

# 2008 General Assembly of the Church of Scotland



## Assembly Update Transcript #2

*Rev Douglas Aitken*

Thursday 15th May 2008, Afternoon

The first report of Thursday Afternoon was that of the Council of Assembly given by its Convener, Helen McLeod. She emphasised her belief in the value of a Co-ordinated Communication strategy for the future of the Church, and then announced that a number of new issues had been addressed by the Council in the past year.

The first was the publication of an Annual Review of the Church, which tells what the Church of Scotland has been doing over the past year. Another issue was the task of meeting the requirements of the Office of the Scottish Charities Regulator – colloquially known as OSCR. The Church of Scotland was approved as a Designated Religious Charity with effect from August last year. Over the next few years OSCR will be reviewing the charitable status of parts of the Church, including presbyteries and congregations.

The Convener went on to say that the Council had established a Gaelic Group which currently is seeking funding to support the more regular use of Gaelic in worship. It is recognised by political bodies, says the Report, that the Church of Scotland can play a distinctive role in fostering the Gaelic language and encouraging its ongoing development.

The next issue was the production of a set of protocols for the Church to speak out on matters of immediate concern, primarily because those conveners within whose remit the matter should fall may not always be available either to speak or to brief the Moderator. An addition to the Deliverance was proposed to consider the appointment of a Strategic Communications Director whose job involves being proactive in the communication of the Church's word on the issues raised in daily life. The Convener accepted it.

She then announced that the Council was increasing the Church's central budget by less than 1% in order to release as much funding as possible for the Church's work locally.

Appropriately, the next report before the Assembly was that of the Stewardship and Finance Committee, introduced by the Convener Mrs Vivien Dickson. She began by recognising the problems facing treasurers at congregational, presbyterial and national level, as a result of the legal requirements of OSCR. She said that, even though OSCR had required a complete change of approach for many congregations and presbyteries, she was delighted to report that 80% of submitted local church accounts had been in accord with the requirement.

Moving on to Stewardship issues, the Convener referred to the experimental project underway in two presbyteries, in which all the churches had been invited to participate together in a stewardship exercise. Because there are signs of success it is hoped to roll the idea out in other presbyteries. She said that the title “Allocation”, which is the name given to the assessment of what a congregation should give for the work of the Councils of the Church, gives the impression of monies given to the congregation, rather than money asked from it. She proposed that the more appropriate term should be “Contribution”. The report indicates that at least 82% of what is contributed returns to the local area in the provision of ministry and other services.

On the issue of what is known as the “attestation” of accounts – and other records – a commissioner moved a motion requiring the diligent inspection of accounts by presbyteries so that a congregation can be sure that its accounts fully meet the requirements of the Regulator. The Convener accepted the motion.

The report of the Church of Scotland Investors’ Trust followed in which the Convener reported that the Fund had had several good years, but that the past year had been difficult. Nonetheless the Trust was able to produce a return in excess of 6% against a benchmark of 4.9%.

Next, the Support and Services Council Report simply declared diligence in bringing together the six constituent committees and engaging with them in their work.

The final report of the afternoon was the report of the Panel on Review and Reform. The Convener told of the Panel’s work on Vacancy procedures (where a Church is between ministers) and how the Church Without Walls report has impacted on local congregations. He added that the Panel was working with the Mission and Discipleship Council on the launch of “Future Focus” – a resource for congregations. The Panel has also been involved in discussions on the Articles Declaratory of the Church. This issue will be discussed in a debate on Monday.

The Assembly will meet again this evening for the retiring Moderator's address and we will include a report on that in our first report tomorrow morning. Join us then.