

ascend

centre for support & development

quarterly magazine for ministry



no minister is an island

DISRUPT THE NORM

Ministerial Development Conversation is a protected space for intentional conversation to enable real change and growth.

What others have said:

'I had a really positive experience. It was so good to say it all out loud. I explored a lot in the time that we had together'

'It was refreshing to be asked some powerful questions'

'I had an epiphany - a moment when I knew what I was going to do'

Book your Ministerial Development Conversation online or phone the office.
www.churchofscotland.org.uk/ascend

Tel: 0131 225 5722 - ask for Ministries Council, Project Officer

We have been nominated for an award with The Hr Network (Scotland).
The award is for Organisational Development of the Year for the work of Ascend
and Ministerial Development Conversation (MDC).

Find out more at www.churchofscotland.org.uk/ascend



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please mark email or letter:
FAO Ascend Editor.

HELLO

Staying connected has never been easier. Digital technology is driving greater numbers of connections every day. Yet when we have listened to those in ministry, the experience of making meaningful connections with peers and colleagues appears to be more challenging than ever. Despite the awareness of our need for connectedness with others, finding the time and space to prioritise this can at times feel like another obligation on an already busy to-do list. Simultaneously, we are part of an organisation that has more than its fair share of meetings, yet the experience of these does not always equal the type of connectedness we desire and need to thrive and flourish in our roles.

This edition of Ascend Magazine looks at our experiences of connection and isolation with and from one another and those whom we seek to serve. At this time of significant change, increasing pressures and demands, it has never been more important to stay connected. We know this from good working environments and, more fundamentally for us, there is a theological imperative to being a community of believers together.



We look at the impact of isolation on ministry today, consider the understanding of the Trinity and what this means for Christian community and hear from people involved in ministry at different stages and in different roles.

This will be my (David) last edition of Ascend. After five years working in the central offices I am off to pastures new. I want to thank everyone who has worked with us on Ascend from attending our consultations and focus groups to reading the magazine and serving in one of the services. Together we have built something special which I hope has a lasting impact for those serving in ministry.

We hope this edition of Ascend Magazine is enjoyable and useful.

Best –

A handwritten signature in white ink, appearing to read 'Gabby & David'.

GABBY AND DAVID

Ascend Leaders

BULLETINS

STAFF UPDATE

In August Ministries Council was delighted to welcome Sally-Anne Dunn to the team as the Learning & Development Officer for Ministries Development Staff. Her role represents a renewed way of working across teams and departments to achieve our core aims. There will be lots of crossover and identifying of shared knowledge, resources, skills and more. This is an exciting next stage for our MDS colleagues.

Also joining us to undertake the role of interim Administration Manager is Sue Williams. Sue is covering for Carron Lunt while she is on temporary secondment.

After five years in the Central Offices, David Plews is leaving Ministries Council at the end of November.

ASCEND TALKS

Ascend Talks are now online. Go to the Development tab and then click on Talks. Topics range from theology to civil law, gender justice to compassion fatigue. Hear from voices from around the Church. Want to contribute a talk? Get in touch!

www.churchofscotland.org.uk/ascend

RIT REPORT

Download your copy of the Rethinking Initial Training Phase 2 Report, available at: www.churchofscotland.org.uk/ascend

FIRST FIVE YEARS CMD ALLOWANCE

Ascend is pleased to launch the new First Five Years CMD Allowance. This gives parish ministers in their first five years an allowance of £200 per year for continuing ministerial development. Find out more and apply for funds online. Terms & conditions apply.

www.churchofscotland.org.uk/ascend

POSTGRADUATE FUND

The Postgraduate Fund provides monies for part-time postgraduate studies. Following the deliverance at General Assembly in 2016, the Council identified a legacy fund which can now be used to fund postgraduate studies. The fund is valued at £300k and annual awards will be given from the fund gains. This will be managed by Education & Support Committee of Ministries Council and 2018 applications are currently open. Applications must be made online:

www.churchofscotland.org.uk/ascend

RICHARD ELLIS - OBITUARY

It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of Richard Ellis, a lecturer who gave voice training to ministers and campaigned against muzak, who has died at the age of 73.

In his role at Edinburgh University's Divinity Faculty as the Fulton Lecturer in Speech and Communication from 1981 until 2016, he watched (and wrote reports on) trainee Church of Scotland ministers in action at more than 800 church services.

MINISTERS HANDBOOK

 The Church of Scotland

MINISTERS' HANDBOOK

Edition: March 2018

As part of Ministries Council's commitment to supporting all those involved in the ministries of the Church, we are pleased to provide for you the Ministers' Handbook.

You will find in this handbook a range of policies and provisions which offer support to you in your role.

Contact details are included throughout the handbook so please get in touch if you would like more detailed information or advice.

Download this handbook at Ascend Online under Resources

www.churchofscotland.org.uk/ascend

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The Church of Scotland

EVENTS

PREACHING TODAY 2019

We are delighted to announce the 2019 programme! We will be joined by Paula Goder, Sally Brown, John Bell and Sam Wells. Preaching Today in 2019 will be over two days to allow for seminars and workshops.

29-30 April 2019, Edinburgh

For more information and booking details please visit Ascend Online:
www.churchofscotland.org.uk/ascend

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The Church of Scotland



THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH
School of Divinity

FFY CONFERENCE 2019 ASCEND TO THE HIGH PLACES

28-30 JANUARY 2019

The conference will provide an opportunity to explore this theme with inspirational speakers and practical workshops. There will be plenty of space for reflection, and of course time to renew friendships and make new ones with others whom God has called to serve him across Scotland.

Keynote speakers include:

Major Maureen Doncaster of Salvation Army who works as co-ordinator for the Critical Incident Programme & Regional Well Being Officer.

More information can be found on the Events page at **www.churchofscotland.org.uk/ascend**

PRE-RETIREMENT CONFERENCE 21 JANUARY 2019

Ministers and deacons, along with their spouses and civil partners, are invited to attend this conference in the year that they turn 64.

BOOKING CLOSES ON 30th NOVEMBER

More information can be found on the Events page at **www.churchofscotland.org.uk/ascend**

CHAPLAINS EVENTS

PRISON CHAPLAINS - DAY CONFERENCE

The Bield at Blackruthven, Perthshire, on Wednesday 13 March 2019 10am -4pm

CHAPLAINS - DAY RETREAT

The Bield at Blackruthven, Perthshire, on Wednesday 8 May 2019 10am -4pm

Book online: www.churchofscotland.org.uk/ascend

In September Ascend convened a 'group chat' that brought together three ministers with very different backgrounds of ministry to talk about their experiences of isolation. A fourth invitee had to pull out so he could support his community following a death at a local school.

Dog Collar Blues

To be a minister you have spent years studying, reflecting and preparing to answer God's call. During that time in discernment, then as a candidate and a probationer, you are surrounded by teachers, supervisors and mentors.

As a "fully-fledged" minister, you will be charting a new path. The freedom may feel exciting, but it might be harder to stay connected to the people who have helped to nourish you. You may feel alone, even isolated.

Isolation can take many forms. It can be geographical, theological, or simply because something important to you is poorly understood by those around you.

Common to all ministers, however, is the simple fact that being a minister is a special role that comes with a multitude of expectations as well as the responsibility to live up to what you preach. »



Rev Dr Frances Henderson went from New College, an environment full of people who shared her academic interests and passion for theology, to parish ministry at Hoddum, Kirtle-Eaglesfield and Middlebie in Eskdale and Annandale Presbytery. This October, after more than five years in the parish, Fran will be taking up a new role as transition minister for Shetland, supporting congregations as they make complex choices about buildings and the future shape of the Church on the islands.



Rev Sheena Orr came to ministry after working for church-related development projects in Bangladesh, Kenya and Malawi. Sheena was called to prison ministry from the outset and spent several years in HMP Edinburgh before taking up a new role this summer as Chaplaincy Advisor to the Scottish Prison Service.



Rev David McNeish was a doctor in his previous life. Now as parish minister for Birsay, Harray and Sandwick, David and his wife Sally are bringing up their young family on the island of Orkney. David has taken a leading role in developing the St Magnus Way pilgrimage route.

Continue »

Solitude, they agreed, is not the same as isolation that is imposed on you. In fact, being geographically isolated can be a gift.



REV DAVID MCNEISH

I'm thinking of a day when I went to a remote part of the island where I was out of range of the phone signal and I could be completely alone. I sat in my car and I wrote my prayers there looking out to the sea. It was a wild day with a dramatic sky and seascape and that was a great experience of isolation. It was restorative and rejuvenating and it was exhilarating

I hadn't appreciated the depth of isolation inherent in the role.

In small communities everything you do is known and, while it can be dismissed as gossip, I realise it is a network and a way to connect people that has been very important for islanders. So I learned very quickly to give people something to talk about that isn't scandalous but gives them something to pass on.

The network is important.

They also recognise the "goldfish bowl" quality of ministry and the weight of living up to other people's expectations. Ministers are supposed to be constantly cheerful and uplifting; to be constantly serving others; to be that little bit better than everyone else.

Fran loves her congregations and appreciates the tremendous support she's had from her kirk session. Yet she also misses the companionship and effortless social life of her university days.



REV FRAN HENDERSON

In parish ministry, you don't impose your interests on your congregation, you see where they are and you respond to their interests. And the friendships you have – even though there is genuine liking – must always be professional too.

A minister friend was telling me about a party she went to and she said it was a lovely party with good people and she had enjoyed herself. But she said she knew if she had had one drink too many it would have been 'the minister had one too many'.

You always have to watch your behaviour and your language because your mistake can damage someone's faith or their faith journey.

You never want to shock in a negative way, so you are always filtering. And for obvious reasons you never want to go to a party on a Saturday night.

Times when your community is happiest can be difficult for ministers, David says.



REV DAVID MCNEISH

Weddings can be particularly lonely, because you are still in your role. You are not off duty; you are there to marry them. So you have got to know when to leave.



REV FRAN HENDERSON

I never stay for the dancing at the end. The dog collar is such a mood killer.

Sheena notes that boundaries are even more rigid in prison where chaplains are bound by strict rules and protocols as they minister to inmates who are physically separated from the outside world.



REV SHEENA ORR

You're the religious person and most of the people you are encountering are not of faith. So you are constantly watched and people make assumptions.

There can be an attitude of, 'Don't swear in front of the minister' – that sort of thing. There is that pressure of being monitored all the time.

It's not like a parish where you can walk off – you are there and it is very intense.

But perhaps most isolating for prison chaplains, Sheena says, are the structures that separate them from other ministers.



REV SHEENA ORR

We don't have Church of Scotland email addresses and in the Yearbook I am listed in Edinburgh Presbytery but in the B section with the retired ministers, which I find disappointing. There are sections for healthcare chaplains and for armed forces chaplains, but not for prison chaplains.

When ministers have been ordained for five years they are invited to a conference and all the ministers who trained with me were invited but for some reason chaplains didn't get an invitation. And the education assistance available to ministers was not offered to chaplains. I do always attend Presbytery and, of course, that is a requirement to stay in good standing with the Church, but chaplaincy is not usually part of the agenda.



REV SHEENA ORR

These may seem like small things that don't matter much, but it is these little practical details that say to me, you don't matter as much. Chaplaincy doesn't matter as much. You're off the radar. And when you put them all together you are feeling marginalised and outside the mainstream.

The irony of this for me is that prison chaplaincy is at the very heart of what Church of Scotland ministry should be. You are reaching out to people from very difficult backgrounds, people who have grown up without faith and are some of the most vulnerable in our society.

While Sheena and David have partners and families, Fran is single which presents a different challenge.



REV FRAN HENDERSON

Dating is a nightmare. When is the right moment to tell someone you are a minister?

Because ministers are often expected to be selfless—and may have similarly outside expectations of themselves—it can be difficult to prioritise family time or say no.



REV DAVID MCNEISH

There is always somebody else to visit. There is always somebody else in need. But in committing to the long haul, I have to say: 'I might not be at your father's bedside when he dies because I've been at three bedsides this week and I just can't be everything for everyone.'

It is so hard to walk away but there are times when you have to.

Other ministers can be sources of support as well as friends and family outside the Church.



REV FRAN HENDERSON

When I meet up with one of my colleagues from a neighbouring parish, we can chat for five hours at a stretch. But sometimes it's a relief just coming into the manse at the end of a long day and shutting the door.



For David, the constant communication of ministry can be draining, meaning that personal relationships suffer.

REV DAVID MCNEISH

After coming from conversations that were so deep and intense, I would be so knackered I would have no desire to pick up the phone to my friends.

I began to realise there is a discipline to connectedness. You do things not because you want to but because they are important and good for you. So now I try to speak to folks on a Monday when I have energy for it.

Sheena gets nourishment from her doctoral studies and relaxation in her hobbies of birdwatching and tennis.



REV SHEENA ORR

They know I am a prison chaplain but to the rest of the tennis team I am just one of the other players.

I was lucky in Edinburgh to be part of a team of seven chaplains and I am missing that support in my new role. I had some Sundays off so it was nice to go to church as an ordinary member of the congregation.

Having a chaplaincy conference once or twice a year is nice to have but does it make a difference?

There is support there, but there could be more.

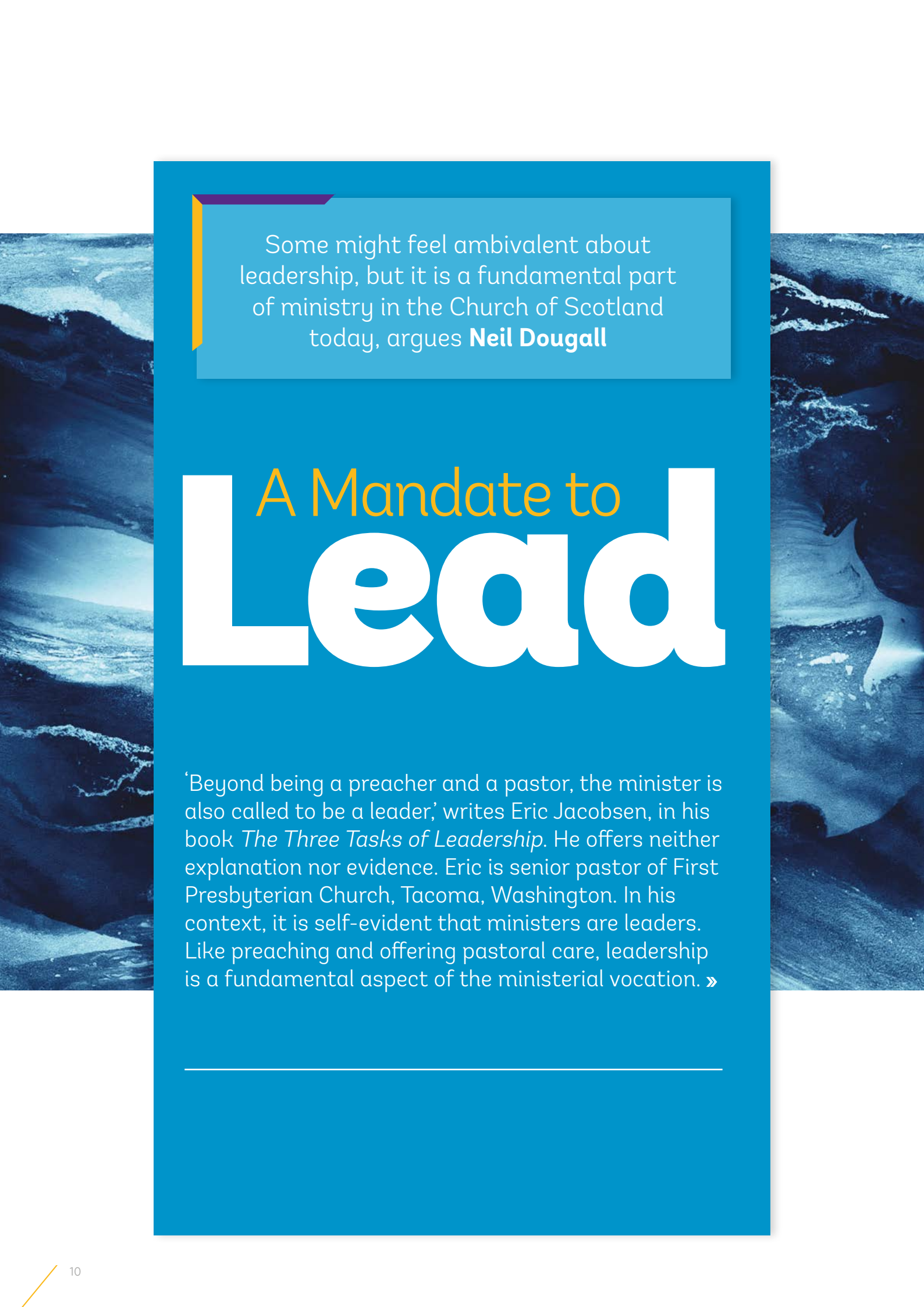
Presbytery feels more like that discipline of connectedness, although I am encouraged that in the new community custody units there will be more connections with prison work.

Fran has valued opportunities to serve on committees and councils for the national Church.



REV FRAN HENDERSON

As tough as it was sometimes, it was very interesting and I was able to build and deepen friendships. Serving on the Theological Forum was a way to reconnect with my previous life as a theologian. It allowed me to contribute and gave me a sense of fulfillment.



Some might feel ambivalent about leadership, but it is a fundamental part of ministry in the Church of Scotland today, argues **Neil Dougall**

A Mandate to Lead

‘Beyond being a preacher and a pastor, the minister is also called to be a leader,’ writes Eric Jacobsen, in his book *The Three Tasks of Leadership*. He offers neither explanation nor evidence. Eric is senior pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Tacoma, Washington. In his context, it is self-evident that ministers are leaders. Like preaching and offering pastoral care, leadership is a fundamental aspect of the ministerial vocation. »

“offering leadership is a fundamental part of parish ministry”

Until 2017, I could not have made this statement about the Church of Scotland. Today I can.

For many years, I'd sensed an ambivalence about leadership among ministerial colleagues. Some seemed comfortable with being seen as a leader, others less so. Whether this stemmed from disagreement or reluctance, confusion or something else was unclear.

In June 2017, I had the opportunity to find out more. I chose to research *Parish Ministers and Leadership* for my Doctor of Ministry final project. I conducted a survey of all parish ministers. I am grateful to all of you who responded. You provided the data that offers clarity in this area.

The survey responses clearly showed that leadership is a fundamental part of being a parish minister in the Church of Scotland today. Three pieces of data put this beyond doubt.

- When “leader” was offered in a list of words which might be used to describe ministry, 87% selected it.
- When participants were restricted to choosing three words from this list, the top three (in order) were: preacher, pastor and leader.
- When participants were asked how significant leadership was in their role as minister, 61% said it was “very significant” and a further 34% said it was “significant”.

The headline conclusion from the survey data is that offering leadership is a fundamental part of parish ministry in the Church of Scotland today. This, together with some of the other results, has prompted me to propose a manifesto for leadership along the following lines. In doing this, I am not suggesting that it is only ministers who do or should lead, simply that leadership is intrinsic to parish ministry.

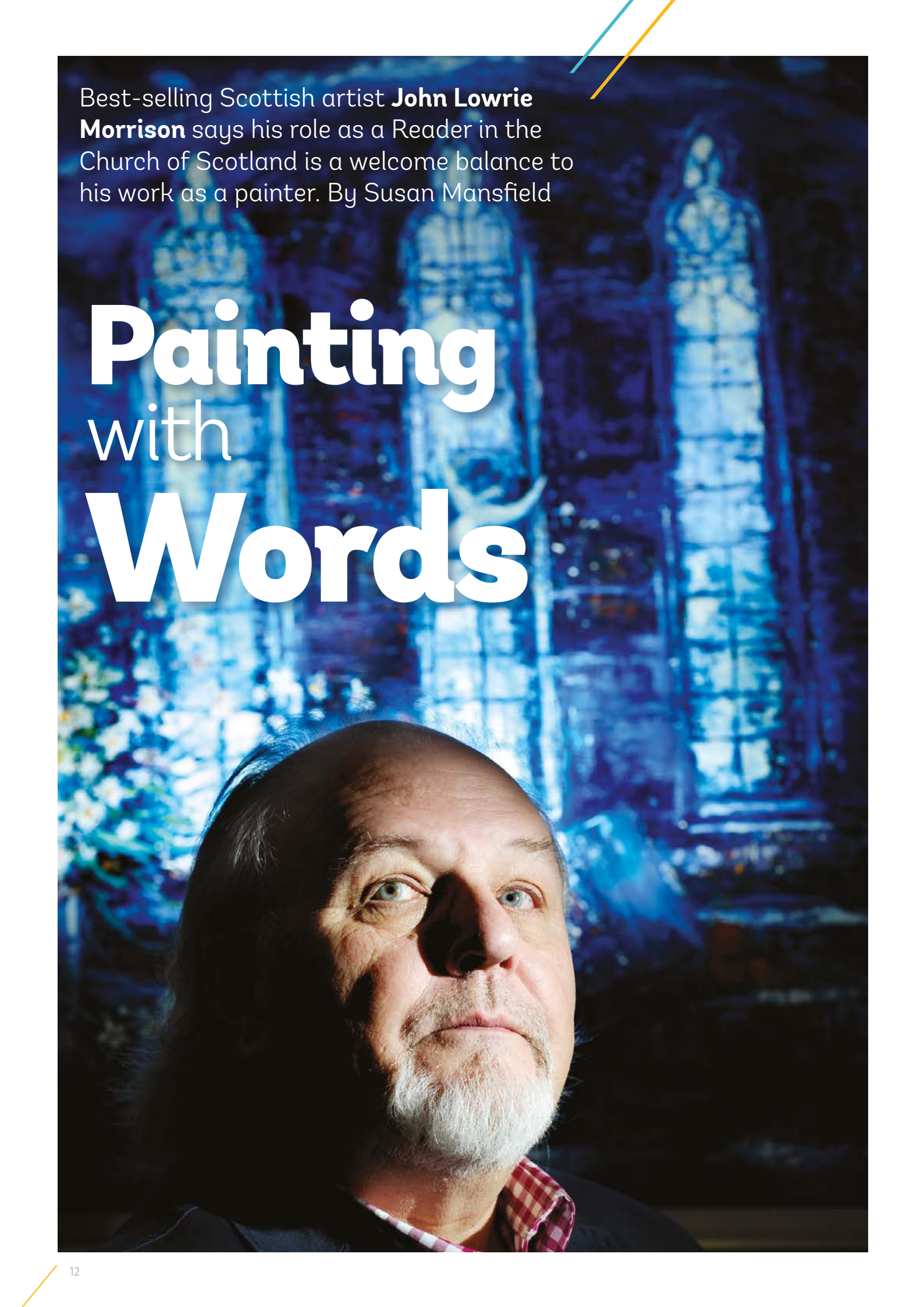


Rev Dr Neil Dougall,
Minister of St Andrew
Blackadder, North Berwick

- Parish Ministry in the Church of Scotland today requires ministers to exercise leadership.
- This is both the norm and is the experience of almost all parish ministers.
- Congregations want their ministers to lead and the General Assembly expects them to lead.
- The transition the Church is currently living through means that leadership is required more than ever.
- The structure of the Church of Scotland means that if parish ministers will not lead, it is difficult for others to do so. They are in a pivotal position.
- Leadership potential is one of the qualities which has always been included in assessment for ministry. Therefore, it is a capacity which parish ministers possess and which they have the potential to develop.
- Leadership should be patterned on Jesus Christ and sustained by the Holy Spirit.
- Leadership is a combination of character, experience and skill. All of these can and need to be developed throughout ministry.
- Leadership is concrete rather than theoretical, so effective leadership development occurs through exercising leadership, reflecting on it, and learning about it whilst being in ministry.
- There is good and bad leadership. Leadership can be, and has been, both life-giving and abusive. Good leadership must be described and encouraged. Bad leadership should be named and rooted out.
- The key question is: what kind of leaders does the Church of Scotland need at this particular point in history?
- Leadership needs to be servant-like, collaborative, adaptive, facilitative and enabling.
- Ministers should develop and increase their expertise to enable them to offer this kind of leadership.

Each of these 12 points merits explanation and justification, and I intend to write further on this theme. In the meantime, I offer these points in the hope that they will stimulate reflection and discussion. ✍

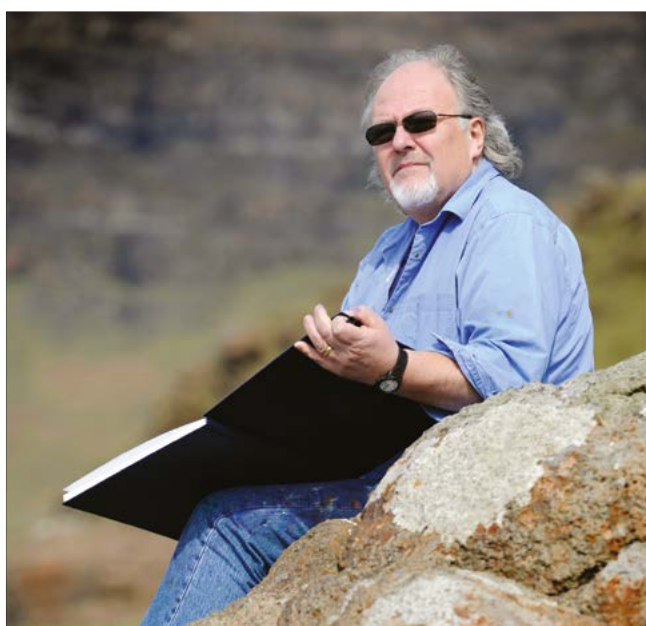
“Congregations want their ministers to lead and the General Assembly expects them to lead.”

A portrait of John Lowrie Morrison, a man with a grey beard and mustache, looking upwards. He is wearing a red and white checkered shirt. The background is a large, colorful stained glass window with various patterns and colors. In the top right corner, there are two diagonal lines, one blue and one orange.

Best-selling Scottish artist **John Lowrie Morrison** says his role as a Reader in the Church of Scotland is a welcome balance to his work as a painter. By Susan Mansfield

Painting with Words

Christmas Eveninglight - St Brendan's Church, Skipness, Kintyre.



It was more than 20 years ago that John Lowrie Morrison was preparing to help lead a service in the small church at Bellanoch near his home in Argyll. Praying in the church before the congregation arrived, he heard God speaking to him. “I just heard this voice within, saying: ‘I want you to do two Ps, Morrison, painting and preaching,’” he remembers.

Two years later, John left his full-time job in art education to concentrate on painting; his distinctive Scottish landscapes in high-key colour, painted using his nom de plume ‘Jolomo’, have made him one of Scotland’s best loved and most successful painters. He also began training as a reader in the Church of Scotland and was “set apart” in 2002.

Now, while juggling painting commitments for exhibitions all over the UK, he preaches two or three Sundays per month, often in Argyll but also further afield. “Because of being Jolomo the painter, I get invited to do things, like preaching at the Remembrance Day Service in Bute Hall at Glasgow University (to a congregation of more than 800), and this summer, I was invited by the Queen to preach at Crathie Church when she was in residence at Balmoral.”

He described the experience as a “lifetime highlight”. “I felt really honoured, especially as I’m just a reader. It was very humbling. The minister and I were at the door, shaking hands with people, when the royal Range Rover pulled away. The Queen caught

“I just heard this voice within, saying: ‘I want you to do two Ps, Morrison, **Painting and Preaching**’”

my eye and gave me the loveliest smile and the loveliest little wave, and I thought 'I've done alright, I'm not going to the tower today!'"

Historically, the role of reader in the Church of Scotland was to stand in for an absent minister by reading aloud the sermon he had prepared. Today's readers undertake academic studies at Aberdeen University through distance learning and a series of residential training conferences and, once set apart, will undertake preaching and other duties in their congregation and presbytery, excluding the sacraments of Communion or Baptism.

Eleanor McMahon, vice-convenor of Ministries Council, says the role played by readers is likely to become increasingly important as the number of vacancies in the Church continues to rise. "The role has developed over the years and remains a

crucial part of the provision of ministry throughout Scotland. In many congregations, readers are offering a stability of Sunday worship and of pastoral care. Ministries Council recognises that readers now do far more than was originally expected of them, perhaps far more than we train them for, and we are looking at how we train and support them."

Working as a reader in Argyll, John has the opportunity to preach in some of the most remote - and beautiful - churches in Scotland, including the picturesque St Brendan's Church, Skipness, with its views to the Isle of Arran, which has featured in several of his paintings. "In Lochgilhead or Campbeltown, the congregations are quite big, but many of the others are quite small. I remember, once, in Kilfinan Church in Cowal, I preached to a congregation of three people and three dogs, but it doesn't matter how many are there, I still do exactly the same thing I would normally do."

John sees both painting and preaching as expressions of his Christian faith. "I thoroughly enjoy preaching because it gets me away from the easel," he says. "I love painting, but being a reader offers a real balance. It's still communicating, just in a different way. Instead of using paint, you're using words.

"For me, my paintings are about God's creation, I'm using the strong colours to express that. The light is the main thing in them, and I always equate that with God's light, with Christ's light. Even people who are not Christians have said they get a spiritual feeling from my paintings. I hope people feel God in what I do, whether it's painting or preaching."



Photography: Colin Hattersley

“I thoroughly enjoy preaching because it gets me away from the easel. It's still communicating - instead of using paint, you're using words.”



Rev Dr Janet Foggie
Pioneer Minister,
Presbytery of Stirling



Into the wild

Rev Dr Janet Foggie goes on retreat into the wilderness

Six brave ministers ventured out into the wilderness for a retreat like no other: working with our partners Natural Change they left their normal surroundings to discover something new about our natural surroundings and themselves. Janet recounts her experience.

We arrived at the Glenfeshie hostel a little nervous of what might lie ahead. Our guides introduced the idea of the solo retreat in silence. We were to spend about six hours in nature, as far as possible in the one spot, and take time to reflect.

“The skill with which this retreat was led was very inspiring to me”


I found the six silent hours in the mountains refreshing and challenging. My personal intention to have more faith in my own natural resources led me to consider deeply the meaning of the concept of endurance, and the beauty of shadow as well as light.

The next day we invested a great deal of time telling our stories, which was a very moving experience and provided cohesion and coherence to our previous day, though of

course, it was impossible to reflect in its entirety the depth of a wordless experience of the divine in a few sentences.

The skill with which this retreat was led was very inspiring to me. I saw much in it which I valued. The leaders never referred to other groups they led, nor compared us to other experiences, instead they were mindful of who we were in the moment and very focused on being all they could be for the people who had gathered there. This clarity of intention and compassion in presence was much appreciated.

For me, this retreat was about continuing professional development being an integral part of my life and not an ‘add on’. I did not come away with notes, flowcharts or PowerPoint hand-outs to shred. What I have carried away from this experience is a deep feeling of empowerment to resolve some of the tensions which ministry can sometimes bring.

It was my pleasure at the end of the retreat to invite the leaders to join us in a little outdoor communion. We took as our text Matthew 5, it is God who clothes the wild grass, and shared willingly with those who had led us a gift from our traditions and faith. 

Read her full account on Ascend Online.
www.churchofscotland.org.uk/ascend

Headlines from *The Church*



Rev Colin Sinclair, minister at Palmerston Place Church in Edinburgh, has been announced to take on the role as the next Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.



Rt Rev Susan Brown has backed a campaign to stop two asylum seeker brothers from being deported from Scotland.



New environmental chaplain, Rev David Coleman, has been seconded by the United Reformed Church to work with Eco-Congregations Scotland.

Nearly 150 Trauma Teddies made by Church of Scotland members and friends will soon be out on the beat to help police officers soothe distressed children.

MSPs across the Scottish Parliament backed a motion praising the Kirk's work in supporting projects with young people across Scotland.

Tributes have been paid to the Church of Scotland's first ever Hub Ministries co-ordinator, Rev Catriona Hood, who has sadly died.

Rev Norman Afrin, 26, the newly inducted minister at Glasgow Sandyhills Parish Church, is one of the youngest new ministers to have recently joined the Church of Scotland.



A woman who first attended church Sunday school at the age of two has been recognised for 102 years of service.

Rev Eleanor McMahon
Vice-Convener responsible for
Education and Support



Ministries Council is committed to listening to ministers and supporting them through times of change, Rev Eleanor McMahon tells, **Susan Mansfield**.

ADAPTING TO A CHANGING WORLD

In a changing world, the Church can't stay the same. At times, it feels as though we're running to keep up with a world which is changing faster than we are and, for those working in ministry, this brings both challenges and opportunities.

"At Ministries Council, we are working to understand what the challenges are and looking at our support provision," says Rev Eleanor McMahon, vice-convener of Ministries Council. "We need to look at how we recruit people into ministry, how we train people for ministry and also how we support those in ministry. The changing shape of ministry will reflect the changing world."

"Ministries Council is looking at the impact that doing ministry has on the lives of those who minister. We are responding by revising the support we currently offer and making sure it fits their needs."

The resources available through Ascend draw on a portfolio of approaches designed to suit different needs. Eleanor says: "For some ministers, deacons and others in ministry, the Ministerial Development Conversation is having an impact by enabling them to take time to reflect on where they are in ministry, and allowing them to develop a sustainable and healthy ministry lifestyle."

"It's important to recognise that all those in ministry have their own specialism - every ministry is a specialist ministry."

Recognising that ministry comes in many shapes and forms has been an important shift. As a member of the Interim and Transition Ministry Team, Eleanor is well aware of the unique package of skills and experience each minister brings to the job.


"The role of a Minister of Word and Sacrament takes many shapes and forms: prison and hospital chaplains, pioneer

ministers, interim and transition ministers. Then there are readers, deacons and ministries development staff looking after a broad range of ministries within the Church. It's important to recognise that all those in ministry have their own specialism. Every ministry is a specialist ministry."

There is a recognition, too, that ministers can feel isolated, particularly as their numbers are declining. "While, in the past, even a small town might have had two or three churches and two or three ministers, with a reduction in the number of ministers available and rationalisation of resources, there might be only one. There are very practical challenges, like making sure there is pastoral cover when a minister goes on holiday."

However, challenges can also be opportunities. In the case of managing vacancies, it can be a chance to invite lay people to take on new roles as part of a team. "There can be an enabling of the people of God to take on some of the traditional roles of ministry, filling the gap, and fulfilling God's calling of them. I suppose, in one sense, what we are seeing is God calling others to serve the Church in new and different ways. While there are challenges in terms of a reduction in the number of ministers, we have to look at the development opportunities it provides for the people of God."

To be Church in a changing world, we must think outside the box and find new ways of connecting with our communities, Eleanor says. "The Church is no longer the first port of call for many people, the Church doesn't have an automatic right to a place within a community. I think the Church is having to work at understanding what its role is and feel its way into this new world, work out how to connect with people."

"We are finding our way in this new world and part of the challenge is how we find ways of communicating the stories of the Gospel, because they are still relevant. Another part of the challenge is not to be consumed by panic at a declining Church — to stop, listen and breathe, to allow ourselves to look around and see this new emerging Church." 

Maggie Lunan reflects on a personal experience of isolation in ministry, and what helped her survive

WHEN GOD AND HIS PEOPLE SEEM FAR AWAY

When I was asked if I would write a short article on isolation and vulnerability in ministry, my mind immediately went back to a time in our life when I felt that not only the people of God but God himself had deserted us. This is, therefore, a personal account of and reflection on that time, a time which shaped my own life journey, and my faith.

An old and dear friend, Rev Ian Cowie, used to say: "When the love of God seems far away, the love of God's people should be very close."

However, at that time, the reality for me was that both the love of God and the love of his people felt far away. It was a time of crisis, of feeling that, however hard I worked, or prayed, however much I tried to get alongside people, there was a sense of being shunned, unwelcome. I would often return from church in tears at the unkind words, the sharp digs, the turned backs. My prayer was: "Where are you, God, in all this?"

My husband, David, and I had come from 12 fruitful years in one parish, responding to a call to a church which we knew would be more challenging. In the early years, we spoke to colleagues and good friends and sometimes came away surprised and disappointed at their response: "It can't be that bad"; "You must be doing something wrong"; "You knew what you were taking on". And so a sense of shame and failure was added to the confusion and despair we felt.

I remember saying to my husband: "I feel like my life has been dismantled." We thought we were doing the right thing, we were being faithful, but it wasn't working.

In purely practical terms, there was also a sense of separation as the manse was not in the parish. My previous experience of meeting people in their ordinary, everyday lives, having coffee with folk in the manse kitchen, just wasn't happening. I was certainly missing our previous congregation, and it all added to the sense of loss, of isolation, of not belonging.

Looking back on this time, it is easy to see how part of the isolation I felt was self-inflicted, accentuated by my retreating from support, worrying that I was getting it wrong. I became defensive, so any criticism made me withdraw even more, perhaps not physically but emotionally. Through this period, we learned that when colleagues unburden themselves, we are to listen, not diminish it, nor try to fix it.

If I'm really honest, pride, too, exacerbated the loneliness as we sought to work harder, try even more new ways of 'being church'. Superficially, looking in from the outside, I'm sure others could see that things were happening, but we were always exhausted. Our cry, like the Psalmist's, was: "How long, O Lord, how long?"

Through those difficult times, lifelines were thrown and we grasped them: a friend from the USA introduced me to

"We thought we were doing the right thing, we were being faithful, but it wasn't working."

Ignatian Spirituality (God in all things), and there was a story from a conference which David attended which helped us to think again. The speaker was Joshua Chiu Ban It, the retired Anglican Bishop of Singapore. He said: "I was praying one time when I heard God say, clearly: 'Ban, I never wanted you to work for me'. I was shocked: how could the Lord say that when I'd given everything? But he is very gracious, he quickly added: 'I want you to work with me'."

I always felt I had been faithful in prayer, reading Scripture daily, trying to live justly, but this stopped me in my tracks. What would that mean? I definitely was in the camp of "working for" God and slightly suspicious of other ways.

My horizons widened and I found support in the most unlikely places and among the most unexpected people: in poetry, which made me both laugh and cry, and in people whose lives and faith journeys were both similar and very different from my own. It took time, and searching, and some softening of my hard edges. I know I didn't always get it right. What it has left is a sympathy and compassion for anyone in ministry who is struggling, whatever form of ministry they are serving in.

For ministers in their first parish, the transition from being one of an established group of probationers to being "set apart" can lead to a sense of loneliness not experienced before. The very term "set apart" inhibits some members in a congregation from making a first approach or leaves them

feeling that "the minister" is too busy to bother. Others might come with high expectations, or even demands.

None of this necessarily comes from ill-will or insensitivity, but it can often leave many families feeling bypassed or uncared for and, on the other hand, under pressure. Leadership in any walk of life can be both a lonely and exposed position, and growing into that role can be made more difficult if there are negative voices, or from a sense of being on a different wavelength. Of course, many ministers are fortunate enough never to experience this, which can make it harder for those who do.

On a much more practical level, the pattern of a parish minister's duties means they are caught between enjoying the flexibility of their hours and feeling that their time seems no longer their own. The demands of the role seem endless

and the expectations of their vocation impossible to fulfil. Even those who guard their breaks in the most self-disciplined way can find it easy to forget to spend time with their partner, let alone their wider circle of family and friends. Added to that, in a society where much social activity takes place at weekends, they can find it difficult to relax.

So how did I/we come through? In little ways, like putting dates in our diary to get away; by "nits and nots" — nights-in-together and nights-out-together; by remembering all the things that give me life and ensuring that they were "in the diary",

and by not forgetting the patterns of Jesus' life, where he took time out to be with friends, to rest, to pray. Eventually my perspective changed, I could pace myself, I could look at life differently, I could let some things go. And, somehow, I began to understand a little of what "the practice of the presence of God" might mean. ✎

Maggie trained as a teacher but her main work was with Christian Aid as education secretary, working with teachers to introduce the global citizen concept, and working with church leaders looking at the gospel imperative for the poor.

She was also a founding member and worker for ALTERnativity, which works with churches and communities to simplify Christmas.

Since retiring, her focus has been on one-to-one spiritual direction and pastoral supervision.

We asked three people serving in
very different contexts for their
thoughts on isolation in ministry

How I See it...

With the help of my friends

Rev Catherine Beattie worked as a catering manager for a local authority for 20 years before being called to ministry. She is minister of Giffnock South Church, south of Glasgow

I think isolation can be a huge problem for ministers. No matter how much training you get, it never really prepares you, it can be quite a lonely furrow.

When I got a call to ministry, I had 20 years of working life behind me. I had been managing quite big teams, I always had support and people around me. And when you hung up your coat at the end of the day, the job was done; it wasn't like ministry where the work is never really finished.

“Often I think isolation comes when people are a bit reluctant to accept help. I think, as ministers, we’re the kind of personalities who are not always very good at that”

You're on your own a lot of the time, and a lot of what you're doing is confidential. I have a good group of elders and an excellent session clerk, I've tried to build a team where we support one another, but it is hard. And I'm in a big suburban parish with office-bearers in every role — not everyone has that luxury.

With a minister it will always be that one comment that stays with you. Ninety-nine people will come out of church and say 'Lovely service, thank you, minister' and one person will say, 'Oh, what did you get your hair cut like that for?' That's the one thing you remember when you go to bed at night, not the other 99. Fortunately, I have a very supportive husband and family. I can blast off to them, and they say, 'Och, mum, just ignore them'.

In my experience, fraternalists haven't been very helpful or successful; I found them competitive and male-dominated, nobody wants to let the side down. What has been really important to me has been keeping in touch with some of the people I trained with. A group of five of us have parishes close enough that we can meet for lunch once a month. We work hard to keep that time clear in our diaries and we support one another. I would have no problem phoning up one of that group if I needed help. And when somebody can't make it, we take steps to make sure they're okay and remember them in prayer.

I've also recently enrolled in a pilot project for pastoral supervision in Glasgow Presbytery at Ignatian Spirituality Centre. It has been immensely helpful - a great resource.

Sometimes, for me, it's just about sitting in the group listening to others and thinking 'It's not just me'.

Often I think isolation comes when people are a bit reluctant to accept help. I think, as ministers, we're the kind of personalities who are not always very good at that. And when somebody finally

does ask for help, the problem has become too big. I am more likely to put my hand up and say 'I can't do this', I don't see that as failing in any way, but that comes out of having had another professional life where there was support.

Also, a lot of isolation is to do with the fact that people don't take time for themselves. I know of ministers who hardly take a holiday. I don't know what that's about - you owe it to yourself and your family, and the Church needs a holiday from you. Once you get into that cycle, it gets harder and harder to say: 'Stop the bus!' You've got to do yourself a favour and stop or you'll be no use to anybody, but that's a hard thing to learn.

You need to built up good networks

Rev Nikki MacDonald is originally from Australia and has been minister of Upper Clyde Parish Church for four years. The parish is 180 square miles, stretching from the M74 into the Southern Uplands, and takes in nine villages, including two of Scotland's highest.

When it comes to isolation, I think it depends what you mean by it. Isolation could be geographical, but it could be a state of mind. You can be at a party and feel the loneliest person in the world. I'm out in the middle of nowhere and I certainly don't feel isolated.

I do know colleagues who would express a sense of isolation. I always remember when I finished my training, had done my probation and got into the charge, thinking: 'Here we go, woo-hoo!' But some folk I trained with, a couple of months in, were feeling really abandoned.

You need to build up good networks. It can be a real competitive thing among some ministers, some people don't feel comfortable talking about things that aren't going so well. But I've have got a brilliant neighbour, we go off for coffee and sort out world peace — and our parishes.

I've always built my own support structures. If you arrive at 5am at the beginning of January into a country where you've never been and you need to find somewhere to sleep, you learn how to do that. But I'm really blessed with my friends. I've got a handful of really, really close pals I can talk to. They know when something is up. You realise the value of deep friendships.

One of the things I've found helpful as a woman is an online community I've been part of for years. We started off on blogs, now we are a Facebook group with members from Anchorage to Auckland, all women in ministries of different kinds, not all ordained. We support one another, and it has led to friendships and meeting up with people in real life. It's a nice thing to know that at any point in the course of 24 hours there is someone around you can talk to.

It's important to have other interests outside of ministry that take you into meeting other people. I'm interested in writing, so I set up a writing group with another writer in the area. We now have eight people who come along. If you find other folk with similar interests, set up a wee group that meets in the pub.

Rural isolation is a big deal — it's less about me, and more about some of my parishioners. They live on farms way down wee dirt tracks. When there's no regular or useful public transport, or you are miles away from getting to the road, and the post office has closed down, and there is no community space in your tiny village, what are the opportunities of meeting with your neighbours? Suicide is a big thing in rural communities. In one sense, my job is working alongside, walking with folks who have issues with isolation.

I'd say to ministers: don't cut yourself off, that would be easy to do. Keep in touch with your friends, meet, go out, do things that interest you beyond ministry. Stay connected whether in real time or virtual time. Make use of the resources made available by Ministries Council through Ascende — they are really good! Get to know ministry colleagues you can trust. It's not a competition, we're all in this together.

“In one sense, my job is working alongside, walking with folks who have issues with isolation”



Often the best support comes informally

Alastair Stark has been part of Ministries Development Staff for four years as a children and families worker who works across five churches in Glenrothes and Leslie

I feel as though I'm in quite a fortunate position because I'm well supported by a number of colleagues who are leaders within the five churches I work for, as well as two other local ministries development staff I work closely with.

The eight of us meet fairly regularly to discuss work and workload.

Rather than finding more for each other to do, we always encourage each other in what we are doing, making sure we are alright, not taking on too much. Often if you are isolated, one of the biggest challenges is you lose track of how much

I have any concerns, issues, new ideas, I'm able to go and talk to him. It's a real blessing to be working with the people I am working with.

Quite often I feel that the best form of support comes informally. It's important to have people you are able to bounce ideas off, who you know are going to be there when you need that sounding board. Having colleagues I'm able to meet up with, even for coffee or lunch, is really important.

Maybe if I were in a very urban or very rural situation, I would be more isolated. From the discussions I've had with colleagues in very urban situations, there can be so much going on in the area, and everybody is so busy, that it's difficult to network with people. Even though you're surrounded by people, it can be isolating. I'm lucky to be in a medium-sized town with ministerial colleagues whose experience I can draw on.

“It's important to have people you are able to bounce ideas off, people who you know are going to be there when you need that sounding board”

you are doing. Sometimes I feel those who are the most isolated end up with the biggest workloads.

I'm in a fortunate position because I'm well supported by a very good line manager who was designated to manage my post when it began. We have a good working relationship; if

Some people, because they are isolated, find it difficult to know they are on track. Ascend has been developing a new competency and appraisal structure to use with ministries development staff which I think is really good. Once it's implemented, people will know how well they're doing and have a measure of their success.

I also think we have to make sure the community groups and others who use the church building don't feel isolated. Churches that build good links with other groups such as messy church, BBs and youth groups help these groups feel less isolated from the rest of the congregation. It's important to nurture volunteers who don't have the infrastructure and links that staff members do. ➤



THE COMMUNITY OF GOD

Theologian **Tom Greggs** reflects on the nature of the Trinity and what the three persons of God have to teach us about themes of isolation and community

THE LONG READ

There are all kinds of ways in which it might be possible to speak of the Trinity and community. After all, the Christian doctrine of God reminds us that God is in Godself a God of internal subsistent relations: as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, God is in God's immanent life (that is, aside from the economy of God's grace) a God who is (in Augustine's terminology) the Lover, the Beloved and the Love which passes between them; or else, in more technical trinitarian language, the Unbegotten, the Begotten and the Spirated.

This is who God *is*—eternally, *a se*. God's Oneness is not a form of unity and simplicity which involves the trumpeting of an abstract principle of singularity, but a unity and simplicity which is dynamically and supremely alive and in *eternal relation*. God is one essence in three co-essential and co-equal persons.

So how does who God is, and how we understand who God is, affect the way in which we understand who we are as the people of God, as the community of the Church, as the Body of Christ?

For some, this understanding of God (as in essence relational) has led them to postulate that, since we are made in the image of God, there is a trinitarian form to the nature of human relations. When trinitarian description begins with the three persons rather than the one essence (following a more Eastern theological emphasis first on the three persons in relation rather than the more Western emphasis first on the unity of God), *perichoresis* (mutual indwelling) is used as the means to describe and protect the unity of the Divine Life. Human relationality and community is understood to have an analogy of being to the Divine Life in its eternal relationality: to be beings in relation is to be beings in the image of God.

There is, of course, a question as to whether this account sufficiently differentiates between God in Godself as Creator and creation as that which is brought into being from God, and whether there is, in these approaches, a sufficient account of human fallenness. There is an inevitable risk of tritheism (an effectual belief in three gods, rather than One God in three persons); an emphasis on the trinitarian persons and their inter-relations as that on which human community and relations are based runs the risk, to some minds at least, of failing to differentiate between the subsistent relations and persons in the Trinity (who are ontologically one) and persons in the world, in the most general sense, who are many.

"The Trinity's internal relations are unique and cannot be replicated even by analogy elsewhere"

When we think *from God towards* creation on these matters there may well not be a danger; however, inverting the thought process from human society and relationality to God (even by analogy) potentially undermines the unity of the Divine Life. Our relations are not subsistent relations in one essence: or, put otherwise, the Trinity's internal relations are unique and cannot be replicated even by analogy elsewhere.

Perhaps within the Church, where the propensity to form committees is always strong, we would be wise to caution the danger of the social trinitarian account of the Trinity turning God into a committee! And we do not have the capacity to have relationships of mutual indwelling (*perichoresis*), surely, in our relationships with one another.

A less problematic version of this account of the Trinity and community might be found in the idea of relationality within the image of God as viewed through a Christological lens. Rather than a direct analogy of relationship working on the basis of an analogy between subsistent relations in the Trinity and human community, it is also possible to suggest that we bear the image of God in that we are relational creatures because we are made in the image of Christ, the perfect human who is fully in relationship with God and fully in relationship with humanity (including us).

“We become, in the Fall, those who believe we are our own islands”

There is, in this account, a vertical and horizontal (in the sense of Godwards and creaturewards) expression of what it means to be a relational creature made in the image of God, since in Christ and in his humanity we are brought into relation with God and with one another.

Furthermore, thought about from the perspective of Christology, it is possible to speak of how we might participate in community with the Holy Trinity without losing any sense of creaturely integrity or eliding the Creator-creature distinction and relation. In Christ, as human beings in his humanity, we participate in the eternal loving of the Father by the Son and the Son by the Father in the bond of union who is the Holy Spirit.

Indeed, we come to participate actively in Christ by sharing in the same Spirit by whom he was incarnate through Mary, who rested fully and completely upon him, whom he gave to the Father in his death, and whom he breathed onto the disciples in his resurrection. The Spirit is the bond of union through whom we share *as creatures* in Christ's eternal trinitarian relation as the Son who, in his ascension, remains the One who bears the human wounds of his loving humanity.

Indeed, it might be wise, rather than focusing on the immanent Trinity and community, to consider community in relation to the gracious activity of God in God's trinitarian economy. It is helpful to consider community from the perspective of the economic Trinity as it speaks of the One God's acts of grace within creation.

The earliest expression of humanity in its perfect state is one of perfect community—the man and woman who are ‘flesh of my flesh, and bone of my bone’ walking in full community with God. In the Fall, community with God is lost: humans hide from God and their unmediated, unbroken, innocent conversation and engagement with God are lost.

But there is simultaneously a breaking of community on the horizontal plane between other humans: Adam and Eve cover themselves in their otherness from one another; Adam blames Eve, and Eve blames the serpent (Genesis 3). This break of human community is emphasised in the chapter following the Fall narrative: almost immediately, community is broken in the most palpable and violent way through Cain's killing of Abel.

Our sinfulness is expressed in our breaking of community. The *cor incurvatum in se* (the heart turned in on itself) is not only turned inwards in individual selfishness from God but also simultaneously from others in the world. We become, in the Fall, those who believe we are our own islands.

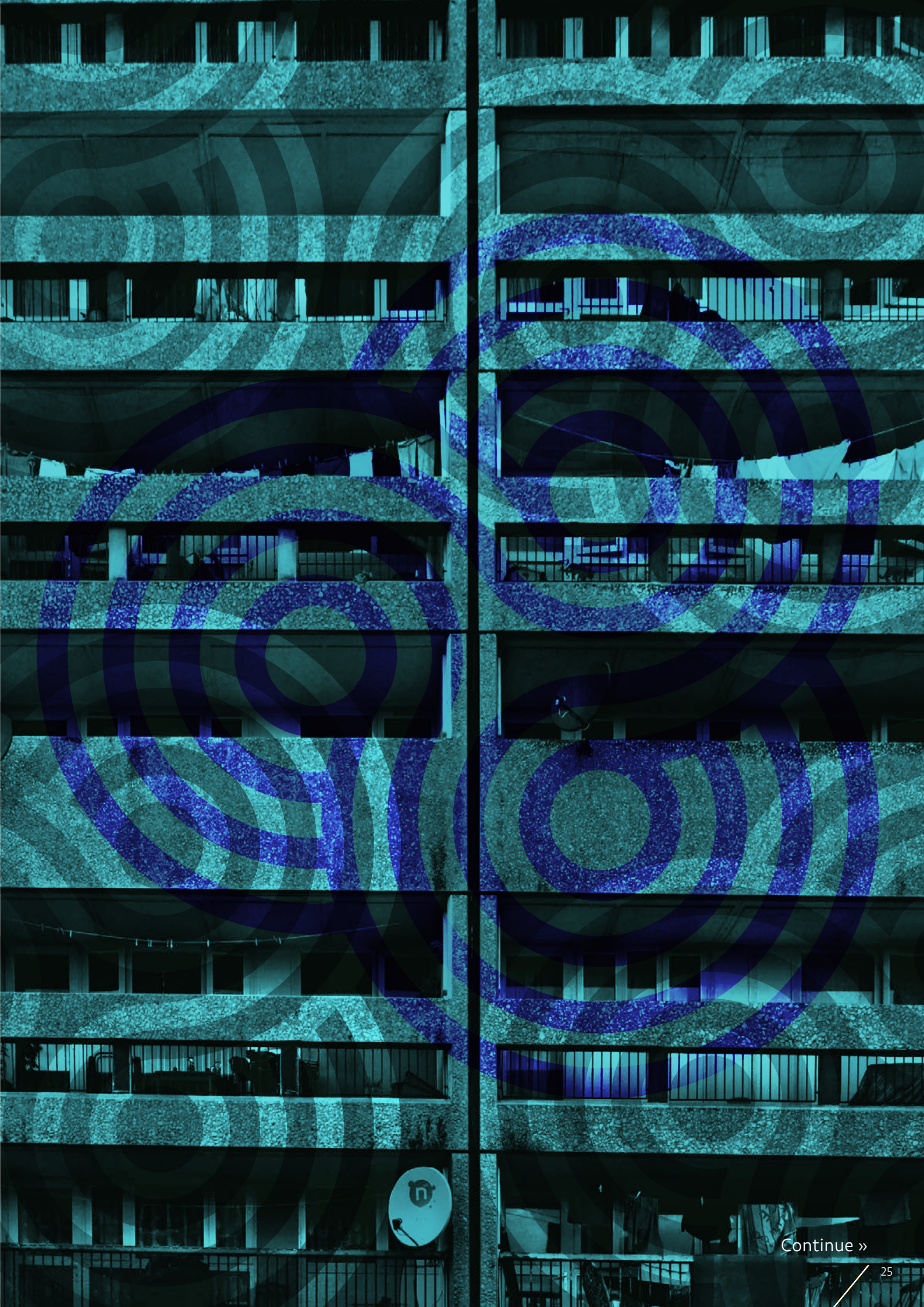
In the salvific economy of God, the work of salvation involves, therefore, not only God's activity of putting right relationship with God, but also relationships with one another—community. This reconciliation of human to human, and human to creation relationships is no less an act of divine grace than that of God's reconciling grace in relation to restoring humanity's relationship to God.

Indeed, when we consider the giving of the Spirit at Pentecost, it is possible to see God's grace at work through the person of God's Spirit creating and restoring human community. In a reversal of Babel, the Spirit's coming is such that the fragmentation of human unity in community is overcome. The comment of Luke that each hears in her own tongue (Acts 2:8) shows that the otherness of the other is not removed or sublated by some religious ‘esperanto’ (to borrow an image from Stanley Hauerwas); it is not because we all make the effort to speak the same language that we are united, but rather because the Spirit descends to us in the Spirit's grace in our difference and makes us a community across difference.

The Spirit unites the people as part of the work of salvation in giving birth to the Church. And this unity is a unity which does not remove difference and otherness but which relativises that difference and otherness, transcending it such that by grace it becomes not something problematic or troublesome but a context in which the Spirit might act in bringing us together.

One person's identity is not suppressed or removed for the sake of another, but various identities are not an obstacle for communication, coming together, community and sociality. The form of the community, therefore, which the Spirit establishes in the Church at Pentecost is a form which includes and rejoices in variety and difference, and it is also a form which comes about not because of humanity's attempt at coming together through a common language which is used to get to God singularly by human effort (as at Babel) but through the Spirit's descent in grace.

Furthermore, there are sociopolitical and economic consequences of the salvific work of the Spirit in and for the community at Pentecost. Rather than individuals preserving the things God has given them for the sake of their own



Continue »

individual self-preservation, all things are held in common: the Church becomes the primary identity of the believer who is so orientated toward those others within the Church that she is prepared to share her individual possessions. The heart in being turned out to God is turned out to the other in creation.

This is clearly something that Luke finds remarkable in his recounting of the life of the first Christians: "All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need" (Acts 2:44–45). This is as much a miraculous event of the act of the Spirit as the more supernatural accompanying signs of Pentecost: the effects of the freeing of humans from hearts turned in on themselves is profound in and for the life of the Church, and, if the story of Ananias

"The heart in being turned out to God is turned out to the other in creation"

and Sapphira is anything to go by, central to the identity of the community that is being redeemed. This is a reversal of the old age, the age of Cain and Abel, the age of Babel. This reversal is an act of grace, an act of the Holy Spirit of God

Indeed, in sharing in the presence of the Holy Spirit, the believer comes to share in community and communion with Christ as part of Christ's body. Christ's is a life of utter dependence on the Spirit as the One who is conceived of the Spirit, the One on whom the Spirit descends at the baptism, the One who is led out by the Spirit, the One on whose ministry the anointing of the Spirit rests, and the One who in his resurrection breathes his Spirit: his human life on earth in space and time is a life perfectly filled and a ministry completely led and governed by the Spirit.

Yet, Jesus is not only the One who is baptised and receives the Holy Spirit; he is also the One who baptises with the Holy Spirit (cf. Mk 1:8)—who immerses those others who follow him with the same Spirit who rested on him fully so they too may share in him, in his perfect and true humanity. Paul picks up this link between Adam's creation, Jesus' baptism, and giving of the Spirit when he writes: "Thus it is written, 'The first man, Adam, became a living being'; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit" (1 Cor 15:45).

This active participation in Christ's humanity as members of the body of Christ involves sharing in a form of living which is—like Christ's—not ordered towards the self but towards the other. Crucially, living a life orientated fully towards the other for Christ involves not only living in full obedience to the Father but also living fully for the creation which is created and beloved of God.

Jesus' life is one in which we see One who actively forms community in all kinds of ways and crossing all kinds of societally imposed boundaries—creating not only the community of disciples, but also community with the women disciples, with those who were lepers, with those perceived

as outcasts and sinners. But, more profoundly, Jesus' life is one in which he gives himself over fully and completely not for the self, but for the other—supremely on the Cross in obedience to the Father's will for the sake of humanity.

Within the life of the Church, therefore, our inter-relational dynamics should not be understood as an added extra or a singularly human activity with no relationship to or significance in relation to divine salvation. God's salvation involves reconciled human relationships within the life of the Church. We need to make our people aware that how we behave in relation to one another is of profound importance for our understanding of salvation.

In our preaching, we must make plain that the Church is a community created by the Holy Spirit as part of God's work of salvation which puts us right with one another, and that we must share this 'living with and for the other' dynamic with the broader communities of which we are a part: after all, from the time of the earliest Church, people have known we are Christians by our love. In the building of our church community, we must pray for the gift of God's Spirit who enables us to participate by grace in the body of Christ, a body in which the parts are united and live for one another; we must pray that ancient prayer, 'Come, Holy Spirit'.

As Christ's body, through the activity of the Spirit, as those who profess faith in the Holy Trinity, we, too, are those called to make community—not simply because it is good, or because we will to, but because God in God's grace sets us right with one another, and because we come to God in no other way than in the body of God's Son. In other words, we come to the Holy Trinity in the community of the Body through the Spirit that the Holy Trinity in God's grace establishes and creates. ➤



Professor Tom Greggs is Marischal Chair (1616) of Divinity at the University of Aberdeen. Educated at the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, his publications include: *Theology against Religion*; *New Perspectives for Evangelical Theology*; *Barth, Origen, and Universal Salvation* and *The Vocation of Theology Today*. He is a preacher in the Methodist Church and sits on the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches (for which he is a sub-group chair).

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Leslie Francis invites us to look at isolation in a new way through reflecting on the early chapters of Mark's Gospel

Experiencing isolation: A Gospel meditation

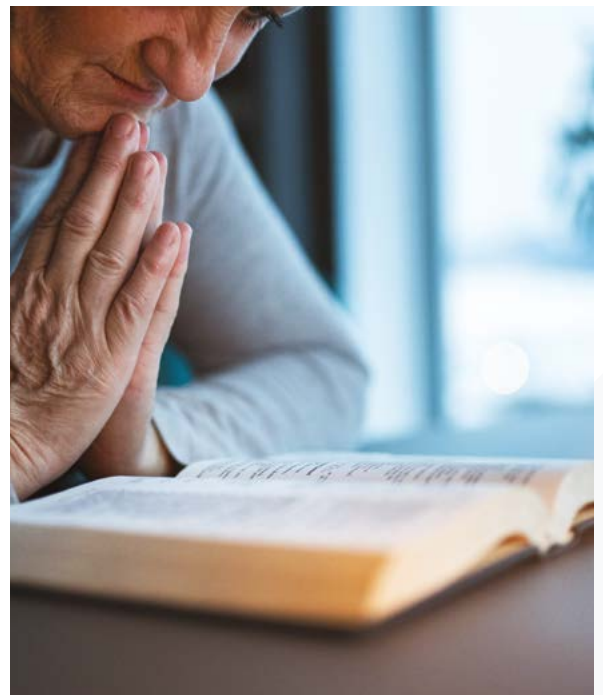
The use of the Bible and the interpretation of Scripture stands at the very centre of the call to become Ministers of Word and Sacrament. This Gospel meditation draws on one distinctive approach to the use of the Bible and the interpretation of scripture.

The aim is to stimulate a conversation between the Word of God printed on the page and the people of God living and engaging in God's world. In this approach, the revelation occurs, and the vision of God breaks through, when the people of God read their experience differently because of the direction in which the conversation leads them.

In this issue of Ascend the people of God are reflecting on and engaging with the challenges of isolation, juxtaposed with the claim that 'No Minister is an island'. The contention of this Gospel reflection is that the claim 'No Minister is an island' is rooted in Scripture.

The reader is invited to revisit the beginning of Mark's Gospel and to read again, with fresh eyes, how the Gospel call of Jesus breaks down isolation and equips us to share in building inclusive communities in and through which God's reign is experienced and proclaimed. Yet, at the same time, this call to break down the isolation which causes divisions creates new divisions of its own that lead to new experiences of isolation.

By engaging in conversation with the Word of God proclaimed in the opening two and a half chapters of Mark's Gospel, perhaps our eyes are opened to the distinctive perspectives which the Christian tradition might invite us to consider in welcoming, challenging, and enduring the experiences of isolation.



Jesus' display of the reign of God breaks through those barriers - isolation is being dissolved

Reflection

Mark's Gospel begins by painting a picture of Jesus as a lone and solitary figure. He comes to John the Baptist, seemingly alone and unescorted, and he is baptised in the Jordan. There, in Mark's account, the religious experience is personal and individual. Jesus sees the heavens torn apart. He sees the spirit descending like a dove, and hears the voice speak to him and to him alone. Here is the call into isolation (Mark 1: 9-11).

Now, notice how the Spirit (who descended so peacefully as a dove) kicks Jesus out into the desert (a violent verb) to endure isolation for 40 days. Here is a casting into creative isolation, which is far removed from loneliness. Here, in isolation, Satan tests him, wild beasts escort him and angels minister to him (Mark 1: 12-13).

Recall how, when Jesus goes into Galilee proclaiming and displaying the reign of God, he begins by building a new community. Reflect for a moment on Simon (Peter) and Andrew, and on James and John. We know little about them, but we might at least speculate. They were working in different boats, they belonged to different families, they may have been working for different 'firms' (with different groups of employees, or hired men). Working in different boats, working for different firms, can be quite isolating. It is quite tempting to stick to rowing our own boat and keep a sceptical eye on others rowing their boats. I wonder whether Jesus was breaking down isolation by inviting those two pairs of brothers to collaborate with him (Mark 1: 16-20)?

Now, Jesus takes those two pairs of brothers off to the synagogue in Capernaum. There, in the synagogue, they come face-to-face with an isolated and fearful man. He is possessed by an unclean spirit which marginalises him, disables him and isolates him. Jesus' display of the reign of God breaks through those barriers. Isolation is being dissolved (Mark 1: 21-28).

Now notice how Jesus moves from the religious setting (the synagogue) to the domestic one (Simon and Andrew's family home). In the house, they come face-to-face with an isolated woman. She is lying there, sick and feverish, marginalised by the illness and disengaged from her family involvement. Jesus' display of the reign of God breaks through those barriers. Isolation is being dissolved (Mark 1: 29-31).

Jesus is travelling through Galilee when a leper comes to him and pleads on his knees. See how the untouchable outcast has been forced into social isolation by his apparently contagious disease. See Jesus do the unthinkable by stretching out his hand and touching the untouchable. Jesus' display of the reign of God breaks through those barriers. Isolation is being dissolved (Mark 1: 40-45).

Next, we see Jesus sheltering in a house in Capernaum. The people are crowding him within the house, while others are left, isolated, on the outside. Sense the desperation of the paralysed man longing to escape from the isolation imposed by his paralysis. Sense the urgency of the four men carrying him when they cannot break their way through the crowd. Sense their determination as they dig through the roof and lower the stretcher into the room. Listen carefully as Jesus

proclaims the effective absolution: 'My child, your sins are forgiven'. Jesus' display of the reign of God removes the isolating barriers of sin and restores wholeness to human life. Isolation is being dissolved (Mark 2: 1-12).

As Mark's Gospel continues to unfold, the attack on isolation intensifies. After so clearly establishing the pattern of calling four individuals into community (Simon and Andrew, James and John), and of freeing four individuals from debilitating isolation (the possessed man in the synagogue, Simon's mother-in-law in the house, the leper on the journey, and the paralysed man lowered through the roof), Jesus tackles an even greater issue of isolation: he confronts Levi.


The name of Levi evokes his priestly status among the tribes of Israel. However, Levi's position in the tax office shows his clear revocation of his priestly call as he repositions his vocation to work for the occupying Roman authorities, raising taxes from his own people to feed the armies that oppress them. Levi has painted himself into a tight corner. He has cut his family ties, severed his spiritual roots and positioned himself as an outcast, a sinner, a despised tax collector.

Just imagine the risk Jesus would be taking if he dared to break down the isolation that Levi was experiencing. The risk was great enough when Jesus stretched out his hand to touch the leper, but at least he had the good sense to send that man on his way saying: 'See that you say nothing to anyone,' — however unsuccessful that command was seen to be. The encounter with Levi, however, was on a completely different order.

Jesus called Levi in exactly the same way as he had earlier called Simon and Andrew, James and John. He saw the potential in Levi and he was not minded to see that potential go to waste. Just as Jesus had called Simon and Andrew and followed them to eat with them in their family home, now Jesus called Levi and followed him to eat with him. Here, around the family table, Jesus' display of the reign of God breaks through those barriers. Isolation is being dissolved.

Now, however, Jesus begins to pay the price for his commitment to destroying isolation and welcoming inclusivity. The scribes and Pharisees begin to take against him. Jesus himself is becoming isolated (Mark 2: 13-17).

Just as the call of the first four disciples was followed up by four narratives of healing and of the resolving of isolation, so the call of the fifth disciple (Levi) is followed by a fifth healing. This time Jesus encounters, in the synagogue, a man who has a withered hand. But what is different now is that 'they' are keeping a close eye on Jesus to see if he will break the Sabbath by healing the man.

Jesus asks the man to stretch out his hand, and his hand is restored. Now, however, Jesus really does pay the price for his commitment to destroying isolation and welcoming inclusivity. The Pharisees go out and begin at once to conspire with the Herodians against him, to destroy him. Jesus himself is becoming isolated (Mark 3: 1-6). 

INTERNATIONAL PRESBYTERY : A RICH AND DIVERSE TAPESTRY

The Church of Scotland's International Presbytery extends from the picturesque canals of Amsterdam to the shore of the Sea of Galilee

With 14 charges spread out across 13 countries — and three continents — the clerk for the International Presbytery has his work cut out for him. Nonetheless, there is a very close bond between charges, with joint meetings taking place twice a year over a three-day weekend, hosted on a rotation basis by the European charges. The weekend combines committee and presbytery meetings, shared Communion and a Sunday service. Each country and congregation offers its own unique style of welcome.

In Lisbon earlier this year, where the International Presbytery group were joined by the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, Rt Rev Susan Brown, representatives were treated to a day trip which included spectacular views of Portugal's capital under the watchful eye of the statue of Christ the King, as well as sampling some local Portuguese brandy. Spouses are also invited to attend the presbytery weekends, with a special "spouses programme" planned for meeting times. As a result, firm friendships have developed, with a lot of mutual caring — pastoral care in a special form.

However, the biggest challenge currently facing the presbytery is how to cope with the projected reduction in available ministers to serve charges. Nine of the 14 charges have a full-time minister, with an additional 11 ordained ministers on the presbytery roll. Vacancies remain in Lisbon, the Costa del Sol (Fuengirola), Rome and Sri Lanka. It's a similar situation in other areas of the Kirk, but the breadth of geographical distance from charge to charge means particularly creative solutions are required.

One such option currently being investigated to address the vacancy in the Sri Lanka charge is the possibility of partnering with the Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUSA) which has a Mission Coordinator for South East Asia in the region.

Above all, the presence of the Church of Scotland in mainland Europe and further afield comes from a long history and no one wants to see that come to an end. The International Presbytery and its charges bring together a rich tapestry of Christian faith involving people from all over the world. They often define their primary purpose as "offering English-language worship in the Reformed tradition wherever people are". The presbytery continues to bring a rich contribution to the life of the Church of Scotland and to offer opportunities to ministers who may want to consider a move "furth of Scotland".

Diversity

The 14 global charges are: Paris, Brussels, Rotterdam, Amsterdam, Budapest, Geneva, Lausanne, Lisbon, Costa del Sol (Fuengirola), Gibraltar, Rome, Malta, Bermuda and Sri Lanka.

375th anniversary

The Scots Kirk in Rotterdam celebrated its 375th anniversary on 16 September with a special service led by the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, Rt Rev Susan Brown. The Kirk was originally formed in 1643 to service the large Scottish community of merchants, seamen and soldiers then living in Rotterdam, but today has a much wider relevance to people from all over the world.

World War I Centenary

St Andrew's Church in Brussels is marking 100 years since the end of World War I with a commemorative service on 11 November. During the day, Very Rev Dr Russell Barr will be preaching the sermon and a special African/Filipino lunch will be served after the service. Flowers of the Forest will be played on the bagpipes, followed by a two-minute silence.

Mission projects

The International Presbytery's two-year mission project supporting the Algiers Project Equestrian Club Hope is coming to an end. The charity, based in Malta, provides equine-assisted therapy for children in Algiers. The presbytery has also been supporting the work of a project helping and supporting the victims of the 2016 earthquake in the Apennine mountains in central Italy.

Moderator's International Presbytery visits

Over the course a year, the Moderator undertakes a number of international visits to the churches of the presbytery and beyond. In the remainder of Rt Rev Susan Brown's year as Moderator, she has visited Uruguay and will visit India & Pakistan and Bermuda in 2019.

A safe space to talk

Increasing numbers of ministers are discovering the benefits of supervision, **Marjory McPherson** tells Susan Mansfield

Have you ever thought it would be good to have a supportive, confidential place to talk about your work? A place where you won't be judged, and no one will offer advice, but a trained listener will get alongside you and help you see things more clearly for yourself? That is the space that is offered by supervision.

Increasing numbers of ministers are discovering the benefits of supervision, which is offered on a funded basis through Ascend. Standard practice in professions such as counselling, it is now being widely recognised as having benefits for all those who work and minister in caring and people-focused roles.

“Often, as ministers, it feels like we’re expected to absorb a lot of the difficult conversations, the difficult pastoral issues, the challenging things that may come and go in congregational life”

Rev Marjory McPherson, now presbytery clerk for Edinburgh Presbytery, was involved in promoting supervision for ministers in her previous role as secretary for training and support with Ministries Council, and has benefitted from it herself. She says: “I have very much found it a safe confidential space to talk and to explore some of the tensions or decisions we face as ministers. It’s a place to talk through a difficult pastoral situation, to bounce ideas off another person, or, if a situation or group is having a negative impact, talk through some different strategies one might use.”

She says that parish ministry can often be isolated, in comparison with other similar professional roles. “When I was a university chaplain, I was part of a chaplaincy team, and also, when there were critical incidents within a university, we were part of a multidisciplinary team. If somebody got meningitis, two dozen people had to get in a room, although I was the one going to visit the hospital. There was always a sense of a bigger group behind you.

“Often, as ministers, it feels like we’re expected to absorb a lot of the difficult conversations, the difficult pastoral issues, the challenging things that may come and go in congregational life. The confidential nature of the job means you are often

carrying burdens and cares and concerns for others. People do different things to support themselves, a friendship group, or meeting another minister, or going out on the golf course and hitting a white ball around. Supervision is another approach.”

Supervision involves a regular meeting (often monthly) which can be one-to-one or in a group. The work is led by the supervisee (the person seeking supervision) who decides what they would like to talk about. The supervisor, usually experienced in ministry or counselling themselves, is trained to listen and reflect what they hear, helping the supervisee gain insights about their own work and ministry. It is confidential, and completely separate to any line management. Edinburgh Presbytery has run a very successful pilot programme offering group supervision, which participants have described as “inspiring”, “hugely supportive”, even “life-changing”.

Marjory says: “What I want to say to ministers is, it’s your space, your time for you to use. The focus is on you and your work. In a context where you spend all your time giving to others, you can carve out something that’s yours, and that’s a legitimate thing to do. It’s about valuing yourself and your ministry, promoting your wellbeing and your self-care. You want to do the best job you can, this is one way — one small way — of helping make that possible.”

Rev Marjory McPherson is the Presbytery Clerk of Edinburgh. She has a wealth of experience in pastoral care and support of those in ministry.

60 SECONDS

with
Rev Derek G Lawson

Name:

Rev Derek G Lawson

Minister since:

1988

Minister for:

The Scots International Church Rotterdam — since coming out of retirement in 2016.

Education:

Primary - Morgan Academy, Dundee; Secondary — Dundee High School; University of Dundee (LL.B. 1969); University of St Andrews (B.D. 1997)

Relationship status:

Married for 47 years to Moira.

Family:

Daughter Paula (married to David), who have two children aged six and four; and son Iain (married to Kirsty) with a wee boy born in April this year.

First Job:

After I completed my training at Elie linked with Kilconquhar & Colinsburgh and then at Hope Park in St Andrews, I was called to the linked parishes of Redgorton & Stanley (just north of Perth).

My Faith:

I grew up in a Christian family and have enjoyed an active life of faith which was certainly sustained in my teenage years by the Youth Camps on Iona and still today by my associate membership of the Iona Community. For me faith isn't something cerebral but more a way of life: it wasn't for nothing that the early followers of Jesus were known as "The Way"!

My Life before Ministry:

I was a late entrant to ministry, having practised as a solicitor for some 25 years, mainly in Dundee.

My Call to Ministry:

I have been very involved in the life of the Church wherever we lived, latterly in Wormit where, as well as being Session Clerk, I regularly led worship and was active in children's ministry. It got to a point where my wife said to me that I really had to decide whether I was working as a lawyer or working for the Church. This was the nudge I needed to prompt me to enquire about training for ministry and, with my wife's blessing, I retired from law and went to St Mary's College to start my divinity course (despite, in the meantime, being turned down at Selection School).

**I'm delighted...**

to have responded to my wife's nudge; to have experienced the ministry of Andrew Stevenson who had also entered ministry late; to have had the benefit of a year-long unofficial "attachment" at Hope Park Church in St Andrews with Bill Henney and Professor James White, and to have shared in the lives of such a diversity of people through my ministry, not least in my "retirement" between 2011 and 2016 when I have served as locum in Costa del Sol, Rotterdam and Bermuda — all very different, with different challenges.

My superpower is:

my wife. I wouldn't have entered the ministry but for her, and we have always worked as a team as she has involved herself in the life of the congregation wherever I have been. Every minister needs support and I'm fortunate to have had this in my wife.

I love ministry because:

of the diversity of people I've had the opportunity to accompany on their journey of faith and relate to — in good times and bad. For me relationships are at the heart of the Christian faith: relationships with God, with our fellow human beings and with all God's creation; along with the pursuit of justice and peace for all people.

My biggest challenge is:


as Convener of the International Presbytery's Appraisal Committee to find a way to allow congregations to realistically evaluate their ministry requirements against the background of the reducing number of Ministers of Word & Sacrament. On a personal level it could be having to determine what my wife and I do in the aftermath of Brexit as we chose in 2011 to retire to France and now find ourselves possibly somewhere between a rock and a hard place.

I'd rather be:

a bit more musical — but, in the overall scheme of things, I can't say there's anything else I'd rather be.

People don't know:

I support Dundee United Football Club — not the happiest experience in recent years! Maybe I should change my allegiance to Feyenoord??



THRIVING, NOT JUST SURVIVING

An American model for support and development in ministry has helped one Scottish presbytery transform in a period of change and turbulence. **Peter Neilson** tells Susan Mansfield about the benefits of Macedonian Ministry

Five years ago, Peter Neilson and Arthur Christie were two ministers sharing their concerns about their presbytery in St Andrews. “We were aware of internal conflict within congregations and a lot of institutional change — we thought our colleagues were going to sink without trace,” Peter says. “We needed to find a way to hold each other together in a period of transition.”

What changed everything was a meeting with Tom Tewell, the founder and director of Macedonian Ministry, a programme created in the USA to support and develop those working in ministry. “He was describing all issues we had recognised, talking about offering a supportive learning community that helped ministers thrive not just survive. We came away thinking: ‘This is it’”

Macedonian Ministry works by bringing together “cohorts”, groups of around 10-15 people who commit to working together for three years. The first year is focused on their own spiritual health and development, the second on their congregation and the third on missional impact. The three-year programme also includes conferences and a two-week funded pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

In September 2015, the first cohort launched, made up of colleagues from St Andrews Presbytery with Peter and Arthur as facilitators. They have now completed all three years. A

second cohort has begun in Kirkcaldy, and Peter and Arthur would like to hear from others who might be interested in exploring the idea.

They emphasise that Macedonian Ministry is not a programme of prescriptive ideas; the emphasis is on support and development in ways appropriate to each person’s circumstances. Peter says: “It has been described as church for ministers, a community where you can learn, deepen your own spiritual walk, be supported by peers, try out new things, and come back to the job energised. We are very presbyterian legally, but not very *presbyterial* relationally. We believe that relationships are fundamental to the health of our Church, and this is one of the ways of improving the health of the Church.”

Feedback from participants in both the St Andrews and Kirkcaldy cohorts has emphasised appreciation for the chance to work on one’s own spiritual life, renew one’s prayer life and be led in worship. Peter says: “It can become sterile as a minister because you professionalise your spiritual life. This is about helping people to mature their spirituality and get back in touch with their core calling.

“There’s a lot of laughter — we have a lot of fun together. A number of people we spoke to at the beginning about Macedonian Ministry said it wouldn’t work here because




we don't trust each other enough, and you couldn't have had a more distrustful group than ours to begin with. But the laughter is a mark of how much we are at ease with one another."

The project also offered valuable fresh insights in a time of turbulence and change. Peter says: "One of the things we

do if they hadn't had other colleagues at their back. For one minister, it gave him the confidence to try new initiatives like Messy Church, and establish a community cafe. In another church, the minister and congregation decided to use the money which had been used to pay a pastoral assistant to pay for a community worker. That was a huge shift for that congregation and minister to take that outwards look, that came out of three years of work."

"It has been described as church for ministers, a community where you can learn, deepen your own spiritual walk, be supported by peers, try out new things, and come back to the job energised."

He emphasises that the ultimate focus of Macedonia Ministry is outwards, about the role of Church in the wider world. In the USA, ministers who have taken part have pioneered programmes in which churches support public schools, and are at the forefront of addressing questions of racial equality. He believes that more people in ministry in Scotland could benefit from the programme as we seek to explore new ways of being Church for the 21st century. 

were able to spend time on was coping with change and conflict. Some of the literature, like Tod Bolsinger's *Canoeing the Mountains*, gave us vocabulary and metaphors and practical insights, and that has percolated through into the congregations, helped us to tackle new things in a creative and constructive way."

Participants in a cohort covenant to meet together for half a day per month for three years, and pay (if they are able) \$500. The other costs of the programme are met by the Atlanta-based organisation. The long-term commitment helps to create a stable group which provides peer support and companionship in the same way as peers might support one another in other professional spheres.

Peter says: "It was a way of breaking the isolation. Ideas were aired, tweaked and developed. People tried things out which they wanted to do but wouldn't have been able to

Rev Peter Neilson has retired recently from his role as a freelance mission consultant after 40 years of ministry within the Church of Scotland.

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

Scott Burton makes a powerful argument from Scripture that no one is called to minister alone

In my final weeks as a probationer, I can look back on 14 months of shared ministry with my supervisor. In that time, we have experienced the various ups and downs of parish life, including some that were unexpected and painful for both of us. But the companionship we have had in faith and ministry has been invaluable during this season.

In Luke 10, Jesus sends out a second, larger, group of disciples to go ahead of him and participate in his ministry. The size of this group could be 'seventy' (NRSV), echoing the number of Jacob's family going down to Egypt (Gen 46:27) or the number of elders sharing in Moses' burden (Num 11:16ff); it could also be 'seventy-two' (NIV), a number equated with the nations of the world (Gen 10 »

“Ministry is not meant to be done in isolation and so Jesus sends the 70 out in pairs”

LXX and 3 Enoch). Both alternatives give an exciting, nuanced understanding of the meaning behind Jesus' actions: a new Israel, a new people of God, is forming and they will have a universal mission to the nations.

But I am struck by Luke's contention that Jesus sent the disciples out "in pairs" (Luke 10:1) even though the need was so great and the harvest "plentiful" (10:2). Why do this, Jesus? Did you not realise that you've halved the potential harvest? Divide up the pairs and you could cover 70 locations, not just 35! Didn't you get that probation seminar on "church growth strategies and how to maximise your impact"? (Joke — neither did we!)

So why pairs? Thinking of pairs — teams of two — I am reminded of Genesis 1 and 2. If you juxtapose those chapters with Luke 10, some surprising correlations appear.

Firstly, the kingship of God is unmistakably on display in these opening chapters of Genesis: the sovereign Lord reigns over the universe and establishes his kingdom upon the earth (Gen 1:1 — 'in the beginning' — has Old Testament links to Judean kingship, Jer 26:1). Similarly, in Luke 10:10, the message the 70 are to take out is that "the kingdom of God has come near".

Other parallels jump out: God is the source of fruitfulness and blessing in Genesis (1:12-13; 20; 22; 28) and, likewise, it is by the sovereign Lord that additional workers will be called forth to gather in the fruitful harvest (Lk 10:2). In both portions, we see that, by the divine word, a people is called forth to be God's representatives in all the world: Genesis 1 reveals humanity, these image-bearers, as being given delegated authority from the King that they might be his embodied messengers; in Luke 10, the seventy are given power to extend the kingdom and are expressly told by Jesus: "whoever listens to you listens to me" (Lk 10:16).

So there appear to be several echoes of Genesis 1-2 in Luke 10: in one we see humanity created as the image-bearers of God and sent forth to fulfil that great and noble task (1:26, 28; 2:15, 18); in the other, we see the creating of a new community that will bear the image of the One who is the "son of Adam, son of God" (Lk 3:38). They are to be ambassadors — image-bearers — of the true King.

Coming at last to the issue of the pairs, it is striking that in Genesis 1-2 the one thing that is labelled "not good" (2:18) is that the man was "alone" — a "helper" and "partner" was needed. The man needed someone who would be "like him" but "like opposite him"; the man needed a counterpart, an equal companion, a fellow "earthling". The point is that we cannot be image-bearers on our own. Chris Wright argues that the focus of this help relates to the immense task that God has given to humanity: the task requires "relational cooperation" — the man needs a helper, not just company.


Nevertheless, many commentators also highlight that Genesis 1 and 2 reveal we were made to be in community and that it is only in such community that God is properly reflected: the image we are made in is most fully seen in personal communion and love between persons, as we "delight in the presence of other persons".

All in all, this echo of Genesis 1 and 2 within Luke 10 is (hopefully) becoming clear: being "alone" in ministry is also "not good". Ministry is not meant to be done in isolation and so Jesus sends the 70 out in pairs. As God the King created humanity, delegated to them a task and gave them the mutual relationships through which to achieve said task under his blessing, so too this new community (a new humanity, cf. Eph 4:22-24) inaugurated by Jesus the Messiah, has a task that can only be achieved through the God-given relationships we have with one another.

Reflecting further, we would never argue for people to live in isolation — indeed, humanity has horribly proven the damage forced isolation can do to a person — so why do some still insist on isolation in ministry? Why do we ignore the warning signs? Why do we put off the encouragements and opportunities to do ministry and life with others?

During my training, we were given regular updates on the likely future circumstances of ministry and of the current impact of ministry on those involved. It was hard-hitting but helpful. It wasn't about doom and gloom, it was just being honest and real. On the cusp of entering fully into that reality, I look back on a probationary period rich in relationship, and I hope, I dearly hope, that the future will also be so blessed and plentiful.

The signs seem positive: a cohort of supportive probationers committed to praying, meeting and reading together; mentors willing to pick up the phone when needed; spiritual director in place; the various opportunities offered through Ascend for support and development. Also, the ways in which the Church is addressing the issue of vacant charges speaks clearly of collaboration and fulfilling our mutual calling together, each person a gift from the King to counter the potential "not good" of isolation in ministry.

So where are your gifts from the King? Who is Jesus sending you out on mission with? I know from speaking with my supervisor that it isn't always clear or easy, but I am convinced the heart of the King is for anything other than isolation in ministry, and being a good King, he will provide for you and for me. Peace be with you. 

“Keeping the plates spinning is more and more difficult.”

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WHO IS WHO?



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**SUSAN
MANSFIELD**

Susan Mansfield is a freelance journalist and editor with over 15 years experience on daily newspapers. She is passionate about communication, and hopes her work can make the magazine an effective tool to support those in ministry.

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Our Father,

They were all there, and I was there too. We spoke at one another. I laughed. They smiled. I fulfilled my obligations and we all went our own way.

You know us, and you're not fooled by appearances. You see when we are alone in a crowd.

You know us, and you made us for relationship with you and with one another.

You made us for communion and community, yet we go it alone.

We look to the world and the path is well sign-posted: make your choices, fight for autonomy, be yourself, assert yourself, love yourself.

We look at ourselves and recognise that our lips are well-practised in saying: *I want, I must, I will do it and I will do it my way.*

Forgive us when we push you out of the picture.

Forgive us for when we look to ourselves for what you alone can give.

Help us to see the reality of our situation.

When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

Have compassion on us. We go it alone and find ourselves in a tangle, stressed, and vulnerable.

Show us the Good Shepherd who can loosen the snares of our solitude.

Show us the one who was singled-out, abandoned, and utterly forsaken, for us and in our place.

So that, through him, we might know the freedom found in life together:
life with you and life with one another;
life to the full and life for ever.

Fill us with your self-effacing Spirit,
who binds us to one another in the bond of peace,
and who testifies, not to himself, but to Jesus,
your son and our saviour,
in whom you have made us worthy to be your children,
and in whose precious name we pray.

Amen.

Rev Tim Sinclair,
Partick Trinity Church Of Scotland, Glasgow

Essential Info

Ministries Council

Tel: 0131 225 5722

Email: ministries@churchofscotland.org.uk

Email: pastoralsupport@churchofscotland.org.uk

Email: ascend@churchofscotland.org.uk

For support information please visit

www.churchofscotland.org.uk/ascend

Communications Department

Tel: 0131 225 5722

Out of hours: 07854 783 539

Law Department

Tel: 0131 225 5722

Email: lawdept@churchofscotland.org.uk

Safeguarding Department

Tel: 0131 240 2256

Email: safeguarding@churchofscotland.org.uk

Safeguarding is about preventing harm and abuse.

And making a timely and appropriate response if it occurs.

Housing and Loan Fund

Email: lmacmillan@cofscotland.org.uk

The Church of Scotland Housing and Loan Fund for Retired Ministers and Widows and Widowers of Ministers was established to facilitate the provision of housing accommodation for retired ministers and widows or widowers of ministers. Help may be by either providing a house to rent or by advancing a house purchase loan.

Reporting Illness - for parish ministers

To submit a sick line or ask about sick leave paperwork, please contact:

Tel: 0131 225 5722 (ext. 2303)

Email: pastoralsupport@churchofscotland.org.uk



The Church of Scotland

www.churchofscotland.org.uk/ascend

Scottish Charity Number: SC0 11353