**Church of Scotland**

**Mission and Discipleship Council**

**Convenor’s Speech**

Moderator,

For as long as I have been a minister, over 20 years now, the numerical decline of the church of Scotland has been a constant narrative. We are so used to it as a denomination we have come to believe this is the only narrative, the only story.

This is our story and we should own it and recognise that is how things are…. But…

Moderator,

One of the great privileges of being involved with Mission and Discipleship is that we know this is not the whole story but only a part of it.

Out there today there are people discovering faith in Jesus for the first time and people whose faith is deepening as they walk their Christian journey.

We know, we have met them.

Show Slide 1 This photo has the faces of some of the people who we have recorded so far as part of the Life Stories project. They are everyday people going about normal lives. The young, the previously young, all different but all with a story they are willing to share.

Remove Slide 1 They are encouraging because they tell us the Gospel works. People encounter Jesus, they come to faith and their lives are transformed.

Of course we know that is just a beginning. Discovering faith is not an end but rather it opens up a whole new chapter, a new adventure.

We have met many people out and about who passionately believe, who want to talk of their faith but struggle to know how.

How do you talk to the person you meet dog walking almost every day about Jesus? When you are having coffee with your friends, what does it actually mean to talk faith?

Does the person whom you have lunch with every day at work know how passionate you are about the Christian faith?

We recognise our responsibility to help each other talk about faith. We need to help people discover the confidence in themselves to speak about Jesus.

We need to take Jesus from being a private belief to being a public faith.

That’s why we have put together this course called ‘Sharing Faith’. It’s 4 Sessions, it’s really easy to get into and it’s designed to get people actually talking about faith with each other. It will help you find the confidence to express your faith. [PAUSE]

As well as talking with people outside the church about our faith, we recognise there can be challenges talking about faith with those inside as well.

That is why we have created a resource called ‘Conversations in Worship.’ This allows people to share their faith as experienced through worship.

Those who have used it have found it has enriched their understanding of worship and their ability to share that with others.

One person in the feedback said, “I never thought I had an experience of God until I heard all your stories and now I know that I do.”

[PAUSE]

Last year the General Assembly gave our council an instruction to bring a theme or themes round which the church could unite. After gathering people from across the church and spending a couple of days trying to discern what God would want of those gathered we came to a mind on the theme of stories.

Show slide 2 Stories of Encounter, Stories of Transformation and Stories of Celebration. These themes are to run from 2018 and they are a chance for the church to share together this great story that God has given us.

Remove Slide 2 The original scope of the deliverance was quite extensive speaking to national, regional and local levels. Should the General Assembly adopt this as its themes we want to encourage every level of the church to share the stories of faith. We have a story to tell!

Part of the challenge of course is that the context into which we speak varies depending on who we are and where we are and when we are.

Whilst the gospel itself is timeless the context into which it speak changes and that means the way we do what we do needs also to change.

That is why after reviewing the National Youth Assembly the Council is recommending a new thing comes into being in 2020.

Shaped by today’s youth and for today’s youth comes into being.

The NYA first ran in 1994. Since then it has helped our young adults find a voice within the GA. We see here every year how our youth reps make a valuable contribution.

It has changed, it is not exactly the same thing that it was, but it is still broadly modelled on what we do here.

One of the interesting things about it, is that in addition to the decision making remit it originally had it has developed a nurturing, discipling side.

We should recognise that for lots of the young adults who have passed through the NYA it is the NYA that has helped sustain their faith and the NYA that has helped shape their faith.

They simply would not be here today if it were not for the NYA. Our denomination owes it a great deal of thanks for all it has achieved.

The review recognises the time is now right to let a new generation of youth shape what will follow the NYA.

We know that for some, seeing the current model of the NYA changing will be a difficult thing.

We ask the Assembly to allow a new generation to discover something for them that will become as cherished as the NYA has been.

Between now and 2019 we will bring continuing reports with decisions for the assembly to make on how it intends to nurture its youth. They will show our thinking, what it is based on and will allow the assembly to make informed choices on what follows the NYA.

Moderator, the NYA has been a good story, and like all stories you move from one chapter to the next but the story does not come to an end. The Council believes that is it time for a new chapter.

Through our work with local churches we are aware that a growing number of congregations do not have the number of young people present they once had. It’s a different world today.

We put together and ran a series of conferences under the heading ‘Community of Faith’ specifically aimed at helping congregations like these in the area of youth.

Over 450 volunteers and paid workers attended. There was such a demand we had to put on extra.

As we go into 2018 which is designated the Year of Young People across Scotland we intend to continue developing this area of work.

Moderator,

Another change that we have seen over the past few years is the way people engage with the resources and materials we put out.

Increasingly it is in the online world that our story is being told. The faith stories videos have been going out on Facebook where they had been shared 13000 times by the end of April.

The 360 Degree video project which is a magnificent tool had been seen by over 40,000 people by end of April and it was continuing to be seen by more.

If you haven’t seen it, it is a way to show our church buildings in virtual reality but more than that.

We can caption things so when someone views a building they can also be educated about for instance Baptism when they click on the font, communion when they click on the table. Same for the pulpit, pew, organ, etc.

This project allows our buildings to tell the Christian story and allows people who have never been in a church to learn a great deal about the faith.

When we are in and out of our buildings on a week by week basis we can become concerned more with how you put the lights and the heaters on.

Yet our buildings have a story to tell. They are wonderful ambassadors for the faith and this project will open them up to the world.

We have already had feedback from overseas from people who grew up in these buildings and how wonderful it is to see them presented like this.

A main driver for this is the revised remit given to CARTA by the GA of 2016 to be more pro-active.

Moderator,

We would like to remind Commissioner’s that due to CARTA we enjoy what’s called the Ecclesiastical Exemption that allows us to take decisions that otherwise would be taken by Local Authority Planning in relation to the internal worship space.

However if some congregations continue to bypass CARTA that may not be something we continue to enjoy. [PAUSE]

We are very aware that when a resource is put online like this, the audience is global. There are far more people who can engage with it. Far more people who have access to it.

This is the reason we have put the Gaelic Supplement online. When it was printed in black and white it was limited to those who could hold a paper copy or receive one from their friends. It didn’t have the longevity of being able to access it long after the publication date.

Now, however, it is online, it is in colour and it is available to the world.

As someone from Stornoway with a smattering of Gaelic I am pleased that this actually brings the supplement to the attention of the world.

This allows everyone with access to the internet or a friend who has access to the internet to learn the heavenly language in preparation for our arrival!

Since our report was written, the Council have further considered the issue of stopping the paper copy of the Gaelic Supplement. On reflection moderator, we do not now believe this is the correct time to stop its printing and we are pleased to tell the GA that it will continue to be printed in black and white. Like everything we do, this will be kept under review.

The online colour copy will continue and because it is online it will be a superb resource for schools and others in the teaching of Gaelic to new generations.

It would be remiss of me not to publicly thank the Reverend Dr. Roddy MacLeod who for the past 37 years has been editor of the Supplement.

He has been nothing short of brilliant. We wish him well in his retirement and we invite the GA to also express it’s thanks to him.

Moderator,

We have a story to tell. It is a wonderful story that has transformed our world for the better. [PAUSE]

It is a story that is changing the lives of people today up and down our country. Every single one of us gathered here; everyone online; we are a living testament to the power of that story.

Our work as a council is to give you the confidence and the tools that you need so you can tell your story.

So that you can share it with your neighbours, your work colleagues, your family and your friends.

We all have a story to tell. We have all been given the greatest story ever told; the gospel. We need to have the confidence to go and share it.

Moderator,

I present the report and move the deliverances.