

Plains Reimagining – a Vision

March 2024

The Goal:

To maintain and grow a meaningful and sustainable Christian presence in the Mid Canterbury region.

The Vision:

To craft something new while continuing to provide ongoing ministry and worship to existing Plains parishioners that is not Ashburton-based.

‘It’s from the old we travel to the new, keep me travelling along with you.’ – Sydney Carter

“No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse. ¹⁷ Neither do people pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved.” ***(Jesus in Matthew 9:16)***

The Plains reality – something has to give!

- In the Ashburton region there has been an 18-month long (so far!) reflective process among the Presbyterian leadership. A time of wondering ‘what’s next?’ as all our churches are struggling against an outgoing tide of decline.
- Presbytery is committed to having an ongoing vibrant Christian presence operating in Mid-Canterbury.
- Plains Parish have been aware of the reality regarding their numerous buildings since May 2023. There have been many opportunities for discussion as to the future, with no clear way forward proposed.
- The buildings need significant attention – there are substantial seismic risk challenges, high insurance costs, maintenance challenges, and the facilities were built for church activities involving many more people than we have now.
- The leadership team are becoming increasingly frustrated at discussions going around in circles with no clear actions. It is dispiriting and overwhelming. The magnitude of the problems and the time and expertise required to fix them is colossal.
- 40 or so people regularly attend services across the Rakaia-Methven-Staveley-Mayfield communities, but the reality is that the numbers at any one service are much lower than that and young families are absent.

Reimagining the future:

A bold step would be for Plains to invite Alpine Presbytery to close Plains Parish and start afresh. This would mean:

- The current Parish Council would be discharged.
- The entire resources of Plains become an entirely fluid resource of Alpine Presbytery with no tags.
- The proceeds from buildings and reserves can be repurposed in whatever way we wish to enable something new to grow in Mid Canterbury.
- Presbytery would work with the current leadership to enable the ongoing provision of Sunday worship, committing an initial five years to work with existing parishioners.

Potential benefits would be:

- Allow the Presbytery to attend to the 'too many buildings' issues rather than us having to do this and carry the weight of having to do the inevitable closures.
- Provide sufficient money to work with the locals to provide ***an initial 5 years of half-time ministry*** to the remnant Plains congregants.
- This ministry leader would work with a team of elders and others in the area - not to simply be a chaplain but to look for opportunities to grow and prosper the church and serve the community.
One possibility is that an effective full-time position could be achieved by linking this person with another half-time ministry position in Ashburton.
- Follow through on the parallel dream that has emerged in our conversations, namely, ***to actively pursue crafting a new mission seedling based in Methven*** (but potentially working in Rakaia as well) that seeks a less encumbered way to connect with the younger generations who are making their way into the region (Presbytery already has a number of these operating in the Christchurch area and has training and support mechanisms in place).
- Explore ways to enable the Methven buildings to best serve all the mission needs for the next season. This could include replacing the hall and creating a more functional and flexible community spaces in the buildings.

Plains Parish Council needs to lead the way in taking the first step – once this has been achieved, an open and comprehensive consultation process can be undertaken across the parish to make sure this bold step is the wish of most of the people.

We note with gratitude the faithful witness of many over the years who sowed the seeds of faith and nourished and nurtured our communities. There was a long season of growth and our forebears committed themselves to doing everything they could to fan the flames of faith. We honour them and look for ways to build on their legacy of faithfulness rather than let the flame extinguish.

Possible Timeline

1. Decision by Parish Council 19th March
2. Congregations get advised the following Sunday – at services and in the Bulletin – advertising Congregational Meeting
3. 3 initial conversation spaces (Mayfield, Methven and Rakaia) to open the discussion and listen to each other. (April – reports back to April Parish Council Meeting).
4. May - one congregational meeting for the whole parish. If agreed to by at least 2/3rds majority then.....
5. Letter from Plains to Alpine requesting closing of Parish.
6. Alpine send in a Commission and a second congregational meeting is called – needs 2/3rd majority to agree to closure. (May/June).
7. June/July/August – transition process from Plains to Alpine.