

RESHAPING FOR MISSION

GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2017

“As a denomination we want to see United Free Church congregations across Scotland revitalised, renewed and growing and to see new congregations established, so that the denomination can play its part in the mission of God’s people in Scotland.”

Two years have passed since the denomination launched the Reshaping for Mission initiative. This initiative aims to see mission coming to heart of our denomination’s life, and has three objectives

1. To see new churches planted
2. To see existing but struggling congregations revitalised
3. To see relatively healthy congregations intentionally renewing their focus on mission

This report considers how things have developed so far and tries to identify areas of challenge which need to be faced for the initiative to progress and to bear lasting fruit.

ENCOURAGEMENTS

Since the General Assembly of 2016 there have been many exciting developments for which it is right to give thanks to God.

- Our first new church plant in many years has been launched in Tullos and Balnagask in Aberdeen, under the auspices of Torry UF Church, and spearheaded by Lewis and Rosie Campbell. They were commissioned in September of 2016. There is also a partnership between Torry Church and 20schemes, an urban church planting network which offers invaluable support and insight to Lewis and Rosie.
- A second church plant has emerged, with the group led by Rev. Jerome O’Brien meeting in Crook of Devon coming under the oversight of the Sauchie and Fishcross church as a mission station of that congregation
- Two formal church revitalisation projects have been launched, one in Dundee led by the Rev. Dr. Jane McArthur, and one in Maxwell Kilmaurs led by Rev. Nathan Owens. In both cases the church contributes to the support of the minister and so too does the denomination, on the understanding that the minister’s time and energy will be split between the preaching and pastoral care duties within the established congregation and activities directed to mission and evangelism in the wider community. This is not to say that it is only the job of the minister to undertake mission. Part of the minister’s role is to encourage and equip members of the congregation themselves to be involved in reaching out into the community and sharing faith among their friends, family and neighbours.
- Chryston Church have been able to buy and renovate a large community hall on the Main Street of Chryston/ Muirhead. While this project is still in its early days, it is clear that there is great potential in engaging in mission in new ways with the community
- Other congregations are taking things forward in their own local setting e.g. Crofffoot with its plans to extend its café ministry
- The launch by the Youth Committee of the PIED strategy to encourage congregations to work towards developing their ministry among children and young people is an important new initiative that urges all congregation to recognise the vital place that children and young people must have in all our mission thinking
- A number of congregations have been visited by representatives from the Reshaping for Mission group to discuss how to begin implementing aspects of the initiative in their own context.

- The West Presbytery have changed both the name and the focus of the Survey and Readjustment committee to the Presbytery Reshaping for Mission committee, as an indication of the importance that Presbytery places on the work of mission and the priority it must have in the business of Presbytery.
- The denomination-wide Week of Prayer, held in November 2016, seems to have gone well, and in some cases to have been very enthusiastically received. Prayer must be at the heart of all our mission activities if we are to see genuine spiritual fruit being borne.

CHALLENGES

At the same time as giving thanks for what has been started, we need to ensure that we do not lose sight of the fact that reshaping the denomination and individual churches for mission is going to be a long task. The following are areas which the Reshaping for Mission steering group recognises as being significant challenges.

- Although we have instigated some specific mission projects, the bigger challenge is the ongoing one of seeing churches across the denomination getting on board and seeking to move from maintenance to mission in their approach to ministry. The ultimate goal is not simply to launch particular revitalisation or planting projects but to see congregations of whatever size and stage catching the vision of mission in their own context.
- There have been many new churches planted across the UK over the last couple of decades, and some large city centre churches have grown significantly. However, there are few fewer examples of smaller, more traditional churches, which is what many of our congregations are, being successfully revitalised. This is not to say that we are engaging in a fruitless exercise, but it does mean that there are few models from which we can learn. There will therefore be a degree of experimentation in what we do, and we will need to be prepared for some failures along the way.
- The small size of many of our churches, often accompanied by a lack of local leadership, may well mean that there is a lack of clarity about how to take things forward in their context. Sometimes this may be due to an unwillingness to engage in mission or to try anything new. More common, however, is a lack of feeling of competence on behalf of the local leadership to undertake something new, experimental, and outside their experience up to now. This is especially so in the area of sharing our faith. Some of this, it is hoped, will be addressed in training offered by the Christian Education and Evangelism Committee
- Along with equipping local leadership in congregations, there is an ongoing need for more workers to spearhead revitalisation projects and to launch new church plants. As a denomination we have been blessed with the addition of over a dozen new ministers and church workers over the last four years, but more are needed. We need to address issues of what sort of training is best for those who move into a pioneer type of ministry, as distinct from the more traditional pastoring and teaching role of ministers and ministry assistants as well as the status of new pioneer workers and leaders around the question of ordination.
- Recruiting new workers for pioneer situations will necessarily highlight the financial challenges faced in supporting workers from central funds. For example, to support and resource a pioneer worker in a church planting situation over five years will cost around £200,000. As a denomination we have some reserves, for which we thank God, and we have been able to commit resources to the Torry plant and the two revitalisation projects already launched. However, our funds are not limitless, and so we will need to pray for considerable amounts to come in. Alongside the funds raised by individual congregations, we will need to encourage members to consider making a significant donation through a legacy in their will. And if some of our congregations reach the stage where they have to close they may be encouraged to direct the finances raised to go into new mission initiatives. This will be another way of ensuring that churches which close still leave a legacy and contribute to the work of the denomination.
- At present, the Reshaping for Mission group includes members of the Administration and Finance, Ministry, and Christian Education and Evangelism committees. We are beginning to

work more closely with the Youth Committee, linking in with the PIED strategy, and Richard Knott, the denomination's Youth Development worker now sits on this group. However, further integration with other committees of the denomination may be worth exploring. For example, while missional thinking is relatively new for many of us, the Overseas Committee may also have much to contribute, bringing us insights into mission from other contexts. Our own active missionaries may also be able to help. Catherine is leading a seminar on work among Muslims at this year's Dunblane event, and Martin Paterson's dual role as a UF minister and Scottish rep for OMF, an agency with long experience in church planting, may help bring insights to us from those involved in church planting overseas.

PRACTICAL NEXT STEPS

- If an individual congregation, or perhaps a group of congregations, wish to think about implementing the vision of Reshaping for Mission we would encourage them to request a visit from someone from the Reshaping for Mission group to begin the conversation.
- We would also encourage congregations to share stories of mission in their own contexts, through Stedfast, Facebook, Dunblane, etc. The more we see of things happening in other settings, the more encouraged we will be and the more our own imaginations will be stimulated to attempt mission where we are
- It will also be healthy if we look outside the denomination's own activities to learn from other denominations and networks. As part of their own Continuous Personal Development, it may be beneficial for our ministers to attend conferences and training events organised by other groups and networks.

If we are to see Reshaping for Mission have a real impact to transform our denomination, we will need to be willing to persevere with this for the long haul. We should prepare for disappointments as well as joys. Above all, brothers and sisters, let us not grow weary or lose heart "for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up." (Galatians 6: 9)

In the name of the Committee

GRAHAM G. BROWN	Convener
JOHN O. FULTON	Secretary