

MELROSE and PEEBLES PRESBYTERY:
MISSION and SERVICE COMMITTEE – Report to Presbytery June 2019.

MINISTRY

1. The Committee was pleased to hear that, having completed local discernment and following attendance at a national assessment conference, Mr Timothy Linford (member of Stow and Heriot Church) has been accepted as a Candidate for the full-time ministry of word and sacrament. Tim will begin his training programme of church placements and academic studies in the autumn. Presbytery is now asked to nominate him as a Candidate and, thereby, a corresponding member of Presbytery.

WORLD MISSION

LEBANON

2. At the end of April a group of 7 set off for NESSL (National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon) Tripoli Church in northern Lebanon, 4 elders from Earlston church, the minister Julie Rennick, Fiona Burnett, chair of the Mission and Service: World Mission Group, together with her husband. Most stayed in a guesthouse run by the neighbouring NESSL church in Miniara which was only 15 miles away but most days took over one hour to get to due to the chaotic roads.
3. Most of our time was spent with the minister Rola Sleiman and some of her elders, visiting the various church institutions in the area, meeting with the elders and congregation in Tripoli, some sightseeing and sitting down to the most amazing meals where the starter dishes never seemed to end! Hospitality was high on the priority of our Lebanese hosts and we could not have been better looked after by them.
4. One institution we visited was the old School premises in the centre of Tripoli, part of which was being used as a refugee school for Syrian children. Most of the teachers are members of Tripoli church and the children were amazing, considering all they have encountered during their short lives. We were dismayed to hear that funding for the school (which comes from NESSL head office and their partner churches) was due to end at the end of May and on returning home we have been in touch with the national Church to see if there is anything the Church of Scotland can do to assist.
5. The main reason for the group visit was to strengthen the links between Tripoli and Earlston. We also wanted to explore possibilities of the Presbytery having other links with NESSL. Reflecting on the visit, it seems likely that Earlston will continue with their relationship with Tripoli but perhaps are not yet ready for a formal link. For Presbytery we are being encouraged to think of some sort of relationship with churches in Syria who are desperate to share their story with other Christians who wish to befriend them. They are not looking for money, have good internet communication and don't expect visits to Syria but in the fullness of time would be willing to meet up in Lebanon if appropriate.

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MALAWI

6. Malawi has been in the news over the past few months with the after effects of Cyclone Idai. Churches in the Presbytery have responded very well to the appeal for funds to help with families affected by the flooding. It has also been a great blessing to have Bob Milne out in Zomba at this time, doing a fantastic job in assisting the distribution of essential supplies. He estimates that with money coming from us, his home Presbytery and Rotary Clubs he is in contact with, he has been sent over £7000 and helped approximately 5,000 people. The response from our Presbytery highlights the bond we now have with our brothers and sisters in Zomba Presbytery and we pray that this will grow in the years to come.
7. The next Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is progressing well and is now in its 5th draft. There have been good discussions between our committee and the Partnership committee in Zomba and we are now, hopefully nearing a conclusion. The final draft will be presented to the September 2019 Presbytery meeting and will be signed during a visit from our Presbytery in mid-October.
8. In drawing up the MoU, we have tried to stress the local to local aspects of the partnership and to this end we are organising a visit to Zomba in October. We have applied for two faithshare grants for members of Stow and Heriot, St Andrew Leckie and Innerleithen, Traquair and Walkerburn. We have also applied for 3 grants for members of Presbytery. One of these grants will be taken up by Denis Robson, a member of the WM Group who will lead the visiting group. There are therefore, assuming we receive the grants, two places available for anyone in any of the other churches in the Presbytery to join the group. Please let Fiona Burnett know as soon as possible if you or anyone you know is interested. The group will be visiting Zomba for 11th to 19th October and will be expected to fund themselves for elements of the visit not covered by the grant (grant covers flights, visa and insurance) which is estimated to come to approximately £500.
9. The Malawian government has very little money and, as a consequence, the Malawi Institute of Health where our midwife students have trained is closed at present. Limbikani, who is due to start his third year is at home, waiting for term to start. The WM Group is of the opinion that there is very little we can do at this stage to assist him.
10. Geoffrey Matias, who graduated last year has still not been offered a permanent post, nor is likely to do so until next year. In September last year, Presbytery agreed to fund Geoffrey at the student allowance rate of £75 per month and Denis Robson was given the task of finding him a placement at one of the local district hospitals. By all accounts Geoffrey has been doing a brilliant job, is well thought of and heavily used, on average assisting in the delivery of about 30 babies per shift.

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11. As funding from Presbytery runs out in September, the WM Group finds itself in a dilemma. If we stop Geoffrey's funding, he will have to return to the village and await the government finding money to employ him and his classmates. Meanwhile the hospital he is working at once more becomes short staffed and loses Geoffrey's capable assistance. The WM Group is of the opinion that as Geoffrey is our student, we should have some responsibility to him but for how long?
12. Is Presbytery:
 - a) Willing to fund Geoffrey for a further year and to instruct the Property and Stewardship Committee to release money for this? or,
 - b) Ask congregations or individuals within Presbytery to pledge a monthly amount of money which can be used to fund Geoffrey for the next year? or,
 - c) Acknowledge the difficulty that Geoffrey faces but agree that funding for one year is the limit to which Presbytery can go.

MISSION THROUGH SERVICE

EDUCATION and LEARNING PROPOSALS: 2020-2023

BACKGROUND

13. In November 2018 Melrose and Peebles Presbytery approved the following action related to education and training as part of the Mission and Service Committee Deliverance.
 - Presbytery invites the Mission and Service Committee to design a three year education and training programme (2020-2023) for consideration by Presbytery in November 2019, the draft programme to include 'Developing Eldership' and 'LEARN' programmes; planned in tandem with the Presbytery Planning Task Group where appropriate.
14. Discussion with the Presbytery Planning Task Group; within the Mission and Service Committee; with Ministers and Worship Leader course participants and during the June 2019 'Away Day'; contributed to determining priority for courses related to parish ministry and church governance. The four most popular learning opportunities, from the list of 26 elements of ministry are: Pastoral Care; Worship Leader; Local Mission and Discipleship and An Introduction to Conducting Worship. (A copy of the collated returns from the 'Away Day' conference is available from the Convener on request).
15. In addition to local discussion, the Mission and Service Convener sought advice from those already involved in considering the training of 'laity' including: Mission and Discipleship Council (Congregational Learning); Lothian Presbytery; Edinburgh Presbytery; Hamilton Presbytery; Jedburgh Presbytery; Ardrossan Presbytery. All of the foregoing will inform the final programme.

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16. Whilst empowering and mentoring/nourishing laity is readily accepted as a major contributor to the future of parish ministry, there is no coordinated approach nationally to holistic learning opportunities for laity. For this reason Presbytery decided to take a lead in seeking and analysing expressed need then to plan the learning programme. However, as a final part of consultation, Kirk Sessions should be invited to indicate their priorities and related training needs; to be returned by the end of September 2019.
17. Of the 36 more general comments the following stood out - the content and presentation of learning opportunities should be structured in a variety of ways with a degree of rigour yet not overly academic – linking with training for the Deaconate; Readership and Ordained Local Ministry; maintain a personal record of learning and re-learning; such learning should include theology and provide opportunity for practical experience of ministering in different contexts; engaging with under 40s will require piloting; use of materials and resources produced elsewhere, both locally and nationally, should avoid the need to invent our own; there needs to be an immediate contact to answer all questions.

A WAY FORWARD

18. Courses may be delivered locally, or at a Presbytery centre, or with a neighbouring Presbytery, some may be integrated with national opportunities. The use of web links and social media platforms should be offered in addition to attendance at learning days. The use of 'satellite' groupings and distance/open/facetime/webinar opportunities should be explored. The 3 year training programme should recognise that the requirements of individuals may need to be accommodated at more than one learning level through introductory and progressive opportunities, by way of the three year rolling programme. There should be formal recognition of participation, course completion and, where appropriate, levels of success with a Presbytery record of individual participation.
19. It is recommended that funding is sought for the three year programme and the appointment of a part time paid Learning and Discipleship post. Presbytery should consider also the appointment of a four/six -person Reference Group to support the Learning and Discipleship Officer and the delivery of the annual programme of learning. If possible the appointment and the group should be established in partnership with neighbouring Presbyteries.
20. Finding visiting tutors to lead courses in Melrose and Peebles Presbytery will prove difficult given that many Presbyteries are currently at various stages in planning similar learning opportunities, It is necessary therefore for Melrose and Peebles to be almost self-supporting in the delivery of courses and programmes of learning. Without this commitment the programme will fail in its purpose although some courses may be possible through external support.
21. Presbytery should consider inclusion of a combined trustee - mission and discipleship module for study by all elders, tutored locally in charges or church groupings, wherever possible, by the parish minister.
22. A comprehensive 'Guide to the Presbytery Learning Programme' will be published towards the end of 2019 together with a leaflet produced annually containing the all necessary details on courses and venues.

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REFERENCES

23. For background information on all of the above please refer to the November 2018 Mission and Service report to Presbytery.
24. The 2019 General Assembly Dr Sally Bonnar, Convener of the Council of Assembly, told the General Assembly: “We need to think about how we can bring the message of the Gospels effectively to the generation in which we live, and what shape the church should take in order to do this.” The Mission and Discipleship Council affirmed - ‘that the Council’s first priority over the period 2019-2021 is to encourage the creation and deepening of a culture of discipleship’.
25. The Mission and Discipleship Council sought to ‘Instruct Presbyteries and Kirk Sessions to engage with the characteristics of discipleship and explore how they are worked out in their own local context’.
As part of the Radical Plan the General Assembly agreed to a review of the size and role of Kirk Sessions, with the hope that smaller Sessions will reduce the length of time spent in meetings and promote, ‘a meeting dynamic more suited to leadership and strategic decision-making’, and ‘a clearer understanding of trustee responsibility’. The Assembly agreed new rules allowing elders to be appointed to membership of Kirk Sessions for a fixed period, instead of for life.
26. In order to support local initiatives the General Assembly accepted ‘Decision-making and resources (to) be devolved from the central administration to regional and local level’ and ‘improved training and support for all ministry and leadership roles’ with an investment of £20-25m over seven years in a ‘Growth Fund’, supporting projects which will ‘encourage greater faith-sharing, innovation and creativity at local and regional levels’ and allow churches the flexibility to ‘explore and expand their horizons in a mission-based context, in ways that best respond to their local circumstances.’
27. The Ministries Council report suggested the need for a flexible training and support programme for all ministerial and leadership roles, paid or voluntary, in the Church. Ministers are to be trained to support and help members and elders ‘identify, release, and develop their gifts’. The Ministries Council sought to ‘encourage those in ministry to use the Ascend resources and website, and encourage Presbyteries to review their pastoral care provision in relation to the services offered through Ascend’
28. Mission and Discipleship Council urged Kirk Sessions to use centrally available resources and to promote their usage in the wider congregation.
29. The Radical Plan anticipated that the new regional bodies (presbyteries) would be better able to fulfil the formal functions of presbyteries than the current small ones, but also to ‘provide leadership and focus alongside practical support for local congregations, freeing them for mission and ministry’. At the end of the week the Moderator, the Rt Rev Colin Sinclair, urged Commissioners to ‘work tirelessly’ to make the reforms agreed during the week a reality. He cautioned that ‘deciding the change is not the same as making the change’.

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DELIVERANCE

1. Presbytery receives the report.

MINISTRY

2. Presbytery nominates Mr Timothy Linford as a Candidate for the full-time ministry of word and sacrament and appoints Mr Linford to be a Corresponding Member of Presbytery.

LEBANON

3. Presbytery thanks the minister, elders and congregation of Tripoli church for the hospitality and friendship accorded to the group during their visit.
4. Presbytery encourages Earlston church in their developing relationship with Tripoli Church.
5. Presbytery urges churches within the bounds to think about the opportunities which present themselves through a relationship with a church in Syria.

MALAWI

6. Presbytery thanks the Rev. Bob Milne for all his work in Zomba Presbytery during the crisis resulting from Cyclone Idai and encourages members of Presbytery to pray for our sister church in Zomba in these challenging times.
7. Presbytery notes the work that is ongoing in revising the Memorandum of Understanding with Zomba Presbytery and instructs the Mission and Service Committee to bring the final draft to the September meeting for approval
8. Presbytery notes the preparations for a visit to Zomba in October and that the names of interested travellers should be notified to the Chair of the World Mission Group.
9. Presbytery agrees to continue support for Geoffrey Matias as a midwife at a suitable hospital in the Zomba area and agrees to find the necessary funds through local contributions, underwritten by Presbytery.

MISSION THROUGH SERVICE

10. Presbytery notes and approves progress in designing a three year learning programme, with mission as a central feature, to meet the expressed needs of churches and charges within the bounds.
11. Presbytery instructs the Business Committee to seek the necessary funding to meet the costs of the programme.
12. Presbytery instructs the Business Committee to make all arrangements for the appointment of a part-time Learning and Discipleship Officer, if possible in partnership with neighbouring Presbyteries.
13. Presbytery instructs the Business Committee to appoint a Learning and Discipleship Reference Group to support the Learning and Discipleship Officer.
14. Presbytery approves inclusion in the programme of a combined trustee - mission and discipleship module for study by all elders, tutored locally in charges or church groupings, wherever possible, by the parish minister.