



THE BONAR TRUST

## GOSPEL WORKERS FOR THE CHURCH IN SCOTLAND

[www.bonartrust.org](http://www.bonartrust.org)

Contact: Eleanor Dawson (Trust Administrator)  
administrator@bonartrust.org

---

### Preaching Conferences – Concept and Format

#### Why it matters:

Jesus, the chief shepherd of his people (1 Pet. 4:5), leads the Church through His Word (1 Tim. 4:6-16, 2 Tim. 4:1-2). In a local church this is expressed through elders who teach the Bible as under-shepherds (1 Pet. 5:2; 1 Tim. 3:1-5), one or more of whom are often set apart to bear the significant preaching responsibility (referred to as ministers, pastors or church leaders) (1 Tim. 5:17-18). Among the most important things a minister/pastor does, therefore, is preach, and so being equipped to preach should be central to their training.

#### What we are doing:

The Bonar Trust runs short residential preaching conferences for small groups of peers to meet annually. The cost of the conference is included in the grant funding, such is the importance placed on this training input. Leaders in Training are funded by the Trust for 3 or 4 years, and so we expect them to commit to an annual Bonar Trust preaching conference with the same group of people over those years. This creates a peer group who get to know and trust one another and so can work hard together on strengthening their preaching, as well as providing support and encouragement for ongoing growth in personal godliness as leaders. It is very encouraging that the first group, having completed their formal training and are now ministers/pastors in churches, continue to meet annually to work on their preaching.

#### Who leads the conferences:

Each conference has two-three leaders: one leads the teaching and the others assist with feedback on preaching and in wider discussion. While the groups stay the same year on year, leaders may change. Our current leaders are:

- Robin Sydserff, Chair of The Bonar Trust and Senior Minister at Chalmers Church Edinburgh;
- Paul Clarke, Trustee of The Bonar Trust, Convenor of the Board of Ministry in the Free Church of Scotland and Senior Minister at St Andrews Free Church;
- Roger Day, Associate Minister (with oversight of training) at Chalmers Church Edinburgh;
- Andy Robertson, Minister of Charleston Community Church (a plant of St Peter's Free Church) with 20 Schemes;
- Ali Sewell, Minister at Haddington Free Church;
- Peter Turnbull, Minister at Burghead Free Church;
- Rupert Hunt-Taylor, Minister at Edinburgh North Church Edinburgh.

#### The format of a conference:

Each residential conference runs from morning (10.30am) to early afternoon the following day (3.00pm). The focus is on one Bible book or section of a book, e.g. 1 Peter. Each delegate is asked to pre-record a sermon on an allocated passage. The deadline for this is one month before the conference, allowing time for people to listen to them before we meet. Leaders allocate the passages.

#### What happens on the conference itself?

- Two-three plenary sessions on how to preach the particular book;
- Three small-group breakout sessions with one leader to give feedback on the pre-prepared sermons;
- Time together in the evening to talk about wider issues in ministry / leadership.

#### Why do we ask delegates to prepare, preach and record a sermon beforehand?

- It helps to become familiar with the Bible book in advance, making the best use of the time when we meet;
- Much better feedback and discussion are possible when the group and leader are able to listen beforehand.

Why do we focus on a particular book of the Bible?

- God has given us his Word as a collection of books, each with pastoral purpose. Teaching the whole counsel of God involves a lifetime of learning to listen to and proclaim each of these unique books for his people's growth.
- Other helpful theological training focuses on the Bible's big picture (systematic, historical or biblical theology) or the minutiae (close exegesis, Biblical languages), but rarely do young pastors get to study whole Bible books for themselves, which is central to preaching them well, applying them faithfully and so feeding Christ's flock.