

# X.

## REPORT

### OF THE

#### TRAINING OF THE MINISTRY & ADMISSIONS COMMITTEE

#### 1. Introduction

This year it can be reported that the Committee ran harmoniously and smoothly due, principally, to the Clerk and the Principal of the Seminary.

The workload of the Committee rises or falls according to the number of individuals seeking recognition as Candidates for the Ministry, making Application for Admission, or studying under the oversight of the Committee, and this has been low for several years. The 'law of supply and demand' does not seem to be operating, because vacancies are increasing but recruitment remains low on the home front, while students are coming forward overseas where charges are all filled! Seven charges are languishing without pastors and this begs the question, "What has gone wrong?" Several thoughts come to mind. Are we presenting an inspiring message which will attract young men to consider a call? Are we complacent, and conclude that we have to just drift into decline? Are we forgetting that vacant congregations will not likely grow when deprived of a pastor?

#### 2. Recruitment

All this suggests that urgent steps have to be taken to seek recruits, yet the Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee are told that this is not their remit. Is it not incumbent on the whole Church to pray, to search, to encourage the provision for those who are 'like sheep without a shepherd'? Is this not the only way the denomination can survive and prosper?

It can be reported that three men were interviewed and granted recognition as Candidates for the Ministry since the last General Assembly. These were from France, USA and Northern Ireland. This is a great encouragement but it does not meet the need of the hour for seven vacancies on the home front to be filled. However, the quality of the students is high and the foreign language students do well at improving their English.

#### 3. Roll of Students

The complement of students in training is as follows (private students in italics):

##### Three Year Diploma Course

First Year: Mr Alan Blaney, Northern Ireland

##### Four Diploma Year Course

Mr Kevin Norman MacDonald, Scotland

Mr Paul Pontacq, France

*Mr Fabien Garat, France*

Second Year:

Mr Joel Suarez, Spain;

Third Year

Mr Tyler Ray, USA

##### Students under Act XIX 2017

Mr Jefferson Logan Shelton, USA

#### 4. Administration

One point needs to be noted regarding the referees who submit supporting references for those applying for recognition. They should be independent and outside of the applicant's Congregation and preferably from former employment.

There was some disjointed setting of Exit Examinations causing problems for the Clerk and the Examiners. This was due to two factors – some students sitting Exit Examinations under Act XIX 2017 and some students being granted recognition having formerly been private students, while awaiting the necessary length of time in membership of the denomination before being able to apply for recognition as a Candidate for the Ministry of the Church. Whilst every attempt is made to sit Exit Examinations at specific times each year, such cases will throw up situations where it is impossible to align them as would be desired.

#### **5. Interview of applicants for recognition from the USA**

The Committee were informed of a possible Petition from the Presbytery of the United States of America seeking to permit the interview of Applicants for Recognition to be held by video-conference, due to the financial burden upon such individuals in travelling to Scotland for the prescribed interview with the Committee. The Committee did not discuss the possible Petition in great depth, but, in considering the matter immediately after one such interview, they indicated that, on first reflection they did not feel minded to support any such proposal, as there were significant benefits in having a face-to-face meeting as well as allowing the Applicant to gain a personal experience of the wider Church in Scotland. One sees and appreciates an Applicant better when he is physically before the body interviewing him, and there is opportunity for both formal and informal interaction. Additionally, there is also a commitment shown on the Applicant's part when he has travelled from his home setting. Should such a Petition come forward to the Assembly, then the matter can be fully discussed at that time.

#### **6. Divinity Student Funding**

The Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee were instructed by the 2018 General Assembly to review funding arrangements for Candidates for the Ministry. The Committee sought advice from the Finance & Sustentation Committee who duly reported 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, they believe this 'risk' is negligible. This was reported to the 2019 General Assembly.

The 2019 General Assembly approved the Finance & Sustentation Committee's proposal of raising the loan repayment threshold to the equivalent of the Equal Dividend Platform, thus effectively ensuring the cessation of student loan repayments to the denomination as of 5 March 2019. Subsequently, a provision of £36,969 was made against existing student loans which were unlikely to be recovered within the 31 December 2021 denominational accounts. It should be noted that these loans have not been written off (and legally they remain outstanding), but rather a provision is being made in recognition that they are unlikely to be repaid. The Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee now propose to the General Assembly that Act X, 2011 — Act anent Student Loans be repealed, and approve that Candidates for the Ministry be funded by a grant payment scheme as found in the Proposed Deliverance.

#### **7. Constitution of the Seminary**

The updating of the Constitution of the Seminary has been on the Committee's agenda for some time. Although a draft was produced, it is only recently that the Principal has had ready access to some of the information required to check what has been drafted. It is intended that a final draft of the Constitution will be set before the 2024 General Assembly.

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

### SEMINARY REPORT

The Seminary's great desire is to serve the Lord through the provision of training to the Church's divinity students that is faithful to Scripture and the Confessional Standards of the Church. Without such faithfulness the Lecturers will be a hindrance rather than a help to the students they teach, undermine the Church they seek to serve, dishonour the Lord and be a plague on the nation. How they are in need of much grace and the help of the Holy Spirit that they may remain faithful to their charge!

With two home-based students having begun their studies at the beginning of the Session, there is a sense of relief and thankfulness to the Lord that the Seminary can once more be fully operational. Of course, this means that the Lecturers are busier than ever, but they are aware of the importance of their work and gladly and freely serve the Lord and his Church in the Seminary. They have demonstrated a remarkable degree of flexibility in seeking to help the various Students under their care. Whilst some are on the standard three or four-year Diploma Course, others from overseas are progressing more slowly on a part-time basis. In addition, a number of Students are under Act XIX 2017. This flexibility demonstrates the desire of the Seminary to be as helpful as possible to students and the wider Church, with the Principal ensuring that everyone has a clear understanding of the plan of studies and teaching for each individual Lecturer and student.

In the past the Seminary ran "Seminary Days" for UK-based students, when the students would gather in Inverness over a number of days each month for lectures and tutorials. This allowed face-to-face contact and teaching, helped student friendships to develop, and gave opportunity for access to the Library resources. Given the increasing use of video-conferencing, some discussion took place as to whether there was a need for such regular Seminary Days. It was agreed that, as an experiment, these would be cut down to three per session, at the opening and closing of the session (September and June), and midway in February, with a review to take place before the beginning of the 2023-24 Session. In the past, one significant blessing arising from these gatherings was the opportunity for informal tutoring in pastoral theology and also "preaching classes", through the kind hospitality provided by Rev. Henry & Mrs Mairi Woods. Now that Mr Woods has moved away from the Inverness area, such provision is no longer practicable. However, the Seminary wish to place on record their sincere thanks to them for this provision so freely made which helped many students over the years.

The Seminary again record their appreciation to the Deacons' Court of Inverness, Free Greyfriars. In addition to making their facilities available for housing the Seminary Library, teaching, and the holding of public meetings, they have also provided accommodation and hospitality in their manse for students and lecturers. This has been greatly appreciated and has greatly eased the organising of Seminary Days.

Rev. John Keddie continues to serve as the Seminary Librarian. Enquiries concerning the Seminary Library should, in the first place, be directed to him.

Due to the increased number of Diploma Students, it was initially agreed that there should be a moratorium on taking in new students for the *Certificate in Theological Studies Course*. However, on reflection it was agreed to allow new applications from men who are from within our own Church. At present there are two students, one in each year of the course.

It is expected that Volume VII of the annual *Seminary Journal* will be available around the time of the Assembly. The *Seminary Handbook* has been 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. A small number of copies are available.

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 adaptation of their tuition to the needs of our students and pray for their continued grace and strength for their vital service;
3. The General Assembly remind Kirk Sessions and Presbyteries of the importance of obtaining independent references from individuals outwith the Church when dealing with Applications for Recognition as a Candidate for the Ministry or Applications for Admission;
4. The General Assembly thank the Exit Examiners appointed by the Committee for their continued effective and important service in ensuring the integrity of the teaching in the Seminary;
5. The General Assembly approve the following for all Student Maintenance Grants approved by the Committee after June 2022:
  1. All recognised Candidates for the Ministry of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) resident within the United Kingdom and under the supervision of a Scottish Presbytery shall be eligible to apply for a Student Maintenance Grant during their time of study at the Free Church Seminary;
  2. Church Student Maintenance Grants shall be awarded by the Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee upon application by a qualifying student, and will be confirmed in writing by the Clerk of the Committee;
  3. Church Student Maintenance Grants shall continue to be awarded in line with the amounts and criteria set out annually by the Student Awards Agency for Scotland;
  4. In addition to Church Student Maintenance Grants, all qualifying Candidates shall still be able to apply for a non-repayable 'Dependants Grant';

Student Maintenance Grants shall be non-repayable except in the following cases:

5. When a Candidate withdraws voluntarily or is directed to withdraw from his course of studies, unless there are compassionate grounds approved of by his Presbytery and the Committee;
  6. When a Probationer has his license withdrawn or does not make a reasonable effort to pursue the Ministry of the FC(C);
  7. When an individual Minister withdraws from the Ministry of the FC(C) or is unable to fulfil ministry within the Church due to discipline within the first ten years of his Ministry, he shall be required to repay a proportion of his Church Student Maintenance Grant, such proportion beginning at 100% and decreasing by 10% for every year he has completed in the Ministry of the Church.
6. The General Assembly give thanks for the students now in recognised training and pray for their success in studies while calling on the Church at large to pray for additional candidates to come forward;
  7. The General Assembly encourage the Committee to complete the updating of the Constitution of the Seminary so that it may be brought before the 2024 General Assembly.