

# ASSEMBLY ARRANGEMENTS COMMITTEE

May 2016

## 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 the Rev Dr Martin Scott as Precentor to the General Assembly for a four-year period. (*Section 2*)
6. Note the development of the electronically available version of the Reports to the General Assembly and encourage its wider usage by future commissioners to the General Assembly. (*Section 6*)
7. Instruct
  - (i) The Committee to explore the implications of moving the General Assembly to the second week in June, and to bring a recommendation to the General Assembly of 2017.
  - (ii) The Committee to redraft the timetable for the opening day of the General Assembly, in consultation with the World Mission Council and the Committee for Ecumenical Relations, and to bring a recommendation to the General Assembly of 2017.
  - (iii) The Committee to continue providing management of the Heart and Soul event until 2020, and continue discussions with the Council of Assembly concerning ongoing funding and resource implications for Heart and Soul, with a review to be reported to the General Assembly of 2019. (*Section 7*)
  - (iv) The Committee to consider the possibility of developing regional Heart and Soul events or Heart and Soul reunions as a way of engaging the whole church in matters of common purpose, and report to the General Assembly of 2017. (*Section 7*)
  - (v) All Councils, Committees and other bodies reporting to the General Assembly to present concise reports and deliverances in accessible language.
  - (vi) The Committee, in consultation with the Communications Department of the Church, to explore the production of short film clips from the Councils, Committees and other bodies reporting to the General Assembly and relating to their work, and making these available annually on the Church website; and submit budget proposals to the Council of Assembly and report to the General Assembly of 2017. (*Section 9.v.d*)
  - (vii) The Committee, in consultation with the Communications Department of the Church, to produce a guide to 'What happens at the General Assembly'; and make this available on the Church website and in Assembly publications by April 2017.
  - (viii) The Committee in consultation with the Council of Assembly and with the assistance of the Legal Questions Committee to explore further the feasibility and practicality of managing the business of the General Assembly, whilst maintaining good governance, in such a way as to save sufficient time to enable the General Assembly to finish on an inspiring note and send out a positive message to the Church and nation.

**SCOTTISH BIBLE SOCIETY**

8. Urge the Scottish Bible Society to pursue its current efforts to address the challenge of global Bible translation.
9. 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.
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 Angus Morrison**

The General Assembly and the Church of Scotland as a whole were delighted to learn that Angus Morrison had recovered fully from surgery and was well enough to accept nomination as Moderator. The schedule for Angus and Marion has been full and the enthusiasm and great warmth with which they have carried out all their engagements have been deeply appreciated by everyone they have encountered. For the first time in many years, the Church of Scotland has had a Gaelic speaker as Moderator and Angus has willingly undertaken preaching, speaking and writing tasks in Gaelic throughout his time in office. Presbytery visits to Argyll, Lochaber, Dunfermline, Ayr and Moray provided many opportunities to see the local church at work in a wide variety of settings and enabled Angus to open doors and help to strengthen links with community groups, local industry, schools and hospitals as well as affirming congregations in their ongoing work and witness.

The international situation during the past year impacted on several of the visits – to Italy and Sicily where Angus and Marion saw some of the work with refugees being undertaken by our partner churches; to Brussels shortly after the terrorist attacks in Paris; to Egypt in January. To each of these, Angus brought thoughtful enquiry and deep concern for the individuals affected and a determination that the Church of Scotland should live out its calling to the poor, the refugee and the stranger.

Throughout the year, Angus has supported the work of the 'Grasping the Nettle' initiative, which seeks to address public understanding of issues related to science and God. This has involved chairing meetings and hosting events to bring people together to discuss the challenge of secularism in contemporary society.

The path to the Moderator's chair was a challenging one for Angus but the Church is indebted to him and to Marion for the gracious way they have carried out their roles and it rejoices with them that good health continues.

**2. Precentor**

The position of Precentor to the General Assembly became vacant on the retirement of the Rev Dr Douglas Galbraith in 2015. After advertising, auditioning and interviewing, the Committee is delighted to invite the General Assembly to appoint the Rev Dr Martin Scott as Precentor. The post will be held for four years, with the possibility of an extension.

**3. Presbytery Representation**

The Presbytery returns show that there are in all the Presbyteries 1,056 charges, whether vacant or not and that there are 211 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: 354 ministers, 354 elders and 27 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. Youth Representatives**

The Committee agreed to give consideration to allowing Presbyteries to offer places to Youth Representatives from outwith their Presbytery bounds. The Committee would resist such a fundamental change, as the practice is no longer allowed for Commissioners to the Assembly. The Committee is of the view that Presbytery representation is a fundamental principle that should be applied consistently to both Commissioners and Youth Representatives. In discussions with representatives from the Legal Questions Committee and the Mission and Discipleship Council, the Assembly Arrangements Committee notes that the Legal Questions Committee will bring forward an amendment to Standing Order 35 (i) to enable Presbyteries to nominate as youth representatives young people living away from their home Presbytery temporarily.

The Committee believes that there is a greater issue lying behind the presenting one and that is the role of young people within the Church and *all* its courts. The resolution of this issue lies more naturally in Kirk Sessions ordaining younger people as elders consequently enabling them to play active roles in Presbyteries and potentially be commissioned to attend the General Assembly. The

Committee would therefore urge Kirk Sessions and Presbyteries to address how younger people are enabled to participate within Kirk Sessions and Presbyteries, whilst affirming that the Presbyterian constitution of the Church requires ordination for its court members.

#### **6. The General Assembly in the digital age**

The Committee strives to keep abreast of developments in technology and is also keen to keep in review some of the costs of the General Assembly. In this regard the Committee has been examining the possibility of distributing the Volume of Reports electronically, rather than only in printed book form. At last year's General Assembly it was noted that 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, however, has also noted that over recent years increasing numbers of commissioners and others are now referring to Blue Book reports, and other papers, on a variety of electronic devices – tablets, smart phones and laptop computers. The Committee believes that this is a trend that is likely to continue as technology develops. With the increase in usage of the e-book versions of the Blue Book the Committee has changed the way in which the Blue Book report copy is processed. This is a more automated process that allows copy to be handled more efficiently and with greater consistency.

By creating a unified format the Blue Book is now more easily accessible digitally as well as continuing to be available in print form. It is hoped, if this ongoing trial proves successful, that there will be some financial saving to the Church. The sums saved (mostly from postage) will not become clear for a year or two and will depend on the number of commissioners who opt for the digital version.

Commencing with the run up to the 2017 General Assembly, Presbytery Clerks, when preparing commissions, will be asked to establish from commissioners whether they will require to be sent a printed copy of the Reports or whether they will be

content to download the Reports electronically. Similarly, prior to the publication of the Assembly Reports every serving minister and deacon will receive an email indicating the anticipated publication date and only those who request a hard copy of the reports will receive the volume in the mail. **For the avoidance of doubt, three things should be noted:**

- (i) that the default position will be that commissioners, serving ministers and deacons will access the reports through digital downloads and only those who request a print version will receive a hard copy by post.
- (ii) that the same conditions will apply to the publication and distribution of Volume II and only those who request a print version of Volume I will receive a print version of Volume II.
- (iii) that for the purposes of maintaining the historic record of the General Assembly, those who receive Volume III of the reports will continue to receive print versions of all three Volumes and in the future all three Volumes will be available for digital download.

The Committee hopes that as the new system becomes part of the cycle of Council and Committee reporting, the time gained through using the new system might lead to an extension of the period of time Councils and Committees have to prepare their reports because the formatting of material is more straightforward.

The Committee has also been considering the further development of the General Assembly App. The Committee is happy to announce that this year the Assembly App gives access to Assembly reports and papers, and also contains information about Heart and Soul 2016.

Wi-Fi in the Assembly Hall has been limited in previous years. Increasing requests to remedy this situation have been addressed. The Committee is pleased to announce that this year Wi-Fi will be available in the Assembly Hall, the Rainy Hall and ancillary rooms throughout the period of the General Assembly. This will enable commissioners to

access Assembly reports, papers and updates throughout the period of the General Assembly. Commissioners, however, are reminded that the business of the General Assembly demands the utmost attention and that they should be judicious in their use of mobile devices when their fullest attention should be directed to the business in hand. This is particularly the case when the Assembly is discussing legislative matters or matters of particular sensitivity and it would be regrettable if, for instance, the inappropriate use of Twitter or other social media prejudiced or otherwise influenced the course of a debate.

## 7. Heart and Soul 2016

Following successful events at the last five General Assemblies, Heart and Soul 2016, with the theme *People of the Way*, will take place in Princes Street Gardens on Sunday 22 May. Those attending in Edinburgh can enjoy worship, fellowship and fun as well as the opportunity to learn from organisations and congregations sharing information about the many different individuals and groups travelling along the way of faith, enriching the journey of belief and discovery.

In other locations it is hoped that smaller local events will be taking place for those unable to travel to Edinburgh. It is hoped these events will include the web-streaming of part of the Princes Street Gardens celebration to these events, as one congregation did in 2015.

Once again 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. The Committee seeks the Assembly's approval to continue discussions with the Council of Assembly about resourcing and funding the Heart and Soul event until 2020, and to consider the possibility of developing regional Heart and Soul events or Heart and Soul reunions as a way of engaging the whole church in matters of common purpose. The Committee would then review progress and

bring a report on future plans to future General Assemblies.

## 8. 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 in the past year 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.

Edinburgh First has managed the General Assembly Hall for some years. The contract has been extended by one year as the Committee continues to review how best to manage the Assembly Hall.

## 9. The shape, size and frequency of the General Assembly

### i. Background

In response to a remit given to the Committee in consultation with the Council of Assembly by the 2014 General Assembly, a small group was set up to consider the shape, size and frequency of the General Assembly.

In the 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, in consultation with the Council of Assembly, identified the following functions of the General Assembly (noted in alphabetical order):

- Fellowship and Encounter – 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 and Courts 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 that 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.

These were noted by the General Assembly of 2015.

### *Survey Findings*

The review group carried out a consultation across many different sectors of the Church: last year's commissioners, Presbyteries, Presbytery Clerks, the National Youth Assembly, and Councils and Committees of the Church. Ecumenical soundings were taken from the United Reformed Church and the Church of England.

A major component of the consultation exercise was a questionnaire that was made widely available during and after the General Assembly 2015. Around 750 responses were received, representing almost every Presbytery. 60% of respondents had attended either the 2014 General Assembly or the 2015 General Assembly. Statistical analysis of responses was supplemented by analysis of comments made in support of responses. A shorter follow-up questionnaire was distributed to Presbyteries and others, including respondents to the first questionnaire

who had indicated that they were willing to be contacted further.

The survey responses affirmed that the following functions (in order) are the key functions of the General Assembly:

- (a) Governance
- (b) Visibility and profile
- (c) Legislative functions
- (d) Fellowship and encounter

The Committee is grateful to all who responded and took part in the consultations, and is particularly grateful to the Rev Dr Fiona Tweedie and Dr Rita Welsh for their expert help in constructing the consultation papers and carrying out analysis once the responses were returned.

### **ii. Ecumenical discussions and the National Youth Assembly**

Conversations with the United Reformed Church suggested that Assemblies on alternate years have not been universally successful and have increased the sense of remoteness from the decision-making process. In particular the URC reported that there were some apparent financial savings in holding its Assembly on alternate years, but it had already been necessary to hold an additional meeting in a 'non-Assembly' year that was unbudgeted and expensive, and it was suspected that this may well be a not infrequent occurrence. The real cost of alternate year Assemblies has been found in the sense of detachment from national decision-making, as well as 'ownership' of those decisions.

In conversation with the Church of England, it was noted that the General Synod meets twice, and sometimes three times in the one year, at a cost considerably more than our General Assembly.

The Committee, aware of discussions about a review of the National Youth Assembly, invites discussions with the National Youth Assembly and the Mission and Discipleship

Council to consider the possibility of holding the National Youth Assembly immediately after the General Assembly, bringing the two Assemblies closer together.

### **iii. Frequency, timing and venue of the General Assembly**

- (a) The Committee does not believe that moving the Assembly from meeting annually to biennially would release sufficient time, energy and other resources to Presbyteries to justify a change in frequency of the General Assembly. The Committee believes that the loss of an annual opportunity to scrutinise the work of the Councils and Committees of the Church at the General Assembly is not something that the Church at large would welcome. The desire to retain the Assembly as an annual event was given clear support from the survey that was carried out (with some 64% of respondents favouring an annual Assembly). The Council of Assembly members of the review group noted that over the past two years the proportion of Ministry and Mission allocation retained by Presbyteries has increased from 3% to 5%, and that proposed amendments to regulations clarify the flexible use of this resource by Presbyteries. The Council of Assembly is producing more detailed guidance for Presbyteries about how these resources might be used. The Assembly Arrangements Committee notes that beyond this issue of the frequency of the General Assembly lies the much more challenging area concerning governance within the Church as a whole, and where the balance between the General Assembly, the Council of Assembly and other councils and committees and the Presbyteries should lie. The Assembly Arrangements Committee simply notes that these issues have arisen from some comments from the survey and its broad discussions.
- (b) The Committee believes that there is no apparent wish across the Church to move the General Assembly from the Assembly Hall in Edinburgh. Without greatly reducing the number of Commissioners, delegates and representatives, the

logistics and cost of moving to other locations in the country, or even other venues in Edinburgh, could not be justified. The experience of the years when the Scottish Parliament was in the Assembly Hall and the Assembly met in the Usher Hall and the Edinburgh International Conference Centre highlighted the problems of using different venues, and the cost (borne by the Scottish Parliament) amounted to far more than the cost associated with maintaining our own Assembly Hall. It is also worth noting that there is considerable convenience in holding the Assembly in Edinburgh when the Church Offices are in the city, and there is further convenience and cost saving in resourcing the Heart and Soul event for similar reasons. One issue, however, that emerged from consultation with the National Youth Assembly related to the timing of the General Assembly. Consideration was given to moving the date of the Assembly to different times of the year. Most options were fraught with difficulties (adequate accommodation provision, church year start-up timings in the early Autumn, holiday periods, the Edinburgh Festival, etc.). The Committee recommends that the General Assembly should move to meet in the second week of June and that the implications of such a move be explored more fully. This slightly later date would allow some additional weeks for preparation of reports by Councils and Committees. It would move the Assembly out of the general exam times at Universities and colleges, and the possibility of a wider range of halls of residence accommodation for commissioners becoming available. The second week in June is also prior to the major holiday season. The Committee seeks permission to explore this possibility further with Universities in Edinburgh and with other relevant bodies.

- (c) The Committee believes that the combined length of sessions on the opening day of the Assembly is too long. The Committee therefore wishes to explore reordering the events that take place on the opening day of the General Assembly. The Assembly would

continue to open on a Saturday, but the Committee recommends that the opening morning, after the usual ceremonial, would then go on to welcome the overseas and ecumenical delegates who would feel enabled to participate in the proceedings of the Assembly from the beginning. Thereafter, apart from formal business which has to be dealt with at the beginning of the Assembly it might be possible to look at orienting the remainder of Saturday's business to setting out what the broad themes, strategies and aspirations of the Church should be in the week of the Assembly. This could be used to set the scene for the forthcoming week. The Committee believes that it would be appropriate for the Council of Assembly to facilitate this 'scene-setting' work with the councils and committees of the Church setting out their strategic views. Consideration would also have to be given to repositioning the report of the outgoing Moderator.

- (d) The Assembly Service at St Giles', with the Gaelic service at Greyfriars Kirk, would continue on Sunday, as would the Heart and Soul event on Sunday afternoon. The survey and other discussions clearly indicated that people felt that Heart and Soul provided a 'shop window' for the Church that would be difficult to replicate at another time, or indeed in another venue, and that it was important for this event to be held during the week of the General Assembly. Heart and Soul was seen as the 'visible church' and provided a good variety of opportunities, allowed for catch-up time with friends from across the country and world, and such informal encounters were highly valued. The theme of the Assembly would also be developed through Heart and Soul and could be carried over into the whole life of the Church.

#### **iv. Size of the General Assembly**

No desire has been expressed to reduce the numbers of Commissioners attending the General Assembly. The Committee believes that to do so would reduce the wide reach of involvement to the Church currently afforded by

the 700 or so attending. The energising effect of a larger Assembly is noted and welcomed. Reduction in numbers attending would mean less frequent attendance and would affect the sense of "belonging". The possibility of offering four-year commissions was raised but, beyond providing some limited advantage of continuity, was felt to provide a broader disadvantage, particularly to working elders, who would have to take more time off work to attend.

**v. General Assembly 'culture'**

- (a) The Committee considered comments relating to the election of the Moderator for a two-year period but noted this would entail a significant change in the Moderator's role and would also raise questions about who would be able to accept such a role for a longer period of time. Recent discussions with former Moderators when the role and duties of the Moderator were considered indicated no enthusiasm for a change in the current pattern. The Committee believes that an increase in the period of office served by a Moderator would make it difficult for him or her to be able to return to duties laid aside in a parish or other church employment; it would be equally difficult for chaplains, elders and deacons at work in the secular world. There would also be a significant change in the 'representational' role of the Moderator if there were a longer period of office. Whilst the Committee is aware that there may be benefits in a longer period of office in relation to dealing with external bodies, and the media, other questions about the Moderator being more than a figure-head would need serious consideration and the Committee is not sure that the Church of Scotland would desire such a significant change.
- (b) From the survey, and from the broader discussions, there was a plea to the Councils and Committees of the Church for more concise reports and for these to be in more accessible language. This must be balanced with the need for transparency in reports and it is important to stress that only matters contained within reports and debated and agreed by
- the General Assembly form the 'decision' or 'view' of the General Assembly. The Committee notes that many Councils and Committees already strive to produce reports that are clear and direct, but that there is a challenge to find comprehensible language for complex material.
- (c) An accessible overview of the Councils' and Committees' remits and responsibilities would be helpful, particularly to first-time Commissioners. This was strongly echoed by members of the National Youth Assembly. The Committee plans to include a short remit of each Council and Committee either as part of the Reports to the General Assembly (the 'Blue Book'), or in one of the mailings to commissioners to the Assembly; this to be done with the agreement of each Council and Committee.
- (d) Some form of 'preparation' for attendance at the General Assembly would prove helpful. The example of Youth Representatives and the amount of preparation they devote before and during the General Assembly is a healthy one for the whole Church. The familiarisation evening held on the Friday prior to the opening of the Assembly for first time commissioners is greatly appreciated. The Committee recommends, following an observation from the National Youth Assembly, that the Church of Scotland website should carry short clips from Council and Committee conveners, or other representatives, about their forthcoming reports. It was also felt that a revised 'What happens at the General Assembly' clip could be included on the Church's website, similar to the previous DVD that covered much of this material. The Committee wishes to explore the costing of this work with a view to bringing a budget proposal to the Council of Assembly.

The Committee intends to identify and highlight good practice in Presbyteries where imaginative, efficient and non-partisan pre-Assembly preparation is carried out and encourage other Presbyteries to do likewise.

**vi. Arranging the business and timetable of the General Assembly**

Responses and wider discussion suggested the need to make time at the General Assembly for the kind of session that would inspire, encourage and send out a positive message to the church and nation. The Committee would like to see the Assembly finish on such a high note. The Committee has wrestled with means by which this might be achieved. Would, for example, a system that outlined 'house-keeping issues' in the reports of Councils and Committees, having been properly scrutinised prior to the Assembly, allow the General Assembly to approve such 'starred' items without debate unless notice was given that questions might need to be raised? The idea of examining and filtering the work of Councils and Committees has been raised before. The issue is undoubtedly complex and sensitive. What, for example, would be considered as a 'housekeeping' issue? What would be the criteria for making such decisions? Who would be responsible for this scrutiny? What timescale would be necessary between the publishing of the reports to the General Assembly to allow a scrutinising body to do its work, or would this be something entrusted to the reporting Council or Committee, or a Commission of Assembly, or the Council of Assembly? Whilst there was agreement that creating time to enable the Assembly to finish on a high note for the Church and nation was desirable, the Committee, in consultation with the Council of Assembly, could not come to an agreement on the best method by which more time could be gained at the General Assembly. The more consideration was given to how to shape the timetable in a helpful way, the more issues of good governance, and the right of the General Assembly to make decisions on all matters of Council and Committee work, became entwined. The Committee is therefore asking for a further year to consider this aspect of the shaping of the General Assembly, in collaboration with the Council of Assembly and with the assistance of the Legal Questions Committee.

**vii. Governance, Accountability and the Way Ahead**

A number of comments from the survey, as well as from the National Youth Assembly and the Presbytery Clerks'

Forum, raised questions about the role of Presbyteries within the broad structure of the Church of Scotland.

The Committee recognises that questions about the role and function of Presbyteries lie beyond its remit. It notes, however, that part of its original remit in consultation with the Council of Assembly, was to identify if, by restructuring and reforming the General Assembly, Presbyteries might be better resourced and enabled to fulfil their role and purpose more effectively. The view of the Committee on this issue is unequivocal: reorganisation of the General Assembly will not, in itself, release the kind of resources needed to meet the aspirations of re-imagined or better-resourced Presbyteries.

The Committee, however, believes that it is right to flag up two significant questions that arose from its survey and discussions, and that others should take these forward:

**1. Governance, accountability and authority**

These three terms were used frequently in relation to the need for greater clarity on where responsibility for direction, supervision and oversight lies within the structures of the Church of Scotland. This has an impact on the way we understand the role and function of the General Assembly, and the Commission of Assembly if that avenue is explored, and the way in which it interacts with the Presbyterian polity of the Church, and its Councils and Committees in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**2. Presbytery review and accountability**

A recurrent issue raised in discussions about the shape, size and future of the General Assembly was that the fulcrum of a Presbyterian church is the Presbytery. The Committee notes that the process of Local Church Review is making a positive impact on congregational life. There is no parallel process overseeing the life of Presbyteries. Given that part of the original remit arose from a consideration of how resources currently expended around the General Assembly might be deployed at the level of Presbyteries, the Committee raises the open question: who should tackle these significant issues in our

Church's life, and how might these important agenda items be taken forward?

*In the name of the Committee*

DEREK BROWNING, *Convener*  
 JUDITH J H PEARSON, *Vice-Convener*  
 JOHN P CHALMERS, *Secretary*

## APPENDIX A

### REPORT OF THE SCOTTISH BIBLE SOCIETY

**'I rise early, before the sun is up; I cry out for help and put my hope in your words. I stay awake through the night, thinking about your promise.' Psalm 119:147, 148 (NLT)**

However we interact with the Bible, it is worth considering how the dynamic of Scripture works in our lives. Our belief is that the Bible is so much more than a text book. It is the Word of God. We often refer to the Bible as the written Word of God and to Jesus as the living Word of God. The Bible will always, ultimately, lead us to Jesus. As the Holy Spirit constantly brings glory to Jesus we rely on him to illuminate our understanding of the Bible. It is as the Word and Spirit work together that we find the Bible to be a dynamic and life-transforming book.

In 2015, we saw this demonstrated through the **Community Bible Experience (CBE)** - a simple way of reading the New Testament as a whole book, together as a community, in just 8 weeks. Set up for discussions and run like a book club, rather than a traditional Bible study, we heard how **CBE** had been a transformative experience for congregations. Across Scotland, we estimate that over 2,000 people were involved in a **CBE** group last year. Some participants claim not to have read the Bible as much in twenty years as they had over the period of reading in the **CBE** programme. Others said this experience has helped them to be more committed to Bible reading and applying it to their daily lives. The impact of **CBE** has been felt positively by both 'mature' Christians and 'new' Christians

with one participant who became a Christian in the past few years saying, "I've never read the Bible like this. It's like a letter from God, just to me."

At the end of the year, we produced a new resource called '*God's Gift*'. This special edition of Luke's Gospel features an attractive cover design plus quotes and illustrations from children exploring what they think Christmas is really all about. The Christmas Gospel project was born from a concern that Christmas has somehow lost its meaning in modern society. As a Bible Society, we wanted to help churches put the Gospel back into Christmas in a way that would intrigue, inform and even amuse their local communities. We were greatly encouraged when 70 churches used over 20,000 copies to give away as 'gifts' during advent in 2015. Distributing these at Christmas services, in shopping centres, with food bank parcels and throughout neighbourhoods, these little red books now have the potential to bring people and God together.

As the atrocities in Syria and Iraq continue and the refugee crisis grows in this area we have been able to help a trauma healing programme begin in **Iraq**. This programme is Bible-based and addresses some of the long term emotional and spiritual needs of those who have experienced extreme trauma. Iraqi Christians are being trained to work with this programme through the Bible Society in Iraq and we pray for deep healing for many.

In the continuing challenge of **Bible translation**, the latest figures from the United Bible Societies show that globally there are 6,901 languages spoken by 7.2 billion people. Only 542 of those languages have a full Bible translated into languages spoken by 4.9 billion people. Our digital Bible Library is a key part of our strategy to make the Bible as widely and as easily accessible as possible. It has over 1,000 Bibles, Testaments and portions in over 800 languages, spoken by over 4 billion people. Here in Scotland we continue to raise funds to enable people to have the Scriptures in their heart language.

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

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

- Translating Bibles in the South Pacific, Mexico and Botswana – where the Bakgalagari people in Botswana have never had the Bible in their heart language.
  - Distributing Bibles to thousands of people in Cambodia, Uruguay and Cuba – where there is a shortage of Bibles as in the last ten years, the number of Christians in Cuba has doubled but due to government restrictions and poverty, it has not been possible to provide Bibles until now.
  - Helping communities in Rwanda to tackle the themes of forgiveness and reconciliation through Bible based programmes that have resulted in healing and togetherness.
- Responding to crisis situations as we continue to support displaced families in Iraq by providing Scriptures and relief parcels. We also responded to the earthquakes in Nepal by answering the call to replace damaged and lost Bibles that bring hope to people in desperate situations.

With everything we do, we pray that people will go beyond just reading the Bible and actually engage with God through it. We believe God speaks through his Word into every situation. We are greatly encouraged by the stories about how the Bible has changed lives in Scotland and around the world. Our vision is to see individuals, communities and cultures transformed as people encounter God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the Bible. What a privilege and honour it is to serve God in this way.