

Loving God,
Loving one another and
Loving others,
from our doorstep to
the ends of the earth.

Introduction

Alongside the re-development of the church building in 2017, we had Vision 2020. It helped set our focus for the following years on what God was calling us to be about in and from this place: Worship – Sending – Serving.

As we move beyond 2020 and all that has happened and changed in the past 3-4 years, we're looking afresh at what our vision is for Saintfield Road Presbyterian Church is for the years to come.

Since before lockdown - and all throughout that period - the elders have engaged in a great deal of prayer, study, listening and discussion about this. We have come to a point in this process where we have put some shape to our thoughts, but we now want to widen this to the whole congregation for further prayer, reflection and input.

So what follows is not "the finished article"! Rather, it outlines our thoughts and discussions so far and provides some questions for others in SRPC to dwell on and also to provide feedback. Please do read, reflect and take the opportunities we will have in groups – or as individuals – to respond. What strikes you, encourages you, or raises questions for you? What you think needs to be more strongly underlined / prioritised, or you feel is currently missing?

We value great engagement. This is to be a vision for us as a whole Church family to own...

Part 1. Looking ahead and having a vision: Beyond 2020...

One of the working titles we have used along the way has been *Beyond 2020*. 20:20 commonly relates to sight. *Vision 2020* caught that idea. In the same way beyond 2020 might express something which is *beyond* sight. We not only move beyond that remarkable year past, though it still affects us; as our world has been shaken, we have been reminded once again, that we live “*by faith and not by sight*” (2 Cor 5:7). We put our faith in the God who is sovereign, living in a world that we see is not under our control.

Yet, under God and with our faith in Him, having a vision for the coming years is important. It helps to unite and inspire us as a church, talking about who we believe God is, who we are, and what we believe He is wanting to do in and through us. It helps us to focus on particular intentions as we anticipate growing as the people Jesus has called us to be in this place beyond 2020.

With this in mind, we should recognise some important things about any vision we might have for the future.

It is a vision that builds on the past.

To move *beyond 2020*, is not to dismiss all God has done to bring us this far. *Vision 2020* helped us to focus on worship, sending and serving. When we look beyond 2020 we are still rooted in who we have been as God’s people and shaped by previous vision. It’s not as if we will no longer worship, send or serve; and these key ideas find their way into a future vision. We are not starting with a blank page.

It is a vision to be thankful for all we have.

There is much to celebrate in what God has done through our ongoing journey of 60 years of SRPC and any vision for the future should reflect this. It is and will continue to be important in these coming years simply to be thankful for how God has worked in us through his Spirit and all that we have in Christ Jesus. Not everything is about change!

It is a vision shaped by these days.

Yet we also recognise how God has brought us through fires, tragedy and now pandemic. None of these things define us, but they all play their part in shaping us. The fires were a catalyst for *Vision 2020*. And we continue to ask as we celebrate all God has done among us: how does God want to continue to shape us, beyond 2020?

It is a vision that gives us focus.

We begin with three big, related, ways in which we believe God wants us to understand ourselves and our calling at Saintfield Road. Coming from this, you will see some areas of our life together under God that we particularly feel led to focus on. For each of these we have talked about both our aspirations and possible actions for the future. Ultimately, a vision needs to lead to a plan of action. We would particularly value feedback and input into this.

There are also things that continue to be important for us, even though they may not have a big title in here. For example, in our Youth and Children’s work, we want to recognise the investment we have made already and the fruit we have seen: the integral part we have for children and young people in our church life and their discipleship within our intergenerational family. We intend to continue investing fully in our children and young people in the ways we want the *whole* family to grow.

It is a vision that recognises the different speed at which things might develop.

This is not a vision of everything changing overnight. Some matters are more straightforward or immediate; others are on the “long finger”. In some areas of church life we simply want to celebrate what is already happening; in other areas, it may involve a change in our culture / attitudes as a church over a period of time. Part of this wider discussion with the congregation is to help us appreciate and clarify this more.

It is a vision where we remain open to the fresh leading of God’s Spirit.

For all we might plan or conceive or believe we might be led to do – we must be open to the Spirit. This is not a vision that says: “we’re doing these things and nothing else!” We do not wish to be blind to what God may do in our world and our lives - surely the pandemic has reminded us of that. Rather, we are setting down what we believe God is particularly calling us to be and do. But there are also a number of areas where we believe we should be open to God at work, even though we’re not sure at the moment how that would take shape: we might simply wait to see if something bubbles up. Perhaps there are things completely unforeseen to us that God has planned. We are called to have vision - we should remain open.

It is a vision where we remain committed to time and space in which to *be*, rather than simply filling life with things to *do*.

Once again, we have been reminded by the pandemic, not simply to do something, but to sit there; and of the precious value of other people in our lives. Our vision, as we set out, is not for Saintfield Road to become a place consumed with doing more things, taking up the time and energy of the members of the family. We do not want to take each other away from other people among who we live lives of love and witness. Of course, there may arise new activities, programmes, actions, and commitments. But we want to guard time to worship and reflect and be in the company of other people: Loving God, loving one another, loving others.

Having a vision helps us to pause and recognise the journey we are on. As we look back, we celebrate the godly heritage we have inherited; and as we look forward, we do so together with anticipation and imagination. We are open to God’s Spirit at work in us as his worshipping people in this place.

At this point, ask yourself:

- What will life be like next year; 3 years from now; 10 years from now?
- What will SRPC be like next year; 3 years from now; 10 years from now?

Part 2. Developing a Biblical vision: grounded in Scripture

We want our vision – our understanding of who God is, who we are and what he is calling us to be and do – to be grounded in Scripture.

One particular verse provides a great starting point for us to express big biblical themes at the heart of our vision.

We love because he first loved us.

(1 John 4:19)



Let's begin by noting three significant things about it:

1. We / us

Here is the language of a group of people, not just individuals. Here is a vision for how God wants to love and shape *us*; who *we* are, what *we* are about, how *we* are a family, how *we* love and meet and serve and grow together. However vital our personal relationship with Christ, this is a vision for *us*, together.

2. Love

Love is the verb. God's love for us in Jesus Christ and our primary response to God and people. Love here is not merely a sentiment but a self-giving, worked-out commitment. It may be emotional, but it is spiritual and practical. It is a choice of the heart and mind to be obedient to God. It is the essence of the commandments: Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind... and Love your neighbour as yourself (Matt 22:37-40)

3. He first loved us

The love of God for us in Jesus Christ – shown in flesh on the cross – is where we begin. Out of love God has made the first move. He is the initiator, the motivation, the source and the example for our lives of love. So we are called always to be Christ-centred, looking first to Christ and being filled with his love. Then, that love may overflow to others – we love them as he first loved us.

A vision grounded in scripture helps us to stay on the right track – always looking first to God; appreciating that it's about *us*, not just *me*; and seeking to love others with a Christ-like love.

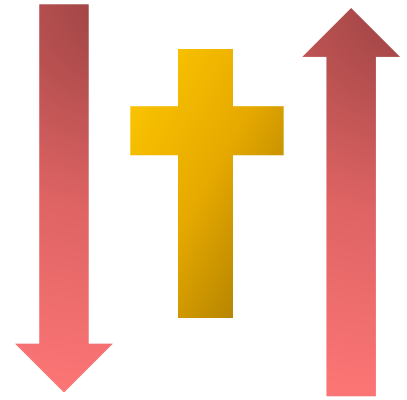
The following three sections arise from this biblical foundation, focussing on how we respond to God's love for us by **loving God, loving one another and loving others**. Each consists of a headline, a diagram (that develops as we go), and some text that expands further what we believe and what that means for us.

But first, you might like to pause to reflect on these questions:

- Who do we love? And how do we show it?

Loving God...

We are created by the Father for Christ-centred worship to be shaped by the Spirit.



*We love **because He first loved us** (1 John 4:19)*

We worship a loving God. Our worship is the response to the fact he first loved us.

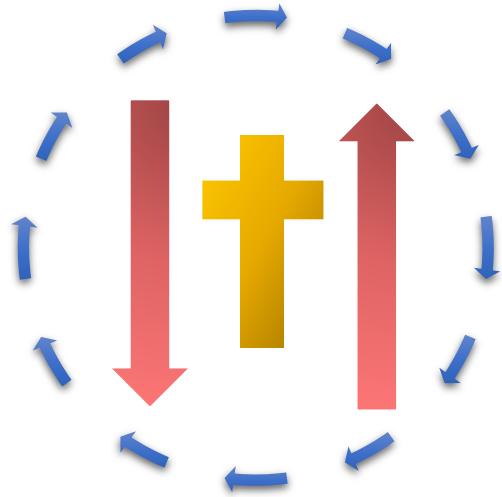
God takes the initiative The God of heaven has come down to us. At the centre of everything is Christ, who gave himself for us on the cross. The Creator of all calls us in Christ to know him as Father. He speaks to us through his Word. His Spirit has been poured out into our lives and He works in and among us.

We love God. We come together to worship; to be renewed in the faith, hope and love we have in Christ and the gospel; to praise Him and grow together; to depend on our Father in prayer; to open Scripture and ourselves to be shaped more like Christ by his Spirit.

Our worship together feeds our daily personal / family worship. All that we are – the living of our very lives - and all that we have, is given in worship out of love for God.

Loving one another...

We are called together in the Father's family to live Christ-like lives equipped by the Spirit.



We love because He first loved us (1 John 4:19)

Loving God leads us to love one another.

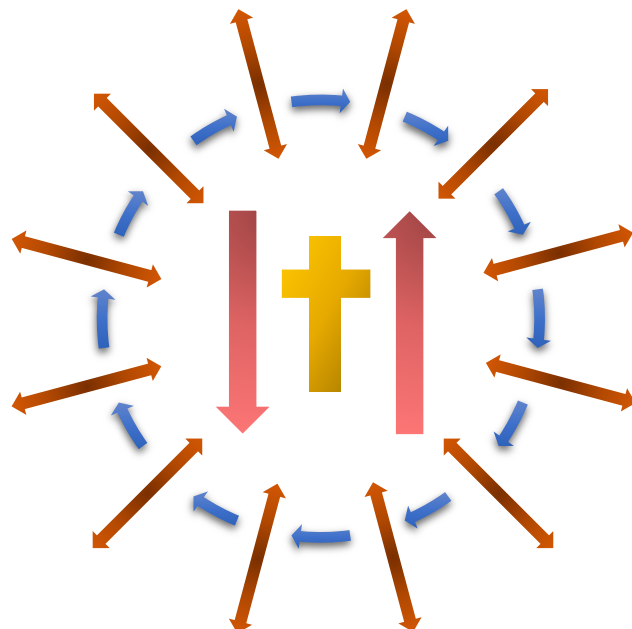
In Jesus Christ, we are called together as a family: one Father, one Lord, one Spirit; different people as one; all ages together.

It is not simply as individuals but together that we grow together and become more like Christ. So we live cross-shaped lives – going through suffering together; but together the Spirit equips us – each one differently but for the common good – to serve him and one another. The many “one anothers” in the Bible make this dynamic clear: we love / forgive / teach and admonish / serve / accept / greet / comfort / encourage / pray for / speak truth to / are hospitable to – one another.

We understand church, then, as a family. Together in Christ we find love, identity, assurance, security, encouragement, purpose in serving; and yet we are challenged by his Spirit in us to grow and live as his people. The church family should therefore be a safe place of refuge for all who come in and are afflicted; and yet a place in which the Spirit disturbs us, moving us out of our comfort zones to follow Christ.

Loving others...

We are sent by the Father on a Christ-proclaiming mission empowered by the Spirit.



We love because He first loved us (1 John 4:19)

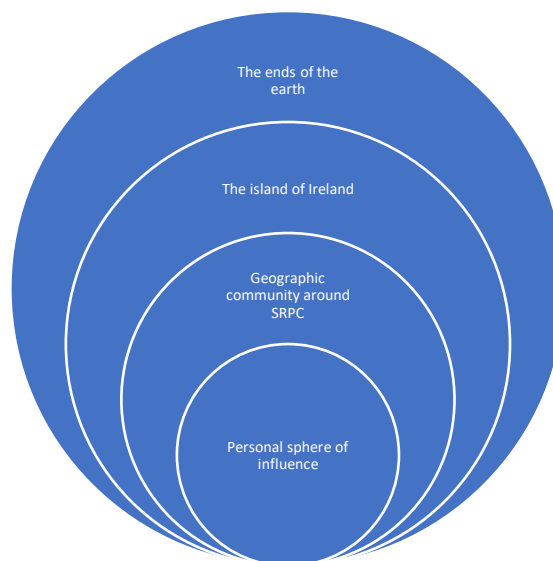
We gather to worship and be renewed in the love of God that we may scatter. We are sent out by God to worship and witness with all of our lives – declaring the praises of him who brought us out of darkness into his wonderful light. We love one another – and in that is witness, says Jesus – by this all men will know that you are my disciples.

All of us are sent, each and every one of us missionaries; we proclaim Christ in word and deed, as we live just where he has placed us – even right on our very doorsteps. We are empowered to do this and emboldened to take risks, by the Spirit.

So we are sent where God has placed us – in our homes and neighbourhoods and around the Saintfield Road where our building is situated. And we also draw people around us in; our building, our warm welcome, our engagement seeking to be at the heart of this community: come and find true hope with us in Jesus.

We go out and draw in with ever-widening circles: where we live and work; the geographic community around SRPC; our Presbytery area and other churches and kingdom work around us; Belfast, Northern Ireland and wider still as part of PCI and the wider church in Ireland; and to the ends of the earth.

Just as we are all sent, so we recognise that we are part of sending people, near and far, with the love of God, to love others.



We are the worshipping family of God created, called and sent in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Our vision of who we are and what we are to be about is grounded in loving God, loving one another and loving others.

As you reflect on this – think about these questions?

- How is our worship together an opportunity to be encouraged, renewed and nourished in the love of God and in our faith?
- How could our church family life be an opportunity to demonstrate love and care for one another?
- What could we do (differently) to share God's love with those who do not know Jesus and are not yet part of our church family?

Part 3. Building on a vision: aspirations and actions...

So we have a biblical foundation of Loving God, Loving one another and Loving others. We understand that it takes place where God has placed us, particularly on the Saintfield Road, but beyond there, too.

Arising from this biblical vision, the following are six areas of SRPC church family life about which we believe we should have an intentional focus.

- Gathering on a Sunday
- Growing together as disciples
- Caring for one another
- Going from our doorstep to the ends of the earth
- Using our buildings
- Reaching out to our surrounding geographic community

For each of these areas, in our Session discussions we we have talked about:

- Our understanding of where we are and our *aspirations* of what we want to see under God (we want..., we value...). This is reflected in the first half of each section.
- possible *actions* we might engage in (develop..., encourage..., explore..., build... etc). These are in the green boxes in the second half of each section.

We have not yet made decisions on these things or made plans to prioritise or action anything. They simply reflect our discussions, which have begun to try to give a greater shape and outworking to this vision. However, they are waiting to take greater shape and ownership with the input of the wider congregation. Please read through them prayerfully and reflect on the questions at the end.

We should also realise that some of what we are focussing on here may have an impact on our resources: our staffing, our money, our time, our prayers. We begin with a loving God who gives us, in Christ, all we need and more. So we ask that he would help us, by his Spirit, to respond to that love. May we be increasingly open to giving ourselves and what we have, to loving God, loving one another and loving others...

Gathering on a Sunday

We recognise that meeting together on a Sunday for worship, teaching and friendship is central to who we are as SRPC. We meet together to grow together. Our worship together flows out into all our living. We also recognise that the Church family is diverse and as such individuals have many different needs, hopes and contributions. We differ in the ways in which we learn, interact with each other and enjoy God. It is also important to note that we are still in a Covid19 pandemic and that it may take weeks and months before all social distancing and other mitigations have been lifted.

However, as a living, growing active Church family we are committed, more than ever, to meeting together. We value:

- The recognition of the awe and mystery of God before whom we bow.
- The welcome inclusion of anyone and everyone who comes and is a part of us.
- Being intergenerational in a way that brings the whole age-range of our family together.
- Teaching from the Bible that impacts on our everyday lives.
- Many different people using their gifts across all aspects of our worship together.
- Time for us to talk meaningfully with one another about God, the Bible and applying the teaching we have heard.
- Time for social, relaxed interaction and the development of relationships and friendships

What we could do to make the most of gathering for worship on Sundays:

- Reflect on the timing and structure of our gathering together on Sundays - to enable what we aspire to above to find concrete form. A small group could begin by considering possibilities, implications and implementation and reporting back to Session. This may include things such as how we:
 - ensure that we are open and welcoming to anyone who joins us on a Sunday – and the sort of place we all feel comfortable to invite our colleagues, friends and neighbours
 - spend time worshipping together; and involving all ages
 - increase engaging bible teaching across all ages (including adult Sunday school?)
 - intentionally make space for meaningful conversations and prayer (e.g. prayer ministry) to take place
 - help relationships across the church to develop
 - hear stories of mission and communicate what is happening in lives and across the world (e.g. This Time Tomorrow, slots hearing from people involved in missional activities)
- Develop how we best deliver our services through digital media. During lockdown we have made great strides in this, thanks to some gifted and dedicated people. We understand that this will continue to be a part of our ministry and want to bring this forward in the best and most suitable ways.
- Take opportunities on Sunday evenings (and maybe occasionally Saturday evenings)
 - Café church style that is more flexible and interactive
 - For evangelistic outreach
 - For sharing in more depth – people's stories / testimonies / topical discussion / hearing from those involved in mission etc.
 - Times of praise and prayer (e.g. Worship louder)

Growing together as disciples

It is important for Church members to develop a deeper relationship with God and grow in their lives lived in service of Him. This is across all ages, backgrounds and personalities. We recognise that as part of the body of Christ, the effective making of disciples happens together.

We aspire to see:

- Every member grow and develop in their spiritual life – and encourage us all to find ways of doing that with others.
- Every member to have the opportunity to discern, develop and exercise the gifts that God gives them by his Spirit, for the common good.
- Every member to be encouraged and built up in living out their Christ faith on their 'front line'.

We want to develop:

- An intentionality about disciple-making – our own growth as disciples and helping others to grow as disciples.
- an ethos of disciple-making together: in families; in groups; in age-appropriate ways; and across the generations.

What we could do to be intentional about discipleship together:

- Actively support disciple-making among children, young people and families and not least with our interns.
- Continue to develop Life Groups and encourage involvement in them.
 - This may involve looking at our current groups and structures; and consideration of how we might make some groups more intergenerational.
- Increase the opportunities for people to get to know one another and share life stories. This might include:
 - A return of This Time Tomorrow in morning services
 - Tuesday Break
 - Specialist interest groups
 - Work parties
 - Sunday lunches
 - Friday café
 - Community Garden
- Encourage deeper involvement in prayer.
 - Prayer ministry e.g. on a Sunday morning
 - Evaluating midweek prayer opportunities
 - Regular, relevant prayer information
 - The potential of prayer triplets
- Identify opportunities for young people to learn from older people and vice versa.

Caring for one another

As part of God's family, we affirm the importance of giving support, help and care to every member as needed. We recognise that there is a particular challenge in caring and supporting many of our older members. Pastoral care is both the responsibility of the minister and members of Kirk Session but also a shared responsibility across every member of the family. We recognise, too: the call of those with a special gift and burden to look out for others; the value of Life groups in which members support one another; and the role other groups and organisations have in looking out for members of the family.

As we endeavour to be a family that cares for every member we want:

- To learn the lessons from the pandemic lockdown in how much we need and value one another; and in particular the value of regular 'low-key' contact.
- To ensure that no-one feels excluded or uncared for.
- To help us all to appreciate more what it means to care for one another in the family of God

What we could do to develop our Pastoral Care:

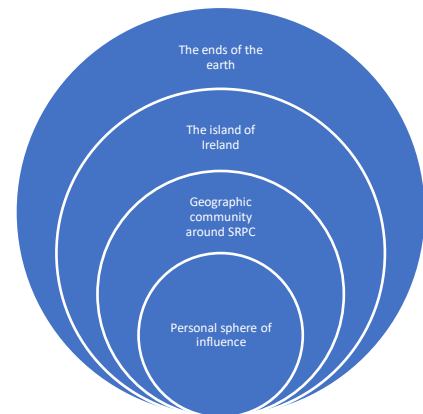
- Reconsider our structures of Pastoral Care – the district elder system and the potential of Pastoral Care teams (benefitting from those with particular pastoral gifts). How could structures be better?
- Explore the possibility of employing a part-time person to assist with pastoral care, particularly of the elderly (e.g this could be a retired minister or a deaconess)
- Encourage an increasing culture of looking out for and caring for one another. This would be a matter of both intentional (we need to put some effort in) and organic (we need to let some things naturally develop) growth, with a particular focus on groups (Life Groups, organisations, other interest groups) and time / space given for building relationships.

Going from our doorstep to the ends of the earth

As a 'sent' Church as well as a 'sending' Church, we want to be playing our part, whatever that is, at each of these levels. We do not want simply to duplicate what others are doing well, but to do what God has given and gifted us to do, where it needs done as we also support others in kingdom work.

So we would love:

- Each one of us to understand that we are sent and to be better equipped for being witnesses where we live and work
- To consider how, as God's people in this place, we continue to reach out to our community and use our buildings
- Every Church member to be aware and informed about
 - SRPC members involved in particular Christian service at home and abroad – and how we support them
 - Mission that we support locally, nationally and internationally, especially linked with our denomination, PCI
 - Opportunities to serve, short-term or long-term, at home or overseas
- To see increased prayerful and financial support for mission work



What we could do to fulfil our calling as a 'sent' and 'sending' Church:

- Give teaching, encouragement, training, equipping and support for all members on their 'front line.'
- Develop evangelistic opportunities (e.g. Alpha Course / Christianity Explored / Café church events)
- Develop communication strategies to keep Church members both informed and challenged about mission work. This could include regular mission spots on a Sunday morning.
- Support and keep Church members fully informed about the work and needs of those specifically associated with SRPC: (e.g. John and Birita in Japan; Gerald and Louise in Kenya; Heather – India; Alf – Wycliffe; Joanne – Biblica; Jonny – Youth for Christ; Lynn – QUB Chaplaincy)
- Inform Church members (young and old) of short-term mission opportunities and encourage them and support them in becoming involved. This could include:
 - Links with those we send and support (e.g. Kenya team)
 - Established opportunities (Newtownbreda CSSM / Exodus teams) as well as wider opportunities with SU, Exodus and others
 - Opportunities within PCI with churches (e.g. in the Republic) and overseas
- Review and refresh SRPC Social Media platforms

In particular, we would like to focus on where we have been placed as God's people at Saintfield Road Presbyterian...

Using our buildings

We are very fortunate to have an excellent set of buildings, which are in good order, which are flexible, and which have the multi-purpose potential.

We want the buildings to be:

- Open and accessible - “Making the walls of our church more porous to the community.”
- A place where everyone who enters feels welcome, safe and secure.
- Well and intentionally used, for what we want to do to reach out to those around us
- A place that people around us think of as a “Community Centre.”

What we could do to maximise the benefits of our buildings in the next few years (and particularly as we emerge from the Covid19 era):

- Ensure optimum facilities for youth and children’s activities, not least Tiny tots, Messy Church, The Vibe, Uniformed Organisations and other opportunities to young people and families in from our community.
- Increase opportunities for social interaction, especially with those who are not members of SRPC, especially through the Community Garden; and by encouraging opportunities to invite friends (e.g. Friday Café / Needlecraft / Tuesday Break)
- Build increasingly good and intentional relationships with local groups using our facilities outside groups (e.g. Cairnshill Primary School; and Pilates / Zumba / Sing and Sign; and others...)
- Explore new opportunities to use / invite people into the building. (e.g. Coffee / tea for parents between 2 & 3pm pickups; homework clubs; prayer garden / room; advice / counselling; contact centre (for separated parent / child contact e.g. from Hydebank). It is, of course, recognised that some or all of these would require significant resources which might include paid staff members; large numbers of volunteers etc. Before starting any new activity it would be important carefully to consider its cost and sustainability.

Reaching out to our surrounding geographic community

We recognise that our Church Building is surrounded by many hundreds of homes. There are a substantial number of people who have lived in the area for a long while; but also a diversity of ages, backgrounds, religions, ethnicities and needs. We also recognise that the wider geographic community takes in Belvoir Estate, where our sister church, Belvoir Presbyterian, is currently vacant and looking for a new way forward.

As a vibrant group of God's people in this place we want to:

- Be a witness for Jesus Christ in the neighbourhood so that those who do not yet know Him will come to faith.
- Make connections and engage with our neighbours in order to serve them as followers of Jesus Christ.
- Support the Presbyterian Church in Belvoir to be an active worshipping and witnessing group within that estate.
- Consider how we might engage with local schools, businesses and Hydebank, all within our environs.

What we could do to have an impact for Christ in our neighbourhood:

- Continue regular contact and outreach with the homes immediately around our building (developing on recent distribution of material to 500 homes surrounding us).
- Organise events for people in the local community (e.g. Community Day) and develop the Community Garden
- Work with Belvoir Presbyterian, Presbytery and wider PCI to explore ways of helping develop the ministry and mission in Belvoir estate in a sustainable way. This could involve some kind of partnership, in which we are encouraged by Belvoir and we also provide encouragement to them, not least in terms of people and practical resources. It could also include us being open to the appointment of a member of staff in SRPC to lead this work.
- Explore ways of engaging with local schools, businesses and Hydebank (e.g. working alongside the PCI Chaplain and finding other ways we can help)

How do you respond to reading this?



What particularly strikes you?



What questions would you have?



Are there things you think need to be underlined / highlighted (literally or metaphorically!) as particularly important?



Are there things you think that are missing?



Are there particular areas or actions you think we should focus sooner rather than later; or give priority / a timeframe to?