

REPORT OF THE ECUMENICAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2017

“But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3.13-14, NIV).

Paul writes here of his frustration at not yet being the way God wants him to be in Christ Jesus. He feels it will only be possible for him to move towards that by orientating himself forwards, both in relationship with Christ and with others. He goes on to encourage his readers to think the same way, to adopt the same “pattern” (3.17) and mindset.

There is no doubt that ecumenical progress can be painstakingly slow, not least because so much time is devoted to matters of structure and policy, to questions of why we ought not to engage with particular denominations or groups rather than what we can actually achieve together. Another fixation is often the past and initiatives which have failed. We examine the evidence, we prepare and digest the findings then we tend to ignore the lessons and somehow a little bit more of our ecumenical energy and drive dissipate.

That’s not to say that learning lessons is not important - indeed the process of ecumenical review we have just completed is being replicated by quite a few of our current partner Churches. There’s a commonality in our findings, a shared expression of frustration and disappointment, but equally a desire to find a new *raison d’être* for these key relationships. If we only relate to ourselves, there’s no one to talk to, and nothing to learn from. If this review has reminded the Committee of anything, it is that the core purpose of ecumenical policy must be simply to talk and engage with people, fellow Christians, as much as we must take time to read their doctrinal statements and assess their theological perspectives.

This report falls into two constituent parts. The first is an audit of the key facts relating to our ongoing ecumenical connections and relationships. The second is an outline of the Committee’s conclusions from our completed process of ecumenical review, initiated by the remit from General Assembly 2014. These are inter-dependent and should not be read in isolation from one another. It is the Committee’s hope that this will allow the United Free Church of Scotland to set her ecumenical relationships on an even keel for the foreseeable future in these challenging, but also exciting, times for Christian witness.

1517-2017: It is 500 years since Martin Luther first nailed his 95 Theses in Wittenberg on 31 October 1517, out of which the Reformation began-out of which the United Free Church of Scotland eventually emerged. The road to theological change and ecumenical progress has always been a long and eventful journey. The Church today is still unpacking together and exploring theologically the consequences of that turbulent 16th Century seismic shift.

A series of diverse events is being organised in St. Andrews this October to mark the momentous happenings of 1517, full details of which are at the following web address: <https://2017.wp.st-andrews.ac.uk>.

The current ecumenical landscape has been greatly shaped by the processes of history, theology and cultural change which started to evolve in 1517. It is our evangelical stance to be in the Reformed tradition, yet we must still reckon with a very different world in 2017 and ponder the not insignificant question, how can we continue to make a meaningful contribution to today’s fluid and increasingly diverse ecumenical scene?

2017 presents us with an opportunity to reboot our ecumenical policy and commitments, to take up the Latin idiom, *Ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda* (the church reformed, always being reformed) with creativity and be truly open to the current opportunities and hard realities of being a small, evangelical and voluntary denomination in a

Christian world of diminishing formalised structures and now supporting much more independent expressions of Church-both within Scotland itself and globally.

PART ONE: ONGOING ECUMENICAL CONNECTIVITY

RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

Last year's report highlighted the willingness of both our denominations to remain in regular contact and positive relationship with one another despite the formal ending of the Covenant. A meeting was held on 17 January 2017, hosted in Church Office, and attended by two representatives from the Church of Scotland and three from our own denomination.

The agenda was open-ended, our discussions wide-ranging and these exposed the reality of very similar ecumenical challenges being faced. We shared our own perspectives and reflected on the wider church landscape and ecumenical scene across a changing Scotland. It was particularly noteworthy that both denominations are currently engaged in a broad-ranging process of ecumenical review.

We agreed to facilitate a joint meeting of our Ecumenical Relations Committees at some point in the coming year, to keep channels of communication open and to organise bilateral meetings when necessary on matters of common interest or concern. Our Church of Scotland colleagues expressed a willingness to share their ecumenical resources with us-specifically reviews and reports covering complex theological issues or proposals emanating from large ecumenical bodies such as WCC. This will be extremely helpful to us within the United Free Church of Scotland.

The Committee would wish to thank Rev. Alison Macdonald (ER Convener) and Rev. Dr. John McPake (Ecumenical Officer) for their warm fellowship, insightful contributions and genuine willingness to develop our future relationship in sustainable and meaningful ways.

We would again encourage congregations in local contexts to continue positive forms of engagement with like-minded Church of Scotland congregations. The natural affinity of our Reformed, Presbyterian heritage draws us together and it is hoped that these links will be strengthened on the ground-as well as at denominational level.

RELATIONSHIP WITH THE FREE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

At the time of writing it is hoped that a bilateral meeting would take place on 2 May 2017 between a small group of representatives from the Free Church and the United Free Church. Once again this would take the form of an open sharing of perspectives, progress and future plans.

This discussion seeks to deepen good communication and discussion, building on our previous meetings-most recently at the end of 2015. The Committee acknowledges that regular contact has been maintained with the Free Church in the interim period, and any request for information or assistance has always met with a positive and helpful response.

The Convener attended the 2016 Free Church Assembly, both an evening reception and one day at Buccleuch Free Church, Edinburgh. Informal contacts at both were warm and it was positive to hear of encouraging developments across their denomination.

The Committee would seek to reiterate its call to positive relationships between congregations at local level and the reciprocal sharing of plans & resources wherever possible. The ministry training opportunities now accessible through ETS (Edinburgh Theological Seminary) as well as the rich youth work programme operated by the Free Church present obvious channels for fruitful ecumenical exchange and the potential for specific benefits across the United Free Church of Scotland.

ACTION OF CHURCHES TOGETHER IN SCOTLAND (ACTS)

Following discussions between the Member Churches, the trustees of ACTS have made arrangements for a consultant-led review of the organisation to be undertaken, with a view to producing a study/report by September 2017.

It is envisaged that the consultant will engage with Member Churches to gauge their views and opinions regarding the future role and strategic direction of ACTS. This will look at basic questions of identity, structure, funding and governance-as well as core priorities to consider moving forward in a very diverse ecumenical landscape across Scotland. Again the broad recognition that this study is necessary highlights the new factors in Scottish ecumenism, some of which this Report seeks to pinpoint. These include membership of only nine churches, the growth of independent and ethnic forms of Christian witness, changing social circumstances and ongoing processes of review within Member Churches.

Key decisions remain regarding the Scottish Churches' House legacy reserve and it is hoped that the review will examine the core areas of church & society, faith & order and local ecumenism which have formed the heart of ACTS activity since formation in 1990. Perhaps we need to explore new priorities and seek to revitalise the ecumenical initiatives which it is possible for ACTS to undertake on behalf of the Member Churches, bearing in mind factors of time, cost, efficiency and outcome.

It has been repeatedly stressed that the evangelical perspective and input by the United Free Church of Scotland are greatly appreciated and valued by ACTS. The Committee would encourage the General Assembly to signal our support for this review in principle and to nurture our ecumenical presence as a Member Church within ACTS.

Rev. Jim Neil is currently a trustee of ACTS, and the Committee would acknowledge his willingness to participate actively on the wider ecumenical scene.

LOCAL ECUMENICAL PARTNERSHIPS (LEPs)

The Committee is mindful that a great deal of informal ecumenism takes place at local level between congregations across a variety of denominations. It is hoped that wherever possible UF Churches will seek to establish, develop and sustain these vital relationships as a core principle of active co-operation and sharing of Christian resources-buildings, ministry and gospel activities.

Formalised LEPs continue at Canonbie, Cathcart & Tayport. The existence of these strong links are an encouragement to the Committee and set a good example for the wider denomination. Anecdotally we are aware of developing relationships in Montrose, whilst discussions have taken place about the possibility of sharing our building at Leith Ebenezer with Grace Church, a Free Church congregation. This would make use of the helpful template agreement for sharing buildings developed by ACTS and would have careful ongoing scrutiny from the Presbytery of the East.

Again the Committee would invite congregations to let us know of significant ecumenical developments in local contexts. This request not only keeps us informed, but it may also lead to useful suggestions for support and advice in moving these important matters forward.

WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES (WCC)

2021 may seem a long way off. The bidding process for the WCC Assembly, due to take place that year, is now starting to crystallise. Often we feel remote from the workings of CTBI (Churches Together in Britain and Ireland), yet this instrument representing Churches across the British Isles is the ecumenical conduit for the possible submission of a bid to host this Assembly in Glasgow.

The obvious impact of such a large and diverse ecumenical gathering (perhaps up to 7,000 people per day) raises great potential for local churches, but equally it gives rise to big

questions about budget, hospitality & legacy. Glasgow (SECC as the main venue) has recent experience of large-scale cultural and sporting events, as well as a rich history of Christian witness, which would make the city an ideal location. It is understood that officials representing Glasgow City and those responsible for managing SECC are very supportive of this bid and feel Glasgow could host the event well and accommodate its size comfortably.

The timescale involves final decisions being made under the auspices of CTBI regarding the submission of a bid by October 2017, with the announcement due from WCC's Central Committee of the successful bid during summer 2018. A process of consultation with the member churches of CTBI will be undertaken between now and October. Obviously a successful bid under the auspices of CTBI would then require a strategic planning and development stage, closely linked to local church denominations and ecumenical bodies like ACTS. Therein might be rich and potentially fruitful local and national ecumenism.

It is clear that member churches will be asked to contribute to the cost of such a large conference—a total figure in the region of £2 million has been mooted, this being offset by financial contributions from government bodies and others.

As a member of CTBI, the United Free Church would be in a position to benefit from the preparation for & legacy from a WCC Assembly in Scotland. The ecumenical possibilities seem obvious - not least in terms of identifying a joint initiative which could lead to productive, local and national co-operation with other denominations.

From the angle of ecumenical policy, this is a good example of multilateral ecumenism which might offer tangible benefits for the United Free Church of Scotland and the opportunity to participate in something missional and much bigger than ourselves.

CHURCHES TOGETHER IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND (CTBI)

Screenshots of the CTBI website during March 2017 reveal the diversity of Christian projects currently active under the auspices of CTBI (www.ctbi.org.uk). These include prayer responses to the attack on the Westminster Parliament and its immediate aftermath, resources for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, an outline plan for a Christian reaction to the global refugee crisis and material covering initiatives to promote the cause of Christ through churches witnessing together.

The range of this activity highlights the intrinsic value for any denomination of sustaining multilateral relationships. Of course the United Free Church of Scotland can engage in unilateral prayer for any of these situations—and the Committee is fully aware that our congregations do so on a regular basis. However the combination of adding to our prayers through membership of ecumenical bodies capable of bringing a Christian perspective (and a collective voice) to the attention of those in positions of power dealing with such matters of deep concern ensures that we still have and can enjoy the benefits of wider ecumenical connectivity.

This is ably demonstrated by the representative voice being given to a bid for the WCC Assembly in 2021 across the UK Churches, a process being coordinated by CTBI as a strong ecumenical instrument (see paragraphs below on WCC).

WORLD COMMUNION OF REFORMED CHURCHES (WCRC)

The 26th General Council of WCRC is scheduled to take place in Leipzig, Germany, from 29 June to 7 July 2017. In marking the 500th anniversary of Reformation, the programme will include visits to Wittenberg and Berlin. Its theme is, *Living God: Renew and Transform Us*.

As the governing body of WCRC, the Council has power to amend the constitutional document of the organisation and it is proposed that changes will be brought to the Leipzig gathering for ratification. Under the Constitution its General Council meets every 7 years.

Full details of these changes can be viewed at <http://wcrch.ch/news/council-to-act-on-proposed-amendments-to-constitution>.

One of the most interesting is the crystallisation of the English text as the authoritative standard for the Constitution. Theological questions have arisen in the past (and still remain) as to the precise implications of full “communion” for WCRC members. Rooted in the Greek NT term *koinonia*, the notions of participation between Churches in the body of Christ, unity within it and deep relationship call us to the pursuit of justice. It is this unique expression of deep fellowship which draws the Church together into action and the principle serves as a driver for all practical programmes of WCRC.

The Joint Declaration on Justification (2016) prepared by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the Roman Catholic Church is also in process of being reviewed by WCRC. This is motivated by a desire to seize the ecumenical significance of the 500th anniversary of Reformation to implement and consolidate church unity, seeking to move away from the momentous theological divisions of the past. Again some reservations have been expressed about the theological arguments contained within this Declaration.

The United Free Church of Scotland is entitled to send a delegate to the Leipzig General Council as a full member of WCRC.

EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE (EA)

The website of EA offers a number of definitions for the term ‘evangelical’. These include, “We’re passionate about God, about the Church and about the Bible” and “We’ve decided to live our lives with Jesus-the Saviour of the world and Son of God-at the centre”.

EA in Scotland uses the principles of networking & story to offer teaching, practical support and assistance to Churches and Christian groups. At present their areas of active involvement include a Christian response to a possible second independence referendum in Scotland, issues of child poverty across our nation and the production of a weekly email digest (Friday Night Theology) reflecting on issues of immediate interest to Christians across politics, culture and the media.

The Committee invites congregations to engage with the ongoing activity and output of EA in Scotland, again the significance of our membership imparts a degree of participation in and ownership of all that this broad and evangelically-minded organisation is doing. EA offers a Christian responsiveness to and appreciation of events-national and global.

PART TWO: REVIEW OF ECUMENICAL ENGAGEMENT

The process of review was initiated by General Assembly 2014, when the Committee was tasked to discern ways to, “conduct and shape our ecumenical relations both in Scotland and with the world Church.” The response to that has involved a number of distinct stages with due process and broad consultation. Firstly the initial robust work of the ER Review Group in meeting with a wide range of denominations and bodies. Thereafter an opportunity was given for its conclusions to be discussed critically and openly at General Assembly 2016, then final reflection took place this year using the fine filter of a small review group (Revs. Colin Brown, John Fulton, Dr. Jane McArthur & Alexander Ritchie).

The Committee’s recommendation is that the United Free Church of Scotland moves forward with an ecumenical policy which combines the *status quo* of our existing connectivity and memberships with an open-minded but nuanced approach to the formation of new links. In addition we would propose that the safeguard of a mechanism for efficient review of any current relationship is maintained, should there be a material change in circumstances to render that connection no longer sustainable.

The Committee would wish to re-affirm our own Reformed & evangelical identity as a potential ecumenical partner for any other denomination or Christian body. We need also to

keep a close watching brief on the fast-changing church landscape across Scotland and beyond. We exist now in a postmodern environment wherein mainstream denominational structures are being eroded, whilst strong and independent expressions of church—some ethnic, others charismatic—have emerged and are taking root across the country. Their theological outlook and ecumenical expectations are changing the long-established patterns and rules of engagement between and amongst Christians. We ignore these fundamental and evolving developments at our peril.

Two related models for ecumenical relationship have featured prominently in our deliberations, **bilateral** and **multilateral**. The way we interact with others as a denomination is either on a one-to-one basis (bilateral) or it is by means of adding the United Free Church of Scotland to an already well-populated ecumenical body or group (multilateral). For example, our covenant relationship with the Church of Scotland was a bilateral one between two parties, whilst our membership of ACTS or WCC exists in a multilateral context alongside a group of diverse members, i.e. diverse in theological terms as well as in structures for governance and modes of worship.

Another emerging thread in the wider ecumenical scene today is the repeated expression of a desire amongst denominations and groups to work bilaterally in the future. That's not to say multilateral relationships aren't significant and can be very effective. However the flexibility and creative possibilities of working with a single ecumenical partner on a single issue basis is a very attractive option for many going forward in these uncertain times.

Some within the United Free Church of Scotland feel the time has come to depart from our multilateral links, or at least to reduce these significantly. The Committee understands the passion and theological integrity with which such views are held. However part of our review process this year has involved some engagement with constitutional documents for each of the multilateral organisations we currently belong to. We have looked at the founding principles and original intentions underpinning these bodies in order to get a sense of what they were formed to be and how they were meant to reflect the common points of theological outlook amongst their members. The results have been very enlightening and perhaps even crucial in the conclusions the Committee has reached regarding the way forward with reference to our multilateral relations.

Short extracts from these documents are given below. The full text for each ecumenical body is available on the appropriate website. The Committee would invite members of General Assembly to spend a bit of time digging into the detail of these provisions, all of which illuminate the valid gospel-based criteria upon which the United Free Church of Scotland's membership currently rests.

- **ACTS: “ACTS’ charitable purposes are to further the mission and realise the unity of the Church Universal by providing a national focus of inter-church counsel, education and action, specifically to promote, participate in, implement and manage actions, projects, programmes and initiatives.”**
ACTS Memorandum of Association, p.1 (8 September 2008).
- **CTBI: “Against the background of so much suffering and sinfulness in our society we were reminded of our call to witness that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself...We now declare together our readiness to commit ourselves to each other under God. Our earnest desire is to become more fully, in his own time, the one Church of Christ, united in faith, communion, pastoral care and mission. Such unity is the gift of God.”**
(*Swanwick Declaration*. CTBI emerged from this foundational document, 1987).
- **WCC: “The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the Scriptures and therefore**

seek to fulfil together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father Son and Holy Spirit.”

(Article 1 of *WCC Constitution*, as amended by its 10th Assembly in Busan, 2013).

- **WCRC: “The basis of the World Communion of Reformed Churches shall be the Word of the triune God, incarnate in Jesus Christ and revealed in the holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments through the power of the Holy Spirit...The World Communion of Reformed Churches is committed to embody a Reformed identity as articulated in the Ecumenical Creeds of the early church, in the historic confessions of the Reformation, and as continued in the life and witness of the Reformed community.”**

(Article II of *the Constitution of the WCRC*, adopted 2010).

- **EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE: “We believe in the atoning sacrifice of Christ on the cross: dying in our place, paying the price of sin and defeating evil, so reconciling us with God.”**

Article 6 of Evangelical Alliance’s *Basis of Faith*.

It is the Committee’s view that each of the above is expressed in theological language and Christ-centred ideas with which the United Free Church of Scotland would wholly agree. None of the statements stands against our core principles or values as an evangelical denomination. Whilst it may be the case that other member Churches have taken a different view with regard to the implementation of these statements, we are responsible only for our own position and it is clear that as a Church we can readily align ourselves with the founding ideals behind each of these multilateral bodies.

It is also worth disclosing the financial implications behind each of our current ecumenical memberships. The annual payments are as follows: ACTS (£2000), CTBI (£1000), WCC (£500), WCRC (£500) and EA (£275). That makes a total contribution of **£4275** each year.

The Committee would submit that this represents a relatively small investment when set against the ecumenical benefits we receive in return. It is often true that direct engagement with the work of such large ecumenical bodies can be difficult, not least because at local level these matters seem distant, remote-even irrelevant. Equally we are hoping to make more information accessible to congregations about the work of these groups, not least for assisting them to understand the range and practical scope of what is happening between the churches at this multilateral, international level.

We grasp the oft-quoted criticism that large-scale ecumenism often appears to have little to do with gospel-focused mission. The Committee would point to the potential missional significance of hosting a WCC Assembly in Glasgow during 2021. The evangelism legacy from such an event could be considerable, although much will depend on the levels of enthusiasm, creativity and vision brought to bear by the churches themselves-and that long after that Assembly itself has finished.

We would encourage the denomination to pause and reflect on ways we might be able to plug-in to this exciting project, both at the bidding stage and afterwards. It illustrates the intrinsic value of belonging ecumenically, of being involved ecumenically, of taking part ecumenically at this multilateral level. Sometimes that participation can yield the potential for rich harvest-and open some of the missional opportunities we long to see happening between churches on our own doorsteps.

In summary the Committee would recommend that the United Free Church of Scotland sustains each of its current multilateral memberships and pursues a policy of more and wider bilateral connectivity across the current range of our relationships-and beyond, as we look to identify new partners and shared gospel-centred projects with others.

Within the framework of accepting these conclusions as the future ecumenical policy of the United Free Church of Scotland, the Committee would wish to say that we remain open to any suggestion of bilateral engagement or discussion with another denomination or group, recognising that many new expressions of church now exist in the form of independent or ethnic groupings without the traditional structures of well-established denominations. These naturally lend themselves to flexible and creative interaction, which is the kind of ecumenical engagement the Committee is keen to develop.

This Report signals that our future model for connectivity with the Church of Scotland, Free Church of Scotland and others is to be shaped by regular bilateral contact, informal discussion, sharing of ideas & resources as well as closer co-operation in relation to single issues-if this is agreeable to both parties. This may include missional projects and outreach opportunities.

That said, it is equally clear that the flexible, responsive and low-maintenance processes of bilateral engagement allow all concerned to maintain their gospel principles and theological integrity, whilst still being able to sustain a whole range of relationships and opportunities as these present themselves. The Committee would commend this methodology for our future ecumenical policy.

Previously contact with the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI) has been suggested, and the bilateral model can be easily utilised to make an initial approach for this viable. Similarly with the Baptist Union of Scotland, it is hoped that a mechanism for regular contact can be devised to facilitate a level of regular bilateral communication in future.

None of our current ecumenical partners express a desire for formalised relationship in covenant or any other fixed arrangement. Ecumenical structures which are cumbersome, multilateral and broad in their membership do still have a part to play in bringing a Christian witness to the world in days of deep fracture, distrust of authority and division. This was demonstrated recently in the joint statement affirming Christian commitment to “love and welcome the stranger, the refugee, the internally displaced person-the other” produced at the end of January 2017 by WCC and others in response to the Presidential Executive Order arbitrarily seeking to restrict travel admission to the United States of America on grounds of terrorist threat. For the full statement, visit:

<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/general-secretary/joint-declarations/statement-on-us-presidential-executive-order-on-refugees>

It is also worth noting that multilateral bodies are closely linked amongst themselves, thus making any process towards disengagement from one or more both complex and dysfunctional. The Committee would recognise that large ecumenical bodies do have their faults and are in need of reform. However the *semper reformanda* principle with which this Report began acknowledges that this is equally applicable to Churches themselves in the midst of human failings and structural weaknesses. The Committee would suggest that the ecumenical intentionality behind each of the multilateral groups we currently belong to is sound theologically and that at the heart of each is a genuine desire for Church unity and gospel partnership.

CONCLUSION

“There is a lot of goodwill but there is also sometimes frustration, which we all share, at the slow progress of Christian partnership at local and national levels. We are nonetheless encouraged towards collaboration rather than working alone, after all it was Jesus who prayed that we might be one so that the world might believe.”

Ecumenical and World Church Committee Report to URC Synod of Scotland
by Rev. Mitchell Bunting (March 2017)-used with permission.

These wise words in the conclusion to his report reflect 10 years’ work as Synod Ecumenical Officer. The Committee would endorse what is being said as a fitting summary of the current ecumenical landscape across Scotland. These are times of transition, within

which denominations are slowly realising that previous models for co-operation, sharing of resources and gospel partnership no longer meet the needs either of churches or communities.

Structures are cumbersome and slow in processes of decision-making, often we resource and support ecumenical projects with low thresholds of input (both spiritual and practical), enthusiasm or even basic commitment. Too often we obsess narrowly on matters of internal governance and the management of decline. That mindset leads to the granting of a minimal priority to ecumenical engagements, because we think *ab initio* that these are of less pressing importance than our own survival.

This Report seeks to affirm the status quo of our current ecumenical memberships, discussions and relationships. It might seem that this is a low grade level of response in itself. The Committee would beg to differ, indeed we feel the sending of these consistent ecumenical signals to our current partners marks our commitment to stability, maturity and growth in links at all levels moving forward. In short it would be too easy to walk away, and of itself a betrayal of the many years during which the United Free Church has been ecumenically consistent in sharing our distinctive evangelical voice with others. Indeed that has been the case since our earliest days post-1929.

The Committee is open to initiating new bilateral and multilateral relationships with others. Equally we would stress the key strategic importance of bilateralism going forward. The main benefit of multilateral engagement rests in its bringing together of diverse denominations and groups, both with a view to sharing and respecting their theological differences, but also to present a strong and united voice on areas of common concern. The Committee is strongly of the opinion that we compromise none of our gospel integrity or focus in doing this.

Whatever the outcome of a possible bid through CTBI for hosting the WCC Assembly of 2021 in Glasgow, the Committee would point out that the withdrawal of the United Free Church of Scotland from any of the related and interested groups (like ACTS) in the midst of this process would look very much like ecumenical isolationism at a critical time for all churches across Scotland seeking renewed focus in the gospel and its urgent sharing with the communities where we are serving.

The United Free Church of Scotland is presently engaged in a process of revitalisation. Our congregations need to be revitalised themselves in order to become partners in more diffuse Christian witness across our nation. That won't be possible by definition if we seek to function in an ever more exclusive mode, whilst movements of exciting possibilities for gospel partnership with others take place around us, but sadly without our input or voice. That is of the essence of true, sustainable and long-term ecumenism.

THANKS

The Committee would wish to record sincere thanks to all those who have contributed to its work in the course of this year, particularly in relation to the process of ecumenical review. The Convener extends sincere gratitude to the members of the Committee for their support, wisdom and encouragement. As always we remain deeply indebted to Rev. John Fulton & Mrs. Helena Jarvis for their patient guidance and considerable practical help.

In the name of the Committee

ALEXANDER RITCHIE
ANN DEACONS
JOHN O FULTON

Convener
Vice-Convener
Secretary