

HOWE O' THE MEARNS PARISH

Our journey to the
Howe o' the Mearns Parish
Church of Scotland



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Church of Scotland



Howe o' the Mearns Parish
Church of Scotland
Aberdeenshire
January 2026
Please scan the QR code
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I lift up my eyes to the hills,
from where is my help to come?
My help comes from the Lord,
maker of heaven and earth.
— Ps. 121:1-2

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Bless to us, O Lord,
this earth on which we walk,
each mountain top, sunlit sky.

Bless to us, O Lord,
The beauty that we see,
soaring eagle, butterfly.

Bless to us, O Lord,
The peace within our heart,
when filled with joy or sorrow.

Bless to us, O Lord,
the journey that we make,
the footsteps that we follow.



INTRODUCTION

A journey shaped by necessity, faith, and hope

The formation of Howe o' the Mearns Parish arose from a sustained, prayerful journey undertaken by our three long-established parishes, namely Aberluthnott, Laurencekirk, and West Mearns. Each brought with it a rich history, a distinctive identity, cherished buildings, established patterns of worship, and deep relationships within local communities.

The movement towards union was shaped by careful discernment, extensive consultation and participation, and a growing recognition that our worshipping communities and faithful ministry in this part of the Mearns would be strengthened through interdependence and shared vision, resources, and leadership.

This narrative tells the story of that journey – the stepping-stone moments from September 2022 that carried three distinct groups of congregations to become one new parish, to come into being on 1 January 2026, as Howe o' the Mearns Parish, Church of Scotland. It is an account of responding faithfully to God's calling for transformation in our times and within the changing context of the broader Church of Scotland, while embracing new possibilities for worship, mission, and community life across the Howe of the Mearns.



REIMAGINING PARISH LIFE: THE WIDER CHURCH CONTEXT

Our journey towards union took place within a wider movement across the Church of Scotland. Over recent years, successive General Assembly deliverances have acknowledged the changing realities facing the Church – including declining membership, increasing costs, and the need to deploy ministry and resources more sustainably.

The General Assembly required Presbyteries to adopt a strategic and proactive approach by developing Presbytery Mission Plans, as set out in legislation: Act 8 of the General Assembly 2021 (Presbytery Mission Planning), as amended; the Presbytery Mission Plan Act; and related property and finance legislation, including the Church of Scotland General Trustees (Properties, Funds and Endowments) Act 2024.

Presbyteries were therefore charged with moving from reactive decision-making to planning – identifying how to sustain worshipping communities, release mission capacity, and exercise faithful stewardship of buildings and finances. The Presbytery of the North East and Northern Isles undertook this work with clarity and purpose, recognising that local congregations required support to navigate change.

It was within this wider ecclesial context that the parishes of Aberluthnott, Laurencekirk, and West Mearns were invited – and ultimately encouraged – to explore a shared future.



EARLY CONVERSATIONS: RECOGNISING CHALLENGES AND POSSIBILITIES

Early conversations began with reflection and openness. Each parish was experiencing pressures that were familiar across rural and semi-rural Scotland: ageing congregations, rising maintenance costs, limited volunteer capacity, and increasing complexity in governance and compliance.

However, there was also a strong awareness of shared strengths - a deep faith in God, committed volunteers and leaders, valued buildings, a strong presence in respective communities, and a clear desire to remain present and active in villages and towns across the Mearns. Gradually, the central question shifted from “How do we survive separately?” to “How might we thrive together?”

The establishment of the Parish Union Task Team (PUTT), comprising representatives from the three governance structures, namely the Kirk Sessions, marked a decisive step forward. This group and its regular, consistent gatherings became the space where shared faith and convictions, legal responsibilities, sharing the best interests of all, and practical reality were held together. Its work was careful, methodical, and relational, ensuring that no parish was rushed and that each voice was heard. Along the way, regular feedback was shared with Kirk Sessions and more generally, congregations.





LISTENING AND DISCERNING: MISSION AT THE CENTRE

Rather than beginning with buildings or budgets, the task team prioritised listening – both to congregations and to the wider communities they serve.

Community questionnaires were distributed across the villages and towns of the Mearns, inviting people to reflect on how they experience church, what they value, and where new opportunities for engagement might lie. The findings of the research process were valuable, with rich variations in responses, reinforcing the conviction that the church's future could not be shaped solely from within, but must remain attentive to the hopes and needs of the communities it serves.

Alongside this, each parish brought their existing mission plan into conversation. While differing in form, common themes quickly emerged: There were clear needs for a pastoral presence in communities, community connection, work with children and schools, hospitality, and creative use of buildings. These shared priorities led to the development of a single, unified mission plan – one that honours local identity while coordinating effort and releasing energy across the whole parish.



MAKING DECISIONS: BUILDINGS AND STEWARDSHIP

Church buildings are places of memory, meaning, and belonging. Simultaneously, the Presbytery Mission Plan required rigorous planning around sustainability, use, and cost. Through professional assessment, consultation, and liaison with Presbytery, a way forward emerged that was creative and realistic. Church buildings at Laurencekirk, Luthermuir, and Fettercairn were to be retained (Luthermuir church would continue its role of 'accommodating' the Caim retreat and mission project). All of our six worshipping communities would continue as such. However, the church buildings of Marykirk, Auchenblae, and Glenbervie were designated for transfer of ownership, with various possibilities of ongoing use, subject to legal requirements, charitable obligations, and Presbytery approval. This would cohere with the consensus that capital resources be directed towards ministry, outreach, and long-term sustainability. Throughout, the PUTT worked closely with Presbytery officers, General Trustees, and professional advisers to ensure decisions were lawful, transparent, and pastorally sensitive.

THE NEW KIRK SESSION

Continuity was a central principle of the unification process; accordingly, it was agreed that all current active elders would constitute the new Kirk Session, ensuring stability during an initial six-month period. Following this phase, a structured review process would facilitate discernment regarding the future configuration of leadership. Alongside this, a renewed commitment to worship, pastoral care, outreach, and spiritual growth was articulated. The ongoing recognition of Local Worshipping Communities (LWC) in Auchenblae, Glenbervie, and Marykirk reflects the prioritisation of a local presence through flexible patterns of worship and pastoral care.

NEW OPPORTUNITIES: DEALING WITH FINANCES

Financial realities were examined and addressed throughout the journey. This meant developing and testing detailed scenarios and examining configurations for the future. Issues for deliberation included the maintenance and insurance of all existing buildings, costs associated with resourcing the work of the parish, and running expenses. These discussions were always grounded in faithful stewardship to ensure long-term future sustainability. The financial accounts of the three parishes were required to be consolidated into a single financial entity, necessitating the pooling of resources, the completion of associated administrative processes, and the establishment of a dedicated financial management team. Although initial apprehension focused on the scale and complexity of the task, these concerns gave way to the recognition of new opportunities. A united parish was understood to offer enhanced administrative capacity, access to wider volunteer pools, more strategic deployment of reserves and investments, greater coherence in applications for external funding, and the sharing of expertise across property, finance, worship, and mission. The union came to be understood not as a loss of independence, but as a gain in resilience – enabling churches to do together what they could no longer do alone.

TAKING THE LEGAL STEPS: CONGREGATIONAL DECISION-MAKING

The journey culminated in congregational decision-making. Votes were held in accordance with church law, overseen by Presbytery, with electoral rolls reviewed and processes followed with integrity and care. The approval of the Basis of Union by congregations, Presbytery, and the relevant national bodies confirmed that this was not merely an administrative change, but a shared commitment to a new future. The new name – Howe o' the Mearns Parish Church of Scotland – expressed both geography and belonging, rooting the new parish firmly in the landscape and communities it serves.



Deep peace of the
RUNNING WAVES TO YOU.

Deep peace of the
FLOWING AIR TO YOU.

Deep peace of the
QUIET EARTH TO YOU.

Deep peace of the
SHINING STARS TO YOU.

Deep peace of the
SON OF PEACE TO YOU.



STRENGTHS, CONTEXTS AND CHALLENGES

Many positive developments and strengths point to resilience as our new parish becomes a firm reality. Collaborations, joint events, and shared worship already characterise the nature of relationships in this beautiful and blessed Howe o' the Mearns. The many participants, volunteers, workers, and supporters in leadership, worship, hospitality, programmes and events, pastoral care, and fundraising, demonstrate that we are already a vibrant community of Christ followers. We have also developed our shared mission, vision, and set of values (available in this booklet). As planning was happening, our new united parish was being constituted naturally.

It is, however, of critical importance that when planning, specific contexts and challenges that need to be considered should be identified. It was agreed that the unified parish must address the realities of the following scenarios:

- The new parish has only one full-time minister overseeing all our worship centres
- The creation of a minister-led parish ministry team is vital to assist in worship delivery, pastoral care, mission and other activities
- As is evident in general trends in the United Kingdom, congregations are ageing, and there is a need to engage younger generations
- There is a need to align building use with mission priorities
- Financial sustainability must be sought in keeping with a rapidly changing world
- There is a need for technological infrastructure to support modern ministry



May the blessing of light be on you
light without and light within
May the blessed sunlight shine on you
like a great peat fire
May the blessing of the rain be on you
and may it fall upon your Spirit
to wash it fair and clean,
May the blessing of the earth be on you,
soft under your feet
as you pass along the roads,
And now may the Lord bless you,
and bless you kindly. Amen.

Scottish Blessing



LIFE TOGETHER IN OUR NEW HOWE O' THE MEARNS PARISH

THE NEW PARISH BEGINS

From 1 January 2026, the parishes of Aberluthnott, Laurencekirk, and West Mearns became a single united parish, marking the culmination of more than three years of prayerful work. We express our sincere thanks to all who contributed to this process: those who served on the Parish Union Task Team (PUTT), supported the process in prayer, contributed, and carried significant additional responsibilities.

As Howe o' the Mearns Parish comes into being, it does so with gratitude for the journey already travelled and confidence in what lies ahead. The union has created space – space for collaboration, imagination, and renewed mission. It has required trust, patience, courage, and a willingness to release familiar patterns for the sake of future faithfulness.

The parish begins its life not as an experiment, but as a hopeful expression of what the Church of Scotland seeks to be: locally rooted, mission-focused, and sustained by shared leadership and purpose. The story so far has been one of discernment and opportunity. The next chapter is now being written.

In these turbulent times, when the world needs hope, love, justice, and peace more than ever, we pray that our new parish will sustain and grow the work of God in the communities across the Howe of the Mearns and beyond.



All of creation declares the glory of God
The skies display the work of the Maker's hands
Day after day the oceans pour forth
the chorus of God's great love
Their praises echo to the ends of the world

God our Maker
Breathe wisdom into our thinking
Grace into our speaking and singing
Mercy into our hearing and doing
Join our praises with your timeless melody
and may all our hearts be united
with your great love for all of creation
and all peoples

May the words of our mouths
the meditations of our hearts
and the work of our hands
be pleasing to you and instrumental
in the peaceful making of your kingdom
so that wars cease, creation thrives,
and justice abounds

Amen

LIFE TOGETHER IN OUR NEW HOWE O' THE MEARNS PARISH

WORSHIP ACROSS THE PARISH

The parish covers a wide geographical area, including six existing places of worship: Auchenblae, Fettercairn, Glenbervie, Laurencekirk, Luthermuir, and Marykirk. Each Sunday, there will normally be two services at 9:30 am and two services at 11:00 am. Fettercairn (9:30 am) and Laurencekirk (11:00 am) meet every Sunday; other churches worship on a rotating basis. There is a combined parish service each time there is a fifth Sunday in a month, at either Fettercairn or Laurencekirk – a visible expression of the shared life of the parish.

ONLINE WORSHIP AND DIGITAL CONNECTIONS

Recognising the importance of accessibility, inclusion, and ongoing connection, the parish has committed to maintaining and developing a strong digital presence. Worship at Fettercairn is live-streamed every Sunday at 9:30 am. This is accessible on Facebook, as well as directly on our new website www.mearnsparish.org. Plans are also underway to livestream the Laurencekirk service of worship.

We offer a Sunday evening online service of prayer and meditation, accessible via our website, at 7:00 pm. An active and accessible online profile will also be maintained through our website and social media platforms to support communication, community outreach, and participation.





MISSION AND MINISTRY IN PRACTICE

We have various ongoing ministries to which all are warmly invited. Contact information is in this booklet.

- Weekly church services welcoming everyone and anyone, whether you are a regular church member or a visitor – seeking worship, quiet reflection, prayer, fellowship, or inspiration: you are welcome
- A weekly online Sunday evening prayer and reflection hour
- The Guilds in Fettercairn and Auchenblae offer friendship, social interaction, and opportunities for service
- Drop-in Cafés in Fettercairn each Monday from July to October, and on the last Monday of each month throughout the year
- Ministry outreach to schools (participation in school assemblies, Scripture Union groups, chaplaincy support for pupils and staff, children’s club, Tuesdays in term time in Fettercairn)
- ‘The Blether’ on Fridays at 10:30 am in Luthermuir Church, a source of friendship and social interaction
- ‘The Table’ on Wednesday evenings, sharing a meal and evening meditation
- Remembrance Sunday services for community reflection, thanksgiving, and prayers for peace
- Community Harvest Festival celebrations, focusing on agriculture and the environment, that are especially significant in the Howe o’ the Mearns
- Baptisms, weddings and funerals are available at all the churches, individually arranged by contacting the parish office
- Community Christmas Carol services at the Caim and across the Howe o’ the Means Parish churches



God of seed and growth and harvest,
Creator of all that grows and all that sustains,
give us we pray our daily bread,
enough for our needs
and an abundance for all good works.
Give us also we pray, the bread of life,
that we shall have a care to feed the hungry,
and to seek for peace and justice in the world.
Help us Lord to remember and to know in our hearts,
that you are our life today and every day;
you are the food we need, now and for ever.
Amen

A New Zealand Prayer Book
Christine Sine <https://godspace.wordpress.com/>

THE CAIM: A CENTRE FOR MISSION AND RETREAT

The Caim is a distinctive expression of parish life shaped by the land, the seasons and faith. Located beside Luthermuir Church, it is led by Rev Fyfe Blair. The Caim is a resource locally and regionally, where growing food, learning together and offering hospitality sit at the heart of what happens. Set on 2.5 acres, it continues to develop a working Market Garden that grows and shares fresh local produce to local larders and the community. It offers meaningful gardening activities, learning opportunities and partnerships across generations. It is actively involved in school-based growing projects. The Caim also provides space for retreats, quiet reflection, prayer, rest and renewal, seeking the well-being and flourishing of people, place and creation as part of the parish's life and witness.

PARISH LIFE, EVENTS AND COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

Throughout the year, many events and activities take place across the parish, reflecting hospitality, creativity, and community engagement. These include coffee mornings, drop-in cafés, quiz and bingo evenings, flower festivals, a Christmas Tree Festival, and music, choral and other special events. We also have various retreats and gatherings at the CAIM and ongoing opportunities for involvement in the many growing activities. All events are advertised widely, including on our Facebook page, and provide important points of connection within and beyond the worshipping community.



OUR MISSION STATEMENT

This unified mission plan for the new parish, encompassing the former parishes of West Mearns, Laurencekirk, and Aberluthnott, reflects a shared commitment to serve God by serving our communities.

By integrating resources, talents, and vision, the parish seeks to be spiritually vibrant, mission-focused, and sustainable, honouring its distinctive histories while embracing a shared future.

We seek to serve God by offering worship, pastoral care, fellowship, and outreach to all; supporting key life events such as baptisms, marriages, and funerals; proclaiming the Good News and nurturing faith in people of all ages; fostering community well-being and inclusivity; and stewarding our resources responsibly to fulfil our calling

OUR VISION

To be a unified, welcoming parish that engages fully with our communities; To offer vibrant, accessible worship and foster spiritual growth; To be a hub of service, outreach, and faith for all

OUR VALUES

- Faithfulness: Rooted in scripture and teachings of Christ
- Inclusivity: Welcoming all regardless of background or belief
- Service: Prioritising the needs of the vulnerable and marginalised
- Collaboration: Working together across churches, communities and organisations
- Stewardship: Responsibly managing our resources to sustain our mission



GRATITUDE AND LOOKING FORWARD WITH CONFIDENCE

Our journey towards becoming one united parish was a journey marked by trust— that God is actively guiding this process. We have increasingly sought to discern how God is at work among us, and how we might respond faithfully, with humility and confidence. As the Howe o’ the Mearns Parish comes into being, it does so with gratitude for the road travelled by each of the historic parishes, and for our more recent journey together, with confidence in the future. It has required trust, patience, courage, and a willingness to release familiar patterns for future growth and faithfulness.

Given our collective parish histories that span hundreds of years since St Palladius arrived in the Fourdon area in the 430s, we know that God’s work in the Howe o’ the Mearns parish is assured for years to come. We thank all those who have contributed to and shared in the ongoing work of the three parishes (West Mearns, Laurencekirk and Aberluthnott) over the years, through your time, monetary contributions, skills, and prayer.

We see the strengths of these three parishes invigorated by this union, having created space for collaboration, imagination, renewed mission, and growing faith. Our new parish begins its life not experimentally, but as a hopeful expression of what the Church of Scotland seeks to be: locally rooted, mission-focused, and sustained by shared leadership and purpose. The next chapter is being written. May we move forward in God’s hope, confidence, and commitment to making a difference in our world.

Rev Brian Smith and the whole team



Minister: Rev Brian Smith

Session Clerk: Alison Duncan

The Caim (Mission Project): Rev Dr Fyfe Blair

Worship Convenor: Phil Smith

Treasurer: Jane McBain

Safeguarding Coordinator: Lesley Adamson

Presbytery Elder: Audrey White

Pastoral Care & Schools Chaplain: Angie Mutch (Student Deacon)

Property Convenor: Ed Murray

Audio Visual and IT: Steve Coles

MINISTRY TEAM

Rev Brian Smith

Rev Dr Fyfe Blair

Angie Mutch

ADDITIONAL SUPPLY PREACHERS

Rev John Notman

Steven Coles

Georgie Middleton

CONTACT DETAILS

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