



The Church of Scotland

Communications Department

GOOD NEWS GENERAL ASSEMBLY UPDATE:

FRIDAY 27TH MAY 2011

RABBI HEAPS PRAISE ON KIRK'S CARE FOR THE ELDERLY

THE first female rabbi to address the General Assembly praised the Church of Scotland for its “truly amazing” care to older people.



Rabbi Julia Neuberger (*pictured above*), a guest of the Lord High Commissioner, hailed the official Care Commission gradings of homes run by the Kirk's social care arm CrossReach. Ninety-four per cent of CrossReach's homes received a grade four, of good care, whilst 51 per cent were marked excellent.

Rabbi Neuberger compared these statistics to some of the “appalling care” which the elderly receive in hospitals and said that faith-run services had a good track record of treating the vulnerable with compassion, dignity and respect.

Rabbi Neuberger said: “Religious services tend to offer very good care services, in my experience among the best in the UK and indeed worldwide.

“Still, we Jews could learn so much from the Church of Scotland about how you care for the elderly and the dying.”

The rabbi, a former trustee of Jewish Care, received hearty applause from commissioners after her speech.

GENERAL TRUSTEES TO EXPLORE QUESTION OF SECESSION AND BUILDINGS



Above: Reverend Dr Jim Jack

THE General Trustees are to explore whether congregations wishing to secede from the Church of Scotland will be allowed to take their buildings with them.

Reverend Ivor Macdonald, minister of Kilmuir and Stenscholl on the Isle of Skye, posed the question as the Assembly heard the Trustees' report this morning.

Chairman Reverend Dr Jim Jack said it was not a matter which the General Trustees had yet discussed, but believed congregations in such a position "could be considered on a case by case basis".

Speaking to commissioners, Dr Jack said: "With regard to properties held by us, the General Trustees as a statutory corporation require to hold these in trust for the purposes set out in our founding statute, the Church of Scotland (General Trustees) Order Confirmation Act 1921 and also contained in the Church of Scotland (Properties and Endowments) Acts of 1925 and 1933.

"The Trustees must act within the powers conferred on them in these statutes – otherwise we would be in breach of trust.

"As Trustees we require to exercise due skill and care in the administration of the trust estate in our charge and to exercise sound judgment before agreeing to any arrangement which potentially might have an adverse affect on those for whom we hold the trust estate – that is the Church of Scotland and its congregations.

"Whilst therefore I am sure that the Trustees would consider each case on its merits to see if an accommodation could be found, we would require to work within the parameters I have mentioned."

WARNING ON RISING LEAD AND COPPER THEFTS

THE General Trustees warned of an alarming rise in lead and copper thefts from church roofs across Scotland.

Chairman Reverend Dr Jim Jack said that lead was in great demand, particularly in the Far East for commodities such as batteries, glass and computer parts, and consequently the price of lead has recently escalated.

Dr Jack told the Assembly: “We are hearing of thefts on a weekly basis.

“At one end of the scale, in Edinburgh of youngsters removing lead roof flashings and transporting their loot in a wheelie bin, and at the other end, to one church in Glasgow having five tons of lead removed in one night by an organised criminal gang.

“The cost of these thefts is obvious but the cost of the damage to the property with the subsequent ingress of water is not so obvious.”



Above: Reverend Dr Jim Jack

Dr Jack said that the General Trustees had recently held a meeting bringing together representatives from Historic Scotland, Edinburgh Council Planning Department and the Police.

The Chairman believed that prevention “is the best policy” and that the Trustees will shortly be issuing a set of guidance notes to all congregations.

He also praised the example of South Leith Church, who sent a leaflet to neighbours asking them to call the fabric convener of the congregation if they saw anyone up on the church roof, which was met with a very positive response.

THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION ANNOUNCED



Above: Reverend Dr John McPake will convene the Theological Commission

THE General Assembly today heard the names of the seven-strong Theological Commission which will examine issues around same-sex relationships, civil partnerships and marriage.

Convened by East Kilbride minister Reverend Dr John McPake, the man behind the 2009 moratorium, the commission will be made up of Reverend Dr Alan Falconer, Reverend Dr Mary Henderson, Reverend Dr Marjory Maclean, Dr Jane McArthur, Reverend Gordon Kennedy and Reverend Professor Andrew McGowan.

It is felt these names are representative of the breadth of the Kirk's theological understanding, and will address the theological matters raised in the course of the work of the Special Commission on Same-Sex Relationships and the Ministry.

Their report will also examine whether persons who have entered into a civil partnership and have made lifelong commitments in a Church ceremony, should be eligible for admission for training, ordination and induction as ministers of Word and Sacrament or deacons – with the caveat that that no member of Presbytery will be required to take part in such ordination or induction against his or her conscience.

This means that the Theological Commission has been given an instruction to explore the possibility of making significant changes to the Church's present position. However, decisions about change will not be made before the Assembly of 2013, thereafter there may be the need for Barrier Act procedure, with final decisions on any matter more likely to be considered by the General Assembly in 2014.

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THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION ANNOUNCED

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In the meantime all Courts, Councils and Committees of the Church have been instructed not to make decisions in relation to contentious matters of same-sex relationships, accept for training, allow to transfer from another denomination, ordain or induct any person in a same-sex relationship until the General Assembly of 2013 has heard the report of the Theological Commission. The only exceptions to this will be ministers and deacons ordained before 31st May 2009 who are in a same-sex relationship.

Commissioners also agreed that until the Assembly of 2013 all Courts, Councils and Committees of the Church should not issue press statements or otherwise talk to the media in relation to contentious matters of human sexuality, in respect to Ordination and Induction to the Ministry of the Church of Scotland.

Consequently, individuals can speak publicly on these matters; however, it is to be hoped that public contributions of individuals should be offered in the same spirit as was evident at the General Assembly.

SPECIAL COMMISSION TO INVESTIGATE TENURE

NAMES of the independent Special Commission on the issue of tenure were announced at this morning's session of the General Assembly.



Convened by Very Reverend Bill Hewitt (*pictured above*), former Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, the nine-strong group will also consider the matter of leadership of local congregations.

Joining Mr Hewitt, will be Reverend Douglas Cranston, Reverend Catherine Hepburn, Reverend Andrew Lees, Reverend Jeff McCormick, Ken Duerden, Mary Stobo, Isobel Montgomerie and George Robertson.

The Commission will report to the General Assembly of 2013.

PLANS FOR NEW FORM OF MINISTRY APPROVED

PLANS for a new form of ministry were approved by 10 votes following a close debate at today's General Assembly.

With part of the Ministries Council report carried over to today's business from yesterday, commissioners voted 200 to 190 in favour of Ordained Local Ministry against a counter-motion from Reverend Professor Andrew McGowan. This figure revealed almost half of the 744 commissioners were not present.

Professor McGowan argued that the Council should depart from the Ordained Local Ministry and instead bring proposals for the further education, training and mobilisation of the eldership.

He said elders were the Kirk's "greatest resource", and his proposals "liberated" them as the Church "doesn't need another tier of collar ministry".

The counter-motion was backed by Very Reverend Dr Andrew McLellan, who described it as "visionary".

But Ministries Council convener Reverend Graham Finch (*pictured below*) said many individuals saw it as an exciting new way of service and responding to God's call.



Mr Finch said: "This is an important way in which the Church of Scotland can address its ministry needs through patterns fit for purpose in the 21st century.

"Presbyteries have said for years that a more flexible form of non-stipendiary ordained ministry would be of great value to the mission of the Kirk as it seeks to serve the people of Scotland in every part.

"Many remote rural congregations struggling to find a full-time minister and pulpit supply would benefit from OLMs, and this would ease the burden on existing ministers having to travel long distances to take Communion and Baptism services."

With a flexible approach to training and serving, the scheme is likely to attract congregational members feeling a call to ministry but not wanting to work full-time as a minister due to other work and family commitments.