

THEOLOGICAL FORUM MAY 2023

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Approve the Confessions of Faith Overture as set out in Appendix 1 and transmit the same to Presbyteries for their consideration under the provisions of Article VIII of the Articles Declaratory in Matters Spiritual (1921), directing that returns be sent to the Principal Clerk not later than 31 December 2023 (*Section 2; Appendix 1*).
3.
 - (a) Receive the Report "The Calling of the Church" as a response to the instruction given by the General Assembly of 2022 (*Section 3; Appendix 2*).
 - (b) Approve and adopt this report as an expression of the Church's calling and purpose.
 - (c) Instruct the Faith Nurture Forum to raise awareness of the calling and purpose of the Church.
 - (d) Instruct the Faith Nurture Forum to provide resources to enable every member of the Church to discover and develop their giftings and callings.
 - (e) Instruct the Faith Nurture Forum to introduce training for Ministers of Word and Sacrament in recognising, developing, and deploying the gifts of members and Elders.
 - (f) Instruct the Theological Forum, the Faith Nurture Forum, and the Ecumenical Relations Committee to explore options for widening access to ordained sacramental ministries within the Church in light of the principles contained in the 2019 Report of the Sacramental Ministry Working Group, and report to the General Assembly of 2024.
 - (g) Instruct the Theological Forum and the Faith Nurture Forum to investigate the production of pastoral guidance on situations where a minister or congregation's sense of call is not affirmed by the Presbytery during its planning processes.
4. Instruct the Theological Forum to explore the theology of transgender identities within the context of the Church's life and ministry, and report to the General Assembly of 2024 (*Section 4*).

Report

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Theological Forum was established by the General Assembly of 2013 to 'resource, express and challenge the theology that informs the life and work of the Church'. Its remit is to:

- (a) articulate and develop the doctrinal understanding of the Church in accordance with Holy Scripture and with reference to the confessional standards of the Church of Scotland;
- (b) express the theological vision of the Church in its worship, fellowship, witness and mission in and beyond contemporary Scotland;
- (c) respond to particular theological requests as and when these arise from the General Assembly, the Council of Assembly and the ecumenical partners of the Church;
- (d) draw to the attention of the General Assembly theological matters which the Theological Forum considers to be of pressing contemporary relevance;
- (e) stimulate wider theological reflection throughout the Church on key doctrinal, ethical and apologetic matters through the provision of appropriate materials and other activities.

1.2 The Forum has continued to serve this wide-ranging remit and over the last year has concentrated on those issues assigned to it by the General Assembly of 2022. Its work has been carried out through substantial reading, discussion, reflection and prayer in its meetings, and through consultation with the other Councils, Committees and Fora of the Church. The Forum has also advised upon a spectrum of issues that have arisen out of enquiries received from the wider Church. The following Report and Appendices are offered as an update on work carried out throughout 2022.

2. WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH

2.1 The General Assembly of 2018 passed an Overture from the Presbytery of Melrose and Peebles, instructing the Theological Forum:

- (1) *to review the reports and debates on the role of the Westminster Confession of Faith in the Church's life arising from the General Assembly of 1968 and the years following;*
- (2) *to give fresh consideration to the issues raised therein in light of developments within Reformed and ecumenical theology since 1646 in which the Church of Scotland has been actively involved;*
- (3) *to advise the General Assembly on the continuing role of a 'Subordinate Standard';*
- (4) *to look afresh at the wording and terms of reference of the Formula of subscription used in services of ordination;*
- (5) *to explore the possibility of producing a Book of Confessions, in print and/or on-line as a teaching resource for office-bearers, members and enquirers;*
- (6) *to report to the General Assembly of 2020.*

2.2 The work carried out to date in obedience to this instruction has included a conference^[i], an interim report in 2021^[ii], a webinar, a consultation with Presbyteries, Kirk Sessions and individuals, a video resource^[iii] and a final report bringing firm proposals to the 2022 General Assembly^[iv].

2.3 Our 2022 report found that the Westminster Confession of Faith has played an important part in the history of the Church of Scotland, and has long been accorded particular honour and status in formal terms as its principal subordinate standard. In practice, however, the Westminster Confession now has a limited role in the life of the Church, and several statements of the Confession are considered problematic in the present-day Church of Scotland. The apparently literal claim that the world was created in six days is felt by some office holders to be at odds with the findings of contemporary science. Similarly, the Confession's statement concerning predestination, that 'some men and angels are predestined [by God] to everlasting life; while others are foreordained [by God] to everlasting death'^[v] is considered unbiblical by some, who view it as at odds with the God of love. Because the majority of office holders have not been able to fully commit to the Confession for some time, the relation of Church office holders to the Confession has been carefully limited by the vows required by the Church since 1929, by which office holders declare their belief in the basic Christian doctrines contained in the Confession but not the entire Confession itself. This has, however, created the current situation in which the Church of Scotland has a subordinate standard that many of its office holders reject, and vows which they do not always understand. The report concluded that this was an unsatisfactory situation that requires correction.

2.4 The 2022 General Assembly received the Forum's report, and approved its proposals. In line with this, with the Legal Questions Committee, the Forum is now bringing an Overture effecting the creation of a Book of Confessions, and corresponding changes to the vows and subscription of office holders. The Book of Confessions will contain the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, The Scots Confession, The Westminster Confession of Faith, and the 1992 Statement of Faith. If the overture is accepted, these will form the subordinate standards of the Church of Scotland. The new vows will explicitly identify the location of the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds. These creeds are short and relatively accessible, and should help ministers, elders and other office holders to disciple enquirers and work with those interested in the Christian faith, as well as promoting ecumenical partnerships with the many other Christian Churches that also accept these creeds. Nevertheless, by retaining the Westminster Confession as a subordinate standard, and adding the Scots Confession and 1992 Statement of Faith, the Reformed character of the Church of Scotland will be maintained. Commissioners who wish to understand more of the reasoning behind our proposals will find our full 2022 report on the Church website.

2.5 The Forum therefore commends these proposals to the Assembly for approval. The Forum is grateful to all those who have taken time to engage with this important work, and would like to thank the Faith Nurture Forum and the Legal Questions Committee for their support and guidance throughout. The Theological Forum will continue to consult the wider Church on its proposals for confessional reform.

3. THE CALLING OF THE CHURCH

3.1 The Forum began first to consider the purpose and calling of the Church in response to specific questions on these subjects brought by office holders, and other individuals in the Church. Furthermore, in 2022, the General Assembly approved the following deliverance:

The Assembly instruct the Theological Forum, in consultation with other relevant parties, to prepare a Report with recommendations for a future General Assembly on a theological and missiological understanding and practice of church membership. The Forum considered that both issues could helpfully be addressed together, and consequently presents the appended report, "The Calling of the Church", to the General Assembly.

3.2 As the Assembly will be aware, the Forum's discussions proceeded within a context of a reorganisation of presbyteries and ministerial posts in the wider church, and during ongoing debate on whether authorisation to administer the sacraments should be limited to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament and Ordained Local Ministry. Beyond these specific issues, however, the Church's calling is obviously a vital subject to address given the scepticism in wider society regarding the usefulness of the Christian Church at all in a secular age. The Church's own ministers and congregations need a clear sense of their own call if they are to be able to fulfil that within their local communities. The subject is therefore practical as well as theological.

3.3 In considering this subject, the Forum undertook reading of various works, notably Rev. Dr Lynn McChlery's book *How do you know it's God? The Theology and Practice of Discerning a Call to Ministry* (London: SCM Press, 2021), and Professor Paul Nimmo's chapter, 'Vocation', in *Wiley Blackwell Companion to Karl Barth*, eds. George Hunsinger and Keith L. Johnson (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2020), 317-326. The Forum also consulted the Church's Director of Assessment regarding the discernment process for verifying the call of candidates for ministry, and undertook a fuller discussion of the issues in a dedicated retreat day on 1st September 2022, at which several members of the Forum read papers. Particular thanks are due to the Convener, Rev. Dr Lynn McChlery and Professor Paul Nimmo for their contributions during the report drafting process.

3.4 The Forum trusts that the resultant report will meet with the Assembly's approval.

4. TRANSGENDER IDENTITIES

4.1 During the past year, the Forum has received specific requests from office holders for it to explore the theology of transgender identities. Questions around transgender identities are already a matter of extensive public debate in Scotland, especially since the passage of the Gender Recognition Reform Bill by the Scottish Parliament. Some pastoral guidance material is already available on this subject, entitled *Diverse Gender Identities and Pastoral Care*. This can be found here: https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/48256/Web_PDF_Diverse_Gender_Identities_and_Pastoral_Care.pdf.

4.2 The Forum recognises a need for a fuller theological perspective to be brought to this subject, and therefore recommends that the Assembly instruct it to explore the matter further and report to the General Assembly of 2024.

5. FUTURE WORK

5.1 The Forum expects to continue to address issues relating to the calling of the Church. If so instructed by the Assembly, the Forum also expects to explore further the theology of transgender identities and prepare a report for the General Assembly of 2024. The Forum stands ready to assist the General Assembly and its Councils, Committees and Fora in any matter of theology and doctrine and would welcome consultation at an early stage in any significant pieces of work.

6. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

6.1 The Forum was established by the General Assembly of 2013, and celebrates its first decade of existence this year. It is grateful for the hard work, commitment and contribution of each of its members over the years, and is grateful to all those who have sought its views and listened so graciously to its comments. In particular, it would like to express its thanks to all those who have contributed to the discussion on the Westminster Confession of Faith since work began in 2018.

In the name of the Theological Forum

LIAM JERROLD FRASER, *Convener*
 PAUL T. NIMMO, *Vice-Convener*
 ALASDAIR J. MACLEOD, *Acting Secretary*

Addendum

Rev. Dr Ruth Morrison

Rev. Dr Ruth Morrison completes a second four-year term as a member of the Theological Forum at the 2023 General Assembly, and will accordingly retire from membership from the rising of the Assembly. Ruth has served on the Theological Forum since 2015, and is one its longest-serving members. She has brought to the Forum not only her expertise on baptism, but has contributed important insights concerning the relation of theology to ministry, and the missional significance of church sanctuaries. As she retires from the Forum, we thank her for her long service, and wish her, her family, and her parish every blessing for the future.

In the name of the Theological Forum

LIAM JERROLD FRASER, *Convener*
 PAUL T. NIMMO, *Vice-Convener*
 ALASDAIR J. MACLEOD, *Acting Secretary*

Appendix 1

CONFESSIONS OF FAITH OVERTURE

The General Assembly adopt the Overture the tenor whereof follows, and transmit the same to Presbyteries for their consideration under the provisions of Article VIII of the Articles Declaratory in Matters Spiritual (1921), directing that returns be sent to the Principal Clerk not later than 31 December 2023.

The General Assembly, with consent of not less than two-thirds of the whole of the Presbyteries of the Church obtained in two immediately successive years, enact, ordain and declare that Articles II and V of the Articles Declaratory in Matters Spiritual (1921) enacted by the General Assembly of 1926 and the Preamble, Questions and Formula authorised by the General Assembly of 1929 shall be amended as follows:

1. Articles Declaratory

1.1 *Change Article II from:*

II. The principal subordinate standard of the Church of Scotland is the Westminster Confession of Faith approved by the General Assembly of 1647, containing the sum and substance of the Faith of the Reformed Church. Its government is Presbyterian, and is exercised through Kirk Sessions, Presbyteries, and General Assemblies. Its system and principles of worship, orders, and discipline are in accordance with "The Directory for the Public Worship of God," "The Form of Presbyterian Church Government " and "The Form of Process," as these have been or may hereafter be interpreted or modified by Acts of the General Assembly or by consuetude.

To:

II. The subordinate standards of the Church of Scotland are contained in its Book of Confessions. Its government is Presbyterian, and is exercised through Kirk Sessions, Presbyteries, and General Assemblies. Its system and principles of worship, orders, and discipline are in accordance with "The Directory for the Public Worship of God," "The Form of Presbyterian Church Government " and "The Form of Process," as these have been or may hereafter be interpreted or modified by Acts of the General Assembly or by consuetude.

1.2 Also remove references to "confession" in Article V and replace with "Book of Confessions".

2. Ordination and Induction Vows

2.1 *Change the vow:*

Do you believe the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith contained in the Confession of Faith of this Church?

To

Do you believe the fundamental doctrines of the Christian Faith **expressed in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds?**

2.2 *Also create a new vow after the aforementioned one:*

Do you confess the Catholic and Reformed Faith of the Church as contained in its Book of Confessions, and promise to be guided by the said Book in your life and doctrine?

3. Formula of Subscription

3.1 Change the first paragraph of the Formula from:

I believe the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith contained in the Confession of Faith of this Church.
To

I believe the fundamental doctrines of the Christian Faith **expressed in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds. I promise to be guided in my life and doctrine by the Book of Confessions of this Church.**

4. Preamble

4.1 Change the last paragraph of the Preamble from:

The Church of Scotland holds as its subordinate standard the Westminster Confession of Faith, recognising liberty of opinion on such points of doctrine as do not enter into the substance of the Faith, and claiming the right, in dependence on the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit, to formulate, interpret or modify its subordinate standards: always in agreement with the Word of God and the fundamental doctrines of the Christian Faith contained in the said Confession – of which agreement the Church itself shall be sole judge.

To:

The subordinate standards of the Church of Scotland are contained in its Book of Confessions, recognising liberty of opinion on such points of doctrine as do not enter into the **fundamental doctrines** of the Faith, and claiming the right, in dependence on the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit, to formulate, interpret or modify its subordinate standards: always in agreement with the Word of God and the fundamental doctrines of the Christian Faith **expressed in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds** – of which agreement the Church itself shall be sole judge.

Appendix 2

THE CALLING OF THE CHURCH (2023)

1. Introduction

1.1 The Church is at a crossroads. The secularisation of Scottish society, and a decline in church membership, has seen churches close across the country. Those that remain now operate with diminished resources, and through Parish and Presbytery reform, face the prospect of unions, linkages, and dissolutions to come. These changes and challenges mean that many in the Church have grown demoralised and confused, uncertain as to the future and purpose of their congregations.

1.2 At a time of great change and uncertainty, this question of the *purpose* of the Church is perhaps the most pressing of all. For some of our neighbours, the Church does not serve any purpose. It is an irrelevance, a relic of a bygone age. Yet Christ is clear: we *do* have a purpose, we *do* have an abiding role in the world, and if we seek to fulfil that purpose rather than following our own then Christ will be with us, even in this secular age.

1.3 For this reason, the Theological Forum has chosen to undertake an investigation into the calling and purpose of the Church. Our predecessor committee – the Panel on Doctrine – reported on some aspects of the Church's call in 2005. Since then, however, the context of the Church of Scotland has changed significantly. New questions regarding the relation of ministry to mission, what missional projects to prioritise, and situations of conflict between different understandings of call have developed, and require a fresh exploration of the Church's calling. In addition, the Theological Forum received an instruction from the General Assembly of 2022 to explore the missional implications of Church membership. We do not believe that this instruction can be fully addressed without a consideration of the Church's calling as a whole, and for this reason, we seek to fulfil this instruction in the current report.

1.4 Our report begins by exploring some of the ways in which the language of 'call' or 'calling' is used in the Church. This leads to a discussion of what it means for God to call us. The foundation of our calling is to become like Christ, by worshipping, loving, serving, and witnessing as he does. If this is the general calling of the whole Church, however, it is fulfilled and lived out through diverse individual callings. When these are ordered to each other in love, the Church serves and witnesses to Christ, manifests the Kingdom of God, makes disciples, and helps to transform the world. While this is the earthly purpose of the Church, it is dependent, however, on worship and discipleship, something that has implications for our understanding of the relationship between ministry and mission. We conclude with a discussion of the particular calling of the Church of Scotland as Reformed, Missional, Presbyterian and National, and explore two areas of confusion regarding callings within the Church.

1.5 While much ground is covered in this report, its ultimate point is this: that in a secular and post-Christian Scotland, where Christians face many uncertainties, the Church *does* have a purpose, and an abiding role in the mission of God. Yet this is true only if we serve *God's* mission and *God's* Kingdom and not our own, something that is only possible when we allow the Spirit to shape us into the likeness of Christ.

2. What is Call?

2.1 Before we are able to understand what the Church's calling might be, we must begin by clarifying what 'call' and 'calling' are.

2.2 At its most basic level, to 'call' means to attract someone's attention. We 'call' friends on the phone, or 'call' them as we see them on the street. We do not call people for no reason, however. We call them to communicate something. Sometimes it is simply to convey our good wishes towards them or to share news. At other times, however, someone is called to convey a particular message, or to be asked to undertake a particular task.

2.3 Within the Church, the word 'call' is used in a number of distinct ways, albeit with related meanings. The first use of 'call' relates to the call a congregation issues to a prospective new minister. For example, the Vacancy Procedure Act (2003) governs the 'call' of the congregation to a sole nominee, thereby initiating a new pastoral relationship.^[vi]

2.4 The second use of 'call' language within the Church relates not to the call of congregations or human beings, but to the call of *God*. This is most evident in the selection process for recognised ministry, where applicants must articulate their sense of God's call. Sometimes this discernment of call also has an administrative function, as in the Admission and Readmission of Ministers Act (2022) where it says, 'The Readmissions Panel ... shall assess the Readmission Applicant's *call* [our emphasis] doctrine and gifts/character and beliefs, vocation...'.^[lvii] Here, a committee of the Church is tasked with discerning whether something called a 'call' exists, and, if it does, to appoint the applicant to office in the Church.

2.5 These examples of selection for ministry, and of admission and readmission to ministry, bring us closer to the central meaning of the word 'call' within the Church: God communicating with us to ensure that someone does something. While the call may be recognised and affirmed by the Church in general or by a particular Presbytery or congregation, it is not the belief of the Church of Scotland that the call comes from these bodies alone. Rather, in a theology dating back to at least the Second Book of Discipline (1578), the call comes from God, and is then recognised and affirmed by God's Church.^[lviii]

2.6 Whether the call is from God or from God's people, however, calling in our Church usually relates to *individuals*. Individuals are generally thought to have callings, and these callings are then tested and recognised, and allow their recipients to be appointed to exercise particular offices.

2.7 In a time of Presbytery and Parish reform, however, and at a time when the Church's role in society is not as clear or as welcome as it once was, a range of questions about calling have arisen. What is the purpose of the Church in contemporary Scotland? What does God want us to do with our diminishing resources? In a time of rapid change, do ordination and church offices help or hinder ministry and mission? And what happens when there is an apparent conflict between the felt calling of an individual or congregation, and the sense of call of the wider Church?

2.8 While discussions of calling – and by extension ministry – have generally concerned the calling of individuals, in order to answer these and related questions, we believe that we must answer the question of what the Church *as a whole* is called to do, and then – and only then – consider questions of personal calling. This point has been noted previously by the Panel on Doctrine, who argued that ordination and ministry depend on a theory of the Church (ecclesiology), which in turn depends on an understanding of the person and work of Christ (Christology).^[ix] As such, we begin with the common calling of the whole Church and its relation to Christ, then continue with the priesthood of the whole Church, and finally consider particular callings to ordained office.

3. The Calling of the Church

3.1 As Niebuhr notes, before secularisation, the question of what the Church was for did not arise with the same urgency as it does now. When our neighbours looked to the Church for regular worship, life events, and even social activities, it was often felt to be clear what the Church was called to do. Yet as the West grew more secular, and the Church became a less visible part of social life, these certainties disappeared.^[x] The result for some in the Church has been a loss of morale brought about by feelings of insignificance; for others a sense of 'drift', with an inability to set clear objectives and prioritise work; while for others the outcome has been burnout, brought on by over-exertion in the attempt to reverse decline.

3.2 The Church Exists Because of Christ

3.2.1 The question of call – of what we are for and what we should be doing – is therefore a timely one, and touches upon the very purpose – and indeed future – of the Church.

3.2.2 While calling has a long history throughout the Old Testament, being particularly connected with the calling of Adam to obedience (Genesis 2: 15-17) the calling of Israel into covenant relationship with God (e.g. Deuteronomy 30), and the calling of the prophets (e.g. Isaiah 6: 1-8; Jeremiah 1: 4-10), we gain a clearer understanding of the calling of the Church and its members from the New Testament. In the familiar story of the calling of the first disciples in Matthew 4: 19-22, we read:

And [Jesus] said to them, 'Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.' Immediately they left their nets and followed him.

3.2.3 While there is much to reflect on in this passage, we will focus on four points relevant to the call of the Church today.

3.2.4 The first is that God's call can be known at all. It is sometimes thought that we can know nothing of God or of God's wishes, and that anyone who claims otherwise is simply speculating. Yet Scripture is clear that our God is a God who *speaks* throughout history and into the present, albeit in myriad ways.

3.2.5 The second is that God calls us to *partnership*. God is all-powerful, and could minister and work in mission alone. Yet as Calvin wrote, God "deigns to consecrate the mouths and tongues of men to his service, making his own voice to be heard in them".^[xi] Our God, then, is a *calling* God, one who summons us to be co-workers and ambassadors for Christ (cf. 1 Corinthians 3: 9). By extension, this also means that God believes that we have – or will be given – the gifts and skills to do this work, that this work will not end in failure but is both possible and achievable. We will return to this point later.

3.2.6 The third lesson concerns the *authority* of the one who calls. The passage is memorable because of the swiftness by which the first disciples abandon their work and follow the voice of Christ. Their response is immediate and unreflective. This is because the one who calls both them and us has the authority to call. As it says in Mark 1: 22 'They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes', and Jesus says of himself that 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. (Matthew 28: 18). People may call us to do all sorts of things, and we are not always obliged to heed that call. Yet Christ has the authority to call us, and can expect us to listen, follow, and obey.

3.2.7 The fourth lesson from this passage – and perhaps the one most important for this report – is that the Church does not exist because we want it to exist, but because *God* wants it to exist, and calls it into being. The calling of the first disciples is reflected in the name of the Church itself. In the New Testament, the usual way of describing the Church is *ekklesia*. This was a common Greek word at the time, and meant ‘an assembly’.^[xii] The etymology of the word is important, however, for *ekklesia* is derived from the two Greek words *ek* (out of/from) and *kaleo* (I call). The Church as *ekklesia*, then, exists because it is called out to exist by God. The Church does not exist out of practical necessity,^[xiii] or because its members have a sense and taste for religion and the infinite,^[xiv] but because of divine invitation and command. We as Christians do not call ourselves into existence, but are called into existence by God. As Jesus says “You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last.” (John 15: 16)

3.3 Why Christ Calls the Church

3.3.1 Yet if the Church is called into being by God, we must ask *why* God does this. Church members will appreciate many things about the Church, and will have many different opinions about what our purpose is and what we should be doing. Yet what does *God* want the Church to do?

3.3.2 Jesus himself explains his wishes for his followers in Matthew 11: 29-30:

Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.’

And in John 17: 19:

And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

3.3.3 We see in these and related passages that Jesus wishes for his followers to become like him. Only this encompasses the diverse changes in feeling, motivation, thought, and action that Jesus asks of us. His intention for us is that by receiving his Spirit, believing his teaching, learning from his example, and doing as he does, we might have life, and give life to others. This not only relates to what we do in this world, however, but what we will be when the new creation comes. In Romans 8: 29-30 we read:

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

And in 1 John 3: 2-3 we read:

Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he [i.e. Christ] is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

3.3.4 What these and similar passages teach us is that becoming like Christ is not only an ethical ideal – which it is – but is the ultimate purpose and destiny of every human being. Christ is the ‘image of the invisible God’ (Colossians 1: 15), the one who restores the image of God in us that was corrupted by the Fall (cf. Genesis 1: 26-27; 1 Corinthians 15: 49). In him, we become what we were created to be, but cannot be through our own strength. Because it is the purpose of all human beings to become like him, so it is the Church’s role to help people become like Christ (e.g. 2 Corinthians 3: 17-18, Galatians 4: 19, Philippians 2: 5). This work is commonly called discipleship, but it is not something that the Church does alone. Rather, it is the work of the Holy Spirit, which enables us to be ‘born from above’ and begin living in the Kingdom of God (cf. John 3: 3-8).

3.4 What Becoming Like Christ Means

3.4.1 The purpose of the Church’s calling, then, is to become like Christ, and to help others become like him. Yet what does it mean to become like Christ, and how does this relate to the calling of the Church as a whole?

3.4.2 While space precludes a full description of everything Christ is – and therefore everything we are called to be – we can summarise his renewal of the image of God in us under three headings: worshipping the Father, loving and serving God and neighbour, and witnessing to the truth.

3.4.3 First, Jesus worships the Father perfectly. His revelation of himself as Messiah and Son of God is intimately connected with the unique relationship of worship, praise and love that he enjoys with the Father by the Spirit. As the incarnate Son of God, Jesus follows the Father’s will in all things, and is his perfect image. As he says ‘Whoever has seen me has seen the Father’ (John 14: 9). Jesus lives out this life of worship by spending much of his time alone in prayer, worshipping in the Temple, and interceding for his followers (e.g. Mark 1: 35; Luke 2: 49; John 17: 6-26). He has come so that all people might worship the Father in Spirit and in truth (John 4: 23-4), and he invites us to enter into the unique relationship of love and praise and worship that he enjoys with the Father (cf. Luke 11: 1-13).

3.4.4 Second, Jesus loves and serves God and neighbour. In his exchange with a lawyer in Matthew 22: 37-40, Jesus confirms that the greatest commandments – and the summation of the whole Law of Israel – is to love God with all our heart, all our soul, and all our mind, and our neighbour as ourselves. We have already noted how Jesus expresses his love to God. Jesus expresses his love for other people through the pity he feels for those who suffer (e.g. Mark 1: 41; John 11: 34-36), his recognition and valuing of those who are forgotten about or rejected by society (e.g. Mark 2: 13-17; Luke 19: 1-6) and in the care he shows even to those who murdered him (e.g. Luke 23: 34). Jesus lives a life of perfect love, showing the height and depth of mercy, charity and kindness that it is possible for human beings to enjoy.

3.4.5 Jesus not only serves and loves, however, but, third, witnesses to the truth. This includes his teaching, as well as his challenging of the religious authorities (e.g. Matthew 23). The particular truth he came to reveal, however, was the truth of himself, of the Father, and of his unique relationship with him by the Spirit (see e.g. John 3: 31-33 and John 5: 36-7). In seeking to witness to the Father and evangelise, the purpose of Jesus’ teaching and truth-telling is to *change* his listeners. He spoke – literally – so that his hearers would possess the same mind as he did (cf. Philippians 2: 5; 1 Corinthians 2: 16), a change which, in turn, would give rise to changes in their feelings, motivations and actions (cf. Matthew 15: 10-20).

3.4.6 If the Church is called to become like Jesus, then, it is called to worship, love, serve and witness. This is what the Church attempts to do through its work. It worships God each Sunday, and throughout the week. It attempts to create loving, supportive congregations where care is given and friendship enjoyed. It raises funds for charity, runs food banks and pantries, and engages in other forms of service such as hostels for the homeless and drug support services. It witnesses to Christ in the public realm and in everyday life, bringing Christ into conversation, social media, and myriad institutions, clubs, businesses and organisations.

3.4.7 It should not be thought, however, that the Church does this by itself, or in its own strength. While Jesus is no longer physically present, as the Westminster Confession states, he continues to minister as Prophet, Priest and King by his Spirit.^[xvi] This work will continue until the world is fully restored (cf. John 5: 17). He continues to call the Church into existence, and to maintain and perfect it, through the preaching of the Word, the sacraments and discipleship. He continues to challenge us to serve and witness better, that every part of society might be brought within his Kingdom. It is when we worship, love, serve and witness as he does that his Kingdom is manifested, new disciples made, and the world changed. Yet the mission, motivation, means and end are his alone.

3.5 Sending and Abiding

3.5.1 Foundational to the Church's calling, then, is to worship, love, serve and witness to Christ. Yet this is not, as we have noted, for the benefit of the Church alone, but of the world. *All things* will be reconciled and restored by Christ, not only those which belong to the Church (e.g. Colossians 1: 20, Rev 21: 5). Yet this raises a number of related questions that concern the calling of the Church and how it fulfils that calling. What is the Church's role in this cosmic restoration? Are some of the Church's activities more important than others? And if all things are to be restored by Christ, in what order should they be restored?

3.5.2 To help orientate ourselves to these questions, we begin by noting that there is both an *intensive* and *extensive* aspect to Christ's work.^[xvi] The intensive part of this work lies within the Church, and the action of the Spirit in shaping and forming people for ministry and mission. We have already considered part of this work in relation to becoming like Christ, and will consider it again later in relation to individual callings. The extensive aspect of Christ's work, however, is when we are sent out from the Church to serve and witness in the world. This latter movement is most commonly called *mission*.

3.5.3 The English word 'mission' comes from the Latin word *missio*, meaning 'sending'. Before moving on to consider its implications for the calling of the Church, it is crucial to remember that it is Jesus *himself* who is the primary person who is sent in mission, being sent by the Father in the power of the Spirit to redeem the world. Yet Jesus makes it clear both before (John 17: 15-18) and after (John 20: 21) his resurrection that just as he has been sent, so he will send the disciples and their successors to witness to him and make disciples. It is only because Jesus is sent in mission that we are sent in mission.

3.5.4 The 'sending' of the Church in mission is most famously expressed in Matthew 28: 19-20: Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'

3.5.5 Of central importance to the calling of the Church, therefore, is to make disciples of all people. The word 'disciple' is a translation of the Greek *mathetes*, meaning a learner or student. A disciple, then, is someone who learns from Jesus or, more specifically, someone who is learning from Jesus in order to *become* like Jesus. Jesus' call to make new disciples is a call to help *all* people become like him, something they do by listening to his Word, receiving his sacraments, and being shaped by the life of the congregation. While making disciples in a secular Scotland is harder than it has been for centuries, it is central to Jesus' call upon us, and is a non-negotiable part of the Church's work.

3.5.6 The *order*, however, in which this calling, shaping, and sending is played out is important. Before his Crucifixion, Jesus said this in John 15: 4: Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me.

3.5.7 Jesus is clear that the disciples cannot hope to make disciples or achieve anything unless they first abide in him and he in them. Being ascended, Jesus cannot 'abide' with us in a physical way, but can do so spiritually. As John 15: 4 suggests, the outcome of abiding in Christ and becoming like him by the Spirit is *fruit*, spiritual fruit, among which are the fruits of mission. Yet fruit grows out of branches, which – in the case of grapes – grow out of the vine and its roots. In the same way, in our – legitimate – desire to engage in mission, we must realise that missional fruit is dependent on abiding in and becoming like Christ through worship, prayer, and discipleship. There is no other way in which it grows.^[xvii]

3.5.8 To use the spatial image of Mike Breen, we can say that it is through our *upward* relationship to God in worship and prayer that the Church is enabled to develop its *inward* discipleship, and growth into the likeness of Jesus. It is through our relationship with God, and the cultivation of the image of Christ in us as individuals and as congregations, that we are then enabled to go *outward* to the world in mission.^[xviii]

3.6 The Relationship Between Ministry and Mission

3.6.1 We see, then, that while the ultimate calling of the Church is to engage in mission – to serve, witness, manifest the Kingdom and make disciples – it is conditional upon becoming like Christ. It only happens through the Holy Spirit in worship, prayer, and the fellowship and discipleship of the congregation. We are shaped within the Church by the Holy Spirit, and then sent out to participate in God's mission.

3.6.2 Yet when we begin to serve, witness, and engage in mission, what are we meant to *do*? If mission is such an essential part of our calling, does this also mean that other aspects of the Church's life – e.g. Sunday worship – are less important, or can be jettisoned?

3.6.3 The first thing to note is that because the Church's calling is only possible through becoming like Christ, we cannot privilege one aspect of his work over others. It is one of the features of Church life that Christians have different interests in relation to ministry and mission. Some are interested in preaching, some in evangelism, some in creation care, and some in acts of service. Yet we do not need to choose between these different activities, because they are all united and coordinated in the person of Jesus Christ. Christ *himself* provides the justification, rationale, and coherence for the Church's activities, which – if they are aligned with God's will – are not only the Church's activities but Christ's by the Spirit. Because our ultimate calling is to become like Christ, we are called to do all of these things, something that safeguards against the reduction of the Christian life to only one interest or type of activity.

3.6.4 It is in this context of prioritisation in ministry and mission that we should consider the Five Marks of Mission. The Five Marks are:

The mission of the Church is the mission of Christ

1. To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
2. To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
3. To respond to human need by loving service
4. To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation
5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth^[xix]

Originating in the Anglican Communion, these have now been adopted by the Church of Scotland in its Faith Action Plan.^[xx] They also form an integral part of the Mission Plan Act, and are used there as criteria by which to create and assess Presbytery Plans.^[xxi]

3.6.5 The Theological Forum has previously welcomed the Five Marks of Mission, and recognised them as an authentic summary of the tasks of mission. The Forum also noted, however, that they do not – and were not intended to – describe everything that the Church is called to do. They do not mention worship, the sacraments or prayer for example, things we might think are important for the Christian Church.^[xxii] Indeed, the absence of worship from the Five Marks of Mission may suggest that worship has no missional relevance, which is, of course, not correct. As such, while they are useful summary of missional activities, they do not exhaust what mission is, nor everything that the Church is called to do and be, and there are perhaps dangers in treating them as such. At its worst, a focus on mission alone runs the risk of *reversing* the order described by Christ in John 15, expecting *fruit* without nurturing the *roots* and *branches*.

3.6.6 This has particular relevance for the Church's calling in light of Presbytery and parish reform. In a time when congregations are asked to become more missional, while simultaneously facing unions, linkages and dissolutions, the Forum considers that there is a very real risk of the order between abiding and sending being reversed or ignored. Mission happens naturally when congregations are healthy, happy, and being conformed to the image of Christ through dynamic worship, discipleship and fellowship. It cannot be forced or commanded. While reforms are necessary, then, without serious thought being given to the health of congregations and office holders, there is real risk of burnout, or even frustration with the very concept of mission.

4. How Are Individuals Called to Fulfil the Calling of the Church?

4.1 The calling of the Church, then, is to become like Christ by the Spirit, that by worshipping, loving, serving and witnessing like him the Kingdom might be manifested, disciples made, and the world changed. Yet how does this calling of the Church relate to the callings of its individual members? And how can something as difficult as the transformation of the world be accomplished by ordinary men, women and children?

4.2 Christ's Priesthood and Ours

4.2.1 We noted earlier that we cannot bear missional fruit without abiding in Christ, and being filled with his Spirit. It is the way in which this happens that brings together the calling of the Church as a whole with the particular callings of individual Church members.

4.2.2 Of great importance to this is the common or corporate priesthood of the Church. At its most basic, to act as a priest is to act as a mediator or link between God and humanity, a reality reflected in the Latin word for priest *pontifex*, which is related to the Latin word for bridge (*pons*). Priesthood in the Old Testament focussed on the sacrifices offered by the Temple priests on behalf of the people to meet the requirements of the Law, and maintain the covenant relationship with God. In the New Testament, however, Jesus himself becomes the mediator between God and humanity, and now exercises the office of Great High Priest (Hebrews 4: 14-16).

4.2.3 Because Christ is Prophet, Priest and King, and because those who are united in him can participate in his ministry, so all Christians, both ordained and non-ordained, can participate in his priesthood. The symbol of this priesthood is baptism, in which our sins are forgiven, we are incorporated into Christ, and begin to be ordered towards him and his ministry. This idea of priesthood is found in 1 Peter 2: 9:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.

4.2.4 This text has been a source of controversy in the history of the Church, with some arguing that it authorises Christians to exercise all aspects of ministry, preaching and sacraments without ordination.^[xxiii] While the Church of Scotland does not hold this interpretation^[xxiv] – more on which will be said later – the corporate priesthood of the Church does enable Christians to do two things: to offer praise to God and prayer for the world through Christ (cf. Revelation 1:6), and – as the reference to proclamation in 1 Peter 2 suggests – to act as witnesses in mission.

4.3 Spiritual Giftings

4.3.1 The common priesthood of the Church began at Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit fell on the disciples. They became spiritually united with the ascended Christ, filled with his Spirit, and empowered to fulfil Christ's calling to go out into the whole world and make disciples. This close connection between the ascended ministry of Christ and the granting of spiritual gifts is referenced in every ordination of the Church of Scotland:

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ,
King and Head of the Church,
who, being ascended on high,
has given gifts
for the building up of the body of Christ...^[xxv]

4.3.2 When individuals are united with Christ by faith, Christ's Spirit begins to sanctify them, making them more like him. This process of sanctification and becoming like Christ includes the granting of spiritual gifts, which enable individuals to serve and witness as Jesus does. Yet crucially, the way in which individuals became like Christ is not uniform but *diverse*. The Church has one common calling, yet this common calling is fulfilled through multiple personal callings which differ from each other.

4.3.3 While we have seen this in practice many times, it is, on one level, surprising. After all, if we are all becoming like Christ, and if we all have the same Spirit, should the way we serve and witness not be identical?

4.3.4 This question is similar to that addressed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12. The Church in Corinth was grappling with a number of disputes, among which was the question of who and what gifts were truly from God or not.^[xxvi] In 1 Corinthians 12: 4-7 Paul says:

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

4.3.5 Paul argues here – and in related passages such as Romans 12: 3-8 – that unity in Christ by the Spirit does not mean that everyone will become like Christ in the same way, or will have the same calling. Rather, they will become like Christ in *different* ways because they have different gifts and different callings. These diverse gifts are not for individuals alone, however, but for the good of the whole Body. As Paul elaborates in 1 Corinthians 12: 12:

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ.

4.3.6 In a similar way to the human body, the Church does not need only one kind of gift in order to fulfil its calling to become like Christ, but a diverse range of gifts. While Christ fulfils his calling perfectly in and of himself, we his followers need each other to fulfil both our common calling *and* our personal callings. This means that the members of Christ's body must first recognise and then share their gifts with each other, using them for the benefit of each individual and the whole. This is not an end in itself, however, but for the good of Christ's mission to the world.

4.3.7 It is the diverse gifts bestowed upon all Christians by the Spirit, and God's call to use and share these gifts for the benefit of all, that lies at the heart of the concept of 'the ministry of all God's people'. This concept is not new in the Church of Scotland. Yet what is not always appreciated is that the ministry of all God's people is not simply an ethical or social ideal – something which those who value equality should champion – but a direct effect of the Spirit's action, and of our corporate priesthood within the one priesthood of Jesus Christ. Because of the countless gifts needed to run a congregation and engage in mission – administration, hospitality, friendliness, discernment, as well as more public-facing gifts such as teaching and leadership – the Spirit intentionally grants a multiplicity of giftings.

4.3.8 This provides an answer to the instruction given to the Theological Forum by the General Assembly of 2022 to investigate the missional implications of Church membership. While hundreds of thousands of people in Scotland are 'members' of the Church of Scotland, it should be clear from the foregoing that 'member' can be used in two distinct – if related – senses. On the one hand, 'church member' can refer to the spiritual reality of being united with Christ by the Spirit and being part of his Body the Church. On the other hand, 'church member' can relate to the institutional reality of being entered into the communion roll of a particular congregation, and included within the membership figures of the Church of Scotland. While the Church can hope that these two senses of 'church member' directly correspond to one another, in practice this may not always be the case. There will be those who are church members in an institutional sense who do not look to Christ as their Lord, and there will be others who follow Christ as Lord but who are not present on the communion roll. To be a true member of the Church, therefore, is to be someone who *wants* to be a disciple, striving day by day to become more like Christ: worshipping the Father, loving God and neighbour, and serving and witnessing to their neighbours. Yet from the foregoing, it should be clear that true membership of the Church necessitates involvement with a Christian community of some kind, and the use of one's gifts for the good of the Church and the world. This is how the phrase 'Body of Christ' is used by Paul, and it is one that the Church must attempt to make real.

4.4 Roles Within the Church

4.4.1 The mutual sharing of gifts described above that constitute the Body of Christ should be organic and unprompted. By abiding in Christ, and becoming like him in the Spirit, Church members should naturally treat each other with respect and self-sacrificial love, using what they have for the good of all. Yet this spontaneous network of relationships – the work of the Spirit of love – exists within a sinful world. We are always forgetting what we are called to be, and day by day we fail to grow into the likeness of Christ (James 1: 22-5).

4.4.2 It is for this reason that the calling of the Church includes a calling to specific roles: The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ (Ephesians 4: 11-13).

4.4.3 We see here that among the gifts given by the Spirit to individuals are those which enable the Church to unite around a common faith in the Son of God, and which help it to grow into his likeness. The importance of these functions within the Church means that Christ creates specific roles in order to ensure that the Church is faithful to Christ and its calling. We see the early Church beginning this process of distinguishing between different roles in Acts 6: 2-4:

And the twelve called together the whole community of the disciples and said, 'It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait at tables. Therefore, friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word.'

4.4.4 Whether the seven men chosen should be understood as Deacons or not,^[xxvii] the Apostles clearly sought to distinguish between different roles within the Church, with different individuals focussing on different tasks. As the Church grew, this process of differentiation, and the granting of authority to particular roles, developed further. Thus we find references to elders (*presbyteros*) and overseers (*episkopoi*) leading congregations, their deployment to such roles sometimes – as in the case of 1 Timothy 4: 14 and 5: 22 – accompanied by the laying on of hands.

4.4.5 While both Protestant and Roman Catholic commentators are clear that Scripture does not present us with a complete account of church offices or ordination,^[xxviii] there is nevertheless broad agreement that roles within the Church differ from each other, and that those roles require different levels of authorisation. It is through these personal callings, recognised and verified by the Church, that the calling of all God's people to worship, love, serve and witness like Christ is fulfilled, and the mission of God advanced.

5. The Calling of the Church of Scotland

5.1 So far, we have examined the calling of the Christian Church in general, rather than any specific denomination. The calling of all Christians is in one sense the same, because all Christians participate in the one Body of Christ, and therefore participate in his one ministry and mission. Our shared salvation and common calling in Christ is the basis for ecumenical cooperation, and is reflected in recent ecumenical statements such as the Columba Declaration, the St Andrew Declaration and, most recently, the St Margaret Declaration. Through its official Ecumenical Policy, the Church of Scotland also recognises the Lund Principle, that churches should act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately.^[xxix]

5.2 Yet what of the calling of the Church of Scotland itself? For while there is only one mission of God, mission is always contextual. It takes place in particular ecclesial and social contexts, whose histories, identities, and expectations are all distinct.

5.3 The Church of Scotland is one particular ecclesial culture, shaped by centuries of theological reflection, social and political action, and institutional forms that characterise our participation in the one ministry and mission of Christ. Just as conformity to Christ has certain general elements such as worship, love, service and witness that must become concrete for individuals in particular ways, so the common calling of the Universal Church becomes concrete for diverse denominations in particular ways.

5.4 The way in which the Church of Scotland makes the call of God concrete may be characterised in the following ways:

5.5 Reformed

5.5.1 The Church of Scotland is a product of the Scottish Reformation of 1560. While there had been an earlier Lutheran influence upon Scottish Protestantism, the form of theology that came to hold dominance in the Church of Scotland was Reformed theology. This theology found early expression in the Scots Confession of 1560, and later in the Westminster Confession of Faith. The First Article Declaratory of the Church of Scotland declares that the Church of Scotland 'adheres to the Scottish Reformation', and 'receives the Word of God which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as its supreme rule of faith and life'.

5.5.2 This Reformed identity should not be placed in opposition to the faith of other denominations, however, but held together with it. The First Article Declaratory makes it clear that the Church of Scotland is part of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church, and affirms 'the fundamental doctrines of the Catholic faith', among which are the Trinity, and the Incarnation, Atonement, Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus Christ. We are only Reformed because we are Catholic, and share the same basic faith as other Christians. This faith is the foundation not only of our communion within the Church of Scotland, but also of the fellowship and cooperation we enjoy with Christians from across Scotland's denominations.

5.6 Missional

5.6.1 Our Reformed faith tells us that God is a missional God, and that the mission of God has a Church. We are a product of God's mission to the world, and of early saints such as Ninian and Columba who – being obedient to the calling of Christ – brought the faith to our shores. Just as we have been called by Christ, and shaped by disciples who went before us, so we must be obedient to Christ's call today, and – trusting in his Spirit and his abiding presence with us – serve and witness to our neighbours that they too might become disciples. This aspect of the Church of Scotland has grown in prominence in recent years, and finds expression in the Faith Action Plan of the Church, and its adoption of the Five Marks of Mission.

5.7 Presbyterian

5.7.1 Mission is always contextual, however, and part of this context for churches is their form of government. The Second Article Declaratory declares that the Church of Scotland is a Presbyterian church, indicating that it is ruled by Jesus Christ, and governed by courts of presbyters ordained in his name. Presbyterians believe that discernment of God's Word is best done corporately, and that God speaks through a multiplicity of voices. Likewise, we believe that oversight of congregations and the Church as a whole should not be left to a small number of individuals, but is the responsibility of all office-holders.

5.8 National

5.8.1 It is perhaps the last aspect of the Church of Scotland's identity, however, that best characterises its unique calling, its 'national' character. This word encompasses many aspects of its history, ethos, and approach towards ministry and mission, all of which influence its self-understanding and how it is perceived by others. For most of its history, through its ministry, schooling, and role in public life, the Church of Scotland has decisively shaped Scottish culture and character. Indeed, before the mid-20th century, the Church of Scotland was seen as one of the preeminent examples of Scottish identity, with Presbyterianism and Scottishness being closely connected in the eyes of many both within and outwith Scotland.^[xxx]

5.8.2 While its influence on Scottish life has waned in recent decades, the national character of the Church of Scotland is still preserved in the Third Article Declaratory. Here, the Church of Scotland declares itself to be 'a national Church representative of the Christian Faith of the Scottish people'. This 'national' identity has two elements to it. First, through the Church of Scotland Act 1921, the appointment of a Lord High Commissioner by the Monarch at each General Assembly, and by its position in public life, the Church of Scotland receives forms of recognition from society and the state that are different from other denominations. Second, the 'national' element of the Church's identity relates to the form of Christianity it espouses. While we are Reformed and Presbyterian, ours is not a sectarian or closed Church, but one that seeks to embody the maxim of 'in essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things love'.

5.8.3 While the recognition we receive from state and society could be viewed as a privilege, it is, in reality, a call to service. As a national church recognised by the state, the Church has an obligation not only to seek the welfare of its own members or of Christians in general but of *all* Scots. This has significant consequences for what the Church does. The Third Article Declaratory acknowledges the Church's 'distinctive call and duty to bring the ordinances of religion to the people in every parish of Scotland through a territorial ministry.' While all churches attempt to bless their communities, the Church of Scotland has legally specified and financially onerous duties to provide 'the ordinances of religion' – worship, baptisms, funerals and weddings – to all Scots in every part of the country.

5.9 The Church of Scotland, then, is Reformed, Missional, Presbyterian and National. This is its unique contribution to the spiritual life of Scotland, and how it seeks to carry out the calling of God. This identity, however – like any other denominational identity – can only ever be relative. Our true identity is in Christ, and our ultimate calling is to become like him in a way appropriate to the age. For this reason, the Church can never be content to rest in its inherited identity, but must always seek to be a Reformed Church that is ever reforming (*ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda*).

5.10 While it is for the Church as a whole to discern God's call in this day and age, from the foregoing, we can describe the outline of what this call might look like. In seeking to maintain its Reformed identity, the Church of Scotland must be orthodox without becoming sectarian, and appreciative of the gifts of other Christian traditions without abandoning its own Reformed distinctives. In seeking to be missional, the Church must never neglect the foundation of this mission, the call to become like Christ by the Spirit. This is done through worship and prayer in the context of congregational discipleship, and the Church must take the health of its congregations and office holders seriously if it is to hope for missional fruit. This is a particular challenge in a context of church closures and amalgamations. In seeking to uphold its Presbyterian government, it is the responsibility of the Church's office holders at local, Presbytery and national level to ensure that law and procedure do not frustrate innovation and growth, and that corporate decision-making does not dilute the Gospel, or make prophetic leadership impossible.^[xxxi] Finally, in seeking to preserve its national character, the Church is not obligated to undertake all aspects of territorial ministry alone, but is free to share this privilege with other denominations. This could take the form of bilateral or multilateral agreements, or – more ambitiously – reunion, something that the Seventh Article Declaratory commits us to wherever possible. In addition, the national character of the Church of Scotland also commits it to continuing – and perhaps increasing – its engagement in the public life of the nation, ensuring that Christ's voice is heard in the political, economic and social issues of the day.

5.11 It is in the context of the Church of Scotland as a distinct denomination, attempting to discern its calling in 21st century Scotland, that we must consider two issues that are currently affecting this calling: confusion over the relationship between different offices in the Church, and situations where different understandings of call result in disagreement. These issues arise directly from our Reformed, Missional, Presbyterian and National identity, and require clarification if the Church is to fulfil its calling, and successfully participate in God's mission.

5.12 Calling and Office

5.12.1 The Theological Forum has been contacted by a number of central committees, office holders and individuals, who – in a context of rapid change – have expressed confusion regarding the way in which church offices are related to each other and to the concept of calling. In particular, there is confusion as to why only Ministers of Word and Sacrament (including Ordained Local Ministers and Auxiliaries) can celebrate the sacraments, and why this is denied to Readers, local worship leaders, and others – for example MDS workers – who regularly preach.

5.12.2 The Church considered aspects of these issues in the 2019 Joint Report of the Sacramental Ministry Working Group. In that report, the Assembly approved the following principles, indicative of our Reformed understanding of ordination, sacraments, and office:

1. Following the example and command of Jesus Christ, the Sacraments are essential for the life and growth of the Church as the people of God;
2. As Reformed Christians, the Sacraments are understood as material signs of the grace of God declared in preaching;
3. For that reason, the Sacraments can never be separated from Word;
4. The calling to preach the Word and celebrate the Sacraments is recognised by the Church and affirmed in the act of ordination;
5. As such, only those who are called and ordained to preach the Word should celebrate the Sacraments.^[xxxii]

5.12.3 In addition, the 2019 Report also made reference to the 2000 Report of the Panel on Doctrine, which noted that: Ordained ministries should be those which are concerned not just for one part of the Church's life and activity, but for the Church as such, for its character as the Church. They are ministries whose concern is to keep the Church faithful to its nature and calling.

And

The fact that such ministries are concerned with the Church's fidelity to its nature and calling means that they are answerable to the Church – the whole Church. They are therefore understood to be ministries of Christ's Church, the Church Catholic, not simply the local Church.^[xxxiii]

5.12.4 Some tasks and offices not only concern the local church, then, but the relation of the office holder and the congregation they serve to the wider Church of Scotland and the Church Catholic. It is for this reason that the Church of Scotland exercises national recruitment processes for offices that can be exercised across Presbyteries or the country as a whole, recognising that such offices and roles must be accountable to the wider Church.

5.12.5 While the Theological Forum supports the principles outlined in the 2019 Sacramental Ministry Report – including its approach to ordination – there are nevertheless a number of outstanding questions relating to call, office, and sacramental ministry within the Church of Scotland that were not fully addressed by that report. First, given the growing use of local worship leaders, some – but not all – of whom have undertaken courses of training, what is the difference between this role and that of the Readership? Second, if the sacraments are as closely connected to the preached Word as the 2019 report suggests, then why do Readers, local worship leaders, and MDS workers who regularly preach not have greater access to ordination to sacramental ministry?

5.12.6 Perhaps recognising the need for further investigation into these matters, the Forum notes that the General Assembly of 2019 issued the following instruction to a number of committees:

Instruct the establishing of a Joint Working Group, comprised of the Ministries Council, the Mission and Discipleship Council, the Theological Forum, the Committee on Ecumenical Relations and the Legal Questions Committee to develop proposals, based on the principles articulated in the Joint Report, for ordination to a form of the ministry of Word and Sacrament shaped by the context of the emerging Church, and to report to the General Assembly of 2020.^[xxxiv]

5.12.7 This instruction was not fulfilled due to the onset of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. Yet given outstanding questions regarding sacramental ministries, and the relation of local worship leaders, the Readership, Ordained Local Ministry, and the Ministry of Word and Sacrament, we believe that the spirit of this instruction should be taken up in a new deliverance. This is particularly pressing given the shortage of ministries within our Church, and the need to maintain our Reformed identity while being cognisant of the great missional challenges facing us. As we have reflected in this report, the calling of the Church as a whole is only fulfilled through the callings of particular people, and it is therefore important that greater clarity concerning the relation of church offices to each other, to the sacraments, and to the mission of the Church is achieved.

5.13 Discerning Calling in Times of Change

5.13.1 Callings, then, are how God instructs individuals and the Church as a whole to do God's will. Yet what happens when callings appear to enter into conflict with each other?

5.13.2 The Church of Scotland is currently facing an unprecedented process of Presbytery planning, with church closures and parish amalgamations that are bringing much hurt, confusion, and exhaustion to its office holders and members. While there are many aspects to this – some of which lie outwith the remit of the Theological Forum – there are a number that directly relate to calling as explored in this report:

- The call of a congregation to their minister
- The sense of call that ministers and other office holders have towards a particular congregation or locality
- The discernment of God's will by Presbyteries as they attempt to unite, link, or dissolve congregations

5.13.3 While these challenges have arisen directly from the passing of the 2021 Mission Plan Act, they also arise from the Church's understanding of its calling as expressed in the Third Article Declaratory, which commits the Church to providing the ordinances of religion to every part of Scotland.

5.13.4 The Theological Forum cannot comment on particular cases. We can, however, offer some guidance as to how different types of call should be understood and navigated.

5.13.5 First, there is a distinction between an individual's general sense of God's call on their life – their vocation – and the particular context in which that vocation is exercised. Both are governed by the providence of God, which determines our historical, social, and family situation as well as our inner convictions. A person's vocational call – whether to ministry, to marriage and parenthood, or to a secular occupation – is often closely related to their identity, and may be unlikely to change over time. However, the *context* in which that vocation is lived out is inevitably more flexible, and changes as situations change. Children grow up, workplaces close, traditional skills become redundant. In all these situations, someone's core calling adopts a different shape in response to changed circumstances. Ministers who sense that their useful time is ending in one congregation may move to exercise a similar ministry in a different location, or to another kind of ministry which draws out aspects of their core calling in new ways. Call remains, but the context in which our calling is lived out is less fixed.

5.13.6 Second, the Church as a whole is called to corporately discern God's leading. God's call to the individual minister or congregation is embraced as part of the Church's wider discernment of God's leading, and against the background of the historical context in which God has placed us (a biblical example is Acts 15). All of these, in the providence of God, circumscribe God's will for us. As with the selection of ministers, then, an individual or congregational sense of call is ultimately subject to the discernment and affirmation of the whole Church, as it seeks to fulfil God's call upon it.

5.13.7 The difficulty arises, however, when changes to office holders or congregations are unwanted and feel imposed, raising questions about whether Presbyteries have accurately discerned God's leading. Presbytery planning decisions are not based solely on questions of call but on a range of other contingent factors. Decisions to close or merge individual congregations may be legitimately open to challenge on these other grounds, yet we do not believe that they can be challenged solely because an individual feels called to minister there, or a congregation feels they should continue as they are. Similarly, historical circumstances now require revising a parish minister's traditional role description. Many ministers will find that their core calling is adaptable to this new shape; others may need to find a new niche that fits their call and skills. Again, changing roles in response to changed circumstances might be challenged on other grounds, but not on personal call alone.

5.13.8 While an individual sense of call cannot overrule the discernment of the wider Church, the changes introduced by Presbytery and Parish reform are extensive, and require a great deal of pastoral sensitivity and support. Further, as we reflected above, Presbyterians believe in both corporate discernment and mutual solidarity and care. For this reason, we propose that the Theological Forum work with the Faith Nurture Forum to see if pastoral guidance concerning call can be produced, which addresses situations where the felt call of a minister or congregation conflicts with the discernment of Presbytery. While Presbytery planning is at an advanced stage, it is likely that further Presbytery reform will be necessary in future. As such, we think it important that greater guidance and support is offered to ministers, congregations and Presbyteries as they seek to discern collectively God's call in a changing context.

6. Conclusion

6.1 The calling of the Church, then, is to become like Christ by the Spirit, that by worshipping, serving and witnessing like him the Kingdom might be manifested, disciples made, and the world changed.

6.2 What this looks like in practice, however, will be different for each congregation and context. Just as there are diverse gifts, so there are diverse communities throughout Scotland, and it is for each congregation and worshipping community – in partnership with other Christians – to discern what God is doing in their midst, and to participate in God's mission.

6.3 As we have seen, however, this requires not only the calling and equipping of the ordained but of *all* God's people, who together constitute a corporate priesthood within the one priesthood of Christ.

6.4 As such, in order for the Church and its members to better understand and fulfil their calling, we make the following recommendations:

6.5 Increased Awareness of the Calling and Purpose of the Church

6.5.1 We think it important that the Church ensures that every member understands what the calling and purpose of the Church is. While this can be done in many ways, one approach would be to better publicise and explain the Church's mission statement: to be a Church which seeks to inspire the people of Scotland and beyond with the Good News of Jesus Christ, through enthusiastic worshipping, witnessing, nurturing and serving communities. The last clause of this vision statement aligns with the theology expressed in this report, in particular, the importance of worshipping and nurturing congregations to the success of the Church's mission.

6.6 Training and Resources for Identifying, Developing, and Deploying Giftings

6.6.1 The phrase 'the ministry of the whole people of God' has been found in General Assembly reports for decades. Yet as we have noted, the corporate ministry of all God's people does not happen by chance, but must be intentionally sought and developed within congregations. We therefore recommend that the Faith Nurture Forum provide training and resources for both recognised ministries and church members to enable the gifts of the Holy Spirit to be identified, developed and deployed, so that all may serve and witness in every walk of life, and the Church can better fulfil its calling to Scotland. These may be existing resources training modules, or those specially suited to our identity as a Reformed, Missional, Presbyterian and National Church.

6.7 Clarity In Relation to Church Office and Sacraments

6.7.1 There is currently confusion regarding offices in our Church, and why only certain offices are permitted to celebrate the sacraments. While supporting the principles contained in the 2019 Report of the Sacramental Ministries Working Group, we believe that further exploration of these issues should be undertaken. In particular, we wish to explore the potential for widening access to ordained sacramental ministry. For this reason, we ask that the Theological Forum, the Faith Nurture Forum, and the Ecumenical Relations Committee be tasked with producing a report on these issues, and proposing reforms to the General Assembly of 2024.

6.8 Guidance on Navigating Callings

6.8.1 Due to Parish and Presbytery Reform, congregations and office holders are experiencing unprecedented levels of uncertainty and change. We propose that the Theological Forum work with the Faith Nurture Forum to investigate whether lessons might be learned from the Mission Planning process, and pastoral guidance be issued to help congregations and Presbyteries hear and fulfil God's call during the planning process. This guidance would have a particular focus on situations where a minister's or congregation's sense of call to a local context is not affirmed by Presbytery.

6.9 This is a time of great challenge for the Church, when much that seemed certain is being overturned and lost. Yet as the calling of Moses from the burning bush shows us, God calls us not only with a still small voice, or from a place of peace, but from the fierceness of fire, a fire that would consume us should the Father not stay his hand. If we seek a maxim for our times, therefore, we should look to the motto of our church: *nec tamen consumebatur*, yet it was not consumed. For if we seek Christ's Kingdom, and not our own, though much else should change or be lost, our calling remains the same, and it is in that calling that we find our purpose and our peace.

References

- [i] Keynote speakers included Very Rev. Principal Stafford Carson (Union Theological College), Professor David Fergusson (University of Edinburgh), Professor Paul T Nimmo (University of Aberdeen) and Professor Amy Plantinga Pauw (Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary). The conference papers have since been published in the journal *Theology in Scotland* and are available in digital format at the following web address: <https://ojs.st-andrews.ac.uk/index.php/TIS/issue/view/188>
- [ii] https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0014/80303/10-Theological-Forum.pdf
- [iii] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Cmq_tG_mWw
- [iv] https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0008/93374/theological-forum.pdf
- [v] Free Presbyterian Church, *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 2003), Ch. 3, p. 29.
- [vi] https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0006/88224/2003-act-08-viii-revised-to-may-2021.pdf
- [vii] https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0006/95730/2022-act-13-xiii-1.pdf
- [viii] James Kirk, ed., *The Second Book of Discipline* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1980), 178.
- [ix] Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, 2000
- [x] Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Purpose of the Church and its Ministry* (New York: Harper, 1956).
- [xi] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), IV.1.5.
- [xii] The word is also used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, to describe the congregation and assembly of Israel. The use of this word by the writers of the New Testament is therefore likely to be deliberate, stressing a degree of continuity with God's people of Israel.
- [xiii] H.J. Wotherspoon and J.M. Kirkpatrick, *A Manual of Church Doctrine According to the Church of Scotland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960), 75.
- [xiv] Cf. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Speeches on Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 23.
- [xv] Cf. Chapter 8 of the Westminster Confession of Faith.
- [xvi] This distinction is used in Tom Greggs, *Dogmatic Ecclesiology: The Priestly Catholicity of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019).
- [xvii] We are reminded of the words of Mike Breen: 'We don't have a missional problem in the Western Church. We have a discipleship problem'. Cf. Mike Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 3rd ed. (United States: 3DM International, 2017), 5–6.
- [xviii] Cf. Breen, *Discipling*, 91–110.
- [xix] <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/mission/marks-of-mission.aspx>
- [xx] Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2020, 7/1–23.
- [xxi] https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0011/95987/2021-Act-8-Presbytery-Mission-Plan-Act.pdf
- [xxii] https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0008/69749/Church-of-Scotland-Theological-Forum-Five-Marks-of-Mission.pdf
- [xxiii] This was an important debate during the Reformation. For an introduction, see Timothy J. Wengert, *Priesthood, Pastors, Bishops: Public Ministry for the Reformation & Today* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008).
- [xxiv] It is interesting to note Van Der Borgh's comment that the priesthood of all believers – understood in its radical sense – plays almost no role at all in Reformed thought. See Van Der Borgh, *Theology of Ministry*, 132. Also see The Second Helvetic Confession – approved by the Church of Scotland – which says (Chapter xviii) that the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers and the doctrine of ministry are "things far different from one another". See J.H. Leith, ed., *Creeds of the Churches* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1973), 154.
- [xxv] Ordinal of the Church of Scotland, https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0008/18575/ordination_booklet.pdf
- [xxvi] See e.g. Anthony C. Thistleton, *First Corinthians: A Shorter Exegetical and Pastoral Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2006), 169–253.
- [xxvii] John N. Collins, *Diakonia: Re-interpreting the Ancient Sources* (Oxford: OUP, 1990).
- [xxviii] See e.g. Thomas F. O' Meara, *Theology of Ministry* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1999), 45–98, and Steven Croft, *Ministry in Three Dimensions* (London: Dartman, Longman and Todd (1999), 36–38.
- [xxix] "Local, Universal and Shaped by the Mission of God: An Ecumenical Policy of the Church of Scotland," <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/connect/ecumenism/ecumenical-policy-for-the-church-of-scotland>
- [xxx] See, e.g., Carol Craig, *The Scots' Crisis of Confidence* (Edinburgh: Big Thinking, 2003), 47.
- [xxxii] https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0008/80297/04-Special-Commission-on-the-Effectiveness-of-the-Presbyterian-Form-of-Church-Government.pdf
- [xxxiii] Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2019, 17/1–2.
- [xxxiv] Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2019, 17/4.
- [xxxv] Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2019, 17/1.