

The theme of this year's Assembly is Building Together: of laying good foundations that will allow us to stabilise our Church, and allow us to work together in mission to Scotland. Our report and its accompanying proposals are a contribution to that work. Of clarifying the common faith on which our Church is founded and built, but to ensure that, as we confess that faith, we confess and speak it in love.

The first part of our work this year concerns the Westminster Confession. The General Assembly of 2018 instructed the Theological Forum to carry out a review of the Westminster Confession of Faith, and the vows and subscription that office holders make in relation to it. After consultation with Presbyteries, congregations, and individual members, the Theological Forum brought an Overture to last year's Assembly, and having approved it, the Church entered into a two-year double barrier act procedure as described in the Articles Declaratory, part of the constitution of our Church.

The recommendations embodied in our Overture are these: that the Westminster Confession of Faith should be retained as a subordinate standard of the Church, but that other creeds and confessions should also be recognised as subordinate standards of the Church. In order to reflect this change, and to ensure that it is clearer what Christian beliefs are fundamental and which are not, we have also proposed a number of changes to the vows and subscription that we as office holders make.

We believe our proposed reforms would bring a number of benefits to the Church. First, by focussing attention on the Apostles' and Nicene creeds as expressing the fundamentals of our faith, it will be made clearer that even in a broad church, we really do have more in common than what separates us. Yet that point, second, also holds for our relation to other churches. Recent years have seen important developments in our relationships with the Church of England, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Scottish Episcopal Church, and in a time of secularisation, when it has never been more important to share resources, and labour in mission together, we believe our reforms will make it easier to find commonality with other Christians, and secure the inter-church working that we heard of in Saturday's debate on the report of Ecumenical Relations.

Our proposed reforms, however, are not only about clarifying what we hold in common with other denominations, however, but also, third, about helping us clarify our own Reformed identity. We want to rediscover elements of our identity that have been overlooked or forgotten, chief among which is the Scots Confession. The Scots Confession is the original confession of our Church, and indeed, the whole Protestant Church in Scotland. By adding the Scots Confession to our subordinate standards, we will once again be able to

hear from John Knox and his contemporaries, so that a legitimate emphasis upon the Apostles and Nicene Creeds will not lead to the loss of our Scottish Reformed identity.

While the Book of Confessions is new for the Church of Scotland, other Reformed churches already have multiple subordinate standards. These include the Hungarian Reformed Church and the Presbyterian Church USA, two Reformed churches with very different cultures, which demonstrate that a Book of Confessions is not tied to any one particular theological or political outlook.

While clarifying our beliefs is crucial for laying a foundation that will last, it is not only our beliefs that matter, but our practice: how we, as living stones, confess our belief in the Triune God through our treatment of others.

That is why the second major part of our work this year concerns the place of transgender people within the life of the Church. The General Assembly previously instructed the former Mission and Discipleship Council to produce pastoral guidance to help support transgender people, and two years ago the Assembly endorsed a Memorandum of Understanding against so-called conversion practices, practices that seek to coerce people into changing their gender identity. While these resources are helpful, the Theological Forum, after consultation with Legal Questions and the Principal Clerk, decided that further theological work was needed to clarify the Church's policy towards transgender people, and this work was approved by last year's Assembly. This is the appended report that we now present.

It is important to stress at the outset that this report is not about the place of transgender people in Scottish society, the rights of transgender people under the civil law, or the relation of these rights to those of others, but purely about the place of transgender people within the Church of Scotland.

Because of that, while this is a report of the Theological Forum, we have been clear from the outset that the voices of transgender people should help to shape it. For that reason, we have spoken with transgender Christians while preparing our report, and have also spoken with a Christian de-transitioner, someone who transitioned in the past, but has now de-transitioned back to their birth gender.

Despite a wide range of theological and political views being present on the Forum, we are unanimous in reaching the following conclusions. First, building on the Church's existing statements on transgender people, we believe that transgender people should be loved, and respected, and welcomed in our congregations. It is the foundation of Christian ethics that all people are made in the image of God, and are worthy of our respect and love, and

this is true of transgender people also. Yet second, and based on our exploration of gender in the Bible, the Forum is also unanimous in believing that transgender people should not only be welcomed in our church, but allowed to serve in our Church. That the Church should not treat transgender people differently from others, but after considering their giftings and callings, should admit them to office if we believe God wills it.

By focussing on the importance of welcome, and the ability of God to use every Christian for service, we believe our report offers the Church a route through a debate that has, at times, become toxic, and allows us to model a better way of engaging with issues of gender.

Because in these days when we as a Church are building for the future, we need to make sure that it is the Lord that is building the house. That it is the Triune God of Father, Son and Spirit - confessed in our creeds and confessions, yet experienced most fully when we live in love - that is building us up. That in our doctrine and our practice, we are both faithful and kind, speaking the truth, yet speaking it in love. It is our hope that our report and our proposals make that building up a little easier.

Moderator - I present the report, and as I am not a commissioner, I ask the Principal Clerk to move the deliverance.