

GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2025

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ASSEMBLY BUSINESS COMMITTEE MAY 2025

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Approve the proposed Order of Business set out in the Order of Proceedings.
3. Appoint Mr David Stewart to prepare and index a summary log of the Assembly.
4. Invite Commissioners to submit to the Procedure Committee via email: pcoffice@churchofscotland.org.uk by Monday 19 May at 12pm, nominations for consideration to serve on the Selection Committee.
5. Note the expense levels for those attending at least 13 of the 17 General Assembly sessions in person.
6. Agree to move to a four-day General Assembly that would run from a Friday to a Monday, as further described in the Report, commencing in May 2026.
7. Commend the Scottish Bible Society's global outreach to the generosity of congregations and members and support the Society in its desire to work in partnership with congregations to encourage confidence in the Gospel and in sharing the Bible.

Report

1. RT REV DR SHAW PATERSON

1.1 When Dr Paterson took "Building Together" as his moderatorial theme, he merged his previous career in the building trade with his pastoral call to the Church, to work together for the good of local communities. His year has taken him across the country to meet with those younger and older, and witness how all are contributing to the life of the Church. There have been the monumental moments during a formal visit to Malawi, quieter times retiling in a CrossReach property, and many occasions of being inspired by ideas from congregations to utilise when he returns to his own Parish. Shaw has represented the Church with dignity and grace, and has been an encouragement to everyone he has met as our Moderator.

1.2 As he undertook his role, Shaw has been thoroughly supported by many, but particularly by his family, his chaplains and those in the Office of the General Assembly, without whom he would have been unable to conduct his duties. As he prepares to hand over, we wish Shaw every blessing and extend our thanks to him for serving as the Moderator of the General Assembly.

2. PRESBYTERY REPRESENTATION

2.1 The Presbytery returns show that there are in all 833 charges, whether vacant or not, and 155 other ministers (excluding retired ones) who are members of Presbyteries. Representation is calculated for each Presbytery in accordance with the Church Courts Act (Act VI 2023) and the total number of Commissioners is currently made up as follows: 208 ministers and 208 elders, with 13 Deacons being eligible for appointment along with the five most recent past Moderators.

3. REVIEW OF STANDING ORDERS

3.1 Standing Orders are the rules and instructions regulating the procedure of the General Assembly. They are permanent until changed by the Court. They are fundamental to the orderly conduct of the business and debate of the Court and, as such, they inform the culture of debate and the quality of outcomes of any General Assembly, as well as the quality of experience for Commissioners to the General Assembly.

3.2 Standing Orders, being rules binding on all members of the General Assembly, should be clear and accessible to all participants. As the life of the Church develops, Standing Orders should be regularly reviewed and updated to meet the needs of the General Assembly over time. It is with all that in mind that the Assembly Business Committee presents, in Appendix B, an updated edition of Standing Orders for the General Assembly's consideration.

3.3 The Assembly Business Committee has reviewed the Standing Orders to remove those Orders the purpose of which has been superseded over time and to make provision for current practice, for example meeting in electronic format.

3.4 Specific attention is drawn to the following three matters:

- the time allowed for a Convener's speech has been reduced to 10 minutes (if this is approved it will apply for the duration of this General Assembly)
- the provisions regarding corresponding members and staff members in attendance at the General Assembly have been amended to clarify their respective roles and participation

- the rules regarding appointments to Standing Committees have been rewritten to clarify eligibility for appointment and the processes of the Nomination Committee.

3.5 The presentation of the Standing Orders within the document has been re-ordered. The Standing Orders document now begins with the provisions regarding the conduct of business and conduct of debate in order that Commissioners may readily find these Orders during the course of a debate without having to search the whole document.

3.6 The new version of the Standing Orders does, of course, require to be approved by this General Assembly, and the deliverance proposing the new Standing Orders is found in the Report of the Legal Question Committee.

4. GENERAL ASSEMBLY REFORM

4.1 Year on year, the Committee keeps under review how we do the General Assembly. The Committee has also been acutely conscious of how much the Assembly costs the Church, both in terms of direct and indirect costs, as was discussed at the General Assembly of 2024. A considerable amount of time has been spent looking again at all that happens during the week of the Assembly and how the supreme Court of the Church could operate more effectively and efficiently in terms of governance, without losing the heart of the Assembly in terms of the Church coming together for worship, fellowship, new encounters, sharing, visibility and profile, as well as what is positively gained from the contributions of our ecumenical and overseas guests.

4.2 The Committee is also very aware that the current six-day length of the Assembly is not conducive to encouraging elders of working age to attend, as this requires taking at least four days holiday from work. In addition, the Committee understands the pressure upon many Commissioners who have family commitments, both in terms of children and/or older relatives, which makes being away for nearly a week very difficult, if not impossible. While the new hybrid form of meeting is helpful, it does not provide all the answers. Despite efforts to seek a reduction in the number of sections of deliverance that come to the Assembly, the Committee is also very mindful of the burden placed upon Commissioners to read and digest the huge volume of reports which come to them in advance of the Assembly.

4.3 The Committee is, therefore, proposing that in 2026 the Assembly should run from Friday morning until Monday late afternoon. A shortened Opening Ceremony would take place on the Friday followed by business sessions in the morning, afternoon and evening, with breaks for meals. The Saturday would have business sessions all day, with the evening available for the traditional and much enjoyed Guild Big Sing to take place in the Hall. On the Sunday there would be the St Giles' service, with the Moderator's Reception over lunchtime at a venue near to St Giles'. In the afternoon there would be a conference session and in the evening the Beating Retreat and Holyrood Palace reception would take place. Monday morning and afternoon would be for business, including, amongst other things, the presentation of HM Forces Chaplains. The closing of the Assembly would be an Act of Worship that included the Sacrament of Holy Communion, the Report anent Deceased Ministers, Missionaries and Deacons (which the Committee believes is more pastorally appropriate to have within a time of worship), presentations, and the Lord High Commissioner's closing address. The Ceremony of the Keys and the First Time Commissioners event would both take place on the day before the opening of the Assembly, and where required Commissioners who need additional nights of accommodation because of the distance they have to travel would be entitled to that, as is the case currently.

4.4. The simple fact that time will be restricted is seen by the Committee as a positive move as this will mean that all who report to the Assembly will need to review fundamentally the way in which this is done. The publication this year of the remits for all reporting bodies has been done to assist Commissioners in being able to see first-hand the vast extent of the work of the National Church. This publication will also enable Commissioners to know more clearly to whom they should address their questions and comments. In a Church that has reduced in size in terms of both people and finances, a new focus is needed on what we do, how we do it and how we ensure that there is both good governance and accountability, as well as ensuring that the strategic direction of the Church is in the hands of the Assembly. To achieve this, we as the Church must work together in renewing relationships of trust, supported by transparency and clarity around why and how decisions that affect the Church as a whole and beyond are made.

4.5 By moving to a four-day Assembly there will also be cost savings to the Church, but it must be borne in mind that set up costs for arranging the General Assembly remain much the same regardless of the length of the Assembly. Extensive work has been conducted by the Stewardship and Finance Department and the Committee is grateful for their work. Moving to a four-day General Assembly in 2026 would result in an estimated:

- 16% reduction in Commissioner's expenses
- 29% decrease in the costs of overseas and ecumenical delegates attending the General Assembly

- potential 20% decrease in costs associated with staff time relating to the General Assembly
- 7% decrease in other general expenses (this includes items such as photography, First Aiders, Interpreters' fees, etc).

After increasing the 2024 budget for inflationary increases in 2025 and 2026, the savings in terms of both direct and indirect costs that could be made from moving to a four-day General Assembly in 2026 amount to at least £111,000.

4.6 As is demonstrated in this report with the extensive revisions to Standing Orders, the new Consent Agenda pilot process, the introduction of a Conference session and the opportunity for Commissioners to meet Conveners and Secretaries to discuss questions, comments and motions before that body formally reports, the Committee is committed to keep looking at new ways of how we do the business of the Assembly in the most effective, efficient, streamlined and accessible way possible.

5. PRESBYTERY DEVELOPMENT

5.1 Presbytery Clerks' Terms and Conditions

5.1.1 Further to the instruction from last year's General Assembly, work has continued with regards to the terms and conditions of Presbytery Clerks' employment, with the Clerks, the Principal Clerk and the HR department. There is agreement that there needs to be consistency of terms and conditions amongst the Presbyteries. The decision about Presbytery Clerks' specific terms and conditions rests with the Presbyteries, as they are employed separately by each Presbytery.

5.2 Moderator's Presbytery Visits

5.2.1 Since 2022, the Moderator has made a formal visit to two Presbyteries as part of their year in office which has meant that each Presbytery can expect a visit on a five-year rolling cycle, on the understanding that each Presbytery can choose whether the Moderator visits a part or the whole of the Presbytery area. The intention behind these visits is to strengthen the life of the local church by bringing words of encouragement and creating occasions which draw attention to the Church's interest and engagement across community life. The next five-year cycle is noted as follows:

2025-2026

Cleir Eilean I
Perth

2026-2027

Edinburgh and West Lothian
Lothians and Borders

England and the Channel Islands (in this cycle then every second cycle so next in 2036-2037)

2027-2028

Clyde
Glasgow

2028-2029

Forth Valley and Clydesdale
Fife

2029-2030

South West
North East & Northern Isles

6. PROPERTY

6.1 Moderator's Residence

6.1.1 The Furlough Flat at Inverleith Row has proved to be suitable accommodation for the Moderator's needs. During the year the Committee investigated the option of buying another property, but preferred to continue with the current arrangement for the time being. The Committee is, however, very mindful that the Inverleith Row flat is not fully accessible for a person with mobility issues (which was also true of 2 Rothesay Terrace) and so will continue to keep this under review. The former residence at 2 Rothesay Terrace was put on the market during the Summer and finally sold in December. The proceeds of sale have gone into the General Fund. The direct savings on an annual basis of selling 2 Rothesay Terrace amount to £31,500; this does not include costs associated with ongoing repairs and upkeep of the property.

6.2 Assembly Hall

6.2.1 Last year the Committee reported the result of the General Trustees' survey of the Hall's condition and review of its maintenance liabilities. This confirmed that the building's external envelope was generally in good condition and that no major expenditure was

anticipated within the next decade. Notwithstanding that, the Committee is wholly aware that the Hall has major issues concerning disability access and that to address this would require major refurbishment and upgrade of the whole building. This would incur a very significant capital investment.

6.2.2 Between 2014 and 2024 the total expenditure on the Assembly Hall amounted to £1.6 million, of which repairs and maintenance accounted for £736,000; insurance was another significant cost, rising from £36,000 in 2014 to £55,000 in 2024, a large premium for a building used by the Church for less than three weeks each year, at a net annual deficit of over £100,000. However, the Assembly Hall continues to require maintenance and upgrading, and as part of the minimum upgrading work required to the Hall, new carpeting, work to ventilation, renewal of corridor floor coverings, an overhaul of doors and water supply improvements is scheduled for 2026. The cost of this in 2026 is likely to be £160,000 higher than presented in the estimated costs for 2024, which represents an almost 185% increase in such expenditure.

6.2.3 Despite extensive efforts, the building is unable to generate enough income to offset more than a fraction of its annual running costs, let alone fund replacement of its plant and furnishings and invest in the facilities required of a modern conference venue. The latter would require substantial sums – without any guarantee that this would raise enough additional revenue in the highly competitive Edinburgh marketplace to result in a significant reduction in the annual deficit.

6.2.4 Income from lets did increase in 2024: the Hall was leased by Assembly Festival over the Christmas and New Year period and by the University of Edinburgh in the Autumn and Spring semesters to replace teaching accommodation being repaired following the discovery of RAAC in some of their buildings. This was only ever a temporary arrangement.

6.2.5 Last year the Committee also noted that in 2016 its predecessor reported that there was no apparent wish to move from the Assembly Hall, advising that without greatly reducing the numbers attending, the logistical challenges and cost of relocating could not be justified. Nine years later the Church is in a very different situation. At the local level, buildings are being closed and disposed of as the Church responds to the challenge of delivering the Five Marks of Mission with fewer resources; while the role of the General Assembly will evolve to take account of the creation of fewer, larger Presbyteries, the current layout of the Hall tends to dictate its culture and limit the scope for reform; there are also fewer Commissioners now than in 2016, and unless there is an increase in ministerial numbers and the funding required to support them, the number of Commissioners will continue to fall; another major change has been the introduction of hybrid meetings. As a result, the Church no longer requires a space as large and costly to maintain, let alone modernise, as the current Assembly Hall.

6.2.6 The Committee continues to review the future of the building in the light of the changing needs of the Church, its priorities, its demographic and its resources. Conversations have resumed with an interested party about a long-term lease of the building which would relieve the Church of its financial responsibilities for repair and maintenance and enable the Assembly Hall to be refurbished, whilst ensuring that both the title and the right to use it for the General Assembly are retained. Should a suitable long-term lease be agreed, alternative accommodation for the General Assembly would require to be found, as was the case when the Hall was leased to the Scottish Parliament between 1999 and 2004, a move that funded the building's last major refurbishment.

7. ASSEMBLY ARRANGEMENTS

7.1 Risk Assessment

7.1.1 A Risk Assessment has been prepared which sets out in detail the risks which are present by a large scale gathering in the General Assembly Hall, and outlines the steps taken to reduce the identified risks to acceptable levels. The Committee continues to monitor all relevant guidance, advice and changes in legislation, and keeps the Risk Assessment under regular review in consultation with the Church of Scotland's Health and Safety Manager. The Committee comply with guidance from the UK and Scottish Governments in compiling the Risk Assessment and associated Evacuation documentation. The Risk Assessment for the General Assembly of 2025 is available to view on the Church of Scotland website.

7.2 Commissioner Expenses

7.2.1 Expense rates for those participating in the Assembly Hall at the General Assembly of 2025 will be a maximum of £100 per night for accommodation and a limit of £20 each day for out-of-pocket expenses. When Commissioners are staying with family or friends, a total allowance of up to £80 may be claimed towards a token gift for hosts. Attendance at 13 of the 17 sessions will be required for any expenses to be authorised.

7.3 Circulation Breaks

7.3.1 The Committee have arranged for tea and coffee to be available in the Rainy Hall during circulation breaks. In order to serve as many people as possible, those attending the

Assembly in person are requested to have a contactless device available as they order their beverage. Drinking water is available throughout the building where indicated.

7.4 Exhibition Space

7.4.1 To mark the 80th anniversary of Christian Aid, an information stand is present in the Martin Hall exhibition area. Those attending the Assembly in person are encouraged to visit and learn more about the work that Christian Aid are engaged in.

7.5 Chief Steward

7.5.1 Following the General Assembly of 2024, our Chief Steward, Mr Sandy Gemmill, indicated his intention to retire at the General Assembly of 2025. The Committee are grateful to Sandy, his Depute, Mr Simon Bolam, and the Assembly Officers, Mr William Mearns and Mrs Karen McKay, for producing an Operations Guide, which will assist future Stewards in fulfilling their duties. Using this Guide, the Committee created a Chief Steward role description, and advertised for Mr Gemmill's successor. At the time of writing, interviews have not yet been held, but the Convener will update the Assembly on the completed process.

7.6 Logging the General Assembly

7.6.1 Mr Roy Pinkerton has intimated his retirement from the logging team. Roy joined the logging team in 1996 and has been the principal person appointed in that role since 2006. The Committee wish to put on record their thanks to Mr Pinkerton for his service, and for his diligence in undertaking this duty. He has approached his position with meticulous care, skill and patience to ensure that contributions to the Assembly are part of the public record and can be easily identified by interested parties in the future. The Committee is grateful to Mr David Stewart who has agreed to assume Roy's responsibilities. David is ably assisted by Ms Louise Brodie, Mr Peter Graham and Mrs Alison Murray.

7.7 Standing Committee Conveners

7.7.1 Following feedback from Commissioners, the Committee are trialling a pilot to make Conveners of Standing Committees available to answer questions prior to their report being discussed. The Convener of the Procedure Committee will inform the Assembly of arrangements as part of the Procedure Committee report.

7.8 Conference Session

7.8.1 Time has been allocated for the General Assembly to meet in a conference session. The Committee will monitor how the conference session works, in advance of any similar session planned for the General Assembly of 2026. Thanks are extended to the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team for leading in 2025; a different body will be approached to lead in 2026.

7.9 Consent Agenda

7.9.1 The Committee propose that some items of business may be taken as read, without Conveners' speeches or debate. These items will be non-contentious areas of work, but Commissioners will always have the opportunity to return an item from the Consent Agenda to the Order of Business. The Convener of the Procedure Committee will move which Reports are proposed for the Consent Agenda process at Session 3.

7.10 Pastoral Care

7.10.1 Following a successful pilot of a Pastoral Care Team at the General Assembly of 2024, the Committee will ensure a similar provision is made in 2025. The Convener of the Procedure Committee will highlight how Commissioners can access pastoral care during the Assembly.

7.11 Communion

7.11.1 As directed by Standing Order 12, the Committee has arranged for the celebration of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper to take place at 9:15am on Monday 19 May. Individual glasses with non-alcoholic wine and gluten-free bread will be dispensed to those gathered on the ground floor of the Assembly Hall. Those participating remotely are warmly encouraged to provide their own elements and have them ready to participate when directed by the Moderator.

8. REPRESENTATIVE ON THE ASSEMBLY TRUSTEES

8.1 The Committee continue to be grateful to the Revd Sheila Kirk for her willingness to be the representative of the Committee at meetings of the Assembly Trustees. Work continues closely with the Assembly Trustees on areas of mutual concern and interest.

In the name of the Committee

MICHAEL J MAIR, Convener
SHEILA M KIRK, Vice-Convener
FIONA E SMITH, Secretary

Addendum

Dr J Graeme Roberts

Dr Roberts has served the Committee and the Church with great skill as Convener of the Property Group over the last six years. In addition to ensuring that the properties which are entrusted to the Assembly Business Committee have been maintained in line with the budgets allocated to us, he has overseen the sale of the Moderator's Residence, as well as ensuring the Assembly Hall is fit for Commissioners to gather within. His diligence, care and graceful convenership of the Property Group has seen the Committee through a significant period, and we are grateful to Dr Roberts for the time he has devoted to this work.

MICHAEL J MAIR, Convener
SHEILA M KIRK, Vice-Convener
FIONA E SMITH, Secretary

Appendix A

REPORT OF THE SCOTTISH BIBLE SOCIETY

'If one part suffers, all parts suffer with it, and if one part is honoured, all parts are glad. All of you together are Christ's body, and each of you is a part of it'.

(1 Corinthians 12:26-27)

The Bible teaches us that those who have a living relationship with Christ are joined together as one body. If one part of the body suffers, we all join in the suffering, and likewise when one part rejoices, we all rejoice together. These verses have a real significance for us, as it is estimated that one in five Bible Societies are currently working in a context of war or civil unrest.

We had a special time at our Annual General Meeting this year, when we were joined (virtually) by our colleagues from The Israeli Bible Society, the Palestinian Bible Society and the Arab Israeli Bible Society. Hearing their stories of how they are continuing to minister to their communities and seeking to share the Bible which offers hope, was both challenging and encouraging. We continue to pray for them as we admire their fortitude and trust in God.

Similarly, our colleagues in Ukraine continue to minister and carry on their work undaunted. President Zelenskyy has visited Bible House in Kyiv to thank the Bible Society for bringing the churches together, and for all the work they are doing. We continue to pray for their safety, and for their faith to remain steadfast. In this complex situation, we continue to pray for our brothers and sisters in Russia too.

Our Chief Executive, Elaine Duncan, had the privilege of visiting China during the year, leading a delegation from the United Bible Societies (UBS). In the midst of the varying reports we hear about the church in China, our relationship with the government 'approved' national church is one we seek to steward well. Our partnership with the Amity Printing Company to provide affordable Bibles for Christians in China continues to be strong.

In 2024, a UBS fellowship event was held in Canada. The underlying theme of the event was 'The Bible for Everyone' and re-emphasised how much can be achieved when Bible Societies work together collaboratively and creatively across the globe.

Through our Appeals we have once again been able to give significant practical support to the Bible Societies in Egypt, Guatemala, Malawi and Ukraine. And through the generosity of our supporters, we have again been able to fund various Bible translation projects throughout the world. These are all ways in which we help other Bible Societies share the Bible in their own context.

We are hugely encouraged about our ministry here in Scotland. A magazine-style, easy-to-read gospel of Matthew was produced for distribution at Magnitude, the SU Scotland youth festival. This gospel, aimed at teenagers, was given away free, thanks to a generous supporter, to around 1,500 young people. Our prayer is that these gospels are read, and God is revealed in a real and tangible way.

We are delighted that the Church of Scotland Guild has adopted our 'Bibles for Bairns' project as one of their project partners for the next three years. When a baby is registered with us (born in specific years) they receive a 'Share the Story' Bible on their first birthday. For birthdays 2, 3 and 4 they will get an age-appropriate gift to help the family continue to engage with the Bible. On their 5th birthday they will receive a children's Bible, just as they are learning to read themselves.

Other Bible-based resources and projects continue to grow and develop. We are encouraged by the number of people being trained as Bible-based Trauma Healing facilitators. The benefit of them using this resource in their own church and community is immeasurable. Equally we give thanks for the number of teachers downloading and using our 'Must Know Bible Stories' classroom resources, including those now translated into Gaelic.

Without doubt there are both challenges and opportunities in front of us, both at home and abroad. However, we press ahead seeking God's will and wisdom, knowing we can trust him.

We are grateful to every individual and congregation who stands with us in prayer and financial support. We look forward to ways we can partner together in sharing the Bible in the year ahead.

Appendix B**REVISED STANDING ORDERS****THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND
GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2025****STANDING ORDERS**

I	Conduct of General Assembly Business
II	Order of Debate
III	Participation and Assembly Hub
IV	Asking Questions & Making Comments
SCHEDULES	
A	Commissioners to the General Assembly
B	Other Members and Attendees of the General Assembly
C	Overtures from Presbyteries and Commissioners
D	Conduct of Cases (including Appeals, Dissent and Complaints and Petitions)
E	Committees of the General Assembly and their Membership
F	Alteration and Suspension of Standing Orders

Note: Generally, references to “laid on the table” shall include “circulated electronically in advance”.

I. CONDUCT OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY BUSINESS

1. The General Assembly consists of various sessions taking place over several days, with matters of business taken in those sessions as set out in the Order of Business, which is found in the Order of Proceedings.

(a) OPENING SESSION

2. **Convening.** The Commissioners elected to serve in the Assembly shall convene on the day and at the hour fixed for the meeting of the Assembly, and, after prayer by the Moderator of the preceding Assembly, the List of Commissioners shall be laid on the table.

3. **Election of Moderator.** The election of a Moderator shall then be made.

4. **His Majesty’s Commission.** His Majesty’s Commission to the Lord High Commissioner shall then be laid on the table and ordered to be recorded.

5. **His Majesty’s Letter.** His Majesty’s Letter to the Assembly shall then be read and a Committee shall be appointed to prepare an answer thereto.

6. **Standing Orders.** The Standing Orders shall be laid on the table.

7. **Committee on Commissions.** The Report of the Committee on Commissions (SO A5) shall be called for and disposed of.

8. **Order of Business.** The Assembly Business Committee shall prepare and circulate electronically before the commencement of the Assembly, in the Order of Proceedings, a proposed Order of Business for the Assembly. The proposed Order of Business shall be put to the Assembly for approval on the opening day.

(b) PROCEDURE COMMITTEE AND SELECTION COMMITTEE

9. **The Procedure Committee.** The Assembly shall appoint a Procedure Committee consisting of the Convener and Vice-Convener of the Assembly Business Committee, plus the Moderator, the Clerks, the Procurator and the Law Agent.

10. **Remit.** The Procedure Committee shall be wholly responsible for any amendments to the Order of Business, ie for any re-ordering (or additional ordering) of the business of the General Assembly.

11. **The Selection Committee.** The Assembly shall also appoint a Selection Committee. Commissioners to the General Assembly shall be free to nominate other commissioners to serve on the Selection Committee. The names of those proposed shall be brought before the first meeting of the Procedure Committee which, in turn and without being limited to those names proposed by commissioners who are not among its members, shall nominate a Selection Committee of twenty commissioners, including a Convener and Vice-Convener, whose function it shall be to select and submit to the Assembly for their approval names of persons to serve on all Special Commissions and Committees appointed during the sittings of the Assembly. Such persons selected need not be commissioners.

(c) DEVOTIONAL EXERCISES

12. The Lord's Supper. The Assembly shall celebrate the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper at a time appointed by the General Assembly in the Order of Business.

13. Acts of Worship. The Moderator shall be responsible to the Assembly for the conduct of all acts of worship, and shall consult the Assembly Business Committee or the Procedure Committee as to any proposed innovation in such conduct.

(d) COMMITTEE ON OVERTURES AND CASES AND RETURNS TO OVERTURES UNDER THE BARRIER ACT

14. Committee on Overtures and Cases. The Committee on Overtures and Cases shall consist of the Clerks, Procurator and Law Agent of the Church (with the Principal Clerk as Convener).

15. Papers. All papers lodged with the Clerks in Overtures and Cases of every sort shall be laid by them before the Committee on Overtures and Cases, which shall consider the same and report to the Assembly.

16. Decision not to Transmit. If the Committee on Overtures and Cases shall decide not to transmit to the Assembly any papers in Overtures or Cases duly lodged with the Clerks of Assembly it shall report the same to the Assembly no later than the second Session, with its reasons for not transmitting the papers, and parties shall be entitled to be heard thereon at the bar of the Assembly. Intimation of a decision not to transmit papers shall be made to the parties concerned as soon as possible, and in time to allow of their being represented at the bar when the decision not to transmit is reported to the Assembly.

17. In Private. The Procedure Committee shall, in its first Report, specify any Overture or Case which in its judgement requires to be conducted in private, and any case which does not appear to it to be of that character although the Clerks of Assembly may have reported it as such. The Assembly shall thereupon determine by a special Deliverance, at what stage in the proceedings the papers in such a case shall be issued to the Commissioners. In every Overture or Case which the Assembly appoint to be conducted in private, the instruction to issue the papers shall be accompanied by a special exhortation to the Commissioners to keep them private.

18. Overtures under the Barrier Act.

(a) The Committee on Overtures and Cases shall also advise any Committee or individual on the procedure to be followed in respect of measures requiring process under the Barrier Act.

(b) Measures remitted to Presbyteries by an Overture under the Barrier Act shall be accompanied by a note of the voting figures in the General Assembly, the text of the relevant Report and a note by the Clerks explaining any technical or legal matters contained in the Overture.

(c) All Presbyteries shall make a return in respect of every Overture sent down under the Barrier Act. The return shall be made upon the schedule sent electronically to the Presbytery Clerk for the purpose, transmitted to the Clerks of Assembly, and then submitted to the Committee on Overtures and Cases. The Committee shall classify the returns and make a report to the next Assembly. It shall be the duty of the Committee to report not only the number of Presbyteries for and against an Overture, but also the numbers voting in the Presbyteries as reported in the schedule.

(d) The Report of the Committee shall include the text of such Overtures as have been approved by a majority of Presbyteries.

(e) The Assembly Business Committee shall ensure that the Committee's Report classifying returns is ordinarily taken by the General Assembly no later than session 2 thereof, save where the Procedure Committee decides otherwise, and in any case before any debate that in the opinion of the Committee on Overtures and Cases would more usefully follow consideration of the Committee's Report.

(f) The Report of the Committee shall be given in to the Assembly by the Principal Clerk, with the reply to the debate on the merits of the measure given by the relevant Convener. Both should be available to answer questions, as appropriate.

(e) MISCELLANEOUS

19. Minutes. The minutes of each day's proceedings, if available, together with the Order of Business for the following day or days, intimations of meetings of Committees, and miscellaneous intimations, shall be circulated to Commissioners as the Assembly Paper. The Minutes, being taken as read and full opportunity having been given for correction, shall be approved as available. Before the dissolution of the Assembly a small Committee, appointed for the purpose, shall be authorised to approve the Minutes not already approved by the Assembly.

20. Quorum. The quorum of the Assembly shall be thirty-one, of whom not less than sixteen shall be Ministers. Any Member may at any time call the attention of the Moderator to the fact that there is not a quorum present, and if, on a count being made, it is found that such is the case, it shall be the duty of the Moderator to suspend or adjourn the session.

21. Acts and Regulations of Assembly. The Committee on Commissions (SO A5) shall arrange for the text of the Acts of Assembly and of Regulations of Assembly to be finalised and shall arrange for a list of the proposed Acts of Assembly and Regulations of Assembly to be circulated in advance in the Assembly Paper, which shall be considered on the last day of the Assembly.

22. Examination of Records. Minutes of the Standing Committees of the Assembly shall be examined by the Legal Questions Committee in advance of the Assembly, and that Committee shall report on its examination to the General Assembly.

23. Special Commissions and Committees.

Special Commissions or Committees will only be appointed where the General Assembly has no existing Standing Committee to which the matter under consideration can, in all the circumstances, properly be remitted. In normal circumstances, business proposed by Standing Committees of the General Assembly or proposed by Commissioners in the course of debate shall be remitted to one or more of the appropriate Standing Committees listed in SO E4.

24. Conference Sessions. The Assembly Business Committee, or the Procedure Committee, in consultation with other Standing Committees as appropriate, may invite the General Assembly to meet in conference sessions and may arrange for guest speakers to address such sessions. When the General Assembly is meeting in conference no resolutions shall be framed or decisions taken.

25. Closing of Assembly.

When the business set down for the last day of the Assembly has been disposed of, the Assembly shall be closed by addresses by the Moderator to the Assembly and to the Lord High Commissioner, and by an address by the Lord High Commissioner to the Assembly, during an act of worship, and dissolved according to the practice of the Church.

[Numbers 26 to 30 not used]

II. ORDER OF DEBATE

Note: Commissioners will normally receive the following information electronically: the Volume of Reports of Standing Committees/individual Reports, the Order of Proceedings (containing, amongst other things, the Roll of Commissioners, the Order of Business, any Presbytery Overtures, any Supplementary Reports from Standing Committees and these Standing Orders), and the Assembly Paper (containing, amongst other things, details of Assembly Worship, Minutes of proceedings as available, and amendments/corrections to other published information). A list of Notices of Motion will be published and updated regularly on the Church website (www.churchofscotland.org.uk), although Commissioners should note that the most up to date information as to Notices of Motion will be found in the Assembly Hub. Commissioners will also find details of the remits of Standing Committees on the Church website.

31. The Assembly will deal with Reports from its Standing Committees in accordance with the following Standing Orders.

(a) REPORTS

32. Transmission. Reports of all Special or Standing Committees reporting to the Assembly shall be transmitted to the Clerks of Assembly by a date in early March notified in advance by the Clerks to all Secretaries. All Reports shall be accompanied by the Deliverance to be proposed to the Assembly, and when the Proposed Deliverance exceeds two sections each section shall be numbered consecutively.

33. Circulation of Reports and Proposed Deliverances. The Clerks shall arrange for all such Reports and Proposed Deliverances to be circulated to each Member of Assembly at least one week before the opening day of meeting. All Reports so distributed shall be held as read.

34. Oral Reports and Reports of Sub-Committees. Oral Reports shall not be received, and no Sub-Committee shall give any Report to the Assembly except with the Assembly's permission.

35. Record-keeping. Reports shall not be engrossed in the Minutes, but the Clerks of Assembly shall arrange for a copy of each Report to be preserved among the other Records of the Assembly.

(b) DECLARATORY OR INTERIM ACTS

36. Declaratory or Interim Act. The draft of any proposed Declaratory or Interim Act, as also the draft of any Overture which it is proposed to transmit to Presbyteries in terms of the Barrier Act (other than any Overture circulated in the Volume of Reports), shall be circulated to Members and laid on the table of the Assembly at least one day before a Motion

for the passing of such Declaratory or Interim Act, or for the transmission of such Overture to Presbyteries, is made in the Assembly.

(c) MOTIONS

37. Time-bound

On the Motion of the Procedure Committee or moved as part of the deliverance of the Assembly Business Committee, the General Assembly may resolve that the Report and Proposed Deliverance relating to a particular Special or Standing Committee's Report be taken in a time-bound process of debate and decision. Such a Motion shall be moved at least 24 hours in advance of the presentation of the Report concerned.

Having so resolved the General Assembly shall operate the following timetable:-

- a) Start times shall be allotted to specified Sections of the Report and to the related sections of the Proposed Deliverance. Discussion of any Section of the Report shall not commence later than its allotted start time, but may begin earlier if debate of the previous Section has been completed.
- b) If discussion and debate of a particular Section of the Report has not been concluded within its allotted time, then further consideration of associated sections of the Proposed Deliverance shall be sisted and the General Assembly shall take up the next Section of the Report.
- c) If, at the close of the debate on the last Section of the Report, there is still time before the Order of the Day requires to be implemented or business is due to conclude, then the General Assembly shall return for further debate of any outstanding sections of the Proposed Deliverance remaining relative to each Section of the Report.
- d) If the Order of the Day or anticipated close of business is imminent, then any outstanding sections of the Proposed Deliverance shall be voted upon without debate, except that other Motions shall also be taken, without debate, the Convener simply having the right to indicate whether or not the Special or Standing Committee is willing to accept the Motion.
- e) Where Motions do not relate directly to the Report and Proposed Deliverance proposed by the Special or Standing Committee, they will be taken either at the end of the appropriate Section, if there is time available according to the allotted timetable, or at the end of the appropriate Section when the procedure leading to the Order of the Day (or close of business) is being implemented.

38. Right to Move. Any Commissioner to the Assembly may make a Motion upon any matter coming regularly before the Assembly; and on rising to do so he or she shall read the terms of the Motion (or may ask the Clerks of Assembly to do so), having previously submitted the Motion in accordance with SO 41. It shall be in order to move a Motion regarding any matter in the care of a Special or Standing Committee to which no reference is made in the Report of that Committee, provided that reasonable notice has been given in writing to the Convener before presentation of the Report. The mover of any Counter-Motion or amendment may reply to the discussion of his or her Motion, immediately before the Convener closes the debate.

39. Withdrawal. When a Motion has been duly seconded it shall not be competent to withdraw it, or to make any alteration upon it, without the permission of the Assembly.

40. Committee Convener. The Convener of a Special or Standing Committee when a Commissioner, on giving in the Report of that Committee, shall move the Deliverance proposed in terms of SO 33. A Convener, when not a Commissioner, shall be allowed to submit the Report of the Special or Standing Committee, and to give explanations in the subsequent discussion. In such a case the Principal Clerk, whom failing, the Depute Clerk, shall formally move the Proposed Deliverance. In all cases the Convener shall have the right of replying to the debate.

41. Notice of Motion. Commissioners are encouraged to give advance Notice of Motions. Any Commissioner may, during the sittings of the Assembly, give advance notice of Motion on any subject due to come regularly before the Assembly, other than a contentious case. The fact of giving Notice of Motion shall confer no right of priority of moving same, the Moderator being the sole judge of the order in which Members are entitled to address the Assembly. For the avoidance of doubt, it is open to the General Assembly to decline to consider any Motion of which it believes inadequate notice has been given, considering the nature of its content.

42. List of Notices of Motion. A list of Notices of Motion shall regularly, in the days preceding the opening of the Assembly and during it, be placed on the Church's website. The most up to date information as to Notices of Motion shall however be found in the Assembly Hub.

43. Submitting a Notice of Motion

[If attending in person]: If such a person has a device enabling them to do so, they may use the Assembly Hub to register a Notice of Motion as in the subsequent paragraph. Alternatively an in person attendee may email a duly completed Notice of Motion form to the Clerks of

Assembly using pcoffice@churchofscotland.org.uk, or may complete and return to the Clerks at the top table or to the Assembly Office, a paper Notice of Motion form.

[If attending online]: Members should use the Assembly Hub to register a Notice of Motion in advance in respect of the relevant section(s) of Proposed Deliverance.

[For all attendees]: All persons entitled to do so are asked to register a Notice of Motion before the start of the relevant Special or Standing Committee's business slot, i.e. before debate on the relevant Report starts.

(d) ORDER OF THE DAY

44. When the Assembly have resolved that a case or other piece of business shall be taken up at a certain hour mentioned in the Order of Business, such case or other piece of business shall be taken not later than the hour fixed and the business before the Assembly, if not finished at the hour named, shall be adjourned. If, in the opinion of the Moderator, it would be in accordance with the general convenience of the Assembly, the Moderator may allow the transaction of the business then actually under discussion to continue for a period of not more than fifteen minutes beyond the specified time, but no fresh business shall be commenced.

(e) THE DEBATE

45. The Chair. Every speaker shall address the Assembly through the Moderator, and the correct address is "Moderator".

46. In Support. When a Motion or Motions have been made and seconded, any Member (including a formal seconder in terms of SO 50) may take part in subsequent debate.

47. Speeches.

(1) Except as provided in SOs 38 and 40, no Member may speak twice on the same question except in explanation, and then only by special permission of the Assembly.

(2) Members shall make relevant declarations of interest where the topic of debate makes it appropriate to do so.

48. Point of Order. Any Member may rise to speak to a Point of Order. A speaker is not to be interrupted unless upon a call to order. When so interrupted he or she shall cease speaking, and shall resume his or her seat until the Point of Order is decided. The Member calling to order shall state the grounds for so doing; and the speaker who has been interrupted may briefly reply in explanation, to show that he or she is not out of order, but no other Member may speak to the Point of Order unless with the permission or at the request of the Moderator, with whom the decision of the point rests, though the Moderator may put the point to a vote of the Assembly.

49. Right of reply. There shall be no right of reply to a debate except as provided for by SOs 38 and 40.

50. Time Limits. All speeches shall be limited to 5 minutes, with the following exceptions:

(i) COMMITTEE REPORTS	
Convener giving in the Report of his or her Special or Standing Committee and moving thereon (seconding to be formal)	10 minutes
Convener responding to a question	4 minutes
(ii) OVERTURES FROM PRESBYTERIES	
Introducing an Overture and moving thereon	10 minutes
(iii) PETITIONS	
Speeches of Petitioners	10 minutes

51. No Time Limit. The time limits shall apply, except in the following cases:

(a) when the Assembly are debating specific proposals for change under Barrier Act procedure;

(b) when the Assembly are exercising judicial functions;

(c) when the Assembly are discussing a matter of doctrine;

(d) in Petitions when, for special reasons, the Committee on Overtures and Cases reports that the circumstances demand an extension, and when the General Assembly adopt that opinion;

(e) in any other matter when the Procedure Committee declares that, in its opinion, such matter is of exceptional importance, and when the Assembly adopt that opinion.

(f) DEALING WITH MOTIONS

52. Character of Motions. Motions shall be considered as belonging to one of the following categories, and shall be dealt with as prescribed, viz:

1. The original Motion.
2. Counter-Motions – being Motions contradictory or negative of the original Motion or of a substantial part of the original Motion.
3. Amendments being Motions not substantially contradictory of the original Motion or Counter-Motion, but for making deletions, alterations, or additions thereto without defeating its main object.
4. Amendments of amendments already moved and seconded.

53. Moderator to Judge. The Moderator shall be the judge of the category to which any Motions shall be considered to belong, and the ruling of the Moderator shall be final.

54. Grouping of Amendments. When to any Proposed Deliverance there has been given notice of amendments which differ from each other only slightly in their general tenor, the Moderator shall decide whether or not to permit more than one of such amendments to be moved.

55. Voting on Amendments. When an amendment (Category 3) has been proposed it shall be disposed of by the Assembly before any other Counter-Motion or amendment is proposed. However, it shall be in order for an amendment of an amendment (Category 4) to be proposed, seconded and debated, after which the Moderator shall take a vote “For” or “Against”. When all such Category 4 Motions have been so disposed of, the Assembly shall complete its consideration of the original amendment (Category 3) and the Moderator shall take a vote “For” or “Against” the original amendment amended or unamended as the case may be. For the avoidance of doubt, it is affirmed that the order of debate for Category 3 and Category 4 Motions shall be the same except as herein provided and that the provisions of SO 40 shall apply to both.

56. Voting on Motions. After all amendments, if any, have been disposed of, the Moderator shall take a vote on the Motion which remains. If there are Motions in Categories (1) and (2), the Moderator shall adopt the following procedure. A vote shall be taken in one of the methods provided below, between all the Motions in the order in which they were made, beginning at the first. Each Commissioner may vote for one Motion only. If, on the numbers being announced, one Motion has obtained a clear majority of votes, all the other Motions shall fall; but if no Motion has obtained a clear majority, the Motion having the smallest number of votes shall be struck off and a vote taken between the remaining Motions until only one remains. A vote for or against that remaining Motion shall then be taken.

57. Deliberative Vote. The Moderator or Acting Moderator in the Chair shall have no Deliberative Vote (meaning a vote cast for the purpose of deciding a matter under deliberation).

58. Casting Vote. If the outcome of any vote is a tie, the Moderator may give a deciding (casting) vote; or he or she may decline to do so, in which case the Motion (and/or any Counter-Motion, as the case may be) shall not pass. Other options open to the Moderator are to direct that the Standing Committee in question give the matter further consideration or to seek further Motions on the matter.

(g) VOTING

59. (a) The Moderator may, in any circumstances and at his or her sole discretion, ascertain the mind of the Assembly by combining the following indications and forming a view: asking in person Commissioners to stamp their feet or stand in their places, and at the same time asking online commissioners to “raise a hand” electronically, and shall intimate to the Assembly on which side there is in his or her opinion a majority. Unless the opinion of the Moderator so intimated is at once challenged, it shall become the decision of the Assembly. If any Commissioner challenges the opinion of the Moderator, the Assembly shall proceed to take an electronic vote using a system approved by the Assembly Business Committee. Alternatively, it shall be open to the Moderator, again at his or her sole discretion and in any circumstances, to ascertain the mind of the Assembly by recourse to the use of electronic voting. The Procedure Committee shall ensure that Commissioners are familiar with the method of electronic voting.

(b) Where an electronic vote is used, it shall proceed as follows:

[If attending in person]: An in person attendee shall vote using a Bluetooth handset supplied to them at the start of the Assembly. Voting for such persons via the Assembly Hub will be disabled.

[If attending online] An online attendee shall use the Assembly Hub to vote. In the event of a failure in the technology operating the Assembly Hub, online attendees shall vote using the voting system within the application which facilitates their online attendance, or shall use such other voting mechanism as may be prescribed at the time by the Procedure Committee.

[For all attendees]: The votes from both from in-person attendance and the Assembly Hub shall be added together and the result shall be announced by the Moderator, which shall become the decision of the Assembly. The voting figures shall be minuted where the Moderator, in his or her discretion, specifically requests this, or where the Clerks of Assembly decide that it would be appropriate to do so. In no circumstances shall a second vote be taken on a matter which has already been the subject of a vote by electronic voting.

(h) DISSENTS

60. Entering. Any Commissioner dissatisfied with a judgement of the Assembly, which has not been unanimous, has the right to enter his or her dissent against it; but no dissent can be given in until the matter to which it refers has, for that session, been disposed of, the Minute adjusted, and the Assembly is ready to proceed to other business.

61. Adhering. When a dissent has been entered, it is in order for any other Commissioner present when that judgement was pronounced to adhere to such dissent. No other's adherence may be entered.

62. Reasons. A person dissenting may do so with or without giving in reasons of dissent. If he or she dissent for reasons given in at the time, or to be afterwards given in, such reasons shall, if received by the Assembly as proper and relevant, and provided they are given in before the close of the next session (or, when made on the last day of the Assembly, before the close of the same session), be recorded in the Minutes.

63. Answers. If the Assembly appoint a Committee to prepare answers to reasons of dissent, the Report of that Committee shall, if possible, be published in the Assembly Paper; and, as approved by the Assembly, shall be included in the Minutes, if the reasons of dissent have been so circulated.

64. Record of Dissents. Reasons of dissent and answers thereto when not entered in the Minutes, shall be kept in a separate Record of Dissents.

65. Submitting a Dissent.

[If attending in person]: If such a person has a device enabling them to do so, they may email their dissent as in the subsequent paragraph. Alternatively, an in person attendee may sign the list provided by the Assembly Office.

[If attending online]: A dissent shall be entered or adhered to by sending an email to: pcoffice@churchofscotland.org.uk with the subject line stating "Dissent against....[insert name of Standing Committee and number of relevant section of Proposed Deliverance]". To be recorded in the minute, any such email must be received by the Clerks by the close of the last session of the Assembly.

(i) STIPEND AND PROPOSALS WITH BUDGETARY IMPLICATIONS

66. Matters Relating to Stipend. It shall not be competent for the Assembly, without due notice of Motion in the hands of Commissioners in proper form (for example as a Proposed Deliverance, Notice of Motion or Crave of a Petition), to debate any proposal which might impact directly on or which might bring about binding changes to the terms and conditions of ministers which relate to stipend or stipend scales.

67. Proposals with Budgetary Implications. Prior to making any Motion, Commissioners should give due consideration as to whether this will incur the use of additional resources or affect the incoming resources for the Church's work, ie whether the Motion has budgetary implications. Advice on any Motion can be sought from the General Treasurer. A proposal with budgetary implications must be in the hands of Commissioners in proper form providing due notice (for example, as a Proposed Deliverance, Notice of Motion, or Crave of a Petition). Specifically, to ensure sensible budget controls:

- (a) Any Motion which involves potential new or additional expenditure whether of a one-off or recurring nature, must be accompanied by a statement specifying where funding will be found, whether by a reduction of existing expenditure; funding external to the Church or from additional funding provided by congregations.
- (b) Any Motion which results in a potential reduction in income, including a reduction in the funding provided by congregations, must be accompanied by a statement of where replacement funding will be found or expenditure reduced to compensate for the reduction in the income.

The Assembly Trustees and/or the General Trustees, as applicable, shall have the right to comment upon any Motion in category (a) or (b) before any decision is taken.

[Numbers 68 to 70 not used]

III PARTICIPATION AND ASSEMBLY HUB

71. In person or online participation

Members may participate in person or online at the General Assembly. A person shall be designated in advance by the commissioning Presbytery as either an in person or an online attendee for the entire duration of the Assembly. No change to a person's status as an

in person or online attendee shall be possible after 28 March, save only in the following circumstances: if an in person attendee becomes ill and unable to attend the Assembly in person, they shall advise the Office of the General Assembly as soon as possible by emailing pcoffice@churchofscotland.org.uk. When doing so they may request to change to being an online attendee and the Office of the General Assembly shall enable this if possible.

72. Assembly Hub for online attendees.

All Members attending the General Assembly online shall require to use the Assembly Hub software application (the “Assembly Hub”) to participate in the General Assembly as set out below. All such persons shall be supplied in advance with login details to the Assembly Hub and training on its use shall be made available. In particular, the Assembly Hub shall be used by online attendees throughout the General Assembly to do the following:

- to follow the business of the General Assembly, read sections of Proposed Deliverance and vote on them;
- to submit Notices of Motion (to amend an existing section of Proposed Deliverance, to propose a Counter-Motion to an existing section of Proposed Deliverance, or to propose a new Motion);
- to second a Notice of Motion; and
- to indicate a request to speak (ask a question, make a comment or raise a point of order).

[Numbers 73 to 80 not used]

IV ASKING QUESTIONS AND MAKING COMMENTS

81. Questions on Reports. After the Proposed Deliverance on the Report of any Special or Standing Committee has been moved and seconded the Assembly, before dealing with any other Motions or amendments thereon, shall have opportunity for asking questions on the Report, this being without prejudice to the right of Members to put questions, with the leave of the Assembly, at any subsequent stage.

82. Questions requiring Notice. It shall be in order to ask questions of the Convener regarding any matter in the care of the Committee to which no reference is made in the Report but in such cases timeous notice shall be given to the Convener.

83. Asking a question or making a comment

[If attending in person]: If such a person has a device enabling them to do so, they may use the Assembly Hub to ask a question or make a comment on a Report as in the subsequent paragraph. Alternatively an in person attendee may use one of the stations placed in the Hall to enter a “request to speak” against the relevant section(s) of Proposed Deliverance.

[If attending online]: Members who wish to ask a question or to make a comment on a Report should use the Assembly Hub to enter a “request to speak” against the relevant section(s) of Proposed Deliverance.

SCHEDULES

SCHEDULE A

COMMISSIONERS TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

A1. Roll of Presbytery. Each Presbytery Clerk shall, by 15 December of each year, transmit to the Clerks of Assembly the number of charges, appointments and deacons specified in section 21 of the Church Courts Act (Act VI 2023) – all as at 30 November immediately preceding.

A2. Presbyterial Representation. The Clerks of Assembly will thereafter intimate to Presbyteries what will be their representation in the ensuing Assembly. Any queries shall be settled by the Assembly Business Committee at the request of the Clerks. The decision of the Assembly Business Committee shall be subject to review by the Assembly on Petition by the Presbytery concerned.

A3. Question Arising. Should there arise between the month of December and the opening of the Assembly any question regarding representation not provided for in these Orders, the Assembly Business Committee shall have power to dispose thereof.

A4. Transmission of names and details of Commissioners. The names, in alphabetical order, full postal addresses, email addresses, charges and types of commission (ie minister, deacon or elder) of Commissioners from Presbyteries, shall be transmitted by Presbytery Clerks to the Clerks of Assembly not later than 31 January in each year so far as they have been elected by that time. In transmitting the names of Commissioners to the Clerks of Assembly, the Clerk of each Presbytery is certifying that to the best of his or her knowledge the Elders named therein are *bona fide* ruling Elders and are commissioned by the Presbytery.

A5. Committee on Commissions. The Committee on Commissions shall consist of the Clerks and the Convener of the Assembly Business Committee; the Principal Clerk shall be Convener. The Committee shall prepare and circulate a list of Commissioners for submission to the Assembly. Along with the said list a copy of the Standing Orders of the General Assembly

shall be made available to each member. The Clerks shall arrange to make available to each Commissioner, at least one week before the opening day of the Assembly, an electronic copy of the volume of Reports and Proposed Deliverances and an electronic copy of the Order of Proceedings.

A6. Objections. During the sittings of the Assembly, the Committee on Commissions shall, if called upon, or if it shall appear to it necessary or expedient so to do, hear any person whose Commission is objected to in support of his or her Commission, and also any person or persons who may object to such Commission, and the Committee on Commissions shall have power to settle any such matters.

A7. Late Commissions. It shall be competent at any time prior to the opening of the Assembly to lodge with the Clerks of Assembly Commissions which have not previously been transmitted to them; and the Committee on Commissions shall settle any queries as to whether or not such Commissions are valid. Once the Assembly has opened and the Roll of Commissioners has been laid on the table, no further Commissions may be received.

SCHEDULE B

OTHER MEMBERS AND ATTENDEES OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

(a) MEMBERS *ex officio*

B1. These are the Moderator of the Assembly, on election, and the immediately preceding Moderator, the Clerks, Procurator, and Law Agent, and also the Convener and Vice-Convener of the Procedure Committee upon their election.

They have all the rights and privileges of Commissioners.

(b) CORRESPONDING MEMBERS, STAFF MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE, DELEGATES, VISITORS AND OTHER SPEAKERS

B2. Definitions

Corresponding Members and Staff Members in Attendance. Representatives of Departments and Standing Committees as stated in SOs B3 – B5.

Delegates from other Churches. Representatives of other Churches who come in response to an invitation from the Principal Clerk sent at the request of the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team or from the Ecumenical Relations Committee to their Church to send a delegate or delegates to the General Assembly and who are duly accredited by the Courts or equivalent authority of their Churches.

Visitors. Visitors from other Churches who come with a Letter of Introduction from Assembly or Presbytery Clerks or equivalent officer of their Church.

B3. Corresponding Members

1. (a) Where neither the Convener or Vice-Convener is already a Commissioner, each of the following bodies may appoint for each day of the General Assembly, one member, failing which one staff-member, to act as a Corresponding Member: the Church of Scotland Guild, the Church of Scotland Housing and Loan Fund, the Church of Scotland Pension Trustees, the Ecumenical Relations Committee, the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team, the General Trustees, the Legal Questions Committee, the Nomination Committee, the Safeguarding Committee, the Social Care Council, the Stewardship and Finance Department, and the Theological Forum.

(b) Each such body will advise the Clerks of Assembly not less than one week before the commencement of the General Assembly of the name of the Corresponding Member appointed for each day. The names of Corresponding Members appointed under this Standing Order shall be included in the Order of Proceedings or the Assembly Paper.

2. The Assembly Trustees, being the Charity Trustees of the Unincorporated Councils and Committees of the General Assembly, and the Chief Officer, shall be Corresponding Members when not Commissioners.

B4. Status. Corresponding Members of Assembly shall be entitled to attend all sessions of the same and to speak on any matter before the Assembly affecting the interests of their Special or Standing Committee, where applicable, but shall not have the right to vote or make a Motion.

B5. Staff Members in Attendance. The Head of Ministries and Mission, the Secretary of the Social Care Council, the Ecumenical Officer, the Chief Executive of the General Trustees, the Editor of Life and Work, the General Treasurer, the Head of Human Resources, the Convener of the Nomination Committee, the Scottish Churches' Parliamentary Officer and the Head of Communications, when not Commissioners, shall attend the General Assembly as required to enable them to answer questions put to them by the Assembly or, when asked by the General Assembly, to make comment for clarification.

B6. Other Speakers. Where any Special or Standing Committee wishes that one of its members or staff members, not being a Member of Assembly nor otherwise entitled to

speak in terms of SOs B3 to B5, should have an opportunity of addressing the Assembly in connection with the discussion of its Report, the Convener shall seek the permission of the Moderator; for the avoidance of doubt, such permission may be sought during a debate.

Where any Special or Standing Committee wishes that a person, not being a Member of Assembly or member or staff member of that Committee, should address the Assembly, the Convener shall submit the name of such person for approval to the Assembly Business Committee before the Assembly opens, or to the Procedure Committee during the sittings of the Assembly, and the decision of the Assembly Business Committee or Procedure Committee shall be final, unless the Assembly themselves shall resolve in terms of SO F2 hereof to dispense with the observance of Standing Orders in respect of that particular matter.

(c) YOUTH REPRESENTATIVES

B7. Status

- (i) Presbyteries shall be entitled to appoint persons to serve as Youth Representatives as follows:
 - (a) Each Scottish Presbytery other than Clèir Eilean I (the Presbytery of the Highlands & Hebrides) and the Presbytery of Lewis may appoint up to four Youth Representatives.
 - (b) Clèir Eilean I (the Presbytery of the Highlands & Hebrides) and the Presbytery of Lewis may together appoint up to four Youth Representatives.
 - (c) The Presbyteries of England and the Channel Islands, International Charges and Jerusalem may each appoint one Youth Representative.
- (ii) Each Youth Representative shall be between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five on the opening day of the General Assembly. They shall be involved in the life of a congregation within the bounds of the Presbytery and shall be regularly involved in the life and worship of the Church of Scotland. The minister of the congregation shall provide confirmation of this involvement if asked by the Presbytery of the bounds.
- (iii) The names of Youth Representatives shall be passed to the Clerks of Assembly by 31 January each year. If a Presbytery does not use fully use its entitlement to appoint Youth Representatives in any given year, its unused entitlement may be allocated to another Presbytery or Presbyteries at the discretion of the Clerks of Assembly.
- (iv) Youth Representatives shall be entitled to speak and move Motions but not to vote:
 - during debates on Committee reports, and
 - during debates on Overtures.
- (v) Youth Representatives shall not be entitled to speak, move Motions or vote:
 - during debates on Petitions or Cases, and
 - during debates on matters affecting General Assembly procedure or Standing Orders.
- (vi) Youth Representatives shall not be members of the Commission of Assembly.

Oversight

- (vii) The Faith Action Programme Leadership Team shall take responsibility for Youth Representatives and shall extend to them appropriate hospitality.

(d) PROBATIONERS AND FAMILIARISATION CANDIDATES

B8. Status

- (i) Persons who are, or have very recently been, (a) in training for Ministries of Word and Sacrament or for the Diaconate and undertaking a Probationary placement ("Probationers"), or (b) Admissions candidates undertaking a Familiarisation placement ("Familiarisation Candidates"), shall be entitled to attend the General Assembly with rights as set out below.
- (ii) The Faith Action Programme Leadership Team shall supply to the Assembly Clerks by 31 March each year the names of those Probationers and Familiarisation Candidates which it proposes attend that year's Assembly. Each Probationer and Familiarisation Candidate shall attend only one Assembly in that role.
- (iii) Probationers and Familiarisation Candidates shall be entitled to speak and move Motions but not to vote:
 - during debates on Committee Reports, and
 - during debates on Overtures.
- (iv) Probationers and Familiarisation Candidates shall not be entitled to speak, move Motions or vote:
 - during debates on Petitions or Cases, and
 - during debates on matters affecting General Assembly procedure or Standing Orders.
- (v) Probationers and Familiarisation Candidates shall not be members of the Commission of Assembly.

Oversight

- (vi) The Faith Action Programme Leadership Team shall take responsibility for Probationers and Familiarisation Candidates and shall extend to them appropriate hospitality. Their accommodation, travel and subsistence expenses will be met as if they were Commissioners.

(e) DELEGATES AND VISITORS

B9. Reception. Delegates from other Churches shall be received and welcomed by the Moderator. The Assembly Business Committee is authorised, after consultation with the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team and the Ecumenical Relations Committee, to recommend to the Moderator to invite two specified delegates to convey greetings briefly after all the delegates have been received and welcomed by the Moderator.

B10. Status.

- (i) Delegates to the Assembly shall have the right to attend all sessions and to speak on all matters before the Assembly, except when the Assembly are exercising judicial functions, but shall not have the right to make Motions or to vote.
- (ii) Visitors shall have the privilege of seats in the Assembly but without the right to speak, make Motions or vote. As in the case of Delegates, the officials of the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team, the Ecumenical Relations Committee, or other relevant Council or Committee shall extend appropriate hospitality to Visitors.

B11. Oversight. The officials of the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team, the Ecumenical Relations Committee, and other Standing Committees which may be interested in Delegates, shall see that invitations to Assembly functions are procured for the Delegates, and that the Members of Assembly shall do everything in their power to make the visits of all the Delegates pleasant and profitable.

SCHEDULE C

OVERTURES FROM PRESBYTERIES AND COMMISSIONERS

C1. Overtures. An Overture from a Presbytery or a Commissioner shall have as its subject a matter which is of concern to the whole Church, rather than a matter of particular interest to a Petitioner. An Overture from a Commissioner must, in addition, relate to a matter which does, in the opinion of Committee on Overtures and Cases, not fall within the remit of any Standing or Special Committee.

C2. Transmissions. All Overtures from Presbyteries passed on or before 24 April shall be sent to the Clerks of Assembly not later than that date in each year. Overtures from Commissioners shall be lodged with the Clerks not later than the Wednesday before the opening day of the General Assembly.

C3. Circulation of Overtures. If the Committee on Overtures and Cases gives leave to transmit in respect of an Overture, (see SOs 14 - 17) the Clerks shall arrange for the circulation of the Overture to Commissioners, in the Order of Proceedings or in the Assembly Paper.

C4. Form. An Overture shall commence "It is overtured by [the Presbytery of X/ Commissioner Y] to the General Assembly, to....". An Overtures shall contain a brief statement of the matter to be brought before the Assembly, giving reasons for so doing, together with a Proposed Deliverance in numbered sections, of which the first section shall be "The General Assembly receive the Overture".

C5. Proposed Legislation. An Overture from Presbyteries or from Commissioners which proposes the introduction of new or the amendment of existing Acts (or Regulations) shall contain the precise terms of the legislation which they propose; and the Committee on Overtures and Cases shall not transmit to the Assembly any Overture which is deficient in this respect, provided always that the Clerks and Procurator shall be available to assist with the framing of such proposals.

C6. When Taken. Overtures relating to matters under the care of Standing Committees shall be assigned by the Assembly Business Committee or the Procedure Committee (unless the Committee on Overtures and Cases decides not to transmit) to the place in the discussion at which they shall be introduced to the Assembly. When the Proposed Deliverance of an Overture is capable of being treated as a Counter-Motion or amendment to the Proposed Deliverance of a Standing Committee, or as a new section of such Proposed Deliverance, it shall be so treated.

C7. Grouping. Overtures on the same or cognate subjects shall be grouped by the Assembly Business Committee or Procedure Committee of the Assembly and only one speaker shall be heard introducing each group.

C8. Introduction. An Overture from a Presbytery may be introduced and spoken to by any member of that Presbytery, specially appointed for the purpose, at the bar; or by any one of its Commissioners to the Assembly in his or her place as a Commissioner. An Overture from a Commissioner shall be spoken to by that Commissioner.

C9. Debate on Overture. The Introducer of an Overture, if a Commissioner, shall move the Proposed Deliverance; and if he or she is not a Commissioner the Principal Clerk, whom failing the Depute Clerk, shall formally move the Proposed Deliverance. The Introducer, whether a Commissioner or not, may answer questions or give explanations in the course of the debate

and may reply to the discussion immediately before the relevant Convener closes the debate. In the normal way, the relevant Convener may answer questions or give explanations during the debate provided that he or she makes it clear that in so doing he or she is not closing the debate.

SCHEDULE D

CONDUCT OF CASES (INCLUDING APPEALS, DISSENT AND COMPLAINTS AND PETITIONS)

D1. Commission of Assembly. The rules of procedure for the Appeals Committee of the Commission of Assembly shall be as set out in Schedule 2 to the Appeals Act (Act 1 2014). SOs D2 – D4 apply where a matter is being brought before the Commission of Assembly in terms of those powers of the Commission of Assembly not being exercised by the Appeals Committee, or before the General Assembly, being a Petition, a Reference or an Appeal on a matter of doctrine. In SOs D2 – D4 references to the General Assembly shall be taken to refer where appropriate to the Commission of Assembly and all references shall be so construed *mutatis mutandis*.

(a) LODGING OF PAPERS

D2. Appeal; Dissent and Complaint; Petition. The papers in all cases intended to be brought before the Assembly, whether Appeals or Dissents and Complaints against the judgement of inferior courts, or Petitions, should be lodged with the Clerks of Assembly not later than 24 April, and must be lodged not less than fourteen days before the opening session of Assembly; except in the case of judgements pronounced within sixteen days of the meeting of Assembly, in which case they shall be lodged within forty-eight hours of the judgement being pronounced.

Petition. A Petition to the Assembly is distinguished from an Overture from a Presbytery or a Commissioner in that it shall concern a matter of particular interest to the Petitioner, rather than a matter of concern to the whole Church. The Petitioner must be able to show a legitimate interest in the action requested.

D3. (a). Reference. In the case of Reference of a matter from an inferior court for the judgement of the Assembly the same limits as to time for lodging of papers in the case shall apply as in SO D2.

(b). Reference of Matter Previously Considered. Where the matter of a Reference has previously been under consideration of the Assembly, the Reference shall state the date when the matter was previously before the Assembly and shall narrate the Assembly's Deliverance thereon.

D4. Answers. It shall be competent for all parties claiming an interest in the subject matter of an Appeal, Dissent and Complaint or Petition to lodge Answers thereto complying with the requirements of this SO D4. Answers may be lodged any time after the Appeal, Dissent and Complaint or Petition is received by the Clerks, but not later than seven days before the opening meeting of Assembly. Answers shall be in the form of articulate numbered Answers to the narrative contained in the Appeal, Dissent and Complaint or Petition, indicating in particular matters of fact that are admitted and denied, and shall set forth a concise statement of the Respondent's case, together with a crave specifying the action the Assembly are invited to take in that respect.

(b) PROVISION OF PAPERS

D5. Circulation. It shall be the duty of the Clerks on receiving papers that are to come before the Assembly in connection with cases to arrange to have these circulated to Members in authorised form.

D6. In Private. Papers relating to business dealt with by Presbyteries in private, or which the Committee on Overtures and Cases (SOs 15 - 17) consider should be taken in private, shall be circulated separately and may be dealt with by the Assembly in private.

D7. In Retentis. A copy of every circulated paper shall be kept by the Clerks of Assembly to be retained among the Records of Assembly.

(c) CIRCULATION OF PAPERS

D8. Date of Dispatch. A copy of all papers transmitted to the Clerks of Assembly not later than 24 April shall be forwarded by them to each Member of Assembly at least one week before the opening day of the Assembly.

D9. In Private. The Clerks of Assembly shall not issue in advance to Members the papers in cases which they think require to be conducted in private, until specially instructed by the Assembly so to do; but shall report such cases to the Convener of the Procedure Committee, for the information of that Committee, immediately after its appointment.

(d) INTIMATION TO PARTIES

D10. Appeal; Dissent and Complaint. In all cases coming before the Assembly by Appeal or Dissent and Complaint it shall be the duty of the Clerks of Assembly to inform the parties on both sides as soon as possible of the time at which such case is likely to be taken by the

Assembly. Such intimation shall, unless in a specific case the Assembly determine otherwise, be regarded as sufficient notice.

The Clerks shall further be bound, on application made to them for the purpose, to supply a copy of all papers circulated in pursuance of the foregoing Orders to the opposite party or parties in any case, or to his or her or their duly accredited Agents.

D11. Petition. In every Petition it shall be the duty of the Petitioner to make such intimation of the Petition as may be necessary having regard to the nature of the Petition. Such intimation shall be made not more than seven days later than the time when the Petition is lodged with the Clerks of Assembly as provided in SO D2 above; and along with the Petition there shall be lodged a certificate signed by the Petitioner or his or her Agent setting forth the names of the parties to whom such intimation has been made or is to be made. The Assembly may refuse to dispose of any Petition if in their opinion sufficient intimation thereof has not been made.

(e) HEARING OF CASES

D12. Announcement. Before parties are heard in any contentious case the Clerk shall read the following announcement, viz – “The Commissioners are reminded that justice requires that all the pleadings at the bar should be heard by all those who vote in this case, and that their judgement should be made solely on the basis of the pleadings.” Immediately before a vote is taken in such a case, the Clerk shall read the following further announcement, viz – “The Commissioners are reminded that only those who have heard all the pleadings at the bar are entitled to vote in this case.”

D13. Appeal; Complaint; One Appellant. In cases brought before the Assembly by Appeal, where there is only one appellant (or one set of appellants concurring in the same reasons of Appeal) and only one respondent (or one set of respondents concurring in the same answers to the reasons of Appeal) the case for the appellant (or set of appellants) shall be stated by him or herself or by his or her counsel, who at the same time shall submit such argument upon the case as he or she shall think fit. The party or counsel so stating the Appeal shall be followed by the respondent or his or her counsel who likewise shall submit such arguments upon the case as he or she shall think fit. At the close of the statement for the respondent the appellant shall be entitled to be again heard, and the respondent shall also be entitled to be heard in answer to the second speech for the appellant and if, in his or her final answer, the respondent shall state any fact or submit any argument not adverted to in his or her answer to the opening statement for the appellant, the appellant shall be entitled to a reply upon the new matter introduced in the final answer for the respondent. With the exception of this right of reply, so limited, more than two speeches shall not be allowed to any party at the bar.

D14. Appeal; Complaint; More than one Appellant. In such cases as those referred to in SO D13 if there is more than one appellant (or set of appellants) insisting on the Appeal, or more than one respondent (or set of respondents) supporting the judgement appealed against, (a) on different grounds, or (b) in separate reasons or answers, each appellant shall be entitled to open and state his or her separate case, and each respondent shall be entitled to make his or her separate answer, and the debate shall be closed with a reply for the several appellants; provided always that it shall be competent to the parties, with consent of the Assembly to make any arrangement for conducting the debate other than herein prescribed, if it shall have the effect of limiting, further than is herein done, the number of speeches to be made from the bar.

D15. Appeal; Complaint; Who may appear. Any Member of an inferior court whose judgement is brought under review of the Assembly may appear at the bar in support of the judgement; but, when Commissioners have been specially appointed by the inferior court to support its judgement, the Assembly shall not hear any Member of such court other than the Commissioners so appointed, unless any Member not so appointed but wishing to be heard can show a separate and peculiar interest to support the judgement; and in all such cases it shall be competent to the Assembly to limit the number of Members of an inferior court who shall be heard in support of the judgement under review.

D16. Dissent and Complaints. In SOs D13 – D15, “Appeal” includes “Dissent and Complaints” and “Appellant” includes “Complainer”.

D17. Petition: Who may appear. In cases brought before the Assembly as the court of first instance by Petition, the party promoting the application shall be entitled to be heard in support of the same; and the Assembly shall also hear an answer from any party at the bar claiming to be heard whom it shall consider to be a proper respondent, and the debate at the bar shall be closed with a reply from the person promoting the application.

D18. Reference: Who may appear. In cases brought before the Assembly by reference from a Presbytery the reference shall be stated to the Assembly by a Member of the referring court, specially appointed for the purpose, at the bar if not a Commissioner, or in his or her place as a Commissioner if a Commissioner from the Presbytery. The Assembly shall thereafter hear

the parties in the case referred in such order as the nature of the case may seem to require, keeping in view the regulations in SOs D12 - D17.

SCHEDULE E

COMMITTEES OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND THEIR MEMBERSHIP

(a) COMMITTEES

- E1. Committees.** The Committees of the General Assembly shall be those listed in SO E4 ("the Standing Committees") together with such Special Committees (see SO 23 as the General Assembly may appoint from time to time. Clerical services for the Special Committees shall normally be provided by the staff of the Office of the General Assembly.
- E2. Quorum.** Save for those bodies where provision is already made for a quorum, the quorum of Standing and Special Committees shall be three. When a meeting ceases to be quorate, business must be suspended. The quorum shall apply also to sub-committees and other bodies constituted from the relevant Standing and Special Committees where such sub-committees and other bodies have decision-making powers, but not otherwise.
- E3. Co-opting.** When, from time to time, a Standing Committee requires to co-opt relevant expertise in order to fulfil the work remitted to it by the General Assembly, it may do so (save where otherwise stated) and the Standing Committee should acknowledge the co-option in its report to the General Assembly.
- E4. Membership.** The Standing Committees of the General Assembly shall have membership as follows, General Assembly appointments being made on the nomination of the Nomination Committee except where otherwise stated.
1. **Assembly Business Committee**..... 16/17
Convener, Vice-Convener, 2 members of the Legal Questions Committee (Convener and another member involved more in judicial matters to be nominated by the Legal Questions Committee), a further 6 members made up of ministers and elders with experience of the General Assembly appointed by the General Assembly through the Nomination Committee, with the following members *ex officio*: the Moderator and the Moderator Designate, the Principal Clerk, the Depute Clerk, the Solicitor, the Procurator and the General Treasurer. The Convener and Vice-Convener shall also serve as Convener and Vice-Convener respectively of the Procedure Committee.
 2. **Assembly Trustees**..... 12/14
12 trustees appointed (from which shall be drawn the Convener, Vice-Convener, and Administrative Trustee). In addition to appointed Trustees, the Assembly Business Committee and the General Trustees shall each appoint one of their members as a representative who shall be entitled to attend all meetings as a corresponding member but without a right to vote or make a Motion, such member being eligible to serve for a maximum period of three years.
 3. **Audit Committee**..... 6
Convener, who shall not be an Assembly Trustee, three other voting members appointed by the General Assembly through the Nomination Committee, all of whom shall be independent of the Unincorporated Entities and at least one of whom shall have recent and relevant financial experience, and two additional voting members appointed by the Assembly Trustees. The quorum shall be three voting members, at least one of whom is a Trustee member. The Chief Officer and the General Treasurer shall attend without a right to vote or make a motion. In addition, other officials, as required by the Committee, may be in attendance from time to time without a right to vote or make a motion. Representatives of the External and Internal Auditors, shall be entitled to attend all meetings but without a right to vote or make a motion.
 4. **Church Hymnary Trust**
Trustees, including a Chairperson, are appointed as required, by the General Assembly on the nomination of the Trust.
 5. **Church of Scotland Housing and Loan Fund**..... Up to 11
Up to 3 ministers and 1 other member appointed by the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team, who having served a term of 4 years shall be eligible for re-appointment for a second 4 year term;
Up to 4 appointed by the General Assembly on the nomination of the Trustees, who having served a term of 4 years shall be eligible for re-appointment for a second 4 year term;
Up to 3 appointed by the Baird Trust, for a term of office determined by that Trust. Any Trustee (other than one appointed by the Baird Trust) may serve for up to a further two four-year terms if elected also as Chairperson or Depute Chairperson
 6. **Church of Scotland Investors Trust**
Trustees, including a Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson, are appointed as required, by the General Assembly on the nomination of the Trust.

7. **Church of Scotland Pensions Trust**
Trustees are appointed as required, by the General Assembly on the nomination of the Trust in accordance with the relevant Pension Schemes, with a Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson from their number elected by the Trustees.
8. **Church of Scotland Trust**
Trustees, including a Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson, are appointed as required, by the General Assembly on the nomination of the Trust.
9. **Committee on Chaplains to HM Forces** 6
Convener, Vice-Convener and four other members appointed by the General Assembly through the Nomination Committee. There is also 1 non-voting member: a representative from and appointed by the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team.
10. **Delegation of the General Assembly** 4
The Clerks of Assembly, the Principal Clerk as Chair, the Procurator and the Solicitor of the Church, *ex officio*.
11. **Ecumenical Relations Committee** 10 plus representatives and co-optees
 - a) Convener, who will act as a personal support for the Ecumenical Officer, and Vice-Convener, both appointed by the General Assembly through the Nomination Committee.
 - b) 8 other members appointed by the General Assembly through the Nomination Committee, 1 to be attached, for the purposes of ecumenical accompaniment, to the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team.
 - c) A representative of the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland appointed in virtue of the Saint Margaret Declaration; a representative of the Scottish Episcopal Church appointed in virtue of the Saint Andrew Declaration; a representative of the Church of England appointed in virtue of the Columba Declaration, and 1 representative from each of 2 churches drawn from the following: the Baptist Union of Scotland, Congregational Federation (Scotland), Methodist Church; Religious Society of Friends, Salvation Army; United Free Church of Scotland and the United Reformed Church, each to serve for a period of four years.
 - d) The Committee shall co-opt Church of Scotland members elected to the central bodies of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI), the Conference of European Churches (CEC), the World Council of Churches (WCC), the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) and the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE, formerly the Leuenberg Fellowship of Churches).
 - e) Meetings of the Committee shall normally be held with all members, representatives and co-optees invited, but a meeting may also be called only for voting members, being those appointed under paragraphs a) and b) above. Where the full Committee is meeting, only those persons appointed under paragraphs a) and b) above shall be entitled to vote, but before any vote is taken the views of members representing other churches shall be ascertained.
12. **Ethical Oversight Committee** 9
Convener, Vice-Convener and 7 other members, each of whom shall serve no more than two three-year terms, to be populated as follows: 3 persons who shall be trustees of the Investors Trust, 1 person from the General Trustees, and 5 appointed by the General Assembly through the Nomination Committee; of these 5, 3 will have a social justice and/or world church background; 1 will be a parish minister; and 1 will be thirty years of age or under at first appointment.
13. **Faith Action Programme Leadership Team** 48
The Leadership Team will comprise
 - a) a Convener appointed by the General Assembly through the Nomination Committee,
 - b) 5 Vice Conveners, appointed by the General Assembly through the Nomination Committee, to deputise for the Convener when unavailable and lead Programme Groups (with 1 of the Vice Conveners to be designated, on the recommendation of the Nomination Committee, as Deputy Convener),
 - c) 5 other members appointed by the General Assembly through the Nomination Committee,
 - d) 12 other members appointed by Presbyteries. There will be 1 such member for each Presbytery or Presbytery grouping,
 - e) The Convener, or substitute, of the Theological Forum, and
 - f) The Convener, or substitute, of the Ecumenical Relations Committee.No Assembly Trustee, member of another Standing Committee or employee of the Church will be eligible to be a member. The quorum will be 5 members. The Convener will have a casting vote. The Convener will be appointed for a term of four years. Of

the Vice Conveners 2 will be appointed for two years and 3 for three years as decided by the Nomination Committee. Subsequent to those first appointed, the Convener and Vice Conveners may be appointed from existing members and will conclude service at the conclusion of their term as Convener or Vice Convener. Of the other members of the Leadership Team first appointed, one third will serve for four years, one third for three years and one third for two years as decided by the Nomination Committee.

Five Programme Groups will report to the Leadership Team and will have written delegated authority from the Leadership Team to take forward their respective elements of the Faith Action Programme. This will include the development of strategy and policy, and working alongside staff members in their implementation.

Each Vice-Convener will lead a Programme Group. No other members of the Leadership Team will be a member of a Programme Group.

Programme Groups, with the exception of the Presbytery Mission Plan Implementation Group (PMPiG), will each consist of 4 members, appointed by the General Assembly through the Nomination Committee plus their Programme Group Leader. Of the 4 members, 2 will serve for four years and 2 for three years as decided by the Nomination Committee. PMPiG will consist of six members appointed by the General Assembly through the Nomination Committee plus their Programme Group Leader. Subsequent to the initial appointments, all Programme Group members other than Leaders, will serve four years. Programme Groups will have power to co-opt members to their Group, subject to approval by the Leadership Team. The number of co-opted members will not exceed the number of General Assembly appointed members, and only General Assembly appointed members will have the right to vote on decisions of the Programme Group.

Programme Groups may form short-life Task Groups to assist or advise them in the delivery of the Faith Action Programme. With the exception of the Presbytery Mission Plan Implementation Group, such Groups will comprise no more than 5 individuals (of whom no more than 2 may be non-members of the Church), and be headed by a Programme Group member, with freedom to select other persons, including members of staff, as co-opts. The remit and composition of each such Group will be agreed by the Leadership Team and reviewed annually, should the task for which it is formed not be completed within a year. Task Groups will report to the relevant Programme Group. The number, size, remits and activities of such Groups will be approved by the Leadership Team Convener and reported to the General Assembly.

14. **General Trustees**
Trustees, including a Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson, are appointed as required, by the General Assembly on the nomination of the Trust.
15. **Iona Community Board**.....20
Convener and 5 other members appointed by the General Assembly through the Nomination Committee;
6 members appointed by and from the Iona Community, 2 changing each year;
The Leader of the Iona Community;
1 member appointed by and from Clèir Eilean Ì, the Presbytery of the Highlands and Hebrides.
In addition the Board will invite 6 member churches of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) to appoint a representative member to the Board, such members being eligible to serve for a maximum period of 4 years.
16. **Judicial Panel**.....30
30 people being ministers, elders, deacons and members nominated by the Nomination Committee and appointed by the General Assembly. All members of the Judicial Panel shall be qualified to practise as lawyers or shall be experienced in the law and practice of the Church.
17. **Legal Questions Committee**16
Convener, Vice-Convener and 10 other members appointed by the General Assembly through the Nomination Committee, plus Clerks of Assembly, the Procurator and the Solicitor of the Church.
18. **Life and Work Editorial Advisory Committee**9
Convener and 7 other members appointed by the General Assembly through the Nomination Committee together with the Principal Clerk as an *ex officio* member. The members should represent a wide range of theological opinion and perspectives, with an interest and particular gifts to offer the Committee, for example journalism, magazine production, former contributors. The Committee may co-opt members with particular gifts or information.

19. **Ministries Appeal Panel** 5
Convener, Vice-Convener and 3 other members appointed by the General Assembly through the Nomination Committee. At least 1 member shall be legally qualified, at least 1 shall be a minister and at least 1 shall be an elder.
20. **Mission Plan Review Group** 15
A group of fifteen persons appointed by the General Assembly through the Nomination Committee and in line with the process for appointing persons to other legal bodies. Additionally, the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team and the General Trustees shall be entitled to make suggestions to the Legal Questions Committee as to persons who are suitable for appointment to the Group, but the final decision as to nominees shall rest with the Legal Questions Committee. The members of the Group shall be suitably experienced members of the Church.
21. **Nomination Committee** 20
Convener, Vice-Convener and 18 other members appointed by the General Assembly through the Nomination Committee. Notwithstanding SO E7, no member of the Committee, having served a term of 4 years, shall be eligible for re-election until after a period of 4 years, except for special cause shown. The Convener'ship of the Committee shall be for 3 years.
22. **Nomination of the Moderator Committee** 12
Twelve persons comprising eleven ministers and elders nominated by Presbyteries plus one deacon selected at random by the Clerks of Assembly. The ministers and elders on the Committee shall be selected as follows: each Scottish Presbytery (provided that in the case of Clèir Eilean I (the Presbytery of the Highlands & Hebrides) and of Lewis, this means the two Presbyteries working together) shall nominate 1 minister and 1 elder to populate the Committee; the Presbyteries of England and the Channel Islands and of International Charges shall nominate 1 minister or elder for the Committee in each alternate year, the first nomination being made in 2024 by the Presbytery of England and the Channel Islands. Upon receipt of all the nominations, the Nomination Committee shall select for appointment 1 or other of the nominees from each Scottish Presbytery, and shall appoint the nominee from the Presbytery of England and the Channel Islands or International Charges, to create a Committee which is representative of the diversity of the whole Church. The Committee is to be convened by the immediate past-Moderator of the General Assembly, failing which by another former Moderator of the General Assembly.
23. **Personnel Appeal Group** 12
12 members appointed by the General Assembly through the Nomination Committee with the Solicitor of the Church as Secretary, each appointed to serve a four-year term with the option of appointment for a further four-year term. Members shall not include any former or current members of staff of any of the Church's Employing Agencies (including the Social Care Council), nor any current Standing Committee member.
24. **Presbytery Review Committee** 15
Convener, Vice-Convener and 11 other members appointed by the General Assembly through the Nomination Committee, together with the Principal Clerk and the Depute Clerk as *ex officio* members. In making nominations to the Committee, the Nomination Committee shall seek to ensure a balance of ministers, elders and members on the Committee, and also shall aim for geographical balance. Membership of the Committee shall include persons with considerable experience of Presbytery life, of Church life, of regulatory functions, of charity governance, of Church law, practice and procedure and of the operation of Church courts. Appointments shall be for a three-year term with some initial appointments being of shorter terms to stagger those stepping down from the Committee in future years. No current employee of a Presbytery shall be a member of the Committee or co-opted onto a Review Group.
25. **Registration of Ministries Committee** 7
Convener, Vice-Convener and 5 other members. Of the 7 members, 1 member is appointed by the Legal Questions Committee, 1 member is appointed by the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team and 5 members (including the Convener and Vice-Convener) are appointed by the General Assembly through the Nomination Committee. The 5 members appointed by the General Assembly shall include one member who is legally qualified, at least one Minister of Word and Sacrament and at least one elder. One or other of the Clerks to the General Assembly and the Head of Ministries and Mission attend the Committee *ex officio* in an advisory capacity but are not members. The Committee is clerked by a staff member of the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team; this person is not a member of the Committee.
26. **Safeguarding Appeal Panel** 6
A Panel of 6 persons appointed by the General Assembly through the Nomination Committee, being persons with Safeguarding and other relevant experience, and

including at least two persons who shall be qualified to practise as lawyers or who are experienced in the law and practice of the Church, and at least two ministers. None of the Panel shall be a current or former employee of any of the Employing Agencies or a current member of the Safeguarding Committee. The Panel will be clerked by the Principal Clerk or the Depute Clerk.

27. **Safeguarding Committee**..... 11
 Convener, Vice-Convener and 6 other members appointed by the General Assembly through the Nomination Committee, 1 representative (voting member) from and appointed by each of the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team and the Social Care Council, the Solicitor of the Church, the National Adviser (Head of Safeguarding) as Secretary to the Committee, the Chief Officer and up to 4 members co-opted by the Committee for their expertise. For the avoidance of doubt it is declared that only the following persons will be entitled to vote: Convener, Vice-Convener, the six Assembly appointed members and the representatives from each of the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team and the Social Care Council.
28. **Social Care Council**..... 12
 Convener, Vice-Convener and 9 other members appointed by the General Assembly through the Nomination Committee, with the Chief Executive Officer of CrossReach as a non-voting *ex officio* member. At least one member shall be a Church of Scotland minister.
29. **Theological Forum** 13
 Convener, Vice-Convener and 11 other members appointed by the General Assembly through the Nomination Committee, the membership being selected to provide an appropriate balance of (a) ministers of Word and Sacrament, (b) members of academic staff from the Divinity Schools (or equivalent) of Institutions of Higher Education in Scotland, (c) elders and (d) members drawn from the wider membership of the Church chosen for their particular expertise, experience or provenance.
- (b) GENERAL PROVISIONS RELATING TO MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEES (OTHER THAN THE LEGAL BODIES)**
- E5. Meaning of Member.** “Member” shall refer in this section (b) of Schedule V to any member of a Standing Committee or Special Committee, including the Convener and Vice-Convener except where stated otherwise.
- E6. Membership of Church of Scotland.** Each Member of a Standing Committee and Special Committee shall normally be a minister, elder, deacon or member of the Church of Scotland.
- E7. Period of Service and reappointment.**
- (a) Members of the Standing Committees shall initially be appointed for a term of four years and shall retire after serving for four years; however, such Members shall be eligible for reappointment subject to the following rule: where more than one Member is due to retire then not more than one-half of the retiring Members may be so re-appointed (“the 50% rule”).
- (b) A Member appointed in the place of one deceased, resigned or removed, or of one appointed as Convener or Vice-Convener, shall serve for the remainder of the period for which the person was appointed whose place he or she takes.
- (c) A Member retiring from a Standing Committee having served eight consecutive years, or having his or her name removed for non-attendance, shall not be eligible for re-appointment to that Standing Committee until the expiry of one year thereafter, unless the General Assembly are satisfied that there are circumstances which make re-appointment desirable.
- (d) No Member shall normally serve for more than eight consecutive years.
- (e) This SO E7 shall not apply to Conveners and Vice-Conveners, to whom SO E16 below applies.
- E8. Under 35.** If possible 20 per cent of the Assembly appointed members of Standing Committees should be under the age of 35 at the time of their appointment.
- E9. Representatives and appointments other than by the General Assembly.** Bodies entitled to appoint representatives shall be permitted to make changes in their representation for special reasons in any year. This shall also apply to direct appointments made by Presbyteries to the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team. The rules in SO E7, save for the 50% rule, shall apply to representatives and direct appointments.
- E10. Non-attendance.** The name of a Member shall be removed from any Standing or Special Committee which has met three times or oftener between 1 June and 1 March unless he or she has attended one-third of the meetings held within that period, unless the Nomination Committee is satisfied that there was a good reason for the non-attendance which has now been rectified. Attendance at meetings of Sub-Committees shall for this purpose be reckoned as equivalent to attendance at the meeting of the Committee itself.

E11. Replacement. When a Member of any Standing or Special Committee is unable to accept the appointment, or where from any cause vacancies occur in Committees during the year, that Committee, with the permission of the Convener of the Nomination Committee, may appoint a Member to take the place of the Member whose non-appointment or retirement has caused the vacancy. All such appointments, if for a longer period than one year, shall be reported for confirmation through the Nomination Committee to the General Assembly.

E12. Eligibility to serve on more than one Committee. No person shall be a Member of more than three Standing or Special Committees at the same time. Appointments *ex officio* shall not be reckoned in this number. This rule shall not apply to those for whom the Nomination Committee is prepared to give special reason to the General Assembly for their appointments to more than three Committees.

The Nomination Committee shall not nominate for Standing or Special Committees any of its own number except in special circumstances which must be stated to the General Assembly.

E13. Secretaries and Deputes. It shall be the responsibility of the Secretary of each Committee to attend the meetings thereof, to provide information and advice as requested, and to provide a depute for any meeting that the Secretary cannot attend.

E14. Expenses. Reasonable expenses incurred by Members of Committees, consisting of travel charges and a sum for maintenance when required, shall be defrayed.

(c) SPECIFIC PROVISIONS RELATING TO CONVENERS AND VICE-CONVENERS

E15. Appointment.

Conveners and Vice-Conveners of Committees shall be appointed by the General Assembly on the nomination of the Nomination Committee. When the Convener or Vice-Convener of a Committee is completing their term of office, the Committee shall be invited by the Convener of the Nomination Committee to suggest the name of one who may be appointed in succession. The Nomination Committee shall satisfy itself that an open and transparent process has been followed in identifying the Convener or Vice-Convener so suggested.

E16 Period of service and reappointment.

- (a) Conveners of Standing Committees shall hold office for not more than four consecutive years (in the case of the Nomination Committee, three consecutive years) and Vice-Conveners of Standing Committees shall hold office for not more than three consecutive years, unless the General Assembly are satisfied that there are exceptional circumstances which make the reappointment of Conveners and Vice-Conveners desirable.
- (b) The period of reappointment shall be for one year only.
- (c) Reappointments may not be made if the Convener or Vice-Convener has already served more than four years (in the case of a Convener) or three years (in the case of a Vice-Convener) as a result of having been appointed in place of a previous Convener or Vice-Convener to complete their term.
- (d) If at the time of their appointment, a Convener or Vice-Convener is already a Member of the Committee, a new Member shall be appointed in their place for the remainder of the period of their original appointment.
- (e) A retiring Convener shall be eligible for re-election as an additional member of the Committee concerned to serve for one year only immediately following tenure of office as Convener.

E17. Replacement. In the event of the death, resignation, non-attendance or supervening incapacity of the Convener or Vice-Convener of any Committee the Convener of the Nomination Committee shall have the delegated authority to make a mid-year appointment, in consultation with the Committee concerned, whose Convener may be invited to suggest the name of one who may be appointed in succession. Where the appointment is for longer than one year an open and transparent process shall be followed in identifying the replacement Convener and/or Vice-Convener. All mid-year appointments of Conveners and Vice-Conveners shall be reported by the Nomination Committee to the General Assembly.

(d) NOMINATION COMMITTEE MEETINGS

E18. Conveners and Secretaries to Attend Nomination Committee Meeting. Conveners and Secretaries of Committees shall be entitled to be present at meetings of the Nomination Committee when the composition of their respective Committee is under consideration, but not to vote.

(e) THE LEGAL BODIES

E19. Meaning. The "Legal Bodies" means the Appeals Committee of the Commission of Assembly, the Discipline Tribunal, the Judicial Commission, the Judicial Panel, the Ministries Appeal Panel, the Mission Plan Review Group, the Personnel Appeal Group and the Safeguarding Appeal Group.

E20. Conveners and Vice-Conveners: period of appointment. Conveners of the Legal Bodies shall initially be appointed for a term of four years and shall be eligible for reappointment for

further terms of four years. Vice-Conveners of the Legal Bodies shall initially be appointed for a term of three years and shall be eligible for reappointment for further terms of three years.

E21. Members: period of appointment. Members of the Legal Bodies shall initially be appointed for a term of four years and shall be eligible for reappointment for further terms of four years.

E22. Nomination process for Legal Bodies (including Conveners, Vice-Conveners and Members).

- (a) In parallel with the Nomination Committee processes, the Legal Questions Committee will draw up a list of people whom it considers suitably qualified to serve on the Legal Bodies and will approach these people to ascertain whether or not they agree to serve. If any forms are submitted through the wider nomination process, these forms will be passed direct to the Convener and Secretary of the Legal Questions Committee for consideration as to suitability.
- (b) At its January/February meeting, the Nomination Committee will receive the list of names proposed by the Legal Questions Committee. The Convener and Secretary (Principal Clerk and/or their Depute) of the Legal Questions Committee, and the Solicitor will appear at the Nomination Committee to discuss the list of names and to answer any questions thereon. Thereafter, subject to that discussion, Nomination Committee will approve the list of names. For the avoidance of doubt, the Nomination Committee as a whole will not receive any names other than those being put forward for nomination on the list of names. The approved names will then be proposed to the General Assembly in the Report of the Nomination Committee, for appointment.

E23. Special rules for Legal Bodies. The rules in SOs E19 - E22 apply in preference to the normal rules set out in SOs E7 - E17 above, which shall not apply to the Legal Bodies.

(f) THE TRUSTS

E24. Meaning. The Trusts means the Church Hymnary Trust, the Church of Scotland Housing and Loan Fund, the Church of Scotland Investors Trust, the Church of Scotland Pension Trust, the Church of Scotland Trust and the General Trustees.

E25. Special rules for Trusts. The rules in SOs E7 - E17 above shall not apply to the Trusts.

(g) NOMINATION COMMITTEE REPORTING TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

E24. List of Nominations. The Nomination Committee shall include in its Report its list of nominations to be submitted to the General Assembly. The Report, so prepared, shall be included in the Volume of Reports issued to Members of the General Assembly.

E25. Amendment to Report.

- (a) No amendment to the Report of the Nomination Committee shall be in order of which due notice has not been given.
- (b) All Notices of Motion proposing amendment to the Report, including such as propose the omission or insertion of any name or names, or the addition of a name or names where the full number eligible has not been nominated by the Committee, must be given in to the Clerks before midday on the penultimate day of the General Assembly. All such Notices of Motion shall be circulated in the list of Notices of Motion.

SCHEDULE F

ALTERATION AND SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

F1. Alteration. Any proposal for alteration of Standing Orders shall be either (a) on the Report of the Legal Questions Committee and included in the Volume of Reports or (b) by Overture and the subject of at least one day's notice in the list of Notices of Motion. This Standing Order shall not apply to SO E4 which may be amended by the Principal Clerk in accordance with the decisions of the General Assembly.

F2. Suspension. It shall always be competent for the Assembly, on the Motion of any Commissioner and on cause shown, summarily to dispense with the observance of the Standing Orders, or any part of them, in any particular case: provided that such Motion shall receive the support of not less than two-thirds of those voting on the question when put from the Chair, and that such suspension shall not contravene any Act of Assembly.

LEGAL QUESTIONS COMMITTEE MAY 2025**Proposed Deliverance****The General Assembly:**

1. Receive the Report.
2. Adopt the new Standing Orders set out in Appendix B of the Report of the Assembly Business Committee (Section 2).
3. Pass the Presbytery Review Act as set out in Appendix A to this Report (Section 3).
4. Pass an Act amending the Discipline Act (Act I 2019), as amended, as set out in Appendix B to this Report (Section 5).
5. Pass an Act amending the Registration of Ministries Act (Act II 2017) as set out in Appendix C to this Report (Section 5).
6. Pass the Communion Rolls and Adherents' Rolls Act as set out in Appendix D to this Report (Section 6).
7. Pass an Act amending the Sacraments Act as set out in Appendix E to this Report (Section 6).
8. Instruct the Legal Questions Committee and the Theological Forum, in consultation with other parties as required, to review the Ministers and Deacons in Same Sex Civil Partnerships and Same Sex Marriages Act (Act I 2015) in the terms set out in the Report, and to report to a future General Assembly (Section 8).
9. Pass an Act amending the Commission of Assembly Act (Act VI 1997) as set out in Appendix F to this Report (Section 9).
10. Pass an Act amending the Church Courts Act (Act VI 2023) as set out in Appendix G to this Report (Section 10).

Report**1. THE COMMITTEE'S REMIT****1.1 This is to: -**

- advise on legal questions, whether of Church or civil law, referred to it by the General Assembly, by the Principal Clerk or by any agency of the General Assembly;
- assist in formulating responses to consultations opened by the Scottish and UK Governments and other bodies;
- provide the legislative drafting service for agencies of the General Assembly;
- advise on reform to Church law in terms of practice and procedure;
- report to the General Assembly on proposed amendments to Standing Orders; and
- inspect annually records of Agencies of the General Assembly.

1.2 In accordance with the sixth bullet point, members of the Committee examined the minutes of Assembly Standing Committees for the year 2024 on 20 February 2025. In general, these were found to be acceptable and any shortcomings were drawn to the attention of the Committee concerned. The Committee felt that there was a general improvement in the format and accuracy of the minutes presented to it this year, and was encouraged to see this.

2. NEW STANDING ORDERS

2.1 The Report of the Assembly Business Committee sets out the work that has taken place on reordering, updating and clarifying Standing Orders, such that the Assembly is asked to adopt new Standing Orders.

2.2 As required by Standing Order 128 and the Committee's remit, the accompanying section of deliverance is set out at item 2 of this Committee's Proposed Deliverance.

3. PRESBYTERY REVIEW

3.1 Following comments received from Presbyteries, and in the light of experience shared by the Presbytery Review Committee, the Committee has prepared a final form of the Presbytery Review Act (attached as Appendix A).

3.2 The final form of the Act does not represent a major departure from the draft Act received by the General Assembly of 2024, with only a few amendments, mainly of a tidying up nature, having been made. A substantive change is that the Act now applies only to Presbyteries within Scotland. It is anticipated that Presbyteries furth of Scotland will be brought within the scope of the Act in due course, but more time is needed to develop a system of Presbytery Review and inspection of records which is appropriate for the particular needs of those Presbyteries.

3.3 Among the comments received from Presbyteries and congregations was an acknowledgement that Presbytery Review is a key part of good governance in a Presbyterian system, allowing Presbyteries to have the accountability and support that congregations have through Local Church Review (and are proposed to have in future through Mission Action Plans). There were a number of comments from Presbyteries expressing concern about the burden of time, energy and focus that would be involved in Presbytery Review, and the Committee is mindful of the need not to add unnecessarily to the work of already busy Presbyteries. However, the Presbytery Review Committee has confirmed that the pilots demonstrated support for Presbytery Review from the Presbyteries involved, who found the process of review to be encouraging, supportive and a helpful way to assist the Presbytery in reflecting on new ways of working. It is hoped that Presbytery Review will be similarly helpful to other Presbyteries as the process unfolds and will result in the sharing of good practice within the wider Church.

3.4. The Guidance referred to in the Act will be prepared by the Committee as soon as possible and will thereafter be kept updated by the Presbytery Review Committee with the approval of the Committee. This will provide flexibility for matters of practice to be set out in Guidance as Presbytery Review continues to develop. The Guidance will also contain the latest versions of the Proforma documents which were first developed during the pilot Presbytery Reviews and inspection of records carried out by the Presbytery Review Committee during 2024-25, namely a Presbytery Questionnaire, Congregational Questionnaire and Inspection of Records Documents List.

4. CHURCH COURTS ACT GUIDANCE

4.1 Work has been ongoing as to producing Guidance on the Church Courts Act. It is being written with Session Clerks in mind, but will be useful for the Kirk Session as a whole, and for members and staff of Presbyteries in their oversight of congregations. The Guidance will go through each section of the Act, but it does not set out to provide an academic treatment of the Act or to cover every question that may arise. However, we hope that it will provide helpful information on practice and procedure in relation to some common areas encountered.

4.2 It is hoped that the Guidance will be available by May 2025.

5. REVIEW OF THE COMPLAINTS PROCESS AND THE DISCIPLINE PROCEDURE

5.1 At the General Assembly of 2023, the Committee received a remit to review the Complaints Procedure:

Instruct the Committee collaboratively to review the Complaints process, seeking views of Presbyteries and congregations to find ways of alleviating the stress, strain and hurt of those involved in the process and report to the General Assembly of 2025.

5.2 The Complaints Procedure is set out on the Church website (<https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/contact/complaints>). The Committee took this remit to apply to the section dealing with complaints against ministers, deacons or office bearers, to include Ministers of Word and Sacrament, Ordained Local Ministers, deacons, elders and readers. The Committee decided in parallel to undertake a review of the Discipline Act. Work on both fronts was delegated to a sub-group.

5.3 The matter has been discussed with Presbytery Clerks, and the sub-group has received and considered various representations about Censures under the Discipline Act.

Complaints Procedure

5.4 It was noted that currently, although the Office of the General Assembly along with the Solicitor will readily respond to requests for advice from Presbytery Clerks who are dealing with complaints, there is no comprehensive Guidance document available. Significant work has been undertaken to prepare a Guidance document, which will be for the benefit of Presbytery Clerks and members of Complaints Committees in operating the Complaints Procedure. This covers topics such as:

- Deciding on whether the matter is for the Complaints Procedure or Discipline process
- Confidentiality
- Presbytery appointments required for the Complaints Procedure to be operated
- Detailed Guidance around the Procedure itself, including dealing with anonymous complaints, accompaniment for the person complained about, and possible outcomes of the Procedure.

5.5 It is hoped that this will go some way towards equipping those carrying out the process to do so timeously, compassionately and professionally.

5.6 There is annexed to the Guidance a template Investigation Report which a Complaints Committee can use. The sub-group plan to add an Investigation Plan. The Committee hopes that this Guidance will bring together knowledge and expertise built up over several years and that it will prove useful to those involved in operating the Complaints Procedure.

Discipline Act process

5.7 After careful consideration, the sub-group proposes two amending Acts to address different aspects of the Act. The first amends section 40 (Censures) and section 47 (Implementation of decision/Censure at Presbytery).

5.8 The Censures available to the Discipline Tribunal have been expanded:

- They now include a Discharge, where despite a finding that there has been misconduct on the part of the Respondent, the Tribunal considers that in all the circumstances there is no merit in imposing a penalty. A Discharge may be absolute or subject to condition(s).
- Another new option is a final written warning, with specification of the required improvement in conduct/performance and the applicable timescale. It is anticipated that the HR department in the national offices may need to provide assistance if such a Censure is imposed.
- A distinction has been drawn between a fixed period suspension, which will be a suspension for a period not exceeding three months, and a suspension without limit of time (though subject to a minimum period). For the fixed period suspension, it is clarified that here, the pastoral tie shall not be broken but payment of stipend and other benefits shall be suspended for the fixed period. Upon expiry of the fixed period the suspension shall automatically be lifted. In contrast, a suspension without limit of time will result in severance of the pastoral tie (and thus of course cessation of stipend and other benefits). This type of suspension will only be able to be lifted following an application to the Registration of Ministries Committee.

5.9 Consequentially, amendments are also proposed to the Registration of Ministries Act to align it with the new provisions on suspension, and to provide that the Secretary to the Discipline Tribunal will be invited to comment upon an application for return from a suspension without limit of time.

Complaints against Presbytery Committees and Presbytery Clerks

5.10 The Committee also received a remit from the Assembly of 2024:

Instruct the Committee to develop a process for dealing with complaints made against a Presbytery committee and a bespoke process for a complaint against a Presbytery Clerk and to report to the General Assembly of 2025.

5.11 The Guidance on the Complaints Procedure addresses the matter of complaints against Presbytery Clerks. A process for dealing with complaints made against a Presbytery Committee is in course of development at the time of writing and will be made available on the Church website when finalised.

6. NEW COMMUNION ROLLS AND ADHERENTS' ROLLS ACT

6.1 The Committee has prepared a replacement of the Communion Rolls Act. This was initially generated by concerns to conform this part of Church law with current Data Protection legislation, but as work progressed, it became apparent that the replacement Act could also reflect streamlining benefits arising from the drafting of the new Vacancy Act: the Call, Election & Appointment of Ministers of Word and Sacrament Act, which is to be proposed to this Assembly by the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team (FAPLT).

6.2 Thus the new Act provides for two Rolls to be kept: one of communicant members and one of adherents, with the Supplementary Roll being phased out for Data Protection law reasons, as the keeping of data in case it might be useful in future is no longer legal. However, transitional provisions for a Supplementary Roll are included. The two Rolls which are to be kept will be utilised for the purposes of the Electoral Register under the new Call, Election & Appointment of Ministers of Word and Sacrament Act. Provisions in the existing Act which were more appropriate to the Sacraments Act are being moved there (see the amending Act found in the FAPLT Report).

6.3 A proposed new Act appears at Appendix D. There is also a consequential change to the Sacraments Act, involving the moving to that Act of wording which currently appears in the existing Communion Rolls Act, but which the Committee felt would be more suitably located in the Sacraments Act. This amending Act is found in Appendix E.

7. REQUESTS FOR REVIEW AND FOR ASSISTANCE UNDER THE PRESBYTERY MISSION PLAN ACT (ACT VIII 2021)

7.1 The Office of the General Assembly continues to process requests for review received from Kirk Sessions, in relation to Presbytery Mission Plan decisions. As noted last year, the Act provides for a review of the process used by the Presbytery in preparing and approving a Mission Plan, not an appeal of the decision made, and thus it does not substitute a different decision; rather it looks at how the decision was taken. A decision to uphold a request for review means that the Presbytery then reruns the process of taking the decision on the

relevant part of the Mission Plan. The decision from the rerun of process could be the same as per the existing Plan or it could be different.

7.2 The grounds upon which a review may be requested relate to errors in Church law, material irregularities of process, or the taking into account of an irrelevant material fact or failure to take into account a relevant material fact. Before a review can proceed, the Act provides for the Committee on Overtures and Cases (consisting of the Procurator, the Solicitor and the Assembly Clerks) to give leave to proceed.

7.3 At the time of writing, there have been 47 requests for review across 22 Presbyteries in relation to Mission Plans; these include 2 requests following on from annual evaluation and development of a Mission Plan, 1 request following a mid-year change to a Mission Plan and 2 requests in addition from Presbyteries for assistance under section 2.2.4 of the Act. The vast majority of these requests have been processed; however they do continue to arise, and some are currently pending decision.

7.4 The Committee remains grateful to the members of the Mission Plan Review Group who carry out this difficult, sensitive and laborious work with diligence and care.

7.5 One Mission Plan (for the Presbytery of Lewis) is not yet in place. This Presbytery has requested assistance under section 2.2.4 of the Act and this is ongoing.

8. ACT I 2015

8.1 Amendments were made to Act I 2015 ("the Act") at the General Assembly of 2023; however the Committee is aware of further issues which arise in relation to it.

8.2 The Committee has been approached about a specific situation which was perceived locally to operate unfairly. This involved votes under Act I 2015 in the two Kirk Sessions of a deferred union. In terms of the Act, with such Kirk Sessions operating the Act's procedure as currently drafted, the effect is that each has a veto on "departing" (section 3(8)). If in practice (as was the case in the specific example), one of those Sessions is much larger than the other, the possibility exists, on votes being taken under the Act, that the larger Session is outvoted and thus constrained in its choice of minister by a much smaller Session. So in the situation which was raised with the Committee, this provision operated (correctly, according to the terms of the Act) to prevent the larger congregation from calling a minister in a same sex union even although that person may never become the minister of the united charge and even although the larger Session had in fact voted to depart. Similar issues could arise in linkings.

8.3 The Committee has also received representations about how Team Ministry interacts with the Act. In 2023 the Assembly agreed that in the case of Team Ministry (section 3(8)(c)): *"a decision to depart or not to depart, once taken, shall apply to all other posts within the Team Ministry as and when such posts become vacant for the following five years, unless there is a request at an earlier date for the matter to be revisited and a new vote held. Such a request must be signed by a majority of the ruling elders on the Kirk Session, or where the ruling Elders exceed nine in number, at least one-third with a minimum of five".*

8.4 This provision was put in place to avoid multiple votes on the same question taking place within a Team Ministry charge, possibly in quick succession. Underlying this are difficult situations: for example if a charge voted to depart, a Team Minister in a same sex union was appointed, and then the charge voted differently on a new appointment within the Team becoming available, this would leave the Team Minister already in post in a very awkward situation. It was recognised at the time that this provision was a "stop-gap" solution as the question remains about what happens after five years to any Team Minister in a same sex union who is already in situ in a charge which could later decide not to depart.

8.5 The Committee also wishes to note a further point about the intentional effect of Act I 2015. The strict terms of the Act permit departure from the historic position of the Church, ie a traditional position, only in the very limited circumstances set out in section 2(3), i.e. only in a parish ministry context (and to a limited extent by a Presbytery in appointing Interim Moderators in terms of section 4A). There is no mechanism in Church law to enable 'departure' to facilitate appointments of a minister or deacon who is in a same sex union to a role at Presbytery or Assembly level, e.g. nomination as Moderator of the General Assembly or of a Presbytery. However, in practice, across the Church, leadership is exercised in non-parish roles (for instance in Presbytery and Assembly Committees) by persons in same sex unions. This divergence between law and practice may give rise to questions about the doctrinal statements in the Act.

8.6 In light of these considerations, the Committee seeks to ascertain the mind of the Assembly on whether or not a review of the Act should be undertaken in relation to these matters, with a report to a future General Assembly. If the Assembly decides that a review should proceed, the points in 8.5 would be passed to the Theological Forum, with the Committee starting work on the matters referred to in 8.2 to 8.4.

9. AMENDMENT TO THE COMMISSION OF ASSEMBLY ACT

9.1 The Committee is aware that the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team, through its People & Training Programme Group, wishes to put in place new legislation on Initial Ministerial Education. However, the timing of this complex process means that it will not be possible for legislation to be drafted in time to be approved by this General Assembly. It is therefore proposed that this General Assembly approve principles for the Act, with the detailed legislation coming to a Commission of Assembly in Autumn 2025.

9.2 The current section 9 of the Commission of Assembly Act (Act VI 1997) arguably constrains this way of proceeding. The Committee was approached and has suggested that the Act might be amended to allow a Commission to legislate in specific circumstances: where a General Assembly has approved a set of principles for the proposed legislation and that Assembly specifically instructs that a Commission of Assembly shall be held within the following twelve months to consider and potentially approve the terms of the detailed legislation, drafted in accordance with those principles. The Committee does not think it wise for a Commission to have an unfettered power to legislate. A draft amending Act appears in Appendix F.

10. AMENDMENTS TO THE CHURCH COURTS ACT

10.1 In terms of the existing provisions of the Church Courts Act, certain chaplains, professors and lecturers are obliged to be a member of the Presbytery where they work. Amendments are proposed to allow them to choose to be a member of the Presbytery where their congregation is, or where they live.

10.2 An amendment is also proposed for the situation of a Team Ministry. This is to ensure that in this case, the Kirk Session is fairly represented at Presbytery by representative elders. In a Team Ministry there could be 2 or 3 Team Ministers but according to the present terms of the Act, only 1 representative elder. The amendment will equalise the number of representative elders with the number of Team Ministers.

10.3 A draft amending Act appears at Appendix G.

11. CHURCH OF SCOTLAND GOVERNANCE: THE UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES

11.1 The Committee is pleased to endorse a project for which its Convener has volunteered: to write an introductory volume under the working title "Church of Scotland Governance: The Underlying Principles". This would be a text which could be supplied, for example, to a new elder to help them understand the polity of the Church.

11.2 The intention with this text is not that it would be a Church law textbook, but rather that it would set out basic principles of church polity which the reader is to uphold. In terms of information about "how to" do anything, the intention would still be that other material on the Church's website would fulfil that purpose. Its focus will therefore be very different from previous Church law texts.

11.3 This volume will be published on a no-profit basis through Amazon, in the name of Marjory A MacLean. She will be doing so with the support and grateful thanks of the Committee.

In the name of the Committee

MARJORY MACLEAN, Convener
KATHERINE TAYLOR, Vice-Convener
FIONA SMITH, Secretary

Appendix A

PRESBYTERY REVIEW ACT

Edinburgh, [] May 2025, Session []

In requiring Presbytery Review, the General Assembly seeks (1) to further the mission of the Church of Scotland by ensuring the good governance and oversight of congregations within the bounds of each Presbytery and by facilitating the sharing of good practice throughout the Church and (2) to fulfil the terms of the Church Courts Act (section 22.2), which states that the General Assembly shall exercise powers of oversight of Presbyteries and these may be exercised generally, or as specified in legislation.

Accordingly, the General Assembly hereby enact and ordain:

1. DEFINITIONS

- a) the “Aims” shall mean:
 - (i) to encourage and enable a Presbytery to reflect on its life and work;
 - (ii) to assess whether a Presbytery is satisfactorily fulfilling its Functions and Responsibilities;
 - (iii) to enable action to be taken when in the life of a Presbytery there is conflict or when there are issues of non-compliance with the Functions and Responsibilities;
 - (iv) to give the opportunity for the leadership and the wider membership of the Presbytery as a whole to challenge one another as to the effectiveness or otherwise of the Presbytery’s structures and the functioning of them;
 - (v) to hear of and celebrate good practice by Presbyteries and share such with the wider Church; and
 - (vi) to assist with the co-ordination of the central resourcing of the wider Church.
- b) the “Committee” shall mean the Presbytery Review Committee, a Standing Committee of the General Assembly, comprising a Convener, Vice-Convener and eleven members nominated by the Nomination Committee and appointed by the General Assembly, together with *ex officio* the Principal Clerk and the Depute Clerk. In making nominations to the Committee, the Nomination Committee shall seek to ensure a balance of ministers, elders and members on the Committee, and also shall aim for geographical balance. Membership of the Committee shall include persons with considerable experience of Presbytery life, of Church life, of regulatory functions, of charity governance, of Church law, practice and procedure and of the operation of Church courts. Appointments shall be for a three year term with some initial appointments being of shorter terms to stagger those stepping down from the Committee in future years. No current employee of a Presbytery shall be a member of the Committee or co-opted onto a Review Group.
- c) “Functions and Responsibilities” shall mean the Functions and Responsibilities of a Presbytery set out in section 10 of the Church Courts Act (Act VI 2023).
- d) “Presbytery Review” shall mean the process of review of a Presbytery by the Committee as set out in this Act, in addition to the annual inspection of records referred to in section 4, and “Review” and “Reviewed” shall be construed accordingly.
- e) “Review Group” shall mean the Review Group appointed under section 3.3.
- f) “Review Report” shall mean the Review Report referred to and the contents of which are described in section 6.1.
- g) “Summary Report” shall mean the Summary Report described in section 6.4.

2. PRESBYTERY REVIEW

2.1 Each Presbytery shall be subject to Presbytery Review, to achieve the Aims, according to a schedule of visits determined by the Committee.

2.2 Presbyteries shall participate and cooperate in Presbytery Review (Church Courts Act (Act VI 2023), sections 10.1.14 and 15.5).

2.3 A Presbytery shall normally be subject to Review once every five years but a Review may be delayed or brought forward or an extra Review may be conducted, as the Committee sees fit, where the Committee is concerned that a Presbytery may not be fulfilling its Functions and Responsibilities.

3. THE COMMITTEE’S ROLE

3.1 Responsibility for Presbytery Review is delegated by the General Assembly to the Committee. The Committee shall be clerked by the Office of the General Assembly.

3.2 The role of the Committee is to be satisfied:-

- that each Presbytery Review is thorough and forward looking;
- that key points (a Summary Report) of the Review Report are shared with the General Assembly;

and in particular that:

- good practice is highlighted and shared across the Church;
- problems are faced and tackled with appropriate support and input; and
- non-compliance is addressed and rectified.

3.3 The Committee shall appoint a Review Group of at least three persons to act on its behalf when embarking on the Review of a Presbytery. None shall be members of the Presbytery under Review. The Review Group may consist wholly of members of the Committee, or it shall be competent for the Committee to co-opt suitably qualified individual(s) from outwith its membership to be part of particular Review Groups, provided that there shall be no more than one co-opted member per Review Group.

3.4 Members of the Committee must adhere to the conflict of interest policy, bribery and procurement policy and whistleblowing policy put in place in terms of those recommended by the Law Department, and as specified in Guidance.

4. ANNUAL INSPECTION OF RECORDS

4.1 Each Presbytery shall submit annually to the Committee for examination the rolls and records of the Presbytery and shall also submit for attestation by the Committee the trustees' report and annual accounts of the Presbytery.

4.2 The Committee shall report annually to the General Assembly on this inspection of all Presbyteries' records.

5. DOCUMENTS AND VISITS/MEETINGS FOR PRESBYTERY REVIEW

5.1 When a Presbytery is to be Reviewed, on a *proforma* devised by the Committee, the Presbytery will be asked to provide:

- factual and statistical information to allow the Review Group to grasp something of the geography and demographics of the area;
- confirmation that specific requirements laid upon it by Church and civil law have been complied with;
- a description of the life and work of the Presbytery in terms of the Functions and Responsibilities, including the ways in which it resources local congregations, acts as the voice of the Church in relation to wider society, and engages with the processes of the General Assembly;
- an outline of the shared vision and guiding principles for the way ahead in the life and work of the Presbytery leading into as detailed as possible an anticipation of what lies ahead and how the Presbytery hopes to meet the specific challenges it faces; and
- any other documents and information as the Review Group may reasonably require in order to carry out the Review properly and effectively.

5.2 On such visits and meetings as they may consider relevant and over such timescale as may be required, the Review Group will enter into conversation with groups and individuals at Presbytery, and also at local and national level, all as it thinks fit, taking account of recommendations in the Guidance. Such discussions shall explore further any aspects of the life and work of the Presbytery in order to learn more about work that is going well or where there may be problems, and to help develop the framework for forward planning.

6. PREPARATION OF A PRESBYTERY REVIEW REPORT

6.1 Having received the documentation and carried out the visits and meetings referred to in section 5, the Review Group shall prepare a written Review Report according to a *proforma* set up by the Committee, which shall include the following:-

- a description of the activities of Presbytery at the time of the Review, giving an indication of priorities, why these were chosen, and how these were implemented, as well as its spiritual life, governance, Committee structure, staffing and how collective decision-making is working in practice;
- the identification of good practice and of areas of work in need of development;
- an outline of any future plans for altering the patterns of Presbytery life and why these changes are envisaged;
- an assessment of whether the Presbytery is satisfactorily fulfilling its Functions and Responsibilities; and
- any other matters which may seem relevant to the Review Group.

6.2 The initial draft of the Review Report shall be submitted to the Presbytery and an opportunity given to submit comments to the Review Group if desired.

6.3 The Review Group shall then finalise the Review Report and present it to the Committee.

6.4 The Committee shall consider the Review Report and shall ensure that key points including those sharing good practice and making recommendations, are reported in a written Summary Report to the General Assembly. The Presbytery shall be entitled to ask that comments from the Presbytery are included as an Appendix to the Summary Report.

6.5 The Committee's Summary Report for the General Assembly shall be submitted to the Principal Clerk no later than 1st March each year.

6.6 The Committee's Summary Report may make recommendations as to good practice, and may include a proposed deliverance with instructions to a Presbytery or Presbyteries.

7. TERRITORIAL EXTENT

7.1 This Act extends to all Presbyteries of the Church, excluding those furth of Scotland.

8. GUIDANCE

8.1 Detailed guidance ("the Guidance") for the conduct of Presbytery Review shall be produced initially by the Legal Questions Committee and thereafter the Guidance shall be updated by the Committee in the light of experience and changing circumstances, subject to approval by the Legal Questions Committee.

Appendix B

[] ACT AMENDING THE DISCIPLINE ACT (ACT I 2019) (AS AMENDED)

Edinburgh, [] May 2025, Session []

The General Assembly hereby enact and ordain that the Discipline Act (Act I 2019), as amended, shall be further amended as follows:

1. Delete the existing section 16(15) and substitute:
"in terms of section 40 of this Act, failure to abide by condition(s) attached to a Discharge, disobedience of an Instruction or failure to achieve the required improvement within the timescale specified in a Final written warning."
2. Delete the existing section 40 and substitute:
"40. The Censures available to the Tribunal, in respect of any Respondent, shall comprise the following or any combination thereof:
 - (1) **Ministers of Word and Sacrament and Deacons**
 - (i) **Discharge**, where despite a finding that there has been misconduct on the part of the Respondent, the Tribunal considers that in all the circumstances (including the nature of the misconduct and the Respondent's overall character and response to the disciplinary process) there is no merit in imposing a penalty. A discharge may be absolute or subject to condition(s). Such discharge shall be reported by the Tribunal to:
 - (a) the Presbytery and recorded by it in a record apart, and
 - (b) the Head of Ministries & Mission and recorded by him or her in a personal file for the Respondent.
 Failure to abide by condition(s) attached to a Discharge shall constitute a Disciplinary Offence.
 - (ii) **Reprimand**, which shall be an expression of disapproval of particular behaviour with counsel regarding future conduct. Such reprimand shall be reported by the Tribunal to:
 - (a) the Presbytery and recorded by it in a record apart, and
 - (b) the Head of Ministries & Mission and recorded by him or her in a personal file for the Respondent.
 - (iii) **Instruction** regarding training, counselling, mentoring or such other course of action as the Discipline Tribunal shall consider appropriate. Such instruction shall be reported by the Tribunal to:
 - (a) the Presbytery and recorded by it in a record apart; and
 - (b) the Head of Ministries & Mission and recorded by him or her in a personal file for the Respondent.
 Disobedience of an Instruction shall constitute a Disciplinary Offence.
 - (iv) **Final written warning** with specification of the required improvement in conduct/ performance and the applicable timescale. Such warning shall be reported by the Tribunal to:
 - (a) the Presbytery and recorded by it in a record apart; and
 - (b) the Head of Ministries & Mission and recorded by him or her in a personal file for the Respondent.
 Failure to achieve the required improvement within the timescale specified in the warning shall constitute a Disciplinary Offence.
 - (v) **Fixed period suspension**: suspension from the status and functions of ministry for a specified period not exceeding three months. The pastoral tie shall not be broken but payment of stipend and other benefits shall be suspended for the fixed period and the Respondent shall be re-categorised to Category S in the Register of Ministry. Such suspension shall be reported by the Tribunal to:

- (a) the Presbytery and recorded by it in a record apart; and
- (b) the Head of Ministries & Mission and recorded by him or her in a personal file for the Respondent.

Upon expiry of the specified fixed period, the suspension shall automatically be lifted, payment of stipend and other benefits shall resume and the Respondent shall automatically be re-categorised back to the same category in the Register of Ministry as the Respondent had prior to suspension.

- (vi) **Suspension without limit of time but subject to a minimum period:** suspension from the status and functions of ministry without limit of time, but subject to a minimum period of suspension. Such suspension shall be reported by the Tribunal to:

- (a) the Presbytery and recorded by it in a record apart; and
- (b) the Head of Ministries & Mission and recorded by him or her in a personal file for the Respondent.

In all cases, suspension will result in stipend and other benefits not being paid for the duration of the suspension, severance of the pastoral tie and the re-categorisation of the Respondent to Category S in the Register of Ministry. The suspension may only be lifted in accordance with section 28 of the Registration of Ministries Act (Act II 2017) upon application by the Respondent. If the suspension is lifted, in no circumstances shall the Respondent be eligible to be re-appointed to the charge in respect of which the pastoral tie was severed.

- (vii) **Removal** of the status and functions of ministry. In accordance with section 34 of the Registration of Ministries Act (Act II 2017), the Respondent's name shall immediately be removed from the Register of Ministry and recorded in List D. Such removal shall be reported by the Tribunal to:

- (a) the Presbytery and recorded by it in a record apart; and
- (b) the Head of Ministries & Mission and recorded by him or her in a personal file for the Respondent.

In all cases, restoration of status can only be sought through application in accordance with the Admission and Readmission of Ministers Act [(Act XIII 2022/Act [] 2025)]. No such application may be lodged until a period of at least four years has elapsed since the date of removal of the Respondent's status and functions.

(2) Graduate Candidates

- (i) **Discharge**, where despite a finding that there has been misconduct on the part of the Respondent, the Tribunal considers that in all the circumstances (including the nature of the misconduct and the Respondent's overall character and response to the disciplinary process) there is no merit in imposing a penalty. A discharge may be absolute or subject to condition(s). Such discharge shall be reported by the Tribunal to:

- (a) the Presbytery and recorded by it in a record apart, and
- (b) the Head of Ministries & Mission and recorded by him or her in a personal file for the Respondent.

Failure to abide by condition(s) attached to a Discharge shall constitute a Disciplinary Offence.

- (ii) **Reprimand**, which shall be an expression of disapproval of particular behaviour with counsel regarding future conduct. Such reprimand shall be reported by the Tribunal to:

- (a) the Presbytery and recorded by it in a record apart, and
- (b) the Head of Ministries & Mission and recorded by him or her in a personal file for the Respondent.

- (iii) **Instruction** regarding training, counselling, mentoring or such other course of action as the Discipline Tribunal shall consider appropriate. Such instruction shall be reported by the Tribunal to:

- (a) the Presbytery and recorded by it in a record apart; and
- (b) the Head of Ministries & Mission and recorded by him or her in a personal file for the Respondent.

Disobedience of an Instruction shall constitute a Disciplinary Offence.

- (iv) **Final written warning** with specification of the required improvement in conduct/performance and the applicable timescale. Such warning shall be reported by the Tribunal to:

- (a) the Presbytery and recorded by it in a record apart; and
- (b) the Head of Ministries & Mission and recorded by him or her in a personal file for the Respondent.

Failure to achieve the required improvement within the timescale specified in the warning shall constitute a Disciplinary Offence.

- (v) **Fixed period suspension:** suspension from status for a specified period not exceeding three months. Payments to the Respondent shall be suspended for the fixed period. Such suspension shall be reported by the Tribunal to:
 - (a) the Presbytery and recorded by it in a record apart; and
 - (b) the Head of Ministries & Mission and recorded by him or her in a personal file for the Respondent.

Upon expiry of the specified fixed period, the suspension shall automatically be lifted and payments to the Respondent shall resume.

- (vi) **Suspension without limit of time but subject to a minimum period:** suspension from status without limit of time but subject to a specified minimum period of up to three years, with payments to the Respondent suspended, subject to restoration by the FAPLT in consultation with the Presbytery, upon petition by the Respondent following the expiry of such period. The FAPLT shall take into account the length of suspension served and may insist upon such discernment, assessment and training processes and placements as it sees fit.
- (vii) **Removal of status,** subject to restoration by the FAPLT in consultation with the Presbytery, upon petition by the Respondent. No such petition may be lodged until a period of at least four years has elapsed since the date of removal of such status. The FAPLT shall take into account the length of removal and may insist on such discernment, assessment and training processes and placements as it sees fit.

(3) Licentiatees

- (i) **Discharge,** where despite a finding that there has been misconduct on the part of the Respondent, the Tribunal considers that in all the circumstances (including the nature of the misconduct and the Respondent's overall character and response to the disciplinary process) there is no merit in imposing a penalty. A discharge may be absolute or subject to condition(s). Such discharge shall be reported by the Tribunal to:

- (a) the Presbytery and recorded by it in a record apart, and
- (b) the Head of Ministries & Mission and recorded by him or her in a personal file for the Respondent.

Failure to abide by condition(s) attached to a Discharge shall constitute a Disciplinary Offence.

- (ii) **Reprimand,** which shall be an expression of disapproval of particular behaviour with counsel regarding future conduct. Such reprimand shall be reported by the Tribunal to:
 - (a) the Presbytery and recorded by it in a record apart, and
 - (b) the Head of Ministries & Mission and recorded by him or her in a personal file for the Respondent.
- (iii) **Instruction** regarding training, counselling, mentoring or such other course of action as the Discipline Tribunal shall consider appropriate. Such instruction shall be reported by the Tribunal to:
 - (a) the Presbytery and recorded by it in a record apart; and
 - (b) the Head of Ministries & Mission and recorded by him or her in a personal file for the Respondent.

Disobedience of an Instruction shall constitute a Disciplinary Offence.

- (iv) **Final written warning** with specification of the required improvement in conduct/ performance and the applicable timescale. Such warning shall be reported by the Tribunal to:
 - (a) the Presbytery and recorded by it in a record apart; and
 - (b) the Head of Ministries & Mission and recorded by him or her in a personal file for the Respondent.

Failure to achieve the required improvement within the timescale specified in the warning shall constitute a Disciplinary Offence.

- (v) **Fixed period suspension:** suspension from the Roll of Licentiatees for a specified period not exceeding three months. Any payments to the Respondent shall be suspended for the fixed period. Such suspension shall be reported by the Tribunal to:
 - (a) the Presbytery and recorded by it in a record apart; and
 - (b) the Head of Ministries & Mission and recorded by him or her in a personal file for the Respondent.

Upon expiry of the specified fixed period, the suspension shall automatically be lifted and any payments to the Respondent shall resume.

- (vi) **Suspension without limit of time but subject to a minimum period:** suspension from the Roll of Licentiatees without limit of time but subject to a specified minimum period of up to three years, with any payments to the Respondent suspended, subject to restoration by the FAPLT, in consultation with the Presbytery, upon petition by the Respondent following

the expiry of such period. The FAPLT shall take into account the length of suspension served and may insist upon such discernment, assessment and training processes and placements as it sees fit.

- (vii) **Removal** from the Roll of Licentiates, subject to restoration by the FAPLT, in consultation with the Presbytery, upon petition by the Respondent. No such petition may be lodged until a period of at least four years has elapsed since the date of removal from the Roll. The FAPLT shall take into account the length of removal and may insist on such discernment, assessment and training processes and placements as it sees fit.

(4) Candidates and Probationers

- (i) **Discharge**, where despite a finding that there has been misconduct on the part of the Respondent, the Tribunal considers that in all the circumstances (including the nature of the misconduct and the Respondent's overall character and response to the disciplinary process) there is no merit in imposing a penalty. A discharge may be absolute or subject to condition(s). Such discharge shall be reported by the Tribunal to:

- (a) the Presbytery and recorded by it in a record apart, and
(b) the Head of Ministries & Mission and recorded by him or her in a personal file for the Respondent.

Failure to abide by condition(s) attached to a Discharge shall constitute a Disciplinary Offence.

- (ii) **Reprimand**, which shall be an expression of disapproval of particular behaviour with counsel regarding future conduct. Such reprimand shall be reported by the Tribunal to:

- (a) the Presbytery and recorded by it in a record apart, and
(b) the Head of Ministries & Mission and recorded by him or her in a personal file for the Respondent.

- (iii) **Instruction** regarding training, counselling, mentoring or such other course of action as the Discipline Tribunal shall consider appropriate. Such instruction shall be reported by the Tribunal to:

- (a) the Presbytery and recorded by it in a record apart; and
(b) the Head Ministries & Mission and recorded by him or her in a personal file for the Respondent.

Disobedience of an Instruction shall constitute a Disciplinary Offence.

- (iv) **Final written warning** with specification of the required improvement in conduct/ performance and the applicable timescale. Such warning shall be reported by the Tribunal to:

- (a) the Presbytery and recorded by it in a record apart; and
(b) the Head of Ministries & Mission and recorded by him or her in a personal file for the Respondent.

Failure to achieve the required improvement within the timescale specified in the warning shall constitute a Disciplinary Offence.

- (v) **Fixed period suspension:** suspension from status for a specified period not exceeding three months. Payments to the Respondent shall be suspended for the fixed period. Such suspension shall be reported by the Tribunal to:

- (a) the Presbytery and recorded by it in a record apart; and
(b) the Head of Ministries & Mission and recorded by him or her in a personal file for the Respondent.

Upon expiry of the specified fixed period, the suspension shall automatically be lifted and payments to the Respondent shall resume.

- (vi) **Suspension without limit of time but subject to a minimum period:** suspension from status without limit of time but subject to a specified minimum period of up to three years, with payments to the Respondent suspended, subject to restoration by the FAPLT in consultation with the Presbytery, upon petition by the Respondent following the expiry of such period. The FAPLT shall take into account the length of suspension served and may insist upon such discernment, assessment and training processes and placements as it sees fit.

- (vii) **Removal** of status, subject to restoration by the FAPLT in consultation with the Presbytery, upon petition by the Respondent. No such petition may be lodged until a period of at least four years has elapsed since the date of removal of such status. The FAPLT shall take into account the length of removal and may insist on such discernment, assessment and training processes and placements as it sees fit.

(5) Readers

- (i) **Discharge**, where despite a finding that there has been misconduct on the part of the Respondent, the Tribunal considers that in all the circumstances (including the nature of the misconduct and the Respondent's overall character and response to the disciplinary

process) there is no merit in imposing a penalty. A discharge may be absolute or subject to condition(s). Such discharge shall be reported by the Tribunal to:

- (a) the Presbytery and recorded by it in a record apart, and
- (b) the Head of Ministries & Mission and recorded by him or her in a personal file for the Respondent.

Failure to abide by condition(s) attached to a Discharge shall constitute a Disciplinary Offence.

- (ii) **Reprimand**, which shall be an expression of disapproval of particular behaviour with counsel regarding future conduct. Such reprimand shall be reported by the Tribunal to:
 - (a) the Presbytery and recorded by it in a record apart, and
 - (b) the Head of Ministries & Mission and recorded by him or her in a personal file for the Respondent.
- (iii) **Instruction** regarding training, counselling, mentoring or such other course of action as the Discipline Tribunal shall consider appropriate. Such instruction shall be reported by the Tribunal to:
 - (a) the Presbytery and recorded by it in a record apart; and
 - (b) the Head of Ministries & Mission and recorded by him or her in a personal file for the Respondent.

Disobedience of an Instruction shall constitute a Disciplinary Offence.

- (iv) **Final written warning** with specification of the required improvement in conduct/ performance and the applicable timescale. Such warning shall be reported by the Tribunal to:
 - (a) the Presbytery and recorded by it in a record apart; and
 - (b) the Head of Ministries & Mission and recorded by him or her in a personal file for the Respondent.

Failure to achieve the required improvement within the timescale specified in the warning shall constitute a Disciplinary Offence.

- (v) **Fixed period suspension:** suspension from the status and duties of the Readership for a specified period not exceeding three months. Any payments to the Respondent shall be suspended for the fixed period. Such suspension shall be reported by the Tribunal to:
 - (a) the Presbytery and recorded by it in a record apart; and
 - (b) the Head of Ministries & Mission and recorded by him or her in a personal file for the Respondent.

Upon expiry of the specified fixed period, the suspension shall automatically be lifted and any payments to the Respondent shall resume.

- (vi) **Suspension without limit of time but subject to a minimum period:** suspension from the status and duties of the Readership without limit of time but subject to a specified minimum period of up to three years, with any payments to the Respondent suspended, subject to restoration by the Presbytery (but only with the agreement of the FAPLT) upon petition by the Respondent following the expiry of such period. In considering whether the suspension shall be lifted, the FAPLT shall take into account the length of suspension served and may insist on such discernment, assessment and training processes and placements as it sees fit.
- (vii) **Removal** of the status and duties of the Readership, subject to restoration by the Presbytery (but only with the agreement of the FAPLT) upon petition by the Respondent. No such petition may be lodged until a period of at least four years has elapsed from the date of removal of status and duties. In considering whether the petitioner should be restored to such status and duties, the FAPLT shall take into account the length of suspension served and may insist upon such discernment, assessment and training processes and placements as it sees fit.

(6) Elders and other Office Bearers

- (i) **Discharge**, where despite a finding that there has been misconduct on the part of the Respondent, the Tribunal considers that in all the circumstances (including the nature of the misconduct and the Respondent's overall character and response to the disciplinary process) there is no merit in imposing a penalty. A discharge may be absolute or subject to condition(s). Such discharge shall be reported by the Tribunal to:
 - (a) the Kirk Session and recorded by it in a record apart, and
 - (b) the Presbytery and recorded by it in a record apart.

Failure to abide by condition(s) attached to a Discharge shall constitute a Disciplinary Offence.

- (ii) **Reprimand**, which shall be an expression of disapproval of particular behaviour with counsel regarding future conduct. Such reprimand shall be reported by the Tribunal to:
 - (a) the Kirk Session and recorded by it in a record apart, and
 - (b) the Presbytery and recorded by it in a record apart.

- (iii) **Instruction** regarding training, counselling, mentoring or such other course of action as the Discipline Tribunal shall consider appropriate. Such instruction shall be reported by the Tribunal to:
- (a) the Kirk Session and recorded by it in a record apart; and
 - (b) the Presbytery and recorded by it in a record apart.
- Disobedience of an Instruction shall constitute a Disciplinary Offence.
- (iv) **Final written warning** with specification of the required improvement in conduct/performance and the applicable timescale. Such warning shall be reported by the Tribunal to:
- (a) the Kirk Session and recorded by it in a record apart; and
 - (b) the Presbytery and recorded by it in a record apart.
- Failure to achieve the required improvement within the timescale specified in the warning shall constitute a Disciplinary Offence.
- (v) **Fixed period suspension:** suspension from membership of a Kirk Session and from holding any other office within a congregation for a specified period not exceeding three months. Such suspension shall be reported by the Tribunal to:
- (a) the Kirk Session and recorded by it in a record apart; and
 - (b) the Presbytery and recorded by it in a record apart.
- Upon expiry of the specified fixed period, the suspension shall automatically be lifted.
- (vi) **Suspension without limit of time but subject to a minimum period:** suspension from membership of a Kirk Session and from holding any other office within a congregation without limit of time but subject to a specified minimum period of up to three years, subject to restoration by the Presbytery, with the agreement of the Kirk Session, upon petition by the Respondent following the expiry of such period.
- Such suspension shall be reported by the Tribunal to:
- (a) the Kirk Session and recorded by it in a record apart; and
 - (b) the Presbytery and recorded by it in a record apart.
- An Elder, having been restored by Presbytery following suspension and being invited to become a member of another Kirk Session (i.e. not the one from which he/she was suspended), shall inform both the Session Clerk and the Presbytery Clerk of the circumstances of his/her suspension and may only be so admitted if the Kirk Session in question then agrees to proceed.
- (vii) **Removal** from the status and office of Elder, subject to restoration by the Presbytery with the agreement of the Kirk Session upon petition by the Respondent. No such petition may be lodged until a period of at least four years has elapsed from the date of removal of status and office.
- Such removal shall be reported by the Tribunal to:
- (a) the Kirk Session, and recorded by it in a record apart; and
 - (b) the Presbytery and recorded by it in a record apart.
- A person, having had the status of Elder restored following removal and being invited to become a member of another Kirk Session (i.e. not the one from which he/she was removed) shall inform both the Session Clerk and the Presbytery Clerk of the circumstances of his/her removal. They shall not accept such an invitation until a period of at least four years has elapsed since their removal from such status.
- (viii) In the case of Office Bearers who are not Elders, **Removal** from a particular office held. Such removal shall be reported by the Tribunal to:
- (a) the Kirk Session and recorded by it in a record apart; and
 - (b) the Presbytery and recorded by it in a record apart.
- An Office Bearer who is not an Elder and who is subsequently invited to take office in another congregation, shall inform both the Session Clerk and the Presbytery Clerk of the circumstances of his/her removal and may only be appointed to that office if the Kirk Session in question then agrees to it.
- (7) Persons holding Certificates of Eligibility
- (i) **Discharge**, where despite a finding that there has been misconduct on the part of the Respondent, the Tribunal considers that in all the circumstances (including the nature of the misconduct and the Respondent's overall character and response to the disciplinary process) there is no merit in imposing a penalty. A discharge may be absolute or subject to condition(s). Such discharge shall be reported by the Tribunal to:
- (a) the Presbytery and recorded by it in a record apart, and
 - (b) the Head of Ministries & Mission and recorded by him or her in a personal file for the Respondent.
- Failure to abide by condition(s) attached to a Discharge shall constitute a Disciplinary Offence.

- (ii) **Reprimand**, which shall be an expression of disapproval of particular behaviour with counsel regarding future conduct. Such reprimand shall be reported by the Tribunal to:
 - (a) the Presbytery and recorded by it in a record apart; and
 - (b) the Head of Ministries & Mission and recorded by him or her in a personal file for the Respondent.
- (iii) **Instruction** regarding training, counselling, mentoring or such other course of action as the Discipline Tribunal shall consider appropriate. Such instruction shall be reported by the Tribunal to:
 - (a) the Presbytery and recorded by it in a record apart; and
 - (b) the Head of Ministries & Mission and recorded by him or her in a personal file for the Respondent.

Disobedience of an Instruction shall constitute a Disciplinary Offence.
- (iv) **Final written warning** with specification of the required improvement in conduct/ performance and the applicable timescale. Such warning shall be reported by the Tribunal to:
 - (a) the Presbytery and recorded by it in a record apart; and
 - (b) the Head of Ministries & Mission and recorded by him or her in a personal file for the Respondent.

Failure to achieve the required improvement within the timescale specified in the warning shall constitute a Disciplinary Offence.
- (v) **Removal** of the Certificate of Eligibility, subject to grant of a new Certificate of Eligibility in terms of the Admission and Readmission of Ministers Act [(Act XIII 2022/Act [] 2025)]. Such removal shall be reported by the Tribunal to the Head of Ministries & Mission. No application for a new Certificate of Eligibility may be lodged until a period of at least four years has elapsed from the date of removal of the previous Certificate of Eligibility."

3. Delete the existing section 47 and substitute:

- "47. The Presbytery shall meet within not less than twenty-one (21) and not more than thirty-five (35) days after receiving intimation of the written decision of the Discipline Tribunal and shall take any steps which may be required to implement the decision of the Discipline Tribunal. The Presbytery shall similarly meet to take any appropriate steps after a Respondent accepts a Censure with consent. If the Respondent is a parish minister:
- (1) In the event that the decision has not involved Fixed period suspension, Suspension without limit of time or Removal of status, it shall (a) lift any Administrative Suspension upon the individual concerned; (b) relieve the Interim Moderator of duty; and (c) undertake such steps in relation to other individuals and superintendence of its members and congregations as it finds necessary.
 - (2) In the event that the decision has involved a Fixed period suspension, the Presbytery shall, at its meeting, confirm the appointment of an Interim Moderator or make a new appointment for the necessary period until the suspension expires, and shall undertake such steps against other individuals and superintendence of its members and congregations as it finds necessary.
 - (3) In the event that the decision has involved a Suspension without limit of time, or the Removal of status, then: (i) the pastoral tie shall be severed with effect from the date on which the written decision of the Discipline Tribunal was issued, and (ii) any other ordained appointment which the Respondent held shall terminate on that date. The Presbytery shall, at its meeting, confirm the foregoing matters and it shall also confirm the appointment of an Interim Moderator or make a new appointment and shall undertake such steps against other individuals and superintendence of its members and congregations as it finds necessary.

In the event of an appeal being taken to the Judicial Commission against the decision of the Discipline Tribunal, (a) a Respondent, who is a parish minister, shall be entitled to remain in occupation of the manse pending the outcome of the appeal, and (b) the Presbytery shall meet again not less than twenty-one (21) and not more than thirty-five (35) days after receiving intimation of the written decision of the Judicial Commission and shall implement the decision of the Judicial Commission. The foregoing sections of this section 47 shall then apply *mutatis mutandis*. Where the decision of the Judicial Commission involves a change to a Censure imposed on a Respondent, who is a parish minister, (a) the Presbytery shall implement the foregoing sections of this section 47 so far as practicable and may seek the advice of the Principal Clerk as to dealing with any practical consequences of the Judicial Commission's decision, and (b) where that change is from a Suspension without limit of time or a Removal of status to a censure which would not have led to severance of the pastoral tie, then the Respondent shall be entitled to be compensated for stipend which should have been paid to him or her for the period from the date of the Discipline Tribunal's decision until the earlier of (a) six months after the date of the Judicial Commission's decision and (b) the date upon which the Respondent takes up remunerated employment or office."

Appendix C**[] ACT AMENDING THE REGISTRATION OF MINISTRIES ACT (ACT II 2017) (AS AMENDED)**

Edinburgh, [] May 2025, Session []

The General Assembly hereby enact and ordain that the Registration of Ministries Act (Act II 2017), as amended, shall be further amended as follows:

1. Amend section 28 by inserting a new sub-paragraph (ii) as follows and renumbering thereafter accordingly:
“(ii) invite the Secretary to the Discipline Tribunal to comment on the application.”
2. Delete sub-paragraph 2(1) in Schedule 2.

Appendix D**[] COMMUNION ROLLS AND ADHERENTS' ROLLS ACT**

Edinburgh, [] May 2025, Session []

The General Assembly enact and ordain:-

Definitions

1. “Adherents’ Roll” shall mean a list of the names and contact details of those persons who are not on the Communion Roll but who are regular worshippers in the charge, who are not members of any other charge, and in respect of whom the Kirk Session is satisfied that they desire to be permanently connected with the charge, provided always that the Kirk Session must know of no adequate reasons why such persons should not be admitted as communicant members on the Communion Roll should they so apply.
“Communion Roll” shall mean a list of the names and contact details of the full communicant members of the charge.
“Electoral Register” shall mean, for the purposes of the Call, Election and Appointment of Ministers of Word and Sacrament Act (Act [] 2025), both the Communion Roll and the Adherents’ Roll.

Communion Roll and Adherents’ Roll

2. The Kirk Session of each charge shall make up and maintain a Communion Roll and an Adherents’ Roll. A person can only be listed on one or the other of such Rolls.
3. A record shall be kept in the Communion Roll of the dates:
 - (1) of enrolment
 - (a) by profession of faith
 - (b) by receipt of Certificates of Transference
 - (c) by special resolution of the Kirk Session
 - (2) of removals
 - (a) by death
 - (b) by issue of Certificates of Transference
 - (c) by special resolution of Kirk Session.
4. A record shall be kept in the Adherents’ Roll of the dates:
 - (1) of enrolment as an adherent as approved by the Kirk Session
 - (2) of removal as an adherent whether by death, by notice to, or by special resolution of the Kirk Session
 - (3) following profession of faith, by transfer to the Communion Roll.
5. Persons whose names are on the Communion Roll may be elected as office bearers in the charge and may vote in congregational meetings. Persons whose names are on the Adherents’ Roll may not be elected as office-bearers and are not entitled to vote in congregational meetings, save as follows: they may vote on Bases of Adjustment as provided for in the Presbytery Mission Plan Act (Act VIII 2021) and, being on the Electoral Register, on the election of a new minister in terms of the Call, Election and Appointment of Ministers of Word and Sacrament Act (Act [] 2025).

Attestation by Presbytery

6. The Communion Roll and the Adherents Roll shall normally be kept digitally, but may be kept in hard copy.
7. At the annual inspection of records by Presbytery, up-to-date printouts of both Rolls as at 31st December, duly attested by the Kirk Session, shall be produced for attestation by Presbytery. The printouts shall contain an appendix recording the names of people who have been removed from the Rolls during the year, along with the date, reason and means of removal.

8. After attestation of the Rolls by the Presbytery, annual printouts shall be kept by the Kirk Session as historical records, and shall be preserved in a substantial loose-leaf binder, or permanently bound at regular intervals.
9. For the purposes of attestation by the Presbytery, Communion Rolls and Adherents' Rolls kept in hard copy shall be submitted in their entirety.

Data Protection requirements

10. The Communion Roll, the Adherents' Roll and any Supplementary Roll kept by the Kirk Session in terms of section 17 of this Act shall be maintained and retained in accordance with the law on Data Protection from time to time, and Kirk Sessions shall follow the Guidance in this respect provided by the Law Dept and available on the Church's website.

Certificates of Transference

11. A communicant's name shall be transferred from the Communion Roll of one congregation to that of another congregation only by a Certificate of Transference, and such certificate shall not entitle the communicant to enrolment after the expiry of one year from the date which it bears. A Kirk Session receiving a Certificate after the period of validity has expired shall investigate the circumstances carefully and may thereafter resolve to add the name of the person concerned to the Communion Roll or to take such other action as it shall deem appropriate.
12. In the case of persons presenting Certificates of Transference, the date of enrolment shall be the date of lodging the certificate; and, in other cases, it shall be the date of the resolution of the Kirk Session to add the name to the appropriate Roll. The date of removal shall be the date of death, or date of issue of a Certificate of Transference, or the date of a resolution of the Kirk Session to remove the name from the Communion Roll.

Annual Revision of Rolls and Pastoral Oversight

13. Having given annual pulpit or other intimation that it is doing so, the Kirk Session shall revise and attest the Communion Roll and the Adherents' Roll, as at 31st December in each year, the attestation to include a statement of the number of names on the Rolls after revision. The Kirk Session shall make an entry in the Minutes that it did so.
14. At the annual revision of the Communion Roll the question of adherence to vows of Church membership shall be raised in the case of any person who during the year under review, without obvious and sufficient reason, has not, in the opinion of the Kirk Session, shown sufficient interest or taken an adequate share in the worship, mission and service of the Church. In the case of every such person whose contact details are known, the question shall be raised personally.
15. In the case of any person with whom the question of adherence to vows has been raised, the Kirk Session shall consider their response, if any, and may remove the name of such person from the Communion Roll at the next annual revision. The names of persons whose names have been removed from the Communion Roll under this Section shall be recorded in the Minutes and may be restored to the Communion Roll by resolution of the Kirk Session.
16. The Kirk Session, with a view to lessening the risk of losing Church connection, shall issue to every member in full Communion when leaving, or immediately after leaving, the parish or district to take up residence elsewhere, a Certificate of Transference, unless the communicant has expressed a definite desire to retain his or her connection with the congregation and the minister and Kirk Session are prepared to accept pastoral responsibility for him or her. A Kirk Session receiving a Certificate of Transference shall acknowledge receipt of the same to the Kirk Session which has issued it. A Certificate of Transference may be issued by email to the departing communicant, and upon request by the communicant, a Certificate may be emailed direct to the new Session.

Supplementary Roll – transitional provisions

17. From the date of passing of this Act, Kirk Sessions are no longer required to keep Supplementary Rolls, on which were historically placed the names of persons who had been removed from the Communion Roll without a Certificate of Transference and who continued to reside in the parish or district. If any such Roll is kept, for example for the purposes of communicating with such persons by email newsletter, the following conditions must be observed:
 - (1) It must be kept accurate and up to date;
 - (2) Access to it should be restricted to those who require access for legitimate congregational purposes;
 - (3) It should be reviewed annually and entries should be erased where it is no longer necessary to retain them; and
 - (4) If an individual asks that their name be removed from the Roll, this should be acted on immediately.

Appendix E**[] ACT AMENDING THE SACRAMENTS ACT (ACT V 2000) (AS AMENDED)**

Edinburgh, [] May 2025, Session []

The General Assembly hereby enact and ordain that the Sacraments Act (Act V 2000), as amended, shall be further amended as follows:

1. Add a new section 18 and renumber the existing section 18 as section 19:
 “The right of the Kirk Session to admit to the Lord’s Table a member of any Christian Church is expressly affirmed.”

Appendix F**[] ACT AMENDING THE COMMISSION OF ASSEMBLY ACT (ACT VI 1997)**

Edinburgh, [] May 2025, Session []

The General Assembly hereby enact and ordain that Commission of Assembly Act (Act VI 1997), as amended, shall be further amended as follows:

1. Delete the existing section 9 and substitute:
 “The Commission shall act in accordance with the Constitution of the Church and the Acts of the General Assembly. The Commission will not normally have power to legislate, but may do so in the following circumstances: (i) as specified in section 5(1)(h) above, or (ii) where a General Assembly has approved principles for the proposed legislation and that same Assembly specifically instructs that a Commission of Assembly shall be held within the following twelve months to consider and, if content, approve the terms of the detailed legislation, which will be drafted in accordance with those principles.”

Appendix G**[] ACT AMENDING THE CHURCH COURTS ACT (ACT VI 2023)**

Edinburgh, [] May 2025, Session []

The General Assembly hereby enact and ordain that the Church Courts Act (Act VI 2023) shall be amended as follows:

1. In section 13.1.2 delete sub-sections g) to k) and then insert a new sub-section 13.1.4 as follows, renumbering the existing sections 13.1.4 and 13.1.5 as 13.1.5 and 13.1.6 respectively:
 “13.1.4 A Minister who is one of the following:
 a) a healthcare chaplain,
 b) a prison chaplain,
 c) a workplace chaplain,
 d) a university chaplain, or
 e) a professor or lecturer in an Accredited institution as defined in Act X 2004,
 shall be a member of the Presbytery where he or she is employed, or of the Presbytery within which is situated the congregation of which he or she is a member, or of the Presbytery within the boundaries of which he or she resides, as he or she may choose.”
2. In the existing sections 13.1.4 and 13.1.5, amend the reference to “sections 13.1.2 and 13.1.3 above”, to “sections 13.1.2, 13.1.3 and 13.1.4 above”.
3. At the end of section 13.3.1, add “In a Team Ministry Charge, the Kirk Session shall elect a number of representative elders equal to the number of Team Ministers.”

PRESBYTERY REVIEW COMMITTEE MAY 2025**Proposed Deliverance****The General Assembly:**

1. Receive the Report.
2. Receive the Summary Reports for the pilot Presbytery Reviews of Edinburgh and West Lothian Presbytery and of Perth Presbytery set out in Appendices A and B (Section 2 and Appendices A and B).
3. Agree that the Presbyteries to be reviewed in 2025/26 will be the Presbytery of Clyde and the Presbytery of the South West, and that the Presbyteries to be reviewed in 2026/27 will be the Presbytery of Lothian and Borders and the Presbytery of the North East and Northern Isles (Section 2.6).
4. Note the report on the Inspection of Presbytery Records set out in section 3 (Section 3).

Report**1. INTRODUCTION**

1.1 The General Assembly of 2024 established the Presbytery Review Committee as a new Standing Committee of the General Assembly.

1.2 The remit of the Committee is:

- To be responsible for Presbytery Review through a flexible five-year cycle in which two or three Presbyteries are reviewed each year by a Review Group which reports back to the Committee.
- Provide a Summary Report to the GA for Presbytery Reviews carried out each year.
- To be satisfied that:
 - each Presbytery Review is thorough and forward looking;
 - good practice is highlighted and shared across the Church;
 - problems are faced and tackled with appropriate support and input; and
 - non-compliance is addressed and rectified.
- Inspect annually the records of Presbyteries.

2. PRESBYTERY REVIEW

2.1 The General Assembly of 2024 instructed the Committee to carry out two pilot Presbytery Reviews, one for Edinburgh and West Lothian Presbytery and the other for Perth Presbytery.

2.2 The Committee developed a process for conducting these pilot Presbytery Reviews, including the preparation of a Presbytery Questionnaire and a Congregational Questionnaire. The Committee also established two Review Groups, each with five members drawn from the Committee. None of the members of a Review Group were members of the Presbytery being reviewed.

2.3 Between October 2024 and January 2025, the Review Groups each carried out their reviews as described in the Summary Reports (see 2.4 below). Each Review Group then drew up a Presbytery Review Report which was submitted to the Presbytery in question. The Presbytery had the opportunity to comment on the Review Report.

2.4 The Summary Reports for the Presbytery Reviews of Edinburgh and West Lothian Presbytery and of Perth Presbytery are set out in Appendix A and Appendix B respectively.

2.5 Feedback received from the pilot Presbytery Reviews was generally positive and the Review Groups are grateful for the friendly co-operation of the Presbyteries and congregations involved. The Committee will continue to evaluate and adjust its processes so that they meet the aims and objectives of Presbytery Review in a way that allows time for reflection, mutual encouragement and highlights areas for development in a constructive way. Now that an initial process has been established, in future years the Review Groups will be able to commence their work much more quickly after each General Assembly, so that there will be less time pressure for the Presbyteries and Review Groups.

2.6 In view of the fact that the Legal Questions Committee will recommend that Presbyteries outside Scotland are brought within Presbytery Review at a future date, the Committee would intend at that stage to provide a schedule of Presbytery Review visits. In the meantime, the Committee proposes that the Presbyteries to be reviewed in 2025/26 will be the Presbytery of Clyde and the Presbytery of the South West. The Committee also proposes that the Presbyteries to be reviewed in 2026/27 will be the Presbytery of Lothian and Borders and the Presbytery of the North East and Northern Isles, and documentation will be circulated to those Presbyteries in advance of the General Assembly of 2026.

3. INSPECTION OF RECORDS

3.1 The General Assembly of 2024 also instructed the Committee to submit a report on the Inspection of Presbytery Records in accordance with the draft Act.

3.2 An Inspection of Records Sub-Group was established by the Committee to consider how best to inspect Presbyteries' own records, and to support Presbyteries in their inspection of congregational records.

3.3 The Sub Group has drawn up a list of the documents which it is intended will be inspected every year, and this will be included in the Guidance to be issued by the Legal Questions Committee. The list has been based on the requirements laid on Presbyteries by the Church Courts Act, and includes the policies which are required by church law or by good practice. Discussion took place with the Clerk and appropriate Conveners of Edinburgh and West Lothian Presbytery regarding the list and the Sub Group is grateful for their views. It is likely that the list will need to be amended from time to time, depending on decisions made by future General Assemblies.

3.4 Discussion has also taken place with the Safeguarding Service, the Stewardship and Finance Department and the General Trustees regarding the information which they require from Presbyteries to enable them to be satisfied that both Presbyteries and congregations are complying with the requirements of the Church Courts Act and civil law. To minimise duplication, it is not intended that these matters will be included in the inspection of Presbytery records, unless a situation arises which necessitates this Committee becoming involved.

3.5 The records of the Presbyteries of Edinburgh and West Lothian and of Perth have been duly inspected and found to be in order, with some particular examples of good practice in both Presbyteries. A number of recommendations have been made, principally around the need for the display of some policies on their websites.

4. PRESBYTERY REVIEW ACT AND GUIDANCE

4.1 In its report the Legal Questions Committee is bringing a Presbytery Review Act in final form to the General Assembly. We understand that this takes account of comments received from Presbyteries on the draft Presbytery Review Act. In addition, the Committee was able to liaise with the Legal Questions Committee to offer its feedback on the pilot Presbytery Review process and Inspection of Records process.

4.2 In accordance with the Act, Guidance will be prepared initially by the Legal Questions Committee, and updated from time to time by the Committee with the approval of the Legal Questions Committee.

In the name of the Committee

MOIRA MCDONALD, Convener
CATHERINE COULL, Vice-Convener
FIONA SMITH, Secretary

Appendix A

Summary Report for Presbytery Review of Edinburgh and West Lothian Presbytery

Introduction

The review of the Presbytery of Edinburgh and West Lothian included an initial meeting with key office-bearers within the Presbytery, followed by the circulation of a Presbytery Questionnaire to glean information from the Presbytery (staff and Conveners) and a Congregational Questionnaire sent to a cross-section of congregations (fifteen in total, with fourteen responses received). Some members of the Review Group visited one of the Presbytery's meetings and a day-long meeting was held with office-bearers, Conveners and staff following the return of the information and congregational feedback.

Report

Formed in 2022, the Presbytery of Edinburgh and West Lothian incorporates city, suburban and rural parishes. Dr Hazel Hastie was appointed Presbytery Clerk with a team of staff including Deputy Clerk, Administrator, Mission Coordinator, Safeguarding Coordinator and a Communications Coordinator (service contracted). The Presbytery meets six times per year in one central location within Edinburgh and, while the meetings are streamed, the expectation is for onsite attendance (participation is not possible online).

This is a Presbytery that is well operated with a suitably resourced and experienced team which has learnt from its constituent Presbyteries as it has developed into the new Presbytery. The transition to a new Presbytery and the Presbytery Mission Plan process has brought considerable pressure and stress in these early years which has affected life within the Presbytery. The efforts to retain and build morale, trust and good relationships were appreciated by many congregations.

Main Observations

The following points were provided in the main report as a summary of the Review Group's work. The Review Group:

1. Thanks the members of Presbytery and congregations who engaged with the Review Group.
2. Commends the staff and Conveners for their work on behalf of the Presbytery.
3. Notes the efficiency and effectiveness of the Presbytery in moving through business and in offering advice and instruction.
4. Encourages the Presbytery to develop further ways to foster friendship across the Presbytery.
5. Encourages Parish Ministers to respond positively to the request of the Business Committee when Interim Moderators or participants for Vacancy Advisory Committees are required, and in fulfilling their duty to play their part in the affairs of Presbytery.
6. Notes the burden placed on Parish Ministers who have taken on new unions and the extra work that is needed to nurture a healthy new congregation.
7. Commends the Presbytery on its provision of pastoral care to Parish Ministers and Deacons.
8. Commends the Presbytery on its website presence, noting that work to ensure ease of use is always helpful, and encourages its further development as a hub for information and resources.
9. Encourages the Presbytery to consider adding a strategic communications remit to the role of Communications Coordinator to facilitate the Presbytery's aspirations towards excellent communication within and outwith the Presbytery.
10. Encourages the Presbytery to prepare a Code of Conduct to assist Presbyters in understanding the expectations upon them and good practice for the Presbytery.
11. Notes that the biggest risk to the financial sustainability of the Presbytery would be the withdrawal of core funding by the central Church.

Recommendations

Further recommendations beyond these points were as follows:

1. Expand the availability of training opportunities, perhaps working with other Presbyteries to develop material that may be useful (noting that this is already happening for some doing Worship Training).
2. When delays in communication arise, consider a method for ensuring congregations are not 'left in the dark' and are advised that there may be some time before a decision is forthcoming and what the reason is for that delay.
3. When possible, video record Presbytery events that take place to provide an opportunity for others to participate at a later date.
4. Continue to work with the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team and Programme Groups to improve communication and foster relationships between the Presbytery and those working centrally.
5. Engage with the Assembly Trustees over the budget and financial considerations for the Presbytery's sustainability.
6. Continue to consider ways to encourage discussion and participation in the decision-making process of Presbytery, perhaps by greater utilisation of conference-style sessions.
7. Endeavour to better understand the reasons why there is a disparity in attendance and commitment to the work of Presbytery between Elders and Ministers, in order to find a way to address this effectively. This may involve a survey of Ministers.
8. Consider the current committee structure to balance the workload of each remit and the capacity of each committee's membership.

Appendix B

Summary Report for Presbytery Review of Perth Presbytery

Introduction

The review of the Presbytery of Perth began in October 2024 when members of the Review Group met with the Business Committee in the Presbytery Office to introduce themselves and the review. The team then attended a meeting of Presbytery in Kinross Parish Church in November and met with Presbyters throughout the day, chatting informally and hearing views. The Convener of the Presbytery Review Committee was invited to speak to Presbytery and introduce the Review Group members. Congregational Questionnaires were sent to five congregations around the legacy Presbyteries, with the aim of reflecting the breadth and depth of the life of Perth Presbytery. We met both OLMs and FTMWS as well as Session Clerks, treasurers and other elders and members of these five congregations, all online. At the end of the process we met, again online, with the Clerk and Depute Clerk, the Business Convener, Church and Community Convener and others, to go through and discuss the completed paperwork.

Report

The Presbytery of Perth was formed in 2023 through the union of five legacy Presbyteries. The new Presbytery includes coastal and farming areas, urban and rural parishes, three cities and many towns and villages. Rev Dr John Ferguson was appointed as Presbytery Clerk and he leads a team including a Depute Clerk, a communications officer, and a buildings officer. Presbytery meets four times a year for ordinary business, twice during the day and twice in the evening, with the opportunity for in person and online attendance.

In addition to the Presbytery Mission Plan, priority has been given, in these early years of Presbytery life, to bringing together people from a very wide geographical area, encouraging Ministers to meet, as well as Session Clerks, Treasurers and Safeguarding Conveners. This is both a pastoral and a practical outlook that has intended to help people get to know one another, share best practice and seek common solutions.

The weekly 'Friday Roundup' brings regular news and updates of what is happening in Presbytery to all congregations, a relatively simple medium which is widely praised and welcomed by Presbyters. Documents, policies and records are all up to date.

It is recognised that the geographical size of the new Presbytery allows people to 'hide' with some not attending Presbytery nor playing a part in its duties. The distance covered also means that some local knowledge is lost or misunderstood when decisions are made or issues discussed. There is recognition too that following the Covid pandemic, the requirements of Presbytery Mission Planning and the work needed to form the new Presbytery, there is a sense of weariness among leaders. There are also concerns around the ability of an increasing number of congregations to cover their costs.

However, praise was overwhelming for the Presbytery Clerk and his team, whose openness, hard work and availability have brought support, encouragement and possibility across both the Presbytery and the many ministries contained within it.

Main Observations

The following points were provided in the main report as a summary of the Review Group's work. The Review Group:

1. Thanks the members of Presbytery and congregations who engaged with the Review Group.
2. Commends the staff and Conveners for their work on behalf of the Presbytery.
3. Commends the members of the five legacy Presbyteries who worked together to form the new Presbytery of Perth.
4. Notes the concerns expressed around the workload of the Clerk and Depute Clerk, and the appreciation of their hard work and accessibility.
5. Commends the communication within the Presbytery, particularly the effectiveness of the Friday Roundup.
6. Commends the Presbytery on its provision of pastoral care to all in ministry, offering a variety of times and services where office holders can meet and share experience.
7. Encourages Presbyters to continue to attend and participate in Presbytery meetings, despite the distances involved in travelling.
8. Notes the appreciation expressed by congregations, in a variety of settings, around the help and assistance offered by other parts of the Presbytery and the positive effect this has brought to some who were struggling.
9. Notes the concerns expressed around the responsibility of every Presbyter being a Trustee.
10. Notes the expressed sense of weariness following changes both of Presbytery and the Presbytery Mission Plan.

Recommendations

Some further points were provided in the main report as a summary of the Review Team's work, as follows:

1. Review and reform of the Congregations in Unsatisfactory State Act at a national level would be welcomed by the Presbytery in order to aid and ease some local situations.
2. We commend and recommend the continuation of the outlook that Presbytery should be more than a court, and instead is seen as a body of support, care and encouragement for all within its bounds.
3. It is recommended that Presbytery seeks ways to encourage a wider and deeper participation of all its members, perhaps based more locally, and to find ways of encouraging attendance at Presbytery meetings, particularly in person.
4. We recommend imaginative thinking around the Giving to Grow contributions which are causing difficulties in an increasing number of congregations.

COMMITTEE ON OVERTURES AND CASES MAY 2025**Proposed Deliverance****The General Assembly:**

1. Receive the Report.
2. Note that following approval at the General Assembly of 2023, the requisite proportion (two thirds) of the Presbyteries of the Church have approved the text of the proposed amendments to Articles II and V of the Articles Declaratory in Matters Spiritual (1921) enacted by the General Assembly of 1926 and to the Preamble, Questions and Formula authorised by the General Assembly of 1929, all of which are contained in the Confessions of Faith Overture sent down for the consideration of Presbyteries by the General Assembly of 2024, this being in a second successive year.
3. Convert into a Standing Law of the Church under the provisions of Article VIII of the Articles Declaratory in Matters Spiritual (1921), the Confessions of Faith Overture in the form set forth in Appendix B, with effect from 1 January 2026.
4. Instruct the Clerks to amend, as necessary, the Acts of the General Assembly in accordance with the terms of the Overture.

Report**1. BACKGROUND: THE PROCESS OF CONFESSIONAL REFORM**

1.1 As we come to the culmination of a process that has lasted seven years, the Theological Forum provides the below summary of the Church's journey of confessional reform.

1.2 This process began back in 2018, following a successful Overture to the General Assembly that instructed 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.

1.3 Work carried out to date in fulfilment of this instruction has included an academic conference^[i]; an interim report in 2021^[ii]; a webinar; a consultation with Presbyteries, Kirk Sessions and individuals; the production of video resources^[iii] and a final report brought to the General Assembly of 2022.^[iv]

1.4 In 2021, the Theological Forum presented its interim report, 'Westminster, Confessions and the Church.'^[v] The report reviewed the current confessional position of the Church and explored possibilities for change, laying out a range of options which the Church could take. The report offered the Theological Forum's own preferred option – that those exercising recognised ministries would assent to Creeds and the first Article Declaratory and commit to be guided by a range of confessions including the Westminster Confession, recognising liberty of opinion on such points of doctrine as do not enter into the fundamentals of the faith. The report invited responses to the Forum by the end of 2021 to assist them in offering up firm proposals to the General Assembly of 2022.

1.5 Drawing on the feedback received from Presbyteries and Kirk Sessions, the Theological Forum brought firm proposals regarding the confessional standards of the Church to the General Assembly of 2022. The report titled 'The Confessional Position of the Church of Scotland: Proposals for Reform'^[vi] found that while the Westminster Confession of Faith had played an important part in the history of the Church of Scotland, in practice it has a limited role in the life of the Church today, and the majority of office holders have not been able to fully commit to the Confession for some time. Because of this, 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 required correction.

1.6 The proposals put forward as a solution were as follows:

- To give ministers and other recognised ministries greater knowledge and confidence in their faith through teaching on the confessional position of the Church and the vows and subscription of office holders.
- To create a Book of Confessions that would contain the Westminster Confession of Faith and other statements of faith that express the range and depth of Reformed thought.
- To clarify the location of the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith that we hold in common.
- To amend the vows and subscription that office holders make in light of these changes.

1.7 The 2022 General Assembly received the Forum's report and approved its proposals. In fulfilment of the first part of the deliverance, the Faith Nurture Forum and the Theological Forum introduced a Church of Scotland Learning module on the confessional position of the Church and the vows of office holders for those entering into recognised ministries and elderships. As further instructed, the Theological Forum with the Legal Questions Committee then prepared an Overture^[vii] that would effect the proposed creation of a Book of Confessions and corresponding changes to the vows and subscription of office holders. The Overture was brought to the 2023 General Assembly and was approved and transmitted to the Presbyteries of the Church for returns by 31 December 2023, seeking a decision on approval or disapproval and also proposed amendments.

1.8 The Overture was subject to Article VIII procedure, which requires two subsequent General Assemblies to pass the Overture, and for two thirds of Presbyteries to pass it in two successive years. In 2024, it received sufficient support from Presbyteries (19 out of 22-more than two thirds-approved with or without suggested amendment), along with some comments and questions, and so the Overture came back to the General Assembly of 2024^[viii]. At the General Assembly of 2024, it was agreed that certain amendments be made to the Overture and the Assembly decided to send it in amended final form to Presbyteries for approval or disapproval, with returns by 31 December 2024.

2. CURRENT DECISION REQUIRED

2.1 As will be seen from the returns detailed in Appendix A, the Confessions of Faith Overture has again received sufficient support from Presbyteries (in this case, 12 out of 14 Presbyteries - more than two thirds approving) to once more be presented to the General Assembly. This General Assembly may now decide whether or not to approve the Confessions of Faith Overture in its final form, as set out in Appendix B, i.e. whether to convert it into a Standing Law of the Church.

3. NEXT STEPS IF THE OVERTURE IS APPROVED

3.1 If this General Assembly approves the Confessions of Faith Overture, the next steps would be as follows:

- The text of the Book of Confessions, along with the text of the updated vows and subscription of office holders, would be made available on the Church's website and would be published in hard copy by 1 January 2026.
- The Ordinal and Service Book would be updated to reflect the proposed changes to the vows and subscription of office holders.
- The companion volume to the Book of Confessions, which the Theological Forum was asked to produce at the 2024 General Assembly (containing the additional documents mentioned in the Second Article Declaratory, namely: "The Directory for the Public Worship of God," "The Form of Presbyterial Church Government " and "The Form of Process" and the Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechisms), would follow on from the production of the Book of Confessions.

3.2 Amendments to the Articles Declaratory and to the Preamble, Questions and Formula would take effect from 1 January 2026.

4. SUMMARY OF COMMENTS RECEIVED FROM PRESBYTERIES AND RESPONSE THEREON FROM THE THEOLOGICAL FORUM

4.1 The Committee is grateful for the comments received from four out of the twelve Presbyteries that submitted returns to the Confessions of Faith Overture and has asked the Theological Forum to comment. The comments coalesced around the following themes:

- The relationship between creeds and Scripture.
- The new vow in section 2.2 of the Overture.
- The translation of different sections of the Book of Confessions into other languages.
- The choice of texts included in the Book of Confessions.
- The process for amending the Book of Confessions.

4.2 The Forum offers the following points in response:

- The documents contained within the Book of Confessions, including the Creeds, would always be subject to Scripture. As the second vow asks, 'Do you believe in the Word of God, which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, to be the supreme rule of faith and life?'
- The Book of Confessions would reflect and affirm both Catholic and Reformed distinctives. In promising to be 'guided' by the Book of Confessions, office holders would vow that their beliefs, teaching and life would be informed and shaped by the Book.
- The Forum agrees that it would be important for the Book of Confessions to be made available in Gaelic. Work has started to produce a Gaelic resource that will contain confessional material.
- Any amendment to the content of the Book of Confessions would require Article VIII procedure, meaning that it would have to pass three consecutive General Assemblies, and obtain the support of two-thirds of Presbyteries in the two intervening years.

5. THE BOOK OF CONFESSIONS

5.1 Should the Confessions of Faith Overture be approved by this year's General Assembly, changes to Articles Declaratory II and V, and the Preamble would mean that the Westminster Confession of Faith would retain its status as a subordinate standard of the Church, and that it would be joined by other historic and contemporary statements of faith. The subordinate standards of the Church of Scotland would therefore be contained in its Book of Confessions, and the Book of Confessions would contain the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, The Scots Confession, The Westminster Confession of Faith and the 1992 Statement of Faith. The fact that the Book of Confessions would contain a number of documents is a recognition that there are multiple Reformed identities present within our Church. This is not a weakness, but would allow for a range of Reformed perspectives to be heard and considered.

5.2 The Book of Confessions would also contain an Introduction and Prefaces, drafted by the Theological Forum, which would explain how the statements of faith came to be written, what is distinctive about them and what role they have played in the life of the Church. The Book could act as an aid for office holders as they teach and disciple in 21st century Scotland. Ministers and other recognised ministries would have a single point of reference for seeking to understand and explain the teaching of the Church to members and enquirers, and would have rich theological resources from across the history of our Church to bring into conversation with contemporary issues.

5.3 A Church of Scotland Learning Module on the Book of Confessions and corresponding changes to vows would also be made available on the Church of Scotland Learning platform. This training would not only be academic, but would foster the ability to apply the faith expressed in the Book of Confessions practically to our own lives of faith and to the communities we live in. Being guided by the Book of Confessions would be an embodied and lived experience, with concrete application in the world we live in. The different expressions of faith in the Book of Confessions would describe the Good News of the love and action of God. They would speak of the God who became incarnate in Christ, and who is intimately concerned with our everyday realities. If we understand what they are saying, believe in them and live them out, they could make a real difference in compelling us to bless our own communities with love and acts of service for others. This not only has implications for everyday relationships, but is the basis for mission.

5.4 The Committee extends its thanks to the following members of the Theological Forum: its Convener, Rev Dr Liam Fraser, for leading work on the Book of Confessions, and key contributors including members Rev Dr John Carswell, Rev Dr Alasdair J Macleod, Rev Dr Lynn McChlery, Prof Paul Nimmo, Ms Jennifer Stark and Prof Andrew Torrance.

In the name and by the authority of the Committee

FIONA SMITH, Convener

Appendix A**RETURNS TO THE CONFESSIONS OF FAITH OVERTURE**

	Approve	Disapprove
Number of Presbyteries*	12	0
Total number of Presbyters	1,021	89

*In the year to 31 December 2024, there existed 14 Presbyteries in the Church. Two Presbyteries did not submit a return: (i) the Presbytery of Lewis, which met and chose neither to approve or disapprove the Overture, and (ii) the Presbytery of Jerusalem, which took no decision.

Appendix B**Text which was sent to Presbyteries for returns by 31 December 2024**

Cumulatively, all proposed changes are shown in **bold italicised font**.

THE CONFESSIONS OF FAITH OVERTURE

The General Assembly again adopt the Overture the tenor whereof follows, and transmit the same a second time 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 2024.

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 Presbyterial 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. The Book of Confessions contains the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, The Scots Confession, The Westminster Confession of Faith and the 1992 Statement of Faith.** 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 Presbyterial 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 change Article V from:

V. This Church has the inherent right, free from interference by civil authority, but under the safeguards for deliberate action and legislation provided by the Church itself, to frame or adopt its subordinate standards, to declare the sense in which it understands its Confession of Faith, to modify the forms of expression therein, or to formulate other doctrinal statements, and to define the relation thereto of its officebearers and members, but 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 shall be sole judge, and with due regard to liberty of opinion in points which do not enter into the substance of the Faith.

To:

V. This Church has the inherent right, free from interference by civil authority, but under the safeguards for deliberate action and legislation provided by the Church itself, to frame or adopt its subordinate standards, to declare the sense in which it understands its **Book of Confessions**, to modify the forms of expression therein, or to formulate other doctrinal statements, and to define the relation thereto of its officebearers and members, but always in agreement with the Word of God and the fundamental doctrines of the Christian Faith contained in the said **Book of Confessions**, of which agreement the Church shall be sole judge, and with due regard to liberty of opinion in points which do not enter into the substance of the Faith.

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. The Book of Confessions contains the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, The Scots Confession, The Westminster Confession of Faith and the 1992 Statement of Faith. The Church recognises liberty of opinion on such points of doctrine as do not enter into the fundamental doctrines of the Faith, 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.

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- [i] <https://ojs.st-andrews.ac.uk/index.php/TIS/issue/view/188>
- [ii] [Theological Forum report](#)
- [iii] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Cmq_tG_mWw&t=10s
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- [viii] https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0016/120913/Chapter-9_Report-of-the-Committee-on-Overtures-and-Cases.pdf

THEOLOGICAL FORUM MAY 2025**Proposed Deliverance****The General Assembly:**

1. Receive the Report.

Report**1. INTRODUCTION**

1.1 The Theological Forum was established by the General Assembly 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 2024. Its work has been carried out through substantial reading, discussion, reflection and prayer in its meetings, and through consultation with the other Committees and Programme Groups 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 is offered as an update on work carried out throughout 2024. The Confessions of Faith Overture, summary of returns from Presbyteries and information on the process of confessional reform and the creation of the Book of Confessions can be found in the Report of the Committee on Overtures and Cases.

2. CONTEMPORARY SIGNIFICANCE OF THE COUNCIL OF NICAEEA

2.1 This year marks the 1700th anniversary of the First Council of Nicaea. The Ecumenical Relations Committee and the Theological Forum were instructed by the 2024 General Assembly to reflect on the contemporary significance of the Council of Nicaea and to report to the General Assembly of 2025. The Forum offers the below in response to this instruction, and further information on the anniversary of the Council can be found in the Report of the Ecumenical Relations Committee.

2.2 The First Council of Nicaea was called in 325. Among other things, it sought to respond to the teaching of Arius, who held that Jesus Christ was not truly God but instead an exalted creature. The Council ruled that this belief was contrary to the Christian faith, and in response, formulated the Nicene Creed, which declared that the Son was 'of the same substance' (homoousion) as the Father. At the First Council of Constantinople in 381 the Nicene Creed was amended further to safeguard the full divinity of the Holy Spirit, who is worshipped and glorified with the Father and the Son. As such, the Nicene Creed confesses the divinity of Jesus and the divinity of the Holy Spirit along with that of the Father.

2.3 Because the Nicene Creed is accepted by the overwhelming majority of Christians, its 1700th anniversary is being marked by a series of events throughout the world. One of these was the conference 'Towards Nicaea 2025: Exploring the Council's Ecumenical Significance Today' held from 4-8th November 2024 at the Ecumenical Institute of the World Council of Churches at Bossey, Switzerland. At this conference, the Convener of the Theological Forum, the Rev Dr Liam Jerrold Fraser, presented a paper on the place of the Nicene Creed in the contemporary life of the Scottish Church.

2.4 After tracing the history of Scotland's engagement with the Nicene Creed, the paper notes the resurgence of references to the Creed in recent ecumenical dialogue in Scotland, particularly the Saint Margaret Declaration^[1] between the Church of Scotland and the Scottish Catholic Church. It then discusses the results of a survey of just under one hundred Scottish Church leaders on the Nicene Creed and its potential for Christian unity. The research found that over 73% of respondents believed the Creed was somewhat important to very important for Christian unity, while just over 25% of respondents believed it was not very important or not important at all. Further, over 77% of respondents believed that the Creed could become more important for Christian unity if its profile was raised. As such, the research

demonstrates a high level of support for the Nicene Creed within the Scottish Church, and a belief that it could encourage greater Christian unity.

2.5 This year, in the Report of the Committee on Overtures and Cases, the Theological Forum is asking the General Assembly to recognise the Nicene Creed as one of the subordinate standards of our Church. Should the Confessions of Faith Overture be approved by the General Assembly, the changes to the Ordination and Induction vows, Formula of Subscription and Preamble would identify the location of the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith in both the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds. This new emphasis upon the Creeds would help to strengthen the unity of the Church of Scotland. Shared statements of faith that emerged from ecumenical councils have a universal intention and remind us that we have more in common than what separates us, and that though we may disagree over secondary issues, we are a single Church with a common faith.

2.6 Emphasising our shared belief in Christ would also help our partnerships with other churches. The Creeds are recognised by almost every other Christian denomination in Scotland, whether this be the Scottish Episcopal Church, the United Reformed Church, the Roman Catholic Church or the Free Church, amongst many others. The increased visibility of the Creeds in the vows and subscription of office holders would make it clearer that the Church of Scotland is part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, and that while we are members of different denominations, all Christians are united in the one, single, and indivisible Body of Jesus Christ. If the General Assembly were to approve this year's Confessions of Faith Overture, it would mark an important chapter in the history of our Church, and in the life of the Nicene Creed in its 1700th year.

3. ASSISTED DYING

3.1 At the General Assembly of 2023 the Theological Forum and the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team (FAPLT) received the following instruction:

3.2 *Noting that the historical decisions of the General Assembly have been to support current civil law as to assisted dying, but now recognising that there exists a range of theological views and ethical opinions on assisted dying within the Church, instruct the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team, the Theological Forum and other relevant parties to explore such views and opinions and report to a future General Assembly.*

3.3 An Assisted Dying Working Group was created and the Theological Forum was represented by Convener Rev Dr Liam Fraser, Secretary Ms Nathalie Mares MacCallum and members Rev Canon Prof Paul Middleton and Rev Dr Alasdair J Macleod. From 2023 to 2025, they attended meetings, contributed to discussion, undertook substantial reading, participated in consultations with medical professionals, researchers, hospice chaplains, palliative care practitioners and politicians, and assisted with facilitating conversations on assisted dying with every Presbytery. They listened carefully to a range of views and made significant written contributions to the final report, 'Assisted Dying: A Spectrum of Belief'.

3.4 The Theological Forum wishes to thank these members and the wider membership of the Working Group for this important contribution to the Church's understanding of and engagement with the issue of assisted dying.

4. APOLOGY FOR THE CHURCH'S INVOLVEMENT WITH AND CONNECTION TO HISTORIC CHATTEL SLAVERY

4.1 The 2023 General Assembly instructed FAPLT, in partnership with the Theological Forum and the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Group, to 'prepare a statement of acknowledgement and apology for the Church's involvement with and connection to historic chattel slavery, to be considered for adoption at a future General Assembly.'

4.2 The Theological Forum has been represented on the Racial Justice Working Group by member Professor Glen Pettigrove, Chair of Moral Philosophy at the University of Glasgow, who brings specialist knowledge and expertise in the research areas of virtue ethics and moral psychology and their application to forgiveness, reconciliation and apology. The Forum is grateful for Prof Pettigrove's contribution to this work to date.

4.3 A short life Working Group is in the process of being set up, with representatives from FAPLT, the Theological Forum and the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Group, with a view to reporting to the General Assembly of 2026. An interim update on this work can be found in the Public Life and Social Justice section of FAPLT's report to the General Assembly of 2025.

5. DECLINE OF THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

5.1 The Theological Forum jointly with FAPLT was instructed by the General Assembly of 2023 'to reflect on the decline of the Church of Scotland in regard to membership and ministry candidates and to offer guidance on what steps should be taken to address it, reporting by

2024 failing which by 2025.’ Much work has been done on assessing and agreeing the main factors which have contributed to the decline of Church of Scotland membership and ministry candidates. A full paper will be available in 2026. In the meantime, a number of initiatives are active to develop pathways to ministry and to invest in church revitalisation and mission.

6. FUTURE WORK

6.1 The Theological Forum will continue to work with FAPLT on the decline of the Church of Scotland and what can be done to address it. Further work on the legacies of slavery is anticipated with FAPLT and the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Group. Possible future work on confessional reform, subject to approval by the General Assembly, is outlined in the Report of the Committee on Overtures and Cases. The Forum stands ready to assist the General Assembly and its Councils, Committees and Programme Groups in any matter of theology and doctrine and would welcome consultation at an early stage in any significant pieces of work.

7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

7.1 The Forum is grateful for the hard work, commitment and contribution of each of its members over the last year, and is grateful to all those who have sought its views and listened so graciously to its comments.

In the name of the Theological Forum

LIAM JERROLD FRASER, Convener
PAUL T. NIMMO, Vice-Convener
NATHALIE MARES MACCALLUM, Secretary

ADDENDUM

Rev Dr Liam Fraser

Rev Dr Liam Fraser completes his term as Convener of the Theological Forum at this year’s General Assembly. Liam has served on the Forum for several years, and prior to becoming Convener served as Vice-Convener. During his Convenorship he has steered the Forum successfully through several important pieces of work, including the live proposal to create a Book of Confessions for the Church of Scotland, and the publication of reports on ecotheology, on the calling of the church, and on transgender identities. To this array of complex and demanding work he has brought knowledge, wisdom, and insight, encouraging constructive debate and promoting wide consensus within the Forum, as well as leavening its affairs with good humour. Above all, he has invested a tremendous amount of time in the steadily increasing business of the Forum, demonstrating his commitment not only to the life and mission of the church but also to the health of its theological foundations. He has also continued to serve the parish of St. Michael’s Parish Church, Linlithgow and to lead it into its recent union. In expressing our sincere gratitude to Liam for his labours, we pray God’s blessing upon him in his ongoing and future ministry, and wish him well in all that lies ahead.

PAUL T. NIMMO, Vice-Convener
NATHALIE MARES MACCALLUM, Secretary

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CHURCH OF SCOTLAND INVESTORS' TRUST MAY 2025**Proposed Deliverance****The General Assembly:**

1. Receive the Report.
2. Appoint Mr J Millar as Chair of the Investors' Trust from 1 June 2025.
3. Reappoint Mr A Richmond as a member and appoint him as Vice-Chair of the Investors' Trust from 1 June 2025.
4. Approve the re-appointments of Mr I Blair and Mr G S Wilson as members of the Investors' Trust from 1 June 2025.
5. Approve the appointment of Mr R Kinloch as a member of the Investors' Trust from 1 June 2025.
6. Receive the Annual Report and Financial Statements of the Investors' Trust for 2024.

Report

The Church of Scotland Investors' Trust, which was established by the Church of Scotland (Properties and Investments) Order Confirmation Act 1994, submits its thirtieth Report to the General Assembly.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The function of the Investors' Trust is to provide investment services to the Church of Scotland and to bodies and trusts within or connected with the Church. The Investors' Trust offers simple and economical facilities for investment in its three Funds: Growth Fund; Income Fund; Deposit Fund. Investors receive the benefits of professional investment management, regular portfolio supervision, diversification of investment risk and economies of scale through the pooling of monies in collective investment vehicles.

1.2 The bulk of the Church of Scotland's investments are held on a long-term basis, for the purpose of generating recurring income and growth in capital to support the work of the Church. An increase or decline in the capital value of investments does not necessarily have a corresponding effect on income receivable.

1.3 The Trustees communicate with investors through a range of methods including bulletins which are sent direct to investors and posted on the COSIT section of the Church of Scotland website (which contains comprehensive information for investors, including practical guidance to assist church treasurers).

1.4 During the year, the Trustees completed their review of the investment managers for each of the three COSIT funds. The outcome of that review was that Royal London Asset Management were confirmed to continue as managers of the Income Fund and Thomas Miller Investments confirmed to continue as managers of the Deposit Fund. It was decided to replace Newton Investment Management as managers of the Growth Fund. In their place, two managers are being appointed: Wellington Management will manage equities and M & G Investments will manage multi-asset credit. The transition to these new managers is being conducted in the first part of 2025.

1.5 The Trustees were advised during the year of the decision of the General Trustees to take a different approach to the investment of the Consolidated Stipend Fund which could not be accommodated within the existing structure of the COSIT Growth Fund. Although the withdrawal of these funds from the Growth Fund will not become effective until early in 2025, it will have the impact of reducing the overall size of the Growth Fund by around 33%. This change is, however, not expected to have any impact on the remaining investors in the Growth Fund.

2. ENVIRONMENTAL, SOCIAL AND GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS

2.1 Ethical considerations form an integral part of the investment management process and the Trustees have given instructions in this respect to the investment managers, taking into account views expressed by the General Assembly. At their own meetings, the Trustees regularly review and consider matters arising in respect of ethical investment. Investment is avoided in any company which engages in management practices which are judged by the Trustees to be unacceptable. In particular, investment is avoided in shares in any company substantially involved (generating more than 10% of turnover) in gambling, tobacco products (including vaping), alcohol, armaments, thermal coal and tar sands and recreational cannabis. Following discussions at the Ethical Oversight Committee, the Trustees have added oil and gas companies to the list of exclusions. COSIT had held no direct holdings in such companies since 2021. In general, investment is sought in companies that demonstrate responsible employment

and good corporate governance practices, have regard to environmental performance (particularly Climate Change), acknowledge the importance of human rights and act with sensitivity to the communities in which they operate. It is recognised that issues relating to Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) issues are complex and more work is required in the investment management industry before there is a standard method of assessing and reporting on these matters.

2.2 The Trust is a member of the Church Investors Group (CIG), an ecumenical grouping of investment bodies charged with investing funds for UK churches and church-linked organisations, and with links to a growing number of international church investors. CIG lobbies companies and investment managers to encourage them to pursue policies aligned with our Christian faith, as well as conducting research on companies' behaviour and collating such research from several agencies. Through its co-operation with other ESG organisations and through its own activities, CIG is able to exert significant influence on corporate behaviour. The Investors' Trust is now represented on the Board of CIG by its Vice-Chair, Mr John Millar.

2.3 Three COSIT Trustees have continued to participate in the work of the Ethical Oversight Committee (EOC) and have contributed to the development of the proposed Ethical Investment Guidelines which is referred to in the Deliverance from the EOC.

3. INVESTMENT PERFORMANCE AND OUTLOOK

3.1 During 2024, global stock markets continued to be impacted by the ongoing hostilities in the Middle East and Ukraine. Uncertainty about the outcome of elections in the UK and the USA caused some turbulence in markets during the year as did a sentiment that some technology stocks, which had performed extremely well, had become overpriced. Markets continued to have concerns about inflation and the speed of reduction in interest rates anticipated. At the end of the year, investors faced uncertainty about the impact on global stock markets of the new administration in the USA, about higher bond yields and inflation. Almost all markets delivered positive returns in sterling terms for the year and the Growth and Income Funds both saw increases in unit prices.

The net total value of funds due to investors increased from £508.9 million at 31 December 2023 to £569.2 million at 31 December 2024.

3.2 Growth Fund (£342.4 million (2023 - £318.6 million))

The Growth Fund is currently mainly invested in global company shares (equities) and is managed by Newton Investment Management. In 2024, the Growth Fund delivered a total net return of 11.6% against the composite benchmark of 16.3%. While the performance exceeded the investment objective of CPI+ 3%, the underperformance relative to the benchmark was disappointing and, in conjunction with relative underperformance in previous years, was a major factor in the decision to replace Newton as managers of this Fund.

3.3 The income payable to investors in respect of Financial Year 2024 was 13.5p per unit (the same as in 2023).

3.4 Income Fund (£85.5million (2023 - £82.9 million))

The Income Fund continues to be invested in pooled funds investing in underlying bonds offered by the managers, Royal London Asset Management and in a small direct holding in the Savills Charity Property Fund. The Income Fund's total return for the year was 6.81% (2023: 9.44%) against the composite benchmark return of 1.71% (2023: 8.60%). The Fund has consistently outperformed its benchmark over every period since the appointment of the managers in February 2012.

3.5 The total income distribution to investors for 2024 increased to 60p per unit (2023: 55p per unit).

3.6 Deposit Fund (£ 141.3 million (2023 - £107.4million))

The Fund is invested in short-term deposits with Banks and Building Societies. Deposits are generally placed for periods of up to 12 months at the rates prevailing at the time the deposit is made. After the decreases in UK bank rates in July and October 2024, there was a further reduction in February 2025 and market anticipation is that there will be further reductions in bank base rates during the year. The timing of these changes remains uncertain.

3.7 The average annual rate of interest paid for 2024 was 5.10% (2023: 4.26%).

4. MEMBERSHIP

4.1 In accordance with the terms of the Constitution, the following members are due to retire by rotation at 31 May 2024: Mr I Blair, Mrs E Crichton, Mr A Richmond, Mr J G Wilson and Mr M G S Yuille.

4.2 Mr Blair, Mr Richmond and Mr Wilson have indicated that they wish to seek re-election. It is recommended to the General Assembly that Mr Blair, Mr Richmond and Mr Wilson should be reappointed as from 1 June 2024.

4.3 Having served as a Trustee since 2016, including a term as Vice-Chair, Mrs Elaine Crichton has indicated her intention to retire. In addition, having served as a Trustee since 2016, including a term as Chair of the Audit Sub-Committee, Mr Michael G Yuille has indicated his intention to retire. We are grateful to them both for all that they have done and wish them well in their future endeavours.

5. ANNUAL REPORT AND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR 2024

5.1 Copies of the 2024 Annual Review and the Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year to 31 December 2024 are available to download from The Church of Scotland website or can be obtained from the Secretary.

In the name and by the authority of The Church of Scotland Investors' Trust

R D BURGON, Chair
J MILLAR, Vice-Chair
J LEE, Executive Officer

Addendum

Mr R D Burgon, Chair

Robert Burgon has served as a Trustee of the Investors' Trust since 2013, and now completes his term as Chair. Robert brings a wealth of experience and insight to COSIT, which he has steered with patience and skill over the last three years, during which time we have conducted a full review of our managers. He has also participated actively in the work of the Ethical Oversight Committee.

We are delighted that Robert will continue as a Trustee for the next year, and look forward to continuing to receive his support and wisdom.

J MILLAR, Vice-Chair
J LEE, Executive Officer

ETHICAL OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE MAY 2025

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Welcome the Church of Scotland Ethical Investment Guidelines set out in the Appendix as clarifying the Church's position on ethical investing.
3. Urge and encourage all parts of the Church holding investments, locally, regionally, and nationally, to make use of the lessons and aspirations of these Guidelines.

Report

1.1 The Ethical Oversight Committee exists to support the Church, most specifically The Church of Scotland Investors Trust (COSIT), to be able to engage with the myriad of ethical dilemmas that are faced in the world of investment. How we manage and invest our money is an important part of our faith, and an important part of the mission of the church.

1.2 This year the Committee has built on the 'front door' language that was brought to the General Assembly last year. The Committee has continued to work with FaithInvest, an international non-profit network of religious groups and faith-based institutional investors which sees faith communities as natural powerhouses for ethical, faith-based, and impact investing that can contribute to environmental, social, and governance (ESG) or socially responsible investing (SRI). Building on the previous work framed around the Five Marks of Mission, the Committee has worked to translate that into a document that is much more specific about the values and priorities of the church, so that can be used to guide investment managers. This is advisory in nature, and does not change the fact that the COSIT trustees have sole discretion over how they direct investment managers.

1.3 Over the last year, the EOC has looked more closely at three broad areas – climate justice, economic justice, and peace and justice. The number of specific issues that came up under all of these broad areas was enormous and the task was to distil this to something that was robust enough to make it clear what the Church believes about using its assets, but avoid being so specific that investment managers would be overly restricted.

1.4 The restrictions that the Church already has have been written into this new document. At the recommendation of COSIT, the EOC was happy to include the exclusion of fossil fuels into the guidelines. The Church has not invested in fossil fuels for a number of years and it is unlikely that the current investment managers would do so, and so it seemed like the right time to add this to the excluded list. It has been written into the guidance document as:

We exclude investment in companies involved with the extraction or production of energy from oil shale or tar sands, coal mining or coal-fired power generation, and oil and gas extraction, refining, or energy production. We exclude companies that are actively exploring or developing any new fossil fuel resources.

1.5 There are clearly many issues that are missing from this document. The ongoing work of the EOC is to be a locus for issues that are of interest to the church to be researched and discussed with the view to working out if there is a practical way to get them reflected in the investment guidelines. It is envisaged that the guidelines will evolve and develop over time.

1.6 The next stage of the EOC's work will be to understand how to better support investment managers to use the votes that they have in our name to lobby for change. The Guidelines are a helpful starting point for that, but there is work to do to craft a section that is explicit in how we would hope our investment managers might go about this.

1.7 This document was produced alongside COSIT and largely for COSIT to engage with; however there are more parts of the Church which undertake investment activities, and the EOC would encourage all parts of the church, locally, regionally, and nationally, who hold investments to use this document as guidance.

1.8 Once again, we acknowledged that what COSIT is doing at the moment is good, and the task of the EOC is to work with COSIT in support of a trajectory which will make it better. In this way the document in the appendix is aspirational. It is not envisaged that all of the things will be achieved quickly, some will be a work in progress for many years. However, it does signal a commitment from the Church that ethical approaches to investments are a key part of the Church's witness, and provides a context in which the General Assembly can ask for issues to be considered.

1.9 The EOC is currently made up of eight members. There are three representatives of COSIT, one from the General Trustees, three ministers, one young person and the Convener. We are delighted to report that the group has worked well together, and there has been a real willingness from all parties to make the EOC effective. It is clear that there are a variety

of opinions in the group and the robust, intelligent, yet respectful, conversations that we have had thus far set us up well to be able to take forward our remit as a forum for engaging with the issues of interest to the Church and their intersection with the investments that the Church holds.

In the name of the Committee

VAL BROWN, Convener
IAN ALEXANDER, Secretary

Appendix

Church of Scotland Ethical Investment Guidelines

The Church of Scotland convened the Ethical Oversight Committee (EOC) to support the Church of Scotland Investors Trust (COSIT) in its work managing the Church's investments. The EOC has developed these guidelines and recommends their adoption by COSIT and all churches, members, and institutions associated with the Church of Scotland that have investable assets. These guidelines are advisory and aspirational in nature.

1. Background

1.1 The Church of Scotland ("Church") exists to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. The financial and investment activity of the Church and its charitable entities will intentionally and publicly be an active part of the Church's mission, as how we use our money is a key part of faith expression. The Church seeks investments that work towards increased positive outcomes and reduced negative outcomes for people and planet. To achieve this, the Church's investment approach includes positive screening, engagement and impact investing in organisations to lead to positive impacts aligned with the Five Marks of Mission, in addition to negative screening and divestment from activities that harm society and are contrary to the Church's mission.

1.2 The Church of Scotland recognises and supports the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a framework for addressing global challenges. These goals align with the Church's mission to transform lives and communities.

2. Investment Principles Aligned with Our Mission

Our investment decisions are guided by specific beliefs and commitments that align with the Five Marks of Mission:

2.1 Climate and Sustainability: The Church of Scotland strives to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the Earth. This compels us to reduce and stop investment in activities now known to damage life on Earth, including climate change, pollution, biodiversity loss, and extraction or consumption of resources.

2.2 Economic Justice: The Church of Scotland labours for the advancement of the Kingdom of God throughout the world. We seek to transform unjust structures of society, challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation. This means avoiding investment in companies that consistently demonstrate practices that prioritise short-term profits over human dignity and wellbeing, such as those with documented patterns of worker exploitation, unsafe working conditions, or predatory business practices that harm vulnerable communities.

2.3 Peace Building: As part of our commitment to working for a just peace for all people, we want to avoid investing in companies that enable war through the production or distribution of armaments, those who provide technical component parts designed for weapons systems, and those involved in the provision of strategic parts or services for weapons of war.

2.4 Diversity, Equity and Inclusion: We recognise that all people are created in God's image and deserve equal opportunities and fair treatment. We expect companies to demonstrate this through their policies and practices at all levels of their organisation.

2.5 We want our investments to be as ethical as possible and recognise that companies can score well on one measure and poorly in another. We seek investment in companies that are well governed, taking climate recommendations seriously, offering fair prices for their services, adhere to responsible tax practices, and demonstrating strong commitment to environmental and social responsibility.

3. Objective Investment Restrictions

Our investment restrictions apply to measurable company activities through turnover thresholds. Companies deriving more than 10% of their turnover from the following activities are excluded from investment:

3.1 Environmental Impact: We exclude investment in companies involved with the extraction or production of energy from oil shale or tar sands, coal mining or coal-fired power generation, and oil and gas extraction, refining, or energy production. We exclude companies that are actively exploring or developing any new fossil fuel resources.

3.2 Social Impact: We exclude investment in companies deriving turnover from alcohol production, tobacco products, recreational cannabis, gambling operations, sexually exploitive entertainment, and pornography.

3.3 Peace and Security: We exclude companies involved in military weapons systems, anti-personnel mines, cluster munitions, chemical or biological weapons, and conventional weapons and ammunition.

4. Qualitative Investment Considerations

Beyond these clear restrictions, we expect asset managers to evaluate investments based on their broader impact.

4.1 Environmental considerations include a company's climate transition strategy, environmental management systems, and impact on natural resources. Asset managers must scrutinise companies' use of freshwater resources, (e.g., plastic bottled drinks production), as well as those involved in rainforest destruction or deforestation. Companies must take the Paris Climate recommendations seriously and implement clear transition pathways. We are concerned about companies that promote monocultures (agricultural practices focused on growing a single crop over large areas) or rely heavily on pesticide or herbicide use. Additionally, asset managers must examine companies' practices regarding pollution of air, waterways, or land, particularly in industries such as mining and resource extraction and must also assess companies' involvement in greenwashing practices, such as making misleading environmental claims about their products.

4.2 Social responsibility encompasses fair labour practices, diversity and inclusion across all levels, supply chain management, community impact, and tax practices. Asset managers must expect companies to demonstrate commitment to fair wages, worker safety, and equal opportunities. Companies should not exploit people either directly or indirectly through their supply chains. Asset managers should examine companies for involvement with modern slavery, defined as the exploitation of people through practices such as forced labour, debt bondage, human trafficking, and other forms of coerced work or service from which victims cannot freely leave. Asset managers should look closely at companies' marketing practices, particularly regarding products targeted at children, and their approach to making essential products and services accessible and affordable to all. Asset managers should be cognisant of companies that actively prevent unionised labour or demonstrate poor worker rights practices. Asset managers must apply heightened scrutiny to companies operating in conflict-affected regions, including the Occupied Palestinian Territory, to ensure that their human rights practices, security arrangements, and impact on local communities are not exacerbating tensions or benefiting from conflict conditions. Asset managers must examine companies' treatment of vulnerable workers, including migrant and immigrant labourers. Companies must demonstrate robust policies and practices to prevent forced labour, human trafficking, and worker exploitation throughout their operations and supply chains. This includes ensuring fair recruitment practices, preventing document retention, providing fair wages and safe working conditions regardless of immigration status, and maintaining transparent labour practices that protect all workers' rights and dignity.

4.3 Corporate governance evaluation considers board effectiveness, executive compensation, business ethics, and transparency. Companies should demonstrate good governance through fair business practices, responsible tax practices, and clear reporting. Asset managers should identify and avoid companies that utilise aggressive tax avoidance strategies or operate through shell companies and offshore arrangements.

5. Positive Investment Approach

We actively seek to invest in companies that demonstrate good practices in environmental stewardship, social responsibility, and governance. This includes companies developing sustainable solutions (such as renewable energy providers and companies researching alternative technologies), financial institutions that prioritise sustainable and ethical investments (such as banks avoiding harmful investments and those with strong ethical ratings), and companies implementing sustainable practices (such as those committed to sustainable palm oil production). We particularly value companies that invest in their people by paying wages that meet or exceed credible independent living wage benchmarks (such as the Global Living Wage Coalition standards) in all countries where they operate, with transparent reporting of their wage practices and standards. We look favourably upon companies that maintain fair trade certifications, demonstrate leadership in ethical business operations, and score well across multiple ethical measures while showing commitment to continuous improvement. We expect asset manager to consider investing in companies that have actively removed themselves from profiting from conflict, such as those that voluntarily withdrew from operations in conflict zones.

6. Implementation

We recognise that implementing these guidelines requires careful judgment. Asset managers should maintain appropriate portfolio diversification while faithfully applying these principles. Regular engagement with companies and thorough documentation of evaluation processes are essential.

7. Reporting and Review

7.1 Asset managers should provide regular reports to COSIT (or their relevant trustees) on compliance with turnover restrictions, implementation of qualitative guidelines, engagement activities, and progress in positive impact investing. These reports should include practical recommendations for improvement.

7.2 The EOC will review these guidelines annually to ensure they effectively support our goal of achieving positive outcomes for people and planet through our investments and evolve them as new issues arise that conflict with the objectives of the Five Marks of Mission.

ASSEMBLY TRUSTEES MAY 2025

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Receive the 2024 Report and Accounts of the Church of Scotland Unincorporated Entities (Section 3).
3. Pass Regulations amending the Congregational Contributions “Giving to Grow” Regulations (Regs I 2022), as amended, as set out in Appendix 1 (Section 4.26 and Appendix 1).
4. Instruct Presbyteries to work with charges who are not currently paying full ministry costs, to foster stewardship such that these charges achieve growth in their contributions towards ministry costs within the next two years (Section 6).
5. Agree the total number of planned ministry posts for 2026 remains at 600 plus 60 vacancies with recognition a different method of distribution may be brought forward to General Assembly 2026, remaining subject to annual reporting and agreement of the General Assembly (Section 7.1).
6. Approve the remit for a Presbytery and Partnership Support Programme Group incorporating the work of Presbytery Mission Plan Implementation Group (Section 8.1 and Appendix 2).
7. Note the position with regard to the work carried out by the Assembly Trustees, FAPLT, the Legal Questions Committee and the Theological Forum on ministerial tenure (Section 9).
8. Pass an Act amending the Presbytery Mission Plan Act (Act VIII 2021) as amended, as set out in Appendix 3 (Section 9.12 and Appendix 3).
9. Pass the Stipend Regulations as set out in Appendix 4 and repeal the National Stipend Scheme Regulations (Regs VII 2003) (Appendix 4).
10. Affirm the Assembly Trustees work in conjunction with FAPLT and all other relevant Stakeholders regarding the development of the Resource Church model (Section 13.10).
11. Encourage the whole Church of Scotland to continue to pray for peace with justice in Israel, Gaza, the West Bank, and Lebanon, and to continue to advocate for the creation of a State of Palestine alongside the State of Israel (Sections 15.1 to 15.10).
12. Instruct the Israel Palestine Committee to continue to share the voices of those from the region, particularly Palestinian Christians, and to raise awareness of their situation and history with Church members, through resources, the media, and 24th of the month events (Sections 15.1 to 15.10).
13. Note the ongoing work relating to the commercial establishments in Israel and the Church of Scotland’s presence in Israel and Palestine (Section 15.12).
14. Adopt the statement and associated actions of: *A Theology of Disability: A Statement for Inclusion and Understanding within the Church of Scotland* (Section 20.5 and Appendix 6).
15. Approve the amendments to the Constitution and Remit of the Assembly Trustees as set out in Appendix 7 (Section 25.3 and Appendix 7).
16. Approve the proposed changes to the remit of the Social Care Council and update the Council’s constitution to reflect those changes and also the changes agreed by General Assembly in 2020 (Section 26 and Appendix 8).
17. Approve the following appointments to the Assembly Trustees – Sarah Ross, minister at East Kilbride Moncreiff; Keith Blackwood, minister at Aberdeen Mannofield; Adam Dillon, minister at Glasgow Sherbrooke Mossparc; and Deon Oelofse, minister at Elgin (Section 25.6).

Report

1. FOREWORD

1.1 The Assembly Trustees are charged by the General Assembly to be the Charity Trustees of the unincorporated Standing Committees of the Church, with overall responsibility for its effective financial management and strategy. This remit sits beyond the central Committees and Councils of the Church to ensure that resources, people and finance, are available to enable Ministry and Mission in all its forms to be accessible across Scotland.

1.2 In 2024, the General Assembly instructed the Assembly Trustees to reach a balanced budget by 2027. The financial situation since last year's Assembly has in fact worsened and the Church of Scotland is at a tipping point in terms of its financial viability. This has resulted in the Trustees having to take a number of decisions in recent months which they hoped could be avoided. As reported below this has involved a voluntary exit scheme followed by compulsory redundancies in the National Administration alongside the reshaping of work which can be delivered. There has had to be a considerable reduction in the Seeds for Growth budget allocation. Changes to Vacancy Allowance, which are now limited to the costs of a locum or of pulpit supply of vacant congregations, were enacted in January. Alterations to the Presbytery Mission Plan Act (Act VIII 2021) are also being brought to this year's Assembly which will introduce a closer focus on congregational financial sustainability and will bring about mandatory Adjustment in cases where congregations cannot meet their debts as they arise.

1.3 It is with heavy hearts that the Assembly Trustees present this report. The Assembly this year is being asked to make some difficult decisions which have for many years been avoided. With free reserves now equivalent to less than five months of operating costs, the Church needs to act now, hence the presentation of a report in such stark terms. The Trustees' role is to enable more than the good governance of the charity – although this is an essential element of the task entrusted to us – it is primarily to ensure that the Church is sustainable to enable the good news of Jesus Christ to be proclaimed across the land. It is on this basis that work is being taken forward over the next year to produce a Financing Ministry Model which is flexible and sustainable, enabling the Church to pay for its Ministry needs and remain fit for the future.

2 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Over the last twelve months, the Trustees have continued the direction of travel outlined across previous General Assemblies, of striving to balance income and expenditure whilst ensuring adequate resourcing of ministry and mission. This task is becoming increasingly difficult. The primary source of income remains the sacrificial giving of members. The severity of the Church's financial situation has increased as a result of the continued fall in membership whilst having to accommodate additional expenditure as we invest in the future through the likes of funding the new Presbytery structures and the Seeds for Growth initiative.

2.2 Mission and Ministry is central to the decision-making of the Assembly Trustees. The Church's constitutional commitment to territorial ministry obliges us to uphold this obligation, yet its long-term sustainability remains uncertain. The Church retains the freedom to adapt its ministry and worship to meet evolving spiritual and societal needs. Whether through traditional parish structures or innovative forms of mission, this flexibility allows the Church to remain faithful to the gospel while responding to change.

2.3 A well-supported ministry is essential for the Church's future. Ministers play a vital role in spiritual leadership, and the Church is committed to equipping them through training and education. Ensuring that ministries are resourced effectively and correctly at time of need, strengthens the Church's ability to lead congregations in preaching, teaching, and sacramental life. Whilst the time is upon us to reflect on the opportunities before us and make them count for God's mission in Scotland, it is evident that progression in terms of finding a spirit of unity and cooperation through one voice is required. This work, in terms of the journey, has begun as we gather around the vision of the Church of Scotland and the guiding principles of the Articles Declaratory.

3 FINANCE

3.1 AUDIT OF ANNUAL ACCOUNTS FOR 2024

3.2 It is the responsibility of the Assembly Trustees to prepare and approve the audited Trustees Annual Report and Accounts of the Unincorporated Entities of the Church of Scotland and to present these to the General Assembly each year. The Report and Accounts describe in detail the Church's objectives, activities and governance arrangements. These are submitted annually to OSCR, the Scottish Charity Regulator, and then published on our website, allowing anyone who is interested to see the extent of the Church's work and witness. The Assembly is invited to receive and read the Report and Accounts which can be found within the General Assembly section of the Church of Scotland website.

4 NATIONAL FINANCES

4.1 The reality of our position

4.2 The finances of the Church are complex and the way they are presented is governed by charity law and accounting regulations. On paper, the Church looks like it has an abundance of wealth, but in reality, this is simply not the case.

4.3 Several factors contribute to this including (figures are taken from the 2023 audited financial statements, at the time of writing the 2024 figures are not available):

Restricted and endowment funds – these are funds where the original donor of the money specified how it was to be used. Restricted funds can only be spent on specific activities or sometimes in a specific location. Endowment funds must be held, and the income they generate spent as directed by the original donor. In some cases, the endowment itself can also be spent on a specific purpose. The Assembly Trustees have limited discretion over how these amounts are spent. At December 2023 our restricted funds totalled £125.3 million, and endowments were £18.9 million.

Social investments – these are funds where we have made an investment either fully (programme related) or partly (mixed motive) in pursuit of our charitable purposes. As the money is invested it cannot be spent elsewhere. At December 2023 our social investments totalled £10.1 million.

Functional fixed assets – amounts that are tied up in fixed assets that we use for our day-to-day activities are not available to spend elsewhere. These would include our offices as well as all elements of equipment and fixtures. At December 2023 our functional fixed assets totalled (i.e. excluding those parts of 121 George Street which are let out) were £10.1 million.

Designated funds – these are otherwise unrestricted funds which have been earmarked by the Trustees for future expenditure. Designated funds that have been committed cannot be spent elsewhere, and these totalled £0.2 million at December 2023.

4.4 When these amounts are stripped out, we are left with our free reserves, which represent the funds that are readily available to spend on our charitable activities. Of our total funds at December 2023 of £215.8 million, only £51.2 million represented free reserves, equating to approximately 5 months of expenditure.

4.5 We have previously talked about when the ongoing operating deficits will cause the General Fund to run out. The reality is that we can never get anywhere near that point. All charities need to have a base level of reserves, effectively providing their working capital and acting as a buffer to ensure their financial sustainability. The Church is no different. With just five months of expenditure left in our free reserves urgent action is needed to achieve a balanced budget. Our modelling, based on the budgets to 2030 shown below, indicate that our free reserves will reduce by £19 million between 2024 and 2030.

4.6 Restricted funds

4.7 As stated above, restricted funds can only be used for the purpose specified by the original donor. The Church has many hundreds of different restricted funds, some of which date back many years and are for purposes which are no longer relevant. Work has been ongoing for a period of time to understand the nature of the original restriction and, where appropriate, formally reorganise these funds with OSCR so that they are available for broader use. This process is very time consuming. Since the autumn of 2024 we have been using additional resource to progress this work and to ensure that wherever possible we are charging expenditure, including the costs of administering the funds, against these balances, which has the added benefit of preserving our free reserves.

4.8 From 2025 our management reporting will split out the spend of these funds, recognising that a deficit caused by spending them is a positive thing. In reality it is merely a timing difference because the money was received and recognised in a prior year and is being spent in a subsequent one.

4.9 2024 Financial results

4.10 At the time of writing the full year end statutory accounts for 2024 are still being prepared. The figures discussed below are based on the unaudited management accounts and ignore the impact of certain year-end adjustments required by the charity accounting rules, such as the revaluation of investments.

4.11 The budget for 2024 was an operating deficit of £8.151 million. The actual result was an operating deficit of £5.898 million. The main reasons for the variance can be explained as follows;

	£'000
Budgeted operating deficit	(8,151)
Reduction in congregational contributions	(132)
Faith Action overspend	(912)
Support and Services underspend	479
Office of the General Assembly underspend	347
CrossReach overspend	(1,794)
Seeds for Growth underspend	765
Transfer of funds	(2,224)
Legacies, donations and grants	3,934
Investment income	994
Actual operating deficit	<u>(5,898)</u>

Notes on the variances;

- Congregational contributions were slightly lower than anticipated as a result of recalculating Giving to Grow following parish adjustments.
- The Faith Action overspend includes £134k in respect of vacancy allowance and £703k in respect of unpaid rent from the establishments in Israel who were unable to make any payments back to us during the year.
- The overspend for CrossReach includes an additional contribution to Scotland's Redress Scheme of £640k as required by the Scottish Government and within the Church's overall capped contribution to the Scheme.

4.12 In summary, against a budget deficit of £8.15m, we came in £2.25m better. However, the main reason we ended up better than budget was that investment income and legacies, both of which are difficult to predict or control, contributed £4.9m of additional income.

4.13 Elsewhere, conscious management of expenditure in support & services and other central areas and delays in Seeds for Growth investment, which occurred for administrative reasons, offset greater than anticipated deficits in Social Care and Faith Action.

4.14 The management accounts for the three wholly owned subsidiary establishments in Israel, namely St Andrew's Galilee Limited (The Scots Hotel, Tiberias), St Andrew's Scottish Centre Limited (Scots House Hotel, Jerusalem) and Tabeetha School in Jaffa showed a combined deficit for the year of £1.3 million reflecting the challenging operating conditions they faced. During 2024 the establishments were not able to pay amounts due to the national Church in respect of rent, loan interest and capital loan repayments. These amounts remain due and at 31 December 2024 the total owed but unpaid stood at £1.28 million.

4.15 As in previous years, the final statutory accounts will show a very different year end result to the operating deficits explained above. This is because the charity accounting rules require us to make various year-end adjustments as follows;

Revaluation of investments; our balance sheet must record investments at their market value rather than what we actually paid for them. Each year this gives rise to an accounting adjustment, through the statement of financial activities, to either increase (a gain) or reduce (a loss) the carrying value of the investments. It's important to note that this is a paper exercise, the gain or loss is unrealised and doesn't represent monies that we can spend unless we sell the investments, and at the time of sale the actual gain or loss will depend upon the market value at that time.

Pension scheme liabilities; we have to include a liability in respect of a deficit on any of the Church's three defined benefit (final salary) pension schemes. We have to obtain a valuation of the three schemes each year to ascertain the position at the balance sheet date. Again, this is a paper adjustment and doesn't represent a liability that would ever be paid. In recent years the schemes have been in surplus and so no deficit needs to be recognised. We are not permitted to recognise the surplus as it doesn't belong to the Church.

Future income; the rules for the deferral of income by charities are particularly complex and, in many circumstances, we can't match income with the expenditure it relates to. In tracking our operating result, we ensure that we carefully match income and expenditure in the periods to which they relate, ensuring we get an accurate picture of the financial situation, but in the statutory accounts we have to also recognise the income which doesn't meet the criteria for deferral. This mainly applies to CrossReach.

Profits on disposal of properties; the Statement of Financial Activities includes the realised gain when a property is sold for more than its book value (and conversely if a property is sold at a loss the SOFA includes that loss). These amounts mainly relate to the properties owned by the Housing & Loan Fund. They are not operational transactions.

Consolidation adjustments; the statutory accounts report our results as a group, incorporating the three establishments in Israel. The process of consolidating these results includes various accounting adjustments which affect the reported surplus or deficit.

4.16 The amounts in relation to each of these adjustments can be significant and so it's critical that we don't allow our assessment of the Church's financial position to be coloured by them.

4.17 2025 Budget

4.18 We reported to the General Assembly last year that the outline budgets for 2025 to 2029 included unidentified, but necessary, cost savings of £4 million per year. At that stage the outline budgeted deficit for 2025 was £5.142 million.

4.19 Over the summer of 2024, as we collated the figures provided by each department within the National Office and calculated the impact of other known changes, such as stipend and salary increase, it became clear that, not only had these necessary savings not been achieved, budgeted expenditure had actually increased from the figures presented last year.

4.20 As a result, and despite anticipated income being some £3.93 million higher than previously forecast, the first full draft budget for 2025 actually showed a deficit of £7.625 million.

4.21 Not surprisingly, in October 2024, the Trustees refused to approve this budget and instructed the Senior Leadership Team to come up with a further plan of action to significantly reduce the budgeted deficit and move towards a break-even position for 2027.

4.22 In the meantime, while work to identify and implement savings is progressed, we do need a budget for 2025 for operational and management reporting purposes and so, in December 2024, the Trustees approved an interim budget, incorporating all known information at that time. At relevant points during 2025 a revised forecast will be prepared, incorporating the implementation costs and subsequent savings from the action plan.

Church of Scotland Unincorporated Entities – Charity Budget 2025

£'000

Income

Congregational contributions	39,695
Stipend Endowment Income (and Glebe Rent)	4,409
Investment and other income	8,186

Total income	<u>52,290</u>
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Local expenditure

Parish Ministries direct costs	31,063
Locum costs and pulpit supply	2,974

Total Parish Ministries costs	<u>34,037</u>
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Transition funding	1,302
Presbytery funding	1,464
Seeds for Growth	2,500

	<u>39,303</u>
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National Office Expenditure

Faith Action	6,540
Office of the General Assembly	1,479
Support & Services Departments	8,797
Other Funds including Housing & Loan	472

	<u>17,288</u>
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CrossReach funding

Operational funding	1,010
Approved operational spend	749

	<u>1,759</u>
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Total operational costs	<u>58,350</u>
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Operating deficit	<u>(6,060)</u>
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Utilisation of restricted funds	<u>3,798</u>
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Explanatory notes on the 2025 budget:

- Congregational contributions are calculated based on assessed congregational accounts for 2023.
- Parish Ministries are based on 472 ministers of Word and Sacrament; 75 Ministries Development Staff; 20 Assistant Ministers; 13 Interim Ministers; 3 Ministers for the Deaf as well as 307 vacancies, a total number of posts of 890. This greatly exceeds the vacancy figure within the 600 + 60 assumptions because we are still in a transitional phase as Presbytery Mission Plans are implemented.
- Ministries and staff costs include a 2.5% pay increase for 2025.
- The increase to employers National Insurance costs is reflected in the budgets for the Central Services Committee and Ministers, with the additional cost totalling £635K.
- Support & Services department costs include the cost of servicing the General Trustees, Pension Trustees, Investors Trust and Church of Scotland Trust. Costs recovered from these bodies, who are separate legal entities, is included in Other Income.
- Utilisation of restricted funds represents expenditure from restricted funds as described above and does not give rise to a true deficit.
- The figure of £2.5m for Seeds for Growth reflected the position at the time of setting the 2025 budget which has subsequently been revised during the exercise to prioritise our expenditure

4.23 There is a further capital expenditure budget for the Church of £3.698 million for various projects including the Digital Transformation programme reported last year (£498k) and the purchase of properties by the Trustees of the Housing & Loan Fund (£3.2 million).

4.24 Rolling Budgets 2026 to 2030

4.25 The rolling budgets for 2026 to 2030 are provided below, but it should be noted that, at this stage, they are an extrapolation of the 2025 budget, and we know that there will be significant changes to the numbers shown. The Assembly Trustees are committed to the ongoing programme of action and to achieving a break-even budget for 2027.

Church of Scotland Unincorporated Entities - Charity Rolling Budget 2026 - 2030

	2026 £'000	2027 £'000	2028 £'000	2029 £'000	2030 £'000
Income					
Congregational contributions	39,817	39,810	38,524	37,727	36,875
Stipend Endowment Income (and Glebe Rent)	4,489	4,570	4,653	4,738	4,825
Investment and other income	7,382	7,229	7,181	7,107	7,083
Total income	51,688	51,609	50,358	49,572	48,783
Local expenditure					
Parish Ministries direct costs	30,212	30,374	31,051	30,889	30,896
Locum costs and pulpit supply	2,806	2,650	2,582	2,572	2,562
Total Parish Ministries costs	33,018	33,024	33,633	33,461	33,458
Transition funding	434	-	-	-	-
Presbytery funding	1,481	1,505	1,525	1,555	1,586
Seeds for Growth	2,500	2,500	2,500	2,500	2,500
	37,433	37,029	37,658	37,516	37,544
National Office Expenditure					
Faith Action	5,279	5,400	5,322	5,365	5,469
Office of the General Assembly	1,617	1,535	1,513	1,361	1,408
Support & Services Departments	8,761	9,094	9,036	9,026	9,277
Other Funds including Housing & Loan	(619)	476	(196)	644	748
	15,038	16,505	15,675	16,396	16,902
CrossReach funding					
Deficit funding	1,010				
Approved operational spend	749	749	749		
	1,759	749	749	-	-
Total operational costs	54,230	54,283	54,082	53,912	54,446
Operating deficit	(2,542)	(2,674)	(3,724)	(4,340)	(5,663)

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4.26 Congregational income and Giving to Grow

4.27 The Giving to Grow Regulations require us to undertake an annual review to ascertain whether they need to be amended in any way. Given the work that has been ongoing on the new Financing Ministry model, and the acceptance that fundamental change will be brought to General Assembly in 2026, it was agreed that the review of the Giving to Grow Regulations should be light touch this year. Therefore, the changes to the Giving to Grow regulations are minimal, with suggested amendments to improve consistency and align with updates to legislation (see Appendix 1).

4.28 Vacancy Allowance

4.29 At £4.026 million in 2023, Vacancy Allowance represented a significant cost to the Church. A comprehensive review of the application of the allowance was undertaken in the early autumn of 2024 with various options given detailed consideration by a range of stakeholders. It was agreed that the intention of Vacancy Allowance was to ensure that vacant congregations were not left out of pocket because of the costs associated with employing a locum or using pulpit supply. Accordingly, the application of Vacancy Allowance was changed with effect from 1st January 2025 such that, rather than blanket application of a full allowance to all congregations who are without a minister, the costs of a locum or of pulpit supply of vacant congregations are met by the National Church. No change was made for Congregations in Guardianship, who continue to receive a full Vacancy Allowance against their Giving to Grow assessment and are invoiced for the cost of locum provision.

4.30 The change to the operation of Vacancy Allowance was not a decision that was made lightly but, given the overall state of the Church's finances it was judged to be necessary. The new system was in keeping with the original intention of the allowance and therefore the fairest option available. It will result in an anticipated saving of nearly £870k in 2025.

4.31 There will be further changes to Vacancy Allowance due to the proposed new definition of vacancy in the new Call, Election and Appointment of Ministers of Word and Sacrament Act and the revised Presbytery Mission Plan Act. This sets out that a charge is only vacant if Presbytery has given permission to call. Further details can be found within the FAPLT report.

4.32 Financing Ministry

4.33 As we move to a balanced budget for 2027, considerable work is being undertaken to outline what a sustainable model for Financing Ministry might look like. We seek to address a number of the known shortcomings of the current system and, most importantly, to give a great deal of control back to individual congregations. This is a complex process as we try to balance the various factors at play.

4.34 The stark reality is that we can never have a fully sustainable operating model until we can address the real-terms decline in the income of the Church as a whole. Until we can start to grow membership numbers and income, we will always be in the position of having to make further cuts.

4.35 The fundamental principle of the new model would be that a charge that was able to meet the full cost of having a full time Minister of Word and Sacrament would be able to call a minister with the permission of Presbytery. This puts the control back firmly at the local level. The full cost of a minister will include indirect costs as well as direct ones. With a commitment to a priority to the poor, provision must also be made for those not able to meet the full cost of ministry. This is in line with our stated objective to promote the ministry and mission of the Church throughout all of Scotland.

4.36 In terms of the funding of Presbyteries, we are examining ending the current system whereby a significant proportion of Presbytery income moves in a circle, coming from the national budget, but paid for by congregational contributions to the national office. Rather, Presbyteries would set their own budget based on the work they are tasked with undertaking, and this would be funded from Presbytery dues. This would again give a degree of control back to local congregations who, in their role as Presbyters (ministers within the bounds and an equal number of elders) would have to approve the Presbytery budget.

4.37 National Office funding would operate in a similar way, with the budget for the coming year being presented to the General Assembly, clearly showing how much would be collected from congregations to fund it. This would allow Commissioners to the Assembly to instruct changes either way; whether to reduce costs by agreeing activities should cease, or to accept an increase in congregational contributions in order to meet ongoing costs or fund new work streams deemed of value to the Church.

4.38 We also envisage a fundamental change to the way congregational income is assessed and contributions collected. The current system, where for example, a congregation's income for 2023 is used as a basis of assessment for how much they pay in 2025, causes significant challenges, particularly in circumstances when income fluctuates substantially. The idea of contributions in respect of Presbytery and National Office being paid in real time, by instalments, in the year to which they relate is currently being considered. Estimated payments on account of contributions in respect of ministry would be paid during the year, with the actual liability calculated as part of the year end process and any balancing amount recognised as a liability in fully accrued SORP accounts or noted as a liability within Receipts and Payments accounts. In this way the contributions will be matched against the relevant income, thereby removing the current disparity.

4.39 Over the coming months we will continue to work on the model, making adjustments where necessary, with a view to bringing full proposals to General Assembly in May 2026, for implementation from 1st January 2027. The changes to the Presbytery Mission Plan Act (Act VIII 2021) in respect of insolvent congregations and tenure coming before this General Assembly are essential building blocks to allow us to move to the new financial model.

5. INCOME GENERATION

5.1 In addition to various initiatives to assist congregations to grow income at a local level, including the excellent Bearing Fruit tool designed by the Stewardship Team (see below), work has also been ongoing to look at improving fundraising at a national level. Initial work has taken place to consider how this should be taken forward, recognising that a careful approach is needed because the National Office should not compete with either congregations or CrossReach for available funding streams. The Trustees will take this project forward during 2025/26.

6. STEWARDSHIP

6.1 In this current season of the Church's life, the need for Stewardship has never been so vital. In the first chapter of his letter to the Colossians, Paul calls on the church to "live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work" (v.10). This call remains relevant for the Church today, challenging us both individually and collectively to examine our values and practices.

6.2 Recognising that all aspects of our lives – including our stewardship – must align with this calling, we seek to honour God and bear fruit for God’s kingdom through prayerful planning, creative thinking, generous giving and faithful resource management.

6.3 Bearing Fruit – a financial health-check for growth

6.4 Inspired by those words from Colossians, the Trustees are pleased to report on the recent launch of an online financial health-check tool, *Bearing Fruit*, designed to help congregations develop a culture of generosity and healthy financial practices that support growth. The topics covered are:

- culture of generosity
- preaching and the offering
- enabling and encouraging giving
- Gift Aid and Gift Aid Small Donations Scheme
- income generation
- legacy giving
- reserves policy
- annual accounts and budgeting.

6.5 By completing a series of simple questions, congregations can receive a tailored report with practical advice and resources to support them in those key areas. These reports are generated for each congregation’s sole use; no data is collected nationally.

6.6 Just as the early church in Colossae received both an encouragement and a call to action from Paul, we are confident that the *Bearing Fruit* tool will help congregations recognise and celebrate their strengths and address areas for improvement, in order to enhance their fruitfulness through more effective stewardship and finance practices. The Trustees encourage all congregations to take advantage of this valuable resource which can be accessed on the Church of Scotland website here bit.ly/cofsbearingfruit. Contact the Stewardship Team (stewardship@churchofscotland.org.uk) for more information.

6.7 Stewardship Resources on Church of Scotland Learning

6.8 To further support congregations, a new dedicated area for stewardship content has been launched on Church of Scotland Learning. This platform provides easy access to the Narrative of Generosity suite of resources which explores stewardship across twelve themes. This dedicated area also introduces a new learning module to equip more people to facilitate stewardship conversations in their local settings. This collaboration between the Stewardship and Faith Action Teams reinforces the integral role of stewardship within a whole life of discipleship.

6.9 Generosity Report 2025 (www.stewardship.org.uk)

6.10 The Generosity Report 2025 from the UK charity Stewardship provides valuable insights into this relationship between stewardship and discipleship. Drawing on data from a survey of over 6,000 Christian adults in the UK conducted in September 2024, the report considers giving by Christians to churches, charities and Christian workers. The full report can be downloaded direct from the charity’s website (Generosity Report 2025 – Exploring Christian giving in the UK).

6.11 The report concludes that deeper Christian practice leads to greater generosity. For example, while 61% of those who attend church monthly give a regular financial contribution, this figure rises to 71% where monthly church attendance is coupled with reading the Bible monthly. The figure rises to 84% where church attendance and reading the Bible take place on a weekly basis. Furthermore, the proportion of income given by weekly attenders is more than double the proportion given by monthly attenders.

6.12 Of particular note is the continuing “positive correlation between financial generosity and regular teaching on the application and impact of giving”.

6.13 The report contains three recommendations specifically for church leaders:

- teach on faith and finance often
“it is important to embed teaching on this topic as a key aspect of discipleship”
- transparency and enthusiasm are key
“communicate clearly the purpose and impact of giving”
- take a financial health-check
“identify which areas of your finances and governance are healthy and which may need further attention”.

6.14 The Trustees are pleased to report that these recommendations are already being actively encouraged and practically supported in the Kirk through our national stewardship function.

6.15 We highlight these findings for reflection and encourage congregations to contact the Stewardship Team to explore the range of ways in which more effective stewardship can be fostered within different contexts.

6.16 Stewardship Stories

6.17 In 2024, the team's direct support reached over 200 congregations, strengthening their efforts in areas like congregational giving, digital giving, funding, unions and Gift Aid/GASDS. The following stories highlight examples of this impact:

- Arbuthnott, Bervie and Kinneff, who received assistance in developing its culture of giving, reports a 35% increase in offerings given by Standing Order following a focussed stewardship season in May 2024. Various aspects of congregational life were showcased and the congregation was encouraged to reflect on how the Church's work was supported and sustained. The congregation also saw new volunteers coming forward to offer their time and skills to support the Church's activities.
- London Crown Court sought to energise its regular monthly income before embarking on a large-scale project and fundraising. Through engaging communications, including a well-produced brochure, they inspired members to reassess their giving as a first step towards realising the Church's vision for the future. This generated new Standing Orders and fostered positive discussions about giving and, importantly, belonging.
- Dollar appreciated the support of the stewardship team in planning a programme to encourage personal giving. As a result, they had over a dozen new people commit to giving regularly to the Church, including non-members. They also had many existing givers increase their gifts, and an increase in the use of their contactless devices in the church. They saw a total increase of over 25% in regular offerings compared with giving at the start of the programme.
- Stranraer was helped to facilitate a service of worship and an accompanying event exploring the gifts of the congregation. As well as providing fresh ideas for mission, ten new people attended the service. Furthermore, financial support to help resource the new ideas was received in the form of five new Standing Orders and eight new Gift Aid declarations.

6.18 Online Events and Recordings

6.19 In terms of wider reach, the Stewardship Team has recently hosted webinar events offering information and practical advice on the topics of *Finance in Unions* and *Faith and Funders*, and has produced a recorded video on *Preaching and Stewardship*.

6.20 The finance team has produced a series of bite-sized videos entitled *Church Treasurer's Guide to Financial Accounting* to assist congregational treasurers in preparing Annual Reports and Accounts, especially for those who do not have a finance background. It is planned that further episodes will be added to the series, covering a range of financial matters relevant to Church of Scotland congregations.

6.21 The webinar recordings and financial accounting videos are available on the Stewardship Team's YouTube page: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCqb_rm5hfTSGVK00tBFv6og.

6.22 The Trustees are grateful to the Stewardship and Finance team for providing these practical and accessible resources, and encourage congregations to utilise them. Churches can keep up-to-date with all of these resources and events by subscribing to the stewardship newsletter: <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/news-and-events/newsletters>.

6.23 Legacy Giving

6.24 Gifts in wills are a powerful expression of faith, enabling the Church to take forward work which would not otherwise be possible. The following table shows income received by congregations from gifts in wills for the years 2022-2023:

Year	No. of congregations in receipt of a legacy	Total Legacy Income (congregations)
2022	325	£5.76m
2023	298	£5.97m

6.25 Legacies received for the wider work of the Church (i.e. the Unincorporated Entities) for the years 2022-2024 were as follows:

Year	Unrestricted Legacies	Total Legacy Income (unincorporated entities)
2022	£0.9m	£2.4m
2023	£5.2m	£6.4m
2024	£2.1m	£5.1m

6.26 We thank God for these gifts and for the faithful stewardship of those who made such generous provision towards the ongoing work of the Church.

6.27 Congregations continue to be supported in promoting gifts in wills through *Faith Will*, a growing partnership with Christian Aid involving the Church of Scotland, Church of England, Quakers in Britain, United Reformed Church and now three further partners: The Church in Wales, Union of Welsh Independents and Presbyterian Church of Wales. To access a range of resources for use in your congregation, visit the *Faith Will* area on Christian Aid's website: <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/appeals/key-appeals/faith-will>

7 PRESBYTERY PLANNING AND FUTURE MINISTRY NUMBERS

7.1 As required under the Presbytery Mission Plan Act (Act VIII 2021), the Assembly Trustees present to the Assembly planning figures for Ministries. This will remain at 600 ministries plus 60 vacancies in line with the Presbytery Mission Planning and five-year future budget assumptions as described in the Finance Section above. The planning figures will be subject to ongoing review and annual revision as the reform process continues.

7.2 As noted in the 2021 Assembly report when the 600 plus 60 vacancies were presented and agreed, this figure was based on projecting both the future affordability and availability of ministries within the Church. As has been raised in previous reports to the Assembly, despite conservative assumptions used in the modelling, the actual numbers of retirements and demissions continues to surpass initial estimates. This is before the affordability of these numbers are considered. The Trustees are acutely aware that Presbytery Mission Planning is based on the 600 ministries plus 60 and therefore at this current time, in light of the detailed work ongoing in terms of the financing ministry model, recognise that this will need to change in future years.

8 REMIT – PRESBYTERY AND PARTNERSHIP SUPPORT PROGRAMME GROUP

8.1 The Assembly Trustees, under their Constitution, are responsible for the creation and structures of the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team. This new structure has faced the challenges not just of the first two years of its existence, but in building on the legacy work of the four predecessor Councils, along with the contributions from the Faith Impact and Faith Nurture Forums. Certain areas of work have not been captured in previous remits for FAPLT, and it has become apparent that there is a need for a Presbytery and Partnership Support Programme Group, to address issues which have been omitted from previous remits and to provide a space where an integrated approach can be taken to matters which belong with a Presbytery and Partnership Support Programme Group. These are covered in the proposed Remit being presented at Appendix 2. This Programme Group will also include the work of the Presbytery Mission Plan Implementation Group. Further detail can be found in the report of the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team.

9 TENURE

9.1 Over the past year the Assembly Trustees have been working with representatives of the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team and the Legal Questions Committee to consider how ministerial tenure should be understood and developed in the context of the needs of the Church in the 21st Century and modern charity law requirements. We have also received valuable input from the Theological Forum, and have benefited greatly from the detailed consideration which has been given by the Procurator to the law and practice of the Church in this area and the Opinion which he has issued on this topic.

9.2 Theological reflections

9.3 In considering difficult questions around the reform of our understanding of tenure, we have been grateful for the reflections which we have received from the Theological Forum. The Forum noted that the Reformed tradition's emphasis on congregational call and tenure did not negate the possibility of redeploying ministers flexibly to serve the wider interests of worship, mission and ministry. The Forum recognise that the concept of tenure *ad vitam aut culpam*, having served the Church well for centuries, is now challenged to breaking point by our changed historical context. Declining numbers of ministers and within congregations, and inadequate funding, necessitate new models. They suggest that it can be argued that there is no necessary connection between God's call and unrestricted tenure. Restricted tenure, which can be extended, offers more flexibility to follow God's leading than unrestricted tenure which cannot be shortened other than by the choice of the minister. Also, many ministers serve in contexts where tenure is not a feature of their deployment: for example, chaplains, Interim and Transition Ministers and Associate Ministers, who may be employed either in an MDS post or as a local Kirk Session appointment.

9.4 Every Christian's primary call is to discipleship, to follow Christ. Beyond that, call or vocation is a sense of God's purpose in a person's life that is holistic, shaped by their God-given charisms, personality, and situation in life. Being unique to each individual, it is unlikely to alter significantly over time. Luther believed that everyone has a vocation, and a call to nursing, plumbing, marriage or parenthood is no less sacred a charge than a call to ministry.

9.5 From this, calling is the divine summons to a particular context in which the vocation is exercised. God providentially situates each person in a specific time and place to live out their vocation. Unlike the core call, in a particular calling change is not only possible but inevitable. A calling to parenthood is lived out differently when the children are toddlers, teenagers and adults. In ministry, even if one stays in the same parish for life, the precise shape of the calling changes with age and maturity and with changes in the congregation or parish – a new housing estate or a factory closure, for example. And of course, a minister may feel called to another charge, or indeed to a different post that brings a previously neglected aspect of their vocation.

9.6 By this understanding, change is not a threat to a minister's call but an invitation to live it out in a different shape. Every calling is necessarily time-bound and subject to contingent factors, under providence but beyond the individual's control.

9.7 In the Church of Scotland, it has been assumed that minister and congregation are the key agents in change, under God. However, in our current situation where the national and regional Church are initiating change that is often perceived as negative and destructive of ministry, there is an essential pastoral dimension for both ministers and congregations. It is also imperative that a congregation's right to call a minister is affirmed, within the larger question of discernment. Who discerns God's leading in these complex situations? Regional and national Church bodies will always be accused of being driven by money and statistics, yet these form part of the data for discernment in the historical context in which God has placed us. A distinction between tenure and call may inform wise decisions, assist care for ministers and congregations, and help us to learn to live together faithfully in these challenging times.

9.8 The legal position

9.9 We have also carefully considered the legal position as set out in some detail in the Procurator's Opinion. His conclusions are:

1. Ministers of religion have long been recognised by the civil law as holding "office" as opposed to being an employee. The law held a parish minister to be a public officer who on admission to an endowed parish was admitted *ad vitam aut culpam* (literally, for life or until fault). For this rule to apply, it was implied that the office of parish minister continued to subsist independently of anyone who filled it: it had a standalone existence. An important factor in the permanence and subsistence of the office was the fact that it was endowed and was seen as a public office. Parish boundaries were a matter for the civil law, overseen by the Teind Court. The parish was recognised as requiring a minister and every parish (*quoad omnia* or *quoad sacra*) was endowed with a benefice, whether deriving from the heritors or endowments provided for under statute. The benefice – stipend, glebe, manse and minister's grass – was, in essence, a public funding of ministry and operated as a permanent endowment for the individual parish, to which the minister on admission to the charge had legal right. Ministers dependent upon voluntary contributions, such as appointment to missionary positions or in chapels of ease, did not have that security of funding. Accordingly, they did not have the security of the parish minister and were not held to be admitted *ad vitam aut culpam*.
2. These considerations were swept away with the 1929 Union, preceded by the enactment of the Church of Scotland (Property and Endowments) Act 1925, which effected a constitutional change in the Church's position. The State effectively withdrew, in order to ensure the Church's independence. Parish properties and endowments were transferred to the General Trustees to be appropriated in the first instance to the proper requirements of the parish and neighbourhood – all at the discretion of the General Assembly. Subsequent amendment provided simply that the funds were appropriated to such ends as the General Assembly determined.
3. Further, being drawn up in preparation for the 1929 Union, the Declaratory Articles declare the constitution of the Church of Scotland in matters spiritual. They are appended to the Church of Scotland Act 1921. The Act does not give them their authority: it merely makes clear the Church's independence in matters spiritual, and their lawfulness. Article III of the Declaratory Articles declares the duty of the Church to bring the ordinances of religion to the people of Scotland and Article IV gives to the Church the sole right to determine all questions of office and division of the spheres of labour.
4. With the 1925 Act and the constitutional position as declared in the Declaratory Articles, ministers became dependent on the funds of the Church, as opposed to having a right to the parish benefice (including stipend), in a situation where the Church was made trustee of those funds for the benefit of the people of Scotland. Trustee duties to properly steward those funds now applied. It also meant that all questions relating to the holding of office

as a minister fell within the exclusive jurisdiction of the Church, it being for the Church to decide and legislate on whether the office subsists, and the terms of tenure. In effect, the parish minister's right to the stipend with which a parish had been endowed ceased. The endowment that represented that stipend was transferred to the General Trustees, and was to be applied as the General Assembly directed.

5. The tenure of parish minister appointments was not, however, reappraised by the Church in light of the duties imposed by Article III, the financial changes and trustee duties imposed by the 1925 Act, or – in more recent times – the requirements of charity law. All of these changes conflict with the traditional concept of tenure, particularly when adherence to the concept places an unsustainable financial burden on the Church and can sometimes prevent strategic and necessary readjustment.
6. It can, therefore, no longer be said that the law of the Church is that tenure applies irrespective of circumstances. Tenure must be subsidiary to the duties of the Church as a truly national Church flowing from Article III. The Declaratory Articles are, as stated in the 1921 Act, declaratory of the constitution of the Church, and Article IV confers the power on the Church to define the boundaries of the spheres of labour of its ministers and other office-bearers. If law and practice as to tenure prejudices performance of the primary duty in Article III then that law and practice are incompatible with the constitutional duty imposed on the Church, and reform is needed.
7. Tenure must also operate in the light of the obligations placed on the Church by charity law. If, as a matter of fact, an office cannot be said to subsist in any meaningful way – where, for example, a congregation is small in number with little income and is therefore insolvent because it cannot meet its debts as they fall due – then there is no office and there can be no tenure. To insist on adherence to the concept of tenure in such circumstances may result in the private benefit to the minister (i.e. continued receipt of stipend, manse etc) being said to outweigh public benefit secured through the congregation's activities, contrary to charity law requirements. This comes into sharp focus since the minister is also a trustee of the congregation, in terms of Church and civil law. It puts the Church in the unwelcome position of operating in conflict with civil law, and exposes both a congregation's charity trustees and the Assembly Trustees (as the body given responsibility by the Assembly for the Church's national budget) to a charge of breach of duty.

9.10 It is also important to bear in mind the Church's privileged position as a Designated Religious Charity ("DRC"), which exempts us from some of the statutory oversight of OSCR. This concessionary treatment recognises the legitimate authority of the Church in matters spiritual. It also recognises that we have internal structures which offer an acceptable degree of self-regulation, such that additional oversight by OSCR is not required. Amongst other things, DRC status means that we do not need OSCR's consent to unions or dissolutions of any of the component elements of the Church of Scotland (the parent charity); OSCR cannot suspend anyone from management or control positions or restrict our transactions; and statutory provisions restricting who is eligible to be a charity trustee do not apply. Not only do these concessions benefit the Church at an administrative level, they endorse the right of the Church to deal with matters of concern itself. This carries reputational benefit – as it recognises that the Church has an internal organisation such that it exercises adequate supervisory functions in respect of its component elements – but also protects our constitutional right to exclusive spiritual government and jurisdiction. It is essential, therefore, that the Church implements the self-regulation expected of it. This involves taking whatever steps are necessary to ensure the sustainability of our constitutional position as a national church.

9.11 The Church has previously departed from the idea of tenure *ad vitam aut culpam* by introducing retirement ages in place of life-time appointment and by providing for termination of tenure where a charge was adversely affected by changed circumstances (Act VI 1984, repealed in 2016) or where a congregation is found to be in an unsatisfactory state in terms of Act I 1988).

9.12 Proposals for reform

9.13 We believe that the time has come for a fresh approach to tenure, underpinned by a continuing commitment to the principle that the strong should support the weak but informed by a degree of financial realism and acceptance that a situation in which one third of charges are net contributors and two thirds are net recipients of the Church's national giving is not sustainable. This new approach proposes that the circumstances of each charge should be examined to determine whether, as a matter of fact, the office of parish minister continues to exist in a meaningful way which is compatible with the Church's constitutional framework and complies with our duties as charity trustees, whether at congregational, Presbytery or national level. It is no longer possible, in light of the Church's current financial crisis and its constitutional and civil law obligations, to maintain a congregation in existence simply because the minister is on unrestricted tenure.

9.14 We are therefore proposing that:

- (One) In the limited circumstances provided for in the amending Act annexed as Appendix 3 the Presbytery Mission Plan Act (Act VIII 2021) will be amended so that with effect from 1 January 2026 Presbytery will have power to sever the pastoral tie and effect readjustment following due process as set out in the new section 10 inserted into Act VIII 2021 by the amending Act.

This process involves a financial sustainability review being undertaken over a period of up to three months, where circumstances come to the attention of the General Treasurer indicating that a charge may not be able to pay its debts as they fall due and/or a charge does not maintain payment of its Contributions in terms of Regulations 1 2022 (Congregational Contributions 'Giving to Grow' Regulations 2022) or has accrued a shortfall in terms of the Ministries and Mission Contributions Regulations (Regulations 1 2012). The Stewardship & Finance staff will work alongside congregations and Presbyteries in this situation to seek to put in place a realistic scheme for the ongoing payment of Contributions and other debts due by the congregation. If this is not possible, in practical terms the charge is insolvent i.e. it cannot pay its debts as they fall due and the Presbytery will have a duty to effect Adjustment unless the Presbytery authorises the shortfall in Contributions. In deciding whether or not shortfalls are justified, the Presbytery will be guided by the Core Principles set out in the Code of Practice for Mission Planning found on the Church website, with a particular focus on the principle of financial responsibility.

As is the case in civil law, the buildings held for the benefit of a charge, whether by the General Trustees or by local trustees, will not usually be taken into account in determining whether it can pay its debts. Church law does not permit the sale proceeds of buildings to be applied to meet Giving to Grow Contributions unless readjustment is taking place. It is not good stewardship of the Church's assets for large shortfalls in payments for the cost of parish ministry to be met by the expedient of selling property. Such a strategy can only be short-term, as it does not address underlying financial problems and in the medium to long term it operates against the wider interests of the Church. It means that some congregations do not pay for the ministry they receive and, when their financial unsustainability means that readjustment takes place, the new united congregation is deprived of the funds which would otherwise have been available to it to meet its ongoing fabric costs (which are likely to be considerable). It also diminishes the likelihood of monies from the sale of properties being made available for other missional purposes. Having said that, we recognise that there will on occasion be circumstances – for example where a congregation has several church/hall buildings – in which it may be appropriate for a property which is not required for the mission purposes of the congregation to be sold in order to reduce ongoing expenses and meet a shortfall in Contributions. Provision is accordingly made for this in the amendments to the PMP Act; and

- (Two) all charges becoming vacant and/or where Adjustment is effected from and after 1 June 2025 shall be designated as Reviewable Charges, such that the next minister shall be inducted on condition that the Presbytery may terminate the tenure of the minister for any reason which may seem good to the Presbytery, on the terms specified in the Basis of Reviewable Charge and always upon giving the minister six months' notice in writing.

We have taken advice from the Procurator, Principal Clerk and Church Solicitor as to whether this change requires Barrier Act procedure. We are satisfied, in the light of this advice, that it does not. There are two reasons for this. The first is that it will be a question of fact in each case, for a Presbytery to decide, whether or not the office of parish minister continues to exist. This does not involve any change to Church doctrine, worship or government. This question has always been inherent in the concept of office, and establishing a procedural mechanism to examine the question and provide for its answer is not something which invokes the Barrier Act.

Second, it would be at odds with the Church's privileged position as a DRC were we to suggest to local congregational and Presbytery charity trustees that it would be legitimate for the trustees of insolvent congregations to opt to continue to incur debts which they do not have the funds to meet. This is not a proposal which the Church can in good faith permit. We are all – Assembly Trustees, Presbytery trustees and local congregational trustees – under a duty to act with care and diligence in managing the financial affairs of the Church and if we fail to do so we are vulnerable to a charge of misconduct. We must bear in mind that the legal standard of care is the diligence that is reasonable to expect of someone who is managing the affairs of another person. We are stewards of the funds and assets entrusted to us by our members, many of whom are giving faithfully and sacrificially to advance Christ's mission in their place of service, and we therefore commend to the Assembly our proposals for reform, focused on that reality.

10 REVISED STIPEND REGULATIONS

10.1 The existing National Stipend Scheme Regs (Regs VII 2003) have become almost entirely out of date and require repeal. Only their provisions about determining the Stipend Scale and on qualifying stipend service remain relevant so these are replicated in updated form in new Regulations attached as Appendix 4.

11 RESOURCING PRESBYTERIES – NEW DIRECTIONS

11.1 Since the formation of the Assembly Trustees in 2019, the new Presbytery structure has been established. The Church is now presented with the opportunity for real change. Focus needs to be on the growth and development of the Church through new Presbyteries, prioritising local congregations, addressing local needs by recruiting and equipping future leaders for ministry and mission. We need to align our structures, finances, and mission to enable the Church to flourish at a local level.

11.2 The conversations over the last year have highlighted the necessity that all parts of the Church come together in order to find a pathway through the complexities of change. To navigate this process, “New Directions” sessions were held, convened by the Assembly Trustees, with the relevant stakeholders in July, October and November 2024. This was followed by sessions with the Presbytery Clerks in January 2025 that were dedicated towards looking at specific issues raised by them to the Assembly Trustees. This initiative seeks to develop both the strategic thinking and practical steps necessary to achieve meaningful change. Work will continue over the next year with outcomes from these discussions to be presented at General Assembly 2026.

12 THE IMPACT OF THE FINANCIAL POSITION ON WORK FOR THE NEXT PERIOD**12.1 NATIONAL CHURCH PROVISION FOR ONLY NECESSARY SERVICES**

12.2 The Chief Officer, under the direction of the Assembly Trustees, commenced a review of the work of the National Office in 2023. This was in response to the instruction to begin paring back central activities and the provision of resources in line with the financial realities being faced by the Church.

12.3 The first phase of the project reported to the Trustees in February 2024 and to the General Assembly that May with the results primarily focusing upon work within the Faith Action area. Significant legacy work had been moved across from the four Councils that became Faith Nurture and Faith Impact in 2019 and subsequently FALPT in 2023. Further reductions in staff resources and budgets had resulted in a thorough review of the remaining work being required. A number of lines of activity were identified as being less relevant to the life of the Church than they had once been. The staff associated with these roles either moved onto other employment or were redeployed into other areas of work.

12.4 Due to the increased fragility of the Church’s financial position in October 2024, the Trustees directed a second phase of the Priorities Project to be instigated. In February 2025, the Assembly Trustees reached the decision that the Church could no longer sustain the size of the National Office and launched a voluntary exit scheme. At the time of writing, it is projected that this will not alone achieve the reductions in staffing levels required, so it is anticipated that compulsory redundancy measures will follow.

12.5 The final outcomes of this phase of reduction of the national administration will be reported to General Assembly 2026. The Trustees are acutely aware that these decisions are not just about structures and budgets, but about people who feel called to work for the Church. The Trustees very much regret the necessity to take these actions which have not been taken lightly. They are conscious that this is an unsettling time and wish to place on record their grateful thanks to all of the staff for their faithful service, often over many years. The Trustees hold in prayer those whose roles are affected, whose futures feel uncertain, and whose service has been faithful, trusting in God’s guidance and grace as we move forward during this difficult time.

13 SEEDS FOR GROWTH

13.1 As noted within the opening section of this report, the Trustees, due to the current financial position of the Church, have taken the difficult decision to scale back the budget provision for awards which can be made by Seeds for Growth. The financial allocation for awards for the remainder of 2025 has been reduced from £2.2m to £500k. The Trustees worked closely with the Convener of the Seeds for Growth Fund in order to reach this position. Agreement was also reached that a settlement in terms of grant monies being made available would occur on an annual basis. This will ensure an additional level of stewardship over funds which are currently being taken from Church reserves. The Trustees deeply regret having to reach this position, but with the imperative to reach a balanced budget by 2027 and Seeds for Growth funding making up 60% of that deficit, there was no other way this could be achieved.

13.2 Confirmation is given that for those projects already in receipt of a grant award, these grants will be honoured over the forthcoming years. If monies collected through Giving to Grow increase over the next period, monies for Seeds for Growth projects which are likely to bring growth to the Church, can also be increased through future budgetary decisions of the General Assembly.

13.3 Awarding its first grants in 2023, Seeds for Growth's core purpose is to support the spiritual and numerical growth of the Church of Scotland. To date it has awarded 72 grants with a total value of £1.94m. It has been an inspiration to the Seeds for Growth Committee to encounter so much in the Church of Scotland which is visionary, passionate, grounded in faith, committed to sharing the Good News and inspired by hope. Behind every project are people who believe in a Church which takes risks, which remains true to itself and to its calling to share the Gospel with our surrounding communities. We will endeavour to share these stories with the wider Church.

13.4 Though awards have been made to a wide variety of projects (funded activities have included Forest Churches, Messy Churches, Youth Drop-ins, Intergenerational Worship Events, Cafes and Art Workshops) almost all fit within a broader pattern. Lower level awards (Level 1 awards up to £1,000 and Level 2 awards up to £10,000) tend to be towards short-term or one-off outreach events, training and research. The higher-level awards (Level 3 awards of up to £40,000 for three years) combine engaging outreach events (sometimes referred to as "gateway" activities) with more intensive faith-based groups. Both these components are essential in supporting projects which seek to make connections with people who would not ordinarily engage with their local church, and to see these people become disciples of Jesus Christ.

13.5 In the two years of its operation, the work has developed in a number of key ways:

- An initial focus on New Worshipping Communities has broadened to include work with young people, and the revitalisation of existing Church communities.
- the Seeds for Growth Committee have increasingly sought to ensure awards are made to projects which combine a responsiveness to the Spirit's leading alongside clearly articulated aims and an ongoing commitment to evaluation.
- The Committee increasingly works with projects to ensure they have long-term financial plans which enable their sustainability. This will usually involve fundraising from the first day of a project's inception, and seeking financial support from a wide variety of sources including those who participate in the project, the sponsoring congregation, neighbouring congregations, the Presbytery, grant-giving bodies and local businesses.
- Part of the Committee's remit is to facilitate the sharing of wisdom and learning across projects: whether through conversations and visits from Seeds for Growth staff, connecting similar projects, or the highly successful Seeds for Growth gathering in September 2024.
- The processes surrounding the release of money to successful applicants was reviewed in March and the process streamlined in order that grant applicants will be receiving monies on a 6-month basis (at first) and subsequently on a yearly basis (subject to outcomes being met).

13.6 Reflecting on its work over the last two years, the Seeds for Growth Committee intends to operate within a four-point strategy for its work in the year ahead:

1. Support and monitor 20 faith-based youth projects; engaging with and developing faith in those aged 0-18.
2. Begin significant work under the leadership of FAPLT in establishing 2-3 student resource congregations, seeing these draw new people to faith, and offering places for discipleship for young people (including many who have grown up in Church of Scotland congregations)
3. Assess and support the development of New Worshipping Communities within the Church of Scotland.
4. Work with 15 congregations in the Leading your Church Into Growth process, adapting this for a Scottish context, and reporting on early results to the General Assembly of 2026.

13.7 The Committee has had an increased number of applications from projects which work with children and young people (those aged between 0 and 18, and their families, parents and carers). In an era where the Church of Scotland has often struggled to engage, and see faith develop, amongst those under the age of 40, this has been an extremely encouraging development. High quality youth work has always been part of the Church of Scotland's life, and it has been very encouraging to see where this is happening. Overall, Seeds for Growth has awarded 16 Level 3 Awards to projects whose work is predominantly with young people. These awards represent a total of £395,000 per year for work with approximately 4,000 young people, and intensive faith-based work with 650 young people by the end of the third year of funding. If these projects are effective, and establish models and expertise which might be shared across the wider Church of Scotland, the effect on our denomination would be transformational.

13.8 Though greatly encouraged by applications for work amongst young people of school age and below, Seeds for Growth has had very few applications from projects where the main emphasis of work is amongst those aged 18-40. Furthermore, we have had no applications where the primary focus of work is amongst students or those who have recently graduated. There is much anecdotal evidence to suggest that when young people grow up in a Church of Scotland, and relocate to enter Higher Education, they very rarely join a Church of Scotland congregation. This has had an extremely detrimental effect on our denomination as these young people often do not return to the Church of Scotland as they grow older, nor do they become leaders in the Church of Scotland (historically, many Church of Scotland ministers either came to faith or grew significantly during their time in such congregations).

13.9 The Seeds for Growth Committee, alongside the Assembly Trustees and FAPLT, believes that the time has come to address the significant need for congregations in the Church of Scotland to engage positively with significant numbers of students and recent graduates.

13.10 Here we are much inspired by a model which has come from the Church of England, through the work of the Church Revitalisation Trust, for student Resource Churches. Such Churches are planted in student areas, look to have an active membership of over 200 people, rely on a high-degree of initial investment but become self-sustaining within five years. The experience of the Church Revitalisation Trust is that Churches also require a high degree of support from their surrounding structure and rely on a highly skilled team of leaders. Such congregations have proven highly effective in leading large numbers to faith, and in providing an effective community for transformational discipleship. They also go on to plant many more churches themselves. There are still many questions which must be resolved in adopting such an approach within the Church of Scotland: how does this model fit with the Church of Scotland's Presbyterian governance; where might these be located, and how these might be supported by Presbyteries and local congregations. This idea has been talked about in the Church of Scotland for at least a decade, but progress has been slow. We believe that this work requires new urgency and a commitment to collaboration across all ages. We hope to report significant progress by next year's Assembly to plant our first student Resource Church, with trained leaders, a building, finance and local support in place, by the autumn of 2027.

13.11 Over the past year, the Seeds for Growth Committee has seen a trend whereby fewer applications have been received from those seeking to establish New Worshipping Communities. We are unsure of the reasons for this: although some indications are that these are becoming less common in the Church of Scotland, or that these tend to be on a smaller scale where the need for funding is less pressing, or for some it is the case that the demands of almost all grant awarding bodies (for long-term financial sustainability, and setting of identifiable aims) do not sit easily with the ethos of some approaches to church planting. We will continue to monitor this situation, alongside our colleagues in FAPLT, and report to future General Assemblies.

13.12 Finally, research in the Church of England – a denomination which faces many similar challenges to our own – is that one of the most effective approaches for the revitalisation of existing congregations is through an approach named “Leading your Church into Growth” (LyCiG). This approach involves intensive work with a congregation's leaders before committing to change within a congregation over 1-2 years. Congregations which have engaged with this process have seen an almost 20% increase of the numbers of young people attending within 12 months. The Committee aims to engage with 15 congregations over the next year in the LyCiG process and will report to the General Assembly of 2026.

13.13 The Committee members appointed to the Seeds for Growth Committee, a sub-group of the Assembly Trustees, can be found at Appendix 5.

14 CROSSREACH

14.1 As noted within previous reports, CrossReach, the Church's social care arm, now accounts for slightly less than 50% of the income under the stewardship of the Assembly Trustees. Robust governance arrangements are in place between CrossReach and the Trustees.

14.2 The CrossReach Board has the Chief Officer or General Treasurer of the Church in attendance. Papers are shared and there is an opportunity to communicate the challenges facing both CrossReach and the rest of the Church more generally. CrossReach remains under the oversight of the Assembly Trustees but has significant delegated authorities under a Memorandum of Understanding which allows it to operate relatively independently. It has its own robust governance and accountability arrangements which meet stringent requirements. It is also highly regulated by both Care Inspectorate and the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC). CrossReach is its own employing agency. As a result, the majority of arrangements between the Trustees and CrossReach are focussed on financial matters, recognising the interdependencies between the financial position of the Church as a whole and that of CrossReach.

14.3 Very strong, mutually supportive relationships exist between the Trustees, the support service departments of the Church and CrossReach. The governance arrangements in place ensure that both parties provide the necessary support towards achieving a balanced budget whilst continuing to meet the missional goals of the Church.

14.4 The Assembly Trustees and CrossReach have established a joint Finance Group meeting. This deals with areas of strategic direction related to the financial sustainability of the organisation and establishing future arrangements that support optimal outcomes for all parties.

14.5 The CrossReach Finance and Resourcing monthly meeting reviews the monthly accounts, looks at forecasts/trends and assesses performance and risks. Any significant matters are reported to the Assembly Trustee Finance Sub-Group (at which CrossReach are represented) and onward to the full meeting of the Assembly Trustees as necessary.

14.6 CrossReach are represented at the Assembly Trustees monthly meeting where they provide high level reporting and are able to input to the overall direction of the Church and highlight their contribution. This also enables CrossReach to be guided directly by the Trustees as necessary and to table proposals for funding of missional activities.

14.7 CrossReach reports into the Assembly Trustees Governance Group on matters of statutory compliance including regulatory requirements, safeguarding, health and safety and data protection.

14.8 In terms of the detail there is a weekly meeting between the Chief Officer and the CEO of CrossReach. This ensures that key issues of significance to the Church which could be affected by CrossReach's operations are shared and understood in "real time" to avoid surprises and enable any operational issues to be communicated and dealt with.

15 ISRAEL PALESTINE COMMITTEE

15.1 PRESENCE

15.2 The 2024 General Assembly agreed to the formation of the Israel Sub-Committee under the auspices of the Assembly Trustees. As the remit relates to the work of the Church of Scotland in Israel and Palestine, the name of the Committee has been changed to reflect this.

15.3 The two fragile ceasefires which, at the date of preparing this report, are in place between Israel and Hamas (in Gaza) and Hezbollah (in Lebanon) have brought some measure of relief to those who have been under heavy bombardment since October 7, 2023. These ceasefires have also brought hope to those who are waiting for loved ones to be released from captivity, with many Israelis and Palestinians already having been released in stage 1 of the ceasefire.

15.4 The situation in Gaza however remains dire. Destruction and devastation is everywhere, and the numbers of dead and injured are incredibly high however they are measured.

15.5 The violence in the West Bank, mainly by Israeli settlers, continues unabated, with many of our partner organisations witnessing this at first hand. There appears to be a willingness to allow the annexation of the West Bank, leaving millions of Palestinians at huge risk of displacement. Our two Mission Partners (Ministers) in Israel report despair amongst many of our partners at the continued extremism and the increasing barriers put in their way as they try to advocate and push for a peaceful and just solution between all the peoples of the Holy Land.

15.6 The Committee has kept regular contact with the Palestinian Christian Communities mainly through our Mission Partners, and this has been shared in various ways through their blogs, partner letters, speaking engagements, social media, and rooftop videos, bringing the requests of the Palestinian Christian Communities to the attention of Church members. Our Mission Partners have met with, and worked alongside, partners and those from other faiths who are working for peace with justice. They have also been involved with Rabbis for Human Rights in planning and participating in the annual Interfaith March for Justice, Equality and Peace in Jerusalem.

15.7 Alongside Christian Aid and the Quakers, we have continued to hold monthly Prayers for Peace in the Middle East on the 24th of each month, hearing from Palestinian and Israeli partners. These gatherings have proved to be a small, but powerful show of solidarity for those living under extraordinarily difficult circumstances, as well as highlighting the valuable work of these partners to a wider audience. With tourism and pilgrimages to the Holy Land still almost non-existent, these small acts of shared commitment are vital in upholding those we have pledged to support.

15.8 In August 2024 the Church of Scotland's Israel Palestine Committee wrote to the Government to urge for a permanent ceasefire in Gaza. The request was set out in a letter to Foreign Secretary David Lammy MP, and also called on the Government to recognise the State of Palestine alongside the State of Israel without delay. The letter also urged the

Government to reinstate funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and noted its disappointment that the suspension of arms export licences had been delayed. The letter received a response from the Parliamentary Correspondence Team of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), outlining the UK's policy response to a range of linked issues.

15.9 Our relationship with the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) UK and Ireland continues to grow in strength, with funds found from restricted reserves to enable the annual Church of Scotland grant towards the Programme's work to be reinstated. The work of EAPPI is even more vital than normal at such a time as this, and we are delighted to be able to support, in a small way, the ongoing work.

15.10 The Scots House Hotel in Jerusalem has been able to support staff from the West Bank and East Jerusalem during the past year. Interfaith events have also been hosted at the House Hotel to help bring together people to pray and advocate for peace. The Scots Hotel (Tiberias) was able to welcome over 100 evacuees from the north of Israel, partially funded by the Government of Israel, who had been displaced due to the constant rocket attacks from Lebanon. Tabeetha School has also been severely affected by the war with many international children leaving the country, but continues to provide a Christian-centred education to 300 children from all faiths and backgrounds, and to foster peace between communities.

15.11 COMMERCIAL

15.12 As the Church looks at priorities for its future work, the establishments in Israel are also under review, with the Assembly Trustees requiring an informed debate regarding our continued commercial operations there. External Consultants have been engaged to produce financial forecasts, proposed solutions, and valuations of the two Hotels. Their report, once it has been received, will be considered by the Israel Palestine Committee and relevant stakeholders, with recommendations for the Assembly Trustees to consider.

16 REVIEW OF THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND'S INTERNATIONAL PRESENCE

16.1 As reported to General Assembly 2024, it was identified that benefit could be achieved by carrying out a more in-depth review of the work undertaken internationally by the Church of Scotland. An initial assessment of the Church's current work was commissioned, with the Very Rev. Prof Sir Iain Torrance kindly agreeing to lead the work under the Assembly Trustees remit. Prof. Sir Torrance quickly concluded that a different approach was required by the Trustees in respect of such a review as it was not possible to make global recommendations on the scope of our international activities. Work is now being taken forward by FAPLT in conjunction with the Principal Clerk's Office. Any outcomes impacting upon the Church of Scotland's international presence will be presented to future General Assemblies.

17 RESPONSE TO GENERAL ASSEMBLY DELIVERANCE ON EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

17.1 The General Assembly of 2024 invited the Assembly Trustees to consider proposals for a new Standing Committee of the General Assembly. This was to include oversight of and responsibility for the Church's work in relation to external affairs potentially encompassing public life and social justice, ecumenical relations, international work, partnerships and presence, and interfaith matters.

17.2 Following some preliminary exploratory work and then further conversations with a number of key people and groups, including the Principal Clerk's Office, Ecumenical Relations and the Commissioner who proposed the Notice of Motion, it is recommended that the formation of a new Standing Committee is not progressed at this time.

17.3 As outlined throughout this report, the next phase of priority setting within the Church – including the International Review – is resulting in significant changes over the coming months with the purpose of enabling the Church to reach a balanced budget. Staff and Committee members' time needs to be focused on managing through the existing changes rather than being diverted to the creation of something new, particularly at a time when it is unclear as to what work is continuing. The Assembly Trustees do intend to revisit the question of such a Committee at a later date.

18 HOUSING AND LOAN FUND

18.1 The Trustees are grateful for the £9m transfer from the Housing and Loan Fund reported to last year's Assembly. Whilst this amount was unrestricted it has subsequently been agreed that, from 1st January 2025 it will be used for purposes that support the future growth of the Church, namely the training and support of ministers (not otherwise covered by restricted funds) and for the Seeds for Growth programme. It is anticipated that the full £9 million will have been expended by the end of 2027.

19 DEFINED CONTRIBUTION PENSION PLAN

19.1 The General Assembly of 2024 instructed the Assembly Trustees to ‘devise a scheme to enable the defined contribution pension scheme for Ministers to be assessed at reasonable intervals against good practice modelling principles to assure scheme members of an appropriate retirement income and report to the General Assembly of 2025’. Good practice modeling principles can be best summarised as ensuring that there is an adequate pension provision for a member’s retirement.

19.2 As the Assembly will appreciate, one person’s definition of what is ‘adequate,’ in respect of a retirement pension differs to the next. Further, the profile of those entering ministry has changed with a greater number entering mid-career than historically and therefore the Church of Scotland pension scheme will only form part of their retirement income planning. Finally, with the introduction of Pension Freedoms in 2015, individuals access their Defined Contribution pension provision in different ways (cash, purchase of annuity or drawdown). Retirement Income through a pension has therefore become more dependent upon the individual’s approach and management of their funds.

19.3 In order to assist people in understanding what their retirement income could look like, the Pensions and Lifetime Savings Association (PLSA) has developed three lifestyle examples to help people visualize the cost of their retirement. The amounts reproduced below are based on individuals living outside of London, who are assumed to be mortgage or rent free, and reflect the annual income amounts that would be needed after paying any Income Tax and National Insurance deductions (as applicable). These have been deemed the most appropriate means of assessing the Church of Scotland retirement pension.

19.4 Levels of Pension Provision (extracted from PLSA website www.retirementlivingstandards.org.uk)

MINIMUM	MODERATE	COMFORTABLE
Covers all your needs with some left over for fun	More financial security and flexibility	More financial freedom and some luxuries
Single Person: £14,400 Couple: £22,400	Single person: £31,300 Couple: £43,100	Single Person: £43,100 Couple: £59,000

19.5 These figures are inclusive of the State Pension (c. £11,500 p.a.) which people are entitled to as long as they have 35 qualifying years National Insurance contributions for full entitlement or a minimum of 10 qualifying years to receive a reduced amount.

19.6 Estimates from the PLSA suggest that the following private pension pot is required by aged 67 (again outside London and presuming no rent/mortgage).

MINIMUM	MODERATE	COMFORTABLE
£64,165	£468,363	£750,584

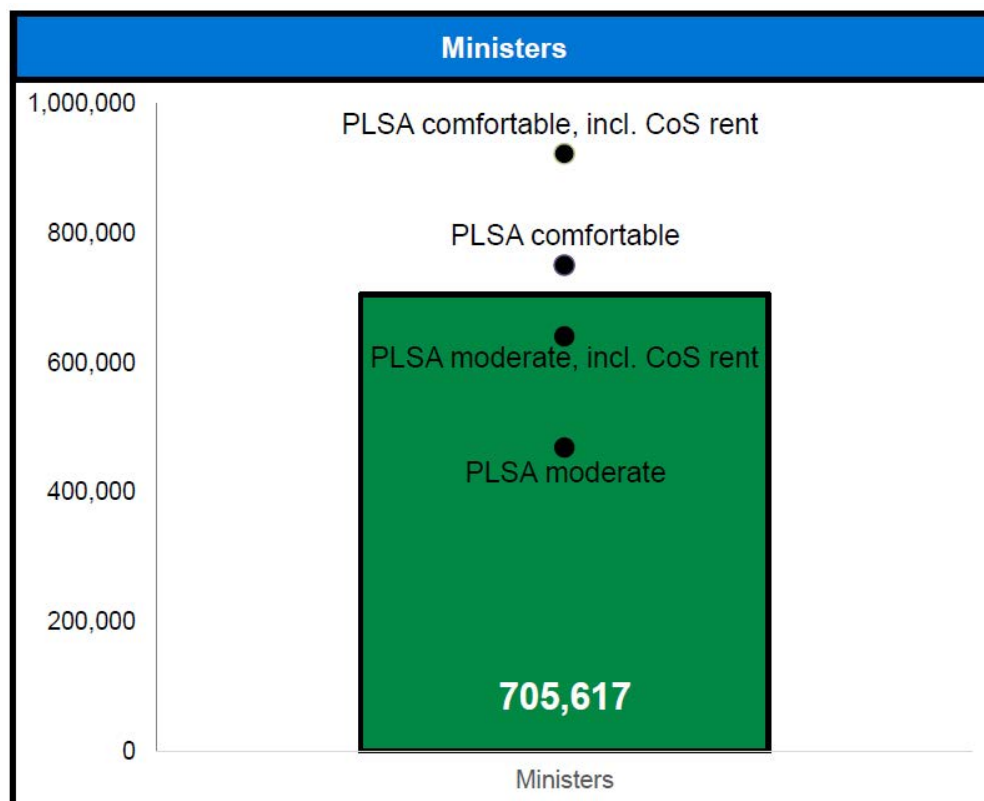
19.7 The current Church of Scotland Pension Provision

19.8 Currently the minimum legal requirements for UK pension contributions for eligible employees is 8% comprising of a 3% employer and 5% employee contribution. The current contribution rate for Ministers^[1] MDS and Central Services Committee (CSC) far exceeds this, and is as follows:

EMPLOYEE CONTRIBUTION	EMPLOYER CONTRIBUTION
0%	11.5%
2.5% and above	14%

19.9 Ministers, when they are first entered into the scheme by the Church, have 5% of their stipend deducted as an employee contribution (mirroring the arrangements which existed for the closed Defined Benefit Scheme) whilst MDS and CSC staff are placed in at 2.5%. All members are able to raise (or lower) their contribution rates. The maximum the Church will contribute is 14% employer contribution.

19.10 Legal and General undertook a review of the current membership data and savings of Ministers. The projection below assumes the starting pot of £0, at age 24, and median contribution profile of active scheme members, along with assumptions of 2.5% inflation, and 6.4% investment growth. Projection of pension savings is to age 67, current state pension age. The graphic presumes that the individual does not live in London. The £600 rental figure for Ministers and other qualifying individuals was provided by the Housing and Loan fund and based on the highest paid rents. Also included are the commercial values used as part of the PLSA assessment.



Reproduced with agreement of Legal and General

19.11 As demonstrated within the graphic, the current pension provision for Ministers suggests that (over a lifetime of service), Ministers could expect to almost be reaching 'comfortable' retirement provision if housing provision did not need to be made. The Trustees are however aware that for a percentage of Ministers, they are not homeowners. This is where the support of the Housing and Loan Fund can be accessed, offering housing provision on beneficial terms for either purchase or rent.

19.12 Long serving Ministers who were members of the Defined Benefit Scheme do also need to take account of the annuity which will be made available upon retirement.

19.13 It must be stressed again that pension planning is a very personal matter and the Trustees strongly recommend that all ministers (and non-minister) take independent financial advice tailored to their personal circumstances.

19.14 The Church of Scotland Defined Contribution Pension Arrangements

19.15 The Church, through Legal and General, has had Defined Contribution pension arrangements in place since 2013. In 2022 the Pension Plan was opened up to staff centrally employed within the new Presbytery structures. Two plans operate, one for the Social Care Council and the other for the wider Church of Scotland, segmented into different parts.

19.16 In contrast to the Defined Benefit Plan (managed by the Pension Trustees and reported upon separately), the Defined Contribution Plan is a Group Personal Pension (GPP) placing the onus on the individual to be responsible for the management and investment of their own money. In order to assist members who might not feel confident in choosing investment funds, Legal and General provide a default fund option through which 90% of Church of Scotland members are currently invested. Due to high reliance upon this fund, the Church instructs its own Pension Advisors, PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) to conduct a periodic review of the fund within the Legal and General Scheme. To date there have been three reviews of the fund, with the most recently completed in March 2025. This review resulted with no change being made to the current default fund provision.

19.17 Whilst not a statutory necessity, the Church has a GPP Pensions Governance Group which meets at least annually and is established in order to ensure pension arrangements are run efficiently and transparently in respect of administration, investment and communication.

19.18 The Church requested that Legal and General reviewed the Annual Management Charge for Members with an offer made to reduce the charge effective from 1st March 2025. This will directly impact every member in terms of their savings.

19.19 Seminars on the DC Pension Plan were organised for Ministers, MDS and CSC staff in the early part of 2025. Around 250 attended across the three sessions where they received updated information (including a number of useful links made available on both Ascend and Insite for Ministers and Staff).

20 EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

20.1 Established in 2021, the Church of Scotland's Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Group strives to ensure the Church is "a Church where all are welcome." Reporting to the Assembly Trustees, the EDI Group provides advice, policies, training, and initiatives tailored to the Church's unique worshipping communities. The Committee members appointed to the EDI Group can be found at Appendix 5.

20.2 The five-year EDI strategy, launched in 2021, emphasises disability inclusion and racial justice. The Disability Inclusion Working Group (DIWG) focuses on accessibility, inclusion, participation, and belonging for disabled people. In 2024, Katrona Templeton, leader of the Reachout Together project, became convener, bringing valuable experience to the role.

20.3 In 2023, a deliverance highlighted discriminatory practices against Black ministers, ministers of colour, and ethnic minority ministers officiating funerals. Despite outreach to public bodies and funeral directors, progress has been limited. The Racial Justice Group will instead focus on raising awareness within the Church and integrating this issue into anti-racism training as a case study.

20.4 Disability Inclusion Working Group Priorities for 2025

1. **Theological Statement on Disability Inclusion:** Collaborating with the Theological Forum, the DIWG will develop tools for congregations to engage with a foundational statement on inclusion.
2. **Neurodiversity Awareness:** Raising awareness about the inclusion and discipleship needs of neurodiverse adults through events featuring insights from the Centre for Autism and Theology.
3. **Accessibility at General Assembly:** Alongside the Assembly Trustees, identify potential barriers to accessibility for disabled commissioners and guests and engage collaboratively with the Assembly Business Committee to develop and improve accessibility.
4. **Deaf Awareness Training:** Equipping staff to better support Deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals, fostering an inclusive church community.

20.5 Theological Statement on Disability Inclusion

20.6 The DIWG calls on the General Assembly to adopt the statement and associated actions of: *A Theology of Disability: A Statement for Inclusion and Understanding within the Church of Scotland*. This statement, developed with the Theological Forum, reaffirms the Church's commitment to dismantling barriers and fostering belonging. Rooted in scripture, it challenges the Church to reimagine worship and community life through justice and inclusion, creating spaces where all are valued as indispensable members of the Body of Christ. The full statement can be found in the Appendix 6.

21 NET ZERO

21.1 Work has progressed through a joint endeavor with the General Trustees in respect of the Church of Scotland's ambition to move towards Net Zero. Following the disbandment of the Net Zero working group at last year's Assembly, a cross departmental working group was formed in order for this work to move forward. A specialist external consultant was subsequently appointed to undertake a review of the Church of Scotland's current position and to advise upon a framework in respect of governance, technical implementation, data & compliance and financial management across the Church. The report noted that it was highly ambitious of the Church to set a Net Zero date of 2030. With the current resource constraints, set against the Church of Scotland's estate, it is not possible for the Church to achieve this. A revised date will be brought to a future Assembly.

21.2 The external report identified that there is significant work for the Church still to undertake in implementing its Net Zero commitments. The report produced a series of recommendations which have now been considered by both the Assembly and General Trustees. Due to the current financial situation of the Church, and at the time of writing, with a number of staff considering a voluntary exit scheme, the Assembly Trustees did not consider it a viable option for any additional staffing resource to be bought in to support this area of work. This position will be reconsidered in the Autumn once the staffing provision in the national administration has been settled. In the meantime, the internal working group will continue to meet in order to move the Net Zero Agenda forward.

21.3 Work is actively being undertaken within the various entities across the Church of Scotland, although it is recognised that this is undertaken in silos and not widely publicised or acknowledged. CrossReach has a Net Zero Officer who is working on improving energy efficiency within the CrossReach Estate and the Housing and Loan Fund has appointed an officer to ensure their properties reach the required level of energy efficiency. Locally, congregations are engaging with Eco Congregations and national resources have been made available through the Net Zero Pathway on the Church website.

22 CHURCH OFFICES, 121 GEORGE STREET

22.1 In 2023, the General Assembly granted permission to radically change how we occupy the National Office building (121 George Street) and optimise income from what is a very valuable asset. In order to enable this, the Assembly agreed to not consider the future of George Street for a further five years (GA 2028). Two years later, the Church now has a thriving building housing a range of tenants and generating at least £400k per annum income with the potential of further lets. This project has enabled a significant improvement to the material condition of the asset and added value to the building's worth. Any investment required to generate this new income has been returned within a year. This approach does not commit us to stay at 121 long term as we have mutual break options on timescales which are commensurate with the General Assembly approved timescales for the next review of the status of 121.

23 SALVESEN TRUST

23.1 The Salvesen Trustees met twice in 2024 and the Salvesen Support Group, which considers applications in finer detail and makes recommendations to the Trustee body, met twice also.

23.2 Income for 2024 had been projected at £508,000 from £16 million in capital (split between the Growth and Income Funds of COSIT). In addition, there was accumulated revenue of around £158,000. The Trustees agreed to disburse up to £638,000.

23.3 Grants were agreed for 2024 in the following regions:

For 2024	£
Europe	159,000
Middle East	217,000
Africa	237,000
Asia	25,000
Total:	638,000

23.4 The principal areas of work supported in 2024 were:

Ministry and mission outreach	£330,000
Theological education	£90,000
Health, justice, development	£200,000

24 DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION ACROSS THE CHURCH

24.1 As reported to the Assembly last year, the Digital Transformation Project is now well underway. The National Office's current IT systems are inefficient and difficult to scale, leading to a poor experience for both staff and other users across the wider Church. To align with the Trustees' priority of modernising governance, digital transformation is essential. Upgrading to modern, agile systems will enhance efficiency, data accessibility and performance while enabling advanced technologies like cloud computing and real-time analytics. The current systems pose risks, including high maintenance costs, data integrity issues, compliance challenges and inefficiencies due to manual workflows. Without change, operational costs will rise, and the Church will struggle to meet regulatory requirements and future demands.

24.2 The Digital Transformation Programme will drive automation, efficiency, and collaboration, improving workflow management, data integrity, security, and communication. It will reduce administrative burdens, enhance reporting, and integrate with key applications, including accountancy, payroll and expenses for scalability. This will strengthen the role of Presbyteries and congregational office bearers with regard to data collation and management. It will support Presbyteries with new functionality, shared systems and data, including tools to assist with Presbytery Planning. The introduction of automated workflows to assist in digitising our processes will improve our speed, agility and visibility to share information across the whole Church. Increased collaboration will be gained from a single system, accessible by everyone, with increased security and permissions. External hosting will improve our resilience in the event of disasters and aid in our ability to more effectively from any location at any time. Our vision is to provide our members with access to self-serve their own data, upload requested data, securely connect and communicate with other members and access the Church's system anytime, anywhere – right in the palm of the hand.

25 THE ASSEMBLY TRUSTEES

25.1 Constitution and Remit

25.2 It is now six years since the Trustees' Constitution was approved by the General Assembly. Some of it was drafted prospectively, making provision for the creation of a new trustee body and the initial steps it was to take, and has been rendered obsolete by the passage of time. Other provisions were duplicated as a result of subsequent changes approved at the General Assemblies of 2022 and 2023. Some additional changes have been recommended by the Trustees' Governance Group to improve governance arrangements and make the Constitution more user-friendly by reducing its length, where possible. No changes have been made to the core provisions setting out the Trustees' remit and powers.

25.3 The proposed changes, which are incorporated within the amended Constitution set out in Appendix 7 are to:

- Update narrative and references which have been superseded by events
- Bring together the two Governance Group Schedules into one cohesive remit for the Governance Group
- Adjust the role of the Administrative Trustee so as to devolve more responsibility for matters of administration to the executive team
- Make provision for the removal from office of a Trustee who is absent without good reason from more than three consecutive board meetings, or who ceases to be a member of the Church of Scotland
- Provide that if a new Trustee is appointed during the year to replace someone whose term has not expired, the new Trustee will hold office for three years, renewable for a further term
- Provide that if any of the office-bearer roles cannot be filled from within the Trustees, they are able to make an appointment to fill that vacancy from outwith their number, subject to approval of that appointment by the General Assembly
- Permit the term of an office-bearer to be renewable until the end of their term as a Trustee
- Give power to make decisions by email in certain limited circumstances
- Adjust the eligibility provision for membership of the Trustees to allow Presbytery or congregational employees to become Trustees
- Reduce the quorum (a) for general business, from eight to seven and (2) as regards stipend determinations, from six to four
- Adjust the Governance Group remit by removing the detailed process for dealing with complaints and making this a process to be approved by the Trustees from time to time

25.4 Related to these proposed changes to the Constitution, the Trustees will continue to ensure that all of their members discharge their duties as Trustees faithfully but do not propose to continue to publish a table detailing attendance at board meetings, as this does not serve any useful purpose in practical terms.

25.5 Trustee Changes

25.6 A number of Assembly Trustees are stepping down from post and a heartfelt thanks is offered to each of them, Ian Forrester, Miranda Heggie; Jennifer MacDonald and Barry Hughes for their dedicated service to the Church in this role. Following a recruitment process, the Assembly are asked to approve the appointment of Sarah Ross, minister at East Kilbride Moncreiff; Keith Blackwood, minister at Aberdeen Mannofield; Adam Dillon, minister at Glasgow Sherbrooke Mossbank; and Deon Oelofse, minister at Elgin.

25.7 Gender balance

25.8 The Trustees are acutely aware that the composition of the Trustee Board does not have an adequate gender balance. The first round of Trustee recruitment occurred in September 2024 at which point no female candidates applied. The Trustees therefore made the decision to advertise the position again in November 2024 making an explicit commitment to diversity whilst also seeking targeted approaches. This resulted in the recommendation for the appointment of four new Trustees presented as recommendations to the Assembly.

25.9 Over the course of the next year the Trustees are committed to reviewing their schedule and timings of meetings to seek to make the fulfilment of the role of Assembly Trustee more accessible to a wider variety of demographic.

26 CROSSREACH REMIT

26.1 In order to integrate The Social Care Council's strategy into its existing arrangements, the CrossReach Board are now seeking to simplify the current remit by making the Purpose (contained within the strategy document) central to the remit and to delete elements already covered by the existing constitution, in order to avoid duplication. The Board also seek to update the constitution (Appendix 8) to reflect the changes agreed at General Assembly 2020.

26.2 The current remit reads:

As part of the Church's mission, to offer professional social care services in Christ's name to people in need:

- To provide specialist resources to further the caring work of the Church;
- To identify existing and emerging areas of need, to guide the Church in pioneering new approaches to relevant problems and to make responses on issues arising within the area of the Council's concern through appropriate channels within the Church structures and externally;
- To conduct an annual review of progress made in discharging the remit and provide an annual written report to the General Assembly;
- To oversee an appropriate corporate management and support service to deliver the above and be responsible for funding all salaries and related costs;
- To set and review terms and conditions of staff and establish appropriate internal governance systems in line with regulatory requirements.

26.3 The General Assembly is asked to agree the following updated remit:

- To demonstrate Christ's love in action by offering high quality care and support which will empower people across Scotland to live full and fulfilling lives;
- To provide specialist resources and services to further the mission of the Church expressing its care for communities across Scotland;
- To identify existing and emerging areas of need and to guide CrossReach services in pioneering new approaches to relevant problems through collaborative partnerships both from within the Church and externally;
- To enable the people we support and our employees to raise issues of concern to them and to amplify their voices through appropriate channels within the Church structures and externally.

27 CONGREGATIONAL STATISTICS

27.1 The Congregational Statistical return can be found in Appendix 9. Summary information is as follows:

- As at December 2024, there were 245,000 members of the Church of Scotland, a fall of 5.5% from 2023.
- In the last ten years (2014-2024) the number of members has fallen by 35%.
- Information collected indicates that in 2024, 59% of congregations offered online worship services; with 24% of congregations offering alternative offline worship services. 23,145 people are estimated to have participated in worship offered online, and 2,475 made use of alternative offline provisions.
- 21% of congregations reported having a New Worshipping Community in 2024.
- 207 congregations formed 72 unions during 2024. In earlier years, only around a dozen unions took place annually.

In the name of the Assembly Trustees

DAVID CAMERON, Convener
GEOFF MILLER, Vice-Convener
BARRY HUGHES, Administrative Trustee

Addendum**Dave Kendall, Chief Officer**

The Trustees wish to place on record their thanks to Dave Kendall who will retire at the end of May, having taken up the post of Chief Officer in November 2019 at a time of unprecedented change and challenge for the Church. Within six months of his appointment, the pandemic hit and he showed exemplary leadership of the staff team as they transitioned overnight from office-based delivery of services to home working during periods of lockdown, with all the complications, frustrations and difficulties which that involved. Since then, he has managed the wide remit of the Trustees, overseen the restructuring of the Standing Committees of the General Assembly, worked closely with Presbyteries as they settled in to their new structures and has selflessly made himself available as a support and encourager to colleagues in the parish and in the National Office. He introduced a set of governing principles, setting out the values of the Trustees and their staff, and has at all times modelled these values of grace, integrity, respect, professionalism, collaboration and innovation. He has effected changes to the use of the office space at 121 George Street which have enabled significant income generation, removal of silos and greater collaboration whilst improving the fabric of the building.

Dave has been unstinting in putting his many gifts to use for the Church not only nationally, but locally, as an office-bearer in his own congregation. His strong personal faith and experience of, and commitment to, participation in his local church has underpinned his service at a national level and given him particular understanding of the challenges facing congregations and Presbyteries across the country in the implementation of mission planning. We will miss his positivity, his patience, his kindness and his enthusiastic approach to the Trustees' difficult task of seeking to balance income and expenditure whilst adequately resourcing ministry and mission. We wish Dave well as he begins a richly-deserved retirement and pray God's blessing for him and his family now and in the future.

Appendix 1

III REGULATIONS AMENDING THE CONGREGATIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS 'GIVING TO GROW' REGULATIONS (REGULATIONS I 2022) (AS AMENDED)

Edinburgh, [] May 2025, Session []

The General Assembly hereby enact and ordain that the Congregational Contributions 'Giving To Grow' Regulations (Regulations I 2022), as amended, shall be further amended as follows:

1. Delete paragraph 2 and substitute:
"Each Congregation shall pay its required Contribution in ten or twelve equal monthly instalments during the financial year by bank standing order, unless permission is granted by Presbytery, in accordance with Guidance issued by the Stewardship & Finance Department, to allow payments to be made under some other arrangement. Any such permission granted by Presbytery shall be notified to the Stewardship & Finance Department."
2. In paragraph 5, delete the second sentence and substitute:
"They will also inform them of shortfalls, where applicable, in respect of reimbursement by Congregations of locums' costs and ministers' car allowances, both for the latest financial year and any accumulated totals for previous years."
3. Delete paragraph 26 and substitute:
"26. Where a Charge has a ministerial vacancy and has been granted Permission to Call in terms of the/Call, Election and Appointment of Ministers of Word and Sacrament Act (Act [] 2025), an allowance within limits determined by the Assembly Trustees shall be given towards extra costs incurred for locum provision during the vacancy."
4. Delete paragraph 27 and substitute:
"27. Where a Charge is in Guardianship in terms of the Presbytery Mission Plan Act (Act VIII 2021), (ie in the relevant Presbytery's Approved Mission Plan, has a 0.25 allocation of the Presbytery's overall ministry allocation), an allowance, within limits determined by the Assembly Trustees, shall be given towards extra costs incurred for locum provision during the Guardianship."

Appendix 2

REMIT – PRESBYTERY AND PARTNERSHIP SUPPORT

Remit

1. To sustain and develop the Church of Scotland's national and international partnerships.
2. To resource and equip those in recognised national ministries through the provision of appropriate support.
3. To support the deployment of all ministries – Full Time Ministers of Word and Sacrament, including Interim and Transition Ministers; Ordained Local Ministers; the Diaconate; Readers; Ministries Development Staff (MDS); and Ministry to the Deaf congregations, in delivering the mission of God.
4. To work with Presbyteries and the Office of the General Assembly in developing and disseminating best practice in the areas for which Presbytery and Partnership Support is responsible.
5. To ensure that all Mission Plans are being visibly implemented, including advising on bases of adjustment and reviewable charge, with regards to their consistency against the Presbytery Mission Plan.
6. To support Presbyteries in evaluating their Mission Plans.
7. To support the development of 100 new worshipping communities to equip those taking part to live out the mission of God by 2028.

8. To provide oversight and governance of Safeguarding arrangements for the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team (FAPLT) and those in recognised ministries.
9. To liaise with the General Trustees (who are the lead body) in the classification and use of buildings and on other matters including the Manse Adjudication process
10. To take such actions as required for it to carry out its duties and functions, including but not limited to offering advice, consulting with, and issuing guidance to the national Church, Presbyteries and Congregations.
11. To provide oversight and governance of the FAPLT partnership with Place for Hope
12. FAPLT may call in any decision or matter for its own consideration. The Group may remit any decision or matter to FAPLT for its consideration.
13. Except in so far as retained by the FAPLT, to exercise the duties of the Team in respect of Presbytery Planning and Presbytery Mission Planning including but not restricted to those set out in:
 - Vacancy Procedure Act (Act VIII 2003)
 - Presbytery Mission Plan Act (Act VIII 2021)
 - Section 31 of the Faith Nurture Forum's Deliverance to General Assembly 2021
 - Call, Election & Appointment of Ministers of Word & Sacrament Act (if agreed by 2025 General Assembly)

Appendix 3

[] **ACT AMENDING THE PRESBYTERY MISSION PLAN ACT (ACT VIII 2021) (AS AMENDED)**
 Edinburgh, [] May 2025, Session []

The General Assembly hereby enact and ordain that the Presbytery Mission Plan Act (Act VIII 2021), as amended, shall be further amended as follows:

1. Add new definitions in section 1.1:
 - "Contribution(s)" shall have the meaning given to it in the Congregational Contributions "Giving to Grow" Regulations (Regs I 2022);
 - "Insolvent Charge" shall mean a charge in respect of which a notice has been issued by the General Treasurer under section 10.5;
 - "Procedural Review" shall mean a procedural review carried out by a Reviewer under section 12;
 - "Reviewer" shall mean a Chartered Accountant or other person with suitable financial expertise appointed by the Principal Clerk from a list of such persons maintained by the Legal Questions Committee;
 - "Shortfall" shall have the meaning given to it in the Congregational Contributions "Giving to Grow" Regulations (Regs I 2022).
2. Insert a new section 5.3 and renumber:
 - "All charges becoming vacant and/or where Adjustment is effected from and after 1 June 2025 shall be designated as Reviewable Charges, such that the next minister shall be inducted on condition that the Presbytery may terminate the tenure of the minister at any time in accordance with section 9.1.1 of this Act".
3. Insert the following words at the start of the existing section 8.1:
 - "Other than where the charge has been designated an Insolvent Charge in terms of section 10.5 of this Act"
4. Insert the following words at the start of the existing section 10.1 (b):
 - "Other than where the charge has been designated an Insolvent Charge in terms of section 10.5 of this Act"
5. Insert the following words at the start of the existing section 10.2 (a):
 - "Other than where the charge has been designated an Insolvent Charge in terms of section 10.5 of this Act"
6. Insert the following words at the end of the existing section 10.3:
 - "(save where the charge has been designated an Insolvent Charge in terms of section 10.5 of this Act)"
7. Insert new sections 10, 11 and 12 and renumber:

FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY REVIEW

- 10.1 If a charge does not maintain payment of its Contributions in terms of the Congregational Contributions 'Giving to Grow' Regulations (Regs I 2022) or if a charge has as of 1 January 2026 accrued any Shortfall, or if circumstances come to the attention of the General Treasurer indicating that a charge is not able to pay its debts as they fall due, the

General Treasurer shall contact the Minister, Session Clerk and Treasurer of the charge and shall remind them of the obligation to maintain timeous payment. The General Treasurer shall also contact the Presbytery Clerk and Presbytery Treasurer and they shall all seek to work with the charge to reach a position of financial sustainability, including putting in place a realistic scheme for the payment of Shortfalls, arising debts and continuing Contributions.

- 10.2 If payment of any Shortfall is not made in full within a period of one month after such contact has been made, the General Treasurer shall send formal intimation to the Session Clerk, the Treasurer and the Minister of the charge warning them of the risk of insolvency if the charge is not able to pay its debts and of the possible consequences in terms of church and civil law. Thereafter the General Treasurer shall endeavour to agree a realistic scheme with the charge for the payment of the Shortfall, arising debts and continuing Contributions. A copy of this intimation shall be sent by the General Treasurer to the Presbytery Clerk and Presbytery Treasurer, who shall work with the General Treasurer and the charge with a view to putting such a scheme in place.
- 10.3 Subject always to section 11.1 of this Act, if it is not possible to agree a realistic scheme for payment of the Shortfall or if payment in terms of any agreed scheme is not made within a further period of one month, the General Treasurer shall issue formal notification to the Session Clerk, Treasurer and Minister of the charge (copied to the Presbytery Clerk and Presbytery Treasurer) that if payment of the Shortfall is not made within a further period of 28 days or if a realistic scheme for such payment is not put in place within the same period, the charge shall be deemed to be an Insolvent Charge.
- 10.4 Any heritable property owned by the charge shall not be taken into account in determining whether it is an Insolvent Charge, other than in exceptional circumstances as agreed by the Presbytery and the General Treasurer.
- 10.5 The General Treasurer shall notify the Presbytery Clerk and the Presbytery Treasurer immediately on a charge being designated an Insolvent Charge.
- 10.6 In respect of any Insolvent Charge:
 - 10.6.1 the tenure of the minister shall following receipt of the notification referred to in section 10.5 be terminated by the Presbytery. This will be effected by intimation issued by the Presbytery Clerk to the minister within seven days of receiving such notification, giving to the minister six months' notice in writing. On the date of termination, the minister shall be deemed to have demitted his or her charge; and
 - 10.6.2 the Presbytery shall proceed to carry out Adjustment of the charge in accordance with the remaining provisions of this Act; and these provisions shall apply whether or not the minister is on unrestricted tenure or inducted to a Reviewable Charge.
- 10.7 After a charge has been designated as an Insolvent Charge it shall not be permitted to call a minister and any process which may be underway to call a minister shall be terminated with immediate effect.
- 10.8 If, after a charge has been designated as an Insolvent Charge but before subsequent Adjustment has been effected, payment of all outstanding sums due by that charge is made and a realistic scheme for the payment of continuing Contributions is put in place, the designation of that charge as an Insolvent Charge and the notice given to the Minister in terms of section 10.6.1 shall be withdrawn. No further process in terms of this section shall happen unless the circumstances of the charge at a later date become as set out in section 10.1.

PRESBYTERY INTIMATION OF JUSTIFIED SHORTFALLS

- 11.1 At any time prior to the issuing by the General Treasurer of the notification referred to in section 10.5 hereof, and provided that the charge is able to meet its debts (other than its Contributions) as they fall due and is otherwise complying with all of its legal obligations), the Presbytery Clerk may intimate to the General Treasurer that the Presbytery considers the Shortfall in the charge's Contributions to be justified and that accordingly the charge should not be designated an Insolvent Charge. For the avoidance of doubt, it shall not be competent for a Presbytery to make such intimation in circumstances where the charge cannot meet its remaining debts (other than its Contributions) as they fall due. In making a decision that the Shortfall is justified, the Presbytery shall be guided by the Core Principles set out in the Code of Practice for Mission Planning found on the Church website and replicated in Schedule 2 to this Act, with particular focus on the principle of financial responsibility.

PROCEDURAL REVIEW OF DESIGNATION AS AN INSOLVENT CHARGE

- 12.1 For the avoidance of doubt, the designation of a charge as an Insolvent Charge in terms of section 10.5 shall not be subject to appeal or dissent and complaint or any other form of review, other than a Procedural Review carried out by a Reviewer.

12.2 With respect to a Procedural Review the following shall apply:

- 12.2.1 a Procedural Review must be requested by twelve or more members of Presbytery or by the Kirk Session within fourteen (14) days of the date on which the General Treasurer provided notification in terms of section 10.5 hereof.
- 12.2.2 A Procedural review can be sought only on one or both of the following grounds: (a) that there was an irregularity in the process followed by the General Treasurer which materially influenced his or her decision; and/or (b) that his or her decision was materially influenced by an incorrect material fact.
- 12.2.3 Such request shall be made by sending or delivering a written request to the Principal Clerk. Such request shall also intimate, in brief, specific, numbered propositions, the grounds as set out in section 12.2.2 of this Act which are relied on by the Presbytery or by the Kirk Session.
- 12.2.4 In the event that the Reviewer determines that one or both of the foregoing grounds have been established, he or she shall order the matter to be referred back to the General Treasurer with instructions that any procedure in terms of section 10 hereof shall be undertaken afresh in accordance with the findings of the Reviewer.
- 12.2.5 In the event that the Reviewer determines that neither of the foregoing grounds has been established, the decision of the General Treasurer shall be deemed to have become final.
- 12.2.6 The decision of the Reviewer as regards the Procedural Review shall be final and not subject to further appeal, dissent and complaint or any other form of further review.

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Appendix 4

[] STIPEND REGULATIONS (REGS [] 2025)

Edinburgh, [] May 2025, Session []

Determination of Stipend Scales

1. The Stipend Scales will be determined in respect of each calendar year by the Assembly Trustees and reported to the following General Assembly by the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team.

Qualifying Stipend Service

2. In respect of each Minister receiving stipend, the appropriate point on the National Stipend Scale will be calculated according to the length of qualifying service as defined below; the exact length of all such periods of service to be added together to determine the number of qualifying years.
3. Qualifying service is defined as all ordained service listed in sections 13.1.2, 13.1.3 and 13.1.4 [Note: and 13.1.5 after GA 2025] of the Church Courts Act (Act VI 2023) or service in another church from which he or she has been admitted, provided the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team determines such service to be the equivalent of that herein listed.
4. Qualifying service is calculated on the basis of full-time and part-time service, with the payment of part-time service calculated on a *pro rata* basis.

Appendix 5**SEEDS FOR GROWTH COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP**From 1st June 2025

	Term ends	Name
Convener	2028	Jamie Milliken
Vice-Convener	2026	Heather Thorp
(Assembly Trustee)	While trustee	TBC
(Assembly Trustee)	While trustee	Norman Smith
Committee Member	2026	Lynsey Brennan
Committee Member	2028	Fiona Morrison
Committee Member	2026	Steven Owens
Committee Member	2026	vacancy
Committee Member	2025	vacancy
Committee Member	2027	Joanne Hood
Committee Member	2027	Andrew Robertson
Co-opt		Anthea Bircham
Co-opt		Michael Harvey
Co-opt		John Drane
Co-opt		Olive Drane
Co-opt		Murdo McMillan

Governance

The operation of the Seeds for Growth Fund shall be overseen by a Committee of eleven persons, two of whom will be Assembly Trustees. The other members shall be appointed by the Assembly Trustees working in collaboration with the Nomination Committee. Members so appointed shall serve a three-year term, renewable unless otherwise determined by the Assembly Trustees. Trustee members shall serve during their appointed term as an Assembly Trustee.

EQUALITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION (EDI) GROUP MEMBERSHIP

	Term ends	Name
Convener	2026	Mandy Ralph
Vice-Convener	2028	Jennifer MacDonald
(Assembly Trustee)	While trustee	TBC
Group Member	2028	James Aitken
Group Member	2028	Shuna Dicks
Group Member	2026	Kay Keith
Group Member	2028	Deanna McCartney
Group Member	2027	Malcolm McIntyre
Group Member	2026	Elijah Obinna
Group Member	2027	Graeme Shaw
Group Member	2027	Gordon Strang
Group Member	2026	Katrona Templeton

Members of the Group shall be appointed in accordance with a system approved by the Assembly Trustees and the Nomination Committee. The Group will comprise the following: Convener; Vice-Convener; one or two Assembly Trustees and nine further members. Plus, a number of co-opted, ex officio and staff members.

Governance

The remit of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Group is to offer assistance and advice to the Assembly Trustees in the development of strategies, programmes and projects on matters of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion; promote and develop work to improve awareness and understanding around issues of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in the Church of Scotland; report to the Assembly Trustees on progress made in discharging the remit.

Appendix 6**THEOLOGICAL STATEMENT ON DISABILITY INCLUSION****Introduction**

The Church of Scotland, rooted in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, is called to be a community that exemplifies God's unconditional love and grace. This calling compels us to reflect upon the diversity of God's creation and recognise the presence, contributions, and dignity of all of the people of God. A theology of disability moves us beyond mere awareness or accommodation and into a deeper understanding of the divine image in all people. This in turn moves us to reflect on what it might mean to become a community of belonging within which everybody has a valued place.

Embracing a theology of disability means listening to and learning from the lived experiences of people with disabilities. The church's commitment to this theology is a testament to its belief in a God who transcends limited human categories and whose Kingdom is marked by radical inclusion and justice.

The Church of Scotland is called to lead by example, demonstrating what it means to be a community where each person is valued as part of the rich tapestry of creation that God has woven together. Our work is informed by a vision of the body of Christ that is incomplete without the full participation of people with disabilities – a vision that aligns with the deepest truths of our faith. As we expand our understanding and implementation of a theology of disability, we are not only engaging in an act of faithfulness to our doctrine and tradition, but we are also bearing witness to the transformative power of the Gospel recognising the inherent worth of the individual. The Church of Scotland is committed to this journey, and this statement seeks to articulate the principles that guide us and the actions that will define us as we strive to embody the inclusive love of Jesus for all people.

Biblical Foundations

The Biblical Foundations for a theology of disability in the Church of Scotland draw from a rich tapestry of scripture that collectively points to God's inclusive love, the inherent value of all individuals, and the call for communities to embody this inclusiveness in their shared life. Key themes include:

Creation and Imago Dei

Genesis 1:26-31: In the creation narratives, God creates humanity in God's own image:

"So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." and "God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good." This foundational concept of Imago Dei establishes that every person reflects aspects of God's character and is imbued with inherent dignity and worth, including those with disabilities.

Psalms and the Affirmation of Individual Worth

Psalms 139:13-16: The Psalmist celebrates the intimate involvement of God in the formation of each person: "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb." This passage speaks to the unique value and purpose of every individual crafted by God's hands, acknowledging diversity as part of God's creative intent.

Jesus' friendship with marginalised people

Luke 14:13-14: Jesus explicitly instructs us to invite the marginalised, which includes those who live with disabilities to the banquet. Jesus' ministry consistently reached out to those society had pushed to the edges, demonstrating God's kingdom as one where all are welcome and honoured. The means by which we are called to be with one another is through Christ-like friendships. Such friendships reach beyond cultural norms and offer vital ways of valuing and loving as we accompany one another on the journey of discipleship (John 15: 15)

Dismantling barrier to access

Mark 2:1-12: To allow their paralysed friend to speak to Jesus, a group of friends tore a hole in a roof and lowered him through. Jesus welcomes and includes both the disabled man and his friends, regardless their unorthodox means of entry. This speaks to breaking barriers, and dismantling obstacles that separate people with disabilities from Christ, community, and Church. This passage challenges us to follow the practical example shown, and break through the literal and metaphorical roofs of our Churches allowing all people to gather at Jesus' feet.

Paul's Vision of the Body of Christ

1 Corinthians 12:12-26: The Apostle Paul describes the church as a body with many parts. He emphasises that all members of the body are necessary. This metaphor powerfully argues for the inclusion and honour of all individuals within the Church, as each contributes to the whole.

The Inclusive Nature of the New Testament Church

Acts 2:17-18: In the early church, the Holy Spirit is poured out on all people, regardless of

status or ability, fulfilling the prophecy of Joel. The gifts of the Spirit are diverse and given to each member of the community for the common good, indicating that all have a role and function within the body of Christ.

The Eschatological Hope

Revelation 21:3-4: The ultimate hope of Christian faith is a renewed creation where God dwells with humanity, and “He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain.” This eschatological vision promises the end of all exclusion and suffering, pointing toward a future where all are included in God’s redemptive plan, a future that begins now.

In these Biblical reflections we see a consistent thread woven throughout scripture: God’s kingdom is one of radical inclusion, where every person’s worth is recognised, and barriers to full participation are removed. The Church of Scotland is called to reflect this kingdom, embodying a practical theology of disability that welcomes, values, and empowers all people as integral members of the faith community.

Theological Reflections

Disability is not merely a medical or psychological condition; it is an experience shaped by social, cultural, spiritual and environmental factors. It is the Church’s responsibility to identify and dismantle barriers that prevent full participation in spiritual and community life. Thinking theologically about the issues is crucial for the church’s ministry. As we have seen, in the Christian tradition, all individuals are seen as created in the image of God. This is foundational for understanding the inherent dignity and worth of every person (Genesis 1:27). The Church recognises that disability is part of the human experience and that every member of the Body of Christ has a unique role to play (1 Corinthians 12:12-27). Some key theological areas to consider include the following:

Creation and the Imago Dei

According to Scripture, all humans are made in the image and likeness of God (Imago Dei), a belief that gives profound value to every life (Genesis 1:27). This theological assertion grounds a Christian understanding of personhood and establishes the intrinsic worth of each individual.

Sin, Suffering, and Disability

Jesus Himself directly refuted the idea that disability was caused by individual sin (John 9:1-3). However, we recognise that people with disabilities have been made to believe the opposite. Disability is not the product of sin. All of us are affected by sin (Romans 3:23).

The Inclusive Kingdom of God

Jesus’ message and ministry were inclusive, emphasising the value of all people and specifically inviting those who were marginalised, including people with disabilities, to be full participants in the Kingdom of God (Luke 14:21).

Accessibility, Inclusion and Belonging

In the light of these biblical and theological reflections it is clear that the Church must commit to removing physical, communicational, spiritual and attitudinal barriers that prevent people with disabilities from being full participation in church life. An inclusive Church is one where people with disabilities participate fully in worship, sacraments, fellowship, and leadership (1 Corinthians 12:22-25). To make this a reality we will need to make permanent changes to our buildings, our processes and our attitudes. Building genuine community involves recognising and nurturing the gifts that each person brings to the Body of Christ (Romans 12:4-8).

Practical Implications

This inclusive theology calls the Church to action:

Examine and Adapt Structures: Ensure that church buildings and practices are fully accessible. Resources for understanding and improving church accessibility can be found here: <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/resources/learn/publications/learning-disabilities/helpful-organisations>

Educational Initiatives: Encourage congregational learning about disability through workshops and resources provided by groups like the Christian charity Prospects Across Scotland: <https://www.prospectsacrossscotland.org.uk> which works towards the inclusion of people with learning disabilities.

Advocacy for Social Justice: Support and partner with advocacy groups that promote justice and equity for people with disabilities. For example, Inclusion Scotland: <https://inclusionScotland.org> provides a platform for policy-making and rights advocacy.

Empowerment for Leadership: Actively support individuals with disabilities in assuming leadership roles within the Church. This can be facilitated by leadership training programs sensitive to the needs of people with disabilities.

Practice Radical Hospitality: Beyond welcoming people with disabilities, ensure that they are fully integrated into the life of the Church. This can involve liturgical accommodations, inclusive ministry programs, and attentive pastoral care.

Conclusion

The journey towards a fully inclusive Church of Scotland, one that embodies the radical hospitality exemplified by Jesus Christ, is both a challenge and a calling. To embrace the theology of disability outlined here is to commit to a transformative process—a re-examination of our communities, liturgies, buildings, and practices through the lens of inclusivity and justice. The Scriptures affirm that each person is fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14), and the diversity of God's creation is meant to be celebrated, not merely tolerated. The Church, as the Body of Christ, must therefore recognise the image of God in all people, and this recognition must be reflected in its actions, its worship, and its mission. The theology of disability reminds us that the Gospel is good news for all. It calls the Church to be a place where the barriers that separate and categorise people are dismantled. It is not enough for the Church to be merely accessible; it must be welcoming, offering meaningful participation and leadership opportunities to all members, recognising that the Holy Spirit imparts gifts to each one for the common good (1 Corinthians 12:7). In the pursuit of this vision, the Church must actively listen to the voices of people with disabilities, inviting and valuing their contributions and leadership. It must advocate for societal changes that reflect God's justice, where people with disabilities are afforded the same dignity, rights, and opportunities as others. Moreover, the Church is called to be a prophetic voice, challenging cultural assumptions and stereotypes about disability, and proclaiming a message of hope and inclusion. It must also be a place of refuge and strength, offering pastoral care that empowers individuals, supports families, and nurtures a sense of belonging.

Finally, the Church's commitment to the theology of disability is an ongoing journey of growth and understanding. It requires humility, a willingness to learn, and a readiness to be changed by the encounters with all members of the family of God. As we move forward, may our actions and words reflect the inclusive love of Christ, in whom we are all made whole. In this spirit, the Church of Scotland acknowledges its role in leading by example, fostering communities where everyone is recognised as integral to the life of the Church, and where the diversity of God's creation is not only accepted but celebrated as a reflection of the Kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven.

Appendix 7

Appendices 1 and 2 of the Report of the Special Commission on Structural Reform as amended and agreed by the General Assembly on 20 May 2019, further amended (clauses 66, 67, 68 and Schedule D) by the General Assembly on 21 May 2022, further amended (clauses 10 and 33, Schedule B and Schedule D with deletion of clauses 34, 35, 36 without renumbering and addition of Schedule B.B) by the General Assembly on 22 May 2023 and again amended (clause 10, addition of new clauses 12A and 16A and addition of Schedule G) by the General Assembly on 20 May 2024.

CONSTITUTION AND REMIT OF THE CHARITY TRUSTEES OF THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND, (the Unincorporated Entities), SCOTTISH CHARITY NO SC011353

Introduction

1. The Charity Trustees of the Church of Scotland (the Unincorporated Entities) Scottish Charity No. SC011353 (the "Charity") are known as the "Assembly Trustees" (hereafter, the "Trustees").
2. The general work of the Church of Scotland (the "Church") beyond the local spheres of Congregations and Presbyteries is directed and controlled by the General Assembly of the Church (the "General Assembly") through Standing Committees appointed for the purpose.
3. The assets of the Charity are those held for the Standing Committees of the General Assembly (the "Unincorporated Entities") and include the assets of the Church of Scotland Housing and Loan Fund. Other Church assets are held by the General Trustees, Scottish Charity SC014574, the Church of Scotland Investors Trust, Scottish Charity SC022884 and the Church of Scotland Trust, Scottish Charity SC020269 (together, the "Statutory Corporations").
4. This Constitution makes provision as to the constitution, powers and duties of the Trustees, confirms their charitable purposes, makes specific provision as to the nature of the matters to be carried out by the Trustees and confirms the extent to which day to day management of the work of the Standing Committees is to be carried out under the aegis of the Trustees and as part of the remit to them.

Trustees

5. The Trustees shall be members of the Church. In selection processes, due consideration shall be given to ensuring that the diversity of Church membership is reflected in their

selection, this to include consideration of an appropriate gender balance and level of youth representation.

6. Trustees shall hold office for a term of three years, renewable for one further term of three years only, whether consecutive or not. The Trustees first appointed shall be eligible to serve a second term of three years, non-renewable, after an interval of three years.
7. The appointment of a new Trustee upon the occurrence of a vacancy by reason of death, resignation or otherwise, and any re-appointment, shall be determined by the Trustees, subject to approval by the General Assembly, through the adoption of the policy set out in Schedule A below. In the event that a new Trustee is appointed to replace a Trustee whose term of office has not expired, such new Trustee shall hold office for a term of three years, renewable for one further term of three years only, whether consecutive or not. There shall be twelve appointed Trustees except in time of vacancy or as provided for in terms of clause 2 of Schedule B. In addition to appointed Trustees, the Business Committee of the General Assembly and the Church of Scotland General Trustees shall each appoint one of their members as a representative who shall be entitled to attend all meetings as a corresponding member but without a right to vote or make a motion, such member being eligible to serve for a maximum period of four years.
8. Up to one half of the Trustees may be ministers and deacons of the Church. No employee of the Church (other than Presbytery or congregational employees) and no member of any Agency will be eligible for appointment as a trustee.
9. There shall be a Convener, two Vice-Conveners (one of whom shall be a minister of the Church) and an Administrative Trustee, chosen as provided for in Schedule B below.
10. A Trustee will automatically cease to hold office if:-
 - a. He or she becomes incapable for medical reasons of carrying out his or her duties as a charity trustee – but only if that has continued (or is expected to continue) for a period of more than six months; or
 - b. He or she gives to the Convener a signed notice of resignation;
 - c. He or she is absent (without good reason, in the opinion of the Trustees) from more than three consecutive board meetings (but only if the board resolves to remove them from office);
 - d. He or she ceases to be a member of the Church of Scotland; or
 - e. He or she is removed from office following the procedure set out in paragraph 12 below.
11. The Trustees shall report to the General Assembly each year on the outcome of the board appraisal carried out in the previous year and agreed action plans to address any issues identified.
12. If it appears to the Convener, a Vice-Convener or the Administrative Trustee that a trustee may be in material breach of her or his duties as a Trustee or if a complaint is made by another Trustee or by an interested party alleging such a breach, the Administrative Trustee (or, if necessary, another Office Bearer) shall report the matter to the Trustees' Governance Group at the first reasonable opportunity, with a request that the Governance Group take such steps as are appropriate within the provisions of Schedule D below.
13. In all aspects of their work as Trustees, each of the Trustees shall be indemnified by the Church in respect of any liability incurred as one of the Trustees arising from acts or omissions save where a Trustee has acted in a breach of trust amounting to wilful default or recklessness.
14. The Trustees have and may exercise all the functions and powers held formerly by the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team (formerly the Faith Impact Forum and previously the World Mission Council and its Middle East Committee) under the Constitution of the Scots Memorial, Jerusalem (St. Andrew's Church and Hospice) Trust. The Convener of the Trustees and the Chief Officer shall be the successors in office of the Convener and Secretary of the World Mission Council and as such are trustees *ex officio* under the said Constitution.

Charitable Purposes

15. The Trustees shall hold the entire heritable and moveable property, assets, securities, investments and income held by or for the Charity (the "Charitable Estate") for the following objects:
 - a. to offer Christian worship, fellowship, instruction, mission and service;
 - b. to bring the ordinances of religion to the people in every parish of Scotland through a territorial ministry;
 - c. to labour for the advancement of the Kingdom of God throughout the world.
16. In doing so the Trustees –
 - a. shall seek to build and strengthen local congregations as centres of worship, care, nurture, service, witness and mission;
 - b. shall promote, in partnership with other churches, the ministry and mission of the

Church throughout all of Scotland, with particular reference to its poorest and most remote areas;

- c. shall support the work of ecumenical bodies and other agencies in Scotland and elsewhere in the world; and
 - d. may make such provision of support, if any, to other charitable bodies having similar aims as those foregoing, as may seem appropriate in a common pursuance of the foregoing objects.
17. As regards the investments and income held by or for the Trustees as part of the Charitable Estate, the Trustees shall have sole and absolute authority to give instructions to the Church of Scotland Investors Trust as to the management of and dealing with those assets, declaring that the Trustees shall maintain, and in consultation with the General Treasurer keep under review, a list of nominated persons by whom such instructions may be given.

Work of the Trustees

Governance

18. The Trustees shall exercise the supervisory function required by the Church's Designated Religious Charity status; in particular, they shall –
- a. maintain a Code of Conduct for the Trustees, adhere to it and supervise compliance with that Code by all Trustees;
 - b. maintain a Code of Conduct for all Agencies, adhere to it and supervise compliance with that Code by all members of such Agencies;
 - c. carry out the work of trusteeship in accordance with the provisions of Schedule B below; and
 - d. maintain and implement such internal audit functions and risk management strategies as appear to the Trustees, upon proper advice, to be appropriate.
19. The Trustees shall liaise with the Principal Clerk of the General Assembly (the "Principal Clerk") as necessary and in particular insofar as the work required in that post interacts with the work of the Trustees. The Trustees shall request the Principal Clerk to attend such parts of such meetings of the Trustees as appear to the Trustees and to the Principal Clerk to be appropriate; but without the Principal Clerk being entitled to participate in any vote or other form of determination by the Trustees. The Solicitor of the Church shall attend meetings for the purpose of giving such advice as may be necessary on the legal implications of matters being discussed.
20. The Trustees shall approve the reports to the General Assembly of all Agencies prior to submission. Before approving reports for submission to the General Assembly the Trustees shall discuss with Agencies any apparent inconsistencies with the policies, priorities and strategic objectives of the General Assembly, with the Financial Strategy of the Trustees and as between or among reports of various Agencies.
21. There shall be a Governance Group as provided for in Schedule D below.
22. There shall be an Israel Palestine Sub-Committee with the remit and powers set out in Schedule E below.
23. The Trustees shall have power to set up such additional sub-groups or working groups as they may consider necessary or desirable.

Powers

24. In carrying out their work in terms of this constitution the Trustees have power to do all such things as are necessary or incidental to the attainment of the Charitable Purposes.
25. In particular, the Trustees shall have all powers necessary to put into effect the matters hereinafter specified and set out in the Schedules below.
26. At a meeting of the Trustees at which the appropriate quorum (as set out in Schedule B below) is present, those Trustees present may exercise all powers exercisable by the Trustees.

Duties

27. The Trustees shall seek to ensure the implementation of the policies, priorities and strategic objectives of the General Assembly through working with the Agencies to achieve a collaborative approach to the nurturing of the people of the Church in their witness, worship and service and through assisting the General Assembly to determine strategy for the Church.
28. The Trustees shall have oversight of the work of the Agencies and shall seek to ensure that the use and proposed use by the Agencies of the Charitable Estate is in accordance with the policies, priorities and strategic objectives of the General Assembly and the Financial Strategy of the Trustees.

Administration of the work of the Trustees

29. The Trustees shall appoint one of their number as the Administrative Trustee who shall support the Convener and Vice-Conveners and liaise with the Chief Officer, the General

Treasurer and, when necessary, the Principal Clerk, as to the proper conduct of the administration of the Charity. In carrying out this work, the Administrative Trustee shall be assisted by the Solicitor of the Church.

Finance and Stewardship

30. The Trustees shall have overall responsibility for the effective financial management and strategy of the Church.
31. The Trustees shall ensure that Church resources are used wisely and effectively and in accordance with the policies, priorities and strategic objectives of the General Assembly; and in particular, they shall –
 - a. adhere to the policies, priorities and strategic objectives of the General Assembly;
 - b. adopt, maintain and keep under review a financial strategy;
 - c. after each General Assembly, review as necessary the appropriate prioritisation of expenditure;
 - d. maintain, and in consultation with the Church of Scotland Investors Trust subject to a periodic review, an appropriate Investment Policy as regards investments held as part of the Charitable Estate;
 - e. maintain, and in consultation with the Agencies subject to a periodic review, an appropriate Scheme of Financial Delegation such as that set out in Schedule C below to be followed by the Agencies;
 - f. maintain, and in consultation with the Agencies subject to a periodic review, an appropriate Scheme of General Delegation;
 - g. maintain and review an appropriate Procurement Policy to be followed by the Agencies (excepting the Social Care Council);
 - h. set appropriate standards of financial management for the Agencies and oversee compliance;
 - i. supervise and assist Presbyteries and congregations in adhering to financial standards required by charity law and by the General Assembly and oversee compliance;
 - j. oversee the provision of financial management services for the Agencies, and as agreed from time to time for the Statutory Corporations;
 - k. determine policy in relation to the teaching and promotion of Christian stewardship throughout the Church and ensure adherence and provide support to Presbyteries and congregations in the promotion of stewardship with a view to generating sufficient income to resource the worship, mission, nurture and service of the Church; and
 - l. make proposals to the General Assembly as to appropriate policy in relation to contributions from congregations to sustain the Church at local, Presbytery and national levels.
32. The Trustees shall maintain budgetary control of the use of the resources of the Charity; and in particular they shall –
 - a. determine for each calendar year, the financial provision (including contingency allowances) to be made available for the work of each Agency and shall ensure that funds are made available to each Agency to meet the provision determined upon;
 - b. prepare, approve and present annually to the General Assembly an indicative rolling budget and outline financial plan for the following four years and the budget for the current year;
 - c. prepare, approve and present annually to the General Assembly the audited Annual Report and Financial Statements of the Unincorporated Entities; and
 - d. ensure the maintenance by Agencies and any other budget holders of proper accounting records including those for financial transactions and payroll matters together with management accounts.
33. The Trustees shall develop and maintain a suitable Reserves Policy.
34. The Trustees shall receive and distribute the income or capital of unrestricted legacies and donations among the Agencies at such times and in such proportions as to the Trustees shall seem appropriate, with power to specify the use to which these funds are to be applied.
35. The Trustees, having supervisory duties in respect of the Church of Scotland Housing and Loan Fund, shall monitor the extent to which that Fund continues to provide a suitable and effective method of achieving the objects of the Fund.
36. The Trustees shall determine annually the stipend rate, having regard to the recommendation of the appropriate Agency; under declaration that any Trustee in receipt of either a salary or stipend from the Church, or married to or the civil partner of such a person shall be excluded from deliberation or voting on that determination.
37. The Trustees shall determine the types and rates of expenses which may be claimed by members serving on Agencies.

Operational oversight and Strategy

38. The Trustees shall employ a Chief Officer to ensure that the determinations of the Trustees are enacted efficiently in order to promote the ministry and mission of the

Church, and to ensure the effective management of staff and resources. The duties of the Chief Officer shall include facilitation of the development and enhancement of joint working between and among the Agencies, strategic oversight of the work of the Agencies, and working collaboratively with the Principal Clerk.

39. The Trustees shall arrange with the Chief Officer the institution and maintenance of a Senior Leadership Team to be convened by the Chief Officer on a regular basis in order to ensure that there is oversight of any emerging issues, effective co-ordination of the work of the Agencies of the Church, and collective leadership of the staff body. The constitution and remit of the Senior Leadership Team shall be determined by the Chief Officer after consultation with the Trustees.
40. In seeking to achieve a collaborative approach to the nurturing of the people of the Church, the Trustees shall meet with Agencies and may establish working groups with them to reflect on the best practices to be adopted.
41. In exercising general oversight of the work of the Agencies the Trustees shall appoint liaison Trustees for each Agency (the "Liaison Trustees"). Liaison Trustees shall work collaboratively with their Agency to understand the development of the Agency's work.
42. The Trustees shall oversee the implementation of any broad frameworks as from time to time determined upon by the General Assembly.
43. The Trustees shall make recommendations to the General Assembly on the relative priority of work being undertaken by its various Agencies.
44. The Trustees shall keep under review the central administration of the Church, with particular regard to resolving issues of duplication of resources.
45. The Trustees shall make recommendations to the General Assembly on matters of reorganisation and structural change, including adjustments to the membership and remits of relevant Agencies.

Vision

46. The Trustees shall encourage vision among the members and the Agencies of the Church so as to enable the emergence of ministries to meet the needs of the people of Scotland.
47. The Trustees may establish working groups to facilitate strategic thinking on vision with power to co-opt members.

Staffing, Management and Communications

48. The Trustees shall consult with Agencies on matters of management, resourcing and organisation; and as and when required shall offer guidance to Agencies or issue instructions.
49. The Trustees shall, in consultation with Agencies determine their staffing and resourcing requirements, including inter-Departmental sharing or transfer of staff, in line with priorities approved by the General Assembly and any policies drawn up by the Trustees; it being declared that the term "staff" shall not include those directly employed by the Ministries Council, the Social Care Council and the World Mission Council or by their successor bodies.
50. The Trustees shall consult with the relevant Agencies in their appointment of senior staff. The Trustees, in consultation with all other relevant persons shall nominate individuals to the General Assembly for appointment to the offices of Principal Clerk of the General Assembly, Deputy Clerk of the General Assembly and Solicitor of the Church.
51. The Trustees, through the Central Services Committee as a constituent committee of the Trustees, shall act as one of the employing agencies of the Church.
52. The Trustees shall have responsibility for determining the terms and conditions of the staff for which it is the employing agency.
53. The Trustees shall ensure that proper salary provision, terms and conditions are adhered to by all Agencies and that salary scales are kept under review when necessary.
54. The Trustees shall have responsibility for policy matters relating to Data Protection within 117-123 George Street, Edinburgh (the "Church Offices") and with respect to the wider Church.
55. The Trustees shall oversee the delivery of central services to departments within the Church Offices, to Agencies and, where appropriate, to the Statutory Corporations, Presbyteries and Congregations namely –
 - Financial support services;
 - Information Technology (including the provision of support services to Presbytery Clerks);
 - Human Resources;
 - Legal Services (as delivered by the Law Department and subject to such oversight not infringing principles of legal privilege);

- Safeguarding; and
- facilities management in relation to the Church Offices.

56. The Trustees shall oversee the development and implementation of any Communication Strategy across the Church.

57. The Trustees shall oversee and manage all media engagement for the Charity arising from major reputational opportunities and risks, working with such Agencies as may be appropriate.

58. The Trustees shall oversee effective communication with members and courts of the Church, encouraging good practice.

Property and contracts

59. The Trustees shall facilitate strategic property planning across the Agencies to ensure that the best use is made of the property portfolio.

60. The Trustees shall consider and decide on proposals from Agencies to purchase heritable property or any other asset valued in excess of £75,000 or take on the tenancy of a lease of any heritable property where (a) the annual rental is in excess of £25,000 or (b) the lease term is in excess of one year. No Agency, except as provided for in paragraph 66 below, shall purchase or lease such property without prior approval from the Trustees.

61. The Trustees shall consider and decide on proposals from Agencies, except as permitted in paragraph 66 below, to sell or otherwise dispose of or grant a lease for a period in excess of five years of any heritable property, or to sell or otherwise dispose of any asset valued above £75,000, held by or on behalf of that Agency. The Trustees shall have power to allocate all or part of the sale or lease proceeds to another Agency or Agencies.

62. The Trustees shall consider and decide on proposals from Agencies to enter into an agreement or contract for receipt of goods or services (with the exception of contracts of employment or those relating to property transactions) with a total actual or potential financial commitment in excess of £75,000. No Agency, except as provided for in paragraph 66 below, shall proceed to enter into such an agreement or contract without prior approval from the Trustees.

63. Title to the Church Offices shall be held by the Church of Scotland General Trustees for behoof of the Trustees.

64. The Trustees shall be responsible for the proper maintenance and insurance of the Church Offices.

65. The Trustees shall be responsible for policy matters relating to Health and Safety within the Church Offices.

66. For the avoidance of doubt, paragraphs 60, 61 and 62 shall not apply to the Church of Scotland General Trustees, the Church of Scotland Housing and Loan Fund and the Church of Scotland Trust, all of which may deal with heritable property and other assets without the approval of the Trustees.

Alteration

67. This Constitution and Remit may be amended only with the approval of the General Assembly or a Commission of Assembly.

Interpretation

68. The terms “Agency” and “Agencies” mean the following bodies being Standing Committees of the General Assembly, namely the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team, the Social Care Council, the Ministries Council and the World Mission Council; and the following Committees: Assembly Business, Chaplains to His Majesty’s Forces, Ecumenical Relations, Legal Questions, Safeguarding and the Theological Forum and the terms “Agency” and “Agencies” shall include any successor bodies to each of the bodies named above.

69. “Fund”, except where used as part of a named Fund other than “Unrestricted Fund” and “Special Fund”, means a financial unit, comprising investments or a sum of money or both, held as a separate component part of the Charitable Estate, and identified by reference to the name of a donor, to a particular use or purpose or to use by an Agency or Agencies.

70. “Trustee” and “Trustees”, for the avoidance of doubt, mean all Trustees, including those participating by virtue of office.

SCHEDULE A

APPOINTMENT OF TRUSTEES

1. When it becomes necessary to appoint a Trustee, the process shall be transparent and competency based and shall be of the following nature:
 - a. The Trustees shall identify the requisite and desirable experience and skills to fill the vacancy. In particular:
 - i. Trustees should possess an understanding of the life and culture of the Church and

- of Scotland's contemporary culture and should be committed to developing the vision and mission of the General Assembly; and
- ii. the expertise of the Trustees must include finance, human resources, management, communications, civil law, strategic planning and theology.
- b. The vacancy shall be advertised and circulated as the Trustees determine; such circulation to include Presbyteries, Congregations and the Nomination Committee. The advertisement and circulation shall confirm that applicants must be members of the Church and that no employee of the Church (other than Presbytery or congregational employees) and no member of any of the Agencies are eligible for appointment as a trustee.
- c. All applications shall be sifted by the Trustees according to the required criteria and an appropriate number shall be invited to interview.
- d. Interviews will be conducted by a panel of the Trustees according to such process of examination of the skills, experience and suitability for trusteeship as the Trustees, guided by the Human Resources Department (who shall nominate a staff team member as a non-voting member of the panel), shall determine.
- e. The panel shall report to the Trustees, who shall consult with the Nomination Committee as to any comments which the Committee wish to make on the panel's recommendations for appointment;
- f. Any appointment shall be made by the Trustees, subject to approval by the General Assembly. In proceeding to determine an appropriate appointment the Trustees shall have regard to the need to seek diversity among the Trustees; and
- g. Following acceptance of appointment, a new trustee shall be given an appropriate induction into each of the facets of Charity trusteeship. The induction process shall be determined upon by the Trustees after consultation with the Solicitor of the Church.
- 2. The Chief Officer shall take no part in the process of recruitment or appointment of Trustees.
- 3. When the term of office of a Trustee has been completed and the Trustee is willing to serve a second term, the Trustees shall renew the appointment without discussion unless the Trustee has failed to participate fully in the work of the Trustees. In the event that a Trustee has failed to participate fully in the work of the Trustees, the Convener of the Trustees shall meet with the Trustee to establish why that failure has occurred and how it might be avoided in the event of reappointment. The Convener shall report to the remaining Trustees after such discussions and the Convener and the remaining Trustees shall decide whether to reappoint the Trustee.

SCHEDULE B

OPERATIONAL WORKING OF THE TRUST

Office Bearers

1. Three months in advance of the anticipated retirement of an Office Bearer, or no later than one month after the occurrence of an unexpected vacancy, the Trustees shall choose a successor from among their own number. In the event that any of the Office Bearer roles cannot be filled from within the Trustees, they shall be permitted to make an appointment to fill the vacancy from outwith their number (in addition to the twelve Trustees provided for in clause 7 of this Constitution and Remit), subject to approval by the General Assembly. In such event, no further Trustee appointments shall be made until the total number of Trustees has once again been reduced to twelve.
2. The term of office as an Office Bearer is three years, which shall be renewable until the end of their term as a Trustee; and such term of office will be counted as part of her or his permissible terms as a Trustee.

Meetings of Trustees

Proceedings

3. The Trustees shall meet on at least seven occasions (an "Ordinary Meeting") in each year.
4. The dates of the Ordinary Meetings for the ensuing calendar year shall be settled by the Trustees no later than 31 October in the year preceding. One of those dates shall be specified as the annual meeting-in-person at which all Trustees are expected to attend in person.
5. Any Trustee may request the Convener to hold an additional meeting (a "Special Meeting") by a request in writing or sent electronically to the Convener and copied to all other Trustees in confidence giving reasons for the request. After taking the views of all Trustees, the decision as to whether to call a Special Meeting shall be at the absolute discretion of the Convener.
6. Notices of every meeting together with an agenda shall be delivered electronically to each Trustee at least five working days prior to the meeting or within such time as the Trustees may determine.

7. Meetings shall be held at times and places convenient for the Trustees.
8. Except in respect of the annual meeting-in-person, attendance at an Ordinary Meeting or at a Special Meeting may be made by way of telephone-conferencing, video-conferencing and other internet- or electronic-based methods of communication.
9. Minutes shall be taken by the Administrative Trustee of topics covered at all meetings, recording reports received, decisions taken and the allocation of any further work required. Copies of approved minutes and of confidential “papers apart” and of all reports and other papers considered at meetings must be retained in a form that continues to allow access throughout the anticipated lifetime of the Charity.
10. A quorum of Trustees shall be seven providing (1) that in the event of vacancy among the Trustees, the quorum shall be reduced by the number of vacancies and (2) that as regards stipend determinations, the quorum shall be four.
11. The Convener shall chair each meeting of the Trustees.
12. In the event that the Convener is not present within 15 minutes after the time at which the meeting was due to start (or is not willing to act as Chairperson), a Vice-Convener, if present, will act as chairperson failing which the Trustees present must elect, from among themselves, the person who will act as chairperson of that meeting, or until the arrival of the Convener.
13. In the event of the need for a vote, each Trustee has one vote, which must be cast personally, but may be given as part of electronic attendance.
14. All decisions will be made by majority vote.
15. In the event of an equal number of votes for and against any decision, the Convener or the chairperson of the meeting will be entitled to a second, or casting vote.
16. Decisions may be made by email by a majority of the Trustees if the following conditions are met:
 - a. All relevant material to allow a fully-informed decision to be made has been circulated to all of the Trustees along with a cut-off time (which must be reasonable in all the circumstances) for notifications under sub-section (ii) below;
 - b. None of the Trustees has notified the Chief Officer that he or she considers that a board meeting should be held to discuss the matter;
 - c. The Constitution does not require the decision to be made in person; and
 - d. The Solicitor of the Church has not advised that the decision requires to be made in person because of the nature and scope of the subject-matter and/or the potential difficulty in all of the Trustees understanding all aspects of the issue and the information they need to consider in coming to a decision.
17. The Trustees may, at their absolute discretion, allow any person to attend and speak at a meeting notwithstanding that the person is not a Trustee, but on the basis that they must not participate in decision-making. The minute of that meeting must make the status of any such person clear for the avoidance of doubt.
18. A Trustee must not vote at a meeting (or at a meeting of any sub-committee) on any decision which relates to a matter in which they have a private interest or duty which conflicts, or may conflict with the interests of the Charity; the Trustee must withdraw from the meeting while an item of that nature is being dealt with.
19. For the purposes of paragraph 18 above:
 - a. a private interest held by an individual who is connected with the Trustee (such as being husband, wife, partner, child, parent, brother, sister) shall be deemed to be held by that Trustee; and
 - b. a Trustee will be automatically deemed to have a private interest in relation to a particular matter, if a body in relation to which he or she is an employee, director, member of the management committee, charity trustee, officer or elected representative, has an interest in that matter.

Requirements

20. Each meeting shall be constituted with prayer.
21. At the commencement of each meeting each Trustee shall be asked to declare whether he or she has any conflict of interest in any item of business.
22. In the event of a conflict being declared the remaining Trustees shall determine the course of action to be adopted, in accordance with their Conflict of Interest Policy.
23. They shall determine whether, in the whole circumstances, it is preferable for the Trustee to withdraw from the discussion and decision, or whether the Trustee may speak but not vote on the matter. In the event that a withdrawal is considered preferable but would render the meeting no longer quorate, and the item of business is urgent the Trustees shall remit the business to a special meeting.

24. Whichever course is adopted, the minutes should record:
- which Trustee was affected;
 - when the conflict was identified and declared;
 - what was discussed about it and decided and why that step was considered to be in the best interests of the Charity;
 - whether the Trustee withdrew; and
 - if the Trustee was not required to withdraw, precisely what was his or her participation.
25. At each meeting of the Trustees they shall consider a financial statement of assets, income and expenditure of the whole Charitable Estate up to date as at no more than six weeks prior to the date of the meeting.

Specific Powers

26. Emoluments: in the event of an Office Bearer being a parish minister the Trustees may make an appropriate payment to the relevant congregational treasurer to provide additional ministerial support.
27. Expenses: Trustees will be reimbursed expenses properly incurred in carrying out their duties as Trustees.

08

SCHEDULE C

DRAFT SCHEME OF FINANCIAL DELEGATION

Introduction

1. The Church of Scotland is recognised as a Designated Religious Charity (the “Charity”), Scottish Charity No. SC011353. The assets of the Charity are those held for the Unincorporated Entities of the Church.
2. The Assembly Trustees (the “Trustees”) have been appointed by the General Assembly (the “Assembly”) to act as the Charity Trustees of the Charity and, as such Trustees, to have general control and management of the assets of the Charity.
3. This Scheme describes the limits and extent of financial decision-making authority delegated by the Trustees. A clear scheme of delegation of authority is fundamental to good governance.
4. The Scheme includes a template for departmental schemes of delegation. Each Agency is required to put in place a robust scheme of delegation, to review it from time to time and to ensure that staff are aware of the scheme and adhere to it.
5. The Governance Group of the Trustees is responsible for overseeing the operation of this Scheme and will involve other bodies, including the Audit Committee, as appropriate. The General Treasurer is the senior staff member responsible for the scheme, reporting to the Governance Group and to the Trustees.
6. Assistance and advice on the Scheme may be obtained from the General Treasurer.

Delegated Powers

7. The Assembly has created a number of Agencies which hold delegated powers from the Assembly. The powers are set out in remits for each body, as agreed and amended from time to time by the Assembly. The remits establish the ambit of decision-making powers for each body.
8. Budget arrangements for the financial consequences of decisions and actions taken by Agencies are approved for each financial year by the Trustees.
9. Any decisions or actions taken by Agencies and staff must be contained within the items of work for which budget approval has been given for the relevant financial year. The associated financial consequences of any decisions or actions taken by Agencies and staff must be contained within the approved budget provisions for those items for the relevant financial year.
10. Proposed plans which might incur unbudgeted costs for items of work for which budget approval has been given for the relevant financial year or which would involve items of work for which budget approval has not been given for the relevant financial year must be referred to the Trustees and their General Treasurer for decision.

Authorised Persons

11. Agencies shall, in consultation with the General Treasurer, prepare individual schemes of delegation as to the level of authority in financial matters to be granted to individual office holders. Such schemes shall make provision for that authority to be exercised by the holder of another nominated office during periods of leave or illness, or where the post is vacant. Such schemes must be approved by the Trustees.

Accountability

12. Agencies and staff tasked with delegated authority under the Scheme shall be accountable for their decisions and actions to appropriate governance bodies including the Audit Committee. The Governance Group, on behalf of the Trustees, has the power to invite

representatives of Agencies and senior staff, to justify decisions and actions taken under the Scheme and to report on issues to the Trustees.

13. It must be made clear by a delegating Agency to all office holders to whom departmental financial authorisation is being given or upon whom departmental authorisation may fall in the event of leave or illness of an office holder or in the event of a vacancy, that they are accountable for their financial decisions and actions to appropriate governance bodies including the Audit Committee.

SCHEDULE D

TRUSTEES' GOVERNANCE GROUP

1. The Governance Group ("the Group") shall comprise a minimum of four and a maximum of five members of the Trustees, one of whom shall be a Vice-Convenor of the Trustees and one the Administrative Trustee, with in addition the Convenor of the Trustees able to attend *ex officio*. A quorum shall be two members. The Convenor of the Group will be appointed by the Trustees and not be one of the three office bearers. The Chief Officer, Principal Clerk, General Treasurer, Solicitor of the Church and the Head of Analysis and Programme Development shall attend meetings of the Group. The Convenor of the Audit Committee will be entitled to attend on any matter which that Committee believes to be of sufficient importance.
2. The Group shall meet on at least four occasions a year. It will have no decision-making powers unless provided for in this Constitution and Remit or specifically authorised by the Trustees.
3. The Group shall seek to ensure that the Trustees fulfil their legal and functional responsibilities in all respects. It shall advise and assist the Trustees in the exercise of the supervisory function of the component elements of the Church as required by the Church's Designated Religious Charity status, and shall oversee compliance by Standing Committees, Congregations and Presbyteries in the proper discharge of their duties and responsibilities under charity and accounting legislation and General Assembly Acts and Regulations.
4. The Group shall:
 - a. maintain a Code of Conduct for all Agencies of the Church as defined in clause 70 of the Constitution and Remit and supervise compliance with that Code by all members of such Agencies;
 - b. maintain a Code of Conduct for the Trustees, adhere to it and supervise compliance with that Code by all Trustees;
 - c. maintain, and in consultation with the Agencies subject to a periodic review, an appropriate Scheme of Financial Delegation such as that set out in Schedule C of the Constitution and Remit to be followed by the Agencies;
 - d. maintain, and in consultation with the Agencies subject to a periodic review, an appropriate Scheme of General Delegation;
 - e. ensure that all necessary policies are in place and regularly reviewed.
5. The Group shall receive regular reports from the Audit Committee and the Audit Committee should in turn receive copies of the Minutes from the Governance Group. The Governance Group remit shall be considered annually by the Audit Committee.
6. The Group will keep under review the adequacy and effectiveness of risk management arrangements of the Unincorporated Entities. The Group shall consider the scope and effectiveness of the systems established by the Chief Officer to identify, assess, manage and monitor risk. This shall include periodic review of the principal risk register and, where applicable, the Chief Officer's assessments and reports on the effectiveness of the systems for risk management
7. The Group shall advise and assist the Trustees on the governance aspects of management, resourcing, organisation and administration and shall undertake such other functions as may from time to time be delegated to or referred to it by the Trustees.
8. The Group shall seek to ensure that there are effective induction and mentoring processes for new Trustees and that they have the necessary knowledge to be able to discharge their responsibilities. In particular, the Group shall provide a process so that –
 - a. each Trustee is aware of the terms of the Constitution;
 - b. each Trustee is aware of the deliverances from the most recent General Assembly;
 - c. each Trustee is aware of her or his role as an Assembly Trustee within the broader context of all of the component elements of the Church of Scotland;
 - d. each Trustee is aware of the need to act with independence of mind and with probity;
 - e. the effective working of the Trustees is enabled through the body of Trustees having appropriate skills, experience and diversity;
 - f. the Trustees exercise the controls necessary to ensure that the strategic priorities, policies and decisions of the General Assembly are implemented effectively and

efficiently and establish appropriate checks on management, financial control mechanisms and risk appraisal; and

- g. the Trustees and the Agencies are open and accountable in their actions, enabling good communication among themselves and with staff, with others working within the Church, with members of the Church and with those with whom the Trustees and the Agencies engage.
9. The Group shall establish, maintain and keep under review an appraisal system for the Trustees which is in accordance with current good governance practice.

Complaints

- 10.1 Upon a report of a possible material breach of duty by a Trustee or by a member of another Agency, the Group will appoint a panel of three of their number (the "panel") to deal with the complaint. Unless the panel decides that the complaint is vexatious, frivolous or without merit (namely that even if the complaint were proved it would not constitute a breach of the Code of Conduct) the panel will investigate the complaint. The individual who is the subject of such an investigation will be informed of the complaint and will be interviewed to ascertain the facts and is required to give the investigators his/her fullest co-operation. The complaint and investigation will be handled in confidence as far as is practicable.
- 10.2 In the event that the panel consider that there has been a breach of the Code justifying action being taken, it will refer the matter to the Governance Group for determination as to how the matter should be disposed of.
- 10.3 The Group shall establish a procedure for dealing with complaints, such procedure to be approved by the Trustees and varied from time to time as agreed by the Trustees.

SCHEDULE E

ISRAEL PALESTINE COMMITTEE REMIT

1. The Committee shall have delegated authority from the Assembly Trustees for:-
 - a. Oversight of the Church's work and relationships in Israel and Palestine;
 - b. Management, maintenance and oversight of the Church's establishments in Israel ("the Establishments"), which are:
 - The Scots Hotel, Tiberias
 - St Andrew's House Hotel, Jerusalem
 - Tabeetha School, Jaffa
 - St Andrew's Memorial Church, Jerusalem
 - St Andrew's Church, Tiberias
 - c. Management, maintenance and oversight of land owned by the Church in Safed (currently leased to the Israeli Ministry of Health) and a cemetery in Tiberias. This shall be recorded in a formal Scheme of Delegation to be put in place by the Assembly Trustees.
2. The Assembly Trustees shall maintain budgetary control of the use of the resources allocated to the work of the Committee.
3. The Committee shall appoint Board members to St Andrew's Galilee Ltd, St Andrew's Scottish Centre Ltd and Tabeetha School, Jaffa. With reference to St Andrew's Galilee Ltd and St Andrew's Scottish Centre Ltd, the Church of Scotland Trust as sole shareholder, will approve these appointments. The Board of Directors of St Andrew's Galilee Ltd, the Board of Directors of St Andrew's Scottish Centre Ltd and the Board of Governors of Tabeetha School shall each report to the Committee.
4. The Boards of Directors and Board of Governors shall be responsible for the day to day oversight of the Establishments. This remit shall include:
 - a. developing strategies for the work of the Establishments within the overall strategies set by the General Assembly and enacted by the Assembly Trustees, and recommending proposals to the Committee for approval;
 - b. ensuring that robust best practice management systems and procedures for the Establishments are in place and followed;
 - c. ensuring that all necessary financial controls and protocols are in place and adhered to, including the preparation of budgets, investment plans, and expenditure authorisations;
 - d. appointing and managing locally based staff in senior management positions within the Establishments;
 - e. ensuring risk registers are updated regularly;
 - f. developing investment and maintenance plans;
 - g. liaising with all relevant stakeholders, including the Church of Scotland Trust;
 - h. ensuring compliance with General Assembly policy in respect of the Church's work within the Establishments;
 - i. ensuring effective communication and reporting processes to the Assembly Trustees are in place and adhered to.

5. The Committee shall be responsible, under the authority of the Assembly Trustees, for implementing policies and strategies agreed by the General Assembly in respect of the Church's wider engagement in Israel and Palestine. In doing so it shall work closely with the Principal Clerk and the Ecumenical Officer.
6. In the event of major capital investment in any property or land owned by the Church in Israel being proposed by the Committee and approved by the Assembly Trustees, the Committee shall manage the project, reporting regularly to the Assembly Trustees, who shall retain overall responsibility for the project. The Assembly Trustees shall appoint a supervisory group with suitable skills and expertise, including representative(s) of the Church of Scotland Trust, with a view to ensuring that any such project is completed on time and within budget.

Management

7. The Resource and Presence Manager shall be responsible for the line management of the Principal of Tabeetha School and the General Managers of the Scots Hotel, Tiberias and the St Andrew's House Hotel, Jerusalem.
8. The Resource and Presence Manager shall also be responsible for the line management of the ministers of St Andrew's Memorial Church, Jerusalem and St Andrew's Church, Tiberias.
9. The Resource and Presence Manager shall report to the Chief Officer.
10. The Convener of the Assembly Trustees shall be responsible for ensuring that all requirements of this remit are implemented.

Membership

11. The Committee shall comprise:
 - a Convener (who shall be a member of the Assembly Trustees)
 - a Vice-Convener (who shall be the Convener of the FAPLT Resource and Presence Programme Group ex officio) to deputise for the Convener when unavailable
 - three members
 - the Chair of the Board of Directors of St Andrew's Galilee Ltd, the Chair of the Board of Directors of St Andrew's Scottish Centre Ltd, and the Chair of the Board of Governors of Tabeetha School, who shall each serve as non-voting members of the Committee
12. The Convener and Vice-Convener shall serve for three years each (non-renewable) save that the first Vice-Convener shall serve for two years. Subsequent to those first appointed, Conveners and Vice-Conveners may be appointed from existing members and shall conclude service at the conclusion of their term as Convener or Vice-Convener.
13. Voting members shall serve for three years, renewable for one further term on special cause shown. Trustee members shall serve during their appointed term as an Assembly Trustee.
14. At least two members of the Committee (including the Convener) shall be members of the Assembly Trustees. Other voting members shall be appointed by the Assembly Trustees, working in collaboration with FAPLT and the Nomination Committee.
15. The Committee shall also have the power, subject to the prior written approval of the Assembly Trustees, to co-opt other individuals onto its membership for specific and time limited tasks. Any such individuals shall be non-voting members of the Committee.
16. In view of the range and complexities of the work, the Committee shall have the power to commission such professional advice as is appropriate and necessary in order to enable it to fulfil its remit.
17. The Committee shall be serviced by the Resource and Presence Manager and the designated Finance Manager. The Chief Officer shall attend meetings of the Committee.

Meetings

18. The Committee shall meet at least quarterly and has discretion to decide on the format, duration and agenda of its meetings. Additional meetings may be called to address urgent issues. All meetings shall be minuted and the minutes shall be circulated to the next meeting of the Assembly Trustees after the relevant meeting of the Committee.

Quorum

19. The quorum shall be three members. The Convener shall have a casting vote.

Reporting and approvals

20. The Committee is accountable to the Assembly Trustees and shall report, through its Convener, to the Assembly Trustees on its activities. Following each meeting of the Committee, a report shall be made to the Assembly Trustees and at each meeting of the Assembly Trustees an update on any material developments will be provided. At least once a year the Convener shall present a full report on the work of the Committee to a meeting of the Assembly Trustees.
21. All approvals which require to be given by the Assembly Trustees in terms of the Scheme of Delegation shall be timeously sought and accompanied by full details of all relevant matters to enable informed decisions to be taken.

Appendix 8

The Church of Scotland
SOCIAL CARE COUNCIL



CONSTITUTION

INTRODUCTION

The Social Care Council is a Council constituted by the authority of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, directly accountable to the General Assembly and subject to the supervision of the Assembly Trustees in terms of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Council and the Assembly Trustees.

1. NAME

- 1.1** The name of the Council shall be the CHURCH OF SCOTLAND SOCIAL CARE COUNCIL (hereinafter referred to as "the Council"). For the purpose of delivery of services in terms of its remit the Council shall operate under the name "CrossReach" and will use the working title of The CrossReach Board. The Council's headquarters shall be at Charis House, 47 Milton Road East, Edinburgh, or at such other location as may from time to time be approved by the Assembly Trustees.

2. MEMBERSHIP

- 2.1** The Council shall comprise:

- an Assembly-appointed Convener and one Assembly-appointed Vice-Convener; and
- Eleven Assembly-appointed members, plus the Chief Executive, acting as Secretary as an ex officio and non-voting member.

At least one member should be a Church of Scotland minister.

- 2.2** The Convener and Vice-Conveners shall normally serve for four years but all care should be taken to ensure that they do not end a period of service at the same time. All other members shall serve for a term of four years.

3. REMIT AND POWERS

- 3.1** The remit of the Council shall be:

- To demonstrate Christ's love in action by offering high quality care and support which will empower people across Scotland to live full and fulfilling lives;
- To provide specialist resources and services to further the mission of the Church expressing its care for communities across Scotland;
- To identify existing and emerging areas of need and to guide CrossReach services and the Church in pioneering new approaches to relevant problems through collaborative partnerships both from within the Church and externally;
- To enable the people CrossReach supports and its employees to raise issues of concern to them and to amplify their voices through appropriate channels within the Church structures and externally;

- 3.2** In furtherance of its remit the Council may, subject to the approval of the Assembly Trustees, borrow money and may charge or provide security therefor over any part of the heritable property belonging to the Council.

3.3 The Council

- 3.3.1** Members of the Council shall be ultimately responsible for directing the affairs of the Council and for ensuring that it is solvent, well run and delivers the objectives for which it has been established. To this end members shall be responsible for:

- Ensuring compliance with the Council's objectives, mission, ethos and values;
- Establishing or approving policies, strategic plans and budgets to achieve these objectives and monitoring performance against them;
- Ensuring that the Council develops and maintains its financial strength;
- Ensuring that the Council, in the performance of its objectives, complies with all relevant legislation, regulations and requirements of appropriate regulatory bodies;
- Establishing and maintaining a clear framework of delegation and internal control;
- Agreeing or ratifying all policies and decisions on any matters which might create significant risk to the Council, financial or otherwise.
- Holding an appropriate register of risks.

- 3.3.2** Council members are required collectively and individually to act reasonably at all times in the best interests of the Council. All members are equally responsible in law for the Council's actions and decisions and have equal status as members. Each Council member shall act as an individual and not as a representative of any other group. Council members shall ensure that they remain, at all times, independent and do not come under the influence of any other body or individual.
- 3.3.3** The Council shall have power to appoint such Committees and Groups as it may from time to time determine to be appropriate to ensure that the Council's remit is fulfilled.
- 3.3.4** The Council can from time to time, and between meetings, delegate decision making to three members: the Convener, Vice-Convener and Chair of its Finance Group.
- 4. MEETINGS**
- 4.1** The Council shall normally meet six times in the year. At all meetings of the Council four members shall be a quorum. Meetings may be held either in person, online, or in hybrid form, using electronic means.
- 4.2** At each meeting, the Council shall receive reports from individuals, Committees and Groups holding delegated powers on the discharge of these powers since the previous meeting.
- 5. FINANCE**
- 5.1** The Council shall be responsible to the General Assembly for its own banking and financial arrangements and shall submit to the Assembly Trustees' Finance Group all financial information necessarily required by the Finance Group to enable it (a) to prepare the Consolidated Accounts of the Unincorporated Entities of the Church of Scotland, and (b) to submit them annually to the General Assembly for approval.
- 6. STAFFING**
- 6.1** The Council, in consultation with the Assembly Trustees, shall appoint a Secretary who shall be known as the Chief Executive and, as a separate employing agency of the Church, shall employ such other staff as are necessary to fulfil its remit.
- 6.2** The Council shall be responsible for funding the salaries and related costs of all employees, and shall be responsible for reviewing, from time to time, the terms and conditions under which it appoints and employs staff.
- 7. ADOPTION OF THE CONSTITUTION**
- 7.1** This revised Constitution, subject to the approval of the 2025 General Assembly, shall take effect from 1 June 2025 (replacing the Constitution in place since 2006).
- 7.2** It shall be open to the Council to amend the terms of this Constitution as and when found desirable and necessary, subject always to the approval of the General Assembly.

Appendix 9

CONGREGATIONAL STATISTICS

We extend our thanks to Presbytery Clerks and congregations for their diligence and strenuous efforts in obtaining this year's statistics and transmitting them to the National Office, enabling this collection to happen. The information which follows greatly assists in supporting the understanding of the Church of Scotland at all levels.

Summary

- As at December 2024, there were 245,000 members of the Church of Scotland, a fall of 5.5% from 2023.
- In the last ten years (2014-2024) the number of members has fallen by 35%.
- Information collected indicates that in 2024, 59% of congregations offered online worship services; with 24% of congregations offering alternative offline worship services. 23,145 people are estimated to have participated in worship offered online, and 2,475 made use of alternative offline provisions.
- 21% of congregations reported having a New Worshipping Community in 2024.
- 207 congregations formed 72 unions during 2024. In earlier years, only around a dozen unions took place annually.

Technical Summary

Numbers at both Presbytery level and national level have been rounded, in line with best practice, to avoid providing a false sense of precision. Numbers that would round down to 0 are indicated with e.g. "<5" to distinguish them from actual zeros.

There was a response rate of 82% to the standard questions about membership, leadership etc.

Additional Questions continue to be included to reflect changes in worship provision, with many churches offering a hybrid form of worship, both online and offline. This is the fourth year in which information on New Worshipping Communities (NWCs) is provided, having been

introduced in 2021. These Additional Questions had a 69% response rate.

Collection was made in mixed mode – some reported through Presbytery Information Management System (PIMS), others through Excel with additional questions through MS Forms or Excel.

Introduction

On 1 January 2024, the new Presbytery of Clèir Eilean I: Highlands and Hebrides was formed from nine Presbyteries which merged on 31st December 2023. The new Presbytery of Clèir Eilean I: Highlands and Hebrides is for the first time reported in its own right for 2024. We are grateful to Presbytery and Session Clerks for their continued efforts and patience through these changes.

Church-level membership and participation – 2024

Congregations within the Church of Scotland come in many shapes and sizes, from large city congregations to small rural or island communities. Table 1 shows the reported participation at the smallest 5% and 25% of churches, the median (middle) church, the largest 25% and 5% of churches (75th and 95th percentile), and the mean (average) church. A “typical” church may be better described by the median value as a few large congregations can contribute to an inflated mean value that may not be reflective of the overall data.

	5th percentile	25th percentile	Median (middle) church	75th percentile	95th percentile	Mean (average) church
Members	12	88	173	311	639	233
Adherents	1	4	10	23	55	18
Weekly Attendance						
In person	0	25	45	75	150	57
Average Age	46	57	63	69	74	62
Online	0	0	8	45	144	36
Offline	0	0	0	0	20	4
Professions of Faith	0	0	0	0	4	1
Children	0	0	4	22	111	22
Children receiving Communion	0	0	0	0	10	3
Elders	4	10	16	27	50	21
Baptisms	0	0	0	1	5	1
Weddings	0	0	0	1	3	1
Funerals	0	0	6	12	30	9

Table 1: Church Participation Summary 2024

What a ‘typical’ congregation looks like:

The ‘typical’ (median) congregation has 173 members and 10 adherents. In the median congregation there are also:

- 4 children associated with the congregation, none of whom receive communion
- 45 people worshipping in the church, 8 people worshipping online and 0 offline
- 0 professions of faith
- 6 funerals, 0 baptisms, and 0 weddings
- A leadership of 16 elders

In 2024, 28% of congregations welcomed new Christians through Professions of Faith. 31% of congregations welcomed new members through certificates from other Church of Scotland congregations, and 24% through resolution of the Kirk Session. Children received Communion in 21% of congregations.

Admissions and Removals within the Church of Scotland, 2024

The membership statistics may be stated thus:

	Removals by Death	7,355	
Less	Admissions by Profession	695	6,660
	Removals by Certificate	1,675	
Less	Admissions by Certificate	1,110	565
	Other Removals	8,270	
Less	Restoration	1,490	6,780
	Total Decrease		14,005

And shown graphically in Figure 1 below.

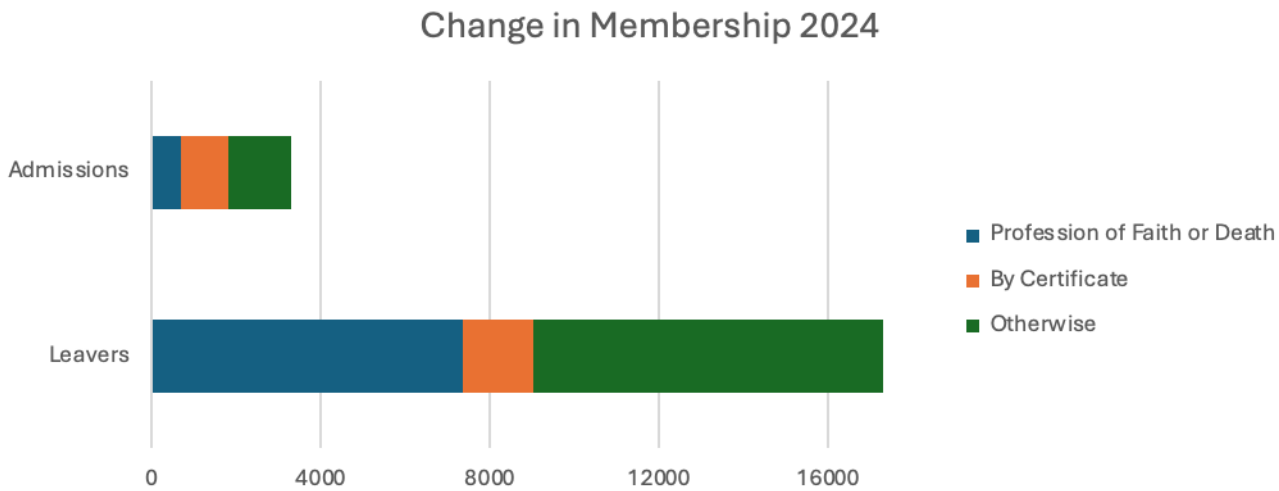
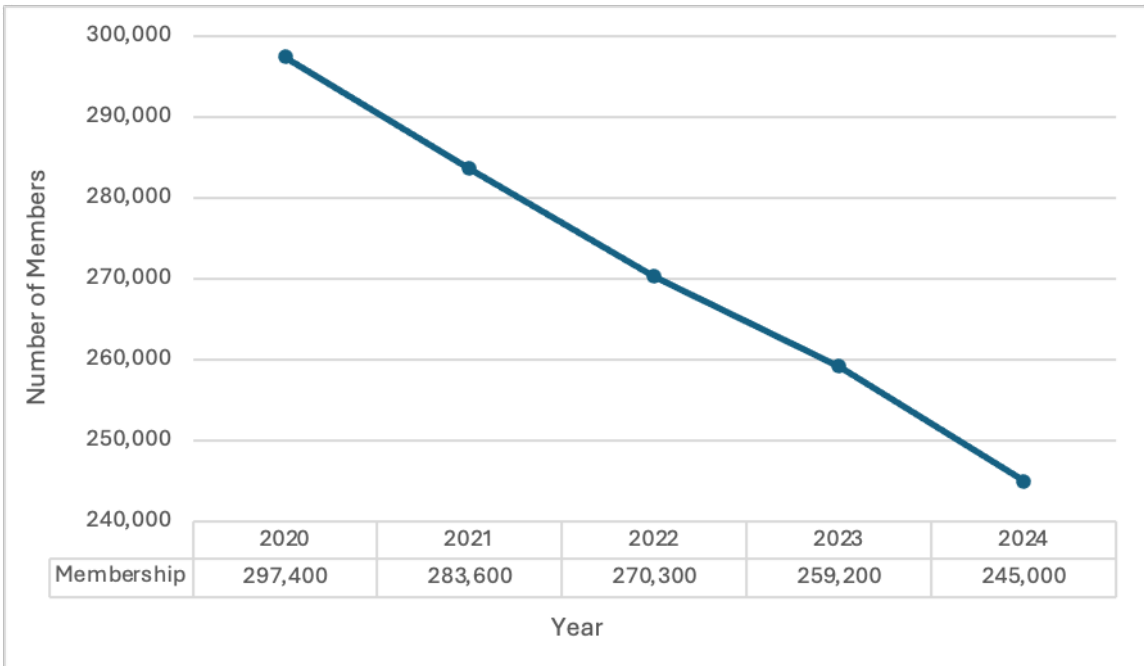
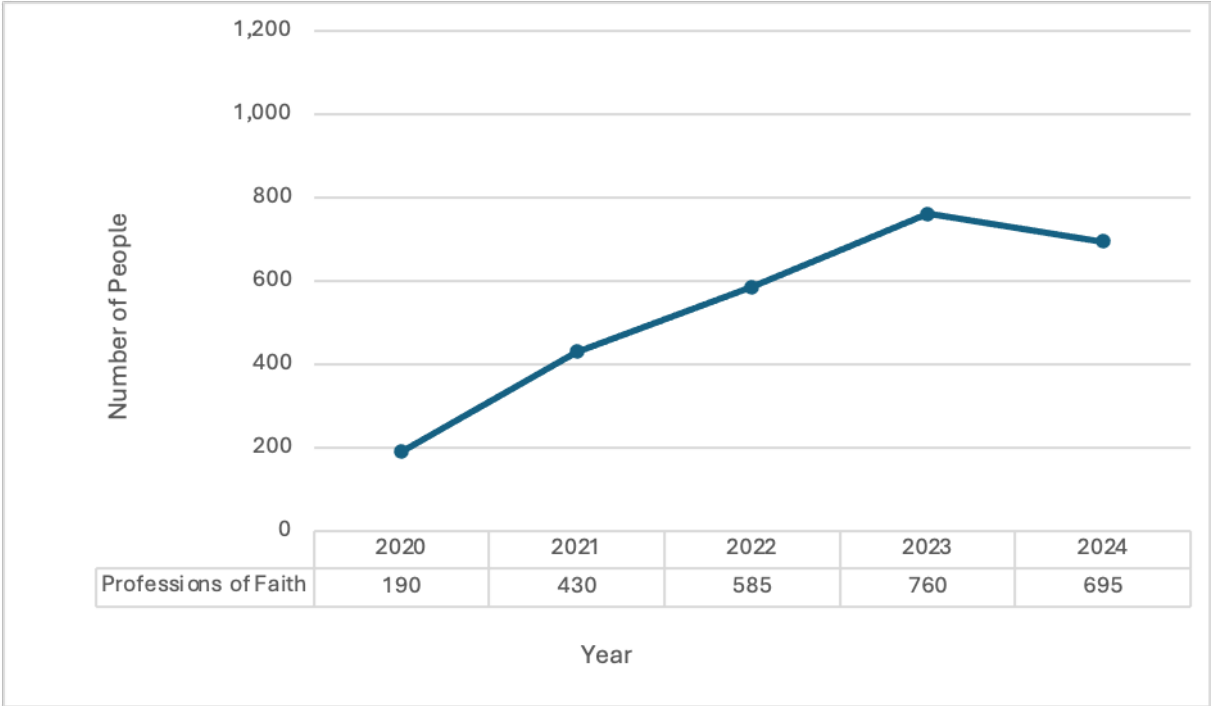


Figure 1: Leavers and Joiners in 2024

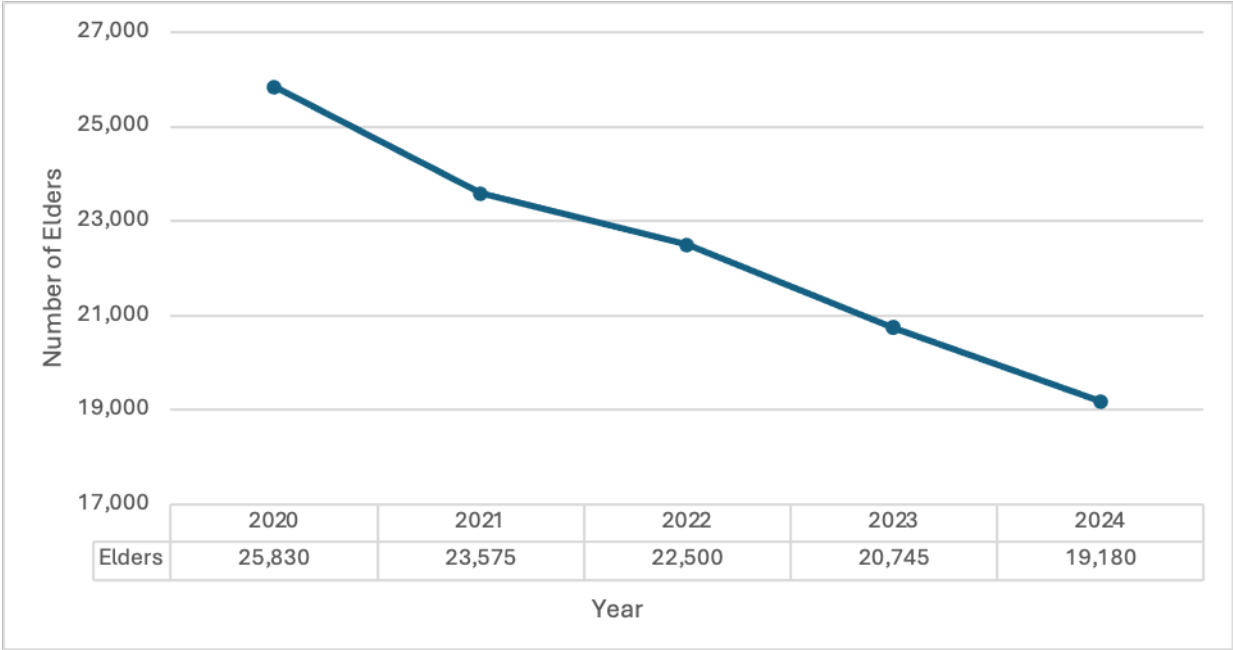
Comparative Graphs
MEMBERSHIP

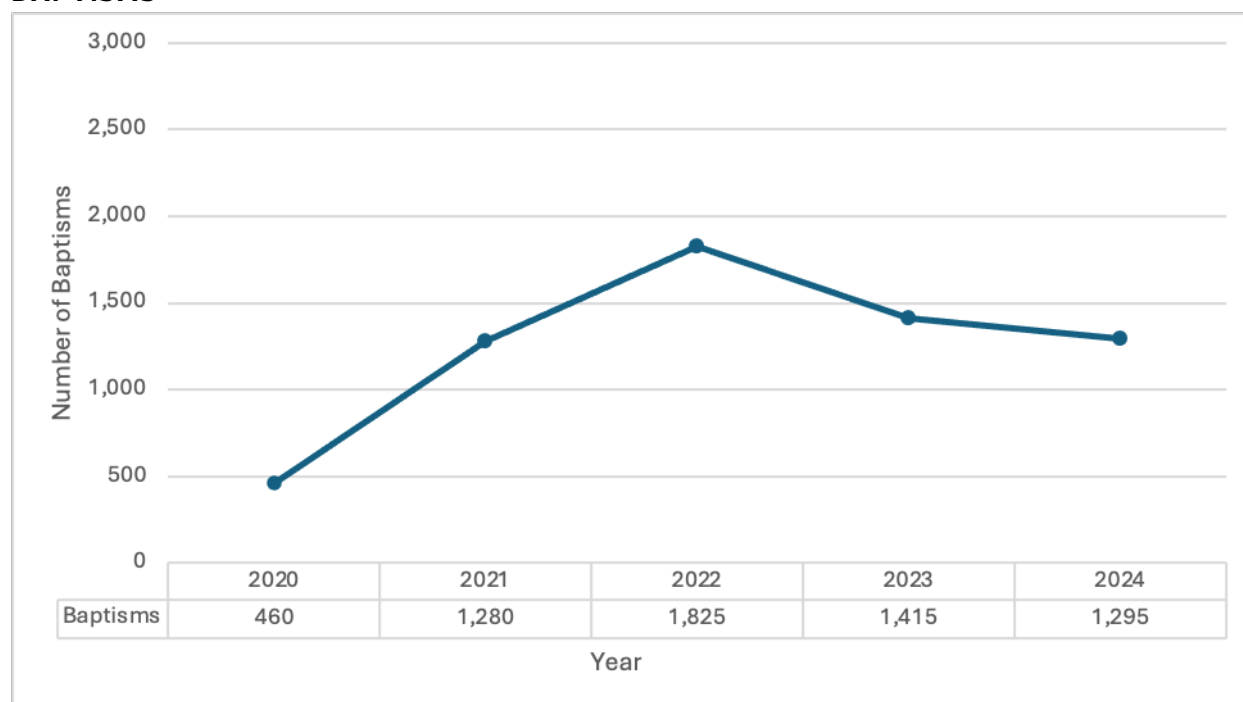


PROFESSIONS OF FAITH



ELDERS



BAPTISMS**Presbytery Data****REPORTING**

Presbytery	Membership as at 31st Dec 2023	Admissions	Removals	Membership as at 31st Dec 2024	Notices of Removal	Supplementary Roll	Response Rate
Edinburgh and West Lothian	22,200	375	1,680	21,600	55	2,185	94%
Lothian and Borders	17,800	145	1,320	16,400	25	1,845	82%
The South West	37,300	325	3,070	34,500	85	4,775	89%
Clyde	20,000	240	1,370	18,800	30	2,355	88%
Glasgow	22,900	370	1,565	21,800	55	2,015	87%
Forth Valley and Clydesdale	27,000	335	1,710	25,300	50	4,105	83%
Fife	15,000	190	855	14,300	25	1,935	81%
Perth	39,400	520	2,785	36,500	65	2,610	70%
North East and Northern Isles	38,400	190	2,025	36,700	80	3,035	76%
Clèir Eilean Ì	14,900	530	840	14,600	35	825	60%
Lewis	800	35	40	800	10	60	100%
England and the Channel Islands	1,400	15	45	1,400	5	110	67%
International Charges	2,200	10	5	2,200	<5	0	7%
Church of Scotland	259,300	3,295	17,305	245,000	520	25,865	82%

Table 2: Presbytery Reporting

MEMBERSHIP

Presbyteries	Number of Congregations as at 31st Dec 2024	Membership as at 31st Dec 2024	Admissions			Removals		
			Profession of Faith	By Certificate	Restoration or Resolution	By Death	By Certificate	Otherwise
Edinburgh and West Lothian	74	21,600	95	165	115	690	205	785
Lothian and Borders	77	16,400	20	60	65	550	70	700
The South West	126	34,500	75	165	85	1,150	255	1,665
Clyde	68	18,800	40	85	110	630	125	615
Glasgow	113	21,800	135	70	170	695	155	715
Forth Valley and Clydesdale	114	25,300	95	125	115	790	250	670
Fife	56	14,300	35	70	90	455	115	285
Perth	119	36,500	90	205	230	1,105	215	1,460
North East and Northern Isles	103	36,700	40	105	45	840	205	975
Clèir Eilean Ì	111	14,600	50	40	445	400	60	375
Lewis	11	800	15	15	5	15	10	15
England and the Channel Islands	6	1,400	10	5	<5	30	5	10
International Charges	14	2,200	0	0	10	<5	0	<5
Church of Scotland	992	245,000	695	1,110	1,490	7,355	1,675	8,270

Table 3: Presbytery Membership Figures

YOUNG PEOPLE AND ADULTS NOT ON THE COMMUNION ROLL

Data reported from all thirteen Presbyteries showed that as at 31 December 2024:

1. The number of children and young people aged 17 years and under who are involved in the life of the congregation was 27,340.
2. The number of adults whose names are not on the Communion Roll, but who are involved in the life of the congregations was 9,905.
3. The number of children who receive Holy Communion in terms of Act V, 2000, Section 15 was 2,110, 8% of the total.

Presbyteries	Membership as at 31st Dec 2024	Children 17 and under	Children receiving Communion	Adults not on Communion roll
Edinburgh and West Lothian	21,600	4,205	390	1,440
Lothian and Borders	16,400	1,245	175	760
The South West	34,500	3,340	265	785
Clyde	18,800	2,635	160	580
Glasgow	21,800	3,835	290	1,055
Forth Valley and Clydesdale	25,300	4,200	345	755
Fife	14,300	1,100	30	435
Perth	36,500	3,010	180	1,135
North East and Northern Isles	36,700	2,285	160	900
Clèir Eilean Ì	14,600	1,145	75	1,715
Lewis	800	265	10	280
England and the Channel Islands	1,400	60	30	60
International Charges	2,200	10	0	0
Church of Scotland	245,000	27,340	2,110	9,905

Table 4: Young People and Adherents

OCCASIONAL OFFICES**CHURCH OF SCOTLAND CONGREGATIONS:**

- baptised or gave thanks for 1,410 people, of whom 240 were adults, 3.1% of Scottish births in 2024.
- celebrated 985 marriages (3.7% of all Scottish weddings) and conducted 10,890 funerals (17.4% of those who died in Scotland).

Presbyteries	Baptisms			Weddings	Funerals
	All Baptisms	Adult baptisms	Birth Thanksgiving Services		
Edinburgh and West Lothian	170	40	10	115	1,010
Lothian and Borders	110	30	15	80	685
The South West	195	30	20	170	1,700
Clyde	115	15	15	70	990
Glasgow	180	40	35	80	1,100
Forth Valley and Clydesdale	140	30	5	60	1,310
Fife	80	15	5	75	565
Perth	145	15	10	130	1,410
North East and Northern Isles	60	10	<5	100	1,115
Clèir Eilean Ì	55	5	<5	75	870
Lewis	10	<5	<5	10	75
England and the Channel Islands	20	<5	0	15	55
International Charges	0	0	<5	<5	0
Church of Scotland	1,290	240	120	985	10,890

Table 5: Presbytery Baptisms, Weddings and Funerals Figures

LEADERSHIP

There were 19,180 elders reported in the Church of Scotland of whom 40.3% are male and 59.7% female. Elders account for 8% of the membership.

Presbyteries	Elders			Other leaders		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
Edinburgh and West Lothian	1,000	1,390	2,395	65	90	150
Lothian and Borders	490	770	1,260	50	75	125
The South West	1,125	1,775	2,900	90	165	255
Clyde	750	1,085	1,835	45	75	125
Glasgow	910	1,305	2,215	70	125	200
Forth Valley and Clydesdale	915	1,355	2,275	90	145	235
Fife	420	735	1,150	25	45	70
Perth	935	1,340	2,275	50	85	135
North East and Northern Isles	670	1,095	1,765	40	110	150
Clèir Eilean Ì	385	530	915	50	55	105
Lewis	60	<5	60	30	25	55
England and the Channel Islands	55	75	130	0	0	0
International Charges	<5	<5	<5	0	0	0
Church of Scotland	7,725	11,460	19,180	605	1,005	1,605

Table 6: Presbytery Leadership Figures

Public Worship in 2024

Congregational statistics continue to be gathered on alternative forms of worship. It should be noted that it is very difficult to obtain accurate estimates for online worshippers and to establish what level of engagement should be of equivalence to in-person attendance. The levels of engagement are however indicative of the wide reach of worship and the efforts of congregations across the country to allow all who wish to continue to worship within their local congregation to do so.

At least 68,160 people attended worship in person (28% of members), 23,145 online, and 2,475 in other offline ways, during a 'regular' week in 2024, that is not a major festival such as Easter or Christmas.

59% of congregations responding offered online worship, with 24% making alternative offline provisions such as phone-in services or worship sheets.

The figures for in-person and accessible worship attendance for Church of Scotland Presbyteries are given in Tables 7 and 8. For accessible worship attendance, there is a 69% response rate.

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Presbyteries	Membership as at 31st Dec 2024	Age ranges of worshippers						Number of Worshippers attending in person	% membership attending worship in person
		Under 16	16-24	25-44	45-64	65-84	85 and over		
Edinburgh and West Lothian	21,600	10%	4%	11%	23%	43%	9%	7,840	36%
Lothian and Borders	16,400	9%	3%	10%	21%	49%	9%	4,635	28%
The South West	34,500	8%	3%	7%	20%	53%	10%	7,740	22%
Clyde	18,800	10%	3%	10%	21%	46%	11%	5,440	29%
Glasgow	21,800	10%	4%	12%	23%	41%	9%	7,890	36%
Forth Valley and Clydesdale	25,300	9%	2%	8%	22%	51%	8%	7,240	29%
Fife	14,300	7%	2%	6%	17%	55%	12%	4,155	31%
Perth	36,500	7%	2%	8%	18%	54%	10%	9,260	20%
North East and Northern Isles	36,700	7%	3%	9%	22%	50%	10%	6,435	19%
Clèir Eilean Ì	14,600	10%	2%	8%	20%	50%	10%	5,775	37%
Lewis	800	15%	9%	19%	32%	23%	3%	780	94%
England and the Channel Islands	1,400	9%	4%	16%	27%	35%	9%	325	24%
International Charges	2,200	7%	4%	20%	29%	34%	5%	640	29%
Church of Scotland	245,000	8%	3%	9%	21%	49%	10%	68,160	28%

Table 7: Presbytery Physical Attendance Figures

Presbytery	Membership as at 31st Dec 2024	Able to offer online worship	Estimate of online worshippers	Able to offer alternative offline worship	Estimate of worshippers engaging with alternative offline worship	Response rate
Edinburgh and West Lothian	21,600	78%	2,680	33%	395	91%
Lothian and Borders	16,400	53%	900	21%	135	61%
The South West	34,500	46%	3,630	23%	310	77%
Clyde	18,800	67%	2,620	18%	30	66%
Glasgow	21,800	69%	2,680	21%	195	68%
Forth Valley and Clydesdale	25,300	61%	2,190	35%	430	70%
Fife	14,300	59%	1,070	16%	185	57%
Perth	36,500	53%	2,145	20%	220	82%
North East and Northern Isles	36,700	54%	1,315	21%	225	59%
Clèir Eilean Ì	14,600	51%	1,415	25%	325	57%
Lewis	800	70%	1,685	50%	25	91%
England and the Channel Islands	1,400	100%	290	25%	<5	67%
International Charges	2,200	100%	525	0%	0	21%
Church of Scotland	245,000	59%	23,145	24%	2,475	69%

Table 8: Presbytery Alternative Worship Figures, includes only those congregations who responded in 2024

NEW WORSHIPPING COMMUNITIES

New Worshipping Communities can take a multitude of forms, and must show evidence of all of the following characteristics:

Missional: the focus is on people beyond existing congregations;

Contextual: their format, culture and activities are shaped by the particular setting;

Consistency: a community is developing, with some of the same people participating regularly;

Ecclesial: it sees itself as part of, and is developing connections with, the wider Church;

Formational: participants are encouraged to grow in Christian faith and character

Additional questions were included in the Congregational Statistics to obtain information on those congregations and Presbyteries with a New Worshipping Community during 2024. We present in Table 9 some overall figures.

21% of all Church of Scotland congregations offered at least one New Worshipping Community, with a number of congregations offering more than one type during the year. A further 15% offered a group that met some, but not all, of the criteria for a New Worshipping Community.

The overall response rate was 69%, with responses being gathered from across all thirteen Presbyteries. Figures given in table 9 are based on the responses submitted, rather than the total number of congregations.

In total 255 full New Worshipping Communities, and 292 others were reported to be operating in congregations across the Church of Scotland. The majority of New Worshipping Communities were described as Messy Church (38%) and Cafe Church (23%). Other types of New Worshipping Communities reported included Youth Church, Older People's Church, Forest Church and Special Interest Groups.

Presbyteries	Number of Responding Congregations	% Responding Congregations with at least one NWC	Number of Full New Worshipping Communities within Congregations	Response Rate
Edinburgh and West Lothian	67	42%	52	91%
Lothian and Borders	47	40%	21	61%
The South West	97	28%	34	77%
Clyde	45	22%	9	66%
Glasgow	77	27%	24	68%
Forth Valley and Clydesdale	80	26%	25	70%
Fife	32	34%	13	57%
Perth	98	31%	32	82%
North East and Northern Isles	61	28%	15	59%
Clèir Eilean Ì	63	24%	18	57%
Lewis	10	20%	10	91%
England and Channel Islands	4	50%	2	67%
International Charges	3	33%	0	21%
Church of Scotland	684	30%	255	69%

Table 9: New Worshipping Communities, includes only those congregations who responded to this section in 2024

CONGREGATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Congregations are asked whether they engage in activities relating to:

- School Chaplaincy
- Youth Work
- Community Development
- International Links
- Environmental Issues
- Political Issues
- Health Issues
- Economic Inequality
- Food Poverty

Data were received from all thirteen Presbyteries, resulting in the following summary graph:

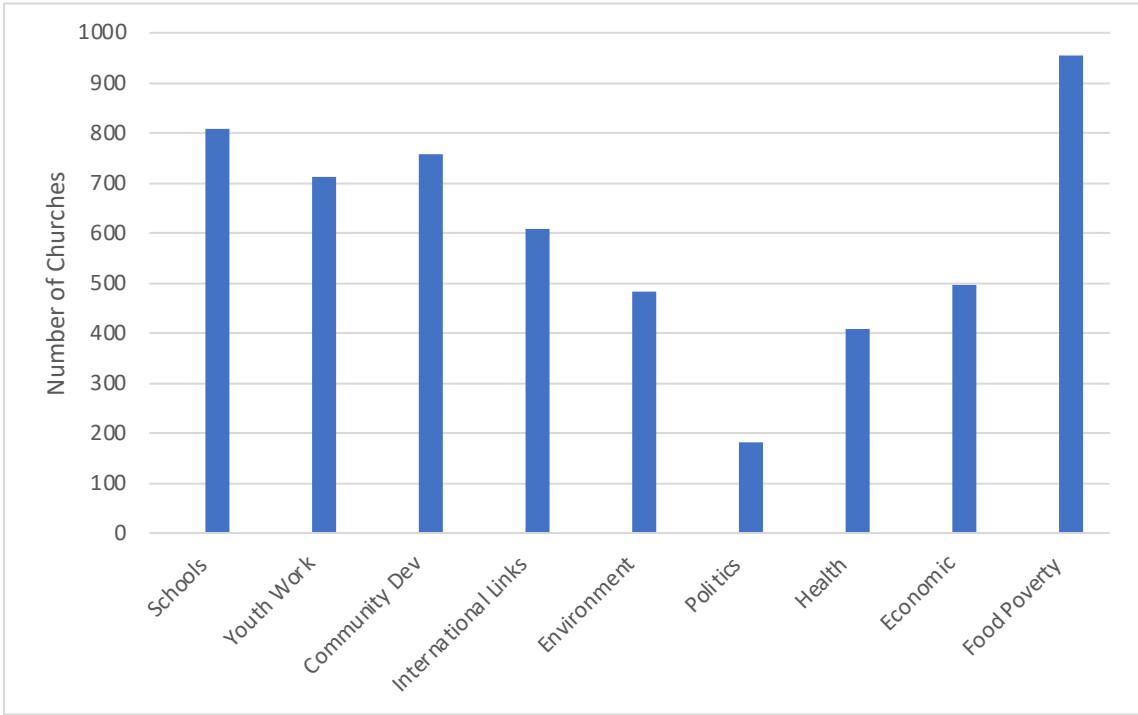


Figure 2: Congregational Activities

Alleviating food poverty (88%) and school chaplaincy (79%) were the most common activities in congregations of the Church of Scotland. Engagement with political issues was the least common with only 18% of congregations reporting this.

Presbyteries	School Chaplaincy	Youth Work	Community Development	International Links	Environmental Issues	Political Issues	Health Issues	Economic Inequality	Food Poverty
Edinburgh and West Lothian	72%	74%	73%	63%	45%	24%	44%	54%	87%
Lothian and Borders	75%	65%	74%	53%	48%	14%	36%	35%	86%
The South West	66%	49%	62%	48%	27%	12%	24%	35%	79%
Clyde	77%	74%	71%	55%	43%	20%	42%	51%	87%
Glasgow	76%	75%	79%	65%	50%	29%	50%	62%	88%
Forth Valley and Clydesdale	85%	81%	70%	56%	56%	21%	50%	54%	99%
Fife	70%	60%	82%	63%	51%	18%	45%	57%	97%
Perth	81%	78%	88%	58%	60%	16%	43%	54%	89%
North East and Northern Isles	92%	73%	73%	64%	41%	12%	23%	41%	95%
Clèir Eilean Ì	97%	66%	70%	53%	44%	9%	34%	42%	82%
Lewis	55%	91%	55%	64%	27%	9%	45%	55%	82%
England and the Channel Islands	50%	67%	67%	67%	67%	67%	67%	67%	67%
International Charges	0%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Church of Scotland	79%	70%	74%	58%	46%	18%	39%	48%	88%

Table 10: Congregational Activities

ECUMENICAL AUDIT REPORT

Questions to congregations about their ecumenical activity were included in the Congregational Statistics for 2024. Congregations in the Scottish Episcopal Church, the Methodist Church, and the United Reformed Church are also answering similar questions at this time so that a wider picture can be obtained.

645 congregations (65%) completed this part of the congregational statistics.

Congregations were asked which denominations were present in their parish:

Denomination	Number	Denomination	Number
Associated Free Church	5	Pentecostal	53
Baptist Church	179	Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)	18
Congregational Federation	27	Roman Catholic	330
Free Church of Scotland	111	Salvation Army	67
Independent Fellowship	119	Scottish Episcopal Church	221
Methodist Church	42	United Free Church	39
Minority Ethnic	33	United Reformed Church	36
Orthodox	12		

Churches of Scotland worked most frequently with Scottish Episcopal and Roman Catholic Churches.

42% of churches are members of **Churches Together** or Local Councils of Churches. Only 12% of these say that the group has an impact on their congregational life. 9% of congregations **shared their church buildings**, with 4% having a written agreement. 2% of congregations had a covenanted partnership with another congregation.

13 (2.0%) had **ecumenical involvement in a congregational appointment**, while 12 (1.8%) had been involved in a partner’s appointment.

21% of congregations **shared funeral cover** with ecumenical colleagues, and 15% shared holiday cover. 9% shared routine pastoral care and 6% weddings. Where cover was not used, 51% of congregations said that they used neighbouring Churches of Scotland, 43% had their own resources, and 7% said that there were no ecumenical partners from which to get help.

When asked what **prevents ecumenical working**, the most common reasons were:

- No one to work with,
- Existing workload,
- Being in vacancy, and
- Work required for Presbytery planning.

The reasons given by most people about the **positives of ecumenical working** are:

- Fellowship with other Christians,
- Diversity, and
- Practical assistance.

References

[i] CrossReach operate a different plan with a difference in contribution rates.

CHURCH OF SCOTLAND PENSION TRUSTEES MAY 2025**Proposed Deliverance****The General Assembly:**

1. Receive the Report.
2. Approve the re-appointment of Ray Martin as Employer Nominated Trustee of all three Schemes.

Report**1. BACKGROUND & STATISTICS**

As at 31 December 2024, The Church of Scotland Pension Scheme for Ministers and Overseas Missionaries (the “**Ministers Scheme**”), The Church of Scotland Pension Scheme for Staff (the “**Staff Scheme**”) and The Church of Scotland Pension Scheme for Ministries Development Staff (the “**MDS Scheme**”) (together referred to as the “**Schemes**”) collectively covered approximately 4,400 members. This Report is made by the Trustees of each of those Schemes (the “**Trustees**”). As at 31 December 2024 the Trustees held, in aggregate, total assets of approximately £330 million for the purposes of the Schemes.

1.1 Scheme funding

The preliminary results of the actuarial valuation as at 31 December 2024 are set out in the table below:

Scheme	Funding level at 31/12/2023	Funding level at 31/12/2024
Ministers Scheme, Main Pension Fund	114%	108%
Ministers Scheme, Widows & Orphans Fund	124%	118%
Ministers Scheme, Contributors Fund	125%	112%
Staff Scheme (CSC Section)	103%	Now fully insured
Staff Scheme (SCC Section)	104%	Now fully insured
MDS Scheme	102%	Now fully insured

The Trustees are pleased to advise that the Ministers Scheme/Sections remain well funded and the Schemes for Staff and MDS are now fully insured.

This means that all Schemes are self sufficient, with all the money needed to pay benefits and expenses already held within the Schemes. There is therefore no current requirement for funding from the Employing Agencies of the Church.

The rules of the Ministers Scheme have been amended to give the Trustees discretion to pay a dependant’s pension under the Widows & Orphans Fund to an adult child of a member, in circumstances where that child suffers from mental or physical impairment.

The Trustees record thanks to the Assembly Trustees, each Employing Agency and the Church Officers for their past and continued support for the Schemes.

1.2 Increases to Pensions in Payment**1.2.1 Statutory increases**

The statutory increases applied to pensions in payment across all of the Schemes, from 1 January 2025, were 1.7% in respect of benefits accrued between 6 April 1997 and 5 April 2005 and 1.7% in respect of benefits accrued after 5 April 2005.

The MDS Scheme had increases applied in respect of benefits accrued prior to 6 April 1997 and these were awarded at the statutory rate of 1.7%.

1.2.2 Discretionary increases in the Ministers Scheme

In line with the Rules of the Ministers Scheme, the Trustees have a unilateral power to award discretionary increases to benefits.

2025 Pension Increases

The Trustees of the Ministers Scheme decided to implement increases as follows

- Ministers Main Fund: 1.7% increase on pre-1997 pensionable service for all pensions in payment as at 1 January 2025
- Widows and Orphans Fund: 2.7% increase on benefits as at 1 January 2025 for all deferred and pensioner members’ benefits
- Contributors Fund: 2.7% increase on benefits as at 1 January 2025 for all deferred and pensioner members’ benefits.

1.3 Investment Strategy

Ministers Scheme

The investment strategy employed by the Trustees reflects the high funding level and the desire of the Trustees, with the support of the participating employers, to minimise the risk of any future deficit contributions. This means holding predominantly assets which match the nature and duration of the Scheme's liabilities. These matching assets are typically fixed income securities, gilts, and inflation linked gilts. The objective is to reduce unrewarded investment risk being taken due to the interest rate and inflation sensitivities of the assets not matching those of the liabilities.

Adopting a lower risk investment strategy means the volatility of the funding position of the Scheme is reduced, leading to improved security of member benefits and more certainty for the employer around the requirement for future contributions.

The Trustees have agreed to target a return from the Scheme's assets of 0.3% per annum above the liability matching assets. This is achieved by investing in a diversified manner in a variety of asset classes whilst maintaining a full hedge against interest rate and inflation movements.

The Trustees continue to consider the nature, disposition, marketability, security, and valuation of the Scheme's investments and their appropriateness relative to the reasons for holding each class of investment. More details about investments are given in the notes to the financial statements.

The investment managers have full discretion over voting rights for the stocks they hold in the pooled funds on behalf of the Schemes.

MDS and Staff Schemes

The investment strategy employed by the Trustees reflects the objectives of the Schemes. For the majority of the year, the Schemes were preparing for an insurer transaction to secure the liabilities. During this time, the Scheme assets were held predominantly in gilts, corporate bonds, and cash, with a small proportion in multi-asset funds. This strategy targeted a return from the Scheme's assets of 0.3% per annum above the liability matching assets, whilst still maintaining a full hedge against interest rate and inflation movements. This low-risk strategy meant that the strong funding position was protected by reducing unrewarded investment risk being taken due to the interest rate and inflation sensitivities of the assets not matching those of the liabilities.

In December 2024, the Schemes purchased a bulk annuity policy with the insurer "Just". Immediately prior to the transaction, the Schemes disinvested from both the corporate bond and multi-asset allocations.

At the time of the transaction, the Scheme held more assets than the price of the policy, which meant that there was a surplus. This surplus is receiving interest in a cash fund.

The Trustees continue to consider the nature, disposition, marketability, security, and valuation of the Scheme's investments.

Prior to the purchase of the bulk annuity policy, the investment managers had discretion over exercising voting rights for the equities held in the pooled fund multi-asset funds. Alliance Bernstein and Baillie Gifford did exercise these rights throughout the year - details on this can be found in the implementation statements which are available on the Pension Trustee Section of the Church website. As the Scheme no longer holds any funds with equities, there are no voting rights in respect of assets at the year end.

1.3.1 Environmental, Social & Governance (ESG)

Ministers Scheme

The Trustees invest through pooled investment funds and their policy is for these funds, and the underlying investment managers, to have the highest Environmental, Social and Governance ("ESG") rating available, as determined by the Trustees' Investment Adviser, other than in exceptional circumstances where the Trustees believed this would compromise the return they were seeking against the inherent risk of the asset class they were looking to invest in.

It is recognised that the majority of any ESG impact within the Scheme's investments arises in the growth assets, and that this is an area that a positive impact could be made. The Scheme continues to hold the Baillie Gifford Defensive Growth Fund and the Alliance Bernstein Sustainable All Market Portfolio. The Scheme's entire multi-asset allocation is considered to be sustainable and has achieved the highest ESG rating available (as assessed by the Scheme's Investment Advisers). The Scheme's Investment Adviser remains comfortable that these mandates align well with the Trustees' ESG views and will help fulfil the Scheme's ESG objectives. During the reporting period, the Trustees received no formal advice from their Investment Adviser on implementing further sustainable allocations.

MDS and Staff Schemes

Prior to purchasing the bulk annuity policy, the Schemes gained exposure to equity markets via investment in multiple pooled investment multi-asset funds. The Trustees' policy was for these funds, and the underlying investment managers, to have the highest Environmental,

Social and Governance (“ESG”) rating available, as determined by the Trustees’ Investment Adviser, other than in exceptional circumstances where the Trustees believed this would compromise the return they were seeking against the inherent risk of the asset class they were looking to invest in. Before the bulk annuity purchase, the vast majority of ESG impact within the Scheme’s investments arose in the multi-asset funds and it was recognised that this was an area that positive impacts could be made. Therefore, the Schemes continued to hold the Baillie Gifford Defensive Growth Fund and the Alliance Bernstein Sustainable All Market Portfolio, with both funds achieving the highest ESG rating available (as assessed by the Schemes’ Investment Advisers).

This consideration was also extended to the bulk annuity selection process, where the Trustees incorporated ESG credentials as part of the criteria in assessing each insurer.

1.3.2 Investment Markets

The Investment and Funding Sub-Group, in conjunction with the investment and actuarial advisers, monitor all Scheme investments closely. Given its low risk approach, the Trustees do not expect the assets of the Schemes to deviate significantly from the movement in the value of the liabilities. During 2024 the assets of the Schemes outperformed the liability value. The Schemes remain well funded at the year-end due to a combination of the liability hedging assets performing as designed and strong growth asset performance over the year. 2024 saw global geopolitical tensions, elections, and monetary policy dominate markets once again. Fortunately given the low-risk investment strategy of the Schemes, these challenges were all managed and the funding level was protected by the interest rate and inflation hedging strategy of the Schemes.

The Schemes’ 12% allocation to growth assets performed well over the year, with global equities once again rallying largely due to easing monetary policy and growth in US tech stocks. Geopolitical tensions and an uncertain inflation outlook hit markets in the fourth quarter but US stocks still managed to move higher. Significant concentration in US stocks, particularly in the technology sector, coupled with elevated valuations in US markets, means diversification becomes even important and can act as a prudent safeguard against future market volatility. In credit markets, investors sought to take advantage of the continued high-yield environment as global interest rates remained high, although this continued investment took credit spreads to historical lows, leading some investors to seek compelling investment opportunities in alternative areas.

The MDS and Staff Schemes have purchased a bulk annuity policy and as the surplus assets are held in a single cash fund, ongoing investment risk for these Schemes is negligible. The Statement of Investment Principles outlines how the residual risks are monitored and managed. The Trustees have adopted a Statement of Investment Principles (‘SIP’) as required by Section 35 of the Pensions Act 1995 and these principles have been applied consistently throughout the year. A copy of the SIP is available on the Pension Trustee Section of the Church website.

1.4 Changes in Trustees

1.4.1 Trustees

There have been no changes to the Trustees this year.

We are still running with one vacancy for a Member Nominated Trustee in the Ministers Scheme and we have agreed, with confirmation from our legal advisers, that we will keep that vacancy open.

The Chair of our Investment and Funding Sub Group, Ray Martin, reaches the end of his term of office in November 2025 and he has agreed to stay on for another term.

We are fortunate to be served by so many skilled and experienced people willing to serve in this way.

2. SCHEME ADMINISTRATION

2.1 The Trustees monitor the administration team’s performance by receiving quarterly reports on service achieved and welcoming feedback from Scheme members on the service they have received from the team.

3. GOVERNANCE

3.1 The Trustees continue their focus on training and development. Each new Trustee completes the Pensions Regulator’s Trustee Toolkit. On-going training this year included a day of training from the Schemes’ advisers prior to the November Trustee meeting and shorter topical sessions as part of quarterly meetings.

In the name of the Pension Trustees

STUART STEPHEN, Chair
LIN MACMILLAN, Vice-Chair

ECUMENICAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE MAY 2025

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Affirm the significance of the Council of Nicaea (325AD) for the Catholic and Universal Church (Section 1.1).
3. Affirm the universal dimension of the identity of the Church of Scotland as expressed in Article I of the *Articles Declaratory of the Church of Scotland* (Section 1.2).
4. Instruct the Ecumenical Relations Committee to bring an amended Local Ecumenical Partnerships Act (Act XI 2012) to the General Assembly of 2026 (Section 2.5.1-4).
5. Delegate powers to the Ecumenical Relations Committee to act on behalf of the General Assembly with respect to the amendment of the constitution of an existing Local Ecumenical Partnership, in conjunction with the relevant Presbytery, the General Trustees, and in consultation with the Law Department (Section 2.5.5-6).
6. Welcome the amendments to the *Code of Canons* of the Scottish Episcopal Church authorising ministers of Word and Sacrament of the Church of Scotland to celebrate Holy Communion within congregations of the Scottish Episcopal Church, subject to the provisions of Canon 15 (Section 3.1).
7. Note the contribution of the Ecumenical Relations Committee to the ongoing review of the international work of the Church of Scotland (Section 3.6).
8. Approve the delegates to Assemblies, Synods and Conferences of other Churches, and the appointment of representatives to Ecumenical Bodies (Appendix II).

Executive Summary

The Report of the Ecumenical Relations Committee in 2025 notes the Catholic and Universal significance of the 1700th Anniversary of the Council of Nicaea in 325AD and recalls the foundation of the work of the Committee in the *Articles Declaratory* with particular reference to Article VII, and to Article I where it is affirmed that the 'Church of Scotland is part of the Holy Catholic or Universal Church'.

The Report focuses on the work of the Committee in developing engagement with local congregations and Presbyteries, with reference to: Ecumenical Audit; Presbytery Mission Plan Ecumenical Guidance; Ecumenical Relations Task Group in the Presbytery of Fife; guidance with reference to the appointing of Locums from other traditions of the church; Local Ecumenical Partnerships Act (Act XI 2012); local partnership models and templates.

The Report welcomes the amendments made by the Scottish Episcopal Church to Canon 15 of the *Code of Canons* and notes the initial discussions with the United Reformed Church on the possibility of a Joint Declaration. Further, it provides an update on progress towards the establishing of a Scottish Christian Forum and notes the contribution of the Committee to the review of the international work of the Church of Scotland.

Report

1. A UNIVERSAL VISION

1.1 A Universal Vision: The Council of Nicaea

1.1.1 The creed of the Council of Nicaea held in 325AD affirms the faith of the Catholic and Universal Church in the following terms:

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things seen and unseen.

And in one Lord, Jesus Christ the Son of God, begotten of the Father, the only-begotten, that is, of the essence of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of the same being as the Father, through whom all things came to be, both the things in heaven and on earth, who for us humans and for our salvation came down and was made flesh, becoming human, who suffered and rose again on the third day, ascended into heaven, who is coming to judge the living and the dead.

And in the Holy Spirit.^[1]

1.1.2 The 1700th Anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, which we mark in 2025, provides an opportunity to reflect on a creed intended to be catholic in its intent and to offer a universal vision of the One God, and the One Lord 'who for us...and for our salvation...was made flesh' amongst us.

1.1.3 The significance of the Council of Nicaea for the Church Universal cannot be overstated and may be described in the following terms:

The convening of the Council of Nicaea in 325 was a defining moment for the Christian church. It was the first attempt to reach consensus in the church through an assembly

representing all of Christendom. It affirmed the Christian faith in the triune God, and marked the transition from Christians being a persecuted minority to becoming a church recognized by the Roman State. In Nicaea, now İznik in present-day Türkiye, Christians who only recently had been persecuted in the Roman Empire were able to gather under the patronage of the emperor to affirm their faith and witness to the society around them. Then, as now, the call to unity was heard within the context of a troubled, unequal, and divided world.^[iii]

1.1.4 The Roman Emperor Constantine embraced the Christian faith in 312AD and, following his assuming sole imperial rule in 324AD, his calling of the Council reflects, in part, his desire to address the issue of disunity amongst those who professed the faith across the Empire. This disunity was expressed in a range of matters relating to, *inter alia*, ministry, church order and the exercise of authority.^[iii] Woven through this, the theological developments pertaining to the understanding of the nature of the relationship between the Father and the Son, as agreed at the Council, may be said to have been foundational in shaping Christian belief for succeeding generations.

1.1.5 The interpretation of the Nicene understanding of the nature of the relationship between the Father and the Son has been shaped in distinctive ways within particular churches and cultures. In parallel with this, the reception of the creed of Nicaea, allied to the further development of it at the Council of Constantinople in 381AD, and the subsequent recognition of Nicaea as the first Ecumenical Council has, in turn, significantly impacted the history of those churches and cultures.

1.1.6 In relation to this, it may be said that the Council of Nicaea ‘marks a point at which Christianity goes from being a persecuted religion and a religion very much on the sidelines to actually having an official status’. This change of status from the 4th century onwards has profoundly impacted the history of the church thereafter. That is, as a consequence of this change of status, it may be said to have created the basis for the evolution and emergence of the relationship between Monarch and Church that we now term “Christendom”. This complex process of evolution and emergence took place over a number of centuries and, whilst there is no sense in which we can describe that process as a simple result of cause and effect, it may be further said that: ‘Without the Council of Nicaea we might not have had European Christendom and the whole of the European history would have been different.’^[iv]

1.1.7 Given the significance of the Council of Nicaea, the 1700th Anniversary will be marked by the holding of the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order, taking place from 24th-28th October 2025 at the Logos Papal Centre, St Bishoy Monastery at Wadi El Natrun, Alexandria, Egypt. The Conference takes place under the auspices of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches and is held in Egypt at the invitation of the Coptic Orthodox Church.^[v] As stated, this is the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order, with the first Faith and Order Conference being held in Lausanne in 1927 and thereafter in Edinburgh in 1937. The Faith and Order movement then became an integral part of the WCC in 1948, with subsequent conferences being held in Lund, Sweden in 1952; Montreal, Canada in 1963 and Santiago de Compostela, Spain in 1993.^[vi]

1.1.8 The theme of the World Conference on Faith and Order: “Where now for visible unity?” will address matters of Faith, Mission and Unity from the perspective of the shared call to visible unity. In respect of the call to unity, *Towards the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order* states:

An increasingly divided and polarized world needs the search for unity of Christians and churches. This unity is not uniformity. It implies the fundamental and profound conviction that humankind must stand together to seek each other’s best interests and to uphold the dignity of each human being and the whole creation...The anniversary of the Council of Nicaea is an encouragement to consider the significance of ecumenical councils as places where Christians can face together the issues on which they are separated.^[vii]

According to this understanding, the call to unity is set in the context of an ‘increasingly divided and polarized world’. At this particular time, we can hardly claim to be unaware of this context as we consider what it means to live out our response to the prayer of Jesus ‘that they may all be one...that the world may believe’. (John 17: 21)

1.1.9 In 2025, we seek to live out our faith in the place where we are and in so doing to bear witness in a ‘divided and polarized world’ to the One Lord ‘who for us...and for our salvation... was made flesh’ amongst us. As we do so, we live out the reality of what it is to be part of the Universal Church in the context of the Church of Scotland of which we are members, of the wider Church in Scotland of which we are a part, and in the locality in which we are called to bear witness so ‘that the world may believe’.

1.2 A Universal Vision: The Church of Scotland

1.2.1 The universal dimension of the Church of Scotland’s identity is expressed in Article I of the *Articles Declaratory of the Church of Scotland* where it is affirmed that the ‘Church of Scotland is part of the Holy Catholic or Universal Church’. The vision of the church expressed there may be understood as core to the identity of the Church.^[viii]

1.2.2 In this context, the role of the Ecumenical Relations Committee within the life of the Church of Scotland is to be understood in the light of the *Articles Declaratory* with particular reference to Article VII:

The Church of Scotland, believing it to be the will of Christ that His disciples should be all one in the Father and in Him, that the world may believe that the Father has sent Him, recognises the obligation to seek and promote union with other Churches in which it finds the Word to be purely preached, the sacraments administered according to Christ's ordinance, and discipline rightly exercised; and it has the right to unite with any such Church without loss of its identity on terms which this Church finds to be consistent with these Articles.

1.2.3 The *Articles Declaratory* themselves are contained in the Schedule to the Church of Scotland Act, 1921, and are described in the Act as follows:

[C]ertain articles declaratory of the constitution of the Church of Scotland in matters spiritual...prepared with the authority of the General Assembly of the Church, with a view to facilitate the union of other Churches with the Church of Scotland.^[ix]

1.2.4 It is of note that within the Church of Scotland Act, 1921, no other purpose is ascribed to the *Articles Declaratory* than that of facilitating union with other churches. That is, the principal purpose of the *Articles Declaratory* is the enabling of a unified Church in Scotland that might, in turn, live out its response to the prayer of Jesus 'that they may all be one... that the world may believe'. (John 17: 21) Once more, the stated purpose of the *Articles Declaratory* is the enabling of a unified church within Scotland for the purpose of serving the mission of God. No more and no less.

1.2.5 One of the earliest advocates within the Church of Scotland in this regard was the Very Rev Dr William Mair who first called for the consideration of a unified Scottish Presbyterian church in his Moderatorial Address in 1897, and in a series of papers published in the years following.^[x] In *The Scottish Churches: The Hope of Union*, Mair sets out his understanding of the case for a unified church and the initial progress made towards that from 1907 onwards.^[xi] The Overture received by the General Assembly in that year marked the beginning of that progress with the expressed desire to enter into conversation with the Free Church of Scotland and the United Free Church of Scotland.^[xii]

1.2.6 Mair begins by setting out the two principles that he judges ought to guide that conversation: the continuing national recognition of the place of the Church of Scotland in the life of the nation; and the affirmation of the spiritual freedom of the Church.^[xiii] However, Mair is clear that unification of the churches in Scotland will not be realised by an abstract consideration of matters of principle, important though they are. Rather, the hope of union is grounded in the practical consideration of the duplication of resources at a local level and of the proliferation of 'church buildings otherwise needless'.^[xiv]

1.2.7 All of this said, Mair is clear that, in the last analysis, it is the 'revealed desire and will' of our Lord expressed in the prayer of Jesus in John 17:21 that is the 'compelling power' that ought to drive the divided Church towards the consideration of unity. The union of the churches in Scotland is to be sought within the purpose of serving the mission of God. That it is the revealed desire and will of our Lord constitutes 'The Hope of Union'.^[xv]

1.2.8 The long journey that eventually led to the union of the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church of Scotland in 1929 began from considerations such as those outlined in the reflections of William Mair, and the Basis of Union eventually realised in 1929 retains that abiding note of hope.^[xvi]

1.2.9 As stated, within the Church of Scotland Act, 1921, no other purpose is ascribed to the *Articles Declaratory* than that of facilitating union with other churches and the realisation of a unified church for the nation. The *Articles Declaratory* themselves become the more intelligible when read in this light and in the light of the reflections of those who first embarked on the journey that led to the union of 1929. That journey was informed by the vision of a Church of Scotland that was a 'part of the Holy Catholic or Universal Church', and that, in common with the Church Universal, is called to bear witness to the One Lord 'who for us...and for our salvation...was made flesh' amongst us.

2. TRANSLATING THE VISION

2.1 Translating the Vision: Ecumenical Audit

2.1.1 In October 2024 representatives of the Committee met with representatives of the EMU Partnership between the Scottish Episcopal Church, Methodist Church and United Reformed Church.^[xviii] In the course of discussion, it was agreed that an Ecumenical Audit would be undertaken in the course of 2025, with each of the churches using an agreed set of questions which would be circulated within each church and thereafter analysed collectively. Within the Church of Scotland, it was agreed that this information would be ingathered in the context of the annual returns on congregational statistics. We are indebted to Rev Dr Fiona Tweedie

and Laura Bryce for their assistance in formulating the questions and their work in the initial analysis of the Church of Scotland returns.

2.1.2 The Church of Scotland had undertaken an Ecumenical Audit in 2013, and the template generated then has provided a basis for the Audit in 2025.^[xviii] The agreement to undertake this, in conjunction with the Scottish Episcopal Church, the Methodist Church in Scotland and the United Reformed Church (National Synod of Scotland), will strengthen the basis for analysis and give a wider perspective on current local partnerships, and potentially highlight the prospects for enabling future local cooperative partnerships. An initial report on this is found in the context of the report of the Assembly Trustees and a further report will be given to the General Assembly of 2026 by the Committee.

2.2 Translating the Vision: Presbytery Mission Plan Guidance

2.2.1 Under the report of the then Faith Nurture Forum, the General Assembly of 2023 approved the following deliverance, with reference to the ecumenical dimension of the development of the Presbytery Mission Plan in each Presbytery:

Reaffirm the ecumenical aspect of the secondary principles and existing guidance relating to the Presbytery Mission Plan Act (Act VIII 2021), and (a) instruct the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team to emphasise this in future guidance; and (b) instruct Presbyteries to consider this and articulate it more clearly in implementation and at the annual evaluation and development of Presbytery Mission Plans.

2.2.2 In December 2023, the Committee drafted a revised form of the Guidance and transmitted this for consideration to the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team. The Committee advises that the ecumenical dimension of the Guidance was updated on 27th September 2024 and would encourage Presbyteries to take account of this as appropriate in their consideration of the Presbytery Mission Plan process.^[xix] The Committee would welcome the opportunity to engage with Presbyteries in this regard and wrote to all Presbyteries with reference to this in January 2025.

2.3 Translating the Vision: Presbytery of Fife

2.3.1 In the course of the past year, the Committee has sought to proactively engage with Presbyteries on a range of issues and to establish good working relationships with Presbytery Clerks. So, for example, in the past year the Ecumenical Officer has met with the Clerk and representatives of the Presbytery of Fife to discuss establishing an Ecumenical Relations Task Group within the Presbytery. The terms of reference of the Task Group offer a framework for the enabling of cooperative working at a local level and signal intentionality at a presbytery level with respect to ecumenism. Further, the intention is to embed cooperative working between the presbytery and the national committee. (Appendix I)

2.4 Translating the Vision: Appointing Locums

2.4.1 In the course of the past year, the Ecumenical Officer has offered advice to a number of Presbytery Clerks seeking guidance on the appointment of ministers from other traditions to the position of Locum within a parish. The appointment of a Locum in a Vacancy is a matter for the Kirk Session, under the direction of the Interim Moderator, and is further enabled through the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team. Of particular importance, it should be noted that the Kirk Session is required to ensure that the potential Locum is a member of the Protection of Vulnerable Groups (PVG) Scheme prior to their appointment.^[xx]

2.4.2 It should also be noted that, whilst the appointment of a Locum is the responsibility of the Kirk Session, Presbytery's permission for such an appointment is required where the person being considered is not a minister holding an O, E or R registration in terms of the Registration of Ministries Act (Act II 2017), and this would, of course, apply when a prospective Locum is a minister within another tradition of the Church.^[xxi]

2.4.3 In seeking to offer advice in the latter case, the matter has been approached through seeking to answer the question as to whether, or not, the understanding of ordination in that particular tradition is 'in accordance with the standards of the Church of Scotland' for the purposes of fulfilling the requirements of the Sacraments Act (Act V 2000) regarding eligibility to celebrate the sacraments. In general terms, s.1 of that Act refers to ordained ministers of the Church of Scotland, ministers of other Presbyterian churches and ministers of churches where we share specific ecumenical agreements. In the case of ministers of other Presbyterian churches and ministers of churches where ecumenical agreements exist then the advice offered is that a minister from one of those churches is, in principle, eligible to be considered for appointment as a Locum.^[xxii]

2.4.4 Where a minister is from a church not covered by these provisions, the advice, as stated, seeks to answer the question as to, whether, or not, the understanding of ordination in that particular tradition is 'in accordance with the standards of the Church of Scotland'. That is, the advice would seek to offer the basis for establishing whether, in principle, a minister from a church not covered by the provisions above is, in principle, eligible to be considered for appointment as a Locum, in virtue of the fact that we recognise their ordination to be 'in accordance with the standards of the Church of Scotland'.

2.4.5 This initial stage might be regarded as the first part of a four-stage process, to be followed in the next stage by the establishing of whether, or not, a minister is in good standing within their church, and it would be for the Presbytery to be satisfied in this regard. The third stage is the decision of a Kirk Session to appoint a Locum, followed in the final stage by the decision of the Presbytery to approve such an appointment and the processing of this through the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team.

2.4.6 Within the context of a Locum appointment, it might be thought prudent for the Presbytery to affirm that the minister is covered by the Sacraments Act, s.2 and to authorise them to celebrate the sacraments, and to specify that the permission of Presbytery in this regard refers to a particular parish context. For the avoidance of doubt, it should be understood that the appointment as a Locum of a minister from outwith the Church of Scotland does not confer any status on that minister with respect to any subsequent application to be admitted as a minister of the Church of Scotland, and that the appointment does not confer membership of the Presbytery within whose bounds the appointment is made.^[xxiii]

2.5 Translating the Vision: Local Ecumenical Partnerships

2.5.1 In the course of the past year, the Ecumenical Officer has offered advice to a number of Presbytery Clerks with respect to existing Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEPs), there being within the Church of Scotland a small number of formal LEPs in which a congregation of the Church is in partnership with a church, or churches: Methodist, Scottish Episcopal Church, United Free Church or United Reformed Church.^[xxiv]

2.5.2 In each case, the congregation will have a bespoke constitution reflecting that particular partnership and one which recognises that the oversight of that congregation is exercised by the Presbytery within whose bounds it sits and also by the equivalent body within the other church or churches.

2.5.3 Within the current Acts of the General Assembly, the Local Ecumenical Partnerships Act (Act XI 2012) provides the basis for the creation of new LEPs, and may be said to offer a template for establishing a formal LEP as a discrete legal entity. That is, the Act is intended to provide the 'Model Constitution for a single Congregation Local Ecumenical Partnership'.^[xxv]

2.5.4 The Committee notes that the Act has been used on only one occasion to establish a new LEP and, following consideration, is of the view that the terms of the Act ought to be reviewed and an amended Act brought to the General Assembly of 2026.

2.5.5 Further, the Committee is conscious that existing LEPs may, from time to time, wish to amend and update their constitution and requests that it be delegated powers by the General Assembly to approve amendments to the constitutions of existing LEPs, in conjunction with the relevant Presbytery, the General Trustees, and in consultation with the Law Department.

2.5.6 The General Assembly has previously delegated powers to the Committee to act on its behalf with respect to the dissolution of LEPs, and a delegation with respect to the amendment of existing LEP constitutions would be congruent with that.

2.6 Translating the Vision: Enabling Local Partnerships

2.6.1 In the course of the past year, the Ecumenical Officer has received requests from a number of local congregations and Presbytery Clerks with respect to enabling the development of local partnerships with other churches within, and furth of, Scotland. The Committee is very willing to respond to such requests and to support Presbyteries in the development of such partnerships. It is recognised that any such partnerships will be framed, from the perspective of the Church of Scotland, within the context of the agreed Presbytery Mission Plan of each Presbytery. Equally, the Committee recognises that it cannot fully respond to each request without reference to the partner church and would encourage active dialogue between local partners and the bodies with responsibility for their oversight, such as Presbytery, Diocese, Circuit or Synod.

2.6.2 The requests referred to will often seek guidance as to models and templates that might be adopted and one resource that the Committee would highlight is that produced by Churches Together in England: *A Flexible Framework for Local Unity in Mission*.^[xxvi]

2.6.3 The *Framework* offers three forms of agreement to address a range of possible contexts for fruitful cooperative partnership: i) Working Agreements; ii) Partnership Agreements and iii) Constitutional Agreements. The Constitutional Agreements will be those most akin to the Local Ecumenical Partnerships Act (Act XI 2012) as discussed above.

2.6.4 In relation to i), *A Flexible Framework for Local Unity in Mission: A Brief Introduction* states:

A working agreement is a set of agreed guidelines which will suffice in some circumstances to enable churches to get on with a particular piece of work together in response to the missional opportunities they discern in their communities – this would apply to many local mission initiatives for example.

2.6.5 Further, in relation to ii) it states:

A partnership agreement covers more extensive sharing of resources – for example, allowing the sharing of a church building with another congregation or setting up a structure to enable the use of resources from a number of congregations to run a night shelter together, or to allow two separate denominations to consult on important decisions, to worship together and to share ministry. A partnership agreement would not attempt to establish an independent organisation, but would be intended to set out how existing denominational bodies would work in partnership together, including decision making, accountability and resourcing.^[xxvii]

2.6.6 Although there are no “copy and paste” solutions available, there are resources available that offer helpful templates which will be potentially applicable when tailored to the local context. The Committee undertakes to continue to engage with partner churches on the development of templates for enabling local cooperative partnerships in Scotland. Alongside this, the Committee is conscious that there are good examples of such partnerships which have developed as a result of local initiative. The Committee will seek to engage with such partnerships and to learn from their experience.

3. SHARING THE VISION

3.1 Sharing the Vision: Scottish Episcopal Church

3.1.1 In 2021, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland and the General Synod of the Scottish Episcopal Church entered into the *Saint Andrew Declaration*. In the *Declaration*, it is affirmed in a series of Acknowledgements that:

We acknowledge one another’s churches as churches belonging to the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of Jesus Christ and truly participating in the apostolic mission of the whole people of God.

We acknowledge that our churches share in the common confession of the Apostolic Faith.

We acknowledge that in our churches the Word of God is authentically preached, and the sacraments of Baptism and the Holy Communion are faithfully administered.

We acknowledge one another’s ordained ministries as possessing not only the inward call of the Spirit but also Christ’s commission through the Church and are given by God as instruments of grace for the mission and unity of the Church.^[xxviii]

These Acknowledgements may be said to constitute the bedrock of the *Declaration*, and as mutually affirming the integrity of our respective churches and our common confession of the Faith. Further, the *Declaration* affirms the integrity of the ministry of Word and Sacrament within our respective traditions.

3.1.2 Following on from the Acknowledgements, there is a series of Commitments in which we ‘commit ourselves to respond together to our common calling to proclaim the reign of God to all the people of Scotland by strengthening our partnership in ministry and mission’. In so doing, ‘we hope to enrich our continuing relationships locally, nationally and internationally with the churches of Scotland and throughout the world, that we may deepen our individual faith and serve God’s whole creation’. Thus, we commit:

To pray for and with one another; to work towards the fuller sharing of ministry...To encourage, affirm and support local expressions of our common calling within the life of the Church as it participates in the mission of God.^[xxix]

3.1.3 To be clear, the affirmation of the integrity of the ministry of Word and Sacrament within our respective traditions should not be interpreted as signifying the mutual recognition of those ministries across our respective traditions. This being so, there is a task to be undertaken in order to reach that point if so desired. In this regard, the General Assembly of 2023 agreed an amendment to the Sacraments Act (Act V 2000), with respect to the authorisation to celebrate the Sacraments and extending that authorisation to:

[A] person who has the status of an ordained minister in the Church of England, in virtue of the Columba Declaration (2016), or of the Scottish Episcopal Church, in virtue of the Saint Andrew Declaration (2021), and who has been duly authorised to administer the Sacraments by the Presbytery of the bounds, in which matter the Presbytery shall be the sole judge.^[xxx]

3.1.4 In parallel with this, the Scottish Episcopal Church began a two-year process to amend their Canon with respect to the authorisation to celebrate the Sacraments. That process was completed at the General Synod in June 2024, with the amending of Canon 15 of the *Code of Canons* and the extension of authorisation to lead worship and to preside at Holy Communion, subject to the provisions of the Canon, to ministers of the Church of Scotland, as well as to ministers of the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church.

3.1.5 The relevant sections of Canon 15 now read:

The Scottish Episcopal Church has...entered into Agreements [including the *Saint Andrew Declaration*], endorsed by General Synod, which permit limited exchange of ministries with a number of Churches...Clergy or authorised lay people of these Churches may give addresses, lead prayers and worship and assist in the distribution of Holy Communion in services in the Scottish Episcopal Church, as authorised by their own Church...Clergy may preside at a service of Holy Communion in a charge in the Scottish Episcopal Church subject to the [further] provisions...of this Canon and as authorised by their own Church.^[xxxii]

3.1.6 With respect to presiding 'at a service of Holy Communion in the Scottish Episcopal Church':

An ordained minister from one of the Churches [with which the Scottish Episcopal Church has entered into Agreement]...may be invited to preside at a Eucharist in a charge of the Scottish Episcopal Church according to a rite normally used in and within the tradition of their own Church. The service should be advertised as a service of Holy Communion in the tradition of the Church to which they are licensed.^[xxxii]

3.1.7 As stated above, this extension of authorisation should not be interpreted as signifying the mutual recognition of those ministries across our respective traditions. Rather, it should be welcomed and celebrated as a significant extension of the affirmation of the integrity of the ministry of Word and Sacrament within our respective traditions, and, in the providence of God, as a potential step towards that mutual recognition.

3.1.8 In expressing the working out of what it means for two churches within Scotland 'belonging to the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of Jesus Christ and truly participating in the apostolic mission of the whole people of God' to affirm the integrity of their respective ministries, we see both a sharing of a vision and a translation of that universal vision that informs the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of Jesus Christ.

3.2 Sharing the Vision: Church of England

3.2.1 The Columba Declaration Contact Group welcomes new Joint Chairs in the Rt Rev Rob Saner-Haigh on behalf of the Church of England and the Very Rev Colin Sinclair on behalf of the Church of Scotland. The Contact Group met in January 2025 with the Joint Chairs and looks forward to continuing to contribute to the ongoing working relationship between our two churches.

3.3 Sharing the Vision: United Reformed Church

3.3.1 In the course of the past year, representatives of the Church of Scotland and the United Reformed Church have had initial discussions on the possibility of a Joint Declaration between the two churches. In recent years, the Church of Scotland has entered into a series of bilateral Declarations with our partner churches: *Columba Declaration* with the Church of England (2016); *Saint Andrew Declaration* with the Scottish Episcopal Church (2021) and the *Saint Margaret Declaration* with the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Scotland (2022). These Declarations have given expression to that which we share in common with respect to our profession of the Apostolic faith, notwithstanding the different traditions from which our respective churches come.

3.3.2 With respect to the possibility of a Joint Declaration between the Church of Scotland and the United Reformed Church, we note that both churches come from a shared tradition and that both are members of the World Communion of Reformed Churches and the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe. That is, the continuing discussion between the churches will be shaped by that which we already hold in common within our shared tradition.

3.3.3 The Church of Scotland and the United Reformed Church already cooperate at a number of levels and we anticipate that a future Joint Declaration will, alongside an articulation of the Apostolic faith we hold in common, focus on the practical outworking of that faith within our shared tradition.

3.4 Sharing the Vision: Scottish Christian Forum

3.4.1 The General Assembly of 2024 approved the following with respect to the creation of the Scottish Church Leaders' Forum and the establishing of a national ecumenical body:

Approve the form of the Scottish Christian Forum, and the participation of representatives of the Church of Scotland within it, and recognise it as the National Ecumenical Body within Scotland.^[xxxiii]

3.4.2 As outlined in the Committee's Report to the General Assembly of 2024, the constituent elements of the Scottish Christian Forum: the Scottish Church Leaders' Forum and the Ecumenical Officers' Forum, are functioning and meeting on a regular basis, with the former meeting on a quarterly basis and the latter on circa eight occasions per annum.^[xxxiv]

3.4.3 The decision taken by the General Assembly is one that has been paralleled in other partner churches and it is anticipated that this process of decision-making will be completed in the course of the year with respect to the nine members of Action of Churches Together

in Scotland (ACTS). Once the process is complete, it is again anticipated that the Forum will evolve and develop more fully.

3.5 Sharing the Vision: Action of Churches Together in Scotland

3.5.1 With respect to ACTS, the Church of Scotland is entitled to appoint a Trustee and the Committee wishes to place on record its thanks to Miss Carole Hope for her service as a Trustee on behalf of the Church of Scotland, and as Convener of the ACTS Trustees, over the course of nearly six years. The Committee is indebted to her for her willingness to serve in this capacity. With effect from February of this year, the Committee nominated Rev Dr George Whyte to serve as a Trustee on behalf of the Church of Scotland.

3.6 Sharing the Vision: International Ecumenical Bodies

3.6.1 During the past year, the Committee has contributed to the review of the international work of the Church of Scotland with particular reference to our participation in a number of international ecumenical bodies. Historically, the Church of Scotland has been a significant contributor to the work of a number of ecumenical bodies, with this being, in principle, understood as consonant with Article VII of the *Articles Declaratory* and the universal vision expressed therein, and with the Ecumenical Policy of the Church of Scotland as agreed by the General Assembly of 2018.^[xxxv]

3.6.2 That said, if Article VII offers the stable reference point with respect to that universal vision, the Ecumenical Policy articulated in 2018 is inherently revisable and did itself replace the 2005 policy. Further, the practical outworking of any policy will be subject to considerations of changing context and the availability of resources. Equally, the practical outworking of that policy will require to be measured against such criteria as are deemed appropriate.^[xxxvi]

3.6.3 The role of the Church of Scotland in these various ecumenical bodies reflects, in part, the history of the Church in the 19th and 20th centuries, and of the modern ecumenical movement which traces its roots to the 1910 Edinburgh Missionary Conference, with the churches in Scotland playing a significant part in enabling the Conference. At this point in time the Church of Scotland is a member of four international ecumenical bodies.

3.6.4 *World Communion of Reformed Churches:* The first ecumenical body in which the Church of Scotland participated was the Alliance of Reformed Churches throughout the World holding the Presbyterian System. The Alliance was founded in London in 1875, with the constituent parts of the present Church of Scotland being among the founding members. Its first assembly was held in Edinburgh in 1877 and its office was in that city from 1913 until it moved to Geneva in 1948. In 1891, the International Congregational Council was constituted in London to unite the Congregational family of churches. In 1970, the Alliance of Reformed Churches throughout the World holding the Presbyterian System united with the International Congregational Council to become the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (Presbyterian and Congregational) (WARC). In 1946, the Reformed Ecumenical Synod, primarily representing churches from the Dutch Reformed tradition, was formed and was renamed the Reformed Ecumenical Council in 1988. In 2010, WARC and the Reformed Ecumenical Council united and formed the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC). WCRC is now a communion of over 200 Congregational, Presbyterian, Reformed, United, Uniting and Waldensian churches worldwide, with its offices now located in Hannover. In 2025, WCRC marks the 150th Anniversary of its founding body and now has member churches in over a hundred countries which have a total membership of over 100 million Christians.^[xxxvii] WCRC has geographically-based regional councils and the Church of Scotland is a member of WCRC Europe in this regard.^[xxxviii]

3.6.5 *World Council of Churches:* The WCC understands itself to be ‘a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the scriptures, and therefore seek to fulfil together their common calling...a community of churches on the way to visible unity in one faith and one eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and in common life in Christ. It seeks to advance towards this unity, as Jesus prayed for his followers, “so that the world may believe.” (John 17:21)’. It ‘brings together churches, denominations and church fellowships in more than 120 countries and territories throughout the world, representing over 580 million Christians and including most of the world’s Orthodox churches, scores of Anglican, Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist and Reformed churches, as well as many United and Independent churches’.^[xxxix] The historical roots of the WCC are found in student and lay movements of the 19th Century, the 1910 World Missionary Conference and an Encyclical from the Ecumenical Patriarchate in 1920, suggesting a fellowship of churches similar to the League of Nations.^[xl] Leaders representing more than 100 churches voted in 1937-38 to found a World Council of Churches, but its inauguration was delayed following the outbreak of the Second World War. It was formally set up in 1948, not least as a response by the churches to the trauma of the second global conflict of the century. It brought together two pre-existing streams of ecumenical life: *Faith and Order* and *Life and Work*, and subsequently further ecumenical streams of work on mission and education were incorporated. The WCC is the broadest ecumenical body of which the Church of Scotland is a member; it was, once more, a founding member of that body.

3.6.6 Conference of European Churches: CEC emerged in the context of a ‘fragmented and divided Europe’ in the years following the Second World War and the recognition of the potential role of the churches in Europe to contribute to the process of healing and reconciliation and that the ‘churches could become instruments for peace and understanding throughout a wounded continent’. The first assembly took place in Nyborg, Denmark in 1959. A significant contribution of CEC, in conjunction with the Catholic Conference of European Bishops (CCEE), was the publication of the *Charta Oecumenica* in 2001, with an updated version of the *Charta* being signed in April 2025.^[xii] At present, CEC has a membership of over 120 churches from the Anglican, Orthodox and Protestant traditions.^[xiii] In 2021, a comprehensive reconfiguration of the work of CEC was undertaken, with a resulting specific focus on: 1) Engagement with European Union institutions, and; 2) Theological dialogue. The work of the Churches Commission on Migrants in Europe, having been previously integrated into CEC, is now being detached from CEC. In 2022, the Ecumenical Relations Committee met with the then General Secretary of CEC in order to better understand this reconfiguration. In November 2023, representatives of the Church of Scotland were invited to convene a conversation amongst such British and Irish churches who would be willing to take part regarding the future direction of the work of CEC, and the extent to which this work aligned with the present concerns of the churches. A series of five meetings were held throughout 2024, and in the course of the year a number of British and Irish churches have withdrawn from membership of CEC.

3.6.7 Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe: CPCE was founded as the Leuenberg Church Fellowship on the basis of the Leuenberg Agreement signed in 1973, with the Church of Scotland being a founding signatory. CPCE encourages churches from differing confessional traditions to accord each other fellowship in Word and Sacrament and to seek cooperation in witness and service. The relationship includes mutual recognition of Ordination and the practice of reciprocal presidency at the Lord’s Supper. The membership of CPCE is composed of over ninety churches from within the Lutheran, Methodist, Reformed and United Church traditions, as well as pre-Reformation bodies such as the Church of the Czech Brethren and the Waldensian Church, drawn from over thirty countries, primarily in Europe.^[xiv] The General Assembly is the principal decision-making body of the CPCE, with Assemblies taking place on a six-year cycle. Between Assemblies, the work of the CPCE is taken forward by a Council elected at each Assembly, which is itself led by a three-member Presidium, coordinated by the office of the CPCE in Vienna. The General Assembly receives the work undertaken as a consequence of the previous Assembly and, in turn, determines the work to be undertaken during the forthcoming cycle. The annual membership fee is relatively modest and gives the Church of Scotland contact with a wide range of Lutheran and Reformed churches in Europe. The United Reformed Church represents the interests of the Church of Scotland on CPCE, with the intention of producing efficiencies within both churches whilst, at the same time, enhancing our mutual relationship.

3.6.8 The international ecumenical bodies of which we are a member allow us to participate in a broad fellowship of churches and in areas of work that are best undertaken in partnership with others. We are a European church and one shaped by European history and our membership of European ecumenical bodies gives expression to that. We are also members of a global church and there is an international dimension to our identity, especially given the role that the Church of Scotland played in former times. However, it need hardly be said that the world has changed significantly over the course of the life of these bodies and that the circumstances which led to their creation have altered significantly.

3.6.9 So, for example, in our engagement with the ecumenical bodies that are based in Europe, we recognise that the relative stability which obtained on continental Europe in recent generations has undergone considerable challenge, not least with respect to the war in Ukraine. Equally, the political relationship between the United Kingdom and the European Union has itself also undergone a profound change. Notwithstanding the latter point and ever-conscious of the former, we ought to resist any tendency to view events on continental Europe in a detached manner. The future shape of the continent will, in part, impact upon our society as a whole and the Church requires to be responsive to any consequent changes in the wider landscape that we inhabit. With respect to the global dimension, that which might be said with respect to Europe is multiplied many times over as regards the disappearance of a previous stability and the increasing range of concerns that now cross the horizon. As the world has changed, so also has the Church of Scotland changed and in ways that now limit the resources available to us. Through all of this, there are questions that remain to be answered and the task of doing so impinges upon us with urgency.

3.6.10 Amongst those questions, we might consider the following to be worthy of addressing at some future point: What is the vision of the Church of Scotland in relation to the universal dimension of its identity? How do we understand the ecumenical dimension of our identity and how is this best expressed in the international context? Does the local dimension of the Church of Scotland’s identity have primacy over the universal dimension, or does the universal permeate and inform the local? How do we acknowledge the changed context that we now

inhabit, and how do we allocate resources in the light of this? These questions would, of course, apply to all aspects of the Church of Scotland's international work and not only to the ecumenical dimension.

3.7 Sharing the Vision: International Ecumenical Engagement

3.7.1 In April 2024, the Committee supported the initiative of Justice and Peace Scotland and the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund (SCIAF), in conjunction with the Archdiocese of Glasgow, in inviting Fr Gabriel Romanelli, priest of the Holy Family Parish, Gaza to Glasgow.^[xliv] Fr Romanelli delivered a profoundly moving account of the situation faced by the Christian community in Gaza to an audience at the Royal Concert Hall, Glasgow, and the Very Rev Sally Foster-Fulton and the Most Rev William Nolan, Archbishop of Glasgow signed a joint statement calling for an end to the violence in Gaza.^[xlv]

3.7.2 In December 2024, the Very Rev Dr Shaw Paterson and the Ecumenical Officer were privileged to be invited to meet and to hear from His Beatitude Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem.^[xlv] Cardinal Pizzaballa highlighted the importance of an ecumenical response to the challenges that the churches face in the Middle East. As judged necessary, the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem have issued statements with respect to the situation in the Middle East, and this is made on behalf of the: Greek Orthodox; Armenian Orthodox; Latin Catholic; Franciscan (Custos of the Holy Land); Coptic Orthodox; Syrian Orthodox; Ethiopian Orthodox; Greek Catholic; Maronite; Episcopal (Anglican); Evangelical Lutheran; Syrian Catholic; and Armenian Catholic churches and communities.^[xlvii]

4. CONCLUSION

4.1.1 The 1700th Anniversary of the Council of Nicaea offers to us a universal vision of the One God, and the One Lord 'who for us...and for our salvation...was made flesh' amongst us, and we take the opportunity to affirm the significance of the Council of Nicaea (325AD) for the Catholic and Universal Church, and it is within this context that we further affirm the universal dimension of the identity of the Church of Scotland as expressed in Article I of the *Articles Declaratory of the Church of Scotland*.

4.1.2 In highlighting this universal vision and the Universal and Catholic dimension of our identity, we should not understand this to be an abstract expression of our faith. Rather, the universal vision permeates and informs the local and allows us to realise our identity, within the local, as part of the One, Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. There is no local church that is not enfolded within the universal and no universal that is not given expression in the local.

4.1.3 Therefore, the Report moves from the universal vision to the realisation of that vision in a range of practical applications, as outlined in sections 2 and 3 of the Report. It does so in order that that universal vision will be lived out in the local churches in which we are necessarily rooted.

4.1.4 The Church is always rooted in the local and we note that one of the bishops who attended the Council of Nicaea in 325AD was Asclepias of Gaza.^[xlviii] The universal vision was, is and continues to be rooted in the places where the people of God gather to worship and to bear witness to the One Lord 'who for us...and for our salvation...was made flesh' amongst us. As it was 1700 years ago, may it be so for us in our generation.

In the name of the Committee

ROSS BLACKMAN, Convener
PAULINE WEIBYE, Vice-Convener
JOHN L MCPAKE, Secretary

Appendix I

Presbytery of Fife

Ecumenical Relations Task Group

Remit

1. To focus upon local ecumenical working within Fife and to regularly update the Presbytery Clerk and Presbytery on local initiatives, national ecumenical developments and strategies.
2. To promote engagement with representatives of other denominations in local parishes recognising the work of Churches Together in many areas.
3. To promote ecumenical initiatives and services, including the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, Thy Kingdom Come, Try Praying and to work on ecumenical projects, as requested.
4. To work closely with the national Ecumenical Relations Committee to provide advice and encouragement to Presbyteries and congregations in developing and deepening relationships and co-operation with churches of other denominations in their contexts.

5. To encourage opportunities for developing closer working relationships with colleagues in different denominations recognising the agreements in recent years between the Church of Scotland and other denominations: The Saint Andrew Declaration with the Scottish Episcopal Church and the Saint Margaret Declaration with the Catholic Church in Scotland.
6. To facilitate and support conversations between Church of Scotland ministers, congregations and representatives of other denominations to explore deepening ecumenical relationships and the possibilities for shared witness in local parishes.

Appendix II

Delegates to other Churches

The following have been appointed as delegates to the Assemblies, Synods and Conferences of other Churches:

Presbyterian Church of Wales: Moderator

United Reformed Church: Moderator

Church of England: Rev Dr David Coulter

United Reformed Church (National Synod of Scotland): Rev Ross Blackman

Methodist Church in Scotland (Synod): Rev Dr John L McPake

Scottish Episcopal Church: Rev Ross Blackman

United Free Church of Scotland: Rev Dr John L McPake

Congregational Federation in Scotland: Mrs Pauline Weibye

Ecumenical Bodies

The following represent(-ed) the Church of Scotland on Assemblies and Committees of the ecumenical bodies of which the Church is a member:

World Council of Churches

Central Committee: Ms Miriam Weibye

Community of Protestant Churches in Europe

General Assembly (August 2024): Rev Ian Alexander; Rev Tara Curlewis

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland

Board of Trustees: Dr Gemma King

Action of Churches Together in Scotland

Members' Meeting:

Voting Member: Convener of the Ecumenical Relations Committee

Non-Voting Member: Vice Convener of the Ecumenical Relations Committee

Non-Voting Member: Ecumenical Officer

Non-Voting Member: Rev Eileen Miller

Trustee: Rev Dr George Whyte

Columba Declaration Contact Group

Co-Chair: Very Rev Colin Sinclair

Co-Secretary: Rev Dr John L McPake

Member: Mrs Pauline Weibye

Saint Andrew Declaration Contact Group

Co-Chair: Rev Ross Blackman

Co-Secretary: Rev Dr John L McPake

Rev Dr Nikki Macdonald, Rev Eileen Miller

Scottish Church Leaders' Forum

Moderator, Principal Clerk, Ecumenical Officer

Scottish Ecumenical Officers' Forum

Ecumenical Officer

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SAFEGUARDING COMMITTEE MAY 2025**Proposed Deliverance****The General Assembly:**

1. Receive the Report.
2. Instruct Presbyteries and Kirk Sessions to ensure that they comply with Church law on Safeguarding, (currently the Safeguarding Act (Act XVI 2018) (as amended) and if passed, the new Safeguarding Act) as well as associated Guidance, including the maintenance of accurate electronic Safeguarding Registers which are made available to the Safeguarding Service on request (Section 2.2).
3. Approve the decisions of the Safeguarding Committee in respect of the Covenant of Responsibilities Review (Sections 1, 4 & Appendix 2).
4. Instruct the Safeguarding Committee to work with the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team and other relevant departments to input into and develop safeguarding content for the training programme of Ministries (Sections 1, 4 & 5).
5. Instruct the Safeguarding Committee to work with the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team, Mission Partners and other appropriate departments and agencies to develop and establish international reciprocal Safeguarding procedures including protocols for informing overseas religious bodies and statutory authorities, where there are allegations against a person in position of trust and they relocate abroad (Sections 1, 4 & Appendix 2).
6. Acknowledge the changes to the Boys' Brigade leader recruitment process and affirm the ongoing relationship between the Boys Brigade and the Church of Scotland (Section 7.3).
7. Pass the Safeguarding Act as set out in Appendix 3 and repeal the existing Safeguarding Act (Act XVI 2018) (Sections 1, 3, 4, 5, 8 & Appendix 3).
8. Repeal the Child Protection Procedures Act (Act V 2005) (Section 8).

Report**1. INTRODUCTION**

1.1 "Where there is no guidance, a nation falls, but in an abundance of counsellors there is safety."

Proverbs 11.14

1.1.1. The Church of Scotland plays a major role in the lives of many children and adults through worship and the provision of services and activities in and around Church, and through Crossreach services. There is a general expectation to care for all and a duty to support those in society who most need care and protection. This means that the task of Safeguarding must be a key consideration for everyone to ensure that the Church is a safe environment for all. Safeguarding means taking measures to protect the health, wellbeing and human rights of individuals, especially children and adults at risk, which allows them to live their life free from abuse, harm and neglect. Harm or abuse can happen anywhere, including in church communities and can be instigated by anyone, even from within church communities, and in the clergy.

1.1.2. This year, the Safeguarding Committee has continued to work to fulfil our duty to provide processes and training that work toward providing a safe church for all and to meet the legal obligations required. Our Training Pathway continues to develop because it is only by increasing the awareness of Safeguarding and embedding its practice across the whole Church that we can hope to achieve this aim.

1.1.3. The Safeguarding Service also seeks to provide adequate risk management through the work of the Recruitment Sub-Committee and by way of Covenants of Responsibilities in managing those who pose a risk. We will do all we can to fulfil our duty in protecting the most vulnerable amongst us and in fostering a pastoral sense of safeguarding in the Church.

1.2 Safe Churches for All – The added value the Safeguarding Service provides

1.2.1 The risk of harm comes in many forms and from a range of different sources. The vision of a nasty person coming into our churches with ill intent is one we can all understand. It is more difficult to accept the threat from within and how our actions or inaction can introduce risk of harm. In October 2024, the findings of the Makin Review were published. This Independent Review was commissioned by the Church of England to consider their handling of the allegations of abuse perpetrated by John Smyth. In the commission of his abuse, John Smyth groomed individual children and young men, but he also 'groomed' groups of people and organisations to enable him to gain access to children and young men.

1.2.2. In 2024, ‘grooming’ was identified as a risk factor in many of the Safeguarding Concerns referred to the Safeguarding Service and in investigations into alleged misconduct within the Church. While these included incidents of individual grooming, the likes of which we are becoming more accustomed to through the media as well as our personal experiences and networks, it is the wider context of grooming that has raised most concern.

1.2.3 Faith-based organisations are, by their very nature, more susceptible to grooming than other groups. Forgiveness and acceptance are shared Christian values which are important to each one of us and, while our work and engagement with others should continue to embrace and extend such values, we must also have an awareness of how others may seek to exploit us through the values we hold dear. We must be awake to the possibility of being groomed. ‘For of Such is the Kingdom of Heaven – where all can safely live’ is the report exploring our theology of forgiveness which was approved by the General Assembly of 2009. It encourages us to recognise that ‘...offenders are adept at disguising motives, confusing and covering up by the clever use of religious language and behaviour, and thereby, masking their intentions.’

1.2.4 As we build and develop relationships we must also realise that these relationships will have an impact on our opinions and the decisions we make. This is human nature and not a fault in any way; however, we must acknowledge the impact relationships have on our capacity to be objective about a person. Objectivity is a critical factor in effective identification and management of risk. This was identified within the Makin Report. The report recommends Safeguarding be “...free from direct influence from Church leaders, to provide external oversight of safeguarding practice, and provide quality assurance within the Church.’ and the importance of the ‘...avoidance of confirmation bias in safeguarding practice.’ The General Assembly has endorsed the Safeguarding Service as the Church of Scotland’s conduit for overseeing Safeguarding Practice in the recognition that it is staffed by professionals with the independence, experience, knowledge and qualifications to make safe, objective and defensible decisions on Safeguarding matters.

1.2.5 The Makin report also recommends that the Church of England ‘Review the non-mandatory status of safeguarding guidance for Church officers with a view to making this mandatory for all Church officers, institutions and participants.’ There is existing provision within our Safeguarding Act which acknowledges the need for mandatory compliance with advice from the Safeguarding Service. Our 2025 deliverance seeks to strengthen this provision in recognition of the specialist skills and qualifications of the professionals providing advice.

1.3 The Makin Review: October 2024

1.3.1 As referred to in section 1.2.1, the Makin Review was an Independent Review commissioned by the Church of England to consider its handling of the allegations of abuse perpetrated by John Smyth. One of Makin’s recommendations was that the “learning and recommendations of his review be disseminated across Church constituencies, institutions and provinces.” While the recommendations made within this report are specifically for the Church of England, there are lessons to be learned by all. It is imperative that we do not think such depravity is not possible within our own Church and associated organisations; to do so would be a failure to recognise our own vulnerabilities.

1.3.2 In January 2025, the Safeguarding Committee participated in a learning session facilitated by our Safeguarding Training Officer. The Committee members were tasked with considering the recommendations within Makin’s report and exploring what this meant for the Church of Scotland. It was both a challenging and sobering task made all the more meaningful by the inclusion of examples from our own congregations which had taken place in 2024. These were not historical examples. While it was difficult to have our own vulnerabilities laid before us, it also provided reassurance that we have Safeguarding measures in place to minimise the risk of abuse.

1.3.3 As the Committee explored the recommendations, many areas of good practice within the Church of Scotland were identified; however, the specific examples discussed indicated that one of the biggest risks to the safety and protection of our vulnerable groups is a failure to engage with and implement the Safeguarding Guidance that is in place. For example, in 2024, the Safeguarding Service identified three situations where known registered sex offenders had been engaging with church activities without appropriate risk assessments. It is impossible to overestimate how vital partnership working with the Safeguarding Service and the National Sex Offender Policing Unit is to ensuring all the relevant information is shared and such offenders are supported to participate in the life and work of the Church in a way that is safe for all.

1.3.4 The Makin Review exercise has informed much of the development work the Safeguarding Committee plan to undertake throughout the next year; however, this is not something that can be restricted to the Safeguarding Committee. Creating and maintaining safe churches for all is the responsibility of every individual, Congregation, Presbytery and Standing Committee of the Church of Scotland. The Safeguarding Committee development priorities can only be achieved with the support of the wider Church.

1.3.5 The key recommendations of the Makin Review are available in appendix 1. The full report is available on the Church of England website.

2. GOVERNANCE AND REGULATORY COMPLIANCE

2.1 Disclosure (Scotland) Act 2020 & Disclosure Scotland Processes

2.1.1 The implementation of this legislation was significantly delayed due to the Global Pandemic; however, the implementation is now progressing which has necessitated some changes over the last year and preparation for further significant changes to come. From 01 April 2025, PVG Scheme Membership for those in a 'Regulated Role' will be mandatory. While this is something that we have always considered as mandatory, from April it will be a legal requirement. Changes coming into force on 01 April 2025 will be subject to a grace period of three months. This means that, from 01 July 2025, it will be a criminal offence for:

- individuals to carry out a regulated role if they are not a member of the PVG Scheme
- organisations to offer a regulated role to an individual who is not a member of the PVG Scheme.

2.1.2 The change from 'Regulated Work' to 'Regulated Role' means more individuals will require to have PVG Scheme membership. Where 'Regulated Work' referred to the type of work an individual carried out with a vulnerable group, the 'Regulated Role' includes those who do not work directly with vulnerable groups. This includes roles which place individuals in a position which allows them to exert power or influence over vulnerable groups or where a person is in a position of responsibility in an organisation where one of the organisation's main purposes is the provision of benefits to children and/or protected adults. The latter has raised concern across the third sector including our network of faith-based organisations as it implies that all Trustees will require PVG Scheme membership by July 2025. At the time of writing, we are in discussion with Disclosure Scotland about the application of the relevant legislative provisions to the eldership of the Church of Scotland and – if this is to be required of us – our capacity to have applications for all Trustees completed and subsequently Disclosure Scotland's capacity to process such applications by the end of the grace period.

2.1.3 From 01 April 2025, the organisation processing an individual's PVG Scheme membership will no longer be given access to the information automatically. To give individuals more control over their personal information, they must give permission for this information to be released after they have received their PVG Scheme membership certificate. This means that the Safeguarding Service will be reliant on applicants viewing their certificate online and clicking the authorisation link to allow this to be forwarded to us. It is inevitable that this will cause delays in the Safeguarding Clearance process and, as a result, delays in individuals being able to start in their role.

2.1.4 Disclosure Scotland is also implementing changes to their application procedures for all types of Disclosure Checks. The roll out of the Scottish Government's My Scot Account means that people can access multiple online public services via one account. Disclosure Scotland are now using this medium as their preferred method for applications. Applicants are required to create an account to complete their application. While there will still be the provision of a paper-based application, this will increase the time taken to process applications and the applicant will still be required to create an account to view their certificate when Disclosure Scotland have issued it. Again, we foresee this will create challenges for many of our applicants and Safeguarding Coordinators who may find digital processes and communication difficult.

2.2 Data Cleanse Project

2.2.1 Compliance with both the Disclosure (Scotland) Act 2020 and the Data Protection Act 2018 necessitated the Data Cleanse Project. It is imperative that we have accurate information of all individuals undertaking Regulated Work as referred to in Section 2.2.2, and that we do not unlawfully retain the personal and sensitive information of people who are not undertaking Regulated Work. The process designed to facilitate compliance within our congregations is the use of a Safeguarding Register, also referred to as Form SG07 or derivative thereof. Congregational Safeguarding Coordinators have the responsibility for adding the names of individuals to the Register when they receive notification of clearance from the Safeguarding Service and then, when an individual is no longer undertaking Regulated Work, they notify the Safeguarding Service using the appropriate form. The Safeguarding Service then make the necessary notification to Disclosure Scotland and amend our records accordingly.

2.2.2 The necessity for the Data Cleanse Project arose primarily from two aspects of practise. The first being the reluctance of congregations to remove volunteers undertaking Regulated Work from the Register 'just in case' they were needed or wanted to return to the role at a later date. The second reason was the failure of Disclosure Scotland to amend their records accordingly when notified of a leaver by the Safeguarding Service. Given that the Church of Scotland has over 40,000 workers (volunteers and paid/stipend staff) it was vital that we conduct the Project electronically and 'draft registers' were created for every congregation on a Microsoft Excel document using the list of names provided by Disclosure Scotland. The request was to enter yes or no in two columns to indicate if the individual was still undertaking Regulated Work within the congregation and then specifically if they were undertaking Regulated Work for the Boys' Brigade.

2.2.3 The Project was significantly challenging for all involved and the Safeguarding Service was extremely grateful for the efforts and commitment of those working on this Project. First notification of the Project started in June 2024 with the provision of information to enable Presbyteries and congregations to prepare for the project. A deadline for return of information of 06 December 2024 was set; however, only 50% of completed registers were returned by this date and information remained outstanding at the end of February 2025 despite several reminders that this information was a matter of legal compliance. This led to concerns regarding the capacity of Presbyteries and congregations to maintain accurate registers going forward and, as a result, increases the risk of non-compliance with legislation and regulatory requirements. The Safeguarding Committee propose deliverance six to reduce this risk.

2.3 Management information and reports

2.3.2 The Safeguarding Service has worked alongside the IT Department and the Analysis and Programme Development Team to review the management information available to us and ensure such information is fit for purpose. The IT Department has supported us to develop reports that allow us to identify trends which enable us to consider what support is required. For CrossReach this includes types of abuse, risk of misconduct or malpractice and regulatory compliance. This has already allowed the Safeguarding Service to make changes to the content of Safeguarding Training for Managers providing an increased focus on regulatory requirements as well as meaningful recording and reporting. It has also enabled us to identify what aspects of Safeguarding our Congregational Safeguarding Coordinators find most challenging which has informed our review of the Safeguarding Handbook with significant changes being made.

2.3.2 Our work with the Analysis and Programme Development Team has led to a review of the management and statistical information provided to the Governance Group. This has seen a move away from statistics which demonstrate workflow, such as numbers of PVG Scheme membership applications processed and numbers of Safeguarding Concern Referrals. From January 2025, while such workflow information is still collated, the data reported to the Governance Group has a focus on the impact of the work of the Safeguarding Service including the outcomes of cases considered by the Recruitment Sub-Committee. This information demonstrates how Safeguarding Clearance is considered, reviewed and amended, and, in turn, how those who may pose a risk of harm have been prevented from entering our Regulated Workforce or have been removed from the Regulated Workforce following concerns being reported to the Safeguarding Service. Our aim is to ensure the data we provide is meaningful and is able to be used to inform strategic decisions.

3. RISK MANAGEMENT

3.1 The core function of the Safeguarding Committee, through the Safeguarding Service, is to identify risks of harm and minimise such risks through robust policies, procedure and processes. Throughout the past year the Safeguarding Service has worked alongside others to review, develop and improve all aspects of risk management practise.

3.2 The Recruitment Sub-Committee (RSC)

3.2.1 The RSC has responsibility for risk assessing applicants for Regulated Roles where vetting and/or conviction information is returned through their relevant Criminal Records Checks. In 2024, the RSC remit was reviewed and, as a result, referrals to the RSC are now limited to the more complex or high-risk cases. This is in recognition of the professional capacity of the Safeguarding Advisory Panel (SAP). The SAP consists of the Safeguarding Service Manager, the Safeguarding Committee Convenor and a representative from the Law Department. The SAP undertakes a risk assessment for all applicants where there is vetting and/or conviction information. If this initial risk assessment indicates that the vetting and/or conviction information is not relevant to the role applied for, Safeguarding Clearance will be approved without escalation to the RSC. Frequent examples are Road Traffic Offences in situations where driving is not part of the role or offences related to a person's experience of addiction when that person is applying to be a peer mentor within CrossReach drug rehabilitation services.

3.2.2 If the SAP members do not unanimously agree to approve a person for a Regulated Role, a referral is made to the RSC for further risk assessment and a determination of the applicant's suitability for a Regulated Role.

3.2.3 The RSC also has responsibility for considering the ongoing suitability of anyone in a Regulated Role in respect of whom Safeguarding Concerns have been raised. This includes but is not limited to Ministers, Elders, Office Bearers and Congregational Volunteers. In these situations, the Safeguarding Service carry out an investigation and present the findings to the RSC for their consideration and determination of the individual's ongoing suitability for a Regulated Role. Should the RSC decide that the person is no longer suitable for a Regulated Role, and the person being considered is an employee or someone in a Ministries role, this can have an impact on their employment or registration status. This is an area of work we have noted an increase in over 2024. Our new management information collation process will enable detailed analysis of this for 2025.

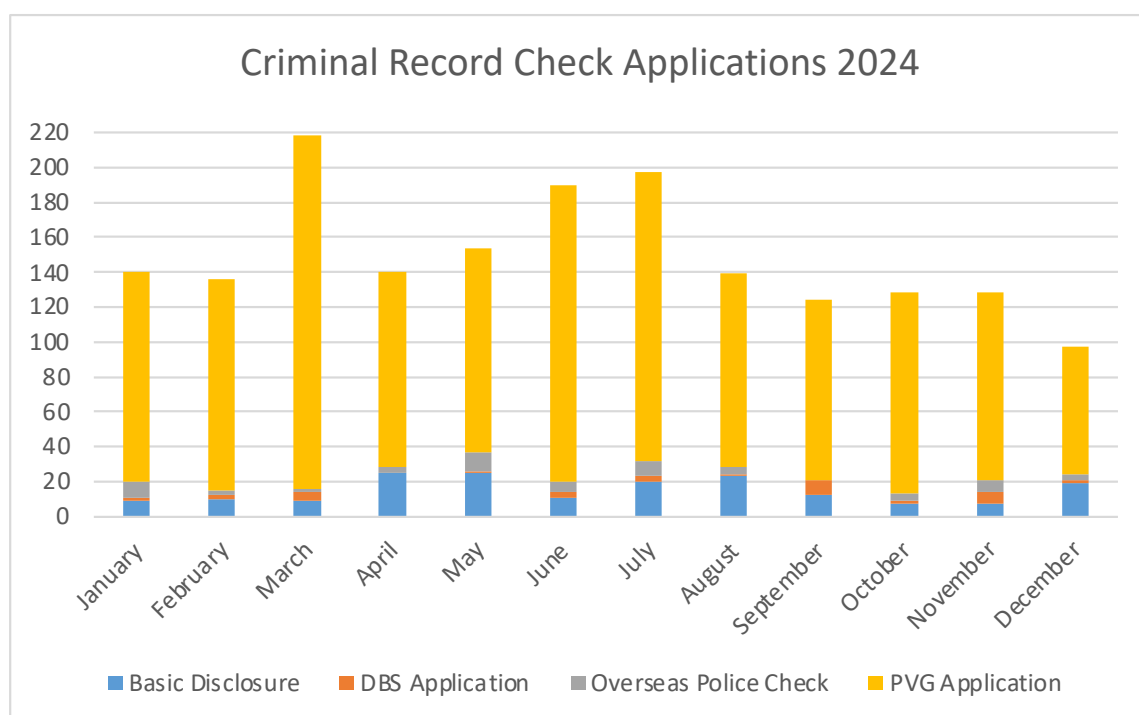
3.3 The International Presbytery

3.3.1 Managing Safeguarding within the context of the International Presbytery presents many challenges including practical as well as cultural. In 2024, the Safeguarding Service have worked alongside the International Presbytery to overcome these challenges. While there is still much work to be done, agreed processes and procedures are now in place as well as a programme of Safeguarding Training. This is reducing the risk of harm to vulnerable groups and promoting safe churches for all.

3.4 Criminal Record Checks

3.4.1 Criminal Record Checks are the first line in managing risk. The Safeguarding Advisor and the Safeguarding Admin Team provide advice and practical support to our congregations in Scotland and around the world regarding what checks are required for Regulated Roles and, as well as being experts in the requirements of the Disclosure (Scotland) Act 2020, they have a sound knowledge of the specific requirements for obtaining the alternative checks in other countries in which the Church of Scotland have a presence. Figure 1 provides information regarding the types and quantity of Criminal Record Checks being processed via the Safeguarding Service. In 2024, a total of 1791 checks were processed.

Figure1.



3.5 The Safeguarding Handbook Review

3.5.1 While Criminal Record Checks are the first line in managing risk, the most important aspect of preventing harm and abuse is our day to day practice. It is vital that we recognise the limitations of Criminal Record Checks and must be aware that such checks will only tell us about people who have already been convicted or come to the attention of Statutory Agencies. The most important and effective way to prevent abuse and reduce risk of harm is through good Safeguarding Practice.

3.5.2 The Safeguarding Handbook has been an important tool. It provides a plethora of comprehensive information on all aspects of Safeguarding from hall lets to summer kids' clubs; from lunch clubs to residential trips. However, in aiming to provide comprehensive information, it has resulted in a Handbook that is not the easiest to navigate and find the information you need in a hurry. In recognition of this the Safeguarding Service has worked with Safeguarding Coordinators, Trainers and Presbytery Contacts to create a collection of 'Quick Guides to...' which are published in the same area on the Safeguarding Service Webpages. These guides are in their infancy and there will be a process of ongoing review to ensure they are useful and remain fit for purpose.

3.5.3 In addition, all Safeguarding Forms have been reviewed to remove any unnecessary tasks and bureaucracy. These will also be subject to ongoing review to ensure they remain fit for purpose and support compliance with regulatory requirements.

4. MANAGING THOSE WHO POSE RISK (MTWPR)

4.1 For of Such is the Kingdom of Heaven – Creating a Church Where All May Safely Live (KOH)

4.1.1 KOH is the joint report of the Mission and Discipleship Council and the Safeguarding Committees and was the outcome of a 'Forgiveness and Proportionality Working Group'. It was presented to the General Assembly of 2009. It provides clear principles, guidance and direction with regard to the theology of forgiveness as well as the practical measures required to both protect children and vulnerable adults, and to support reformation and responsibility in those who pose a risk.

4.1.2 At the General Assembly of 2024, the following deliverance was approved: (7) Note the ongoing work to review and update the 2009 report 'For of Such is the Kingdom of Heaven'. During the initial phase of considering the scope of the review, it was evident that the KOH report continued to be valid, relevant and fit for purpose. As a result, the Safeguarding Committee took the decision not to carry out any further review or amend the report in any way.

4.2 Covenant of Responsibilities

4.2.1 However, it was necessary to review the processes and procedures the report underpins; The Covenant of Responsibilities Guidance. This Guidance had undergone an extended period of implementation, and a review was necessary to consider its effectiveness and to provide an opportunity for amendment should the need be identified. The review has been informed by a range of stakeholders including representatives of:

- Congregational Safeguarding Panels
- The original Forgiveness and Proportionality Working Group
- The National Sex Offender Policing Unit / National ViSOR Unit
- Criminal Justice Social Work Services
- The Safeguarding Service
- Those subjected to a Covenant of Responsibilities

4.2.2 The need for this review was identified in a number of ways. Firstly, the ongoing joint working between the Safeguarding Service and Police Scotland specialist services including: The National Sex Offender Policing Unit/ National ViSOR Unit, Specialist Crime Division (Nationally coordinated Adult & Child Protection & National Risk and Concern) and Public Protection (Local arrangements under the responsibility of Local Police Commanders).

4.2.3 In addition, a proposed deliverance from the floor of the General Assembly 2024 was passed, and invited the Safeguarding Service to 'consider its processes as they relate to people who have been found not guilty in criminal proceedings but who are subject to safeguarding procedures.'

4.2.4 Lastly, when a Covenant is agreed, it must be regularly reviewed to ensure it remains fit for purpose. In carrying out such reviews, the Safeguarding Service has identified challenges relating to those who have impaired cognitive capacity or are considered to be adults with incapacity. To agree to the conditions within a Covenant, the individual must fully understand both the risks they pose to others and the conditions under which their participation has been agreed. Therefore, consideration must be given to how we manage Covenants for such subjects ethically while ensuring safe churches for all.

4.2.5 in summary, the scope of the review was:

- (i) The lifelong nature of Covenants (Section 4.1 of Appendix 2)
- (ii) The Risks associated with those accused of sexual offences who are found not guilty in criminal courts (Section 4.2 of Appendix 2)
- (iii) Managing risks and Covenants for those with impaired capacity (Section 4.3 of Appendix 2)

4.2.6 The outcomes of the review are as follows:

- (i) The duration of a Covenant of Responsibilities will be based on the individual Subject and will reflect the Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) management and risk assessment process. More information about MAPPA is provided in appendix 2, section 4.1.10. When the Sexual Offences Notification Requirements end, the Covenant would also end, unless the 'exit from MAPPA assessment' or other available information indicates otherwise. Section 4.2 provides further information and recommendations regarding Covenants for those not subject to statutory notification. This would ensure we recognise that "...the issues of forgiveness and proportionality, and the nature of grace must be discussed in relation to the facts of dealing with sex offenders, with their particular characteristics and problems." (KOH P.7 section 6.3). MAPPA provides the reassurance that those who pose a risk will be appropriately and safely managed within our community.

EXCEPTION

Where the commission of an offence has occurred within a church setting, through any church activity or can be perceived to have a link to a church, the subject's Covenant will be lifelong. As the offender has used their connection to the Church as a means to access

those they have abused, we must recognise this presents an additional risk in this specific context and must ensure supervision and monitoring within the Church remains in place. The methods and level of monitoring will continue to be proportionately reviewed and applied.

- (ii) The Risks associated with those accused of sexual offences who are found not guilty in criminal courts have been demonstrated in a number of Significant Case Reviews including those mentioned in sections 4.2.15 & 4.2.16 of Appendix 2. It is pertinent to reflect on the recent Makin Review into the Church of England's handling of the abuse perpetrated by John Smyth which refers to abusers 'hidden in plain sight'. The decision of the Safeguarding Committee was that no change be made to this aspect of Safeguarding Service practice and to confirm the need for a Covenant of Responsibilities is dependent on, and informed by risk assessments using validated information.

While not part of the deliverance informing this aspect of the review, it is also important to acknowledge that the same principles apply to cases that have not proceeded to trial. In such cases, the judgement regarding the evidence has been made at an earlier stage where Police Scotland or the Procurator Fiscal has decided the evidence does not meet the criminal standard of proof which is 'beyond a reasonable doubt'. Where authorities continue to have concerns and believe the subject is responsible for harm or abuse 'on the balance of probabilities', appropriate and proportionate Safeguarding Measures will be put in place.

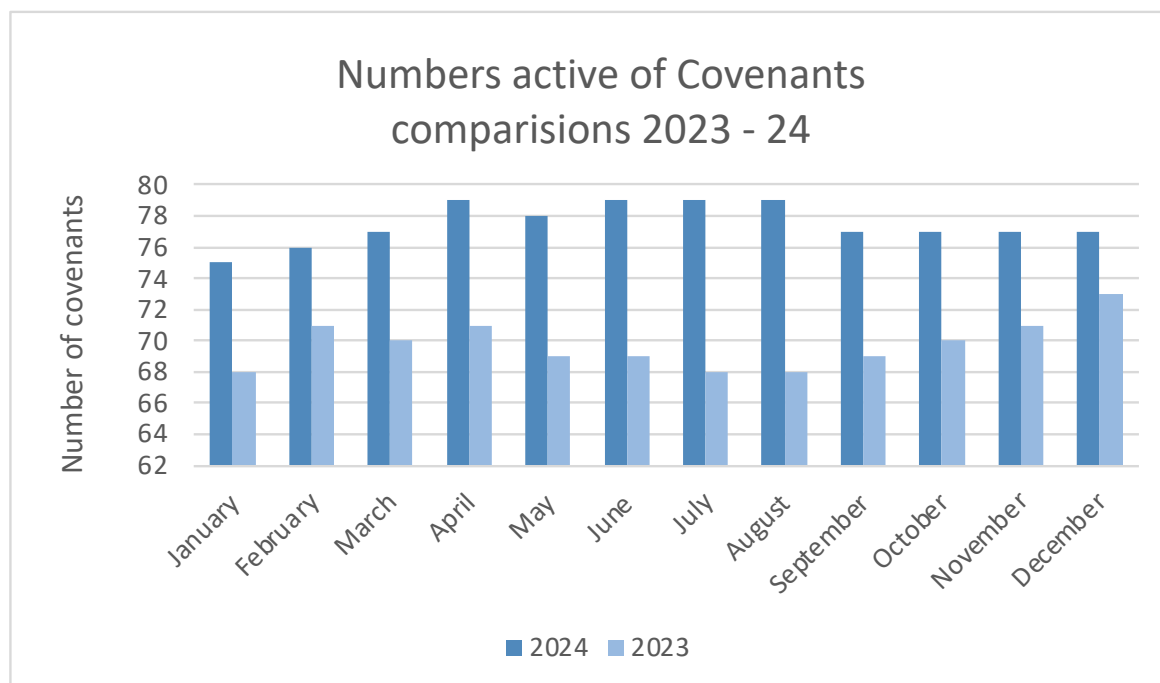
- (iii) It was agreed that it is not ethical, or morally just, to invite or insist that those with impaired cognition sign a Covenant with conditions they don't understand or have no capacity to independently fulfil. As a result of the review, such Subjects have a more limited Covenant which is agreed with their main carer and/or the agency responsible for managing the Subject's care plan.

4.2.7 The full Report and Reviewed Guidance are at Appendix 2 and provides the details of the review and the rationale behind the decisions taken.

4.3 Live Covenant of Responsibilities

4.3.1 The number of Covenants of Responsibilities has increased from an average of 69.75 in 2023 to 77.5 in 2024 as is illustrated in figure 2.

Figure 2



5. SAFEGUARDING TRAINING

5.1 Role and Responsibility of the Safeguarding Service

5.1.1 The role and responsibilities of the Safeguarding Service have been steadily increasing since the roll out of the Safeguarding Training Pathway. This is having a significant impact on the workload of the Service as well as the invaluable and much appreciated Volunteer Trainers. As well as creating and updating courses to ensure they remain fit for purpose and reflect regulatory requirements, the Safeguarding Service also facilitate many Safeguarding Courses. In addition, the Service also has responsibility for undertaking Quality Assurance and mentoring both to increase confidence and to improve practice when this need is identified through evaluation. Figure 3 demonstrates the range of training within the framework that the Safeguarding Service manage and oversee the implementation of.

Figure 3.

		Course	Content creation and updating	Facilitate by	Mentoring & Quality Assurance
Church of Scotland		Introduction	Safeguarding Officers	Volunteer Trainers	Safeguarding Training Officer
		Safeguarding Officers	Safeguarding Officers	Volunteer Trainers	Safeguarding Training Officer
		Safeguarding Officers	Safeguarding Officers	Volunteer Trainers	Safeguarding Training Officer
		Safeguarding Officers	Safeguarding Officers	Safeguarding Officer x 2	Safeguarding Service Manager
		Safeguarding Officers	Safeguarding Officers	Safeguarding Officer	Safeguarding Service Manager
CrossReach	Children	Introductory	*Approving CR course	CrossReach Staff	Safeguarding Training Officer
		Managers	Safeguarding Service	Safeguarding Officer & Safeguarding Service Manager	Safeguarding Service Manager
	Adults & Older people	Introductory	Safeguarding Service	CrossReach Staff	Safeguarding Training Officer
		Managers	Safeguarding Service	Safeguarding Officer & Safeguarding Service Manager	Safeguarding Service Manager

5.2 The Safeguarding Training Pathway

5.2.1 The Pathway consists of four Training Courses which are facilitated as described in figure 3. While all four courses are continually available, in 2024 there has been an additional focus on the Trustee and Leadership Training Courses. After some initial reluctance, many Kirk Sessions are now on their way towards compliance with the Training Pathway. To reduce the number of courses a Trustee has to attend if they are also involved in Safeguarding Panels, amendments were made to both the Advanced and Trustee course content to enable them to be interchangeable rather than the requirement to attend both.

5.2.2 The Leadership Course Rollout over 2024 has gathered pace and, so far, 110 participants have completed the training. The course has received very positive feedback, with participants praising its content, delivery, and engagement methods. Since the pilot session, the training has evolved based on participant feedback, leading to improvements in content delivery, session timings, and a more structured use of pre-course materials to enhance engagement.

5.2.3 Around 50% of participants have completed and returned evaluations. 97% of these evaluations have rated the training as Excellent, Very Good or Good. Some examples of feedback include:

"By far the most helpful training I have ever experienced. The pre-reading and workbook were very helpful."

"The training was exceptional—very well delivered and informative. I feel much more empowered to help others."

"Having received training from the very first pilot session, I can say this was far superior to previous ones."

"I really appreciated the different modes of gathering feedback. The balance between content and discussion was perfect."

"Thank you very much – I feel inspired!"

"This course goes a long way in preparing us for safeguarding challenges in the Church."

5.2.4 The Safeguarding Committee is proposing a change to the name of the 'Leadership' course. This course is aimed at Ministers and those in Ministries Roles; however, we are very aware that these are not the only individuals who provide 'leadership' within the Church, for example, Trustees are a vital part of our leadership. Therefore, this training will become the 'Ministries' Training Course.

5.2.5 The Safeguarding Service continues to promote upcoming training dates through Presbyteries. While the course is primarily delivered online, every effort will be made to accommodate requests for in-person sessions where possible.

5.2.6 The tables below provide details of engagement with Safeguarding Training in 2024. Figure 4 illustrates the number of people and figure 5, the number of courses facilitated. Please note, these numbers represent the information which is submitted to the Safeguarding Service by those facilitating training. As we are dependant upon the submission of registers, we are aware that more training may have taken place in some Presbyteries that has not be notified and, therefore, not represented within the figures below.

Figure 4

Presbytery	Number of Attendees per Presbytery				Total
	Introductory	Advanced	Trustee	Leadership	
Clyde	122	0	138	0	260
Edinburgh and West Lothian	227	52	230	0	509
England and Channel Islands	3	12	9	0	24
Fife	120	66	317	0	503
Forth Valley and Clydesdale	256	39	15	0	310
Glasgow	364	45	401	0	810
Lothian and Borders	138	51	168	18	375
North East and Northern Isles	272	85	412	20	789
Perth	61	0	179	0	240
Lewis	0	1	0	0	1
The South West	310	69	706	0	1085
Cleir Eilean I	160	51	154	20	385
International	36	14	25	0	75
	2069	485	2754	58	5366

Figure 5.

Presbytery	Number of Courses Available per Presbytery				Total
	Introductory	Advanced	Trustee	Leadership	
Clyde	4	0	3	0	7
Edinburgh and West Lothian	11	3	14	0	28
England and Channel Islands	2	3	1	0	6
Fife	7	5	19	0	31
Forth Valley and Clydesdale	12	3	1	0	16
Glasgow	20	2	14	0	36
Lothian and Borders	8	3	5	1	17
North East and Northern Isles	12	8	13	1	34
Perth	4	0	8	0	12
Lewis	0	1	0	0	1
The South West	20	8	29	0	57
Cleir Eilean I	19	4	10	1	34
International	9	4	7	0	20
	128	44	124	3	299

6. SAFEGUARDING CONCERNS

6.1 The Safeguarding Service is responsible for managing all Safeguarding Concerns reported to it by providing the appropriate advice and instruction, or by directly managing the concerns including reporting to Police Scotland, Social Work Services and any other relevant Statutory Agency. Referrals can be in relation to child protection, adult protection or public protection (managing those who may pose a risk to others).

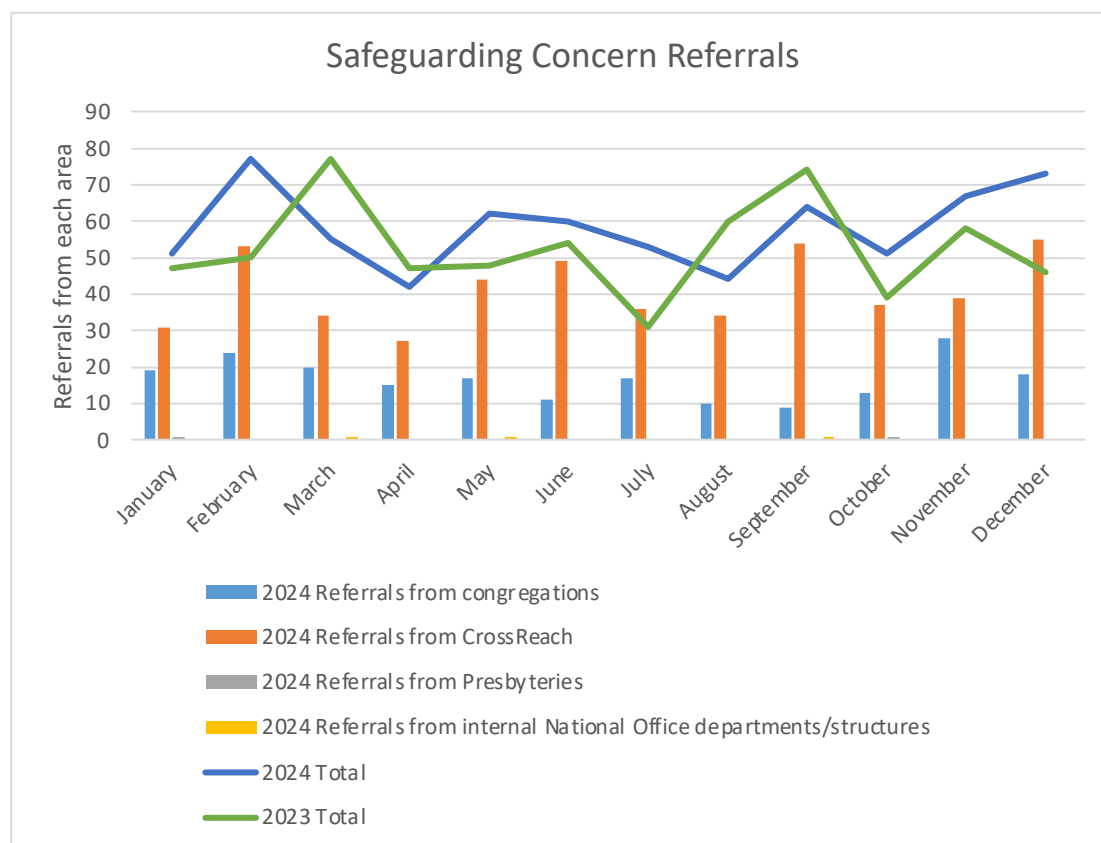
6.2 The main sources of referrals are Congregations, Presbyteries, CrossReach and the National Office. The number of concerns increased slightly from 631 in 2023 to 699 in 2024. Figure 6 provides a breakdown of the sources of referrals. The nature of Safeguarding Concerns being referred by congregations does not demonstrate any pattern of abuse.

6.3 As detailed in section 2.3.2, the Safeguarding Service has been working with the IT Department to develop our Management Information Reports. This has taken a considerable

time and involved many alterations to our system; however, we are now confident that we have the appropriate data fields to enable meaningful data collection and analysis of referrals from CrossReach Services. This will enable detailed reports to be created for each service and provide a quality assurance function in identifying areas of good practice as well as areas for development. In 2024, we have been able to develop a picture of where CrossReach Services are in relation to the development and implementation of good Safeguarding Practice.

6.4 What has been most stark are the number of Services that did not make a Safeguarding Referral throughout the year. Given the nature of most CrossReach Services, this is not the picture expected. The Safeguarding Service Manager is now attending CrossReach Head of Children's Services meetings to facilitate discussion around the Management Information Reports and provide advice and guidance based on these. The Safeguarding Service Manager is currently working with CrossReach's Quality Compliance Business Partner to promote the same engagement with CrossReach Adult & Older People's Head of Service meetings.

Figure 6



7. PROFESSIONAL ADVISORY SERVICE

7.1 Congregations and Presbyteries

7.1.1 The Safeguarding Service's Professional Advisory Service is primarily facilitated by the Safeguarding Advisor and the Safeguarding Administration Team. It supports Congregations and Presbyteries to achieve compliance with both legislative and regulatory requirements. Enquiries are wide and varied; however, understandably, many are related to Criminal Record Checks, particularly PVG Scheme Membership application. With the ongoing progression towards a digital society and the related changes to Disclosure Scotland's processes, many Congregational Safeguarding Coordinators find these processes challenging and have required a significant level of support. Other topics of enquiries include but are not limited to Policy and Procedure, Safeguarding Forms and Practice issues.

7.2 National Offices

7.2.1 The Safeguarding Advisory Service also supports the National Offices. As with congregations and Presbyteries, this often includes support with identifying the appropriate Criminal Records Checks required for Central Services Staff as well as Ministries Candidates and World Mission Partners.

7.3 Service Level Agreements

7.3.1 The Safeguarding Service continue to work with other partners in supporting their compliance with legislation and regulatory compliance. These arrangements are in place with CrossReach, The United Reformed Church and the Girls' Brigade.

7.3.2 As reported to the General Assembly of 2024, the Safeguarding Service has ended its Service Level Agreement with the Boys' Brigade. They now take full responsibility for all Safer Recruitment processes and training arrangements. However, it is important to recognise that the end of this SLA is not a separation. The SLA defined the responsibilities of both the Boys' Brigade and the Safeguarding Service in relation to recruitment and training of those applying for Regulated Roles. The Church of Scotland and the Boys' Brigade will continue to work together in recognition of our shared Christian values and the desire to ensure children and young people have access to positive experiences to support their personal and spiritual development.

7.3.3 The Service Level Agreement has now been replaced by a Joint Safeguarding Agreement which redefines the roles and responsibilities in relation to any Safeguarding Concerns that arise in Boys' Brigade Companies affiliated with a Church of Scotland Congregation. This will promote ongoing good Safeguarding Practice and details the responsibilities of Kirk Sessions in the recruitment of Boys' Brigade leaders. As Kirk Session no longer have the reassurance of the Safeguarding Service providing confirmation of PVG Scheme membership, they will now 'affirm the nomination' of a new leader 'subject to successful completion of the safer recruitment process' which will be carried out by the Boys' Brigade. The Joint Safeguarding Arrangement provides detailed guidance on all associated processes.

8. THE SAFEGUARDING ACT 2018

8.1 The Committee has taken the opportunity, in the light of the Makin Report and the changes in practice and terminology introduced by the Disclosure (Scotland) Act 2020 which necessitate changes to the Safeguarding Act (Act XVI 2018), to carry out a review of that Act to determine whether further changes were required. That resulted in a relatively large number of changes, such that rather than amend the existing Act it has been thought better to repeal the existing Act and replace it with a new Act, which is up to date with current terminology and legislation. This is found in Appendix 3.

8.2 The relevant changes are outlined below:

- In accordance with civil legislation, the term "Regulated Work" has been replaced with "Regulated Role" throughout the Act.
- In accordance with civil legislation, the changes to levels and names of Disclosure Scotland products have been changed throughout the Act.
- In accordance with the addition of new civil legislation, the term "Safeguarding Legislation" has been used as a collective term to represent all civil legislation related to "Regulated Role" throughout the Act.
- Definitions in section 1 have been amended to reflect changes in civil and Church legislation.
- In accordance with civil legislation and the recommendations of the Makin Report, changes have been made to include the risk assessment of those currently in post for whom misconduct related Safeguarding Concerns are reported.
- In accordance with the remit of the Recruitment Sub-Committee, the name has been changed to the "Recruitment and Risk Sub-Committee" throughout the Act. This reflects the consideration of risk posed when Safeguarding Concerns are raised regarding a person already in post.
- In accordance with civil legislation, Interim Moderators will only require PVG Scheme membership when the duties reflect those expected of a 'Regulated Role'.
- The Makin Report underpins amendments to sections 5 and 16 to clearly separate and define the management of risk posed by misconduct of workers (section 5) and the duty of worker to report Safeguarding Concerns and associated risks (section 16).
- The Makin Report underpins the amendment to include those in ministries' roles within the list of workers for whom it is mandatory to report Safeguarding Concerns.
- Amendments have been made to provide clarity for the reporting of Safeguarding Concerns across the range of contexts within the Church setting.
- Amendments have been made to provide clarity of responsibility for the Safeguarding Training Pathway and associated compliance requirements.
- All sections and sub-section have been renumbered accordingly throughout the Act.

8.3 The Committee has taken the opportunity to include the requirements of the Child Protection Procedures Act (Act V 2005) within the new Safeguarding Act as detailed in section 8.1 and 8.2 and, as a result, repeal this Act.

In the name of the Safeguarding Committee

SONIA BLAKESLEY, Convener
JUDY WILSON, Vice Convener
DEBORAH BLACKHURST, Service Manager

Appendix 1

The Makin Review

Thematic concerns

The key thematic concerns identified by the Review comprise the following:

- Abuse of positions of trust and power;
- Excessive deference to senior clergy in leadership roles;
- That the abuse was hidden in plain sight;
- Failures of leadership and accountability for safeguarding;
- Problematic and/or insufficiently examined funding sources;
- The cover-up, over an extended period;
- Radicalisation and the exploitation of theologies by Smyth;
- The abuse in Zimbabwe and South Africa.

Key recommendations

The Report Review stated that lessons must be learned from the organisational and institutional failings detailed in this Review. The Review makes 27 specific recommendations, reflecting the lessons to be learned from these terrible events. In particular, those recommendations include:

- taking active measures to understand and incorporate into revised safeguarding policies the risks associated with the abuses of power by those in positions of trust, and prioritising safeguarding considerations in decision-making;
- establishing international reciprocal safeguarding procedures with other Anglican communion institutions and leaders where allegations are made against a person in a position of trust who relocates overseas;
- ensuring independent oversight of the implementation of safeguarding measures, including the development of a wholly independent body, free from direct influence by senior Church officers, to guide the development of the Church's safeguarding procedures;
- placing safeguarding measures at the centre of every Church officer's professional responsibilities, including conducting a Church-wide review of existing policies and procedures and embodying the principle of 'never not clergy' in Codes of Conduct;
- reviewing donations and funding arrangements and providing additional guidance regarding overseas missionary work, including an express and enhanced requirement of due diligence irrespective of amount;
- seeking independent assurance as to the robustness of the Church's whistleblowing procedures, to ensure that credible suspicions of abuse and the risks of a cover up can be reported and investigated;
- considering the application, now, of mandatory reporting within future Church safeguarding policy and procedure prior to its possible introduction as a national requirement;
- ensuring that the commissioning of a full independent review of John Smyth's activities in Zimbabwe and South Africa is considered by the Church.

Appendix 2

Managing Those Who Pose a Risk – Review of Proportionality.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Covenant of Responsibilities (Covenant) process was developed to support the inclusion in worship and, where appropriate, the wider life of a congregation, of those considered to pose a risk of serious harm to the public because they have been convicted of sexual or some violent offences, or their conduct is deemed to pose a risk but may not have met the evidential threshold for criminal processes. For the purpose of this report the term ‘offender’ will be used’. This process is underpinned by [‘For of such is the Kingdom of Heaven – Creating A Church Where All May Safely Live’](#) which was presented to the General Assembly in 2009 herein referred to as KOH. This joint report of the Mission and Discipleship Council and the Safeguarding Committees, was the outcome of a ‘Forgiveness and Proportionality Working Group’. It provides clear principles, guidance and direction with regard to the theology of forgiveness as well as the practical measures required to both protect children and vulnerable adults, and to support reformation and responsibility in those who pose a risk.
- 1.2 The report refers to two main aims for the purpose of a Covenant (KOH P.3)
 - I. To assure all victims of abuse and the families of children and adults at risk in a congregation that precautions and safeguards are in place to ensure ‘safety from harm’ in church premises, and
 - II. To provide structure and support for the sex offender (and some other offenders as per MAPPA expansion in 2016) who seeks to make his/her life characterised by forgiveness and the opportunity to participate in the worshipping life of a congregation.

N.B. References to statistical information and available reports were correct at the time of writing (November 2024)

2. Identified points of review

- 2.1 The need to review the Covenant process was identified in a number of ways. Firstly, the ongoing joint working between the Safeguarding Service and Police Scotland specialist services including: The National Sex Offender Policing Unit/ National ViSOR Unit, Specialist Crime Division (Nationally coordinated Adult & Child Protection & National Risk and Concern) and Public Protection (Local arrangements under the responsibility of Local Police Commanders). This work identified the need to review proportionality in respect of the lifetime nature of Covenants.
- 2.2 In addition, a proposed deliverance from the floor of the General Assembly 2024 was passed, and invited the Safeguarding Service to ‘consider its processes as they relate to people who have been found not guilty in criminal proceedings but who are subject to safeguarding procedures.’ (Church of Scotland, [Collated Deliverance](#) P. 13.10).
- 2.3 Lastly, when a Covenant is agreed, it must be regularly reviewed to ensure it remains fit for purpose. In carrying out such reviews, the Safeguarding Service has identified challenges relating to those who have impaired cognitive capacity or are consider to be adults with incapacity. To agree to the conditions within a Covenant, the individual must fully understand both the risks they pose to others and the conditions under which their participation has been agreed. Therefore, consideration must be given to how we manage Covenants for such subjects ethically while ensuring safe churches for all.
- 2.4 In summary, the review needs to consider:
 - (i) The lifelong nature of Covenants
 - (ii) The risks associated with those accused of sexual offences who are found not guilty in criminal courts
 - (iii) Managing risks and Covenants for those with impaired capacity

3. Church, Criminal and Civil Law & Statutory Guidance

- 3.1 The Criminal and Civil legislative framework, and subsequent guidance, which underpins the management of those who pose a risk of serious harm includes, but is not limited to:
 - Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968
 - Human Rights Act 1998
 - The Sexual Offences Act 2003
 - The Management of Offenders etc. (Scotland) Act 2005
 - Adult Support and Protection (Scotland) Act 2007
 - Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act 2009
 - Children’s Hearing (Scotland) Act 2011
 - Standards and Guidance for Risk Management (2018)

- Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) National Guidance (2022)
- Child Protection: National Guidance 2021 (updated 2023)
- Sex Offender Community Disclosure Scheme

3.2 Church of Scotland Law: Arrangements for Covenants of Responsibilities are laid out in Section 20 of the [SAFEGUARDING ACT \(ACT XVI 2018\) \(AS AMENDED BY ACTS XVIII 2020 AND VII 2021\)](#). Covenants are underpinned by the guidance within the report referred to in section 1.1 above (KOH). Section 4 provides excerpts from said report, to highlight specific aspects of guidance which are relevant and provide context for this review alongside reflection on Criminal and Civil Law.

4. Themes of review

4.1 The lifelong nature of Covenant and Proportionality.

4.1.1. KOH section 6.2 (P7) provides clarity regarding the balance of the inclusion of offenders, and risk. There is recognition of the importance of providing opportunities for the offender to grow and develop; however, it is clear that this must not compromise the safety of vulnerable people accessing worship and church activities.

“The Group is clear that what is involved in trying to incorporate a sex offender in a congregation is a task of discipleship. The intention, according to the perspective of the Group, is for the sex offender to be given opportunities for growth and development without risking harm to children or adults at risk, in the congregation, or themselves. The inclusion of sex offenders must never be at the risk of harm to vulnerable groups within church settings.”

4.1.2. The need to treat every Subject as an individual within the framing of a Covenant and its conditions is an area of practice which requires further consideration to ensure this individuality is respected in all aspects of the Covenant.

“While the theological issues are crucial, it must be recognised the issues of forgiveness and proportionality, and the nature of grace must be discussed in relation to the facts of dealing with sex offenders, with their particular characteristics and problems.” (KOH P.7 section 6.3).

‘Covenants of Responsibilities’ will be drawn up to ensure that the particular circumstances of each sex offender are recognised and that the appropriate oversight and support are offered in congregations. (KOH P.3 Overview)

4.1.3 In the previous excerpt, we are encouraged to recognise forgiveness and proportionality within the context of individual Subjects. This practice is evident in the current process of agreeing and writing the Covenant. The risk assessment informing the conditions of a Covenant is based on, but not limited to, the Subject’s index offence, victim profile, mode of offence (contact/non-contact/ online etc), Responsible Authorities’ specialist assessment tools (assessments are only carried out by those who have undergone accredited training in a Risk Management Authority accredited tool), any other information held by Responsible Authorities that they deem relevant to the Subject’s participation in church activities. Information sharing between Police Scotland and the Church of Scotland is governed by a formal Information Sharing Agreement. More details about information sharing can be found at section 4.2.5 to 4.2.7.

4.1.4 This demonstrates good practice in consideration of conditions within a Covenant; however, individuality and proportionality are missing in terms of the lifetime of a Covenant. With regards to the terms of a Covenant, the Act section 20 (3) merely stipulates such terms shall be determined by the Safeguarding Service in consultation with the relevant parties. It provides no direction that every Covenant should be lifelong; however, this is what has occurred in practice.

4.1.5 KOH provides the Church of Scotland’s agreed theology and sets out how the theological concept of forgiveness in Christianity may shape the policy and practice of the church in relation to the involvement of sex offenders in the life of congregations. In KOH section 9.5 (P.12) we are reminded that:

“...those who have committed sexual assault still remain as the children of God. The Church has a duty to support them in their transformation and process of redemption. It is our responsibility and privilege to offer them a covenant to support them in the change required by God’s grace.”

4.1.6 If there is recognition of the capacity for change and encouragement to support Subjects to make that change, this is not reflected in the indeterminate terms of all Covenants. In Scots Law, there is an indeterminate sentence available for those who have committed sexual offences; Order of Lifelong Restriction (OLR). However, in contrast to Covenants where all are lifelong, the OLR is only used in the most serious cases where there is a pattern of serious violent offending or where a court considers that the individual could commit such violence in the future. The OLR is only available as a disposal in the High Court following the outcome of a Risk Assessment Order (RAO).

4.1.7 Below are statistics from the Risk Management Authority to provide some context. This is the most recently published [12 month data – 2022 to 2023](#)

– Number of Risk Assessment Orders	27
– RAO outcome low risk	0
– RAO outcome medium risk	6
– RAO outcome high risk	18
– Total number of OLRs imposed	24
– Total number of ‘live’ OLRs	237
– Rate of RSOs subject to OLRs	3.8%*

*Due to differences in reporting periods, an average figure of 6,229 (years 2022 + 2023) was used to reach the given rate.

4.1.8 The number of [Registered Sex Offenders](#) is published monthly. This data can be access via the hyperlink. The data in the table below provides information regarding RSOs for the most recent full calendar years: 2022 and 2023. [The RSO data is from Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements \(MAPPA\) in Scotland: national overview report 2022-2023.](#)

Numbers of Registered Sex Offenders in Scotland, 2022 to 2023

Category	2022	2023
RSOs managed in custody and in the community on 31 March	6,038	6,420
RSOs managed in the community on 31 March	4,520	4,747
RSOs managed at Level 1 in the community on 31 March	4,407	4,584
RSOs managed at Level 2 in the community on 31 March	111	140
RSOs managed at Level 3 in the community on 31 March	2	1
RSOs reported for breaches of notification	374	465
RSOs convicted of a further group 1 or 2 crime ^[9]	114	139
RSOs wanted on 31 March	16	13
RSOs missing on 31 March	0	0

4.1.9 As a key purpose of a Covenant is to ensure safety from harm in church premises, it is imperative that the risk of harm is assessed. If risk assessments are to be objective, fair and proportionate, we must have an awareness of any internal/personal views that may impact on our capacity for such objectivity. While research data around this has not been sought for the purposes of this report, it is fair to assume from our everyday engagement with congregations and the wider public, that people find sexual offences particularly emotive. The following information is intended to support objective understanding of the risks posed by RSOs and to provide context for the statistics in section 4.1.8.

4.1.10 Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) is the process by which RSOs are monitored by Responsible Authorities. These arrangements are underpinned by statutory guidance which is regularly reviewed to ensure it remains fit for purpose. The most recent review was in [2022](#). The Management of Offenders etc. (Scotland) Act 2005 is the specific legislation which informs the guidance.

4.1.11 Who is subject to MAPPA?

- Category 1 – Registered Sex Offenders
 - Offenders convicted of an offence listed in Schedule 3 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 and required to comply with Sex Offender Notification Requirements (SONR) set out in part 2 of the 2003 Act. Those made subject to Sexual Harm Prevention

Orders (SHPO) or Sexual Risk Orders (SRO). These orders replaced the Sexual Offences Prevention Order (SOPO) and Risk of Sexual Harm Order (RHSO); however, they are still relevant to offenders convicted prior to the changes.

- Mentally Disordered Restricted Patients (those patients subject to Specific Orders or directions as a result of a mental disorder).

- Category 2 – Not currently used in Scotland
- Category 3 – Other Risk of Serious Harm Offenders

Offenders not required to comply with the SONR or are a mentally disordered restricted patient; who by reason of their conviction are subject to supervision in the community by any enactment, order or licence; are assessed by the responsible authorities as posing a high or very high risk of serious harm to the public which requires active multi-agency management at MAPPA level 2 or 3.

NB: All Church of Scotland Covenants subjects are category 1

4.1.12 The table below illustrates the period of Sex Offender Notification Requirements (SONR) for the range of sentences.

Sentence	Notification period
Prison sentence of 30 months or more (including life)	Indefinite
Order for lifelong restriction	Indefinite
Admission to a hospital subject to a restriction order	Indefinite
Prison sentence of more than 6 months but less than 30 months	10 years
Prison sentence of 6 months or less	7 years
Admission to a hospital without a restriction order	7 years
Community payback order with an offender supervision requirement	The length of the offender supervision requirement
Any other sentence (e.g. a fine or admonition)	5 years

4.1.13 How are they managed?

There are 3 management levels in MAPPA:

- **Level 1: Routine Risk Management**
The risks posed by the offender can be managed by one agency without significant active involvement from other agencies. Notwithstanding this, the expectation for information sharing, joint working and collaboration at an inter-agency level remains.
- **Level 2: Multi-Agency Risk Management**
Usually used in high risk cases where the active involvement of more than one agency is required to manage the risks.
- **Level 3: Multi-Agency Protection Panels (MAPPP)**
The MAPPP is responsible for offenders at Level 3, who are expected to be the “critical few” who pose an imminent risk of serious harm or where there is a high risk of media scrutiny or public interest in the case.

4.1.14 **NB:** Ongoing and dynamic risk assessment while subject to MAPPA ensures the appropriate level of monitoring required reflects any changes in circumstances. Offenders can be moved between MAPPA levels if the risk assessment indicates a change in the level of risk.

4.1.15 The information in section 4.1.12 illustrates the recognition of the seriousness of sexual offences and their impact on victims. A significant level of monitoring, via the SONR, is put in place even in situations where the sentence may be considered lenient, for example in situations where the sentence is a fine or admonishment, there is still a monitoring period of 5 years. Likewise, the consequences for failing to comply with notification requirements are significant with a maximum sentence of 5 years imprisonment.

4.1.16 It is reasonable to assume that the concern regarding subjects on Covenants is that they will reoffend while engaging in the life of the church. To consider this objectively, it is important to understand recidivism rates for sexual offences. According to the most recent Scottish Government published statistics 2020-21, the rate of sex offenders

reconvicted was 8.8%. These statistics acknowledge the impact of the pandemic on court procedures and, therefore, the rate for 2019-20 is provided – 10.7%. While this is slightly higher, it is a low rate when it is compared to recidivism for other offences illustrated below (figures for 2019-20):

- Dishonesty 40.5%
- Drug offences 20.9%
- Damages and reckless behaviour 27.1%
- Threatening and abusive behaviour 22.5%

4.1.17 [The MAPPA Guidance \(2022\)](#), acknowledges that the end of the notification period has no bearing on the risk presented and the need to manage risk; the period is determined by the sentence imposed at the time of conviction. However, the guidance is also clear on the importance of MAPPA exit arrangements and procedures being in place to ensure the appropriate assessment of risk has been concluded prior to the end of SONR. This provides reassurance for the public that, in cases where the risk a person poses to the public remains high, further powers will be sought.

“...sufficient time to allow for a review of the circumstances and consideration of whether there is criminal or on-going concerning behaviour which evidences that the risk they pose is so high that further law enforcement powers are justified and necessary”

MAPPA Guidance 2022 (P.47)

4.1.18 The available research and data referred to throughout this report indicates that offenders who are no longer managed through the MAPPA process are a low risk to the public. The risk that they will commit further sexual offences is low. The research and data also demonstrate that, where there remains concern that an offender continues to pose a high risk to the public at the end of the SONR period, there are structures in place to address such concerns.

4.1.19 In acknowledging this information, we must also consider the rights of those subject to Covenants. The imposition of a Covenant is relevant to consideration of Article 8 of The Human Rights Act 1998, the right to respect for private and family life, which states:

1. Everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life, his home and his correspondence.
2. There shall be no interference by a public authority with the exercise of this right except such as is in accordance with the law and is necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security, public safety or the economic well-being of the country, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others

The imposition of a Covenant when the Responsible Authorities, which are subject to legal process, through the means of specialist risk assessment, do not consider an individual to require additional supervision or monitoring, may be considered to breach the individual's human rights. In addition, The Office of Scottish Charity Regulator (2018, p7), state within their Safeguarding Guidance that “Safeguarding comes from a rights-based approach...”. In addition to the Church of Scotland's agreed values and attitudes, as a registered charity, we have a duty to uphold the rights of those involved in the life and work of the Church.

4.1.20 It is evident that the Church of Scotland Covenant process is not proportionate in respect of the level of risk posed and the indeterminate monitoring period. As a result, current safeguarding practice is not in line with the intentions of ‘For of such is the Kingdom of Heaven – Creating A Church Where All May Safely Live’ as stated in section 4.1.2.

Proposal & recommendation

4.1.21 It is recommended that Covenants of Responsibilities reflect the MAPPA management and risk assessment process. When the Sexual Offences Notification Requirements end, the Covenant would also end, unless the ‘exit from MAPPA assessment’ or other available information indicates otherwise. Section 4.2 provides further information and recommendations regarding Covenants for those not subject to statutory notification. This would ensure we recognise that “...the issues of forgiveness and proportionality, and the nature of grace must be discussed in relation to the facts of dealing with sex offenders, with their particular characteristics and problems.” (KOH section 6.3, P.7). MAPPA provides the reassurance that those who pose a risk will be appropriately and safely managed within our community.

4.1.22 EXCEPTION

Where the commission of an offence has occurred within a church, through any church activity or can be perceived to have a link to a church, the subject's Covenant will be lifelong. As the offender has used their connection to the Church as a means to access

those they have abused, we must recognise this presents an additional risk in this specific context and must ensure supervision and monitoring within the Church remains in place. The methods and level of monitoring will continue to be proportionately reviewed and applied.

4.2 The risks associated with those accused of sexual offences who are found not guilty in criminal courts

- 4.2.1. The deliverance as detailed in section 2.2 above, specifically invites the Safeguarding Committee to consider their processes in how they relate to people accused of sexual offences who are found not guilty in criminal courts. However, full transparency in relation to the status of subjects who are managed by the Safeguarding Service via Covenants is important in recognising and acknowledging the intent and motivation of the proposed Deliverance. Therefore, the review focus of this aspect of safeguarding will be extended to include subjects who have been accused of an offence, which has not gone to criminal trial.
- 4.2.2. Such subjects are currently recognised within the Act, section 1 (30) Definitions as:
- (iii) Any person who admits to having committed a sexual offence
 - (v) Any person in respect of whom the Safeguarding Service receives a notification from any of the Responsible Authorities that such a person poses a risk of harm
 - (vi) Any person found responsible by a court of law (civil law) or by their professional body or regulator for committing an act which has, even in part, a sexual element, whether or not that individual accepts the finding
 - (vii) Any person, who after risk assessment by the Safeguarding Service, is believed to pose a risk of violence or sexual harm and who has contact with the Church of Scotland, its members and adherents or those individuals who use and access worship, groups and services run by or on behalf of the Church.
- 4.2.3. To understand the importance of monitoring subjects as described in section 4.2.2 above (non-conviction subjects), it is necessary to reflect on the context of sexual crimes and abuse, in both criminal and civil law as both are relevant. In criminal law, the standard of proof for a guilty verdict is – ‘beyond a reasonable doubt’. It is accepted that the standard of proof for criminal convictions is very high. Rightly so, in a fair and just society, people should not be subjected to punishment or the ramification of a criminal record if there is any doubt about their guilt. The ‘balance of probabilities’ is the standard of proof used in civil law cases to determine if an event is more likely to have happened than not. If this determination is made, the subject is considered to be ‘responsible’ for the act rather than ‘guilty’ as in a criminal court.
- 4.2.4. Both systems are relevant to Child, Adult and Public Protection. If the Procurator Fiscal decides the evidence available meets the ‘beyond a reasonable doubt’ standard, a criminal conviction is likely to be sought. However, not achieving this criminal standard of proof does not automatically mean someone is ‘innocent’ or doesn’t pose a risk. The verdict is ‘not guilty’ in terms of the criminal standard of proof; beyond reasonable doubt. This is the same for all criminal convictions.
- 4.2.5. In considering the nature of sexual offences, we must acknowledge that such offences take place in circumstances where achieving the criminal burden of proof is extremely difficult. In the [five-year reporting period for 2018-19 to 2021-23](#), the average conviction rates for all sexual offences was 24%. As a comparator, non-sexual violent crime convictions rate was 82%. KOH section 7.1 (P.8) recognises the impact of additional challenges when ‘securing a conviction where there are children or adults at risk, involved, only 5% of allegations of sexual assault actually lead to conviction. It must be noted that only a very tiny part of the 95% will be due to the fact that the allegation was false.’
- 4.2.6. Challenges in securing convictions for sexual offences can include, but are not limited to:
- The need for corroboration which is a distinct feature of Scots Law. It means the prosecutors need to provide a second independent source of evidence which can come in the form of forensic or witness evidence.
 - The circumstances in which sexual crimes take place often mean the likelihood of witness evidence is limited.
 - Delays in reporting allegations. Contrary to common perception, many victims of such crimes do not report the offence at the time it occurs. In 2014-15, 39% of recorded rapes were reported one year or more after the alleged incident took place. This often impacts on the possibility of collecting forensic evidence to use for corroboration.
 - Disengagement of victims either during the investigation or the court process. This is likely to be exacerbated where the accused is known to the victim.

- Targeting of vulnerable individuals including children and people with learning disabilities or mental health problems who are the least equipped to participate in an adversarial criminal justice system

[Investigation and prosecution of sexual crimes: Review
The Scottish Government, 2017](#)

- 4.2.7. In being cognisant of this information and of the difference in standards of proof, it is important that non-conviction subjects be risk assessed, and decisions regarding monitoring be made in partnership with Responsible Authorities. It must be noted that the Safeguarding Service does not undertake risk assessments on every person accused of a sexual offence. Action is taken based on validated information from Responsible Authorities and/or Regulatory Bodies that is shared within strict guidelines.
- 4.2.8. Information sharing between Police Scotland and the Church of Scotland is governed by a formal Information Sharing Agreement. This reflects the [National Concordat of the Sharing of Information on Sex Offenders](#) which was developed following the publication of the Expert Panel report '[Reducing the Risk: Improving the Response to Sex Offending](#)' in 2001. Section 3.2 of the Information Sharing Protocol highlights proportionality:
- "Whether information should be shared and, if so, what information and to whom, must be decided on a case-by-case basis. That said, the presumption should be that in cases where there is a risk of harm to the public, information should be shared. Critical to the justification of information sharing are the twin requirements of necessity and proportionality. The necessity criterion requires that there is a pressing public protection/individual need. The proportionality criterion requires the information shared must be only that information necessary to achieve the purpose for which it is being shared."
- 4.2.9. Information sharing between Regulatory Bodies and the Church of Scotland is carried out in line with the Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010, The Adult Support and Protection (Scotland) Act 2007, and Scotland's National Guidance for Child Protection 2021 (reviewed 2024). All make provision for the sharing of information between agencies and professionals where there is a risk of significant harm.
- 4.2.10. The clarification of the standards of criminal and civil proof and information regarding the risk assessment of non-conviction subjects alongside the information sharing arrangements outlined in this section, demonstrate the care that is taken in the Safeguarding Service's consideration of imposing safeguarding measures on non-conviction subjects.
- 4.2.11. The information provided in this section highlights the need to implement a Covenant of Responsibilities in some circumstances where there has been no criminal conviction. The specific scope of non-conviction Covenants is defined in the Safeguarding Act, section 1 (30) Definitions:
- (iii) Any person who admits to having committed a sexual offence
 - (v) Any person in respect of whom the Safeguarding Service receives a notification from any of the Responsible Authorities that such a person poses a risk of harm
 - (vi) Any person found responsible by a court of law (civil law) or by their professional body or regulator for committing an act which has, even in part, a sexual element, whether or not that individual accepts the finding
 - (vii) Any person, who after risk assessment by the Safeguarding Service, is believed to pose a risk of violence or sexual harm and who has contact with the Church of Scotland, its members and adherents or those individuals who use and access worship, groups and services run by or on behalf of the Church.
- 4.2.12. The scope demonstrates that non-conviction Covenants are only used when the Safeguarding Service is aware of non-conviction information that indicates a subject poses a risk within the church setting and associated activities.
- 4.2.13. The Safeguarding Service is recognised by statutory and regulatory bodies as a partner in the protection of the public and vulnerable groups. As such, relevant information sharing protocols are in place either via formally agreed arrangements as in section 4.2.8, or through statutory requirements as in section 4.2.9.
- 4.2.14. The Safeguarding Service respectfully suggests that the general public and our church communities do not have an in-depth understanding of the arrangements in place nationally to ensure the risks posed by some individuals who have not been convicted of a crime, are effectively managed and reduced where possible.
- 4.2.15. It is also important to consider 'Grooming'. While we are all becoming more aware of the grooming of individuals by perpetrators of abuse, we also need to acknowledge that perpetrators can groom groups, organisations and communities. Unfortunately, perpetrators target organisations where they can embed themselves as a credible person who is liked and respected. If we take a moment to look into cases of abuse

outside the home setting, we will often see a history of grooming behaviour. While there are high profile cases such as Jimmy Saville, grooming has been identified in many other Significant Case Reviews.

- 4.2.16. There are also examples of similar reviews within faith based organisations such as the [Independent Lessons Learned Review \(incorporating an Audit of Safeguarding Arrangements\) Concerning Jonathan Fletcher and Emmanuel Church Wimbledon](#) which was carried out by Thirtyone:eight in 2021. It is important to note that the perpetrator in this case was never charged with any offence and many participants in the review reported very positive aspects of behaviour in the perpetrator. This was identified as a key factor in the delay of recognition and reporting of the abuse. KOH recognises the manipulative nature of offenders, "The reality is that many sex offenders are adept at disguising motives, confusing and covering up by the clever use of religious language and behaviour, and thereby, masking their actual intentions." (KOH P.7 section 6.3). To ensure we promote safe churches for all, we too must recognise such behaviours and understand that not being convicted of a crime does not mean there is no risk posed by an individual.
- 4.2.17. It is hoped that the information in this report supports an increased awareness of the risks posed by some individuals who have no convictions, and of the national arrangements as described in section 4.2.8. In turn, it is hoped this leads to an increased understanding of the need to impose a Covenant of Responsibilities in some circumstances.

Proposal & recommendation

- 4.2.18. It is recommended that no change be made to this aspect of Safeguarding Service practice and that the need for a Covenant of Responsibilities is dependent on, and informed by risk assessments using validated information.

4.3 Managing risks and Covenants for those with impaired capacity

- 4.3.1. As stated in section 2.3, it is necessary to review how Covenants are developed and agreed in situations where the subject (both those with convictions or non-conviction subjects) have been identified as an adult with incapacity or where there are concerns regarding the level of cognitive capacity of the subject, such as a possible learning disability or mental health concerns.
- 4.3.2. The lack of cognitive capacity does not correlate to a reduction in risk. In some circumstances, it may lead to an increase in risk as the subject may lack the capacity to understand the conditions of the Covenant and/or the capacity to adhere to the conditions and understand the impact of their behaviours. Therefore, it is important to develop an appropriate Covenant process for such subjects.
- 4.3.3. There are currently a small number of subjects who have a Covenant and for whom there are concerns around the person's capacity. Examples include a subject who was convicted of historical sexual offences. During the period of Sex Offender Notification Requirements (SONR), he has developed dementia. Another is a young adult who has significant learning disabilities and has already been formally assessed as an adult with incapacity. He has recently been charged with sexual offences; however, he is always accompanied to church by a carer.

Proposal & recommendation

- 4.3.4. It is not ethical, or morally just to invite or insist that those with such impaired cognition, sign a Covenant with conditions they don't understand or have no capacity to independently fulfil. It is recommended that, for such subjects, a more limited Covenant is put in place and is agreed with their main carer and/or the agency responsible for managing the person's care plan.
- 4.3.5. This would meet the needs of the congregation in providing safe churches for all, while ensuring the subject is monitored in a manner which reflects their individual needs and circumstances.

NB: Information within this report was accurate at the time of writing.

5. Consultation information

5.1 Supporting information added following the Safeguarding Committee meeting of 05 November 2024:

The Safeguarding Committee:

- Approved the proposed recommendation.
- Requested additions to the report to ensure clarity:
 - Human Rights context
 - Expand on detail regarding exemptions from time-limited Covenants in section 4.1.22
- Agreed that processes and procedure with regard to managing those who pose a risk should be updated to reflect the recommendations within the report (See Appendix I)

5.2 Consultation with the members of 'Forgiveness and Proportionality Working Group' responsible for the report 'For of Such is the Kingdom of Heaven – Creating a Church Where All May Safely' on 13 & 24 February 2025.

As well as identifying points of good practice, the consultation informed the following:

- Change to text to clarify that the MAPPA exit point was not the only risk assessment used to inform the termination of a Covenant. Any other salient information will also be consider including the experiences of the Subject and the Safeguarding Panel responsible for managing the Covenant.
- Clarification on the sharing of information with Ministers who are not members of their Congregational Safeguarding Panel.

5.3 Consultation with Congregational Safeguarding Coordinators, Presbytery Safeguarding Contacts and Volunteer Safeguarding Trainers 03 March 2025.

Consultation was carried out using two methods

- (i) Distribution of Review Report and Proposed Procedures and Processes
- (ii) Focus Group discussion considering the Review Report and Proposed Procedures and Processes

5.4 Consultation with those Subject to Covenants and their representatives

Appendix 3

[] SAFEGUARDING ACT (ACT [] 2025)

Edinburgh, [] May 2025, Session []

The General Assembly enact and ordain as follows:

Definitions

1. In this Act, the following words shall have the following meanings:

- (1) "Applicant" means any person applying to undertake or carry out a Regulated Role, whether in a paid or voluntary position.
- (2) "Charge" means a sphere of pastoral duty to which a minister is inducted, and may include a Team Ministry Role as referred to in section 7(10) of the Presbytery Mission Plan Act (Act VIII 2021).
- (3) "Children" means persons under the age of 18 years.
- (4) "Consideration for Listing" means the process at Disclosure Scotland whereby a person is being considered for listing as unsuitable for carrying out a Regulated Role with Vulnerable Groups.
- (5) "Covenant of Responsibilities" means a covenant entered into between a Subject and a Safeguarding Panel on behalf of a Kirk Session(s) in the form prescribed from time to time by the Safeguarding Service.
- (6) "Data Protection Policy" means the Data Protection Policy of the Church of Scotland Central Services Committee as that policy exists from time to time.
- (7) "Data Retention Policy" means the Data Retention Policy of the Church of Scotland Central Services Committee as that policy exists from time to time.
- (8) "Decision to list" means a decision by Disclosure Scotland to place a person on any of the lists of persons barred from carrying out a Regulated Role with Vulnerable Groups.
- (9) "Disclosure Scotland" means the Scottish Government executive agency which manages and delivers the PVG Scheme.
- (10) "Employing Agencies" means for the purposes of this Act, courts of the Church and Standing Committees of the General Assembly, and any other bodies so designated by the General Assembly.
- (11) "Guidance" means the Guidance published by the Safeguarding Service from time to time.
- (12) "Listed" means that a person has been placed on any of the lists of persons barred from carrying out a Regulated Role with Vulnerable Groups, noting that a person may be barred from working with Children, or with Protected Adults, or from working with both Children and Protected Adults.
- (13) "Ministries' Roles" means parish ministers, Interim Ministers, Transition Ministers, Associate Ministers, Assistant Ministers, auxiliary ministers, Probationers, OLMs, Readers and locums, and, depending upon their job descriptions, may also include Deacons and Ministries Development Staff.
- (14) "Protected Adults" means a person over 16 years of age, who because they receive a certain type of service, become protected. These services are likely to be provided for people affected by physical or mental illness and/or disability, who have particular needs over and above those of the general population.
- (15) "Safeguarding Legislation" means the Protection of Vulnerable Groups (Scotland) Act 2007 and the Disclosure (Scotland) Act 2020 or any subsequent modification, amendment or re-enactment of either of them.
- (16) "PVG Scheme Record" means the record that a person receives when they join the PVG Scheme.

- (17) "PVG Scheme Record Update" means an update from Disclosure Scotland of information contained in a PVG Record.
- (18) "PVG Scheme" means the scheme legislated for by the Safeguarding Legislation which is intended to ensure that people whose behaviour makes them unsuitable to work with Vulnerable Groups cannot undertake a Regulated Role.
- (19) "Recruitment & Risk Sub-Committee" means a sub-committee of the Safeguarding Committee which considers cases referred to it by the Safeguarding Advisory Panel of the Safeguarding Committee or the Safeguarding Service Manager.
- (20) "Registered Sex Offender" means a person who is required to register with the Police in terms of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 or any subsequent modification, amendment or re-enactment thereof.
- (21) "Regulated Role" has the meaning given to it in the Safeguarding Legislation and can be found set out in full in a Schedule to the Guidance.
- (22) "Responsible Authorities" means the Police, Local Authorities, Health Boards, Special Health Boards and the Scottish Prison Service.
- (23) "Safeguarding" includes but is not limited to (1) taking measures to protect the health, wellbeing and human rights of individuals, especially Vulnerable Groups, which allow them to live their life free from harm, abuse or neglect and (2) responding appropriately to Safeguarding Concerns.
- (24) "Safeguarding Committee" means the committee (or any successor body) appointed by the General Assembly to deal with Safeguarding matters in the Church.
- (25) "Safeguarding Concerns" means concerns about, or allegations of, harm, abuse or neglect.
- (26) "Safeguarding Coordinator" means a person appointed by the Kirk Session(s) to have responsibility for Safeguarding within a Charge.
- (27) "Safeguarding Panel" means a panel of at least three persons appointed by the Kirk Session(s) as responsible for Safeguarding in a Charge, and will always include the Safeguarding Coordinator; from time to time additional persons may be co-opted onto a Safeguarding Panel.
- (28) "Safeguarding Service" means the Church's department providing advice, support and action to Safeguarding Coordinators, Kirk Sessions, Presbyteries and others on Safeguarding matters.
- (29) "Self Declaration Form" means the form^[1] in such terms as may be prescribed by the Safeguarding Service from time to time, which form is to be completed by an Applicant for the following purposes: providing information to the Safeguarding Service, stating information which might appear on the Applicant's PVG Scheme Record and undertaking to inform the Safeguarding Service of certain matters.
- (30) "Subject" means
 - (i) Any person who has been convicted of any offence within the Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act 2009 or associated legislation (or any modification, replacement or re-enactment thereof); and/or
 - (ii) Any person who has been convicted of any other sexual offence;
 - (iii) Any person who admits to having committed a sexual offence; and/or
 - (iv) Any person who is currently or who has at any time been a Registered Sex Offender; and/or
 - (v) Any person in respect of whom the Safeguarding Service receives a notification from any of the Responsible Authorities that such person poses a risk of harm; and/or
 - (vi) Any person found responsible by a court of law or by their professional body or regulator for committing an act which has, even in part, a sexual element, whether or not that individual accepts that finding; and/or
 - (vii) Any person, who after risk assessment by the Safeguarding Service, is believed to pose a risk of violence or sexual harm and who has contact with the Church of Scotland, its members and adherents or those individuals who use and access worship, groups and services run by or on behalf of the Church.
- (31) "Vulnerable Groups" means Children and/or Protected Adults.
- (32) "Worker" means any person undertaking a Regulated Role, whether in a paid or voluntary position; for the avoidance of doubt this includes Ministers of Word and Sacrament, as defined in the Registration of Ministries Act (Act II 2017) and those in Ministries' Roles.

Interpretation

2. (1) Whenever "Vulnerable Groups" are referred to in this Act, that may be a reference to either Children or Protected Adults, or to Children and Protected Adults.
- (2) The footnotes in this Act are for information only and do not form part of this Act.
- (3) The Safeguarding Service shall be entitled to amend any form referred to in this Act as it deems appropriate from time to time.

Safe Recruitment – Kirk Session(s)

3. (1) Subject to subsection 3(6) below, the Kirk Session(s) shall ensure that all Workers within the Charge are members of the PVG Scheme, prior to taking up their post. This shall include Locums.

- (2) Subject to subsection 3(6) below, whenever a person is being recruited and will be undertaking a Regulated Role, that person must make application to become a member of the PVG Scheme. If the person is already a member of the PVG Scheme, an Existing PVG Scheme Member Application must be completed and submitted. No person may be employed or appointed to undertake or to carry out a Regulated Role unless that person is a member of the PVG Scheme.
- (3) The Kirk Session(s) shall appoint a Safeguarding Coordinator. The Safeguarding Coordinator shall have the task of ensuring that all PVG applications required for that Charge are completed accurately and submitted to the Safeguarding Service for processing. The Safeguarding Coordinator shall monitor the return of the applications and their outcome.
- (4) Subject to subsection 3(6) below, if any application results in notification that a person is barred from becoming a member of the PVG Scheme, ie is Listed, that person must not be employed or appointed to undertake or to carry out a Regulated Role. It is an offence under the Safeguarding Legislation to employ or appoint a person who is Listed to undertake or to carry out a Regulated Role.
- (5) In arranging recruitment, the Kirk Session(s) must comply with the Guidance.
- (6) In addition, in the case of a person who is domiciled outwith the UK, such further information must be provided and such further checks must be undertaken, both as the Safeguarding Service may require, before that person may be employed or appointed to undertake or to carry out a Regulated Role
- (7) In addition Kirk Sessions must conduct Level 1 Disclosure Checks on all individuals (regardless of their employment status) in (or working with) their congregations in leadership roles and/or positions of trust, including but not limited to organists, church officers/caretakers and cafe workers, where their duties may involve contact with Vulnerable Groups.

Safer Recruitment – Presbyteries and other Employing Agencies

4. (1) Subject to subsection 4(5) below, Presbyteries and other Employing Agencies shall ensure that all Workers are members of the PVG Scheme, prior to taking up their post. This shall include Interim Moderators undertaking a Regulated Role.
- (2) Subject to subsection 4(5) below, whenever a person is being recruited and will be undertaking a Regulated Role, that person must make application to become a member of the PVG Scheme. If the person is already a member of the PVG Scheme, an Existing PVG Scheme Member Application must be completed and submitted. No person may be employed or appointed to undertake or to carry out a Regulated Role unless that person is a member of the PVG Scheme.
- (3) Subject to subsection 4(5) below, if any application results in notification that a person is barred from becoming a member of the PVG Scheme, ie is Listed, that person must not be employed or appointed to undertake or to carry out a Regulated Role. It is an offence under the Safeguarding Legislation to employ or appoint a person who is Listed to undertake or to carry out a Regulated Role.
- (4) In arranging recruitment, Presbyteries and other Employing Agencies must comply with the Guidance.
- (5) In addition, in the case of a person who is domiciled outwith the UK, such further information must be provided and such further checks must be undertaken, both as the Safeguarding Service may require, before that person may be employed or appointed to undertake or to carry out a Regulated Role.

Recruitment & Risk Sub-Committee

5. (1) At its meetings, the Recruitment & Risk Sub-Committee shall deal with the risk assessment of the following:
 - (i) Any vetting information which has been provided to the Safeguarding Service by Disclosure Scotland.
 - (ii) Any notification received by the Safeguarding Service from Disclosure Scotland, including a notification that a person is under Consideration for Listing.
 - (iii) Self Declaration Forms, references, matters of reputational risk and any other pertinent information.
 - (iv) Any information received via Safeguarding Concern referrals relating to the possible misconduct of Workers.
- (2) The Recruitment & Risk Sub-Committee may decide (one or more of the following):
 - (a) In relation to safer recruitment:
 - (i) To decide that a person is suitable for a Regulated Role (which decision may or may not be made subject to conditions).
 - (ii) To decide that a person is not suitable for a Regulated Role.
 - (b) In relation to a notification from Disclosure Scotland:
 - (i) To take no action.
 - (ii) To impose a precautionary administrative suspension, to be reviewed by the Sub-Committee on a three monthly rolling basis.

- (iii) To take no immediate action but to reconsider the matter at a further meeting on a date within the next three months.
- (iv) To decide that a person is not suitable, or is no longer suitable, for a Regulated Role.
- (c) *In relation to Safeguarding Concerns indicating possible misconduct:*
 - (i) To take no action.
 - (ii) To decide, whether on a temporary or permanent basis, that a person is not suitable, or is no longer suitable, for a Regulated Role.
 - (iii) To instruct a Congregation led investigation.
 - (iv) To instruct a Safeguarding Service led investigation.
- (3) Decisions of the Recruitment & Risk Sub-Committee shall be notified to the person involved, to the relevant Safeguarding Coordinator, to the Registration of Ministries Committee, to the relevant Presbytery Clerk and to any other person who has a legitimate interest. Notification shall include a statement of the reasons for the decision.
- (4) Decisions of the Recruitment & Risk Sub-Committee must be implemented by all Employing Agencies and by all Presbyteries, Kirk Sessions, Safeguarding Coordinators, office-holders, staff and volunteers involved in work with Vulnerable Groups.
- (5) Subject always to any appeal in terms of section 6 below, where the Recruitment & Risk Sub-Committee makes a decision in terms of section 5(2)(a)(ii), 5(2)(b)(iv) or 5(2)(c)(ii), no Employing Agency shall employ or appoint or continue to deploy that person to undertake or to carry out a Regulated Role, nor may such person be appointed or continue in post as a Minister of Word and Sacrament, as defined in the Registration of Ministries Act (Act II 2017).

Appeals from decisions of the Recruitment & Risk Sub-Committee

- 6. (1) A person in respect of whom a decision has been made in terms of section 5(2)(a)(ii), 5(2)(b)(iv) or 5(2)(c)(ii), as to suitability for a Regulated Role has the right to appeal that decision. A person may also appeal against the terms of any conditions applied by the Recruitment & Risk Sub-Committee in terms of section 5(2)(a)(i) as to a person's suitability for a Regulated Role. Such a person is referred to in section 7 as "the Appellant".
- (2) An appeal can be brought only on one or more of the following grounds:
 - (a) that there were irregularities in the process whereby the Recruitment & Risk Sub-Committee reached its decision
 - (b) that the final decision of the Recruitment & Risk Sub-Committee was influenced by incorrect material fact (subject however to the exception noted below in regard to the contents or accuracy of the PVG Scheme Record), or
 - (c) that the Recruitment & Risk Sub-Committee in reaching its decision acted contrary to the principles of natural justice.
- (3) Any disagreement as to the contents or accuracy of the PVG Scheme Record information itself cannot be the subject of an appeal under this procedure and will require to be taken up by the person direct with Disclosure Scotland through the procedures established by that body.

Process for Appeal

- 7. The appeal shall proceed as follows:
 - (1) The intention to appeal must be intimated to the Principal Clerk by the Appellant within fourteen days of the date of issue of the relevant decision.
 - (2) Within a further twenty eight days after the date upon which the intention to appeal was intimated in terms of section 7(1), the Appellant shall lodge with the Principal Clerk a note setting out in writing in brief numbered propositions, the grounds referred to in section 6(2) above upon which he or she is appealing ("the Grounds of Appeal").
 - (3) Upon receipt of the Appellant's Grounds of Appeal, the Principal Clerk shall require that within twenty eight days, the Recruitment & Risk Sub-Committee lodge a note responding to the Grounds of Appeal.
 - (4) The appeal will be determined by an Appeal Group comprising three persons selected by the Principal Clerk from the Safeguarding Appeal Panel. The Safeguarding Appeal Panel shall be a Panel of six persons appointed by the General Assembly, being persons with Safeguarding and other relevant experience, and shall include at least two persons who shall be qualified to practise as lawyers or who are experienced in the law and practice of the Church, and at least two ministers. Having due regard to the need to ensure independent scrutiny of any appeal, none of the Panel shall be current or former employees of any of the Employing Agencies nor shall they be current members of the Safeguarding Committee.
 - (5) The Appeal Group will be chaired by a person who is either qualified to practise as a lawyer or who is experienced in the law and practice of the Church. The Appeal Group shall include at least one minister. The Appeal Group will be clerked by the Principal Clerk or the Depute Clerk.
 - (6) The Appeal Group shall be entitled to require both the Appellant and the Recruitment & Risk Sub-Committee to provide further information and may determine the appeal

either on the basis of written submissions only and/or by holding a hearing. If a hearing is held, procedure shall be in accordance with the Standing Orders of the General Assembly so far as applicable and consistent with this Act.

- (7) The Appellant will be notified of the Appeal Group's decision in writing within six weeks of the written submissions being received by the Principal Clerk or of the hearing date, whichever is later.
- (8) The Appeal Group will also notify the Safeguarding Service and the Recruitment & Risk Sub-Committee of its decision. The Safeguarding Service will take any necessary action, in accordance with the Appeal Group's decision.
- (9) The decision of the Appeal Group will be final.

Training

8. (1) All Kirk Sessions, Safeguarding Coordinators and Workers must undertake such training as is prescribed by the Safeguarding Service from time to time.
- (2) Each Presbytery shall provide appropriate training on Safeguarding matters to Kirk Sessions, Safeguarding Coordinators and Workers, with updates when appropriate.
- (3) Kirk Sessions will maintain records of all training undertaken by Kirk Sessions, Safeguarding Coordinators and Workers and will disclose these records at any time upon request by the Safeguarding Service or the Presbytery.
- (4) The Safeguarding Service shall provide Safeguarding Training for those in Ministries' Roles as per Guidance.
- (5) Each Presbytery will maintain records of all training undertaken by those in Ministries' Roles and will disclose these records at any time upon request by the Safeguarding Service.

Record retention

9. (1) The Safeguarding Panel will maintain records of Workers within the Charge who are PVG Scheme members in the form of the Safeguarding Congregational Register^[iii].
- (2) All hard copy records of the Safeguarding Panel shall be kept confidentially in a secure place.
- (3) In accordance with the Data Protection Policy and the Data Retention Policy, the Safeguarding Service will retain originals of the Self Declaration Forms which are signed by all Applicants either (1) to join the PVG Scheme or (2) for an Existing PVG Scheme Member Application. Documents shall be destroyed only in accordance with the Data Retention Policy.

Presbyteries' Responsibilities of Superintendence

10. Presbyteries shall confirm that Kirk Sessions are complying with their obligations under this Act: (1) during Annual Inspections of Records, and (2) as part of Local Church Review, and shall report to the Safeguarding Service in such form as the Safeguarding Service may prescribe from time to time.

Audit

11. Kirk Sessions and Presbyteries shall review and minute on an annual basis their compliance with Safeguarding policies and procedures using the Safeguarding Audit Checklist for Kirk Sessions and Presbyteries^[iii].

Annual Inspection of Records

12. Kirk Sessions shall electronically submit the Safeguarding Congregational Register^[iv] and the Safeguarding Audit Checklist for Kirk Sessions and Presbyteries^[v] annually to Presbytery as part of the Annual Inspection of Records.
13. Presbyteries must forward electronically the Safeguarding Congregational Register and the Safeguarding Audit Checklist to the Safeguarding Service on conclusion of their annual inspection of records.
14. Presbyteries must hold a Presbytery Safeguarding Register and must forward this electronically to the Safeguarding Service on conclusion of their annual inspection of records.

Obligations on individuals

15. (1) All PVG Scheme members shall advise Disclosure Scotland and the Safeguarding Service promptly of any changes to their personal details.
- (2) All PVG Scheme members shall advise Disclosure Scotland and the Safeguarding Service promptly if they cease doing a Regulated Role for the Church of Scotland.
- (3) All PVG Scheme members must advise the Safeguarding Service promptly of (i) any act, default or omission, or (ii) any circumstances arising, which might affect whether they can undertake a Regulated Role.
- (4) All persons who sign Self Declaration Forms must adhere to the undertakings given therein.

Safeguarding Concerns

16. (1) Every Charge must have a Safeguarding Panel and a Safeguarding Coordinator.
- (2) If any Safeguarding Concerns arise in relation to any individual involved in a congregation, such Safeguarding Concerns shall be reported without delay to the Safeguarding Coordinator.
- (3) During office hours, such Safeguarding Concerns shall then be reported by the Safeguarding Coordinator to the Safeguarding Service immediately. The Safeguarding Service shall where appropriate report the matter to the appropriate statutory agencies.
- (4) Outwith office hours the Safeguarding Coordinator shall report the concern to the Safeguarding Panel and, if someone is at immediate risk of harm, they will report the matter to the appropriate statutory agencies. The Safeguarding Service shall be notified on the next working day.
- (5) Standing Committees, Presbyteries, those in Ministries' Roles and office-bearers must report any Safeguarding Concerns to the Safeguarding Service immediately or, where Concerns arise outwith office hours, at the start of the next working day.
- (6) Employees of the Social Care Council shall follow the agreed Child and Adult Protection Policies when Safeguarding Concerns arise.
- (7) Anyone may report a Safeguarding Concern direct to the Safeguarding Service.
- (8) Advice given by the Safeguarding Service, when framed as an instruction, must be followed by all Employing Agencies and by all Presbyteries, Kirk Sessions, Safeguarding Coordinators, office-holders, staff and volunteers involved in work with Vulnerable Groups.
- (9) Standing Committees, Presbyteries and Safeguarding Coordinators must report promptly to the Safeguarding Service on action taken after advice from the Service has been given in relation to reports of Safeguarding Concerns.

Safeguarding in the Presbyteries of England, International Charges and Jerusalem

17. Kirk Sessions in the Presbyteries of England, International Charges and Jerusalem will follow the recommendations and advice of the Safeguarding Service.

Overseas work

18. (1) Any Church body or agency which sends Workers abroad must ensure that such persons are members of the PVG Scheme, and Kirk Sessions must ensure that any individuals who host Vulnerable Groups from abroad are safely recruited.
- (2) Standing Committees must have clear Safeguarding protocols, approved by the Safeguarding Service, in place for overseas work.

Other services provided by Safeguarding Service

19. The Safeguarding Service may from time to time with the approval of the Assembly Trustees enter into arrangements with other churches, agencies and groups as to the provision of Safeguarding services to them.

Management of Subjects (Covenants of Responsibilities)

20. (1) Whenever a Subject wishes to be involved in the life of a congregation, then the following shall apply:
- (i) the Safeguarding Coordinator shall inform the Safeguarding Service (in turn, the Safeguarding Service shall inform the Safeguarding Coordinator if such information comes to its notice);
- (ii) a Covenant of Responsibilities shall be entered into by the Safeguarding Panel on behalf of the relevant Kirk Session(s) with the Subject.
- (2) If the Subject refuses to sign a Covenant of Responsibilities, then the Subject shall not be entitled to be involved in the life of the congregation.
- (3) The terms of the Covenant of Responsibilities shall be determined by the Safeguarding Service in consultation with the Safeguarding Panel of the relevant Kirk Session(s) and, where appropriate, the Responsible Authorities, in accordance with the Safeguarding Service's procedures from time to time. The Subject shall have no input into the drafting of the Covenant of Responsibilities, which shall not be negotiable by the Subject. The Covenant shall provide for its regular review and this shall be implemented according to the procedures from time to time of the Safeguarding Service.
- (4) A Covenant of Responsibilities is specific to a congregation and is not transferable to a different congregation. Should the Subject wish to be involved in the life of another congregation then a new Covenant of Responsibilities shall require to be entered into and the preceding provisions of this section 20 shall apply. In addition the terms of the Covenant to be entered into in respect of the new congregation may be determined in consultation with the Safeguarding Coordinator of the former congregation.

Consequential amendments

21. (1) This Act shall be added to the list of Acts in the Schedule to the Alternative Dispute Resolution Processes Act (Act VI 2014), as being an Act in respect of which ADR shall not be used.
- (2) The Protection of Vulnerable Groups Act (Act VII 2011) as amended shall be repealed.

Act to prevail

22. From its date of passing, the terms of this Act shall prevail where those are inconsistent with any previous deliverances of the General Assembly.

References

- [i] Currently Form SG3
- [ii] Currently Form SG7
- [iii] Currently Form SG11
- [iv] Currently Form SG7
- [v] Currently Form SG11

REGISTRATION OF MINISTRIES COMMITTEE MAY 2025

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Note that Licentiates seeking to return to ministry should do so via the Admissions and Readmissions process and not the Registration of Ministries route.
3. Instruct the Committee to consider the designation of the existing categories within the Registration of Ministries Act and to report back to the General Assembly of 2026.

Report

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Committee's main function is to consider applications from Church of Scotland Ministers, who wish to have the status of a Category O registration, which entitles them to be considered as an applicant for a vacant charge. Category O stands for Office-Holder; the other categories are listed in the Act, which can be found at this link: <https://bit.ly/3QMLnzV>. In addition, where ministers are returning from suspension, and wish to transition out of category S (for those who have been suspended) the Committee is required to consider applications from ministers in this category who wish to exercise ministry again. The Registration of Ministries Committee's task is to assess an individual's readiness for parish ministry, and then to specify what steps need to be taken to address any gaps in knowledge, understanding and experience which come to light. Further information on the workings of the Committee can be found at the Committee's page on the Church of Scotland website, here: <http://bit.ly/3J3jSzg>

1.2 Over and above this, the Committee also works with Presbyteries to review the names of those for whom the Presbytery has pastoral responsibility and this exercise takes place each year.

1.3 At last year's General Assembly (2024), there was significant engagement with the Committee's Report, not least on the proposal to restrict the validity of Category O registration to two years following demission. As part of that debate, the Convener assured the General Assembly of a commitment to listen and engage, and he has followed up on that commitment by being in contact with some Commissioners in relation to their comments at last year's General Assembly.

2. PRINCIPLES AT THE HEART OF THE COMMITTEE'S WORK

2.1 The Act has at its heart not just a concern for accountability and good order, but also a passion for pastoral care and vocational direction. The Committee seeks in its engagement with those applying for Category O registration (or an extension of an existing Category O registration) to explore whether those who seek to enter, or return to, parish ministry are equipped with the spiritual and vocational gifts to enable them to serve the congregations which call them: also, to assess the individual's readiness for parish ministry, and to indicate how individuals might address any gaps in knowledge, understanding, and experience which come to light. That passion for pastoral care also extends to a heart for those pastoral charges engaging with applicants for their vacancy, who have gone through the Registration of Ministries process. The Committee aspires to assure such charges, and their Nominating Committees, that those presenting are appropriately equipped for the challenges of ministry in this season in the Church's life.

3. FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

3.1 At the 2024 General Assembly, the question was asked why inducted ministers are not facing similar questions about their involvement in the wider Church, at national or regional level; about their spiritual life; about awareness of issues to do with Church Law and civil law. It should be noted there was a discussion about the possibility of compulsory Continuing Ministerial Development as part of the Report of the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team (FAPLT) to the 2024 General Assembly. Work is also being done by FAPLT on Capability and Competence, building on the Formation Framework presented to the General Assembly of 2019, and that will eventually impact on the work of the Registration of Ministries Committee. The Committee would wish to commend the process of Ministerial Development Conversations to all. It is hoped that Presbyteries and Kirk Sessions will encourage individual ministers to take up these possibilities, as well as the opportunities for pastoral supervision and spiritual direction outlined on the Ascend pages of the Church of Scotland website at this link: <https://bit.ly/3UPyb0f>

4. ASSISTANT MINISTERS, PROBATIONERS, AND FAMILIARISATION CANDIDATES

4.1 The Committee reported to last year's General Assembly the position that those Assistant Ministers, Probationers, and Familiarisation Candidates, who have taken on assistant minister contracts and have been ordained by their Presbytery should be registered as Category E. Subject to their graduate candidate status being affirmed by the Presbytery, or certificate of eligibility still being valid, they will move to be automatically registered as Category O status on induction to a parish. The provisions of section 22A (5) of Act X 2004 on Selection and Training for Full-Time Ministry will still apply, where a Presbytery has renewed such graduate candidate status, on three occasions (i.e. for up to three years) and it would then fall to the individual minister to make application to the Registration of Ministries Committee. For familiarisation candidates, the three-year validity of a certificate of eligibility applies similarly, and thereafter they should make application to the Registration of Ministries Committee for Category O registration following the expiry of their certificate of eligibility.

5. LICENTIATES

5.1 In the past, when candidates for ministry finished their academic studies, and before they began their placement as Probationer Ministers, they were licensed to preach the Gospel. There are still a small number of people in this category, known as licentiates. Following conversation with the People and Training Team of FAPLT, the Committee asks the General Assembly to affirm that the route of licentiates to return into ministry should not be via Registration of Ministries but should be via the Admissions and Readmissions process.

6. MINISTERS AND COMMUNION ROLLS

6.1 It has become clear in the work of the Committee that there is some confusion about whether the duly inducted minister of a charge is automatically a member of that charge. For the avoidance of doubt, the Minister's name should feature on the Communion Roll as an individual member. When a minister demits a charge, and then moves to become part of a worshipping congregation elsewhere, they should obtain a certificate of transference and be added to the Communion Roll of that congregation.

7. STATISTICS

7.1 At the time of writing (February 2025), since 1 June 2024, the Committee has engaged with seven applicants seeking Category O registration and granted five of the seven applications. Three were people seeking to move from Category E to Category O; three were ministers not in parishes seeking to extend their Category O registration for a further period; and one was a minister seeking to return from suspension.

8. CATEGORIES AND EXCEPTIONS

8.1 The Committee has received representations about the names of the different categories. In particular, the use of the word "Inactive" – Category I – has particular pastoral sensitivities, and has caused a degree of upset in some quarters.

8.2 Category E, for Employed, covers not only those in the employment of the Church, including staff in the Church Offices, but also a whole range of others, including those in the different posts of chaplaincy, and others in roles where the Church's engagement is not as clear cut, but where they are able to exercise all aspects of ministry, save being inducted to a charge.

8.3 Category R is to be understood as R for Retained. It is worth noting, that, at time of writing, there are 617 in Category R.

8.4 There are ministers inducted to parishes, on restricted certificates of eligibility, either in terms of the Admissions and Readmissions Act (Act 13,2022), or The International Presbytery Act (Act 2, 2016). While the terms of these certificates are defined, the Committee will work with the International Presbytery and FAPLT to explore how best to ensure that such ministers are appropriately equipped to minister in the Church of Scotland, where such ministers are not subject to the discipline of the Church but, nonetheless, are serving in parishes or charges.

8.5 The Committee will consider these matters and report to the General Assembly of 2026.

9. SOME WORDS OF THANKS

9.1 The collaborative nature of the Committee's engagement is a vital part of its work. The Committee would like to express its thanks to Presbytery Clerks, and Presbytery Administrators – this last group of people an unsung and often unheralded group of people – who have supported the Committee in its work, both in offering insights on individual applications, and in the work which goes in the annual review of the names of those for which each Presbytery has pastoral responsibility.

In the name of the Committee

ROBERT HAMILTON, Convener
HILARY MCDUGALL, Vice-Convener
ANGUS R. MATHIESON, Registrar

Addendum

Robbie Hamilton assumed the Convenership of the Registration of Ministries Committee following the General Assembly of 2023, when he was minister at Airdrie: New Wellwynd. He brought to the role the experience and wisdom as a former Depute Presbytery Clerk in the then Presbytery of Hamilton, as well as a pastoral heart for those presenting before the Committee. That pastoral concern was allied to a deep respect for good order and accountability, and these characteristics were typical of Robbie's leadership of the Committee. The work of the Committee covers issues of real sensitivity and Robbie has without fail, both skilfully and sympathetically addressed those. He steps down to concentrate on his duties as Presbytery Clerk; the Committee is grateful to him for his counsel and commitment, and wishes him well in his role as Presbytery Clerk with all the complexities involved in that role.

HILARY MCDUGALL, Vice-Convener
ANGUS R. MATHIESON, Registrar

12

JOINT REPORT OF THE THEOLOGICAL FORUM AND THE FAITH ACTION PROGRAMME LEADERSHIP TEAM ON ASSISTED DYING MAY 2025

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Affirm that every human being is made in the image of God with inherent dignity and worth.
3. Call on the Scottish Government to prioritise development of excellent palliative care services to ensure that they are universally available and urgently to review the funding models currently in place.
4. Note the diversity of theological views in the Church on the issue of assisted dying, and the integrity with which they are held.
5. Agree that if assisted dying is legalised, robust safeguards must be in place.
6. Acknowledge that further resources and pastoral care training will be required, from FAPLT, should assisted dying be legalised.
7. Recognising the value of open discussion around death and dying, commend the Report for further study, reflection and dialogue.
8. Thank and discharge the working group on assisted dying.

Report

Assisted Dying: A Spectrum of Belief

This report contains reference to topics that some may find distressing. If you have found this report to raise concerns for you or a loved one, and you would like to talk about this, Marie Curie Information and Support is a free service and can be contacted via their website www.mariecurie.org.uk or by phone on 0800 090 2309.

1. METHODOLOGY

1.1 Over the past two years the working group on assisted dying has endeavoured to listen widely on this complex and often emotive issue. We have consulted with medical professionals and researchers, both in the UK and in places where assisted dying has been legalised; hospital and hospice chaplains and directors for spiritual care; palliative care practitioners; CrossReach and other social service providers; ethicists, academics and politicians. We have also held conversations on assisted dying with members of every Presbytery. For full lists of those with whom we have consulted, please see Appendices A and B.

1.2 We have read widely on the subject, including medical research publications, news reporting, past reports by the Church of Scotland and other denominations, judicial and legislative material as well as theological and ethical academic papers. Some of these can be found in footnotes and in Appendix D.

2. TERMINOLOGY

2.1 We begin this report with a note on language and terminology. Many of the terms used to denote situations where a person's life is ended through medical means are complex and loaded. For this reason, we have provided a glossary of terms below to help the reader navigate this document. We have chosen to use the term 'assisted dying' throughout this report for several important reasons. First, this term reflects the language used in our instruction from the 2023 General Assembly. Second, it is also the term used in the proposed Bill which has been brought to the Scottish Parliament by Liam McArthur MSP, and provides the immediate political context for this report. Third, while we acknowledge that there is little agreement whether or not assisted dying is a form of suicide, we wish to resist the language of 'suicide' being applied to the cases to which this legislation would be relevant. This is because it is a word that regrettably still conveys a suggestion of stigma and judgement due to its association with distressing, sometimes impulsive, premature deaths.

2.2 Terminology is also important because there appears to be a lack of public understanding about what is being proposed in the assisted dying legislation and proposed legal safeguards.^[i] For example, in one study only 43% of people surveyed understood assisted dying to mean providing people who have less than six months to live with lethal drugs to end their life. 42% thought assisted dying meant giving people who are dying the right to stop life-sustaining treatment. 10% thought assisted dying meant hospice type care, and 5% said they did not know what assisted dying meant.^[ii] This is why education around this

issue is so important, and why we created opportunities for discussion through the Presbytery conversations to help clarify language and to encourage constructive conversations around the issues raised by assisted dying. Without clarity and shared understanding of key terms, people engaged in discussions and debates often talk past each other.

3. GLOSSARY OF TERMS^[iii]

3.1 Assisted Dying: The prescription of life-ending drugs for terminally ill, mentally competent adults to self-administer, after meeting legal safeguards. Proponents of the use of this term say that it is more apt than 'assisted suicide' because the current Bill proposed in Scotland only applies to terminally ill patients, for whom the question is not whether they will live or die, but rather what kind of death they will have.

3.2 Assisted Suicide: Providing assistance to die through the prescription of life-ending drugs to those with long-term and progressive conditions, those with terminal illnesses and also to those who are not dying. The drugs are self-administered. Some opponents of assisted dying do not accept that it is different from assisted suicide and critique the ambiguity of the term.

3.3 Voluntary Euthanasia: Directly and intentionally administering life-ending drugs to a patient who has requested it, or who has given their consent.

3.4 Non-Voluntary Euthanasia: Directly and intentionally administering life-ending drugs to a patient who has not given their consent, for example if they were in a coma.

3.5 Involuntary Euthanasia: Directly and intentionally administering life-ending drugs to a patient who does not wish to die and who has not given their consent, despite being able to. This is regarded as murder.

3.6 Active Euthanasia: Death is brought about by an act, such as the administering of life-ending drugs.

3.7 Passive Euthanasia: Allowing death to occur by withholding or withdrawing treatment.

3.8 Palliative Care: The holistic care of patients with advanced, progressive illness that cannot be cured. It includes the management of pain and the provision of psychological, practical, social and spiritual support. Its goal is the achievement of the best quality of life for patients and their families and to endeavour to deliver the best possible care around death.

4. INTRODUCTION

4.1 The issue of assisted dying has been constantly in the news in recent times, and provokes strong feelings and passionate debate. While polls show that a majority of the public in the UK favour its legalisation, including those who claim religious adherence,^[iv] many Christian denominations and other faith groups have consistently opposed a change to the current legal situation.

4.2 The Church of Scotland had been consistent in its opposition to assisted dying and euthanasia for decades. In light of the introduction of a Bill to the Scottish Parliament to change the law, in 2023 the Faith Impact Forum invited the General Assembly to reaffirm its historic opposition and encourage members to express that opposition to their MSPs:

[The General Assembly] Support the current legal protections which prohibit assisted suicide/assisted dying and urge members of the Church to make representation to their MSPs.

4.3 However, a countermotion recognising opinion in the Church was more diverse than outright opposition was moved. This countermotion also instructed that this diversity of views be explored further. On a vote, 103 voted for the original motion to reaffirm the Church's blanket opposition to assisted dying, while 225 voted for the countermotion, which then passed 238–71, with five commissioners recording dissent.

4.4 The final Deliverance therefore stated:

[The General Assembly] Noting that the historical decisions of the General Assembly have been to support current civil law as to assisted dying, but now recognising that there exists a range of theological views and ethical opinions on assisted dying within the Church, instruct the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team, the Theological Forum and other relevant parties to explore such views and opinions and report to a future General Assembly.

4.5 Following this decision, a small working group, consisting of members of the Theological Forum, FAPLT and experts in this area, was formed to fulfil the instruction of the General Assembly. This report provides some background and historical context to the Church of Scotland's position on assisted dying before moving to consider theological views. These theological questions have been considered thematically rather than in a 'reasons for and reasons against' structure to avoid perpetuating an unhelpful binary that often characterises

this debate. Finally, the report turns to pastoral and practical considerations, and concludes by offering some reflections on the areas of agreement within the Church, and further steps that the Church can reasonably take in addressing this issue. We hope that this report will help members think more deeply about this important issue, and that it will inform a range of views within the Church.

5. BACKGROUND

5.1 The debate and the decision of the 2023 General Assembly was held against the background of the proposed ‘Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill’ brought to the Scottish Parliament by Liam McArthur MSP. The Bill “will allow terminally ill adults in Scotland, who are eligible, to lawfully request, and to be provided with, assistance by health professionals to end their own life.”^[vi] The Bill requires the means of assisted dying to be self-administered rather than doctor-administered. To be eligible, applicants would have to be resident in Scotland for at least 12 months, registered with a GP in Scotland, and have the capacity to make the request.

5.2 It is worth noting that at the time of writing this report, the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill,^[vi] which would apply only to England and Wales and which could be subject to amendment, was voted in favour by MPs in the House of Commons on Friday 29th November 2024. The Bill for England and Wales will face months of further scrutiny and votes in the Commons and Lords before the proposed legislation could become law. Some of the key differences between the Westminster and Holyrood Bills include eligibility requirements; in Scotland, 16 years would be the minimum age to be given assistance to die, while in England and Wales it would be 18. The Westminster Bill also requires death to be expected within six months, while the Holyrood Bill applies to those with an advanced and progressive disease, illness or condition from which they are unable to recover and that can reasonably be expected to cause their premature death. Both Bills are still at the fairly early stages of the parliamentary journey and could be further amended.

5.3 In response to the ‘Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill’, representatives of the Church of Scotland initially expressed strong opposition to the proposals, which was in line with the Church’s long-standing position. A formal response was submitted by the Faith Impact Forum in 2019, which resisted any change to the law.^[vii]

5.4 Days before the opening of the 2023 General Assembly, a joint statement on behalf of the Church of Scotland, the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland and the Scottish Association of Mosques included the following:

Our faith traditions are united in the principle that assisted dying in itself inevitably undermines the dignity of the human person, and to allow it would mean that our society as a whole loses its common humanity. The Church of Scotland, the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland, and the Scottish Association of Mosques remain firm in their opposition to assisted suicide and euthanasia. We would call upon Members of the Scottish Parliament to consider carefully the implications of this Bill, to express their concerns, and to vote against it.

5.5 However, the subsequent General Assembly debate and Deliverance indicated that opinion within the Church of Scotland on the issue of assisted dying was more varied than this statement suggested.

6. BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND’S POSITION ON ASSISTED DYING

6.1 In the last few decades the Church of Scotland has strongly opposed any changes to the law which would permit assisted dying. Its position has been that while the relief of suffering is an obligation, to allow the artificial termination of a life is morally unacceptable.

6.2 The 2009 General Assembly received the ‘End of Life Issues’ report^[viii] which explained the reasoning for the Church’s opposition.

6.3 The General Assembly reaffirmed this position on end of life care in 2014 with a Deliverance in the Church and Society Council’s report, in which the General Assembly declared its intention to:

Continue to oppose any change to the legal position with regard to assisted suicide because of concerns about the effect any such change would have on the way society views its weakest and most vulnerable members, whilst recognising that many individuals and families face difficult decisions at the end of life, and urge the provision of better resources for palliative care.

6.4 In the same year, the General Assembly also instructed the Church and Society Council to:

... reflect theologically, in cooperation with the Theological Forum, on the issues surrounding

assisted dying, paying attention to recent attempts to change the law and to Christian voices supporting and opposing change and report to a future General Assembly.

6.5 While the Council in 2015 stated that a substantive report would be brought to the 2016 or 2017 General Assembly, for whatever reason, no such report was produced.

6.6 In 2014 and 2015 the Church argued against the Assisted Suicide (Scotland) Bill which was rejected by the Scottish Parliament by 82 votes to 36 in May 2015.

7. OTHER DENOMINATIONS' POSITION ON ASSISTED DYING

7.1 Many Christian denominations oppose assisted dying. This includes some of our ecumenical partners, including the Catholic Church in Scotland, the Church of England, the Free Church of Scotland, the United Free Church of Scotland and The Salvation Army. The reasons given for their opposition are broadly the same reasons as for the Church of Scotland's historic position; the sacredness of life, the protection of the vulnerable, the undermining of palliative care and of suicide prevention, the possibility of widening eligibility criteria, and the permanent alteration of the patient-doctor relationship. Because these Churches are divided on many other issues, some would argue that this unity should give us pause for thought. For opponents of assisted dying, to change the Church of Scotland's stance on this issue would endanger this consensus, leading not only to disagreements with other denominations, but also to a weakening of our shared Christian witness to civic society and the people of Scotland.

7.2 However, there are some denominations that have moved away from outright opposition to assisted dying including our partners in the United Reformed Church, Methodist Church and Scottish Episcopal Church. For example, the Scottish Episcopal Church expressed 'partial opposition' in its response to a 'Call for Views' on the Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill in August 2024. The response acknowledged:

"Whilst believing the principle that all humanity was created in the image of God, and that all human life is sacred, many will support a legal, pastoral, and carefully approached end to suffering in cases of terminal illness. Others will oppose any legislation which seeks to bring about deliberate ending of life... The Church continues to grapple with these issues."^[ix]

7.3 The response made clear that while it reflects views and discussions on the matter of assisted dying, it does not represent the settled view of the Scottish Episcopal Church as a whole.

7.4 The official position of the Methodist Church was expressed in a statement adopted by the Methodist Conference in 1974, which opposed any kind of assisted dying.^[x] However, when the Conference debated the question in 2015, a wide variety of views were expressed and following a referral to the Methodist Council, it was agreed to make available a broad range of resources to assist any who are grappling with issues of death and dying.^[xi] While the official position of 1974 remains, the Methodist Church responds to the issue of assisted dying as a matter of pastoral complexity, with a recognition that differing theological and ethical dimensions exist in tension with one another.

7.5 The United Reformed Church expressed opposition to assisted dying in a 2007 report to the General Assembly. The URC National Synod of Scotland supported the 2013 Scottish Parliament Bill, and they responded 'neutral/don't know' to the consultation on the Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill in August 2024, stating that they "welcome diversity of viewpoints as a means of stimulating debate on the subject and as a mechanism for ensuring that both law and practice receive the highest level of scrutiny and evaluation."^[xii]

7.6 This acceptance of a diversity of viewpoints is shared by the Quakers in Britain, who in 2019 considered issues and ethics around assisted dying, stating:

"There are strong feelings in all quarters, but it is clear that we have not reached a united view about possible changes to legislation. We do not regard lack of unity as a weakness. Quakers as a religious body embrace diversity in what we believe individually but hold the space for opposing views; we can have conversations, answer questions of ourselves and of God, work through our contradictions and support each other in difficulty."^[xiii]

7.7 This diversity is not only present ecumenically with other Christian Churches, but also between different faith groups. In the UK, the Religious Alliance for Dignity in Dying^[xiv] is formed of religious organisations, leaders and people who, they state, "follow more than a dozen different denominations and who support a change in the law to enable terminally ill people the ability to determine how, when and where they die alongside high quality end of life care."

7.8 While it is true that opposition to assisted dying remains significant within Christian denominations, it cannot be said that religious opinion on this matter is homogeneous.

8. SCRIPTURE AND ASSISTED DYING

8.1 Unsurprisingly, the issue of assisted dying is not directly addressed in Scripture. Traditionally, the sixth commandment—‘You shall not kill’ (Exod 20.14; Deut 5.17)—has been taken to include self-killing. For many, this closes the debate. However, as there are many examples of what appear to be divinely sanctioned killing in the Hebrew Bible, mainly in judicial or warfare contexts, the commandment is generally taken to refer specifically to murder of fellow community members outside these contexts.

8.2 Moreover, while Christianity and Judaism both have long-standing traditional opposition to suicide, to include self-killing within the scope of the sixth commandment is complicated by the presence of several deaths by suicide in the Old Testament that pass without particularly critical judgment. There are six self-killings in the Hebrew Bible: two accounts of Saul’s death (1 Sam 31.1–6; cf. 1 Chron 10.1–6); Saul’s armour-bearer (1 Sam 31.5); Abimelech (Judg 9.52–54), Ahithophel (2 Sam 17.23), Zimri (1 Kgs 16.18), and Samson (Judg 16.23–31).

8.3 While there is some moral ambiguity attached to each of these figures, there is no evidence the narrators considered their suicides to contribute to any negative assessment of their characters.^[xvi] In fact, there is no explicit criticism of self-killing anywhere in the Old Testament. Indeed, the narrator endorses the result of Samson’s death, in which he not only kills himself, but thousands of Philistine spectators at the same time (Judg 16.30).^[xvii]

8.4 Furthermore, in late Second Temple Jewish literature, there are many positive examples of ‘heroic’ figures dying at their own hand, usually in the context of battle or persecution.^[xviii] It is only in the Rabbinic period that Jewish attitudes to self-killing begin to shift.

8.5 However, when it comes to the sole example of self-killing in the New Testament—Judas Iscariot—the overwhelming weight of Christian tradition has read the manner of his death negatively. Both Augustine (*City of God* 1.17)^[xviii] and Jerome (*Commentary on Matthew* IV.17 on Matt 27.5)^[xix] argue Judas added to his ‘crime’ of betraying Jesus by taking his own life. Augustine further argues Judas “despaired of God’s mercy and in a fit of self-destructive remorse left himself no chance of a saving repentance.” Augustine’s claim that those who take their own lives make repentance impossible—literally an unforgivable sin—is arguably the root of much of the subsequent centuries of stigmatism in mainstream Christianity.^[xx]

8.6 While Augustine’s reading has been hugely influential in the centuries of subsequent negative interpretations of Judas’ death, it is far from clear this can be justified from Matthew’s text. The narrative is brief and matter of fact. After repenting and returning the thirty pieces of silver, “he went out and hanged himself” (Matt 27.4). As there was not yet any antipathy towards self-killing in Jewish tradition, there is no *a priori* reason to read any direct criticism of the manner of Judas’ death.^[xxi] There are also clear parallels with the Ahithophel story, who, after his counsel against David was ignored, set his affairs in order “and hanged himself”, and was buried with his fathers (17.23).^[xxii]

8.7 Despite the iconic nature of Judas’ suicide in Christian tradition, it is worth noting that in the other New Testament account of his death, he does not in fact die by his own hand, but “falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out” (Acts 1.18). There is at least an implication that God has some responsibility for his death.

8.8 The extent to which biblical self-killings are relevant for modern debates on assisted dying is disputed,^[xxiii] and in any case, these narratives should be read in the context of the ancient tradition of the ‘Noble Death’. In this tradition, self-killing was philosophically acceptable, but only under very strict conditions. The closest biblical example to assisted dying, that of Saul asking his armour bearer to deliver the *coup de grace*, falls under the criterion of avoiding capture on the battlefield. Other criteria include when one’s death is demanded by the authorities or by the gods, to restore honour, to avoid shame, or to end intolerable suffering.^[xxiv]

8.9 While there have been attempts to draw a sharp distinction between ancient Noble Death philosophies and early Christian thought,^[xxv] some early Christian apologists make precisely this comparison in order to commend the phenomenon of Christian martyrdom to sceptical pagan critics who thought Christians too eager for death.^[xxvi] Indeed, a number of Christians recognised as martyrs die at their own hand.^[xxvii] The Christian martyr tradition is illustrative of Paul’s conviction that ‘to die is gain’ (Phil 1.21); death does not have the final word.^[xxviii]

8.10 As there are few direct points of contact between the biblical and early Christian traditions and our contemporary questions about assisted dying, Christians will draw different conclusions on what weight to put on what can be said about self-killing in the ancient world in our current discussions. Some might consider relevant passages where various characters in the Hebrew Bible through desperation asked God to end their lives, but took no action themselves, such as Elijah (1 Kgs 19.4), Job (6.8–10), Jeremiah (20.14–18), and Jonah (4.3). Yet Jonah also offered his own life to save the sailors from the storm (1.11–16), while Samson’s prayer to die with the Philistines at his own hand was answered positively (Judg 16.30). Even so, while Christian antipathy towards self-killing is primarily a post-biblical development, it is nonetheless deeply ingrained in our tradition.

9. THEOLOGICAL QUESTIONS AROUND ASSISTED DYING

A number of theological questions are raised by the proposal that assisted dying be legalised.

9.1 Imago Dei (Sanctity of Life/Dignity of Life)

9.1.1 Christians affirm that human beings are made in the image of God (Latin: *imago dei*), a concept found in the Genesis creation account (1.27). While this phrase has been interpreted in many ways over the centuries, they all focus on the inherent dignity and divine purpose of human beings.^[xxix] For Christians, human life is sacred, and all people reflect the goodness of God simply by existing. It can therefore be argued that any violence or action that negatively impacts someone's health or wellbeing is an assault upon the image of God in humanity.

9.1.2 The idea of *imago dei* is closely connected with the concept of dignity. Across the spectrum of Christian opinion on assisted dying, there is agreement that our fundamental dignity as human beings remains intact regardless of our physical circumstances. It is not given to us by society, or Human Rights laws, or by our own or other's opinions. It is innate and inalienable; part of the fabric of human nature as fashioned by our Creator.

9.1.3 Where opinion diverges is whether the indignity that we may suffer on an experiential level with a terminal illness would justify a choice to end one's life. For example, if someone receives a terminal diagnosis and loses certain capacities which cause suffering or an irreversible drop in the quality of life, does this justify the choice to end one's life, all the while understanding that our essential dignity, given to us by God, remains unchanged?

9.1.4 One observation made from both sides of the debate is that we routinely allow our animals a peaceful death through euthanasia. Those in favour of assisted dying may point to the contrast between veterinary and human medicine in which the principle of the former is more concerned with quality of life rather than prolonging it. They might further argue that in denying someone the right to end their lives in the face of intolerable suffering when the outcome of death is a certainty, we risk treating people worse than dogs. Those against assisted dying would argue that is precisely the point – we are not dogs, but people made in the image of God, and should be treated differently.

9.1.5 The central question here is, do we mar the image of God by ending human life prematurely or by denying someone with a terminal illness suffering a particularly undignified death the opportunity to hasten their own death?

9.2 God's Sovereignty

9.2.1 A second theological concern is rooted in the sovereignty of God. Job says in acknowledgment of God's sovereignty, "A person's days are determined; you have decreed the number of his months and have set limits he cannot exceed" (Job 14:5). Ecclesiastes 8:8 speaks in similar terms: "As no one has power over the wind to contain it, so no one has power over the time of their death" (see also Psalm 139.6). Some would interpret these texts to mean that God's sovereign rule implies that any intervention to shorten one's life is an assault upon that sovereignty. In this view, only circumstances can legitimately shorten life, not human intervention. Others would argue these are descriptive of the limits of human understanding in an ancient context, and to take them as prescriptive for contemporary ethics is merely proof-texting.^[xxx] Moreover, taken literally, texts such as these could be used to rule out medical intervention such as vaccination.

9.2.2 All Christians acknowledge that God is the author of all created life, but the complex relationship between God's sovereignty and our free will have been debated throughout Church history. Some consider the taking of life under any circumstances as an assault on God's sovereign rule. So in this view, submission to God's providence in life and death is considered to be an exercise of faith in Divine sovereignty. This is considered to imply acceptance of the outcome once the limits of medical intervention have been reached. However, there is divergence among those who hold this view as to what extent interventions to prolong life are included in this prohibition. While an individual's autonomy is recognised as an important legal and medical principle, this view holds that our autonomy would not extend to choosing to end one's life, which is understood as a denial of God's sovereignty.

9.2.3 Opponents of assisted dying argue that we were not created to be gods in our own right, choosing for ourselves what is right and wrong. However, others might argue that this ignores choices that we frequently make such as the use of contraception, fertility treatment, and choosing or declining chemotherapy or dialysis for treatable conditions, which also arguably 'plays god.' Moreover, Hans Küng criticises an account of sovereignty that reduces people to mere servants owned unconditionally by God, who "simply exercises sovereign control over human beings." Küng argues that the "God of the covenant who shows solidarity, wants to have human beings in his image, as free, responsible partners".^[xxxi] While people might argue that we do not have a right to decide when we die, medical interventions such as vaccines, surgery, and pharmacology already influence the length of our lives. We have the right to withhold or withdraw a life sustaining treatment, which will hasten an inevitable end, or to refuse a treatment such as resuscitation, but these are not viewed as controversial or a denial of God's sovereignty.

9.3 Suffering

9.3.1 Medicine is advancing at a rapid rate. Our technical ability to prolong life through medical intervention has not always kept pace with our moral thinking around the quality of life some of those interventions afford. The line when prolonging life becomes prolonging suffering may be defined differently by each individual. What one person determines an acceptable quality of life or a tolerable pain or capacity threshold may be unacceptable to someone else. One striking comment from a medical professional was that even with the best palliative care in the world, not all suffering (physical or existential) can be palliated. While physicians can try their best to alleviate physical suffering, the indignity some experience with the loss of function and capacity and the extreme symptoms that can accompany terminal illness towards the end of life cannot always be avoided. One study suggests that “even if every dying person who needed it had access to high quality, specialist palliative care in Scotland, 591 people a year would still have unrelieved pain in the final three months of their life.”^[xxxii]

9.3.2 There is a theological tradition that valorises physical suffering, either as meritorious in itself, or as a spiritual practice to share in the sufferings of Christ. In some traditions this takes the form of fasting or self-mortification, but more widely there is the idea that we draw close to God through the experience of suffering.

9.3.3 However, some theologians reject the notion that God wills anyone to suffer.^[xxxiii] Hans Küng rejects as “religious rigorism without compassion” the view that intolerable suffering should be borne as an act of submission to God, as if that suffering has been inflicted by God.^[xxxiv] Instead, Küng argues, “for the terminally ill our theological task is not spiritualizing and mystification of suffering or even a pedagogical use of suffering (‘purgatory on earth’) but – in the footsteps of Jesus, who healed the sick – one of reducing and removing suffering as far as possible.”^[xxxv]

9.3.4 These two different accounts of suffering are held within the Church of Scotland. Indeed, we heard numerous poignant and heart-breaking accounts of Commissioners at the General Assembly describing the trauma of losing their loved ones in this way.^[xxxvi] For some, while they would not contend that God wants us to suffer, there is the belief that we draw closer to God through the experience of suffering. Jesus himself cried on the cross “my God, my God why have you forsaken me?” This view was represented in the 2024 General Assembly debate by one commissioner, who spoke of her husband who died 18 months after his diagnosis of motor neurone disease. While there were times when both she and her husband cried the same refrain as Jesus did, she counselled that we should listen to the value in suffering as well. Conversely, others do not see any particular value in suffering, and do not believe that God would want suffering to continue. This stance was also represented at the General Assembly by another commissioner whose sibling endured immense suffering from a rare disease which left her completely immobile. Her last words were, “help me, help me”, but no one could. This commissioner did not believe that God would have wanted her sister to suffer, and now pleads for the Church to support carefully regulated assisted dying. As demonstrated above, two people can accompany their loved ones through a devastating terminal diagnosis and reach very different conclusions about the meaning and purpose of their suffering.

9.3.5 While there is divergence of opinion on the role of suffering, all can agree that it is to be met with love and care. The divergence of interpretation is whether assisting someone to die and end their suffering can ever be the ‘best’ option in a bad situation. The disagreement does not lie in the call to be compassionate, but rather how that compassion is lived out. This may mean that while we may personally recognise some value in end of life suffering, we may not wish to impose this theology on others, or in the words of Stanley Hauerwas, who nonetheless opposes assisted dying, “it is one thing for us to make our own suffering part of our life in service to God, it is quite another to make another’s suffering part of his or her service to God.”^[xxxvii]

10. PERSONAL AUTONOMY/COMMUNITY RESPONSIBILITY

10.1 Some may consider human autonomy as one of the stronger arguments in favour of a change in the law. The principle of autonomy and personal decision-making is a key – often decisive – consideration in the provision of medical care. End of life care often involves a choice whether or not to undergo treatment that would almost certainly extend life, but has to be balanced by the side-effects of that treatment or a personal judgement about the quality and value of that extended life. In most cases the right to refuse treatment is a decision for patients and is respected. We see this with ‘do not resuscitate’ orders or advanced directives, where individuals can say whether or not they would wish to be kept alive in a persistent vegetative state. In principle, this involves a decision about the relative value of life that overrides the medical ability to extend it. Therefore, it could be argued that it is a relatively small step to extend this principle of personal bodily autonomy to a right for life to be brought to a more dignified end with medical assistance at a time and in circumstances of one’s own choosing.

10.2 However, even those who believe the principle of human autonomy is a critical factor in medical ethics would also acknowledge that any right to human freedom has theological, legal, and social limits. It is an established principle that living in community or society limits absolute individual freedoms. We have already considered the theological issue of God's sovereignty over creation, but there are also potential social consequences should the law on assisted dying be changed. Our decisions do not affect us alone, but impact loved ones, health professionals, and there may also be effects on society. We have heard concerns from some working in the medical profession that a change to the law would change the nature of health care, potentially violating the principle of 'do no harm'. Others are concerned about the role of personal conscience, and whether those who would not wish to assist someone in ending their life would be protected. While provision may well be made to protect the conscience of medical staff, it would be more difficult to extend this legal protection to care workers or residential staff. Clearly, should there be a change in the law, it would be wrong to prevent someone from being able to exercise the right to an assisted death on the basis of the moral objections of others. Nonetheless, the potential tension should be acknowledged, and as far as is possible addressed.

10.3 The impact on carers is perhaps more complex. We have already heard that those who care for loved ones can reach divergent views on whether or not assisted dying would have helped them. Some may also take the view that the opportunity for what they perceive as a more dignified death, cutting short a time of prolonged agony or ignominy, may help loved ones remember their life rather than these memories being overwhelmed by the horror of their death. On the other hand, some loved ones may be deeply troubled by the choice of assisted dying, which may also create long-term negative memories. We have to accept that it is difficult to reach a definite conclusion on this aspect of the discussion.

10.4 One further concern is the effect a change in the law might have on society. There is a fear that the legalisation of assisted dying may signal an erosion of the value of life. While it is unhelpful to conflate shortening the life of a terminally ill patient by a few weeks with wider suicide prevention strategies, some worry that the State sanctioning the deliberate ending of life may have unintended consequences, and render some lives of lesser value. This potentially could lead to the erosion of protection for vulnerable people or people with certain disabilities, whose lives may be deemed to be not worth living. Proposed legislation is restricted to people with a terminal illness and a short life expectancy, so these fears are at present potential rather than actual. Nonetheless, this does not render them unimportant.

10.5 Here is a similar fear that the economically disadvantaged could be vulnerable and targeted to access assisted dying. However, it is important to note that this is not borne out by data from Canada which challenges the idea that access to MAiD (Medical Assistance in Dying) is driven by social or economic vulnerability.^[xxxviii] The current prohibition on assisted dying in our country means those without financial means do not have the option to travel to countries in which assisted dying is legal. Therefore, there is currently inequality of access on economic grounds. There is also the danger that even those who could afford to do so may fear losing capacity to travel at the time of their choosing, which might lead them to arrange their deaths earlier than they would otherwise have chosen.

10.6 Therefore, while some may see the appeal to personal autonomy as decisive in this discussion, this has to be balanced by the fact that we live in community, and cannot live our lives ignoring the potential consequences on others. For some Christians, the command to love our neighbour means opposing a change to the law that might risk devaluing the lives of vulnerable people, yet for theologian Paul Badham, the love commandment, and Jesus' concern for people on an individual level, is the primary reason for his supporting the right of people to choose an assisted death in certain regulated situations.^[xxxix] Similarly, Küng, who sees his position as mediating between "anti-religious libertinism" and "religious rigorism without compassion" (as he terms it) argues strongly for God-given responsible autonomy at the end of life. He writes: "I am convinced that the all-merciful God, who has given men and women freedom and responsibility for their lives, has also left to dying people the responsibility for making a conscientious decision about the manner and time of their deaths. This is a responsibility which neither the state nor the church, neither a theologian nor a doctor, can take away."^[xli]

11. PASTORAL CARE AND RELATIONSHIPS

11.1 The divergent biblical and theological understandings explored above inform the Church's concern about assisted dying in relation to one of its most important duties: pastoral care.

11.2 There are various reasons why people seek assisted dying after a terminal diagnosis. Sometimes it is not due to incurable pain, but rather 'existential distress', that is, anxiety or despair over their diagnosis and its effects. Studies vary widely on how influential existential distress is to their decision. In a study where respondents chose multiple reasons influencing their decision, 87% of respondents indicated that existential distress was a contributing

factor.^[xli] In another study however, only 4.7% respondents indicate such distress to be a contributing factor.^[xlii] Despite this variation, we are in agreement that helping those in existential distress is one of the core callings of the Church, though we differ in how we do that.

11.3 The current report is designed to assist the Church to come to a considered position on a difficult—but at the time being potential—situation. Should there be a change in the law, this potential situation will become a reality, and we believe further work would then need to be done to outline principles of pastoral care where Ministers, Deacons, Office Bearers and members may find themselves ministering or involved in situations where a decision to seek assisted dying is being actively considered. Further guidance and support would be necessary to navigate issues of pastoral care and conscience, and we have requested that this be acknowledged in section 6 of the Deliverance of our report.

11.4 The Church has the privilege of coming alongside people as they wrestle with illness and death, often making healthcare choices different to what we might choose for ourselves. We would want to affirm that this would remain the same should there be a change in the law, and while we would affirm the important principle of freedom of conscience to disagree with someone else's decision, the Church would still be there to offer pastoral care with love, support, and prayer.^[xliii]

12. SLIPPERY SLOPE CONCERNS

12.1 By far the most commonly deployed arguments against a change in the law on assisted dying are those that might be called consequentialist or 'slippery slope' arguments. Even those who either support or can accept the case for assisted dying in principle may determine that the potential for harmful consequences is decisive in coming to a decision on the issue. So, for example, even if robust safeguards were to be put in place, over time these could be eroded, such that there could be fewer protections. Where the slippery slope ends is often imagined or potential, but in the case of assisted dying, it is often the case that opponents will point to other countries in which there has been increased relaxation of the law, such that people with disabilities or mental health illnesses have been allowed to elect an assisted death. Therefore, while the proposals currently being considered in Scotland are restricted to people with a terminal illness with a short life expectancy, some worry the eligibility criteria could be expanded in the future.

12.2 At the same time, it is fair to say that the legal situation in other countries is not always accurately described or well understood, often hampering the quality of public debate. In 2024, the Westminster Parliament's Health and Social Care Committee produced a detailed report on the issues around assisted dying designed to be a resource for the debate rather than advancing any specific position. The committee noted: "both the individuals who agree and those who disagree with the current law...frequently used examples from international jurisdictions to support their viewpoint" (115).^[xiv] The Committee noted as a point of fact (at the time of writing) that "jurisdictions which have introduced [assisted dying] on the basis of terminal illness have not changed the law to include eligibility on the basis of 'unbearable suffering'" (142).

12.3 The fact that as yet there are no examples from the international community where a jurisdiction has expanded eligibility criteria where it was initially restricted to terminal illness does not, of course, guarantee that it could not happen. Nor is it impossible that, should the Bill with its current restrictions be passed in Scotland, a future Parliament could seek to amend the eligibility criteria. However, this would have to be done through the legislative process, and a future General Assembly would similarly wrestle with the theology and implications of what was being proposed. For example, it may be that there are already different views on the current Bill's eligibility restriction to those who are able to self-medicate, potentially excluding those who are terminally ill with certain neurological conditions making self-administering difficult or impossible.

12.4 Another, perhaps more powerful, argument runs that even with robust safeguards, people receiving end of life care might feel pressured to choose an assisted death; in short, a 'right to die' could become a 'duty to die'. The force of this argument lies in the fact that, as an anticipated theoretical risk, it is difficult – if not impossible – to adequately counter. While it is not a risk absent from current decisions around end of life care, it illustrates how important assessment and safeguards would be in the implementation of any legislation. For some, this risk is decisive. For others, the absence of a right to die creates a certainty of avoidable suffering, and while acknowledging the potential problem, believe it can be overcome.

12.5 A related concern is the potential effect on the perceived value of vulnerable groups, particularly disabled people. In Scotland there are conflicting reports on whether the disability community would support assisted dying or would want access to it or protections from it,^[xv] while the Westminster Health and Social Care Committee heard a variety of different views

from disability groups and campaigners (202-211). While some respondents thought legislation might lead to a perception that disabled people's lives "weren't worth living" (e.g. 138), others argued by failing to recognise the diverse voices among disabled people risked devaluing their lives even more, especially by refusing to respect their autonomy (e.g. 139). In Canada when MAiD (Medical Assistance in Dying) initially excluded those with disabilities to protect the vulnerable of society, it was disabled people who sued and won the right to be included in MAiD.^[xlvii] Any decisions of exclusions or safeguards for disabled people in Scotland should be made in consultation with the disability community themselves, honouring the disability advocacy principle of 'nothing about us, without us.'

12.6 There is also fear that introducing assisted dying may cause patients, families and healthcare professionals to stop looking for – and, crucially, investing in – improvements to palliative care both for individuals and within wider society. Currently, palliative care is not equitably available in the UK, particularly for poor and rural communities. Indeed, data shows that there is inequality of access to good palliative care among minority groups due to socioeconomic factors, race, rurality and other intersectional injustices.^[xlviii] A 2019 study in England looking at urban and rural differences in geographical accessibility to inpatient palliative care found that rural dwellers are less likely to die at palliative and end-of-life care inpatient facilities, compared to their urban counterparts.^[xlix] Moreover, the 2024 Better End of Life 'Time to Care' report,^[xlii] which was based on a large survey of 1179 responses of people's experiences at the end of life in England and Wales, concluded:

"Our findings reveal patchy and inconsistent provision of care for people approaching the end of life. While there were examples of excellent care, the overall picture is of overstretched services, with health and care staff lacking enough time to provide care, and where coordination and communication are inadequate. This means that people lack timely management of symptoms and family carers spend precious time struggling to access, navigate, and manage different services, in addition to providing much of the care needed themselves. This leaves carers feeling unprepared, unsupported, traumatised, and let down, which has lasting consequences into bereavement."

12.7 While this data is from England and Wales, it can be extrapolated to our context in Scotland. Research funded by Marie Curie shows that the palliative care need in Scotland is projected to increase by up to 20% by 2040, which could mean an additional 10,000 people needing end-of-life care.^[i] Concern for the potential negative effects that the introduction of assisted dying may have on palliative care is expressed by Dr Ian Morrison, Consultant Neurologist at Ninewells Hospital, Dundee, and clinical lead for Motor Neurone Disease in NHS Tayside, who stated when interviewed for a video produced for the Presbytery conversations on assisted dying:

"Care in the community costs a lot, and I worry that assisted dying will become palliative care on the cheap...At a national level, where is the incentive to focus on the significant needs of palliative and social care if there's a cheaper alternative available? The truth is that money unfortunately is a very significant part of this debate...Once we have a system in place where everyone can access outstanding palliative care, then I think assisted dying would be a potential alternative, because in that scenario, people would have a choice that is fair and reasonable."^[ii]

12.8 However, the fear that palliative care may be negatively impacted by legalising assisted dying has not materialised in Canada, where the evidence suggests that following the introduction of MAiD, both the access to and uptake of palliative care has been expanded.^[iii] Nonetheless, the authors of this report are unanimous in believing the Church should strongly advocate for better provision and access to palliative care, and we ask the General Assembly to call on the Scottish Government to prioritise development of palliative care services to ensure that they are universally available and to urgently review the funding models currently in place, in section 3 of the Deliverance of this report.

12.9 There is also a concern that should legislation pass, it would effectively introduce a form of state-sanctioned suicide. This in turn, it may be argued, could damage the effectiveness of suicide prevention strategies. Indeed, in 2021, the Faith Impact Forum of the Church of Scotland argued in a response to proposed legislation that "While many work to support those who are at risk due to self-harm or suicide, we feel that to allow a legally assisted form of suicide would send the wrong signal to those who are most vulnerable."^[iv] Subsequent events have demonstrated that opinion in the Church of Scotland is more diverse than this response might suggest, and a further response more reflective of this diversity was submitted to a consultation in 2024.^[v] While some in the Church may still hold to the view expressed by the Faith Impact Forum in 2021, others may find it unhelpful. Those eligible for assisted dying under the current proposals—those with an advanced and progressive disease, illness or condition from which they are unable to recover and that can reasonably be expected to cause their premature death—are not choosing between life and death, but between two types of death.^[vi] This, some might argue, is in a different category from the tragedy of suicide, and to conflate the two is not only unhelpful, but dangerous. We have

already noted this is one of the reasons why the terminology of assisted suicide is rejected in favour of assisted dying.

12.10 This list of potential consequences is by no means exhaustive. Opinion will vary on how much weight to put on ‘slippery slope’ arguments. Paul Badham argues that “it is wrong to oppose something for fear of something else if in fact it is possible to exclude the other by careful [legislative] drafting.”^[lv] People who reach different conclusions might nonetheless agree slippery slope arguments are secondary to the principles at stake. Others who may or may not have strong views on the principles, may determine that the weight of the argument rests on the practical outworking of the proposals, and whether any safeguards would be sufficient. We should acknowledge that not only is there diversity of opinion on whether or not there should be a change in the law on assisted dying, we each reach our views in a diversity of ways.

13. PRESBYTERY CONVERSATIONS

13.1 Between September and November 2024, a series of Presbytery ‘conversational’ events around the issue of assisted dying were undertaken, one event being hosted by each of the Presbyteries. These meetings took a variety of forms: some were held as part of a regular Presbytery meeting; some as stand-alone events. Many were in-person, a number were held as online or hybrid events. The format was similar at each event, with a brief introduction to set the scene, and then a video^[lvii] summarising a number of voices from within the Church of Scotland was shown. Participants were then given the opportunity to engage in facilitated small group discussions, with a number of questions aimed at eliciting discussion about what people knew about assisted dying, what their views were, and how they felt they should act in relation to this.

13.2 Many people said how grateful they were to have the opportunity to discuss this challenging and sensitive topic and to do so in a non-adversarial setting, as part of a genuine conversation. People came with a wide variety of views, some informed by professional (e.g. medical or legal) experience and expertise, but often by personal experience. Many felt able to share deeply personal stories. Some spoke of concerns for themselves or their loved ones, or of the societal implications. One aspect that came out repeatedly was a concern that this was a pivotal issue on which the Church should speak and that it should do so based on theology.

13.3 The video resource was appreciated, and many expressed an intention to use it in similar discussion events in, for example, a Kirk Session. The vast majority of participants felt they had benefited from having taken part. Comments on the feedback forms included surprise at some of the strictures being proposed in the Scottish legislation (some that they were too lax or too strict, or that they might be unworkable in practice). Many felt that such legislation was long overdue, while concerns of a ‘slippery slope’ were repeatedly expressed, as were intentions to contact their MSPs. Some concluded that there is no right or wrong answer.

13.4 Participants in the conversations were asked to complete evaluation forms before and after the event, and more than 250 responses were received, the results of which demonstrate increased knowledge and understanding of the issues around assisted dying and what is currently being proposed. There was also evidence of more confidence in participants being able to articulate their faith perspective on the issue, as well as where to find information on the Church’s work on societal issues. Many expressed the view that such a listening space was a rarity as death and dying is still considered to be a taboo subject. There was a desire for more opportunities to discuss the experiences, fears, and issues around death and dying.^[lviii]

14. CONCLUSION

14.1 In 2023, the General Assembly declined the opportunity to reaffirm the Church of Scotland’s historic opposition to assisted dying. Instead it supported a counter-motion that recognised a range of views on the subject existed in the Church, and called for these views to be explored further. In this report we have explored this spectrum of opinion, outlining the nuances and complexities of the different theological and ethical approaches, and have explained why members of the Church come to different conclusions. We do this in the hope that we may all seek a better understanding of those approaches that we may not agree with, and to encourage humility on all sides of the debate.

14.2 We also acknowledge that the issue of assisted dying is not purely theoretical and abstract, but grounded in people’s real, and often painful, experiences of love and loss. Ultimately, we wish to stress that while the different theologies and ethical opinions considered in this report vary greatly, we believe they are all rooted in a deep, heartfelt compassion for human suffering and the desire to alleviate it. In this spirit, we find it helpful to reflect on the areas on which we found general agreement:

- We agree that life is precious. We are children of God made in God's image. Illness and suffering do not in any way diminish this status.
- We agree that the fear of being or becoming a burden to loved ones because of disease or diminished capacity should not be an acceptable criterion for assisted dying.
- We agree that legalising assisted dying is a serious step for Scotland with inherent risks. It is crucial that legislation not be rushed and that intended and unintended consequences are carefully considered and monitored.
- We agree that palliative care is valuable and necessary, and that the Church should advocate for increased funding and availability of palliative care. We would all wish to see the availability and effectiveness of palliative care vastly improved.
- We agree that if this Bill passes, pastoral care should be offered by the Church to those who would choose assisted dying as well as those who would not.
- We agree that death is too much of a taboo subject in society and there is a need to talk more openly about death and dying so that people are educated about the issues around end of life and can make informed decisions for themselves.
- We agree that caricaturing views in support of positions we do not hold is unhelpful and obscures our ability to see and engage constructively with our neighbours who disagree with us.
- We agree that the Church can have a positive role in fostering healthy discussion on dying, death, and bereavement – discussion that seeks mutual understanding and which would benefit our societal engagement on this issue.

14.3 At the same time, we acknowledge that the range of views in the Church explored above may lead to three broad positions:

- People who would continue to support the historic opposition to assisted dying.
- People who would not choose assisted dying for themselves for theological or other reasons, but would support a change in the law as they recognise the ethical legitimacy of that choice for others.
- People who would support a change in the law and would be at peace in their Christian faith to consider and/or choose assisted dying if they received a qualifying terminal diagnosis.

14.4 Having explored the theological and ethical reasoning behind this spectrum of belief, we conclude that they can all be held with theological integrity within the Church of Scotland.

14.5 We appreciate that this conclusion may lead some to question, 'what does this mean for the Church's position on assisted dying?' We acknowledge that it moves the church away from a binary 'for' or 'against' approach. Some may argue that this ambiguity makes advocacy difficult, and that it may diminish the Church's public witness. While these are valid concerns, we would respond that this approach more accurately reflects where we are currently as a Church on this matter. It reflects the complex and nuanced conversations that Presbyteries have had on assisted dying, and the Church's most recent response to the Scottish Parliament's consultation.^[lix] We do not see this diversity as a weakness. Instead we have found positive theological support for this diversity of views on the issue of assisted dying. We hope readers who already have a view on the issue will find their position fairly reflected, and will be able to appreciate those who hold a contrary opinion, while those whose opinion is not fixed will find the report a useful resource. We therefore offer this report as a resource for the Church of Scotland and wider community.

In the name of the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team and the Theological Forum

TOMMY MACNEIL, Convener
KAY CATHCART, Secretary
LIAM J FRASER, Convener
NATHALIE MARES MACCALLUM, Secretary
JOHN FERGUSON, Working Group Convener

Appendix A**List of those with whom we have consulted:**

Researcher in Medical Ethics, Our duty of care/Care not Killing	15 November 2023
Consultant Neurologist in NHS Tayside	15 November 2023
Division Head, Palliative Care, Ottawa Hospital Cancer Centre	6 December 2023
Strategic Lead for Spiritual Care and Bereavement at NHS Fife and Scottish Government Adviser on Spiritual Care	14 June 2024
Liam McArthur MSP	9 September 2024
Chief Executive, CrossReach	9 September 2024
Vice Convener, CrossReach	9 September 2024
Chaplain, Strathcarron Hospice	9 September 2024
Policy and Public Affairs Manager, CHAS	9 September 2024
President of the College of Healthcare Chaplains and Head of Pastoral Care, Royal Devon University Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust	13 September 2024

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Appendix B**List of Presbytery conversations on Assisted Dying:**

Presbytery	Date of conversation
Lothian and Borders	7 September 2024
Fife	21 September 2024
Glasgow	2 October 2024
NENI	8 October 2024
England	12 October 2024
Edinburgh	22 October 2024
Perth	2 November 2024
Clèir Eilean Ì	6 November 2024
South West	19 November 2024
Clyde	26 November 2024
Forth Valley and Clydesdale	27 November 2024

Appendix C

Feedback from Presbytery conversations on Assisted Dying

Participants were offered the opportunity to provide feedback on the helpfulness of the sessions. They were invited to state the extent to which they agreed with four statements on a scale of 1 (no agreement) – 10 (full agreement). The change was measured before and after the event.

	Mean score		
	Before	After	Change
I am confident in my knowledge and understanding of issues around assisted dying	5.7	6.9	+1.2
I know what is being proposed in the Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill	5.2	6.5	+1.4
I can speak confidently about what my faith says about assisted dying	5.5	6.2	+0.7
I know where I can find out more information about the Church's work on societal issues	6.3	7.1	+0.7

Appendix D

Further Reading and Resources

Books

Paul Badham, *Is there a Christian Case for Assisted Dying? Voluntary Euthanasia Reassessed*. London: SPCK, 2009.

Michael Banner, *Christian Ethics and Contemporary Moral Problems*. Cambridge University Press, 1999 and *The Ethics of Everyday Life: Moral Theology, Social Anthropology, and the Imagination of the Human*. Oxford University Press, 2014.

Nigel Biggar, *Aiming to Kill: The Ethics of Suicide and Euthanasia*. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2004.

Robin Gill (ed.), *Euthanasia and the Churches*. London: Cassell, 1998.

Hans Küng and Walter Jens, *Dying with Dignity: A Plea for Personal Responsibility*. New York: Continuum, 1998.

Emily Jackson and John Keown, *Debating Euthanasia*. Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2012.

David Albert Jones, *Approaching the End: A Theological Exploration of Death and Dying* (Oxford Studies in Theological Ethics). Oxford University Press, 2007.

Gilbert Meilaender, *Bioethics: A Primer for Christians*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2005.

Neil Messer (ed.), *Theological Issues in Bioethics: An Introduction with Readings*. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2002.

Mary Warnock and Elisabeth MacDonald, *Easeful Death: Is there a case for assisted dying?* Oxford University Press, 2009.

Documentaries

A Time to Die — True Vision TV <https://www.truevisiontv.com/films/a-time-to-die> <https://www.itv.com/watch/a-time-to-die/10a3960>

Better Off Dead? BBC <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m001z8wc>

Beyond Belief – Assisted Dying – BBC Sounds
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m001y272#:~:text=The%20debate%20about%20assisted%20dying,the%20heart%20of%20all%20religions.>

Church of Scotland Reports and Videos

2023 General Assembly debate on assisted dying, 2:02-2:48 https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/about-us/general-assembly/previous-general-assemblies/general-assembly-2023/video-highlights#group_one-29

Interim Joint Report of the Theological Forum and the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team on Assisted Dying May 2024 https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0018/121194/Interim-Joint-Report-of-the-Theological-Forum-and-Faith-Action-Programme-Leadership-Team-on-Assisted-Dying.pdf

Interim Report on Assisted Dying, General Assembly 2024 debate https://stream1.churchofscotland.org.uk/about_us/general_assembly/archive/interim_report_on_assisted_dying

The Church of Scotland's response to the Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill, August 2024:
https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/125978/2024.08.16-Assisted-Dying-for-Terminally-Ill-Adults-Scotland-Bill-Stage-1-Call-for-Evidence.pdf

Assisted Dying: A Brief Introduction to some of the Issues: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T6Wn0FAaQFA>

The Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill:

The Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill, as introduced 27 March 2024: <https://www.parliament.scot/-/media/files/legislation/bills/s6-bills/assisted-dying-for-terminally-ill-adults-scotland-bill/introduction/bill-as-introduced.pdf>

A summary by Palliative Care Scotland of the key features of the Bill: <https://www.palliativecarescotland.org.uk/content/publications/Key-Features-of-the-Bill.pdf>

The Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill, House of Commons:

The Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill, as introduced, 11 November 2024: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/59-01/0012/240012.pdf>

Briefing and overview of the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/CBP-10123/>

References

- [i] <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/about-us/our-views/end-of-life/respond-to-the-proposed-assisted-dying-for-terminally-ill-adults-scotland-bill>
- [ii] <https://www.dyingwell.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Survation-Assisted-Dying-Survey-July-2021-Summary-3.pdf>
- [iii] Sources used for Glossary: <https://www.bmj.com/assisted-dying> <https://cks.nice.org.uk/topics/palliative-care-general-issues/background-information/definition/#:~:text=The%20National%20Institute%20for%20Health,and%20spiritual%20support%20is%20paramount.>
- [iv] In 2019 a Populus poll showed that 82% of respondents who identified as Christian were in support of legalising assisted dying for terminally ill people. <https://www.dignityindying.org.uk/news/poll-assisted-dying-support-84-britons/>
- [v] <https://www.parliament.scot/bills-and-laws/bills/assisted-dying-for-terminally-ill-adults-scotland-bill/introduced> The Bill can be read in full at the following web address: <https://www.parliament.scot/-/media/files/legislation/bills/s6-bills/assisted-dying-for-terminally-ill-adults-scotland-bill/introduction/bill-as-introduced.pdf>
- [vi] <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/59-01/0012/240012.pdf>
- [vii] <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/about-us/our-views/end-of-life/respond-to-the-proposed-assisted-dying-for-terminally-ill-adults-scotland-bill>
- [viii] https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/3877/end_of_life_ga09.pdf
- [ix] https://yourviews.parliament.scot/health/ecdded04/consultation/view_respondent?show_all_questions=0&sort=submitted&order=ascending&q__text=episcopal&q_question-2021-10-07-9548647634-radiosubquestion=Organisation&uuld=532250072
- [x] https://media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/pi_euthanasia_74_bNiGJld.pdf
- [xi] <https://www.methodist.org.uk/faith/life-and-faith/death-and-dying/>
- [xii] https://yourviews.parliament.scot/health/ecdded04/consultation/view_respondent?show_all_questions=0&sort=submitted&order=ascending&q__text=reformed&q_question-2021-10-07-9548647634-radiosubquestion=Organisation&uuld=785904856
- [xiii] <https://quaker.org.uk/documents/mfs-2021-04-follow-up-package>
- [xiv] <https://www.dignityindying.org.uk/religiousalliance/>
- [xv] For a survey and analysis, see Paul Middleton, ‘The “Noble Death” of Judas Iscariot: A reconsideration of Suicide in the Bible and Early Christianity. *Journal of Religion and Violence* 6/2 (2018), 245–266. A more accessible version can be found in the Society of Biblical Literature Bible Odyssey Project: <https://m.bibleodyssey.org/articles/suicide-in-the-bible/>
- [xvi] The positive presentation and reception of Samson’s self-killing causes some scholars to designate Samson’s death as somehow not a suicide. So Dónal P. O’Mathúna (“But the Bible Doesn’t Say They were Wrong to Commit Suicide, Does it?” in Timothy J. Demy and Gary P. Stewart [eds], *Suicide: A Christian Response: Crucial Considerations for Choosing Life* [Grand Rapids: Kregal, 1998], 349–366) redesignates his death as a martyrdom rather than suicide (361). Eugene H. Merrill (“Suicide and the Concept of Death in the Old Testament” in Timothy J. Demy and Gary P. Stewart [eds], *Suicide: A Christian Response: Crucial Considerations for Choosing Life* [Grand Rapids: Kregal, 1998], 315–326), whose essay considers suicides in the Hebrew Bible as tantamount to murder does not include Samson in his discussion, despite Samson killing several thousand people through his death. A different approach is taken by Kenneth Cragg (*Faith at Suicide: Lives Forfeit, Violent Religion, Human Despair*. Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2005). He views the depiction of Samson negatively, arguing his death made him “a victim of his own hate” (32). However, there is nothing in the text of Judges, let alone his positive reception in Hebrews 11.32-36, to warrant this negative assessment. For discussion of the complex interplay between suicide, murder, and martyrdom, including Samson, see Paul Middleton, *Martyrdom: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T & T Clark, 2011), 1 - 30.
- [xvii] For example, individuals such as Eleazar Avaran (1 Macc 6.45-46) or Razis (2 Macc 14.37-46), or families (Josephus, *Ant.* 14.15.5), or even whole communities, most notably at Masada in the aftermath of the Roman-Jewish war (Josephus, *War* 7.8-9).
- [xviii] <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/45304/45304-h/45304-h.htm>

- [xix] [https://isidore.co/CalibreLibrary/Jerome,%20St_/Commentary%20on%20Matthew%20\(7526\)/Commentary%20on%20Matthew%20-%20Jerome,%20St_.pdf](https://isidore.co/CalibreLibrary/Jerome,%20St_/Commentary%20on%20Matthew%20(7526)/Commentary%20on%20Matthew%20-%20Jerome,%20St_.pdf)
- [xx] In recent years, churches have adopted more compassionate attitudes to suicide. For example, the Church of Scotland's 1995 report, *Euthanasia, A Christian Perspective*, observes that 'suicide is still recognised by most people as a tragedy, but no longer as a sin'. https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/3878/euthanasia_book.pdf
- [xxi] While most commentators reach a negative judgement on Judas' self-killing, the basis for this conclusion is generally an appeal to Jewish and Christian antipathy towards suicide which had not yet developed (e.g. Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave*. [New York: Doubleday, 1994], 644). In other words, they 'appeal to a tradition that simply did not exist, and owes more to importing later Jewish and Christian attitudes to suicide' (Middleton, 'The "Noble Death" of Judas Iscariot', 263).
- [xxii] First century Jewish historian Josephus comments that "it was better for him to remove himself from the world in a free and noble spirit" rather than to face punishment by David (*Antiquities* 7.229). Later Rabbinic opinion is more divided on Ahithophel's death.
- [xxiii] See Arthur J. Droge and James D. Tabor, *A Noble Death: Suicide and Martyrdom among Christians and Jews in Antiquity* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), and a vigorous response by Darrel W. Amundsen, "Did Early Christians 'Lust after Death'? A New Wrinkle in the Doctor-Assisted Suicide Debate" in Timothy J. Denny and Gary P. Stewart (Kregal, 1998), 285–295.
- [xxiv] For introductions to the Noble Death tradition, see Droge and Tabor, *A Noble Death*, 17–51; Friedrich Avemarie and Jan Willem van Henten, *Martyrdom and Noble Death: Selected Texts from Graeco-Roman, Jewish, and Christian Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 2002).
- [xxv] For example, Niceto Blázquez, "The Church's Traditional Moral Teaching on Suicide" in Jacques Pohier and Dietmar Mieth (eds), *Suicide and the Right to Die* (Concilium: Religion in the Eighties. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1985), 63–74; O'Mathúna, "But the Bible Doesn't Say They were Wrong to Commit Suicide, Does it?".
- [xxvi] For example, Tertullian, *Apology* 50; *To the Martyrs* 4; John Chrysostom, *Homily IV on 1 Corinthians* 1.18–20. While excusing the self-killing of some women martyrs to protect their virginity, Augustine decisively rejects the Noble Death tradition in his discussion of suicide (*City of God* 1.16–20)
- [xxvii] Eusebius, *Church History* 6.41.7; 8.6.6; 8.12.3-4; Ambrose, *On Virginity* 3.7; *Martyrdom of Carpus, Papyrus and Agathonice*, 42-44.
- [xxviii] Paul Badham (*Is there a Christian Case for Assisted Dying? Voluntary Euthanasia Reassessed*. London: SPCK, 2009) makes some appeal to the enthusiastic Christian martyr tradition, but especially resurrection hope in making his Christian case for assisted dying.
- [xxix] For an introduction to some of the ways of interpreting this concept, see Michelle A. Gonzalez, 'Created for God and for Each Other: Our Imago Dei,' in Mary Ann Hinsdale and Stephen Okey (eds), *T&T Clark Handbook of Theological Anthropology* (London: T&T Clark, 2021), 61-70.
- [xxx] Hans Küng argues this account of Divine sovereignty basically reduces God to an 'executioner'. See Hans Küng and Walter Jens, *Dying with Dignity: A Plea for Personal Responsibility* (New York: Continuum, 1998), 36.
- [xxxi] Küng and Jens, *Dying with Dignity*, 36.
- [xxxii] The Inescapable Truth About Dying in Scotland, *Dignity in Dying Scotland*, 2019.
- [xxxiii] Paul Badham pointendly asks, "If suffering is so good, why do we use painkillers?" (*Is there a Christian Case for Assisted Dying?*, 89).
- [xxxiv] Küng and Jens, *Dying with Dignity*, 38.
- [xxxv] Küng and Jens, *Dying with Dignity*, 27.
- [xxxvi] <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/news-and-events/news/articles/elders-terminally-ill-sister-asked-for-help-to-end-her-life>
- [xxxvii] Stanley Hauerwas, *Naming the Silences: God, Medicine, and the Problem of Suffering*; Eerdsman's: Grand Rapids, 1990) 96.
- [xxxviii] <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7043822/>
- [xxxix] Badham, *Is there a Christian Case for Assisted Dying?*

- [xl] Küng and Jens, *Dying with Dignity*, 37-38.
- [xli] <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/to-your-health/wp/2017/05/24/its-not-pain-but-existential-distress-that-leads-people-to-assisted-suicide-study-suggests/?fbclid=IwAR3X0kVlchMXSIR-HBSQe1-RLWL4QayWqVwdqn6hzqdn97x0B8qp3bo5OnE>
- [xlii] <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/hc-sc/documents/services/medical-assistance-dying-annual-report-2019/maid-annual-report-eng.pdf>
- [xliii] A helpful articulation of this view from a theology of kenosis can be found in Laura Gilmore's auto ethnographic reflection on the spiritual and moral integrity of hospice chaplains in relation to assisted dying. <https://jebs.eu/ojs/index.php/jebs/article/view/1240/1031>
- [xliv] The Committee's report can be accessed here: <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/43582/documents/216484/default/>
- [xlv] <https://www.betterwaycampaign.co.uk/assisted-suicide-law-would-heighten-inequality-dr-miro-griffiths/>; <https://www.dignityindying.scotland.org.uk/blog-post/79-disabled-people-support-change-law-assisted-dying/> ; <https://www.humanism.scot/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/PolicyBriefingDisabilityAndAssistedDyingLaws.pdf>
- [xlvi] <https://www.cba.org/Sections/Health-Law/Resources/Resources/2022/HealthEssayWinner2022>
- [xlvii] [Enhancing equity and diversity in palliative care clinical practice, research and education | BMC Palliative Care | Full Text](#)
- [xlviii] <https://ij-healthgeographics.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12942-019-0172-1>
- [xlix] <https://www.mariecurie.org.uk/globalassets/media/documents/policy/beol-reports-2024/beol-2024-time-to-care-report.pdf>
- [l] <https://www.pure.ed.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/199188756/e041317.full.pdf>
- [li] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T6Wn0FAaQFA> 15:44-21:10
- [lii] <https://www.cihi.ca/sites/default/files/document/access-to-palliative-care-in-canada-2023-report-en.pdf> See <https://www.pcads.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/PCADS-Policy-Paper-Palliative-Care-and-Assisted-Dying.pdf> for more data showing increase and improvement in palliative care in those countries with assisted dying.
- [liii] <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/about-us/our-views/end-of-life/respond-to-the-proposed-assisted-dying-for-terminally-ill-adults-scotland-bill#1>
- [liv] https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/125978/2024.08.16-Assisted-Dying-for-Terminally-Ill-Adults-Scotland-Bill-Stage-1-Call-for-Evidence.pdf
- [lv] So Paul Badham notes assisted dying is 'choosing to end a life that is already dying' (*Is there a Christian Case for Assisted Dying?*, 61).
- [lvi] Badham, *Is there a Christian Case for Assisted Dying?*, 56.
- [lvii] <https://youtu.be/T6Wn0FAaQFA>
- [lviii] For participant feedback on the events, see Appendix C.
- [lix] https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/125978/2024.08.16-Assisted-Dying-for-Terminally-Ill-Adults-Scotland-Bill-Stage-1-Call-for-Evidence.pdf

FAITH ACTION PROGRAMME LEADERSHIP TEAM MAY 2025

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.

Faith Action Leadership Team Report

2. Welcome and endorse the film of a Vivid Vision for the Church of Scotland and its associated resources and commend their use to congregations and Presbyteries for developing vision and mission for their own context (Section 1).
3. Thank all those who have served, and are serving, the Church through the Assistant Minister Scheme and encourage Presbyteries to identify creative opportunities for local deployment, noting that there are many charges which could progress to vacancy were local circumstances ready (Section 3).
4. Instruct the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team, Presbyteries and congregations to act on the key findings of the Ministerial Wellbeing Study (Section 2).
5. Instruct FAPLT to set up a working group to reflect on the support offered by the Church towards Ministers and to bring a revision of the Income Protection and Ill Health Act to the General Assembly of 2026 (Section 5.3.6).
6. Adopt the 'Competency Framework for Inducted Ministers of Word and Sacrament', as the basis for a Capability and Competence Process, for which the details of the process will be considered by the General Assembly of 2026 (Section 9 and Appendix I).
7. Appoint the Reverend Michael Goss as a Trustee of the Church of Scotland Housing and Loan Fund (Section 10).

Public Life & Social Justice

8. Instruct the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team to consider what it means to be a justice-seeking Church, and to report to a future Assembly on how work for justice, peace and the integrity of creation is being supported and developed (Section 11).
9. Welcome and endorse the initiative for a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty and encourage congregations to consider how to promote opportunities for worship, education, advocacy and practical action to support care for creation (Section 12).
10. Instruct the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team to continue to support the development of the Church's work around the legacies of slavery, including by
 - a) engaging Presbyteries in the creation of the statement of acknowledgement and apology;
 - b) reviewing the recommendations of the 2023 report 'The Church of Scotland and the Legacies of Slavery'; and
 - c) bringing an updated plan of action to the General Assembly of 2026 (Section 13).

People & Training

11. Pass the Admission and Readmission of Ministers Act set out in Appendix III (Section 18 and Appendix III).
12. Note the progress on the development of the Apprenticeship Route (Section 19).
13. Note that an initial pilot scheme of up to 12 Apprentices has been launched and will commence for the session 2025-2027, and instruct FAPLT to bring an interim report on progress to GA 2026 (Section 19.4.1).
14. Approve that the £200 annual ministerial development grant for Ministers in their first five years is retained to allow a Minister to spend as required and agree that those in their first five years can apply to Presbytery for approval of a two-week Study and Reflection allocation to be taken within each calendar year (Section 22.12.1).
15. Instruct Presbyteries to develop a process of support for the Study and Reflection scheme, including if necessary the provision of pulpit supply for the Minister's congregation (Section 22.12.4).
16. Note the progress of the Church of Scotland Learning Platform and encourage congregations to use the resources provided (Section 23).

Mission Support

17. Instruct FAPLT, in collaboration with Seeds for Growth and the Assembly Trustees, to develop church planting strategy and structures and report to the General Assembly of 2026 (Section 25).
18. Welcome and endorse Church of Scotland Learning materials for Intergenerational ministry and Future Focus, enabling these ongoing priorities to be resourced within congregations and Presbyteries (Section 26).

19. Give thanks for the support of the Church of Scotland HIV Programme over the last 22 years and encourage congregations to continue to engage with Partner Churches as they support people living with HIV (Section 28).
20. Encourage congregations to make use of the online resources, as they become available, in order to engage fully with the God Welcomes All hymnary supplement in the life of their worship (Section 29).
21. Give thanks for all those who have been raised from poverty and injustice through the work of Christian Aid over eight decades, and for all those who have been supporters in the Church of Scotland; encourage congregations to continue to support the work of Christian Aid with international partners; and to use Christian Aid resources to participate in the 80th anniversary activities (Section 30).
22. Encourage the Church to remember and pray for the Church and people of South Sudan as they live with the effects of conflict, coping with climate changes, and seeking a just and peaceful transition to new political leadership; and welcome a new leadership in the Presbyterian Church of South Sudan (Section 37.3).
23. Give thanks for the solidarity and witness of Presbyterian and Ecumenical partners in Korea in speaking out for justice and truth in a time of crisis for the Republic of Korea; and encourage congregations to learn about and pray for the church in Korea (Section 37.5).
24. Give thanks for the witness of the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon (NESSL) and the Middle East Council of Churches in pursuing an inclusive society for all in Syria and in Lebanon, and encourage all in the Church of Scotland to consider ways in which we might offer solidarity in faith, prayer, and mutual support (Section 37.6).

Presbytery Mission Planning Implementation Group

25. Pass an Act on Call, Election and Appointment of Ministers of Word and Sacrament as set out in Appendix VI (Section 38 and Appendix VI).
26. Pass an Act amending the Church Courts Act (Act VI 2023) as set out in Appendix VIII (Section 38 and Appendix VIII).
27. Pass an Act amending the Parish Ministry Act (Act II 2018) as set out in Appendix IX (Section 38 and Appendix IX).
28. Approve the allocation of the total number of planned ministry posts among the Presbyteries as contained in Appendix XI for 2026 (Section 40 and Appendix XI).
29. Repeal the New Charge Development Act (Act 13, 2000) (Section 41).
30. Repeal the Voluntary Additional Payments Regulation (Regulation 4, 2005) (Section 41).
31. Repeal the Church Extension Regulation (Regulation 5, 2000) (Section 41).

Faith Action Programme Report

1. VIVID VISION

1.1 We are at a particularly challenging time in the life of the church. Presbytery reform and the implementation of Presbytery Mission Plans are changing what is expected of Ministers and how much Ministers are being asked to do, causing many to question who they are being asked to be. It is overwhelming for some. Our heart in the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team (FAPLT) is to come alongside those who are struggling in ministry. Those whose primary focus is often offering such support and comfort to others. We have a genuine heart to minister to our Ministers and so bring renewed hope to them about worshipping and working towards a better future for their churches and communities.

1.2 Part of the fruit of this was hosting a National Ministers' Day Conference in Murrayfield, Edinburgh, at the end of February. An encouraging and envisioning day for all who attended. We had not organised anything of this nature and scale before and did not receive agreement to begin organising until early January 2025. Budgets were very tight, and so the resources to tailor the event to differing ministries were limited. Hence the reason for this being a conference for Parish Ministers. Our hope would be to organise similar day conferences for those serving in other ministry roles within our church. This will be budget dependant moving forward.

1.3 Our hope is that by investing in Ministers in this way, many others will benefit through them. To help ensure this, we used the day to launch the film of our Vivid Vision for the Church. This short film paints a picture of the hopeful future we see for our Church. There are accompanying resources to help you consider what this might look like in your community and your Church.

[Faith Action Programme Leadership Team launch Vivid Vision video | The Church of Scotland](#)

We would love to hear how you see this vision developing and what you hope for in your context: faithaction@churchofscotland.org.uk

2. MINISTERIAL WELLBEING SURVEY

2.1 Background

2.1.1 The General Assembly of 2023 instructed the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team to commission or otherwise conduct a comprehensive independent survey of ministerial well-being with the aim of deepening understanding of the causes of work-related ministerial stress and developing strategies to reduce it.^[i]

2.2 Context

2.2.1 Because this was the first time such a survey had been undertaken by the Church of Scotland, these responses provide a baseline, but cannot yet be the basis for any significant substantive conclusions. This will belong to future studies.

2.2.2 A response rate of 63% was achieved (314 responses) which is an excellent return for such surveys, especially given it was completed in the wake of Presbytery Reform and during Presbytery Mission Plan implementation, unions, and readjustments.

2.3 Key findings^[ii]

The following outlines the key findings from the report and the priorities for action:

2.3.1 Sense of Call: 80% of Ministers of a charge reported that their sense of call was as strong as when they were first ordained. Whilst this is very positive and comforting to note we need to recognise that 20% of the respondents had a reduced sense of call.

2.3.2 Mental Wellbeing: Almost two-thirds (62%) of those who responded were categorised as having average wellbeing based on the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scales (WEMWBS) measurement (14% met the threshold for mild depression and 16% for clinical depression) with only 9% of the sample categorised as having high wellbeing.

2.3.3 Support for Ministers: Family and friends were reported as being the main source of support for most Ministers. 69% of Kirk Sessions were seen as being only a moderately or not beneficial source of support to a Minister.

2.3.4 Other named factors that can also significantly affect a Minister's wellbeing included good quality, well-maintained manse, appropriate IT equipment funded by the congregation not the Minister, and Kirk Session attitude towards expenditure on these items. Whilst it was noted that the main source of support was family and friends, the importance of support for Manse families is equally important. Support for Manse families is available, but this fact seems not to be widely known. Manse families are encouraged to access [Ascend](#) when feeling the need for support.

2.3.5 Presbyteries provide varying levels of support to Ministers and those in related posts. It is essential that Presbyteries establish what is appropriate for their local circumstances.

2.3.6 As a result of discussing the outcome of the survey, the subject of a Sabbatical Scheme for Ministers of Word and Sacrament has once again been raised. Such a scheme would provide Ministers with a supported period of uninterrupted Sabbatical Leave, free from parish or Presbytery responsibilities. This would allow Ministers to consider their future direction, give focus for mental and physical rest and re-invigoration^[iii] and should be a period of time that allows the individual to reconnect with God, to renew their soul for the next phase of leadership.

2.3.7 Demands of the role: in general, Ministers rated the role of ministry as being emotionally, spiritually, and intellectually demanding. This is healthy. However, many indicated that they are not appropriately trained to cope with the administrative and staff management role they are expected to undertake.

2.3.8 Independent time and space: a third of Ministers in charges do not take a whole day off per week and only 62% reported taking their full annual leave allowance.

2.3.9 Development: Only 35% of Parish Ministers felt that they had time to spend on development, and only 42% said they had sufficient funds for development.

2.3.9 Financial Wellbeing: Only 52% of Ministers in charges claimed their full expenses. 58% of Ministers of a charge say they can save regularly. 29% of all responding Ministers expected to need assistance from the Church with housing for retirement.

2.4 Outcomes

2.4.1 National Church

2.4.1.1 This is the first scheme of this nature to be undertaken across the Church of Scotland. It is recommended that the Survey is completed on an ongoing basis, every two years, to provide longitudinal data on the improvements to the health and wellbeing of Ministers across the Church.

2.4.1.2 FAPLT should compare all results against both the general population and comparable roles to determine any significant differences. Where any are identified, FAPLT should investigate significant factors, possible recommendations and any required actions.

2.4.1.3 It is recommended that access to Ascend should be on the homepage of the Church of Scotland Website, which would also allow manse families to easily access the information for their support.

2.4.1.4 FAPLT should explore proposals for a national Sabbatical Scheme and bring a report to the 2026 General Assembly.

2.4.2 Presbyteries & Congregations

2.4.2.1 An assessment of the priority placed on support for those in ministry needs to be clarified and implemented at Presbytery level, particularly in response to previous General Assembly deliverances regarding the support of those in the first five years of ministry.

2.4.2.2 Presbyteries and congregations should be encouraging their Ministers to take time off, to make space for themselves on a weekly basis, along with adequate holiday time, retreat, and Study Leave.

2.4.2.3 Ministers need to be encouraged and supported to take their full entitlement to Study Leave.

2.4.2.4 All Session Clerks, regardless of the length of time they have been in post, should be encouraged to participate in the training available via Church of Scotland Learning.

2.4.2.5 Ministers need to be encouraged to claim the full expenses to which they are entitled.

3. THE ASSISTANT MINISTER SCHEME

3.1 At the General Assembly of 2021, the Assembly suspended all Presbytery Plans and sisted all Parish Minister vacancies, pending the implementation of the new Presbytery Mission Plan Act with a proposed implementation date of the new ministry allocations by 1st January 2026.

3.2 As a consequence, the Assembly instructed the then Faith Nurture Forum, in consultation with the Assembly Trustees, to provide appropriate financial and pastoral support to the Graduate Candidates and those involved in the Familiarisation Programme, who might be adversely affected by this Assembly decision. This instruction led to the Assistant Minister Scheme being established by FAPLT and a new Assistant Minister fixed term contract of employment and terms and conditions being developed and put in place. The terms and conditions mirrored those of MDS Associate Ministers, where the salary matches the parish Minister stipend scale.

3.3 As this was a new and temporary bridging scheme, the job title, duties, geographical range and length of contract varied depending on the local deployment and gifts and skills of those taking up the contracts. These ranged from specific projects across a number of congregations, to more locum style ministry duties but always with a focus of ensuring the ministry to be meaningful, fulfilling and serving our Church. Each role required a job description, signed off by Presbytery and FAPLT and, in some occasions, the post holder would move to a new job description after a period of time, directed by the needs of the Presbytery.

3.4 To date, FAPLT have issued over 70 Assistant Minister contracts, for those who chose to take up the offer of these roles. Some chose not to take up this offer and pursued other paths of ministry.

3.5 FAPLT have remained in communication with those on the scheme via online check-in sessions, every two months, encouraging questions and feedback as a means of support. The take up of these has been good and fruitful. Faith Action staff have also been available to answer individual queries and offer and follow up on one to one pastoral support where requested. Presbyteries have been encouraged to move ahead with adjustments and parish Minister vacancies, where they are able to, which has resulted in new vacancies being added online, almost weekly. Each of these communications have been with the intention to support this bridging scheme to a time where Ministers, presbyteries and congregations can move ahead and fulfil their mission and ministries.

3.6 The commitment of these Ministers and our congregations through this national journey and period of transition has been noticeably felt and appreciated in each case. New Parish Minister vacancies were initially slow to become available for applications but for some time now they have incrementally increased offering all our Ministers, those on the scheme and those in parishes discerning a new call, the opportunity to follow God's call to serve the Church.

3.7 In May 2024, those on the scheme and Presbyteries were advised by FAPLT that the scheme was very likely to end at the end of September 2025, ahead of the 1st January 2026 deadline for Presbytery Mission Plans to be in place, and that FAPLT would continue to review the scheme and this decision up until this time. All but one Presbytery Mission Plan has been in place since April 2024, resulting in new vacancies being advertised and congregations calling their new Minister. We have been delighted and encouraged to see this progress.

3.8 In February 2025, FAPLT convened to review the scheme and decided that the Assistant Minister fixed term employment contracts will end on the 30th September 2025.

3.9 FAPLT has sought throughout this time to approach this process with care for those impacted, both Assistant Ministers and congregations, but we are aware that not everyone has felt this. For some, the ending of this scheme will present considerable challenge. At time of writing, conversations with Presbytery Clerks are focusing on local support and opportunities as well as anything else the national can be doing in the next season, including support with CV writing and interview skills.

3.10 At time of writing, there are four members of the cohort of Assistant Ministers who do not yet have a charge and who require a certificate of sponsorship and engagement as a Minister, as a condition for that visa. FAPLT is monitoring carefully what is happening for those in this situation.

3.11 The scheme could never be, nor was it intended to be, a permanent or long-term arrangement. It was intended to support those who were affected by the suspension of Presbytery Mission Plans and the sisting of vacancies. That time has now passed and so it is time to close the scheme, and revert to the situation which existed prior to the General Assembly passing the Presbytery Mission Plan Act in May 2021.

3.12 FAPLT thanks all those who served, and are serving, under this scheme for their commitment and contribution.

4. MINISTRIES SUPPORT

4.1 The Pastoral Support Team

4.2 While primary pastoral support for those serving in the National Recognised Ministries of the Church lies within each Presbytery structure, FAPLT provides further dedicated and skilled support. The Support Team offer confidential conversations and facilitate support interventions. Access to support for ill-health management, counselling, hardship and support grants, retreats, and a variety of advice relevant to ministry are all part of the everyday work of the team.

4.3 The Team can be contacted via pastoralsupport@churchofscotland.org.uk

4.4 The Pre-Retirement Conference allows those who are two or three years out from retirement and their spouses to receive appropriate advice on how to approach retirement. In the autumn an online seminar aimed primarily for those in ministry around 10 to 15 years away from state retirement age will help encourage people to think ahead and plan for retirement.

5. INCOME PROTECTION AND ILL HEALTH ACT REVIEW

5.1 Introduction

5.1.1 The General Assembly of 2024 instructed the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team (FAPLT) (in consultation with the Assembly Trustees) to review the Income Protection and Ill Health Act (Act VI 2019) in light of its operation in practice over the past five years.

5.1.2 A survey was sent to Ministers, Session Clerks and Presbytery Clerks who had actively engaged with the Act since the General Assembly of 2019. Views were also sought from church office staff who have worked with the Act.

5.1.3 FAPLT are grateful to all those who responded to our request for feedback. Ministers, and their loved ones, are involved with the Ill Health Act process at the most uncertain and vulnerable time of their life. Making major decisions about vocation and having to consider consequential decisions related to finance and housing can be challenging. Additionally, this happens often as a consequence of medical investigations, complex treatments and diagnoses. Sensitive matters were being commented upon in the survey and responses were received in confidence by the Ministries Support Team. All responses were anonymized before being shared further within FAPLT.

5.2 Survey Response Themes

In the light of the responses the following themes emerged:

5.2.1 At a congregational level:

5.2.1.1 It was seen as important for Presbyteries to appoint Interim Moderators quickly. Over time it is not uncommon for frustration and anger to build as the process unfolds. Confidentiality is paramount for the individuals who are medically absent and therefore congregations face the strain of the unknown. Even so, where privacy and confidentiality allow, appropriate updates from Presbytery would enable congregations to feel less 'in the dark'.

5.2.1.2 It was also suggested that a shorter time before a decision on return to ministry was reached would be helpful for Ministers and congregations; it would provide a focus to help Ministers plan for their future and particularly in the light of ongoing Presbytery Mission Planning would allow increased clarity for congregations.

5.2.2 At a Presbytery level:

5.2.2.1 The Act is not easy to understand but was generous and flexible to ministers. Support offered from the Ministries Support team is high quality and well received.

5.2.2.2 It is helpful to have clear dates in the Act, and to have an emphasis on working together and pastoral support.

5.2.2.3 The process relies on Ministers engaging with it.

5.2.2.4 The lack of certainty about when a Minister might return, can present challenges when arranging Interim Moderators, Locums and congregational support.

5.2.2.5 It takes six months of absence before the Act is triggered and some considered that to be too long. Clearer understanding of possible opportunities to allow part time working with a reduced stipend may be helpful in some cases.

5.2.3 Comments from Ministers included the following:

5.2.3.1 Ministers generally expressed gratitude. It must be noted some expressed frustration at the care offered by Presbyteries, and by the Support Team.

5.2.3.2 Many acknowledged that the financial support offered – up to 18 months full stipend – was generous. Some recipients of Income Protection noted there is a large drop in income from full stipend to 1/3rd stipend.

5.2.3.3 Frustration was expressed by some at the lack of clarity around occupational health provisions, what makes for reasonable workplace adaptations and their eligibility for the Access to Work scheme. A sense of unjustness when the process asks that updated Fit Notes be provided when Income Protection payments are being made rather than, as was the case before 2014, a process where retirement on the grounds of ill health was allowed, with full pension benefits.

5.3 Reflections and Actions

5.3.1 Ministers have little or no control over timing of investigation or management of their clinical problems. This means that the time from first being unable to work until their situation is clear can exceed the timescales within the Act. Whilst every effort was made to respond to individual circumstances, the tension between pastoral considerations and facilitation of the Act created an unsatisfactory outcome for all involved.

5.3.2 The potential length of time a Minister can receive a full stipend is exceptional when compared to almost any other professional equivalent. By way of contrast, some local congregations expressed concern for the length of time to deal with the uncertainty of when (or if) their Minister would return.

5.3.3 One of the themes in the feedback was people's personal expectation of the Church of Scotland to support them at their most vulnerable time, and genuine hurt when they experienced the limits of it. Even with its objectively generous terms, there has been a frequent and powerful subjective sense of how the Kirk should extend or exceed the limits of the Act. Reflecting upon this feedback, and indeed much more broadly about the range of scenarios the support team are involved with, it appears that this issue cannot be resolved simply by legislating or tweaking new terms to the Act. Rather, a deeper and more reflective conversation about the expectations that Ministers have towards the Church seems necessary considering the widespread unhappiness, which is openly discussed within Church. It is now time to review this Act having had five years of its implementation and clear responses suggesting we can do better.

5.3.4 It is right also to affirm the Pastoral Care offered by Presbyteries to those under their jurisdiction and encourage best practice in how Ministers are supported through the ill health process. The rearrangement of Presbyteries gives us opportunities to facilitate this.

5.3.5 Comments on the service given by the Income Protection Provider ranged from 'great' to 'very poor'. The gathering of feedback coincided with a difficult transition in 2023/24 for the national support team due to staff changes. One of the challenges in facilitating this Act is holding the tension between an internal Church process and an external insurance provider with individuals reporting different service provision. The Church spends considerable time working both with individuals and the provider to ensure that people experience the best possible service at a time of difficulty. If this should not occur, the Church is able to engage with the provider undertaking a lessons learnt approach with future cases.

5.3.6 The Act will be kept under review and consideration will be given to helpful alterations to the Act with a revision brought to the General Assembly of 2026.

5.3.7 Internally, the Ministries Support Team have responded to the feedback and will continue to do so pending any review of the Act. We have initiated some changes to how the Act is communicated to Ministers and their families. We have created a new Frequently Asked Questions sheet, which will continue to be adapted as new scenarios and issues create new learning. We have also redesigned our Flow Chart so that it is more personalised to the individual.

5.3.8 The Support Team are committed to ensuring that each person:

- understands the Act and its implications for them and their family
- is able to explore all possible support options available; including Ascend provisions and resources available to them
- is able to explore bespoke adaptations which could potentially allow them to continue their Ministry.

6.1 Developing Support Services**6.1.1 Integrated Support Allowance**

The Support Allowance of £250 per calendar year is available to fulltime stipendiary Ministers, Probationers, those who subsequently went on to become Assistant Ministers, those in Familiarisation, and Ordained Deacons in Deacon-specific MDS posts to be used for personal or group pastoral supervision, coaching, (either from existing Ascend provision or external providers), or spiritual accompaniment. This is all subject to agreed invoicing arrangements and appropriate qualifications/credentials for each support provider.

Individuals have freedom to choose whatever support provision they consider will be most beneficial for them. Access to counselling remains in addition to the Support Allowance, as does the ability to request hardship and support grants. Some support provisions are also able to be accessed by Ordained Local Ministers (OLMs), Readers and Mission Development Staff (MDS), but due to the nature of policy decisions, employment terms, and/or Trust Fund terms, we recommend that people speak first with a Line Manager or contact pastoralsupport@churchofscotland.org.uk.

6.2 Partnership with Place for Hope – Living Peace

The Living Peace Partnership with Place for Hope moves into its third year. Place for Hope offers mediation, facilitation, and coaching support to Church of Scotland leaders and congregations in times of change and conflict; training to understand conflict, live well with difference, and equip people and congregations to realise their potential as peacemakers.

It is not only the call of Christ to live peacefully, but a mark of the Church, to be a people of peace, grace, forgiveness and reconciliation. More details of the services offered by Place for Hope can be found at their website, accessible here: <https://bit.ly/4bPTTaA>

7. DIFFERENT CHURCH, DIFFERENT SOCIETY, DIFFERENT DIACONATE

7.1 FAPLT reported to last year's General Assembly on the proposal from the Diaconate Council to use endowment funds to create a part time Development Worker post, to research and shape proposals for the future of the Diaconate. In the end it was more cost effective to commission a research proposal than to employ someone, and the end result was more speedily available. Brendan Research consulted with various stakeholders, and their report was handed over to the Executive Committee of the Diaconate in December 2024. This research, carrying the title, *"Different Church, Different Society, Different Diaconate?"* reviews the place of the Diaconate within the Church and has relevance for the whole Church. It will be discussed by the Diaconate and further discussions and proposals will be formed over the coming year.

8. MINISTRY TO THE DEAF

8.1 Following the passing of the new Ministries for Deaf Congregations Act at the General Assembly of 2023 and in line with the national planning and adjustment exercise undertaken by all congregations, the ministries for the Deaf have now entered into Local Mission Church arrangements with supervising congregations. The moves are as follows:

- Presbytery of Glasgow: John Ross Memorial joined Queen's Park Govanhill
- Presbytery of the North East and Northern Isles: St John's Church for Deaf People joined Aberdeen: Devana
- Presbytery of the South West: Ayrshire Mission for the Deaf joined St Marnock's (Kilmarnock)
- The Edinburgh and West Lothian congregation (Albany Deaf Church) remains as a Presbytery Mission Initiative with Edinburgh: New Town.

8.2 Recruitment to the vacancies in these congregations for ministry leadership continues to be a challenge, despite a UK wide recruitment campaign. At present only one congregation to the Deaf has a full-time Minister of Word and Sacrament. This coming year will require a review of the national Church of Scotland provision across these congregations and what options exist for resourcing this specialist ministry.

9. COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK AND CAPABILITY PROCESS

9.1 The question of a Capability Process for inducted Ministers of Word and Sacrament has been raised at General Assembly on a number of occasions in recent years. FAPLT wish to acknowledge the delay in responding, and offers its apologies to the General Assembly.

9.2 Now is the time to move ahead with proposals, and the accompanying framework of competency, based on the Formation Framework presented to the 2019 General Assembly, is offered as the framework for what the Church of Scotland might expect from a fully competent Minister, while recognising that some Ministers will have strengths in some areas and not others. This can be found at Appendix I.

9.3 The eight areas – Faith, Vocation, and Spirituality; Character, Ethics and Development; Leadership and Relationship; Worship, Sacraments, and Preaching; Pastoral Care; Mission; Discipleship; and Church Management offer a useful framework, and it is recognised that there are areas where there will be significant overlap – confidentiality and prayer can apply across all areas, for instance. The number of entries in each area is not necessarily indicative of importance or priority.

9.4 The Framework is designed to integrate with the Professional Code of Conduct, as well as the set of Terms and Responsibilities agreed at last year's General Assembly, and the Church's ordination vows. Both documents are contained in the Ministers' Handbook, available on the Church's website at <https://bit.ly/4bPTTaA>; they are of a piece and together offer the vision of what the Church expects of its Ministers.

9.5 These are markers for the inducted Minister of Word and Sacrament; it is recognised that further work is needed to offer a similar framework for Ordained Local Ministers, while recognising the specifics of that form of ministry and associated resource implications. The framework will require a process for implementation, as well as a set of guidelines, and both the process and guidelines will be brought to the General Assembly of 2026.

10. CHURCH OF SCOTLAND HOUSING AND LOAN FUND

10.1 FAPLT is grateful to have received monies from the Housing and Loan Fund, for two purposes, and reference is made later in the Report (Section 21), about the support for those in training for Full Time Word and Sacrament (FTWAS) ministry, and for Assistant Ministers. FAPLT wish to acknowledge the support of the Housing and Loan Fund towards removal costs on retirement for Parish Ministers. This is much appreciated by FAPLT, and also by those Ministers who are supported at this particular point of transition out of Parish Ministry into what lies ahead for them.

10.2 FAPLT is named in the constitution of the above Fund, and is invited to nominate members to serve as Trustees of the Fund. The Reverend Scott McCarthy has intimated his resignation, and FAPLT places on record its appreciation of his contribution to work of the Fund. FAPLT now brings the name of the Reverend Michael Goss to the General Assembly to serve as a Trustee.

Public Life and Social Justice Programme Group Report

11. ...WHAT DOES THE LORD REQUIRE OF YOU BUT TO DO JUSTICE, AND TO LOVE KINDNESS, AND TO WALK HUMBLY WITH YOUR GOD?

11.1 Justice-seeking is a calling for the whole Church, for every Christian. We want to explore how the Church of Scotland is *doing justice, loving kindness and walking humbly with God* in all its work.

11.2 The mandate to do justice is as clear as ever, especially as we face new challenges and crises. If we follow Jesus, then love of neighbour and concern for mercy is a duty for all of us. The Church of Scotland is part of a tradition which can clearly encourage calls and actions for work for justice, peace and the integrity of creation. As a national committee, we recognise our limited resources and overstretched people, but feel there is an opportunity if we can identify priorities which can empower the whole Church and lead to meaningful change.

11.3 In the work of justice-seeking, the Church of Scotland often works with partners, particularly other Christian groups, and increasingly also with other faith organisations and expert secular groups. When we work with other groups it is even more important that we are clear and consistent about our own values and culture.

11.4 With our world and our Church facing new challenges and crises, what does it mean for us as a Church to follow these words of Micah (Chapter 6, verse 8)? What are the constant and consistent principles which we should be following and promoting in our work of doing justice, loving mercy and walking humbly with our God? At a time of limited resources and overstretched people, what are the priorities and how do we encourage one another in our common quest for justice, peace and the integrity of creation? How do we ensure that the gospel imperative for justice is for the whole of our Church, reaching beyond the work of Public Life and Social Justice?

11.5 We have been inspired by the Methodist Church in Britain's project *A Justice-seeking Church*.^[iv] This work, which itself was inspired by the Church of Scotland's own *Speak Out* (2015-2020) and *Imagining Scotland's Future* (2012-2014) projects, and the work of the Poverty Truth Network, has helped to equip the Methodist Church with a new framework for the principles, priorities and practices of justice which it is now sharing across the denomination. This includes adopting a justice-based lens to all of the work of the Methodist Church, from finance and procurement to ministry and mission. We propose to look closely at *A Justice-seeking Church* and see if there are things we can adapt and adopt for our context. As we do so we will review *Imagining Scotland's Future* and *Speak Out*, and will seek to work with congregations, Presbyteries and other committees and church-related organisations. We want to equip and inspire everyone to play their part in living out what it means to be a justice seeking Church and actively pursue opportunities to engage with younger generations, who are so passionate about justice. Where there is continued scope for partnership, especially with other Churches, we will hope to build on this too.

11.6 We hope this reflection and work will be of direct usefulness and relevance to ministry and mission in the Church of Scotland. Our hope is that the Church has confidence in its role in serving local communities, in how we care for people struggling against poverty and marginalisation, and especially people for whom the rest of society too often ignores: prisoners, racial and religious minorities, victims and survivors of violence and oppression, disabled people, people who are dependent on alcohol or drugs. Our commitment is that we continue to speak out against injustice, and we work towards a more fair and just society.

12 FOSSIL FUEL NON-PROLIFERATION TREATY INITIATIVE

12.1 The Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty Initiative (FFNPTI) is a global effort to foster international cooperation to accelerate the transition to renewable energy, end the development of new coal, oil and gas resources, and equitably phase out existing production of fossil fuels. It started in 2015, the year of the Paris climate conference (COP21), with the [Suva Declaration On Climate Change](#) from the Pacific Islands Development Forum in Suva, Fiji. This called for: "an international moratorium on the development and expansion of fossil fuel extracting industries, particularly the construction of new coal mines, as an urgent step towards decarbonising the global economy." It is significant that the initiative emerged from the global south, from countries that have most to lose from climate change. In 2017, the Least Developed Countries (LDC) group made a [joint closing statement](#) at COP23, chaired by Fiji and held in Bonn, in which they stressed the need for: "an increase in ambition by all countries to put us on track to limit the global temperature increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius by strengthening our national contributions, managing a phase-out of fossil fuels, promoting renewable energy and implementing the most ambitious climate action." The initiative addresses climate justice in a report submitted to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference in Samoa. The report noted that three countries (the United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada) have historically accounted for over 60% of emissions from the Commonwealth countries. However, they represent just six per cent of these countries' populations.

12.2 The Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty Initiative is based on three principles.

- A just transition to clean energy for everyone
- Preventing the expansion of oil, gas and coal by ending all new exploration and production
- Fair Phase Out: Equitably phase out existing fossil fuel production in line with the 1.5°C goal.

12.3 These are important objectives, particularly given current developments. The COP process has now been through 28 annual conferences with COP 29 held in Baku, Azerbaijan in November 2024. Progress has been far slower than foreseen at the Paris conference (COP21) in 2015 and since then greenhouse gas emissions have continued to rise. Fossil fuel companies are investing in new oil and gas fields, generating billions of dollars in profit annually, and progressing to strengthen government policies to reduce 'Nationally Determined Contributions' has been patchy. The policy directions of the current United States administration present a further challenge, including the withdrawal from the Paris agreement and the commitment to maximise domestic production of oil and gas.

12.4 As of November 2024, the list of supporters is as follows:

Supporters	Number	Notes
Nation states	14	Principally island nations including Fiji, Samoa, Tuvalu, etc.
Cities/regions	120	From all continents including Kolkata (India), Lima (Peru), Sydney (Australia), Toronto (Canada), Los Angeles (USA), Greater London Authority (UK), Paris (France).
Organisations and businesses	3782	Includes World Council of Churches, World Health Organisation, European Parliament. Faith groups in UK include Church of England, United Reformed Church, Quakers, Christian Aid, CAFOD, SCIAF. Iona Community, Justice and Peace Scotland, Islamic Relief.
Individuals	985,000	Includes 101 Nobel laureates, 3000 scientists.

Source: <https://fossilfuel treaty.org/about-treaty>

12.5 The Church of Scotland has, at the General Assembly and elsewhere, made commitments to respond to climate change and promote climate justice. This includes the 2022 Theological Forum report to the General Assembly: *The Earth is the Lord's: A Theological Account of Creation Care*, the worship and witness of many congregations and church-affiliated women and men, as well as practical work to move towards net zero emissions, its support for Eco Congregation Scotland and the decision of the Church of Scotland Investors Trust in 2021 to divest from fossil fuel companies. The Church is a member of Stop Climate Chaos Scotland and together have challenged the Scottish Government to take more decisive action to reduce emissions in Scotland. In part these actions have been motivated by stories from partner churches around the world on the impact of climate change, for example in Bangladesh, Malawi and India, and remains an important part of the work of Christian Aid in development and poverty relief. In the current challenging circumstances, the initiative makes a valuable political contribution towards climate justice. It is consistent with the deliverances of the General Assembly and offers the opportunity to renew and refresh the Church's message to congregations and to its partners. We are therefore seeking the General Assembly's agreement to support the Initiative.

12.6 Further details can be found at <https://fossilfuel treaty.org/>

13. LEGACIES OF SLAVERY AND THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

13.1 In 2023 the General Assembly received the report *The Church of Scotland and the Legacies of Slavery*.^[v] Work to take forward the 2023 deliverances and the report's recommendations has been undertaken by the Racial Justice Working Group, a project group of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Group. Since the start of 2024, the Racial Justice Working Group has been working in collaboration with the Public Life and Social Justice Programme Group and the Theological Forum towards a draft statement of acknowledgement and apology. It is intended that the text of this statement will be presented to the 2026 General Assembly. We plan opportunities over the coming year for Presbyteries to have sufficient time to discuss and reflect on the purpose of the apology and the reasons why this legacy is still relevant and important.

13.2 The 2023 report detailed the Church's historic ties to the 18th and 19th-century enslavement of Africans. Commissioned at the 2020 General Assembly amid the Black Lives Matter movement, the report reflected heightened awareness of racism not seen in the UK on such a scale since the 1993 murder of Stephen Lawrence and the subsequent public inquiry, which highlighted the factor of institutional racism in the failures of the police investigation. After the killing of George Floyd, Black Lives Matter spurred a public international reckoning. In Scotland, attention turned to the nation's connections to the transatlantic slave trade and the role of Scots in the Caribbean during the colonial period.

13.3 The legacy of African enslavement continues to fuel systemic racism, and discussions of its impact on modern inequalities and spirituality gained significant prominence during the Covid-19 pandemic. Since then, public focus on racism has waned, and so it is even more important to affirm the Church's commitment to reflection and lament. Lament requires confronting discomfort and courageously seeking healing. We therefore seek the support of the 2025 General Assembly to reaffirm its commitment to a long-term process of acknowledgment, apology, and local engagement to uncover the Church's full legacy so that the Church can do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God.

13.4 Legacy, particularly for the Church, encompasses the spiritual, moral, and cultural inheritance, which is part of our tradition, passed down from our forebears. It includes the teachings, values, and faith individuals leave behind, shaping future lives. While often celebrated for its role in the abolitionist movement, the Church of Scotland has also faced a complex history regarding slavery. The 2023 report built on prior research, revealing not

only the wealth tied to slavery evident in church buildings but also the involvement of Church affiliates in profiting from, supporting, and morally justifying chattel slavery. This included Scots who defended slavery both in Scotland and abroad, particularly in the Caribbean, where many sought to amass fortunes. Since the report, additional examples have been uncovered, expanding the Church's understanding of its connections to slavery in Africa, the Caribbean, Central and South America, and the United States.

13.5 In the Spring of 2024 representatives of the Church of Scotland were part of an ecumenical pilgrimage to Jamaica.^[vi] The Churches' Reparation Action Forum (CRAF), a Jamaican ecumenical body, led the pilgrimage. CRAF bridges the Jamaican Government's work on reparations with Church leaders and has developed a seven-point Reparations Plan to address the enduring trauma of enslavement in the Caribbean and diaspora. The plan highlights key elements for holistic healing: Apology, Addressing Psychological Trauma, Reimagining Education, Promoting Wealth Creation and Property Ownership, Honouring Ancestors with Spatial Markers, and Tackling Agriculture and Climate Change.

13.6 The United Church of Jamaica and the Cayman Islands, which inherited assets from denominations linked to colonialism, uses this plan to address the lasting impact of slavery on their own denomination and to explore how they might lead and model a journey of repair amongst Jamaica's Churches and between them and Churches in the UK.

13.7 The Church of Scotland is on a historical threshold as it prepares for a statement of acknowledgement and apology. The deliverance received by the 2023 General Assembly instructed the Church of Scotland to continue to take steps on a path towards repentance and reconciliation. The key to ensuring that the path towards apology is meaningful and impactful involves the incorporation of two guiding principles: -

13.7.1 The first is that the work undertaken listens to and pays attention to those from Black African and Caribbean backgrounds who have been working tirelessly in the Church and beyond to recognise the continuing impact of this legacy.

13.7.2 The second principle is to listen to the whole Church. The 2022 Theological Forum paper on *Apologising for Historic Wrongs*^[vii] provided essential guidance on what it means to issue a collective apology for historic wrongs. It emphasised that such an apology requires the same acknowledgment of harm and empathy as a personal one. As the Church prepares its collective apology, it is worth revisiting this report's reminder that apologies are not solely about accepting blame; they may express solidarity with victims, past and present, and reaffirm a commitment to challenging the norms that enabled such harm.

13.8 In that vein, conversations and reflections in Presbyteries have taken place with the aim of holding open, honest and sometimes difficult reflections on what can be learned from the Church of Scotland's history, both positive and negative, and the nuance of what lies in between. The vision is for the whole Church, at all levels to feel represented when a statement of acknowledgment and apology is prepared for a future General Assembly. Before this can happen, everyone needs an opportunity to hear the information that has inspired this apology, learning from our ecumenical and Caribbean partners in order to piece together a vision for what spiritual healing might look like.

13.9 In order to begin facilitating the means for congregations to learn more about this legacy in their local context (see section d) of the 2023 Deliverance), a pilot project is being developed in collaboration with the University of Highlands and Islands and local primary schools in Aberlour. This pilot is due to commence in June-July 2025 with the hope that this might provide a model as well as inspiration for other congregations to do something similar. We intend to review this work and the other 2023 report recommendations to develop a new plan of action for presentation at next year's General Assembly.

13.10 One internal change to the oversight of this work that we are making is over the next year is to establish a Legacies of Slavery short life working group which will have the task of completing dialogue, preparing an acknowledgement and apology statement, and the related actions outlined above. This will allow a dedicated group the time, energy and focus to drive this work forward and provide clearer lines of accountability for the wider Church. It will also allow more space on the agenda of the Racial Justice Working Group to undertake other core work related to its remit.

14 MIGRANTS, REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

14.1 The 2024 General Assembly agreed the following deliverance: -

Urge political leaders and media institutions to avoid the use of dehumanising and hostile language when describing migrants, refugees and asylum seekers; and instruct the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team to work with partners in challenging this rhetoric through advocacy, encounter and practical initiatives.

14.2 During the year we have supported several significant activities which have advanced this deliverance. During Refugee Festival Scotland (17– 23 June 2024) we provided

congregations with resources to help engage in meaningful conversations about migration and sanctuary in the lead up to the general election. Using the City of Sanctuary resource [Speak Up for Sanctuary](#) and our own [Stand Up for Sanctuary](#) worship materials, we offered church members advice in initiating productive dialogues with election candidates and members of their communities.

14.3 In August, following the shocking far-right rioting and violence seen across the UK, the Church of Scotland supported Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees to collaborate with Interfaith Scotland and Faith in Community Scotland to [publicly condemn these actions](#). Glasgow Presbytery also came together with interfaith partners to demonstrate solidarity. Additionally, the Public Life and Social Justice Programme Group have begun seeking to understand ways to counter the far-right's misuse of Christian imagery and symbols, recognising the need to address this concerning trend.

14.4 In December the Convener of the Public Life and Social Justice Programme Group spoke out against divisive attempts to remove free bus travel for asylum seekers from the Scottish budget. In contrast to the previously civil and respectful conversation on this issue, the language of a Holyrood motion sought to pit the needs of vulnerable people seeking asylum against those of pensioners set to lose their winter fuel payments. This rhetoric escalated inflammatory divisions in Scottish politics. We issued a [joint statement](#) with Justice and Peace Scotland (part of the Catholic Church in Scotland), urging MSPs to reject this false dichotomy. The statement was widely cited during the Scottish Parliament debate, including by Finance Minister Shona Robison, and played a key role in empowering MSPs to condemn such divisive politics.

14.5 By agreeing and then working to implement actions supporting this deliverance, the Church of Scotland has demonstrated a steadfast commitment to promoting justice, compassion, and solidarity for migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers.

14.6 For more information see the Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees website <https://www.sfar.org.uk/>

15 INTEGRITY – THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN TASK GROUP

15.1 Since 2022 Integrity^[viii] have been focusing on offering training on recognising and preventing violence against women for the wider Church, and revising and refining what types of training can be provided. We do so in the climate of rising misogyny fuelled by online influencers and social media. In the Faith Action Leadership Team report to the 2024 General Assembly commissioners heard concerns that the societal issues of misogyny, toxic masculinity and the rise of influencers such as Andrew Tate are becoming even more prevalent in our schools and young persons' groups. This is reflective of wider societal issues around misogyny promoted by alt-right^[ix] groups.

15.2 Whilst we acknowledge that women can also be perpetrators of abuse, we know that overwhelmingly victims of domestic abuse are women and girls. The statistics back this up, as in 2023/24 Police Scotland recorded 63,867 incidents of domestic abuse. Of those incidents recorded, 81% involve a male perpetrator and female victim. Where age was known, 35% of incidents featured a male perpetrator under the age of 35. We recognise what when children witness domestic abuse the effects are long lasting.

15.3 Gender-based violence is an issue for the whole of society, however women historically have been over- represented in our training sessions. Conscious of the need to draw men into the conversation around prevention, in 2023 Integrity delivered male-only training to groups within the Church of Scotland. These training sessions were judged to be a useful start to a much-needed conversation and enlightening for the participants who attended. There is still more however we can do as a Church to empower those in ministry and those involved in safeguarding to recognise the signs of coercion and control and be confident in their ability to respond to a disclosure.

15.4 To achieve this, over the last year Integrity have been exploring our current training resources and have established a new partnership with Restored^[x], a Christian domestic abuse charity which largely focuses on female victim/survivors of domestic abuse. This has allowed the group to explore further the spiritual elements of domestic abuse and how our own church environments, structures, and theological beliefs can be weaponised by some perpetrators of domestic abuse.

16 PUBLIC ISSUES POLICY REVIEW

16.1 The General Assembly has agreed Deliverances on national public issues for many decades. The list and range of public policy positions is not organised or published, and requests for "the view" of the Church often relies on institutional memory. This way of doing things has been challenging for the Public Life and Social Justice Programme Group members, none of whom have had experience of sitting on the predecessor bodies the Church and

Society Council or the Faith Impact Forum. Over the last year we have received policy and media questions about public issues where the General Assembly has said nothing for nearly 40 years. The Programme Group have been reluctant to present potentially obsolete positions as a current opinion of the Church of Scotland.

16.2 The Public Life and Social Justice Programme Group intends to work on a process whereby a collated and agreed list of public issues Deliverances can be published and shared; older deliverances which are still felt to be relevant and a key priority for current work and witness will be reaffirmed by their inclusion. Where a Deliverance from a General Assembly from several years previously is no longer felt to be appropriate, it may be proposed that it is not included on a list and so might be deemed to have expired.

16.3 We recognise there is a need to share such a process for the General Assembly to approve, and we expect to bring a proposal, following consultation with other relevant committees, to the General Assembly of 2026.

17 INTERFAITH RELATIONS AND ACTIVITY

17.1 2025 marks a number of important anniversaries. For reflections and conversations with other faith communities, the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz and the 30th anniversary of the Bosnian genocide will be poignant.

17.2 Auschwitz has come to represent a moment of reckoning in human history, out of which the concept of universal human rights has sprung along with a resounding commitment to ensuring something like this never happens again. The subsequent genocides since 1945 has put this commitment under strain and with the ever-dwindling number of survivors to bear witness to the world what happened in Auschwitz, it feels increasingly imperative to refocus on what each of us can do to challenge hatred and improve understanding and empathy between all groups.

17.3 For Churches, and individual Christians there is a particular responsibility to consistently examine Christian forms of anti-Judaism, and Islamophobias. We must be vigilant and wary of actions performed in the name of 'Christian nations' or under the guise of defending 'Scottish/British Christian values.' We saw elements of this during the riots which took place in England and Northern Ireland and, while we can be thankful that riots did not take place in Scotland in the same way, that does not mean we are immune. There are those who are ready to blame Muslims for the fact that many of our Churches are closing and use so-called Christian identity as something divisive and to inspire the de-humanising of others.

17.4 In light of the increasingly polarised world the interfaith strategy for the Church of Scotland is being revised to ensure the Church of Scotland has a comprehensive and integrative approach to:

- Improving understanding and empathy of other faith communities in Scotland
- Providing opportunities for interfaith collaboration
- Challenging hate in all forms

17.5 Amid growing socio-political polarisation, there are signs of unity. Muslim and Jewish leaders in the UK have come together to acknowledge the impact of the war in Gaza, Lebanon, and Israel on their communities and reaffirm their relationships. Their discussions led to the Drumlanrig Accord, agreed in January 2025 and signed on 11th February in the presence of HM King Charles. The Church of Scotland welcomes this achievement, recognising how it represents a strong commitment to open dialogue and the honest exploration of differences and will be a supportive partner in all that comes from this accord. The accord can be found here: [Microsoft Word – Muslim-Jewish Reconciliation Accords v14 9Feb25.docx](#).

17.6 A Summary of Public Life and Social Justice activity as a result of the Deliverance of the 2024 General Assembly in relation to the Report of the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team can be found at Appendix II.

People and Training Programme Group Report

18. ADMISSIONS LEGISLATION

18.1 We paused accepting applications from ordained Ministers outwith the Church of Scotland in Spring 2024 as the number of Ministers seeking charges outnumbered available charges. During this time, we honoured those who were currently being assessed and ensured those who had been previously accepted were able to come to Scotland to fulfil their Familiarisation placements. We have taken this opportunity to undertake a review of the Admissions and Readmissions process and bring a new Act to the General Assembly. We anticipate resuming the Admissions process in the summer of 2026, providing that the pace of implementation of the Presbytery Mission Planning process continues as at present.

18.2 A period of consultation was undertaken with a number of key groups including meeting with those who had entered through the Familiarisation route and Supervisors of Familiarisation placements, Equality Diversity and Inclusion, Ecumenical Relations and the then Convenors of Legal Questions and the Committee on Chaplains to the HM Forces.

18.3 It was found that there was a need to extend our present provision of certification. All those entering the Admission process are presently assessed for parish ministry with the expectation that unless there are exceptional circumstances, they will undertake a 12-month, full-time, assessed Familiarisation period. This meant that those in other areas of ministry e.g. chaplaincy or theology lecturers, cannot find a way to serve as ordained Ministers within the Church of Scotland. Further, we heard that for some Presbyteries seeking to undertake new and developing projects through Seeds of Growth funding, we need a way to ensure that those bringing expertise from other denominations to this area could also apply for status as a Church of Scotland ordained Minister.

18.4 The Temporary certificate, allowing someone to come serve in Scotland on a temporary three-year basis was no longer applicable given the shape and nature of Presbytery Mission Planning, and so we are proposing that this is removed.

18.5 The Restricted Certificate which is only applicable to the International Presbytery is being renamed to reflect this and will be called the International Presbytery Certificate.

18.6 We also heard of the challenges faced by those entering the Church of Scotland from outwith as they adapt to life and ministry within Scotland. Pastoral support and appropriate additional training will help with this process at both a national and Presbytery level. The Church remains indebted to the many Supervisors and their congregations who supported those through their Familiarisation period with practical provision and spiritual support.

18.7 It should be noted that serving Chaplains to the HM Forces are prohibited from changing denomination during their service, and therefore applications cannot be accepted from individuals until they have left HM Forces.

18.8 As a result, we wish to update our Certificates of Eligibility:

18.8.1 We retain the Standard Certificate which allows those ordained Ministers from the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) denominations who are Reformed in theology and Presbyterian in governance to apply for admission to the Church of Scotland. Further, we include applicants from the Church of England and the Scottish Episcopal Church in response to the Columba Declaration and the Saint Andrew Declaration.

18.8.2 A new Non-Parish Ministry Certificate will allow those who work in non-parish appointments like hospital, hospice or university chaplaincies to claim status as a Church of Scotland Minister. This allows us to assess the calling of those applicants specifically in their areas of deployment, without the need to undertake a 12-month, full-time Familiarisation placement.

18.9 It is important all entering the Church of Scotland through the Admissions process are appropriately trained and upskilled to undertake their wider Presbytery responsibilities. Therefore, the Act introduces elements of compulsory training to be undertaken between the period of assessment and the issue of the Certificate of Eligibility. These are courses in Safeguarding, Church Law and Scottish Church History.

18.10 We are also aware that as Church of Scotland Ministers they will be required to fulfil the responsibilities of their ordinations vows which includes undertaking their due part in the courts of the Church. This will inevitably require them to be aware of the responsibilities of an Interim Moderator and the moderating of a Kirk Session. Training in the area will be a compulsory element of preparation before receiving their certificate of eligibility.

18.11 Presently those coming to take up a Familiarisation placement have to do so within three years of their point of acceptance. With the introduction of the Presbytery Mission Plan, and with the need to monitor on an annual basis the budgets of the national Church, the new Act introduces the capacity for FAPLT to set each year the number of places available for Familiarisation, with Candidates being given a start date by the Church. This will also allow FAPLT to provide the essential programme of training and support for those entering the Church of Scotland.

18.12 The new Act is attached in *Appendix III*.

19. THE APPRENTICESHIP ROUTE

19.1 Why a new route?

19.1.1 As approved at the General Assembly of 2024, work began on the Apprenticeship Route (AR). This is a new pathway for people to explore a more general sense of Call to fulltime service within the Church of Scotland. At the Assembly of 2024 the Assembly Trustees were instructed to work with FAPLT to make provision in the 2025 budget for funding for the AR. The AR will enable people to consider if God's call is specifically to leadership and ministry. It will also widen access to our training routes to those coming from a broader diversity of demographic and socio-economic backgrounds and will be designed to enable younger people

who may not have the academic foundation that our traditional pathways require. This seeks to complement our present provision and not replace it.

19.2 The 'What?' of the new route

The AR will have four elements:

19.2.1 Discernment

Apprentices will be invited to explore God's call on their lives as part of a small learning community of people. Each person will be supported by experienced and trained mentors.

19.2.2 Formation

Since the publication of the Ministers of the Gospel report in 2000, focus on formation within training has developed significantly. The Formation Framework agreed by the General Assembly of 2019 outlines the eight key areas of formation for our Ministers of Word and Sacrament. Whilst Apprentices will not focus on all of these areas, the route will give a high priority to ensuring the Christ-centred shaping of the whole person, encouraging a constant reflection on the story of Jesus, to allowing healthy devotional habits to form.

19.2.3 On-the-job

It is expected that about 70% of the Apprentice's time will be spent engaging with a range of ministry experiences, working day-to-day in congregations and communities. With one primary placement, there will also be opportunities to explore their Calling through shorter secondments to chaplaincies and other contexts. This will be guided by a reflective practice process, to bring their practice and developing theology together.

19.2.4 Classroom

Time will be dedicated to more formal learning, with the equivalent of a day a week for biblical and theological enquiry. We are presently exploring how best this might be delivered through our academic providers.

19.3 The 'Who?' of the new route

19.3.1 This route will be open primarily to people between the ages of 18 and 40. Our traditional routes have an average entry age of 39 for FTWAS and much older for the Readership and OLM. While not excluding those outwith this age range, this will allow us to focus on a more general sense of Call to Christian ministry and assess the potential of an individual in much broader terms than we presently undertake for our nationally recognised ministries. Seeking the 'raw' material within an individual is not without its risks and will require us to develop new and creative selection processes for this route.

19.3.2 We will be looking for the following five 'C's^[xi] within the assessment and selection process:

- Christian Commitment
- Character
- Calling
- Chemistry
- Competence

19.4 The 'Where?' of the new route

19.4.1 A pilot scheme for 2025-2027 involving up to 12 AR Apprentices has been launched and will commence in September 2025. These Apprentices will be placed in one of three possible Hubs^[xii], located in major population bases to maximise initial engagement. There will be an experienced, trained mentoring team in each Hub.

19.4.2 Key to the selection of these Hub areas are the following:

- The ready availability of Ministers and those already trained as Mentors, Supervisors, Formation Partners etc.^[xiii]
- The ready availability of a wide range of church expressions, ministry experiences, chaplaincies and community engagements through which Apprentices might 'taste and see'. A clear missional focus. In an age when the denomination has shrunk so significantly and when, for the first time, the majority of Scots define themselves as non-religious, the need to raise up leaders who have a 'heart for mission' is obvious and to that end, the Apprenticeship Hubs will offer strong missional experience.

19.5 The 'What next?' of the new route

19.5.1 For some people, the AR might prove to be an end in itself. They will have grown in terms of their Christian journey, sharpened their leadership skills and have a clearer sense of who they are and to where God is next calling them. They will have worked in congregations, contributing to their life and witness, and will take that experience to the wider community.

19.5.2 For many others, it will be a launch pad to the specific ministries of the Church of Scotland. This may be a local congregational role or an MDS role, for which they will be better theologically and practically prepared, or it may be one of our national recognised ministries. Either way, Apprentices will require to undertake traditional processes of application and assessment to progress.

20. THOSE CURRENTLY IN TRAINING

20.1 A table of those currently in training is provided at *Appendix IV*.

21. HOUSING GRANTS

21.1 We are grateful to have received monies from the Housing and Loan Fund to enable us to assist those in training for FTWAS ministry. The aim of the grant is to enable Candidates and Probationers to retain their own house as they train for ministry. For this season only, this grant is also being extended to those on Assistant Minister contracts. The monies received were on condition that these did not replace any funding given by FAPLT but would always be additional to it.

21.2 After consultation with the Law Department, we developed a process of means testing to allow Candidates and Probationers to access this grant. As this is a charitable fund, we cannot give grants without applicants showing an evidential base of need.

21.3 We therefore developed a system of application, where applicants were asked for details of their household income, which would be balanced against their housing cost including rent, mortgage and Council Tax. We have asked applicants to self-declare their income, and there will be a random testing of applicants where a small number will be asked to produce the necessary paperwork for their claim.

21.4 We used information regarding the Minimum Income Standard produced by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, and with that, those exceeding that Minimum Income Standard based on their particular circumstances were ruled to be ineligible for this grant. Thereafter the net household income was assessed against three broad bands of monthly payments of £150, £300 or £500 per month towards housing costs, with those in most need being given the most.

21.5 The Housing and Loan Fund monies were also used to cover the third-party tax and national insurance costs for Candidates, and the national insurance costs for Probationers and Assistant Ministers, associated with these housing grants.

21.6 We continue to report regularly to the Housing and Loan Fund on the uptake of the fund and remain grateful for this essential level of support that is being given to those training for FTWAS ministry.

22. CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

22.1 We continue to develop the services of ASCEND, reviewing how and in what ways these are offered.

22.2 We are aware of the changing demands particularly on those who serve within the parish context. With increased parishes, the union and linkages of congregations and the emergence of new ministry teams, there is a need both to encourage and to provide additional support and learning.

22.3 Work continues in establishing a programme of First Five Year support, bringing FAPLT into partnership with the Meikle Trust who largely funded a retreat for 50 of our FTWAS ministers. The four days together allowed peer group relationships to be reaffirmed, and provided reflective space, fellowship, and times of worship for those who are leading our congregations in times of exceptional challenge. Together with an annual leadership programme it is hoped that those in ministry will continue to lead creatively and missionally, whilst flourishing as Ministers of the gospel.

22.4 Specific thought is now being given to what will be required by those undertaking the new Initial Ministerial Education (IME) BD/MDIV course. The length of training will be reduced, but that will increase the need for continuing support and development for each newly ordained Minister.

22.5 It is therefore proposed that for those undertaking this new programme there be an element of compulsory continuing professional development during the first five-year period. It is hoped that with a positive habit established, that the present provision of study and retreat leave will be voluntarily taken up by ministers throughout the length of their ministry.

22.6 Consideration has also been given to the deliverance received at last year's General Assembly regarding the establishing of Study Leave for those in the first five years of ministry.

22.7 The following deliverance was received by the General Assembly of 2024:

Instruct the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team to consider introducing, in relation to ministers in their First Five Years, an annual two week allocation for study leave and investigate whether the present financial allocation for the Continuing Ministerial Development Fund can be increased from £200 to £275 for ministers in their First Five Years; strongly encourage all ministers in their First Five Years to utilise the resources available, including the Continuing Ministerial Development Fund, and urge all congregations with ministers in their First Five Years to encourage their minister to take up what is on offer.

22.8 At present, only 35% of Ministers in their first five years fully utilise the support currently available. Those that do have a flexibility of how they use this money, be it retreat, software, books. This is a higher degree of flexibility than Study Leave provision.

22.9 Ministers in their first five years do not currently get a two-week allocation of study time.

22.10 Those in their first five years of ministry could join the present Study Leave scheme. However, it is especially important to encourage those in this category to access regularly both the funding and any period of leave, establishing good habits at the beginning of their ministry.

22.11 It was felt that the 2024 deliverance pointed to the need to combine the national support with Presbytery and congregational understanding and support.

22.12 Therefore, the following is proposed:

- the £200 annual grant for Ministers in their first five years is retained to allow a Minister to spend as required, and not according to the narrower criteria of the Study Leave scheme.
- those in their first five years be given a two-week Study and Reflection allocation per annum. It would not be accumulative to ensure that the time is taken within each calendar year, to build a practice of taking time for prayer, reflection and review.
- the period would be approved by Presbyteries. This would help bind the support of the Presbytery to the new Minister.
- local congregations cover the pulpit supply, and that should there be a good economic reason why they can't afford to do this, Presbytery arrange cover to allow the Study and Reflection period to be accessed.

23. CHURCH OF SCOTLAND LEARNING

23.1 Following the launch of this platform in August 2023, the provision continues to expand. In addition, collaborative relationships are being established with Presbyteries, with an encouragement to share mutual learnings and resources. New modules continue to be developed, which include partnerships with Stewardship and Future Focus.

23.2 An overview of Church of Scotland Learning can be accessed here:
<https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/resources/church-of-scotland-learning>

Mission Support Programme Group

24. MISSION SUPPORT PROGRAMME GROUP

24.1 The Mission Support Programme Group (MSPG) and Staff Team have worked closely with one another and other relevant programme groups to examine how the Church moves forward in a number of key areas including Priority Areas, New Worshipping Communities, Intergenerational Ministry, Ministry to the Under 40's and Digital Mission and Ministry.

25. CHURCH PLANTING

25.1 Why, and why now?

25.1.1 FAPLT believe it is time for the Church of Scotland to plant churches. We have been through a significant period of decline (or, to view it through a lens of God's work amongst us, pruning). We have been cut back, but we believe that God means for us to grow again into the shape of Church He means for the Kirk at this time. Our FAPLT Vivid Vision, as an aspiration for where we'll be in two years from now, contains these words:

25.1.2 Some of the growing Churches are smaller and rural, others are in towns or cities, whilst yet others are new expressions developing in radically different ways. They are clearly being shaped by their context. It doesn't look like a master plan by the national Church has been rolled out. Instead, it feels much more organic. Or perhaps better put, birthed, guided and prompted by the life-giving Holy Spirit who constantly surprises us!

25.1.3 New worshipping communities of different kinds are emerging all across Scotland, developing their work, witness and worship very differently. Whilst they feel embryonic there is excitement. Online Church looks like it has become a focus, both through national initiatives and local congregational connection.

25.1.4 Before going further, it will be helpful to explain what we mean when we use the terms New Worshipping Communities and Church Plants, and the difference between the two.

25.2 New Worshipping Communities

25.2.1 New Worshipping Communities are new expressions of gatherings in worship that any local church can develop with their existing resources and with support from Seeds for Growth available – with their people, in their parish, and across parishes where there is partnership and permission. It needs no legislative or other changes. It can and is being done now.

25.3 Church Plants

25.3.1 Church plants envisage more of a giving away from what is established to what is new, with the goal that the new becomes a sustainable church community of its own, with the potential to plant again. To that end, through the Presbytery Mission Initiative Act, a Presbytery, and a local 'sending church' (where possible), commit resources to establishing a church plant with Seeds for Growth support, which might grow into a local church with distinct legal identity as an addition to the existing Presbytery Plan.

25.3.2 Some of the growth that we trust God will bring will be in our existing congregations. However, to believe in growing the Church, we must surely believe in growing the new alongside renewing the old. That is envisaged in our FAPLT Vivid Vision. The General Assembly has repeatedly affirmed a goal of 100 new worshipping communities. Although those can happen under the leadership and resource of existing congregations, that is not the only way that people come to faith in Jesus and communities experience transformation.

25.3.3 Colleagues in other denominations are demonstrating how investing in planting new churches brings many more people and communities into a living faith in Jesus. To say, "They're doing it so we don't have to," we contend is to unnecessarily limit what the Spirit of God can do in and through the Church of Scotland in these coming years. This is not about 'do new things or the Church of Scotland will die.' It is about 'do new things alongside what we have, because the people of Scotland know little of Jesus' work – and we want to be involved in enabling an infinitely fuller life in Jesus.'

25.3.4 We are taking time to listen to church planters and policy makers and are being honed as a result. We want to give a route for the people God will call to church planting; something that has enough flexibility to give a variety of options for how things begin, as led by the Spirit of God, and a variety of options for where that could end up; something that has enough boundaries, clarity, support and resourcing to truly empower and equip and remunerate church planters, while also bringing accountability, direction and clear goals to their work.

25.3.5 If God is about to raise up many church planters, we are seeking to give them an open door and a supported path in the Church of Scotland.

25.4 Who is going to plant churches?

25.4.1 Our proposals envisage a variety of people hearing that call and getting on board. It could be a Minister, a Deacon, a Reader. It could be someone neither ordained nor set apart. It could be one person; it could be a team of part-time people.

25.4.2 We are at a fascinating time of opportunity in the Church in Scotland. In March, the Send event gathered thousands of young adults following Jesus and rallying them to a call to reach this nation. The summer Magnitude event continues to gather young people from across the nation, including in our Church of Scotland village, where FAPLT staff and committee members are meeting the emerging leaders of the future and can communicate a vision for church planting.

25.4.3 There is no reason that the Church of Scotland cannot call people, young and old, to join in with the season of planting new churches that God may be leading us towards. There is every reason to believe that the emerging generation of Christian leaders are ready to join in with God in 'doing the new thing.'

25.4.4 One of our members with great church planting experience suggested that if we want 100 new worshipping communities (and why not actually say, 100 new church plants) – then we'd need to pray for 200-250 leaders to emerge who will go on that journey.

25.4.5 That could include the already trained and ordained. It could also include any of the thousands upon thousands of members of the Church of Scotland. It could include any of the thousands of young people hearing a call to mission in Scotland during 2025. There are so many people who could hear the call that if we set it up with openness and clarity, 200-250 new leaders are possible.

25.5 So, we believe it is time to pray for that

25.5.1 Coupled with that is a plea that as the Church of Scotland we begin to confidently articulate that call; to hear from our pulpits, 'Is God calling you to church planting?'; to explore that route with people in discernment; to clearly communicate the call in our national and Presbytery communications; for the Church of Scotland to hear the call, and to resource those who respond.

26. INTERGENERATIONAL CHURCH

26.1 The Faith Action Programme Leadership Team identified the need to explore the following question: *How can churches be supported to develop missional activities and attitudes that will lead to younger generations being brought into the heart of church life and leadership?*

26.2 In initial discussions, the group identified two distinct yet related aspects of church life which stem from the above question.

26.2.1.How do we reach those who are not currently involved in the life of the Church?

26.2.2.How do we engage with those who are currently part of the Church and support them to be part of church life and leadership?

26.3 It is apparent that at local level, the Church is engaged in a wide range of activities which reach out to those under the age of forty. These include toddler groups, youth clubs, Messy Church, school chaplaincy, young people involved in leading worship and outreach activities within local communities. Much of the focus of these activities is on children, young people and parents, with very few activities specifically for those in their twenties and thirties. While the group acknowledge that there is merit in these activities, the focus on reach and numerical growth must develop into opportunities for spiritual engagement and growth.

26.4 The group considered the work previously undertaken by the Intergenerational Church Working Group. This highlighted the benefits of an Intergenerational Church Culture being developed across the Church at all levels. It emphasised a clear shift in focus from numerical growth to spiritual growth, from doing things for Under 40s to church families being together across generations and all discipling one other.

26.5 Much of what happens within churches is age segregated. While there may be times within worship where the whole church family is together, children and young people often leave to attend their own activities while adults continue with the remainder of the worship service. This means that, as children and young people grow up, they are constantly having to build new relationships and communities. While there are relationships developed between children, young people and adults, most of these relationships are one directional, with adults passing on information, knowledge or wisdom to younger people. There is little consideration given to the knowledge and experiences that all ages bring to worship.

26.6 While there is benefit to age segregated activities, the group identified that developing an intergenerational culture within the Church, particularly at a local level, would deepen relationships between all generations, see spiritual growth of congregations and empower people of all ages to be involved in Church life and leadership.

26.7 Being an Intergenerational Church is about intentionally providing opportunities for people of all generations to be involved in all core activities of the church: worship, mission, learning, serving and decision-making. When people of all generations are meaningfully involved in these activities, they disciple each other, journeying together in faith as they worship with their whole lives. It is not simply about having all-age worship services.

26.8 Developing an Intergenerational church culture includes

26.8.1. planned opportunities for hospitality. This allows for people from across the generations to consciously spend time getting to know one another and, therefore, building relationships.

26.8.2. These warm relationships should develop everyone's sense of belonging.

26.8.3. it is about everyone knowing that they have a place and they can be fully involved in what happens within church, which is more than just being welcome

26.8.4. An intergenerational church cultivates a culture of learning and questioning. This requires humility to ensure everyone can come ready to learn and ready to sense how God is working in their lives.

26.8.5. This culture of questioning is particularly important in a post Christendom society, where many have little or no understanding of Christian faith and the teachings of the Bible.

26.8.6. In a truly Intergenerational Church, everyone feels they are able to ask questions and have opportunities to explore answers together as they grow together

26.9 While Presbyteries and the national church have a role in supporting congregations with becoming an intergenerational, it becomes real at the local level. Materials have been developed for Church of Scotland Learning which will support this development.

26.10 Relationships are at the heart of what it means to be an intergenerational church, and these are best developed in the local context.

26.11 Seeking to become an Intergenerational Church does not provide us with a 'silver bullet' to church growth and may not even answer the question that the group were initially tasked with answering. It is a long-term culture shift which will require change and commitment at all levels of the church. While local churches explore what it means to be a truly intergenerational, there remains the need to plan missional activities which specifically reach younger generations. This may involve many of the activities for children and families which were outlined at the outset but also some that specifically focus on those in their twenties and thirties. It is the intention of FAPLT to develop a strategy for youth and young adult mission and ministry in the coming year.

26.12 The group believe that developing an Intergenerational Church culture will see congregations experience both spiritual and numerical growth as people journey together with Jesus, learning and growing together. This is by no means easy and will require significant change in culture and organisation. However, it is hoped that by investing in this culture, we will see younger generations at the heart of church life and leadership.

27 PRIORITY AREAS

27.1 The 2024 General Assembly agreed the following deliverance:

Instruct the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team to encourage Presbyteries to engage with Priority Areas to explore ways in which the Church of Scotland's priority for the poorest and most marginalised in society can continue to be delivered in areas where major adjustments have taken place to Priority Area parishes (Section 4).

27.2 The Priority Areas and Mission Support teams have developed strong relationships with Presbytery Mission staff, fostering fruitful collaboration. We are grateful for the engagement of Presbytery staff with the Priority Areas review, giving Presbyteries their voice as key stakeholders in the shaping of the Priority Areas work. In light of the Priority Areas review we have been encouraged by the growing sense of partnership with Presbyteries and look forward to further collaboration.

27.3 PRIORITY AREAS REVIEW

27.4 Priority Areas work had not been reviewed since the development of the '2017-2022 Priority Areas Action Plan.' Significant changes have occurred between 2017 and 2024, including budget reductions and personnel changes, making it an appropriate time for a comprehensive review of this vital area of work. (Appendix V).

27.5 The dedication of the Priority Areas staff team over many years and the Church of Scotland's commitment to communities facing the highest levels of deprivation are clear. The Priority Areas work has been described as a flagship initiative of the Church, consistently supported by General Assemblies, which reaffirm the church's dedication to those struggling with poverty, emphasizing the biblical mandate to care for the poor and vulnerable. This flagship work unites the denomination, transcending theological and social differences.

27.6 The review reaffirmed our desire to remain a denomination that supports, encourages, learns from, and stands alongside our most deprived parishes and ministries, remaining committed to this biblical mandate which is at the heart of our worship of God.

27.7 The conclusions and key recommendations of the review were:

27.7.1 Expand the national staff team's remit to support missional work in all areas of deprivation, not just those on designated lists. A re-evaluation of the terminology used to refer to the team may be required at some point to reflect this broader focus.

27.7.2 Support for those working in areas with high levels of deprivation could be more strategic, focusing resources on areas with significant missional potential rather than maintaining a worshipping presence without evaluating missional activity, capacity, or impact. Explore alternative support methods, such as a "SIMD solidarity^[xiv]" fund.

27.7.3 Track the number of church closures in areas of high deprivation to ensure they are not disproportionately higher than in wealthier areas.

27.7.4 While double-weighting for Priority Area parishes is considered helpful, the fulfilment of it relies heavily on appointing MDS colleagues noting, at times, recruitment challenges.

27.7.5 Review the Priority Area and Supplementary List designations with 2026 SIMD data and updated parish boundaries. Additionally, identify areas of poverty that are not captured by these lists and consider the creation of a deprivation scale for each parish.

28. THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND HIV PROGRAMME

28.1 The Church of Scotland HIV and AIDS Project was launched by the General Assembly of 2002. In 2003 a personal appeal to every one of its 600,000 members was issued, such was the need at the time to break the silence around HIV and AIDS and respond to the desperate need and cries of our Partners overseas and here in Scotland.

28.2 Throughout its 22-year existence, it developed and moved alongside the changing face of the pandemic and the needs of our partners. There have been many highlights throughout this time, including the Souper Sunday Initiative, the support from the Guild Projects and the amazing Heart & Soul Swing Band who educated people and raised funds via donation at every concert. Of greatest importance was the regular giving from people over 22 years. We could not have envisaged this continued support for people living with or affected by HIV and are grateful for all that has been achieved.

28.3 In 2025, the Church of Scotland HIV Programme has, like many other stand-alone programmes, been absorbed into the larger Faith Action Programme. Support will now be given in response to requests, and donations received from congregations and individuals earmarked for HIV work.

29 GOD WELCOMES ALL

29.1 The 2024 General Assembly agreed the following deliverance:

Encourage congregations to make use of the online resources, as they become available, in order to engage fully with the God Welcomes All hymnary supplement in the life of their worship.

29.2 Following the successful launch of the God Welcomes All (GWA) hymnary supplement in May 2024, digital resources are currently in production for the GWA website which will complement the existing CH4 website. This site will have information for each song and indexes that are integrated across both hymnbooks, allowing a full search of themes and biblical references. The proposed backing track and lyric video resources are postponed on the advice of the publisher due to a delay in copyright permissions. The viability of producing these resources will be considered when more information is available from copyright holders. We encourage congregations to use these resources when this work is finalised.

30 CHRISTIAN AID

30.1 Christian Aid grew out of the compassion shown by the Rev Douglas Lister, a Church of Scotland minister who was serving as a Forces Chaplain in Luneburg, Germany at the end of the second world war. His work for justice for some of the poorest and most vulnerable grew into the organisation we know as Christian Aid. Some eight decades later, the work continues still supported by churches in Britain and Ireland. The theme for their 80th anniversary is ‘the Unstoppable Power of Hope’.

30.2 As the relief and development agency of our Church, Christian Aid accompanies the poorest and most vulnerable in our world, supporting people with the necessary tools to lift themselves out of poverty. As a Church, we refuse to accept that poverty is inevitable. Part of the unstoppable power of hope is working tirelessly for justice for every child of God, no matter where they are born, embedding fair trade, calling for debt cancellation, pushing for tax justice, living out gender justice, and caring for creation.

30.3 (Martin Luther once said, “Even if I knew that tomorrow the world would go to pieces, I would still plant my apple tree.”). In this 80th year of Christian Aid, we give thanks for all its work, and for our partnership at national and local levels. Congregations are being encouraged to plant a tree of hope to mark what has been achieved over the last 80 years and to use the Christian Aid materials to rededicate ourselves to the task of striving for a world where all God’s children have opportunity to thrive. Woodlands Trust will provide up to six trees free to share with schools and your local community.

30.4 Hope needs to be active: together with Christian Aid, let’s mark this 80th anniversary, showcasing the unstoppable power of hope that our partners around the world embody.

31. REVIEW IMPACT OF CASS REPORT

31.1 The 2024 General Assembly agreed the following deliverance:

Instruct the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team and other relevant parties, recognising the pace of societal change at this time, acknowledging the significance of the recently released Cass Report, and informed by the work done by the Theological Forum on Transgender identities, to consider the implications of the Cass Report to the work of the Church, particularly amongst young people, and report to a future General Assembly.

31.2 A briefing paper on the Cass Review was produced and used to enable informed discussion in both the Public Life and Social Justice and Mission Support Programme Groups. There was also comment and background provided by the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Group. The implications of the review to the work of the church are limited, for its deliberations and recommendations apply only to England (healthcare is a devolved issue), and were restricted to medical interventions, in which the Church is not involved. Nonetheless, we recognise that the Cass Review has brought a greater public focus to the topic of gender identity in Scotland. We would concur with the Theological Forum’s report of 2024 that any ministry with people, especially young people, exploring their gender identity or self-identifying as transgender, should be undertaken from an individual-centred pastoral approach, and the guidance document [‘Diverse Gender Identities and Pastoral Care’](#) continues to be a powerful tool to enable that.

32. READERS AND LOCAL WORSHIP LEADERS REVIEW

32.1 The 2024 General Assembly agreed the following deliverance: -

Instruct the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team to consult with Presbyteries, Readers and local worship leaders about the use of local worship leaders and Readers across the church, and to report to the General Assembly in 2025 with recommendations on how these roles should be shaped to best support the emerging shape of the Church of Scotland and its worshipping communities and in the interim encourage Presbyteries to promote the use of Readers already set apart and willing to serve (Section 3.8).

32.2 Due to insufficient staff capacity following the departure of the co-lead of this project from the organisation, we have been unable to undertake this work in time for the 2025 General Assembly. It is scheduled for the coming year.

33. NEW WORSHIPPING COMMUNITIES

33.1 With the development of new worshipping communities (NWC), which are expressions of church geared toward those who currently do not engage with church, we have been attempting to measure our progress. Our baseline research from the 2021 Congregational Returns, along with extensive follow-up, revealed 78 congregations with one or more NWCs, involving over 12,000 people, over 8,000 of whom had no other church connection. Sixty-five percent of those involved were under the age of 45.

33.2 This was encouraging news, but the returns from 2022 and 2023 do indicate that many of these initiatives have since paused or stopped. There is still great potential, however, as nearly a quarter were verified as still active in the 2023 Returns. Additionally, around a third of congregations that reported a NWC in 2021 did not submit their Congregational Statistics in 2023, highlighting a valuable opportunity to fill this data gap. This year, we will, once again, conduct a more detailed follow-up to gain clearer insights into the local context, helping the wider church learn and grow.

34. SANCTUARY FIRST

34.1 Nearly three years after Sanctuary First became a SCIO, separate from but connected with the Church of Scotland, we have taken time to refine the Church's relationship with Sanctuary First.

34.2 A number of meetings were held during 2024, initially catalysed by a funding challenge for Sanctuary First. It was mutually agreed that a greater separation would benefit both parties.

Going forward, both Sanctuary First and the Church of Scotland will be free to develop their own digital strategy, and then look to engage well with one another where we find common ground.

34.3 Sanctuary First will be able to grow and develop its financial and ecumenical partnerships, sensing for itself the leading of the Spirit, using the wide and varied ministerial and pastoral talent from across the wider church and without a designated minister.

34.4 The Church of Scotland will look to encourage this and will be able to embed the national digital ministry strategy, aiming to enable the Church for digital ministry developed by the Digital Ministries Advisor.

35. DIGITAL STRATEGY

35.1 The national digital strategy has been a key priority, aiming to empower and equip the Church for effective digital ministry. The strategy focuses on fostering a revitalised and dynamic Church of Scotland, creating a fruitful digital presence in every community to fulfil its mission for Christ. A summary of the strategic aims of the digital strategy for 2025 are:

- 1: Embed the digital ministry (DM) strategy across all relevant areas of Church life
- 2: Inspire Jesus-centred digital ministries thereby developing a revitalised missional (outward-facing) and equipping (inward-facing) DM presence with fresh and relevant resources
- 3: Resource the Church for the work of DM for worship, displaying the Five Marks of Mission with contextually and culturally relevant digital mission, ministry resources, content, and training
- 4: Pioneer and nurture a flourishing, ecumenical creative community
- 5: Develop a National Creative Well for DM and worship creation
- 6: Nurture, prepare, train, and equip Ministers, OLMs, the Diaconate, Readers, worship leaders, and all members for digital ministry

36. GAELIC COMMITTEE

36.1 The Church's 2022-2025 Gaelic Development Plan, prepared in response to a deliverance of the 2021 General Assembly, is available on request from Faith Action. Entering its final year, the Gaelic Committee is pleased to report substantial progress in relation to objectives (i), (ii) and (iv) of the Plan, in the development of innovative resources for children and young people, through the medium of Gaelic for use at home, in church, by community groups and in many schools. In particular, 1,500 copies of *Innis Stòiridh às a Bhìoball* (Tell a Story from the Bible) have been produced and widely distributed; six animated videos using Lego have been produced and work is ongoing on an innovative, interactive project of international potential called *Molaidh Mi È* (I Will Praise Him). Two other projects, "*Ag aithris*" (Telling) and "*Na Sgeulachdan*" (The Stories) are in development. The planning of training courses for lay people wishing to lead Gaelic worship (objective (iii)) is also underway. The Committee would welcome an extension to the period of the Plan so that this fruitful cluster of intergenerationally inclusive developments can be continued and expanded but, with an eye to the future, has also started work on a wider follow-on five-year plan.

37. INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

37.1 Scholarships

37.1.1 Education has been a key element in the historical engagement of the Church of Scotland internationally. Opportunities for education have been transformational for individuals within the churches with which the Church of Scotland is partnered, as well as with the churches themselves. Today, such scholarship opportunities are much reduced, mainly as a result of the significantly increased fees charged by universities in Scotland, but some remain. Edinburgh University partners with the Church in the Desmond Tutu Scholarship, with the University covering the tuition fees and the Church providing accommodation and an allowance. Some partners come as visiting scholars to undertake some specific research for a short period, getting access to a University library, and the Church providing accommodation. These relationships remain important in helping to build the capacity of the Church around the world through education.

37.2 AFRICA

37.2.1 *Visit of Moderator to Malawi – Church of Central Africa Presbyterian 100th anniversary & Kenya.*

37.2.2 In August 2024, the Moderator, Rt Rev Dr Shaw Paterson visited Partners in Kenya and Malawi. In Malawi, the Moderator attended the centenary celebrations of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP), and took the thanks of the 2024 General Assembly for the one hundred years of faithful witness and service in the CCAP. One highlight was a day with the church in Thondwe, a village in Zomba Presbytery, where he saw life at the very local level and how the twinning with Innerleithen, Traquair and Walkerburn has impacted both congregations in Thondwe and Scotland. Gary Brough, Mission Partner in Malawi, reports on challenges with ongoing fuel crises, and irregular rains threatening food production. National elections in September 2025 will take place against the background of cuts in American aid.

37.2.3 In Kenya, the Moderatorial group was hosted by the Presbyterian Church of East Africa and met with senior leaders as well as visiting a number of institutions including the Hospital and the University at Kikuyu. The Moderator preached in PCEA Emmanuel in Kibera, Africa's largest urban slum and heard there of the impact of the twinning with Barrhead Bourrock. He also visited St Paul's University Limuru, PROCMURA (Programme of Christian Muslim Relations in Africa) and met with the British High Commissioner for Kenya.

37.3 SOUTH SUDAN

37.3.1 The government in South Sudan delayed the elections expected at the end of 2024, pushing them back for two years. The Presbyterian Church of South Sudan (PCOSS), through the South Sudan Council of Churches (SSCC), issued a pastoral message, highlighting the lack of political will which led to a lack of implementation of the key provisions of the agreement (known as the [R-ARCSS](#) process) which brought the civil war to an end in 2018. In general, while there was frustration with the delay, it was not a real surprise as the needed preparation had not been done and the necessary infrastructure for an election was not in place.

37.3.2 Within the Presbyterian Church of South Sudan, two leadership groups emerged and created factions in the church after the 2020 General Assembly; through the efforts of mediators from the All Africa Council of Churches, there has been facilitated dialogue through 2024, and the delayed General Assembly is now due to take place in March 2025. It is hoped this will see a reunification of the church leadership and a united church going forward. The Churches in South Sudan remain in a position of respect within the society and have an influence in helping the people navigate their lives in unpredictable times. They appreciate the prayers of partners for an end to drought and floods, for unity in the churches, for peaceful and fair elections, and for peace where all people may flourish.

37.4 EUROPE

37.4.1 Mediterranean Hope

37.4.2 The 2024 General Assembly gave thanks for Mediterranean Hope's ten years of active mission in welcoming and supporting refugees and migrants who come to Italy, and commended their continued efforts to identify and develop models of best practice. Fiona Kendall, Church of Scotland Mission Partner in Italy, has worked with Mediterranean Hope since 2017.

37.4.2 A Vocabulary Resource of 27 words considered significant in the life of Mediterranean Hope has been published, using words to describe their work and using the opportunity to reflect on new possible meanings. Mediterranean Hope imagines this resource as a tool that can be used in a variety of groups in communities and churches as a stimulus to find one's own words. The material is available – in Italian and English – in a format ready for printing, on their website: <https://www.mediterraneanhope.com/2023/03/24/materiali-utili/>

37.5 ASIA

37.5.1 Korea

37.5.1.1 The 2024 General Assembly gave thanks for a century of faithful witness and service in the National Council of Churches of Korea (NCKC) and committed to continuing accompaniment for the campaign for peace and reconciliation on the Korean Peninsula. In early December 2024, Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol declared martial law. The Korean Churches strongly condemned this action, categorizing it as a grave violation of constitutional values, an act that undermined democracy and human rights, and a tyrannical abuse of power. Under Parliamentary pressure, the President rescinded the law the following day. On the following Sunday, National Council of Churches of Korea (NCKC) member denominations held worship services across the country, praying for the restoration of democracy and constitutional order in South Korea. This was followed by a national prayer meeting led by the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PCKK). We are asked to pray for the democratic institutions in South Korea; for their stability and for the continuation of democracy.

37.6 MIDDLE EAST & NORTH AFRICA

37.6.1 Lebanon/Syria

37.6.1.1 The National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon (NESSL), our partner Church, reported that a political era in the history of the Syrian people came to an end in early December 2024. This era was one that profoundly divided Syrians. Some saw the mere existence of a state—any state—as a guarantor of security for its citizens, while others viewed the Assad regime as an instrument of injustice, a hindrance to the freedom they longed for. Sylvia Haddad, from the Middle East Council of Churches in Beirut, welcomed the end of the fighting, “with feelings of relief shared by the whole country as the war has stopped... We are earnestly praying that peace will last and allow people to rebuild their lives, houses and towns.”

37.6.1.2 With the change of government taking effect, the Churches in Syria and Lebanon encouraged a new beginning for all Syrians as they aspired to build a country where all citizens – regardless of religion, denomination, or faith – could enjoy safety and security. Christians in Syria have consistently been advocates of peace and reconciliation, a stance which has sustained their presence for over 1,400 years alongside their Muslim compatriots. Power has never been their primary concern; rather, they have focused on their role and presence as agents of goodwill, serving as “salt and light”.

37.6.1.3 The Synod appealed to all their international partners and friends to advocate for Syria's future, one where there will be safety, security, inclusion, and freedom for Christians to practice their faith without oppression or persecution, and free from the interference of external forces. They concluded, “This is a time to stand in solidarity with the future of Christians in (the) Syria we all aspire to see. The path ahead will undoubtedly be challenging, but it cannot be navigated without our partnership in faith, prayer, and mutual support.”

37.6.1.4 The 2024 General Assembly called on the Church to pray for peace in Lebanon when Israel was bombing large swathes of the country in its attacks on Hezbollah. The Moderator wrote a prayer for the situation, and included an email from the Revd Joseph Kassab, General Secretary of the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon (NESSL), who wrote: “these are dark days. The number of casualties and injured people in one day surpassed all expectations. More people are being displaced inside the country ... from every background and religion. Continue to pray for those innocent people who did nothing other than being in a particular place. We are afraid that Lebanon will turn into a second Gaza. We are prepared for the aftermath. The destruction is enormous and the needs are larger than the capacity of an already bankrupt government. God have mercy.”

37.6.1.5 The needs in Lebanon are huge. International support and assistance for rebuilding the country will be essential. We can continue to pray for peace, and to explore ways in which we can offer tangible support for the rebuilding of churches and communities.

Presbytery Mission Planning Implementation Group**38. CALL, ELECTION, AND APPOINTMENT OF MINISTERS OF WORD AND SACRAMENT**

38.1 The question of call, and whether the Vacancy Act (Act 8, 2003) is fit for purpose has been raised at successive General Assemblies. The Faith Nurture Forum first invited comments on the operation of this Act in its Report to the General Assembly of 2022. Consideration was given thereafter as to whether what was needed was a replacement Act, or whether a series of changes to the existing Act would be an adequate response. Given that the existing Act has been amended in almost every year since it was first passed by a General Assembly, a replacement Act is the preferred option. A further consultation took place with Presbytery Clerks in the latter part of 2023, and the new Act being presented in this Report was discussed with Presbytery Clerks in November 2024. FAPLT now presents a replacement Act, with the title of the Act for Call, Election and Appointment of Ministers of Word and Sacrament. This replacement Act can be found at Appendix VI. The Act affirms the critical part which the Presbytery plays in the process, in declaring a vacancy; in giving permission to call; in the role of the Advisory Committee, which is renamed as the Advisor Panel; and the judicious use of the Presbytery's Vacancy Procedure Committee. The cumbersome processes involved in confirming the names on the Electoral Register as those entitled to vote in the election of a Minister are not present in the replacement Act, and confirmation of the names will take place as part of the Kirk Session's annual attestation of the Communion Roll as provided for in the proposed Communion Rolls and Adherents' Rolls Act. This latter Act is being brought to this Assembly by the Legal Questions Committee.

38.2 The challenge facing those who worked on the Act from within FAPLT and the Legal Questions Committee was how to ensure the essential parts of the process were enshrined in the new Act; Presbytery's role as the Court of the Church; the Nominating Committee as the body representing the congregation in the process of call and presentation of a nominee; the place of the congregational vote, while offering a shorter Act which would be easier for Presbytery, Kirk Session, Nominating Committee, and Interim Moderator to operate. A table of changes is also attached as Appendix VII.

38.3 There are two further areas of Church Law which require amendment should the General Assembly pass this Act on Call, Election, and Appointment of Ministers of Word and Sacrament. It is already the case that on occasion a member of one Presbytery may serve as Interim Moderator in a charge in a different Presbytery. This amendment to the Church Courts Act (Act 6, 2023) explicitly affirms this as a possibility, where it has proved difficult to find an Interim Moderator from within the membership of the Presbytery of first instance. An amending Act is attached at Appendix VIII.

38.4 The second change is a consequential amendment resulting from the new provision in this Act on Call, Election, and Appointment of Ministers of Word and Sacrament to require ministers to normally give three months' notice when seeking to demit charge or status, or to be translated. This requirement to give notice is introduced in response to frequent questions as to how much notice a minister is required to give, as well as allowing Presbyteries to deal with such requests in an orderly manner and to support congregations through this process. This amendment has been added to the Parish Ministry Act, and the opportunity has also been taken to move to this Act the provisions which previously appeared in the Vacancy Procedure Act on demission of status. An amending Act is attached at Appendix IX.

39. PRESBYTERY MISSION PLAN IMPLEMENTATION GROUP

39.1 The role of the Presbytery Mission Planning Implementation Group (PMPIG) has evolved since the General Assembly of 2021 passed the Presbytery Mission Plan Act, and even more so since the General Assembly of 2024 agreed the Overture in the name of the Presbytery of the Lothians and Borders. When the Presbytery Mission Plan Act (the Act) was agreed by the General Assembly of 2021, there were 43 Presbyteries; now there are thirteen which are subject to the provisions of the Act.

39.2 The Overture agreed at last year's General Assembly moved away from annual approval of Presbytery Mission Plans, or, indeed, the previously required approval of any change to a Presbytery's Mission Plan. This change to the Act agreed to a five-yearly approval of Presbytery Mission Plans and gave greater freedoms to Presbyteries in implementing those plans, without the need for every alteration to be approved by PMPIG.

39.3 This has meant that the role of PMPIG since the General Assembly of 2024 has been one of supporting and advising Presbyteries on a whole range of matters, offering insights, lessons, and wisdom garnered from many different conversations and situations.

39.4 Members of PMPIG have been allocated particular Presbyteries, so that relationships might be developed, and a deeper understanding of each Presbytery's particular context applied which reflects the different circumstances, and timescale. Some Presbyteries are unchanged following Presbytery Reform, while others are having to respond to the challenge of as many as five or more Presbyteries coming together to shape a new entity with its own

culture. The complex and challenging task faced by the newly created Presbyteries has been significant and of a different order to that faced by Presbyteries whose boundaries were largely unchanged, as different approaches and cultures have been unpacked, shared, and learned about.

39.5 The work of commenting on bases of adjustment continues, and it is fair to say that the task of implementation is as challenging and time consuming, if not more so, than the labour that was involved in compiling Presbytery Mission Plans.

39.6 There remains one outstanding Presbytery Mission Plan (PMP) to be agreed, for the Presbytery of Lewis. The provisions for the involvement of the Presbytery Mission Plan Review Panel, as outlined in the Schedule to the Presbytery Mission Plan Act (Act 8, 2021) were made use of here, with the support of the Office of the General Assembly. A group of three, nominated by the Office of the General Assembly, visited Lewis and engaged with local parties. A report compiled by that group of visitors that was issued to PMPIG and to the Presbytery of Lewis in December 2024. Conversations continue about the precise detail of the PMP for the Presbytery of Lewis.

39.7 Secondary Principles

39.7.1 Presbyteries have evolved, and in refining and shaping their Mission Plans, have applied the secondary principles in varying ways. It is worth referencing two of the secondary principles (see Appendix X for the complete list) – the ecumenical dimension, and the financial. Some Presbyteries have fully embraced the ecumenical dimension of Presbytery Mission Planning, while others, in taking decisions to categorise certain buildings for release, did not engage or consult with congregations of other Christian denominations who might have hoped to continue shared use of these spaces. Presbyteries are asked to bear the secondary principles in mind as they shape bases of adjustment and reflect on changes, and also on annual evaluation and development. Amendments to the Presbytery Mission Plan Act to include these secondary principles more explicitly will be presented to the General Assembly in a separate Joint Report.

39.8 Ministries Numbers

39.8.1 The Act requires that a proposed total number of ministry posts is presented annually to the General Assembly, outlining the disposition of posts to be funded by the Parish Staffing Fund, allocated among the Presbyteries, in each of the next five years, so that there is a five-year rolling plan for such allocations.

39.8.2 There are ongoing discussions within the Assembly Trustees about sustainability of ministries, and about the future financing of ministry. It is also worth noting that when the Act was agreed at the General Assembly of 2021, plans had to be submitted outlining the vision for ministry to be implemented at the end of 2025. The Church is almost at that point; it is also worth repeating that PMPs are five-year rolling plans, and while decisions should be for the medium to long term, the dynamic nature of mission planning should not preclude changes to a Presbytery's Mission Plan. While work goes on about future models of funding for ministry, the figures presented to previous General Assemblies will similarly apply for 2026 with any amendments coming to subsequent General Assemblies. These allocations can be found at Appendix XI.

39.8.3 The concept of weightings, first considered following the General Assembly's passing of the Appraisal and Adjustment Act in 2003, has stood the Church in good stead for the most part. The Church has recognised that criteria used for allocating and deploying ministries in the larger towns and cities of Scotland are not helpful in the more rural parts of the country, far less in the islands, and the concept of weightings, to recognise the differing challenges posed by the geography of Scotland has meant a more equitable allocation of ministries in areas of sparse population. The most remote parts of Scotland, using the concept of weightings, were subject to a threefold increase in ministry, recognising the challenges in pastoral care, and extra time involved in, for example, hospital visiting, navigating ferry timetables. The General Assembly of 2022 instructed Presbyteries to ensure that, in the period up to the General Assembly of 2025, where a weighting of resources is allocated to part or parts of the area of a Presbytery, the allocation of ministry in the Presbytery Mission Plan is demonstrably distributed so as to fulfil the spirit and purpose of the weighting; and instructed the then Faith Nurture Forum to take this principle into account in approving Presbytery Mission Plans.

39.8.4 The numbers shown at Appendix XI represent the aggregate of weightings previously reported to the General Assembly and allocated across the 13 Presbyteries affected.

39.8.5 The FAPLT Report to the 2024 General Assembly hoped to report to this year's General Assembly with initial findings based on the data arising from the 2022 Scottish Census. At time of writing, this has not proved possible. Alongside possible changes to Tenure, and early indications from the Assembly Trustees of a new approach to funding ministries, it was felt advisable to hold back on more detailed work. FAPLT will report to a future General Assembly about any changes in the modelling of ministries numbers, in consultation with the Assembly Trustees.

39.8.6 In order to reduce the uncertainty and anxiety for existing Probationers, ministry students, potential ministry candidates and those in Familiarisation and reviewable tenure, the General Assembly of 2022 instructed the Faith Nurture Forum, or successor, to report to future General Assemblies with full ministries numbers, covering the following areas:

- Ministers of Full Time Word and Sacrament currently in charges,
- number of MDS staff counted towards the 600 fulltime ministries target figure by end of 2025,
- number of Ministers in reviewable charges,
- number of Ministers in Familiarisation,
- Number of ministers expected to retire in the year.

39.8.7 These figures can be found at Appendix XII. With more vacancies reaching the stage of being advertised, and the vacancy numbers on the Church website settling at around 30 each month, with a good proportion of vacancies being filled, and others coming through, FAPLT seeks to be discharged from this instruction and the current data set will be the last to be reported on in this format.

39.9 Protocol on Presbyteries being allowed to recruit into charges above the Presbytery's ministries allocation

39.9.1 FAPLT has also agreed a protocol with the Assembly Trustees to allow those Presbyteries which are close to, or who have exceeded, their ministry allocation, special dispensation to recruit into posts or charges which the Presbytery deems necessary for the implementation of a Presbytery Mission Plan. This was done in recognition that not all charges in any given Presbytery will be staffed, and that there is sufficient flex in the system to allow for such recruitment. To date two such dispensations have been agreed, for Kelvin West in the Presbytery of Glasgow, and for Burnfoot in the Presbytery of the Lothians and Borders. Perth Presbytery in terms of its consolidated plan has exceeded its ministries allocation. Any Presbytery which is nearing its allocation and wishes to recruit in excess of its ministries allocation is invited to contact FAPLT to explore possibilities and, if needed, to submit a formal request.

39.10 Words of Thanks

39.10.1 PMPIG appreciates the hard work that goes into Presbytery Mission Planning. A helpful meeting, with representatives of the General Trustees in attendance, took place in May 2024, and a similar online gathering took place in March of this year. FAPLT is hoping to meet regularly with Presbytery Clerks and Planning Conveners in 2025/2026, say every three to four months. In conversation with members of congregations across the country, FAPLT acknowledges the pain and grief experienced by many – those whose buildings have been closed; those congregations which have been dissolved; and those whose buildings have become part of a different entity, with many congregations moving into new unions or linkages. PMPIG has sought to recognise the creative, dynamic nature of mission as well as the importance of pragmatism and pastoral concern, always following the Holy Spirit.

39.11 Team Ministry

39.11.1 We intend to be in contact with those charges developing Team Ministries to explore what the challenges have been, and what the learning points are. As the work of Ministerial Education develops, so too will the training and support requirements develop for these areas where ministers and congregations are committed to working together more closely.

39.11.2 PMPIG will work closely with others to discern what the training needs are for those serving in Team Ministries, both as outlined in the PMP Act, as well as the longer standing teams of Minister and MDS. PMPIG will work with the People and Training Programme Group in shaping training (1) to support those exploring the challenges of team ministries, (2) to better equip Nominating Committees working with team ministries, and (3) to address the challenge in working with some partially formed teams which have sitting Ministers, as opposed to teams starting from scratch.

39.12 Revised Frequently Asked Questions and Guidance in Compiling Presbytery Mission Plans

39.12.1 Recognising the changed role of PMPIG, and acknowledging that current guidance in the main dates back to June 2021, there is now an updated set of Frequently Asked Questions and changes to guidance on the Mission Planning section of the Church of Scotland website. This will reflect current activity and the current legislation as well as being a resource for Presbyteries, recognising that Presbytery Mission Planning Conveners are changing, and that the shift from compiling PMPs to implementing them brings additional challenges.

39.12.2 At time of writing in early March, there are some 50 bases of adjustment which have been the subject of conversation with Presbyteries which will result in a vacancy, over and above those vacancies already on the Church of Scotland website. Some of these are being held back because manses are not ready; because manses are being acquired; and others still have the finer details of the basis of adjustment to be confirmed, or, in the case of a Basis of Union, some are still to be ratified by the Office of the Scottish Charities Regulator (OSCR).

Some Bases of Adjustment and recruitment into vacancies are being held up because of the challenges presented in identifying an Interim Moderator who is able to steer a congregation through the process of establishing a Nominating Committee and advertising for a minister. PMPIG is keen to support Presbyteries as far as possible in implementing bases of adjustment and allowing recruitment into vacant charges.

40. FINANCIAL INFORMATION AND ALLOWANCES

40.1 Information re stipend levels and other allowances can be found at *Appendix XIII*.

41. REPEAL OF REDUNDANT LEGISLATION

41.1 There are various pieces of redundant legislation, and in looking at other pieces of legislation, it is appropriate to ask the General Assembly to repeal one Act, and two Regulations, which are no longer relevant. The General Assembly agreed at a previous Assembly not to seek to establish any new congregations using the New Charge Development process, and accordingly FAPLT asks the Assembly to repeal the New Charge Development Act (Act 13, 2000)

41.2 In similar vein, Regulation 4, 2005, on Voluntary Additional Payments, no longer makes sense. Regulation 5, 2000, should also be repealed as there are longer any Church Extension Charges extant to whom this Regulation might apply.

In the name of the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team

TOMMY MACNEIL, Convener

KAY CATHCART, Head of Ministries and Mission

ALISTAIR CUMMING, Vice Convener, Convener, Resource and Presence Programme Group

EMMA JACKSON, Vice Convener, Convener, Public Life and Social Justice Programme Group

DAVID CLARKSON, Vice Convener, Convener, People and Training Programme Group

JONATHAN FLEMING, Vice Convener, Convener, Mission Support Programme Group

KAREN KATRINA CAMPBELL, Vice Convener, Convener, Presbytery Mission Planning Implementation Group

Addendum

The Rev Dr Karen Katrina Campbell has served as Vice-Convener of the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team for one year, and as Convener of the Presbytery Mission Plan Implementation Group (PMPIG) since August 2021.

A minister with wide experience, and as someone who has been extremely involved in the life of her Presbytery, she has been deeply committed to the work of PMPIG. She has engaged in deputation work both online and in-person, and has sought to be in relationship with the existing and emerging Presbyteries as they have wrestled with the challenges of compiling, and implementing, Presbytery Mission Plans. She has brought a robust approach often asking searching and clarifying questions of different parties, always seeking to help the different parties reflect on mission and the art of the possible rather than settling for the comfortable. FAPLT thanks Dr Campbell for her service in this role.

TOMMY MACNEIL, Convener

KAY CATHCART, Head of Ministries and Mission

Appendix I**COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK AND CAPABILITY PROCESS**

Competency Framework for Full Time Ministers of Word and Sacrament

Sources

1. Formation Framework
2. Terms and Responsibilities
3. Ordination Vows

1. Faith, Vocation, and Spirituality	On first appointment	After five years (and including all that is expected on first appointment)
	Ready for, and open to, exercising a ministry of leadership and vision as an ordained minister in the Church of Scotland. ^{1,2,3}	Able to reflect on the nature of their call as a dynamic concept and how the call to their charge is to be sustained and refreshed; able to discern and articulate whether they are still in the place where God wants them to be ^{1,2,3}
		Able to demonstrate sophisticated skills as a reflective practitioner, and the capacity to apply these skills to energise a creative and theologically informed practice ^{1,2}
	Lead, shape and enable the worship of the whole people of God ^{1,2,3}	
	Someone who is sustained in the joys and pains of ministry by a life of prayer and a vibrant spirituality that informs every aspect of ministry and life ^{1,2,3}	Someone whose prayer life is shaped by the understanding of the responsibilities of public ministry and corporate worship in the best traditions of the Church of Scotland ^{1,2,3} Someone whose spirituality permeates their perceptions of, and interactions with, others in and outside the Church ^{1,2,3}
	Someone who displays an integrity of faith and life, with Christ like values and attitudes, and knows the importance of taking time off ^{1,2,3}	Able to balance ministry's joys and pains with the fostering of right relationships with family, friends, and congregation ^{1,2,3} Able to evidence sacrificial commitment to their ministry role ^{1,2,3} Aware of his or her own strengths and limitations following the lived experience of practicing ministry ^{1,2,3}
	Able to take a lead role in working with partners, representing the Church appropriately in public life, including where possible working with other faith leaders ^{1,2} Able to demonstrate an understanding of the history of, diversity in, and contemporary challenges facing the Church of Scotland ^{1,2}	Someone who can represent the Church effectively in partnerships with churches of differing denominations and other faith communities ^{1,2,3}
	Someone who exercises appropriate accountability consistent with a position of responsibility ^{1,2,3} Someone who knows and understands the legal and administrative responsibilities of those in leadership ^{1,2,3}	

2. Character, Ethics and Development	On first appointment	After five years (and including all that is expected on first appointment)
	Able to demonstrate preparation and openness to learning ³	Someone committed to continuing development in ministry, who has taken up opportunities for self-development, well-being, and study, to equip themselves for ministry in the context in which they find themselves. ^{1,2,3} Able to demonstrate and show learnings from such opportunities for self-development, well-being, and study ^{1,2,3}
	Able to evidence maturity, integrity, and resilience in ministry practice, encouraging and enabling colleagues to balance the appropriate care of self with the care of others ^{1,2,3}	
	Someone who is aware of potential conflicts of interest, and is appropriate in managing boundaries ^{1,2,3}	Aware of their own limitations and willing to seek support or refer to appropriate other parties ^{1,2}
	Someone who personifies an integration and integrity of authority and obedience, leadership and service ^{1,2}	
	Someone who is committed to engage with others, to reflect with insight on their style of leadership, its strengths and weaknesses in context, and to demonstrate appropriate development ^{1,2}	Someone whose practice of ministry is continually informed by reflection and experience ^{1,2,3}

3. Leadership and Relationship	On first appointment	After five years (and including all that is expected on first appointment)
	Someone who is able to lead teams collaboratively in a variety of settings ^{1,2,3}	A committed participant in the wider life of the Church regionally and nationally, responsive to God's call, as gift and blessing, to be lived out within the discipline and accountability of the Church ^{1,2,3}
	Someone who has a willingness to deal constructively with personal and inter-personal conflict, and with conflict between individuals and groups ^{1,2,3}	Someone who consistently chairs and manages diverse meetings with grace, courtesy, and respect ^{1,2,3}
	Able to supervise and mentor others in a limited range of roles and responsibilities ^{1,2}	Someone who is able to effectively supervise others in diverse roles adopting a contextually appropriate supervision style ^{1,2,3}
	Someone with a real desire to recognise with thankfulness the gifts of others, a readiness to receive from those gifts, and to co-operate with others for the good of the Church's mission and ministry. ^{1,2}	Someone who is skilled at working with volunteers and managing meetings effectively ^{1,2,3}
	Someone who shows skill and sensitivity in enabling the formation and flourishing of community life in the presence of diversity ^{1,2,3}	

	Someone who is able to exercise leadership and build relationships, working in and outside the Church. ^{1,2,3}	Someone with experience in building and developing strategic relationships in the Church and wider community ^{1,2,3}
	Someone who can facilitate change creatively and sensitively, exercising leadership with an entrepreneurial and forward-looking approach ^{1,2,3}	
	Someone who is able to lead communities in reflecting on the use and abuse of power/role, and is alert to how power is exercised ^{1,2,3}	
	Someone who uses authority appropriately in ways that release, equip, enable and empower others, including colleagues, to fulfil their calling to mission and ministry within a Christian community ^{1,2,3}	

4. Worship, Sacraments, Preaching	On first appointment	After five years (and including all that is expected on first appointment)
	Someone who is able to preach, in the power of the Holy Spirit, a message: which is rooted in the Christian gospel, which is an incisive reading of the biblical text, which is shaped by the context of the congregation, which is structured around a coherent core, and which serves to deepen the faith of the listener, in the strength of the Holy Spirit ^{1,2,3}	
	Able to lead worship competently in a variety of settings ^{1,2,3}	Someone who is unafraid to create and advocate new or different forms of worship as appropriate ^{1,2,3}
	Someone who is open to, and comfortable with different traditions, styles, and expressions of liturgy, spirituality and worship ^{1,2,3}	
	Someone committed to the appropriate inclusion of the various components of liturgy, particularly in the sacraments ^{1,2,3}	
	Someone who is committed to preparing and planning ahead, and who has a collaborative approach to curating worship ^{1,2,3}	Someone who models grace and courtesy to those involved in the leadership of worship ^{1,2,3}
	Someone who makes appropriate use and acknowledgement of third-party resources ^{1,2}	
	Able to demonstrate an appropriate understanding of the nature of marriage, consistent with the law and practice of the Church of Scotland and the civil law: the Marriage (Scotland) Act 1977 ^{1,2,3}	

5. Pastoral Care	On first appointment	After five years (and including all that is expected on first appointment)
	Able to nurture, enable and supervise others in the conduct of pastoral relationships ^{1,2,3}	Demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of issues of power in pastoral relationships and exercises influence with sensitivity, discernment and within ethical boundaries ^{1,2,3}
	Demonstrates good practice in a wide range of pastoral relationships ^{1,2,3}	Able to demonstrate loving care and good practice in all pastoral relationships ^{1,2,3}
	Conducts funerals in good order, dignity and sensitivity, responding sensitively to the family's wishes, and consistent with good order and practice in the Church of Scotland ^{1,2,3}	
	Makes time to walk in love alongside people, rejoicing and grieving with others through listening deeply and offering prayerful support ^{1,2,3}	Able to demonstrate wisdom in knowing their limits and boundaries ^{1,2,3} Able to recognise when more specialist help is needed ^{1,2,3}
	Reliably deals with issues of safeguarding and confidentiality ^{1,2}	Able to demonstrate wide awareness of Safeguarding law and practice in the Church and to promote and safeguard the interests and wellbeing of those to whom they minister ^{1,2,3}

6. Mission	On first appointment	After five years (and including all that is expected on first appointment)
	Demonstrates that they have the formational capacity, knowledge, leadership skills and theological understanding to immediately undertake and lead mission in a team, both within a parish context, by starting on a 'fresh expression of church' and in engagement for social justice ^{1,2,3}	Evidence of having lead mission, and having begun church plants and/or fresh expressions.
	Demonstrates that they have a rounded comprehension of mission, and the applications and practice of mission, in word and deed, in parish renewal, pioneer ministry, and church planting ^{1,2,3}	Demonstrates advanced knowledge of mission theology, understanding and context and the applications and practice of mission in context ^{1,2}
	Passionate about, and active in, sharing the love of God for the world ^{1,2,3}	Alive to the significance of contexts and cultures in shaping mission and being creative in discovering missional opportunities ^{1,2,3}
	Demonstrates acceptance of the necessity of missional engagement and the formation of Christian Community, including creating new worshipping communities ^{1,2,3}	
	Being available and responsive to demands from the wider parish ^{1,2,3}	
	Reliable and effective in representing the Church in ecumenical, community, and wider settings ^{1,2,3}	

7. Discipleship	On first appointment	After five years (and including all that is expected on first appointment)
	Committed to Christian education and skilled at leading others in discipleship ^{1,2}	Open to learning discipleship from others and able to demonstrate that this has been the case ^{1,2,3}
	Understands how children and adults learn, and the implications for nurturing others in their discipleship and faith development ^{1,2}	
	Skilled at nurturing others on their faith development, including those with little or no previous knowledge of the Christian faith, through teaching and preaching, including preparation for baptism and membership ^{1,2,3}	Sustained by their own rhythm of prayer, Bible Reading, and other aspects of their devotional life, to model discipleship and lead other disciples, so that they might model and encourage life-long patterns in others with integrity ^{1,2,3}
	Committed to learning in community, and to the discernment and development of gifts in others ^{1,2,3}	
	Understands the importance of the Church's engagement with schools and education, for the common good, as well as for the mission and ministry of the Church ^{1,2,3}	
8. Church Management	On first appointment	After five years (and including all that is expected on first appointment)
	Able to demonstrate the formational capacity, knowledge, leadership skills and theological understanding to immediately survive and thrive within a parish and to actively participate in the courts and Committees of the Church ^{1,2}	Able to exercise leadership roles in the Church at regional or national level ^{1,2,3}
	Has a sound knowledge of Church Law, polity, and good governance, and exercises sound judgement in their application ^{1,2,3}	Demonstrates awareness of relevant legislation and shows sound judgement in applying it to the life of the Church and using it to shape policies and procedures ^{1,2,3}
	Has a solid knowledge of the place of the Courts of the Church and differing roles of members of those courts ^{1,2,3} Understands the legal and administrative responsibilities of those in public ministry ^{1,2} Knows and understands the legal responsibilities of those in leadership roles and positions of responsibility at congregational level ^{1,2} Aware of the interface between Church Law; Civil Law; and Charity Law ^{1,2}	Has an in-depth knowledge of what is appropriate behaviour and able to carefully manage boundaries so as to avoid conflicts of interest ^{1,2,3}
	Pursues avenues of renewal and reform ^{1,2,3}	
	Has an appreciation and understanding of the need for an efficient yet purposeful and person-centred approach to management ^{1,2,3}	

Appendix II**PUBLIC LIFE AND SOCIAL JUSTICE**

Summary of activity as a result of the Deliverance of the 2024 General Assembly in relation to the Report of the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team.

Deliverance	Comment
7. Instruct the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team and other relevant parties, recognising the pace of societal change at this time, acknowledging the significance of the recently released Cass Report, and informed by the work done by the Theological Forum on Transgender Identities, to consider the implications of the Cass Report to the work of the Church, particularly amongst young people, and report to a future General Assembly.	Consideration has been given to the fulfilment of this deliverance by the Mission Support Programme Group, the Public Life & Social Justice Programme Group, and the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Group. The report of this work is included at Section 31 of the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team report.
12. Call for the introduction of a Minimum Income Guarantee.	Since the General Assembly we have continued to support awareness of this campaign as members of the Poverty Alliance. This included the Moderator and Convener of the Public Life and Social Justice Programme Group supporting a joint faith leader's statement on the Minimum Income Guarantee during Challenge Poverty Week 2024.
19. Call on the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team to publicly and explicitly call on the UK Government to call for an immediate and permanent Ceasefire in Gaza, to cease granting export licences for the sale of armaments to Israel and to reinstate UNRWA funding immediately.	The agreement of this deliverance last year was widely publicised by the Communications Department. A formal letter was sent to the UK Government as soon as practicable, and a response was subsequently received. The letter and reply are available to read on the Church website. Representatives of the Church met with a Minister in the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development office in November to share further the position of the General Assembly.
21. Urge political leaders and media institutions to avoid the use of dehumanising and hostile language when describing migrants, refugees and asylum seekers; and instruct the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team to work with partners in challenging this rhetoric through advocacy, encounter and practical initiatives.	We have continued to take forward this work over the last year, particularly in response to the violent riots which took place following the Southport attacks. More information can be found at Section 13 of the Report of the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team.
25. Invite congregations and Presbyteries to use and share resources prepared for the upcoming UK Parliament general election by the Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office, especially the Voter Champion initiative to promote voter registration and awareness, and guidance on how to organise an election hustings.	The congregational resources around hustings, voter registration and political engagement at election time were promoted and shared in the period running up to the UK election. Since the election we have been developing a new initiative called Constituency Action Network with the Joint Public Issues Team, to facilitate ongoing relationships with elected representatives.
26. As the UK General Election will take place during the Scottish School Holidays, encourage those who will be on holiday to register for a postal vote.	We ensured that in our publicity and communication about election resources, this point about the clash of dates with the school break was prominent.

Appendix III

ADMISSION AND READMISSION OF MINISTERS ACT

XIII ADMISSION AND READMISSION OF MINISTERS ACT (ACT [] 2025)

Edinburgh, [] May 2025, Session []

The General Assembly hereby enact and ordain as follows:

PART A – DEFINITIONS AND INTERPRETATION

Definitions

1. In this Act the following definitions apply:
 - (a) “Admission” means the process of making an application for a Certificate from a person who has not previously held a post in ministry in the Church of Scotland.
 - (b) “Admissions Candidate” means a person who has been accepted at an Admissions Conference.
 - (c) “Admissions Conference” means a conference of trained Assessors to which FAPLT delegates authority to assess suitability of applicants for a Standard Certificate.
 - (d) “Admissions Panel” means a panel of trained Assessors to which FAPLT delegates authority to assess suitability for a Non Parish Ministry Certificate.
 - (e) “Certificate” means one of the Certificates referred to in section 3 below.
 - (f) “Familiarisation Placement” means a placement as described in section 13 below.
 - (g) “FAPLT” means the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team, being the Standing Committee of the General Assembly responsible for recruitment, selection and training for ministry.
 - (h) “Ordinand” means a person who has completed all requirements for training for Ministry in their own denomination and who is eligible for ordination in that denomination but who has not yet been ordained there.
 - (i) “Readmission” means the process of making an application to be readmitted to ministry in the Church of Scotland from a person who has previously held a post in ministry in the Church of Scotland.
 - (j) “Readmissions Panel” means a panel of trained Assessors to which FAPLT delegates authority to assess suitability for Readmission.
 - (k) “UK State Pension Age” means the age at which a person, had they been a UK citizen, would reach UK State Pension Age as determined at the relevant time by the UK Government’s calculations.^[xv]
2. Wherever a matter referred to in this Act is within the discretion of FAPLT, that decision may be delegated, whether to staff or suitably qualified persons, as FAPLT sees fit.

Part B – ADMISSION

Types of Certificates of Eligibility available

3. The types of Certificate of Eligibility which may be issued by FAPLT are:
 - (a) a “Standard Certificate of Eligibility”: This:
 - (i) Entitles the holder to apply for charges and appointments in ministry in the Church of Scotland for which Category O registration is required for a period of two years after its issue.
 - (ii) Grants the status of Minister of the Church of Scotland, to take effect at the point of admission to membership of Presbytery, which, in the case of an Ordinand, shall involve ordination.
 - (b) an “International Presbytery Certificate of Eligibility”: This entitles the holder to be introduced to a specified charge within the Presbytery of International Charges, while retaining status as a minister in their denomination of origin, and that on the basis of the holder being introduced to the charge for an initial period of three years only. The following shall also apply to the holder of such a Certificate:
 - (i) The post must commence within six months of the date on which the International Presbytery Certificate of Eligibility is granted.
 - (ii) At the request of the Kirk Session and with the concurrence of the Presbytery of International Charges and FAPLT, the initial period of three years may be extended for one further period of not more than three years.
 - (iii) The holder shall sign the Formula upon being introduced to the post and shall thereafter be granted membership of Presbytery.
 - (iv) Any contract which the holder enters into in the Presbytery of International Charges shall have a condition that it is an essential requirement for the person to hold an International Presbytery Certificate of Eligibility and without it the contract shall cease.
 - (v) In addition, the provisions of sections 13 & 14 shall apply to the Presbytery of International Charges when an International Presbytery Certificate of Eligibility is issued.

- (c) a “Non Parish Ministry Certificate of Eligibility”: This entitles the holder to be granted category E registration in the Register of Ministry should they apply for such a Certificate while holding a specialised post in the Church of Scotland which is not in parish ministry, ie for which Category O registration is not required, such as certain chaplaincies, academic (theology) lecturers and Presbytery-sponsored ministers funded through the Seeds for Growth Fund. Further details can be obtained from FAPLT.
- (i) The person shall be granted the status of Minister of the Church of Scotland, to take effect at the point of admission to membership of Presbytery.
- (ii) Category E registration shall be granted only while the person holds the post in question. If the person ceases to hold the post then sections 21 and 22 of this Act apply.

4. In this Act the types of Certificate may be individually referred to as “a Standard Certificate”, “an International Presbytery Certificate” and “a Non Parish Ministry Certificate”.

Preliminary Conditions applying to all Certificates

Who can apply – denomination

- 5. (1) FAPLT will accept applications from ordained ministers and Ordinands from the following denominations:
 - (i) the United Reformed Church;
 - (ii) the Presbyterian Church in Ireland;
 - (iii) the Presbyterian Church in Wales;
 - (iv) A denomination in the World Communion of reformed Churches (WCRC) or Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe (Leuenberg Fellowship) which is reformed in theology and Presbyterian in governance;
 - (v) the Church of England (in terms of the Columba Declaration);
 - (vi) the Scottish Episcopal Church (in terms of the St Andrew Declaration); and
 - (vii) any other denomination whose orders are in accordance with the standards of the Church of Scotland to administer the Sacraments, which application would only be accepted after such accordance has been confirmed by the Ecumenical Relations Committee.

Who can apply: age

- 6. (1) In the case of a Standard Certificate, an application will not be considered from any person who in all normal circumstances could not complete the requirements for a Standard Certificate before 31 December in the year which is ten years before the calendar year in which that person will reach the age which would be their UK State Pension Age.
- (2) In the case of an International Presbytery Certificate, an application will not be considered from any person who in all normal circumstances could not complete the requirements for an International Presbytery Certificate before 31 December in the year which is three years before the calendar year in which that person will reach the age which would be their UK State Pension Age.
- (3) There is no age requirement for a Non Parish Ministry Certificate.

Visa fees and travel costs

- 7. All visa fees and travel costs involved in the Admission process for any Certificate shall be the responsibility of the applicant. If the necessary visa to visit Scotland or to work in the Church of Scotland cannot be obtained at any time, as required, the application may not proceed further.

Pre assessment of eligibility

- 8. (1) A person applying for any Certificate shall submit to FAPLT a Pre Assessment Form together with their current curriculum vitae and academic transcripts of subjects studied in their theological degree, to enable FAPLT to assess their suitability and equivalency of academic qualification.
- (2) In addition:
 - (a) a person who has been ordained in their own denomination shall supply their Ordination Certificate to enable assessment of whether or not their ordination is recognised by the Church of Scotland for the purpose of Admission, and
 - (b) a person who is an Ordinand in their own denomination shall supply information to verify the completion of their academic training, their Church completed placements/probation and their current eligibility for ordination in their own denomination.
- (3) Further, the person shall supply evidence of being in good standing with their own denomination, from the central offices of their denomination.
- (4) The person shall thereafter be advised by FAPLT whether or not they are eligible to proceed to the next stage of application, depending on the type of certificate they are applying for. FAPLT’s decision on this is final and there is no right of appeal.

Ordinands

9. An Ordinand may only apply for a Standard Certificate.

Applications for Standard Certificates

Application Form

- 10.(1) A person who is advised by FAPLT that they are eligible to do so in terms of the Preliminary Conditions set out at sections 5 to 9 above may complete the Application Form prescribed by FAPLT, including any self-declaration(s). The completed Form shall be sent to FAPLT along with the required accompanying documentation and payment of the appropriate fee(s), all by the date determined and supplied by FAPLT.
- (2) The Application Form shall give full particulars as to the person's age, present Church connection, educational curriculum, ministerial career and other employment, Calling and theology, together with a statement indicating the reasons for the person's wish to be admitted to ministry in the Church of Scotland. The person will also require to satisfy FAPLT of competency in preaching and the leading of worship in the English language (by supplying notes and recordings) and in missional initiative. The Application Form shall be accompanied by all the documents (originals, extracts or copies) necessary in the opinion of FAPLT to substantiate the facts set forth, and shall include the names of three referees.
- (3) If English is not the person's first language, he or she shall also complete such evaluation(s) as FAPLT may require as to their linguistic proficiency.
- (4) A person completing the Application Form shall also require to exhibit a criminal record check, in terms satisfactory to both FAPLT and the Safeguarding Service. In addition, if a person has lived outwith the UK for 12 months or more (whether continuous or in total), in the ten years before their application, they will require to exhibit a criminal record certificate from the government or an appropriate government/police agency of any such countries (excluding the UK) where they have lived while aged 18 or over, in terms satisfactory to both FAPLT and the Safeguarding Service.
- (5) The person shall thereafter be advised by FAPLT whether or not their application can proceed to the next stage under section 9. FAPLT's decision on this is final and there is no right of appeal.

Recruitment process

- 11.(1) A person applying for a Standard Certificate shall enter into an annual recruitment process, proceeding through various stages of assessment, including Admissions Conference(s), according to a procedure and timetable determined by FAPLT. FAPLT will annually set and publicise that procedure, including a date by which Application Forms must be received, and no Application Forms shall be accepted for that annual recruitment process after the date specified. FAPLT shall also determine from time to time in its sole discretion the maximum number of Standard Certificates which will be available for issue in each annual recruitment process and shall notify this information to all persons applying. Subject as aftermentioned in this Act, a person who is not successful in obtaining a Standard Certificate in any particular annual recruitment process may reapply in future rounds of recruitment (provided that at such time they still meet the Preliminary Conditions set out in sections 5 to 9 above).
- (2) FAPLT will supply an outline of the annual recruitment process upon request. Also upon request, FAPLT will supply feedback to a person who is not successful in their application for a Standard Certificate.

Occupational Health Assessment

12. A person who is successful in the recruitment process for a Standard Certificate shall undergo an Occupational Health assessment in the form prescribed by FAPLT and may only proceed to the next stage, a Familiarisation Placement, if that assessment is, in the opinion of FAPLT, satisfactory. FAPLT's decision shall be final and not subject to appeal or review. If the assessment is satisfactory, the person shall be known as an Admissions Candidate. If the assessment is not satisfactory, the person may not proceed to be recruited in that round of recruitment but the person may apply again in future annual rounds of recruitment, starting at the point of completing an Application Form (provided that at such time they meet the Preliminary Conditions set out in sections 5 to 9 above).

Familiarisation Placement/Probationary placement

- 13.(1) Following a satisfactory Occupational Health assessment in terms of section 10(1) above, and provided that updated Safeguarding checks are satisfactory, the Admissions Candidate will enter a Familiarisation Placement assigned by FAPLT, or in the case of an Admissions Candidate who is an Ordinand, shall enter into a fifteen-month full-time Probationary placement undertaken according to the provisions of section 17 to 22 of the Selection and Training for Full-Time Ministry Act (Act X 2004).
- (2) An Admissions Candidate must commence their Familiarisation Placement on a cohort date specified by FAPLT, failing which their status as an Admissions Candidate shall cease. Such a person may apply again in future annual rounds of recruitment, starting

- at the point of completing an Application Form (section 10), provided always that at such time they still meet the Preliminary Conditions set out in section 5 to 9 above.
- (3) If a matter which would constitute a material breach of the Terms and Conditions document referred to in section 13(5), had that been signed, comes to the attention of FAPLT in the period between acceptance as an Admissions Candidate and commencement of the Familiarisation Placement, FAPLT may advise the Admissions Candidate that their status as an Admissions Candidate has been terminated. Such a person shall not be entitled to reapply for Admission. There shall be no right of appeal against such a decision.
 - (4) During a Familiarisation Placement, the Admissions Candidate will work under the supervision of a Supervisor. The Familiarisation Placement shall last for a period of twelve months, subject always to sections 13(12) & 13(13) below. A proportion of minimum stipend will be payable during the Familiarisation Placement, but the Admissions Candidate will be responsible for locating and funding their own accommodation during this time.
 - (5) At the start of the Familiarisation Placement the Admissions Candidate shall enter into a Terms and Conditions document in the form prescribed by FAPLT.
 - (6) The Supervisor for the Familiarisation Placement will be chosen by FAPLT. The Supervisor shall undertake such training for the role as may from time to time be specified by FAPLT. The Supervisor shall be responsible for supervising the Familiarisation Placement according to the guidelines and standards established by FAPLT.
 - (7) During the Familiarisation Placement the Admissions Candidate shall undertake such courses and/or training as may be prescribed by FAPLT in Scottish Church History, Church Law, Safeguarding, Church of Scotland Liturgy, Church of Scotland Structures and Moderating a Kirk Session/Interim Moderator training.
 - (8) During the Familiarisation Placement an Admissions Candidate may be invited by the Presbytery within which lies the charge or appointment where his or her Familiarisation Placement is proceeding, to become a corresponding member of that Presbytery.
 - (9) After six months, FAPLT shall undertake an interim review of the Admissions Candidate according to the Terms and Conditions document.
 - (10) After nine months FAPLT shall undertake a final review of the Admissions Candidate according to the Terms and Conditions document. At that point a decision shall be made as to sustain, extend or not sustain the Familiarisation Placement.
 - (11) If the Familiarisation Placement is sustained and provided the Admissions Candidate has completed the necessary courses and/or training in terms of section 13(7), the Admissions Candidate may commence applying for charges or appointments. At the completion of the full Familiarisation Placement, the candidate shall be entitled to receive a Standard Certificate.
 - (12) It shall be competent for FAPLT to refuse to sustain a Familiarisation Placement, or, in the event of a material breach of the Terms and Conditions document which was entered into between the Admissions Candidate and FAPLT in terms of section 13(5) to terminate a Familiarisation Placement. There shall be no appeal against such a decision but a written explanation shall be provided. Such a person shall not be entitled to reapply for Admission. There shall be no right of appeal against such a decision.
 - (13) Exceptionally a Familiarisation Placement may be extended at the instigation of FAPLT, on a month by month basis, for a maximum period of up to three months to allow the Admissions Candidate to be inducted to a charge or take up an appointment.
 - (14) Exceptionally, where in the opinion of FAPLT there is sufficient evidence of rooted and recent experience of ministry in the Church of Scotland, FAPLT may decide that an Admissions Candidate need not complete a Familiarisation Placement and FAPLT may instead immediately grant to that person a Standard Certificate subject to a mentoring arrangement, such mentoring arrangement to be put in place by the relevant Presbytery.

Applications for International Presbytery Certificates

14. Once FAPLT is satisfied that the Preliminary Conditions set out at sections 5 to 9 above have been met, the responsibility for recruitment, in terms of deciding whether or not to issue an International Presbytery Certificate, shall pass to the Presbytery of International Charges.
15. The Presbytery of International Charges shall ensure as follows:
 - (1) That the following conditions are satisfied before an International Presbytery Certificate is issued and before allowing a recruit to be introduced to a charge in the International Presbytery:
 - (a) That the applicant is interviewed in person and the Presbytery is satisfied that the applicant is suitable for introduction to the charge;
 - (b) That the applicant is theologically suitable to be ministering in the Church of Scotland;

- (c) That all necessary Safeguarding checks and confirmations are obtained as to the applicant's suitability for Regulated Work, as defined in the Safeguarding Act (Act [] 2025) and as that term can practicably be understood in the country where the applicant would be introduced to a charge, such checks to be undertaken in both the country where the applicant would be introduced to a charge and in the applicant's home nation, all in accordance with advice obtained from the Safeguarding Service;
 - (2) That the following conditions are satisfied within three months after a recruit is introduced to a charge:
 - (a) In consultation with the Principal Clerk's office, that the recruit is given sufficient training on the law of the Church as it applies to ministry in the Presbytery of International Charges;
 - (b) In consultation with the Stewardship & Finance department, that the recruit is given sufficient training on matters of finance in the Church;
 - (c) In consultation with the Safeguarding Service, that the recruit undertakes appropriate training on Safeguarding rules and procedures to enable the recruit to work safely in the charge;
 - (d) In consultation with the Law Department, that the recruit is sufficiently briefed on matters of Church property law to enable the recruit competently to manage property matters arising in the charge; and
 - (3) That appropriate oversight over the recruit is exercised by the Presbytery.
16. A person holding an International Presbytery Certificate is only entitled to exercise the type of ministry set out at section 3(b) above; to exercise any other ministry they must apply for transfer to a Standard Certificate, in which case the age limit at section 5(1) applies.

Transfer from International Presbytery Certificate to Standard Certificate

17. The person will require to undergo further assessment:
- (i) A qualifying period of three years' service in an International Presbytery Certificate will be required before an application to transfer will be considered.
 - (ii) The application will require to outline the person's specific experience within the service of the Church of Scotland, such as membership of Presbytery, locumships, interim moderatorships etc.
 - (iii) An assessment will be undertaken through Admissions Conference(s).
 - (iv) A recommendation will be sought from the Admissions Conference regarding future training needs, including the length of any Familiarisation Placement.
 - (v) At least one reference shall be provided from a person with knowledge of the person's current post.
 - (vi) The person's service in the Presbytery of International Charges shall be taken into account in determining what Familiarisation Placement might be required.

Applications for Non Parish Ministry Certificates

Application Form

- 18.(1) A person who is advised by FAPLT that they are eligible to do so in terms of the Preliminary Conditions set out at sections 5 to 9 above may complete the Application Form prescribed by FAPLT, including any self-declaration(s). The completed Form shall be sent to FAPLT along with the required accompanying documentation and payment of the appropriate fee(s), all by the date determined and supplied by FAPLT.
- (2) The Application Form shall give full particulars as to the person's present Church connection, educational curriculum, ministerial career and other employment, Calling and theology, together with a statement indicating the reasons for the person's wish to be admitted to ministry in the Church of Scotland. The person will also require to satisfy FAPLT of competency in preaching and the leading of worship in the English language (by supplying notes and recordings) and in missional initiative. The Application Form shall be accompanied by all the documents (originals, extracts or copies) necessary in the opinion of FAPLT to substantiate the facts set forth, and shall include the names of three referees.
- (4) If English is not the person's first language, he or she shall also complete such evaluation(s) as FAPLT may require as to their linguistic proficiency.
- (5) A person completing the Application Form shall also require to exhibit a criminal record check, in terms satisfactory to both FAPT and the Safeguarding Service. In addition, if a person has lived outwith the UK for 12 months or more (whether continuous or in total), in the ten years before their application, they will require to exhibit a criminal record certificate from the government or an appropriate government/police agency of any such countries (excluding the UK) where they have lived while aged 18 or over, in terms satisfactory to both FAPLT and the Safeguarding Service.
- (6) The person shall thereafter be advised by FAPLT whether or not their application can proceed to the next stage under section 19. FAPLT's decision on this is final and there is no right of appeal.

Further process

19. (1) A person who is advised by FAPLT under section 18 that their application may proceed shall be assessed by an Admissions Panel for suitability for a Non Parish Ministry Certificate.
- (2) A person who is accepted by an Admissions Panel as suitable for a Non Parish Ministry Certificate shall require to satisfy the following conditions before any such Certificate may be issued:
 - (i) they must undergo the training specified at section 13(7) above; and
 - (ii) they may be required to undergo an Occupational Health assessment in the same terms as section 12 above.

They shall not be required to undergo a Familiarisation or Probationary Placement.
- (3) If not already in post, the holder of a Non Parish Ministry Certificate must commence their post within 12 months of the grant of their Certificate.
20. A person who is not accepted by an Admissions Panel as suitable for a Non Parish Ministry Certificate shall be entitled to apply again in future for such a Certificate, starting at the point of completing an Application Form (section 18), provided always that at such time they still meet the Preliminary Conditions specified in section 5 to 9 above.
21. A person holding a Non Parish Ministry Certificate is only entitled to exercise the types of ministry set out at section 3(c) above; to exercise any other ministry they must apply for transfer to a Standard Certificate, in which case the age limit at section 5(1) applies.

Transfer from Non Parish Ministry Certificate to Standard Certificate

22. The person will require to undergo further assessment:
 - (i) A qualifying period of three years' service in a Non Parish Ministry Certificate will be required before an application to transfer will be considered.
 - (ii) The application will require to outline the person's specific experience within the service of the Church of Scotland, such as membership of Presbytery, locumships, interim moderatorships etc.
 - (iii) An assessment will be undertaken through Admissions Conference(s).
 - (iv) A recommendation will be sought from the Admissions Conference regarding future training needs, including the length of any Familiarisation Placement.

PART C – READMISSION

Application for Readmission

23. (1) A person wishing to be readmitted to ministry in the Church of Scotland shall complete the application form prescribed by FAPLT, including any self-declaration(s) and shall send it to FAPLT along with the required accompanying documentation, their current curriculum vitae, their ordination certificates for the Church of Scotland and for their current denomination (if any), and proof of status in their current denomination (if any), all by the date determined and supplied by FAPLT.
- (2) The application shall give full particulars as to the person's age, present Church connection, educational curriculum, ministerial career and other employment, together with a statement indicating the reasons for the person having demitted status in the Church of Scotland and the reasons for their wish to be readmitted to ministry in the Church of Scotland. The application shall be accompanied by all the documents (originals, extracts or copies) necessary in the opinion of FAPLT to substantiate the facts set forth, and shall include the names of three referees.
- (3) All visa fees and travel costs involved in the Readmission process shall be the responsibility of the applicant. If the necessary visa to visit Scotland or to work in the Church of Scotland cannot be obtained at any time, as required, the application may not proceed further.
- (4) A person making application shall require to exhibit a criminal record check, in terms satisfactory to both FAPT and the Safeguarding Service. In addition, if a person has lived outwith the UK for 12 months or more (whether continuous or in total), in the ten years before their application, they will require to exhibit a criminal record certificate from the government or an appropriate government/police agency of any such countries (excluding the UK) where they have lived while aged 18 or over, in terms satisfactory to both FAPLT and the Safeguarding Service.
- (5) The person shall thereafter be advised by FAPLT whether or not their application can proceed to a Readmissions Panel under section 24. FAPLT's decision on this is final and there is no right of appeal.

Readmissions Panel

24. (1) Following application under section 23, a person who is accepted by FAPLT to proceed to a Readmissions Panel arranged by FAPLT shall be known as a Readmissions Applicant.
- (2) A Readmissions Panel shall normally be held in person in Scotland, but FAPLT reserves the right to hold a Readmissions Panel online should circumstances make this necessary or desirable.

- (3) The Readmissions Panel shall take place on a date supplied to the Readmissions Applicant and shall assess the Readmissions Applicant's Call, doctrine and gifts/character and beliefs, vocation, motivation, general suitability, together with their reasons for having demitted status in the Church of Scotland and the reasons for their wish to be readmitted. The Readmissions Panel shall make a decision as to whether or not the Readmissions Applicant may be readmitted to ministry in the Church of Scotland.
- (4) All Readmissions Applicants who attend a Readmissions Panel shall receive notification of the decision taken by the Readmissions Panel in terms of sub-section 24(3) and feedback on the reasons for the decision.
- (5) If the decision of the Readmissions Panel is that the Readmissions Applicant is to be readmitted to ministry in the Church of Scotland, the Panel may additionally determine as follows:
 - (a) that the Readmissions Applicant will require to undergo a Familiarisation Placement and that the granting of a Standard Certificate will be subject to satisfactory completion of that Placement, in which case section 13 shall apply amended as appropriate, or
 - (b) that the Readmissions Applicant will be granted a Standard Certificate subject to a mentoring arrangement to be put in place by the relevant Presbytery; and declaring that both such decisions will be subject to an Occupational Health assessment in terms of section 27 below.
- (6) A Readmissions Applicant who is not accepted at a Readmissions Panel must wait a minimum period of one year, as notified to that person by FAPLT, before they may again participate in a Readmissions Panel.

Opportunities to be accepted by a Readmissions Panel

- 25.(1) A person applying under this Act shall have three opportunities in total to be accepted by a Readmissions Panel. Each time the person is not accepted shall count as one "non-accept" decision. Once a total of three "non-accept" decisions have occurred, no further entry into the Readmission process, at any stage, will be possible for that person. A person will however have rights of appeal as set out in section 26 below.
- (2) Following a "non-accept" decision at any stage, a person must wait for the period specified by FAPLT, being a minimum period of one year, before making application for Readmission again.
- (3) After a "non-accept" decision at a Readmissions Panel, a person who chooses to re-enter the Readmission process shall start again at section 23, ie at application stage.

Appeals

- 26.(1) A Readmissions Applicant shall have the right to appeal to the Ministries Appeal Panel following a third "non-accept" decision at Readmissions Panel. For the avoidance of doubt, no appeal shall be possible after a first or second "non-accept" decision.
- (2) Notification of the intention to appeal shall be made to FAPLT and to the Principal Clerk within 14 days of the date upon which the decision of the Readmissions Panel was intimated to the Readmissions Applicant.
- (3) At the Appeal Hearing the Readmissions Applicant shall be entitled to appear either online or in person, as determined by FAPLT, and to address the Panel. He or she may be accompanied by a companion, who shall not be entitled to speak to the Panel, but who may confer with the Readmissions Applicant. A representative of FAPLT shall also appear to present the case for the decision under appeal. All parties will be in possession of the documents from the Readmissions Panel.
- (4) An appeal to the Ministries Appeal Panel can only be brought on one or more of the following grounds: (a) that in the course of the Readmissions Panel there were irregularities in the process, (b) that the final decision of the Readmissions Panel was influenced by incorrect material fact, or (c) that the Readmissions Panel acted contrary to the principles of natural justice.
- (5) The outcome of an appeal shall be either to uphold the decision of the Readmissions Panel, or to annul that decision, in which case sub-sections (6) and (7) below will apply.
- (6) If the outcome of the appeal is to annul a decision of the Readmissions Panel the person shall be treated as if they had not attended that Readmissions Panel and shall be entitled to attend only one further Readmission Panel and that within one year of the appeal decision. Any further "non-accept" decision on that next attendance shall terminate that person's eligibility to enter the Readmission process under this Act and there shall be no further right of appeal.
- (7) If the outcome of the appeal is to uphold the decision of the Readmissions Panel, that shall terminate the Readmission process for that person and they may not re-enter into it at any time.

Occupational Health Assessment

27. (1) A person who is accepted by a Readmissions Panel shall undergo an Occupational Health assessment in the form prescribed by FAPLT and may only proceed to enter ministry in the Church of Scotland (subject to section 24(5)) if that assessment is, in the opinion of FAPLT, satisfactory. FAPLT's decision shall be final.
- (2) If the Occupational Health assessment is unsatisfactory, the person may choose to apply again for Readmission under this Act, provided always that the person must wait for the period prescribed by FAPLT, being a minimum period of one year. In this situation the person must consent to undergoing a further Occupational Health assessment prior to making the new application and that assessment must be satisfactory in the opinion of FAPLT in order for the application to proceed. An unsatisfactory Occupational Health assessment on that occasion shall mean that no further entry into the Readmission process is possible for that person.

Type of Certificate

28. A person who is readmitted into ministry in the Church of Scotland following acceptance at a Readmissions Panel and subject always to sections 24(5) and 27(1) above, shall be granted the type of Certificate determined by FAPLT.

Additional requirements where the person applying for Readmission has been previously judicially deprived of status

29. If a person has been previously judicially deprived of status as a Church of Scotland minister in terms of Act III 2001 or Act I 2019, both as amended, the following additional provisions shall apply in the Readmission process:
- (1) At the application stage, the person must submit a statement as to why they were judicially deprived of status, how they have resolved the issues around their deprivation of status and why they wish to be readmitted to ministry in the Church of Scotland.
- (2) The Readmissions Panel shall be entitled to see and take account of the judicial documents relating to the deprivation of status.
- (3) FAPLT shall forward to the Presbytery of residence, or, in the case of an applicant who has not resided in Scotland for three months prior to the date of the application, to the Presbytery of Edinburgh, and also to any Presbytery within whose bounds the applicant was previously appointed as a minister, such documents as are reasonably required (which may include (a) a copy of the application in full and (b) copies of any documents obtained by FAPLT) to enable the Presbytery or Presbyteries, as the case may be, to provide the Readmissions Panel with its/their opinion of the application.
- (4) The Readmissions Panel shall then make its decision on the application in terms of section 24 and sections 25 to 28 may thereafter apply.

PART D – GENERAL PROVISIONS

Confidentiality

30. Each application and all procedure under this Act shall be taken in private by FAPLT and by Presbyteries.

Repeals and Amendments

31. (1) The Admission and Readmission of Ministers Act (Act XIII 2022) shall be repealed on the date this Act comes into force, subject to section 33 below. Any references to Act XIII 2022 in other Acts and Regulations of the General Assembly shall from that date be read as references to this Act.
- (2) The Restricted Certificates of Eligibility Regulations (Regs II 2020) shall be repealed as at the date of passing of this Act.

Commencement date and transitional arrangements

32. This Act shall come into force on [date of passing at GA 2025] May 2025.
33. Where a person has commenced the Admission process as at [date on which this Act is passed at GA 2025] May 2025, such a person shall continue to be subject to the provisions of the Admission and Readmission of Ministers Act (Act XIII 2022) until they have been granted a Certificate of Eligibility, or their application expires, whether due to refusal by FAPLT to sustain their Familiarisation Placement or otherwise. All other applications for Admission or Readmission, whether new or ongoing, and whether such applications commence before or after [date on which this Act is passed at GA 2025] May 2025, shall from [date on which this Act is passed at GA 2025] May 2025 be dealt with under the provisions of this Act. Any disputes as to what that shall mean in practice for any particular person shall be resolved by FAPLT and its decision as notified to the individual shall be final and not subject to any right of appeal.

Appendix IV**CANDIDATES, PROBATIONERS AND ADMISSIONS STATISTICS**

The tables below provide statistics relating to applicants at different stages in the Discernment and Assessment processes.

Year	2020	Jan-Dec 2021	Jan-Dec 2022	Jan-Dec 2023	Jan-Dec 2024
Enquirers	124	95	85	108	100+
Discernment Conversations	65	36	36	45	50
Applicants for Ministry (all types)	50	28	29	38	38
Entered Local Assessment	52	31	35	36	27
Chose to Withdraw (locally)	3	3	7	3	7
Readership (Applicants)	1	6	1	4	5
Readership Accepted	0	6	1	4	5

Year	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Completed Local Assessment	37	45	20	29	24
Attended Assessment Conference	36	39	13	23	21
Full-time Ministry (Applicants)	25	26	7	17	12
Full-time Ministry Accepted	17	15	5	12	11
Ordained Local Ministry (Applicants)	9	12	6	5	8
Ordained Local Ministry Accepted	7	9	3	5	5
Deacons (Applicants)	2	1	0	1	1
Deacons Accepted	1	1	0	1	1
First Time Applicants	30	31	8	21	18
Accepted	21	21	4	16	14
Returning Applicants	6	8	5	2	3
Accepted	4	4	4	2	3

Admissions

Numbers of attendees at Admissions Conference

YEAR	ATTENDEES	ACCEPT	NON ACCEPT
2020	27	15	12
2021	27	12	15
2022	18	2	16
2023	17	5	12
2024	2	1	1

Candidates and Probationers

Candidates in training 2024-2025	Number			
	FTWAS	OLM	Diaconal	Total
Candidates in training	24	5	3	32
Candidates accepted for entry to training in but entry deferred	4	1	0	5
Candidates across all years prior to probation including deferrals	29	9	3	41

Candidates Studying at Training Provider 2024-2025	Number			
	FTWAS	OLM	Diaconal	Total
Aberdeen campus based	0	0	0	0
Aberdeen distance learning	3	2 (3)*	2	7
Edinburgh campus-based	8	0	0	8
Edinburgh distance learning	0	0	0	0
Glasgow campus based	5	0	0	5
Glasgow distance learning	0	0	0	0
Highland Theological College campus based	0	0	0	0
Highland Theological College distance learning	8	2 (3)*	1	10
St Andrews campus based	0	0	0	0

*Numbers in brackets include those who left the training process within the year

Probationers 2024-2025	Number
Number of Probationers in training	26
Number of Probationers appointed to Assistant Minister posts by Presbytery since GA 2024	16
Number of Probationers inducted into Ministry since GA 2024	8

Readers in Training 2024-2025	Number
Number of Readers in training	9
Number of Readers set apart since GA 2024	2

Appendix V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE REVIEW OF PRIORITY AREAS

V. INTRODUCTION.

V.1 There has been no review of the Priority Areas work since the development of the '2017-2022 Priority Areas Action Plan.' The Prioritisation Exercise highlighted that significant changes have occurred between 2017 and 2024, including budget reductions and personnel changes, making it an appropriate time for a comprehensive review of this vital area of work.

V.2 The dedication of the Priority Areas (PA) staff team over many years and the Church of Scotland's commitment to communities facing the highest levels of deprivation are clear. The Priority Areas work has been described as a flagship initiative of the Church, consistently supported by General Assemblies, which reaffirm the Church's dedication to those struggling with poverty, emphasising the biblical mandate to care for the poor and vulnerable. This review does not seek to reconsider the Church of Scotland's theological stance but acknowledges that this flagship work unites the denomination, transcending theological and social differences.

V.3 As the Church becomes smaller and its societal influence lessens alongside a streamlined national office, it is crucial to reaffirm that our commitment to the poorest in our nation remains strong. The national staff team, despite its smaller size, represents this ongoing commitment and concern. For those living and working in areas of deprivation, knowing that they are 'seen' and 'heard' by the national office is both important and encouraging. This review begins with a reaffirmation of our desire to remain a denomination that supports, encourages, learns from and stands alongside our most deprived parishes and their ministries, remaining committed to this biblical mandate at the heart of our worship of God.

V.4 Conclusions from data and consultation with all stakeholders

Ministry in areas with high levels of deprivation is unique, and the challenges faced by ministers and workers in these contexts must not be underestimated. The support they require often differs from that in other areas of ministry. Isolation can be a significant issue, and simply being 'seen and heard' can provide great encouragement, giving individuals the courage to persist and innovate. According to feedback from the questionnaire, 'connection' is a key need, both connection with others facing similar challenges and with presbytery and national staff teams.

The following conclusions are drawn from all the data and form the basis, along with the strategic outcomes, of the Priority Areas Action Plan 2025 – 2027.

Building strong relationships with Presbytery is essential for the PA staff team. It is important to recognise that communities with high levels of deprivation face complex challenges and vulnerabilities that are not always widely understood. The national staff team should establish robust links with Presbytery to ensure the needs of Priority Area and Supplementary List parishes are recognised and addressed. Additionally, the PA team should actively support presbytery staff, including presbytery Mission Officers.

The staff should increase the frequency and depth of their engagement to maximise their effectiveness, emphasising accessibility. Stakeholders highlighted that visits and face-to-face support are the most needed and appreciated forms of assistance. When in-person engagement is not feasible, due to capacity constraints, the focus should shift to excellent communication and network building for support and shared learning.

Equipping and training: The Learning Programme remains important, providing expert advice to empower those working in areas of deprivation to address unique missional challenges. Additionally, the staff team could collaborate with People and Training to harness learning from Priority Areas and ensure resources are available to equip churches, in areas of deprivation, for mission.

Funding: the PA staff team should work with *Seeds for Growth* to ensure the success of work in areas of deprivation that have received this funding.

Networking events, like the Big Conversation, are key, particularly for congregations in presbyteries with few Priority Areas, where feelings of isolation, as expressed, are more pronounced. Additional networking and support opportunities should be explored, focusing on the strategic outcomes. Using the experience and knowledge within the PA network, the PA team is well-positioned to provide coaching-style support.

Effective communication and shared learning are crucial for the Church. The PA staff team, with the IT department, could explore using a CRM system to support missional work in areas of deprivation to foster connections, share examples, facilitate twinning opportunities for shared learning and support and benefit the wider church. (Feedback from *Seeds for Growth* highlights the value of matching congregations with similar visions or ministries for mutual support).

Other methods of supporting parishes with high levels of deprivation should be explored. Examples include: focused learning communities; twinning for short-term projects or longer-term support and mutual learning; and cross-presbytery Priority Area hubs for mutual support.

The PA team should work to keep the issue of poverty at the forefront of the Church's priorities and decisions, in collaboration with the PLSJ team. The team should also maintain accountability to those with lived experience of poverty to stay focused and up to date on the realities faced by affected communities.

Engagement in adult recruitment within the wider Faith Action should continue, to incorporate learning from the YAV programmes into planning. Any new approach should encourage placements in Priority Areas and other areas of deprivation to strengthen mission efforts and support.

The PA staff team should work closely with the wider Mission Support and Faith Action teams, drawing on their knowledge and expertise to ensure they are well-positioned to support 1. new models of church, 2. innovative ways of building community 3. approaches to addressing injustice, within areas of deprivation.

The Priority Areas staff team have made a lot of adjustments during the past year in particular. They should be applauded for their positivity, expertise and care, all of which have been highlighted during this process.

V5 Key recommendations of this review:

Expand the national staff team's remit to support missional work in all areas of deprivation, not just those on designated lists. **A re-evaluation of the terminology used to refer to the team may be required at some point to reflect this broader focus.**

Support for those working in areas with high levels of deprivation could be more strategic, focusing resources on areas with significant missional potential rather than maintaining a worshipping presence without evaluating missional activity, capacity or impact. Explore alternative support methods, such as a "SIMD solidarity" fund.

Track the number of church closures in areas of high deprivation to ensure they are not disproportionately higher than in wealthier areas.

While double-weighting for Priority Area parishes is considered helpful, it relies heavily on recruiting MDS personnel, with inconsistent quantity and quality of applicants. Regular monitoring is recommended to ensure effective use.

Review the Priority Area and Supplementary List designations with 2026 SIMD data and updated parish boundaries. Additionally, work to identify areas of poverty not captured by these lists and consideration given to the creation of a deprivation scale for each parish.

Appendix VI**CALL, ELECTION, AND APPOINTMENT OF MINISTERS OF WORD AND SACRAMENT****CALL, ELECTION AND APPOINTMENT OF MINISTERS OF WORD AND SACRAMENT ACT (ACT [] 2025)**

Edinburgh, [] May 2025, Session []

The General Assembly, hereby enact and ordain as follows:–

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PART	SECTION NOS	NAME
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4	6-10	PRESBYTERY ACTIONS: RELEASE OF DEPARTING MINISTER, APPOINTMENT OF INTERIM MODERATOR AND PERMISSION TO CALL
5	11-14	LOCAL FINANCIAL BOARD RESPONSIBILITIES: VACANCY SCHEDULE, MANSE, PARISH PROFILE AND ELECTORAL REGISTER
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PART 1 – DEFINITIONS AND INTERPRETATION

1.1 For the purposes of this Act the following terms shall have the meanings assigned to them below:–

- (i) “Adjustment” shall mean a form of adjustment set out in section 7, sub-sections (1) to (11) of the PMP Act;
- (ii) “Advisory Panel” means the pool of persons appointed by Presbytery to provide advice and support to congregations in a vacancy in terms of section 5 of this Act;
- (iii) An “appointment” shall mean an appointment to a post other than an inducted Minister detailed within the Approved Mission Plan and which is either counted within the allocation of ministry posts funded by the General Fund and allocated to that Presbytery by the General Assembly or is funded locally by the congregation and/or the Presbytery;
- (iv) “Approved Mission Plan” shall mean a Mission Plan formulated in terms of the PMP Act which has been initially approved by the Presbytery, FAPLT and the General Trustees and which thereafter has been annually and five-yearly evaluated and developed in accordance with the PMP Act;
- (v) “Basis of Adjustment” shall mean the written terms upon which an Adjustment is implemented;
- (vi) A “charge” shall mean a sphere of pastoral duty to which a minister is inducted and may include a Team Ministry Role as referred to in section 7(10) of the PMP Act;
- (vii) A “congregation” shall mean an association of persons in a parish whose names are on the Communion Roll and Adherents’ Roll and who are under the pastoral oversight of a minister or ministers or a Team Ministry (or an Interim Moderator) and a Kirk Session, for Christian worship, fellowship, instruction, Mission and service;
- (viii) A “Financial Board” shall mean the body responsible for managing the finances of a congregation, being a Congregational Board, Deacons’ Court, Committee of Management or Kirk Session;
- (ix) “FAPLT” shall mean the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team, a standing committee of the General Assembly;
- (x) “Permission to Call” shall mean permission to call and elect a Minister of Word and Sacrament granted by the Vacancy Procedure Committee or the Presbytery in line with the terms of the Approved Mission Plan and in terms of this Act;
- (xi) “Presbytery” shall mean the Presbytery of the bounds;
- (xii) “PMP Act” means the Presbytery Mission Plan Act (Act VIII 2021);
- (xiii) “Reviewable Charge” shall have the meaning ascribed to it in the PMP Act;
- (xiv) “Team Ministry” shall mean a Team Ministry in terms of section 7(10) of the PMP Act;

- (xv) "Team Ministry Role" shall mean a role in a Team Ministry as referred to in section 7(10) of the PMP Act;
- (xvi) "vacancy" shall mean a charge which is without an inducted minister and which has been granted Permission to Call, and shall include the situation of a prospective vacancy with Permission to Call where an Interim Moderator has been appointed under section 7(1) of this Act, as well as the situation with Permission to Call where a member of a Team Ministry has demitted or translated from his or her Role, and "vacant" shall be construed accordingly; and
- (xvii) "Vacancy Procedure Committee" shall mean a standing committee of Presbytery established in terms of section 3 of this Act.

1.2 While this Act lays out steps to be taken in sequential order, certain tasks can be undertaken concurrently and Kirk Sessions and Nominating Committees are encouraged to consider where this can happen.

PART 2 – VACANCY

2. Circumstances of Vacancy

This Act may apply in the following circumstances (although the following list is not exhaustive) and provided that Permission to Call has been granted:

- (a) the death of the minister of the charge;
- (b) the removal of status of the minister of the charge or the judicial suspension of the minister in terms of section 40 of the Discipline Act (Act I 2019);
- (c) the dissolution of the pastoral tie in terms of the Congregations in Unsatisfactory State Act (Act I 1988) or the Income Protection and Ill-Health Act (Act VI 2019);
- (d) the demission of the charge and/or status of the minister of the charge;
- (e) the translation of the minister of the charge to another charge;
- (f) the demission or translation of a minister from a Team Ministry Role.

In the circumstances of sub-sections 2(d), (e) or (f), the minister shall normally give at least three months' prior notice in writing to the Presbytery Clerk of the Presbytery for that minister's current charge.

PART 3 – PRESBYTERY COMMITTEES/PEOPLE WHO ASSIST

3. Vacancy Procedure Committee

- (1) Each Presbytery shall have a standing committee known as the Vacancy Procedure Committee. The Presbytery shall appoint at least three and no more than seven of its members to serve on the Vacancy Procedure Committee and shall provide information and training as required for those so appointed. The Vacancy Procedure Committee shall fulfil the Presbytery's functions specified in this Act in relation to vacant charges, including the question of granting of Permission to Call.
- (2) Where any member of the Vacancy Procedure Committee has a significant personal connection to the ministry or a former ministry of the vacant charge or of any constituent congregation thereof, he or she shall not take part in the decision-making process related to that charge/congregation.
- (3) The Vacancy Procedure Committee shall include a Convener, Depute Convener and Clerk, the latter of whom need not be a member of the Committee but may be the Presbytery Clerk.
- (4) The Vacancy Procedure Committee shall have a quorum of three.
- (5) The Convener of the Vacancy Procedure Committee may, where he or she reasonably believes a matter to be non-contentious, consult members individually, and may do so by electronic means. A meeting shall be held at the request of any member of the Committee.
- (6) Every decision made by the Vacancy Procedure Committee shall be reported to the next meeting of Presbytery, but may not be recalled by Presbytery where the decision was subject to the provisions of section 4 below and no request was made under section 4(2).
- (7) One of the tasks of the Vacancy Procedure Committee, subject to the provisions of section 4 below, shall be to determine the number of members of each congregation who shall serve on the Nominating Committee, the overall number on any Nominating Committee being an odd number up to a maximum of thirteen.

4. Request for Consideration of a Vacancy Procedure Committee decision by Presbytery

Where in this Act any decision by the Vacancy Procedure Committee is subject to the provisions of this section, the following rules shall apply:–

- (1) The Presbytery Clerk shall intimate to all members of the Presbytery by mailing, by electronic means, or at a Presbytery meeting, the course of action or permission proposed, and shall arrange for one Sunday's pulpit intimation of the same to be made to the congregation or congregations concerned, in terms of Schedule A. The intimation having been made, it shall be displayed as prominently as possible at the church building(s) for seven days.
- (2) Any four individuals, being communicant members of the congregation concerned or full members of the Presbytery, may give written notice requesting that action be taken in

terms of subsection (3) below, giving reasons for the request, within seven days after the pulpit intimation.

- (3) Upon receiving notice in terms of subsection (2), the Presbytery Clerk shall sist the process or permission referred to in subsection (1), which shall then require the approval of the Presbytery.
- (4) The Moderator of the Presbytery shall in such circumstances consider whether a Specific Purpose meeting of the Presbytery should be called in order to avoid prejudicial delay in the vacancy process.
- (5) The Presbytery Clerk shall cause to have served upon the congregation or congregations an intimation in terms of Schedule B citing them to attend the meeting of Presbytery for their interest.
- (6) The consideration by Presbytery of any matter under this section shall not constitute an appeal or a Petition, and the decision of Presbytery shall be deemed to be a decision at first instance subject to the normal rights of appeal or dissent-and-complaint.

5. Advisory Panel

- (1) The Presbytery shall appoint a pool of at least three persons to be known as the Advisory Panel.
- (2) Members of the Advisory Panel shall provide advice and support to congregations in a vacancy and may do so individually or collectively, save as referred to in section 28, where the whole Advisory Panel shall act.
- (3) The Advisory Panel may comprise members of the Vacancy Procedure Committee and may contain individuals who are not members of the Presbytery. Members of the Advisory Panel shall initially be appointed for a term of two years, and may serve further terms.
- (4) Member(s) of the Advisory Panel shall meet:
 - (a) before the election of the Nominating Committee, with the Kirk Session (or Kirk Sessions both separately and together) of the vacant charge, to consider together in the light of the whole circumstances of the charge (i) what kind of ministry would be best suited to their needs, and (ii) the finalising of the Profile which has been prepared in accordance with section 13;
 - (b) with the Nominating Committee before it has taken any steps to fill the vacancy, to consider how it should proceed;
 - (c) with the Nominating Committee at any other time by request of either the Nominating Committee or a member of the Advisory Panel.

PART 4 – PRESBYTERY ACTIONS: RELEASE OF DEPARTING MINISTER, APPOINTMENT OF INTERIM MODERATOR AND PERMISSION TO CALL

6. Release of Departing Minister

Where the circumstances pertain to subsections 2(d), (e) or (f) above, the Vacancy Procedure Committee shall

- (1) except in cases governed by subsection (2) below, decide whether to release the minister from his or her charge and, in any case involving translation to another charge or introduction to an appointment, instruct him or her to await the instructions of the Presbytery or another Presbytery;
- (2) in the case of a minister in the first five years of his or her first charge (other than a Reviewable Charge), decide whether or not there are exceptional circumstances to justify releasing him or her from his or her charge and proceeding in terms of subsection (1) above;
- (3) determine whether a vacancy has arisen or is anticipated and, as soon as possible, determine the date upon which the charge becomes actually vacant, and
- (4) inform the congregation or congregations by one Sunday's pulpit intimation as soon as convenient;

The provisions of section 4 above shall apply to the decisions of the Vacancy Procedure Committee in terms of subsections (1) and (2) above.

7. Appointment of Interim Moderator

- (1) At the same time as the Vacancy Procedure Committee makes a decision in terms of section 6 above, or where circumstances pertain to subsections 2(a), (b) or (c) above, the Vacancy Procedure Committee shall appoint an Interim Moderator for the charge in terms of the Church Courts Act (Act VI 2023) and shall make intimation thereof to the congregation subject to the provisions of section 4 above.
- (2) The person appointed as an Interim Moderator shall not be a member in the vacant charge nor a member of the Vacancy Procedure Committee. The name of the Interim Moderator shall be forwarded to FAPLT.
- (3) Subject always to section 7(4), if the Interim Moderator appointed is a ministerial member of Presbytery, she/he is thereby disqualified from becoming an applicant or accepting an invitation to be considered in the current vacancy.

- (4) A ministerial member of Presbytery who has in the past served as an Interim Moderator in the charge is not subject to the disqualification set out in section 7(3) if one of the following conditions applies:
 - (a) The person was discharged as Interim Moderator at least two years prior to time of applying for the vacancy, or
 - (b) Intimation of the request to be discharged as Interim Moderator was given to the Presbytery Clerk prior to Permission to Call being given.

8. Duties of Interim Moderator

- (1) The Interim Moderator shall preside at all meetings of the Kirk Session (or of the Kirk Sessions in the case of a linked charge), save in the case of a Team Ministry where the Interim Moderator is not appointed to the Team Ministry Role which supplies the Moderator of the Kirk Session, in which case the Interim Moderator shall only preside in relation to vacancy business. The Interim Moderator shall also preside at all congregational meetings in connection with the vacancy, or at which the minister would have presided had there been a sitting minister. In the case of a congregational meeting called by the Presbytery in connection with adjustment the Interim Moderator, having constituted the meeting, shall relinquish the chair in favour of the representative of the Presbytery, but he or she shall be at liberty to speak at such a meeting. In consultation with the Kirk Session and the Financial Court he or she shall make arrangements for pulpit supply.
- (2) The Interim Moderator appointed in a prospective vacancy may call and preside at meetings of the Kirk Session and of the congregation for the transaction of business relating to the said prospective vacancy, ahead of the actual date of demission or translation. He or she shall be associated with the Kirk Session until the date of the actual vacancy; after that date he or she shall take full charge.
- (3) It shall be the duty of the Interim Moderator to ascertain whether or not the Kirk Session (or Kirk Sessions in the case of a linking or deferred linking or deferred union) may wish to follow the procedures contained in the Ministers and Deacons in Civil Partnerships and Same Sex Marriages Act (Act 1 2015), as regards making a decision on whether or not to depart (as "depart" is defined within that Act). Any such decision should be made after the Kirk Session(s) meets with the Advisory Panel.
- (4) The Interim Moderator shall act as an assessor to the Nominating Committee, being available to offer guidance and advice. If the Committee so desire he or she may act as their Convener, but in no case shall he or she have a vote.
- (5) In the event of the absence of the Interim Moderator, the Vacancy Procedure Committee shall appoint a member of the Presbytery who is not a member of the vacant congregation to fulfil any of the rights and duties of the Interim Moderator.

9. Permission to Call

When the decision to release the minister from the charge has been made and the Interim Moderator appointed, the Vacancy Procedure Committee shall consider whether to give Permission to Call, and such a decision shall be subject to the provisions of section 4 above. The Vacancy Procedure Committee must refer the question of Permission to Call to the Presbytery Committee holding appropriate delegated authority or to the Presbytery itself if:

- (a) a financial sustainability review of the charge in terms of section [X] of the PMP Act is underway (as to which the Vacancy Procedure Committee shall obtain confirmation from the Presbytery Clerk;
- (b) shortfalls exist which in the opinion of the Vacancy Procedure Committee require consideration in terms of section 10 hereunder;
- (c) the Vacancy Procedure Committee has reason to believe that the Vacancy Schedule referred to in section 11 below will not be approved;
- (d) the Manse is not currently available with vacant possession;
- (e) the Vacancy Procedure Committee has reason to believe that the Presbytery will, in terms of section 12 below, instruct work to be carried out on the Manse before a call can be sustained, and judges that the likely extent of such work warrants a delay in the granting of Permission to Call, or
- (f) the Vacancy Procedure Committee has reason to believe that the Presbytery may wish to delay or refuse the granting of Permission to Call for any reason.

Any decision to refuse Permission to Call shall be subject to appeal or dissent-and-complaint.

10. Shortfalls

- (1) As soon as possible after intimation of a vacancy or anticipated vacancy reaches the Presbytery Clerk, the Presbytery shall ascertain whether the charge has current or accumulated shortfalls in contributions to central funds, and shall determine whether and to what extent any shortfalls that exist are justified.
- (2) If the vacancy is in a charge in which the Presbytery has determined that shortfalls are to any extent unjustified, it shall not resolve to allow a call of any kind until:
 - (a) the shortfalls have been met to the extent to which the Presbytery determined that they were unjustified, or

- (b) a scheme for the payment of the unjustified shortfall has been agreed between the congregation and the Presbytery and receives the concurrence of the Assembly Trustees, or
- (c) a fresh assessment of the charge in terms of the PMP Act has been carried out, regardless of the status of the charge in the Approved Mission Plan; and:
 - (i) During such assessment no further steps may be taken in respect of filling the vacancy, and the Presbytery shall make final determination of what constitutes such steps, which may include suspension of the vacancy process.
 - (ii) Following such assessment and any consequent adjustment or deferred adjustment the shortfalls have been met or declared justifiable or a scheme has been agreed in terms of subsection 2(b) above; the Presbytery shall inform FAPLT and the Assembly Trustees of its decisions in terms of this section; and the Presbytery shall remove the suspension of vacancy process referred to in subsection 2(c)(i).

PART 5 – LOCAL FINANCIAL BOARD RESPONSIBILITIES: VACANCY SCHEDULE, MANSE, PARISH PROFILE AND ELECTORAL REGISTER

11. Vacancy Schedule

- (1) When in terms of sections 6 and 7 above the decision to release the minister from the charge has been made, the Interim Moderator has been appointed and Permission to Call has been granted, there shall be issued, by the Stewardship & Finance Department a Schedule or Schedules for completion by the responsible Financial Board(s) of the vacant congregation(s) in consultation with representatives of the Presbytery, setting forth the proposed arrangements for payment of ministerial expenses and for provision of a manse, showing the ministry requirements and details of any endowment income. The Schedule, along with an Extract Minute from each relevant Kirk Session containing a commitment fully and adequately to support the ministry, shall be forwarded to the Presbytery Clerk. For the avoidance of doubt, the Vacancy Schedule submitted to Presbytery shall include a recently completed Manse Condition Schedule following inspection of the manse of the charge.
- (2) The Schedule shall be considered by the Vacancy Procedure Committee and, if approved, transmitted to the Stewardship & Finance Department by the Presbytery Clerk. The Vacancy Procedure Committee or Presbytery must not sustain an appointment and call until the Schedule has been approved by them and by the Stewardship & Finance Department, exercising delegated powers on behalf of the Assembly Trustees, which shall intimate its decision within six weeks of receiving the Schedule from the Presbytery.
- (3) The accuracy of the Vacancy Schedule shall be kept under review by the Vacancy Procedure Committee.
- (4) The provisions of section 4 above shall apply to the decisions of the Vacancy Procedure Committee.

12. Manse

Where the Manse is vacant or becomes vacant, the Presbytery Property Committee shall inspect the Manse, consult with the Presbytery Buildings Officer and come to a view on what work, if any, must be carried out to render it suitable for a new incumbent. The views of the Property Committee shall then be communicated to the Presbytery which shall, subject to any modifications which might be agreed by that Court, instruct the Financial Board of the congregation to have the work carried out. As noted in sections 9(d) and (e), Permission to Call may be delayed if the Manse is not available with vacant possession or if that is warranted by the likely extent of work to be carried out on the Manse, and in particular, no induction date shall be fixed until the Presbytery Property Committee has again inspected the Manse and confirmed that all required work has been undertaken satisfactorily.

13. Parish Profile

Subject to the right to call having first been granted, the Kirk Session(s) shall prepare a Profile of each congregation and parish within the charge, in accordance with the template published in the Guidelines for Kirk Sessions. In the case of a linked charge, this shall take the form of a single document, with separate sections for each constituent congregation. In all cases the Profile shall contain, as an Appendix, a copy of the current Mission Action Plan on each constituent congregation produced in accordance with the Presbytery Mission Plan Act (Act VIII 2021). The draft Profile(s) shall then be submitted to the Advisory Panel, prior to its meeting with the Kirk Session(s) (section 5(4)(a)), for possible comment and revision.

14. Electoral Register

- (1) The Kirk Session shall keep each of its Communion Roll and Adherents' Roll up to date in accordance with the Communion Rolls and Adherents' Rolls Act (Act [] 2025). The persons on each of those Rolls shall together constitute the Electoral Register of the congregation/charge.

- (2) At least one week before intimation is given in term of section 15 below that a Nominating Committee is to be appointed the Session Clerk shall send the current Electoral Register to the Presbytery Clerk and that shall constitute the Electoral Register for the purposes of subsequent sections of this Act, amended thereafter only as specified in this section 14.
- (3) If, after the Electoral Register is sent to the Presbytery Clerk in terms of subsection (2) above, any communicant is given a Certificate of Transference, or any person's name is removed from the Communion or Adherents' Roll, the Session Clerk shall delete that person's name from the Electoral Register and initial the deletion. Such a Certificate shall be granted only when application for it has been made in writing, and the said written application shall be retained until the vacancy is ended.
- (4) The Session Clerk shall only update the Electoral Register to reflect any additions to the Communion Roll or Adherents' Roll where a reinstatement and extension of Permission to Call is granted in terms of section 28 of this Act.

PART 6: THE NOMINATING COMMITTEE

15. Appointment of Nominating Committee

- (1) Once the Electoral Register has been sent to the Presbytery Clerk in terms of section 14(2), intimation in terms of Schedule C shall be made that a meeting of the congregation is to be held to appoint a Committee of its own number for the purpose of nominating one person to the congregation to be elected as their minister.
- (2) (a) The Interim Moderator shall preside at this meeting, and the Session Clerk, or in his or her absence a person appointed by the meeting, shall act as Clerk.
- (b) The Interim Moderator shall remind the congregation of the number of members it is required to appoint to the Nominating Committee, as determined by the Vacancy Procedure Committee, and shall call for Nominations. To constitute a valid Nomination, the name of a person on the Electoral Register has to be proposed and seconded by another person whose name is on the Electoral Register, and assurance given by the proposer that the person is prepared to act on the Committee. The Clerk shall take a note of all Nominations in the order in which they are made.
- (c) For the avoidance of doubt, a member of a vacant charge shall not be eligible for nomination to serve on a Nominating Committee, if he or she is:
 - (i) a minister (including a retired minister) of the Church of Scotland,
 - (ii) a member of the diaconate of the Church of Scotland,
 - (iii) an employee of the vacant charge,
 - (iv) an employee of FAPLT who works in the vacant charge, or
 - (v) the spouse or civil partner, of an outgoing minister, or of any Team Minister, or of any former minister of the charge.
- (d) When it appears to the Interim Moderator that the Nominations are complete, they shall be read to the congregation and an opportunity given for any withdrawals. If the number of persons nominated does not exceed the maximum fixed in terms of subsection (4) below there is no need for a vote, and the Interim Moderator shall declare that these persons constitute a Nominating Committee.
- (e) If the number exceeds the maximum the election shall proceed by a system of written ballot devised by the Kirk Session to suit the size of the congregation and approved by the Vacancy Procedure Committee or the Presbytery. In either case, in the event of a tie for the last place a further vote shall be taken between or among those tying.
- (f) The Interim Moderator shall, at the same meeting or as soon thereafter as the result of any ballot has been determined, announce the names of those thus elected to serve on the Nominating Committee, and intimate to them the time and place of their first meeting; which may be immediately after the congregational meeting provided that has been intimated along with the intimation of the congregational meeting.
- (3) Where there is an agreement between the Presbytery and the congregation or congregations that the minister to be inducted shall serve in a Parish Grouping or with part of their time in a Presbytery-designated role, that agreement may specify that the Presbytery is entitled to appoint up to two non-voting representatives to serve on the Nominating Committee.
- (4) When the vacancy is in a linked charge, or when a union or linking of congregations has been agreed but not yet effected, or when there is agreement to a deferred union or a deferred linking, or where the appointment is to more than one post, the Vacancy Procedure Committee shall, subject to the provisions of section 4 above determine how the number who will act on the Nominating Committee will be allocated among the congregations involved, unless provision for this has already been made in the Basis of Union or Basis of Linking as the case may be.
- (5) The Nominating Committee shall not have power to co-opt additional members but the relevant Kirk Session shall have power when necessary to appoint a replacement for any of its appointees who ceases, by death or resignation, to be a member of the

Nominating Committee, or who, by falling ill or by moving away from the area, is unable to serve as a member of it.

16. Constitution of the Nominating Committee

It shall be the duty of the Interim Moderator to summon and preside at the first meeting of the Nominating Committee, which may be held at the close of the congregational meeting at which it is appointed and at which the Committee shall appoint a Convener and a Clerk. The Clerk, who need not be a member of the Committee, shall keep regular minutes of all proceedings. The Convener shall have a deliberative vote (if he or she is not the Interim Moderator) but shall in no case have a casting vote. If the Clerk is not a member of the Committee, he or she shall have no vote. At all meetings of the Committee only those present shall be entitled to vote.

17. Task of the Nominating Committee

- (1) The Nominating Committee shall have the duty of nominating one person to the congregation to be elected as minister.
- (2) It shall proceed by a process of announcement in a monthly vacancy list, application and interview, and may also advertise, receive recommendations and pursue enquiries in other ways. The Nominating Committee shall make available to all applicants and enquirers the Profile and Appendix specified in section 13. Regardless of how such individuals may initially have been approached or identified, no individual shall be considered as a candidate for the vacancy unless he or she has first submitted a formal application.
- (3) The Nominating Committee shall make themselves aware of the roles of the other members of any Team Ministry as described in section 7(10) of the PMP Act and may meet with them for this purpose.

PART 7 – WHO CAN BE CALLED AS THE MINISTER

18. Eligibility for Election

- (1) The following categories of persons, and no others, are eligible to be nominated, elected, and called as ministers of parishes in the Church of Scotland, but always subject, where appropriate, to the provisions of the Admission and Readmission of Ministers Act (Act XIII 2022):
 - (a) A minister holding Category O registration, in terms of the Registration of Ministries Act (Act II 2017);
 - (b) A minister who has applied for Category O registration, whose application is currently under consideration, provided that before the call can be sustained or the minister in question inducted, Category O registration must have been granted;
 - (c) A Graduate Candidate holding an Exit Certificate or a Graduate Candidate's Certificate in terms of section 22A of the Selection and Training for Full-Time Ministry Act (Act X 2004).
 - (d) The holder of a Certificate of Eligibility or of a Temporary Certificate of Eligibility, in either case in terms of the Admission and Readmission of Ministers Act (Act XIII 2022).
- (2) Notwithstanding section (1) above, the following categories of persons shall not be eligible to apply for vacancies:
 - (a) Anyone who has served as an Interim Moderator in the current vacancy unless the conditions set out in section 7(4) apply.
 - (b) A person who is the subject of ongoing proceedings being undertaken in accordance with the Discipline Act (Act I 2019).
 - (c) A person who is not a member of, or cannot become a member of, the PVG Scheme, as defined in the Safeguarding Act (Act XVI 2018) and in addition, in the case of a minister who has lived outwith the UK for 12 months or more (whether continuous or in total) in the last ten years, who cannot exhibit appropriate Safeguarding clearance, including a criminal record check, satisfactory to the Presbytery and the Safeguarding Service, from the appropriate government/agency in the relevant jurisdiction(s).

19. Undue Influence

- (1) Ministers occupying positions within a Team Ministry in the charge, or larger area including the charge, and former holders of such positions, shall be eligible to apply and shall not by virtue of office be deemed to have exercised undue influence in securing the call.
- (2) A *locum tenens* or Assistant Minister in the vacant charge shall not by virtue of office be deemed to have exercised undue influence in securing the Call.
- (3) Any person nominated to a charge shall in accepting a Call provide an assurance that no undue influence has been used by the person appointed or by others to secure the Call.
- (4) The Presbytery has a duty to take into consideration any evidence or allegation that undue influence has been used to secure the Call.

20 Team Ministry

An Interim Moderator shall be appointed in relation to vacancy business where there is a Team Ministry and one of the ministers in the team demits from his or her Role. Where the Team Ministry Role of the minister in question included being Moderator of the Kirk session, then the Interim Moderator shall also fulfil that role.

21. Temporary Certificates of Eligibility

A minister who holds a Temporary Certificate of Eligibility shall, if inducted to a charge, be inducted for a period of three years only, extendable on one occasion only in accordance with the provisions of section 12(b) of the Admission and Readmission of Ministers Act (Act XIII 2022).

PART 8 – THE NEW MINISTER

22. Nomination

- (1) Before the candidate is asked to accept Nomination, the Interim Moderator shall ensure that the candidate is given an adequate opportunity to see the whole ecclesiastical buildings (including the Manse) pertaining to the congregation, and to meet privately with all members of staff of the charge and/or of any members of a Team Ministry. Furthermore, the candidate shall be provided with:
 - (a) a copy of the Approved Mission Plan and of any current Basis of Adjustment or Basis of Reviewable Charge;
 - (b) copies of the most recent annual report and accounts for each congregation of the charge, as approved by an independent examiner;
 - (c) copies of the most recent quinquennial inspection reports in relation to the buildings of the charge; and
 - (d) a copy of the current Action Plan for each constituent congregation in the charge.
 The candidate shall acknowledge receipt of the above documents in writing to the Interim Moderator.
- (2) Before the Nominating Committee reports the identity of the nominee to the Kirk Session and Presbytery, it shall report the process followed to the Advisory Panel (by electronic means if desired) who shall give any further advice it or they deem necessary.
- (3) Before any Nomination is intimated to the Kirk Session and Presbytery Clerk, the Clerk to the Nominating Committee shall secure the written consent thereto of the nominee.
- (4) Before reporting the Nomination to the Vacancy Procedure Committee, the Presbytery Clerk shall obtain from the nominee or Interim Moderator evidence of the eligibility of the nominee to be appointed to the charge.
 - (a) In the case of a minister being a member of Presbytery, this shall constitute a certified extract from the Register of Ministry showing that the minister has Category O registration.
 - (b) In the case of a minister not being a member of any Presbytery of the Church of Scotland, this shall constitute an Exit Certificate or Graduate Candidate's Certificate in terms of Act X 2004, or a Certificate of Eligibility or Temporary Certificate of Eligibility in terms of the Admission and Readmission of Ministers Act (Act XIII 2022).
 - (c) In addition, in the case of a minister in the first five years of his or her first charge, an extract minute shall be obtained either from the Vacancy Procedure Committee of his or her current Presbytery, or from that Presbytery, exceptionally releasing the minister.
 - (d) In the case of all ministers, this shall include evidence of membership of the PVG Scheme, as defined in the Safeguarding Act (Act XVI 2018), or of application for such membership, provided always that
 - (i) no induction shall take place until evidence of PVG Scheme membership is exhibited, and
 - (ii) where the minister has lived outwith the UK for 12 months or more (whether continuous or in total) in the last ten years, the minister shall exhibit appropriate Safeguarding clearance, including a criminal record check, satisfactory to the Presbytery and the Safeguarding Service, from the appropriate government/ agency in the relevant jurisdiction(s).

23. Preaching by Nominee

- (1) The Interim Moderator, on receiving notice of the Nominating Committee's Nomination, shall arrange that the nominee conduct public worship in the vacant church or churches, normally within four Sundays of receipt of the Nomination, and that the ballot take place immediately after each such service.
- (2) The Interim Moderator shall arrange for intimation to be made on the two preceding Sundays regarding the arrangements made in connection with the preaching by the nominee and the ballot thereafter, all in terms of Schedule D.

24. Election of Minister

- (1) The Interim Moderator shall normally preside at all congregational meetings connected with the election, which shall be in all cases by ballot, and shall normally be in charge of the ballot.

- (2) The Interim Moderator may invite one or more persons (not being persons whose names are on the Electoral Register of the vacant congregation) to assist him or her in the conduct of a ballot vote.
- (3) When a deferred union or deferred linking is involved the Interim Moderator shall consult and reach agreement with the minister or Interim Moderator of the other congregation regarding the arrangements for the conduct of public worship in these congregations by the nominee as in section 23(1) above. The Interim Moderator shall in writing appoint a member of Presbytery to take full charge of the ballot vote for the other congregation. If there is a minister already inducted in another congregation in terms of a deferred union or deferred linking, he or she shall not be so appointed, nor shall he or she be in any way involved in the conduct of the election.

25. Ballot Procedure

- (1) The Kirk Session shall arrange to have available at the time of election a sufficient supply of voting-papers printed in the form of Schedule E hereto, and these shall be put into the custody of the Interim Moderator who shall preside at the election, assisted as in section 24 above. He or she shall issue on request to any person whose name is on the Electoral Register a voting-paper, noting on the Register that this has been done. Facilities shall be provided whereby the voter may mark the paper in secrecy, and a ballot-box shall be available wherein the paper is to be deposited when marked. The Interim Moderator may assist any person who asks for help in respect of completing the voting-paper, but no other person whatever shall communicate with the voter at this stage. The Interim Moderator, or the deputy appointed by him or her, shall be responsible for the safe custody of ballot-box, papers and Electoral Register.
- (2) As soon as practicable, and at latest within twenty-four hours after the close of the voting, the Interim Moderator shall constitute the Kirk Session, or the joint Kirk Sessions when more than one congregation is involved, and in the presence of a quorum of the Kirk Session(s), shall proceed with the counting of the votes, in which he or she may be assisted as provided in section 24 above. When more than one ballot-box has been used and when the votes of more than one congregation are involved, all ballot-boxes shall be emptied and the voting-papers shall be mixed together before counting begins so that the preponderance of votes in one area or in one congregation shall not be disclosed.
- (3) A voting-paper shall only be considered as spoilt and the vote not counted where the intention of the voter is unclear, and in no other circumstances. It shall be for the Kirk Session, on the recommendation of the Interim Moderator, to determine whether the intention of the voter is clear.
- (4) If the number voting For exceeds the number voting Against the nominee shall be declared elected and the Nominating Committee shall be deemed to be discharged.
- (5) If the number voting For is equal to or less than the number voting Against, the Interim Moderator shall declare that there has been failure to elect and that the Nominating Committee is deemed to have been discharged. He or she shall proceed with the election of a fresh Nominating Committee in terms of section 15 above, without further reference to the Presbytery.
- (6) After the counting has been completed the Interim Moderator shall sign a declaration in one of the forms of Schedule F hereto, and this shall be recorded in the minute of the Kirk Session or of the Kirk Sessions. In presence of the Kirk Session the Interim Moderator shall then seal up the voting-papers along with the marked copy of the Electoral Register, and these shall be transmitted to the Presbytery Clerk in due course along with the other documents specified in section 29(1) below.
- (7) The congregational meeting connected with the election may be held in hybrid form, and in that event the terms of the Protocol agreed at the Commission of Assembly on 30 November 2023, which are appended in Schedule 2 to this Act, shall apply.

26. Withdrawal of Nominee

- (1) Should a nominee intimate withdrawal before he or she has preached as nominee, the Nominating Committee shall continue its task and seek to nominate another nominee.
- (2) Should a nominee intimate withdrawal after he or she has been elected, the Nominating Committee having been discharged, the Interim Moderator shall proceed with the election of a fresh Nominating Committee in terms of section 15 above, without further reference to the Presbytery.

27. The Call

- (1) The Interim Moderator shall, along with the intimation regarding the result of the voting, intimate the arrangements made for those on the Electoral Register of the congregation, during a period of not less than eight days prescribed within a two week window, to subscribe the Call (Schedule G). Intimation shall be in the form of Schedule H hereto.
- (2) The Call may be subscribed on behalf of an individual on the Electoral Register not present to sign in person, provided a mandate authorising such subscription is produced

as in Schedule I. All such entries shall be initialled by the Interim Moderator or by the member of the Kirk Session appending them.

- (3) Those eligible to sign the Call shall be all those whose names appear on the Electoral Register. A paper of concurrence in the Call may be signed by persons associated with the congregation whose names have not been entered on the Electoral Register.

28. Failure to Nominate

The exercise by a congregation of its right to call a minister shall be subject to a time-limit of twelve months; this period shall be calculated from the date when intimation is given of the grant of Permission to Call.

If no election has been made and intimated to the Presbytery by the expiry of that time then the Permission to Call expires and the Presbytery shall review the matter. Thereafter the Presbytery may either (1) resolve to review the relevant aspects of the Approved Mission Plan in accordance with the PMP Act or (2) if the Presbytery is still satisfied that a minister should be appointed, resolve that the Permission to Call shall be reinstated and the Presbytery shall proceed in one of the following ways:

- grant an extension, which shall usually be for a further six months and instruct the Kirk Session to revise and update the Parish Profile in line with the template published in the Guidelines for Kirk Sessions. If no appointment is made in this further period, the Presbytery shall proceed again in terms of this section of the Act and may select any option, including further extensions;
- instruct that a fresh Nominating Committee be elected in terms of section 15 above, subject to a further time-limit on the right to call of six months, calculated from the date that Presbytery so resolves. The process shall then be followed in terms of this Act from the point of the election of the Nominating Committee; or
- take steps to make such an appointment, proceeding as follows:–
 - (i) The Presbytery shall discharge the Nominating Committee, instruct the Advisory Panel as a whole to bring forward to a subsequent Presbytery meeting the name of an eligible individual for appointment to the charge and intimate this instruction to the congregation. If satisfied with the recommendation brought by the Advisory Panel, the Presbytery shall thereupon make the appointment.
 - (ii) The Presbytery Clerk shall thereupon intimate to the person concerned the fact of his or her appointment, shall request him or her to forward a letter of acceptance along with a certified extract from the Register of Ministry showing that the minister has Category O registration or other evidence of eligibility to be called in terms of section 18(1) above, as the case may be, together with evidence of membership of the PVG Scheme, as defined in the Safeguarding Act (Act XVI 2018) (and in addition if applicable Safeguarding clearance as specified in section 22(4)(d)(ii) above), and shall arrange with him or her to conduct public worship in the vacant church or churches on an early Sunday.
 - (iii) The Presbytery Clerk shall cause intimation to be made in the form of Schedule J that the person appointed will conduct public worship on the day specified and that a Call in the usual form will lie with the Session Clerk or other suitable person, for not less than eight free days within a two week window, to receive the signatures of the congregation. The conditions governing the signing of the Call shall be as in section 26 above.
 - (iv) At the expiry of the time allowed, the Call shall be transmitted by the Session Clerk to the Presbytery Clerk who shall lay it, along with the documents referred to in sub-paragraph (ii) above, before the Presbytery at its first ordinary meeting or at a Specific Purpose meeting.

PART 9 – CONFIRMING THE NOMINATION

29. Transmission of Documents

- (1) After an election or appointment has been made the Interim Moderator shall secure from the person appointed (i) a letter of acceptance of the appointment, (ii) evidence of Category O registration in the form of a certified extract from the Register of Ministry (or other evidence of eligibility to be called in terms of section 18(1) above, as the case may be), (iii) evidence of membership of the PVG Scheme, as defined in the Safeguarding Act (Act XVI 2018) (iv) in addition, if applicable, Safeguarding clearance as specified in section 22(4)(d)(ii) above) and (v) a letter of assurance that no undue influence has been used by the person appointed or by others to secure the Call.
- (2) The Interim Moderator shall then without delay transmit the relevant documents to the Presbytery Clerk. These are:
- the minute of Nomination by the Nominating Committee,
 - all intimations made to the congregation thereafter,
 - the declaration of the election and appointment,
 - the voting-papers,
 - the marked copy of the Register,
 - the letter of acceptance,

- evidence of Category O registration in the form of a certified extract from the Register of Ministry, (or other evidence of eligibility to be called in terms of section 18(1) above, as the case may be), and
- evidence of membership of the PVG Scheme, as defined in the Safeguarding Act (Act XVI 2018) (and in addition if applicable Safeguarding clearance as specified in section 22(4)(d)(ii) above).

He or she shall also inform the Presbytery Clerk of the steps taken in connection with the signing of the Call, and shall arrange that, at the expiry of the period allowed for subscription, the Call shall be transmitted by the Session Clerk to the Presbytery Clerk.

- (3) After the person elected has been inducted to the charge the Presbytery Clerk shall:
- (a) deliver to him or her the approved copy of the Vacancy Schedule referred to in section 11(2) above, and
 - (b) destroy the intimations and voting-papers lodged with him or her in terms of subsection (2) above and ensure that confidential documents and correspondence held locally are destroyed.

30. Sustaining the Call

- (1) All of the documents listed in section 29 above shall be laid before the Vacancy Procedure Committee which may resolve to sustain the Call and determine arrangements for the induction of the new minister, subject to (a) a request for the release, if appropriate, of the minister from his or her current charge in terms of this Act and (b) the provisions of section 4 above as to decisions of the Vacancy Procedure Committee. The Moderator of the Presbytery shall, if no ordinary meeting of the Presbytery falls before the proposed induction date, call a Specific Purpose meeting for the induction.
- (2) In the event that the matter comes before the Presbytery in terms of section 4 above, the procedure shall be as follows:-
 - (a) The Call and other relevant documents having been laid on the table the Presbytery shall hear any person whom it considers to have an interest. In particular any member of the Advisory Panel shall be entitled to be heard if he or she so desires, or the Presbytery may ask for a report from him or her. The Presbytery shall then decide whether to sustain the appointment in terms of subsection (1) above, and in doing so shall give consideration to the number of signatures on the Call. It may delay reaching a decision and return the Call to the Kirk Session to give further opportunity for it to be subscribed.
 - (b) If the Presbytery sustain an appointment and Call to a Graduate Candidate, and there be no appeal tendered in due form against its judgement, it shall appoint the day and hour and place at which the ordination and induction will take place.
 - (c) If the Presbytery sustain an appointment and Call to a minister of the Church of Scotland not being a minister of a parish, or to a minister of another denomination, and there be no ecclesiastical impediment, the Presbytery shall appoint the day and hour and place at which the induction will take place.
- (3) In the event that the Call is not sustained, the Presbytery shall determine either (1) to give more time for it to be signed in terms of section 27 above or (2) to proceed in terms of subsection (1) or (2)(b) or (2)(c) of section 28 above.
- (4) No Call shall be sustained until the following evidence has been laid before the Vacancy Procedure Committee:
 - (i) that the new minister has Category O registration, in the form of a certified extract from the Register of Ministry (or other evidence of eligibility to be called in terms of section 18(1) above, as the case may be),
 - (ii) that the new minister is a member of the PVG Scheme, as defined in the Safeguarding Act (Act XVI 2018) and
 - (iii) in addition, if applicable, Safeguarding clearance as specified in section 22(4)(d)(ii) above.

PART 10 – SERVICES OF ORDINATION, INDUCTION AND INTRODUCTION

31. Admission to a charge

- (1) When the Presbytery has appointed a day for the ordination and induction of a Graduate Candidate, or for the induction of a minister already ordained, the Clerk shall arrange for an intimation in the form of Schedule K to be read to the congregation on the two Sundays preceding the day appointed.
- (2) At the time and place named in the intimation, the Presbytery having been constituted, the Moderator shall call for the return of the intimation attested as having been duly served. If the minister is being translated from another Presbytery, the relevant minute of that Presbytery or of its Vacancy Procedure Committee agreeing to translation shall also be laid on the table. Any objection, to be valid at this stage, must have been intimated to the Presbytery Clerk at the objector's earliest opportunity, must be strictly directed to life or doctrine and must be substantiated immediately to the satisfaction of the Presbytery, in which case procedure shall be sisted and the

Presbytery shall take appropriate steps to deal with the situation that has arisen. Otherwise the Presbytery shall proceed with the ordination and induction, or with the induction, as hereunder.

- (3) The Presbytery shall proceed to the place of worship where public worship shall be conducted by those appointed for the purpose. The Clerk shall read a brief narrative of the cause of the vacancy and of the steps taken for the call and election of a new minister. The Moderator, having read the Preamble, shall, addressing him or her by name, put to the person to be inducted the questions prescribed Satisfactory answers having been given, the person to be inducted shall sign the Formula. If he or she has not already been ordained, the person to be inducted shall then kneel, if able to do so, and the Moderator by prayer and the imposition of hands, in which members of the Presbytery, appointed by the Presbytery for the purpose, and other ordained persons associated with it, if invited to share in such imposition of hands, shall join, shall ordain him or her to the office of the Holy Ministry. Prayer being ended, the Moderator shall say, "I now declare you to have been ordained to the office of the Holy Ministry, and in name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the King and Head of the Church, and by authority of this Presbytery, I induct you to this charge, and in token thereof we give you the right hand of fellowship". The Moderator with all other members of Presbytery present and those associated with it shall then give the right hand of fellowship. The Moderator shall then put the prescribed question to the members of the congregation. Suitable charges to the new minister and to the congregation shall then be given by the Moderator or by a minister appointed by the Presbytery for the purpose.
- (4) When an ordained minister is being inducted to a charge, the act of ordination shall not be repeated and the relevant words shall be omitted from the declaration. In other respects the procedure shall be as in subsection (3) above.
- (5) When the appointment is for a limited or potentially limited period (including to a Reviewable Charge, or where the minister holds a Temporary Certificate of Eligibility in terms of section 21 above) the service shall proceed as in subsections (3) or (4) above except that in the declaration the Moderator shall say "I induct you to this charge on the Basis of [specific Act and Section] and in terms of Minute of Presbytery of date"
- (6) After the service the Presbytery shall resume its session, when the name of the new minister shall be added to the Roll of Presbytery, and the Clerk shall be instructed to send certified intimation of the induction to the Session Clerk to be engrossed in the minutes of the first meeting of Kirk Session thereafter, and, in the case of a translation from another Presbytery or where the minister was prior to the induction subject to the supervision of another Presbytery, to the Clerk of that Presbytery. The Presbytery Clerk shall also send intimation of the induction to the national offices, to FAPLT and to the Payroll Department at the national offices.

32. Service of Introduction

- (1) When a minister has been appointed to a linked charge the Presbytery shall determine in which of the churches of the linking the induction is to take place. This shall be a service of induction to the charge, in consequence of which the person inducted shall become minister of each of the congregations embraced in the linking. The intimation regarding the induction, which shall be in terms of Schedule K, shall be read in all of the churches concerned. There shall be no other service of induction, but if the churches are far distant from one another, or for other good reason, the Presbytery may appoint a service of introduction to be held in the other church or churches.
- (2) In any case of deferred union or deferred linking the minister elected and appointed shall be inducted "to the vacant congregation of A in deferred union (or linking) with the congregation of B" and there shall be no need for any further act to establish his or her position as minister of the united congregation or of the linked congregation as the case may be. The Presbytery, however, shall in such a case arrange a service of introduction to the newly united congregation of AB or the newly linked congregation of B.
- (3) When an appointment has been made to an extra-parochial office wholly or mainly under control of the Church (healthcare chaplaincy, prison, workplace or university, full-time clerkship, professor or lecturer in an accredited institution as defined in Act X 2004 etc.) the Presbytery may deem it appropriate to arrange a service of introduction to take place in a church or chapel suitable to the occasion.
- (4) When an appointment has been made to a parochial appointment other than that of an inducted minister, the Presbytery may arrange a service of introduction to take place within the parish. If ordination is involved, suitable arrangements shall be made and intimation shall be given in terms of Schedule L.
- (5) A service of introduction not involving ordination shall follow the lines of an induction except that instead of putting the normal questions to the minister the Moderator shall ask him or her to affirm the vows taken at his or her ordination. Where the service, in terms of subsection (3) or (4) above, includes the ordination of the minister, the vows shall be put in full. In either case, in the declaration the Moderator in place of "I induct you to" shall say, "I welcome you as"

- (6) When an appointment is for a limited or potentially limited period (including an appointment in terms of section 21 above) the service shall proceed as in subsection (4) and (5) above and the Moderator in welcoming the new minister shall specify the basis of the appointment.

33. Minister's name on Communion Roll.

Upon induction, or where appropriate in the case of introduction, the minister's name shall be added to the Communion Roll of the charge.

PART 11 – MISCELLANEOUS

34. Guidelines

FAPLT shall prepare and issue Guidelines for (a) Interim Moderators and Kirk Sessions, (b) Nominating Committees, (c) Advisory Panels, and (d) compiling Parish Profiles, in order to facilitate procedures in this Act. Such Guidelines shall be kept under review and shall be updated periodically to reflect current Church law, policy and practice.

35. Intimations & notices

- (1) For the purposes of this Act intimations to congregations may be made (a) orally during an act of worship, or (b) in written intimations distributed to the whole congregation provided that the congregation's attention is specifically drawn to the presence of an intimation there in terms of this Act.
- (2) Any notices or intimations may be made or sent by electronic means.
- (3) Confirmation that all required intimations have been duly made on the correct number of Sundays shall be sent by the Session Clerk to the Presbytery Clerk before the service of induction or introduction.

36. Effective date, Repeal, Amendments and Transitional Provisions

- (1) This Act shall come into force when agreed by the General Assembly. The existing Vacancy Procedure Act (Act VIII 2003) (as amended) is repealed on the same date; all other legislation prior to this Act shall be construed in conformity with this Act.
- (2) Notwithstanding subsection (1) above, the repeal of Act VIII 2003 as amended shall not affect the operation of the said Act (or Deliverances of the General Assembly in pursuance thereof) prior to the repeal of the said Act, or anything done or suffered under the said Act or related Deliverances; and any rights or obligations acquired or incurred thereunder shall have effect as if the said Act had not been repealed.
- (3) Where a charge has been given Permission to Call on or after 1 June 2025, this Act shall apply to all process under this Act following thereafter, but where Permission to Call was granted prior to 1 June 2025, then Act VIII 2003 shall continue to apply to all process, provided that in the case of any charge where Permission to Call was granted prior to 1 June 2025 and process has not concluded as 31 December 2025, that process shall thereafter switch to be followed to conclusion under this Act and Act VIII 2003 shall no longer apply.

SCHEDULE 1: INTIMATION SCHEDULES (A TO L)

A NOTICE OF DECISION OF VACANCY PROCEDURE COMMITTEE – Section 4(1)

To be read on one Sunday

Notice is hereby given that the Vacancy Procedure Committee of the Presbytery of proposes [proposed course of action]. This action will proceed unless at least four persons, who are either communicant members of this congregation of X [and Y]* or full members of Presbytery, together or separately submit to the Presbytery Clerk a request for this proposal to be considered at the next meeting of the Presbytery. Any such request must set out the relevant reasons.

You should submit any such request in writing to [name and postal address of Presbytery Clerk] by [date seven days after date of this intimation].

If four valid requests are received, then [state the proposed course of action] will be suspended and the approval of Presbytery will be required.

A B Presbytery Clerk

**refer to other congregation(s) if a linked charge*

NB this intimation is also to be displayed as prominently as possible at the church building for seven days

B NOTICE CITING A CONGREGATION TO ATTEND – Section 4(5)

To be read on one Sunday

Notice is hereby given that in connection with the [anticipated] vacancy in this congregation of X [and Y]*, a valid request has been made for the matter of [here insert action or permission which had been proposed] to be considered by the Presbytery. [The proposed course of action] is in the meantime suspended

The Presbytery will meet to consider this matter aton the day of at o'clock. Any member of this congregation of X [and Y]* may attend that meeting and Presbytery shall hear any person whom it considers to have an interest.

A B Presbytery Clerk

**refer to other congregation(s) if a linked charge*

C ELECTION OF NOMINATING COMMITTEE – Section 15(1)

To be read on two Sundays

Notice is hereby given that a meeting of this congregation of X [and Y]* will be held in the Church [or other arrangement may be given here] on Sunday at the close of morning [or other main occasion of] worship for the purpose of appointing a Nominating Committee. The task of the Nominating Committee will be to nominate one person to this congregation of X [and Y]* to be the new minister.

At that meeting, the congregation shall be invited to elect [number of persons] people, who are on the Electoral Roll of this congregation of X [and Y]*, to serve on the Nominating Committee. If you wish to propose anyone to serve on the Committee you may do so at the meeting providing the person has indicated a willingness to serve.

C D Interim Moderator

**refer to other congregation(s) if a linked charge*

D NOTICE OF NOMINATION – Section 23(2)

To be read on two Sundays

At a meeting held at..... on, the Nominating Committee chose the person who they wish to propose to this congregation of X [and Y]* to be our new minister. The name of the person proposed is **

Arrangements have been made for [give name again], to conduct public worship in this Church on Sunday the day of at o'clock.

Immediately after that service, there will be a vote on whether or not [Name] should be appointed as the new minister of this congregation of X [and Y]*. Anyone whose name appears on the Electoral Register of this congregation of X [and Y]* shall be entitled to vote. No-one else shall be entitled to vote.

C D Interim Moderator

**refer to other congregation(s) if a linked charge*

*** The name and status of the person should at this point be entered in full*

E VOTING-PAPER – Section 25(1)

FOR Electing [Name]	
AGAINST Electing [Name]	

Directions to Voters – If you are in favour of electing [Name] put a cross (x) on the upper right-hand space. If you are not in favour of electing [Name] put a cross (x) in the lower right-hand space. Mark your voting-paper in this way with a cross, and put no other mark on your voting-paper or your vote may not be counted.

Note: The Directions to Voters must be printed prominently on the face of the voting-paper.

F DECLARATION OF ELECTION RESULT – Section 25(6)

I hereby declare the results of the voting for the election and appointment of a minister to the vacant charge of *..... to be as follows.

FOR Electing [Name]: [No of votes]

AGAINST Electing [Name]: [No of votes]

EITHER

(1) Therefore, [Name] has accordingly been elected and appointed as the new minister subject to the approval of Presbytery.

OR

(2) In consequence of this vote there has been a failure to elect. The Nominating Committee is deemed to have been discharged. [Continue in terms of Schedule C if appropriate.]

Date

C D Interim Moderator

* Here enter details

G THE CALL – Section 27(1)**Form of Call**

We, members and adherents of the Church of Scotland and of the congregation known as *....., being without a minister, address this Call to be our minister to you, [Name]....., of whose gifts and qualities we have been assured, and we warmly invite you to accept this Call, promising that we shall devote ourselves with you to worship, witness, mission and service in this parish, and also to the furtherance of these in the world, to the glory of God and for the advancement of His Kingdom.

* Here enter details

Paper of Concurrence

We, persons associated with the congregation of the Church of Scotland known as *..... concur in the Call addressed by that congregation to [Name]..... to be their minister.

* Here enter details

Note: The Call and Paper of Concurrence should be dated and attested by the Interim Moderator before they are transmitted to the Clerk of the Presbytery.

H SUBSCRIBING THE CALL – Section 27(1)**To be read on at least one Sunday**

Notice is hereby given that this congregation of X [and Y]* has elected [Name] to be our new minister and a Call to the said [Name] has been prepared. This Call will lie in [Place]..... from..... theday of [Month]..... until [Date which is at least eight days later], between the hours of and During that time any person whose name is on the Electoral Register of the congregation may sign the Call in person or by means of a mandate.

If a mandate is to be used, the relevant form may be obtained from the Session Clerk.

A paper of Concurrence will also be available for signature by any person who is connected with the congregation but whose name is not on the Electoral Register of the congregation. Children are also welcome to add their names to this paper.

C D Interim Moderator

*refer to other congregation(s) if a linked charge

I MANDATE TO SIGN CALL – Section 27(2)

I,* of **....., being a person whose name is on the Electoral Register of the congregation, hereby authorise the Session Clerk, or other member of Session, to add my name to the Call addressed to [Name] to be our new minister.

(Signed)

* Here enter full name in block capitals

** Here enter address in full

J CITATION IN CASE OF NOMINATION BY PRESBYTERY – Section 28(c)(iii)

To be read on one Sunday

Notice is hereby given that [Name], whom the Presbytery has appointed to be minister of this congregation of X [and Y]* will conduct public worship in the Church on Sunday the day of at o'clock.

A Call addressed to the said [Name] will lie in [Place]..... from the day of between the hours of and during the day and between the hours of and in the evening, until [Date which is at least eight days later]. During that time any person whose name is on the Electoral Register of the congregation may sign the Call in person or by means of a mandate.

If a mandate is to be used, the relevant form may be obtained from the Session Clerk.

A paper of Concurrence will also be available for signature by any person who is connected with the congregation but whose name is not on the Electoral Register of the congregation. Children are also welcome to add their names to this paper.

The Presbytery will meet to deal with the appointment and Call at on the day of at o'clock. Any member of the congregation may attend that meeting.

A B Presbytery Clerk

*refer to other congregation(s) if a linked charge

K NOTICE OF INDUCTION – Section 31(1) and section 32(1)

To be read on two Sundays

Notice is hereby given that the Presbytery of has received a Call from this congregation of X [and Y]* addressed to [Name] to be the new minister. This Call has been sustained as a regular Call, and has been accepted by him/her**.

The Presbytery, having judged the said[Name] qualified for the ministry of the Gospel and*** for this charge, has resolved to proceed to his/her [ordination and]**** induction on[day of the week] the[date] day of[month] at[time] o'clock. The only circumstance in which this would not occur is if an objection occurs which may reasonably impede it.

Notice is given that if any member of this congregation of X [and Y]*, has objection to the life or doctrine of the said [Name] you should intimate your objection at the earliest opportunity to the Presbytery Clerk. If you do this, you will also need to submit to the Presbytery Clerk appropriate evidence to substantiate your objection.

The Presbytery is to meet at[time] on[date as above]. If an objection is not notified in advance but is first brought at that meeting the objector must satisfy the Presbytery that there was no earlier opportunity to bring the objection to the attention of the Presbytery Clerk.

Unless a substantiated objection is made which is then upheld, the Presbytery shall proceed to [ordination and]**** induction of the said[Name] without further delay.

By order of the Presbytery

A.....B.....Presbytery Clerk

*refer to other congregation(s) if a linked charge

** Add, where, appropriate, "and his/her translation has been agreed to by the Presbytery of....."

*** Omit "for the ministry of the Gospel and" if this minister to be inducted has been ordained previously

**** Omit, where appropriate, "ordination and"

L NOTICE OF ORDINATION IN CASE OF INTRODUCTION – Section 32(4)

To be read on two Sundays

Notice is hereby given that a service of introduction is to take place because *[narrate circumstances requiring service of introduction]*. The Presbytery has found that the said *[Name]* has been regularly appointed and is qualified for the ministry of the Gospel and for the said appointment. The Presbytery has resolved to proceed to his or her ordination to the Holy Ministry and to his or her introduction as *[specify appointment]*.

This ordination and introduction will take place on the day of at o'clock, and will proceed unless an objection occurs which may reasonably impede it.

Notice is given if any member of this congregation of X *[and Y]** has anything to object to in the life or doctrine of the said *[Name]*, you may appear at the Presbytery meeting at on the day of at o'clock to state your objection. Any objection which is made must be substantiated.

Unless a substantiated objection is made which is then upheld, the Presbytery will proceed to ordination and introduction of the said*[Name]* without further delay.

By order of the Presbytery

A B Presbytery Clerk

**refer to other congregation(s) if a linked charge*

SCHEDULE 2: PROTOCOL AS TO HYBRID CONGREGATIONAL MEETINGS

From 1 December 2023, congregational meetings, in addition to being held wholly in person, may be held in hybrid form, meaning with attendees permitted to be present in person or online, provided that certain conditions as set out below are met.

However, congregational meetings may NOT be arranged to be held wholly online.

The conditions which will apply to congregational meetings held in hybrid form are mainly intended to achieve equivalence to the requirements which would apply under existing Church law to a meeting held wholly in person, and they are as follows:

- 1) The Kirk Session must decide in advance that the specific congregational meeting in question is one which it is appropriate to hold in hybrid form rather than wholly in person, having regard to the subject matter of the meeting and to the congregation's particular circumstances;
- 2) The Communion Roll or Electoral Register, as the case may be, must be up to date as follows: in the case of the Communion Roll it must have been annually revised and attested in terms of the Communion Rolls Act (Act VI 2000)^[xvi] within the calendar year prior to the date on which the congregational meeting is to take place, and in the case of the Electoral Register, it must have been prepared and may be updated in terms of the Vacancy Procedure Act (Act VIII 2003)^[xvii];
- 3) Notice of the congregational meeting must be intimated in the normal way, ie by pulpit intimation and where appropriate via the congregation's website and/or social media, by at least ten days' (including two Sundays') notice to the congregation;
- 4) The Kirk Session must be satisfied that arrangements can be made to distribute in advance to those who request it and are entitled to it, a link to join the congregational meeting online and information about how to connect and participate, including details of how to contribute to the discussion and how to vote;
- 5) The Kirk Session must be satisfied that it will be able to verify the identity of those who will be joining the congregational meeting online as being persons entitled to attend, participate and vote in such a meeting;
- 6) The Kirk Session must be satisfied that the congregational meeting can be set up and run with sufficient technical expertise to enable all those present, whether in person or online, to hear the full meeting, including all prayer, worship and debate and also to participate in the meeting should they so wish;
- 7) Before any vote is taken, the Moderator or Interim Moderator shall remind the meeting that only those who have been present during the full meeting and who are eligible to vote, can now proceed to vote;
- 8) Where a vote is required, the Kirk Session must be satisfied that an accurate ballot can be held; in the case of a secret ballot the arrangements made shall ensure secrecy of the ballot while maintaining verification of eligibility to vote^[xviii]; and
- 9) The minute of the congregational meeting shall record that the conditions set out in this Protocol were fulfilled, and the minute shall then be engrossed (included and signed) in the minutes of the next Kirk Session meeting.

APPENDIX VII**TABLE OF CHANGES (FROM VACANCY PROCEDURE ACT (ACT VIII 2003) TO PROPOSED CALL, ELECTION & APPOINTMENT OF MINISTERS OF WORD AND SACRAMENT ACT**

Note: this doesn't list every single change made but tries to give a flavour of the main changes.

TITLE OF SECTION	CHANGE MADE	OLD SECTION	NEW SECTION
	Individual sections have been reordered and the Act has been divided into 11 sections overall.		
	References to other Acts of Assembly updated throughout the Act.		
Definitions	Definitions section added. Definition of vacancy has been amended to be one that has Permission to Call as defined. Faith Nurture Forum updated to FAPLT: Faith Action Programme Leadership Team.		1.1
Interpretation	Interpretation section added to encourage tasks to be undertaken concurrently where possible.		1.2
Circumstances of vacancy	For demission of charge or translation, minister is normally to give at least 3 months' prior notice to Presbytery Clerk. This provision is also to be inserted in the Parish Ministry Act. Call & Election process is now subject to the grant of Permission to Call.	3	2
Vacancy Procedure Committee	VPC is made a standing committee of Presbytery. Provision made for a Depute Convener of the VPC.	1	3
	Section 5 (Seat in Presbytery) deleted (superseded by Church Courts Act).		
Advisory Panel	The Advisory Committee becomes the Advisory Panel, a pool of at least three persons, and members of it will be able to act individually, save where there has been failure to nominate. People are to be appointed to the Panel for 2 year terms.	13	5
Release of Departing Minister	Wording about release of a minister in the first five years of his or her first charge has been clarified.	4(2)	6(2)
Appointment of Interim Moderator (IM)	Some provisions about who can be an Interim Moderator (IM) have been moved to the Church Courts Act. Slight expansion of who can be an IM.	6	7
Duties of IM & Shortfalls	Minor tidying up of wording.	7 & 9	8 & 10
Permission to Call	Question of Permission to Call must now be referred to the Presbytery additionally if the charge is subject to a financial sustainability review or where the manse is not currently available with vacant possession.	8	9
Shortfalls	A scheme for payment of unjustified shortfalls must be agreed with the Assembly Trustees rather than FAPLT and/or the Stewardship & Finance Committee.	9	10
Vacancy Schedule	Stewardship & Finance issues and approves the Vacancy Schedule.	10(1)	11
Manse	Presbytery Buildings Officer to be consulted about the manse. Wording added to link to section 9 as to possible delay to Permission to Call, depending on extent of works required and if the manse is not available with vacant possession.	11	12
Parish Profile	There are proposals elsewhere for Local Church Review to be replaced by each charge having its own Action Plan.	12	13

Electoral Register	Provisions on Electoral Register have been conformed with a rewritten Communion Rolls and Adherents' Rolls Act, so that congregations will simply keep their Rolls up to date and attested by Presbytery, then will use those as the Electoral Register. Names may be removed but not added unless an extension to Permission to Call is granted. A new Communion Rolls and Adherents' Roll Act is to be proposed by the Legal Questions Committee, which will be a tidied-up version of the current Act.	14	14
Appointment of Nominating Committee (NC)	Election of Nominating Committee simply to take place by secret ballot, ie option of voting for membership of the Committee by standing up is deleted. Some other minor tidying up of wording, including as to Team Ministry.	15	15
Task of the NC	Minor tidying up of wording.	17	17
Eligibility for Election	Wording tidied up. Eligibility of a Licentiate to be elected removed. Clarification that a minister who has lived outwith the UK for more than 12 months (whether continuous or in total) in the past 10 years must be able in addition to exhibit appropriate Safeguarding clearance, including a criminal record check.	18	18
Undue influence	The requirement for a minister accepting a call to confirm there has been no undue influence has been reinstated and a duty added for Presbytery to take the matter into consideration. Suitable provisions might be included in the Act or in Guidance.	New section	19
Team Ministry	Provisions added as to appointment of an IM in a Team Ministry.	New section	20
Nomination	Wording tidied up. At new 22(4)(d), mention added of Safeguarding clearance for ministers who have lived outwith the UK for more than 12 months (whether continuous or in total) in the past 10 years.	21	22
Preaching by Nominee & Election of Minister	Minor tidying up of wording.	22 & 23	23 & 24
Ballot Procedure	Counting of votes only requires to take place in presence of a quorum of the Kirk Session, ie three people. Reference added to hybrid congregational meetings and the Protocol from 1 December 2023.	24	25
The Call	Call to be subscribed during a period of not less than 8 days within a 2 week window.	26	27
Failure to Nominate	Provisions will activate after 12 months rather than 2 years. Final paragraph of old section 28 deleted as obsolete.	28	28
Eligibility for Election, Nomination, Transmission of Documents & Sustaining the Call	Wording as to Eligibility for Call and Safeguarding clearance tidied up in various sections. At 29, documents required now appear in a bullet point list for ease of reference.	18, 21, 29, 30	18, 22, 29 & 30
Admission to a charge	Presbytery to send intimation of the induction to the national offices, to FAPLT and to the Payroll Department.	31(6)	31(6)
	Demission of Status provision moved to the Parish Ministry Act (Act II 2018).	33	
Service of Introduction	Reference to edicts/edictal intimations deleted and all references are now to intimations.	32	32
Minister's name on Communion Roll	Provision inserted that minister's name is to be added to the Communion Roll.	New	33

Guidelines	Legal Questions Committee no longer to be involved in preparation of Guidelines – this reflects what has happened in practice recently. Guidelines updated to refer to those which FAPLT actually prepare.	34	34
Intimations & notices	Intimations may now be made electronically. Provisions streamlined.	35	35
Effective date, Repeal, Amendments and Transitional Provisions	Existing Act (Act VIII 2003) to be repealed. Transitional provisions confirm that where Permission to Call was granted prior to 1 June 2025, the existing process still applies, but from 1 January 2026 the new process in the new Act applies if that process has not concluded.	36	36
Intimation Schedules	Schedules C, D, E & F deleted in light of the new Communion Rolls and Adherents' Rolls Act.	Schedules	Now to be Schedule 1.
	<i>Protocol from 1 December 2023 on hybrid congregational meetings has been attached for ease of reference.</i>		Schedule 2

APPENDIX VIII

ACT AMENDING THE CHURCH COURTS ACT (ACT VI 2023)

[] ACT AMENDING THE CHURCH COURTS ACT (ACT VI 2023)

Edinburgh, [] May 2025, Session []

The General Assembly hereby enact and ordain that the Church Courts Act (Act VI 2023) shall be amended as follows:

1. Amend section 5.1.6 a) to read:
“review and approve the Communion Roll and Adherents' Roll,”
2. Amend section 5.3.2.2 to read:
5.3.2.2 Where the relevant Presbytery appoints an Interim Moderator, the Interim Moderator shall be (i) a ministerial member of the relevant Presbytery, or (ii) a ministerial member of another Presbytery who has agreed to serve, or (iii) a member of the Presbytery who has attended training for the task provided by the Office of the General Assembly, or (iv) a voting member of another Presbytery who has agreed to serve and who has received the training referred to in sub-section (iii), provided that such a person shall remain a member of their originating Presbytery.
3. Insert a new section 5.3.2.3:
5.3.2.3 A person appointed as an Interim Moderator in a vacant charge shall not be a member in the vacant charge nor a member of the Vacancy Procedure Committee. The name of an Interim Moderator shall always be forwarded to the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team.

APPENDIX IX

ACT AMENDING THE PARISH MINISTRY ACT (ACT II 2018)

[] ACT AMENDING THE PARISH MINISTRY ACT (ACT II 2018) (AS AMENDED)

Edinburgh, [] May 2025, Session []

The General Assembly hereby enact and ordain that the Parish Ministry Act (Act II 2018), as amended, shall be further amended as follows:

1. Add a new section 19 and renumber the existing section 19 as section 20:

Demission of charge and/or status and/or Team Ministry Role

- (1) Where a minister seeks to demit his or her charge or status as a minister of the Church of Scotland, or to translate to another charge, or to demit from a Team Ministry Role, the minister shall normally give at least three months' prior notice in writing (which may be by email) to the relevant Presbytery Clerk.
- (2) Where a minister seeks to demit his or her status as a minister of the Church of Scotland, any accompanying demission of a charge will be dealt with by the Vacancy Procedure Committee in terms of section 6 of the Call, Election and Appointment of Ministers of Word and Sacrament Act (Act [] 2025), but the question of demission of status shall be considered by the Presbytery itself. The Moderator of Presbytery, or a deputy appointed by him or her, shall first endeavour to confer with the minister regarding his or her reasons and shall report to the Presbytery if there appears to be any reason not to grant permission to demit status. Any decision to grant permission to demit status shall be immediately reported to the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team.

APPENDIX X

SECONDARY PRINCIPLES

5.3.1 Presbytery, the Forum and the Trustees must prioritise Mission (as defined in sections 1.1 (l) and (n) through the PMP process. No area of church life is exempt (see section 1.1(r)). Everything in this Code of Practice should be read in the light of, and is subordinate to, section 2.1.1.

5.3.2 Communities: Every community of every size in every location within Scotland is part of a Church of Scotland Parish. While population should no longer be the only principle in shaping Presbytery Plans, it still remains the starting point. Our calling as a church is not primarily to resource congregations: it is mission to everyone in the land.

5.3.3 Ecumenism: "The Commission readily acknowledges that reaching the people of Scotland is an ecumenical task and one to which the Church of Scotland contributes along with other denominations as partners in the gospel." If a particular community is well served by another denomination, there may be no need for the Presbytery to duplicate that. Where a community is equally well served by the Church of Scotland and another denomination the Presbytery should explore what local possibilities there might be for recognising each other's ministry so that resources can be used elsewhere. The General Assembly of 2021 instructed the Forum, when developing principles for Presbytery Mission Planning, to include a principle of ecumenical working, bearing in mind the Lund Principle, affirming that churches should act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately. That same deliverance also encouraged the forming of Local Mission Communities and regional Covenant Partnerships as outlined in the [report of the Ecumenical Relations Committee](#).

5.3.4 The poor: The General Assembly has repeatedly affirmed that the gospel imperative is priority to the poor. At a time when resources are scarce, it is tempting to take away from the most marginal communities where churches are often very fragile and small. However pressing the reasons may be locally, this must be resisted because it makes a mockery of the gospel and the repeated commitments of the General Assembly. However, as in every part of the Church, this does not mean that existing patterns of ministry should not be evaluated and reviewed and different forms of church life introduced.

5.3.4 Whole people of God: One aim of the Act is to assist the church in making the most effective use of paid ministries. However, this takes place in the context of the ministry of the whole people of God. The Special Commission on the Third Article Declaratory, in 2010, noted that "the living out of the commitment of Article III may well involve an increasing number of communities where the ministry is exercised largely by the eldership and membership of the Church, albeit under the oversight of an ordained minister." (8.5.6) Therefore a further principle to guide Presbyteries in their deployment of ministries is how they might be used to encourage and enhance the ministry of the whole people of God. This sharing of talents may be across a wider area than a parish – some Presbyteries are developing the idea of Mission Districts, on which more information will be available later.

5.3.5 Congregations: The church has “a commitment to maintain worshipping, witnessing and serving Christian congregations throughout Scotland.” One of the ways in which the gospel finds visible expression is in committed congregations under the power of the Holy Spirit. They both express the gospel and commend the gospel. In their Planning, Presbyteries will identify congregations that are outward looking, which engage with their communities and the wider church and consider how they might build on these strengths.

5.3.6 Mixed economy: Whilst affirming the importance of the Parish system and recognising the importance of a sense of ‘place’ the General Assembly stated that this needs to be expressed in a variety of ways. Martyn Percy, an Anglican scholar, says: “For the Church to find its place in the modern world, it will have to create new spaces for new communities and different opportunities for differentiated niche groups.” While in many communities the sense of place is best expressed in something physical and tangible, that is not universally true. The Church will need, for example, to discover how to relate to those whose belonging is primarily through networks or the virtual world.

5.3.7 Financial responsibility: Presbytery Mission Planning does not mean ensuring that congregations which make a net contribution to central funds take priority. Nonetheless a degree of financial realism is required and it is appropriate that some consideration is given to congregational financial responsibility. Some congregations are more generous than comparable ones and all congregations are expected to make a financial contribution appropriate to their means. At present one third of congregations are net contributors and two thirds are net receivers. However, per capita giving can be much higher amongst some of the poorest congregations than it is in some of the wealthiest. It is essential for Presbyteries to consider the complex financial picture and allocate ministerial resources to congregations that take their financial stewardship seriously. The Presbytery, Forum and Trustees should also take account of the effect of a Mission Plan on the aggregate amount of Ministry and Mission Contributions which the Presbytery’s congregations remit to the national Church.

5.3.8 Buildings: There is a connection between ministry and church buildings, although that connection is neither uniform nor universal. At a national level there is a consensus that the Church of Scotland has too many buildings, numerous buildings that are underutilised, buildings that are too large for present-day needs and buildings that are in the wrong place. At a local level, however, almost every church building is deemed essential by those who worship there week by week. There is no simple solution to this problem. The starting point, however, should be mission. Presbyteries will want to consider which buildings are essential and useful for the mission they envisage, and offer to local parties means by which they might look more objectively at the bricks and mortar which they possess. The General Trustees will support Presbyteries in developing their mission plans. Presbyteries are encouraged to make use of the General Trustees Land and Buildings Toolkit, and other assessment tools which will be available.

Appendix XI

ALLOCATION OF MINISTRIES NUMBERS

Presbytery Number	Name	Allocation
1.	Edinburgh & West Lothian	65.5
2.	Lothian and the Borders	44
3	South West Total	78
4	Clyde	40
5	Glasgow (inc. Cumbernauld)	84
6.	Forth Valley and Clydesdale	59.5
7	Fife	44.5
8	Perth	78
9	North East and the Northern Isles	87
10	Clèir Eilean Ì	71
11	Lewis	5
12	England	4
13	International	5
		665.5

Appendix XII**OVERVIEW OF VACANCIES**

In order to reduce the uncertainty and anxiety for existing probationers, ministry students, potential ministry candidates and those in familiarisation and reviewable tenure, the General Assembly of 2022 instructed the Faith Nurture Forum, or successor, to report to future General Assemblies with full ministries numbers, covering the following areas:

- ministers of Full Time Word and Sacrament currently in charges,
- number of MDS staff counted towards the 600 fulltime ministries target figure by end of 2025,
- number of ministers in reviewable tenures,
- number of ministers in familiarisation,
- number of ministers expected to retire in the year;

Overview of Vacancies	
Minister numbers (FTE)	489
Interim / Transition Ministers	8
Ministers inducted on basis of reviewable charge	111 reviewable charges 47 with inducted ministers
Probationers and Familiarisation	22
MDS numbers (FTE)	72.57
Fixed Term assistant ministers contracts	41
Actual Retired in 2024	38
Actual Demitted in 2024	11
Expected retirals and demissions in 2025	35

These figures are the ones collected as at 31 December 2024. At time of writing, there are 30 vacancies on the Church of Scotland website. The Presbytery Mission Plan Implementation Group since February 2024 has processed bases of adjustment amounting to 50.2 vacancies which should appear on the vacancy list when Presbyteries have exercised due diligence in terms of congregation votes and subsequent Presbytery approval of these votes, with the (hopefully concomitant) granting of permission to call.

Appendix XIII**FINANCIAL INFORMATION AND ALLOWANCES****XIII.1 Stipends and Salaries**

The Assembly Trustees approved the recommendation of the Faith Action Leadership Team that stipend & salary scales be increased by 2.5% for 2025.

Stipend Scale (including Associate Ministers) 2025

Point 1 £32,433
Point 2 £34,554
Point 3 £36,675
Point 4 £38,796
Point 5 £39,856

Ministries Development Staff Scales 2025MDS General Scale

Point 1 £29,535
Point 2 £30,502
Point 3 £31,464
Point 4 £32,431
Point 5 £33,389

Team Leader Scale

Point 1 £35,960
Point 2 £36,763
Point 3 £37,564
Point 4 £38,369
Point 5 £39,170

Deacon Scale (Genuine Occupational Requirement)

Point 1 £31,464
Point 2 £32,431
Point 3 £33,389
Point 4 £34,354
Point 5 £35,317

Island Allowance

Island allowances also increase by 2.5% for 2025.

Outer Island Allowance: £2,114 pa

Inner Island Allowance: £831 pa

Travel Expenses 2025

Travel expenses payable remain as:

Rates for those providing their own car:

a) reimbursed to ministers and MDS providing their own car for pastoral duties:

45p per mile for the first 10,000 miles

25p per mile for all additional mileage

From April 2025 travel expenses are redeemable at a local level and will not be paid through payroll.

Ministers also receive capital reimbursement of £80 per month.

b) reimbursement of travel expenses for students, probationers, OLMs, auxiliary ministers and locums:

45p per mile for the first 10,000 miles

25p per mile for all additional mileage

c) reimbursed to ministers and MDS providing their own motor bike for pastoral duties:

24p per mile travelled per annum

d) reimbursed to ministers and MDS providing their own pedal bike for pastoral duties:

20p per mile travelled per annum

XIII.2 Recommended Pulpit Supply Fee and Expenses

In Charges where there is only one diet of worship, the Pulpit Supply Fee shall be a Standard Fee of £100. In Charges where there are additional diets of worship on a Sunday, the person fulfilling the Supply shall be paid £50 for each additional service.

In all cases, Travelling Expenses shall be paid. Where there is no convenient public conveyance, the use of a private car shall be paid for at the standard rate of 45p per mile.

XIII.3 Removal and Disturbance Allowance

When a Minister is called to a Charge, the congregation(s) to which the Minister is called shall meet the removal costs incurred in transporting the minister's personal effects into the manse of the Charge. In addition, a manse disturbance allowance of up to £1,740 can be paid on production of appropriate receipts.

If a Charge has an average income base of less than £60,000, application may be made to Faith Action for assistance in meeting removal costs. This assistance may take the form of a grant or loan (or a combination of both) to the congregation.

When a minister retires on account of age or infirmity, and in the case of a widow(er) of a Minister who dies in service, Faith Action will meet the cost of removal expenses. The removal costs paid are classed as a taxable benefit.

XIII.4 Funerals

Where a congregation calls upon the services of a minister not already in receipt of a stipend, or other suitably qualified person, to conduct a funeral, a fee of £100 may be paid by the congregation. On no account should such a fee be charged to the family of the deceased.

For the avoidance of doubt, no fee may be offered to or received by a serving Parish Minister for the conduct of a funeral service, whether in their own or another parish.

XIII.5 Vacancy Allowance

Vacancy Allowance has been removed from 1st January 2025. From 1st January 2025 vacant congregations can have the costs of a locum (for two pastoral days plus a Sunday service or two services for a linked charge) paid for by FAPLT, or if no locum is in place, can be reimbursed for the costs of pulpit supply for Sunday service (two for a linked charge).

XIII.6 Guardianship Allowance

For 2025 the Guardianship Allowance remains at £933 per month.

References

- [i] In addition, a previous General Assembly instructed the consideration of the report *"Holding Things Together: Church of England clergy in changing times"* and review what we need to put in place to ensure that clergy, MDS staff and those in training feel valued and supported.
- [ii] The full report is available at [Ministerial Wellbeing Wave 1 Report FINAL.pdf](#)
- [iii] The Presbytery of Lothian & Borders have introduced a local Sabbatical Scheme and learning from the first year of the scheme should inform any national Sabbatical Leave Scheme
- [iv] [A Justice-seeking Church – The Methodist Church](#)
- [v] <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/about-us/departments/faith-action-programme-committees-and-departments/equality-diversity-and-inclusion-group/legacies-of-slavery>
- [vi] On the pilgrimage were Rt. Rev. Sally Foster-Fulton (Moderator of the General Assembly), Mirella Yandoli (Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and Interfaith Manager, Church of Scotland), Rev. Dr Elijah Obinna (Racial Justice Convener, Church of Scotland), Most Rev. Mark Strange (the Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church), Miriam Weibye (the Church Engagement officer of the Scottish Episcopal Church), and Dr Lisa Adjei (British Church Relations Manager for Christian Aid), Rt. Rev. Dr Tessa Henry-Robinson (Moderator of the General Assembly of the United Reformed Church – URC), Karen Campbell (Secretary for Global & Intercultural Ministries, URC), and Tom Hackett (Children and Youth worker of URC).
- [vii] https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/93862/apologising-for-historic-wrongs-final-version.pdf
- [viii] <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/about-us/our-views/violence-against-women>
- [ix] The alt-right (alternative right) is a loosely connected far-right movement that emerged in the 2010s, promoting nationalism, white identity politics, and opposition to mainstream conservatism. It often embraces online activism, conspiracy theories, with some factions espousing racist, antisemitic, and extremist views.
- [x] <https://www.restored-uk.org/>
- [xi] Some basic research will lead to the conclusion that there are multiple versions of these collections of 'C's. The ones selected here are largely self-explanatory and underline our starting point that Commitment and Character come first, with Calling and Competence coming further down. The AR is a place for people to explore their Calling as it is now and how it might develop. Competencies are what will be learned through the programme.
- [xii] The Hubs are: Greater Glasgow, Edinburgh and the Lothians, Perth and Dundee.
- [xiii] Though already experienced, Apprenticeship Mentors will do specific training in the art of mentoring.
- [xiv] The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) is a tool, developed by the Scottish Government, to measure relative levels of deprivation. The tool divides Scotland into 6,976 small areas, called data zones. It doesn't just focus on low income but also looks at limited resources and opportunities in areas like health, education, and employment. SIMD helps identify where people face multiple disadvantages by ranking areas based on seven key factors: income, employment, education, health, access to services, crime, and housing.
- [xv] Ascertained currently by the calculator found on the gov.uk website
- [xvi] This reference will require to be updated, following the General Assembly, with the specific reference to the Act.
- [xvii] This reference will require to be updated, following the General Assembly, with the specific reference to the Act.
- [xviii] There are anonymised polls available on both Zoom and Microsoft Teams (Zoom Polls and Microsoft Forms/Polls).

JOINT REPORT OF THE FAITH ACTION PROGRAMME LEADERSHIP TEAM AND THE LEGAL QUESTIONS COMMITTEE MAY 2025

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Joint Report.
2. Pass an Act amending the Presbytery Mission Plan Act (Act VIII 2021), as amended, as set out in the Appendix (Section 1.2).
3. Repeal the Local Church Review Act (Act I 2011).

Report

1.1. Work has been undertaken jointly between the Presbytery Mission Plan Implementation Group and the Legal Questions Committee on amendments to the Presbytery Mission Plan Act (Act VIII 2021).

1.2 The proposals can be explained as follows:

1.2.1 The definition of “vacancy” is aligned with that found in the new Vacancy Act, also being proposed by FAPLT this year: ie the Call, Election and Appointment of Ministers of Word and Sacrament Act. Consequentially, a new definition of “Permission to Call” is also needed.

1.2.2 Amendments are suggested to section 2.2.1 of the Act, to require Presbyteries to take account of the Core Principles in their Mission Plan. These of course already exist as a Code of Practice for Mission Planning and are found on the Church website (under <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/resources/presbytery-planning/presbytery-mission-plan-act-guidance-code-of-practice>). In particular, in connection with proposals on insolvent congregations found in the Report of the Assembly Trustees, in light of the Church’s financial situation, Presbyteries are asked to take particular note of the Principle on Financial Responsibility. The Principles will be annexed to the Act as a second Schedule, for ease of reference.

1.2.3 It is proposed that the Local Church Review process, which has become too cumbersome and time-consuming and which is severely back-logged within Presbyteries, be replaced by a simpler requirement for each charge to have an Action Plan. This is brought into section 2.1.1 of the Act, as something to be taken account of in addition in Mission Planning. The Action Plan would express the vision of a charge for its Mission over at least the next five years, taking account of the resources available in terms of personnel, property and finance, and also of the Approved Mission Plan for the Presbytery. A template is available. It is hoped that if each charge has an Action Plan, this will enable Presbyteries better to understand, assess and support their charges. The Local Church Review Act (Act I 2011) will be repealed.

1.2.4 Further amendments are included to ensure that FAPLT and the General Trustees have up to date copies of Mission Plans and that Stewardship & Finance in the national offices have an understanding of which charges have Permission to Call and thus are entitled to Vacancy Allowance, whether for a locum or pulpit supply.

1.2.5 There has been a lacuna in the Act around amendments to Mission Plans taking place outwith the cycle of annual and five-yearly evaluation and review. It is clarified that such a change to a Mission Plan gives rise to the normal right of review.

1.2.6 The opportunity has been taken to tidy up the wording of section 7(10) – the definition of Team Ministry. A charge where there is a Team Ministry will be known as a Team Ministry Charge (some existing Bases will have terminology which thus becomes superseded but it is hoped that this will be ironed out over time). Provisions have been included about when the role of Moderator of the Kirk Session may change. Overall, it is hoped that the new wording will be easier to understand and apply.

1.3 A proposed amending Act is found in the Appendix.

In the names of the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team and the Legal Questions Committee

KAREN KATRINA CAMPBELL, Vice Convener (Presbytery Mission Plan Implementation Group)
TOMMY MACNEIL, Convener
KAY CATHCART, Secretary
MARJORY MACLEAN, Convener
KATHERINE TAYLOR, Vice-Convener
FIONA SMITH, Secretary

Appendix

[] ACT AMENDING THE PRESBYTERY MISSION PLAN ACT (ACT VIII 2021) (AS AMENDED)

Edinburgh, [] May 2025, Session []

The General Assembly hereby enact and ordain that the Presbytery Mission Plan Act (Act VIII 2021), as amended, shall be further amended as follows:

1. *Add new definitions in section 1.1:*

““Action Plan” shall mean an Action Plan expressing the vision of a charge for its Mission over at least the next five years, taking account of the resources available in terms of personnel, property and finance, and also of the Approved Mission Plan for the Presbytery; “the Core Principles” shall mean the principles set out in the Code of Practice for Mission Planning found on the Church of Scotland website, which are replicated in Schedule 2 to this Act;

“Permission to Call” shall mean permission to call and elect a Minister of Word and Sacrament granted by the Presbytery’s Vacancy Procedure Committee or the Presbytery in line with the terms of the Approved Mission Plan.”

2. *Delete the existing definition of “vacancy” at 1.1.s) and substitute:*

““vacancy” shall mean a charge which is without an inducted minister and which has been granted Permission to Call, and shall include the situation of a prospective vacancy with Permission to Call where an Interim Moderator has been appointed under section 7(1) of the [Call, Election and Appointment of Ministers of Word and Sacrament Act (Act [] 2025)], as well as the situation with Permission to Call where a member of a Team Ministry has demitted or translated from his or her Role, and “vacant” shall be construed accordingly;”

3. *Delete the existing section 2.1.1 and substitute:*

“2.1.1 A Mission Plan shall describe how in that Presbytery the Church of Scotland’s engagement with Christ’s mission is to be shaped and resourced in the following five years and to that end shall:-

- i) ensure that the life of the Church of Scotland is shaped around Mission;
- ii) take account of the Core Principles and reflect these in the content of the Mission Plan;
- iii) take account of each charge’s Action Plan;
- iv) sustain the commitment to a territorial ministry as described in the Third of the Articles Declaratory appended to the Church of Scotland Act 1921 and affirmed in Declaratory Act V 2010, including its commitment to ecumenical working;
- v) make appropriate use of such ministry posts as may be permitted by the General Assembly so that the number of post holders in each Presbytery conforms to the numbers and timescales set by the General Assembly; and
- vi) ensure that new ways of being Church, other than stipendiary Ministers of Word and Sacrament or traditional MDS appointments, are reflected in the Mission Plan.”

4. *Insert a new section 2.5 and renumber the existing section 2.5 as 2.6:*

“2.5 AMENDMENT OF A MISSION PLAN

2.5.1 Whenever a Presbytery amends its Mission Plan outwith the cycles of annual and five-yearly evaluation and development, it must send a copy of that Plan to FAPLT and the General Trustees.”

5. *In the existing section 2.5, to be renumbered as 2.6, add new sections 2.6.4 and 2.6.5:*

“2.6.4 Presbyteries are required to present, for information, the most up to date version of their Approved Mission Plan to the Presbytery, to FAPLT and to the General Trustees, by 30th June each year; this is a requirement irrespective of when the cycle of annual or five-yearly evaluation and development takes place and irrespective of when amendment to the Approved Mission Plan takes place.

2.6.5 Presbyteries are also required to present, for information, to FAPLT and to the Stewardship & Finance Department at the national offices, by 30th June each year, an annual return stating which charges in their Presbytery are vacancies, in terms of the definition in section 1.1 s) of this Act, ie vacancies which have been granted Permission to Call.”

6. *After section 2, insert a new section 2A:*

“2A ACTION PLANS

2A.1 Each charge shall have a five year Action Plan that brings together the vision of the charge for its mission, worship, life and service taking account of its present position, its capacity and finances. The Action Plan shall set out aims/objectives, a timescale for achievement, notes of annual progress reviews and a traffic light indicator of status, in each of the following areas:

- Worship & Teaching
- Pastoral Care & Fellowship
- Youth & Children
- Local Mission/Community Outreach
- Wider Mission, including Ecumenism and Interfaith relations (as applicable)
- Finance
- Communications
- Property
- HR/Staffing within the charge eg MDS, Reader, locally employed staff
- Relationship with provisions of Approved Mission Plan for Presbytery

2A.2 The Kirk Session of the charge will initially prepare its Action Plan, and then submit it to the Presbytery for their evaluation, comment and support. After consultation with the Presbytery the Kirk Session will approve their five year Action Plan. Thereafter the Action Plan must be reviewed and updated annually in an ongoing process of reflection, planning & action by the Kirk Session with support, encouragement and input from the Presbytery as it sees fit and in light of the Presbytery's Functions and Responsibilities as set out in section 10 of the Church Courts Act (Act VI 2023). The Action Plan must be submitted to the Presbytery as part of the annual attestation of records."

7. Amend section 3.1 to read:

"3.1 Within fourteen days of the date of the Presbytery meeting at which one of the following has been recorded:

- (a) the agreement of FAPLT and the General Trustees to the Mission Plan; or
 - (b) the approval by Presbytery to an annual evaluation and development of the Mission Plan; or
 - (c) the agreement of FAPLT and the General Trustees to a five-yearly evaluation and development of a Mission Plan; or
 - (d) the approval by Presbytery to an amendment of the Mission Plan outwith the cycles of annual and five-yearly evaluation and development;
- it shall be open to any twelve or more members of the Presbytery or to any Kirk Session within its bounds to seek a review of the process used by the Presbytery in preparing and approving the Mission Plan (or its annual or five-yearly evaluation or development, or its amendment, as the case may be). This shall be done by sending intimation to the Principal Clerk (who in turn shall inform FAPLT and the General Trustees in the case of a first agreement to a Mission Plan or a five-yearly evaluation and development of a Mission Plan)."

8. Delete the existing section 7(10) and substitute:

(10) TEAM MINISTRY

"A Mission Plan may provide that a particular charge shall be a Team Ministry Charge, meaning that within the charge there shall be Team Ministry. The following shall apply to a Team Ministry Charge:

- (i) In a Team Ministry there shall be posts for at least two Ministers of Word and Sacrament, known as Team Ministers, each fulfilling a separate Team Ministry Role.
- (ii) The terms under which a Team Ministry Charge will operate, including the detailed remit of each Team Ministry Role, shall be set out in a Basis of Team Ministry. The Basis shall include a dispute resolution mechanism. The Basis shall be exhibited to all proposed members of the Team prior to the Team Ministry Charge being established. Any person who is considering joining an established Team Ministry shall have the Basis of Team Ministry exhibited to them.
- (iii) The Team Ministers shall be appointed in one or other of the following two ways:
 - (a) the Team Ministers may be called through the vacancy processes set out in the [Call, Election and Appointment of Ministers of Word and Sacrament Act (Act [] 2025)], or
 - (b) where the Team Ministry Charge is being created by a union of existing charges and where there are at the time of the proposed union, minister(s) inducted to one or more of those charges with unrestricted tenure, it shall be competent for the Presbytery to create the Team Ministry Charge to include a Role(s) for such minister(s) in respect of which such minister(s) shall have unrestricted tenure subject to their agreement to the Basis of Team Ministry.
- (iv) The Team Ministers shall share the same congregation and the same Kirk Session, shall be part of the same Church life and shall be of equal standing in the Team Ministry.
- (v) Roles within the Team Ministry Charge may be designated part-time and/or may be job-shared.

(vi) Except in the case of job-sharing, the Basis of Team Ministry shall identify one of the Team Ministry Roles as supplying the Moderator of the Kirk Session. This may only be changed as follows:

- (a) The Team Minister who holds the Role which supplies the Moderator may on occasion as required delegate the moderating of a meeting of the Kirk Session (or of a particular item of business) to another member of the Team Ministry.
- (b) Where a Basis of Team Ministry is being reviewed by Presbytery in accordance with paragraph (xi) below, a change in the Role of Moderator may be negotiated if the Team Minister(s) in post so agree(s).

The minister(s) not holding the Role that provides the Moderator shall be entitled to vote at meetings of the Kirk Session unless they are moderating the meeting under sub-paragraph (a) above.

(vii) Where any Role in the Team Ministry becomes vacant, the other Team Ministers shall not have any right to succeed to that Role but shall be entitled to apply for it through the vacancy processes set out in the [Call, Election and Appointment of Ministers of Word and Sacrament Act (Act [] 2025)].

(viii) Presbyteries shall in designing a Team Ministry Charge consider how the participation of those other than Ministers of Word and Sacrament may support and assist the Team Ministry, and thus a Team Ministry Charge may also include Deacon(s), Ordained Local Minister(s), MDS appointment(s), and such other appointment(s) as may be deemed appropriate by the Presbytery and agreed during the Mission Plan process. For the avoidance of doubt, a charge which is staffed by a ministry team comprising only one inducted parish minister (who shall be the Moderator of the Kirk Session) and one or more Deacon, Ordained Local Minister appointment, MDS appointment and/or such other appointment(s) as may be set out in the Mission Plan, is entirely valid but it is not a Team Ministry Charge for the purposes of this section 7(10).

(ix) Each Team Minister shall occupy the manse provided for their use.

(x) A Team Ministry Role, save for any exception at (iii) (b) above, shall be subject to a Basis of Reviewable Charge in the terms set out in section 9(1) of this Act.

(xi) A Basis of Team Ministry shall be reviewed by the Presbytery as follows:

- (a) At regular intervals, at least every five years, to ensure it remains apposite, and
- (b) On the occurrence of a vacancy in a Team Role.

Where following such review, the Presbytery wishes to amend the Basis, it may do so where the Presbytery has first consulted with the Team Ministers and Kirk Session, provided always that the Presbytery may not amend the Role of an existing Team Minister without his or her consent."

9. Number the existing Schedule as Schedule 1 and insert a new Schedule 2 as follows:

"5.3.1 Presbytery, FAPLT and the General Trustees must prioritise Mission (as defined in section 1.1 (n) through the Mission Plan process. No area of church life is exempt (see section 1.1(r)). Everything in this Schedule should be read in the light of, and is subordinate to, section 2.1.1.

5.3.2 Communities: Every community of every size in every location within Scotland is part of a Church of Scotland Parish. While population should no longer be the only principle in shaping Mission Plans, it still remains the starting point. Our calling as a church is not primarily to resource congregations: it is mission to everyone in the land.

5.3.3 Ecumenism: "The Commission readily acknowledges that reaching the people of Scotland is an ecumenical task and one to which the Church of Scotland contributes along with other denominations as partners in the gospel". If a particular community is well served by another denomination, there may be no need for the Presbytery to duplicate that. Where a community is equally well served by the Church of Scotland and another denomination the Presbytery should explore what local possibilities there might be for recognising each other's ministry so that resources can be used elsewhere. The General Assembly of 2021 instructed the Faith Nurture Forum, now FAPLT, when developing principles for Presbytery Mission Planning, to include a principle of ecumenical working, bearing in mind the Lund Principle, affirming that churches should act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately. That same deliverance also encouraged the forming of local Mission Communities and regional Covenant Partnerships as outlined in the Report of the Ecumenical Relations Committee to the General Assembly of 2021.

5.3.4 The poor: The General Assembly has repeatedly affirmed that the gospel imperative is priority to the poor. At a time when resources are scarce, it is tempting to take away from the most marginal communities where churches are often very fragile and small. However pressing the reasons may be locally, this must be resisted because it makes a mockery of the gospel and the repeated commitments of the General Assembly. However,

as in every part of the Church, this does not mean that existing patterns of ministry should not be evaluated and reviewed and different forms of church life introduced.

5.3.4 Whole people of God: One aim of the Act is to assist the church in making the most effective use of paid ministries. However, this takes place in the context of the ministry of the whole people of God. The Special Commission on the Third Article Declaratory, in 2010, noted that “the living out of the commitment of Article III may well involve an increasing number of communities where the ministry is exercised largely by the eldership and membership of the Church, albeit under the oversight of an ordained minister.” (8.5.6) Therefore a further principle to guide Presbyteries in their deployment of ministries is how they might be used to encourage and enhance the ministry of the whole people of God. This sharing of talents may be across a wider area than a parish – some Presbyteries are developing the idea of Mission Districts, on which more information will be available later.

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5.3.6 Mixed economy: Whilst affirming the importance of the Parish system and recognising the importance of a sense of ‘place’ the General Assembly stated that this needs to be expressed in a variety of ways. Martyn Percy, an Anglican scholar, says: “For the Church to find its place in the modern world, it will have to create new spaces for new communities and different opportunities for differentiated niche groups.” While in many communities the sense of place is best expressed in something physical and tangible, that is not universally true. The Church will need, for example, to discover how to relate to those whose belonging is primarily through networks or the virtual world.

5.3.7 Financial responsibility: Presbytery Mission Planning does not mean ensuring that congregations which make a net contribution to central funds take priority. Nonetheless a degree of financial realism is required and it is appropriate that some consideration is given to congregational financial responsibility. Some congregations are more generous than comparable ones and all congregations are expected to make a financial contribution appropriate to their means. At present one third of congregations are net contributors and two thirds are net receivers. However, per capita giving can be much higher amongst some of the poorest congregations than it is in some of the wealthiest. It is essential for Presbyteries to consider the complex financial picture and allocate ministerial resources to congregations that take their financial stewardship seriously. The Presbytery, FAPLT and the General Trustees should also take account of the effect of a Mission Plan on the aggregate amount of Giving to Grow Contributions which the Presbytery’s congregations remit to the national Church.

5.3.8 Buildings: There is a connection between ministry and church buildings, although that connection is neither uniform nor universal. At a national level there is a consensus that the Church of Scotland has too many buildings, numerous buildings that are underutilised, buildings that are too large for present-day needs and buildings that are in the wrong place. At a local level, however, almost every church building is deemed essential by those who worship there week by week. There is no simple solution to this problem. The starting point, however, should be mission. Presbyteries will want to consider which buildings are essential and useful for the mission they envisage, and offer to local parties means by which they might look more objectively at the bricks and mortar which they possess. The General Trustees will support Presbyteries in developing their Mission Plans. Presbyteries are encouraged to make use of the General Trustees’ Land and Buildings Toolkit, and other assessment tools which will be available.”

COMMITTEE ON CHAPLAINS TO HM FORCES MAY 2025

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Thank those who serve in His Majesty's Forces as Chaplains for their service to Royal Navy, Army and Royal Air Force personnel, their families, and the wider military community, and commend them, and their own families, to the prayers of the Church (Section 2).
3. Note the significant contribution of HM Forces personnel in a variety of theatres, notably the NATO response to the war in Ukraine, actions in the Red Sea and preparations for potential Non-Combatant Evacuation Operations (NEO) in the Middle East and beyond (Section 2.1.2).
4. Welcome the increased level of applications for military chaplaincy while continuing to encourage all eligible ministers of the Church to consider service as a Chaplain to HM Forces, Regular or Reservist (Section 3).
5. Encourage those eligible to consider service as Chaplains in any of the Cadet organisations and thank all serving Cadet Chaplains for their work with these organisations (Section 3.3).

Report

1. THE COMMITTEE

1.1 The Committee gives thanks for the work of its outgoing Convener, Rev Scott Brown CBE, who resigned from the committee due to ill health, ending his Convenership after two years, into the usual four-year term. The increase in recruiting (Section 3) is testament to his tireless efforts to promote military and naval chaplaincy.

2. THE WORK OF CHAPLAINS

2.1 Routine and Operational Work

2.2 The operational tempo continues to affect the whole of the Armed Forces and their families. Over Christmas in 2024 over 10,000 UK personnel were deployed overseas on 60 operations in 40 countries.

2.3 The Committee congratulates Rev Stephen Ashley-Emery RN, (a Church of Scotland Chaplain) on his appointments in 2024 as Deputy Chaplain of the Fleet at Navy Command HQ and as Honorary Chaplain to His Majesty the King (King's Honorary Chaplain, or KHC). The Committee also congratulates Rev Dr Mark Davidson, a Church of Scotland Chaplain serving with the Royal Navy, likewise appointed KHC, so that two of the 4 KHCs in the Navy are currently Church of Scotland chaplains.

2.4 Rev Dr Mark Davidson has recently been selected to be the next Chaplain of the Fleet, the senior appointment for a Naval Chaplain.

3. RECRUITMENT

3.1 Since the Committee's deliverance to the 2024 General Assembly, highlighting the significant risk posed by low recruitment numbers to military chaplaincy, there has been a positive response. At the time of writing, the Committee, as a part of its constitutional role as Endorsing Authority for potential chaplains, has endorsed five candidates for ministry in HM Forces since the last Assembly, and is in discussions with another three who are considering applications. This increase in interest is very welcome, as our numbers remain at an historic low and the Committee is expecting a significant number of retirements of serving Chaplains in the next 3 to 5 years. Please continue to pray for an increase in vocations to this important and valued ministry.

3.2 The Committee encourages all eligible ministers to discern if God is calling them to serve as a Chaplain in the Royal Navy (including the Royal Marines), the Army or the Royal Air Force, whether Regular (full time) or Reservist (part time). The Committee welcomes suggestions or advice on how we respond to the need for steady recruiting to minister to our fantastic Service communities. The Committee notes the special demands that service as a Reserve Chaplain places on ministers in full-time parish charges and has produced a letter defining the role, rights, and deployment commitments of Reserve Chaplains to reassure the Kirk Sessions and congregations of ministers considering Reserve service.

3.3 The Committee also commends chaplaincy in the Cadet Forces as a mission to youth which also assists with the development of ministerial skill sets in the course of parish (or other civilian) ministry.

4. CHAPLAINS AND THE CHURCH

4.1 Tri-Service Conference 2024/25

The Tri-Service Conference (Continuous Professional Development) for Church of Scotland and Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI) Chaplains was held at the Leuchars Station in Fife, in September 2024. The Committee very much values the shared fellowship with PCI and the cooperative relationship developed with its parallel committee in the PCI.

4.2 Pastoral Care

As well as recruiting, pastoral care for Chaplains is a primary component of the Committee's remit. The Committee continues to offer regular pastoral contact with Chaplains and their families, organised by the Vice Convener. If necessary, the Convener responds to more acute pastoral situations, which may involve ill-health, discernment conversations, or care concerning professional issues.

4.3 Moderator's Visit to HM Forces

In February, the Moderator and Vice Convener visited the Royal Navy at Portsmouth, including Navy Command Headquarters at HMS EXCELLENT & the training establishment at HMS COLLINGWOOD. The Committee is grateful to the Chaplain of the Fleet and the wider Naval Service community for their welcome and hospitality, and to Rev Dr Mark Davidson RN, the Principal of the Armed Forces Chaplaincy Centre at the Defence Academy, for coordinating the visit.

4.4 Armed Forces and Veterans Champions

The Committee continues to work with the new Presbyteries to appoint Armed Forces and Veterans Champions for each. Further work will develop as we continue to understand the needs of those in such roles and hope to be able to offer them training and support through the Committee.

5. GOVERNANCE ISSUES

5.1 Tri-Service Advisory Group

The Committee invites the church to note continuing changes to Defence policy on chaplaincy to the Services. Following last year's decision to allow non-religious chaplains to serve in HM Forces, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints has been accepted as an Endorsing Authority and discussions are in progress to establish Muslim and Rastafari Endorsing Authorities. The Committee welcomes these changes and is assured that they will complement the well-established and successful Christian and World Faiths chaplaincy to HM Forces.

5.2 The Committee welcomes to the Assembly representatives of all Endorsing Authorities, (Christian, other world faiths and humanist) and thanks them for their support as we all seek what is best for our serving personnel and their families across the Defence community.

In the name of the Committee

ANDREW TAIT, Convener
AMY BENDER, Vice-Convener
DARAN GOLBY, Secretary

Appendix 1 – Royal Navy Report

Rev Fergus Cook RNR

Chaplain Fergus Cook completed his Phase 2 training at Britannia Royal Naval College (BRNC), Dartmouth in Nov 24. He is the oldest person ever to pass out from Dartmouth. On completion of training, he was appointed to the role of Chaplain, HMS SCOTIA in Rosyth. He has had a busy few months there with his appointment directly preceding the annual Remembrance Service at Pattiesmuir Cemetery, Rosyth. Since then, Chaplain Cook has conducted Christmas Divisions, provided ongoing pastoral support to the Service Personnel, and advised on Chaplaincy Recruiting.

Rev Stephen Ashley-Emery KHC RN

Chaplain Stephen Ashley-Emery had a busy start to the year working in Naval Chaplaincy Service HQ as Staff Chaplain. In Jul 24 he was selected as Deputy Chaplain of the Fleet (DCOTF), and made a seamless transition to this demanding role. Appointed a King's Honorary Chaplain (KHC), he has spent the last nine months focusing on Branch Management and developing policy. Highlights of the year have included Defence Engagement in Baghdad, where he officiated at the Remembrance Service for the Embassy staff, and time in Indonesia planning multinational chaplaincy support for the Navy-led OP HIGHMAST deployment taking place this year in the Indo-Pacific.

Rev Mark Dalton RN

Chaplain Mark Dalton has spent this past year providing spiritual and pastoral care to the Service Personnel and their families in and around HMNB Clyde. He has sought to offer an holistic, inter-agency approach by establishing and improving relations with other military agencies and charities both locally and nationally across Scotland. He has also extended the reach of RN chaplaincy, through regular visits to HMS Caledonia in Rosyth, where he provides pastoral care for an eclectic range of Service Personnel. At Easter, Chaplain Dalton moved to a Phase 2 training establishment in the Portsmouth area, where he provides pastoral support and teaches ethics to new Service Personnel.

Rev Dr Mark Davidson KHC RN

Over the past year, Chaplain Mark Davidson has continued in his role as Principal of the Armed Forces Chaplaincy Centre, and Principal Denominational Chaplain, Church of Scotland and Free Churches. Both roles have been challenging and rewarding. Current academic projects include gathering Lessons Identified from the war in Ukraine, and editing a collection of essays on Spiritual Resilience. As a member of the Chiefs of Chaplains Strategic Coordinating Group, he develops shared doctrine and policy with other senior NATO chaplains. He was appointed a King's Honorary Chaplain (KHC) in Nov 24, and awarded a medal from the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine in Feb 25 for his contribution towards the war effort. Mark has now been selected to be the next Chaplain of the Fleet.

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Appendix 2 – Army Report

It is clear that we are living in interesting times. The changing nature of the geopolitical landscape and its challenges continue to bring hard choices for government. That inevitably works itself out through Defence. HM Land Forces continue to work to support those challenges be it: training Ukrainian soldiers and chaplains for the front line; supporting our partners and allies 'staggering on' in Estonia and joining them in large-scale exercises in Romania; offering Peace-Keeping duties on the green line in Cyprus; supporting other nations to develop their Army skills; and the generic duties of preparing to protect and defend our nation on and from the land. Chaplains are very much at the heart of all that we do 'caring for the Army's people' spiritually, morally and pastorally.

We currently have 10 Regular chaplains and 5 Reserve chaplains serving in the Royal Army Chaplains' Department. David Anderson has been promoted to CF1 moving to take up his new role as Assistant Chaplain General Field Army Troops.

Alan Cobain has been promoted to CF2 and has taken up his new role as the Senior Chaplain 38 (Irish) Brigade & Joint Military Command (Northern Ireland) and Deputy Assistant Chaplain General Regional Command.

Nathan McConnell has recently been commissioned as a Reserve chaplain and has completed his training and is assigned to 215 (Scottish) Multi Role Medical Regiment.

Sadly, we have had to say farewell to three of our long-serving chaplains who have come to the end of their time in the Army. Rev Duncan MacPherson, Rev Dr Jim Francis, and Rev Geoff Berry between them have served for over 50 years. They have been involved in caring for our soldiers and families through some of the most difficult operational commitments the country has known. That service has encompassed duty in Northern Ireland during 'The Troubles', Iraq and Afghanistan; as well as representing our denomination at some of the most Senior levels of service in the Dept. Rev Dr Jim Francis leaving as Assistant Chaplain General and Rev Duncan MacPherson serving our denomination well as the Denominational Representative

Chaplain for many years. Their contribution will continue beyond them and we wish them well as they journey to new challenges beyond the RACHD.

The following notes give a flavour from a few of our chaplains of some of the continued and interesting ministry and work that we are privileged and humbled to be a part of.

‘Over the last several months, I have been getting to grips with living in a different devolved nation with its own distinctive language, culture and traditions. As Senior Chaplain 160th (Welsh) Brigade, I am involved with the Brigade’s efforts to support the Army in Wales and engage with the civilian population. This makes for a hugely varied role that so far has ranged from attending meetings of the interfaith and bereavement cross-party groups at the Senedd (the Welsh Parliament) to engaging with Churches Together in Wales at the Royal Welsh Show, visiting Army Cadet Camps and participating in a virtual school assembly with an astonishing 14,000 young people from across the country. I continue to be surprised and enormously grateful for the varied opportunities to bear witness to the love of God whether leading prayers at a public event, saying grace at a mess dinner or quietly holding space for conversation with a soldier in distress.’

Rev Nicola Frail, Senior Chaplain, HQ 160th (Welsh) Brigade

‘Being posted to a training establishment is a huge privilege. The tempo can be high, with a significant pastoral load, yet the sense of reward puts everything into marvellous perspective. At the Infantry Training Centre, Catterick chaplains are at the forefront of supporting recruits joining the Infantry and Royal Armoured Corps: helping to ease them into their new surroundings early on, exploring matters relating to mental and spiritual resilience, giving insight into important moral dilemmas such as the ‘right to kill’ and providing spiritual and pastoral support. The ministry of chaplains in ‘the early days’ of Army life, provides a foundation whereby soldiers, and their families, know that they matter not only to Christian chaplain, but also to the God in whose name they minister.’

Rev Hector MacKenzie, Senior Chaplain Infantry Training Centre and Soldier Academy North

‘Even reserve unit chaplaincy provides the opportunity to come alongside people in their highs and lows, often when dark humour is relied upon. For me as the padre it is about trying to represent the hope of a God who knows and loves them, whatever else is going on. As in a civilian parish, funerals offer an opportunity to address spirituality head on. In the serving military community those funerals tend to be younger people, and so it was I was asked to conduct the funeral for one of my Battalion’s senior warrant officers. The army is not a very big organisation, and if someone has served a long time they will likely have made many connections over the years and I witnessed the coming together of this big family. It is inspiring to be part of an organisation that does so much for its members and their families in times of death. Even in death, humour is important, and that this particular soldier’s parents were called Mary and Joseph and that he was born on 25th December, was not lost on many. For a reserve unit the Annual Continuous Training -annual camp to a previous generation -is a key opportunity to spend time with the troops, finding time to seek out those who might be struggling, lead some ethics training and join in with the compulsory physical training (usually accompanied by some irreverent humour about praying harder padre). Alongside a large military funeral with elements of ceremonial, there were less polished encounters when I joined the Corporal’s Army Leader Development Programme - a fairly arduous fortnight’s course for the reserves which was very much in the bleak mid-winter in late November on the military training area at Otterburn, when the temperatures were dropping below minus eleven, and the windchill was ferocious. In such circumstances it is less about words and more about presence, a few rounds of ‘if you’re happy and you know it clap your hands’ before they went out on patrol and plenty of sweets. But these are the times that build the shared memories that open the doors for people to seek you out when there might be something more personal or spiritual to discuss.’

Rev Christopher Rowe, Parish Minister Colston Parish Church and Reserve Chaplain, 5 Military Intelligence.

‘On November 11th 2024, Revd Alan Cobain CF was invited to preside over a service of rededication at Busan United Nations Cemetery for four recently identified British Soldiers of the Korean War: Major Patrick Angier, Sergeant Donald Northey, Gloucestershire Regiment and Rifleman Mark Foster, Corporal William Adair, Royal Ulster Rifles. The visit was hosted by the British Embassy through His Excellency Ambassador Colin Crooks and the UK military’s Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre. The visit included a trip to Imajin River the site of Hill 235 or ‘Gloster Hill’ where the bitter battle of April 1951 had been fought close to the modern border with North Korea.’

Rev Alan Cobain, Senior Chaplain 38 (Irish) Brigade & Joint Military Command (Northern Ireland) and Deputy Assistant Chaplain General Regional Command

‘As the Senior Chaplain 51st Infantry Brigade and Joint Military Command Scotland, it is a privilege to support the efforts of the Army across our country. Our *raison d’être* is to Lead, Enable, Sustain, and Promote the Army in Scotland. That has seen our chaplains deploy to support all of those involved in the iconic Royal Military Tattoo in Edinburgh; to participate in

the National Acts of Armistice and Remembrance in the Scottish National War Memorial and across the country; and amongst many other things to continue to provide day-to-day pastoral care for our Regular, Reserve and Army Cadet Force communities.'

It continues to be a privilege 'caring for the Army's people' in the name of the God we serve. I commend our ministry to anyone who might be considering taking on the 'King's shilling' and would be happy to discuss further the many opportunities the Royal Army Chaplains' Department offers.'

Rev David Anderson, Senior Chaplain 51st Infantry Brigade and Joint Military Command Scotland and Denominational Representative Chaplain for the Church of Scotland.

List of Church of Scotland Regular Chaplains (Actively recruiting)

Chaplain	Unit	Location
Rev David Anderson	Assistant Chaplain General, Field Army Troops	Andover
Rev Chris Kellock	Senior Chaplain Army Special Operations Brigade	Andover
Rev Nicola Frail	Senior Chaplain HQ 160th (Welsh) Brigade	Brecon
Rev Alan Cobain	Senior Chaplain 38 (Irish) Brigade & Joint Military Command (Northern Ireland) and Deputy Assistant Chaplain General Regional Command	Lisburn
Rev David Thom	Northern Ireland Garrison Support Unit	Lisburn
Rev Paul Van Sittert	3rd Battalion, Royal Regiment of Scotland	Inverness
Rev Hector MacKenzie	Senior Chaplain Infantry Training Centre and Soldier Academy North	Catterick
Rev Richard Begg	Headquarters Hereford Garrison	Hereford
Rev Stewart MacKay	Senior Chaplain Army Training Centre Pirbright and Soldier Academy South	Pirbright
Rev Neil McLay	Senior Chaplain 11 Brigade	Aldershot

List of Church of Scotland Reserve Chaplains

Chaplain	Unit	Location
Rev Mike Mair	32 Signals Regiment	Glasgow
Rev Mike Goodison	105 Regt Royal Artillery	Newtonards
Rev Dr Ken Jeffrey	7 th Battalion Royal Regiment of Scotland	Perth
Rev Christopher Rowe	5 Military Intelligence Battalion	Edinburgh
Rev Nathan McConnell	215 (Scottish) Multi Role Medical Regiment	Glasgow

List of Church of Scotland Army Cadet Force (ACF) Chaplains (9 Vacancies out of 20)

Chaplain	Unit
Rev Alen McCulloch	1 Bn The Highlanders, ACF
Rev Sean Swindells	1 Bn Highlanders ACF
Rev Shuna Dicks	2 Bn The Highlanders, ACF
Rev Keith Blackwood	2 Bn The Highlanders, ACF
Rev George Hunter	Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders ACF
Rev Fiona Wilson	West Lowland, ACF
Rev Ecilo Selemani	Glasgow & Lanarkshire, ACF
Rev Sean Swindells	Angus and Dundee, ACF
Rev Cameron McKenzie	Lothian & Borders, ACF

Appendix 3 – Royal Air Force Report

At the end of 2024, the Chief of Air Staff spoke of challenging times in our world and for our country, and that it has never been more important that we retain our skilled people, so that we can fulfil our duty to provide global air and space power to protect our nation and help it prosper. What the RAF does really matters, arguably more so today than at any time over the past three decades. That's why caring for our people remains such an important part of our strategy. RAF Chaplains play a central role in supporting our people and strengthening the faith, hope and resilience of RAF personnel in these days. Their highly valued, incarnational and sacrificial ministry within the RAF community, both at home and abroad, supports the spiritual, pastoral and moral wellbeing of our people.

The RAF continues to provide training for Ukrainian pilots, ground staff and troops and patrols NATO airspace, deterring future aggression on NATO's eastern flank. We also continue to patrol the skies above the UK, with our Quick Reaction Alert Typhoons ready 24/7/365 to fly and protect our nation.

Our two Church of Scotland RAF Chaplains continue to contribute strongly to the ministry of our Profession:

The Reverend (Wing Commander) Craig Lancaster is the Senior chaplain at RAF Cosford, a training unit preparing aircraft engineers, physical training instructors, photographers, and many more, for their specialist roles. Our chaplains at Cosford provide pastoral care to these trainees and the many training staff, and teach the Beliefs and Values Programme (BVP), helping trainees to understand their own moral beliefs and values in the context of military service and prepare them to meet the challenges and ambiguities of life on the front line. Encouragingly, our chaplains are noticing a significant increase in the number of personnel enquiring about the Christian faith. Craig has also led a team of chaplains reviewing and rewriting the BVP training material. By the time of the General Assembly he will have taken up post as chaplain to the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers in Europe (SHAPE) in Belgium, with an area of responsibility covering most of Western Europe and as far as The Republic of Turkiye.

The Reverend (Squadron Leader) David Young is station chaplain at RAF Honington, supporting the trainee Gunners of the RAF Regiment and the Junior Regiment Officers' Course from start to finish of their training, and is very proud to give the blessing at the Graduation ceremonies at the end of the courses. He also led, at short notice, the NATO Remembrance Service at the Reichswald Commonwealth War Graves site in Germany, where in excess of 6400 British and Commonwealth service personnel are laid to rest; a very poignant event.

We are grateful to God for Craig and David's vocation to this valuable ministry, and to the Church of Scotland for releasing and supporting them in their service.

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, Gourrock, 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

REPORT OF THE SOCIAL CARE COUNCIL (KNOWN AS CROSSREACH BOARD) MAY 2025

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Strongly encourage congregations and Presbyteries to practically and prayerfully engage with CrossReach on the new strategy 'Love from CrossReach' and explore areas of closer collaboration and mutual interest so that the missional work of the Church can be furthered as outlined in the CrossReach website (<https://www.crossreach.org.uk/churches-and-congregations>) (Section 1.2.2).
3. Recognise the dedication and professionalism of the CrossReach staff group and encourage Presbyteries and other partners across the Church to continue to support recruitment efforts (Section 3.1 and 3.4.2).
4. Endorse the ecumenical and interfaith efforts made to raise awareness of the need for Fair Work in social care, note the need for continued action and instruct the Social Care Council to continue to work with partners to engage on this issue at the highest level of Scottish Government (Section 3.4).
5. Express deep frustration about the worsening position of social care in Scotland and the lack of progress on the longer-term reform needed and instruct the Social Care Council, working with the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team, to make resources available which will allow Presbyteries and congregations to raise this issue as a matter of critical concern in the run up to the Scottish Elections in 2026 (Section 3.4.4 – 3.4.7).
6. Celebrate the positive changes which have been reported in the survey of those accessing CrossReach services and endorse the focus on human rights and wellbeing (Section 6.1).

Report

1. LOVE FROM CROSSREACH

1.1 "We love because he first loved us." (1 John 4 v 19)"

1.1.1 This simple command sits at the front of the CrossReach strategy 2025-2030. Launched at the end of 2024 after a significant period of reflection and consultation, 'Love from CrossReach' captures our ambition for the future.



Access the strategy via the link:

<https://flipbooks.crossreach.org.uk/Strategy>

1.1.2 The strategy builds on 155 years of delivering care and support to the people of Scotland, in Christ's name, and as part of the Church of Scotland. It recognises that the way in which social care is designed and delivered is changing around us, and that we need to adapt and change with it. We have taken the opportunity to refresh our core purpose and set out a number of principles which will help the CrossReach Board to steer a steady course for the future, despite the acute challenges faced by CrossReach and the wider social care sector.

1.1.3 These principles, which are worked up more fully in the service area plans, are based around the issues which matter most to the people we support, our employees and volunteers, our key supporters and commissioners and those who took time to engage with us from within the Church. Strong sustainable services which support and empower those both supported by them and working within them is the key premise, with Christian love being the driving force behind it all.

1.1.4 The values have been re-written reflecting our Christian ethos, which sets us apart from other social care providers. They have been cross-referenced with The Scottish Social Services Council, the body which oversees the registration of employees within the social care sector.

1.1.5 Some of the aspirations contained within the strategy are bold, others will allow us simply to build on what has gone before. Together they will allow us to continue to play our part in a missional Church by responding to human need by loving service.

1.2 Change to Remit and Constitution

1.2.1 In order to integrate the new strategy into existing arrangements The Social Care Council (CrossReach Board) are seeking to simplify the current remit by making the purpose,

as contained within ‘Love from CrossReach’ central to the remit and to delete elements already covered by the existing constitution, to avoid duplication. The Board has also sought approval from the Assembly Trustees to update the constitution in order to reflect the changes agreed at General Assembly 2020. Appendix 1 of this report contains the proposed new remit and constitution.

1.2.2 The General Assembly is also invited to give prayerful and practical support to CrossReach as we roll out the strategy over the course of 2025 and explore ways in which we can meaningfully collaborate.

2. A YEAR OF LOVING SERVICE

2.1 Our Impact

2.1.1 Bringing love to the forefront of the strategy is simply a reflection and strengthening of what we have seen in operation all year in each of the services. When a highly professional and skilled workforce comes alongside people struggling to reach their full potential and together they work in a spirit of partnership, love and acceptance, it makes change possible.

2.1.2 This year, we have supported over 30,000 people, which represents a growth in the number of beneficiaries from last year, and is in line with the huge demand for services being placed on our sector.

2.1.3 You can learn more from our impact report here: www.crossreach.org.uk/impact-report-2025

2.2 A few of the successes from 2024 are captured below

2.2.1 The children and young people from Erskine Waterfront Campus (<https://www.crossreach.org.uk/our-locations/erskine-waterfront-campus-0>), our school for up to 30 young people with complex learning needs, over 70% of whom are day pupils, took part in a time of celebration at their annual award ceremony earlier this year. The curriculum covers all 8 areas of the Curriculum for Excellence: sciences, languages, mathematics, expressive arts, social studies, technologies, health and wellbeing and religious and moral education. In total, 53 personal awards, 54 H15/DYAs, 82 NAT2s, 24 NAT3s, 7 NAT4s and 1 NAT5 awards/stand-alone units were handed out.

2.2.1.1 Staff were delighted when pupil Rory achieved the highest music grade the school has ever had. This was a NAT5 equivalent for performing on one instrument or voice, which is a remarkable achievement.

2.2.2 Our Children With Disabilities Services, Go2 and Mallard Short-Breaks, support nearly 70 children and young people with complex needs. We provide bespoke support, that helps grow independence, skills and friendships. At Go2 (<https://www.crossreach.org.uk/our-locations/go2>), young people access enriching experiences, including a sensory room, hydrotherapy pool, art room, and large garden. Residential Short Breaks (<https://www.crossreach.org.uk/find-service/children-families/disability-and-additional-support-needs/residential-short-breaks>) offers respite care, tailored to each young person’s preferences for activities, meals and outcomes.

2.2.2.1 Ciaran, once highly anxious and requiring one-to-one support, has grown in confidence and is now enjoying group activities. Recognising his passion for building, we created opportunities for hands-on projects, like assembling new desk chairs and other DIY experiences. A parent shared “I can’t take both boys out alone, but Go2 lets them build friendships and thrive. The staff are amazing, taking time to truly understand their personalities and needs”. These stories highlight our impact - empowering young people to grow, gain confidence, and flourish.

2.2.3 In the spirit of lifelong learning, a number of our Older People Services care homes have purchased an interactive activity touch table, designed for use in educational environments but adaptable to a residential care home setting. The table creates a positive and engaging environment for people living in the service and offers them an opportunity to engage in stimulating activities designed to improve cognitive function. The table facilitates social interaction and can be used for individual use or group activities and games.

2.2.4 The Dick Stewart Service (<https://www.crossreach.org.uk/our-locations/dick-stewart-service>), a small residential service in Glasgow which has traditionally supported people coming to the end of a long-term prison sentence, was repurposed during the course of 2024 to support the early release of prisoners under the emergency arrangements made in June of that year. The service filled up quickly and the population has remained largely stable over the last 6 months. Demand remains high and vacancies are filled quickly. The service has produced positive outcomes for people in terms of increased wellbeing, moving to settled accommodation, greater independence and notably, no return to prison, which has been one of the challenges of the early release scheme in general.

2.2.5 The Dornoch Men’s Shed, a community resource for the people of Dornoch, opened in the grounds of Oversteps Care Home (www.crossreach.org.uk/our-locations/oversteps) in 2018. The space provides two workshops which are equipped with woodworking machines, tools and

benches. A recent extension at the back hosts a kiln and working space. The Men’s Shed team have helped provide stimulating activity to some of the residents within Oversteps, whether it is to attend a pottery workshop or simply to share stories over a cup of tea.

2.2.5.1 Oversteps residents, staff and families have been fundraising over the past 6 years to upgrade the large garden space at the front of the home. 2024 saw some new pathways being laid which has made the garden much more accessible. The Men’s Shed team have now offered to build a pergola for the garden. This will provide a central feature for the sensory garden, which is in the planning phase at present. Planting will begin in the spring, and the residents are looking forward to having a colourful, fragrant garden to sit in during the summer months.

2.2.6 One of the areas we have been strengthening is participation across the organisation so that those using our services feel empowered to have their voices heard on issues which matter to them. This has been well developed in the Learning Disability Services (<https://www.crossreach.org.uk/find-service/adults/learning-disabilities>). Each year, we hold a Learning Disability Forum, and the 2024 Forum was a huge success. Organised by a small team of volunteers, the event provides a platform for feedback from all those using CrossReach Adult Learning Disability Services. The theme of this event was “growing together” with the aim of building even better services for those who use them. Presentations, songs, arts and crafts, Zumba and even a silent disco meant there was something for everyone to enjoy. A presentation was also given by the chairperson of the National Involvement Network (NIN), a network of people with additional support needs. The group meet regularly to discuss issues which matter to those with additional support needs, with the aim of allowing them to have more say in what happens within the organisations which support them.

2.2.6.1 Michael, the Chairperson of NIN, spoke to us after his presentation and said the key message he wanted to get out at the event was to allow those with additional support needs “to have their voices heard and not have decisions made for them.”

2.2.6.2 Organising Committee member Robert said; “it was brilliant to see the event come to life after putting a lot of work into it”.

3. WORKFORCE

3.1 Employee Awards

3.1.1 Recognising and celebrating the achievements of our people is important to us. While these celebrations take place every day within services, each year we hold our annual Employee Awards event. As a diverse organisation, this was celebrated with our theme of ‘A garden’s beauty never lies in one flower’. 183 nominations were received for one of our special category awards of Employee of the Year, Volunteer of the Year, New Recruit of the Year and Team of the Year.

3.1.2 The nominations received illustrate the difference our staff make to the lives of those we support and their peers every day:

“When I nearly gave up, she stopped me and I will always owe her for that.”	“She is a wonderful example of the compassion that CrossReach strive to provide.”	“She is wonderful, but more important as a human being, she simply is fantastic.”	“I was able to feel love for myself for the first time in 58 years.”
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3.1.3 Finalists in each category were invited to our awards event at the Dunblane Hydro on 6 November, where following lunch, winners were announced by our guest speaker Fiona Stewart and presented by the Moderator. 51 employees who had gained a new qualification in the past year were recognised along with 15 staff celebrating their 20 or 30 years service anniversary, and one employee who was recognised for 40 years service – a remarkable achievement.

3.2 Chaplaincy Pilot

3.2.1. In 2024, we reported that we were about to embark on a pilot to introduce a model of workforce chaplaincy to support services and provide emotional and spiritual encouragement to employees. We are pleased to report that the pilot has been active in five services: Eskmills, (Learning Disabilities), Cunningham House (Homelessness), Cumnor Hall (Older People Services), Go To and The Mallard (Children With Disabilities) and Morven (Mental Health). A sixth potential chaplain is in the process of training and will be paired with St Margaret’s House (Older People Services). Scottish Workplace Chaplaincy provide and support the volunteer chaplains who offer employees a confidential listening ear, and, if appropriate, advice or referral on to relevant support agencies. The pilot, which sees chaplains operating slightly differently, depending on the setting in which they are based, will be evaluated mid-2025 to determine if this initiative should be rolled out further. There are early indications that where a strong connection has been established, the additional support is much appreciated.

3.3 Employee Wellbeing

3.3.1. As our people show love to those we support, it is critically important that we ensure that they are appropriately supported by the organisation. The majority of roles within CrossReach are physically, emotionally and psychologically challenging. Therefore, it is important that we have the right range of wellbeing supports in place.

3.3.2 During 2024, we promoted a range of wellbeing initiatives. We have changed occupational health provider to ensure that employees are well supported not only while they are absent, but also as they return to the workplace. We have also changed provider for our employee assistance programme so employees can access counselling and legal or health helplines, if or when required. In addition to this, our employee health cash plan allows employees to reclaim some health costs such as dental and optical or with other practitioners e.g. physiotherapists.

3.3.3 CrossReach also signed up to See Me in Work, a See Me Scotland initiative. The programme helps us to make improvements to our culture, practice and policies and directly tackles mental health stigma and discrimination. A baseline survey will take place in spring 2025 which will inform action plans and areas of priority for this important piece of work.

3.3.4 Individual services have also been investing in staff wellbeing. One initiative being taken forward in the residential care homes is the development of wellbeing hubs and improvement to staff facilities onsite. This follows on from discussions between Williamwood House (<https://www.crossreach.org.uk/our-locations/williamwood-house>) and the local Health and Social Care Partnership about staff wellbeing, after which the first hub was created. The management team were awarded a local government grant and after speaking with staff, decided how the funds would be best used. The hub is open most days with relaxing music and aromatherapy oils diffusing throughout the day for staff to simply take time out as and when required.

3.3.4.1 *“Having the management, ancillary staff, care staff, admin staff and cooks all being together in that relaxed environment was so nice...there was such a great vibe. It allowed us all to get to know a bit better ‘the person’ and not just ‘the colleague!’”* Joanna, Activities Co-ordinator at Williamwood House.

3.4 Fair Work

3.4.1 CrossReach can recognise the value of the workforce in many different ways, some of which are outlined above, but ensuring that their pay, terms and conditions, and support arrangements are the best we can offer is our strongest statement and help with both recruitment and retention.

3.4.2 We are pleased to report that we have made significant progress in filling vacancies in some areas of work and continue to invest in recruitment and retention initiatives. Over the course of 2024, vacancies fell by 27% with an overall gain of 60 employees and voluntary turnover stabilised at 13.8%. We are grateful to all of the Presbyteries and individual congregations who have shared our vacancies throughout the past year and remain keen to work in partnership on this initiative over the course of 2025.

3.4.3 Despite the progress made, recruitment of staff remains an area of high risk on our risk register as it impacts on the quality and financial performance of services which are then reliant on agency staff for cover.

3.4.4 Unfortunately, the full value of the social care workforce is not fully recognised in the contracts under which we operate and there is still much to be done by the Scottish Government which remains well behind its own aspiration for Fair Work as laid out in the recommendations made in the report ‘Fair Work in Scotland’s Social Care Sector 2019’. The Coalition of Care and Support Providers in Scotland (CCPS) issued a statement to MSPs prior to the Scottish Budget being agreed which outlined the situation for Not-For-Profit (NfP) social care workers and the consequences for social care and those relying on it as a whole:

- NfP support workers are now paid 15% less than equivalent NHS staff
- Number of people in Scotland waiting for a social care assessment: 6,027
- Number of people in Scotland waiting for assessed care to be delivered: 3,281
- Vacancy rate in not-for-profit providers (March 2024): 9%
- NfP providers delivering public services despite a deficit budget (Mar 2024): 83%
- NfP providers discussing contract viability with one+ council(s) (Mar 2024): 61%

3.4.5 The CrossReach Board have been most grateful for the support received from the Moderator, the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team, Justice and Peace Scotland and a number of Ecumenical and Interfaith partners in recognising the importance of this issue to Scottish society and continuing to raise it in meetings with Scottish Government. There is some progress being made, but it is slow and, meanwhile, the pay gap between those working in the Not-for-Profit sector and equivalent grades in the NHS and Public Sector grows. The sector is largely made up of female workers and the gender inequalities have been highlighted.

3.4.5.1 As stated in the 'Fair Work in Scotland's Social Care Sector 2019' report:

The lack of status and chronic undervaluing of social care is not unconnected to perceptions of care as 'women's work'. Failure to address the gendered dynamics of the care sector and to challenge its significant voice deficit, low pay and one sided-flexibility contributes significantly to women's poorer quality of work and to Scotland's gender pay gap.

3.4.6 With the Government plans for a full scale reform of social care having been withdrawn, and no further communication on how the recommendations of the Independent Review of Adult Social Care (The Feeley Review) are to be implemented, the already critical situation for social care in Scotland feels set to worsen with the lives of hundreds of thousands of people in the most vulnerable situations affected.

3.4.7 We will continue working with partners across the Church on these issues over the course of 2025 and will provide resources to help others understand and raise this issue of concern with MSPs in the run up to the Scottish Elections in 2026.

4. STRONG SUSTAINABLE SERVICES

4.1 A journey towards financial sustainability

4.1.1 Recruitment and the consequent overspends in staffing costs are one factor which affected the financial performance of CrossReach last year but there are others which are significant. Generally, there is a failure to recognise the true costs of care in many of the contracting arrangements that the sector works under. The CCPS statistics quoted above speak to the stress within the sector as the majority of Not-for-Profit providers turn to reserves to support services operating at a deficit. Many, ultimately, are forced into a position where they may have to hand work back and stop supporting the very people relying on them at their greatest time of need. The situation has worsened over the course of 2024 as Local Authorities, who often commission the services, find themselves in a challenging financial situation where they have had to cut costs in order to balance their own books.

4.1.2 The latest blow is the National Insurance Contributions (Secondary Class 1 Contributions) Bill which has been identified as a threat to public services and will add an additional £1.2M to our operating costs unless mitigation is offered. We are currently working through a process to find ways to minimise the impact on the 2025 budget.

4.1.3 There are, however, always areas within our own control that we can improve on. Even before the National Insurance Bill announcement, we had identified a number of areas of improvement for services and central support areas which were continuing to cause concern and are working through a programme of key decision points in 2025. This does not necessarily mean services will close, but we do need to find a sustainable way forward, so reduction in service, longer waiting lists, having to decline some of the most complex clients being referred because of the high level of support needed or restructures are all under consideration. Capping our central costs, controlling bad debt and driving efficiencies in procurement are also areas receiving intense focus. None of that is easy, and so closure of services cannot be ruled out. The stark reality is that we face a most challenging year in our journey towards breakeven.

4.1.4 We know that many supporters from within the Church of Scotland congregations make generous personal donations as well as contributing to collective efforts, and that is most appreciated.

4.1.5 We are also grateful to the Guild for selecting CrossReach as one of its charity partners in the 'Let's Build a House' initiative and look forward to meeting and working with Guilds across Scotland, over the next 3 years, to support our Daisy Chain (www.crossreach.org.uk/our-locations/daisy-chain-early-years-project) and Perinatal Counselling Services (www.crossreach.org.uk/find-service/adults/counselling-for-adults/perinatal-counselling-and-therapy).

4.1.6 The CrossReach Board fully recognises that this is a challenging time across every part of the Church and will continue to give consideration to the ways in which we can best support one another. There are already a number of areas where close collaboration is proving of mutual benefit and we would encourage Presbyteries and congregations to explore the many opportunities which exist to partner with CrossReach to raise awareness, raise funds and ultimately to deliver something of the Church of Scotland's mission to the people of Scotland, together.

4.1.7 We would also wish to record sincere thanks for the generosity which continues to be shown to the organisation by Presbyteries, congregations, and the national church offices, without which many of the people we support would not be given the service they need and deserve.

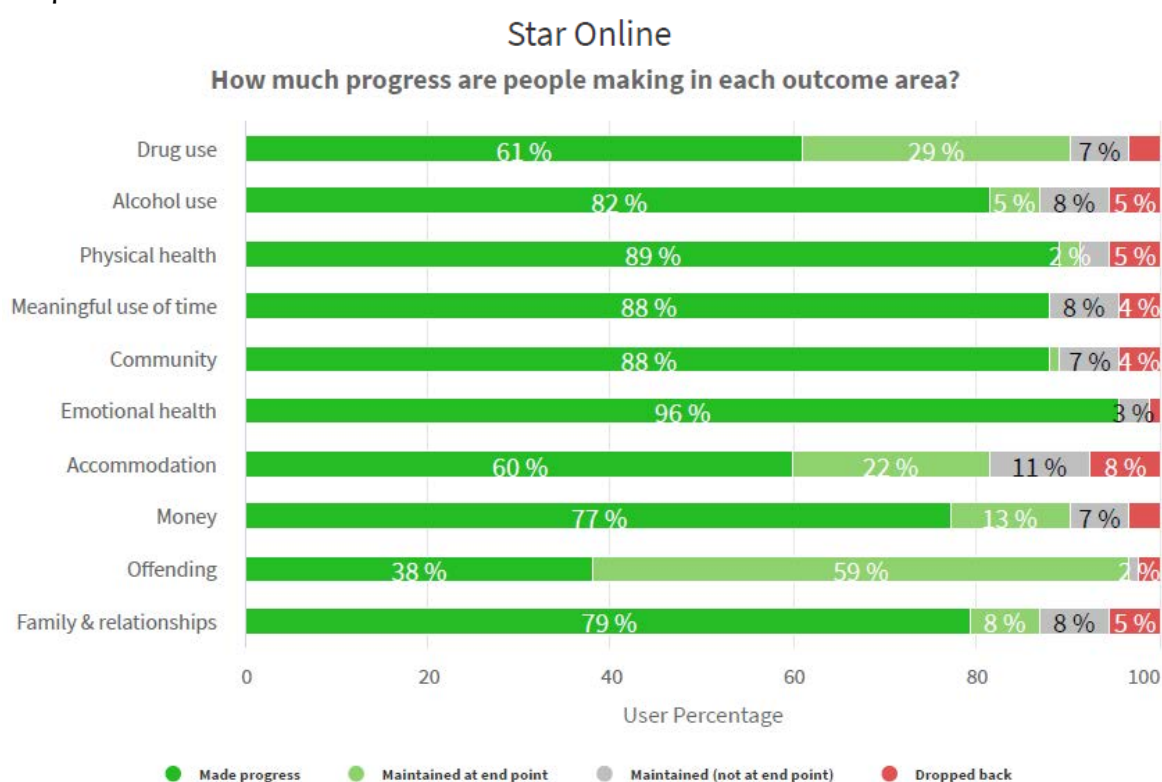
4.1.8 The 2026 financial target may continue to be a significant challenge for CrossReach at a time when the Church, nationally and locally, is also stretched in terms of its own resources, but we remain determined to bring things to balance as soon as practicably possible with the aim of the end of the year 2026 still firmly in our sights.

4.2 Investment in services

4.2.1 While clear about the challenges, the CrossReach Board recognises the need to concentrate on growth and investment if we are to continue to meet the needs of a society which is ever more reliant on the support which social care can offer. The demographics around the growth of the older population, and the recently released statistics around drugs deaths, homelessness, delayed discharge, suicide, and the rise in the number of people reporting with a mental health concern are ones where we would want to lend our expertise and be fit to respond to opportunities to do more. Some of the areas in which we have been active include:

4.2.1.1 Substance Use: The data on deaths related to drug use and alcohol use remains shocking and concerning. In August 2024, it was again reported that drugs deaths had increased on the previous year. While the overall figures tell their own story, CrossReach recognises that each data point represents an individual who potentially did not have access to the support they needed to live life in a different way. CrossReach have supported the Church of Scotland Public Life and Social Justice Programme Group to respond to the Right to Recovery Bill but have also been working to ensure that the services they offer themselves make the difference needed to the people turning to them for help. The information gathered on the outcomes tool used shows the significant progress many people engaged in the recovery services across the country make.

Graph A Outcomes tool



4.2.1.1.1 Maggie, a former service user, said “Miracles do happen when you get clean and sober and CrossReach have given me a wonderful opportunity. They believed in me and I became part of the team involved in the new development of the new service, thank you CrossReach. My life is full now”.

4.2.1.1.2 It is this sort of result which has attracted investment from the Scottish Government Drugs Mission Programme and in October 2024, work was completed on Nevis House, which sits in the grounds of Beechwood House (<https://www.crossreach.org.uk/our-locations/beechwood-house>), a CrossReach residential rehabilitation centre. It will double the capacity of the residential rehabilitation centre, offering support to an additional 24 people every year from across the north of Scotland (from Moray to the Western Isles, as well as Orkney and Shetland). The first residents will be admitted from April 2025.

4.2.1.1.3 Vikki, one of the former residents from Beechwood House said: “I feel very honoured to have been given the opportunity to help out with the designs of Nevis House right from the start. It has greatly helped my recovery. I now feel I have a sense of purpose again and look forward to the next chapter”.

4.2.1.2 Mental Health: CrossReach Counselling (www.crossreach.org.uk/find-service/adults/mental-wellbeing/counselling-for-mental-wellbeing) is vital as one in four people experience a mental health problem at some point in their lifetime. Recent studies show people with a mental illness die up to 20 years younger than their peers, with the largest age demographic

of self-harm between 5 and 30. Scotland holds the highest rate of suicide in the UK, particularly in the ages between 25 and 44. 74% of our clients fall within these age brackets. Thanks to the development of online counselling delivered via the NHS Attend Anywhere platform and telephone counselling, both of which complement face to face counselling, our services can now be accessed across Scotland. However, that has led to a growth in demand.

4.2.1.2.1 A CrossReach impact report published in April 2024 records the following:

4.2.1.2.1.1 Over the past year, CrossReach Counselling managed over 2,100 referrals and worked with over 1,900 individuals and families, an increase of 20% compared to the previous year. We offered over 17,300 therapeutic sessions, an increase of 16%. Clients were supported with an average of 9 sessions.

4.2.1.2.1.2 The figures below show the very real impact that counselling is having on our adult clients' everyday lives in four key areas:

Graph B Counselling client outcomes



4.2.1.2.1.3 There is also a significant change recorded for Children and Young People who measured positively against the GIRFEC wellbeing indicators.

Graph C Children and Young People counselling outcomes



4.2.1.2.1.4 Quotes from our Children and Young People:

"I felt I have learned to "Love myself" a little more, and to reason with the problems I have had thrown at me. I have 'HOPE' and am very grateful for the help you offered."

"Counselling has made me feel more confident in myself and helped me to control my emotions. It has helped me to find school easier and I also find it easier to talk to people and has made me feel more included. It has encouraged me to reach out more and I feel as if there's always someone to listen".

4.2.1.2.1.5 We are grateful for the continued support of the Assembly Trustees for this area of our work, which continues to attract some funding despite Mission and Renewal for our core costs no longer being available.

4.2.1.3 **Our Buildings:** Older People Services have been focussing on improving the environment in our care homes with the use of legacies which have been kindly left to us for that purpose. Most of our 15 care homes have seen improvements to the internal and external environment, resulting in a number of enhancements to daily living for people living, working and visiting services. Clashfarquhar House (www.crossreach.org.uk/our-locations/clashfarquhar) completed its upgrade in the summer of 2024 which involved a complete refurbishment of all flats including new wet rooms and mini kitchen facilities.

4.2.1.3.1 The improvements across the portfolio have supported a recovery in occupancy from the pandemic, with our care homes and specialist holistic model of care realising an average of around 92-96% occupancy.

4.2.1.3.2 The feedback has been extremely positive with the refurbished lounges, hairdressing salons, and dining rooms being particularly appreciated. The quality of the environment can have an enormous effect on the health, wellbeing and safety of residents and it is hoped the additional investment made will make a significant difference to the lives of our residents.



4.2.1.4 Infrastructure: Investing in infrastructure, which supports direct service provision but is one step removed, can be equally important. Ensuring that our buildings are well maintained and carbon efficient remained a priority in 2024. As we have worked to enhance the comfort and quality of our buildings, it has given us the opportunity to attend to carbon reducing measures. Grant funding has contributed to some of the initial investment necessary and we anticipate that energy costs for many of our buildings will be driven down as a result of the work being done.

4.2.1.4.1 The CrossReach Board agreed 8 key targets in June 2024 on which work has already started or a way forward, identified.

4.2.1.4.1.1 Progress made:

- Source 100% of our electricity from renewable sources by 2030 or earlier.
- Insulate our buildings to the maximum appropriate level, where technically feasible, by 2030 or earlier.
- Decarbonise the heating in our buildings, in line with the phased targets for public sector buildings, by 2038 or earlier.
- Transform our road based fleet, removing petrol and diesel cars by 2030.
- End use of single use plastic and send zero waste to landfill by 2028.
- Ensure that our investment decisions, including procurement, are aligned with Scotland's net zero targets and support the move to a circular economy.

4.2.1.4.1.2 Work still to be started:

- Maximise opportunities to enhance and restore biodiversity on our estate.
- Ensure adaptation to the impacts of climate change alongside our efforts to reduce our emissions as far as we can, as fast as we can.

4.2.1.4.2 Whilst it has been good to note the progress made, it is clear to us that we will not achieve the strategic vision to achieve net zero by 2030, agreed by the General Assembly 2023. We do believe, however, the targets set to be achievable and realistic based on the size of our estate and the resources available to us. We will report annually on our progress towards these targets and update our interim science-based targets every 2 years to support delivery of our long-term net zero aspirations.

4.2.1.5 Information Technology: During the course of 2024, it was agreed to make significant investment in the implementation of Microsoft 365 and SharePoint to enhance operational efficiency, data management, and security. It was also seen as important to aid collaboration among staff through new tools and practices.

4.2.1.5.1 The project has included updating systems, restructuring staff access to data, ensuring secure data storage, and providing training for staff to use new tools. It emphasises the necessity of Microsoft 365 and SharePoint for productivity, collaboration, and data security.

4.2.1.5.2 A project for the adoption of Microsoft 365, SharePoint, OneDrive, and Microsoft Teams in three services demonstrated improved workflow efficiency and collaboration. However, it highlighted the need for more extensive staff training due to the steep learning curve.

4.2.1.5.3 As a result, a number of adaptations were made to the implementation process and the pilot is now being rolled out across the organisation, with the initial feedback being largely positive.

5. SCOTTISH CHILD ABUSE INQUIRY (SCAI) AND SCOTTISH COVID INQUIRY

5.1 In the report to the General Assembly 2024, the CrossReach Board indicated that it was making preparation to give evidence at both the SCAI (Phase 8 Residential Schools) and the Scottish Covid Inquiry. An update was given in the Convener's speech to General Assembly 2024. Since our last report, the Procurator has delivered a final submission on Phase 8 to the SCAI in February 2025, at the close of all evidence having been heard for that phase. We currently await publication of the case study on residential schools and will consider the recommendations in full, once issued.

5.2 Operation Koper was set up by the Procurator Fiscal in 2020 to investigate all Covid-19 related deaths in care homes. That Inquiry is ongoing. Currently 8 of our care homes remain under scrutiny as a result of this investigation. We are grateful to the legal team at 121 George St for their ongoing support

6. PERFORMANCE

6.1 Results from the annual survey of people who access our services.

6.1.1 The results from the annual survey of people who access our services yielded the following results:

Graph D Measurements against Health and Social Care Standards

	Total Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Did Not Answer	Total Positive Responses
Dignity and Respect CrossReach staff treat me with respect	448	369 83.9%	53 11.4%	16 3.6%	3 0.7%	2 0.5%	5 1.1%	422 94.2%
Compassion CrossReach staff are kind and caring to me	448	365 82.5%	58 13.0%	15 3.1%	4 0.9%	2 0.5%	4 0.9%	423 94.4%
Be Included I receive the right information at the right time and in a way that I can understand	448	310 71.5%	87 18.5%	34 7.8%	8 1.7%	2 0.5%	7 1.6%	397 88.6%
Responsive Care and Support If I make a complaint or raise a concern it is acted upon	448	278 66.2%	85 19.2%	49 11.9%	8 2.0%	3 0.7%	25 5.6%	363 81.0%
Wellbeing I feel safe and am protected from neglect, abuse or avoidable harm	448	371 83.7%	55 12.3%	14 3.1%	2 0.5%	2 0.5%	4 0.9%	426 95.1%

6.1.1.1 A number of questions were also asked within each service area, with a focus on human rights.

Graph E Service user survey question on human rights

Adult Care Services

The organisation protects me & makes sure my rights are upheld	86	65 83.9%	15 11.4%	3 3.6%	0 0.7%	2 0.5%	1 0.5%	80 93.0%
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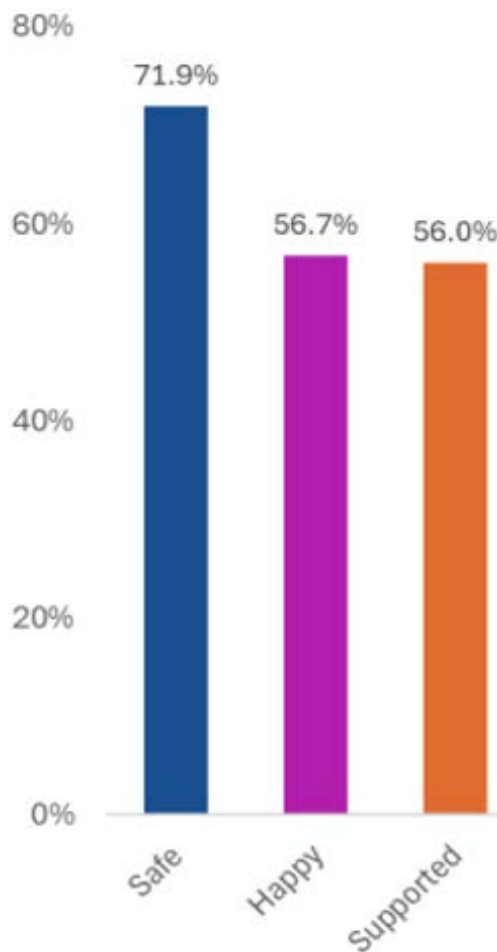
Children and Families Services

The organisation protects me & makes sure my rights are upheld	172	127 73.8%	28 16.3%	12 7.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	5 2.9%	155 90.1%
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Older People Services

The organisation protects me & makes sure my rights are upheld	186	118 63.4%	57 30.6%	9 4.8%	1 0.5%	0 0.0%	1 0.5%	175 94.1%
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6.1.1.2 In addition, an exercise was carried out asking people to identify their top three words after receiving CrossReach support. The graph below shows the top three words, aggregated.
Graph F What Three Words?



6.2 Quality

6.2.1 CrossReach has 53 services which are inspected by the Care Inspectorate.

6.2.2 During 2024, 20 services were inspected. Grades are awarded for each inspection theme ranging from 1 – unsatisfactory to 6 – excellent.

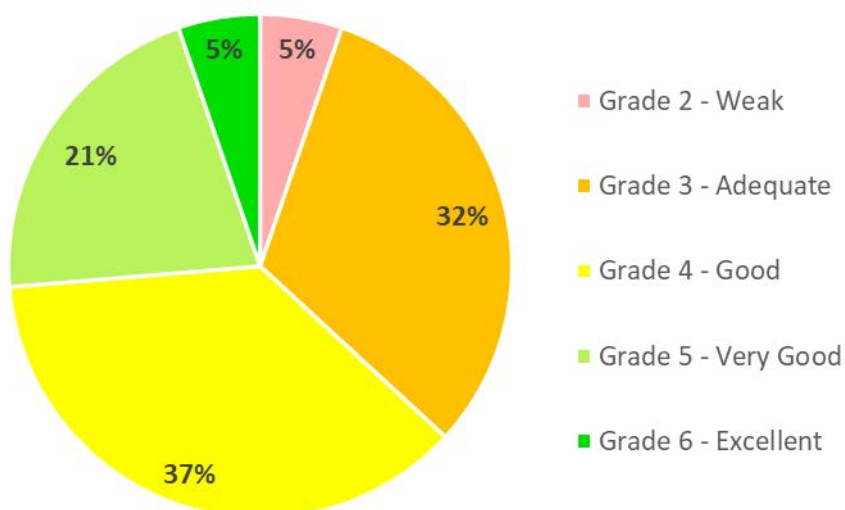
6.2.2.1 The inspection themes are:

- How well do we support people's wellbeing?
- How good is our leadership?
- How good is our staff team?
- How good is our setting?
- How well is our care and support planned?

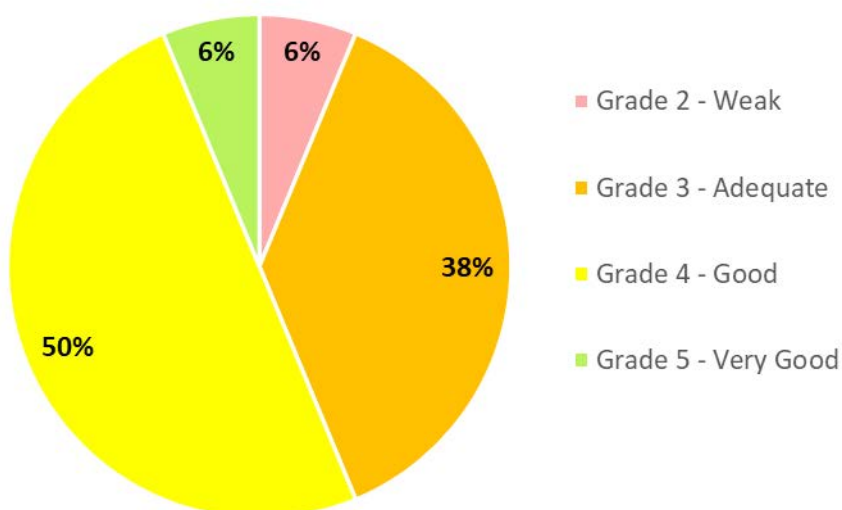
6.2.2.2 Not all inspection themes are assessed in each inspection, but most inspections cover the following three areas. Our results for 2024 are captured below:

Graph G Care Inspectorate Grades

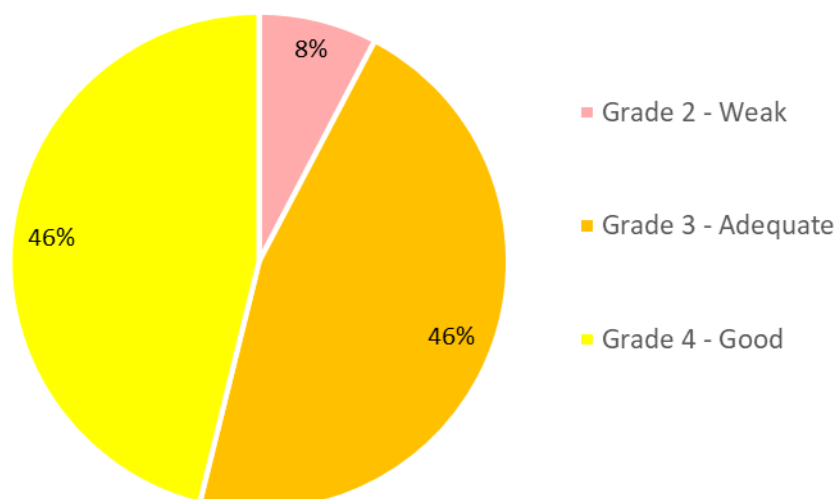
How well do we support people's wellbeing?



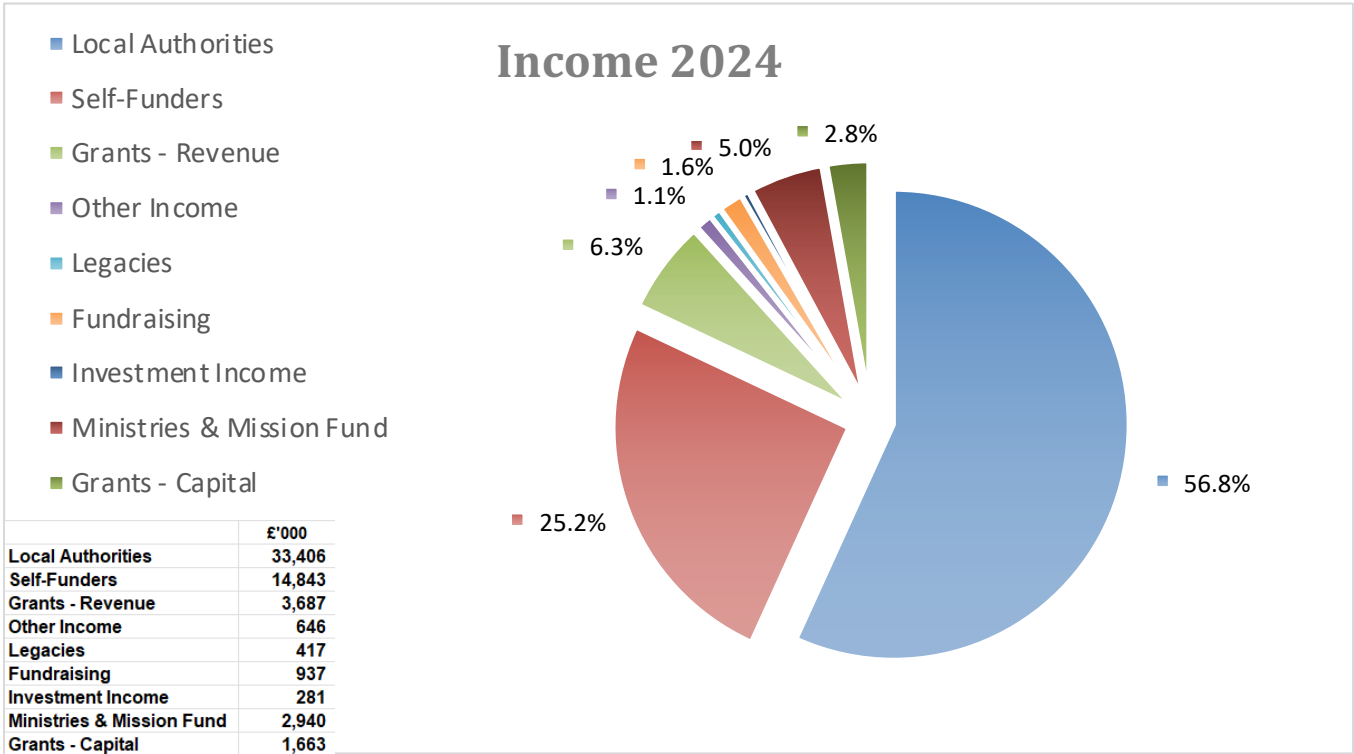
How good is our staff team?



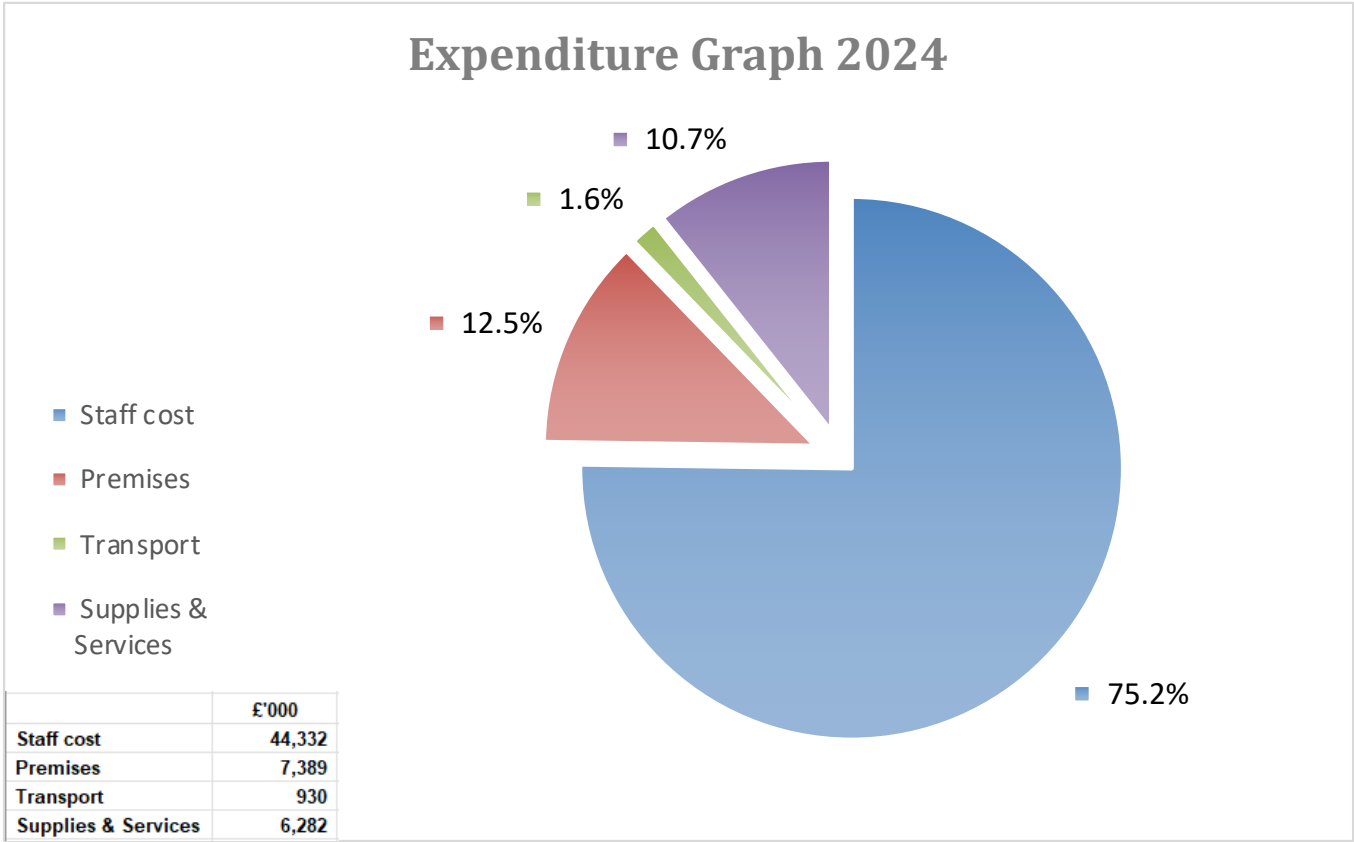
How well is our care and support planned?



6.3. Finance
Graph H Income and Expenditure



* Future years grant funding for service delivery programmes (£4.88M) has been excluded from this report.



6.3.1 Financial pressures continued to challenge CrossReach in 2024, with funding for services not keeping up with the cost of providing those services. Year on year, service delivery costs increased by 10.1%, while income from charitable activities delivered in 2024 only increased by 7.7%. The increased cost of service delivery primarily related to a welcome increase in pay for frontline staff. This was mandated by the Government through linking funding to payment of the Scottish Living Wage, but the related costs were not fully funded. In addition, as previously stated, funding for increases in non-wage costs was specifically omitted.

6.3.2 There continues to be a heavy reliance on agency staff, but there was a significant improvement in 2024, with overall agency costs falling by 16.6% in the year, despite an increase in rates per hour.

6.3.3 In spite of the unfunded cost increases, the net effect is that the net outgoings of CrossReach, before property disposals, gains on investments and property impairments, decreased year on year from a deficit of £(3,141)K in 2023 to a deficit of £(2,109)K in 2024.

In the name of the Social Care Council (known as CrossReach Board)

MIKE CANTLAY, Convener
DOUGLAS HAMILTON, Vice-Convener
VIV DICKENSON, Chief Executive Officer

Appendix 1 – Amended Social Care Council Constitution

The Church of Scotland SOCIAL CARE COUNCIL



CONSTITUTION

INTRODUCTION

The Social Care Council is a Council constituted by the authority of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, directly accountable to the General Assembly and subject to the supervision of the Assembly Trustees in terms of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Council and the Assembly Trustees.

1. NAME

1.1 The name of the Council shall be the CHURCH OF SCOTLAND SOCIAL CARE COUNCIL (hereinafter referred to as “the Council”). For the purpose of delivery of services in terms of its remit the Council shall operate under the name “CrossReach” and will use the working title of The CrossReach Board. The Council’s headquarters shall be at Charis House, 47 Milton Road East, Edinburgh, or at such other location as may from time to time be approved by the Assembly Trustees.

2. MEMBERSHIP

2.1 The Council shall comprise:

- an Assembly-appointed Convener and one Assembly-appointed Vice-Convener; and
- Eleven Assembly-appointed members, plus the Chief Executive, acting as Secretary as an ex officio and non-voting member.

At least one member should be a Church of Scotland minister.

2.2 The Convener and Vice-Conveners shall normally serve for four years but all care should be taken to ensure that they do not end a period of service at the same time. All other members shall serve for a term of four years.

3. REMIT AND POWERS

3.1 The remit of the Council shall be:

- To demonstrate Christ’s love in action by offering high quality care and support which will empower people across Scotland to live full and fulfilling lives;
- To provide specialist resources and services to further the mission of the Church expressing its care for communities across Scotland;
- To identify existing and emerging areas of need and to guide CrossReach services and the Church in pioneering new approaches to relevant problems through collaborative partnerships both from within the Church and externally;
- To enable the people CrossReach supports and its employees to raise issues of concern to them and to amplify their voices through appropriate channels within the Church structures and externally;

3.2 In furtherance of its remit the Council may, subject to the approval of the Assembly Trustees, borrow money and may charge or provide security therefor over any part of the heritable property belonging to the Council.

3.3 The Council

3.3.1 Members of the Council shall be ultimately responsible for directing the affairs of the Council and for ensuring that it is solvent, well run and delivers the objectives for which it has been established. To this end members shall be responsible for:

- Ensuring compliance with the Council's objectives, mission, ethos and values;
- Establishing or approving policies, strategic plans and budgets to achieve these objectives and monitoring performance against them;
- Ensuring that the Council develops and maintains its financial strength;
- Ensuring that the Council, in the performance of its objectives, complies with all relevant legislation, regulations and requirements of appropriate regulatory bodies;
- Establishing and maintaining a clear framework of delegation and internal control;
- Agreeing or ratifying all policies and decisions on any matters which might create significant risk to the Council, financial or otherwise.
- Holding an appropriate register of risks.

3.3.2 Council members are required collectively and individually to act reasonably at all times in the best interests of the Council. All members are equally responsible in law for the Council's actions and decisions and have equal status as members. Each Council member shall act as an individual and not as a representative of any other group. Council members shall ensure that they remain, at all times, independent and do not come under the influence of any other body or individual.

3.3.3 The Council shall have power to appoint such Committees and Groups as it may from time to time determine to be appropriate to ensure that the Council's remit is fulfilled.

3.3.4 The Council can from time to time, and between meetings, delegate decision making to three members: the Convener, Vice Convener and Chair of its Finance Group.

4. MEETINGS

4.1 The Council shall normally meet six times in the year. At all meetings of the Council four members shall be a quorum. Meetings may be held either in person, online, or in hybrid form, using electronic means.

4.2 At each meeting, the Council shall receive reports from individuals, Committees and Groups holding delegated powers on the discharge of these powers since the previous meeting.

5. FINANCE

5.1 The Council shall be responsible to the General Assembly for its own banking and financial arrangements and shall submit to the Assembly Trustees' Finance Committee all financial information necessarily required by the Finance Committee to enable it (a) to prepare the Consolidated Accounts of the Unincorporated Entities of the Church of Scotland, and (b) to submit them annually to the General Assembly for approval.

6. STAFFING

6.1 The Council, in consultation with the Assembly Trustees, shall appoint a Secretary who shall be known as the Chief Executive and, as a separate employing agency of the Church, shall employ such other staff as are necessary to fulfil its remit.

6.2 The Council shall be responsible for funding the salaries and related costs of all employees, and shall be responsible for reviewing, from time to time, the terms and conditions under which it appoints and employs staff.

7. ADOPTION OF THE CONSTITUTION

7.1 This revised Constitution, subject to the approval of the 2025 General Assembly, shall take effect from 1 June 2025 (replacing the Constitution in place since 2006).

7.2 It shall be open to the Council to amend the terms of this Constitution as and when found desirable and necessary, subject always to the approval of the General Assembly.

2025

Appendix 2 – List of CrossReach Services

Adult Services

Justice Services

- Dick Stewart Service (Glasgow)

Homeless People

- Cale House (Inverness)
- Cunningham House (Edinburgh)
- Kirkhaven Project (Glasgow)

Learning Disabilities

- Eskmills (Edinburgh)
- The Bungalow (Stonehaven)
- Threshold Edinburgh
- Threshold Glasgow
- Threshold Support Services – Housing and Residential (North and South Lanarkshire)
- Threshold Support Services – Community and Short Breaks (North and South Lanarkshire)

Mental Health

- Allarton (Glasgow)
- Gaberston House (Alloa)
- Morven Day Services (Kilmarnock)
- Lewis Street (Stornoway)

Substance Use Services

- Beechwood House (Inverness)
- CrossReach Abstinence Recovery Service (Glasgow)
- Dochas Housing Support (Stornoway)
- Nevis House (Inverness)
- Rankeillor Initiative (Edinburgh)
- Tayside Support Service (Dundee)
- Whiteinch Move on Service (Glasgow)

Children and Family Services

Looked After Children (7 small residential houses and education campus)

- Carraig View (Port Glasgow)
- Dumbrook House (Strathblane)
- Fanniescroft Farm (Lennoxton)
- Millmuir Farm (Gargunnock)
- Mount Pleasant (Dalry)
- Rockwood House (Beith)
- The Old Lodge (Stirlingshire)
- Erskine Waterfront Campus

Children With Disabilities

- Short Breaks & GO2 (Glasgow)

Community Services / Early Intervention

- Daisy Chain Early Years Project (Glasgow)
- Perth Prison Visitors Centre
- Polmont Prison Visitor Centre

Counselling, Support & Training

CrossReach Counselling West and North – includes:

- Bluebell Perinatal Counselling Services (Glasgow)
- COSCA Counselling Training (Glasgow)
- CrossReach Counselling Inverness – Children and Young People (CYP) Counselling and Generic Service
- CrossReach Counselling Moray – Perinatal and Generic Service
- Tom Allan Service (Glasgow)

CrossReach Counselling East – includes:

- Counselling & Recovery (Edinburgh)
- Perinatal East Counselling (Edinburgh)
- Sunflower Garden (Edinburgh)

Older People Services

- Adams House (Elderslie) – Dementia & Heart for Art in the Care Home
- Balmedie House (Balmedie)
- Bellfield (Banchory)
- Cameron House (Inverness) – Dementia
- Clashfarquhar House (Stonehaven)
- Cumnor Hall (Ayr) – Dementia & Heart for Art in the Care Home
- Heart for Art, Broughty Ferry
- Heart for Art, Carluke
- Heart for Art, Edinburgh (Charteris Centre)
- Heart for Art, Edinburgh (Morningside)
- Heart for Art, Galashiels
- Heart for Art, Garelochhead
- Heart for Art, Glasgow (Broomhill)
- Heart for Art, Musselburgh
- Heart for Art, Perth & Kinross (The Tryst)
- Heart for Art, Strathaven
- Heart for Art, Stonehaven
- Heart for Art, Dunfermline
- Morlich House (Edinburgh)
- Oversteps (Dornoch)
- Queen's Bay Lodge (Edinburgh)
- South Beach House (Ardrossan)
- St Margaret's House (Polmont) – Dementia & Heart for Art in the Care Home
- The Elms Care Home (Edinburgh) – Dementia & Heart for Art in the Care Home
- The Oasis Garelochhead
- The Walter & Joan Gray Care Home (Shetland)
- Whinnieknowe (Nairn)
- Williamwood House (Glasgow) – Dementia & Heart for Art in the Care Home

Further information on our services can be found on our website www.crossreach.org.uk

THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND TRUST MAY 2025

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Re-appoint Mr Thomas Watson and Mrs Valerie Macniven as members of the Trust from 1 June 2025.
3. Appoint the Rev Dr John Cowie as a member of the Trust from 1st June 2025.

Report

The Church of Scotland Trust, which was established by Act of Parliament in 1932, submits its Ninety second Report to the General Assembly.

1. THE WORK OF THE TRUST

1.1 General

1.1.1 The function of the Church of Scotland Trust is to hold properties outwith Scotland and to act as a trustee in a number of third party trusts. During the year it has dealt with various matters which have arisen regarding these properties and trusts. Matters of particular significance are noted hereafter.

1.2 Third Party Trusts

1.2.1 The Trust is currently trustee of 48 third party trusts which benefit different areas of the Church's work. In 2007 the Trust instigated a Rolling Review Programme for these trusts. The Trust's Secretary and Clerk undertakes a review of the trusts annually, producing reports on half the third party trust portfolio to each of the February/March and September/October Trust meetings. An annual administration charge is applied to each fund in line with standard accounting practice.

1.3 Pakistan

1.3.1 The Trust is disappointed to report that the new Succession Trust is still not operational. Urgent action is being taken to appoint local trustees in order that a revised trust deed can be submitted to the local registrar. It is intended that the new Trust will take title to the Church's property interests in Pakistan in terms of the Church of Scotland Trust Order Confirmation Act 1958. At the same time the Trust are continuing to pursue a transfer of assets to Government authorities in Pakistan in the event that registration of the new Trust cannot be completed timeously. This is not a straightforward process and progress in this regard has been minimal.

1.3.2 The Trust continue to meet regularly with their attorney for Pakistan, Dr Peter David, to monitor developments and agree future strategy.

1.3.3 As reported for a number of years, the Trust continues to be a party to a number of court cases involving its property interests in Pakistan. Some cases which have been found in favour of the Trust are now the subject of an appeal. The Trust is legally represented in all these cases but, due to the nature of the Pakistan legal system, it is anticipated that the cases will be ongoing for some time.

1.4 Israel

1.4.1 The Trust continues to be consulted by the Israel Palestine Committee regarding ongoing and future developments relating to property in Israel.

1.5 Act II, 2016 – the International Presbytery Act

1.5.1 Since the General Assembly of 2016 all congregations in the International Presbytery require the approval of both Presbytery and the Church of Scotland Trust for (a) any extensive alterations to their building/s; (b) any property purchase and (c) the lease of any property in excess of one year. The Trust continues to work with the International Presbytery to fulfil these responsibilities.

1.5.2 Every congregation in the International Presbytery is required to produce a Property Report to Presbytery each year with details of the management, maintenance and insurance of congregational buildings which is copied to the Trust.

2. ACCOUNTS FOR 2024

2.1 The Trust's Accounts for the year 2024 have been audited and copies thereof are available on request from the Secretary and Clerk.

3. MEMBERSHIP

3.1 In accordance with the constitution of the Trust, the following two members retire by rotation on 31 May 2025 but are eligible for re-appointment: Mr Thomas Watson and Mrs Valerie Macniven. It is suggested to the General Assembly that Mr Thomas Watson and Mrs Valerie Macniven be re-appointed as members of the Trust from 1 June 2025.

3.2 It is suggested that the Rev Dr John Cowie be appointed a member of the Trust from 1 June 2025.

In the name and by the authority of The Church of Scotland Trust

LEON MARSHALL, Chairman
MORAG ANGUS, Vice-Chairman
MADELAINE SPROULE, Secretary & Clerk

IONA COMMUNITY BOARD REPORT MAY 2025

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Affirm the importance of learning about the pressing economic circumstances affecting the people of our country, in particular those already living on the margins; and commit anew to working, with our partners, towards alleviating hardship for the poorest people in our society (Section 2.3).
3. Affirm the consistent position of the Church of Scotland in condemning the existence and threat of nuclear weapons as sinful and an offence to God's created order and urge the Church to recommit to working and praying for peace and disarmament (Section 3.1).
4. Encourage all congregations and members to consider how they can further peace in their context, and support peacebuilding organisations (Section 3.1.3).
5. Encourage congregations to put environmental concerns at the heart of their mission, recognising that these concerns impact all other aspects of mission (Section 3.2).
6. Invite church groups and bodies to consider a stay at Iona Abbey www.iona.org.uk (Section 4.5).

Report

1. ROOTED IN HOPE: LIVED IN COMMUNITY

1.1 'Divide and conquer' is a cry of the power-hungry. The more we fragment and separate, the weaker we become. On the contrary, the more we build relationships, deepen ties and grow community, the stronger and more resilient we become and the more courage we find to stand up and speak out for justice. In a world where climate catastrophe is writ large – poverty gallops on apace, exclusion and marginalisation continue to blight the lives of many including refugees and asylum seekers, and the voice of young people continues to be squashed – the question remains: what is ours to do? How are we to be?

1.2 Paul's words of hope in 1 Corinthians 13 are a blue-print for how to keep a radical minority movement alive, describing in down-to-earth detail the kind of love that is needed if we are to flourish. This is a love rooted in faith and in hope. This is a love made real in action, mirroring the message in 1 John that love which does not help our neighbour is not love (1 John 3:16-17); and the message in James that faith without works is nothing (James 2:14-26). In the same way, hope which doesn't try to make 'God's Kingdom come on earth' isn't hope but delusion. It is this kind of hope, lived in the real lives of real people, to which we are called and committed.

1.3 As a Christian community, we in the Iona Community lean on a framework of hope to guide us. This is a framework rooted in God's time: *kairos* time. This framework of hope opens us to possibilities as yet unseen, tapping into intuitive as well as logical approaches to the world's challenges. It is a framework that is perhaps more resonant of the notion of emergence than of robust plans: hope in the not yet, nestled within the now. Hope in the story of resurrection in the midst of catastrophe. Hope in the small, ordinary miracles of love and justice in the face of so much that is wrong. Hope in acts of compassion and kindness. Hope in the welcome of the stranger at our tables, in our centres of hospitality, in the learning, reflection and campaigning inspired by our Common Concern Networks. Hope that extends us beyond optimism to a deep, embedded, visionary belief that despite all that changes, the world will not fall apart: "It's because I don't change, says God, that you don't fall apart." (Rowan Williams)

1.4 We know this hope is real when guests at Iona Abbey tell us they leave re-energised and focused; when those who meet us at the Glastonbury or Greenbelt Festivals say that we give them hope in times of despair; when folk who follow us on social media, who worship with us daily online, who read our publications or who encounter us through our poetry or hymns say that they are supported, and encouraged; or when our friends in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories tell us how much they rely on the prayers from around the world to cling on to the little hope they have of lasting peace.

1.5 The Very Rev Sally Foster Fulton addressed the charity Trustees on the Iona Community Council in September 2024 on the theme of hope, encouraging us to 'hold on to each other'. It is in staying connected, in continuing to turn up together when it matters – on marches and at the gates of nuclear weapons bases, in prayer networks and letter-writing campaigns – that we are reaffirming our faith in 'God's goodness at the heart of humanity, planted more deeply than all that is wrong'. We share those words daily in our Affirmation of Faith.

2. IN SOLIDARITY WITH CHURCH(ES)

2.1 In these times of change and transition we stand in solidarity with all churches and faith communities who work for peace and justice. We remain steadfast and courageous in faith, recognising that as in our short span of nearly 90 years of life as a community, so too our churches in their longer span have witnessed much change and flux. This is the nature of the created order. In times of change, transition and flux, our prayer is that we will remain open to radical transformation for the good of all. In all of this we recognise, applaud and affirm the ongoing and essential ministry of all leaders in our churches, and of lay leaders in particular.

2.2 Iona Community Learn completed a successful 18-month pilot programme in December 2024 focussing on volunteer pathways, partnerships development and the new members global programme. We are delighted that this work has now been made permanent. The work for this next period will focus on seeking accreditation for our volunteering programme with Volunteer Scotland; developing further partnerships including with Glasgow and Edinburgh Universities and with the Student Christian Movement, and an additional partnership with the Joint Public Issues Team; and supporting the development of the Wild Goose Resource Group.

2.3 We celebrated our partnership with the [Joint Public Issues Team \(JPIT\)](#) in 2024, with the Iona Community Lecture given by Simeon Mitchell in October at New College, Edinburgh.

2.3.1 We see this partnership flourishing in future years with participation in the JPIT annual conference, with JPIT leading a week at Iona Abbey, and with possible collaboration in campaigns and policy work, for example, in relation to the Government's Child Poverty Strategy.

2.3.2 In his lecture, entitled 'Turning the Tables', focussed on economic justice, Simeon Mitchell affirmed the grounding principles for a Christian understanding of economics, including: Creation is good and abundant; we were created for relationships; God desires the flourishing of all life; we will be judged on our choices – God requires justice and mercy. Jesus' overturning of the tables in the Temple remains a potent symbol of the need for followers of Christ to overturn unjust economic structures.

2.3.3 He went on to uncover the fallacy of the 'homo economicus' (a model presenting humans as rational, self-interested agents) rooted in a structure which glorifies work, and he encouraged us to look for deeper wisdom when it comes to designing more just economic systems. How do we ensure that the welfare of the worker is as vital as the profit to the employer? How do we look anew at debt, providing more opportunities for jubilee, and for writing off debt?

2.3.4 Simeon encouraged us to believe that a just economic order is possible, urging us to reclaim economics as part of our civic discourse, vital to democratic decision-making. We commend to the Church [JPITs free six-session course on 'Just Economics'](#), designed to open up questions of justice and the economy within small groups in churches and faith communities.

2.4 In 2023 we welcomed back to our Youth Festival members of a youth network from a London church. When they first joined us in 2022, many of them had never been out of London. They took a while to adapt to being in a medieval abbey on a remote Scottish island. They kept their hoods up and avoided eye contact. As the week went on, they found their bearings, grew in confidence. The hoods came down a little more each day. As the week progressed, they displayed fine football skills, raced up Dun I, marvelled at Staffa, built intricate sea-weed sculptures on Calva beach and found their voices to read and sing at worship.

2.5 This year, about 80% of those young people from London returned. Now they knew where they were going and understood the rhythm of the Abbey worship, and life in community. Their confidence spread throughout the rest of the group. They shared reflections in small groups, and chose projects in drama, art or song writing. They hosted a hilarious Open Mic night, and tried out Scottish country dancing with great panache. "We got soaked and frozen on the pilgrimage. It was terrible. And then it was good. We all made it the whole way back. We did it!"

2.6 Join the waiting list for [Youth Festival 2025](#) or book your group in for our [two Youth Festivals in 2026](#).

3. UNITED IN OUR CONCERNS

3.1 The Iona Community affirms the consistent position of the Church of Scotland in condemning the existence and threat of nuclear weapons as sinful and an offence to God's created order. Jesus' call to be peacemakers (Matthew 5:9) is an urgent one. And so, we urge the Church to recommit to working and praying for peace and disarmament.

3.1.1 Within our Community we continue to learn the art of peacemaking from within, in the knowledge that any call to others to take action for peace must begin with ourselves. We continue to work with [Place for Hope](#) on honing our skills for peace and reconciliation.

3.1.2 In a year of continuing conflict and escalating militarism on a global scale, it is increasingly important to campaign for peace, reconciliation and disarmament. The Iona

Community does this through the activities of individual members and its Peace Common Concern Network (CCN). Opposition to the UK nuclear defence system continues with protest action at the Faslane base, and to the arms trade with actions at UK arms manufacturing sites. We particularly deplore: the Government's refusal to have any association with the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW); the prospect of US nuclear missiles being restationed at Lakenheath in East Anglia; and [the continued export to Israel of parts for maintenance of their F-16 fighter aircraft.](#)

3.1.3 Members of the Peace CCN have been involved with the Anglican Pacifist Fellowship, Network of Christian Peace Organisations, and the Peace Conference of European Churches. The conflict in Ukraine and the hope for peace was recognised by the purchase for Iona Abbey of an icon, painted by a Ukrainian artist on the wooden lid of an ammunition box. The proceeds from the purchase went to a Ukrainian mobile hospital, symbolising the transformation of conflict and death into life and hope.

3.1.4 August 2025 sees the 80th anniversary of the destruction of the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. On 2nd August we will stand in solidarity with church and religious leaders of all faiths as we call for the eradication of nuclear weapons at Faslane.

3.1.5 "The root of violence in our society today is our intention to use nuclear weapons. Once we have agreed to that, all other evil is minor in comparison." (Richard McSorley SJ 1976). From 9th -15th August we are hosting a week at Iona Abbey entitled "[Peacebuilding in a World of Conflict](#)". Speakers from the Fellowship of Reconciliation, Rethinking Security, Quaker peace work and Ulster Community Engagement will give us the opportunity to develop practical ideas which we can then implement in our own circumstances and localities. During the week a triptych by Susie Alexander will be introduced to the Abbey for permanent display – "New Life Rises from the Ashes of Hiroshima."

3.2 Our Eco CCN produced a [Position Paper](#) setting out the Iona Community's views and commitments around the extreme urgency and great potential of transitioning to a just and sustainable world. Our colleagues on Iona are auditing the carbon footprint of our work there, and have made [recommendations to lessen the environmental impact of guest travel.](#)

3.2.1 The crises of nature and climate do not just happen. As the powerful witness of the prophets, together with voices from global-south churches will confirm, these crises are the result of intentional, knowing and sinful injustice. The environmental movements of UK churches are clear that further development of fossil fuel infrastructure is a choice for harm to people and wildlife.

3.2.2 These crises will not be 'fixed' in our lifetimes. The choice of inaction, however, rapidly lessens the potential to make significant change. In these circumstances, faith offers a treasure of resources for spiritual resilience. Faith is deepened and joy and community are enriched by the demanding common tasks of response.

3.2.3 As the World Council of Churches launches its 'Ecumenical Decade for Climate Justice Action: Moving Together in Ecological Metanoia for Transformation' in June 2025, no approach to mission can have integrity which ignores the urgency of mainstream response to and repentance for those threats which are already reality and, without a change of direction, will increasingly fall on future generations. Our own rural and island communities, who will be hit hardest and early, will be of particular concern.

3.2.4 With active Members and Associate Members around the world the Eco CCN is acutely aware of the many who don't take climate change seriously and/or feel they can make no real difference. Too often other pressing concerns get in the way. They are also acutely aware that many, including numerous young people, do take the worsening catastrophe very seriously. Such concerns are real. And so we believe we must find ways forward. From developing sustainable food systems to greater demilitarisation, from considering technological to theological advances, we are concerned in particular with those most impacted by both change and lack of change. Alongside people of all faiths and understandings, the church must lead by example. As a Community, we seek to play our part.

3.2.5 We see the synergy between the call of our two Associate Members in Kenya, and the inspirational Founder of the Iona Community, George MacLeod: 'Changing the narrative of climate change is not a solo job, it is not for the chosen few, it is the choice everyone needs to make.' (Frida Wafula and Marksén Masinde, Associate Members in Kenya). 'All is in flux, turn but a stone and an angel moves. Underneath are the everlasting arms. Unknowable we know you, Christ beneath us.' (from a prayer by George Macleod)

3.3 Aware that poverty is a global issue, members of our CCN on Poverty and Inequality continues to focus their efforts on justice for the poor by promoting the Minimum Income Guarantee that should lift people out of financial poverty and promote independence and dignity. This is an initiative that is being considered by some in Scotland and much further afield. The CCN will draw on the work of the Poverty Alliance, believing that this approach could reduce poverty and inequality for the most marginalised. Members of this CCN continue

to support the work of Faith in Community Scotland, Faith in Community Dundee and other similar initiatives in the North of England. These agencies and others amplify the voices of those living with poverty and inequality in order to shape policies and take actions to address injustice.

3.4 Our CCNs on Challenging Racism, Faith and Spirituality, Inter Faith and LGBTQ+ continue to meet regularly and are preparing Position Papers to outline the demanding common task of these concerns.

4. LIVED IN COMMUNITY

4.1 Twenty-nine new Members joined the first year of our two-year New Members Programme in September 2024. This programme offers residential and online components so that New Members can experience living in community together, reflecting on the Rule of Life of the Iona Community, and discerning the path to community for themselves and the Community. New Members range in age from 22 to 82 years, live in Scotland, England, Belgium, Germany, Italy, the USA and Australia and represent a range of Christian denominations including Presbyterian, Anglican and Methodist.

4.2 A rigorous business analysis of the MacLeod Centre on Iona has resulted in the decision that the building should provide housing on the island of Iona for those who most need it. As this report goes to print, we are reviewing various options to enable this to happen.

4.3 Each week at Iona Abbey we welcome up to 44 guests to live with us in community. Our lift, accessible bedrooms and bathrooms, and ramp into the refectory allow us to welcome all. We worked in partnership with the Poverty Truth community in 2024 to support 26 guests from situations of poverty to stay at the Abbey free of charge.

4.3.1 One guest from the Poverty Truth community shared this reflection, showing her collection of stones and shells, from her time at Iona Abbey in 2024: "These are my stones and my shells, and there's 5 stones and there's one shell. [...] I've been (to Iona) five times and each time I've been, I've picked up one of these and every time it's been a hard time for me. Like my husband died or I've hit crisis point, and really bad, bad things in my life and each one represents a bad thing. But each one is also one that I've survived. I survived that stone and lived so I could get another and another. So, even though each one's a bad thing, it's a good thing. And it's kind of like everyone in the PTC, we're all different shapes and sizes and colours, but we're all still just one collection."

4.3.2 We were particularly delighted in 2024 to have welcomed members of the Presbytery of Clèir Eilean I to Iona Abbey and look forward to more such visits. "The Business Committee retreat on Iona came about as the result of a providential encounter between myself and the Iona Community Leader at an ecumenical conference early in 2024. I mentioned that the new Presbytery of the Highlands & Hebrides had adopted the name of the island which inspired the community she leads and Ruth reciprocated by stating the desire of the Iona Community to strengthen links with the Church of Scotland. The obvious outcome was to look for an opportunity to draw together these strands and that soon arose in the search for where to hold the Business Committee of Clèir Eilean I's first retreat. The Iona Abbey team went the extra mile to make the Business Committee of Clèir Eilean I, the Presbytery of the Isle of Iona, feel at home in our eponymous isle. Tha sinn uile fada nur comain!" (Rev Rory MacLeod, Clerk, Clèir Eilean I: Highlands & Hebrides)

4.4 The Community Life Committee is working with a team of young people to re-launch our Youth Strategy in 2025. We place a high value on the work done at our Camas Centre with young people. The Camas Centre needs essential repair work to its roof. This means that the centre is closed for the 2025 season, while we are doing all we can to ensure that it reopens to guests in 2026.

4.4.1 One young person from a group of refugees who visited Camas in 2024 commented: "It's a very new feeling but wild is great. Standing from a distance we will see an endless ocean. It's been a long time since I've felt like I had family around me, everyone is so warm!"

4.4.2 "Camas has more than a 75-year history with the Church of Scotland bringing young people who have faced big challenges in their young lives, and being welcomed into week-long transformative experiences on the Isle of Mull. From the Rev Dr George MacLeod bringing borstal boys in the 1950s, to current connections with church and church-birtherd organisations who bring youth groups, we continue to witness the power and impact of community experience. Simple living, fostering connection with the natural environment and building relationships of trust truly changes lives for the better. Well into adulthood, a visit to Camas remains a memorable experience held on to when life throws up difficulties; an experience that grows resilience and widens horizons." (Rev Sarah Brown, Minister, St. Machar's Cathedral, Aberdeen)

4.4.3 Our Young Adults Group completed a pilgrimage from Melrose to Lindisfarne in 2024, staying in church halls and meeting with local church groups on the way. Their commitment to a life of prayer and action was evident in their daily devotions – held in fields, on hillsides and in hostels – and in their commitment to campaigning for peace, equality for all, and climate justice.

4.5 All are welcome to join us in community whether that means living or working with us in intentional community at Iona Abbey or joining our active, praying dispersed global community – www.iona.org.uk

5. The Members, and Board of the Iona Community are grateful to Rev Anikó Schütz Bradwell who has skilfully convened the Board since 2023, a role which she relinquishes in May 2025. Her wise and dedicated leadership has inspired the Board. We wish her well in her ongoing ministry.

6. **A PRAYER FROM OUR FOUNDER, GEORGE MACLEOD AND OUR DAILY AFFIRMATION**

Invisible we see You, Christ beneath us.

With earthly eyes we see beneath us stones and dust and dross,
fit subjects for the analyst's table.

But with the eye of faith, we know You uphold.

In You all things consist and hang together:

the very atom is light energy,

the grass is vibrant,

the rocks pulsate.

All is in flux; turn but a stone and an angel moves.

Underneath are the everlasting arms.

Unknowable we know You, Christ beneath us.

Our daily affirmation

With the whole church

we affirm that we are made in God's image,
befriended by Christ, empowered by the Spirit.

With people everywhere

we affirm God's goodness at the heart of humanity,
planted more deeply than all that is wrong.

With all creation

we celebrate the miracle and wonder of life,
the unfolding purposes of God,
for ever at work in ourselves and the world.

In the name of the Committee

ANIKÓ SCHÜTZ BRADWELL, Convener, Iona Community Board

TORSTEN HAAK, Executive Director, Iona Community

RUTH HARVEY, Leader, Iona Community

GENERAL TRUSTEES MAY 2025

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report (Section 1.2).
2. Encourage the Trustees to work with other areas of the Church and ecumenically to continue to lobby the UK government on the need for reinstating the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme provision of recovery of full current VAT on repair and refurbishment works to listed churches, in light of the UK government's decision to limit the reclaimable amount in any given tax year to £25,000 per building, with the total amount of assistance set by the government at £23m (Section 5.2).
3. Note that the remit to act for the General Assembly in connection with proposals to dispose of surplus communion plate, whether by gift or sale, in accordance with the guidelines previously approved, has been transferred to the General Trustees, as successors to the work of the former Committee on Artistic Matters (Section 5.5).
4. Instruct, once again and urgently, Presbyteries to comply with their obligations under sections 8-12 of Schedule 1 of the Church of Scotland General Trustees (Properties, Funds and Endowments) Act (Act V 2024) in terms of attestation of property inspection records, commission of five-yearly surveys and the undertaking of any works required to buildings following on from such inspections and surveys, any failure of which is noted by the General Trustees (Section 5.6).
5. Note the new Manse Handbook and amended manse specification contained therein (Section 6.1).
6. Note the 25% increase in funding for parish ministry costs from the Consolidated Stipend Fund (Section 7.2.5).
7. Note the transfer of insurance brokerage services from the Church of Scotland Insurance Services to Howdens, effective 1 January 2026, with the expectation that insurance premiums will diminish significantly (Sections 7.4.2 & 7.4.3).
8. Increase the levy on the disposal of redundant properties (which is referred to in sections 10, 11 and 12 of Schedule 3 of the Church of Scotland General Trustees (Properties, Funds and Endowments) Act (Act V 2024)) from 10% to 15% (Section 7.4.4.4).
9. Pass an Act amending the Church of Scotland General Trustees (Properties, Funds and Endowments) Act (Act V 2024), as set out in Appendix 2 to this Report (Section 8.1.1 and Appendix 2).
10. Appoint Mr Michael Pearson as a member of the General Trustees (Section 9.1.5).
11. Authorise the payment of £2,100 to each of Mr Alan Kennedy as Chair and Rev Scott Rennie as Vice-Chair for their services over the past year (Section 9.1.6).

Report

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 *"The General Trustees support Congregations and Presbyteries in maintaining and developing appropriate flexible, robust and sustainable facilities capable of supporting local mission and worship."* (Mission Statement). The Trustees operate a number of restricted and designated funds, all of which are maintained for the benefit of congregations.

1.1.1 The Consolidated Fabric Fund is largely capitalised from the net sale proceeds of buildings in the ownership of the Trustees and this capital is made available, under application via Presbytery, to relevant congregations for meeting the cost of works to retained buildings. Similarly, revenue (derived from interest on capital and other sources such as rental income) in the Consolidated Fabric Fund is available for congregations to draw down towards the cost of fabric items, including reimbursement of utility and insurance premium costs. There has been a significant increase in the capital available in the Consolidated Fabric Fund as a result of buildings disposal and it is anticipated that all of this increase will be "recycled" into meeting the cost of repair and project works to retained buildings. Additionally, funds in the Consolidated Fabric Fund may be available to be drawn down for non-fabric purposes in the circumstances set out in the General Trustees' Report to the 2024 General Assembly. In the case of revenue funds, drawdown is a very simple process and can be for any purpose which meets at least one of the 5 marks of mission. At the end of 2024, there remained around £9m available in revenue for drawdown by congregations and the Trustees urge congregational treasurers to drawdown revenue funds where appropriate as this could make a significant difference to local finances. The Trustees were disappointed with this uptake of reclaim from Revenue holdings and encourage congregational treasurers to utilise this important facility more in the future. Similarly, capital funds may be made available for non-fabric purposes, in agreement with Presbytery, subject to there being sufficient remaining capital to meet the cost of expected works to buildings within the following 10 years or so. Detailed guidance for congregations on the administration of Consolidated Fabric Fund monies can be found [here](#).

1.1.2 The Consolidated Stipend Fund contributes significantly to the cost of ministry, off-setting for a great many congregations local Giving to Grow obligations.

1.1.3 The Central Fabric Fund is used primarily to make grants available to congregations, under application via Presbytery, towards the cost of works to buildings and the levy applied to the sale proceeds of buildings is credited to this Fund.

1.2 The Trustees submit to the General Assembly their ninety-eighth report since their incorporation under the Church of Scotland (General Trustees) Order Confirmation Act 1921 and their Annual Report and Financial Statements for 2024.

1.3 The General Assembly of 2024 passed the Church of Scotland General Trustees (Properties, Funds and Endowments) Act (Act V 2024). This consolidating legislation is referred to as the 2024 Act in this report.

2. APPRECIATION

2.1 The General Trustees wish to thank all members of their staff for the service they provide to them and to congregations. They are also most appreciative of the assistance they receive from other staff in the central offices, especially those in the Law and Stewardship & Finance Departments with whom they work most closely.

2.2 The Trustees continue to collaborate with Presbyteries and Presbytery Clerks. Regular meetings are held with the Convener of the Assembly Trustees and the Chief Officer and the Vice-Chair attends meetings of the Assembly Trustees as an observer. The Principal Clerk and representatives of the Assembly Trustees attended the Trustees' conference.

2.3 The General Trustees look forward to continuing our strategic partnership working with the Assembly Trustees.

3. GOVERNANCE

3.1 The General Trustees reported about their governance review to the 2024 General Assembly and continue to implement the recommendations.

4. PROGRESS WITH THE 2023 AND 2024 GENERAL ASSEMBLY DELIVERANCES

4.1 **Manse Standards:** the Manse Working Group continue to meet, further information can be found in section 6.1.

4.2 **Manse Condition Schedules:** the template has been updated as part of an overall review of manse guidance, further information can be found in sections 6.1 and 6.2.

4.3 **Attestations:** only a small number of Presbyteries have provided evidence to demonstrate that the attestation process has been completed. The General Trustees will continue to liaise with Presbyteries to stress the importance of the attestations to enable the proactive management of buildings. Further information can be found in section 5.6.

4.4 **Pipe Organs in Closing Churches:** Discussions are ongoing regarding possible relocation of pipe organs, some of which have already taken place. The Scottish Federation of Organists has produced a list of organs available based on churches identified as closing in the Presbytery Plans-this is being widely circulated. The quality of the pipe organ and suggestions about possibility of relocation is identified in the closure reports which we produce for each church. Although we have been successful in relocating a number of organs this year the number of serious proposals received are limited largely owing to the costs involved.

4.5 **Church Building Disposal:** The General Trustees have continued to manage the release of buildings following the receipt of Presbytery extract minutes approving the sales. The number of sale approvals received has increased considerably in the last year, as have the number of sales. The figures for buildings sold are included in section 5.8.3.

4.6 **Increased flexibility in Consolidated Fabric Fund Disbursements:** In December 2024, the General Trustees circulated a document entitled "Quick Guide CFF Non-Fabric" to Presbyteries which provided guidance on the release of Consolidated Fabric Fund Capital for Non-Fabric purposes, as outlined in paragraph 1.1 above. The General Trustees are ready to respond to any such applications once received. A more comprehensive update of the Consolidated Fabric Fund guidance has been undertaken and the revised "[CFF Admin](#)" document is available on the Church of Scotland website.

5. COMMITTEE REPORTS

5.1 Fabric Committee

5.1.1 The work of the Committee continued, and the Trustees provided guidance and financial assistance to congregations where applications were considered via Presbytery. There was a notable increase in both the number of applications received and the level of financial

assistance provided. This results from the implementation of Presbytery Mission Planning and the reactivation of projects that were paused during the Covid epidemic.

5.1.2 A review of online resources available to assist both congregations and Presbyteries has been undertaken. The aim of the review was to consolidate and simplify the advice provided. A series of “quick guides” formatted to provide questions and answers have been produced, and these are available on the General Trustees’ section of the main Church of Scotland website. The application form for the approval of work, release of funds and for grant assistance has been updated to gather all the necessary information to enable the Fabric Committee to assess applications and provide additional information to assist Presbyteries in their review and approval of applications before they are considered by the Fabric Committee. This will hopefully ensure that applications can be approved as quickly as possible.

5.1.3 Specialist advice continued to be made available in the areas of:

- Lighting
- Heating
- Audio Visual (AV) systems
- Communion-ware, memorials and movables
- Local Authority planning and Ecclesiastical Exemption
- Organs
- Release of funds held for the benefit of congregations in the Consolidated Fabric Fund for a variety of fabric and fabric-related items, including utility and insurance cost reimbursement

5.1.4 The Fabric Committee meets ten times per year, usually in the second half of the month, and to December 2024 made available £2.4million in grant assistance, £1.1million in loans (both from the Central Fabric Fund) and £0.5m in Bequest Fund grants. The table below shows a comparison with 2023 and demonstrates both the increase in funding and the consequential increase in the number of projects being supported.

	2023	2024	Variance
Grant Assistance	£0.8m	£2.4m	+£1.6m
Loans	£1.8m	£1.1m	-£0.7m
Bequest Fund	£0.07m	£0.5m	+£0.43
Total	£2.67m	£4.0m	+£1.33m

5.1.5 In addition to the above, the Fabric Committee approved expenditure on projects totalling £4.3million of capital released from the Consolidated Fabric Fund during 2024.

5.1.6 To summarise, building projects have therefore benefitted from £8.3million of capital funding in 2024 through the work of the Fabric Committee.

5.1.7 The Consolidated Fabric Fund revenue accounts are available for drawdown by congregations to pay for building related revenue costs such as utility bills and insurance premiums. The revenue account can also be used for payment of costs that don’t relate to buildings providing they relate to the five marks of mission. To assist Congregations, applications can be made retrospectively for costs incurred within the last two years. In 2024, £3.67million was drawn down from the revenue accounts from the total available fund of £12.7million.

5.1.8 In person and on-site visits have increased with Trustees and staff providing pre-application advice to congregations. Where possible, joint visits with Presbytery are being undertaken involving the Presbytery Building Officers. This is leading to a smoother and more timely application process. Congregations are strongly encouraged to engage and consult with the Presbytery and the Trustees at the earliest possible opportunity where a project or major scheme of works, whether repair, refurbishment or new construction, is being considered.

5.2 Listed Places of Worship Scheme

5.2.1 The changes to the Listed Places of Worship Scheme (LPWS) announced by the UK Government limit the amount of Value Added Tax (VAT) that can be reclaimed for each listed place of worship to £25k from 31 March 2025 and introduces an overall cap on the Scheme of £23million for places of worship across the UK. This will have a negative impact on any project costing over £125K in value. The Fabric Committee are analysing the impact on approved projects and raising awareness of the changes. It is likely that the Fabric Committee will be seeking additional grant funding from the Central Fabric Fund to assist Congregations who have been impacted by the changes. The General Trustees continue to work with colleagues across the Church and other bodies to highlight the impact of the changes. It is estimated that the scaling down of the scheme will add £1m to cumulative costs incurred by congregations in important repair works to listed buildings.

5.3 Presbytery Buildings Officers (“PBOs”)

5.3.1 The PBOs continue to provide invaluable advice to Presbyteries and congregations, as well as to the Trustees. PBOs are now in post for all Presbyteries except for Clèir Eilean I which at the time of writing is currently being recruited. From 1 January 2025, the total cost of employing the PBOs (payroll costs plus expenses) is being met by the Trustees’ General Fund with the intention that half would be charged to the Central Fabric Fund with that proportion being kept under review. Such a review would take account of the expected increase in income to the Central Fabric Fund arising from the application of the Levy to the net proceeds of sales of buildings as well as the future level of requests from congregations for grants and loans.

5.4 Climate Change and Net Zero

5.4.1 The General Trustees were previously asked to provide guidance to congregations on how to mitigate against the risks of climate change to church buildings. Historic Environment Scotland have done extensive research in this area and have permitted the General Trustees to direct congregations concerned about climate change resilience to this Short Guide document entitled [Climate Change Adaptation for Traditional Buildings](#).

5.4.2 With regards to the Net Zero Strategy, the General Trustees, as instructed by the General Assembly of 2024, have worked closely with the Assembly Trustees and the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team, following the commission of a report into the current position. Both the General Trustees and Assembly Trustees agree that further joint work is required to produce a long-term sustainable strategy for Net Zero and the Assembly Trustees will report in more detail on this project. In the meantime, the Fabric Committee will continue to:-

- Support local congregations with their repair and refurbishment projects to buildings, including the award of grants from the Central Fabric Fund of over £2.4m in 2024. Some of these projects include net zero initiatives such as the installation of solar panels and heat pumps as well as improving insulation.
- Promote external sources of grant funding to congregations including the Benefact Trust, National Churches Trust and CARES.
- Attend Eco Congregations Scotland meetings.
- Hold regular meetings with external funders.

5.4.3 As part of their current roles, the Presbytery Building Officers will continue to

- Build trusted relationships with Congregations to care for each property and provide guidance on building repairs and interventions including improvements to insulation and general energy saving advice.
- Advise congregations on statutory requirements and proactive maintenance practices, many of which have an energy efficiency benefit.
- Signpost congregations to suitably qualified external consultants.
- Review EPCs for manses and assist congregations to decide whether manses can be improved or whether a replacement manse would be a more viable alternative.
- Through the Quinquennial Reports, gather data such as information relating to the existing heating system and insulation.

5.4.4 In addition, the General Trustees will review the current Better Heating scheme with the aim of developing a future scheme which would provide a more holistic Net Zero review for buildings and assist congregations with external grant applications.

5.5 Communion Ware

5.5.1 Up until 1997, the Board of Practice and Procedure had delegated authority from the General Assembly to approve formal applications from congregations for permission to dispose of surplus Communion Ware. This authority passed to the Committee on Artistic Matters (CARTA) at the 1997 Assembly in succession to the Board of Practice and Procedure. At the 2020 General Assembly, CARTA was discharged and was transferred to become part of the General Trustees. The disposal of Communion Ware has since then been handled by the General Trustees on an informal basis but this will now be put on a more formal footing.

5.5.2 Previous Assemblies have noted that Communion Plate is an inheritance from the Church’s past and should, if possible, be retained, but that such Plate was acquired for the benefit of local congregations and if circumstances change or financial need arises, it may be necessary to sell surplus Plate. Guidelines on such sale were approved by the General Assembly in 1975 and were reaffirmed in 1985. For ease of reference, they are reproduced here:

- (a) It should be recognised that Communion Plate and similar items represent an inheritance from the past, and that they should not be lightly disposed of. This is especially true of valuable items which it should be the concern of those who possess them to cherish.
- (b) Only “surplus” Communion Plate should be sold and it should be required of those who make application to sell to prove that it is surplus i.e. they should state what Plate is at present being used and whether it is adequate for the needs of the congregation.

(c) The purpose to which the proceeds are to be applied should be carefully considered, and permission to sell should only be granted where projects are likely to contribute to something of more than passing value e.g. the preservation of a historic church building, the endowment of a fabric fund, the further endowment of stipend etc.

(d) The opinion of the applicant's Presbytery should be sought with regard to the application.

5.5.3 Congregations wishing to dispose of surplus Communion Ware should approach this in accordance with the foregoing guidelines and obtain the approval of Presbytery to any proposed sale. Thereafter, the congregation should apply to the General Trustees for further approval, advice on this process being available from the Trustees' Sanctuary Development Manager.

5.5.4 Prior to disposal, Communion Ware will require to be stored locally except, in some circumstances, in cases of dissolution where it may be necessary for the General Trustees to arrange alternative storage provision.

5.6 Attestations

5.6.1 The General Assembly of 2024 instructed Presbyteries to fulfil their obligations under Schedule 1 of the Church of Scotland General Trustees (Properties, Funds and Endowments) Act 2024 in respect of annual attestation of property inspection records and five-yearly survey reports and such records and reports being sent in summary to the General Trustees by 31st August each year.

5.6.2 In October 2024, Presbyteries were provided with a spreadsheet of all buildings within their Presbytery along with accompanying notes and requested to provide attestations confirming the receipt of the following key essential information from individual congregations for each building-

- Property register or manse condition schedule
- Date of last Quinquennial Inspection
- Fabric Convenor contact details

5.6.3 This information is considered essential to enable the proactive management of property. The 2024 Act requires Presbyteries to review the information provided by property records and reports/surveys and to ensure the required repairs to buildings are undertaken. As at April 2025, only a small number of Presbyteries have provided the required summary evidence of attestation of records.

5.7 Glebes Committee

5.7.1 The Trustees encourage all congregations who have glebes to engage with the Trustees in the management of glebeland, either to generate Giving to Grow income for their congregation – by leasing or sale – or to utilise land for mission purposes. The majority of glebes are let to farmers providing a regular income to the congregation. Income received from glebeland, whether rent or capital receipts, accrues for the benefit of the local congregation.

5.7.2 To maximise income for the long term and, in many cases, provide much needed housing in rural communities, the Trustees are keen to engage with local congregations on long term planning for potential development of glebeland. The Trustees engaged with the local parish in Newtyle to assist in fulfilling their aim to provide an area of glebeland for the construction of mainstream and affordable housing that was needed in their village. 29 mainstream houses and 10 affordable houses are being built resulting in an improved annual income for the congregation from the Consolidated Stipend Fund. At Aberlour, the Session have started Aberlour Glebe Garden using the outside space as part of their missional work. At Muckhart the Trustees supported the local church in their partnership with community groups to provide an award winning eco project for flood water.

5.7.3 Leases

5.7.3.1 Income from agricultural, grazing and amenity lets in 2024 was higher than last year despite land sales. During 2024, the Trustees entered into 94 new leases and 113 rent reviews of existing leases were carried out to ensure that rents remain at market rates. Total income generated from glebe rents was £478k which assists the financial commitment of congregations to support their Giving to Grow contributions.

5.7.4 Sales

5.7.4.1 Where glebeland is sold, the capital received is credited to the Consolidated Stipend Fund and, as with glebe rents, the income accrued annually is applied towards Giving to Grow in that particular parish.

5.8 Presbytery Support & Buildings ("PSB") Committee

5.8.1 The PSB Committee has delegated responsibility from the General Trustees' Board to support and guide Presbyteries on General Trustees' matters, generally relating to the management and release of buildings, disposals, special projects and Presbytery Mission Planning. Two working groups report to the PSB Committee covering Presbytery Mission Planning and Signature Churches.

5.8.2 The PSB Committee gives particular focus to the development of General Trustees' guidance and policy. The Committee has developed policy in relation to the off-market transfer of properties, the use of the Consolidated Fabric Fund for non-fabric purposes and guidance for the letting of halls.

5.8.3 In 2024, the Trustees approved and instructed the sale of 122 properties: 63 churches, 39 manses, 20 other property types including halls and offices. The comparable figures for 2023 were 71 properties: 32 churches, 25 manses, 14 other property types.

5.8.4 Most were open market sales with the marketing carried out by the Church of Scotland Law Department, however, there have been an increasing number of requests for off-market transfers. Such requests are generally by groups seeking to retain community access to the building. If successful, the group will be given exclusivity as preferred bidders, without the need for marketing. The General Trustees, through the Committee, are currently handling over 50 requests of this nature and a further 15 have been remitted to the Law Department for the sale to be progressed with the preferred bidder.

5.8.5 The General Trustees will consider off market requests if they are from a legally constituted group based in the community and the group is willing to match an independent valuation. Statistics show that many Church and Hall properties sell for sums which exceed valuation, sometimes by large amounts. The General Trustees will seek to test the market in instances where the property is thought to be marketable, desirable and of value. This includes properties in their own plot with external grounds and properties in centres of population. In such instances, the interested party would be encouraged to make an offer once marketed. This approach, which was developed by the PSB Committee, reflects the General Trustees' trusteeship responsibilities of properties vested in the General Trustees.

5.8.6 The Committee is required, from time to time, to give direction in relation to more complex disposals which are not able to progress down the standard marketing and conveyancing route. Such complexities may include health and safety concerns, issues with incumbent tenants, or title issues.

5.8.7 The Committee continues to consult with Presbyteries in relation to Annual Evaluation and Development submissions and ad-hoc amendments to the categorisation of buildings. The Committee is represented on PMPIG, through which feedback on submissions is issued to Presbytery. The General Trustees have also assisted Presbyteries and congregations with building-related advice in the context of Presbytery Mission Planning.

5.8.8 Signature Churches Network

5.8.8.1 The Committee produced a paper which defines a Signature Church and sets objectives for the Signature Churches Network. A shortlist of Signature Churches has been produced, and the relevant Kirk Sessions have been contacted and invited to contribute to the Network. The definition stipulates that a church must be:

- category A in the Presbytery Mission Plan;
- of Cathedral style in proportion with a very high reinstatement value;
- HES A-Listed;
- located in a prominent setting with high footfall;
- have a low market value; and
- be owned by the Church of Scotland.

5.8.8.2 The purpose of this network is to help the constituent congregations flourish in their life as visitor attractions and story tellers about Christianity in Scotland to the wider public; to improve their sustainability as congregations, and to mutually support each other in this task with the input of partner organisations such as Historic Environment Scotland, the National Heritage Lottery Fund, the National Churches Trust, the Church Service Society as well as any other agencies and organisations that wish to give assistance to the Network.

5.8.8.3 Our sincere hope is that by sponsoring the network we will help stimulate growth and renewal in the life of the network's congregation and greater appreciation of the Christian heritage of Scotland to the general public and visitors alike.

5.8.9 Creative Commercial Collective

5.8.9.1 In a joint initiative with the Stewardship and Finance Department we are currently seeking to establish a Creative Commercial Collective of congregations and people within the Church of Scotland who have been entrepreneurial in their use of commerce as a vehicle for mission and ministry in their local communities. This has been happening within the life of the Church for some time, and there are success stories to be found in urban centres and rural villages, in commuter towns and in Urban Priority Areas. The Collective will aim to publicise these as case studies for others in the Church to take encouragement from, but also to be a resource of advice and support for any congregation with an idea, or seeking advice on how to embark on commercial activity as a means of sharing Christ's love and presence in their community, and at the same time furthering sustainability in the life of their congregation.

The Historic Property Portfolio working group has been discontinued following the successful release of one of the affected buildings and the establishment of a plan to release the second.

5.8.10 Change of Convener and Vice Convener

5.8.10.1 Following a review of the Board's governance arrangements by the Nominations Committee, the Board approved the appointments of Rev Tim Podger as Convener and Rev Nigel Robb as Vice Convener of the PSB Committee. Both appointments were effective from 8 October 2024.

5.9 Audit and Assurance Committee

5.9.1 The Committee has overseen the audit of the 2024 Annual report and accounts. They are assisting in the implementation of an updated risk register for the Trustees and are working with the Trustees' internal auditors to create and implement a strategic internal audit plan.

5.10 Finance & Resources Committee ("F&RC")

5.10.1 Responsibilities

5.10.1.1 The F&RC is responsible for the production of the Trustees' Annual Reports, the review of draft budgets and, after their approval by the Trustees, monitoring performance through quarterly management accounts with summaries being provided to the Board.

5.10.1.2 The F&RC has responsibility for reviewing the investments under the control of the Trustees as well as assessing any new investment opportunities that may be presented to the Board. An example of the latter was the loan facility made available to CrossReach for the redevelopment of the residential care facility at Gaberston; the details of which were set out in the report to the General Assembly in May 2024.

5.10.1.3 The Insurance Forum working group reports to the F&RC. It provides Board level communication with the Insurance Company that is a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Trustees.

5.10.1.4 The Energy Procurement working group also reports to the F&RC that, in turn, makes recommendations to the Board about the renewal of electricity and gas supply contracts. The electricity supply contract ends on 30 September 2025 and the gas supply contract on 31 March 2026.

5.10.1.5 Detailed reports about investment, insurance and energy matters are found in Section 7.

5.10.2 Change of Convener and Vice Convener

Following a review of the Board's governance arrangements by the Nominations Committee, the Board approved the appointments of Mr Michael Craig as Convener and Mrs Isobel Gray as Vice Convener of the F&RC. Both appointments were effective from 8 October 2024.

6. MANSES

6.1 Manse Working Group

6.1.1 Following establishment in 2023, the work of the Manse Working Group (Standards) continues with representatives of the General Trustees, Faith Action Programme Leadership Team, Assembly Trustees and the Law Department invited to attend monthly meetings.

6.1.2 The Trustees report to the General Assembly of 2023 instructed congregations (a) to ensure that all retained manses are fully wind and water-tight and meet the Repairing Standards as per the Housing (Scotland) Act 2006 by 31 December 2024 and (b) to provide a valid Energy Performance Certificate and a report on compliance with the Repairing Standard along with the next Manse Condition Schedule sent to Presbyteries. It also reminded Presbyteries of their oversight obligations in regard to each of these.

6.1.3 In 2024 the report noted that whilst progress is being made relating to manses, significant further works are required to ensure that the manses provided for ministers and their families are of a good standard, make their contribution to net zero and provide suitable spaces for ministerial activities.

6.1.4 In order to gather information directly from ministers, a survey was issued requesting information on how the ministers feel about the manse relating to its condition, energy performance and suitability. The survey was issued to ministers in March 2024. A summary of the Survey findings is included at Appendix 4.

6.1.5 Focus Groups: Following on from the survey issued to ministers in March 2024, ministers were invited to attend online focus groups in November 2024. The focus groups highlighted the need for clarity about manse requirements and responsibilities.

6.1.6 Since the General Assembly last year, the group has been working on reviewing existing guidance, including specifications, relating to manses. The Group found that guidance has not been updated for a number of years with guidance being spread across various documents. A new Manse Handbook has been drafted and approved by the Manse Working Group and Fabric Committee. The Handbook seeks to

- Consolidate manse guidance
- Update manse requirements to reflect the needs of current ministers and their families
- Provide performance related criteria for the selection of manses
- Provide a tool for existing manses to be assessed and compared
- Provide links to useful sources of information
- Address the issues raised in the survey and focus group

6.1.7 The Manse Handbook can be found via the General Trustees section of the CofS website. Training will be arranged to publicise awareness of the handbook.

6.2 Energy Performance Certificates (EPC)

6.2.1 High energy bills and poorly performing buildings were one of the major issues raised by ministers during the survey and focus groups.

6.2.2 The General Assembly in 2023, instructed that “the Energy Performance Certificate Rating for the Manse is within Categories A – C by 31 December 2025 as a target date through carrying out any necessary improvements to the building or through the sale and purchase of an approved Manse by that date”. Over the last year, we have seen a steady increase in the number of congregations reviewing manses, undertaking upgrade works or buying replacement manses however the Trustees consider it unlikely that all manses will have an EPC rating of C by the target date. EPC ratings will be tracked through the manse condition schedule and attestation process. Following completion of the manse handbook, the Manse Working Group will focus on energy performance and how best to assist ministers and congregations.

6.3 Caretaker Occupancy Agreements

6.3.1 The Trustees have adopted a default position of not permitting manses to be let in view of the difficulties of evicting tenants in the event that a Minister is called to the relevant charge, although a let may be permitted in certain circumstances, depending on the context. Genuinely surplus manses, following Adjustment, should be sold. Presbyteries and congregations should not allow manses to be used as free living accommodation by anyone other than the minister of the congregation, as doing so can lead to significant tax liabilities for both the beneficiary and the provider of the accommodation. The provision of free accommodation is classed as a taxable benefit by HMRC and as such the beneficiary will be taxed on the value of the property (which is often significant, due to the relatively large size of manses). Also, the congregation will be liable to pay Class 1A National Insurance (currently 13.8% and to rise to 15% for 2025/2026) on the value of the accommodation provided. If properties are locally vested and the congregation or Presbytery provide free accommodation, they are responsible for ensuring that the necessary notifications are made to HMRC and that all tax and NI liabilities are declared and paid. Any non-declaration or late payment is likely to be subject to penalties and interest. Costs involved for both the beneficiaries and the provider of the accommodation can be significant, with the taxable benefit potentially reaching up to £30,000 per annum. The Trustees therefore no longer permit Caretaker Occupancy agreements to be entered into for their properties.

7. FINANCIAL RESOURCES

7.1 Use of Monies in the Consolidated Fabric Fund

7.1.1 The fund comprises capital accounts as well as revenue accounts that arise from the investment income from the capital accounts.

7.1.2 Capital Accounts: The total distributed from capital accounts in 2024 for fabric projects was £4.3m. In certain limited circumstances, if the fabric endowment held for a congregation is in excess of its reasonable requirements (Section 36 (iii) of the 2024 Act), transfers may be allowed to the Consolidated Stipend Fund. In 2024, there were two such transfers totalling £23k. Withdrawals in restricted cases for local mission purposes can also be permitted, as noted in section 1.1 above. In 2024, there were seven such withdrawals totalling £106k.

7.1.3 Revenue Accounts: The total revenue account was £10.6m at the start of 2024 and £12.7m at the end. During the year, £3.7m was withdrawn to cover fabric works or utility, energy and insurance costs. A change in administrative policy reported to the 2024 General Assembly increased flexibility and simplified administration by permitting withdrawals for any purpose aligned with mission. The General Trustees strongly urge congregational treasurers to reclaim utility and insurance premium expenditure from revenue funds held for the congregation's benefit, where applicable, as these individual sums could be significant and will reimburse the congregation's local bank account. Once again, treasurers are reminded that, in addition to the foregoing, revenue funds are available for a range of non-fabric purposes where those purposes meet at least one of the five marks of mission. From 1 June 2024 until the end of 2024, such withdrawals totalled £176k. This is a surprisingly small amount given the increase in the total of these revenue accounts.

7.2 Consolidated Stipend Fund

7.2.1 The General Trustees administer the Consolidated Stipend Fund ("CSF") for the benefit of the 1,025 congregations with holdings in it. The investments comprising the Fund are largely derived from the sale of glebe land since 1925. As agreed with the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team ("FAPLT") and adopted and re-affirmed by the General Assembly on a number of occasions, the most recent being in 2016, the CSF is regarded internally as a permanent endowment for investment strategy purposes and invested for the very long term.

7.2.2 Revenue generated within the Fund, net of administration costs, is distributed through FAPLT to help individual congregations meet their parish ministry costs. The General Trustees are empowered to augment what would otherwise be distributed from capital sales.

7.2.3 At present the Fund is invested in the Growth Fund of the Church of Scotland Investors Trust ("COSIT") apart from a loan facility for up to £3.2m for CrossReach. The Assembly Trustees have provided the Trustees with an indemnity in the event of default by CrossReach.

7.2.4 In 2024, the Trustees decided to take a different approach to the investment of the Fund based on the recommendations of the external Investment Policy Review. Discussions took place with COSIT, FAPLT and other parties. As COSIT was unable to accommodate the new approach within its funds, the General Trustees decided that, in early 2025, the Fund's holding in the COSIT Growth Fund should be transferred to an investment vehicle provided by Mercer's Implemented Consulting Services. With this approach, Mercer would provide enhanced diversification of assets, select managers suited to each investment segment and monitor ethical investment practices relating to environmental, social, and governance issues.

7.2.5 The investment objective of the CSF is to maximise the long-term capital value of the Fund while providing regular distributions to FAPLT for the benefit of congregations' ministry costs from income received or from the sale proceeds of capital. Under the new arrangements with Mercer, the General Trustees have set a more specific investment return objective of CPI+4% pa. As a result, the Trustees decided to increase the yearly distributions to FAPLT from a level amount of £3.2m in recent years to £4m in 2025; thereafter increasing in line with inflation until at least 2029.

7.2.6 In accordance with Schedule 2 section 36 (ii) of the 2024 Act, transfers are allowed to the Consolidated Fabric Fund. In 2024, there were no such transfers.

7.3 Central Fabric Fund

7.3.1 This restricted fund provides financial assistance through grants and loans to congregations with approved fabric projects.

7.3.2 The fund's main sources of income comprise the application of a levy on the net proceeds of the disposal of congregational buildings and the residual assets from dissolved congregations. The levy is currently set at 10% as stated in the 2024 Act. In 2024, the sums received by the fund were £1.5m and £30k respectively.

7.3.3 Grants totalling £2.5m were approved in 2024. Grants awarded in 2024 exceed Central Fabric Fund income for the year, and the level of grants in the future is expected to increase.

7.3.4 Since the start of 2025, the Trustees have been meeting 100% of the employment costs and expenses of the Presbytery Buildings Officers. Presbyteries had paid 50% of their employment costs until the end of 2024. The 2024 Act permits these costs to be met from the Central Fabric Fund.

7.4 Church of Scotland Insurance Services ("COSIS")

7.4.1 COSIS is a limited company incorporated and domiciled in Scotland with registered company number SC001777. It is a regulated insurance intermediary with its registered office at 121 George Street, Edinburgh, EH2 4YN. The Company is a wholly owned subsidiary of the General Trustees and, as such, its assets, liabilities and results for the year are consolidated with those of the General Trustees. With its Church Scheme, the Company provides a tailored comprehensive package of cover at competitive rates for buildings, liabilities and contents for congregations. The Scheme provides certainty for congregational treasurers, and it was successfully renewed for a further five-year period with Aviva from 1 January 2025. While the level of underlying premium charges (before indexation) increased by some 10%, this was a much better outcome than was expected given the events of the past five years such as the impact of COVID, market instability and the church change programme.

7.4.2 For some time, the Board of COSIS has been considering the best way to continue to provide tailor-made insurance coverages for congregations. Due to the risks associated with the small size of COSIS, the difficulty of recruitment following Edinburgh's decline as a centre for General Insurance, the imminent retirement of its Chief Executive and the ever-increasing level of regulation affecting both its operations and the Trustees as the sole shareholder, it has been decided to transfer its client base to Howden Scotland Limited ("Howden"). The General Trustees have given their approval to this decision. On 13 March 2025, COSIS and Howden signed a client transfer agreement with an implementation date at the end of 2025. The Trustees were co-signatories. The details of the transaction are set out in the General Trustees' Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2024.

7.4.3 Congregations will benefit from the agreement as, after the application of a small fee by Howden, moving to a net rating basis will result in a material reduction in insurance premiums from renewal dates in 2026 onwards.

7.4.4 Another important by-product of this transaction will be that Gift Aided profits will no longer flow to the General Trustees after 2026. As a result, the General Fund is expected to incur an additional shortfall of c£750k per year from 2027 onwards. Therefore, alternative sources of income will be required to replace the lost revenue. The General Trustees' strategy for doing so has the following elements:

7.4.4.1 As stated in section 7.3.4, the cost in respect of Presbytery Buildings Officers ("PBOs") is currently split 50:50 between the General Fund and the Central Fabric Fund. ("CFF"). The 2024 Act permits all such costs to be charged to the CFF and the Trustees propose to do that from 1 January 2025 onwards. This will reduce the yearly shortfall in the General Fund by approximately half.

7.4.4.2 Following the planned transfer of the COSIS client base to Howden, the investments and other assets of some £7m (end 2024 value) held in COSIS will be transferred to the General Fund boosting its capital and future income stream.

7.4.4.3 The above actions combined with prudent management lead the Trustees to expect that the General Fund could be sustained for a period of 10 years or more.

7.4.4.4 However, the action outlined in 7.4.4.1 will mean that the CFF is carrying additional costs in relation to the PBOs. To fund these additional costs, it is proposed that the levy charged on the net proceeds of the sale of buildings that are no longer required by local congregations will be increased from 10% to 15% from 1 June 2025. If approved, the change would apply to all proceeds from disposals received on or after 1 June 2025.

7.4.5 The Church of Scotland Insurance Services has provided excellent insurance brokerage services to the Church over many years and the General Trustees would like to take this opportunity to thank COSIS staff and directors past and present.

7.5 Investment Update

7.5.1 The General Trustees invest primarily in the Deposit, Growth and Income Funds of the Church of Scotland Investors Trust ("COSIT"). Although they obtain the benefits of professional management, continuous portfolio supervision, spread of investment risk and economies of scale, decisions as to the appropriate investment mix as between the three COSIT Funds are the responsibility of the General Trustees.

7.5.2 Asset allocation strategies for the General Fund, Central Fabric Fund, and the Consolidated Fabric Fund are monitored quarterly to ensure that they remain consistent with their objectives. External advice, in respect of asset allocations for these funds between the Deposit, Growth and Income Funds of COSIT, was received in 2022 as part of the external Investment Policy Review and, after careful consideration, the recommendations were implemented in full. The asset allocation of the General Fund will be further reviewed prior to the receipt of assets from COSIS as described in section 7.4.4.2 above.

7.5.3 Recommendations from that same Investment Policy Review resulted in the Trustees deciding to invest the Consolidated Stipend Fund elsewhere as described in section 7.2.4 above but to continue to invest the other Funds of the Trustees with COSIT.

7.5.4 The Investment Policy Review also covered the area of Ethical Investment. Manliffe Goodbody has represented the Trustees alongside representatives of COSIT on the Ethical Oversight Committee established following the General Assembly of 2023. Similar ethical investment considerations will continue to apply to the Consolidated Stipend Fund.

8. LEGISLATION

8.1 Legislation Amendments

8.1.1 The Trustees request amendments to the 2024 Act, as set out in Appendix 2 to this Report. Four changes are proposed:

- Distributions from the Consolidated Stipend Fund to FAPLT will be made as agreed between the Trustees and FAPLT rather than being limited to June and December
- It is clarified that it is only Capital monies in the Consolidated Fabric Fund which can only be applied to buildings where title is held in the name of the General Trustees or contains an Assembly control clause
- As referred to in section 7.4.4.4 above, the Levy on sale proceeds is increased to 15%
- An erroneous reference to the Central Fabric Fund in the existing section 19.2 (i) of Schedule 3 is corrected

8.1.2 The guidelines and resources provided by the General Trustees will be updated so as to bring about consistency with the provisions contained within the 2024 Act.

8.2 Determinations made under Act V 2024

8.2.1 The Trustees report that, under the powers delegated to them by the General Assembly by the 2024 Act they have made 185 Determinations during 2024 as set out below in Appendix 3.

9. OPERATION OF THE GENERAL TRUSTEES

9.1 General Trustees and Advisory Members

9.1.1 The Trustees wish to record their thanks for the dedicated service given to them and to congregations by those who have retired or resigned since the General Assembly of 2024.

9.1.2 General Trustees: Retirements:

- Mr Manliffe Goodbody (May 2025) (Finance & Resources Committee and Ethical Oversight Committee representative)
- Mr William Lawrie (May 2025) (Convener, Glebes Committee)

9.1.3 Advisory Members: End of term:

- Ms Bahar Raeisi Dehkordi (May 2025) (Fabric Committee)

9.1.4 No Advisory Members have been appointed by the Board since the 2024 General Assembly:

9.1.5 The Trustees ask the General Assembly to appoint Mr Michael Pearson as a new member of the General Trustees.

9.1.6 The Trustees recommend that Mr Alan Kennedy (Chair) and Rev Scott Rennie (Vice-Chair) each receive £2,100 for their services as Chair and Vice-Chair over the past year, as authorised under S.38 of the 1925 Act.

9.1.7 The Trustees continue to seek new members with skills and backgrounds aligned to its needs and its wish to increase the diversity of its membership. Those interested are asked to contact the Chair, Vice-Chair or Chief Executive for further information.

9.2 Staffing

9.2.1 The Trustees wish to report that Mr Robert Lee was appointed to the post of Head of Policy & Planning as part of their senior staff team.

In the name of the General Trustees

ALAN F K KENNEDY, *Chair*

SCOTT RENNIE, *Vice-Chair*

BRIAN D WALLER, *Chief Executive*

Appendix 1**Funds of the General Trustees**

	31/12/2024 (£'000)	31/12/2023 (£'000)
Held for Congregations (Consolidated)		
Glebes (Land)	29,212	29,588
Stipend Fund (Investments)	119,190	109,252
Total Stipend	148,402	138,840
Buildings (Churches & Halls)	237,242	238,208
Buildings (Manse)	296,849	294,933
Fabric Fund (Investments - Capital)	111,766	88,677
Fabric Fund (Investments - Revenue)	12,688	9,884
Total Fabric	658,545	631,702
Individual Funds	1,440	4,349
Total for Congregations	808,387	774,891
General Trustees' Funds		
General Fund	12,169	11,524
CoSIS	7,675	7,307
Central Fabric Fund	22,587	21,745
Glebe Improvement Fund	457	441
Heritage Property Fund	75	793
Individual Bequests	6,596	3,699
Total for GT Funds	45,559	45,509
Grand Total	857,946	820,400
Total for Buildings and Land	563,440	562,729
Total for Investments	244,947	212,162
Total for GT Funds	49,559	45,509
	857,946	820,400

Appendix 2**[] ACT AMENDING THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND GENERAL TRUSTEES (PROPERTIES, FUNDS AND ENDOWMENTS) ACT (ACT V 2024)**

Edinburgh, [] May 2025, Session []

The General Assembly hereby enact and ordain that The Church of Scotland General Trustees (Properties, Funds and Endowments Act (Act V 2024) shall be amended as follows:

1. In Schedule 2, section 24, distribution from the Consolidated Stipend Fund may be made at any time as requested and not restricted to twice a year in June and December (although the twice-yearly distribution remains the default) therefore after "June and December" add "(or at such other time(s) as FAPLT may request)".
2. In Schedule 2, section 18, insert "Capital" at the beginning of the section.
3. In Schedule 3, section 12, amend the levy figure to 15%.
4. In Schedule 3, section 19.2(i) delete "Central Fabric Fund" and substitute "Consolidated Fabric Fund".

Appendix 3**Determinations made under Act V 2024****General Sales:**

In the following cases, the General Trustees made determinations authorising the sale or let of the property concerned and directed that the proceeds should be credited for the benefit of the congregations in the Consolidated Fabric Fund:

Abercorn, Pardovan, Kingscavil and Winchburgh – sale of Abercorn Church; Aberdeen Fountainhall – sale of former Rubislaw manse; Aberdeen St Nicholas South of Kincorth – sale of church; Aberdeen St Nicholas South of Kincorth – sale of manse; Aberluthnott and Laurencekirk – sale of manse; Abernethy, Boat of Garten, Carrbridge and Kincardine – sale of manse; Alness – sale of Alness Church; Arbroath and District – sale of Arbirlot Church; Arbroath and District – sale of Arbirlot Church Hall; Arbroath and District – sale of former Arbirlot manse; Arbroath and District – sale of Colliston Church; Arbroath and District – sale of Friockheim Church; Arbroath and District – sale of Inverkeilor Church Hall; Balmerino lw Wormit – sale of former Wormit manse; Bellie & Speymouth – sale of Speymouth Church; Birse and Feughside – sale of manse; Boclair Community Church – sale of manse; Black Mount – sale of Black Mount Church Hall; Blackbraes & Shieldhill – sale of Blackbraes & Shieldhill Church; Blair Atholl and Struan – sale of manse; Bo'ness Old – sale of manse; Braemar & Crathie – sale of Braemar Kirk; Buckhaven & Wemyss – sale of Buckhaven Church; Buckhaven & Wemyss – sale of former St Andrew's Church (Buckhaven Theatre); Buckie South, West & Enzie – sale of Enzie Church; Callander – sale of Trossachs Church; Campsie – sale of manse; Carnoustie Trinity – sale of Panbride Church; Carriden – sale of Blackness Church; Carriden – sale of Carriden Church; Carriden – sale of Mission and Lund Halls; Cathcart Old – sale of Cathcart Old Church and Hall; Clydebank Radnor Park – sale of Radnor Park Church and Hall; Coalburn & Lesmahagow – sale of Lesmahagow Old Church; Cockenzie Old & Port Seton – sale of Cockenzie Old Church; Cockenzie Old & Port Seton – sale of Cockenzie Old Church Hall; Craigowl – sale of Strathmartine Church; Culloden and Ardersier – sale of manse; Cumbernauld Kildrum and St Mungo's – sale of manse; Cumbernauld Old – sale of manse; Currie – sale of manse; Dalkeith St John's and Newton – sale of Newton Church; Dalkeith St Nicholas Buccleuch – sale of manse; Dryburgh Churches – sale of Maxton Church; Dryburgh Churches – sale of Mertoun Church; Dumbarton St Andrew's – sale of St Andrew's Church and Hall; Dumfries St Mary's Greyfriars – sale of hall; Dumfries St Mary's Greyfriars – sale of St Mary's Church; Dundee Broughty Ferry – sale of manse; Dundee Camperdown – sale of Dundee Camperdown Church; Dundee Logie St John's Cross – sale of manse; Dundee North East – sale of former Fintry manse; Dundee North East – sale of Whitfield Church; Dundee North East – sale of former Whitfield manse; Dundee Stobswell Trinity – sale of Stobswell Church and Hall; Dundee Strathmartine – sale of manse; Dundee The Steeple – sale of manse; Dunfermline Townhill and Kingseat – sale of Kingseat Church and Hall; Dunfermline Townhill and Kingseat – sale of Townhill Church and Hall; Dyke & Edinkillie – sale of Edinkillie Church; East Kilbride South – sale of East South Church and Hall; Edinburgh Craigmillar Park – sale of Craigmillar Park Church and Hall; Edinburgh Gorgie, Dalry & Stenhouse – sale of Diadem building; Edinburgh Juniper Green – sale of manse; Edinburgh St David's Carrick Knowe – sale of St David's Broomhouse Church; Elgin – sale of Elgin High Church and Halls; Elgin – sale of former Elgin High manse; Evie & Rendall – sale of Evie Church; Findhorn – sale of Findhorn Church; Findochty – sale of manse; Forfar All Souls Church of Scotland – sale of Guthrie Church; Forfar All Souls Church of Scotland – sale of Rescobie Church; Forfar East and Old and Inverarity – sale of manse; Foveran – sale of former Noth manse; Garelochhead – sale of Garelochhead Church; Glamis – sale of manse; Glasgow Carmyle Kenmuir and Cornerstone – sale of Carmyle Church; Glasgow Carntyne & Cranhill – sale of former Cranhill manse; Glasgow Kelvinbridge – transfer of Landsdowne building; Glasgow Kelvinbridge – sale of Glasgow Kelvinbridge Church; Glasgow Knightswood Anniesland Trinity – sale of Knightswood St Margaret Church; Glasgow Ruchazie – sale of Ruchazie Church; Glasgow St Andrew's in the East – sale of manse; Glenelg, Kintail and Lochalsh – sale of Ardrae Mission House; Glenorchy and Strathfill – sale of Crianlarich Church; Grantown-on-Spey and Dulnain Bridge – sale of manse; Hamilton Cadzow – sale of manse; Howe of Fife – sale of manse; Innerleithen, Traquair & Walkerburn – sale of Traquair Church; Inverkip, Skelmorlie & Wemyss Bay – sale of former Inverkip manse; Inverness Trinity Dalneigh – sale of manse; Isle of Arran – sale of Corrie Church; Isle of Arran – sale of Kilmory Church; Isle of Arran – sale of Lamlash Church; Johnstone High – sale of manse; Keith, St Rufus, Botriphine & Grange – sale of Botriphine Church; Kennoway, Windygates & Balgonie St Kenneth's – sale of Windygates Church; Kennoway, Windygates & Balgonie St Kenneth's – sale of Windygates Church and Hall; Kilbirnie New – sale of manse; Killearnan – sale of manse; Kilmorack and Erchless – sale of Struy Church; Kincardine Coastal – sale of manse; Kincardine-in-Menteith – sale of Kincardine-in-Menteith Church; King Edward – sale of church; Kinloch – sale of Lemreway Church; Kinlochleven – sale of manse; Kirkfieldbank – sale of Kirkfieldbank Church; Kirkmaiden – sale of Church Hall; Kirknewton and East Calder – sale of manse; Knockbain – sale of Knockbain Church; Laggan & Newtonmore – sale of Laggan Church; Langholm, Eskdalemuir, Ewes and Westerkirk – sale of Ewes Church; Langholm, Eskdalemuir, Ewes and Westerkirk – sale of former Langholm manse; Larbert East – sale of

manse; Lasswade and Rosewell – sale of Lasswade Church; Libberton & Quothquan – sale of Libberton & Quothquan Church; Lockerbie, Dryfesdale, Hutton, Corrie & Applegarth – sale of Applegarth Church; Lockerbie, Dryfesdale, Hutton, Corrie & Applegarth – sale of Dryfesdale Church; Lockerbie, Dryfesdale, Hutton, Corrie & Applegarth – sale of Hutton & Corrie Church; Lossiemouth St Gerardine’s High – sale of St Gerardine’s Church; Luss – sale of manse and part of garden ground; Lundie & Muirhead – sale of manse; Lyne and Manor – sale of Lyne Church; Marnoch – sale of manse; Mid Strathearn – sale of Monzie Church; Monigaff – sale of manse; Monimail – sale of Monimail Church; Mormond West – sale of New Pitsligo Church; Mormond West – sale of Tyrie Church; Muiravonside – sale of Muiravonside Church; New Deer St Kane’s – sale of St Kane’s Church; North West Lochaber – sale of Arisaig Church and Hall; Orwell and Portmoak – sale of Portmoak Church; Pencaitland – sale of manse; Perth Craigie and Moncreiffe – sale of Perth Craigie Church; Peterculter – sale of Drumoak Church; Peterculter – sale of Durris Church; Ratho – sale of manse; Selkirk & Ashkirk – sale of Ashkirk Church; Shotts Calderhead Erskine – sale of Shotts Calderhead Erskine Memorial Hall; Stenhouse and Carron – sale of manse; Stirling Holy Rude Viewfield – sale of Viewfield Church and Hall; Stoneykirk – sale of manse; Strathnairn and Strathdearn – sale of Croy Hall; The Glens and Kirriemuir United – sale of Cortachy Church; Thornliebank – sale of manse; West Gordon – sale of Lumsden Church; West Gordon – sale of North Church; West Gordon – sale of Towie Church; Whitburn Burnfield Valley North – sale of former Whitburn Brucefield manse; Whitburn Burnfield Valley South – sale of former Breich Valley manse; Uddingston Viewpark – sale of manse; Upper Tweedale – sale of Broughton Church; Urquhart and Glenmoriston – sale of Corrimony Church; West Gordon – sale of former Alford manse; Wigtown – sale of Wigtown Church Hall;

Glebe Sales:

In the following parishes, the General Trustees made determinations authorising the sale of Glebe subjects and directed that the proceeds should be credited to the benefit of the congregations in the Consolidated Stipend Fund:

Auchtergaven and Moneydie – sale of Moneydie Glebe; Black Isle East – sale of part of Avoch Glebe; Bracadale, Duirnish and Snizort – sale of Waternish Glebe; Dyke & Edinkille – sale of Edinkillie Glebe; Innerleithen, Traquair & Walkerburn – sale of part of Traquair Glebe; Kelso Old and Sprouston – sale of Kelso glebe; Kilbirnie New – sale of Kilbirnie Glebe; Kilchrenan and Dalavich – sale of Kilchrenan Glebe; Kildonan and Loth, Helmsdale – sale of Kildonan Glebe; Kildonan and Loth, Helmsdale – sale of Loth Glebe; Luss – sale of Luss Glebe; Mid Deeside – sale of Kincardine O’Neil Glebe; Millisle – sale of Kirkinner Glebe; Monigaff – sale of Monigaff Glebe; Montrose Trinity – sale of Dun Glebe; Orwell and Portmoak – sale of Portmoak Glebe; Pencaitland – sale of Pencaitland Glebe; Penpont Keir & Tynron – sale of part of Penpont Glebe; Peterculter – sale of part of Durris Glebe; Resolis and Urquhart – sale of Resolis Glebe; South West Ross – sale of part of Kintail Glebe; The Glens and Kirriemuir United – sale of Kirriemuir Glebe

Miscellaneous Sales:

The General Trustees made the following miscellaneous determinations: Aberdeen Kirk of St Nicholas (Dissolved) – transfer of Kirk of St Nicholas; Carinish – sale of part of garden of former manse; Ceres, Kemback & Springfield – sale of Beadle’s cottage; Cleland (Dissolved) – sale of Cleland Church; Lockerbie, Dryfesdale, Hutton, Corrie and Applegarth – sale of two plots of land at Applegarth Church; Sanday – sale of land at former East Kirk; Selkirk & Ashkirk – sale of land at Loanside, Selkirk

Appendix 4**Manse Survey**

Meeting	Manse Working Group
Description	Survey of Ministers Living in Manses
Date	Updated September 2024
Note Title	Feedback for Ministers

1. Introduction & Background

This report has been prepared to provide an update to ministers who responded to the questionnaire and offered to attend a future focus group. In March 2024 Ministers were invited to complete a questionnaire to gather their experiences of living in manses. We received 246 responses, which equates to approximately 50% of ministers. Compared to previous surveys, this was acknowledged as a great response rate.

2. Results**Manse Standards**

The survey indicates that the main issues facing ministers are:-

- Not enough flexibility in manse standard
- Cost of heating
- Dampness in manses
- Technical maintenance not carried out (Windows etc)
- Gardens being too large to maintain including poor condition of boundary walls and fences

Energy Performance

Whilst two thirds of ministers reported that the manse had an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC), only 15% of ministers confirmed that recommendations on the certificate had been implemented.

Ministerial Activities

The majority of ministers believe that they are able to undertake all necessary activities from the manse. The top three ministerial activities undertaken are quiet space for study, preparation for worship and holding of online meetings. Less than half the ministers use the manse for small Bible study or other small group meetings. Visitors to the manse tend to be individuals from the Kirk Session or others invited to discuss pastoral matters.

Suitability & Satisfaction

Ministers were asked a series of questions to assess the suitability and satisfaction with the manse on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 5 (very suitable). The average ratings are summarised below:-

Question	Average Rating
Suitability of accommodation to allow ministerial activities	4.47
Suitability as a home for family	4.22
Satisfaction with the condition of the manse	3.98
Satisfaction with the speed of response to reported issues	4.06

Specific Concerns & Opinions

As well as answering specific questions, ministers were invited to share particular concerns or topics that they believe would warrant further discussion. The majority of concerns related to heating & energy efficiency along with maintenance & upkeep.

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, the responses to the manse questionnaire have provided valuable insights into the multifaceted concerns surrounding ministerial housing. With heating and energy efficiency emerging as the foremost issue, followed closely by maintenance and upkeep, it's evident that there's a pressing need for action by the Manse Working Group to review how the General Trustees can provide further assistance and whether reforms are required to current policy. The concerns raised regarding financial burdens and environmental sustainability underscore the importance of addressing these issues to ensure the well-being of ministers and their families, while also promoting responsible stewardship of resources.

TRUSTEES OF THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND HOUSING AND LOAN FUND MAY 2025

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Re-appoint Mrs Sharon Anne Ho as a Trustee of the Fund.

Report

1. AIM OF THE FUND

1.1 The Fund exists to support retired Church of Scotland ministers, and widows, widowers, separated or divorced spouses and separated or former civil partners of Church of Scotland ministers, in need of help with housing. The assistance available depends on an individual's circumstances and finances. Details of the help available, and the parameters set, and regularly reviewed, by the Trustees are available in the Guidance Notes on the Church of Scotland website or from the Secretary at the Church offices. The Secretary may also be contacted by potential applicants to discuss their particular situation, and the assistance which the Trustees may be able to provide to them.

1.2 Help from the Fund takes one of two forms. A beneficiary of the Fund is provided with either a house to rent or a loan to assist with a house purchase. The current maximum house purchase price, set in December 2024, is £270,000. Rents are charged at concessionary rates and loans are provided on favourable terms. Loans are granted up to 70 per cent of a house purchase price, subject to an overriding maximum, since December 2024, of £189,000 for Shared Appreciation Loans and £50,000 for Standard Loans.

2. HOUSING TRANSACTIONS: 2024

2.1 Assistance provided during 2024 is detailed in Appendix 1. The property market was affected by national events during the year and remains patchy, with some areas remaining competitive and others being slow. As the Fund both buys and sells properties, these variations can sometimes work in the Fund's favour and other times not.

2.2 The Trustees owned 189 houses at the end of 2024, an increase of 1 over the year. Appendix 2 shows the number of purchases and sales during the year, and the average prices paid or attained. One purchase at only £57,000 lowered the purchase average, which would otherwise have been very similar to the average sale price. At the end of 2024, 17 houses were being marketed or prepared for sale.

3. RENTS AND RENTAL REVIEWS

3.1 At the start of a tenancy the Fund obtains a professional assessment of the Market Rent. Rents are charged at 50% of the Market Rent for Ministers, separated or divorced spouses and separated or former civil partners of ministers, and at 25% for widows, widowers and bereaved civil partners of ministers.

3.2 The Trustees carefully considered the level of annual rent increase. In light of the good financial position of the Fund, and as was the case in 2024, the Trustees have decided that rents should not be increased in 2025.

3.3 Rental income has been sufficient to cover maintenance and repairs. Routine visits to rental properties are carried out and reported maintenance work dealt with as expeditiously as possible.

4. LOAN TRANSACTIONS: 2024

4.1 The Fund provides loans by way of Standard Loans, Shared Appreciation Loans and Short-Term Bridging Loans.

4.2 Standard Loans in 2024 were available up to a normal maximum limit of £50,000 at a rate of interest of 2% for ministers and separated or divorced spouses and separated or former civil partners of ministers and 1% for surviving widows, widowers or bereaved civil partners of ministers.

4.3 Shared Appreciation Loans, which link loan repayment values over their term to the value of the property concerned over the same period, were granted up to the maximum limit of £182,000. Currently, rates of interest for such loans are 1.5% for ministers and separated or divorced spouses and separated or former civil partners of ministers and 0.75% for widows, widowers or bereaved civil partners of ministers. Borrowers with Shared Appreciation Loans receive quinquennial visits from the Secretary and, in 2024, 9 loan visits were carried out.

4.4 Short Term Bridging Loans are granted for a specific period, and in specific circumstances, at the discretion of the Trustees. Interest is charged at a rate equivalent to that permitted by H M Revenue & Customs without liability for benefit-in-kind taxation. At the time of preparation of this Report this was 2.25%.

4.5 Details of each of the three types of loan outstanding as at 31st December 2024 are given in Appendix 3.

5. DONATIONS, BEQUESTS ETC.

5.1 The Trustees gratefully acknowledge donations, bequests and gifts received by the Fund during 2024, including the bequest of a property, amounting in value to £158,091.

6. FUNDS

6.1 The amount realised from sales of houses, less the expenditure on house purchases, during 2024 was £187,379. The net increase in long-term loans during 2024 was £100,300.

6.2 Investments at market value and cash deposits at 31st December 2024 amounted to £21,178,531. This is considerably less than the equivalent figure at the end of 2023. That is because, as was reported to the General Assembly last year, the Trustees had identified surplus assets of £9 million which were to be transferred to the Assembly Trustees, and this transfer was made in June 2024.

6.3 In addition, a transfer of £650,000 was made in January 2025, to the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team. Of that amount, £500,000 is earmarked to provide help with housing costs for those training for the Full Time Ministry of Word and Sacrament, with the remaining £150,000 to be applied to the removals costs for retiring ministers.

6.4 The Trustees continue to monitor the Fund's assets, taking account of future commitments and expected calls on the Fund, but being ready to transfer further surpluses, should they arise, to help with the wider work of the Church.

7. THE FUTURE

7.1 Ministers who are within five years of retirement are encouraged to contact the Fund if they feel they may need the Fund's assistance. Similarly, the Trustees welcome an initial approach from those who are within five to ten years of retirement. Such approaches not only assist the Trustees with financial forecasting, but can help to alleviate some of the anxieties which ministers and their spouses or partners may experience in respect of housing as they contemplate their future after retirement. The Secretary had 59 enquiries about assistance in 2024, with 20 new and 6 updated applications approved. Details of commitments for the next five years, and approved at 31st December 2024, can be found at Appendix 4. The number of ministers planning to retire with assistance from the Fund within a five to ten year period from 31st December 2024 and the number on the Preliminary Applications List for assistance can also be found there.

7.1.1 The Fund can be of assistance beyond the point of retiral. Potential and existing beneficiaries are welcome to speak to the Secretary at any point.

7.2 In December 2024, the Trustees carefully considered the Fund's parameters for granting assistance with housing to rent, and assistance by way of housing loans. Taking into account the current housing market, the numbers of ministers due to retire, and the proper and appropriate stewardship of its resources, the Trustees agreed that the house purchase price limits for 2025 be increased. Thus, the maximum price for a house to rent increased by £10,000 to £270,000 and the maximum price, or value, of a house in respect of which a loan would be given increased to £270,000. The Trustees are satisfied that such parameters will enable appropriate housing to be purchased in the current housing market for those who are eligible for assistance from the Fund.

8. DILIGENCE

8.1 The Trustees confirm that the Staff have monitored their stock of rental housing and housing over which loans have been secured, and have continued to support their tenants and borrowers. Maintenance and repair work is carried out as expeditiously as possible, though finding reliable contractors and trades people is a constant challenge.

8.2 Work to increase the energy efficiency of the Fund properties continues. In 2024, solar panels were installed in 9 properties and new boilers in 16, with further such work being planned for 2025. In addition, at the end of 2024, 60 of the Fund properties had an Energy Performance Certificate rating of C and work continues to get as many properties to this level as possible.

8.3 Any empty property held by the Fund presents challenges, as the Fund is obliged to make regular checks on these properties and keep them heated during cold weather, as well as maintaining gardens and paying Council Tax. Efforts are made to re-let a vacated property to new tenants, but where this is not practicable, it will be marketed for sale as soon as possible.

8.4 The Trustees seek to maintain the properties owned by the Fund at a high standard and to comply with all legal requirements.

9. STAFF

9.1 The Trustees wish to place on record their indebtedness to the work of the staff of the Fund, and in particular the care and support afforded by staff to all those who apply to, or have been assisted by, the Fund.

10. MEMBERSHIP

10.1 Mrs Sharon Ho has served an initial four-year term as a Trustee. Under the terms of the Fund's Constitution, she is eligible to serve a further four-year term and is willing to do so. The Trustees would be pleased if the General Assembly would agree to her re-appointment.

10.2 The Rev I Scott McCarthy resigned as a Trustee in October 2024. The Trustees wish to place on record their appreciation of his involvement with the Fund, and their thanks for the valuable contributions he made to their discussions and decisions.

10.3 Mr Sandy Mowat resigned as a Trustee in March 2025 having served the Fund as a Baird Trust appointee for 16 years. The Trustees wish to put on record their grateful appreciation of his long and faithful service, his pastoral concern for those who apply to the Fund for help and his particular insight and guidance relating to financial matters.

10.4 The Baird Trust have appointed The Rev Ian Murray, as Mr Mowat's successor as a Trustee of the Fund from March 2025.

10.5 The Trustees and Secretary would be delighted to hear from anyone interested in becoming a future Trustee of the Fund.

In the name of the Trustees

DOROTHY U ANDERSON, Chair
BRUCE H SINCLAIR, Deputy Chair
HAZEL BETT, Secretary

Appendix 1

Assistance provided	2024	2023	2022
Number of Ministers retiring *	36	48	38
Percentage assisted with a house to rent	6%	17%	3%
Percentage assisted with a house purchase loan	8%	6%	8%
Total percentage assisted	14%	23%	11%
Instances of assistance provided*	2024	2023	2022
Retiring Ministers	5	14	4
Ministers already retired	3	2	1
Widow(er)s & Civil Partners	4	1	0
Spouses	0	0	3
Total	12	17	8

* Assistance may be provided in a different calendar year to that in which the Minister actually retires

Tenants as at 31st December	2024	2023	2022
Ministers	104	115	111
Widow(er)s & Civil Partners	53	51	54
Spouses	12	12	11
Commercial rental	2	2	2
Vacant	18	8	7
Borrowers as at 31st December	2024	2023	2022
Ministers**	61	62	65
Widow(er)s & Civil Partners	37	36	34
Spouses	0	0	0

**2 Borrowers have dual loans

Appendix 2

Rental Housing			
	2024	2023	2022
Total number of houses owned at 1st January	188	185	189
Houses purchased during year	8	12	4
Total cost of purchases	£1,541,121	£2,703,418	£704,521
Average house price	£192,640	£225,285	£176,130
Houses sold during year	8	9	8
Total amount realised	£1,728,500	£1,960,310	£1,598,609
Average proceeds	£216,062	£217,812	£199,826
Houses bequeathed/gifted during year	1	1	1
Houses relet during year	0	1	0
Total number of houses owned at 31st December	189	188	185
Average market rent of property purchased during year	£11,212	£10,520	£8,700
Average rent of new tenancies - Ministers/Spouses	£5,606	£5,260	£4,350
Average rent of new tenancies - Widow(er)s	£2,803	£2,630	£2,175

Appendix 3

Housing Loans			
	2024	2023	2022
<i>Long term loans outstanding at 1st January</i>	100	101	101
Value of loans outstanding	£6,232,750	£6,191,250	£6,000,250
New loans granted during year	4	2	3
Value of loans granted	£328,300	£195,000	£302,000
Loans fully repaid during year	4	3	3
Loans partially repaid during year	0	0	2
Value of loans repaid	£228,000	£153,500	£111,000
Long term loans outstanding at 31st December	100	100	101
Value of long-term loans outstanding	£6,333,050	£6,232,750	£6,191,250
<i>Short term Bridging Loans outstanding at 1st January</i>	0	0	0
Value of Bridging Loans outstanding	£0	£0	£0
Bridging loans granted during year	1	3	2
Value of Bridging Loans granted	£49,575	£175,280	£117,000
Bridging loans repaid during year	1	3	2
Value of Bridging Loans repaid	£49,575	£175,280	£117,000
Short term Bridging Loans outstanding at 31st December	0	0	0
Value of Bridging Loans outstanding at 31st December	£0	£0	£0

Appendix 4

Outstanding Commitments at year end	2024	2023	2022
For next 5 years			
Houses to rent	20	15	20
Housing Loans	6	5	7
Value of outstanding commitments	£6,219,296	£4,581,150	£5,485,030
Preliminary Applications	2024	2023	2022
For those retiring between 5 - 10 years	2	2	4

NOMINATION COMMITTEE MAY 2025

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Thank those who have offered their skills to serve the Standing Committees of the General Assembly through the nomination cycle of 2024/25.
3. Note that a Strategic Review has been undertaken and that a number of action points have been implemented, including the production of a Nominations Handbook, and agree that the review of the nominations process will continue within the Nomination Committee as an integral part of its work (Section 2).
4. Note the intention of the Committee to seek a conversation with the Assembly Trustees regarding the processes for making appointments to the Assembly Trustees and its Sub-Committees in relation to the involvement and place of the Nomination Committee (Section 2.3.4).
5. Make alterations to the Standing Committees of the General Assembly as set forth in the Report (Section 5).
6. Appoint Andrew Tait as Convener of the Chaplains to HM Forces Committee (from September 2024) (Section 5.1).
7. Reappoint Shona Haldane as a Convener of the Discipline Tribunal (Section 5.1).
8. Reappoint James Drummond Young as Convener of the Judicial Commission (Section 5.1).
9. Appoint Sigrid Marten as Convener of the Iona Community Board for two years (Section 5.1).
10. Agree to suspend Standing Order 122 and reappoint James Stewart as Convener of the Life and Work Advisory Committee for one year (Section 5.1).
11. Appoint Paul Nimmo as Convener of the Theological Forum (Section 5.1).
12. Agree to suspend Standing Order 122 and reappoint Hilary McDougall as Vice-Convener of the Registration of Ministries Committee for one year (Section 5.1).

Report

1. COMMITTEE REMIT AND PROCESS

1.1 Preamble

1.1.1 The remit of the Nomination Committee is to identify Ministers, Deacons, Elders and Members with relevant skills and experience to serve the Standing Committees of the General Assembly. The Nomination Committee works with Standing Committees to ensure that the appointment of Conveners and Vice-Conveners is done in a fair and transparent manner.

1.1.2 At the time of writing this report, nine vacancies remain unfilled on Standing Committees.

1.1.3 The Communications Department helped raise the profile of the Nomination Committee by distributing two short videos promoting the work of the Nomination Committee.

1.1.4 The Committee continues to support the work of the Assembly Trustees and its Sub-Committees (Seeds for Growth and the Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Group) in the appointment of Conveners, Vice-Conveners, and members.

1.2 Meetings and Membership

1.2.1 Nomination Committee meetings in 2024/25 took place in a hybrid format in order to reduce costs and contribute to the General Assembly's strategy towards a Net Zero Pathway.

1.2.2 It was with sadness that the Committee learned about the untimely death of one of its members, Rev Linda Pollock. The Committee appreciates the diligence with which Linda undertook her duties and has extended condolences to her family.

1.3 Appointments to Legal Bodies

1.3.1 The Committee received names at its January meeting from the Convener of the Legal Questions Committee, Principal Clerk and Depute Clerk.

1.3.2 The Committee is pleased to report an increase in the number of new members to the Legal Bodies and expresses thanks to all those who provide professional expertise to the Church in this way.

2. STRATEGIC REVIEW OF THE NOMINATIONS PROCESS

2.1 Context

2.1.1 The General Assembly of 2023 agreed the following section of deliverance: "Instruct the Nomination Committee to carry out a strategic review of the General Assembly's nomination process and put forward proposals for reform to the General Assembly of 2024".

2.1.2 At the General Assembly of 2024, it was noted that a Strategic Review Group had been established and the work of review was underway. The Review Group had identified six areas of work as the parameters for review: internal working of the Committee; sources of information; the recruitment process and engagement with the wider church; eligibility for membership of committees and other bodies; working with Conveners of other committees and bodies and working with the new enlarged Presbyteries. The scope of the review was agreed by the General Assembly of 2024 and it was noted that further recommendations would be brought to the General Assembly of 2025.

2.2 Strategic Review

2.2.1 During 2024/25, the Strategic Review Group focussed on one or two topics from each of these areas of work. It also met with representatives of the EDI Group and is grateful for their input into the review.

2.2.2 Some changes have already been implemented to the nominations process, including those described in the following paragraphs.

2.2.3 Nominations Handbook. A Nomination Committee Handbook has been compiled, containing sections on the principles of the work of nominations, the relevant sections from Standing Orders; policies; a timeline of the annual work of the Nomination Committee with application forms and standard forms of communication; and guidance on the process for mid-year appointments. Much of the information already existed, but the Handbook helpfully pulls it together in one place. New resources and Guidance Notes are also being developed and added to the Handbook as they become available. At this stage the Handbook will not be made more widely available as it is felt that it would be better to focus on maintaining the Handbook as a comprehensive and current resource for the Nomination Committee itself. However, information, forms and guidance can be extracted and sent to others in the Church as required.

2.2.4 Application Deadline. In practice, the annual application deadline of 30 November usually had to be extended several times. Now that electronic systems allow application forms to be processed more easily, it was decided that the deadline could be moved to the first week in January to give more time for people to make their applications. This has already been implemented for appointments to be made at the General Assembly of 2025.

2.2.5 Notification of Applicants. The time frame for notifying those who are being nominated for a Standing Committee, and those who have not been nominated at this time, has been brought forward. The aim is for all applicants to receive a response within a month after the January/February meeting of the Nomination Committee.

2.2.6 Standing Orders. The Committee is grateful to have had input into the revision of the Standing Orders as they relate to the Standing Committees and their membership. The Committee expresses thanks to its Secretary for her work on these. It is hoped that the amendments will provide greater clarity and consistency which in turn will help to streamline the work of the Committee.

2.2.7 Candidates, Probationers and New Ministers. In 2021, the General Assembly adopted a policy whereby "Candidates in Training, Probationers and Ministers in their first year after ordination will not normally be appointed to serve on Standing Committees". The Review Group was aware that purpose of the policy was not well understood in the Church and that exceptions had been made for reasons which were not always articulated. Over the past year, the Committee has sought to apply the policy in a more open, transparent and consistent way. The policy is in no way intended as a rejection of the skills and experience possessed by Ministers in training or new Ministers; rather it is a pastoral measure to ensure that those individuals can focus on ministry formation in their local setting and in their own Presbytery. Where the Nomination Committee allows an exception to the policy, it is where the Candidate, Probationer or new Minister has particular qualities, skills or experience which would be of benefit to the Standing Committee in question and where the individual is confident they can take on the workload at this time. Although some applications this year have not been accepted as a result of the policy, the Committee warmly encourages individuals to apply again at a later date.

2.2.8 Presbytery Selections. In 2024/25, the Committee asked those being selected by Presbyteries as possible nominees for the Committee to Nominate the Moderator to complete a short form to provide the Nomination Committee with more information to assist in seeking balance in its nominations. The Committee is grateful to those who completed the form and encourages Presbyteries to request that those selected by them do this again in future years.

2.2.9 Presbytery Appointments. The Committee produced a Guidance Note on the process of direct appointments by Presbyteries to the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team (FAPLT) and feedback from some Presbyteries suggests that this was helpful. It is noted that the process of direct appointments by Presbyteries in 2024/25 has resulted in a decrease in the balance within FAPLT.

2.3 Topics for Review in 2025/26

2.3.1 The Committee has identified some areas on which to focus its review during the coming year, including those identified in the following paragraphs.

2.3.2 Accessibility. Following discussion with the EDI Group, the Committee will consider the introduction of an Equalities Monitoring Form at the end of the application form and/or inviting an EDI representative to be present at Committee meetings.

2.3.3 Application Forms. Following feedback from applicants, other Committees and the EDI Group, the Committee plans to review the application and supporting forms as a whole in terms of their format and content, and to consider a simplified application process for reappointments.

2.3.4 Assembly Trustees and Sub-Committees. The Committee is not directly involved in the recruitment process for the Assembly Trustees but it does have a consultative role. Appointments to the Sub-Committees of the Assembly Trustees are made by the Assembly Trustees, but the Committee has a role in receiving applications and helping to ensure a fair and transparent process. The Committee would welcome a conversation with the Assembly Trustees to explore ways in which the co-ordination between the Committee and the Assembly Trustees can be developed in order to better streamline these processes.

2.4 Looking Ahead

2.4.1 The Committee is grateful to the members of the Strategic Review Group, which comprised the Convener, Vice Convener, Secretary, Administrator and a member of the Nomination Committee, along with (for part of 2024 and 2025 only) the Liaison Trustee from the Assembly Trustees and the Secretary of the Assembly and Presbytery Clerks Forum. With the scope of review of the nominations process having been agreed and the practical work of review well underway, the Nomination Committee proposes that the review is now integrated into the Committee as a whole rather than within the separate Strategic Review Group. The Committee assures the General Assembly that it will continue to consider each area of review to ensure that it fulfils its remit in a way that is efficient, effective, clear and consistent, both internally and in its engagement with other Committees, Presbyteries, applicants and all in the wider Church.

3. APPOINTMENTS TO THE ASSEMBLY TRUSTEES AND SUB-COMMITTEES

3.1 Assembly Trustees

3.1.1 The Nomination Committee was not involved before or during the recruitment process but is satisfied that new appointments being proposed by the Assembly Trustees have been selected in a fair and transparent manner.

3.2 Seeds for Growth Committee

3.2.1 A representative from the Nomination Committee was present when the Seeds for Growth Committee met and selected nominees. The Committee is satisfied that the process for appointments to the Seeds for Growth Committee was fair and transparent.

3.2.2 Furthermore, the Nomination Committee is satisfied that the process for appointment of a new Convener was conducted in a fair and transparent manner with a member of the Nomination Committee being present when interviews for the post were conducted.

3.3 EDI Group

3.3.1 A representative from the Nomination Committee was present when the EDI Group met and selected nominees. The Committee is satisfied that the process for appointments and reappointments to the EDI Group was fair and transparent.

3.3.2 Furthermore, the Nomination Committee is satisfied that the process for appointment of a new Vice-Convener was conducted in a fair and transparent manner.

4. NOMINATION PROCESS FOR 2024/25

4.1 Mid-Year Vacancies

4.1.1 The work of the Nomination Committee continues throughout the year with the need to fill mid-year vacancies caused by members of Standing Committees choosing to resign their appointment. The Convener, Vice-Convener, Secretary and Administrator are continually engaged in supporting Committees and other bodies to ensure their work can continue with the minimum impact following a resignation.

4.1.2 The Committee has been concerned with the number of mid-year vacancies that have required to be filled in the course of the year, with a significant number relating to the work of FAPLT and its Programme Groups. In the period between the General Assembly in 2024 and the date of writing the report, the Committee has worked to fill 26 mid-year vacancies which is a 100% increase from the 13 mid-year vacancies filled in the same period in the previous year.

4.1.3 The Committee is keeping an open mind on the reasons for this increase in the number of resignations and mid-year vacancies and will report to the General Assembly of 2026 should the trend continue.

4.2 Appointment of Conveners and Vice-Conveners

4.2.1 In accordance with the Standing Orders of the General Assembly, the Committee reminds all Committees and bodies of the need to ensure that the nomination of a Convener or Vice-Convener should only be made after an “open and transparent process” involving the Nomination Committee.

4.2.2 The Nomination Committee would encourage that in all such appointments, an application and interview process which is both fair and robust is employed by Standing Committees.

4.2.3 It is important that the General Assembly have confidence in the process employed by Standing Committees of the nomination of individuals for appointment to leadership positions within the Church.

4.2.4 In accordance with this, the Nomination Committee undertook a search process for a Vice-Convener this year which included the intimation of the vacancy and opportunity for an expression of interest to all members, and a robust interview conducted by the Convener and two members of the Committee. The Committee then discussed fully the vacancy and the recommendation of the interview panel at a regular meeting.

4.3 Facts and Figures

4.3.1 A total of 54 proposed nominees were considered with several individuals proposed for more than one Standing Committee, and a further 17 individuals agreeing to serve on various Legal Bodies.

4.3.2 From the online forms submitted, 44% heard about the nomination process through e-mail directly from the Nomination Committee, and 20% heard of the process through a member of the Nomination Committee or another Standing Committee. Others heard through their Minister, the Session Clerk, the Presbytery Clerk or Facebook.

4.3.3 Of the 54 people who applied to serve on Standing Committees, almost 42% had not served on a General Assembly Committee in the past 10 years.

4.3.4 Of the nominees considered, 40% indicated that they would be willing to be considered for serving on any Standing Committee.

4.3.5 Of the application forms received for the 54 nominees considered, 41% came from Ministers, 9% came from Presbyteries, 39% came from the Standing Committee and 11% came from Kirk Sessions.

4.3.6 Of the forms received, 14% were from applicants under the age of 45, 58% were in the age bracket 45-64, and 28% were 65 and over.

5. NOMINATIONS FOR APPOINTMENT TO STANDING COMMITTEES

5.1 The Nomination Committee recommends the following appointments:

* denotes a reappointment

Assembly Business Committee

Vice-Convener Retiring Sheila Kirk

Vice-Convener Appointed Sheila Kirk* (Deer Parish Church) (1yr)

Minister Resigned John Ferguson May 2024

Minister Appointed James Teasdale (Glasgow: Eastwood) (1yr)

Elder Resigning Graeme Roberts

Elder Appointed Iain Cormack (Comrie and Dundurn)

Audit Committee

Minister Resigned Fiona Anderson Aug 2024

Member Appointed Barbara Finlayson May 2024 (Edinburgh: The New Town) (1yr)

Member Retiring Barbara Finlayson

Members Appointed Elaine Barrowman (East Kilbride: Moncreiff) (2yrs), Barbara Finlayson* (Edinburgh: The New Town)

Chaplains to HM Forces Committee

Convener Resigned Scott Brown Sep 2024

Convener Appointed Andrew Tait Sep 2024 (Tullibody: St Serf's)

Vice-Convener Resigned Andrew Tait Sep 2024

Vice-Convener Appointed Amy Bender Oct 2024 (Keith: North, Newmill, Boharm and Rothiemay)

Vice-Convener Retiring Amy Bender

Vice-Convener Appointed Amy Bender* (Keith: North, Newmill, Boharm and Rothiemay)

Ministers Resigned Neil Galbraith Feb 2025, Peter Sutton Jan 2025

Member Resigned Amy Bender Oct 2024

Member Appointed Robert Wright Feb 2025 (Colvend, Southwick and Kirkbean)

Committee to Nominate the Moderator

Ministers and Deacons Appointed Lynsey Brennan (Baldernock linked with Milngavie: St Paul's), Jonny Clipston (Brimmond), Derek Hughes (Glasgow: Easterhouse), Nikki Macdonald (Upper Clyde), Grant Maclaughlan (Dundee: Westgait), Sheila Wallace DCS
Elders Appointed Robert Kenneth (Lausanne: The Scots Kirk), Gordon Macdonald (Prestwick: Kingcase), Connor MacFadyen (Tranent), Frances McCafferty (Dunfermline: Abbey), Elizabeth McClelland (Edinburgh: High (St Giles')), Mabel Wallace (Fort William Kilmallie linked with Kilmonivaig)

Ecumenical Relations Committee

Ministers Resigned Pauline Steenburgen Jan 2025, Peter Sutton Dec 2024
Ministers Appointed Ian Scott McCarthy (Corby), Margaret Fiona Ogg (Presbytery of England and the Channel Islands) (3yrs)
Member Retiring Gemma King

Faith Action Programme

-Leadership Team

Vice-Convener Resigned William Wishart Jul 2024
Vice-Convener Appointed David Clarkson Aug 2024 (Edinburgh: Barclay Viewforth)
Vice-Conveners Retiring David Clarkson, Jonathan Fleming
Vice-Conveners Appointed David Clarkson* (Edinburgh: Barclay Viewforth), Jonathan Fleming* (Greenock: Lyle Kirk), Scott McRoberts (Inverness: St Columba)
Ministers and Deacons Resigned Morag Crawford DCS Nov 2024, Doug Gay Aug 2024
Minister Resigning Scott McRoberts
Ministers Appointed Ibidun Daramola (Foveran) (1yr), Nathan McConnell (Dundee: Downfield Mains) (1yr), Scott McInnes Dec 2024 (Stirling: North), Julia Pizzuto-Pomaco (Peterhead: New)
Ministers from Presbytery Resigned Graham Duffin Jul 2024, Rory MacLeod Oct 2024, Amanda MacQuarrie Sep 2024
Ministers from Presbytery Appointed Everisto Musedza Dec 2024 (Cowal Kirk, Presbytery of the Highlands and Hebrides), David Rankin Nov 2024 (Perth: Riverside, Presbytery of Perth)
Members from Presbytery Resigned Amy-Louise Scott Jul 2024, Linda Watt Sep 2024
Members from Presbytery Appointed Frances Heafield Sep 2024 (Ettrick and Yarrow linked with Selkirk and Ashkirk, Presbytery of Lothian and Borders), Chris Mackintosh Sep 2024 (Burnside Blairbeth, Presbytery of Glasgow)

-Mission Support Programme Group

Minister Resigned Emma McDonald Jan 2025

-People and Training Programme Group

Ministers Resigned Scott Blythe Jul 2024, David Clarkson Aug 2024
Ministers Appointed Timothy Linford (Gorebridge) (2yrs), Hanneke Marshall Aug 2024 (St Machar's Ranfurly Church)

-Presbytery Mission Plan Implementation Group

Minister Resigned Lorna Tunstall Feb 2025
Minister Appointed James Reid Jul 2024 (Burntisland and Kinghorn)
Member Retiring Barbara Finlayson
Members Appointed Barbara Finlayson* (Edinburgh: The New Town), Ruth Mackenzie Aug 2024 (Peterhead: New)

-Public Life and Social Justice

Member Resigned Frances Heafield Sep 2024
Member Appointed Aaran McDonald Oct 2024 (Kilwinning: Abbey)

-Resource and Presence Programme Group

Member Resigned Tom Burnham Aug 2024
Minister Appointed Cindy Campbell (Bermuda: Christ Church, Warwick, and London: St Columba's linked with Newcastle: St Andrew's) (2yrs)

Iona Community Board

Convener Resigning Anikó Schütz Bradwell
Convener Appointed Sigrid Marten (Edinburgh: High (St Giles')) (2yrs)

Legal Questions Committee

Vice-Convener Retiring Katherine Taylor
Vice-Convener Appointed Katherine Taylor* (Tranent) (2yrs)
Minister Retiring Douglas Reid
Minister Appointed Douglas Reid* (Edinburgh: Gorgie and Palmerston Place)
Members Retiring Shona Cook, James McLean, John Ritchie
Members Appointed Douglas Monaghan (Monifieth South Angus), John Ritchie* (Edinburgh: Barclay Viewforth)

Appointment to Legal Bodies

-Discipline Tribunal

Convener Resigned David Burns Jun 2024

Convener Retiring Shona Haldane

Convener Appointed Shona Haldane* (Edinburgh: Wardie)

-Judicial Commission

Convener Retiring James Drummond Young

Convener Appointed James Drummond Young*

Vice-Convener Retiring Colin Renwick

Vice-Convener Appointed Colin Renwick* (Dunblane Cathedral, Kilmadock and Blair Drummond)

-Judicial Panel

Ministers Retiring Jan Mathieson, Gordon McCracken, Ian McLean, MaryAnn Rennie

Ministers Appointed Susan Brown (Coldstream and District Parishes linked Eccles and Leitholm), Brenda Elwell-Sutton (Dundee: Northeast), Christine Goldie (Dumbarton), Gordon Kennedy (Edinburgh: Craiglockhart), Donald MacEwan (Chaplain: University of St Andrews),

Jan Mathieson* (Williamwood), Ian McLean* (Montrose: Trinity), Andrea Price (Edinburgh: St Michael's) MaryAnn Rennie* (Dunfermline: Abbey), Matthew Ross (Edinburgh: Canongate)

Elders Retiring Fiona Drysdale, Chris Dunn, Douglas Hamill, Pauline Weibye

Elders Appointed Chris Dunn* (Cumbernauld: Trinity), Pauline Weibye* (Edinburgh: Newington Trinity), William Windram (Bowden and Melrose)

-Ministries Appeal Panel

Member Retiring Isabell Montgomerie

Member Appointed Isabell Montgomerie* (Ochiltree linked with Stair)

-Mission Plan Review Group

Member Appointed Roger Dodd (Coldstream and District Parishes linked Eccles and Leitholm) (2yrs)

Member Resigned Grant Gordon Mar 2024

Life & Work Advisory Committee

Convener Retiring James Stewart

Convener Appointed James Stewart* (Perth: Letham St Mark's) (1yr)

Minister Resigning Rosemary Frew

Minister Retiring Jane Barron

Member Retiring Jane Robson

Members Appointed Jane Robson* (Edinburgh: Northwest Kirk: Cramond and Pennywell), Ruud Witte (Rotterdam: Scots International Church)

Nomination Committee

Vice-Convener Retiring Bryan Kerr

Vice-Convener Appointed Bryan Kerr* (Lanark: Greyfriars)

Minister Retiring Donald Campbell

Minister Passed Away Linda Pollock Nov 2024

Ministers Appointed Matthew Ross (Edinburgh: Canongate), Christopher Wallace (East Mainland)

Members Resigned Jonathan Buchan Feb 2025, John Dent Jul 2024, Robert McQuistan Oct 2024

Member Retiring Connor MacFadyen

Members Appointed Ann Gammack (Ellon), Mhorag Murphy Aug 2024 (Torrance)

Registration of Ministries Committee

Convener Retiring Robert Hamilton

Vice-Convener Retiring Hilary McDougall

Vice-Convener Appointed Hilary McDougall* (Cambuslang) (1yr)

Ministers Appointed Lynn Brady Jul 2024 (Gretna: Old, Gretna: St Andrew's, Half Morton and Kirkpatrick Fleming linked with Hoddum, Kirtle-Eaglesfield and Middlebie), Gary Peacock Jul 2024 (Dumfries: St Michael's and South linked with Irongray, Lochrutton and Terregles)

Safeguarding Committee

Minister Retiring Julia Wiley

Minister Appointed Aaron Stevens (Budapest: St Columba's)

Member Retiring Doreen Henderson

Members Appointed Doreen Henderson* (Kilmore and Oban linked with Tiree), Jane Nicol (Paisley: St Mark's Oldhall)

Social Care Council - CrossReach Board

Minister Resigning Keith Blackwood

Minister Appointed Dawn Westwood (Bathgate: Boghall)

Member Retiring Amy Reid

Member Appointed Amy Reid* (Cumbernauld: Trinity) (3yrs)

Theological Forum

Convener Retiring Liam Fraser

Convener Appointed Paul Nimmo (Aberdeen: St Machar's Cathedral)

Vice-Convener Retiring Paul Nimmo

Vice-Convener Appointed Lynn McChlery (Auchterarder)

Minister Resigning Lynn McChlery

Ministers Retiring John Carswell, Paul Middleton

Minister Appointed Daniel Spencer (Dundee: Northeast, and Dundee: Law)

Member Retiring Joshua Ralston

Members Appointed Helen Bond (Falkirk: Trinity), Sara Mannen (Ellon), Scott Paget (Lanark: Greyfriars) (2yrs)

In the name of the Committee

ANDREW GARDNER, Convener

BRYAN KERR, Vice-Convener

VICTORIA LINFORD, Secretary

DELEGATION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY MAY 2025

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report of the Delegation of the General Assembly and thank it for its work.
2. Continue the appointment of the Delegation with the same powers as hitherto - the Principal Clerk of the General Assembly to be Chair, the Depute Clerk of the General Assembly to be Vice-Chair and the Solicitor of the Church to act as Secretary.

Report

The General Assembly of 2016 instructed that from 1 January 2017 the only form of constitution which congregations may adopt and which may be granted by the Delegation should be the Unitary Constitution, and urged those congregations constituted in terms of the Model Deed and other forms of constitution to adopt the Unitary Constitution. 97 congregations adopted the Unitary Constitution in 2024 compared to 87 in 2023. Since 2004, the Unitary Constitution has been issued to 1,041 congregations.

The Delegation once again expresses the hope that those congregations who have not yet reviewed their constitution will do so in the course of this year.

In the name and on behalf of the Delegation

FIONA SMITH, Chair
MARY E MACLEOD, Secretary

CHALMERS LECTURESHIP TRUST MAY 2025

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Reappoint the following Trustees each for one further year of office, until May 2026: Mrs Kay Keith, Rev Dr John McPake and Mr Roy Pinkerton (Section 3).

Report

1. CHALMERS LECTURES 2022-2026

1.1 'Hope in today's world'

1.1.1 The Rev Professor John Swinton and Dr Katie Cross each delivered three of a series of six inspiring and thought-provoking online lectures during October, November and December 2024 with the overarching theme 'Hope in today's world'.

1.1.2 Rev Professor Alison Jack also facilitated a hybrid (online and in-person) event in King's College Conference Centre at the University of Aberdeen – a dialogue between the two theologians with a Question and Answer session at the end of the conversation.

1.2 Dr Katie Cross – "Hope is a verb: from witness to action in a traumatised world".

1.2.1 Dr Katie Cross' three lectures considered hope as an action – a 'doing word.' They explored the scarcity of hope in the world today, and the way that trauma in particular challenges the ability to hope. Trauma is central to the Christian faith, so Dr Cross explored the cross and the way it had been interpreted both as a place of trauma and of hope. The second lecture considered the practice of witness particularly in the Easter story. Using the story of the disciples on the Emmaus road, thinking through Jesus' actions as he appeared alongside the traumatised disciples, bearing witness to their ongoing suffering. Finally, this was drawn together in the last lecture by looking to the future and how it would be possible to generate hope in a traumatised world. In doing so, Dr Cross presented hope not as a passive set of emotions but as an active and collaborative practice, one which draws on community, protest, and politics.

1.3 Rev Professor John Swinton – 'Being present: finding friendship in a 'hopeless' world.'

1.3.1 Rev Professor Swinton's three lectures offered a profound exploration of three interconnected themes crucial to navigating the complexities of modern life: presence, friendship, and hope.

1.3.2 The lectures invited people on a transformative journey, weaving together theological insights, contemporary challenges, and practical wisdom. Using the unifying metaphor of a garden to represent our spiritual and relational lives, the series explored how being present tends to the soil and plants the seeds of our existence, how friendship nurtures the soil that sustains the roots of our relationships, and how hope provides the essential sunlight for growth, flourishing and connection with God and one another.

1.3.3 Each lecture delved deeply into its specific themes in the light of a concept: "gentle time" – a slower, more reflective approach to life that contrasts sharply with the frenetic pace of our digital age.

1.3.4 By embracing gentle time, attendees were encouraged to cultivate deeper connections with God, themselves, and others. The lectures blended biblical and theological foundations with personal stories and interdisciplinary insights from psychology, sociology, and neuroscience, providing a holistic understanding of each theme. Practical strategies and actionable steps were developed in the hope of empowering participants to implement these concepts in their daily routines and relationships.

1.3.5 Throughout the series, the lectures addressed contemporary challenges such as digital distraction, social isolation, and global uncertainty, offering a faith-based perspective on finding meaning and connection in a world that often feels fragmented and hopeless. By the conclusion of this part of the series, attendees gained not only a deeper theological understanding of presence, friendship, and hope but also practical tools for living out these concepts in their communities and personal lives. The lectures aimed to inspire a renewed sense of purpose, deeper relational connections, and a more grounded, hopeful approach to faith in the face of life's challenges.

2. PUBLICATIONS

2.1 Work is underway on the format for producing a book from the lecture series, including the dialogue, and publishers have been approached. The book will be a resource for congregations.

3. TRUSTEES

3.1 Certain Trustees (Mrs Kay Keith, Rev Dr John McPake and Mr Roy Pinkerton) complete their current term of office in May 2025. It is proposed that they be reappointed for one further year to enable them to participate in the publication of the book from the current lecture series. Proposals for the appointment of new Trustees will be brought to the Assembly of 2026.

In the name of the Trust

FIONA SMITH, *Chair*

**REPORT OF THE CHURCH HYMNARY TRUSTEES
A REGISTERED SCOTTISH CHARITY (SCOTTISH CHARITY NO. SC002769) TO
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND
IN RESPECT OF THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2024**

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.

Report

1. CHURCH HYMNARY 4TH EDITION AND SUPPLEMENT

- 1.1** In the year to 30 September 2024 the sales of the various editions were as follows:-

Words:	261 copies compared with 231 (2023)
Full Music Edition:	358 copies compared with 310 (2023)
Melody Edition:	269 copies compared with 76 (2023)
Large Print Edition:	230 copies compared with 113 (2023)
CD-Rom:	21 copies compared with 24 (2023)
God Welcomes All	1,277 units

- 1.2** The commission due to the Trust calculated in respect of the year to 30 September 2024 in respect of CH4 was £4,797.42 compared with £1,370.40 in the previous year. From this, royalties were payable to the authors of £5,579.44, the first £2,000 of which is met by the publishers with net commission due to the Trust of £1,217.98.

2. CURRENT WORK

- 2.1** The Trustees are pleased to report that they agreed a grant of £2,760 to a congregation in the Borders as a contribution to the cost of a modern projector to facilitate hymn singing during worship and online.

3. FUNDING FOR PROJECTS

- 3.1** The Trustees affirm their wish to encourage more applications for grants to be made from trust funds, particularly where the applications relate to local training purposes. Enquiries can be sent to the Secretary Anne Steele by email asteele@churchofscotland.org.uk or by post to the Church offices, 121 George Street, Edinburgh EH2 4YN. The Trust purposes include: -

“the advancement of the Christian faith through the promotion and development of hymnody in Scotland with particular reference to the Church of Scotland by assisting in the development, promotion, provision and understanding of hymns, psalms and paraphrases suitable for use in public worship... to enable the Church, and in particular the Church of Scotland, to worship in ways which are relevant to individual congregations or groups of congregations”.

4. MEMBERSHIP

- 4.1** Membership remains unchanged.

In the name of the Trustees

PHILIP H BRODIE, Chair
ANNE STEELE, Secretary and Treasurer