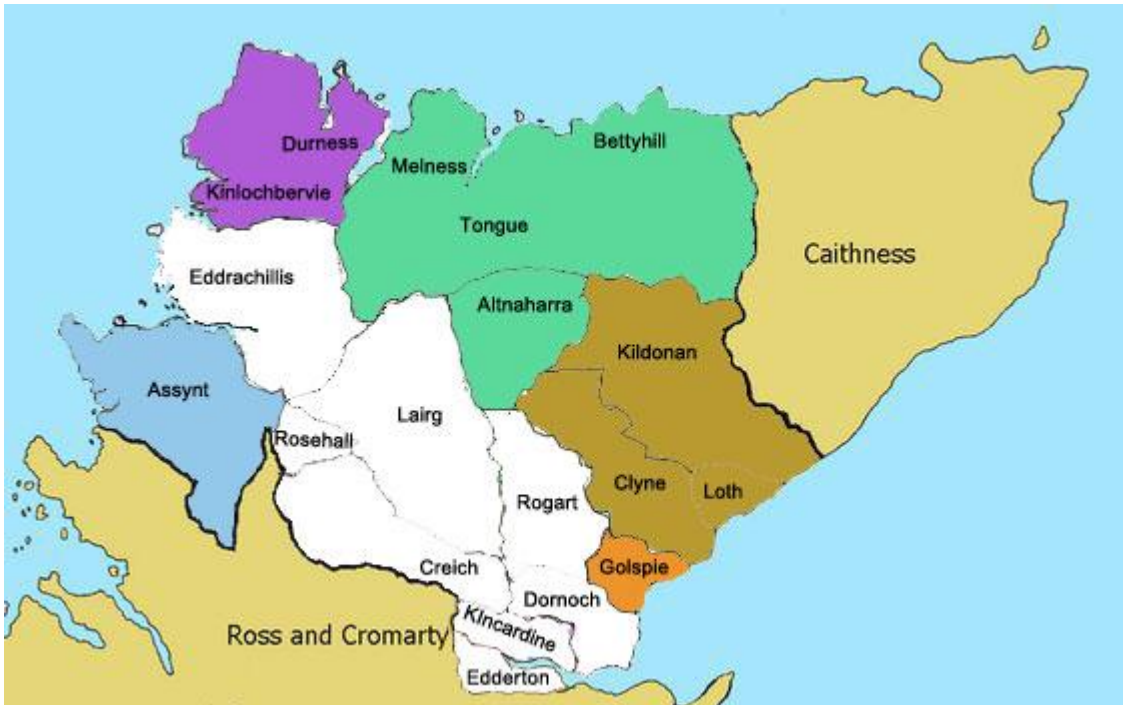
As the overture failed, this plan explores how future ministry can be conducted within Sutherland with four full time posts in alignment with the five marks of mission. Many innovative ideas were considered when working through the planning process but there are constraints that will limit what could have been achieved with additional resources, such as ministers in unrestricted charges and an aging Christian community. Despite these realities, we have developed a plan that will prioritise mission within four parish areas.

DRAFT

MAPPING PARISH AREAS

Current Map of Sutherland Presbytery Parishes (based on seven full-time FTE)

Before we look to the future, the map below shows the current configuration of the parishes in Sutherland with the congregations that have no full-time minister in white.

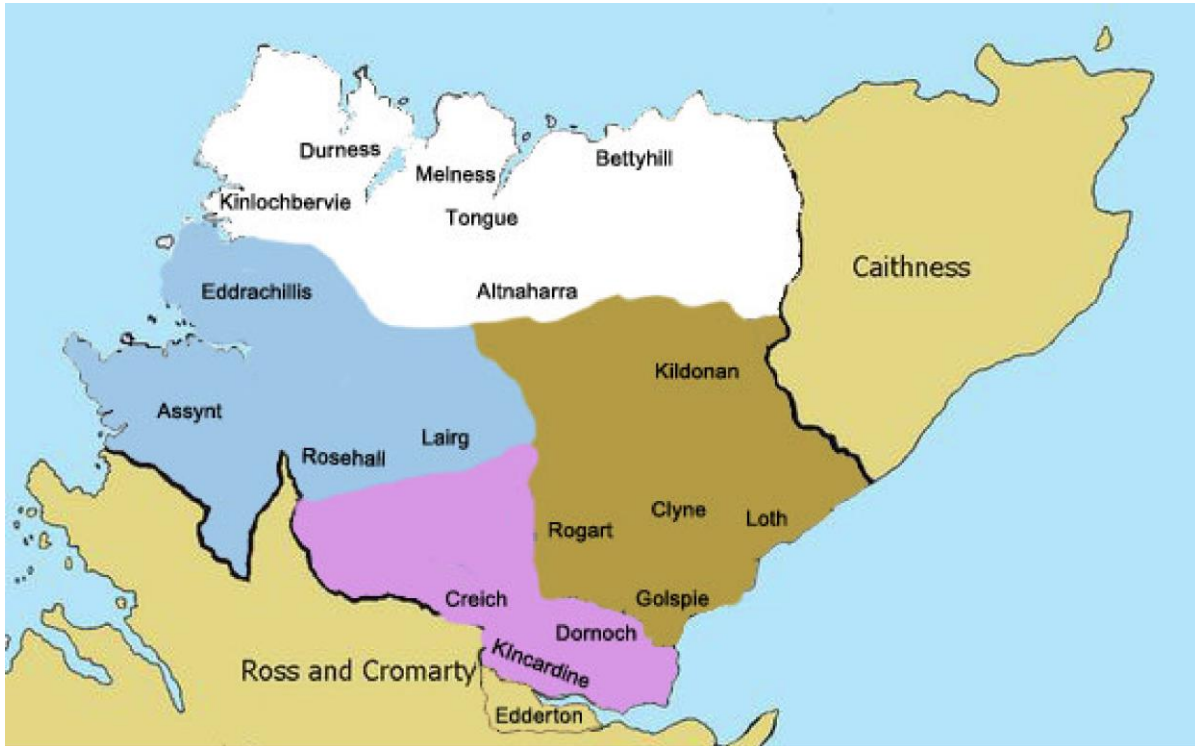


The current configuration leaves a large void in the centre of Sutherland with a high dependence on locums, OLMs, readers and other pulpit supply, as many of the parishes have been vacant. Whilst this maintains a pattern of regular services, it does little to drive mission and evangelism.

The status of each congregation prior to the presbytery planning process is detailed below:

Current Congregations	Tenure	Population
Altnaharra & Farr linked with Melness & Tongue	Unrestricted	1521
Assynt & Stoer	Unrestricted	1021
Clyne linked with Kildonan and Loth, Helmsdale	Unrestricted	2629
Creich linked with Kincardine, Croick and Edderton (Rosehall)	Vacant	2067
Dornoch Cathedral	Vacant	2478
Durness and Kinlochbervie	Reviewable	668
Eddrachillis	Deferred linkage (Vacant)	1661
Golspie	Unrestricted	1349
Lairg linked with Rogart	Vacant	2629

Future Map of Sutherland Presbytery Parishes (based on four full-time FTE)



The map above illustrates the parish areas which the four ministry posts will cover. The small village of Edderton where the church closed in 2021 would be better served by Tain Parish Church, which is why it has not been included within the southern parish boundary.

The parish areas which will be supported by four full-time posts are shown below:

Future Congregations	Tenure	Population
Altnaharra & Farr, Durness & Kinlochbervie, Melness & Tongue	Unrestricted	2209
Assynt & Stoer, Eddrachillis, Lairg & Rosehall	Unrestricted	2479
Clyne, Kildonan and Loth, Helmsdale, Golspie & Rogart	Unrestricted	4748
Creich, Dornoch Cathedral, Kincardine, Croick and Edderton	Vacant	4330

These four geographical parish areas are essential to provide ministry coverage for the whole of Sutherland. It is recognised that the larger geographies and larger groupings will be challenging and therefore ministry expectations will need to change both at congregational and parish levels. The driving times between parishes are highlighted in Appendix 1.

In addition to the regular duties of parish ministry, each FTE ministry post in each region will incorporate an allocation of 0.2 FTE within their role towards specific and agreed mission opportunities within this area.

The proposed Unions and rationale behind each parish grouping is outlined below.

Proposed Unions

Western Parish Area

(Assynt & Stoer with Eddrachillis united with Lairg and Rosehall)

- Union of Assynt & Stoer with Eddrachillis
- Union of Lairg and Rosehall
- Union of Lairg & Rosehall with united charge of Assynt & Eddrachillis

Southern Parish Area

(Dornoch, Creich, Kincardine and Croick)

- Union of Creich, Kincardine and Croick (Kyles of Sutherland Parish)
- Union of Dornoch Cathedral with united charge of Kyles of Sutherland
- Potential transfer of Edderton (4 miles from Tain) into Tain Parish Church's parish

Eastern Parish Area

(Clyne linked with Kildonan and Loth, Helmsdale and Golspie & Rogart)

- Union of Clyne with Kildonan and Loth, Helmsdale
- Union of Golspie and Rogart
- Deferred union of Golspie and Rogart with Clyne, Kildonan & Loth, Helmsdale

Northern Parish Area

(Durness & Kinlochbervie, Melness & Tongue and Altnaharra & Farr)

- Parish grouping of all northern parish area
- Union of Durness & Kinlochbervie with Melness & Tongue
- Deferred union of the new united charge with Altnaharra & Farr
- Sale of existing manses and purchase of a more centrally located manse
- Potential deferred transfer discussions of the easternmost parts of the parish to Caithness Presbytery

Area Rationale

Northern Parish Grouping

The Northern Parish Grouping incorporates the parishes of Kinlochbervie and Durness in the northwest, Melness and Tongue and Altnaharra and Farr, in the northeast. Although there has been a linkage between the latter two congregations this has not worked well and with the development of a Space Hub in the Melness area there is an opportunity to start afresh with a union between Melness and Tongue and Kinlochbervie and Durness. The development of the Space Hub in the Melness area is already underway, which will employ 61 people in the short term and 250 over the longer term,⁵ and outreach to this growing community is seen as a priority as is pioneering to develop new worshipping communities across the northern parish area.

Discussions with Caithness Presbytery are required to explore whether there are opportunities to merge some activities within the Bettyhill area, where there is already some crossover, before committing to a union of Altnaharra and Farr with the united congregation of Kinlochbervie, Durness, Melness and Tongue.

The location of manses in Bettyhill and Kinlochbervie at the extremities of the new parish area are not suitable locations from which to effectively minister in this area. The sale of both manses will facilitate the acquisition of a new manse somewhere around the Tongue area.

Western Parish Grouping

It is envisaged that the Western parish area will be accomplished within two stages. Firstly, a union between Assynt & Stoer with Eddrachillis should be established at the earliest possibility. A union between Lairg and Rosehall should also be formalised at the earliest possibility. Finally, the larger parish grouping will consist of a union between all four existing parish congregations – Lairg, Rosehall, Assynt & Stoer and Eddrachillis. This will result in one Kirk session that will be responsible across the four parish areas. One full FTE position will be allocated to this union.

The union of Lairg and Rosehall within the Western Parish area was primarily based on the proximity of both these parish areas. The inclusion of the union of Lairg and Rosehall into the Western Parish area of the union between Assynt & Stoer and Eddrachillis was based on geographical coverage and population figures.

Due to the distances between parishes, it will not be possible for one FTE to conduct live Sunday worship within each congregation on a weekly basis. Weekly worship for each individual congregation could potentially continue to be supported. This could be achieved by a combination of a rotational ministry presence along with a mix of the use of technology to live stream or host a pre-record weekly sermon. Using this approach, the congregation would still meet in their familiar building and participate in the singing of hymns, scripture readings and prayers together.

⁵ Sutherland Space Hub puts 'north on the map as an innovator in space technology' <https://www.northern-times.co.uk/news/sutherland-space-hub-puts-north-on-the-map-as-an-innovator-257870/> accessed 31/05/2022

Eastern Parish Grouping

The Eastern Parish Groupings would be made up of Golspie, Rogart, Brora and Helmsdale. The rationale behind this is based on population centres and distances between the 4 churches. Brora and Helmsdale are already in a linkage and will become a union at the most appropriate opportunity. Rogart is at present without a minister and it is proposed that they would form a union with either Golspie or the united charges of Brora and Helmsdale as soon as is practical. The order in which the unions between the four churches are to proceed is yet to be determined. As Brora and Golspie both have ministers on unrestricted tenure, this parish grouping would remain in a deferred union with one other until one of the two current ministers have either left or retired. The total population of Golspie, Brora, Helmsdale and Rogart together are high for Sutherland, although the distances involved are relatively short. Due to the cumulative distances and the fact that the 4 churches would ultimately become one union with one Kirk Session, it is unlikely that it would be possible for all churches to have a service with the minister in person every week. However, technology such as is already installed in Clyne Church could be put in all 4 churches so that the same weekly service could be accessed by all.

Southern Parish Grouping

The rationale for merging the parishes of Dornoch, Kincardine, Croick and Creich are both historical and geographical.

The parishes within the Southern Parish groupings are in relatively proximity to one another and are therefore more easily accessible than in some of the other parish groupings. Additionally, the Dornoch Firth Group that operates across each parish area has become a well-established grouping for over a decade and continues to work well. There is already a close working relationship with the congregation of Dornoch Cathedral and the other congregations in the area.

As with the other parish groupings, it will not be possible to provide a minister led service on a weekly basis within each congregation however worship could be arranged on a rotational basis, particularly within the Kyle of Sutherland parishes.

The rationale behind the potential transfer of ministry responsibilities to the parish of Edderton back to the Presbytery of Ross is based on its historical original placing.

Each individual parish congregation will be able to lean on each other's strengths and help with each other's weaknesses. A union into one Kirk Session will ensure diversity of thinking, aligned activities and outreach to all areas within the grouping.

In time, and if financially viable, it may be possible for this area grouping to employ an assistant minister that could be based in the manse at Ardgay. It should also be possible for ministers in training to spend part of their training placements or probation attachments across this grouping, with accommodation provided in the manse at Ardgay.

Pioneering Ministry

In addition to the four FTE parish ministry posts, there is a need for pioneering ministry to serve across the parish areas of the presbytery. Pioneering ministry is distinct from parish ministry in that its main aim is to spread the good news of the gospel beyond existing church boundaries. Pioneers connect with people outside of Church, creating new ways of doing Church together in their community. Pioneering ministry looks at potential new areas for church planting and growth for mission.

In 2023 a Seeds for Growth fund will be launched in which presbyteries can apply for a grant to fund new pioneering positions. The planning team propose to apply for two full time pioneering positions that will primarily focus on two main areas

- Pioneering ministry to the under 40s. The focus would be to engage with the younger demographic within the region focusing on developing deeper relationships within the school settings and enabling new ways to connect with young families.
- Pioneering ministry to rural areas and industries. The focus would be to the Crofting, Fishing and agricultural communities within Sutherland bringing ministry to these industries natural hubs and gathering points.

As things currently stand, presbytery cannot assume that full funding will be granted for these pioneering positions and therefore these posts cannot be guaranteed within this current version of the mission plan. The team will build upon the assurances made by the General Trustees of the Church of Scotland, after the overture presented in May 2022 was overturned, that they will work with the planning team to assist with any application to the Seeds for Growth fund. It is envisaged that vacant manses could be used to accommodate any pioneering ministry post e.g. Pioneering ministry to the under 40s could be based in Lairg manse, which would enable them to access all parish areas within the presbytery.

Additional pioneering opportunities will also be considered for each parish grouping subject to grant applications from pioneer mission funds. These could include a focus on industries such as pilgrimage, tourism, and explore the potential for pioneering ministry within the proposed space station in the Northern area of Sutherland.

Future role of OLMs, Readers and Retired Ministers

The changes above will necessitate consultation with OLMs and readers to align their activities with the missional goals of the plan, though that may be through direct action or helping to free up others to prioritise mission. The role of retired ministers within Sutherland Presbytery will also be explored.

THE MISSION PRIORITY & STRATEGY

The mission imperative is clear in the Presbytery of Sutherland with declining numbers and aging members within most congregations across the presbytery. There are few active young people involved in church life and engaging young people with the Christian message is essential for the future of the church in Sutherland. Therefore, reaching young people must be a top priority.

Making time for Mission.

Increased parish areas and reduced resources, present a significant challenge to the plan and that is why we begin this section by reviewing how things will need to operate if the necessary priority is to be given to missional activities. Clearly, the way things have been done needs to change.

In his book '*Necessary Endings*' Dr Henry Cloud discusses the need for pruning to increase '*focus, mission, purpose, structure, and strategic execution*'. He identified three areas that need to be pruned if growth is to become a reality:

- Where sick branches are taking up time that should be devoted to healthy ones
- Where dead branches need to be pruned so that healthy growth can flourish
- Where too many buds are developing and threaten the fruitfulness of the harvest⁶

The lesson is clear in our context, where too much time has been spent on things that are sick and dying instead of the things that have potential to thrive. The hardest part can be cutting off things that are dead, so that space is made for the things that have the potential to grow. We also need to be careful that we do not start too many initiatives otherwise we will stretch our limited resources and achieve very little.

Ministry Roles

We have examined several possible ministry roles that could be introduced but given the vast geographical areas that require to be covered, we see little alternative to deploying four full-time ministers of word and sacrament within four parish areas. It has been hard to recruit for full-time posts given the remoteness of the area and higher costs of living, so we have concluded that part-time posts are not viable in our presbytery.

Traditional ministry is not delivering growth and it has been demanding a high level of resources for pastoral care and funeral services, but these have brought limited benefit to mission. Therefore, the role of the ministry must '*shift from church-centred mission to a mission-centred church,*'⁷ and the danger that things go on as before must be avoided. Updated job descriptions will help to reflect the priority of mission and assign key aspects of the mission imperative to the four post holders. To ensure that real change occurs across the presbytery. At least 0.2 of each role will be required to focus the mission priority across the presbytery in four key areas:

- Training of lay people in ministry and mission
- Mission to the under 40s and young families
- Mission to the over 40s and senior citizens
- Mission to the NC500 visitors

Church members perceive the role of the minister as it has been done traditionally in the past, but this perception needs to change as members start to take responsibility for tasks that were previously the responsibility of the minister.

⁶ Cloud, H. (2011). *Necessary Endings* (12/19/10 ed.). Harper Business, p. 15-16, 29

⁷ Wickeri, P. L. *Mission from the Margins: The Missio Dei in the Crisis of World Christianity*. *International Review of Mission* no 369. pp 182-199. 2004

Time must be freed up for minister to prioritise mission and to devote the bulk of their time to reaching un-churched people in their communities. This means more responsibility will fall on OLMs, readers, elders and members for pastoral care and missional outreach as it was modelled in the early church.

The Presbytery has been slow to address church closures. Even when decisions have been agreed, they are reopened, and as a result little progress has been made. This clearly cannot continue, and hard decisions must be made and implemented given that ministry resources are greatly reduced. Yet, in a presbytery area where there is poor transport infrastructure, churches that serve remote communities that can be funded locally and require little maintenance should be retained and utilised to serve the mission imperative in these scattered communities.

Sunday Services



Instead of having two or three services on a Sunday in different locations, which demand extensive travel, one service will be broadcast via livestreaming to smaller satellite churches with local participation of members in readings and prayers from different locations and congregations.

This will require investment in technology such as large screens, computers and video equipment.

The missional initiatives that are proposed within this plan, have been carefully considered in terms of their ease of implementation, capability to be resourced and the likelihood of them delivering on the planned objectives.

Worship Services

Due to the geographical coverage that each individual minister will have to cover it may be that worship services out with a traditional Sunday morning will have to be introduced. Having different types of worship services on different days of the week would enable the minister to maintain pastoral relationships with a congregation. Services out with a Sunday could also provide an outreach opportunity for those that are unable to worship on a Sunday morning due to other commitments. The use of technology as mentioned earlier could also be used to provide different styles of worship that may appeal to different demographics.

Training of Church Members & Elders

Discussions are underway with HTC, Dingwall for the provision of training on pastoral care and leading worship. Training materials have been acquired from Angus and Hamilton presbyteries so that in-house training of elders to take funeral services can take place.

As it is envisaged that church members will be actively involved in evangelism and outreach, training will be provided on how to unobtrusively move conversations to matters of faith and deliver a simple outline of the Gospel message within each parish area.

Whilst the plan offers guidance and some examples of good practice in missional outreach it leaves each congregation to decide the initiatives that will be most effective for outreach into their local communities and the training that will be required to support them.

Accountability

One of the historic failings in the presbytery has been its unwillingness to address congregations and ministries that are failing, and this will need to change. Each congregation and minister's mission activities will need to be held accountable for their commitment to and their success in achieving the objectives of the mission plan within their own context.

The Five Marks of Mission

As we start to map out the strategy, we will do so focusing on the five marks of mission, which have been defined in their simplest form as Tell, Teach, Tend, Transform and Treasure. Whilst a simple and memorable summary is helpful, it will need to be clearly understood without any ambiguity, so we have opted to summarise the five marks of mission with the following terms: Outreach, Discipleship, Service, Advocacy and Care for Creation.

The more comprehensive statement of the five marks of mission is as follows:

- To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom (Outreach)
- To teach, baptise and nurture new believers (Discipleship)
- To respond to human need by loving service (Service)
- To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation (Advocacy)
- To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth (Care for Creation)

Missio Dei – The Mission of God

As we start to outline our missional approach, it is important to note that *'mission is, primarily and ultimately, the work of the Triune God, Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier, for the sake of the world.'*⁸ Therefore, all that follows is presented in recognition of the importance of prayer, total dependence on the Holy Spirit and seeking to determine where God is already working, creating a hunger for spiritual reality. We noted earlier the need for a *'shift from church-*

⁸ Bosch, D. J. (2011). *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (American Society of Missiology Series) (20th Anniversary ed.). Orbis. p. 391

*centred mission to a mission-centred church,*⁹ and we recognise that this will be challenging for some ministers and congregations, but it is an essential change of perspective.

Corporate prayer in each parish area should be seen as much a priority as the activity being undertaken to reach unchurched people. Jesus used the metaphor of the vine and the branches to hit home to his disciples the meaning of *'without me you can do nothing'* (John 15:5) and we must recognise that this remains true. Our plans will only succeed with God's help, but that does not mean that we do nothing, instead we are encouraged to pray hard and work hard.

The work of rebuilding is never easy, yet we are reminded of God's encouraging words to those who had returned from exile to rebuild Jerusalem's broken-down walls: *'Do not despise small beginnings, for the Lord rejoices to see the work begin. All this may seem impossible to you now, a small remnant of God's people. But is it impossible for me? So don't be afraid. Be strong, and get on with rebuilding,'* (Zechariah 4:10 & 8:6, 13)

Outreach

The word 'outreach' has been chosen deliberately as historically proclaiming the Good News was seen as something that was solely done within the church context. With few non-Christians attending churches, it is essential that missional outreach to share the Good News is done in the communities and places where people are located. This plan does not advocate how this work is done within the local context, but it does require that outreach into the community is given priority. All activities should build relationships so that sharing of the Gospel can take place in a similar way to how Jesus connected with the woman at the well of Samaria.

1. Engaging and attracting those aged 40 and under (children, young people and families)

The days when lots of young children came to church are long gone and most congregations have very few children involved in church life, unless they have a Boy's Brigade or Girl's Brigade company. We need to move away from thinking that the only measure of successful youth ministry is how many children attend our Sunday Schools, instead we need to find new ways of engaging with young people in the places where they are located.

Schools

Primary and secondary schools provide excellent opportunities to connect with young people. Where there is an openness to teach about the Christian faith on a weekly basis through the curriculum of excellence these opportunities should be taken and there are plenty of excellent resource materials available that inspire pupils to fully engage with the subject matter. A few pilot projects have presented the Christian message through art, film and drama and similar projects are encouraged. Where the school and church are located close to one another, this can provide opportunities for special services at the end of term and at Christmas time.

Young families

⁹ Wickeri, P. L. Mission from the Margins: The Missio Dei in the Crisis of World Christianity. International Review of Mission no 369. pp 182-199. 2004

Many of the churches in Sutherland have halls, which are often utilised by community groups and provide a helpful income to the congregation but do little for mission. Each congregation is being asked to review how they utilise their halls and to prioritise projects that fit with the church's mission objectives. Programmes such as Mainly Music, Scripture Union's Prime Time, Summer and Autumn holiday clubs and other youth programmes are to be encouraged. We should look for ways to extend café church and messy church programmes into each parish area.

2. Developing mission through new worshipping communities (including online worship)

The Presbytery of Sutherland is totally committed to mission and with several new ministries recently begun a host of pilot programmes are currently underway. The pilot projects have the potential to help congregations within the presbytery reach age groups and parts of their communities that they are currently struggling to connect with in a meaningful way.

Some of the projects listed below are live, some are about to be launched and others are in the early stages of development, and they are listed to illustrate what can be achieved with a little imagination, even with the limited resources available.

Workshops will be held quarterly across the presbytery to come up with new ideas and to share best practice on the initiatives that are delivering the best results.

Songs of Hope

Music is a great relationship builder and can be a great route to connecting with unchurched people. One pilot has been set up called 'Songs of Hope' and it is proving to be effective in engaging the under 40s. Several under 40s have stepped forward to sing some contemporary Christian songs alongside other hope filled secular songs and opportunities to have conversations about the Christian faith have emerged. It is hoped that this initiative could lead to a new worshipping community that meets monthly for a contemporary service of praise and worship. Songs of Hope evenings can reach un-churched people with a light Christian message.

Never Thirst Again Water Stations



Church buildings can be liabilities or assets. They can be liabilities when they demand major finance for their upkeep, but they can also be missional assets, that presently are under employed. Dornoch Cathedral and other churches in key locations are a major draw for tourists who visit Sutherland in big numbers. Cafés and restaurants compete for their business but there are few places that provide water stations to fill water bottles. With a few volunteers trained to communicate the Gospel message, a water station can increase the traffic through these buildings, yet a water station is a perfect place where a spiritual conversation can take place. Jesus demonstrated how a simple conversation at a well led to the transformation of a whole community. For a relatively low cost these water stations can be installed and be operational very quickly. In line with our care for creation, no plastic cups

would be available but stainless-steel water bottles would be available for sale at a small cost. A pilot is due to become operational in September 2022.

Cultivate

We would encourage Kirk Sessions to explore the use of glebe land and whether glebes could be developed for community use. Polytunnels set up on glebe land could provide families with an opportunity to work together and support their household income. With poverty levels in Sutherland high, these poly tunnels could provide families with their own fruit and vegetables. It is envisaged that a percentage of each poly tunnel's production would support local food banks or food larders.

A growing environment provides for relationship development and a place where conversations about God can take place more naturally. This initiative needs to be thought through carefully in conjunction with the legal team and once the plan has been worked through, grant funding applications would be made to provide the necessary funding for the project.

Captivate

This is a skill-based programme aimed at teenagers and young adults which provides training in videography, editing, interviewing and web development. Providing access to video cameras and recording equipment, delegates will create a range of intergenerational videos that engage the community, present Christian values, and build long lasting relationship across the community.

Discipleship

The key measure of effective outreach is the number of people who become disciples and make a commitment to follow Christ. In previous generations almost all baptisms were of young children but today in a society that has little exposure to the Christian faith, baptisms will mostly be of adults and, potentially, their children.

In most congregations there are only a few people who have read the Bible all the way through and have a detailed understanding of its content. Many members want to have deeper insight into what the Bible says. Reading groups, such Immerse Bible Reading programme are to be encourages as they help people to read and reflect on the whole Bible over a three-year period.

Service

Before church initiatives are launched detailed research should be conducted into the needs of the area. Whilst some research data is available online, there is no substitute for consultative dialogue with key service providers within an area, such as medical practices, care providers, council support staff, police officers and direct engagement with the public. Often this type of engagement reveals needs that are hidden from view and these can guide the development of services that can make a real difference to people's lives.

Poverty is a recognised problem across Sutherland and many congregations are already involved in food banks and food larders, which are becoming increasingly essential as living

costs escalate. There is a shift towards food larders rather than food banks, as they tackle waste as well as poverty and have no restrictions on who can access them. Ministers and church members are encouraged to become actively involved in these important community services.

Pastoral care also extends beyond the church membership into the whole community whether that is simply sending a card at a key life event or by offering services that meet the needs of those across the generations.

Advocacy

Domestic violence is an issue in Sutherland and each congregation has been encouraged to adopt the Violence against Women Charter and more recently the plight of Ukrainian refugees has been a focus for prayer at church services with vigils being held in some churches.

Congregations are encouraged to get involved in advocacy to give voice to the voiceless. Organisations such as CSW (Christian Solidarity Worldwide) campaigns for the rights of Christians and other faith groups across the world and church members can influence outcomes by writing letters to MPs and other key decision makers. The presbytery plan leaves each congregation free to determine how to take its advocacy work forward and decide locally what issues it is most passionate about.

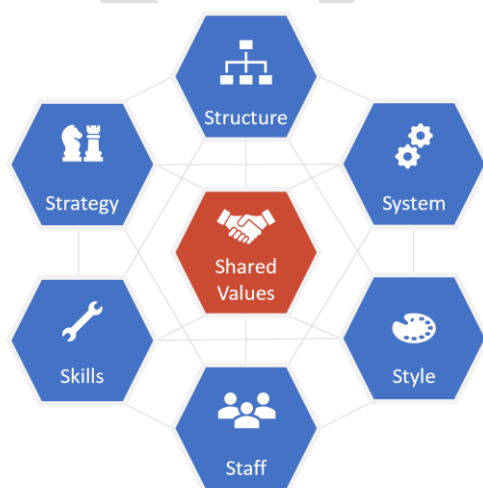
Care for Creation

Every congregation in Sutherland is expected to become an eco-congregation with every major purchase being considered through an environmental lens before being ordered.

Workshops and films that promote care for the creation should be shown in church premises and available to all within the community. Partnerships with local rangers and groups such as Take One Action and which provides films on eco related topics are encouraged.

MAKING THE PLAN WORK

As there are many aspects to this presbytery plan the McKinsey 7S Framework has been selected as a model that will be applied to each of the new parish areas as they form and to ensure that each operates cohesively and effectively within the context of the larger presbytery plan.



At the centre of the model are the **shared values** that will underpin each parish grouping. The code of practice for Prioritising Mission will combine with local shared values.

- Strategy – the mission and specific objectives
- Structure – the leadership structure
- System – the way things are done practically
- Style – the culture that drives the vision
- Staff – individual roles and responsibilities
- Skills – assessing and developing skills

Shared Values

At the heart of the plan are the five marks of mission, which will help to focus the minds of each congregation on what is important - Outreach, Discipleship, Community Service, Advocacy and Care for Creation. As each parish grouping forms there will be a need to create shared relational, behavioural and spiritual values that build strong relationships between the congregations. Facilitated workshops will be needed early in the formation stage to agree these shared values and determine how to embed them in the life of local congregations

Structure

“ The Special Commission on the Third Article Declaratory, in 2010, noted that “the living out of the commitment of Article III may well involve an increasing number of communities where the ministry is exercised largely by the eldership and membership of the Church, albeit under the oversight of an ordained minister.” (8.5.6)¹⁰

The plan envisages parish groupings under the leadership of an ordained minister who will develop the eldership and membership of the congregations to lead worship, take funerals and engage in missional activities within their communities.

The plan seeks to preserve the identity and ministry of congregations and empower them to become more effective in their local areas. One advantage of such groupings is that one treasurer may be able to produce the accounts supported by a simple local finance process.

The independence and autonomy of kirk sessions would be maintained but all the kirk sessions would meet at the same time to create a greater sense of shared responsibility and partnership.

System (IT infrastructure)

Earlier in the plan mention was made of the need for IT infrastructure and this would include broadband, a PA system, large screens, and other specified equipment so that services can be delivered locally via zoom, live streaming or other methods.

Appropriate individuals will need to be recruited and trained to manage the IT desk.

Readings and prayers would be delivered locally in the different churches each Sunday to enable as much participation as possible. It may that some congregations may wish to have a worship leader lead the local service with the sermon being delivered via zoom and there may be other configurations developed at a local level.

On at least a quarterly basis, the minister would lead a service from each of the congregations in the parish grouping.

Style

Leadership styles will vary across the parish groupings in line with the uniqueness of the minister, but the overall approach will be consultative. The culture that will operate in each

¹⁰ <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/resources/presbytery-planning/presbytery-mission-plan-act-guidance-code-of-practice> (accessed 07/07/22)

grouping will have its own local characteristics but foundational to everything will be respect for each other and allowing for differing opinions to be expressed. A key role of the minister will be that of facilitator and cheerleader who encourages everyone to get behind the vision.

Staff

Within each grouping there may be OLMs, Auxiliary Ministers, Readers, Youth Workers, Treasurers and other volunteers and each will bring their own set of skills. It will be important to give clarity to each member of the team as to their roles and responsibilities, and to set up regular developmental reviews.

Skills

A skills audit should be conducted early on, which identifies and seeks to utilise these skills for the benefit of all. There will also be skills that need to be developed and it is envisaged that elders will be trained to conduct funerals and offer pastoral support. As readers can conduct weddings, they should be able to help alleviate pressure in busy parishes such as Dornoch.

Strategy (Planning & Oversight)

The strategy is the key to implementation, development, and the overall success of the plan and as it is so critical, it has been covered elsewhere in the report.

Presbytery has the ultimate responsibility for the success of the plan and as such will monitor each parish area in line with the Prioritising Mission Code of Practice to ensure that the mission is prioritised within every congregation and parish grouping.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1:

Mileage distances between current parish areas.

	Brora	Bettyhill	Bonar Bridge	Dornoch	Durness	Gospie	Helmsdale	Kinlochbervie	Lairg	Lochinver	Melness	Rogart	Rosehall	Scourie	Tongue
Brora															
Bettyhill	57 (1h35m)														
Bonar Bridge	55 (1h41m)	57 (1h35m)													
Dornoch	16 (25m)	27 (38m)													
Durness	79 (2h5m)	40 (1h27m)	63 (1h45m)	21 (28m)	11 (15m)	27 (37m)	18 (38m)	65 (1h37m)	82 (2h6m)	47 (1h11m)	46 (1h4m)	56 (1h25m)	36 (58m)	28 (37m)	83 (2h10m)
Gospie	6 (9m)	79 (2h5m)	40 (1h27m)	63 (1h45m)	21 (28m)	11 (15m)	27 (37m)	18 (38m)	65 (1h37m)	82 (2h6m)	47 (1h11m)	46 (1h4m)	56 (1h25m)	36 (58m)	28 (37m)
Helmsdale	11 (15m)	45 (1h36m)	38 (1h)	57 (1h24m)	61 (1h55m)	11 (15m)	27 (37m)	18 (38m)	65 (1h37m)	82 (2h6m)	47 (1h11m)	46 (1h4m)	56 (1h25m)	36 (58m)	28 (37m)
Kinlochbervie	71 (1h46m)	61 (1h55m)	57 (1h24m)	68 (1h43m)	74 (1h58m)	91 (2h21m)	17 (23m)	65 (1h37m)	82 (2h6m)	47 (1h11m)	46 (1h4m)	56 (1h25m)	36 (58m)	28 (37m)	83 (2h10m)
Lairg	24 (36m)	45 (1h24m)	11 (13m)	56 (1h34m)	18 (38m)	91 (2h21m)	17 (23m)	65 (1h37m)	82 (2h6m)	47 (1h11m)	46 (1h4m)	56 (1h25m)	36 (58m)	28 (37m)	83 (2h10m)
Lochinver	70 (1h45m)	90 (2h35m)	49 (1h19m)	62 (1h36m)	74 (1h58m)	91 (2h21m)	17 (23m)	65 (1h37m)	82 (2h6m)	47 (1h11m)	46 (1h4m)	56 (1h25m)	36 (58m)	28 (37m)	83 (2h10m)
Melness	56 (1h10m)	17 (36m)	42 (1h3m)	65 (1h52m)	30 (1h5m)	62 (1h47m)	69 (1h25m)	48 (1h44m)	46 (1h4m)	92 (2h4m)	92 (2h4m)	53 (1h8m)	22 (35m)	55 (1h50m)	5 (12m)
Rogart	14 (19m)	55 (1h38m)	21 (28m)	68 (1h52m)	68 (1h52m)	8 (10m)	26 (37m)	53 (1h8m)	53 (1h8m)	53 (1h8m)	53 (1h8m)	22 (35m)	22 (35m)	54 (1h11m)	48 (1h13m)
Rosehall	32 (48m)	54 (1h45m)	16 (32m)	25 (40m)	65 (1h50m)	27 (41m)	44 (1h3m)	55 (1h35m)	9 (16m)	36 (58m)	53 (1h39m)	22 (35m)	42 (36m)	42 (36m)	47 (1h22m)
Scourie	68 (1h31m)	68 (1h44m)	54 (1h13m)	66 (1h28m)	25 (45m)	62 (1h22m)	79 (1h56m)	15 (21m)	44 (58m)	28 (37m)	55 (1h50m)	54 (1h11m)	42 (36m)	55 (1h20m)	55 (1h20m)
Tongue	62 (1h48m)	13 (22m)	49 (1h17m)	60 (1h34m)	29 (1h2m)	57 (1h26m)	52 (1h43m)	48 (1h28m)	38 (1h)	83 (2h10m)	5 (12m)	48 (1h13m)	47 (1h22m)	55 (1h20m)	
<i>(Ref: https://distancecalculator.globefeed.com)</i>															
Notes															
All mileages are rounded up to the nearest whole number															
The mileage is the first number, the time is in brackets															
Distances one hour and over are highlighted in yellow															
The times are taken using average traffic flows at the time taken off the website - these are mid morning times, the new ones added in are evening times.															
Comments															
The blue highlights the huge distances covered in the presbytery and one of the consequences of reducing to 4 ministers, however it is split up, is the sheer amount of time spent travelling on poor roads and in all weathers.															