

REPORT OF THE CHRISTIAN EDUCATION COMMITTEE

GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2006

Last year's General Assembly agreed that the priority for this year and next should be the visits by the Development team to individual congregations. The bulk of what may be termed this Committee's 'work' therefore has fallen on the National and Presbytery Development Coordinators. Arising from this, however, is coming a clearer sense of the needs of the congregations, and the priorities for developing the Christian Education structure in the coming years.

NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The National Development Team has been working in four areas in the past year – visits to local churches, presbytery events, the denominational event and seeking to learn from the wider church scene in Scotland and the United Kingdom.

Visits to Local Churches

It was agreed by the General Assembly of 2005 that the National Development Team assisted by others would visit every congregation within the denomination over a two year period. The Team was augmented by the United Free Church Elder Trainers and the General Secretary. An initial seminar was held at which the material to be used in local church visits was presented and discussed. Each visitor was assigned a number of churches and visits have taken place over a number of months.

The visits have three aims.

- The first is to help congregations look at their present "health" and identify one or two key areas that they feel should be developed.
- Secondly, evangelism is to be looked at as a matter of priority. This is a crucial area of church life today and it is important to examine what is actually currently taking place in congregations. From this it is hoped to detail the different outreach initiatives so that these can be shared with other congregations as examples of good practice.
- Thirdly, the visits would identify what work is being done locally in cooperation with churches of other denominations.

It is hoped that the initial visits will have been completed by June and that some preliminary feedback will be available to be shared at the General Assembly. It is important that the churches visited are supported in the work and mission. It is intended that advice and help will be provided to aid congregations in the key areas they wish to develop. In particular, the National Development Team will be available to act as Mission Accompaniers to those congregations who want to pursue this further. A number of the "visitors" attended a seminar on this area of development in April and were able to learn what is happening in growing churches in various parts of the U.K.

Presbytery Events

The Presbyteries of the East and West have continued their programmes of events in this past year and these seem to be benefiting the life and work of the presbyteries. The

Presbytery of the North was planning a day seminar to explore how it could further develop its work.

20:20 Vision – God’s Mission-Shaped Church

The Denominational event will be held again at Bannockburn High School on Saturday 26th August 2006. The theme for the 2005 event will be continued as the content of the day seeks to support the church in its outreach to Scotland and beyond.

The response to last year’s event was encouraging both in the numbers attending and in respect of the worship, workshops and activities of the event, and as before the Committee sees it as an important opportunity for those from differing situations, in different parts of Scotland to come together, share together and encourage one another. It has been particularly heartening to see the number of teens not only attending, but beginning to find their place in the main workshop programme.

This year the focus will be on practically supporting and equipping the church. As congregations strive to build their spiritual life and outreach, the workshops have been arranged to cover worship, pastoral issues, growing in faith, youth work, evangelism and mission. They will provide opportunities for reflection, new ideas and sharing experiences from local situations. There will be a crèche, children’s and teen programmes. It is hoped that the day will allow time for prayer, fellowship and uplifting worship. The Committee has been encouraged by the willingness and support of so many very gifted musicians, speakers, workshop leaders and helpers and asks congregations to encourage more and more people to attend. Rev Fergus Buchanan of St. Paul’s Church in Milngavie has agreed to be our keynote speaker on the day.

Further Contacts

The National Development Team has benefited from the wider contact, meetings and conferences attended. These have covered such subjects as church planting in new areas, mission accompaniment, and evangelism in today’s spiritual world, outreach initiatives, healthy church and useful information from the 2001 Census. These contacts have enabled the Team to look at the broader picture in terms of how congregations can begin to engage with the communities around them. There is much to learn and to share in what is a very challenging period for the Church.

TRAINING

We are pleased to now have a Training Team of 6 ready to assist Sessions, congregations or Presbyteries in identified training needs. It is hoped that arising from the Development Coordinator visits, particular needs can be both identified more clearly, and then addressed through the Training Team. A leaflet was distributed earlier this year with a list of the many courses available covering the whole range of church life and it is heartening already to find more use being made of the Trainers.

RESOURCES - WEB INFORMATION

Mention has been made already in the Development Coordinators’ visits, and in the denominational event of the opportunity to share ideas and resources. The Committee was very conscious that many of our congregations are smaller, and may not have immediate access to resources – and where they do, they may be uncertain as to their quality and

usefulness. The Committee, with the help of Rev. Martin Keane, made its first tentative steps to provide a web site where such information could be exchanged. The success, indeed viability, of such a site depends on those with access beginning to think instinctively of actually posting their findings on the site. We are looking at ways of encouraging this, since we see it as potentially of great benefit to the wider church.

In the name of the Committee

IAN F R LLOYD	Convener
GORDON STEEL	Vice-convener
JOHN O FULTON	Secretary