# General Assembly 2017

Thank you Moderator,

I had an email on Sunday afternoon

A simple email, the content of which would be familiar to almost everybody here engaged in ministry

It was from a mother in our congregation, saying she suspected I might be busy but could I possible visit her 20 year old son in hospital

He was due to have an operation the next day and had much valued a previous visit

I was a little surprised

During the previous visit I had felt myself powerless and ineffectual in comparison to all that modern medicine was doing for this young man

There was nothing emotionally startling in our conversation

It felt ordinary, and yet something must have happened

*It was a moment where I encountered the Church’s desire*

*Yes, the Church’s need for Ministry.*

Speak to representatives of vacant congregations, as the Panel on Review and Reform did this year,

And they will often say they don’t want a minister to run the whole show, to do all the work, to disable a team of elders and volunteers, but they do still want a minister.

Yet again – the Church’s desire, the Church’s need for ministry.

A few weeks ago I spoke to someone whose ministry was extremely painful

There were breakdowns of relationship, vitriolic words had been said

There was a sense of seeing someone being worn down

And yet she also closed by saying

“But you must know, that every day, I feel so grateful to God to have been called to this work.”

In 2014, in what was perhaps the defining the moment of that year’s Assembly

The General Assembly issued a call for a Decade For Ministry

Which was launched with Tomorrow’s Calling the following year.

All of these moments were expressions of what the New Testament teaches

Ministry is essential to the life of the Church.

And yet curiously, we often struggle to say what this ministry is.

It is the quest to clearly articulate a vision for ministry

Which begins our report.

a vision

Cannot simply be an inventory of ministerial competencies

We have attempted such lists before

They become redundant very quickly.

They never inspire.

Rather we are inspired by the approach taken by our Deacons

Who express a vision for the Diaconate in language which begins with the heart of their work:

 “We grow where we are planted

We build bridges between Church and world

We equip

We embody the gospel in our day to day living”

A vision for all the Church’s ministries must do the same

Must express the core

The heart

The essential purpose of ministry.

This vision must be powerful enough to counteract that which draws us away from the core of ministry

Too much Financial management, Personnel Management, Property Management

The tyranny of the inbox

And yes even,

The EXPECTATIONS OF LOCAL AND NATIONAL ROLES in a context of fewer ministers.

It must be a vision which

Speaks To those discerning a call

Shapes our training

And crucially

Enables common expectations to be reached by Minister, Kirk Session Congregation and Presbytery

It must be A vision

Which affirms the distinct identity of the Parish Minister, the Deacon

The Chaplain

A member of Ministries Development Staff

The Ordained Local Minister and Auxiliary Minister

The Reader

Those employed through our Go For IT projects

* Which this year celebrates its 5th anniversary and has supported a wonderful array of projects across the Church. Fantastic stories from their work can be found on page 36 of our report.

In seeking our core vision

It has been extremely helpful for us to cast our minds back to 1645.

*FOR THE BENEFIT OF THOSE WHO WERE NOT PRESENT AT THAT ASSEMBLY, I SHOULD INDICATE THAT, AS TODAY, IT MET IN EDINBURGH.*

It was moderated by your predecessor Robert Douglas, who *presided over a General* Assembly no fewer than five times, and who had two years previously conducted the Scottish coronation of Charles II.

These were very different times

And yet when the Church passed an Act anent Ministry, much was the same:

There were to be Parish Ministers, Deacons and elders

There was to be prayer …. The first call of the minister was to pray, just as we began our Assembly with a call to prayer.

There was to be preaching and teaching , there was to be pastoral care

There was to be mission amongst the poor, and the minister was to exercise leadership

And in all of this - relationship,

The with-ness that you spoke of at Monday morning’s communion

Grounded in the relationship of Father, Son and Spirit

*It* is striking that the central emphases of 1645:

prayer,

preaching and teaching,

Administration of the sacraments

pastoral care,

mission

Leadership

Also reappear in the renowned ecumenical discussions in Lima in 1982 which led to the seminal document Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry.

It seems that across time and across the Church the core of ministry

Is found in prayer, preaching and teaching, administration of the sacraments, pastoral care, mission and leadership

Not all of these belong to every single ministry

But together they form the whole ministry of the Church

Which itself

Belongs to the ongoing ministry of Jesus Christ.

We also identity three movements that must shape contemporary ministry

**The first is that ministry happens in a changed culture**

A culture often disenchanted to the possibility of another world, yet yearning for a chasm to be filled

Defensive of personal independence, yet yearning for community

Seduced too often by lesser joys, yet mourning the emptiness that comes of having tasted them

How can ministry, how can the Church, re- enchant , nurture community, embody the joy of the heaven?

**The second movement lies in the paradox that true ministry must enable the ministry of all God’s people**

This movement is attentive to Jesus’ commission to make disciples.

Often we have celebrated the rhetoric of the pulpiteer

But we must also attend to that part of the ministry of Jesus

Which spent three years with a spectacularly under qualified group of disciples

Walking, questioning, challenging

And through them built his Church

**And finally a movement that has come to us from our Priority Areas,**

That

In the place of the marginalised,

With those who have abandoned the pretence of being sorted

Among the stones which have been rejected which turn out to be most precious of all

We, the supposedly wealthy, have been taught the gospel by the poorest

We, the supposedly wise, have been taught the gospel by those whose voice has been ignored.

Like you, they have been inspired by the writing of Sam Wells

And remind us that authentic mission is as much about “with” as it is about “for”

# Deployment

Much of our work develops deliverances given to the Council by previous Assemblies

In 2016 there was much talk of “Hubs” and we develop this thinking.

How can we help sustain Christian community across Scotland and beyond.

When there are fewer stipendiary ministries.

“Hubs” must not simply be a means of keeping the show on the road

Of trying to squeeze more ministry out of fewer people

Rather they must challenge us to change the shape of the Church

 patterns of worship, discipleship and mission.

Alongside Hubs we talk about Presbytery planning

Which must also be characterised by “with”

Rather than the adversarial encounters which too often have exhausted presbyteries and congregations.

# Ascend

This year we are also launching Ascend which grew out of the Special Commission on Tenure, of which you yourself Moderator were a member.

Ascend is a central location to find the core services provided by the Ministries Council for support and development for those in ministry.

The start point is the Ministries Development Conversation which has just finished a very successful pilot.

This leads to a range of other services each with a proven record in supporting the Wellbeing of ministers, which absolutely essential to the overall Ministry of the Church.

Ascend takes it’s name from Psalm 24,

A psalm embedded in the Identity of Scottish Presbyterianism through the Communion Hymn “Ye Gates lift up your heads on high”

That psalm where pilgrims ask each other questions… “Who will ascend the hill of the Lord?”

The pilgrims answer each other with a challenge

And on this journey they discover

Not only that God waits at the summit of the mountain

But also that he, unseen, has been travelling with them

We are now going to hear from people who have not only helped to shape the services of Ascend, but have personally benefitted from them too.

**\*\*\*\*\*\* Playing of Ascend Film \*\*\*\*\*\***

## Other Work

Our report also gives detail on much other work which develops instructions given to us by previous assemblies

* The Priority Area Actions Plan which builds on the Action Plan produced in 2010
* Rethinking our initial training which the Council first intimated last year
* The plan for recruitment which grew out of the launch of the Decade For Ministry
* Pioneer Ministries

# Appreciation

I want to conclude Moderator by noting and affirming the work of three groups of people.

Firstly, I want to pay tribute to our valued partners:

* Place For Hope
* Workplace Chaplaincy and Chaplains
* GK Experience
* Wevolution
* Faith in Community Scotland

Secondly, I want to pay particular tribute to the Ministries Council staff, many of them seated on *the Assembly’s left*:, others watching online over in 121.

This has been an incredibly busy year, - much of it extremely sensitive and demanding; yet critical to the life of our Church.

Finally, those who exercise ministry in the Church of Scotland – in Parishes and in Chaplaincies. They bear witness to the most remarkable truth – that the angels do not change a world of hurt and pain into a world of love, it is we – our frail human selves – who are the hands and ears of Christ today.

# Closing Remarks

Moderator I am pleased to present the report and move the deliverance of the Ministries Council.