

**REPORT OF THE MINISTRY COMMITTEE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2013**

INTRODUCTION

The Committee continues to be encouraged by the faithful work of ministry carried out within the Church. The Church is well served by ministers, pastors, ministry assistants and readers. The numbers of students in training for the Ministry of Word and Sacraments is uplifting. The people who give of their time in support of the Committee's work are admirable.

Yet the Church faces considerable challenges in these days. The size and age profile of congregations exert increasing strain on the ability of churches to sustain paid ministry. In a number of congregations, resources of people willing and able to take on positions and responsibilities is very restricted. The spiritual climate in which the Church serves God is bracing. I suspect in any age difficult challenges are ever before us.

PATHWAYS

'Pathways to Ministry' is now up and running. Congregations have received all the necessary information which is included in the set of four leaflets. The introductory leaflet which outlines Pathways to Ministry, along with leaflets for Readers, Ministry Assistants and Ministry of Word and Sacraments are readily available to all who would like to know more about these forms of service within the United Free Church. It is hoped that Pathways to Ministry will continue to be highlighted throughout the whole Church.

Enquirers' Day

An Enquirers' Day was held in Auchterarder in November 2012. Sixteen people from across the denomination attended the event. This was an encouraging response and those attending seemed to find the whole day to be helpful. The Overseas Committee and Ministry Committee shared some of the opportunities available at home and abroad and good contacts were made with those who attended.

STUDENTS

Mr Duncan Whitty, Leith: Ebenezer completed a BD degree at Edinburgh University in 2012 and is currently fulfilling the other denominational requirements as part of his preparation for ministry. Mr Whitty completed an attachment at Bannockburn: Murrayfield and is now serving a second attachment at Leith: Ebenezer. It is hoped he will be available for a call in 2014.

Mr Martin Paterson (Uddingston: Park) is in his second year of theological study at the Highland Theological College. Mr Paterson has completed an attachment at Glasgow: Darnley and has begun a second attachment at Stirling: St. Ninians. Mr Paterson is expected to complete his course of studies during 2014.

Mr Gordon Mackenzie (Lochwinnoch: Calder) is in his second year of theological study at the Highland Theological College. Mr Mackenzie has begun a first attachment at Glasgow: Crofffoot. Mr Mackenzie is expected to complete his course of studies in 2015.

Conferences

Two Student Conferences will have been held in the past year. A residential conference was held at Gartmore House in September 2012 and a two-day event in the Church Office in April 2013. The Committee is indebted to the Ministry Development Worker for his organisation of the programme of the conferences. There is a three year programme set which covers a wide range of subjects from preaching and pastoral care to speaking and the Manual of Practise and Procedure. Thanks are also due to the various speakers who lead these sessions. The response from the students and probationer has been very positive.

Support of Students

Student support is a priority for the Committee. It was felt that support to the students from an experienced minister, who is not a member of the Committee, could be helpful. The Committee was grateful to Rev. Dr John Evans for his willingness to assist in this way but sadly, following his recent death, the Committee will need to give further thought to this matter.

Ministerial Formation

The Committee continues to give serious consideration to the content of theological education currently available at universities and theological colleges across Scotland. Courses have changed in recent years as the numbers of theological students in training for the ministry has diminished. The Committee is also mindful of the changing requirements of ministerial formation. The nature of ministry has changed significantly in the past 50 years and will change all the more in the next 50 years. The Committee is in the process of contacting other Presbyterian denominations to see if there could be ways to explore this area together.

UCCSA STUDENT CONVOCATION

An invitation was received from the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa to their Student Convocation being held in Pietermaritzburg in July 2013. Unfortunately none of our students were available to attend but it is hope that this will be possible in the future.

PROBATIONER

Rev. Nathan Owens having completed the requirements set out by the church was licensed by the Presbytery of the West in June 2012. In September Mr. Owens embarked on the Cornhill Course for preaching and has found these studies to be of considerable benefit. The practical aspects of the course have been carried out at Uddingston: Park church.

PASTORS, MINISTRY ASSISTANTS AND PART-TIME MINISTERS

The United Free Church is very well served by its part-time Pastors, Ministry Assistants and Part-time Ministers. The Committee continues to receive regular reports and is encouraged by the faithful work carried out by these men and women.

IN-SERVICE CONFERENCE

The annual conference for ministers and pastors was held at Gartmore House in September 2012 and was greatly appreciated by those who attended. Rev Iain H Murray, Co-founder of Banner of Truth Trust spoke on a number of topics including 'Apostasy' and 'Controversy'. Andy Bathgate, Chief Executive of Scripture Union Scotland led two sessions

on youth work and Rev. Deirdre Lyon spoke enthusiastically about her time of Sabbatical leave in the United States.

The 2013 In-Service Conference is booked for 24 - 26th September at Gartmore. The main theme will be on preaching and it is hoped that four of the main sessions will focus on this vital area of ministry.

SABBATICAL LEAVE

The committee has reviewed the arrangements for Sabbatical Leave. Following a consultation exercise at the In-Service Conference, it was agreed there is a need to have more flexibility in the arrangements and this would encourage more ministers, ministry assistants and pastors to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the scheme. Among the changes being proposed are:

- Leave can be taken for periods of 1 week - 8 weeks.
- Leave will be accumulated at the rate of 1 week per year.
- There is greater flexibility in how the leave can be used and this will include attending a conference, taking time for a retreat or to reflect on one's ministry, following a programme of reading, engaging in a programme of study, research or other appropriate activity. However the intention continues to be that the leave will benefit the work of the ministry and therefore the work of the church as a whole.
- To reflect this greater flexibility, the name will change from Sabbatical Leave to Study Leave.
- The cost of pulpit supply during leave will be covered by the Ministry Committee and an allowance of up to £50 per week may be available to assist the minister etc. with costs incurred.
- The new scheme will commence on 1st January 2014 and there are transitional arrangements for those who have already accumulated 8 weeks of leave.

It is hoped that the introduction of these changes will make the new Study Leave more accessible to more of those serving the denomination as ministers, ministry assistants and pastors

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Committee is examining the area of professional development and how best support for ministers in this area can be provided. Members of the Committee have met with their counterparts in the Church of Scotland to find out more about its provision. It is hoped to make progress in the coming year.

PENSION SCHEME

In the light of new legislation in respect of pensions, consultations took place with Campbell Thomson, the Church's Independent Financial Advisers. The scheme operated with Friends Life did not meet all the new requirements and it was agreed to identify a new provider. Having considered a number of quotations it was agreed to accept the quotation from Aegon. Members of the previous scheme have been moved to the new scheme with Aegon. Members who have funds under the old scheme have been given advice on the benefits or otherwise of moving such funds to Aegon or leaving the existing funds with Friends Life.

STIPENDS AND SALARIES

A group with representatives of this Committee and of the Administration and Finance Committee has been considering various aspects of Ministry Funding. This included comparing the level of stipend with other denominations and with average salaries in the UK. This took account of the Pension Scheme, Life Assurance Scheme and Long Term Illness Cover, the provision of a Manse for ministers and assumed a figure of approximately £2,000 included in the minimum stipend towards expenses. It was also noted that the average salary in the UK is in the region of £26,000 p.a. On the basis of all the information available, it was felt that the remuneration package is reasonable compared with other denominations and compared with average salaries nationally.

In reviewing stipends and salaries and considering proposed figures for 2014, the Committee takes account of economic factors including inflation and also of comparisons with other Churches.

MINISTRY DEVELOPMENT WORKER

The Committee continues to be indebted to the Rev Alexander Ritchie for the work he has undertaken as Ministry Development Worker and would seek to extend this post for a further year.

SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

Representatives of the Committee have met with officials of the Church and Society Committee, Principal Clerks and General Secretary to prepare responses to the legislation being prepared on the issue of Same-Sex marriage. This has involved difficult and detailed examination of the proposed legislation and its possible impact on ministers and others within and out-with the church. Thanks are due to those who carried out incisive examination of the various documents to be considered and who led our discussions.

THANKS

Thanks are expressed to the many people who have contributed to the extensive work carried out by the Committee. Thanks especially to Rev. John Fulton and Mrs Helena Jarvis for their considerable and valued work.

ARCHIBALD M FORD
IAN F R LLOYD
JOHN O FULTON

Convener
Vice-convener
Secretary