

*LOVE IN ACTION**1 Corinthians 13*

Social Care Sunday at the beginning of CrossReach Week and my first task is a very pleasant one: as Moderator to bring you and all CrossReach staff the greetings, prayers and good wishes of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.

With the great variety of services and support CrossReach offers to people across the age range, and throughout every part of Scotland, it goes without saying that your contribution to the on-going health, life and vitality of our church, and to the lives of so many individuals and families, is immense.

Yet it is worth saying – and as Moderator I am proud to say it – your contribution to the health and well-being of so many people of Scotland is immense.

As much as I am proud to say it, I hope you are proud to hear it being said, and to know you belong and play an active part in the work of this outstanding organisation.

Of course as Christian people it is not our custom to boast of our achievements – St Paul is at some pains to remind us that our only boast should be in Christ our Lord.

And of course living and working in Scotland, it is not our custom to boast of our achievements either – we are won't to cut people down to size, especially people who have a 'guid conceit' of themselves!

So put the two together – Christian teaching and a cultural reticence to blow our own trumpet – and add to it the very sensitive and often intensely private and personal nature of much of the work in which you are engaged – and we end up with CrossReach being described as one of the Church of Scotland's best kept secrets.

Beginning with this afternoon's celebration and its theme of celebrating the social care mission of the church, CrossReach week creates the opportunity to showcase some of the good things CrossReach is doing.

It is a chance to highlight some of its achievements and bring them to the attention of a wider audience throughout the church and the general public.

It is a chance to look at some of the considerable challenges CrossReach is facing in such a changed and fast changing environment.

And it gives me the opportunity to say on behalf of the wider church just how much you are valued and how much the work you do is appreciated.

As Moderator, our travels this week will take us from Perth to Garelochhead to Glasgow to Lennoxton to Polmont to Shetland, back to Glasgow and then to Edinburgh – goodness me, I am exhausted already – but Margaret and I are looking forward to visiting such a wide cross section of the services CrossReach provides, including services for people who are homeless,

an issue which is very dear to my own heart, to meeting as many members of staff as possible – and if and when appropriate some of the people CrossReach supports.

The pair of us are glad to offer you our support and encouragement, and to assure you of our thoughts and prayers for the work you do in the service of the church and in the name of Christ our Lord.

Can I make a confession?

This year's General Assembly was the first time I have ever read the Blue Book from cover to cover – indeed I read it twice.

Now for those of you who don't know what the Blue Book is – and just in case you think my confession sounds more interesting than it really is – the Blue Book is the volume of reports presented to May's General Assembly by the various Councils and Committees of the Church of Scotland.

The good news is I have just discovered the best cure for insomnia, because reading through the Blue Book twice really ought to come with a health warning.

In any other year however – and this tells you a great deal about where my own interests lie – when the Blue Book thudded through the Manse letterbox the first report I would read was the CrossReach report – closely followed by the Guild report.

Why?

As the people of my congregation at Cramond Kirk know only too well, I will often tell them it is never enough to ask what does this Bible passage or parable or particular doctrine commit us to believing, you also have to ask; how does it commit us to live?

During my years of ministry, it has been CrossReach and the Guild reports which have given me an insight not just into what the Church of Scotland stands for, its views on any number of issues and subjects, but what the Christian faith looks like when it lives and breathes.

The parable of the Good Samaritan might teach me not to walk past on the other side of someone's need but CrossReach's support for people who are homeless shows me what it looks like when you stop to help.

The story of blind Bartimaeus might teach me about Jesus capacity to notice people vulnerable and on the edge of things but the Guild's work on human trafficking or female genital mutilation shows me what noticing people on the edge looks like today.

Jesus accepting a drink of water from a Samaritan woman might say something about boundaries and barriers but in a culture which values celebrity and youthfulness, CrossReach's work with older people, especially people with a diagnosis of dementia, helps me address my own boundaries and barriers.

In other words, as well as being one of the Councils of the Church of Scotland with a duty to write a report for the General Assembly, CrossReach enables the Church to be the Church, the living, breathing body of Christ in Scotland today.

And as the American theologian Stanley Hauerwas has written, when it is at its best the church is a very odd creature indeed (Radical Aliens).

Troubled and difficult children and young people.....women and men in prison because they have broken the law.....people addicted to alcohol or some other substance and who have caused a great deal of harm and pain to themselves and to their family and friends.....people who for whatever reason have ended up homeless.....people who have grown old and frail, incontinent and no longer able to remember who they are or what to do.....who in their right mind would want to make any of these people their core business?

Well, we do, CrossReach does, the Church does, because coming alongside and offering care, support and love to people whatever their circumstance and whatever their need is the Church's core business – and because it is your core business, CrossReach helps the Church be the Church.

In the latest edition of CrossReach News, Peter Bailey wrote about good not being good enough, and of how he was so impressed by the many examples he saw of staff already providing good services but looking for ways to make them better.

He also described a constant desire for new and innovative ideas which would lead to better care and better outcomes for the people CrossReach supports.

One of the reasons I liked Peter's article is because the message about good not being good enough resonates with one of the most important messages in the New Testament.

As he addressed the church in the Greek port of Corinth, St Paul had a great deal to say about different aspects of church life.

Paul spoke about divisions in the church, about marriage, about the care of people widowed, about idolatry, about how the Lord's Supper should be celebrated, about the gifts of the Spirit and about how he liked to imagine the church as a body with many parts and Christ as the head.

And having offered lots of practical and helpful advice Paul then said: let me show you a more excellent way.....the way of love.

So, as CrossReach week begins, let me paraphrase St Paul and say that for all the business plans agreed, for all the care plans put in place, for all the budgets approved, for all the maintenance contracts signed, for all the grant applications completed, for all the training programmes introduced, for all the risk analysis completed, for all the staff handbooks written, for all the awards handed out, for all the myriad things which need to be done to keep

such a complex organisation as CrossReach functioning, and last but by no means least for all the Assembly reports written and presentedif we have not love?

It is never enough to know what a particular passage or parable or doctrine commits us to believing, it is also vital to know how it commits us to living.

If the Bible teaches me God is love, then CrossReach reveals love in action, love when it gets its sleeves rolled up and its hands dirty.

Best of all, CrossReach show us what it looks like to live God's more excellent way.

Now unto him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end, Amen.