

**A
SAD
DEPARTURE**

Why we could not stay in
the Church of Scotland

DAVID J. RANDALL

FOREWORD BY SINCLAIR B. FERGUSON

Full Appendices
to
A SAD DEPARTURE
by David J Randall

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A *Sad Departure* gives an account of recent decisions of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland which have led many ministers, elders, and members to depart from the denomination, while others continue to wrestle with the issue of what faithfulness to God's Word demands. The book gives an account of Assembly decisions which have opened the way for practising homosexuals to be ordained and/or inducted as parish ministers, setting these decisions in a biblical and historical context and explaining why many have concluded that departure is the right response for them.

The last chapter of the book gives a record of the experiences and testimonies of some of those who have left the denomination over the issues discussed in the book. Some of those who were invited to make contributions have been unsure about going over the ground again, while others have found a therapeutic value in doing so. Some have said that for various reasons (eg., personal and local sensibilities) they would rather not record their stories at this time, and there are some new congregations that have not contributed to this record but who 'press on' (Philippians 3:14) in the work of the Kingdom. The accounts that were submitted were edited for the book, and this document gives the full versions.

The series of appendices:

1. The personal testimony of a struggle with same-sex attraction. 4
 2. A paper by the Rev. Ivor Macdonald on the subject of schism. 19
 3. A series of stories of some of the new congregations, new ministries, and other developments. 22
- Trinity Church, Aberdeen 22

Highland International Church, Inverness	25
Grace Community Church, Kyle of Lochalsh	27
The Tron Church, Glasgow	31
Grace Church, Larbert	36
Grace Church, Dundee	40
Christ Church, Edinburgh	43
Hope Free Church, Kirkmuirhill	46
Broughty Ferry Presbyterian Church	49
Holyrood Evangelical Church	54
North Harris Free Church	59
West Church, Inverness	62
Rev. Ivor MacDonald	66
Rev. Paul Gibson	71
Rev. David S. Randall	74
Rev. Andrew Downie	77
Rev. Andrew W. F. Coghill	82
Rev. Ross McAskill	87
Rev. Douglas Campbell	91
Rev. Thomas Mackinnon	92
Rev. Bob Fyall	93
Rev. Aonghas Ian Macdonald	99
Rev. Brian McDowell	102
Rev. Bob Gehrke	105



I.
'MY JOURNEY'

This is the personal testimony of a 27-year-old Christian who battles with same-sex attraction. In 2012 she visited the website of the Tron Church, Glasgow and found a message on the subject of homosexuality that was sensitive and challenging. She started attending the Tron and now tells her story.

Looking back, I feel like my life has been a lot like the L action of a yo-yo. I started my journey firmly in God's grip and from then on it has been a series of episodes of falling away from Him and being drawn back by His gracious hand.

I was very young when I first became aware that the sexual attractions I experienced were not the same as my female friends. I spent a long time trying to deal with and hide my feelings from others and from myself. I thought I was a Christian. I thought I loved God. I thought I knew Jesus to be my Saviour— so how on earth could I have feelings like this? In my mind there was no way that a Christian could be gay.

It was at high school that things started to intensify and I ended up being treated for depression, although at that point I was still unable to tell anyone the real cause of my

anxieties. To be perfectly honest I was still in denial about the causes myself. I never knew that God could love me in spite of these unwanted feelings I was experiencing, and as such I was trying my best to pretend that they didn’t exist.

I struggled on for a few more years but eventually something had to give. I eventually came out to my parents, my brother, and some trusted friends. It felt like such a relief to finally let go of all that I had built up inside and to realise that the people I loved *still* loved me. But I still had the issue of trying to figure out where these feelings left my standing with God. I had a lot of anger towards God which I now think stemmed mostly from sheer confusion as to why He would allow this in my life. The next few years then became a series of rebellions and returns as I like to call it, some of which will be covered later in this account. Ultimately God called me back and thanks to His grace and mercy I now stand secure in His love and sure of my salvation.

Tackling Temptation

All of us have facets of our personality that we sometimes feel we have no control over. Some people have a bad temper; some people are worriers. We all like to say, ‘I can’t help it; it’s just the way I am.’ And whilst it’s true that often these behaviours are something one feels naturally inclined towards, this does not give us licence to grant them free reign in our lives.

Look at children with toys. Their natural instinct is to grab and be selfish. No-one ever had to teach a human to be selfish! It’s something that comes very naturally to us. Parents don’t sit back and say, ‘Oh, it’s just the way they are’ and let them get on with upsetting every other child in

the vicinity, do they? The behaviour has to be corrected, and often children have to be *taught* that they must act against the inclination to hoard all the toys and instead learn to share.

In the same way, some of us have a natural tendency to be angry or jealous, but this doesn't justify letting the feelings go unchecked. I know some people may say we can't compare SSA (same-sex attraction) with this, that it's a much deeper issue than simply learning to control your temper. And I'll admit that the past-me would have been the first one to make that point. But I've come to see that we all have feelings that would lead us to behave in a manner contrary to that which God asks of us and we need to learn to correct this behaviour.

I am *not* stating that homosexuality is a choice. I firmly believe that in most cases orientation is not something an individual can choose or dictate (I say 'most cases' because I have encountered individuals who have made a conscious choice to be in same-sex relationships due to horrific and abusive past heterosexual relationships, and the human mind is a fragile thing. I have no doubt that the feelings they have for their partner are genuine. But that is a whole different subject and one which I won't try to tackle at the moment). For me, and a large majority of the homosexuals I have met, SSA is not, and never was, a choice. I don't recall a time when I didn't have these feelings. Again, many psychologists like to offer explanations as to why we have these feelings: our mothers didn't love us, we were abused as children. But for me, none of this was true. The simple fact of the matter is that my SSA has always been a part of me.

It took me a long time to realise that feelings themselves are not what bring condemnation; it's how we *respond* to those feelings. You may be tempted to let your temper blow up and say something hurtful but you learn not to act those feelings out. People with SSA cannot control who they are attracted to any more than a heterosexual person can. What we can control is what we do with those feelings. Do we indulge in the thoughts that we know we shouldn't? Do we act on the thoughts?

Once this became apparent to me I felt like a huge weight had been lifted. I now understood that my SSA did not exclude me from God's family; that God could love me in spite of how I felt. Those who struggle with SSA, or indeed any temptation can be reassured by this:

We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are; yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:15-16).

Jesus himself was tempted, yet he acted in a way that left him 'without sin'. We cannot be perfect as Jesus was, but we *can* ask God for His strength and guidance to help us resist temptation when it rears its head.

Wondering Why

For me SSA was something that seemed natural and was certainly not a conscious choice. In the beginning this used to lead me to think 'Well, if this wasn't a choice then God must have made me this way'. It's only in recent years that

I've started to really doubt the truth of this. God is good. He looked on His creation and saw that it was good. So how can He have created a desire in me which lies in direct contradiction to the original creation plan? The simple answer is that He didn't. I believe it all comes back to the fall of man: '... by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners' (Romans 5:19). All of us are born into sin. What I'm about to say may be controversial to some and I'm sure may be met with some disagreement, but I believe God did not make me gay, and the feelings that I have, my broken sexuality, just happens to be one of the ways that my sinful nature manifests itself.

So although God did not *create* my SSA, he has *allowed* these feelings to remain. I have no doubt that God could snap His fingers and change my orientation in an instant, but He has seen fit to leave me with this particular 'thorn in the flesh.'

And for a long time that is exactly what I saw my SSA as. I used to pray and pray and pray for change. Some ex-gay ministries have really damaged individuals by saying that any persistence of SSA is due to the fact that their faith isn't strong enough or that their manner of praying is wrong, that they're not praying hard enough. But wouldn't it be easier for anyone suffering from SSA to run from the issue and embrace their sexuality, rather than to turn to God in agony and bring these open wounds to Him?

It's also important to remind ourselves that one has to be careful when assessing whether God has answered prayer or not. At first I believed that I just wasn't praying hard enough and that my prayer had gone unanswered. However, over time I began to wonder if perhaps my

prayer *had* been answered but I had failed to see it. Perhaps God's apparent silence *was* His answer. Maybe he was saying, 'No, I won't remove your feelings' or, 'Not yet.' This is where I got stuck. If God was allowing me to experience these feelings, to have these same-sex attractions, but made it clear in Scripture that I was forbidden to have a same-sex relationship, wasn't that just twisted, a sick joke?

I had to ask myself if that logic matched what I knew to be true of my God. Is my God a cruel and twisted God? Of course He isn't! It was apparent that a change of perspective was required. God was allowing this to happen—but for what purpose? He obviously had a plan so it became a matter of trying to figure out what that purpose was. And I think this applies to all aspects of life, to all people, not just homosexuals.

The Longing for Love

Trying to deal with what I thought was just one issue, this issue of same-sex attraction, has over the years uncovered a much deeper problem and probably one that many people can identify with.

At school, I would always strive to be the perfect student. I wanted to please people. I wanted them to like me. In friendships I often allowed myself to be trampled on and used—I just wanted people to like me. One particular afternoon my mum and I were talking and she told me that when my brother was a baby, my mother would always have to force him to be held. He would push away; he wanted his own space. I on the other hand was like a koala—clinging to anyone I was passed to. Upon hearing this, a picture sprang into my head of what my lifelong pursuit

had been—I just wanted to be loved. I'm not for a minute suggesting I wasn't loved by my family and friends—far from it! But I finally saw that my whole life I had been striving to find that deep love and acceptance that can only come from a relationship with God. And as I grew older, and finally accepted my SSA, that longing for love manifested itself in my desire to have a partner. I am sure that this search for wholeness through a relationship is something that heterosexual people struggle with too.

One of my favourite bands has a song which goes,

There's a God shaped hole in all of us
and the restless soul is searching ...
it's a void only He can fill.

When we feel a sense of emptiness, rather than looking to God to satisfy the hunger, we begin to look for earthly things to fill the gap. For many it becomes a search to find that one special person who we believe will complete us. But the truth is that nothing and no one on this earth is capable of truly satisfying that longing within us.

I was pursuing a relationship because I thought that I would only be happy if someone else loved me, and if I had someone to express my love to. I was not allowing God to fill that emptiness with His love and as such it would continue to remain unfilled. I was attending church and going through the motions of being a Christian, yet I hadn't fully given my life over to God. I was still holding on to the things that I thought I needed to be happy. When I was still in a same-sex relationship I was convincing myself that it would satisfy and I was torn between a relationship with my partner and a relationship with God.

Eventually God brought me to a point where I said, 'OK, I give up the chase. Have *all* of me.' I stopped chasing what I thought would make me happy and instead put my focus on God. God wasted no time in making it clear that His love was what I needed all along. He has been overwhelmingly gracious. God has kindled so many new relationships and friendships in my life. He has shown me that it's possible to have immensely deep and intimate relationships with other females in a healthy and Christian way.

I'm not saying this journey has been easy or that I don't have days when I wake up and think, 'God, I'm really struggling with loneliness' or, 'God, I'm really struggling with lust', but the big difference is that I have *peace*. Even when I'm in the deepest state of sorrow, I know that God loves me. I know that no matter how far I fall, 'underneath are the everlasting arms' (Deuteronomy 33:27).

So I began to realise that God was using this trial in my life to really pull out parts of me that I didn't even know were an issue. I mentioned earlier that I spent a long time praying for healing. When I say 'healing', I meant that I would be turned around from these feelings of SSA and settle down, get married, live the dream life. And for a long time I resigned myself to thinking, 'Well, God just doesn't see fit to heal me so I better get used to this.' But you can see from what you've read that actually healing *has* come. It's come to many different areas of my life, such as the realisation that my striving for love would never leave me satisfied unless my eyes were turned to God. It's come in the form of being able to accept the feelings I have, to be at peace with them and now even start to use them to bring glory to God!

For example, denial of an active same sex relationship has proven an unbelievably effective tool for evangelism. When you get to know people the subject of relationships inevitably comes up. ‘Are you married? Do you have a boyfriend?’—and many times I’ve felt it’s not the right place or time to give the truly honest answer. But when I have, it always leads to, ‘Well, do you have a girlfriend?’ And in this day and age, especially when you are young and at university, amongst throngs of hormonally-ripe students, nothing engages people more than telling them that you feel called by God to lead a life of celibacy!

The issue of identity

Closely linked to the pursuit of love are the pursuits of identity and a sense of belonging—something which applies to all of us and not just those who struggle with homosexuality.

Society loves labels. Whether on your clothes or on your food, a lot of judgements are based on or around labels. Christians often find themselves labelled as ‘Bible bashers’ or ‘holy rollers’. But is this really our true identity? The issue of identity was something else that I didn’t really realise was an issue in my life until my eyes were opened during my struggle with SSA. I realised that I always liked my labels. At school I was the ‘smarty pants’, ‘geek’, ‘clever clogs’ and (while I realise that not all of these labels have positive connotations!) it made me feel good to know that people thought I was intelligent and respected me for it. It appealed to my pride. When I was older I had a job waitressing in a restaurant where I also ended up playing music and singing for the customers in the evenings

and weekends. I liked my label of E., the one that sings! People knew me.

After I came out to my friends I was inevitably labelled as ‘The Lesbian.’ And for a while I embraced this and wanted people to know that I was not ashamed of this part of my personality. After all it wasn’t something I could control. But soon the label became more than just a label. It was starting to become my *identity*. Slowly but surely I slipped further away from the church and away from the label of ‘The Bible Basher’ to ‘The Gay.’

The search for support

I realise that I have jumped back and forth whilst discussing these topics but I’d like to focus more now on how I came to be where I am now—part of a loving church family.

I felt God’s call to come back to church while I was still in a same-sex relationship. This process was difficult on many levels as every time I set foot in a church, I felt like I was stepping straight back into the closet. I constantly felt like I had this huge weight hanging over me. ‘If they really knew me, if they knew my Monday to Saturday lifestyle they wouldn’t want anything to do with me.’ I’m sure that these thoughts have plagued many Christians, regardless of sexual orientation.

What made it even harder (and I have no doubt that this was the devil at work, trying to quench any desire I had for God) was the debate that was taking place in the church at this time regarding same-sex ‘marriage’.

I moved from one church to the next, but it felt to me that any time the issue was raised, it was talked about in a

cold and matter-of-fact manner with little thought towards those who might actually be struggling with SSA. I realise now that a lot of my anger stemmed from pride and fear. I didn't want to be convicted of the fact that the relationship I was in was wrong. I didn't want to face up to the fact that there was sin in my life that had not been dealt with. I feared the healing process would be a difficult and painful one.

So I struggled for a long time, torn between the world and the church. I guess I knew on some level that there was no way that these two parts of my life could co-exist. It had to be one or the other. I'm sure that the guilt I felt regarding my same-sex relationship was the Spirit convicting me of my sin. But we humans are very good at self-deception; we like to ignore the things we know are wrong.

Ignoring the sin in our lives is like ignoring an infection. You notice that something is wrong with you—a small rash, or a niggling pain. But you don't want to go to the doctor because you fear that the treatment required may be painful or difficult. So you try to ignore the symptoms but the infection begins to spread. More rashes appear, the pain intensifies, and more symptoms crop up. You try some quick fixes, some creams, and some painkillers but eventually you get to a point where you have to admit defeat and realise there is nothing you can do to heal yourself.

I found it to be very much the same way with sins that are not dealt with. You know something is wrong but you try to ignore it and treat it with quick fixes. Eventually your submission to sin spreads and begins to show itself in your life. There comes a point where you know there is nothing you can do to free yourself from this sin. You have to come to God and ask for help. God sees our problems;

He sees our sin, and the blood of His one and only Son heals us of this. And God's Word directs us as to how we should live in light of this amazing salvation.

It wasn't until I came to the Tron that this amazing truth actually became apparent to me. I used to attend the Tron occasionally as a student and I remembered always being encouraged by the preaching and the warmth of the people. So during one of my periods of falling away from God I looked up the Tron website and (by no coincidence, I'm sure) found a sermon regarding homosexuality. It was the first time I had heard the topic preached on with such sensitivity and understanding whilst upholding all that the Bible teaches. I knew that I wanted to be in a church where the truth was declared in spite of the fact that it could be painful to hear, and this was the first time that I felt loved and challenged by the preaching of the Bible regarding homosexuality, rather than judged and discouraged by it. God spoke to me more and more and eventually it came to breaking point. I had to end the relationship I was in.

I cannot begin to describe how painful this was and how much hurt it caused. I knew that through Jesus my sin was forgiven, but the repercussions of the sin were hard. I had hurt my partner and caused her pain. I had caused damage to myself. I had been a poor witness to others. This was the painful healing process that I had been scared of. It wasn't an easy journey and a lot of big changes had to be made but I'm always reminded of the story of the prodigal son:

He arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him (Luke 15:20).

Thanks to God's mercy and the riches of His grace I stand here now: forgiven, saved and loved.

Eventually I felt called to join the Church and I felt sure that this was a place where my struggle with SSA would be supported in a loving yet wholly biblical way. I can now say with total confidence that it is a place where love and support abounds. Not everyone is aware of my personal struggles, but those who are have shown nothing but love. The very thing that I had been battling for has now been granted in overwhelming proportions.

As was discussed previously, many homosexuals find there is a struggle in life for a sense of belonging. Many assume, or have been taught to think, that the church is not a place for them, that they won't be accepted, that they won't find a sense of belonging, that God couldn't possibly love them. So many try to find their sense of belonging in a society portrayed by the media as accepting, as tolerant, as enlightened and living in the modern age—unlike these pre-historic Christians!

But actually, I found the opposite to be true. Society is hostile. It's changeable. It is not as tolerant as everyone likes to think. One minute you're the in-thing and the next you're last week's news. You never belong anywhere for very long. But being in the church, we are in it together. There is no need for labels; we are all God's children. No matter what your struggle is, no matter what damaged state you come to God in, here is a place where you will be shown that Jesus is enough. It's not about being a good person, it's not about being popular, it's not about any of the things which society holds up as important. We are all fallen and in need of a Saviour.

What really hit home for me was looking around at freshers' week over the past couple of years. There are numerous LGBT support groups, and I have to say that it's no wonder that a lot of young people fall away from the church and into these groups instead. I think for many it's the sense of safety and acceptance they find within these groups that's so attractive. But shouldn't the church have that same appeal? Shouldn't we be running out to meet people who are still a long way off and showing them what they can find through Christ—the love and acceptance that awaits them? We need to do more to reach out to those struggling with homosexuality and reassure them that support for their struggle exists within the church.

As I have already mentioned, one of the things that actually drew me to the Tron was the stance I knew that was taken on homosexuality. While some people may have viewed it as homophobic or judgmental, it's actually the opposite. What could be more loving than to preach the truth? Yes, it hurt. Yes, it made me uncomfortable. But it brought me to God, to Jesus, to healing, and to peace.

At the end of the day we are called to love one another. How can a church possibly be called loving if all it gives out are false truths and if it only preaches what people *want* to hear? If we fail to make people aware of God's righteousness and judgement, and also the saving power of the blood of Christ, then we have failed to love them at all. That said, it's important that this process is carried out with sensitivity. I think many homosexuals are afraid to approach the church because they think the active pursuit of homosexuality is one sin that just cannot be forgiven. Wherever the trepidation lies, it needs to be approached

with a delicate balance of care and compassion whilst upholding the Word of the Lord.

We all have battles and challenges in the Christian journey. I still battle with my SSA and God continues to reveal other parts of my life that really need worked on. He also provides the strength for the battle, the light for my feet on the narrow path, and the assurance that nothing, *nothing*, can separate me from His love.



2.
NOTES ON SCHISM

A paper by the Rev. Ivor MacDonald, Minister of Hope Church, Coatbridge.

One of the common responses when the question of separation is raised is: 'the last thing we want is a split.' That assertion presupposes that it is never right to separate from a denomination.

However, the New Testament repeatedly tells us to separate from ungodliness. 2 Corinthians 6:14 is often applied to marriage between Christians and non-Christians but its primary application is to the church. The church is to be purified from the world.

Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, 'I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you (2 Corinthians 6:14-17).

What is clear from this passage is that communion or fellowship in the church has clear boundaries. You cannot have fellowship with those who deny the faith. That is why Paul instructs the church to expel such people and to make clear that fellowship no longer exists with them (1 Corinthians 5:1-12).

However, in the modern Church of Scotland, true biblical discipline is absent. The Confession of Faith does not function practically within the Church so that all kinds of doctrinal error and open immorality are tolerated. When that happens to the extent it has done in recent years and it is not possible to expel those in error, the only option open is for believers to separate. Such is the significance of communion/fellowship within a church.

Thus it is not consistent for ministers to say that they may continue to preach faithfully in their own corner and be unaffected by the state of the wider church. They are in communion with an ungodly institution and the world looking on knows it. (That is why in the 1560 Scots Confession drawn up by Knox and his associates biblical discipline is regarded as a mark of the true church. Where there is no discipline the true church soon disappears.)

For the same reason, remaining within the denomination as a church within a church does not hold up to careful scrutiny. It involves affirming fellowship at one level and denying it at another, which is deeply confusing to those within as well as those outside the church. Although such a polity seems (for the moment) to be workable in Anglicanism, it is unlikely to work in Presbyterianism. Presbyterianism is built on the premise that we operate in a connected way rather than as congregationalists. We are

either in the system, paying our dues and upholding what the system stands for, or we are not.

Sometimes, therefore, separation is the only course that is open to those who wish to uphold Christian witness.

One of the present ironies is that some evangelicals view separation with horror and yet hold as heroes men like Calvin, Luther, Knox, Owen, Wesley, M'Cheyne, Bonar, Chalmers, Lloyd-Jones, etc., who were all convinced of the principle of biblical separation. God has seen fit to bless His church in times when men and women made costly decisions to follow the truth wherever it led. Could we pray that God would unleash his Spirit on us in power as men and women in today's Scotland make a determined stand for the truth? Our hope does not lie in gaining influence within a rebellious denomination by being better ecclesiastical politicians. Our hope lies in the mercy of God who may bless us if, humbled and chastened and shorn of the weapons of the world, we simply seek to honour His Son.

Separation may be inevitable but we are not schismatics. The goal before us is, after all, evangelical unity. In leaving an establishment that pours scorn on the truth we must make common cause with all in Scotland who uphold the Scriptures and are committed to missional, confessional Christianity. The prize is to see new energy released to plant churches, influence education, and address cultural matters biblically. The prize is to know meaningful fellowship with evangelicals who believe in the Scriptures. The prize is to see an end to evangelical fragmentation and to witness to the nation that our loyalty is to Christ who is the Way, the Truth and the Life (John 14:6).



3.
TESTIMONIES & STORIES

TRINITY CHURCH, ABERDEEN

In the May 2012 issue of *Evangelicals Now*, a front-page article reported that on 4th December 2011 ‘Trinity Church, Aberdeen was born. The new church fellowship was formed as a result of decisions taken by the Church of Scotland ...’

In 2011, the Rev Peter Dickson had written in an information booklet for members of High Hilton Church, where he had ministered for fifteen years:

I have decided (after nearly three years of heart searching, discussion, negotiation, and many meetings) that the best way in which to honour Christ and continue a gospel ministry is for me to demit my charge, leave High Church, Hilton, and, together with David Gibson, serve a new church family here in Aberdeen.

This was the first of the new congregations formed as a result of the Assembly decisions described in *A Sad Departure*.

He gave expression to sentiments that would be shared by many others in succeeding years:

In choosing to endorse ministers who are in same-sex relationships the Church of Scotland has, at the same

time, chosen to make it impossible for me to continue in its ministry. That clear choice reveals two diametrically opposed views of the Bible and two incompatible understandings of the gospel.

We did not leave at the first opportunity ... We have tried hard for three years to communicate to the Church of Scotland the seriousness of the decisions it has taken and the impossible position we have been placed in as a result.

The real issue, it is argued, is the authority of the Bible, and

The Church of Scotland has acted in a schismatic way, separating itself from the worldwide church's historic understanding of the nature of the Bible, marriage and sexuality and breaking fellowship with those who hold to Christ's teaching. Jesus said, 'Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me' (John 14:21).

The *Evangelicals Now* article stated:

One practical concern for the new church was to find accommodation. A fellow elder and his wife provided a beautiful building at the bottom of their garden for a new office, and four members of staff were able to commence work in it straight away. David (Gibson) explained, 'when we announced our resignations we did not know where our new church would meet. Two weeks before we were due to start, a venue we were banking on fell through dramatically and left us looking for an alternative. In the end we found ourselves in the Northern Hotel, with very accommodating staff and

all our requirements suitably met. We had to move our evening service to 5 pm due to the hotel's long-standing booking with other clients, but this has proved an attractive time for those with younger children to begin attending together.'

The first Sundays together were marked by tangible relief and tremendous gratitude to God for His faithfulness. Leaving one church family to start another felt like the tearing of a fabric never meant to be torn and some have struggled to understand why we have done what we have done. Others have discovered the essence of the church in profoundly new ways and have visibly grown in their faith, rejoicing to be in a living church family.

Within the Trinity church family there are people from varying backgrounds—Anglican, Baptist, Presbyterian, Pentecostal, Brethren—yet, as Galatians 3:28 says, all are one in Christ Jesus. At an early stage the decision was made to become a congregation of the International Presbyterian Church, which was introduced to members:

The IPC is a small, growing, Christ-centred, Bible-believing family of churches. It was started in Europe in the 1950s and the first UK church was planted in England in 1969. It remained small until the late '90s, and since then has seen some encouraging growth. There are currently two presbyteries: a Korean-speaking Presbytery of six churches and a British Presbytery of seven churches, and plans are underway to form a Presbytery of Europe.

Looking to the future, a building fund was established in September 2014 with a view to the eventual acquisition of permanent premises. At the time of writing, over

£300,000 has been pledged over the next three years—which the elders regard as an encouraging start.

The Church, which has about 170 attending (membership 130), is led by the Kirk Session, two of whom were full-time ministers. One, Peter Dickson, resigned in late 2014 and the other, David Gibson—IPC's first ordinand in Scotland (ordained on 19th February 2012)—now serves as minister and pastor.

HIGHLAND INTERNATIONAL CHURCH, INVERNESS

The following account is by James Torrens, who describes the decision to leave the ministry of the Church of Scotland as the hardest decision of his life. Exchanging the world of medicine for the ministry of the Word had been a tough call, but this decision was in a different league. Over time he became sure that God was calling him away, not just from the congregation of St Rollox in Sighthill, Glasgow, but from the Church of Scotland also. James announced his resignation on the 18th September 2011.

Several factors were at work in reaching that painful decision:

- a prayerful searching of the Scriptures regarding the nature of the New Testament church, including its attitude to unrepentant sinners and false teachers, as well as how local churches relate to each other.
- A detailed examination of the specific issues involving sexual immorality and church discipline with my fellow-elders at St Rollox.
- Meeting up, speaking, and praying with colleagues, all

struggling with the same issues but with differing points of view as to what our response should be.

- Reading how others in the worldwide church were facing up to (or refusing to face up to) these issues and the consequences of doing so.

Apart from the decisions being taken at a national level, events had a particular focus in Glasgow Presbytery. A member of Presbytery had admitted on the floor of Presbytery to having been in a civil partnership for some years and in a homosexual relationship for years before that. He made the observation that none of the roofs of the churches where he continued to lead worship had ever fallen in, implying that God was not particularly bothered about his lifestyle.

A few of us sought to use the proper procedural mechanisms in Presbytery to respond to this public display of defiance of the Word of God and the laws of the church. But over the next year it became clear that there was no appetite either in the committees and courts of the church or among evangelicals in Glasgow Presbytery to discipline, in love, the individual concerned.

I began to realise, that even if the conservative position were upheld at the General Assembly, the likelihood was that nothing would change on the ground. As it happens, the conservative position was being repeatedly undermined at successive Assemblies and so, in June 2011, I informed the elders and congregation that it was unlikely that I would be able to continue for much longer as a minister in the Church of Scotland.

When I announced my demission in September 2011, I did not know where I was going to go or what I was going to do. It was time to put into practice the

obedience of faith as outlined in Hebrews 11:8 (NIV), a verse which hung on my study wall: ‘By faith Abraham, when called ... obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.’

In October that year James was invited to meet up in Glasgow with representatives of the International Presbyterian Church. At that meeting he was asked if he would consider going to Inverness to minister God’s Word to a new group, consisting of a number of Christians who were unhappy with the position and direction of the Church of Scotland. Most, though not all, were members of Kinmylies Church of Scotland where Peter Humphris had been minister for over ten years. (Peter demitted his status as a Church of Scotland minister on 7th February 2012, four months before he was due to retire.)

I did not give an immediate response, but it soon became clear, through various providences, that this was a door the Lord had graciously opened. And so it was that the congregation of Highland International Church held its first gathering for public worship at the Best Western Palace Hotel on 1st April 2012. The significance of the date did not go unnoticed—but if we were fools, we were fools for Christ (1 Corinthians 4:10).



GRACE COMMUNITY CHURCH, KYLE OF LOCHALSH

John Murdo Macdonald had had misgivings about the direction which the Church of Scotland had been taking with regard to the authority of God’s Word for a number of years, and matters began to come to a head for him in

2009. He was appointed by Lochcarron & Skye Presbytery to be part of a group of three who were to present an Overture to the 2009 General Assembly in opposition to the proposed induction of a practising homosexual as minister of Queen's Cross Church, Aberdeen.

As matters turned out, our Overture was overtaken by a motion to appoint a Special Commission to look into the issue of same-sex partnerships in the ministry. We were urged, in the interests of 'unity' to withdraw the Overture, some of the strongest arguments coming from those of an evangelical persuasion. With reluctance we agreed to withdraw, and the General Assembly agreed both the said induction and the setting up of the Special Commission.

Back home in Kyle, I informed the Kirk Session that I was deeply concerned about the future of the Church, and that I believed the General Assembly had made a disastrous decision.

Prior to leaving for the 2011 General Assembly, at which I was a Commissioner, I informed the Kirk Session that if the vote went against the evangelical position there was a distinct possibility that I would leave the Church of Scotland. My memories of that Assembly are of earnest prayer together as a group of brothers and sisters, and of some very faithful and courageous men and women putting across the message of God's Word very powerfully on the floor of the Assembly. The General Assembly was warned clearly of the consequences of denying and disobeying God's Word. I particularly remember one man from Egypt who pleaded with the Assembly, on behalf of brothers and sisters in Muslim countries, not to take what would be a disastrous step

which would result in the persecution of the church in these lands.

The vote went against us (351 to 294). I remember tears and a feeling that a line had been crossed that day. I spent the next six months explaining my own position to the congregation. I explained that I could no longer with any integrity receive a stipend from the Church and live in their manse, while at the same time feeling so strongly about what had happened, and indeed preaching from God's Word against the path which the Church had chosen to take. I made clear that the call on my life to preach the gospel came from Christ, and that when the Church denied Him and His Word, my allegiance had to be with Christ. I also made clear that each and every member and adherent had a responsibility before God to make their own decision, and I urged people to show love and understanding towards those of different opinions.

In October 2011, I informed the Presbytery Clerk of my decision to demit my charge on 31st December that year. This was one of the most difficult and heart-rending decisions I have ever had to take as I laid down my pastoral charge and made the decision to leave behind some of those who had been my parishioners for the previous ten years. I remember sitting in front of the computer for about ten minutes before I finally prayerfully pressed the 'Send' key.

Although the congregation was split on the issue, about half (approximately 35 people) determined to leave the Church with me. Several public meetings were attended by people who were deeply unhappy at the Church's attitude to, and apparent rejection of, the clear

teaching of Scripture. Following much prayerful heart searching, a group of men intimated their desire to see a new church fellowship established in South Skye and Lochalsh, with a view to providing a place of worship for those people who felt that they could no longer support the Church of Scotland.

The new fellowship met for the first time on 1st January 2012 in Kyle Primary School with about fifty people attending. In March, three of us travelled to London to represent the congregation at the Presbytery meeting of the International Presbyterian Church in Ealing, and then on Sunday 11th March the congregation voted unanimously to call me as their minister. Later that month it was agreed that the congregation would be named 'Grace Community Church', a congregation of the International Presbyterian Church.

At the time of writing, we look back on these three years and thank God for His ongoing presence, provision, and blessing; during that time we have seen established a congregation with 42 members and 15 adherents together with over 20 young folk coming along regularly to worship. We have run *Christianity Explored*, *Discipleship Explored* and *Alpha* Courses, and have seen many come to engage with the gospel through these courses. We continue to run a Road to Recovery Group which helps people struggling with addictions and dependencies.

We have also established a local Christians Against Poverty Debt Centre which has been a great witness in the local community, and we have been involved, together with other local churches, in the setting up of a Foodbank. Through these outreaches about 20 families

have been touched by the grace and love of God in Jesus. And above all we have seen fourteen people come to a saving knowledge of the Lord. That to us is the ultimate proof of God's presence—only He can save souls and set us free from sin. To God be the glory.



THE TRON CHURCH, GLASGOW

In May 2011 William Philip wrote about the decisions of that year's General Assembly:

Where, then, does this leave our church fellowship in St George's-Tron? Alas, it seems, greatly at odds with the clearly expressed official will of the denomination to which we are affiliated. But, notwithstanding the deliberations and decisions of the highest court of our denomination, we are simply not at liberty to walk away from Christ and His gospel, or depart from the historic foundations of our Church or separate from communion with orthodox Christian believers globally. To do so would be sin against God, and sin against our Christian brothers and sisters worldwide, many of whom are facing great persecution for their adherence to the truth. This we cannot do. We must obey God rather than men.

Former Session Clerk, Tom Magill, has contributed the following summary of the Tron story.

Biblical ministry has characterised The Tron for many years, and the beliefs of the congregation have reflected this: a metropolitan, gathered congregation, comprising folk from many denominations, new converts, many from overseas, and not a few rescued from a life of

addiction. Whatever their personal history, faithfulness to the Bible is the *sine qua non* of belief and congregational loyalty.

Buchanan Street is the second busiest shopping street in the United Kingdom, and the Tron was ‘a church in the heart of the city with the city in its heart.’ It needed to be a welcoming place seven days per week to those who would never darken the door of a church. There they could meet to hear the gospel in a variety of non-traditional encounters. This spiritual imperative was the indispensable, and only, driver for a major refurbishment programme initiated in 2007. Some £3m for the new facilities was pledged, with a tithe of the construction cost to be set aside for gospel work elsewhere. Unforeseen structural problems costing £600k led to the need for bridging finance, and a loan of £750k was secured from the General Trustees at commercial rates. Repayment by instalments was scheduled to the end of 2015. The work was completed in 2009.

Tom then refers to the decisions of the 2011 General Assembly, described by the Minister as ‘a resounding defeat for those like ourselves who were committed to the orthodox, historic, Christian gospel.’ The Kirk Session followed with a statement declaring that it found itself in ‘impaired fellowship’, unable to contribute funds or to recognize oversight of, or participate in meetings of, the Kirk structures. Meetings were held with the Presbytery Clerk and the General Trustees to seek a reasonable agreement whereby the building could be retained. These meetings initially were amicable and a clear expectation was given that, with suitable financial arrangements, a settlement

would be reached by March 2012, including the settlement of debts. A general meeting of the congregation was held in November 2011 which was attended by 247 members; a vote of confidence in the Session's plans was carried by 96%.

However, Glasgow Presbytery granted wide powers to a new committee, the Glasgow Cohesive Group (GCG) to oversee congregations considering their relationship with the Kirk, and from that point things deteriorated. In early 2012 Presbytery requested a meeting with the Tron membership, issuing a letter to the members on the Tron Roll, inviting attendance at a meeting on 7th March in order for the Church of Scotland to hear the views of the congregation. 274 Members attended the meeting with representatives of Glasgow Presbytery along with officials from '121' (Principal Clerk, Solicitor, and Chair of General Trustees). It was a very unpleasant affair, with allegations made by those visiting of bullying, intimidation, and misinformation against our leadership.

The GCG eventually recommended to Presbytery that negotiations should not be continued and that another Special Committee be set up to investigate the possibility of creating a new congregation in our building.

On 27th May 2012, the Session resolved unanimously that the congregation would formally secede from the Church of Scotland. On Monday 11th June the congregation approved a new constitution by 217 votes to 2 and next day Presbytery was informed. We also informed The Charity Regulator of our removal from the denomination. A few days later we discovered

that ‘121’ had managed to have frozen all our bank accounts without telling us.

The Cohesive Group reported to Presbytery in June that it was ‘deeply disappointing that the congregation had unilaterally seceded, without first settling the debts of some £1m’. This was complete misinformation, £500k being the outstanding loan to the General Trustees, a liability on a building they themselves were claiming as their asset, and in any case a future liability since it was not due for repayment until 2015. Every payment had been made to the date of our secession, and indeed on the day following our vote to secede, the minister and Session Clerk personally handed over the one outstanding loan payment to the Chairman of the General Trustees as a gesture of good faith that we might still, despite all, be able to reach a negotiated and reasonable settlement. The remainder of the alleged £1m was a supposed accumulated ‘shortfall’ in Mission & Aid Fund allocations going back years, which we had vigorously disputed and many previous meetings with Presbytery had already conceded was totally unrealistic.

The report also urged Presbytery to take immediate action to protect the interests of the remaining members, to appoint Office Bearers, and to consult with the Council of Assembly to investigate the probity and integrity of the Trustees of St George’s Tron. This report was approved, and an announcement was placed in *The Herald*, inviting members who wished to remain in the denomination to a meeting on 24 June 2012. Five people turned up, only one of whom was on the Roll of St George’s

Tron, but the Presbytery resolved to appoint a Transition Ministry to rebuild the congregation, make effective use of the building and recover all assets—even though not a single member of the congregation remained in the building in Buchanan Street.

The last service was held on the morning of 9th December 2012, and the new congregation met that evening in 25 Bath Street with ‘an overwhelming sense of liberation and joy.’

Despite the fresh air of freedom, legacy issues remained (and still drag on to date). The Law Department at ‘121’ made official complaint to the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR) in 2013 alleging financial improbity and breach of trustee duties on various matters including the sale of the Bath Street Halls some years previously—which had been instructed by the Presbytery of Glasgow itself! In April 2014, after a thorough investigation, OSCR concluded that there had been no misconduct by the trustees of the congregation.

We have strong legal advice that we had (and still have) a strong case in law that we remain the true St George’s-Tron congregation. We were advised that we had a good chance of victory, but only after several years of litigation. In the end we decided that to pursue this would be counter-productive. We therefore decided not to pursue our financial losses, including a legacy of £250,000 which was clearly intended for our congregation but was seized by the Church of Scotland since the Will had included the charity number retained by the Church of Scotland. Again, we would have had to litigate, and we felt that we simply had to move on. Added to the loss of monies raised from the congregation and

actually invested in the building of £2.7m (£3.2m total, less the remaining £500k loan unpaid), our loss to the Church of Scotland therefore totalled almost £3 million.

Reflecting on all that has happened, Tom says that two remarkable factors have emerged from this crisis. One is that the congregation has remained united throughout; not one member has chosen to stay with ‘the artificial Church of Scotland gathering in the Buchanan Street building. Never has the fellowship been stronger, more vigorous and more focussed on the gospel than it is today.’ The second reflection is that the Lord has provided accommodation. The Bath Street Halls had been declared in May 2009 to be surplus to the Glasgow Presbytery Plan, and the Session had been instructed that the building must be disposed of within ten years. Providentially, Cornhill Scotland bought the premises, and so the Tron and Cornhill Scotland were provided with a home to continue their ministry in the city centre. Today the congregation is in the midst of rebuilding work to fit the building for ongoing and expanding ministry in the city centre of Glasgow, and planning further growth into other parts of the city.



GRACE CHURCH, LARBERT

Andrew Randall was ordained and inducted at Larbert Old Church in June 2009, following the faithful 23-year ministry of the Rev Cliff Rennie and a few weeks after the 2009 General Assembly. The congregation had had a history of biblical ministry stretching back to the 1970s and as a result, the vast majority of the Kirk Session and congregation were in no doubt about the wrongness of the decisions

of the General Assemblies of 2009, 2011, and 2013. The real question throughout those years was how to respond in a manner which was faithful and Christ-exalting. This is Andrew's account of their journey.

As with many other congregations of Reformed convictions, we had to feel our way through a myriad of issues. The potential significance of the Kirk's rejection of Scripture was immediately apparent and over the following four years, a number of congregational meetings were held, various statements were issued, and the congregation was kept advised of developments through regular articles in the church magazine.

Throughout that period we sought to play our part in making clear to the denomination the potential ramifications of its continuing down the path it had chosen. We joined the Fellowship of Confessing Churches in the autumn of 2009, seeking to unite with others in standing for biblical truth. Following the General Assembly decisions of 2011, we withdrew from cooperation with the courts and committees of the Church of Scotland and suspended payments to central funds beyond the costs of our own ministry. We also brought these issues before the Lord constantly in prayer, including establishing a separate weekly prayer meeting (in addition to our existing one) specifically relating to this issue.

Historically, Larbert Old Church had a difficult relationship with the Presbytery of Falkirk, stemming particularly from the fact that the Kirk Session consisted of men only. The Presbytery had previously alienated the congregation through a particularly inappropriate and aggressive quinquennial visit. From the summer of 2011 onwards our relationship with the Presbytery

deteriorated further, particularly as its officers sought to use various procedural mechanisms to disrupt the life of the congregation and undermine the elders' authority. Resisting these efforts was immensely draining in terms of time and spiritual energy, and increasingly so as time passed. The spiritual nature of the battle could not have been clearer.

Many of the elders were tempted to leave the Church of Scotland after May 2011. In the end we decided to await the 2013 decision, but only on the basis that we would use the intervening period to consider what our destination might be if we did choose to leave the Kirk. We considered that question carefully over a period of around eighteen months, before deciding that we would seek affiliation with the International Presbyterian Church.

In May 2012 the General Assembly rejected a proposed resolution seeking to clarify that church premises should only be used for Christian (rather than non-Christian) worship. This further intensified our sense of alienation from our own denomination and our uneasiness of conscience at remaining a part of it.

Throughout this time, the work of the congregation continued as the elders sought and articulated a vision for the future of gospel ministry in the area. One of the wonderful things about our experience was to see great blessing from God, with a significantly growing congregation and a growing hunger for the Word, at the same time as things were becoming more and more difficult in our relationship with our denomination. In particular, our Sunday School multiplied several times over as new families came to faith and others joined

the church. These were much-needed encouragements in difficult days.

Following the decision of the 2013 General Assembly to approve the ordination of practising homosexuals, the final decision to leave the denomination was simultaneously very easy and immensely difficult. It was an enormous relief finally to reach this point and intimate it to the congregation. By this time, following some resignations, we had around twenty elders on the Kirk Session. Fifteen indicated their intention to leave. At the time of this announcement in June 2013 we had no concrete arrangements in place for a new church. What we were clear about was that this initiative would be led by the elders, who we believed had this God-given responsibility.

Over subsequent weeks we saw the Lord provide in the most extraordinary way. On Sunday 25th August, Grace Church Larbert held its first services in a local school. An attendance of around 200 that day, including some extra supporters, gave way to a normal weekly attendance of 140-160 at the morning service and 60-80 in the evening. Approximately three-quarters of the worshipping congregation from Larbert Old joined Grace Church. Our prayer meeting and youth work were able to continue without interruption through the generosity of a local mission hall, the Dawson Mission, who graciously allowed us to use their premises in a spirit of gospel unity.

At the time of writing, the church is eighteen months old. This has been a period of rich blessing, sweet unity and great anticipation. The congregation has grown in that time and we now have around 140 adults and 60

young people associated with the Church. Our youth ministry has been reinvigorated, our work with teenagers is flourishing as never before and the congregation continues to give major support to a local interdenominational youth project. A new small group ministry was launched in 2014 and has been much appreciated, as has the new 5th Larbert Company of The Boys' Brigade, formed by officers who belong to the congregation and the local Baptist Church.

The congregation has been generous in its giving, allowing for the purchase of a manse on a 50-50 joint equity arrangement with minister and congregation; we received the keys less than one year after our first services. By the time of our second anniversary we have introduced a part-time assistant and are well under way in raising funds to buy or build a new permanent home for the church family.



GRACE CHURCH, DUNDEE

Grace Church began its life on 22nd September 2013 after departing from the congregation of Logie & St John's (Cross). The account below is given by David J. Randall.

In June 2012, the Kirk Session of Logie & St John's (Cross) Church issued a written statement to members of the congregation. It referred to the decisions of the General Assemblies of 2009 and 2011 which placed the Church of Scotland on

a trajectory in regard to the issue of same-sex relationships and the ministry which rejects the authority of God's Word and resists the Kingship and Headship of the Lord Jesus Christ whose good and gracious rule

among his people is exercised through obedience to that Word. It is these decisions which have plunged the denomination into a crisis.

The statement went on to refer to the possibility that the 2013 Assembly might reverse that trajectory but also said that it was difficult to see that happening

in such a manner as to hold the denomination together and to make possible a future for ourselves within it. We pray it will—but we need to think, and have been thinking, about what we will do, if it doesn't.

It mentioned that the Session intended to

look carefully at the International Presbyterian Church and the Free Church, and other options that may surface.

Shortly before the 2013 Assembly, the Session issued another letter to members, making several affirmations, including the reaffirmation that

... deep pain and sadness notwithstanding—leaving the Church of Scotland is still a real possibility if the revisionist trajectory is pursued but we want to do so in the unity of the Spirit, as a church family, mindful that the enemy would love nothing better than to sow discord.

The Rev David Scott left Logie & St John's at the end of April and, after the self-contradictory decision of the 2013 General Assembly, the members of the Kirk Session stood together on the chancel of the church on Sunday 9th June when the following statement was read out:

After further deliberation at its meeting on 5 June 2013 and taking into account last Sunday's congregational

meeting, the Kirk Session has firmly decided to find an appropriate means for this congregation to leave the Church of Scotland;

it was added that they said this

mindful of our pastoral responsibility, as Elders, for the whole of the church family here—both those who have expressed a desire to leave and those who have not.

On Sunday 18th August a further document was distributed, which said:

The Kirk Session unanimously agree that this decision is a clear affront to our risen Saviour and Lord Jesus Christ who said, ‘Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me’ and unless the Church of Scotland experiences reformation and a return to its 400 year heritage of submitting to God’s Word, the Bible, we see no future for ourselves within the denomination.

The same document, however, revealed the fact that some elders had changed their minds and felt that

this fight can be conducted from within the denomination in the courts of the General Assembly and (we) will continue a congregation within Logie & St John’s (Cross) Church.

The statement intimated that on 22nd September the new Grace Church would meet for the first time but that others would remain in the Church of Scotland.

Arrangements were made to meet in the Menzieshill Community Centre, and Grace Church began its life on 22nd September, with an attendance of about 90 in the morning and 40 in the evening. I had submitted my

resignation to Presbytery and, after a lifetime's involvement in the Church of Scotland, stepped into new territory as Locum of the newly-birthing church. A sense of excitement permeated the fellowship of the congregation. The provision of facilities for Sunday services and for the Wednesday Prayer Meetings (which alternated with house-groups) was providential and a strong sense of family-ness was evident. People willingly co-operated in various practical expressions of Christian concern: the Thursday 'Bowl 'n' Roll' soup lunches, Christians Against Poverty, Raven Trust (aid to Malawi). After an initial year of consolidation, the church believed it was time to call a pastor and in August 2014 Mark Ellis took up this position.



CHRIST CHURCH, EDINBURGH

David Court has ministered for over 25 years, first in Glasgow and then since the year 2000 in Edinburgh. He demitted the charge of New Restalrig in 2013 and writes as follows.

Many years ago Francis Schaeffer wrote: 'Once Christ is no longer King and Lord in a church, then that church cannot have our loyalty. When a church comes to the place where it can no longer exert discipline, then with tears before the Lord we must consider a second step. If the battle for doctrinal purity is lost ... it may be necessary for true Christians to leave the visible organisation with which they have been associated. But note well: if we must leave our church, it should always be with tears—not with drums playing and flags flying.'

I demitted the pastoral charge of New Restalrig

and left the Church of Scotland on the 30th September 2013. About eighty of us associated ourselves with St. Columba's Free Church of Scotland and started a new congregation—Christ Church, Edinburgh. I can assure you there were no drums playing, nor any flags flying!

So what led us to take such drastic action and secede from the Church of Scotland, a denomination of which I had been part for almost my whole life? The General Assembly of 2009 was undoubtedly a watershed occasion. I wrote in the aftermath of it: 'I have been a Church of Scotland minister for almost exactly twenty years and in that time I have attended General Assemblies both as a commissioner and as a corresponding member. I must say that I have never before been so ashamed to be a Church of Scotland minister than at this Assembly.'

I believe all that has happened within the Church of Scotland in the years following and leading up to the acceptance of same-sex relationships amongst ministers has simply been an outworking of the decisions taken by that Assembly. I do not think it possible to underestimate the damage caused by the decisions and conduct of that Assembly.

The Kirk Session at New Restalrig engaged with the Assembly's 'Special Commission' and awaited its report and subsequent outcome at the 2011 Assembly. We were disappointed—but not surprised—at the result: another Commission that would report back in 2013.

Members of the Kirk Session met with representatives of the denomination—the Principal Clerk, the Depute Clerk and the Solicitor of the Church. We held a meeting with the congregation in February 2012 to express the views of the Kirk Session and to engage with

the members. After that, meetings were arranged with the Presbytery of Edinburgh's 'Cohesiveness Group'. I myself met with the Presbytery Clerk on a couple of occasions. These meetings were all conducted in a friendly and cordial manner.

However, the decisions of the General Assemblies of 2009, 2011 and 2013 in relation to ministers and same-sex relationships ultimately led the Kirk Session to seek an exit from the Church of Scotland. We held a congregational meeting on 28th May 2013 at which it was clear that the overwhelming majority of the Kirk Session and active congregation wished to leave the Church of Scotland.

At a meeting on 20th June 2013 all members of the Kirk Session present expressed their intention to leave the Church of Scotland and, God-willing, form a new congregation in order to honour Christ and continue a clear gospel witness within the local community, and on 6th October that new church came into being. We now meet in a different building; we are part of a different denomination, and we are now a different church. It has not been easy; leaving a building is neither here nor there, but leaving behind some of our brothers and sisters was hard. However, for the most part we left on good terms and with no bitter feelings or harsh words. We simply had to do what God had asked of us.

A sad departure? Yes, but the sadness was not really in having to leave the denomination with which many of us had been associated for decades. The sadness rather continues to be in the departure of that denomination from the one holy, catholic and apostolic faith.

HOPE FREE CHURCH, KIRKMUIRHILL

Ian Watson tells of how Kirkmuirhill Church of Scotland was a congregation with a long evangelical history, an all-male eldership, and general distress among the membership when the appeal from Aberdeen was refused and the General Assembly set the Church of Scotland on a trajectory that was contrary to Scripture. Ian was for a time Secretary of Forward Together and he was often asked to comment on church affairs and appeared on television, radio, and in the newspapers, putting forward the evangelical case. He testifies that throughout that time the members of the congregation were very supportive of him. Prayer meetings were held during the Assembly debates. He goes on to describe the unique aspect of the Kirkmuirhill situation as it related to title to the property.

Originally a United Presbyterian congregation, the feu disposition was also a trust deed vesting title in local trustees on behalf of the congregation. Two clauses envisaged divisions in the congregation. Although our initial legal advice turned out to be misleading, in the end we clarified that if three-quarters of the congregation voted to adhere together the property would be held on their behalf irrespective of denominational allegiance.

In January 2013 the Kirk Session met to discuss its response to the possible outcomes of the Theological Commission. All eighteen elders were opposed to the idea of anyone in an active same-sex relationship being in the ministry. However, two of them were adamant that they would not leave the Church of Scotland. The Session called a congregational meeting in advance of the General Assembly and informed the congregation that,

should the Assembly confirm the revisionist trajectory, they intended to resign as elders and would ballot the congregation as to their future denominational home, assuring the congregation that if we stuck together we would be able to retain the building. There was a feeling among the Session that the congregation was generally supportive.

After the Assembly voted to approve its compromise motion, the Session met again to discuss whether or not we felt this changed anything. The elders were clear that it did not, and informed the congregation that a vote would be held in late June to determine the mind of the membership.

A small group of members contacted Presbytery, who ordered the ballot stopped on pain of discipline. A meeting with Presbytery representatives, the Principal Clerk, and the Church Solicitor resulted in an agreement to postpone the ballot on the understanding that there would be an attempt to reach a mutually agreeable solution. Sadly, from then on the situation deteriorated. Presbytery held meetings for those who opposed the Session. These were only disclosed afterwards; they were not announced beforehand. As the year went on the numbers attending these meetings increased as the Presbytery encouraged those who wished to remain in the Church of Scotland and coached them for the congregational meetings called by Presbytery. Three elders who previously had been adamant about leaving the Church of Scotland aligned themselves with Presbytery. Congregational meetings were acrimonious.

Eventually, in December the Presbytery organised what it called an indicative ballot to determine the mind

of the congregation. While the result showed a small majority in favour of leaving the Church of Scotland, the percentage fell short of the three-quarters required in order to retain the buildings.

The Session therefore began the search for an alternative place to worship for those who wished to leave the Church of Scotland, and from then on the story becomes one of blessing after blessing—the gift of £50,000; the offer of free accommodation for the manse family for as long as necessary; sacrificial giving at Gift Days; the provision of the Community Centre on a Sunday morning and the Bowling Club in the evening; the purchase of a manse directly opposite the Community Centre; identifying land as the possible site of a future building.

The Session decided to hold a ballot in January 2014 which would satisfy the terms of the title deed. The result was that the congregation was split down the middle—140 for leaving, 140 for remaining. I indicated my intention to demit and resign my status as a Church of Scotland minister as of 28th February 2014. During the process I had been in touch with the Free Church of Scotland and was accepted by them as a minister in March. The Free Church has been very supportive and very kind both to me personally and to the congregation, and we obtained official status as a settled congregation in March 2015.

The process of leaving the Church of Scotland has been harrowing. The greatest distress has been caused not by those who were nominal members of the Church but by those who would identify themselves as evangelicals, those who were supportive up to the point of leaving the Kirk. They seem to feel their loyalty to

Christ and His Word has been called into question and their response to those of us who left has been scathing.

Those of us who have left, however, feel a tremendous sense of freedom. If we have suffered it has been for Christ's sake and that is a privilege. Worshipping in a gym hall and club house has released us from the tyranny of a traditional church building. We have been forced to think differently. One of the surprising results has been the support from those outwith our number. We have received a number of substantial financial gifts from others who admire the stand we have taken for Christ and this has been most encouraging.



BROUGHTY FERRY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Alberto de Paula, who had been minister of St James' Parish Church in Broughty Ferry since 2005, informed the Presbytery of Dundee that he planned to demit his charge on Sunday 10th August 2014. He says that the last service in St James' had an atmosphere of sadness. The family moved house on 14th August and on Sunday 17th August the new church—Broughty Ferry Presbyterian Church—began. Alberto's account of the story is as follows.

St James', Broughty Ferry had been under evangelical ministry since the arrival of the Rev Malcolm Ritchie in the mid 1950s. His presence of spirit and deep pastoral heart, combined with a clear gospel message caused many to come to faith during his time in Broughty Ferry. After his departure the congregation was minded to call another evangelical minister and the Rev Tom Robertson worked for about thirty years, consolidating St James' as an evangelical congregation.

When I came, four and a half years after Tom's departure, there was no doubt what we stood for. When the decision of the 2013 Assembly came, none of the elders had any doubt about being against it. After all, ever since 2009 we had been praying and talking about possible outcomes if such a prospect became reality. Of the many people who spoke to me during the last year, there was only one church member who wouldn't oppose same-sex committed relationships. However this person was very clear about not imposing those views on the congregation, being very happy with the kind of ministry developed there.

After the 2013 Assembly, Alberto informed the Kirk Session of his decision to leave the Church of Scotland more or less a year from then, asking them to make up their own minds on the matter. This gave a year's notice for all interested parties to make their arrangements in preparation for his departure. There and then, one of the elders, speaking on behalf of Session, asked him whether, if they left the Church of Scotland and formed a new congregation, he would become their minister. Alberto answered that that question was premature; they had to think it through without making hasty decisions.

After some weeks pondering it, I decided to say Yes without stipulating any conditions like housing, salary, or any other working conditions which ministers generally expect to be in place for them. In view of that, St James' Session unanimously recommended that the whole congregation leave the Church of Scotland.

What seemed to be a consensual matter soon proved to be a controversial one. There had been two informal

congregational meetings. The first, in August 2013, was marked by a lengthy discussion of the merits of leaving and how that would weaken the evangelical voice within the Church of Scotland.

My perception of the matter today is that some people were prepared to stick to our shared convictions but they were still afraid of becoming too vocal about it. There was also the issue of a lifelong relationship with the buildings. The prospect of no longer worshipping in those premises would be too much for some. Others, despite over fifty years of evangelical ministry, would still pay allegiance to the establishment regardless of which trajectory it decided to take. And finally there were those who would prefer to continue to carry on a faithful ministry there without having resource to such radical measures. For many, I think, the fear of being branded as homophobes was too much to bear.

The initial purpose of the meeting was to vote on the matter, but Presbytery's last minute communication with the Kirk Session made us change the purpose of the meeting to an informative one where we tried to explore different scenarios with the prospect of my departure. I left the meeting emotionally and psychologically drained, but ready to move on into a year of transition. As a result of that meeting, a liaison group was formed to explore with Presbytery the best way forward for those who were of a mind to stay and for those who were of a mind to leave.

Meanwhile we kept the church activities running as normally as possible. Then came the second meeting in January 2014. We split those present into groups led by an elder allowing them to consider Session's view of the

prospect of a congregation without a minister as well as without key office bearers who had already made up their minds about leaving. Some took it as a kind of scaremongering, while there was an expectation that Presbytery would allow them to have a way forward without much fuss and the assurance of securing the premises. Only time will tell if that expectation will be fulfilled or not.

During the group discussion all sorts of questions were asked. We tried to answer each one as best as we could with the knowledge we had then. In my view, the main concern continued to be the premises. It was unfortunate that, at one point, because of lack of courtesy in the debate, I had to issue a public rebuke. That surely aggravated the situation and some felt the need to stop coming to church until the whole situation was sorted. For better or for worse, that at least helped us to consolidate our position and work peacefully for the conclusion of the transition process.

After the second congregational meeting, one elder resigned and two others finally spoke their minds departing from that decision. Church meetings continued to happen regularly and Session appointed an action group to explore and prepare a departure for the sake of those who were definitely leaving. The group met every other week going through a list of more than 35 items, making provision for the formation of the new church.

On 8th March 2014 there had been a meeting mediated by *Place for Hope* with church members, adherents, and a representation from Presbytery. Presbytery assured those willing to stay that there would be support for

the church to carry on and that, for the next five years they wouldn't put the church under review. However, the previous decision about 'guardianship' was reiterated: the departure of the minister would mean that the church would no longer be allowed to call another until some form of adjustment were agreed (i.e. linkage or union). In my view the meeting was quite biased with the representative from *Place for Hope* clearly favouring Presbytery's position.

On that same day, Presbytery was informed that I would demit my charge after Sunday 10th August. Those who were staying finally started to get themselves organised. Although some would love to have seen us leaving much earlier, that gave them time to plan and prepare for running the church after 10th August. The last morning service had an atmosphere of sadness with many of those staying wishing us well. I tried my best to uphold my stance on the issue without making of it a personal argument with any individual in the Church. The sermon was on the passage in Acts when Paul and Barnabas had to part company because of strong disagreement. The congregation was dismissed with the usual blessing. Monday came with a heavy burden being lifted from our shoulders.

On 17th August the new Church was born, with over 100 people present and many messages of support from all over Scotland. Ever since we began the new Church we have been running a Youth Club, Messy Church, three house groups, morning and evening Sunday services, a café for the elderly, Tuesday prayer meetings and Wednesday morning services. We have about 65 communicant members, plus children and teenagers and

an average attendance at morning services of about 80 to 90 people. There is a desire to grow, sharing the gospel in our community. Thanks to the generosity of some members, a manse was made available for the move in August and new premises have now been used at 343 Brook Street—The Brook, the home of Broughty Ferry Presbyterian Church.



HOLYROOD EVANGELICAL CHURCH

Euan Dodds describes the decision of the Holyrood Abbey elders to leave the Church of Scotland as one that was taken slowly, prayerfully, and reluctantly. Some elders felt that the congregation should remain in the Kirk and stand for biblical truth, and others felt that there was a case for leaving but that they should wait until the final decision of the General Assembly before doing so. Yet others were persuaded of the need to secede and willing to do so at the earliest opportunity.

Euan is an elder (and Outreach Co-ordinator) of Holyrood Evangelical Church, and he gives the following account of how things developed.

After the 2011 Assembly the elders intimated to the congregation and to Presbytery that they were unhappy at the trajectory the Church of Scotland was taking. However, it was felt best to wait until the Theological Commission report and debate in 2013. Shortly after that Assembly, a Session meeting was called to consider the outcome, which was seen by many in Holyrood as a desperately unhappy, last-minute, attempt at compromise with a primary focus on preserving unity.

After considerable and intense discussion, another time of prayer was held. Following this, the elders were unanimous that we should begin the process of leaving the denomination. This was not an easy decision. Some had been in the Kirk all their Christian lives and others had family members committed to staying in, but at this meeting there was agreement. In time one elder would leave for another denomination (for various personal reasons) and one eventually chose to remain within the Kirk. However, our fellowship in the gospel transcends this one issue, and there is frequent and friendly interaction with those who did not make the move into the new fellowship.

The congregation followed a similar path. Many were appalled at the Church of Scotland's trajectory and realized the need to respond. We were aware that the leadership had to be seen to engage with the issue to prevent people leaving in response to our inaction! Others wrestled with the decision. Again, some members had been in the Kirk—indeed in Holyrood Abbey—all their Christian lives. They had been baptized there, come to faith there, married there, been sent out from there to minister at home and abroad, had the funerals of loved ones there, seen their children baptized and married there. Furthermore, it was only seven years since the congregation had themselves raised upwards of £1.6 million to build a state-of-the-art church hall which accommodated a full range of midweek ministries. However, people were quite prepared to count the cost.

The same views expressed by elders could be found within the congregation: 'stay in and fight', 'wait a little longer', 'leave now'. The elders explained their decision

and invited the congregation to follow their lead. Opportunities were given to discuss the issues and implications in various settings from special congregational meetings to house group evenings. Printed update sheets were also distributed informing people of progress. These were sent to Presbytery to keep them abreast of our developments. It was important that every voice was heard, and those who were opposed to departing from the Kirk had opportunity in public meetings to respond to the elders. Following the congregational meeting with Presbytery, members of the congregation were then invited to declare their intention.

The interactions with the Presbytery of Edinburgh were invariably awkward but usually cordial. The representatives of the Presbytery Cohesiveness Group were not impressed with our stance and reminded us of our obligations as charity trustees and elders who had vowed to seek the peace and unity of the church. However, they did not stand in our way and sometimes offered helpful guidance on what needed to be done before our final departure.

In early discussions, a small group of elders was told that there might be the option to rent the building once Presbytery had a clear idea of how many were leaving. Yet when the Cohesiveness Group visited early in 2014, and before there was any indication of whether some might stay, it was announced that the Holyrood Abbey buildings would be retained for the Church of Scotland's use.

It became clear that the *status quo* was no longer an option. People could either follow the lead of their minister and elders—confident of the kind of ministry

that would continue, albeit in an unknown location—or they could throw in their lot with Presbytery, remain in the church building for a period, but face the uncertainty of what sort of ministry they would receive, or whether they would be united with another congregation, and one perhaps with a different theological emphasis. In the end, a small number remained in the Church of Scotland while the vast majority of the congregation left to found Holyrood Evangelical Church.

Initially four elders resigned to become the trustees of the new fellowship. Small groups began the process of identifying suitable venues for Sunday meetings and a manse, and exploring the logistical challenges ahead. They felt a commitment to east Edinburgh and decided to hold morning and evening services in separate locations to see a gospel church ‘planted’ in two different ‘parishes’. They settled upon Leith Academy for the morning and Portobello Town Hall for the evening.

Although we had experienced some national media attention (and were prepared for this with press releases sent to interested journalists), we had no problems with the local authority. In fact, they have been nothing but helpful, from administrators to janitorial staff. There were inevitably a few teething troubles—venues being unavailable, boilers breaking down—but these have been met with cheerfulness and resolve. There is a significant amount of setting up of equipment before each service and two elders and the music group met this challenge head on.

We have also benefited immensely from the support of another seceding congregation, Chalmers Church, who have provided us office space, use of their photocopier, and premises for a prayer meeting.

There are, of course, many things needing done behind the scenes: church logo, website design, public liability insurance, safeguarding policy, hygiene certificates, copyright licenses, staff contracts, appointment of elders and refinement of governance structures—and more! Also, we still have the two questions of accommodation—where we might meet more permanently—and affiliation—which denomination or grouping we might join. Great wisdom is needed in the days ahead.

Writing four months after their departure, Euan says that leaving the denomination and the building was not easy but they were spared from sentimentality. The Sunday services are identical in all but venue, and the same commitment to midweek house-groups and prayer meetings goes on. The church timetable has been stripped back to the basics of worship and prayer, a couple of midweek ministries have continued in different locations, and others—a family service and a young adults group—have both been launched in recent months. A small number of new people have come along to services. Door-to-door work has started in Portobello and they are getting acquainted with other churches in the area.

There is grief over the state of the Church of Scotland and sadness that some, while forever brothers and sisters in Christ, could not follow the lead of the elders into safer pastures. Some of the older saints have found the move unsettling and there have been discomforts and difficulties along the way. The emotional wounds are beginning to heal but the scar may take years to fade.

Nonetheless, we do not look back in anger but fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our

faith who for the joy set before Him endured the cross
(Hebrews 12:2).



NORTH HARRIS FREE CHURCH

In February 2014 the elders of Tarbert Church responded to the decision of the 2013 General Assembly in a document that was circulated among members of the congregation. It argued that the ‘compromise decision’ of the Assembly was incoherent in that it sought to uphold the traditional biblical view of sexual relationships and at the same time allow congregations to call ministers in same-sex partnerships. This decision, it was stated,

is untruthful by its very nature, trying to hold together two completely opposing views as if they were compatible.

The elders also wrote,

We do not believe the orientation to be attracted to the same sex is of itself sinful. What the Bible teaches is, however, very clear: same-sex sexual practice is sinful ... if this decision is confirmed, the Church of Scotland, for the first time, formally in its laws and regulations, will have rejected the Bible and the gospel on an issue where the Bible is completely clear and consistent.

Various meetings were held and, after much prayer and with great sadness, the elders announced plans to dissociate from the Church of Scotland and seek affiliation with another Presbyterian denomination. They also expressed the hope that those people who had expressed the desire to remain in the Church of Scotland would nonetheless come

with the majority so that the Church family would stay together.

In August 2014 the Moderator of the Church of Scotland Presbytery of Uist issued a ‘personal appeal to members and adherents of Tarbert’ to remain within the Church of Scotland. While expressing strong disagreement with the ‘shameful decision’ of the Assembly, he wrote,

I do not find any authority in the New Testament to justify a response of leaving the Church of Scotland and dividing a faithful and God-honouring congregation. The evidence of the New Testament is clear—the Church is one body whose individual members need one another and we should remain united.

In response to the appeal, and in particular to the view that secession would be harmful to unity, the elders argued that, on the contrary,

the idea of moving to another denomination ... is an act of solidarity with our fellow evangelicals in the western isles.

They pointed out that the decision to secede was no knee-jerk reaction but one which had taken years of heart-searching and prayer;

It is not about being anti-gay. It is about the way our denomination has abandoned truth. The statements by the Church of Scotland supporting the traditional views on sexuality are false—they have already abandoned the traditional biblical view.

Writing about the possibility of becoming a congregation of the Free Church, it was pointed out that no

denomination is perfect, but the Free Church

does hold to the truth of Scripture and provides a home for an evangelical congregation that can only be beneficial;

they even argued,

If we all join the Free Church there will be one less denomination in North Harris and therefore greater outward unity. It is those who are doing their best to keep people in the Church of Scotland who are putting a denomination first and thus hampering efforts at a greater unity of believers.

In due time—October 2014—about 100 members and adherents left the Church of Scotland to form North Harris Free Church, with the Rev Roddy Morrison serving initially as Locum. Mr Morrison had demitted his status as a minister of the Church of Scotland in February 2012 and joined the Free Church in October of that year. He speaks of the buoyancy and the spirit of joyful worship in the new congregation meeting in the village hall. The title deeds of the Church building were in the name of the Deacons' Court and, since the members of the Church of Scotland did not all leave, the Church of Scotland claimed the buildings. However, according to Mr Morrison, once the seceders

gave up their buildings and walked out, they told me that it was as if a burden had been lifted from them. They were convinced that they took the right action (in not pursuing issues legally).

There are ten elders and two deacons, and on 10th

February 2015 the Rev David Macleod, who had resigned from the Church of Scotland (Applecross, Lochcarron & Torridon), was inducted as minister of North Harris Free Church.



WEST CHURCH, INVERNESS

Andrew McMillan was converted in the year 2000 while serving in the Royal Marines. He then attended his local parish church in Denny where he benefitted from what he calls ‘the faithful expository ministry of an evangelical man who had a deep love for Christ and desire for people to know God in His fulness. He became a member and then elder, before sensing a call to ministry and, after study at the University of Edinburgh, he was ordained and inducted to Dalneigh and Bona (Inverness) at the beginning of 2012. He resigned in February 2015 and is now minister of the newly-formed Inverness West Free Church. He writes:

In the Church of Scotland I have encountered and been influenced by many men who have spoken about the need to contend for the faith in the midst of a ‘broad church.’ Perhaps naively, I believed that, despite this reality, there was still a glimmer of hope for the reform of the denomination, and I gratefully accepted a call from Dalneigh and Bona, a charge with a noted history of evangelical ministry.

From the beginning of my ministry there I was greatly heartened by the mind-set of the many godly people and their zeal for God and His glory. Like me, they were grateful for all that God had done in the denomination and embraced the rich Christian heritage of the Kirk. But at the same time, they were deeply grieved at the

way things seemed to be spiralling out of control from one General Assembly to another. The presenting issue has been that of ministers in same-sex relationships, but the underlying issue is the question of the authority of the Bible. Do we receive what the Bible says, or do we stand in judgment over it, accepting what we agree with and rejecting what we don't? This is an issue which is fundamental to the life of the church.

As we discussed these issues in the congregation, it became more and more clear that our understanding of the nature of the Scriptures—which is entirely in line with Christian faith throughout the last 2000 years—was simply not shared by the vast majority of our denomination, which has chosen to listen to the spirit of the age rather than the Spirit of Christ. The situation deeply grieved us all and for me my future in the Church of Scotland was uncertain.

It was evident from the General Assembly's decision in 2013 to adopt the so-called 'mixed economy' that this would distance us from the doctrine taught in Scripture and from the worldwide church. Furthermore, it would seem that the Kirk's commitment to the cause for which it was formed had passed clearly out of the sight of the superior court, and attachment to the denomination had become an end in itself. These were sentiments shared not only by myself but by the vast majority of my congregation.

With the erosion of Reformed orthodoxy and a disregard for the authority, sufficiency, and clear teaching of Scripture (particularly in the case of the Church's endorsement of sexual sin) I came to the decision that I could no longer remain as a minister in the Kirk in

good conscience. When the reformation marks of a true church are neither present nor practised it becomes virtually impossible to be a true minister with real integrity. In setting this fatal course, the Kirk was indicating that there are no longer any institutional restraints to prevent a succession of deviations—moral, theological, and ecclesiastical—in the years ahead. There has been a failure to recognise that the Lord reigns through His Word (Psalm 110:2; Isaiah 11:4); no-one has authority above Christ and no-one has authority alongside Him. He alone has the right to determine what will be done in His church.

The Church of Scotland, by virtue of its General Assembly decisions, has gone beyond the Word of the Lord. Neither is it listening to God Himself revealed in Scripture, but instead creating a god based on the projections of flawed human minds. Issues such as homosexuality are red herrings to the real issue which is the substitution of anthropology for theology. And one thing has always remained firmly in my mind: ‘We must obey God rather than men’ (Acts 5:29), and I personally must obey God rather than submit myself to a denomination that has left biblical truth for heretical but politically correct teachings. I therefore made the painful decision to leave. I have always been of the firm conviction that leaders have a responsibility to lead.

Over the course of 2014 much discussion took place, particularly at Session level, as to the right course of action and whether or not it was viable for me to lead the congregation out of the Church of Scotland with a view to joining the Free Church of Scotland. Sadly, it became clear that there was a dichotomy in the congregation.


The rumour mill started turning and there was much unrest in the congregation, but I and many others believed that God was calling us to do something new in faithfulness to Him, for the glory of His name and for the sake of Inverness and beyond.

The whole thing came to a climax in the week leading up to 25th January 2015 when I planned to announce my demission from the charge of Dalneigh and Bona and my intention to leave the denomination with a view to seeking admission as a minister of the Free Church. The Kirk Session was now split, manipulation was going on, and upsetting rumours were being directed at those who indicated that they were leaving.

While I planned to demit formally on February 28th 2015, a number of elders had resolved to establish an entirely new church in the west of Inverness as of 1st March 2015 (associated with the Free Church of Scotland) and had asked me to serve as minister of the new congregation. I accepted, and at the time of writing West Church Inverness has been blessed with a congregation of approximately eighty people who made the painful decision to take a stand and leave Dalneigh and Bona as well as the Church of Scotland. We were very grieved at the painful decision we all had to make, but we are also so grateful for God's provision and blessing as we look forward in anticipation and with a real sense of excitement at the prospect of what God may be preparing in these days.

I thank Almighty God for the privilege of being able to serve Christ and His gospel in Dalneigh and Bona and I continue pray that each one remaining will know the eternal riches of His grace through repentance and

faith in His Son Jesus Christ. Finally, I am grateful for the opportunity of being able to leave with others, albeit weeping, but with our heads held high—knowing that we chose to walk with Christ rather than away from Him. *Soli Deo Gloria.*



The above has told of some of the new congregations formed in the last few years. There are also some ministers who have resigned their status and taken up ministry in another denomination—such as the following:

Rev. Ivor MacDonald
Hope Free Church, Coatbridge

For 12 years I was Church of Scotland minister in Kilmuir and Stenscholl in the north of Skye. It was, until the last couple of months, a very happy time. Coming from Skye it was a thrill to preach the gospel to my own people. I still remember the strong emotion I felt at one of my first funerals in Staffin. We stood around an open grave in the Cille a' Bhealaich cemetery, embraced by the Quirang, a blue sky above us. I looked at the faces around me and felt I was looking into a mirror. These were my people. We were returning to the dust one of our own.

My time there was blessed with gospel growth and a harmony in Church life. Unlike some congregations, Kirk Session meetings were never an ordeal. Until the latter days voting was unheard of. I counted my elders as friends. Their interests were my interests. So precious was this unity that I made it a practice to remind the

people often how precious this was and that we should beware lest Satan cause divisions amongst us. In the end it was Satan who led to our division, for schism is the result of false doctrine gaining acceptance and false doctrine is the work of Satan.

The first indications that there might be fissures in our solidarity appeared in connection with the 2009 General Assembly. I presented an overture from the Presbytery of Lochcarron and Skye to that Assembly. We had framed this in consultation with the evangelical group *Forward Together*, anticipating the desire of some in the Church of Scotland to hear the Aberdeen case before debating the issue of homosexuals and ordination. We knew that sentiment would prevail over doctrine.

In the event it was evangelicals claiming the interests of unity who spiked our guns. A proposal for a Theological Commission was put together, accepted gleefully by the Assembly managers and approved by the Assembly. The petition included a proposed moratorium on discussing the question of homosexuality. The most immediate result of this was that when I was invited by the Moderator to present the Overture I was forbidden to address the question of homosexuality. I had been hung out to dry.

Back in the parish there had been huge shock at the events of the Assembly. Some had followed the debates on the internet, and the atmosphere on the Sunday after was funereal. With the passage of time, however, some were convinced that the decisions would have little relevance to them and would not trump their commitment to the Church of Scotland.

The decisions of the 2011 Assembly made crystal clear that there was no going back. I intimated to my elders shortly afterwards that I could not remain in the denomination but I did not wish to leave the congregation. I wanted to shepherd them to a place that was safe, a place that was not doctrinally toxic.

In 2011 Lochcarron and Skye Presbytery passed a motion calling on ministers to consult with their congregations as to whether they were minded to explore change or to stay with the *status quo*. It was a carefully worded motion designed to encourage engagement with the issues without committing to a particular course of action. On 29th June we held the first of two congregational meetings to discuss possible future action. It was a tense meeting. I stressed the need for us to stay together as a congregation and floated the possibility of us leaving the Church of Scotland and becoming a Free Church congregation with a minimum of change. I made it clear that if we were unable to stay together as a congregation I would not remain to lead a faction but those who left with me would be encouraged to join with other congregations in the area. We explained the voting pattern and ballot papers were handed out to members.

It was to be a postal vote and two weeks later I stood with the two elders who were counting the votes, realising with deepening disappointment that it would not be the decisive result I had expected. 37 voted to explore change whilst 27 voted for the *status quo*.

From this point I began to feel a decided frostiness from those in the congregation who had made up their minds to remain in the Church of Scotland whatever. At

about this time one adherent began to send me vitriolic letters, copying in the local newspaper as he did.

We held a crunch Kirk Session meeting on 30th August. It was clear that as some had already intimated that they would be leaving, the only way we could remain as a congregation was to leave together. For that to happen the elders had to give a lead. However after a very emotional discussion only three of the elders (out of nine) declared their intention to leave.

Our final congregational meeting on 28th September was an emotional affair. There were a number of low points, some personal attacks and a lot of tears. The three elders who had decided to leave behaved with great dignity and they made it clear that their decision was driven by a desire to honour the Lord.

The meeting was a watershed. Those who had decided to leave left at this point. The first Sunday after was an eerie experience. The congregation in Kilmuir Church was reduced by more than half and the elders present were clearly shaken. They had evidently underestimated the strength of feeling of those who departed. I opened the service by reading my demission statement and preached with a great deal of difficulty.

I endured a difficult month preaching to a greatly reduced congregation. Some of them, though by no means all, were hostile towards me, laying the blame on me for the reduction in the congregation. Throughout the final weeks my own family were a tower of strength. Painful as it was for them to hear their father publicly maligned, my daughters came home from the mainland to take part in the meetings. When I moderated the crucial Kirk Session meeting there was a little family

praying all the time in the manse. And finally when we came to leave the manse in Staffin my parents, half an hour away in Kensaleyre, took us in to their home. The family stayed there for the next six months, the boys sleeping in the dining room. Throughout the ordeal they were uncomplaining even though the eldest had to sit Higher exams under difficult circumstances.

I took a month off to rest after the demands of the previous months. I sought to encourage the ones who had left whilst making plain that I would be moving on in God's providence. My Free Church colleague John MacLean organised a community farewell and presentation in the absence of one from our former congregation and we greatly appreciated that support.

One of the main challenges I faced was to guard my heart from bitterness. There is nothing more damaging to Christian ministry than to be preoccupied with real or imagined hurts to yourself. Many of those who took a contrary view have maintained their friendship with us. I am ready to be reconciled to the few who have not.

I have never been in doubt that the actions of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland left me with no option but to leave the denomination. It has been a costly decision but one that has brought blessing. Those of us who live in the secular west are rarely called on to suffer for Christ's sake but when it happens we are to count it a privilege. The Lord has been good to us. The trial strengthened us a family and we are now involved in fulfilling ministry in Coatbridge with the Free Church of Scotland.



Rev. Paul Gibson
Knox Church Perth (Free Church of Scotland)

At the time of the fateful General Assembly of 2009, Paul Gibson was preparing for ministry in the Church of Scotland. After that Assembly he and his wife Debbie considered prayerfully whether it was right to continue into ministry within the denomination at all, given that the decisions taken by the Assembly had shown such disregard for the plain teaching of Scripture.

However, they still hoped that there might be a reversal of the liberalising trend. The fact that many spoke of a growing number of evangelicals within the denomination, plus the reality that the issue of homosexuality in ministry was still to be debated by the 2011 General Assembly, strengthened their conviction that the right thing was to continue along the path on which they had been placed in God's providence.

In December 2010 Paul received a Call from Tain Parish Church. At interview he had responded to questions on how he viewed the current situation by speaking openly about the seriousness of the issue and the possibility of a time coming when it might become impossible to continue in the Church of Scotland. He remembers thinking that it was a bold thing to say at such a meeting, but felt that it was important to set out his stall rather than risk being called under false pretences. He was heartened to note that the committee seemed to agree with his position and in due time he was inducted to the charge.

The following Assembly, however (2011), voted to continue on its movement towards the acceptance for ordination of those in active same-sex relationships and to allow

those homosexuals and lesbians who had been ordained prior to 2009 to move freely between congregations.

For some people, the issue might have seemed distant and even theoretical, but in Paul's experience the matter took on a very personal and local significance when it came to light that two elders (both of whom had been on the nominating committee) were apparently living together in a homosexual relationship.

Paul refers to reformed teaching that the three marks of the true church are faithful preaching, the right administration of the sacraments, and the exercise of discipline, and in seeking to follow through on the third of these marks, he encountered controversy and increasing opposition. He taught that where immoral behaviour is allowed to continue over a prolonged period of time, instead of being addressed biblically (Matthew 18; 1 Corinthians 5), the result is that people come to accept it and a minister is denied the means by which he is called to discharge his ministry.

Ultimately, though some members expressed relief that attempts were being made to address the situation, the majority of elders would not support a biblical course of action, and in November 2011 Paul felt that he had no option but to demit his charge. In his open letter to the congregation before his departure he mentioned difficulties in the denomination and locally. The congregation knew the local problem was of a homosexual nature, but Paul, anxious not to be provocative, did not mention this relationship in his public statement.

Should he take up another charge, as encouraged by several other ministers? Two factors convinced him that the right thing was to leave. First, a clear decision had been

taken in May 2011 to follow a trajectory towards the ordination of homosexual clergy which meant that the Church had already effectively decided to depart from the authority of Scripture; secondly, the response of several ministers to his own situation left him with serious concerns regarding the nature of evangelicalism within the denomination. Having been advised by some senior evangelicals to just preach the word and ‘leave this other stuff alone’, he became convinced that the *modus operandi* of many was a detachment of the call to faithfully preach God’s Word from the responsibility of applying that Word to every aspect of congregational life. With this in mind, and having personally experienced in Tain the ultimate consequence of such a view, Paul felt he had no option but to leave the Church of Scotland.

Personal reflections

Paul now ministers in Knox Church Perth, a congregation of the Free Church of Scotland. Reflecting on his experience of life in the Church of Scotland as a member from the age of seventeen, an elder in his thirties, and then a minister of Word and sacrament, he writes here of three things that lie on his heart.

The first is a *plea*: that born again ministers who have, by God’s grace, been convicted of the authority and sufficiency of Scripture, would make sure that they are committed to acting upon that conviction—not just in the pulpit, but in doing everything that is in our power to apply its truth within the congregations and denominational settings in which we find ourselves. Where heresies have been proclaimed and immorality practised, too many men have failed to grasp the nettle and act on

that which they know to be the truth according to their own convictions. Perhaps here lies the reason why so many evangelical ministries in Scotland have not been matched by evangelical congregations.

My second burden is of *thankfulness*. God, in His wisdom and sovereignty, allowed me to experience heartache and pain in the earliest days of pastoral ministry and, while no sane person would choose such a situation, it has nevertheless been a sanctifying experience for me to be brought so low in the grace of our good God.

My final burden is one of *prayer*. The motivation for church discipline is always a loving desire for the restoration of a person who professes faith in Christ and yet is committed to an ongoing life of sin. It is my earnest prayer that I would be reunited in heaven with those to whom I had the brief privilege of ministering in Tain. However, we know that for spiritual restoration to take place in any life, the grace of repentance needs to be received and acted on. May God grant that grace, both to those who feel trapped in a sinful pattern of living and to those of us who are called to the privileged task of pastoral ministry and yet so often deny the truths we confess by our actions and our inaction.



Rev. David S Randall
Falkirk Free Church

I was sitting in the drawing room at Crieff Hydro in January 2009 when news came through to the Crieff Conference that the Presbytery of Aberdeen had agreed to induct a homosexual minister to one of its charges. As early as then I knew that this decision, unless

overturned by the General Assembly, would lead to a situation where evangelicals would feel that a line had been crossed, the line of biblical authority, of Christ's right to reign in His church—which right had been preserved in a previous generation through the blood of the Covenanters—and that it was impossible to continue in a Scripture-denying, Christ-denying denomination.

At this time, I had agreed to preach as sole nominee at Loudoun Church, Newmilns, and I was inducted there in March 2009. The decision of the General Assembly provoked an immediate response in the local congregation. Despite a statement from the Kirk Session condemning the decision and distancing ourselves from it, some of our members felt that they could no longer continue—and left either immediately or soon afterwards. They mostly ended up in independent evangelical churches, and included some of our most generous givers. Others resigned their membership but continued attending.

The Kirk Session met regularly throughout that time, seeking to keep the congregation united and seeking also to discuss the future, since the elders were unanimous in believing that we neither could nor would be willing to accept the Assembly's decision.

For me personally, an incredible amount of time and energy was expended on telephone calls and meetings with fellow-evangelicals—with most of the meetings proving to be frustrating and fruitless, as a result of a lack of clear commitment to action from many evangelicals. I was pursued by the Presbytery's Pastoral Oversight & Superintendence Committee because of an article in *Minister's Forum* in which I

bluntly stated that the Assembly had departed from the Word of God and betrayed not only its calling but its membership. As the result of an apparent abuse of the Presbytery's authority, and bully-boy tactics (where Presbytery sought to have unofficial hearings on unspecified charges) it became necessary to seek legal advice through this process, which ended with no formal charges being made.

As time went by, we continued to try to make a stand against it—joining the Fellowship of Confessing Churches and seeking to distance ourselves from the Kirk. Through all this time, it became increasingly difficult to maintain the unity of the congregation—some of whom felt we weren't doing enough, while others felt we were going too far.

In the spring of 2013 the Kirk Session held a consultation with the congregation to ascertain the level of support for breaking away from the Kirk and seeking a denominational home elsewhere. This was done against a background of active opposition from long-standing members of the congregation who sought to turn members against their leaders. The consultation revealed that, while a majority in the congregation were in favour of leaving the Kirk, it was only a slim majority—and certainly not a sufficient number of people to sustain a full-time ministry.

This having become clear, and with me thinking that I had done all I could to steer the congregation on a course of biblical integrity, the only thing left for me to do was to demit my charge and status, which I did on 30th September 2013—ten years to the day since I completed my assistantship and entered the ministry.

By this time, talks had been underway with Falkirk Free Church for some weeks and with the Free Church as a denomination, and I was accepted as a Free Church minister on 2nd October 2013. This left me facing a period of unemployment—which lasted five months. This, we knew, was a step of faith for us—and the unchanging faithfulness of God was the wonderful answer to our step of faith.

On my last Sunday in Loudoun Church, Newmilns, as part of the expository series we'd been on, I preached on 1 Kings 17—Elijah and the widow of Zarephath, whose jar of flour was not used up and whose jug of oil did not run dry until the end of the drought. This was a tremendous encouragement to us—and turned out to be prophetic of our experience over the next few months, when our needs (in fact more than needs) were so fully supplied by God, through the generosity of His people.

On 1st March 2014, I was inducted to Falkirk Free Church, where I have been labouring happily since. Much has happened in our lives (and in the national Church) that could, I believe, have been prevented, had evangelicals been willing to stand together and stand up and be counted. But God builds His church in ways other than we'd choose—our calling is to follow on and be found faithful, which I now seek to do in a new sphere of service that has opened up.



Rev. Andrew Downie
Balintore United Free Church

The elastic finally snapped on Monday 20th May 2013. I had been a member of the Church of Scotland

since 1985, an elder since 1989, a Church of Scotland minister since 1991 and parish minister on the island of Benbecula since 2006. I visited my Session Clerk on Tuesday 21st May 2013 to explain and wrote a letter of resignation to the Uist Presbytery Clerk.

The theological elastic binding me to the Church of Scotland had been stretching for a number of years. The repeated and increasing acceptance of liberal nonsense was disheartening. The 2009 decision of the General Assembly not to discipline a man in an openly homosexual relationship but rather to agree that Aberdeen Presbytery induct him as minister of Word and sacrament beggared belief. In response to that decision, at the June 2009 meeting of Uist Presbytery, I preached on 'Wolves in sheep's clothing.' As a Presbytery and as a Kirk Session we agreed that we were travelling in a direction opposite to the General Assembly. Three members of my congregation resigned. Eventually I was able to persuade them that their departure was premature and they returned to resist the liberal, unbelieving tide.

I returned from the 2011 General Assembly filled with grief, yet determined to continue our resistance. On Tuesday 7th June we discussed the General Assembly decision as a Kirk Session. On Sunday 12th June I preached on 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, making direct response to the Assembly's fateful decision (a sermon that elicited warm support among the congregation but a letter of complaint to Presbytery from a visitor). With myself, folks began restricting their giving, specifying their charitable gift for use only in local ministry and mission. At the June 2011 meeting I managed to persuade Uist Presbytery to issue a statement to all

congregations in the Presbytery explicitly refuting the General Assembly decision.

Then on Monday 20th May 2013 I watched the internet stream of the 2013 General Assembly debate considering homosexuality and the ministry. I squirmed, pacing up and down my study, often shouting at the screen in face of the politicking and obfuscation (the issue was not actually debated until 4.10 pm and guillotined at 6 pm). My biggest grief was that the facing-both-ways compromise voted through had been championed by ‘evangelicals’, so called. After five years, with no hint that the Church of Scotland could or would alter its godless trajectory, I could no longer take the stubborn refusal of God’s Word and will. The elastic had snapped.

On Sunday 2nd June the pre-morning service meeting of the Benbecula Kirk Session was emotional when I announced my decision. The post-service announcement to the congregation was doubly so. I shook hands at the door with tears in my eyes. On Tuesday 4th June Uist Presbytery met in Leverburgh, Harris, and my demission was complete. To facilitate handover and to enable our packing, the church agreed to my working three months notice.

Thankfully we had retained our flat in Kilmarnock so we returned to Ayrshire. In a self-flit van full of our possessions, my wife and I left Benbecula with heavy hearts on 31st August. Sadly we left the Church of Scotland with some relief. It would have been invidious to have formed a breakaway Church in a small island community. It was clear that some elders and most of the small, aid-receiving congregation were committed to the Church of Scotland.

From September 2013 to June 2014 I was unemployed and accepted invitations for Sunday pulpit supply in non-Church of Scotland churches. Our prayer was that if the Lord had future ministry responsibilities for us, He would make it known. If not, I would look for a 'normal' job.

We worshipped happily in Kilmarnock's Central Evangelical church. The Bible preaching, the contemporary worship, the commitment to prayer and evangelism, the desire for godliness and obedience to God's Word, and the loving Christian fellowship all brought huge encouragement. Despite minimal financial income, by the grace of God, these months allowed personal healing and refreshing, both physical and spiritual. Unsought cheques arrived from well-wishers. The Lord provided wonderfully and God's people were wonderfully supportive.

Over the months three congregations approached us regarding the possibility of future ministry with them. Extended discussions, prayer, and preaching eventually meant that on Sunday 13th April 2014 I preached as sole nominee for the vacant charge of Balintore United Free Church of Scotland, a small seaboard fishing village congregation in Easter Ross. Another self-flit van saw us move north on June 10th, with induction on Saturday 5th July. It has been a joy to find a spiritual home in the Balintore United Free Church.

Post Script

Position of the United Free Church of Scotland

Prior to 2009 the United Free General Assembly approved two reports which concluded that homosexual

acts are incompatible with the Bible's teaching on the physical expression of sexuality and therefore sinful—to be repented of and forgiven.

In 2006 the United Free Church of Scotland had entered into Covenant with the Church of Scotland to recognise each other's ministers and to facilitate united worship, ministry, and Christian service. Over the next five years, with the deepening refusal of the Church of Scotland to stand on the clear teaching of Scripture regarding homosexuality and the ministry, the United Free Church communicated its concern, making submission to the Church of Scotland Special Commission set up by the 2009 General Assembly. The Covenant was due for review after five years, but following the 2011 decision of the Church of Scotland General Assembly to set up a Theological Commission, the Covenant review was suspended pending the outcome. Following the report of the Theological Commission and the subsequent decision of the Church of Scotland General Assembly in 2013, the United Free Church General Assembly agreed to communicate its 'deep concern' at the decision made to permit those in civil partnerships to be selected for training, and ordained and inducted at the discretion of individual Kirk Sessions. That communication also indicated that such practice 'is highly likely to undermine the ability of our two denominations to remain in covenant with one another.'

In light of the decisions taken by the Church of Scotland General Assembly in May 2014 confirming a fundamental difference between the two denominations, not only on same-sex relationships but on how Scripture is regarded and interpreted, the United Free General

Assembly of June 2014 agreed this statement: ‘The General Assembly regretfully agree, in view of the decisions taken by the Church of Scotland, to take steps to bring the Covenant with the Church of Scotland to a close’.

Rev. Andrew W. F. Coghill
Scalpay Free Church

‘When do we leave?’ The text from my wife (23rd May 2011) was as brief as it was eloquent and pain-filled. We had talked about it: what would we do if the Kirk finally approved homosexual practice amongst its ministers and in its manses? We had ‘prayed without ceasing’, individually, as a family, in the congregation, and in Presbytery-wide Prayer Meetings; we had lain awake at night wondering how we would survive without home or income and what would happen to the children; we had had times of being cold with fear and dread, or warm with assurance that the Lord would look after us; and, yes, there had been times of temptation that maybe it wasn’t really necessary to leave after all, or at least not just yet; and also times of pure fantasy, that maybe the General Assembly would vote against the proposals and return to its biblical and confessional roots.

During congregational meetings between 2009 and 2011 I had been asked how long I would stay, and I had replied that as long as there was still something to fight for I would stay and fight. My foolish and naïve belief had been that the Assembly would not actually and finally approve of unrepentant homosexual practice!

Sermon preparation for that first Lord’s Day after the 2011 General Assembly was poorer than it should

have been, as so much time and tears went into the drafting of the intimation statement which I read to my congregation, morning and evening, on the 29th May, advising them of my intention to demit on 31st August.

Since my decision there have been, broadly speaking, three types of response which I have found painful. First, there is the notion that my response was simply that of hot-headed immaturity, and that older wiser heads, if only I had sought their advice, would have counselled the wisdom of remaining within the established Church to fight on from within. I think it is only fair to say that a number of older wiser heads, who remain in the Kirk, were not slow in offering their advice, and the idea that I would subject my wife and family, to say nothing of the wrench from my parish and people, to such an ordeal *without* having seriously thought through the consequences was (no doubt unintentionally) patronising.

The second notion which I found difficult to take was the charge that it was wrong to 'turn and run at the first sign of trouble.' The most charitable response to such an accusation is to ask where on earth the questioner has *been* for the past thirty years? Do they know nothing of the steady erosion of biblical standards and belief within the General Assembly? The Assembly decision was not the 'first sign of trouble.' It was the final straw.

Thirdly, a charge which has been used not so much to me personally as *about* me, and those others who now have left, is that we 'have taken the easy way out', to 'soothe our consciences', while the really difficult, hard, and faithful thing to do is to stay in and look after one's flock, and help those remaining faithful souls within the Kirk. Staying to support the flock is indeed

a worthy and laudable vision, and I do not oppose it. The question however might, I think, be asked whether we ourselves, as pastors and leaders, are able to show willingness to ‘deny ourselves and take up the cross’. Charity demands that we take the most brotherly and positive view of such accusers, and it is this. They simply do not know. To leave the Established Church, the Church of one’s country and nation, the Parish Church of our fathers and mothers, is painful.

We as a family left the manse finally on 17th October 2011 after eighteen years. From the day after my intimation the e-mails had begun flooding in, and, more slowly, the letters and cards. It was the messages from complete strangers which were often the most moving. Every message was replied to, except where they were anonymous. There was a small amount of hate mail, inevitably, but it was anonymous, but overwhelmingly the incoming messages had been of support and of respect. They had included three very generous and practical offers of accommodation, two of them from Church of Scotland people, and one of which we subsequently accepted. The house in question had been that of a lovely old Christian gentleman, in the Point district of Lewis, and it was his son who offered us the house at a nominal rent. We were extremely happy in Point. Had it not been for the uncertainty over my future, it would have been ideal. The children settled well in school, and we all loved the house and location.

My first concern had been to pray through whether or not the Lord might want me to leave the ministry altogether and find a secular job, and anyone who has worked in the ministry will recognise a certain

wistful longing for the comparative peace of just being an ordinary worshipper in the pews! But I reached the conclusion that ministry is a resource, one which takes time and cost to prepare and train for; that all denominations have a need for more ministers, and that consequently to have been able to help a little in that regard, but decline to do so, would be a less than faithful use of the Lord's resources.

I had foolishly imagined that the one advantage of being unemployed would be long hours of uninterrupted leisure to read, and catch up on all the good material which one is inevitably too busy to digest in busy parish life. But preaching engagements had begun within days of my demission. Between demitting at the end of August 2011, and receiving the Call to Scalpay Free Church in January 2013, I could count on two hands the number of Sabbaths when I was present on the island but not preaching somewhere.

In November of 2011, Ivor MacDonald announced his departure from the Church of Scotland. It didn't change our own immediate circumstances, but it meant that we were no longer alone in the wilderness. Determined not to rush any decision about a denominational home, I had allowed myself until the New Year (of 2012) to come to a decision about where to apply, and months of praying about it had still produced no hard and fast guidance from the Lord, and although my heart had its own preference I still needed to know that the Lord would be with me in that. Finally, in the early evening of 16th December 2011, I was upstairs in the house praying about the subject, and insisting to the Lord that I would do whatever He wanted me to do, or go

wherever He wanted me to go—even if it meant joining the Free Church!

The process began with my application being received in Presbytery in the January, interviews with the Students Committee and then Presbytery itself (February), interview by the Board of Ministry in Edinburgh (March) and then the General Assembly in May. I duly signed the Formula at the Western Isles Presbytery of 26th June.

The next six months proved to be arguably the most painful and difficult of the entire experience. I know with hindsight that the Lord wanted me to be in Scalpay, and certainly of all the places I had preached, this was the place where I had felt most peace and contentment, but Scalpay had various obstacles to overcome, not least the lack of an available manse. With two thirds of our worldly goods in storage requiring a monthly payment in three figures, with (albeit nominal, but they still had to be found) rent and Council Tax, and all the normal running costs and expenses for a family of two adults, four children, and an ageing family car, it is clearly only of the Lord's providence (provide-ance) that we survived; mysterious anonymous gifts of cash would arrive periodically in the post.

In mid-December 2012 we heard rumours from sources of good authority that Scalpay was indeed preparing to call me, and in January 2013, the Presbytery Clerk duly visited my home to place the Call physically in my hands. God is no man's debtor. Each member of our family has warmed to our new home and sphere of labour in Scalpay. The work is incessant at both congregational and Presbytery level, but it is all, ALL,

the Lord's work. In-service training (compulsory for all serving ministers on rotation) is free of the worldly politicised agendas which blight almost every Church of Scotland event, and the (Free Church) training items are centred in the gospel work. The General Assembly is a pleasure to attend. (Read that last sentence again!) Despite the undoubted demands of the work, there is so much fighting one just doesn't have to do any more, that one is free at last to do the REAL work.

I mourn and pray still for beloved evangelical brethren who suffer yet under the relentless and unforgiving steamroller of aggressive liberalism in the established Church, but each of us must follow our own path of obedience, wherever it may lie. For all the blessings yet received, I do honestly believe that the best is yet to come.



Rev. Ross McAskill
Wick Associated Presbyterian Church

After a background in the APC, Ross trained for ministry in the Church of Scotland and served in the parish of Knock in Lewis. He resigned after the 2012 General Assembly, was accepted into the APC ministry and invited to move to Wick to do outreach work and oversee a small congregation in Strathy on the north coast. He describes the area as a difficult part of Scotland with little vibrant gospel ministry, and is thankful for the opportunity to share the truth in this place. He shares these thoughts about 'Evangelicals in the Church of Scotland and Church of Scotland Evangelicals':

Like others I had come into the Church of Scotland from another denomination determined that, so long

as I could conduct a faithful ministry to the Lord, there was no reason that I should be anywhere else. After all, in constitution the Church of Scotland was not problematic for me. She still held to the authority of Scripture and subordinate to that were the standards of the Westminster Confession of Faith. In addition to this I was encouraged to believe that there was something of a spiritual renewal in the Church. There were many more ministers who were described as evangelical believers than before. It seemed that it was a good and purposeful thing to be a part of this movement which I hoped would encourage a more united Christian witness in Scotland.

However, it was not without struggle. Training to be a minister of the Kirk revealed that liberalism was alive and well. While there were many in the Church who professed to have evangelical faith, there was little influence. Over the years the evangelical tactic had been characterised by quiet infiltration but this has succeeded, in my mind, in producing people who are shaped by the Church of Scotland rather than the Lord. Evangelicals in the Church of Scotland had become Church of Scotland evangelicals.

This was evident to me as a minister of a congregation in Lewis (Knock Parish Church) that had many years of evangelical ministry prior to my own. Many congregations work with a deeply entrenched ‘them and us’ mentality, where the expectation is that we get on with things in our corner and what happens elsewhere is not our concern. And if there is to be involvement elsewhere, the expectation is not to ruffle feathers. This is particularly true of dealings with ‘121’ over which there is a culture of fear with evangelicals. I think there is also a lack of accountability and discipline in the church

as a consequence. I will never forget a colleague telling me during a particularly difficult time in my ministry in Lewis that the Presbytery would rather dissolve the pastoral tie than deal with the case of discipline that I was troubled by. In this particular situation, next to personalities, the Word of God became unimportant and compromise was the only thing on the agenda. But this is the Church of Scotland all over. This passive attitude which somewhat ironically is referred to as ‘fighting the good fight’ represents what has possibly been the undoing of the whole evangelical project. It is with such a mind-set that individuals and even whole congregations reason to themselves that so long as they keep themselves to themselves then they will be faithful.

I have come to the conclusion that their faithfulness is to the Church of Scotland; being part of the Kirk is more important than actually being faithful to the Lord. And this problem has been exacerbated in more recent times through legislating things which go above and beyond scriptural warrant. The law of the Church is replacing the Bible. There is no room for conscience or opinion; the Church of Scotland has spoken.

The current debacle relating to the ordination of practising homosexuals certainly demonstrates the depths to which the Church has sunk. This debate has been irksome and as time has gone by it has been evident that change is not likely. This was impressed upon me in great measure at the time of the 2012 General Assembly where after little debate the Church affirmed the availability of buildings to people of other faiths to worship their gods and did so in the name of Christian charity.

With no prospect of change at a local or national

level, I made the decision with a heavy heart to apply to the Presbytery for demission from my pastoral charge. They validated my grounds for application and granted my demission.

In 2013 a clear choice was presented to the General Assembly in the debate for or against the ordination of practising homosexuals. There was certainly a true witness given at that time but faithfulness to the Kirk prevailed. And perhaps we saw in that time the greatest demonstration of how the Church of Scotland can shape a person who gives himself to her. Out of an evangelical's mind came the proposal that individual congregations could opt out of the traditional position of the Church and have a practising homosexual minister, that is to say, we can remain faithful whilst being unfaithful. How confusing but prophetic of the Church of Scotland evangelical who is busy in his own corner and what others do doesn't matter.

This is indeed sad, and despite leaving such things behind I still have a burden for the Kirk. There is still a longing to see her reformation and renewal and I pray that would happen. Some think that the people who have left are just running off into holy huddles. The sad truth of the matter is that it is the Church of Scotland that is on the run. Under the pressure of a secular world she is unable to stand, and as she conforms she will become increasingly irrelevant to a lost world. It may be true that those who leave will be liberated but they should not be despised. They are now free to get on with the work of the gospel with greater fervency and zeal and with greater faithfulness to the Lord.



Rev. Douglas Campbell
Milngavie U. F. Church

I attended the General Assembly of 2009 and was dismayed to listen to a debate on the induction of a minister who was living in a homosexual relationship. The very fact that this debate took place was, for me, an indication of how far the denomination had drifted from an adherence to biblical orthodoxy.

Later in 2009 I was called by God from Aboyne-Dinnet linked with Cromar to serve the congregation of Bo'ness Old. Here I followed the evangelical ministry of David Randall (Jun.), and although I had the support of the majority of the elders with regard to my position on the issue that had become known as 'same-sex relationships and the ministry', the issue became a cause of division within the Kirk Session and congregation. We had some resignations from those of a revisionist position as well as a few from those with a traditionalist perspective.

Some members stopped giving because they were unwilling to continue to support the central funds of the Church of Scotland; at the same time, we gained several adherents who told me that they appreciated the preaching of the Word and the worship of God but could not join the denomination because of our unbiblical leanings.

After much prayer, Bible-reading and discussion I came to realise that the crisis in the Church of Scotland was such that I could not in good conscience continue to serve within the denomination. I shared this with a colleague in the United Free Church of Scotland who expressed his concern and suggested I consider a move to that denomination. Following a meeting of enquiry I

applied to the U.F . Church as a candidate for ministry. Things moved fairly rapidly from that point on. I was approached by the Interim Moderator of Milngavie Church, after which their vacancy committee heard me preach, interviewed me and invited me to preach as Sole Nominee. Preaching at Milngavie, I had a clear sense of God's blessing and the Lord confirmed the call to me when the congregation voted unanimously to call me as their minister. And so by the grace of God on 5 March 2015 I was inducted to this charge. I left the good people of Bo'ness Old with a heavy heart and my prayerful good wishes, but assured that this is the Lord's will and I must obey and honour Him.



Apart from these new congregations and new ministries, there are some ministers who do not fit into any category but who have felt compelled to depart from the Church of Scotland.

Rev. Thomas Mackinnon

After being minister at Kilmuir & Logie Easter from 2005 till 2009 Mr Mackinnon gave notice to the Presbytery of Ross that he would demit his charge on 6th July 2009 following the induction in Aberdeen: Queen's Cross. He tells his story:

Like many other ministers of the Church of Scotland I had made my intention of demitting known should that induction take place. It was a difficult choice to make, knowing that in leaving I would leave the congregation vacant, yet I have had peace of mind since I took that decision.

For quite some time prior to demitting I had a recurring dream when I was aware of arriving at a church to preach and was unable to find a Bible or any book of praise. At other times I would dream of finding a Bible but be unable to read the print because of how damaged the pages were. Always the situation would mean that the congregation was sitting waiting for worship to begin whilst I would feverishly search for a Bible or a praise book. Once I demitted, this dream has never re-occurred.

There were some in the Church of Scotland who were concerned that I would be homeless, without any income and with a reduced pension, making the case that I would be foolish to demit due to the financial loss. I can say that I have preached in various pulpits by invitation most Sundays since I demitted, that I have a roof over my head and am not in debt—other than to the Lord!

I was recognised as a minister of the Free Church of Scotland in 2011.

Rev. Bob Fyall

Dr Fyall was an honorary associate minister at St George's Tron, Glasgow. When the Tron seceded, he resigned as a Church of Scotland minister, although he states that, whatever his situation had been, he would have resigned anyway. In the following account, he reflects not only on the past but on questions relating to the future of evangelical ministry in Scotland.

A brief ministry in a difficult and unrewarding Scottish parish was followed by fourteen years in Durham—teaching at a theological college and pastoring a church where two to three hundred students attended regularly.

When I left, the church (then known as Claypath) voted to leave the United Reformed Church so that gospel ministry could continue, as it does today, under the name of Christchurch. So my last months there were concerned with leading that process.

On my return to Scotland as Director of Rutherford House in 2003 I became involved in a number of bodies: on the steering group of *Forward Together*; trustee of the Crieff Fellowship; director on the boards of Highland Theological College and International Christian College; member of Scottish Council of Universities & Colleges Christian Fellowship. This meant participation in discussions of the Scottish and wider scene—and also a growing awareness that it was extremely difficult to get evangelicals to work together. I have been involved in Cornhill Scotland from its beginning in 1996, part-time for one year and since 1997 full time, as well as being an honorary associate pastor at the Tron Church.

We are in a time of great uncertainty and lack of clarity about the future, but also as evangelicals who have left a denomination which has drifted from its biblical moorings we have great and exciting opportunities ahead of us.

The first great advantage is to be *free from the restrictions of denominationalism* and enjoy greater freedom of association with other like-minded churches. There has always been such association but now it can be pursued openly. Joint projects, gospel partnership, greater freedom in employing ministry teams and sharing of resources now have greater opportunities to flourish. No longer do we have to join with Churches whose loyalty to the gospel is dubious simply because they belong to

the same denomination or commit money and other resources to projects which are of doubtful value. We need to grasp these opportunities vigorously.

However, that new freedom also has some potential problems. While we would never want to return to hide-bound denominationalism it is important that we have some simple structures in place. We have been blessed by the emergence of some significant younger leaders, but gospel work can never be built on individuals. We need to think strategically about how partnerships will develop over the next decades when new leaders will have emerged and thus we cannot rely on the personal friendships of a number of individuals.

Also we need in this connection to remember the needs of smaller churches, and large and wealthy groups need to consider how resources can be best used and how help can be given to small, struggling fellowships. Meetings of church leaders ought not to be confined to large Churches or what emerges will not be helpful to those who lead in very different circumstances.

New simple structures are certainly not designed to create a new denomination. In any case, Churches or groups who have already left the Church of Scotland have already followed a variety of different paths such as joining the Free Church or International Presbyterian Church, while others are effectively operating independently. The simple structures have to do with co-operating in gospel work, regular prayer for each other and, perhaps most importantly, mutual recognition of ministries—which leads us to our next point.

Training. Our second great blessing is no longer having to conform to Church of Scotland training;

perhaps lack of training would be more appropriate because for long the Church of Scotland has handed its training to the University Faculties of Divinity. I know that the Church has a foothold but this has become decreasingly significant as the sharp decline in Church candidates and the increasing emphasis on Religious Studies has eroded the need for training future ministers as a significant factor in curriculum design. Also, the drift to liberalism in the Church of Scotland means that few people of evangelical convictions have any voice in the direction and content of training. All this has been happening for a long time.

Against this background Cornhill has already proved its worth. In less than a decade a stream of mainly, but not entirely, young men and women have enriched many churches and benefitted from the biblical training received. Other agencies such as the Edinburgh Theological Seminary (formerly Free Church College), Highland Theological College, Edinburgh Bible College, and Faith Mission College are vigorously alive, although I regret the demise of the International Christian College. Cornhill too is pioneering the innovative Pastors' Training Course. There is a real desire to see people prepared to serve the church and evangelise the world.

However, there is a danger that, in a natural reaction against the 'ivory tower' theology of many divinity faculties, we throw out several rather large babies with the bath water. Those of us who did degrees at the divinity faculties in the past, crucially combining it with regular listening to strong expository preaching, know that it was not all bad. Those who engaged seriously with what was on offer, especially if there was serious engagement

with biblical studies, including the biblical languages, gained great benefit. Such engagement produced a robust evangelicalism which knew what it believed and why it believed it.

If we focus too narrowly on church-based learning we are in danger of producing practitioners who simply don't know enough theology. In every generation there will need to be people who will do theology degrees, including higher degrees, who will teach in places like Cornhill, who will write books and teach the teachers. The College I served in Durham did not take people out of churches but set out to balance theology and ministry; indeed that was the title of all the degrees and diplomas. One size does not fit all any more than it did in the old system. There is a great need for the scholar/preacher, by which I do not mean a scholar who occasionally preaches but a preacher who works hard at scholarship. The various bodies mentioned need to talk to each other and think strategically.

Gospel work. A third great advantage is that we now have a new opportunity to concentrate on real gospel work without the distractions of the painful process of leaving the denomination. Thus youth work, innovative evangelism, and other activities can flourish. Again, this has been happening in many places where there were sufficient resources and here again helping smaller Churches is important. It is also important that we commit ourselves to expository preaching and teaching to prepare God's people for their own ministries in their homes and at work.

All this needs accountability to each other. That does not mean supervision of each other's activities, but a

willingness to learn that no one church or leader has all the answers. One of the sad features of recent times has been the condemnation and refusal to support those who have left the Church of Scotland by some evangelicals who have stayed in. Doubtless unwise things have been said on both sides but it is depressing when loyalty to a denomination takes precedence over support of those who have been associated with them over the years in bodies such as the Crieff Fellowship.

However, our new-found freedom must not lead to trying to persuade others who have left that any of us have found a way with which others must agree. We need mutual recognition of each other whatever path we have chosen, whether to be largely independent or to join another denomination.

The Lord is doing a real work in our time providing leadership, vision, and renewed clarity as well as giving new hope and direction for many who no longer felt at home in the Church of Scotland. But we can be sure that the devil is at work also, trying to divide, disrupt, and discourage.

I close with two striking biblical examples of kings who reacted in different ways. In 2 Chronicles 20, Jehoshaphat, faced with overwhelming opposition prayed, 'we are powerless against this great force; we do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.' By contrast in 2 Chronicles 26, Uzziah began magnificently but then comes the chilling phrase, 'he was marvellously helped until he became strong.' Our safety lies in recognising like Jehoshaphat that we are weak and that all the glory is the Lord's.



Rev. Aonghas Ian Macdonald

Mr Macdonald was ordained and admitted to the Church of Scotland charge of Gairloch, Ross-shire in August 1967. In October 1973 he moved to Barvas in the Presbytery of Lewis and then in April 1981 to Inverness East in the Presbytery of Inverness. He retired after over forty years in parish ministry in October 2007. He left the membership of the Church of Scotland in 2012, joined Smithton Free Church and is now a recognised minister of the Free Church of Scotland.

In explaining why he could no longer remain in the Church of Scotland, he refers to the vows which he took at his three inductions which he feels he can no longer affirm conscientiously and with integrity. In one of them he promised to be ‘subject in the Lord to (this) Presbytery and to the superior courts of the Church, and to take your due part in the administration of its affairs.’ He raises the question: does the phrase ‘in the Lord’ provide a ‘safety clause’ that would allow him to remain in the Church of Scotland? He answers that everything turns on the issue of who it is that decides what ‘in the Lord’ means.

On the face of it, it seems that I decide on the issue of being subject while knowing that there is an irreconcilable difference of view on the interpretation of Scripture in regard to moral and other issues. Does the denomination allow me to refuse submission on an issue in which I reject its affirmations, e.g. sexual morality or the ordination of female elders? Is the ‘broad church’ really that broad?

He then refers to the context of the vows. That context

is provided by the ‘preamble’ which ends with the statement:

‘The Church of Scotland holds as its subordinate standard the Westminster Confession of Faith, recognizing liberty of opinion on such points of doctrine as do not enter into the substance of the Faith, and claiming the right, in dependence on the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit, to formulate, interpret, and modify its subordinate standards: always in agreement with the Word of God and the fundamental doctrines of the Christian Faith contained in the said Confession, of which agreement the Church itself shall be sole judge.’

Although the phrase about the Church itself being ‘sole judge’ may carry the implication: ‘the Church and not the civil power or any other body’, Aonghas Ian sees the phrase as also implying that the Church itself (which effectively means the General Assembly as the supreme court and decision-making body of the Church of Scotland) is to be regarded as the sole judge of what is or is not in agreement with the Word of God.

In my view it is doubtful whether as a minister of the Church of Scotland I can claim integrity when I disagree on a major moral issue which I see clearly defined in the Scriptures and still vow my submission and loyalty to a denomination which takes the opposite view. For example, the acceptance of female elders has become mandatory in the Church of Scotland. Those objecting ‘in the Lord’ to women elders and refusing pulpits in the Presbytery of Lochcarron & Skye to a lady Moderator on an official visit were described by a former Moderator at the 2014 General Assembly as ‘antiquated gangsters.’

In the late sixties, I was in the Assembly when legislation on female eligibility for eldership was approved. It was passed initially with verbal assurances that there would be freedom of conscience for congregations which did not want to go down this route. I heard the late Very Rev. Dr Roy Sanderson, Convener of the Panel on Doctrine, give verbal assurances. Significantly, however, this was not put on official record and a few years thereafter these assurances were dismissed and the new legislation was made mandatory.

I think it is reasonable to expect this pattern will be repeated with regard to practising same-sex partnership in the ministry. In a few years time I envisage similar terms will be used for those who object to the approval and acceptance of same-sex intimacy in the ordained ministry.

The other vow that Aonghas Ian says he can no longer affirm wholeheartedly in the context of the present debate is

‘to seek the unity and peace of this Church; to uphold the doctrine, worship, government and discipline thereof; and to cherish a spirit of brotherhood towards all the followers of the Lord.’

Fundamentally the unity and peace Jesus prays for (John 17: 20-21) in the High Priestly prayer must be based on acceptance of the Word of God (John 17: 6b, 8, 14, 17, 20). This acceptance of God’s plain Word, in my view, does not lie at the core of the doctrine—the teaching on sexuality, etc.—now being adopted by the Church of Scotland. In its declaration of the Church of Scotland’s right to be sole judge of what agrees with God’s Word,

how can I in my disagreement, ‘seek its unity and peace; and vow to uphold its doctrine, worship, government and discipline’?

The issues of ‘discipline’ and ‘the spirit of brotherhood’ are distinguished and defined specifically in 1 Corinthians 5: 9-13 where the immoral person who is committed to such a lifestyle, along with those who manifest lifestyles which promote other vices, is to be excommunicated, according to the Apostle Paul, and refused the status of brotherhood rather than being accepted and commended. This, of course, does not imply being disrespectful or unloving toward those who accept such lifestyles or to those of other faiths.

It is painfully obvious to me that I do not share the view of ministry and of gospel fellowship that is now being defined by the resolutions of the Church of Scotland’s General Assembly. The only solution is for me to withdraw from it.

I do not believe that this separation involves discarding all contacts with evangelical friends whose personal guidance directs them to continue within the denomination. I may not understand their guidance but I must respect it. The work transcends denomination—in missionary support, in evangelism that calls people to Christ and in services of compassion, etc.



Rev. Brian McDowell

Brian McDowell was ordained in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland in 1978. After ministries in Co. Antrim and Belfast, he came to Scotland in 1999 as Chaplain at Fettes College, Edinburgh. In 2007 he was called and inducted

to Elie, Kilconquhar & Colinsburgh in the Presbytery of St Andrews. Here is Brian's own story.

I exercised what would be termed a traditional reformed ministry, majoring on expository preaching in worship and comprehensive home visitation. Thankfully there was a positive and visible response to this and, aided by the visits of industrious and committed elders, we saw attendance at Sunday worship increase considerably. Also, the witness of the church in the community was enhanced by our care of many within the parish who had hitherto had no church connection. A weekly prayer-time was begun which greatly helped to enliven the spirit in worship each Sunday and to foster a happy and positive atmosphere throughout the congregation. It would be fair to describe the situation at that time within the congregation as healthy in every way—spiritually, numerically, and financially.

In 2009 I was appointed as a commissioner to the General Assembly. Upon receiving the papers relating to it I warned my congregation of the seriousness of the consequences attendant on any unscriptural decision regarding homosexual relationships. In the wake of the Assembly decision I was extremely troubled about my place within the Church of Scotland, but after some discussions and much deliberation and prayer I believed it right to stay within the denomination at that time. However, in the wake of the 2011 decision I believed that I could no longer honour the promise I had made to 'be subject to the courts of the Church of Scotland; the Presbytery of St Andrews and the General Assembly.'

I tried very hard to find a way round the situation. I argued with myself that the Church of Scotland had

broken its covenant with me—that it was no longer a reformed church, having abandoned the authority of Scripture; therefore I was released from my promise to it. But of course that is the logic of the child—if he did it to me then I can do it to him. Our standards must always be set by God and not by what others do.

I tried to argue that there was a genuine work of God taking place in our three villages and—what would happen if I left? Here also I quickly remembered the advice I had given to so many during my years of ministry—leave the consequences of your obedience to God. Through troubled days and sleepless nights my wife and I talked and argued and prayed. Finally we both came to see and accept that integrity demanded we leave a denomination that had, at an institutional level, chosen to set its agenda by the world's standards. The Church of Scotland, with its wonderful history of service for Christ had gone through the blender of secular humanism.

There was both relief and deep sadness at this decision. We were going to be leaving a people we had come to love and a work that we revelled in. I felt that I had done little enough and am still not sure how much my ministry helped the people of Elie, Kilconquhar & Colinsburgh. But their Christian grace and witness helped me hugely and it was heart-breaking to have to tell them of our decision. We will never forget the warmth of their support for us in that dark hour.

I am writing this some three years after our leaving and return to Northern Ireland. Although my wife and I have always been at peace about the decision and do not regret it, I have to say that the first weeks and months

after leaving were not easy. I have to confess that I was less than Christian in my response. During those first early days I felt some bitterness at the hierarchy within the Church of Scotland. I resented their disdain for the people of the Church, their cynicism about the traditions of this once great Church, and most of all their rejection of God, His Word and His Son. It is not just God who is being failed but the people of Scotland as well.

However, as time has passed and I have found new areas of service back here in Co. Antrim helping in local congregations, I have come to see what I believe is a bigger picture. The Church of Scotland has been abandoning God and His Word for generations now in many places. The permissive doctrines and elastic ethics it has embraced have resulted in problems with declining numbers and falling finance.

Deeply sad though all of this is, I believe that there is still hope. God still has a work to do in Scotland and He will not leave Himself without a witness in the land. How sad though that that witness will not be from the institutional Church of Scotland. How sad that the church of John Knox and Thomas Chalmers and Robert Murray M'Cheyne has come to this. How sad that so many of those who wish to serve in ministry for Christ do not believe they can do so within this new Church of Scotland.



Rev. Bob Gehrke

I am not one readily given to tears but they were present on that day in 2011 as I sat with the two elders representing Blackridge and Harthill: St Andrews. We

had withdrawn to the quiet little chapel tucked away below the university library next to the Assembly Hall. All three of us were in shock. The Assembly business was continuing in the building above us but we had to get away.

It was not so much the fact that the General Assembly had voted to openly accept practising homosexuals within the leadership of the Church; it was how the issue was argued: 'Yes of course the Bible takes a negative position with regard to homosexual practice but in the light of advances in our understanding, we now know better.' We had just witnessed the highest court of the Church of Scotland unambiguously set itself up in judgment of God and His Word and in this matter declared it to be null and void.

The public discussion and debates within the media leading up to the debate at the 2011 General Assembly had caused considerable unease and discomfiture within the two congregations. Now that the outcome was known and was not a good one as far as the congregations were concerned, the elders keenly felt the responsibility of having to lead their respective congregations through this difficult and potentially disruptive time.

The elders met four days after the close of the Assembly and were unanimous in their declaration that the General Assembly's decision was a denial of Scripture as the supreme rule of faith. It was not a knee-jerk reaction and they still realised that a final decision was still two or three years down the line. They resolved to engage positively with other like-minded congregations in exploring how to unite in standing against the ungodly direction the Church had lurched in. They also planned

to make a formal statement to the two congregations and considered how to help members who were unwilling to continue giving to the work of the Church of Scotland. The elders invited a Free Church minister to come and speak to them in February 2012, but this was met by a lukewarm response in both Sessions. It was then decided to take a poll of the congregations to see what level of support the respective Sessions would receive in the event of separation. A paper was circulated and then presented to the respective congregations on 13th May, 2012. Almost two thirds of those at worship that day indicated that they would either leave or consider leaving the Church of Scotland unless there was a significant change in direction. This result encouraged the elders to consider pursuing options.

During the next year it became apparent to the elders that there would be little likelihood of being able to leave the Church of Scotland along with the buildings, and they knew that many within the congregation were strongly wedded to them. At their own Session meeting, the Blackridge elders discussed this difficulty and could see that pursuing separation would result in a painful split within the congregation and also within the village. Although few within the village attended worship, many considered it 'their' church. In the face of this, the elders unilaterally decided to discontinue pursuing options and so remain within the Church of Scotland.

This decision was made toward the end of 2012, making it more difficult for the Harthill: St Andrew's elders. If they were to separate from the Church of Scotland, they would be doing so without the linked congregation and so making it harder to sustain a full-time

ministry. Furthermore, like the Blackridge elders, they could now see that it would split the congregation almost down the middle and in effect it would mean starting again in terms of material resources. The decision of the General Assembly on the matter however was the final straw.

On Tuesday 28th May there was a final joint meeting of elders which was scheduled to discuss and respond to the General Assembly's decision on same-sex relationships in ministry. There was not much debate with the extract recording the outcome of the discussion we did have:

'Both Sessions were encouraged to hear the General Assembly affirming its support for traditional marriage and although disappointed in the likelihood of a "mixed economy" being accepted, believe that they will be able to live with the compromise insisting that they will always insist on traditional marriage within the Blackridge and Harthill congregations.'

A statement made to the congregation on 17th June 2013 said:

'As you know, your elders have been looking for options since the 2011 General Assembly, but sadly none could be found, especially when it would mean leaving our buildings behind. In the light of this and the Assembly's compromise decision the elders have decided to stop looking into leaving the Church of Scotland. Please be assured that the elders have not simply given up but are committed to working closely together with like-minded congregations to do all we can to bring the national church back in line with the teaching of Scripture through agencies like *Forward Together*.'

This left me with a decision to make. Throughout the process, I believed it important that I not push the elders in any particular direction. I did my best to inform them, encourage them, and also offered my opinions but without trying to tell them what they should do. It had to be their decision—they had to own it because they would have to live with it within their communities longer than I would. So after speaking to the Presbytery Clerk and the Ministries Council, I announced to the congregation that I would be leaving at the end of June 2013.

