

## Mission and Discipleship Council – General Assembly 2019

Moderator,

I was ordained in 1997, I remember well the number of people who kept telling me the church was facing massive change. To be honest, for the most part, I never saw it. The same rhythms that governed church life repeated year after year. We ran services, people came to the services, we ran programs, people took part in the programs. We called, people came along.

If I was to characterise these days, it would be business as usual.

I moved to my current charge in Granton in inner city Edinburgh in 2005. Part of our work as a congregation was the Granton Waterfront Churches Centre. An ecumenical project aimed at planting a new church among the projected 40,000 new waterfront residents.

One of the things we did was to hold a come and meet your neighbour, cheese and wine night. We hand delivered 750 invitations to 750 flats. We prepared the cheese, we opened the wine and we waited.

Of the 750 invites that went out, one couple came along, and they had moved from within Granton so were already effectively locals.

That experience, along with others has taught me it is no longer business as usual. The patterns and expectations of how we do church are increasingly less effective. This isn't unique to Scotland, it's the same across the western world.

Whether we like it or not, this is our world, this is the time we find ourselves in. We don't get to choose our time, we only get to choose what we do within it.

The Mission and Discipleship Council chooses to go forward with hope. Let me explain why. This past year we have travelled all over the country. You can see from our report some of the places we've been.

What we have found is people who know it is not business as usual. That's caused them to ask a lot of questions around things like..... What does it mean to follow Jesus? What does God want us to do? Who does God want us to be?

You can sum it all up in the word 'Discipleship'.

The church today is grappling with what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, in this time and in this place.

That is why the main focus of our Council's work is based around helping people deepen their discipleship and trying to help congregations foster a culture of discipleship that naturally nurtures.

This is what we've been doing to achieve this:

The conferences we've run have been pretty much fully subscribed. When almost 500 people came along to the pastoral care conference, it showed people were looking for more than business as usual. These folks weren't there to attend a conference; they were there to get tools to help their congregations grow in discipleship. All the people who are booked into the Eldership Conference in June are there to get the tools to help their congregations grow in discipleship.

When people and congregations have bought books such as Building the Body, Go Create or one of the Learn Series, they are not buying books. Again they are looking for tools to grow in discipleship.

Given how much the world we knew, the world we grew up in and let's be honest, loved and shaped us, how much it has changed. We now need to re-equip ourselves for this new world. It's time we were honest with ourselves that the patterns of yesteryear are not enough.

Our Gospel has not changed but the culture within which it operates has changed and that means we need a different set of tools to be effective.

Within our report you will find 6 characteristics of discipleship. We offer these to the church based on our biblical understanding, the work we have been doing and the conversations we have been having. They are no good if they just sit on the page. They are offered for congregations to really grapple and explore, to pray over and to live with. The aim being that through them we will become better disciples.

For the past two years we have had the privilege of working with a group of young people on what might succeed the National Youth Assembly.

Being part of this as the young folks really got to grips with deep questions of faith has been fantastic.

What I have seen is that they have faith, they have passion, they have really good ideas, they have a willingness to get stuck in and to see things through.

If you could have travelled with us as we have travelled with them, you would not be worried about the future of the Church of Scotland. It's in good hands.

The National Youth Assembly has been successful. For some of those who went it was effectively their church, and it was for many the thing that sustained their faith. Without it the Church of Scotland would be much poorer.

However, it is a creature of its time. The group looking at this has tried to discern a structure, a program, a way of nurturing faith that will do for the next generation what the NYA did for the last.

Ultimately we know, and the folks in the group know that is it the Assemblies choice. We hope you will accept the proposals. The intention behind them is to help nurture discipleship amongst our young people so they can become better disciples.

Someone might say, all this is good and well but isn't it inward focused when we as Christians are meant to be outward looking? In other words, where is the Mission in the Mission and Discipleship Council.

Our Mission comes from our discipleship. It is when we grow in our relationship with God there is a corresponding growth in our desire to share the Christian message with others. We've seen this in the weekend of invitation. Those who are most successful in drawing others to God are themselves drawn to God in the first place. Some people had such a positive experience last year we simple had to do it again this year.

It's our belief that every single congregation is part of God's story and therefore has a story to tell so if you aren't already, be a part of this. Tell your story, go out into the highways, the byways. Remember, the invitation is not come to church but go and change the world. That's what it means to be salt and light for the world.

Moderator,

All of these things and more, mean we have hope. We are not downplaying the struggle or the difficulty. We know people are tired, we also understand people realise that what used to work isn't anymore. None of us want to move away from what we have known and are comfortable with....

But if we are serious about taking the Gospel to the people of Scotland we don't have a choice.

It's not business as usual and you know what... we are ok with that.

The foundation of our faith is Jesus and has not changed. Nor has our calling to be salt and light for the world. We are not here to do the same things over and over again; we are here to change the world. To be the hands and feet of God in every part of creation. To be light in the darkness and stand with the people of Scotland, and beyond, as we have for generations.

Was it not the Apostle John who wrote: The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not put it out.

This is why we have hope. This is why we will not give up hope. This is why we will strive to be the best disciples we can be.

One of the challenges we face as a council is that we don't have the resources to meet every opportunity that's out there. We know that in prioritising discipleship, other things will get less time and less money. Even within the massive area of discipleship we can't do everything we would want to do.

Assembly should know that the current pot of NYA funding, a legacy from a Reverend Daniel Blades is due to run out. At this time no future funding has been identified for the continuation of the NYA.

There is more to do than there are resources to do it, even with everything we have already been asked to do. That means we constantly have to prioritise. Assembly should know that taking on new work means some pieces of existing work will not be done. It's not ideal but it's the situation we find ourselves in.

This is a challenge we face, like most of our congregations out there, and like them it doesn't diminish our hope; because our hope is not based on our resources it is based on our Lord. That is not going to change.

For the past couple of years I've included some Gaelic in the speech so thought why not again this year. My parents always used to say this to my brother and sister and I . Say this with me.... Shin man a bha a, shin man tha a, agus shin man a bheas a. That's how it was, that's how it is, and that's how its going to be.

As I said at the beginning we don't get to choose our time, we only get to choose how we respond. We have been born into a time where we have less resources but more opportunity. The harvest-field has never been greater so we must go forward as the workers to take in that harvest.

Moderator,

That couple who came to the cheese and wine. The sole couple who went home with so much cheese and so much wine....

They went on to do Alpha in Granton. They then joined the congregation and became part of our fellowship. I have fond memories of baptising their first wee one. A few years ago they moved away due to work but our part of their story was done. We had helped them take the next few steps in their discipleship journey. Somebody else would help them take subsequent steps.

Our job is to help the church take its next step in discipleship. Your job, as Elders and Ministers is to help your people take their next step in discipleship. So we take the next step together, in hope.

It may not be business as usual, but it's still our business and we will do this together. Moderator on behalf of the council I present the report and move the deliverance.