

ASSEMBLY ARRANGEMENTS COMMITTEE

May 2015

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. Instruct the Committee to consider arrangements for the electronic distribution of the volume of Assembly Reports and to bring a report to the 2016 General Assembly. (*Section 7*)
6. Instruct the Committee to make Long Service Certificates available for presentation to elders for thirty years' service and then at ten year intervals beyond thirty years' service. (*Section 9*)

SCOTTISH BIBLE SOCIETY

7. Urge the Scottish Bible Society to pursue its current efforts highlighting the Bible's key role in building healthy churches and communities.
8. Support the Society in its desire to work in partnership with congregations to improve Bible engagement and its application to everyday life.
9. Endorse the Society in its efforts to encourage confidence in the gospel and in providing Scripture resources for mission purposes.
10. Commend the Society's global outreach to the generosity of congregations and members.
11. Appoint Rev Sandy Gunn and Rev Dr Norman Maciver to the Scottish Bible Society's Council of Church Representatives.

REPORT

1. The Very Rev John P Chalmers

Following the withdrawal of the Rev Dr Angus Morrison because of ill health, John Chalmers was nominated just a few weeks before the General Assembly. The Church is very grateful to him for accepting the nomination and to those who stepped in to fill his duties as Principal Clerk enabling him to undertake the role. John has put his

considerable gifts at the disposal of the Church and has fulfilled the role with grace, warmth and energy.

John and Liz undertook Presbytery visits to Lewis and Uist, Greenock and Paisley, Aberdeen and to the Borders Presbyteries of Duns, Jedburgh and Melrose and Peebles. They found a warm welcome from presbyters and from the many others whom they encountered and their

enthusiasm and deep knowledge of the Church has made a lasting impression.

The Moderator's skills in mediation and conflict resolution equipped him very well for the work he undertook to encourage respectful dialogue among all parties involved in the referendum debate and in other areas of conflict. The Moderator's involvement was widely appreciated by church members, leaders of other denominations and politicians; it was a significant contribution made in a thoughtful and insightful way. The Moderator has also made valued comments about other matters of importance within society, as well as exhibiting a genuine pastoral concern to those affected by tragedies in recent months. The Church's role as a questioning, caring presence in the landscape of the nation has been enhanced in this moderatorial year by the work of John Chalmers.

The annual visit to London offered further valuable opportunities for political engagement and for contact with other institutions.

Overseas travel for John and Liz included Hungary, Nigeria and South Sudan where relationships with partner churches were strengthened and mutual understanding increased. In February the Moderator visited the Pope at the Vatican. The Moderator extended an invitation to the Pope to visit Scotland and also spoke about the relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of Scotland having never been more cordial or productive than it is now. John presented Pope Francis with a Dove of Peace made by a Palestinian Christian Group in Bethlehem. These glass doves are made out of fragments of broken bottles thrown away or glass found in the rubble of bombsites. The Dove speaks of how that which seems worthless and hopeless can be transformed. The gift has been shared on John's visits wherever he has gone, a memorable symbol of his moderatorial year.

Returning to becoming Principal Clerk might not be an easy adjustment for John but we look forward to welcoming him back to the Clerk's chair at next year's General Assembly.

The Church expresses its appreciation to each Moderator but for stepping up at such short notice and for giving so much of themselves in this significant year, the Church is deeply grateful to John and Liz Chalmers whose service has been exemplary.

2. Principal Clerk's Office

The Committee wishes to record its warm appreciation to those who assisted with the work of the Principal Clerk's office while John Chalmers served the Church as its Moderator. The Rev Dr George Whyte and the Rev George Cowie worked together very well as Acting Principal Clerk and Acting Depute Clerk at the General Assembly and throughout the year; the Very Rev David Arnott co-ordinated the work of the department with grace and good humour.

3. Presbytery Representation

The Presbytery returns show that there are in all the Presbyteries 1074 Charges, whether vacant or not, and that there are 218 other ministers (excluding retired ministers) who are members of Presbyteries. Representation is calculated for each Presbytery in accordance with Act III, 2000, and the total number of Commissions is made up as follows: 356 Elders, XXX Elders and 29 Deacons.

4. Election of Committee to Nominate the Moderator

In 2014, new Regulations passed by the 2013 General Assembly were used to elect the Committee to Nominate the Moderator. In terms of Section 4 of the Regulations, some adjustment to the practicalities of the process has been required. Under the Schedule to the Regulations the Committee has altered part of the timetable for the process to allow adequate time for ballot papers to be printed. Commissioners are encouraged to submit nominations by Monday at noon. 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.

5. Assembly Future

In response to a remit given to the Committee and the Council of Assembly by the 2014 General Assembly, a small group has been set up to consider the future purpose of the General Assembly. Looking back over the years at the reports of the Assembly Arrangements Committee, and before that to the former General Administration Committee and the Board of Practice and Procedure, the same themes emerge and re-emerge. Changes have been made, tried for a time, and then adopted or altered depending on whether subsequent Assemblies found that the changes were helpful or unhelpful.

In the current review it has been challenging but important to identify what the functions of the General Assembly ought to be, before considering how these might be achieved. The Committee has identified the following functions of the General Assembly (noted in alphabetical order):

- Fellowship, Encounter and Worship – the Assembly gives commissioners' experience of the wider Church and its activities, connecting us with Christians from across the country and the world.
- Governance – the Assembly is the means by which the Councils and Committees of the Church are held accountable.
- Judicial - the Assembly, on certain occasions, can still receive appeals and can also be asked to adjudicate on matters which are raised via overture or petition.
- Legislative – the Assembly passes laws and approves regulations which help order the Church's life and also reflect the Church's engagement with theology and society.
- Resourcing and Encouragement – the Assembly provides support, inspiration and information.
- Visibility and Public Profile – the Assembly offers a platform for the work and the opinions of the Church to the wider Church and to the wider world.

The Committee is in the process of carrying out a consultation across the Church of Scotland

(Commissioners, the Youth Assembly, Presbyteries, the Councils and Committees) to gather as many views and opinions as possible. The experiences of our ecumenical partners will also be considered. The Committee will bring a report to the General Assembly of 2016.

6. Property

The Property sub-committee continues to advise the Assembly Arrangements 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 the Committee is carrying 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 in hosting 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 and opened as part of 24 Doors of Advent, an initiative of Edinburgh's Christmas celebration. 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 activities of the Church. The General Assembly Hall has been managed by Edinburgh First; this contract is due for renewal this year. In reviewing these arrangements the Committee is meeting with Edinburgh First to consider the financial and practical details of the current management contract in order that the benefit to the Church is not only maintained but, where possible, increased.

7. Distribution of Blue Book hard copy and General Assembly App

The Committee is keen to keep in review the cost of the General Assembly and is examining the possibility of distributing the Volume of Reports electronically, rather than only in printed book form. Printed copies will always remain available for those who do not choose to receive the reports electronically, and for the purposes of the official records of the General Assembly. The Committee

is also considering the development of the General Assembly App.

8. Heart and Soul

Following successful events at the last four General Assemblies, Heart and Soul 2015, with the theme *Living Stones*, will take place in Princes Street Gardens on Sunday 17 May. Those attending in Edinburgh can enjoy worship, fellowship and fun together as well as the opportunity to learn from organisations and congregations sharing information about the living stones which form their life and witness and who share their buildings and facilities.

In other locations, smaller local events are taking place for some of those unable to travel to Edinburgh. These events will include the web-streaming of part of the Princes Street Gardens celebration. The future of Heart and Soul will be considered by the Committee as part of its ongoing review of the General Assembly, with a report being made in 2016. It is intended that a Heart and Soul event will take place in 2016.

This year the Committee was pleased to work alongside the *Pray Now* group from Mission and Discipleship so that the theme of Heart and Soul and *Pray Now* would be the same. *Pray Now* will be launched to coincide with the General Assembly and Heart and Soul.

9. Long Service Certificates

An elder who has served thirty years is currently eligible to receive a Long Service Certificate signed by the Moderator but not to receive a further certificate, for example marking forty or fifty years' service. The Committee recognises that this practice was brought in when elders were ordained later in life and therefore longer service was less likely. Requests for certificates marking longer service are now much more frequent and the Committee proposes that the General Assembly would ensure further certificates may be issued to elders at ten year intervals beyond thirty years' service.

10. 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 £15.00 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.

In the name of the Committee

DEREK BROWNING, *Convener*
JUDITH J PEARSON, *Vice-Convener*
GEORGE J WHYTE, *Acting Secretary*

APPENDIX A

REPORT OF THE SCOTTISH BIBLE SOCIETY

'The seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.' Luke 8:15 (NIV)

As we reflect on the past twelve months, the defining memory came in the form of a special edition of Luke's Gospel featuring inspiring stories of sporting men and women who believe their faith is worth *More Than Gold*. Priced at only a penny, this book was designed to be a tool to help Christians share their faith and pass on the Word of God to others. Fondly known as the *Penny Gospel*, the project was a journey of faith. At the launch of the project, we could never have imagined that ten months later our original estimate of 50,000 copies being sold would have risen to over three quarters of a million, with over 600 churches, organisations and individuals across the nation being inspired to simply give them away to their

neighbourhoods and communities. Knowing that the equivalent of one third of Scottish households now have a copy leads us to hope that somehow this book of five athletes' testimonies and the Gospel of Luke will bring change to people's lives and even our society. We are thankful for the many congregations who caught the vision and distributed Penny Gospels. Today our prayers continue that each copy of the Penny Gospel will be read and each life will be changed.

In addition to instigating one of the largest Scripture distributions in Scotland for decades, we also published a commemorative ***Commonwealth New Testament***. The book features contributions from across the globe – the contributors sharing their thoughts on the Bible's influence and impact in their part of the Commonwealth. We were delighted that Her Majesty the Queen, our Patron, provided an introduction to the book and set the context for the pages within.

Both the ***Penny Gospel*** and the ***Commonwealth New Testament*** projects were the result of our partnership with Biblica – the publishers of the New International Version of the Bible. In our continuing partnership and shared vision to see people engaging with and being transformed by the Word of God, we have been encouraging churches to run a ***Community Bible Experience (CBE)***. It's a simple way of reading the New Testament as a whole book together as a community, in 8 weeks. Set up for discussions and run like a book club rather than a traditional Bible study, it's ideal for people reading the Bible for the first time. During Assembly week last year, we ran a well-attended lunch introducing people to CBE and the take-up has been positive. We encourage you to find out more about this ongoing resource.

We are also delighted to report that the modern ***Gaelic translation of the New Testament*** is near completion and we are aiming to publish this digitally and in printed formats.

Thanks to the prayers and generous financial gifts of congregations, volunteers and donors, we are able to

support Bible Society ***projects around the world***, including:

- Distributing Bibles to thousands of people in China, Botswana and Burundi.
- Translating Bibles in Indonesia, Vietnam and Papua New Guinea – where local tribal groups have approached the Bible Society for assistance to carry out translation work into their indigenous languages in remote areas that can only be reached by small dinghy or through air travel.
- Working with churches and sometimes government agencies on holistic projects that bring hope through the Bible to people in need. In Swaziland, for example, a programme of Bible studies addressing the issue of gender-based violence in relation to biblical values is helping to support those who have been affected.

Towards the end of 2014, we asked our supporters to ***stand together with the church in Iraq*** where our colleagues are continuing to witness the mass displacement of people due to the advancing militants of the Islamic State (IS). During his visit to Scotland, Nabil from the Bible Society in Iraq, travelled the country to bring this news to over six hundred people through church meetings, conferences and a visit to the Scottish Parliament. In addition to asking for prayer and financial support for refugee camps, he highlighted the trauma that many people have suffered and the subsequent need for doctors and trained councillors to help with psychological healing alongside physical healing.

Whilst world affairs, like the situation in Iraq, continue to be unsettling, questions about what kind of nation we want to be still linger, and financial challenges persist for many in our communities (evidenced by food banks), there is a need to depend upon God and reach people with the Word of God. Governments come and go. Economies flourish and falter. The Word of God endures. Let's encourage one another as we give our time and energy to building the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ – that is the one that will last!