

The team visited Craigmillar Park Church on 31st March 2015.

We were struck by two statements they had made in their report - the first being their admission that they were in a fragile state, and the second that they were seeking advice on how to move forward working with neighbouring churches, both statements which immediately gave a positive rather than negative aspect to our visit. Here, we felt, was a congregation that was both honest and aware of its situation, and open to change and development. Our visit underlined this attitude.

In discussion with first John Urquhart and then the wider Session we heard of a church that was fragile but not frail - there are encouraging signs of new members and new growth, but with no school or obvious centre to the parish, finding a focus for mission has been difficult. Efforts have been made to 'galvanise people beyond the usual stalwarts to do anything', which has been hard but again is beginning to see results. A mother and toddler group is held on a Saturday rather than the usual weekday morning, to appeal to working parents who are often out of the parish during the week. The Session is also open to holding different types of service at different times in order to appeal to the wider parish and the needs of the parish.

Ecumenical work is strong within the area and relationships with neighbouring churches are positive. Recent meetings with elders from Priestfield and Reid Memorial churches to imagine ways forward, helped by an independent facilitator, have been very positive, with meetings also taking place between the three ministers.

This is a congregation genuinely seeking God's will and guidance, with no debilitating sense of self that might impede future development and partnerships. They are people who have a belief in a greater shepherd and try to trust that shepherd beyond immediate circumstances and this brings them a quiet but firm faith, and openness to growth and change. Concerns about the tenure of the minister come from a sense of care for the minister and his family, rather than simply the life of the church, and together the minister and Session make a strong, faithful and outward looking team.

Moira McDonald

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