

Assembly Trustees Speech – General Assembly 2020

Very Rev John Chalmers

Moderator,

I want to begin by paying tribute to the ministers, deacons, MDS workers, the extraordinary staff of CrossReach and the staff and volunteers across the whole of the Church who have risen with energy and imagination to meet the challenges that have changed our lives and changed our church over the last nine months. We will never be able to calculate just how much has been done to witness to the goodness and grace of God in these unprecedented times.

Now we meet in General Assembly at a time when it is still hard to know what long-term impact COVID-19 will have on the future shape of our church life **at every level**. However, in spite of the fact that we have found ourselves responding to the challenges posed by social distancing, the closure of our buildings and the business of trying to second guess what the future will hold – it is my job today to take you back to the General Assembly of May 2019 and remind you of the underlying malaise which was unanimously acknowledged. The list of major issues to be addressed included:

- Lack of budgetary discipline
- Duplication of efforts across departments
- Structures and staffing levels appropriate to the church we once were and not the church we are now
- A need to disentangle the development of policy from the efficient implementation of necessary work
- An acknowledgement that the current configuration of Charges, ministries and buildings requires a radical overhaul and, with this,
- An urgent need to reform our Presbyteries and equip them to support the local church in ministry and mission shaped around the challenges we are facing today.

We have made a start. We have changed our Council structures and have been developing a new way of working with a Faith Action Plan which will incorporate the whole of the work of the church. But the Trustees wonder if we have done enough: so, we are also asking for the liberty to consider more effective and efficient ways of:

- Setting our priorities

- Funding the essential work we have to do at every level
- And working smarter to be all that we want to be as a church.

That might mean holding to what we have now, but equally it might mean further coordination across the Forums and across other agencies of the church.

In any event there is a need to better understand:

- The relative responsibilities of the Trustees and the Forums
- The nature of their relationship to one another and to the General Assembly and
- As the Assembly Trustees come to terms with their responsibilities for charity governance, we have to better understand our role and function over against the role and function of the General Assembly.

The reason that we want to research these deep and meaningful issues is that, for the first time, we have placed the management of our central operations into the hands of a Chief Officer. Dave Kendall has confirmed the concerns listed in 2019 and offered us an insight into how we might overcome them. We were well on the way to evolving a plan of action when COVID-19 came along and our Chief Officer, with his colleagues, had to take on the management of a very different kind of challenge. However, COVID-19 has done to the Church what it has done in so many other areas of our common life – it has accelerated the need for change.

A very different shape of church lies ahead and against the extraordinary challenges that we face. We have to be ready, lean and fit for purpose. We cannot go back to the old ways. Dave Kendall has made clear the stark reality of our situation and I am going to ask him now to give you his “state of the church” analysis. His message is a message of hope if we pull the right levers of change. And after Dave has spoken, the Vice-Convenor of the Trustees, Norma Rolls, will, Moderator, with your permission, complete our presentation.

Dave Kendall

Moderator,

The Convenor has asked me for my “state of the church” analysis from the perspective of being able to deliver the changes decided by Assembly 2019. Achieving the agreed outcomes will require a clear focus that is joined up, aligned, coherent and able to support the local, national and global Church on a prioritised basis. The foundation in delivering this

is the fantastic staff that we are blessed with – a hugely talented, experienced, professional and passionate group committed to do all that they can to support those in ministry, volunteers, congregations and Forum members advance the goals of the Church. Much of our focus over the past year has been on identifying the underpinning enablers so that we can use our resources wisely in the future. However, what will matter most in taking us forward will be the vision, quality, enthusiasm and ambition of the staff and the willingness of the Church, as people of God, to engage with the changes on our journey.

Just like any household, business or charity, good budgeting is critical. Whether looked at from the viewpoint of M&M contributions or the clearly thought through use of reserves (yes, use of reserves even although they are depleting and cannot be viewed as endless), we can no longer allow central spending to consistently go over budget (as it did to the tune of some £14m aggregate total over the 5 years to 2018). As the Trustees' report shows, we will be using reserves over the next year to support the local church; but this makes it even more critical to be sure that spending other than on stipends, ministry and salary costs is focussed on the essential and that what is non-essential at this time or truly peripheral is stopped and put to one side. We have a duty to make the very best use of the sacrificial giving of members and congregations.

This is not just about financial numbers, it demands more effective oversight, stronger governance, robust accountability, streamlined infrastructure and processes, learning from our own and others' experiences, high-quality internal communications, and performance management and coaching.

I would like to focus on three things that I believe are enablers to effective change. They are Our Values, The Faith Action Plan and The Operational Plan.

First, we need to be committed to each of our six National Office values in all that we do, and they should inform our attitude to working together: Grace, Integrity, Respect, Professionalism, Collaboration and Innovation.

Second, the Faith Action Plan, a significant effort, which will continue to develop and is there to help us answer the question, "what are we all here for?"

The key element of the Plan is Inspirational Leadership – whether this be in our congregations on a Sunday morning or on-line, our interactions with the outside world, our political voice or how we communicate.

The Plan will help define how we can achieve this. As an increasingly smaller – but still powerful – body, we need to integrate all aspects of our work through positive, enthusiastic, inspirational leadership at every level of the church.

As the Church's vision statement indicates – we are a Church which seeks to inspire the people of Scotland and beyond with the Good News of Jesus Christ. So, the critical elements of our Faith Action Plan are:

- Worship – continuously developing to reflect the changing needs of society
- Witness – focusing on priorities, new ways of working and active stewardship
- Nurture – faith formation & discipleship
- Serving communities – supporting the local church and beyond. Partnering where we cannot make a significant impact or it is beyond our reach, capability or affordability. Collaboration & relationship building.
- Training – a single integrated faith training programme with a clear focus on targeted selection, inspirational leadership for worship, witness, nurture, service and impact

I know that these all seem obvious, but without an overall plan we will just continue to waste precious resources – personal and financial – in the duplications and inconsistencies identified in 2019.

Finally, operational planning of our strategic goals and objectives. This will enable us to describe milestones and conditions for success and explain how, or what portion of, our strategic plan will be put into operation during a given period.

We also need to understand how our future is impacted by the trends in congregational numbers, income and expenditure, the demographics of our population of ministers and the numbers of congregations and buildings. If we don't analyse all of this collectively it will not be possible to make robust high-level decisions in support of the local Church. By doing this we can define clear, tangible objectives to achieve the transformation we yearn for.

What I aim to bring, with the support of the National Office team, is a balanced view that is firmly based on both my business experience and the enthusiasm and faith that I try to bring as a worship leader and elder in my own congregation.

People ask me if I see a positive future for the Church – and the answer is a resounding, 'yes'.

Norma Rolls

Moderator,

If you are here as a Commissioner or simply watching at home on line and if this is the first time you have come across Dave Kendall, I hope that you now understand why the Assembly Trustees felt that their prayers had been answered when they were looking for a Chief Officer with a successful background in transformational change.

A large part of the Trustees' and the Chief Officer's responsibilities involve financial oversight. You are asked to **receive** the 2019 Report and Annual Accounts. Please do **read** them too, as the figures and the text, together, provide a clear explanation of our difficulties. As a result:

- We are reluctantly recommending putting the establishment of the Growth Fund on hold
- We are recommending a reduction in congregational contributions of 18% for 2021, appreciating that this will transfer the burden of risk in our finances onto our general reserves. For some this may be good news, but we are acutely aware that others will still find this a huge challenge and we hope that Presbyteries will take this on board while we await the final report from the M&M Review Group.
- We are targeting a reduction of £4m in the budgets of the Faith Nurture and Faith Impact Forums. In this, the Trustees are acting on the instructions of last year's Assembly to reduce the cost of the central administration by some 20-30% as well as eliminate recurrent budget deficits. £4m may sound like a lot of pain, but we will have further to go if we are to meet the demand that we placed upon ourselves last year.

The Trustees are at one with the Church of Scotland Vision Statement and the Five Marks of Mission which together underpin our Faith Action Plan framework. The Chief Officer and his Core Management Team, along with the Forums, are committed to being guided by these as they move to prioritising within the identified Key Areas of Work, while aiming to sustain the breadth of the work that we have done in the past, BUT, realising the need for greater flexibility and collaboration. The mapping of most of the Radical Action Plan within the Faith Action Plan, we believe, makes for a much more systematic and efficient use of all our resources. We hope that you will agree.

At GA 2019 there was disquiet at only three women being appointed by the Selection Committee to the new trustee body. We are delighted to report that, after our first

appointments round, the current composition brings an excellent gender balance as well as that of skills. Now, only the Convener and myself remain from Council of Assembly days and we wish to acknowledge the huge amount of time and energy given by our colleagues during 2019 as well as 2020 as they grapple with the complexities of our business when meetings have to be conducted in an electronic environment. Our five new trustees have not met each other or the rest of us in person; yet they have brought insight into new ways of working, been able to identify critical issues, and to pose incisive questions. Electronic working has not been a bar to making constructive contributions and decisions. We are about to advertise for a further trustee and will want to try to reduce our average age and to find someone able to bring an additional theological perspective to the table.

Finally, in common with the General Trustees and the Forums, we believe that the future shape of our church is going to be very different from what we knew. We want to see the local church properly resourced to meet the needs of community both in the parish and online: so, we have identified as a priority the need for a new and robust approach to Presbytery Planning. This will be accompanied in time with realistic assessments of how many Charges, ministries and buildings can reasonably be supported in order to place the Church of Scotland back on a growth curve. Please join us as we work towards fulfilling our Vision.

Moderator, this completes the submission of our report – the Convener will move the deliverance.