

Happy New Year 2026

Dear Friends, Happy New Year, and already from 100 metres above sea level at Denhead I've seen the sun rising a wee bit earlier. It won't be long before the dawn chorus wakes us up at some unearthly time in the morning. While most of us can't quite believe it's 2026 we are aware of time marching on - if there's one thing which is sure in this life it's movement and change. The earth relentlessly orbits the sun ... night follows day ... the weather shifts and alters and the seasons move us from one year's end to the beginning of the next ... my psychologist husband Ian tells me that one reason why human beings find change difficult is because it brings a transitional period and transitions are messy - rather like moving house where packing up the old house and decanting into the new one is exhausting and emotional: We lug too heavy boxes and come face to face with sentimental items which we just don't know what to do with. Remember how the writer of Ecclesiastes is conscious of the march of time - and reassuringly says for every single thing under the sun there is an appropriate time and season, even the unpleasant things we'd rather avoid. (Ecclesiastes chapter 3)

And yes, the Church is not immune - in fact I'd like to think that the gift of faith and belief in Christ offers us resilience in the face of change - especially the sort we'd rather avoid. Over the last several years the elders and congregation have been consulting and praying to gauge how to deal with more big change. Three years ago Fife Presbytery categorised Ceres Church and Session House for closure. This is devastating for people long associated with Ceres Church, but it stands empty save for one Sunday morning every fortnight, and when the Connections' Community Choir sings there every Wednesday evening for an hour. Local families do sometimes choose to hold Thanksgiving services there when loved ones die, but the number of non religious funerals happening nationally and locally is rising, as fewer people associate with Christian faith. In future I envisage families being welcome to remember their loved ones either in Springfield Church, or perhaps in the plans we hope for in the renovation of the Session House.

Continuing to maintain and insure the church building is costly, and we do sail close to the wind financially as regular offerings do not cover the costs of running our parish church. However, we were and are conscious of both buildings' significance, the church standing as it does so prominently high up on Kirk Brae, dominating the bucolic village below and the Session House at the foot of Kirk Brae.

The Kirk Session agreed some time ago that Ceres Church should leave the care of the local congregation, and we have acted since in hopes of attracting another business or group of trustees to take it on. To avoid a rushed decision to put the church building on the market the elders and congregation asked for a stay of execution from the presbytery while we held two public consultations with the local community, employing Rev Dr David Coulter (former Chaplain General to the British Army) to help us liaise with an architect, potential new trustees, numerous potential grant awarding bodies and a temporary partnership with Community Enterprise. The latter produced a feasibility study and business plan to determine the potential for the building's continuing future. I am extremely grateful to David for his dedicated and rigorous work to help us

discern the future of Ceres Church, and to our elders who are the buildings' trustees, and therefore legally responsible for the financial security of both church and session house.

Following this extensive consultation period, no single individual or organisation has come forward to take the building on at this time, and the Kirk Session is recommending Ceres Church be put up for sale. We have indicated as such to the Presbytery and to the General Trustees, the latter hold the title deeds for both the church and Session House.

This disturbing time has called your elders and minister to think hard about how Christ is calling us to be present in the area. The original meaning of 'Church' is found in the Greek word '*Ecclesia*' which means *gathering of people*. The most important way to be 'Ecclesia' I suggest is to be WITH people, whoever they are, so following Christ into the highways and byways and beyond our walls is vital. If you care to re-read my letter dated 31st October,'25 you will see that far from retreating and diminishing, our parish church is discovering new forms of how to be church.

So it is, that the elders are recommending to the presbytery and the General Trustees that we keep the Session House. It is already used more often, particularly by the Ceres Youth Club led by our sessional worker Karolina, and we have worshipped there on occasion. It is not a large building, but with the imagination perhaps of someone like Ben Tindell, the architect who master-minded the fantastic transformation of Springfield Church it may open up Christ's call to be an affordable, attractive physical presence in the village - and we have nascent ideas for how we may renovate it and make it fit for modern use and purpose.

Our recommendations are going to the February 2026 meeting of Fife presbytery, and are being considered meantime by the General Trustees. We will keep you informed of developments.

In the Book of Ecclesiastes chapter 1 verse 1 the writer offers this wisdom:

There's an opportune time to do things, a right time to do everything on the earth: A right time for birth and another for death. The sale of Ceres Church, as any sacred building is fraught with affection and memory not to mention one thousand years of being a Christian site. I believe with all my heart that none of these are lost, but as with all dear things we lose sight of, they are held in the mysterious power of God's blazingly powerful Spirit and keep working (in that mystery) for God's Kingdom on earth. Meanwhile we give thanks for the millennia long worship and service that have happened in this beloved place, and thank God for the countless women, men and children who have been welcomed and strengthened within the walls.

Your minister,

Rev Jane Barron

1st January 2026