

There come in the life of any organisation or group moments that indicate the strength and health of the organisation. Not unexpectedly the church is not exempt from these kinds of moments. I think the Slains vote and result that will come shortly from that is a litmus test of the health and strength of this church. Depending on how we conduct ourselves over the next few months it will tell the parish of Ellon, from Ythanbank to Collieston and from Toll of Birness to Tippetty exactly what our beating heart is and where our passions lie. No matter the outcome of the upcoming vote we need to show we as a church are united behind one thing, and one thing only – the love of God. In all we do we need to show God's unconditional love whether the vote went in our favour or not. And that means rolling our up our sleeves to work and find ways to raise money to refurbish the Slains building and encouraging the parish as a whole to be part of that or seeking the best ways for us all to show love and compassion and solace to the community of Collieston and Slains who may be downhearted to lose a part of their community.

In the minutes and hours and days after the vote we need to remember that we are on the same team, we are on the same side and that's been the case for over 44 years since on 4th March 1973 we became members of the one body that is Ellon Parish Church.

We need to remember that tomorrow the sun will rise and will keep on rising for the days after. And we need to remember we're not Ellon folks first. We're not Slains folks first. We are Christians first. And our number one job is to show the good news of Jesus Christ to our community and encourage them to become part of our community of faith. We cannot do that if we choose division. We cannot do that if we choose to hold on to past hurts and disagreements. We can only do that if we embrace whichever decision is made, accept that God is in it and make the best of whatever situation we find ourselves in. Together. Our church needs a sense of unity, a sense that no matter what we do we are in it together and have a respect for the will of the congregation and each other.

Unless there is a tied vote, today some of us will hear a result we like and some of us will hear a result we don't. We need to not talk of winners or losers. There are no winners and no losers on one team. No matter what the outcome our mission is still the same, no matter what happens we need to show God's love to the whole of the parish, and we need to do it undiminished in strength and unity.

The path our church has taken is not one we would choose and there are some decisions and incidents we'd rather not have had to make, or live through, but this is where we are. And from this place we can move forward together in the presumption of faith, a presumption that says that God is in control, a presumption that says that our church is strong and can get stronger and healthier as we move forward together, no matter whether we use one worship centre or two.

Remember that Ellon Parish Church is not ours, it is God's, we are merely the custodians of it and hope to leave it in a stronger place than we found it. Today is one day where we can choose to show that strength and that wisdom.

So, once again, on your behalf I offer my thanks to the Slains Task Group and the Slains Next Steps Group in bringing us to this point. They have worked hard and diligently with a sizable amount of wisdom and grace in what has never been an easy task both procedurally and emotionally.

Once the votes have been counted I will reveal the numbers and the outcome. That will be the option chosen and that is the direction the church will follow. No matter the outcome there will be a sizable amount of work to be done to bring whichever option to fruition and there may be future decisions to be made and stages to follow. Therefore, it is important that we support and encourage our office bearers and the Congregational Board or Kirk Session in taking things to the next stage.

In the unlikely event of a tied vote, I will have the casting vote. I will not take the casting vote immediately or today. I will take time to think and pray.

So, in the words of St Paul in the letter to the Ephesians

I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.