ADDRESS OF THE MODERATOR OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND TO THE GENERAL SYNOD OF THE SCOTTISH EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Friday 9 June 2023

I am so honoured and thrilled to be here! Thank you for your genuine welcome and for your generous invitation, not only to join you, but to listen and learn from you, to sit with the wisdom in the room, and also to share some hopes and prayers and vision for our shared call in Scotland.

One of the greatest joys I have experienced over the years has come from intentional ecumenical partnerships, locally, nationally and globally. What a powerful living out of the gospel, to get over ourselves to get to each other – to be intricately inter-related as part of the body of Christ. When we stand together, walk together, add our voices to a growing call for justice that turns the volume from a whisper to a roar, that embodies the 'body of Christ'.

When we choose to expand our embrace, open our hearts and minds, widen our perspective and step out in faith with those from other faiths who share a vision for love and equity and peace, we are never diluted but enriched and enriching. I will never forget the COP 26 march in Glasgow, where a sodden and fully robed Primus walked in rain-soaked solidarity with sisters and brothers who know the depth of this climate catastrophe – the Scottish Episcopal Church made a statement that day, and you have continued to be a beacon for the church in Scotland and I am gladdened to hear of your desion yesterday. Thank you.

My hopes for the Church in Scotland at this present time are for us to embrace every opportunity for love to take hold mightily, for us to genuinely shake off the stuff that might keep our making a difference together muted or slowed, and for us to be empowered and really excited about practical bridge-building and path-clearing. It has been

an extraordinarily challenging time in the life of our shared planet home, the life of this country and the church and communities of faith have not been exempt. I said to the General Assembly that I went a little bit rogue with the Moderatorial gear this year, but there was a reason. Green is the liturgical colour for 'ordinary time' and it reminds us – throughout history, the world, the country, the church have experienced extraordinary challenges – and it has been the grit, the determination and the hopeful imagination of individuals and communities who have risen to those challenges.

These are challenging times. Ordinary time is extraordinary, and we know what is at stake here – all we need to do is look around us. There is a South African phrase 'Ubuntu' – it's best translated 'I am because you are'. The body of Christ has work to do, we have love to share, we have justice and equity to seek. We will do that best and most authentically together. Yes, these are challenging times but they are ripe for imagination, for collaboration and, dare I say it, for love. Real love.

To get more of a grounding, I re-read the ecumenical policies of the Scottish Episcopal Church and the Church of Scotland. They are about as far from the dry-as-toast, formulaic documents we might have cynically expected, as they could be, in my humble opinion. If we truly embrace the vision they offer, we can, no, we will, truly serve God and our communities. I love how they celebrate our unique gifts and traditions, while at the very same time they are blowing wide open the possibilities to serve Scotland and the world together today.

Working together to meet local needs and there are so many - food poverty, homelessness, poor access to financial services.

Working together to find ways of addressing the challenges of climate change, injustice, violent conflict. Christain Aid talks about the triple threat: Covid, conflict, climate change . We need all the

love, determination and faith we can muster to respond to that triple threat to our global neighbourhood.

Working together to offer befriending to those who are isolated or vulnerable or afraid.

Working together to provide worship that feeds the souls of our Christian communities in imaginative ways that sing of our unity.

Thank you for the Saint Andrew Declaration. I rejoice in the St Margaret declaration with the Catholic church and I commit my time as Moderator to supporting and exploring ways we can put the spiritual, physical and emotional needs of the communities we serve first and foremost in our decision-making.

If we start with the theological questions, our imaginations and determination will go to a different level.

I see that happening every day in our local communities, so let's empower that inspiring work. This challenging quote from your ecumenical policy document set my heart on fire. 'God calls the Scottish Episcopal Church to share in the mission of God and, in the light of this, to remove any obstacles that hinder our cooperation with our sisters and brothers in Christ.' Amen, sisters and brothers. And we will do the same!

The theme of the Church of Scotland's General Assembly was 'Remember who you are.'

The Church of Scotland and the church in Scotland are going through an extraordinary, difficult-but-necessary, evolution. And even though we hold to 'Ecclesia semper reformanda est'/reformed and always reforming, it doesn't make it not painful. Doesn't make it not scarey. But if we are to continue this vital work to ensure we are fit for purpose, we need to be clear what the purpose is. And remember who we are …

Remember who we are. We are part of the body of Christ – eyes that see the world as good, who see other human beings as stand-ins for God. Who see a beautiful world, yes, with broken bits, but beautiful! And one that needs all the love we can muster.

The body of Christ – we need hands that aren't afraid to get dirty or reach out or work for a better world we may actually, probably or definitely, never live to see.

The body of Christ - feet that walk the extra mile and the one after that, ones that slow down and wait and are in it for the long haul. We dance too because there is so much to be joyful about.

The body of Christ - here to hold up a sister who's struggling or sit with a brother who's afraid. With a heart hot with compassion and a voice that will not, cannot, be silent when people are shoved or subtly nudged into the margins, cornered there by greed dressed up as 'the way things are.'

The body of Christ – we are part of something so much bigger than any **one** of us, or one denomination of us, and we are blessed to be.

I'd like to end this part of our shared time with a closing affirmation, and then I look forward to spending some more time sharing wisdom in this room. Let us pray …

Salty drop in a deep blue ocean

Grain of sand on an endless white beach

Leaf on a tree in a vast majestic forest, petal in a sea of poppies, blade of grass in a field green and growing …

Part of something bigger – thanks be to God.

Note in a song, voice in a choir, instrument in a symphony of sound.

Word on a page, chapter in a story, character in an evolving saga …

Face in a crowd, one in a million, or a billion – or 7 or 8 …

Part of something bigger – thanks be to God.

When we don't see the beauty in the bigger picture, when we won't work well as a cog in-a-wheel, when we can't come round to the reality that the universe doesn't revolve around us, forgive.

Being human depends on others to be human with – so God help us embrace our interdependency.

Part of something bigger – how extraordinary! How beautiful! Thanks be to God.

Thank you.

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