

## The Guild speech—General Assembly 2022

### Margaret Muir

Moderator, General Assembly Commissioners and Guild Friends

It is my pleasure as National Convener of The Church of Scotland Guild to present The Guild report for 2021/22 to The General Assembly.

My year of office began in September here in this very hall, when I had the honour of taking the Guild oath of office and became National Convener of our wonderful movement, The Church of Scotland Guild.

It is hard to believe that 135 years ago, speaking very close to where I am standing, the Rev Dr Archibald Charteris addressed the General Assembly and encouraged Commissioners to establish the Guild. A lot has happened in those 135 years; there have been times of celebration, such as when her Majesty the Queen addressed our Annual Meeting in 1977 and we give thanks in this her platinum jubilee year for her continued work and witness. We have had times of sadness too, but even through these the Guild has shone through.

Just a few weeks ago, I was at the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of St Andrew's Guild in Clydebank and I was struck by the images of the blitz sadly so like the images we are seeing today in Ukraine. At the end of the war, that Guild, along with Guilds across Scotland reached out in friendship to women in Germany, sending over 3000 layettes, to women who had also lost sons, husbands, brothers just as the women in Scotland had. A brave and courageous thing to do so soon after the war.

And of course, we have had times of challenge as like the wider church, our members get that bit older and we begin to look at how best to face the future.

In 2019, with the challenges in mind we chose as our strategy for 2021-24 'Look Forward in Faith.' Little did we know then just how appropriate it was as we emerged from lockdown to launch this strategy at our 'smaller than usual' Annual Gathering, here in the Assembly Halls last September.

But that is what the Guild is about, looking forward, meeting the challenges but with Jesus front and centre of all that we do.

This year we have been focussing on our theme of 'Lights and Bushels'. We have been encouraging Guild folks throughout the country to let their light shine as they slowly began to come together and share in fellowship with each other.

Last night we held our annual Big Sing for the first time in 2 years and Moderator I am just glad that we still have a roof, such was the level of singing and celebration. And we heard from Guilds across the country who let their light shine in their communities over the past year. The buzz in the room was tremendous, filled with hope and expectation for what God has for the Guild in the months ahead. And folk were sharing how much they are enjoying being back together again in Guild meetings, at Guilds Together events and at regional and national events.

Moderator, throughout this week we are grappling with the impact of these changing times within The Church of Scotland and for us in the Guild these changes have implications too. We are encouraging Presbyteries and Guilds Together Groups to explore new ways they can work more closely together.

We are particularly looking forward to working more closely with the Faith Action Programme staff to support greater involvement of Guilds in the future mission of The Church.

In the report we seek to focus on the positives. So many Guilds are reporting that they have welcomed new members emphasising the important role that Guilds play supporting people into the fellowship of the church and the Guild. We are particularly encouraged by the establishment of two new Guild branches, in Newmilns in Ayrshire and Newport-on-Tay and discussions taking place with another congregation. As churches look more closely at their mission to their community is this a time to think again about how the Guild might play a role in that wider mission. We have seen growth too in Guilds where church unions have taken place and Guilds in other places establishing themselves in village halls as the church building itself closes, ensuring a continued Christian presence in a community. In other places Guilds have come together in anticipation of union, enabling people to get to know each other better before the church itself joins.

The Guild is a movement that is not afraid of challenge or change. If you had asked what would happen to the Guild if a global pandemic closed everything down for 18 months not many people would have thought we would survive, but survive we have. We adapted, we learned to use technology, we kept in touch by phone, by enews, by door step deliveries, with angels and chicks and even Guild in a bag.

In March, 80 Guild leaders from across Scotland came together for our Vision conference. Focussing on the journey of the Israelites we explored the stories of the Guild, the challenges and opportunities we have and considered our vision for the future. We took heart from the past two years and the ways in which we had made opportunities from the challenges. We were enthused in new ways about the importance of the Guild in the wider mission of the church locally, nationally and internationally. Now Guilds across the country will be focussing on the learning from that event and determining how best to respond in their own situation.

In September last year we said goodbye to our Partner Projects for 2018-2021 and despite a year without meeting a fabulous £ 570 thousand and 68 pounds and 13 pence was raised.

We launched our project partnership scheme in 1969, and it is just amazing to think that the Guild has brought such important issues such as HIV, post-natal depression, the plight of refugees and FGM right to the heart of the church and challenged and changed attitudes whilst at the same time raising £7,347,490.52, a phenomenal amount.

Looking Forward in Faith for the next three years we work alongside our current Project Partners Beat, Home for Good, Pioneers, Starchild, Unida and Vine Trust.

As we shine our light through them nationally and internationally we will work with:

- People suffering from eating disorders
- Children requiring foster care or adoption
- Supporting cocoa bean farmers obtain fair prices
- Helping to prevent future generations of people with learning difficulties from being hidden away in their communities
- Supporting theological education for young women from low income backgrounds
- And enriching the lives of young families and orphaned children.

We also continue to develop our twinnings with our friends in Bandawe, Milala, Dwanga and Mzuzu and our Guilds Together Groups in Ayr and District, Dunbartonshire, North Ayrshire and Shetland. These twinnings are a great way in which we can learn from each other and that has continued despite COVID-19.

There have been a number of changes in our central staffing over the past year with Iain Whyte our General Secretary retiring after 10 years developing many new ways of 'being Guild' and we thank Iain for all he did for us during his time as General Secretary. Our new

General Secretary, Karen Gillon began her role in January and we are confident the Guild is in good hands.

Our finance assistant Alice Finlayson, also retired and we thank Alice for her attention to detail in ensuring safe keeping of Guild finances.

We are moving to a more regional base of working and our Guild administrator Mandy Moir and our two new regional staff who take up post next month will work together with our National Vice Conveners Helen, Andrea, Flora and Helen as they develop relationships with Guilds at a Regional level across Scotland. This is an exciting development and we hope it will strengthen the work of the Guild particularly in our relationships with new Presbyteries.

Moderator, the Guild has shown over this past year our willingness to let our light shine locally, as Guilds have been able to meet together, albeit in slightly different ways, welcoming new members, looking for ways to reach out and thinking how best they can respond to the challenges they face. We have shone nationally with our project partners and through our national events and we have shone internationally in our relationships with brothers and sisters in Malawi and through our current and previous project partners.

In conclusion, these past months have been challenging as we have come back together again but we continue to be positive and enthusiastic about the future of our wonderful movement, The Church of Scotland Guild and keep in mind this verse from Hebrews 11:1:

‘Now faith is confidence in what we hope and assurance about what we do not see.’

Moderator, as I am not a commissioner, I ask the Principal Clerk to move the deliverance.