

to glorify God ... to proclaim Christ ... and to serve others

**JULY 2019**

**No. 814**

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**Morning Worship at Blackhall St Columba's  
while refurbishment of the church takes place.**

**All welcome, come and join us.**

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<b>Minister (Vacancy)</b> <b>Interim Moderator:</b> The Very Rev Dr Russell Barr <b>Locum:</b> Rev Gordon Farquharson Tel. 343 1047	<b>Session Clerk</b> Mr Eddie Thorn Tel. 332 5702	<b>Church Secretary</b> Ms Julie Nicol In Church Office from Mon-Fri, 9.00-12.30pm Tel. 332 4431 <a href="mailto:secretary@blackhallstcolumba.org.uk">secretary@blackhallstcolumba.org.uk</a>
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## **Congratulations to Brian James Duffin OBE**

**We are delighted to offer our congratulations to church member Brian Duffin on the award of the OBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours List.**



Brian's award is made in his capacity as a Non-Executive Director of the Debt Management Office and for services to the Pensions Industry. The Debt Management Office (DMO) is the agency of the UK Government responsible for issuing debt instruments (Gilt-edged Bonds and Treasury Bills) to finance the gap between total spending and taxation revenues. It also manages the assets of government funds (such as the National Insurance Fund) and ensures there are sufficient liquid assets held to meet spending calls at the close of business day. Since Brian's appointment in January 2009 financial markets have been anything but dull and the government's total debt in issue has risen to £1.8 trillion. But that's not his fault!

Brian trained as an actuary with Scottish Life and became Chief Executive before leaving to pursue non-executive work in 2007. Scottish Life was a leading provider of pension plans and Brian's other current board roles are with insurance companies and pension schemes, including chairing the GEC Pension Plan. Alongside various jobs held with the actuarial profession over the years, he has been able to contribute to the development of pension arrangements as well as finding ways of keeping pace with the unstoppable flow of regulation in the financial sector.

Brian has recently taken over as Chairman of the Church of Scotland Investors Trust (in which the church is an investor!).

Since joining Blackhall St Columba's in July 2017, together with his wife Joan, Brian has become very actively involved in BStC's life, being admitted as an elder of the congregation in November that year and serving on our Building for the Future Steering Group, making a particular contribution to the Finance sub group.



### The Welcome Break

School holidays are here and parents, and grandparents no doubt, will be prepared to assist with the activities and experiences that will keep girls and boys from boredom and lethargy during what we all hope will be sunny days.

In the life of the Kirk organisations will be on holiday too while their committee members will be looking back on successes and disappointments of the session of work gone by and already will be preparing the winter programmes.

Our Sunday worship in the Hall, that has been necessitated by the Building for the Future plans, has been well-attended and most folk seem to find congenial the more relaxed and intimate fellowship that the hall provides. We are certainly grateful for the work of the team who are turning up weekly to arrange the seating layout and make sure the services run smoothly.

Many members are giving time and money to help with the new facilities which will make the church more welcoming and accommodating across the age range. There is a sign of faith in the future and good intentions for the development of Blackhall St Columba's Church.

Many of us will be able to enjoy time spent away on holiday – hoping, as Brexit looms, that going abroad may still be possible in years to come.

We know that the concepts of holidays and tourism developed in the years of relatively recent generations, but they represent a need to relax from work and the everyday stresses of life. Time to relax and slow down for some; to get going in the diversions of sport or sailing or more strenuous pursuits for others, while travel to see sights and learn more of the world around has some appeal of adventure and discovery. As we engage in our own forms of rest and recreation we hope to find our batteries re-charged and our bodies and minds refreshed whether we choose the climate or the geography that suits our requirements, the beach or the hillside, the open road or the restful locale.

The Biblical text that argues about the need for holidays is Ecclesiastes Chapter 4: verse 6 '*... it is better to have only a little, with peace of mind, than to be busy all the time with both hands, trying to catch the wind*'.

The preacher's advice is really that all work and no play is good for nobody.

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**From the Minister** continued

But we all know that the main counsel of the Scriptures is to cherish time and to use it wisely. In Biblical times holidays were unknown, breaks from labour were for travel, or family or local celebrations. The Gospel stories about the preaching and teaching of Jesus and of John the Baptist show that folk were willing to give up time away from toil or responsibilities to find life-giving and life-enhancing experiences in company with others and led by those whose words and examples made them think about life and its values and how to apply these. The themes of our summer services in most churches will be likely to review these Gospel stories.

I wish a good summer to everyone. May you enjoy happy and safe holidays and journeys. I encourage you, to go to church while on holiday to hear again the varied messages of the Gospels and to learn and to share Christian fellowship wherever you go. And I look forward with you to sharing the welcome of our fellowship with visitors to our city and community.

Sincerely yours,

Gordon Farquharson, Minister

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This year the children at Sunday Club have been learning the stories of the Bible through the animals that appear in them, and exploring some of the themes such as friendship and trust through crafts and games, culminating in a 'treasure hunt' trip to Ravelston Woods.

We also said goodbye from Sunday Club to Lilian Cockburn and Graizella Smith who stepped down after many years with the children of Blackhall St Columba's. We thank them for all their hard work and send our best wishes.

For anyone interested in their children coming along to Sunday Club please email Lorna Rogers ( [lornajrogers@hotmail.com](mailto:lornajrogers@hotmail.com) ).

### **Children at Summer Services**

Throughout July and August there will be only one service at 10 30 am. For children who do not wish to sit through the service there will be other activities. For more information please speak to Ruth Laidlaw or Michael Cockburn.

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# Church Diary

## July

- 14 **10.30 am** Morning Worship  
21 10.30 am Morning Worship, with visiting musical group, 'The Chapel Praise Singers' (see below)  
28 10.30 am Morning Worship followed by short Communion  
30 4.00 pm Strachan House Service

## August

- 4 10.30 am Morning Worship  
11 10.30 am Morning Worship  
18 10.30 am Morning Worship **followed by the election of the Nominating Committee**  
25 10.30 am Morning Worship followed by short Communion  
27 4.00 pm Strachan House Service

## September

- 1 **11.00 am** Morning Worship  
4 12 noon Midweek Service followed by light lunch  
8 11.00 am Morning Worship  
15 11.00 am Morning Worship  
18 12 noon Midweek Service followed by light lunch  
22 11.00 am Morning Worship  
24 4.00 pm Strachan House Service  
29 11.00 am Morning Worship

### **Sunday 21 July - The Chapel Praise Singers**

This ladies musical group have been singing together for many years. Those present at the final meeting of the Fellowship Afternoon Group will recognise Lesley Walker, one of those who provided the entertainment on that occasion.

### **Halls closed for annual maintenance**

The Halls are closed for annual general maintenance on the **weeks commencing Monday 15 July and Monday 22 July 2019**. Should anyone require access please arrange with Church Office to confirm.

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Progress has been made in clearing the Sanctuary and the items for storage have now been removed. Items no longer needed have been disposed of. You will have noticed a huge skip outside the halls. This was filled in one morning by an army of volunteers who assisted in this mammoth task.



The pews will not be removed until adequate covering for the organ against dust damage is sorted out. Ruth Laidlaw is dealing with that but any queries should be sent to the Church Secretary. These will be passed on. There may be some pew cushions available for a small contribution.

Tenders have been received from a number of companies and negotiations are underway about detail and costings. This process takes time so the start date for any work may be delayed. However, it is more prudent to take the time at this stage to get things right so that when the work starts it should go smoothly. Once the terms are agreed with a chosen contractor there will be a report to the Kirk Session and the Session's agreement sought for the work to go ahead.

The Church services in the hall are now established and well attended. The decoration is complete with the corridor and other halls to be done during the summer. The toilets at the back of the large hall are being refurbished at the time of writing.

### **Personal thoughts on the move to the hall**

The Services in the Hall have proved to be very successful. Have you noticed how friendly the atmosphere is before the service starts? People are feeling at home in the hall and chatting far more than in the past.

Is it that we must make the space fit for purpose? A Team of volunteers put the chairs out most efficiently and quickly but that doesn't stop the chat and the greetings. So, before we even arrive looking for seat there is already a communal atmosphere.

All the people concerned are organised, but if something doesn't work, they are flexible and find a new way to sort it.

I do like what is happening and I hope you all do too.

Alison Hewat

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# WATCH COMMITTEE

This year the WATCH Committee, with the agreement of the Kirk Session, is supporting two local charities and will share all funds raised between Beach Wheelchairs Portobello (Scottish Charity SC046190) and Kindred (Scottish Charity SC000264).

**Beach Wheelchairs Portobello**, adjacent to the promenade at Portobello beside the Tumbles car park, provide the free hire of beach wheelchairs. They have wheelchairs suitable for children and adults and a hoist is available if required. We hope to donate enough funds to provide a new chair for children.

**Kindred** have a team based at Edinburgh's Royal Hospital for Sick Children which provides practical information, emotional support and guidance, supporting families of children with complex needs. They also have a trained therapist who provides massage therapy in the ward.

We recognise that with the Building for the Future project already started in the halls and with the sanctuary unavailable for the rest of the year, there could be challenges ahead to our fundraising programme. Nevertheless, the plan is to hold the usual events and continue the run of 28 consecutive Christmas Fairs at Blackhall St Columba's.

The Committee starts the fundraising through the **Summer Coin Collection**. Empty money bags are available at the Hall door and the bags, duly filled, can be handed in at any service during the summer.

We will also hold the **Craft Coffee Morning** on Saturday 19 October. Our final event will be the popular **Christmas Fair** on Saturday 30 November at 2 pm – a planning meeting for all involved in the organisation of this event will be held in September. More details about the Coffee Morning and the Christmas Fair will be published in forthcoming editions of the Kirk News and the Blackhall Bulletin.

## Dates for your diary

- **Craft Coffee Morning** on Saturday 19 October from 10 am to 12 noon
- **Christmas Fair** on Saturday 30 November at 2 pm

George Millar, WATCH Committee Convener

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## KIRK SESSION REPORT

The Kirk Session met on 5 May, 3 and 6 June.

### **Vacancy Business**

At the meeting on 5 May Rev Gordon Farquharson was formally appointed Locum for the period of the vacancy.

On Monday 3 June we were visited by Rev Jim Jack and Rev Suzie Stark, both representing The Presbytery of Edinburgh Deployment of Resources Committee. The purpose of their visit was to hear how as a Congregation we were progressing following the departure of Rev Benjamin Abeledo in order that they may report back to Presbytery. Various members of Session made verbal presentations on the main areas of activity across the Congregation. Rev Dr Jack asked the question ‘As a Kirk Session, what can we learn from our previous minister’s short time with us and if we could have done anything different.’ This stimulated a fair amount of feedback and general discussion regarding the relatively short tenure. Rev Dr Jack thanked all for their contributions and advised that when our new minister is in place he or she must be given our support and protection at all times. Subsequent to the meeting the Deployment of Resources Committee recommended that we be allowed to call a new minister and approval was granted at the Presbytery meeting held on 18 June.

On Thursday 6 June we received a visit from the Presbytery Vacancy Advisory Committee – Rev Alistair Keil, Rev Anne Logan and Ms Sheila Minty, Elder. Basically their remit is:-

- As a resource to be called upon, providing advice and prayerful support for the duration of the vacancy.
- Providing practical support in helping to draw up our parish profile e.g. what would we include in it that would stand out and appeal to prospective applicants. What qualities would we look for in candidates and what could they expect from us. What stand out features in our Parish profile might prove irresistible.
- Encouraging us to be frank about strengths and weaknesses.

Session members in pairs spent a few minutes discussing what we might include and indeed highlight in our Parish profile and Rev Keil highlighted the need to be completely honest in what we write.

We were reminded that as a Kirk Session we would be required to state our position in regard to considering applicants / continued



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## **KIRK SESSION REPORT** continued

applicants in a same sex relationship or marriage. This has been the case for Churches in vacancy since the Assembly Act of 2015. The Moderator stressed that it was very much for the Kirk Session to deliberate on this matter.

**N.B. Election of the Nominating Committee will take place on Sunday 18 August immediately after Morning Worship.**

### **Building for the Future**

Considerable discussion took place regarding having an accessible toilet in the Sanctuary area. A number of options were put forward but the view of the majority of Elders was that none of these, in all the circumstances, was viable.

Fay Stirling, Project Manager, reported on the situation with regard to tenders for Phase 1 work. Seven companies had been invited to tender, two withdrew from the process and three were ruled out as being too costly. Discussions were taking place with the final two regarding specifications and the exact nature of the work in order to arrive at final tender prices. Because of the amount of work still to be done before settling on a contractor with an agreed contract price it was noted that there would be a delay to the start date of the project.

### **Correspondence**

Letters of thanks received from :-

- Mary's Meals acknowledging a donation of £497.50 from our Easter collection.
- Disasters Emergency Committee thanking the Congregation for the donation of £400 from the special collection for people affected by Cyclone Idai.
- Crossreach acknowledging £305.50 from the February Communion Retiral Offering;
- Letter from Rev Benjamin Abeledo thanking the Congregation for the generous present he received at his last Service.
- Letter from Tearfund acknowledging donation of £1,056.20 for Cyclone Idai Appeal raised from Retiral Offering.

Letter received from the Executors of the late Mrs Alison Johnson advising of a legacy of £600.

### **Other Business**

- John Crombie was re-admitted to the Kirk Session.
- Eddie Thorn was re-appointed as Presbytery Elder. /continued

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## KIRK SESSION REPORT continued

- The Finance Working Team proposed that £15,000 of the Reserve Fund should be invested in The Church of Scotland Investors Trust Growth Fund. It was considered that a better long term return would be achieved by investing the money than by leaving it on deposit. It was recalled that at the time of the Roof and Stonework appeal it was decided to sell circa half of the investment in the Fund and that it was specifically stated at that time that an opportunity would be sought to reinvest the funds in due course. Session supported this proposal.
- Session supported and wholeheartedly agreed the recommendation of the Watch Committee that funds raised this calendar year should be split evenly between Beach Wheelchairs Portobello and Kindred.
- It was noted that the Hall Users charges had been increased by 2.5% which equated to approx 75/80p per hour. Session concurred.

Eddie Thorn  
Session Clerk

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Fresh Start celebrated their 20<sup>th</sup> birthday with a Garden Party in June. Blackhall St. Columba's became involved in the early days, under the auspices of Muriel Morton, when goods were collected in a garage in Cramond. Twenty years on and homelessness is still a huge issue in Edinburgh with Fresh Start trying to help as many people as they can.



Apart from providing goods, Fresh Start works with clients to develop social, practical and employability skills. They are in the process of developing a Community Hub in North Edinburgh and have been consulting those in the area as to which services and activities they would like to see.

I would like to thank everyone who gives of their time on a Friday morning to receive donations for starter packs. Thanks also to those who respond so generously when there is a shortage of specific items in the warehouse. During this past year I have been able to take a carload of donations to Fresh Start's warehouse every 2-3 weeks.

To keep up to date with what is happening go to Fresh Start's website: [www.freshstartweb.org.uk](http://www.freshstartweb.org.uk) or like their Facebook page.

Fiona Cooke  
Coordinator

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## Musical Notes

Another Easter season has passed and we enjoyed some wonderful singing from the choir on Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday. The singing at Ravelston Park at 8.00 on Easter Sunday was led by Amy on the accordion and we had a very healthy turnout for that.

Now that the refurbishment of the main church is underway, we have had to revert to an older version of the hymnary since it is available in a “words only” version and is lighter for folk to carry and easier to find hymns than the heavy music version of CH4.

However this has the disadvantage of not offering us many hymns that were written in the last century far less this one. The choir is sitting on the stage to the left of the congregation so they are well placed to lead us in new songs but the practicality of having to write out words every time we want to sing a hymn not contained in the book makes such an approach inconvenient, especially if we choose to use two newer songs on the same day. Accordingly, I have compiled a small booklet of a selection of modern songs and I have also included some “golden oldies” which do not appear in any of the CofS books. These are being published in a properly printed booklet A5 format which will be light enough to carry and store and will enable us to introduce a cross section of styles to the church.

One thing that I notice with the modern hymn books is that they do not classify their hymns into topic groups. The CofS books have groups of hymns on “God the Father”, “The Holy Spirit” as well as times of the year. However the modern songs all focus very clearly on the person and sacrifice of our Lord Jesus and in that sense they provide a very helpful balance to our worship.

Many of the hymns that are particularly well constructed are those by Keith Getty and Stuart Townend. They have provided a cohort of songs in a modern idiom that manage to retain a sense of dignity in worship while introducing a sense of rhythm and modernity. Coming from an Ulster background the songs tend to have a Celtic feel making regular use of the pentatonic scale (shared with North American and Chinese music) and while that can give a sense of similarity, it also offers a sense of cultural familiarity which I am sure the church will appreciate. While the tune is “just” the vehicle for the words, we have all been faced with songs where the words do not match the grandeur of the tune or, much worse, the tune does not support the elegance of the poetry.

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## Musical Notes continued

The words and tunes by Getty/Townend have a poetic line that bears closer examination and the melodies are always in sympathy with the theme of the song. You will find all the songs on YouTube and that will give you a flavour of the way the songs go. Do not be put off by the video of crowds of 8000 in the congregation, that's for the future!

As we move through this next year we will use a mix of new and old hymns and while you will not like all the new ones, just as you do not like all the old ones, I trust this will be a positive improvement to the singing and then the life of our worship services.

In the months of July and August we do not have a choir taking part in the services so I hope we will all be in good voice when we come together on Sundays. I have to say the singing in the hall is much brighter and more vibrant so I look forward to sharing some new music with you.

If you want to feedback on any of the new songs please feel free to speak to me any Sunday.

Donald Cameron LLCM  
Director of Music Blackhall St Columba's Church



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## Flowers

The flowers in church will be donated as follows:

### July

7 Mrs Jacquie Lowe  
14 Mrs Anne Burton  
21 Mrs Joan Welsh  
28 Mrs Ruth Mitchell

### August

4 Mrs Christine Denham  
11 Mrs Elaine Walker  
18 Mrs Anne Anderson  
25 Mrs Violet Troup

The flowers will be delivered in July by Mrs Elizabeth Watling and Mrs Ishbel Robertson and in August by Miss Susan Scrimgeour and Mrs Billie McKinnell.

Violet Troup, Flower Convener

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## Midweek Services



We will begin the next session on **Wednesday 4 September at 12 noon** in the Small Hall. These run fortnightly after that with a break at Christmas. The services are a short half hour and are followed by lunch of delicious homemade soup with home baking and coffee. If you have not been before do come along. You will find a relaxed friendly atmosphere with a wide range of speakers throughout the year. Transport can be arranged.

The lunch is served by teams of volunteers. If you would like to offer your services please let the Church Secretary know and we will contact you. We have one or two helpers who do not make soup so we also have a small rota of people willing to make soup and hand it in on the day. Again if you could do this please let the Church Secretary know.

We rely on a small willing team of drivers to bring people if necessary (and take them home again). We desperately need some more people to do this. Please speak to Elspeth Williamson if you could help even now and again.

Church Secretary [secretary@blackhallstcolumba.org.uk](mailto:secretary@blackhallstcolumba.org.uk) or 332 4431  
Elspeth Williamson [elspethwilliamson@gmail.com](mailto:elspethwilliamson@gmail.com)



### Edinburgh Floral Art Club

The Club meets monthly in Blackhall St Columba's Church Hall from 2 - 4 pm. The next meeting is on Friday 13 September when Dawn Weaver from Cheshire will give a demonstration entitled 'Artistic License'.

Come along and see beautiful flowers being arranged.  
All welcome.

Subscription £41. Visitors £7.

Christine Morrison

### Tuesday Topics

Our final meeting for last session was a superb and fun filled afternoon tea at The Orient Express (also known as The Queen Charlotte Rooms) !

The first meeting for the next session is planned for 24 September. Our programme is shaping up well, more information later. Keep alternate Tuesdays free!

A warm invitation is extended to all members and friends.

Eleanor Lowrie, President  
Jacky Cowie, Secretary

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## Church Golf Outing Involvement 88 Cup

The Church golf outing held on the afternoon of Friday 14 June 2019 was again played at Ravelston Golf Club and 13 players enjoyed a lovely afternoon which was a relief after the washout of last year.

The winners this year were:-

Involvement 88 Cup

1. Alan Francey

Handicap Cup

1. Alastair Wood  
2. Sandy Horn  
3. Mike McKinnell

Ladies Cup

1. Diane Ross  
2. Jenny Clark  
3. Frances Douglas

Nearest Pin at 5th

Alastair Wood

Nearest Pin at 18th

Sandy Weir

Once again a big thank you to Ravelston for the use of their Course and afterwards for the delicious meal which was enjoyed by all. Thank you also to Frances Douglas for sorting out the score cards and also to Murrayfield House to whom we say thanks for their support and sponsorship of the Event.

I look forward to a bigger turnout next year.

Mike McKinnell



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# A RADICAL ASSEMBLY



SPECIAL GENERAL  
ASSEMBLY 2019  
SUPPLEMENT

- Up to £25m to be spent on projects aimed at church growth, with particular emphasis on church planting
- 100 new worshipping communities to be established
- Focus on engaging with people under 40
- Cost of central administration to be cut by up to 30%: four councils to be merged into two
- Number of Scottish presbyteries to be reduced from 43 to about 12, focused on supporting local congregations in their ministry and mission
- Networks, hubs and other new local church structures to be developed
- Kirk Sessions to be reduced in size and focused on 'leadership and strategic decision-making'
- Decision-making and resources to be devolved from the central administration to regional and local levels
- No congregation to pay more to the centre after next year until new arrangements are agreed
- Land and buildings plan to focus on 'well equipped spaces in the right places'. Money from sale of redundant buildings to be shared between congregations
- Improved training and support for all ministry and leadership roles
- General Assembly to be made smaller
- Encouragement of a season of 'prayer and preparation' across the Church from September to December 2019

**The 2019 General Assembly of the Church of Scotland opened with a reminder from the Convener of the Council of Assembly that its decisions could 'shape the future of the Church for years to come'; and closed with the Lord High Commissioner, the Duke of Buccleuch, saying someone had described it as the most significant Assembly since the Union in 1929.**

Only time will tell whether either of those statements proves true, but what can be said is that the Assembly accepted three reports that between them have the potential to radically reshape the Church of Scotland, at every level from the local to the national and the General Assembly itself. The overall thrust of the plans is devolution of decision-making and resources from the centre to reorganised and re-energised regional and local structures, with an emphasis on equipping churches for mission in their local context. / continued

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## RADICAL ACTION PLAN

The Radical Action Plan was drawn up by the Council of Assembly in response to the General Assembly of 2018. It includes:

- An investment of £20-25m over seven years in a 'Growth Fund', supporting projects which will 'encourage greater faith-sharing, innovation and creativity at local and regional levels'. Paid for from reserves, it will continue and expand the work of the Go For It Fund, with a particular focus on plans to reach young people and families, on work in Priority Areas, and on church planting (the Plan envisages 100 new worshipping communities).
- A reduction in the number of presbyteries in Scotland to around 12 (from the current 43, not including the English and overseas presbyteries). The plan is that the new bodies will be better able to fulfil the formal functions of presbyteries than the current small ones, but also to 'provide leadership and focus alongside practical support for local congregations, freeing them for mission and ministry'. The process is expected to be complete by 2025, but several of the Presbyteries have already started negotiations.
- A review of the size and role of Kirk Sessions, with the hope that smaller Sessions will reduce the length of time spent in meetings and promote, 'a meeting dynamic more suited to leadership and strategic decision-making', and 'a clearer understanding of trustee responsibility' (the Assembly agreed new rules allowing elders to be appointed to membership of Kirk Sessions for a fixed period, instead of for life).
- A deliberate focus on engaging with young people, 'through combining current good practice and encouraging increased innovation and experimentation'.
- New networks, hub ministries and other forms of local church structure will be developed, building on existing work in Pioneer Ministries and Hub-Style Ministries. This is a response to problems sustaining smaller congregations and the shortage of ministers, but will also allow churches the flexibility to 'explore and expand their horizons in a mission-based context', in ways that best respond to their local circumstances.
- Increased co-operation with other denominations and organisations, helping the Church maintain its commitment to a presence in every part of Scotland.
- A flexible training and support programme for all ministerial and leadership roles, paid or voluntary, in the Church. Ministers are to be trained to support and help members and elders 'identify, release, and develop their gifts'.
- The Action Plan also calls for a 'season of prayer and preparation' across the Church from September to December this year. The report states that the plan 'should be thought of, first and foremost, as an act of faith... we are a people of faith, rooted in prayer'.

Another section of the plan proposed a reconfiguration of ministries and mission contributions (the money paid by local churches to the centre), but this was replaced at the Assembly by one instructing that no church should have its contributions increased after next year (for which budgets are already set), until alternative arrangements have been agreed. / continued



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Introducing the plan, Council of Assembly, convener Dr Sally Bonnar told the Assembly: “We need to think about how we can bring the message of the Gospels effectively to the generation in which we live, and what shape the church should take in order to do this.”

## **STRUCTURAL REFORM**

The Special Commission on Structural Reform, convened by the Rev Professor David Fergusson, was established last autumn, to suggest ways in which the central structures of the Church could better fulfil their legal duties, support the local churches and become more financially sustainable.

The proposals included:

- The setting up of a new body of trustees, replacing the Council of Assembly, with responsibility for overseeing the work of the central charity and its finances, and ensuring all parts of the organisation are working in accordance with the strategic priorities of the Church.
- A reduction in the cost of the central organisation of about 20-30% over the next 1-2 years.
- The merging of four Councils into two, with the Ministries and Mission and Discipleship Councils combined into one ‘inward-facing’ body, while the World Mission and Church and Society Councils will merge into an ‘outward-facing’ group. This is expected to take effect on January 1 2020.
- Discussions on how CrossReach (the Church’s Social Care operation) can become a more financially viable organisation.
- The appointment of a new Chief Officer.
- The establishment of a new research facility ‘to inform the development of policy across the Church’.

Professor Fergusson told the Assembly that the changes were necessary to create ‘organisational structures capable of responding with sufficient speed and flexibility to the enormous challenges we face’- declining membership and income, a shortage of ministers, and an operating deficit of £4.5m this year.

He emphasised that not all the savings would come from staff costs, but he did note that staffing levels have ‘risen steadily in recent years’, even while Church membership has fallen.

While detailed discussion took place on the make-up and constitution of the new trustees body, and its relationship with existing structures, the reforms as a whole were overwhelmingly approved. / continued

### **THE ASSEMBLY TRUSTEES**

- The Very Rev Dr John Chalmers, Convener
- Norma Rolls, Vice Convener
- James McNeill QC, Administrative Trustee
- Alan Campbell CBE
- Jamie Lockhart
- The Rev Anikó Schüetz Bradwell
- The Rev George Cowie
- Dr Gary MacFarlane MBE
- David Watt
- Sandra Carter
- The Very Rev Professor Iain Torrance
- Professor Brian Ashcroft

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Later in the week there was some dismay about there being only three women among the 12 new Trustees, but a motion urging that the Trustee body should have an equal gender split from next year was narrowly defeated. The Trustees take legal responsibility for the charity from June 1, and meet for the first time on June 3.

### **‘WELL EQUIPPED SPACES IN THE RIGHT PLACES’**

The final part of the reform jigsaw was the General Trustees’ report on the Church’s land and buildings.

Introducing a consultation on the Trustees’ ‘Well Equipped Spaces in the Right Places’ strategy, which will be finalised next year, chairman Raymond Young told the Assembly it was time for the Church to ‘get real’: “There are some very good spaces in the Church, but we have too many, and many are not fit for purpose. Neither is the Church a building preservation organisation.

“Church buildings should be managed, changed and developed in such a way that they are not a distraction from the call ‘follow me’.

“For years the Assembly has nodded in sympathy when my predecessors have said that we must reduce the size of this estate, yet at the start of this year Presbyteries have said 86 per cent of these church buildings are expected to remain in use beyond the life of the Presbytery Plan. Only six per cent are expected to go. Really?”

He said that progress in the Presbyteries of Shetland and St Andrews, and new churches including St Rollox in Glasgow, showed what could be achieved. A church plant on a new housing estate in Perth might not have a traditional building. There was also a need to develop partnerships to support buildings which are not just church but community assets.

Mr Young concluded: “We need to be fleeter of foot, not encumbered with buildings that take up energy that should be used for worship and mission.”

Separately, the future of the Church of Scotland’s administrative offices in Edinburgh is still being discussed, with options of basic repair and refurbishment, a major reconfiguration which would allow staff to be concentrated across two floors and the rest of the building to be leased out, or simply selling and moving out. As the future staffing requirements at the centre are uncertain due to the other ongoing reforms, the Council of Assembly reported this year that it was ‘not appropriate... to reach a definitive position at this stage’.

### **OTHER REFORMS**

The demand for radical reform also pervaded other debates during the week:

- The Ministries Council will consider building into new vacancy rules a principle that, in future, no minister should be called on unrestricted tenure.
- The Assembly Arrangements Committee said its successor body, the Assembly Business Committee, would look at reducing the number of commissioners to future Assemblies. Convener, the Rev Fiona Smith, said it was not just about cutting costs but making the Assembly more fit for purpose. / continued

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- A special commission is to be formed to explore the effectiveness of the Church's Presbyterian form of government.
  - A working group is to be formed to 'develop proposals... for ordination to a form of Word and Sacrament shaped by the context of the emerging Church'.

At the end of the week the Moderator, the Rt Rev Colin Sinclair, urged Commissioners to 'work tirelessly' to make the reforms agreed during the week a reality. He cautioned that 'deciding the change is not the same as making the change', and warned that the changes will be painful.

"We need Commissioners of the General Assembly, as we go back to the parishes, to be advocates and change makers. We need to be willing to make the sacrifices ourselves, to set an example."

And he warned that all the changes agreed will not bring about the revival of the church without people responding to Jesus' call 'follow me', which had been the Assembly's theme.

### **CLIMATE CHANGE AND DIVESTMENT**

For the second year in a row, a call for the Church's Investors Trust to withdraw its holdings in oil and gas companies was narrowly rejected. This was despite the Assembly also passing a motion recognising 'that we are experiencing a climate and ecological emergency'.

Anger over the decision rumbled on into the next day, when a group of youth representatives and their supporters held a silent protest on the Assembly Hall steps, and there was another brief protest at the beginning of the report of the Investors Trust. By the end of the week, 78 Commissioners had registered their dissent against the decision.

### **YOUTH ASSEMBLY**

The Assembly confirmed the changes to the church's engagement with young people, which will see a series of smaller regional events replace the National Youth Assembly. There was considerable disquiet in the hall about the loss of the NYA, but Mission and Discipleship Convener the Rev Norman Smith said there was 'a huge body of evidence' behind the proposals. He admitted that there was no funding identified for the NYA, but said: "It's not just the Church trying to do things for less. We are trying to do things better."

### **ISRAEL/PALESTINE**

The Church of Scotland's presence in Israel and Palestine was reaffirmed by the Assembly, which approved the conclusions of a strategic review by the World Mission Council. This included investment in the St Andrew's Guest House in Jerusalem and support for the continued operation of the Scots Hotel in Tiberias.

### **FIRST MINISTER**

The high-profile speech of the week came from the First Minister of Scotland, Nicola Sturgeon, who praised the Church's engagement in 'the great national and international issues of the day'. Ms Sturgeon said that the Kirk could remind politicians of their responsibility to air differences 'in a civil and respectful way, while seeking common ground and consensus'. / continued

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## SOLIDARITY WITH PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS

During the World Mission report, Commissioners stood for a minute's silence in remembrance and solidarity with persecuted Christians around the world. On the first day of the Assembly the retiring Moderator, the Very Rev Susan Brown, criticised the UK Government for its refusal to grant asylum to the Bakhsh family, Pakistani Christians living in Glasgow who say they would be in danger if they were sent back to Pakistan.

## MINISTER TRAINING

The number of academic partners for initial ministerial training is to be reduced from the current five to 'one or two'. Convener of the Ministries Council, the Rev Neil Glover, said that inclusiveness and provision of distance learning would be key elements in the selection process for the training providers; and that the Council would accept collaborative applications from two or more of the providers working together.

## ANTISEMITISM

The Assembly agreed to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's working definition of antisemitism and its guidelines. A counter motion arguing that the Church should develop its own definition was defeated.

## ECUMENICAL RELATIONS

It was reported that Action of Churches Together in Scotland is to be replaced with a looser Scottish Christian Forum. The convener of the Ecumenical Relations Committee, the Rev Sandy Horsburgh, said it was hoped the less formal organisation would allow more churches to take part.

## BIG SING

The Guild's Big Sing on the Tuesday evening of the Assembly raised £3437.05, which will be used to help replace a church roof in Malawi.

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