

REPORT OF THE CHRISTIAN EDUCATION AND EVANGELISM COMMITTEE

GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2017

INTRODUCTION

For much of the last three years the energies of the Committee have gone towards the planning, the launch and the initial implementation of the Reshaping for Mission initiative. This is now becoming established in the denomination, and different committees are identifying how their work is shaped and led by the vision of Reshaping for Mission. So, the overall challenge now facing the Christian Education and Evangelism committee is to identify our own distinct role within the overall development of Reshaping for Mission across the denomination and among the various committees, as well as at Presbytery level. Much of the work of the committee this year has been to identify and to take forward our particular contribution.

FOCUS ON THE COMMITTEE'S ACTIVITIES

In terms of our identity and purpose as a committee, we have come to see that our focus needs to be on the nurturing and equipping of all members of our congregations, both in their own personal discipleship and in their engagement with the wider society, in evangelism and in service. This is not to say that we are trying to take away from local congregations as being the primary place where such nurturing and equipping takes place. Rather, we want to work with local congregations and with their ministers, and also with presbyteries, to resource better what is already happening and to foster new learning opportunities. This year, when Protestant churches look back 500 years to the start of the Reformation, is a good opportunity to reflect on the question of what the concept of the priesthood of all believers should look like in practice. We rejoice in the way that the Lord has brought some gifted new ministers and other leaders into the denomination, but we need to recognise that we dare not leave the work of mission and ministry simply to the paid professional. For a whole host of reasons, among many Christians in established denominations like the United Free Church there is still a tendency to think of the minister as the one who does the bulk of the work in the church. On top of that, where there is involvement of church members it is often in the area of *maintaining* the institution of a church's activities and its building rather than in activities which may be thought of as *mission*. Over the next few years it is our hope that we will be able to promote increasing numbers of opportunities for resourcing and equipping all members of our congregations. We need to see church members being able to identify and to develop their gifts both for use within their congregations and within their communities.

TRAINING NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

One of the key ways in which the committee has attempted to provide training and development opportunities is the annual 'Dunblane' event. The theme for 2016 was "Sweeter than Honey", in which through the plenary session and various workshops different ways of engaging with Scripture were explored. The 2017 event is due to be held on August 26th with the theme of "Singing the Lord's song", and we hope that as many churches as possible will have some of their members attend. The committee is grateful to all those volunteers who help out in the planning and set up, in staffing crèche, children's and youth programmes, in serving teas and coffees and in other ways behind the scenes.

One of the things we hope to avoid as a committee is us making decisions on behalf of others as to what they need to be learning. Instead, we want to listen to the voices of members of the church and respond to their requests for training and equipping. At last year's Dunblane event we circulated a feedback survey asking people both to say in what

areas they wished to receive training, and also how they felt they learned best. In terms of what people wanted to learn more of, the top areas were as follows

- 43% want teaching on evangelism
- 41% want something on apologetics
- 31% want something on prayer
- 23% want something on community involvement
- 20% want something on pastoral visiting
- 19% want something on faith at work

In terms of how people like to learn, this is how they said they prefer to take in information

- 81% like small groups
- 46% like informal conversation
- 24% like a more formal class setting
- 24% like to learn from CDs or DVDs

The committee is in process of conducting a similar survey among elders and ministers to help develop training materials for elders, both for new elders who will be appointed and for elders already in post who feel the need for a refresher course.

GOALS FOR THE NEW SESSION

One of our challenges is that our small size as a denomination means that it is very difficult and time consuming to produce good quality resources tailor made for ourselves. We are therefore to a great extent dependent on courses and training materials produced elsewhere. There are, however, difficulties in simply using an “off the peg” course developed elsewhere for a different context. A training programme which has been developed for a 20,000 member US megachurch may not be immediately relevant for a church of three dozen members in a small town in Scotland. One of our hopes as a committee is to be able to recommend courses which we have discovered which we think will be appropriate, perhaps with suggestions as to how best to adapt them to our own contexts.

There are two things in particular which we will be organising this year to help encourage and resource churches for their mission in their communities. Firstly, we will have a stall at the Dunblane event where we will be highlighting some materials and courses for congregations. Secondly, over the course of next year, we will be running the Mission Shaped Intro course, which has been produced by the Fresh Expressions movement of the Church of England and the Methodist Church, and which is a resource to help churches begin to think in a new way about how to engage in mission in their communities.

As a committee we also want to encourage individual congregations to let us know about courses and materials which they have found helpful in their own contexts and which they feel could work in other similar settings.

In Ephesians 4, Paul talks about the gifts which God gives to his church, including apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. What is significant is *why* God gives these gifts to the church. They are given, says Paul in verse 12 of chapter 4 “to equip his people for works of service”. That vision, namely that all of God’s people and not just ministers and other leaders be equipped to serve, is the vision which the committee seeks to work out in practice in the life of the denomination. We covet the prayers of the Assembly as we do this.

In the name of the Committee

I DAVID MILLER	Convener
ROBERT O OWENS	Vice-convener
JOHN O FULTON	Secretary

