

Moira Hewitt's year as Mrs Moderator.

Our Minister Bill became Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in May 2009. Moira gave up her job as a Pharmacist to accompany Bill on most of his duties as Moderator and she shares here something of her year

Moira was born in Kilmarnock and has one sister, Sheena. Moira knew Bill from schooldays but only went out with him after he had invited her to be his partner at a dance, a good few years later. The rest they say is history. They have three children Rhona a Dietician, married and living in Kilmarnock, Martin a doctor in Australia at present and Neil a medical student in Edinburgh.

Moira moved with Bill into the Moderator's flat in Edinburgh where they stayed for the year. One of the privileges was that they were provided with a housekeeper, Nancy, who came in every day to tidy up and the use of a caterer when they entertained officially in the flat. All Moira was left to do was arrange flowers and fold napkins! It was a spacious and beautifully furnished flat with stunning views over the Dean Village to the back and the garden in front of the flat. It was a pleasure to live in such a beautiful part of central Edinburgh. Neil stayed there too during term time and enjoyed being looked after for a short while.

Moira had two assistants during the week of the general assembly, her daughter Rhona and a friend Moira, the Chaplain's wife. In the main her duty that week was to welcome visitors and to accompany Bill on official engagements. She had many changes of outfits for this first week as Mrs Moderator including at least **three** hats worn at the opening of The Assembly. The service in St Giles and at the garden party, the last for the Moderator of the Church of Scotland during Assembly week. Royal cut backs.

A highlight of this week was meeting Desmond Tutu, an unforgettable moment. As part of worship Beth Pyles was able to come to come over to Scotland and share some of her experiences in Iraq, speaking at the Sunday evening meeting. This was very special too. During the summer they enjoyed being guests at the Royal Highland show, the opening of the Edinburgh Festival and the Tattoo. The rest of the year was spent travelling around Britain and abroad. It was a privilege to share in special events and anniversaries in churches around Scotland and to experience the positive side of the church. They visited four presbyteries in Scotland, Caithness, Inverness, Dundee and Lanark. Included in these were visits to churches, schools, old people's homes, hospitals, local communities and projects. A visit to Iona for The National Children's Assembly was a very memorable and uplifting experience.

The trips abroad included going to Israel for the signing of a covenant with the Lutheran Church in Jerusalem and visiting the projects being supported by the Church of Scotland Guild there. These were Rabbi for Human rights, Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme Initiative and a nursery school in Palestine for children whose mothers need to work because the fathers cannot work as they live in a village between enemy territories.

To Africa where they visited churches, schools and hospitals started many years ago by Scottish missionaries. They also managed to visit two of the projects Westburn supports, The Family Upliftment Centre in Johannesburg and the school in Venda. To see the work done at the centre and the progress that Sue has made at the school due to the support from us and other churches was quite remarkable.

A further trip was made to India to the Church of South India to share in celebrating the centenary of the birth of Lesslie Newbiggin, a Church of Scotland missionary who did great work among the poor and outcasts and became the first bishop of Madras. The welcome everywhere was overwhelming. Among a whole range of visits the day they were driven in a horse drawn carriage to the sounds of bands playing, children lining the street and floral welcome displays stands out as a vivid memory. As in Africa they were gifted lots of traditional outfits. In India Moira wore the saris to different cultural ceremonies, these were very bright and colourful and a joy to wear. One of the hardest parts was to see the extreme poverty in all these countries, but the generosity shown to them was incredible and the joy in their worship is something Moira will never forget. Also the respect for the Church of Scotland was amazing. The help given to them for education and healthcare is so much appreciated.

A week with the Royal Navy in Portsmouth and Plymouth was very enjoyable. They had dinner in Nelson's Cabin on Trafalgar night which is a very special experience that only a few groups of people are invited to share. Time in London included visits to both houses of Parliament and places of worship, among them Westminster Abbey, the venue for the forthcoming royal wedding. In these places they were the guests of politicians, Archbishops, Bishops and Deans. A meeting at Downing Street with Prime Minister Gordon Brown was much more relaxed than expected and a privilege to be in such an important place.

They enjoyed hospitality in so many different places, more sandwiches than they have ever had before and lots of beautiful home baking.

It was a great privilege and a unique experience to support Bill in his moderatorial year and they both have so many wonderful memories from that time.

