

Assembly Business Committee Speech—General Assembly 2023

Rev Donald McCorkindale

Moderator, The Assembly Business Committee congratulates you on your appointment and looks forward to working with you and supporting you through the year.

To our immediate past Moderator: Iain, we record in our report our grateful thanks for leading us through the past 12 months.

The Assembly of 2019 formed the Assembly Business Committee. At that time, I was vice-convenor of its predecessor, the Assembly Arrangements Committee, and by the end of that year would be Acting Convener of ABC. These four years have seen some of the change and reform called for in 2019. COVID-19 necessitated further change, most notably the online and hybrid nature of our business, which following the joint review with Legal Questions Committee is now part of our new normal.

Assembly has been reforming. Not as much as some might wish, and too much for others. Compared to 2019, we are fewer in number, shorter in duration, have moved almost entirely to digital documentation, and have embraced hybrid gathering. Increased opportunities for prayer during Assembly was mentioned last year and was one of the priorities emerging from feedback. In all our business, always in the context of prayer and worship led by the Moderator, we seek to discern and follow the plans and purposes of God – In that way – rather than my view being set against yours we journey together where God is leading. There will be online and in-person opportunities for all Assembly participants to gather each day for prayer, on Zoom (1.15 to 1.45), and in the New College Chapel.

Introducing business coming to Assembly as early as possible, so giving time for all to engage was another aspect of reform which on feedback forms many agreed or strongly agreed. The Assembly Trustees hosted a webinar the week before last. Some have expressed concerns that other such gatherings would give Committees two bites at the cherry, while some reckon they would be another opportunity for ideas to be dismissed. For yet others, including ABC, it seemed a good idea, but time ran out in the lead up to another GA. And there's the all-pervading culture that says, 'but we don't do it like that here.' Change is happening and will continue as long as the drivers for change outweigh the pressures to remain the same.

One small, subtle change has been made already this Assembly. Already agreed is a change in standing orders, meaning that the Assembly Business Committee will present the order

of business for the entire Assembly. In the past only the first two days business was presented – and then on the Monday the Procedure Committee (and its predecessors) would present the business for the remainder of the week – but we had it already and could readily have presented it all on the opening day. A Standing Order which no doubt made sense in pre-postal service, pre-internet days of former centuries has been continued into current practice. We tend to do that a lot – preserving the rules from the past – that don't serve the present.

We present the order of business as outlined in the Order of Proceedings, noting that the Overture regarding the formation of Clèir Eilean Ì: Highland and Hebrides Presbytery will be taken as a new section 14 to ABC business, and the Overture from Glasgow Presbytery will be taken within the Assembly Trustees business on Monday.

The Committee invites nominations of Commissioners to serve on the Selection Committee by midday Monday. The Selection Committee is the body which will nominate membership of any committee or Special Commission appointed by this Assembly. If required to meet, it will do so on Tuesday lunchtime (and other times if needed) and will complete its task by reporting its findings on Thursday. We are looking for 20 people comprising a good representation of the church, who are familiar with who's who around the Church. Nomination forms have been emailed to all commissioners, and are also available on request to me, or from the Assembly Office.

In the Committee report we lay out the Expenses rates and appreciate that many have found it difficult to secure accommodation within the allowance. Recognising that many are in accommodation beyond the city centre, travel within Edinburgh up to £4/day can also be claimed.

This Assembly Hall, and the Moderator's Residence in Rothesay Terrace are in the care of Assembly Business Committee whose property subgroup continues to oversee their ongoing maintenance and keeps under review their long-term future. Following an in-depth review of the Moderator's residence, the Committee has concluded that the flat is no longer fit for purpose, and we therefore seek approval to sell it, and progress plans to repurpose existing church property for the Moderator's use.

In 2019 the restructuring of Presbyteries began, and Assembly Business Committee was given oversight of the process. In view of the relative autonomy of Presbyteries, central direction was often resisted, but the new bodies have been able to put in place arrangements that suit their particular circumstances. In 2022 Assembly Business Committee was asked to initiate a process to ensure consistency of terms and conditions, pay and grading, codes of practice and capability for Presbytery Staff. Much work has already been done, and much more remains to be done in consultation with Presbyteries

and others. The committee asks for time to complete the remit and will report more fully next year.

Extensive work has also been carried out regarding the role of the Moderator, and we bring updated regulations on the Nominations process, and on the Office of Moderator. We believe that under the guidance of the Holy Spirit the nominations process has always reached the right conclusion, but that the committee appointed to that task could be put together in a more meaningful and representative way. Appendices D & E carry the detail.

Moderator, this is my final Assembly as Business Convener. These have been interesting times for the church, and I want to place on record my thanks to all staff in the Office of General Assembly, appointed members, co-opted members of ABC and our many service providers.