

Housing and Loan Fund speech – General Assembly 2019

Moderator, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Report of the Housing and Loan Fund is to be found at Section 26 of the Blue Book, and, as before, most of the factual detail about the Fund's properties and other assets, along with a record of the Fund's financial and other activities are to be found in the four appendices.

{Jesus} put before them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.' St. Matthew 13:31-32

I have always found that parable a comforting one for it reminds me that from the small, seeming innocuous things, great and lasting things can emerge through the providence of God.

The General Assembly of 1965 recognised the difficulties faced by Ministers in providing their own house for retirement and had approved the setting up of a "Retired Ministers' Housing Fund". Over the next four years discussions ensued mainly between the Aged and Infirm Ministers' Fund (the forerunner of the Ministers' Pension Scheme), the Ministry Department and The Baird Trust.

All these three bodies contributed money towards the setting up of the Fund - £100,000 in total – and the first meeting of the Fund's Board of Trustees took place on 2nd June 1969.

Initially assistance was just small loans of around £500 to £1,500. The Fund started to accumulate a small number of houses available for rent as properties were gifted or bequeathed - over the years around 40 houses have come to the Fund this way.

The Trustees owned 212 houses at the end of 2018. The houses purchased and those sold by the Trustees during that year, are detailed in Appendix 2, which also shows the average price of the houses so purchased, and the average price of the houses disposed of. At the end of 2018, 12 houses were still being marketed for sale.

This year as it is our Golden Jubilee, rather than rhyming off further statistical figures relating to the Fund's activities which I am sure Commissioners have already read in our Report and its 4 appendices, I thought it would be appropriate for the General Assembly to

see and hear from two families who have benefitted from the Kirk's care through the Housing and Loan Fund.

Over the years the Fund has seen many changes. In 1969 the average house price in Scotland was under £5000 whilst last year that was £148,711, with the Fund's average house purchase price costing £158,000 in 2018. During the last five decades the Fund has granted loans of £13m, £6 million of which have been repaid. We are delighted to report that our oldest tenant is 95 years young! The Fund has properties in every local authority area in Scotland with the exception of Shetland and the Western Isles.

In 1969, Her Majesty the Queen was present at the General Assembly, Harold Wilson was the Prime Minister, and Richard Nixon occupied the White House. The first man, Neil Armstrong found himself on the moon and Concorde made her maiden flight. How things have changed over those years.

A Minister's Stipend was then £1200 p.a. plus a Manse when the Fund began and there were 200 students in training for Ministry. How things have changed indeed. What has remained constant however for Housing and Loan has been the demand for housing. Expectations of standards have shifted, and the complexity of requests before the Trustees has become greater.

Whilst in recent years the numbers of applications before the Trustees has been reducing due to a variety of factors, we are looking ahead in the next 5 year period to greater activity with 31 applications currently lodged with us (£4.4m).

Several years ago, the Housing and Loan Fund was described, at the General Assembly, as "one of the success stories of the Church". Over 1,000 individuals have been assisted in one way or another over the last 50 years, and the Trustees are gratified that the Fund has benefitted so many. The Fund is in a healthy position 50 years on, and the Trustees look forward to supporting more Ministers and their families in the future.

Moderator our Secretary Lin Macmillan will shortly retire and the Trustees would wish to record their gratitude to Lin for all that she has done for and with us. We welcome Hazel Bett her successor and trust that she enjoys the post as much as her distinguished predecessors have and we celebrate with our Property Manager Hilary Hardy, who has been in the Kirk's service with the Fund for 25 years – half of our lifetime!

Finally, Rev. Allan McCafferty completes an initial four year term as a Trustee, and the Trustees would be pleased if the General Assembly would agree to reappoint him for a second term, and I would therefore commend to you Deliverance 2 of the Report.

Moderator, I present the Report and as I am not a Commissioner would ask the Principal Clerk to move the Deliverances.