

REPORT OF THE MINISTRY COMMITTEE

GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2010

INTRODUCTION

This report reflects much of the work carried out by the committee throughout the year, particularly with regard to the provision of a trained ministry within the United Free Church. The report of the committee has two elements. The first part concentrates on Pathways to Ministry as a structure for providing a trained ministry. The second part covers the deployment and continuing development of those engaged in ministry.

The challenge the committee faces is how to provide a trained ministry within a changing situation. A growing number of congregations find they can no longer support a full time ministry and those who can have often found it difficult to do so, enduring a prolonged period of vacancy. Added to this is an increasing move toward the part time ministry offered by pastors, or congregations exploring new patterns of ministry, or entering into local ecumenical partnerships.

This presents a clear challenge as to how ministry is delivered, but also an opportunity to develop training that is appropriate and flexible enough to equip people for the challenge of ministry today. It is the view of the committee that the Pathways to Ministry structure provides a framework suitable for the delivery of a theologically trained ministry. Recognising however that the traditional picture of one congregation with one ordained minister is at present not always a viable option, those engaged within ministry and those congregations seeking a trained ministry may well have to rise to the challenge and the opportunity of being flexible enough to adapt to the national and local situation.

The committee has given considerable time to exploring the provision of available courses of study that would be suitable for readers, ministry assistants, candidates for ministry, and for the professional development of those involved in Ministry who would like to undertake ongoing study and presents 'Pathways to Ministry' as a new way forward for Ministerial Formation in the United Free Church which would aim to provide those involved in Ministry with appropriate training and ongoing development.

PATHWAYS TO MINISTRY

Ministerial Formation in the United Free Church

Introduction

The future of ministry in the United Free Church has been a subject for considerable concern and discussion within the Church for a number of years. In particular two documents presented to the General Assembly have influenced the thinking of the Ministry Committee and form the background to the strategy presented in this report.

A discussion paper prepared jointly by the then Business and Administration and Ministry and Home Affairs Committees was presented to the General Assembly of 2004 in which consideration of future forms of ministry in the United Free Church was a key element. Kirk Sessions were asked to respond to the paper, which included the question, 'Does the United Free Church desire a trained ministry?' The responses clearly indicated agreement with the Committee's view that a trained ministry was necessary for the Church although further work was needed to clarify how this was to be attained and exactly what form ministerial formation might take.

In the light of the responses to the Discussion paper, the General Assembly of 2005 instructed the Panel on Doctrine “to give theological consideration to ‘Ministry for the United Free Church of Scotland’ and report to the General Assembly of 2006”. A final report from the Panel was accepted by the General Assembly of 2007 and various matters remitted to the Ministry Committee for further consideration. The Panel's report forms the backdrop to the Ministry Committee's consideration of these matters and in particular the Committee has recognised as the Panel's report states, that 'There is a need for the United Free Church of Scotland to develop a clear strategy for ministry which takes account of the particular place given to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament. It is to be hoped that such a strategy would enable us to have the most helpful arrangements for all including those serving as ministers, pastors and readers and that it would enhance and encourage the ministry of the whole people of God.'

This is what the Ministry Committee has attempted to do and over the past three years has spent much time and effort finding a way forward for ministry and in dealing with the matters raised by the Panel on Doctrine. This report presents a strategy for the future of ministry within the denomination giving, as agreed by the General Assembly recognition to the particular place given to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament but also looking at the arrangements for other forms of ministry.

Common point of entry

All applicants for ministry, full time or part time, seeking ordination or not, will face the same selection procedures. Regardless of the applicant's view as to their ultimate destination or the route they wish to take, all applications will proceed in the same way and it will be for the committee in consultation with the applicant to decide on the path to be followed. Although not included as part of the main body of this report, it is the intention of the committee to have a similar procedure for those wishing to become readers.

If the proposals in this report are agreed by the General Assembly, the committee intend to prepare leaflets which would be available to individuals and congregations which will clarify roles and outline opportunities for all interested in trained ministry within the Church.

It is proposed that the Church should have three categories of trained ministry, readers, ministry assistants and ministers of word and sacrament. Details regarding readers will be given later and this report outlines procedures for the other two categories.

Enquirers

Throughout this process the committee would seek to assure people of their value and help them to follow God's call in a way that best suits their gifts. The process would normally begin with an informal and confidential meeting with officials of the committee who will outline procedures but also offers ways in which the prospective candidate might be helped to explore their sense of Call.

The enquirer would then normally be given a short exploratory placement with a minister. The purpose of this placement would be to allow the minister to explore with the enquirer about their sense of call to ministry, make an initial assessment of any strengths and weaknesses and report back to the committee. This period will not be funded – except for expenses - by the committee and would be arranged to suit both the convenience of the minister and enquirer. It would be at this point that the enquirer would decide if they wanted to make a formal application to the committee.

They could apply either to be accepted to become ministry assistants or candidates for the ordained ministry. The ministry assistant path is intended for those seeking to be employed as ministry assistants and working under the oversight of a minister or interim moderator. The ordained ministry path is for those seeking to become ministers of word and sacrament. The nature and length of the courses of study obviously vary between the two paths. There will be the possibility for someone initially accepted to become a ministry assistant to apply at a later date to be considered for the ordained ministry.

Applicants

All applicants must normally be members of the United Free Church for at least one year. Current age restrictions will be amended so that normally ministers should have completed their training by age 55, ministry assistants by age 60 and readers by age 65. Following the submission of a formal application accompanied by references, the selection procedures would be followed. Different arrangements would apply for those who are ordained ministers of other recognised denominations who wish to serve within the United Free Church of Scotland. If the application is to become a candidate for ministry of word and sacrament it would normally go first to the Presbytery for consideration of the person's piety and motives.

Selection Procedures

All applicants would be interviewed by the committee. An applicant's recognition as a student in preparation for ministry would be based not only on the interview but on references, report from the initial attachment, health examination and a psychological assessment. If a candidate was selected with the aim of working towards completing ministry assistant path, this would not preclude them moving to the ordained ministry path at a later date. However should someone wish to remain as a 'ministry assistant' it would be clear that there could be no change in their responsibilities, terms of employment or status no matter how long they serve or how effective their ministry.

Training

Ministry Assistants: It will normally be the case that a certain level of training is undertaken by part-time ministry assistants, and the committee is conscious that such individuals may well have employment or other commitments outside of church life. It is hoped that this training is sufficiently accessible and flexible to take account of these factors.

The Committee has identified suitable courses delivered by institutions which can be studied either full or part-time. These are based on a module structure, and are offered normally in distance learning or online formats, with full tutor support. This has the benefit of enabling applicants to study at their own pace, working towards a *Certificate* level qualification in theology. Applicants will normally select a course appropriate to their experience and circumstances under the committee's direction, and in full consultation with the Adviser of Studies. Courses have no formal entry requirements, and whilst previous study would be advantageous, this is not essential. Options for training for ministry assistants include courses at Highland Theological College, International Christian College, St John's College, Nottingham and the Theological Institute of the Scottish Episcopal Church.

The Committee feels it appropriate to require applicants to become ministry assistants to complete 1-year of study in their approved course satisfactorily, prior to any appointment

being considered. All applicants will undertake modules in *Biblical Studies*, which cover introductory Old Testament and New Testament material.

It is now standard practice to view ministry training as holistic in nature, and the Committee would acknowledge the need to facilitate more than just academic study. Therefore, training for those seeking to be ministry assistants will normally involve a 3-month placement, during which the emphasis will be upon participation in Sunday worship and aspects of pastoral care. These are the core functions of work as a ministry assistant. This placement will normally take place in the course of the applicant's initial year of approved study.

Ministry assistant applicants will sit an English Bible exam, and guidance as to the paper's format and expectations will be given in due course. It is also envisaged that applicants will be subject to two assessments of their leading of public worship and these would normally take place at strategic points in their training, and will be overseen by experienced ministers and elders duly appointed by the committee.

Training for those on the ministry assistant path will introduce applicants to the history and ethos of the United Free Church of Scotland, as well as to the rudiments of church practice and procedure as contained in the *Manual*. This aspect of training will be in-house and provided by those within the denomination suitably qualified to deliver it. The committee also envisages providing some training for such applicants in the vital area of voice production. Aspects of the training may be delivered in covenant partnership with the Church of Scotland.

Applicants will be encouraged to continue study after appointment, and normally ministry assistants will be required to attend additional conferences or other training events under the direction of the committee. It is envisaged that all qualifications and study credit gained at the ministry assistant stage will be transferable. In practice this means either that these can be used as a means of accessing further study, or that they may form part of an application for the ordained ministry (i.e ministry of word & sacrament) training. However it must be stressed that each application for training will always be assessed on its own merits.

Candidates following the ordained ministry path may come from those who apply direct to be recognised as candidates for the ministry, or from those who have previously trained and served as ministry assistants. Candidates for the ordained ministry will be required to undertake academic courses from the institutions approved by the General Assembly in consultation with the Adviser of Studies. All candidates for the ministry would fulfil all the other present requirements including two attachments.

If the committee considers it appropriate and the individual senses a call to be a minister of word and sacrament, a 'ministry assistant candidate' already serving the Church may be able to undertake training leading to the ordained ministry whilst still employed by the committee.

All candidates would sit three Bible exams and one in Church Practice and Procedure. All candidates would also attend courses arranged by the committee on the ethos, history and practice of the United Free Church.

Mentoring Period:

Both ministers and ministry assistants would have a mentor assigned for the first year, and longer if required.

Denominational Courses

The need for more denominational input in our ministerial formation is generally accepted but the delivery of it is more difficult. Some courses might be for all candidates, some for those already serving as pastors or ministry assistants and some could include ministers as part of their ongoing professional development. We are exploring the possibility of some important areas not covered in the university courses being covered in co-operation with other Churches. Indeed there may be several aspects of ministerial formation which could be conducted on an ecumenical basis.

Roles

The position of ministry assistant would seek to develop the current role of pastor, while providing opportunities to move on to become candidates for the ordained ministry of the United Free Church of Scotland. This will not affect the role or position of those who were serving the Church as pastors prior to the General Assembly of 2009 who will continue on the same basis with annual contracts, unless they themselves wish to change to the new system.

The new role of ministry assistant would be centred around the conduct of worship and pastoral work. Ministry assistants would be appointed by the Ministry Committee, and in congregations served by ministry assistants the Presbytery shall continue to appoint an interim moderator of Session.

The role of the *interim* moderator is outlined in the Manual of Practice and Procedure, with specific references found on pages 39 and 49. The interim moderator is appointed by, and answerable to, Presbytery and must therefore be a member of Presbytery. The interim moderator is responsible for ensuring that arrangements are made for public worship and the celebration of the Sacraments and that pastoral needs attended to. The interim moderator must also make sure that Church Courts are properly constituted and correct procedures followed including those regarding the filling of the vacancy.

If the interim moderator is a minister some of the above will be carried out personally so far as responsibilities to his or her own congregation allow. However when the interim moderator is an elder, some functions will require to be carried out by a minister. In either case regardless as to whether some aspects are delegated to another person, it remains the role of the interim moderator to ensure they are properly carried out.

Deployment

There is a need for stronger links between the committee and presbyteries in order to make best use of the ministerial resources available. It may be that a regular meeting between committee and presbytery officials prior to the review of appointments would be helpful. This would provide an opportunity for discussion on various forms of ministry such as team ministries and on ways of managing readjustments.

Conclusion

This presents a framework for the future of ministry in keeping with the Panel on Doctrine Report of 2007 and the views expressed by Kirk Sessions and Presbyteries in their responses to the previous Discussion Paper on Ministry.

OTHER MATTERS

MINISTRY DEVELOPMENT WORKER

Rev A Ritchie was appointed as Ministry Development Worker from September 2009. This was an appointment made initially for a period of one year on the basis of one day per week. The committee greatly appreciate the vast amount of work Mr Ritchie has undertaken in surveying the wide range of courses of theological study offered by universities and colleges, ascertaining what courses are available and appropriate, and courses that offer flexibility and with options for distance and/or online learning. Recognising the contribution made by Mr Ritchie, and the work still to be carried out regarding Pathways to Ministry the committee would seek to extend this post for a further year.

CONVERSATION WITH PRESBYTERIES

Recognising the requirement for greater conversation between the committee and Presbyteries a meeting was arranged by the committee to meet with representatives of all Presbyteries. The aim of the meeting was to outline the work of the committee, survey the current ministry situation throughout the presbyteries and its impact on congregations, and facilitate discussion on ministry needs and possible patterns of ministry.

STUDENTS

As reported last year, Miss Ann Deacons had already completed her academic studies and was in process of completing the various requirements of the Church. Miss Deacons has successfully completed her attachments and Trials for Licence, and passed her Bible Exams and Essay. Miss Deacons was available for a call in March 2010, and the Presbytery of the West has been asked to make arrangements for her licensing. Whilst there are no other students at present, the committee is progressing with one application to become a student in training for the Ordained Ministry of Word and Sacrament and has also received a number of enquiries.

PASTORS

The Committee expresses its gratitude for the dedicated work of those who serve our congregations as Pastors and for the valuable contribution they make to the ongoing work of the church. During the year four appointments were made.

- Mr Steven Marr was appointed to Chryston in November 2009.
- Mr Kevin Hammond was appointed to Aberdeen: Northfield in December 2009.
- The appointment of Mr R Ralston at Langside and Shawlands came to an end in May 2009 after which he took up an appointment at Partick. Mr Ralston also continues to serve at Shieldhall and Drumoyne.
- The appointment of Rev C B Rogers to Crofffoot came to an end in January 2010 after which he took up an appointment at Dalreoch.

PART TIME APPOINTMENT

Following retirement in November 2009, Rev T Ireland was appointed as Part Time Minister to Kilmaurs: Maxwell and Kilmarnock in December 2009.

CONFERENCES

The committee arranged two conferences this year and are indebted to all who assisted with these events.

The In Service Conference for ministers and pastors took place in September 2009 at Scottish Churches House, Dunblane. The main theme of the conference was the subject of 'Conflict and Mediation.' Rev. John Munro and Mrs Rhona Foy led very helpful sessions that enabled us to explore what conflict is, how it affects us, and the various ways we respond to conflict; how to communicate effectively in conflict situations; and the methods of negotiation and mediation skills that can be drawn upon to aid conflict resolution. Other sessions were led by Rev. Bruce McDowall who spoke on Christ the Mediator, Laura MacKenzie updated us on the planning for the visit to Scotland by Young People from South Africa in 2011, and Rev Tom Ireland shared reflections from his visit to the UCCSA Assembly. Arrangements are underway for the 2010 conference, to be held 21 – 23 September, again at Scottish Churches House. In addition to the main sessions, the conference offers the opportunity to spend time together, enjoy warm fellowship, and encourage one another. The committee would encourage ministers and pastors to set this time apart in their diary and make every effort to attend the conference as fully as possible.

The Spring Conference for students and pastors was held at Scottish Churches House, Dunblane, 23 – 24 March 2010. The theme was Spiritual Transformation. Insightful and challenging sessions on the personal devotional life of the preacher/pastor and the preparation for preaching were led by Rev J G McPhee who drew from personal experience in ministry. This was followed by two thought provoking sessions from Rev Dr Rory MacKenzie on how Christians experience the presence of God in ordinary life and not just in a context of worship, and the faith journey towards spiritual transformation. We are indebted to both speakers for raising practical issues on ministry and Christian devotion.

The committee are in the process of arranging a study day for Readers to take place in the Autumn.

SABBATICAL LEAVE

In addition to conferences the committee would encourage all involved within Ministry to consider taking up opportunities for ongoing study that would continue their professional development, expand their thinking and enrich their practice. The committee would further suggest that ministers give serious consideration to Sabbatical Leave and remind them that this provides an opportunity to develop areas of interest that might benefit them, their ministry and their congregation. It is encouraging to report that this year two ministers are taking up the opportunity of sabbatical leave.

CONCLUSION

The committee is grateful to all who have been involved in the work of the committee throughout this past year. This work is demanding and time consuming and without the support especially of the office staff much of the work would be overbearing. The Committee appreciates the amount of work carried out by the office staff on its behalf, and particularly the help and guidance provided by the General Secretary.

In the name of the Committee

GARY J A. BARCLAY	Convener
ALEXANDER RITCHIE	Vice-convener
JOHN O. FULTON	Secretary