

REPORT
OF THE
ECUMENICAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

The Committee continued over the course of the year to maintain contact with other Churches in the Reformed Faith, fully persuaded that such Churches need not only to maintain good relations and communication but also that they need to cooperate as far as possible gospel ministry in a world where increasing secularisation and humanistic philosophies are ranged against the gospel. For Churches of the Reformed Faith it is increasingly vital that they show and exercise their substantial unity in Jesus Christ, whatever differences there may be in secondary matters. Division amongst those who subscribe to the Reformed Faith continues to be a matter which challenges our resolve and commitment to the unity for which we have been given the Holy Spirit in the bonds of peace.

In the course of the year the Committee engaged in a series of meetings, discussions and correspondence and is pleased to report the following to the Assembly.

1. ICRC The Free Church continues to relate at home and abroad to other Reformed Churches through the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC). There are currently 30 Churches in membership of the ICRC and the next main conference is due to take place in Wales in 2013. The Conference which met in Christchurch in 2009 appointed a Committee of Review to report back to the 2013 Conference. The Clerk to the Committee is a member of this Committee which is tasked with reviewing the structure and operation of the ICRC, the first time this has been done since the formation of the ICRC over 25 years ago. The Committee met recently in Philadelphia and it is expected that a number of substantial changes will be recommended to the next Conference in the hope that these, if implemented, will improve the workings of the ICRC, particularly in the areas of communication and cooperation between Churches.

2. EuCRC Conference Edinburgh Under the auspices of the International Conference of Reformed Churches a fourth European regional conference is due to be held in Kiev, in 2012. Attendance at the Conference is arranged by the member Churches inviting other Churches and groups with which they have a working contact, resulting in some 80 people from more than a dozen Churches throughout Europe attending the last Conference in Edinburgh in March 2010. The practical arrangements and planning for the Conference is done by the Organising Committee comprised of representatives of the member Churches. Some progress has been made since the first conference some five years ago in the area of cooperation in theological education, with a Conference being held in Kampen, Netherlands, recently involving representatives of a number of theological institutions in Europe. The Committee is convinced that the Free Church College can play a major role in advancing the cause of theological education and training in cooperation with other Reformed institutions in Europe and is pleased that Professor John McIntosh is a member of the Organising Committee for the Conference in theological education. It is hoped that similar progress can be achieved in co-operation in evangelism. The Committee wish to commend the EuCRC Conference and all that it has set out as its objectives in theological education and evangelism to all ministers and elders within the Church.

3. Other Church Relations

3.1 United Free Church Informal discussions are still in place between the Committee's three representatives, Rev. Alasdair Macdonald, Rev. Angus Macrae and Rev. David MacPherson, and representatives of the United Free Church. The Committee is again asking the Assembly to agree that the discussions be continued between the two groups of representatives under the direction of the Committee.

3.2 Affinity Rev. David Meredith continues to represent the Committee and the Free Church on the Council of Affinity and is also Chairman of the Gospel Partnership team within Affinity. Through Mr. Meredith the Committee is kept informed of the work of Affinity and is glad to learn that in the last year Affinity has made further progress following a difficult couple of years. The Committee is happy to commend the work of Affinity to the wider Church for their prayerful and practical support.

3.3 Associated Presbyterian Churches As instructed by the last General Assembly the Committee appointed three representatives, Rev David Meredith, Rev. Ian MacAskill and Dr Allan MacPherson, along with

Rev. Dr. Malcolm Maclean and Rev. Jeremy Ross, to meet with representatives of the Associated Presbyterian Churches (APC), who also had appointed three representatives. Having arranged a meeting, unfortunately for a number of reasons this meeting had to be cancelled and to date no further progress has been made in advancing these discussions. The Committee would wish to be able to bring a report with recommendations to the next Assembly in 2012.

3.2 *International Presbyterian Church* The Committee continues to be in correspondence with the International Presbyterian Church, London, through Rev. Paul Levy, Clerk to their Church Relations Committee. It is hoped that further progress can be made in the year ahead with a view to closer relations between the two Churches. The Free Churches in London City and Cobham continue to enjoy good relations with the International Presbyterian Church.

3.3 *ACTS* The Free Church of Scotland is not a member of Action of Churches Together Scotland (ACTS) by deliberate choice. The Committee, however, considers it important to maintain an awareness of ACTS and its work and responded positively to an invitation to Rev David Meredith as Moderator of the last Assembly to attend a meeting of Church Leaders arranged under ACTS. In his report to the Committee Mr. Meredith recommended that the Committee maintain attendance at the meetings of this group but continue to stay outwith membership of ACTS. He also recommended that the Committee appoint a representative as a permanent member of the group. The Committee appointed the Clerk in his role as Principal Clerk of Assembly. Mr. Meredith's report also referred positively to Core Mediation, who had given a presentation of their work, and recommended that Presbyteries could have some of the members trained in mediating and problem resolution by Core Mediation. The Clerk, having contacted Core Mediation to obtain an outline of courses and costs, has passed this matter to the Board of Trustees for their consideration.

3.4 *Presbyterian Church of East Africa* The Committee was contacted in the course of the year by Mr. Neil White, currently seconded from AIM International to Glasgow City Free Church to work with the African community in Glasgow and pastor to a congregation of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEAf). Mr. White had recently met with the General Secretary of the PCEAf who had indicated a desire for closer relations with the Free Church of Scotland, as had the Moderator of the PCEAf last year. The PCEAf is located mostly in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda and has around five million members. The Committee resolved that, as a first step and to obtain more details, Rev. Colin Dow and Mr. White be invited to meet with Dr Allan MacPherson who would then report to the October meeting with his findings. In reporting back to the Committee it was proposed, and the Committee agreed, that it would be sufficient meantime to recognise with approval the link with Glasgow City Free Church and to refer to this in the Assembly Report.

3.5 *Argentina* The Committee was contacted by Rev. Jose Luis Podesta, designated as Moderator of the Free Protestant Church in Argentina, inquiring as to the possibility of the Free Church of Scotland working together with the Free Protestant Church in their mission work in Argentina. The Committee passed this correspondence to the International Missions Board as the more appropriate body to deal with this inquiry.

4. *Visits*

4.1 *PCA Assembly* Rev. Dr. Malcolm Maclean attended the 2010 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of America (PCA), and also promoted *Sing Psalms* on behalf of the Psalmody Committee. The Committee are grateful to Dr. Maclean for his visit.

4.2 *PCEA* The Convener, Rev. Kenneth M. Ferguson, carried out visits to congregations of the Presbyterian Church in Eastern Australia on his way back from the ICRC in New Zealand in October 2009. He was given a warm reception and preached in a number of congregations. This visitation was inadvertently omitted from the Committee's report to the 2010 Assembly. The Committee is grateful to the Convener for his visit.

4.3 *Baptist Union* The Committee is grateful to Rev. Douglas Campbell who attended the opening session of the Baptist Union Assembly, at their invitation, in Dunfermline in October 2010. The visit was profitable and had been appreciated.

4.4 *United Free Church* The Committee is grateful to Rev. Alasdair Macdonald who attended the opening session of the United Free Church Assembly, at their invitation, in June 2010.

4.5 *Lausanne* Rev David Meredith attended the Lausanne Conference in South Africa in 2010 and the Committee is grateful to him for his attendance there.

KENNETH M. FERGUSON, *Convener*

PROPOSED DELIVERANCE

1. The General Assembly receive and adopt the Report of the Committee on Ecumenical Relations.
2. The General Assembly thank the Committee for its work in promoting the interests of the Free Church of Scotland and in seeking to maintain good relations with Churches and Christian organisations in the UK and abroad.
3. The General Assembly thank the Committee for its contacts with the ICRC and they note that a major review is presently being carried out. They direct the Committee to keep the Assembly informed as to the progress of this review and any proposals which may arise out of it.
4. The General Assembly welcome the information provided in the Committee's report concerning the EuCRC and its objectives. They welcome the news that progress has been made in the matter of cooperation in theological education and look forward to hearing of similar progress in regard to cooperation in evangelism.
5. The General Assembly note the ongoing meetings between representatives of the Committee and representatives of the United Free Church of Scotland. The General Assembly approve of further meetings between the two groups under the oversight of the Committee.
6. The General Assembly thank Rev. David Meredith for representing the Free Church on the Council of Affinity. They commend the work of Affinity to the prayers of the Church.
7. The General Assembly thank the Committee for appointing a group to engage with discussions with representatives of the Associate Presbyterian Churches. They note that discussions have yet to take place and they direct the Committee to report on this matter with recommendations to the next general Assembly.
8. The General Assembly thank the Committee for maintaining contact with the International Presbyterian Church. They encourage the Committee to progress matters towards a closer relationship and welcome the good relations between congregations of the International Presbyterian Church and the Free Church of Scotland in the London area.
9. The General Assembly thank Rev. David Meredith for his attendance at meetings of Church leaders arranged by ACTS. They approve of the Committee's resolve that the Free Church of Scotland remain outwith the membership of ACTS. They further approve of the Committee's appointment of the Clerk in his capacity as Principal Clerk of Assembly as a member of the leaders' group and they encourage him in his involvement to promote the theological stance of the Free Church of Scotland in regard to the Lord Jesus Christ alone being the Redeemer of sinners and in regard to justification being by faith alone in him.
10. The General Assembly welcome the link with the Presbyterian Church of East Africa through Glasgow City Free Church. They encourage the Committee, in consultation with Glasgow City Free Church, to maintain a close contact and to seek further ways in which the two Churches might have a closer relationship. They commend Mr. Neil White and his work to the prayers of the Church.
11. The General Assembly welcome the contact with Rev. Jose Luis Podesta, Argentina, and look forward to more information in due course from the International Missions Board.
12. The General Assembly thank Rev. Kenneth M. Ferguson for his visits to congregations of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia in October 2009.
13. The General Assembly thank Rev. Dr. Malcolm Maclean for his attendance at the 2010 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of America and for his promotion of *Sing Psalms* there.

14. The General Assembly thank Rev. Douglas Campbell for his attendance at the opening session of the Baptist Union Assembly in October 2010.

15. The General Assembly thank Rev. Alasdair Macdonald for his attendance at the opening session of the United Free Church Assembly in June 2010.

16. The General Assembly thank Rev. David Meredith for his attendance at the Lausanne Conference in 2010.