

Bushmills

Presbyterian Church

Founded 1646



Mission Development Plan 2010-2015

1. The Basis for Mission

- *What's a mission plan all about?*

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:16-20)

The first disciples then, rather like many followers of Jesus now, were scared. They were scared of getting it wrong, scared of being found out, probably scared even of losing their lives for the faith. Like many of us, they may well have worshipped, but some also doubted. At this stage Jesus doesn't seem too concerned about their doubts, but says boldly (and simply) that he has received "all authority". His power-base is the foundation for the commission to the disciples to make more disciples out of all kinds of people. This process isn't natural or automatic (disciples are "made", not born). It's a process of education through the Holy Spirit, which arises from making contacts with people initially, before making friendships with them. This is what mission is all about.

2. The Wider Community of Bushmills

- *The continual need to make new contacts*

Bushmills is the joint oldest congregation in the Route Presbytery, founded in 1646 when it emerged from the Parish Church at Billy. The congregation moved to where Dunluce Presbyterian Church now is, before occupying its present site at Upper Main Street from 1753. The decision to move to the "town" (i.e. where people worked and lived) was extremely controversial even then and remains a challenge to this day.

The village of Bushmills (population 1,400 approx) has some of the most pressing social needs in the province. There has been a history of paramilitarism, sectarianism, racism and hate crimes. There is high unemployment, many young people have no qualifications and derelict buildings dominate the Main Street. The Kirk Session realise that most of the people in the village have little or no interest in the life of the congregation. Session believe some reasons for this are:

- Many people are preoccupied with materialism, sport and family responsibilities – not all of which are bad – but which mean there is little “space” for Church in its traditional sense.
- Those who don’t attend Church are often “decent” people, with genuine spiritual needs, but Church simply isn’t “on their radar”, so isn’t seen as the answer to any of these needs.
- There is a marked social class division between the middle class worshipping community and the lower social classes who do not worship regularly anywhere.
- Regrettably, the perception exists that those who attend church are well-off, well-dressed and respectable, suggesting that most Christians are “snobbish”.



The War Memorial in Bushmills, looking up Main Street

Having said this, the congregation has very significant opportunities to interact with the local community. Session realises that Christ’s love, can overcome all social divisions and notes and supports the following on-going means of engagement with wider society:

- There are good relationships with Dunluce Presbyterian Church (shared evening services); along with St John the Baptist Parish Church and St Mary’s Roman Catholic Church (shared events at Christmas, the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, Lent and Harvest).
- As part of the Route Presbytery Mission Plan, Bushmills also enjoys ever-closer relationships with the following congregations which, along with Bushmills, form the “Northern Group” in Presbytery: Ballycastle, Croaghmore, Toberkeigh, Ramoan and Dunluce.
- Bushmills in recent years has hosted the following special church services for the wider community: Multiple Sclerosis, Christian Aid, Hospice, Queen’s Royal Irish Hussars Association Troop, Royal Ulster Constabulary Special Reserve Association, Bushmills District Orange Lodge, Royal Black Perceptory, Bushmills Orange Lodge, and Remembrance Services.
- The Peace Group, founded as an inter-denominational initiative, enjoys wide support in the congregation. The promotion of a harmonious, peaceful wider community is an intrinsic part of the witness of the congregation.
- The Village Forum, recently established to explore ways in which the village of Bushmills could be improved, is actively supported by several members of the congregation and the Minister. The Forum informs the congregation about the local community and vice versa.



Friday Fabrics, art and craft group

3. The Congregation

– The on-going task of making friendships out of contacts

In recent decades the Congregation of Bushmills has enjoyed continuous, steady growth across most areas of congregational life. There are now 312 families – 62 more than in 1995. This growth contrasts with many other congregations’ decline. New housing has brought a mix of additional members moving to the area, others have joined on Profession of Faith, the crèche and Sunday School are growing and there is a blend of contemporary and older worship. Within the last decade the following initiatives have been made:

- Re-opening of the refurbished Meeting House in 2006 at an approximate cost of £700,000 and paid for in full by 2008. This is a modern, welcoming resource with full disability access.
- Prayer Focus – the monthly prayer group, regularly attended by approximately 15 people.
- Young at Heart – the monthly group for senior members, with a steady attendance of 15-20.
- Friday Fabrics – a weekly arts and crafts group.
- Alpha Courses – there have been two, which attracted 30+ members each.
- Mid-Week Courses – also attended by 35+ people, looking at Biblical books and subjects.

- Fellowship Initiatives, such as coffee after morning worship on Sundays.
- Holiday Bible Club – attended by 60+ children.
- A Church Web Site – with over 7,000 visits per annum.



Some members of the YF at a "Ready, Steady, Cook" night, with judges

The Session is grateful to God that there's so much growth and encouragement. But there are areas for concern, some of which are listed below, along with proposals for action. The Session realises, in the words of Archbishop William Temple, that: "The Church is the only organisation on earth that exists for the benefit of non-members".

In all the proposals that follow, the chief aim is to provide a friendly way for people to know Christ better as Saviour and Lord and to become more like Him.

1. Bushmills is a busy **tourist area**. The Meeting House is located near some of Northern Ireland's most popular visitor attractions. The appearance of a closed building for 6 days of the week, however, isn't very encouraging.

Proposal: To open the Meeting House to the public, with two volunteers present, every Friday in July and August, with the aims of showcasing a local community; showing hospitality; and offering a quiet space for reflection and prayer.

2. Few people have interest in, or personal involvement with, the **world-wide mission** of the Church. If some-one volunteers to serve overseas for any length of time, there's no existing way of offering practical and spiritual support.

Proposal: To establish immediately a "World Mission Group", accountable to the Kirk Session, with its own Co-ordinator, which would advertise and support practically and financially at congregational level the world-wide mission of the Church.

3. There's an urgent need for more volunteers in the growing **Sunday School** (known as "Children's Church"). Session takes seriously its responsibility for providing a thoroughly Biblical Christian education, in a friendly environment of trust and good behaviour.



Younger members enjoying themselves in the Hamill Hall at a Holiday Bible Club

Proposal: To establish immediately a "Youth and Children's Ministry Group", accountable to the Kirk Session, made up of elders and Children's Church leaders and others to oversee, pray for and support the curriculum, events, financing and personnel requirements of the children's and youth organisations of the congregation.

4. The congregation offers nothing to young parents during the week. There used to be a **Mother and Toddlers Group** in the Hamill Hall, facilitated by Sure Start, but this stopped in 2005.

Proposal: In the next five years to establish a Toddlers' Group, which would meet weekly for 2-3 hours.

5. While **Men** are extremely well represented on Session and Committee and many help out with practical tasks, it's now the case that not one man teaches in Sunday School or Bible Class (apart from the Minister), no men help with crèche and hardly any men assist with the Holiday Bible Club. Very few men regularly attend Young at Heart and there's no longer a Boys' Brigade Company. It seems that men are more practical than spiritual. This is a recent phenomenon and begs the question: Will today's young boys be in tomorrow's Church at all?

Proposal: In the next five years to establish a Men's Group for all ages, which would meet monthly for fellowship and would promote occasional events organised specifically for men.

6. Both Church and Society are becoming **increasingly secular** and many people have little knowledge of the historic claims of Christianity. Even among regular worshippers there are those who say they lack certainty of their own faith. Some find it difficult to volunteer with confidence and integrity in the community of faith. It's now half a century since anyone from Bushmills became a Minister.

Proposal: To help people grow in their faith two more courses will be held in the next five years for those investigating the claims of Christianity for themselves (e.g. Alpha or Christianity Explored). There will also be consideration of holding

a further such course in a non-church venue which would appeal to other sections of the community. To help people to become better disciples, there will be at least one follow-up Bible course per year.



The leaders of a recent, well-attended Discipleship Explored Course

7. The non attendance and non contribution of so many whose names are on the **Communion Roll** is a cause for considerable concern. The Roll has 475 names on it, but only 216 people received communion once a year, a ratio of 2.2 to 1 (2008). This situation will require careful thought and prayer in coming years. Kirk Session takes its responsibilities seriously in this regard, while realising that the *whole* congregation has a ministry to show neighbours, family and friends that they would benefit from a fuller involvement in Church life. Everyone has a part to play in building up God's people.

Proposal: Before the end of 2010 the Kirk Session will outline a timetable for action, over a four-year period (2011-2014), which will include:

- Identification of those on the Communion Roll who attend infrequently.
- Special Visitation/s to these people, with literature from Minister and Session inviting them to attend specific events.
- A Congregational Outreach Week, with different activities for men, women, youths and children, special services and a visiting speaker – to which the whole congregation will be invited.
- A review of the Communion Roll in 2014, after further discussion in Session and additional personal contact and communication with all concerned.



New communion ware on the new communion table at Bushmills Presbyterian Church. The wine trays depict the distinctive shape of the Giant's Causeway stones, which are in the Parish Bounds.

Mission is about helping people to see who Jesus is as Saviour and Lord through word and deed. Like the first disciples, many of us in Bushmills may have our own doubts. So how can we reach the different types of people in our community with God's love? Jesus gives us hope for our doubts because He who has all authority promises to be with us always – "even to the end of time". Mission is all about Jesus.

This is why we can say:

*We do mission not in our strength, but through His.
We do it not for our Church, but for His.
We do it not for our glory, but for His.
We do it not in our time, but in His.*



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ADOPTED BY THE KIRK SESSION AT BUSHMILLS, 19 APRIL 2010