

REPORT OF THE GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2022

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The outline Order of Business in Appendix 1 details the arrangements for the 2022 General Assembly, which will be held in the Salutation Hotel, Perth from Wednesday 8th June until Friday 10th June.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2023

The Committee recommends that the General Assembly 2023 be held in the Salutation Hotel, Perth from Tuesday 30th May to Thursday 1st June.

COVID-19

For a second year the pandemic has adversely affected the work of the church with various prohibitions and restrictions being placed on travel, in-person meetings and worship. The Committee has held online meetings and the officials have monitored the advice from the Scottish Government and communicated this to Ministers and Session Clerks as appropriate. The Committee record thanks to the Moderator, Rev. Dr. David Miller and the office staff who have supported congregations throughout this period.

STEDFAST

Mr Alastair Wright continues as Stedfast Secretary and works well with the Stedfast Editorial Team. The Team is grateful to those who make valuable contributions to Stedfast and we continue to commission and request material from within and beyond the Church in an effort to provide a magazine that encourages, supports and advances the life and witness of the denomination. The Committee commends the Stedfast group that despite the various limitations imposed by the pandemic, has consistently managed to produce full editions of the denominational magazine. Congregations are, as always, encouraged to give Stedfast their support.

PRAYER UNION

The Committee appreciates the valuable contribution which the Prayer Union continues to make to the life of the church in providing an opportunity for focused prayer throughout the denomination. Mrs Wemyss Billows has now served for 25 years on the Prayer Union Committee as Convener. We commend her and her Committee for maintaining the quality and content of the Prayer and Study Guide which is widely used throughout the church.

NOMINATIONS TO GENERAL ASSEMBLY COMMITTEES

The Committee would again like to express thanks to everyone who has willingly accepted nomination to General Assembly Committees, in particular to those who have agreed to become Conveners and Vice-Conveners of Committees.

MODERATOR

Thanks are expressed to the Moderator, Rev. Dr. David Miller who has served our denomination throughout a difficult year. His visits made to congregations have been limited but have been appreciated for the encouragement they have brought. The Moderator has also willingly represented the church at a number of meetings and events.

CHURCH OFFICE

The Committee expresses grateful appreciation to Mr Adrian Rootes as General Secretary and Mrs Helena Jarvis for the general running of the office and servicing of Committees; and also to our Accountant, Mr Lawrence Renn.

With the gradual lifting of restrictions due to the pandemic, our staff who were working from home have begun a phased return to the office. Fibre optic broadband and multimedia equipment has recently been installed, meaning that meetings can now be held online as well as in person in the church office.

QUINQUENNIAL VISITATION

Presbytery of the West: Chryston and Cumnock

Presbytery of the East: none

Presbytery of the North: none

SAFEGUARDING

The Committee recognise the difficulty in meeting for Safeguarding training over the past two years but remind congregations of their responsibilities in terms of safeguarding Children and Adults at Risk of Harm, such as having a named safeguarding co-ordinator, providing initial training and then refresher training after 2 years.

OSCR REVIEW

The Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR) confirmed the removal of United Free Church's status as a Designated Religious Charity (DRC) with effect from 21st January 2022. This decision was communicated by the Church Office to all congregations. For the avoidance of doubt: both our denomination and individual congregations still retained charity status and that the only practical change is in regard to the process to be followed if a congregation is seeking dissolution. Congregations should have removed any reference to the United Free Church being a Designated Religious Charity in any documents or communications (including email signatures).

SPECIAL AID

Special Aid funds give assistance in special circumstances and with the utmost discretion. Grants from this fund are treated with strict confidentiality. In recent months residential properties owned by the General Trustees and occupied by retired ministers and their widows/widowers have been fitted with fire alarms that meet the legislation recently introduced by the Scottish Government.

NOMINATIONS

FINANCE REPORT

The Report and audited Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2021 are at the back of the Assembly Reports. Detailed Fund Accounts are available from the General Secretary.

This Report highlights the principal factors affecting movement in Funds in 2021, explains agreed 'Target' contribution amounts for 2021 and 2022 with the recommended level of Target for 2023.

The General Trustees of the Denomination hold funds deposited for investment on behalf of third parties. These Third Party funds have been excluded from the Balance Sheet amounts for Investments and Creditors (see Note 12 to the Accounts). They should still be accounted for in the financial statements of the third parties.

MOVEMENT IN FUNDS 2021

Total Funds	2021	2020
	£	£
Unrestricted Funds:		
General	1,426,824	1,350,794
Designated	1,776,476	1,783,443
Restricted Funds	738,676	644,729
Funds at 31st December 2021	3,941,976	<u>3,778,966</u>
	£	£
Ordinary income	1,350,125	1,304,135
Ordinary expenses	<u>1,32,6854</u>	<u>1,354,196</u>
	23,271	(50,061)
Income from Dissolutions	-	-
Net Incoming resources	23,,271	<u>(50,061)</u>
Net gains on investments etc. (realised & unrealised)	139,739	(115,336)
Net Movement in Funds	<u>163,010</u>	<u>(165,397)</u>

TARGET

2021 The Target figure for 2021 was set at £194,000. The amount received was £197,776

2022 The Target figure agreed for 2022 by General Assembly was £194,000.

2023 It is the recommendation of the Committee that we seek to raise in 2023 the amount of £200,000 from target on the basis of £60 per member on the roll and an additional amount

calculated equally on the basis of ordinary income and the funds held by congregations for their use. It is also recommended that the cap on the level of annual change is reduced from £750 to £600.

Since its introduction in 2019 the new method for calculating target has been the subject of a number of queries which the Committee has devoted a significant amount of discussion to. Whilst it is acknowledged that the previous per capita method of calculation was easier to understand, it was not sustainable in the long term and did not equitably share the challenge of funding the work of the denomination across the whole Church.

The Committee felt that basing the Target calculation on three factors (membership, income and funds held), attempted to recognise the different circumstances faced by different congregations e.g. some congregations may have lower membership, but a higher level of attendance and financial contribution from adherents; some congregations may have a high membership level but a lower proportion of members/adherents who are in employment and therefore may have lower income levels. The Committee did discuss the adding in of a fourth element to the calculation – that of expenditure levels – but on balance did not believe that this would significantly enhance the matter of producing fair and equitable shares of the financial contribution sought for the denomination's work and would rather further complicate what is already a complex calculation.

This discussion did however lead the Committee to consider two areas which are part of the current calculation where perhaps some change could enhance the equitability of the calculation formula:

Per Capita Figure - It was noted that sadly, membership numbers have been falling in recent years – exemplified by the announcement of the recent loss of our Designated Religious Charity status (brought about by the denomination dropping below the threshold of having 3,000 members). The decline in per capita receipts was being offset in recent years by more pressure on the income and congregational funds elements. The Committee agreed that a proposal be taken to General Assembly to increase this figure from £50 to £60 for 2023.

Cap on annual change of requested Target contribution –It was considered that the cap on the difference between one year's Target figure compared with the previous for a congregation, was currently too onerous at £750, and that a proposal should be made to General Assembly to reduce this to £600.

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEES' FUNDS 2021/ 2022

The Schedule on page 9 details the movements in Committee's resources in 2021. The Committee have sought to apply a similar allocation of Target for 2022 reflecting the differing responsibilities of the new Committee structure.

The funding of the denomination has not for a considerable time been met by target contributions. The Committee are grateful to the General Trustees for the considerable contribution they make to work of Committees. There is considerable pressure on the Governance Committee to ensure all committees are treated equitably in the distribution of target income.

REMUNERATION

The current mileage rate of 30 pence per mile for travel expenses for pulpit supply has been in place for some years. The Committee recommend an increase to 40 pence per mile, where a car is used, from 1st January 2023.

CONGREGATIONAL TREASURERS

We acknowledge the additional work and commitment which has been required from all treasurers in recent years to fulfil and the requirements of Charity Law and of OSCR and thank treasurers and responsible committees for their efforts.

In response to issues raised at the 2021 General Assembly, and subsequently outlined in writing by Mr David Smith (Darnley), the Committee deliberated and responded to the main matters and suggestions raised as follows:

The Committee agreed that challenges and pressures do exist with regard to identifying and supporting members of congregations to fulfil the role of Treasurer which has become more demanding in recent times due to increased regulation etc, but felt that these challenges were already being managed via the system of oversight in place, in that every congregation has a Minister or Interim Moderator and therefore has a representative on Presbytery to flag up any issues.

The Committee agreed that succession planning was an area that all congregations need to consider, and that smaller congregations in particular were sometimes struggling generally with governance issues and with succession planning for key roles such as Treasurer. In addition members were also in agreement that wherever possible and appropriate some of the various tasks relating to the role of Treasurer could be assigned to other members of the congregation in order to lessen the load on the Treasurer and to make taking on the role of congregational Treasurer seem less daunting. It was noted that in many congregations this does already happen – a finance team approach - but perhaps this practice could be further encouraged.

The Committee has written to all Presbyteries affirming their role of oversight and encouraging their congregations to actively consider succession planning and to ask for help when required.

AUDIT OF DENOMINATIONAL ACCOUNTS

Alexander Sloan, Chartered Accountants, who are the Auditors appointed by General Assembly, have carried out their audit. It is recommended that this firm be reappointed for the 2022 audit.

ECUMENICAL RELATIONS

The Working Group met twice this session, on 5th October 2021 and 3rd March 2022. There continues to be a good mix of views with insightful contributions from those attending. The Moderator's enthusiastic presence has brought a welcome additional perspective.

COVID's long shadow continues to make in-person meetings difficult, though signs of movement towards greater interaction at the denominational level offer the hope of more ecumenical connectivity to come.

Our meetings have focused mostly on bilateral issues, not least because this seems the most fruitful avenue for meaningful gospel progress as all churches emerge from the pandemic. Equally our portfolio of memberships across ecumenical bodies continues and we monitor their activities as far as is practically possible.

It was very good to hear of our representation during COP26 in Glasgow, when the Moderator and Beth Tait (Darnley) attended a large ecumenical service in Glasgow Cathedral on Sunday 7th November 2021.

Some issues have been submitted for consideration and response from within the denomination. We are grateful and would encourage congregations to make the Working Group aware of anything local which carries an ecumenical dimension with potentially wider consequences.

BILATERAL MEETINGS

On Thursday 24th March 2022, a very positive bilateral conversation was held online with representatives from the Church of Scotland Ecumenical Relations Committee.

A number of issues were discussed informally, including options for local co-operation alongside the present situation with Action of Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS) and the Scottish Christian Forum (SCF).

It was noted that Church of Scotland Presbytery planning across the country is likely to have a direct impact on current arrangements, especially local situations where a covenant is in place. This will be kept under review as more Presbyteries finalise their plans for future presence and ministry provision.

Warm support was expressed for constructive ongoing relationships at Canonbie and Cathcart, along with the BEK partnership in Burntisland and Kinghorn. A local covenant is being signed between Burntisland and Kinghorn Parish Churches and Erskine UF Church on Easter Sunday, 17th April 2022.

Rev. Alexander Ritchie comes to the end of a four-year tenure of representation on the Church of Scotland Ecumenical Relations Committee shortly. The opportunity for contact, interaction and involvement with this Committee has been invaluable and the warm welcome always extended has been greatly appreciated.

The Working Group would express personal thanks to the Church of Scotland Ecumenical Relations Officer, Rev. Dr. John McPake, for his willingness to assist, support and nurture good relations with the United Free Church whenever he is approached or invited to contribute either in practical or substantive ways.

It remains our intention to pursue bilateral meetings with others, including The Free Church of Scotland and the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. The helpful suggestion has also been made that we make initial contact with the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches.

It's indicative of our ecumenical willingness to engage widely that these options are still active and realistic opportunities for us. Greater freedom to hold in-person meetings should enable us to expedite these matters soon.

WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES (WCC) ASSEMBLY

The 11th World Council of Churches Assembly is due to take place in Karlsruhe, Germany from 31st August to 8th September 2022. The Working Group is delighted that Rev. Dr. Jane McArthur will represent the United Free Church of Scotland at this significant ecumenical gathering.

A number of pre-Assembly events have already taken place online, it's been helpful to bring groups of delegates together in advance of the Assembly itself. This has mostly taken place at regional level, which is a European context from our Scottish perspective.

In times of challenge to world order and recent suffering in Ukraine the Assembly's theme is, "Christ's love moves the world to reconciliation and unity." This has a particularly sharp focus and resonance in light of current circumstances undermining peace. A primary WCC role has always been one of advocacy, presenting the Christian response to global events at the very highest level.

The Working Group would ask for your prayers as this strategic Assembly takes place.

ACTION OF CHURCHES TOGETHER IN SCOTLAND (ACTS) AND SCOTTISH CHRISTIAN FORUM (SCF)

Unfortunately it remains the case that no resolution to the position of ACTS has taken place. The ecumenical body continues to exist legally as a charity, but with no office premises, staff members and only very limited activities. Significant funds are still being held on behalf of ACTS by its trustees.

ACTS could be wound up, but a receiving charitable body has to be in place in order to receive its funds. This is further complicated by the fact that SCF does not yet exist in a legally recognised form.

The Working Group's view is that ACTS has to be wound up as soon as possible, this is the only way to break the impasse in finding a replacement for our national ecumenical instrument. At the time of writing (March 2022) it is understood that Member Churches will be contacted by the ACTS trustees shortly.

Although sadly the early signs of real optimism raised by SCF have largely dissipated, the positive work of the Scottish Church Leaders Forum (SCLF) alongside the evolving Ecumenical Officers Forum has undoubtedly re-introduced a clear Christian voice into the public square.

This has occurred at national levels of government in Scotland, something invaluable during the very difficult days of COVID. It is hoped that good relationships and missional activity across a genuinely diverse range of churches will flourish, hopefully enabled by the detailed background work of the Ecumenical Officers.

The United Free Church doesn't have an Ecumenical Officer, but it's worth emphasising that we have participated actively both in SCLF (via the Moderator) and the Officers' Forum (via our ER Working Group Convener).

ASSEMBLIES AND SYNODS

The nomination of a representative from the United Free Church to attend any Assembly or Synod of another denomination has been assigned to the Working Group.

Invitations have been received for The United Reformed Church's National Synod of Scotland, The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland and The General Synod of the Scottish Episcopal Church.

The normal method has been to approach the Moderator, though there may be difficulties when these events overlap with our own General Assembly. We would express thanks to those who have given consideration to representing us, the work of being present on such occasions sends a clear signal of willingness to engage, discuss and learn from others.

LOCAL CO-OPERATION

The Working Group continues to be encouraged by and very supportive of local ecumenical co-operation. The places where formal relationships exist have already been noted, these are uncertain times with the shifting of ministry priorities across many denominations.

It cannot be denied that the impact of pandemic has reduced all church attendances, everyone is trying to rebuild connections with people fragmented during lockdown for a whole variety of complex reasons. In this shared landscape, some form of local initiative to work together seems very logical and may also be profitable spiritually for us all.

We are aware that some situations are developing slowly and organically. The Working Group has anecdotal details of informal discussions at Presbytery level and in local contexts where our own congregations are starting to forge new ecumenical contacts.

The local witness to our communities of churches co-operating should always be borne in mind. People notice these things and it enables us to present Christ to people from the consistent stance of our shared faith.

STATISTICS

Presbyteries: The number of Presbyteries remains at 3.

Congregations: The number of Congregations at the end of 2021 was 51 two less than 2020.

Name of Presbytery	Number of Congregations
1. East	14
2. West	23
3. North	14

Roll of Ministers, etc.

Ministers:

	2019	2021
In Pastorate.....	20	19
Others appointments	3	2
Total	23	21
Full time Ministry Assistant	1	1
Part-time Ministers, Ministry Assistants & Pastors.....	11	11
Students.....	3	1
Probationers.....	2	2
Retired Ministers.....	25	24
Widows (ers) of Ministers.....	14	14
Widows of Pastors.....	3	3

Persons and Agencies: In the table appended to this Report the analysed details of schedules received from Congregations will be found with the corresponding figures for previous years.

Communicants: The number of Communicants on the Roll at 31 December 2021 was 1,988 compared with 2,084 at the end of 2020.

Admissions were as follows: -

	2020	2021
By Profession	19	51
By Certificate	15	16
By Resolution	3	6

Removals were as follows: -

By Death	89	80
By Certificate	16	18
Without Certificate	30	55

Office-Bearers: There were 323 Elders and 236 Deacons, Managers or Board Members who are not Elders.

Baptisms: There were 9 Baptisms of children and 4 of adults.

Sunday Activities:

	2020	2021
Pre-school	58	50
P1 - 7	127	107
Congregations	29	24
Leaders	95	87
S 1 - 3	37	34
Congregations	18	19
S 4 - 6	18	13
Congregations	13	7

Midweek Organisations for Children & Young People:

Number	59	71
Membership	733	856

Adult Organisations:

Number	143	136
Membership	1,908	1,937

Roll of persons not yet Communicants: The Committee recommend to the Kirk Session the practice of keeping a careful record of all persons not yet communicants who are in any way connected with the Church either by attendance or by affiliation with any organisation of the Church.

In the name of the Committee,

DOUGLAS I CAMPBELL	Convener
ANNE C BRYCE	Vice-convener
ALEXANDER RITCHIE	Vice-convener
ADRIAN J ROOTES	Secretary

