**Presbytery Strategic Planning Group – Convener’s Report to Presbytery**

Moderator,

The Presbytery Strategic Planning Group has continued meeting since last I reported to Presbytery, as recently as last week, building up a picture of the congregations as they are now, based on material gathered in the past, and of the city as it will become in the decade ahead. In the first preparatory phase of our work we have been, in one regard, in a holding pattern, awaiting the outcomes of the General Assembly, as many of the reports and deliverance, if passed, would influence the parameters, limitations and opportunities of our strategic planning.

We now know that all the elements of both the Special Commission and the Radical Plan were approved, as was the General Trustees’ consultation on buildings entitled, *Well-Equipped Spaces in Right Places* and the Joint Emerging Church Group Report on pioneer ministry and church planting. The Ministries Council reported a temporary moratorium on the future recruitment of Ministries Development Staff, but also indicated that we must also wait for the next General Assembly in regards to new applications for New Charge Developments and to learn what the legislation, if any, for the introduction of new style local ministry, be they called hubs, clusters or something else, might contain. Also motions from the floor on Reviewable Charge status for congregations and a new Special Commission set up to review our Presbyterian system of government will be considered at that time.

So we do not yet have a complete picture, but we have a clearer picture of some of these parameters, limitations and opportunities for the task ahead.

The Group has also been invited to attend some gatherings of local churches who are already considering their future at grassroots and to a meeting with the General Trustees as they seek to forge stronger ties with presbyteries in regards to church buildings. We have also been in contact with two other city presbyteries who are also presently engaged in future planning and who have shared on paper some of their thinking. At our next meeting in August we hope to meet as a group with representatives from Aberdeen and Glasgow presbyteries to further these conversations.

By the autumn we will hopefully be ready to enter phase two of the process and start having conversations face-to-face with congregations alone or in groups. In anticipation of this we bring tonight’s report and deliverance.

At our meeting last week Stewart Weaver led our opening devotions and quoted from a book by Jean Vanier. It concerned a woman working with L’Arche in Sydney, Australia. One night she came across a man in a park dying from a drug overdose, a man she had encountered many times before. As she cradled him in her arms, with his dying breath, he said, “You never wanted to meet me, you always wanted to change me.”

This statement, that had first impressed itself on Stewart, now did so for the group, for as I have already indicated to Presbytery this future plan for presbytery must not be imposed from on high but rise collectively from the grassroots, from the local congregations working within the local communities. And for this to occur congregations involved in the process need to be assured that we are first and foremost seeking to meet with you and not coming to change you.

To that end we present a document entitled Values and Principles for which I am indebted to Liam Fraser for creating its first draft; it is a document we hope presbytery will approve and congregations then will receive to become the charter for how we shall conduct our meeting with you and you with us which we hope will alleviate any perceived anxieties or suspicions.

Secondly, we have prepared with the Presbytery Communication Officer a strategy for how we can remain in communication with congregations. Following this meeting a new page will be set up on the presbytery website for our Group. The first document that will go up will be the Values and Principles, if approved.

But a second document will go up at the same time. We call this one *Tell Us Your Story.*  This is to test our communication links and gauge its effectiveness. I have written the text explaining its purpose which is to invite congregations, as ministers, Kirk Sessions, and members, to answer a few questions, either electronically or in hard copy, that would provide us with meaningful *new material* to help us when we start to meet with you. An e-mail will be sent via presbytery elders and Session Clerks as to when it all goes live and encouraging a presbytery-wide enthusiastic response.

We intend to use this webpage to keep everyone informed of future developments, timescales, etc and to share any papers and ideas, requests for prayer we consider useful and helpful.

Moderator I present the report and move the deliverance.