

# **Covenant Fellowship Scotland Strategy Document**

## **Introduction**

Covenant Fellowship Scotland believes that the Church of Scotland is moving away from its roots in Scripture and the Westminster Confession of Faith. We believe that the time has come to draw together those in the Church who believe that the Scriptures, in their entirety, are the Word of God and must provide the basis for everything we believe and do. Our vision is nothing less than the reformation and renewal of the Church of Scotland, in accordance with the Word of God and by the empowering of his life-giving Spirit.

In light of the above, Covenant Fellowship Scotland deeply regrets the decision taken by the 2015 General Assembly of the Church of Scotland to permit those in same-sex civil partnerships to serve as ministers and deacons within the Church. In doing so, the Church is contravening both Scripture and our Confession of Faith, as was made clear by many who spoke clearly and graciously during the Assembly debate. We call on the Church of Scotland to repent of this unbiblical decision and to seek forgiveness from God, who alone sets moral standards and whose voice on this matter is clearly heard in the Scriptures.

We do this as a body of believers who ourselves need, receive and are dependent upon the redeeming grace of God on a daily basis, conscious as we are of our own individual and collective besetting sins. We do so also as those who believe that the blessings of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus are freely available to all irrespective of gender, race, sexual orientation or any other human characteristic and we desire to fellowship, as Jesus did, with all broken women and men who desire to submit themselves to his authority as Lord and Saviour.

We know that the Assembly's decision has caused great pain and sorrow throughout the Church and that many people are prayerfully considering how to respond. Some feel that the only way to protest is to leave the Church of Scotland. Some ministers, elders, members and adherents have done so already and more will follow. While respecting that position, our vision is to remain within the Church in order to seek its reformation from within. We hope and pray that the Church can be brought back to its roots in the Bible and the reformed faith and it is our intention to work tirelessly for the realisation of that goal.

## **Plan of Action**

The trustees of Covenant Fellowship Scotland met on Monday 8th - Tuesday 9th to consider a three-fold strategy. First, the need for an immediate response to the decisions of the General Assembly regarding Ministers and Deacons in same-sex Civil Partnerships and the decision (now coming down to Presbyteries under Barrier Act procedure) to extend this further to include Ministers and Deacons in same-sex 'marriages'. Second, the need to develop a programme for the reformation of the Church of Scotland according to the Word of God. Third, the need to prepare for the possibility that the Church of Scotland will depart even further from its roots in Scripture and the Reformed faith. Thus we considered a short-term, medium-term and long-term strategy.

## **Short-Term**

It is our conviction that, in making the decision to permit those in same-sex Civil Partnerships to become Ministers and Deacons of the Church of Scotland, the General Assembly has acted contrary to the plain teaching of Scripture and has also rejected the biblical teaching on marriage as expressed in our Church's Confession of Faith. Having made that unbiblical decision, the General Assembly is now consulting Presbyteries with the intention of extending this disobedience to God's Word even further, by also agreeing to appoint as Ministers and Deacons those who have entered into same-sex 'marriages'. To that end we have agreed the following:

First, we look to the Lord asking that in wrath he will remember mercy. We recall 2 Chronicles 20 where the people of God faced a huge and apparently insurmountable problem. Strikingly they said, 'Lord, we do not know what to do but our eyes are upon you.' The Lord made it clear to them that the battle was his, not theirs and that he would act on their behalf, as he did. The response of the people was to worship the Lord and to trust in him. That is our attitude as we face the current crisis in the Church.

Second, we call upon members and adherents of the Church of Scotland to join with us in taking a stand against these actions of the General Assembly. It is our intention to build a strong grassroots movement of men and women who are not prepared to allow our Church to be led astray by the prevailing party within the General Assembly, but who continue to affirm the biblical position with regard to human sexuality and marriage as reflected in the Church's historic and current doctrine and practice. There are various things we would urge members

and adherents to do: 1. We urge you to pray, both individually and corporately, asking the Lord to turn the Church back. In addition, it is our intention later in the year to organise a day of prayer and fasting, when all of us together will seek the Lord's mercy. 2. We urge you to work for the evangelisation of Scotland. Only as men and women are converted to Christ and become convinced of the truth and reliability of God's Word will our church and our nation be changed. 3. We urge you to register your support for CFS. This can be done on our website, by email or by letter. The details can be found at the end of this statement. 4. We urge you to make use of our CFS website where news, information, articles, videos and other material will be posted over future weeks and months. 5. We urge you to write to your Kirk Session, Presbytery and to the Principal Clerk's office, indicating in a gracious manner your concern over what the General Assembly has done. Many members and adherents are telling us how upset they are at never having had an opportunity to let their voice be heard on this matter. Please take this opportunity to speak up. These matters are too important to leave solely to those who are commissioners to the General Assembly, we need every member and adherent of the Church who shares our basic concerns to stand with us.

Third, we call upon the Elders of the Church to use their influence to help re-direct the Church. In every Kirk Session, the Elders make up 100% of the voting members and in Presbytery and General Assembly the Elders are 50% of the voting membership. The potential for Elders to change the Church is huge and we encourage Elders to take up this responsibility. In particular, raise the matter of the General Assembly's decision at Kirk Session, if there has been no discussion so far, and do not allow Ministers to try and close down discussion. You might consider moving a motion to the effect that your Kirk Session holds to the traditional position of the Church and rejects the decision of the General Assembly. We also encourage Kirk Sessions to express support for CFS.

Fourth, we call upon all members of Presbyteries to vote against the Overture which would extend the provisions of the new Act to cover those in same-sex 'marriages'. We also call on all members of Presbyteries to resist the ordination and/or induction of anyone in a same-sex relationship, or indeed of anyone in a relationship that is not in agreement with the teaching of Scripture and the historic and orthodox position of the Church with regard to human sexuality. Just because the General Assembly passes an Act does not make it right. In the history of the Church of Scotland there have been times when faithful men and women were prepared to resist the decisions of the Courts of the Church when these decisions were plainly contrary to

Scripture. We believe that this is just such an occasion. We recognise that this will put us on a collision course with the General Assembly but believe that this is the only honourable position to take. Some might argue that, on the basis of our ordination vows we are obliged to obey the decisions of the General Assembly but this is not true. A Minister vows ‘to be subject in the Lord to the courts of the Church’ and the words ‘in the Lord’ must be taken seriously. Our promise to obey is not an unconditional vow but a vow conditioned by our loyalty to a higher authority than the General Assembly, namely, the authority of the Lord. Where a court acts in a manner contrary to the clear teaching of Scripture we have not only a right to disobey but a duty to disobey. ‘We must obey God rather than men’ (Acts 5:29). Another ordination vow which is often quoted is the vow to seek to maintain the unity and peace of the Church. Truth, however, is as important as unity. To be united in error is the path to the ruin of the Church rather than to the peace of the Church.

Fifth, we would like to offer support to congregations which have been divided and damaged by this issue of same-sex relations and to those who are considering leaving the Church of Scotland. We would be happy to meet with Kirk Sessions or congregations in these circumstances and to offer support and encouragement. The message has been widely disseminated that either we stay in the Church, in which case we are tainted and share in the sinful disobedience of the Church at this point, or, we leave the Church. We would appreciate the opportunity to present a third option, namely, remaining in the Church as part of a movement which rejects the decision of the General Assembly and is committed to working for its reformation. We refuse to be compromised but we remain with integrity as those who support the stand being taken by CFS.

Sixth, it is our intention to hold meetings for worship, preaching, fellowship and discussion in early autumn in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Inverness and Stornoway. At these gatherings we will be open to hearing of other ways in which we might offer a spirited resistance to the current trajectory of the Church.

Seventh, we recognise that the Church of Scotland is not the first Church to face this issue and so we intend to consult with like-minded colleagues in other churches who have faced (or are facing) this issue and seek their advice and help. We are grateful for the support and encouragement of many in other denominations within Scotland and in our sister churches

around the world who are rightly appalled by this decision. We covet your prayers and value our partnership in the gospel as we seek to stand for the truth within the Church of Scotland.

### **Medium-Term**

The trustees of CFS would like to make it clear that we are not a ‘one issue’ group. The issue which has presented itself concerns same-sex relationships but it could easily have been other issues. The underlying problem is the failure of the Church to make all its decisions according to the Word of God and in line with our reformed theology. To that end, CFS intends to embark on a programme that seeks the reformation and renewal of the Church of Scotland. This will involve various strands:

First, we want to remind people of what the Bible says on various key issues. In the course of the debate on same-sex relations and the ministry since 2009, a great deal has been said about the law of God, the love of God and the doctrine of the Church, much of which we believe to be inaccurate and unhelpful. We intend to address some of these issues on our website. We believe that the Scriptures have a clarity and unity which leave us in no doubt as to what God is saying. We want to go ‘back to basics’ and remind people of what the Bible actually says. Our Confession states that Scripture is ‘God’s Word written.’ That is the position we seek to affirm. There are various ways in which we shall do this, including the writing of a series of papers (which will be put on our website) entitled ‘What the Bible says about...’

Second, it is our intention to arrange gatherings of Ministers and Elders to remind ourselves of what the Church actually believes and why. We hope for a resurgence of interest in our reformed theology, by reminding people what it means to be a Church in the reformed tradition. The Articles Declaratory of the Church of Scotland says that we ‘adhere to the Scottish Reformation’. In other words, we understand the Bible to teach certain key doctrines, as did the founders of the Church at the Reformation in 1560. Sadly this history and theology have been largely ignored and there has developed a ‘believe what you like’ mentality. We must recover these convictions and work out what a reformed theology will look like today, a Church which is reformed in theology and fit for purpose in the 21st century.

Third, CFS wants to work with others who have the same vision for a Church which is biblical and reformed. To that end, we want to encourage a new generation of evangelicals to study for the ministry. We are also happy to commend good biblical and theological materials

prepared and made available by a number of organisations, including resources on issues such as coping with same-sex attraction and how congregations, while remaining faithful to the Bible's teaching on human sexuality and marriage, can, nevertheless, be genuinely welcoming to those who identify with the LGBT community.

Fourth, we must prepare for the future of the Church by bringing up our children to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and to play a part in the life of the Church. We must also educate our children (at home, in Sunday School, in youth fellowship and in Bible study groups), teaching them the Scriptures and explaining the doctrines of the faith. We must also inspire them, not least by telling them the stories of the history of our Church and of Christian mission at home and overseas. They are going to be the future leaders of the Church and we must ensure that, when that day comes, they are properly equipped and prepared.

Fifth, we urge all members and adherents to 'get stuck in' and play a full part in the life of the Church. We cannot stand outside and criticise the decisions made by courts, councils and committees if we are not prepared to serve on these. Every Autumn, Ministers and Kirk Sessions receive nomination forms to recommend people for various councils and committees. Let's make sure that we make use of this opportunity.

### **Long-Term**

Our vision is nothing less than the reformation and renewal of the Church of Scotland in accordance with the Word of God and by the empowering of his life-giving Spirit. We believe that God has called us to engage in this work and we do so with enthusiasm. Despite our many failings and shortcomings there are many evidences that God is still working in and through the Church of Scotland. Many good and encouraging things are happening up and down the country. We press on with our God-given calling with our eyes fixed upon our gracious, sovereign Lord who alone has the power to renew and revive us.

We reject the claims of some that the Church of Scotland is 'apostate'. This shows a clear failure to understand the meaning of that word. The Church of Scotland, by its actions at the General Assembly, has fallen into serious moral error but it is not yet apostate. Nevertheless, we recognise that it is possible for a Church to move to a place where it is no longer a Christian Church and our decision to remain in the Church of Scotland and work for its reformation and renewal is not unconditional. If the Church were to come to the place where it denied those

Cardinal doctrines which identify a true Church of Jesus Christ (for example, the doctrines of the Apostles' Creed) then we would have no option but to leave. We will either be forced to leave the Church of Scotland, or (as has been done in the past) we will have to pursue a legal route whereby we claim to be the true Church of Scotland. We hope and pray that this day will never come but, if it does, we will be ready for this and will have made appropriate plans.

**The Trustees of Covenant Fellowship Scotland:**

Mr Kenneth Mackenzie (Chairman)

The Rev Andrew Barrie

The Rev Richard Buckley

The Rev Mike Goss

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