

REPORT OF THE MINISTRY COMMITTEE

GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2007

INTRODUCTION

There is a fine line between optimism and pessimism. It is on this fine line that the Ministry Committee seeks to balance itself in these days. Like the church in general, the committee wavers between a position of steadiness and a position of wavering: between an overwhelming gratitude for the dedication and effort of those for whom it has special responsibility (in Ordained Ministry, in Pastoral positions and in the Readership) **and** a genuine concern for the ways in which these people are being used to their absolute limits. Alongside this is a deep awareness that, in some cases, these services cannot be provided satisfactorily for all congregations.

In reality, there are 64 congregations in the denomination served by 25 ordained ministers, 1 ordained pastor, 11 part-time ministers and pastors and there are 2 students in training for the ordained ministry.

APPLICATIONS

The committee continues in its important function of considering applications and in supporting, training and developing successful applicants for the roles which God has called them to.

Since last year's General Assembly there have been no applications by anyone desiring to become a student in training for the ministry. It is of concern that generally we are unable to provide ministers or recruit pastors from within the United Free Church - this has to be of serious concern to the Church as a whole if, as the Panel on Doctrine has already stated, 'the Ordained ministry has a significant part to play in the life of the Church'. It was partly because of this concern that the committee instigated the Panel on Doctrine's report on 'Ministry'.

It is imperative that, as a Church, we challenge our congregations with the call of God in these days and pray for people to have the courage and the enthusiasm to respond in faith. It should be noted that officials of the committee will make themselves available to informally and confidentially discuss a possible call with individuals even at the very earliest stages of this process.

STUDENTS IN TRAINING FOR THE MINISTRY

- **Mr Robert Allan** is currently taking time out of his required course of study in order to pursue another course of study in preaching.
- **Mr Martin Whitehead** has successfully completed his first placement and is now actively involved in his second. It is hoped that, when he has satisfactorily completed all required elements of his training that he may be available for a call in the early part of 2008. Vacant congregations should note that they will be informed directly when this time comes and will be reminded of the regulations governing the settlement of students.

PART-TIME PASTORS

There have been no new part-time pastors added to the list this year although we are glad to say that all on the list are in employment. The committee are delighted that one new appointment has been made of Mr Nicky Kyle to the Largs congregation.

The training of our part-time lay pastors is an area which the committee hopes to give further consideration to throughout the coming year in order to strengthen and help those serving in this capacity. This would be in addition to their annual attendance at both the 'Ministers and Pastors In-Service' conference in September and the 'Pastors and Students' conference in April.

PANEL ON DOCTRINE

In the light of the above the committee awaits the report of the Panel on Doctrine with interest and hope that the General Assembly will participate in a constructive debate on this whole vital area of the church's life.

CONFERENCES

The committee organised and funded three main conferences at Scottish Churches House, Dunblane.

- The Ministers and Pastors conference in September on the theme of 'Ministry' led with skill and humour by Rev Dr. Bob Fyall of Rutherford House, with other much appreciated contributions from Rev David Cartledge and Rev Archie Ford. Thirty four ministers and pastors were in attendance.
- A study day in February for the Readers on the theme of 'The Sermon' led by Revs Alexander Ritchie, Ian Boa and Douglas Scrimgeour brought fascinating insight into the construction and presentation of the sermon.
- The Pastors' and Students' conference in April led by Rev Joey Naika and Rev Margery Collin on the general theme of 'Pastoral Issues'.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

It is important that opportunities are given for ministers to reflect on and/or develop in their Christian life and service. The committee continues to try and encourage this through its Professional Development Scheme.

Our Professional Development Adviser is now in his second year of visits to individual ministers. He has informed us that several ministers have indicated an interest in developing their ministry. However, due to constant demands on time in the fulfilment of their role there is often little perceived opportunity for them to allocate time for personal study, short/long term courses of study, conferences, seminars and sabbaticals. This is perhaps best reflected in the fact that only three ministers have taken sabbaticals since the scheme was set up.

The committee is proposing two adjustments to the regulations governing sabbaticals in order to make them more accessible to ministers. The committee would also like to encourage ministers and kirk sessions to give serious consideration to opportunities for professional development. It would be the committee's opinion that this scheme is vital to the encouragement and vitality of ministry today and could benefit not only the individual but the church in general.

The committee is well aware that finance is another perceived obstacle to ministers taking time for professional development and sabbaticals. While the committee confirms it

only has limited financial resources available for these schemes it is also aware that not all projects need be financially burdensome in order to be of any value.

Information about Sabbatical leave can be found in previous General Assembly Reports and through the Adviser.

The Adviser hopes also through the pages of Stedfast to make information available on current good reading material for ministers and those interested in extending their theological understanding.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Through the General Secretary's involvement with a group considering funding in Local Ecumenical Partnerships, it has become apparent that our pension contributions are much lower than any others and our combined stipend and expense figures are also low. Also in view of the new age-discrimination legislation, we would be required to make pension contributions for all employees regardless of age. This will be looked into in the coming year.

HIGHLAND THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE

The General Assembly of 2006 instructed that "consideration be given by the Ministry Committee to the recognition of the Highland Theological College as a suitable academic establishment for the training of students for the ministry of the United Free Church of Scotland."

The Committee appointed a small group which has been examining the content of courses and reading lists on offer and will, by the time of the Assembly have made a visit to the College. Fuller details will be given during the verbal report at the Assembly.

In the name of the Committee

JAN CROSS	Convener
ALEXANDER RITCHIE	Vice Convener
JOHN FULTON	Secretary