

## REPORT ON THE MINISTRY COMMITTEE

### GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2008

#### INTRODUCTION

At last year's General Assembly there were two events which may prove to be crucial to the future witness of the United Free Church of Scotland continuing.

Firstly, there was the submission of the Panel on Doctrine report on 'Ministry' which was accepted by the General Assembly as "the considered position on 'Ministry for the United Free Church of Scotland'". This report was rich in theological reflection, covered a broad base of 'ministry of the whole people of God' and restated the firm foundation to the 'particular service of the ordained' in the areas of Word and Sacrament.

Secondly, at the conclusion of the Assembly, Rev David Cartledge, Moderator, entitled his Address 'Taking the Bible Seriously'. One strand of the address challenged us to consider that, "Every significant renewal of the Church by God has been bound up with a new discovery of and a new regard for the written word of God."

Both these elements of the General Assembly issued inspiring challenges to the whole church as individuals and corporately to take responsibility for active involvement in the ministry of Jesus in the light of our serious interaction with the Word of God as contained in the Scriptures. It is exciting then that the theme for this year's Bannockburn day is 'Celebrate the Word' and that this Committee alongside others has an active role to play in responding positively to these challenges.

The Ministry Committee has had six statutory meetings for its normal business and four additional, special meetings, including an overnight stay at Scottish Churches House, to begin the task of developing the Panel on Doctrine material.

#### CONFERENCES

**Ministers and Pastors In-Service Conference:** This took place from 18 – 20 September 2007. There was excellent input from our main speaker Rev Colin Sinclair on the theme of 'Caring – within the congregation, more widely and for ourselves'. While looking at the theme from a strong Biblical perspective it was also very practical with our speaker sharing from his own personal experience and reflection. A good emphasis was placed on the theme of ministers looking after themselves. This was further developed in an informative and encouraging discussion regarding 'Sabbaticals'. As a result of this discussion the Committee decided to write to Kirk Sessions as well as the individual ministers who meet the requirements to consider planning for a sabbatical.

We were also pleased to welcome Rev. Fred Drummond, Director of Evangelical Alliance who spoke on themes from his recently published book 'All that Jazz' and Rev Patrick Coltman who led us in a Bible study based on Psalm and the haunting question 'How shall we sing the Lords song in a strange land?'

**This year's conference** takes place from 23 - 25 September at Scottish Churches House, Dunblane. The main speaker will be Rev. Prof. Donald Macleod, Principal of the Free Church College, Edinburgh on the theme of 'The Uniqueness of Christ'.

**The 2008 Student and Pastors Conference** took place from 21 – 22 April 2008 when the topic covered was 'Talking with children in the church'. Sessions were led by Rev.

Chris Foxon and our own youth worker Laura McKenzie. Opportunity was also given for pastors and students to meet with the Convener and Vice Convener to share experiences and/or concerns.

**A Readers 'Study' Day** is being planned for the autumn of this year around the theme of the Incarnation.

The committee has ascertained that several ministers, due to retire in the next 5 – 10 years, are keen to have a **Retirement Preparation Course**. The Committee is looking into the possibilities of arranging this.

### **SCOTTISH CHURCHES HOUSE, DUNBLANE**

There is a degree of concern regarding the future of Scottish Churches House as a conference centre and the Committee will keep an eye on further developments. The Committee has used this venue for many conferences over the past few years and there is concern as to the availability and suitability of alternative accommodation.

### **STUDENTS IN TRAINING FOR MINISTRY**

The Committee has dealt with a number of enquiries during the year but, to date, no new students have been recognised.

**Martin Whitehead** successfully completed all the requirements of the Committee and was licensed to preach by the Presbytery of the North on 1 March 2008. At the time of writing he is preaching in vacancies and awaits a call. The Committee prays for a suitable settlement.

**Robert Allan**, after careful and prayerful consideration, decided not to continue in training for the Ministry of the United Free Church of Scotland. The Committee commends him to the continued service of God.

### **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Rev David Cartledge has completed a three year appointment as our Adviser in Professional Development. The Committee has appreciated Mr Cartledge's commitment to this area of work and hopes that at the very least it has been useful to Ministers in allowing them to reflect on their work and consider possibilities of taking courses of study and sabbaticals. The Committee awaits any specific applications but is sure that this could be a significant input into the strengthening and up-building of the ministry of the United Free Church of Scotland.

The Committee receives up-dates from the Adviser on issues relating to the scheme while at the same time maintaining the privacy of the individual ministers involved. The Committee is grateful for this sensitive handling of matters. We are pleased that Rev. D. Cartledge will remain in this position for a further three-year cycle.

The Committee is also grateful for the very generous offer made by Christian Focus publications, through the Adviser in Professional Development, of a substantial reduction on books for ministers.

## **PASTORS**

The Committee continues to be grateful for all the work undertaken by those serving as Pastors. The officials had the opportunity to meet with each of them during the Spring Conference and to discuss any matters which they had raised in their annual reports.

## **PANEL ON DOCTRINE**

The Panel on Doctrine's report on 'Ministry' was accepted at the 2007 General Assembly as "the considered position on Ministry for the United Free Church of Scotland." This document then forms the basis from which members, kirk sessions, presbyteries, Assembly committees and the Church develop their understanding, thinking and practice for 'ministry'. Ministry should be a chief concern and responsibility of the whole Church, not the sole responsibility of ministry committees within the Church. For its part, your committee has been working through the practical implications of the theological foundation for ministry set out in the report.

Important/ crucial themes coming through in these discussions have included: education/training; clarity of roles; the tension between the perceived 'immediate needs' of individual congregations while still providing a ministry well prepared and grounded in theology to ensure the sensitive and proper handling of God's Word.

At the time of writing the Committee has identified the following 'next steps':-

- to amass information from various sources regarding the availability of suitable courses and crucially the flexibility of such courses;
- to share the journey with representatives from other similar denominations who are having similar experiences to ourselves with regard to the provision of ministry;
- to make further progress in this important area in the denomination's life.

## **OVERSEAS PARTNERSHIP SCHEME**

The Committee has continued to be represented on the Overseas Partnership Group by Rev. Jan Cross, Convener and Rev. Ian Boa, past Vice Convener. This group has met when required and been available to give pastoral support and friendship to the three South African ministers and their families currently serving in Scotland under this scheme. The process of reviewing these appointments has begun given that the initial three year appointments will be coming to an end towards the end of 2008 and beginning of 2009. The Overseas Committee will report to the General Assembly on these matters.

## **YOUTH ASSEMBLY**

In light of the introduction to this report, the Convener and Vice Convener were delighted to receive an invitation to speak at this year's Youth Assembly on the "call to ministry". They found a group of enthusiastic, warm young people, under the leadership of the Youth Worker, keen to discuss and live out their faith. The Committee was delighted that opportunity was given to present the call of God to ministry and in particular to the unique ministry of word and sacrament. It prays that seed may have been sown over that weekend.

## **STEDFAST**

The Committee has added 'Stedfast' as a permanent item on the agenda in order to communicate with the church on issues/information surrounding ministry. This year we were glad to encourage reports on conferences and in particular the regular inclusion of book

reviews by the Adviser in Professional Development to stimulate interest in reading and an interest in today's issues from a Christian perspective. The Committee thanks all those who have willingly undertaken to write these articles.

## **PENSION SCHEME**

As promised in last year's report, the Committee has looked at the issue of our pension scheme. Information from other Churches underlined the low level of pension contribution from the United Free Church to the Group Scheme. Our contribution is 3% of minimum stipend while other denominations contribute up to 12% or more. The present cost, at a rate of 3%, is £12,500 a year and this is funded from Target. The committee proposes that the pension scheme contributions should be raised to 6% of minimum stipend from July 2008.

## **EXPENSES**

The Committee spent some time considering expenses. It was agreed in the past that the manse telephone should be in the name of the congregation with the treasurer paying the whole of the telephone bill and the minister/ pastor reimbursing private calls. In the period since this was agreed there has been considerable change in the Telecommunications industry. In some cases such an approach can lead to greater costs for congregations as changes mean that it is often cheaper to bundle services and calls. The increased use of the internet and emails in communication mean that almost all ministers use this as a vital part of their ministry.

The Committee therefore agreed that it was time to update the approach taken. Because the provision of services varies according to which telephone exchange provides the telephone connection, the most cost effective approach will vary from congregation to congregation. However it was agreed that the Congregation should be responsible for the provision of telephone and internet connection for the manse. In providing such a package for church business purposes, it may mean no breakdown is possible between church business and private calls, and the Inland Revenue accepts this provided private use is not significant.

In the name of the Committee

JAN CROSS	Convener
ALEXANDER RITCHIE	Vice Convener
JOHN O FULTON	Secretary

