

Chalmers Lectures - Lecture Two - Call and Response

Tonight I want to take further a discussion of missional refocusing and institutional reform, in particular I want to look at questions of ministry and money.

I have given this the title, call and response, because I want to reflect on the importance of context for the development of theology, for the shaping of the church and for the ordering of ministry.

One of the definitions of culture offered by the anthropologist Clifford Geertz - is that it is the ensemble, the set of stories, that we tell ourselves, about ourselves. The dialogue with our history as a church is key to these lectures, because out of it come the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves.

Presbyterianism has been shaped by the different historical, geographical and cultural contexts in which it has existed, so that although it describes a family resemblance between churches, it is not only one thing. Within those different contexts, the Church has had to try to hear God's call and to respond to it faithfully.

A prophetic church, a missional church, lives in the space and in the rhythm of call and response - a rhythm which is basic to the church's life - it is gathered in worship as the *ekklesia* and sent in mission as the church apostolic.

The critical thing for the church in changing contexts, is to discern what it may not or should not change and what it may or must change in order to be faithful to its Lord.

If we begin with the call which was heard 500 years ago..

The 16th century reformers were prepared, for the sake of the mission of God, to reshape the church and to reorder its ministry.

So they introduced reforms:

- they left behind the ideal of a celibate priesthood and they affirmed that ministers of the gospel could be married
- they left behind the insistence on episcopal ordination and they affirmed that a church which was faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ, to the apostolic witness, could create a new pattern of ordination for ministers
- they left behind the idea of a hierarchical and episcopal structure of church government and they created a new form of government for the church, in which ordained ministers and what Calvin and Knox came to call 'elders' would share in governance together
- and they bound themselves into a national church, through a federal system of tiered courts, in which both ministers and elders would be represented at every level

There is a big story, then, to tell about the 16th century -

- it includes a strong reaffirmation of the distinct office of the pastor, reserving to it the ministry of word and sacrament
- it includes clear moves towards a rejection of bishops, although there was some flexibility about the use of regional superintendents - a sign that the early reformers could see value in some of the functions of that office, but they wanted to give it a different character and status
- it includes the introduction of elders and deacons - initially, in the First Book of Discipline, these are to be appointed annually by 'common and free election' - on a night when we are going to be thinking about money, some of you may be inspired by the touching provision "that the deacons, treasurers, be not compelled to receive the office again for the space of three years." - these elders and deacons shared in the governance of the Church alongside the Pastors, but for now they were not ordained
- by the time of the Second Book of Discipline in 1578, thinking about eldership has changed: as an office it includes pastors and doctors - but it is also used to apply to those "whom the apostles call presidents or governors" Three new things were now being stressed: that this was a spiritual office, that those who entered it must be called to it through election and ordination - (election here by the judgment of the eldership and the consent of the congregation) - and strikingly "Elders once lawfully called to the office, and having gifts of God meet to exercise the same, may not leave it again."

In the 17th century, the rhythms of call and response lead us into protracted and bloody struggles over the role of the monarch, the role of bishops, the shape and content of liturgy, the freedom of the church to call Assemblies.

in the 1640s, against the backdrop of civil war, The Westminster Assembly was summoned with the aim of reforming the Church of England. The ironies here are well known that while it had little influence in England, its documents or standards have played a crucial role in the Church of Scotland.

If ever there was an example of contextual theology - the Westminster standards give it to us - with all kinds of theological disputes and tensions hovering behind tightly worded and fiercely negotiated paragraphs - sometimes where there was no agreement, an option is given - other times, a matter is simply passed over in silence. Interestingly, the ordination of elders is one of those areas - it does not command enough support in the Westminster negotiations to make it into the final text of the ***Form of Church Government***.

In the 18th and 19th Centuries - some within the Church of Scotland felt the call of God to affirm the spiritual independence of the church and to uphold the rights of congregations to call a minister, over against the operation of patronage

by landowners and others. Thomas Chalmers, for whom these lectures are named, responded by leaving to form a new Presbyterian denomination. Others felt the call to stay and work out the issues within the old church.

For those who felt the call to leave, their response was to build a new rival and parallel Presbyterian establishment from the ground up - as Henry Sefton once said, 'the seceders planted strategically, the Free Church planted competitively'. Historical and economic context matters here also - at the height of the British Empire, this response, which took the form of a competitive fever of church building, was financed by the profits of Victorian industry - leading often to monumental church buildings glowering at each other across high streets in Scotland's towns and cities.

But after all the drama and all the sacrifice and all the reassertion - only four years after the Disruption, the Secession Churches felt the call to reunite and most responded by forming the United Presbyterian Church.

Within a generation that same call to be one was heard again and in 1900 most of the Free Church united with most of the United Presbyterians.

The United Free and the Auld Kirk then eyed one another suspiciously. While theologians and ministers debated what the next move should be, waiting to see who would blink first and what they might concede, the enormous, devastating slaughter of the First World War came and went - churches which began the War in brash patriotism, ended it in sorrowful humility.

The subsequent negotiations were still difficult and fractious - but in time they led to the 'glorious' union of 1929 when most of the United Free Church was reunited with the Old Kirk. Among the gifts the UF Church came bearing were the newly merged sustentation and augmentation funds, the bureaucratic culture which had been created to build a centrally funded, national denomination from scratch, the offices at 121 George Street and of course the Chalmers Lectureship.

A powerful legacy of both world wars, was the impetus they gave to the ecumenical movement - in a bitterly divided world, there was a passionate sense that the churches needed to be a sign of unity. From the 1930s, the Church of Scotland began conversations with the Church of England, and also with the Presbyterian Church in England and the Scottish Episcopal Church.

In the 1950s, one fruit of these conversations, in which T.F. Torrance played a prominent role after the Second World War, would be the so called Bishops Report, which was rejected by the General Assembly in 1959.

Despite the Church's Ecumenical resolve in 1954, to seek closer relations with other churches, it was not possible to fully resolve theological differences over church government and the ordering of ministry either in 1959, or a generation

later, when the Scottish Churches Initiative for Union or SCIFU was rejected by the General Assembly in 2003.

In 1964 and then in 1968 - while many within the Church of Scotland had heard this call from God for a long time, the Church finally responded and took the decision to open first the eldership, then the ministry of word and sacrament to women on the same basis as men.

Context matters. As we look back on past controversies, we can see how it matters profoundly to the church's hermeneutics - its interpretation and understanding of scripture. And yet, all any generation can ever do, is to walk by the light they have and pray for more light. All we can do, is to try and ask what God is calling us to in our time and how we should respond.

For both of tonight's issues, ministry and money, the stories we tell ourselves about our own history are profoundly important, but so is our own context.

Ministry

The conversation about introducing reform to the ordered ministries of the church has, for the past 70 years, been dominated by ecumenical concerns. While I have a strong commitment to ecumenism, I believe this conversation now needs to change direction.

Our debates about reforming ministry have been shaped by the inhibitions of the ecumenism of late Christendom; they now need to be decisively shaped by the missiology of post-Christendom.

I do not believe that Christian witness to the Gospel in Scotland has suffered greatly in the 20th and 21st centuries, from the existence alongside one another of the Scottish Episcopal Church and the Church of Scotland, nor do I believe that there are too many parishes today, where organic union would lead to a greater missional synergy or effectiveness.

What has been damaging to our witness are the older sectarian divisions within Scottish society between Protestants and Roman Catholics; and in some communities, the divisions between the Kirk and the smaller conservative Presbyterian denominations, all of which oppose the ordination of women.

I do not believe that either of those more damaging examples is fixable in relation to full recognition of ministry in the foreseeable future. We are decades away from the Roman Catholic Church ordaining women, if it ever does. We are also, I suspect, decades away from the Free Church doing it, if it ever does.

What we can hope for, in both of these very different cases, is as much friendly, peaceable co-operation and as many positive alliances on key issues as we can healthily achieve.

Relationships between the Kirk, the URC and Methodists in Scotland are good - there are few real barriers to joint working, to setting up LEPs or even to union, although there seem to be few felt incentives either. If there are people around in the Kirk, who believe that SCIFU would have released and resourced new and dynamic energies for mission within Scotland, they have been very quiet over the past decade or so.

My sense is rather that there were too many unfinished conversations going on within our own denominations - we have needed to allow these to develop organically and see where they would lead.

If we had voted for SCIFU, we would be on a different course. But we did not and in the end, neither did the Scottish Episcopal Church. Sheilagh Kesting has commented that this was seen as yesterday's "top down" model of ecumenism, adding "It is unlikely that there will be further talks of this nature in Scotland for the foreseeable future."

I want to suggest therefore, that the call to us today is to move away from the inhibitions of late-Christendom ecumenism and embrace the imperatives of post-Christendom missiology.

My thinking here has been influenced by the work of Jurgen Moltmann in his 1977 book, *The Church in the Power of the Holy Spirit* - a book which has not always been very popular, perhaps because it was ahead of its time. Moltmann draws what I think is a useful distinction between the **charges** given to the church, which do not change - to preach the Gospel, to make disciples and to celebrate the Sacraments - and the **assignments** made within the church, which he believes are historically variable, which can vary in different missional contexts.

This is an area where we still have theological work to do. We have, I think, inherited an understanding of ordination which is too rigid, too singular and too compressed - there are some very real tensions between the New Testament witness to a diversity of ministries within the body and the way we compress so many of these into a single office. I think our understanding of **ordination** is too restrictive and our understanding of **commissioning** is too weak and too underdeveloped.

We are already painfully short of ministers and we will soon be dangerously short of ministers. As I said last week, I am both aware of and excited by the

opportunities which can come from a less minister centred church, but I am also very aware of the threats.

It is irresponsible, even when well intentioned, to exaggerate the speed and ease with which an institution like the Kirk, can make the transition to radically different models of ministry. Both unity and continuity are hugely important to making such a transition.

So the call I am hearing in our context, is not to go full steam ahead for a radical dismantling of current structures of ministry - it is not even to go as far as my own convictions might allow me to go - but it is to go further than we have gone until now - seeking to find a way forward that will not divide or destabilise the church and will not leave our existing ministers and elders feeling alienated or devalued.

The Future of Eldership

To turn to the eldership first, The ecumenical issues I raised earlier are less significant here. Ecumenical documents are usually polite about the eldership, but nobody else really understands what we are on about and certainly not why we ordain elders. That is not entirely surprising - my colleague Sandy Forsyth has written a superb paper on the history and theology of eldership which you can download from the Church's website - we already noted how 1560 said one thing, 1578 said another, while 1645 rowed back a bit - from the 16th C onwards, one strand of reformed theology and even of Presbyterian theology, has clearly not believed we should ordain elders - T.F. Torrance of course stood in that tradition - while another strand has defended this practice.

What is also clear, is that in recent years when proposals to reform the eldership have been brought before the church, they have not won support.

My sense of why that has been, is that our elders - who do so much of the gracious working, the faithful caring, the heavy lifting - who take with great seriousness that they are ordained to a spiritual office - they have felt such proposals to represent a devaluing of their ministry, which would also move the balance between minister and elders in the wrong direction.

I hear that. At the same time, I believe that we urgently need more flexibility within our system. We very much need a new generation of younger people to become elders between now and 2030 and I know that for significant numbers of people, the prospect of being permanently ordained into a life-long office, which 'they may not leave again' - is something they find off-putting.

The Third Chapter of *The Second Book of Discipline* begins like this: “Vocation or calling is common to all that should bear office within the kirk’. I believe that a way forward may be for us not to overturn our existing traditions, but to add to them.

What if we continued to think of the eldership as a single office within the church, but we affirmed that there were different ways to be called into it.

Some might enter the office as elders do now and have done for hundreds of years, through ordination to a ministry which they understand as a permanent and life-long vocation.

Others might enter the office in a new way, elected as **Commissioned Elders**, who would serve for a period of three years, after which they could step down, or if there was mutual agreement, they could serve again for a further term.

Those who were experiencing a call to serve as elders, could discern with their minister and other elders, which of these they believed they were called to. There would be no other difference in status or function.

This would allow a gracious flow of change to take place, without conflict or compulsion, without injuring the calling or status of existing elders and without preventing others from being ordained in the future. At the same time it would open our Sessions to full participation by those for whom commissioning for three years feels like a more natural and appropriate way to fulfil their spiritual calling.

Ministers

I want to move on to ministers. We urgently need to address the growing shortage of ministers. There are really only 4 ways of doing that:

1. Recruit more ministers
2. Reduce the number of charges
3. Add new forms of Ministry
4. Introduce greater flexibility around ministerial assignments

I want to explore each of these in turn.

I. Recruit More Ministers

The area of vocations or recruitment is one on which some important research has been done by Catherine Skinner - her conclusion was that between the 1990s and the early 2010s not enough work was done on nurturing and supporting vocations, at a time when other trends were reducing the pool of likely candidates.

The excellent **Tomorrow's Calling** initiative has been informed by that - I believe we need to support it and we need to work on a number of other initiatives to increase numbers:

- a. so first of all, through Tomorrow's Calling, we need better communication and support for vocations
- b. we also need a clearer and more generous package of financial support for candidates, many of whom have to make real sacrifices to go and study
- c. In addition I want to suggest that we consider three targeted initiatives to help address supply in the next few years
 - i. the first I am calling - give us 10
recognising the age weighting within our church membership, we should consider making a specific appeal to some of our members, to consider taking early retirement and to give us the last ten years of their working lives. In support of this, we would set aside money from reserves which could be used by agreement to compensate for pension losses they might occur.
 - ii. the second give us five?
we should consider making a formal approach to the PCUSA, which is well supplied with ministers and ordinands just now, to develop an initiative for ministers from the USA to come and serve in Scotland for 5 years, with a programme of induction and support
 - iii. the third could be called a woman's place...
we should make a fresh appeal within Tomorrow's Calling to women, who are still underrepresented in our ministry, emphasising how much their gifts and experience are needed and welcomed in the ministry - as they say these days, a woman's place is in the White House, is in the resistance and is in the ministry
- d. Finally, still on recruiting more ministers - I have argued for some years that like the Church of England and the Methodist Church, we need a new pathway to candidate directly for Pioneer ministry, linked to a national strategy for church planting between now and 2030.

2. Reduce the number of charges

Taking initiatives to reduce the number of parishes, has been one major way in which the Kirk has addressed the shortage of ministers as well as responding to the oversupply of churches which was a legacy of the Secessions and the Disruption - a programme of Union & Readjustment over many years has been replaced in recent years by the Presbytery Planning process.

This has undoubtedly been part of the pain of decline - people form strong attachments to the churches in which they were baptised, or married, where

family funerals have taken place - to their church. These attachments die hard. Some unions are a model of grace and mutual care - others are resisted, resented and finally boycotted by those who feel their church has been taken away from them.

The last round of presbytery planning was driven not by a shortage of money but by a concern to spread ministers across all of Scotland's parishes in a relatively just and even handed way. This meant a distribution of ministerial posts per presbytery being agreed by General Assembly and implemented by presbyteries. It was difficult to do and it was painful for those who felt they lost out. In fact, it was so painful and so difficult, that few seem to feel the church has the stomach to do it again in the same form, despite the situation which called for it, continuing to worsen.

Last year in their report Ministries Council floated the idea of ministry 'Hubs' making clear the idea was still at a formative stage. The key difference to the previous presbytery planning model seems to be the promise of linking more, while uniting and closing less. This addresses the original problem not by solving it, but by making it change shape and also, potentially, by making the role of the minister change shape. The only way 'Hubs' can be effective in addressing the question of shortage, is to make more stipendiary ministers into 'team vicars' with charge of a group of parishes. Although hubs give with one hand, they take away with the other - but this time round, we may want what they can give and be prepared to adjust to what they take away.

3. Add New Forms of Ministry

A third way to address a declining supply of ordained ministers is to create more of them by other means. This is a major route which the Church of England has embraced, reflecting the fact that the pattern of a weekly parish communion is now normative, unlike the Kirk, in which quarterly communions remain common. In order for the normal pattern of Anglican worship to continue as numbers of stipendiary clergy fell, it has been necessary to provide a new supply of Eucharistic presidents and this has been achieved through very significant increases in the numbers of "Self-Supporting Ministers" and "Ordained Local Ministers". Of the 28,000 licensed ministers in the Church of England, 65% do not receive any stipend and 30% of parish clergy are non-stipendiary.

This stands in stark contrast to the Church of Scotland. Neither Auxiliary Ministry, nor the newer Ordained Local Ministry programme have been anything like as successful as these Church of England schemes in drawing in new ministers. Within the Kirk, these seem to be suffering the same fate as the stipendiary ministry, in failing to attract enough new candidates, although we can hope that Tomorrow's Calling may be of help here as well.

4. Introduce greater flexibility around ministerial assignments

The final way to address a crisis in the supply of ministers, is to think more flexibly about the nature of ordination itself. This is an option which in the past, has struggled to gain support for two main reasons. The first is the ecumenical caution I discussed earlier, about making it harder to achieve some future mutual recognition of ministries. The second is a concern, particularly on the part of ministers, that this might somehow undervalue their role and their formation for that role.

I believe the time is right for the Church of Scotland to change tack on this question and to introduce provisions to allow elders to assume new responsibilities. If we compare ourselves to other sections of the Reformed family of churches, this is not such a drastic step to imagine ourselves taking. We would be joining the United Reformed Church and the PCUSA if we enabled presbyteries to authorise suitably trained and experienced elders (who could be commissioned or ordained elders in terms of the suggestion made above) to preach, baptise and preside at communion. The question of what to call them I will leave as an open one. The PCUSA calls them Commissioned Ruling Elders, having previously called them Commissioned Lay Pastors.¹ I find that terminology on the clunky side, although I agree with moving away from the language of 'lay' which does not belong in the Reformed tradition. The word 'pastor' is a friendlier term, but if as I have already proposed, we were embracing and developing a more expansive theology of commissioning, we might prefer to opt for Commissioned Local Minister (CLM) to sit alongside OLM? In the PCUSA, they are commissioned for up to three years at a time and can conduct worship, including sacraments, weddings and funerals - working, as OLMs do, under the oversight of an ordained minister. They could work either in a vacant charge or alongside an existing minister within their congregation.

If we followed the US model, then CLMs could also be paid.

If we were convinced that we could justify this theologically - there would still be the concerns of existing ministers to address - there are various ways in which I think this could be done. Commissioning would be local and time-limited; commissioned ministries would be subject to oversight from ordained ministries (which is how they might work in a Hub anyway); CLM's if paid, could be paid less than ordained ministers (although I have some reservations about that) and they could have stricter requirements for ongoing CME and training.

¹ <http://oga.pcusa.org/section/mid-council-ministries/clp/>

In that way we could maintain the distinction between this ministry and ordained stipendiary ministry, the potential erosion of which has worried many ministers. However, I think as with OLM, we would also want to create pathways from CLM to OLM or to nationally recognised Ordained Ministry - in some cases, this would prove to be a way of people discerning such a calling.

I recognise some will have theological and ecumenical concerns about this change. But I want to stress I am not asking the Church of Scotland to row dangerously far away from its ecumenical moorings - if we row out into this part of the river - we will be moving alongside the PCUSA, the URC, the Methodist Church, the Scottish Baptist Union, - all of whom allow this already in some form.

I am referring to very few people by name in these lectures - however at this point I do want to mention Iain Torrance - and I feel I can say this because he knows how much esteem and respect I have for him - he really is a renowned theologian, unlike myself, who is more of a jobbing theologian - I think he spoke too soon when he responded to this issue at Assembly and if I can throw out a wee challenge, I hope he and the Theological Forum will consider how this question relates, not just to a late Christendom ecumenism, but to a post Christendom missiology.

I said there were four ways in which we could act as a church to address a potentially destabilising decline in the number of ministers and I have now discussed each of them. So which should we pursue? For me the answer is very clear - that we will need to pursue all of them. None of them on their own is likely to be enough. Not only that - but all of them are only ways to work on a broader and even more important ministry objective - which is the one set out in Ephesians 4:12 - to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.

Money

In the final section of tonight's lecture, I want to offer some thoughts about money and reform.

There is a long and complicated historical story to tell ourselves about the Kirk and money, one which includes teinds and glebes, heritors and patronage, the establishment principle and the rise of voluntarism - I will address this in more detail in the book. The 19th C saw crucial changes. When he came to believe Disruption was inevitable, Chalmers set about preparing financially for the task of building a new denomination from the ground up. Soon there were three contrasting presbyterian financial cultures - alongside the older establishment

expectations of state, heritor and teind support in the Old Kirk, two new voluntarist models were in operation: the UP Church operated an **augmentation** fund while the Free Church established a **sustentation** fund - the first topped up local funds from a central pot, the second gathered funds locally, sent them to a central pot and redistributed them to local congregations.²

As these various presbyterian establishments grew and then merged, the sustentation model prevailed alongside the traces of establishment support. The whole church now worked with a system which was introduced as a response to a particular historical call and context - that of building a new national denomination from scratch.

So my former teacher, the late Douglas Murray once commented:

It was in the later 19th century that there was an increase in the centralised bureaucracy of the Kirk. The Free Church in particular had to raise its own funds and this led to a more centralised structure and power tending towards the Assembly Committees and their Conveners. The '121' syndrome is very much a Free Church phenomenon.

By contrast, the churches which would come together to form the PCUSA, have stayed with a less centralised system and one which overall was more Darwinian. For them there was and still is strong emphasis on local responsibility to raise money to pay the stipend. With that comes flexibility about how much ministers are paid and about how many people the congregation can employ locally. Once again, I make the point that there are different ways to be presbyterian.

Today in the Church of Scotland, we have a financial system which is strong on solidarity and central control. That has its strengths. For one thing, you could argue it has worked reasonably well. We are not broke. In fact, congregational giving has held up remarkably well in recent years, despite the decline in membership.

The \$64 thousand dollar question or closer to \$64 million in the case of our annual M & M figure - is whether this highly centralised system, with its rather rigid mechanisms for administering solidarity - is the one best suited to the new context we find ourselves in.

I will admit to being disappointed at General Assembly 2016, that the high level working group reviewing the Kirk's financial systems for the Council of Assembly, recommended virtually no change to present arrangements. The Council of Assembly report is clear why this was done: because for now income is still

² Gibson 1961, 43

holding up well and to embark on change seemed to be to introduce too much risk.³ The danger is that this is a missed opportunity. We need a persuasive vision for the future of the system as well as a sober assessment of its present. I am not sure that this recent review took enough account of the risks posed by how congregations are feeling in the wake of presbytery planning and how they will react to a future which includes more and longer vacancies.

While there is real commitment to the principles of financial solidarity which must be present in a presbyterian system, there is also disquiet and discontent across the church.

I want to reflect on where I think the current system stands in need of change:

1. while properly reflecting solidarity with the poorest congregations in the poorest areas, the current formula for weighting resources to priority congregations does not seem sustainable - it needs to be revised - we need to develop new ways of expressing that solidarity which are less damaging to other parts of the church
2. the attempt to remove stigma from congregations being 'aid-receiving' has weakened a proper and healthy sense of aspiration to become self-sustaining
3. although the current system is simple to operate, it is uninspiring and unimaginative - it contains too few incentives and offers too little flexibility
4. there is suppressed liberality within the system, many people wish to give for local ministry and mission, but feel too much of their money will be skimmed by the wider church; while this does raise some concerns, I think we are too mistrustful of this
5. vacancy allowances need to be increased, particularly where those vacancies are prolonged or where they have become guardianships; there are limits to how far fewer people will only go on paying more to have less
6. some churches are so alienated from current arrangements, that they are sheltering money from assessment - this is not a healthy way to protest the system
7. as well as showing solidarity with the poorest, we also urgently need to support larger churches and help them to grow - we need our strongest churches to get stronger - they have crucial gifts to bring to the denomination as a whole
8. we need to consider whether some expressions of solidarity should be invited in the form of a pledge, rather than imposed in the form of a tax

³ RGA 2016

9. we need to stop micro-managing so much of congregational spend on fabric at presbytery level - you really don't need me to vote on your new kitchen units - it's disempowering to congregations and a waste of everyone's time

Devising new formulas for congregational assessment is a process fraught with difficulty. It is essential but not interesting, vital but not enlivening, strategic but not sexy. As is the case with any kind of tax policy, it requires an alchemy of technical skills, psychological understanding, theological/ethical integrity and creative instinct. [In thinking about this, my mind has often returned to the parable of the dishonest steward in Luke 16]. This process calls for 'design' skills, to build new formulas around memorable images and ideas, to strike a balance between simplicity and adaptability, to strike a balance between positing ideals and anticipating behaviours. It has to minimize the resentments of the poorest and the richest. And it has to work. The formulas have to raise enough money to meet existing commitments, to pay salaries and provide for pensions. They have to maintain responsibility and incentivize liberality. Small wonder, when the system seems to be coping under pressure, that we have been cautious about changing it. We are mindful of the medical maxim - to first Do No Harm.

Devising new ways forward must be a collective task - I would like to see a phase in which we do some more creative and exploratory work on a new funding formula - when we generate ideas and discuss options. Here I can only offer a few tentative thoughts as a contribution to that work:

- The funding formula should have a nominal **floor** and **ceiling** to it.
 - o The floor should relate to the basic cost of parish ministry, currently around £50,000 for a full time post and should represent a healthy aspiration and challenge for as many congregations as possible to become self-supporting.
 - o The ceiling should act as a maximum figure for assessed contributions from wealthier congregations and might be set at £100,000. The decision to leave more money with these congregations would reflect a judgment that the whole Kirk would benefit from encouraging such congregations to grow further. It would be part of a deliberate institutional strategy to support the development of a greater number of larger churches.
 - o A ceiling would have the effect of reducing the funds available for subsidy, so it would be necessary to draw more congregations towards being self-sustaining, as well as possibly creating new pledged funds, as a means to maintain sharing and solidarity.

Congregations must be supported where necessary, but should also be incentivised where possible. A missional refocusing might encourage us to think

more creatively about where our own congregations fit within the financial ecology of our church.

Some congregations are ***Solidarity Congregations***

We must continue to make a core commitment to fund ministry within our poorest congregations, but in ways which do not take so many ministry posts from a limited pool. Above and beyond the core commitment, we need routes to additional funding via dedicated solidarity funds held at national and presbytery levels.

Some might best be seen as ***Development Congregations***

Some congregations may respond best, to working with a match-funding formula, which could be geared differently for different circumstances.

For some congregations which are able to cover their core costs and make a contribution to supporting ministry and mission elsewhere, a key incentive may be the knowledge that having reached an agreed figure, they retain any additional money for local use.

If we imagined a range of ***Self-Sustaining Congregations/Contributer Congregations/Investor Congregations***, In these three cases, for example, reaching the floor figure of £50,000, the ceiling figure of £100,000 or a midpoint between the two could mean the congregations kept 80, 90 or 95% of any additional income.

These are rough and ready designations and rough and ready figures⁴ - they are offered only as thought experiments, throwing my hae'pence worth into a conversation about money which I believe needs to be opened up more candidly and creatively.

Conclusion

Next week, in the final lecture, I will be reflecting on presbyteries and councils and on rebalancing the federal identity of the church. Once again, I very much appreciate your time and attention.

⁴ They are illustrative.