

REPORT OF THE CHRISTIAN EDUCATION COMMITTEE

GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2005

Though it is true that the remit of this Committee could be as wide as we could want – it includes “to help equip people to integrate faith and life in everyday experience” – it was early recognised that much was already in place with this same aim. The Committee gathers under one umbrella for the first time the work of the National and Presbytery Development work, and the Elder Training programme, and it seemed therefore that our first priority was to encourage and support this work.

This was especially true for two main reasons – firstly the denomination has itself set the Development work as one of its major priorities; secondly the Elder Training programme seemed to have become somewhat semi-detached and the bringing of the two functions under this Committee offered opportunities to find ways of integrating the training/development areas. This also means that the National Development Coordinator has further courses available directly to him through the elder trainers as he (and the Presbytery Coordinators) sees the needs in the course of his work. Along with this work comes what has been the denominational August event. On the whole the Committee felt that this was enough for the churches, who have many ongoing priorities in ministry and outreach.

NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The National Development Team (NDT) was established to coordinate and assist the work of the denomination. This it has sought to do through the various Assembly committees and the three Presbyteries. Its function has been to respond to what is going on in the Church. In the Presbyteries of the East and West help has been given to organise the various “event” nights agreed by the Presbyteries and these have been appreciated by the people attending. This has been more difficult in the Presbytery of the North as, understandably, Rev Stephen Matthews has been serving the Church as Moderator of the General Assembly. “*Spirit of life – Unlocked*” was held in August 2004 and was well attended and received. The events are an attempt to create a programme which focuses on the crucial spiritual issues of our time. It has been hoped that such events would be a springboard to new initiatives in congregations.

As a support to some of the Assembly Committees, the “Outreach” newsletter was begun. It is hoped that this quarterly will provide up-dated information from committees on their plans and aspirations and also provide some theological reflection. The clear emphasis of “Outreach” is that of mission and evangelism. It is a great challenge in our time to share the Gospel throughout our land. There are a number of initiatives within the United Free Church and beyond which are focused on this. This year’s denominational event entitled “*20/20 Vision God’s Mission-shaped Church*” centres on this theme. “*Fresh Expressions*”, an initiative in the Church of England, challenges the Church as a whole to explore new ways of reaching others for Christ. The Evangelism Committee is looking at steps to employ, identify, train and support evangelists. The Overseas and Ministry Committees have been attempting to bring missionaries to Scotland.

The future of the work of the National Development Team is in the hands of the Church. Although the work highlighted above has been helpful there is more that could be done to root this broader work into the life of individual congregations. The Coordinators have therefore identified a number of congregations to be visited before the General Assembly. These visits are intended to explore whether the NDT could be of assistance to congregations or groups of congregations in helping them look at congregational development, spiritual growth or mission and evangelism. If these visits prove to be of benefit, the team feel that this approach should be explored in the year ahead and to that end the Committee recommend the continuance of

the National and Presbytery appointments for a further year. If this does not prove to be the way ahead we will need to review the role, function or continuance of the team itself.

ELDER TRAINING

Currently there are three accredited trainers, Nicky Kyle (Cumnock/Lochwinnoch), George Banks (Corstorphine/Leith) and Gordon Steel (Millerston), who are available to provide training for Elders and others. In addition, Andrew Scott (Milngavie) and Ian Shering (Auchterarder) have both attended trainer's core skills weekends, run by the Church of Scotland Elder Training Advisor, and it is anticipated that Ron Bingham (Sauchie) will attend one sometime this year.

For some time now elder training has generally been carried out in an ad hoc fashion consisting of individual workshops presented within other events rather than complementary workshops presented as a complete course. This has had the further drawback of not providing sufficient opportunity for Andrew or Ian to conduct any workshops and gain accreditation as trainers yet. The Church of Scotland Elder Training Advisor will assist us, where possible, to enable them to gain accreditation at the earliest opportunity. The increased number of trainers should assist the Committee, through the trainers and co-ordinators, to develop a more pro-active adult training strategy for the future.

There is already a wide range of courses available, and though we do see the linking of the National Development Coordinator with Elder Training as helpful, this does not in any way preclude Kirk Sessions or Presbyteries from taking the initiative in examining their own training needs, and the Committee would encourage this.

The Committee is also aware that much of the training available is very suitable for a broader group than just elders, and viewing the wider possibilities of working with churches individually or in groups, we are looking at a change of name for the Elder Trainers to recognise the wider role we see them undertaking.

DENOMINATIONAL EVENT

The Committee felt that this has been – and remains – a worthwhile and valuable contribution to the life of the church. It provides an opportunity to learn new skills; develop gifts; be challenged in thinking – and as importantly allows us to enjoy fellowship across the whole denomination. Responses from “Spirit of Life Unlocked” were analysed and the group who had put together the 2004 event encouraged to develop the 2005 programme “20/20 Vision God’s Mission-shaped Church”. The concept combines looking forward, with clarity of vision.

Two things ought to be said. The first is obvious – be there! It is in Bannockburn High School on Saturday 27th August. The second is – be ready to be stretched. It was interesting to note that in 2004 the practical seminars on evangelism were either worst attended, or had to be cancelled. We need to take risks with our faith for 2020 to be a reality.

OTHER PRELIMINARY THOUGHTS

The Committee is keen to see the development of small group work, bearing in mind that for some, the church *is* a small group. We also recognise that the greatest stimulus to this is through the work of the Development Coordinators, and the experience of the Denominational event. We would simply ask that those who have experienced, enjoyed and benefited from these events not be shy in sharing with the more reluctant, and seeking to encourage wider participation.

One of the simplest ways in which individual Christians can develop their Christian education is through good Christian books. The history of the thriving church in Scotland

shows clearly the important place of a well-read laity (and ministry!). Research also seems to suggest that although there have never been more books published, less than ever is being read. We are exploring ways of stimulating reading through book reviews with the possibility of using the denominational web-site.

In the name of the Committee

IAN F R LLOYD	Convener
GORDON STEEL	Vice-convener
JOHN O FULTON	Secretary