IX.

REPORT

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON HOME & FOREIGN MISSIONS

1. Introduction

Mission is not something that we as a Church can choose to do, rather it is an obligation laid upon us by the Lord Jesus Christ, the King and Head of the Church: *Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature* (Mark 16:15). While a significant part of the Church's work in preaching the Gospel is fulfilled in the settled pulpit ministry throughout our Congregations, this must be complemented by going out to those who are not already coming in, both at home and further afield.

While some are identified as 'missionaries', it is important to recognise that each member of the Church must be engaged prayerfully in seeking the advance of the Gospel. In this great work we must all labour together.

The Committee are aware of, and thankful for, other missionary interests within the Church. This Report focuses upon those areas of mission which are the specific responsibility of the Committee on behalf of the wider Church.

2. Home Mission

The Committee are thankful for the tireless industry of Mr Donald John Morrison who has been involved in outreach in Portmahomack, Partick, Stornoway, Ayr, Ardelve, Holm (Inverness) and Edinburgh, as well as on Inverness High Street.

Between 2020 and 2021 Mr Morrison distributed 15,500 booklets and magazines, 24,000 gospel tracts, and 12,000 Trinitarian Bible Society calendars.

Donations to the Gospel Fund in 2021 almost correspond to expenditure, and there remains sufficient funds to cover this shortfall (income £7,779.33, total expenditure £8,125.04).

In part due to the period of enforced furlough during 2020-21, there remains a stock of 18,000 *Good News* magazines, and it is not anticipated that more will be required until 2023.

In a personal capacity, Mr Morrison has been responsible for communicating with all politicians at Westminster, Edinburgh, Belfast and Cardiff about the ongoing moral outrage of abortion and promoting repeal of this legislation.

3. European Mission

Navarre & Aragon

The General Assembly of 2021 made the historic decision to erect the Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon and organise the Spanish mission work into two Congregations, Pau in France, and Rubí, near Barcelona, in Spain. Both Congregations were permitted to call a minister in a self-supporting tent-making capacity. Rev. Jorge Ruiz was already settled in Rubí, and on 30th October 2021 Rev. Hugues Pierre, *Probationer,* was ordained and inducted to Pau. Assessor Elders have been appointed by the General Assembly to support the Presbytery and are also involved in the individual Kirk Sessions.

Presently there are two men who are in the process of being recognised as Candidates for the Ministry; one is a native French speaker while the other speaks Spanish. These men, Mr Paul Pontacq and Mr Joel Suarez, are presently engaged in studying through the Free Church Seminary following advice from the

Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee. Now that international travel is becoming easier, it is expected that they will be able to visit Scotland in the coming months and be interviewed with a view to being formally recognised as Divinity Students.

Recognising that the Presbytery of the United States successfully engaged in a process to raise sufficient funds to ensure the financial support of each minister presently in a charge, the Committee gathered and forwarded relevant information to the Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon to encourage consideration of this important matter. The Committee remain available to the Presbytery for consultation and support.

The Committee are pleased to note that Mr Ruiz and Mr Pierre have been invited to participate as lecturers in a new online seminary, Seminario Teológico Reformado – William Ames (Reformed Theological Seminary – William Ames), currently being developed by the Iglesia Presbiteriana Reformada Nacional de Bolivia (IPRNB) (National Presbyterian Reformed Church of Bolivia).

The Seminary developed by Mr Ruiz, the Academía de Teología Reformada, continues with two students actively pursuing the course; one is a member in the Congregation in Rubí, the other is a pastor of a Congregation in another part of Spain. Mr Ruiz also presents regular lectures in Systematic Theology on a Friday evening in the church in Rubí, which a small number attend.

Contact has been made with the Presbytery from a group of believers in Braga, Portugal, seeking information, advice and support. Although they are distinct languages, there is a strong relationship between Spanish and Portuguese which facilitates this. Although located in Portugal, most of these brethren originate from Brazil.

The Committee have been made aware of a growing movement within the Church in Brazil seeking reformation, strengthened by the discovery of reformed theological literature. A significant factor in this development has been a series of conferences held over several years, with some speakers coming from our own Church. It is interesting to note that the relatively small investment of speaking at a conference may have a significant impact, extending over many nations.

4. International Mission

Zambia

The Committee are pleased to continue making a financial contribution to the work of Marjanne Hendriksen who promotes and develops Christian Education in Zambia, primarily though supporting local schools and teachers.

Sri Lanka – Reformed Protestant Mission

Although the impact of Covid-19 has been felt throughout the Church, the consequences for the mission work in Sri Lanka have undoubtedly been greater, with families associated with the Congregation experiencing real hardship. Religion appears to govern every aspect of life in Sri Lanka, where Buddhists and Hindus are the two dominant groups, although Islam's rising presence is making itself increasingly felt. One Buddhist Shaman made international headlines with his claim that by adding a particular herbal concoction to the principal rivers of Sri Lanka and nearby India he would be able to heal the land and peoples of Covid. The empty hopelessness of his claims was emphasised when he himself died after contracting the virus.

The Gospel, however, offers a hope which does not make one ashamed. Together with the faithful preaching of God's Word, and through the generous giving of the Church, more than £9,000 worth of practical aid was distributed. This ensured that the families of the Congregation, together with many in the local communities, were provided with basic supplies during periods of lockdown. The Committee are thankful to the Lord for the individuals and Congregations who contributed to this.

Due to the various lockdowns it was not possible to continue the successful Sabbath School outreach which brought children from a village outside Vavuniya. It is hoped that this work may begin again.

While Covid lockdowns appear to have passed, economic pressures remain, with inflation escalating. While inflation has been increasing over the past couple of years, matters have reached a crisis point in the months leading up to the General Assembly. The value of the Sri Lankan Rupee has plummeted, and, at the time of preparing this Report, is the world's worst performing currency. For many, basic household staples are either unavailable or simply unaffordable. The nation's largest supplier of fuel has increased prices by 65%.

The Government's import ban of chemical fertilisers last year has unsurprisingly resulted in decreasing crop yields and an increasing dependency upon unaffordable imports.

All of this has an impact upon different aspects of the work of the Mission. Poorer families are struggling to provide basic meals and are unable to afford to travel.

The Mission has been advised by Government officials that it is not possible to continue operating the small Berith Hostel from the church in Vavuniya, as the law prohibits its establishment upon religious grounds. This has been a disappointing development, and it does not appear that there is any alternative but to identify other options for the individual families using this facility. Discussions are presently taking place with a suitable boarding school in the Northern province.

Ceylon Christian Care (CCC), who have generously supported the diaconal work of the Mission since its inception ten years ago, ended their support during the past year. While greatly appreciative of their past help, it was both disappointing and surprising that this happened. The Kirk Session have spoken with representatives from CCC and expressed to the Committee their confidence that this decision does not reflect negatively upon the work of the Mission or the missionary, Rev. S.N.V. Partheepan. In the providence of the Lord, financial dependence upon CCC had reduced significantly over recent years, in large part because the Mission now owns property, where previously CCC paid the monthly rent. The withdrawal of CCC funds was not anticipated when building work began.

The Christian Pre-school at Vavuniya is the only remaining project that was entirely funded by CCC, and by redirecting funds allocated to Berith Hostel there is only a small uplift required to ensure the continuation of this excellent project in a poor and otherwise disadvantaged community.

Presently, work has been advancing with the building of a house for Rev. S.N.V. Partheepan next to the Vavuniya church. A generous donation from a donor from outwith the Church was expected to be sufficient; however, sudden escalating costs, because of the national economic crisis, mean that there are presently insufficient funds to complete the project. Once complete there will be an annual saving to the Church of the cost of the present, rented accommodation.

The gift of a generous donor has enabled publication in Tamil of *Healthy Spiritual Growth* by Rev. Joel Beeke. This publication is now available for distribution.

It was possible for Rev. James MacInnes to visit the Mission in March 2022, the first visit made to the Mission since Covid restrictions began two years previously. A report will be available in the May issue of the *Free Church Witness* magazine relating to this. One significant event during this time was the ordination of a deacon in the Congregation, Mr Beniel Jayolasintan. This development is not only of practical advantage to the Mission but a very tangible encouragement to Rev. S.N.V. Partheepan, who was previously the only local office-bearer.

Acknowledging national inflation and the diminishing value of the Rupee, the General Assembly in 2021 changed the way the monthly support for Rev. S.N.V. Partheepan is paid and allowed the Committee

greater flexibility. In June 2021 the Committee resolved to continue payment in Rupees but at an increased rate, from 117,000 to 139,088 SLR.

The Committee has since resolved from April 2022 to provide £500 sterling per month, recognising that the number of Rupees paid varies according to the exchange rate. This will be monitored and adjusted as appropriate, as the economic situation in Sri Lanka develops.

Following previous Assembly findings, the Committee have initiated discussions with the Finance & Sustentation Committee in relation to making provision for Rev. S.N.V. Partheepan in retirement, but they do not yet have a proposal to bring before the Assembly. The difficulty of bringing such a proposal has been hindered by the financial instability in Sri Lanka.

The Committee had hoped that Rev. S.N.V. Partheepan would have been able to visit the UK to address the Assembly and visit the Congregations of the church. Covid restrictions over the past two years have prevented this, and the lifting of these restrictions in recent months has not allowed sufficient time to plan a visit in 2022. Consequently, provision has been made in the budget with the hope that he will be present at the General Assembly of 2023.

As a result of meeting remotely by digital conference, it was however possible for Rev. S.N.V. Partheepan to bring a brief report to the Assembly of 2021, and in the same way to address the School in Theology meeting at Larbert last September.

5. North America

Smiths Falls, Canada

Rev. Daniel Kok, a minister of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA), who had applied to join the denomination, has decided to withdraw his application. The significant distance from other parts of the church has made supporting the work in Smiths Falls difficult. There are no local office-bearers.

United States of America

The Committee has a supervisory and supportive role in relation to the Presbytery of the USA, including ensuring the ready flow of information between Scotland and the USA.

The Presbytery gives thanks for the blessings it enjoys as part of the larger denomination. The fellowship and friendships maintained have been of tremendous encouragement and support to the work of Christ in America. It remains the desire of the Presbytery to serve the larger denomination well, while establishing the doctrine, worship and heritage of the Free Church throughout the United States.

The Presbytery currently consists of four established Congregations: Atlanta, Georgia; Burlington (formerly Mebane), North Carolina; Greenville, South Carolina; St. Louis, Missouri; in addition there is a Preaching Station in Auburn-Opelika, Alabama. Each of these Congregations maintains two services of worship on the Lord's Day and a midweek prayer meeting. An opportunity has recently arisen for our Congregation in North Carolina to purchase the building they have been renting. A local Associated Reformed Presbyterian Church (a denomination with roots in the Scottish Secession churches) is closing down and their building is being sold for an excellent price to our Congregation to continue a Reformed and Confessional witness in the area.

The Presbytery developed contact in the last year with a group of believers just over the Mexican border and have recently erected another Preaching Station in Nuevo Laredo, Mexico. The Presbytery would value prayer for the development of this work, especially given the practical challenges of it being in a different country and the language barrier. The Presbytery is also currently investigating the potential of establishing Preaching Stations in Greenville, Texas, and in Philadelphia, and would solicit the prayers of the wider

Church. One of the challenges in the past has been having men available to plant churches. The Presbytery recently licensed Mr Joshua Cochran and continue to have Mr Tyler Ray as a Divinity Student under Presbytery care, together with two other men who are studying through our Seminary and hope to apply to be received officially as Divinity Students.

The Presbytery were disappointed to cancel their annual Family Conference for 2020. However, it was a joy to host the 2021 conference in Lexington, Kentucky, in August. Circumstances prevented the Presbytery from its long-cherished custom of hosting ministers from Scotland, but the tradition was at least in part upheld and the Word was clearly preached in a Glaswegian accent by the visiting minister, Rev. Craig Scott (Grand Rapids RPCNA). With certain travel restrictions remaining in place, the Presbytery will be sad not to have FC(C) ministers from Scotland to visit our 2022 conference, but again Scotland will be represented with Rev. Ian Macleod (Heritage Reformed Congregations, Canada) as the visiting minister. The Presbytery look forward to resuming their practice of inviting FC(C) ministers from Scotland to their Family Conference once more.

Grange Press Trust, the Presbytery's publishing arm, continues to publish its quarterly periodical, *The Master's Trumpet*. It has also produced a digital album of 16 selections from the Scottish Psalter named *Grave Sweet Melody* ,and also sells *The Shorter Catechism Deck*, a deck of cards to aid catechism memorisation. The Trust is the sole distributor of the red *Scottish Metrical Psalter* in the USA, for which there is increasingly high demand. Other projects include a Greek New Testament reader, a new edition of the metrical Psalter with John Brown's notes and an abridgment of David Dickson's notes on the Psalms. Other projects include the publication, for the first time in English, of John Brown of Wamphray's work on *The Nature of the Church*. Further details of Grange Press are available on its website, www.grangepress.com.

6. The Jews

The Committee contacted Christian Witness to Israel to enquire about the recent name change to International Mission to Jewish People (IMJP). It has been confirmed that this change does not relate to any deviation from the theological basis for the work of bringing the Gospel to Jewish people and relates rather to an attempt to emphasise Gospel priorities over geopolitical questions. Furthermore, much of the work undertaken by IMJP is transacted away from the nation of Israel and involves working with Jewish people in other nations, including our own.

As in previous years the Committee has allocated £1,000 to support the work of IMJP.

More than 200 copies of the booklet, *Mission of Inquiry to Israel in 1839 and its Consequences*, written by Rev. John W. Keddie, has been published by the Committee. The majority of these booklets have been sold, generating a small profit devoted to mission work. It is the Committee's desire that this will kindle and encourage an interest in Jewish mission.

A. JAMES MACINNES, *Convener*

PROPOSED DELIVERANCE

1. The General Assembly receive and adopt the Report of the Committee on Home & Foreign Missions, and thank the Committee, especially the Convener and the Clerk;

2. The General Assembly thank the Home Mission Worker, Mr Donald John Morrison, for his continued faithful service and assistance. They commend Mr Morrison, his wife and family to the prayers of the Church;

3. The General Assembly note the establishment of the Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon, and pray for the work of the Gospel within its bounds;

4. The General Assembly note with thankfulness the ordination and induction of Rev. Hugues Pierre to the Congregation of Pau, and commend Mr Pierre and the Congregation at Pau to the prayers of the Church;

5. The General Assembly note the progress and developments of Spanish language online Theological Seminaries and pray that the Lord would use these facilities in the reformation of his Church;

6. The General Assembly note the potential impact of ministers speaking at theological conferences and encourage any minister who might be invited to consider participating;

7. The General Assembly commend the work of Miss Marjanne Hendriksen in developing Christian Education in Zambia. They affirm support for this vital work amongst the children in the Christian schools;

8. The General Assembly note with thankfulness the ongoing developments in the work in Sri Lanka under the care of Rev. S.N.V. Partheepan. They commend him for his tireless service and commit both him and his wife, Dinogee, together with their daughter, Diyaththika, to the prayers of the Church;

9. The General Assembly note with thankfulness the progress made in the building of a manse in Vavuniya and commend the project to the prayerful and practical support of the Church;

10. The General Assembly continue to direct the Committee, in consultation with the Finance & Sustentation Committee, to consider what steps are required to be taken to ensure an equitable pension provision is made for Rev. S.N.V. Partheepan;

11. The General Assembly acknowledge the debt of gratitude they owe to Ceylon Christian Care for their generosity in support of the diaconal work of our Mission in Sri Lanka;

12. The General Assembly acknowledge the generous support provided directly to the Reformed Protestant Mission, Sri Lanka, that has enabled the recent building developments, and commend the ongoing work to the prayers and practical generosity of the Church;

13. The General Assembly express their thankfulness for the Congregation of Smiths Falls and commend its ongoing needs to the prayers of the Church;

14. The General Assembly note the development of a new preaching station in Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, by the Presbytery of the United States of America and commend this work to the prayers of the Church;

15. The General Assembly commend the Presbytery of the United States of America to the prayers of the Church as it investigates the possibility of establishing preaching stations in Greenville, Texas, and in Philadelphia;

16. The General Assembly commend the work of International Mission to Jewish People (formally Christian Witness to Israel) to the prayers and practical generosity of the Church.