

The Council was held on 15th-16th March 2016, at Fishers Hotel, Pitlochry. Opening devotions were led by Nigel Heath.

Previous Council Minutes

Council accepted the September 2015 Council minutes.

Assembly 2015 Minutes

Council accepted the Assembly 2015 minutes.

BUS Bye-law change proposal - notice of motion

The following wording in bold italics is a proposed addition to Bye-Law 9 of the Bye-Laws of the Baptist Union of Scotland:

"Assembly will appoint a Board of Trustees consisting of a minimum of five people each belonging to a Baptist church in membership of the Union. Trustees will meet at least three times a year and will provide a level of oversight and accountability for all the decisions of the Union. They will be appointed to serve initially for a period of three years but, if willing, may serve a further period of three years subject to agreement by Assembly. The Board of Trustees is normally chaired by the Convenor and facilitated by the General Director who are not Trustees. A quorum of three Trustees is required at each meeting."

If Council is satisfied with this change then it will be brought back to September Council for formal approval.

This was approved by Council.

National Team Report

Our new 'church' Council members have been appointed by Assembly. Council is commissioned in their work by Assembly and is our primary space to stop and reflect about current issues within our Union.

Mo Gibbs has returned from maternity leave and we are grateful to Yvonne Faddes for covering this.

The BUS Office has a new database system to aid better communication with our churches. The annual returns have mostly been returned to us, however there have been significant issues over obtaining responses from our churches, which causes frustration and hampers effective communication. Our database is mainly used by admin staff and National Team members to contact key office bearers within our churches. Accurate contact information, especially for ministers, is essential particularly when dealing with confidential matters.

The decline in church membership we have seen in recent times of 1% per year, slowed to 0.5% last year and our membership was almost static in 2015. We had 134 baptisms in 2014 and 2015 saw 311 people being baptised, which is a very encouraging trend.

The number of churches in our Union will reduce by one this year, as Newburgh BC closes (to 163 churches). Partick BC has closed and Queen's Park BC are setting up a new campus in the Partick building, initially for one year, starting on Easter Sunday. A number of our churches, both large and small, grew significantly in 2015 which is really encouraging.

The Refugee offering at Assembly 2015 raised around £25,000; with EBF and BMS World Mission each receiving £8,500 for their own work with refugees. We have also responded to applications from our own churches for their work with refugees in Scotland. We still have £3,000 available which our churches can apply for, specifically for work with refugees in Scotland.

Mo Gibbs noted that 50 young people signed up to Step Out in 2012 and now we probably have between 30-40 young people. The drop off is due to young people having to take on summer employment to fund study and the emergence of a Scottish Soul Survivor event.

Joint Assembly Planning

Assembly 2016 will be from 27-28th October in the Rothes Hall, Glenrothes. Confirmed contributors include Roy Searle,

from The Northumbrian Community; Didi Oprenova, Co-Pastor of Sofia Baptist Church and Alan Donaldson, General Director BUS. Amie Aitken and her band will lead sung worship again. Our theme this year is 'Gazing on God's Glory'.

Finance Report

Our overall financial position is good at present and support from our churches will be around 96-98% of budget. A number of legacy gifts have been received over the year which has been a great blessing. The Partick church property and funds have now been transferred to the Union and while some of the funds will be used with refurbishment of the church building, there will be a substantial amount left for other projects. We have been able to help a number of churches this year with Viewfield, Ladywell and Collydean receiving Mission Initiative grants.

The pensions world is quite complex with regular changes, including age equalization, affecting the whole situation. Once the age equalization situation is resolved, the pension administrators will restart calculating figures for churches. Peter also highlighted the auto-enrolment scheme which churches also need to comply with. Pension enquiries should be directed to Lane, Clark and Peacock LLP who have a special helpdesk for the Baptist Pension Scheme.

Non-contributing churches

We still have over a dozen churches who do not contribute anything to the Scottish Baptist Fund. Council was asked to consider what we do about churches who do not contribute anything to SBF.

This is a pastoral relationship issue for the National Team to work through with these churches. We would not wish to make finance the core of the relationship. Our young ministers perhaps need encouraged to better understand our Union and the benefit of being in Union with other Baptists. Non-contributing churches would still receive help if the church was in crisis.

Stipendiary Discussion

It was noted that we fall short compared with other denominations as regards stipend. Over the next 3-5 years we would like to index our minimum stipend, to bring us more in line with other denominations. Discussion also took place around our terminology and the way that minimum stipend becomes both a base and a ceiling; perhaps better terminology would be a 'reference stipend'.

Agreement of 2016/17 Reference Stipend

Council agreed an increase in Reference Stipend of 2% to £23,715 for 2016-17.

Agreement of 2016/17 Per Capita

Council agreed a Per Capita of £40.

Agreement of 2016/17 Budget

Council agreed the 2016/17 Budget.

Change to Ministry Resource Grant Wording

Council agreed the following additional wording to our Ministry Resource Grant guidelines:

'That the award of a Ministry Resource Grant should lapse if no appointment is made within 12 months of award, similarly when a grant is suspended if an appointment ceases early.'

Other Reports

Board of Ministry – Anne Muir introduced herself as the new Chair of the Board. We are possibly the only 'denomination' who continues to see a steady flow of candidates for ministry. We have 14 people just about to become fully accredited ministers.

Mission Initiative Group – Mark Bentham, chair of MIG, noted that this group continues its work with projects in the pipeline.

Public Issues – The Public Issues group have been

considering the future shape and work of the group. The Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office are also reviewing their future at present. We considering whether we should start to relate to the Joint Public Issues Team, an English public issues group that the Church of Scotland has joined. Both of these conversations will affect the direction of our own public issues group. Documents regarding the forthcoming EU Referendum are taking shape and will appear on our website in due course. We have a rep place available for the Scottish Churches Rural Group.

Convenor Appointment Group

Jacqueline Primrose will step down as Convenor at our Assembly in October 2016. She will chair the September Council and Assembly 2016 with the new Convenor hopefully shadowing Jacqueline for a time. Council appointed a small group to review the Convenor role, seek applicants and put a preferred candidate proposal to the September Council.

Finance Director Role Review

All National Team members roles are reviewed every 5 years. This is to make sure that role descriptors are accurate, and not a review of the person in the post. Council appointed a group to do this which will report to September Council.

Retirement Housing Group

Council appointed a group to consider how we prepare current ministers and those coming into ministry for retirement. They will seek to ascertain the needs of ministers and devise a scheme that is fair, sustainable and helps those who really need it. They will report back to September Council.

Yearbook

Council agreed to trial ceasing printing a Yearbook and producing a pdf version of our churches information which will be distributed to our churches by email or by post. This will be sent to ministers, secretaries and treasurers. The Lay Preachers and SWBF contact lists could also be circulated with the pdf or with the Assembly papers. This will be reviewed at the March 2017 Council. We have also been looking at a password protected members section on our website but still have work to do on this. It was noted that the College would also receive the pdf information.

Partick BC

Queen's Park BC are leasing the Partick building for the next year. Minor refurbishment is being undertaken to make the building wind and watertight.

Refugees

Dennistoun BC received funding for their work with refugees, which including English classes and to Castlemilk BC received funding for their furniture ministry which helps refugees and asylum seekers.

BMS World Mission

Edwin Penman, Church Relations Co-ordinator with BMS World Mission, highlighted the new BMS strategy document for 2016-2020. The Highest Goal is to see people come to know Jesus and the key goal set out for this season is to see 1 million lives transformed by 2020. This will be achieved through prioritising outreach to up to a third of the most marginalised people; to reach half of the least evangelised communities and to reach 10 out of the 20 most fragile states.

BMS would like to concentrate on those countries that are the most marginalised and least evangelised: Congo, Mozambique, Chad, Guinea, Afghanistan, Nepal, Haiti and Bangladesh. The most fragile countries are in central Africa. Scottish Baptist churches have sent and continue to send a particularly high number of missionaries out of our 164 churches.

Alastair Clunie and Edwin Penman will be in Scotland for key dates in the year and would be happy to speak to people at these times.

EBF Representative

Brian More was thanked for his 13 years of service as an EBF representatives and David Purves has now agreed to take up this role.

Assembly Feedback Discussion

Stephen Younger was thanked for the analysis of the Assembly feedback. Council discussed four strands of feedback:

Personally sharing our faith; Releasing church members into different ministries; Reorganising church programmes to create the opportunity for church members to meet with non-Christians and Re-imagining church and mission.

Council also reviewed the four Mission Initiative group priorities, namely: supporting a transition of churches below 30 members; the need to reach out to Scotland's poor; encouraging the development of churches in under-reached areas and considering mission initiatives from other places and organisations.

Scottish Baptist College

The ethos of the college is to equip people for ministry in different contexts. Culture, society and our churches are all changing and how to prepare people from ministry in our changing world is a challenging opportunity. Currently, there are 45 students; 29 full-time students, 16 modular students and 12 ministerial candidates.

A new development for the college is the module in chaplaincy care which began in September 2015 with the lead tutor Carol Campbell. Students come from Workplace Chaplaincy Scotland as well as from health care, sport, prisons and schools.

Financial Status

The figures represent the financial position for the current financial year to the end of February.

Income: £156 494
Church Donations £21,966 (£1.99 per Baptist Church member per year)
Student Fees £118,872
Individual Donations £4,990

Expenditure: £135 531
Staff costs £105 425

If churches were able to give more, this would lessen the burden on students and allow the college to award grants. The College's legal status is changing with OSCR approving their new constitution which will come into force on 31st May 2016. The College will become a charitable company limited by guarantee which will provide better risk management for the running of the College and College Trustees.

As was mentioned at the last BUS Council, the churches in membership of our Union will be members of the Scottish Baptist College. Individual church's liability equates to a nominal £1.

Council agreed that the BUS Council will now become the AGM for the College and that the College AGM is conducted during a BUS Council business session.

Date of next Meeting

7th – 8th September 2016, Gartmore House, Stirling