

ascend

centre for support & development

a magazine for ministry

the dark night of the soul



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 were 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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Commissioning Editor:

Gabby Dench

Editors:

Helen Silvis & Susan Mansfield

Design:

Chris Flexen

Photography:

Comms Team

Contributors:

Alison Burnside
Neil J Dougall
Leslie J Francis
Tom Gordon
Alison Jaffrey
Cameron Langlands
Karl Martin
Ian J. M. McDonald
Alan McWilliams
John Munro
Robin Paisley
Gillian Paterson
Fiona Reynolds
Marion Stewart
Ian Taylor
Anne Tomlinson
Jenny Williams

Ascend is a programme of Education & Support Committee of Ministries Council.

Council Lead:

Rev Eleanor McMahon
(Vice-Convener)

Programme Lead:

Gabby Dench

Project Officer:

Clare Milrine

Church of Scotland
121 George Street
Edinburgh EH2 4YN
Tel: 0131 225 5722

ascend@churchofscotland.org.uk
www.churchofscotland.org.uk/ascend

To send comments to the Editor
please mark email or letter:
FAO Ascend Editor.

HELLO

Welcome to the fifth edition of Ascend. I apologise that due to staff changes and absences—including my own maternity leave—it is reaching you far later than we had planned.

It seems to jar a little that the theme of this edition speaks of darkness and struggle and yet we are now in spring and enjoying longer days and bluer skies as well as the joy and hope of the resurrection.

Although we did not plan for this edition to come out at this time, I wonder if there is an important message in this. We often read about the challenges of the winter season: the short days, the weariness that often hits after Christmas passes, the increase of mental and physical ill-health in the early 'dark' months of the year.

These challenges are all real and yet, as we read in this edition, personal darkness can be experienced in the brightest of months, taking us by surprise and bringing despair and isolation even when we feel we should be in a season of growth and new life.

I am thankful for the honesty and vulnerability of contributors in this edition and I hope that continuing to make space to address the personal challenges of our



callings and our humanity might help to take the stigma out of the messy process of surviving ministry and encourage us towards lifelong learning and development, finding ways to cope with the challenges life throws in our direction.

Reading the contributions, I was also reminded of the power of inviting others to speak into the darkness, or simply meet us in it offering their presence even if there are no words to say.

It is encouraging to read the ways in which individuals have found support through an MDC, pastoral supervision or spiritual direction. You can find out more about these services on the Ascend website.

Thank you for taking the time to read this publication

A handwritten signature in white ink on a blue background.

GABBY

Ascend Lead

BULLETINS

PASTORAL SUPERVISION - FUNDING NOW AVAILABLE

Do you know we can fund Pastoral Supervision up to £240 annually?

*"I come away
with my sense
of purpose
renewed and
my enthusiasm
for what I do
reinvigorated"*



MINISTERS HANDBOOK

 The Church of Scotland

MINISTERS' HANDBOOK

Edition: April 2019



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

ascend



The Church of Scotland

BENEVOLENT GRANTS

We have a small number of funds that can be applied to when hardship is being experienced.

For an application form contact:

pastoralsupport@churchofscotland.org.uk

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The GA Blue Book this year contains links to access a number of extended documents of interest — the Resilience Research report, Recruitment Review report and the Formation Framework for Initial Ministerial Education. To find out more, visit:

www.churchofscotland.org.uk/about_us/general_assembly

STAFFING UPDATE

At the end of May we bid farewell and thank Rev Ian McDonald for his time as Pastoral Support Manager [maternity cover] and welcome Gabby Dench back.

We look forward to welcoming a new Education & Training Secretary in July and introducing them in due course

EVENTS

ELDERS CONFERENCE 2019

5 - 7 JUNE 2019, TULLIALLAN CASTLE

A Learn conference to inspire current and future Elders in the Church of Scotland with a fresh vision and understanding of the characteristics of Christian discipleship, exploring their role in creating and deepening a culture of discipleship.

Through the six characteristics of Christian discipleship we will explore the role of elders in areas of church ministry such as worship, Christian learning, pastoral care, sharing faith and office bearers.

For more information and booking details please visit the Events page at:

www.churchofscotland.org.uk/ascend

GERMINATE LEADERSHIP

3 OCTOBER 2019, NORTHAMPTON

Applications for the 2019 programme are now open.

Helping lay and ordained leaders from all denominations to develop creative, entrepreneurial skills for rural church leadership.

Germinate Leadership is for lay and ordained leaders in rural churches who have already displayed some creative and entrepreneurial flair in ministry and are keen to develop themselves and their skills.

Every part of the Germinate Leadership programme is rooted in the opportunities and challenges of ministry in rural contexts and fosters a collaborative, ecumenical approach and a culture of continuing personal and professional development. It is expected that all participants, both lay and ordained, will end the programme as creative, entrepreneurial, collaborative and strategic leaders, better equipped to engage effectively with local communities and encourage churches to be an effective Christian presence.

The programme combines leadership theory, theological reflection on the nature of leadership in ministry and the exploration of practical leadership issues including conflict resolution, team building and group dynamics, collaboration between lay and ordained leaders, and the importance of deepening emotional intelligence.

For more information and booking details please visit the Events page at:

www.churchofscotland.org.uk/ascend

LEADERS RETREAT: WHO I AM IS HOW I LEAD


3 - 5 SEPTEMBER 2019, GARTOCHARN

A short retreat to gather with others in ministry and to reflect and realign and to rest in order to re-engage.

Your guide will be Di Murray who will provide the "container, content and containment" over this three-day experiential learning programme. We will be working with the core values underpinning the ComingUp4Air model: curiosity, compassion and courage. Participants will have the opportunity to dig deep into their sense of "who I am" and how this impacts on their leadership. We will work both indoors and out, individually, in small groups and in one collective learning circle. We will use tools of deep listening, journalling and creative practices, inviting an openness to slowing down and sensing self.

For more information and booking details please visit the Events page at:

www.churchofscotland.org.uk/ascend



Two ministers explore the wide-ranging benefits of group pastoral supervision.

A Problem Shared...

Rev Ian Taylor explores the ways in which group pastoral supervision can help us see things differently

When you read these words “dark night of the soul”, I am curious to know what you notice as you meet them. Do you wonder where that phrase originated? Or have you already realised that it is attributed to John of the Cross (1542-91)?

“It has been striking how quickly an atmosphere of mutual support and care has emerged”

As Marjory McPherson noted in a recent edition of *Ascend*, ministers can often experience pressure and feelings of isolation in ministry or, to put it another way, a dark night of the soul. Group pastoral supervision can provide a safe confidential space to explore some of those experiences in the company of others, with facilitation from a trained pastoral supervisor.

So how does it work? The supervisee brings an issue — some aspect of their ministry — to reflect upon with the supervisor and the other group members, and all the members reflect upon the issue. Each member of the group is given an opportunity to present something which means there is a significant level of engagement and involvement within the group. Sometimes, but not always, what will be shared might be an issue of great weight — an issue that comes from a very deep place of ministerial reflection, a dark night of the soul scenario.

In the resurrection account found in John 20, we meet some of the women and the disciples at the Easter tomb following their own dark night of the soul. As they reflect together on what they see, we discover that the English verb “to see” has three different equivalents in Greek, all of which are used in this passage.

Mary (John 20:1) sees by observing without interpretation (blepo). Simon Peter (v.6) is curious about what he has seen and observed (theoreo). Then John (v.9) goes into the tomb and sees with insight, as if a penny has dropped (horaō). This is often referred to as the three levels of seeing and can be applied in group supervision very effectively. All of this could be described as contemplative inquiry.

[Continue »](#)

Such an approach avoids the temptation that ministers can fall into when they meet together — of always giving advice. The supervisory emphasis is on accompanying the one who shares their issue rather than on trying to fix someone. Judgment is avoided and this aids learning for all the participants.

Quick fix solutions are not offered. Instead, individuals are given room to explore, and contributions are offerings not prescriptions or directives. This ensures that the group does not stray into analysis and interpretation. The focus within the group is on the supervisee and the wisdom they possess as a practitioner but might not always be able to access.

Those who have engaged in group pastoral supervision have found that the sharing of experience within supervision is beneficial for all the group members. The collegiate nature

of the supervision has an impact not just for the supervisee but for the whole group. The depth of the relationship established within supervision is often carried out of the supervisory space into other areas of shared ministerial practice.

In one presbytery, participants in group supervision commented that after they had begun working together in supervision they discovered that they related much better to one another in the rest of their presbytery's life. From darkness had come light; transformation had occurred within individual lives and within their corporate life. Now that can be no bad thing. As we read in John's Gospel, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." (John 1:4)

Jenny Williams describes how a supportive atmosphere helps combat isolation in ministry

About 15 years ago, I can remember being with a group of ministers talking about the value of small groups. One of these ministers said: "But Jenny, who really wants to be in a small group?"

The culture amongst ministers has changed since then. Over the past three years, I have been involved as facilitator with three groups of ministers meeting for pastoral supervision monthly or every six weeks in different presbyteries. What has been striking is how quickly an atmosphere of mutual support and care has emerged.

These groups have all begun with four sessions which outline the features of pastoral supervision and introduce practical and creative tools that encourage reflection and the inclusion of imagination to support ministry.

"Sometimes people remark on the similarity of concerns shared; at other times, it is the difference that people notice"

As in individual pastoral supervision, group supervision offers a regular, intentional and boundaried space where two or more disciples meet to look together at practice. It is a relationship of trust, confidentiality, support and openness that offers freedom and safety to explore issues arising in ministry.

The focus is on our day-to-day ministry. Together, we learn ways of reflecting which take us deeper than just recounting an incident. We find ways of listening to one another that take our stories deeper. In a group, this can be done through


simply reflecting back what we notice, what strikes us, by helping our colleague to stay in the moment with their reactions and responses, feelings and thoughts and by expanding the information in a way that creates space, enabling other perspectives and allowing connections to be made.

This is not problem-solving for our colleague, rather it is supporting him or her to stay with their concern until they see more clearly a potential next step. It is a joy to see people find wisdom and insight from within that simply needed time, space and a supportive atmosphere to come to the surface. Such experiences demonstrate the value of reflecting on the past in a way that resources the future.

Sharing together in this form of reflection engenders concern and support for each other. Doing pastoral supervision in a group means that several different situations can be heard and reflected upon in one session, so that we learn not

just from what we ourselves may have brought with us to consider but also from others. Sometimes people remark on the similarity of concerns shared; at other times, it is the difference that people notice. As a result, participants learn from others' contexts and have a greater appreciation of each other's ministry situations.

Comments from ministers who have taken part in group pastoral supervision demonstrate that it is addressing the isolation they experience by enabling companionship that is engaged in the practicalities of ministry. This form of meeting together as a group has also stimulated and encouraged deeper engagement with the day-to-day tasks of ministry.

Such groups are providing ways for ministers to reflect on their vocation in relationship to their current role in ministry which, at the same time, is attentive to the individual context of each unique church situation. 

A photograph of three people, two men and one woman, looking at a tablet together. The woman in the center is wearing a yellow cardigan over a dark blue polka-dot shirt and glasses. The man on the left is wearing a light blue shirt and glasses. The man on the right is wearing a grey jacket over a red and white checkered shirt. They are all smiling and looking at the tablet.

What has group pastoral supervision been about for you?

Participants have said:

"The value of colleague support and deeper understanding of one another. Often we can be in similar places or situations and not know it, (group pastoral supervision allows us to) feel we are not alone."

"The realisation that we all share in challenges, frustrations, joys and celebrations in ministry and that it is a privilege to be part of it."

"The encouragement to reflect and learn rather than plough on with activities."
"(It) has given me more confidence to face challenges in ministry. (It) has helped me to be more reflective."

"I attended more out of a sense of duty, but found something valuable. Not a natural place for me. That said, a way of taking me to a place where I would think more about ministry."

Group supervision is currently organised and offered by three presbyteries. Supervisors listed on the Ascend website offer both individual and group supervision for which Ministries Council/Ascend funding is available. If you would like to know more, Please contact:

ascend@churchofscotland.org.uk

www.ascend.churchofscotland.org.uk/supervision

A Fresh Perspective

Rev Alison Jaffrey talked to Susan Mansfield about her experience of a Ministerial Development Conversation

When change is on the horizon, it can focus our minds on finding resources which aid good decision-making. When Rev Alison Jaffrey started to consider new directions after eight years in her parish of Meldrum & Bourtie in Aberdeenshire, she decided to take up the offer of a Ministerial Development Conversation (MDC).

A structured conversation about your ministry with a trained facilitator, an MDC is recommended for ministers every two years, but particularly in times of transition and decision-making. Alison says: "I wanted the more strategic long-term thinking about what I was going to do. I felt that I would like to move on, but I was aware of being confused about whether I should stay here, whether I'd done everything I could do in the parish."

Applying for an MDC online via the Ascend website enables you to choose a facilitator you feel will be suited for you (after 29 years in ministry, Alison wanted a facilitator with a similar level of experience). You are encouraged to reflect in advance

"It's a very good way to get a focussed look at things because you're having to explain it all to somebody who doesn't know you or the situation"

on a number of questions about your ministry including your current situation and where you might like things to go in the future. This reflection then becomes the starting point for the conversation.

Alison says: "I tend to think well in conversation with people, and the facilitator was really careful and considered about what they said. It helped that they were an experienced person and at a similar stage in life to me. It also helped that it was someone who didn't know me very well because they didn't make any assumptions.

"They identified with me something I hadn't realised, which is that I was extremely angry about the situation I was in. I had buried that well and truly and identifying that was very useful. It was something I went on to explore and work through in the weeks after the MDC. In the months since, I have thought deeply about what we talked about."

The role of the MDC facilitator is not to give advice but to invite the minister to explore their thoughts and feelings, and to make suggestions about resources which might be available to them. Alison says she was keen to explore possibilities for further study, but also to look at how these could be balanced with family responsibilities.

In the end, she says, she made a different decision to the one which seemed to emerge from the MDC, but the conversation was instrumental to her thought process. "When I reflected on it I realised that staying put and waiting for things to get better was not actually going to work. A lot of things in the parish were beyond my control. What I've decided to do is the exact opposite of what the conversation led to, but that doesn't mean it wasn't helpful.

"It formed the basis of a longer conversation with my pastoral supervisor and that has led to a bit more clarity. I was casting around looking at further study, looking for things that would keep me going here rather than acknowledging the reality which is that I'm not in the right place any more."

She says she would recommend an MDC to any minister thinking about a change.

"Especially if you're having to make quite a big decision, it's a very good way to get a focussed look at things because you're having to explain it all

to somebody who doesn't know you or the situation. It helps you to clarify what you're looking at, and they bring a different viewpoint. They are not looking at how you were last year, they are focussing on how you are at this moment.

"It's one day, it might not give a final conclusion, it might take you a lot of thinking afterwards, but it will bring out what you should think about." ✍

If you are interested in exploring having a Ministerial Development Conversation visit:
www.ascend.churchofscotland.org.uk/MDC

Two women working in ministry describe their own journeys through the dark night of the soul

How I See it...

Marion Stewart DCS, Skene Parish Church, Gordon Presbytery

2019 finds me having been employed by the Church of Scotland for 40 years: first with the then Overseas Council in Ekwendeni, Malawi and Tiberias, Israel; then with National Mission as a deacon in Richmond Craigmillar, Edinburgh and, for the last 25 years, in Skene Parish Church, Aberdeenshire.

'Gaze and see what God has done and move forward with renewed faith and greater expectancy' are words which have brought me encouragement over many years when times were tough.

In 2011, my minister retired and the locum who came was not a team player. I had to adjust to a different routine while

talk to and share my anguish. I called a friend and explained my situation and asked them to pray for me while I took the funeral. Trying to remain calm and composed on that occasion was a work of the Spirit.

The bereaved family knew nothing until later. They sent me flowers and cards and such an act of kindness brought healing to my soul. During this sad time, I was once again supported by my minister, fellow deacons and members of the congregation.

Many moons ago I was in charge of the catering at the Church of Scotland Centre in Tiberias. The Centre relied mainly on young volunteers coming out from the UK. To cater for the

needs of the guests, the volunteers had to be trained up quickly for the tasks in hand and the kitchen was a favourite place to be.

I felt as though I went into lockdown

keeping a smiling face so the congregation would know that 'all was well with my soul'! Taking time out to go away for several days retreat helped immensely and restored my wellbeing. Thankfully, the vacancy didn't last too long.

The new Rev is a team player and a good relationship and friendship has grown over recent years as we support and care for each other through the joys and sorrows of life in 'ye olde parish' and also in family life.

I discovered how lucky I was to have the support of fellow deacons, minister and members of a loving congregation when a dear friend, who was also a deacon, died. I felt so lost without her and life just wasn't the same. The same tender loving care was shown when my father died shortly after being diagnosed with cancer, which was a big body blow to all the family.

Then, in April 2017, my niece died suddenly after going into a diabetic coma. She was 27. The phone call came before 9am as I was preparing to head out to take a funeral! I felt as though I went into lockdown. Then reality set in. I needed help to get through the funeral and the day. I needed someone to

For the smooth and efficient running of the Centre, I found myself putting all my energies into training and caring for the volunteers. Sadly this affected my own health and wellbeing and I had a sense that I was losing my own identity. These words from Isaiah brought healing and comfort way back then and still do: "Do not be afraid, I will save you. I have called you by name — you are mine. When you pass through deep waters, I will be with you; your troubles will not overwhelm you." (Is 43:1-2)

After all these years, I am still learning to remember that the light of Christ shines in the darkness and promises to be with me always. What a wonderful gift to cherish through 2019.

Alison Burnside, Kingussie Parish Church, Abernethy Presbytery

I love Job (both my “job” as a minister and “Job”, the guy from the Old Testament).

I do not love people who spout out “encouraging” phrases like: God is testing/punishing you. God has a plan and knows what he is doing. God is doing this to make you stronger. God is giving you these experiences so that you will be able to help others in a similar position, you are lucky God has chosen you.

These people look at me strangely when I say: if God is like that then God is very cruel. The God I know, and love, is not cruel. He would not, for example, let someone’s fiancé die very unexpectedly on Hogmanay just so that the bereaved person can “understand” — that’s a bit unfair on the fiancé!

Sometimes I say to God: You are lucky I am still talking to you! People ask me: How can you even go to church, never mind stand in the pulpit? Luckily for God, and those in my congregation, my trials and tribulations and times of

I love Job, and I love the Psalmists, because they reassure me that it is alright for me to shout, to cry, to ask: Why, God? How could you let this happen? And I know he will listen.

Yet it goes far deeper.

When Jesus heard that his friend Lazarus had died, he “wept”. When he prayed in Gethsemane he was distraught: “Father... take away this cup of suffering from me” and his sweat was like drops of blood. On the cross he cried: “My God, why have you abandoned me?”

So, I know I have One by my side who will not simply sweep me up in strong arms and carry me off to safety but — more importantly for me — will walk by my side, walk at my pace, put his hand out when I stumble and am weary, weep with me and wipe my tears, knowing and sharing my sorrow. He understands my despair, my feelings of alone-ness. He is there with me in the midst of my mess. And yes, when I come through the darkness, my experiences help me to be more

aware and understanding as I walk with those I meet.

Of course, God works with and through others. There is no way I could have come through all I have without the support of the Pastoral Support Team. Their details should be on the inside page of our Red Book

Sometimes I say to God: You are lucky I am still talking to you!

darkness have not been caused by my congregations — other than through a lack of understanding — but have been in my personal life.


This, in turn, begs the question: how much does a minister share with their congregation? I shared with my congregation after my first miscarriage. Suddenly, there were lots of women wanting to tell me about theirs. One woman was well into her eighties and, with tears running down her face, said it was the first time she had spoken about it.

It’s 30 years ago this year that I graduated from Glasgow University with my BD and began my ministry journey. That journey began by being told by two Selection Schools that I was wrong in my calling. And then there’s my personal life, which has often made EastEnders seem dull in comparison.

so we all know who we can contact and that they want us to contact them!

I have had invaluable support over the years. I thought my story was unique but have heard identical stories and know I am not alone (though it scares me that the issues are so common).

What I have not always had, and some of you might take offence at this, is the support of other ministers. I’ve had: Oh, I’m sorry, I had hoped to see you but I’ve been so busy. Feeling shunned does not help you to get strong.

So why am I still talking to God? Well, I know I am not alone. I know I am with One who understands. And God has given me support. Now, I try to be there for others in the way I would like them to have been with me. And, day by day, I am stronger, more positive and nearer the brightness. 

Rev Dr Cameron Langlands explores the value of sitting alongside those in pain as they tell their story

Peering into the darkness

‘Even though I go through the deepest darkness...’ Psalm 23:4

‘As you start to walk on the way, the way appears’ Rumi

It was a cold December morning when I received a call from one of our nurses letting me know that a patient, a middle-aged man, had requested a visit from a chaplain. I wandered over to the ward and spoke with the ward staff who then pointed me in the direction of Jim, the patient. After I had introduced myself and sat down beside him, he slowly began to tell me his story.

As I sat alongside him in the spiritual darkness that was enveloping him, he told me how his faith — a faith that had been so important to him throughout his life — had slowly melted away to the point that he felt there was little left. He was despairing as he felt that there was no God there to listen to him.

In that moment it wasn't about judgment or advice, it was about creating a sacred, safe space, setting apart the area we were sitting in and turning it into a place of contemplation where honesty, hurt and distance from God could exist, and where his story could be told in a way that was met with an appreciation for how difficult this was for him.

“In that moment it wasn't about judgment or advice, it was about creating a sacred, safe space... It was about sitting with him in gloom, peering into the darkness and helping him to see what was there”

It was about sitting with him in gloom, peering into the darkness and helping him to see what was there. It was about validating all that he was going through, knowing that I couldn't make it better, yet letting him know that I was willing to sit there and accompany him through the hell he was experiencing. In many ways, it is about consoling, about bringing the sacred stories that speak to the person which help them make sense of what they are going through.

This encounter reminds us of a number of things with regard to meeting people where they are, whether that be on a psychiatric ward, in the street, in church or at home; meeting them where they are rather than where we might like them to be.

Firstly, it reminds us of the uniqueness of each individual we meet. As we listen to their stories, it's about picking up cues, even the ones that we would rather not hear, such as pain, fear, worry, upset, feelings of hopelessness. It's about hearing what they actually say. As the old saying states: 'If you already know what to do then you have stopped listening.' It also reminds us that we need to see the person as real, as someone struggling with genuine difficulties, and not merely defined by their mental illness.


Secondly, we are reminded that, in addressing the spiritual, we are working with that spark, that thing which makes each and every one of us unique. The time I spend helping Jim unpack what he is experiencing is time that, perhaps, no one else can offer. Others may not have the time, skills, patience, insight or will to sit with Jim.

Thirdly, and to me this is the most important aspect of sitting alongside someone, it values the person for who they are in all their brokenness, distress, upset and fear. It allows the person to guide the conversation in the direction that they wish to go.

It would be easy to step in and start guiding the conversation into territory where we feel safe and confident, but this disempowers the person and lets them know that their story is of secondary value to our own. As Henri Nouwen once said, 'A wounded healer is someone who can listen to a person in pain without having to speak about his or her own pain.' It takes great powers of self-restraint to accompany

someone as they stumble, seek and search for meaning in the darkness that surrounds them.

In many ways, as we accompany those who seek our counsel, we are there to assist them to articulate those things that they struggle with, to help them find the language which escapes them. We help them to try to make sense out of the senseless and, hopefully, find a light in their darkness.

Rev Dr Cameron Langlands is Head of Chaplaincy for South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust. 

Rev Fiona Reynolds speaks to Susan Mansfield about living with mental health challenges in ministry

OWNING OUR BROKENNESS

When Moderator Rt Rev Susan Brown spoke movingly about depression during Morning Worship at last year's General Assembly, many welcomed the fact that mental health issues were being raised in such a prominent forum. However, at least one minister would like to see the Church go further in terms of owning our own brokenness.

Rev Fiona Reynolds, who lives with depression herself, has been minister of Monifieth Parish Church near Dundee since she was ordained in January 2018. She says: "Susan Brown spoken very eloquently, but in the end I still felt we were talking about people 'out there'. I didn't feel there could be ownership that people in that hall were living with this. We talk about vulnerability but we're scared to own it."

"We talk about vulnerability but we're scared to own it"


Fiona was diagnosed with depression in 2010 while serving as an officer in the Royal Navy, and was open about her illness and its challenges throughout her training for ministry. While she felt welcomed and supported, she sensed there were mixed messages about how frank she could be about the condition. She says: "I know my own experience of the illness has been positive in many ways, helping me engage with people and develop my own pastoral skills, but sometimes there is a reluctance to be open and honest about what it really is."

Fiona benefits from support in her ministry in the form of regular meetings with a spiritual director and with a pastoral supervisor. "The spiritual director has been really fundamental in helping me navigate for the last two years, recognising and affirming that God is working in me and in and through the brokenness of depression.

"It's a sacred space where I can honour what is going on for me at any given time as being both okay and also an opportunity to reflect and find where God might be within it. From a place of non-judgmental deep listening, the spiritual director can suggest Scripture and stories from the tradition which sit alongside what I'm feeling. I'm not a lesser person, or a lesser minister, as a result.

"Pastoral supervision is more about me in a professional role. I am able to reflect on things which happen professionally, and the supervisor can offer a bit of perspective. It helps me to see when my reactions are normal given the circumstances and not to do with the depression. If I feel I handled something badly, it might be because I didn't have the energy or resources at the time, it's not about me being rubbish. That's really helpful."

Fiona believes wrestling with her illness has made her a better minister. "When you look at the Scriptures from the perspective of someone who has lived with suicidal ideation, you see it quite a lot: Elijah, for example, when he's on the run and wants to die. There's a lot of brokenness in the Bible. In my own pastoral work, my experience allows me to say to people, 'It's okay to be angry with God — Job was', or to feel that God has deserted you — that's what Jesus felt on the cross."

She says more openness about dealing with mental health issues as ministers could make us more effective agents of God's grace. "I think the support structure in place now is a good step forward. I think I would just like the Church to say that ministers are people too, and ministers are as susceptible to mental health as other people. My illness isn't a lack of faith, or a sin, or a weakness. In some ways it's the opposite. It's something we find in our Scriptures and tradition throughout time. We should not be afraid to own that and lead by example." 

Ministers are not immune to the effects of dark pathologies. **Prof Leslie J. Francis** explores The Dark Triad with a focus on narcissism as described by R. Glenn Ball and Darrell Puls in their book, *Let us prey: The plague of Narcissist Pastors and what we can do about it.*

Seeing the darkness more clearly

“Christian theology is about what it means to be human. It informs the science of human understanding and finds a clear ally in the science of psychology”

Christian theology is shaped by the three key doctrines of creation, fall and redemption. Each of us is caught up in this dynamic process. The doctrine of creation teaches that the human community is created in the image of God. The doctrine of the fall teaches that the divine image has been damaged, corrupted by the fall. The doctrine of redemption teaches that the saving work of Christ is restoring the human community in line with the divine intention in creation.

The Church, the Body of Christ, is actively caught up in that dynamic process in the power of the Holy Spirit, and Ministers of Word and Sacrament are there in the midst. Theologically, we may expect all three key doctrines to shape what we are likely to experience in our lives as ministers.

Understood in this way, Christian theology is clearly about what it means to be human. It informs the science of human understanding and, as such, finds a clear ally in the science of psychology. Drawing on the insights of the psychology of individual differences, the theology of individual difference (giving proper weight to the doctrine of creation and fall) identifies three categories of individual differences.

First, there are differences that can be located in the divine intention of creation. According to Genesis 1:27, gender differences come into that category, and by extension so

might ethnic differences and some differences of personality (for example, introversion and extroversion). Second, there are differences of character that may reflect the corruption of the fall or the restoration of redemption (for example, pride and humility).

Third, there are pathologies that fracture human flourishing and need patient understanding and endurance, including those described in current psychology as The Dark Triad. As part of the human community, caught up in the theological drama of creation, fall and redemption, we may expect Ministers of Word and Sacrament to reflect individual differences across all three categories.

In terms of personality, some may be more or less extroverted or more or less introverted and may need to accept that it is how God intends them to be. In terms of character, some may display the fruits of the Spirit more generously than others, and some may strive harder than others to repent and to be restored. In terms of pathologies, some may be influenced by The Dark Triad more than others and might need to learn strategies for compensating for the effects of these pathologies.

In current psychology, The Dark Triad refers to three pathologies that may damage human flourishing, and of

which it is helpful to be properly aware. The three pathologies are characterised as Machiavellianism, Narcissism, and Psychopathy. Of the three, Narcissism may be the most pressing for ministers to acknowledge and for the Church to be prepared to manage.

The effects of Narcissism, and the damage it wreaks within churches, has been recently highlighted by R. Glenn Ball and Darrell Puls in their book, *Let us prey: The plague of Narcissist Pastors and what we can do about it* (Cascade Books, 2017). Ball and Puls characterise the narcissist in the following way: Narcissism is typified by an exaggerated sense of self-importance and power, rigidity, the inability to admit error, a sense of personal greatness, the use of power to manipulate and control others, an inability to feel or express remorse, and a lack of empathy for others.

Narcissist pastors are highly competitive and may initially attract followers but will often tear the followers down as a means of bolstering their own fragile egos. Thus they create their own enigmas: they attract followers as part of their deep need for admiration and often charismatic image, but then attack those same followers and drive them away, creating the need for more followers.

Ball and Puls then offer nine key insights into the style of narcissist pastors which they discuss under the headings of forgiving, envy, revenge, decision-making, delegating authority, impatience and inability to listen, deferential and preferential treatment, feeling threatened by talented staff, and needing to shine. Each will be discussed in turn.

Forgiving. Narcissistic ministers find forgiving those whom they feel have slighted or wronged them nearly impossible. This inability to forgive is fuelled by unquenched rage. Ball and Puls argue that 'narcissistic rage has a special unforgiving quality. It is striking how this rage can live on in the unconscious, seemingly untouched by events that follow the wounding situation.'

Envy. For narcissistic ministers, envy is the desire to possess what someone else already has. Ball and Puls argue that the narcissistic pastor is envious of those seen as having greater power, prestige or possessions. 'That envy then drives him to imitate or copy those things... to give the narcissist the same limelight and prestige, often by diminishing the envied person.'

Revenge. Narcissistic ministers are not only unforgiving, they also take revenge. Ball and Puls argue that no slight can go unpunished, and no good deed escapes punishment if it is perceived as a threat. Such revenge is often engineered in secrecy and delivered by stealth.

Decision-making. Narcissistic ministers need to control all decision-making. In order to control decisions, they will manipulate people and distort information. They will attack and marginalise those who may take an opposing position and apply power and authority to ensure that their view prevails.

Delegating authority. Seeing themselves as superior to others, narcissistic ministers assume that they hold more knowledge and possess better skills than those with whom they work. The tasks done by those to whom they may be obliged to delegate will be criticised and found to be deeply flawed. Ball and Puls argue that narcissistic pastors keep everyone else subservient while taking credit for their work.

Impatience and inability to listen. Narcissistic ministers see their time as being more important than the time of others.


They are important and able to listen to others only for a short period. They will then turn the conversation into a lecture that is patronising and condescending. Signs that the listener is disagreeing lead to an attack that is humiliating and sadistic, or to an abrupt dismissal. They may also abruptly steer the conversation towards themselves and demand affirmation and support.

Deferential and preferential treatment. Narcissistic ministers see themselves as special and privileged individuals who deserve deferential and preferential treatment. They will assume privilege and demand it. They will resent the occasions when that demand is not met.

Feeling threatened by talented staff. Narcissistic ministers will do whatever is necessary to destroy a perceived threat. Ball and Puls argue that such threats must be eliminated quickly 'and by all possible means, which often means all-out emotional assault' on the target. They say the assault is likely to be unrelenting and without remorse.

Needing to shine. Ball and Puls argue that narcissistic pastors have 'a deep need to be the best and brightest in the room'. They contend that, in this context, a pastor will build up his or her own profile by making astonishing claims about him or herself, while at the same time sowing seeds of doubt about the profiles of others. In order to bring the reputations of others down, narcissistic pastors rely strongly on sarcasm and cynicism.

Focusing specifically on the experience of multi-church rural ministry in northern Canada, Ball and Puls profile the trajectory of a minister to whom they ascribe the name Mary Jane Almighty (pp. 79-82). When Mary Jane eventually left her charge, 'the members of each congregation were emotionally beat up and spiritually abused'.

When Christian theology (shaped by doctrines of creation, fall and redemption) informs the science of human understanding, narcissist pastors may need to be embraced with compassion and hope, but equally compassion and hope may need to be extended to those communities devastated by their ministry. 

Leslie J. Francis is Professor of Religions and Education within the Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit, and Honorary Distinguished Canon at Manchester Cathedral.

He obtained his PhD from the University of Cambridge in 1976. His published works have been recognised by three higher doctorates: ScD from Cambridge in 1997, DD from Oxford in 2001 and DLitt from University of Wales, Bangor in 2007.

Professor Francis' research in religious education has been shaped by creative links with practical and empirical theology and with the individual differences approach to psychology.

The Pastoral and Vocational Care Task Group commissioned Professor Francis to undertake a significant piece of research for the Church of Scotland on resilience in ministry in 2017.



Headlines from *The Church*



CROSSREACH
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Rev Andrew Morrison, 27, has been inducted at Arbuthnott, Bervie and Kinneff Church in Aberdeenshire as the Kirk's third youngest minister.

The Church of Scotland's Social Care Council, CrossReach, is celebrating 150 years of social care in 2019.

A new £1million church on the small island of Cumbrae off the Ayrshire coast has officially opened.

Rt Rev Susan Brown has called on congregations and communities to "come together" in prayer and reflection amidst our changing position within Europe and beyond.

Dana McQuater (left), a 23-year-old Alloa Kirk member, has been named as the next Moderator of the National Youth Assembly.



Rt Rev Susan Brown invites congregations to take part in Thy Kingdom Come, a global prayer movement being held between Ascension and Pentecost.



Rev Dr Andrew Gardner has been appointed to Christ Kirk in Glenrothes having spent the last 14 years leading a multinational Church of Scotland congregation in Belgium.

A deep but dazzling darkness

Rev Dr John Munro writes of his personal 'dark night of the soul' and what he learned by waiting with the darkness

After winning the 2018 Man Booker Prize for her novel, *Milkman*, Anna Burns described her job as a novelist to waiting reporters. It is, she said, 'to show up and be present and attend. It's a waiting process... I just had to wait for my characters to tell me their stories.'

Anna Burns' patient discipline of showing up, being present, attending, waiting is what I think of as the core of ministry, undergirding all action, missional plans, administration and so on. It reminds me of when I was a chaplain at Stirling University, a 'ministry of presence' as someone described it (as if other ministries were not). One morning I decided to put this into practice and sat for three hours in the main student thoroughfare. I did more work in that morning than I could ever have done in the chaplaincy centre. I 'attended', i.e. was present, paid attention. I waited for characters to tell me their stories, and they did.

That was 40 years ago. Move forward to 2006 in Kinross Parish Church. I became gradually overwhelmed by the busyness of parish ministry until one day I found myself in the 'dark night of the soul'. There, I was once again made to 'wait' and 'attend'.

Maybe when you read that phrase 'the dark night of the soul', you feel defensive. This is not somewhere you would ever want to go. But that is not the way it works. If you find yourself in the dark night, you have not arrived there by choice. You may have been led.

This is what happened to me. One night shortly before Easter I woke suddenly at dead of night with the words in my mind: "There is no God." It was not a case of, 'I don't know if God exists', or 'I am not sure if I believe in God any more.' I felt

"The experience of emptiness of spirit, far from being the absence of God, is a divine way of catching our attention"

that I knew for a fact that there was no God. In my journal I wrote of 'a feeling not of relief but of fear and dread. Not just empty, but dread'.

In the morning, I was still the minister, but how to go on? I reached for two unread books on my shelf: St John of the Cross' *Dark Night of the Soul*, in which I read that it is God himself who 'leads into the dark night those whom He

desires to purify from all these imperfections so that He may bring them further forward.' Reading that let me hope that what I was experiencing was not a loss of faith but an invitation, however unwelcome and troubling. The other book was Simone Weil, *Waiting for God*, in which I found this:

"Attention consists in suspending our thought, leaving it detached, empty, and ready to be penetrated by the object... Above all, our thought should be empty, waiting, not seeking anything, but ready to receive in its naked truth the object that is to penetrate it."

The French word 'attendre', which we translate as 'waiting', has much more of an active sense than simply hanging around waiting for something to happen. This waiting means attending, paying attention, being present. When Anna Burns says she attends, she is not describing a passive pose but an attentive listening for that which is seeking her attention, which is hidden but present.

Back in Kinross that morning, I decided to stay with what was happening to me although I did not know if I would ever get out of the darkness. Anyone who says, 'You'll come out of it', or other seemingly encouraging words, is ignoring the reality of the darkness. It's not that you can't see the door; you don't know if there *is* a door.

For the next few weeks, between Easter and Pentecost, I listened and looked for any signs of presence in the darkness. I took to walking the streets in the evening with a book of Psalms. I memorised Psalm 139: "If I say, 'Let the darkness hide me and the light around me be as night,' even darkness is not dark to you and the night is as clear as the day." I read poems. If you are in this dark night yourself, you could try

Denise Levertov, 'Suspended', with the image of 'grasping God's garment in the void': "Though I claw at empty air and feel nothing, no embrace, I have not plummeted." And try most of R S Thomas!

Each Sunday, I had to preach. On the day of Pentecost, I said: "Be explorers

of the Spirit. Listen to the Wind and follow, wherever it blows." Then I added: "A few weeks ago, I woke up sure that there is no God, and since then God has been trying to attract my attention." There followed the kind of silence in which you know that people are really paying attention (that word again!). For an hour after the service, I listened to people needing to talk. Somehow, I had given them

permission to speak about own their experience, to say what they thought rather than what they ought.


What I discovered in these weeks was that the experience of emptiness of spirit, far from being the absence of God, is a divine way of catching our attention. Darkness, so easily thought of as the absence of light, is also the place within which even the smallest light has power to show itself. All we need to do is to *attend*, as Anna Burns said.

One of the ways I was helped when I was searching for a way out of the darkness was that I took part in a training course in Ignatian Spiritual Conversation, organised by the Epiphany Group, in 2007-8. Now, more than ten years later, having in the past done two degrees in theology, I no longer find

theology a helpful route for me to find God.

Instead, rather than work out any route to God by thought, I pay attention to my felt experience, and hold to the words of the 14th-century mystical text, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, when the unknown writer asks: "How am I to think of God himself, and what is he?" The answer he gives is: "Of God himself can no one think... because he may well be loved, but not thought. By love he can be caught and held, by thinking never." That last sentence is one I carry with me in my heart, along with a line from Psalm 63: My soul clings to you, your right hand holds me fast.

Be still and know that I am God. Be still and know that I am. Be still and know. Be still. Be. 🏹



John Munro was ordained as a chaplain to Stirling University in 1977, taught theology in Kenya as a missionary of the Church of Scotland in the 1980s, worked for World Mission as Asia Secretary in the 1990s, and has served as a parish minister in Arbroath and Kinross. He took early retirement in 2008, then worked as a mediator in church and neighbour disputes for some years before retiring for a second time.

GLASGOW PRESBYTERY: THE CHALLENGES OF SCALE

Scotland's biggest city is full of contrasts, and is a place of challenges and opportunities for the Church

With 122 congregations, Glasgow Presbytery is the largest in Scotland, stretching beyond the city limits into the towns and suburbs of East Renfrewshire, North and South Lanarkshire and East Dunbartonshire. Its churches serve city-centre areas and sprawling suburbs, from communities which are affluent and thriving to some of the poorest in Scotland.

The presbytery's size brings its own advantages and disadvantages. Unlike many presbyteries in Scotland, it has a full-time presbytery clerk and a team of administration and support staff, including a congregational facilitator and a youth development co-ordinator. However, supporting so many diverse parishes can be a challenge.

"The size of the presbytery does mean the dynamic is very different to some other places," says presbytery clerk Rev George Cowie. "It takes a lot of work to support individual congregations and make local people feel part of something as big as our presbytery in a meaningful way."

In common with presbyteries across Scotland, Glasgow faces challenges of declining congregations, vacant charges and making tough decisions about church buildings.

Mr Cowie says: "A lot of our congregations are becoming very small and fragile in terms of sustainability. This can be a challenge, particularly when there are important community projects such as foodbanks or thrift shops run out of congregation premises. They are important centres for the community, even though the congregation itself might be tiny. We need to think carefully about how to take things forward to make sure that work goes on."

In recent months, the presbytery has put time aside to think about its role. Mr Cowie says: "Whatever challenges might be facing the Church nationally, the presbytery is there to support and encourage what happens at a local level. We want to grow the Church in local communities. We have to think about the best and most imaginative ways of being church for the people of Glasgow."

City centre outreach

After a turbulent period, St George's Tron on Buchanan Street is building a new congregation at the heart of the city under interim minister Alastair Duncan. A lively cafe and projects such as the work of artist in residence Iain Campbell help draw people into the building every day.

New building

The church building at St Rollox, Sighthill, was subject to a compulsory purchase order as part of the redevelopment of the area. Currently meeting in temporary premises, the congregation hopes to move into a brand new worship centre and community building later this year.

New congregation

For some years, Chryston Parish Church has run a weekly service in the nearby town of Moodiesburn, between Stepps and Cumbernauld. The congregation has thrived, and the presbytery has decided in principle to raise Moodiesburn to full status as a charge in its own right.

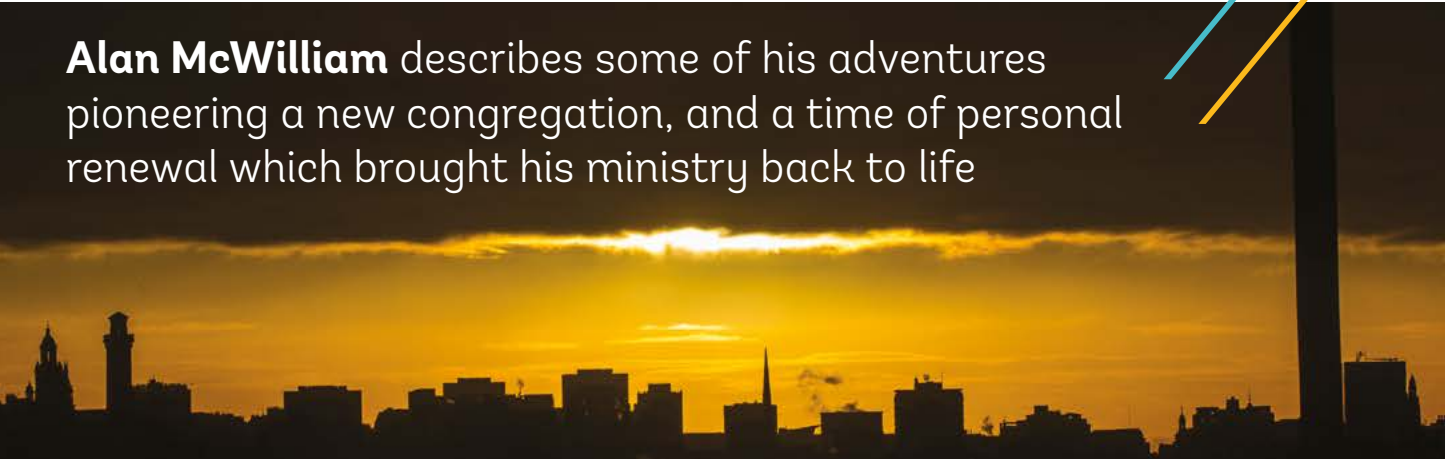
Priority areas

Some congregations in Glasgow's poorer areas are home to innovative projects and partnerships which reach out to refugees and asylum seekers and support those in need in their communities by hosting foodbanks, thrift shops and other practical forms of outreach.

Conference

Glasgow Presbytery kicked off 2019 with a conference aimed at focussing its thinking about what a presbytery should be. The event emphasised the presbytery's role in supporting and encouraging the work of the Church in local communities.

Susan
Mansfield
Editor



Alan McWilliam describes some of his adventures pioneering a new congregation, and a time of personal renewal which brought his ministry back to life

Making it up as you go along

Adventures with God whilst pioneering in the Church of Scotland

It was 1993 when the call came to come and help 're-establish a worshipping community' in Whiteinch, Glasgow. The job was an associate minister's post. The job description had clearly been written by a committee of people who had never met each other and ranged from 'industrial chaplaincy' through 'working with unwed mothers' (yes, that was how it was phrased in 1993!). But it was 're-establishing a worshipping community' which got my attention.

Quite quickly, I discovered that this was something about which there was not a lot of experience in the Church of Scotland at that time. Although I was brought up in a Church Extension Charge (Greenhills in East Kilbride), by the mid-1990s there really wasn't anyone I could find who knew about 'starting from scratch'. There were a few books, and in England a few church-planting courses, but nothing, and perhaps more importantly, no one, for me to connect with in Scotland.

I really didn't have a clue how to start or what to do, so I hunted around for support and input. And the answers came in strange places: Youth With A Mission (YWAM) and the Scottish Network Churches. I spent

a couple of weeks on the Frontiers Mission Training School at YWAM's Seamill base with people who would be planting churches into Iran, China, North Africa and North Korea. Essentially, I was learning how to do cross-cultural mission but, in my case, I was crossing the road rather than the world.

The Scottish Network Churches is a group of independent churches which emerged from the house church movement of the 1980s. They held monthly gatherings for people who were leading new churches (less than 10 years old) in Glasgow. They were very kind and welcoming towards me, despite being a little confused by my presence.

When New Charge Development came along in the late 1990s, Whiteinch became part of that group, and that was a time of great support and encouragement. I have also been immensely grateful for the amazing and wonderful Uno Society — not, as we were once mistakenly called, the United Nations Organisation Society, but a group of 10 who came together through Glasgow's Trinity College 25 years ago. This group, which got its name from raucous card-playing at probationers' conferences, has met every three or four

months ever since to provide friendship and support for each other.

Despite all of this support and encouragement in those early years, I always felt that the only way to describe what we were doing was 'making it up as we go along'. Often, it felt as though we were trying something that no one else was doing — sometimes successfully and at other times with spectacular failure!

The sense of always feeling the odd one out in the presbytery and at other Church gatherings led to times of feeling quite isolated and misunderstood. Pioneers tend to be pretty thick-skinned but I know that there were meetings at which I just didn't want to try and explain our latest 'new idea' to a sea of confused faces.

Don't get me wrong, I loved pioneering and still do. I loved the freedom of the blank page and coming up with creative ways of connecting with our community and sharing the good news among the people with whom we lived and

and found that God simply didn't come through in the way I thought he would or should.

Disappointment with God, and the unbelief that comes with it, is how I felt as I went off on study leave for 12 weeks to Iris Ministries Harvest School in Pemba, Mozambique. Harvest School is a missionary training school with 150 students from all over the world. We picked it because I wanted to visit a place where they were planting multiple churches (currently 200 a month!). Diane, my wife, wanted to see community development amongst the poorest of the poor, which is at the very heart of Iris's work.

Iris was exactly what I needed, even though it didn't feel like it at the beginning. For the first four long weeks, I was annoyed every day — mostly by young enthusiastic Americans who 'just loved' everything. I hated their enthusiastic, perky faith — it seemed so frothy and naive. "They know nothing about what real ministry is like," I would rant to Diane. I didn't realise that the Lord was gently wooing me throughout that time.


In week five things changed. I had the most amazing experience: visiting speakers started to pick me out of the crowd of students and share what they felt the Lord was wanting to say to me directly. These were words of encouragement and loving kindness, words which spoke of his love for me, his desire to bless me and give me hope.

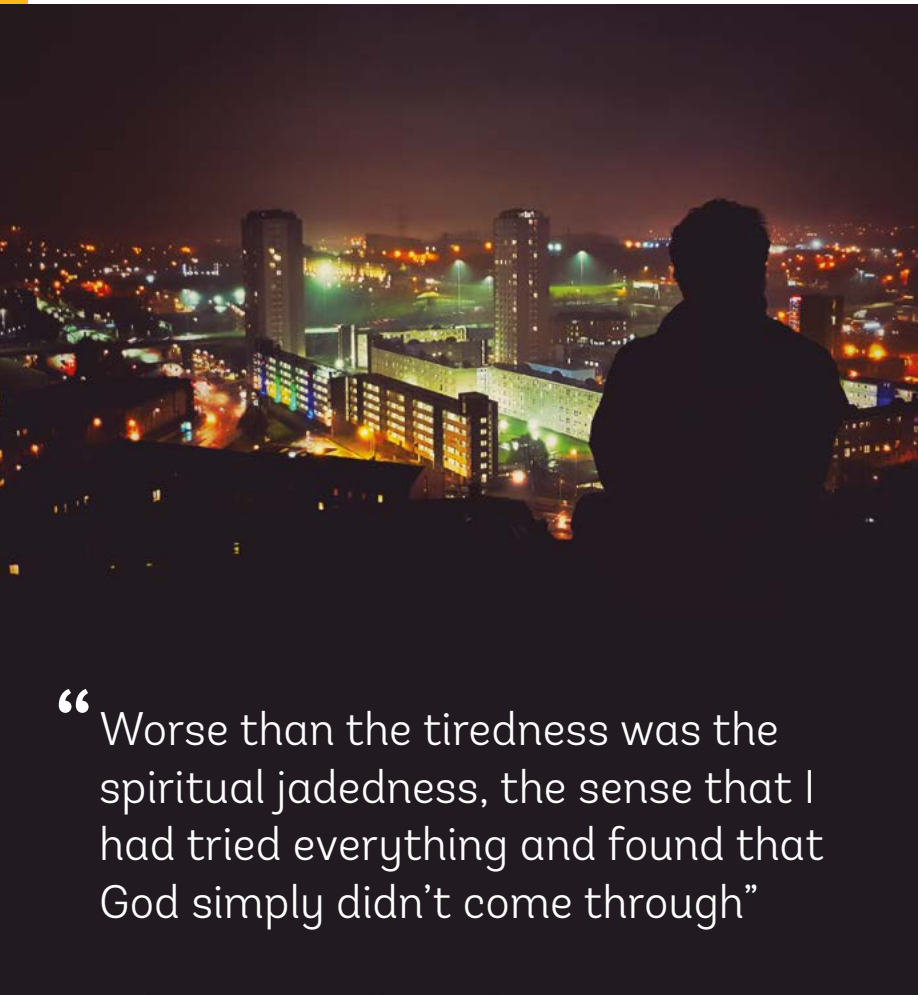
For the next four weeks, every speaker would do exactly the same thing, adding layer upon layer of encouragement. It got silly after a while when some of the other students would sit close to me, hoping that somehow proximity might cause this phenomenon to spread to them too.

After a few weeks of this, my heart simply began to melt. The weariness, bitterness, anger, disappointment, confusion and unbelief somehow faded. In their place, I found hope, joy and life coming to the fore again. I don't think I can honestly say that I found answers to all my questions but somehow that didn't seem to matter as much. I felt that, as Ezekiel put it, the Lord had removed my heart of stone and replaced it with a heart of flesh, which he filled with his Holy Spirit again. I was changed by the loving kindness of God, not his harsh correction.

Coming home was a difficult process. I had changed but everything at home was still the same. It took several months before I found my balance again, and lots of time with wise friends who helped me to talk, think and pray through what had happened.

I still have seasons of weariness, unanswered prayers and painful struggles, but the time in Mozambique seems to have marked me for ever. Perhaps we all need those times of wrestling with God to discover a new future ahead of us, even if 'making things up as I go along' involves a bit more limping than it did before.

If you recognise any or all of this, then know that the Lord has not forgotten you. He loves you, and I believe that if you will let him, he will love you back to life. 



“Worse than the tiredness was the spiritual jadedness, the sense that I had tried everything and found that God simply didn't come through”

served. It has been a privilege, but there have been times when I simply felt that I didn't fit and was tolerated as a strange ecclesial aberration. That can be very wearing after a while.

By 2008, I had come to the point where I had probably run myself into the ground. Fifteen years of ministry had left me wounded and deeply weary. I spent my down-time thinking about other jobs I could do and how I could orchestrate an escape from ministry. Worse than the tiredness was the spiritual jadedness, the sense that I had tried everything

ACEDIA:

a twenty-first century sin with
fourth century solutions

THE LONG READ

I was sitting in a clergyman's study conducting a ministerial review, asking about his patterns of liturgical practice. With a listless look he replied: "When Lent comes round, I've got to the stage when I just open a file." A response in pure haiku form, and just as expressive. In those sparse syllables, the minister, a man in his late fifties, showed me the state of his soul, one beleaguered by indifference, weariness and discouragement. Here was someone for whom vocation had slipped into job, seasonal cycle into mere repetition.

Listening further to his story, it was clear that this ennui manifested itself in two contrasting ways. On the one hand there was a lack of self-care, both outer and inner—in his appearance and his devotional life—and an ambivalence about his clerical identity. Like Maurice Sendak's eponymous hero, Pierre, he didn't care about anyone or anything, least of all his vocation to serve God.

On the other hand, an overarching activism was manifested, an eagerness to get involved in every conceivable project in the local community and beyond. If ministerial competence had been measured in terms of busyness using a 'diligence equals devotion' metric, his ministry would have been deemed a success.

But ministry is not calibrated in this way. Here, instead, was 'a hollow man', someone exhibiting the ancient sin of *acedia*. Or not so ancient. Evelyn Waugh, writing in the 1940s, called it 'the besetting sin of the age', while Christopher Jamison deems it endemic in today's society.

Derived from the Greek ἀκηδία, '*acedia*' literally means 'without care'. In the Latin tradition of the Seven Vices it was subsumed into *tristitia* or sadness, but the condition is more complex than that, involving rather *torpor animi*, dullness of soul. Medieval English writers termed it *wanhope*, a waning of confidence in the efficacy and importance of prayer.

To the Desert Fathers and Mothers, it was known as 'the noonday demon', after Psalm 91:6. According to Evagrius Ponticus, a 4th-century eremitic monk, those following the religious life often became restless at that torrid hour, disaffected with the disciplines of monastic life. Over time, symptoms would intensify into a sense of the meaninglessness of their vocation and a conviction that God would be better served elsewhere.

"The contemporary conception of acedia is of physical laziness or depressive illness, but it was a spiritual problem"

The demon of acedia is the one [of the eight capital vices] that causes the most serious trouble of all. He presses his attack upon the monk about the fourth hour and besieges the soul until the eighth hour. First of all he makes it seem that the sun barely moves, if at all, and that the day is 50 hours long. Then he constrains the monk to look constantly out of the windows, to walk outside the cell, to gaze carefully at the sun to determine how far it stands from the ninth hour, to look now this way and now that to see if perhaps one of the brethren appears from his cell. Then too he instils in the heart of the monk a hatred for the place, a hatred for his very life itself, a hatred for manual labour. This demon drives him along to desire other sites where he can more easily procure life's necessities, more readily find work and make a real success of himself. He brings before the mind's eye the toil of the ascetic struggle and leaves no leaf unturned to induce the monk to forsake his cell and drop out of the fight. (from Evagrius Ponticus, *The Praktikos and Chapters on Prayer*)

Acedia can take two forms, both born of despair: a listless inactivity on the one hand and a self-distracting activism on the other—what Dorothy Sayers termed 'a whiffling activity of body'. Such seemingly virtuous activism is well described by John Cassian, a 5th-century monastic:

Acedia suggests that he ought to show courteous and friendly hospitalities to the brethren, and pay visits to the sick, whether near at hand or far off. He talks too about some dutiful and religious offices; that those kinsfolk ought to be inquired after, and that he ought to go and see them oftener; that it would be a real work of piety to go more frequently to visit that religious woman, devoted to the service of God, who is deprived of all support of kindred; and that it would be a most excellent thing to get what is needful for her who is neglected and despised by her own kinsfolk; and that he ought piously to devote his time to these things instead of staying uselessly and with no profit in his cell. (from John Cassian, *The Institutes*)

These contrasting attitudes are exquisitely depicted in Hieronymus Bosch's painting 'Table of the Seven Deadly Sins'. Here, acedia is represented by a semi-somnolent man sitting comfortably by a fire, a dog slumbering at his feet. He holds in his hand a navigational instrument, mirroring the sextant and rolled maps on the shelf beside him; clearly a man in thrall to exploration. By these conceits are sloth and distraction both depicted. By contrast, the middle way of redemption through prayer and disciplined living is personified by a nun holding a prayer book and proffering a rosary.

A stage on the journey

Bosch died the year before Luther's theses were promulgated. From then on, acedia was evacuated of its spiritual content or medicalized; the contemporary conception is that of mere physical laziness or else depressive illness. But this late mediaeval painting depicts the eremitic and pre-Reformation attitude to acedia, namely that it was a spiritual vice, as demonstrated by the antidotes represented: the religious life, the rosary and the prayer

book. Situated at the opposite end of the spectrum from 'the carnal vices', acedia concerns nothing less than a person's fundamental commitment to spiritual identity and vocation.

In essence, acedia is aversion—Thomas Aquinas goes so far as to describe it as 'dislike, horror, and detestation'—to a deepening relationship with God because of the transforming demands of that call. It is resistance to the effort to change demanded by our new identity as a disciple of Christ.

Growth in holiness demands a readiness to be challenged, to be oriented away from the old self; the journey towards participation in the divine nature demands that effort be put into that relationship. Acedia, by contrast, wants the easy way out; it desires the benefits of the relationship without the burdens. It is laziness about love for God and what this relationship requires. The acedic person prefers the ennui of slow death by spiritual suffocation to the riskiness of spiritual growth. Rather than being lifted up by joy at union with God, the person so afflicted is weighed down, the divine good being seen as a burden.


Such disordered desires often become manifest when the vocational honeymoon period ends, when the repetitive slog of life as a minister becomes all too apparent. 'Vision conflict' sets in: what was expected, and what actually is, appear to be poles apart. At such a juncture, core beliefs begin to be questioned, accompanied by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and a diminished sense of personal accomplishment. Ministers find themselves 'going through the motions' or else engaging in a frenzy of displacement activity and bodily vagabondage.

This state of spiritual lassitude must not, however, be viewed as a mark of failure; rather such turmoil is a significant stage on the journey to spiritual maturity, a cairn along the path of growing in Christlikeness. Courage should be drawn from the fact that our forebears in the faith experienced acedia, and comfort from realising that there is much remedial wisdom to be extracted from their writings.

There is reassurance in knowing that they believed that, in the words of Thomas Aquinas, 'no other demon follows close upon the heels of this one [when he is defeated] but only a state of deep peace and inexpressible joy'. Acedia can become a place of sacred transformation rather than of despair.

Two transformative strategies are recommended in the eremitic tradition. The first is that of *stabilitas loci*, remaining in place to do the hard work of growing into one's identity in Christ: "The time of temptation is not the time to leave one's cell, devising plausible pretexts. Rather stand there firmly and be patient." (Thomas Aquinas).

'Stay in your cell' is counsel to live into one's calling, to face up to the 'terrifying good of God' rather than fall prey to the lesser gods of success, acclaim and approbation, those ever-present seductions of the ministerial life. It is counsel to follow the kenotic road of self-emptying, a letting go of ego and other structures which are assumed to give meaning. It is encouragement to face up to any resistance to Love's demands; keeping rooted enough to allow God to work on us and in us.

A person is silhouetted against a vibrant night sky. They are standing on a dark rock, looking up at a brilliant, colorful nebula that stretches across the frame. The nebula features a mix of purple, pink, and blue hues, with a bright orange and yellow glow at its base. The background is filled with countless stars of varying brightness.

*“Ministers find
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Prioritising prayer

Prayer, the Desert tradition counselled, forms the largest component of this 'staying put' discipline: faithful, regular, private prayer inspired by Scripture. So must it also be for acedic clergy today. Prioritising prayer in the midst of an ever-increasing workload forms the primary plank of any Rule of Life. Unless regular times for the work ('office') of prayer are scheduled daily, this discipline can be all too easily elbowed out by the urgent, the immediate and the seemingly essential. Prayer trumps activism, reminding us that our ministerial identity is primarily about *being* in relationship with God, not doing.




The second strategy that the eremitic tradition advised is that of living the reflective life. The disciple in the desert always had a relationship with an elder with whom to share the burden of acedia and from whom guidance on spiritual transformation could be garnered. The central practice was that of 'manifesting one's thoughts' to the older, wiser guide:

A brother asked Abba Poemen, 'Why should I not be free to do without manifesting my thoughts to the old men?' The old man replied, 'Abba John the Dwarf said, "The enemy rejoices over nothing so much as over those who do not manifest their thoughts"' (from Sayings of Abba Poemen in *The Heart of the Desert* by John Chryssavagis)

Today, there is ample opportunity for clergy to avail themselves of similar reflective relationships: spiritual direction, action-learning groups, pastoral supervision and ministerial review. Such 'safe containers' allow parched, acedic souls to open up to others and to God, enabling growth in wisdom and spiritual re-orientation.

Through the implementation of these two strategies of stability and reflective living, those troubled by acedia find themselves enabled to accomplish their telos of loving and serving God. Nowhere has the journey from acedia to vocational confidence been better described than in Waugh's trilogy *Sword of Honour*. In the aptly-named third volume, *Unconditional Surrender*, Guy Crouchback, who has manifested symptoms of acedia in his stasis and in his ardent military activism, has a moment of revelation:

In the recess of Guy's conscience there lay the belief that somewhere, something would be required of him; that he must be attentive to the summons when it came. One day he would get the chance to do some small service which only he could perform, for which he had been created. He did not expect a heroic destiny. Quantitative judgements did not apply. All that mattered was to recognize the chance when it was offered. 'Show me what to do and help me to do it,' he prayed.

Making a similar petition and living into God's response through prayer and reflective practice transformed the ennui of the clergyman described at the beginning of this article. May all who suffer from acedia likewise find rest for their souls and a reawakening of their true vocation. 

Canon Anne Tomlinson is principal of the Scottish Episcopal Institute, which oversees ministerial formation and training within the Scottish Episcopal Church. Following degrees in prehistoric archaeology, Dr Tomlinson did her formational training through St John's College, Nottingham, and subsequently studied Practical Theology at New College. She held a range of posts within the Scottish Episcopal Church before taking up her present position in 2014.

BOOK EXTRACT

THE SECRET OF SUCCESSION

In his book, *Lead*, **Karl Martin** mines the later chapters of John's Gospel for lessons in leadership Jesus' way. His surprising findings provide profound, honest and practical insights for both budding leaders and established ones

In a very old church in West Yorkshire, Blackley Baptist Church, there are some wonderful plaques and tablets on the walls. One reads:

"In grateful appreciation of the services and gifts of James Cartledge esq., who founded this church in 1789 and preached **for a few years until a pastor was appointed.**

Another reads:

Reverend John Rigby whose wise leadership, Christian counsel and faithful preaching were **largely owned** by God during his pastorate of the Church.

What will be written about you? What will be your legacy? Will you live for something that will outlast you? Or will you settle for pursuing and living for your own success?

In John 20:16–23, the leadership commission from Jesus that we witness is surrounded by, and grounded in, the

reality of a miraculous resurrection. Jesus is alive—the future is bright and certain.

This commission has us reaching forward and beyond. We are called to die well but we are called to look for resurrection. The call is to lead, laying down our lives that those very lives might be ramps for the leadership beyond us—the leadership of others.

The problem is that much of our motivation is still fundamentally selfish. It's all about you. *Your* leadership. *Your* legacy. *Your* memory. *Your* mark on the world. *Your* dent in the universe. Jesus models a 'beyond-you' leadership.

Here in John 20 Jesus meets Mary Magdalene. His strong message to her is 'Don't cling on to me' (v. 17), but rather give me away. Don't hold on, pass it on.

Then he comes to his disciples through a locked door into a fearful room: his message is 'Peace.' Peace for them and peace through them. He ministers with grace

"What will be written about you?"



and truth to Thomas the sceptic. This is the culmination of a three-year apprenticeship programme in which Jesus has been catalyst (example, model), coach (support, equip, encourage), challenger (permit, release, critique) and champion (relational cheerleader).

Jesus now commissions the disciples to do the same. To lead beyond themselves, for something bigger than them, for leaders who will succeed them and for a dream beyond them.

He commissions his leaders to a 'beyond-you' leadership, 'As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.' He breathes on them and they receive the Holy Spirit, 'If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.' (John 20:21-23). It's an incredible statement.

Same style, same appointing, same call, same anointing, same authority, same results... as Jesus. The same perspective, the same scope, the same trajectory. Beyond you.

My father, who baptised me, as he prayed for me gave me John 15:16: "You did not choose me but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last". That is my call, that is what I whisper in the moments that I want to quit. That beyond-me call, that 'fruit that will last' call, is the thing I remind my soul of when I am tempted to bow to the opinion of others or live for their applause. A beyond-me call. It began with him and belongs to him and outlives me.

If your vision is not beyond you, your purpose will be about you, your team will only serve you and your dream will die with you. If your vision is not beyond you, it is dependent on you and limited by you.

In reality, it is a to-do list.

In all probability, it is disappointing to God.

Many leaders talk about vision when what they mean is 'a plan', one that is limited by them, their abilities, their capacities, their imaginations and their lifetimes. Jesus' resurrection offers more. Jesus' commission is beyond.

There was one moment in my ministry when God seemed to say to me, 'What you are doing is not very good'. And it didn't make much sense, because I thought what I was doing was, by most measures, pretty good. I had a growing, youthful and passionate church. We had grown from a church of about 180,

and we were at that time about 700 people. And so I had this argument with God. I said, 'Well I think it is. I know you're usually right. But on this occasion... I beg to differ.'

And he said to me: 'What you are growing is a mile wide and an inch deep. You are one smoke machine away from a mega church (he didn't use that exact language, that's me) ...but, actually, this is not what I'm doing.'

So I started to investigate discipleship and missional communities. And I discovered something which has been very significant for me. What I began to see was that Jesus was amazing in every social space. He was awesome with the crowd. I mean, there was nobody like Jesus in communication with the crowd. Check out the Sermon on the Mount. He was amazing with the 72. I mean, look at how he sends them out: it's an incredible passage of Scripture. He was at his best with the 12 and the three, but he always wanted to be with the Father.

Now here's the interesting thing. There is a journey that's being made, always: watch it. Jesus was always trying to get away from the crowd to the 72, away from the 72 to the 12, away from the 12 to the three and away from the three to the One.

And the Lord said to me: 'Karl, why are you always trying to make the opposite journey?' And I think probably it's what most church leaders do.

One leader with a thousand followers sounds great, but the influence will last, at most, a lifetime. It will make a seasonal splash. But a leader who grows a thousand leaders—who each grow a thousand more—can change the world.

This is Jesus-leadership. If you have a vision that is beyond you, you can set a purpose that is beyond you. A beyond-you purpose means that what you begin to build may well be completed after you have gone. And more, what you develop should be built upon as a foundation when your leadership tenure is past. A beyond-you purpose means that those you lead will surpass you, supersede you and eclipse you. A beyond-you purpose results in those you lead not always serving your dream but developing and running with theirs. They may well leave you. And that's a good thing!

A beyond-you leadership requires that those you currently lead are free to make their own mistakes because you have modelled transparent success and failure to the extent that they will not make your mistakes. Your success becomes their springboard and your train wrecks become their schooling.

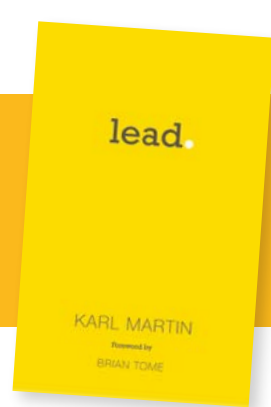
So how do you do succession?

Healthy succession requires focus. My experience in leadership tells me that busyness and driven-ness, unless intentionally harnessed in a beyond-me direction, will always suffocate a beyond-me purpose. I will have no time or patience for succession and I will trade it for superficial and short-term success. This is not Jesus. Should he have so chosen, Jesus could have done a pretty good solo job, but he knew something that we will understand only if we pause long enough to consider.

This article is an extract from 'Lead' by Karl Martin, published by Muddy Pearl in 2017.

www.muddypearl.com/lead-ascend-offer (Lead for £10)

www.muddypearl.com/ascend-leaders (Leaders Offer – 5 copies for £40)



The primary function of leadership is not to attract followers but to lead leaders. This is often quoted but rarely walked out. Jesus knew that if something was worth doing, it was worth doing averagely by successors, rather than doing brilliantly by himself. Leader, I know it is a tough teaching, but your competency, efficiency and brilliance at doing the thing that God has gifted you to do could well be the very thing that is killing the thing that God has called you to do. Your calling is to lead, and that call is beyond you, so you must make space.

For succession to be successful there has to be a relational process. Those I apprentice orbit around my family and my house and become my friends. Anything that is going to become a movement must be built relationally. If you get to the end of the process of releasing those who will succeed you and the relationship is still held together by structure, you have not done it Jesus' way and it is unlikely to last.

If Jesus was always making a journey from the crowd to the three, most leaders spend most of our time trying to make the opposite journey. Not only is this not the way of kingdom succession, it doesn't work! If you want a crowd, you don't get one by trying to get a crowd—you get one by building into the three.

It seems to me the real genius of Jesus' plan is his apprenticeship of the three. It is Peter, James and John who get the most direct input from the head of the Church and it is they who end up leading the fledgling church. Peter, and then James in Jerusalem, and then John in Ephesus end up leading the most significant centres in the early church movement.

Your leadership call is to love everyone you lead, but invest unequally. Everyone you lead has equal value, but not equal time from you. The success of your beyond-you call is dependent on your spending more time with fewer people. You will have apprentices—not favourites. Prioritising your three and your 12 will not make you popular but it will secure your legacy and build a movement.

For healthy succession to occur, your three, and your 12, need you to be catalyst, coach, challenger and champion. All four.

Many inspirational leaders catalyse well. They are great starters. They gather followers and energy around their vision, then perhaps delegate but eventually frustrate because there is no real release mechanism for succeeding leadership. It creates a one-generational leadership culture and only helps the intuitively gifted, high-functioning apprentice. If all you do is cast vision, you will create a culture of frustration in which followers will grow disillusioned and potentially take matters into their own hands. The best that catalysts can do is inspire. This is not enough.


Healthy succession is dependent not only on the ability to inspire but also to empower. The engine room of true

apprenticeship is fuelled and managed by coaches and challengers. They are the leaders who intentionally spend time honing gifts, developing character and growing dreams. At their best, coaches and challengers empower others.

To be a great leader, you must learn to be a great coach, but you must not stay only a coach. If you sit too long in the coach's seat you will likely create a culture of dependence. If you create an environment of protection for too long, or a culture of support too strong, those you lead begin to need you and depend on you and never grow the leadership muscles they need to walk into their destinies. You must help them stretch.

Young leaders need you to believe in them, even when they are not the finished article. They need you to advocate for them, even when you know they might disappoint, because there will come a day when they will not disappoint but make you proud. They need you to take a punt on them even when the odds appear long.

But, if all you do is challenge, you will create a culture of fear and insecurity. You also need to grow through the stages of catalyst, coach and challenger to become a champion. To champion is to operate with relational influence—you may have no functional leadership role, but you are still leading. From a distance. You are there to advise when asked, you are there to encourage when asked.

My prayer and my call is that there may be many sons and daughters who stand on my shoulders and eclipse my successes. And then make space for others. Make it your prayer, because it is your call also. 

Karl Martin is the Senior Pastor of Central, a church with a big vision for the city of Edinburgh. He is also the founder of Cairn, a movement of mission and discipleship, involved in training and building relationships with churches across the Celtic nations. Karl is passionate about equipping, encouraging and releasing individuals in leadership. He tweets regularly at [@revdkarlmartin](https://twitter.com/revdkarlmartin).

Rev Tom Gordon talks about changing approaches to bereavement care, and why it is needed more than ever

ACQUAINTED WITH GRIEF

No minister is a stranger to bereavement. At times, it feels like a constant companion. Every funeral brings a fresh acquaintance with grief, different in every situation, yet always recognisable in its colours.

Rev Tom Gordon, who spent 20 years in parish ministry, followed by 15 years as a hospice chaplain, perhaps knows grief better than most. He says that, in his years of ministry, he has witnessed a sea-change in how society deals with death and dying, and believes the support provided by the Church is needed more than ever in this important area of life.

While we talk more openly about our feelings that we used to, Tom believes we are less comfortable with death and loss. He says: "We live in a society where strength is valued over weakness, where coping is valued over continuing to have troubles. We are expected to come through these very quickly and have frameworks that helps us to do that. As a consequence, people can feel more isolated in their losses and the dark times—and I think that's getting worse."

The abandoning of traditions around mourning such as the wearing of black, and the trend for funerals which focus on a 'celebration of life' can have the effect of making those who are grieving feel even more isolated. Tom says: "You're expected to be strong, you're not expected to mourn or

publicly grieve. If somebody gives themselves to hysteria in that context, they are deemed to be over-reacting. We need to begin with a recognition that the dark night of the soul, particular in bereavement, is okay, it's normal. It doesn't mean there's anything wrong with us, or that our faith isn't strong enough."

As professionals, Tom says, it's important to remind ourselves that we can't 'fix' bereavement. "A person is as bereaved 10 years down the line as they were when it first happened. People have a right to grieve, and also have a right to expect that we will continue to journey with them through that period of time, so that they know they're not abandoned."

With some ministers being called upon to conduct more than 100 funerals per year, it's clear that no one individual can provide meaningful ongoing bereavement support to so many. The Church needs new models of bereavement care which empower and equip lay people to support the minister in this work.

Tom says: "There has been a failure to grasp the gifts of the

whole people of God in this regard, but it is changing. In some parishes, there is shared care, where people at a local level are upskilled and empowered within a proper structure where they are trained, supported and supervised. But the minister also has to learn to let go.

"I speak personally, here, and I'm sure it's the case for a lot of people in ministry, that we feel we're expected to fix things, to make them better. There has to be a recognition that ministry isn't about fixing, pastoral care isn't about fixing, it's about being alongside and continuing to believe that being alongside is a healing process even though it doesn't come to a fixed conclusion."

He describes a situation early on in his ministry as a hospice chaplain in which he visited a room where a dying woman was surrounded by her grieving family. He spoke with them but withdrew quickly, feeling he had offered nothing but



Susan Mansfield
Editor

"As professionals, it's important to remind ourselves that we can't 'fix' bereavement"

meaningless platitudes, but afterwards the family thanked him sincerely for his support. "People recognise that somebody entering into their world of pain provides a context for healing. I have to accept that it's okay for me not to know what to do. That is profoundly theological for me, because it's about engaging with people and believing that we are all held in the palm of God's hand."

He also emphasised the importance of support for ministers who are helping the bereaved, particularly in the form of ongoing pastoral supervision. Ministers, he says, like police or medical professionals, must sometimes live in two worlds. "On a parish Minister's Evening, you might go from planning a funeral of a child to seeing a couple about their wedding. You have to be what both of these situations need, and then you have to go home and let go of that. You have to process it in some fashion."

"We have to learn to live in two worlds at the same time, to live in the world of coping, of putting the masks on, of being the strong person we are expected to be, while also being alive to our own pain and sorrow. When I conducted my first funeral of a cot death, my first child was six months old. I had no idea what I was doing, it was too painful."

"It's not enough to say 'I'm going to be protected by my faith, by my personality, by my sense of humour, by the fact that I go to Tynecastle every Saturday,' whatever we might say. Pain seeps under our defences and we need to be prepared to deal with that through support such as regular pastoral supervision." ■

After 44 years in ministry, Tom Gordon is now retired and concentrates on writing and bereavement support work through the Acorns programme in Edinburgh and Stepping Stones in his own church in Port Seton. He is the author of seven books including *A Need for Living* and *New Journeys Now Begin: Learning on the Path of Grief and Loss*. His most recent book is *The Very Life of Life*.

60 SECONDS

with

Rev Gillian Paterson

Name: Rev Gillian Paterson

Minister since: November 2010

Minister for: Wellesley Parish Church, Methil

Education: Fleetdown Primary School, Dartford; Dartford Grammar School for Girls; Kirkcaldy Technical College; New College, Edinburgh.

Relationship status: Married to Steven for 35 years.

Family: We have one grown-up daughter, Christina, who works for Sainsburys. Both my parents and my parents-in-law still live in Burntisland, which is where we moved to when I was 16 and still regard as home.

First job: After doing Business Studies at Kirkcaldy Technical College, I worked with my parents in their newsagents business until it closed, then I worked for fashion retailer Burton Group, managing shops in Kirkcaldy and Falkirk.

My faith: I've gone to church since I was a wee girl. I went to a Baptist church in Dartford and the youth fellowship there was very influential. My grandfather was an elder in the Church of Scotland, he was a true Christian gentleman and I used to have amazing conversations with him. My dad was also a very positive influence on me. He was a prisoner of war in World War II, which shaped his life. He and I were ordained as elders together on the same day in 1988.

My life before ministry: After working in retail, I worked for the stewardship department of the Church of Scotland for 17 years. I helped over 500 congregations all over the south-east of Scotland. I travelled thousands of miles and I absolutely loved it.

My call to ministry: My call came partly out of that, I saw so many terrific examples of God at work in churches and communities that excited and inspired me. I was also encouraged to get more involved in my home congregation in Burntisland. But, really, my call came through bereavement. I sensed God working in my life and felt a growing sense of wanting to journey with people in similar circumstances.

I'm delighted... about the number of children and young people coming to Wellesley, especially our youth fellowship who challenge, encourage and inspire me. Some of them come from difficult backgrounds but they are really positive, determined young people, I'm proud of them.



My superpower is: I think I have two. One is my husband. I could not be in ministry without his support. He has been fighting cancer for four years and is absolutely inspiring. The other is to take strength from Jesus' ministry, because I'm serving in a place where I see him at work.

I love ministry because... of the people here in Wellesley. We are the most deprived parish in Fife, but the people here are so dedicated and hard-working and committed. There are huge problems here, but there are also amazing people.

My biggest challenge is: balancing the workload. The longer you're in a place, the more you become involved in, both in the community and the parish. I took over 100 funerals last year. If you try to do everything it's impossible, sometimes you have to sit down and reassess what your priorities are.

I'd rather be: swimming. I love swimming; it's my relaxation, my rest, my thinking time.

People don't know: I've been a Donny Osmond fan for 50 years. My husband thinks I'm the only fan left, but there were a few thousand of us at the Hydro in 2017—and a few ministers among them!



DISCOVERING GOD-GIVEN STRENGTHS

Canon Robin Paisley describes how coaching techniques developed in sport and business can also help those in ministry

One might suppose that the 16th-century Spanish mystic St John of the Cross and the world of contemporary professional development don't have much to say to one another. However, a conversation with Canon Robin Paisley manages to embrace both within a few minutes.

Robin, who retired in 2016 after 25 years of ministry, is one of the team offering both coaching and pastoral supervision to ministers as part of Ascend. When he heard about the theme for this issue of the magazine, 'the dark night of the soul', he was quickly transported back to New College where he first read St John of the Cross, to whom the phrase is attributed.

"As I reconnected with my understanding of St John of the Cross, I realised he was talking about a process of moving from darkness to light," Robin says. "The dark night of the soul, in his understanding, was not a place you're stuck in, it was a place you had to go through in order to discover the light."

"My understanding of coaching is that it is about helping people discover the light that is within them, the resources

within them, which I believe are God-given. It's about helping people realise the assets they have. It might mean transiting through a time of difficulty, which could be darkness, feeling our way, but we're feeling our way towards the light, to where God is, and to finding out how God has gifted us."

When Robin was first offered the opportunity to train as a coach, he admits he had some questions. "My perception was that coaching was largely to do with big business, particularly big-money financial institutions, I wasn't sure how it fitted into a church setting." However, he quickly realised that coaching techniques could be useful in ministry too.

Many of the principles and methods which are commonly used in coaching today developed within the field of sport. Writers such as Timothy Gallwey, a former Harvard tennis captain, and Sir John Whitmore, a British racing driver, pioneered ideas from their background in sportsmanship which translated easily into other spheres of life.

Robin says: "For a tennis player at the top of his game, it's a strategic thing. What makes Andy Murray a really good tennis

player is not the competence of his strokes, which is a given, it's how he is not put off his stroke by something going badly, particularly under the intense pressure of competing in front of millions on TV. If you're a racing driver, cornering at 200mph, you need to keep your nerve. It's about resilience: if you lose a key point, do you fold and collapse or recover?"

As coaching is goal-focussed, he suggests that it might be particularly useful in ministry when there is a specific goal in mind. "Let's say you're being asked to take on a new role: other people have seen the potential assets within you but you have concerns yourself about being able to do it. Coaching is particularly good if you want personally to own the confidence other people are placing in you to take on a significant ministry task."


He also uses coaching techniques in partnership with pastoral supervision. "Pastoral supervision is a regular practice of reflecting on your ministry and learning from that. It's about your health, your spiritual health and your ministry health. If I have been working with someone in a pastoral supervision relationship and there is an anxiety about a specific event, like a difficult Kirk Session meeting, I might suggest that we have a meeting where I wear my coaching hat,

to prepare for that event. Then, afterwards, I would meet them again in pastoral supervision to reflect on how it went and learn from that."

"My understanding of coaching is that it is about helping people discover the light that is within them"

He emphasises that those in ministry will draw on different sources of support at different times in their lives, but that pastoral supervision is a good foundation. "Ministry is not a level experience — there are enormous joys and enormous

challenges and worries. Regular pastoral supervision is a preventative system which keeps you well in the ups and downs of ministry."

He also advised ministers to 'pay attention to the regular recharging of batteries'. "Ministry is very draining. Give yourself permission to do something that is just for you, that spiritually lights your fire. In big financial institutions, people talk about 'going to the institute library', which is code for going off somewhere by yourself for a while. In that high-pressure world, they recognise that you need to recharge your batteries, and ministers need to feel able to do that too." 

COACHING: A 60-SECOND GUIDE

Timothy Gallwey's best-selling book *The Inner Game of Tennis* (1974) was one of the first to introduce a system of coaching which could be applied beyond the world of sport to work, business and life in general. Sir John Whitmore, who was a champion racing driver in the 1960s, studied with Gallwey and was one of those who introduced his 'Inner Game' method to the UK. He went on to help develop the GROW method, one of the most established and successful coaching methodologies, which he described in his bestselling book, *Coaching for Performance* (1992).

The GROW Method

Goal-focussed: What does the person want to get out of coaching? The coach and client define it together.

Reality: What are the facts? Why is this situation challenging?

Options: What could you do? Coach and client weigh up the options.

Way forward: We decide to engage with the best option and commit to moving forward.

Canon Robin Paisley grew up within the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and, after a career as an adult educator, became a cleric in the Scottish Episcopal Church, ministering in Glasgow and Galloway for 25 years. His last parish, before his retirement in 2016, involved an ecumenical partnership with the Methodist Church in which he also continues to serve. He is one of Ascend's panel of coaches and pastoral supervisors.

As the context for ministry grows increasingly complex, **Neil Dougall** adapts a familiar model to show us more about Jesus' model for leadership



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

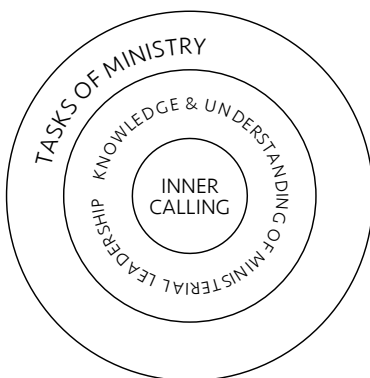
Energised from the centre

"You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." (Luke 3:22)

These words, spoken at Jesus' baptism, are much more than chronologically significant. They reveal what sustained Jesus. In the face of opposition, disappointment and pressure, Jesus flourished in ministry. He did not crumble, collapse or conform because his ministry was lived out of a profound sense of call. He knew who he was, why he had come and what he was to do.

Ministry today is exercised in the midst of change, ambiguity and complexity. Ministering as Jesus did, out of a sense of call, is vital. However, while this lies at the heart of ministry, it is not the sum total of it. Radiating out from this is a series of other matters.

In its 2018 General Assembly Report, Ministries Council offered this model as a definition of ministry.



Ministry begins with an inner calling; we hear Jesus' call to share in his mission. The middle circle describes the life-long practice of theological reflection and learning. The outer circle represents the outworking of this in the practice of ministry day by day.

I want to suggest a development of this model, adding two further circles and adjusting the titles of each.

Call: *This answers the question 'Why?' and addresses the issue of motivation.*

Ministry begins with the call of God to us. All discipleship, ministry and leadership is grounded in the grace of God. Just as the fishermen heard Jesus say: 'Come, follow me', we hear Jesus calling us. Our discipleship can never be anything other than a

response to the grace of God that summons us.

Call takes us to the issue of motivation. Why are we in ministry? Why do we seek to lead? Many people in leadership and some in ministry are there for the wrong reasons. They seek status or power over others. They are looking for worth. They are seeking to compensate for something which is missing or damaged in the core of their being.

Ministry begins from the position that God loves us and accepts us as we are. We are saved by grace. We are not working to earn anything. The leadership we offer is a response to God's generosity.

In *In the Name of Jesus*, Henri Nouwen writes: "Christian leaders cannot simply be persons who have well-informed opinions about the burning issues of our time. Their leadership must be rooted in the permanent, intimate relationship with the incarnate Word, Jesus, and they need to find there the source for their words, advice and guidance."

Through prayer and other spiritual practices, we learn to live in the reality of being called by God. The more we find our security in him, the greater our capacity to serve will be.

Character: *This answers the question 'How?' and addresses the issue of the kind of ministry we exercise.*

To be a disciple is to be committed to a life-long process of transformation. As we follow Christ, we begin a process of becoming like Christ. Character is one of the words that captures this process. Disciples are engaged in a process of character formation and transformation. By the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, we seek to be changed into the likeness of Christ.

All ministry is coloured by our character, by the kind of people we are. The leadership we offer will express our character. Our character will be critical in

"Curiosity, openness to new ideas and treating every day as a school day helps us stay fresh and relevant"

deciding whether or not people trust us, choose to respond to our ministry and accept our leadership.

Character addresses the question of the kind of leadership we offer. How will we lead? How will others experience our leadership? Leadership can give life, or be life-denying.

In *Reviewing Leadership*, Bernice Ledbetter explains that: "Leadership is not primarily a skill, although it employs skills. It is a way of living that suffuses everything we do and are."

Our leadership is grounded in who we are. The only way to offer consistently life-giving leadership is to pay attention to our own walk with God. The only way we will avoid the pitfalls of leadership is to walk in step with the Holy Spirit.

Comprehension: *This answers the question 'What?' and addresses the issue of content, that is the knowledge and understanding which informs ministry.*

We live in a world where the amount of knowledge is expanding exponentially. On the plus side, this means resources are readily available allowing us to become an expert in almost any aspect of ministry. On the down side, the expectations placed on us are much higher. Added to this, the challenge facing us is not simply of accumulating information, it is also to reflect on that information in the light of the Gospel. Only by doing so will we be able to use it wisely.

Comprehension addresses the matter of knowledge. What sort of leadership will we offer? What does its content comprise? Will it be well-informed, contextually appropriate, theologically grounded?

In his 2017 book, *Lead*, Karl Martin explains: "If you would grow, you must put yourself in environments where the truth is spoken, wrestled with and applied, and where your thinking is stretched."

Curiosity, openness to new ideas and treating every day as a school day helps us stay fresh and relevant, interested and interesting.

Competence: This answers the question 'How well?' and addresses the issue of quality.

If you are about to have brain surgery, you want your surgeon to be an expert in the anatomy and physiology of the brain. That, however, is just the beginning. You need to know that he or she has mastered the skills that are required to do successful brain surgery. You look for reassurance that he or she has practised and perfected the different practical skills that are involved.

Alan Roxburgh identifies this as being a significant problem the Church needs to acknowledge and address. In *The Missional Leader*, he writes: "In our experience, many congregations are in trouble because their leaders don't know the basic principles of leading people, forming effective staff, developing teams or communicating processes."

Competence addresses the issue of quality. How well will we do the various tasks that are involved in being a leader? Are we developing and learning?

There are no short cuts to competence. It is developed through practice and perseverance. We identify areas where our skills can be improved and address them. We ask for

advice and feedback. We avoid the traps of self-pity and self-condemnation. Gradually our skill levels rise.

Context: *This answers the question 'Where?' and highlights the importance of discerning the right place to exercise ministry.*

Leadership is always contextual—ministry occurs in a specific context. We lead in a particular place, at a specific time and among real people. The leadership needed in this congregation will not be identical to the leadership needed in another congregation.

Context addresses this question: where am I at the moment? Where is it that I can best serve God?

Sometimes, a person will be struggling in ministry. They will doubt their call, their comprehension and their competence. In fact, none may be an issue. It might simply be that they are in the wrong context, or that the context which once was right for them has changed so they no longer fit.

The question of context requires discernment. Am I a good fit for this place? Where does God want me to be? Where am I being called to serve at this point in my life?

In *Contextual Theology for the Twenty-First Century*, Stephen Bevans asserts: "Christians cannot engage in mission that is not contextual. The way we live as Christians—which is to live in mission—is constantly to live in dialogue with and discerning our context."

Context is constantly changing, so discernment is an ongoing requirement. As the context shifts, we need the courage to ask: am I still a good fit? Do I need to learn something new or develop new skills so that I can be equipped to keep serving in this context?

To be an effective leader, call, character, comprehension, competence and context are all essential. We need to pay attention to all of them. There is, though, a certain logic to this. You have to begin with the centre. If someone's motivation is mixed, how much knowledge they have will be unimportant. If someone's knowledge is lacking, how much they practise skills will be irrelevant. If someone is in the wrong context, it's unlikely that they will ever flourish in ministry.

In this Jesus offers us a pattern. At the Last Supper, he washed his disciples' feet. This extraordinary act was rooted in call: "Jesus knew... that he had come from God and was returning to God." (John 13:3). This counter-cultural action was an expression of his character. As well as being an act of service, it widened the disciples' comprehension—and came with an instruction to copy it. In this, as in all things, Jesus offers us a model for ministry in the context of change, ambiguity and complexity. ▀

Neil Dougall was ordained in 1991. Since then he has served as a Church of Scotland parish minister. He took up his current position as minister at St Andrew Blackadder Church in North Berwick in 2003.

Gathering in Glasgow on Conflict and Faith

Glasgow Royal Concert Hall and Adelaide Place Baptist Church, Glasgow
Thursday 31st October (09:00) – Saturday 2nd November (12:30) 2019

**Tickets from
£170 – £295**

Early bird and day
tickets available

Change, conflict and reconciliation are core to the journey of faith, to churches and to the world. Open to everyone interested in faith-based conflict transformation, this gathering aims to:

- respond to the hunger for reconciliation and peace in churches and communities
- develop and sustain the art of conflict transformation, reconciliation and peace building
- share and develop knowledge and skills to support reconciliation work
- strengthen the unique contribution made to conflict transformation by churches and faith communities
- uncover the peace-making skills you already have!

Keynote Speakers

David Brubaker
Sarah Hills
Place for Hope / Ruth Harvey
Brendan McAllister

For more information and to book

w: www.placeforhope.org.uk/events
e: info@placeforhope.org.uk
t: 07884 580 359
Charity No: SC045224

This event is eligible for Church of Scotland Study Leave.

Place for Hope acknowledges the support of Glasgow Convention Bureau, and that a Civic Reception is being hosted courtesy of The Rt Hon The Lord Provost Councillor Eva Bolander.



Gathering in Glasgow is a partnership between:



WHO IS WHO?



**NEIL
GLOVER**

Neil is convener of Ministries Council. He believes in the transformational power of ministry to change both the minister and those around them. His vision is of a council which exists to support ministry.

nglover@churchofscotland.org.uk



**ELEANOR
MCMAHON**

Eleanor is the vice-convener responsible for education and support. As an interim minister, she supports congregations travelling in times of challenge and change.

emcmahon@churchofscotland.org.uk



**GABBY
DENCH**

Gabby Dench is our pastoral support manager. Gabby is passionate about providing care for “caregivers” and firmly believes in the importance both of listening and being heard. Gabby co-leads on Ascend.

gdench@churchofscotland.org.uk



**CRAIG
RENTON**

Craig is our deputy council secretary, acting on behalf of the council secretary during any absence and with line management responsibility for the council’s various functions.

crenton@churchofscotland.org.uk



**JAYNE
SCOTT**

Jayne is council secretary for Ministries Council. She offers strategic leadership in support of the council’s development of its vision, strategies and plans. Jayne manages the work of Ministries Council and leads the Ministries Senior Management Team.

jscott@churchofscotland.org.uk



**RUTH
MACLEOD**

Ruth MacLeod is the head of communications for the Church of Scotland, managing a multi-disciplinary team which is focussed on delivering effective communication.

rmacleod@churchofscotland.org.uk



**HELEN
SILVIS**

Helen Silvis is communications manager for the Church of Scotland who works with people from all walks of life to tell stories that uplift and inspire. Helen believes everyone has a story to tell.

hsilvis@churchofscotland.org.uk



**CLARE
MILRINE**

Clare Milrine is Ascend’s project officer. Her focus is on project management strategy, planning, scheduling and oversight of various sub-projects and contracts.

cmilrine@churchofscotland.org.uk



**CHRIS
FLEXEN**

Chris Flexen is the design team leader in the Church of Scotland’s Communications Department. He works to provide a design service that contributes creatively to its councils and departments.

cflexen@churchofscotland.org.uk



**LEZLEY
STEWART**

Lezley is the recruitment and support secretary for Ministries Council, providing leadership for vocational guidance of ministries in the Church and oversight of the pastoral support services of the council.

lstewart@churchofscotland.org.uk



**RHONA
DUNPHY**

Rhona Dunphy is our pastoral support officer. Knowing that even people who work within the church can hurt, she aims to offer the care and resourcing they deserve.

rdunphy@churchofscotland.org.uk



**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.

*“If I say, ‘surely the darkness will cover me and the light around me become night’,
even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day;
for darkness is as light with you.” Psalm 139 :11,12*

God,
Surely as night follows day, so day follows night —
Such is the promise of which the psalmist sings.
So when darkness presses in and light seems to flee,
Draw me closer to you, silent and still, embraced, invited
Again and again to know that you are God!
Lord, help us do what can be done in this day.
You know us completely and understand
Our broken hearts, our fragile spirits and our anxious, fearful minds.
You hold and you bless our beloved common humanity
And we are thankful
 Thankful for the small things in life and for the big things too!
 Thankful for your knowledge of us, the scope and breadth beyond our measure.
 Thankful that no part of life or loss remains untouched, unreached, unknown.
Guide us, Lord, to places where love is found — grief-filled, embodied love
And —
*Into my anger, I invite the patience of the Father
Into my numbness, I invite the healing of the Son
Into my confusion, I invite the wisdom of the Spirit
And we shall live together
 I, in community with the Three in One. Amen**

Rev Ian J. M. McDonald,
Pastoral Support Manager (Maternity cover)

(*words in italics based on an anonymous prayer in the Celtic style)

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@churchofscotland.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