

Old Parish and St Paul's Church of Scotland, Galashiels

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Greetings and thanks to the congregation

On Sunday 13th May I informed both St John's and St Paul's congregations that I am going to demit in August this year. Sunday 12th August 2018 will be our last Sunday before we leave Scotland on the 14th. It was not an easy decision to make, but through much prayer Janette and I decided to return to South Africa with the hope that you will understand the decision and continue to pray for us. Therefore I want to thank everyone who supported us during our stay here in Scotland as we have indeed met wonderful people who blessed our lives. It was a period which enriched us in many ways and we thank the Lord for the time we have been here. We really pray that the Lord will let His will be done here in Galashiels and that everyone who loves the Lord Jesus may continue to grow in His grace and experience His love.

May the blessing of 2 Corinthians 13:14, which we repeat so often, be with all who love and serve the Lord Jesus...

'May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all'.

Rev. Dr Leon Keller

Every Christian Should Be a World Christian

The Bible makes it clear that in the early church there was a lot of contact between Christians who lived far away from each other. There is no doubt that believers took great interest in how their brothers and sisters in all sorts of places were getting on. And it is clear that they often took steps to help them, even when they were separated by long distances.

Greetings

In the endings of most of the New Testament letters, for example, greetings are sent between fellow Christians. And often these believers lived far apart.

In some passages, those sending greetings and those being greeted are named individually. See Romans 16:3-15, 21-23; 1 Corinthians 16:19, 21; Colossians 4:10-18; 2 Thessalonians 3:17; 2 Timothy 4:19-21; Philemon 23-24.

We also find more general greetings between churches or groups of Christians. See Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 16:19-20; 2 Corinthians 13:12-13; Philippians 4:21-22; 1 Thessalonians 5:26; Titus 3:15; Hebrews 13:24; 1 Peter 5:13-14; 2 John 13; 3 John 15.

These greetings strongly imply that the early Christians were genuinely interested in each other, even if they lived far apart or had never met.

Praying for each other

In the Bible we also find a concern that Christians pray widely for each other. Especially noteworthy is Ephesians 6:18, where Paul tells the Ephesians:

'Pray in the Spirit at all times with every prayer and request. And with this in view, be alert with great endurance in all your requests for all the saints . . .'

Nothing in the context of this verse suggests that 'all the saints' should be interpreted in a limited way. Paul is clearly instructing his readers to pray for Christians throughout the known world.

Paul's collection

Important, too, is Paul's collection for the churches in Judea. He spent years collecting money from various congregations for the impoverished Judean believers. See Romans 15:25-31; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8-9; Galatians 2:10.

Continued overleaf

This collection allowed wealthier Christians to practically express their love for their brothers and sisters in need. And it also served to strengthen relationships between the Judean churches and those elsewhere, many of which were some months' journey from Judea.

Close, loving contact

In the early church, then, Christians typically took a real interest in what was happening with other believers in far-flung places. And they did this even when the others were personally unknown to them. What is more, they often took steps to help fellow Christians in prayer and more practically too, including those who lived far away.

There was clearly a sense of love, unity and family among God's people that didn't take account of physical distances between them.

We should all follow this example

In a real sense the world today is a much smaller place than it was in the days of the early church. We can fly to the opposite side of the globe in 24 hours, and we can communicate with someone there in a matter of seconds. We are therefore much more able to find out what is happening with Christians in various parts of the world than was possible in the first century.

Given that getting information is relatively easy, and given the biblical emphasis on believers taking a close interest in each other, there is really no excuse for us today not to find out what is going on with our brothers and sisters the world over. We should be learning what is happening to Christians in various places and praying for them. And, where possible, we should be helping those who are in material need.

Of course, there are many more places in the world today where there is a Christian presence than there were in the first century. And we can't be expected to know what is going on in every single place.

But God surely expects us all to find out at least some basic information about the circumstances of Christians in various countries. And He surely wants us to pray for the church in the whole world, even if not specifically for believers in every individual country.

For Christians to take no more than a passing interest in the lives of brothers and sisters in foreign countries is to act very differently from the early church. And it fails to take proper account of Ephesians 4:4, which tells us that there is one body, i.e., church, in the world. It also seems quite selfish for anyone to focus almost all their attention on their own country.

Practical examples

Finding out about what is happening with Christians all over the world can often be very encouraging.

For example, at the present time the church in many places is growing quickly. Knowing something about what is happening in Brazil, Uganda and Nepal, for instance, is bound to encourage us. We can also learn a lot from brothers and sisters who are experiencing great church growth.

On the other hand, knowing about the huge difficulties and persecution faced by Christians in some countries is also very important. For example, if we are aware of what believers in North Korea, Pakistan or Iran are going through, we will be able to pray for them in informed and specific ways. And it might give us ideas about how else we can help them too.

Nor should our interest in world affairs be limited to what is happening to Christians. We need to be aware of the major goings-on among non-Christians too, especially so that we can pray for them.

In 1 Timothy 2:1-2 Paul instructs Timothy:

'... I urge that requests, prayers, petitions and thanksgivings be made on behalf of all people, for kings and all who are in authority ...'

Clearly, if we know something about what is happening in various countries, we will be able to pray more effectively for their governments. And we will know better how to pray in other ways as well.

Giving of ourselves

Making the effort to learn about and pray for Christians and others in distant places will mean giving of ourselves to a certain extent. But we must remember Jesus' promise in Luke 6:38:

'Give and it will be given to you.'

Giving to and for others is bound to be good for us too. Nor does learning about and helping those in far away places have to be a burdensome or particularly time-consuming thing.

Let us all, then, like believers in the early years of the church, make it our aim to be world Christians. If every Christian took this attitude, God's church would surely become much stronger.

Max Aplin

General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)

As you may be aware, the GDPR came into force across the European Union on 25 May 2018. The "Privacy Notice" included with this Newsletter is about your personal information in the light of GDPR. Information held may include:

- Baptism Rolls, some of which are displayed in the Small Hall.
- The Communion Roll, in hand-written and digital form, which contains names and addresses of all members and adherents, and the districts to which members have been assigned.
- A database of names and email addresses of those who have notified us they wish to receive an email with a [link to our website](#) alerting them to the availability of our latest Newsletter in digital form.
- A database of members who make [Gift Aid](#) donations.

General Assembly 2018

Peter Sandison was privileged to attend, along with our Minister, Leon, this year's General Assembly, which had as its motto "Peace be with you!" The following is a record, with apologies for the many omissions in what was an extremely busy week!

Saturday 19th May



The Opening Session of the Assembly - a coming together of Church and state - is attended by a wide variety of guests, including the First Minister, representatives of local authorities, visitors from other churches and ecumenical representatives. It begins with a procession of former Moderators and Principal Clerks, followed by the entrance of the Lord High Commissioner, this year the Duke of Buccleuch and Queensberry, and his entourage. Following morning worship, the retiring Moderator, Dr Derek Browning (now Very Rev.), reflected on the 2018 Assembly theme: 'Peace be with You' , and consecrated the new Moderator, Susan Brown (now Right Rev.), minister of Dornoch Cathedral, handing over the Moderator's ring and pectoral cross.

The Legal Questions Committee gave their report in the afternoon, during which legislation was discussed allowing ministers to conduct same-sex marriages . An amendment to a deliverance was tabled, instructing the Committee "to prepare legislation enabling those Ministers of Word and Sacrament and Deacons who wish to do so to be nominated to solemnise same-sex marriage ceremonies". After a passionate but respectful debate, Assembly voted electronically, with 345 votes for and 170 against. However, following the vote, Commissioners further agreed that the Committee should only act subject to certain safeguards.

Sunday 20th May

The Moderator was the preacher at the annual General Assembly service at St Giles. Another event which is becoming an annual fixture, "Heart & Soul", took place in a Princes Street Gardens bathed in sunshine. As well as family fun and music at the Ross Bandstand, a marquee hosted a variety of speakers, including: broadcaster and writer Sally Magnusson talking, amongst other things, about her book "[Where memories go: why dementia changes everything](#)", and the charity she founded, "[Playlist for Life](#)"; Louise Macdonald OBE, CEO of Young Scot, who was in conversation with a former Moderator, the Very Rev. Lorna Hood OBE ; and the Rev. Dr Margaret Forester, reminiscing about 50 years of women's ministry in the Church of Scotland.

Monday 21st May

Following the quiet contemplation of the morning service of Holy Communion there was a heated debate on the Church's proposed Strategic Plan 2018 - 2028, "[Worshipping God, Inspiring Faith and Connecting People](#)", which was outlined in a glossy brochure given to Commissioners. The Plan aimed to address issues such as declining numbers in congregations and missing generations of church-goers - resulting in a drastic fall in income - and the need to dispose of buildings surplus to requirements. However, there was a feeling that consultation had not been wide enough and the Plan not radical enough. A counter-motion of five new sections was proposed, the first of which was to "Instruct the Council [of Assembly] to return to the General Assembly of 2019 with a radical action plan for 2019-2022 to achieve much needed reform within our Church." This was accepted on an electronic vote by 439 to 130, a surprising majority. Commissioners wanted more time to study the additional 4 sections of the counter-motion, and this was postponed to Wednesday.

Tuesday 22nd May

Highlight of the day was the procession of some 500 women ministers and their supporters up the Mound to New College. This marked the 50th anniversary of the historic decision to ordain women to the ministry. They sang "We are Marching in the Light of God", and held the bright blue banner pictured on the right. One of the week's many moments of humour occurred when the Rev. Margaret Forester, one of the pioneer ministers, introduced herself as Commissioner 007, "licensed to preach". Her speech to the Assembly appropriately received a standing ovation.

The afternoon session included the Report of The Guild, which has commendably raised a total of £750,000 over three years for six life-changing projects in Scotland and beyond. The [six new projects](#) the Guild will support for the next three years, and the new theme, 'One journey many roads', were announced.



Wednesday 23rd May

In the morning session The Church and Society Council recommended that the Church of Scotland Investors Trust and Pension Trustees should withdraw from investing in oil and gas companies if their business plans are not aligned with the Paris climate agreement within two years. A lively debate with various counter-motions ensued. In the end a proposal by former Moderator, the Very Rev. Albert Bogle, that the Church would be more likely to influence meaningful change if it didn't disinvest, was agreed.

In the afternoon the Assembly returned to the issue of the Strategic Plan, and agreed a number of proposals, including one to "Instruct the Council [of Assembly] to work collaboratively with other Councils, Committees and Presbyteries to bring proposals to the General Assembly of 2019 for structural change, consulting with the Rev. Dr Doug Gay about the ideas contained in the [recent Chalmers lectures](#) and with other appropriate persons with expertise in the reform of institutions and structures, to enable a Church structure that is lean and fit for purpose to lead reform". There was also a discussion about the future of the national offices of the Church of Scotland at 121 George Street, with an agreement for a preferred solution to be proposed in 2019.

Thursday 24th May

On what is commonly know as 'Chaplain's Day', the Assembly was graced with the colourful presence of some forty armed forces Chaplains. One of the Chaplains present was the Rev. Hector MacKenzie, the son-in-law of our previous Minister, Rev. Leslie Steele. Unfortunately I was unable to catch Hector before he headed up to St Giles for the Chaplains' annual service.

The afternoon session covered theological matters, including the matter of whether children who have not been baptised should be permitted to share in a service of Holy Communion, and an "Overture" in the name of our Presbytery [Melrose and Peebles] instructing the Theological Forum to examine the present-day value of the Westminster Confession of Faith. After much thoughtful debate, with strongly expressed views, there was a large majority in favour of the proposal.

Friday 25th May

The morning session of the Assembly began with an address by Imam Sayed Razawi, Director General of the Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society, who concluded by saying that it's time to walk shoulder to shoulder with each other and with God.

Discussion of the work of the Mission and Discipleship Council covered issues such as a new vision for eldership and the training of local worship leaders and lay members. The morning concluded with a presentation by the Moderator of the National Youth Assembly, Robin Downie, one of the group of young Commissioners, who contributed much to the week's proceedings.

After lunch the Assembly concluded with addresses from the Moderator and the Lord High Commissioner about their respective weeks , following which they were "clapped out" by Commissioners lining the steps of the quadrangle.

