

Greyfriars Kirk & St Cuthbert's Parish Church

Working Towards Union Newsletter: Issue 1 February 2026

It has been some time since we published a newsletter on Union matters and we understand that an update communication is overdue. 2025 brought challenges for both congregations but ended on a more positive note as we explain below.

Union Progress

Following a joint Kirk Session Meeting in March which raised a number of issues, there was a pause in Union discussions. The Presbytery Deployment Committee met with both Kirk sessions so that concerns could be aired and output from the meetings was shared between the two Sessions. The Deployment Committee are now actively involved and are in fact facilitating our Working Group meetings.

This team is led by Rev Dr Stewart Weaver and he is supported by Mrs Karen McKay and Mr Robert Armour. These representatives also met with the elders of both congregations in November. It has been helpful to have their support and experience of other Unions in the presbytery and elsewhere. This support is necessary as we take on more challenging conversations around our Union, and get down to the practicalities of what a Union could look like, to see the positives which could result and, more importantly, how the united congregation could function.

The Presbytery Deployment Group produced a paper, based on the output from that meeting of Elders in November, which focuses in on the key points for resolution before union. The Working Group considered the first two areas for discussion at a meeting in December. We agreed following that Working Group Meeting, we needed to take the mind of the Kirk Sessions and Congregations on the patterns and timings of worship, bearing in mind, that under the Presbytery Plan, we will be allocated only one ordained minister of word and sacrament to the united congregation. If the union is voted through, then, until we appoint our new Minister we will have a single locum Minister covering both St Cuthbert's and Greyfriars, so it makes sense for us to have established a basic model of worship patterns, to take us through the vacancy until a minister is called.

The Deployment Committee has also suggested that if a basic structure is in place, it could prove more attractive for a new incoming Minister knowing groundwork has been done and that they don't have to start from scratch. The new Minister, will undoubtedly have ideas of their own on how the congregation will work, but it is better to have a foundation to build upon.

The two Kirk Sessions have been asked to consider this matter in some detail. Both Kirk Sessions are committed to the continuation of regular services being held at both churches on Sundays, with the exception of Communion Sundays (last Sunday of the month), which will continue to be held in one of the two churches alternately, as we currently enjoy.

Patterns for Sunday Worship in Union

In light of that commitment, two particular patterns for regular services emerged as the strongest options:

1. "staggered" worship times – with the minister leading services at both churches, for example one church having a service at 10am and the other at 11:30am
2. Services continuing at 10:30am at both churches – with the minister alternating between the two.

After consideration, both Kirk Sessions have agreed that the second option, continuing services at both churches at 10:30am the preferable option. A primary factor in this was the number of people and groups that would be adversely impacted by a change to staggered service times, including church choirs who practise before services, bell-ringers at St Cuthberts who have duties at other churches on Sundays too, and the practicalities of travelling to services in the city centre on Sundays, especially for those using public transport to attend the earlier service, or incurring council parking charges to attend the later service.

Another benefit from continuing services at both churches at 10:30am is that the monthly 9:30am communion services can continue at both churches, though as it is currently held at both churches on the first Sunday of the month it is proposed that one of the churches moves this to the second Sunday of the month in due course. It also ensures no adverse impact upon the Gaelic congregation which holds services at Greyfriars at 12:30pm.

Two primary points for consideration come with the preferred option. First, that the minister will not be able to attend services at both churches each Sunday. While this might be seen as a “downside”, the “upside” is that the minister will be able to enjoy fellowship over tea and coffee at services at both churches every other week. If a staggered pattern was agreed, they would not be able to do this after the earlier service, thus one church missing out on that aspect of ministry presence.

Following from this, the second point is that others will be required to lead regular services at churches every second Sunday. However, with a mixture of pulpit supply from visiting ministers and readers, and volunteers from both churches, it is thought that this will become a real benefit to the united congregation, creating a wider worship group involved in leading services, sharing their talents and strengthening the sustainability of church life. Members of both churches’ Kirk Sessions have volunteered to be part of this group, others who wish to be involved in this are warmly welcome too.

Your Views

The Kirk Sessions are now keen to know whether the two congregations are content with the direction of travel for services on a Sunday. With that in mind, we will be grateful if you could complete the short survey available in paper format from the welcomers with orders of services on Sundays or electronically here: <https://forms.gle/MLL4FDTcj7DYBMQ17>. We would appreciate **responses by Sunday 15 Feb**, to enable collation and review for the working group to consider when it next meets on 24 Feb. Any additional questions or comments, to those prompted by the survey itself, are welcome too.

Please do complete this if you presently attend, or intend to attend, services at either church, however frequent (weekly, monthly etc) and whether you are a formal member of the congregation or not. If completing in paper form, please return your survey to a working group representative or one of the two church offices. There will also be a box at each church to receive responses after Sunday services for the next few weeks.

Members of the Union Working Group are available to help you complete this survey over coffee/tea after services, and help with any questions you have about anything contained in this newsletter or the general progress of union discussions. The members of the group representing both churches are:

St Cuthbert’s representatives – Christine McGuinness (Co- Chair), and Graham MacLagan, John Kirk, James McLean, Jeannette Barton, Scott Turnbull.

Greyfriars representatives – Gillian Couper (Co-Chair) and Catherine Alexander, Anne Bradbury, Maggie Cormack, Jo Elliot.

Get in touch! Contact Christine/Gillian through church offices: sessionclerk@stcuthberts-edinburgh.uk or tel 0131 229 1142; contact@greyfriarskirk.com or tel 0131 225 1900. All thoughts welcome.

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Patterns of Worship Congregation Survey – February 2026

(1) Your name: _____

(2) Which church do you currently attend regular services at: Greyfriars / St Cuthberts

(3) Once the two churches unite, are you happy for the Kirk Session to arrange for services to continue at both churches at 10:30 am?

Yes / No

(4) If you would like to add any comments as to your reasons for the above answer, please add those here:

(5) Would you be willing to help lead services as part of a worship leadership group, say once a year (or more if you wish)? **Please tick any/all that apply** (if you are already helping in some way, please do tick again to assist as we gather info).

Yes – I would be willing to prepare a short talk (e.g. 10 mins, like a sermon) []

Yes – I would be willing to read out a talk prepared by someone else []

Yes – I would be willing to prepare and lead prayers []

Yes – I would be willing to read out prayers prepared by someone else []

Yes – I would be willing to read Bible passages []

No []

(6) If you would be interested in finding out how to be involved in services in some other way (e.g. choir, catering, welcoming on the door, or any other role), please add comments here:
