

Saint Andrew Declaration: Address to Synod by the Rev Canon John McLuckie

“Just a few metres down the road from where I’m sitting, the church of Old St Paul’s stands on the site where Bishop Alexander Rose famously led members of his Cathedral congregation of St Giles in 1689 or ‘90 to set up a new church following the establishment of Presbyterianism by King William. It seems that he did not envisage that this separation from the Presbyterian party of the Church of Scotland would be a permanent arrangement and had expected the restoration of a Stuart monarch before too long. If he had the gift of seeing into the future, would he be surprised at the continued separate identities of those two parts of the Church of Scotland 332 years later? Would he even have recognised the sumptuous choral liturgy, the candles, the robes and the resounding organ music (I’m referring of course to what goes on in his former charge of St Giles, not the simple Gospel service that takes place in his later charge of Old St Paul’s of a Sunday morning!)? Indeed, would he recognise the nation of Scotland as it is now, where the deadly religious wars of the century of his birth have given way to one the least religiously observant states in Europe?

“The religious landscape of our nation still bears the scars of that bloody 17th century but the battles that caused them are far in the past. In the intervening centuries, both Episcopalian and Presbyterian traditions in our land have benefitted from the Liturgical Movement, from Evangelical revivals, from the insights of biblical scholarship, from the growing convergence in the practice of Christian spirituality, from the richness of inter-faith encounter and, above all, from a growing sense that the church of today is united in its mission to participate in God’s work of renewing creation and healing humanity in its brokenness.

“It is this call from God to his church that is front and centre in the commitments of the Saint Andrew Declaration that we present to you today. Our two sister churches, forged in the same turbulent history, are invited to work together, united in a common purpose and delighting in an enriching diversity. That work is not an organisational merger, but an organic and creative cooperation in the work of God’s mission of love and reconciliation to the world.

“The Common Calling Working Group, which began its work in the Autumn of 2016 and whose progress was warmly endorsed by this Synod two years ago, has kept this mission focus throughout its deliberations. With that calling in mind, we have visited rural and urban contexts across the land as well as hopping over the border to explore the work of the mission communities of the churches in Cumbria. The needs of each community are different, so the response of the churches to those needs must also be appropriate to the context. So we are not proposing any kind of one-size-fits-all approach, but giving permission and encouragement to each local partnership of churches to share their human, spiritual and physical resources in the work of mission in the most appropriate way. For some, that might mean the sharing of a building, for others sharing pastoral care or regular worshipping together. For many, it may be shared projects like food banks, joint eco-congregation ventures, meditation groups, Messy Church, befriending schemes, bible studies, courses for those new to faith. Of course, this kind of activity is already common across the land. What we want to do is to encourage more of it, and, as we are two of the churches that seek to offer ministry to every community in Scotland, we recognise that we have a particular and distinctive commitment to work together to that end.

“As well as energising and stimulating such work in local communities, the Saint Andrew Declaration does something else that is of deep and historic importance: it is a formal mutual recognition of our churches as belonging to the One, Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church of Jesus Christ. To many, this may feel like a statement of the obvious, and if that is so, it is a sign of the closeness we now enjoy. But it is important to pause and note the significance of this step between two churches who share so much history, not all of it glorious. This is a profound and joyful recognition, a moment of healing and hope.

“The Saint Andrew Declaration recognises that, *because* of our distinctive identities, we have much to offer one another, much to receive. It recognises that we do not exist for ourselves but for the mission of God in our nation. It recognises that, although there are unresolved matters between us, not least the nature of the church’s ordained ministry, these need not hold us back from doing all we can now to share in our life of faith. This is the start of a journey and not its end. It is a journey that is concerned with the mission of God to God’s world. It is a journey that our two churches – sister churches in Christ – are being invited to undertake **together** in faith, in unity and in the strength of the Holy Spirit.”

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