

## REPORT OF THE MINISTRY COMMITTEE

### GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2024

#### **INTRODUCTION**

*As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in Scripture: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." So, the honour is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone," and "A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense." 1 Peter 2:4-8 (ESV)*

The passage above reminds us that the church which God is building is not one of bricks and mortar but of 'living stones'. Christ's church is made up of people, those who believe in their hearts and confess with their lips that Jesus is Lord. It is a building made up of imperfect stones whose rough edges are being smoothed by the Holy Spirit so that together we might be built into a spiritual house. God, as the architect is working out a great plan of salvation and Christ the builder is also the chief cornerstone upon which we the living stones are orientated. Without the chief cornerstone the whole structure would fall apart which is a reminder that we need to keep Jesus at the centre of our lives but also at the centre of all we do as his church so that we might see Jesus at the centre of our life as a nation. That is why it is our desire as a Committee to see the church here in Scotland flourish, to quote a well-known motto, *'through the preaching of Thy Word and the praising of Thy name.'*

Scotland has undoubtedly become a 'mission field' and so the Committee seeks to train, equip and support those who are called to lead God's people and proclaim His Word in a rapidly changing society so that those who view Jesus as a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence might come to know him as the chosen and precious cornerstone of their lives. As this report reflects, the Committee seeks to support those called to pastor and lead God's people right from their student years through to retirement. We pray that those called would be encouraged in their respective ministries and the Lord would build his house here in Scotland for his glory.

#### **MINISTRY & TRAINING**

##### **STUDENTS**

Mr. Samuel Parkinson is currently working through the remaining requirements of the denomination whilst continuing to serve in the role of Ministry Assistant at Knightswood U.F Church.

The Committee asks churches to continue to encourage those with ministry giftings to explore whether they feel a call to full time ministry. The Committee is happy to arrange placements for those who wish to further explore a sense of calling.

##### **FRIENDS OF THE STUDENTS**

The Friends of the Students has a long and rich history of supporting the students of the denomination through ongoing prayerful support and financial contributions. That work

continues and over the past year they have continued to support our current student Sam Parkinson as he draws near to the end of his studies. They look with confidence and anticipation to see who else God will call into His service.

## **READERS**

Readers play an important role in the fabric of the denomination as they serve both in their own churches and in the wider church. Their work is appreciated by those congregations which benefit from them leading worship and bringing God's Word to bear. With the first round of ALP candidates coming to the end of their training we look forward to seeing them begin to serve within the wider denomination.

## **ENQUIRIES**

The Committee continues to receive enquiries from those wishing to pursue ministry within the United Free Church. This year it has been pleased to grant a Certificate of Eligibility to one person who is ordained and now wishes to serve within the denomination. The Committee, as always, 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 has been kept busy over another year with the majority of time spent planning and implementing the In-Service Conference. The helpful feedback received after the previous conference led to the Board altering the 'feel' of the event to better serve the current needs of those attending. The changes were well received and the Board continues to keep all aspects of the conference under review.

The other areas of the Board's work continue as they oversee the training needs of current student and keep abreast of developments in academic training and ministry formation along with the professional development of those already serving in ministry.

The Ministry Committee thanks those responsible for carrying out the various roles of Ministry Development Worker (Rev Alexander Ritchie), Advisor of Studies (Rev Dr David Miller) and Professional Development worker (Rev Dr Jane McArthur) and for all their endeavours over another busy year.

### ***ALPs (Approved Local Preachers) TRAINING COURSE***

The first cohort of students on the Approved Local Preachers training programme completed their two years of study of the Bible and of Christian doctrine in November 2023, and, at the time of writing, are in process of completing their attachments in different churches. In total,

10 students completed the Christians Studies programme, seven or eight of whom are in process of seeking to be recognised as Approved Local Preachers. After completing their church attachments satisfactorily, they will then be “heard” by representatives of their presbyteries and will then be set aside to serve as Approved Local Preachers. By the time of this General Assembly, it is anticipated that some will already have been set aside.

The ALPs steering group are grateful to all those who have contributed their expertise in the teaching sessions, and also to those ministers who have served as mentors to the students, as well as to Bo’ness: Craigmailen church who hosted the group once a month over the two years of the programme, and to the two members in particular who provided wonderful hospitality and welcome each time. It helped greatly to build a bond among the students.

New Approved Local Preachers and the current Readers will, it is hoped, continue to develop their preaching gifts together at the regular Readers’ Days which the Board of Studies organise.

The challenge facing the steering group is how best to make future courses available and accessible to maximise the number of members of the denomination who can attend. The current plan is that a new course will be launched in spring of 2025, again running over two years, with the students studying the Bible, Christian Doctrine and Preaching and Leading Worship, together. This time, rather than the monthly meetings on a Saturday, the intention is that the course will be delivered with a number of overnight residential study times, three or four per year, offered at a location which it is hoped, will be within reach of most of our churches and therefore accessible to our potential students. Publicity will be available for this and circulated round our congregations, in order to ascertain levels of interest. In order for the course to run there will need to be a sufficient number of participants.

The steering group will appreciate the prayers of the members of the Assembly for the newly qualified Local Preachers as they begin their ministries, and also for future courses, that God will continue to raise up those with a sense of being called to help to teach and nurture the church of Christ.

## **CONFERENCES**

### **STUDENTS AND PROBATIONERS CONFERENCE**

Whilst no residential conference has taken place over the last year the Principal Clerks have run training with both the current student and those ministers new to the denomination which has allowed for some more interactive sessions to take place.

### **IN-SERVICE CONFERENCE**

The In-Service Conference took place at the Grange Manor Hotel from the 19<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> September under the overall theme *‘He restores my soul’*. This theme came about in response to the feedback forms received by the Board of Studies. As the theme suggests the desire for last year’s conference was to create more of a retreat format, so that attendees could recharge, be encouraged and re-invigorated by the teaching. To this end Dr Mark Stirling led several encouraging sessions on Philippians and Dr Ian Hepburn brought his Hebraic skills to give colour to a number of the Psalms. Liz Marr led a session on the important topic of Drug &

Alcohol issues from a Christian perspective and Rev Tom McWhirter led a helpful book review on Mental Health and Your Church (Helen Thorne & Steve Midgley) with input from the authors. Joint times of prayer were enjoyed in the morning and the Rev Andy Downie (Moderator) led the evening Communion. In the midst of the conference there was space to relax, to share, catch up with colleagues and generally support one another.

The Grange Manor proved itself to be an excellent venue and it is planned to return there for the 2024 In Service Conference.

### **PRE-RETIREMENT CONFERENCE**

The need for a Pre-Retirement Conference is kept under review and there has been no need for a further conference since the 2022 gathering. However, as more ministers approach retirement age then the committee will seek to once again make this event available.

### **PASTORAL CARE**

The pastoral care ministry exercised by Rev Jim Neil and Rev Deirdre Paterson over a number of years now has been of great benefit and the Committee is grateful to both for their love and care of the retired ministers, spouses and widows within our denomination. Mr Neil stepped down from the role last year and Mrs Paterson also indicated, more recently, a desire to do likewise. The Committee wishes to thank the Mrs Paterson for the support she has so graciously extended to those she has cared for in this role.

With both positions now vacant the Committee felt this would be a good time to review how we carry out this area of pastoral care. With this in mind a working group has been formed and is in the process of looking at how we best fulfil this important ministry in the future. In the interim presbyteries have been asked to maintain care for those in their bounds that had previously been served by the pastoral care group.

### **THANKS**

The Committee recognises there are a number of individuals and churches who continue to support and contribute to the training and ministry within the United Free Church. The Committee wishes to thank all who have been involved over another year giving of their time and talents for the furtherance of Christs church, it has not gone unnoticed. A heartfelt thanks is extended by the Committee to Rev Jerome O'Brien, Mrs. Helena Jarvis and Mr. Lawrence Renn along with the Principal Clerks for their support, guidance and hard work on behalf of the Committee over the past year.

GORDON D MACKENZIE  
THOMAS MCWHIRTER  
DUNCAN WHITTY  
JEROME O'BRIEN

Convener  
Vice-convener  
Vice-convener  
Secretary