

Launch Service for the Scottish Episcopal Institute

St Ninian's Cathedral, Perth

Sunday 4 October 2015

This is a moment of celebration and hope. The launch of the Scottish Episcopal Institute is an important moment for our church. We have planned, worked and prayed. Now we celebrate with joy.

But ministry often isn't like that. In my experience, many of the moments which have spoken to me of the movement of the spirit of God in the hearts of his people have been half-whispered. They have been the words of people – about to turn the door handle on their way out – standing in the relatives' room at the hospital – facing the breakdown of relationship - half understanding the way in which we are caught up in the working of God's grace. It's people who find themselves in the most challenging of circumstances saying almost without realising it the words of forgiveness, sacrifice and hope.

But now and again a moment comes along – a moment at which we can celebrate and give thanks because something rather wonderful has come about. As William Barclay once said, we stand on the shoulders of our parents. As we mark the launch of the Scottish Episcopal Institute, we carry forward some of the story of Coates Hall and of TISEC – but we write a new chapter which is about our understanding of ministry in 2015 and onwards and we place that chapter in the ongoing story of the vocation of the SEC in Scotland in 21st century. This development has come about with extraordinary speed. It has seemed right. The Institute and its staff have the confidence and trust of our church. What we see today gives us hope for the future of our church.

The readings today are carefully chosen. Joshua is commissioned by Moses 'so that the congregation of the Lord may not be like sheep without a shepherd'. The church may line up with Apollos or Paul – but we are all servants and it is God who gives the growth. And we hear Jesus in the synagogue reading the words of Isaiah – proclaiming God's presence with the poor, the prisoners, the blind, and the oppressed. Our calling is to be servants. What we do is about God and not us. However hard we work, however great our learning or our skills, it is God who gives the growth.

Staff and students have just attended the first Residential Weekend of the academic year. You are a special kind of community. The 'strap line' is 'Forming People for Ministry' I sometimes feel a little flat-footed in the presence of those who are training for ministry. For it is a time when you live with a heightened sense of your calling – and you are in prayerful dialogue with it. So the forming of people for ministry tests and develops the very human vessel of temperament and character in

which vocation is experienced and held. It means the developing of skills and talents. It means over and over again shaping the spiritual life which says that 'this is not about us'. It prepares those who are committing their lives to ministry for the possibility – no certainty – that ministry will bring them at times testing and pain almost beyond endurance just as it will bring joy and fulfilment beyond expectation.

This community of learning is doubly special because it expresses the life of the Scottish Episcopal Church not just at this moment but as it will be in ten, twenty or more years from now. As a church, we are and need to become a community which lives with vocation – a community which is being formed for mission – a community which needs to become not so much a church of agendas and projects as a church of obedience so that we may be blessed. For me that means that, like the people who half-whisper what they half grasp, we need to be people who catch glimpses of what by God's grace we may become – becoming that not for ourselves but for the community which we serve and to which we go in mission.

And of the contexts in which the ministry for which we are being formed – we can know little other than that they will become ever more complex and demanding. In the secular culture of Scotland, we need to minister with our spirituality uppermost and our institutional life as something secondary. Poverty, migration, devolution, religiously-motivated violence, human rights, hunger, climate change and climate justice – the list of questions to which there are no easy answers is endless and growing. People formed for ministry will seek God's answers and minister God's love in ways which are for the building of the Kingdom.

And so the readings inform us and challenge us. God's people need people appointed by God so that the congregation of the Lord may not be like sheep without a shepherd. This is not about taking sides. It is about the service of God who alone gives the growth. Jesus connects his hearers with the scripture and reminds them that the Spirit calls us to be for the poor, the prisoners, the blind and the oppressed.

I believe that God has brought us to this point. I believe that the Scottish Episcopal Institute is here to help to form the next generation of people for the ministry of our church. I believe that their story will be at the heart of the story of the Scottish Episcopal Church as we respond to God's call in the 21st century.

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The Most Rev David Chillingworth

Bishop of St Andrews, Dunkeld & Dunblane and Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church