

## **Proposed Adoption of The Church of Scotland Unitary Constitution: The Steeple Church Congregational Vote - Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2020.**

*Everything must be done in a proper and orderly way (1 Corinthians 14.40)*

On Sunday 2nd February, immediately after the Morning Service, the members and adherents of the Steeple Church will be invited to vote on whether to move from our current Model Deed Constitution to a new Unitary Constitution.

Please make every effort to be there to help our congregation make this important decision. This short document has been written to help you as you consider how to respond.

### **Frequently Asked Questions about the Unitary Constitution.**

It used to be that every Church of Scotland congregation was encouraged to have a way of working using a Kirk Session and a Congregational Board. This was called the Model Deed of Constitution. The Steeple Church has operated with the Model Constitution for many years. Recognising that this organisational model was no longer optimal for many congregations, a different model was introduced at the General Assembly in 2003. Under this new Unitary Constitution, everything is governed by a single group, the Kirk Session. While it remains up to each congregation to discern the best way of managing themselves, the central Church of Scotland has been strongly encouraging congregations to consider moving to the Unitary Constitution.

#### **Q. What are we being asked to decide?**

**A.** The members of both the Kirk Session and Congregational Board have voted to recommend changing The Steeple Church's constitution from our current Model Constitution to a new Unitary Constitution. This requires a vote of the congregation, which will take place immediately after the Service on 2nd February. This decision, if agreed, would lead to the Congregational Board being disbanded and the Kirk Session taking on its responsibilities. If agreed by the congregation on 2<sup>nd</sup> February, it is intended to seek to have the new Unitary Constitution come into effect on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 following approval by Dundee Presbytery.

#### **Q. Why would we want to do this?**

**A.** Currently the responsibility for running the Church is split between the Board and the Session. Ending that division of responsibilities will make for more effective decision making and allow us to move forward more positively as a congregation. One important issue is that under the current Model Constitution, all members of both Kirk Session and Congregational Board are legal Trustees of the Steeple Church Charity. Currently Trustees who are elected Board members only make decisions over some areas of the Steeple Church's life, though, as Charity Trustees, they have a legal responsibility for all aspects of the Charity's functioning. For this reason it is better for all core Charity Trustee responsibilities to be handled by one body of Trustees, so all Trustees are fully involved in the governance of the Charity and able to promote a clearer sense of direction for the overall strategy of the congregation.

#### **Q. What are the main differences between the Model Constitution and the Unitary Constitution?**

**A.** The Steeple Church currently operates under the Model Constitution whereby spiritual matters are the responsibility of the Kirk Session and temporal matters (finance and property) are the responsibility of the Congregational Board. The Congregational Board is made up of Elders, who also sit on the Kirk Session, and other non-Elders elected by the congregation. It is recognised that the separation between spiritual and temporal matters is often quite arbitrary as they are often closely intertwined. For example, stewardship, giving and the use of buildings are not just about property and

finances. If the congregation decides to adopt a Unitary Constitution, then a single body, the Kirk Session, will have oversight of the whole life and service of The Steeple Church and there will not be a Congregational Board.

Importantly, most of the operational work of the congregation, including fabric and finance matters, is already devolved to 'Teams'. The Unitary Constitution places a stronger emphasis on the devolution of responsibility and operational decision-making to these Teams and so should allow for better informed and faster decision-making and fewer and more focussed Kirk Session meetings.

**Q. Will there be opportunities for non-Elders to participate in the running of The Steeple Church?**

**A.** Definitely YES. The Teams are where the bulk of The Steeple Church's work will be carried out. All members of the church family will be encouraged to become active in the decision-making process and delivery of the work of the church through their participation on one or more Teams. It will be essential to maintain the current very high level of volunteering from the whole congregation in the future work of The Steeple.

Some people may have a concern that the 'democratic' element contained in the Model Constitution, whereby members of the congregation are elected to serve on the Congregational Board, will be lost under the Unitary Constitution if the present system of appointment of elders is maintained. It is proposed to adopt a system whereby all members of the congregation are encouraged to nominate names of potential elders to the Minister or Session Clerk. Assessment and appointment of new elders would then be made by the Kirk Session.

Kirk Session meetings will continue to be open to all and an invitation will be extended to the congregation to attend. There will be an opportunity for any member of the congregation to speak at meetings, though final decisions will remain in the hands of the elders.

It is recognised that there are those in the congregation who wish to be more involved in the life and work of the congregation but for a variety of reasons do not wish to be Charity Trustees. Under the new structure they can have their voice heard and skills fully used for the glory of God and the life and work of the our church without this additional tier of responsibility.

**Q. Will there still be an Annual Business Meeting?**

**A.** Yes. Annual Business Meetings will be held to receive the Congregational Accounts and to report on the life and work of the congregation.

**Q. Will the Unitary Constitution help to strengthen our congregation's life and work?**

**A.** The Unitary Constitution gives more flexibility on how congregational matters are dealt with. The new organisational structure that is being proposed within the framework of the Unitary Constitution will give our Teams more authority to get on with the work within their remit, but with more effective leadership, support and lines of communication for all involved.

**Q. Who should I speak to if I have further questions?**

**A.** If you have any other questions, please refer to the document 'The Steeple Church: options around adoption of a new organisational model' on the Steeple Church website or ask Robert Calvert, Lynda Forte or Alistair Emslie-Smith.