

Church of Scotland

Place for Hope

Theology of Mediation

January 2013

'So chosen by God for this new life of love dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you: compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, discipline. Be even tempered, content with second place, quick to forgive an offence. Forgive as quickly and completely as the Master forgave you. And regardless of what else you put on wear love. It's your basic, all-purpose garment. Never be without it. Let the peace of Christ keep you in tune with each other, in step with each other'¹

1 Introduction

1.1 Place for Hope has its genesis in the Report on Conflict in the Church submitted to the General Assembly of 2008.² One immediate and positive result of the Report was that the Church of Scotland Guild agreed to fund an initiative for a three year period to allow what became a Place for Hope to develop. The Place for Hope website tells something of the story and describes much of the background.³

1.2 This is intended to be a theological statement in relation to the Place for Hope which reflects the consultations undertaken with those who are called to the rôle of mediators as well as those who have received mediation services.

1.3 Given that this was a specifically Church of Scotland initiative it was believed that a statement of the theology underpinning the work of mediation and facilitation would be informative and appropriate both for those who are practitioners of mediation and facilitated conversation and those who sought their services. The initiative is now Ecumenical and by no means restricted to Congregations.

1.4 While the ecumenical dimension of Place for Hope is encouraged and acknowledged, there is also the need for Place for Hope to take account of other faith traditions, in particular those of the Jewish and Muslim communities given that they, like Christianity, belong in the Abrahamic faith tradition.

1.5 Place for Hope has a rôle in enabling the voiceless to be heard. The purpose of involving Place for Hope is to leave disputing parties in a better place and, by the Spirit of God working in them, enable them to go on and be more like the people God intended them to be – a process of 're-creation' or transformation. In this way there is a prophetic echo of the biblical literature, helping people to allow God to shape their thinking and to reflect on their situation with a specific reference to the question posed by Micah 'What does the Lord require of you?'⁴

1.6 The Theology Group find the insights of Paul writing to the Church at Corinth to be helpful. Early in what is a letter to a church that has serious conflict among its members Paul makes it clear that he is keen to work with the congregation at Corinth so that 'its joy may be made complete'⁵

¹ Colossians 3.12-15 quoted from the Message Bible Eugene Peterson

² Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2008 section 5 pages 3/21 and following

³ www.placeforhope.org.uk

⁴ Micah 6.8

⁵ 2 Corinthians 1.24

1.7 According to St. Paul, hope is one of the three gifts of God which last forever⁶. With faith and love there is a tripod: that most stable of bases on which to build. Without hope, faith and love may not grow and increase and, therefore, hope is a crucial aspect of the Christian life.

2. Biblical Foundation

2.1 Conflict and disagreement threads its way through the Biblical narrative and human existence, as do difficult conversations between those of differing views. Such is the area in which Place for Hope seeks to serve the Church.

2.2 Looking at Scripture through the lens of the work of Place for Hope a key question needs to be addressed: What biblical narratives and images come to mind to inform our approach in relation to mediation? The understanding of the group is that no one biblical image would suffice to encapsulate all the aspects of the work of the Place for Hope, but some of the following seem reflective of the critical characteristics of the process of enabling difficult conversations to take place between parties who have contrary views or different perspectives.

- Abraham and Abimelech⁷
- Joseph and his brothers⁸, Moses⁹, Job¹⁰, Jonathan interceding with Saul and David¹¹
- the spies in the promised land some who see grapes and others giants¹²
- the Prophets – for example Nathan;¹³ Amos;¹⁴ Zechariah;¹⁵ Malachi¹⁶
- Jesus listening to and healing those with whom he engaged¹⁷
- Jesus teaching regarding coming to the altar when in dispute with a neighbour¹⁸
- Jesus stilling the storm and helping the disciples to face fear and uncertainty.¹⁹
- Jesus' words 'where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them'²⁰
- the motif of the 'opening of eyes' as in the story of blind Bartimeus and the phrase used by Jesus 'what do you want me to do for you?' There is a similar motif in Saul's conversion following his encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus.²¹

⁶ 1 Corinthians 13.13

⁷ Genesis Chapter 20

⁸ Numbers Chapter 12

⁹ Exodus Chapter 18

¹⁰ Job 2.11 and following

¹¹ 1 Samuel Chapters 18 -20

¹² Numbers Chapter 13

¹³ 2 Samuel Chapter 12

¹⁴ Amos 9.11 (see Amos 2.6 and following for the overall context)

¹⁵ Zechariah 8.16 -18

¹⁶ Malachi 3.1

¹⁷ St Matthew Chapter 5 and following. There are many examples of listening and healing in the Gospels

¹⁸ St Matthew 5.23-26

¹⁹ St Matthew 8.23-27; St Mark 4.35-41; St Luke 8.22-25

²⁰ St Matthew 18.20

²¹ St Mark 10.46-52; Acts 9.17

- Martha being distressed then challenged by Jesus²²
- the woman taken in adultery²³
- the farewell discourses²⁴
- the promise of Christ's continuing presence with us²⁵
- St. Paul's teaching regarding the inappropriateness of coming to the Lord's Table when there are differences among the people of God.²⁶
- Jesus' words to Peter 'take you where you would rather not go'²⁷
- Peter and the dream of food and gentiles.²⁸
- The Council of Jerusalem controversy²⁹
- the breakdown of relationship between Paul and Barnabas over John Mark.³⁰

2.3 Particularly insightful in the context of the work of Place for Hope is the two volume work the Gospel according to St Luke and its sequel the Acts of the Apostles. Especially important are his themes of healing in the Gospel and Acts as the Church finds its place, develops its nature and discovers its identity in a difficult religious and political environment. Luke's account in his Gospel and, later, of the post-Pentecost Church in the Acts of the Apostles deals with the topic of 'healing' on the one hand and on the other the need of the Church to deal with conflict and its self-understanding as the first Christians – Jews and Gentiles – struggled to come to terms with the growth of the early Church in a changing cultural context.

2.4 Another is the way in which Paul in his letters to the early Church addresses conflict and dispute and offers encouragement and insight. He does not even shirk an issue (among many) in which he is personally involved and, while it is unfortunate that we do not have Peter's response to the questions raised, Paul then uses that encounter to address the issue between Faith and Law³¹

2.5 Justice has to be part of the overall theological picture of Place for Hope. The work is not ethically neutral. For example, the cases of Nathan confronting David or Solomon settling a custody dispute³² or Jesus and the question of payment of Temple tax³³ are not simply historical narratives. They invite the reader to understand the world differently. This understanding offers the possibilities of an alternative perspective inspired by God as we understand God's nature in Christ. This – new – perspective should guide us in relation to Place for Hope and those who work to bring justice and healing.

²² St Luke 10.38-42

²³ St John 8.1-11

²⁴ St John Chapters 13-17

²⁵ St Matthew 28.20

²⁶ 1 Corinthians 11.1-33

²⁷ St John 21.18-19

²⁸ Acts Chapter 10

²⁹ Acts 15.1-35

³⁰ Acts 15.36-40

³¹ Galatians 2.11-15 and following.

³² 1 Kings 3.16-28

³³ St Matthew 17.22-27

2.6 There are other stories in which Jesus provokes or offers fresh thinking – recounted to reflect the importance of relationships and the ability to challenge thinking through story rather than confrontation; giving rise by what he said to self-reflection and cause to think again.

2.7 Consideration was also given to how the biblical narrative with its accounts of conflict might illuminate the need for 'Place for Hope' where people are encouraged to view conflict as an opportunity and not a threat. It should, therefore, act as an inspiration and model, prompting people in the Church to have the courage to engage in the difficult conversations rather than avoiding such conversations so that, in turn, communication might take place in a way which does not destroy relationships.

3. How do we understand mediation?

3.1 The mediator is called by Christ to the ministry of mediation. Reconciliation is the Spirit's work, but Christians who are called on to exercise their skills in mediation on behalf of Christ's Church share the ministry of Christ. Jesus' disciples were all so different yet they managed to come together as a distinctive group under the power and influence of the Spirit in spite of the differences in their individual skills, strengths and weaknesses. We, like them, are imperfect and are to be remade and remoulded in Christ.

3.2 Based on the Scriptures, then, there are some comments which may be made. Mediation is about enabling opposing parties to work towards a (positive) outcome. The mediators' ministry might be described as one of presence where the facilitator accompanies people in the situation in which they find themselves. This is a ministry of the 'non-anxious' presence who facilitates by presence and prompting of, and an enabler in, a safe environment where the facilitators are in charge. To adapt words of the Rev Dr Martin Luther King Jr,³⁴ a genuine facilitator is not a searcher for consensus but a moulder of consensus.

3.3 The idea of the moulder is then one which illuminates our thinking. Jeremiah used the imagery of the potter and his clay to provide a vivid illustration of the transforming power of God.³⁵ Similarly in the letter to the Romans Paul encourages his readers to be transformed by the renewing of their minds.³⁶ Mediators do not determine the shape of an outcome; rather they seek to participate in the transformation process the purpose of which is to turn a difficult situation into one which is acceptable to God.

3.4 It is important to emphasise that the mediator or facilitator is not the creator of a consensus but works with parties to mould consensus: an agreement with which all parties are satisfied. The task is about assisting people with opposing views to find a solution which enables a new relationship to begin. It is not about taking sides.³⁷

3.5 Consensus can come only from a solution which belongs to the parties involved – it is not to be imposed by the facilitator. Key to the task is enabling parties to discover what they really think or value by clarifying issues and checking out understanding; helping them to articulate appropriate choices and vision.

4. Why Mediate in a Church context?

4.1 The alternative is unpalatable. The fractured state of the Scottish Church's History tells its own story. Breakdown and heartache are seen to be the norm – rather than the exception – arising from the way the Church has, historically, dealt with conflict. Jesus injunction to take disputes to the

³⁴ The original said '*Ultimately a genuine leader is not a searcher of consensus but a molder of consensus*' from a speech given by the Rev Dr Martin Luther King Jr on January 14, 1968. He had visited Joan Baez and her mother in jail and he gave the speech outside the Santa Rita jail in California afterwards.

³⁵ Jeremiah 18.1-4;

³⁶ Romans 12.1-2

³⁷ Galatians 3.20

Church³⁸ has too readily been interpreted as requiring judicial process. In some cases that may be so: in others not.

4.2 Mediation in a Church context requires that we do so from a recognition of our own imperfections and our need of grace. Brokenness requires to be acknowledged. Once done there are then prospects of having the difficult conversations about our broken-ness with feelings of regret over that division, asking the question 'How long can the Church go on paying the price of division?'

4.3 There is a wider issue of course, and it is that unhealthy conflict in the Church destroys credibility in the public's mind. Thus we need to be honest about our divisions and be real about our intention to address them. The gift of the Gospel is such that the Church ought to be perceived differently by society. We are, as Jesus puts it, to be One³⁹, and a light to the world.⁴⁰ His is the invitation to a life of love, compassion and tolerance – 'as I have loved you.'⁴¹

4.4 The Church exists within a wider culture but it is recognised that sometimes the Church is disconnected from it – 'in the world but not of the world'⁴². What the Church does well is not communicated effectively, and it can be badly damaged by what it does not handle well. The Church was seen, originally, as a place of healing and it needs to reclaim this healing ministry.⁴³

4.5 One particular distinction from secular mediation services is important to note. At no time in the Church or in the work of Place for Hope, given our understanding of ecclesiology, it is possible for a person who is involved in facilitation to say 'It's not my problem': for if one person suffers in the body of Christ, then all are affected.⁴⁴ No-one involved in Church mediation can abrogate his or her responsibility to the parties involved, to the Church and, of course, ultimately to Christ himself. It is clear that, in the light of this, no mediator can walk away from a mediation and not be affected. It would be impossible for those involved with Place for Hope and we must acknowledge this as a real issue.

5 Mediation as a description of the task in a Church context.

5.1 This raises questions of terminology. The question requires to be addressed 'is mediation the appropriate word for what is being done in Church?' This question is raised against the background of faith issues which have the potential to complicate the process. Belief matters! What, then, are the negative implications arising from the fact that belief matters? It is suggested that what makes Church mediations different from secular mediation may lie in the distinctive mix of relational contexts, processes and theology of Church.

5.2 There is one Mediator who is Jesus.⁴⁵ What Place for Hope offers is 'facilitative mediation' rather than evaluative mediation. There is no judgement offered. Parties in disagreement are guided to reach their own settlement. The term 'agents of hope'⁴⁶ might be used to reflect the network of facilitators who have the skills to help the process of communication and reconciliation.

5.3 The aspiration of Christians is to allow the fruit of the Spirit to mature in their lives.⁴⁷ The very context which that aspiration offers creates the temptation to evil.⁴⁸ Therefore where evil exists it

³⁸ St Matthew 18.15 and following

³⁹ St John 17.21

⁴⁰ St Matthew 5.14

⁴¹ St John 13.35

⁴² Romans 12.2

⁴³ Acts 3.1-9 (the first post-Pentecost healing.)

⁴⁴ 1 Corinthians 12.26

⁴⁵ 1 Timothy 2.5

⁴⁶ 'Agents of Hope' derives from the title of Professor Donald Capps' book of the same name

⁴⁷ Galatians 5.22-23

⁴⁸ Romans 6.7- 7.11

must be acknowledged and brought under control.⁴⁹ We face the reality of evil in the church. There is little doubt that mediation would be inappropriate in some circumstances, for example, child abuse or repeated bullying.

5.4 Mediation should not be used instead of due process. For example, in cases of bullying mediation must not be used to avoid bringing a case. Issues of justice may require a transparent dealing, whereas mediation is a confidential process. It could also be that the judicial process might produce a decision that requires mediation (however defined) to reconcile opposing parties to the decision and its impact.

5.5 The issue of authority in mediation and the Church was also considered and the particular challenge of the exercise of authority in relation to volunteers. Authority is difficult to define and has at least two aspects: the first related to external power and the second an innate gift. Mediation is not 'power over' but 'power to serve' in order to create a new reality.⁵⁰

5.6 Such service might be described using some or all of the following as images of the process : Catalyst; Companion; Energiser; Enabler; Facilitator; Prophet; Sower. The process, however, is not one of arbitration and the vital aspect of early intervention preventing entrenched positions developing cannot be overstated.

5.7 Conflict can arise out of perceived injustice and through the facilitation of conversation it may be possible for justice to be achieved and peace restored.

5.8 No one was ever argued or bullied into the Kingdom of God. This means that the task of the facilitator is not one of offering solutions, nor is it about preset conditions. Jesus invited people to develop a new way of understanding by helping them to think and behave differently. Place for Hope seeks to 'go and do likewise'.⁵¹

6. The Ministry of Reconciliation⁵²

6.1 The Ministry of Reconciliation belongs with God: supremely in the life, death and resurrection of Christ. Those involved as mediators in a Church context are called and enabled by God for this ministry. It is a mark of an individual's faith and his or her life as a disciple.

6.2 What does the word reconciliation mean in this context? Reconciliation is defined as 'an end to a disagreement and the start of a good relationship again'⁵³ The insight offered is that Mediation is a process in which those who are in dispute work towards leaving the past behind and looking to a new future. Time and again in the Scriptures God draws a line under the past, through the words of the Prophets, for example, so that there is the prospect of a better future. There is a dynamic about that journey as the path to reconciliation is sought. Better than reconciliation marked simply by tolerance is the reconciliation that is the foundation of the transformation of relationships. Here is something of the sense of Paul, alluded to earlier, where mediator and mediated work together so that joy may be made complete.

6.3 Place for Hope in seeking that wholeness is likely to be engaged in a variety of areas of work: controversial issues in the Church, the challenges of presbytery planning, the challenge of those of differing views working harmoniously together for the advancing of Christ's Kingdom. Beyond the Church Place for Hope work is required in, for example, areas such as Sectarianism. Given that the keynote of the entire Place for Hope initiative is 'How can Place for Hope assist to achieve improvements in such relationships?' To address this question the Group considered three further key questions.

⁴⁹ Genesis 4.7

⁵⁰ St Luke 22.25 and following

⁵¹ St Luke 10.37

⁵² 2 Corinthians 5.11-21

⁵³ Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary

6.4 What does mediation contribute to reconciliation? Quite simply 'agents of hope' involve themselves in the task of transforming conflict : peace-making as they walk beside those who are estranged from one another for whatever reason. A strong theme running through scripture is that of a journey. Abram was called to go on a journey to a land he did not know.⁵⁴ God travelled with him through all its ups and downs.

6.5 This journeying motif was explored. Paradoxically this image had come as the Group reflected on its understanding of the Ministry of Reconciliation against the background of an almost completed Report. The exploration revealed some particular insights based on individuals' experience as well as, specifically, arising from mediation on the one hand and the discussions on the other. The task of Place for Hope is to journey with people through a sometimes demanding experience.

6.6 Such thinking led to the development of the journey as a model for the task of mediation in a Church context. This has a firm basis in Scripture especially because the reality is that some journeys, for example Abram's⁵⁵ relied on the response of faith rather than the knowledge of a destination. This offers some significant strength in considering the motif of the journey as a model of mediation.

6.7 The narrative of the Bible offers a journey which begins with Creation⁵⁶, continues with the Fall⁵⁷ and concludes with the Healing of the Nations⁵⁸. The latter remains a future hope. Christians draw such hope from another, different, journey which is described in one word: Incarnation. The Word became flesh and lived among us full of Grace and Truth⁵⁹ It has been with us since the day we heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth.⁶⁰

6.8 What is the added ingredient brought to mediation through those working with 'Place for Hope' as 'agents of hope'? The Incarnation is the supreme act which demonstrates the love of God expressed for a fallen humanity⁶¹. The Incarnation is perfectly understood in the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus. The post-Ascension fulfilment of the Jesus' promise⁶² of the gift of the Comforter⁶³, the Holy Spirit enables Christians, through the Church - the Body of Christ - to experience incarnation, to participate in it and contribute to it

6.9 What makes Church mediations different, then, is their incarnational experience. What makes Place for Hope different is that it is incarnational: an expression of the reconciling ministry of God in Christ to which people are both called and enabled as part of their discipleship. The Ministry of Reconciliation thus draws its hope from, and is expressive of, the Incarnation itself and that is what makes it a unique ministry.

6.10 Place for Hope strives to progress through a process which allows people not to be controlled by a difficult past. The Group found it helpful to draw on the Parable of the Prodigal Son⁶⁴ as a story that has the dynamic of a journey and the responses of individuals

6.11 The Prodigal began his journey in a pig sty. Recognising that this very unpleasant situation could not continue he decided to travel home to seek forgiveness from his father. The father saw him coming and against all expectations ran to meet his wayward son. The son could not have

⁵⁴ Genesis Chapter 12

⁵⁵ Genesis 12.1

⁵⁶ Genesis 1.1-2.3

⁵⁷ Genesis 2.4 - 3.24

⁵⁸ Revelation 21.1 – 22.21

⁵⁹ St John 1.1-17

⁶⁰ Colossians 1.6

⁶¹ St John 3.16

⁶² Acts 1.2-4

⁶³ St John Chapter 14 (especially 14.16)

⁶⁴ St Luke 15.11-32

known what was on his father's mind. He was soon to discover that forgiveness did not have to be sought. It was given by the father as an act of grace. The joy is complete – well not quite! The father had another journey to make. This time it was to the elder brother whose journey had been different. He rejected his father's grace and refused to attend the party.

6.12 Like the elder brother people can be invited but cannot be coerced into reconciliation or into transformation. This is so very well illustrated by the story of the rich young ruler⁶⁵ which is germane. He asked his question Jesus looked lovingly then answered the question. The young man couldn't accept the grace offered. He turned and walked away. Jesus did not run after him.

7 Conclusion

7.1 The Group reflecting on the Theological underpinning of Place for Hope's work recognise that this Report is a work in progress and will need revision as Place for Hope develops. What is offered is both tentative and suggestive. It is not prescriptive. No doubt it will grow as others' insights and experiences are added to the collective understanding.

7.2 Place for Hope seeks to be an agency of the Church serving to offer better ways towards healing and well-being: that wholeness expressed by the Hebrew prayer 'Shalom'⁶⁶. It is profoundly a ministry of and a witness to the Gospel. The distinctive theology that it strives to express in action is cohesive rather than divisive and applies across the theological spectrum.

7.3 Jesus in his farewell discourse used language like 'not as the world gives'⁶⁷ and John offers 'grace and mercy and peace'⁶⁸ – 'the peace that passes human understanding'⁶⁹ – which comes from Christ alone.

7.4 Kenneth Cloke, Director of the Center for Dispute Resolution, challenges all who engage in the task of reconciliation with this insight 'there are no sides in a conflict there is only us'⁷⁰. It is a hope – and a prayer!

7.5 All who strive to engage in the ministry of reconciliation⁷¹ have a key asset which is the presence and power of the Holy Spirit – Christ's gift to the Church – who is at once our fuel and energy, our guide and inspiration.

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Members of the Place for Hope Theology Group

Rev Iain Goring	Interim Minister and Place for Hope Mediator
Ms Elspeth McCallum	Elder, Counsellor and Place for Hope Mediator
Rev E Lorna Hood	Moderator Designate and Place for Hope Mediator
Rev Dr Gordon A McCracken	Interim Minister and Place for Hope Mediator
Rev Nigel J Robb	Secretary and Acting General Secretary Mission and Discipleship Council
Very Rev John C Christie	Convener and Place for Hope Mediator

⁶⁵ St Matthew 19.16-26; St Mark 10:17-31; St Luke 18:18-30

⁶⁶ Interestingly Shalom comes from the same root as the Arabic word Salaam an opening greeting a prayer, a 'hello'

⁶⁷ St John 14.27

⁶⁸ 2 John 1.3

⁶⁹ Philippians 4.7

⁷⁰ from a speech to the closing Session of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland May 2010
Kenneth Cloke's website is at <http://www.kennethcloke.com>

⁷¹ 2 Corinthians 5.11-21

