

Saint Andrew Declaration service, held at St Mary's Cathedral in Edinburgh on 30 November 2021

Reflection from Lord Wallace, Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland

“Sometime after I was nominated as Moderator Designate of the General Assembly, I received a message from Sandy Horsburgh asking me if I could keep my diary free for the 30th of November, in the hope that both the General Assembly and the General Synod of the Scottish Episcopal Church would approve the Saint Andrew Declaration for signature on that day.

“They did, and I'm delighted that this momentous occasion has now arrived, and many thanks to our Common Calling working group for all the endeavours they made to bring us to this moment. The very fact that this day has been chosen underlines our common heritage.

“Together we celebrate Andrew, who heard Jesus's call and immediately left his nets to follow him. And our common heritage is something to be cherished not only by those of us in these two denominations, but also by all who follow Jesus in other denominations throughout Scotland.

“It encourages us to give thanksgiving for the mission to, and practice of, the faith in our land by Ninian, Columba, Kentigern. And our churches continue to find inspiration in contemplating the life of Queen Margaret and her works of charity motivated by her faith in Jesus.

“But the Declaration doesn't sweep under the carpet the tragic and often violent history of the relations between the Presbyterian and Episcopalian traditions in Scotland. Rather it narrates our Common Calling working group, acknowledged our shared history and have named past conflicts, divisions and hurts. And in so doing, we have

learned from one another and have asked for forgiveness of each other, where we have caused pain by our words and actions.

“And surely it is by acknowledging these past transgressions and seeking forgiveness that today we move forward. That today the Church of Scotland and the Scottish Episcopal Church can and do make the welcome joint declaration to commit ourselves 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.

“Such has been the level of agreement, joint working, understanding over many years, including the mutual welcome accorded to communicants of both denominations when the Eucharist has been shared, that some might try to downplay the significance of today and say, well, is it really a big deal? Well, emphatically: yes, it is. It remains the case that in spite of reservoirs of goodwill, and many good examples of common action and purpose, our churches have never before entered into any formal joint declaration, recognising that we share the same faith, and accordingly are true churches of the gospel. And that we solemnly do today.

“Today is not only a culmination of the work put in to achieve the Declaration, but it must also be a starting point, to give impetus to identifying more ways in which we can express our unity. At the core is the recognition that together we share the calling of the Church to serve the people of Scotland in mission and ministry. And we're all too familiar with the challenges facing our respective churches, and ensuring that that calling is a reality in all parts of Scotland.

“At the conference held earlier today we heard inspiring and encouraging examples of the imaginative ways in both rural Scotland and in urban Scotland, as to how people have been coming together to work together and sharing ministries in ways which enrich congregational life. The General Assembly in May also instructed the

faith nurture forum when developing principles for presbytery mission planning, to include a principle of ecumenical working. And our hope and prayer must be that the signing of this Declaration will provide fresh enthusiasm for discovering new ways of working together, and a stimulus for presbyteries and dioceses, to look outward, to identify working examples of good practice.

“I think it's also the case that we are familiar with the challenges facing our land of Scotland, and indeed the wider world. And in the Declaration, we are called to work together in practical and prophetic ways on the social, political and ethical issues arising from our shared participation in public life. I somewhat think that shared participation in public life took on a new dimension when Bishop Mark and I stood in the pouring rain in Glasgow at the Climate Justice march. But our cooperation, that along with leaders in other denominations and other faith leaders, I hope sent out a powerful message of unity in the face of a very compelling international issue.

“And of course, there are so many others, of which it is important that we work together in from our shared participation in the public life of this land. It's also important to note that this Declaration does not seek to fudge, nor to deny that differences between us exist. There is still work to do. But I'm looking forward to a time when a fuller unity may be realised; a framework is established, where discussions to address outstanding issues can be undertaken in a spirit of partnership, and friendship.

“And in all this, all the work that has been done and the fruits of that work, it must also be our hope and prayer, that we can provide a template for similar discussions to take place with other churches. As we heard the words of St Paul in his letters to the church in Ephesus, May we take to heart today that message in Scotland. I therefore beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one

another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”