

7 DECEMBER 2021. On Tuesday the second day of December 2021, the Presbytery met by Zoom at 7 pm for Ordinary Business. The meeting began with a reading, Luke 1: 8-20, given by Pamela Kennedy, one of our candidates for ministry. The Moderator, Rev. Victoria Linford, then screen-shared a sketch of “The Angel Gabriel appearing to Zechariah” by the 19th century Russian artist Alexander Ivanov inspired by the words in the passage from Luke. She drew two points from the passage. Firstly, a warning and challenge to all of us in the Church not to give in to doubts about God’s promises, and secondly, to understand the kindness and tenderness of God, who gives us second and more chances, and to enjoy being his children and thankful that his wonderful grace lifts us up. She then constituted the meeting in prayer.

SEDERUNT AND APOLOGIES: There were present 11 ministers and 23 elders whose names were recorded by the Clerk in the attendance book. The names of corresponding members in attendance were also noted, as were apologies. Two guests also joined the meeting, Prof. Peter Ford of Near East School of Theology, and Eve Hartswood, Chair of World Mission on the Presbytery Mission and Service Committee.

MINUTES: The minutes of the meeting of 2 November 2021 (pp133-134) were submitted and approved as circulated.

TRIBUTE TO MR TOM FAIRBAIRN

Rev. Calum Macdougall gave a very warm and personal tribute to Tom Fairbairn, who died at his home in Peebles on the 28th of October 2021. He was an out and out Peebles man who loved the nature and countryside of Peeblesshire, where he did a great deal of walking. He was also a man of great faith dedicated to the church. He was an elder at Peebles Old for some 55 years, much of it spent as Presbytery elder, first in the Presbytery of Peebles, and then after it became the Presbytery of Melrose and Peebles, he was its Moderator in 2011/12. At Peebles Old he was instrumental in establishing daily worship. He was also a key member of the choir for well over 50 years with a rich baritone voice, and in recent times regularly recorded solo hymns for the online services. He also led services and gave scripture readings with great conviction. By profession a teacher, he inspired the youngsters at Moredun and Royal High Primary Schools in Edinburgh, before becoming Head Teacher at Hawthornden Primary School, Bonnyrigg, where he met his lifelong companion and partner, Helena, who was Deputy there. He cared for her with great devotion, which continued after she suffered a stroke in 2005, following which she lost her power of speech and mobility. Calum ended his tribute by giving thanks for Tom’s devotion to and practice of his faith and in his ability to develop and maintain friendships and relationships with people of all ages. The Moderator thanked Calum for his warm tribute and added that Tom’s knowledge of church matters, sense of fun and occasional mischief will be sorely missed at Peebles Old and in Presbytery.

ADMISSION OF NEW MEMBER - REV. GEORGE SHAND: The admission of Rev. George Shand from Lanark Presbytery was postponed due to his indisposition. His admission will now take place at the February meeting of Presbytery, by which time it is hoped he will have moved into his house in Peebles.

PRESENTATION OF CANDIDATES AND READER

Rev. Margaret Steele said it gave her great pleasure to present two Candidates and one Reader. **Mrs Sarah Cook**, whose home church is Dryburgh District Churches, was selected as a candidate for the full-time ministry this year and began her training at Highland Theological College in their distance learning programme. She reports that she is thoroughly enjoying her course work. She is also in her first placement with the Rev. Malcolm Jefferson at Lyne and Manor linked with St Andrews Leckie and enjoying her time there, too. **Mrs Pamela Kennedy** has now finished her academic training, graduating from Highland Theological College with a BA (Theological Studies) with Distinction, for which congratulations are in order. She is now in her final placement (formerly known as Probationary Placement) with the Rev. Graham Duffin at Loanhead Parish Church. She finds this placement very stimulating, giving her two different experiences from her previous placements and the opportunity to think through how the different experiences in each of her placements will help form her own ministry. **Mrs Fran Selkirk**, well known throughout Presbytery, is the attached Reader for the Dryburgh District Churches. This has been a particularly busy year for Fran as she has helped fill the gap during the absence of Rev. Sheila Moir. She has taken Sunday services, looked after the WOW (Worship on Wednesday) services once a month and the pop-in services for the Old Folks’ Day Centre at Newtown Community Wing. She has had telephone contact with elderly members of the charge and taken a couple of funerals when requested. She has also provided support for the Session Clerks and elders during Sheila's absence, and chairs a committee for Mission and Outreach in the charge. Forward planning of services and continuing Zoom Bible Studies have proved a wonderful way of growing faith and knowledge in the congregation as well as being a time of friendship and laughter. Most of all she has enjoyed her time as Reader watching the folk take on their new roles and responsibilities, and offering help to those struggling in different ways. The Moderator added comments of encouragement, commendation and thanks to the Candidates and Reader and said that Presbytery was here to assist in any way required.

PRESENTATION BY PROF. PETER FORD, NEAR EAST SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY (NEST)

Prof. Peter Ford, Assistant Professor of Islamic Studies at NEST, presented Presbyters with a detailed and sobering account of life in Lebanon, which has got worse since he last spoke to Presbytery. He explained how Lebanon is unique in the Arab Muslim world in that about a third of the population is Christian, which makes for quite an open society. Christians are free to practice their faith and he is able to invite Muslims to his classes and take his students to visit mosques. However, those of all faiths and none are finding life desperately difficult due to the economic crisis in the country, fuelled by competing political factions.

This is further exacerbated by the pandemic. Electricity is often available only two or three hours a day, so most people need access to some kind of generator, for which, however, the diesel fuel is very expensive. NEST relies on donations to keep its generators running for part of the day, and his participation in this Zoom meeting was only possible because the generators had been switched on for it. He kindly agreed to answer questions from Presbyters, which included ones about the content of preaching in the current climate, the tradition and patterns of Christian faith in Lebanon, whether there is much hope for the future, and the very practical question of how we can help out. He responded to this last question by asking for continuing help in funding generators, for political pressure to be put on Lebanese leaders, and for more prayer. Eve Hartswood thanked Peter for taking the time to share his concerns with Presbytery and read out a prayer which is included in the World Mission Report (p9 of the Presbytery Papers) and on p7 of the latest issue of the Prayer Diary.

ORDER OF BUSINESS: The Order of Business was approved as circulated.

BUSINESS COMMITTEE

Prof. Murray Campbell, Convener, presented the Report of the Business Committee, which Presbytery received.

1. Overture on Church Courts Act. Presbytery noted the results of the ballot as follows: For the Overture 27; Against the Overture 2. Presbytery instructed the Clerk to make the required return of the ballot to the Principal Clerk by 31 December 2021. Presbytery noted that one comment was made on a ballot paper: "Will there be an equal number of ministers and elders at the General Assembly if five elders are not appointed to balance the five former Moderators?". This comment will be added to the return.
2. Overture on Same-sex Marriage. Presbytery noted the results of the ballot as follows: For the Overture 19; Against the Overture 11. Presbytery instructed the Clerk to make the required return of the ballot to the Principal Clerk by 31 December 2021. Presbytery noted that one comment was made on a ballot paper: "What protection is there for church officers and organists who do not wish to participate in same-sex marriage services?", which will also be added to the return. One member of Presbytery asked for dissent on this vote to be formally noted. The Moderator added that it was open to any other Presbyter to note dissent on either of the votes, and that this should be done by emailing the Presbytery address by 5 pm on Friday 10th December, and any other dissent, or comments, would also be noted in the minute.
3. Presbytery agreed that, subject to technological capacity, weather limitations and ongoing Covid regulations, the Business Committee should seek to arrange hybrid meetings of Presbytery with effect from February 2022, i.e., an in-person meeting in Innerleithen Church with the option for members of Presbytery to join online.
4. Presbytery thanked the Committee on the Re-opening of Church Buildings for all its work over the last 18 months and discharged the Committee with effect from 31 December 2021.
5. Noting that Commissioners to the General Assembly of 2022 (to be held from 21-26 May 2022) should be appointed by the end of January 2022, but that the format of the General Assembly has not yet been finalised, Presbytery remitted to the Business Committee the task of appointing Commissioners to the General Assembly, as far as possible in accordance with the rota previously drawn up.
6. Presbytery thanked Rev. Pamela Strachan for her work in the Presbytery as an Ordained Local Minister, Locum and Interim Moderator over recent years, and agreed not to appoint her to any ordained local ministry duties within the Presbytery for a period of one year.
7. Presbytery noted that Rev. Margaret Steele has intimated her intention to retire as minister of Ashkirk l/w Ettrick and Yarrow l/w Selkirk at the end of February 2022.
9. Presbytery thanked Rev. Sheila Moir for her work as Interim Moderator of Channelkirk and Lauder since August 2018. Presbytery noted that a new Interim Moderator would be needed.
10. Presbytery noted that the Presbytery Mission Plan Implementation Group (as part of Faith Nurture Forum) has approved the making of an application by Presbytery for an Interim Minister to be appointed to the charge of Channelkirk and Lauder; Presbytery remitted to the Clerk the task of submitting the application for interim ministry along with the required information, in conjunction with the congregation, as soon as possible.
11. Presbytery noted that the Presbytery Mission Plan Implementation Group (as part of Faith Nurture Forum) has refused to grant an extension to the permission to call a minister previously granted to Galashiels Church of Scotland: the decision was based on the fact that the future of the buildings has not yet been decided. However, it has recently emerged that a Sole Nominee may preach before the end of this year, in which case the extension may not be required. It is hoped that allowance would be made for any delay caused by bad weather.

VACANCY PROCEDURE COMMITTEE

Rev. Margaret Steele, Convener, presented the Report of the Vacancy Procedure Committee, which Presbytery received.

Deliverances

1. Presbytery noted the VPC's decision to sustain the call to Rev. Aftab Gohar of Abbotsgrange Parish Church, Grangemouth.
2. Presbytery noted the Service of Induction will be held on Tuesday 28th December at 2 pm in Peebles Old Parish Church with the Reverend Andrew Anderson being invited to preach. Presbytery will meet at 1.45 pm.
3. Presbytery noted the appointment of the Rev. Malcolm Jefferson as Interim Moderator of Galashiels Church of Scotland from 30th November 2021 for as long as the Rev. Dr David Donaldson is on sick leave.

COMMITTEE ON RE-OPENING OF CHURCH BUILDINGS

Keith Simpson, Convener, reported that the only Church not yet to have applied to open is Maxton and it is unlikely to reopen this year. The Moderator thanked Keith and the two other members of the Committee, Rev. Calum Macdougall and Mrs Fan Heafield, and added that any further work required relating to Covid buildings issues would fall into the remit of the Property and Stewardship Committee.

STANDING COMMITTEE REPORTS

Governance

Mr David Brackenridge, Convener, referenced his reports arising out of General Assembly remits of 2021: on Presbyterian Governance and Safeguarding Compliance Audit (pp4-5 and p6 respectively of the Presbytery Papers). In the first report he has focussed on questions relevant to the regional Church to give a flavour of the report, and suggested that the issues arising could in the main be dealt with by the Presbytery Reform Steering Group. Regarding the second report, he was pleased to report that 19 out of 22 congregations had now returned safeguarding forms SG7 (Safeguarding Congregational Register) and SG11 (Safeguarding Audit Checklist). He thanked those congregations who had submitted forms or were in the process of doing so. He stated the importance of taking the relevant action when a safeguarding incident occurs. The required actions are agreed between the Safeguarding Department at 121 and the congregation. Presbytery is not involved, and this has been deliberately included in the protocol. It is important, however, that all parties involved in any incident have the appropriate pastoral support. Safeguarding is an important aspect of church life, so it is vital that safeguarding information is kept up to date.

Mission and Service

Dr Fiona Burnett, Convener, introduced two reports from her committee. The first (p7 of the Presbytery Papers) provided an outline of the proposed Presbytery Conference in September/October 2022. She explained with great enthusiasm that the Conference will provide a space to listen to what God is calling us to do and then to arm ourselves and others with the tools that he's giving us to grow the churches in our parishes. As this will be a special event it is hoped to make use of the £5,000 that Presbytery set aside in 2019 for mission and service work by holding the event in a hotel. For the event to be a success it will require the input of us all! Presbytery received the Report and its deliverances. The second report, on World Mission (pp8-9 of the Presbytery Papers), was spoken to by Eve Hartswood, who was thanked by Dr Burnett for agreeing to take over as World Mission Chair. Eve highlighted the service of celebration of partnership with Malawi which took place courtesy of Innerleithen Church on 21st November 2021, and reminded Presbyters that the service is still available on [YouTube](#). She also spoke of the great success of the nurse-midwife sponsorship programme referred to in the Report.

Property and Stewardship

Mrs Isobel Hunter, Convener, in presenting her Report (p10 of the Presbytery Papers), stated that although Presbytery has already approved the proposed contributions to Ministry and Mission, the Stewardship and Finance Department of the Church of Scotland have asked that we reconfirm this. Mr Fraser Simm commented on the challenges to Treasurers presented by the proposed contributions, which might require them to examine whether funds in other accounts, such as Fabric, can be used for Ministry and Mission. The Convener agreed to raise this point with the Church of Scotland. She reminded Presbyters that the Stewardship and Finance Department does have considerable resources to help with finance in the current environment. Presbytery approved the report and its deliverances.

TREASURER AND PROPERTY CONVENER

Mr Fraser Simm explained the two key items in the joint Report from himself and Keith Simpson, Property Convener (p11 of the Presbytery Papers). Following the death of Tom Fairbairn, the Presbytery's Independent Examiner of Presbytery's accounts, he asked if anyone would consider offering their services or would know of anyone who could do this. If so, potential names should be submitted to the Business Committee for consideration and approval. He also reported that on the matter of congregational property surveys the Business Committee was recommending that Presbytery approve the figure of £5,000 in the 2022 budget. Presbytery agreed with the proposal to delegate the appointment of an Independent Examiner to the Business Committee and approved the expenditure of £5,000 in the 2022 budget for property surveys as outlined in paragraph (e) of the Report.

PRESBYTERY MISSION PLAN COMMITTEE

Mr Graeme Donald, Convener, highlighted some of the key points from his Report (p12 of the Presbytery Papers), following which there was a lengthy discussion focussing on the positives of consultation with Churches in Presbytery and neighbouring Presbyteries on planning buildings for mission, instead of thinking about closures and rationalisation. The General Trustees of the Church of Scotland would be involved in this process, and to aid planning an Asset Management Building Audit (AMBA) form would be circulated shortly to all Session Clerks. A Presbytery Planning Toolkit for Land and Buildings will be part of the resource to help development, and an online training resource will be made available.

The Convener urged anyone with interest or expertise in mission planning matters not already on the Committee to contact him, and brought an additional two deliverance to the Report in addition to the two already printed on p7 of the Presbytery Papers:

1. Presbytery receives the report.
2. Presbytery urges all Kirk Sessions and congregations to respond to the Committee's request for their views on the Mission Plan by March 2022.
3. Presbytery seeks an outline Mission Plan to be presented to the February 2022 meeting of Presbytery.
4. Presbytery urges Kirk Sessions to become familiar with the content of the Asset Management Building Audit.

Presbytery approved the deliverance as a whole, and the Moderator thanked the Committee for its work.

PRESBYTERY REFORM STEERING GROUP

Prof. Murray Campbell, Convener, reported on very interesting discussions from both Clyde and Fife Presbyteries. The next meeting of the Steering Group is going to be next year, with the Conveners of the Mission Planning Groups from the different Presbyteries present. Fan Heafield added that it is hoped to formulate the Overture at that next meeting so that it can come to Presbytery either in February, or at the very latest March, so that it can then go to the General Assembly if it is passed at Presbytery.

INTIMATIONS

1. Presbytery noted that the Presbytery website (melrosepeeblespresbytery.org.uk) has now been restored and thanked Mr Peter Sandison for his work on this.
2. The Assistant Clerk agreed to make the Prayer Diary and updated Yearbook available as soon as possible.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the Presbytery adjourned to meet at 1.45 pm on Tuesday 28 December 2021 prior to the Service of Induction at 2 pm in Peebles Old Church for Rev. Aftab Gohar, the new Minister of Eddleston l/w Peebles: Old l/w Stobo and Drumelzier.

The next meeting for Ordinary Business is planned for Tuesday 1st February 2022, of which public intimation was made. It is hoped that this meeting will be a “hybrid” one, as intimated in item 3 of the Business Committee Report on p137 above. The *sederunt* was closed with the saying of the Grace.

Moderator

Assistant Clerk

PRESBYTERY of MELROSE and PEEBLES

28 December 2021

PEEBLES 28 DECEMBER 2021. At Peebles: Old on Tuesday the twenty-eighth day of December 2021, the Presbytery met *in hunc effectum* at 1.45 pm and was constituted in prayer by the Moderator, Rev. V Linford.

SEDERUNT AND APOLOGIES: There were present 5 ministers and 6 elders whose names are recorded in the attendance book. 2 Ministers from other Presbyteries were in attendance. Apologies are also recorded in the book.

SERVICE OF INDUCTION: Presbytery was reminded that, at its meeting on 7 December 2021, Presbytery had resolved to meet on Tuesday 28 December 2021 for the induction of Rev. Aftab Gohar to the vacant charge of Eddleston l/w Peebles: Old l/w Stobo and Drumelzier.

The Moderator handed the Call to Mr Gohar. The Interim Moderator of the charge confirmed that the prescribed edicts had been duly circulated. No one having appeared to object to the life or doctrine of Mr Gohar, Presbytery proceeded to the Church where the Moderator conducted worship and Rev. Andrew Anderson preached an appropriate sermon. A brief narrative of the proceedings in the vacancy was then read by the Assistant Clerk. The Moderator put to Mr Gohar the prescribed questions, which he satisfactorily answered, and he signed the Formula. The Moderator by prayer inducted Mr Gohar to the pastoral charge of Eddleston l/w Peebles: Old l/w Stobo and Drumelzier and gave him the right hand of fellowship on behalf of Presbytery and the Kirk Sessions within the charge. Suitable charges were then addressed to Mr Gohar and the congregations. Presbytery, continuing its meeting, resolved to add the name of Mr Gohar to the Roll of Presbytery and the Assistant Clerk was instructed to intimate his induction to the Faith Nurture Forum.

Presbytery expressed its thanks to all who took part in the service, and the *sederunt* was closed with prayer.

Moderator

Assistant Clerk