

## Retiring Moderator Colin Sinclair –Installation of Rev Dr Martin Fair 2020

The theme of my year has been Jesus' call, "Follow me," and that call will be worked out differently depending on the person called, their context, and the needs before them. For me, over this last year, the call has been to be your Moderator.

When I met with the Committee appointed to discern who to nominate as Moderator I was asked, "If appointed, what are you looking forward to most?" I replied, "Finding out what the Moderator does in the other 51 weeks when the General Assembly is not in Session!" For all my years as a Minister I really had little idea. Well, now I know!

Thanks to the daily postings and photos put up on Facebook by my wife, Ruth, we have tried to share our year so that you could travel with us. Supported by Catherine McIntosh at 121, the diary filled up and Ruth and I set off on our year with a difference.

Each year there are certain weeks blocked off for four ten-day visits to Presbyteries, two similar overseas trips, a week with Cross Reach, another with a section of the Armed Forces and a third in London. Time is spent at Holyrood with the leaders of the Scottish political parties. Visits made to a number of the Scottish Universities and a weekend spent at Balmoral with her Majesty when you are invited to preach at Crathie Kirk. On top of that there are civic, cultural and national events both in Scotland and in the UK in which you are invited to be present or to participate.

There are special events for Churches and Presbyteries including notable anniversaries, new buildings opening, new congregations being formed. Time is spent with the Guild, with Go for It Projects, work in Priority Areas and you attend and speak at many meetings and conferences. You meet with people at every level of society and we were privileged to have real conversations with real people. You work with senior Christian leaders both in Scotland and in the UK and Ireland and with other Faith Leaders. In both cases, we made friends that, I am sure, will continue in the years ahead. It was a great joy to reconnect with parts of my spiritual journey, meeting up with congregations and organisations with which I had been a part.

It has been a rich experience for which Ruth and I are very grateful. Into it all we tried to share what "Follow me" might mean and sought to live it out ourselves. We were very conscious of the support of family and friends and grateful for those who prayed, not least of my home congregation of Palmerston Place.

The Special Commission and Radical Action Plan at last year's General Assembly highlighted the need for significant change and we saw the reality of those challenges. However, we never left any place without being impressed by people whose living faith was shown in faithful, robust and cheerful service.

Among the standout memories were our two Presbytery visits to Caithness and Lanark, where we were immersed into the life of the church in the community. We were constantly impressed at the work that was being done in Jesus' name. Our two overseas trips were to Ghana and Zambia, the first where Ruth had been born and grown up, the second where I worked for three years. Both were memorable, and in each case were well supported by the team with whom we travelled.

Back at the beginning when asked what I hoped for the year, I said, "A quiet year in which nothing happens and I can simply share with people the importance of Jesus." Well it didn't quite work out like that! Brexit dominated the first half of my year, Coronavirus, COVID-19, the second.

Add in the resignation of the PM, the election of her successor, a General Election, the resignation of the leader of the opposition and then the election of his successor, floods in February, a Prime Minister in intensive care and that prayer was answered differently from what I imagined!

The General Election affected our week in London in November and overnight Coronavirus wiped out completely our last two months' diary, including Presbytery visits planned for Inverness and Dundee and a lot more besides, including, of course, this year's General Assembly! Following Jesus is indeed an adventure of faith.

However, unexpectedly, a new door opened up. I was asked to record something for the Church website for the first Sunday when church buildings were closed, and such was the response that I then posted a message every Sunday for the next eight weeks. Ruth and I started a daily reflection on Facebook live in which we built up a strong virtual community. Most of them we have never met, but their daily comments made us feel we knew each other.

It was not the ending we expected and for which we had planned. However, we are grateful to God that when one door shut another door opened. Possibly we have reached more folk in the last eight weeks than we could have ever done in the whole of a normal year. I am grateful to so many who helped me over this last year, both staff in 121 and ministers and

congregations around the country. Thank you for kindness, encouragement and prayer. I want to thank my chaplains for their support and my family, but especially Ruth, who has been with me throughout and shared this year with me and contributed so much.

What have I learned?

### **I have learned**

- that while the role of Moderator has a long history, your time in it is very short
- that though the remit is large you only get one shot at each task
- that people want to meet the Moderator and you just happen to be that person
- that though you dress differently it actually puts people at their ease
- that the role opens doors to allow others to walk through
- that the role opens hearts to allow real conversations
- that while you may think you have things to share, in fact you have much more to learn
- that while you hope you may change the Church, in fact the Church changes you
- that though you take the role seriously you must never take yourself too seriously
- that you are left on your own more than you expected, but support is always there when you need it
- that position and role count for far less than love, encouragement and understanding
- that though only one person can be Moderator at a time, you travel better and are more effective as a team
- that every day is unique and if you don't capture it in word and image on that day, the chance will be gone and it will be lost forever
- that so many people follow you with interest and share your journey and their prayers and love make a tangible difference
- that being the Moderator promotes you to being the expert at everything, even if when asked you know absolutely nothing about the issue at which you are being asked shortly to be the keynote speaker
- that Presbytery visits and overseas visits and other "weeks away" immerse you in a parallel universe that is fascinating, though relentlessly hard work
- that the bible is still relevant, that prayer makes a difference and following Jesus is the best journey you could make and that transformation still happens to people, churches and communities
- that in the end you are just another Moderator, yet your year will always be unique

### **Words to Martin Fair**

So now to the future. Martin, whatever lies ahead for you and Elaine it will be a unique year. I am delighted that we meet here today to install you as the Moderator for 2020-2021 though in the most unusual circumstances facing any Moderator. For the last time there was no General Assembly was 330 years ago in 1689! Your fault or mine!

While you cannot moderate a General Assembly you can act as both an Ambassador *for* the Church and Ambassador *to* the Church and for both you are very well qualified and I believe God's person at this time.

You grew up in Johnstone and in Thornliebank Parish alongside your near neighbour and childhood sweetheart, Elaine, and together with your two chaplains came through church and summer missions to a living faith. A degree in Politics and Geography from Strathclyde was followed by a spell as a Youth Worker in Leeds. As a candidate you studied at Glasgow University before undertaking with Elaine, now your wife, a two-year appointment with the Church of Scotland congregation in Bermuda. After a six-month re-acclimatisation period at St Mary's Church in Dundee city centre, you responded to the call from Arbroath St Andrew's where you have served for over 28 years. Now you and Elaine have been blessed with 3 sons: Callum, Andrew and Fraser.

Last month was the 700<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the 1320 Declaration of Arbroath. In this anniversary year, you are the first minister from Arbroath to be appointed Moderator. Over the years your ministry has developed as you have both involved others in the work and reached out increasingly to your parish and beyond. I respect the fact, Martin, that you are equally passionate about social care and social justice and also about evangelism, apologetics and mission. You care for people as whole people, body, mind and spirit. You serve your congregation and also minister to the excluded, isolated, and unloved. You have both a local and a global vision.

Awarded a Doctorate of Ministry from Princeton University in 2004, you have served as Moderator of Angus Presbytery in 2006 and been Convenor of the Parish Development Fund.

Although we had met before, it was when we both served in leadership roles in the Mission and Discipleship Council and in our involvement in Grasping the Nettle that we have got to know each other better.

You ask the questions that need to be asked. Your tone is always gracious, allowing people to hear what you are saying. Your mind is keen and ready to embrace fresh ways to communicate effectively the heart of our faith and to see it worked out in action. You live a

full and active life, loving nothing better than to 'head for the hills'. You enjoy sports, reading, cinema and travel and run a mean quiz on social media.

Martin, the whole Church welcomes you and blesses you, and believes you will be a blessing. We commit to pray for you in this unique and extraordinary time we are living through, and for the forthcoming year. God bless you in the year ahead.

There is no map to guide you but Jesus will be your guide. So you are in safe hands.