
**General Assembly 2017 podcasts
by the Revd Douglas Aitken**

6. Tuesday 23 May: afternoon

The Assembly returned from lunch to hear the Report of the Church of Scotland Guild. The National Convener, Rosemary Johnston, said that Dr Archibald Charteris founded the Guild 130 years ago and, in that time, it has empowered women to go on to become elders, ministers and even Moderators. She wanted to paint a picture not of what people *think* the Guild is but of what it *actually* is: a movement *within* the Church of Scotland belonging to *all* the Church of Scotland.

Currently, the Guild's Projects Programme is supporting activities across the world, including the battle against FGM in Kenya and the provision of solar ovens in Bolivia. In the present three-year cycle, £467,665 has been raised – with the FGM project breaking the £100,000 mark. The current six projects supported have another year to run and then six more will be chosen for the Guild's support.

But it's not all about money. By taking on these projects, the Guild raises awareness in congregations and communities about sometimes challenging and controversial subjects.

The Convener went on to speak of the resources available explaining the Guild and its activities. The Guild has developed a network of CORE groups dealing with Communications, Outreach, Resources and Events – and in the last couple of years the Guild has worked hard on improving its communications.

Resources are always developing – like the annual theme and discussion guide, the *Big Book of Guild Ideas*, the books *Help, I'm Leading Worship*, and *Planning and Practice: a guide to the constitution*. The National Council has also run a number of events including two Big Sing events in the last year – one at the General Assembly and one in Westburn Church in Greenock, each with over a thousand people participating. The offerings at these events have gone to the work in the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian Synod of Livingstonia in Malawi.

A number of questions were asked of the Convener about what help can be given to Guilds struggling to fulfil traditional leadership roles; about starting a new branch; and closing the gap – where it exists – between a Guild and its congregation. In each case, the Convener offered suggestions, from existing resources to the offer of a visit from a member of the national leadership team. One Commissioner asked Kirk Sessions to consider *reinvigorating* their local Guild; others

praised the Guild's support of the project combatting the practice of FGM. And from the Presbyterian Church of Korea, the Revd Dr Yie Shik Kim – the first woman to be ordained in that denomination – paid tribute to the solidarity between the Presbyterian Church of Korea and the Church of Scotland.

At the close of the debate, the National Convener presented the Moderator's chaplains with Guild mugs (because they'd asked for them), and the moderator with a special anniversary mug – which Dr Browning said would go very nicely with his Château Margaux!

Next came a joint report of the Church of Scotland Guild and the National Youth Assembly on developing intergenerational initiatives within the Church. It was presented by two members of the working group – for the Guild, Mary Reid, and for the Youth Assembly, Naomi Dornan.

They began by making a distinction between multigenerational activities (people of all ages doing things together); and having them *interacting with each other* in meaningful ways (learning from each other and getting to know and respect each other): *that* is intergenerational practice and it takes a lot of planning and preparation. And why is it important? “The future of society requires fruitful interaction between young and old”, said Naomi. And it's easier said than done now that family members often live wider apart than in previous times. Most importantly, intergenerational work helps God's work to flourish and love to be made real. If we're going to do this correctly, age diversity should be evident through every area of the church's work.

The working group looked at other dominations (for example, the Baptist Union of Great Britain) and the Scottish Government, which helps fund intergenerational work. Responses to a survey within the Church of Scotland, especially from priority areas, offered some quality examples of intergenerational work, with diverse examples of worship.

Coming up with imaginative ideas and persuading people that change is helpful can be difficult – so is finding times to plan, given the very different schedules of younger and older people. However, problems were practical and weren't seen to be arising from lack of will. It was noted, however, that where intergenerational work was happening, often this brought together the oldest and youngest in a congregation and didn't always address the needs of the generations in between. The report gives thought to how this approach can be extended throughout the Church of Scotland – and it was hoped that this is an approach that would become embedded within the Kirk's life.

The report didn't give rise to much discussion, though one commissioner did ask what support could be given to the missing "in between" generations, of which she was a member. The initiative of Messy Church was offered as one way of drawing different age groups together.

Turning to the report of the Iona Community Board, the Convener, the Revd Alan Kimmitt, said he realises that people wonder what on earth the Board is. It does not exist to tell the Community what to do. Nor is it simply a Church of Scotland body but brings together representatives from other denominations. It provides the conduit for the Community to report to the Assembly. He then asked the Assembly to hear the retiring leader of the Community, Revd Peter Macdonald.

Mr Macdonald began by supporting the Assembly's word on the terrorist attack in Manchester. He said the children of the world suffered most from terrorism. He showed a picture of a small girl holding dolls which are on fire. He added that the youngest victim in Manchester reported so far was an eight year old girl, about the same age.

He said hospitality and justice are core Christian values and told the story of a Kenyan grandmother who wished to come to Scotland for an Iona event and was refused a visa because the money in her bank account for the journey "might not be genuine", even though there was evidence that she had sold crops and cattle to fund her visit; also she might not return to Kenya even though she had a farm, a family, children and grandchildren. He asked the General Assembly to pursue with strength the issue of the treatment of people like the grandmother and of the two ministers who were refused permission to come to this Assembly. He then commended to the support and prayers of the Assembly his successor as leader, Dr Michael Marten.

Moving to the Deliverance, one Commissioner asked what the situation was with the funding of the refurbishment of the Abbey and the MacLeod Centre on Iona. Mr Macdonald said that the Community had not been wise in planning ahead for such issues but that the fundraising is moving on. The Deliverance passed without amendment and the Assembly rose for the day, with two fringe events still to come including a Guild 'Big Sing' this evening. We will return with the Assembly proper tomorrow for the reports of the Ecumenical Relations Committee, the Safeguarding Committee and the Ministries Council. Join us.