

CHURCH OF SCOTLAND GUILD MAY 2025

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Encourage Kirk Sessions to support their Guilds to come together in a Union and to find their place at the heart of the congregation (*Section 2.1*).
3. Urge Presbyteries to maintain links with Guilds Together Groups through involving them as Corresponding members to Presbytery (*Section 2.2*).
4. Agree the amendments to section 3 of the constitution (*Section 2.2.4*).
5. Welcome the continued growth of LIFT and encourage Presbyteries to support the group in their local area (*Section 2.3*).
6. Commend the Guild on raising £553,318.40 for the 2021-2024 project partners (*Section 5.2*).
7. Urge congregations and Presbyteries to support Guild projects over the next three years and to pray regularly for the Guild and its Project Partners (*Section 5.3*).
8. Commend the Bibles for Bairns initiative to congregations and encourage Kirk Sessions to explore ways in which they can fully engage with the project as part of the Church's mission and outreach work.

Report

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 'Sure Foundations'

1.1.1 The Guild theme for this year is 'Sure Foundations' within an overall strategy of 'Let us Build a House.' This theme has encouraged us to look back on the foundations of the faith on which the Guild was established and on which we now build.

1.1.2 In 1887, the General Assembly in response to a proposal by Archibald Charteris, agreed to the formation of the Woman's Guild. This bold and historic idea took time to find acceptance and the Guild of 2025 records its gratitude and thanks to Charteris and his supporters for the vision and commitment that led to the creation of the Guild and for the sure foundations they laid on which we now build.

1.1.3 That the organisation continues to be so important to so many some 138 years later is testament not only to those who founded the organisation, but to the generations since then, the pioneers of the faith, who have built on those foundations, enabling the Guild to grow and develop whilst facing challenges both within and out with the church.

1.1.4 The Guild began before women had the right to vote, before women were ordained to ministry or were elders, yet into that world the Guild gave women a voice within the church and the opportunity to express their faith in the wider world through worship, prayer and action.

1.1.5 The Guild has been able to survive because of its ability to adapt to change and to re-invent itself to suit the day. The constants have not been about structures or constitutions, but rather about faith and fellowship; about commitment and a concern for the world in which we live.

1.1.6 From its earliest days the Guild has stood alongside the most marginalised in society, the homeless, refugees, mothers struggling with post-natal depression and today the Guild continues to speak up against injustice and inequality both at home and overseas.

1.1.7 This report will highlight the many areas the Guild is involved in and will highlight the ongoing success of the project partnership scheme and our strengthened relationship with the Guild in Malawi.

2. HOPE

2.1 Guild branches are the foundations on which the movement is built but changes at a congregational level are proving challenging in some areas. There is a need for Kirk Sessions to actively engage with Guilds and provide support when people are struggling so that the fellowship and missional engagement that the Guild provides in their congregation is not lost. This is particularly true at a time when more elderly people express their feelings of social isolation and loneliness. The Guild is a vehicle to overcome these issues and provide people with fellowship and friendship not to mention fun.

2.1.1 There are green shoots of hope in areas where a union of congregations has led to growth in the Guild, with new people finding fellowship, friendship and a place to express their faith as members of the Guild family.

2.1.2 Our newest branches in Ellon and Newport on Tay continue to grow and develop and having these new branches gives us hope that other congregations will see the value of a Guild in their church.

2.2 Our structure at Presbytery level has undergone significant change this year and from June we will move to a more streamlined National Council and smaller network of Guilds Together groups that provide us with that essential link between the local and the National. This has not been an easy process to find the best make up of groups but it has been done after wide ranging discussion, a National Conference and final debate at the National Council.

2.2.1 We hope that this new structure will provide opportunities for Guilds Together groups to be strengthened and for members to engage with each other and be enthused as they work together for the good of the Guild. They are also designed to be ways in which Guilds Together Groups can continue to have valuable relationships with Presbyteries whilst still meeting the needs of Guild members.

2.2.2 This streamlined structure will also enhance the governance of the Guild, ensuring that we are able to make decisions that include members across Scotland and safeguard the future of the Guild.

2.2.3 This is a time when many faithful servants have decided to take a step back and enable others to take up the reins and become the new leadership within the movement. We give thanks to God for all these faithful women and men who have given so much to ensure the Guild has a firm foundation on which to continue.

2.2.4 The changes have also encouraged us to look at the terms of office for members of the National Council and following discussion it is agreed that the term of office for members of the National Council shall be restricted to one three year term after which time a member must demit office. It is hoped that this will encourage new people to become involved and ensure fresh ideas are able to be brought forward. Should no new person be appointed that place on the National Council shall remain open until the vacancy is filled. In addition, this amendment necessitates a change to the term of office of a National Vice Convener at section 3.4.6. Constitutional amendments at section 3.4.2 and section 3.4.6 are therefore proposed. The new wording is attached as Appendix.

2.3. The Young Adult Guild relaunched as LIFT (Love in Fellowship and Trust) at last year's General Assembly is progressing well, meeting online monthly and discussing a range of issues and ideas that have challenged and inspired in equal measure.

2.3.1 In April we brought together young people from across Scotland to explore what the future might look like for them as they grow together in their faith and encourage each other to build on the foundations of their faith. The conference included sessions on worship, mission locally and internationally. It also considered next steps for LIFT and how best they can support each other and their local congregations.

2.3.2 The next step for LIFT will be to pilot in-person meetings in some Presbyteries to consider how young people can best be engaged in mission in their local area.

2.3.3 These young people work alongside Guild members and together they are a tangible example of genuine intergenerational church.

2.4 The Guild is keen to find ways of celebrating the nationwide presence of its membership and so in the course of the year, we have held various events in different parts of Scotland to engage with members and promote the Guild.

2.4.1 In October and April, National office bearers and staff along with project partner representatives worked with Guilds Together Groups in various parts of the country. These included Dunblane, Gourock, Hamilton, Glasgow, Inverurie, Cupar, Galashiels, Castle Douglas, Dingwall and Dundee where we held Mini Gatherings. These full day events included a programme with input from each project partner, discussion about the new structure and worship. They were a source of encouragement to all who came along and recognition that the Guild is much bigger than our individual branches and has a much greater impact when we all work together.

2.4.2 In May and in December we held Big Sings in Edinburgh and Glasgow respectively. These events are always popular and a real of celebration showing the vibrancy of the Guild.

2.5 In 2023 we held our first Guild Weekend with members coming together for a weekend of training, fellowship and mutual support. 12 people attended, then in 2024 that increased to 18 and we are delighted that this year 30 people were able to come along. It was a tremendous weekend of sharing, of encouragement and of fun. People came from all parts of Scotland and have gone back to their own areas with new ideas, with fresh enthusiasm and a sense of being part of the Guild family.

2.6 We are delighted that Clair Macdonald has joined us as our new Communications Officer. Clair will look after all our social media channels, enews and magazine as well as helping to develop resources for Guilds. Clair completes our small staff team led by Karen Gillon, our General Secretary, Mandy Moir our senior administrator and Dorothy McMonigle our finance assistant. Together they do an incredible amount of work for the Guild and we are grateful to each of them for all that they do to ensure that the Guild is well resourced, finances are carefully managed and that the wider church is aware of the crucial role the Guild plays in the life of the church both locally and in the wider world.

3. PEACE

3.1 2024 has been a year of conflict in many parts of the world. Regular updates have been provided on various situations including Ukraine, the Middle East and Sudan. Prayer points are shared through our monthly enews, on our social media channels and in our annual magazine. These encourage Guild members to be actively engaged in prayers for peace.

3.2 Peace of mind continues to be an issue that many people find increasingly difficult to achieve. Working with Beat, support has been given to provide increased access to a telephone helpline where people struggling with an eating disorder and their families can access help to find the support that they need. The speakers who came to Guilds were all people who had experienced an eating disorder personally. One of the speakers summed up the benefit of the relationship by saying, *'It was clear that the Guild community really invest in the charities they support, not simply from a monetary perspective but also through spreading the word of the charity throughout their own local communities. This was, I believe, the power of the partnership created. I am proud to have been a part of that.'* In building this relationship, the Guild and Beat have helped people find peace of mind as they come to terms with an eating disorder and find strategies to overcome it.

3.2.1 The new project with CrossReach will work with parents struggling with perinatal depression and searching for peace of mind. This impacts both the parent and the child. By supporting parents to find access to counselling alongside creche services, families will be stronger and more at peace with themselves. Again, this is evidence of The Guild supporting people both practically and prayerfully.

3.3 Gender based violence continues to affect families across Scotland and the wider world. Tackling this difficult issue has been something that has been part of the Guild's work for many years.

3.3.1 This year we have continued to be part of the Church of Scotland Integrity Group helping to shape the activities and direction of the group. Guilds were encouraged to support the 'Red Chair Initiative which involved them placing an empty chair, draped in a red fabric, in a prominent place in the church as a symbol of the many women and girls who have been killed through gender-based violence across the world. The chair was also used to display information about domestic abuse and violence against women.

3.3.2 As part of the Inter Faith Group on Domestic Abuse, The Guild works with people of other faiths to highlight the lived experience of women experiencing domestic abuse. This year a series of pop up banners were produced to highlight issues around domestic violence. These banners were displayed at the Annual Gathering and are available for Guilds to use in their own local area.

3.3.3 We also continue to work with our brothers and sisters in Malawi, together seeking to change unjust structures and enable victims of gender-based violence to find a place of safety and peace.

4. JOY

4.1 In September we welcomed to our Annual Gathering, five sisters and brothers from the Guild of the Synod of Livingstonia in Malawi. Their presence with us on the day brought a joy to the day that you could almost touch. From the poignancy of sharing in Holy Communion, to the singing and dancing together, it brought to life in a new way, a relationship that has been developing over the past 18 years. The joy of sharing with brothers and sisters in Christ from another part of the world reminded us in a tangible way that we are part of a worldwide family of believers.

4.1.1 We were also delighted to welcome the Moderator, Very Rev Dr Shaw Paterson who led us in a very special time of Holy Communion and addressed the Guild. We were heartened by his encouragement to the Guild. In his address he said 'My theme for the year is 'build together' – not buildings but as the people, who are the church, we need to be working, cooperating, building with and for the Glory of God... and I have to say that the Guild has been a beacon over the years of the church at work – not only supporting the local entity that we know as 'our' church, but the whole of the church across the country and around the world.' We continue to strive to be a beacon for God in our local communities and in our relationships with the wider world.

4.1.2 The day also saw one of our youngest male members, Finlay Morse, lead us in some traditional Scottish dancing and some reflective Gaelic psalms.

4.2 In the week following the Annual Gathering, our Malawian guests were hosted by Guilds Together Groups in North Ayrshire, Ayr & District, Shetland and Dunbartonshire. They took part in church services, Guild meetings, visited schools and community groups and visited local employers in each area to gain a greater insight into life in Scotland. This visit helped strengthen relationships and build a firm foundation on which to take our twinnings forward.

4.2.1 During the course of the year, these relationships have grown with regular prayer updates shared between groups and WhatsApp used as a means of maintaining regular contact. They are all now working towards formalising twinning agreements that will set out how each area will work with other over the next five years.

4.3 Guild Big Sings are always a time of great joy, and this was again true at both the Big Sing at the General Assembly and at our Advent Big Sing at St George's Tron in Glasgow. As well as being a time of praise and reflection they also raise money that supports the work of the Guild in Malawi. This year in the face of natural disasters and food shortages, Guilds in Dwangwa, Bandawe and Mzimba have benefitted from support from the Guild to develop income generating activities which enable them to support those most severely affected by flood, drought or cyclone.

5. LOVE

5.1 This year sees the end of one cycle of projects and the beginning of another. Here again we are both at a beginning and an ending, a time of change but a time of constancy in terms of the energy, commitment and faithful service that the success of the Partnership Project has always displayed. These projects are based on a deep love by Guild members for those in need both here in Scotland and further afield.

5.2 2021 – 2024 Project Partnerships

5.2.1 These six projects began when the United Kingdom, and indeed many parts of the world were still struggling with the impact of the COVID 19 pandemic. Guild activities did not take place for most of 2021 and the usual fundraising activities were prohibited. The economy was struggling and people's disposable income was reduced as a result. In addition, membership numbers continued to fall and members themselves were getting older. In that environment it was reasonable to assume that these projects would struggle financially.

5.2.2 The six projects chosen were:

Blether with Beat, supporting people living with and affected by eating disorders run by BEAT.

Finding homes for vulnerable children through fostering and adoption with Home for Good.

Chocolate Heaven, ensuring a fair price for cocoa producers in South East Asia working with Pioneers UK.

Finding a Light in Every Child, working with Starchild to build a school for children with special educational needs in Uganda.

Hear my Voice, supporting women to gain theological training with UNIDA in Brazil.

Kazunzu Village of Hope in Tanzania, where Vine Trust have built homes for children orphaned as a result of HIV and other diseases.

5.2.3 Despite all the challenges Guilds across the country embraced these projects and found new and innovative ways to raise money. To date over £550,000 has been raised to enable these projects to fulfil their objectives, a truly remarkable amount.

5.2.4 Whilst the success of the projects has been impressive, perhaps just as important is the fact that the work of raising the money has been made easier by the accompanying sense of fellowship and mission that pervades this work and which makes it a labour of love rather than in any sense a chore or a duty.

5.3. 2025-2027 Project Partnerships

5.3.1 As we look ahead to the next three years, we are confident that the membership of the Guild will rise to the new challenge that the 2025-2027 Partnership Projects offer. A new start will offer new impetus and the varied nature of the new projects will certainly appeal to a broad range of interests and enthusiasms.

5.3.2 In recognition of the changes in Guild membership and the hope to ensure that each project is able to realise a worthwhile amount the decision was taken to reduce the number of projects from six to four.

5.3.3 Projects were chosen using a fair and transparent process. The vast majority of applicants would have made excellent Project Partners and organisations see this partnership as being worthwhile not just in financial terms but in the prayerful support they receive and the extensive Guild network they are able to access.

5.3.4 The four projects chosen are a mixture of projects at home and abroad and the tradition of the Guild to push at barriers and challenge orthodoxy is maintained.

5.3.5 The projects chosen are:

Bibles for Bairns, providing bibles and other educational materials to children born in Scotland in partnership with the Scottish Bible Society

Build my Church, a new church plant with associated community outreach in the city of Sliven in Bulgaria with Bear Necessities.

Operation Hope, supporting persecuted Christians in Upper Egypt with practical and pastoral support through Release International.

Playful Beginnings, working alongside CrossReach to support perinatal counselling services across Scotland and the work of Daisy Chain based in Glasgow, working with children with special educational needs and children facing challenges in the home.

5.4 The Guild Initiative Fund supports projects where the Guild is starting something new to enhance mission in their local area. This year a grant was given to St Andrew's High in Musselburgh to begin a 'Friday Family Films' initiative as part of the church's Growing Young Programme. This initiative has provided a space where families and community groups can access affordable entertainment and has enabled the church to reach out to their local secondary school and to the dementia group that meets in the church. This is another example of the Guild showing God's love in action.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1 The Church of Scotland Guild remains an integral part of the church. In these changing and challenging times, we have faith that God continues to work in and through the Guild, enabling us to continue to serve Him in our local communities and in the wider world.

'Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.' Hebrews 11:1

In the name of the Committee

CHRISTINA PATERSON, *National Convener*
KAREN GILLON, *General Secretary*

Appendix

Amend section 3.4.2 of the Guild constitution to read: Guilds Together groupings representatives are elected to serve on the National Council for three years. These appointments will not be extended.

Insert 3.4.3 and renumber accordingly

Should an area be unable to nominate a new representative their place on the National Council shall remain vacant until such time as a new representative is nominated.

Amend current section 3.4.6 National Vice-Conveners will be elected for a term of up to three years or for the term of their nomination to the National Council from their Guilds Together grouping, whichever is shorter.

To read: National Vice-Conveners will be elected for a term of up to three years.

Appendix**Guild Finances 2024**

Membership **10,117**
Groups **477**

General Fund Income	£	General Fund Expenditure	£
Members' Contributions	160,840	Management and Admin	172,314
Donations and Grants	4,867	Objects Expenditure	35,683
Sale of Goods	9,334	Cost of Sales	5,008
Project Support	21,972		
Other	24,367		
Total	221,380	Total	213,005

DONATIONS TO THE WORK OF THE CHURCH

Sums given by Guilds in 2024, based on returns received to 14 March 2025, were as follows;

	£
To Ministry and Mission Funds via Congregations	33,116.79
To Congregational Funds	142,542.30
To work of the Church, including projects	168,160.04
To work outwith the Church	75,649.40
Total	419,468.53

2021-2024 GUILD PROJECT DONATIONS FROM APRIL 2024 TO FEBRUARY 2025

	£
BEAT – There is Hope	20,886.17
PIONEERS – Chocolate Heaven	20,265.54
STARCHILD – Finding the Light	28,352.20
VINE TRUST – Kazuznu Village	31,231.06
HOME FOR GOOD – A Home for Good	28,665.84
UNIDA – Hear our Voice	24,460.22
Total	153,861.03

2025-2027 GUILD PROJECT DONATIONS FROM JANUARY TO FEBRUARY 2025

	£
BEAR NECESSITIES – Build My Church	1,674.24
RELEASE INTERNATIONAL – Operation Hope	1,939.29
SCOTTISH BIBLE SOCIETY – Bibles for Bairns	1,879.87
CROSSREACH – Playful Beginnings	3,592.50
Total	9,085.90