

Presbytery Meeting Tuesday 3rd November 2015 Summary

Holburn West Parish Church was the venue for the November Presbytery meeting. In his opening remarks the Moderator spoke of three tragedies in the previous week, the Russian Airliner crash in Sinai, the fire at the Romanian nightclub and closer to home, the death of Bailey Gwynne in tragic circumstances at Cults Academy.

Tragedy at Cults Academy

The Rev Ewan Gilchrist, minister at Cults Parish Church, spoke on behalf of the six members of the chaplaincy team at Cults Academy and described the actions they had taken following the fatality of a pupil, Bailey Gwynne, at the school. A "gathering place" had been created at Cults Church where a vigil was held offering space for meditation, reflection and the opportunity to light a candle. The chaplains tried to be of use giving comfort to people in a dark time. It was notable that those attending had expressed concern for both of the families involved.

Two members of the Church of Scotland Communications Department, sent up promptly from Edinburgh, had been very helpful in assisting with dealings with the media.

Overture amending the Ministers and Deacons in Civil Partnership Act (Act 1 2015)

The Overture was sent down to Presbyteries under the Barrier Act by the General Assembly of 2015. The Barrier Act is a measure which compels the General Assembly to consult the wider Church before innovating in the areas of worship, doctrine, discipline or church government. A majority of Presbyteries have to ratify an Overture before being returned to the General Assembly of the following year.

Presbytery much appreciated The Very Rev Prof Iain R Torrance, Convenor of the Theological Forum and the Legal Questions Committee, explaining the background to Act 1 2015 and the reasons for the amending Overture. The amending legislation would extend the ambit of the Act to include ministers and deacons in same sex marriages.

A new section states, "Nothing in this Act implies that the Church will permit its ministers or deacons to register civil partnerships or solemnise same sex marriage".

Debate centred round whether the amendments were merely an extension of the existing Act following the Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Act 2014 or had wider implications which should have awaited further theological input with a paper due in 2017. Some thought the Church was moving too slowly, others too quickly.

Aberdeen Presbytery voted 46 for the Overture and 29 against.

Launch of new Malawi Fund Raising Project

The Rev Dr Robert L Smith Jr, Convenor of the Malawi Partnership Committee spoke of how successful the previous "Swimathon" fundraising project had been with money being raised to purchase 1500 LifeStraws giving clean water to many people. A new project is seeking to raise money to help churches in rural parts of Blantyre City Presbytery where life in the villages is much more difficult than in the city.

The new project is called a "Bikeathon" with a target of at least 12,000 sponsored miles, the distance calculated to cycle from Aberdeen to Blantyre. The idea is that individuals could be sponsored for a set number of cycled miles, either outside or on stationary cycles set up in churches. Ministers were asked to take the lead.

Ministries and Mission Contributions 2016

Presbytery noted that the Ministries and Mission Contributions Schedule for 2016 had been received and approved the Schedule with amendments showing reductions for Stockethill and St George's Tillydrone congregations.

The total M&M Contribution for Aberdeen Presbytery is £1,657,070. From January 2016 the percentage which Presbytery is allowed to retain to assist congregations who are looking at new forms of mission or have an unexpected expense that was not budgeted for is being raised from 4% to 5%. It was made clear that this is for one year only and could not be guaranteed to continue at that level.

Presbytery Retreat

At the September 2015 Presbytery meeting, the Ministries Committee expressed concern for the future of the Presbytery Retreat and the regard in which it is held. This Retreat is intended to provide an opportunity every two years for active ministers, together with Ministries Development Staff (MDS), to spend time together in conference. Presbytery supported the Committee in its proposal to send a consultation questionnaire to those eligible to attend a Retreat giving an opportunity for an individual response to the issues raised.

Kenya Deployment

Presbytery noted that the Rev Louis Kinsey had completed his deployment as a chaplain to the British Army Training Unit at Nanyuki, Kenya and warmly commended him for the work he had undertaken there over the past six months.