

**V.**  
**REPORT**  
**OF THE**  
**FINANCE & SUSTENTATION COMMITTEE**

**1. Introduction**

The Committee are charged by the General Assembly to oversee all the financial affairs of the denomination and to seek to exercise wise stewardship of these resources.

The Committee are aware that, what in accounting terms is named income, often represents the sacrificial free-will offerings of the Lord's people. We have sought to fulfil our duties in a fair and consistent way throughout the year, conscious that unless the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it.

**2. Income**

Total income for 2016 was £926,303, an increase of £149,544 (19%) compared to 2015. This increase is largely the result of a mortgage deposit of £120,000. Congregational remittances (including Gift Aid) increased by 6% and totalled £659,828. Despite the budget for 2016 projecting a deficit of £91,685 we are thankful to the Lord that there was a surplus for the year of £52,427 (£28,781 in 2015).

For the third year in succession there were no Legacies to Central Funds and the Committee would draw the attention of the Church to the leaflet, '*Remembering the Church in your Will*', which should be available in each congregation.

Total Gift Aid tax reclaimed was £132,731, an increase of £10,413 (9%) compared to 2015. It should be noted that this represents 20% of all congregational remittances. It is important to maximise the claim made under Gift Aid, and the Committee would encourage the Church to promote this within each congregation.

The Committee are grateful to Congregational Treasurers for recording and submitting the necessary information to claim Gift Aid, and to facilitate the operation of the Gift Aid Small Donations Scheme.

Total Central Building Fund income was £185,533; this figure comprises Mortgage repayment income of £175,513 (of which £120,000 was an initial deposit), and net Central Building Fund remittances of £10,020 (a decrease of 19% from 2015). At the close of 2016 the total in the Central Building Fund was £80,911 (£70,891 in 2015).

**3. Expenditure**

Total expenditure for 2016 was £873,876, an increase of £125,898 (17%) compared to 2015, and mostly accounted for by payment of the £120,000 mortgage deposit.

Payroll costs were £556,965, a decrease of £4,172 (1%) compared to 2015. Payroll costs represent 84% of congregational remittances.

The other major expenditure was mortgage loans repayments totalling £53,144 for the four Stewardship funded properties.

**4. Net Assets**

At the end of 2016 the total net assets of the denomination amounted to £1,005,542, an increase of £52,427 (5%) over 2015. This figure comprises of cash funds of £532,990, net Fixed Assets of £634,727, stock of £9,156, loans due of £84,527, Gift Aid due of £78,506, other debtors of £1,151, less Property Loans repayable to Stewardship of £324,783 and net current liabilities of £10,731. Restricted Funds amount to £144,891 (£134,574 in 2015).

### **5. Central Building Fund**

During 2016 mortgage borrowing was arranged on behalf of the Congregation of Bracadale & Duirinish. An administrative delay resulted in the mortgage provider, Stewardship, not releasing funds until 2017, and consequently in consultation with the General Trustees, an interest free loan was provided from Central Funds to allow the purchase to proceed at the end of August.

Contributions to the Central Building Fund come through two principal sources, monthly payments from congregations that have mortgage loans, and other income. The Committee are considering how best to invest this 'other income', so as to minimise the cost of borrowing for congregations with a mortgage. The Committee's intention is to make the prospect of securing suitable property accessible to as many congregations as possible. The Committee are seeking to establish a process that will protect the Church's interests at both congregational and denominational level.

The Committee also recognise that a number of congregations currently are servicing property loans directly, without having used the Central Building Fund.

It is hoped that a matured proposal can be brought to a subsequent General Assembly or Commission.

### **6. Gospel Fund**

The Committee are pleased to report, following last year's General Assembly, that a 'Gospel Fund' account, managed within the Church's accounting systems, has been established and is operating to the satisfaction of all interested parties.

### **7. Budgetary Planning**

The Committee were pleased to invite Clerks and Conveners from each Standing and Special Committee of Assembly to participate in a budget preparation training seminar led by the General Treasurer. Feedback was positive and a similar event may be held in the future.

The Committee are grateful to Clerks and Conveners of Standing and Special Committees for submitting Draft Budgets for 2018.

The Committee having approved all the Draft Budgets noted the projected deficit of £3,482 and recommend that the 2018 Draft Budget be noted and approved by the General Assembly. There will be opportunity at the General Assembly for Conveners of Standing and Special Committees to be questioned regarding specific details of their respective Committee Budgets.

The Unclassified Budget includes provision for payroll costs for the 20 ministers currently on the payroll along with those eligible for a call.

### **8. Budget Management**

The Committee want to emphasise the importance of working within budgetary constraints in as far as is reasonably practicable. With the exception of statutory obligations, any anticipated expenditure of £500 or over, that is not included within approved Committee Budgets, must first be approved by the Finance & Sustentation Committee before the expense is incurred. The Finance & Sustentation Committee has an Executive which can convene at short notice to ensure a prompt response if necessary.

It is not appropriate to reallocate any portion of an agreed budget that has not been expended, without prior consultation with the Finance & Sustentation Committee.

Any income gathered through the activity of any particular Committee cannot be 'banked' for expenditure in future years. The Finance & Sustentation Committee is aware of each Committee's previous and potential future income and will take this into consideration when making decisions about expenditure.

Regular budget reports are now provided to Standing and Special Committee Clerks to promote responsible financial management, and each Standing and Special Committee should, as a matter of course at ordinary meetings, review actual income and expenditure with what was budgeted.

### 9. Psalmody Committee

The Committee received a request for funding from the Psalmody Committee for an unbudgeted expense amounting to £5,555 for printing 500 Staff Psalters. While sympathetic to the concerns of the Psalmody Committee to proceed with this print run, the Committee believed it appropriate to bring this request, far in excess of the budget previously approved for 2017, to the General Assembly. Consequently, the Committee seek the approval of the General Assembly for an amendment of the Psalmody Committee Books budget for 2017 from £500 to £6,055.

### 10. Annual Analysis of Congregational Accounts

The Committee thank the General Treasurer for his analysis of Congregational Accounts and Statistical Schedules; this information will be circulated at the Assembly. This detail is provided to help give a realistic 'snap-shot' of the current situation, to encourage a prayerful concern throughout the Church, and to assist in future planning.

### 11. Loans

<b>Mortgage Loans due to be repaid</b>	<b>Balance at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2015</b>	<b>New Loans in 2016</b>	<b>Repaid in 2016</b>	<b>Balance at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2016</b>
Edinburgh	179,749	0	(13,557)	166,192
Partick	77,365	0	(7,275)	70,090
North Uist	42,981	0	(5,222)	37,759
Duthil-Dores	64,208	0	(13,468)	50,740
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£364,303</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>(£39,522)</b>	<b>£324,781</b>
<b>Loan Denominational Funds</b>	<b>Balance at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2015</b>	<b>New Loans in 2016</b>	<b>Repaid in 2016</b>	<b>Balance at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2016</b>
Edinburgh	4,935	0	(4,935)	0
Knock & Point	8,000	0	(8,000)	8,000
North Uist	23,000	0	0	23,000
Harris	0	10,000	0	10,000
<b><u>TOTAL CHURCH LOANS</u></b>	<b><u>£35,935</u></b>	<b><u>£10,000</u></b>	<b><u>(£12,935)</u></b>	<b><u>£33,000</u></b>
<b>CAR LOANS</b>	29,056	4,000	(16,201)	16,855
<b>STUDENT LOANS*</b>	32,797	2,288	(413)	34,672**
<b><u>TOTAL LOANS</u></b>	<b><u>£122,025</u></b>	<b><u>£19,500</u></b>	<b><u>(£43,737)</u></b>	<b><u>£97,778</u></b>

\*All Student Loans awarded since September 2011 are repayable

\*\* This includes an outstanding student loan of £10,987 awarded to a candidate who has since left the denomination.

**12. General Treasurer's Department**

The Committee are pleased to report that Mr Murray Mackay, appointed General Treasurer by the 2016 General Assembly, has quickly settled into his new role. Mr Mackay provides helpful and relevant advice to the Committee and has a clear grasp of the necessary processes to promote good financial management.

The Committee value and appreciate the Financial Administrator, Mrs Muriel Smith, who has carried out her duties diligently and efficiently over the past year.

The services of CIB Audit, Stornoway, have been appreciated and the Committee is recommending to the General Assembly that they be appointed as auditors again for the coming year.

**13. Support of Mission Work**

The denomination continues to support the work of the Gospel both within Scotland and in relation to its various missionary endeavours abroad. Over the past year financial expenditure totalling £92,486 was given as follows:

Zambia £24,279; Sri Lanka £15,016; Ballyclare & Doagh £3,600; Home Missions Work £29,666; Gospel Fund £19,225; Christian Witness to Israel £700; the balance represents Home & Foreign Missions Committee expenses.

Although there has been no direct funding of the work in Spain the Committee are thankful that the Church has an involvement there.

The Committee have agreed to support the recommendation of the Home & Foreign Missions Committee for a £500 monthly grant payment to the Ballyclare & Doagh congregation, commencing from June 2017 up to and inclusive of May 2018.

The Committee support the recommendation of the Home & Foreign Missions Committee that £4,000 budgeted for theological training in 2017 be reallocated toward capital costs in Mullaitheevu and Vavuniya.

**14. Congregations Furth of Scotland**

In considering the financial arrangements of congregations furth of Scotland the Committee recommends to the General Assembly that these be considered in two distinct categories:

1. Congregations furth of Scotland but still within the United Kingdom, and;
2. Congregations furth of Scotland and outwith the United Kingdom.

The Committee recommends that provision for congregations in the second category be considered on an individual basis, taking into account local circumstances and the desirability of a general equity with the provision made for ministers and congregations within Scotland. The Committee recommends that congregations in the first category come under the same Sustentation Fund arrangements as for congregations within Scotland, as they are currently set out in Act XVIII 1998 Act anent Sustentation Fund.

Unless the General Assembly instructs otherwise, the Committee considers that it has discharged its responsibility concerning this remit.

**15. OSCR Scottish Charity Regulator**

The Committee have noted comments made by an increasing number of congregations who now find that they have become liable for water and sewerage charges. Previously churches enjoyed an automatic exemption, but now this must be applied for and one criterion that is essential in order to be exempt is that the registered charity has an annual income of less than £300,000. Because the denomination, rather than individual congregations, is registered, the charity number indicates an income in excess of £300,000. The cost of water charges varies according to location and usage, and some congregations are yet to be billed,

but presently across the church annual payments are in excess of £3,500, with this figure likely to increase to in excess of £4,500 per annum. The Committee have communicated this information to the General Trustees and are awaiting their response.

### (B) SUSTENTATION

#### 16. Stipend

The Committee are recommending that there be no increase in the ministerial stipend during the current year and that the Equal Dividend remain at £20,000.

#### 17. Death-in-Service Scheme

Over recent years the practice has been to provide death-in-service life assurance cover, to the value of two and one half times stipend (or salary), which would be payable to the estate of any minister (or other employee) should that person die while still in post before retirement. The primary purpose of this is to help make provision for surviving dependants. The cost of providing this level of cover increases significantly once a person has reached 65, the expected age of retirement. After the age of 70 the cost of providing this cover is prohibitive and understandably the financial services industry does not offer suitable products. The Committee are therefore reviewing the Death-in-Service Life Assurance Scheme and hope to have recommendations before the next General Assembly or Commission of Assembly.

#### 18. Changes in Ministerial Personnel during 2016

##### Deaths:

Rev. Donald M. MacDonald	Minister, Uig (Bernera), Rtd	22nd June 2016
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##### Retirals:

Rev. Kenneth Macdonald	Minister, Scalpay (Harris)	30th April 2016
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##### Inductions:

Rev. Iain Smith	To Harris (Leverburgh),	6th May 2016
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##### Resignation:

Rev. David Lachman	From Zambia Mission Field	8th October 2016
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##### Register & Rolls:

##### Probationers:

Rev. Murdo MacIver	Licensed by Free Southern Presbytery	22nd June 2015
Rev. James Haram	Licensed by Free Southern Presbytery	14th December 2015
Rev. Travis Fentiman	Licensed by Presbytery of United States	8th November 2013

#### Register of Minister without Charge — Eligible for a Call as at 1st March 2017

Nil

#### Roll of Resigned Ministers

Rev. John J. Harding

Rev. Sherman Isbell

Rev. Bert Pohl

#### 19. Funeral Fund Grant

The Committee, having reviewed the Funeral Fund Grant Scheme as currently legislated for in Act IV 2013 Act anent Grants for Funeral Costs of retired Ministers, are recommending that the grant paid on the decease of a retired Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) minister to assist with funeral costs, be increased by 5%, from £1,000 to £1,050.

**20. Congregations under Special Arrangements**

The Committee commend the Congregations of Aberdeen, Ayr, Brora, Harris, Knock & Point, Lochalsh & Strath, North Uist & Grimsay and Poolewe & Aultbea to the prayerful concern of the Church. Each congregation has experienced particular challenges over the year but there are also encouragements to report. A summary of the Annual Reports received from these Congregations are included in Appendix 1.

The Committee recommend that the Congregation of Harris (Leverburgh) be placed on the Equal Dividend Platform under Special Arrangements in accordance with Act XVIII 1998 for a further period of five years from the rising of this Assembly, subject to the Congregation promising to remit to Central Funds the sum of £16,100 annually.

The Committee recommend that the Congregation of Aberdeen be placed on the Equal Dividend Platform under Special Arrangements in accordance with Act XVIII 1998 for a further period of five years from the rising of this Assembly, subject to the Congregation promising to remit to Central Funds the sum of £18,000 annually.

The Committee recommend that the Congregation of Lochalsh & Strath be placed on the Equal Dividend Platform without restrictions, in accordance with Act XVIII 1998.

The Committee recommend that the Congregation of North Uist & Grimsay be placed on the Equal Dividend Platform under Special Arrangements in accordance with Act XVIII 1998 for a further period of five years from the rising of this Assembly, subject to the Congregation promising to remit to Central Funds the sum of £14,500 annually.

**(C) SUPPLY****21. Pulpit Supply**

The denomination owes a great debt of gratitude to retired ministers, divinity students, elders and others who assist with pulpit supply. The Committee trust that their labours, which are particularly appreciated by our vacant congregations, will be greatly blessed by the Lord.

**22. Supply Expenses and Preaching Fees**

Recognising that Supply Fees and Expenses have not been increased since 2011, the Committee propose to:

1. Increase the 'Resident Supply' for retired single ministers from £60 per week to £70 per week, and the resident supply for retired married men to be increased from £90 per week to £100 per week;
2. Increase 'Other Preaching Supply' from £28 per service, up to a maximum of £55 per Lord's Day to £30 per service, up to a maximum of £60 per Lord's Day.

Further the Committee have agreed to clarify that 'a child' is here deemed to be under the age of 16.

The Committee are not proposing any change to the current mileage rate of 32p per mile.

**23. Resident Lay Agent**

The Committee are thankful for Mr Donald Robertson who serves faithfully providing pulpit and pastoral supply in otherwise vacant congregations. During 2016 he has divided his time between the two congregations of Assynt & Edrachillis and Poolewe & Aultbea.

**(D) CONCLUSION**

The Committee, which has had a heavy workload over 2016, greatly appreciate the diligent and conscientious work of the Clerk, Mr Murdo Murray.

The Committee value the support and expertise of both advisers, Mr John MacKenzie, *Chairman of the General Trustees*, and Mr Murray Mackay, *General Treasurer*.

A. JAMES MACINNES, *Convener*  
TIMOTHY J. MCGLYNN, *Vice-convener*

### PROPOSED DELIVERANCE

1. The General Assembly receive and adopt the Report of the Finance & Sustentation Committee and thank the Committee, and especially the Convener, for their stewardship of the financial affairs of the Church during the past year;
2. The General Assembly acknowledge with thanksgiving the goodness of Almighty God in the provision for the financial needs of the Church in the past year;
3. The General Assembly thank each individual and every congregation for their sacrificial support of the Gospel ministry, missionary interests and other activities of the denomination;
4. The General Assembly draw the attention of the Church to the Wills Leaflet and thank those who remember the Church when drawing up their Wills;
5. The General Assembly note the significant amount of income reclaimed through the Gift Aid Scheme and encourage each congregation to promote the benefits of using the Scheme wherever possible;
6. The General Assembly thank all who have contributed to the Central Building Fund and encourage each congregation to support this if they are not already doing so;
7. The General Assembly give thanks for the satisfactory relationship with Stewardship and note that all financial commitments to the Company have been met over the past year;
8. The General Assembly remind Deacons' Courts that Applications for property funding from the Central Building Fund must be made via the formal application process, details of which can be obtained from the Clerk to the Finance & Sustentation Committee;
9. The General Assembly thank all Congregational Treasurers and Church Courts for managing financial affairs at a congregational level and for providing the necessary information at the request of the Financial Administrator;
10. The General Assembly endorse the recommendation of the Finance & Sustentation Committee that the Draft Budget for 2018 be approved and note that there is a projected deficit of £3,482;
11. The General Assembly declare an Equal Dividend of £20,000 from 1st July 2017;
12. The General Assembly remind all congregations that the total payroll cost from the 1st July 2017 for each minister is £24,000 per annum;
13. The General Assembly declare a Funeral Fund Grant of £1,050 as of the 1st July 2017;
14. The General Assembly note the review of the Death-in-Service Scheme and await recommendations from the Finance & Sustentation Committee at the next General Assembly or Commission of Assembly;
15. The General Assembly exhort congregations to remit, in a timeous manner each month, a minimum

- of 75% of ordinary income to Central Funds wherever possible, in order to ensure financial support for the Gospel ministry;
16. The General Assembly note that a suitable system has been devised within the central financial structures of the Church that enables the work of the Gospel conducted by the Home & Foreign Missions Committee to continue unhindered and as effectively as possible;
  17. The General Assembly thank Congregations and Presbyteries for the prompt submission of Statistical Schedules and attested Accounts to the General Treasurer;
  18. The General Assembly direct that the Congregation of Aberdeen be placed on the Equal Dividend Platform under Special Arrangements in accordance with Act XVIII 1998, Act anent Sustentation Fund, for a further period of 5 years from the rising of this Assembly, subject to the Congregation promising to remit to Central Funds the sum of £18,000 per annum;
  19. The General Assembly direct that the Congregation of Harris (Leverburgh) be placed on the Equal Dividend Platform under Special Arrangements in accordance with Act XVIII 1998, Act anent Sustentation Fund, for a further period of 5 years from the rising of this Assembly, subject to the Congregation promising to remit to Central Funds the sum of £16,100 per annum;
  20. The General Assembly direct that the Congregation of North Uist & Grimsay be placed on the Equal Dividend Platform under Special Arrangements in accordance with Act XVIII 1998, Act anent Sustentation Fund, for a further period of 5 years from the rising of this Assembly, subject to the Congregation promising to remit to Central Funds the sum of £14,500 per annum;
  21. The General Assembly note with thankfulness the admission of the Congregation of Lochalsh & Strath to the Equal Dividend Platform, without restrictions, in accordance with Act XVIII 1998, Act anent Sustentation Fund, from the rising of this Assembly;
  22. The General Assembly encourage a prayerful concern for all of our congregations and the particular challenges faced at a local level;
  23. The General Assembly direct that congregations furth of Scotland, yet within the United Kingdom shall henceforth be treated in the same manner as are Congregations within Scotland for the purposes of the Sustentation Fund and shall be eligible to submit an application requesting admittance to the Equal Dividend Platform under Act XVIII 1998, Act anent Sustentation Fund; all such congregations shall cease to be eligible for financial support from the Home & Foreign Missions Committee;
  24. The General Assembly direct that all other congregations furth of Scotland, i.e. those outwith the United Kingdom, shall continue to have their financial affairs supervised by Home & Foreign Missions Committee acting *in loco synodi*, and that any application for financial support shall be considered by the said Committee on an individual basis, taking into account local circumstances and the desirability of a general equity with the provision made for ministers and congregations within Scotland;
  25. The General Assembly approve that the Psalmody Committee's Budget for 2017 be increased by the sum of £5,555;
  26. The General Assembly note the Committee's support for the reallocation of £4,000 of Sri Lanka funds, within the Home & Foreign Missions Committee 2017 budget, to capital costs in Mullaitheevu and Vavuniya;

27. The General Assembly approve of all Standing and Special Committees of Assembly being notified of the following;

27.1 Funds that have been allocated and approved for specific purposes within Committee budgets are not to be reallocated to any other purpose without prior approval from the Finance & Sustentation Committee;

27.2 With the exception of statutory obligations, any anticipated expenditure of £500 or over, that is not included within approved Committee budgets must be approved by the Finance & Sustentation Committee;

27.3 Any surplus Committee Income at the closure of the end of year accounts cannot be carried forward to the following year for expenditure.

28. The General Assembly thank Mr Murray Mackay, General Treasurer, for the dedication and professionalism he has shown in the performance of all his duties in the past year;
29. The General Assembly thank Mrs Muriel Smith for the efficient manner in which she has set about her duties as Financial Administrator over another year;
30. The General Assembly thank CIB Services, Stornoway, for their work on behalf of the Church over the past year and re-appoint them as Auditors for the coming year;
31. The General Assembly express their appreciation to all who have assisted with pulpit supply over the past year and crave God's blessing upon their labours in the Gospel;
32. The General Assembly note with gratitude the excellent work done in the past year by Mr Donald A. Robertson, Resident Lay Agent, in the congregations of Assynt & Eddrachillis and Poolewe & Aultbea, and commend his labours in the Gospel to the prayers of the Church;
33. The General Assembly approve the following Supply Fees and expenses:

1. The following scale of preaching fees will be effective from 1st July 2017:

Resident supply by Students and Probationers:

- Single men at the rate of £120 per week.
- Married men without children at the rate of £140 per week.
- Married men with children at the rate of £140 per week plus £28 for each child under the age of 16, up to an overall total of £250 per family, including amounts for children.

Resident supply by Retired Ministers:

- Single men at the rate of £70 per week.
- Married men at the rate of £100 per week.

Other preaching supply:

- At the rate of £30 per service, up to a maximum of £60 per Lord's day.

This is not applicable to ministers in charges and in receipt of full stipends.

2. Additional Expenses may be claimed in the performance of the duties involved as follows
    - Motor car mileage at 32p per mile without distance restriction.
    - Costs of public transport, including ferry costs, trains or buses.
    - Bridge tolls and any other out-of-pocket expenses (supported by relevant receipts where possible)
    - Resident supply fees and expenses, when arranged by the Finance & Sustentation Committee, will be calculated and paid for by the Committee and charged to the congregation requesting the resident supply arrangement, unless that congregation is not a fully sanctioned charge.
  3. Supply preachers should use the most economical mode of transport readily available to and from the congregation supplied.
  4. Supply preachers supplying on the Lord's day should avoid travel by public transport on the Lord's day. In cases where public transport is used to fulfil an engagement in a congregation accommodation should be arranged in the local congregation from the Saturday to the Monday.
  5. The General Assembly repeal Act VI (Class II) 2011 anent Supply Fees and Expenses;
34. The General Assembly thank the Clerk to the Finance & Sustentation Committee for performing his duties in a conscientious and diligent manner over the past year.

## APPENDIX I

### Annual Report from Congregations on Special Arrangements

The following are summaries of the Reports submitted to the Finance & Sustentation Committee by the various Congregations for whom Special Arrangements were in place during 2016.

**Aberdeen.** This past year has been an eventful one for the congregation, which has seen them making a bid for a church property. Although the initial bid was unsuccessful it has since been accepted and with the proceeds of the manse sale and continued good giving by the Congregation a significant sum of money was available to help fund this bid. The outstanding amount will be financed through a commercial lender and it is hoped that matters will be concluded shortly.

Numbers attending the earlier service on the Sabbath continue around 22, with the evening service remaining steady at 25-30. Sabbath School has 1 junior and 2 senior pupils attending with the prospect of several young ones due to commence in the next few years.

The Congregation is reapplying for admittance to the Equal Dividend Platform under Special Arrangements at the 2017 General Assembly and are thankful that they have exceeded their financial commitments every year. With the new church building being at the heart of a residential area they are hopeful of growing numerically and financially so that they no longer require Special Arrangements.

The Congregation sees the potential for greater growth in Aberdeen and remain convinced that Aberdeen offers one of the most likely areas for congregational growth in the denomination.

**Ayr.** This year has seen a reversal of some of the encouragements and additions that the Congregation had seen in 2015. The Haram family has relocated back to Glasgow, joining the Knightswood Congregation, and the Congregation recognises the significant numerical loss of a family of 10 souls and one of their elders. Another couple have been away most of the year caring for a sick relative and have recently intimated their intention to move to the North of England in March 2017. In October 2016 their minister accepted a call to minister in Mebane, North Carolina, and it is expected that he will make the move with his family some time in Summer/Autumn 2017. The Congregation feel their weakness and vulnerability as a result of this and are cast upon the Lord for the future.

The Congregation are encouraged by the birth and baptism of a child in the Congregation and having one of their young people confess faith in Christ at their October Communion. Some contacts were made in the community during the annual week of outreach in the Spring. A monthly witness on a Saturday is maintained from Spring to Autumn in the town centre where they distribute tracts and have a literature table on the main street.

The Congregation are grateful that their financial contributions to Central Funds have reached the target that they had set in out in their Special Arrangements application.

**Brora.** The Congregation remains in good heart and is very keen to obtain the services of a minister. Attendances at services are stable and indeed slightly up on the previous year at a regular 18, with 12 attending the Prayer Meetings and 3 attending the Bible Class.

Financial givings have held up well and the Congregation has fulfilled its undertakings with regard to givings to Central Funds. The Congregation have in very recent years begun to save for the purchase of

property and their Deacons' Court continue to investigate and pursue the various options open to them in this regard.

**Harris (Leverburgh).** The Leverburgh Congregation of the FC(C) is numerically small with a current membership of ten, nevertheless it is a remarkably united Congregation with a track record of steadfastness. There are thirteen in fairly regular attendance as well as four young people of school age. The Congregation continue in good heart and are appreciative of the Gospel.

Remittance commitment to Central Funds has been maintained with a slight increase over 2016. Renovation works have begun on their church property with the roof being replaced and new windows installed, together with the drainage of the surrounding ground and construction of a car park. Some manse windows were replaced and all the rooms extensively redecorated.

Future prospects are a concern to the Congregation as South Harris does not lend itself to promising evangelism. The indigenous locals are either well-settled in their own churches or have little interest in attending any church. On the other hand, incomers, of which there are a considerable number, show respect but again little interest in the Gospel. One potential source for the Congregation to grow numerically is the possibility of families moving to South Harris who may be sympathetic to our Church; the other potential is a sideways growth from one of the other 3 denominations in the greater Leverburgh area, although this is unlikely.

**Knock & Point.** The last year has been one of stability and continuity in the Congregation. Average attendances are unchanged from last year at 22 in the morning and 25 in the evening, with around 10 attending the midweek Prayer Meeting. Givings have enabled the Congregation to fulfil its remittance obligations. The Congregation also passed an important milestone at the end of December 2016, by paying off the entire outstanding balance of the loan from the denomination towards the cost of the church building. The aim of the Congregation is now to build up the fabric fund with the intention of eventually owning its own manse.

**Lochalsh & Strath.** At the morning, afternoon and evening services (3 different locations), on average 28 adults and 6 children regularly attend on the Sabbath. There are others who attend periodically and would identify with the Congregation.

Ongoing visitation has continued throughout the district – both in homes associated with the Congregation and others with no connection. The local nursing home continues to welcome pastoral visits. There is regular access to one local primary school to take the assembly.

The rental agreement for 2 village halls remains satisfactory, and it was possible to install double-glazing in the church in Ardelve during the last year.

The overall financial position has improved in comparison to that of the previous year, with total remittances amounting to £30,276 (£27,652 in 2015). The Congregations greatly appreciate the Special Arrangements provision that permitted them to call a minister 5 years ago. Since that time there has been an encouraging uplift in the Congregations' finances.

**North Uist & Grimsay.** Overall attendances at the services during 2016 increased slightly compared to 2015. At the end of the year there were sixteen regular attendees at the Sabbath noon service and fifteen at the evening service; the regular number attending the prayer meeting was nine. A senior elder passed away in August, with an adherent of the Congregation passing away in November.

The Congregation's 2016 income showed an increase over the 2015 figures. The Congregation are making an application for their continuance on the Equal Dividend Platform under Special Arrangements to the

2017 General Assembly. They are thankful God for enabling them to meet their financial commitments.

The Congregation has a website ([www.northuistandgrimsayfcc.org.uk](http://www.northuistandgrimsayfcc.org.uk)) which has recently been redesigned and hosts sermon recordings and offers free Christian literature. A free 20-page bi-monthly congregational magazine entitled '*Grace & Truth*' is stocked by two local shops and is also sent by request to people in Harris, Lewis and elsewhere in the UK. This publication, and the '*Witness*' and the '*Quarterly Record*' of the Trinitarian Bible Society, are sent to the local library regularly.

The minister is thankful that he is welcome to visit in many homes beyond those represented in the Congregation and he uses this opportunity to distribute magazines. Worship is conducted every sixth Sabbath afternoon in the nursing home at Carinish.

Attracting new people to their services is not easy as there are four Presbyterian denominations with a local presence in North Uist, Grimsay and Berneray, but they trust that the Lord will be pleased to bring in those who have a desire for the gospel and to worship Him according to His word.

**Poolewe & Aultbea.** The Congregation has continued in good heart over the past year with regular supply from Mr Donald Robertson, whose ministry is greatly appreciated by the people. There was an attempt to arrange a settlement when the Congregation agreed to approach Mr Iain Smith with a view to calling him; this proved unsuccessful however, when Mr Smith accepted a call to Leverburgh. It is hoped that in early summer the Congregation will begin the process of calling someone else and that there will be unanimity among them.

The Congregation itself is very friendly and welcoming and those in it are active in seeking to encourage others to attend. They are most willing to give both accommodation and hospitality to those who give supply. The Congregation is also involved in conducting worship both in the local Old Folk's Home and in the one in Gairloch.

The numbers attending are about 12-15 with some encouragements in that there have been one or two new people coming. However it is fair to say that the Congregation is fragile and the sooner a settlement is made the sooner there is a possibility that matters might improve.