

# **Former Deputy First Minister to become Moderator**

## **A former Deputy First Minister of Scotland has been chosen to be the next Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.**

The Rt Hon Lord Wallace of Tankerness QC (Jim Wallace) will become the Kirk's ambassador at home and abroad from next May.

The 66-year-old life peer from Orkney is the second elder in modern times to take up the 12-month role which will mean he gets the opportunity to speak out on issues important to the Church and its mission to follow and proclaim the example of Jesus Christ.

The Moderator Designate, a member of St Magnus Cathedral in Kirkwall, said: "I am delighted to have been asked to take up the role and feel humbled and honoured that people have put their trust in me.

"I am both excited and daunted about the challenge of the task that lies ahead and to be honest I have had to pinch myself that this is actually happening."

Lord Wallace grew up in a Christian family – a so-called "cradle Presbyterian" – and his late father John was an elder at Annan Old Parish Church in Annan, Dumfries and Galloway for 64 years.

In his youth, the Moderator Designate was a member of the Boys Brigade, involved with Scripture Union and was confirmed in the faith while a law student at Cambridge University in 1973.

Ordained as an elder in what was St Bernard's Church in Stockbridge, Edinburgh in 1981, he has been a member of the Session of St Magnus Cathedral since 1990.

Lord Wallace, a former leader of the Scottish Liberal Democrats, said he hoped to use the position of Moderator to inspire and encourage people.

Married to Rosie with whom he has two grown-up daughters, Helen and Clare, the trained Advocate and past deputy leader of the House of Lords said his faith is one of the things that "drove" him into politics.

"I went into politics to make a positive difference to society and my motivation is grounded in my Christian faith," he added.

"It is a core belief that if people are to live life in all its fullness as promised by Jesus, this has implications for the kind of society we want to have.

"People have to have good health, a sound education, rewarding employment and a healthy environment.

"I hope that my years of experience in public life as an MP for Orkney and Shetland then as MSP for Orkney will stand me in good stead as I carry out the duties of the Moderator of the General Assembly."

Lord Wallace said having a Moderator from Orkney demonstrated that the Kirk is a national Church.

He added: "Hopefully I can reflect some of the spirit of island life.

"When I read Archbishop Desmond Tutu describe the meaning of 'ubuntu' – 'I am because we are' – I recognised it as describing the ebb and flow of our island life."



Earlier this month, the General Assembly approved a range of measures to ensure that the Church operates more effectively and efficiently.

Asked if he thought the Kirk had a positive future, Lord Wallace said he is hopeful that it will continue to reform and grow.

“The Kirk lives by the power of God who has a mission for the Church,” he added.

“And if we are to be the instruments of God’s mission then we must have a future and it is incumbent on us to get it right and live up to the challenge of that mission.

“The Covid-19 pandemic has led to real challenges for the Church and I would like to try and help ensure that we harness all that has been positive out of the experience.”

Lord Wallace said it is encouraging to see so many congregations developing an innovative style of online worship which has engaged more people than would be ordinarily walking

through the doors on a Sunday morning.

“Many people have a spiritual longing and the Church has to be nimble, innovative and imaginative as to how it meets that need,” he added.

“But it’s not only through forms of worship that we’ve witnessed positive reactions.

“During the last six months, people redoubled their efforts to step up to the plate, going out of their way to help one another and vulnerable members of our communities.

“That spirit of service to one’s neighbour is something I would like to help the Church build on.

“As an elder, I hope my year will be a source of encouragement to other elders and members of congregations who already play a very full part in the life of their church and communities.

“We are living in a time when we will probably be called on even more than ever, given the decreasing number of ministers in charges and the challenges that lie ahead as we slowly emerge from this pandemic.

“I hope to help encourage elders and congregation members that they have an important role to perform which will be valued.”

Lord Wallace said he is conscious that many lives have been turned upside down by Covid-19 through sickness, bereavement, the loss of a job or uncertainty.

“I believe that the Church must play a key role in helping to heal and renew Scotland after this virus emergency subsides,” he added.

The Moderator Designate said he hoped to use the role to try and promote the theme of justice – social, economic and climate – as the country rebuilds.

“Climate justice is a very real challenge and we have an opportunity, given the UN Climate Summit is scheduled to be held in Scotland next year, for the Church to be a relevant and powerful voice,” he added.

“Churches should be at the forefront of campaigning and people will hopefully make the connection that this issue is very relevant to Christians.

“We are the stewards of God’s creation and it is absolutely fundamental that the Church seeks to safeguard its integrity.”

At present a working peer, Lord Wallace will move to the non-affiliated benches in the House of Lords during his time as Moderator.

This means he will not belong to any parliamentary group and will cease to take the Liberal Democrat whip.

Lord Wallace will not be taking part in the Scottish Parliament election campaign next year.

In his spare time, he enjoys playing golf, reading, travelling and is a member of St Magnus Cathedral Choir.

Dr Alison Elliot was the first Church of Scotland elder in modern times to take up the role of Moderator of the General Assembly, serving in 2004-2005.

