

The Church of Scotland - Assembly Trustees
Assembly Trustees Report to the General Assembly
Webinar at 1730-1830, 10 May 2023, via Zoom

Presentation from the Rev David S Cameron, Convener of the Assembly Trustees

I'm minister at New Laigh Kirk, Kilmarnock. I'm married with three children, young adults now. I don't know where the time is gone. They grew up in our congregation as a manse family. With a freedom to be themselves and express themselves within the constraints of what I hope has been okay parenting. They mixed weekend worship with weekend activities from swimming, football and modern jazz dance and everything the BBs and Guides and school activities threw at them and they were willing to be involved. Often at the expense of coming to church. They are all in their twenties, they come to church on Christmas day because their mum insists. They have no interest in church as it is today but didn't endure. Every now and again they dig into what I post on our digital platforms and say 'I like what you did today dad', but not enough to share and invite friends in an invitational way. Two have moved away from home and I encouraged them to at least try the local church – no takers.

It's a story repeated among many families since the pandemic. My congregation enjoyed a large attendance, a good mix of generations, good, young families and about 40 children. Since, families are missing and I get 3 – 7 kids on a Sunday morning. Teenagers have gone and that's in spite of the efforts of a family worker and youth workers in locally paid posts.

My own ministry context is urban town with a gathered congregation, the product of two unions in 10 years, another one just about to happen.

It's not the same as 3 and 5 link charges across a wide geography like some around the country, but it's a pattern that has emerged in presbytery plans. An answer to reduced numbers of ministries and buildings in need of much repair and maintenance.

From personal experiences as a parish minister, I know how hard the last year has been for congregations and presbyteries. We are grateful to the ministers, elders, church members and staff who have been pulling together faithfully to solve the serious challenges we face and making some very difficult decisions for the future of our church.

We have much to be thankful for and much to commend in the work already done from the Radical Action Plan and Special Commission of 2019.

Our energy coming out of the planning process must be redirected to the mission field that is Scotland. The pandemic has accelerated a lot of the issues we face today. Nationally and locally we have woken up to the reality we all now face. The traditions we have held on to are in need of disruption. It's well overdue, because we have lost our children, our young families, young leaders. We realise we're dealing with a new generation, and we should strive to minister in a way that is relevant to them.

The gospel message of Jesus Christ never changes, but the way we package it must; that of gathering for worship and mission evangelism, encouragement and inspiration, must now be our focus as a the church of Scotland in Scotland.

The Trustees have set three key priorities emphasised in our report. The focus of which is to resource the mission of the church. We've launched the Seeds for Growth Fund, releasing £25m. This £25m initiative, funded through Church reserves.

The purpose of the fund is to support Presbyteries identifying and planting new worshipping communities and developing new forms and expressions of Church life. We need to move to a growth and innovation

mindset. Key is that we need to see new growth leading to self-sustainability. Willing to take a calculated risk to nurture and develop new ideas. New models of church, relevant to your local contexts must be enabled and allowed to flourish and develop. The Assembly Trustees are committing to that, but it also needs you to develop those ideas within your localities.

Many of you will be familiar with the church revitalisation movement in the Church of England. 30 years ago Nicky Gumbel said to the Church of England let me send out 10 people, with £50,000 for two years, into three closed delapidated churches - each returned 600 members in two years. That was in Brighton.

Born out of HTB's 30 years of church planting experience, the Church Revitalisation Trust (CRT) was set up to help accelerate church growth by planting and revitalising churches in city centres and areas of social deprivation. Revitalized, vibrant, worshipping communities have had significant impact on their local areas. Predominantly with younger families in the 20 – 40 age. Even in lockdown 2021, launched 21 church plants across the UK.

This initiative has become mainstream in line with the Church of England's strategy for growth, CRT works with dioceses to plant Resource Churches – church plants that will become hubs for resourcing and planting within their diocese – their vision is to play a significant part in the evangelisation of the nation, the revitalisation of the Church, and the transformation of society.

Accelerated and specific missional leadership development training plays a key role in their vision to plant churches. CRT's planting-specific training programmes are designed to equip and empower leaders for the different contexts in which they serve, with a priority to support those planting into areas of social deprivation.

I show you this video as one example of what can be achieved with confidence to step out and send out and develop new models of ministry.

The Seeds for Growth Fund, I believe, is the catalyst for doing a new thing alongside the old traditions and ways that are slowly dying out. It's hugely exciting to be facilitating the planting of 100 new worshipping communities and fleshing out a pioneering culture in a new era of mission and evangelism. Developing new churches and new forms of church and worship, new training modules to meet the needs of society today must be pursued.

The Faith Action Programme Leadership Team is also coming into focus this year. The Faith Action Programme brings together many aspects of Church life and witness which have traditionally been led and delivered nationally.

The Programme includes key elements as:

- how the Church recruits and trains existing and future ministries
- how to support the vision for 100 new churches
- how mission is encouraged and supported
- how the 'voice' of The Church of Scotland is developed and expressed on many key issues.

The Assembly Trustees encourage vision among the members and agencies of the Church so as to enable the emergence of ministries to meet the needs of the people of Scotland. Supporting our presbyteries through the Faith Action Programme to be innovative and active in developing new worshipping communities and mission is the thrust of this as we look to all of Scotland as mission field. The Programme is the national effort to show leadership, to recruit, train and develop new ministries. In support of Presbyteries and local congregations. And with renewed participation of the new presbyteries in the development, oversight and delivery of the Programme, there is a future with hope for this old church of ours...but it is not as the institution we have known and loved. It is as a missionary movement that we must encourage in presbyteries. To follow the missional God, who is at work in the places where we live. That work is to follow Jesus, transform communities, correct social injustices, and to spread the Good News.

Where presbyteries and congregations no longer look to the center for the solutions but become the solutions themselves with their own reform agenda under a cohesive vision supported by the Assembly Trustees and delivered under the Faith Action Programme. Where we all work together in a common aim exemplifying Christ together as one with the weight of the national church behind you.

Our task is not to build the church that everyone wants, but rather the church that God wants you to build. For the first time in a long time there is an opportunity for us to get past the old central structures. We now have a platform to work from. And from this platform we can rediscover the confidence and courage that comes from remembering that God is active in this church, still inviting us to face these challenging issues before us.

The Assembly Trustees will continue a reform agenda, as we are tasked by the General Assembly to do, to use all our gifts in drawing together all sections of the church national, regional and local.

What a responsibility we all have; Christ is already at work calling the next generation to follow him. We must be tuned into the nature and purpose of that calling. God has given us the resources we should never be afraid to use them. Consider now, for the Lord has chosen you to build a house as the sanctuary. Be strong and do the work.