

PRESBYTERY of MELROSE and PEEBLES

The Presbytery will meet at **Innerleithen Church** on Tuesday 6 February 2018 at 7pm for ordinary business.

Victoria Linford, Clerk

Business

1. Constitute
2. Sederunt and Apologies
3. Minutes (pp66-67)
4. Speaker: Very Rev Dr Finlay Macdonald – Westminster Confession (pp2-4)
5. Order of Business
6. Appointment of Independent Examiner (p5)
7. Register of Ministries (p6)
8. Business Committee
9. Committee Meetings (45 minutes)
10. Standing Committee Reports (urgent business only):
 - (a) Governance (Inspection of Congregational Records)
11. Intimations
12. Correspondence
13. Adjournment

TEA/COFFEE WILL BE SERVED DURING A BREAK IN THE MEETING, FOLLOWING THE REPORT OF THE BUSINESS COMMITTEE

Business Committee

1. Presbytery resolves to appoint Commissioners to the General Assembly (19-25 May 2018). Presbytery notes that its allocation of ministers for 2018 is four (plus an equal number of elders). The ministers of the following charges are asked to confirm to the Clerk by 26 February 2018 their willingness to accept commission, and submit the name of an elder to accompany them: Innerleithen Traquair and Walkerburn; Galashiels: Old and St Paul's l/w Galashiels: St John's; Channelkirk and Lauder; Earlston. Presbytery notes that the Very Rev David Arnott and the Very Rev Dr Finlay Macdonald also plan to attend the General Assembly of 2018; names of two possible additional accompanying elders should be submitted to the Clerk by 26 February 2018.
2. Presbytery notes that the national Presbytery Planning Conference scheduled for 18 January 2018 was postponed due to bad weather and is rescheduled for 8 March 2018. The Governance Committee has therefore requested that it may delay reporting on its review of the Presbytery Plan (remitted to it in December 2017); Presbytery agrees that the Governance Committee may bring its report to the May (rather than the March) meeting of Presbytery.
3. Presbytery gives permission for the recording of Melrose Parish Church by the Borders Church Recording Group, subject to approval of such recording by the Kirk Session.
4. Presbytery receives the report of the Presbytery Prayer Co-ordinator (p7) and agrees to invite the National Co-ordinator for 24/7 Prayer for Scotland to address the March meeting of Presbytery, with a view to organising an ecumenical prayer event around Pentecost 2018.
5. In advance of the March meeting, at which the Presbytery pilot structure will be reviewed, members of Presbytery are asked to complete the attached questionnaire (p8) and return it to the Clerk, if possible by 23 February 2018 (by email or hard copy).

Intimations

1. Kirk Sessions are requested to submit all remaining Congregational Statistics forms to the Clerk as soon as possible.

2. The Presbytery website (www.melrosepeeblespresbytery.org.uk) has been updated, including with the addition of the latest Presbytery prayer diary, past minutes and a list of the books required by Zomba Presbytery.
3. Borders Street Pastors – the latest update is enclosed with these papers.

Correspondence

1. Presbytery notes that, due to bad weather, services were not held at Tweedsmuir, or at Etrick and Yarrow, on Sunday 21 January 2018.
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THE VERY REV DR FINLAY MACDONALD: THE WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH

Members of Presbytery may have read the article by the Very Rev Dr Finlay Macdonald in Life and Work recently (“A Fresh Statement of Faith?”, February 2018), arguing that now is the time to review once again the role of the Westminster Confession of Faith. Members of Presbytery are asked to consider whether they would wish an Overture on this matter to be presented to the General Assembly of 2018. A draft Overture is set out below.

Deliverances:

1. Presbytery receives the report and thanks the Very Rev Dr Finlay Macdonald for his presentation.
2. Presbytery agrees that the draft Overture anent the Westminster Confession of Faith be presented to the General Assembly of 2018 in the name of Presbytery.
3. Presbytery agrees to nominate representatives to speak on this matter in the General Assembly of 2018; if anyone would like to do so, please could they contact the Clerk.

DRAFT OVERTURE ANENT THE WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH

Whereas:

1. ‘The Westminster Confession is justly regarded as one of the most impressive of all the Confessions framed by the Reformers or their successors in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries...Yet the status it enjoys has also provoked searching questions about the theological adequacy and continuing relevance of its teaching – questions which began to come to the surface in the eighteenth century, grew acute in the nineteenth and are still

with us today.’ (Professor Alasdair Heron – Introduction to *The Westminster Confession in the Church Today*, Saint Andrew Press 1982);

2. The Confession was drafted in 1646 by an Assembly of English parliamentarians and clergy, with assessors from Scotland, against the background of the English Civil War and moves to unite the Churches of both countries under Presbyterian government;
3. The Confession was adopted by the General Assembly of 1647 as ‘most orthodox and grounded upon the Word of God’ and further approved by the Scottish Parliament in 1649 as ‘the public and avowed Confession of the Church, containing the sum and substance of the faith of the Reformed Church’;
4. Through these measures the Westminster Confession effectively superseded the Scots Confession drawn up by John Knox and others and approved by the Scottish Parliament of 1560;
5. Over succeeding centuries varying formulae of subscription were required of candidates for ordination and holders of certain public offices. These ranged from seeking recognition of the Confession as a statement of the Church’s faith to its acceptance as an expression of personal belief;
6. By the late nineteenth century serious unease was being expressed over aspects of the Confession’s teaching, in particular the doctrines of divine decrees (double predestination), election and limited atonement. This led the United Presbyterian Church in 1879 and the Free Church in 1892 and 1894 to pass Declaratory Acts, qualifying adherence in respect of such doctrines and allowing liberty of opinion on matters ‘not entering into the substance of the faith’. These Declaratory Acts continue as ‘leading documents’ in the Church of Scotland’s constitution in the area of doctrine;
7. The Articles Declaratory of the Church of Scotland in Matters Spiritual, appended to the 1929 Uniting Act, declare the Westminster Confession to be ‘the principal subordinate standard of the Church of Scotland...approved by the General Assembly of 1647 (and) containing the sum and substance of the Faith of the Reformed Church.’ The associated formula of subscription requires ordinands to affirm their belief in ‘the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith contained in the Confession of Faith of this Church’;

3.

8. In the General Assembly of 1968 significant concerns were raised over the Confession’s accessibility and practical usefulness as a ‘subordinate standard’ in articulating the Church’s faith in a language and style relevant to contemporary theological challenges;
9. Over the next four years the issues were debated at kirk session, presbytery and Assembly levels with the General Assembly of 1972 adopting an Overture recommending certain amendments of the Declaratory Articles. These involved introducing references to the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds as ‘declarations of the faith of the Universal Church’ and to the Scots and Westminster Confessions as ‘historic statements of the faith of the Reformed Church.’ Reference to the Westminster Confession as ‘subordinate standard’ was removed. In addition it was proposed that a short statement of faith be included in the Preamble read at services of ordination, with ordinands required to subscribe a revised Formula declaring their belief in ‘the fundamental doctrines of the Christian Faith affirmed in the Preamble’;

10. In terms of the procedure for amending the Declaratory Articles these recommendations were referred to presbyteries in two successive years where they received the required approval of more than two-thirds of presbyteries in both years. Notwithstanding this support further debate ensued in the General Assembly of 1974 leading to the rejection of the amendments in favour of a counter motion to depart from the matter 'until a new Statement of Faith is accepted by the General Assembly';
11. Over subsequent years efforts were made to produce such a Statement, with some seeking a simple, credal formula while others argued for a more substantial and detailed text. In 1978 the General Assembly drew attention to the first Declaratory Article as 'an authoritative guide in any statement of Christian belief' and in 1982 a collection of essays was published under the title *The Westminster Confession in the Church Today*. Over the next two years further amendments of the Declaratory Articles, Preamble, Questions and Formula were considered but failed to find the necessary support. Eventually, in 1992 the General Assembly, following consultation with presbyteries, approved the Statement of Christian Faith which is printed inside the back cover of *Common Order* 1994. The question as to whether this met the conditions of the successful 1974 counter-motion for re-visiting the matter remains open;
12. In 1986, in response to a petition from Dr Kenneth Stewart, an elder from Stirling, the General Assembly passed a Declaratory Act dissociating itself from the intemperate language employed by the Confession when referring to the Pope, the Mass and the Roman Catholic Church, declaring that it no longer affirmed such terms. The petitioner successfully argued that such expressions were 'beyond modification except by their exclusion', though they remain in the text of Confession;
13. In recent years questions have continued around the role of the Westminster Confession as an effective 'Standard' for the Church, both in terms of its accessibility to those required to subscribe it and its practical usefulness as an exposition of the Church's faith for today's members and enquirers;
14. Last year's Reformation 500 commemoration offers a timely opportunity for reaffirming our catholic, reformed, evangelical and ecumenical identity alongside other Churches, perhaps through a broader set of confessional documents;
15. In 1983 the Presbyterian Church USA published a *Book of Confessions* containing twelve statements of faith beginning with the ancient creeds, continuing with a number of Reformed texts (including the Scots and the Westminster Confessions) and concluding with contemporary affirmations of faith. Revised and updated editions have been issued in subsequent years. Arguably, a similar publication for the Church of Scotland, in print and/or on-line, could prove a valuable resource for church members and enquirers;
16. Much valuable theological work was undertaken in the years following the 1968 General Assembly and the various reports and verbatim records of Assembly debates remain readily available as a basis for fresh analysis and study;

It is humbly overtured by the Presbytery of Melrose and Peebles, to the Venerable the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, that the General Assembly instruct the Theological Forum:

- (1) to review the reports and debates on the role of the Westminster Confession of Faith arising from the General Assembly of 1968 and the years following;
- (2) To give fresh consideration to the issues raised therein in light of developments within Reformed and ecumenical theology since 1646 in which the Church of Scotland has been actively involved;
- (3) to advise the General Assembly on the continuing role of a 'Subordinate Standard';
- (4) to look afresh at the wording and terms of reference of the Formula of subscription used in services of ordination;
- (5) to explore the possibility of producing a Book of Confessions, in print and/or on-line as a teaching resource for office-bearers, members and enquirers;
- (6) to report to the General Assembly of 2020.

Or to do otherwise as to your Venerable Court may seem good.

Proposed deliverance:

The General Assembly

1. Receive the Overture;
2. Instruct the Theological Forum
 - (1) to review the reports and debates on the role of the Westminster Confession of Faith in the Church's life arising from the General Assembly of 1968 and the years following;
 - (2) to give fresh consideration to the issues raised therein in light of developments within Reformed and ecumenical theology since 1646 in which the Church of Scotland has been actively involved;
 - (3) to advise the General Assembly on the continuing role of a 'Subordinate Standard';
 - (4) to look afresh at the wording and terms of reference of the Formula of subscription used in services of ordination;
 - (5) to explore the possibility of producing a Book of Confessions, in print and/or on-line as a teaching resource for office-bearers, members and enquirers;
 - (6) to report to the General Assembly of 2020.

Presbytery of Melrose and Peebles

Treasurer's Report – Appointment of Independent Examiner

On taking the post of Treasurer again last year, I discussed the position of Independent Examiner with both Grahame Henderson and Tom Fairbairn. As he had been Treasurer for part of 2016, Grahame felt he would not be able to act as Independent Examiner for that year's accounts; at the time he also said he would be happy to carry out the role in future years.

In the circumstances, Tom Fairbairn kindly agreed to act as Independent Examiner for 2016 – it was noted that he although Alistair Robertson had acted as Examiner in previous years, he often relied on Tom for advice.

Presbytery is very grateful to both Grahame and Tom for the services they have provided over many years, and I hope they will confirm the appointment of Grahame – as originally planned – for the examination of presbytery's accounts for 2017.

Fraser Simm
Treasurer

Deliverances:

1. Presbytery receives the report.
2. Presbytery appoints Mr Grahame Henderson as Independent Examiner for the accounts of Presbytery for 2017.

6.

REGISTER OF MINISTRIES AS AT 1 JANUARY 2018

Attached is the initial Register of Ministries, effective from 1 January 2018.

Under the Registration of Ministries Act 2017, the Register will be reviewed annually (in April/May of each year).

Rev Victoria Linford
Presbytery Clerk

Deliverances:

1. Presbytery receives the report.
2. Presbytery approves the initial Register of Ministries with effect from 1 January 2018.

7.

PRAYER CO-ORDINATOR'S REPORT – FEBRUARY 2018

In the light of the Moderator of the General Assembly's call to focus on prayer, and as the Presbytery Prayer Co-ordinator, with a remit to encourage prayer, I would like to suggest that we hold a prayer event at or around Pentecost, hosted by the Church of Scotland and held in one of our Presbytery's churches, to be open to all denominations.

With this in mind, I met up with the National Co-ordinator for 24/7 Prayer for Scotland, Crystal Cryer. By virtue of her position she has a lot of experience of working with different denominations, including the Church of Scotland. She would be willing to help with an event. She spoke of some very good material called "Thy Kingdom Come", which is based around Pentecost, and was initiated by the Archbishop of Canterbury. It focuses mainly on prayer, but also on worship generally.

I would like to invite Miss Cryer to come to the March meeting of Presbytery to speak briefly about this. I hope Presbytery would be in favour of holding such an event.

*Winnie Munson
Presbytery Prayer Co-ordinator*

8.

MELROSE AND PEEBLES PRESBYTERY

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR REVIEW OF PRESBYTERY PILOT STRUCTURE

In September 2016, Presbytery approved changes to the structure of Presbytery for a two-year pilot scheme in 2016/17 and 2017/18. The mission statement agreed at that time for Presbytery was “To provide support, oversight and fellowship to the congregations within the Presbytery and to enable mission and service in the name of Jesus Christ across its parishes”.

The main practical change under the pilot scheme has been to reduce the number of Presbytery committees from 11 to four, and to adjust the remit of these new umbrella committees. The four committees under the pilot scheme are: Business Committee, Governance Committee, Mission and Service Committee, and Property and Stewardship Committee.

The meeting structure for Presbytery has also changed, to include two Committee Evenings (when the committees meet as part of the Presbytery meeting), as well as more forum evenings (with the focus on a particular topic), congregational showcase meetings in different churches, Away-Days, and more events with the other Borders Presbyteries. Tea/coffee is now included in each meeting.

The reason for the changes was to try to advance the following priorities identified at the June 2016 Away-Day: “a slightly different committee structure with delegated powers allowing for less formal and intimidating meetings”; “less business, more vision and mission”; “fellowship and flexibility”; “pursuing joint working/co-operation with other Presbyteries”; “slightly fewer meetings, developing more relaxed style with coffee, while maintaining dignity and order of court, and ensuring committees function in an accountable manner”.

In order to help with the review of the pilot (at the March meeting of Presbytery), members of Presbytery are asked to complete the following questionnaire and return it to the Clerk, if possible by 23 February 2018:

1. What has worked well? What benefits have you seen?

2. What difficulties have arisen?

3. How do you see the pilot developing?

4. Any other comments?