

Address of Archbishop Leo Cushley of St Andrews & Edinburgh — General Assembly 2022

Bishop President for Ecumenical Relations

Bishops' Conference of Scotland

Moderator, let me start by offering you the warm greetings of my fellow Scots Catholics, along with our prayerful good wishes, that your time in office will be a successful and happy one, and that the General Assembly will discuss and discern the matters before it this week in all charity and wisdom.

I also take the floor to offer a word of support for the draft Declaration now before you. Before the Second Vatican Council committed Catholics in 1964 to a more ecumenical spirit, a Moderator of the General Assembly, in 1961, Dr Alistair Craig, had already gone to Rome to meet Pope John XXIII, something quite unheard of until then. And, as many of us recall, almost 40 years ago to the day Pope John Paul II and Professor John McIntyre met on the steps of this very building. Not long after that, Action of Churches Together in Scotland – ACTS – was founded.

These last forty years have been ones characterised by sincere theological dialogue, and we have arrived occasionally at agreement, mostly notably, perhaps, on Baptism. We have also learned to pray together as brothers and sisters in Christ, especially in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity every January. And our people and parishes now work together here and there in charity outreach, through food banks, action on homelessness, credit unions and so on. The visits of the Moderators to the Bishop of Rome are now – nearly - an annual event, something that I for one am very happy to see.

Above all, however, through our contacts over 40 years, something else has grown up, perhaps unnoticed. While sifting through our theological differences, and praying together, and helping others, many on both sides have learned to become friends. And that, given our shared history, isn't nothing.

We all know the history that we share. It contains some dark pages, and much for us to regret. It would also be naïve simply to wish it all away; but I believe that's all the more reason for us to do something about it, and to appreciate what the Declaration before the Assembly is endeavouring to do. Given our context, then, a friendship that is the unlooked-

for consequence of the last 40 years is something to be welcomed, to be cared for, and to be built upon.

The Declaration is also a consciously new approach to ecumenism, an attempt to re-imagine the path of Christian unity. Instead of listing our problems and points of friction or grievance, old or new, the Declaration chooses to focus on what we have in common, and to underline that we treasure and hold, together, so much that is inspiring, ancient and profound. It suggests that we might one day reach *effective* unity by means of a growing *affective* unity.

We may continue to diverge on deep and subtle points of that heritage and what it means; but, finally, more importantly, we believe, already, here and now, that where two or three are gathered together in the Lord's name, He is there in our midst. We are brothers and sisters in Christ. We recognise each other as such, or we ought to. We stand shoulder to shoulder before an unbelieving world, or we should. We wish to respect each other, to be a support to each other, to recognise that *koinonia* or *communio* that is a necessary prerequisite to any serious progress towards the unity the Lord prayed for and commanded us to seek and to keep.

Do I expect our two old institutions to be perfectly aligned and united any time soon? I suspect that may be a task for another generation. Nevertheless, I believe that by acknowledging all the good that we hold in common, we can walk and pray together as friends, deepen our affective unity, and be a more authentic Christian witness in the land. The rest will come in God's good time.

I respectfully recommend the Declaration to the General Assembly. Thank you.