

THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND GUILD REPORT to PRESBYTERY 2025

Moderator, as the present Convener of the Lothians Guilds Together Group (LGTG), I bring you the report of the Guild and the greetings of the members.

This Session sees the Guild begin a new three-year strategy entitled "**Let us Build a House**".

This strategy was chosen to help Guild members focus on building up the people of God in their faith and in their mission when a lot of external focus is on physical buildings. Whilst it is important to acknowledge and understand the hurt that many of our members feel about the changes happening in the Church, our aim is to focus on the positive outcomes that could come as a result where mission is at the heart of everything we do.

The annual theme for 2024-25 has been "**Sure Foundations**" and this was launched at the Guild Annual Gathering held in September 2024, at the Assembly Hall. Whilst this is always an uplifting and inspiring day with Guild members from across Scotland joining together in worship and to celebrate the life and witness of the Guild, this year was particularly joyous as we were joined by five sisters and brothers from the Guilds of the CCAP Synod of Livingstonia with whom we have had a long and positive relationship based on mutual learning and support. This year we were joined by the Moderator, Rt Rev Shaw Paterson who led us in Holy Communion with a Malawian flavour as the elements were brought in slowly to a traditional Malawian hymn. In addition, one of our youngest members, Finlay Morse and his band, led us in some traditional Scottish music that had Scots and Malawians joining in some dancing. Our Guild pop up choir also brought a new element to that day with voices coming together in worship. The day concluded with Christina Paterson of Stirling and Clackmannanshire Guilds Together being installed as National Convener for 2024-25 and we continue to pray for Christina as she serves God in this role. One of the important aspects of the day is that we can be joined online by Guild members and friends from across Scotland and indeed further afield. This is a great addition to our ability to connect with people.

The **theme** for the session, **Sure Foundations**, has encouraged Guilds to think about the ways in which the foundations on which our faith is built and how these foundations encourage us to build upwards and outwards as we develop as Christians.

This session has also been one of transition as we move to a new regional structure, loosely based on the new Presbytery boundaries but also taking into consideration the needs of the Guild branches in each local area.

Over the 2024/25 session the former Guilds Together groups from West Lothian, Lothian East, Esk Valley and Edinburgh have been working together as the Lothians Guilds Together Group (LGTG) and will formally come into being on 1st June 2025.

The LGTG had three meetings during 2024/25.

In October 2024, we had our opening meeting at St Ninians Craigmailen Parish Church in Linlithgow, where the Rev Rhona Dunphy spoke on our theme 'Sure Foundations' and shared Communion with us. A good number attended from across the Lothians, and we enjoyed a time of fellowship over some great refreshments. In December 2024, we had a wonderful carol service in Cockenzie and Port Seton Parish Church, which was very well attended and followed by a splendid tea afterwards.

Our final meeting was in March 2025 when we had our AGM at St Anne's Church in Edinburgh. New office bearers were appointed to the group, and our guest speaker was the Moderator of Lothian and Borders Presbytery, the Rev Lorna Souter. Again, this was followed by some delicious refreshments and a time of fellowship.

In April 2025 the National Guild leadership team held a Mini Gathering in Galashiels and we are pleased to report that we now have a contact person, a national Guild council member and two project partners from across the Borders. As well as worship and information from the leadership team we also heard from representatives of our four new projects. We look forward to working more closely with the Guilds in the Borders.

A mini gathering, led by the National Guild's leadership team, is planned for our opening meeting in October 2025 at St Michael's Parish Church, Edinburgh. Our guest speakers will include representatives from our four new Guild projects.

It has also been a year of transition as the Guild moved from one set of projects partners to another. From 2021 – 2024 we were delighted to partner with Beat, Home for Good, The Vine Trust, Unida, Pioneers and Starchild. All these projects help people on the margins and many who have been written off by others. Throughout the history of the Guild, we have been at the forefront of challenging social norms and these projects were no exception. In total £553,318.40 has been raised for the projects which is a remarkable total particularly when year one of the partnership found us still under COVID 19 restrictions and Guilds could not carry out their usual fundraising activities. A testament to the outward facing nature of Guild members.

We are also delighted to have begun four new project partnerships which will run from 2025 – 2027.

Working with Release International we will stand alongside persecuted Christians in Upper Egypt by providing practical and pastoral support through our Operation Hope project.

Again, we will partner with the church's social care arm, CrossReach, enabling them to provide perinatal counselling services in locations across Scotland and by supporting Daisy Chain in Glasgow which provides support to children from vulnerable families. Playful beginnings will help give families the best start in life. Our partnership in Bulgaria with Bear Necessities is already seeing the roots of a new worshipping community established in the city of Sliven where 30,000 people live in an area with no Christian church. We are excited to see how this church and community hub will develop to bring hope and care to some of the poorest people.

Finally working with the Scottish Bible Society, we will support their Bibles for Bairns initiative which aims to provide a bible and other age specific activities to every child born in Scotland whose parents want it. This is a great opportunity for mission, and we hope that Kirk Sessions and congregations will get involved in this initiative with us. Please consider registering your Church with this project.

Since January more than £50,000 has been raised for the new projects.

Supporting the projects generally is a great way to support the Guild and so we hope you will consider ways in which your congregations can engage with these projects.

Our ongoing partnership with Malawi continues to flourish and this year thousands of trees have been planted in Malawi to help tackle soil erosion and provide nutritious fruits for local people. In addition, Guilds have actively supported the Moderator's challenge to provide solar lights to young people.

Through all these partnerships our faith is enhanced and our horizons broadened.

LIFT (our young adults Guild) had its first in person event in April 2025. Whilst we were disappointed that so many Presbyteries were unable to identify young people to participate, those who did attend were clear in what they were hoping to develop: a safe, caring space where young people under 40 could grow and develop their faith and be missional in their outlook. We are so encouraged by this and hope that this Presbytery will do all that they can to identify young people who might benefit from this initiative by our own young people.

As we begin a further stage of Church Unions, we do not underestimate the challenge this is for Guilds. Where there is one place of worship our aim is for there to be one united Guild meeting the needs of its members and the community we serve. Where Presbytery has provided more spaces, we can help support mission in these spaces. Working together we are confident that we can all together continue to support the communities God has called us to serve.

Moderator, I am grateful to have had the opportunity to share the work of the Guild nationally and locally.

I present this report to the Presbytery.

Kay Coull, on behalf of the Lothians Guilds Together Group.