

## REPORT OF THE CHRISTIAN EDUCATION AND EVANGELISM COMMITTEE

### GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2017

#### INTRODUCTION

The main role which the Committee seeks to undertake is to help encourage the spiritual 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. In this we are not 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. We rejoice in the way that the Lord has continued to bring 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. 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*. As a Committee 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.

#### DUNBLANE EVENT

The annual 'Dunblane' event is one of the key ways in which the committee attempts to provide training and development opportunities across the denomination, and we are always heartened by the numbers that attend, representing about 10% of our total membership. The theme for 2017 "Singing the Lord's song", in which, through the plenary session and workshops we thought about the challenges we face in serving the Lord and witnessing to the kingdom in the midst of a secular society. This year our theme is "Even greater things...", when we will explore the promise which Jesus gives to his disciples in John 14 that they will do even greater things than they saw Him do. This year, alongside the usual plenary session and workshops we are also having opportunities to hear some of the stories of what is going on in some of our own churches, with the hope that as people hear what others are doing, they will be inspired to try some new things for themselves. 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.

#### MISSION SHAPED INTRO

Another learning opportunity which we have offered this year is the Mission Shaped Intro course, which has been produced by the Fresh Expressions movement of the Church of England and the Methodist Church. This is six-week course designed to help churches begin to think in a new way about how to engage in mission in their communities. Most of the material in terms of PowerPoints and study notes, with supporting video clips is available for free, and all that is required is to make slight adjustments so that it is relevant to the local situation. A pilot course was run in autumn 2017 at Chryston UF Community Hall, and a recent article in Stedfast focussed on how people had found the course. Our immediate goal is that Presbyteries or clusters of local churches, or even a congregation on its own, will offer this course again, and members of the committee are happy either to lead the course, or to train those on the ground in the local setting to lead it.

## **COURSES AND MATERIALS**

As a committee we continue to encourage individual congregations to let us know about other courses and materials which they have found helpful in their own contexts and which they feel could work in other similar settings. This is particularly the case in terms of courses or training resources to help equip people in the area of personal evangelism and faith sharing, which most of us recognise as being the greatest need which we face today.

## **ELDER TRAINING**

At last year's General Assembly the Committee announced the launch of a survey of ministers and elders with a view to identifying the needs for elder training, to help us in preparing material or identifying suitable materials already available to train our elders. The results of this survey show that though most elders are encouraged in their work they recognise the need of training in a wide range of areas. Over the next year the Committee will be offering both home-grown materials and pointers to other helpful training courses, along with the possibility of occasional training days for current elders and those preparing to become elders. One of the things which the survey identified is that most elders see their role primarily as being pastoral, with a focus on serving within the church, assisting the minister and so on. While this aspect of the elder's role remains important, given the missional challenges which we face as a denomination, one of the key areas we need to encourage is to help elders take the lead in encouraging mission in a local congregation. This may be particularly the case in those churches which are in vacancy or are of too small a size to be able to consider calling a minister or pioneer worker in the immediate future

## **FAITH STORIES**

Another resource which is newly available is the material on "Faith Stories, Faith Sharing". Along with the video testimonies of members of the denomination is some study material which it is hoped will both encourage members in understanding that people are still coming to faith even in this secularising society and give them confidence to share their own faith with others.

## **VISION**

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 continues to seek 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