

Moderator, thank you for this opportunity to reflect on this last year; and to the General Assembly, thank you for the immense privilege of being given the opportunity to serve the Church of Scotland in the Office of Moderator.

For Liz and for me this has been an extraordinary year. I cannot think of a time in our lives when we have spun quite so many plates. Just over a year ago we pressed the pause button on our life and stepped into this extraordinary experience and I cannot thank Liz enough for being prepared to do that and for the support that she has been over the past 13 months. She has continued to run her business, helped to organise a family wedding – she has lost both of her parents during this year and yet turned out to every official event looking calm and in control.

This Moderatorial year has been a team effort on so many fronts and all of our family – Mum, Ruth and Brian, David and Jen and JJ and Kornelia have all played their part. My Chaplains MaryAnn Rennie and Ian Alexander and so many friends have supported us throughout the year.

Let me also thank George Whyte for the additional strain he has taken as Acting Principal Clerk, David Arnott who has occupied my desk in the complaints department and in the office of silly questions. And there are others – George Cowie, Alan Hamilton, Derek Browning, Linda Jamieson and Christine Paterson who wouldn't let me get drawn into the work

of the office – they allowed me to focus on being the Moderator.

And to Alison Murray who has patiently put up with me, handed me briefings just as I needed them, sent out hundreds – maybe thousands – of invitations, put up with doves cluttering the office and so on: Alison from Liz and me, our heartfelt thanks.

The year itself has been a series of unforgettable experiences, but experiences only benefit us when we take the time to give them meaning and then carry forward what these experiences teach us.

So, as the year has progressed I have written many pieces for the website, for newspaper columns, for Life and Work and for special events – these pieces were written to give context to and to draw out lessons from visits which might not otherwise be seen as having much meaning.

Let me give you a short, but connecting string – the year began by preaching at a joint service for the people of Hexham and Hawick commemorating Border hostilities that took place just a year after Flodden 500 years ago, later we visited the Synod of the Reformed Church in Hungary where the church is still dealing with the guilt, distrust and fear which emerged following perestroika, throughout the year there have been events commemorating the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of World War 1 and last weekend the year drew to a close taking part in the 70<sup>th</sup>

Anniversary celebrations of the Liberation of Jersey from Nazi occupation.

These experiences in themselves may seem quite random – but taken together there is the emergence of a common theme which is about the healing of memory and the long slow haul which leads people from hostility to peace and from peace to reconciliation.

Each of these visits or events represents a spiritual journey as much as they are memorials of past history. I say that because for the people directly affected, to have moved from where they were to where they are now, has involved a long slow engagement with the real stuff of the spiritual life – repentance and regret, justice and truth, pardon, forgiveness and atonement. It was been a lesson for me in understanding the timeframes over which transformational change takes place. Freedom isn't free and the journey from conflict to concord is complex.

I cannot begin to tell you what these experiences have meant to me in understanding human nature and human relationships; in understanding the nature of God and the nature of our relationship with God.

A friend of mine constantly reminds me that the unique role of the Church is to speak into the spiritual hunger that pervades the world, he is not wrong when

he says that if we do not nourish the inner life most of the big outer journeys are doomed to failure.

It was the gift of Jesus to get people to look past religious structures, it was the gift of Jesus to drill deeper than moral assertions and it was the gift of Jesus to give people an inner life that transformed their engagement with the outer world.

In the Church of Scotland we are good at offering moral commentary on what we believe people of Christian conscience should think and feel about all manner of social, national and international issues.

But ours is to do more than that - our real gift is in nourishing people's inner lives and we need to get down to that serious work – new disciples will be born in doing that work. They might not appear on our annual statistical returns, but I don't think that Jesus is keeping that kind of score.

Speaking of new disciples – here's another concern that has been troubling me over this past year. I think it's high time that we reviewed what we mean by membership and started to think seriously about how we support people on their spiritual journey within the widest possibly definition of the family and fellowship of the Church of Scotland.

This is a screen shot of the opening page of **onlinexMOVIES8** from this you can access the whole world of movies. Adventure, Romance, Love

Stories, Comedy, Horror you name it, it's all there. Because of this kind of resource there are people who are movie buffs who couldn't tell you when they last went to the cinema.

This is a screen shot of one of the ways in which I imagine a new generation of people might access the fuel for a spiritual journey that does not revolve around 11am on a Sunday morning.

This opening page does a number of things:

- It declares unequivocally the breadth of the Church of Scotland
- It concedes that one size does not fit all
- It allows the modern day seeker to find the spiritual experience that meets their need and
- It allows access to worship, learning and prayer 24/7
- You may even become a deeply committed disciple without going to church very often

However, in my world of **online+CHURCH12**, as well as downloads of Sunday worship, there are programmes made for the medium, there is a Church of Scotland kite mark which guarantees its pedigree and there is a way in which the viewer/listener can make human contact and become part of the living community.

The tools are now quite literally in our hand which can help us to sustain people on their spiritual journey and nourish their inner life. Every day for the whole of

this Moderatorial year a friend has sent me a **text by Text** – it has kept me grounded and for the life of me I do not know why we are not sending such texts to every one of our members every week at least. With **whats app** it would be free and it's such a simple way to nourish the faith. From such inner transformation will come the next generation of leaders in church and society.

That takes me to the 16<sup>th</sup> February when my daughter posted on FaceBook, “guess what, Pope Francis met my mum and dad today!”

Whatever the visit of the Moderator meant to Pope Francis, this private audience meant a great deal to me. What I discerned on that occasion is that the power of the Pope's leadership is not in dictates, papal decrees and ex cathedra statements. The power of his leadership is in the strength of his spiritual life and inner integrity.

You look into this man's eyes and you know that there is someone in and that the light is switched on. It is Christ who is in and the light is the grace and goodness and justice and righteousness of God. That is why he is disturbing the waters, that is why he is a reformer and that is why his leadership is so powerful.

So my friend is right when he says that the priority for these days is to foster that inner life – it is from there that the power for transformational change will come.

But there's something else that we have to learn as a Church and that is the power of harmony. Of course we need the freedom across the Church to shape the life and worship of the Church according to local needs and local gifts (and we have seen wonderful examples of this – from Soul Space at Johnstone High Parish to the Shed in Stornoway) but we cannot go on suffering the pain of internal attacks which are designed to undermine the work or the place of others. It's time to play for the team.

And let me be very clear here – I am not speaking to one side or another of the theological spectrum. I am speaking to both ends and middle. It is time to stop calling each other names, time to shun the idea that we should define ourselves by our differences and instead define ourselves by what we hold in common - our baptism into Christ, our dependence on God's grace, our will to serve the poor and so on.

Almost every experience of any worth in these last 12 months has come about as a result of team work. In Advent a daily thought for the day appeared on the Church of Scotland website - notes and emails of appreciation came back to me from across the church, but this project happened because 24 friends from across the breadth of the church agreed to share their perspectives and their insights on advent – the result was a harmony of Christian voices – not unison – but harmony. Everyone played for the same team or sung in the same choir.

On Christmas Eve I found myself writing to another 30 friends to set up daily reflections for Lent. In this venture Christian Aid Scotland was a big part of the team, Kathy Galloway was inspirational in making it all happen and when the reflections were published, day by day they led those who wanted to explore beneath the surface of these daily thoughts, to some of the serious theological fundamentals that underpin the work of Christian Aid. The people who contributed to these two projects were not all folk who would find themselves on the same side of every issue, but their strength was in ***playing for the team.***

Here is one other image of the year to ponder. It was a great joy to be present at the Invictus Games. In this image three guys who are otherwise highly competitive – realised that there was something more important than winning. So they joined hands and they crossed the line together. All of these were awarded Gold medals, one of these characters just happens to be our son JJ of whom I have said on more than one occasion this year, “if he had belonged to a company of Marines who were only interested in their own survival he would not be here today - his unit was made up men who were not all natural bedfellows, but at the heart of the Commando Spirit is the dictum of ***Unselfishness – Oppo (best friend) first; Team second; Self last.***

We got this message first hand while visiting the Commando training centre at Lympstone, where

embedding the values of the Royal Marines is every bit as important as building physical fitness or learning to use a weapon. Indeed, how can anyone be put in charge of a weapon unless they already have deeply embedded principles and values.

We need to learn to play for the team and to fight for the unit. I have heard it for too long – that working with “ministers is like herding cats” and that’s not a criticism of ministers alone – Try to get a Presbytery of Congregations to work with one another rather than compete, try to get Presbyteries to realign so that they can actually function as the kind of Presbyteries we need in the 21<sup>st</sup> century or try to get Councils and Committees to operate outside of their silos and you will experience the same frustrating outcome.

So strategic plans to meet the challenges and changes of our times and measures to meet the breadth of the theological reality which is the Church of Scotland, are of no use to us if one element or another is determined to undermine the cause rather than demonstrate loyalty to it.

This year I have not ignored the fact that in the Church of Scotland we are divided on questions of how Scripture should be interpreted. I am not prepared, however, to accept that only those who read scripture in one particular way are those who

are shaped by scripture. This is simply not true and it is a travesty that some of our people (from both ends of the scale) trade in such language. This year I hosted a day-long event for a group of ministers from across the breadth of our Church of Scotland – on my part it was an experiment in Respectful Dialogue; those present:

- were challenged to walk a mile in the shoes of others
- they were exposed to the ways in which others read the Bible
- and they were challenged to cross the room and speak with people (not speak at them or speak past them) but speak with people who held different views and yet served the same Lord.

This, for me was a powerful experience and while this year has left me with a list of unfinished agenda, the one I would go back to if I could - would be to hold another forty of those gatherings for ministers across the Church of Scotland.

Moving on - one of the great privileges for me this year was to join Christian Aid UK at its gender justice workshop. This huge priority for the coming decade is of enormous importance. For the most part - across the world men are the problem.

- Men who carry guns
- Men who wield power

- Men who subjugate women
- Men who exclude women from leadership in church and community.

National and tribal customs, theological concepts and church cultures often support the sins that lead to gender discrimination, female exclusion and female abuse. Upwards of four billion people on this planet today live their lives with little or no protection of the law and little or no access to anything that looks like justice as we know it.

The vast majority of these people are women and children.

Yet women hold the key to bringing a different approach to leadership, a different voice at the peace table and a different role model to that of the sabre rattling generals and the male-adjusted patriarchal leadership which has brought us to where we are in church and community.

This year Liz and I visited Nigeria to celebrate the work of a strong woman and a role model for a nation - Mary Slessor. If you ever needed proof that women can be stronger and more influential than men – read more about Mary Slessor’s life. Single handed she ended the practice of the killing of twins – in Duke Town I preached before a congregation with a hundred sets of twins present. Mary Slessor may have had no children of her own, but she became the mother of a nation.

We then went from Nigeria to South Sudan and we saw for ourselves how things are when women are excluded from the leadership of society and the only role models are men who turn too rapidly to violence.

We were hugely impressed in this Assembly last year by Peter Gai, the Moderator of our partner church in South Sudan who told us of the plight of his people. Peter stood in front of the rebels who were on a rampage of killing and rape and he saved the lives of more than 2000 people who were sheltering in the Presbyterian Church Compound in Malakal.

There were no women standing at the gate of the Church compound wielding guns.

But, Malakal is now a ghost town and we saw for ourselves how South Sudan, the newest country on earth, had descended into complete brokenness.

Women there said to us, “we try to influence the men, but instead we lose them in war.” South Sudan is a tragedy on a scale that I cannot begin to report. There is work to be done that will take generations. I don’t know when South Sudan will get to emerge onto the world stage as a peaceful and productive nation.

But I do know this, when it does emerge, women will be the key. They can and will be the peacemakers of the future, but only when gender justice is taken

seriously – and I will be supporting Christian Aid's Gender Justice Campaign; not least because it will force us to face up to some theological home truths of our own.

It will force us to drill down to the roots of gender prejudice and exclusion. It may be uncomfortable for us, but there will be little point in dealing with the speck in someone else's eye without also dealing with the log in our own.

Speaking of discomfort I am still sore from the Moderators' Munro! This, however, was another massive piece of teamwork. Rachel Hutcheson, NYA Moderator and my son David stuck with me to the top of Ben Lomond, Alex MacPherson and his team at Drymen Parish Church, 130 climbers who battled with us through the wind and hail and snow, Wendy and her team from Christian Aid, mountain guides from the Abernethy Trust, our coms team providing web support and media exposure mean that we raised, with gift aid over £18,000 for the Nepal Earthquake Appeal.

My sincere thanks to everyone who helped to make this happen - it's still not too late to add to the total (web address) and there is here for sale a pair of second hand hiking boots – one careful owner, only worn twice!

With one exception (Ice Bucket Photo) - we had a very good time visiting the Presbyteries of Lewis and Uist, Greenock and Paisley, Duns, Jedburgh and

Melrose and Peebles and Aberdeen. It is safe to say, that such a varied experience confirms that there is no one pattern of Church that fits all.

Many, many good things are happening in congregational life; however, if there is a concern it is that we are becoming just a bit too fragmented – a bit less Presbyterian and a bit more Congregationalist. In my analysis there is great strength in our Presbyterian polity and it's time to recover the best bits. We saw evidence, in more than one part of the country, that ministers and members alike are ready for the kind of regional restructuring and devolution of resources which would better empower the local church.

Just a few, however, are getting in the way, sometimes using the system, as it is, to their own advantage and worst of all there is some evidence that strategic restructuring for the mission and ministry of the church is being blocked by a desire to hold onto Barrier Act votes. The morality of this has to be challenged and the self-evident injustice of the Barrier Act as it is currently applied has to be addressed.

This year I came across a congregation that had never heard of the work of CrossReach. I found that remarkable.

For me it was hugely rewarding to spend a week with Church of Scotland CrossReach - we are a great Church when we are living our faith. I'd rather see a sermon than hear one any day.

I said earlier that Liz had lost both of her parents this year, but I'll tell you what was really special – she and I and the rest of the family had the comfort of her dad finding contentment, new friends and care that was second to none in the Crossreach home at St Margaret's in Polmont.

CrossReach also gave me the excuse to do what I enjoy most! At the Moderator's golf day we raised £5000 for CrossReach children's and family services.

This too was another team effort. Scottish Golf Professionals Bill Lockie and John McTear; Jim McGuire, Peter Bailey, Elizabeth Hay and many others threw themselves into this great day. 24 people beat the Moderator and made off with one of my Doves. 60 didn't beat the Moderator, but went home informed, excited, well aware of CrossReach and of the life of a living church. And they asked if we could do it all again next year – how's your Golf Angus?

My year began with us imagining Scotland's future.

Whatever your view of the outcome of the referendum, I believe that the church found an authentic voice both during the campaign and after it in the service of Commitment to Common Purpose and St Giles.

I was grateful to the Assembly last year for allowing me to experiment with our Respectful Dialogue and from later conversations with politicians of all parties I know that our voice of reason and restraint was greatly appreciated.

The Comms Team made sure that we were one of the **go to** voices as the campaign proceeded. St Giles was packed for the post-referendum service, BBC rolling News transmitted 35 minutes of the service live, more than 900 people watched again in the following week and since then more than 1700 have watched the service on YouTube.

There is no other voice in Scottish public life like the voice of the Church of Scotland; and it is still heard – when it is reasoned and rational and respectful – it is also heard when it is prophetic and profound.

Of huge significance this year has been the launch of the Churches Mutual Credit Union. I have been proud to have been involved as part of this initiative – even though it is not the immediate answer to the need to provide credit for those who get caught and collared by the exorbitant rates of the payday loan companies.

It's up to all of us now – to buy into this venture so that it becomes a real player in the world of personal finance. And although Moderators don't always get the benefit of being able to follow up on the projects that they are asked to launch, I consider myself privileged to have been asked to continue to work with the Carnegie UK Trust on the question of how lower cost borrowing can be made available for those who are currently unfairly excluded from the fairly priced marketplace.

Finally, the doves around the Assembly Hall will not have escaped your notice. You may or may not; however, have noticed that this year I have tried to find ways of getting the wider Church of Scotland, from time to time, to sing from the same page. Advent and Lent and giving for the Christian Aid, Nepal Earthquake Fund were examples of that, but we are not a Church that readily responds to such initiatives.

I feel that that is a great pity, because if every Church of Scotland – once a month or four times a year was, in a coordinated way, flooding the local papers and hitting the same note in our parishes right across Scotland – then I think that would be a very powerful tool.

With these Doves we came closest to getting congregations across the Church of Scotland to share a common theme. Doves came in from congregations across the country, they came from

our congregations across Europe this one made of Bermuda cedar came from our congregation in Bermuda. A member from Abernethy Church sent me this one made from the body panel of an ex-war department jeep, a housebound member in Edinburgh sent this one which was hand embroidered. They came in from schools and Brownies and BBs.

The Prime Minister got the first 2500 doves with an assurance that across the Church of Scotland we were praying for peace and for peacemakers.

The Dove project was ably assisted by Carol Finlay (someone who never short of good ideas) and it was inspired by the little glass doves that I have given as gifts to leaders of church and community wherever I have gone. These glass doves are made in Bethlehem, by Palestinian Christians - living under occupation. They are made from glass recovered from bombsites. And whatever else the symbol of the Dove stands for, these doves stand for ***beauty from brokenness***.

So my last word to this General Assembly is that wherever we find ourselves serving – ours is to find beauty in the broken places:

- in lives broken by the wretched circumstances of life
- broken by failing memory
- broken by addiction
- broken by loss

- broken by loss of direction
- broken by loss of self-esteem
- broken by failure or
- broken by rejection.

If our Church of Scotland can dig in these broken places, then we cannot help but find the beauty of the Kingdom God.

Thank you once again for the trust you have placed in me and thank for the immense privilege that this past year has been.