

report by the House of Bishops' Working Group on the Clergy Discipline Measure 2003 (CDM). The working group propose the replacement of the CDM with a 'Clergy Conduct Measure'. An implementation group has been established to bring legislative proposals to Synod.

OTHER BUSINESS

The April group of sessions agreed a motion concerning international religious freedom. The November group of sessions agreed motions noting the housing crisis; commending the report of the Archbishops' Commission on Housing, Church and Community; establishing a new body, 'Life in Covenant', to continue the work of the Anglican–Methodist Covenant; taking note of the report from the Implementation and Dialogue Group; and welcoming the consultation paper on the Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011.

The following were approved: Churches Conservation Trust Order 2021; Legal Officers (Annual Fees) Order 2021; Ecclesiastical Judges, Legal Officers And Others (Fees) Order 2021; the Trust Deed and Rules of the Church of England Funded Pension Scheme; Church Representation Rules (Amendment) Resolution 2021; Ecclesiastical Offices (Terms Of Service) (Amendment) Regulations 2021; and Vacancy in See Committees (Amendment) Regulations 2021.

DISSOLUTION

In July, the Convocations of Canterbury and York were dissolved and in consequence the General Synod was also dissolved.

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General Assembly of the Church of Scotland

May 2021

THE REVEREND JASON LINGIAH

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INTRODUCTION

The General Assembly of the Church met in a 'blended' form, based at the Assembly Hall, from 22 May to 27 May. The Moderator on this occasion was

an elder, rather than a minister, but with the distinction of being Lord Wallace of Tankerness PC QC FRSE, a Liberal Democrat life peer since 2007, who served as the Deputy First Minister of Scotland from 1999 to 2005. He was formerly Leader of the Scottish Liberal Democrats from 1992 to 2005 and of the Liberal Democrats in the House of Lords from 2013 to 2016. He also served as a Member of Parliament for Orkney and Shetland from 1983 to 2001 and a Member of the Scottish Parliament for Orkney from 1999 to 2007. He was Advocate General for Scotland in the Westminster Government from 2010 to 2015.

REFORM

The Assembly passed a new Presbytery Mission Plan Act (Act VIII, 2021) which will see the number of ministry posts in the Church cut to 600, plus 60 vacancies, by 2025—a number, the Assembly was told, that was both financially affordable and also reflected projections for the near future, with over 35 per cent of ministers reaching retirement age within five years.

Until new presbytery plans have been approved, churches will only be given permission to call a minister with the approval of both the presbytery and the Faith Nurture Forum, and where both parties deem this to be a strategic priority. Churches already given permission to call will have until 31 December 2021 for a nominee to preach. All new calls during this period will be on the basis of reviewable rather than unrestricted tenure.

Presbytery reform continued, with the General Assembly agreeing to three mergers: combining Edinburgh with West Lothian, Hamilton with Lanark, and six presbyteries in south-west Scotland. The Assembly rejected an overture from the Presbytery of Lewis which would have put a year's pause on the process of presbytery reform.

Disquiet was expressed over the proposal to delay a decision on the future of the Church's administrative offices in Edinburgh for a further two years, although the Convener of the Assembly Trustees, the Very Rev'd Dr John Chalmers, committed that no more than £100,000 would be spent on maintaining the buildings before the end of 2022.

FINANCE

The Assembly Trustees advised that progress had been made on finance, including reducing the costs of central administration by 30 per cent, but that it would be for nothing unless the work of reforming presbyteries and 'radical reshaping of local church' was completed.

The Assembly passed a budget with a deficit of £11 million and approved a new scheme to replace the system of Mission and Ministries allocations. It also agreed to the establishment of a new Pioneer Mission Fund to support local church growth, with a particular emphasis on church planting and the establishment of new worshipping communities under 2021, Regulation 2: Local Mission Church Regulations.

ST ANDREW DECLARATION

During the report of the Ecumenical Relations Committee, the Assembly agreed the St Andrew Declaration, in which the Church of Scotland and the Scottish Episcopal Church recognise each other as sharing the same faith and being ‘true Churches of the Gospel’. The two Churches also acknowledge each other’s ordained ministries and commit to respond together to ‘our common calling to proclaim the reign of God to all the people of Scotland by strengthening our partnership in ministry and mission’, welcoming each other’s members to worship and committing to work together ‘in practical and prophetic ways’.

The Church’s participation in the Scottish Christian Forum, the national ecumenical body which is to replace Action of Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS), was also approved.

COMMITTEE ON LEGAL QUESTIONS

Amendments were made to the Discipline Act (Act I, 2019) and on regulations for virtual meetings and vacancy procedure during COVID-19.

There is to be a second edition (possibly in electronic format) of the 1997 textbook on church law, *The Constitution and Laws of the Church of Scotland*, the first edition of which was by James L Weatherhead.

SPECIAL COMMISSION ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PRESBYTERIAN FORM OF CHURCH GOVERNMENT

The Assembly was given an outline and remit and a narrative background to the work of the Special Commission. It will report to the General Assembly of 2022 and focuses on the ‘terms of reference’ of the Church as given in the Articles Declaratory of the Constitution of the Church set out in the Schedule to the Church of Scotland Act 1921—in particular, in relation to Article 2, as follows:

The principal subordinate standard of the Church of Scotland is the Westminster Confession of Faith approved by the General Assembly of 1647, containing the sum and substance of the Faith of the Reformed

Church. Its government is Presbyterian, and is exercised through Kirk Sessions; Presbyteries, [Provincial Synods deleted by Act V, 1992], and General Assemblies. Its system and principles of worship, orders, and discipline are in accordance with 'The Directory for the Public Worship of God', 'The Form of Presbyterian Church Government', and 'The Form of Process', as these have been or may hereafter be interpreted or modified by Acts of the General Assembly or by consuetude.

SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

The solemnisation of same-sex marriages by Church of Scotland ministers and deacons came a step closer after the General Assembly voted to send draft legislation brought by the Legal Questions Committee to presbyteries for consideration. The legislation, brought in response to an instruction of a previous General Assembly, will require ministers and deacons to apply for approval to preside over same-sex weddings, without compelling anyone who does not wish to do so. Proposing that it be approved, the Rev'd John Purves said it was 'not a threat to anyone's strongly held beliefs' and showed the church's 'willingness to allow our theology to grow and evolve, and to recognise and respect our differences'.

Arguing for a counter-motion that would have delayed the legislation while it was considered by the Theological Forum, Eric Smith, an elder from Falkirk Presbytery, said that the legislation represented a 'de facto change in the church's position on the definition of marriage' and that it therefore needed further thought and consideration. However, the convener of the Theological Forum, the Rev'd Dr Donald MacEwan, pointed out that the forum had produced a report on the theology of same-sex relationships in 2017. In response to concerns about the possibility of ministers facing legal action for refusing to conduct same-sex weddings, the Procurator, Laura Dunlop QC, said that the legislation had been carefully drawn up to prevent that.

The proposal defeated the counter-motion by 320 votes to 211. The legislation will now be considered by presbyteries later in the year under terms of the Barrier Act 1697 and, if a majority agrees, will return to next year's General Assembly for final approval.

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