

Statements made at Glasgow Presbytery (10th Oct 2023) regarding Rev Dr Scott Kirkland demitting from the Church of Scotland.

David Merriman – Presbytery Elder

I'm David Merriman, Presbytery Elder, Maxwell Mearns Castle Church. Moderator, Clerk, Members of Presbytery, thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak tonight. I was elected chairman of the Nominations Committee when Maxwell Mearns became vacant 14 years ago. We were impressed with Scott Kirkland early on, when he was then a Presbyterian minister in the Bahamas.

At that time, Scott said he did not sense God's call to Maxwell Mearns and so we continued our search elsewhere. However, two years later, still searching, we contacted him again, by which time he did feel a sense of God's call to Maxwell Mearns. My only regret is that we didn't get the opportunity to interview Scott in the Bahamas for the vacancy. Skype interviews are not quite the same! All of us on the Nominations Committee had a strong sense that he was the person to answer the Call to our congregation.

Twelve years on, we are even more convinced. We have been blessed with a minister who has been faithful to his Call and the preaching of God's Word to us. His clear exposition and application of God's Word has been a blessing to us all. Not only that, Scott has been a wonderful pastor to his flock throughout his ministry, a fact that my wife and I can personally attest to. In his personal life, in his love of the Lord, in his care for his own family, in dealing with his own illness, he has been a tremendous witness to all of us.

Normally, when a minister demits a charge, it is a sad time because he is moving away from the congregation. This is not the case here because a large number of the congregation are moving with Scott to form a new church with him as our minister. We have many happy memories of our time in the Church of Scotland and have many reasons to give thanks for the support of the Church of Scotland's office bearers but, with a sense of great sadness, we now feel the time has come for us to leave. We want to wish the Church of Scotland the very best for the future and we will continue to hold you in our prayers. Thank you.

Rev Dr Scott Kirkland

Moderator, I was brought up in a non-Christian home. However, at 21, the Lord gifted me faith to believe in His Son and to know the forgiveness of sin and the wonderful promise of resurrection life. Apart from my first year as a Christian, the rest of my Christian life has been attached to the Church of Scotland, with immense blessing.

For the last 27 years, I have been an ordained minister and had the privilege and joy of ministering amongst three congregations. Over these last 12 years, the Lord has placed on my heart a very special love for the people of Maxwell. I cannot express how fond of them I am.

Alongside the privilege of being part of Maxwell Mearns Castle Church in Newton Mearns, I have had the blessing of neighbouring ministers in Rev Jim Boag, Joe Kavanagh, Stuart Crawford and more recently Jade Ableitner. I have come to consider these ministers not only as colleagues but as friends and I am grateful to them for that friendship, their counsel and prayers.

There are many here in Presbytery whose ministry and pastoral care I have admired from afar and some I have benefitted from personally. So many of you I count as friends. You have also been mentors to me and I thank God for you.

Moderator, perhaps the most joyous part of my ministry has been the delight in standing back and watching how the Lord has been at work, bringing many to faith in Jesus and to maturity in that faith.

This joy would include my own two daughters who I led in public professions of faith and now continue to serve the Lord Jesus as married women and my own dad who was also brought to faith through our congregation at age 90 and who I baptised.

Moderator I suspect I will not really convey well tonight the sense of sadness and loss I have as I speak to you of my demission.

However, I must demit. because I believe the Church of Scotland has moved so far from my understanding of the Word of God as given in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments that I cannot follow the trajectory of the Church of Scotland any longer, in regard to Theology, Ethics or Practice.

Practically, I don't recognise what we now call Presbyterianism;

When I reflect on biblical Presbyterianism, I would expect to see local congregations with the liberty to minister the grace of Jesus freely in their locations; I would expect to see a supportive network of congregations breathing a shared love of Christ and his gospel, and a desire to support one another in the proclamation of that gospel.

When I look at The Church of Scotland, I see a bureaucracy that is increasingly controlling and coercive. The "Mission Plan" is a present example of this. At every Plan meeting, I am being coerced into agreeing to things that are contrary to the interests of the congregation I was called to serve. And I know I am not alone in this.

At Presbytery, we will soon be asked to agree that office bearers only have to subscribe to the Nicene Creed and Apostles' Creed: two documents from the fourth century and one thousand years before the Reformation.

Moderator, this would permit a breadth of belief among ministers and elders which would be unrecognisable as a reformed denomination.

We are told that the “Book of Confessions” will safeguard our reformed and Presbyterian character.

In reality, it will be ignored, because it will be simply a guide, with no legal force.

Moderator, I have to demit tonight not because I believe what I have said tonight is true.

The reason I have to demit is because too many of you do not believe what I have said to be true. I have no place among you in the Church of Scotland any more.

Moderator, let me conclude by saying, I am a fallen human being; my understanding is limited; I know how often I fail to reach my own standards - never mind that of a Holy God. So, I neither presume nor pretend that I have any moral or theological high ground, in my words tonight or my decision to demit. But, to go against conscience is neither right nor safe, biblically. And, as my wife Anita (and she is with me here tonight) and I have prayed at length to this conclusion, both she and I don't want my remaining years of ministry, or even my remaining years of life, sucked dry by what is happening in the institution we call The Church of Scotland.

It is with a profound sense of sadness and loss that I demit.

I continue to pray with thanks for the many blessings I have received from the congregations of which I have been a part, and I pray for Christ's Kingdom to be advanced through The Church of Scotland.