

REPORT OF THE MINISTRY COMMITTEE

GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2009

INTRODUCTION

The Apostle Paul writes, *"It was he (Christ) who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare all God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ, may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."* (Ephesians 4:11-13). Commenting on this passage, John Stott says, "Nothing is more necessary for the building up of God's church in every age than an ample supply of God-gifted teachers. Yet I wonder if this need has ever been greater than it is in our own day." (The Message of Ephesians, John R.W. Stott, IVP, p164).

The Ministry Committee is aware of the importance of its work. The committee has the responsibility for the selection, training, and development of people within three main roles. These roles are that of Ordained Ministers of Word and Sacrament, Pastors who give continuity in the leading of worship and pastoral care, and Readers who are trained to provide pulpit supply. The provision of a trained ministry does however raise a challenge and an opportunity.

The reality of the current situation which the church faces presents a strong challenge. Within an increasingly secular society where people are less likely to attend or become members of the church, congregations are struggling with issues of decline and of having to operate with an ageing membership. A growing number of congregations find they can no longer support a full time ministry. In addition to this, there is a shortage of ministers and candidates applying to become students training for the ministry and this has led to a number of congregations, often for a prolonged period of time, being without an Ordained Minister.

The current situation also presents the church with an opportunity to develop training that is both appropriate and flexible enough to equip people for the task of ministry within the United Free Church. Recognising this opportunity, the committee has given a considerable amount of time to looking at the future of Ministry within the United Free Church. Within the section of this report entitled 'Pathways to Ministry', the committee presents a new way forward for Ministerial Formation in the United Free Church which would aim to provide those involved in Ministry with appropriate training and ongoing development.

PATHWAYS TO MINISTRY

Ministerial Formation in the United Free Church

Introduction

The future of ministry in the United Free Church has been a subject for considerable concern and discussion within the Church for a number of years. In particular two documents presented to the General Assembly have influenced the thinking of the Ministry Committee and form the background to the strategy presented in this report.

A discussion paper prepared jointly by the then Business and Administration and Ministry and Home Affairs Committees was presented to the General Assembly of 2004 in which consideration of future forms of ministry in the United Free Church was a key element. Kirk Sessions were asked to respond to the paper, which included the question, 'Does the United Free Church desire a trained ministry?' The responses clearly indicated

agreement with the Committee's view that a trained ministry was necessary for the Church although further work was needed to clarify how this was to be attained and exactly what form ministerial formation might take.

In the light of the responses to the Discussion paper, the General Assembly of 2005 instructed the Panel on Doctrine 'to give theological consideration to 'Ministry for the United Free Church of Scotland' and report to the General Assembly of 2006. A final report from the Panel was accepted by the General Assembly of 2007 and various matters remitted to the Ministry Committee for further consideration. The Panel's report forms the backdrop to the Ministry Committee's consideration of these matters and in particular the Committee has recognised as the Panel's report states, that 'There is a need for the United Free Church of Scotland to develop a clear strategy for ministry which takes account of the particular place given to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament. It is to be hoped that such a strategy would enable us to have the most helpful arrangements for all including those serving as ministers, pastors and readers and that it would enhance and encourage the ministry of the whole people of God.'

This is what the Ministry Committee has attempted to do and over the past two years has spent much time and effort finding a way forward for ministry and in dealing with the matters raised by the Panel on Doctrine. This report presents a strategy for the future of ministry within the denomination giving, as agreed by the General Assembly recognition to the particular place given to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament but also looking at the arrangements for other forms of ministry. However having presented a strategy there remains a great deal of work to be done in working out the practical details that are necessary to put this strategy into practice.

Common point of entry

All applicants for ministry, full time or part time, seeking ordination or not, would face the same selection procedures. Regardless of the applicant's view as to their ultimate destination or the route they wish to take, all applications will proceed in the same way and it will be for the Committee to decide on the path to be followed. Although not included as part of the main body of this report, it is the intention of the committee to have a similar procedure for those wishing to become readers.

If the proposals in the final report are agreed by the General Assembly, the Committee intend to prepare leaflets which would be available to individuals and congregations which will clarify roles and outline opportunities for all interested in trained ministry within the Church.

It is proposed that the Church should have three categories of trained ministry, readers, ministry assistants and ministers of word and sacrament. Details regarding readers will be given later and this report outlines procedures for the other two categories.

Enquirers

Throughout this process the Committee would seek to assure people of their value and help them follow God's call in a way that best suits their gifts. The process would begin with an informal and confidential meeting with officials of the Committee who would outline procedures but also offers ways in which the prospective candidate might be helped to explore their sense of Call. Further consideration is being given to holding some form of Enquirers Conference on a reasonably regular basis so that people have the opportunity to explore with others various forms of service.

The enquirer would then be given a short exploratory placement with a minister. The purpose of this placement would be to allow the minister to explore with the enquirer about their sense of call to ministry, make an initial assessment of any strengths and weaknesses and report back to the Committee. This period would not be funded – except expenses - by the Committee and would be arranged to suit both the convenience of the minister and enquirer. The length of this placement would need to be determined. It would be at this point that the enquirer would decide if they wanted to make a formal application to the Committee.

They could apply either to be accepted for stage 1 or stage 2. Stage 1 is intended for those seeking to be employed as ministry assistants and working under the oversight of a minister or interim Moderator. Stage 2 is for those seeking to become ministers of word and sacrament. The nature and length of the courses of study obviously vary between the two stages. There will be the possibility for someone initially accepted at stage 1 to apply at a later date to be considered for stage 2.

Applicants

All applicants must be members of the United Free Church. At present all candidates for the ministry must have been a member of the United Free Church for at least two years. It is recognised that this has considerable value as it allows the applicant time to experience something of the ethos of the United Free Church and indicates a degree of commitment to the denomination. It is therefore the Committee's view that this should be retained as the norm but with the Committee able to use its discretion in some cases.

Current age restrictions will be amended so that normally ministers should have completed their training by age 55, ministry assistants by age 60 and readers by age 65. Following the submission of a formal application accompanied by references, the selection procedures would be followed. If the application is for the Ministry of Word and Sacrament it would normally go first to the Presbytery Clerk for consideration of the person's piety and motives.

It is intended that the Church would continue to employ people who are not ordained to assist with the work of ministry but, if the General Assembly accepts the structures outlined in this report, as from the rising of the 2009 General Assembly, any people being appointed as pastors by the Committee will be on the understanding that the new arrangements for ministry assistants will apply to them if they are agreed by a future Assembly. This will not affect the role or position of those already serving the Church in this way. The present pastors would continue on the same basis with annual contracts, unless they themselves wish to change to the new system. A new position of ministry assistant will be created and appropriate training and terms and conditions will be agreed.

Selection Procedures

All applicants would be interviewed by the Committee. An applicant's recognition as a student in preparation for ministry would be based not only on the interview but on references, report from the initial attachment, health examination and a psychological assessment. If a candidate was selected with the aim of working towards completing stage one, this would not preclude them moving to stage two at a later date.

However should someone wish to remain as a 'ministry assistant' it would be clear that there could be no change in their responsibilities, terms of employment or status no matter how long they serve or how effective their ministry. The Committee is well aware that there are issues regarding who may or may not conduct communion which go beyond

its remit but which have an impact on those who may be employed by the Committee. There are questions relating to the logic of someone being authorised to conduct one Sacrament but not the other and whether authorisation to conduct the sacraments does not amount to a 'de facto' ordination.

Such matters go beyond the remit of the Committee which would request the Panel on Doctrine to review the Church's current position on who may or may not conduct the sacraments and ask that the Panel bring a final report on the matter to the General Assembly of 2010.

Roles

At present there can be some uncertainty regarding the various roles and responsibilities of pastors, interim moderators and ministers. The role of the *interim* moderator is outlined in the Manual of Practice and Procedure but information on this will be included in the full report when it is brought to the General Assembly. The new role of ministry assistant would be centred around conduct of worship and pastoral work.

Training

Stage 1: The content and level of courses of study to reach stage one is the principal area on which work requires to be done. In doing so, consideration would need to be given to the possibility that the candidate would be, in at least part time, employment. It may also be that some of the training takes place after the person has been appointed. All Stage 1 candidates would also be expected to complete one attachment.

Stage 2 candidates will continue with the current academic courses from the institutions approved by the General Assembly in consultation with the Adviser of Studies. All candidates for the ministry would fulfil all the other present requirements including two attachments.

If the Committee considers it appropriate and the individual senses a call to be a Minister of Word and Sacrament a 'stage one candidate' i.e. a ministry assistant already serving the Church may be able to complete stage two training whilst still employed by the Committee.

All candidates would sit three Bible exams and one in Church Practice and Procedure. All candidates would also attend courses arranged by the Committee on the ethos, history and practice of the United Free Church. The possible means of delivery of such courses will be considered later.

Probationary Period:

The committee is exploring the possibility of having some form of probationary period for both ministers and ministry assistants as well as having form of mentoring arrangement for those beginning in both roles.

Denominational Courses

The need for more denominational input in our ministerial formation is generally accepted but the delivery of it is more difficult. Some courses might be for all candidates, some for those already serving as pastors or ministry assistants and some could include ministers as part of their ongoing professional development. We are exploring the possibility of some important areas not covered in the university courses being covered in co-operation with other Churches. Indeed there made be several aspects of ministerial formation which could be conducted on an ecumenical basis.

Ministry Development Worker

The provision of Denominational courses and consideration of possible courses for stage one candidates would involve a great deal of work. In the past the Church has seconded ministers and appointed other individuals for one day a week to work as development co-ordinators and the committee believe that there would be considerable value in having someone seconded, or otherwise appointed, to do this work on a similar basis. The person would work closely with both the Convener and the Adviser of Studies and would be responsible for planning all denominational training events for ministers as well as looking at options for academic study for stage one candidates. The proposal is that someone be appointed on a one day per week basis to undertake this work. The initial appointment would be for 12 months and the cost is estimated to be in the region of £4,000 - £4,500.

Deployment

There is a need for stronger links between the Committee and Presbyteries in order to make best use of the ministerial resources available. It may be that a regular meeting between Committee and Presbytery officials prior to the review of appointments would be helpful. This would provide an opportunity for discussion on various forms of ministry such as team ministries and on ways of managing readjustments.

Conclusion

This presents a framework for the future of ministry. Much work needs to be done on developing aspects of this structure but in keeping with the Panel on Doctrine Report and the views expressed by Kirk Sessions and Presbyteries in their responses to the previous Discussion Paper on Ministry the emphasis continues to be on the Ministry of Word and Sacrament.

OTHER MATTERS

CONFERENCES

The Committee arranged four conferences this year and are indebted to all who assisted with these events.

The In Service Conference for Ministers and Pastors took place in September 2008 at Scottish Churches House, Dunblane. The keynote speaker at this event was Rev. Professor Donald MacLeod of the Free Church College who led three spiritually enriching and challenging sessions on the theme 'The Uniqueness of Christ'. Other sessions were led by Laura and Gordon Mackenzie and Nathan Owens who shared thoughts and experiences of their trip to South Africa; the Principal Clerks gave an imaginative presentation on the Manual of Practice and Procedure; and Archie Ford led a challenging session on Evangelism. Arrangements are underway for the 2009 conference, to be held 15 – 17 September, again at Scottish Churches House.

A much appreciated study day for Readers was held in St Ninians UF Church on Saturday 15 November 2008. The theme of the day was 'Preparing for Christmas'. There were thoughtful and stimulating sessions on Exploring the Christmas Story and Expounding the Christmas Story, led by Mr David Millar from International Christian College; exploring Christmas Praise led by Mrs Helen Scott, and Christmas Preparations: Nuts and Bolts led by Rev Jan Cross and Rev Gary Barclay.

A Retirement Preparation Conference was held at Scottish Churches House, Dunblane 3 - 4 March 2009. Sessions covered were Medical Issues, led by Dr Jim Thomson; Financial Advice, led by Mr Jim McLatchie; Information on Pensions and Benefits, led by Mrs Jean Tait; Spiritual and Emotional Issues, led by Rev Martin and Mrs Ann Allen. Feedback from this conference indicated how much it was appreciated by those who attended. The Committee would express its grateful thanks to David and Alice Cartledge for hosting the conference.

The Spring Conference for Students and Pastors was held at Scottish Churches House, Dunblane, 28 - 29 April 2009. The aim of the conference was to explore the topic of the conduct of public worship. Sessions covered were the Preparation of the Leader and Why Worship, led by Rev Jim Neil; The Sermon in Worship, led by Rev. A Ritchie; Music in Worship, led by Mrs H Scott; and Prayer in Worship, led by Rev. G Barclay.

STUDENTS

At present there is one student in training for the ministry. Miss Ann Deacons has already completed a B.D. Degree at Glasgow University. She is currently involved in her first attachment and it is hoped she will be available for a call in March 2010. Miss Deacons is a member of our Cathcart congregation.

PROBATIONERS

The Committee was pleased to hear that the Rev Martin Whitehead had been ordained and inducted to the congregation of Cunningburgh and Sandwick.

PASTORS

The Committee is grateful for the dedicated work of Pastors and the valuable contribution they make to the ongoing work of the church. During the year, two Pastors have been added to the list of Pastors. There are currently ten Pastors serving in congregations.

ENGLISH BIBLE EXAM

Rev G Cowan who has been the examiner for the last six years has indicated his desire to be relieved of this task. The committee appreciate the work Mr Cowan has carried out in both setting and marking the exam papers. The committee is reviewing the purpose and content of the Bible Exam prior to appointing a new examiner.

SABBATICAL LEAVE

This year one minister has taken up the opportunity of sabbatical leave. The Committee would encourage ministers to consider this valuable opportunity to develop an area of interest that would benefit them, their ministry and the local congregation.

PENSION SCHEME

Last year the Assembly agreed to increase the contribution from the United Free Church to the Group Personal Pension Scheme from 3% to 6% of the minimum stipend and this took effect in July 2008. The committee has kept the scheme under review, especially at a time of financial turmoil, and has sought to take appropriate advice from those who are in a position to guide us in these complex matters.

CONCLUSION

The committee is grateful to all who have been involved in the work of the committee throughout this past year. This work is demanding and time consuming and without the support especially of the office staff much of the work would be overbearing. The Committee appreciates the amount of work carried out by the office staff on its behalf, and particularly the help and guidance provided by the General Secretary.

In the name of the Committee

GARY J A BARCLAY	Convener
ALEXANDER RITCHIE	Vice-convener
JOHN O FULTON	Secretary

Appendix 1

Settlements etc during the year

Ministers: Settlements

Rev J Martin Whitehead to Cunningsburgh & Sandwick, Shetland
Rev J Patrick Coltman to Milngavie (from Stonehouse: Paterson)

Pastors: Changes

Rev John O Evans appointed to Millerston
Mr Robert Ralston appointed to Partick
Mr Robert Ralston, appointment at Langside and Shawlands came to an end.
Mr Nicky Kyle, appointment at Largs came to an end.