

Church of Scotland Trust Speech—General Assembly 2023

Mr Leon Marshall, Chair

Moderator,

I have pleasure in presenting my first report as Chairman of the Church of Scotland Trust.

Our Report, and our Deliverance, are among the shortest in the Volume of Reports, and this will be similarly reflected in the length of the Chairman's speech! That is not to say we have not been busy over the last twelve months, for over that period we have continued to fulfil the remit given to us by the Assembly, although our work is perhaps less well-known than that of the other statutory bodies.

As the opening paragraph of our Report states: 'The function of the Church of Scotland Trust is to hold properties outwith Scotland and to act as a trustee in a number of third-party trusts'.

The Trust is currently trustee of forty-nine third-party trusts which benefit different areas of the Church's work, such as support for university faculties of divinity, educational grants to divinity students, study grants to ministers and financial support for specific congregations or presbyteries or the work of the unincorporated entities. The total value of these funds at 31 December 2022 was just under £7m. Some of the individual funds are very small – four of them being under £10,000 – some are much larger, the largest being £1.5m.

The Trust provides a very efficient and cost-effective way of managing these funds. By definition, every trust must have trustees and where these are professional trustees – such as solicitors or accountants (and I speak as a Chartered Accountant) – the administration costs can very often use up a significant part of the annual income. The annual charge levied by the Church of Scotland Trust to cover the work of the General Treasurer's and Church Law departments is only 0.125% of the capital value of each trust. Thus, for a trust with capital of £100,000, the annual charge is only £125. It is therefore worth mentioning that for anyone considering creating a legacy to benefit some aspect of the Church's work, the Church of Scotland Trust would be a very cost-effective trustee.

With regard to the Trust's work outwith Scotland, this falls under three headings.

First, Pakistan. There was a time when the Church of Scotland had properties all over the world, and there was scarcely any country that did not have a St Andrew's Scots Kirk in it. However, since the 1950s it has been the policy of the Church of Scotland to transfer its

former foreign mission properties to the indigenous church in the country in question and that has happened everywhere, except in Pakistan. In that country, Church of Scotland interests are located in Sialkot District which is in the north-east of Punjab Province, comprising land, church buildings, residences, and other property. For more than fifty years, the Trust has been trying to divest itself of these properties to the Church of Pakistan, without success.

My predecessor as Chairman, and his predecessor, have year on year expressed a hope that matters were moving towards a resolution, particularly since in 2019 a new Succession Trust was agreed under which the Church of Scotland would transfer the properties to local trustees for the benefit of the Christian communities in the Diocese of Sialkot. Unfortunately, four years on, the relevant deed has still not been registered in Pakistan. We have now sought to bring matters to a head and at the end of March contacted individually the nine Pakistani trustees advising that if the new Succession Trust was not registered soon, we would seek to have the deed returned to the Church of Scotland and would commence the process of transferring the properties instead to local or national government in Pakistan.

Next, with regard to Israel, the Church of Scotland Trust acts as trustee on behalf of the Faith Impact Forum, holding the title deeds of our various properties there, and also holding the shares in our two commercial ventures, St Andrew's Galilee Ltd and St Andrew's Scottish Centre Limited. While policy and operational matters are the responsibility of the Faith Impact Forum, the Church of Scotland Trust is consulted by the Forum on all major financial, land and property developments. Rental payments, loan interest payments, and loan repayments are all made to the trust by the hotel and guesthouse and then passed on in their entirety to the Faith Impact Forum.

And then, with regard to the International Presbytery, the Church of Scotland Trust has a broadly similar role to that of the General Trustees for congregations within Scotland. Once again, policy decisions are the responsibility of the International Presbytery, but the Trust has to approve any extensive alterations to properties, any property purchase, and the lease of any property in excess of one year. As the International Presbytery moves forward with the implementation of its own mission plan, the Trust is involved in the disposal of any buildings deemed surplus to requirements.

Finally, in terms of our constitution, the number of Trustees in the Trust must not exceed twenty. At present, there are ten serving Trustees, representing a wide range of professional qualifications and experience. The Trustees retiring at this time are the Very Rev Dr Lorna Hood and the Rev Dr George Whyte. Both are eligible for reappointment, are willing to be reappointed, and we seek the Assembly's approval of this.

I would like to thank all of the members of the Trust for their commitment and contribution to the work of the Trust over the past year. We are ably supported by the General Treasurer and members of her department, and by the Law Department. In particular I would thank Madelaine Sproule in her tripartite role as our secretary, clerk, and solicitor for her support in ensuring the smooth and efficient functioning of our business.

I table a copy of the audited Trust accounts for the year ended 31 December 2022, copies of which are available for inspection by request to our clerk, Madelaine Sproule.

Moderator, I present our report to the Assembly and, as I am not a Commissioner, I would ask the Principal Clerk to move the Deliverance.