



# VISION DOCUMENT 2021

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## INTRODUCTION

This document sets out our vision for Pulteneytown & Thrumster Church. Building on the previous understanding and work of our congregation, it contains the principles and attitudes which are the foundational understanding of who we want to be as a congregation. This document was written at the same time as our 5 year plan 2021-2026 and is best understood in conjunction with that document and our document which outlines our fuller understanding of Mission.

### Mission Statement

**Our Mission is: To help people of all ages become disciples of Jesus and be part of a loving Christian community.**

The Kirk Session reaffirm this as our understanding of our God-given mission in our parish. Our sincere hope is that any work or actions undertaken because of this plan will lead to the fulfilling of this mission.

This is a concentrated statement which “packs a lot in”. In this document, we will clarify what we mean by this, and how it shapes our principles and attitudes.

At the core of this statement is an understanding that we are all disciples, or learners of Jesus Christ.

### We want to:

- Follow Jesus just as the first disciples dramatically and radically followed Jesus.
- Grow in this: We are all apprentices of Jesus our Lord and Saviour, Master and King.
- Follow Him according to His revealed will in the Scriptures.
- Lead others to come and join us in this.

We know that this will never be comfortable, but we know it is right and best. By the Spirit’s leading, we want to faithfully follow in our God-given calling. In the next 5 years we want to be transformed to be more like Him as individuals. We also want our congregation to be a people where the radical love, costly grace and deep compassion of Jesus is displayed clearly to everyone.

## Looking forward

We are setting out our vision as a church, with a view to planning for our next 5 years under God. While we seek to look forward, it is important we do not forget or assume our convictions and foundations. In a day and age where our denomination is increasingly moving away from the solid foundations of our historical faith, it is especially important that we not only reaffirm these foundations, but also seek to recover our confidence in God's appointed means to make disciples.

### *Our History*

Pulteneytown Church was built in 1842. It was built to serve the spiritual needs of the newly developed area of Pulteneytown and was quickly established as important part of the community.

Thrumster Church was built as a mission church in 1900 by subscription.<sup>1</sup> This was a great achievement and showed the commitment of the local people to the mission and work of God.

As a congregation we intend to show that same commitment to the spiritual needs of our local community, striving together in sacrificial service in God's work among us.

### *Our Theological convictions*

Many in our church would use the word "evangelical" to describe our Christianity. While this word isn't used in the bible in this way and isn't without negative connotations today, we mean it in the classical sense<sup>2</sup>. Our core message is the Good News of Jesus Christ<sup>3</sup> which, in the original language of the New Testament is, "evangel". As a church, we want to be all about following Jesus as disciples and sharing his "Evangel" in our community and beyond: The message of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, according to the scriptures.

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<sup>1</sup> This means that the money to build the church was raised locally.

<sup>2</sup> The "Bebbington Quadrilateral", a standard academic definition of classic evangelicalism states there are 4 emphases – a high view of the authority of the bible, a central focus on Christ's atoning work on the cross, the need for people to be converted and a belief in the Christian gospel needs to be worked out in discipleship or action.

<sup>3</sup> See 1 Corinthians 15:3-4

A way to broaden our expression is to look to the historical roots of our evangelical faith, in the teachings of the Reformation and the historic understanding of the Christian faith. In this, we stand in a good tradition in our denomination and country, seeking to follow in the footsteps of those God has raised up before. In this, we want to emphasise that we aren't the first generation of Christians who have sought to articulate and live out our faith; we stand in a long line of faithful witnesses, who have guarded the good deposit of the faith and have handed it down like a baton from generation to generation. We believe this Evangelical Reformed understanding of the faith is the same as Jesus and the Apostle's, is captured in the inspired words of Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and is distilled in the historic creeds of the church, as well as our confessional document, the Westminster Confession. As part of the Church of Scotland, we are a Presbyterian Church, which means we are ruled by a Kirk Session of Elders, chaired by our Minister, Rev Andrew A. Barrie<sup>4</sup>.

### *Our context today*

As a congregation in 21<sup>st</sup> century Scotland, we face many challenges. We recognise the relative weakness of the church compared to previous generations. We also observe that our congregation is ageing and increasingly in the elderly age bracket. We want to continue to care for our congregation and welcome people of all ages to join with us. As we seek to fulfil our mission, we want to express our rich, historic faith in a way that is contemporary and relevant to our parish today.

We also write this document at the beginning of 2021, with the effects of COVID-19 part of daily life. We recognise that there are obstacles and opportunities brought by this, and seek to plan ahead with the reality of the effects of the pandemic in mind.

The rest of the document sets out our vision under 3 key, distinct but overlapping areas: Ministry, Mission and Administration.

Our understanding is that, in general:

- The Ministry is generally what we do among ourselves
- Mission is generally outward facing to the community and wider world.
- The Administration is the foundation that helps support and enable the ministry and mission.

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<sup>4</sup> We understand there to be two types of elder: Ruling Elders and Teaching Elders, or Ministers (see 1 Tim 5:17). All elders are equal overseers of the flock, under-shepherds of Christ, qualified by character to lead the church in example and practice, for good. (See Exodus 18:17-27, 1 Tim 3:1-8, 5:17-21, Titus 1:5-9, 1 Peter 5:1-4)

## MINISTRY

### A Definition

To “minister” means “to serve”. The words used to describe ministry or ministers in the New Testament mean “servant” in different ways. One of these words is also closely related to the word for worship. When you add this up, you get a good description of our church: *We are a worshipping community serving God and each other.*

Many different elements that make up this service. It includes our Sunday worship services, but also our everyday worship as we live for God. For some of us that is serving God by caring for family, for others it is in work. For others still it is using our time, talents and money in other ways which glorify God. Some of our service is together, other parts are as individuals in our community. For us all it will mean a mix of serving God as an individual and also through sharing in the work of the church fellowship. This service also includes our building up of each other in discipleship, and our care for one another as believers in Jesus.

So while Andrew is our Minister, we are all ministers or servants together, under God.

### The Foundation

As we move forward, under God, it's important that we don't forget or assume any of our history, theological convictions or context. Our plan is not to start again but to build on the foundation which we are blessed to have. We want to express, share and practice our faith in a real way, relevant for today. The solutions of yesterday are not always the best for today. We want to embrace the future with God, expecting Him to challenge, stretch and surprise us as He works. As we do this, we trust the foundation He has given us. As Evangelical, Reformed and Presbyterian Christians, we believe that God has some means which he uses to build up His Church. As a church we want to have full confidence in God to work by His means of grace:

*WORD* - We trust that the bible is the Spirit-inspired word of God, where God has revealed Himself to His church. It is authoritative for all matters of faith and life. We believe God speaks powerfully through the reading, preaching and study of His word. As He speaks to us of who He is, of Jesus and his promises in the gospel, and of who he calls us to be as His people. God uses his word to correct, mature and transform us more into Christ's image.

*PRAYER* - We believe that our shared prayer life is an important part of our formation, leading and strengthening. Times of gathered prayer and shared prayer for each other and the work of the gospel continue to be a priority. We recognise that God is sovereign and works out His plans according to His wisdom, but he often uses the prayers of His people as a means to bless His work. We are thankful to God for His faithful answering of our prayers in the past and want to continue to seek Him in all we do. We also recognise the importance of personal prayer and want people to grow in this too.

*GATHERED WORSHIP and SACRAMENTS* - One of the most important ways we expect God to shape us is as we meet together to worship Him. During this pandemic, we recognise the important way that technology has helped us gather online. We want to continue to use the internet to help us as a church, however we want to affirm our understanding that the best way is to physically gather and worship God together. Corporate worship is an event that we believe is scripturally mandated, and the primary way God shapes His people. As part of this, we deeply value the praise of God in song, prayer and the preaching of His word. We also emphasise the importance of the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper as God's further means of grace to us.

*FELLOWSHIP AND SHARING LIFE TOGETHER* - We affirm the importance of fellowship as Christian believers. God has wisely gathered us together as a body of believers who are to grow in faith, hope and love together, spurring one another on in good works. We are to shine out the light of Christ in holiness and proclamation. God intends for Christians to be part of "a loving Christian community." We recognise that as a church we have not perfectly achieved this, but we wish to grow and become more like the church God calls us to be. We want to be more than people who meet to do religious things; we want to be a loving, caring community who are centred on Christ and growing in His likeness.

### 3 POINTS OF EMPHASIS

Given these foundations which we trust, we want to have two points of emphasis in our ministry in the next 5 years.

*INTENTIONAL DISCIPLESHIP* – We seek to grow as disciples of Jesus. We trust God to use His appointed to grow us. This does not mean that we will do things the same as we have always done. We will need to adapt and consider our methods according to the needs of our day. As we emerge from this pandemic and reconstruct church life, it is important that we prioritise what will help us grow in our faith. We also recognise that anything we do in ministry should have a deliberate aim of deepening our discipleship. This aim of intentionally building disciples is more important than running groups or activities, although it may be achieved in these things. In this we want to deliberately cut against an understanding of church life that is busy for busy-ness sake, or trusts in a thriving programme of activities as a sign of a healthy church.

*SHARING THE LOAD* – We should do all we can to share the load. We are very thankful to all who are so willing to be part of the church and serve in a variety of ways. However, we recognise that for all organisations that it can be easy for a small number of individuals to take on most of the work. We understand that we are a body of believers, with a variety of gifts and skills and that God has given us each other to share in the work of His Kingdom together. As we say in our definition, we are all servants and we want to serve together in the work God has given us.

*EMBRACING GROWING PAINS TOGETHER* – As we go forward, we hope to grow in maturity and number. Just as when our bodies go through “growing pains” in adolescence, so there will be challenges as we grow together. Whenever there is growth, there is change. Change is never easy but we commit to embracing this together as a fellowship.



## MISSION

### THE GREAT COMMISSION

As followers of Jesus together, we want to obey the last instructions Jesus gave to his followers before he ascended into heaven:

*'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'*

*(Matthew 28:18-20)*

### THE STORY SO FAR

We have sought to fulfil this command over many years. In 2018 we took a fresh look at how best to do this together today. Andrew took some extended study leave to visit other similar churches in the Highlands and learn about their practices in Mission. The results of that study were presented to the congregation and Kirk Session and agreed as a basis to go forward in Mission. As a congregation, we prayed for God's leading and we sought to put the results into action. One part of this was to appoint a Mission Development Worker and establishing an Outreach Team. We have since continued to pray and act to develop this Mission work. We are thankful for God's leading to grow in this together even during the pandemic.

We want to continue to fulfil this commission, developing this work in prayerful action, according to our understanding of how to best do this today in our parish.

## 5 PICTURES THAT EXPLAIN OUR THINKING



### *ICEBERG*

Mission is an integral part of being followers of Jesus together. It is connected to our foundational convictions and church life and is how we seek to fulfil our part in the Great Commission today.



### *NC 500*

Just as the North Coast 500 initiative has helped many to come and experience the beauty of the North Highlands, we want to help people to know Jesus.



### *BUILDING BRIDGES*

There is a widening gap between how most people understand and make sense of life and the Christian Worldview. We need to find ways to build bridges to show how relevant, captivating and life-transforming following Jesus and the message of the gospel is.



### *STEPPING STONES*

To help people come from a distance, we plan stepping stone events. These events are safe, open events for everyone to come to that address objections to faith, build relationships and share the gospel sensitively.



### *HARBOUR*

The harbour at Pulteneytown has had to evolve over the years to be successful. We want to evolve to faithfully fulfil Mission today as a church of Jesus Christ.

## ADMINISTRATION

The third and final key area that we would like to set out our vision for is administration.

### Administration is an important spiritual gift

In various places in the New Testament, Paul outlines spiritual gifts<sup>5</sup>. In 1 Corinthians 12, he binds this to the image of the church being the functioning body of Christ. God has given different gifts, for the good of the whole church. Everyone has a part in the use of their gifts and all are needed for the body to function well.

As part of this, Paul identifies administration as a spiritual gift<sup>6</sup>. Therefore, we should recognise administration as an important spiritual gift to be used for the good of the whole body.

John Truscott defines administration as, "...the organisation and co-ordination of the earthly resources that are available in the service of Christ."<sup>7</sup>

To manage administration well should be the involving of the body, to organise and co-ordinate our earthly resources, to support our work as a congregation.

### Administration is important...but not everything

One of the most effective administrators in the bible is King Solomon, who oversaw a golden age of Israel and even built the temple. 1 Kings 4 gives us a glimpse of the organisational effort needed to run the kingdom well. The author, Dale Ralph Davis identifies this "efficient and orderly structure" as wisdom<sup>8</sup>.

We want our administration to be a wise stewarding of our earthly resources and to have the same effectiveness in our work as part of Christ's Kingdom today.

In this, we should be sure to keep our hearts close to God, trusting Him, rather than the efficiency of our systems.

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<sup>5</sup> Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4.

<sup>6</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:28 "And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues." (ESV)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Articles-index/Christian-administration> accessed 7.4.21

<sup>8</sup> Dale Ralph Davis, 1 Kings- The wisdom and the folly, p.45

The sadness of Solomon's life is that while he did much in earthly terms, his journey is one from loving the Lord (3:3) to loving the world and doing what is evil in God's sight<sup>9</sup>.

This is an important warning for us as a church. We are rightly required to undertake a variety of tasks in our administration as part of the Church of Scotland and as an OSCR registered charity. It is important that we do this to God's glory. However, it is also crucial that we do not think that because we perform these functions and organise some activities, that we are fulfilling the call of Christ.

This is often a problem within organisations with a long history. It can, at times, be seen within courts of our denomination and we want to guard ourselves against the danger of looking like a church from the outside, but not keep the heart of being Christ's church.

We also recognise that the task of ministry and mission is hard and costly, and at times we can slip into excessive administration because it is "safer".

This is always a serious danger for the church, it is what was seen among the Pharisees in Jesus day, and has sadly been seen throughout church history. We want to avoid this. We ask for God's help to see that administration is important but not everything.

#### Our administration in relation to ministry and mission

One way to help this is to keep a clear vision of what our administration is for. As we said, it is the "...organisation and co-ordination of the earthly resources..." for our work of ministry and mission.

One helpful way to think of it is the image of the trellis and the vine<sup>10</sup>. We see our administration as the structure to support our ministry and mission. A good trellis supports a vine and gives it space to grow well. A bad trellis can warp and even limit the growth of a vine.

So, over the next 5 years we want to work to make our administration the best trellis it can be within our limitations. We seek it to be fit for purpose. We want to be open to change whenever it is helpful and we want to share the load of administration among the body of the congregation as much as possible.

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<sup>9</sup> Compare 1 Kings 3:3 and 1 Kings 11:1-2,6

<sup>10</sup> We are drawing on the work of Colin Marshall and Tony Payne here but not using their image exactly as they define it.

## SUMMARY

We set out this vision document to share our best understanding of what God is calling us to as a congregation. We do this to encourage our congregation and set out a path for church life, under God. In all this, we simply seek to be faithful and fruitful in the service of Christ and His Kingdom in the years ahead. We also recognise our utter dependence on God in everything.

We believe that these principles and attitudes will best help us shape our Ministry, Mission and Administration and will help us to fulfil our mission statement: *Helping people of all ages to be disciples of Jesus and part of a loving Christian community.*

As we do, we humbly ask God to lead and bless us as we seek to honour Him. We are thankful for how we can look back and see His faithfulness to us over the years, we now ask that He would “establish the work of our hands”<sup>11</sup>, and that this would all be to His glory and praise. As we look ahead together as a congregation, we echo the prayer of Paul in Ephesians 3:

*Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.*<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> See Psalm 90

<sup>12</sup> Ephesians 3:20-21