

MISSION AND DISCIPLESHIP COUNCIL

FUTURE FOCUS: A WAY FORWARD FOR CONGREGATIONS

The 2008 General Assembly welcomed the publication of *Future Focus: a way forward for congregations* and commended it to congregations seeking to use a facilitated resource.

At the 2007 General Assembly the Council intimated its intention to develop a resource to help congregations develop, and throughout 2007 a Working Party with representation from the Council, the Ministries Council, the Panel on Review and Reform, Elder Trainers and Regional Development Officers has been undertaking the necessary work. The Working Party is indebted to the Rev Peter Neilson who has acted as Consultant for the project, and the Council welcomes Peter's assurance of a willingness to support *Future Focus* through the early stages of delivery.

The 2006 General Assembly agreed, on the Report of the Panel on Review and Reform, the following Vision Statement:

The vision of the Church of Scotland is to be a church which seeks to inspire the people of Scotland and beyond with the Good News of Jesus Christ through enthusiastic worshipping, witnessing and serving communities

The Council believes that if this vision for the Church of Scotland is to become a reality, every congregation needs to reflect prayerfully on its life in the light of the Gospel, and begin on a journey to ensure that every neighbourhood and network in Scotland has access to the Gospel of the grace of God and then responds to the call of Jesus Christ. We believe that God is already at work in every corner of the land if only we have the eyes to see and the readiness to follow Jesus.

Future Focus is a "toolbox" of ideas intended to help congregations understand their situation better, to read the signs of the times, and to answer the call of God to be all that God wants us to be in these challenging times.

Different congregations will need to address different issues. Some will be tentative while others will want to take a longer and more comprehensive look at their current life and future shape. The tools help us look at who we are, where we are and how we tick. We will begin to imagine God's future for us and to take steps into that future together, drawing on the wisdom of those who know how to navigate change and transition.

Research has shown that congregations benefit from having external accompaniment on his journey. *Future Focus* is designed as a resource to be used by a facilitator who will guide a congregation through the various steps of reflection and redirection.

When the 2006 General Assembly affirmed the above vision for the Church of Scotland, it also declared that the purpose of the church is "to glorify God". These tools are offered with the prayer that they will help the Church fulfil that purpose – to put the spotlight on the God we meet in Jesus Christ, and to see His glory reflected through the presence of the Holy Spirit in the communities of Scotland.

The Council has welcomed the ready co-operation of the Panel on Review and Reform and the Ministries Council in the preparation of *Future Focus*, and is pleased to note references to this collaboration in the Reports of the Panel to the 2008 General Assembly (Section 4.5, Page 19/15) and the Council (Section 2.2.5.1.2, Page 3/12).

In particular, the Council welcomes the hopes expressed in the Report of the Panel on Review and Reform of the way in which *Future Focus* could in the future be used in the life of the Church; and offers to be supportive to these initiatives as they develop.

The Council is taking steps to use *Future Focus* through the Development Team with Regional Development Officers being asked to recruit, share in the training of, and work alongside volunteer facilitators, in such a way that the number of people trained and experienced in delivery will grow.

In partnership with others already trained through the work of Rev Peter Neilson with the Ministries Council, and with those to be trained for participation in the pilot scheme detailed by the Panel on Review and Reform, over the coming years it should be possible for every congregation to enjoy the benefits of such facilitated, forward thinking.

The Council commends *Future Focus – a way forward for congregations* as a resource for the whole Church.