

REPORT OF THE EVANGELISM COMMITTEE

GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2005

The Oxford Dictionary says, "To evangelise is to preach or promulgate the Gospel". One of the problems with evangelism is the particular perception that some Christians may have of evangelism - and this perception, in itself, can often be a barrier. Those Christians who are happy with the concept of evangelisation may still struggle with some aspects of outreach - e.g. door to door work or street work. But evangelism is much more than knocking on a door or handing out a tract. The Committee would encourage every Christian to see that evangelism is the out-working of God's grace in our lives. Evangelism is not just what we do, but what we are. For too long many have appeared to see evangelism as an option rather than a way of life.

ENCOURAGING EVANGELISM

Over this year the committee has sought to get a flavour of what is happening, or not happening, in evangelism across many of our congregations. Although there are some good things happening, the overall picture is not very encouraging. This led the committee to consider how best they can support and encourage congregations in this vital area.

It was helpful to receive a report from rev Archie Ford, National development Coordinator, who attended a mission consultation attended by representatives of a number of denominations. There had been a recognition that many people never attend church and are unlikely ever to come along on a Sunday. The Church needs to become 'mission-shaped' and to develop new ways of reaching these people and communicating with them where they are. For example the Church of England has developed a programme 'Fresh Expressions' which aims to reach people 'on their territory'. The committee continues to grapple with what it means to be a 'Mission shaped Church'.

MISSION ENABLERS

Flowing from the discussions of the Committee a vision emerged of seeing 'Mission Enablers' in each of our congregations. It is the vision of the Committee that the Mission Enablers would work with the Kirk Session to encourage others within the Church to see evangelism as a way of life for all Believers.

The Committee is concerned that our evangelism is based on the Word of God. It is also concerned that we have a good theological base for encouraging members of our congregations to see that Evangelism is the outworking of God's grace in our own lives. With this in mind the Committee is recommending the Distance Learning Programme Course provided by the International Christian College on Mission and Evangelism. This we believe would be a good base from which to start the training of our own people in evangelism. It is hoped that a number within the UF will take up this Distance Learning Programme. The Convener has contacted a number of Ministers and Pastors to see if they could identify a member of their congregation who would be willing to take part in this course of study. If any other churches are interested, the convener would be happy for you to approach him about this matter.

The ICC is willing to offer this course at a reduced rate, for which we are very grateful. At present the Committee is hoping to offer the course free to those identified by their Minister or Pastor. The course can be completed in anything from one year to three years, allowing those who take part to work at their own pace. They will receive help from a tutor.

BRIDGES TO FAITH

The Committee agreed to support a project 'Bridges to faith in 21st Century Scotland'. This is being coordinated by Rev David Currie, Senior Adviser in Mission and Evangelism to the Church of Scotland. A number of people will be interviewed who have come to faith in the last two years and are actively involved in a local church. The intention is to identify some of the 'bridges' which have been crucial to people coming to faith in Christ.

The Committee is grateful to Mr I Shering, of Auchterarder, who is receiving training to enable him to carry out some of these interviews. The challenge is to find five people who have recently come to faith and to identify the bridges to faith. It is hoped that from the 'Building Bridges report' the Church might learn how we can more effectively reach the lost.

FUTURE PLANS

The Development Coordinators will be visiting congregations over the coming year and evangelism will be one of the matters they will be exploring. It may be that members of the committee will also share in these visits to help us develop initiatives which are appropriate and helpful for congregations.

The committee believes that if we are to take evangelism seriously within the United Free Church there is a need to have someone appointed, at least initially on a part time basis, who will not only engage in evangelism but will train, support and encourage others in this vital area of the Church's life.

William Booth the founder of the Salvation Army was stung into wholehearted Christian work by a sceptic who said, "If I believed what you Christians believed, I would not rest day or night from telling people about it." What a need in our day for more Christians to be wholehearted about their faith. To this end the Committee is working closely with the Development Coordinators and the Youth Worker to encourage a more wholehearted approach to mission and evangelism.

In the name of the Committee

ROBERT O OWENS

NICKY KYLE

JOHN O FULTON

Convener

Vice-convener

Secretary