

Ministries Council speech – General Assembly 2019

Moderator,

It is not something we admit terribly often,
But it is a strange thing to be a minister.

To be a minister
Seemed too often about trading in your humanity in order to be more like God.
A strangeness that was about being distant or unrelatable

And yet the most powerful moments I knew involving ministers were when a burning
humanity broke through,
In a mix of the humanness and Godness,
Holy strangeness
This remarkable place where the magic happens

In memories of my grandfather, a Congregational minister in Watford during the Blitz
And later in the Scottish Borders
Memories of a funeral in a downpour for one of the shepherds in the Ewes valley
The widow so disappointed that there was such bad weather that day,
Nessie, he said to her, today, the whole valley is weeping
Words of comfort that she recalled decades later

Or George Macleod coming to dinner and discussing the nuclear bomb

Or the stories that Rev Murdo Ewan MacDonald told of being a padre in a Prisoner of War
camp
Speaking Gaelic to fool German eavesdroppers

Godness and humanness
The power of the strange breaking through in the ordinary
And this is where the magic is, the blessing, the ministry that builds up the body

Or of my own Father, minister in Arbroath, involved in starting an employment training
centre during the recession of the early 1980s
Or of the time that he appeared on the headlines of the Scottish News when he called for
the General Assembly to support the families of striking minors

My brother cheering at the TV
And later that week being even more chuffed when he was harangued by another minister
in the town for being a quasi Communist

That mix of the human and the divine
Prophetic and Pastoral
The strange and the ordinary
The word and the flesh
This beautiful mystery we call ministry

Rev Anne Logan leading worship at a Billy Graham telecast in the 1980s
where many had not previously encountered the ordained ministry of a woman

And more recently in my experiences of ministry in different forms.

More recently
Meeting Deacons, almost every one whom is a bit of a legend

And Ministries Development Staff, like amazing youth workers called Neil
Neil Young in Provanmill, and Neil Campbell in Douglas & Mid-Craigie.

Doing crazy outrageous things
Humanness and Godness
Strangeness and the ordinary
Ministry building up the body.

And Auxiliaries and OLMs
Auxiliaries like Linda Walker training half of Hamilton and Lanark
And Alistair Cumming enabling the camaraderie of the Presbytery of England

OLMs sustaining the life of the Church - Fiona Tweedie and her beautiful numbers
I think of Jim Sharp who does so much to sustain the International Presbytery
Heather Stewart sustaining the Church in Caithness
Grace Steele in Perthshire
And Robert Nicol in both

And Readers like Jim Paxton or Stuart McClery packing out the recent Preachers
Conference
Reminding us that the second largest expression of Recognised Ministry is the Readership

These memories of humanness and strangeness
Of Goodness and blessedness

This speech was written at the same time as the dying of
Rachel Held Evans, the uncompromisingly honest and eloquent blogger and author
And Jean Vanier who taught us that Christ is present in the “little ones” who are our
teachers

And these two reminding us that ministry belongs to all the saints, not only those who have
been ordained.

And also in the memory of Johnny Paton, much loved Parish minister in Mull who died all
too suddenly, with memories still raw in Argyll Presbytery
Where Catriona Hood, a pioneering hubs minister died last year.

In their lives memories of that holiness and strangeness
Humanness and blessedness

But rather the strangeness of gathering a community every week round a story
Whose Good news is of God coming near, and bringing all broken things back together,

You can never capture such strangeness in words
It is of the Spirit and beyond language
But in order to ensure that the ministry for which we are trained and formed
Is aligned with the ministry to which we are called

This year we bring to the General Assembly our Formation Framework for ministry, a kind of
vision of what a minister should be.

The Formation Framework produced thus far relates to Full-time ministers of word and
sacrament
Future frameworks will relate to other Recognised Ministries
And in future, especially in the light of the Radical Action Plan
Frameworks for the formation and development of all God’s people.

In assessing the hugely diverse work of the Ministries Council
We would suggest that all of this should be subject to one question
Does the work here, as much as is possible

Enable, inspired, and encourage
Those in the Ministry of the Church of Scotland.

Poverty

We begin our report this year with the report of the Priority Areas Committee and the Churches with whom it works.

Because Priority should mean priority

64 congregations whose life is marked by the most incredible richness and adventure.

Telling a different story about a different way to be

It's not about bringing God to our communities
But finding out what God is already doing

All of the work, builds on conversations
Undoes the destructive powers of poverty
Highlights the humanity of life that is rich and strange, and human, and ordinary, and divine
and blessed.

Education and Support

Our work in education and support includes an update on our Recruitment strategy
One to one conversations, discernment will be at the heart of our Recruitment

The continued work of the Ascend program.
Our ability to carry out ministry
Is vastly enhanced when we are supported.

We also outline the process for identifying which Academic partners will provide the next generation of ministerial formation -
this process must be robust and transparent - and, if our proposals are adopted, be brought for scrutiny and final confirmation to next year's assembly.

After much consultation we bring new legislation for those in ministry experiencing long term ill health, seeking to ensure that the best support and information
Is made available to those in the most vulnerable of situations.
Attempting to ensure that technical arrangements are attentive to the human stories and the people that this work must support.

Partnerships and Development

In Partnerships and Development we seek to develop new models of deployment, building on the idea of Hub Ministries which continues to generate much interest within the life of the Church -

This is about finding ways through our sometimes baroque legislation which supports doing the right thing, rather than getting in the way.

Above all it is about ensuring that people are supported
And their gifts are nourished.

We also bring proposals for the payment of Ordained Local Ministers and Auxiliary Ministers in situations where other ministers would receive payment.

Our recruitment is such that in future years over a third of our ministers will be operating in a non-stipendiary capacity. This has big implications for the way that we think of the ministry of our Church and we wish to begin more intentional reflection on the crucial role of non-stipendiary ministry in our Church.

It is also a challenge to our Church to continue to develop the role of Deacons - Next month, our Diaconate will be hosting the Europe and Africa region's Diakonate conference, 25 years after the first conference was also held in Scotland.

This year we have also thought much about our support of readers, something which is the responsibility of presbyteries, but in which Ministries Council has the lead role in initial and ongoing training.

At last year's assembly we gave notice that we would bring proposals relating to the affordability of Ministries Development Staff posts currently in Presbytery Plans. Given the budgetary pressures facing the Church, we must ensure that we can continue to properly fund the work of Ministry Development Staff; so we propose a temporary pause on new recruitment, give notice that a process for future MDS recruitment should be in place by the end of this year,

This proposal does not include or suggest any redundancies to existing MDS in post. Indeed the Ministries Council value and appreciate the variety of ministry development work undertaken across the Church.

Our work relies hugely on our partnerships with presbyteries, and other agencies and councils of the Church

At this time we should pay tribute in particular to Iain MacFadzean who is shortly to retire as Chief Exec of Workplace Chaplaincy Scotland,
He has done a huge amount in birthing and leading an organisation which now has over 100 superbly trained chaplains.

We have been aware for some time the changes that were going to be proposed at this year's assembly, and were subsequently adopted on Monday and Tuesday.

Does the work here support, inspire and enable those
Who are called to the ministry of the Church of Jesus Christ.

I would like to close moderator by saying a huge thank you to the staff of the ministries Council,

Many of them seated on my right.

In particular I would like to mention Elizabeth Dailly, due to her forty years in the finance department, and for many of them responsible for Minister's travel expenses, the individual who probably received more letters from Church of Scotland than anyone else in history.

And Moira Whyte - just retired

And John Thomson - just about to retire

Who have become hugely loved and respected after long periods of service in the work of the Council.

Since this is my last Assembly as convener, I would like to take a moment to thank my former congregation of Flemington Hallside who supported me through many years in this work,

And my current congregations of Aberfeldy, Dull and Weem and Grantully Logierait Strathtay.

Finally it is important that as an Assembly and through this report

We record the remarkable work across all of Scotland, in England, the Channel Islands, in the Presbytery of Jerusalem and the presbytery of International Charges

The work of all those

Who as Parish Ministers

Deacons

Ordained Local Ministers

Auxiliary Ministers

Chaplains

Readers

Ministries Development Staff

Those who work through the projects of Go For It

Who engage in this unique, perhaps sometimes strange,

Always remarkable and inspiring thing which is called the Ministry of the Church of Scotland.

Moderator, I am not a commissioner

And so ask the Clerk

To move the report and deliverance

Of the Ministries Council.