

Question and answer session – informal congregational meeting after morning service on 12th December 2021 in St Mungo’s church.

1. Will the combined Churches of St Mungo’s and South be ministered to by John, and also Peter.....?

By John after the union; Peter will be involved until then

2. Who will have the final say on the new name for the congregation?

The Church of Scotland lays down the form of a congregation’s name, consisting of the place (Penicuik), a name to distinguish it from others in the town (St Mungo’s), and that it is part of the Church of Scotland.

*The process of uniting two congregations is for both Kirk Sessions to agree the wording of a **Basis of Union** document with Presbytery, which will include the name of the new congregation.*

*The whole **Basis of Union** is finally voted on (by secret ballot) by all members and adherents of each congregation separately. Normally this would be at a congregational meeting, but at this time (when a meeting may not be possible) we are allowed to use ballot papers sent to all members.*

3. What names have been suggested for the new congregation?

We have had a lot of different names suggested – our Kirk Session thought we should avoid names with ‘St Mungo’ or ‘South’, as we are forming a new congregation. In the discussions so far we have come up with a ‘short-list’ of names, which meet the Church of Scotland’s name format, and seem to be acceptable by both Kirk Sessions.

These include:

- Penicuik United Church – or Penicuik United Community Church
- Penicuik: Christ Church – or Penicuik: Christ Kirk
- Penicuik: Trinity

We do need your feedback on these names – the new congregation will be your congregation.

4. When will all this happen?

The union has to be approved by Presbytery, which means we have to have gone through the process of approving the Basis of Union (by voting) in time for a Presbytery meeting, which in this case would be 24th February or 28th April next year.

It would be good to have everything completed by Easter, so we’d need to aim for the Basis of Union to be agreed by Kirk Sessions and Presbytery by the middle of February – so a lot of work required in January!

But the process has already started – some members of Penicuik South & Howgate have been worshipping with us for some weeks now. Penicuik South church building will be closed for worship from the start of the New Year, so we will be effectively worshipping as one congregation here from then onwards.

5. Who will be on the new Kirk Session?

Initially, all the current elders from both Kirk Sessions, but we would build in a review period (probably 6 months) to allow us to find out a bit about whose skills matched which jobs, and which would also allow an elder to retire from the new Kirk Session if he/she wished. In this 'review' period the jobs (for example, Session Clerk) would be shared by the current Session Clerks.

6. What happens to all the money?

All the money from both congregations would be merged into single bank accounts, over which the new Kirk Session would have control. Our Congregational Board would no longer exist (this is called moving to a Unitary Constitution) and all the congregation's business will be conducted by the Kirk Session and its (new) committees (eg for Fabric or Finance as appropriate). These new committees will draw on the expertise of members of the congregation, not just the elders. The union also means that the new Kirk Session, in addition to its responsibility for St Mungo's church and hall, would have responsibility for the maintenance of Howgate church and Penicuik South church buildings, until they are sold or otherwise disposed of.

7. Will I still have an elder?

In St Mungo's we were already discussing how best to keep in touch with and care for all our members. Covid has got in the way of developing a new scheme, but also showed us how people can be effectively kept in contact by phone, as well as by regular emails and the newsletter. Penicuik South & Howgate do much more of their pastoral care through house groups. It's likely that we will come up with a 'hybrid' system that keeps the best elements of an 'elder's district' method and also make use of our experiences over the past 2 years. When we did the Questionnaire recently we said we'd provide every member with a designated contact (an elder or pastoral visitor) and I'd hope that that would still be possible.

8. What time will the service be at?

The time of the service is usually decided by the Kirk Session. We know that a significant number of our congregation come by bus, so to some extent we have tried to match Sunday morning times to the bus timetables. Penicuik South & Howgate have usually met earlier – this is something we'll need to work out in the new Kirk Session.