

Reshaping for Mission - Guidance for ministers, Kirk Sessions and interim moderators

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 ministers, Kirk sessions and interim moderators to encourage the church for which they have responsibility to think positively about the future and not to focus simply 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 Kirk session or even the whole congregation work through the questions contained here, which should 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 if vacant 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 get a 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 a minister, elder or 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