



Pastoral Letter - June 2022

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I have had a some time to let the week of the General Assembly settle in my soul. Like the reason for Presbytery reform, GA2022 has followed the vein of other recent General Assembly of the Church of Scotland by seeking answers of how to keep the denominational ship afloat. That we would have sufficient staff, ministers, finance to do the 'work' and 'mission' of the church, but of course we definitely want to do it differently, and we don't need all the buildings we've got. Oh, and how could I miss the continuing drive to keep the denomination in step with society and it's trajectory of ensuring the trinity of inclusiveness, justice and equality. However, the Trinity of Father, Son and Spirit along with the Word of God which are the source of all holy and righteous inclusiveness, justice and equality is not always at the centre of our church.

I don't have the answers to the many pressing issues of our denomination (they've been issues for decades but have been ignored for too long) but the following response is a reality check. **The church IS growing!** What wonderful good news that is - THE CHURCH IS GROWING.

The Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary indicate in their latest statistics that there are fewer atheists around the world today (147 million) than in 1970 (165 million) and the report expects the number to continue to decline into 2050.

Almost 2.56 billion people will identify as a Christian this year and by 2050 is expected to reach 3.33 billion. The two fastest growing Christian groups around the world are evangelicals and charismatics where in 1900, less than 1 million people around the world identified as either Pentecostal or charismatic Christians. By 2050, that is expected to number 1 billion!! Also, this year 93 million copies of God's word will be printed, up from 54 million in 2000 and 5 million in 1900. By the way, I can recommend listening back to Elaine Duncan's Report of The Scottish Bible Society at GA2022, always a hugely uplifting report hearing what the word of God is doing in our world (*watch back Church of Scotland General Assembly video highlights, Saturday 21st May, Report of Assembly Business Committee, 2hrs 22 minutes in*).

This Christian growth is real but doesn't tell the whole story. The sad truth is virtually all growth is taking place in Asia, Africa and South America. Christianity in the global North (Europe and North America) is growing at a yearly rate of about 0.13 per cent compared to 1.79 per cent in the global South (Africa, Asia, Latin America, Oceania) with Africa at 2.77 per cent, leading the way.

It's noticeable that growth areas include some of the planet's poorest and most repressive nations. What is it about the richer nations where many are unable to see a need for God? God's world is undergoing upheaval, a paradigm shift if you like. A shift to disobedience to parents, teachers, the law; distrust of information; disorientation where what we thought we could trust and rely on we no longer can; disease seemingly ever one step ahead of medical advances; disruption in all areas of life - family, community, work, leisure; and of course division. Everywhere change is occurring and not always for the better, and it's manifesting discontent, a malady from which the church is not immune.

But has it ever been any different. In Acts 6:1-7 there was already discontent in the early church, with the Greek believers complaining that their widows were not getting a fair share of the food compared to the Hebrews. This issue resulted in the creation of the office of Deacon. A new structure and a way of service that met the needs of all parties. Among the newly created deacons was Stephen, whose powerful preaching resulted in his arrest and martyrdom by stoning. Among the crowd, approving of the stoning of Stephen was one man named Saul, soon to be renamed Paul. Just think about the sequence of events for a moment: a fight over food started a chain reaction resulting in, among other things, the rise of the man whose letters make up most of the New Testament.

What relevance does this early church history have to the rapid and apparent continuing decline of Christian faith in the West and North and the opposing rise in the East and South? That belief in Jesus Christ and the rise of His church grows in places of turmoil and thrives in spite of uncertainty.

In the West generally, and definitely in Scotland there is less and less tolerance for the church and its narrow gate (yes folks, the gate is narrow despite what some might preach, though all are welcome). Concern of evangelicals is justified. But if we only consider our church family in the global East and South (where Christianity is thriving), our sisters and brothers are groaning under considerably worse conditions. It is no coincidence that in these places the church is most alive. The Right Rev. Iain Greenshields said as much in worship at the GA2022 (*again, watch back via the CofS website—Thursday 26th May*). So as minister of GMC in 2022, and having had a couple of weeks to consider the GA, how am I feeling, and more importantly what is God saying to me? Well as I write this I am in my mother's room at her care home, watching her slip away and waiting on the Lord to come. I'm praying alongside her, listening to hymns, singing along, and when I do so she responds attempting to sing, but no sounds comes. Trust and Obey is playing right now - *'Trust & obey, for there's no other way; To be happy in Jesus, than to trust and obey'*. TRUST, that is what I am hearing. Trust in God's goodness as my mum dies. Trust God's faithfulness in a changing world. Trust in God's saving grace to those who would turn to Him. Trust in God to build His church despite what might be done and taught in

contravention to His mighty word. **Trust and Obey.**

So, rather than fear the changes in our society, the growth of a culture in opposition to much of Christian values in the global West and North, perhaps we as an evangelical congregation should not be worried. Opposition gives the opportunity and chance to stand ground. Rather than create safe spaces or even depart from The Church of Scotland I believe I am called to simply speak the truth. Folk have already left the CofS and more will no doubt follow and I wish them every blessing, but it's not for everyone. I refuse to watch my words as I preach and speak the Gospel of Jesus Christ which includes the whole canon of the breathed word of God, for fear of offending anyone. I will stand on Christ crucified, who will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and who will rule the world, without end, and I will accept whatever verbal opposition may come my and our way. We should accept it with joy, that we might be worthy, as some human hands try to suppress the Word. But please know, the Holy Spirit is stronger, and of course 'Trust and Obey'.

To the glory of God, from your servant in Christ,

Pastor Mike

The GM3 Ministry which is the outward missional work of GMC to the community launches 'OpenHouse Café' on Monday 5th July. Initially opening Monday and Thursday 10.30am to 12.30pm, we will be serving great beverages (teas, coffees and soft drinks) alongside home baking and daily fresh soups, all with a serving of the love of Christ, with a listening ear and heart to support those in need.

WILL YOU HELP? PLEASE SPEAK TO PAULINE!!

And come along yourself to support us

**OPEN
HOUSE
CAFE**



'IMPORTANT STUFF'



Songs

FUN FOR ALL THE FAMILY
no need to book just come along!

Stories

Messy Church GAMES

Crafts

1st Sunday of the month
10am - 12 noon
Gillespie Church Hall
Chapel Street, Dunfermline

For information call: 01383 621253
or email: office@gillespiechurch.org

It's FREE!



3 July – Seaside Stories

make cards from the sea shore,

create your own lim-pets,

go land fishing,

search for the whale!

puppet stories,

learn new songs,

play games,



Date for the diary

31st July

Summer Communion Service

...at regular worship 10.30am, and also
a shorter service celebrating the Lord's Supper
at 2.00pm the same day

The mission of GMC ministry to our church family and our community needs the following:

- **PRAYER:** will you pray for opportunities to change lives for Jesus?
- **PEOPLE:** will you participate by offering some of your time each week or month?
- **POUNDS:** will you make a regular offering to the work of our church?

In need of pastoral support or wish to help or support the work of GMC? contact

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