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# REPORT

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## TRAINING OF THE MINISTRY & ADMISSIONS COMMITTEE

Last year the Report of this Committee mentioned lack of student applications and appealed to Commissioners to press on suitable men the need to answer the call to gospel service. This year, one new application can be reported. This student hopes to enter the Seminary on a four-year course in September, and for this the Committee are heartily thankful. However, the need of more recruits is accentuated by the retirement of two more men from full-time pastoral ministry in the last six months.

Our interim moderators are greatly dependent on retired men to fill vacant pulpits week by week but, in the course of nature, these men will see their strength declining and so they are only a short-term solution. When John Knox was a tutor, besieged in St Andrews Castle, he was summoned to answer the call of the Protestant Congregation to be their pastor. He rose from his place sobbing and left the people, but could not refuse their call. Without that compelling call, there might well have been no Reformation. How earnestly must we press the need of the hour on able men so that they offer their service to the cause of Christ!

THE SEMINARY

The Committee are impressed again with the Seminary Lecturers' willingness to adapt to various demands on their tuition. This is all skilfully managed by the Principal, whose Report is appended below. There may be further calls on them to adapt if the Committee brings forward measures to avert the crisis in manpower. Some Congregations are too weak and isolated to support a full-time ministry but a mature man, on early retirement and pension, could serve part-time after abridged training?

OVERSEAS STUDENTS

The Committee were informed of two potential applicants for Recognition as Candidates for the Ministry from within the Bounds of the Presbytery of the United States of America. Both have already undertaken theological studies in outside theological institutions but neither of them has been in membership for two years, and so they are unable to have their applications formally processed. At the request of the Presbytery and with the advice of the Seminary, a course of studies was recommended to them at the Seminary which would enable them to fulfil the requirements of Act XIX 2017 should they be granted recognition. One of these potential applicants is currently undertaking a one-year course, while the other has a two-year course to fulfil.

The Committee also received applications for Recognition as Candidates for the Ministry from two men from within the Bounds of the Presbytery of Navarre & Aragon. Due to travel and associated difficulties in connection with the Covid-19 pandemic it was not possible for them to travel to Scotland for interview, and thus, in both instances, the application process has not been completed. It is expected that this situation will be rectified in the coming months. Meantime, following advice from the Seminary, the Committee recommended that they both pursue the Diploma Course at the Seminary. One of them is pursuing a four-year course, while the other, due to work commitments, is pursuing the course on a part-time basis.

It is the hope of the Committee that all these men from overseas may be interviewed by the Committee and, if successful, they will then come formally under the supervision of the Committee for the remainder of their studies.

APPLICATION PROCESS FOR RECOGNITION AS A CANDIDATE FOR THE MINISTRY

*Timetable for Applications*

Whilst the Seminary and the Committee have sought to be as flexible as possible in handling applications

for Recognition as Candidates for the Ministry, both are aware of the importance of adhering to the timetable for processing applications to ensure that all parties are fairly treated and that time is given for considered judgments to be made. At present, it is expected that any application should be processed by the lower Courts and forwarded to the Committee by 1st January for commencing studies later that year. This enables the Committee to deal with the application, including liaising with the Seminary, and allows the Seminary to make plans in reasonable time for each new Seminary year. It is intended, going forward, to strictly adhere to this policy.

*Applications and Act XIX 2017 and Act VI 2020*

Where Students are to be treated under Act XIX 2017 and Act VI 2020, there is a need for much fuller information than is ordinarily supplied with the Application forms for Recognition. Only a detailed explanation of the previous studies of Students can enable both the Seminary and the Committee to make valid judgments in relation to the said Act, and such should accompany each application, together with an assessment of the training and teachers that the applicants have been under during their previous theological training. Without such the applications are incomplete and cannot be properly processed, and therefore it is incumbent on Presbyteries who wish the said Act to be applied to ensure that full information is forwarded to the Committee along with the application.

APPLICATION OF ACT XIX 2017 and ACT VI 2020

Now that a group of students have completed their training under Act XIX 2017 and Act VI 2020, the Committee have been able to review how, in practice, the said Acts can best be applied. The following has been agreed in consultation with the Seminary:

1. All Exit Exams in each department must be sat by each student. The Principal will liaise with the Students and Lecturers to enable the Exit Exams to be undertaken in a time frame that is realistic for each Student. Only where individual courses are prescribed by the Committee will the usual exam timetable be followed;
2. The Seminary have agreed that each Lecturer will, where practicable, provide the notes for his courses to Act XIX 2017 Students so that they have all the material necessary to enable them to undertake the Exit Exams for each Department;
3. Where Lecturers do not have set Courses for Students under Act XIX 2017, they will seek, nevertheless, to be in communication with such students, especially where there are specific areas of study which they believe are of importance and should be brought to their attention. The Committee believe this to be important and for the good of such students;
4. The Committee have agreed with the Seminary Lecturers that it is inappropriate for students to supply as Discourses pieces of work formerly submitted to other institutions as, *inter alia*, this could lead to awkwardness in the vetting of work attested by other institutions. The Committee have therefore directed that all Discourses provided by Students under the said Acts be fresh pieces of work produced under the direction of the Seminary Lecturers themselves.

APPLICATION FOR ADMISSIONS

An application for admission from overseas reported at the last Assembly, which was deferred when Covid-19 prevented a face-to-face interview, has now been withdrawn.

An application received through the Southern Presbytery is the subject of a Supplementary Report.

DAVID S. FRASER, *Convener*
DONALD A. ROBERTSON, *Vice-convener*

**SEMINARY REPORT**

The Seminary are aware of the pivotal role they play, under Christ, in maintaining the welfare of the Church for future ages. They, having themselves learned the apostolic truth, are to commit the same to faithful

men, who shall be able to teach others also. In watching themselves and their doctrine, they are to set a pattern before those who are taught. All too often in the history of the Church decline has set in from within, often having its roots in the theological halls of the day. Those who teach in the Free Church Seminary are mindful of the solemn duty committed to them and seek to discharge it faithfully, aware that what they do, or fail to do, may affect generations to come.

During the past year the Seminary has been active in teaching four students who are in the process of applying through Presbyteries furth of Scotland to train for the Ministry. Advice was sought as to potential courses of studies and agreements were reached, which has meant that these students have not been hindered in their studies whilst their Applications for recognition as Candidates for the Ministry have been processed. The lessons learned from the first batch of Students under Act XIX 2017 and Act VI 2020 have proved helpful. The flexibility of the Lecturers is to be commended and demonstrates the desire of the Seminary to be of as much help as possible in the training of Students. In saying this, the Seminary believe that there is a need for Church Courts to seek to deal with Applications from potential Divinity Students according to the generally recognised timetable to enable the Seminary to function efficiently.

Increasingly the Lecturers are making use of modern technology to communicate with Students. As the Course is by distance learning, it is much easier to maintain contact with Students and provide them with tutorials and lectures. Some of the Lecturers are making use of an online learning management system. For a modest cost this provides a way whereby the materials needed for courses can be located in one place and students can make progress in their learning, moving from module to module, without relying on new materials being sent individually to them. Additionally the Lecturers can immediately see how their students are progressing. This should enable any problems to be picked up quickly and make the whole learning experience more efficient.

At the 2021 General Assembly, Rev. Greg MacDonald was appointed as Lecturer in Systematic Theology. He is settling into this work and has one student who is following the full Diploma Systematic Theology Course. This is enabling him to familiarise himself with the material without being overburdened.

Whilst privileged to be able to provide training for those from overseas, the Seminary are thankful that, after a break of some years, they will have a "home-based" student once more when the new session begins in September. This should enable the Lecturers to be able to recommence the "Seminary days" of face-to-face teaching and fellowship. How exactly this will work in practice has still to be arranged and there will be changes to what happened hitherto, given that, at present, none of the Lecturers is resident in the Inverness area. In addition the Seminary will be able to recommence their public meetings, which will begin with a meeting to mark the opening of the Seminary Session in September. After a break of a number of years this development is to be welcomed.

With the translation of Rev. James Clark to Harris, the Seminary are thankful that Rev. John W. Keddie has agreed to serve as the Seminary Librarian. Enquiries concerning the Seminary Library should, in the first place, be directed to Mr Keddie.

The *Certificate in Theological Studies Course* continues as before. At present there are two students, one in each year of the course, and they are diligently pursuing their studies. Sometimes students have to drop out for various reasons, leaving the numbers depleted, but the Seminary believe that the Certificate Course is a useful form of study and of benefit to those men who wish to gain some theological training, but who are not seeking preparation for full-time ministry. It has been agreed that, with the limited number of places on the course, priority be given to FC(C) office-bearers and members who apply, then UK-based applicants and then other applicants.

It had been hoped that the 6th Volume of the annual *Seminary Journal* would be available last year. Attempts are being made to have it ready in time for the 2022 General Assembly. The *Seminary Handbook*

is again being updated and, with the agreement of the Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee, it also contains, as an Appendix, their *Handbook for Free Church Students*. It is hoped that this may prove beneficial to future FC(C) Students.

The Seminary are grateful to the Lord's people for remembering them in prayer.

GRAEME CRAIG, *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 and Clerk;

2. The General Assembly thank the Principal and Lecturers of the Seminary for their continued, innovative adaption of their tuition to the needs of our students and pray for their continued strength for their vital service;

3. The General Assembly note with satisfaction the progress of overseas students towards full enrolment into the prescribed training courses;

4. The General Assembly express their thanks to God for one new student accepted and expected to begin his training in September, inst.?;

5. The General Assembly remind Ministers, Kirk Sessions and Presbyteries of the need to adhere to the timetable set by the Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee and that all Applications for Recognition as a Candidate for the Ministry should be in the hands of the Clerk of the said Committee by the 1st January preceding the anticipated commencement of studies at the Seminary;

6. The General Assembly remind Presbyteries supporting Applications for Recognition as a Candidate for the Ministry under Act XIX 2017 and Act VI 2020 that they are required to submit full information on such applicants' previous theological training when forwarding the Applications to the Clerk of the Committee;

7. The General Assembly note and approve of the way in which the Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee and the Seminary are currently applying Act XIX 2017 and Act VI 2020;

8. The General Assembly renew their appeal to our ministers to seek out men worthy to serve in the ministry and to recommend that they apply for training.