

## Lord High Commissioner's closing speech

### General Assembly 2019

Moderator, Right Reverend

May I begin most deliberately with words of admiration and congratulation which I offer both to you Sir and to all who have played their parts in this General Assembly this last week. Whether or not this is judged the most significant Assembly since 1929 as some have suggested, it is unquestionably a milestone in the history of our national church. For the spirit of engagement, of shared purpose, of respect, of fresh thinking that has characterised it, for your own handling, firm, fair and humorous, together you have set us as a Nation an example that it would hard to better. Before saying anything else I wanted to offer those simple, unequivocal and heartfelt words of praise.

Members of the General Assembly, pray be seated

Moderator, That said , you will forgive a more informal approach now that we are approaching the close, now that we have come to know each other as we travelled together through an extraordinary week. We have in the words of my wrist band become Companions on the Road.

You and I were of similar mind, as were many of the commissioners young and old with whom I spoke at last night's reception that we looked forward to this closing afternoon with a relieved sense of anticipation –

It would not be human to do otherwise - but I know just how much I will wake up tomorrow and on subsequent mornings and miss

I will miss the quiet prayers we have to start the day in the Palace and the grounding Power of our opening worship , those moments of unaccompanied voices raising the roof, your beautifully chosen words –

I will miss the camaraderie – shakers – or of a Sunday afternoon at Heart and Soul ricocheting from stand to stand -infectious atmosphere, discovering so much I didn't know about the church's work

I will miss little things –

The fine art of synchronised bowing which I think we have perfected.

The sight of Rev Mary Whittaker's Labrador guide dog in the front row here – Scott is his name so you will understand the sense of kinship - even if he is once again blissfully asleep as I drone on , though I did notice he came instantly awake when the word Dog was mentioned in a story told by the First Minister.

George's vivid red robes as a newly appointed Chaplain to Her Majesty - Reveered  
But I will have a bank of memories to draw upon.

New vocabulary – the God botherers given us by the admiral yesterday – and the day before up the St John's Bell tower a Carillionaire – the man doing the bells - GNAMI – turn to if I may to Ruth / African phrase - except god –

I spoke a week ago about the part Edinburgh's Royal Palace can play in supporting the church – the reception for Crossreach's 150th anniversary on Tuesday will provide some of the richest memories of all, meeting the most extraordinary people – thanking them for walking in the different ways that Cross Reach so remarkably does , from Cradle to Grave, alongside people throughout their lives - Margaret who has done so for 44 years etched in my memory

Cross Reach was but one of the events and when you add last night's reception, the Ceremony of the Keys, a constant turnover of people staying, of lunching and dining we find that, rather remarkably we have been able to welcome on behalf of Her Majesty over 1,400 guests inside the Palace during the week

Impossible without a brilliant team at the Palace and the wonderful Lord High Commissioners suite who you will have become familiar with

Ladies in Waiting:- Caroline Fleming Sarah Lukas Gilly OW

ADCs:- Lt Alex Olsson RN Capt Al McCormack Flt Lt Jonny Mulhall all volunteers , all hugely conscientious in Looked after me and my guests so well. Tom Murray and my maker's rep Neil Gardner

Not only have they made possible the hosting - They have been my companions when we slip out mid morning after an hour or so – probably think its just because we are bored - on all the journeys made –

In a whirlwind of travel – through to Glasgow to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital and to Castle Milk, Down to Duns in the Borders, to East Lothian round the Bass Rock with its 150,000 seabirds, and across the bridge for an afternoon of visits in and around Perth and yesterday, closer to home, - just across the street to the General Assembly of the Free Church where I was received with much kindness and their expression of gratitude that my appointment by Her Majesty here should also allow me to be with them. I came away bearing gifts including a beautiful walking stick with handle, - it had been fashioned as the Moderator put it rather disarmingly by a senior retired policeman who was still knocking crooks into shape

In trying to distil some message, some way of describing so rich a mix of visits and experiences I find myself going back to my opening thoughts about Hidden Ways, which become in their turn New Ways which can be twinned with rediscovered values – values above all of service shown by passionate and committed volunteers and professionals. It echoes of course, what I said about the Crossreach staff.

Time allows in a flavour

Visit to Horatio's Garden in the spinal injuries unit at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital— it's a beautiful set of spaces, a courtyard garden , perimeter landscapes by a brilliant garden designer looked after by an army of volunteers which can provide some sense of normality and peace for the people whose lives have been turned upside down in a second by a dreadful accident with months and months ahead of them in hospital.

A special personal significance – my father – 40/ 50 years ago– dedicated nursing in the western General but captive inside a hospital ward for week after week with none of the opportunity for reconnection with the natural world now offered, with the therapy of gentle gardening, handling flowers that means so much.

A visit to the Helimed air ambulance based at Scone reinforced how much things have changed – making possible the vital golden hour journey time to hospital – an essential service equipped and funded year in year out entirely by charity – something that simply didn't exist in the 1970's.

I can't imagine the Huge growth in palliative care evidenced by the Cornhill Hospice in Perth, could have happened without the values of service to others building a feeling of shared community at the hospital but also enabling people to stay at home – again all of

this is done by volunteers – with funds raised by volunteers at the Quarrymill café – over £1m

I found it especially moving when such service was done across the generations – seeing families in the round and in doing so bringing the generations together  
The Jeely Piece Club families in Castle Milk are a beautiful example of that – for youngsters above all – who as one volunteer told me find their visit ‘the only happy time of the day’ but with a smattering of parents and grandparents also now enjoying the café.

And in the same vein I will have an abiding image from St John’s Church of a young school girl violinist hugging her granny having just taken centre stage in a performance as part of the Perth Festival - She was so thrilled to have performed in that great space with an audience and been appreciated and I felt in the first Ministers own recollection of her first speech as a young MSP something of the excitement and challenge of a new venture , a new beginning in this very chamber 20 years ago.

Today Moderator even as we all go away, uppermost in our minds will be the new beginning which the Church now has pledged itself to make in this chamber.

I spoke earlier of my admiration but let me also reflect, as I have heard and indeed we heard this morning, something of the challenges this brings. Pursuing New Ways means getting down to brass tacks, and if they say that the devil is in the detail then surely we can say that God is there too and my thoughts prayers and belief is that you will find it so - and find strength in the words of the great paraphrase we sang so rousingly a day or two ago

Each future period that will bless  
As it has blest the past  
He loved us from the first of time  
He loves us to the last

Right Reverend and well beloved, your labours are at an end and I shall inform Her Majesty that you have concluded the business for which you assembled. In The Queens name I bid you farewell.

