



## Relations with Presbyteries

1. This note sets out proposals that were put to the Presbytery Clerk's conference in February. It followed the Ministries Council and Council of Assembly Conference in October 2015 which looked at regional structures, and at which one of the key questions was 'How do we become more agile with our structures, including physical buildings and Presbytery structures?' This then created an opportunity for the Trustees to suggest ways in which we can work more closely with Presbyteries. It also relates to the mission of the Trustees: *The General Trustees working with Presbyteries and other Church of Scotland agencies, use the land, buildings and investments entrusted to them as resources to assist congregations to develop flexible, robust and sustainable facilities capable of supporting local mission.*
2. Despite good personal relations between the Trustees Secretariat and individual Presbytery Clerks and Fabric Conveners in relation to individual buildings, the Trustees have been concerned about the need for a more strategic relationship. Nor is this solely in relation to fabric maintenance and building provision; the Trustees' responsibilities relate to a wide range of land, building and financial matters. The need for a closer and more strategic relationship is also the concern of many Presbyteries who may see the Trustees as reactive and operational. The fabric seminars that the Trustees organised in 2014 round the country were welcomed, and there is a general feeling that these should be built upon.
3. The particular concerns include:
  - A. **Information and support.** The Trustees recognise that their website is difficult to navigate and plans are underway to improve it. Presbyteries also feel that demands are placed upon them without the Trustees understanding the resource implications and little in the way of consultation. There is no induction process for new Presbytery Fabric Conveners, nor any regular support mechanism, including training.
  - B. **The Presbytery planning process.** While the Trustees recognise and respect that the Presbytery is responsible for decisions about which buildings should be retained or disposed of, the Trustees (particularly where they are the owner or where buildings are subject to Assembly Control) can and should contribute to the consideration. The Trustees are concerned that the rigour with which the process is carried out varies considerably across the country. The Trustees are conscious that the Church of Scotland will not be able to continue to support the number of buildings that are currently in use. They recognise the challenge that some smaller Presbyteries have in making difficult and painful decisions for individual congregations; the involvement of the Trustees in those decisions may help. Where decisions involve buildings being made redundant, the Trustees are able to help with discussions with Historic Environment Scotland and may be able to identify potential development opportunities.
  - C. **The Quinquennial process.** Presbyteries are responsible for commissioning and following up Quinquennials. Again, there appears to be little consistency on how this is done across the country, and the Trustees would welcome the opportunity to work with Presbyteries on ensuring that the programme of inspections is properly carried out, that follow up action is taken and recorded.
  - D. **Grants and loans availability.** Follow up action from Quinquennials should have an influence on repair, improvement and replacement expenditure, and therefore the call

on Trustees' grants and loans. Demand for these resources is beginning to outstrip supply, and the Trustees would value discussions with Presbyteries on their priorities for funds.

- E. **Manses.** In financial terms, manses are the some of the major assets of the church, and as such have to be well looked after. Most manses are well looked after, but some suffer from poor maintenance, either because the congregation cannot afford to maintain some of the larger Victorian and Edwardian manses, or because the minister does not wish work to be done. The Trustees know of manses where the minister will not allow the congregation to carry out work. In a smaller Presbytery this can cause difficulties, and the Trustees would be willing to work with Presbyteries on these matters. An outsider can often help! The Trustees are considering reviewing the Manse Condition Schedule to ensure that the standards being met are equivalent to the Letting Standard for the private Rented Sector, and that follow up action is being undertaken and recorded.
  - F. **Glebes.** These are an important and sometimes underused resource, with an asset value of around £24 million. The Trustees would welcome discussions with Presbyteries about the future of glebes and whether the best value is being obtained from their current use.
4. To improve the relationships, the Trustees propose:
- 1. More regular contact between the Trustees and Presbyteries - both as a group and with individual Presbyteries.
  - 2. Regular contact with Presbyteries as a group would involve
    - 1. induction training for new Presbytery Fabric Convener, and CPD
    - 2. a 6 monthly meeting with all Fabric Conveners,
    - 3. the development of a regular 'e-news' joint with CARTA and the Law Department on building issues.
    - 4. the inclusion of Presbytery representatives on Trustee working groups such as the Manse Review,
    - 5. greater consultation before recommendations are made to the General Assembly.
  - 3. Regular relations with individual presbyteries would include
    - 1. Nominated Trustees (not just from Trustees Fabric Committee) would act as 'link persons' in addition to the day to day link with the Trustees Secretariat. This could involve participating in Presbytery Strategic Planning groups (including Fabric Conveners).
    - 2. The nominated Trustees would also be available to report annually or biennially to the Presbytery as a whole.
    - 3. These Trustees would be available to help with the Presbytery Planning process (but fully recognising that the final decision on categorising buildings lies with the Presbytery), and with support on Manses and Quinquennials.
    - 4. Discussions (where appropriate) on glebes.
    - 5. There is already the beginnings of a model for this through the Glasgow Strategic Network Group which is led by Glasgow Presbytery (Fabric, Strategy and Congregational Support) and involves the Trustees.

General Trustees  
February 2016