

Upper Braes Church – Summary Reflections – 30 November 2025

Less than a month ago, many of us took part in our church conference, with over two thirds of the worshipping congregation sharing in that meaningful time together. The Kirk Session has seen all the feedback that was shared, and begun to reflect and discern upon this, but more time is needed, so today I simply want to share a little of what we're heard, seen and begun to note.

The feedback about the weekend has been unanimously positive, from all the feedback forms we've received – those who could be there, found benefit in that time, and could see the value in doing something similar at a future point, but not too soon, so don't worry!

Over the weekend, we listened well, we spoke openly, and we reflected honestly on where we've come from, where we are now, and where God might be leading us next. The tone of the weekend felt relational, honest, hopeful, and we found that what emerged was a picture of a church that is loving, active, and open to God's leading. That had been a key aim of the weekend - just to give space for our hearts and minds to catch up with the need for change, and to do that in community and through conversation.

We began by reflecting on our four core values on the Friday evening, and it built up a picture of an active church, with a lot of opportunities where we can each invite, encourage and enable people to follow Jesus – and we do that by being connected to God, by belonging to His family, by being equipped for kingdom-living, and by being sent to partner with God in His mission.

But as a Kirk Session, we're wondering what needs to be pruned or adapted, to make space and time for greater balance in our values, as well as adding where things might be lacking. We noted for example, that our areas around equipping and being sent on mission, could do with some work, if we're to have a greater impact in our community. So, we intend to have conversations within the church family around this, beginning probably with the Team Conveners in January, which they heard about in an email earlier this week.

We recognise our strengths. But where we are strong, that's also where we have some fears. Many people mentioned the warmth of our welcome, the friendships they've formed here, the care that is shown in practical ways, and the sense they have of being accepted and valued. So this is already a place where people feel – by and large – that they are held, supported, and at home. This came across when we looked back over our story as a congregation. People remembered times of strong relationships, busy buildings, intergenerational life, meaningful worship, and a sense of shared purpose. There was of course an element of nostalgia with this, and rightly so - but it was also a reminder of what it feels like when a church family flourishes together.

And that's probably where most of our fears come in: concerns about losing our roots, losing connection with young adults or newcomers or even the people we know, as well as a fear of becoming overly busy, overstretched, such that we lose the breadth and depth of community we've come to value. In this particular season, some fear that structural or cultural change might outpace our readiness, leading to anxiety or fatigue.

Nevertheless, when we asked what people have already seen in terms of growth and renewal, well, the list there was really quite long. Reading it, gave a sense that these developments have brought greater maturity, openness, and spiritual fruitfulness, that there are signs of genuine renewal happening, even now amongst us. This is seen in greater freedom and

warmth in worship, children and young people more deeply involved, development of our prayer life, new leaders emerging, improved inclusion, strengthened outreach, and growing boldness. There is a sense of spiritual vitality for many — of God stirring something new in us.

And then as we looked to the future, we found these themes continued. There is a desire to grow not only in number, but in faith and maturity, so that we are a church who listen — to God, to our community and to one another. We heard hopes of remaining rooted in Scripture and prayer so that there is deeper spiritual formation; hopes of staying intergenerational; and hopes of becoming known locally as a joyful, hospitable presence in our community, where we welcome and support those who are searching, but also go out with greater boldness and openness to serve, to draw alongside, to take risks of faith, and maybe through all this to hear testimony of lives, or communities, transformed.

To realise these hopes, the conference deliberately didn't come with a plan, a strategy, or a vision to sell to the church family. It sought to make space to listen, that there would be no "us and them" between leaders and congregation. The reason for this, is that the Elders hope, wherever possible, that the transformation we all aspire to see, might come through each of us, each of us making positive choices to change, and discern how to live out our purpose and values. Too often, we hear stories elsewhere of churches struggling with change because only a few voices are heard, or a few people carry the load, or the collective buy-in to a journey forward, is simply not there. Yet, we recognise there may be a need to support such conversations and reflections, whether that's in teams, across the church family, or at an individual level.

So, to that end, we anticipate sharing in January some other outcomes based on feedback from the conference. Then in February, we'll have another weekend of prayer like we had in September (the 24/7 initiative), as well as the release of the community audit report. And then in early March, we'll have an afternoon of equipping around discerning where God is leading us to be on mission with Him in our local area. We hope that these resources and opportunities, as well as a number of other initiatives and things to trial, will keep the conversation going, and that by Easter we will feel further along the journey towards deeper discipleship, Spirit-led mission, and a future shaped by God.

We do believe God is inviting us on that journey, a hopeful journey, and if we will each engage through attentiveness, humility, courage, patience, and trust — then we are confident we will, as a church family, be giving God the space to continue His good work in us and lead us into that new season, a new chapter, where more of His Kingdom is seen in our midst and in our community, than we've ever known.