

X.
REPORT
OF THE
TRAINING OF THE MINISTRY & ADMISSIONS COMMITTEE

1. Introduction

Ordinarily the spiritual tone and life of our denomination and congregations can be measured by our ministers. This is not to set the minister on a pedestal, but it reflects the fact that he is an under-shepherd ultimately appointed by the Chief Shepherd to lead the people of God on the narrow road that leads to life. If the minister does not set an exemplary standard by his life and conversation (1 Timothy 4:12), that will have a detrimental effect upon those he is expected to lead. This thinking permeates the work of the Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee. Along with others, the Committee seek to prepare students for the ministry who are both mentally and spiritually ready for the challenges that face those who enter the pastoral ministry.

2. Exit Examinations Committee

Following the 2017 General Assembly the Committee was given the task to appoint an Exit Examinations Committee consisting of the Seminary Lecturers and Exit Examiners. As reported last year, one meeting took place via Skype. Since then no developments have transpired. With a new Committee Convener, along with changes in the Seminary and the personnel of the Exit Examiners, it is anticipated that the matter will receive fresh impetus and be taken up timeously and pursued to a conclusion. With no home-based students due to start in the new academic year the matter is not urgent, but it would be ideal to get it finalised before fresh students begin.

3. Students Update

It is anticipated that Thomas Buchanan, *Ballyclare & Doagh*, and Tom Budgen, *Stornoway*, will finish their formal theological training shortly. At the time of writing there is only one vacant congregation in a position to Call a minister, but it is hoped that in due course the other two vacant congregations will find themselves in the same position. Prayer is sought for the students and their families as changes will inevitably come as they seek licensing to enable them to follow God's calling upon their lives. Remembrance should also be had of their home congregations who will miss the students and their families. This will mean the denomination will have no UK students in the Seminary during the next academic year. With an ageing ministry and natural generation we do need more men to enter the holy ministry soon.

Mr. Tyler Ray from Calhoun, Georgia, began his four-year course in September and is making excellent progress.

The Presbytery of the USA has confirmed that Dr. Noah Manring is no longer a Free Church (Continuing) divinity student. Dr Manring left the denomination on 3rd September via Disjunction Certificate.

4. Review of Student Funding

In complying with the finding of the 2018 General Assembly anent a review of funding arrangements for Candidates for the Ministry, the Committee have been in consultation with the Finance & Sustentation Committee (F&SC). The Committee have asked the F&SC to investigate whether there might be any unforeseen consequences arising from the proposed change from a loan to a grant system for funding ministerial candidates. Following their meeting of 5th March the F&SC have advised the Committee that as with any payment made to an individual there is a risk that HMRC could seek to treat it as taxable income in the hand of the recipient; however, due to the nature of the payment being made we would be of the opinion that this 'risk' would be negligible. Therefore, the F&SC would support a recommendation to the

General Assembly were the current regime to change to a grant system as it is more favourable to the recipient.

The above response came after our Committee's March meeting and will be on the agenda of our meeting in June.

5. Free Church Seminary

The Committee note the imminent retiral of Rev. John W. Keddie. Mr Keddie has been Lecturer in Church History & Church Principles since 2008 and Seminary Principal since 2014. During his time at the Seminary he has given dedicated service to the Seminary, students and the Church. We wish Mr. Keddie a long and happy retirement to be able to spend time with his wife Jean and their family.

The Committee, in line with present legislation, has taken steps to fill these vacancies. All Presbyteries were informed of the upcoming vacancies, and were invited to submit to the Committee one or more nominations for the posts of Lecturer in Church History & Church Principles and of Seminary Principal.

The returns received are the subject of a Supplementary Report.

6. Quinquennial Visitation

As reported last year, in February 2018 the Committee undertook a Quinquennial Visitation of the Free Church Seminary when it met with the Principal, Lecturers and Students. To complete the Visitation the Committee met with the External Examiners on 1st October 2018.

The final report is the subject of a Supplementary Report.

ANDREW R. ALLAN, *Convener*
DONALD A. ROBERTSON, *Vice-convener*

SEMINARY REPORT

This is my last Report as Principal of the Seminary. It has been my joy and privilege to serve as Lecturer in Church History & Principles for the past eleven years and Principal for five. To be entrusted by the Church in these roles has been humbling. I can but pray that the Lord would follow with His blessing the work done, in which I have had a felt inadequacy, but dependence upon Himself. This is something keenly felt by all the Lecturers.

The work of the Seminary has proceeded well this year. Our two able students are at the end of their course and will graduate in June, Lord willing. There is one other student passing through the Seminary course, Mr Tyler Ray, who is attached to our Atlanta congregation. He has just completed his first year of a four-year course.

Although there are no students anticipated for the next Session, the Lecturers will be active with a new distance-learning Certificate in Theological Studies course. This is a two-year modular course covering core issues in all five disciplines. Each of the Lecturers has two modules in their own subjects. The purpose of the Certificate course is not to prepare men for the ministry as such, but to make Biblical and Reformed teaching available to those office-bearers and other laymen who desire an introduction to some Reformed distinctives in a manageable way for those who are working men. This course was initiated at the beginning of the year (2019) and there are three students (from the USA, Kenya and Northern Ireland) pursuing the course. The Seminary Committee are restricting entry to three students per year only.

Another notable feature of the work of the Seminary is the production for 2019 of the 5th Annual Seminary Journal. Once again, all the lecturers have contributed to an interesting and stimulating piece of work. We commend it to the Church.

We are deeply thankful to the Lord for His goodness to us in enabling this good work to continue. We solicit the prayers of the Church that the work of the Seminary and each of the lecturers might be abundantly blessed by the Holy Spirit, and that it may please the Lord Jesus to raise up among us both students for the work of the ministry and lecturers to continue to prepare men for this greatest of callings.

John W. Keddie, *Principal*

PROPOSED DELIVERANCE

1. The General Assembly receive and adopt the Report of the Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee and thank the Committee, especially the Convener for his diligence throughout the year;
2. The General Assembly thank the Clerk of the Committee for his diligent service over the past two years;
3. The General Assembly thank the Principal and Lecturers in the Seminary for their work over the past year;
4. The General Assembly note the service of Rev. John W. Keddie as Lecturer in Church History & Church Principles, and latterly as Principal also, and wish him a long and happy retirement;
5. The General Assembly note the vital work performed by the External Examiners;
6. The General Assembly commend the staff and students of the Seminary to the prayers of the Church;
7. The General Assembly commend Thomas Buchanan and Tom Budgen and their families to the prayers of the Church.