

Glasgow, August 2017

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Greetings to you in the name of Jesus, who lived the life of love and paid the price, overcoming death by the power of love. I have enjoyed a stimulating, varied sabbatical this year, as I withdrew from the life of the circuit and discovered afresh the wonder and variety of living in God's world. From Jerusalem and Bethlehem to Ben Lawers and Stob Binnien, from a retreat centre in Larne to the Barras in the east end of Glasgow this God was real to me. In the conversation with strangers at St George's Cross, with family and friends, in the silence of the nights in the Highlands I caught something of the sound of God walking in the garden. The seven years since my last sabbatical have been full of change – and a good deal of pain has been tasted on the way; these three months have enabled me to come again to the Fountain of Living Water and drink again. I come back to the circuit with a new energy and readiness to face the challenges and opportunities which lie ahead.

It was a joy and privilege to accompany Jill to Birmingham and to be her companion as she was inducted as Vice-President of the Methodist Conference. She will need much grace and wisdom in the year ahead; thanks for your prayers for us both. I was emotionally drained by her address on the Saturday of the Conference of the theme of finding a rhythm to our living . . . in laughter and lament. Yes, the way to share the life and love of Jesus is to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep; to recognise God's fingerprints in life's laughter and lament. There is much to lament in the Methodist Church in Strathclyde – and perhaps we need to recognise our part in an unwillingness to change and be changed so that we meet the needs of this generation. There is much also to celebrate as we find new opportunities to serve and witness. There is a lot of love being shared in the life of the church – let the joy break out!

So, we dance and we weep as we travel through this valley of sunshine and shadows. We trust in the God who laughs and laments with us. By the way, what an excellent TV series *Broken* was.

Peace be the journey.     Andrew