

ASSEMBLY ARRANGEMENTS COMMITTEE

May 2017

PROPOSED DELIVERANCE

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Approve the Order of Business for the first two days. (*Order of Proceedings*)
3. Appoint Mr Roy Pinkerton to index the verbatim record.
4. Invite commissioners to submit to the first meeting of the Business Committee nominees for consideration to serve on the Selection Committee.
5. Appoint Mr Craig Marshall as Assembly Officer from June 2017.
6. Remind commissioners of the deadline of noon on Monday 22 May for submitting nominations for the Committee to Nominate the Moderator. (*Section 3*)

SCOTTISH BIBLE SOCIETY

7. Urge the Scottish Bible Society to pursue its ongoing efforts to address the challenge of global Bible translation.
8. Support the Society in its desire to work in partnership with congregations to improve people's experience of the Bible and its impact on their life.
9. Encourage congregations to consider using *Bibleworld Books* as a way to improve literacy levels amongst children in their communities.
10. Endorse the Society in its efforts to encourage confidence in the gospel and in providing Scripture resources for mission purposes.
11. Commend the Society's global outreach to the generosity of congregations and members.

REPORT

1. The Very Rev Dr Russell Barr

From the moment he danced back through New College quad with his wife Margaret at the end of the 2016 General Assembly, Russell Barr has never stopped being on the move. His visits to the United States and to Canada strengthened links with the Presbyterian and other denominations there. The other overseas visit was to Kenya, developing the partnership with the Presbyterian Church of East Africa. In Scotland he took to the air in a

micro-light plane over Lothian Presbytery. More orthodox forms of transport took him to the Presbyteries of Gordon, Dumbarton and Dunkeld and Meikle.

In his moderatorial year Dr Barr has highlighted the issue of homelessness and the church's need to respond to this with compassion and generosity. His tireless work for Fresh Start has received national prominence. The biblical imperative to welcome the stranger and, wherever

possible, to provide that most basic of needs, shelter, has featured in many of Dr Barr's engagements with the church and with wider society.

During his moderatorial visit to London, Dr Barr was able to highlight this issue and many others in discussions with the Prime Minister and other politicians, as well as with ecumenical colleagues.

Throughout his year Dr Barr has been wonderfully supported by his wife Margaret who has shared in many of his visits at home and abroad, bringing her own special gifts and qualities to bear. The Church is indebted to the Barrs for their dedication and commitment in this last year and wishes them well as they return to the parish of Edinburgh: Cramond, and to other opportunities of service that the moderatorial year has made possible.

2. Presbytery Representation

The Presbytery returns show that there are in all the Presbyteries 1,041 charges, whether vacant or not and that there are 193 other ministers (excluding retired minister) who are members of Presbyteries. Representation is calculated for each Presbytery in accordance with Act III, 2000 and the total number of commissioners is made up as follows: 347 ministers, 347 elders and 27 deacons.

3. Election of Committee to Nominate the Moderator

Since 2014, revised Regulations have been used to elect the Committee to Nominate the Moderator. Commissioners are encouraged to submit nominations by the deadline of noon on Monday. Ballot papers will be distributed to commissioners on Wednesday morning, with the ballot closing at 5pm that day. The names of those nominated will be announced on Thursday and will appear in the Friday Daily Papers.

4. Reshaping the General Assembly

The results of last year's survey of the shape, size and purpose of the General Assembly have been given further consideration. The Committee has begun what will be an

ongoing review of the way the General Assembly functions and, in particular, how commissioners attending the Assembly will have the best opportunity to participate in its working and decision-making processes. Key to effective governance within the Church of Scotland is the opportunity that commissioners have annually at the General Assembly to scrutinise the work of Councils, Committees and other associated bodies reporting to the Assembly. The Committee will continue to keep the Assembly's processes and procedures under review to ensure that commissioners are fully enabled to carry out this essential function of the Church's Presbyterian polity.

For the Assembly to function effectively it is vitally important that it uses its time to the best advantage. The Committee has for some time considered that the opening day of the General Assembly is too long, requiring attendance for over twelve hours. The Committee believes that with some readjustment of the timetable, a more focussed approach to the opening day is achievable and is running a trial to see if this reconfiguration of Saturday's business is helpful.

The opening session of the General Assembly when civic and other guests are present is a unique opportunity for the outgoing Moderator to give a short address about their year as Moderator. The address will give insight and perspective upon the work and witness of the Church in our nation and in the wider world. This will replace the former evening session address and will enable a wider audience to hear about the significant contribution the Church continues to make. The outgoing Moderator will be given a lunchtime slot, this year on Monday, to have a more extensive opportunity to reflect on the past year. With no Saturday evening session, commissioners will now have an evening free from Assembly business after what will have been a full day. It will also alleviate pressure upon those involved with the Communion rehearsal, which takes place at the end of the Saturday afternoon session.

The Assembly should note that overseas and ecumenical delegates have commented in previous years that they felt

they could not contribute to the work of the Assembly until they have been formally introduced and welcomed, something that previously happened on Saturday evening. The Committee is grateful to the World Mission Council and the Ecumenical Relations Committee for their support in these proposed changes.

The new trial arrangement for Saturday morning will have a brief adjournment between the outgoing Moderator's address and the welcome to overseas and ecumenical delegates.

Except in cases of extenuating circumstances, Commissioners will be expected to attend ten of the twelve sessions in order to receive payment of Assembly expenses.

The Committee had been asked to consider moving the date of the General Assembly, but after researching what accommodation might be available at different times of the year, and particularly reviewing when our sister denominations hold their Assemblies and similar meetings, the Committee concluded that there was no merit in changing the date, and that the best date for commencement of the General Assembly continues to be the third Saturday of May.

5. Conveners' Speeches

In its broad review of the practice of the General Assembly, the Committee has assessed the length of time Conveners of Councils and Committees take in delivering their speeches. Standing Order 95 (i) currently allows for 20 minutes, but in recent years an overwhelming number of conveners have taken around 15 minutes or less. The significant support for commitment to good governance evidenced in the survey of commissioners carried out by the Committee two years ago leads the Committee to believe that all diligent commissioners will have read reports in advance and will appreciate having more time to ask questions, thus exercising their responsibility to hold Councils and Committees to account. Accordingly the Committee has requested an amendment to SO95 (i)

to allocate all Conveners 15 minutes for their speeches. This will be dealt with during the report of the Legal Questions Committee.

6. The General Assembly in the Digital Age

The Committee continues to enhance the General Assembly experience by increasing use of developing technology.

WiFi is available in the Hall, Rainy Hall and all office areas. The prime purpose is to access General Assembly Publications. The Committee urges responsible use and reserves the right to restrict or block sites placing a strain on the network.

The General Assembly App for smartphones and electronic devices such as iPhone and android tablets continues to be developed by the Committee in consultation with APS, the publishing group which produces Assembly publications. The App contains information about the General Assembly, provides access to the reports and information regarding Heart and Soul. The App can be downloaded from the General Assembly Publication website www.gapublications.co.uk and relevant device App stores.

A daily audio podcast overview of each day's proceedings will be available from the General Assembly pages of the Church of Scotland website. The Committee is delighted that Douglas Aitken will once again be writing and presenting these podcasts. To help commissioners learn more about Assembly procedures, the wider Church and the work of the Councils and Committees, a series of brief videos has been created outlining the work of the Councils and some of the Assembly Committees. These are available to download from the General Assembly pages of the Church of Scotland website, alongside information and videos for first time and more experienced commissioners.

The General Assembly, including Heart and Soul, will be webcast and can be viewed at www.churchofscotland.org.uk and also from the GA App. Following feedback, an improved web facility using British Sign Language will be available.

For the first time, the full recorded video proceedings of the 2017 General Assembly will be available online through the Church of Scotland website in the General Assembly section. The entire proceedings will be viewable with each report available as a separate clip, indexed by day, time and Blue Book reference. This new feature further enhances the Church's online web presence, and recognises that not everyone has the ability or freedom to watch the online webcast live as it happens. This "replay" function will allow everyone to watch the proceedings of the General Assembly at a place and time of their own choosing. In this first year, the goal is to have clips available within twenty-four hours of a speech or report being delivered. In future years, the target will move to "same day" and perhaps even within a matter of hours.

The Committee is investigating the possibility of providing 30 minutes of daily video highlights of the General Assembly. If this turns out to be viable it would, as with other digital content, become available through the General Assembly pages of the Church of Scotland website.

A unified format for the Book of Reports (Blue Book) is now in use by all reporting councils and committees. This facilitates production in a variety of media using the same source. This year, as agreed by last year's General Assembly, only those requesting printed copies of the Blue Book will have received them by post. The saving to the Church is likely to be more in postage than in printing, and the Committee continues to keep the matter under review. The Committee is keen to listen to the experiences of commissioners; it will continue research into the use of digital media and will do all it can to migrate to a cost effective and convenient system, while recognising that a paperless General Assembly will not suit everyone.

7. Heart and Soul 2017

Following successful events at the last six General Assemblies, Heart and Soul 2017 with the theme *Word of Life*, will take place in Princes Street Gardens on Sunday 21 May. By tapping into the webcast and drawing on local resources, Heart & Soul Local will mirror in different venues the celebration of the Edinburgh event. The Committee is grateful to everyone who makes the event not only possible but enjoyable and meaningful, and this year it is particularly grateful to the GROW project at Edinburgh: Greyfriars for crafting the individual letters that go to make up the words 'Word of Life'. The Committee hopes that these letters will be used across Scotland to show how the *Word of Life* engages with different communities. This year over 60 exhibitors will be taking part in Heart and Soul 2017 and further information is available at www.heartandsoul.org.uk

8. Property

The Property sub-committee continues to advise the Committee on matters relating to the General Assembly Hall and the Moderator's flat. Both properties are maintained appropriately and are subject to quinquennial inspection.

The Church has owned the property at Rothesay Terrace since 1999 and in recent years has carried out refurbishment work in the kitchen and bedrooms. The Moderator's flat is not only the Moderator's 'residence' in Edinburgh; it is also used extensively to host a variety of significant church events in a more informal atmosphere.

The General Assembly Hall was again part of Edinburgh Doors Open Day with over a thousand visitors. These are welcome opportunities to engage with visitors and with those less familiar with the Church's work and to share information about the wider work of the Church. Amongst the visitors this year was a large group of American tourists who enjoyed seeing the Assembly Hall close up and in particular the embroidered chairs used by former moderators at the opening and closing of the General Assembly, three videos showing historic and more recent

General Assemblies, and a collection of historical artefacts curated by the Mission and Discipleship Council and the Church Art and Architecture Committee.

At the end of its contract with Edinburgh First, the Committee has resumed responsibility for the marketing and letting of the General Assembly Hall. This has prompted the Committee to seek the appointment of an Assembly Hall Officer who will oversee the janitorial and letting management of the Assembly Hall, reporting to the Head of Estates and to the Committee. This will be a fixed-term arrangement, under review, until it becomes clear how the work and responsibilities unfold. The new post will be financed through the revenue raised by letting the Assembly Hall.

The Committee has had an Accessibility Audit carried out in the Hall and its environs. Whilst pleased that the Hall met most accessibility requirements, a few areas were highlighted that required attention, and the Committee will be addressing these as part of a planned programme of maintenance.

9. Commissioners' Subsistence and Travelling Expenses

The Committee recommends the following rates for payment of expenses:

Overnight subsistence not exceeding £60.00 for each night.

Daily out-of-pocket expenses not exceeding £15 per day.

Mileage rate, when no public transport is available, 25p per mile.

Further details appear on the reverse of the claim form issued to commissioners.

10. *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae*

The *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae* is the official record of ministers who have served within the Church of Scotland and includes important information such as dates and places of service, ordination and study, as well as notable details from ministers' lives.

Over the years the *Fasti* has been published at 20 – 25 year intervals with the most recent *Fasti*, Volume XI, produced in 2000. The Committee has begun consideration of a further volume.

11. David McColl

David McColl has served as Assembly Officer since 2000, having previously served as Depute Assembly Officer. His cheerful and friendly greeting extended to all who attend the General Assembly has become part of the fabric of what the Assembly has been. As well as duties around the Assembly Hall, particularly during the number of set-up days required, David has ensured that the Moderator's block and Clerks' suite have been well managed over the years. His has been a hugely supportive role and the General Assembly is grateful to him. The Committee wishes him a happy retirement.

12. Alison Murray

Alison Murray has been a stalwart in the Principal Clerk's Office for sixteen years, having acted as Minute Secretary at the Assembly before that. She has supported sixteen Moderators as their personal assistant, and has worked with six Conveners of the Assembly Arrangements Committee. Her institutional memory of the work of the Committee, and of the General Assembly, is exceptional and her commitment to ensuring that the day-to-day running of the Assembly is smooth is outstanding. Her ability to cope with the multiplicity of requests and demands made during the year, and particularly around the time of the General Assembly, is inspiring. She has also played a significant role in making sure that the Assembly Hall has been opened to the general public during the Edinburgh Doors Open Day scheme in recent years, and has spent long hours ensuring the Hall and various exhibits were properly prepared.

Alison's support of Moderators during their period of office is something to which each one will testify positively. The long hours of preparation and the niceties of dealing with an incoming Moderator-Designate while the current

Moderator is still in office have been handled with tact and aplomb, and on occasion not a little firmness!

So much of the work of the General Assembly is built on a dedicated group of individuals working hard and quietly in the background. For her work on behalf of the General Assembly, her work with Moderators and Conveners and her work in the Office of the General Assembly, the Church owes Alison an enormous debt of gratitude. The Committee wishes her well in her retirement.

In the name of the Committee

JUDITH J H PEARSON, *Convener*
 FIONA SMITH, *Vice-Convener*
 JOHN P CHALMERS, *Secretary*

ADDENDA

Rev Dr Derek Browning

Rev Dr Derek Browning has been involved in the work of the Assembly Arrangements Committee for eight years and has served as its Convener for the last two years. As is customary, this has also involved being Business Convener of the General Assembly.

Derek has shown a deep concern for the place of the General Assembly in the life of the Church. His respect for its practice and procedure is clear but in all things, he brings a gentle good humour and a keen wit.

Under his convenership, the Assembly and its Hall have become more accessible to people with a variety of needs and Dr Browning has maintained his concern for inclusion here and in his parish at Edinburgh: Morningside.

We know that Dr Browning would have enjoyed serving the Committee and the Assembly for a further two years in this capacity but now that he has been nominated as Moderator Designate, we wish him well in a different sphere of service.

Retirement of the Principal Clerk, the Very Rev Dr John P Chalmers

The Committee pays tribute to the Very Rev Dr John P Chalmers, Principal Clerk to the General Assembly, and Secretary to the Assembly Arrangements Committee, who retires in July. John Chalmers studied chemical engineering at the University of Strathclyde before moving to the University of Glasgow where he graduated BD. He was awarded an Honorary Doctor of Divinity degree by Aberdeen University in 2016. Dr Chalmers' first charge was Renton Parish Church in Dunbartonshire. He was then translated to Palmerston Place Parish Church in Edinburgh in 1986. In 1995 he became Depute Secretary to the Board of Ministry and in 2010 he became Principal Clerk to the General Assembly, as well as being Secretary to the Moderator, to the Assembly Arrangements Committee and the Legal Questions Committee. He is a Chaplain to Her Majesty The Queen. In 2014, at very short notice, Dr Chalmers became Moderator of the General Assembly and served with distinction. His calm manner, wise counsel and gentle humour were greatly appreciated not only at the Assembly but also throughout his year as Moderator. In the Scottish Referendum campaign of that year and elsewhere, Dr Chalmers championed the cause of 'Respectful Dialogue', and called for the Church to be a source of healing after the Referendum took place.

Dr Chalmers' grace under pressure, a skill acquired during his parish ministry and honed during his service in the offices of the Church, has been a source of comfort, encouragement and challenge to all who have encountered him. His desire to find the 'question behind the question' has led to thoughtful and purposeful dialogue and decision-making within the Church at every level where he has been involved. The Church has been embellished and heartened by his caring ministry and sage counsel.

Dr Chalmers has been warmly supported by his wife Liz and their family throughout his ministry. Fuller tribute will be paid at the closing session but the Committee wishes to place on record its own indebtedness and to wish Dr

Chalmers and Mrs Chalmers a long, healthy and happy retirement.

APPENDIX A

REPORT OF THE SCOTTISH BIBLE SOCIETY

‘Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.’

Galatians 5:25 (NIV)

Journeys take many forms. There are numerous stories in the Bible about people on the move. From Abraham being called to leave his home country, to God’s people being in exile, to Jesus travelling around Galilee, Samaria and Judea, to the early Christians being scattered because of persecution – to give a few examples. We often use ‘journey’ as a metaphor and life is described as a journey. We all have very different experiences of life’s journey.

In 2016, the spotlight in our news reports was very much on the people whose journey has been particularly challenging due to being displaced by war. Images of desperate refugees making perilous journeys and arriving in Europe played across our screens. As difficult as their journeys are, the reality is that the poorest and most desperate will never be able to leave these war-torn countries.

Our colleagues in the Middle East have been working with refugees in the region for many years. In this current crisis they are reporting an increased demand for Bibles. Their work has had to develop beyond providing food, blankets and other material aid alongside Bibles. A programme of Bible-based emotional and spiritual healing has been developed because the ongoing trauma that the refugees experience means they are dealing with serious psychological needs. Using trained volunteers, thousands of refugees are encountering the Bible in a new way. Many passages in the Bible talk about the suffering of God’s people. Through seeing elements of their suffering reflected in the characters and events of the Bible, refugees begin to understand God’s love and care for

them. They discover that they can take their pain and suffering to the cross for healing from the trauma they are experiencing. The Bible-based trauma healing programme is a long, slow process, but vital for the healing and well-being of each individual.

In Scotland, we are continuing to support congregations in their response to helping refugees and asylum seekers. Our booklet, ‘On the road...A Journey through the Bible for migrants’ is a recommended resource by the Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees project and the booklet is available in English, Arabic and Farsi.

Thanks to the prayers and generous financial gifts of congregations, volunteers and donors, we are able to support Bible-based trauma healing programmes in the Middle East, as well as other **projects around the world**, including:

- Providing Bibles in a language people understand – in Algeria where the early Berber Christians produced theologians like Saint Augustine, Scriptures in the Berber language are supporting the current growth in Christianity in what is a predominantly Muslim country.
- Distributing Bibles to thousands of people – the church in China is growing so fast that there is a virtual Bible famine. Many believers long for their own Bible but are often unable to afford one.
- Responding to the holistic needs of people – in Brazil where the *Luz na Amazônia* (Light in Amazonia) boat navigates to isolated riverside communities, providing much needed medical, social and spiritual assistance to people.

A journey of our own that we celebrated in 2016 was 25 years of our **Bibleworld** ministry. In four different exhibition formats, **Bibleworld** has welcomed close to 220,000 school children, parents, teachers and volunteers. We thank the many congregations who have been involved with **Bibleworld** over the years. Whilst the **Bibleworld Mobile** classroom was retired from active

service, we are excited by the next stage of our journey - ***Bibleworld Books*** which is currently in development. This is a Bible-based resource suitable for children to learn the principles of reading and writing. We pray that congregations will capture the vision of using our modern illustrated resources to run ***Bibleworld*** book clubs - after school groups staffed by trained volunteers building relationships with schools and families in communities, and helping children to improve their literacy levels using stories from the Bible.

Throughout the year, we were encouraged by stories of people's personal journeys with the Bible. In partnership with Biblica, the ***Community Bible Experience (CBE)*** was introduced in Scotland nearly three years ago. Since then well over 3,000 people around the country have read the

entire New Testament. People who have read the Bible all their lives have discovered new things in the Scriptures and many who have never read the Bible, or who struggle to read the Bible, have found that ***CBE*** transformed their experience of the Scriptures as God's Word was opened up in a new and fresh way.

Our belief is that the Bible speaks to us in every situation we face and that God is faithful and brings hope to all of our different journeys. In life, we may find ourselves constantly on the move, but God is on the move too. Perhaps our prayer should always be that we will have the courage to move with him and 'keep in step with his Spirit' (*Galatians 5:25*).