

RESHAPING FOR MISSION – a review of progress, and next steps

A report to the General Assembly presented by the Reshaping for Mission group, a sub-group made up of members of the Administration and Finance Committee, the Ministry Committee and the Christian Education and Evangelism Committee

At the General Assembly in June 2015, the denomination adopted the Reshaping for Mission report, a document which is intended to encourage congregations across the denomination to be aware of the challenges which we face, and to respond to them in faith and with a renewed commitment to engage in mission in our communities across Scotland. Here is the vision of Reshaping for Mission.

“As a denomination we want to see United Free Church congregations across Scotland revitalised, renewed and growing and to see new congregations established, so that the denomination can play its part in the mission of God’s people in Scotland.”

Specifically, Reshaping for Mission has a threefold emphasis, namely

- Church planting
- Church revitalisation
- Established churches focussing on mission

Encouragements

There have been some very positive first steps in beginning to realise this vision and indications that the Lord is blessing this initiative.

- Plans for our first church plant in many years are getting underway in Aberdeen, with Torry Church hoping to see a daughter church come into being in Tullos. At the time of the writing of this report, conversations with a church planter are taking place, and may have borne fruit by the time of this General Assembly
- Dundee Church has called the Rev. Dr. Jane MacArthur with a view to church revitalisation whereby the minister will have both a pastoral role and also the responsibility to lead the congregation in engaging in mission within the local community.
- Kilmaurs Church has called the Rev Nathan Owens to be minister of the church, with the same goal of revitalisation as Dundee. They have been encouraged by a number of new people coming to attend worship.
- Chryston Church has bought a hall and community centre in Muirhead so that they can be in the heart of that community, and are exploring how best to use these new premises to engage in mission.
- Carnoustie Church is also committed to revitalisation and are currently seeking the right minister or church worker to lead this project.
- A number of churches have been visited by members of the Reshaping for Mission group who have introduced the initiative and have encouraged the ministers, Kirk Sessions and members of these churches to begin putting this into practice in their own setting.
- A number of congregations have had the joy of seeing individuals coming to faith over the last year, or have seen an increase in numbers attending.
- Others have had many encouragements in the commitment to prayer together.

CHALLENGES WHICH WE FACE

Developing prayer

There is the danger in Christian work that we talk so much about the importance of prayer (and we all acknowledge it) yet in practice often find that we let it slip, or for prayer to become an added extra at the end of a business meeting. If we are to see new churches planted, congregations revitalised, individuals coming to faith and maturing, and if we are to see the resources of personnel and finance which we need being provided then the sovereign Lord must do this – because we in our own strength cannot. So, the most crucial thing which we need to see occurring this year is increasing prayer for this initiative. A Reshaping for Mission prayer letter is produced regularly, and we would encourage the use of this in congregations. We will also encourage opportunities for ministers to support each other through times of prayer together, and to see time given to this in presbytery meetings or meetings organised by presbyteries. It will be good to see, where appropriate, congregations in a particular geographical area having “cluster” meetings to pray together.

Spreading the vision across the denomination

The goal of Reshaping for Mission in the end is not just to see individual church planting or revitalisation projects launched and brought to fruition, though these are part of it, but rather to see a commitment to mission becoming the lifeblood of our denomination. We desire that in all our congregations we are committed to seeing mission happening and growth resulting – growth in individual spiritual maturity and faith, growth in the impact our congregations make in their community, and growth in numbers. We will continue to give information about the progress of individual projects through Stedfast and the prayer letter, and use events such as the Dunblane day and presbytery events to foster this. There is also potential in social media such as Facebook to spread information and encouragement, though we recognise that perhaps for many of our members this is currently rather unknown territory. Members of the denomination who are on Facebook may be interested to know that there is a Reshaping for Mission Facebook page. And perhaps the best starting point is to have a member of the Reshaping for Mission group come to speak with a congregation’s Kirk Session or perhaps the whole church, to begin the process of seeing how this may be put into practice in a church’s own context.

Implementing the vision across presbyteries

At present, the Reshaping for Mission initiative is steered by a small group consisting of the convenors of the Ministry, Administration and Finance and Christian Education and Evangelism committees, along with some other co-opted members. However, we recognise that if this vision is to become a reality across the denomination, we will need to see it being disseminated and implemented through presbyteries, and individual congregations in turn being helped and encouraged to put it into practice as best they can. In the past it was expected that each presbytery should have a home mission committee. Our limited resources of time and personnel mean that forming such a committee now may be impractical, but the Reshaping for Mission group would want to encourage each of our presbyteries to consider the best way in which this vision can be implemented. Specifically we would like to see presbyteries encourage Reshaping for Mission in the following areas -

1. Facilitating prayer
2. Identifying opportunities for church planting
3. Identifying suitable churches to commit to working towards revitalisation
4. Sharing resources, stories and examples of good practice

(NB A fuller document going into more detail about this is being sent to each presbytery for consideration – see Appendix 1)

Involving children and young people

The appointment of Ricard Knott as full-time Youth and Children's Development worker across the denomination has been heartening. Many of our congregation's face the challenge of having few or no children regularly attending or involved in the life of the church, and the missional challenge of reaching this and upcoming generations of young people is great. Part of Reshaping for Mission must include a focus on how best to reach children and young people with the Gospel, and to that end we will continue to work with Richard to ensure that the needs of children and young people are highlighted, and also that their voices and insights are heard and fed into our plans.

Leaders and workers, and the need for reinforcements

We recognise that the challenges we face are huge. In particular, many of our smaller congregations would benefit from having a minister or mission worker in place to lead them forward. This is not to say that one individual can solve a whole congregation's mission problems – this is something in which as many members as possible need to share. Nevertheless, good leadership is often key growth. As a denomination we have often benefitted from having people from other denominations with experience who have come and joined us, and we see the need for that process to continue to help us take up some of the present and future opportunities which Reshaping for Mission provides. We have advertised for such workers on our website, and in both Life and Work and the Presbyterian Herald (the magazine of the Presbyterian Church of Ireland). We do not wish simply to be a job creation scheme but instead look to God to bring to us those whom he is calling to share in the mission challenge which faces us.

Developing resources to help presbyteries and individual congregations

We will continue to develop resources ourselves and also to share resources which other church groups and individuals have found helpful in encouraging and equipping for mission. Many churches and denominations across the UK are seeking to respond in a way similar to ourselves to the mission challenges of a secularising society, and so there are many resources out there. It is hoped that the denomination's website will be a place to which ministers, interim moderators, Kirk Sessions and congregations will go to find material which they can use to help them go forward in this process. We also encourage people to recommend other resources which they have used and which they themselves have found helpful. (One resource is a sheet giving guidance to interim moderators as to how they might start or take forward conversations on Reshaping for Mission within the congregation for which they have responsibility – see Appendix 2)

And in all this we should emphasise that the Reshaping for Mission group will do all we can to help and advise presbyteries as we seek to take this process forward together. Please do not hesitate to get in touch, either by contacting the UF offices or by contacting David Miller at david.millerstonpastor@gmail.com.

In the name of the Committee

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| GRAHAM G. BROWN | Convener |
| JOHN O. FULTON | Secretary |

Appendix 1

Reshaping for Mission – Implementing the vision across presbyteries

At the General Assembly in June 2015, the denomination adopted the Reshaping for Mission report, a document which is intended to encourage congregations across the denomination to be aware of the challenges which we face, and to respond to them in faith and with a renewed commitment to engage in mission in our communities across Scotland. Here is the vision of Reshaping for Mission.

“As a denomination we want to see United Free Church congregations across Scotland revitalised, renewed and growing and to see new congregations established, so that the denomination can play its part in the mission of God’s people in Scotland.”

The challenge of course is to find ways to help this vision become a reality across the denomination, and to help as many churches as possible both to grasp it and to begin to put it into practice in their own contexts. We recognise the limitations which we have on our time, our shared sense that we are all beginners in this area, and the hard soil of a secular Scotland in which we are seeking to sow the seeds of the Gospel and in due time to reap a harvest. At present, the Reshaping for Mission initiative is steered by a small group consisting of the convenors of the Ministry, Administration and Finance and Christian Education and Evangelism committees, along with some other co-opted members. However, we recognise that if this vision is to become a reality across the denomination, we will need to see it being disseminated and implemented through presbyteries and individual congregations in turn being helped and encouraged to put it into practice as best they can.

Our Manual of Practice and Procedure refers to “a home mission committee...in each presbytery” (Appendix4.A.II.4), indicating that it our current focus on mission is not something new but rather is an attempt to return to something which we have in our history recognised as important . Our situation is different now, and our more limited resources mean that forming such a committee may not be practical at this stage. However, what this reference reminds us of is the recognition that each Presbytery should have a commitment to home mission. So, this document aims to indicate the key ways in which Presbyteries can support and encourage Reshaping for Mission and to encourage presbyteries to consider how best, given their resources, to take this forward. It may result in the forming of a mission committee, it may result in an existing presbytery committee taking on the remit of encouraging mission, or it may result in an individual member of presbytery being given this role supported by the presbytery. The important thing is that mission makes its way into presbytery’s thinking, planning and praying, and ultimately, we hope, into the heart of the life of the denomination, of presbyteries and of individual congregations.

Reshaping for Mission has a threefold emphasis, namely

- Church planting
- Church revitalisation
- Established churches focussing on mission

Although the fragile state of many of our churches means that there is a lot of talk about church revitalisation and that may be where we are tempted to place our priorities, that is only one aspect of Reshaping for Mission. Church planting, in other words, establishing new UF congregations where none currently exists, is hard but it comes without the difficulty of having to reorganise an existing congregation who are used to doing things in a particular way and for whom the changes needed to see revitalisation happen may be hard to take. This is what makes revitalisation difficult. And churches which are already functioning well

need to be sure that they are continuing to address the challenges of mission in their community. So, we hope that presbyteries will keep this threefold emphasis of Reshaping for Mission in view as they consider how best to encourage mission across their congregations.

In practice, we would like to urge presbyteries to seek to encourage Reshaping for Mission in the following areas.

5. **Facilitating prayer** – All our mission activity will be empty and hollow unless it is undergirded by prayer. We produce regular prayer letters and hope that these will be used individually and in church prayer meetings. However, we would particularly like presbyteries to explore ways in which to encourage corporate times of prayer across a group of congregations or across the whole presbytery. Could presbyteries organise days of prayer, or have “clusters” of churches which are relatively close to each other geographically to meet together to pray, for each other and for mission across the denomination? And could there also be time set aside in regular presbytery meetings for members of presbytery to pray together?

6. **Identifying opportunities for church planting** – Church plants emerge in a number of ways. Sometimes a particular congregation will see the opportunity in a geographical area close to where they are, and will seek to plant a daughter church. Sometimes a group of Christians meeting together in some form of Bible study group or other outreach will realise that they have the potential to become a church. However, a third approach to church planting is for a need to be identified in a particular area, perhaps of new housing or perhaps where there are no actively witnessing churches, and for a group of churches to decide, under God, to launch a church plant there. And this is where the Presbytery mission group may come in. It may be that they may be able to identify an area where there is both need and opportunity for a church plant (and perhaps where there is an existing UF congregation relatively nearby which may be able to support it) and undertake to pray and work towards launching such a plant. How exciting would it be if each of our presbyteries could pray and work towards launching at least one church plant in the next three or four years.

7. **Identifying suitable churches to commit to working towards revitalisation** – Many of our churches are small and their longer term future, without significant growth and change, appears uncertain. One significant factor in a church being revitalised and experiencing fresh growth is leadership. However, many of our smaller congregations are not in a position where they can afford to call a full-time or perhaps even a part-time minister. The idea behind revitalisation projects is that the denomination will work with churches which appear to have both the willingness and the potential to aim at renewed growth and life, giving help in both identifying a suitably gifted worker, who may be an ordained minister but who does not need to be and helping support them financially. It must be stressed here that this is not simply a case of the denomination underwriting a church’s finances and enabling them to support business as usual, nor should it be seen as the church buying in someone to do the work of mission instead of them. The revitalising worker will have the responsibility to nurture the existing congregation and equip them to engage in mission together, and will also have the task of engaging significantly in the local community seeking opportunities both to serve and to share the Gospel. There is no blueprint for what a revitalised church will look like, but the existing congregation must realise that it is likely to look rather different from what is currently there. Growth may not necessarily translate into more numbers on a Sunday morning worship service – it may show itself in activities such as Messy Church or an Alpha or Christianity Explored course running in a local pub or café. It may also mean changes in the style of Sunday morning worship, or even a change of location of the church. So, for a church to move towards revitalisation it will need to show:
 - A willingness to change for the sake of growth

- A desire to pray for new life to emerge
- A generosity that makes the congregation willing to offer their “five loaves and two fishes” for the sake of the Gospel – this is not just giving money but also offering time and their spiritual gifts
- An indication that there is potential for new growth to happen

The interim moderator of a small congregation will be key in helping that church think through the questions of whether they want to engage in revitalisation. It should also be stressed that while a leader *in situ* is really important in helping a church move towards revitalisation, the congregation should be encouraged not just to wait until a leader arrives. Presbytery and interim moderators, within their limitations, should seek to encourage small congregations to explore ways in which they can engage in mission themselves. Indeed, this willingness to try something will itself be an indicator of whether the church truly wants to be revitalised.

8. **Sharing resources, stories and examples of good practice** – We are all beginners in this area, so we will need continually to be encouraging each other. One of the ways in which we can do this is by helping each other to see what we are trying, what is effective, and what resources we have found that help us. There are lots of denominations across the UK who are engaging in processes which are similar to Reshaping for Mission and which may be things from which we can learn. And we will also try to encourage each other when we try things that don't work. Giving each other permission to experiment and perhaps to fail is important in this process. And doing this means we will not only focus on our church plants and revitalisation projects. Our established churches also need to be continually exploring ways in which they can engage in mission. And linking these opportunities to share ideas and good practice with opportunities to pray for each other will be particularly helpful.

Putting this into practice

The Reshaping for Mission Group is well aware of the limitations of time, personnel and resources which we face, as a denomination and as presbyteries. This paper is intended to highlight the areas of mission to which we would like Presbyteries to give attention. However, it is not intended to be prescriptive as to how Presbyteries can put things into practice. It may be possible to establish a mission committee, as the Manual of Practice and Procedure envisages. It may be that there is an existing committee which can take this on, or be reconstituted to focus on mission. Alternatively, it may be possible to appoint a Presbytery Mission Coordinator whose role will be to encourage the development of Reshaping for Mission across presbyteries. Another, perhaps more manageable, approach would be simply to include “Reshaping for Mission” as an agenda item for presbytery meetings and to give time to discussing it among all those who are there.

And in all this we should emphasise that the Reshaping for Mission group will do all we can to help and advise presbyteries as we seek to take this process forward together. Please do not hesitate to get in touch, either by contacting the UF office or by contacting David Miller at david.millerstonpastor@gmail.com.

Appendix 2

Reshaping for Mission - Guidance for Interim Moderators & Kirk Sessions

The vision of Reshaping for Mission - *“As a denomination we want to see United Free Church congregations across Scotland revitalised, renewed and growing and to see new congregations established, so that the denomination can play its part in the mission of God’s people in Scotland.”*

The Reshaping for Mission group have prepared this document to help interim moderators to encourage the church for which they have responsibility to think positively about the future and focus not just focus on survival. It should help the church to assess the mission challenges and opportunities which they face in the area of local mission and to explore ways, however modest, of engaging in mission. Each congregation is different in terms of its location, its numbers and its resources, so there cannot be a “one-size-fits-all” policy. It is suggested that a congregation work through the questions contained here, which should, along with the congregational profile, give an indication of whether the congregation have begun to grasp the serious challenges which all of our congregations face. Our intention is not, however, to leave congregations feeling overwhelmed and hopeless but rather to help them to begin or to continue the process of reshaping for mission, even if this process begins with small steps.

We should also stress that we recognise the difficulties which interim moderators face in overseeing a congregation, as they have responsibilities to their own church. Factors such as distance from the congregation and time available will also impact on how much they are able to do. However, it may be possible to devote part of session meetings to working through some of the questions and discussion material below. And the Reshaping for Mission group are happy to come to speak to a meeting of the Kirk session, perhaps along with managers/ Deacons Court/ congregational board, or even to the whole congregation about Reshaping for Mission and how to take it forward in their own context.

Discussion questions

1. If the church is of a good size, is spiritually and financially healthy and is looking to call a full-time minister, the church should be encouraged to ensure that mission remains a priority in its thinking, and that it calls a minister who shares that recognition of where a church’s priorities need to be.

Mission health check

- *How many new members have joined the church through profession of faith over the last five years?*
 - *What will make that number increase over the next five years?*
 - *What resources and opportunities for mission do you have locally?*
 - *Which of your activities are aimed at nurturing the Christians in you church, and which are aimed at encouraging church members to build relationships with non-Christian or at least non-church going folk in the area?*
 - *Do you have an evangelism or outreach element in your church’s budget?*
 - *Are you already praying for the impact of mission in your community?*
 - *Do church members feel equipped to share their faith with friends and neighbours?*
2. If the church is small and has been declining in numbers or has been vacant for a while then the following questions may be appropriate to consider with them. They are in four areas – foundations, attraction, invitation and innovation. They do not need to be

followed rigidly. Instead, we suggest you use them to help a congregation begin to change its mindset about mission, and to begin to sense of what may be possible.

Foundations – These are intended to help you gauge the health of your church and your resources for mission

- *What proportion of your membership live within one mile of the church? (Your outreach approaches will vary depending on whether you are predominantly a “local” or a “gathered” church)*
- *How do you understand mission, and what is the goal of the mission of the local church?*
- *Who sets the direction of the church, and how is this done?*
- *What financial resources do you have? How can you use them for mission?*
- *Do you have a prayer meeting or gatherings when the church prays for mission? (If the answer to this is “no” then the congregation should be encouraged to start such a gathering.)*
- *Apart from a Sunday service, what activities do you have?*
- *What is the goal of these activities? How will they help the church in her mission?*
- *Do you have a Sunday school or other children’s and youth activities? Are the children and young people who come mainly children and/or grandchildren of church members, or mainly from non-church families?*
- *If you don’t have children’s or youth work, do you have people in your church who are able to start and run something*

Attraction – can people find us and how welcoming are we?

- *How do you let people in the community know that your church is there and is active?*
- *When new people come, who welcomes them and helps them feel at home? Remember that for many people now, going to church feels about as strange as we would feel about going to a mosque*
- *How welcoming and comfortable is your building where you have your worship services?*
- *Do you have coffee and a chance to meet and chat after your service? If not, how do you build fellowship and get to know newcomers?*

Invitation – how can we bring people in? (And remember that most non-Christians are very suspicious of coming to a church meeting, so this can only be a small part of the solution)

- *What does your church do to invite people in?*
- *What events or activities do you have to which members can invite non-church friends along? Remember that many people are rather suspicious or cynical about church and Christianity, so building relationships and having events which can act as “stepping stones” for people may be quite important.*
- *How often do you and your church members invite people to church or church activities?*
- *What things make it easy or hard to invite people?*
- *How confident do you and your church members feel about sharing their faith with others? How can you increase this confidence?*

Innovation – launching new things on other people’s territory (where we may feel uncomfortable) rather than just expecting folk to come to church (where they may feel uncomfortable)

- *Where in your community do groups of people gather? (e.g. pubs, social clubs, sports halls, school halls, street corners, etc.)*
- *What different, distinct groups do you have in your community that are not involved in the life of the church? (e.g. park runs, gangs, art groups, mothers and toddlers, carers, literacy groups, immigrants, lonely elderly, folk with learning disabilities, etc.)*

- *Do you have any personal contacts through some of your church members with any of these groups?*
- *Who are the gatekeepers, i.e. the people who will be your way in to one of these groups?*
- *How can you and your church serve your community in some way?*

We hope that you will find some of these helpful in working with the congregation which you serve as interim moderator. You may also find the course "Mission Shaped Intro" which is available through the Fresh Expressions website - <https://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/msi> - a useful resource. Other resources will increasingly be made available through the Reshaping for Mission section on the denomination's own website, including a PowerPoint presentation introducing the Reshaping for Mission initiative which you may wish to use with a Kirk session. And if, after having spent time with the congregation engaging with this material you feel that there is a desire to take things forward, please get in touch with you Presbytery mission coordinator or with the Reshaping for Mission group to consider the next step.

May the Lord encourage you in your service for Him.

The Reshaping for Mission Group, March 2016