

Lord High Commissioner's Closing Sederunt—General Assembly 2023

RIGHT REVEREND AND RIGHT HONOURABLE, pray be seated. The business for which the Assembly has been convened has now been completed. I congratulate all those, who have been involved in preparing for and carrying out the organisation of the Assembly, for the efficient way in which the business has been conducted.

I have greatly enjoyed hearing, once again, about your debates. You have conducted your deliberations with dignity and grace, tackling difficult issues concerning the Church's future structure on which differing views are held in good faith. You have also seen the glossary which reveals the common ground between our Christian faith and the Judaic faith and have been addressed by the Chief Rabbi, healing misunderstanding which may have developed in the past. I should have liked to have heard more but have, as you know, been hosting events in Holyrood Palace and been out and about on visits to churches and public service organisations in Scotland.

We started with a visit to the Edinburgh headquarters of the Boys' and Girls' Brigade where we heard about the Brigade's valuable work; we saw and joined in with activities in their garden. I managed not to injure anyone with my erratic archery and was captured in a photo on the back of a police motorbike which our outriders had brought into the garden for the young people to mount. Thereafter, we have been in the new Presbyteries of Lothian and Borders and of the South West. We visited the lovely village of Kirk Yetholm, walking on the pilgrimage route of the St Cuthbert's Way and meeting clergy and community leaders in the church. We then travelled to Kelso to contribute to the 250th anniversary celebration of Kelso Old Church. We visited Huntlyburn House, the psychiatric unit of Borders General Hospital, where we met staff and volunteers who were developing a therapeutic garden providing a space of sanctuary. Patients maintain the garden, assisted by staff and "peers", who are former patients giving support to current patients. I enjoyed speaking to some of those former patients or "peers" who do such valuable work as counsellors. I planted a tree both at Kelso and at the hospital. On Tuesday, we travelled to St Andrews Church at Moffat. The huge 19th century church is undergoing a thorough redevelopment of its interior so that it can serve as a community facility with the church at its heart. There we met community volunteers, including a man who has organised many activities, among which is a pizza evening on a Friday night for young people of the town.

Then we went on to Traquair House, long a centre of Jacobitism and Catholicism, where we met Mrs Catherine Maxwell Stuart, clergy and the church warden at Traquair. We learned about the Beyond Borders initiative at Traquair, which fosters international peace and understanding between nations. A place which has seen conflict and intolerance in the past

has become a centre for reconciliation. Yesterday, we met the Forces' chaplains, whom I addressed; we attended and I addressed the General Assembly of the Free Church, and we had lunch with the Presiding Officer, politicians and officials in the Scottish Parliament, maintaining the good relations between the Palace and the legislature.

When out and about I was struck by the energy of those engaged in local initiatives to improve people's lives and keep the Church active in the local community. The Moderator said "the worship is over let the service begin". From what we have seen, the service continues and is developing in new and imaginative ways. I was particularly heartened by the ecumenical spirit in the local communities, meeting clergy from the Episcopal Church and the Catholic Church working together with Ministers of our Church.

I enjoyed our all-too-short walk at Kirk Yetholm along the pilgrim route which runs from Melrose to Lindisfarne. I was struck by the enthusiasm of the local community, including the school children, for their local saint, St Cuthbert. The walk caused me to wonder whether we might continue to learn from the spiritual practices and traditions within our shared Christian faith. Walking with friends or strangers on routes on which others have walked between ancient centres of holiness, contemplating and rejoicing in the landscape which is God's creation, may be a way of finding an inner peace.

In carrying out my duties this year, I have been indebted to my suite. They are my three ADCs, Lieutenant Jamie Hodge RN, Captain Seamus O' Duffin and Flying Officer Greg Fleming, and Her Grace's ladies in waiting, Annie Duncan and Rosaleen Chalmers. They have, with great charm and equal energy, looked after our guests and have accompanied us on our visits. I am indebted to my chaplain, the Rev Richard Frazer, for conducting our inspirational morning prayers and giving me advice throughout the week. I am most grateful to Tom Murray, the Purse-bearer, and to Jeffy Erskine, his assistant, for their seamless organisation of this week. I thank all the staff who have worked so hard to enable people to enjoy the events in Holyrood Palace. And finally, may I acknowledge my huge debt of thanks to her Grace, my wife, Penny, for her steadfast love and support in the forty years of our lives together?

To them all, and for the huge privilege of being Lord High Commissioner, I am deeply grateful.

I have reached the end of my time here in this, my second year, as the monarch's personal representative.

MODERATOR, may you with your husband, Stuart, find success and spiritual rewards in representing the Church and implementing the decisions of this Assembly in your year in office.

RIGHT REVEREND AND WELL-BELOVED, your labours are now at an end. You have concluded the business for which you assembled. May you return to your communities

enlivened and enriched by your experience of this Assembly. In The King's name, I bid you farewell.