

Report of the Mission and Discipleship Council Thursday 21st May 2015

The report of the Mission and Discipleship Council is found in Section 20 of the Blue Book. Moderator, the question I want to ask is this: How can we inspire our Church in mission and encourage one another on the path of discipleship?

So much seems to be set against us today. It is all too easy to get tired and discouraged, to set your sights on survival, content if you can keep the show on the road. But is there another way? Our report wants to give *help* but we also want to give *hope*. Both are needed.

Sir Christopher Wren is best known for rebuilding St Paul's Cathedral after the Great Fire of London. One day, after work on his cathedral had begun, Wren, unrecognised by the workforce, walked among the artisans and stonecutters. He asked one of the workmen: "What are you doing?" "I am cutting a piece of stone", the workman replied. He asked the same question of the second stonecutter. "I am earning five shillings two pence a day", the second workman replied. He asked a third workman the same question and the man answered, "**I am helping Sir Christopher Wren build a magnificent cathedral to the glory of God.**" Same job but different visions! Which one do you think gave energy for the task?

Let me push the illustration a bit further. Charles Hendy wrote, "Cathedrals are incredible testaments to human endeavour. It is not only their grandeur or splendour, but the thought that they often took **more than fifty years to build**. Those who designed them, those who first worked on them, knew for certain that they would never see them finished. They knew only that they were creating something glorious which would stand for centuries, long after their own names had been forgotten..... **We may not need any more cathedrals but we do need *cathedral thinkers*, people who can think beyond their own lifetimes.**"

Are you playing your full part just now but also looking at the end game? The Kingdom of God is always both "now" and "not yet" We sow seeds and wait patiently for the harvest. My father worked up country in West Africa as a District Commissioner and he often had visitors to stay. Some were missionaries who wanted to change the world by next week. But the one that impressed him most was the elderly Jesuit priest who, having given his life to the country, said simply, "I don't expect any of this generation to become real Christians; I am not sure that any of the next will either, but my vision is set on the generation after that!! If the rebuilding of our church takes three generations will you invest now, believing that the full return may come much later? Help is received when hope is reborn. We are not in the business of propping up an institution. We believe in renewing the Church and transforming lives.

To build a cathedral each must cut the stone that is before them. In our report we offer practical help in a whole range of ways, through events, publications and online resources- but we want to give hope first.

People say “Where there is life there’s hope” and I agree. But it is equally true to say “Where there is hope there’s life” We want you to dream with us and then work for a Church fit for the 21st century. It is a Church that is born and nurtured in prayer, for our hope ultimately is in God. People ask “Are you an optimist or a pessimist?” I say “Christian hope is not a matter of temperament.” “But is the glass half full or half empty?” I say “What matters most is who holds the glass. I see the glass firmly held in the hands of God.” My definition of hope is simply this “God is in control.” With that confidence we can make a difference and we will not lose heart.

So we work as seed sowers; our vision- a fruitful church that is: rooted in worship, growing in faith, and serving God in the world. Our focus in this last year has been precisely that.

We want to help people be rooted in worship

And so we provide “Starters for Sunday”, our growing online library, that each week helps people plan worship and resources them for that task. We launched Different Voices last year. It is becoming the “go to” resource for worship leaders with its blogs, tutorials, recordings and sheet music, supporting its four streams of music. We are showcasing one stream, the classical, through our partnership with Greyfriars Church by streaming parts of its Spark Festival throughout the country. This week we published “Living Stones”, our new prayer resource, which builds on the popularity of last year’s Pray Now resource “Revealing love” and gives shape to our prayers. When people worship God and rejoice in the gospel they find hope and we want to help them in that.

Where we worship affects *how* we worship. For most people, their church buildings tick all four boxes in a SWOT analysis – it is a strength, a weakness an opportunity and a threat. We want to help you with your place of worship so that your parish want to come and your people are glad to be there. To make it easier for you, our Church Art and Architecture committee (CARTA) and the General Trustees will launch on June 1st their single gateway. This will provide a one-shop-stop for people wanting advice and approval to make the alterations needed to make their buildings fit for purpose and for mission. We can work with you, respecting your church heritage, and at the same time shaping a light, colourful, warm, welcoming place where worship is enhanced and people feel good about coming.

Then we want to help people grow in their faith

We are not the experts. We do not set ourselves up as those who tell others what to do We began by listening to what you said and responding to that. You said... we did.

Since its launch last autumn at our Session Clerk’s and Elders Conference, the Learn: Eldership book has been described as a best seller and a potential game changer. It came about because we took seriously what you said you needed. We have now provided a publication that can be used in different ways. One Kirk Session uses a chapter at each meeting. The elders read it, and in discussion answer the questions and apply what they share in the life of their church. For one elder the opportunity to share and discuss rather than simply be told was both novel and appreciated. Tell us how you are using it, for that

helps us and gives us hope and makes us want to produce other resources. Can you imagine a generation of Elders revitalised, equipped and enthused, energised to think in new ways, encouraged to set about their tasks with new heart?

Alongside our conferences and publications we have a range of online resources at www.resourcingmission.org.uk If I didn't mention that, you would wonder what had gone wrong!

A few years ago St Andrew Press came under the management of Hymns Ancient and Modern. This has now led to a creative rebirth in our relationship with it. This last year, alongside their commissioned titles, we are working closely with them to produce resources to serve the church. There is a buzz around publishing that has not been there for some time.

Learn:Eldership is just the first in a series that are being planned and commissioned. Last year you asked at the GA for a book for new communicants. Working with Donald McEwen and the Theological Forum and with contributions from other writers we will launch Learn: Exploring Faith, on October 22nd in St Andrew's. Very Rev Lorna Hood, when Moderator acted as a catalyst to encourage us to develop our work with children. We listened and acted. Our consultation 'Now you're talking!' and other research activity led us to appoint a children's worker and undertake a successful event, "Community of Faith," for those working with children. This summer, a guide addressing the needs of the next generation will come out, entitled "How will our children have faith?"

Next year we will publish Learn: Office bearers. At this Assembly, we are selling a study guide on "Mission and Older People," to help congregations to engage with this subject. All these publications are done in partnership with St Andrew Press.

This last publication is the work of our Mission Forum. Drawing from the expertise of Crossreach and from the Guild's Golden Age project and enriched by the insights of other Councils and specialists in this area, we held a conference from which has emerged a printed resource with accompanying DVD. Our aim is to help the church, at a local level, to respond to the changing demography both of Scotland and the church, taking seriously the Third Age generation.

A few years ago, looking for volunteers to drive our older members down to Peebles Hydro for high tea and a service, I noticed that one of the first volunteers who had signed up was a man called Craig. I said to him "Here is my problem, Craig, what would happen if there was an accident?" "I have never had one", he replied. "Yes but if you did, and I had to say "He is 100 years old" it might not go down too well!" He understood, but in the end drove himself there, and drove beautifully.

We can use the gifts of older people to reach others and also bring grace to them through the richness of the gospel. We can do so much more when we do it together and in that shared vision we find help and hope.

If we care about reaching children and older people, we are also well aware of those who can easily be overlooked. Our Learning Disabilities Working Group have produced an evidence based report that shows some of the good practice going on currently in our churches and shares that with the whole church. These are people who have something to give as well as needing to be included and involved. We can learn from them and grow with them.

My brother-in-law, Peter, has Downs's syndrome. Years ago his mother was told "Well you see he has no economic potential," as if that summed up and dismissed his value. I thank God that his local village church has made him their beadle and with great dignity he carries the bible in each Sunday at the start of worship. I thank God that a Christian organisation in town gives him a job to do, a community to belong to, and the gift of real friendship. We want to give help so you can give others hope.

What of our young adults? They also need hope. Each year they enrich our GA as Youth delegates and probably work harder in preparation than any Commissioner.

This year the NYA comes of age as it celebrates its 21st year. We bring, as the GA asked last year, a joint report telling its story and shaping its future and long for the whole church to get behind them, affirm and support them. They meet together to bring their voice to the GA. We need to ensure that it is heard clearly and not overlooked.

The voice of our members of our church is captured in Life and Work. With a Facebook page, a Twitter account, a weekly newsletter and a dedicated website. Life and Work has not stood still, but is using the media platforms available to it to remain relevant. However much more could be done and the review's findings point us in the direction that will better enable its voice to be heard not only in the church but beyond. Beyond is where we need to go to give hope and for that we need help.

For we want to serve God in the world

The research reported on last year on the Invisible Church has been undertaken in other parts of Scotland and the headline results are just coming out. Not only is there a seismic shift in our political landscape in Scotland, but it is also happening in the Christian landscape and we need help to understand it. Then we need to go out in hope and do things in a fresh way.

The "Going for Growth" days and the follow up "Vision Days", are ways the Fresh Expressions movement, in which we are ecumenical partners, is being rolled out in Scotland over the next four years. The stories of faith and transformation that can be found on the Fresh Expressions website are encouraging and inspiring. Why not come to our Summer School in Dundee next month where these things can be explored in great depth and adventures in faith can be undertaken? One lady from another church said "As a denomination we had forgotten what God had called us to be but through Fresh Expressions we have rediscovered our purpose". Equip days and Future Focus help us in our task and encourage us to support one another.

Many churches found themselves stronger together during the Commonwealth Games when they joined together under the “More than Gold” umbrella and opened their homes to visitors using the unique atmosphere of that event to bridge the gap between church and community in a variety of creative ways.

We finish our report by suggesting “Why not try?” Help can only give hope when it is received and put into practice. I do not know what stone you have been entrusted with but there is a cathedral which needs to be built and without your contribution something will be missing. Today we face a choice; you can either live by hope or by fear. Hope energises us, fear paralyses us; hope empowers us, fear weakens us; hope lifts us up, fear drags us down. I am told that, in the New Testament, the word “hope” only occurs once before the resurrection and somewhere between 50 and 70 times afterwards. Hope may be the most neglected of the Christian graces - faith hope and love, but the Bible, from start to finish, is a textbook of hope.

Hope, in God’s language, means to dare to swim against the tide. It means daring to lose to gain something better, learning to give to become richer, investing in lost causes, loving without expecting anything in return. Hope is to go in search of God’s world, even when you can’t see the path any more. In fact hope is like a path in the countryside. Originally there is nothing, but as people walk this way again and again, a path appears.

Whether trailblazer or follower, will you walk with us and can we walk with you? We want to help you on that way so we can travel together in hope, into God’s future.

Moderator I present our report and move the deliverances.

Colin Sinclair
Convenor Mission and Discipleship Council
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