

CHURCH OF SCOTLAND GUILD – REPORT TO GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2017

130 years ago this year, Archibald Charteris founded the Guild – he was Bold and Strong just as we are today! He founded our movement which from the very outset helped to shape the church as it is today. Through “organising the women” he created an environment in which women were able to develop and achieve their potential in many areas of church work – and ultimately to be ordained as deacons, elders, ministers and even moderators. Indeed men are very welcome to join and many already have and are taking on leadership roles having been elected and not imposed as in the early days.

This year our theme has been GO IN JOY – indeed we have been celebrating 130 years of worship, prayer and action – the three original tenets – to which we have now added fellowship as being fundamental to the ethos of The Guild.

WORSHIP is at the core of all we do, it is what makes us who we are – whether it be at a branch, Presbyterial Council or regional or national gathering. It’s how we best express our motto, whose we are and whom we serve.

PRAYER is powerful! We are in the process of publishing the Wee Tartan Book of Prayer – a collection of 366 prayers written

by members – one for every day of the year. We have a strong and prayerful connection with both the Men’s Guild and the Woman’s Guild in the CCAP Synod of Livingstonia, where we are continuing to deepen our relationships, hoping to connect individual branches and Presbyterial Councils. The support we give is not based on practical or financial considerations, but by praying for each other as equals – I quote from Eunice Kayira from Malawi – “people from abroad are going all the way to show us love. I do pray for them that God should bless their work”. Prayerful support for the Guild is important too – whether you have a branch in your congregation or not – we ARE part of the church family.

ACTION – The Guild is renowned in the Church and elsewhere for taking up the challenge of reaching out to the margins of society both at home and abroad. Over the years, through our project partnership scheme, we have taken the gospel and the love of God and touched the lives of vulnerable people at home and in every continent of the world except Antarctica - watch this space!

From building and supporting hospitals in India and Edinburgh, through working with prostitutes in Leith, through the HIV/AIDS project in Malawi, to developing aid and micro financing for refugees in Malta and helping to provide social care through Crossreach – the Guild has indeed touched the lives of many.

Our current projects operate from Kinross to Kenya, from Bathgate to Bolivia and Haddington to Haiti. We are enabling the prevention of family breakdown in Scotland; we are trying to bring a halt to FGM in Kenya; we are helping to rebuild church and community following natural disasters in Haiti; we are assisting in mitigating against the effects of climate change in Bolivia; we are supporting the protection of vulnerable folks out on the streets at nights in our own towns and cities; we are enabling the bringing of Jesus to people with learning difficulties in our churches.

Since the projects first started, many are still running today, having been given seed-money from the Guild – eg Kalimpong School/hospital; Bluebell, Sunflower Garden and Perth Prison Visitors Centre, LISAP (Livingstonia Synod Aids Project) to name but a few.

This is the Guild in Action – at the sharp end of human need.

Our actions and opportunities for service extend beyond our project partnerships. We are currently in discussions with Crossreach to develop a Pray Talk Walk initiative, linking Guilds with their services at local, regional and national level. We are represented on the Action for Churches Together Scotland Anti Human Trafficking Group which has been a consultee on the implementation of the Scottish Government's Trafficking and Exploitation Strategy. Many Guilds at a local

level support local initiatives – eg gathering goods and bringing fellowship to Syrian refugees settling in their areas.

Whilst we raise a phenomenal amount of money,

An amazing £467,665.22 has been raised to date this project cycle.

However every bit as important is the fact that we raise the awareness of congregations and communities of these sometimes controversial and often uncomfortable issues. Indeed in this cycle, one project has already broke the £100,000 and it would be fair to say that subject it tackles, Female Genital Mutilation is a challenging issue for us as a society to take on.

FELLOWSHIP encompasses everything! All our worship, prayer and actions are carried out in the spirit of fellowship and togetherness. We do not need to look further than the Annual Gathering last September in Dundee, where we were entertained and inspired by Very Rev Dr Barr and deeply moved by Sally Magnusson as she talked about life with her mother as she struggled with dementia and how she came about founding her charity Playlist for Life. The Annual Gathering gives an opportunity for members to come together as a whole Guild family worshipping, praying, learning and celebrating this wonderful movement. We hold regional gatherings too – we do not just operate in the Central Belt, but

throughout Scotland – after all, not everyone can come to Dundee. We have just held a Regional Gathering in Aberdeen – where we learned about the plight of refugees in camps in the Greek Islands and also about how Syrian refugee families are settling into life in Aberdeen, and how personal contact and hospitality is so meaningful – providing yet another opportunity for Guild folk to serve in their local communities.

Another source of fellowship and learning is through our Resource Co-ordinators' and Project Co-ordinators' events – the role of these co-ordinators is to communicate information about the Guild and our project partners. The delegates from Presbyterial Councils have a pivotal role in ensuring that all information gets down to branch and member level. Each year, the Guild produces a Theme & Topic Guide – this publication provides a wealth of resources to enable the running of a meeting – there are ideas for worship, prayers, speakers, in-house meetings and so on. It provides material for workshops on the discussion topic. Resource Days are held in local Council areas and provide a great opportunity for learning about using the Theme & Topic Guide as well as the sharing of news and ideas. This year too we have produced the Big Book of Gui(l)d These publications are modern, bright and very user friendly and they should not be restricted to use within Guild meetings – they can be used in congregational worship, bible study, youth and prayer groups and I will say more on that later.

This session has been the first of the National Council operating the new Group Structure - we now have the CORE Group, Communications, Outreach, Resources and Events which facilitates the effective running of the Guild fit for the 21st century and is working well.

C Communications & Marketing – Our e-news, our newsletters, our Facebook page all offer the chance to hear about our work and for others to use the Guild channels as a way of getting ideas and messages out there. Why not take that chance to sign up and keep up to date with everything going on in the Guild?

O Outreach – There are Guild representatives on other councils and committees of the Church and also on outside bodies –the complete list is contained in the written report. A major part of the Outreach Group relates to our Project Partners – this incoming year is the final year of the current projects and a new set of 6 will be selected during the year.

R The Resource Group is responsible for the provision of the excellent quality of resources – the Theme & Topic Guide and Big Book as mentioned earlier, and further resources to enable the effective running of a Guild.

E A significant area of work is that of Events – Nationally we have held some big events. In November when we went to Greenock for a Big Sing during Guild week more than 1000

voices joined in praise and worship. Many of you will remember The Big Sing at the General Assembly last year – it's on again here tonight at 7 pm, why don't you join us? You can be sure you will leave having been uplifted and encouraged – ask anyone who joined us last year.

All truly spiritual and joyful occasions.

We are indebted to our dedicated team in the Guild office who work unstintingly to support us in all we do with such good grace.

Here is a short presentation that says much about the work of the Guild in pictures and music.

So what about the future? Recently I was asked if the Guild was still relevant today now that women have a voice in the Church and a fully participant role in every area. The Guild was founded not just to provide women with a voice but to organise the WORK that was being done by women. Specific issues may have changed over the last 130 years – where intemperance was once a major issue, we could substitute drug addiction; where socks were darned for soldiers at the front, we could substitute gathering items for Syrian refugees – and so on. The issues may have changed but vulnerability, poverty, ill-

health, lack of education and injustice have not. The Guild is every bit as relevant today as it was 130 years ago.

But we don't want to work in isolation!

Let me remind you of the Guild aim:

“The Church of Scotland Guild is a movement WITHIN the Church of Scotland which invites and encourages both men and women to commit their lives to Jesus Christ and enables them to express their faith through worship, prayer and action”.

This is a great time to really encourage involvement and to build on your challenge to the Council of Assembly!

The key word here is WITHIN. Indeed, our aim could be applied to the Church as a whole. What the Guild seeks is for the Church at every level to engage with us and recognise our value to congregations in the way we work out our faith in worship, prayer, action and fellowship. The Guild has over 20,000 members and has a presence in 801 congregations. Our membership has a vast range of gifts, both practical, intellectual and spiritual. We have experience, opinions, ideas and resources. We want these to be recognised, shared and valued throughout the Councils, Committees, Presbyteries, Kirk Sessions and Congregations across the church.

We are seeing how Kirk Session support and involvement can totally turn things around and the result is a thriving Guild. At Presbytery level, we are hearing of how the Guild Projects can be promoted in and supported by congregations where there is no Guild branch. Indeed we are exploring the possibility of a whole congregation becoming a corporate member of the Guild. Individual members are very much valued – we were delighted when Very Rev Dr Russell Barr joined their ranks becoming a member during Guild Week last November.

We also want people around the Guild to have the chance to share in what we do and to benefit from it.

So, how can you get involved?

It's great when Presbyteries and Kirk Sessions take a real interest in the Guild, but there are so many ways that the connection can be developed and can enhance the life of the whole congregation.

Here are a few suggestions:

We believe that our resources could be used more widely within congregations. For example, why not look to the Theme Guide as a source of reflective worship for your Kirk Session?

Or use the discussion on “Loving when it is difficult to love” at a Bible study?

Could our resources provide material to help those asked to be involved in leading worship?

Or maybe think about taking your youth group, Boys Brigade or Girls Brigade to learn more about the work of our project partners such as the Street Pastors

Perhaps your congregation, or Presbytery or your youth organisations could look at supporting the Guild projects, opening up opportunities for the exploration of issues that challenge and for practical support through fundraising. Or invite them to speak, they will undoubtedly challenge and inspire you in equal measure.

Could your Presbytery spend time thinking about the place of the Guild in its area and in the church as a whole, allowing folk to reflect on how they can support us and, where there is no Guild, realise what they are missing!

Where Guilds have difficulty in finding leaders, perhaps your Kirk Session could encourage elders and others to take on some of those roles?

At any time you could pray for the Guild, individually or in congregations.

We are committed to looking at different and innovative ways of BEING Guild and DOING Guild. One size definitely does not fit

all and it is important that we can adapt locally, regionally and nationally to be appropriate to the needs of our communities both within the church as well as out with.

Friends, The Guild is as relevant to our Church as we were when we began 130 years ago, encouraging, enabling and supporting people to get involved through worship, prayer, action and fellowship.

These are challenging times for the Guild, but they are also exciting times.

With your help and support we will continue to flourish and encourage the Church to push the boundaries and explore the possibilities through the work of The Guild.

We are the Guild and 130 years on we are still Bold and Strong!