

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

### **8. Wednesday 24 May: afternoon**

The Assembly returned after lunch to consideration of the Ministries Council Report and Supplementary Report. Turning to the deliverance, the first speaker simply welcomed the work of the Council that ensures a high level of education for the ministry. There were students for the ministry and diaconate in the gallery and the Moderator addressed them encouragingly.

One commissioner wished the Council to encourage resilience in ministers. Dr Andrew McLellan asked for the Council's ongoing support for ministers in preaching, which he said had not become any easier for him after 47 years in the ministry. The Convener accepted the motion. The Revd Scott Rennie said that he welcomed the possibility of changing parish structures – but that there hadn't been much change since he was in training; he liked the idea of hubs but congregations have to be encouraged to welcome change. He suggested that congregations might be encouraged to partner with less well-endowed congregations, which might in turn result in discussions between those with different theological approaches.

Another commissioner, from a rural parish, wanted the Council to work with the Council of Assembly to create a strategy to support ministries in remote areas where many congregations suffer serious deprivation. The Revd Neil Dougall, a former Convener of the Ministries Council, said that much of what was being asked for is already available. Another minister of a linked charge of an immense size in a rural area supported the motion. He said simply adding ministerial posts would not serve the purpose. Perhaps a training hub in the Highlands could provide people with a reason to consider service in the area where they live. However, the Convener of the Council resisted the motion and it was defeated.

Another motion wanted the Council to think of responses to the recorded index of social deprivation set as five per cent of the population. The General Trustees declared that they were clear they wished to support the motion. On a section regarding supervision, coaching and spiritual accompaniment, the Revd Tom Gordon rose to commend the Council and encourage ministers to accept supervision. He first experienced this in his work as a hospice chaplain, where it helped him greatly. An elder rose to say that elders also have a responsibility to support the minister: she said we sometimes expect them to have all the gifts of the Lord God and suggested that our question should not be 'What can our ministers do for us?' but 'What can we do for them?'

The Revd Dr Mary Henderson moved a motion asking that the Council reconsider the age limit for starting training for the ministry, in line with extending retirement ages. A youth delegate asked

successfully that the Council find a way of celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the admission of women to the ministry of word and sacrament. Mr Scott Burton wished the fullest possible range of learning options to be available to ministerial candidates, including distance learning.

In the light of so many long-term vacancies, the Revd Howard Hudson asked the Council, with the Legal Questions Committee, to reconsider the rule that prevents former interim moderators from applying for the vacant charge. The Council agreed to look at this. Another commissioner commended 'Path of Renewal', which helps ministers and their congregations reflect on leadership styles in a changing culture. The Very Revd John Christie asked the Assembly to instruct the Council, in consultation with the Legal Questions Committee and other Councils, to review the current Vacancy Procedure processes in order to create a process which is more appropriate to this time while honouring the right of Call which congregations have.

Towards the close of the debate the Revd Alec Shuttleworth moved that the titles Miss, Ms and Mrs should be removed from the *Year Book* on the grounds of creating equality. A woman minister moved that this should be a matter of choice. At the end of the debate Mr Shuttleworth said, "Thank you Mr Moderator", to which the Moderator responded to laughter and applause "Actually it's *Doctor!*" The amendment was defeated. Another motion was moved regarding the indexes against which stipend increases are calculated. This was accepted by the Convener.

Moving to the Supplementary Report, there was an amendment to a section of the Deliverance on the consideration of pay structures for salaried ministers. The amendment simply asked for an explanation of how the figures are calculated. The mover said that the current system had become messy, and she listed a number of anomalies. She explained that ministers of word and sacrament take the same vows and make the same commitments but are in a variety of posts having different rates of remuneration. She simply spoke in the pursuit of fairness. Her amendment was supported by the Assembly.

Another Commissioner asked the Church to consider paying the visa fees for ministers ministering in Scotland who have moved from outside the European Union or the European Economic Area. The mover has a wife and two children and had so far made visa payments amounting to more than £6,000; to extend it for another three years takes the total to £19,000. Another American said that she was in the same situation but that this was where God is calling her. The Convener said that, from experience, there are very considerable challenges involved in this matter, including an annual cost to the Council of between £100,000 and £170,000 as at 2015. However, the Assembly voted for the Council to consider the matter again.

The Assembly closed for the day, to return tomorrow for the reports of the Committee on Chaplains to Her Majesty's Forces, the Mission and Discipleship Council, the National Youth Assembly and the Theological Forum. We will be here to report, join us.