**FUTURE TRAVELLERS GROUP INITIAL MEETING – 7 July 2016**

AIM: To explain why the Kirk Session think that the Future Travellers programme wold be good for us as a church.

* Why is it needed?
* What will it ‘do’?
* What is being asked of each one of us as individuals?

Why is it needed?

* The current state of the church
  + “Stagnant” – numbers; growth; fulfilment of the Simple Church ‘vision’
  + Assumption of what church is ‘for’
  + Moving from A to B

How will we move from A to B? Requires knowing:

* What is A like
* What is B like
* How to make the journey

How will FT help us with that?

* Consider what B is for
* Consider what B can look like in order to be part of God’s mission here and now
* Help us get a vision for B
* Help us in the process of moving from A to B
* Practicalities of that:
  + How FT works

What is being asked of each one of us?

* Commit to be part of the process as wider team or core group
* Commit to the church
* Commit to one another.

1. Coffee
2. Prayer
3. **Intro**

Welcome. The reason we’re here this evening is because the Kirk Session think that it would be a good idea for our church to be involved in a programme called Future Travellers, which is jointly run by two organisations: Forge Scotland and Scottish School of Christian Mission. This programme requires a core group of people within the church to be at the heart of the process. The idea of this evening is to help each one of you decide whether you want to be part of that group. Everyone here this evening are folks who the kirk Session thought had something to contribute but there are probably more people here than there needs to be. That’s quite deliberate as it means that there is no pressure. Already there are one or two folk who have said either ‘it isn’t for me’ or ‘I can’t commit to it right now’ – and that’s OK. This is all part of a discovery process.

So the aim of this evening is - **To explain why the Kirk Session think that the Future Travellers programme wold be good for us as a church.**

* **Why is it needed?**
* **What will it ‘do’?**
* **What is being asked of each one of us as individuals?**
* **And I want to leave some time for prayer at the end…**

I’m going to do a lot of talking this evening – I’m afraid that there isn’t much we can do about that – but I’d much rather that it was more of a conversation, so please jump in. Is this OK – are we clear where we are going and why we are here?

1. Why is it needed?

I’m sure that you all know the history of the church: how 17 years ago the old Stockethill congregation was closed and a few months later a new one begun. Over the last 16 and half years the church has taken root, grown, become established, developed. I am unbelievably grateful to God not only for what he has done amongst us, but the people that have done it together. The fact that we are all here I suspect means that we are all probably quite committed to our church and see it as, for want of a better word, good. We could say a lot that is positive, and I’m sure that we could all come up with ways in which things could change and improve – or that we would just like to see as different.

I’m going to use a fairly negative word to describe our church as it is right now – ‘Stagnant’. Now I know that that is not a nice word, and it might immediately put people on the defensive and in some sense that is good. But I do want to be a little bit… and talk about three related things:

How we’ve perhaps stagnated in terms of growth

How we’ve perhaps stagnated in terms of vision

How we’ve perhaps stagnated in terms of mission

Firstly let me just give you some bare statistics. In 2010 68 adults regularly attended S@C and 38 regularly attended Stocket Grange and/or W.C. In 2015 those numbers were 68 and 40. In other words pretty much exactly the same. But, and here is the catch – between 2010 and 2015 38 adults started attending S@C and 14 the other two congregations. In other words we have had, at the community centre in particular, a 50% turnover.

Now there are all sorts of implications about that:

Hard to sustain relationships.

But it is also hard to sustain the ethos – culture – of the church

And it suggests that our ethos, our culture, our way of doing church – particularly at the community centre – somehow gets stuck around the 60/70 mark – that there is a barrier to growth there.

As you know, there are some distinctives about our church life together – whether it is in the way that we do our services or the way that we structure and run things.

Going back a few years the key phrase that was used was “Simple Church”. Now I could go into this in great detail – I often have – but some of the main things – some of the things we were aiming to be as a church included:

Discipleship taking place in communities of people who were committed to one another and knew one another and loved one another.

That led to a desire for multiple gatherings – multi congregational – reliance on small groups.

Also shaped how we met together – so opportunities of interaction; participation – breakfast, sharing, involvement from lots of people

Mission took place not through the church doing things for the community around us but enabling one another to simply love our neighbours and enabling individuals to ’take the lead’. “The vision of the church is in the hearts of the people”.

Leadership that is about enabling the environment, the atmosphere for these things to happen; supporting and enabling discipleship, worship, mission.

Sustainable with as little resources as possible; reproducible so that new groups, gatherings etc could develop.

Now, there’s a lot more to be said about that and about the pro’s and cons of what we we’ve been about. But I want to just look at 4 areas which suggest that perhaps that vision has stagnated, for whatever reason. Worship, discipleship, leadership and mission.

So for example in worship. One of the distinguishing marks of our church was/is that we gather for breakfast together. I often say that it is part of our worship. But it is questionable if that is true. Breakfast has become for us what ‘coffee after the service’ is for most other churches.

*Symptoms – not the issue*

Discipleship: in 2010 there were 55 people in community groups in 2015 there were 37. What’s more, the number of CG leaders has shrunk. And that connects with the leadership stuff where Sarah and I (or rather to depersonalise it) the paid, professional ministry, has become more and more central to the life of the church, rather than less so.

And finally in mission it is an open question as to what impact we have on our particular community – on Stockethill – if we weren’t here would anyone notice.

Now, I’m trying to be brief and all of these signs of stagnation could be challenged and debated. 52 people have become part of the church in the last 5 years. That is pretty good. And indeed that fact that there has been a big turnover makes it unsurprising that some of the ‘way we do things and the reason we do them’ has been lost.

The point is that a lot of what we hope to be we’re not. And it could be a problem with what we are aiming to be – or how we are going about doing it.

That’s what I mean by stagnated in terms of vision.

And the point is that the reason that we are trying to do church in a particular way is in order to be what the church is meant to be – to participate in God’s mission in the world. And so there comes a question about whether we are actually doing that?

This is where my A to B stuff comes from. I’m suggesting that A is not all that it could be. I’m not saying it’s all wrong or all bad - in fact we might already have an idea of what B should be like

How will we move from A to B? Requires knowing:

* What is A like
* What is B like
* How to make the journey

More positively:

The question that we are asking:

**How should Stockethill Church organise our life together in order to fulfil our purpose in Christ?**

In order to answer that question we to answer the following questions:

1. What is the purpose of the Church?
   1. The answer to this is given in Scripture
2. What does the church need to do and/or be in order to achieve this purpose?
   1. The answer to this is found in biblical and theological reflection.
3. How should we, therefore, structure our life together as a church in order to do and/or be these things?

The answer is found in:

* 1. Biblical and theological reflection
  2. Reflecting on the context of the church
     1. Place, time, culture, being a ‘parish church of the CofS’
  3. Reflecting on the history and current practise of the church
  4. Prayerful discernment

1. What implications do the answers to 3 have on our current and future life together?
   1. What needs to be affirmed
   2. What needs to change
   3. What needs to be introduced
   4. How do these things happen
2. What needs to be done in order to sustain the life of the church in accordance with the above, including ongoing reflection and change?

Take a break – small groups – how do you respond to all of that – immediate thoughts etc.

1. How will FT help us with that?

* How does FT work
  + Small group – weekends etc….
  + Hand outs
* Consider what B is for
* Consider what B can look like in order to be part of God’s mission here and now
* Help us get a vision for B
* Help us in the process of moving from A to B
* What are the dangers
  + Navel gazing!
  + Change is hard and harder for some
  + Diviision.

1. What is the commitment?

* Commit to be part of the process as wider team or core group
* Commit to the church – commissioned; approachable etc
* Commit to one another – not just about coming up with a plan – it’s about the values that
* Small group chosen to go in the 24 hour teaching days.
* Meet regularly – at least every 2 months.
* Reading and discussing.
* What next?
  + Alan coming in September and we’ll get more information and a taste of what FT sessions will be like
  + Each individual will need to decide if it is for them
  + We will need to choose up to 5 people to join me at the weekends

1. Questions, comments, discussion
2. Worship and Prayer