

COMMUNICATIONS BOARD

Convener: Rev Dr RA RUSSELL

Secretary: Mr STW LYNAS

1. Since its last report to the General Assembly the Board has continued to consider how to make an effective response to the communications requirements of the Church. In doing so, it has reviewed the history of the Board of Communications from its beginnings as 'Publications and Aids to Worship' through the developments that have led to the present structures of the Board. It has noted how the original technological and social conditions that prompted the Assembly to form a Board to deal with publications, television and broadcasting, public worship, architecture, the Presbyterian Historical Society, the Memorial Record and publications within the Church have evolved over the years as the patterns of our society have changed, often as a result of continued technological development. In addition, it would seem that there was a tendency to place responsibilities with the Board on a miscellaneous basis without consideration of a broad strategy for its work. Thus, as a result of the various Assembly reviews of its Boards various responsibilities of the Board of Communications have been transferred elsewhere. As matters now stand, the Board has been left with two Committees – Communications Administration (jointly convened by the agent for the Presbyterian Historical Society) and Church Architecture. Although the Architecture Committee appears to function well within the Board it would seem that, given the nature of the Board's primary responsibilities, the Board of Communications may not be its obvious natural home. Effectively, therefore, the main work of the Board of Communications has shrunk to duplicate the function of the Communications Administration Committee.

2. The roles of those who work under the oversight of the Board have also altered over the years. The operational demands on our Communications and Press Secretary/Officer have grown in various directions since his appointment in the mid 1990s. Both parts of our island, as well as the wider UK, have seen dramatic political and social change and methods of communication have emerged that were technological dreams more than 15 years ago. The Board has come to the conclusion that it is no longer feasible to combine the growing necessities of public relations, the efficient management of press and media relations, media training and the implementing of communication strategies both within and outside the Church with the management of a department designed for the practical delivery of resources.

3. The present Department continues to be run by skilled and experienced staff who bring strong commitment to their work. However, two of them are now part-time, one position has become vacant since last Assembly and, with a reduced work force, there are severe limitations to what can be achieved. Again, technological and associated social changes have spawned urgent requirements to redesign the Church website (as opposed to keeping it up to date), and provide a wider range of video and other electronic media. The

Board believes that this would best be achieved by new managerial arrangements.

4. Since the middle of the last decade plans have been made for the Board to construct and implement a communications strategy for the Church. The time has come to acknowledge that it has not succeeded. Whatever the internal shortcomings, the Board has concluded that this failure mainly lies with the nature of the Board itself and its present place in the structure of Assembly Boards. The reasons for reaching this conclusion include the conviction that the Board would be unable to deliver any communications strategy with the necessary authority to determine the communications activity of other Boards and agencies. Also, the contraction of the Board's responsibilities has resulted in the difficulty of maintaining a sense of interested involvement from members of the Board – often shown in attendance figures at meetings.

5. The Board met on 3 November, 2010, and, with these considerations in mind, passed the following resolution: *“That the Board of Communications invites the General Board, along with the Communications Department and its Board Officers, to consider how the communications needs of the Church may be effectively carried out in the future and, if appropriate, bring forward proposals for the discharge of the Board of Communications.”* The General Board considered this resolution at its meeting in March 2011 and passed the ensuing resolution: *“That the General Board approves the structure for communications co-ordination under the General Board, as outlined in the Clerk's report, and recommends that the Board of Communications be thanked and discharged at the next Assembly.”*

6. The Communications Board met on 31 March, 2011, and after the sharing of information and discussion, agreed to endorse the recommendation of the General Board according to the resolution submitted below. This was done with the understanding that, since the Board would continue in operation until the General Assembly, Board representatives and Officers would be involved in arranging the details associated with setting up the new Committee under the General Board.

7. In the meantime, the Board continues to address its responsibilities as described in the remainder of this report.

8. In his work as Communications and Press Secretary, Mr Stephen Lynas covers a wide range of responsibilities, from his supervision of the Church's public relations and media services, to managing the work of the Communications Department. The Board has appreciated his judgement and the experience he has gained over the years in guiding those who respond on behalf of the Church through difficult and sometimes delicate relationships with the press and other media. In addition, Stephen has been editing the *Presbyterian Herald* since the beginning of 2008. He has been successful in developing the magazine in a fresh and relevant direction. The possibility that he might retain the position of editor on a permanent basis has been explored, but it was concluded last year that this is a role in which it will be increasingly difficult for him to continue. However, the Board has not been successful in making alternative arrangements and now considers that it would be best to wait for the decision of the Assembly as to the future of the Board.

9. The Communications Department continues to incorporate the offices of information, publication and the production of the *Herald*. Once again the work of our dedicated and skilled staff: Mrs Anne McCully (Administration Manager), Mr Edward Connolly (Production Manager), Mrs Sarah Harding (Projects Manager). As with others in Church House, they have had to cope with the disruption of temporary accommodation and are looking forward to new facilities in the refurbished building.

10. During the year the Historical Society moved out of Church House to its new residence at 26 College Green, Belfast, BT7 1LN; Tel. no. (028) 9072 7330. This required considerable expense (so far approximately £23,600, for which an appeal brought in £17,150) and a considerable amount of hard work, especially for the Librarian, Miss Valerie Adams, and the office bearers of the Society.

11. The opening hours are Tuesday and Wednesday 9.30am-1pm; 1.30pm-4.30pm; Thursday 9.30am-1pm.

12. In addition to the usual varied programme of lectures and the annual *Bulletin*, the major publishing event was the reprint of the autobiography of Robert Blair of Bangor, including, as an introduction, Dr. John Lockington's lecture on Blair. This was launched in May 2011 and sells for £20.

13. Finally, gratitude is expressed for the work of the Committee Conveners. Mr Maurice McNicholl, Convener of the Communications Administration Committee, has been invaluable in helping to think through the proposals for the future of communications in the Church. His Co-Convener, the Rev Ivor Smith, continues to raise awareness of the work of the Presbyterian Historical Society. The Church Architecture Committee, which also functions under the supervision of the Board, is ably convened by the Rev George Simpson. The Board would pay tribute to its thoughtful and thorough work as outlined in its own report.

14. This report ends with the aspirations and prayers of the Communications Board for whatever future arrangements the Assembly might make for the communications needs of our Church. It also looks back with thankfulness to achievements made under the Board and for the work and thoughtful support that so many people have given from the setting up of the Board of Publications and Aids to Worship in 1976 to the decisions of the General Assembly of 2011.

The Rev Dr Donald Watts writes:

Thanks are also due to the Rev Dr Alan Russell who, as Convener, has led the work of the Board since 2009. It is to his credit that he has seen the vital role of communications as more important for the Church than the preservation of any particular structure and so has brought this insightful report to the General Assembly.

CHURCH ARCHITECTURE COMMITTEE

1. The Committee has met on 9 occasions since the last report.

2. Fifty-four submissions were dealt with and these ranged from new Church buildings, new Church halls, new manses, audio/visual installations, stained glass windows, major and minor renovations.

3. A number of site visits were made by some of the Committee members and these proved very useful.

4. It is always helpful if Congregations submit plans at an early stage and preferably before working drawings are produced. Guidance is given by the Convener to any who are unsure of the procedure.

5. All submissions receive a written reply immediately after the Committee meeting.

6. In September a visit to a number of recently renovated Church properties in London proved to be of benefit to the Committee.

7. Sincere thanks are expressed to all the members of the Committee who have supported and encouraged the Convener during his Convener'ship, which has proved to be an interesting and pleasant task.

8. Many thanks to Anne McCully who faithfully sends out the minutes after every meeting, and to the Architects for giving their time and expertise so willingly and completely free of charge.

GEORGE SIMPSON, Convener

RESOLUTIONS

1. That the Report be received.

2. That a grant of £1,000 for 2011 be paid from the Incidental Fund to the Church Architecture Committee.

3. That a grant of £16,750 be paid from the Incidental Fund to the Presbyterian Historical Society.

4. That the resignation of the Rev George Simpson as Convener of the Church Architecture Committee be accepted, that he be thanked for his services, and _____ appointed in his place.

5. That the Church Architecture Committee be transferred to the supervision of the Board of Mission in Ireland.

6. That the resignations of Mr Maurice McNicholl and the Rev Ivor Smith as Co-Conveners of the Communications Administration Committee be accepted and that they be thanked for their services.

7. That the Presbyterian Historical Society be invited to report annually to the General Board.

8. That the resignation of the Rev Dr Alan Russell as Convener of the Communications Board be accepted and that he be thanked for his services.

9. That the Board of Communications together with its associated Committees be thanked and discharged and its responsibilities transferred to a Committee to be formed under the supervision of the General Board.