

PLACE FOR HOPE

Hugh Donald



THE pathway to healing and reconciliation requires face-to-face encounters. It is in these encounters that we can face difference and diversity. "It is in such face to face meetings, deeply resistant to adequate description, that many of the most significant things in our lives happen." (Professor David Ford quoted by the Archbishop of Canterbury in a recent talk)

Yet our history and our experiences suggest that in our churches and faith communities such encounters are often avoided or can become places for positional arguments, win/lose or, more often, lose/lose. This offers a breeding ground for conflict to escalate, for relationships to be damaged and, of critical importance, the message of the Gospel to be lost or impaired.

It was in response to observing the negative cost of conflict, that in 2009 the Church of Scotland invested in training a group of people to be able to respond to situations of conflict. From there Place for Hope grew in recognition of the extent to which churches and faith groups are encountering the effects of what is a time of considerable change and uncertainty and lacking the skills and the means to encounter difference and transform conflict.

In the last few months Place for Hope has become an independent charity to enable the gift of this work by the Church of Scotland to be accessible to all denominations. Our primary purpose is to accompany and equip individuals and faith communities so that we are all

more able to be peacemakers and navigate conflict well. Specifically we provide leadership training through workshops and resources to enhance our understanding and response to conflict and how to navigate difference within our communities. Through our trained team we help groups at a time of crisis, accompany sensitive or difficult group conversations and provide coaching, advice and support.

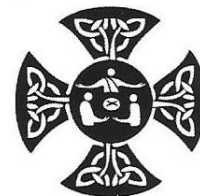
Our work is rooted in and informed by faith, with much of our work being carried out within large groups. By way of example, a common encounter is with a church divided around its leadership, whether through lack of clarity around roles and differing expectations, changing patterns of ministry or pressures brought about by declining membership.

It has been a privilege for Place for Hope to be a part of some of the cascade conversations within the Scottish Episcopal Church. Whilst no one process can ever be perfect, it has offered the creative space for differing voices to be heard, stories shared and relationships deepened. It required courage on those participating to enter the conversations, reaching out to others, risking vulnerability. Perhaps it offered a model for how addressing

difficult issues could be discussed, as well as a place to learn about living with difference.

If you are passionate about peace building, facing a difficult conversation or struggling with conflict, please accept an invitation to be in contact with Place for Hope at info@placeforhope.org.uk to find out more. ●

Hugh Donald is Director of a Place for Hope



EMMAUS HOUSE

Hospitality and prayer at the heart of the City

For counselling, spiritual direction, quiet days, retreats (Ignatian guided retreats available). Vestry away-days and meeting space.

www.emmaushouse-edinburgh.co.uk
e-mail: info@emmaushouse-edinburgh.co.uk
phone: 0131 228 1066