

Bennachie Parish Church

Union Prospectus



Blairdaff/Chapel of Garioch,
Cluny, Echt/Midmar, Kemnay,
Kintore and Monymusk



Introduction

The Presbytery Mission Plan approved in 2022 included the proposed union of the congregations of Cluny, Monymusk, Echt & Midmar, Kemnay, Blairdaff & Chapel of Garioch and Kintore. All of the participating Kirk Sessions have voted in favour of the union. The next step in the process is for us to seek the approval of the members of each congregation in the grouping. This will take the form of a proposal at a congregational meeting to be held before the end of April this year. If all congregations approve the Basis of Union, we will proceed to union at the start of September this year.

This booklet is designed to help you, the members, to understand the process and implications of the proposed union and to thus inform your decision.

We warmly invite your comments and questions about the proposed union by contacting your Minister or Session Clerk, whose details are in the covering letter.

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1. Our journey so far

The national picture

In 2011, the Church of Scotland was anticipating a future whereby the Church operated with a total of 1040 full-time equivalent Charges (i.e., individual churches or church linkages served by a minister) across Scotland. By 2021, however, that figure had been revised and reduced to 660 full-time equivalent Charges.

Over the past five years, the Church of Scotland has been undergoing a process of significant change and transformation. This process has involved the Church examining three principal areas – 1) finances, 2) staffing, and 3) buildings and assets.

The local picture

In terms of ministers themselves, in 2011, the number of ministry posts which were allocated to the Presbytery of Gordon was 30.4 full-time equivalent Ministers of Word and Sacrament. By March 2021 that figure had been reduced to 15.75, with the addition of 5 full-time equivalent Ministry Development Staff posts. This resulted in a total allocation of 20.75 full-time equivalent posts.

However, staffing levels were discussed again at the General Assembly in 2021, and the General Assembly took the decision that staffing levels needed to be reduced by a further 20%. In effect, the total allocation for the Presbytery of Gordon then became 16 posts, inclusive of Ministers of Word and Sacrament and Ministry Development Staff.

The Presbytery Mission Plan

The Presbytery Mission Plan is an agreed 5-year plan for the congregations within our area. The Plan includes both staffing numbers for our group of churches and the plan for an initial reduction of church buildings. The Mission Plan confirms that the parishes of Blairdaff and Chapel of Garioch, Cluny and Monymusk, Echt and Midmar, Kemnay and Kintore are to share an eventual ministerial resource of 2 full-time Ministers of Word and Sacrament, and one 0.5 Ministry Development Staff member.

Our individual congregations of the Bennachie Churches Together group have all been involved in the Church of Scotland's review process

and each Kirk Session has contributed to the Presbytery of Gordon's Presbytery Mission Plan.

Going forward

In 2019 our group of ministers were already looking to the future and had begun to work informally together. Their plan was to seek a more collaborative way of working, with the hope and intention of fostering greater links between our local congregations. Because of this developing relationship, during the pandemic in 2020, the ministers and congregations were ideally placed and able to offer mutual support, assistance and to further develop existing relationships.

Three years on, and having welcomed the congregation of Blairdaff and Chapel of Garioch to the group, the relationship between our congregations has grown to such an extent that the individual Kirk Sessions of our churches are in agreement that the way forward is to create one united parish with multiple places of worship, staffed by the current team of ministers.

2. What is a "Union"?

Two or more congregations may be united to form one congregation and such union shall involve the union of charges, parishes, Kirk Sessions, Financial Boards, property and funds and all congregational agencies and organisations.

In other words, whereas each of the former congregations served its own separate parish, called its own minister and managed its own affairs including pastoral care and finances, within a union there would be:

- a) a single parish – its boundaries encompassing all the territory included in the constituent parishes;
- b) a single membership list – including all members of the constituent congregations;
- c) a single Kirk Session – with responsibility for the whole united congregation;
- d) a shared ordained ministry – in our case it would be a team of ministers who would share pastoral responsibility for the whole parish and all future ministers would be called by the members

- of the whole united congregation; and,
- e) a single treasurer and a single set of financial accounts – where all income and expenses across the union are consolidated.

A united congregation can maintain several places of worship and centres of mission. In this union, mission (for example: outreach, fellowship, worship, etc.) will continue in each of our constituent towns and villages under the responsibility of a Local Leadership Team in each place.

3. What will a union mean for me?

While there is no doubt that this is a significant time of change in the life of the church, please be assured that many aspects of pastoral care and ministry will continue largely as before. As a member of Bennachie Parish Church, you will still have regular access to opportunities for Sunday worship at various locations around the united parish (including baptism and communion), other worship opportunities, and Christian fellowship. Furthermore, you will continue to have access to pastoral care, bereavement care, and other forms of support. With that said, the realities of the presbytery plan will eventually require a reduction in our allocation of ministers. This change will necessitate the discovery and use of other people's gifts and skills for the furtherance of our shared ministry.

Going forward, all formal pastoral duties will be shared by members of our ministry team (currently comprised of Euan, Sheila, Neil, Tose, and Joshua). As circumstances continue to evolve, we expect that along with general responsibility for the united parish, every minister will also have specific pastoral remit (such as Christian education, outreach, etc.). We hope this approach will enable you to get to know our ministry team better, and for them to get to know you, too. In time, our hope is that every minister in our grouping will be known as "our minister".

4. Possibilities and potential within a union

It is already a fact that the Church of Scotland is looking to a future in which there will be fewer full-time ministers of Word and Sacrament

and a reduced number of church buildings. Inevitably there will be challenges for us all as we transition to a new way of being and working in the Church.

The constituent Kirk Sessions of Bennachie Churches Together believe firmly that by choosing to work even more closely together now, we will have the advantage of being able to better design our own future – a future that well serves both the mission of the Church and the care of our people and parishes. By proposing a union of our existing constituent congregations, we would be taking a pro-active and informed move in relation to certain future change. The proposed ministerial team already has a good track-record of having worked well together.

The move to union would present a number of significant possibilities, including:

for the congregations:

- security of access to dedicated ministry going forwards (currently, any congregation losing its minister will not be allowed to seek a replacement);
- the ministerial team being available across the whole parish area;
- the ministerial team consisting of a team with a healthy and diverse mixture of skills, experience, formation and ability;
- ensuring continuity of relationships and access to ministers that are (or are becoming increasingly) familiar to the congregations;
- empowering a greater number and different mix of people to play a part in the life of the congregation;

for the Church:

- the development of a sustainable model of ministry going forwards;
- the introduction of a model of working that would be mission focussed, more adaptable, and which would allow for a better sharing of our current, combined resources;
- fostering a 'permissive' model of working, where a single Kirk Session will encourage creativity, imagination and growth in terms of local mission and worship;

- maintaining our existing congregations' identity, 'flavour' and history, whilst becoming a part of a bigger church community;
- for the ministers:*
- a healthier working environment through greater support and collegiality;
 - the potential to further develop areas of specialist personal and professional interest;
 - the ability to avoid needless duplication across the parishes and to more easily streamline and share certain leadership roles;
 - increased opportunities to use individual gifts and skills;
 - ease of cross-cover and improved co-ordination in relation to annual leave, sickness and time off, etc.

5. The cost of a union

While there are many real and potential benefits to working together in a union, we need to be realistic about the cost attached to the changes.

Church building and church hall closures across the Church of Scotland are due to run into the hundreds over the next five years. In our group of churches this applies to the church buildings at Midmar and Blairdaff and the church and halls at Cluny. We need to acknowledge the deep sense of loss felt by the worshipping communities at each of these locations for whom these buildings have been a spiritual home for generations.

With five remaining places of worship and a final ministry complement of just two ministers and 0.5 MDS, we will all have to learn to live with the reality that we won't have a minister in the pulpit every Sunday and we may well have some Sundays when worship does not take place at all in "our" familiar building. Digital technology and lay worship leaders will ease some of the shortfall but we will all have to come to terms with some changes in the ways we worship.

While we each bring traditions, projects and ministries to the union, the limits of time, staff and volunteers across the entire parish will

mean that not everything we've all done in the past will be able to continue – or at least, not in its present form. There will be negotiation, compromise and sharing involved. While many will see these positively as opportunities for growth, others may feel a sense of loss if and when some activities come to an end. We will need to be gentle and patient with each other in dealing with these changes.

6. How the voting will take place

It is recommended that two Sundays' pulpit intimation be given as notice when calling a congregational meeting. When a congregation meets for a Stated Annual Meeting, to call a minister, to deal with possible unions or to dispose of property a vote is taken to find the view of the congregation and only members and recorded adherents can vote.

Each congregation will have to decide how to address the issue of counting votes and ensuring members only vote. Members may, for example, be checked against a copy of the communion (membership) to ensure only members and adherents received a voting paper.

It might be prudent to invite members from other congregations to help with the count to avoid any question of impartiality with those from the local congregation.

The voting can be for or against the proposal and there could be a number of votes. For some it may be:

1. for or against sale of a property (in those congregations where closure is proposed).
2. for or against a basis of union.
3. for or against a basis of team ministry.

Only those who are present can vote. There are no PROXY votes. While this may be unfortunate for any who cannot make it to the meeting proxy votes are not counted neither are abstentions. On a hybrid meeting there is an allowance that voting can take place but, again, only those who are members are counted.

7. What happens next?

Each Kirk Session in the group will decide when to hold a Congregational meeting at which the members will be given an opportunity to speak about and vote on the proposed union. These meetings will all take place before the end of April and may coincide with the Stated Annual Meeting of the Congregation.

If all Congregations vote "YES", the Basis of Union, Basis of Team Ministry and the outcome of the votes will be forwarded to the Presbytery of the North East and Northern Isles for approval. The Presbytery will then arrange a special Presbytery Service (around 1 September 2023) for union to take effect. Thereafter we will be known as Bennachie Parish Church and begin to operate as laid out in the Basis of Union.

If one or more Congregations vote "No" the situation is more complicated. It is clear that every congregation (in the denomination) is subject to readjustment. This means that the status quo will not be an option for any of us. Presumably the congregations who vote "Yes" will be allowed to enter into a union under a revised Basis of Union, although this will take some time to sort out procedurally. Congregations who vote "No" to the union will be visited by the appropriate Presbytery Committee to discuss alternative options for their future but, since the Presbytery has approved a Mission Plan that makes provision for a union, the onus will be on the Congregation to present a viable alternative to the Presbytery.

Appendix 1 – Basis of Union

BASIS OF UNION – Blairdaff & Chapel of Garioch, Cluny, Echt & Midmar, Kemnay, Kintore and Monymusk

THE CONGREGATIONS of Blairdaff & Chapel of Garioch, Cluny, Echt & Midmar, Kemnay, Kintore and Monymusk upon satisfying the requirements of charity law, shall be united as from 1 September 2023.

- 1 Name:
The name of the united congregation shall be: Bennachie Church of Scotland and the Scottish Charity Number (*one existing charity number will be retained*).
- 2 Transference of Property and Funds:
The property and funds belonging to or held on behalf of each congregation shall belong to or be held on behalf of the united congregation, and any transference necessary shall be duly effected.
- 3 Places of Worship:
The churches at present used and occupied by the above congregations and following on from discussions with the Presbytery Mission Plan, the following buildings shall be the places of worship of the united congregation, namely:
 - a. Chapel of Garioch
 - b. Monymusk
 - c. Echt
 - d. Kemnay
 - e. Kintore

All members and adherents will remain members or adherents of the Church of Scotland.

- 4 Other Buildings and Land:
The church buildings at present used by the above congregations and categorised in the Presbytery Mission Plan as Category A (Kemnay Church Centre) will be retained and all other buildings

categorised as Category B shall be used, sold, let, or otherwise disposed of subject to the titles on which they are held, subject to the approval initially of the Presbytery of Gordon, and later of the Presbytery of North East and the Northern Isles, and, where appropriate, the General Trustees.

The free proceeds of any such sale or let shall be applied in accordance with the Acts of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.

Any other church properties or church-owned land shall be retained by the united congregation. Any glebe land shall be retained by the united congregation.

Any income from or proceeds from the sale of glebe land shall be offset against the Giving to Grow contributions of the united congregation.

5 Territorial Responsibility:

The bounds to be served by the united congregation shall be the bounds of the parishes uniting.

6 Kirk Session:

The elders of all six Kirk Sessions shall remain elders of the Church of Scotland.

For the first three years, the Kirk Session will be composed of up to three elders from each of the constituent Kirk Sessions, together with the four ministers, one of whom will be designated Moderator.

After the initial establishment of the new Kirk Session of the parish, elders will be elected from the united parish on the basis of gifts and calling, rather than on the basis of numerical representation of the former constituent congregations.

Elders will serve for a term of three years, which can be extended for up to six years in total, with up to one third of the eldership rotating in any given year. After serving on the Kirk Session, elders will be eligible for re-election to the Kirk Session after a

break of twelve months.

The Kirk Session will appoint a Clerk, a Safeguarding Coordinator and a Treasurer. These office bearers need not be members of the Kirk Session but while in post, the Clerk will be a charity trustee. The Kirk Session will apply a fixed term to any of its appointments.

7 Congregational Management:

The temporal affairs of the united congregation shall be administered by the united Kirk Session as in the Unitary Constitution 2003, the Delegation of Assembly being authorised to issue the appropriate Constitution.

8 Ministers:

The four ministers serving the constituent congregations shall initially be the ministry team of the new united charge. One of the ministers will be designated as the Moderator of the Kirk Session. It is noted that during the life of the Presbytery Mission Plan 2022-2027 that the allowance for full-time equivalent Ministers of Word and Sacrament for the united congregation will be expected to reduce from four to two ministers.

Initially:

- a. each minister would work in a co-ordinated way across the whole of the parish area.
- b. each minister would work to a 'portfolio', having a specific remit and specific area/s of responsibility (in addition to their responsibilities for worship, for conducting weddings and funerals and for pastoral care) all as detailed in the Basis of Team Ministry.
- c. ministers would work closely with groups or committees within the congregation – for example, those providing pastoral care, those enabling digital communication or those overseeing work with children and young people.

9 Additional Post:

The united congregation will be allocated a further 0.5 full-time equivalent MDS (Ministries Development Staff) posts who shall work under the line management of the Parish Minister designated as Moderator of the Kirk Session. The appointment to these posts shall be employed by the Faith Nurture Council under the terms and conditions of Ministries Development Staff.

10 Manses:

The manses in Echt, Kemnay, Kintore and Monymusk shall be the manses of the united congregation. The Manse at Chapel of Garioch will be sold.

11 Ministerial Support:

The stipend(s) of the Charge shall be paid in accordance with the terms of the National Stipend Scheme.

12 Power to Readjust:

While the articles and terms shall form the Basis of Union for the six congregations now uniting, the united congregation shall be free like other congregations to adjust arrangements under the authority firstly of the Presbytery of The North East and The Northern Isles, as need may arise.

Appendix 2 – Basis of Team Ministry

At the time of printing we do not yet have the finalised finer details of the Basis of Team Ministry, but these will be worked out shortly and made known to the Congregations at or before the Congregational meetings. The Basis of Team Ministry will however contain details of the following:

1. TEAM ROLES – setting out details of various team roles including those of the ministers and the Mission Development Staff (MDS) member.
2. MODERATOR OF THE KIRK SESSION - stating which team role provides the Moderator of the Kirk Session.
3. TEAM MEETINGS AND CO-ORDINATION – setting out the pattern of team meetings and decision making.
4. DISPUTE RESOLUTION – laying out the procedures to be followed in the event of a dispute arising within the team.
5. PRESBYTERY’S POWER TO ADJUST TEAM MINISTRY
The Presbytery shall be free to adjust arrangements relating to the Team Ministry, subject to matters of tenure, as Presbytery may determine from time to time. Any material change to this Basis shall require to be agreed by all members of the team.

Bennachie Parish Church

