

REPORT OF THE CHRISTIAN EDUCATION COMMITTEE

GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2007

As last year the main focus of this Committee's work has been the continuing visits by the Development Coordinators of the congregations. By Assembly last year around half of all congregations had been visited, and by this Assembly it is anticipated that almost all of the churches will have been seen. This has continued to inform your Committee of the basic needs within the churches.

NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Local church issues and the way forward

To remind commissioners, the basic purpose of the visits to congregations was

1. to help congregations examine their "health" and identify one or two key areas that they feel should be developed;
2. to examine evangelism in practice within the life of the churches, and to share what is going on;
3. to examine what work is going on in inter-denominational cooperation.

As this aspect of the work comes to an end it would be fair to say that there are deep concerns for the general condition of the church. Whilst the exercise has raised issues within congregations, and some are responding, we remain to be convinced that there is the spiritual energy on the whole to see churches moving forward.

Having examined what has arisen, and having met with all the Development Coordinators, our view was that we could not tackle the problems we face in a general manner across the whole denomination. We believed that it was necessary to focus in on a small number of churches to work intensively with them. Furthermore, the feedback raised the view that evangelism, and the promotion of an evangelistic mindset was the top priority.

In the light of these discussions, the Development Coordinators felt that they could not move this on to the next stage, and that a different kind of expertise and training was now required. Consequently the Development Coordinators will cease from their posts as of this General Assembly.

At the point of writing this report, we are in joint discussions with the Evangelism Committee with Rev Peter Neilson, who was Adviser in Mission and Evangelism for the Church of Scotland and is now working on a consultative basis. The purpose of these discussions is to try to work through the best way of encouraging evangelism and mission within individual churches. This may involve working through a number of "evangelism helpers" or perhaps encouraging congregations with finances in reserve to consider employing someone to assist in a particular aspect of their work – with the key of outreach in the forefront of their thinking. It is hoped to be able to report more fully at the Assembly.

In the meantime the Development Coordinators have produced a resource package looking at evangelism in a very simple way through a Bible Study which points us to the very ordinary ways in which opportunities to share can arise, and we commend this material to the churches.

TRAINING

We continue to be aware that many of our churches are small in size, and have a variety of needs in leading worship, pastoral care and visitation, and basic evangelism. We have a Training Team available and able to cover aspects of all of these issues, and they remain very under-utilised. We would encourage churches to remind themselves of the courses available and use them. The Training Team very purposely had a name change from “Elder Trainer” because we saw the need for the whole church to be involved in the variety of ministries that make up the church. For some the material will be new; for others a reminder, but these refreshments in aspects of faith and care can help reawaken the spiritual embers, and help reinvigorate a church. Leaflets giving full information on the training will be available at the Assembly and can also be obtained from Church Office.

PRESBYTERY DEVELOPMENT

We are glad to hear of the ways in which Presbyteries have continued their own development through a variety of events. Although the Presbytery Development Coordinator post will be coming to an end at this Assembly we would encourage Presbyteries to see the benefit of such a role continuing and to use the expertise and contacts that have been built up over these three years.

One other aspect of Presbytery life which we would raise is the use of quinquennial visits and reports to stimulate discussion on congregational development matters, particularly as the posts of Development Coordinator will no longer be there. We would encourage more and better use to be made of these occasions to help move churches on.

WEB SITE

The Committee at the last Assembly launched a web-site which it was hoped would enable all within the United Free Church, but particularly ministers, pastors and elders to share information about resources and ideas. Unfortunately it has been very poorly used. We would again urge people who have used e.g. evangelistic material/ courses; read helpful (or even unhelpful) books to share what they have found with the rest – with the many pressures on us we have little time to explore the myriad resources out there, and it would help if this exchange of ideas site was used. The Committee has considered closing the site, but is holding off in the short term – so it’s use it or lose it!

The address is www.ufchurch.proboards60.com and simply requires your own choice password to log on.

READING

We remain convinced that one of the pressing needs of the whole church is to read good Christian literature. To repeat what we said in 2005, the history of the church shows the importance to a thriving church of a well read ministry **and** laity. We are grateful to Rev. David Cartledge who, from the initial angle of supporting the Ministry Committee, has taken on writing book reviews for Stedfast. The Committee likewise will examine how best to get the best theological literature into the hands of the church – to be read.

20/20 VISION – GOD’S MISSION-SHAPED CHURCH

The Denominational event will be held again at Bannockburn High School on Saturday 25th August. We continue to be encouraged by the response to this event thanks to the quality of the workshops, the main teaching and the fellowship shared.

We also continue to be grateful to the 20/20 Team who with increasingly practised expertise put the whole thing together. We do, of course keep this under review each year, but we see it as continuing to fulfil a need in a very positive and mutually encouraging way.

CONCLUSION

We are concerned about the church as a whole, and concerned especially about its spiritual temperature. To some extent this is inevitable in the discouragements around, but we need to remind ourselves of the encouragements within, and the reward ahead so that we “consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds” (Hebrews 10:24) and remind ourselves of our call to simple faithfulness to God.

In this new phase, without the Development Coordinators, we are continuing to wrestle with how best to support churches, but the visitation by the Coordinators seems to remind us that churches will need to desire to move on themselves first.

In the name of the committee

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