

MODERATOR,

I am delighted to present this year's Report to the General Assembly.

Challenge and change have never been strangers to the Guild. Since its inception in 1887, the Guild has embraced, and indeed welcomed reappraisal, after the pattern of our founder the Very Rev. Dr Archibald Charteris. Dr Charteris' vision gave our Church, among much else, the following: Life and Work magazine, the Church of Scotland Yearbook and the system of Quinquennial visits (now known as Congregational Reviews). The latter system has encouraged scrutiny, evaluation, and vision-setting.

As we emerged from the restrictions of Covid-19 it was vital that we renewed our contacts with local Guild branches, supporting their local fellowships, yet also meeting the wider obligations which we have globally.

The past year the theme "NEW WINE NEW WINESKINS" has been the final in our 3-year strategy: "LOOK FORWARD IN FAITH ". This has proved to be an appropriate invitation to negotiate the way forward in which the Guild responds to changes in society, in the Church and in ourselves. We were aware that changes in the Church would impact on how, where, and when local Guilds meet.

We are reminded that although we are products of the past, we are architects of the future, accepting both as opportunities for growth and renewal despite losing some of what is familiar.

One of the greatest challenges we faced and continue to face is the position of Guilds within newly united congregations. The Guild can play a pivotal role in reshaped congregations as it is in a strategic position to act as a catalyst for congregations which might be linking or uniting. Some, where there has been no Guild, have welcomed this new opportunity by joining the Guild, enjoying the chance to establish new friendships, in a different locality. The assumption of the National Guild is that when a congregation comes together into one place of worship the Guild would do likewise. There might be exceptions in more rural areas where a church building has closed, with no opportunity for regular Christian worship in that location. In these areas, with the support of a Kirk Session to whom the Guild is responsible, we hope other alternatives might be available. There remain the issues of transport, and age - common to our Church, to all faiths and many community groups.

There has been great encouragement over the past couple of years with three new Guilds being established: Loudoun Church Newmilns, Ellon and Newport on Tay.

Better liaison between Guilds and Kirk Sessions might be enriching, allowing Guilds to be involved in leading Sunday worship, and to be proactive in mission.

This year we are delighted that 402 new people have chosen to join their local Guild fellowship.

There are many new resources available to all Guilds including the Theme Guide. These have been valuable tools allowing people to blossom in self-belief, public speaking, being relaxed and secure in leading worship.

The Guild continues to reach out to communities in view of the rise of social isolation, with many people having no close relatives nearby, and the continuing effect of Covid-19 inhibiting relationships. To this end, this year the Guild Initiative Fund provided a grant to embark on a new community project called “Faifley Flicks” in Clydebank, creating a Community Cinema.

In Millport, the Guild in partnership with the congregation and school, has developed a polycrub, a sheltered growing area, which has cemented relationships with the community. Without doubt one of the most inspiring days in the Guild calendar is the Annual Gathering where last year 750 Guild members celebrated with sister organisations. This year, many joined us online either from home, or other venues.

Our then Moderator, now the Very Rev. Sally Foster-Fulton encouraged us to keep being Christ in our communities. Our keynote speaker was Professor Jason Leitch detailing his Christian journey, part of which has led to the establishment of a charity in India. He also outlined his role during the Covid-19 pandemic. Both presentations were inspirational and challenging. The Govan Songsters from the Salvation Army rounded off the day with uplifting praise.

When I took up my new role as National Convener, I encouraged members to reaffirm their focus on God, renewing their commitment and renewing their Guilds in the year ahead. My personal Challenge to Guild members this year has been to provide a Review of the Christian Book which has most impacted on their lives.

The Guild has developed many partnerships enhancing relationships with not only local communities, but nationally and internationally.

We continue to work with “Faith in Older People”, the “Scottish Women’s Convention”, our sister Church organisations and the Faith Action Programme.

Internationally we work through our Project Partner Scheme and we continue to develop our links with Malawi.

Our Partnerships have encompassed many issues over the years, trailblazing topics such as HIV/AIDS, prostitution in Leith, FGM, post-natal depression, and the plight of refugees.

This is the final year of our current projects and despite a year lost because of Covid-19 restrictions, an incredible four hundred and twenty five thousand, three hundred and twenty one pounds (£425, 321) has been raised.

This is a remarkable achievement for Guild members, bringing a lifeline and hope to many people and follows in the tradition of 137 years of service at home and abroad.

Over the past three years we have helped with the building of a landmark facility in Uganda called the Sunflower Sanctuary which is the first in the history of the country for children with special needs.

In Tanzania the Kazunzu village now has enabled children in their adopted homes to develop, within a stable family unit, lives full of promise.

Here in Scotland we partnered with BEAT, an organisation for people and relatives with eating disorders to help people get the support and help they need.

Working with Pioneers our project in South East Asia has enabled women farmers to develop a self-sustaining commercial enterprise in a community where Christians are subject to hostility and marginalisation.

Home for Good encourages Christian families in Scotland and helps mobilise churches to find possible homes for children through fostering, adoption, or supported lodgings for teenagers. In Scotland almost 3000 children entered the care system last year.

Our partnership in Brazil with UNIDA has provided 42 scholarships supporting women as they access theological training equipping them to serve communities.

You can hear from all of these Projects at our Big Sing tonight. Why not come along and hear for yourself what difference our partnership scheme is making and be inspired? Tickets are available from the Guild stall.

Our partnership with the Guilds in CCAP Synod of Livingstonia in Northern Malawi is a constant source of encouragement to us. This past year my predecessor Helen Eckford was able to attend the biennial conference of the Woman's Guild in Bandawi and brought greetings from the Church of Scotland. This relationship is a way of forging strong bonds of faith. The twinnings between Guilds Together in Ayr and District, North Ayrshire, Shetland, and Dunbartonshire with Presbyterian Guilds in Bandawi, Milala, Dwanga and Mzuzu respectively have continued to develop over the past year. We look forward to welcoming five sisters and brothers from Guilds in Malawi in September. They will spend time in each of these Guilds Together Groups exploring our life and witness across Scotland.

Our practical support to Ekwendeni Hospital continues through supplies via the Banana Box Trust and monetary donations. Over £8000 has been raised to buy much needed medicines.

THE GREEN CANOPY INITIATIVE has seen a tree nursery established at Ekwendeni with future planting planned across two planting seasons in our four twinned areas. This project helps with soil degradation, food production, and the impact of climate change.

The Guild continues to serve the poor, the marginalised and the voiceless, whilst learning so much from the faith and resilience of our brothers and sisters we spend time with and share together in the work of the Gospel through our partnership.

NEW REGIONAL STRUCTURE. One of the greatest strengths of the Guild is the energetic way it tackles the problems of the social context in which it operates. Reflection and self-examination are key - highlighting issues, unafraid to express concerns or engage in dialogue.

The Guild has traditionally been organised as Guilds Together Groups within the same boundaries as Presbyteries. It is these groups who elect members to serve on National Council giving strategic direction for the Guild. The Guild has continued to evolve, ascertaining how best we can function and serve. We recognised the current structure required to be reviewed, being more responsive to the needs of the Guilds whilst maintaining important relationships with Presbyteries.

Following consultation with branches, Guilds Together groups, and National Council, our National Conference has agreed a more streamlined structure. Although it reduces the size of National Council and combines Guilds Together Groups, it will facilitate better practice. This will enhance the sustainability of the Guild at Regional level whilst providing a hopefully more appealing new policy-making method.

NEW EVENTS.

The Guild, like the wider church faces the same financial constraints due to an aging membership, and reduction in numbers. However this has in part been overcome by imaginative ways of connecting with members while at the same time adapting to local needs.

Our quarterly online meetings bring support, explore new ways of working together and sharing information with each other.

In response to the members, there is a four-year rolling programme of Regional Mini Gatherings which are hosted by the National Guild. This is a way of forging better relationships and has been universally welcomed. Our visits this year included, Earlston, Fort William, Dingwall, Orkney, Shetland, Kilmarnock, and Castle Douglas.

Our Big Sing events in Glasgow, Kilmarnock and the General Assembly are also a source of inspiration to members, also raising funds to support our brothers and sisters in Malawi through our offerings.

The fellowship enjoyed at the Guild weekend has provided a way of worshipping together, having fun whilst consolidating our links with each other.

As we look to the future we are excited to work with our young people, the Young Adult Guild, and to seeing what God is doing through them. Let us hear from them as we watch their short video presentation.

LIFT - Love in Fellowship and Trust – our young adult guild – I don't know about you but these young people always give me a LIFT and we would encourage congregations, youth workers, Ministers, and Presbyteries to support them and us by doing all you can to promote this venture, giving new impetus to the Guild in developing and securing its future and encouraging and enabling our young people at the same time.

The Church of Scotland Guild is in good heart, enthusiastic, enterprising, imaginative and ready for future service. I have found this to be the case in my many visits where I have been warmly welcomed.

Our founder Dr Charteris said "What would be the ideal Guild? It rises before me, the friendly gathering of old and young, each on trustful terms with all a fragrance of kindness pervades the whole meeting, and the heart says, 'These are the disciples of Jesus 'Whose we are and Whom we serve'".

Amen to that!

Moderator I present the report and as I am not a Commissioner, I invite the Principal Clerk to move the Deliverance.

