

# They've asked me to be... Church Secretary

*'I can't type, or take shorthand and I am only a learner with a computer  
- surely there would be some better equipped to be Church Secretary!'*

These indicate some of the common misconceptions concerning the role of the Church Secretary. The emphasis is on the CHURCH secretary and this gives an idea of the immense scope of the job. No two Church Secretaries will see their responsibilities in the same way. In some churches the Church Secretary is very much the local lay leader who carries most of the burdens of administration and organization, being responsible to the Elders and Church Meeting. Elsewhere the Church Secretary may have more clearly defined duties and work within a team of leaders e.g. Elders, Minister, Assistant Secretary/Administrator, pulpit supply, worship leaders, pastoral secretary etc.

It is clear therefore that the responsibilities of the Church Secretary will be unique to your own church. Hopefully, however, this leaflet will help you think through some of the aspects of being a Church Secretary.

*'Whilst it is a great privilege to be called to serve as a Church Secretary, it is also a great challenge'* writes one Church Secretary, continuing *'above all it is essential to know that your work is part of God's work and forwarding His work in the Church and in the locality'*

Could this be your calling? – then read on!

## The Person

A good Church Secretary needs to be:

- ✓ **Proficient**  
Gifts of leadership, encouragement and inspiration are needed, together with an ability to see issues through. Much time and energy are needed as change is managed, vision is sought and mission implemented. The Church Secretary will have a key role in this, together with other leaders.
- ✓ **Pastoral**  
It is essential that the Church Secretary has a pastoral heart. The relationship between the Church Secretary and the Minister is vital and needs to be nurtured. There will also be a need for confidentiality and trust in areas of church development, conflict and individual pastoral needs. The confidentiality of the Elders' meeting is shared with the other Elders. Tact, diplomacy and integrity all play a part in the work of a pastorally minded Church Secretary.
- ✓ **Positive**  
A Church Secretary with a positive attitude to the life and future mission of the Church will find that such an attitude will rub off on the other leaders and the congregation as a whole. In many churches the Church Secretary is given power by the church and without a positive prayerful attitude the Church Secretary will soon become a barrier to growth. The Church Secretary, like all leaders, will need to develop a healthy amnesia for past problems, failures and conflicts.

## The Appointment

A Church Secretary will normally be an ordained Elder of the United Reformed Church

The appointment is made by the Church Meeting, sometimes at the recommendation of the Elders, or appointment group. The exact way in which the election takes place will vary but it is essential for the Church Secretary to have the support of the congregation as a whole. The appointment should not be seen as 'never ending'. There are many advantages in making fixed term appointments e.g. of five years, with an additional term of not more than a further five.

## Councils of the Church

The Church Secretary needs to make sure that these meetings (Elders' meetings, Church Meeting and other task groups) run properly. A skill that the Church Secretary needs to develop is discernment over which meeting to take certain items of business to.

Typical issues to be addressed are:

- Frequency and dates of meetings
- Arrangement of agendas
- Chairing of meetings
- Minutes
- Church rules where appropriate
- Special meetings e.g. A.G.M's, elections, vacancy, etc

It is important to remember that the church has a decision making process. The Church Secretary's role is to facilitate and work with the church councils and not to approve or reject such decisions.

### **Correspondence**

The Church Secretary will often be the first point of correspondence. Along with the Minister the Church Secretary is often seen as the key contact person. The Secretary will need to pass on correspondence where appropriate. Typical types of correspondence are:

- From members of the congregation or Church Organizations
- From the wider URC, local pastorate/group of URC's, District, Synod or General Assembly/ national level. This might be general correspondence and information or specific forms e.g. annual statistical returns and General Assembly Resolutions for church discussion.
- From ecumenical partners
- From secular bodies

### **Working with the Minister**

A good working relationship is needed, with honesty, trust and encouragement. The exact relationship will be dependent on the local ministry arrangements. As one Church Secretary puts it *'I consider a Church Secretary must also be a support to the Minister, to encourage, to listen, and if necessary to act as a sounding board for possible ideas for change'* Another Church Secretary writes *'I found that I was sometimes able to pick up undercurrents which the Minister could not be aware of. It is helpful to keep a finger on the pulse of the congregation'*. It is sometimes necessary for the Secretary to encourage the Minister in the area of rest, relaxation and family life where applicable.

### **Vacancies**

The Church Secretary will have an increased workload during a vacancy. Correspondence and matters that might have normally come via the Minister will come to the Church Secretary. There are matters relating to profiles, vacancy meetings, meetings with prospective Ministers that the Church Secretary, together with the Interim Moderator, will need to deal with.

### **Other Matters**

The following matters are not necessarily directly undertaken by the Church Secretary but they will need to ensure that they are dealt with properly.

Church records: Maintaining registry of baptisms, church membership lists, minute books, other archive material

Proper storage of marriage documents

Elders' duty rotas, notices etc

Other worship duties, communion, pulpit supply

Elders' pastoral lists

Working with other officers e.g. Treasurer, Property Officer, Lettings Manager, etc.

Publicity, notice boards etc.

**All in all, the work of a Church Secretary is vital, serving the church and helping to enable its mission. The work is demanding and sometimes frustrating and needs to be taken on with faith in Christ and love for His Church and His world.**