

XI.
REPORT
OF THE
SPECIAL COMMITTEE ANENT STRATEGIC REVIEW

Introduction

Over the past three years the Committee has sought to look into matters that might help the denomination in its desire to fulfil the great commission given to the Church by our Lord Jesus Christ. The Committee has expended time, energy and thought towards this end.

However, in light of comments made at last year's General Assembly to the effect that the Committee had exceeded its remit, the interpretation of the overall remit has, this year, been restricted to a very narrow field of work. Some might even say this has resulted in a rather pointless exercise of asking the Presbyteries and Committees questions and then telling them (via the General Assembly) what they have answered. This is how the Committee have interpreted their remit and the unedited responses are contained in the appendices. However, whatever one's opinion of the usefulness of the Strategic Review Committee, we are duty bound to report to the General Assembly the results of our enquiries.

There are clearly both positive and negative matters discernable in the current situation of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing). In order to consider these matters it is needful to set forth the encouragements enjoyed by the denomination. It would be remiss of us not to acknowledge these blessings at the very outset of our report.

1. It is a most wonderful blessing that in a time of widespread spiritual and ecclesiastical declension the denomination has been able to maintain a faithful and united stance for the truth of the Gospel and the purity of God's worship. These things are being attacked on every side and abandoned by many far and near. Therefore, it is a most wonderful thing to be able to declare that the denomination's strict confessional adherence continues to this day. In addition it is a great blessing to say that as a denomination we unashamedly assert, maintain and defend the purity of worship practised by the Church in Scotland since the days of the Reformation and reflective of the practice of the church since the days of our Lord. This is evidence that the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) continues to be amongst the few in that faithful line of succession from the Scottish Church of 1560, and the moral successor of the Disruption Free Church of 1843.
2. Secondly, over the past seven years the denomination has operated a surplus in its finances in every year despite fears that it might fail to do so being properly sounded from time to time. The result has been that our people have become used to hearing calls for improved giving and the danger of failing to meet our financial commitments. However, we should acknowledge the goodness of God, through the sacrificial giving of His people in the Church, in the provision made for the work of the Kingdom.
3. Thirdly, there are a number of congregations who are now at, or approaching, "Equal Dividend", which were not able to do so in previous years. This is a cause for rejoicing locally as congregations and Presbyteries observe these positive changes. However, it is also right that the denomination as a whole rejoice with those who rejoice and take note of these positive tokens. Additionally, the building and buying of new manses and church buildings has given further encouragement.

Having acknowledged with thankfulness the positives outlined above, we are also duty bound to consider some of the ongoing challenges that are to be faced. There are certain challenges faced by all faithful Christians throughout the land and others that are more particular to us.

1. The growing secularisation of society continues to hamper many ministers, outreach workers, and Christians in the workplace, from reaching many schools, hospitals and other institutions and areas of society. Such places were once freely open to Gospel workers but are now much less willing to entertain a faithful declaration of the truth of the Bible. There is a need for the Church to prayerfully seek the Lord God of Heaven for a change in this situation. Even areas once renowned for their adherence to the Gospel, such as Lewis, the Highlands and Northern Ireland, now face a growing challenge from militant atheism and perhaps even more dangerously a suffocating indifference in society and large parts of the church.

2. The Committee noted the great challenge before the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) due to the limitations we face in resources. We have rightly acknowledged the surpluses enjoyed over the past seven years. However, it is also true that our ability to do more is limited in no small part to the restricted financial and ministerial resources of the denomination. The ability to plant new congregations, strengthen existing ones and redevelop struggling ones is hampered by a limited supply of members, ministers and money. There are suggestions for the expanding of current initiatives or the attempting of new endeavours that are unlikely to be realized unless these resources increase.

The questions put to the Presbyteries and Committees of the denomination are now set before the General Assembly, along with the responses of these bodies to the questions.

The Church needs a vision for the years ahead which cannot come from any Committee established with the near- impossible remit of presenting a strategy for the future. This vision can only come from a heart's desire, placed there by the Lord himself, which so burns that the faithful will arise, step out in faith, and if blessed by the Lord the limited resources will be multiplied in the Lord's work that the excess will overflow.

We should not wait to be told what to do, how to do it, and when to do it in the work of the Kingdom. If what we do is Biblical and Confessional, we should be working not to 'hold the fort' but to see Christ's Kingdom conquering the land.

The strategy for the future is, Faith. We cannot expect any advancement if there is no exercise of faith and a looking to the Lord. But alas this truism may be used as an excuse for waiting, and waiting, and ...waiting. The children of Israel had this fatal and dangerous tendency, but the Lord was clear in his direction to them: 'And the LORD said unto Moses, Wherefore criest thou unto me? speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward:' (Ex. 14:15)

'Go forward!' 'Go forward, now!'

TIMOTHY J. MCGLYNN, *Convener*
RAYMOND A. KEMP, *Vice-convener*

PROPOSED DELIVERANCE

1. The General Assembly receive and adopt the Report of the Special Committee anent Strategic Review and thank the Committee, especially the Convener and Clerk;
2. The General Assembly note the considered proposals placed before Scottish Presbyteries, and their responses thereanent;
3. The General Assembly recognise that future endeavours are curtailed, in the providence of God, by limitations of finance and personnel;

4. The General Assembly give thanks to God for His great encouragement and faithfulness to the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) in the provision of surplus financial reserves through the generosity and loyalty of its people, and in His provision of that greatest resource, its people;
5. The General Assembly, in warning against an overcautious position in the proclamation of the Gospel, warmly encourage all church courts to pursue every Biblical and Confessional endeavour in working for the extension of Christ's Kingdom;
6. The General Assembly thank and discharge the Strategic Review Committee.

APPENDIX I

PRESBYTERY CONSULTATION

1. PRESBYTERY BOUNDARIES

The Committee considered whether there is a need for further restructuring of presbyteries. There is a need to ensure the presence of sufficient congregations, office bearers, members and adherents in a Presbytery to allow it to function properly in a given area. There appears to be little benefit in having presbyteries which need to be filled with a multiplicity of assessors in order to make them viable.

However, when increasing the geographical size of a Presbytery it is also important to consider the needs of congregations further from the seat of their Presbytery. Often the congregations which are numerically smaller are those who are geographically remote. In such circumstances smaller congregations can feel overlooked or forgotten (and sometimes with good reason) when the seat of their Presbytery moves still further from their location. It is therefore essential that in any changes we remember the needs of outlying congregations. A practical example is the need to consider the options available for holding meetings of a Presbytery throughout its bounds.

The Committee, out of a concern for the welfare of congregations, and having the best interests of the Northern and Inverness Presbyteries and the wider Church at heart, are desirous of your thoughts on the above.

1. PRESBYTERY RESPONSES

Southern Presbytery

The Presbytery endorse in general the points made by the Committee. They find it difficult to justify a situation where the viability of a Presbytery (as in the case at present of the Northern Presbytery) is dependent on the continued presence of annually appointed assessors. At the same time, however, they accept that any efficiency benefits secured by amalgamation of Presbyteries have to be measured against the effects on smaller and more remote congregations. The Presbytery would therefore be inclined to envisage an arrangement which while combining the Northern and Inverness Presbyteries would also include provision for mitigating the effect of such a merger on the smaller and more outlying congregations. This might be done, as the Committee suggest, by holding Presbytery meetings at various places within the enlarged Presbytery, where this is at all practicable, so as to foster a sense of belonging on the part of congregations who might otherwise feel themselves increasingly isolated.

Northern Presbytery

The view of those who responded is that they would rather see a continuation of the concept of General Assessors in preference to yet further integration. With reference to the comments in the discussion document, paragraph 2, experience already shows that smaller and often more remote congregations tend to enjoy lesser attention and understanding.

Inverness Presbytery

While acknowledging that there may be some administrative benefits from the merging of the Northern Presbytery with the Presbytery of Inverness, Presbyteries do not at this time see benefits for the congregations within its bounds from such a merger.

Skye & Lochcarron Presbytery

The Presbytery see no problems in the current structure of our Presbytery, and will not comment on issues relating to other Presbyteries.

Outer Hebrides Presbytery

We are thankful as a Presbytery that we are able to function without assessors. We agree with the Committee that there is little benefit in having presbyteries which depend constantly on assessors to make them viable, and would be of the view that in such circumstances a presbytery covering a large geographical area might be preferable for the regular functioning of Presbyterial church-government.

2. CONGREGATIONAL LINKAGES & DISTRICT MINISTRIES

The ideal situation would see a minister of the Gospel in every parish, supplemented by other Christian workers and support staff where necessary. Sadly we have neither the manpower nor the finance sufficient at this time to achieve that aim. We are faced with small scattered groups of believers, unable to support a minister and yet in need of spiritual preaching and pastoral oversight.

The Committee noted the need for a degree of rationalization in this area. In consultation with the Presbyteries, as well as having representatives of each of the (Scottish) Presbyteries on the Committee, they set about looking at this matter. They considered the spiritual, financial, and numerical benefits that might come from such linkages. In addition to this they considered the geographical, practical and emotional hurdles to be overcome if these things were to be brought about. Practically speaking some of the linkages presuppose changes in Presbytery boundaries if they are to be possible.

Kilmorack & Strathglass with Kiltearn

The Committee noted that while these congregations are currently in different Presbyteries, matters involving the congregations are often linked practically due to geographical and manpower issues. The potential exists to strengthen the two congregations by bringing them together into a unified Kirk Session and Deacons' Court, and the Committee are desirous of your thoughts on this matter.

Please take as much space as necessary to answer this.

Poolewe & Aulbea with Assynt & Eddrachillis

The obvious geographical and logistical challenges of such a linkage are easy to see. However, the need to reorganize is equally apparent. The Committee believe that the raising of a district ministry covering these population centres is one possible practical solution to an obvious need, and are desirous for your thoughts on this matter.

Please take as much space as necessary to answer this.

Ayr with Arran

A linkage between these two congregations would hold out the potential for a closer pastoral oversight of the linked charge. The ability to use live audio/video links for providing ministry as a result of technological advances make this a realistic option, and the Committee are desirous of your thoughts on this matter.

Please take as much space as necessary to answer this.

What improvements do the Presbytery recommend?

PRESBYTERY RESPONSES**Southern Presbytery**

The Presbytery agree that significant benefits can flow from linkages of congregations. Such linkages can not only produce economies of scale but also opportunities for closer pastoral oversight, particularly where one of the congregations has been without a minister. In at least some cases they can produce sufficient

local office-bearers to dispense with the need for assessor elders. At the same time, as the Committee have recognised, they can generate unease on the part some who, perhaps for many years, have been accustomed to having a minister of their own and who may see their status as a congregation diminished. It is important that these issues are treated sensitively, and that no impression is given that the linkage is being imposed on one or other of the congregations. Where mutual agreement is secured, there is no reason why such an arrangement should not work effectively, and be to the benefit of both congregations and of the Church generally.

It is assumed that in any such linkage the combined charge would be presided over by a minister. The Presbytery do not believe that any other arrangement would be workable. The minister would usually preach in the part of the congregation where he is resident but from time to time would preach and conduct visitation in the other part, possibly every 4-6 weeks or so. On other occasions the pulpit would be supplied locally or by means of an audio/video link as is already done in some congregations.

Technological advances through wide screen equipment with much improved image and sound quality have made this a much more acceptable form of ministry than formerly.

On the particular question of Ayr and Arran, the possibility of a linkage was considered by the Presbytery a few years ago at the suggestion of the Ayr congregation but the Arran congregation were not at that time disposed to favour it. The Presbytery are willing to review the matter again in the light of present circumstances, including the forthcoming move of the minister of the Ayr congregation. Arran currently has a DVD link with Edinburgh and this could be moved to Ayr if need be.

Northern Presbytery

The view of the Assynt & Eddrachillis congregation was sought at a recent congregational meeting on the proposition that there might be a linkage effected with the Poolewe & Aultbea congregation. The unanimous opinion was that the proposal is both impractical and undesirable.

Inverness Presbytery

Presbytery reject the proposal to link Kilmorack & Strathglass with Kiltearn and recommend that the Strategy Committee consider a linkage between Kiltearn and Tarbat.

Regarding the proposal to link Poolewe & Aultbea with Assynt & Eddrachillis, Presbytery recognise the potential for the employment of a District Ministry in these areas but consider that the area covered by the combined congregations of Poolewe & Aultbea and Assynt & Eddrachillis is too large for one District Ministry and recommend that two District Ministries be considered, one for each of these two separate areas.

Skye & Lochcarron Presbytery

The Presbytery considers linkages when every Congregation within the Bounds becomes vacant. The Presbytery views the concept of District Ministries positively. However, congregations need to be realistic about their responsibilities under District Ministry, given that the minister will not necessarily be located within their given Bounds

Outer Hebrides Presbytery

The Presbytery would remind the Committee that there is existing legislation covering these matters which has worked well in the past and could be used today. In addition, there have been linkages which did not use legislation, in particular that between Rogart and Eddrachillis.

The Presbytery do not see any possible linkages within their own bounds.

3. OUTREACH ASSISTANT

Local Outreach Assistant - Medium term support to congregations showing potential for growth.

The denomination needs to consider ways to promote the growth of congregations that have the potential for such growth but may not yet have the resources to fund an assistant. In the day we live in there is a great need to make the most of any opportunities for growth. We are aware that Divine sovereignty means it is possible for growth to occur in the most unlikely of situations. Nevertheless, certain areas, towns or cities may present genuine prospects for growth. In such situations it may actually be more sensible to place a second worker into an area to increase the ability of a congregation or a small group of congregations to reach out to those around.

1. The worker would work under the guidance of two or more congregations in reasonably close proximity to each other. This would give the potential for mutual co-operation and allow costs to be spread more widely and provide broader support networks. The work done in a given congregation would be under the supervision of the relevant Kirk Session, with mutual agreement between the Sessions (or possibly through Presbytery) to regulate timings.

2. A worker at a particular congregation for a defined period would focus on the outreach of the individual congregation. He would oversee various programmes such as: home Bible studies, children's work, youth outreach, seniors groups, and door-to-door witness in the congregation, under the direction of the local Kirk Session.

3. These would be subject to regular periodic review, and would provide annual accountability in a form similar to that already provided by congregations on special arrangements. (To the General Assembly, or (in certain cases) Commission of Assembly, via the Finance & Sustentation Committee)

Local Outreach Assistant - Requirements

Area with clear potential for growth. This should be clearly demonstrable with regards to population size, local factors (e.g. few or no churches of similar stance nearby), spiritually encouraging situation, etc.

Local request for such help.

This should in the first instance commence with a request from the office bearers in a specific congregation aware of the factors (mentioned above) approaching the Presbytery with a proposal for such an assistant.

Support from the local Presbytery.

The local Presbytery should consider the matter carefully as to the wisdom and necessity for such assistance. They would take into account the local factors and also weigh up the need or otherwise for the placing of such an assistant and approach the Finance & Sustentation Committee with the proposal.

The Finance & Sustentation Committee Support.

The Committee shall take into account the local opportunity and the financial implications for the denomination of such a placement. In considering any requests the Committee will need to balance the potential benefits of growth and the ability of the denomination to fund such a commitment and how long such a placement can be sustained. If they believe the case is worthy of consideration by the Church then they shall produce a suitable proposal for the next General Assembly, or Commission of Assembly.

General Assembly Approval.

The General Assembly, or its Commissions, will consider any proposed placement brought before them on the merits of each individual proposal.

Time Limitation.

Such placements are to be for a limited time, i.e. 3 to 5 years, to make the most of particular opportunities: they are not to be long-term.

Position Renewal.

The assistant will be placed for a period of time agreed by the General Assembly, with any extension to that time requiring proposal for such an extension to be brought to a future General Assembly by means of the same process outlined above.

Would the Presbytery be in favour of proposals along these general lines or have any other suggestions for improvements?

In which congregation/s in your Presbytery do you think this scheme might be useful?

PRESBYTERY RESPONSES**Southern Presbytery**

The Presbytery believe that this would be a useful proposition in the right circumstances. A limited arrangement of this kind currently operates within the Presbytery where a Probationer gives outreach assistance to three local congregations. His help is appreciated, though experience has shown that this is not work which brings quick results.

It is important in the Presbytery's view that a person appointed to this work is in the full sense of the term an assistant, and not to be regarded as engaged in a work different from, or supplementary to, the settled ministry. At the same time, he would be expected to have particular gifts for outreach and local evangelism. This might enable him, for example, to give practical training in such work so as to encourage more active participation at the local level. An eventual aim might be to establish experienced local outreach teams in as many of our local congregations as possible.

As the Committee have recognised, a prerequisite for any appointment must be the growth potential of the area concerned. It is important that this be assessed realistically, and on the basis of verifiable data. While it is understandable that there should be a desire to make the most of perceived opportunities for growth, this has to be balanced by a need to ensure that the effort matches the particular needs of the area and that resources are directed as effectively as possible.

Another important consideration is the presence of spiritual support at the local level. It would seem for instance highly desirable that there should be a committed core of supportive believers resident in the area, and a regular and well-supported prayer meeting. Availability of local Christian hospitality is by no means unimportant, and could provide useful opportunities for personal evangelism.

The Presbytery have noted with approval the emphasis the Committee have placed on the need for oversight and direction of the work to be under the local Kirk Session.

The Presbytery would view this as reflecting the fact that the primary responsibility for outreach at the local level rests with the Kirk Session in conjunction with the local congregation. It would not seem unreasonable to hope that the appointment of a local

outreach assistant with the necessary gifts would stimulate Kirk Sessions to encourage more active participation in such efforts on the part of congregations.

Northern Presbytery

It was felt that there may be merit in principle with these proposals but in practice they are unlikely to yield the desired outcomes. The two congregations referred to at item 2 above already benefit from the presence on a two week on/ two week off basis of the Resident Lay Agent. Sadly, notwithstanding genuine efforts to attract people to the Assynt congregation, a few have attended perhaps once or twice but with one exception have failed to persevere. Effectively the presence of the Resident Lay Agent operates on a 'pulpit supply' basis.

Inverness Presbytery

Presbytery support this matter in principle and recommend that the Strategy Committee pursue it further and then bring matured proposals to Presbyteries /General Assembly.

Skye & Lochcarron Presbytery

In principal the Presbytery is supportive of the proposals. The Presbytery sees the determining of where limited resources are to be targeted as a problem. It was not clear to the Presbytery whether the role envisaged was exclusively for one who was, or would be, ordained. The Presbytery expressed concern that is a danger of forgetting the smaller, often rural, congregations which stood with the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) in 2000, and of seeing potential as commensurate with concentrated centres of population. There should be some consideration given to the placing of divinity students in some congregations during the summer months.

Outer Hebrides Presbytery

We think that a clearer idea of what is in mind by a 'worker' is necessary, and some idea of the scriptural basis. Would the 'worker' be an ordained man?

We feel that the questions below must be left until these points are clarified

4. CHURCH PLANTING TEAMS

The Committee have taken note of the common New Testament practice of two men engaging in gospel outreach together, both in the Gospels and after Pentecost, and so would encourage any Presbytery considering the establishment of a new preaching station or outreach work, to investigate if the planned work would be best served with one or two men involved.

A presbytery considering the establishment of a new preaching station or outreach work, should investigate whether the planned work would be best served with one or two men set aside to it.

NB Should it be concluded by Presbytery that having two men employed in the outreach is preferable in such an instance, here is a general outline for such a joint church-planting situation:

The work is to be proceeded with following the analogy of a call to one minister/probationer.

The Presbytery may issue such a call either jointly or individually, to those ministers/probationers they deem most suited to the work.

The two men will act to encourage one another in the hard task of breaking new ground for the Gospel in 21st Century Scotland.

They will share the preaching and pastoral duties equally.

Each will receive one-half of the stipend.

Each will seek other employment to further support themselves and the work.

The Free Church (Continuing) does not consider that the Lord Jesus, as King and Head of his Church, calls men to be part-time ministers as such, but instead consider that such part-time employment is rather the means of fulfilling the calling of the Lord to the ministry.

Other employment is sought purely for the sake of supporting the outreach work. It is not an end in itself. It is an enabling of the ministry. It is not a career, nor ought it to involve the minister being routinely away from the locality of the outreach

The foregoing must be recognised clearly and accepted by any potential minister/probationer being called to this work.

Such additional employment must involve no more than 20 hours per week.

The Central Funds of the Church will provide a full stipend to each man for the initial three months following his induction to the work, to allow time to find employment, before being reduced to one-half of the stipend thereafter.

Pension and annual leave provision will apply, on a pro rata basis.

No extension to the initial three month period is possible.

Such dual-appointments are to be for a set three-year term.

Such appointments are to be reviewed by the local Presbytery (or HFMC acting in loco synodi) before the three-year term is completed, and the Presbytery is to bring to the forthcoming General Assembly proposals thereanent.

Such appointments shall entitle those appointed to a seat on Presbytery.

Any local Kirk Session meetings shall be moderated by each minister in turn, one year at a time, starting with the senior minister.

The purpose of such dual-appointments is to provide additional support during the early stages of a new outreach charge during what are days of hardness and apathy to the Gospel across Scotland.

The aim is to see the congregation built up over the three-year period.

The hope is that after the initial period the congregation is able to sustain a ministry outright, or to apply to be placed under Special Arrangements.

Such three-year appointments may not be extended beyond a second term (i.e. a maximum of six years in total).

Such second terms are subject to the recommendation of the Presbytery and the approval of the General Assembly.

Does your Presbytery approve of these proposals in general terms?

Please aid the Strategic Review Committee by suggesting ways in which this proposal may be improved (and please take as much space as is necessary).

In which area/s of your Presbytery do you think this scheme might be useful?

PRESBYTERY RESPONSES

Southern Presbytery

In general terms the Presbytery are content with these proposals. However, they are not necessarily convinced that they comply in every degree with New Testament norms and they can in the Presbytery's view only be justified in relation to the exceptional circumstances in which the church finds itself placed in today's society.

The Presbytery note that provision for a church planter is already made in Assembly legislation (Act XXVIII 1989) and that appointments have been made under that provision. To that extent the broad principle of the current proposals has been accepted by the church. Of course, the main thrust of the proposals -the use of two men rather than one -is new, but at the same time the Presbytery would suggest that there are some features of the original scheme which might, with advantage, be retained. These might include extending the three-year appointments to five years, as in the original scheme (with say three years for extensions, i.e. a total of eight years). Also, the original scheme was for a full- time appointment, the incumbent being debarred from taking on any outside work. The Presbytery appreciate the financial constraints under which the church is labouring, but in principle they believe that church planting is a full-time job -and a particularly challenging one in today's society - and that the salary should be a reflection of

this. The Presbytery have noted the Committee's proposal that the incumbent should seek part-time employment of up to 20 hours per week. While they understand the Committee's aim, the Presbytery doubt whether men would be able to find lucrative employment for the equivalent of two or three days a week or whether employers would be happy with a situation where they did not work to a pattern of regular times or hours. The minimum living wage is at present £7.20 per hour, which at 20 hours per week and payment of half stipend would provide an annual income of some £17,500). It may be possible for the Committee to consider, in consultation with the Finance Committee, whether the level of salary might be increased to a higher proportion of stipend in order to avoid the need for any part-time employment.

The original scheme provided for "agreed sums for expenses and provisions normally made for ministers in settled charges". It would seem desirable that something similar should be included in the present proposals. Housing provision will need particularly careful consideration.

An additional proposal which may be worth consideration would be to encourage an elder, deacon or communicant member to consider moving with his family to work and reside, on a long-term basis, within the bounds of an area being considered for a church plant. Such a person could be of considerable help by living, worshipping and working in such an area and in organising outreach and local evangelism, in conjunction with the church planting team. The presence of such a man and his family with a Free Church background could be a stabilising factor in the critical initial stages of a church plant. There could be a precedent for such an arrangement in the appointment of "artisans" to provide practical support for missionaries in the field.

Northern Presbytery

This concept is felt to have the greatest potential but not on the basis envisaged by the Committee, namely part time ministries. Bullet point 7 in the Committee's paper seems to correctly set out the Biblical position but appears to be in tension with the objectives of true Church planting endeavour. We ought to seek to learn from the example of some of our brethren in Northern Ireland whose strategy, if we have correctly understood the thrust of their reports to our Assembly, has been to financially support, say, two willing families to settle in a chosen location. Their presence immediately brings encouragement to the host congregation and the hope is that they will be able to attract other local families.

Inverness Presbytery

Presbytery agree in principle with the concept of church planting teams. Presbytery agree that preference be given to 'two-by-two' teams within such a ministry. The church plant should be under Presbyterial oversight. It should run over a period of three to five years and then be reviewed.

Skye & Lochcarron Presbytery

The Presbytery does not approve of the proposals. The Presbytery are of the opinion (i) that the proposals raise questions regarding the Church's commitment to such ventures if such little finance is to be provided; (ii) timescale outlined are unrealistic.

Outer Hebrides Presbytery

The Presbytery, while affirming the biblical principle set out in the paper regarding the practice of two ordained men engaging in gospel outreach together, have concerns regarding the feasibility of many of the specific proposals. It may be that one way of maintaining the biblical principle would be to explore the possibility of having an ordained man working alongside a minister and congregation where there is a perceived potential for growth.

We see no areas within our bounds where this scheme might be useful at the present.

5. TENTMAKING MINISTRIES IN EXISTING CHARGES

To all Presbytery Clerks

The Committee suggest that where a congregation can submit only a fraction of a minister's stipend to Central Funds that the Finance & Sustentation Committee could allow such a Congregation to call a minister for a five-year period under certain, special conditions. This would apply where a congregation submits 35-55% of the Equal Dividend to Central Funds, and cannot otherwise be considered for Special Arrangements. Central Funds would pay one-half of the stipend in this instance. The minister would be permitted to seek other employment for a maximum of 20 hours per week. Again this is with a view to rebuilding the charge, and so rendering this arrangement unnecessary after five years. It is further proposed that this arrangement be not eligible for a second five-year term, but only a further three-year term, and only when a noticeable improvement in the circumstances of the congregation can be demonstrated. The desire of the Committee is certainly to see such growth and to live out as a denomination the principle of the whole body helping those areas that are weaker.

The General Assembly recognise that certain, existing charges may not be eligible for consideration under Special Arrangements. In such cases the General Assembly support the right of the congregation to call a minister for a limited five-year period on the following basis:

1. That the congregation submits between 35% and 55% of the Equal Dividend to Central Funds.
2. The Central Funds would pay one-half of the stipend in such a case for a maximum of five years, in an attempt to build up the congregation during this period.
3. The minister would be permitted to seek other employment for a maximum of 20 hours per week.
4. This arrangement would be eligible for a further three-year term, but only should a noticeable improvement in the circumstances of the congregation be demonstrated over the period. No extension is possible beyond this three-year term.
5. Thereafter the established practice of the Church be followed to place the congregation on the Equal Dividend platform or under Special Arrangements.

Is the Presbytery in favour of these proposals?

Does the Presbytery have any further observations to make with regards to the above?

In which congregation/s of your Presbytery do you think this scheme might be useful?

PRESBYTERY RESPONSES

Southern Presbytery

The Presbytery accept that by analogy with the practice of the Apostle Paul (Acts 18:3) the principle of tentmaking ministries can be argued to have Scripture authority behind it and they believe that there may well be men with the skills or ability to work part-time while also taking charge of a small congregation which would otherwise be without a minister. However, there are realities to be faced. For a part-time minister to go into a small congregation and build it up in five years is a formidable challenge. He will be conscious of the expectations of the church and at the same time will meet competing pressures from his part-time employment. Evidence suggests that unless he gets the balance right he could be in danger of suffering from stress-related illness with possible long-term effects. It would seem prudent therefore that before any such appointment is made, a careful assessment is carried out of the circumstances in which the individual will be working, i.e. whether he is self-employed or able to work from home, the nature of his part-time work, and the possibility of adhering to fixed hours of employment. The aim here would be to

help ensure not only that the individual is relieved from undue pressure, but that the claims of his part-time work are not allowed to obtrude into the time he needs for his ministerial duties.

In the prospect that Tentmaking may become a more prominent feature in the church's strategy the Presbytery would suggest that attention be given to it in the particular context of training students for the ministry. It could well, for example, be prudent to advise students to acquire some means, training or qualifications to assist them in earning effectively in a Tentmaking capacity as ministers. While state benefits are at present available to those with families, the future of these -at least at their present level - cannot be guaranteed. There are issues here which the church may well need to address in the light of whatever recommendations the Committee may make. Furthermore, these issues could potentially become relevant to men with families who (without such state benefits) may even have to supplement a full stipend.

Northern Presbytery

The conjoint view of those who responded was that this proposal is the most effective formula for breaking ministers. Presumably the intention is to supplement stipend by taking on secular employment in smaller rural congregations. The pre-division Church attempted to engage in such a strategy with disastrous results for both ministers and congregations in terms of stress and disillusionment. It is understood that a few such arrangements have been put into effect by congregations within the residual Body and with similar results.

Inverness Presbytery

Presbytery resolve that if the proper conditions arise both personally and financially, then the concept of bi-vocational ministries could be an effective one and worth pursuing.

Skye & Lochcarron Presbytery

The Presbytery were divided on the proposals in this document, and resolved to forward a summation of the discussion which took place for the Committee's consideration. *For the Proposal:* (i) A shrinking numerical base may necessitate bi-vocational ministry if ordinances are to be provided, though there may be a difficulty in congregations recognizing that their minister is no longer full-time; (ii) there is NT precedent for a tent-making ministry evinced by the Apostle Paul. *Against the Proposal:* (i) a divided vocation may allow for an increase in doctrinal and pastoral problems arising in a congregation; (ii) the NT precedent was in a missionary church, not a settled congregation; (iii) the stress and pressures would increase on a man with two vocations, leading to an upturn in health pressures thereby impacting adversely on the functioning of the Church; (iv) if financial resources become a problem the Church should consider reducing the stipend instead of moving towards bi-vocation.

Outer Hebrides Presbytery

The Presbytery is in favour of these proposals in general terms.

The Presbytery wish to highlight the difficulty which such a minister may have in obtaining employment. There is a need to safeguard such a minister from an undue or unsuitable workload.

We see no congregations within our bounds where this scheme might be useful at the present.

GENERAL PRESBYTERY POINTS

Southern Presbytery

In response to the Committee's query as to which areas/congregations of the Presbytery might be benefited by proposals 3 to 5 above, the Presbytery would require to make fuller assessments before coming to a view. However, without prejudice at this stage the Presbytery would see those areas in the South West (such Dumfries/Lockerbie) which are the subject of ongoing evangelistic efforts on their part as potentially suited to the forms of outreach proposed.

Inverness Presbytery

As a general principle covering all of the above, Presbytery recommend that any work undertaken be centred on one particular area.

Northern Presbytery

The foregoing are the comments of three only of the members of Presbytery (submitted both by email and orally) and now consolidated by the Clerk into this joint response which has yet to receive the formal approval of Presbytery.

APPENDIX II

COMMITTEE QUESTIONNAIRE

1. In what areas of your remit are you most effective as a Committee?

RESPONSES:

Assembly Arrangements & Nominations Committee

The Committee deal with the practical arrangements for the General Assembly, the Commission of Assembly and Committees of Assembly and monitor the need for review in Presbytery Boundaries. The Committee are satisfied that they are fulfilling the remit given to them by the General Assembly.

Ecumenical Relations Committee

Establishing, building up and maintaining appropriate relationships with like-minded churches worldwide. In particular the Committee have worked hard and successfully to establish our good standing in the aftermath of the division of 2000, without compromising our position.

Finance & Sustentation Committee

The Committee believe that they are effective in overviewing and keeping the finances of the church in order and that in so doing they strike a balance of being fair and even handed in doing this formally and yet being flexible when the need arises.

As a Committee we are also effective in forwarding regular financial reports to Presbyteries by means of the General Treasurer.

Home & Foreign Missions Committee

The Committee have been blessed to see the missionary interests of the denomination expand significantly over the past five years. We acknowledge this as the good hand of the Lord upon the church. We would hope that our overseas missionaries would feel that the Committee are interested, helpful, and brotherly in our dealings with them.

Legal Advice & Property

Liaising with legal advisers. The Committee has built up a reasonable relationship with lawyers and advocates which can be founded on in future cases of difficulty.

Psalmody

In promoting psalmody within the denomination and in the wider Christian church.

Public Questions Religion & Morals

With the Lord's help the Committee is able to write (and sometimes to speak directly) to government and our political representatives from a biblical perspective.

Publications

The Committee has been able to cope reasonably well with its main areas of activity hitherto. In particular the Committee has managed to oversee the regular monthly printing and distribution of the Church magazines, and is thankful to the editors, subscription secretary, distributor and others who bear the burden of this work.

Welfare of Youth

Effective at arranging excellent SS material, processing exams, and organising extra activities (camps and AAH).

2. In what areas of your remit are you least effective as a Committee?

Ecumenical Relations Committee

Developing potentially-valuable church relationships where physical distance poses a difficulty

Finance & Sustentation Committee

We are least effective in dealing with sudden financial requests due to the scheduling of ordinary meetings, and when requests are presented to the Committee that are of an informal nature, not having gone through the appropriate church channels.

Home & Foreign Missions Committee

The Committee have struggled to find an appropriate outlet for the expression of Jewish evangelism.

Legal Advice & Property

Keeping up with the complexities and implications of recent legislation in the light of the requirement to maintain a biblical standard.

Psalmody

Don't know.

Public Questions Religion & Morals

Some of the issues the Committee has taken up, such as the Human Fertilisation and Embryology (Mitochondrial Donation) Regulations and the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act (the 'Named Persons' legislation), are either very complex or require a lot of research and there is not always enough time to deal with them as we would wish.

Publications

The Committee probably has more areas of activity and projects in hand at present than it can manage efficiently, especially when the time allotted for the regular meetings of the Committee is brief and when the bulk of the workload tends to fall upon a small number of people who are already involved in other duties.

Welfare of Youth

Convincing all SSs to use the FCC material, encouraging greater attendance at AAH, and knowing what steps to take re support for Christian education in home schooling, Christian schools and state schools.

3. In what new areas do you feel the committee might make a worthwhile contribution?

Ecumenical Relations

Developing relationships at a congregational level with congregations of like-minded denominations overseas

Finance & Sustentation Committee

The Committee may have a role in an advisory capacity with regards to the future strategy of the Church, e.g. a congregation's financial viability, maximum number of ministers affordable to the Church.

Home & Foreign Missions Committee

Jewish evangelism has been high in our priorities for some time. Home evangelism too needs attention.

Legal Advice & Property

Relating with legal advisers and also with other Committees of the Church.

Psalmody

In holding more psalmody workshops for office bearers, precentors and church goers.

Public Questions Religion & Morals

Given that the Committee tends to deal with issues in the way of reacting to them as they arise in providence, and not as we decide upon them, it is difficult to consider new areas to pursue.

Publications

Since the 2015 General Assembly the Committee has been developing a presence for the Church on social media; it is planned that these platforms will be integrated with the Church website, which may need to be redesigned. It is hoped that the Committee's publications will continue to address topics of importance to our people as the need arises.

Welfare of Youth

More proactive proposals re Christian education to inculcate Free Church Principles into our children.

4. How do your Committee understand your role? How would you summarise it?**Ecumenical Relations**

Establishing, building up and maintaining relationships, at an appropriate level, with like-minded churches worldwide.

Finance & Sustentation Committee

The Committee understands its role as it is stated in their Memorandum on Procedure under point 1 titled 'The Remit of the Committee' and summarised as:

A Group 1 Standing Committee responsible for all matters relating to Finance & Sustentation, and formulating policy in these areas.

The monitoring of draft budgets for the financial year from Standing and Special Committees of Assembly.

The scrutinising of Sustentation Fund Schedules to authorise the filling up of vacancies as required by Assembly legislation.

Home & Foreign Missions Committee

Our role is to seek to ensure that the denomination is fulfilling its duty in relation to the Great Commission.

Our role is to oversee all home and foreign missions of the denomination, so as to provide both pastoral and ecclesiastical oversight of them.

Our role includes identifying potential new opportunities of service, and bringing these to the General Assembly for their consideration.

Legal Advice & Property

Advert to the interests of the Church in relation to the law of the land.

Psalmody

To engender love for the singing of psalms and to promote exclusive psalmody within the visible Christian church.

Public Questions Religion & Morals

The Committee is responsible for representing the Church's view on matters of spiritual and moral concern to government and other churches, as the need arises. We aim to defend, and, where appropriate, to

promote, the Christian viewpoint on these matters.

Publications

The Committee is responsible, as directed by the General Assembly, for promoting the Church's testimony, chiefly by use of the following means: the Church magazines and other literature; the Church website and social media; the Spring Conference; the audio ministry.

Welfare of Youth

See Memorandum on Procedure

5. What is/are the benefit(s) of your Committee to the denomination and the church at large?

Ecumenical Relations

Facilitating the recognition that the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) is part of the wider Christian Church and, by fostering relationships at an appropriate level with like-minded parts of the Christian Church, enabling the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) to encourage, and be encouraged by, the wider Christian Church.

Finance & Sustentation Committee

In providing regular financial information to Presbyteries and to the wider church, together with wise stewardship in regards to finance and general expenditure.

Home & Foreign Missions Committee

The HFMC benefits the denomination by lifting our eyes to mission fields, and the Lord's working in other lands. This yields prayerfulness, true Christian interest, and opportunities for our people to support these works practically, financially and in other ways.

This helps burden our people with a heart for the salvation of the lost, for the expansion of the kingdom, and for the coming of Christ.

We believe that our Home Mission Worker likewise stirs up prayerful concern, and interest in the needs of Scotland, and encourages many in our congregations with his labours and zeal for the lost and for the Lord's honour.

Legal Advice & Property

Protection of the interests of the Church in terms of the law of the land.

Psalmody

In producing "WORTHY TO BE PRAISED" psalmody CDs and securing psalters and making them available to all interested parties.

Public Questions Religion & Morals

Because of the remit we have from the General Assembly we are generally the voice of our Church to government on important issues affecting our society in general – issues which often have an impact on the church and on Christian families and individuals.

Publications

The Committee's remit and functions mean that as well as informing and instructing our own people in our principles and practices it is often also the 'public face' of our Church to other Christians.

Welfare of Youth

Promotion of orthodox Bible and doctrinal teaching through our material. Fostering of friendships and fellowship through AAH and camps.