

DAVIDSON'S MAINS PARISH CHURCH
LOCAL CHURCH REVIEW
SUMMARY

Much of Davidson's Mains' congregational life is very healthy: in worship there is innovation; evangelism is well understood and taken seriously; the need for effective pastoral care and outreach to the surrounding parish is appreciated; discipleship is fully part of the Davidson Mains web of relationships; the Kirk Session and congregation are characterised by their spiritually uplifting fellowship. This is a well-attended, well-supported, well-run congregation that attracts the resources it needs in order to maintain and develop a strong infrastructure. The visiting team recognised that congregational faith in the power of prayer and a search for God's blessing have been the basis for such a generous provision.

Underpinning congregational life is a relatively new, radical and to some extent experimental approach to leadership. Although there are approximately 50 active elders in the congregation, the Kirk Session is made up of only 18 members. Of those 18 members, 9 are elders elected for 6-year terms and 6 are the leaders of the congregation's committees (not all of whom are elders); the minister, the Development Ministries Leader and the Presbytery elder make up the balance.

The visiting team noticed the efficiency and focus that this structure brings to congregational leadership. The Kirk Session appears largely unified with a strong spiritual bond between members. It has recently guided the congregation through turbulent waters that were unsettled by feelings of disappointment at General Assembly decisions, and the decision of their minister, the Rev. Jeremy Middleton, to retire this year. This period in the congregation's life and the spiritual approach the Session have taken in order to coming to terms with it feel like a significant part of the congregation's story. It was heartening to hear that as a body the Session feels both blessed and resolved in the decisions it has taken. In preparing it for the future the Kirk Session appreciates greatly the strong leadership Mr. Middleton offered before he retired.

Other congregations in the Presbytery, especially those with large Kirk Sessions, may be interested in learning more about Davidson's Mains' radical approach to leadership and the restructuring of its Kirk Session. The new structure is flexible, efficient and focuses on the strengths and gifts of individual elders. Overall, it is still a work-in-progress for such large-scale change is not always easy for everyone to accept, and it can often take some time before snagging problems are identified and rectified. The visiting team appreciated that by including on the Kirk Session members who are not elders other congregational voices can be heard, but it also noted that the small size of the Kirk Session along with its strong bonds could leave the congregation feeling under-represented, and the opinions of contrary voices unheard. We would encourage the Session to pay particular attention to ensuring that their team always includes a broad demographic representation, a range of theological opinion, and a breadth of social background. We would also like to encourage the Session to ensure that once they call their next minister the leadership team remains as flexible as it is focused.

In looking to the future the Kirk Session exhibits confidence and the ability to reflect on past experience in order to seek new opportunities and efficient ways to focus energy. At Davidson Mains change is not feared and challenges are not avoided. This is a stable foundation upon which to continue addressing the challenge of how to convert

the engagement many un-churched families have with Davidson's Mains into a Christian commitment and associated church membership. It is also a stable foundation for Davidson's Mains to build stronger bonds with the Church of Scotland nationally and the world-church internationally.

Completing the Local Church Review process during a vacancy presents a Kirk Session with particular challenges. The visiting team would like to thank the Kirk Session and the interim moderator, the Rev Mike Frew, for their willingness to take on those challenges, their engagement throughout the process, and the impressive quality of the documentation that was returned to the visiting team.