



PEOPLE OF THE WAY



THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND  
GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2016



transforming power of the Good News is heard by the people of Scotland.

He and Ruth now deserve time to relax and the whole Council wishes them well for the future.

#### **Dr Graeme Roberts**

Dr Graeme Roberts has made an enormous contribution to the work of CARTA, not least in leading the Committee through a two year review of its purpose and practice. This has resulted in the development of a new and effective working relationship with the General Trustees and a more proactive remit to stimulate congregations to think critically and imaginatively on how they might use their places of worship; in addition, he has overseen the creation of a new CARTA Development Worker post. We are very grateful to Graeme for the work he has done and know that it stands us in very good stead as we develop the support we can offer to congregations.

As Convener of CARTA Graeme has also contributed to the wider work of the Mission and Discipleship Council's Executive and Finance Group and latterly the Resourcing Worship Group, where his keen eye for detail and insightful problem solving have proven to be invaluable time and again. There have been other key contributions in working with the Council of Assembly on the business plan for the Scottish Storytelling Centre or editing and preparing for the General Assembly Council report. The energy, skills and experience he has brought to every meeting are driven by a passion for the Church he faithfully serves whether in the Council, Presbytery or congregation. We are deeply grateful for all Graeme has done for the Church in recent years and wish him God's rich blessing.

## **APPENDIX I**

### **DEVELOPING THE ELDERSHIP – INTERIM REPORT**

#### **A. Executive Summary**

Elders were commended by the General Assembly of 2014 for their participation in widespread and detailed

consultations nationally about their role, noting their desire to enhance the effectiveness of the office of Elder. Elders identified the need for training in the areas of: enabling prospective Elders to discern associated gifts, talents and calling; preparing to serve; and ongoing support and development.

Reflection by the Eldership Working Group (EWG), operating within the Mission and Discipleship Council (MDC), on the history and theology of the Eldership identified that a new direction may be called for which re-focuses the meaning and purpose of Eldership around local contextual mission, ie mission which is sensitive to the needs and opportunities within each parish.

Bringing these two areas of need together, the EWG believe that its work on considering the development of the Eldership has reached an interim stage where it is necessary to share its findings and engage with others in responding to them. Hence, it makes the following proposals:

- MDC to collaborate with other Councils and Groups to come to a mutually agreed position on re-focusing the meaning, purpose and role of Eldership around local contextual mission.
- Define how such a re-focusing would shape the nature and content of Eldership training provision.
- Based on the above bullet points, develop detailed proposals for Eldership training provision in the areas of: 'call'; 'preparing to serve'; and 'ongoing support and development'.

#### **B. Background**

The Report of the Mission and Discipleship Council (MDC) to the General Assembly of 2014 notes the creation of the EWG following the 2011 Assembly, whose purpose is 'to look at patterns and models of Eldership currently in use across the Church today and to bring to the attention of the General Assembly ways in which these could be shared, reflected upon and in some cases adapted to encourage appropriate practice in our changing contexts'.<sup>147</sup>

In April 2013 the EWG carried out a consultation with Elders. The first phase involved a series of facilitated discussions with Elders and Ministers throughout the country which informed the second phase in which a discussion document and questionnaire template was sent out to all Kirk Sessions. Completed questionnaires representing the views of 518 Kirk Sessions (38% of the total number) were received from this second phase of consultation. The EWG conducted an initial interrogation of the findings in preparing its report to the 2014 Assembly. The Assembly supported the various proposals that were made in the report and the associated deliverance section 21 which asked the Assembly to commend the Kirk Sessions for their participation in widespread and detailed consultations nationally, and 'their desire to enhance the effectiveness of the office of Elder'.

An initial response from the Mission and Discipleship Council to the needs identified was to produce the *Learn: Eldership* publication for use by Elders as a learning and development resource. This was launched in October 2014 and has been very well received, as evidenced by the significant numbers being purchased (nearly 8,000 as of 3 November 2015) and the significant, albeit informal, feedback about its positive value to Elders.

MDC recognised that there was a need to follow up on this initial response in two ways:

- To identify needs and make proposals for more in-depth training and support provision for Elders.
- To provide proposals about how current patterns and models of Eldership could be adapted to encourage enhanced effectiveness and appropriate practice in the changing context within Scotland.

To this end two pieces of work were commissioned:

- In August 2015 an independent research analyst carried out a thorough detailed analysis of the 518

responses to the Eldership questionnaire, noted above.<sup>148</sup>

- In September 2015 a researcher from one of the academic institutions developed a paper with reflections upon the history and theology of the Eldership within the Presbyterian tradition in Scotland.<sup>149</sup>

This interim report on developing the Eldership summarises the key findings from these two pieces of work and the EWG makes proposals arising from them.

### **C. Key findings from the detailed analysis of the Eldership questionnaire responses**

#### **(a) The Call**

- Most respondents agreed that a clear sense of both call and commitment to the role of Elder is essential.
- More than nine out of ten agreed that clear guidance should be provided to help Kirk Sessions in seeking new Elders and in supporting prospective Elders to prayerfully discern associated gifts, talents and calling.

#### **(b) Preparing to serve**

- Just over half of respondents agreed that Elders should be expected to undertake a period of training before being ordained.
- The training would need to be flexible in its delivery to allow for the varying congregational contexts.
- The content of the training should include an introduction to: specific details about what the role is understood to be; fundamentals, such as the creeds that shape our Church;

<sup>148</sup> Full report by Dennis McCoy Consulting can be found at <http://goo.gl/ytrQvv>

<sup>149</sup> Full report by Rev Dr Alexander Forsyth can be found at <http://goo.gl/ytrQvv>

<sup>147</sup> Appendix VII, 5/37

understanding of Kirk history, governance and procedures; an introduction to the different areas of church life in which Elders will serve, eg involvement in worship, pastoral care, developing a missional focus.

(c) **Ongoing support and development**

- Eight out of ten respondents agreed that Elders should be expected to engage in recognised post ordination training opportunities, as necessary, for the purpose of ongoing development and equipping for whatever responsibilities they are called to exercise within the local congregation.
- Training should be flexible in its delivery, for example, online, locally available or performed in-house, recognizing that Elders are in a voluntary role and often have limited time to attend training.
- Specific areas suggested for post-ordination training largely mirrored those identified for 'preparing to serve' training. However, the difference would be that the 'ongoing support and development' provision would need to move beyond the primer nature of the 'preparing to serve' provision so as to engage Elders in deeper learning and development on the various themes, where necessary and appropriate.

**D. Key findings from the reflection upon the history and theology of the Eldership within the Presbyterian tradition in Scotland**

(a) **Scriptural Basis**

- The Eldership is a pragmatic institution at least in its present form, whose averred direct Scriptural warrant in 1 Timothy 5:17, for 'ruling Elder' in distinction to 'teaching Elder' as one of two forms of 'presbyter', is generally held to be weak in strength.

- The Eldership nevertheless plays a key role in the Presbyterian system of governance, with its existence justifiable otherwise:
  - its presence reflects the concentration and importance within Presbyterianism upon enabling the laity to be ordained to a specific role responsible for church governance, spiritual oversight and discipline, both in relation to the congregation and the parish; and
  - its spiritual justification lies in the assertion that the Presbyterian system is consistent with the will of God, and of Christ's headship of the Church.
- Eldership is a malleable office which could potentially be subject to innovative adaptations in direction and purpose.

(b) **Ordination**

- From the terms of the *Second Book of Discipline* (1578), and in the light of the Eldership's principal role until the nineteenth century in congregational and community discipline, the Eldership became 'semi-clerical' and 'spiritual' in nature, recognising a 'divine calling'; that appreciation persists to a significant extent, for example being reflected in continuing support within the Eldership for ordination and a life-term.
- The traditional starting point is that the post of Elder, whilst associated with the corporate ministry in the administration and governance of worship and the sacraments, and retaining a restricted spiritual role in the oversight of congregation and parish, is not ordained in like manner to a 'minister', nor to perform the same tasks.
- Whilst Elder ordination cannot be equated with ministerial ordination, and leading worship is the concern of the minister with Elder participation only permitted at an ancillary level,

the practical blurring in present practice of those divides calls into question whether the original definitions of Eldership are still relevant. It may be, in any event, that a 'hybrid' office which engages in some traditional 'ministerial' roles is necessary to meet need, irrespective of past theological boundaries.

(c) **Roles and responsibilities**

- The potential for establishing a set definition of the nature of the role depends largely on the conclusion preferred between 'presbyter' and 'lay' theory:
  - (i) If the choice is 'lay theory' and thus the Elder is a 'representative' of the congregation, as stated by Charles Warr, 'The function of the lay Elder is administrative, but is in no sense ministerial'.<sup>150</sup> Commissioning to a fixed term thus becomes appropriate.
  - (ii) If, on the other hand, the choice is 'presbyter theory' and a 'spiritual' nature retaining ordination and life term, the principal functions begin to depart from close association with the congregation at the same level and instead become more focused on oversight of the spiritual development of the congregation and dispersion of the Word in mission. It cannot be a 'spiritual' role to carry out administrative tasks alone.
- The delineation of Elders' duties changed significantly in the nineteenth century, accelerated within the present 'post-Christendom' era: we are now, for the most part, reliant upon a 'one size fits all' district system. The well-known writer on the Eldership in the late 20th Century, Stewart Matthew, contended

that the functions of the Elder by the 1950s and 1960s, although onerous, had become emasculated to 'The Doorman' (at Sunday worship), 'The Spiritual Postman' (delivering communion cards), and 'The Royal Cup-Bearer' (at communion).<sup>151</sup> Successive reports to the General Assembly have called for the recognition of a diversity of spiritual gifts within the Eldership, and the re-structuring of the office to encourage their expression.

- If 'oversight' now encompasses forms of decision-making including worship, pastoral care and mission, a prime focus in present times has to be beyond such limitations: guiding the community, both internal and external, in their response to faith, the challenge being to work out the nature of the contextual mission that Elders will lead.

**E. Bringing the findings together**

Identifying the appropriate direction for the Eldership and therefore the training provision to be developed is partly bound up in two areas:

- Theological: the implications of presbyter/lay theory, depending on which side is favoured.
- Practical: whether concerns to fill gaps in ministry and in the servicing of the district system dictate that the future of Eldership should be directed to trying to maintain the present structure, rather than re-considering its purpose and broader goals.

The problem of concentrating only upon those concerns is that there may be no definitive conclusion to the debate on 'presbyter/lay' theory which has now been rumbling on for over four centuries, or indeed much potential for lasting compromise. Furthermore, propping up the existing structure could be seen to be a short term reaction to current problems rather than a long term

<sup>150</sup> Charles Warr, *The Presbyterian Tradition: A Scottish Layman's Handbook*, (London: Alexander Maclehose and Co, 1933), 374.

<sup>151</sup> Stewart Matthew, *Session Matters: A Book on Eldership*, (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1990), iv-v.

strategy for renewal in the church. Instead of narrowing the debate to those issues, an alternative may be to identify an over-arching focus for the Eldership and in doing so find a more creative way out of the impasse.

The Third Article Declaratory entails an acceptance by the Church of Scotland of 'its distinctive call and duty to bring the ordinances of religion to the people in every parish of Scotland through a territorial ministry'.<sup>152</sup> That commitment was re-affirmed in stark terms by the General Assembly in the Declaratory Act passed by the General Assembly in 2010:

*The Church of Scotland...declares anew its commitment to be a national church with a distinctive evangelical and pastoral concern for the people and nation of Scotland; recognising (4) ...its continuing responsibility to engage the people of Scotland wherever they might be with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.*

Are those simply words? If not, surely that responsibility does not fall only on the ordained ministry of Word and Sacrament?<sup>153</sup>

The tone of recent Reports to the General Assembly seeks to recover a broad definition of Eldership duties in this context, such as within the Assembly Council Report on Eldership of 2003, describing an Elder's position as 'The call and commitment to undertake, along with the minister, responsibility for the life of the congregation in all aspects, including worship, mission, and service to the wider community'.<sup>154</sup>

The Church thus declares itself nationally to be responsible to engage all people of the nation with the Gospel. That

duty locally requires all members of the Church to be engaged in so doing, but particularly its office-bearers.

The question then arises, 'engaged in what'? What might local, contextual mission look like to reflect the expression of that responsibility by the Eldership?

Since World War II, the Christian Church globally in all denominations has undergone a seismic shift in thinking about mission, based on the recognition that 'it is not the Church of God that has a mission in the world, but the God of mission that has a Church in the world'.<sup>155</sup> This is described as *missio Dei* ('Mission of God') theology.

The following two global definitions of 'mission', amongst many others, are drafted in the light of that realisation. The first definition is offered by the World Council of Churches:

- "Mission" carries a holistic understanding of the proclamation and sharing of the good news of the gospel by word (kerygma), deed (diakonia), prayer and worship (leiturgia), and the everyday witness of the Christian life (martyria); teaching as building up and strengthening people in their relationship with God and each other; and...reconciliation into koinonia - communion with God, communion with people, and communion with creation as a whole.
- "Evangelism", while not excluding the different dimensions of mission, focuses on explicit and intentional voicing of the gospel, including the invitation to personal conversion to a new life in Christ, and to discipleship.<sup>156</sup>

Therefore, under this broad definition, 'evangelism' by the explicit voicing of the gospel for conversion is potentially an element in the exercise of all other constituent parts

<sup>152</sup> Articles Declaratory of the Constitution of the Church of Scotland in Matters Spiritual, 1921, Article III.

<sup>153</sup> V 2010, Declaratory Act Anent the Third Article Declaratory of the Constitution of the Church of Scotland in Matters Spiritual.

<sup>154</sup> As quoted in the Mission and Discipleship Council Report to the General Assembly 2014, 5/38.

<sup>155</sup> Tim Dearborn, 'Beyond Duty: A Passion for Christ, a Heart for Mission', (MARC, 1998), quoted in Church of England, *Mission-Shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context*, (London, Church House Publishing, 2004), 5.

<sup>156</sup> *Mission and Evangelism in Unity Today* (2000), para 7, within *You are the Light of the World: Statements on Mission by the World Council of Churches 1980-2005* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2005).

of 'mission', but does not subsume or denigrate the other expressions such as diaconal service, prayer and worship, the Christian life, the building up of community and reconciliation.

The Anglican Communion express a similar breadth to 'mission' in shorter compass. The Five Marks of Mission are:

- To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
- To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
- To respond to human need by loving service
- To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation
- To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth<sup>157</sup>

When considering a potential 'missional agenda' for the Eldership, the *missio Dei* demands a more fundamental ethos and mind set to be evident beyond the definitions. Rather than being an occasional function which belongs to the Church and us, mission is 'God's activity, which embraces both the Church and world'.<sup>158</sup> That realisation has very important consequences for the Church and particularly those who are commonly called the 'laity' rather than the 'clergy'.<sup>159</sup>

The church learns of its place in the world, as 'it is not the church that has a mission of salvation to fulfil in the world; it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that includes the church'.<sup>160</sup> Therefore, the underlying realisation is that, in Bosch's words, 'there is Church because there is mission, not vice versa'.<sup>161</sup>

<sup>157</sup> Anglican Consultative Council, *Bonds of Affection* (1984), ACC-6, 49; *Mission in a Broken World*, (1990) ACC-8, 101.

<sup>158</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (New York: Harbour Row, 1977), 64

<sup>159</sup> 'Laity' is a clumsy term, as strictly speaking it means every Christian, but for convenience it is used here to mean all people who are 'non-clergy'.

<sup>160</sup> Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 65.

<sup>161</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 390.

Mission is, therefore, to be carried out by us in a spirit of "bold humility",<sup>162</sup> through what has been described as "prophetic dialogue".<sup>163</sup> Mission is exercised in 'dialogue' with others: listening not lecturing, being as much as the learner as the teacher, our interaction forcing us also to rethink our own understanding of the Gospel.

Mission on these terms becomes a founding core of the church, and so also of its lay people. The Church exists by the community of those that have been transformed by God's mission, which has created the Church. It will only survive by mission. It should not be an occasional function imagined by a small group for a series of events, but what defines it: 'mission is not an agenda item - it is the agenda'.<sup>164</sup>

In that light, a re-focus would thus recognise that:

- the church is essentially missional in nature
- the local, contextual mission of God, in which the local Church community participates, defines its existence
- the Church has a vital role to play in God's mission to the world as its only self-conscious agent
- the Church of Scotland has declared itself as recently as 2010 to be a national church with a responsibility to engage all people with the Gospel
- the Elder holds a unique position as an ordained office bearer with responsibility, along with the minister, for the spiritual health of those in the congregation and, more importantly, in the parish
- therefore, the Eldership in the exercise of a 'spiritual office' needs to be at the forefront of mission.

It would follow from the above that the Elder is not simply an ordained administrative assistant dependant on the

<sup>162</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 489.

<sup>163</sup> Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue: Reflections on Christian Mission Today* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2011).

<sup>164</sup> Stuart Murray, *Church after Christendom: Church and Mission in a Strange New World*, (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2004), 137.



needs of the minister but, instead, by re-asserting the 'spiritual' nature of the office, has a dynamic role to play in shaping and flourishing the very future existence of the Church of Scotland through playing a key role in mission in all of the above terms. All duties of the Elder would then be re-assessed through a missional lens to test their 'fitness for purpose'.

Eldership as a 'spiritual' office would reclaim its main purpose as spiritual 'oversight' of both the congregation and all in the parish as it was in the immediate post-Reformation period<sup>165</sup>, but by which would now be meant the encouragement of the growth of faith rather than its assessment, judgment and censure. In other words, Eldership might be a closer reflection of what T F Torrance describes as the Elder's 'diaconal/complementary' form of ministry, whose basis and distinction from the pastor is recovered from the Second Book of Discipline: 'As the Pastors...should be diligent in teaching and sowing the seed of the word, so the Elders should be careful in seeking the fruit of the same in the people.'<sup>166</sup>

Therefore, as T F Torrance wrote:

*...their distinctive ministry is not the service of the Word but the service of response to the Word...Whilst ministers are ordained to dispense the Word and Sacraments to the people, Elders are set apart to help the people in their reception of the Word and in their participation in the Sacraments, and to seek the fruit of the Gospel in the faith and life of the community... Thus their specific calling is to help the faithful from within their midst...'<sup>167</sup>*

A new direction may be called for which re-focuses the meaning and purpose of Eldership beyond narrower foci viewed from the 'inside-out'; which begins the debate with the method of engagement in the office and the

precise duties of the post, and then turns outwards. Instead, we might re-orientate so as to look towards wider horizons in the first instance, and adopt that focus as normative in every decision regarding the Eldership from an 'outside-in' approach. The 'outside-in' approach encourages congregations to explore the missional opportunities of their local setting and thereafter shape the office of Eldership in this context.

We might then discern which potential roles and tasks in the eldership should be kept and which discarded within the Presbyterian tradition from the many previously employed and now proposed. We would thus place mission above the internal functioning of the Church, and retain only those duties that are key to the flourishing of the mission of God in the world, whether by streamlining the internal governance of the Church primarily for that purpose, or by enabling and empowering elders to be at the vanguard of initiating and leading mission in the world.

## F. Proposals arising

The EWG believe that its work on considering the development of the Eldership has reached an interim stage where it is necessary to share its findings and engage with others in responding to them. Hence, it makes the following proposals:

- MDC to collaborate with other Councils and Groups to come to a mutually agreed position on re-focusing the meaning, purpose and role of Eldership around local contextual mission.
- Define how such a re-focusing would shape the nature and content of Eldership training provision.
- Based on the above, develop detailed proposals for Eldership training provision in the areas of: 'call'; 'preparing to serve'; and 'ongoing support and development'.

<sup>165</sup> Second Book of Discipline, VI.5 – 'The eldership is a spiritual function, as is the ministry.'

<sup>166</sup> Ibid, VI 12

<sup>167</sup> T F Torrance, *The Eldership in the Reformed Church*, 510.

