

GENERAL ASSEMBLY SUPPLEMENT

OCTOBER 2020 FREE

www.lifeandwork.org

facebook.com/lifeandwork

Twitter: [@cofslifeandwork](https://twitter.com/cofslifeandwork)

LIFE AND WORK

THE MAGAZINE OF THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

A VIRTUAL ASSEMBLY

- **Congregational contributions and central budgets cut as Church faces £30m loss of income in 2020**
- **Commitment to net zero carbon emissions by 2030**
- **Black Lives Matter affirmed**
- **Moderator calls on Church to be 'outwardly-focussed'**



HISTORY was made on October 2 when the Church of Scotland convened its first General Assembly held mostly online.

With only the Moderator, speakers, officials and technical crew in the Assembly Hall in Edinburgh, around 730 Commissioners took part, speaking and voting through video conferencing technology.

Thousands more watched the livestream on Facebook and on the Church website.

They heard the Moderator, the Rt Rev Dr Martin Fair, open the Assembly with a warning that if the Church were to become overwhelmingly concerned with its

own survival, it would fail. Instead, he called for the Church to be outwardly-focussed as it faces the challenges of both Covid-19 and its own historic decline.

He said: "To be outwardly-focussed means, in our language, to be focussed on mission rather than maintenance.

"It's understanding that the same Jesus who calls us to Him sends us out for Him. The Jesus who says, 'Follow me' goes on to say 'Now go and make disciples... be fishers of people as I have shown you.'"

He said that being outwardly-focussed meant both 'doing' and 'saying'. The 'doing' included 'sitting

silently with the bereaved and the broken', 'taking climate justice seriously', and 'refusing to brush aside racial injustice'.

"So mission, being outwardly-focussed, is engaging, acting, working, doing. But it is also saying. Sharing, proclaiming, speaking a word in season, always being ready to give an explanation for the hope that is within us."

During the truncated Assembly, which took place over an evening and a day, there were discussions focusing on the challenges facing the Church, and on the Church's response to the climate emergency and protests about racial injustice. ■

GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2020: KEY DEBATES AND DECISIONS

FINANCE

The Assembly approved a reduction of 18% to the amount of money congregations will be asked to contribute to the central church in 2021.

It is hoped the cut in ministry and mission contributions will help struggling churches which have fallen behind in their payments this year due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Assembly Trustees report warned that the Church's total annual income could fall by £30m this year due to Covid-19, although convener the Rt Rev Dr John Chalmers admitted that it was too soon to judge the impact of the pandemic on church life at all levels.

The Assembly also approved cuts of £4m to the budgets of the two central forums – Faith Nurture and Faith Impact – but was warned that £8m would be needed from reserves next year.

The Trustees won the support of the Assembly to explore the implications of unifying the two forums – which were formed in January - into a single body.

BLACK LIVES MATTER

The Assembly affirmed that Black Lives Matter, reaffirmed that racism is a sin and committed to a future report on the legacy of slavery and the Church.

However, the Faith Impact Forum's deliverance was not accepted without some debate on the Black Lives Matter organisation and whether it was compatible with Christian values.

The Rev Dale London said that while he approved of the sentiment of the deliverance and condemned racism, the phrase 'black lives matter' had been co-opted by a political group and become associated with disorder and violence. He proposed replacing 'Black Lives Matter' with 'all lives matter to God'.

Faith Impact Convener, the Very Rev Dr Susan Brown said: "We have to be very careful about the message we convey... All lives matter, but we have not lived as though they do. We have a system in which because of the colour of their skin, some people are treated unequally. Saying 'black lives matter' is not about excluding everybody else. It's about focusing on deepest need. Jesus had a particular passion for the poorest and the most marginalised and

those who were suffering most, and he focussed on them above all others."

The motion passed by 315 votes to 116.

ZERO CARBON

Although there was concern that a report on the climate emergency originally intended to be presented to the Assembly had been withdrawn due to lack of time, a motion was passed calling for the church at all levels to work towards achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2030, and to bring an outline strategy to the General Assembly of 2021; and for Faith Impact to report next year 'on the ethical, scientific and theological arguments for and against urgent disinvestment from oil and gas companies'.

YOUTH

The Moderator of the last National Youth Assembly (NYA), Dana McQuater, said it had been difficult for those involved in the NYA to understand why it had been brought to an end, but added: "We look forward in hope to young people finding new ways to become involved in the decision making of this church."

In response to a question from a youth delegate, the convener of the Legal Questions Committee, the Rev Dr Grant Barclay, committed to keeping youth representation at the General Assembly at at least current levels.

QUEEN'S LETTER

In her letter to the Assembly, the Queen praised the Church's response to the pandemic, both in moving services online and in providing practical support. The letter states: "We greatly admire the ways in which the Church of Scotland has responded to these difficult days.

"Care has been offered to the bereaved whose grieving has been constricted by restrictions on funerals while churches have kept open their doors to feed the poor and offer safe space to the children of key workers.

"Many congregations have taken their worship online and touched the lives of people who did not in normal times attend church services.

"The Kirk's care workers have remained faithful in sustaining the services upon which



The Rt Rev Dr Martin Fair, Moderator of the General Assembly

so many older people and their families depend."

SPEECHES

Chief Officer Dave Kendall told the Assembly that, when asked whether he saw a positive future for the church, his answer was 'a resounding yes', and that 'what will matter most in taking us forward will be the vision, quality, enthusiasm and ambition of the staff and the willingness of the Church... to engage with the changes on our journey'.

The Convener of the Faith Nurture Forum, the Rev Rosemary Frew, urged the church to build on the innovations that have been forced upon it by the Covid-19 epidemic.

She said: "As we look to the future, a future with fewer buildings and fewer ministers of word and sacrament, we must continue to explore new ways of being church and build on our lockdown learnings.

The General Trustees presented its report on 'well-equipped spaces in the right places', with chairman Raymond Young urging the Church to be willing to 'prune' its building estate, while dealing sensitively with the disposal of unneeded buildings, and to work in partnership with other denominations and community groups on new buildings. ■

Deputy editor: Thomas Baldwin

Pictures: Church of Scotland

Try Life and Work from just £1.99 for an electronic copy or £12 for a six-month print subscription at www.lifeandwork.org/subscribe