

Background Information about ACTS for General Secretary Job Applicants.

Basis, Aims and the Churches Together principle.

As presently constituted, ACTS dates back to 1990 though there is a history of formal ecumenical working in Scotland going back to the 1960s. The basis of the 1990 body is shared with those of the other ecumenical instruments in Britain and Ireland.

‘Action of Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS) unites in pilgrimage those churches in Scotland which, acknowledge God’s revelation in Christ, confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the Scriptures and in obedience to God’s will and in the power of the Holy Spirit, commit themselves

to seek a deepening of their communion with Christ and with one another in the Church, which is His body, and

to fulfil their mission to proclaim the Gospel by common witness and service in the world

to the Glory of the One God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.’

This basis is expressed through three aims:

- **Oneness**
 - to become a fuller realisation of the unity that Christ wills, in accordance with the prayer, “that they all may be one; even as thou, Father art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that thou has sent me” (John 17:21);
 - to express the degree of unity that is already theirs by Christ’s gift, their commitment to one another, and their resolve to continue as Pilgrims Together;
- **Growth of understanding and Common Life**
 - to grow into a greater unity of mind and heart through experience of each other’s living tradition of spirituality and worship;
 - to co-operate through prayer, theological reflection and consultation, at local and national levels, in all that concerns their common life, especially the nature, purpose and unity of the Church;
 - to work through joint study towards a Christian evaluation on moral and social issues.
- **Unified Action**
 - to co-operate as far as possible in
 - proclaiming the gospel so as to evoke a personal commitment to Christ and his Church;
 - obeying the Gospel in practical response to the life and needs of the community, the nation and the world;
 - witnessing to Christian moral and social values, in a critical phase of human history;
 - bringing Christian perspectives on the above matters into dialogue with the secular authorities.

and is lived out in four expressions:

- **Worshipping Together**, an expression of our need at all times to pray together to the Lord and including the experiencing of each other’s living tradition of spirituality and worship.
- **Studying Together** – beginning with Scripture, through prayer, theological reflection and consultation co-operating in all that concerns the common life of the churches, especially the nature, purpose and unity of the Church at local and national levels and issues of social and moral concern.

- **Serving the Community Together** – identifying projects to support or initiate which can demonstrate Christian witness, including education and justice and peace issues.
- **Proclaiming Together** – so as to evoke a personal commitment to Christ and his Church in ways that respond to the life and needs of the community, the nation and the world including press releases, publications and church representation in the national sphere.

The Churches Together model asks of the Churches that they hold out what is important to them in the expectation that that will be respected. Divisions are acknowledged but are not allowed to impede those things that can be done together. Authority lies with the churches and is expressed differently by the churches. Unless this is taken seriously, ACTS will continue to be a source of frustration. In committing themselves to the Churches Together model the Churches themselves take responsibility for the agenda. It is the denominations that are responsible for the task of advocating the ecumenical principle both locally and nationally. It is the task of ACTS to provide space for ecumenical formation, **ACTS has no agenda apart from the Churches**. Or, put another way, **ACTS cannot do anything apart from the Churches**.¹

Structure.

ACTS presently has nine member churches². Operating on the churches together principle the churches come together as the Scottish Churches' Forum and as four Networks relating to the four expressions above (Worshipping Together – Church Life, Studying Together – Faith Studies, Serving Together – Church and Society and Proclaiming Together – Mission). The Forum and the Networks provide opportunities for member churches to bring their denominational agendas to the table for information sharing, the sharing of mutual concerns and discerning common action. A number of specialist ecumenical groups which belong to the churches also feed into the ecumenical conversation eg. Healthcare Chaplains. There is a Scottish Parliamentary Officer based in Edinburgh. The Officer participates in the Church and Society network and the ACTS Network Officer links with the Parliamentary Office advisory group. The Parliamentary Office is not part of the ACTS structure directly but is an Associated Ecumenical group. ACTS seeks to resource local expressions of ecumenism, although there is no formal place for such groups within the national structure. ACTS facilitates the work of the Scottish Churches National Sponsoring Body for Local Ecumenical Partnerships on behalf of its member churches.

Staffing.

ACTS has four core staff, a General Secretary, Assistant General Secretary and two Network Officers. The General Secretariat is responsible for implementing the work of the Forum, Standing Committees, and the Sponsoring Body. It also develops relationships with the churches, ecumenical organisations and civic society. The Network Officers implement the work of the Networks and the specialist ecumenical groups. They are all based in Alloa. There is a strong ethos of collaborative working across the team with each member of staff being responsible for their own workload from the beginning to completion. All administrative and financial work is currently handled within the Secretariat. In addition ACTS employs two part time Project Staff who are also based within the ACTS Office though the funding for these posts comes from outwith the ACTS budget. These are the CAIRS Education Officer and the Scottish Churches Racial Justice Officer.

¹ Basis. Aims and Churches Together Principle material drawn from The Basis of a New of Working' adopted by the Central Council of Scottish Churches Council June 2002.

² Church of Scotland, Congregational Federation, Methodist Church, Religious Society of Friends, Roman Catholic Church, Salvation Army, Scottish Episcopal Church, United Free Church of Scotland, United Reformed Church