III.

REPORT

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON PUBLICATIONS

It can be quite discouraging to have to begin a Report with a confession that not a lot has changed since the previous year, but the reality is that the Committee have still not brought anything they have been working on to a point where it can be published. The sad reality is that we are depending on an ever-decreasing pool of men who are able to assist with the production of publications. We have plenty of materials in the pipeline – indeed too much for us to cope with – but we are struggling when it comes to those who are able to proofread what has been done. Some things have been hampered due to differences of opinion that have arisen in connection with one proposed booklet, resulting in it being shuttled back and forth from one Committee to another. It is difficult to know what can be done to circumvent such a situation.

We are happy to report however that the Presbytery of the United States of America has been doing sterling work over the past year and has brought forward a number of important publications, details of which may be seen in the body of the Report. We commend our brethren for their diligent work in this regard.

We would like to thank our new Clerk Mr Donald Macleod (Point) and Rev. David M. Blunt for his guidance in settling Mr Macleod into the post of Clerk to the Committee. Thanks are due to them both for the production of this year's Report.

And finally, I would like to thank all the members of the Committee who have diligently sought to serve it over the last year.

2. Magazines

The oversight of the Church's magazines is one of the Committee's main responsibilities, and invariably the production and distribution of the magazines take up more than half of the Committee's annual expenditure. The magazines reflect the position of our Church, in its doctrine, worship, discipline and government, and are aimed principally at our people, yet we are thankful that they also reach Christians belonging to other Churches.

2.1 Editors

The Committee are once again grateful to the editors of the *Free Church Witness* and *The Explorer*, as well as the editorial team of the *Free Church Witness*, for their labours in writing and obtaining and preparing material for the magazines. We encourage the people of our Church to remember these men in their prayers, that the Lord would guide them and enable them in their work.

2.2 Production

The Committee continue to be indebted to Donald Smith Graphic Design for the design and layout of both magazines and the helpful way in which Mr Smith collaborates with the editors. Printing of the magazines remains with HelloPrint in London.

The Committee will continue to obtain quotes periodically from alternative graphic designers and printers, to ensure that these significant costs are kept as low as is possible while still allowing for a reasonable level of service. The Committee apologise to Congregations and individual subscribers for the late arrival of the magazines on occasions during the past year. These delays are generally due to factors beyond the Committee's or the distributor's control.

The Committee are thankful to all who have contributed material to the magazines during the past year,

whether in response to requests from the editors and assistant editors or as news items. The Committee have noted requests made at the General Assembly and by members of the Committee for there to be a greater variety of contributors to the *Free Church Witness*. The Editor does encourage the Assistant Editors to approach all ministers for articles as appropriate, but often their requests bear little fruit. The magazine, and we believe the Church, benefit from the different gifts and graces that individuals possess, even in their writing. Therefore, if individuals are asked to write an article, they are encouraged to see their duty to do so, and to produce the article according to the word count suggested and the deadline set.

The Committee are grateful to Miss Anne MacAulay, who prepares the Puzzles Page in *The Explorer* magazine each month and marks the entries sent in by the children. We trust that she will continue to know the Lord's blessing in her work.

The editors of both magazines rely upon the grammatical skills of the proofreaders each month, and often benefit from their comments and the advice they give when there is occasion to do so. During the year, the Committee received the resignation of Mr Maurice Grant from his role as proofreader due to his failing health. The Committee thank Mr Grant for his diligent work over many years. The Committee welcomed Mr Donald Macleod as proofreader in Mr Grant's stead and wish him the Lord's blessing in the work. The Committee express their continued indebtedness to the other proofreaders: (*Witness*) Rev. Raymond Kemp, Mrs Marion Macleod, Mrs Isobel Scott; (*Explorer*) Mrs Maryanne Gillies, Miss Sandra Mackay, Mrs Joan Nicolson.

The Committee are grateful to Mr Derek W. MacLean for his willingness to make the material in the Church magazines available in audio form for the benefit of the visually impaired, as and when this service may be requested.

2.3 Circulation

Most magazine subscriptions fall due at the beginning of the calendar year. Circulation figures for the *Witness* at mid-April 2024 (with equivalent figures for 2023) were:

Category	**2024**	**2023**	**Change**
Congregational Bulk Orders	390	410	-20
Individual Subscriptions	53	60	-7
Individual Gift Subscriptions	16	21	-5
Airmail Subscriptions	46	32	14
Predicted Total Subscriptions for Year	505	523	-18
Copies by sale or return	0	2	-2
Copies sent free of charge	119	113	6
Predicted Total Circulation for Year	624	636	-12

The Committee would bring particular attention to the increase in Airmail subscriptions. This is primarily due to an increased order from the Preaching Station in Alberta, Canada. We pray that the *Witness* magazine would be blessed to the brethren there.

Although the costs for the printing and distribution of the magazines increased again in 2023, the Committee did not increase subscription rates for 2024, there having been a 25% price increase as recently as 2021. It is, however, likely that subscription rates will be raised for 2025.

As well as once again encouraging Congregations to do what they can to maximise the uptake of the magazines locally, the Committee remind them that free copies of the magazines may be obtained in addition to their regular orders for distribution beyond their Congregation. The Distributor should be

informed as to how many extra copies are required each month (contact details are to be found on the inside front cover of the *Witness*).

Congregations are reminded that *The Explorer* is available free of charge for Sabbath schools to order. At the recent Dores FC(C) Youth Conference it was disappointing to learn that there were some FC(C) children who had never seen *The Explorer* magazine. While there may be a number of reasons for this, Congregations are encouraged to be aware and thoughtful about ensuring all the younger people are provided for. It is a fact that children like to feel included and that they can look forward to something for each of them in the Church's publications each month. For example, if there is a family with multiple children, perhaps thought could be given to ordering extra copies of *The Explorer* so that the children do not have to share (or fight over!) the one copy that comes to the home with the *Witness*. There are plenty of spare copies of *The Explorer* available each month.

During the past year, the Committee were made aware that the Subscriptions Secretary was being frustrated in her duties by some Congregations who delayed payment of their bulk order. This really ought not to be happening, unless for some exceptional reason. The Committee have resolved to address this matter over the coming year. At the date of writing, 22 Congregations have paid in full, 1 has submitted partial payment and 4 have yet to pay. This leaves a total of £2,250 outstanding. Congregations are reminded that congregational bulk order subscription payments are due by the end of February.

2.4 Content Review

During the past year the Committee gave further consideration to a proposed questionnaire produced by Rev. David Fraser with the aim of assessing the views of readers on the content of the magazines, and particularly the *Witness*, in order that a review of the Assembly's Editorial Policy for the magazine could be advanced. Having considered the matter, it was decided that the content of the magazines, as a general rule, should be left with the editors, as they are guided by current policy. The Committee and the editors continue to welcome feedback on the magazines from subscribers and readers at any time.

2.5 Subscriptions and Distribution

The Committee continue to be grateful to Mrs Elizabeth Nicolson (Snizort) for the efficient way in which she carries out her work as Subscriptions Secretary, and the contact she maintains with readers of the magazines. Likewise, the Committee are thankful to Miss Katrina MacKay (Ayr) for her diligent work as Magazine Distributor, which includes operating a Royal Mail Online Business Account and on occasion printing leaflets for insertion into the magazines.

2.6 Spanish Translation of the *Witness*

In July 2022 Mr Joel Suarez, who is studying at the Free Church Seminary in preparation for the ministry, informed the Committee of his desire to translate the *Free Church Witness* into Spanish to reach the Spanish-speaking people of our Church. This was to be a digital version, with the aim of making it available, not only to our own Congregation in Spain, but potentially well beyond the initial target audience. The Committee gave their approval to this project and rejoiced recently to learn of reports that the magazine has been well received in Mexico, Colombia and Venezuela. It seems clear that there is indeed a hunger for the Reformed faith and our Presbyterian principles in lands that are still blighted by the darkness of Rome. The Committee are greatly encouraged by this and would covet the prayers of the Church, that Mr Suarez's labours in this venture would indeed be owned of the Lord and blessed to many beyond our shores. The Committee thank the Trinitarian Bible Society for granting permission for the use of their Spanish translation of the Scriptures in the *Witness* magazine. Currently, Spanish editions of the June 2023 and the July-August 2023 issues are available on the Church website.

2.6 Good News Magazine

A new edition of the *Good News* magazine was prepared towards the end of 2023 but has not yet been published due to uncertainty over the likely demand. The Committee hope to be in a position to proceed

with publication later in the year, and they encourage Congregations in Scotland to consider making use of the magazine as an evangelistic tool in their localities.

3. Publications

3.1 Booklets

Finding Out About Series

The various booklets in the *Finding Out About* series, the first of which was published in 2010, are at the following stages of development:

Title	Author	Status
The Five Points of Calvinism	Rev. John W. Keddie	Published (2010)
The Lord's Supper	Rev. John Morrison	Published (2011)
Baptism	Rev. John Macleod	Published (2015)
Worship	Rev. James Clark	Published (2015)
Presbyterianism	Rev. David M. Blunt	Published (2017)
Elders	Rev. John W. Keddie	Almost ready for final proofreading.
Deacons	Rev. John W. Keddie	No further progress / Currently suspended.
Church Membership	Rev. William Macleod	No further progress / Currently suspended.
Marriage	Rev. Graeme Craig	No further progress / Currently suspended.
Funerals	Rev. James I. Gracie	Text submitted and with PQRM Committee
Scripture/The Bible	Rev. John Morrison	Text in preparation
The Sabbath/Lord's Day	Rev. Jonathan Mattull	Text in preparation
God's Covenant	Rev. Robert McCurley	Text in preparation

Until the booklets on *Elders* and *Deacons* have been published, work on the other projected titles has been suspended at the Committee level, apart from the work on *Funerals*. The Committee do however encourage the authors who are preparing texts for consideration by the Committee to continue with their work.

The Committee have given significant attention to the *Funerals* document over the past year. The document has now been proofread and will soon be passed to Rev. James Gracie for further comment. It is intended to take up this matter again in June with the possibility of the draft being sent to Presbyteries for their comments prior to publication.

3.2 Books

History of the Division of 2000

At the time of writing, the Introduction and ten chapters (out of twenty-five) have been proofread and returned to the principal author, Rev. James Gracie. Further proofreading is ongoing and, when complete, a foreword, preface, acknowledgements, glossary, bibliography and index(es) will be added. After all legal considerations have been satisfied, it will be ready for presentation to the General Assembly for publication. The Committee would remind the Church that these works are painstaking and attention to detail is paramount. The Committee are also conscious of the fact that one of the key persons involved has recently passed away, and they are agreed that, in the circumstances, publication would not be appropriate at present. Therefore, it was decided to hold back publication for at least a year.

Subordinate Standards & Authoritative Documents of the Free Church of Scotland

This project goes back some years. The initial stage involved the digitising of the relevant documents. At their October 2021 meeting the Committee were informed that this work had been completed and that the files had been forwarded to Rev. John Keddie for proofreading and review. Mr Keddie presented a draft of

the complete work in October 2022, having spent some 260 hours working on it. This work included only the references to the proof texts, and not the proof texts themselves, and the Committee upon reflection decided to require their inclusion, and instructed the Convener and the then Clerk to add the words of the proof texts to the draft. It is only fair to say that Mr Keddie considered that to be unnecessary as in his opinion, it would swamp the main text, significantly expand the book, and delay its production.

Mr Keddie's careful work, with the proof text references only, in an approximately A5 format with a reasonable font size, at least for the main documents, would be a volume of some 430 pages. For comparison, the 1933 Free Church edition is 390 pages, even though it uses a smaller page size and includes the scripture proofs in full; it uses smaller font sizes, however. The 1985 Free Presbyterian edition, which has a slightly larger page size than Mr Keddie's draft and includes the scripture proofs in full, is 438 pages; it lacks some of the authoritative documents, however.

Further progress has been made on this important project since then. Following on from last year's Report, the Committee is pleased to be able to say that the work on collecting the words of the proof texts of the *Shorter Catechism* and *Larger Catechism* is now complete, and that work on the *Confession of Faith* has begun.

Principles, Beliefs and Practice of the FC(C)
Rev. Trevor Kirkland and Rev. Raymond Kemp are continuing to work on the text of this document, the purpose of which is to identify and explain the Church's principles, beliefs and practice, both for our own people and those belonging to other denominations. There is nothing new to report on this project.

The British Embassy to the Holy See: A Reappraisal
Work on *The British Embassy to the Holy See* document has been ongoing for a number of years now. In one sense the subject is inexhaustible as there are always developments in the Roman Catholic Church and its worldwide diplomacy, both covert and overt. However, the document is now in a form which requires editing and proofreading, and although the men appointed to do this, like many others, are busy men, we would encourage them to try to devote some time to this longstanding project.

3.3 Storage, Distribution and Retail of FC(C) Publications
Unfortunately, the retail of the Committee's publications via the Church website has been stalled by the lack of a payment platform. The Committee hope to rectify this as soon as reasonably practical in order that online orders may commence.

4. Website and Social Media

4.1 Website
During the past year, it was realised that the Website Digital Content Editor did not have sufficient privileges within the website design environment to fully perform the tasks he needed to do. It was also realised that Mr Sam Gerdt was, in effect, a single point of failure and, were he to be incapacitated for any reason, there would be no way to administer the website. The Committee were also mindful of the responsibility and demand falling on Mr Gerdt and his time. Therefore, Mr Gerdt was asked to provide two further administrator logins in order to ease his responsibilities somewhat. These logins have been given to the Website Digital Content Editor (Rev. Andrew Allan) and the Clerk to the Committee (Mr Donald Macleod). Mr Gerdt, however, remains the primary administrator of the website. The Committee is indebted to Mr Gerdt for his work on the website.

4.3 Social Media
At the beginning of April, the Church's Facebook page had 2,010 followers, compared with 1,670 (2023). The Church's Twitter account had 1,058 followers, compared with 958 (2023). When new material, such as intimations and reports of Church events, is uploaded onto the Church's website, Facebook and Twitter are used to highlight it and provide a link to it.

The Committee thank Rev. David M. Blunt, Social Media Overseer; Mr Derek W. MacLean, Digital Content Editor (Facebook platform); and Mr Alastair Manderson, Digital Content Editor (Twitter platform) for their contributions to these platforms.

5. Spring Conference

The 2024 Spring Conference took place on 29th March in the Greyfriars Free Church, Westhill, Inverness, the same venue as the previous year. This year the theme was 'Last Things'. The Committee thank the two speakers, Rev. Thomas Buchanan (Brora) and Rev. James Gracie (Edinburgh), and Rev. John Keddie (Rtd), who kindly chaired the Conference.

The Committee thank all who helped with this year's Conference, and in particular the following: Mr Lindsay MacCallum, for his work as booking secretary; Mr Derek W. Maclean, for broadcasting and recording the addresses; Mrs Joan Nicolson and Mrs Ruth Keddie, for organising and running the children's programme and also providing the morning and afternoon refreshments. The Committee thank the Inverness Congregation Deacons' Court for graciously granting the use of the Greyfriars Free Church.

As usual, the Committee will review the Conference in depth at their June meeting, but initial indications are that the addresses were well received and led to profitable discussion. Approximately between 60 and 70 people of all ages attended the Conference, which is up on last year's figure of around 40 to 50 attendees. The addresses at the Conference were broadcast using Zoom, allowing people unable to be present at the venue to hear them live. The provision of a Zoom link is not meant to be a substitute for actual attendance at the Conference, however, and enjoying the benefit of partaking in its worship and fellowship. The Committee therefore continue to encourage ministers to promote attendance at the Conference by people in their Congregations.

The Committee also thank the Clerk to the Committee, Mr Donald Macleod, for his input into the organisation of the Conference.

The addresses given at the 2024 Conference are available on the Church website.

6. Publications Committee of Presbytery of the USA

We are grateful to Rev. Jonathan Mattull (St. Louis) for the following Report on the work of the USA Presbytery's Publications Committee during the past year:

> Following is a brief update of the work of our Presbytery's Publications Committee. The prayers of the Church and their support are much appreciated. We continue to pray for you and give thanks to the Lord for his mercies.
>
> The Lord provided us with the opportunity to print an edition of John Bunyan's *The Greatness of the Soul*. Through financial support and volunteer labour, we have been able to make this volume available at an affordable price in order to encourage purchasing it and passing it out to encourage men to consider well their great need.
>
> We have revised our Shorter Catechism Deck, a card deck incorporating all 107 questions and answers as a tool for learning and reviewing the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*. We expect that these will be available later this year.
>
> We have been privileged to assist with the reprinting of our beloved Scottish Psalmody. We expect that the newest reprint will be available this April.
>
> We give thanks to the Lord that *The Greek New Testament, Textus Receptus, Reader's Edition* has continued to sell well. Beyond individual purchases, it appears that some Bible colleges have

recommended this volume to their students. We have about 200 copies left, and we are in process of correcting several mistakes discovered since the first printing, none of which affect the actual Biblical text itself.

We are in process of producing a book by Rev. Gavin Beers relating the historic Scottish covenants of the 17th century to our own denomination. It traces the history of the Second Reformation through the Revolution Settlement, including an assessment of the Reformed Presbyterian testimony. In the main, it is answering an objection we encounter here, namely that the Free Church is a compromised Church due to the Revolution Settlement. We pray that God will use this book to answer that objection and vindicate his cause. It is in the final stages of review.

We are nearing completion of a small but weighty work of John Brown of Wamphray on the nature of the Church. It is made up of 32 theses on the doctrine of the Church never before translated from the original Latin. It covers familiar material, doing so in a clear and cogent manner, faithful to the Bible and our beloved standards.

There are a number of other projects in various stages of development. The work of *The Master's Trumpet* continues: a new issue being produced every quarter. We attribute all to the Lord's mercy and blessing. We are few and limited. God is good. Our sufficiency is in him.

Prayer is coveted that the Lord would sustain our small effort and bless it to his glory in our day and in generations to come. The prayers of the brethren are appreciated.

For contact information, it should be noted that the Convener of the Committee is Rev. Robert McCurley and the Clerk is Mr John Uselding.

7. Annals of the Free Church of Scotland 1900-2000

Sadly, for a variety of reasons, the *Annals* project has suffered repeated delays. One of the principal difficulties has been the number of changes in interested personnel on both sides of the divide. This has meant that useful contacts have been lost and has led, at times, to the project being temporarily sidelined in the constant struggle for competing priorities. However, in recent times contact has been renewed and there is now a real prospect of the material being made available on the Ecclegen website constructed by Rev. Ronald C. Christie. Discussions will continue in coming months and we would hope to be in a position to bring news of real progress to the next Assembly.

8. Media Officer

The Committee are thankful to Rev. Murdo A.N. Macleod, the Church's Media Officer, for his work over the past year. They trust that he will continue to enjoy the Lord's help in performing this role, which he does alongside his many other duties.

HENRY J.T. WOODS, *Convener*
LINDSAY MACCALLUM, *Vice-convener*

PROPOSED DELIVERANCE

1.1 The General Assembly receive and adopt the Report of the Committee on Publications, and thank the Committee and especially the Convener, Vice-convener and Clerk;

1.2 The General Assembly note that Mr Donald Macleod has now taken up the role of Clerk to the Committee, and pray that he will know the Lord's help in this role and thank Rev. David M. Blunt for his service as Clerk *pro tem*;

2.1 The General Assembly thank Rev. David M. Blunt for his work as Editor of the *Free Church Witness*;

2.2 The General Assembly thank Rev. Trevor Kirkland, Rev. James Clark and Rev. James MacInnes for their work as Assistant Editors of the *Free Church Witness*;

2.3 The General Assembly note that Rev. A. James MacInnes has now taken up his role as Editor of *The Explorer,* thank him for his work thus far, and pray that he will continue to know the Lord's help in this role;

2.4 The General Assembly thank Mr Donald Smith of Donald Smith Graphic Design for his work on the design and layout of the *Free Church Witness*, *The Explorer* and the *Good News* magazine;

2.5 The General Assembly thank all those who write articles for the Church's magazines;

2.6 The General Assembly thank Miss Anne MacAulay for her work in providing the Puzzle Page for *The Explorer*;

2.7 The General Assembly thank the proofreaders of the magazines for their work;

2.8 The General Assembly note that subscriptions to the *Free Church Witness* continue to decline. They encourage the Committee and Congregations to do what they can to extend its readership and reach;

2.9 The General Assembly pray that the Lord will guide the Committee in their oversight of the content of the Church magazines;

2.10 The General Assembly thank Mrs Elizabeth Nicolson for her diligent work as Subscriptions Secretary for the magazines;

2.11 The General Assembly thank Miss Katrina Mackay for her diligent work as Magazine Distributor;

2.12 The General Assembly express their hope that the new issue of the *Good News* magazine will be published soon, and pray that the Lord will bless its distribution to the good of many souls;

2.13 The General Assembly welcome the report from Mr Joel Suarez regarding the feedback on the Spanish translation of the *Free Church Witness* magazine, especially the encouraging news of its reception in South America. They encourage Mr Suarez in his ongoing labours and pray the Lord would guide and bless him in them;

2.14 The General Assembly thank the Trinitarian Bible Society for permission to use their Spanish translation for Scripture quotations in the Spanish edition of the *Free Church Witness* magazine;

3.1 The General Assembly note the information regarding the various titles in the *Finding Out About* series, and the continued lack of progress with the majority of them. They urge the Committee to bring the booklets on *Elders* and *Deacons* to publication as soon as possible, and pray that the Lord will guide the Committee as they work towards publication of the booklet on *Funerals*;

3.2 The General Assembly note that there has been progress on the final proofreading of the *History of the Division of 2000*;

3.3 The General Assembly note the progress made in the preparation for publication of the *Subordinate Standards & Authoritative Documents of the Free Church of Scotland*. They thank Rev. John Keddie for his diligent work on this project and pray that the Lord will assist the Committee as they seek to bring the project to completion;

3.4 The General Assembly note the ongoing preparation of a handbook on the *Principles, Beliefs and Practice of the FC(C)*;

3.5 The General Assembly note that further material has now been added to the document *The British Embassy to the Holy See: A Reappraisal*. They encourage the proofreaders in their work and urge the Committee to bring this work to a state of readiness for publication as speedily as possible;

3.6 The General Assembly note the delay in getting a payment platform operational on the Church website to enable retail of the Committee's publications. They urge the Committee to bring this to fruition as quickly as possible;

3.7 The General Assembly are thankful that a number of Congregations, Courts and Committees of the Church are now making use of the new burning bush design approved by the 2022 General Assembly as the denominational emblem. They encourage remaining Congregations, Courts and Committees to do so where possible;

4.1 The General Assembly give thanks to the Lord for the provision of the new Church website with its added capabilities and encourage the Committee to further develop its potential;

4.2 The General Assembly are grateful to Rev. David M. Blunt, Editorial Overseer, and Rev. Andrew R. Allan, Website Digital Content Editor, for their work on the website, and all who over the past year provided new content for it;

4.3 The General Assembly are pleased that the Church's Facebook page and Twitter account have both increased their following over the past year. They thank Rev. David M. Blunt, Social Media Overseer; Mr Derek W. MacLean, Digital Content Editor (Facebook platform); and Mr Alastair Manderson, Digital Content Editor (Twitter platform), for their work in maintaining an appropriate presence for the Church on social media;

5. The General Assembly note that the Spring Conference took place on 29th March. They thank Rev. John Keddie for chairing the Conference, Rev. Thomas Buchanan and Rev. James Gracie for their addresses, and all who in any way contributed to the organisation and running of the Conference. They pray that the Committee will be guided in their review of the Conference and that it will continue to be a spiritually profitable event for our people. They urge ministers to promote the Conference in their Congregations;

6. The General Assembly rejoice with the Publications Committee of the Presbytery of the United States of America to see their further projects come to fruition. They pray that the Lord will bless the Committee's worthy efforts to promote our Reformed and Presbyterian heritage;

7. The General Assembly note the progress from the Working Group on the *Annals*. They are grateful to Rev. Murdo A.N. Macleod for his efforts in this important work and trust that the Group will be directed by the Lord as they endeavour to carry this project forward;

8. The General Assembly thank Rev. Murdo A.N. Macleod for his work as Media Officer.