



PARISH PROFILE

NORTH COAST AND THE FLOWS CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

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Introduction

The congregation of North Coast and the Flows (NC&F), part of the Presbytery of Clèir Eilean I, was established in April 2025 following the union of five legacy congregations in north Sutherland and west Caithness. It encompasses 44 miles of the iconic North Coast 500 road trip and borders the UNESCO World Heritage site of the Flow Country Peatlands.

At the time of union all the legacy congregations were vacant. Under the Presbytery Mission Plan, NC&F has been allocated 2 Full-time Equivalent (FTE) Ministry positions: 1 FTE Minister of Word and Sacrament and 1 FTE Ministry Development Staff.

Since the union, we have been establishing the new congregation with the support of the Interim Moderator who, since January 2026, has been appointed as Locum Minister. The Kirk Session has developed a new Vision and Mission statement, identified our priorities and agreed an initial action plan.

We are now prayerfully seeking to appoint our first Minister to join us on our faith journey.

The Kirk Session has voted to uphold the Church of Scotland's traditional position in respect of the ordination of ministers in civil partnerships and same-sex marriages.

This profile is intended to be read in conjunction with the separate introductory video.

Who are We?

We are a congregation *"United in purpose and committed to building new connections of faith"*.

Our Vision To be a community of worshippers where all are welcomed and enabled to experience the joy, peace, forgiveness and fullness of life that comes from knowing God through faith in Jesus Christ

Our Mission To strengthen relationships within our church family by supporting, encouraging and nurturing each other to grow in faith and involvement in church life

To build connections with our communities by fostering a commitment to the well-being of others and creating places where people feel they belong and are accepted

To connect with the wider community through practical action, prayer and pastoral support

Our Leadership Development – identify, nurture and support emerging

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Priorities leaders by providing training and empowering them to serve

Spiritual Growth – help people grow in their faith by encouraging discipleship and fostering a deeper relationship with God

Building the Church Family – create a welcoming and inclusive environment, foster fellowship, and strengthen relationships

Outreach and Service – connect with our communities by addressing local needs and building relationships with those outside the church

Stewardship – make best use of our resources (people, finances and facilities) to enable delivery of the mission

Our Leadership and Governance

From the outset, our objective has been to ensure that the union will be more than just an administrative exercise and that, in line with our Vision and Mission, it will enable us to connect the different parts of the parish and develop a team ministry based on shared talents and resources.

The congregation has a Unitary Constitution and the organization structure to carry out the daily functions of the church is shown in Appendix 1.

We have 34 Elders of whom 18 are active.

The role of Session Clerk is fulfilled on a team basis.

We are currently in the process of fully establishing each of the functional sub-committees.

Following the appointment of a Minister we will jointly develop the remit for the Ministry Development Staff role (which could be split into more than one post) to ensure a balance of complementary responsibilities and skill sets.

Our Worship

There are three principal Local Worship Centres (LWCs) within the parish: Halkirk Church, Strathy Church and Thurso West Church. In addition, the congregation utilises local community buildings in Bettyhill, Reay and Strath Halladale.

Sunday services are led by a combination of Locum Minister, established local Worship Teams, comprising Elders and other members of the congregation, and pulpit supply.

The current schedule of services is as follows:

Bettyhill	3 rd Sunday in month	11.00 a.m.
Halladale	5 th Sunday in month (where applicable),	

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	Easter Sunday, and as otherwise agreed by KS	11.00 a.m.
Halkirk	Weekly	10.00 a.m.
Reay	1 st and 3 rd Sunday in month	11.00 a.m.
Strathy	2 nd and 4 th Sunday in month	11.00 a.m.
Thurso West	Weekly	11.15 a.m.

There are currently no regular NC&F services held in Tongue/Melness. There are developing links with the Far North Fellowship, an ecumenical group who lead fortnightly services and fellowship in the Kyle community centre, Tongue.

All Sunday services follow a broadly similar traditional format but with each of the legacy congregations retaining their own distinctive elements, reflecting their different history and traditions.

Communion services are held Quarterly and, as a visible demonstration of our commitment to the union, are held jointly on a rota basis between the LWCs.

The LWCs have the services of organists and Thurso West has a Church Choir.

Currently only one of the LWCs, Thurso West, has the capability to live-stream services. However, as part of our action plan we are in the process of installing broadband capability within all three LWCs.

Our Church Family

The congregation has 175 members and 211 adherents. In common with many parts of the north of Scotland, there is a higher proportion of adherents than might be the case in other areas of the country.

Like many congregations, we face the challenge of an ageing but faithful and 'young at heart' core congregation. However, we are blessed by having 'young church' groups in each of the LWCs.

Some of our members are no longer able to attend Church regularly, either through ill health or lack of transport, and whilst some participate remotely via 'Zoom' we are aware of a need to re-connect in different ways.

Outreach & Service

The congregation currently supports a number of community outreach and service activities, which include:

Warm Spaces

Halkirk - fortnightly

Thurso West – weekly (Nov – Mar)

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Community Coffee Mornings	Halladale Hall – monthly
Care Home Services	Thurso – monthly
Parent & Toddler Breakfast Club	Bettyhill – monthly

A congregational newsletter is produced quarterly.

We are in the process of developing a website and social-media presence for the new congregation.

Stewardship

1. Finances

The congregation's general financial position is satisfactory and sufficient to meet all existing financial commitments and running costs.

The NC&F Giving for Growth (GFG) contribution for 2025 was £35,062 and was met in full. The GFG requirement for 2026 is £48,252 and the congregation is on target to meet this requirement in full.

2. Property

The Thurso West Church and Strathy Church are designated as Category 'A' buildings in the current CEI Presbytery Mission Plan. Both buildings are well maintained: Thurso West having undergone major renovation work in 2010/11 and Strathy Church requiring some minor upgrades.

Halkirk Church is designated as Category 'B' and is currently under deferred closure with a review period of December 2026. The final decision on retention of the building will be subject to demonstration of the missional need for the building. In the meantime, some essential remedial maintenance work is being undertaken.

The former Halladale Church and Mission house have been leased to the local community and have been converted into a modern multi-purpose community hall. Responsibility for maintenance and upkeep of the building lies with the community association. Under the terms of the lease the congregation retains rights to hold services in the building.

There are two Manses within the parish.

Under the Basis of Union, the preferred Manse is in the village of Reay, 10 miles from Thurso and geographically centrally located within the parish. This modern, purpose designed bungalow was built in 2004. It has been vacant since the

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departure of the last Minister in July 2023. The building is in a good state of decoration and repair, the central heating boiler and windows and doors having recently been replaced.

The second Manse, a two-storey detached villa built in 1963, is in Thurso and is currently rented out on a long-term (18 month) tenancy.

The former Bettyhill, Melness and Reay churches have recently been sold and the Syre and Tongue churches and former Bettyhill Manse are currently for sale.

Where are we going?

To achieve our Vision and deliver our Mission, we see the challenges facing us as falling into two main areas:

- In our congregation

We recognise the need to grow, spiritually and numerically, to ensure we can continue to support and provide pastoral care to our current membership whilst seeking to connect and re-connect with the missing generations.

- In our community

Over the coming years there will be many challenges in the local community as we adjust to the impact of the loss of jobs resulting from the decommissioning programme at Dounreay as well the wider pressures on the local economy and services in a rural area 'on the periphery'.

One of the biggest obstacles we face is our geography: the size of the parish; the distances between settlements; the lack of public transport and the sense of 'dis-connection' and social isolation that can result from this.

Our congregation has gone through a period of significant change and during this time we have moved forward trusting God to lead us in the right direction. It is with this same attitude of faith that we approach the challenges ahead and trust that through the work of the Holy Spirit, God will give us the wisdom and energy to find new ways to connect.

Will you join us?

We are excited, if not a little daunted, by what the future holds. To quote L.P Hartley, "the past is a foreign country: they do things differently there'. Whilst we cherish our heritage we see this as an opportunity to re-imagine how we 'do church' in the context of rural ministry in a unique part of Scotland.

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Our part of Caithness and Sutherland has been described as 'the undiscovered country'. Come and discover the life that awaits you as part of North Coast and the Flows, a place where you can help us build new connections of faith.

Contact Information and How to Apply

If you have any questions about North Coast and the Flows, or if you are considering applying for the position of minister of this charge, then please get in touch.

Informal queries may be made in confidence to the Interim Moderator/Locum Minister, Rev Heather Stewart. Mob: 07955103362. Email: heatherburnthill@gmail.com

Applications should be sent to the Clerk to the Nominating Committee, Mr Graham Cameron: cameroncroick@gmail.com

Applications should comprise:

- A Curriculum Vitae (including two referees who will only be contacted if the application is to be progressed)
- A Covering Letter explaining your reasons for applying and how you believe you can help us achieve our Vision and deliver our Mission.

If you have a link to any live streams of services you have conducted, please provide information about how to access them.

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APPENDIX 1 GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

