

REPORT OF THE MINISTRY COMMITTEE

GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2023

INTRODUCTION

'And I, when I came to you, brothers, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.' 1 Corinthians 2:1-8 (ESV)

In the above passage Paul is challenging those at Corinth who have been dazzled by lofty speech and 'wisdom'. Public speaking was highly developed in the Greek culture of the day and great orators greatly prized, yet Paul points to the power of what he brought to the church, during his first visit to Corinth, being in the message and not in him, the messenger. The message that we bring to a broken world is life changing and life giving and we give thanks that Christ turns the world's 'wisdom' on its head and that in the 'foolishness' of the cross there is redemption for *'the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.'* Many great preachers have felt insufficient for the task yet God equips those He calls and as scripture testifies, it is not always the most able that He calls to the task. It is in our weakness that Christ is glorified and we are thankful for those that he has called and equipped within our denomination for the task of proclaiming Christ and Him crucified.

As the Committee continues in its work to train, equip and support those involved in the ministry of proclaiming Christ's name, it gives thanks for those who continue to serve in the face of a culture with a growing hostility towards the things of God. As will become evident below the Committee seeks to faithfully support those called to minister from student through to retirement. This brings with it a wide remit but one that allows the Committee to journey with those that serve within their respective communities. We pray that God would bless those in each season of training or ministry using them for His glory and the furtherance of His kingdom.

MINISTRY & TRAINING

STUDENTS

Mr. Samuel Parkinson continues with the MTh in Reformed Theology at Union Theological College, Belfast. Mr. Parkinson has completed all the taught elements and is working towards the completion of his dissertation. He continues to work through the requirements of the denomination and the expectation is that all studies and requirements will be completed by the next General Assembly. Mr. Parkinson continues to serve as a Ministry Assistant at Knightswood U.F Church.

FRIENDS OF THE STUDENTS

The ongoing prayers, support and financial contributions of the 'Friends of the Students' continue to be a great encouragement to our current student. The 'Friends' also look with confidence to the future believing God will raise up workers to proclaim the glories of His name to each new generation.

READERS

The denomination continues to be blessed by the work carried out by the Readers as they preach in the various congregations in which they give support and minister. A conference for Readers took place on 2nd April 2022 and it is hoped that this can be repeated in the not-too-distant future as a way of supporting and equipping those called to this role.

ENQUIRIES

The Committee continues to receive enquiries from those wishing to explore ministry within the United Free Church. With the changing church landscape both nationally and internationally this has meant enquiries from both near and far. The Committee encourages those with a sense of calling, having spoken with their own minister, to speak to the Committee about opportunities to explore that calling further.

STUDY LEAVE

The Committee reminds and encourages Ministers/Ministry Assistants/Congregations of the benefits of study leave. Applications are dealt with by the appropriate presbytery and a grant of up to £250 per week is available for any reasonable expenses incurred during Study Leave. It has been encouraging to note that there have been two applications for Study Leave this year.

WORKING GROUPS

BOARD OF STUDIES

The Board of Studies continues with its broad remit covering all aspects of ministerial formation. Considerable work goes into the planning of the In-Service Conference, the continued professional development of those in active service and the ongoing training of those who are recognized as Students. Having the various roles of Ministry Development Worker (Rev Alexander Ritchie), Adviser of Studies (Rev Dr David Miller) and Professional Development worker (Rev Dr Jane McArthur) means that each area is well served.

The planning of the annual programme for the In-Service Conference is a time where themes can be discussed and the most appropriate speakers considered to pick up on the overall theme. Over the years those attending have been blessed by contributors who have agreed to give of their time and talents, both outside speakers, and those from within the denomination. The range of topics and the choice of speakers always keeps the conference relevant and up to date within a rapidly changing culture.

The Adviser of Studies not only supports those recognized as Students but keeps abreast of the latest changes in academia and training so that the Committee can be aware of the best opportunities and learning institutions for those seeking to train for ministry or those who wish to do further training.

ALPs (Approved Local Preachers) TRAINING COURSE

Whilst the Board of Studies laid the groundwork for the Approved Local Preachers course it was felt prudent that as the course moved forward there would be a separate working group to build and drive forward the work begun by the Board of Studies.

Launched in February 2022, the Approved Local Preachers Course, or ALPs course, is now in full swing. This course is designed to train up a fresh group of those who, like the current lay readers, are equipped to lead worship and preach in churches across the denomination. The first cohort of students are well into the second year of the two-year programme. On the fourth Saturday of each month (apart from breaks for summer and winter holidays) a group of over a dozen students meet at Craigmalen UF Church in Bo'ness. The mornings are taken up with study of an overview of the Bible and an introduction to Christian beliefs, while in the afternoon the focus shifts to learning how to preach and lead worship. Some of those who come join only the two morning classes, for their own interest and personal spiritual growth. There are, at the time of writing, eight students aiming to become ALPs.

The course is overseen by a subgroup of the Ministry committee, and consists of Mr. Andrew Scott, and the Revs Deirdre Lyon, Jane McArthur, Alexander Ritchie and David Miller. The morning sessions have been led by members of the organising committee along with a number of guest teachers, both from within the denomination and out with it. These have included Revs. Jared Michelson, Archie Ford, Colin Brown and Ian Lloyd, and Professor David Reimer, formerly of new College Edinburgh. Particular mention should be made of Dr. Ian Hepburn who has taught many of the sessions on the Old Testament, despite having to battle some severe health issues over the last few months. The afternoon sessions have been more interactive, as students and members of the organising group have worked through different aspects of what is involved in preaching and in leading worship, through the lens of the Preaching Spiral. They also enjoyed a workshop led by Fiona Stewart of Foolproof Creative Arts on voice projection and delivery.

The students and the organising group are very grateful for the generous hospitality provided by members of Craigmalen Church who go above and beyond to make everyone feel at home, with a plentiful supply of tea, coffee and biscuits, all with a great view over the Firth of Forth. Along with the monthly teaching days and some related homework, those students who are preparing to become Approved Local Preachers undertake attachments in different churches where they are mentored by an experienced preacher. Generally speaking, their first attachment is in their home church, followed by a second attachment in another church, so that they develop experience of preaching and leading worship in two different contexts. When they complete the course, they will be "heard" in their own presbytery and if all goes well they will be recognised as Approved Local Preachers, and begin their ministry across other churches in the denomination, and perhaps beyond.

The possibility of running a second course, perhaps more accessible to those in the north and east of Scotland, is now being explored, and if there is sufficient level of interest this will launch in February 2024.

CONFERENCES

STUDENTS AND PROBATIONERS CONFERENCE

Due to there being only one student and no probationers a conference did not take place in the past year. However, with ministers who previously served in other churches, now serving within the denomination, it will be possible to share some training elements with our student and new ministers.

IN-SERVICE CONFERENCE

The In-Service Conference took place at the Grange Manor Hotel from the 20th-22nd September under the overall theme '*Preaching & Mission in Scotland Today*'. To help unpack this theme there were two sessions on Preaching & Mission led by Rev Colin Adams and two sessions on Ministry, Worship & Mission led by Rev Liam Fraser. The Committee thanks both speakers for the hard work they clearly put into preparing for their sessions and how they approached such challenging topics which allowed attendees to grapple with some of the issues that we face in today's rapidly changing culture in Scotland. As always, the conference allowed time for colleagues to share and to support one another along with making some space, in busy diaries, to be refreshed

After seeking feedback from those in attendance it was felt that we should return to the Grange Manor for 2023 albeit with a slightly modified programme which takes into account some of the helpful comments received. This will see the 2023 Conference have a greater retreat feel so that those attending might leave more refreshed both in body and spirit.

PRE-RETIREMENT CONFERENCE

A Pre-Retirement Conference took place in the Grange Manor Hotel from 22nd-23rd November 2022. The conference was attended by six ministers and their spouses. As in previous years the conference sought to address some of the challenges associated with retirement including health and financial arrangements. The preparation for retirement is undoubtedly important and it is always better to consider these areas sooner rather than later. Those who attended found the topics covered helpful and insightful and the Committee wishes to convey its thanks to Rev and Mrs. James Neil (Hosts), Rev Archie Ford (Preparing for Retirement), Dr Jim Dunn (Health and Wellbeing), Rev Colin Brown (Special Aid) and Clara Jackson (Financial Planning) for all that they contributed to make it such a worthwhile event.

PASTORAL CARE

Rev James Neil and the Rev Deirdre Lyon continued in their pastoral support of ministers, retired ministers and widows. The scale of the task cannot be underestimated and the Committee is indebted to them for their commitment and concern towards those they so diligently seek to care for. The gatherings organised in the respective Presbyteries for retirees, spouses and widows were well received, enjoyed and much appreciated by all who attended as they allowed for times of fellowship and the opportunity to share with one another.

Mr Neil has indicated his desire to retire from the role by September 2023 allowing the Committee time to appoint a successor. The Committee wishes to thank the Mr Neil for the support he has so graciously extended to those he has cared for in this role.

THANKS

The Committee wish to thank all who support and contribute to the training and ministry of the Church. The work of the Committee is enabled and enhanced by the willing service of so many within the United Free Church and by many in the wider Church who readily give of their time and talents in the furtherance of the Lord's work. A heartfelt thanks is extended by the Committee to Mr. Adrian Rootes, Rev Jerome O'Brien, Mrs. Helena Jarvis and Mr. Lawrence

Ministry Committee

Renn along with the Principal Clerks for their support, guidance and hard work on behalf of the Committee over the past year.

In the name of the Committee,

GORDON D MACKENZIE
THOMAS MCWHIRTER
DUNCAN WHITTY
JEROME O'BRIEN

Convener
Vice-convener
Vice-convener
Secretary