

MINUTES

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Wednesday 22nd June 2022

7.30pm to 8.30pm

Zoom meeting link – all attendees online at same address

1. Welcome

Richard Murray welcomed attendees as charity chairperson. He apologised for the two-stage process as a full and accurate statement of the accounts were unable to be presented as initially planned at the Annual Gathering on 30 April 2022 for reasons beyond our control which had now been overcome.

Trustees present:

Richard Murray (Chairperson), Mary Sweetland (Treasurer), Elizabeth South, Penelope Blackwell, Fintan Hurley, John Seenan, Sally Foster-Fulton, Jenny Adams, Iain McLarty

Attendance registered online by Full Members with voting rights and other attendees observing.

2. Apologies for absence

Full Members:

Anne Backhouse, St Mary's Cathedral, Edinburgh

Bill Wilson, St John's Kirk, Perth

Eco-Congregation Scotland trustees: Len Gregory and John Collings

3. Approval of [Minutes from 2021 AGM](#)

Minutes moved by Jenny Adams and seconded George South

4. Chairperson's Report on the activities of Eco-Congregation Scotland

Last year was a challenging year dominated by COP26. COVID continued to turn everybody's lives upside down, so it was an enormous relief that we were able to hold our hybrid Annual Gathering at Dunblane where Eco-Congregation Scotland came into being 21 years ago. He hoped those who attended online or in person took something away from that meeting.

No one can deny the impact COVID has had nationally and internationally, changing lives and our communities in some cases beyond recognition. The risk remains globally although the shadow cast over the UK is beginning to shift. Nevertheless we need to stay alert to any possible resurgence which means we have to keep under constant review how best to maintain the effectiveness of our organisation.

The run-up to COP26 was a busy time to say the least organising and supporting a range of events including Scotland's Climate Week and the Climate Fringe. We also were a supporting partner of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland with their Climate Sunday initiative, for which James Anthony was project coordinator. Shortly before COP26, Richard attended an online meeting with the First Minister and two Cabinet colleagues, together with a number of interfaith leaders. It was very interesting to hear the Scottish Government making pledges to listen.

At COP26 itself, we linked up with Glasgow Churches Together, Interfaith Scotland and countless international groups, networks, organisations and pilgrims who had all come to tell their different stories of pain and hope. It was particularly good to make connections with so many young people, through Christian Climate Action and the Young Christian Climate Network, notably those young pilgrims who had made the journey from the G7 in Cornwall who Richard met with Methodist Church representatives.

Richard was very pleased to attend the global ecumenical service in Glasgow's St Mungo's Cathedral with a powerful sense that we were part of a global family it was important to be part of that community.

During the conference we were privileged to have access to the diplomatic area known as the Blue Zone, but the overwhelming experience that those who attended was really where Glasgow became a global village where voices were unified and powerful messages were put across on the climate emergency. Colourful demonstrations and wonderful drumming, with vigils in George Square and the culmination of the march with 100,000 in the pouring rain – which fortunately or unfortunately he was unable to attend.

The outcome was the Glasgow Climate Pact with the aim of keeping alive the ceiling of 1.5 degrees Centigrade on our warming planet. This needs to be read in the context of the latest IPCC report, warning that the world is set to reach that level within the next two decades. Only the most drastic cuts in carbon emissions from now on will help to prevent an environmental disaster. Notwithstanding this stark warning, we are inevitably seeing some backtracking from certain businesses, financial institutions and politicians on the promises that were made in Glasgow. Sometimes this form of denial falls into the category of greenwashing and we need to be very careful about this. This is where the management team of an organisation makes false or misleading claims about the sustainability of a product or service they provide. It is shocking behaviour. It can be unintentional due to lack of knowledge or understanding, but it is also being carried out intentionally for market reasons and we need to stay alert.

How do we provide a counterbalancing voice? Our strength lies in the relationship we have with congregations and networks, and the degree to which they interface with us. Our focus should be on how that relationship can be secured and improved upon. We know that Climate Action Hubs are springing up in regions across the country and Richard had been involved in the North East, and knows eco-congregations are very much playing a central part. The idea of a Hub has broader coverage than our Networks can provide and has the ability to empower communities to develop local solutions in order to make the transition to Net Zero and develop climate resilient living for their communities. These Hubs are able to provide advice and support for local collaboration across communities, and enable sharing and learning, helping groups identify funding opportunities. Two are currently funded by the Scottish Government and able to employ full and part-time staff.

Eco-Congregation Scotland has experienced a surge in registered and Full Member eco-congregations, exceeding the figure of 600. Although that is a great thing, we know there are countervailing circumstances. For example, the Church of Scotland Presbytery changes may affect our absolute number but we can be confident the Members are still there in some form or another.

We are also encouraged that our online resources are being downloaded at encouraging rates. Although the 22 Local Networks have seen a fall in the number of meetings in person, we are also pleased and encouraged that individuals from across Scotland are tuning into our webinars through Zoom video conferencing. This new way of communicating has led to a more flexible networking approach that doesn't have geographical boundaries. Networks have been able to do this working jointly. Online seems to work well in rural areas, although we must not forget that in-person events are still an important way of networking and finding out what our neighbours are doing to tackle familiar issues, float ideas, get ideas and try out new things. It is important we hear what our neighbours are saying and we work together.

As a charity we are continually exploring ways to help guarantee available ongoing funds to resource our activities. We aim to maintain a broad base of different sources of funding. We are very grateful for financial support we receive from the Church of Scotland, the Scottish Episcopal Church and SCIAF. Seeking funding is something we have to do with care, considering very closely the ethical issues that might arise through fundraising from corporate businesses, charitable trusts or foundations. We have developed a policy framework which we will keep under constant review.

Richard was very pleased we were able to welcome our third coordinator to the staff team, Audrey Kelly, as Administrative Coordinator. Our other two co-ordinators have been busy in their respective fields. Judith Macleod as Programme Coordinator successfully renewed the "Let's Talk About The Climate Emergency" resources covering new topics, offering campaigning activities as well as personal and corporate activity in our congregations. It follows the same format, with Bible references, prayers and activities for all ages as used successfully before. Judith has also hosted online Network meetings and continued the good work of EcoHighland churches from COP26.

James Anthony as Net Zero Coordinator has focused on Net Zero initiatives with a majority of denominations now committed to this policy. It is good to see central funding coming through for whatever changes may need to be made to heating systems and so on. James will provide any support that is required, through virtual or physical visits, to get churches' initiatives onto a practical footing. It is important, as changing heating in a church can be a big task and longer term achievement, we also want to encourage urgent attention on other aspects such as food and clothing, working with others in those areas. We have to manage very carefully the Just Transition which involves respect for vulnerable groups, the creation of decent jobs with employment rights, fairness in energy access and use, and democratic consultation. Achieving the urgent and necessary transformations laid out in the recent IPCC report will require placing people at the heart of climate action, in a way that engages with people and is valued by decision makers from government, industry, civil society and the law. That was certainly the message from the meeting with the First Minister. Tackling climate change cannot be achieved solely through technological breakthroughs or new climate models, we need to achieve wider societal gains, such as wellbeing, equity and fairness.

The assessment process for our Awards can now resume as an in-person process as well as online, helpful for more remote locations and where we have fewer Assessors. We would like to increase the number of Assessors this coming year and we are happy to offer training and a potential role for others who may want to volunteer. We recognise the importance of volunteers to our organisation and have a volunteer policy that formalises the relationship and governs issues such as health, safety and wellbeing.

The role of our Eco-Chaplain, Rev'd David Coleman is supported financially by the United Reformed Church and Scottish Episcopal Church, with the Church of Scotland providing accommodation. David played a key role in the run-up and duration of COP26. We had a successful launch of Creation Time with the Joint Public Issues Team, a partnership of several denominations in the UK. David has provided worship support across the length and breadth of Scotland, most recently back from Shetland. He has been invited to Presbyteries, Dioceses and Synods. We have also been having discussions with the Scottish Episcopal Institute, the training body of the Scottish Episcopal Church, to explore how we can support the policy of greening the curriculum, spreading eco-theology and eco-spirituality across the breadth of ministerial training. David has lately been working closely with the European Christian Environmental Network and the World Council of Churches.

Richard remarked his first year as chair was daunting, he was extremely grateful that when Mary Sweetland stood down as chair she took on the role of treasurer. He thanked all his fellow trustees and staff for their support and commitment. Two trustees, Elizabeth South and Len Gregory are standing down as trustees this AGM. Richard thanked them warmly for the wisdom and practical assistance they have provided over the years. Faith and hope do not run charities, trustees do, so we are recruiting. If you feel we have the sorts of skills we need, please get in touch.

Reflecting on the past year's achievements, he does not underestimate the challenges we face, in order to make a meaningful difference in the years ahead, particularly how we can and must make our presence felt more strongly. We are a highly respected organisation and need to build on that reputation. What underpinned our original purpose in 2001 has changed dramatically. Climate doomers believe the world has already lost the battle. As Christians we have to counter this, interpreting and using our faith in support of an integrated and sustainable ecology. The Bible is not a monochrome textbook about morality but a rich, multi-layered story of Christian mission and this is a very important part. We must not underestimate how hard it is to persuade the world to take action on climate change and to care for those most harmed by its impact, indeed all living creatures and things. Given that all climate solutions will involve people, people of faith have a vital role to connect in our families and communities, but also become trusted messengers providing simple, clear and compelling messages about why climate action matters and what solutions are available. We cannot give into despair. As Christians we carry a message of hope.

With all we achieved this past year, we continue to be confident in reaching our objectives and performing in circumstances that remain unpredictable after an unprecedented two years. We will work tirelessly to build upon our co-operative history while remaining future-focused and inclusive, meeting the needs of our Members and the diverse communities in which they live and work, delivering on our purpose and vision so we can all be part of a resilient community.

5. Annual Accounts and Financial Report

Mary shared a presentation referring to the previously circulated [2021 Annual Accounts](#) that have been submitted to the independent examiner and will be recorded with the charity regulator OSCR, outlining the different funds and their purpose:

- General - Any income & expenditure not falling within coverage of other funds (Unrestricted)
- Development - Ring-fenced expenditure for SG Grant, covers all operating costs other than those that are net by other Restricted Funds (Restricted)
- Chaplaincy - Ring-fenced income and expenditure associated with Environmental Chaplain. Includes a reserve for dilapidations due to Church of Scotland on vacating Manse (Restricted)
- Local and Network Support - Ring-fenced for income from membership fees and donations used solely to help pay for cost of supporting local congregations and networks (Restricted)

Last year our good financial performance was partly due to COVID restrictions limiting travel costs. Our income was slightly ahead of 2020 and overall we had a surplus of £16,452.

In the Statement of Balances we had a Closing Balance of £47,850 in the bank at the end of December. That was a very good position enabling us to rebuild our reserves through surpluses.

Sources of income were outlined. We are grateful for funding from the Scottish Government although it had taken until the end of May to confirm 2023/24 funding. This was required to confirm the charity's "going concern" status. The Church of Scotland and Scottish Episcopal Church continue to provide grant donations, Church of Scotland down £1,000 to £10,000 and the Scottish Episcopal Church £7,000 over five years to support the chaplaincy. SCIAF's £3,000 contribution had been received after the year end in early 2022.

Donated Services cover the Church of Scotland for manse costs and the United Reformed Church for Rev'd David Coleman's special category ministry. In other donations we had been grateful for a very large donation from an individual towards the end of the year. Membership fees totalled £4,956.

Mary outlined payments of nearly £120,000 on charitable activities, most on employment costs, with the overall cost of the chaplaincy around £50,000.

In conclusion, Mary summarised that:

- COVID gave us a frugal year with online meetings, staff working from home and not travelling, sickness absence have contributed to the surplus of £16,452 in 2021.
- Reserves have been restored.
- There had been an impact on administration due to staff pressures which the board are addressing with Audrey Kelly appointed as part-time Administrative Co-ordinator with work on the Membership Database and Website to be reworked.
- Membership renewals were being requested later due to dates in joining/payment
- The Church of Scotland withdrew donated services contribution of £10,000 on retirement of Adrian Shaw
- Confirmation of SG grant for 2022/23 at end of May 2022. This delayed accounts submission as OSCR require a statement of 'going concern' from independent examiners.

There were no further questions and Richard thanked Mary for her comprehensive report.

6. Appointment of Independent Examiner

As agreed at the 2021 AGM, a market resulted in six different offers for Members to consider which were shared by Mary. Trustees have agreed that the decision should not be based on cost alone, but that we should look at those who know their way around OSCR practices, be people we can work with and are available when needed ie not a sole employer.

Trustees recommended that French Duncan be appointed for a period of 5 years, based on experience with this company as a large, reputable organisation.

Mark Kirkbride asked if there was a fixed price for 5 years. Stephen was able to confirm that this was only for one year. It was agreed to ask French Duncan if this price could be fixed for 5 years.

Mark proposed that we appoint French Duncan for initially one year, seconded by Mary.

7. Election/re-election of Trustees

Three trustees must formally retire this year. Richard noted that Len Gregory and Elizabeth South were retiring. Len was unable to attend but had passed on his "best wishes for a productive and successful future".

John Seenan was also retiring at this AGM but willing to continue for another term as trustee. John was proposed by Mary Sweetland and seconded by Bill Craigie.

Sheena Wurthmann had attended a recent Board meeting as observer and was keen to return as a trustee.

Sheena was proposed by Mary Sweetland and seconded by Anne Currie.

There were no further nominations and John Seenan and Sheena Wurthmann were elected unanimously. Richard encouraged prospective trustees to get in touch.

Stephen thanked all trustees on behalf of staff and particularly Elizabeth South for her constructive support of staff and encouragement for us to build up the organisation with a focus on the "fragile web of life". Elizabeth thanked Stephen, all staff and all trustees she had worked with in her ten years serving on the Board. She would not be out of touch and wished us all the best.

8. Any other competent business

Barry asked about attending events if experiencing a degree of impairment or disablement. Trustees were keen to encourage Barry's further involvement. Stephen was keen to include Barry in future as a lead volunteer on air quality, adding that accessibility was important in encouraging parishes to share good practice.

Lisa Conlan of Penicuik North Parish asked, having received their Bronze Award, if COVID's impact over the past two years would be taken into account for their Silver Award application?

Judith Macleod responded that, yes, this would be taken into consideration and encouraged Lisa to please submit the application. Mary added that COVID was considered in her latest Award assessment and it was taken into account for applicants.

9. Close of meeting

Meeting closed at 8.25pm with a reading from Rev David Coleman, by Rev Dr Nicola Robinson from the United Reformed Church, in a new contributor to the [Season of Creation](#) resources this year.

Richard thanked everyone attending for their attendance and participation, looking forward to another successful year.