

REPORT OF THE GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2023

INTRODUCTION

“The Lord says, I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you” (Psalm 32.8, NLT).

These words bring into sharp relief the clear existence of God’s plan for his people. The Lord will show us, he will counsel and he will protect us each step of the way.

The unchanging nature of our God and the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ offer a stability, reassurance and blessed hope which transcends the forces of change in society, not to mention the seemingly fragile and diminishing presence of Church in an increasingly secularised Scotland.

It is God-honouring for us to manage church affairs with the best resources that we have. As we bring our plans, vision, organisation and structures to the Lord we find that he takes all their frailty to ensure that his pathway for us is made clear.

Equally, there is a distinctive witness to our wider society when God’s people organise things in good order and with careful attention to detail. It is our loving service to the Lord Jesus Christ which underpins our governance of his Church.

The Committee’s diverse remit continues to present significant challenges, but also some encouragements, in these profoundly uncertain times.

The past year has been marked by changes in those fulfilling significant responsibilities within the denomination. This has flagged up a core issue for proper governance- viz. the need to identify qualified people to occupy key roles, from the local level of congregations to the national level of the wider church.

This report will cover the Committee’s work in three broad sections. A general overview of our ongoing activities with major developments suitably highlighted. A detailed section on finance, covering issues like Target, the impact of the current cost of living crisis and the role of congregational treasurers. An outline of what’s happening in the field of ecumenical relations as this directly impacts the United Free Church of Scotland.

The Committee would express its appreciation to Church Office staff for collating and formatting the various tables, figures and statistical data which appear within the pages of this report.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2023

Appendix 1 of this report outlines the Order of Business for our 2023 General Assembly, due to take place at The Salutation Hotel in Perth, from **Tuesday 30th May until Thursday 1st June**.

The Committee would ask everyone to take note of the different weekdays for Assembly this year, with proceedings starting and finishing a day earlier in the week than in previous years.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2024

The Committee recommends that the 2024 General Assembly be held in The Salutation Hotel, Perth from **Wednesday 5th June until Friday 7th June**. These dates will revert to the usual pattern of weekdays for our gathering.

ECUMENICAL RELATIONS

Rev Alexander Ritchie having stood down from his role as Convenor of the Ecumenical Relations Group, Rev Martin Whitehead took up the position in October 2022. Since then the meetings have mainly been concerned with discussing the steps being taken at National level to reshape the Ecumenical Instrument in Scotland going forward, and the future of ACTS within that context. Throughout the year the Moderator, Rev A Ford, has represented the denomination on the Scottish Church Leaders Forum and, although the United Free Church does not, of course, have an 'Ecumenical Officer', Mr Whitehead has been our representative on the Ecumenical Officers Forum which continues to meet monthly via video conferencing.

BILATERAL MEETINGS

No further Bilateral meetings have taken place this year although the working group is still endeavouring to arrange a meeting between the United Free Church and the Free Church of Scotland.

WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES (WCC) ASSEMBLY

This took place in Karlsruhe, Germany from 31st August to 8th September 2022. Rev. Dr McArthur, our representative at the event, spoke briefly of her experiences at the Inservice Conference in September and wrote a very acceptable article for Steadfast. Also, at the January meeting of the Ecumenical Relations Group, Dr McArthur further elaborated on her experience of attending the event expressing her thanks to the Group for giving her 'the opportunity of a lifetime' as she spoke of how much she had gained from attending the Assembly. It was agreed, that as part of the Governance Committee's presentation at the General Assembly, Dr McArthur should be asked to give a brief report on the WCC Assembly.

ACTION OF CHURCHES TOGETHER IN SCOTLAND (ACTS) & SCOTTISH CHRISTIAN FORUM (SCF)

It still remains the case that at the time of writing (March 2023) no resolution to the position of ACTS nor of the emerging SCF has taken place and this is a source of some frustration for the Working Group. However, a 'Roundtable on the Future Shape of Scottish Ecumenism' was convened by the Ecumenical Officers Forum at Nicolson Square, Edinburgh, on Monday 16th January 2023, which was attended by members of that Forum as well as interested parties from the Church Leaders' Forum, the Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office, ACTS members and Trustees, and Churches Together in Britain and Ireland. The intention being that everyone involved with ecumenical activity at a national level would be able to come together and express their hopes for the kind of body that is needed in Scotland going forwards. As a result of the discussion, it was agreed that the Ecumenical Officers Forum would consider the responses, and hopefully bring concrete proposals back to a similar meeting to be held later on in the year.

ASSEMBLIES AND SYNODS

Invitations have been received from a number of other denominations, requesting a representative of the United Free Church attend their Synod or Assembly.

We would express thanks to those who have given consideration to representing the United Free Church of Scotland at these Assemblies and Synods. We also express our gratitude to the denominations concerned for their invitations.

LOCAL CO-OPERATION

New informal ecumenical contacts continue to be forged on a local level by a number of congregations although, as was expected, the Church of Scotland's ongoing Presbytery planning process is having an impact on some of these local arrangements.

ADMINISTRATION

GENERAL SECRETARY

It was with genuine sadness that the Committee accepted the decision of Mr. Adrian Rootes to retire on health grounds at the end of January 2023. We are very grateful to Mr. Rootes for his two years of service in this challenging role. He managed to work through the pandemic and introduce some significant changes to ways of working at Church Office.

The whole Church would join with the Committee in wishing Mr. Rootes good health and a fruitful, if perhaps less hectic, retirement.

The Committee was delighted to accept the offer from Rev. Jerome O'Brien to step in as *interim* General Secretary at least until the end of June 2023. He brings many gifts from a legal background and also has significant experience of church administration.

Mr. O'Brien has been working on a part-time basis, for two days per week in Newton Place. It has also been very helpful that he's willing to work additional hours from home as and when required.

The Committee continues to keep the role of General Secretary and its accompanying job description under review. We would ask everyone to note that changes in the way we manage and facilitate the day-to-day workings of our denomination may have to be considered in the not-too-distant future.

CHURCH OFFICE

Church Office has been open again for three days per week, Tuesday to Thursday, since summer 2022. On Mondays and Fridays, office staff have generally worked from home in line with current trends of hybrid working. The office staff deserve great credit for keeping things going during the long period of COVID-related shutdown.

The Committee would remind everyone that the main meeting room in Newton Place is equipped to host hybrid meetings for both in-person and online attendees.

However, the Committee would note that since the end of the pandemic, the Church Office has been far less of a hub and meeting point for Committees, Working/Sub- groups and others than in the past. Although the undoubted benefit of online meetings has enabled committees to function well and efficiently in terms of use of time and reduction to expenses, the legacy of pandemic lingers in terms of much-reduced footfall within our office premises.

On a more positive note, we have learnt some valuable lessons from the COVID period in relation to adopting more streamlined and efficient ways of working. These have been picked up in wider society with many companies and businesses now operating a mixed economy of home and office working which has led to increased levels of productivity.

ELECTRONIC DIRECTORIES

For some time it has been suggested that the approach of issuing an updated UF Church Handbook only every two years means that a lot of information is quickly out of date. The legal requirements for data protection (GDPR) must also be borne in mind, thus ensuring that personal information is held and distributed properly.

No printed Handbook has been issued since 2018. The Committee has looked at the potential to replace this with Electronic Directories, both for local congregations and Committee/Working or Sub-group members.

Congregational details will be kept to a minimum, with only key office bearers included. Updating is far easier, indeed seamless, when the Directories can be amended and redistributed via email.

Congregations have already been contacted to update information on their entries, this has been helpfully collated by Church Office into a draft format for a Directory.

It should be noted that a review and update of Directories will take place every six months, using details submitted to Church Office by our congregations.

A similar approach will be taken to information that's held regarding the Committees and Working/Sub-groups of our denomination.

Of course, the key to any compilation of contact details being accurate is that those involved keep Church Office informed when a change of any kind takes place.

CO-ORDINATING FORUM

The Committee has decided to refrain from any meeting of the Co-ordinating Forum being called at the present time.

It is very noticeable that many issues which present to one Committee will have a corresponding knock-on effect for another. This is leading to the setting-up of some small *ad hoc* groups with cross-committee membership to review, explore and discuss the best approach to follow.

A practical example of this is the Future Ministry Group. The initiative came from CL&M in its oversight role of part-time ministry. It was very helpful that CL&M noted the wider impact of looking at this aspect of ministry across our denomination. This has led to the setting up of Future Ministry Group to examine things collaboratively.

If this kind of process is operating naturally and effectively to identify areas for shared input and discussion, then it strongly suggests that holding a meeting of the Co-ordinating Forum just to report on what's already taking place wouldn't represent the best use of anyone's time.

It should be noted that there will be a need at some point to evaluate our new Committee structure in terms of its efficacy, efficiency and workability more generally across the whole church.

STEDFAST

There has been a changing of the guard in relation to the role of Stedfast Secretary. The

Committee would wish to record warm appreciation to Mr. Alastair Wright for his twelve years of skilful and devoted service to our denominational magazine.

We are very grateful to Miss Jane Sandell who has agreed to take on this responsibility and to work alongside the Stedfast Group. Miss Sandell is a member of our Corstorphine congregation and brings a very useful skill set to the role from her professional background in librarianship.

It is always encouraging to browse through the pages of Stedfast. There's a balanced mix of in-house articles, news from our congregations, as well as thought-provoking pieces drawn from a wider circle of Christian contributors.

The Committee would invite folks from all our churches to consider sending in material for publication, as well as seeking to give strong support to the magazine itself.

PRAYER UNION

The Prayer and Study Guide is one of the most valuable resources we have within the denomination. It structures and aligns our prayers around each UF congregation, whilst also offering a daily thought to help us draw closer to the Lord in devotions. The Guide is distributed widely, often beyond our own congregations.

It was with regret that the Committee was informed of Mrs. Wemyss Billows's decision to step down as Prayer Union Convener at the end of 2023. She has advocated passionately for this vital aspect of church life over many years, ably assisted by an excellent team of contributors.

We wish Mrs. Billows well for the future, with a real sense of gratitude and appreciation for the consistency of her work in promoting a prayer ministry with an infectious enthusiasm to engage the whole denomination.

Those who so diligently prepare the Prayer Union material each year will continue to do so. It will be the task of Governance to find a worthy successor to Mrs. Billows in due course.

SAFEGUARDING

It remains a serious, essential responsibility to do all that's possible to protect our children and vulnerable adults from harm.

The Committee notes that the availability of online applications for PVG Scheme membership has made a significant difference to the time needed to process what's required. We would thank Church Office staff for their receipt and handling of PVG applications from congregations.

It is crucial for all congregations to bear in mind the reach of current legislation beyond regulated work with children and young people to working with adults who are vulnerable.

The Committee thanks co-ordinators at all levels of church life for their work. COVID-19 meant that the ongoing cycle of training was delayed. We would remind Kirk Sessions and congregations that every effort should be made to ensure that the two-year cycle of initial and refresher training is reinstated and maintained.

MODERATOR

The Committee would express heartfelt appreciation to Rev. Archie Ford for his year of visits

to UF congregations as Moderator. It has been noted by many that his preaching from the 'I am' sayings of Jesus in John's Gospel has brought comfort and challenge to our folks in these fragmented, dysfunctional times.

The Moderator has, of course, represented the denomination at a wide range of national meetings and events, including the Scottish Church Leaders' Forum. It is good that we have both a presence at and a voice in these wider discussions.

Certainly, the warm and approachable way in which the Moderator has engaged with people, along with his gentle sense of humour, have left a lasting impression on all who have met him.

NOMINATIONS TO ASSEMBLY COMMITTEES AND WORKING/SUB-GROUPS

The Committee would express its sincere gratitude to everyone now involved in administration of our three Assembly Committees, including Conveners and Vice Conveners. Equally the operation of all Working/Sub-groups which meet under the authority of these Committees continues to ensure that detailed, grassroots work is done to progress the diverse responsibilities covered.

Governance currently has the following active Working/Sub-groups under its remit- Administration, Finance, Remuneration, Safeguarding, Ecumenical Relations and Stedfast.

SPECIAL AID

It is the mark of a caring denomination that, if requested, a support mechanism is in place for retired ministers and their spouses. Special Aid exists for that very reason, all that's done is carried out with pastoral sensitivity and strict criteria to remain very confidential and discreet.

Requests relating to property and the offering of financial support are dealt with in accordance with the above standards. All matters brought to the attention of Special Aid are always handled as efficiently as possible.

FINANCE

The Report and audited Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2022 are at the back of the Assembly Reports. Detailed Fund Accounts are available from the General Secretary.

This Report highlights the principal factors affecting movement in Funds in 2022, the proposed Stipends and Salaries for 2024, and explains agreed Target contribution amounts for 2022 and 2023 with the recommended level of Target for 2024.

The General Trustees of the Denomination hold funds deposited for investment on behalf of third parties. These Third Party funds have been excluded from the Balance Sheet amounts for Investments and Creditors (see Note 12 to the Accounts). They should still be accounted for in the financial statements of the third parties.

TARGET

2022 The Target figure for 2022 was set at £194,000. The amount received was £194,972

2023 The Target figure agreed for 2023 by General Assembly was £200,000.

2024 It is the recommendation of the Committee that we seek to raise in 2024 the amount of £200,000 from target on the basis of £60 per member on the roll and an additional amount calculated equally on the basis of ordinary income and the funds held by congregations for their use. It is also recommended that the cap on the level of annual change remains at £600.

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEES' FUNDS 2022/2023

The Schedule on page 24 details the movements in Committees' resources in 2022. The Committee have sought to apply a similar allocation of Target for 2023 reflecting the differing responsibilities of the various Committees.

The funding of the denomination has not for a considerable time been met by target contributions. The Committee are grateful to the General Trustees for the considerable contribution they make to work of Committees. There is considerable pressure on the Governance Committee to ensure all committees are treated equitably in the distribution of Target income.

CONGREGATIONAL TREASURERS

The Committee acknowledges the work and commitment which has been required from all treasurers in recent years to fulfil the requirements of Charity Law and of OSCR and thank treasurers and responsible committees for their efforts.

During discussions at last year's General Assembly with respect to the role of congregational Treasurers, the suggestion was made that there is a need for training to be made available to Treasurers to assist them to fulfil what has become a more regulated and more complex role. While the need for training to be provided was expressed by a number of Commissioners, there was a lack of clarity as to what those required areas of training were.

In considering this matter, the Committee acknowledged that over the years the role of the congregational Treasurer has had to develop to match the ever growing technical and legal requirements with regard to charity accounting, and that the time may now be right for some form of denominational training resource to be provided. Consequently, congregational Treasurers were contacted directly to determine what the perceived areas of training need were.

From an analysis of the 12 responses received, the Committee noted that the main areas of training need identified were: set of model accounts, gift aid/small donation scheme, and record keeping. It was noted that the Presbytery of the West had also supported the request of one congregation for assistance with sourcing grant opportunities and completing grant claims. In response to this, the Committee agreed to offer "in-house" training to Treasurers on these topics. On balance, the Group felt that an in-person event would probably be most beneficial to attendees, but given the geographical spread of Treasurers, the Group were willing to consider a video conferencing event if this was thought beneficial.

Consequently, it was agreed that all Treasurers would be informed of the agreed areas of training, and asked if they would prefer to attend either a video conferencing or an in-person training course on a selection of possible dates in September 2023.

INFLATIONARY COSTS

The Committee is aware of the impact that current increases in the cost of living, including rising energy costs, are likely to have on congregations. Congregations facing challenges with respect to their ability to meet day to day costs are encouraged to notify the Church Office of their specific concerns.

AUDIT OF DENOMINATIONAL ACCOUNTS

Alexander Sloan, Chartered Accountants, who are the Auditors appointed by General Assembly, have carried out their audit. It is recommended that this firm be reappointed for the 2023 audit.

STATISTICS

Presbyteries: The number of Presbyteries remains at 3.

Congregations: The number of Congregations at the end of 2021 was 50 one less than 2021.

Name of Presbytery	Number of Congregations
1. East	13
2. West	23
3. North	14

Roll of Ministers, etc.

Ministers:

	2021	2022
In Pastorate.....	19	21
Others appointments	2	2
Total	21	23
Full time Ministry Assistant	1	1
Part-time Ministers, Ministry Assistants & Pastors.....	11	9
Students.....	1	1
Probationers.....	2	2
Retired Ministers.....	25	23
Widows (ers) of Ministers.....	14	14
Widows of Pastors.....	3	3

Persons and Agencies: In the table appended to this Report the analysed details of schedules received from Congregations will be found with the corresponding figures for previous years.

Communicants: The number of Communicants on the Roll at 31 December 2022 was 1875 compared with 1939 at the end of 2021.

Admissions were as follows: -

	2021	2022
By Profession	51	38
By Certificate	16	33
By Resolution	6	18

Removals were as follows: -

By Death	80	88
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Governance

By Certificate	18	12
Without Certificate	55	53

Office-Bearers: There were 323 Elders and 216 Deacons, Managers or Board Members who are not Elders.

Baptisms: There were 19 Baptisms of children and 10 of adults.

Sunday Activities:

	2021	2022
Pre-school	50	58
P1 - 7	107	116
Congregations	24	23
Leaders	87	97
S 1 - 3	34	48
Congregations	19	15
S 4 - 6	13	21
Congregations	7	9

Midweek Organisations for Children & Young People:

Number	71	56
Membership	856	1317

Adult Organisations:

Number	136	140
Membership	1,937	1,762

Roll of persons not yet Communicants: The Committee recommend to the Kirk Session the practice of keeping a careful record of all persons not yet communicants who are in any way connected with the Church either by attendance or by affiliation with any organisation of the Church.

In the name of the Committee,

ALEXANDER RITCHIE	Convener
ANNE C BRYCE	Vice-convener
J MARTIN WHITEHEAD	Vice-convener
JEROME O'BRIEN	Secretary

Appendix 1
GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2023
OUTLINE PROGRAMME
SALUTATION HOTEL, PERTH

Tuesday 30th May

- 11.15 Committee on Women's Home and Overseas.
7.00 Opening of General Assembly
Appointment of Moderator
Moderator's Address
Reception of Delegates from other Churches

Wednesday 31st May

- 09.45 Opening worship including Lord's Supper
Memorial Tributes
Report of Assembly Business Committee
Presentation by Christian Life and Mission Committee: Christian Life Issues
Presentation by Governance Committee Ecumenical Relations
Presentation by Christian Life and Mission Committee: Global Focus
Presentation by Christian Life and Mission Committee: Resourcing Mission
Presentation by Ministry Committee
Wednesday evening Presentation by Ministry Committee on ALPS
*Breaks will be: Lunch 12.30 – 1.45, Tea 4.30 – 6.00 (Meal at 5 p.m.)
with tea / coffee from 11 – 11.15 and 3.00 – 3.15 p.m.
The Annual meeting of the Friends of the Students Association
will be at the close of the afternoon session.*

Thursday 1st June

- 09.45 Opening worship
Representative of Scottish Bible Society
Report by Committee on Women's Home and Overseas
Presentation by Governance Committee: Administration
Presentation by Christian Life and Mission Committee:
Children, Young People and Families
Presentation by Christian Life and Mission Committee: National Church Events
Presentation by Governance Committee: Finance
Presentation by Panel on Doctrine
Report by General Trustees
Committee on Records and Minute Books
Any business left over from previous diets / closing items
4.00 Closing worship