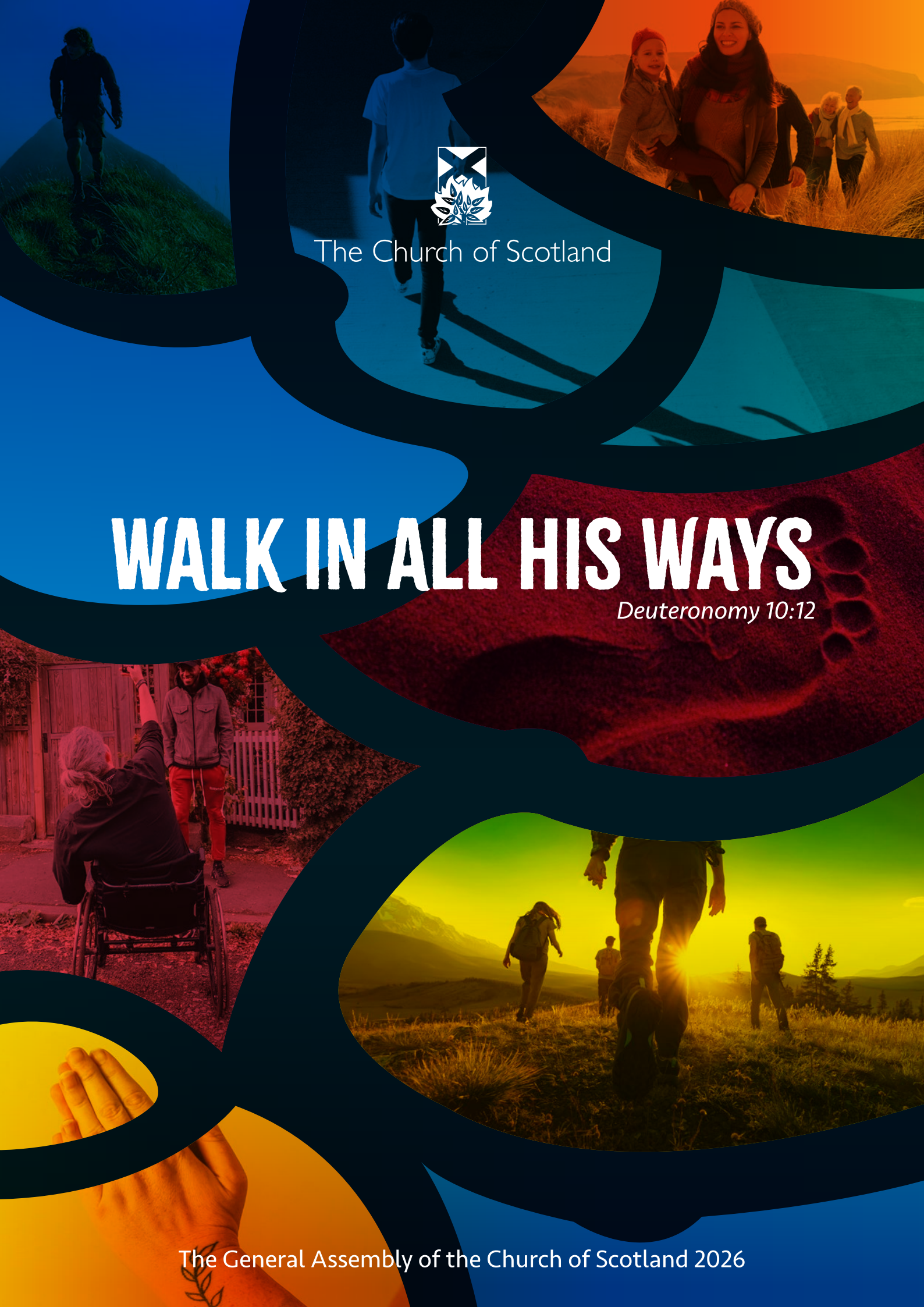


The Church of Scotland

WALK IN ALL HIS WAYS

Deuteronomy 10:12

The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2026

Published in 2026 by
THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND ASSEMBLY BUSINESS COMMITTEE
121 George Street, Edinburgh EH2 4YN

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ISBN 9781800830691

Scottish Charity Number: SC011353

British Library Catalogue in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

All copy keyed by the Church of Scotland
Produced by APS Group Scotland
21 Tennant Street, Edinburgh EH6 5NA

GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2026

Reports

1/1 Assembly Business Committee

2/1 Minute of the Appeal Hearing on 25 June 2025 before the Safeguarding Appeal Group in the matter of an appeal against a decision of the Recruitment Sub-Committee

3/1 Minute of the Appeal Hearing on 11 December 2025 before the Safeguarding Appeal Group in the matter of an appeal against a decision of the Recruitment Sub-Committee

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8/1 Report of the Theological Forum and the Faith Action Programme Leadership team on the Causes of Decline of the Church

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ASSEMBLY BUSINESS COMMITTEE MAY 2026

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. Appoint the Rev Alan Reid as Precentor for the General Assembly of 2026 *(Section 4.8)*.
5. 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 *(Appendix A)*.

Points for Information

1. Rev Fiona Smith

The Committee were saddened to learn of the resignation of Rev Fiona Smith as Principal Clerk to the General Assembly in October 2025, following recent health concerns.

Since her appointment in May 2022, Fiona fulfilled a key leadership role in the Church, supporting and enabling ministry and advising the Assembly and the wider Church on matters of Church law, practice and procedure. She always did so with a pastoral heart and an absolute commitment to the good of the Church, and brought her estimable gifts and talents to bear at the highest levels. Fiona also brought a sense of fun, much appreciated by her colleagues, to even the most challenging circumstances. Having served as minister of Ness Bank Church in Inverness for 12 years prior to her appointment as Principal Clerk, Fiona brought a deep pastoral awareness and care for the wider Church. She supported and enabled ministry to flourish, and her counsel to the General Assembly and wider Church were well received. Fiona played an important role in the continued dialogue between Christian denominations within Scotland, as well as in inter-faith communications, as exemplified by her role as one of the Presidents of the Council of Christians and Jews. Her wise advice, considered thought and vision were offered freely and are much missed. The Committee are grateful for her outstanding service and wish her well as she discerns the call to new pastures.

2. Review of the four-day Assembly

On its final day, the Assembly will be invited to pass an Act, referring to a Commission of Assembly the task of reviewing the four-day Assembly and determining a date, duration and format (in person with whether online to be determined) for the next General Assembly, to meet in Edinburgh in May 2027.

3. Moderatorial Year 2025/2026

Rt Rev Rosie Frew will share some reflections from her year in office in a lunchtime session during the Assembly in the Martin Hall. This will be an excellent opportunity to discover more about Rosie's time representing the Church in settings near and far.

Executive Summary

The Report of the Assembly Business Committee specifies how Commissions have been calculated *(Section 2)* and outlines the steps taken by the Committee to facilitate the four-day Assembly *(Section 4.1)*. The Committee believe an enhanced Consent Agenda is appropriate, with the mechanism for items being returned to the order of business outlined in Amendments to Standing Orders *(Appendix B)*.

Report

1. RT REV ROSIE FREW

1.1 As Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, the Rt Rev Rosie Frew has represented the Kirk nationally and internationally. In local congregations, on Presbytery visits, with CrossReach, the Armed Forces, and overseas at important ecumenical events, Rosie has served faithfully and has taken the time to listen with care, attention and focus to those who she has been with. Taking her theme of *'Extravagant Love'* she has borne witness to the life and service of congregations impacting their local communities and wider society.

1.2 As Rosie returns to her much beloved parish and people in Bowden and Melrose, she takes with her the grateful thanks of the General Assembly for her year of service. She has been well supported throughout her time as Moderator by her husband, Dave, and by her wider family, as well as by the Team in the Office of the General Assembly. The Committee put on record our thanks to her for her leadership and expression of *Extravagant Love*, and wish her well as she prepares for all the new opportunities which lie ahead.

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2. PRESBYTERY REPRESENTATION

2.1 The Presbytery returns show that there are in all 762 charges, whether vacant or not, and 176 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: 193 ministers and 193 elders, with 11 Deacons being eligible for appointment along with the five most recent past Moderators.

3. PROPERTY

3.1 Moderator's Residence

3.1.1 The Committee have recommenced their search for a permanent moderatorial residence, with a view to purchasing an accessible property in Edinburgh.

3.2 Assembly Hall

3.2.1 The Committee continue to monitor and inspect the building to ensure it is able to be used when required.

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4. ASSEMBLY ARRANGEMENTS

4.1 Four-Day General Assembly

4.1.1 The General Assembly of 2025 tasked the Committee to bring forward plans for a four-day Assembly in order to facilitate the attendance of more working age elders, streamline our processes and widen engagement. Accordingly, work has taken place to facilitate this timeframe whilst retaining the General Assembly's functions as the highest legislative court and policy setting environment. To make this possible, the Committee has encouraged Standing Committees to bring only sections of deliverance which require a decision to be made. An Executive Summary appears as part of each Report to enable Commissioners to understand the major issues being brought. Additional information and updates to work being undertaken can be found in the body of each report. The Committee has further expanded the Consent Agenda from 2025. We are fully cognizant that there will be moments during the General Assembly where time will be a major limiting factor and that there may be moments where not everyone who wishes to speak may be called upon to do so. The Committee seek the patience and understanding of Commissioners as we trial meeting over a long weekend. We are committed to reviewing the four-day Assembly, and seek permission to report to a Commission of Assembly to be held later in 2026 to determine how the General Assembly should meet in 2027.

4.2 Risk Assessment

4.2.1 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 2026 is available to view on the Church of Scotland website.

4.3 Commissioner Expenses

4.3.1 Expense rates for those participating in person in the Assembly Hall at the General Assembly of 2026 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.

4.4 Circulation Breaks

4.4.1 The Committee have arranged for tea and coffee to be available in the Rainy Hall during 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.

4.5 Consent Agenda

4.5.1 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.

4.6 Pastoral Care

4.6.1 Following provision of a Pastoral Care Team at previous General Assemblies, the Committee will ensure a similar provision is made in 2026. The Convener of the Procedure Committee will highlight how Commissioners can access pastoral care during the Assembly.

4.7 Communion

4.7.1 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 18 May. Individual glasses with non-alcoholic wine and gluten-free bread will be dispensed to those gathered on the Ground Floor and in the East (Public) Gallery 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.

4.8 Precentor

4.8.1 The Rev Colin Renwick is unable to fulfil the duties of Precentor at the General Assembly of 2026. The Committee are grateful to him for his assistance in the preparation of worship for this year's Assembly, and are grateful to the Rev Alan Reid who has agreed to step into the role of Precentor for 2026. Accordingly, the Committee seek the approval of the General Assembly to this appointment.

4.9 Standing Orders

4.9.1 The Committee has reviewed Standing Orders and has a few changes to propose. With a four-day Assembly and the possibility that the Assembly might decide to remit work to a Special Commission or Committee on the Saturday afternoon or even Monday morning, it is not thought practicable to run the Selection Committee process. Instead it is suggested that the Nomination Committee fulfil this task, by 30 June after the Assembly. New wording is proposed for the Consent Agenda process. Schedule C is to be amended to remove the possibility of an Overture from a Commissioner;

this is thought to be anomalous as Commissioners can of course give Notice of Motion. Another anomaly is that the Convenership of the Nomination Committee has historically been three years whereas Conveners of all other Standing Committees serve for four years; this term of service will be brought into line with others at four years. Finally, it is clarified that the rule whereby members of Standing Committees retiring after four years may be eligible for reappointment but not more than 50% may be so reappointed, also applies to Faith Action Programme Groups.

4.9.2 All amendments are contained within Appendix B. In accordance with SO F1, the section of deliverance proposing the amendments to Standing Orders is found in the Report of the Legal Question Committee.

In the name of the Committee

MICHAEL J MAIR, *Convener*
SHEILA M KIRK, *Vice-Convener*
JOHN L McPAKE, *Secretary*

Addendum

Rev Sheila M Kirk
Sheila has served the Committee with great skill as its Vice Convener and as its representative at meetings of the Assembly Trustees. Sheila has brought to the Committee her innate ability to think with clarity and at great speed. She has drawn upon her legal training to great effect to ensure that the Standing Orders of the General Assembly, and our plans for reform, are fit for purpose. Her knowledge of the inner workings of the Church, and how to navigate potential pitfalls, has been of great use as the Committee has manoeuvred through the challenges of the last few years. Sheila has offered her gifts freely and completely, and has willingly undertaken additional duties when asked. We will miss her wisdom, insight and precision as she steps down following her three-year term.

MICHAEL J MAIR, *Convener*
JOHN L McPAKE, *Secretary*

Appendix A

REPORT OF THE SCOTTISH BIBLE SOCIETY

"You will do more than restore the people of Israel to me. I will make you a light to the Gentiles, and you will bring my salvation to the ends of the earth". (Isaiah 49:6 NLT)

Jesus said "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations". (Matthew 28:18,19 NLT)

Throughout the Bible, we are reminded again and again, that God has a deep love for all people, in all lands both near and far. God is eager to draw people closer to Him regardless of their background or status, and asks us, His followers, to take that message of light and hope out to a world that can often feel dark and downcast. God has invited us to *Share the Bible*.

This message resonated with the National Bible Society of Scotland's Dr Williamson, who in 1874, during a visit to Japan, commented, *"Thirty million of the human family, educated and enterprising, need and wait for the Word of Life at the hands of the Church of Christ. So far as Scotland is concerned, are they to wait in vain?"*. Shortly thereafter, the Bible Society of Japan was formed. It was a privilege to be in Japan to help them celebrate their 150th anniversary and hear how they have sought to bring 'light' to their nation.

We had a special time at our Annual General Meeting this year, when we were joined (virtually) by our colleague from The Bible Society of Algeria. Despite many difficulties and restrictions in place within the country, we heard stories of how they are continuing to minister to their communities, finding creative ways of sharing the Bible with those eager to engage with the God revealed within its pages. We pray that God will encourage and energise the staff team there.

Of course, many of our sister Bible Societies around the world are currently operating in a context of conflict and war, as many as 1 in 5 at present. We pray that God will keep our colleagues and their families safe, and sustain them during these hugely uncertain days. We cannot help but be challenged by their confidence and trust in a God whom they believe is always with them and has the nations in His hands, despite the chaos around them.

We are humbled again by the generosity of our supporters. Through our Appeals we have been able to give significant practical support to Bible ministry in China, and to the Bible Societies in Cuba, Malawi and Ukraine. With the gifts received from 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 and from research like the 'Patmos Global Attitudes to the Bible' survey and the 'Quiet Revival' report which indicate that there is a growing appetite for engaging with God's Word. A magazine-style, easy-to-read 'Letters for Life' (Paul's letters to the Philippians, Ephesians, and Galatians) was produced for distribution at Magnitude, the SU Scotland Youth Festival. This Gospel, aimed at teenagers, was given away free to around 1,500 young people, thanks to a generous supporter. Our prayer, as ever, is that this resource is read, and God is revealed in a real and tangible way.

We continue to enjoy our visits around the country, speaking at Church of Scotland Guild meetings. We are in our second year of support from The Guild, who have adopted our 'Bibles for Bairns' project as one of their partners over a three-year period. When a baby is registered with us (born in Scotland in specific years) they receive a 'Share the Story' Bible on their first birthday. For birthdays 2, 3 and 4 they get an age-appropriate gift to help the family continue to engage with the Bible. On their fifth birthday they will receive a 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.

As ever, we are confronted with various challenges and possibilities, both at home and abroad. But we press on, seeking God's will and wisdom, as we endeavour to be His faithful servants.

Appendix B

AMENDMENTS TO STANDING ORDERS

Delete existing SO 11 and substitute extra text at SO 23 (Special Committees and Commissions) as follows:

Make existing wording para (a) and add: "(b) Where the General Assembly remits a matter to a Special Commission or Committee, the Nomination Committee shall, as soon as practicable after the Assembly, and by 30 June at latest, fulfil the task of appointing the requisite number and nature of persons to such Special Commission or Committee, in accordance with Guidance on the process produced by the Legal Questions Committee. Such persons so appointed need not be commissioners at the Assembly which made the remit. The Nomination Committee shall report to the following General Assembly the names and congregations (where applicable) of all persons so appointed."

Add a new SO 68 – Consent Agenda Process – as follows:

"68. **Consent Agenda process**

(a) The Assembly Business Committee may propose, in the Order of Proceedings, that if the Assembly so agrees, certain specified Reports may be taken as read and their Proposed Deliverance agreed to by the Assembly without being heard in debate. At an early stage in Assembly proceedings, the Convener of the Procedure Committee shall remind commissioners which Reports are subject to such proposal and shall announce a timeframe within which commissioners will be able to intervene and request that a Report should be heard and debated in the normal way.

(b) A commissioner who wishes to request that a report should be heard and debated in the normal way shall email pcoffice@churchofscotland.org.uk to that effect, naming the Committee(s) whose Report(s) he or she proposes be heard and debated by the Assembly in the normal way. Such an email must be received within the time frame announced by the Convener of the Procedure Committee. In order for any given Report to be moved off the Consent Agenda and instead be heard and debated in the normal way, such a request must be received from at least five commissioners.

(c) At a further session of the Assembly, the Convener of the Procedure Committee will confirm for which Report(s) the requisite number of requests from commissioners have been timeously received. Where that has not happened, the Convener shall confirm that the Report(s) has been taken as read and their Proposed Deliverance has been taken as agreed to by the Assembly. Where the requisite number of requests from commissioners have been received, the Procedure Committee will allocate the Report(s) to a later business session of the Assembly, and the relevant Report(s) will be heard and debated in the normal way."

In Schedule B, paragraph B3 1(a), add "Presbytery Review Committee" *to the list of bodies.*

In Schedule C delete all references throughout to Overtures from Commissioners.

In SOs E4 (21) and E16(a), delete references to the Convenership of the Nomination Committee being for a period of three years.

In SO E7(a) add at the end "This rule shall also apply to the Faith Action Programme Groups."

MINUTE OF THE APPEAL HEARING

BEFORE THE SAFEGUARDING APPEAL GROUP

IN THE MATTER OF AN APPEAL AGAINST A DECISION OF THE RECRUITMENT SUB-COMMITTEE MADE ON 28 FEBRUARY 2025

HELD AT 121 GEORGE STREET, EDINBURGH ON WEDNESDAY 25 JUNE 2025 AT 10.30AM

Sederunt: Mr Alan Miller, Convener of the Appeal Group
The Very Rev John Christie, member of the Appeal Group
Mrs Sheena-Jane Clark, member of the Appeal Group

Rev Fiona Smith, Principal Clerk
Ms Christine Paterson, Depute Clerk

Appellant

Respondent: the Recruitment Sub-Committee of the Safeguarding Committee, represented by its Convener, Rev Dr Sonia Blakesley and the Safeguarding Manager, Ms Deborah Blackhurst

Introductions were made. The Hearing was opened with prayer.

The Convener explained that the role of the Appeal Group is to review the decision of the Recruitment Sub-Committee in light of material submitted in relation to the grounds of appeal set out in the Safeguarding Act (Act XVI 2018). He noted that the outcome will either be that the matter is sent back to the Recruitment Sub-Committee to be reconsidered, or the Recruitment Sub-Committee's decision will be upheld. The Appeal Group's role is not to look at the matter from the beginning, nor to consider the process of the Appellant's suspension, nor to cast any doubt on the Appellant's Call; their task is simply to review the Recruitment Sub-Committee's decision.

The Convener confirmed that the members of the Appeal Group have read all of the papers submitted.

The appeal proceeded as follows:

- The Appellant was invited to make comments.
- Questions were asked of the Appellant by members of the Appeal Group and responses were given.
- The Respondent was invited to make comments.
- Questions were asked of the Respondent by members of the Appeal Group and the responses were given.
- The Appellant made immediate response to some of the Respondent's comments.
- Each Party was given the opportunity to make final comments, with the Appellant being given the last word.

The Convener advised that the Appeal Group will now reflect upon and consider its decision, which will be intimated to the Parties by email.

The Hearing was closed with prayer.

Note: The decision and written reasons were issued on 9 July 2025.

MINUTE OF THE APPEAL HEARING

BEFORE THE SAFEGUARDING APPEAL GROUP

IN THE MATTER OF AN APPEAL AGAINST A DECISION OF THE RECRUITMENT SUB-COMMITTEE MADE ON 1 APRIL 2025

HELD AT 121 GEORGE STREET, EDINBURGH ON THURSDAY 11 DECEMBER 2025 AT 10.30AM

Sederunt: The Very Rev John Christie, Convener of the Appeal Group
Rev Bryce Calder, member of the Appeal Group
Mrs Barbara Finlayson, member of the Appeal Group

Rev Dr John L McPake, Acting Principal Clerk
Ms Christine Paterson, Depute Clerk

Appellant, accompanied by their Formation Partner

Respondent: the Recruitment Sub-Committee of the Safeguarding Committee, represented by its Convener, Rev Dr Sonia Blakesley and the Head of Safeguarding Service, Ms Deborah Blackhurst

The Hearing was opened with prayer. Introductions were made.

The Convener explained that the role of the Appeal Group is to review the decision of the Recruitment Sub-Committee in light of material submitted in relation to the grounds of appeal set out in the Safeguarding Act (Act XVI 2018). He noted that the outcome will either be that the matter is sent back to the Recruitment Sub-Committee to be reconsidered, or the Recruitment Sub-Committee's decision will be upheld.

The Convener confirmed that the members of the Appeal Group have read all of the papers submitted.

The appeal proceeded as follows:

- The Appellant was invited to make comments.
- Questions were asked of the Appellant by members of the Appeal Group and responses were given.
- The Respondent was invited to make comments.
- Questions were asked of the Respondent by members of the Appeal Group and the responses were given.
- The Appellant made immediate response to some of the Respondent's comments.
- Each Party was given the opportunity to make final comments, with the Appellant being given the last word.

The Convener advised that the Appeal Group will now reflect upon and consider its decision, which will be intimated to the Parties by email. Written reasons for the decision will follow.

The Hearing was closed with prayer.

Note: Parties were advised by email on 12 December 2025 that the appeal had been upheld and written reasons were issued on 20 January 2026.

LEGAL QUESTIONS COMMITTEE MAY 2026

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Approve amendments to Standing Orders as set out at section 4.9 of the Report of the Assembly Business Committee *(Section 2)*.
3. Pass an Act amending the Safeguarding Act (Act XVI 2025), as set out in Appendix A to this Report *(Section 6)*.
4. Pass an Act amending the Discipline Act (Act I 2019), as set out in Appendix B to this Report *(Section 9)*.

Points for Information

1. The Committee has produced and circulated Guidance on the Church Courts Act, written with Session Clerks in mind.
2. Presbytery Clerks will also be aware of the Guidance now available to them on the Complaints process and accompanying template investigation report.
3. The Committee's Convener has written a not-for-profit book entitled Church of Scotland Governance: The Underlying Principles (the "grey book"), which addresses the long-term structures of the Church. It discusses our constitutional make-up, our system of Courts, the complementary roles of Church Law and Civil Law (including Charity Law), and the way our processes and regulations work in the everyday life of a congregation. It is an ideal ordination gift, or bookstall addition, and the Committee commends it to the Church.

Executive Summary

The Committee has continued its work throughout a changing year, in which the Rev Fiona Smith resigned as Principal Clerk and the Rev Dr John L McPake was appointed as Acting Principal Clerk. Work has continued on producing and updating Guidance documents, in relation to both the Church Courts Act and as to Discipline and Complaints processes. Careful consideration has been given to the remit given to the Committee by last year's Assembly on Act I 2015 and following receipt of a paper from the Theological Forum, the Committee now provides its Report. In a Safeguarding context, the processes for risk assessment decisions and consequent appeals have been reviewed, and new provisions for the Safeguarding Act, including the substitution of a review rather than an appeal, are being proposed. The Committee continues to monitor and provide comment upon various other issues according to its workplan, which is updated in June of each year.

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, on 19 February 2026 members of the Committee examined the minutes of General Assembly Standing Committees (including those of Faith Action Programme Groups and certain sub-committees of the Assembly Trustees) for the calendar year 2025. In general, these were found to be acceptable and any shortcomings have been drawn to the attention of the Committee (or Programme Group or sub-committee) concerned.

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2. AMENDMENTS TO STANDING ORDERS

2.1 The Report of the Assembly Business Committee sets out the work that has taken place on preparing amendments to Standing Orders.

2.2 As required by Standing Order F1 and the Committee's remit, the accompanying section of deliverance is set out at section 2 of this Committee's Proposed Deliverance.

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3. CHURCH COURTS ACT GUIDANCE

3.1 This Guidance, which has been 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, has now been finalised and circulated to Presbyteries, with a request to circulate the Guidance Note to Ministers and Session Clerks in their Presbytery. It is intended that the Guidance will evolve and be updated over time.

4. PRESBYTERY REVIEW GUIDANCE

4.1 The Guidance which is to be prepared will be drafted by the Committee after this year's cycle of reviews, in order to ensure it is well-informed by practice and experience. The Guidance once prepared will thereafter be kept updated by the Presbytery Review Committee with the approval of the Committee.

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5. THE COMPLAINTS PROCESS AND THE DISCIPLINE PROCEDURE

5.1 A sub-group of the Committee has continued to work on ensuring the provision of assistance to those operating the Church's complaints and Discipline processes in terms of Guidance, and also ensuring that such Guidance is kept up to date.

Complaints Process

5.2 Last year the sub-group produced both a Guidance document, which will be for the benefit of Presbytery Clerks and members of Complaints Committees in operating the Complaints Procedure, and a template investigation report. These have been circulated to Presbytery Clerks and the feedback has been that they are helpful.

5.3 Work is also ongoing to produce a commentary on aspects of the template investigation report.

Discipline Act procedure

5.4 Work has been undertaken to update the existing Guidance for the Discipline Act procedure and the updated Guidance will be circulated to Presbytery Clerks when finalised.

Complaints against Presbytery Committees

5.5 The Committee was instructed by the General Assembly of 2024 to develop a process for dealing with complaints made against a Presbytery Committee. After careful consideration, the sub-group has concluded that often such complaints are in fact about individuals or about dissatisfaction with a decision made, and will be amending the Guidance document for the Complaints Process to say that in such situations, contact should be made with the Office of the General Assembly/the Solicitor for advice.

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6. SAFEGUARDING RISK ASSESSMENT DECISIONS AND APPEAL / REVIEW OF THOSE DECISIONS

6.1 The Risk & Recruitment Sub-Committee of the Safeguarding Committee deals with the risk assessment of various matters which may give rise to Safeguarding concerns. These include where vetting information or a notification has been received from Disclosure Scotland, or where there is a concern about the misconduct of a Worker. "Worker" is widely defined to mean any person undertaking a Regulated Role, whether in a paid or voluntary position, and includes all types of ministers. Generally speaking, a Regulated Role covers all persons who work with vulnerable groups, including children and Protected Adults.

6.2 Following recent experiences with the process in the Safeguarding Act (Act XVI 2025) ("the Act") for dealing with appeals against such risk assessment decisions, a sub-group of the Committee has undertaken work to review the risk assessment and appeals processes and now presents proposed amended sections 5 to 7 of the Act, along with some amendments to definitions. The intention is to ensure that Safeguarding can carry out its proper function of protecting people from harm, while still ensuring that those subject to risk assessment have fundamental legal protections.

6.3 The main suggested changes are:

- a definition of "risk assessment" has been added;
- the definition of Protected Adult has been adjusted to reflect the current terms of the civil legislation, ie the Disclosure (Scotland) Act 2020;
- the risk assessment is to be carried out according to a process set out in a Risk Assessment Process document prepared by the Safeguarding Committee (which has been reviewed by the Legal Questions Committee sub-group), with it being provided that the person being risk-assessed will have sight of this document;
- instead of an appeal, there will be a review carried out by two persons (the Reviewers) selected from a Safeguarding Review Panel: one who is legally qualified and one with Safeguarding expertise;
- the grounds for seeking a review have been adjusted, so that the grounds are:
  - irregularities in the risk assessment process, such that the agreed process was not followed in some material respect, and/or
  - the risk assessment decision was subject to manifest error or was plainly irrational, having regard to all the circumstances disclosed;
- the Reviewers may decide either (i) to dismiss the request for review and uphold the decision of the Recruitment & Risk Sub-Committee, or (ii) to uphold the request for review, annul the decision of the Recruitment & Risk Sub-Committee and send the matter back to the Recruitment & Risk Sub-Committee to be decided again, with identification of any deficiencies in its decision found in terms of the grounds for review;
- there is express provision added that where there is a related Discipline Act process, risk assessment will again occur upon conclusion of the Discipline Act proceedings; and
- there is also provision added that where new evidence comes to light which is likely to have a material bearing on the decision, a further risk assessment decision must be taken.

6.4 An amending Act is set out in Appendix A.

7. REQUESTS FOR REVIEW 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 in previous years, the Act provides for a review of the process used by the Presbytery in preparing and approving a Mission Plan, or of the process of amending or annually evaluating and developing 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 52 requests for review across 23 Presbyteries. As all Mission Plans are now in place, requests over the past year have generally resulted from mid-year changes to Plans or from annual evaluation and development of Plans.

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 With the approval of the Committee on Overtures and Cases, the Office of the General Assembly has issued a Guidance Note to Presbytery Clerks as to the operation of section 13.3 of the Presbytery Mission Plan Act (Act VIII 2021). This is the section which states that a Presbytery has the right to effect Adjustment, subject to making every effort to secure approval of office-bearers and congregations involved, and subject to the consent of ministers whose rights would be adversely affected.

7.6 The Note explains that section 13.3 of the Act sought to achieve finality in the Planning & Adjustment process and thus where a Presbytery has used section 13.3, no further right of review or appeal is available where office bearers and/or a congregation do not agree with an Adjustment; instead, the process has reached the end of the road. There is a right of review arising under section 14 is where the details of the Basis of Adjustment are not in conformity with the Approved Mission Plan Act but that is the only right of review arising from section 13.

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8. MINISTERS AND DEACONS IN SAME SEX CIVIL PARTNERSHIPS AND SAME SEX MARRIAGES ACT (ACT I 2015)

8.1 Remit from the Assembly of 2025

8.1.1 A remit was given to the Committee and to the Theological Forum at the Assembly of 2025 as follows:

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).

8.2 The Committee's work

8.2.1 A sub-group of the Committee met to discuss the two issues which the Assembly asked the Committee to consider (a third being referred to the Theological Forum):

8.3 Deferred union/linking

8.3.1 This was described in the Committee's 2025 Report as follows:

"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."

8.3.2 After careful consideration, the sub-group did not see that any change to Act I 2015 (the Act) is possible. They considered whether the Act might be amended to provide for the voting figures in the two Sessions to be added together to reach an overall decision, but it was felt that this would negate the right of Call of each individual congregation. Also, the size of the Session may not be directly proportional to the size of the congregation. The sub-group felt that instead, such a situation might simply mean that the Presbytery must re-consider the proposed adjustment, as it indicates that the congregations involved may not be compatible.

8.4 Team Ministry

8.4.1 This was described in the Committee's 2025 Report as follows:

"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."

8.4.2 Again, the sub-group could not see a way to change the Act to address the problem identified. If, for example, the Act's provision was altered to say that where a minister in a same sex union is in post within the Team, the five year period (of no further votes on whether or not to depart) would be extended indefinitely while that remained the case, that would again result in negating the individual congregation's right of Call for that further indefinite period. Also, the sub-group did not want to assume that it would not be possible for ministers of different theological persuasion to work together in a Team Ministry. In addition, such an approach risks giving undue weight to a minister's sexuality, above other aspects of their Call and ministry.

8.4.3 Rather, the sub-group felt that the Church should trust in the Holy Spirit, that such a situation could instead be resolved and that the parties involved might work together for the peace and unity of the Church.

8.5 The Theological Forum's work

8.5.1 The Theological Forum were separately asked by the Assembly of 2025 to address a matter identified in the Committee's 2025 Report. This related specifically to the fact that the Act permits "*departure from the historic position of the Church, i.e. 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*)". Yet, as the Report notes, "*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*", and it was noted that "*this divergence between law and practice may give rise to questions about the doctrinal statements in the Act*."

8.5.2 The Theological Forum has now reported to the Committee as follows:

"*The detailed theological work underlying the Act was undertaken by the Theological Commission on Same-Sex Relations in the Ministry, which was established in 2011 and reported to the General Assembly in 2013. In response, the General Assembly voted to affirm the Church of Scotland's historic position in relation to human sexuality, but to permit Kirk Sessions which wished to do so to depart from that position. In the process, it explicitly affirmed that the matter of ordination of those in civil partnerships – and by subsequent extension of the principle also of those in same-sex marriages – is a matter of liberty of opinion (Act I 2015, 2(2)): "For the avoidance of doubt, the historic and current doctrine and practice of the Church in relation to human sexuality, their application to the ministers and deacons of the Church and the provisions of this Act are points on which there is liberty of opinion in accordance with Article Declaratory V". Such matters, according to the Fifth Declaratory Article of the Church of Scotland, 'do not enter into the substance of the Faith', and therefore permit of different views.*

The present Theological Forum affirms that human sexuality should continue to be considered a matter of liberty of opinion, and does not consider it necessary, wise, expedient, or helpful to revisit the detailed theological work underlying the Act. Such would require significant amount of resources of time and money, and risk causing (further) division within the denomination, with little to be gained in the process.

However, the Theological Forum does recognise the infelicity that would be involved in a divergence between law and practice of the kind the Legal Questions Committee notes.

The Theological Forum considers that, given liberty of opinion is allowed on matters of human sexuality, it would seem consistent if departure from the historic position of the church in respect of appointments were to be affirmed in a wider range of cases than is currently possible. ... This would also allow for the current law and the existing practice of the Church to be brought into greater alignment.

*The Theological Forum recognises at the same time that any such widening of the scope for ministers in same-sex relationships to be appointed to [a broader range of roles across the Church] may not be possible under the existing Act or by way of modest revision of the same. The Theological Forum also recognises that any such wider affirmation may give rise to questions of consistency between the historic and the current positions. Such questions of law and polity are, however, beyond the remit of the Theological Forum***."**

8.6 History of the Act and legal background

8.6.1 Act I 2015 was passed by the General Assembly after Barrier Act procedure.

8.6.2 A Special Commission had reported in 2011. This was followed by the Theological Commission which reported in 2013. At the 2013 Assembly, the Commission's suggestions were put aside and a new approach was formulated by speakers from the floor. The new approach sought to affirm the traditional doctrine and practice of the Church while allowing the exercise of liberty of opinion as set out in the Articles Declaratory. At the conclusion of that debate, the Assembly of 2013 agreed a set of principles on the basis of which the Legal Questions Committee was instructed to bring forward legislation in 2014. The Overture was approved at the Assembly of 2014, and the following year, after approval from a majority of Presbyteries, became Act I 2015.

8.6.3 The relevant deliverance in 2013 was as follows:

3(i). Affirm the Church's historic and current doctrine and practice in relation to human sexuality; nonetheless permit those Kirk sessions who wish to depart from that doctrine and practice to do so.

(ii) Instruct the Legal Questions Committee to bring an Overture to the General Assembly of 2014 which enacts the following principles of 3. (i) above:

Principles of the Overture:

1. Would not require the Church to abandon its traditional position.

2. But would allow individual congregations – by decisions of their Kirk Sessions – to depart from the Church's traditional position.

3. Would allow ministers and deacons (current and prospective) who are in civil partnerships to be selected for training and to be trained. Would also allow them to be ordained/inducted into a charge the Kirk Session of which had decided to depart from the Church's traditional position.

4. Would cover inducted ministers and ministers and deacons working in other roles in congregations.

5. Would not enable one congregation to depart from traditional position where others in a linking do not wish to do so.

6. Would enable a Kirk Session to change its mind. But a minister or deacon who had been appointed to a congregation whose Kirk Session had decided to depart from the traditional position would not be prejudiced by a change of mind by the Kirk Session.

7. Would preserve liberty of opinion and responsible expression. Would not permit harassing or bullying.

8. Would preserve the right of members of Presbyteries – whatever views – to engage or not in ordinations/inductions.

8.6.4 The principles were therefore about ministers and deacons in congregations, and not about roles beyond that setting. Those parameters are reflected in the Act. The Act was amended in 2023 to allow for the new rule about team ministry, which is referenced above, and to allow for a minister who is in a same sex marriage or same sex civil partnership to be appointed as Interim Moderator to a charge (section 4A). The Act has thus not been amended to have effect beyond the congregational setting.

8.7 Key provisions of the Act[i] and legal commentary thereon

8.7.1 The relevant sections are section 1, which supplies express interpretation provisions, section 2, section 4A on Team Ministry and section 5. Here are these sections:

Section 1
(a) "appointment" shall mean the appointment of a minister (other than the induction of a minister) or deacon to work with or within the life and witness of a congregation. An appointment may be part or full-time, paid or unpaid. An appointment may be made by the Kirk Session, Congregational Board, Deacons' Court, Committee of Management or other body responsible for employing persons on behalf of a congregation or by the Presbytery or by a Standing Committee of the General Assembly. An appointment shall include the appointment of an Interim Moderator, Ordained Local Minister, Interim Minister, Transition Minister, Pioneer Minister or Associate Minister. "Appointed" shall be construed accordingly.

Section 2
(1) The historic and current doctrine and practice of the Church in relation to human sexuality (including marriage) and their application to the ministers and deacons of the Church are hereby affirmed.

(2) For the avoidance of doubt, the historic and current doctrine and practice of the Church in relation to human sexuality, their application to the ministers and deacons of the Church and the provisions of this Act are points on which there is liberty of opinion in accordance with Article Declaratory V. Departure from the doctrine of the Church is permitted to this extent.

(3) In recognition of the diversity of views within the Church about the historic and current doctrine and practice of the Church in relation to human sexuality and their application to the ministers and deacons of the Church and in the interests of the peace and unity of the Church, departure from the practice of the Church shall be permitted to (i) Kirk Sessions in terms of section 3 of this Act, and (ii) Presbyteries in terms of section 4A of this Act. In this Act, the term 'depart' and its variants shall be construed accordingly.

Section 4A
Where a Presbytery is considering the appointment of a minister who is in a same sex marriage or same sex civil partnership as Interim Moderator to a charge, written intimation of the proposed appointment shall be given to the Kirk Session(s) of the charge. If, within fourteen days of the date of the sending of the intimation, the Session Clerk sends to the Presbytery Clerk with the approval of a majority of the Session a notice requesting that the appointment does not proceed, no further steps in relation to the appointment shall be taken.

Section 5
(1) A person who is in a same sex civil partnership or a same sex marriage shall be eligible for selection, training and, as provided for in section 3, ordination as a minister or deacon.

(2) Once ordained, a minister or deacon who is in a same sex civil partnership or a same sex marriage shall have the same status, rights and responsibilities as any other minister or deacon respectively, except that he or she (i) may not be inducted or appointed to a congregation the Kirk Session of which has not decided to depart in terms of section 3, and (ii) may not be appointed as an Interim Moderator if a notice from the Session has been sent as provided for in section 4A.

8.7.2 The Act attempted to chime with the principles agreed by the 2013 Assembly but with hindsight, experience and close study it has perhaps not been wholly successful in doing so. It says in effect:

- The doctrine of the Church is that marriage is between one man and one woman. This doctrine applies to ministers (s 2(1)). So, in practice, ministers should not be in same sex marriages/civil partnerships.
- Liberty of opinion is permitted, so dissent from this doctrine is permissible (s 2(2)).
- Reflecting this difference of view, appointment of ministers in same sex relationships is permitted to congregations which follow the process set out in the Act (s 2(3)).

- Section 5(2) says that Ministers and Deacons in same sex relationships have the same rights as any other Ministers, except that they may not be appointed to congregations where the Kirk Session has not decided to depart, or where the Kirk Session has not been given the opportunity to object to an Interim Moderator. The Committee does not believe that section 5(2) could be construed as meaning that all other appointments are open to such Ministers and Deacons.

8.7.3 Further, the Committee does not believe that Standing Committees of the General Assembly can exercise "liberty of opinion". In addition, the Committee believes that as the General Assembly is the body which determines doctrine for the Church, it cannot itself depart from that doctrine, and exercise "liberty of opinion".

8.7.4 The Committee suggests that if the Church wished to affirm that ministers and deacons in same-sex unions are eligible for appointment to all posts in the Church, then the central tenet of the Act expressed in section 2 would not stand and the Act would need to be revisited.

8.7.5 The Committee believes that the options open to the Assembly are firstly, that the Act is not revisited and the status quo continues. Alternatively, if the Act were to be revisited, there are two possibilities: either (i) a reversal of the default position (ie where the default becomes "liberal" and where "conservative" Kirk Sessions would be given the right to "opt out" and to insist that anyone appointed to work with them in ministry in the parish should not be in a same sex union), or (ii) a move to no default at all (ie liberty of opinion would apply, with or without mechanism(s) for individual court(s) to make decisions).

8.8 Overall conclusions

8.8.1 These are:

- Having looked closely at the two issues referred to it by the Assembly of 2025, the Committee concludes that it is not possible to amend the Act to address the matters identified. Instead, if they arise, the Committee suggests that these matters will need to be resolved in other ways.
- As regards the matter referred to it by the Assembly of 2025, the Theological Forum recognises the issue of divergence between law and practice, and affirms liberty of opinion, but thinks the matter is beyond its remit and has expressed a wish not to revisit the detailed theological work underlying the Act.
- The Committee's legal view is that the current Act cannot be further amended so as to widen the categories of ministers and deacons to whom it applies.

8.8.2 The overall conclusion is thus that in respect of the issues respectively referred to them, neither the Committee nor the Theological Forum has a specific recommendation to make.

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9. AMENDMENT TO DISCIPLINE ACT

9.1 The Registrar of the Register of Ministry has requested that the Discipline Act be amended to make explicit provision for the Registrar to be notified where a Referral under the Act is made in respect of a person whose details appear on the Register of Ministry. It was thought wise to make the situation clear in terms of the Act.

9.2 A proposed amending Act appears in Appendix B.

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10. LEGISLATIVE DRAFTING ASSISTANCE TO THE FAITH ACTION PROGRAMME LEADERSHIP TEAM, THE REGISTRATION OF MINISTRIES COMMITTEE & THE GENERAL TRUSTEES

10.1 The Office of the General Assembly reports having provided drafting assistance as follows:

- to the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team (FAPLT) in connection with the new Training Act and new Deacons Act, the new Ill Health & Income Protection Act and the Capability for Parish Ministers Act.
- also to FAPLT in connection with the appointment form and Guidance Notes for locums.
- to the Registration of Ministries Committee in connection with amendments to the criteria upon which Category O applications are assessed and as to changes in the registration categories, with R to become P (for Practising) and I to become R (for Retired). The latter entails consequential amendments.
- to the General Trustees in connection with amendments to the Church of Scotland General Trustees (Properties, Funds & Endowments) Act (Act V 2024), including the creation of new Manse Regulations.

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11. CHURCH OF SCOTLAND GOVERNANCE: THE UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES

11.1 The Committee has been delighted to see the publication on a non-profit basis through Amazon, on 1 November 2025, of the Convener's latest book: an introductory volume entitled "Church of Scotland Governance: The Underlying Principles". This small hardback (the "grey book") is designed to be an initial introduction for anyone joining the Courts and Committees of the Church, perhaps at the point of ordination to the eldership or appointment to any trusteeship role. It is an ideal ordination gift, or bookstall addition.

11.2 The book addresses the long-term structures of the Church, those elements of our polity that do not change as our legislation develops from year to year. It discusses our constitutional make-up, our system of Courts, the complementary roles of Church Law and Civil Law (including Charity Law), and the way our processes and regulations work in the everyday life of a congregation. Readers are directed to the legal information on the Church's website and elsewhere for more detailed materials about rules and processes that change from time to time. The hope is, therefore, that this volume will remain accurate for a longer period than previous published books (Weatherhead, Herron, et al) have done.

11.3 The book has been selling well and the Committee is very grateful to the Convener for this valuable addition to Church law know-how. The book can be purchased by searching for its title on Amazon. Bulk purchases of more than 30 copies at a reduced rate can be arranged by contacting the Convener direct.

In the name of the Committee

MARJORY MACLEAN, *Convener*
KATHERINE TAYLOR, *Vice-Convener*
JOHN L McPAKE, *Secretary*

Addendum

The Rev Fiona Smith

The Committee was sorry to see the resignation of the Rev Fiona Smith from the post of Principal Clerk in October 2025 on health grounds. Her unwavering passion for things to be done in good presbyterian order, the energy and commitment she brought to her service of the Office of the General Assembly and other agencies throughout the Church, and her personal warmth in clerking the General Assembly were all much appreciated. She combines the ability to take the long view of the Church's needs and find creative ways to navigate detailed challenges. The Committee sends Fiona its good wishes and keeps her in prayer as her ministry continues.

MARJORY MACLEAN, *Convener*
KATHERINE TAYLOR, *Vice-Convener*
JOHN L McPAKE, *Secretary*

Appendix A

[ ] **ACT AMENDING THE SAFEGUARDING ACT (ACT XVI 2025)**

Edinburgh, [ ] May 2026, Session [ ]

The General Assembly hereby enact and ordain that the Safeguarding Act (Act XVI 2025) shall be amended as follows:

1. *In section 1(3), at the end of the definition of "Children", add* "and "Child" shall be construed accordingly".
2. *In section 1(14), amend the definition of "Protected Adults" to be as follows:*
   ""Protected Adults" means individuals aged 18 or over who, by reason of physical or mental disability, illness, infirmity or ageing:
   (i) have an impaired ability to protect themselves from physical or psychological harm, or
   (ii) require assistance with the activities of daily living,
   and "Protected Adult" shall be construed accordingly."
3. *Add a new definition in section 1 and renumber thereafter accordingly:*
   "(22) "Risk Assessment" is an assessment of whether there is a significant risk that the person under consideration may:
   (a) harm, abuse or neglect a Child or Protected Adult,
   (b) cause a Child or Protected Adult to be harmed, abused or neglected,
   (c) put a Child or Protected Adult at risk of harm, abuse or neglect,
   (d) attempt to harm, abuse or neglect a Child or Protected Adult,
   (e) incite another person to harm, abuse or neglect a Child or Protected Adult, or
   (f) fail to take the necessary action to prevent harm, abuse or neglect of a Child or Protected Adult."
4. *Delete sections 5 to 7 and substitute:*

"Recruitment & Risk Sub-Committee – Risk Assessment decisions

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) A Risk Assessment shall be carried out according to the Risk Assessment Process document adopted by the Safeguarding Committee, as that document may be updated from time to time, with any material changes requiring the approval of the Legal Questions Committee. A copy of the Risk Assessment Process document shall be supplied to any person who is subject to a Risk Assessment.
   (3) Following Risk Assessment, the Recruitment & Risk Sub-Committee may decide (one or more of the following):
   (a) *In relation to safer recruitment:*
   (i) That a person is suitable for a Regulated Role (which decision may or may not be made subject to conditions).
   (ii) 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) That a person is not suitable, or is no longer suitable, for a Regulated Role
   (v) To implement conditions imposed in the notification from Disclosure Scotland.

(c) *In relation to Safeguarding Concerns indicating possible misconduct:*
   (i) To take no action.
   (ii) That a person is suitable for a Regulated Role (which decision may or may not be made subject to conditions).
   (iii) Whether on a temporary or permanent basis, that a person is not suitable, or is no longer suitable, for a Regulated Role.
   (iv) To instruct a Congregation led investigation.
   (v) To instruct a Safeguarding Service led investigation.

(4) Decisions of the Recruitment & Risk Sub-Committee following a Risk Assessment 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 Risk Assessment decision.

(5) Risk Assessment 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.

(6) Subject always to any review in terms of section 6 below, where the Recruitment & Risk Sub-Committee makes a Risk Assessment decision in terms of section 5(3)(a)(ii), 5(3)(b)(iv) or 5(3)(c)(iii), 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).

(7) Where the Recruitment & Risk Sub-Committee makes a Risk Assessment decision and there is a Discipline Act process proceeding in respect of the same person and arising from the same or related circumstances, the Risk & Recruitment Sub-Committee shall meet again promptly upon conclusion of the Discipline Act process (including any appeal) to take a further Risk Assessment decision in relation to the person involved in light of the decision(s) of the Discipline Tribunal and (if applicable), the Judicial Commission. The possible decisions which the Risk & Recruitment Sub-Committee may take at that point shall be those set out in sections 5(3)(c)(ii) or (iii). Such further Risk Assessment decision shall be subject to review according to sections 6 & 7 of this Act.

(8) In the event that the Recruitment & Risk Sub-Committee makes a Risk Assessment decision and new evidence comes to light which is likely to have a material bearing on the decision, whether brought forward by the person involved or which otherwise comes to light, the Recruitment & Risk Sub-Committee shall meet again promptly to take a further Risk Assessment decision in relation to the person involved in light of the new evidence. The possible decisions which the Recruitment & Risk Sub-Committee may take at that point shall be those set out in sections 5(3)(c)(ii) or (iii). Such further Risk Assessment decision shall be subject to review according to sections 6 & 7 of this Act.

Review of Risk Assessment decisions of the Recruitment & Risk Sub-Committee

6. (1) A person in respect of whom a Risk Assessment decision has been made in terms of section 5(3)(a)(ii), 5(3)(b)(iv) or 5(3)(c)(iii) as to suitability for a Regulated Role has the right to seek a review of that decision ("a request for review"). A person may also seek a review against the terms of any conditions applied by the Recruitment & Risk Sub-Committee in terms of section 5(3)(a)(i) or 5(3)(c)(ii) as to a person's suitability for a Regulated Role. Such a person is referred to in section 7 as "the person seeking review".

(2) A request for a review can be brought only on one or both of the following grounds:

   (a) that there were irregularities in the Risk Assessment Process such that, in some material respect, the process set out in the Risk Assessment Process document was not followed, or

   (b) that the Risk Assessment decision of the Recruitment & Risk Sub-Committee, having carried out the process set out in the Risk Assessment Process document was subject to manifest error or plainly irrational having regard to all the circumstances disclosed.

(3) Any disagreement as to the contents or accuracy of the PVG Scheme Record information itself or as to the contents or accuracy of other notification documentation from Disclosure Scotland cannot be the subject of a review under this section 6 and will require to be taken up by the person seeking review direct with Disclosure Scotland through the procedures established by that body.

Process for review of a Risk Assessment decision

7. The review shall proceed as follows:
   (1) The intention to seek review must be intimated to the Solicitor of the Church by the person seeking review within fourteen days of the date of issue of the relevant Risk Assessment decision.
   (2) Within a further fourteen days after the date upon which the intention to seek review was intimated in terms of section 7(1), the person seeking review shall lodge with the Solicitor 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 seeking review ("the Grounds of Review").
   (3) Upon receipt of the Grounds of Review from the person seeking review, the Solicitor shall require that within fourteen days, the Recruitment & Risk Sub-Committee lodge a note responding to the Grounds of Review.
   (4) The outcome of the request for review will be determined by a group of two Reviewers working together, one who is legally qualified and one with Safeguarding expertise, selected by the Solicitor from the Safeguarding Review Panel. The Safeguarding Review Panel shall be a Panel of up to six persons appointed by the General Assembly through the Nomination Committee according to the process for legal bodies, being a mixture of persons who are (i) legally qualified and (ii) with Safeguarding expertise. None of the Panel shall be current members of the Safeguarding Committee.
   (5) The Reviewers shall be entitled to require both the person seeking review and the Recruitment & Risk Sub-Committee to provide further information and may determine the request for review 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.
   (6) The person seeking review will be notified of the Reviewers' decision in writing within four weeks of the written submissions being received by the Solicitor or of the hearing date, whichever is later.
   (7) The Reviewers will also notify the Safeguarding Service and the Recruitment & Risk Sub-Committee of their decision. The Safeguarding Service will take any necessary action, in accordance with the Reviewers' decision.
   (8) The Reviewers may decide either (i) to dismiss the request for review and uphold the Risk Assessment decision of the Recruitment & Risk Sub-Committee, or (ii) to uphold the request for review, annul the Risk Assessment decision of the Recruitment & Risk Sub-Committee and send the matter back to the Recruitment & Risk Sub-Committee to be decided again, with identification of any deficiencies in its decision found in terms of s 6(2).
   (9) The decision of the Reviewers will be final."

Appendix B

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

Edinburgh, [ ] May 2026, Session [ ]

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

1. Amend section 17(6) by deleting the second sentence and substituting:

"The Presbytery Clerk shall, at the same time, send to the Respondent copies of (a) this Act and (b) the Guidance for Respondents prepared in terms of Part 16. The Presbytery Clerk shall further notify the Head of Ministries & Mission, Faith Action (who in turn shall notify the Registrar of the Register of Ministry) in writing that the Referral has been made (save where the Respondent is one referred to in section 10(8) or 10(9))."

References

[i] The Ministers and Deacons in Same Sex Civil Partnerships and Same Sex Marriages Act (Act I 2015) is found here: https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/27940/2015-act-1-ministers-and-deacons-in-same-sex-civil-partnerships-and-same-sex-marriages.pdf

ASSEMBLY TRUSTEES MAY 2026

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Adopt a Growth Strategy with the Strategic Principles outlined in Sections 1 - 3 as the Strategic Principles of the Assembly Trustees from 2026 to 2031 and commend them to the whole Church *(Sections 1–3)*.
3. Adopt the statement and associated actions of 'A Short Theological Note on Church and Ministry in the Church of Scotland Today' as a theological underpinning of work on Financing Ministry and commend it to the Church for further study *(Section 4)*.
4. Receive the 2025 Report and Accounts of the Church of Scotland Unincorporated Entities *(Section 5.2)*.
5. Receive the 2026 budget *(Section 5.3)*.
6. Instruct the Assembly Trustees to develop a sustainable model of ministry funding based on the principles underpinning Financing Ministry with detailed proposals being brought to the General Assembly of 2027 for approval *(Section 5.5)*.
7. Approve Regulations amending the Congregational Finance Regulations (Regs II 2016), as amended, as set out in section 5.6.1 and Appendix 1 *(Section 5.6.1 and Appendix 1)*.
8. Instruct kirk sessions to engage with the national stewardship team and its suite of resources and events, particularly the *Bearing Fruit* online financial health-check, to equip congregations for sustainable growth *(Sections 6.10 - 6.12)*.
9. Thank and discharge the *Life and Work* Advisory Committee *(Section 7)*.
10. Agree the total number of nationally planned ministry posts for 2027 remains at 600 plus 60 vacancies whilst allowing the Presbytery & Partnership Support Programme Group to authorise presbyteries to exceed their allocation in respect of a charge meeting full-cost recovery ministry costs *(Section 8)*.
11. Encourage the Assembly Business Committee, Assembly Trustees, General Trustees, CrossReach, Faith Action Programme Leadership Team and presbyteries to maintain continual and active engagement amongst their key leadership bodies to ensure mutual recognition, better communication, and improved understanding *(Section 9)*.
12. Instruct the Assembly Trustees to identify and implement an effective contemporary replacement for what has previously been provided by *Life and Work*, giving serious consideration to how ordinary members of the Church might access different platforms to express their views *(Section 9)*.
13. Instruct the Assembly Business Committee to propose a reporting mechanism to evidence implementation and outcomes of the decisions and policies of the General Assembly *(Section 9)*.
14. Instruct the Legal Questions Committee to explore alternative arrangements for charity trusteeship for both congregations and presbyteries, reporting back to the General Assembly of 2027 *(Section 9)*.
15. Instruct the Assembly Trustees, with the assistance of the Legal Questions Committee, to make available appropriate induction and training for all existing and new charity trustees *(Section 9)*.
16. Invite presbyteries and kirk sessions to alert the Assembly Trustees of any cases of administrative duplication required of them by the Standing Committees and national office departments of the Church, so that simplification of processes can be found by those Committees and departments, in consultation with the Legal Questions Committee in any situation where a change of process may have implications in church or civil law *(Section 9)*.
17. Instruct the Assembly Trustees and CrossReach to implement a structured line management and appraisal process involving 360-degree appraisal addressing areas of role clarity, accountability, and support for staff holding senior positions *(Section 9)*.
18. Instruct the Assembly Trustees, jointly with the Legal Questions Committee, to make recommendations as to the appointment and support of presbytery clerks and presbytery business conveners (or equivalents) to cover induction, resourcing, role description, core competencies, ongoing training, employment arrangements, support, appraisal, and accountability *(Section 9)*.
19. Thank and discharge the Assembly Trustees Working Group *(Section 9)*.
20. Agree amended remits for the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team, Mission Support Programme Group, Resource and Presence Programme Group and Presbytery & Partnership Support Programme Group *(Section 10)*.
21. Instruct the Assembly Trustees through its Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Group: *(Section 11)*
    1. to work with the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team to further develop work on neurodivergence in the life of the Church, with particular regard to welcome, discipleship, and participation.
    2. to facilitate collaboration with the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team, and relevant Church bodies to ensure access to high-quality, theologically informed and faith-sensitive training on matters relating to equality, diversity, and inclusion.
    3. to work with the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team to develop further theological reflection and practical guidance on welcome as a core, Christ-centred commitment, and to equip congregations to recognise and respond pastorally to those who have experienced exclusion or harm.
    4. to work directly with the General Trustees in relation to reasonable access requirements in churches, halls and manses.

22. Note the appointment from 15th December 2025 of Leanne Thompson as Head of Finance and General Treasurer and confer upon the said Leanne Elizabeth Thompson, Head of Finance and General Treasurer of the Church full power to discharge all legacies, bequests or donations which may have been or may be left, bequeathed or made to the Church of Scotland, or any of the Schemes, Councils, Committees or agencies thereof, or which may have been or may be left, bequeathed or made to the United Free Church of Scotland or to any of the Schemes, Boards or Committees or agencies thereof and which in terms of the Agreement with the continuing United Free Church of Scotland fall to the Church of Scotland or its Schemes, Councils, Committees or agencies, and to sign all Discharges, Agreements, Indemnities, Undertakings, and other Deeds which may be necessary in connection therewith (*Section 12).*

23. Ratify the appointment of Rev Dr John L McPake as Acting Principal Clerk from 20th October 2025 to 18th May 2026 and appoint Rev Dr Alistair May as Principal Clerk to the General Assembly with effect from the close of the General Assembly of 2026 (*Section 13).*

24. Approve the following appointments to the Assembly Trustees: Elizabeth Ashcroft, Martin Fair, Martin Fairbairn, Nairn Angus-McDonald, Suzanne Stringer and David Watt. *(Section 14).*

Points for Information

Sections 16 to 33 contain reports with no attached deliverances. These inform Commissioners of ongoing work and recognise that though no deliverance is offered, work continues.

1. International Presence Review (*Section 16).*
2. Israel Palestine Committee (Section 17).
3. Digital Transformation (Section 18).
4. Seeds for Growth (Section 19).
5. Congregational Statistics (Section 20).
6. National Offices Service Departments (Sections 22 to 31).

Executive Summary

The Assembly Trustees recognise that to sustain the Church of the future requires the Church of today to place growth at the core of our vision and strategy. Our theological understanding of the covenant between congregation and minister and formulating a new financing model that makes that covenantal connection clearer is closely tied to our ability to grow the Church. This raises a number of challenges as outlined by the Assembly Trustees Working Group, who draw attention to the need for more transparency, support and accountability across all levels of the Church. In achieving these aims there must be space for all.

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 wherever the Church of Scotland is active.

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 improved through hard work, diligence and difficult decisions effected over the past year at all levels of the Church. Reductions in personnel in the national offices and changes to vacancy allowance are two examples where implementation has resulted in an overall decrease in the deficit.

1.3 Whilst this is good news, projections show an increasing deficit in subsequent years. The Trustees accept that if the Church continues its current trajectory, it will be caught in a cycle of ever deepening cuts. Recognising this the Trustees offer to the Church an alternative vision based on growth.

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2. A VISION OF GROWTH

2.1 Contrary to what has often been reported, God is active within the Church of Scotland, where every year faithful Christians seek to live out their faith. In Bible studies, prayer spaces, foodbanks, addiction services, care-homes, dementia cafés and myriad other places, you will find Church of Scotland members. Additionally new people are joining the Church with new professions of faith occurring across the denomination. Growth is already in our Church, and the Trustees are asking the Assembly to agree that for the next five years the locus and focus of the Church and in particular the Trustees should be to foster, nurture and increase growth across every facet of Church.

2.2 OUR VISION: GROWTH – Growing in faith, growing in service, growing in impact.

2.2.1 Growing in Faith

Mission has been at the forefront of the Church's thinking, illustrated through much of our activity being organised around the five marks of mission and the requirement for Presbytery Mission Plans. Our missional activity, living out faith, is directly built on our walk with God, our discipleship. To grow the Church means first and foremost to grow our own faith.

2.2.2 Growing in Service

If the Church is the action of God's people in the world, then it stands to reason that as faith grows there will be a resulting increase in that action. A focus on growth will result in more people being involved in their local church and community, and more volunteers.

2.2.3 Growing in Impact

Which of course will be evidenced as increasing impact on society around us. A Church that is salt and light in the world as commanded by Jesus is predicated on the people living out their faith.

2.3 The Trustees hope an emphasis on growth as outlined above will enable the Church to grow God's kingdom in Scotland and beyond. This is a vision of what the Church can be, is complementary to the Vivid Vision adopted by FAPLT and aims to focus on a Church of Scotland that looks to fulfil its calling to the people and Scotland and the world.

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3. ASSEMBLY TRUSTEES STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

3.1 Unless a vision is translated into action it has no impact. It will join many other visions put forward by the Church over many years which were approved with the best of intentions but were soon superseded. Knowing this the Trustees propose the areas outlined below in sections 3.2 to 3.5 become their strategic priorities for the next five years. Through them we intend to see the Church grow, to release congregations from as much needless administration as possible and for them to be placed on a sound financial basis with respect to ongoing ministry needs – all in the context of our covenant relationship with Jesus, each other, and the people we are called to serve.

3.2 **Mission** – Inspiring the people of Scotland and beyond with the Good News of Jesus Christ through enthusiastic worshipping, witnessing, nurturing, serving, teaching and learning communities.

3.2.1 Mission is a core part of our DNA as Christians. Being commanded by Christ, we have no other option, or desire, than to see mission remain at the heart of our priorities. We do not need to restate all that has already been said over previous years of the importance of mission. We commend previous GA reports for more detail.

3.3 **Simplification** – Operating structures, procedures and processes that are fit for purpose ensure compliance with external law and regulations and are not a burden on the Courts of the Church.

3.3.1 The Trustees recognise the administrative burden on congregations and presbyteries is now greater than ever before, whether it is from our own polity and practice or that required by external bodies due to charitable status or being a designated religious charity ourselves. Increasing time, effort and resource are being put into form filling, surveys, reports and processes. Whilst many of these are required the Trustees intend to make it a priority to stop if allowable, simplify where possible, and explain where necessary the variety of administrative tasks now required. The aim here is to free up time, energy and resource so that we can grow the Church.

3.4 **Financial Sustainability** – A flexible and responsive operating model which puts control back with congregations and allows us to deal with fluctuations in income in a reasonable timeframe.

3.4.1 In the past five years the Trustees have repeatedly flagged up the requirement for a successor system to *Giving to Grow* that has flexibility built into it and which will not require the Church to undertake another round of Presbytery Mission Planning as it was done previously. This work is underway with underlying principles being presented later in this report. Please see section 5.4 for further details.

3.5 **Duty of Care** – Being in a covenantal relationship with Jesus, each other, and our communities brings many benefits yet also confers responsibilities. We are bound to each other as brothers and sisters in the same family who believe that which binds us is greater than anything which divides us. Although we may at times disagree, we remain brothers and sisters through the covenant of God's grace.

3.5.1 The Assembly Trustees affirm the covenant of grace and recognise that given the difficult years many across our denomination have experienced, a vision of growth with its attendant strategic priorities could easily become yet another initiative for people to feel they are achieving less than they should and are falling short. This vision and these priorities can therefore only be pursued where we recognise our duty of care to each other and where we hold each other steadfast in the covenantal relationship with Jesus, each other, and our communities.

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4. A SHORT THEOLOGICAL NOTE ON CHURCH AND MINISTRY IN THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND TODAY

4.1 *'But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.'* —Ephesians 4:15-16

'Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ.'—Galatians 6:2

4.1.1 The language of the Bible, our confessions, and derived theological traditions is the church's primary language. It supplies our most basic vocabulary and grammar, allowing us to tell our story and to reflect upon it faithfully. We always aim to understand ourselves better as the Church of Jesus Christ and so to be able to (re-)orientate our life and work together well. The need to undertake practical refors of Church order and practice offer valuable occasions for just such reflection – they give us an opportunity to 'remember who we are'. Of course, practical pressures can tempt us to analyse, reflect and decide such matters non-theologically and so to 'forget who we are'. The difference between faithful reform and faithless change lies here.

4.1.2 The Church of Scotland continues to undertake changes to patterns of congregational ministry including wide-ranging reconsideration of its disposition and financing. As it does so, it is good and useful to recall some of the

fundamental features of our doctrines of church and ministry. These doctrines can and should supply the most basic substance and shape to our thinking and speaking about these important matters. At the present juncture, as we work together to discern and to pursue a faithful and practical path in these affairs, we do well in particular to recollect and keep in mind certain elements of our teaching which bear most directly upon the matter. What follows offers an all-too-brief sketch of some of what we might take to be the most relevant aspects of our doctrine of the Church in this regard.

4.2 The Church is a fruit of the gracious outworking of the triune God by Word and Spirit who gathers, upholds, and sends us out into the world. The body of the church are thus sanctified sinners, disciples, ambassadors, witnesses, and ministers of the gospel. The church is fundamentally a fellowship, an ordered body, a covenanted community, a living congregation, a commonwealth, an embassy. The church exists for the sake of worship, witness, and service of the God of the gospel. The structures and offices of the Church exist in service of it being just this and doing these things.

4.2.1 The Church is the body of those graciously gathered into fellowship with God and with one another under the headship of Christ in and by the power of the Spirit. Those so gathered are further graciously upheld and sustained by the living word in both proclamation and the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper, which is to say, by sharing in the gifts of divine grace. Gathered and built up in this way, the Church is a covenanted community of sisters and brothers graciously sent to the world as disciples with a ministry of gospel witness and selfless service. So gathered, upheld and sent, the church is the living community of the living Lord Jesus Christ. Indeed, by the Spirit it is a 'communion, a kind of Christian commonwealth' (*Bohemian Confession* (1609), §8).

4.2.2 As an embassy of the gospel, the Church's worship and ministry aim to testify truthfully, publicly, and joyfully to the Lord Jesus Christ from whose salvation and direction it lives. Crucially, the church's ministry is entrusted and enjoined upon the community as a whole: it is the work of the whole people of God, the exercise of the 'priesthood of all believers', the shared vocation and service of all the saints.

4.2.3 The Church discharges its ministry by word and deed, in worship and witness; but it also does so by way of the ordering of its community life as such. The church's ordered ministers are in the congregation as its teaching and ruling elders for the sake of the exercise of its common ministry. Deacons, teaching elders, and ruling elders are ordained and covenanted to this service by presbyteries and in congregations that their common life and witness may flourish and bear fruit, not least in virtue of their good order and discipline. The structures and offices of the wider church further facilitate, resource, and support congregational life and ministry, extending that good order and discipline that makes for flourishing across the whole Church of Scotland. In this way our structures are expressions of the unique quality of the fellowship into which Christ draws and holds us, the 'ligaments' of our communion, as it were. In short, our very ways of organizing ourselves should, in their own way, testify that we are a Church that belongs to Christ, and should clearly serve the essential Christian life and ministry of our congregations.

4.2.4 All this is concisely expressed in the language of the 1935 *Restatement of the Church's Faith* when it characterised the church as a '*fellowship*' constituted by God, sharing one common ministry, namely: *'joyfully to bear witness to its Lord in faith and righteousness and the spirit of unity, to proclaim His gospel to the ends of the earth, to give loving service to humankind for His sake, and to watch and pray from the coming of the Kingdom'* (article IX).

4.3 The Church of Scotland is a national church which finds itself today in an increasingly pluralistic and secular nation, established *de jure* and disestablished *de facto.* This humbling of the Kirk, while painful, is also gift and opportunity. Reforms in ministry provision and ministry finance invite us to ask how these can be good and/or better expressions of what the Church is and what the church is for today. Our moment invites us to fresh theological reflection upon our freedom and responsibility as we envisage, pursue, and communicate these practical changes.

4.3.1 The ordering and disposition of ministry within the Church of Scotland has and continues to take the basic form of a geographically comprehensive parochial ministry. In this way it owns the charge expressed in its Articles Declaratory, that 'as a national Church representative of the Christian Faith of the Scottish people it acknowledges its distinctive call and duty to bring the ordinances of religion to the people in every parish of Scotland through a territorial ministry' (III).

4.3.2 Yet, even as it does so, the Church of Scotland recognizes that today it is a national church less by privileged status than by duty, calling, and, increasingly, by missionary aspiration. This recognition is no bad thing, as it provides an occasion to recollect that the Church is ever a free servant of God's own mission, and so a church for others, a church for the world, even and especially as it finds itself increasingly to be a church without social and political privileges. The Church stands free and open to the civic life of the nation while no longer serving as privileged chaplain to its public life.

4.3.3 Such circumstances drive us to think afresh about what is most essential to our identity and vocation as the Church, and so also to recover the distinctive qualities of our church community. Doing so will require that we reconsider afresh our ecclesiastical structures and forms. We must look for them to become what they can and must be for us today: namely, the explicit outworkings and invaluable expressions of the covenanted bonds of love, solidarity, service, and support that knit us and our congregations together in shared worship, and our common ministry of witness and service.

4.3.4 As we continue to work to reform the ways we organise, dispose, and finance congregational ministry in the Church of Scotland, we would do well to keep such theological considerations firmly in mind. We should continually ask ourselves whether and how the changes we envisage and pursue will help:

1. to express rather than obscure the reality of the Church's existence as 'a communion, a kind of Christian commonwealth', the one body of the Lord Jesus Christ;
2. to strengthen and build up rather than weaken the congregational worship, witness, and service that constitutes the fundamental life and ministry of the whole people of God;

3. to make our institutional order—both as a whole and in its parts—more rather than less transparent and serviceable to our shared apostolic calling and mission;
4. to uphold and support rather than constrain the covenant bonds into which congregations enter with their ministers, both teaching elders and ruling elders alike;
5. to heighten both our joy in giving and our responsibility to honour the generosity of others in our stewardship of the Church's resources in relation to ministry;
6. to acknowledge our place in and contributions to the work and witness of the whole ecumenical church in this land and beyond.

4.4 Some Questions

1. What elements of this brief theological account of the Church strike you as most relevant as we confront the challenges of our moment?
2. What might it look like for the Church's structures and polities to be clear expressions of our 'covenanted bonds as a Christian commonwealth'?
3. How might we each, in our own particular role, post, or situation, help to reflect and inhabit this theological vision of the Church?
4. How do we best communicate such an understanding of the church to all parts of the Church?
5. How are God's 'gathering, upholding, and sending' experienced in your congregation? How could they better be acknowledged and celebrated?
6. How does your congregational life give expression to the gospel by its 'worship, witness, and service'? How might we do so better and more joyfully?
7. How might the theological ideas presented here help us to move faithfully as we pursue pressing practical questions about how, given who we are as Church, we should best be organised and manage our resources in face of our current reality?

4.5 Some Further Questions particularly for kirk sessions

1. What forms does the (1) worship, (2) witness, and (3) service of the Church take in your own parish? How have these changed in recent years?
2. How do you understand your responsibilities as a parish to support the life and work of the wider Church? What motivates you in doing so? What limits you in doing so?
3. What might you look to change in your own local practice in order better to reflect or express the reality of God's gracious 'gathering, upholding, and sending' where you are?
4. What would you welcome in support of your parish life and work from the wider 'commonwealth' of the Church of Scotland?

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5. FINANCIAL REPORTING

5.1 AUDIT OF ANNUAL ACCOUNTS FOR 2025

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.

5.2 NATIONAL FINANCES

5.2.1 2025 Financial Results

At the time of writing, the full year-end statutory accounts for 2025 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 charity accounting rules, such as the revaluation of investments. The results presented do not include those for CrossReach or the establishments in Israel. They do, however, include funding provided to those agencies/entities from national funds.

5.2.2 The budget for 2025 was an operating deficit of £6.06m, but the actual result was an operating surplus of £1.207 million. The significant improvement in the year-end position is, of course, very welcome, but it's important to understand the contributing factors. Much of the improvement arises from one-off or unpredictable income, such as legacies and higher-than-expected investment returns.

5.2.3 Additionally, there is the impact of the cost-control measures implemented over the past year, such as the reduction in the Seeds for Growth budget. These measures were difficult but necessary to move towards a more sustainable financial position. However, the surplus should not be interpreted as a signal that our financial challenges are behind us. Many of the favourable income movements cannot be relied upon in future years. Ongoing discipline in managing expenditure and a continued focus on growth remain essential. Overall, the position allows for cautious optimism: we are moving in the right direction and have bought ourselves the time needed to make further changes, but continued vigilance and prudent stewardship are still required.

The key variances between the budgeted and year-end figures are as follows:

	£000
Budgeted operating deficit	(6,059)
Income:	
Legacies, donations and grants	1,369
Congregational contributions	1,051
Investment income	670
Housing and Loan income	247
Israel rent	(328)
Expenditure:	
Savings on Seeds for Growth	1,420
Savings on Support & Services depts	1,251
Savings on vacancy allowance	872
Savings on Parish ministry costs	977
Other FAPLT savings	412
Crossreach funding	(941)
Other net variances	266
Actual operating surplus	1,207

5.2.4 The increase in congregational contributions is mainly due to focused work on recovering shortfalls, together with a reduction in the bad debt provision. The latter is an accounting adjustment that increases reported income but does not represent additional cash received.

5.2.5 Changes to vacancy allowance go beyond the reduced budget set for 2025 following the new legislation introduced at the start of last year. In total, this has resulted in a decrease of £1.7 million in the cost of vacancy allowance compared with 2024.

5.2.6 Reduced parish ministry costs reflect the continued difficulty in recruiting to interim and deaf ministries and also decreases against a budget which had been set for the first year of the apprenticeship scheme, which was more generous than required.

5.3 2026 Budget and rolling budget to 2031

5.3.1 As reported to the 2025 General Assembly, the Assembly Trustees refused to approve the draft 2025 budget (instead, approving an interim budget for operational and management reporting purposes) 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.

5.3.2 This action plan has led to significant reductions in expenditure and the 2026 budget presented here has a much-reduced deficit compared to the 2026 budget presented to the Assembly last year.

5.3.3 Key changes to the 2026 budget (compared with that presented to GA 2025), which contribute to reducing the deficit, are as follows:

1. An increase in congregational contributions due to the increase identified in congregations' assessable income for 2026 Giving to Grow – this represents a 1.3% increase from 2025.
2. An increase in investment income arising from higher levels of invested funds and the resulting increase in returns.
3. A reduction in costs due to the conclusion of the Life and Work publication.
4. Reduced staff costs arising from the completion of our voluntary exit and redundancy programme and associated restructuring
5. A reduction in the Seeds for Growth budget
6. A reduction in the costs of parish ministries due to impact of presbytery mission planning on ministries development staff numbers, timing differences on probationer stipends and a freeze on familiarisation placements.

5.3.4 The 2026 budget shows a net deficit of £217k before approved restricted expenditure, with larger and increasing deficits projected from 2027 onwards. This reflects declining income, which continues to be collected under the current *Giving to Grow* system. Expenditure in 2026 is lower than that presented to the Assembly in 2025 because of the work undertaken through the Priorities Project and redundancy programme.

5.3.5 Beyond 2026, expenditure reduces slightly and then remains broadly stable for the remainder of the budget period. Despite this, the net cost before approved restricted spend increases year on year, reaching £3m by 2031.

5.3.6 Beyond our normal operational activities, we are utilising restricted funds in line with donors' wishes. In reality, this 'good deficit' is merely a timing difference because the money was received and recognised in a prior year and spent in a subsequent one.

5.3.7 Congregational contributions (*Giving to Grow*) are budgeted to increase by 1.3% in 2026 as a result of a 2.5% increase in congregational assessable income. However, this rise in income is primarily due to non-recurring increases. Offerings, which make up the largest proportion of assessable income, were down by 3% signalling a downward trend in congregational assessable income, and therefore a reduction in *Giving to Grow* has been included in the future budgets.

5.3.8 Church of Scotland Unincorporated Entities – The Budget as presented is projected without adopting a strategy for growth. Should the denomination embrace and experience growth we would expect this to significantly improve.

	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Total congregational contributions	40,039	39,329	38,098	37,357	36,948	36,481
Other income	12,656	11,769	11,927	12,055	12,213	12,317
Total income	52,695	51,098	50,025	49,412	49,161	48,798
Total parish ministries costs	32,455	33,225	32,934	33,019	33,066	32,721
Total costs outwith parish ministries	17,560	16,428	16,515	16,492	16,705	16,797
Presbytery funding costs	1,496	1,522	1,542	1,573	1,604	1,626
Transition funding	680	0	0	0	0	0
Other Funds net costs/(income)	117	270	352	463	564	617
Total costs	52,308	51,445	51,343	51,547	51,939	51,761
Investment in Seeds for Growth	(603)	(605)	(607)	(608)	(611)	(611)
Net costs before approved restricted spend	**(217)**	**(952)**	**(1,925)**	**(2,743)**	**(3,389)**	**(3,574)**
Approved restricted spend	(1,525)	(767)	(738)	(738)	(738)	(751)
Total net costs	**(1,742)**	**(1,719)**	**(2,663)**	**(3,481)**	**(4,127)**	**(4,325)**

5.3.9 We acknowledge that the steps taken to reduce national office costs have not been easy. They were, however, necessary to control expenditure and have helped slow the rate at which our free reserves are being used. We recognise, however, that we cannot continue to reduce costs indefinitely. We have a responsibility to focus on growth and to continue to develop a more sustainable model for financing our Church, as outlined below.

5.4 FINANCING MINISTRY

5.4.1 For a number of years, the Assembly Trustees have highlighted serious financial sustainability issues that the national Church is facing. With the 2024 General Assembly deliverance to 'break-even' by 2027, work accelerated on improving the national Church's financial position. The function and cost of the national office was tackled through the Priorities Project, and wider stakeholder consultations led to the initial creation of 'Financing Ministry' – a new operating model which rebalances the way in which ministries are provided and supported, as highlighted to the General Assembly last year.

5.4.2 This new model will replace *Giving to Grow* as a congregational contribution system. Whilst *Giving to Grow* has moved the church forward in some respects, the following issues have been identified from both a local and national church perspective:

- Whilst *Giving to Grow* strengthens the link between the cost of a minister and the contribution required, the model fails to fund ministry sustainably at a national level. The contribution to the national budget may fall, but the fixed cost of a minister remains.
- The 10% shared activities component is not capped and so congregations that are seeking to grow their income may feel disincentivised because as their income rises so does the level of contribution.
- There is little incentive to grow income, as congregations who cannot cover the cost of their ministry are fully subsidised for as long as they retain a post or posts in the Presbytery Mission Plan.
- There is no real reason for congregations to be innovative in their approach to income generation due to the above point.
- The cost of a minister includes only direct costs, resulting in ministry-related overheads being subsidised from other national income funds.
- The calculation is based solely on Ministers of Word and Sacrament and lacks flexibility, leaving limited scope for more creative and alternative approaches to ministry.

5.4.3 The improved financial position generated by the Priorities Project and national budget reductions has given the Church a little time to get this new model right. The outcome of this work will affect every congregation. To ensure fairness and credibility, assumptions require real world testing, impact must be explored across diverse local contexts, and meaningful feedback from presbyteries and congregations has to be considered. Offering principles at this stage in the process allows the Church to shape the direction of travel before more specific regulations are finalised.

5.4.4 As the initial concept has developed, it has become clear that Financing Ministry is not simply a replacement of *Giving to Grow*. Creating a financial model that has longevity, and which supports the ministry and mission of the Church now and into the future, needs to go further than a congregational contribution system alone.

5.4.5 Financing Ministry will be grounded in theology, an act of covenant faithfulness, ensuring that the Church of Scotland continues to proclaim the gospel and serve communities in every part of the land. By introducing a more responsive model, we can strengthen the tie between local income and provision of ministry, creating financial certainty that the Church can sustain its mission through times of both growth and challenge.

5.4.6 We need the new system to give more control and flexibility to congregations. To do this there needs to be provision of flexible forms of ministry beyond the traditional full-time Minister of Word and Sacrament model. Ministry is not a one-size-fits-all concept. Building flexibility into the new model ensures that the Church can respond to local needs, capacity and mission priorities—making congregations inherently more flexible than the traditional single-parish, full-time model. Some of these flexible forms of ministry are already in operation such as team ministries, part-time charges and local worship leaders. Further work is required on the 'House for Duty' model and other forms of ministry provision.

5.4.7 The new system will move to a full cost recovery basis for the cost of the ministry allocated to a Charge. This will include both direct costs, such as salary and pension (which under the current system total £53k for one full-time Minister of Word and Sacrament in 2026), and indirect costs that are directly attributable to the delivery of that ministry. These would include costs associated with recruitment, training (both pre- and post-ordination), ministerial support and payroll. Based on the 2026 budgets, including these costs would increase the total cost of a full-time Minister of Word and Sacrament to approximately £63k. Full cost recovery will ensure that the true cost of ministry is transparent and properly funded, enabling income to meet real expenses and supporting sustainable delivery.

5.4.8 The detailed methodology for the new calculation is yet to be determined. However, it is likely to retain some similarities with *Giving to Grow*, in that the cost of ministry to be met will be calculated as a portion of assessable income. We recognise, however, that what counts as assessable income will need to be reviewed to ensure the approach is simple to understand and appropriate for the Church as it is today, as well as in the future. Congregations continue to have to meet a range of local costs outwith those of ministry, and so committing 100% of income to ministry costs would not be sustainable. This means there is likely to be an assessable income threshold that will be required to be met to fund the level of ministry sought. If this is not met, then a congregation may apply to have the costs subsidised.

5.4.9 This subsidy funding pot will be similar to 'Ministry Elsewhere' under the current *Giving to Grow* system. It has been referred to as the 'Solidarity Fund', as we continue to consider the new system. The Solidarity Fund enables us to resource congregations that need more ministry than they can realistically fund on their own because of geography or deprivation.

5.4.10 There are wide disparities in income across the country, leading to some presbyteries generating a surplus relative to the cost of ministry they receive, while others experience a funding deficit. A system for sharing resources nationally is therefore essential if the Church is to remain true to its identity as a national church. Initial work has determined that an appropriate way to achieve this sharing would be in the use of weightings to allocate a proportion of the Solidarity Fund to each presbytery who would then allocate this down to local congregations. It is recognised that a different model would be needed for Church of Scotland congregations outside Scotland.

5.4.11 A considerable amount of work is still required to deliver the new model well. To enable successful implementation, a staggered timescale is proposed for consultation and communication which are essential in ensuring this model works.

5.4.12 Within this report we have set out key underlying principles for approval. We will build and develop these with further modelling and engagement with the wider Church taking place during this year with the intention of bringing detailed regulations to the 2027 General Assembly. A transition to the new system will begin from 1 January 2028.

5.5 KEY PRINCIPLES FOR FINANCING MINISTRY

The key principles for approval by the General Assembly are:

5.5.1 The cost of ministry used in the charge requirement calculation will be based on full cost recovery, reflecting the total cost of ministry provision across the Church.

As mentioned previously, the full cost recovery figure for a full-time Minister of Word and Sacrament in 2026 would be £63k. The current *Giving to Grow* contributions are calculated on the basis of direct costs of £53k. This methodology is not sustainable going forward. This practice has significantly added to deficits and is unsustainable going forward. A charge in a covenant relationship with their minister who can cover full costs should be doing so.

5.5.2 If a charge can fund the full cost of the ministry it requires, it should be able to call a minister.

When a charge covenants to supply a living (stipend) to a minister, and the minister in turn covenants to serve that charge, the Church's contribution scheme for financing ministry should facilitate that ministry. Under *Giving to Grow* a small number of charges were denied the right to have their own minister but were still giving substantial amounts to support ministry in other charges. These charges quite rightly raised questions of fairness, equality and justice. Financing Ministry aims to honour any situation where a charge covenants (and fulfils their side of that covenant) to fully support the costs of ministry by allowing them to call.

5.5.3 Presbyteries should be responsible for mission planning in their area. There should be no artificial cap on numbers; they should only be constrained by funding.
A national cap artificially constrains a presbytery because the ministry available is limited to the cap and not to the resource covenanted by charges or the missional need identified within the presbytery area. Local resource, coupled with the Solidarity Fund, will allow a presbytery to better respond to its own needs. As there is a covenant between minister and charge, so there is also a covenant between presbytery and national Church where the national Church encourages, resources and supports a presbytery to best deploy its resources as it sees fit.

5.5.4 Funding will be available from the Solidarity Fund to subsidise charges that cannot afford the level of ministry sought, though this will be limited to the level of funds available.
The Church of Scotland has a long history of charges with means supporting other charges who have little. Requiring everyone to cover full costs does not take into account factors such as the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation or specific extenuating factors that may be present. Then there are the theological and biblical imperatives present from as far back as Paul's missionary journeys where Christians support one another. If we are to live out our calling, then we must model the care and love we profess in our practice.

5.5.5 If local income falls and a charge can no longer meet the cost of its allocated ministry; it should be supported for a period to allow remedial action. Thereafter, if income is not sufficient, that ministry will be reduced or removed.
Charges go through cycles of growth and decline. For a charge experiencing decline, there are various actions that can be taken to address the situation, including receipt of short-term support. However, for a charge where there has been no growth for a long period of time, and no sense of a vision and sustainable plan for the future, there may need to be difficult decisions taken. This is challenging. The Church of Scotland wants to see every charge thrive and grow, yet we must also recognise that the Church can no longer subsidise charges at the level to which they have become reliant. Every charge will be called to consider its responsibility to be a faithful and effective steward of the Church's resources.

5.5.6 Shared services will be funded through a fee to give certainty that income will cover essential national costs. This fee will be proportionate to local income and capped at an upper limit.
In *Giving to Grow* there is no upper cap on congregational contributions for shared services. Every new £1 of income a congregation generates means a percentage of that pound being required by *Giving to Grow* under current shared services rules. Each year the shared services component will be calculated, and Financing Ministry will stop collecting monies under shared services as soon as the already agreed limit is reached. This incentivises congregations to generate more income in the knowledge more of it will stay locally for ministry and mission.

5.5.7 Flexible forms of ministry will be available to congregations, and this will be reflected in the required contribution.
Not every charge will be able to generate 100% full costs for the ministry they might desire. That should not mean there is no ministry available in that charge. A charge may raise 80% of the costs needed and receive the remaining 20% through the Solidarity Fund where eligible. They may only generate 50% and recognise they do not need a full-time ministry and consequently offer a 50% ministry or indeed any percentage as agreed between themselves and presbytery. It may be the case that a manse is available, and they would offer a House for Duty (once the model is developed) or some other form of ministry that is agreeable to the Church and within our legal polity.

5.5.8 Presbyteries will continue to have an element of core funding from national funds. Any funding above this will require to be collected locally through dues.
When the new presbyteries were set up they were each given an allocation of £120k, recognising that every presbytery was expected to have a full-time clerk and administrative support. These costs are common and core to all presbyteries. Considering again the covenantal relationship between presbyteries and the national Church, it would be wrong to set up these bodies without offering any resource. Unfortunately, there is not enough resource to fund every activity a presbytery might wish to undertake, so Financing Ministry will ensure a presbytery's core costs such as clerk and administrator are supported whilst giving them freedom to raise additional resources from congregations for further work.

5.5.9 The national church will communicate effectively on how the money collected from congregations is distributed and used.
From a charity trustee perspective, it is important that congregations know exactly what happens with money they have contributed so they can inform and encourage those who gave in the first place. We are building God's kingdom together, and it is important that our members and supporters understand the impact of their offerings and donations. Under Financing Ministry, every effort will be made to keep congregations informed and encouraged in their giving and participation within the life of our Church.

5.6 NEW DIRECTIONS
5.6.1 This group has continued to meet throughout 2025 and into 2026, exploring with presbyteries what a new model of financing our ministries might look like. In 2025 the group investigated principles that might lie behind a new system, the need for and nature of a solidarity fund, whether weightings were necessary and what they might look like. It looked at a framework of covenant theology to underlie all of this work so that decisions would be theologically led. Into 2026 it considered issues around presbytery funding. Looking forward it will continue to be part of the consultative process between the national Church and presbyteries as they shape the new Financing Ministries methodology together.

5.7 GIVING TO GROW ANNUAL REVIEW
5.7.1 The *Giving to Grow* Regulations require us to undertake an annual review to ascertain whether they need to be amended in any way and to report to the General Assembly. The Assembly Trustees agreed that no changes are required at this time due to the ongoing work on Financing Ministry.

5.8 INTERNATIONAL PRESBYTERY – CONGREGATIONAL FINANCE REGULATIONS

5.8.1 The Congregational Finance Regulations do not apply to congregations within the International Presbytery, as they are required to prepare their accounts in accordance with the legal and statutory reporting obligations of the jurisdictions in which they operate. Those national frameworks take precedence over the Scottish charity accounting requirements on which these regulations are based. It is therefore appropriate that presbytery attestation confirms that their congregational accounts are in accordance with the relevant jurisdiction rather than with the Congregational Finance Regulations. Draft amending regulations are set out at Appendix 1 and the Assembly is asked to approve them.

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6 STEWARDSHIP

6.1 As we turn our focus towards growth, the stewardship of our resources must reflect our confidence in God's vision for our future. In the book of Malachi, we read:

"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it." (Malachi 3:10)

6.2 God has blessed us abundantly. In giving a proportion back to God in our offering, we resource the Church to participate in God's mission. By prioritising giving, we prepare the way for God's floodgates to open. As we anticipate growth and recommit to our shared life, we are called to be generous – as individuals and as a church family – in the joyful expectation that God will provide blessings for the Church that far exceed our capacity to contain them.

6.3 Recognising the sacred connection between giving and spiritual renewal, the Stewardship Team continues to foster a culture of generosity at the heart of our Church's mission and vitality.

6.4 Stewardship Stories

6.5 In 2025, the team's direct support reached more than 250 congregations, strengthening their efforts in developing a culture of generosity. The following feedback points to the range and impact of this support:

- *"The presentation to the Kirk Session gave us the language, ideas and tools to begin to explore stewardship in the context of discipleship, and to involve and enthuse the wider congregation. I wish we had made contact sooner."* (Dundee: Northeast)
- *"This support really helped point us in the right direction to plan the infrastructure of the next five years of stewardship and gave us practical takeaways to put into action."* (Edinburgh: High (St Giles'))
- *"Working with the stewardship team helped us plan our congregational 'Connections' gathering. The advice and templates were very useful in preparing for this celebration and ensured we didn't have to start from scratch."* (Bathgate)
- *"What was particularly valuable was the balance between principle and practice. The sessions addressed stewardship theology and responsibility, while also offering concrete guidance on cost management, fundraising approaches, governance and long-term sustainability."* (Presbytery of Forth Valley and Clydesdale)

6.6 Stewardship Events and Resources

6.7 In addition to its direct work with congregations, the stewardship team hosted well-received webinars on *Growing Giving,* which supported personal giving programmes, and on *Preaching Generosity,* which provided ideas and resources for weaving stewardship themes into worship over the liturgical year. These recordings are available on the stewardship team's YouTube page: Church of Scotland Stewardship – YouTube.

6.8 Online stewardship resources, including starters for worship, intergenerational materials, small group studies and a learning module to facilitate stewardship conversations, can be accessed through Church of Scotland Learning. Register here: Church of Scotland Learning.

6.9 Churches can keep up-to-date with resources and events throughout the year by subscribing to the stewardship newsletter: https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/news-and-events/newsletters.

6.10 *Bearing Fruit* – a financial health-check for growth

6.11 March 2025 saw the launch of the *Bearing Fruit* online financial health-check for growth. By January, around 180 congregations had utilised this tool to reflect on and strengthen their practice around stewardship, income generation and financial governance. Feedback has highlighted that this tool is being used to great effect:

- *"The tool gave us a clearer sense of where we currently stand, identified areas where we needed to improve and helped us plan our next steps. It gave us a good starting point from which to work forward in a structured way." (Aberdeen: Hillside)*
- *"I have just received a Bearing Fruit report based upon my answers to the questionnaire. May I offer you my thanks for such a comprehensive, encouraging and informative document."* (Isla Parishes)
- *"We found the online Bearing Fruit tool helpful in identifying issues requiring attention, including the need to prepare a local policy on legacy giving."* (Bathgate)

6.12 The Trustees encourage all Kirk Sessions to take advantage of this practical resource which can be accessed on the Church of Scotland website: bit.ly/cofsbearingfruit.

6.13 Legacy Giving

6.14 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 2023-2024:

Year	No. of congregations in receipt of a legacy	Total Legacy Income (congregations)
2023	298	£5.97m
2024	288	£6.19m

6.15 Legacies received for the wider work of the Church (i.e. the Unincorporated Entities) for the years 2023-2025 were as follows:

Year	Unrestricted Legacies	Total Legacy Income (unincorporated entities)
2023	£5.2m	£6.4m
2024	£2.1m	£5.1m
2025	£2.0m	£2.7m

6.16 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.

6.17 **The Trustees would encourage kirk sessions to be intentional about adopting a local legacy policy** and to help build trust and promote this valuable means of giving among church members and wider supporters. Further information can be accessed on the Church of Scotland website here: Legacy resources for your congregation | The Church of Scotland

6.18 **Generosity Report 2026 (Stewardship.org.uk)**

6.19 The UK charity *Stewardship* recently launched its Generosity Report 2026. This is the third such report offering valuable insights into giving by Christians in the UK to churches, charities and Christian workers.

6.20 Drawing on data from a survey of more than 6,500 Christian adults, the findings identify trust as a primary theme, demonstrating a clear correlation between confidence in the local church and increased levels of generosity. Furthermore, the data indicates that consistent teaching on stewardship is a vital component in fostering such trust within congregations.

6.21 The full report can be downloaded from the charity's website here: https://www.stewardship.org.uk/generosity-report. The Trustees highlight this research to the Church for further reflection.

6.22 **Stewardship: Supporting the Journey**

6.23 In looking towards a transformed future, we are called to prepare for and contribute to the growth we seek. The Trustees therefore invite the Church to develop a refreshed commitment to faith-inspired giving and encourage congregations to engage with the Stewardship Team at stewardship@churchofscotland.org.uk to help support and sustain our Church's renewal.

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7. COMMUNICATIONS

7.1 Due to Life and Work ceasing activities following the decision of GA 2025 there is not a continuing role for the Life and Work Advisory Committee. On behalf of the Church, the Assembly Trustees therefore wish to publicly thank all current and former members of the committee for their service and discharge the committee.

7.2 Reference was made to a Communications strategy at GA 2025. Since then, a Communications Forum has been set up and a new head of Communications has been in place from January 2026. Alongside this there have also been changes to personnel within the wider communications team. Taken together these signify an evolving application of the strategy which will further develop with the adoption of the Trustees vision for growth. We would ask GA 2026 to be patient as these developments take place and expect to give a fuller accounting to GA 2027.

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8. PRESBYTERY PLANNING AND FUTURE MINISTRY NUMBERS

8.1 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. For clarity, should Financing Ministry be implemented, there will be no cap on numbers.

8.2 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 demission's continue 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

8.3 Currently numbers of Ministers and MDS across the church are running significantly below projections with no realistic likelihood of reaching the full 600 plus 60. At the same time there are congregations with impending adjustment who under the new Financing Ministry principles, if they meet the full cost recovery of paying for their ministry, (see section 5.4.7) would be given a right to call. . (See also section 5.5.2). In these cases congregations are asked to firstly contact their presbytery who in turn contact Presbytery & Partnership Support to see whether Permission to Call can be granted.

9. ASSEMBLY TRUSTEE WORKING GROUP & ASSEMBLY TRUSTEE APPRAISALS

9.1 The 2025 General Assembly passed a deliverance instructing the Assembly Trustees to create a working group with the following remit: *Note the intention of the Trustees to build on the work begun by their "New Directions" initiative by establishing a working group, which will be comprised of four Assembly Trustees and four representatives from the wider Church co-opted by the Assembly Trustees having been approved by the General Assembly on the recommendation of the Selection Committee, such group to be advised as appropriate by the Principal Clerk and the Solicitor of the Church, and which will: (a) review the functional and relational dynamics amongst the Trustees, Standing Committees (including the General Trustees), presbyteries and congregations of the Church and the Office of the General Assembly in the context of our presbyterian church polity; and (b) consider how the policies, priorities and strategic objectives of the General Assembly should be resourced in accordance with the Financial Strategy of the Assembly Trustees, and made evident and acted upon; and instruct the Trustees to report to the General Assembly of 2026 on the outcomes of the working group's deliberations, this to include proposed mechanisms to improve alignment, accountability, performance and internal and external communication."*

9.2 The 2025 General Assembly appointed (on the recommendation of its Selection Committee) the Very Rev Dr Derek Browning, the Very Rev Sally Foster-Fulton, Prof Nancy Loucks and Rev James Stewart as four non-Assembly Trustee members, while the Assembly Trustees appointed Mrs Jean Couper, Mr Geoff Miller, Rev Norman Smith and Rev Prof Philip Ziegler. In attendance to offer guidance were the Principal Clerk (Rev Fiona Smith followed by Rev Dr John McPake as Interim Principal Clerk) and the Solicitor of the Church, Ms Mary Macleod.

9.3 The group decided to rotate the convenorship of its meetings around the Assembly Trustee members and the non-Assembly Trustee members at each meeting, with Rev Norman Smith acting as Secretary. Subsequently, in December 2025, Rev Norman Smith was appointed as Chief Officer and stood down as an Assembly Trustee. The group asked him to continue to serve in a non-voting secretarial capacity. It was decided not to appoint an additional Assembly Trustee at this late stage in the process. In approaching its task, the group reached a clear consensus that the work had to be undertaken from the vantage point of the life, work, and governance of congregations and presbyteries. Everything that follows, including the order of research undertaken, was from this perspective.

Research Stage One

9.4 At its first meeting in June 2025, the working group agreed a set of questions, based on the remit, which would be disseminated across all levels of the Church using Microsoft Forms for efficient collation and protection of anonymity. Each presbytery business committee (or equivalent) was asked to contribute and to forward the questions to five congregations of its choosing as they deemed appropriate. In addition, individuals who played a particular role in shaping current Church life were asked to contribute. They were the Principal Clerk, Acting Chief Officer, General Treasurer, Solicitor of the Church, and Head of Human Resources.

9.5 The Faith Action Programme Leadership Team (FAPLT) and representatives from each programme group, the General Trustees and/or their subgroups, the Assembly Trustees and/or their subgroups, the Office of the General Assembly and/or their subgroups, the Assembly Business Committee and/or their subgroups and CrossReach and/or their subgroups were consulted. It was left to each main body how their subgroups would respond.

9.6 Dave Kendall (former Chief Officer), The Very Rev. Dr John Chalmers (former Principal Clerk and Convener of Assembly Trustees) and Rev Prof David Fergusson (former Convener of the 2019 Special Commission on Structural Reform), were invited to contribute in recognition that whilst in the service of the Church they had also helped shape current Church life.

9.7 Overall, 47 responses were received. All responses were anonymised, collated by individual, presbytery or committee and fed into Research Stage 2. The Working Group wishes to record its thanks to all who took the time to respond.

Research Stage Two

9.8 By August, the Working Group had analysed all responses and used these to formulate a series of questions for more in-depth discussion. These were:

- *What specific changes would you make to mutual communications to improve: transparency, effectiveness, relevance, accessibility, and timeliness?*
- *What would signal the success of such changes?*
- *What do you understand as the strategic priorities of the General Assembly?*
- *How should the priorities of the General Assembly be enacted through the proper balance between national, regional and local?*
- *Which bureaucratic processes should be simplified, streamlined or removed and what criteria could you use to decide what information is essential?*
- *How should trusteeship and governance roles at national, regional and local levels be clarified and/or redefined to ensure clear accountability?*

- *What practical investments in frontline support and next generation leadership (e.g. training, digital help, short-term roles) should be prioritised and tracked? What would your contribution be – how will you effect this?*
- *Anything else you would add?*

9.9 The group then decided that between September and November, they would work in pairs (one Assembly Trustee and one non-Assembly Trustee).

9.10 The surveys and subsequent group discussions provided empirical confirmation that certain issues exist and need to be addressed by the wider Church. The evidence showed there was no level of the Church, local, regional and national, at which these issues were absent. The Working Group therefore draws the attention of the General Assembly and wider Church to this.

9.11. Observations and recurring themes:
Overall, a wide-ranging consultation that included responses from national, regional and local levels and interviews reinforced well-recognised areas of concern where the national Church would do well to improve our practice and ways of working. The most consistently recurring themes included:

- The need to improve **communication**, in substance, pace, and tone, to those inside and outside the Church.
- The notably burdensome complexities arising from the overlap of Church and charity law/roles in our **governance**, especially as regards trusteeship, audit, and accountability in congregations and presbyteries.
- The value of **aligning activities and use of resources** clearly with the Church's leading priorities and ambitions (i.e., the strategic priorities agreed by the GA).
- The burden of **bureaucratic processes** and a desire to simplify these wherever possible whilst maintaining good order and clarity about responsibilities.
- The need to **cultivate and equip church leadership** in all areas, to clarify roles and paths of accountability, as well as to plan effectively for succession.
- The real importance, under the strained conditions of the present pace of change and pressures of financial austerity, of maintaining the good, respectful, gracious, humane, and indeed the Christian quality of **trusting and transparent working relationships** between individual leaders and office holders across the church.

9.12 Having been asked specifically *'to include proposed mechanisms to improve alignment, accountability, performance and internal and external communication',* we offer the following recommendations.

9.13. Communication
9.13.1 Development of agreed communications strategy (2025) under the direction of the Head of Communications.

9.13.2 Review of active engagement amongst key leadership roles (including Senior Leadership Team, Assembly Trustees, Faith Action Programme Leadership Team, Office of the General Assembly, General Trustees, CrossReach, and presbytery clerks) to ensure engagement, mutual recognition, better communication, and improved understanding.

9.13.3 Maximise use of the New Finance System and Digital Transformation Project, for improving both internal and external communications.

9.13.4 Communication should be more proactive than reactive, and should be aligned with the central purposes, strategy, policies and plans of the whole Church.

9.13.5 Identify and implement an effective contemporary replacement for what was provided for by *Life and Work*. This is to include, but not be limited to, a review of the Church of Scotland website, and a serious consideration around how ordinary members of the Church might access different platforms to express their views. This is not only a national Church issue but one which has echoes at presbytery level.

9.14 Governance and its burdens (Church / Charity)
9.14.1 Propose a reporting mechanism to evidence implementation and outcomes of the decisions and policies of the General Assembly with clear accountability across the Church.

9.14.2 Ensure clarity of criteria and processes of appointing and nominating people to the agencies and committees of the Church. We note the Nomination Committee deliverance of the GA 2025 regarding its ongoing review of processes and anticipate its report.

9.14.3 Carry out further review of the General Assembly after its 2026 meeting, in terms of frequency, length, conduct and role in governance, particularly in respect of the accountability, interaction and role of the Assembly Trustees, Office of the General Assembly, Faith Action Programme Leadership Team and General Trustees not only at the General Assembly but throughout the year.

9.14.4 Review training and information for Commissioners to the General Assembly.

9.14.5 Explore the question of charity trusteeship in relation to office of both congregations and presbyteries with a view to exploring alternative arrangements to shift and lighten these demands.

9.14.6 Provide a clear guide on trusteeship for all those in a trustee role and provide appropriate induction and training for all existing and new trustees.

9.14.7 Continue to develop the process of decision-making to address the need for transparency and accountability:

9.14.7.1 For **presbyteries:**

- The resolution of outstanding presbytery reforms and reconfigurations.
- The realisation of existing / adapting presbytery mission plans.

- Review the issue of presbytery trusteeship: is there a different charity model that would work at presbytery level that might reduce the number of trustees?
- Clarification, training, and realisation of new presbytery posts, roles, and responsibilities.

9.14.7.2 For **FAPLT**:
- Upcoming review already scheduled for 2026/27 should be taken as opportunity to explore possible reforms and improvements as regards (1) engagement with other national Church leadership bodies, (2) communications inside and outside the Church, (3) ways of working with presbyteries, (4) questions of scale of remit, reduced capacity, division of labour, and ways of working (5) clarifying and reinforcing how the national Church speaks into national and international issues and ensuring appropriate communication about what is being said and done in the Church's name to the regional and local church – and by whom.

9.14.7.3 For the **Assembly Trustees:**
- To ensure that the agreed process for nominating and appointing Assembly Trustees is regularly and clearly made known across the Church.
- Review questions of scale of remit, limited capacity, division of labour and ways of working in a body whose workload is considerable and lies heavily on a small number of individuals.
- Review how and where presbyteries may be involved/engaged with the Assembly Trustees.

9.15 Aligning activity and resources with General Assembly strategy

9.15.1 The Assembly Trustees should ensure that financial and other resources of the Unincorporated Entities are aligned with the agreed strategy and priorities of the General Assembly.

9.15.2 Actions suggested in this report should be founded in our Presbyterian theology as defined by the Book of Confessions and should be explicitly stated and disseminated throughout the Church.

9.15.3 Ensure robust evaluation and review processes are in place to maximise effectiveness and grow good practice and to give confidence across the Church in relation to accountability.

9.16 Reduce the burden of bureaucratic processes where possible

9.16.1 Presbyteries and kirk sessions should be invited to alert the Assembly Trustees of any cases of administrative duplication required of them by the Standing Committees and national office departments of the Church, so that simplification of processes can be found by those Committees and departments. This should be done in consultation with the Legal Questions Committee in any situation where a change of process may have implications in church or civil law.

9.17 Cultivate and equip church leadership

9.17.1 Concerning senior staff roles, a regularly structured line management and appraisal process involving 360-degree appraisals should be in place to ensure role clarity, accountability, and meaningful support of those exercising these demanding roles.

9.17.2 Concerning other leadership roles (in particular the Conveners of the Assembly Trustees, General Trustees, and Assembly Business Committee) there should also be induction, an appraisal process, and specific training for line management as appropriate and required.

9.17.3 Concerning the role of presbytery clerks, the Assembly Trustees jointly with the Legal Questions Committee should make recommendations as to their appointment and support, to cover induction, resourcing, role description, core competencies, ongoing training, employment arrangements, support, appraisal, and accountability.

9.17.4 Concerning the role of Presbytery Business Conveners, the Assembly Trustees jointly with the Legal Questions Committee should make recommendations as to their appointment and support, to cover induction, resourcing, role description, core competencies, ongoing training, employment arrangements, support, appraisal, and accountability.

9.17.5 Focus on training and development of leadership at all levels within the Church, for ministers, deacons, elders, readers and members.

9.17.6 Review the terms for leadership roles and membership of standing committees and agencies to ensure that our structures best serve our needs.

9.18 Cultivate and support good working relationships

9.18.1 To cultivate and support good working relationships, the national Church must embed Christ-like respect, transparency and collaboration at the heart of all interactions. This means prioritising clear and timely communication, fostering mutual trust between leaders and office holders and ensuring that roles and responsibilities are well understood. Under the pressures of change and financial constraint, it is vital that the national Church model grace and humility in our dealings, actively listening and valuing diverse perspectives. Practical steps such as structured induction, ongoing training, and regular appraisal processes will help equip leaders for success, while simplifying governance and reducing unnecessary bureaucracy, will ease tensions and free energy for mission. Above all, maintaining a Christ-like culture of kindness and accountability will strengthen unity and enable the Church to flourish in its calling.

9.19 The Working Group wishes again to thank all those who participated in its discussion and information gathering. The Church of Scotland is served at all levels by dedicated people who give their time, talents and money to see God's kingdom grow. We commend them all. Similarly, we commend this report to the Church in the hope that it helps foster good working relationships that we might be more effective in sharing the Good News of Jesus.

9.20 ASSEMBLY TRUSTEE APPRAISALS

9.20.1 As required under section 11 of the Trustees Constitution, Trustee annual appraisals took place. These recognised the dedicated nature of the staff across all bodies of the UE. Issues identified by the appraisals were consistent with those identified by the Working Group: communications, how we do governance and pace of change. Actions to address these areas are being incorporated into the ongoing Assembly Trustee workplan for 2026/7.

10 CHANGES TO FAITH ACTION PROGRAMME LEADERSHIP TEAM AND FAPLT PROGRAMME GROUPS REMITS

10.1 In May 2023 the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland decided to merge the Faith Nurture Forum with the Faith Impact Forum to become the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team (FAPLT). Recognising this was a new body that would take time to develop its own identity, a set of initial remits for both the Faith Action Team and its programme groups were approved with the understanding that as the Team developed alterations to remits would be brought back to the General Assembly for approval.

10.2 In the original setting up of FAPLT it was agreed a review would take place in 2026. In the interim, the Faith Action Team and programme groups have now developed a rhythm and pattern that has moved beyond the initial implementation phase. To allow them to best serve the Church changes in remits are presented for the Assembly to consider and approve.

10.3 The Faith Action Programme Leadership Team

The Leadership Team is a standing committee of the General Assembly and comes under the Assembly Trustees as one of the agencies referred to in the Constitution and Remit of the Assembly Trustees and the Assembly Trustees, as charity trustees, exercise general oversight over the work of the Leadership Team.

10.3.1 Purpose, status and membership section of the FAPLT remit:

Changes proposed to this section of the remit are to make clear that appointments of the convener and vice-conveners are through the Nomination Committee. This is the practice; the change states this openly. With the adoption of the Presbytery Mission Planning Implementation Group as a programme group, it changed the number of programme groups from four to five. The remit is updated to reflect this. Use of the word 'additional' clarifies that these appointments are additional people. A more significant change is the direct appointment of presbytery-appointed members This change is being brought in after a direct request by presbyteries to have the people they nominate appointed.

When the Leadership Team was originally set up it had specific rules over how long a person could serve, which are not normally associated with appointments to standing committees and agencies. As the Leadership Team is no longer in its infancy and has matured it is proposed to align this to normal practice.

10.3.2 Current Remit of the Leadership Team:

- a convener
- four vice-conveners to deputise for the convener when unavailable and lead programme groups (with one of the vice-conveners to be designated, on the recommendation of the Nomination Committee, as depute convener)
- five members appointed by the General Assembly through the Nomination Committee
- twelve members appointed by the General Assembly through the Nomination Committee, having first been nominated by their presbytery. It is anticipated that presbyteries nominate more than one possible member, and that the Nomination Committee select by the skills and experience which have been identified by the Leadership Team as being requisite bearing in mind the need for diversity in the membership of the Leadership Team and programme groups. There will be one such member for each presbytery or presbytery grouping.
- The Convener, or substitute, of the Theological Forum
- The Convener, or substitute, of the Ecumenical Relations Committee. No Assembly Trustee, member of another agency of the Church or employee of the Church will be eligible to be a member.
- No Assembly Trustee, member of another agency of the Church or employee of the Church will be eligible to be a member.
- The quorum will be five members. The convener will have a casting vote.
- The convener will be appointed for a term of four years. Of the vice conveners two will be appointed for two years and two 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 end of their term. 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.

10.3.3 Proposed remit changes (amendments shown in **bold**):

- a convener **appointed by the General Assembly through the Nomination Committee**
- five vice-conveners appointed by the General Assembly through the Nomination Committee to deputise for the convener when unavailable and lead programme groups (with one of the vice-conveners to be designated, on the recommendation of the Nomination Committee, as depute convener)
- five additional members appointed by the General Assembly through the Nomination Committee,
- twelve **additional** members appointed by presbyteries. There will be one such member for each presbytery or presbytery grouping,
- The Convener, or substitute, of the Theological Forum
- The Convener, or substitute, of the Ecumenical Relations Committee. No Assembly Trustee, member of another agency of the Church or employee of the Church will be eligible to be a member.
- No Assembly Trustee, member of another **Standing Committee** or employee of the Church will be eligible to be a member.
- The quorum will be five members. The convener will have a casting vote.
- The convener will be appointed for a term of four years.

10.4 FAPLT Programme Groups

10.4.1 Originally four groups, the Presbytery Mission Plan Implementation Group was incorporated as a fifth group at GA 2025. This then became Presbytery & Partnership Support [PPS]. Each group except PPS had four ordinary members and there was a high turnover of membership due to requirements that no more than 50% of retiring members could be reappointed each year. This has had a detrimental effect on the ability of the groups to hold memory of many situations which are multi-year projects.

10.4.2 Presbytery & Partnership Support, recognising it had a significant remit working with presbyteries to approve and implement Presbytery Mission Plans, was set up with six ordinary members, resulting in a significant difference in the ability of the group to hold onto members a year or two longer and therefore hold the memory and be more effective. It is proposed below that all Programme Groups be increased to six ordinary members plus a convener, except Presbytery & Partnership Support who also have a vice-convener. They still retain the ability to co-opt and that number would now increase.

This results in changes to remits as below:

10.4.3 There will be five Programme Groups, with the remits set out in the following section. Programme Groups will report to FAPLT and will have written delegated authority 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.

Becomes (amendments shown in **bold**):

10.4.4 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.

10.4.5 Programme Groups, with the exception of the Presbytery Mission Plan Implementation Group (PMPIG), will consist of four members appointed by the General Assembly through the Nomination Committee plus their Programme Group Leader. Of the four members, three will serve for four years and two 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 FAPLT. 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.

Becomes (amendments shown in **bold**):

10.4.6 Programme Groups will each consist of **six members**, appointed by the General Assembly through the Nomination Committee plus their Programme Group Leader. Programme Groups will have power to co-opt members to their group, subject to approval by the **Leadership Team** and notification to the Assembly Trustees. 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.

10.4.7 Programme Groups may form short-life Task Groups to assist or advise them in the delivery of work. Such groups will comprise no more than five individuals (of whom no more than two 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 FAPLT 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 FAPLT Convener and reported to the General Assembly.

Becomes (amendments shown in **bold**):

10.4.8 Programme Groups may form short-life task groups to assist or advise them in the delivery of the work. Such groups will comprise no more than five individuals (of whom no more than two 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.

10.5 Mission Support Programme Group

10.5.1 The Mission Support Programme Group exists to help local churches thrive in the mission of God. At a time when interest in Jesus and His Church is growing among a new generation, it aims to support and amplify the work of congregations as they make the love and good news of Jesus known in their communities.

10.5.2 Staff and committee members focus on fresh expressions of church, renewal and growth of existing congregations, Priority Area parishes, digital ministry, young people and young adults, and worship renewal. It is also developing a church planting work stream for the coming years, working alongside Presbytery Mission Officers, Mission Committees, and congregations seeking growth. Mission Support want to be alongside presbyteries and local congregations and ask:

- 'How can we help you make Jesus known in your communities?'
- 'How can we help you make disciples of Jesus?'
- 'What is God leading you to at this time, and how can we help you step into it?'

Included in current work is overseeing the work of the Education and Schools Group, Scottish Workplace Chaplaincy, and the Gaelic Committee, each delivering innovative and practical missional offerings. Presbyteries and congregations interested in these areas are encouraged to reach out and contact the group.

10.5.3 The updated remit for the Mission Support Programme Group reflects a significant staffing shift following the 2025 national office restructuring and redundancy process. It refocuses on priorities the national office can deliver to local congregations, ensuring these efforts strengthen and broaden—rather than duplicate—the support provided by presbyteries.

10.5.4 Current remit:

- Equipping, inspiring, resourcing and supporting the Church locally, at presbytery and at the national level in mission.
- Engaging with congregations through international education and support.
- Supporting new ways of being Church.
- Overseeing international partnership support.
- Support congregations to walk together with people locally and globally, building relationship and learning and sharing practice.

10.5.5 Proposed new remit:

- Equip, inspire, resource and support the Church locally, at presbytery and at the national level in mission with a focus on digital ministry, Priority Areas, young people and young adults' ministry and church planting.
- Support worship renewal and the renewal of inherited congregations.
- Encourage and develop new ways of being Church, fostering innovation and church growth.
- Provide oversight of the Gaelic Committee, the Education and Schools Group and Scottish Workplace Chaplaincy.

10.6 Resource and Presence Programme Group

10.6.1 In response to a demanding period for our church, Resource and Presence is asking the Assembly to agree to refining its approach to focus on deeper integration and partnership with other departments and governance bodies. To support this commitment to collective working, an update to its remit is proposed as below.

10.6.2 Current remit:

- Ensuring that net revenues are maximised through the resources available within the Faith Action Programme.
- The business output for Life & Work.
- Maximising the use of furlough properties.
- Overseeing the place of John Knox House/ Scottish Storytelling Centre.

10.6.3 Proposed new remit:

- To use our presence and assets to promote and strengthen the Church's witness, mission, resilience and profile, particularly partnering with Stewardship and Finance and the General Trustee's Creative Commercial Collective.
- To maximise and rationalise the use of furlough properties for international students and partners, and mission partners, and ensure resources are managed effectively to safeguard these provisions for the future.
- To enable a financially sustainable operation for the Scottish Storytelling Centre and John Knox House, partnering with the Assembly Trustees on future works and partnerships.
- To sustain and develop the Church of Scotland's international partnerships.
- To maintain and grow good relationships with international partners – such that the Church of Scotland dialogues well and honestly with them, seeking to learn and understanding their reality and how that impacts on our mission.

10.7 Presbytery & Partnership Support

10.7.1 Effective support for our international partnerships relies on close collaboration with other national church leadership bodies. Consequently, this work is best situated within the Resource and Presence Programme Group, as its remit is now specifically designed to facilitate such engagement. The proposed new remit is therefore exactly the same as the existing remit except that the first two bullet points will now become the responsibility of the Resource and Presence programme Group.

10.7.2 Original remit:

- *To sustain and develop the Church of Scotland's national and international partnerships.*
- *To maintain and grow good relationships with international partners – such that the Church of Scotland dialogues well and honestly with them seeking to learn and understanding their reality and how that impacts on our mission.*
- To resource and equip those in recognised national ministries through the provision of appropriate support.
- 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; MDS; and Ministry to the Deaf congregations, in delivering the mission of God.
- To work with presbyteries and the Office of the General Assembly in developing and disseminating best practice in the areas for which Presbytery & Partnership Support is responsible.
- 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.
- To support presbyteries in evaluating their Mission Plans.
- To support the development of 100 new worshiping communities to equip those taking part to live out the mission of God by 2028.

- To provide oversight and governance of Safeguarding arrangements for the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team and those in recognised ministries.
- 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
- 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.
- To provide oversight and governance of the FAPLT partnership with Place for Hope
- 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.
- Except in so far as retained by the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team ('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:
  - Appraisal and Adjustment Act (Act VII 2003)
  - Vacancy Procedure Act (Act VIII 2003) as temporarily amended
  - Presbytery Mission Plan Act (Act VIII 2021)
  - Section 31 of the Faith Nurture Forum's Deliverance to General Assembly 2021
  - Act on Call, Election & Appointment of Ministers of Word & Sacrament Act

11. EQUALITY DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

11.1 Since the last report to the General Assembly, the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Group has continued to support the Assembly Trustees in embedding inclusive practice across the life and structures of the Church. The Group's work has increasingly focused on collaboration and enabling culture change, rather than the direct delivery of stand-alone initiatives.

11.2 Theology of Welcome

Recognising that welcome is often the first and most tangible way in which people encounter the Church—and, through it, may glimpse something of Jesus Christ and God's love—the EDI Group has begun work on a renewed Theology of Welcome. This work arises from the conviction that welcome is not a peripheral concern, but a foundational aspect of the Church's witness, discipleship, and mission.

11.3 Many congregations publicly affirm welcome as a core commitment and aspire to be places of hospitality and belonging. At the same time, experience suggests that welcome is neither simple nor static. Initial encounters with the Church—whether through a building, a congregation, or a community activity—often shape whether people feel able to return, to listen, or to trust. For this reason, welcome is a vital stepping-in point for faith and one which the Church must continually seek to deepen in order to reflect God's love more faithfully.

11.4 The EDI Group is particularly conscious that many people approach the Church carrying complex histories. For some, these include experiences of exclusion or harm—whether arising from institutional practices, individual interactions, specific teachings, or assumptions made about aspects of identity that could not be changed. Recognising these histories is essential if the Church is to be better equipped to offer care, humility, and attentiveness in its life and witness.

11.5 As an initial step, the Group engaged with the Theological Forum to develop a Christ-centred theological understanding of welcome, grounded in scripture. This work frames welcome as an invitation into life in Christ, offering a shared theological orientation rather than prescriptive practice. It provides a foundation for congregations to reflect on how welcome is embodied and where barriers may exist. The General Assembly is not being asked to approve this framework at this stage, but to recognise welcome as an area of ongoing theological development requiring further work and commitment across the Church.

11.6 Neurodiversity and Inclusion

11.6.1 A Church-wide webinar on neurodiversity, discipleship, and faith practice was held in September 2025, generating strong engagement and highlighting a clear appetite for practical change. Neurodiversity refers to the natural variation in how human brains function and process information, including (but not limited to) autistic, ADHD, dyslexic, and dyspraxic people, and is often experienced as a hidden disability. Learning from the webinar emphasised the importance of moving beyond awareness-raising towards tangible expressions of welcome, participation, and flourishing for neurodivergent people within congregational life, leadership, and discipleship.

11.6.2 In response, the EDI Group recommend further collaboration with the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team (FAPLT) to explore how the Church can become a more inclusive place for neurodivergent people. This work will focus on welcome, discipleship, and participation in the life and mission of the Church, drawing on theological reflection, lived experience, and practitioner insight. It offers a practical example of how EDI work supports the Church to translate learning into sustained cultural change.

11.7 Accessibility and Inclusion

12.7.1 This strand of work was initiated following a question put to the General Trustees during their report to the General Assembly in 2025, which highlighted concerns about how accessibility and reasonable adjustments are addressed across the Church's buildings and processes.

11.7.2 The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Group has reflected on the distinction between physical accessibility and genuine inclusion, noting that buildings may meet basic access requirements without enabling safe or meaningful participation, particularly for disabled and neurodivergent people. In a context where buildings are being reviewed,

closed, or sold, the Group identified the Property Register as a potential starting point for developing a clearer picture of accessibility across churches, manses, and other properties, and for supporting more consistent consideration of reasonable adjustments in collaboration with presbytery buildings officers.

11.7.3 Discussion also highlighted ongoing challenges relating to responsibility, resourcing, and implementation, including uncertainty around funding for reasonable adjustments and the inappropriate reliance on local fundraising for basic accessibility needs. These concerns underline the gap that can exist between policy commitments and lived experience.

11.7.4 As an initial action, the Group agreed to gather data on requests for reasonable adjustments, with a report to be prepared for a future meeting of the Assembly Trustees. This work is intended to inform clearer processes and more credible mechanisms for implementation across the Church.

11.8 Nominations Processes and Anti-Bias Work

11.8.1 The EDI Group has contributed to work undertaken in response to a 2025 General Assembly deliverance instructing the FAPLT, working with the EDI Group, to develop measures aimed at preventing discrimination within the processes of nominating committees for vacant charges.

11.8.2 This work is reported separately by the Nomination Committee in the Faith Action section of the Blue Book and represents the completion of an initial learning and scoping phase. Consultation identified significant variation in practice and highlighted points at which conscious or unconscious bias may influence discernment. The report concludes that further development and testing of supportive, theologically grounded resources is required before any recommendation on mandate is brought to the Assembly. The EDI Group will continue to contribute to this work as it progresses.

11.8.3 In parallel, the EDI Group has worked with the Nomination Committee to introduce equality monitoring into standard nomination documentation. An initial date has been analysed to identify patterns and support evidence-informed efforts to improve inclusion within appointments processes. To find a detailed analysis on this, please refer to the report of the Nomination Committee. Membership of the EDI Group, a sub-group of the Assembly Trustees, can be found at Appendix 2.

11.9 Other Collaborative Work

11.9.1 The EDI Group has also contributed to the Church's work on the legacies of slavery, which is reported separately as a stand-alone item in the Blue Book. Members of the Group have participated in the relevant task group, offering particular input through an anti-racist lens and supporting a listening-first approach to this work.

11.10 Ways of Working

11.10.1 The EDI Group has continued a transition to a primarily advisory, collaborative, and consultative role. This reflects both capacity realities and the Church's wider ambition to embed responsibility for equality, diversity, and inclusion across all levels of Church life. The Group's revised remit emphasises guidance, constructive challenge, theological and cultural reflection, and the provision of thematic insight to inform the Assembly Trustees and other Church bodies.

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12. APPOINTMENT OF THE HEAD OF FINANCE AND GENERAL TREASURER

Following the retirement of Jenny Simpson, the Assembly Trustees wish to record our thanks for her work over these past years. Jenny brought with her a wealth of practical knowledge and experience from previous posts across all sectors of financial management. On the retirement of Dave Kendall, Jenny took on the role of Acting Chief Officer where she continued to exercise leadership, competence and integrity as she had done when Head of Finance and General Treasurer. She retired with gratitude from the wider Church and all who worked with her.

The Trustees are pleased to announce the appointment of Leanne Elizabeth Thompson, previously Deputy Treasurer, to the post of Head of Finance and General Treasurer. Leanne brings with her extensive experience of working at all levels of finance within the Church of Scotland along with the requisite knowledge. This role has overall responsibility for the finances, financial management and income strategy of the standing committees of the General Assembly (the Unincorporated Entities of the Church of Scotland (SCO 11353)) and for the finances of the General Trustees and some other Assembly bodies. The Assembly is asked to confer upon Leanne Elizabeth Thompson full power to discharge legacies, bequests and donations (as defined in Section 22 of the proposed deliverance above).

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13. APPOINTMENTS OF PRINCIPAL CLERK

13.1 Following the decision of the Rev Fiona Smith to step down from the post of Principal Clerk to the General Assembly, the Trustees wish to record their thanks for the dedication, energy and passion that Fiona brought to the role. On behalf of a grateful Church, every blessing is wished upon her for the next chapter. A process was established to bring the nomination of a successor to the General Assembly for confirmation. A panel, comprising the Conveners of the Assembly Trustees, Assembly Business Committee and Legal Questions Committee along with a representative presbytery clerk and support from senior members of staff, was set up to review the job description and person specification and to lead the process of open recruitment. As a result of wider changes in the life of the Church modest changes were approved in the job description and person specification, and these were included in the recruitment pack.

13.2 Following due process, the Assembly Trustees brings forward with pleasure the name of the Rev Dr Alistair May for appointment by the General Assembly to the post of Principal Clerk. Dr May will be moving into post following parish ministry in Rutherglen Stonelaw from 2002 till 2005 and Motherwell: Kirk at the Cross from 2005 till 2026. Dr May has held offices in different parts of the Church including as Vice Convener of the Legal Questions Committee, a member of the Presbytery & Partnership Support Programme Group and as Convener of the Presbytery Planning Group in Forth Valley and Clydesdale.

14 APPOINTMENT OF ASSEMBLY TRUSTEES

14.1 Several Assembly Trustees are stepping down from their posts and a heartfelt thanks is offered to each of them - David Cameron, Jean Couper, Crawford Gillies, David Harrison, Geoff Miller, Norman Smith and Phil Ziegler - for their dedicated service to the Church in this role. Following a recruitment process, the Assembly is asked to approve the appointment of:

- **Professor Elizabeth Ashcroft**, an elder who serves locally on committees in her local church of Kelvin West. Elizabeth served a previous term as an Assembly Trustees 2019-2021. As an Emeritus Professor in Economics University of Strathclyde, Elizabeth brings valuable insight and perception as a trained economist, research leader, public finance and government policy adviser.
- **The Very Rev Dr W Martin Fair**, a minister for 36 years, 31 of which were spent at Arbroath: St Andrew's Church and whom has recently been inducted to Christ Church Warwick, Bermuda. Martin has served in a considerable number of committee roles locally and nationally as a convenor and vice convener, including as the Moderator 2020-2021.
- **Mr Martin Fairbairn**, an elder at Larbert Tryst Parish Church who is active in both worship and mission locally. He brings particular knowledge in financial sustainability and change programmes from his professional life which includes senior roles at the Scottish Funding Council. This is complemented by board experience currently serving on NHS Forth Valley.
- **Mr Nairn Angus-McDonald**, an elder at Kilwinning Abbey Church and a Councillor in Irvine East. He will bring significant governance experience including serving as a Board member for Public Health Scotland & as a Trustee at the Scottish Youth Parliament.
- **Miss Suzanne Stringer**, a member and worship leader at Aberfeldy, Dull and Weem, and Grantully, Logierait and Strathtay parish churches, Suzanne will bring the skills developed in her legal background as a prosecutor and legal advisor.
- **Mr David Watt**, who has held a number of roles as an Elder in Airdrie: The New Wellwynd and within the presbyteries of Forth Valley and Clydesdale and Hamilton. This is alongside serving on a substantial number of committees nationally, including the Assembly Trustees in 2019-2020. As a chartered accountant, David brings knowledge and skills from his professional career combined with multiple roles as a non-executive director including at the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service, Glasgow Clyde College and Quarriers.

14.2 We are also delighted to announce the appointment of Rev Keith Blackwood, currently Administrative Trustee, to the post of Convener following the retiral of Rev David Cameron. A future Administrative Trustee will be appointed in due course.

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15 POINTS FOR INFORMATION

The following items have no actionable deliverance section and are offered for information. They each represent many hours of dedicated service by committed and faithful people, employees and volunteers. Please do not consider this section to be any less important or critical to the life and witness of the denomination that the section above.

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16 INTERNATIONAL PRESENCE REVIEW

16.1 . This interim update is being offered in the spirit of keeping the General Assembly informed. A full report will be presented to the General Assembly in 2027.

16.2 Two hundred years ago the Church of Scotland took a momentous decision to send its first mission partner overseas. Departing in 1830, Alexander Duff ministered in India where amongst his numerous activities he went on to found the Scottish Church College. Many people have since answered the call to serve as missionaries all over the world. Our understanding of mission has changed in the intervening years. The Church of Scotland now sees itself as one denomination amongst many equal denominations, each giving expression to the Kingdom of God within their own culture. The language we use has changed. Where once we talked of sending people overseas to the 'mission field' we now work in partnership with fellow churches recognising the greatest mission field we experience is within our own increasingly secular culture.

16.3 All Church of Scotland partners are valued. While the Church will seek to continue to cherish our partner relationships, we realise that it may be in different ways moving forwards. We cannot do things in exactly the same way they have been done before.

16.4 New language may be helpful here to describe how the Church of Scotland relates to different partners.

- Close Family defined as regions, churches and organisations with whom the Church of Scotland has long-standing or particularly significant ties. These would be prioritised for resourcing and staffing support, receive General Assembly invitations and proactive strategic engagement.
- **Extended Family** churches or organisations with which engagement is ongoing but in a more reactive way and at a more modest level (e.g. shared projects, congregational links, occasional visits, supportive conversations).
- **New Relatives** are new or short-term relationships entered into for a defined period, often in response to a specific need or opportunity, reviewed before renewal.

16.5 Whilst work has been undertaken to look at our relations with partners in these terms, more work remains to be done. In the meantime, the group offer the following as helpful indicators of where their work will be developed with a full report on the practical implications of these eight points being presented for consideration next year.

16.5.1 Encourage every member to develop global friendships
Encourage every member of the Church of Scotland, of all ages and backgrounds, to cultivate friendships with Christians and churches around the world. These relationships help us to see the gospel from new perspectives, challenging our assumptions, and deepen our discipleship through mutual prayer, storytelling and shared witness.

16.5.2 Encourage each local church to develop a live global relationship
Encourage every congregation to form and maintain a living, mutually beneficial, and prayerful relationship with another church in a different part of the world. These connections should be marked by regular communication, shared prayer, and practical support where appropriate. Visits, whether in person or virtual, can deepen mutual understanding, strengthen faith, and witness to the body of Christ.

Annual statistical returns should be adapted to include information regarding overseas partners. National and presbytery staff could curate a network of such partnerships, offering light-touch coordination, safeguarding guidance, and practical support for travel, communication and prayer.

These relationships need not be with existing Church of Scotland partnerships, recognising that a number of churches have their own links and connections.

16.5.3 Encourage presbyteries to promote global partnerships
Encourage every presbytery to take an active role in fostering and sustaining global partnerships. Presbyteries can provide structure and support for congregational links, coordinate regional learning events about global mission, and host visiting partners.

Each presbytery should have some kind of Global Connections Group or designate a 'World Church Champion' to nurture this work. In this way, presbyteries embody the unity of the Church as a community of communities, locally rooted and globally connected. Co-ordination across presbytery relationships will be required.

16.5.4 Strengthen national staff engagement (online and in-person)
National staff should continue to nurture relationships with partner churches primarily through online communications where practical, ensuring regular and accessible contact. In-person visits should be prioritised where they are crucial to relationship health, critical to project discernment, or carry reputational or pastoral significance.

Wherever possible, local leaders and congregations should be involved in hosting and participating in these visits to ensure shared ownership. Online platforms can extend participation to younger generations and to those previously excluded by distance or cost.

National engagement should model accompaniment rather than oversight – walking with partners, listening carefully, and enabling local voices to lead. Efforts should be made to ensure continuity in relationships even through staff transitions, with shared documentation and mutual networks of contact.

16.5.5 Invite meaningful contributions to our General Assembly
We wish to continue to bring partners who are close family to join us each year for our General Assembly. This is especially important where we will be discussing matters that would affect our partners or in which they have experience. However, debating time is limited and it can be difficult to hear from every guest during the Assembly. We recommend we rotate invitations to close family members, inviting between six and eight international guests each year, looking to make invitations every five years.

16.5.6 Standardise the way we support overseas work
We wish to host oversight of all our national relationships with international partners within the Resource and Presence Programme Group, sitting within FAPLT. This group will ensure that Finance, Salvesen, presbyteries, staff, Health and Safety and Risk Compliance are all involved in the ongoing administration of these partnerships.

Resource and Presence will develop and oversee the application, award, and reporting process for all financial agreements. They will also develop and oversee possible new partnerships.

16.5.7 Review of International Ecumenical Partnerships
The ongoing sustainability of the number of international ecumenical partnerships maintained by the Church is under review. The result of this review will be set out in due course.

16.5.8 Review Mission Partner contracts, moving to these principles

1. **Sustainability and Regulation**: Maintaining global support across multiple regulatory environments (UK, host country, and origin country) is becoming increasingly complex.
2. **Contractual Transitions**: As existing Mission Partner contracts end, the Church is considering what this means for each mission partner and the host church with which they work.
3. **Future International Posts**: Future international roles might look at prioritising local employment in the host countries rather than attempting to employ individuals directly from the UK.

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17 ISRAEL PALESTINE COMMITTEE

17.1 The Committee has focused closely this year on the commercial establishments that the Church of Scotland owns and manages in Israel, in particular on the Scots Hotel in Tiberias. An options appraisal for its future was developed and discussed in depth by the Committee over several months, and a recommendation was made to the Assembly Trustees as to the future of the hotel. The Assembly Trustees discussed this recommendation along with other options. The outcome of this is reported elsewhere.

17.2 The situation in Israel over 2025 and early 2026 has meant that our commercial operations have faced a difficult and challenging climate. The Committee has worked closely with the directors and governors of the establishments to ensure that the best possible business decisions were made to enable their viability. Towards the end of 2025, cash injections were made into the hotel and the house hotel, recognising the difficult trading conditions.

17.3 The Scots House Hotel in Jerusalem worked hard to continue to receive the permits which allow around half of its staff to come from the West Bank, whilst the Scots Hotel in Tiberias continued to employ a mix of staff from all of the four major religious backgrounds represented in Israel. Both managers are Christian, ensuring that the Christian ethos pervades in both the house hotel and hotel.

17.4 Tabeetha School in Jaffa continues to provide education to around 300 pupils of all religious backgrounds, both local and international. The school provides a Christian education and gives the opportunity for children (and parents) of different faiths to learn together. Assemblies are often led by the Church of Scotland mission partners, further developing Christian education. The Committee was pleased to hear of the continuing work throughout the year, and of the fundraising successes through the hard work of the Board of Governors, fundraisers and staff of the school.

17.5 From a governance perspective, the Committee has worked with the directors of the hotels, and the governors of the school, to develop the financial and operating reporting, and has further supported attempts to build the number of directors and governors to ensure succession planning. The Committee appreciates the hard work and support of these bodies.

17.6 The Church of Scotland's mission partners in Israel and Palestine continued to walk alongside the Church's ecumenical partners, and with the various organizations which the Church supports, who are striving for peace with justice. Their input and feedback helped give the Committee a greater understanding of the situation on the ground. As both contracts have come, or are coming, to their end, the Committee is considering the next steps for recruitment, understanding that the outcome of the decision around the Scots Hotel in Tiberias will have an impact on these roles. The Committee is grateful to the Rev Muriel Pearson and the Rev Stewart Gillan for their service.

17.7 The General Assembly 2025 passed a deliverance encouraging 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. The Committee were delighted that the UK Government took the step of recognising the State of Palestine in 2025 but continue to have concern about the practical outworking of that step. In reality, little has changed on the ground, and the continued instability in the Middle East gives cause for concern. The "Kairos Palestine II" document, written by Palestinian Christians, emphasizes that reality. Peace with justice remains a distant hope, and the Church is encouraged to continue to pray into this situation.

17.8 The Committee has also supported the "24th of the month" events in partnership with Christian Aid, and staff members have been involved in various events run by the Friends of St Andrew's Jerusalem and Tiberias which have brought partners from Israel and Palestine to Scotland for public meetings. It is hoped that in the coming months there will be a more detailed programme of resources and media which can be shared with congregations and Church members. The Committee has supported the statements made by the Moderator of the General Assembly about the situation in Israel and Palestine.

17.9 A member of the Committee had been designated to take part in an ecumenical pilgrimage alongside the Methodist, Baptist, and United Reformed Churches. This visit was to focus on the 'living stones', meeting with people, and hearing their pleas for support and encouragement.

17.10 Similarly, the Moderator of the General Assembly had planned to visit the Holy Land over the Easter period, and meet with partners and church leaders, along with taking part in events in Jerusalem. This would have been a visit of solidarity with the Palestinian Christians who continue to cry out for the support of the churches around the world in their struggle for peace with justice. Sadly, due to travel restrictions from the ongoing conflict, both visits were unable to go ahead.

17.11 Details of membership of the Israel Palestine Committee, a sub-committee of the Assembly Trustees, can be found at Appendix 2.

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18 DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

18.1 The Digital Transformation Programme has progressed significantly throughout 2025 with the replacement of legacy databases within the national office and presbyteries. A comprehensive discovery exercise was completed to enable a better understanding of core activities and key engagements. The new member management platform went live during January 2026. Digital Transformation will deliver substantial benefits across multiple areas, driving automation, efficiency, and collaboration. Ongoing phases planned throughout 2026 will enable further functionality to be delivered including a web portal for ministries and congregations to interact and communicate. Not merely just replacing technology; this project is about transforming how the Church works, becoming more agile and member focused, and in turn meeting the needs of members both today and tomorrow.

18.2 Phase 1 of the project went live on 22nd January 2026. Prior to this, users were consulted at different points throughout 2025 to ensure the new system met actual needs of congregations, presbyteries and the national offices. Phase 1 involved replacing old out of date systems used by presbyteries (PIMS) and the national offices (CIS) with a much more user-friendly modern system that will be easier to maintain moving forwards. Subsequent phases are planned throughout 2026 and beyond that will add to Phase 1. The project is not only about updating our technology; it is about transforming how we work.

19 SEEDS FOR GROWTH COMMITTEE

19.1 Encouragement to Congregations

The Seeds for Growth Committee encourages congregations and presbyteries to continue to consider the missional opportunities existing within our communities. We invite you to reflect on where your aspirations fit within Seeds for Growth funding criteria and to consider applying. The Committee continues to be inspired by the visionary, faith-grounded work happening across the Church of Scotland – work that is focused on reshaping the Church towards our missional context and sharing the good news of Jesus Christ beyond ourselves.

19.2 Three Years of Impact

Since inception, Seeds for Growth has now funded:

- 48 Level 1 awards (maximum £1,000)
- 22 Level 2 awards (maximum £10,000)
- 30 operational Level 3 awards (maximum £40,000 per annum for three years)

In 2025, the Committee awarded 16 Level 1 grants, nine Level 2 grants and 13 Level 3 grants. Having been in operation for three years, Seeds for Growth is nearing a position where the Committee will be able to review the effectiveness of these grants to identify funded projects showing early signs of numerical and spiritual growth of the Church, and which funding areas are struggling to see such growth. The outcome of this review will influence future funding decisions.

19.3 Financial Context

For 2026, the funding allocation for Seeds for Growth remains at £500,000, in line with the budget approved by the Assembly Trustees. Looking ahead, the allocation will be reassessed through the normal annual budget process, taking account of the Church's overall financial position and ongoing evaluation of the impact of Seeds for Growth funding. The Committee continues to honour all existing grant commitments to projects already in receipt of funding.

19.4 Enhanced Processes

Following a period of change brought about through the national Church reprioritisation project and listening to feedback from applicants and funded projects, Seeds for Growth has established revised processes designed to assist grant applicants:

- A simplified application process with revised documentation
- Level 1 & 2 applications are now considered monthly by a Seeds for Growth subgroup
- Level 3 applications are invited through a revised Initial Proposal Form. If the project shows potential to fit within our funding criteria, then staff members work with applicants to develop proposals and establish measurable outcomes. The anticipated outcome of this will be stronger projects and more consistent applications
- A reporting framework enables the Committee to readily identify projects requiring assistance with an early intervention

19.5 Partnership Working

Seeds for Growth is now positioned primarily as a funder for mission with Mission Support primarily recognised as the lead for mission. Both work closely together to ensure this relationship is productive. Seeds for Growth continues to work under the leadership of FAPLT in establishing two to three student resource congregations. It is anticipated that these congregations shall draw new people to faith and offer places for discipleship for young people, including many who have grown up in Church of Scotland congregations.

19.6 Funding Rounds

In 2026, Seeds for Growth will maintain two Level 3 funding rounds. However, with current available funds, determining how much to reserve from the first round to ensure adequate funding for the second round is proving challenging. Consequently, from 2027, Seeds for Growth will move to one funding round per annum, with Initial Proposal Forms to be submitted by May 2027.

19.7 Recruitment Challenges

The Committee notes the challenges that some of our successful applicants are experiencing in recruiting for posts and highlights this issue to congregations and presbyteries.

19.8 Leading your Church into Growth (LyCiG)

Following the invitation issued to all ministers and congregations in November to attend the LyCiG course, the Committee received 17 expressions of interest of which 10 congregations booked themselves onto the course run in February. This course was highlighted within the Assembly Trustee Blue Book in 2025 as highly recommended due to the programme's success, which typically sees congregations grow by 10% within the first year. Seeds for Growth will liaise with the congregations who attended the February course to assess whether we experience similar levels of growth within the Church of Scotland.

19.9 Seeds for Growth Conclusion

Whether you are considering a project to work with young people, exploring new worshipping communities, or seeking to revitalise your existing congregation, Seeds for Growth exists to financially support the spiritual and numerical growth of the Church of Scotland.

19.10 Behind every project are faithful people who believe in a church that takes risks, remains true to our mission imperative, and is committed to Christ's calling to share the Gospel with our surrounding communities. Working in close partnership with Mission Support, we look forward to enquiries and applications from congregations ready to prayerfully and intentionally take steps, whatever size these may be, into mission.

19.11 Membership of the Seeds for Growth Committee, a sub-committee of the Assembly Trustees, can be found at Appendix 2.

20 CONGREGATIONAL STATISTICS

The Congregational Statistical Returns are being made available via the Church of Scotland website with the intention they will reach a wide audience and be available all year round, and not only in the published Blue Book. Statistics for 2025 are available through the Church of Scotland website and will be in the RDLM once published.

21 NATIONAL OFFICE SERVICE DEPARTMENTS

The following provides a summary of service provision from the national office which exists to support the local church and enable the Assembly Trustees to fulfil their overall governance, co-ordination and reporting function for the Church, as one of the largest charitable organisations in Scotland. The aim in publishing this information is to address the question that is often asked: "What is 121 doing for us?" Please note this is not an exhaustive list but a flavour of what has happened since the last General Assembly.

22 COMMUNICATIONS TEAM

22.1 The Communications Team worked ceaselessly and professionally to protect and enhance the Church's reputation and connecting its many audiences in 2025.

22.2 The Team assisted congregations and General Trustees around the sale of buildings, with detailed communications planning and stakeholder engagement on projects such as the sale of the Mackintosh Halls in Glasgow. As a sign of the significant external interest in the topic, a third of the 376 media enquiries this year were about church sales. The Team helped shine a light on the Church's role in public and ecumenical life by supporting the publicity of Their Majesties, The King and Queen unveiling a memorial to Queen Elizabeth II at St Giles Cathedral, and the Moderator accompanying the King to meet the Pope.

22.3 On social media, the Church was more selective. Posting less led to positive results: across all the centrally managed social media accounts followers increased by nine per cent and engagement (the number of shares, likes, comments etc.) rose by eight per cent compared with the previous year.

22.4 The Communications Team worked with colleagues from across the Church to improve the clarity, usability, and accessibility of the Church's website. They refined how visitors navigate the site and streamlined how key information is organised. Invisible, but vital, work included introducing new measures to protect against modern cybersecurity threats, reducing exposure to automated abuse, malicious activity, and service disruption.

22.5 Collaborating closely with the IT and Law departments, the Team also delivered a secure new system to provide congregations with a safe and accessible way to manage sensitive property and trustee information.

22.6 The Design team worked across all areas of the Church with the number of requests – more than 300 - remaining consistent with previous years. As well as providing guidance and a design service for congregations and presbyteries, the team contributed graphics to strategic Church campaigns such as Vivid Vision, the Moderators Challenge, and the work of the Guild. They delivered memorable imagery for Advent and the 2025 General Assembly, worked with the Faith Action Team on designs for the Day of Prayer and presented the Church's Annual Report in a visually engaging way.

23 ESTATES DEPARTMENT

23.1 The Estates team manages operational properties owned by the Unincorporated Entities and reporting to the Assembly Trustees. Managing buildings, tenants, health & safety compliance, planned and reactive maintenance and co-ordinating day to day operating of the national offices.

23.2 This year we have achieved 100% occupancy of the national offices, generating an additional onward income of £515,000 per annum (covering most running costs). The majority of tenants (93% by floor space) are charities with similar ethos and overlapping objectives and include Worldwide Cancer Research, Unicef and Safe Families, all welcome assets to our office community. A proportion of initial earned funds were utilised to refurbish Church of Scotland office space, creating brighter, open plan areas to be more welcoming to staff and visitors, including installation of additional kitchen and bathroom facilities. Underused meeting rooms are let externally occasionally, to the likes of the Scottish Courts, Redress Scotland, NHS or small charities, to maximise income generation.

23.3 This co-location has enabled the national office and tenants to reduce their respective carbon footprints through efficiencies and sharing energy costs. We continue recycling initiatives and upgrading over 90% of lighting to LEDs. The team also manages travel and provides reporting on associated carbon emissions.

23.4 We actively manage 25 other properties such as John Knox House / Scottish Storytelling Centre, office and domestic accommodation and furlough housing. Undertaking statutory testing and ongoing maintenance and repair schedules including the current programme of planned maintenance works to the historic fabric of John Knox House.

24 FAITH ACTION TEAM

The Church of Scotland's Faith Action Programme aims to equip individuals and congregations for mission through five key teams: Mission Support, Public Life and Social Justice, Presbytery & Partnership Support, People and Training, and Resource and Presence. The Faith Action staff work to strengthen mission in areas the local church requires, promote social justice engagement, provide training for all types of ministries, oversee deployment and partnerships in ministry, and contribute towards the Church's sustainability. A further account of the work of Faith Action can be found in their own report elsewhere in the Blue Book.

25 HEALTH AND SAFETY

Over the past year, health and safety performance across CSC teams, field-based staff and our centrally managed properties have continued to improve, with fewer near misses, accidents and incidents than the previous year. One HSE reportable case was successfully concluded, and one safety instruction remains under review. We also maintained strong proactive safety practices, supporting a wide range of events, delivering structured inductions and training for new colleagues, carrying out risk assessments for existing staff and activities, and completing regular workstation assessments. International travel safety and security remained well managed throughout. Overall, the year reflects positive progress and a continued commitment to keeping our people safe.

26 HUMAN RESOURCES

26.1 The Human Resources Department provides comprehensive HR advice and support to the employing agencies of the Church, with the exception of CrossReach. Delivering a full generalist HR service, the team supports all stages of the employment lifecycle and provides a dedicated learning and development function. The team advise on a complete range of employment topics including recruitment and selection, contractual matters, employee relations case work and health and well-being. These areas sit alongside policy development, job design and evaluation, the payroll interface and contributing to annual pay reviews discussions.

26.2 During this last year, the department has supported the Priorities Project within CSC in partnership with the Employee Council Committee and the final implementation year of the Presbytery Mission Plans where it affected MDS colleagues. These regrettably did result in a number of changes for staff, including redundancies but also redeployments, with the HR team ensuring that these processes were managed professionally and sensitively. Since the last General Assembly, more guidance and advice is being given to presbyteries and congregations on local HR matters, in conjunction with the legal assistance from the Law Department.

26.3 The priorities for the department for the coming year are employee engagement and creating and developing a learning culture. The HR team remain committed to providing professional and responsive support in line with the Church's values.

27 IT DEPARTMENT

27.1 Throughout the year the IT Team have upgraded the core systems that allow staff to log in and access their work, improving reliability and performance, including moving from traditional on-site printing to a cloud-based solution, making printing more flexible and easier to manage. All staff devices were upgraded from Windows 10 to Windows 11 to ensure continued security and compatibility with modern software.

27.2 National office and presbytery staff were transitioned onto Microsoft 365 Business applications, providing improved collaboration tools and a more consistent working experience. Older servers were safely retired and, where needed, replaced with modern systems. Within the General Assembly building, a new networking solution was introduced to improve both speed and resilience. In addition, the team continued to provide technical support to tenants within the national office.

27.3 A significant focus during 2025 was digital transformation. The first phase of Project Lighthouse was delivered, replacing older databases with a more modern and sustainable system. This included detailed planning, design, development, testing, and a successful launch. An in-depth review of the General Trustees' property management requirements was conducted that will assist in shaping future improvements. Work began on preparing for the replacement of the finance system, and new reporting tools were developed to provide clearer insights and better decision-making information.

27.4 To strengthen resilience, a new, comprehensive backup and recovery service across all systems was introduced. The disaster recovery processes were also reviewed and improved to ensure an effective response in the event of disruption.

27.5 Supporting colleagues remains a core part of the departments work. During 2025, the IT Team resolved 3,060 helpdesk requests, an average of around 12 per working day, alongside delivering major project work. A clearer and more structured process for onboarding and off-boarding staff was introduced, helping to ensure appropriate access and security.

27.6 Security continues to be a key priority. Additional file protection measures were introduced within Microsoft Teams, firewall and network policies were regularly updated, which continued to strengthen security across both on-site and cloud-based systems.

27.7 Finally, a new phishing awareness programme was launched to help staff recognise and respond to suspicious emails, reinforcing a collective responsibility in keeping information safe.

27.8 Overall, 2025 has been a year of strengthening foundations, modernising systems, and building resilience, ensuring that technology continues to support the wider mission and work of the Church.

28 LAW DEPARTMENT

28.1 The Law Department has had another busy year, dealing with a wide range of legal matters for congregations, presbyteries and other Church bodies, with informal feedback on the service provided being consistently very positive. It continues to handle a high volume of often sensitive property disposals flowing from the implementation of Presbytery Mission Plans. Many congregations are taking the opportunity to replace older, less energy-efficient manses

and the Department has been active in the marketing and sale of these buildings and the acquisition of more suitable properties. The Department also liaises with OSCR to document changes resulting from ongoing adjustments and ran a live webinar for congregations and presbyteries to provide guidance on changes in charity law in 2025.

28.2 The team have been involved in dispute resolution of various kinds on behalf of congregations, including recovery of vacant possession of let manses and of arrears of rent; Council Tax disputes; the successful defence of a claim of unfair dismissal at an employment tribunal; ongoing guidance in difficult employment matters and providing a telephone support service for one-off employment queries.

28.3 Management and delivery of data protection compliance across the Church sits with the Department and the team also act for the Housing & Loan Fund, the Church of Scotland General Trustees and the Church of Scotland Trust in a huge variety of matters. The solicitors represent the standing committees of the Church in many ways, for example. putting in place 15 commercial leases to achieve full occupation of the top floors of 121 George Street; reviewing and negotiating contracts; advice and support to the Safeguarding Service; contract review, debt recovery and other matters for CrossReach; and close working with the Principal and Depute Clerks on matters of Church and civil law.

28.4 The Department drafted submissions to the Scottish Covid Inquiry on behalf of the Church in relation to Worship and Life Events Impact Hearings in the summer of 2025, in support of witness statements from Church office-bearers. It also represented CrossReach at the Health and Social Care Impact Hearings and continues to support and represent CrossReach in its engagement with the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry.

28.5 His friends and colleagues in the Department and across the Church were shocked and saddened by the death in March of Gregor Buick, one of the solicitors in the property team, after a tragic accident. Gregor had worked in the team for 14 years and was greatly valued not only for his legal expertise and good judgement but for his readiness to help colleagues and clients and his friendly and engaging manner. He is hugely missed and fondly remembered.

29 OFFICE OF THE ASSEMBLY TRUSTEES

Over this past year the Office of the Assembly Trustees has continued to offer support to the Chief Officer who has overall executive responsibility for Central Services Committee (CSC) employees and budgets and is accountable to the Assembly Trustees for the implementation of vision, strategy, priorities and policy as determined by the General Assembly. Support is also offered to the constituent committees and groups of the Office of the Assembly Trustees include the Central Services Committee (CSC); Assembly Trustees' Governance Group; Finance Group; Seeds for Growth Committee; Israel Palestine Committee; Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Group and any ad hoc groups created by the Trustees. Further work has been undertaken to enable the Audit Committee as they advise and assist the Assembly Trustees in the oversight of financial reporting, systems of internal control and risk management. Other areas where the Office of the Assembly Trustees are active include Congregational statistics and health and safety.

30 SAFEGUARDING

30.1 The work of the Safeguarding Service is continually evolving to meet the needs of the Church of Scotland in respect of their regulatory and legislative compliance with Safeguarding Guidance, Church Law, Scots Law and the relevant legislative frameworks worldwide. The Safeguarding Service undertakes the following on behalf of the General Assembly.

30.2 The staged introduction of the Disclosure (Scotland) Act 2020 in April 2025, has increased the number of roles which are now defined as 'Regulated Roles'. This had a significant impact on the numbers of PVG applications being processed.

30.3 Data accuracy related to Disclosure (Scotland) Act 2020 and the Data Protection Act 2018 continues to provide significant challenge. A large data cleanse project has been running from late 2023 and is progressing. To date, the Safeguarding Service has removed over 15,000 volunteers from our records. Significant challenges remain and the exploration of alternative arrangements has begun.

30.4 The safeguarding concern service facilitated by our experienced Safeguarding Officers has seen the number and complexity of safeguarding and protection referrals continue to increase. Feedback demonstrates that people welcome the guidance and advice provided, often in very difficult situations. Safeguarding Officers implement a person-centred trauma informed approach to their work, which empowers individuals to take the appropriate action and/or work with the Safeguarding Officers to affect such a response.

30.5 Facilitated by the Safeguarding Advisor and Administration Team, the Safeguarding Advice Service dealt with numerous requests in 2025 focusing on identifying 'Regulated Roles' within congregations, in line with changes to legislation. The Safeguarding Service worked closely with Disclosure Scotland to undertake a review of all roles within the Church ensuring a shared understanding of our Regulated Roles. The requirement for everyone visiting care homes for older people on behalf of the Church to have PVG Scheme membership raised understandable concerns; however, we must follow the guidance of Disclosure Scotland. The Advice Service also continued to support congregations in promoting good safeguarding practice through a range of policy, procedures and practical guidance for the day-to-day work and life of the Church.

30.6 The Safeguarding Administration Team are experts in matters relating to criminal records checks across a range of countries and legislative frameworks. Disclosure Scotland has implemented a new default position of online applications which has created barriers to volunteering. The Administration Team has been working towards reducing these barriers through the provision of additional support.

30.7 Working with those who pose a risk is an important part of the Safeguarding Service's work. Relevant sections of deliverance of previous General Assemblies have been implemented resulting in a fairer, more proportionate system of Covenants of Responsibilities.

31 STEWARDSHIP AND FINANCE

31.1 The Stewardship and Finance Department continues to support the life and mission of the Church by delivering core financial, accounting and stewardship services. As part of its routine work, the department prepares statutory annual accounts, administers payroll, manages restricted funds, maintains the *Giving to Grow* system, provides guidance to congregational treasurers, and ensures strong financial controls and compliance across the Church's national operations. The stewardship team continues to encourage and equip congregations in Christian giving, generosity and income generation, working closely with the local church to provide tailored support.

31.2 Since the General Assembly of 2025, the department has delivered a wide range of additional activity. This has included progressing the new financing ministry model, supporting congregations through the online tool *Bearing Fruit: A financial health check for growth*, and delivering presbytery and congregational workshops and webinars. The team has also scoped, tendered and launched the project to implement a new finance system; completed the disinvestment and transfer of the Consolidated Stipend Fund; and supported the Scots Hotel working group in exploring future operating models. Further work has included implementing full cost recovery, advancing the restricted funds review and updating processes following changes to vacancy allowances. Alongside contributing to the Priorities Project and related organisational changes, the department has continued work on budgets for 2026 and beyond. The team of four regionally based stewardship consultants has seen a marked rise in requests for direct support from congregations, reflecting a growing recognition that stewardship needs to feature prominently within the life of our church. This change in mindset has been further encouraged by positive and practical webinars from the team on 'preaching generosity' and 'growing giving in your congregation'.

In the name of the Assembly Trustees

DAVID CAMERON, *Convener*
GEOFF MILLER, *Vice-Convener*
KEITH BLACKWOOD, *Administrative Trustee*

Addendum

Rev David Cameron, Convener of the Assembly Trustees

Rev David Cameron joined the Assembly Trustees in 2022 having served the Church for many years at local, presbytery and national level. His experience in parish ministry and his understanding of the challenges facing the national Church as an Assembly Trustee as well as being convener of a number of General Assembly bodies, presbytery committees and local community organisations has served him well in contributing to the work of the Assembly Trustees. It was no surprise when David followed The Very Rev Dr John Chalmers as Convener in 2023.

In 2023 when David became Convener, the Trustees were dealing with the challenges that COVID had presented, and the Trustees had a plan on dealing with these challenges. However, throughout 2021 and 2022 there was a further economic shock, with the cost-of-living crisis, and this presented further significant challenges for the Church. Under David's leadership it was recognised that what was required was fundamental change in order to get to a sustainable financial model that served the church in good times and in difficult times. This required courage to come up with more radical solutions, vision to see what was required and engagement across all the various stakeholders to ensure buy in and acceptance.

These are the qualities that David has brought to this role. David possesses a drive, a single-minded focus, clarity of thought and an ability to communicate at all levels, with at all times a Christ-centred focus and a heart for what is best for the Church. David's strong leadership enabled the trustees to work together with a sense of purpose and clear direction, and it is testament to this that the Church is now significantly better placed to deal with the further challenges that lie ahead. The work goes on but the foundations have been laid. The Churches finances are on a more stable footing, relationships with key parts of the Church have been strengthened and there is better understanding and more engagement of the issues that require to be addressed going forward. The Church of Scotland owes a debt of gratitude to David for his faithful service and for stepping up to this crucial role at a vital time and for this we say a heartfelt thank you.

GEOFF MILLER, *Vice-Convener*
KEITH BLACKWOOD, *Administrative Trustee*

Appendix 1

[ ] REGULATIONS AMENDING THE CONGREGATIONAL FINANCE REGULATIONS (REGULATIONS II 2016) (AS AMENDED)

Edinburgh, [ ] May 2026, Session [ ]

The General Assembly hereby enact and ordain that the Congregational Finance Regulations (Regulations II 2016), as amended, shall be further amended as follows:

1. *In paragraph 2* (**REGULATIONS FOR CONGREGATIONAL BUDGETS**) *(b), add at the end* "(or, in the case of the Presbytery of International Charges, the office of the applicable Regulator)".
2. At the end of the Regulations, after paragraph 3, add a new paragraph 4 as follows:

4. APPLICATION TO THE INTERNATIONAL PRESBYTERY

"Sections 1(A) to 1(C) of these Regulations do not apply to congregations within the Presbytery of International Charges. Such congregations shall prepare their annual accounts in accordance with the legal and statutory reporting obligations of the jurisdiction in which they operate, and these local requirements shall take precedence over the accounting formats and reporting standards set out in these Regulations. If the local requirements do not require an independent examination or audit, an independent examination must nevertheless be performed, by a person who is reasonably believed by the Financial Board (or equivalent) of the congregation to have the requisite ability and practical experience to carry out a competent examination of the accounts."

Appendix 2

MEMBERSHIP OF ASSEMBLY TRUSTEES' SUB-COMMITTEES

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Group Membership

Role	Term ending	Name
Convener	GA 2027*	Mandy Ralph
Vice-Convener	GA 2028	Jennifer MacDonald
Assembly Trustee	GA 2029	Nairn Angus-McDonald
Assembly Trustee	GA 2028	Adam Dillon
Member	GA 2029	Reuben Addis
Member	GA 2028	James Aitken
Member	GA 2028*	Shuna Dicks
Member	GA 2029	Lynsey Kimmitt
Member	GA 2028 (mid-term appointment)	Jean Kirkwood
Member	GA 2027	Malcolm McIntrye
Member	GA 2027	Graeme Shaw
Member	GA 2027	Gordon Strang
Member	GA 2029 *	Katrona Templeton
Co-opt	GA 2028	Dan Harper

** denotes a reappointment*

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.

The remit of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Group is to:

- Provide advice, guidance, and constructive challenge to a wide range of Church bodies;
- Support inclusive policy and strategy development through shared expertise;
- Promote deeper awareness of EDI issues and encourage theological and cultural reflection;
- Serve as a resource and sounding board for EDI-related initiatives;
- Offer regular thematic insights to the Assembly Trustees to inform broader Church understanding.

Israel Palestine Committee Membership

Role	Term ending	Name
Convener	GA 2027	Michael Yuille
Vice-Convener	GA 2028	David Gray
Member (& Assembly Trustee)	While a Trustee	Will Storrar
Member	GA 2027	Teri Peterson
Member	GA 2029	Vacancy
Chair of Directors St Andrew's Galilee Ltd and St Andrew's Scottish Centre Ltd		George Russell
Chair of Governors Tabeetha School in Jaffa		Bart McGettrick

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 officiis*) to deputise for the Convener when unavailable; three members; plus 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. Co-opts may sit on the Committee membership for specific and time limited tasks.

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. 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.

Seeds for Growth Committee Membership

Role	Term ending	Name
Convener	GA 2028*	Jamie Milliken
Vice-Convener	GA 2029	Anthea Bircham
Assembly Trustee	While a Trustee	Sarah Ross
Assembly Trustee	While a Trustee	Adam Dillon
Member	GA 2029	Peter Wood
Member	GA 2029	Murdo Macmillan
Member	GA 2029	Anne Stott
Member	GA 2028	Mark Nicholas
Member	GA 2028*	Fiona Morrison
Member	GA 2027	Andrew Robertson
Member	GA 2027	Vacancy

**denotes a reappointment*

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.

JOINT REPORT OF THE ASSEMBLY TRUSTEES AND THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND TRUST ON THE SCOTS HOTEL, TIBERIAS MAY 2026

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Authorise the Assembly Trustees and The Church of Scotland Trust to take all necessary steps to lease the Scots Hotel to the preferred operator, or to another hotel operator which meets the selection criteria set out in the Joint Report should it not be possible to negotiate satisfactory terms with the preferred operator, for an agreed period and on commercial terms to be agreed by the Trustees in line with professional advice received by them in the UK and in Israel, and with a commitment by the lessee to continue to honour the heritage of the hotel and the ethos of the Church of Scotland *(Section 6)*.

Executive Summary

The General Assembly 2025 charged the Assembly Trustees to achieve a balanced budget by 2027. Cost reductions and savings implemented in the 2026 budget total £4.5m. The Assembly Trustees have reviewed many activities to assess alignment with agreed priorities, efficiency, effectiveness and affordability. That review has, by necessity, included the Scots Hotel, Tiberias.

The Assembly Trustees and The Church of Scotland Trust remain committed to the Church's continued presence and Christian mission in Israel and Palestine. They recognise the efforts and commitment of directors and staff to demonstrate Christian values to all guests, support small suppliers and work together harmoniously as a multi faith, multi racial team. However, key financial results show the hotel has not been financially sustainable, nor operated profitably and has rent and loan repayments outstanding to the Church of Scotland.

- Accumulated losses in 2022-2025 exceed £3m.
- Total accumulated losses to 31 December 2025 exceed £14.5m.
- Accumulated tax losses to end 2024 of £18.3m.
- Unpaid rent and loan repayments in recent years totalling £1.56m.
- Current balance on the loan of £10m is now £9.44m plus unpaid interest of £0.73m.
- The hotel has no funds available to meet the £1.12m cost of time critical, essential improvements and refurbishments.
- The Church has had to provide cash in late 2025 and early 2026 to fund operational costs.

The Assembly Trustees considered options for the future of the hotel. Retention and continued operation was deemed financially unsustainable. Selling the hotel would realise a cash sum and relieve the Church of all responsibilities for the hotel but staff would be unemployed and the loss of Christian land would be harmful to local Christians and hurtful to ecumenical partners.

Leasing the hotel to an established, reputable hotel operator would maintain ownership by the Church, provide employment for staff and guarantee substantial, regular income for the Church which could contribute to the development of mission in Israel and Palestine and elsewhere.

The Assembly Trustees agreed key selection criteria and established a Working Group to seek potential operators, identify a preferred operator and negotiate the terms of a lease. The Working Group engaged specialist advisers on the Israeli hotel sector, took advice on Israeli and UK law and tax and undertook business and financial diligence of potential partners.

Key terms of the proposed lease agreed with the preferred operator include:

- Maintenance of the hotel name and brand and commitments to operation as non-kosher and in accordance with defined Christian ethos and values.
- Substantial annual rental payments plus regular rental uprating.
- Significant investment in the fixtures, fitments and furnishings of the hotel and annual sums committed to regular refurbishment.
- Employment opportunities for current staff.

After careful and prayerful consideration of the varied and complex issues, the Assembly Trustees and The Church of Scotland Trust concluded that this lease provides the most sound and secure way forward which will provide substantial financial benefit to the Church, employment of staff and opportunities to support Christian mission, local Christians and our ecumenical partners in the area and beyond.

Report

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Church of Scotland has a significant holding of land in the State of Israel. In addition to a church and guesthouse in Jerusalem, a school in Jaffa and a church and other accommodation in Tiberias, the Church owns and runs the Scots Hotel in Tiberias in buildings that were originally a clinic and hospital and have, over the years, been developed into a maternity unit, a guesthouse, and latterly a hotel.

1.2 In 1999 the General Assembly approved the development of the Sea of Galilee Centre (now the Scots Hotel, subsequently referred to as "the hotel" in this Report) at Tiberias. Investments in the Investors Trust were realised to fund the development. The business case for the development stated that the return to the Church from the hotel business would exceed the return from investments in the Investors Trust. Funding arrangements were put in place with a "Back-to-Back" loan of $12.5M to the hotel company (St Andrew's Galilee Limited) from an Israeli bank, secured by a $12.5M deposit from the World Mission Council. In 2019 it was necessary to re-structure the financing arrangements. The Back-to-Back loan facility with the Israeli bank was repaid and replaced with a charitable loan of £10m from The Church of Scotland Trust to St Andrew's Galilee Limited. Under this arrangement, the Trust repays the capital and gifts the interest on the loan to the Unincorporated Entities of the Church of Scotland (UE) and the loan is not taxable.

1.3 St Andrew's Galilee Limited, an Israeli company, operates the hotel. The company was set up to take advantage of Israeli tax incentives and is fully incorporated into the Church of Scotland accounts as a subsidiary company. The Church of Scotland Trust is the sole shareholder and the company is operated by a board of directors drawn from members of the Church of Scotland.

1.4 Title to the property is held in the name of The Church of Scotland Trust, as a nominal trustee on behalf of the UE. The beneficial interest lies with the UE. The Church of Scotland Trust leases the hotel to St Andrew's Galilee Limited. Rental payments received from St Andrew's Galilee Limited are gifted from The Church of Scotland Trust to the UE.

1.5 By 1999 the existing Sea of Galilee Centre had suffered from a lack of investment over the years. The decision was then made to commit to a large-scale redevelopment of the buildings in pursuit of the hoped-for rejuvenation of the Church's presence in Galilee, to allow a substantial increase in the numbers of pilgrims staying in the hotel, provide an opportunity of ministry to pilgrims and guests and contribute to a greater understanding of the issues facing those living in Israel and Palestine. It was also seen as playing an important role in welcoming people of all faiths, daily contact with the local community providing an opportunity for both Jews and Muslims to interact in a natural way with both local and expatriate Christians and staff of all three faiths working side by side and in harmony for the good of the hotel and its witness to the wider society.

1.6 When the 1999 Assembly approved the initial investment, it was envisaged that the redevelopment would enable the hotel to become financially independent of the then Board of World Mission's central resources and ultimately to become a financial contributor to the Church's wider work elsewhere in Israel and elsewhere in the world. Unfortunately, as set out below, that has not proved to be the case and the operation of the hotel has required subsidy from Church funds, more frequently in recent years as the pandemic has been followed by increased political volatility in the region.

1.7 We have looked at the missional activities facilitated or provided by the hotel, in the light of this financial shortfall, and considered whether these activities justify their ongoing cost or whether the stated aims of the Church in the region might be achieved in a different way. The inescapable conclusion is that the hotel has not achieved all that had been hoped for in terms of Christian mission in the region. Its charging rates are higher than many pilgrim visitors are able or willing to pay, which means that the bulk of its hospitality is offered to guests who have a purely commercial relationship with it (although that is not to minimise the Christian ethos of the hotel, from which guests and staff benefit). We recognise the value that the directors place on living out a just peace in an employment setting, reflecting Christian values in how staff are treated and in the ethical sourcing of supplies, but are not persuaded that these should be the overriding considerations in our current context, with pressing financial constraints in every element of the Church's work and a corresponding need to review all of our activities.

1.8 GA2025 instructed the Assembly Trustees to achieve a balanced budget by 2027. If the Trustees were to pursue that to the exclusion of all else, then it could be done expeditiously by closing any loss-making programme or initiative and be entirely within the scope of responsibility as given by the GA to the Trustees. Yet in that approach, which will reduce / mitigate risks, how are we true to the fact we are not only a charity, we are also the Church of Scotland, called to engage in God's mission to the world?

1.9 This tension lies at the heart of the Assembly Trustees' and The Church of Scotland Trust's approach to the question of a loss-making hotel in Israel and the proposal, set out in more detail below, that the Church relinquish direct responsibility for running the hotel and instead enter into a partnership with a local hotel company to run and manage the hotel under a long lease.

1.10 Selling the hotel and the land it sits on would be the most straightforward option as there would be no on-going responsibility for it, but it was made clear by our ecumenical partners in the world church and by all with whom we consulted that giving up Christian land would be harmful to local Christians and hurtful to our ecumenical family. We are therefore not pursuing that approach. We propose that we retain ownership of the land and hotel which in 24 years and 11 months will come out of lease and return to the Church of Scotland. A lease is a more complicated option exactly because of the ongoing engagement it requires. The Assembly Trustees and The Church of Scotland Trust are aware of this but consider our Christian duty to the local Christians and our ecumenical partners (along with hotel staff) to be worth the attendant risks and responsibilities a lease brings. Sometimes not taking the easier path is the Christian thing to do and we consider that to be the case here.

1.11 In the journey to reach this decision the Assembly Trustees are fully aware that for many years expenditure incurred by the Church of Scotland has exceeded income leading to substantial deficits. To date the ATs have reviewed many programmes and activities to assess how each aligns with agreed priorities, if they operate efficiently and effectively, deliver value for money and are affordable.

1.12 The Church's activities in Israel and Palestine are not exempt, and the rest of this report outlines the rationale behind the recommendation of the Assembly Trustees and The Church of Scotland Trust to lease the hotel rather than continue to run it directly, with the attendant costs and risks of doing so as set out below.

1.13 Before getting into details the Assembly Trustees and The Church of Scotland Trust once again state they remain committed to maintaining and enhancing the Church's presence and Christian mission in Israel and Palestine and believe that this will best be achieved through application of income from the lease rather than depending on anticipated profit from our own operation of the hotel, which has proved to be unreliable at best.

2. FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE OF THE HOTEL

2.1 Firstly we would acknowledge the hard work, commitment and faithfulness of the staff, managers and directors to provide a warm welcome and high-quality services to all users of the hotel, and how much it is appreciated. All have adhered to the General Assembly direction to operate to high social and ethical standards, to work in harmony as a multi faith, multi racial team, to demonstrate Christian values to all who patronise the hotel and to support small suppliers.

2.2 The hotel directors have recognised the need for the hotel to be financially sustainable, to operate profitably and to return funds (rent and loan repayments) to the Church. The main currency used in Israel is the New Israeli Shekel (NIS). That the hotel has not managed this in recent years is demonstrated by the accumulated losses incurred by St Andrew's Galilee Ltd over the past 4 years (2022-2025), which are in excess of £3m (NIS 14m). Total accumulated losses at 31 December 2024 were £14.26m (NIS 65.07m) with an expected increase to £14.85m (NIS 68.32m) at 31 December 2025. Accumulated tax losses of £18.3m (NIS 84.3m) had accrued at 31 December 2024 with further tax losses expected for 2025.

2.3 The hotel was unable to pay its rent in 2023, 2024 and 2025, nor loan repayments due in 2024 and 2025. The total outstanding by the hotel to the Church for unpaid rent and loan interest (excluding the loan capital balance) is £1.56m (NIS 7.19m). If the Church sought payment of all or part of this amount the hotel is likely to be insolvent under Israeli law as it would be unable to meet its debts as they fall due. The loan of £10m was made to the hotel by The Church of Scotland Trust in 2019 with a repayment period of 39 years. The current balance on the loan is £9.44m plus unpaid interest of £0.73m. Assuming the contracted repayment amount is paid in each year going forward the date of full repayment will be 2060. Any further default will delay the repayment date further.

2.4 Urgent, time critical improvements and refurbishment requirements costing over £0.42m (NIS 1.92m) for 2026 were identified by the directors. HVS Global Hospitality Services (HVS) – an international consulting and valuation services organisation focused on the leisure and hospitality industry – estimated a further spend of £0.7m (NIS 3.22m) would be required to refurbish guest rooms to maintain the standard of the hotel, bringing a total of £1.12m (NIS 5.15m) necessary spend in the short term.

2.5 Together with the ongoing security concerns in the wider region and the resultant uncertainty of tourism within and to Israel, there was no certainty the hotel would be able to both cover its debts and remain in operation without further cash injections. It was therefore decided that in depth consideration must be given to options for the future of the hotel, recognising always the dual responsibilities of charity and church. A Working Group comprising members of the Assembly Trustees along with a representative of The Church of Scotland Trust was therefore tasked to take this forward.

2.6 St Andrew's Galilee Ltd, which operates the hotel, has shown declining financial performance over recent years. Some but not all of this can be considered due to the declining tourist markets during the Covid Pandemic and more recently the ongoing conflict in the country and the political and security uncertainty in the wider region.

2.7 In addition to the losses previously mentioned, cash funding requirements were requested, and paid, from the Church of Scotland in late 2025 and early 2026. £0.07m (NIS £0.3m) was paid in 2025 and requests made for January to March 2026 are for £0.17m (NIS 0.8m) – these are to fund operational costs.

2.8 As part of the 2026 budget, the directors identified a number of specific areas in the hotel which required maintenance and improvement to maintain standards. The estimated cost of this is £0.42m (NIS 1.92m). In the review undertaken by HVS in the first half of 2025, they noted that £0.88m (NIS 4m) expenditure was required to renovate the guest bedrooms and other maintenance/improvement works. Some of this work has been included in the directors' review for 2026 resulting in the total required short term spend of £1.16m (NIS 5.29m). However, resources within the company have not been, and are not, available in order to undertake this work.

2.9 Within the hotel sector it is normal practice to create a reserve from income each year to fund ongoing maintenance and refurbishment costs required within a hotel – around 4% of annual income would be reasonable. Based on 2024 accounts of the hotel this would have been £0.14m (NIS 0.65m). Based on 2022 income (the last full year prior to the war) this would have equated to £0.24m (NIS 1.11m). The Directors have not been able to create such a reserve or provide for such costs due to ongoing losses.

2.10 If there are no changes to operations and the ongoing cash flow funding is not provided by the Church, or outstanding debts are called upon then there is a high risk of insolvency for St Andrew's Galilee. This would result in the hotel immediately ceasing to trade, a need to sell the hotel at possibly a significantly reduced value, with loss of employment for all staff and the loss of Christian land and presence in Israel and Palestine.

2.11 As part of the Audited Financial Statements for 2024 for St Andrew's Galilee, the external auditors required both a letter of support from the Church to confirm no debts would be called upon within the following 12 months, and also for the directors to confirm how they, and management, would address the accumulated loss and future going concern situation of the company. Letters of support were similarly required in previous years. That these letters were required is a reflection of the precarious nature of the hotel's financial situation.

3. OPTIONS EXPLORED FOR THE FUTURE OF THE HOTEL

3.1 Due to the losses accumulated by the hotel, the ongoing uncertainty of peace and security and the resultant negative impact on tourism, the Assembly Trustees decided that options for the future of the hotel had to be examined. Four options were considered, namely:

1. Retain the hotel and continue to operate it, under the direction of a board of directors, and the implementation of any necessary changes to governance and operations. All funds required for the ongoing operations not generated by the hotel itself would have to be given by the Church. We retain ownership of the land.
2. Retain and prepare for sale: this option envisaged the Church continuing to own and operate the hotel until such time as normal market conditions returned, and the hotel could be sold at a higher value. It was envisaged that this might be in 2028 but the June 2025 war between Iran and Israel set back the sector recovery and it was considered more likely that full value may not be achieved until 2029. This option also commits the Church to ongoing funding to the hotel in the hope that market conditions improve, of which there is no guarantee in the short to medium term. This means selling the land and reducing our Christian presence in Israel and Palestine.
3. Sell immediately: this option envisaged the Church moving directly to sell the hotel, with its value being maximised by a sale as a going concern. The Church would have to continue to provide financial support until a buyer was found and the sale completed. This means selling the land and reducing our Christian presence in Israel and Palestine.
4. Lease the hotel to an external hotel company which would take on the operation of the hotel, pay an annual rent to the Church for use of the asset and remove from the Church much of the financial uncertainty and risk. We retain ownership of the land.

3.2 The Assembly Trustees commissioned several papers to inform their decision-making:

- In March 2025 HVS prepared a Summary Valuation Report for the hotel and projections of occupancy and profit/loss performance.
- An overview of the Church's presence and activities in Israel and Palestine was written by staff at the national offices who have had a long involvement in that area of our work.
- Also produced by staff in the National Office, a report catalogued the mission work undertaken at the hotel by the Mission Partner, hotel staff and others.
- Tax advice was taken from PwC
- Details of the current management and financial arrangements
- An Options Appraisal which set out four options for the future of the hotel with an assessment of each.

3.3 The Assembly Trustees also considered three papers prepared for, and agreed by the directors of the hotel:

- St Andrew's Galilee Ltd. Business Plan
- Directors' Strategy Document May 2025
- Scots Hotel Forecast at July 2025

3.4 The views of the Israel Palestine Committee and ecumenical partners in Israel and Palestine were also considered. In conversation with ecumenical partners, it became clear that they did not consider the missional activity of the hotel as critical to the work of the Church in the area.

In summary the outcome of the consideration of each option was:

3.5 Retain and operate

3.5.1 This option would keep the hotel and land within the ownership of the Church, and the hotel would continue to employ all current staff, maintain the commitment to employ those of differing faiths and backgrounds and to support small, fair-trade suppliers. However, given the current financial situation of the hotel, the costs of needed refurbishment would have to be paid by the Church from general funds. Also, risks of financial loss year on year and of the need for cash input to keep the hotel open in times of low occupancy would remain, as would the ongoing risk of insolvency due to the hotel being unable to pay bills as they become due (with attendant personal risks for individual directors of the company). Significant changes would be necessary to the governance, strategy and operation of the hotel with no guarantee of these changes resulting in a return to profitability.

3.6 Retain and prepare for sale

3.6.1 This option would keep the land and buildings in Christian ownership, provide ongoing employment of current hotel staff and the support for small suppliers only for a period of time. HVS projected that the hotel could achieve an increase in occupancy and profitability following the return of peace and of international tourists. It was anticipated that, if the hotel achieved the projected profitability the sales value at the end of the period of successful operation would be considerably higher than that of an immediate sale.

3.6.2 However, the increased profit level was dependent upon a significant increase in room rates, substantial investment in refurbishment and the achievement of a gross operating profit level considerably beyond that achieved in past years. The costs of the necessary refurbishment would have to be paid by the Church, as the hotel had no available reserves funds and the strategy and business plans adopted by the directors did not include changes or plans to drive and support such improved performance.

3.6.3 The Assembly Trustees had significant concerns that without significant changes in governance, strategy and operating methods and urgent, substantial investment the projected profit figures would not be attained. In addition to the need to fund the costs of refurbishment the Church would continue to face ongoing uncertainty of the financial performance of the hotel and the possibility of cash support being required to maintain operations. The sale and resultant loss of Christian land would bring considerable damage to our ecumenical relations with other Christian denominations in the area.

3.7 Immediate sale

3.7.1 The proceeds from an 'immediate' sale would provide much needed capital to finance the operations and growth of the Church but once spent it is spent, the asset would be lost and the outstanding loan value (almost £10m) would have to be written off. Hotel staff would all lose their jobs. In addition, the sale would cause the loss of Christian land and buildings never to be regained and would cause considerable disappointment in the local Christian community and reputational damage amongst ecumenical partners and within the Church in Scotland.

3.8 Lease to an established hotel operator

3.8.1 Through retaining the land, the Church would continue to be seen to support local Christians and ecumenical partners. This would in turn give a message that the Church of Scotland sees itself having an ongoing involvement in Christian life in Israel and Palestine. This was clearly seen as the best way of holding responsibilities of being a charity and a church together.

3.8.2 The Church would not be responsible for day-to-day management of the hotel but would retain ownership of the buildings and land. There would be some landlord responsibilities under Israeli law and in terms of the lease, as negotiated, which means that the Church would remain a stakeholder. There would also be a mechanism for monitoring and managing the lease conditions. The key terms of a lease would include a substantial annual rental payment and significant initial investment in the refurbishment of the hotel and an annual sum from the rental could be put aside to fund future upkeep and refurbishment costs. This would provide certainty of income to the Church while releasing the Church from the need to provide funding support or the need to invest in the hotel. A further benefit of leasing would be that a professional operator would have capacity in depth across their business portfolio to absorb losses if the Scots Hotel experienced periods of reduced capacity such has been the case through Covid and the current regional difficulties.

3.8.3 It is anticipated that a new operator would offer continued employment to staff of the hotel with similar pay and conditions and agree to purchase from small suppliers who rely on hotel business for their livelihoods. The Church would be able to stipulate that the hotel remained non-kosher, retained the name 'Scots Hotel' and the heritage of the hotel as displayed within the visitor centre. The guaranteed annual income would meet the Church's costs related to the hotel and contribute to the growth of ministry and mission and the development of the Church's ongoing mission in Israel and Palestine.

3.8.4 The lease arrangement would apply only to the hotel and the land it occupies. The remaining land and buildings owned by the Church in Tiberias would continue to be used for missional purposes. The church at Tiberias has offered services each Sunday and a Minister resident to offer pastoral support. It also provides premises for Messianic Fellowships and for visiting Christian groups to worship. At the time of writing, the Israel Palestine Committee is considering how best to deploy mission partners, under a new arrangement, but is committed to retaining activities in the church building.

3.8.5 After much discussion, consideration and prayer the Assembly Trustees decided to explore the option of a lease to an established, reputable hotel operator. Subsequently The Church of Scotland Trust agreed to support that decision.

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4. SELECTION OF THE PREFERRED LESSEE – PROCESS AND OUTCOME

4.1 The working group of Assembly Trustees and a member of The Church of Scotland Trust explored the chosen option. HVS were engaged to provide expert support and advice, based upon their knowledge of the local hotel market and valuations, operating conditions and key operators in Israel and of negotiating leases. Firon Law Firm, a prominent Israeli company with strong credentials in commercial leases were engaged to provide legal advice and PwC were retained to provide advice on Israeli tax matters and financial due diligence.

4.2 An extensive and complex programme of work to identify potential lessees, and then a preferred operator, offering within the lease good investment, substantial annual income for the Church and appropriate guarantees and governance arrangements was undertaken and completed.

4.3 The Working Group met with the directors of St Andrew's Galilee, members of the Israel Palestine Committee, Trustees of The Church of Scotland Trust, the Ecumenical Officer and the Chair of Tabeetha School in Israel to seek their views on what they:

- Would wish to see in a commercial lease for the operation of the hotel
- Consider would be essential/important in the chosen commercial partner

4.4 The views and advice of those consulted was considered and it was agreed that a potential leasing partner must:

- Be a business of good standing, have a strong financial base and able to continue with the lease and required payments during periods of instability and poor trading
- Have a strong, positive reputation for high quality services and business practices
- Demonstrate positive employment and service practices- inclusive of differing faiths, backgrounds and those with disabilities
- Have a sustained track record of successful, profitable operation of high-quality hotels and associated services
- Operate the hotel in sympathy with the hotel's historical Christian ethos

4.5 The following were agreed to be the key requirements in a lease of the hotel

- Acceptable annual rental payment and scheduled rent reviews
- Sufficient early investment in the refurbishment and upgrading of the hotel furniture, fixtures and equipment

- A lengthy lease to provide security of income for the Church plus mechanisms to allow exit if necessary
- Commitment to employ current hotel staff on the same or similar terms and conditions; and demonstration of inclusive employment practices
- Commitment to source from small suppliers
- Retention of key elements of the mode of operation and Christian ethos enacted within the hotel including the name, similar target market, operation as non-kosher and support for the visitor centre and heritage of the hotel

4.6 From a long list of national and international hotel companies six established operators were identified as possible lessees. Each was given relevant information about the size, location, facilities of the hotel and key financial and occupancy data. In addition, each had an opportunity to tour the hotel buildings and grounds.

- One company decided operating the hotel would not fit well with their business strategy and declined to proceed
- three companies approached the Church directly seeking an opportunity to submit a proposal. Each was considered in terms of the scale and scope of their business and the nature of their proposed contracts and decided none was a good fit to the Church's needs
- five companies submitted proposed heads of terms
- A pre-qualification assessment was conducted of all five companies and their bids against the key selection criteria
- Two companies were eliminated due to the limited fit of their range of business operations and proposals to the needs of the Church
- HVS was consulted and from them further advice on each of the three shortlisted companies was gained
- Further due diligence was commissioned from PwC on the financial performance and stability of the shortlisted companies, which raised no 'red flags' or concerns

5. ASSESSMENT OF THE THREE SHORTLISTED COMPANIES

5.1 As this information is commercially sensitive the identification of each potential operator has not been provided.

5.2 The preferred bidder is a growing hotel company with a shorter track record than the other shortlisted companies. The senior management team have extensive experience in other more established groups and are considered very competent. It is part of a large, well established real estate group and both the hotel company and its parent company have strong financial figures which indicate good resilience to periods of poor tourism, occupancy and income. The company previously bought over another hotel group which includes hotels comparable to the hotel.

5.3 The rental offer gives the best financial return to the Church over the length of the lease. Published information indicates strong non-discrimination and equality policies of employment, payment, training and opportunities for all staff. They have committed to respect the Christian heritage in the operation of the hotel and strong governance clauses in the lease will protect the hotel name, non-kosher operation, staff employment and small supplier support. Of all the prospective companies this was the one which offered the highest confidence that they would be sympathetic to the hotel's ethos.

5.4 Whilst the proposals from the other short-listed operators provided a rental return, both offered lower total rent to the Church over the course of the lease. The annual rent proposed by Operator 2 was below that of the expected minimum. Operator 1 had a strong presence in Israel but did not deliver a balanced portfolio of operations and had a limited presence outwith Israel. Whilst they proposed investing twice as much as the others, there was no specific basis for this and no gain to the Church for this investment – and it raised concern that the strong branding could risk the loss of the hotel's established identity. Operator 2 were considered by HVS to operate their hotels to an acceptable rather than high standard and there was a concern that the hotel would be 'institutionalised' to the group's standard and lose its 'character and heritage'.

5.5 At the time of writing this report detailed financials are in the process of being formulated. This information will be made available to the General Assembly prior to any decision being made.

5.6 Having considered all the available information against the selection criteria as set out above, the Working Group had no hesitation in recommending Operator 3 to both the Assembly Trustees and The Church of Scotland Trust who agreed.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1 For some years the global costs incurred by the Church (UE) have exceeded the income received, resulting in substantial deficits. While some increases in costs have been due to changes and developments to support ministry and mission and the growth of the Church, others have been outwith the Church's control such as increased regulatory requirements, government policies and inflation. Due to ongoing work to reduce costs and ultimately move towards a more sustainable position of a balanced budget by 2027, as instructed at GA25, significant, difficult and necessary cost reductions/savings have been implemented into the 2026 budget totalling £4.5m. None of these savings was achieved without a human cost. Key reductions in costs to the 2026 budget (compared to that presented to GA25), which contributed to the reducing deficit are:

- Reduced staff costs arising from the completion of our voluntary exit and redundancy programme and associated restructuring.
- A reduction in costs due to the conclusion of the *Life and Work* publication.
- A reduction in the Seeds for Growth grants budget.

- A reduction in the costs of parish ministers due to impact of presbytery mission planning on ministries development staff numbers, timing differences on probationer stipends and a freeze on familiarisations.

6.2 The savings made help maintain the general funds of the Church and enable us to move towards looking at areas of growth and future sustainability. The reduction in deficit does not result in large operational surpluses and general funds are not at sufficient levels to maintain the ongoing financial requirements of a loss-making hotel.

6.3 Balancing the responsibilities of charity and church is never easy but is necessary. We believe that entering a lease will safeguard both responsibilities for the Church of Scotland going forward. Having taken professional advice, heard from hotel staff and staff within the National Office who have long experience working in the region, it is the considered and prayerful conclusion of the Assembly Trustees and The Church of Scotland Trust that the interests of the Church and its work both in Israel and Palestine and throughout the world are best served by the recommendation we have made that the hotel be leased to the preferred bidder for a period of 24 years and 11 months.

6.4 We do not believe that this will have a material adverse impact on the Church's capacity to be present and to collaborate with other churches in support of the Christian community in the Holy Land and to continue to witness for peace and justice there. On the contrary, we believe that a strategic partnership with a highly regarded hotel operator will release financial resources which will enable the Church better to fulfil its long-standing commitment, privilege and responsibility to maintain a Christian presence in the land of Christ's birth. Working alongside our partners and through the collaborative and imaginative use of the Church's other property holdings both in the Galilee and in Jerusalem and Jaffa, we seek to build on the faithful work of previous generations and ensure that the Church, in a time of change, remains constant to its vision of presence, proclamation and practical action.

In the name of the Assembly Trustees and The Church of Scotland Trust

DAVID CAMERON, *Convener of the Assembly Trustees*
LEON MARSHALL, *Chairman of The Church of Scotland Trust*

THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND TRUST MAY 2026

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Appoint Mr Christopher N Mackay as Chairman of the Trust and Mrs Valerie Macniven as Vice-Chairman of the Trust from 1 June 2026.
3. Re-appoint the Very Rev Dr John Chalmers as a member of the Trust from 1 June 2026.

Points for Information

1. Note that the terms of office of the Chairman Mr Leon Marshall and the Vice-Chairman Mrs Morag Angus fall to be completed on 31 May 2026 and thank them both for their diligent service.
2. Thank Mr Angus Bethune for his 18 years' service to the Trust.

Executive Summary

The Church of Scotland Trust submits its ninety fourth annual report, outlining key matters relating to its statutory role in holding the Church's properties outwith Scotland and acting as trustee for 48 third party trusts. The Rolling Review Programme continues to provide regular oversight of these trusts, with administration carried out in line with standard practice.

The Trust continues to pursue the transfer of the Church's property interests in Pakistan to local trustees in terms of the Church of Scotland Trust Order Confirmation Act 1958 while investigating contingency arrangements in terms of the Act. Progress has been limited. Multiple longstanding court cases concerning these properties are ongoing. Regular engagement continues with the Trust's attorney, Dr Peter David.

In Israel, the Trust liaises with the Israel Palestine Committee on matters related to the Church's property interests. The Trust has been represented on the Assembly Trustees Working Group to investigate a proposed lease of the Scots Hotel in Tiberias to a third party operator. A Joint Report on the proposal with the Assembly Trustees has been submitted to the General Assembly.

The Trust continues to support the Presbytery of International Charges by reviewing and approving the sale, purchase or lease of over 12 months of any property and the review and approval of major works being carried out. The Trust receives annual Property Reports from each congregation to ensure adequate oversight of building maintenance.

The Trust's audited accounts for 2025 are available on request.

The terms of office for the Chairman, Mr Leon Marshall, and Vice Chairman, Mrs Morag Angus, conclude on 31 May 2026. The Trust records its appreciation for their service and invites the General Assembly to appoint Mr Christopher N Mackay as Chairman of the Trust and Mrs Valerie Macniven as Vice-Chairman of the Trust from 1 June 2026. It recommends the re appointment of the Very Rev Dr John Chalmers and formally acknowledges the significant contribution of Mr Angus Bethune, who retires after 18 years of service.

Report

The Church of Scotland Trust, which was established by Act of Parliament in 1932, submits its Ninety fourth Report to the General Assembly.

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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 Following the Report to the General Assembly of 2025 the Trust continues to pursue a transfer of the Church's property interests in Pakistan to local trustees in terms of the Church of Scotland Trust Order Confirmation Act 1958. At the same time the Trust are investigating other options in terms of the 1958 Act in the event that registration of the new Trust cannot be completed. 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 current and future developments relating to the Church's property interests in Israel.

1.4.2 The Trust has been represented on the Assembly Trustees Working Group to investigate a lease of the Scots Hotel, Tiberias to a third party operator. The Assembly Trustees and the Trust have prepared a Joint Report to the Assembly on the Hotel lease proposal.

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 sale or 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.

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2. ACCOUNTS FOR 2025

2.1 The Trust's Accounts for the year 2025 have been audited and copies thereof are available on request from the Secretary and Clerk.

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3. CHAIRMAN

3.1 The term of office of the Chairman of the Trust, Mr Leon Marshall, will be completed on 31st May 2026. It is recommended that the General Assembly appoint Mr Christopher N Mackay as Chairman from 1st June 2026.

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4. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

4.1 The term of office of the Vice-Chairman of the Trust, Mrs Morag Angus, will be completed on 31 May 2026. It is recommended that the General Assembly appoint Mrs Valerie Macniven as Vice-Chairman from 1st June 2026.

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5. MEMBERSHIP

5.1 In accordance with the constitution of the Trust, the following two members retire by rotation on 31 May 2026 but are eligible for re-appointment: The Very Reverend Dr John Chalmers and Mr Angus Bethune. It is suggested to the General Assembly that The Very Reverend Dr John Chalmers be re-appointed as a member of the Trust from 1 June 2026.

5.2 Mr Angus Bethune has intimated his resignation from the Trust with effect from 31 May 2026 and members would like to record their sincere gratitude for his contribution to the work of the Trust since his appointment in 2008.

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

LEON MARSHALL, *Chairman*
MORAG ANGUS, *Vice-Chairman*
MADELAINE SPROULE, *Secretary & Clerk*

Addendum

Mr Leon Marshall, CA, Chairman

Leon Marshall was appointed Chairman of the Church of Scotland Trust by the General Assembly of 2022 after serving as a member since 2017. The Trust has particularly benefitted from Leon's financial expertise. On behalf of the Church, we would like to record our appreciation to Leon for giving so generously of his time and abilities and we are pleased that he has decided to continue to serve the Trust as a member.

MORAG ANGUS, *Vice-Chairman*
MADELAINE SPROULE, *Secretary & Clerk*

REPORT OF THE FAITH ACTION PROGRAMME LEADERSHIP TEAM AND THE THEOLOGICAL FORUM ON CHURCH DECLINE: REFLECTING ON THE CAUSES AND BUILDING FOR A BETTER FUTURE MAY 2026

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Commend the Report and encourage congregations, Presbyteries, the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team and the Assembly Trustees to study it and act upon its recommendations.

Executive Summary

The Theological Forum and the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team were instructed 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.'* This report is a fulfilment of that instruction and has three parts.

The first part, prepared by the Theological Forum, reflects upon some of the possible causes of the decline in the Church of Scotland. It begins by identifying several possible long-term causes, beginning with the process of secularisation that took place in the eighteenth century, which saw the progress of the physical sciences, the advance of Enlightenment rationality and the start of industrialisation. It then considers more recent possible causes, noting in particular the deep cultural shifts of the 1960s, which brought about increasing wealth and growing consumerism and individualism as well as changes in social morality and the rise of diverse spiritualities. It then moves to explore the possible contribution of the Church of Scotland to its own decline, recognising both the particular challenges the Church of Scotland has had to encounter and the ways in which its own structure, culture, attitude, and message may have contributed to the decline. Part I concludes with a brief theological reflection on the decline, affirming the place of lament and repentance, but also maintaining the importance of hope and liberation.

The second part, prepared by FAPLT, rehearses some of the steps that the Church of Scotland has taken to address this. Over the past eight decades, the Church of Scotland has launched many major initiatives to combat declining membership, ranging from the post-war Baillie Commission and the 1950s 'Tell Scotland' campaign to the 2001 'Church Without Walls' report. Recent strategies include the 2019 Radical Action Plan, involving Presbytery reform, extensive structural restructuring, and renewed focus on worship. Despite these efforts and the ongoing dedication of local ministry, the church continues to face significant challenges in membership and recruitment within a post-Christendom context.

The third part, also prepared by FAPLT, seeks to identify possible steps to address this decline going forward. It responds to the current challenges through a spiritual lens, encouraging the Church into intentional disciple-making, encouraging all members to adopt habits of naming, knowing, trusting, and serving Jesus. It challenges the Church to frame current structural reforms as a purposeful pruning to enable future growth and spiritual maturity. Relational, intergenerational, and prayer-driven discipleship will inspire the Church to be a vibrant community in the twenty-first century.

Report

1. PART ONE

1.1 Reflecting on the causes of decline

1.1.1 Since 1956, the Church of Scotland has steadily fallen from a peak of 1.3 million members to less than 300,000 today, consistently losing around 160,000 members per decade, with parallel downturns in the number of its ministers and the state of its finances.

1.1.2 The causes of the decline of the Church of Scotland over the past 70 years are diverse and complex. Its decline mirrors the decline of many churches in certain other parts of Europe, but there are also factors particular to our own context and to our own church that have had a particular impact upon the Scottish story of church decline. In what follows, possible causes of decline, both long-term and more recent, are identified; there is also a consideration of how the Church of Scotland itself may have contributed towards its own decline.

1.2 Long-term causes of church decline

1.2.1 Church decline in Britain is sometimes said to have begun with the start of the process of secularisation, in the eighteenth century. That tumultuous time that saw the start of industrial revolution, rapid urbanisation, and social upheaval. A number of factors have been identified as contributing to the decline of religion – and the church – over the ensuing decades and into the early twentieth century. The progress of physical sciences and the advance of Enlightenment rationality in different ways undermined confidence in inherited patterns of thinking about the world under God and the place of human beings within it. The transition from a primarily rural economy to a newly industrialised landscape led to the mass displacement of people, and the consequent erosion of long-standing social bonds and the rapid alienation of human communities from nature. Growing class divisions, increasing individual freedoms, and multiplying church schisms each in their own distinct ways further eroded confidence in communal and traditional ways of thinking about God and religion.

1.2.2 The later years of the nineteenth century are often accorded a particular significance in this narrative of church decline. Certainly, these were years of revival movements, and churches continued to have a prominent role in national life. However, the rise of natural science – including the emergence of Darwinian theories of evolution – offered people a different account of the origin of the world in which they lived than the familiar narrative of Scripture. And the rise in the practice and the acceptability of biblical criticism – accompanied by some high-profile controversies – further eroded confidence in the Christian world-view. A rather naturalistic outlook with little room for religion became increasingly popular at this time.

1.2.3 There are some factors particular to the Scottish context which bear mention at this point. At the outset of this period, it is clear that the Church of Scotland was central to the political, social and economic life of most Scottish communities, and had a significant role in the daily life of the nation through its schools in every parish, and the poor relief and social discipline that it enacted. Loyalty to the church and to the nation went hand in hand. But the changes mentioned above impacted the place of Christian religion in Scotland as elsewhere. The Church of Scotland in particular was slow to respond to the rapid urbanisation of some parts of the country and provision of parish churches was slow in many places. The Disruption of 1843, when one-third of its ministers left, changed the perception of the Church of Scotland in national life, particularly as it resulted in subsequent decades to the Church of Scotland ceding control over poor relief, school education, and other social functions to the state. Certain local factors might therefore be seen to exacerbate the process of church decline.

1.2.4 Such an account has had significant appeal in scholarship across the decades. It seems to have explanatory power in respect of the situation in Britain as well as in many other western industrial nations, suggesting that there was an almost inevitable decline in institutional religion from industrialisation onwards. However, this idea of a long-term process of secularisation going back to the eighteenth century has also been questioned. It has been claimed that the ongoing vitality and significance of Christian religion in Britain until well into the twentieth century, despite all the adverse factors listed in previous paragraphs, points to a different story. It has already been noted, for example, that as late as the 1950s, the Church of Scotland had a record number of members – as did most of the mainline Protestant churches in Britain – and was both prominent and influential in society. The counter-argument is that there was a decisive rupture in the 'long sixties' from around 1958 to 1974, which involved a conscious rejection of the Christian faith. It is important, therefore, to consider also the developments which have taken place more recently that have also impacted church decline.

1.3 Recent causes of church decline

1.3.1 Certain recent accounts have identified the key moment in the history of secularisation in Britain as lying in the 1960s, a decade of significant changes in western society. In this pivotal decade, the austerity of the immediate post-war period had given way in the west to a period of unprecedented affluence and welfare security. The consequent onset of a consumerist mentality – particularly among the young – emphasised the freedom of the individual to choose how to deploy their resources, and there emerged an increasing number of ways of spending time and money on discretionary items. Such privileging of the self-fulfilment of the individual went along with the displacement of any need to conform to conservative norms or to depend on close community bonds to survive. A change in social attitudes towards sexual behaviour and an explosion of diverse forms of personal spirituality were corollaries of these phenomena. The result was a paradigm shift in the way individuals related to themselves, to each other, to society, to the state, and to organised religion.

1.3.2 These developments were reflected in various ways on a broader national scale in Britain. Changing perspectives on social morality were reflected in liberalising Acts of Parliament regarding gambling, divorce, abortion, and homosexuality, as well as in a reduction of the moral censorship and media control exercised by the state; the Christian identity and purpose of various institutions, such as the BBC, was gradually and purposely diminished; a new youth culture emerged that focused on fashion and popular music and that often characterised itself as in rebellion against earlier attitudes; and the emergence of satirical, critical, and polemical responses to traditional religious beliefs and established thinking were common-place in the mass media. This period also witnessed a significant shift in the portrayal of and attitudes towards women, who in the immediate post-war period had been expected to return to and embrace the traditional role of house-wife: now women were increasingly addressed as independent thinkers, valued workers in their own right, and equal partners in relationships.

1.3.3 These deep cultural shifts in the 1960s in Britain and elsewhere in the west took place at around the same time that the Christian religion that had previously been dominant in society began to lose much of its power and influence. If anything, subsequent trends and events have continued the advance of secularisation from that decade. The advent of Sunday trading and the explosion of Sunday sports and leisure activities (particularly for children) has further eroded the place of Christian religion in society. The attention accorded by the various media to the church and to matters of religion in general has steadily been reduced, with only major developments and scandals now reaching mainstream audiences. The emergence of post-modern ideas, in which truth is relativised and personalised in a 'turn to the self', has exacerbated the reluctance of many people to accept the Christian narrative. The rise in the profile of other, non-Christian religions arising from trends in globalisation and immigration has also increased the number of ways in which people can exercise their spirituality. This situation has been further impacted by the rise of the internet, which has not only provided information about other religious communities, but has also enabled young people in particular to form new communities in virtual spaces.

1.3.4 Such wider shifts in more recent times have all no doubt contributed towards church decline in Scotland. Both church membership and worship attendance have continuously diminished in recent decades, and there is now an increasing generational dominance in the Church of Scotland, with the vast majority of its people are over the age of 60. The comparative dearth of those in the Church of Scotland aged between 18 and 50 is a significant factor behind the lower numbers of applicants for the ministry, as the pool is much smaller. Certainly, it has been questioned whether

the churches in the 1950s were really as strong in terms of discipleship and witness as the record membership figures of that time suggest, or whether even by then their influence was far more social and cultural than religious. Such matters are notoriously difficult to measure or even to estimate. Certainly, since that time the statistical decline of Christian religion in Scotland has been dramatic, and the Church of Scotland and the Methodist Church have seen the most precipitous downturns. The picture is naturally not uniform: there are regional variations in church decline across Scotland, and not all denominations are equally affected, with some even seeing modest growth. Nevertheless, the overall situation is not an encouraging one, and church decline continues year on year.

1.4 The Church of Scotland and church decline

1.4.1 In the last section, attention focused on the long-term and more recent causes of church decline that were external to the Christian religion, that is, on changes to the economic, social, and cultural landscape that have negatively impacted the situation of the church. However, the church itself has been at points heavily criticised for its own response – or lack of response – to such external changes, and particularly to the changes of recent decades. Indeed, at times, the church seems to have been its own worst enemy and to have contributed to its own decline. A number of terrible scandals involving religious personnel has harmed the reputation and trustworthiness of organised religion in general. Ongoing divisions within and between Christian denominations has deeply harmed not only its unity but also its witness. In some quarters, the church has been criticised for being unwilling to accommodate itself to cultural changes, or as being too slow to respond to them; in other quarters, the church has been criticised for accommodating itself too readily to the same cultural changes, and for responding too quickly to them.

1.4.2 The Church of Scotland has not been immune from such critical attention, in so far as its own reaction to recent changes has been deemed inadequate or insufficient. And, as will be noted below, the Church of Scotland has faced very particular challenges as well. It might be observed at the outset that several factors arose in the first decades of the twentieth century that may have left the Church of Scotland ill-equipped to adapt and respond to the enormous changes in society that followed. Such factors include: the effects on religious belief of the calamities of two World Wars; the consequences of the church reunion of 1929, which created a huge mega-structure of an institution over-burdened by buildings and dependent for its operation on a tightly controlled legal bureaucracy with centralised power; the distancing of the Church of Scotland from those most in need during the poverty of the 1930s, as recognised by the Baillie Commission in the immediate aftermath of World War II; and the failure of the Church to embrace and implement the dynamic movements of the 1950s, led by such ministers as Tom Allan and George MacLeod, for the 'apostolate of the laity'. Without these factors, some of them self-inflicted, the Church may have been in a better place to withstand the storms of the social upheaval that was then to come.

1.4.3 The criticism that the Church of Scotland has received in respect of its perceived failure to respond appropriately to recent social changes since the 1960s is often linked to concerns that its own structure, culture, attitude, and message may have contributed to the decline. It seems salutary to consider such concerns in more detail.

1.4.4 In terms of its structure, the particular instantiation of Presbyterian government in the Church of Scotland has been criticised for being overly bureaucratic, rendering the Church of Scotland slow to respond and to adapt to rapid external changes, as well as unable to process and effect necessary internal changes in a successful way. The rather centralised organisation of the Church of Scotland – for all its Presbyterian polity – has led to concerns that it is insufficiently flexible and sensitive in regard to local situations and developments. The constantly changing constellation of commissioners at the General Assembly has on occasion seemed to make long-term – or even medium-term – planning and strategy difficult. At parish level, the manner in which too many congregations are quite regularly tied to costly, underused historic buildings has hindered flexibility and drained resources, a major problem at a time of economic pressures.

1.4.5 In terms of culture, there have been repeated worries concerning a generational disconnect at the heart of the Church of Scotland and its practices. Its worship and language often feel outdated to modern Scots, especially the young, and it has sometimes struggled to integrate young people effectively into the life of the church, or to connect faith with everyday issues such as climate change, justice, or digital culture. The latter seems particularly relevant to church decline, in so far as the Church of Scotland risks not having kept pace with how people – particularly young people – engage with ideas, meaning, and community today. The result is that Christianity is often deemed simply irrelevant by younger generations.

1.4.6 In terms of attitude, there has been criticism offered in some places regarding the lack of willingness on the part of the Church of Scotland to engage deeply with local communities, particularly in times of great upheaval. A series of forced unions and linkages risks having left congregations in some places feeling disenfranchised and ignored. There have been concerns registered by many voices regarding the lack of meaningful engagement of the Church of Scotland with its ecumenical partners, where far more extensive and effective co-operation would be possible. Sometimes an attitude can seem to prevail in which the Church of Scotland is held to be the national church in a way that renders others merely secondary; this can only lead to a lack of shared witness and mutual hospitality in relations with other churches. At other times, the Church of Scotland has seemed to display an unwelcome legalism, with a particular worry arising around obstacles to baptism. There have also been concerns expressed that the Church of Scotland has tended to resist innovation, and – specifically – that it has regularly failed fully to implement the results of previous reports and commissions where these have recommended bold new initiatives.

1.4.7 Beyond criticisms of these features of its own life, the Church of Scotland has faced very particular challenges with regard to the political, cultural, and social changes in Scotland over the past decades. The shift in political outlook in the 1960s towards a more radical left, particularly among the young, did not always harmonise well with the broad conservatism of the Church of Scotland, and increasingly the Church came to be seen as an institution of the old establishment to be rejected. The Protestant, Conservative and Unionist identity that had once been strong in the industrialised heartlands of Scotland, at times with unwelcome shadows of sectarianism, slowly diminished in Scottish

life, reducing core loyalty and social allegiance to the Church. The need for Protestant allegiance and Church of Scotland membership for social or employment advancement is largely a thing of the past. While the Church of Scotland initially flourished in the new housing schemes of the 1960s and 1970s, as the sense of community in these schemes faltered and as former industrial towns were ravaged by unemployment, there was a significant decline of engagement with the Church – even as the Church committed significant resources to such areas. In turn, this meant that the Church became more heavily dependent on more economically advantaged areas, with a consequent effect on its public image. Wider shifts in demography have not always helped: one might note a lower birth-rate among churchgoers, the advance of rural depopulation, the trend of aging congregations, and the impact of immigration patterns, with many new Scots belonging to other Christian traditions or world religions.

1.4.8 Perhaps the most important challenge, however, has been the perceived loss on the part of the Church of Scotland of a core Christian message, and the decline of centrist enterprises in mission as the Church has become increasingly polarised between liberal and conservative camps. In terms of message, the Church of Scotland seems not to have found it easy to articulate a clear and compelling vision of discipleship in the contemporary era. On the national stage, there has been an increasing awareness that the Church of Scotland seems to have lost not only its audience but also its voice. This situation has no doubt been impacted by the reopening of the Scottish Parliament in 1997, with the Church of Scotland now having a less prominent voice in the political sphere. However, and perhaps more troubling, it has also at times appeared to fail to communicate a clear articulation of the gospel and thereby to keep the gospel relevant in changing times. In an era in which younger people identify less and less with particular denominations, the specific vision of the Church of Scotland has on occasion seemed difficult to discern. For some time, and perhaps into the present, there seems to have been a risk of complacency in the church, a sense that if the church simply keeps doing what it has always done, 'people will come back'. They have not.

1.4.9 It might be noted by way of mitigation that the declines in finance and in ministry of the Church of Scotland that have tracked the decline in membership have increasingly constrained its ability to respond to the challenges of difficult times. Diminished financial resources have limited what initiatives and changes it has been able to fund; diminished personnel numbers have led to over-burdened church workers and uneven parish coverage.

1.4.10 Furthermore, it is important not to identify directly the institutional decline of the Church of Scotland with a decline in exploration of the Christian faith or of Christian belief. Whilst the latest national census and various Social Attitude Surveys clearly indicate that Christian belief has been declining in Scotland, there has also arisen in recent years a considerable variety of expressions of faith beyond institutional churches such as the Church of Scotland. These have arisen in independent evangelical churches, in rapidly growing diaspora churches, in fresh expressions of church, in the invisible church of those who believe but do not belong, among those who exercise vicarious religion through a residual loyalty or sympathy to the church, and among those who self-describe as 'spiritual not religious', who might pray and read Scripture as part of a 'pick and mix' spirituality. Recent research points to an increasing openness among younger generations to exploring the Christian faith, unencumbered by the baggage of the past. One aspect of the decline of the Church might, therefore, be a failure to attend to this increasing diversification of Christian practice, which may be rejecting the Church of Scotland, but not God or the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

1.4.11 Nevertheless, the overall outcome of these various factors, criticisms, and challenges explored above is that the majority of Scots no longer look to organised religion – or to the Church of Scotland in particular – to offer them a compelling narrative of who they are or what they should do. For many people at the present time, the Church of Scotland and Christianity in general is no longer of any relevance in seeking answers to life's questions.

1.5 Theological Reflection

1.5.1 To the extent that the Church of Scotland has, despite its best efforts, contributed to its own decline, there would seem to be space for regret and even repentance. It is beyond doubt that at times opportunities have been missed to address the ways in which the structure, culture, attitude, and message of the Church of Scotland have contributed to its decline, opportunities that were all the more precious in view of the wider cultural developments outlined above. There may arise a corresponding tendency to lament this decline, and even a related desire to ascribe this situation to a divine judgement upon the strategies, policies, and attitudes of the Church of Scotland in times past. If God wills that the message of God be spread, as seems indicated by the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19–20), then decline represents a problem.

1.5.2 At the same time, the providence of God works in all places and at all times. Even the decline of the Church of Scotland falls within that divine oversight of creation, and it is not always easy to discern where the will of God has been effective, actively ensuring that a particular outcome transpires, and where the will of God has been simply permissive, allowing that a particular situation results. There are plentiful occasions in Scripture where God has worked through faithful remnants rather than through dominant institutions (Genesis 6:5–8:22, 1 Kings 19, Romans 11:5). And for all that any church labours and has laboured, planting and watering, it is God alone who gives faith, and growth (1 Corinthians 3:6–7). Thus the current situation of the Church of Scotland may not simply be a matter of regret and repentance.

1.5.3 Indeed, the new situation of the Church of Scotland may bear remarkable possibilities for its future mission. Its loss of national power and influence, of cultural hegemony and leadership, may prove to be a liberation, allowing the Church of Scotland to speak more unrestrictedly and more authentically than ever of Jesus Christ. Thus even in a time of disappointment, lament, and frustration at the decline of the church, the Church of Scotland and its members still have a profound calling to proclaim and serve the Gospel, and can live in the hope that fruitful opportunities to fulfil this calling are abundant and will continue to arise. In a time of quiet revival of Christian religion, there are now whole generations who have not heard the Gospel, and who are respectful of spiritual ideas and receptive to fresh insights. The Church of Scotland may wish not to mourn for too long for what is past, but to press on instead to what lies ahead.

2. PART TWO

2.1 Decisions and Actions Already Taken

2.1.1 The Theological Forum has addressed historical failures and contemporary challenges, highlighting significant structural and doctrinal reforms. Over recent decades the Church has implemented several major initiatives in response to the decline of membership. It must be emphasised that over recent decades at a local parish level, many thousands of ministers, elders and members have continued to devote much of their lives to the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the church and community, dedicating their many gifts and skills to the nurture of Christian faith and in service to those in their parish and far beyond. The Church should always be grateful that they still do so. At a national level, among the attempts to explore, address, and reverse the decline of the Church of Scotland, a number of initiatives can be explicitly mentioned.

1. In the latter stages of the Second World War, the Church of Scotland set up the Baillie Commission, under the convenorship of Professor John Baillie of New College, Edinburgh. This Commission produced an extensive and visionary report that attempted to anticipate the changes necessary in society when peace came. This particularly focused on the need for health and welfare arrangements that reflected Christian principles undergirding the nation. It also addressed issues such as ecumenical developments and the need to care for the poor and vulnerable in society appropriately, and it affirmed the role of women in partnership with men.
2. The 'Tell Scotland Campaign' from 1953 onwards was another influential initiative undertaken by a broad ecumenical alliance of Reformed Churches in Scotland, including the Church of Scotland. The focus of 'Tell Scotland' emphasised mission to all people, led by the people of the church, and uniting social engagement in Christ's name with evangelism. Led by Rev Tom Allan, later of Glasgow St George's Tron, the decision was taken to host the Billy Graham rallies, which generated huge attendances and created mass interest, although the long-term success of their evangelical endeavours is debated.
3. It was recognised in the 1970s that, in light of changes not anticipated by the Baillie Commission, further work by the Church was required. The Committee of 40 was set up under the Convenorship of Professor Robin Barbour of the University of Aberdeen. The focus of its report was on how the Church of Scotland might flexibly and creatively adapt traditional structures to meet contemporary needs, and its recommendation that a non-stipendiary Ministry of Word and Sacrament be developed. The resultant emergence of Auxiliary and Ordained Local Ministry has not, yet, had as significant an impact as was hoped.
4. In 1999, the Church of Scotland set up a further commission on Review and Reform, led by the Rev Peter Neilson, to re-examine in depth the primary purposes of the Church, the shape of the Church of Scotland at the turn of the millennium, and to formulate proposals for a process of continuing reform. The resultant Church Without Walls Report of 2001 made several recommendations. Not all of these were enacted, and some did not have the desired effect. Among its legacies, however, have been the Parish Growth Fund, the precursor to the Go For It and Seeds for Growth funds, and the much later developments within the Church of Scotland of pioneer ministries and of executive powers being held at the level of Presbyteries.
5. In 2000, the Church of Scotland published the Ministers of the Gospel Report, in which it stated its aspiration to have a ministry that was reflective, formative and collaborative. This report clarified and focused attention on the nature of the ordained Ministry of Word and Sacrament. However, this report did not lead to more people placing themselves before the Church of Scotland for consideration as Ministers of Word and Sacrament, as the numbers of those training for ministry, which had declined sharply in the 1990s, has continued to do so to the present day. This may reflect the low percentage of those aged 18 to 50 in the Church, but also the challenging nature of the role in a post-Christendom context and the need to reform the length and content of ministry training.
6. There have been long term commitments over the past twenty years since the Mission Shaped Church report of the Church of England in in 2004, to encourage, nurture and develop fresh expressions of church alongside the inherited structures, from New Charge Developments to Seeds for Growth, albeit the impetus and momentum in doing so has not developed to the extent of the Church of England or in the independent churches in Scotland.
7. There has been a long re-consideration of ministry training from the late 1990s to seek to prepare ministers more fully to be reflective and adaptive practitioners who can flourish in an ever-changing social and church context. This is coming to a conclusion now with a re-focus via the Formation Framework of 2019 and an intended new scheme for ministerial training from 2027, and the development of new initiatives in recruitment and discernment such as the Apprenticeship Route.
8. There has been major re-structuring of the Church in recent years, with the Radical Action Plan emerging from the Fergusson Commission of 2019, Presbytery unions, the reduction of personnel in the central Church, and the ongoing effects across the country in unions, linkages and closures from Presbytery Mission Planning.
9. Renewal of worship: Movements that grew from sensing a call to social justice, or the need for healing, or the necessity to work in unity among the Church have all played a part in renewing, refreshing and re-invigorating the worshipping life of the Church. The sphere of influence of groups such as the Wild Goose resource group, the Alt Worship movement, and the Spill the Beans resources are examples of groups that have responded to shifts in the Church and in society and have responded with energy and enthusiasm in resourcing where there were gaps in national provision.

   The Book of Common Order was revised in 1996 and 2005, with fresh versions of liturgies for the life of the church, particularly in response to the General Assembly opening up a more invitational way to practice communion and baptism.

In 1998, the Panel on Worship released the Common Ground hymnary supplement. This pioneering ecumenical project united representatives from across Scotland to broaden the Church's repertoire, integrating global songs and contemporary works into the Scottish worshipping tradition.

In the 1990s, the Panel on Worship launched the Pray Now devotional series. Featuring writers from the Church of Scotland and beyond, these books evolved from personal devotionals to central pillars of the Radical Action Plan, eventually serving as the foundation for current Faith Action Plan prayer initiatives.

In 2005, the fourth edition of the Church Hymnary (CH4) was launched, featuring over 800 songs. This collection aimed to bridge traditional sung worship with diverse global practices, encouraging engagement with major themes of society and culture.

In recent years, the rise of non-ordained worship leaders has been bolstered by collaborative Presbytery training schemes and academic short courses. These initiatives empower local leaders to create and lead worship within new congregational hubs and diverse community contexts.

The God Welcomes All supplement published in 2024 is enabling congregations to renew their worship and new worshipping communities to develop by resourcing them with contemporary songs which complement the rich musical resources the church already has to offer. It focuses on songs written in the last twenty years, recognising that radical reform within our Church requires new forms of worship published physically and online.

2.1.2 Through these and other initiatives, the Church of Scotland has steadfastly sought to address the decline in ministry and membership, but the initiatives have sometimes encountered mixed success, and the decline has continued to the present day.

2.1.3 Why have such initiatives not succeeded, as yet, in arresting the decline? One key answer may lie in the very nature of the Church of Scotland. The Church has a self-image and identity which is based upon its history as a national church with a parish system of a minister and a building within each geographical area, secured by its former role as a key part/member/constituent in national and political life. That self-image and identity served the Church well for four centuries from the Scottish Reformation of 1560 onwards but is now hampering the change needed to halt decline.

2.1.4 A central problem is that over the centuries, self-image and identity have offered much internal safety, security and standing, and thus become almost 'sacralised,' so that in some places there is what commentators have called a 'structural fundamentalism' – it is seen as foundational and untouchable. This means that there can be resistance to change of structure within the Church. Too often the Church's basis of mission is seen as a centripetal movement with an inward-facing momentum whose purpose is to bring others into the Church. Attempts to develop a centrifugal movement with an outward-facing momentum whose purpose is to see the mission of God expressed at its fullest in word and deed in the world are often thwarted.

2.1.5 Because of its structure and identity, the inclination of the Church can be to protect the *status quo* as it believes it to be inviolable, and to implement Church law as an instrument to stifle action, innovation and development in mission, rather than to enable and encourage them. This has brought the implication that any other structure or form of church, mission or ministry, such as 'pioneering' or 'fresh expressions,' can be seen as anathema to who we are. In short, the Church by its very nature may not be suited to the re-orientation that is required towards imaginative, adaptive, organic mission 'on the edge,' without a significant change in mindset and ethos.

2.1.6 This stasis has meant that the Church has chosen to spread its decreasing resources ever more thinly to preserve that identity, and to meet the widespread demand for a minister and a building. This, in turn, has decreased the opportunity and energy to initiate change.

2.1.7 As a result, in popular perception 'mission' remains 'getting people into the church' in order to save it, long after this approach began to fail. Or mission is seen as territorial acquisition or a series of evangelistic events led by experts, rather than a natural expression of the joy and fulness of an embodied Gospel in the community bearing the fruit of a nurturing faith in God.

2.1.8 The ongoing decline of the Church will not be solved by employing the same thinking and practice that created it. If the Church is wedded to such thinking and practice, based on its historical self-image and identity, and therefore cannot change, it may be that the decline is an inevitable consequence.

2.1.9 We should not accept that consequence. There is still a need to consider what steps might be taken today to address this ongoing challenge. Whilst such questions are considered further in the next section, much work has already been done to address them in recent years. The Church would be wise to grapple with the analysis and proposals set out in some or all of the six recent books by Church of Scotland ministers and theologians who have sought to address the issues of the decline and potential solutions, as follows:

- Bill Clinkenbeard & Ian Gilmour, *Stirred by the Storm*, (privately published, 2024) – proposing significant change in the Church of Scotland, learning from successful models of church to engage the whole people of God.
- Alexander Forsyth, *Mission by the People: Re-Discovering the Dynamic Missiology of Tom Allan and his Scottish Contemporaries*, (Pickwick Publications, 2017) – re-discovering from our recent past dynamic modes of mission based on the 'apostolate of the laity' and seeking mission at ground level in everyday life
- Liam Jerrold Fraser, *Mission in Contemporary Scotland*, (Saint Andrew Press, 2021) – examining causes of the decline and the Scottish social context and exploring the nature of mission and appropriate models for Scotland.
- Doug Gay, *Reforming the Kirk: The Future of the Church of Scotland,* (Saint Andrew Press, 2017) – exploring the reasons for the decline and proposing a wide range of structural, liturgical, doctrinal, ministerial and missional reforms in the Church.

- Neil Glover, *Finding Our Voice: Searching for Renewal in the Mainline Church*, (Saint Andrew Press, 2024) – re-engaging with the meaning and purpose of faith, and the foundations of our identity as Christians in the Church of Scotland
- Tommy MacNeil, *Sleeping Giant: A Call to the Church to Awake and Arise!* (River Publishing & Media, 2021) – a clarion call for spiritual revival to enable the Church to re-discover its calling and deliver God's love in the world.

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3. PART THREE

3.1 Identifying Future Steps, Moving Beyond Decline

3.1.1 This analysis leads us to some profound yet simple questions: How do we follow Jesus in the twenty-first century? What are the rhythms of faith that reveal a healthy spiritual heartbeat within the Church? And how is this revealed by the lives of church members to those who are seeking God in their own lives?

3.1.2 Discipleship is fundamentally about turning our lives toward Jesus. FAPLT wishes the church, following on from the Church without Walls report (2001) and the General Assembly definition of discipleship (2018) to focus on making discipleship central to every member and ministry in the Church—encouraging all (members, elders, ministers, staff, etc.) to grow in naming, knowing, trusting and serving Jesus. This is about renewed habits for all of us.

3.1.3 Mike Breen once wrote, "If you make disciples, you always get the church. But if you make a church, you rarely get disciples." This reflects a core issue facing the Church of Scotland today: weak discipleship. For centuries, we have focused on "making church," while Jesus clearly called us to "make disciples" (Matthew 28:19–20).

3.1.4 A paradigm shift happens when core assumptions change. That is what is needed across the Church as we reconsider our roles and expectations—both of ourselves and others.

3.1.5 To move forward, we must recognise that we are still operating under outdated assumptions, some of which were incorrect when first stated, such as:

- **Our job is to build the Church.** Yes, we are part of the Body of Christ, the Church, but we are primarily called to follow Jesus. God will build the Church using these followers.
- **We live in a Christian country.** This has led to confusion between cultural Christianity and discipleship. It may be good news to consider ourselves as part of an upstart community, far different from the cultural setting from which the Church of Scotland was formed.
- **Jesus is in control.** Yes, Jesus has authority, but he did not retain it all to himself. He empowered others to become disciples and go out in his name to share good news and bring about the Kingdom of God.
- **Pastors and Teachers are most important.** But that does not do justice to the important complementary roles in a healthy Church of evangelists, prophets, and apostles.
- **Transformation must be enforced.** The Church should be a place of transformation of people's lives but bringing that about through enforced moral behaviour is not as effective as inviting people to know Jesus better and letting the Holy Spirit change them.

So, what are the habits that we can make a priority for church? They are not complicated, but they are effective.

- Naming Jesus
- Knowing Jesus
- Trusting Jesus
- Serving Jesus

3.2 Naming Jesus

3.2.1 Let's emphasise speaking about Jesus, rather than about church. This may seem a small shift in language, but it could lead to a cultural change. It would mean routinely identifying in our own minds how Jesus' teaching and ministry is informing our decisions, thoughts and actions, and not being afraid to share that with others: naming Jesus as part of our lives. Imagine a church where from pulpits to bus stops, church meetings to family dinners, and water coolers to social media, we intentionally talk about Jesus and the difference he makes in our lives.

3.2.2 This is not the same as using the traditional formula 'in the name of Jesus' in prayer. While that carries an authority relationship, acting on Jesus' behalf, the intent here is that we in the Church become much more comfortable with simply talking about Jesus amongst ourselves and in our communities.

3.3 Knowing Jesus

3.3.1 Let's prioritise deepening our individual and church family relationship with Jesus, not simply maintaining religious structures or bible knowledge. Discipleship is not for "experts" to pass down—it happens as *"little learners pass things on to other little learners."* Growth comes through community, humility, and intention.

3.3.2 We encourage every member, elder, minister, deacon, reader, and staff member to ask regularly: Who is discipling me? And who am I discipling?

Too often we assume discipleship is happening without intentionally fostering it.

3.3.3 Discipleship involves more than head knowledge. People encounter Jesus through Scripture, prayer, community, nature, service, and personal revelation.

3.3.4 Good discipleship involves:

- Setting aside regular time to deepen your walk with God.
- Reading and reflecting on the Bible with others regularly.

- Adults and children learning together in intergenerational churches (see *Intergenerational Church report 2025*).
- The poor and the rich, people of all backgrounds, serving and leading together.
- Learning from our global partner churches, many of whom are experiencing exponential growth and have much to teach us—if we are humble enough to listen.

As we grow in knowing Jesus, the body of followers, the Church, will increasingly become a beacon to the One who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

3.4 Trusting Jesus

3.4.1 Let's learn to trust Jesus. This is especially relevant in this season of loss, change, and uncertainty. The last several years have brought real grief and upheaval to church communities. We can choose to continue to focus on the loss, see it as meaningless, or we can see it as a pruning—a painful but purposeful preparation for future fruitfulness.

As Jesus says in John 15: "*Every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful… No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine.*"

3.4.2 We believe the reform and reshaping of the Church are not signs of decline, but of God's preparation for growth in maturity, unity, fruitfulness, and number.

3.4.3 True trust in Jesus does not silence doubt—it holds space for it. In Scripture, Jesus welcomed the disciples' questions. The Psalms give voice to doubt, lament, and faith together.
But too often our church life still operates as if authority should speak without adequate space for response or exploration.

3.4.4 If we want a church where disciples grow in trust, we need:

- Worship and fellowship spaces that allow honest questions.
- Training and leadership models that welcome doubt and dialogue.
- Governance structures that allow time to grapple with change and seek God's will.

3.4.5 Prayer is an outworking of trust. To pray is to trust. It is the clearest expression of dependence on Jesus, in which we admit that we cannot do things in our own strength. We need the Holy Spirit to bring transformation. While few will argue against the need for more prayer, we call for specific, practical changes to embed prayer more deeply into the life of the Church:

- Every member, elder, minister, deacon, reader and staff member is encouraged to develop regular, intentional rhythms of prayer—alone and with others.
- Amongst those rhythms of prayer different forms and styles of prayer should be encouraged and nurtured, learning from tradition and contemporary practice.
- Every court of the Church—from Kirk Sessions to General Assembly—and every committee, including FAPLT and the Assembly Trustees, should begin each meeting with prayer that seeks God's guidance.
- The General Assembly should provide practical leadership by including dedicated prayer time each day, and when necessary, introducing prayer within the business to seek the Spirit together.
- Every church and worshipping community aim to pray at least ten minutes together in every worship or formal meeting gathering, expressing corporate trust in Jesus, praying together and encouraging one another with experiences of answered prayer.

3.5 Serving Jesus

3.5.1 Let's understand serving Jesus in a more developed way. There has been a tendency to see the church as being minister-led with more passive congregational members. However, Ephesians 4 reminds us that ministry roles are given by Christ to equip God's people for works of service, so that the whole Body may grow.

Ephesians 4 points to a diversity of roles:

- Apostles – sent to break new ground
- Prophets – discerning and declaring God's heart
- Evangelists – sharing the good news of Jesus
- Pastors – offering care and comfort
- Teachers – helping others understand and apply Scripture

3.5.2 It follows that for the Church to be effective then a significant and sustained change in our thinking must happen throughout the whole church. We need to be Minister-enabled, not Minister-dependent – where ministry is the work of the whole Church, not just the ordained few.

3.5.3 These five priorities are for every follower of Jesus, not just the ordained few. We believe the current generation, shaped by teamwork in their daily lives, can respond eagerly to team-based national ministries. Perhaps they have been ready all along. We just needed to ask the right question. This shift will require reimagining of the purpose of all our national ministries. We must call, train, and equip people for new kinds of roles, both paid and unpaid and perhaps recognise new forms of national ministry entirely. Their main priority should be empowering all God's people for every aspect of God's mission.

3.5.4 Flourishing is about human wellbeing and fullness of life, not about maintenance of institutions. By removing barriers to discipleship, relinquishing privilege, and trusting the Holy Spirit's gifts in all people, we might begin to resemble thriving Presbyterian churches around the world, where the Church is growing and vibrant.

3.5.5 As more people respond to God's call, we expect many to be drawn to serve the poorest and most marginalised. God has always shown priority for the poor—and as we release more people to dream and act on God's calling, new, dynamic and less encumbered expressions of service will emerge, especially among those society often overlooks.

3.6 Conclusion: Time to Grow

3.6.1 *Naming Jesus, Knowing Jesus, Trusting Jesus, Serving Jesus*. What we've laid out is not 'a quick fix.' The Church of Scotland's long decline in discipleship has developed over generations—and real growth will also take time. Pruning is painful, and growth afterward is often slow. The habits and cultural shifts we're calling for will take time to bear fruit.

3.6.2 But we believe that as we repent, refocus, and reorient, God may yet bless us with new life and growth—perhaps even sooner than we expect.

3.6.3 We've already begun to learn from others. In 2018, the General Assembly committed to learning from vibrant churches of Sub-Saharan Africa, where disciple-making, prayer, evangelism, repentance, and whole-church participation have led to significant growth. Their example teaches us that it's not just doing these things but making them a priority**.**

3.6.4 We pray that our response now is fuelled with a desire to see positive change in our structures, a keenness to explore the findings, and a heart to engage in the recommendations.

3.7 A Call to Spiritual Renewal

3.7.1 Ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda, the church reformed, always reforming, is often quoted. Though we may have missed past opportunities to reorient ourselves toward Christ, we now face another moment for true renewal. Declining numbers are not our greatest threat. Weakness is not failure. In weakness, God's strength is made perfect. What Jesus offers us is not more pressure, but rest: "Walk with me and work with me, watch how I do it… Learn the unforced rhythms of grace…" (Matthew 11:28-30, The Message).

3.7.2 Many Church of Scotland-rooted communities, from the Iona Community to the Crieff Fellowship, have found transformation by committing to both individual and shared spiritual practices. We believe that if tens of thousands of members develop habits of worship, prayer, evangelism, and discipleship, God will grow the Church in God's time and God's way.

What if every member knew their gifts and calling?

What if all were released to serve in mission and ministry?

What if we believed that Jesus could transform the nation, and the world, through all of us?

3.8 Recommendations

1. Affirm our obedience to the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19–20), lived out in love of God and neighbour.
2. Repent of past failures in discipling and commit to helping people follow Jesus.
3. Encourage the Assembly Business Committee to include dedicated times of prayer each day during Assembly.
4. Encourage the Assembly Trustees to clarify a communications strategy that takes seriously the need to communicate faith in multiple environments and to diverse demographics.
5. Commend the following reports for study and action:
   - *Church Without Walls* (2001)
   - *Lessons for Scotland from Christian Faith in Africa* (2018)
   - *The Calling of the Church* (2023)
6. Encourage FAPLT to shape discernment and training processes so that national ministries equip all God's people for service.
7. Call on Church committees and courts to embed prayer in the rhythm of meetings — not just at the beginning, but throughout.
8. Encourage Presbyteries to foster a culture of discipleship and partner with groups like Cairn Movement, Fresh Expressions, Growing Young, and others where helpful.
9. Commend the Church of Scotland Learning resources to the whole Church.
10. Encourage every member to speak more about Jesus than about church.
11. Affirm that every member has spiritual gifts, regardless of age or background, and is called to offer them.
12. Urge members to ask: "Who is discipling me?" and "Who am I discipling?"
13. Call on leaders to create space for people to discover and develop these gifts.
14. Challenge all leaders to model and support these habits of discipleship.
15. Promote daily personal and regular communal practices of Bible reading, prayer, and spiritual curiosity.
16. Promote space for honest questioning in worship, congregational life, and governance.
17. Encourage congregations to explore fresh worship practices as expressions of seeking God.

3.9 Notes and resources

GOOD NEWS COLLECTIVE

3.9.1 During 2023–24, a small team from FAPLT and Seeds for Growth visited ten of our new Presbyteries. Our purpose was threefold: to listen to congregations where they are, to worship and pray together, and to rekindle "strength for today and hope for tomorrow," echoing the great hymn Great Is Thy Faithfulness. Our current circumstances are no surprise to God; God knows our needs, and in Christ we are promised both provision and the building of the church.

3.9.2 Across the roadshows, we met a people who were beleaguered, discouraged, disillusioned, and despondent. While we could offer some strength for the present, inspiring hope for the future was harder. What we saw and heard during those visits is shaping something called The Good News Collective. This is a renewing process which focuses on:

You Matter: Strengthen personal faith and confidence in who we are in Christ.

Hope Has a Name: Encourage openness to being part of the answer to our own prayers as we share the Good News of Jesus.

Your Future Is Out There: Move from protecting what we have to engaging, serving, and inviting those we haven't met yet.

It's Time to Dream Again: Encourage congregations to rediscover God-given vision and dream of a renewed future.

3.9.3 What will The Good News Collective do?

- Restore confidence in the gospel.
- Renew hearts to love and serve our communities.
- Open eyes to the needs around us—and how each of us can help meet them.
- Reduce fear of the future and call faith to rise.
- Help shift from a "managing decline" mindset to a "preparing for growth" mindset.

3.9.4 At the heart of this work stands the promise of Jesus: "I will build my church." We believe He intends to do this through the Church of Scotland—across our nation and wherever we are present.

3.9.5 The Good News Collective is a new piece of work for FAPLT in the coming year.

ACORN

3.9.6 The ACORN initiative, repeatedly commended by the General Assembly, is a practical tool for praying and growing in this way. It involves simply noticing others, listening, and responding with your faith in Jesus. It's free, requires no formal training, and helps people grow in confidence and faith—but is often dismissed for seeming "too simple."

CHURCH PLANTING

3.9.7 FAPLT is actively encouraging church planting across the Church of Scotland—not through national posts or quotas, but by making local planting desirable, achievable, and sustainable. This means identifying and supporting those called and gifted to connect with people not yet in church, speak of Jesus, and disciple them.

3.9.8 Working with the Scottish Church Planting Network (SCPN), Fresh Expressions, and Seeds for Growth, together, we aim to provide discernment, training, and community for pioneers in this work. The goal isn't merely to stop numerical decline or to chase growth for its own sake. It's to foster a culture of multiplication—where churches plant churches, and disciples make disciples.

RESOURCES FOR DISCIPLESHIP

3.9.9 Several excellent tools already exist within the Church of Scotland:

- **Church of Scotland Learning** https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/resources/church-of-scotland-learning: equipping the whole Church to grow in faith.
- Conversations Series: guided discussions that help people talk openly and deeply about their faith.
- Learn Series (Saint Andrew Press): e.g., *Discipleship, Understanding Our Faith, Exploring Faith.*

3.9.10 There are vast numbers of resources available from a variety of sources. We will help to share the knowledge and experience of the resources available and develop connections to make it easy to use them in Scotland.

3.9.11 Research, including Steve Aisthorpe's *Invisible Church*, shows many believers are leaving traditional services for smaller, relational, discussion-based communities. These house groups often reflect deeper engagement, especially among those under 45. Indeed, 2021 data shows that 60% of those in New Worshipping Communities are under 45. To respond to this, the traditional Kirk must embrace mixed ecologies—traditional worship *and* newer, smaller expressions of church.

3.9.12 FAPLT will support and resource this shift, training leaders in our national ministries to serve both traditional and emerging models of worship and discipleship.

3.9.13 FAPLT will work with the Theological Forum to explore how gifted and called individuals in local churches might take on these responsibilities, in line with Presbyterian values and good oversight.

In the name of the Theological Forum and the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team

PAUL NIMMO, *Convener*
NATHALIE MARES MACCALLUM, *Secretary*
TOMMY MACNEIL, *Convener*
KAY CATHCART, *Secretary*

PRESBYTERY REVIEW COMMITTEE MAY 2026

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Receive the Summary Reports for the Presbytery Reviews of the Presbytery of Clyde and the Presbytery of the South West (Section 2 and Appendices A and B).
3. Receive the report on the Inspection of Presbytery Records (Section 3).
4. Note that the Presbyteries to be reviewed in 2026/27 are the Presbytery of Lothian and Borders and the Presbytery of the North East and Northern Isles, and agree that the Presbyteries to be reviewed in 2027/28 are the Presbytery of Fife and the Presbytery of Glasgow, and that the Presbyteries to be reviewed in 2028/29 are the Presbytery of Forth Valley and Clydesdale and Clèir Eilean Ì.

Executive Summary

The Presbytery Review Committee has worked well in 2025/26, the first full year of Presbytery Reviews and Inspection of Presbytery Records carried out in terms of the Presbytery Review Act (Act I 2025) following the pilots conducted in 2024/25. There have been some challenges, not least with the resignation of Rev Fiona Smith as Principal Clerk. However, work has continued on developing the Presbytery and Congregational Questionnaires and creating a system of Inspection of Records for all the large Scottish Presbyteries. The Committee is grateful to Presbyteries for their co-operation with the Presbytery Review and Inspection of Records processes. The Committee is ready to assist the Legal Questions Committee in the production and updating of Guidance to accompany the Presbytery Review Act.

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.
- To 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.
- To inspect annually the records of Presbyteries.

2. PRESBYTERY REVIEW

2.1 Following the two pilot Presbytery Reviews carried out in 2024/25, the Committee carried out its first full Presbytery Reviews in 2025/26. The Presbyteries reviewed were the Presbytery of Clyde and the Presbytery of the South West.

2.2 The Presbytery Reviews were carried out by separate Review Groups which were formed as sub-groups of the Committee. The Review Groups each attended a meeting of the Presbytery under review, and had one or more meetings with the Presbytery Clerk and other key staff and office bearers. Each Presbytery was asked to complete a Presbytery Questionnaire seeking information about various aspects of the Presbytery's life, functions and responsibilities. A Congregational Questionnaire was also sent to selected congregations within each Presbytery to elicit feedback on the Presbytery in its various spheres of responsibility.

2.3 Each Review Group then drew up a Presbytery Review Report which was submitted to the Presbytery in question. The Presbytery had the opportunity to make corrections to the Review Report before it was finalised. The Committee strongly recommends that Presbytery sends the Review Report to all of its members and that there is an opportunity for the whole Presbytery to discuss the Review Report at a Presbytery meeting.

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

2.5 The Committee is grateful for the co-operation of the Presbyteries under review and for the diligent input of the Presbytery staff, office bearers and congregations involved. The Committee will continue to evaluate and adjust its processes to fulfil its remit and to ensure that Presbytery Reviews meet the aims set out in the Presbytery Review Act. The Committee reminds Presbyteries of the need to respond in a timely manner to requests from the Committee and encourages Presbyteries to share the task of completing the Presbytery Questionnaire among all relevant staff and office bearers, in order to spread the load and reduce the burden on any individual.

2.6 The General Assembly of 2025 agreed 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 (at the time of writing) it is intended that initial documentation will be circulated to those Presbyteries in advance of the General Assembly of 2026.

2.7 The Committee proposes that the Presbyteries to be reviewed in 2027/28 are the Presbytery of Fife and the Presbytery of Glasgow, and that the Presbyteries to be reviewed in 2028/29 are the Presbytery of Forth Valley and Clydesdale and Clèir Eilean Ì. Thereafter it is hoped that the Committee will be able to publish a schedule of Presbytery Reviews on a five-yearly cycle.

2.8 At the moment the Presbytery Review Act does not apply to Presbyteries outside of Scotland but it is anticipated that the review process will be extended to them in due course.

3. INSPECTION OF RECORDS

3.1 The Inspection of Records Group was established as a sub-group of the Committee with responsibility for inspecting Presbyteries' own records, and to support Presbyteries in their inspection of congregational records.

3.2 In 2025/26, the Inspection of Records Group carried out an inspection of the records of all the larger Scottish Presbyteries, save for the Presbyteries of Edinburgh and West Lothian and of Perth whose records were inspected during the 2024/25 pilot year. In 2026/27 and in future years, the records of all ten larger Scottish Presbyteries will be inspected annually, and the Inspection of Records Group will continue to develop the list of documents to be inspected and its practices for doing so.

3.3 The Committee is grateful to the Presbyteries for their co-operation with the inspection of records. After inspecting the records received, the Inspection of Records Group wrote to each Presbytery whose records were inspected, with comments on good practice and feedback on any areas for development. We are pleased to report that Presbyteries are working towards having all necessary policies etc in place, updating their websites to include all appropriate information and generally making good progress in ensuring that high standards of governance are met. The Group's aim is to be encouraging and to seek improvement in the record keeping of Presbyteries over time, where that is required.

3.4 Further discussions have 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 Presbyteries and congregations are complying with the requirements of Church law and civil law. It is likely that these matters will be brought within the inspection of records processes from 2026/27 onwards.

4. PRESBYTERY REVIEW ACT GUIDANCE

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

In the name of the Committee

MOIRA McDONALD, *Convener*
CATHERINE COULL, *Vice-Convener*
JOHN L McPAKE, *Secretary*

Addendum

Rev Fiona Smith

The Committee was sad to hear of the resignation of the Rev Fiona Smith from the post of Principal Clerk in October 2025 for health reasons. Fiona was instrumental in the establishment of the Presbytery Review Committee and her unstinting passion for good order throughout the Church courts, together with the warmth with which she guided the Committee in its first year, have been enormously appreciated. The Committee sends Fiona its best wishes and prayers for her future service to the Church.

MOIRA McDONALD, *Convener*
CATHERINE COULL, *Vice-Convener*
JOHN L McPAKE, *Secretary*

Appendix A

Summary Report for Presbytery Review of Clyde Presbytery

Introduction

The review of the Presbytery of Clyde commenced with an initial meeting held on 19 August 2025 between members of the Review Group and key office-bearers of the Presbytery, including the Presbytery Clerk and Business Committee representatives. This meeting provided an opportunity to understand the historical context of the Presbytery's formation, its current structures, and the principal areas of focus in its shared life.

Following this meeting, a Presbytery Review Questionnaire was completed by relevant conveners and staff, providing detailed information across governance, mission planning, finance, safeguarding, staffing, and civil law responsibilities. The Review Group records its thanks to all who took part in the completion of the questionnaire and related discussions regarding the Review. In addition, a Congregational Questionnaire was circulated and responses were collated to provide perspective from congregations within the bounds. The Review Team records its appreciation for those congregations who contributed and recognises that such participation requires time and care.

The Review Group expresses its gratitude for the openness with which the Presbytery engaged in this process and for the candour of conversation that greatly assisted the preparation of this report.

Sincere thanks are extended to the congregations who participated in completing the questionnaire, members of Presbytery who met with the review team and completed the questionnaire, and the Presbytery Clerk, the Presbytery Secretary and all involved.

Main Observations

The Review Group concludes that the Presbytery of Clyde is functioning well and serving its purpose as a court of the Church and a worshiping community of God's people. It has acted and developed responsibly and faithfully within a period of significant structural change.

Since its formation in 2020, the Presbytery has navigated its union, the disruption of the pandemic, significant staff transition, and the sustained demands of Presbytery Mission Plan implementation. Governance structures are operating, financial oversight is compliant, vacancy procedures are progressing well, and communication is being strengthened. There is clear evidence of diligent and considered leadership, significant resource given to pastoral attentiveness, and a growing sense of shared identity and the need to continue building on this across the bounds of the Presbytery.

Good News to Share

While the Presbytery Review process appropriately identifies areas of challenge and development, the Presbytery of Clyde has articulated a number of practices and experiences which merit sharing more widely within the Church.

The Presbytery has intentionally developed opportunities which foster connection and strengthen relationships. Ministerial away days and shared lunches, including Ordained Local Ministers, provide space for fellowship and mutual encouragement. These gatherings allow members to get to know one another beyond formal business and contribute positively to morale, trust and relationship building in the at times lonely work of ministry. Such practices are particularly helpful as this and most Presbyteries continue to create a shared identity after the various unions.

Presbytery meetings consistently begin and end with worship. This integration of worship into the conduct of business reinforces the understanding that Presbytery is not simply an administrative Court but a worshipping community drawn together to discern God's will for their part of the Church.

The availability and visibility of staff during tea and coffee times at Presbytery meetings has also been highlighted as a valuable feature of Presbytery life. Informal accessibility strengthens communication, encourages approachability, and reduces perceived distance between office-bearers or employees and members of Presbytery.

In terms of good news, the Presbytery notes that encouraging stories from congregations are regularly shared through the Mission Committee and via social media platforms such as Facebook. Services conducted across the bounds have brought people together and fostered a sense of unity and encouragement. The Presbytery also records that much of its Mission Plan has now been implemented successfully and that positive outcomes are beginning to be seen.

Recommendations

The Review Group recommends that:

A. The Presbytery continue to give sustained attention to the implementation and annual evaluation of its Presbytery Mission Plan, ensuring that pastoral sensitivity, realistic timescales, and clear communication accompany structural decisions, particularly in relation to congregational unions and property matters.

B. The Presbytery continue to strengthen and formalise its structures for Superintendence, ensuring proactive oversight mechanisms are in place following the discontinuation of the Local Church Review model.

C. The Presbytery review the operation of its Complaints Procedure in light of the guidance of the Legal Questions Committee (September 2025), through the establishment of a distinct Complaints Committee separate from the Superintendence Committee, in accordance with national guidance.

D. Those serving in the handling of complaints undertake appropriate training, including guidance available through the Safeguarding Service in areas such as trauma-informed practice.

E. The Presbytery consider developing and publishing a structured annual training programme for office-bearers and congregations, responding to identified needs in safeguarding, trustee responsibilities, finance, youth work, and digital participation.

F. The Presbytery establish clear communication response protocols, ensuring timely acknowledgement of enquiries and continued development of its Communications Strategy and digital presence.

G. The Presbytery complete and implement its developing governance policies, including conflicts of interest, procurement, and whistleblowing.
H. The Presbytery continue to prioritise pastoral care for ministers and deacons, building on existing relational initiatives and progressing exploration of structured chaplaincy or peer-support models.
I. The Presbytery consider committee structure and membership levels to share the workload.
J. The Presbytery, once the most pressing elements of structural adjustment have settled, continue to consider and articulate a vision for its work in the world.

Appendix B

Summary Report for Presbytery Review of the Presbytery of the South West

Introduction

The review of the Presbytery of the South West began with initial contact with the Presbytery Clerk, Mrs Christine Murray, which was followed by a visit by two members of the Review Group to a Presbytery meeting on Saturday 13 September 2025 at which the process was introduced to members of the Presbytery. Prior to this the Presbytery Review Form was circulated along with a Congregational Questionnaire to the Clerk.

The Convener of the Presbytery Review Committee, Rev Moira McDonald, met with the Presbytery Clerk on 3 October 2025 to further discuss the process and paperwork requirements. While it is anticipated by this process that Conveners and staff would be involved in completing the Presbytery Review Form in order to get input from across the leadership of the Presbytery, that was not the case in this instance. The form was completed by the Presbytery Clerk. Encouragement to involve others was provided. The Presbytery Review Form was received by the Review Group on 2 December 2025 along with copies of policies, standing orders and remits.

A selection of congregations was suggested by the Business and Nomination Committee to represent a spread across the former constituent Presbyteries and a mix of different settings (rural, urban, linkage, new union, urban priority area). These were contacted by the Review Group. Six congregations were approached and four responses were received.

Rev Peter Johnston met online with the Vice-Convener of the Business and Nomination Committee on 9 December 2025 and Mr Douglas Vallance had a phone conversation with the Moderator of the Presbytery on 8 January 2026. It was not possible to arrange a meeting with the Business and Nomination Committee of the Presbytery until the Presbytery Review Form had been returned to the Review Team. The delays in receiving this placed some pressure on the Review Team in organising a meeting. Initial attempts to organise a hybrid meeting and to include meeting with staff did not transpire and an online meeting was held with members of the Business and Nomination Committee at relatively short notice. The Review Team are grateful to those who were able to meet with us at that meeting on Monday 19 January 2026.

Thanks are also extended to those congregations that participated in completing the questionnaire, to the Clerk and Presbytery Administration Officer.

Main Observations

There is full recognition by those with whom the Review Group spoke that the Presbytery is a work in progress at the moment, but that it has also seen development and growth take place over its first few years. There are many deeply committed people working for and with the Presbytery and striving towards making the Presbytery work effectively.

Those with whom the Review Team spoke or from whom received feedback were keen to acknowledge the huge amount of work undertaken by the Clerks and Administration Officer on behalf of the Presbytery. Their work is vital in enabling the Presbytery to function. Furthermore the feedback from congregations indicated an appreciation of the advice and support that was provided by the Presbytery. The work of Conveners and their Committees in the good administration of the Presbytery's responsibilities is to be commended.

A concern of the Review Group is the workload upon the Presbytery Clerk. We note the appreciation we heard for the Clerk's work in this role and we encourage her in the work that she is doing, with the caveat that she needs to improve the delegation of work/responsibilities wherever she can. The very process of this Presbytery Review clearly highlighted this as an issue to us. In order for that to happen, of course, it means the willingness of others to respond positively when their assistance is sought and it requires excellent communication and coordination to work most effectively.

Good News to Share

Some of the good news stories from within the Presbytery include:

- Strength for Today, Hope for Tomorrow conference with worship, prayer, workshops and vision.
- A successful Mission Conference that particularly supported the Mission Pioneers.
- The filling of vacancies with the implementation of the Presbytery Mission Plan.
- The visit of the Moderator of the General Assembly in early 2025.
- A Confident Christianity conference to help people share their faith in conversation.
- A lively Wee Sing event held in the Presbytery as part of The Guild.

Recommendations

The Review Group made a number of recommendations for the Presbytery:

A. Take full advantage of the opportunities to meet together in order to build relationships across the Presbytery, perhaps including the development of local gatherings to join online Presbytery meetings in a group setting.

B. Continue to develop support for the teams conducting inspections of records and to expand the team inspecting congregational accounts.

C. Create a Complaints Committee as a standing committee, as per the current guidance from the Legal Questions Committee, and separate from the current Superintendence Committee.

D. For those who are appointed to a Complaints Committee ensure that they are provided with some training and support in how to manage the complaints procedure appropriately. This is particularly helpful for dealing with situations that may involve trauma. The Safeguarding Service can be contacted to assist.

E. Consider developing a Communications Strategy for the Presbytery which will involve a coordinated review of the different methods of communication utilised, timing, and who is involved.

F. Further develop the website so that it is a live and active space to find up-to-date news and resources that can be readily accessible by congregations and office-bearers. Once the website is in a more complete state, ensure that it is periodically checked so that it is accurate, relevant, and that links work.

G. Consider putting in place a Staffing Group/Committee that will have responsibility for dealing with staffing matters on behalf of the Presbytery, including coordinating recruitment as necessary.

H. Develop a means by which to induct new members into the life of the Presbytery. This may be assisted by the creation of a Code of Conduct with relevant information about the Presbytery and how to participate within the Presbytery effectively.

I. When considering training opportunities beyond those already in place, for instance the Worship Leaders training, explore the potential of working with other Presbyteries to develop material that may be useful.

J. Consider the preparation of a Risk Assessment for the Presbytery (not for each congregation) which would include the identification of potential and actual risks and the mitigation strategies for these risks.

K. Engage with the Assembly Trustees over the budget and financial considerations for the Presbytery's sustainability.

L. Seek to find time and capacity amongst a group within Presbytery to prayerfully consider a whole vision strategy for the Presbytery.

SAFEGUARDING COMMITTEE MAY 2026

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Instruct the Safeguarding Committee to work in partnership with Faith Action Programme Leadership Team, all relevant departments and external agencies to develop a framework of practical support to enable the spouses of ministers and their children to leave an abusive relationship when they are ready to do so and to report back to the General Assembly of 2027 *(Section 1.4)*.

Points for Information

1. The evolving Safeguarding needs in relation to regulatory and legislative compliance indicated the need for a review of the structure of Safeguarding Provision across the Church. Changes have been implemented to the staffing resource and structure of the Safeguarding Service as detailed in section 1.1. Changes to local arrangements for the Safeguarding responsibilities of congregations and Presbyteries are being considered by a Working Group as detailed in section 2.2.
2. We are once again highlighting the importance of learning the lessons from reviews into documented Safeguarding failings in sister denominations, to which we are also vulnerable. This is discussed in section 1.3.
3. A review of the processes of the Recruitment and Risk Sub-Committee and as to appeal/review of RRSC decisions was carried out following some recent experiences with appeals as explained in the Report of the Legal Questions Committee. This led to recommendations for changes to the Safeguarding Act (Act XVI 2025) sections 5, 6 and 7. The relevant proposals will be brought to the General Assembly by the Legal Questions Committee as detailed in section 6 of their Report.
4. Remits from the General Assembly of 2025 continue to form part of the Safeguarding Committee's Work Plan Priorities. These are 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, and to develop and establish international reciprocal Safeguarding procedures.
5. The Safeguarding Committee wishes to thank the volunteers who promote Safeguarding within congregations and ensure that Safeguarding training is delivered locally with dedication and care

Executive Summary

Safe Churches for All – Governance & Compliance

The Safeguarding Committee continues to provide for the Safeguarding responsibilities of the Church of Scotland on behalf of the General Assembly. The work of the Safeguarding Service is continually evolving to meet regulatory and legislative compliance with Local and National Safeguarding Guidance, Church Law, Scots Law and the relevant legislative frameworks worldwide.

2025 was a time of significant change and challenge for a number of reasons, most notably the further staged implementation of the Disclosure (Scotland) Act 2020 which introduced new criteria for PVG Scheme membership resulting in a large increase in the numbers requiring membership. In addition, a review of the capacity of the Safeguarding Service indicated a significantly increased workload when comparing 2022 with the comparable figures on 30 June 2025. This led to a comprehensive proposal for additional staff capacity and amendment to the structure of Safeguarding to achieve regulatory and legislative compliance. The changes to the staffing were completed by February 2026 and the consideration of Safeguarding at a congregation and Presbytery level, currently dependant on volunteers, is continuing through a working group with the aim for reporting in late 2026.

Further comparison undertaken using full 2025 figures indicated an increase of 134.67% in Criminal Record Checks processed; 62.92% in Safeguarding Concern responses; 260% in training provision and 40% in individuals being risk assessed by the Recruitment and Risk Sub-Committee due to the receipt of vetting information or reports of possible misconduct. There was a decrease of 26.43% of such risk assessments being managed more proportionately by the Safeguarding Advisory Panel.

Safeguarding Concern Referrals continue to be predominately from CrossReach Services, and the Safeguarding Service provide Management Reports indicating any patterns or concerns to enable a focus on practice improvement. Congregation referrals are appropriately supported which can include direct management by Safeguarding Officers.

Learning from Safeguarding Reviews in other Churches is vital and we must honestly and transparently consider how recommendations from such reviews impact on us. The concern that is common to most is regarding failure to effectively implement Safeguarding Processes. This is reflected by the inclusion of this as a high risk within the Corporate Risk Register and continues to be a priority for the Safeguarding Committee.

Domestic Abuse in the Manse is never acceptable. 'Living a Theology that Counters Violence Against Women', a Report by the Church and Society Council in 2014, demonstrates understanding of domestic abuse and offers a theological position that challenges this. Through work with individuals, the Safeguarding Committee has identified a gap in the practical support available to spouses of Ministers experiencing domestic abuse to enable them to leave the abusive relationship. The Committee proposes to explore the particular challenges within this context with partners across the Church and external agencies.

Review of Safeguarding Act in respect of the effective implementation of RRSC decisions and risk assessments was carried out. This work was done in partnership with a sub-group of the Legal Questions Committee and will be presented by that Committee.

Report

1. A SAFE CHURCH FOR ALL

1.1 Safeguarding Service Structure

1.1.1 "Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also the interests of others." Philippians 2:4

1.1.2 The work of the Safeguarding Service is continually evolving to meet the needs of the Church of Scotland in respect of regulatory and legislative compliance with Local and National Safeguarding Guidance, Church Law, Scots Law and the relevant legislative frameworks worldwide in respect of laws pertaining to:

- Relevant Criminal Record Checks
- Recruitment of workers undertaking a Regulated Role or equivalent within that locale
- Child Protection
- Adult Support and Protection
- Public Protection (The management of sexual or violent offenders)

1.1.3 There has been significant change to, and increase in, the workload of the Safeguarding Service in recent years which resulted in a position where the Service was operating beyond capacity. This presented significant risk of staff burnout, increased opportunities for failure points and non-compliance and, most importantly, impacted on our ability to lead in our aim of providing a safe Church for all. The table below (figure 1) demonstrates the raw data for the change in workload related to the key functions of the Department comparing 2022 to 2025 calculated using monthly average figures.

Figure 1

Com' 2022 to 2025	PVG & DBS applications	SG Concern referrals	RSC Cases	SAP	Training (Individual participants)
% shift	+134.67%	+62.92%	+40%	-26.43%	+260%*

*2022 training figures were recorded as per the number of training courses. From 2023 onwards, training stats represent individuals who have participated in training. A generous estimate of 20 participants per course was used to estimate 2022 figure.

1.1.4 Following a needs analysis and review of the Safeguarding Service structure and outputs, a comprehensive staff structure proposal was approved by the Assembly Trustees in July 2025 (see figures 2 & 3). This resulted in an increase from 7.96 WTE to 10.36 WTE positions. Importantly, the change was not only an increase in staffing resource to meet the increasing workload, it introduced a new structure providing capacity for individual support and supervision of all Safeguarding Staff. The importance of this cannot be overestimated given the type of work undertaken and the type of information staff are exposed to. Vicarious trauma and secondary traumatic stress are identified in many research studies as key factors in staff burnout. It is our duty to ensure we are Safeguarding those given the responsibility for Safeguarding others within the Church.

Figure 2

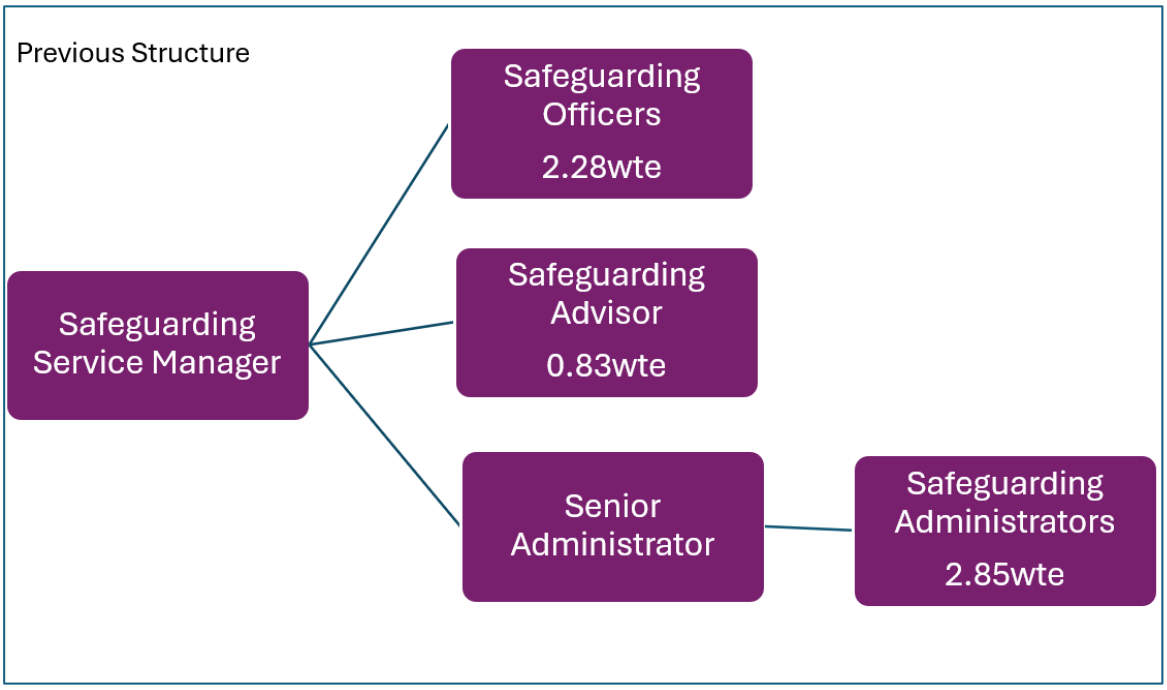
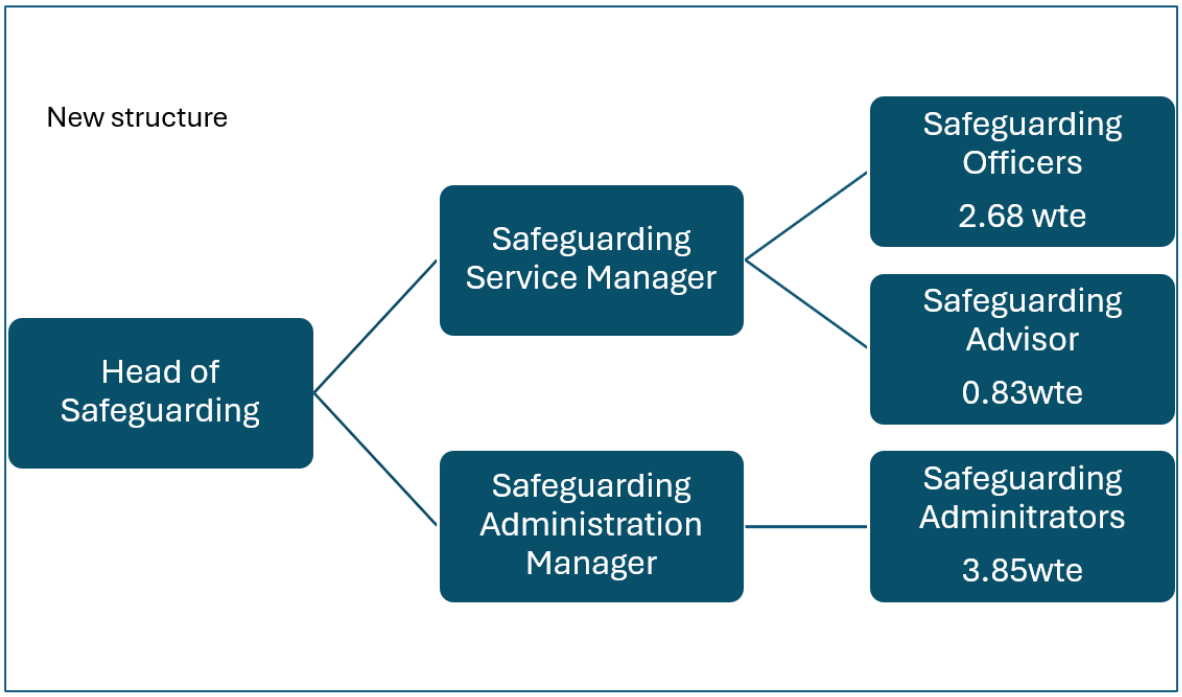


Figure 3



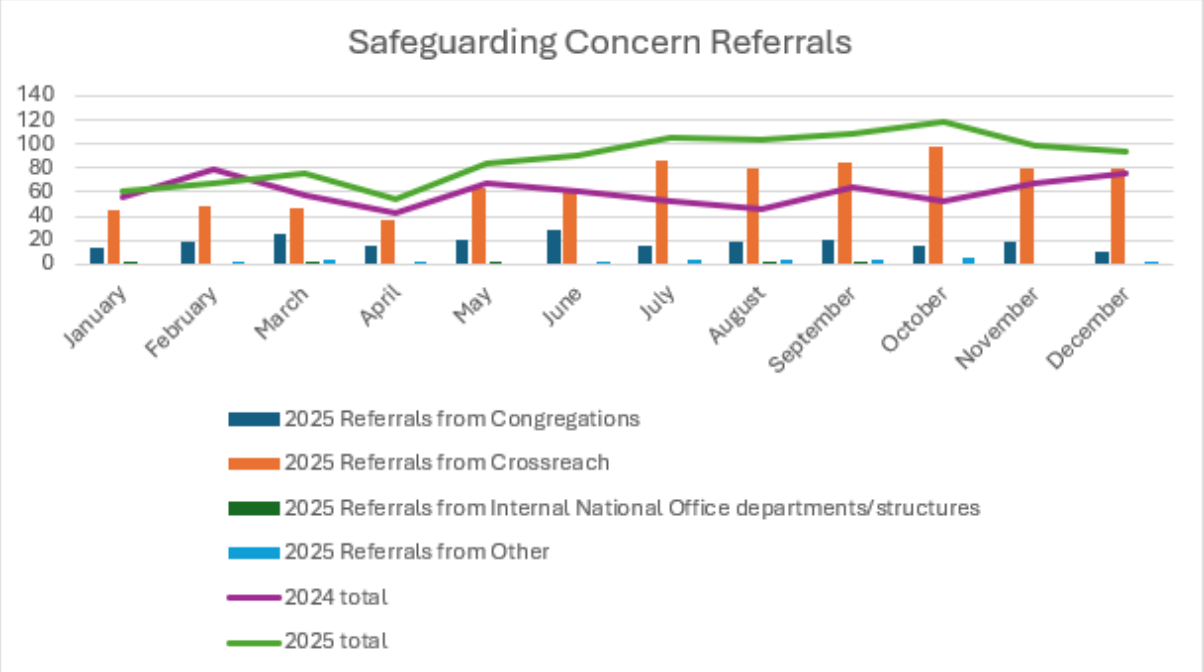
1.1.5 The new administrative staff took up post in late November 2025. One Safeguarding Officer increased hours from 0.6 WTE to full-time. The Safeguarding Officer (Training) was successful at interview and appointed to the Safeguarding Service Manager role. This necessitated further recruitment with that vacancy being filled in February 2026. The Safeguarding Service is now appropriately resourced with the capacity to meet our responsibilities.

1.2 Safeguarding Concern Service

1.2.1 The Safeguarding Service is responsible for managing all reported Safeguarding Concerns. Responses to such reports can take the form of the provision of 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, public protection (managing those who may pose a risk to others) or wider Safeguarding wellbeing referrals.

1.2.2 Referrals come from many sources as demonstrated by the chart below (figure 4). While CrossReach continues to account for the majority of referrals, the Safeguarding Service has not had to directly manage any of these concerns. CrossReach Service managers are frequently seeking confirmation of actions required as they have identified them or are able to implement the advice and guidance provided.

Figure 4



1.2.3 As reported in the Safeguarding Service Report 2024, the Service had been working with the IT Department to develop our Management Information Reports. These reporting systems have now been in place for a full calendar year. This has facilitated a more robust analysis of referrals and the identification of trends or areas requiring further exploration of practice. CrossReach managers have expressed that the reports have been useful and provided added value to their self-evaluation processes. Figure 5 indicates the key factors underlying referrals as per CrossReach Directorate. These are not the only factors; they are the factors that represent the highest number of referrals.

Figure 5

Key factors	Adult Services		Children & Families		Older People	
Adult - Emotional/ psychological	29	21%	49	16.80%		
Child - Emotional/Psychological			12	4.10%		
Physical	35	25%	41	14%	289	79%
Internal factors			71	24.30%		
Parent/carer factors			24	8.20%		
Related to staff conduct	13	9.40%	6	2%	11	3

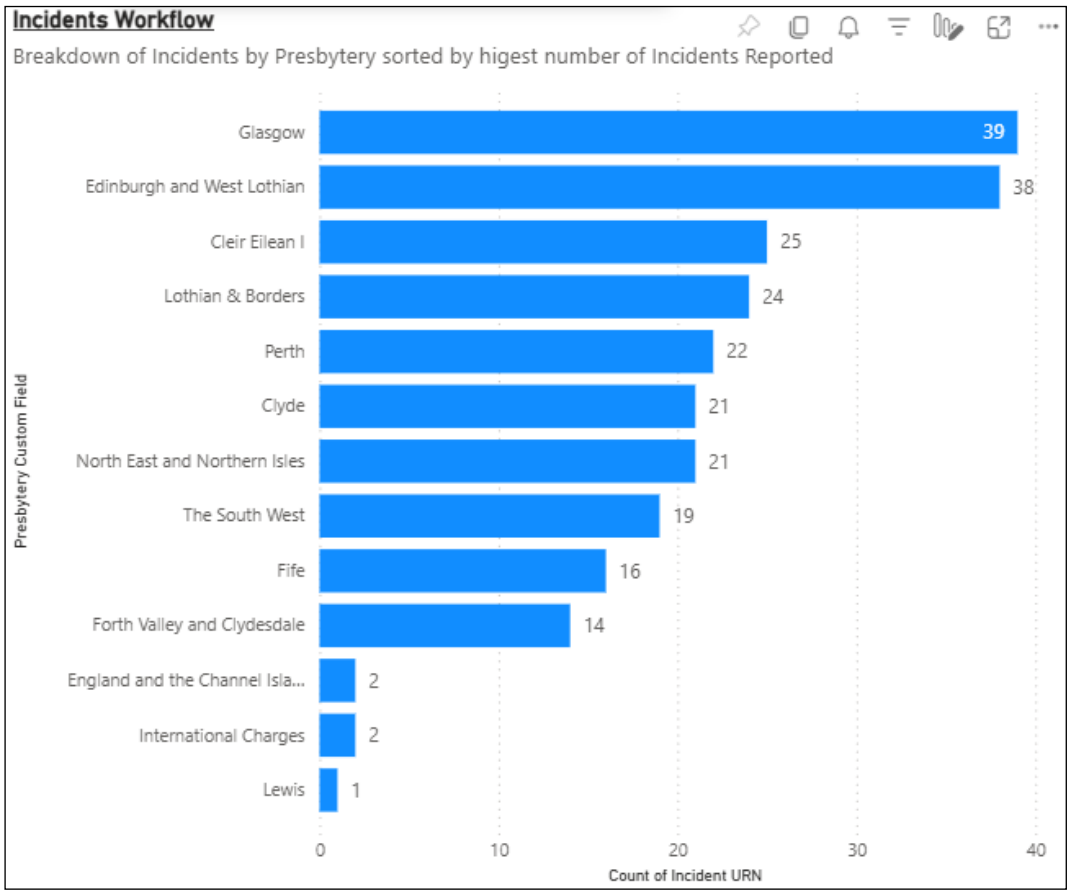
1.2.4 It is difficult to draw any general conclusions with respect to Adult Services as there are a significant number of services that have never made a referral, although the number has increased on the previous year. One important observation is in relation to newly appointed managers; it has been noted that this has led to referrals from a Service which has never referred before. This may indicate that those new to post are starting from a position of good practice rather than having to change embedded working practices.

1.2.5 Within the Children and Families Directorate, Counselling Services are the most frequent referrers. This is in line with expectations and reflects the type of services being provided. Emotional and psychological factors are the main reason for 45.2% of referrals with a further 8.2% of referrals where a parent/carer's emotional or psychological wellbeing is the cause. It should be noted that where 'adult-Emotional/Psychological' factor is identified, this is in relation to the adult being the person accessing the service such as an adult receiving counselling from Bluebell Peri-natal Service which sits within this Directorate. Where 'Parent/Carer' is used, it is the child who is receiving the Service and the referral has identified a characteristic of the parent to be impacting on the child, for example, a parent with mental health difficulties or problematic substance use.

1.2.6 Physical factors are by far the most prevalent concern within the Older People's Directorate. Closer analysis indicates that falls, both witnessed and unwitnessed, account for a large number of these referrals. Safeguarding regularly give advice regarding the use of a 'falls risk assessment' to promote awareness of risk and pro-active safeguarding measures. Alongside falls, medication errors feature regularly. Most are minor errors relating to missed doses of medications; however, this does indicate the presence of risk and the need for consistent monitoring and frequent training for staff.

1.2.7 Congregations made 210 Safeguarding Concern referrals in 2025.Figure 6 provides a breakdown by Presbytery. 24.76% of these referrals were in the 'Adult- other' category. This category is a catch-all one which reflects types of harm that are not frequently reported. Closer analysis indicates that the main factors identified in this category were domestic abuse and non-recent abuse. Assessment for a Covenant of Responsibilities was the largest single factor in Congregational referrals accounting for 11.9% of the total. Interestingly, 13.8% of referrals received were classified as 'not a safeguarding concern'. Such referrals are frequently related to concerns for the wellbeing of children and/or protected adults which do not require a Safeguarding response; however, the Safeguarding Service will provide advice and signpost sources of information and support.

Figure 6



1.3 Safeguarding Reviews – Lessons Learned

1.3.1 In their report to General Assembly in 2025, the Safeguarding Committee highlighted the findings and recommendations of the Makin Report with respect to the Church of England and identified possible weak points in our Safeguarding Processes and Practice. While good progress has been made in strengthening our processes, there remains two key remits from the General Assembly of 2025 which have not been achieved:

i. 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.

ii. 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.

1.3.2 The Safeguarding Committee believe these continue to be areas of importance and will prioritise them within their 2026 – 2027 work plan. Faith Action Programme Leadership Team also remain committed to these areas of development.

1.3.3 The seriousness of these issues, which affect all denominations and faith groups, is readily illustrated. The Presbyterian Church in Ireland has recently carried out a Safeguarding Review which noted a number of recent failures in good safeguarding practice and the fact that in most instances there was a basic failure to follow its own safeguarding guidance and procedures. The Church of England has come under criticism by the Charity Commission for being too slow to implement safeguarding improvements following the Makin Report and further allegations of abuse. Also, in January 2026 the Charity Commission issued official warnings to two Dioceses for failures, amounting to mismanagement, in handling allegations against a former Bishop. It is noteworthy to understand the context in which the Charity Commission expected the Dioceses to implement Safeguarding Measures – a Police investigation resulted in no further action due to lack of evidence and the threshold for Disciplinary action within Church of England was not reached. The Charity Commission were aware of this and still expected Safeguarding Measures to be implemented.

1.3.4 These issues are relevant to Safeguarding in the Church of Scotland. All denominations face the same risks and we are all vulnerable to failing in our duty to protect vulnerable people. The risk posed by failure to implement the Safeguarding Act and associated processes appropriately is included within the Corporate Risk Register which also relates to the dependency on volunteers to implement Safeguarding within congregations and Presbyteries. In addition, there have been challenges within the Recruitment and Risk Sub-Committee processes. It is essential that decisions based on risk are made as soon as risk has been identified rather than delaying Safeguarding Measures pending the outcome of a Disciplinary Process or criminal proceedings. Information detailing the Safeguarding Committee's response to these identified risks is within section 3.2.

1.4 Domestic Abuse within the Manse

1.4.1 Domestic Abuse is a complex form of abuse. While domestic violence has been recognised as abuse for some time, the awareness of the impact of coercive control within relationships has been acknowledged more recently and continues to grow. The complexity of domestic abuse can be further complicated when experienced in the context of a marriage where the perpetrator is a faith leader. This introduces a level of status, authority and power within a community not just the marriage. Sometimes, religions and belief systems can act as a barrier to justice and can encourage a culture of silence, leaving the victim unable to speak up about their abuse due to shame, fear, and trauma that is embedded in their lives because of the cultural norms that they, their families and the communities that they are a part of conform to.

1.4.2 The possibility of a Minister of Word and Sacrament perpetrating domestic abuse must be acknowledged. Indeed, Living a Theology that Counters Violence Against Women, a report by the Church and Society Council to the General Assembly of 2014, demonstrates such understanding and offers a theological position that challenges violence against women and girls and acknowledges tackling abuse "... requires of us the honesty to face up to the ways that church structures, power relations, expectations, theology and practices have been implicated in the normalising of gender injustice."

1.4.3 The Safeguarding Committee also recognise the good work being undertaken by the Integrity Group to raise awareness and provide resources to support greater understanding and promote an appropriate response to disclosures of abuse. Their Information sheet 2: Domestic Abuse asserts "We are committed to offering our best possible pastoral care to everyone who has experienced domestic abuse, regardless of age or gender, and to help them access any support or resources they may need."

1.4.4 Recent work of the Safeguarding Committee has identified further developments required in this area. In addition to recognising the barriers that stop people leaving any abusive relationship, we must also recognise the specific barriers within our own Church. The Safeguarding Service has responded to reports of domestic abuse perpetrated by Church of Scotland Ministers, and despite staff having considerable experience of supporting victims of domestic abuse within the general population, they were surprised by the additional barriers facing the spouse of a Minister. The challenges around housing and the complexity of the Manse as a marital home when attempting to secure accommodation is only one of the additional challenges experienced in this context. In recognising that the point at which a spouse leaves an abusive relationship is the most dangerous in terms of physical safety, the Safeguarding Committee plan to work with Faith Action Programme Leadership Team, other appropriate departments and external agencies to develop a framework of practical support to enable spouses and their children to leave an abusive relationship when they are ready to do so.

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2. GOVERNANCE & REGULATORY COMPLIANCE

2.1 Disclosure (Scotland) Act 2020

2.1.1 The staged implementation of the Disclosure (Scotland) Act 2020 brought substantial change regarding who required membership of the PVG Scheme to carry out their role. Prior to April 2025, this was based on 'Regulated Work' as defined by the Protection of Vulnerable Groups (Scotland) Act 2007; from April 2025 the criteria changed to focus on the role a person was carrying out. The 2020 Act introduced the 'Regulated Role' criteria and also defined certain locations where those engaging with children or protected adults would now require PVG Scheme membership. The impact of the changes brought significant challenges for the Safeguarding Service and workers across the Church.

2.1.2 Preparation for the changes was difficult due to the lack of guidance from Disclosure Scotland. Guidance was eventually published just two weeks prior to the implementation. It became apparent that Disclosure Scotland had underestimated the impact of changes both on the workforce and on their capacity to manage the influx of new applications they would receive. To manage this, they took the decision to close to the public, including their phone lines, every Thursday to enable them to focus on processing applications. In addition, at the same time, they changed the process for applications to an online model. This was overwhelming for many of our volunteers in congregations whose demographic can sometimes result in issues of digital literacy.

2.1.3 The Safeguarding Service engaged with Disclosure Scotland's Senior Leadership Team on behalf of the Scottish Churches Committee's Safeguarding Sub-Committee, and as an individual registered body. Some solutions were identified and we continue to work with them to address the issues which continue to cause difficulties.

2.1.4 The implementation of regulated locations was the most problematic for us, particularly the designation of Care Homes for Older People as such a location. This meant that anyone visiting a Care Home on behalf of the Church to carry out an activity as defined in the relevant Schedules of the Disclosure (Scotland) Act, needed to be a member of the PVG Scheme. There was significant resistance to this by many of those affected by the change and some resistance to accept the Guidance of the Safeguarding Service. However, the Head of Safeguarding met with a member of Disclosure Scotland's management team to assess all roles within the Church and ensure a shared understanding of which roles meet the criteria of a regulated role. New Guidance has been produced to support congregations in complying with the legislative requirements.

2.2 Maintaining Accurate Records – legal compliance

2.2.1 In 2025 the Safeguarding Committee reported on the progress of our Data Cleanse Project which had been implemented with the aim of achieving compliance with the Disclosure (Scotland) Act 2020 and the Data Protection Act 2018 in respect of maintaining accurate records and only storing information for which there is a continuing lawful purpose to have it. Phase one of the project, removal of individuals from Congregational Safeguarding Registers where necessary, has been completed; however, it has not been possible to make further progress due to barriers which have prevented us from creating new registers in a format that will enable us to keep them up to date. At the time of writing,

we continue to work with the IT Department with the aim of identifying a solution. If we are unable to identify a solution, a further large scale data cleanse is likely to be required in the future.

2.2.2 It is important to note that a digital solution is available; however, it would require those with responsibility for maintaining the records to have a good working knowledge of Microsoft 365 software. Many of our Safeguarding Volunteers in Congregations and Presbyteries are not confident in the use of such software. This highlights some of the challenges that reliance on volunteers for legal compliance brings. The Safeguarding Committee is aware that some Presbyteries and Congregations have employed people to fulfil their Safeguarding responsibilities; however, this is being done without consultation with the Safeguarding Service and, therefore, there is no overview of what is working well or assurance that such workers have an accurate understanding of legislative and regulatory requirements. The Safeguarding Committee currently has a Working Group exploring alternative options for meeting regulatory requirements. This work includes engaging with Congregations and Presbyteries to gain a better understanding of the paid Safeguarding Roles and what benefit these have brought.

2.3. Professional Advisory Service

2.3.1 The Advisory Service supports different aspects of Safeguarding. It provides advice and guidance to support all areas of the Church in maintaining regulatory compliance with the recruitment of those in roles which require Criminal Record Checks. In Scotland this is the PVG Scheme; however, the Safeguarding Advisor provides information relating to appropriate check in all countries in which the Church of Scotland has a presence. In addition, the Advisory Service is available to support Congregations in policy, process and Safeguarding Practice. This can include anything from setting up a youth club to planning for a residential trip or developing a transport service for Sunday Worship.

2.3.2 Over 2025, the most prevalent request for advice and support was in respect to the changes imposed by the Disclosure (Scotland) Act 2020 as detailed in section 2.1 above, the identification of Regulated Roles.

2.4 Safeguarding Handbook

2.4.1 The Safeguarding Handbook has an important role in promoting good practice and regulatory compliance; however, it became clear that the structure and complexity of the online Handbook made it difficult to use. After consultation with Safeguarding Volunteers a reviewed structure was designed. There are now Safeguarding Guidance documents designed around specific roles and responsibilities including guidance for Kirk Sessions, Presbytery Clerks, Ministers and Safeguarding Panels. These are complemented by a range of 'A Guide To…' documents based on the activities and Safeguarding Practice issues raised by those contacting the Safeguarding Service. For example, 'A Guide to Digital & Social Media'; 'A Guide to Covenants of Responsibilities'; 'A Guide to Basic/L1 Disclosure' and more. At the time of writing, work is being undertaken to reconfigured to the Safeguarding Webpages to make the quest of finding information much simpler.

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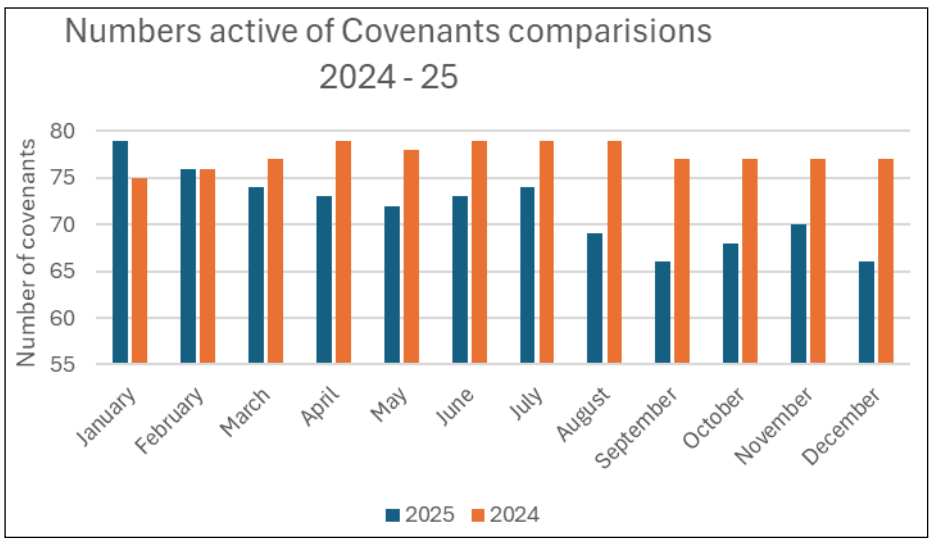
3. RISK MANAGEMENT

3.1 Covenants of Responsibilities.

3.1.1 Covenants of Responsibilities support those who may pose a risk to others to safely participate in the life of the congregation. Covenants are individually tailored to meet the needs of the individual as well as the congregation and are overseen by the Safeguarding Service to ensure ongoing professional support and advice for our Congregational Safeguarding Panels.

3.1.2 Following the decision of the General Assembly in 2025 to align Covenants to Responsible Bodies' supervision and reporting requirements as managed through the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangement framework (MAPPA), the Safeguarding Service has implemented this through the existing review process. Taking this approach enabled the Safeguarding Service to review each case that was no longer subject to statutory measures in a planned and manageable manner. We worked closely with the National Sex Offender Management Unit/ViSOR in risk assessing individuals who no longer met the threshold for a Covenant before any Covenant was closed. As can be seen in figure 7 below, this has resulted in a steady reduction in the number of Covenants being managed from an average of 77.5 in 2024 to 71.67 in 2025.

Figure 7



3.1.3 The review of the identified Covenants is not yet complete; however, for the majority of cases, there can be confidence that the management of sex or violent offenders within our congregations is now proportionate to the risk posed and ensures a rights-based approach for all involved.

3.2 Recruitment and Risk Sub-Committee (RRSC)

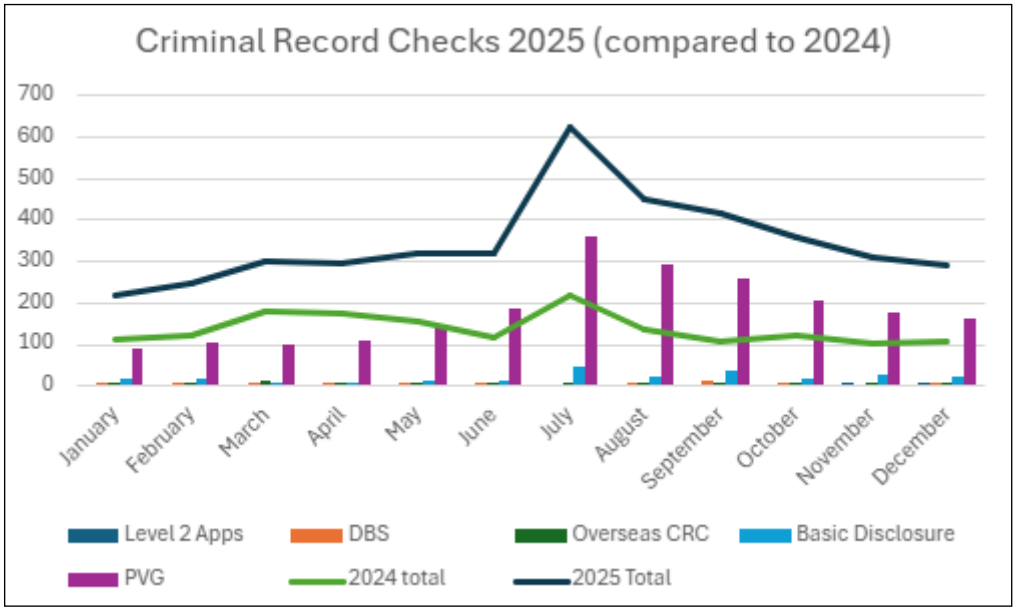
3.2.1 The RRSC has responsibility for considering the suitability of individuals to undertake a regulated role when in receipt of vetting information from statutory agencies or where a Safeguarding concern has been raised regarding the conduct of a worker. Following recent experiences with the processes in the Safeguarding Act (Act XVI 2025), the Convener of the Safeguarding Committee and the Head of Safeguarding have participated in a sub-group of the Legal Questions Committee set up to review the risk assessment and appeals processes. The aim was to ensure that defensible Safeguarding decisions can be made and implemented at the earliest opportunity to reduce the risk of harm. We must learn the lessons identified through the reviews into Safeguarding failings in other organisations. We must ensure that our processes are transparent, robust, trauma-informed and prioritise the safety and protection of children and vulnerable adults.

3.2.2 The Legal Questions Committee sub-group reviewed the risk assessment process and the appeal provisions of the Safeguarding Act (Act XVI 2025) and are proposing amendments to that Act which will be brought before the General Assembly by the Legal Questions Committee. Information about the Risk Assessment process will be given to those being considered by the RRSC.

3.3 Criminal Record Checks

3.3.1 Criminal record checks are part of our standard risk assessments in the recruitment of individuals for Regulated Roles and for assessing the ongoing suitability of such workers. The application and processing of the vast range of criminal record checks required across the Church is managed by the Safeguarding Administration Team. 2025 was a particularly challenging year for the Team as the front line contact for anyone experiencing difficulties in making an application. They are to be commended for their patience and perseverance as well as the grace in which they managed and supported the distress of many volunteers throughout the implementation of the Disclosure (Scotland) Act 2020 as detailed in section 2.1 above. Figure 8 demonstrates the impact of the changes in relation to the increasing number of checks necessitated by the legislation.

Figure 8



4. SAFEGUARDING TRAINING

4.1 Safeguarding Training for the Regulated Role workforce of the Church of Scotland continues to be a key function of the Safeguarding Service, and the Safeguarding Committee are dedicated to the ongoing development of our training programme. In 2025 the facilitation of Leadership/Ministries* Safeguarding Training was greatly increased as we worked towards the further development of a positive Safeguarding Culture across the Church. The feedback and evaluation of this course have been overwhelmingly positive. Some quotes are provided below.

"I found the training to be top class and benefitted hugely from Noelle and Verita as facilitators."

"I just wanted to email directly and say how I found the training by Noelle and Verita to be first class: engaging; thoughtful; faithful; sensitive and well-presented."

"The references to God's love and interest in the wellbeing of everyone, and perhaps, in particular, those who are being downtrodden was helpful and grounding. Reclaiming the ground perhaps?"

"It's not an easy subject. However, it is of the utmost importance that we provide the best leadership possible in this area of the life and work of the church on earth. "

"it is possibly the most thoughtful and thought provoking safeguarding training I have participated in."

"Never easy to stir a group of clergy, but I think you accomplished the task very well. I certainly appreciated the day and am hopeful that it will help improve our ways of care and safeguarding in our own context."

4.2 Figure 9 provides information of the number of individuals who have attended the various Safeguarding Training Courses per Presbytery in 2025. Figure 10 has information of the number of each course facilitated in each Presbytery and by the Safeguarding Service directly (Central Services).

Figure 9

Presbytery	Introductory	Advanced	Trustee	Ministries*	Total
Cleir Eilean I	236	104	237	26	603
Clyde	69	0	238	15	322
Edinburgh and West Lothian	310	56	264	6	636
England and Channel Islands	0	3	0	2	5
Fife	148	33	89	24	294
Forth Valley and Clydesdale	38	11	434	44	527
Glasgow	276	36	296	22	630
Lewis	1	1	0	3	5
Lothian and Borders	302	45	237	16	600
North East and Northern Isles	233	138	71	37	479
Perth	170	32	204	40	446
South West	146	33	248	10	437
International Presbytery & Jerusalem	6	4	1	6	16
	1935	**496**	**2319**	**251**	**5000**

Figure 10

Presbytery	Introductory	Advanced	Trustee	Ministries*	Total
Cleir Eilean I	13	7	13	0	33
Clyde	2	0	3	0	5
Edinburgh and West Lothian	14	3	12	0	29
England and Channel Islands	0	1	0	0	1
Fife	8	5	7	0	20
Forth Valley and Clydesdale	3	1	15	0	19
Glasgow	10	2	10	0	22
Lewis	1	1	0	0	2
Lothian and Borders	10	3	8	0	21
North East and Northern Isles	12	11	5	0	28
Perth	10	2	10	0	22
South West	10	4	13	0	27
International Presbytery & Jerusalem	2	4	0	0	6
Central Services	0	0	0	12	12
	95	**44**	**96**	**12**	**247**

*Previously known as Leadership course, now Ministries

In the name of the Safeguarding Committee

SONIA BLAKESLEY, *Convener*
JUDY WILSON, *Vice-Convener*
DEBORAH BLACKHURST, *Head of Safeguarding*

FAITH ACTION PROGRAMME LEADERSHIP TEAM MAY 2026

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.

Faith Action Programme Leadership Team

2. Note the progress of plans for a Resource Church in the Presbytery of Glasgow and commend continued support for developing such plans *(Section 1)*.
3. Instruct the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team to develop the Good News Collective, a suite of resources and opportunities to strengthen confidence in the good news of the Gospel for our lives, communities, church and world *(Section 1.9)*.
4. Thank David Stewart for his service as Yearbook Editor, wishing him well on his retirement from the role, and appoint Rev Angus Mathieson as the new Yearbook Editor *(Section 1.10)*.

Mission Support Programme Group

5. Reaffirm the Church's commitment to maintaining a worshipping, pastoral and missional presence in Scotland's poorest and most marginalised communities, recognising this as a Gospel imperative and integral to the Church's calling *(Section 3)*.
6. Note the publication of updated Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) data, together with the availability of new census data, and, recognising the importance of ensuring that the Priority Areas list continues to be informed by the most accurate and current statistics, instruct the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team:

   i. to report to the General Assembly of 2027 with a proposed methodology for redrawing the Priority Areas list, focusing on levels of population deprivation and the balance of Priority Area designation across the life and work of the whole Church:

   ii. to report to the General Assembly of 2028 on the implications of the agreed methodology and bring a new Priority Areas list, which will then continue to be reviewed on a seven-year review cycle; and.

   iii. throughout the scoping, review, and reporting phases, to ensure that comparative analysis between Priority Areas and the wider Church is undertaken and informs each stage of the work, and to include such analysis within the Reports brought to the General Assembly *(Section 3.1.1)*.
7. Instruct the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team, working with the Theological Forum, to establish a Task Group to explore liturgical renewal and develop new liturgical resources for the Church and to report back to a future General Assembly *(Section 12)*.

Public Life & Social Justice Programme Group

8. Urge those involved in public life in Scotland to uphold the values of integrity, compassion, justice and wisdom in their discourse and decisions, and encourage the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team in its work around promoting a positive vision for Christian responsibility in an age of political extremes (*Section 14.)*
9. Affirm that people have the right to seek sanctuary from danger and persecution and commit to continued advocacy with and for refugees; for an asylum system that is fair, humane, and respectful of human dignity; and for policies and practices that support integration from day one of arrival *(Section 15.2)*.
10. Urge congregations to be places of welcome, accompaniment, and practical support for refugees, and to play an active role in facilitating community cohesion by bringing people together, challenging fear and hostility, and nurturing relationships of mutual respect and belonging within our communities *(Section 15.3)*.
11. Urge the UK Government to restrict gambling advertisements *(Section 18)*.

People & Training Programme Group

12. Pass the Selection and Training for National Ministry of Word and Sacrament Act, as set out in Appendix I, following the principles agreed by the General Assembly of 2025, which will be applicable to Candidates entering training from 1st September 2027 *(Section 26 and Appendix I)*
13. Following the instruction of the General Assembly of 2024 to bring a recommendation to the General Assembly of the Lead Academic Partner to provide the delivery of a new 3-year BD degree and 2-year Diploma for national ministry of Word and Sacrament and Diaconate candidates, approve the recommendation of the Selection Panel that Trinity College, University of Glasgow, be the Lead Academic Partner *(Section 28.7.6)*.
14. Approve the outline of the contents of the Minute of Agreement between the Church of Scotland and the University of Glasgow, and of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Church of Scotland and Trinity College, to enable the delivery of a new 3-year BD degree and 2- year Diploma for national ministry of Word and Sacrament and Diaconate candidates *(Section 30.2.5, Section 30.2.6)*.
15. Note that Candidates presently in training will continue in their current training pathway, as designated at the beginning of their training *(Section 30.9.12 and Appendix I, Section 26)*.

16. Instruct the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team to bring a revised Deacons Act (Act VIII 2010) to the General Assembly of 2027 which includes designated training at Trinity College, University of Glasgow, as the Lead Academic Partner *(Section 26.1.2)*.

17. Note the lifting of the pause on recruitment to the Diaconate and instruct the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team to consider new ways to deploy those called to Ministry of Word and Service *(Section 26.1.2)*.

18. Instruct the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team through the People & Training Programme Group to undertake a full review of the apprenticeship pilot scheme, bringing both the learnings and recommendations to the General Assembly of 2027 *(Section 33.7.1).*

19. Approve the appointment of Mrs Alison Fenton as the Senior Director of the National Assessment Team *(Section 37.1).*

Presbytery and Partnership Support Programme Group

20. Give thanks for the Christian witness of The National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon (NESSL), and The Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) in serving the needs of those affected by war and violence and urge the whole Church to stand in solidarity to alleviate human suffering and strengthen hope for a more stable and dignified future for humanity *(Section 40)*.

21. Instruct the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team, working with the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Group, the Legal Questions Committee and Presbytery Clerks, to undertake further work on the process undertaken by Nominating Committees of vacant charges, with a particular focus on training, guidance, and review, including:

    i. how applications and supporting materials are assessed and compared;

    ii. how Interim Moderators and Presbytery Advisory Panels are equipped to assist Nominating Committees;

    iii. how information is gathered, recorded, and weighed during interviews and decision-making;

    iv. how feedback is offered to applicants in ways that are appropriate, meaningful, and professional;

    v. how awareness of unexamined assumptions of bias can be strengthened;

    vi. how theological reflection on call, discernment, and congregational formation can better inform practice, and

    vii. which stages of the process may benefit from further clarification or review; and instruct the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team to bring a further Report to a future General Assembly *(Section 42)*.

22. Pass the Capability Procedure for Parish Ministers Act, as set out in Appendix IV *(Section 43 and Appendix IV).*

23. Pass the Ill Health and Income Protection Act as set out in Appendix V *(Section 44 and Appendix V).*

24. Instruct the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team to reflect on and review the roles of ministry which might be required within the Church going forward, giving consideration to flexible and emerging forms of ministry, and to bring an interim report to the General Assembly of 2027, including identifying where consultation with other standing committees might be required *(Section 45)*.

25. Pass an Act amending Act XI 2025, on the Call, Election, and Appointment of Ministers of Word and Sacrament, as set out in Appendix VII *(Section 46 and Appendix VII).*

26. Repeal Regulation VI 2008, on Pulpit Supply.

27. Urge Presbyteries, from 1 June 2026, to implement a Sabbatical scheme as outlined in Appendix VIII (*Section 47, Appendix VIII).*

28. Appoint Elizabeth Fox, Elder, as a Trustee of the Church of Scotland Housing and Loan Fund *(Section 48).*

29. Pass Regulations amending the Regulations for Remuneration and Reimbursement of Parish Ministers (Regulations I 2015), as amended, as set out in Appendix IX *(Section 49 and Appendix IX).*

Points for Information

Public Life & Social Justice Programme Group

1. We encourage reflection and thinking about 'Scotland's Four Words of Hope' - the values of **Integrity, Compassion, Justice and Wisdom** – especially during this 2026 election year and in a context of global uncertainty.

2. We reiterate our commitment to the scriptural call to welcome the stranger and love our neighbour, through the encouragement of practical projects on the ground to support integration of refugees and asylum seekers, as well as speaking out nationally to urge our political leaders to prioritise and uphold human rights and dignity.

3. We are committed to reviewing and updating the Church of Scotland's interfaith relations strategy.

4. We congratulate the UK Government for its decision to scrap the two-child benefit cap, and the Scottish Government for its commitment to the Scottish Child Payment; we continue to urge all levels of Government and all political parties to make the eradication of child poverty a key priority.

5. We ask the General Assembly and the whole Church to support the Campaign to End Gambling Ads, which urges the UK Government to impose restrictions where the evidence has shown the most harm caused by gambling.

6. We remind the wider Church of the commitment to care for creation, both through local efforts around education, advocacy and prayer, as well as in reducing carbon footprints and promoting biodiversity. We hope to build on last year's deliverance on the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty by continuing to speak out against new oil and gas licensing in the North Sea.

7. The work of Integrity, the Church of Scotland's task group on gender-based violence, has a new strategy with a particular focus on creating a safe space for women, girls and children through training and support. This group plans future work around the issue of misogyny.

8. In response to a report commissioned by the Scottish Government on policies developed and implemented in the 20th Century on Scotland's Gypsy/Traveller communities, we issued a statement in the summer of 2025 which acknowledges the role that the Church had to play. Our statement is reproduced in this Report, and we encourage church members, elders and ministers to reflect on it.

9. We report on the decisions taken to end the Society, Religion and Technology Project, and to cease the Church of Scotland's membership of Eurodiaconia.

People & Training Programme Group

10. Thank both the Working Group and the Selection Panel for their dedication and commitment to continued development work within IME *(Section 28.6.4)*.

11. Acknowledge the work undertaken to initiate the apprenticeship pilot scheme and thank the Hub leaders, mentors and People & Training team for their commitment to this new area of work *(Section 33.3)*.

Presbytery and Partnership Support Programme Group

12. Give thanks for the work of Christian Aid; welcome the appointment of Thabo Makgoba, Archbishop of Cape Town, as the new Chair of Christian Aid; and encourage congregations to continue to support the work of Christian Aid *(Section 38.1)*.

13. Remember the Church's commitment to the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, to support the right of the people of Taiwan to self-determination, and to embody a mission that accompanies suffering communities with courage, faith, and hope; and commit to walk alongside the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, alongside the work of the Ecumenical Forum on Taiwan, advocating for peace grounded in justice *(Section 39.1)*.

14. Encourage the Church to continue to pray for the Church and people of South Sudan *(Section 38.2)*.

15. Give thanks for the ongoing work of the Middle East Council of Churches in bringing together Orthodox, Eastern Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant churches across the Middle East in support of the scattered Christian communities; and for their ongoing work with Palestinian refugees through the Department for Services to Palestinian Refugees (DSPR) *(Section 40.1)*.

16. Give thanks for the witness of the Synod of the Nile, The Coptic Evangelical Organisation for Social Services (CEOSS), and St Andrew's Church Refugee Service (StARS) and encourage members to learn more of their work and witness and congregations to consider a twinning *(Section 40.2)*.

Executive Summary

The Great Commandment calls us to a dual love: for God and for our neighbour. In our shared life within the Church of Scotland, this truth reminds us that we are profoundly interdependent, both upon God and one another.

Whether you serve as an elder or deacon; a reader or minister of Word and Sacrament; a pioneer minister, chaplain, or mission officer; a children's and family worker, or a dedicated member of the congregation—each of you is essential to the fabric of this Church.

Our mission is only made possible through your faithfulness and commitment. We offer our deepest gratitude for your service and pray God's continued blessing upon you.

Faith Action Programme Leadership Team Report

1. RESOURCE CHURCH

1.1 Vision and Rationale

1.1.1 We believe the Church of Scotland is called to meet a growing spiritual curiosity among young people, recognising that this is a significant weakness for our denomination. Because we have lost many churches in areas where students live, we plan to invest in "Resource Churches"—vibrant city-centre hubs that provide a welcoming space for young adults to explore or return to their faith. Instead of just focusing on one local neighbourhood, these hubs will act as launchpads: they will gather people for worship and community, train them to follow Jesus in their daily lives, and then send them back out to serve and support the wider city.

1.2 Definition

1.2.1 A Resource Church is strategically developed to be a hub for mission, planting new churches, revitalising existing ones, and developing leaders, intentionally sharing its people and skills to expand the church's reach across a city or region, rather than just growing itself.

Key Characteristics:

- Partnership between national, presbytery and local: Developed as part of a national church-planting strategy; because of the level of strategic development and investment required, Resource Churches are built on collaboration between national, Presbytery and local.
- Mission-Focused: Aimed at evangelism, seeing lives and communities transformed, not just internal growth.
- Leadership-development Hub: Develops leaders and teams to start new congregations or revitalise others.
- Resource Provider: Shares trained people, proven programmes (like youth work) and develops its funding to enable growth.
- Strategic Growth: Works within a Presbytery Mission Plan to reach a whole area, impacting diverse communities. It begins with a plan for engaging with students and young adults but immediately looks to become intergenerational.

1.3 Strategic Location

1.3.1 Location is critical. Experienced planters confirm that early success often depends on being positioned near universities to reach students and young adults, and more financially stable neighbourhoods to provide a base of long-term support. We propose a location close to university areas and well-connected communities. This allows for strategic access to students, families, and spiritually curious individuals.

1.4 Planting

1.4.1 Church planting is already happening in the Church of Scotland, driven by people sensing God's call. However, growth is limited as people are unsure about legislation, lack of resources, and assumptions that new churches aren't needed.

1.4.2 We affirm three key levels of planting identified in our church planting strategy:

- Locally initiated efforts (grassroots)
- Presbytery-led mission initiatives
- National coordination for support, coherence and shared learning

1.4.3 Priority in church-planting must be given to enabling local efforts while ensuring accountability, sustainability, and inclusivity across different contexts (urban, rural, suburban, student). Resource church will not be our default way of church-planting; rather they will be our strategic approach in some university cities and towns.

The Presbytery Mission Initiatives Act (2015) guides and enables us in all methods of planting. Each new plant should have a sending church with whom a clear covenant is agreed. Other supporting churches may be involved with finances, people, buildings and any other areas of support.

1.5 Structure and Flexibility

1.5.1 The Resource Church must be:

- Flexible and adaptable to context
- Purposeful, with clear focus on students and young adults
- Structured around mission, worship, training, and sharing
- Led by diverse teams, including ordained and non-ordained leaders

1.5.2 We must explore new ministry models: Bi-vocational, pioneering, youth ministry, team ministry.

1.6 Training and Team Development

1.6.1 This is not about replicating models—but developing people. We will want to identify APEST roles (Ephesians 4:11–13): Apostolic, Prophetic, Evangelistic, Shepherding, Teaching, within team leadership, to equip the whole church. Training must prepare teams for flexibility, resilience, and missional engagement.

1.7 The Role of Presbytery

1.7.1 Presbyteries are vital in providing:

- Oversight and support (e.g., through Presbytery Mission Initiative Covenants)
- Clear agreements with sending churches
- Support in governance, encouragement, and accountability
- Flexibility with property and structures

1.7.2 Presbytery support must be relational and strategic, not just procedural.

1.8 Cultural Change and Next Steps

1.8.1 This journey will involve risk, learning, and flexibility. The Church of Scotland must begin asking its members: "Is God calling you to plant a church?"

1.8.2 All Presbyteries with significant university cities or towns were invited to journey with this work over the summer of 2025. Glasgow Presbytery indicated they were keen to begin exploring possibilities in their context. At time of writing, one congregation is preparing to become a sending church.

1.8.3 Throughout the spring of 2026, work is proposed in the following ways:

- The existing congregation becomes a Resource Church, stretching into new geographical areas and ministries, especially into the east side of Glasgow city centre.

- A rhythm of mission, discipleship, community and worship will be established in 2026, focused on the east side of the city centre, with a new member of staff employed to lead this.
- A programme of Leadership Development will be developed which resources the existing church congregation, the city centre ministry and other Glasgow Church of Scotland congregations.
- A local leadership team will be established for the city centre ministry, which sits under the oversight of the existing Kirk Session.
- Funding will be made available for up to two days to release the minister to bring leadership for this new development.
- Venues will be explored as possible venues for monthly worship nights.
- A budget will be prepared.
- Conversations will begin with other specific Glasgow city-centre / student congregations and a PMI covenant will be drawn up.
- People will be invited to pray and discern how God is leading.
- The Revitalise Trust will be asked how they might support, especially with training and team development.

1.9 The Good News Collective

1.9.1 In recent years, our Church has faced a convergence of significant challenges all of which can easily be framed as a narrative of decline. In the face of such adversity, it is understandable that many have felt a sense of despondency; yet the continued presence and commitment of this community serve as a powerful testament to our resilience. Despite these struggles, we must remain steadfast in our identity as a people of the Gospel, refocusing our collective witness on the "Good News" that remains at the heart of our mission. Our mission statement-

The Church of Scotland seeks to inspire the people of Scotland and beyond with the Good News of Jesus Christ through enthusiastic worshipping, witnessing, nurturing and serving communities.

1.9.2 The essence of the Gospel lies in the transformative power of Christ's love. As we receive this grace, we are called to embody that "Good News" for the sake of others. This theological conviction underpins the potential for the Good News Collective, a new initiative to be developed by the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team (FAPLT) to inspire and equip presbyteries, congregations, and individuals.

1.9.3 Tasked by the General Assembly with shaping the future focus of ministry and mission, FAPLT envisions this collective as a diverse "menu" of resources designed to foster spiritual renewal. By engaging with these tools, the Church is encouraged to rediscover its core identity: that the Good News we have received is, by its very nature, meant to be shared.

1.9.4 We're living in a day where there are green shoots of something new and fresh appearing. There is evidence of greater bible engagement; a revived interest in spiritual things; growing church attendance; growing number of youth and young adults coming to faith and being unashamed of it. This is good news that should inspire us to rediscover the Good News we have to share.

1.9.5 This is the heart behind The Good News Collective. Helping us as a church rediscover our confidence in the gospel, and as we share The Good News and see what God does in us and through us, we share these good news stories to encourage and inspire others.

1.9.6 Work will begin this summer to bring this initiative to the church in 2027.

1.10 Yearbook editor

1.10.1 David Stewart has brought to the role of Yearbook Editor an encyclopaedic knowledge of the Church, its ministers, its buildings, and its congregations; a perspective arising out of years of commitment and service as an elder and organist. Appointed in February 2018, his quiet attention to detail and understanding of the Church have been hallmarks of his editorship, and he leaves a substantial legacy which is hard to follow. For this, and for his many gifts, the Church is truly grateful and offers its thanks to him. Angus Mathieson will be a suitable and able successor to this role, and we express our thanks to him for continuing to provide this important service.

1.11 Vivid Vision

1.11.1 A set of materials has been developed to support congregations in developing vision and articulating purpose for the next few years, especially with regard to mission. The Vivid Vision materials have been used by Kirk Sessions and church members to explore possibilities and develop plans for the future. A number have used the materials in the development of Action Plans. Ongoing, hopeful conversations are happening as a result. All materials continue to be available here https://ascend.churchofscotland.org.uk/a-vivid-vision-for-the-church/, and we commend them to your congregation's use.

1.12 Remit

1.12.1 FAPLT was established at the General Assembly in May 2023. Initial remits for FAPLT and its Programme Groups were approved, with the understanding that revisions would be brought back to a future Assembly as the Team developed.

1.12.2 Since then, FAPLT and its Programme Groups have moved beyond the initial implementation phase and established a regular working rhythm. To support their ongoing work, updated remits are now presented within the Assembly Trustees' report.

A review of FAPLT is scheduled for 2026.

1.13 Departing staff

1.13.1 The Faith Action department has reduced significantly in size over the past year following a period of voluntary and compulsory redundancies, resulting in the departure of 17 staff members. We express our enormous appreciation for their dedicated service and extend our best wishes as they move forward. Their contributions have created lasting platforms on which the Church will continue to build.

In June 2026, Angus Mathieson will retire from his role as Presbytery Partnership Support Programme Manager. Angus has served in the Church Offices for over twenty-eight years, working in a variety of departments, and with different boards, councils and committees. His attention to detail, knowledge of the church and concern for people will be sorely missed.

Mission Support Programme Group Report

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 The Mission Support Programme Group exists to help our local churches thrive in the mission of God. At a time when interest in Jesus and His Church is growing among a new generation, we aim to support and amplify the work of congregations as they make the love and good news of Jesus known in their communities.

2.2 Our staff and committee members focus on fresh expressions of church, renewal and growth of existing congregations, priority area parishes, digital ministry, young people and young adults, and worship renewal. We are also developing a church planting work stream for the coming years, working alongside Presbytery Mission Officers, Mission Committees, and congregations seeking growth.

We want to be alongside presbyteries and local congregations and ask:

'How can we help you make Jesus known in your communities?'

'How can we help you make disciples of Jesus?'

'What is God leading you to at this time, and how can we help you step into it?'

2.3 We oversee the work of the Education and Schools Group, Scottish Workplace Chaplaincy, and the Gaelic Committee, each delivering innovative and practical missional offerings. Presbyteries and congregations interested in these areas are encouraged to contact us.

2.4 An updated remit can be found in the Assembly Trustees' report. This reflects both the change in staffing and priorities which the national can bring to the local.

2.5 After years of challenge and pruning, we believe the Church, seeking God's help and depending on the Spirit, can enter a new season of mission. This report sets out how we have been supporting that work and what lies ahead.

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3. PRIORITY AREAS

3.1 Background

3.1.1 Over many years, the Gospel imperative to give priority to the poorest and most marginalised has shaped the Church of Scotland's commitment to sustaining a focused presence of prayer, people, and resources within communities experiencing the highest levels of social and economic deprivation. Central to this commitment is the credibility, transparency, and robustness of the methodology used to identify, support, and review the Priority Areas list.

3.1.2 The publication of updated Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) data, along with new census data and changes arising from the Presbytery Mission Planning process, provides a significant and timely opportunity to ensure that the Priority Areas list continues to reflect accurately the realities of poverty and inequality in contemporary Scotland.

3.2 Context, Rationale and Transition

3.2.1 Previous reviews of the Priority Areas list have demonstrated the importance of adopting a measured, consultative, and pastorally sensitive approach, recognising that any change in designation carries missional, financial, and organisational implications for congregations, presbyteries, and wider communities. The continuation of the established seven-year review cycle is proposed as an appropriate and proportionate rhythm for this work. It offers sufficient stability to support long-term mission and development, while enabling periodic reflection, learning, and renewal.

3.2.2 This review will also take full account of progress arising from Presbytery Mission Planning. Where there has been a reduction in the overall number of congregations, the Priority Areas list should reflect this reduction proportionately, maintaining Priority Areas at broadly five per cent of total congregations and ensuring that they are not disproportionately affected by structural changes.

3.2.3 Where an updated Priority Areas list emerging by 2028 results in a change of designation for any congregation, transitional arrangements will apply. Transitional support of up to two years will be provided, in line with arrangements offered following the 2021 Priority Areas list. During this two-year transitional period, the existing Priority Area designation will remain in place, and the Priority Areas team will work with the congregation and Presbytery to ensure that appropriate mechanisms of support are maintained throughout the transition.

3.3 Proposed Process and Timescale

3.3.1 It is proposed that 2026 be designated as a scoping and preparatory year. During this period, FAPLT will review the current methodology for identifying Priority Areas, assess the impact and outcomes of the existing process, and explore how updated datasets may be integrated within a refreshed framework.

3.3.2 This phase will include consultation with relevant Councils, Committees, and partners, and will draw upon learning from research, evaluation, and lived experience within Priority Area communities.

In 2027, a proposed methodology for redrawing the Priority Areas list will then be brought to the General Assembly. This anticipated methodology would seek to highlight threats and opportunities, while considering the balance, distribution, and impact of Priority Area designation across the life and work of the whole Church. The methodology would also aim to identify hidden poverty.

3.3.3 The outcomes of this work, together with recommendations for implementation, will be reported to the General Assembly in 2028, resulting in a renewed Priority Areas list that continues the seven-year review cycle, and provides proportionate transitional support where designation changes for congregations either transitioning on or off the Priority Areas list.

3.3.4 This approach reflects the whole Church's continued commitment to the Gospel imperative through evidence-based mission, accountable stewardship, and faithful accompaniment of communities experiencing the greatest social and economic deprivation and thus ensuring priority for the poorest and most marginalised remains at the heart of our mission.

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4. NEW WORSHIPPING COMMUNITIES

4.1 A new worshipping community is a distinct gathering of people who meet regularly for Christian worship, formed with the intention of reaching new people rather than serving an existing congregation. It has its own developing identity, leadership, and pattern of meeting, is missional in origin, and is intended to grow into a sustainable Christian community. It is more than a course, event, or additional service, and is not simply an extension of another church but a community that could continue in its own right.

4.2 The development of New Worshipping Communities (NWCs) remains a significant strand of the Church's mission, seeking to create expressions of church life that engage those who do not currently connect with traditional congregational worship.

Baseline research in 2021, drawn from the Congregational Returns and subsequent verification, identified 78 congregations with one or more NWCs.

4.3 Tracking these original, verified congregations over subsequent years now offers a clearer picture of sustainability. In 2022, 79% of these congregations still reported having an NWC. This fell to 47% in 2023 and stands at 46% in the 2024 Statistical Returns. In effect, just under half of the original verified initiatives are still being reported three years on. It should be noted, however, that there has been considerable non-response to this question in the returns, meaning the true figure may be higher than recorded.

4.4 Looking more widely across the Church, the 2024 Statistical Returns show that 204 congregations - approximately 30% of all congregations - reported having a New Worshipping Community. While these figures are not yet verified, they demonstrate that engagement with the concept of NWCs continues across the Church.

4.5 Taken together, these figures present both encouragement and challenge. While some early initiatives have paused or ceased, a substantial number continue.

4.6 In the coming year, follow-up work will be undertaken to verify current reports, to understand the local context more fully, and to enable the wider Church to learn from what is emerging, what is enduring, and where additional encouragement and support may be needed.

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5. GA 25 DELIVERANCE FAP23

Instruct FAPLT to engage in a process of listening and learning by engaging with congregations across the Church of Scotland where growth in numbers or spiritual vitality is evident, in order to identify effective practices and share them with congregations facing decline or difficulty, so that existing congregations are supported in renewal alongside Church planting.

5.1 Comment

5.1.1 Members of Mission Support and People & Training have undertaken extensive listening and engagement across the Church of Scotland. While the sharing of stories of growth and vitality is valuable, experience and feedback suggest that stories alone rarely lead to sustained developmental action. For learning to be effective, such stories must be carefully framed, with effective practices clearly identified and accompanied by practical, accessible steps that can be applied across a range of contexts.

5.1.2 Learning from pioneering practice indicates that lasting church communities grow out of their own unique context and cautions against the direct replication of another congregation's pathway. Nevertheless, there remains value in sharing stories, if they are presented in ways which: identify effective practice; offer tools for contextual reflection and analysis; reflect a broad range of contexts, traditions and stages; allow for elastic definitions of spiritual vitality; and avoid the introduction of further programmes or initiatives.

5.1.3 We plan to deliver a suite of in-depth, conversational; multimedia learning resources which allow for exploration of context and journey, identify effective practice, and demonstrate approaches to contextualisation. These conversations would be honest and reflective, including learning from failure as well as success. Brief accompanying written material would support each resource, ensuring that learning is framed in ways that are accessible and actionable. This work would require close integration with the Communications Department and the Digital Advisor.

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6. GWA

6.1 The rollout of the *God Welcomes All* hymnary supplement continues through a range of launch and training events across presbyteries, national gatherings, and online platforms, following the initial launch at GA24. In partnership with People & Training and with presbyteries, training is being delivered in music and liturgy, drawing extensively on *God Welcomes All* and focusing on its effective use in local contexts.

6.2 The Full Music Edition of *God Welcomes All* is now in its second imprint. It is anticipated that the CH4 website will reach one million streams by GA26. The recently introduced indexes and search functions will be enhanced further by digital resources becoming available as this work progresses throughout 2026.

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7. LOCAL WORSHIP LEADERS/READERS

7.1 Following the loss of several staff members from this multi-lead project, due to the ongoing staffing restructure, alternative approaches to delivery have been implemented. A presbytery-level consultation has taken place, with further engagement planned involving groups of Local Worship Leaders and Readers. This work will be undertaken, in collaboration with relevant presbytery staff, to ensure sufficient narrative is gathered on training and deployment, and on the challenges and opportunities inherent in these roles.

Alongside the ongoing development of networks for practitioner support and shared learning, Mission Support staff, working in collaboration with key stakeholders, will analyse the data gathered and develop recommendations regarding the appropriate level of national support.

7.2. These recommendations will be reported to the General Assembly 2027 (GA27).

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8. CHURCH PLANTING

8.1 The General Assembly of 2025 passed a deliverance to:
'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.'

8.2 We are not ready to bring strategy and structures to this General Assembly. The reduction in central support staffing across the Church, including in Mission Support and in Seeds for Growth, has made it impossible to commit the necessary staff resource within the timescale.

8.3 Work to determine how this will be taken forward, however, is ongoing. In March 2026, a team of representatives from the Church of Scotland participated in the Scottish Church Planting Network Conference, contributing to a developing strategic understanding of how the Church of Scotland might be better equipped to plant and sustain new churches, alongside its ongoing commitment to the renewal of existing congregations. To progress this work, one member of MSPG will dedicate a month, May 2026, to responding to this deliverance, including assessment of the implications for staff resourcing and the scope for further strategic exploration.

8.4 We are supporting church plants that are already emerging, seeking to learn from these pioneering initiatives and to identify how best to support them through monitoring and evaluation processes that can inform approaches shaped to serve the whole. Following the completion of the focus group work on Resource Churches (reported elsewhere), we have taken on responsibility for enabling, learning from, and supporting this work. (Section 1.1)

8.5 We believe in the work that the General Assembly has asked us to undertake in relation to church planting, and we look forward to bringing proposals on church planting strategy and structures to a future General Assembly.

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9. YOUNG PEOPLE AND YOUNG ADULTS

9.1 We continued to prioritise Magnitude within our young people and young adult programme because it offers a strategically significant space for nurturing belonging, discipleship, and emerging leadership at a national level, enabled through strong partnership with presbyteries and local congregations.

9.2 The Church of Scotland Village at Magnitude provides more than practical support; it creates a shared home where young people - particularly from smaller, rural, and Priority Area congregations - can experience identity, connection, and accompaniment within the wider life of the Church. Participation has grown markedly in recent years, from 23 young people in 2023, to 70 in 2024, and 110 campers in 2025, drawn from 10 congregations with a further four attending as day visitors, providing evidence of both increasing demand and the effectiveness of this partnership approach. The Church of Scotland represented 15% of all young delegates, including other larger groups who camped independently.

9.3 Presbytery representatives play a critical role in this work, acting as key connectors who support, encourage, and enable congregations to participate in ways appropriate to their context and capacity. The national role is therefore intentionally facilitative, coordinating infrastructure, safeguarding, and shared learning so that presbyteries and congregations are empowered to lead locally. Looking ahead, our focus is on strengthening this collaborative model

through distributed leadership and clearer structures, ensuring the Village remains sustainable, relationally rich, and well placed to walk alongside young people as they grow in faith, confidence, and vocation within the Church of Scotland.

10. DIGITAL MINISTRY

10.1 Reflecting the Church's commitment to shaping mission for the future, the Church of Scotland's digital ministry continues to develop and mature, building on significant progress made over the past year.

10.2 Launched in April 2025, Instamission is an ongoing digital outreach initiative which supports the Church's wider missional strategy by engaging audiences beyond traditional church settings, particularly younger people. The project produces short-form digital content intended to prompt reflection on Christian faith in contemporary contexts and is supported by a volunteer team drawn from across the Church, the majority of whom are under 40.

10.3 Alongside Instamission, the Digital Ministries team will continue to develop themed video series that support mission, testimony, and engagement with contemporary social issues. Previous work, including content produced around Pentecost and the Week of Action to End Violence Against Women and Girls, demonstrates the contribution of digital ministry to the Church's commitments in mission, discipleship, and justice.

10.4 In response to the 2025 Digital Ministry Strategic Aim to equip the whole Church for digital ministry, a suite of practical resources has been developed and is now available to support ongoing training and capacity-building. These resources provide theological grounding, set out core principles for effective digital engagement, and offer practical guidance to enable congregations, ministers, and members to participate confidently in digital ministry.

11. SCOTTISH WORKPLACE CHAPLAINCY

11.1 In line with the Church's commitment to live out the Five Marks of Mission, Scottish Workplace Chaplaincy, an agency within the Church of Scotland, is responsible for overseeing and developing chaplaincy services, through which Scottish Christian churches collaborate in engaging with working life. These services provide pastoral care and spiritual support throughout Scotland, to people of all faiths and none, across a wide range of workplaces, including Royal Mail, Fire and Rescue Services, local councils, and commercial settings.

11.2 The network currently comprises around 40 chaplains from diverse denominational backgrounds, serving urban, rural, and island communities. Initiatives such as the CrossReach pilot, which places chaplains in its services, demonstrate ongoing innovation and the potential to extend the Church's presence and pastoral care within Scottish workplaces.

12. LITURGICAL RENEWAL

12.1 Theological Basis of Liturgical Renewal

12.1.1 Worship is crucial to the healthy life of the church. Indeed, Article Declaratory IV declares that Christ has given the church the right to adjudicate finally in matters of doctrine, worship, government and discipline. Worship is therefore one of the key areas of its life to which the church must attend according to its own constitution. The Church of Scotland is also described as a 'national Church' in Article Declaratory III, with a 'distinctive call and duty to bring the ordinances of religion to the people.' This means that the church has a responsibility to be courageous in its liturgical leadership, shaping our worship to be culturally relevant, dynamic and essential to life in contemporary Scotland, while remaining faithful to its Reformed heritage.

12.1.2 Worship in the Church of Scotland is understood fundamentally as a response to the sovereign grace of God revealed in Jesus Christ and is rooted in the conviction of the Westminster Shorter Catechism that the chief end of human beings is 'to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever' (WSC 1). Worship is on this view not a human invention but a divine summons; it is the act of 'spiritual worship' in which believers offer their lives as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1). As the Westminster Confession states simply: 'Religious worship is to be given to God, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost' (WCF XXI.2). So it is that in the gathering of the covenant people of God, the Word is proclaimed and the sacraments are administered, with the promise and in the prayerful hope that Christ will be present in the power of the Spirit among the people gathered in his name (Matthew 18:20). Such gathering in worship of the covenant people serves to transform the minds of those gathered in accordance with the pattern of God's new world, as they gratefully acknowledge that everything they are and have as the body of Christ has been received from God the Creator and Redeemer.

12.1.3 The church is, however, a living body, and its faith a living faith. Its worship is part of its living history, in which the church is always on the move. Hence, obedience to the divine summons to worship always occurs in a specific place and at a specific time and in a specific context. Correspondingly, worship can only inspire and empower the 'priesthood of all believers' as it speaks meaningfully to them of God and allows them to speak meaningfully of God before the world. It is for this reason that liturgical renewal is desirable for any church that is an *ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda* (a church reformed, always in need of being reformed). Such renewal affords the church the opportunity to ensure that its worship continues to be worthy of God in the present – by being intelligible to everyone (1 Corinthians 14:9), and by doing justice to the challenges facing the people of God and their experience of Christian life today. Liturgical renewal thus ensures that the tradition and witness of the church remain a living tradition and witness, ready to be taken up by the Spirit in such a way that 'God's deeds of power' are heard 'in our own languages' (Acts 2:11).

12.2 The Case for Liturgical Renewal in Today's Context

12.2.1 In the current context of church decline, some may ask whether worship is a priority at this time. It has been questioned whether the Church should be looking inwards and reforming its own internal practices and structures, when an outward focus upon mission is so clearly a priority.

12.2.2 Empowering worshippers amid the dynamic and shifting landscape of contemporary Scotland to gather – to seek God and to know God, to discern where the Spirit is leading, and to understand the truth of Christ's claims in a post truth world – is even more crucial within this context. Proactive liturgical experimentation, purposefully reflecting the breadth and depth of belief within the Church of Scotland, will take us to the intersection of faith and public square. Being united in worship as the body of Christ makes the church a visible and corporeal reality, present in society and drawing others towards God. Just as God has initiated worship and invites us into divine presence, we discern the Spirit's lead and our further invitation into the Missio Dei.

12.2.3 While a key driver in renewal can be a sense of urgency around church decline, there is also a desire for a more authentic or experiential form of Christianity. Structural and institutional renewal has seen significant investment throughout the past few years. Missional and cultural renewal will not happen effectively without liturgical renewal at its foundation. The renewing and refreshing of our worship practice and liturgy is a vital stage in the deepening of faith and the opening of pathways to spiritual experimentation that enables shifts in the relationship of faith and society.

12.2.4 Liturgy – spoken litany, sacramental practice and sung worship – is a primary source of theology and it gives us language and practice that is foundational to faith formation and discipleship. The principle of the Latin maxim Lex orandi, lex credenda – which translates to "the law of prayer is the law of belief" – essentially means that our worship, and particularly our liturgy, play a fundamental and formational role in shaping and reflecting not only our theology and doctrine, but moreover – our belief, which in turn shapes life (*Lex orandi, lex credenda, lex vivendi*).

12.2.5 Renewal of liturgy therefore profoundly impacts the discipleship cultures within the church. As with our public worship, language and practice that situates us in the place of hope and within the deep places of our common life is vital. It is here that we need to be both courageous and disruptive. While the church continues to stand at the forefront of communities grappling with the complexities of our time and understanding the evolving mission that we are part of, our discernment and prophetic expression is made possible in our liturgical response. The renewal of our liturgical life together makes us ready for the journey outward into our missional calling as the church, with 'the work of the people' uniting us in our common endeavour.

12.3 The Task Ahead

12.3.1 In recent times, worship renewal within the Church of Scotland has been given a significant step forward with the launch of God Welcomes All – the supplement to Church Hymnary Fourth Edition. This book reflects the complexity of our local and global communities and society, and the shared experience of singing our faith as we seek God and the establishing of God's Kingdom in this time and place. We are reminded in the introduction to God Welcomes All:

> *Songs also have power when sung collectively and congregational singing has been at the heart of worship renewal throughout the history of the Church. Therefore, at a time when there is so much change in both the Church and in wider society, it is important that we seek out new songs that can provide a musical and liturgical language to accompany us through the tensions and complexities of our time.*

12.3.2 The Book of Common Order has historically served as both a theological anchor and a liturgical resource for the Church of Scotland, shaping the language of prayer, public worship, and connecting us to the sacred in the important moments of our lives. The introduction to the 1994 Book of Common Order begins:

> *At a time of ceaseless change in the way churches understand and participate in worship, to publish a book of Common Order may seem a courageous act. Liturgical and gender language, the understanding of worship leadership, the theology of preaching and of the sacraments – all are in flux, a restlessness which may be a sign more of the Spirit's indwelling than absence.*
>
> *Whatever else God calls us to, we are called to worship, to do so together, and to do so in the promised company of Jesus Christ. It is in worship that our lives are expressed before God and informed and converted by God's Word. It is in worship that through song, prayer, and preaching, our theology is formed, our discipleship encouraged, and our spirits nourished. It is in worship that we reach out to touch the hem of Christ's garment and find that, instead of touching the hem, we are being offered the grace of God by word of mouth and gift of hand.*
>
> *The Church of Scotland, since the Reformation, has provided publications such as this to aid the corporate experience of worship.*

12.3.3 It is now time for additional liturgical resources to be created for The Book of Common Order. Investing in liturgical renewal is indeed a courageous act, particularly within a rapidly shifting context and in a denomination that has experienced profound change and reform. In the 30 plus years since the 1994 edition of the Book of Common Order (and in the decade since any revision), there have been vast movements not only in language, but also in understandings of identity, gender and sexuality, in issues of migration, racial justice, poverty, and in increasingly individualistic and consumer cultures. How we connect, how we worship and how we understand ourselves as communities of faith has additionally been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, technological change and political and cultural shifts.

12.3.4 The societal changes described above are not peripheral but are central to how we share the gospel. The language of worship and prayer must embody justice and compassion – not as add-ons, but as intrinsic to the nature of God's Kingdom and how we embody this as a church. Inclusive language need not be seen as a dilution of theological depth, but rather as a recovery of the fullness of expression of God's self-revelation, beyond the limitations of gendered or cultural assumptions. Any shared liturgy would need to both reflect our rooted Reformed heritage and the lived realities of contemporary Scotland within a rapidly changing social, political, and cultural landscape.

12.4 Approach

12.4.1 The approach would be based on the assumption that what is required is first and foremost 'liturgical renewal' within the Church of Scotland, more than – in a rigid sense – a 'Book' of Common Order. Rather, some kind of holistic liturgical support would be envisaged, something that may take the form of a 'collection' that is open-ended and dynamic – a sort of compendium or anthology of liturgy that is accessible through a variety of different mediums and digital platforms, and that speaks both to the church and to those outside of our current influence.

12.4.2 Developing such a resource for the Book of Common Order is not merely a technical exercise in revision—it is an act of theological discernment, communal listening, and imaginative creativity. It is a process that will hold the space for intentional Spirit led revitalisation of the Christian community, while deepening our worshipping life and discipleship. Exploration, discernment and narrative gathering will be essential as we seek to understand more fully the liturgical landscape within our denomination. This approach enables the process of renewal to become more intentional – while acting as a method of gaining insight and narrative data around experiences of liturgical formation, the use of liturgy within the worshipping life of communities, the noted omissions of particular types of liturgical expression, and possibilities for liturgical development. Rather than merely surveying the use of specific liturgical material and in particular past editions of Common Order and Ordinals, the approach described above is integral to the ethos of the process. Through deep listening and by weaving together narratives of our common and diverse experiences of God in worship, this methodology will allow us to recognise and retain the necessary breadth and depth of theology and expression within the living worship of our tradition.

12.4.3 The next step would then be to gather the required groups to discern what the process of writing, collating and using emerging liturgy might look like. This would also allow us to hear from a diverse group of practitioners, which would be more reflective of the emerging landscape of the Church of Scotland, and also of the demographics that we would engage with as we continue our missional purpose in contemporary Scotland. This would reflect the Acts 2:11 principle of worship and the narrative of God being expressed and understood in language and medium that connect to each of our lived realities.

12.4.4 Exploring how liturgy might be developed, experiment and piloted would also be a factor – refreshed and new liturgical elements could be launched, tested and embedded into the active worshipping life of the church in dynamic and responsive ways. This would have bearing on the shape and delivery of resourcing, training and empowering liturgy within our denomination, whilst also gaining more cognisance of development within liturgy that moves to a space of cultural connection. This would recognise with integrity our liturgical responsibility and shared identity in public worship as a national Church, with the weight of heritage and tradition pointing to an important influence and obligation for us to keep theologically coherent liturgical practice alive, all the while balancing it with local adaptability and contextual creativity already flourishing in local congregations.

12.4.5 Producing a static 'product', would invite a sense of obsolescence and limit longevity, but as we are reminded in the introduction to Common Order 1994:

> *The Church of Scotland, since the Reformation, has provided publications such as this to aid the corporate experience of worship.*
>
> *These books have never been prescriptive, making 'this and this only' mandatory on ministers and congregations. Rather, in a tradition which reveres both freedom to worship and freedom in worship, three things are offered:*
>
> *Firstly, orders of service, which may be followed verbatim.*
>
> *Secondly, patterns of prayer and devotion, which can be used as models to be emulated or starting points for development.*
>
> *Thirdly, a wealth of resources, which can be mined and re-mined for many years to come.*

12.4.6 As well as dynamic and emerging resources that reflect the diverse means by which people avail themselves of worship and liturgical content, a holistic strategy is required; one that incorporates any liturgical development into the training of our people and into use at General Assemblies and other courts of the church on a regular basis, ensuring that any development is rooted in current and emerging practice.

12.5 Conclusion

12.5.1 The process of liturgical renewal must embody the very values it seeks to promote: fulness of God, openness, attentiveness to justice and faithfulness. It must emerge not from assumption but from encounter—between Scripture and culture, between heritage and hope, between the local experience and the national Church. In doing so, the Church of Scotland can offer a liturgical resource that does more than sustain worship: it can help shape a renewed liturgical theological imagination for the next generation of faith in Scotland.

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13. CHURCH OF SCOTLAND GAELIC COMMITTEE

13.1 Draft Five Year Gaelic Development Plan 2026-2031

13.1.1 This draft is presented to the 2026 General Assembly in obedience to Deliverance 29 of the 2025 General Assembly:

> "*Thank the Gaelic Committee for their work stemming from the Gaelic Development Plan 2022-2025 and affirm the continued shaping of a follow-on five-year plan to be brought to the General Assembly 2026, complete with a review of work undertaken in the year 2025-2026.*"

13.1.2 Regarding the state of Gaelic, the dichotomy identified in the Church of Scotland Gaelic Language Plan has grown more stark. While 2022 Census data confirms continued growth in speakers and Gaelic-medium education, the language's decline within the Church has accelerated toward an existential threat.[1] As similar trends affect other denominations, including the Free Church of Scotland, an ecumenical response is essential. The objectives in this draft plan prioritise such collaboration, offering hope for a resurgence of Gaelic worship both within and beyond the Church of Scotland.

13.1.3 Our current plan was produced in obedience to a deliverance of the 2021 General Assembly:

> *"Instruct the Forum[2] to explore the possibilities of developing a 3-year Gaelic Language Plan [2022-2025] that includes a particular emphasis on Gaelic Ministry and Mission to children and young people and to bring a report to the General Assembly of 2022."*

13.1.4 As that deliverance required, the present plan focuses very much on children and young people under the following four headings:

1. Encourage Children & Young People who are already involved in the life of church communities (resources to encourage them in their involvement and discipleship)
2. Resource those working with children and young people in church communities, both paid workers and volunteers, to effectively nurture the faith and ongoing discipleship of children and young people.
3. Equip chaplains and other congregational members to minister/engage with children and young people in school.
4. Developing faith in the home (resources for use in nurturing a life of faith in the home and beyond).

13.1.5 An account of the work done in 2025-2026 can be found in 13.2 below. It would be fair to say that, while significant progress has been made, the need for additional resources will be ongoing in a world where the nature of materials suitable for use with children and young people is constantly, and ever more quickly, changing. That has informed this aspect of the draft plan we now present for the next five years.

13.1.6 However, the Committee is strongly of the view that the focus for the next five years needs to be widened to include the needs of Gaelic speakers and would-be Gaelic speakers more widely. We therefore envisage a twin-track approach combining the continued needs of families, children, and young people and those of adults who may wish to worship in more contemporary ways. That is the approach followed in our draft plan.

13.1.7 One of the reasons for the continued decline in Gaelic services referred to above is that fewer ministers and other worship leaders are willing and able to lead worship and preach in Gaelic. Some see no value in it. In taking that approach, they are totally out of step with how Gaelic is now perceived in Scotland. Others would like to be able to do it but lack confidence and training. It is therefore an important innovation of our draft plan that the training of worship leaders, both ordained and non-ordained, is emphasised.

13.1.8 The other area of innovation has to do with the production of worship materials which combine (a) the continued use of Gaelic psalmody and "putting out the line", which is enjoying at least a mini-revival of interest (particularly in the unlikely setting of the Scottish Borders), (b) the rich archive of Gaelic hymnary which exists but is not now easily accessible and (c) the best of modern praise items and arrangements, such as feature in BBC Alba's *Alleluia* programmes.

13.1.9 At the risk of stating the obvious, in pursuing our aims, we see ourselves principally as facilitators. We will not ourselves produce the materials which are needed for rejuvenated Gaelic worship, in church or home. Instead, we will work with others. To be sure, we will pursue our own initiatives from time to time, but much of what we want to achieve can only be achieved by working with others, helping them to realise their own aspirations where those align with ours. So, partnership, such as has already been established with a wide range of entities,[3] is key, and we look forward to working with those and other partners in the future.

13.1.10 Whilst we will continue to facilitate the work of others, we also need to acknowledge those who facilitate our work, notably the trustees of the Alexander J MacLeod Fund, who fund us to a maximum of £20,000 *per annum* at the moment and *Bòrd na Gàidhlig,* who support us in relation to projects which align with their own strategic plan. Without their support and that of others, what has been achieved to date would not have been possible and the plan which we now present would be purely aspirational.

13.2 Gaelic Committee Report on Work Done in 2025-2026

1 It should be acknowledged that, although Gaelic in-church services are now fewer and further between than they used to be, Gaelic services are still transmitted weekly on BBC Radio nan Gaidheal, which also broadcasts a Gaelic "Thought for the Day" (*Smuain na Maidne*) as part of its morning news programme from Monday to Friday, whilst, on television, BBC Alba broadcasts successive series of (mainly) praise programmes called *Alleluia*. Accordingly, the Gaelic broadcast media still carry Gaelic worship into people's homes weekly/daily. Arguably, they take their responsibilities in that area more seriously than the churches do.

2 A reference to the Faith Nurture Forum, which existed at that time.

3 Such as *Bòrd na Gàidhlig, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar* (the Western Isles local authority, including *Sgoil Nis* (Ness Gaelic Medium School), *Comhairle nan Leabhraichean* (Gaelic Books Council), Dyslexia Scotland, Education Scotland, individual members of the Free Church of Scotland, Go Chatter Studios, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education in Scotland (HMIe), Highland Council including *Sgoil Inbhir Pheofharain* (Dingwall Gaelic Medium School), the presbyteries of Glasgow, Lewis and Iona, Scottish Bible Society, Scottish Roman Catholic Education Service, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, *Stòrlann* (National Gaelic Resource Centre), United Free Church of Scotland.

13.2.1 The work saw the continuation of **'Proiseact Pentecostes'**, a multi-pronged, exciting, innovative, missional project that aims to bring the message of God's love to the children and young people of Scotland through the medium of Gaelic. What follows gives examples of this ongoing work and has been compiled by Rev Hugh Stewart, Vice-Convener of our Committee, who leads this work.



13.2.2 In collaboration with Lion Publishers and the Scottish Bible Society, 1500 copies of 'Innis Stoiridh as a' Bhioball ['Tell a Story] Bible Story Books were translated, updated, published and distributed, FREE of charge, to children across Scotland, for use at home, in schools and churches.

'Proiseact Pentecostes ' also created a Gaelic audiobook of the 'Innis Stoiridh as a Bhioball' which is accessible via a QR code found within the newly published book. This allows children and Gaelic Learners to hear the text audibly whilst reading it visually. This is particularly helpful for Gaelic learners and children with reading challenges.

A' Ceangal le Breigichean [Tying with Bricks]



13.2.3 A new series of videos for children and young Scots that explores biblical stories using LEGO® bricks.

13.2.4 With support from Bòrd na Gàidhlig, the London Gaelic Services Committee (via the A J MacLeod Bequest), and the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge (SSPCK) – publisher of the first Gaelic Bible – these videos are available free of charge to schools, churches, and parents as a gift to Scottish children.

13.2.5 Featuring well-known Bible stories in a fun and accessible way, the series includes stories such as David and Goliath, Jonah, and the resurrection of Lazarus, continuing from previous releases on Christmas and Easter.

13.2.6 Each video includes teaching notes that align with the Curriculum for Excellence, together with a schema enabling children and young people to create their own sets of the video using LEGO® bricks.



Sar Clasaichean a' Ceangal le Breigichean [Tying with Bricks Masterclass]

13.2.7 Masterclasses have been held in Dingwall (Rosshire), Ness (Isle of Lewis) and Stornoway (Isle of Lewis), with others planned for Glasgow and other centres going forward.

13.2.8 These sessions involve the use of Clasaichean a' Ceangal le Breigichean animation videos to learn about the Bible stories portrayed, create sets using LEGO® and produce short animation videos, all in line with the Curriculum for Excellence.

Ag Aithris / Ag Innse

13.2.9 Work has begun on the production of new Bible-based, innovative, missional resources, developed in conjunction with other parties.

13.2.10 The Gaelic Committee wishes to record its thanks to all those who have been involved in 'Proiseact Pentecostes': Storlann; Comunn na Leabhraichean Ghaidhlig; the Society for the Proclamation of Christian Knowledge; Bord na Gaidhlig; Education Authorities; Education Scotland; HMIe Scotland; Scottish Bible Society; the Education and Schools Group of the CofS; other churches, including the United Free Church and the Roman Catholic Church of Scotland; and the many individuals who have given freely their time and expertise to the project.

DRAFT PLAN

1. Continued involvement in meeting the needs of families, children and young people for Gaelic faith materials for use in home, church and school			
Action	**Outcomes**	**Impact**	**Timescale**
Continue to add to the resources available to families, children and young people for use in home, school and church, working in partnership to develop contemporary materials in attractive and engaging multimedia formats.	Equipping future generations of parents, teachers and church leaders with the contemporary resources they need to keep pace with rapidly evolving changes in how young people engage with the faith.	The rejuvenation of the use of Gaelic in homes, schools and churches, where it was once so significant.	Ongoing
Complete the work already begun under *Project Pentecostes* including the production of further Lego videos, the completion of *Sgeulachdan a' Bhiobaill* (Stories of the Bible), *Ag Aithris* (recording of stories for use with both primary and secondary students) and *Molaidh Sinn E* (We will praise Him – an innovative, inter-school online project with international potential within the Gaelic diaspora giving school pupils the opportunity to create their own worship materials).	These projects will be completed or as is appropriate, continued during the lifetime of this plan with the result that by the end of Year 5 hundreds of children and young people will have encountered the Gospel in Gaelic.	Bringing, or helping to bring, children and young people to faith so that the next generation contains a cohort of Gaelic-speaking believers able and willing to hand down the faith through the medium of Gaelic.	Ongoing. It is anticipated that the individual projects mentioned will be replaced by others, equally innovative, when completed
Develop a specific initiative aimed at early teenagers (12-15 years of age), to take the form of holiday camps using tried and tested venues like Nethy Bridge where those attending can engage in the usual activities offered at such camps but engage with the faith interactively, through the medium of Gaelic.	Get early teens engaged with the Gospel in a fun environment in which they can get to know each other and learn more about the faith free of any demands or challenges.	Create friendships rooted in faith and in a shared commitment to Gaelic and get youngsters thinking about faith matters at a crucial stage of their development, bridging the gap between childhood and adult faith.	The first camps to take place in Year 2 and annually thereafter.
Work closely with Gaelic-medium educators in order to help meet their needs for suitable faith and Religious and Moral Education materials and activities in Gaelic.	Close alignment between the needs of Gaelic-medium educators and the church(es) in the creation of resources needed specifically in the field of education.	Schools and teachers will be equipped to deliver RME as effectively in Gaelic as is presently possible in English	Ongoing

With particular reference to the use of Gaelic in church, invite other denominations, including the Free Church of Scotland, The Free Church Continuing, the Roman Catholic Church and the Episcopal Church to pool resources and personnel capable of producing materials and activities suitable for use in Sunday Schools, Messy Church, Youth Groups and whatever forms these may take in years to come and to devise training for those leading such groups.	A talent pool will be created ecumenically to produce faith materials suitable for use across Scotland's Christian community.	Equipping Scotland's churches with all they need for worship and the nurturing of faith through Gaelic in tomorrow's world.	This pool will be created in Year 1 and will pursue its mission throughout Years 2-5.

2. Devising and delivering training in the leading of Gaelic worship			
Action	**Outcomes**	**Impact**	**Timescale**
Create an online training course for people, including, but not restricted to, ministers, who are interested in leading worship and preaching in Gaelic.	The creation of a re-usable training vehicle/platform for those interested in preaching in Gaelic.	To begin supplying interested congregations with trained worship leaders and preachers.	First course to be created by end of Year 1
Deliver such a course, complemented by in-person gatherings of participants, so that they can get to know and support each other in their ongoing ministry, with a view to creating a pool of such people capable of leading worship and preaching anywhere in Scotland.	Produce, say, 15 people so trained by the end of Year 1 and a similar number in year 3.	The creation of a mutually supportive community of Gaelic preachers, capable, where possible, of flexible deployment across Scotland.	First course to be delivered by end of Year 2 and repeated, with appropriate modifications, in Year 4.
Make such courses available ecumenically to participants and contributors interested in reviving Gaelic worship in their own denominations.	Ecumenical participation in preparing and delivering such courses and in benefiting from them, with the possibility of Gaelic preachers working inter-denominationally.	The creation of a pool of trained people prepared to work inter-denominationally.	Make available as each course is released
Monitor the need/ possibilities for repeating such a course at intervals over the period of this plan.	Thoroughly assess the outcome of each course and make appropriate adjustments for the next one.	The creation of a training programme capable of meeting demand and adjusting to developments in the way worship should be delivered.	Subject to demand – first repeat to be delivered in Year 3

3. Creating new, and improving access to existing, Gaelic praise materials			
Action	**Outcomes**	**Impact**	**Timescale**
Foster the present resurgence of interest in Gaelic psalm-singing by arranging *Scoiltean Ciùil* (Precenting Schools).	In the First Year of the plan, the provision of support to the *Scoil Chiùil* which is already underway at Greyfriars Kirk, Edinburgh, as a result of an awakening of interest centred on a group based in Carlops.	Create an opportunity for the widespread revival of traditional Gaelic psalmody in Scotland's presbyterian churches.	Work to begin in Year 1 and develop organically subsequently.
Support a nascent project originated by a leading Gaelic singer and musician for the creation of a new Gaelic hymnary, combining old favourites now seldom heard, such as the hymns of *Pàdruig Gràннd* (Patrick Grant, a 19th century Gaelic poet and hymn writer), and new material and new arrangements of traditional material, by assisting in the identification, collection and collations of suitable material.	By the end of Year 1 the Committee will have identified material which already exists and is thought suitable for inclusion in the new hymnary and shared that information with those whose project this is.	Ultimately, the production of a comprehensive Gaelic hymnary suitable for use in the modern world.	End of Year 3? (Note: this is not our project, so timing is not within our control.)
Support the production of new music for use in Gaelic worship by bringing together musicians and songwriters already working in this area, as well as newcomers, with a view to making their work more widely known and available.	By the end of Year 1 such a group will have been pulled together and a roadmap agreed for the further developme nt of the work in subsequent years of the plan.	The creation for a suite of contemporary Gaelic music for use across Scotland's Christian churches.	End of Year 1 and ongoing from then.

Public Life & Social Justice Programme Group Report

14. Christian RESPONSIBILITY in an age of political extremes

14.1 2026 is an election year in Scotland, and as a Programme Group and Leadership Team we are mindful of the usual tussle for attention and voters' support as we head for May 7th. We have noticed that there are some elements of our public life which we find worrying, and that statements and policies which would have caused outrage or widespread condemnation a few years ago are now perceived as being mainstream or worthy of consideration. We note that there has been some attention on the actions and words of extreme right-wing and racist political actors (particularly those who use the language, values or symbols of Christianity to promote their ideology). However, there is also a problem from some who are involved in hard-left wing movements. In both areas of extremism where violence, or the threat of violence, personal attack and othering, as well as an undermining of the institutions of democracy are being used for political ends, the Church can and must speak out to say that this is not the way our society, our body politic or our relations with one another should proceed. The duty to pray, preach, teach and share a better way rests on each one of us who seek to follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

14.2 Since September 2025, we have been working on a joint elections project with the Scottish Episcopal Church. This has included creating practical toolkits for congregations to organise election hustings (promoting the idea that in-person events can be a better way to share ideas and truth in an age of digital misinformation and social media algorithms, which drive what people see online), as well as developing a shared conversation from our two denominations about what Christian responsibility (our ability to respond to the world around us in a way which follows scripture, Christ's example and the teachings of the church) looks like in our context.

14.3 We continue our close partnership with the Joint Public Issues Team (Methodist, Baptist and United Reformed Churches) and have worked and talked with them particularly in relation to issues about extreme right-wing movements and the co-option of Christian values, language and symbols. We have discussed what is our God-centred response to the raising of flags on town centre lampposts, or the gathering in large numbers of protesters on the streets or outside asylum hotels who call for a crusade or a return to Britain/Scotland's traditional Christian values? And do we recognise and acknowledge that a century ago, our General Assembly and its Committees promoted positions and values against Irish Catholic immigration (which we now repudiate) that were racist, nationalistic, and which fuelled sectarianism, the consequences of which we still live with to this day. In the words of Micah 6:8 – what does the LORD require of you, but to seek justice, love mercy and walk humbly with your God?

14.4 One final election year initiative we have connected with is a project promoting 'Scotland's 4 Words of Hope'. On the ceremonial mace in the Scottish Parliament are inscribed the words Integrity, Wisdom, Compassion, and Justice. This project seeks to promote serious consideration by everyone involved in Scotland's public life to reflect on what they mean, and how our discourse and decisions could be improved if we strived to better adhere to them. They might also be used after the election, to hold our politicians, our journalists, our business leaders and our churches to account so that we can hold together with these values a love for all our neighbours – those living in Scotland, and around the world, and for the generations still to come.

14.5 A summary of activity as a result of the Deliverance of the 2025 General Assembly in relation to the Report of the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team – Public Life and Social Justice Programme Group is at Appendix X.

15. REFUGEE SUPPORT

15.1 The past year has seen the concerning rise in protests outside asylum accommodation and growing hostility towards people seeking refuge. Such responses cause real harm to vulnerable individuals and stand in stark contrast to the values of compassion, hospitality, and justice that underpin the life and witness of the Church. In the years to come, our congregations will continue to have a key role to play in fostering community cohesion, building understanding between people, and promoting welcome and solidarity at a local level.

15.2 We are concerned about government policies that exacerbate these challenges, most concerningly the pause on family reunification, which prolongs the separation of loved ones and undermines the protection and security to which refugees are entitled. Public policy must respect human dignity, uphold justice, and ensure that families and communities are not further harmed. We call on the General Assembly to reiterate its position that people have the right to seek sanctuary from danger and persecution, and to commit to continued advocacy with and for refugees; for an asylum system that is fair, humane, and respectful of human dignity; and for policies and practices that support integration from day one of arrival.

15.3 The Church of Scotland remains committed to the values embedded in the New Scots Integration Strategy approach, supporting the integration of refugees and people seeking asylum from the point of arrival and enabling people to participate fully in Scottish society. That integration is a two-way process that needs to involve and include receiving communities. We continue to call for a fair and humane asylum system, including practical measures such as free bus travel for people seeking asylum, and pledge to continue our advocacy to ensure that Scotland remains a place of refuge, welcome, and sanctuary.

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16. INTERFAITH RELATIONS

16.1 Interfaith relations continue to be put under significant pressure in Scotland, the UK and the wider world. The international context is one where respect for freedom of religion and belief is under growing pressure, and actions and decisions of national leaders in some countries are contributing to a rise in religious hatred.

16.2 It has been several years since the Church of Scotland's interfaith relations strategy was last reviewed and considering the changing global context and the recent prioritisation work led by the Assembly Trustees, an update to this strategy is, at the time of writing, underway.

16.3 In our own context, the work of supporting ministry and mission remains paramount. What it means to be a good neighbour is especially relevant, particularly with the responsibility that the National Church bears to regularly convene or lead conversations around faith and belief engagement.

16.4 We know the benefit of maintaining good relations with other faith and belief groups, particularly when a united stand can be taken on social issues or government policy proposals. There is a benefit too in offering our solidarity and friendship, particularly in the aftermath of religious hate incidents.

16.5 Once the updated interfaith strategy has been agreed upon within Faith Action, we will endeavour to share and make this known via the website and the General Assembly.

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17. CHILD PROVERTY

17.1 The General Assembly of 2025 enthusiastically gave its support to the 'Scotland Demands Better' movement, which was an advocacy call for more to be done to tackle poverty. The major event was a march and rally in Edinburgh on 25 October, where the Moderator and other Church leaders took part, along with dozens of other organisations, including charities, trade unions and anti-poverty groups.

17.2 It was with great joy that the news was received from the autumn UK budget that the Two Child Benefit Cap will be abolished, which experts believe will be a major contribution to the reduction in child poverty. We note that the Scottish Government had said that they would already do what they could to mitigate the cap in Scotland, and we can now celebrate that it will be ended across the whole of the UK.

17.3 We continue to support the expansion of the Scottish Child Payment and believe that this has helped to make a real difference to families across Scotland who struggle against poverty. The 'End Child Poverty Scotland' coalition has highlighted that the 2017 Child Poverty (Scotland) Act set a legally binding target to ensure that fewer than 10% of children are living in poverty by 2030. In May 2026, we will elect our Parliament, which will have to oversee the completion of this target. We continue to offer our solidarity to the work of the 'End Child Poverty Scotland' coalition, and to join them in urging politicians and Scottish and Local Government to make this issue a core priority.

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18. GAMBLING ADVERTISEMENTS

18.1 The General Assembly in 2014 called for a ban on Gambling advertisements in sport. In the years since, there has been a proliferation of gambling adverts, particularly through online platforms such as websites and social media. The Campaign to End Gambling Advertising argues that the gambling industry has created a business model based on addiction and harm. Excluding the National Lottery, 86% of online betting profits come from just 5% of customers. Over half the income of betting shops now comes from highly addictive gaming machines. The Gambling Commission suggests that 1.3 million people in the UK could have a gambling problem. The gambling industry spends £1.5 billion per year on advertising, leading to consumers being inundated with gambling ads, and contributing to the normalisation of gambling in society as a whole.

18.2 Sports sponsorship and advertising during sports events are banned in Belgium, Italy and the Netherlands, and in Germany it is prohibited to advertise gambling online, on tv and radio, or with public posters.

18.3 The Gambling Act 2005 provides the UK Government with the power to restrict gambling ads as necessary; the Campaign to End Gambling Advertising advocates that the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport should use the powers available to them to help reduce gambling harm.

18.4 We invite the General Assembly to confirm its opposition to gambling advertising and to share our support for the Campaign to End Gambling Advertising.

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19. CARE FOR CREATION

19.1 The UN COP30 summit held in Brazil in November produced limited progress; leaders from the three most polluting countries (USA, China and India) did not attend, and for the first time in the history of COPs, the US Government did not send a delegation. There was a lack of progress on fossil fuel phase-out, and the final negotiated text has been described by environmental groups as weak. There were, however, some advances in relation to climate adaptation, the inclusion of indigenous voices, commitments on energy systems, and some academic comment that the COP process is still the best mechanism the peoples of the world have to limit global temperature rise. In the current geopolitical climate, the continued commitment of so many nations to meet and cooperate is worth cherishing.

19.2 We continue to work with Christian Aid Scotland, Eco Congregations Scotland, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland and the World Council of Churches to highlight the opportunities for learning, prayer and advocacy during Creation Time (1 September – 4 October every year), and around the time of the COP summit meeting. We continue to be a member of the Stop Climate Chaos Scotland coalition.

19.3 Last year's General Assembly endorsed the idea of the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty Initiative, and we have looked for opportunities to express our concerns in Scottish and UK public policy. This included adding our voice to other campaigners in an open letter against the development of the Rosebank oil and gas field, to the west of Shetland.

19.4 In 2025, we worked with Operation Noah, a UK Christian environmental charity, as part of their campaign to encourage churches and denominations to consider how their land might be better used to reduce carbon emissions and promote biodiversity. We held a webinar with Operation Noah in the autumn on this topic. We will continue to explore with them how the use of land owned, managed or controlled by the Church of Scotland can best be done with a concern for caring for creation as an important consideration.

20. INTEGRITY TASK GROUP

20.1 The Church of Scotland's Task Group on Gender-Based Violence, known as Integrity, is working to deliver a new 18-month strategy (January 2026 - August 2027), which will see the group maintain its current focus on creating a safe space for women, girls and children in the church through training and support. In the last year, Integrity has continued our partnership with 'Restored', a Christian domestic abuse charity. They have completed an in-depth training series on domestic abuse awareness and response, which includes the specific ways disclosures of domestic abuse can be shaped by our Church environments. The training was extended to some staff members of Faith Action. We have licenced an introductory domestic abuse awareness training course from Restored and are working closely with Church of Scotland Learning to make this more widely available to ministers and office holders.

20.2 The updated strategy also sets Integrity on a new course to more deeply examine the ever-present problem of misogyny and the more overt ways this is now being expressed in public discourse, to which our churches are sadly not immune. We aim to bring an updated report to a future General Assembly on the issue.

21. Historic Policies affecting Scottish Travellers

21.1 At the end of June, the Scottish Government published an independent report it had commissioned into archival research on how policies impact on the lives of Travellers in the 20th Century.

21.2 Following consultation with the Communication Department, Law Department and CrossReach, a public statement was made by Tommy MacNeil and Mike Cantlay, as Conveners of the committees which are the successor bodies to those Church boards which were highlighted in the report: the Board of Home Mission and the Board of Social Responsibility: -

The publication of this report on archival research exploring policies affecting Gypsy/Traveller communities in the 20th Century is an important contribution to our understanding of the history of Scotland and the experiences of people from these communities.

We appreciate the concern of the Scottish Government in commissioning it and the efforts of those who have been involved in preparing it.

We make this statement as the Conveners of the committees of the Church of Scotland that are the successors to the agencies and boards of the Church which were involved in work with Gypsy/Traveller communities in the 20th Century.

On behalf of the Church of Scotland, we offer a heartfelt and genuine apology for these historic wrongs highlighted in the report and carried out in the name of the Church.

Today, we wish to say we stand in solidarity with those who suffered and deeply regret the harm that came to them as a result of actions by the Church in the past.

We affirm the dignity of the people that our forebears wrote off.

In particular, we regret and are very sorry for the trauma that was inflicted on Gypsy/Traveller communities, families and individuals by our Church.

We acknowledge that the Church of Scotland tolerated discrimination and the use of derogatory language by its employees and members.

The Church fostered an atmosphere of moral judgement which condemned as shameful any way of life that deviated from a particular view of what was "normal". It disregarded the culture, values and respect for Gypsy/Travellers.

In the context of the Report, we see how the actions and attitude of the Church of Scotland up to the 1970s contributed to the perpetuation of discriminatory and prejudicial views against Gypsy/Travellers across many parts of the settled community.

Where this led to family separation, we are especially sorry, as we fully recognise the grief, trauma and disruption this causes can have long-lasting, even life-long, impact.

It is important that we acknowledge that there was a time when the Church of Scotland promoted discriminatory and prejudicial attitudes and actions towards Gypsy/Traveller communities in Scotland.

The historic treatment of Gypsy/Travellers by government, wider society and Churches has been intentionally and unintentionally discriminatory.

There will have been those in the Church who held prejudicial views and acted in a way which did not respect the cultural identities of the Gypsy/Traveller communities.

This is a matter of deep sadness and regret for the Church of Scotland.

The report presents challenging reading.

We recognise that the lasting impact of the Church and other organisations has contributed to continued prejudice and discrimination against Scotland's Gypsy/Traveller communities to this day.

The Church of Scotland has a long tradition of involvement in social and community work, and we know that many Church

members and ministers in the 19th and 20th Century were motivated from a position of wanting to relieve poverty and, as they saw it, help to improve the lives of others.

Interventions which sought to house or settle Gypsy/Traveller communities can be seen as an intentional attempt to destroy a culture and a way of life.

The report draws the conclusion that this was a deliberate attempt by the Church to forcibly assimilate Gypsy/Travellers.

As Christians, we follow as Jesus asks us to love our neighbours as ourselves.

Where we have fallen short, we humbly seek forgiveness and God's guidance as we walk in the way of repentance, to turn our lives around, and to follow Him.

In the Church of Scotland, we have sought to bring an open and fair mind to understanding this research and recommendations, and we seek to do so with humility and kindness.

21.3 A separate report on this subject was published by the Scottish Human Rights Commission in January 2026 https://www.scottishhumanrights.com/media/3271/pdf-mainreport-spotlights-culturalrecognition-2026.pdf. The actions of Church of Scotland office holders and committees were highlighted in this report too.

21.4 The Public Life and Social Justice Programme Group continues to seek constructive engagement and input to Scottish Government, statutory bodies and civil society consideration of the impact of policies affecting Gypsy/Traveller communities in Scotland in the 20th Century. In so doing, we continue to be guided by the principles that were commended by the 2011 General Assembly when it received a substantive report: -[4]

Churches in Scotland should:

1. *Support the Scottish Government in recognising Travellers as a distinct ethnic group.*
2. *Note that past treatment of the Travelling Community by Government, wider society and the Churches has intentionally and unintentionally been discriminatory.*
3. *Encourage the Scottish Government and local authorities to afford to Travellers protection against discrimination.*
4. *Encourage the Scottish Government, in conjunction with local authorities, to take steps to improve the provision of services to Travellers, recognising the distinct culture and lifestyle of the Travelling Community.*
5. *Encourage the Scottish Government to take steps to ensure that members of the Travelling Community are enabled to vote.*
6. *Explore opportunities to celebrate with the Travelling Community the richness of its culture.*
7. *Seek ways ecumenically through which the spiritual needs of the Travelling Community can be met.*
8. *Explore the theology of welcome and hospitality as it relates to the relationship between the Travelling Community and those outwith the Travelling Community.*
9. *Enter into dialogue with representatives of broadcasters and of the print media about promoting more positive images of the Travelling Community.*
10. *Encourage Church bodies and individual church members to speak out against instances of the negative and abusive portrayal of the Travelling Community in the media.*

22. RELIGION AND TECHNOLOGY PROJECT

22.1 In 2025, the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team made the decision to close the Church of Scotland's Society, Religion and Technology Project.

22.2 In 1970, the Church of Scotland embarked on a new project to look at Society, Religion and Technology, and at the time, it was doing something unique. It was at the cutting edge of how Church and public life could intersect. It transformed the way of thinking for the Church of Scotland, which has had a lasting impact, particularly since SRT merged with Church and Nation and the Education Committee to form the Church and Society Council in 2005, and more recently, Faith Impact Forum and FAPTL/Public Life and Social Justice.

22.3 We acknowledge the important work that has been done in the name of the Church of Scotland's SRT Project, and celebrate its role in equipping the Church to respond to and confront with confidence and faith some of the great scientific and technological developments of our time, including: -

- oil and gas discovery in the North Sea
- understanding of climate science and global heating
- originating the eco congregation movement in Scotland
- genetic modification, including the cloning of Dolly the sheep and in synthetic biology
- the rise of digital information, the internet and artificial intelligence
- the purposes of economic activity in response to the 2008 financial crash

4 https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/5892/ga11_churchsociety_travellers.pdf

- farming, food production and consumption
- the ethics of defence
- medical ethics, including assisted dying

22.4 It is with sadness that, due to the staffing changes in the national office in 2025, it was decided that the SRT project needed to come to an end. The decision to make the post of Policy Officer redundant had the impact of leaving the SRT with no staff support.

22.5 Following careful and heartfelt discussions, it was concluded that the time for laying down this strand of work had come. We noted that this decision came at a time when other long-standing pieces of work were also ending, including the closure of the HIV Programme and of Life and Work.

22.6 The Faith Action Programme Leadership Team offers its thanks to the present and past members of the SRT committee, and staff members connected with the project, for their service, dedication, commitment and contributions.

22.7 We acknowledge and celebrate that in 2026 there are numerous church and faith based organisations who are now engaged in this space: Theos Think Tank (established in 2006), the Faraday Institute for Science and Religion (2006), Equipping Christian Leadership in an Age of Science / Scientists in Congregations (2013), Grasping the Nettle (2015), Christians in Science, the Faith Experiment, Believing Science, Society of Ordained Scientists.

22.8 A final comment on this decision is that the role and remit of the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team, and of the Public Life and Social Justice Programme Group, continue to look at the big questions about the Christian faith and public issues, including science and technology. The Programme Group has been tasked to consider how the Church of Scotland can continue to respond to future opportunities in relation to issues of science, technology, medicine and the environment, within the present context of staffing capacity and budget reality. We will also continue to work with the Communications Department to ensure that past SRT papers, resources and reports continue to be available to the wider Church.

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23. EURODIACONIA

23.1 The Church of Scotland has been a member of Eurodiaconia for many years. Eurodiaconia is a European network of Churches and Christian organisations which provide social and healthcare services and advocate for social justice. The membership link with Eurodiaconia was retained with the Public Life and Social Justice Programme, as it had previously sat with the Faith Impact Forum and, before 2020, the Church and Society Council.

23.2 Following consultation internally, particularly with the Ecumenical Relations Committee and with CrossReach, and after dialogue with the General Secretary of Eurodiaconia, we have taken the decision to relinquish our membership at the end of 2026.

23.3 The reasons behind this include the consequences of Brexit, and the weakening of the relevance of European-wide approaches to social care policy and practice to the work of the Church of Scotland. Membership also comes at a cost, both in terms of money through the payment of an annual fee, but also through staff time in relation to engagement (reading reports, participating in events and attending the in-person AGM held in a different European city each spring).

23.4 While we regret that circumstances have led us to this point, we recognise the importance of focusing our efforts where they will have the greatest impact. The decision reflects a realistic and faithful assessment of how best to use our limited resources to support the mission and ministry of the Church of Scotland.

23.5 As we prepare to conclude our formal membership, we express our deep appreciation for the work of Eurodiaconia, its staff, and its member organisations. We remain grateful for the relationships formed and for the shared commitment to compassion, justice, and care for vulnerable communities. We offer our prayerful support for Eurodiaconia's continued flourishing in the years ahead.

People & Training Programme Group Report

24. Initial Ministerial Education (IME) and LEAD ACADEMIC PARTNER

24.1 Introduction

'A more integrated, mission-focused approach to the formation of ministers — one that is apostolic in nature, rooted in Christ, and capable of shaping leaders who can serve faithfully and imaginatively in today's rapidly changing contexts.' Report of the Selection Panel for Lead Academic Partner, 2026

24.1.1 This report, in sections 24 to 32, proposes a generational shift in the training and formation of national ministers of word and sacrament in the Church of Scotland, with consequent reforms to follow for the diaconate. It urges the Church to grasp now a unique opportunity to produce new, bold, dynamic and innovative forms of education and training for ministry, always focussed on enhancing and resourcing the calling and vocation of our candidates. It does so by inviting the Church to embrace a significant renewal and reform of the basis and structure of our ministerial and diaconal training in its purpose and content; and, as part of that re-framing, to affirm the move to a sole Lead Academic Partner for the Church; and to approve the recommendation of a Selection Panel that the Lead Academic Partner of the Church be Trinity College (University of Glasgow).

25. NEW IME SCHEME – 'A GENERATIONAL SHIFT'

25.1 A New Vision for the Training and Formation of our Ministers and Deacons

25.1.1 The traditional academic theological programme for the training of ordained ministry in the Church of Scotland has focused primarily on acquiring and displaying rational knowledge of Scripture and theology, in keeping with the priorities of the broader University context in which candidates for ministry undertake study. This has produced generations of ministers with a high level of academic theological understanding, suited to a restricted 'preacher/ teacher model' of a minister proclaiming the Word within a flourishing parish system. Whilst a thorough grounding of theological learning and knowledge remains integral to ministry and must not be set aside in any training model, the value of such learning is diminished if it is not closely integrated with the formation of a candidate in the whole of their ministerial vocation or becomes disconnected with the ever-changing realities of ministry, church and society; such that a candidate cannot translate such knowledge into ministry practice.

25.1.2 The translation of academic knowledge into ministry practice beyond the pulpit is often hindered by a significant "gulf of separation." While academic discussions of ministry are beneficial, they remain insufficient if they fail to move beyond the classroom. As Robert Banks notes, "action will be devalued as a route to learning so long as it is talked about and not engaged in.[5] Historically, the Church has viewed church placements as a secondary "add-on" for "working out" theological knowledge. Consequently, connecting academic theology to the realities of parish life often becomes a "journey without maps"—an isolated pursuit dependent largely on individual initiative and supervisor guidance. Whilst the academic input from our present providers is of a high standard, the gulf with ministry practice and the inconsistency in the curriculum between five academic providers has left a proportion of newly ordained ministers feeling that notable sections of their university learning have been irrelevant or absent, while simultaneously feeling unprepared for the practical demands of contemporary ministry.

25.1.3 Such training methods are no longer "fit for purpose" in a post-Christendom Scotland. We are training ministers for a Church and a world that has been disappearing since the 1960s. There is now an urgent need to integrate theory and practice at the heart of a transformational, missional training model that directs the entire journey of context-based ministerial formation.

25.1.4 While maintaining academic rigour and retaining the strengths of core teaching in Bible and theology, we must recognise that theological education is a contributor to, rather than the totality of, ministry formation. Training ought to be redirected towards developing a personal and spiritual identity capable of adapting reflectively and resiliently to Church and societal realities. This requires an intentional, "in time" learning model where theory and practice are implemented simultaneously. In the words of Banks, "the one-way relationship between theory and practice, according to which the former precedes the latter, must give way to a more complex relationship between the two.'[6]

25.1.5 We begin with key foundational principles. It is important to remember why we undertake the training of our ministers of word and sacrament and deacons. The key desire for Initial Ministerial Education (IME), and of every step of the present re-development process, including the selection of a Lead Academic Partner (LAP), is to nurture and enable candidates for national ministry of word and sacrament, and word and service (the diaconate), to fulfil their calling from God and their apostolic, missional and pastoral vocation in ministry; all to the glory of God, and for the expression in word and deed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The training of ministers must also be to enable the whole people of God to exercise God's mission in the world.

25.1.6 Therefore, ministry training must be focussed heavily on the personal, spiritual and ministerial formation of candidates so that they attain 'attributes' for ministry and are ready for ordination and the challenges ahead; with the acquisition of educational qualifications, as well as skills and competencies to perform the role, as important secondary considerations. Rather than just 'what we learn' and 'what we can do', both 'how we learn' and 'who we become' need an equal status. This has been a key focus of the IME re-development work over the past decades, and of the present selection process for LAP.

25.1.7 The Church of Scotland has, for many years, been moving on such a trajectory, and this report must be seen as a continuation of all of that work. Following a comprehensive review of IME initiated by the General Assembly in 1993 which resulted in the Report of the Education for the Ministry Review Group to GA 1997, the 'Ministers of the Gospel Report' to the General Assembly of 2000 set out a vision for ministers in the 21st Century to be 'reflective practitioners, collaborative leaders and formative learners', who 'integrate who they are as persons in Christ with the particular functions they fulfil in the service of Jesus Christ.' In so doing, as the 2000 report sets out, there are 'qualities' that ought to be evident in ministers, such as 'maturity of faith', 'lives lived in communion with God' and 'lives marked by the Fruit of the Spirit.'

25.1.8 These words have not aged in the past quarter-century. The dynamic re-shaping of ministry training set out in the pages to follow seeks to enable that vision to fully take shape at last.

25.1.9 The trajectory developed further through aspects of the Church Without Walls report of 2001; from an instruction of GA 2008 to review ministry training, leading to the Enabling Ministries Report of 2011; the Rethinking Initial Training Report of 2017; and the Blake Stevenson Report of 2018; culminating in the Ministries Council Report to GA 2019 which introduced the Formation Framework and led to Assembly approval to initiate a final stage of re-framing IME, including the reduction of academic partners to 'one or two'. Likewise in relation to the diaconate, the Deacons of the Gospel Report 2001 set out the distinctive nature of diaconal ministry, and the Ministers of Word and Service Report of 2019 further developed this into five images of diaconal service.

5 Robert Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education: Exploring a Missional Alternative to Current Models*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 61.

6 Banks (1999), 59.

In the more recent past, this has gained further momentum with the implementation of the Formation Framework, which now forms the basis of candidate development and appraisal, and a Curriculum for Ministry also produced in the same year; and then the present process initiated by GA 2019 to reach a recommendation of a Lead Academic Partner. This final stage began in 2024 and has been reported upon for the General Assembly in subsequent years. This has been supplemented by the appointment of a Director of Studies for ministry by the Church in September 2025, namely Rev Dr Sandy Forsyth, whose role is to shape and oversee the implementation of the new IME scheme with its formational focus.

25.1.10 The Church intends to bring all of this work to a culmination by introducing the new scheme for the core phase of training for national ministers of word and sacrament and deacons from the candidate intake beginning in September 2027.

25.1.11 In that light, the key desired features of the new IME scheme are as follows:

- That all aspects of training have as their aim the enhancement and development of the personal, spiritual and ministerial formation of a candidate shaped by the Church's Formation Framework, to enhance and fulfil their apostolic, pastoral and missional vocation; such that by the end of the core phrase of training they might exhibit 'attributes' that indicate readiness for ordination, as well as achieving key skills and competencies in ministry.
- That theological education must remain a key aspect of such formation, but in the context that it is thoroughly integrated with assessed ministry placements that have reflective practice at their core – all academic courses must help students to ask the 'so what?' question for ministry and mission; and in the placement setting the candidate and supervisor should implement theological reflection/reflective practice that is linked to such learning, as well as addressing the core skills and competencies of ministry.
- That the Church enters into a new partnership with a Lead Academic Partner which will allow the close, mutual development of such a scheme, enabled through the work of the Director of Studies in the Church, and a Formation Panel, under the governance of FAPLT, which will oversee the formational development of each candidate.
- A key direction is one of the integration of academic provision: between courses within an academic scheme of study itself; with other modes of delivery of formation beyond the academy, in particular by the Church; with intended vocational outcomes; and with the practice of ministry. All of this should entail a reduction in the time from the beginning of training to ordination as a national minister of word and sacrament, from a standard period of 4.25 years to 3 years, or 2 years under certain exceptions.
- Degree-level academic training will be further set in context as one part of a lifelong process, albeit during a 'core phase', which must also take account of the prior personal, spiritual, social and intellectual formation of the individual, such as through prior life skills or career, the discernment process or the apprenticeship route, and also a key element of 'continuing ministerial development' ('CMD') post-ordination i.e. this being a lifelong process of formation, not everything will, or should, be covered or achieved at the 'core stage' within the academy. There are, therefore, central roles also for the Church at national and local level in enabling formation, and for personal, spiritual exploration.
- As well as integration, it should also be noted overall that another key for future development will be the presence of flexibility and adaptability in delivery by the Lead Academic Partner and the Church. The curriculum requires flexibility and adaptability to account for future developments in Church and society. In addition, despite the restricted length of degree in the standard route (to a maximum of three years), some flexibility will need to be incorporated into the academic curriculum whilst training for ministry to also allow for the particular training needs of each individual; and the potential for 'streaming' towards certain directions of ministry, such as pioneering, academia, youth ministry, chaplaincy etc.

25.1.12 In the present re-development of ministry training towards a context-based formational and missional focus, the Church is aligning itself with many sister denominations who have followed a similar pathway, such as the Scottish Episcopal Church, the Church of England, the Methodist Church in Britain and Ireland, the Uniting Church in Australia and the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand, from whom valuable lessons can be learned.

25.1.13 The curriculum for ministry and programme of candidate formation detailed in Sections 30 to 31, and the recommendation for a Lead Academic Partner in Section 27 to 29 represent an integral, generational shift in training. Before evaluating the Selection Panel's recommendation of Trinity College, University of Glasgow, it is important for the Assembly to view that recommendation as a cornerstone of this broader overhaul, which seeks to redirect theological education within the context of overall ministerial formation.

26. THE NEW TRAINING ACT & THE FORMATION PANEL

26.1 The New Training Act

26.1.1 To implement the new methodology for the training and formation of our ministers, a new structure in Church law is required, which sets out its key features. The appointment of a Lead Academic Partner is an imperative, without which the scheme is inoperable, hence the separate deliverance with a recommendation of a LAP to the Assembly. We present for approval, therefore, a new Training Act, being the Selection and Training for National Ministry of Word and Sacrament Act, replacing Act X 2004. The new Act can be read in full in Appendix I to this report.

26.1.2 Discussions continue with the Diaconate Council to finalise the terms of the new Deacons' Act, replacing Act VIII 2010, which will set out IME for deacons. The new Deacons' Act will incorporate significant sections of the Training Act and include designated training with the Lead Academic Partner and will be brought before the General Assembly of 2027. In the meantime, the pause on recruitment to the Diaconate is lifted, and diaconal candidates may begin training from September 2027. FAPLT will consider, along with the Diaconate Council, new ways to deploy those called to diaconal ministry of word and service.

26.2 Purpose of the Act

26.2.1 The Act defines and regulates the Church of Scotland's process for selecting, forming, training and assessing candidates for national ministry of Word and Sacrament. The central purpose is to ensure that candidates undergo personal, spiritual and ministerial formation shaped by the Church's Formation Framework, with theological education being carried out in partnership with the Lead Academic Partner (LAP).

26.3 Four Phases of Training

26.3.1 Training for ministry is now structured into four distinct phases:

1. Initial Phase – discernment, initial screening, local review, and national Assessment Conference.
2. Core Phase (IME) – degree-level study with the LAP plus integrated, accredited placements.
3. First Five Years Phase – compulsory additional training post ordination.
4. Continuing Ministerial Development Phase – lifelong learning.

The new Act governs phases 1 and 2.

26.4 Governance: Formation Panel & Partnership Model

26.4.1 The training system will be delivered through a partnership between FAPLT, represented by the Director of Studies and People & Training, and the Lead Academic Partner, with intended contributions also from our other academic providers and external training bodies and individuals.

26.4.2 Beyond educational provision, 'formation' occurs through many avenues, not only in the exercise of ministry on practical placement, but also in personal and spiritual growth. Skills and competencies, formation and 'attributes' of ministry are inextricably linked, yet the sources of development in each are diverse. Each contributor towards the candidate's learning and formation should have a voice that feeds into the overall picture i.e. we must avoid any continuation of a segmented or 'siloed' approach to the provision of ministry training in a split between what is seen to be theoretical and practical; or between the central church, local and regional church, and academic partner. We must instead embrace a fuller collaboration, knowing that all sources contribute to candidate learning and formational growth.

26.4.3 All of this will require strong communication, collective responsibility and common goals in a partnership between the Director of Studies, People & Training and the LAP, as well as with Presbyteries, placement supervisors and candidates. Beyond regular, informal contact, the Formation Panel is the main vehicle for such collaboration to fulfil the formational goals.

26.5 The Formation Panel

26.5.1 The presence of a Formation Panel fits well within the collaborative re-framing of training and formation, and also with the affirmation of a 'College' identity for ministry training within the LAP. Indeed, the Panel might be seen as the essential 'glue' to hold together the stakeholders for a common purpose, acting to increase those bonds and ensure that all partners in the process of formational training are working towards those ends, in the best interests of the candidate's development.

26.5.2 Meeting three times a year, the Formation Panel will oversee all aspects of a candidate's formation, including:

- Allocating routes of training
- Approving placements and overseeing academic provision
- Evaluating progress following annual appraisal, and recommending any additional training avenues
- Initiating the 'streaming' of training in a particular direction, if appropriate.
- Assessing readiness for ordination, and issuing exit certificates

26.5.3 The Formation Panel will have six core members; being the Director of Studies who will chair the Panel; a member of People & Training; the Principal, or a council member, of the College associated with the Lead Academic Partner; a representative on behalf of the Presbyteries of the Church; and an elder or member of a Church of Scotland congregation with appropriate experience in academia or in vocational training; supplemented when appropriate by the candidate, their Formation Partner, and/or their placement supervisor.

26.5.4 In their decisions year on year, they will work alongside the candidate to enable their formation and development. The work of the Formation Panel is also strongly linked to other aspects of training and assessment:

- It must enhance and not supplant the existing inputs of People & Training and the many positive avenues that have been developed within the Team to assess candidate formation and to assign placements.
- The work of the Panel in the 'core phase' of IME must account for three other phases in the life-long learning of a candidate; to recognise formation, gifts and skills from past life experience, prior work and the discernment/ apprenticeship periods, and also future formation in the first five years after ordination, and then for the remainder of ministerial life.
- The Panel will need to work with further frameworks that consider whether a candidate has reached a certain stage of formation by (a) more closely aligning the Formation Framework goals with each training year; (b) aligning the attaining of skills and competencies with each training year; and (c) at the end of the 'core phase', aligning both of those with the attainment by a candidate of 'attributes' for ministry, as well as skills and competencies, to a sufficient level to allow ordination.

26.6 Routes of Training

26.6.1 The Act sets out the following routes that a candidate may take:

- The primary route for the Core Phase will be to undertake a three-year undergraduate Bachelor of Divinity degree or equivalent with the Lead Academic Partner, integrated with three accredited ministry placements, each of one-year duration and running from September to August. For suitable candidates, the continuation for a further year to complete a BD (Honours) degree, and potentially beyond to postgraduate study, will be encouraged.
- As a first exception and at the discretion of the Formation Panel, the candidate may instead undertake a two-year Diploma degree with the Lead Academic Partner (to run concurrently with the BD programme), integrated with two accredited ministry placements each of one-year duration and running from September to August. This exception may apply if the candidate fulfils at least three of the following four criteria, being:
  (a) aged over 50 years;
  (b) previous theological study;
  (c) significant prior experience as an employee or volunteer in the Church of Scotland or another Reformed Christian denomination; and
  (d) one other relevant and significant circumstance in prior life, work, academic study or calling, taken into account at the Formation Panel's discretion.
- As a second exception and at the discretion of the Formation Panel, if the candidate has a prior theology degree, or a period of prior training for ministry in the Church of Scotland or another Reformed Christian denomination, they may be directed towards a 'bespoke route' which would be better suited to their formational goals towards attaining the 'attributes' for ministry at ordination. The 'bespoke route' would potentially involve postgraduate study, a research project and/or tailored placements, with a flexible duration.

26.6.2 As for the content of training, candidates must complete:

- Degree level study in the following subject areas:
  (i) Critical academic reflection on the Life of Faith and Discipleship;
  (ii) Christian Scriptures, History and Thought;
  (iii) Practice of Ministry; and
  (iv) Mission.
- Integrated contextual placements focused on:
  (a) The calling and vocation of ministry, and its varied forms including team ministry;
  (b) Personal development, devotion and faith, prayer, study, resilience and self-care;
  (c) Identity as a minister in the Church of Scotland in the light of its history and present formation, and its social context;
  (d) Preaching and the leading of worship in different contexts, and the conduct of the sacraments, funerals and weddings;
  (e) The knowledge, interpretation, understanding and application to everyday life of Scripture, key beliefs and doctrines of Christian faith in the Reformed tradition, and in applying Christian ethics and theology to major issues in our country and world;
  (f) The nurturing of Christian faith in the congregation and community, and the provision of Christian education;
  (g) Mission and discipleship, including the enabling of church members in mission and the training and support of volunteers;
  (h) Theology and practice of pastoral care;
  (i) Pioneer ministry and fresh expressions of church;
  (j) Church communication, education and mission via digital platforms;
  (k) Adaptive leadership through challenge and change, church management, relationship building and governance in the local context, and within the broader Presbyterian polity; and

(l) Knowledge and application of Church law including Church governance and courts; and relevant civil law, including safeguarding law and practice and charity law.

- Mandatory seminars, intensives, gatherings and worship as required by FAPLT and the LAP.

In relation to the management and assessment of integrated placements, the Church anticipates it will take the lead role in the following, subject to further development in the future in working with the LAP:

- Placements will be allocated by People & Training using supervisors trained and assessed by them;
- Their location will be a decision for People & Training, acting on the advice of the Formation Panel;
- Each placement will continue to be governed by a Learning Covenant. All placements bar one must be in Scotland.
- People & Training will liaise with the supervisor, candidate and Presbytery in relation to the ongoing progress of the placement; and any issues of unsatisfactory progress or conflict that arise; as well as considering any questions of a placement being changed;
- Recognising the roles of the LAP and the Presbytery in also doing so, the Church will provide pastoral support to the candidate in relation to issues that might arise during the placement; and
- At the end of the placement, People & Training will collate the reports of the candidate and the supervisor and hold the appraisal meeting in relation to the progress of the candidate, reporting to the Formation Panel thereafter.

26.6.3 In relation to the management and assessment of integrated placements, the LAP will take the lead role in the following aspects:

- Develop the placement course from the University perspective that will lead to accreditation; including proposed course expectations and outcomes for the candidate;
- Provide all teaching, and academic materials required by the candidate in order to undertake the course and the placement;
- Provide appropriate materials to the Supervisor to ensure that they are aware of the tasks set by the LAP for the candidate in their placement and can work with the candidate accordingly, and supervisor training in conjunction with the Church;
- Liaise with the candidate and, if necessary, the supervisor, during the placement to ensure that there is understanding of the goals, and development towards the proposed outcomes;
- Undergo a thorough basis of academic assessment at the end of the placement that is related to theological reflection/reflective practice and the formational goals; and
- Liaise with People & Training and the Formation Committee about the outcome for the candidate in the course and placement, following assessment.

27. A LEAD ACADEMIC PARTNER

27.1 Over the past four decades, the number of national ministry of word and sacrament and diaconate candidates has declined from 215 in 1985-6 to 35 in the 2025/26 session, with a particular fall in the 1990s. At present there are 5 candidates at Christ's College, Aberdeen (all distance-learning, including 2 deacons), 10 candidates at New College, Edinburgh (all in-person); 9 candidates at Trinity College, Glasgow (all in-person); 11 candidates at Highland Theological College, University of Highlands and Islands (all distance-learning, including 1 deacon); and 0 candidates at St Mary's College, University of St Andrews.

27.2 For most of our academic providers, this makes our candidates a small cohort within a much larger student body. Being so thinly spread between institutions they have restricted opportunities to learn and grow together as a unified group. The scope to provide foundational courses at each institution for ministerial training for small numbers of students is limited. As a result, the provision of ministry and mission-related courses is patchy and inconsistent between the five providers, with no common curriculum. This means that the Church has created a 'bolt-on' provision of learning and formation through conferences, MTN networks and other events - leading for some candidates to an inevitable duplication of what they have already learned, and for others a revelation of entirely new material.

27.3 The core advantages of re-shaping education for ministry with one Lead Academic Partner are therefore:

- One centre, with a unified student cohort of much larger numbers, to be a stronger learning and support community that has ability to:
- Initiate a strong 'College' ministry training identity
- Set a core curriculum for ministry
- Complement and be integrated with the training and formation in practice on church placement
- Allow the Church to provide additional courses and directions of formation that more fully complement and do not duplicate
- Bring about a new relationship between church and academy in a close working partnership, with the LAP liaising strongly with the Director of Studies and Formation Panel
- Provide a clear, well-defined and inspirational training route for ministry, that may build recruitment numbers
- Build in 'streaming' for candidates in their training and formation to make it 'person-centred' and not 'one size fits all', towards such as pioneering, chaplaincy, academia etc
- Within a realistic acceptance that the Church cannot afford to fund such development in more than one institution.

27.4 It is in this light, and from previous General Assembly deliverances which have approved this direction (in 2019 and 2024), that one provider has been sought, to implement one (rather than two or more) structure which can deliver an agreed core curriculum which all candidates will take, with enough students to justify ministry-related subjects; and to place theological reflection/reflective practice at its core through integrated assessed placements. There would be one partnership to nurture with the Church, the Director of Studies and the Formation Panel. Doubling the number of providers (or retaining the status quo) would make such a structure much harder to create in duplicate and also stretch People & Training resources in oversight and appraisal, as well as making the work of the Formation Panel far more complex.

27.5 Since the General Assembly has agreed to and is expecting a recommendation of one Lead Academic Provider, that is the task that a Selection Panel was invited to undertake from the beginning; and that is the recommendation brought before the Assembly.

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28. THE SELECTION PROCESS FROM SEPTEMBER 2024 TO PRESENT

28.1 What Was the Church Looking for in a Lead Academic Partner?

The following factors are important:

- A passion and desire to train ministers, seeing that as core to the whole identity of their divinity school and their teaching lives
- Servants and close partners of the church
- 'Buy in' to the ministerial and missional vocational focus of all teaching and subject areas, and willing to re-orientate existing courses in that direction, as well as developing courses in new subject areas
- Willingness to radically re-assess the curriculum
- Not simply a very good version of what we have already with the same focus and output, but a bold and new approach.
- A strong track record in practical theology, church connection, publication and advocacy about the Church, faith nurture of candidates, innovative action and online provision for the Church of Scotland, with ministers involved in teaching who are also active as ministers
- Desire to re-affirm their 'College' identity as focussed on ministry training
- Skill in theological reflection and a clear vision and desire for integrated, assessed placements
- Ability to deliver a 'hybrid' national provision with both in-person and online elements

28.1.1 As for what a Lead Academic Partner might provide, Perry Shaw in Transforming Theological Education set out that the questions 'What?' and 'How?' are 'not in fact the beginning but the end of curriculum planning.' Instead, the overriding factor should be one of purpose for theological education, driven by the questions 'why exactly do we exist and what are we trying to accomplish anyway?' 7

28.1.2 In entering a selection process, the Church was looking less to find out how well the four providers had done in recent years, or for them to tell us about how good they were. It is undoubted that all our providers have great strengths and have trained ministers well in different ways, with equal amounts of positive and negative feedback from candidates about their education at each institution. This is much more about their passion and desire to provide vocational education for training ministers and deacons, and to enter a new partnership with the Church to do so, with a resurgence of the 'College' identity to train ministers within the broader University. It is about the questions 'why exactly do we exist and what are we trying to accomplish anyway?' We wanted to work alongside an institution that sees itself as a servant of the Church and collaborator with it, who will be wholly committed to a new partnership working with the Director of Studies, People & Training and the Formation Panel. We wanted to work with an institution that will engage enthusiastically and dynamically with the Formation Framework and the Vivid Vision.

28.1.3 With that direction of travel, over the past eighteen months there has been a lengthy and rigorous process to bring a recommendation of a Lead Academic Partner to the General Assembly of 2026. A Selection Panel was appointed by the Church, ultimately consisting of two theological academics working in England but with a depth of experience of the Scottish training institutions, along with two parish ministers of long standing with roles in key bodies of the Church.

28.1.4 Submissions to become LAP were made to the Selection Panel by Christ's College, University of Aberdeen; New College, University of Edinburgh; Trinity College, University of Glasgow; and Highland Theological College, University of Highlands and Islands. St Mary's College, University of St Andrews decided not to make submissions.

28.1.5 For the reasons set out by them in their report within Section 5, the Selection Panel found that Trinity College, University of Glasgow met all of the aspirational goals above more strongly than any other academic provider, as well as scoring highest under graded criteria. The process and outcome are considered in more depth in what is to follow, and in the Selection Panel's Report in Appendix II.

7 Perry Shaw, *Transforming Theological Education; A Practical Handbook for Integrative Learning*, (Carlisle: Langham Providership, 2014). 19.

28.2 The process of selecting one Lead Academic Partner

28.2.1 Stage 1 - in late 2024, People & Training sought to identify which of the Church's existing academic providers (AP) were best placed to act as Lead Academic Partner and to evaluate their strategic alignment, capacity, and credibility. A compelling vision for IME was outlined. APs were invited to offer their own creativity to the submission, and to offer a model that need not align with what was presently being undertaken.

28.2.2 APs were invited to submit an initial proposal outlining how they would:

- Deliver a revised three-year BD/MDiv degree with an optional two-year diploma route
- Align the curriculum with the Formation Framework, integrating academic study, placements, and reflective practice
- Provide integrated, assessed placements across Scotland, including rural, urban, and diverse contexts
- Support missional theology, worship, preaching, pastoral care, and leadership development
- Sustain national accessibility through a mix of in person, blended, and online provision
- Demonstrate academic rigour, institutional stability, inclusivity, and pastoral support for candidates
- Ensure eligibility for SAAS student funding

28.2.3 Submissions were also asked to address:

- The shape of the academic and calendar year
- Peer learning and formation
- The anticipated partnership with People & Training and other academic providers

28.2.4 Rather than selecting a LAP at this point, the outcome of Stage 1 was to:

- Identify areas requiring clarification, expansion, or greater detail
- Invite providers to proceed to Stage 2 with targeted guidance and questions

28.2.5 Stage 2 in early 2025 - was designed to enable a deeper, comparative evaluation of each provider's proposed IME model and partnership approach, allowing the Church to test deliverability, financial sustainability, depth of integration between theory, practice and formation; and quality of partnership working with the Church. Each provider received:

- Their Stage 1 submission with Church comments and questions
- A common set of Stage 2 guidance notes, plus provider specific questions

28.2.6 Stage 2 submissions were required to expand upon:

- Detailed course content for core BD/MDiv modules
- Structure and assessment of accredited placements
- Models of reflective practice linking learning and ministry
- How responsibility would be shared between the LAP and the Church
- Costings, within the indicated Church budget
- Arrangements for 'hybrid', national delivery including in person elements and online learning, peer formation, and supervision, which mean that no candidate will be required to re-locate from their present home

28.2.7 To strengthen assurance and accountability, Stage 2 submissions also included:

- Candidate testimonials (from recent BD/MDiv graduates)
- A letter of institutional authorisation and support from the provider's governing body
- An outline budget covering programme development, delivery, and accreditation

28.3 How was the selection made of the LAP?

28.3.1 Following consultations after GA2024, we sought feedback from the APs regarding the selection process. We heard that they would appreciate an independent process with people who understood both academic and theological education and the present context of the Church of Scotland. Recommendations of suitable personnel were received from some of our APs, and a panel of four people were approached to form a Selection Panel:

Dr Heather Major (Research Fellow in New Places for New People, Evangelism & Growth, Cliff College, Derbyshire)

Rev Professor Paul Middleton (Professor of New Testament and Early Christianity in Theology and Religious Studies, University of Chester).

Mr Geoff Miller (Assembly Trustees)

Rev David Rankin (Parish Minister, Perth and a Presbytery-appointed member of FAPLT)

28.4 Moving towards a decision

28.4.1 It had been originally anticipated that the Selection Panel would make a recommendation that, if approved by the People & Training Programme Group and FAPLT, would be taken to GA2025. In the event this did not happen, and the Selection Panel asked that FAPLT provide them with clearer criteria to enable them to undertake a comparative exercise between the four submissions and thus make a recommendation.

Following GA2025, a Working Group was appointed by FAPLT to agree these criteria, whose members were:

Rev Dr David Clarkson (Convenor of P&T Programme Group)

Rev Julia Pizzuto-Pomaco (FAPLT member)

Rev Mike Goss (recently retired FAPLT member, former member of Ministries Council and Faith Nurture)

Mrs Lorraine Fraser (elder and FAPLT member)

28.4.2 Their task was to answer the question, "What is the Church looking for?" in a Lead Academic Partner, and to offer clarity to the Church's expectations regarding the LAP's role in delivering the core phase of IME, including a revised BD/MDiv and Diploma pathway integrated with accredited placements, reflective practice and formation for ministry. The purpose of their work was then affirmed by FAPLT.

28.5 Overview of the Criteria

28.5.1 The newly appointed Director of Studies drafted 22 criteria in September 2025 of what the Church was looking for in an LAP, to enable the Panel to make comparative assessments between the submissions of the four providers. The criteria were considered, commented upon, amended and finalised through interaction with the Working Group, FAPLT, a student from each of the four providers (confidentially), the Selection Panel and the providers themselves. The People & Training Programme Group approved the criteria.

28.5.2 The Panel was later provided by the Director of Studies with a marking system addressing each criterion. The full Criteria and Marking papers utilised by the Panel can be accessed at this link Resources - Ascend.

28.5.3 Together, the criteria articulate the Church's aspirations for a collaborative, mission focused partnership capable of shaping the future of ministerial formation. In brief, the criteria were:

Highest Priority Criteria (Rank 1 – Core Requirements)
The Church placed strongest emphasis on:

- **Motivation and Vision**
  A clear articulation of why a provider wished to act as LAP, alongside a compelling vision for ministry training within the Reformed tradition and the Church of Scotland.
- **Formation and Outcomes**
  A coherent understanding of formation, aligned with the Formation Framework, and a clear articulation of the attributes expected of candidates at ordination.
- **Theological Reflection and Reflective Practice**
  A robust and integrated model of reflective practice that underpins both academic learning and ministerial formation.
- **Academic Standing and Capacity**
  Strong institutional and staff credibility, including teaching capability, research profile, and capacity to deliver the programme at scale.
- **Curriculum Quality and Deliverability**
  A broad, well-structured proposed curriculum capable of being delivered sustainably and in time for implementation.
- **Partnership with the Church**
  A clear shift from being one provider among many to working as the Church's Lead Academic Partner, including close collaboration with the Director of Studies, Formation Panel and People & Training.
- **Hybrid Delivery Model**
  Effective integration of in person and online learning to support national accessibility.
- **Community of Learning**
  Intentional development of peer support, shared worship and community formation within a national cohort.
- **Integrated Placements**
  Clear proposals for the implementation and assessment of accredited placements, with appropriate shared responsibility between the provider, Church and Presbyteries.
- **Diversity and Inclusion**
  Demonstrated ability to engage positively and respectfully with candidates of diverse personal identities and theological outlooks.
- **Interview**
  Strength of the provider at interview in their presentation and their answers in discussion
- **Professionalism**
  Professionalism and reliability demonstrated by the Provider at interview; and degree of confidence from the interview that a partnership of the Church with that Provider will deliver the curriculum well for candidates towards the formational goals

Medium Priority Criteria (Rank 2 – Important Enablers)

- Reasonable demands on Church resources, but with advice that there may be flexibility in budget.
- Understanding IME within the wider context of lifelong formation
- Adaptive flexibility in response to change
- Scope for specialist ministry streams
- Ecumenical and interfaith engagement
- Strong pastoral and academic support systems for candidates

Lower Priority Criteria (Rank 3 – Added Value)
While desirable, these were not decisive:

- Contribution to broader training for the Church
- Additional benefits or opportunities available to candidates e.g. grants, field trips
- Implications for SAAS funding

28.6 Change to the Selection Panel membership

28.6.1 Unfortunately, two members of the Selection Panel had to step down because of other commitments, and so in September 2025 Rev Dr Paul Middleton and Mr Geoff Miller were replaced by Rev Keith Blackwood (Parish Minister, Aberdeen and Assembly Trustee) and Dr Cathy Ross (renowned missional theologian, lecturer and former leader of Church Mission Society Pioneer Mission Training, Oxford, lecturer in mission at Regent's Park College, Oxford).

28.6.2 Both Keith and Cathy took time and care to catch-up on the process and provide valuable contributions, and all the panel members gave very generously of their time and skills to consider fully the four submissions.

28.6.3 Short biographies of the four members of the Selection Panel, and their connections to the four academic providers whose submissions they were considering, are to follow:

Rev Keith Blackwood

Minister Mannofield Church, Aberdeen: 2007 to Present

Studied Divinity at Glasgow University: 1988-1991 and 1993-1995

As part of the Presbytery of Aberdeen (now Presbytery of NENI) loose connection with some staff at Aberdeen University over last 18 years.

In addition, spouse completed the OLM Training Modules through Aberdeen University 2021-2024

Vice Convener of the CofS Assembly Trustees

Dr Heather J Major

Cliff College

Lecturer in Practical Theology & Mission

Research Fellow in New Places for New People, Evangelism and Growth

PhD - Trinity College, University of Glasgow (graduated 2022)

MTh - New College, University of Edinburgh (graduated 2016)

BA (Hons) - Highland Theological College, University of the Highlands and Islands (graduated 2015, Tutor in Hebrew and Old Testament from 2019-2023)

Rev David Rankin

Minister Perth Riverside Church

MA – Aberdeen University

BD - Edinburgh University

Pg Dip – Aberdeen University

Member of CofS FAPLT

Dr Cathy Ross – is a lay canon

Pioneer Mission Training Lead at Church Mission Society, Oxford 2019-2026, (continuing as a tutor)

Adjunct Lecturer at Regent's Park College, University of Oxford

BD from Melbourne College of Divinity (1998), PhD from University of Auckland (2004)

External examiner for University of Glasgow Theology courses.

Contributor to the pioneer course at New College, Edinburgh

28.6.4 The Director of Studies and People & Training would like to thank all Panel Members for the depth of their commitment to this process, and for the dedication and wisdom they displayed throughout. The Church has been greatly blessed by their contributions and could not have wished for a better balance of knowledge and skills to reach this recommendation.

28.7 Coming to a decision

28.7.1 While the Selection Panel had a quantity of papers from each submitting academic provider, they also opted to interview each one, which took place in November and December 2025. Each academic provider was invited to make a presentation based on their passion and desire to train ministers and deacons, their vision for ministry and their commitment to formation and reflective practice, and the proposals that they had for ministerial training.

28.7.2 Following those meetings, the Selection Panel requested that People & Training might provide a summary of the key aspects from the agreed criteria from the Church's perspective for the Selection Panel to bear in mind in their deliberations, which were as follows:

- "that you are confident that the LAP has a strong motivation and desire, as part of its identity, to enter into a partnership with the Church rather than as a contractual relationship, to develop and implement new forms of education and training that aspire towards formational and vocation goals for ministers
- that their educational training envisaged, if delivered, gives the best chance amongst the providers of training ministers well for the present and future context and challenges
- that their curriculum, as presently set out and subject to development, will be broad and deep enough to meet those goals
- that the modes of delivery, being hybrid in whatever form, will be implemented as described by the LAP, and will work well not only in teaching but in forming a candidate community for spiritual and social formation and growth
- that the LAP can teach all candidates equally from all genders, social and theological backgrounds from across all of Scotland
- that there is openness to creativity, flexibility and adaptation now and in the future
- that the institution and its staff display a high degree of professionalism, ability and standing, with a solid structure for the longer term and support at higher levels, and therefore that there can be confidence in future partnership and delivery"

28.7.3 Each member of the panel then scored each AP according to the criteria and the marking grid, individually and without consultation.

28.7.4 The panel then came together to discuss in depth each submission, sharing their scoring under the 22 criteria. Whilst the scoring system allowed the Panel to assess the strengths and weaknesses of each of the submissions, we understand that it was just as important to them to ensure that the recommendation resulted from a discernment process before God. Therefore, while the criteria and scoring were an essential element of the process, they did not dictate the outcome and recommendation by themselves.

28.7.5 In our view, all of this has resulted in a fair, rigorous, transparent and spiritually guided process by which the recommendation for LAP has been made, ensuring that the process leading to the Selection Panel's recommendation can be relied upon by the General Assembly and the wider Church.

28.7.6 In the Selection Panel's view, Trinity College, University of Glasgow expressed the visional goals with the greatest cogency and resonance; met each one of the factors strongly as set out above and were most closely aligned with the 22 criteria set by the Church. Trinity College, University of Glasgow articulated all of the above at interview and in their submissions, in a manner which was far more prominent and consistent than the other providers; establishing a unique identity amongst the providers as primarily servants of the Church and not of the academy. Their orientation to the service of the Church and ministry training was made clear in their longstanding focus upon Practical Theology which is a strength within their curriculum and degree programmes; and in their online public course provision to the Church; history of publications and Church engagement, and vision for the future. Other providers were more focused on what they provide at present, and some showed a lack of willingness to adapt, to innovate or enter into a new partnership.

28.7.7 Given that the purpose of the selection process was not primarily to identify 'who is best right now', but 'who is best aligned with the vision for the future', it is fully understandable that Trinity College received the Panel's recommendation.

28.8 The Church's Other Academic Partners

28.8.1 The Director of Studies and People & Training are very grateful to all four providers for their strong levels of commitment to the selection process, and their desire to be the Lead Academic Partner of the Church. All of our providers are gifted educators and theologians, and their Colleges have all contributed significantly to the formation of Church of Scotland ministers over many decades or centuries, for which the Church should remain very thankful.

28.8.2 It is undoubtedly a painful process for one Lead Academic Partner to be selected, entailing disappointment and hurt for partners with whom the Church has enjoyed a strong relationship, and on a personal level for individuals with whom there have been strong bonds over the years. We have been struck by, and would wish to put on record our gratitude for, the graciousness, humility and kindness of our friends and colleagues at New College, Christ's College and Highland Theological College in their responses to the recommendation of the Panel.

28.8.3 The word 'Lead' in the title 'Lead Academic Partner' is consciously chosen. Looking to the future, the Church hopes very much to continue a fruitful relationship with our colleagues in all of those institutions. Candidates currently studying in Edinburgh, Aberdeen and HTC will remain there to the conclusion of their course. Training for OLM and Readership will remain with Aberdeen and HTC, where the current group of apprentices will continue to be taught. We hope that the valuable contribution of New College to ministry training will continue through their public access courses, the annual Lectionary seminar and the DMin programme with Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.

28.8.4 In addition, we hope to partner with all of our providers in the course and module creation for candidates beyond the core curriculum, and in the suite of resources to be developed for those in the first five years of ministry after ordination.

29. THE SELECTION PANEL'S RECOMMENDATION AND REPORT

29.1 In January 2026, the Panel made the recommendation that Trinity College, University of Glasgow be the Lead Academic Partner, subject to the approval of the General Assembly. The Panel judged Trinity College, University of Glasgow ('Trinity College') to score highest on the marking of the twenty-two criteria set by the Church, and as importantly, discerned that Glasgow offered the boldest, most innovative and most compelling vision to deliver the educational input to the new training scheme.

29.2 The Panel focussed especially on the degree of passion of each provider to train ministers and deacons and their larger vision to make training dynamic and transformative, as well as the integration with practice and innovation that they envisaged at the heart of their proposed new scheme for training and curriculum content.

29.3 With those considerations, the Selection Panel were unanimous in recommending Trinity College, to be the Lead Academic Partner, both as the highest-scoring provider according to the criteria, averaged between the four members of the Panel; and as the provider who offered the vision which most closely connected with what the Church was seeking, and might need in the future.

29.4 In summary, the Panel judged that Trinity College's submissions and interview demonstrated that they were:

- Passionate and dedicated, as their core identity, to train ministers and deacons;
- Firmly aligned to reflective practice, practical theology, hybrid learning, and partnership working with the Church
- Best placed to support candidates and prepare them for ministry in today's changing contexts.

Their proposals for the future of ministry training were seen to be:

- Bold and innovative,
- Well aligned with the Church's training needs,
- Strong in vision, imagination, and strategic coherence.

29.5 The Panel were of the view that Trinity College's submissions and interview were in keeping with a desire to move forward in a new direction, which is in line with the trajectory of IME development over the past decades, the new focus on formation and theological reflection; the new degree structure; the new integration of learning with practice in placements; the new appointment of a Director of Studies; and the new Formation Panel to guide candidate development. This is a 'one shot' opportunity for the Church, and a bolder vision is, in their view, required. This was demonstrated by Trinity College in their expression of a passion to train ministers formationally and vocationally, with the processes of high-quality education to then be considered in that light; rather than having a passion to deliver high-quality education, with the vocational and formational elements to then be considered, which they viewed to be the approach elsewhere.

29.6 The Selection Panel's full report to the General Assembly is set out in Appendix II, where the Panel expand in detail upon the process, their discernment and their recommendation, as well as undertaking a comparative exercise between the strengths and weaknesses of the submissions and interview of each provider.

29.7 In their Executive Summary, the Panel also recognised that testing the 'deliverability' of Trinity College, University of Glasgow as LAP now was essential, as was the presentation to the General Assembly of not just a name, but details of a full package of both the intended curriculum and IME programme that the LAP and the Church would deliver, by the full agreement of both. In addition, any new resources sought and their consequent costs would have to be approved beforehand by the Assembly Trustees.

29.8 The Panel's Report to the General Assembly, therefore, concludes as follows:

'In recommending Trinity College as the preferred Lead Academic Provider, the panel identified several conditions essential for becoming the LAP:

- A fully costed model to be developed jointly by the Director of Studies and Trinity College early in 2026, demonstrating feasibility and sustainability.
- Assurance of long-term viability and capacity.
- A genuinely whole-of-Scotland approach to training.
- Clarity regarding the relationship between Trinity College and the University of Glasgow, including recruitment processes and the Church's voice in staffing decisions.
- Protection of the Church's broad theological spectrum, ensuring that candidates from all traditions are both supported and challenged.
- A commitment to partnership in shaping a curriculum that is mission-focused, contextually aware, and responsive to the diverse callings of candidates.

29.9 These recommendations form the basis for the collaborative work undertaken between the Church and Trinity College in developing the final training package which is laid out in detail.' Sections 30 and 31 below set out the agreed terms between the Church and Trinity College, Glasgow, that have been concluded from discussions and negotiations in early 2026.

29.10 Press releases in January 2026 provided the Executive Summary of the Panel's full report, and the criteria and marking papers. The principle that the recommendation of the Panel that Trinity College (University of Glasgow) be the Lead Academic Partner should be put before the General Assembly was approved at a full FAPLT meeting on 17 January. Budgetary approval of the Assembly Trustees for the additional resources sought was given at their meeting on 5 February. Webinars were held in March and April to set out the proposals and discuss them with all interested people in the Church, with an FAQs video recorded by the Director of Studies, which can also be accessed here - https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/news-and-events/news/articles/general-assembly-to-consider-proposal-to-select-lead-academic-partner-for-ministry-training. It is now for the General Assembly to affirm or not the recommendation of the Selection Panel.

30. DETAILS OF THE PROPOSED AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND AND TRINITY COLLEGE/ UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW AS THE LEAD ACADEMIC PARTNER

30.1 Introduction

30.1.1 Since early January, there have been a series of in-depth discussions between the Director of Studies and People & Training on the one hand, and the academic and support staff representing Trinity College, University of Glasgow on the other. The meetings have focussed, on (a) agreeing the key points of a Minute of Agreement and Memorandum of Understanding and (b) agreeing the whole training package, subject to further development, including the curriculum, 'hybrid' delivery nationally, and the nature and expectations of both integrated, assessed placements and the 'Candidate Year'.

30.1.2 These meetings have reached agreement on the key issues, such that the present proposals can be placed before the Assembly, to support the recommendation of the Lead Academic Partner.

30.2 The Draft Minute of Agreement and Memorandum of Understanding

30.2.1 It is important to recognise, and to celebrate, that the Church will be entering into partnership with two bodies located at the University of Glasgow. The first is the University itself for the provision of academic services and structures, including the award of degrees. This will entail a contractual Minute of Agreement between the University of Glasgow and FAPLT to regulate the legal arrangements between the two bodies.

30.2.2 The second is Trinity College, founded in the mid-19th century as a ministerial training college of the Free Church of Scotland, and associated with the University of Glasgow following the reunion of the Church of Scotland with the United Free Church in 1929. Trinity College remains a separate body from the University of Glasgow, albeit it works in tandem with the University. Trinity College has a separate charity number, is governed by a Principal and Council, and has its own finances and endowments. The Constitution of Trinity College states it to be: 'a college of the Church of Scotland…which serves the mission of God by preparing God's people for the work of ministry.' It is this relationship that the Church seeks to enhance, support and develop. The agreement with Trinity College will entail a Memorandum of Understanding which will focus on ministerial training and formation within this context.

30.2.3 Since early January 2026, detailed discussions have taken place between Trinity College (who have also been in discussion with the University of Glasgow), the Director of Studies and People & Training. Agreement has been reached on key issues such that, if the General Assembly supports the deliverance relating to the Lead Academic Partner, there will be further discussions so that those two agreements can be concluded and signed.

30.2.4 In short, agreement has been reached to include the following areas, subject to further discussions and approvals from the higher structures of the University, from Trinity College Council, and from FAPLT. Letters of support and commitment to the partnership with the Church over the period of the agreement will be forthcoming from Trinity College and from all levels of the University of Glasgow.:

30.2.5 University of Glasgow – Minute of Agreement

- agreement for ten years, with provision for a widespread review after five years and termination clauses
- to provide academic training to standards deemed to be acceptable by the Church
- to provide the academic training nationally in 'hybrid' delivery
- to ensure that the provision and delivery of all academic training is in accordance with the University's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policies
- to ensure that all academic training is delivered by appropriately qualified and experienced academic staff: specifically, to ensure that at least the current capacity in the teaching of Practical Theology is maintained as part of core staffing, with succession planning in place to the satisfaction of the Church
- to ensure that adequate administrative support is available to service the increased workload resulting from the delivery of the academic training;
- to provide access to appropriate learning resources, including library facilities, online resources, and learning materials
- to conduct assessments and examinations in accordance with its academic regulations
- to provide candidates with appropriate academic support and guidance throughout their studies
- to award appropriate academic credit, certification, and/or qualifications
- to maintain appropriate quality assurance and enhancement procedures, with annual review based on external examination reports and student feedback
- to comply with all funding rules or requirements which may from time to time be issued by relevant awarding bodies

- to provide regular reports to the Church on the progress and performance of candidates
- to agree detailed confidentiality and GDPR provisions, as well as intellectual property

30.2.6 Trinity College – Memorandum of Understanding

- to commit to a partnership with the Church in shaping a curriculum that is mission-focused, contextually aware, and responsive to the diverse callings of candidates
- to commit to the formation of candidates for ministry by the integration of academic learning with assessed Church placements
- in recognition of a national provision, to ensure that the Academic Training includes teaching from across a broad theological spectrum
- to ensure the active collaboration of the College with the Director of Studies and People & Training, and the active participation of the College in the Formation Panel convened by the Church
- to agree the curriculum for those training for ministry in the Church in collaboration with the Director of Studies
- to commit to partnering with the training bodies of other denominations, and external Christian or public organisations for the delivery of academic training
- to agree financial investments and commitments, along with routes of grant funding provision

30.3 Formation and Training Routes

30.3.1 As in the new Act before the General Assembly previously set out, the potential training routes for a candidate will entail:

- A standard 3-year route of training for word and sacrament ministry consisting of a 3-year BD degree with three one-year integrated and assessed placements. The potential will remain for suitable candidates to continue to complete a 4-year Honours BD degree
- Under certain exceptions, such as age and prior theological study or lengthy church experience, an alternative route of a 2-year Diploma degree, with two integrated and assessed placements prior to ordination
- For those with a prior theology degree, the potential of a 'bespoke route', which could mean postgraduate study, and/or certain 'tailor-made' placements

In our view, the curriculum now envisaged promises the delivery of academic input to ministerial formation which meets the goals above, and which the Church has been seeking for decades

30.3.2 However, formation entails the integration of academic and practical learning, and so IME is based more broadly on a Formational Year for every candidate, overlaying the University's semesters and integrating:

- revised BD modules,
- assessed reflective practice linked to placements, and
- non-credit confessional/vocational formation delivered jointly by Trinity and the Church (or commissioned)

30.4 Curriculum for Ministry

30.4.1 The full proposed curriculum for ministry for the 3-year BD programme and the 2-year Diploma programme is set out in Appendix III.

30.4.2 The curriculum was developed in partnership of Trinity College, the Director of Studies and People & Training, with helpful input from a Focus Group of newly ordained ministers and deacons, and a Working Group of FAPLT consisting of ministers, a deacon and an elder.

30.4.3 The curriculum is streamlined so that all subjects will bear a direct relationship with ministry and will be integrated into placement practice. Subjects that are irrelevant to ministry will now be omitted from the core curriculum for candidates, and the Director of Studies will work in collaboration with the Lead Academic Partner to maintain the ministry focus. The core weighting on Biblical Studies and Christian Theology remains, but now with a heavy concentration too on the Practice of Ministry and Mission. Short descriptions of each course have been provided to the satisfaction of the Director of Studies and People & Training.

30.4.4 Important areas of formation that do not find a place within the curriculum are listed at the end of the curriculum document and will be developed by the Church in conjunction with academic providers and suitable course leaders. They delivered either within the core phase of training or in the first five years after ordination in different formats. The intention will be to develop modules in such areas for candidates, which can then be re-modelled for the benefit of the whole Church.

30.5 Provision of National 'Hybrid' Training

30.5.1 The provision of 'hybrid' training, incorporating both in-person and distanced/online education, is an essential criterion for the Church. No provider currently does so – two are distance-learning only without combined in-person elements, and three are in-person only without significant online presence.

30.5.2 Trinity College is committed to developing and implementing a model of national teaching delivery that is a 'hybrid' of both in-person and distanced/online education. The anticipated modes of 'hybrid' delivery will meet the transformational learning and formation goals for candidates. The implementation and delivery of the hybrid model that Trinity anticipates is set out coherently and demonstrates a flexible and cohesive whole. Their proposals for hybrid delivery far outstrip any current provision by an academic provider

30.5.3 All candidates will attend two national 'in-person' intensives per year replacing the current conference programme, plus study trips, allowing the gathering of the cohort for teaching, formation and community.

30.5.4 Candidates will not need to relocate geographically, unless they wish to do so. The candidate experience will not be significantly diminished by being online rather than in-person for classes. Those within travelling distance of Glasgow will be expected to attended classes for module teaching in-person. Those beyond travelling distance of Glasgow will not be required to do so.

30.5.5 As well as online access to lectures, seminar groups will be synchronous online with the essential capability for online students to contribute to live discussions in seminars alongside those 'in-person' and so be participative and interactive in real time. Local 'in-person' seminar groups will be considered, depending on the numbers of candidates in close location to each other, that are distant from Glasgow. All candidates will continue to undertake local training placements overseen by their local Presbyteries and People & Training.

30.5.6 Full details of the technological and pedagogical aspects of the nature of the online delivery by Trinity College, (University of Glasgow, can be accessed here Resources-Ascend.

30.6 Integrated, Assessed Placements

30.6.1 The melding of theological learning and reflective practice is strongly focused on accredited placements where the candidate, supervisor, Presbytery, Church and LAP will all have a significant role.

30.6.2 A placement will be integrated with the courses being taught that year at the Lead Academic Partner, and an overall reflective theme. Assessed placements will involve weekly reflective practice (e.g., journalling, verbatims, critical incident analysis) facilitated by a Pastoral Studies Tutor/Field Education Coordinator and involving small reflection groups, replacing the former MTN model.

30.6.3 The candidate and supervisor will be provided with materials and training to implement the integrated aspects of the placement. They will be in regular communication with the Pastoral Studies Tutor/Field Education Coordinator in relation to the reflective practice elements of the placement, as well as with the Training Officers of the Church in relation to the progress of the placement overall. Assessment of placements will occur via the Lead Academic Partner for the accredited reflective elements; overall appraisal will continue to be led by People & Training and involve Presbytery assessment.

30.6.4 Whilst it is recognised that the Church will retain responsibility for assessment that will determine candidate progression, Trinity College has committed themselves to involvement and commitment with integrated placements. The differing assessment inputs of supervisor, Presbytery, Church and LAP have been recognised. Trinity has provided a strong vision for how such placements would work in terms of course delivery and their potential involvement in supervisor training and liaison with the supervisor. Their teaching staff have a global reputation and depth of experience in the teaching of theological reflection and reflective practice, and in models of implementation on placement, from which candidates and the Church will greatly benefit.

30.7 The Formational Candidate Year - 'In Person' Intensives

30.7.1 To replace the current candidates' gathering structure (with the MTN also replaced by reflective integrated placements), candidates will participate in two 'residentials' in-person:

- A five day 'residential' in early to mid-September at the start of the 'candidate year', in Glasgow. The first two days will be a spiritual retreat together as the training year begins, at a retreat centre (or church).The next three days will be delivery of the intensive course(s) in the curriculum (perhaps two/three different courses depending on candidate years and numbers on the Diploma), plus induction to University of Glasgow for first year candidates.
- Second 'residential' in say early June for four to five days: a reflective 'summer mission' engagement in a different Presbytery every year across the country, linked in with the reflective theme for the current year. Candidates will, for example, engage in churches, parish projects and pioneering/outreach; assist in community audit and understanding context; lead clubs or special events or care home worship; culminating in their leading worship on the Sunday morning in their host church and then departing. Candidates would stay in groups in vacant manses or in ministers/members' homes, within a town or geographical area.

30.8 Outline Proposals for Candidate Responsibilities

- For two or three years as a candidate for ministry, to be paid an increased allowance of £21K per annum.
- Placements yearly from 1 September to 31 August. During term-time September to May, 10 hours per week on placement in the first year, 15 hours per week in the second/third year (with more at Christmas and Easter), plus worship on Sunday. Trinity teaching schedule will leave one clear day for placement work, anticipating at least one evening too.
- Candidate expectations in the core phase will be made clear from the outset, with a consciousness of the risk of over-demand. Close attention will also be paid to integration between university deadlines and parish demands, both in time spent on placement and timings of assessments.
- During summertime after exams, May to end August, a candidate will be full- time on placement (35 hours per week).
- Equivalent of two days off each week – could be Saturday plus two half days elsewhere. If equivalent of two days off not possible in a certain week due to workload on placement, balance can be carried over to supplement other time off.
- Expected minimum of forty Sundays at worship on placement per year, with the remainder as holidays or for other purposes e.g. church intensives, visiting other churches, time off at exams etc.
- As per ministers, six weeks holiday per year with seven Sundays off.

- As per ministry, Holy Week and Easter Sunday, and Advent to Christmas Day, are compulsory, with no holidays permitted.
- No external work commitments will be permitted during the core phase of training
- A commitment to at least five years' service in the Church of Scotland in some form after ordination (parish, chaplaincy, academia, pioneering etc), with pastoral exceptions; failing which there will be 'clawback' provisions for some of the cost of training, such as university fees or a proportion of the cost per candidate of travel and accommodation for intensives (overall cost to the Church of training a candidate currently around £130K).

30.9 Important Further Criteria from Selection Process re Delivery of Theological Education and Integrated Placements

30.9.1 Relationship with the Church, the Formation Committee and the Director of Studies.

30.9.1.1 Trinity College have expressed the desire and vision to develop a close partnership as LAP with the Church, and not simply to be a 'sub-contractor' left alone to provide a service. They echo the hope of the Church that this will be a new form of relationship, which will require changes, concessions and innovations in the practice of both the LAP, the central and the local Church. There are strong prospects that this new relationship will be based on a developing trust and mutual understanding, allowing one party to critique the other and for decisions on future direction to be taken collaboratively.

30.9.1.2 Trinity College have demonstrated an enthusiasm to engage meaningfully as LAP with the Director of Studies and the Formation Panel to design and implement the new IME programme. The whole mood of their proposals and engagement in recent discussion has 'buy in' and does not understand the guiding principles to be the Church's ideas and responsibility alone.

30.9.2 Relationship of IME 'Core Phase' to Lifelong Formation in the 'Prior Phase' and 'Compulsory Additional Training'.

30.9.2.1 Trinity College have envisaged their involvement in the 'core phase' of formation and training as part of the overall context of lifelong formation and considered their curriculum and submissions accordingly.

30.9.2.2 They have indicated a willingness and desire to engage in intensives for candidates that are non-credit bearing, and in training offered in the 'first five years' after ordination. They have also considered and commit to exploring further the question of credit for 'apprenticeship route' courses, which would count towards access for admission or course credit within degree courses.

30.9.3 Creating a Community of Learning and Peer Support.

30.9.3.1 Trinity College have set out how such a community will be created within their envisaged structure, accounting for this within a national 'hybrid' provision: to encourage peer learning and growth, friendship and pastoral support; and also, to develop the tools to foster, nurture and develop community in ways that will be directly translatable to ministry contexts. This will develop present strengths in doing so; in the relationships of candidates with each other and within the broader student population, and in their spiritual lives through prayer and worship. This will occur through an emphasis on developing the 'College' identity for ministry training that sits within the broader University context; and in sharing worship and fellowship, in retreats and in study trips in the UK or abroad.

30.9.4 Key Issues and Adaptative Flexibility in Training.

30.9.4.1 There is a recognition in Trinity College's submission that the nature of ministry has changed significantly in recent decades in response to growing secularisation, the numerical decline of the institutional churches and shifts in the political and sociological demographics of our society and the world; and that the next decade will no doubt bring fresh challenges that are not, as yet, anticipated.

30.9.4.2 In that light, Trinity recognises that they are contributing to the formation of resilient, adaptive practitioners in ministry, who will be able to respond to an ever- changing church and world.

30.9.4.3 Therefore, Trinity recognises that they may have to adapt and further develop their curriculum in response to shifting ministerial, ecclesiological, social or political challenges.

30.9.5 Specialist Streams of Ministry.

30.9.5.1 The Formation Panel might affirm a strong calling for a candidate in a ministry, say at the start of the second year of the 'core phase', in such as parish renewal, pioneer ministry, youth ministry, chaplaincy, or to progress further in academia with a view to future teaching. It is important to note that training and development in all such areas of ministry are also anticipated beyond the 'core phase'.

30.9.5.2 Trinity has indicated a potential flexibility in its provision as LAP which might allow the opportunity for a candidate later in the core phase to focus on training in a more intensive manner in such a particular area. As regards academia, there is no barrier for a candidate to progress further academically after three years, in order to continue to an Honours BD and beyond.

30.9.6 Ability to Engage with Diverse Candidate Identity and Theological Outlooks.
30.9.6.1 If approved as our national LAP, Trinity is aware that that this means they must commit to embracing and including those of diverse personal identities and from the whole spectrum of theological backgrounds. Trinity provides the following statement:

> "Trinity College and the University of Glasgow recognise that the role of Lead Academic Provider needs to command the confidence of the whole Church and to respect the breadth of theological opinion within the Church. We are committed formationally to an ethic of hospitality towards a range of theological positions from the more liberal/progressive to the more conservative. We are committed educationally to helping all students to think critically, to reflect honestly on their own stances and to engage thoughtfully and respectfully with others. Trinity College is committed pastorally to supporting the theological, spiritual and personal formation of all candidates in training recognising that this can be a time of significant personal and spiritual challenge. Our aim as a College will be to enable the formation of candidates who can take their ordination vows with confidence and conviction and be well equipped for mission and ministry in the Church."

30.9.7 Ecumenical and Inter-faith Outlook.
30.9.7.1 Trinity College is committed to partnering with the training bodies of other denominations, and external Christian or public organisations for the delivery of IME. Candidates training with Trinity will be in contact with those training in other denominations, and with those of other faiths and none. The content of the curriculum will develop knowledge of other branches of the Christian Church and of other global faiths.

30.9.8 Pastoral and Learning Support to Candidates.
30.9.8.1 Supplementing the provision by the Church, there is strong pastoral support that will be offered to candidates by those leading the IME provision of Trinity College, and via Student Support Services within the broader School, College and University. Likewise, there are strong resources available in support for learning, or coaching, for those with additional educational needs and thus necessary adjustments, or who may need support in developing academic skills.

30.9.9 Commitment to Engagement in Broader Training for the Church.
30.9.9.1 Trinity is demonstrating a commitment to training beyond academic provision within the University setting, both to candidates for ministry and to the wider church. Trinity has a strong suite of public access courses designed for, or open to, church members and elders. Staff members express faith by undertaking Church roles, leading worship or providing liturgy beyond the academic setting, or give talks to congregations or Presbyteries. They organise or contribute to conferences and seminars for the Church of Scotland or other denominations, designed for candidates, ministers or members of congregations.

30.9.10 Additional Activities and Benefits for Candidates.
30.9.10.1 Trinity will contribute beyond the teaching curriculum to the life and development of the candidate, such as in bursaries or in offering opportunities to engage in the learning environment throughout the broader University and in social events within their School; and in study trips for candidates that are relevant for learning and ministry formation.

30.9.11 SAAS Funding
3.9.11.1 Accepting that the provision of SAAS funding for degrees in ministerial training may change in the coming years as a matter of overall principle, Trinity will confirm that the proposed degrees, courses and modes of delivery in their submission will not alter the provision of funding as it presently stands and make any necessary adjustments if that is the case.

30.9.12 Implications for Candidates and Supervisors

- **What does it mean for present candidates?** They will continue studying at their present academic provider until they complete their degree. They will continue with the present placement programme and undertake a probationary period before ordination. The rest of their candidacy will be governed under the old Training Act and not the new Training Act, unless agreed otherwise.
- **What does it mean for candidates from September 2027 onwards – will they have to re-locate?** There will be no need for candidates to re-locate from their present location to Glasgow, unless they wish to do so. 'Hybrid' provision will ensure that in-person intensives will be mixed with in-person/online delivery of course material. Placements will be carried out locally, and candidates will remain under the supervision of their Presbytery.
- **What of the lack of a probationary period?** The core three-year period of training will mirror the demands of ministry, increasing in involvement until its conclusion. Full time placement work from May to August each year will compensate for the absence of probation on a 'time spent' basis, with around one year of full-time work. The final placement, in particular, will see candidates engage at that stage in many of the practical elements of ministry that presently would be part of their work on probation, such as funerals or church projects. In addition, the new integration of learning and practice will, hopefully, pay dividends in the earlier formation of candidates during the training process.

  There will be three important considerations that will be strongly borne in mind as the new IME scheme is implemented:

  (a) That candidates should not be over-burdened and, therefore, a balance needs to be struck between the intensity of experience and time off for health and wellbeing; as well as placement and Church work being carefully planned to recognise University deadlines;

  (b) That the provision of formative learning is not restricted to a core period of two or three years – provision will be made for the 'first five years' after ordination and, therefore, the burden within the core phase can be lessened, if needs be; and

(c) We need to avoid a 'cliff edge' on ordination and ensure as much support as possible – not only will that come through the relevant Training Officer within People & Training, if desired and appropriate, provision will also be made for a continuing relationship of a candidate with their Formation Partner for the first few years of their ministry.

- **What implications will integrated, accredited placements over a one-year period have for ministers who are supervisors, and for Presbyteries?** The desire is that ground-level ministry experience will form the heartbeat of training and formation for ministry, integrated with learning in the academic context. If this comes to fruition, it might provide a greatly enhanced placement experience not only for the candidate, but also for the supervisor and congregation. The hope is, therefore, that there will be enriching benefits for supervisors in their interactions with candidates.

  Placements which are year-long and full-time in the summer, should allow a candidate to immerse themselves in the life of a church, and contribute more broadly to the work of ministry than at present. It will, however, place an additional time demand upon supervisors, and also require them to engage more directly with theories and outcomes of reflective practice, as well as focus upon the integration of the classwork or reflective theme of the candidate for that year; and to liaise with staff from the Lead Academic Partner. Whilst that might bring more focus to the placement, it will also bring greater responsibility. In that light, People & Training will be concentrating upon the following before implementation in September 2027:

- The development of resources and avenues of training for supervisors that are appropriate for these tasks;
- Discussing the time commitment of supervisors with Presbyteries to see what allowances, incentives and support might be given by Presbyteries to supervisors, considering other duties and responsibilities that a minister might have within the Presbytery structure; and
- Consulting with supervisors in all of the above, to ensure that the right training and support is being given.

31. RESOURCING THE PARTNERSHIP AND BUDGET

31.1 Introduction

31.1.1 Budgetary approval was given by the Assembly Trustees for additional resources at their meeting on 5 February. The full papers setting out the additional resources, and the draft budget, can be accessed at the following link Resources - Ascend.

The following is a summary of those resource implications.

31.2 Shared Resourcing Principles

31.2.1 This will be a mixed funding model recognising that undergraduate fee levels in Scotland sit below operating cost, and that a relatively small candidate cohort cannot fund the enhanced IME alone. The model anticipates contributions from Trinity College, the University of Glasgow (UG) and the Church.

31.3 Trinity College Contributions

31.3.1 Trinity College will:

- double the present College Administrator post to 0.6 FTE (c. £40k total cost annually, including £20k increment),
- invest up to £50k in constructing a further hybrid teaching space in Kelvin West Church, also for formational Church use such as in placement contact and worship; and
- pursue endowment growth to £500k by 2036 to sustain day-to-day operations in its LAP role.

31.4 University of Glasgow Contributions

31.4.1 UG will provide undergraduate/postgraduate academic teaching, assessment infrastructure, student support, and maintain at least the present capacity in Practical Theology within the Department of Theology & Religious Studies.

31.4.2 UG will be invited to restore the historic Chair of Divinity; and to adopt the present post of Lecturer in Pastoral Studies, which is funded by Trinity College, as core staffing of UG.

31.5 Church of Scotland Contributions

31.5.1 In the implementation of the new training scheme, particular resources are sought by Trinity College, University of Glasgow, focussed on a new teaching post of a Pastoral Studies Tutor/Field Education Co-ordinator; travelling expenses for such a postholder; and a 'buy out' for one day per week of the Principal of Trinity College from their work at the University of Glasgow to focus specifically on confessional ministry training and candidate development.

31.5.2 Therefore, the Church would fund over the ten-year period, with a funding review after five years:

- A new teaching and integrated placement post of Pastoral Studies Tutor/ Field Education Coordinator (Lecturer, Level 7);
- Expenses for that post (placement travel/support); and
- A grant to Trinity College for the Principal function (0.2 FTE buyout or parish cover).

31.5.3 Initial annual total: £100,000 (indicative: £70k salary; £10k expenses; £20k Principal grant), with review mechanisms for scaling if candidate numbers exceed 40.

31.5.4 The Church also commits to the travel and accommodation costs of hybrid intensives and national formation events for candidates, and for leaving rare Trinity library holdings on deposit with GUL while UG is the LAP.

31.6 Further Church of Scotland Investment

- Candidate training allowance increased to £21K p.a.
- Increased 'conference' costs from intensives
- An additional post in Church of Scotland Learning Module Development, to contribute to the additional online modules that will be developed for the core phase, First Five Years and the broader Church - £60K per annum
- Additional 0.5FTE admin support for the new IME scheme - £17.5K per annum
- Costs of additional course development in commissioning new courses beyond the curriculum, and possible adjunct teaching costs - £30K per annum

31.7 Summary

31.7.1 The budget includes the additional resources sought by Trinity College, and also additional costs within People & Training in the post of an online learning developer; costs of commissioning new courses from outside individuals, academic providers and training bodies; and the increased costs of bringing candidates together for 'intensives' instead of the present candidate conferences as well as formative study trips.

31.7.2 The existing commitment to the new IME scheme which was communicated to the academic providers last year should also be noted; of an additional budgetary sum of £50,000 per annum for two years in 2027-29, followed by a continuing £25,000 per annum. The additional staffing and expenses support payable to Trinity College, University of Glasgow of £100,000 per annum should be seen in this context.

31.7.3 Under this present estimate, there is a total additional investment in IME of £207,500 per annum. However, given the re-allocation of prior budget resources due to the shortened timeframe of training, the new IME Scheme will entail a net saving on the training budget of £30,000 per annum; translated to a saving of around £11,000 per candidate over the whole core phase of training (the cost per candidate now being around £120,000).

31.7.4 It is important to note, however, that the purpose of remodelling the IME programme was not to save money, and further costs will be required to be invested within the development of the ongoing CMD programme for those within their 'first five years' after ordination. Costs for the now compulsory Continuing Ministerial Development in the first five years after ordination are presently unknown, pending upcoming development of that programme which will be implemented from September 2029. An estimate of those costs will follow in the budget for next year.

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32. CONCLUSION

32.1 The new scheme for the formation of ministers and deacons, including the significant re-development of IME, represents an important sea-change for the Church at this vital time in its life. They offer:

- A re-vitalised programme for ministerial training and education: which has the potential to provide the ministers of this generation with the skills and gifts they need for ministry in the present day; and to engage larger numbers in the training process and enhance the Church
- An integrated formation: academic, practical, and reflective learning are aligned to the Formation Framework with assessed placements throughout.
- Consistency and quality: a single national pathway with clear accountability through the Director of Studies and a Formation Panel.
- A new, close partnership: a collaborative future with a Lead Academic Partner, namely Trinity College, University of Glasgow and the Formation Panel, ensuring that the focus on relevant formation for candidates will remain. The constitution of Trinity College states: "Trinity College is a college of the Church of Scotland… which serves the mission of God by preparing God's people for the work of ministry. The College exists to support the work of the Church of Scotland." There is a genuine excitement for the Church to work closely with such a body.
- Access and inclusion: hybrid national delivery; candidates remain in context, supported locally by Presbyteries and nationally by People & Training.
- Sustainability: time to ordination reduced; forward staffing in Practical Theology; CPD linkages into "first five years" foreseen and to be developed.

32.2 For these reasons and the many others set out above, the new programme of IME is commended to the General Assembly, and the approval of the Assembly is sought for the recommendation by the Selection Panel that Trinity College, University of Glasgow be the Lead Academic Partner of the Church.

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33. APPRENTICESHIP ROUTE

33.1 Deliverance of GA2025

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).

33.2 Establishment of the Scheme

33.2.1 The development of the Apprenticeship Route (AR) must be seen against the context of the new Initial Ministerial Education (IME) programme for Word and Sacrament ministers and deacons who are training full time. It has long been recognised that the Church needs to do more to widen the "on-ramp" to ministerial and diaconal training, ensuring that those who traditionally felt ineligible to train for ministry have a genuine opportunity to do so.

33.2.2 The Programme Group brought several deliverances to GA2024 aimed at developing the Apprenticeship Route. This two-year foundational programme seeks to provide a broader scope for ministry, ensuring it leads to developing new forms of ministry required by the Presbytery Mission Planning Process, Team Ministry and the changing needs of the Church. Primarily this scheme is for people who are now seeking to explore God's call within to some form of fulltime service.

33.2.3 The first adverts were launched on 11th March 2025, seeking to attract applications from those in the 18 – 40 age group, who are making life-defining decisions. There was no initial requirement that they be members of the Church of Scotland. Initial assessments were carried out in June, with an induction week in August and an official start date of 1st September 2025.

33.2.4 The application process was designed to be simple and accessible, beginning with the collection of basic information followed by exploratory video calls with each applicant. During these initial stages, candidates were provided with all available details regarding the scheme. To ensure consistency and quality, the Directors of the National Assessment Team adapted core elements of the existing assessment framework, delivering them through this innovative and streamlined approach.

33.2.5 The emphasis throughout the whole application and assessment process was on the 5 Cs: Christian Commitment, Character, Chemistry, Calling and Competence. There was no expectation that potential apprentices would be 'finished articles'; rather, the assessment process sought sufficient indications of the 5 Cs and, critically, a teachable spirit.

33.2.6 In September 2025 a pilot phase was launched in which 11 apprentices began their training across three area Hubs in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Tayside.

33.3 Development of Presbytery Hubs

33.3.1 In this pilot phase, ministers from the Presbyteries of Edinburgh & West Lothian, Glasgow, and Perth lead the hubs. This structure established a strong numerical core of apprentices in each hub and provided access to a diverse range of projects. While each hub was initially intended to host four apprentices, the current allocation consists of five in Tayside (led by Rev Dr Lynn McChlery), four in Glasgow (Rev Alistair Duncan), and two in Edinburgh (Rev Ian MacDonald).

33.3.2 Each placement maintains a clear missional focus, situating apprentices within congregations showing "signs of life and energy." By engaging with chaplaincies, community projects, and both urban and rural Priority Areas, apprentices gain a broad insight into the Church's work while benefiting from the expertise of seasoned hub leaders.

33.4 The Apprenticeship Experience

33.4.1 The core of the apprentice experience is four-fold:

i. On-the-job Experience
ii. Classroom Learning
iii. Discernment
iv. Formation

33.4.2 Time is allocated in 70:20:10 divide, spending 70% of their time on hands-on experience within their placements, 20% (one day a week allocated to study), and 10% of their time for mentoring, peer group contact, conference programmes, etc.

33.4.3 The timetable was designed to balance study, mentoring and practical experience. The seasonal curriculum is more structured, developed through collaboration between Hub leaders and the Ministries Pathway Manager. The local schedule is more flexible and able to respond to specific events and local and personal needs. Both the leadership team and the apprentices have shown significant adaptability, particularly when faced with key personnel changes in the Tayside Hub; we remain grateful to the apprentices, leaders, and mentors for their resilience as we navigated these transitions.

33.4.4 Each apprentice follows a unique journey, bringing distinct talents that shape their individual development. This learning is formalised through a Learning Covenant, ensuring that training aligns with their evolving strengths and passions. Central to the programme is reflective practice, overseen by Hub leaders and mentors; apprentices maintain a regular reflective journal to support their growth, complemented by more in-depth termly reflections.

33.4.5 Each local Hub operates with some national support. The Hub leaders oversee the whole process for each apprentice with each being allocated a mentor. We also have sought to respond to the specific support needs our apprentices require as we progress both their and our learning.

33.5 The Classroom Curriculum

33.5.1 As mentioned above, we aspire to develop a course of Church Studies and work through to gain SVQ accreditation, but after careful consideration for this pilot scheme, we feel that to offer four modules over the two years, gaining 80 credits, meets our 70:20:10 split better.

33.5.2 We approached HTC, who are presently one of two providers who train our Readers and OLMs. This allows us to train our apprentices as one cohort. We have therefore chosen four modules, with two modules undertaken in each year of the programme.

i. Jesus and the Gospels
ii. The Pentateuch
iii. The Reformation
iv. An introduction to Pastoral and Practical Theology

33.6 Reflective Practice

33.6.1 The mentor meets weekly with the apprentice, with the Rolfe Model informing reflective practice that asks: What happened? So what? What now?

33.6.2 This is new for some of our apprentices and working to develop insight and depth is a primary aim of this process. This reflective growth is seen as essential to the development of both the pilot and of the apprentices themselves.

33.7 Review of the Apprenticeship Route

33.7.1 The process of review is critical to this pilot scheme. It is important that the learnings are continually advised and feed into evaluating the investment made by the Church into this programme. It is therefore proposed that a full review of all areas of AR be undertaken and reported to GA 2027.

33.7.2 Among the questions we seek to ask of ourselves are:

i. What should be learned from the initial recruitment campaign, and what expectations did it set for both the apprentices and the wider Church?
ii. What insights can be gained from the first assessment process? Should we adjust our assessment indicators or review the age and experience criteria for prospective apprentices?
iii. Regarding the nature of hands-on learning: what new skills are being developed, and how are they integrated into congregational life? What opportunities allow apprentices to develop individually while contributing to their congregations? Furthermore, where is the balance between the core skills and theology required for a congregational worker and the preparation needed for the next stage of the journey?
iv. In terms of the classroom curriculum: have we identified the correct courses? How can Church of Scotland Learning complement this? Additionally, what content is best delivered through the academic core, the Presbytery Hub, the national training team, or local providers?
v. Where is the balance between mentoring and ongoing assessment? What core skills must apprentices possess by the end of their training?
vi. What would be required to develop a bespoke SVQ qualification, and is this a desirable goal?
vii. Is there a specific model of Hub leadership that is preferable?
viii. What are the advantages and disadvantages of apprentices serving within their "home" congregations?
ix. What modes of assessment should be developed, how frequently should they be conducted, and who should be responsible for undertaking them?
x. At what point is it appropriate to link this programme to the formal assessment process for national ministries?

33.8 The Outcomes of the Pilot Programme and anticipated next steps

33.8.1 There are four broad areas that we feel this programme will support in the future:

i. It will provide a foundational layer of formation and development for those who wish to pursue a Calling to FTWAS, the Diaconate, OLM and the Readership. During the final months of the Apprentice training, we will be able to tie in their experiences with the discernment and assessment processes of Local Review and National Assessment.
ii. We will explore further how those trained may be used in pioneering and church planting situations, bringing a resource for the Church of the future.
iii. It will be established whether it can act as a foundational layer of preparation for MDS workers. This may ensure that those undertaking MDS roles in the future have some theological training, either by entering this route prior to fully activating their MDS role, or by undertaking elements of training alongside apprentices.
iv. We will encourage any congregations that locally employ staff to benefit from being able to employ those who have previously undertaken apprenticeship training.

33.8.2 Beyond these specific roles, we must consider not only how we equip individuals for formal church work but also the long-term vision of a programme that invests in the faith and formation of all members. Such an initiative equips people for discipleship, mission, and service, empowering them to act as committed members of the Church in whichever sphere of life God calls them to serve.

34. STUDY LEAVE

34.1 Study Leave may be claimed by an inducted minister once they have served as such for a full five-year period within the Church of Scotland. An allowance of two weeks is given annually, and this can be accumulated over a maximum of five years. At present, there is an annual allowance of £275, which again is accumulative over a five-year period. In addition, pulpit supply costs are reimbursed to the congregation for any approved period of study leave absence.

34.2 The purpose of Study Leave is '*to provide inducted ministers with the opportunity for a period of focused study and/or training for the sake of their continuing growth in knowledge/skills for the benefit of ministry and for the greater benefit of the Church*'.

34.3 This implies that there are two essential criteria that should be fulfilled:

i. to the benefit of the Minister

ii. to the wider benefit of the Church

34.4 The People & Training Programme Group considered carefully last year's deliverance

'Instruct FAPLT to provide clearer criteria for Study Leave applications within the Scheme details, ensuring that the principle of the Scheme being an opportunity for 'ministerial development as defined by Ministers' is maintained.' against the criteria.

34.5 At present, the criteria do not provide a description of what this benefit to either the Minister or the Church might be, except that it is *'a course of study or an activity to provide for the needs and circumstances of the minister concerned, to be approved by the People and Training Study Leave panel'.*

34.6 An examination was undertaken of the type of applications that had been previously approved. Each application is unique and ranged from the undertaking of short courses offered by the Church colleges, supplementing study time and funding for postgraduate study, a wide variety of conferences that covered liturgy, worship, bereavement care, development of media skills, neurodiversity, mental health, digital ministry together with self-guided study that led to the development of devotional material and story sermons, or a work placement with the local hospital chaplain to build a better understanding of child bereavement.

34.7 It was noted that it is rare for a Study Leave application to be refused. Often this happened when the advice of the Ascend Project Worker was not sought or was ignored, where the details of the application were extremely limited or vague in their objectives, or did not reference any link to a period of study. In such cases, the Ascend Project Worker will offer support, guidance and encouragement to resubmit an application.

34.8 Approved applications are subject to specific requirements. For leave over six weeks, the itinerary should include recreation alongside educational goals. If the leave exceeds one month, arrangements for an Interim Moderator and full pastoral/pulpit cover must be agreed. We acknowledge that supporting one minister's leave necessitates additional commitments from their colleagues.

34.9 It was also noted that the Ascend Project Worker was very responsive to requests for information and support for applications and often went the second mile when applications from ministers had missed stated deadlines.

34.10 The conditions also highlight that Study Leave is not sabbatical leave, and state, 'and is not to be used as a means of rehabilitating ministers who require time off for other reasons.' Through Ascend, inducted ministers are entitled to an annual pastoral support grant and a retreat grant. These are not cumulative, and together with the opportunity to undertake a Ministerial Development Conversation on an annual basis, the encouragement to all ministers is to make regular use of these provisions. The Programme Group noted that some Presbyteries were beginning to consider offering longer-serving ministers' sabbatical leave. It is important to keep the Study Leave period distinct in application and purpose.

34.11 After evaluating the Study Leave scheme, the Programme Group concluded that the two-fold criteria provide sufficient scope for both ministers and the panel. This framework facilitates the functional use of Study Leave for attending key conferences while encouraging the creative exploration of this generous provision.

34.12 To improve the application process, the Study Leave form is being revised. Rather than requiring a standard declaration of aims and objectives, the new format encourages a reflective approach, allowing ministers to narrate how and why they intend to use the leave. Furthermore, the revision sets clearer expectations for Presbytery consultation, particularly regarding applications for cumulative study periods.

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35. CHURCH OF SCOTLAND LEARNING

35.1 Over the past year, Church of Scotland Learning has continued to expand its library of resources, including the launch of 'The Conversations Series'. The team has developed close working relationships with Priority Areas, The Guild and Integrity. They have provided support to the IME training process and sustained engagement with Presbyteries through the termly Presbytery Newsletter. All materials are structured to give high support in training, maximising the opportunities for the leaders to share stories, provide accompaniment and support practice.

35.2 There is a consistent sign-up to the platform, and every encouragement is given to those who have not yet explored the resources to do so, with further consultation work with other areas of the Church under active consideration.

36. ASCEND

36.1 The platform continues to provide information on support services, grant funding and training courses to those in the national ministries. Following technical challenges and consultation with the national office's IT and Communications teams, we determined that a complete website rebuild was the most prudent course of action. While users may only notice subtle improvements to their experience, the bulk of the work is happening behind the scenes to ensure the site remains secure and flexible for the future.

36.2 Ascend continues to offer access and information to a variety of support offerings for those in the ministries of the Church, including grants for study leave, pastoral support, retreats and post-graduate study.

36.3 Several areas are specifically highlighted on the Ascend website, including Ministerial Development Conversations and Pastoral Supervision. Following a recent review of our coaching provision, we are pleased to confirm that this service will continue through the pastoral support grant. We are immensely grateful to the Rev Robin Paisley and Iain Johnstone for their dedicated support throughout this process as long-serving coaches.

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37. SENIOR DIRECTOR OF NATIONAL ASSESSMENT

37.1 We are pleased to propose Mrs Alison Fenton to be our new Senior Director of the National Assessment process. This team has been led until now by the Rev Donald Campbell who has continued to ensure that the assessment processes for our national ministries meets the changing needs, building a team that reflects the width and depth of our Church at large. We thank Donald for his dedicated and faithful service.

37.2 Alison Fenton has worked as a freelance HR consultant for over 20 years, specialising in the design and delivery of recruitment, assessment and development centres within the private, public and third sector organisations. Her previous roles include positions in Learning & Development at the University of Glasgow and CrossReach. In addition to her consultancy work Alison is a certified coach and facilitator.

For more than 25 years, Alison has served as an ordained elder. She is the Session Clerk of Giffnock South Parish Church and a trained worship leader within the Presbytery of Glasgow. Currently, she is an Interim Moderator at Glasgow: St Andrew & St Nicholas Church. She has been actively engaged with National Assessment, serving as a Church Assessor since 2016 and advancing to the role of Director in 2021.

37.3 Alison brings a wealth of professional and church experience to this role, as well as a commitment of faith and service which will ensure that the national assessment provision continues to develop to meet the changing needs of those in the national ministries.

Presbytery & Partnership Support Programme Group Report

38. INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

38.1 Christian Aid

38.1.1 Christian Aid, the relief and development agency of many UK Churches, including the Church of Scotland, accompanies the poorest and most vulnerable in our world, supporting people with the tools they need to lift themselves out of poverty. With the Chair of the Board, Sarah Mullally, appointed as Archbishop of Canterbury, Christian Aid has appointed Thabo Makgoba, Archbishop of Cape Town, as the new Chair.

38.2 South Sudan

38.2.1 In February, the Church of Scotland joined the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church to follow up on the February 2023 visit of His Holiness Pope Francis, Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby, and Rosie Frew, the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in their historic pilgrimage of peace to South Sudan. The letter, to the Government of National Unity and Opposition Groups in South Sudan, urged them to seek reconciliation for a better future for South Sudan. "Violence can never be the pathway to progress… years of almost constant fighting since South Sudanese independence have proven this so…There must be another path, a path of unity, a path to settle disputes without bloodshed". The letter called on all "South Sudanese, in particular the leaders and elders, to reject the temptations of hatred and revenge, and any other acts that may trigger violence between sisters and brothers. Such attitudes and actions are obstacles to the peace and prosperity that the country greatly needs."

38.2.2 Within the Presbyterian Church of South Sudan, the two leadership groups have been participating in mediation, and there is a nascent plan to hold a united General Assembly. South Sudan was again hit by floods in late 2025, and some emergency financial support was sent for the work of the Presbyterian Church of South Sudan (PCOSS)'s Presbyterian Relief and Disaster Agency (PRDA).

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39. ASIA

39.1 In April 2026, the Taiwan Ecumenical Forum for Justice and Peace (TEF) met in Changhua City to address Taiwan's self-determination amidst rising geopolitical tensions. The Church of Scotland, a decade-long partner in the TEF Steering Group, joined global churches to affirm that the right to self-determination is both a fundamental human right and a theological mandate. Emphasising a prophetic witness, the forum called for international solidarity and advocacy to protect Taiwan's democratic values and human dignity. This ongoing partnership with the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (PCT) remains a vital expression of Christian discipleship and pursuit of global justice.

40. MIDDLE EAST & NORTH AFRICA

Two of the Church's partners in the Middle East, the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon (NESSL), through its Compassionate Protestant Society, and the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC), have been actively supporting those affected by military attacks by Israel and USA, and the Iranian response. These hostilities have caused severe human consequences for civilians across the region.

In Lebanon, MECC reported that Israeli evacuation orders for Beirut's southern suburbs and southern Lebanon forced approximately 700,000 people to flee. This mass displacement caused gridlock and a critical shelter shortage, leaving families to sleep in schools, cars, or on roadsides. Joseph Kassab, General Secretary of NESSL, described the sight of displaced families in parks and streets as "heartbreaking," noting the deep uncertainty facing those from the South, Bekaa, and Beirut.

These actions have resulted in catastrophic human loss, including the parish priest Fr. Pierre al-Rahi, killed by an Israeli tank attack while assisting wounded neighbours. The crisis has devastated essential infrastructure like hospitals and schools, disproportionately impacting children, the elderly, and the sick. Thousands require urgent food, healthcare, and psychological support, as well as the rehabilitation of damaged homes and community facilities.

The MECC issued an urgent humanitarian appeal to partners, highlighting that Middle Eastern churches form a trusted network capable of reaching the most vulnerable groups directly. Reminding the international community that protecting human dignity is a shared ethical responsibility, the Council reaffirmed its commitment to mercy and peace, calling for solidarity to alleviate suffering and restore hope for a stable future. It called on all partners to stand with the people of the Middle East during this critical phase and work together to alleviate humanitarian suffering and strengthen hope for a more stable and dignified future for humanity.

40.1 LEBANON/SYRIA AND MIDDLE EAST COUNCIL OF CHURCHES (MECC)

40.1.1 Building on the 2025 report, Christians in Lebanon and Syria continue to serve as "salt and light," advocating for peace, religious freedom, and a tolerant civil society. In autumn 2025, the Church of Scotland, alongside the Presbyterian Church USA, reaffirmed this long-standing presence by participating in the Middle East Council of Churches International Partners meeting in Beirut and visiting the National Evangelical Synod and the Near East School of Theology.

40.1.2 The Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) serves four major church families, working to sustain a Christian presence in the region through ecumenical cooperation and interfaith dialogue with Muslim partners. For international supporters like the Church of Scotland, the MECC provides a vital ecclesiastical perspective on regional crises. Given the significant ongoing needs in Lebanon, international assistance remains essential for rebuilding communities. Additionally, through the Department for Services to Palestinian Refugees (DSPR), the MECC continues to provide critical healthcare, education, and vocational training to displaced Palestinians.

40.1.3 Under the leadership of Professor Martin Accad, the Near East School of Theology (NEST) is expanding its influence through a new Centre for Public Theology, designed to bring Christian perspectives into the political sphere. Alongside traditional clergy training, NEST is diversifying its curriculum with youth-focused Christian Education and a specialised programme on Christian-Muslim relations rooted in lived experience. These courses already attract international students, offering a unique opportunity for Scottish theologians to engage with Middle Eastern perspectives on interfaith dialogue and public witness.

40.2 Egypt

40.2.1 A recent visit to Egypt enabled the Church of Scotland to reaffirm its partnership with the Synod of the Nile and its Evangelical Theological Faculty. The delegation participated in the triennial meeting of the Coptic Evangelical Organisation for Social Services (CEOSS) and engaged with the vital work of the St Andrew's Church Refugee Service (StARS), an organisation providing legal, medical, and educational support to displaced people in Cairo. This engagement underscored a commitment to ongoing ecumenical cooperation and humanitarian support within the Egyptian context

40.2.2 The visit confirmed that the Church of Scotland's partnership is highly valued by the Synod of the Nile**,** with significant potential for future congregational Twinning and volunteer placements. The Evangelical Theological Seminary (ETS) in Cairo is well-equipped for international students, and opportunities for faculty sabbaticals in Scotland could further strengthen these ties. Additionally, StARS (St Andrew's Refugee Services) offers a powerful witness by employing the skills of refugees themselves—including doctors and lawyers—to serve their own community, providing both vital aid and a profound sense of purpose.

40.2.3 Celebrating 75 years of service, the Coptic Evangelical Organisation for Social Services (CEOSS) has reached 100 million people since its founding by a Presbyterian pastor. Beyond its vast literacy and poverty alleviation work, CEOSS prioritises interfaith bridge-building to maintain positive relations with Muslim communities. A key initiative is the 80/800 programme, which rehabilitates run-down churches while training local leaders in outreach. Supported by Bible study and family training for young clergy, this programme ensures that physical restoration goes hand-in-hand with sustainable spiritual and congregational growth.

40.3 The Church of Scotland and HIV

40.3.1 While the Church of Scotland HIV and AIDS Project was officially concluded last year, HIV and AIDS remain a need to be addressed with many partners around the world. In Zambia, for example, support for those needing nutritious food when receiving anti-retrovirals remains a need. In the course of this past year, numerous donations have come from various churches still supporting work amongst partners, and one generous legacy of £40,000 was received to support this ongoing need. We will continue to ensure monies given for work in HIV and AIDS goes to partners engaged in this work.

40.4 Stamp Project

40.4.1 Used stamps have supported the world church for over 50 years. Since 1969, Keith Scott from Wishaw has been recycling used postage stamps from congregations and turning them into money to support a different small project each year. The stamp project has supported partner churches in numerous countries through a variety of projects. As our stamp project draws to a close, thanks are due to Mr Keith Scott and to all the congregations and individuals who have saved their stamps for World Mission in the past 56 years. They have done a huge amount of good amongst partners worldwide, helping many people change their lives. A few charities continue to be able to receive used stamps.

40.5 Faithshare & Twinnings

40.5.1 Rooted in the theology of the incarnation, the Church of Scotland prioritises a "ministry of presence" built on mutual respect and authentic, cross-cultural listening. By moving beyond outdated structures and embracing global networks, the Church revitalises its own faith and discovers new ways to share the gospel. This commitment is practically lived out through the 'Twinning' programme and 'Faithshare' grants, which foster international exchanges that strengthen the witness of both local congregations and their global partners.

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41. EUROPE

41.1 Portugal

41.1.1 On 28 January 2026, Storm Kristin caused widespread destruction across Portugal, severely damaging the Cova Gala Social Centre of the Presbyterian Church in Portugal (IEPP). The storm destroyed the office roof and caused significant water infiltration, disrupting essential services at the kindergarten and social hall. Despite these challenges and damaged equipment, staff have implemented temporary repairs to maintain vital community support. The Church of Scotland continues to assist this mission through emergency grants from its Trust Funds.

41.2 Czechia

41.2.1 As the Evangelical Church of the Czech Brethren (ECCB) prepares for full financial independence from the state by 2028, it is prioritising the development of dedicated, well-supported ministers to lead its local mission. Recognizing that financial stability is merely a foundation for its true goal of proclaiming Christ, the ECCB is focusing on revitalising congregational growth through active community outreach. Central to this new era is the commitment to sustaining international partnerships, including its long-standing and productive relationship with the Church of Scotland.

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42. ANTI-BIAS MEASURES FOR NOMINATING COMMITTEES

42.1 Background

42.1.1 The 2025 General Assembly instructed the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team, working with the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Group, to develop measures aimed at preventing discrimination in the processes undertaken by nominating committees of vacant charges, and to provide appropriate remedies where discrimination is proven to have occurred. The deliverance envisaged that this work might result in mitigations being mandated.

42.1.2 This report presents the outcome of the first phase of that work. Through consultation with presbytery clerks, interim moderators, presbytery advisory committees, nominating committee members, and ministers, the report writers focused on developing an accurate understanding of how nominations processes operate in practice and where bias—conscious or unconscious—may influence discernment.

Those engaged with this work concluded that, while there is clear evidence of pressure points and inconsistency within current practice, there was insufficient time or evidence at this stage to determine responsibly what mandatory measures would be appropriate. This report therefore represents a learning and scoping phase, intended to inform the careful development of supportive resources in subsequent phases before any recommendation on mandate is brought to the Assembly.

42.2 Mandate and Scope

42.2.1 The 2025 General Assembly instructed the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team, in collaboration with the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Group, to develop measures aimed at preventing discrimination in nominating committee processes and to identify appropriate remedies where discrimination is proven to have occurred.

42.2.2 In beginning this work, it became clear that the diversity of practice across presbyteries and congregations, together with the theological and pastoral weight of the call process, required a phased approach. The report writers therefore focused this initial phase on listening, learning, and identifying recurring patterns, rather than on proposing immediate or mandatory change.

This report should be understood as the completion of Phase 1: Understanding the Current Landscape, and as preparatory work for the development and testing of future resources.

42.3 Method

42.3.1 This phase involved structured conversations with those recently involved in nominations processes, including presbytery clerks, interim moderators, advisory committee members, nominating committee members, and ministers who had recently applied for or been appointed to charges.

42.3.2 The consultations explored:

- how the process operates in practice.
- where committees experience challenge or uncertainty.
- where bias or exclusion may arise.
- what forms of support would strengthen discernment.

42.4 Key Findings

Consistency and Support

42.4.1 Practice varies significantly across presbyteries and congregations. Training and guidance for nominating committees and interim moderators are uneven, often focused on legal process rather than on discernment, culture, or bias awareness. Presbytery advisory committees are widely perceived as under-used and unevenly equipped.

Secrecy, Anxiety, and Feedback

42.4.2 The confidentiality of the process, while pastorally necessary, can limit transparency and learning. Applicants frequently receive little or no feedback, making it difficult to distinguish between decisions based on skills, theology, or communication and those shaped by unexamined preference. High levels of anxiety and fear of making an irreversible mistake contribute to risk-averse decision-making.

Points Where Bias May Influence Outcomes

42.4.3 Through the conversations that led to this report, a number of stages were identified where bias is most likely to affect decisions:

- initial application review where style of information presented in a CV might influence an outcome.
- shortlisting and interviews, especially where subjective language such as "fit" or "strength" is used.
- post-interview discernment and congregational decision-making.

42.4.4 Accent, perceived and actual cultural difference, assumptions about age, gender, disability, family life, or a congregation's "readiness" were repeatedly identified as factors that can obscure fair assessment. In many cases a decision will have been reached with no detectable bias present. The lack of feedback, or feedback that was deemed too generic, and a wider pattern of consistent rejection for a candidate may lead them to assume that prejudice was a key factor in the decision to reject their call to a charge rather than something they could do to improve their presentation and written applications.

42.5 Theological Reflection: Call, Discernment, and Formation

42.5.1 The nominations process is rooted in the Church's understanding of call. Congregations are entrusted with the freedom to discern whom God is calling to minister among them and to shape a vision of the leadership they believe is needed. The handbook for nominating committees offers a useful guide for every stage of the process including the difficulty of navigating interviews, knowing what to look for in answers and generally does an excellent job to ensure a degree of consistency for the process. Similarly advisory committees provided by presbyteries were often reported as hugely helpful when it comes to navigating the legal aspect of the nomination process.

42.5.2 At the same time, the consultations made clear that discernment does not take place in a neutral space. Fear, familiarity, anxiety about change, and unexamined assumptions can all limit a congregation's ability to hear what God may be calling them to become, rather than simply affirming what they already expect.

42.5.3 Faithful discernment therefore involves both freedom and formation: the freedom of a congregation to seek God's call, and the willingness to be stretched, challenged, and grown through that call. Openness to a minister who is not exactly what was anticipated—culturally, stylistically, or personally—was consistently identified as a mark of healthier processes.

42.5.4 This theological framing does not undermine congregational autonomy; rather, it invites deeper attentiveness to the factors that can distort discernment and greater humility about the limits of human judgement.

42.6 Existing Practical Guidelines

42.6.1 As part of this phase of work, Guidelines *for Nominating Committees (November 2024)* were reviewed in light of the experiences shared during consultations.

However, when read alongside the accounts shared by ministers and interim moderators, several limitations became apparent. The Guidelines make limited explicit reference to issues of bias, discrimination, or equality beyond general statements of good practice. As a result, they do not consistently equip committees to recognise or challenge problematic assumptions that may arise during shortlisting, interviewing, or discernment. There were also some practical gaps that might improve reflective decision-making in nominating committees. For instance, there is reference to the fact that notes are a permissible aspect of the interview process but no practical advice about how to take notes. In particular, the Guidelines would benefit from clearer guidance on:

- structured approaches to reviewing CVs and written applications.
- taking consistent, appropriate, and professional notes during shortlisting and interviews.
- analysing and weighing evidence gathered through interviews rather than relying on subjective impressions.

- avoiding vague or coded language (such as "fit" or "strength") that can mask unexamined assumptions or bias; if using this language then preparing committee members to understand and explain what is behind their understanding of 'fit.'
- offering feedback that is pastorally sensitive, appropriate, and sufficiently specific to be meaningful.
- handling disagreement within a nominating committee in a transparent and accountable way.

42.6.2 Strengthening the Guidelines in these areas would complement their existing procedural focus, improve consistency and professionalism, and help committees recognise and challenge assumptions that may otherwise go unexamined during the discernment process.

42.7 Implications and Next Steps

42.7.1 During the consultations undertaken in response to the 2025 deliverance, several ministers and interim moderators shared personal experiences—or accounts they had directly witnessed—relating to applications for vacant charges. Some of these accounts were deeply concerning and, in the judgement of the staff members, represented practice that was unacceptable and incompatible with the Church's commitments to equity, dignity, and justice.

42.7.2 It would not be appropriate to rehearse the detail of these experiences within this report. However, it is important to record that the consultations heard accounts of unchallenged racism and sexism, unprofessional conduct within the selection process, and decisions made based on unfounded or inappropriate assumptions. These included, but were not limited to: the withdrawal of interview invitations without explanation; the leaking of background reasoning behind decisions; the asking of questions in interviews that had no bearing on a person's ability to undertake the duties of a minister; and decisions being unabashedly shaped by assumptions linked to protected characteristics or justified on spurious cultural or pastoral grounds.

42.7.3 These accounts have materially informed the findings of this phase and the conclusions set out in this report. The staff members recognise that sharing such experiences carries personal and professional risk and therefore wish to place on record their sincere gratitude to those—particularly ministers and interim moderators—who spoke openly and honestly. Their willingness to do so has strengthened the integrity of this work and has underscored the importance of proceeding with care, seriousness, and resolve.

While the 2025 deliverance envisaged the possibility of mandated mitigations, it was judged that it would be premature to recommend such measures based on this phase alone. Nevertheless, the evidence gathered—including the personal accounts referenced above—makes clear that further action is necessary. Subsequent phases of this work will continue to be shaped by what has been heard and will focus on developing practical, theologically grounded resources that support fair discernment, challenge harmful practice, and provide appropriate avenues for remedy.

42.7.4 Faith Action therefore proposes that subsequent phases focus on:

- developing guidance and tools to support reflective practice.
- strengthening training and confidence for interim moderators and advisory committees.
- normalising feedback and clearer articulation of decision-making.
- inclusion of anti-bias measures and an outline of bias awareness in the nominating committee handbook.

42.8 Conclusion

42.8.1 This report fulfils the first phase of the General Assembly's instruction by providing a grounded account of current practice and identifying where bias may interfere with faithful discernment of call.

The Committee commends this report to the General Assembly as a foundation for further work, through which appropriate measures may be developed and evaluated before any decision is taken on wider adoption or mandate.

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43. CAPABILITY

43.1 The Capability Procedure is one which was requested by the General Assembly of 2013, in response to the Special Commission on Tenure and Leadership in the Local Church. In referencing the Capability Procedure, the Faith Nurture Forum said this in its report to the General Assembly of 2021:

A capability procedure seeks improvement in what a minister does, and how he or she does it, with a view to being faithful in helping a congregation discern its mission in context and to be faithful in fulfilling that context.

43.2 Previous Reports to the General Assembly have referenced this process, and the General Assembly of 2025 agreed the Competence Framework to undergird this process, which can be found in the FAPLT Report to the 2025 General Assembly at this link; https://bit.ly/4cQu9Ox. FAPLT now offers a process as outlined in the proposed Act which can be found at Appendix IV.

43.3 The Framework, and the Act, are designed to integrate with the Professional Code of Conduct, as well as the set of Terms and Responsibilities agreed at the General Assembly of 2024, and the Church's ordination vows. Both documents are contained in the Ministers' Handbook, available on the Church's website. They are of a piece and together offer the vision of what the Church expects of its ministers. They are designed to be applicable to inducted ministers of word and sacrament as office-holders, and it is worth repeating that the Special Commission referenced above was committed to preserving this distinction.

43.4 The equivalent processes within both the Church of England and the United Reformed Church see a role for appropriate Human Resources involvement in a Capability Procedure. That provision is included, and it is worth noting that the proposed Act has been developed in consultation with the Solicitor to the Church, the Principal Clerk, and the Head of HR.

43.5 In its report to the General Assembly of 2022, the Faith Nurture Forum shared words from one of the early Church Fathers, St Irenaeus; his words resound down through the centuries, that the glory of God is a human being who is fully alive. Our hope and prayer is that our ministers will be fully alive and exercising their potential in the context where they find themselves.

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44. INCOME PROTECTION AND ILL HEALTH ACT REVIEW

44.1 The General Assembly of 2025 instructed FAPLT to bring a revision of the Income Protection and Ill Health Act (Act VI 2019) to the General Assembly of 2026. In the end, a new Act, the Ill Health and Income Protection Act, is being presented for approval and can be found in Appendix V.

44.2 In 2024, a survey was sent to Ministers, Session Clerks and Presbytery Clerks who had actively engaged with the existing Act since the General Assembly of 2019. Views were also sought from national office staff who have worked with the Act.

44.3 In 2025, a consultation was conducted with parish ministers. FAPLT are grateful to those who participated. It lasted four weeks and was completed at the end of November. Besides the opportunity to make comments and ask questions, a webinar took place during the consultation period outlining proposed changes and answering questions.

44.4 Three proposed changes to the existing Act were part of the consultation.

44.5 The first change FAPLT seeks is to bring forward the deferred period for Income Protection (IP) assessment from 78 weeks to 52 weeks to allow for earlier medical assessment for IP benefit. Earlier assessment for IP would mean ministers who remain absent at 12 months are making a final decision about return or demission once they know whether IP benefit will be paid.

44.6 The second change would be a reduction in the maximum length of time for which someone could receive stipend payments during periods of absence from work due to ill health. This would reduce from a maximum of 18 months full stipend to 15 months stipend, comprising six months full stipend, six months of one-half stipend and three months of one-third stipend. This would help provide useful staging points to help focus ministers on reaching a return-to-work decision if they are able to do so. At a time when Church finances are severely constrained this not only reduces costs but, alongside access to support interventions appropriate to the circumstances (e.g. reasonable adjustments, coaching, counselling, supervision, Access to Work provisions and/ or phased return), it helps encourage a return to service where possible. Importantly, a quicker decision would also provide congregations with clarity sooner than at present, when a congregation can be left in a state of uncertainty for a long period.

44.7 The third change would be a change to the combined absence rules, so that the trigger date in such a situation would be combined absences totalling 180 days over a rolling twenty-four month period. This aligns more equitably with the continuous absence rules, as it roughly equates to six months of total absence.

44.8 The majority of respondents accepted the suggested changes.

44.9 In light of feedback and further consideration, additional changes to the existing act agreed by FAPLT include:

1. Cumulative absence to be 500 days in any three-year rolling period
2. Stipend paid during ill-health absence will be six months full stipend, six months half stipend, then three months of one third stipend and this only happens once in a three-year rolling period.
3. Under exceptional circumstances, FAPLT, after appropriate consultation, may extend the date when the pastoral tie should be severed e.g. to allow time for post-operative recovery (see 7(2)(e) iii, 8(2)(e) ii).
4. Under exceptional circumstances FAPLT, after appropriate consultation, may extend stipend paid at a rate of a third of stipend (see 9(3)).

44.10 These changes have all been incorporated into the Act (see Appendix V). Further additional changes and variations are also pointed to in the table shown in Appendix VI.

The proposed Act strikes a balance between support for ministers and clarity for congregations.

44.11 In light of feedback received, it is right that a clearer timescale is offered to congregations. At present, if a minister has a chronic recurring health condition which leads, to extended periods of absence, a congregation may have many years of unsustained ministry provision. The new Act, whilst offering a substantial time provision for a minister, also offers a time limit for the congregation, and after 500 days' absence in any three-year rolling period, the Presbytery, after consulting with the Ill Health Committee, may decide to sever the pastoral tie at any time thereafter.

44.12 It should be noted that a minister may bring along a companion to any Ill Health Committee meeting.

44.13 An improvement for ministers is the shortening of the deferred date from 18 months to 12 months (ministers are being asked to make a decision about a return to work once they know whether income protection benefit will be paid or not, unlike at present when they are asked to decide six months before when the claim decision is made).

44.14 If a minister has unrelated absences (e.g. first a mental health illness, a return to work for a year say and then a cancer diagnosis leading to further time off) it is proposed that normally whether for the same or different health conditions the same stipend rules would apply (six months full stipend, six months half-stipend, three months at one-third stipend) in the three-year rolling period. Note though, that the Act allows, in exceptional circumstances, for payment agreed by FAPLT on the advice of the ill health committee to be extended at the one-third stipend rate (see sections 9(3) and 9(4)).

44.15 One of the challenges in facilitating both the existing and the proposed Act is holding the tension between an internal Church process and an external insurance provider. FAPLT is pleased to note that the service the Church receives from the insurer has improved, and a consistent, effective working relationship has been re-established.

44.16 One of the continuing themes in a minority of the feedback was the power of 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. It therefore remains the case that, at least for some, a more reflective conversation about the expectations that Ministers have towards the Church, whilst financial pressures still exist, may be helpful.

44.17 We 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.

Other comments received as part of the consultation process will contribute to operational aspects of the Support Team's work going forward.

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45. FLEXIBLE FORMS OF MINISTRY

45.1 A Flexible Forms of Ministry Focus Group has been convened to explore how our present models of ministerial leadership might be enhanced to ensure that training, deployment and recognition of these might better meet the changing demands of the Church at large. There is a widening gap between available stipendiary ministers and the number of charges, and so the Church must move beyond 'managing decline' and instead focus on resourcing through flexibility. The roles of Deacons, Readers and Ministers need to be promoted, affirmed and creatively deployed. Part-time and bi-vocational ministry are not widely used within our Church, and along with emerging roles, e.g., Pioneering Ministry, Youth Ministry and Church Planting, work will consider how these roles could be trained, assessed and deployed.

45.2 The group in conversation with the wider Church, including with other standing committees where appropriate, will be aiming to develop a creative, theologically grounded and practical framework to ensure that every charge is served by the kind of ministry it requires.

There will be an exploration of how to move from a model of 'one minister per church' to the right ministerial leadership for every community, where the whole people of God are empowered, and no ministry role is considered 'secondary.'

45.3 An interim report will be brought to the Assembly of 2027, with the intention that firm proposals will follow at the Assembly of 2028.

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46. AMENDMENT TO THE CALL, ELECTION AND APPOINTMENT OF MINISTERS OF WORD AND SACRAMENT ACT (ACT XI 2025)

46.1 In the light of Presbytery's experiences in using this Act, it has become clear that there is a need for clarity about the place of the Presbytery's Vacancy Procedure Committee and that Committee's involvement in any processes relating to extending the time allowed for permission to call, or applying the other options in s.28 of the Act when there has been failure to nominate. Similarly sections 3 and 4 are silent on this point, and about the possibility of the VPC's decision on such matters being referred to Presbytery.

46.2 It makes sense for this to be explicit, and for the VPC to have agency on this question of extending permission to call and exercising the other powers as outlined in the existing s.28 of the Act, and for the VPC in coming to any such decision to have consulted with the Presbytery Committee which has responsibility for implementation and review of the Approved Mission Plan.

46.3 Accordingly, the FAPLT presents an amending Act to Call, Election and Appointment of Ministers of Word and Sacrament Act (Act XI 2025) in terms of Appendix VII.

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47. SABBATICALS

47.1 The Old Testament instructed Israel to adopt a pattern of work and rest (Exodus 8:9-11, Exodus 23:10-11). Jesus too built rest into the rhythms of life (Luke 5:15-16). Sabbaticals are not holidays nor are they to prevent rightly attending to health concerns; they are, however, an intentional period of time away, it is suggested between four to six weeks; an opportunity to withdraw from day-to-day service. Thanks are due to the Presbytery of Lothian and Borders for the willing assistance offered by them, and drawing heavily on the scheme operating within that Presbytery, the following template (see Appendix VIII) is offered to urge Presbyteries to adopt a sabbatical scheme.

47.2 The template offered allows the possibility of a sabbatical after five years of service in a charge and a further sabbatical no earlier than five years later.

47.3 The agreement of all parties, including Kirk Sessions and Presbytery, is required. Pulpit supply costs are met by the Presbytery. Intentional planning, preparation and implementation of the sabbatical includes a Ministerial Development Conversation (MDC) or the appointment of a trusted colleague to provide support.

47.4 The adoption of sabbatical schemes by Presbyteries would further broaden the range of support provisions available to those ministers serving in parishes.

48. HOUSING AND LOAN FUND FOR RETIRED MINISTERS AND WIDOWS AND WIDOWERS OF MINISTERS

48.1 The Faith Action Programme Leadership Team is named in the constitution of the above Fund, and is invited to nominate members to serve as Trustees of the Fund. Dr Eilidh Renwick's term of office has come to an end, and FAPLT places on record its appreciation of her contribution to work of the Fund. FAPLT now brings the name of Miss Elizabeth Fox to the General Assembly to serve as a Trustee.

49. REMUNERATION AND REIMBURSEMENT OF PARISH MINISTERS

49.1 It has also become clear that the Regulations for Remuneration and Reimbursement of Parish

Ministers (Regulations I 2015) need updating. With regards to claiming expenses, it is silent on a time limit within which expenses can be claimed. It is proposed that a three-month window for claiming expenses should normally apply. An amendment to s.2 to this effect can be found at Appendix IX.

49.2 Similarly, while some provision is made in the Regulations for internet use and software, it is recognised that technology has impacted on the practice of ministry, and it is proposed that there be provision for a congregation to reimburse within reason the cost of subscriptions to programmes, apps and other internet services wholly necessarily and exclusively required for ministerial duties. The amendment would be to add wording to this effect to s.2.7 of the Regulations, again outlined in Appendix IX.

49.3 There are two other changes; one is to delete the reference to the provision of Log Books at s.2, and to amend the references to the Manse Regulations, and the Manse Adjudication Committee, to reflect up-to-date legislation and practice.

49.4 Finally, the reference to Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs in part 2 of the Schedule should of course be amended to His Majesty's Revenue and Customs.

50. PRESBYTERY MISSION PLANNING

50.1 There is still work to be done in finalising some of the challenging pieces of adjustment – to do this in the light of the work which the ATs are doing in exploring alternative models of funding ministry, as referenced in the Report of the Assembly Trustees to this General Assembly. The decision of General Assembly 2025 to withdraw Vacancy Allowance for congregations which have no permission to call has focused the minds of Presbyteries and congregations.

50.2 Agreement was reached with Stewardship and Finance for conversations to take place with Presbyteries on transitional arrangements which would allow Presbyteries to make a case for continuing to pay either the costs of a locum, or pulpit supply, in circumstances where permission to call was being held up because of manse issues, or where imminent permission to call would be granted pending agreement of bases of adjustment which allowed permission to call but which had not yet been fully agreed.

50.3 The Programme Group would also note the provisions reported to previous General Assemblies for Presbyteries to approach the Programme Group for exceptional permission to call, even though theoretically this would mean that a Presbytery could potentially exceed the ministry number allocated to it by the General Assembly.

50.4 That possibility is open to all Presbyteries where adjustment has stalled, particularly when implementation is no longer possible either because a congregation has exercised its right to vote against union under a sitting minister, or because a sitting minister has opted not to be part of discussions about adjustment involving their charge.

50.5 FAPLT notes that no Presbytery is currently at risk of exceeding its ministry allocation. In line with the Presbytery Mission Plan Act (Act 8 2021, as amended), the team presents the table of ministry allocations for the coming year. These figures may introduce changes that impact the current presbytery mission planning model. This work builds on lessons from the past five years and involves collaboration with the General Trustees (GTs). The goal is to ensure the Church has well-equipped spaces in the right places to support mission work and community building.

50.6 The Presbytery Mission Plan Act requires FAPLT to bring annually to the General Assembly for approval, the proposed total number of ministry 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. Accordingly, the proposed total number of ministry posts to be funded can be found at Appendix XI. These figures are offered with the proviso that they may be open to change as the Assembly Trustees develop their proposals on new funding models of ministry.

51. ASSISTANT MINISTERS' SCHEME

51.1 The Assistant Ministers' Scheme came to an end on 31 December 2025. The General Assembly of 2025 encouraged Presbyteries to identify creative opportunities for local deployment, accompanied by an instruction to FAPLT to make short-term finance available to Presbyteries to fund such posts to 31 December 2026. Positive conversations took place with two Presbyteries, with only one appointment being made. Most of those who were on the Assistant Ministers' Scheme have found charges, and the number of vacancies on the Church of Scotland website is steady around fifty, with other vacancies coming online as Presbyteries continue to implement Presbytery Mission Plans.

52. FAMILY OF MINISTRIES

52.1 The gifts Christ gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ. (Ephesians 4.11, NRSV)

52.2 Our vision for our family of ministries describes a Church that seeks to equip all its people to live out God's mission in a changing world, embracing a collaborative approach to ministry.

52.3 Foundational Principles

- **Whole People of God:** All ministries take place within the wider ministry of the entire people of God.
- **Equipping for Mission:** The primary purpose of the Family of Ministries is to enable people across the church to live out the mission of God effectively, as faithful disciples, and also discipling others.
- **Diversity and Flexibility:** Ministry expressions will vary, including established parish roles, part-time and flexible positions, local worship leaders, church plants, new worshipping communities, and various chaplaincies.
- **Affirming** the contribution that these expressions of ministry make in different communities and contexts.

52.4 Our Vision for those serving in our Family of Ministries

- **Confident Communicators:** Clear and confident preachers and leaders of worship, exploring new expressions and reshaping traditional liturgies as appropriate.
- **Mission-Driven and Spiritually Anchored:** Passionate about the Gospel and mission, with a robust spiritual life that strengthens the practical application of their caring and loving of others.
- **Empowering Leaders:** Encouraging congregations and communities keen to grow spiritually and missionally, raising up leaders from within, and encouraging of leadership around them.
- **Welcoming and Evangelistic:** Finding joy in creating open and welcoming spaces and leading people to faith.
- **Collaborative Partners:** Working within supportive networks that are welcoming, enabling, nourishing, and offering accountability, as a community of disciples
- **Reflective Practitioners:** committed to reflecting on how they practice their ministries, and to ongoing development in how they exercise their roles.
- **Pastoral and Compassionate:** Pastorally sensitive and competent, meeting people where they are and reaching out in times of grief, challenge, celebration, and remembrance.

52.5 A Church That Works Together

We envision a Church where different ministries:

- **Value and Affirm Each Other:** Recognising the distinctiveness of each role (Ministers of Word and Sacrament, Deacons, Readers, Worship Leaders, etc.) while appreciating their similarities.
- **Model Unity in Diversity:** Working together in their different contexts, witnessing to and modelling something greater than the sum of their parts.
- **Are Intentionally Utilised:** Presbyteries recognise, and plan for, and make the best use of this diversity of ministries, intentionally seeing their full potential and varied contexts.
- **Demonstrate transformation:** Showing the possibility of transformation of community, both within and out with the church.

52.6 For these reasons, wherever possible, we will integrate elements of training across our family of ministries, enabling partnership and understanding from an early stage.

52.7 Strong Team Ministries at work in many contexts

Team Ministries will model early Church patterns of working together, rooted in Jesus' model of mission and ministry in a way which is contextually appropriate.

52.8 Team Ministries will enable individual team members to exercise their distinctive gifts and skills and play to their strengths, and will also bring together different skills, and the resources of their collective minds to bear on problems and situations. They will operate by valuing diverse spiritual gifts, encouraging shared decision-making, and fostering mutual respect to address complex challenges.

52.9 Team Members will have a common vision for their shared ministry, shaped at the beginning of the team, and revisited on a regular basis, often expressed in a mission statement or regularly reviewed aims and objectives.

52.10 FAPLT is working to offer Team Coaching to a group of Team Ministries and will report back to General Assembly 2028 on this pilot project. It will build on FAPLT's previous experience with coaching and will help Presbyteries as they shape Team Ministries within future Mission Planning. FAPLT recognise there is a need for more support of Team Ministries in their diversity across the country, with over thirty Team Ministries envisaged in Presbytery Mission Plans. The Vision for the Family of Ministries references many of the benefits of collaborative working, and this applies particularly to Team Ministries as defined in the Presbytery Mission Plan Act.

52.11 This is a challenging but exciting time, with the opportunity to explore how these roles complement each other. How can the local Church, the Presbytery, and the national work together to tease through how these ministries best relate to each other in delivering mission in context in today's church?

53. ORDAINED LOCAL MINISTRY

53.1 FAPLT is aware of varying approaches to the use of Ordained Local Ministries across the Church and commends the diversity of how such ministry is exercised. FAPLT would also encourage Presbyteries to be mindful of their responsibility in reviewing OLM appointments as required in the Act, and to be creative in deploying OLMs, particularly as their engagement as locums reduces in line with implementation of Presbytery Mission Planning.

53.2 FAPLT apologises to the General Assembly for failing in recent years to report to the General Assembly the amount of the Resource Grant for Ordained Local Ministers (OLMs), as required in the Ordained Local Ministry Act (Act IX, 2011). FAPLT states the Resource Grant as £275 for the period between now and the General Assembly of 2027. A revision of the Ordained Local Ministry Handbook has also taken place, and this has been uploaded to the Church website.

53.3 FAPLT will explore the appropriateness of providing a resource grant to Ordained Local Ministers who are working as locums in a charge. In a time of budgetary constraint, the wisdom of remunerating an Ordained Local Minister and also offering a resource grant has to be considered.

53.4 FAPLT would wish to explore with Presbyteries the scope for their contribution towards

Resource Grants for Ordained Local Ministries, as was envisaged in the OLM Act.

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54. MINISTRIES SUPPORT

54.1 While primary pastoral support for those serving in the family of ministries of the Church lies within each Presbytery structure, FAPLT provides further dedicated and skilled support. The Support Team can 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.

54.2 Each year, a 24-hour Pre-Retirement Residential Conference takes place, allowing those who are two to three years out from retirement to hear from recently retired ministers and to receive appropriate advice on how to approach retirement. This is a universally well-received event and is open to ministers and spouses.

54.3 In the autumn of 2025, there was a positively received online webinar aimed primarily at those in ministry around 10 to 15 years away from state retirement age, which encouraged people to think ahead 7

54.4 The Support Team also oversees ill health matters and absence management, receiving and recording Fit Notes and liaising with Presbyteries accordingly. Requests for Compassionate Leave are also made through the Support Team, and claims for pulpit supply or locum costs in cases of illness are handled by the Team. The Team can be contacted via pastoralsupport@churchofscotland.org.uk.

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55. MINISTERIAL WELLBEING STUDY

55.1 Session Clerks were emailed last summer to encourage them to arrange for elders to meet and discuss the Ministerial Wellbeing Survey. FAPLT trusts that these discussions will have led to a deepening understanding of ministerial wellbeing and served as an opportunity to heighten the support and encouragement Kirk Sessions and congregations offer to ministers.

55.2 The results from the first survey offer a baseline, and the intention is to conduct surveys every two years. This longitudinal study will provide valuable information to 'take the temperature' on ministerial wellbeing. The last survey was conducted in 2024, and preparation for the second survey was issued in March 2026. Variations between surveys will offer a measure to aid the crafting of ongoing and future responses offered by FAPLT.

55.3 FAPLT reminds stipendiary ministers of their Pulpit Supply provisions for rest and recuperation throughout the year. Congregations are encouraged to exercise their duty-of-care role in supporting Office Holders to take time off, for physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing.

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56. INTEGRATED SUPPORT ALLOWANCE

56.1 The Support Allowance of £250 per calendar year is available to full-time stipendiary ministers, Probationers, those who subsequently went on to become Assistant Ministers, those in Familiarisation, and Ordained Deacons in Deacon-specific MDS posts.

56.2 The Support Allowance can be used for personal or group pastoral supervision, for coaching (either from existing Ascend provision or external providers), or for spiritual accompaniment. This is all subject to agreed invoicing arrangements and appropriate qualifications/credentials for each support provider being forthcoming. Individuals have the freedom to choose whatever support provision they consider will be most beneficial for them.

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57. FUNDED RETREATS

57.1 The ongoing possibility of funded retreats, up to £250 per year, through the Todd Endowment Trust continues to be a welcome addition to the support provisions. Serving Ministers and Deacons, each with at least two years' service, may benefit from this opportunity.

58. ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

58.1 Access to counselling remains in addition to the Support Allowance/Retreat Allowance, as does the ability to request hardship and support grants.

58.2 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. We do not seek to minimise the contribution of any who serve in the variety of ministries of the Church, but we also do not want to raise expectations which are unable to be met.

59. REVIEW

59.1 All Support provisions and funding arrangements remain under ongoing review as would be expected for good governance and sustainability. FAPLT is committed to offering the best support it can to those serving in ministry into the future. Over the coming year, consideration will be given to the possibility of increasing the Integrated Support Allowance as work is done on the 2027 budget.

60. MINISTRY FOR THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING

60.1 Finding suitable ministers for our congregations for the Deaf and hard of hearing has proved near impossible for a number of years now. Each of the congregations have now moved to become Local Mission Churches with host congregations; this has provided a much-needed governance and stability. More work is now needed to address the recruitment challenge and to look at different ways to resource these congregations. This work was started in 2025 and will continue, working in collaboration with key stakeholders, Presbyteries and the Principal Clerk's Office. We thank those that have offered, and who continue to offer locum cover, for these congregations.

61. MANSE ADJUDICATION

61.1 Manse Adjudication is the process by which it is possible for a Minister to apply to live in their own home rather than occupy the manse. In Act 5, 2024, The General Trustees Act, provision was made in Schedule 4 for Manse Adjudication Processes. The Manse Adjudication Committee was to be serviced from within the General Trustees. The reality is that on occasion there will be requests for Manse Adjudication relating to Manses where titles are held locally and not with the General Trustees. The General Trustees are of the view, and FAPLT supports this, that Manse Adjudication is better served by a standalone regulation, and that the administration of the process should sit with the Solicitor of the Church. A deliverance to this effect can be found in the Report of the General Trustees to this General Assembly.

62. PARTNERSHIP WITH PLACE FOR HOPE – LIVING PEACE

62.1 The partnership with Place for Hope continues. 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.

62.2 The theme of Living Peace underpins this partnership. Living Peace is a responsibility shared by all serving in ministry, and every member, congregation, Kirk Session and Presbytery of the Church of Scotland. 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.

63. FINANCIAL INFORMATION AND ALLOWANCES

63.1 Information re stipend levels and other allowances for 2026 can be found at Appendix XII.

Resource & Presence Programme Group Report

64. LIFE AND WORK

64.1 The final issue of *Life and Work* was published in August 2025, and we thank the editorial team for their careful curation. News regarding Ministries and Eldership has been integrated into the main Church of Scotland website. The *Life and Work* website closed in the spring of 2026. Our thanks go to those who handled the complex administrative tasks required to wind down subscriptions and operations.

64.2 The development of a successor publication has been paused due to the implementation of the Assembly Trustees' Communications Strategy, the establishment of the Communications Forum, and a leadership transition between Heads of Communications. We anticipate resuming this project in the spring of 2026 and intend to provide a progress report at the General Assembly.

65. REMIT

65.1 In response to a demanding period for our church, Resource and Presence is refining its approach to focus on deeper integration and partnership with other departments and governance bodies. To support this commitment to collective working, we are proposing an update to our Remit, which can be found in the report of the Assembly Trustees.

In the name of the Committee

TOMMY MACNEIL, *Convener*
KAY CATHCART, *Head of Ministries and Mission*
ALISTAIR CUMMING, *Vice-Convener, Convener, Resource and Presence Programme Group*
SALLY SHEAIL, *Vice-Convener, Acting Convener, Public Life and Social Justice Programme Group*
DAVID CLARKSON, *Vice-Convener, Convener, People and Training Programme Group*
SCOTT MCROBERTS, *Vice-Convener, Convener, Mission Support Programme Group*
JONATHAN FLEMING *Vice-Convener, Convener, Presbytery and Partnership Support Programme Group*

Addendum – Alistair Cumming, Emma Jackson and Sally Sheail

Alistair Cumming

Alistair Cumming steps down from his post of Convener of Resource and Presence after three years of dedicated service. As the first convener of the new Programme Group, he brought years of professional experience and strategic thinking, along with dedication, laughter, and a strong commitment to helping the work of FAPLT flourish. His wisdom and prayerful consideration have steered the committee through a number of challenges and changes, and we are grateful for the manner in which he led the team with care and integrity. Alistair was also exemplary in his role as Depute Convener of FAPLT. As he moves on to pastures and opportunities new, we pray God's blessings on him and wish him all the best.

Emma Jackson

In the autumn Emma Jackson had to relinquish the role of Convener after a period of consideration of the competing demands on her time due to her high-level role as Director for Social Justice with Citizens Advice Scotland. Emma came into the role as the first convener of the new Public Life and Social Justice programme group with a commitment to professionalism, integrity and most importantly a heart for Jesus. She has inspired many with her words of wisdom and passion at the two General Assemblies that she presented, as well as being a regular contributor to BBC Radio Scotland's thought for the day. We know Emma's service to the Church of Scotland locally, and in ways not directly connected to the institutional church but to furthering God's kingdom will continue, and we thank her and wish her and her family every blessing in the years ahead.

Sally Sheail

Since November the Public Life and Social Justice Programme Group has been guided and supported with the steady hand of Sally Sheail as Acting Convener. Stepping into a role mid-year is always a big undertaking and we are incredibly grateful that Sally heard the call of the Church and for the way she has helped programme group and staff team in particular over the past 6 months. Sally has made her mark as a FAPLT Vice Convener and in FAPLT meetings, and we know that her work with the Church continues, as a Reader in the Presbytery of Fife, and through her continued leadership of Integrity, the Church of Scotland's task group on gender-based violence.

TOMMY MACNEIL, *Convener*
KAY CATHCART, *Head of Ministries and Mission*

Appendix I

SELECTION AND TRAINING FOR NATIONAL MINISTRY OF WORD AND SACRAMENT ACT

Edinburgh, [ ] May 2026, Session [ ]

The General Assembly hereby enact and ordain as follows:

Definitions

1. In this Act, the following definitions shall apply:

(a) "an applicant" is a person who is seeking to be recognised as a prospective candidate for ministry.

(b) "the Assessment Conference" is the gathering of the body of trained assessors to which FAPLT delegates authority to assess the calling and fitness of applicants for ministry (in terms of section 7), and to accept as prospective candidates those deemed appropriate.

(c) "a candidate" is a person who has been nominated by their Presbytery for training for ministry, following acceptance by FAPLT as a prospective candidate after an Assessment Conference. The term "candidate" may not be used of, or by, any person who has yet to be, or who has failed to be, nominated by a Presbytery.

(d) "candidature" means the whole time during which a person is a candidate or graduate candidate.

(e) "the Director of Studies" is the person within the People & Training Team of FAPLT with responsibility for overseeing and developing education and formation for ministries within the Church of Scotland, including ministry in terms of this Act.

(f) "FAPLT" is the General Assembly's Faith Action Programme Leadership Team or its successor.

(g) "the Formation Panel" is the body described in section 2(5) which oversees and encourages the personal, spiritual and ministerial formation and growth of a candidate during their candidature and prior to ordination.

(h) "the Formation Partner" is the mentor of a candidate who is appointed by FAPLT in conjunction with the Presbytery to work alongside them to develop and support their personal, spiritual and ministerial formation and growth during their candidature and prior to ordination.

(i) "a graduate candidate" is a candidate who has completed their training and received an exit certificate in terms of section 22, but who has not yet been ordained. The term is to be applied without limit of time to anyone in this situation.

(j) "IME" means Initial Ministerial Education.

(k) 'the Lead Academic Partner" is the principal provider of academic study within higher education for candidates, appointed by the General Assembly, and the partner of FAPLT in the formation of candidates for ministry.

(l) "ministry" in this Act refers to national ministry of word and sacrament, being ordained, stipendiary ministry in the Church of Scotland; for the avoidance of doubt not including other ministries such as Ordained Local Ministry, the Diaconate and the Readership whose selection and training is regulated by other Acts of the General Assembly.

(m) "People & Training Team" means the People & Training Team of FAPLT, or its successor in that role.

(n) 'placement supervisor" is the person who is from time to time supervising a candidate's placement(s).

(o) "prospective candidate" is a person who has been accepted by FAPLT following an Assessment Conference and who is awaiting the outcome of their application to Presbytery for nomination.

Overview of the Purpose and Progress of Ministry Training

2.

(1) The purpose of ministry training shall be the personal, spiritual and ministerial formation of a candidate for their apostolic, missional and pastoral vocation in ministry; through transformational learning and integrated, reflective practice, to equip them and the whole people of God to embody the Gospel of Jesus Christ and enable participation in the mission of God in the world; alongside the attainment of the level of skills and competencies necessary to fulfil their anticipated ministry.

(2) A candidate for ministry shall undertake training comprising four phases of formation, being: (i) an 'Initial Phase' prior to acceptance as a candidate during a period of discernment or under the 'apprenticeship route'; (ii) a 'Core Phase' of IME following such acceptance, consisting in the normal course of degree level study with the Lead Academic Partner integrated with accredited ministry placements; (iii) a 'First Five Years Phase' of compulsory additional training following ordination; and (iv) a 'Continuing Ministerial Development Phase' for the remaining duration of their ministerial life. This Act sets out requirements in the first two of these phases.

(3) All ministry training shall be guided by the provision within the Formation Framework of the eight values of ministerial training, three layers of formation and eight dimensions of formation, as set out in Schedule 1 to this Act.

(4) The training and formation programme for ministry will be developed and implemented by a partnership of FAPLT, represented by the Director of Studies and the People and Training Team of FAPLT, and the Lead Academic Partner, supplemented by provision from other academic providers, ecumenical partners and external individuals and training bodies.

(5) A Formation Panel shall be responsible for overseeing, on behalf of the Church, the implementation of the training and formation programme for ministry as defined in section 1(k) and the Diaconate. A Formation

Panel will oversee the shared partnership work between FAPLT and the Lead Academic Partner, together with other key stakeholders. The Formation Panel shall have six core members at each meeting; being the Director of Studies who will chair the Panel; a member of the People & Training Team of FAPLT; the Principal or Vice Principal or Clerk of the College within the Lead Academic Partner and one further representative from the Lead Academic Partner; a representative on behalf of the Presbyteries of the Church; and an elder or member of a Church of Scotland congregation with appropriate experience in academia or in vocational training; supplemented when appropriate by the candidate, their Formation Partner, and/or their placement supervisor.

(6) The progress in formation and in the skills and competencies of ministry of a candidate within the Core Phase, their course of study and the nature and location of placements, shall also be overseen and reviewed by the Formation Panel. The Formation Panel will work with the Director of Studies and the Lead Academic Partner to review academic course provision, and with FAPLT through the People & Training Team and Presbyteries to oversee the placement provision for candidates. The Formation Panel shall decide whether a candidate trains under the standard three-year course of IME training, or qualifies within an exception so as to follow a modified two-year course of training, or a bespoke route, as set out in section 15. The Formation Panel shall oversee the personalised training plan for each Candidate that has followed an Initial Formation Meeting, and shall thereafter do so on an annual basis. The final decision on the assessment, progress and direction of a candidate, and recommendation of the nature and location of placements, shall be taken by the Formation Panel, informed by the decision(s) and any recommendations of the appraisal process set out in section 21, the input of FAPLT via the People & Training Team and also the Lead Academic Partner.

(7) If satisfied in terms of this Act, the Formation Panel will grant an exit certificate in terms of section 22, to allow a candidate to be ordained as a minister of word and sacrament. In order for the Formation Panel to recommend the ordination of a candidate by the Church following completion of the Core Phase of IME, the Formation Panel shall be satisfied that the candidate now demonstrates readiness for ministry as defined in section 1(k) in displaying the formational 'attributes' required, as set out in Schedule 2 to this Act; the relevant skills and competencies for the beginning of ordained ministry which will, from time to time, be agreed by the Director of Studies, the People & Training Team of FAPLT and the Formation Panel.; and has completed successfully their academic training

INITIAL PHASE

Discernment Conversation and Initial Screening process

3.

(1) A person wishing to apply for ministry in the Church of Scotland shall have a discernment conversation with a staff member of FAPLT's People and Training Team to determine how they will proceed, and should they subsequently make application, this will be followed by an Initial Screening process arranged by FAPLT, including psychometric testing and an application to Disclosure Scotland for a PVG certificate.

(2) A person deemed ready to proceed after the Initial Screening process shall be entitled to apply in terms of section 5 to be recognised as a candidate for ministry. Any person who makes such an application shall be known as an applicant.

(3) A person who is not deemed ready to proceed after the Initial Screening process must normally wait a period of between one and three years, as notified to that person by FAPLT in writing, before they may again participate in an Initial Screening process

(4) The outcome of each Initial Screening process shall be final and not subject to any form of review or appeal (save as specified in section 10 below).

(5) The provisions of this section are subject to those of section 4.

Age, Time and Membership Limits for applicants

4.

(1) FAPLT will not consider an application from any person who has not attained the age of eighteen years by the date on which FAPLT receives the application.

(2) FAPLT will not normally consider an application from any person who has not been either a member or adherent of the Church of Scotland, or who has not been actively involved in a congregation of the Church of Scotland, or who has not been a member of. one of the following denominations, in each case for a period of at least 3 years immediately prior to receipt of the application:

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.

(3) FAPLT will not consider an application from any person who in all normal circumstances could not complete a route of training set out in section 15 before 31 December of the year in which that person will turn 60 years of age. The acceptance of a candidate who has delayed commencement of the prescribed route of training will be discontinued if in all normal circumstances that route of training could not be completed before 31 December of the year in which that candidate will turn 60 years of age.

(4) The acceptance of a candidate may be reviewed by FAPLT if the prescribed route of training has not been commenced within three years of acceptance.

Submission of Application

5.

(1) FAPLT will, on request, issue the relevant application forms to each applicant who has fulfilled the requirements as set out in sub-section 3(2) and section 4, 4, which shall be completed by the applicant and sent to FAPLT by a specified date.

(2) FAPLT will inform Presbyteries of applicants within their bounds, the appropriate Presbytery being determined according to section 12 of this Act.

Period of Discernment and Local Review

6.

(1) Following FAPLT's receipt and acceptance of their application, the applicant will enter a period of discernment with a mentor. During the period of discernment, the applicant and the mentor shall explore together the nature of the applicant's call and gifting. The period of discernment shall normally last for six months. The mentor will be chosen by FAPLT and shall undertake such training as may from time to time be specified by FAPLT. The mentor shall be responsible for supervising the period of discernment according to the guidelines and standards established by FAPLT, and shall produce assessment materials as required using such Indicators for Assessment as may be from time to time in use by FAPLT. During the period of discernment the applicant shall also meet regularly with a representative (or representatives) of their Presbytery.

(2) At the end of the period of discernment the applicant shall proceed to a Local Review. The Local Review will be undertaken by a group consisting of a national assessor appointed by FAPLT, the mentor and an assessor appointed by their Presbytery. In the event that the mentor or presbytery assessor cannot attend the Local Review, it may still proceed if the applicant consents and the Local Review paperwork is complete. No individual shall serve as the national assessor appointed by FAPLT for the same applicant more than once.

(3) Before the end of a period of discernment, the Presbytery or FAPLT may require that an early Local Review takes place. Such a Review shall be undertaken by the same group as specified in section 6(2) but may only reach a decision in terms of section 6(4) (ii), (iii) or (iv). Sections 6(5) and 6(6) shall still apply.

(4) The Formation Panel will determine prior to the Local Review, and inform the applicant, as to the probable route of training and the likely nature of the first placement were the applicant to be successful at both the Local Review and the Assessment Conference.

(5) Subject to the provisions of section 6(3), arising out of the Local Review, one of the following written decisions shall be reported to FAPLT:

i. That the applicant is ready to proceed to national assessment in terms of section 7;

ii. That the applicant should undergo a further period of discernment of such length as may be determined by the Local Review before a decision to proceed to national assessment can be made;

iii. That the applicant is not yet ready to proceed to national assessment in terms of section 7;

iv. That the applicant is not suitable to proceed to national assessment in terms of section 7.

(6) Applicants in respect of whom a decision is made in terms of section 6(4)(iii) shall be subject to the terms of section 8 below.

(7) Applicants in respect of whom a decision is made in terms of section 6(4)(iv) may have a right of appeal in terms of section 9 below, subject to the terms of section 10.

(8) All materials received by FAPLT from the Local Review in terms of sub-section 6(4) shall be available to those making consideration in terms of sub-section 7(1).

National Assessment

7.

(1) National Assessment shall consist of an Assessment Conference at which there shall be careful consideration and assessment of the applicant's apostolic and missional vocation and calling to ministry, integration of faith and life, existing personal and spiritual formation, character and beliefs, skills and gifts from prior employment or volunteering, motivation and general suitability for ministry in the Church of Scotland. The assessors shall utilise 'Indicators of Assessment' specified from time to time by FAPLT in reaching their decision. The Assessment Conference shall normally be an in-person residential event but FAPLT reserves the right to hold an Assessment Conference online should circumstances make this necessary or desirable.

(2) At the Assessment Conference a decision shall be made as to whether or not the applicant shall be accepted as a prospective candidate for ministry, based on the 'Indicators of Assessment' specified from time to time by FAPLT, and the applicant and the Presbytery shall be informed of the decision.

(3) All applicants who attend an Assessment Conference shall receive, as part of their training and development, feedback in the form of a report.

(4) An applicant who is accepted as a prospective candidate shall, following Assessment Conference, undergo a medical check in the form prescribed by FAPLT and may only proceed as a prospective candidate if this check is, in the opinion of FAPLT, satisfactory. There shall be no appeal against FAPLT's decision on this matter.

(5) An applicant who has not been accepted as a prospective candidate following an Assessment Conference shall be subject to the terms of section 8 below.

Opportunities to become a prospective candidate

8.

(1) A person applying under this Act shall have up to three opportunities in total to progress through Initial Screening, Local Review and Assessment Conference to become a prospective candidate, unless they receive a decision in terms of section 6(5)(iv) at Local Review. In that case, no further applications can be received for national ministry of word and sacrament, Ordained Local Ministry, the Diaconate or the Readership, if an appeal under section 8(5) has been unsuccessful.

(2) For the purposes of this section, each time the person is not accepted, whether at Initial Screening, Local Review in terms of section 6(5)(iii) or at Assessment Conference, shall count as one "non-accept" decision. Once a total of three "non-accept" decisions have occurred, no further entry into the assessment process, at any stage, will be possible for that person. A person will however have a right of appeal as set out in section 9 below, subject to the terms of section 10.

(3) Following a 'non-accept' decision at any stage, a person must wait for the period specified by FAPLT, normally being a minimum period of one year, before being assessed again.

(4) After any "non-accept" decision at any stage, a person who chooses to re-enter the assessment process shall start again at section 3 i.e. at the stage of discernment conversation and Initial Screening.

(5) On receipt of a decision at Local Review in terms of section 6(5)(iv) a person will have the right to appeal as set out in section 9, subject to section 10, on one occasion only. A refusal of that appeal will be final.

Appeals

9.

(1) Subject always to the provisions of section 10 below, an applicant who has not been accepted at Initial Screening, Local Review or Assessment Conference, shall have the right to appeal to the Ministries Appeal Panel.

(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 Initial Screening, Local Review or Assessment Conference, as the case may be, was intimated to the applicant. At the Appeal Hearing the applicant shall be entitled to appear either online or in person, as determined by FAPLT, and to address the Panel. The applicant may be accompanied by a companion, who shall not be entitled to speak to the Panel, but who may confer with the 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 reports from the Initial Screening, Local Review and/or the Assessment Conference, as the case may be.

(3) 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 Local Review or Assessment Conference there were irregularities in the process contrary to natural justice which may have had a material effect on the outcome or (b) that the final decision of the Initial Screening, Local Review or Assessment Conference was unduly influenced by incorrect or immaterial facts, or failed to take sufficient account of relevant material facts.

(4) The outcome of an appeal shall be either to uphold the decision of the Initial Screening, Local Review or the Assessment Conference, as the case may be, or to annul that decision, in which case sub-sections (5) and (6) below will apply.

(5) If the outcome of the appeal is to annul a decision, whether at Initial Screening, Local Review or Assessment Conference, the person shall be =entitled to enter the discernment and assessment process again on one occasion only, beginning immediately before the stage in the process where they were not accepted. Such re-entry into the process must commence within one year of the appeal decision and shall be permitted notwithstanding the terms of section 4(3) of this Act. Any further "non-accept" decision on that next occasion at any stage shall terminate that person's eligibility to enter the assessment process for national ministry of word and sacrament, Ordained Local Ministry, the Diaconate or the Readership, and there shall be no further right of appeal.

(6) If the outcome of the appeal is to uphold the decision of the Initial Screening, Local Review or the Assessment Conference, as the case may be, that shall terminate the assessment process for that person and shall terminate that person's eligibility to enter the assessment process for national ministry of word and sacrament, Ordained Local Ministry, the Diaconate or the Readership, and there shall be no further right of appeal.

Appeal at third "non-accept" decision, after Local Review or if age-barred

10. A person shall only have the right to appeal to the Ministries Appeal Panel as follows:

(a) following a third "non-accept" decision, whether that is at Initial Screening, Local Review in terms of section 6(5)(iii) or Assessment Conference, or

(b) Following a decision at Local Review in terms of section 6(5)(iv), or

(c) following a first or second "non-accept" decision whether that is at Initial Screening, Local Review in terms of section 6(5)(iii) or Assessment Conference, where the person would thereafter be age-barred in terms of section 4(3) from pursuing a fresh application for Assessment. For the avoidance of doubt, in no circumstances other than as set out at sections 10(a) or (b), shall an appeal be possible after a first or second "non-accept" decision.

Nomination by the Presbytery

11. A prospective candidate seeking nomination by the appropriate Presbytery as a candidate for ministry shall apply in writing to that Presbytery as soon as, but not before, FAPLT indicates acceptance as a prospective candidate following an Assessment Conference.

12. Application for nomination shall normally be made to the Presbytery within whose bounds is situated the congregation of which the prospective candidate is a communicant member. With the written agreement of that Presbytery, such an application may be considered by the Presbytery within whose bounds the Lead Academic Partner is situated, or by the Presbytery within whose bounds the prospective candidate resides, always provided that nomination does not precede communicant membership of the Church of Scotland.

13. If satisfied with the prospective candidate's apostolic, missional and pastoral vocation and calling to ministry, integration of faith and life, existing personal and spiritual formation, character and beliefs, skills and gifts from prior employment or volunteering, motivation and general suitability for ministry in the Church of Scotland, the Presbytery shall then nominate him or her as a candidate for ministry and shall give notice of such nomination to FAPLT as soon as possible.

14.

(1) A prospective candidate who has been refused nomination by the Presbytery has the right of appeal to the Ministries Appeal Panel. The prospective candidate may in any event submit a re-application for nomination on up to two further occasions, provided that at least one year elapses between each application.

(2) Notification of the intention to appeal to the Ministries Appeal Panel shall be made to FAPLT and to the Principal Clerk within 14 days of the date upon which the Presbytery's decision was made. At the Appeal Hearing the prospective candidate shall be entitled to appear either online or in person, as determined by FAPLT, and to address the Panel. They may be accompanied by a companion, who shall not be entitled to speak to the Panel, but who may confer with the prospective candidate. Such an appeal can only be brought on one or more of the following grounds: (a) that in making the decision as to nomination, there were irregularities in the Presbytery's process contrary to natural justice which may have had a material effect on the outcome, or (b) that the final decision of the Presbytery as to nomination was unduly influenced by incorrect or immaterial facts, or failed to take sufficient account of relevant material facts.

CORE PHASE

Formation Routes for Ministry of Word and Sacrament

15.

(1) The formation routes of the Core Phase of training for ministry shall normally consist of degree level study with the Lead Academic Partner integrated with accredited ministry placements.

(2) The primary route for the Core Phase will be to undertake a three-year undergraduate Bachelor of Divinity degree or equivalent with the Lead Academic Partner, integrated with three accredited ministry placements, each of one-year duration and running from September to August.

(3) As a first exception to section 15 (2), and at the discretion of the Formation Panel, the candidate may instead undertake a two-year Diploma degree with the Lead Academic Partner, integrated with two accredited ministry placements each of one-year duration and running from September to August. This exception may apply if the candidate fulfils at least three of the following four criteria, being:

(a) aged over 50 years;

(b) previous theological study;

(c) significant prior experience as an employee or volunteer in the Church of Scotland or another Reformed Christian denomination, as defined in section 4(2); and

(d) one other relevant and significant circumstance in prior life, work, academic study or calling, taken into account at the Formation Panel's discretion.

(4) (a) As a second exception to section 15(2), and at the discretion of the Formation Panel, if the candidate has a prior theology degree or a period of prior training for ministry in the Church of Scotland or another Reformed Christian denomination, as defined in section 4(2), they may be directed towards the route set out as a first exception in section 15(2), or to a bespoke route which would be better suited to their formational goals towards attaining the 'attributes' for ministry at ordination.

(b) The bespoke route for such a candidate would be expected to ensure that, taken as a whole from the past and present, the candidate's training has encompassed the academic subject areas and integrated placements anticipated in the primary or first exception routes. The bespoke route for such a candidate may involve postgraduate study, a project on behalf of the Church, and/or forms of supervised ministry or placement, and may be of any duration.

(5) The Formation Panel shall have the right, at its discretion, to direct that the course of training being followed by a candidate be amended after that route has commenced, having first consulted with the candidate, the People and Training Team, and the Lead Academic Partner.

Content of Study & Placement

16. The Core Phase will seek to enable the formation of a candidate for their apostolic, missional and pastoral vocation in ministry; through transformational learning and integrated, reflective practice. To that end, unless an exception applies in terms of section 15(4(b)the candidate will complete:

(1) (a) A degree course at the Lead Academic Partner as outlined in section 15, which will consist of a curriculum developed and agreed in partnership between the Lead Academic Partner and FAPLT through the Director of Studies, and which includes a balanced provision of core courses within the following subject areas:

(i) Critical academic reflection on the Life of Faith and Discipleship;

(ii) Christian Scriptures, History and Thought;

(iii) Practice of Ministry;

(iv) Mission; and

(v) In any other relevant subject area as may be agreed by that partnership.

(b) Whilst the expectation will be that a candidate will study on a full-time basis with the Lead Academic Partner, part-time study and placements may be permitted with the consent of the Lead Academic Partner and the agreement of the Formation Panel.

(2) Contextualised, assessed placements which are focused on the growth in formation of the candidate through theological reflection and reflective practice, whilst also developing core skills and competencies for ministry. For those purposes, the candidate will engage in key areas of ministry, including:

(a) The calling and vocation of ministry, and its varied forms including team ministry;

(b) Personal development, devotion and faith, prayer, study, resilience and self-care;

(c) Identity as a minister in the Church of Scotland in the light of its history and present formation, and its social context;

(d) Preaching and the leading of worship in different contexts, and the conduct of the sacraments, funerals and weddings;

(e) The knowledge, interpretation, understanding and application to everyday life of Scripture, key beliefs and doctrines of Christian faith in the Reformed tradition, and in applying Christian ethics and theology to major issues in our country and world;

(f) The nurturing of Christian faith in the congregation and community, and the provision of Christian education;

(g) Mission and discipleship, including the enabling of church members in mission and the training and support of volunteers;

(h) Theology and practice of pastoral care;

(i) Pioneer ministry and fresh expressions of church;

(j) Church communication, education and mission via digital platforms;

(k) Adaptive leadership through challenge and change, church management, relationship building and governance in the local context, and within the broader Presbyterian polity; and

(l) Knowledge and application of Church law, including Church structures and courts; and relevant civil law, including safeguarding law and practice and charity law.

(3) Attendance and active participation in further areas of formation and education required by FAPLT and the Lead Academic Partner throughout their candidature (i) in such courses, seminars, conferences, events and candidate gatherings as are prescribed by FAPLT and (ii) in seminars, events, candidate gatherings and worship services provided by the Lead Academic Partner where their attendance and participation are required.

Placements

17.

(1) As part of the Church requirements in section 15, under the primary and first exception routes, periods of placement work of one year duration from September to August shall be undertaken by the candidate and must be completed to the satisfaction of FAPLT and the Formation Panel. All placements bar one must take place within Scotland. Placements of a duration specified by the Formation Panel may also be required under the second exception route.

(2) (a) Placements will be allocated by the People & Training Team of FAPLT using placement supervisors trained and assessed by them. At the beginning of each placement a Learning Covenant will be agreed by the placement supervisor and the candidate on placement. The placement supervisor shall be responsible for supervising the placement according to guidelines and standards established by FAPLT, and in conjunction with the materials provided for the integration of the placement by the Lead Academic Partner, and shall produce assessment documentation as required. It shall be competent for FAPLT or the Formation Panel to refuse to sustain a placement.

(b) The location of placements will be the decision and responsibility of the People & Training Team of FAPLT, acting on any recommendations of the Formation Panel;

(c) The People & Training Team of FAPLT will liaise with the placement supervisor, candidate and Presbytery in relation to the ongoing progress of the placement; and any issues of unsatisfactory progress or conflict that arise; as well as considering any questions of a placement location and placement supervisor being changed;

(d) Recognising the roles of the Lead Academic Partner and the Presbytery in also doing so, the People & Training Team of FAPLT will provide pastoral support to the candidate in relation to issues that might arise during the placement.

(e) At the end of each placement, the People & Training Team of FAPLT will collate the assessment reports of the candidate and the placement supervisor, and hold the appraisal meeting in relation to the progress of the candidate, reporting to the Formation Panel thereafter.

18. In relation to the management and assessment of integrated placements, the Lead Academic Partner will take the lead role in the following aspects, acting in partnership with the Director of Studies and the People & Training Team of FAPLT:

(1) The development of the placement course from the University perspective that will lead to accreditation; including proposed course aims and intended learning outcomes for the candidate of the placement course;

(2) The provision of all teaching, and academic materials, required by the candidate in order to undertake the course and the placement;

(3) The provision of appropriate materials to the placement supervisor to ensure that they are aware of the tasks set by the LAP for the candidate in their placement, and can work with the candidate accordingly;

(4) Liaison with the candidate and, if necessary the placement supervisor, during the placement to ensure that there is understanding of the goals, and satisfactory development towards the proposed outcomes;

(5) To undergo a thorough basis of academic assessment at the end of the placement that is related to theological reflection/reflective practice and the formational goals of training; and

(6) Liaison with the People & Training Team of FAPLT and the Formation Panel about the outcome for the candidate from the course, following assessment.

Presbytery Supervision during Core Phase

19.

(1) Throughout the Core Phase of training a candidate must remain under the oversight and pastoral supervision of a Presbytery, initially the Presbytery which nominated that person, and must inform the Presbytery of any change of address.

(2) Having been nominated by a Presbytery, a candidate shall remain under the supervision of that Presbytery unless the candidate's place of residence changes so that they come within the bounds of a different Presbytery, in which case the candidate may apply to FAPLT to change the supervising Presbytery, and after consultation by FAPLT with both Presbyteries, permission to change the supervising Presbytery may be granted at FAPLT's discretion.

Initial Formation Meeting

20.

(1) At the outset of the candidate's training an Initial Formation Meeting shall be held, attended by the candidate and a staff member of the People & Training Team of FAPLT.

(2) At the Initial Formation Meeting the candidate and the staff member will discuss the route of training decided by the Formation Panel, a personalised training plan, training policies (including the performance review policy) and the Expectations and Responsibilities document. Academic, practical and personal goals for the first year of training will also be discussed. In due course, all of these documents will be agreed.

(3) Other tasks of the Initial Formation Meeting, and its structure and procedure, shall be determined from time to time by the People & Training Team of FAPLT or the Formation Panel.

(4) At the Initial Formation Meeting or soon thereafter, a Formation Partner will be allocated to the candidate by agreement with their Presbytery.

Appraisal during Candidature

21.

(1) An appraisal meeting shall take place by September towards the end of each yearly placement and the beginning of each academic year, with the exception of the appraisal meeting relating to the final placement in training that will potentially grant an exit certificate under section 22, which will take place in June or thereby.

(2) The functions of each appraisal meeting shall be to confirm whether or not there is satisfactory progress in the formation of a candidate and their skills and competencies in ministry, the need for any additional steps in learning and development in formation; to set formation and learning goals through a facilitated conversation and discussion, and to implement the performance review policy if applicable. Other tasks of the appraisal meeting shall be as determined from time to time by FAPLT.

(3) The member of staff of the People & Training Team of FAPLT who has been allocated responsibility for chairing the appraisal meeting shall receive written reports from the candidate, the supervising minister and the Lead Academic Partner; and shall use them along with any other written reports which the staff member obtains and the Formation Framework to prepare a Pre-Appraisal Form, to be circulated to all those attending the appraisal meeting, containing the significant points to be considered at the meeting. The appraisal meeting shall make an Appraisal Report to the Formation Panel setting out their decision.

(4) (a) A 'satisfactory' decision on the candidate's progress shall mean that the candidate has made sufficient progress in their formation and their skills and competencies in ministry and that the candidate can proceed to the next stage of training without condition.

(b) A decision of 'learning and development needed' shall mean that the candidate ought to undertake one or more specific area(s) of training in order to improve an aspect(s) of formation, or skills and competencies in ministry, within a period of time to be specified in the report, normally to be reviewed thereafter at a further appraisal meeting and by the Formation Panel, following which progress will be reviewed to now be 'satisfactory', or 'unsatisfactory'.

(c) An 'unsatisfactory' decision at any time on the candidate's progress shall mean that one of the following decisions may be reached:

(i) that an extension of training requires to be arranged by FAPLT with specific goals, and a further, final appraisal meeting thereafter conducted; or

(ii) that the candidature should be terminated.

(5) At any appraisal meeting the following shall apply:

(a) Any person who acts as a representative of Presbytery or FAPLT shall receive appropriate training as shall be determined and provided by the FAPLT.

(b) The representatives appointed by the Presbytery and FAPLT shall each be appointed with powers to make decisions on behalf of the Presbytery and FAPLT respectively; if a member or representative of FAPLT is not present, it shall be the member of staff who has powers to make decisions on behalf of the FAPLT.

(c) In attendance shall be the candidate, the member of staff of FAPLT who has been allocated responsibility for the appraisal and will chair the meeting, a further member or representative of FAPLT and a representative of Presbytery.

(d) The Meeting shall be co-convened on behalf of FAPLT and the Presbytery.

(6) Following the appraisal meeting, an Appraisal Report will be prepared by the member of staff of FAPLT who has been allocated responsibility for the appraisal and circulated within 7 working days of the meeting to all those who attended the meeting and the Formation Panel. If the candidate dissents from the Report or any part thereof, their dissent and the reasons for it shall be recorded in the Report, but shall not alter the status of the Report for the purposes of this Act.

(7) The Appraisal Report shall contain a decision to be sent to the Formation Panel of 'satisfactory, 'learning and development needed' or 'unsatisfactory', with the meaning and consequences as set out in sub-section (4):

(8) The decision of the appraisal meeting shall be considered by the Formation Panel who may either confirm that the decision of the Appraisal Report will apply, or modify the outcome. The decision of the Formation Panel will be final, subject to the right of appeal in sub-section (9), and the candidature will proceed on the decision following the meeting of the Formation Panel.

(9) The decision of the Formation Panel to confirm that the decision of the Appraisal Report will apply, or will be modified, will be communicated by the Formation Panel to the candidate and to FAPLT within 7 working days of the Formation Panel meeting. The candidate may appeal to the Ministries Appeal Panel against a final decision of the Formation Panel which is a section 4(c)(ii) decision (i.e. a decision that candidature is unsatisfactory and should be terminated) on one or more of the following grounds: that in the course of the appraisal meeting or meeting of the Formation Panel there were (a) irregularities in the process contrary to natural justice which may have had a material effect on the outcome, or (b) that the decision of the appraisal meeting or the decision of the Formation Panel was unduly influenced by incorrect or immaterial facts, or failed to take sufficient account of relevant material facts. 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 Formation Panel was intimated to the candidate. At the Appeal Hearing the candidate shall be entitled to appear in person and a member of the Formation Panel shall appear to present the case for the appraisal decision. The candidate may be accompanied by a companion, who shall not be entitled to speak to the Panel but who may confer with the candidate.

(10) Notwithstanding the above provisions, at any time during candidature an appraisal meeting with full powers may be called and held, at the discretion of FAPLT.

Issue of Exit Certificate/Graduate Candidate Certificate

22.

(1) Where final approval on behalf of the Presbytery, FAPLT and the Formation Panel has been given in terms of section 21, and FAPLT is satisfied that the requirements of sections 2(7) and 15 to 18 have been fulfilled, including all academic requirements, the Formation Panel shall thereafter have the power to issue an exit certificate enabling the candidate to be ordained, subject to the satisfactory completion of their final training placement. At that point the candidate shall become a graduate candidate and shall remain under the supervision of their Presbytery, pending ordination to a charge or appointment.

(2) The Presbytery shall in each calendar year assess in terms of the criteria set out in section 13 above, the general suitability of each graduate candidate and, if satisfied, shall issue a graduate candidate's certificate confirming continuing approval, and shall advise FAPLT by 31 December. Candidates will have a right of appeal in terms of sub-section (3) below in the event of the Presbytery declining to issue a certificate.

(3) The graduate candidate may appeal to the Ministries Appeal Panel against a decision in terms of section 22(2) on one or more of the following grounds: that in the course of the Presbytery's decision there were irregularities in the process contrary to natural justice which may have had a material effect on the outcome, or (b) that the decision of the Presbytery was unduly influenced by incorrect or immaterial facts, or failed to take sufficient account of relevant material facts. Notification of the intention to appeal shall be made to the Presbytery and to the Principal Clerk within 14 days of the date upon which the Presbytery's decision was intimated to the graduate candidate. At the Appeal Hearing the graduate candidate shall be entitled to appear in person and a representative of the Presbytery shall appear to present the case for the Presbytery's decision. The graduate candidate may be accompanied by a companion, who shall not be entitled to speak to the Panel but who may confer with the graduate candidate.

(4) A Presbytery must obtain a current graduate candidate's certificate for any graduate candidate whose call or appointment is to be sustained by that Presbytery after 31 December of the year in which their exit certificate was awarded.

(5) A Presbytery may issue a graduate candidate's certificate on up to two occasions only. Thereafter, in order to obtain a graduate candidate's certificate, the graduate candidate must apply for such a certificate to the Registration of Ministries Committee, following an application procedure equivalent to that set out in section 27 of the Registration of Ministries Act (Act II 2017) (Application for Category **O** registration).

Complaints Procedure

23. Subject always to the provisions of the Discipline Act (Act I 2019), which shall apply in respect of a Disciplinary Complaint (as that term is defined in the Discipline Act) relating to a candidate or graduate candidate, the provisions of this section shall apply:

(a) where any party to an *Expectations and Responsibilities* document asserts that another party is in breach thereof; or

(b) where the Presbytery or the FAPLT assert that a candidate has failed to fulfil their obligations under the agreed *Learning Covenant*; or

(c) where a material complaint is made to FAPLT or Presbytery about the candidate's conduct during training; or

(d) where circumstances come to the attention of FAPLT or Presbytery which give cause for concern about the candidate's conduct during training.

Any such assertion complaint or circumstances shall be intimated by lodging with the senior staff member of FAPLT within People and Training, a written statement providing specific details thereof. The senior staff member shall intimate the statement to the candidate, the Convener of FAPLT and the Presbytery.

24.

(1) As soon as is reasonably practicable after receipt of the statement referred to in section 23, a staff member of the FAPLT shall meet with all relevant parties to discuss the matter, seeking to resolve the matter to the satisfaction of all concerned, if that is possible and advisable.

(2) In the event that such resolution is not possible or advisable, any of the parties mentioned in section 23 may request a formal meeting of all parties in order to determine what is required to effect resolution.

(3) Such a formal meeting shall be attended by up to two representatives of each party, shall be called by FAPLT and shall be convened by a staff member of FAPLT, who will notify all parties in writing of the conclusions of the meeting and any agreement reached between the parties to resolve the matter. Such notification shall provide details of the consequences that will ensue in the event of failure by any parties to adhere to the conclusions and agreement from the meeting.

(4) The provisions of section 24 shall not apply where FAPLT makes a resolution in terms of section 25(2) below.

25.

(1) In the event that no agreement is reached between parties at such a formal meeting as to the facts, or no agreed resolution is reached; or in the event that any party fails to adhere to the agreed conclusions, the Convener of FAPLT shall convene a further hearing of all relevant parties.

(2) Furthermore, FAPLT shall have power to resolve that it will not be possible to reach a resolution under a section 24 process, in which case the Convener of FAPLT shall convene a hearing of all relevant parties without recourse to the procedure set out in section 24.

(3) The hearing shall be held as soon as is reasonably practicable. At such a hearing the Candidate shall be present and may be accompanied by a companion who shall not be entitled to speak to the panel, but who may confer with the candidate. The panel for the hearing, in addition to the Convener, shall comprise two representatives of Presbytery and two representatives of FAPLT, none of whom shall have had prior personal involvement with the assertion, complaint or circumstances giving rise to the Hearing. The two representatives appointed by the Presbytery and FAPLT shall each be appointed with powers to make decisions on behalf of the Presbytery and FAPLT respectively. A FAPLT staff member shall attend as an adviser.

(4) At the hearing all parties shall be entitled to present evidence, to question witnesses and to make a concluding statement. At the conclusion of the hearing, or as soon as may be practicable thereafter, the panel shall issue its decision and advise all parties. Such a decision shall be final and binding on all parties, subject only to appeal to the Ministries Appeal Panel in terms of Act VI 2007 on the following grounds (a) that in the course of the hearing there were irregularities in the process contrary to natural justice which may have had a material effect on the outcome, or (b) that the decision taken at the conclusion of the hearing was unduly influenced by incorrect or immaterial facts, or failed to take sufficient account of relevant material facts. The intention to appeal shall be intimated to the FAPLT and to the Principal Clerk within 14 days of the panel's decision.

Repeals and Amendments

26. This Act will come into force from 1st September 2026 onwards in relation to all people accepted as candidates for training following national assessment and nomination by Presbytery after that date. For the training of all such individuals, Act X 2004, as amended, is repealed as of that date. For the avoidance of doubt, for all those who have been accepted as candidates or graduate candidates prior to 1st September 2026, the provisions of Act X 2004, as amended, will continue to apply until the end of their candidature; subject always to the discretion of FAPLT to determine that this Act applies to such persons, such as in cases of deferment.

SCHEDULE 1 – THE FORMATION FRAMEWORK

(1) The eight values of ministerial training in the Formation Framework are that it should be: Christ-centred, student-focused, mission-orientated, responsible, reflective, diverse, reforming and community-building.

(2) The three layers of formation in the Formation Framework are: Who We Are; Theory, Tradition and Knowledge; and Skills, Practices, Abilities and Qualities.

(3) The eight dimensions of formation in the Formation Framework are: Faith, Vocation & Spirituality; Character, Ethics & Development; Leadership & Relationships; Worship, Sacraments and Preaching; Pastoral Care; Mission; Discipleship; and Church Management.

SCHEDULE 2 – ATTRIBUTES OF A CANDIDATE FOR ORDINATION

(1) a deep personal faith in God, a commitment in discipleship to Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, and the capacity to articulate and communicate the Christian faith contextually;

(2) the practice of Christian spiritual disciplines of personal prayer and devotion, Bible study, regular participation in public worship and the sacrament of communion; and embodying faith in their own lives, as disciples of Jesus Christ;

(3) a mature knowledge of the Bible and Christian theology and the ability to apply them to the realities of everyday life and the world, and to help the Church shape its future in the light of them;

(4) a contextual theologian, worship leader and preacher rooted in the Reformed tradition, able to craft worship and communicate faith and its implications, within and beyond congregations;

(5) a desire to serve God and as a pastor amongst the people of God, with a growing self-awareness of personal identity, gifting and lifelong calling in that context;

(6) articulating a call by God through the Church to give themselves to the ministry for which they are to be ordained, following Jesus' example of love and service;

(7) a well-developed and reflective understanding of being an ordained minister within the Church of Scotland within Presbyterian polity, with a commitment to serve the Church and be answerable to its supervision and discipline;

(8) a commitment to speaking truth to power, and challenging injustice, prejudice and marginalisation in Christ's name.

(9) the ability to exercise ministry as a reflective practitioner, and as a deep listener in pastoral care;

(10) the ability to exercise ministry by interacting in a humble, courteous, tolerant and respectful manner with others, no matter their personal identity, faith or social background.

(11) a commitment to the practice of ministry without discrimination on grounds of gender, sexuality, religion or ethnic origin;

(12) personal development which demonstrates integrity, maturity, honesty, stability, emotional intelligence, stamina and resilience; and the desire to live a personal life which reflects the God-given calling of the office of Christian ministry.

(13) a desire to enable and nurture the new or developing Christian faith of others, and for them to grow in discipleship, encouraging the expression and development of their gifts and calling from God;

(14) equipped and energised to engage in God's mission in the world, with a mature understanding in theory and practice of what that might entail in a rapidly changing and diverse cultural and social context, and within both inherited and new expressions of church;

(15) the ability to engage in the tasks of ministry with critical imagination, courage, emotional maturity, theological judgment and self-reflection; and to exercise this ministry by enabling and empowering others within the ministry of the whole people of God;

(16) readiness for the practice of day-to-day ministry in its necessary skills and competencies; including the ability to exercise bold, imaginative and strategic leadership, collaboration and team-building, and to manage change and conflict;

(17) an understanding of the history, Presbyterian polity and historic Christian doctrine of the Church of Scotland within the global Reformed tradition, and an ability to relate those to the contexts and challenges of the present day, including in the need for renewal and reform;

(18) a commitment to the unity of the Church of Scotland in recognition of its full diversity, and to work ecumenically with respect amongst other Christian denominations and with other faith traditions; and

(19) a well-developed understanding of the meaning and commitments of the vows of ordination, including the breadth and contents of the Church of Scotland's Book of Confessions

(20) the capacity for, and commitment to, intentional life-long learning in ministerial practice.

Appendix II

REPORT OF THE SELECTION PANEL

1. The Vision Shaping the Panel's Work

The panel's work took place within a wider movement of renewal across the Church of Scotland. The Church has recognised the need for a more integrated, mission-focused approach to the formation of ministers — one that is apostolic in nature, rooted in Christ, and capable of shaping leaders who can serve faithfully and imaginatively in today's rapidly changing contexts.

The Church's emerging vision for Initial Ministerial Education is grounded in five long-standing principles of ministerial formation: knowledge, wisdom, holiness, competency, and role modelling. These are not discrete outcomes but interwoven dimensions of a single formation process. Academic study and placement experience must therefore function not as parallel tracks but as partners in shaping ministers for lifelong, dynamic ministry.

This integrated approach is expressed in the Church's Formation Framework, which understands ministerial formation as a whole-of-life discipline. Initial training is not an end in itself, but the beginning of a lifelong practice of theological reflection, vocational discernment, and adaptive leadership. Formation must cultivate in candidates a discipline of ongoing discernment, enabling them to grow in calling and purpose throughout their ministry. Space must also be created for specialisation, recognising that individuals are called by God to varied ministries, even within similar settings.

Candidates must be equipped not only for traditional settings of ministry — parish, chaplaincy, and congregational leadership — but also for mission on the margins, where the Church meets the lived realities of contemporary Scotland and where God is already at work. Exposure to the wider mission of the Church — including contexts such as CrossReach, the Iona Community, the Grassmarket Project, Chaplaincy, Pioneer Ministry, Urban and Rural Ministry — is an important part of this formation.

To support this renewed vision, the Church has appointed a Director of Studies, Rev Dr Sandy Forsyth, whose role the panel recognised as pivotal. The Director of Studies will hold strategic oversight of the integrated formation process, ensuring that academic modules, placement experiences, and reflective practices are aligned with the Church's missional priorities. The person appointed to the role will act as both the glue that holds the whole system together and a creative developer of ideas, enabling innovation and coherence across the formation pathway.

The panel therefore approached its task with a clear sense that the Lead Academic Provider (LAP) must be a partner capable of flexibility, imagination, courage, and innovation. The Church must remain the lead in ministerial formation, but the LAP must be able to work collaboratively, adaptively, creatively and with a shared commitment to transformational learning. Mission is the imperative — not an optional emphasis for those so minded. The LAP must be able to support both the core, foundation, traditional tasks of ministry that the Church, and the people it serves, value so highly, and blend this with training towards the additional types of fresh expressions of mission and ministry.

The traditional foundations will remain a key part of training, and the Church will continue to look for academic strength toward these ends from its LAP.

2. Composition and Integrity of the Panel

The Selection Panel consisted of four members. During the process, two changes in personnel were required due to workload and conflict of interest, but the panel remained balanced and robust throughout.

The final composition included:

- Two Ministers of the Church of Scotland, each with extensive experience in accompanying candidates through training and formation.
- Two panel members with backgrounds in ministerial education in other denominations and training institutions, with theological teaching and writing experience, bringing external insight and comparative perspective.

While it is impossible in a small national church to eliminate all relational links with institutions, the panel's composition ensured that such links were balanced and did not compromise the integrity of the process. The panel operated prayerfully and with transparency, independence of judgment, and a shared commitment to the Church's missional future.

3. The Process Followed

3.1 Criteria and Scoring

The Selection Panel was tasked with assessing the submissions and interviews of four potential providers for the Church of Scotland's Initial Ministerial Education (IME) partnership.

Though discernment and prayer were key factors in the Panel's deliberations, the Criteria Scoring contributed solid support to the decision of the Panel.

The Criteria assessment was conducted using a structured scoring framework comprising 22 weighted criteria, developed by a Working Group and approved by the Church. These criteria reflect the Church's priorities for ministerial formation, including theological depth, reflective practice, curriculum design, partnership capacity, and the ability to support candidates.

This weighting ensured that the most mission-critical aspects of formation—such as vision, theological reflection, integrated placements, hybrid learning, and partnership with the Church—carried appropriate influence in the final assessment.

Each panel member independently scored the providers, with the final totals representing the averaged and collated scores across all four panellists. This process ensured both rigour and transparency, enabling the Panel to test its shared discernment against a consistent evaluative framework.

3.2 Overview of Scoring Outcomes

The total averaged scores for each institution were as follows:

Trinity College (University of Glasgow)	124.25
New College (University of Edinburgh)	121.5
Christ's College (University of Aberdeen)	101.25
Highland Theological College (HTC)	94.25
(University of Highlands and Islands)	

The scoring demonstrates a clear separation between the two strongest proposals (Trinity and New College) and the two institutions whose submissions and interviews revealed more significant limitations (Christ's College and HTC). Within the top two, Trinity's proposal showed the greatest consistency across the highest-weighted criteria, particularly in communicating a bold and imaginative vision for ministry, formational outcomes, integrated curriculum and placements, partnership capacity, and support for individual candidates. These strengths are reflected in Trinity's consistently high scores across the Ranking 1 criteria, which carry the greatest weight in the assessment system.

New College also performed strongly, especially in institutional standing, clarity of vision, and interview professionalism. However, its proposal scored less well in comparison to Trinity in areas the Church has identified as essential for the next phase of ministerial formation, including specialist ministry pathways, hybrid delivery, broader engagement with the Church's training programmes, and the imaginative re-shaping of courses in response to changing ministry contexts.

Christ's College and HTC both demonstrated areas of genuine strength—Christ's College in theological reflection and institutional standing; HTC in motivation, pastoral commitment, and an integrated placement model. However, their proposals scored less well in categories central to the Church's formational goals, including curriculum integration, community formation, specialist pathways, hybrid provision, as well as adaptive and creative responsiveness to the changing context of ministry.

References from current or recent students, offering insight into their lived experience of formation, confirmed that all four institutions provide high-quality academic training and pastoral support. All offer robust curricula, a range of delivery modes, and the ability to challenge candidates' theological assumptions. Had the Church simply required a single provider to deliver the existing BD-equivalent academic provision, the evidence showed that any of the four could have fulfilled that requirement competently.

The scoring therefore did not simply identify "who can do the job," but helped the Panel discern which institution was best placed to partner with the Church in re-imagining ministerial formation in line with its missional priorities.

3.3 Beyond capability: a discernment of vision

Through the process it became clear that the Panel's task was not to identify which institution could maintain the status quo. The Church is seeking something more: a partner capable of shaping a new, integrated, mission-focused formation pathway—one that is risk-enabling, adaptive, and capable of supporting a complete re-imagining of ministerial formation rather than incremental adjustment.

The Panel therefore engaged in a process that was both analytical and spiritual. Each interview with the Academic Providers began with worship, acknowledging that this was not merely a competitive bidding exercise but a sacred act of discernment. The training of ministers is not simply a logistical or academic undertaking; it is a spiritual responsibility entrusted to the Church for the sake of Christ's mission.

Over months of reading, discussion, and interviews—sometimes with the Director of Studies and People and Training Manager present, sometimes independently—a shared sense of direction began to emerge. With hindsight, Panel members recognised a growing, Spirit-led agreement and coherence in their reflections, culminating in a clear and unanimous consensus at the final meeting.

Taken together, the scoring outcomes and the Panel's discernment provided a clear and coherent picture. The quantitative assessment highlighted distinct strengths and limitations across the four institutions, while the qualitative, spirit-led discernment helped the Panel interpret these findings considering the Church's wider missional priorities. With this foundation in place, the Panel turned to a more detailed reflection on each institution's submission and interview, considering how their strengths, approaches, and capacities aligned with the Church's vision for integrated, mission-focused formation.

3.4 Alignment of Scoring with Panel Discernment

The Panel's qualitative discernment during the interview process aligned closely with the quantitative scoring. Trinity's submission and interview demonstrated:

- A creative, compelling and coherent vision for ministry
- Strong articulation of formational outcomes
- A well-developed and integrated curriculum, including placements
- Clear capacity for collaborative partnership with the Church
- A strong commitment to supporting individual candidates
- Confidence in the ability to deliver a hybrid, flexible, imaginative curriculum which is contextual, missional and future-oriented

These strengths are reflected in Trinity's consistently high scores across the Ranking 1 criteria, which carry the greatest weight in the assessment system.

New College also performed strongly, particularly in institutional standing, clarity of vision, and interview professionalism. However, its proposal scored less well in areas the Church has identified as essential for the next phase of ministerial formation, including specialist ministry pathways, hybrid delivery, and broader engagement with the Church's training programmes.

Christ's College and HTC both demonstrated areas of genuine strength, but their proposals scored less well in categories central to the Church's formational goals.

4. Reflections on Each Institution

4.1 Christ's College (University of Aberdeen)

Christ's College presented itself as a research-intensive institution with strong staffing and a track record in delivering OLM training and the impactful work of the Centre for Ministry Studies. Their proposal emphasised foundational theological literacy and offered a stable, low-risk option.

However, the panel felt that the approach suggested only minor adjustments to existing provision. While reliable and competent, the proposal did not convey a strong appetite for the deeper re-imagining of formation that the Church is seeking.

4.2 New College (University of Edinburgh)

The New College presentation was polished and professional. The panel appreciated the emphasis on placements as sites of integrated learning and the creative use of Honorary Teachers drawn from diverse missional contexts such as Iona, CrossReach, the Grassmarket Project and globally through their Centre for the Study of World Christianity.

New College demonstrated institutional strength and resilience in the face of sector-wide funding pressures. Yet the panel discerned a degree of distance between the presentation and the lived experiences of candidates navigating formation today.

4.3 Highland Theological College (HTC) (University of the Highlands and Islands)

HTC offered a confessional environment and a commitment to challenging students across all theological positions. HTC expressed a clear motivation for training practitioners and has consistently demonstrated a valuable and significant contribution to ministerial training. However, the institution acknowledged significant constraints: limited staff, reliance on external specialists, and the relocation from Dingwall to a smaller facility unsuitable for in-person teaching. Their current provision is almost entirely remote.

The panel felt that HTC's proposal involved minimal change, with minor adjustments in curriculum, and lacked the physical and structural capacity required for the Church's vision.

4.4 Trinity College (University of Glasgow)

The Trinity College submission was a compelling one that asked critical questions of training reflected on the place of church today and laid out an aligned vision to meet the opportunities of the present and the future. Their starting point was not "this is what we will offer" or "this is our institutional capacity," but a set of searching questions about the needs of future ministers: What tools will a minister require for mission in today's Scotland? How can formation cultivate courage, imagination, and adaptability?

Trinity articulated a clear commitment to serving the mission of the Church of Scotland. Their proposal emphasised:

- mission-focused curriculum development
- partnership with the Church in designing new modules
- a confessional community that nurtures calling and purpose
- hybrid learning combined with essential in-person gatherings
- cohort-based formation across Scotland
- willingness to be bold and courageously rethink existing structures

The panel also noted Trinity's strong track record in Practical Theology, theological reflection, online education, and publication focused on ministerial formation and the life of the Church.

Trinity expressed this posture succinctly in stating that their primary purpose is to serve the mission of the Church of Scotland, and that their academic work exists in service of that calling.

The panel found that Trinity's vision, courage, imagination, and strategic coherence — particularly its integrated approach to academic and experiential formation — aligned most closely with the Church's aspirations for "something new."

4.5 Summary of Strengths and Weaknesses of Institutions based on Criteria Scoring

Trinity College - University of Glasgow

Strengths:

- Highest overall score
- Strongest performance across the highest-weighted criteria
- Expressed a clear vision and motivation for ministry with imagination and flexibility
- Integrated curriculum and placement model
- Strong support for candidates as individuals on unique pathways
- Confidence in partnership demonstrated at interview
- Demonstrated the integration of context-based learning in developing and refining teaching.

Weaknesses:

- Some resource implications for the Church
- Institutional standing score slightly lower than Edinburgh's

New College - University of Edinburgh

Strengths:

- Very strong institutional standing and academic capacity
- Clear vision
- Excellent interview professionalism
- Strong curriculum and placement integration

Weaknesses:

- Offered less clear support towards individual ministry pathways
- Lower engagement in broader Church training
- Hybrid delivery and lifelong formation less fully developed
- Lower expression of imagination for what ministry could look like

Christ's College - University of Aberdeen

Strengths:

- Strong theological reflection
- High institutional standing
- Good engagement with diverse candidates
- Less expansive partnership with less demand on church

Weaknesses:

- Weaker curriculum integration and community formation
- Limited support towards specialist pathways
- Moderate interview performance
- Demonstrated little contextual awareness of the practical challenges facing ministers

Highland Theological College – University of the Highlands and Islands

Strengths:

- Clear motivation and pastoral commitment
- Strong sense of mission focussed approach
- Strong integrated placement model
- Expressed a commitment to training practitioners

Weaknesses:

- Lower scores across most Ranking 1 criteria
- Limited hybrid provision and community formation though in-person work
- Lower institutional capacity
- Limited demonstration of refining content to match changing context of ministry
- Weakest interview performance

5. The Panel's Discernment and Decision

Two institutions emerged with the highest scores. Yet when the panel gathered after the final interview, there was immediate and unanimous recognition that one institution had demonstrated alignment with the direction of travel that had been forming through months of discernment and prayer.

Trinity College responded to the primary criteria of 'Vision for Ministry' and 'Motivation', by offering a partnership and commitment to serving the Church. It felt as though the invitation being extended to the Church was: "Let us shape this and journey together, beginning with the needs of candidates and the mission of the Church for today's society, work, and the challenges of people and the wider world." It felt relevant, grounded, and aligned with the lived experiences of people both within and beyond the Church.

In the final meeting, the panel became acutely aware that the months of discussion, prayer, and reflection had led to a shared spiritual clarity, and that the decision reached was part of a deeper process of discernment, discussion and ongoing reflection rather than simply the outcome of scoring.

The panel judged that Trinity's approach was more aligned with the Church's missional priorities, more responsive to the realities of contemporary ministry, and more open to the creative, integrated formation the Church seeks. The decision was therefore both evidence-based and spiritually and prayerfully grounded. The panel experienced a unanimously shared sense that Trinity's proposal was in harmony with the wider movement of renewal already emerging across the Church.

6. Recommendations Accompanying the Decision

In recommending Trinity College as the preferred Lead Academic Provider, the panel identified several conditions essential for becoming the LAP:

- A fully costed model to be developed jointly by the Director of Studies and Trinity College early in 2026, demonstrating feasibility and sustainability.
- Assurance of long-term viability and capacity.
- A genuinely whole-of-Scotland approach to training.
- Clarity regarding the relationship between Trinity College and the University of Glasgow, including recruitment processes and the Church's voice in staffing decisions.
- Protection of the Church's broad theological spectrum, ensuring that candidates from all traditions are both supported and challenged.
- A commitment to partnership in shaping a curriculum that is mission-focused, contextually aware, and responsive to the diverse callings of candidates.

These recommendations form the basis for the collaborative work undertaken between the Church and Trinity College in developing the final training package which is laid out in detail.

Appendix III

CURRICULUM FOR MINISTRY

The following text was drafted by Trinity College and amended following consultation and discussion with the Director of Studies and People & Training Team. The curriculum was developed in partnership.

1. Introduction

The University of Glasgow/Trinity College proposal for Initial Ministerial Education (IME) is aligned with the Church of Scotland's Formation Framework and has been developed in consultation with the Church of Scotland's Curriculum Document of 2019. It is conceived as a unified and integrated process, developed and delivered in an active partnership between University of Glasgow (UG)/Trinity College and the Church of Scotland's People and Training Team, with UG independently responsible for academic (SCQF) assessment and the Church of Scotland independently responsible for assessment of formation for ministerial candidates.

The overall vocational IME experience will be delivered through a Formational Year, which is overlaid on the UG semesters and academic year; and incorporates and conforms to standard UG assessment schedules and deadlines. The Formational Year will include non-UG credit bearing elements linked to the confessional position of the church and to vocational formation of candidates, which will be delivered in partnership by Trinity College and the Church of Scotland, or commissioned by the Church elsewhere.

- **The standard academic element of IME will continue to be delivered through Glasgow University's Bachelor of Divinity (BD) degree programme**, but key areas of this programme will be revised and refreshed to accommodate an increased amount of context-based learning and to enable integration of academic and placement learning through assessed reflective practice at every level of the degree.

The standard programme will be a three year, 360 credit Ordinary BD Degree, with three integrated assessed placements delivered in 8 themed segments and assessed via 5 x 10 credit modules - within the Church's pathway to ordination, this will normally mean that a candidate who is awarded the BD, and who has developed in formation so as to be granted an exit certificate by the Church, will be immediately eligible for ordination without a further probationary period.

Whilst the three-year BD is the standard and most comprehensive route, the diversity of student experience and prior learning means that some candidates for ministry will need alternative academic pathways:

- Depending on certain conditions, a candidate may be approved by the Church to undertake **an alternative or bespoke route** of training and will take a selection of BD and/or Masters courses, exiting with **a Diploma, Certificate, or Masters degree**, where applicable, alongside placements and formational activities identified by the formation panel.
- To ensure that the Church will continue to have a stream of ministers who are qualified to doctoral level to contribute to scholarship and teaching, BD candidates who show academic promise can be approved and funded by the Church to undertake a further year of study in order to gain the 480 credits necessary for the award of a BD Hons.
- Some candidates who already have a theology degree may also be approved to begin doctoral studies and will undertake placements alongside their doctoral research.

The Training Act of the Church identifies four subject areas relevant to formation:

(1) Critical academic reflection on Life of Faith and Discipleship

(2) Christian Scriptures, History and Thought

(3) Practice of Ministry

(4) Mission

In terms of pedagogy and delivery within the Formational Year, there are eight possible delivery modes of education and formation:

(1) Retreats (not for credit [NFC])

(2) For Credit [FC] Placement experience + Reflective Practice

(3) NFC Placement experience + Reflective Practice

(4) Semester-long FC courses

(5) Intensive FC Courses

(6) Intensive NFC Courses

(7) FC study or formational trips

(8) NFC study or formational trips

3 Year Ordinary BD Programme (whole) – weighting by subject areas and modes of delivery

FC Placements	5 x 10	50
Bible Courses	3 x 20	60
Theology + Doctrine	3 x 20	60
Church History	2 x 20	40
Mission	1 x 20, 2 x 10	40
Practice of Ministry	4 x 20, 3 x 10	110
TOTAL		360

1. Draft Curriculum Plan for the Bd 2.0

New courses are highlighted in bold. New assessed placements are in italics. Existing Trinity courses that need their scope, level, basis of assessment and/or credit amended have an asterisk. Not For Credit Courses run by Trinity/CofS as intensives are in the final column. The remainder are existing courses that can be taught as at present, with the potential to include candidate-specific seminar groups. University of Glasgow levels come after the course names, and course credits are in the first set of brackets, with the relationship to the four subject areas in the second set of brackets. The proposed curriculum is subject to development prior to intended implementation in September 2027.

YEAR ONE 120 Credits – WORSHIP/SPIRITUALITY					Trinity NFC Intensives (121 + UG/Trinity Staff)
Semester One	Biblical Studies - Level 1 - Creation to Apocalypse (20 credits) *(Bible)*	History of Worship Level 1 (10 credits) (*Practice of Ministry*) **Or** Biblical Hebrew (10/20) Or NT Greek (10/20)	**Intro to Preaching and Prayer – Level 1** (20 credits) * (*Practice of Ministry*)	*Assessed Placement 1a (10 credits)* *RP Focus: Worship/ Designing + Leading*	Intensive – Personal Faith & Spirituality Voice Training Workshop
Semester Two	Theology 1 - The God Question (20) (*Theology*)	Listening in Mission 1 (10) (*Mission*)	Bible for Ministry 1 (20) (*Bible*)	*Assessed Placement 1b (10)* *RP Focus: Mission/* *Listening to Context*	Intensive – Visual Arts, Music, and Drama in Church and Worship
Summer Placement				*Assessed Placement 1c* *(assessed with 2a)* *RP Focus: Pastoral/* *Anthropology*	Specialist Placement + Creative Reflection/ Response

YEAR TWO 120 Credits – MISSION/CHURCH					
Semester One	World Religions, including Judaism, Christianity & Islam - The Search for Meaning 1 (20) (*Theology*)	Church History 2 Traditions & Transformations (20) (including history of mission) (*Church History*)	**Leadership & Innovation 2** (10) (Practice of Ministry 10/2) **Or** Biblical Hebrew (20) Or NT Greek (20) (for any Sem 1 course)	*Assessed Placement 2a (10)* *RP Focus: Worship/ Sacraments*	Intensive – 'How to Run a Church' – An Introduction
Semester Two	Theology 1 Theology for Ministry/ Mission *including sacraments, ecclesiology* (20) (*Theology*)	**Managing Conflict & Change 2 (10)** **(including power/diversity/ equality)** (*Practice of Ministry*)	Mission in Contemporary Scotland 2 (20) * – *Culture, Population, Religious Diversity, Secularity* (*Mission)*	*Assessed Placement 2b (10)* *RP Focus: Mission/ Pioneering + Planting*	Intensive – Parish Renewal: Missional Innovation and Church Growth
Summer Placement				*Assessed Placement 2c* *(assessed as part of 3a)* *RP Focus: Pastoral/ Congregational Life + Dynamics*	Specialist Placement + Creative Reflection/ Response
YEAR THREE 120 Credits – PASTORAL/PUBLIC (NB – Dissertation available in place of one subject (auditing that subject), focussed on another course below)					
Semester One	Biblical Studies 3 (20) *OT or NT Texts* (*Bible*)	Pastoral Theology L3 (20) (*Practice of Ministry*)	Pioneering & Church Planting 2 (10) (*Mission*)	*Assessed Placement 3a (10)* *RP Focus: Worship/Pastoral* *Weddings + Funerals/Family Systems/Sexuality + Gender*	Intensive – End of Life, Funerals and Bereavement Care
Semester Two	Theology 3 (20) Christology/ Doctrine of God (*Theology*)	Church History 3 Scottish Church History since 1500 (20) (*Church History*)	Christian Ethics (Level 2) (20) (*Practice of Ministry*)	*(no formal assessment)* *RP Focus: Holistic Mission/ 5 Marks/ JPIC*	Intensive – Digital Communication, Mission and Theology
YEAR FOUR 120 Credits – for those on academic track – Church will decide how much placement work or if candidates should focus on academic work					

Assessed placements will involve two hours of compulsory contact time for candidates per week in semester: one hour with the Pastoral Studies Tutor/ Field Education Director supporting reflective practice through online teaching; and one hour in reflection groups (replacing the MTN), with the potential for local 'in-person' groups where possible. Modes of reflection will vary over the three years, and will include journalling, verbatims, critical incident analysis, role play etc. Summer placements will produce journal and project work which will generate material for assessment within the subsequent semester one placement course.

2. Two-Year Diploma Curriculum

Weighting by subject areas and modes of delivery

Credit Bearing Placements	4 x 10	40
Bible Courses	1 x 20	20
Theology + Doctrine	2 x 20	40
Church History	2 x 20	40
Mission	1 x 20, 1 x 10	30
Practice of Ministry	2 x 20, 3 x 10	70
TOTAL		240

YEAR ONE 120 Credits WORSHIP/MINISTRY				
Biblical Studies 1 Creation to Apocalypse (20)	History of Worship incl. sacraments 1 (10)	Intro to Preaching & Prayer 1 (20) *	*Assessed Placement 1a (10)* *RP Focus: Worship/ Designing + Leading*	Intensive – Personal Spirituality Voice Training Workshop
Theology for Ministry/Mission 1 *including sacraments, ecclesiology* (20)	Listening in Mission 1 (10)	Bible for Ministry 1 (20)	*Assessed Placement 1b (10)* *RP Focus: Mission/ Listening to Context*	Intensive –Visual Arts, Music, and Drama in Church and Worship
			Assessed Placement 1c (assessed with 2a) *RP Focus: Pastoral/ Anthropology*	Specialist Placement + Creative Reflection/ Response
YEAR TWO 120 Credits PASTORAL/MISSIONAL				
Church History 2 Traditions & Transformations (20) (including history of mission)	Pastoral Practice for Church Leaders 2 (20)	Leadership & Innovation 1 (10)	*Assessed Placement 2a (10)* *RP Focus: Worship/ Pastoral* *Weddings + Funerals/ Family Systems/ Sexuality + Gender*	Intensive – End of Life, Funerals and Bereavement Care
Christian Ethics (Level 2) (20)	Managing Conflict & Change 1 (10) (incl power/diversity/ equality)	Mission in Contemporary Scotland 2 (20) * – Culture, Population, Religious Diversity, Secularity	*Assessed Placement 3b (10)* *RP Focus: Holistic Mission/ 5 Marks/JPIC*	Intensive – Digital Communication, Mission and Theology

3. Not For Credit (Nfc) Additional Courses for Formation

The Director of Studies and People & Training Team, in consultation with Trinity College, will develop a suite of additional courses and subject areas for formation, utilising various modes of delivery including online platforms, in order to create a reserve of flexible resources which can also be shared or adapted for public access via Church of Scotland Learning. Such courses for candidates could be intensives in the summer, short day or weekend courses, conferences, or online provision via Church of Scotland Learning, to be taken at some point during the 'core phase', and/or as part of an integrated First Five Years (FFY) programme post-ordination. Courses where prospective course leaders have been identified are marked.

Life of Faith and Discipleship

- *Nurturing Personal Faith & Spirituality in Ministry*
- *Life as Clergy: Boundaries, Safeguarding and Self-Care*
- *Power and Discrimination in Ministry, including EDI - prospective course leaders*

Christian Scriptures, History and Thought

- *The Global Reformed Tradition, Churches and Presbyterianism*
- *Ecumenical Studies & World Christianity (potentially with Scottish Episcopal Institute)*
- Hebrew & Greek – if not taken as part of the BD

Practice of Ministry/Mission (marked where suitable course leaders can be identified within the Church)

- *Workings of the Church (building management, accounts, manses, Kirk Session, General Trustees, Assembly Trustees, Presbytery Planning etc)*
- *The Law and Polity of the Church of Scotland, incorporating The Churches and the Civil Law – prospective course leaders*
- *What Do We Believe In? The Doctrine and Confessions of the Church of Scotland - available course leader*
- *Discipleship – Growing and Nurturing the Faith of Adults*
- *Religious Questions in Ministry ('Apologetics'), including e.g. suffering, war, human sexuality*
- *Mission as Justice – Public and Political Theology, including refugees and asylum seekers, poverty and injustice*
- *Eco-theology and Creation Sustainability*
- *Team Ministry in Practice, including working with volunteers*
- *Conflict and its Resolution in Practice – prospective course leaders*
- *Stewardship in a Congregation – Generosity and Giftings – available course leader*
- *Schools and Youth Ministry and Spirituality - available course leaders*
- *Rural Ministry and Mission*
- *Mental Health and Pastoral Practice*
- *Disability, Neurodiversity and Trauma-informed Practice in the Church.*
- *Priority Area Congregations and Ministry amongst the Poor*
- *Asian Religions – including Buddhism, Hinduism & Sikhism*

Plus, as presently above as start-of-year 'intensives' taught by Trinity + CofS:

- *Personal Spirituality*
- *Voice Training*
- *Visual Arts, Music, and Drama in Church and Worship – prospective course leaders*
- *'How to Run a Church' – An Intensive Introduction - available course leader*
- *Digital Communication, Mission and Theology*
- *End of Life, Funerals and Bereavement Care*
- *Parish Renewal: Missional Innovation and Church Growth*

Appendix IV

CAPABILITY PROCEDURE FOR PARISH MINISTERS ACT (ACT [ ] 2026)

Edinburgh, [ ] May 2026, Session [ ]

The General Assembly enact and ordain as follows:

Definitions

1.1 In this Act, the following words shall have the following meanings:

(1) "Appointed Person" means a suitably competent minister appointed by Presbytery to act on its behalf, selected from a list maintained by the Legal Questions Committee of ministers with significant experience of parish ministry and who have received training in the administration of the Procedure.

(2) "Capability Committee" means a body of three persons, including at least one minister and at least one elder, drawn from the Capability Pool and constituted to deal with the Procedure under this Act.

(3) "Capability Pool" means a pool of up to fifteen ministers, elders, deacons and members appointed by the General Assembly on the nomination of the Nomination Committee, in line with the process set out in General Assembly Standing Orders for appointing persons to legal bodies, to serve on Capability Committees and Capability Appeal Panels.

(4) "Capability Appeal Panel" means a body of three persons drawn from the Capability Pool and constituted to deal with appeals against capability decisions under Part 3 of the Appendix to this Act.

(5) "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).

(6) "Minister" means a Minister of Word and Sacrament inducted by a Presbytery to a Charge and who is not serving under a contract of employment.

(7) "Procedure" means the Capability Procedure set out in the Appendix to this Act.

1.2 The Faith Action Programme Leadership Team shall make suggestions to the Legal Questions Committee of persons who are suitable for appointment to the Capability Pool. All persons appointed to the Capability Pool shall receive training in the administration of the Procedure.

The Procedure

2. In dealing with matters of capability, a Presbytery shall follow the Procedure set out in the Appendix to this Act.

Purpose of the Procedure: Improvement

3.1 The principal objective of the Procedure is to help Ministers whose performance falls below an acceptable minimum standard to improve in cases where the problems are not disciplinary in nature. It is designed to be supportive and to give Ministers the time, training and resources they need to improve performance.

3.2 It is expected that most performance-related matters will be identified and addressed informally without engaging the Procedure. Nevertheless, there will be occasions where informal steps are not appropriate and, in such cases, it will be necessary to implement the Procedure. If an improvement in performance cannot be achieved through the Procedure, it is possible that the pastoral tie will be severed.

3.3 Capability is demonstrated by the execution of the duties of parish ministry, in an individual context, to an acceptable minimum standard over a sustained period of time. It is about both what a Minister does and how he or she does it.

3.4 In assessing what is an acceptable minimum standard, there should be taken into account:(1) the requirements of the post, (2) the Competency Framework approved by the General Assembly of 2025, (3) the more general requirements of the Code of Professional Practice and Good Conduct for the ministries of the Church of Scotland approved by the General Assembly of 2022 and (4) the Terms of Responsibility for Ministers Serving in the Church of Scotland agreed by the General Assembly of 2024.

3.5 Lack of capability in one particular charge does not necessarily mean that the Minister is not capable of exercising any Ministerial function. Removal from one particular charge on capability grounds does not remove a Minister's status nor does it debar him/her from seeking another charge. However, a Minister who has been removed from a pastoral charge following use of the Procedure will be re-registered in the Register of Ministry maintained in terms of the Registration of Ministries Act (Act II 2017) in such category and with such conditions attached to his or her registration as may be determined by the relevant Capability Committee.

Principles for operating the Procedure

4.1 The Procedure is based on the following principles:

a. the Procedure must not be used in response to complaints that are found to be frivolous or unsubstantiated;

b. unsatisfactory performance;

c. the Procedure should be carried out in a way that is fully in accord with the principles of natural justice;

d. appropriate HR and legal advice should be taken by those responsible for operating the Procedure;

e. the Minister should be given the opportunity to respond to all points made;

f. reasonable notice should be given in advance of any meeting;

g. the Minister should have the right to be supported by a colleague or some other appropriate person who is not acting in a legal capacity;

h. sanctions should only be imposed if the Minister has not reached the specified level of improvement having been given reasonable opportunities to do so;

i. there should be a right of appeal against a decision to sever the pastoral tie;

j. meetings to resolve matters should be held as soon as reasonably possible after the issue has been raised and the evidence gathered, in order to minimise the level of anxiety experienced by those involved;

k. incapability related to ill health should be handled with reference to section 10 of this Act; and

l. the Presbytery should ensure that appropriate pastoral support and care is provided for Ministers undergoing the Procedure.

4.2 A decision to sever the pastoral tie on the ground of lack of capability should never be the outcome of a single meeting, but only after a series of conversations that have:

- assessed the evidence;
- recorded dissatisfaction with performance;
- provided evidence of opportunities given to improve and develop; and
- noted where there was persistent failure to improve.

4.3 Before a Procedure begins, a Minister shall be informed in writing of:

a. any matters relating to his/her performance which are to be taken into account in assessing his or her performance;

b. the details of the Procedure which is to be followed in assessing his or her performance which shall include the opportunity of a meeting between the Minister and the Appointed Person;

c. any action which may be taken following the completion of the Procedure;

d. the Minister's right of appeal against any decision to sever the pastoral tie.

4.4 Once the formal stage of the Procedure has been initiated by the issuing of a letter to the Minister in terms of paragraph 5 of the Procedure, a Minister shall not be entitled to demit his or her status or charge.

Keeping records

5.1 It is important, in the interests of all parties, to keep written records during the Procedure. All personal data should be held and used in compliance with the Data Protection Act 2018. Records should include:

- the concerns raised about the Minister's capability;
- the Minister's response;
- findings made and actions taken;
- the reasons for actions taken;
- whether an appeal was lodged;
- the outcome of the appeal; and
- any subsequent developments.

5.2 Records should be treated as confidential.

5.3 Copies of meeting records should be given to the Minister, including copies of any formal minutes that have been taken. In certain circumstances (for example to protect a person supplying information) the Data Protection Act 2018 may allow some information to be withheld.

After the severing of the pastoral tie

6. Where the final Capability Committee at stage 3 of the formal part of the Procedure decides that the Minister is unsuitable for his or her current position, and should be removed from it, it is important to continue to provide support and pastoral care. In some cases, it might be appropriate to provide career counselling.

Membership of the Capability Committee

7.1 The Minister should be given the right to object to membership of the Committee, but only on cause shown.

7.2 Membership of the Capability Committee should where possible be the same at each stage of the Procedure, but no member of the Capability Committee may sit on any Capability Appeal Panel in the same case. Where necessary, for example because of illness, the Appointed Person may ask a substitute to serve on the Committee.

7.3 A decision may be reached by a majority of two out of three Committee members.

Use of a shortened Procedure

8.1 There will be exceptional cases in which the Procedure may be shortened, but the principles of natural justice and the opportunity to appeal against severance of the pastoral tie must not be jeopardised. They will include the following:

a. Cases where immediate improvement can be expected, through an easily acquired alternative pattern of behaviour or action likely to produce immediate effects. If the expected improvement does not occur, and there are no mitigating circumstances such as ill health or personal difficulties, the Procedure could move through each stage fairly quickly.

b. Cases arising during the first year of a Minister's tenure where it becomes clear that he or she is not suited to the post and so not capable of undertaking what is required.

c. Cases of ill health (see section 10 below).

8.2 In these very particular cases, the Appointed Person, with advice as appropriate from the Head of HR and the Solicitor of the Church, may decide that a shortened Procedure should be used. Only one stage of the Procedure may be dropped: that is, there must always be a formal warning stage prior to holding a final capability meeting that might result in the severing of the pastoral tie.

Implementation of decision at Presbytery

9.1 The Presbytery shall meet within not less than 21 and not more than 35 days after receiving intimation of the written decision of the Capability Committee at stage 3 of the formal part of the Procedure and shall take any steps which may be required to implement the decision.

9.2 In the event of an appeal being lodged by a Minister against such a decision of the Capability Committee, the Presbytery shall meet not less than 21 and not more than 35 days after receiving intimation of the written decision of the Capability Appeal Panel and shall take any steps which may be required to implement the decision.

Incapability due to Ill-Health - Dealing with absence

10.1 The Procedure should be followed where the Minister is not off sick, or is off sick only occasionally or intermittently, but is not performing the duties of the post to an adequate standard. The Procedure should not normally be used if the Trigger Date in terms of the provisions of the Ill Health and Income Protection Act (Act [ ] 2026) or the Income Protection and Ill Health Act (Act VI 2019) has been reached; but the Procedure may on occasion be used in conjunction with these Acts where their application has been so triggered and it is evident that the Minister's absence from work arises in whole or in part from the context in which the Minister is placed.

10.2 Where the Procedure is being used and there are ill health issues, the Procedure must still be followed and must be clearly documented to demonstrate that every attempt has been made to improve attendance or performance. In cases of persistent sickness absence or poor performance as a result of illness, it may be necessary to make clear to the Minister that, however genuine the health problem, severance of the pastoral tie is a possibility because the duties of the office are not being carried out or are not being performed to an adequate standard.

10.3 The handling of incapability due to sickness or injury needs to be distinguished from other capability issues. The Appointed Person should take a sympathetic and considerate approach, and the needs of the Minister must be borne in mind. The Appointed Person shall be entitled to require the Minister to undergo a medical examination (including an Occupational Health assessment) where he/she has reasonable concerns about their health. If the Minister fails to comply with such a direction or authorise the disclosure of any relevant medical records when requested to do so, those operating the Procedure may draw such inferences as appear to them to be appropriate in all the circumstances. In every case there will be different circumstances and varying factors to take into account, so the Procedure must be applied flexibly, for example by using a shortened Procedure as described at section 8 of this Act. In all cases:

a. evidence must be gathered;

b. the Minister must be offered the opportunity to comment;

c. a warning of the consequences of a lack of improvement must be given;

d. help and time must be given to improve;

e. a hearing should be held, if practicable, at which progress is reviewed; and

f. a formal warning stage must take place.

10.4 Time limits for the operation of each stage of the Procedure in sickness cases should, wherever possible, be established by agreement, after taking medical and other appropriate professional advice.

10.5 When thinking about how to handle these cases it is helpful to consider:

i. whether medical advice has been sought or an occupational health referral has been made;

ii. whether, if the Minister has a disability in terms of the Equality Act 2010, steps have been taken to make reasonable adjustments to the working environment or the way the role is carried out;

iii. whether, in other cases of sickness absence, steps have been taken to make temporary adjustments to the working environment or the way the role is carried out, to ease the Minister back to full duties;

iv. the likelihood of, and prospective timescale for, a resumption of the full range of duties to the required standard;

v. whether alternative work might be available and what support might be required to enable the Minister to obtain such work;

vi. the effect of the Minister's absence on the parish and congregation; and

vii. how any similar situations involving the Minister have been handled in the past.

Currency of warnings

11.1 Different periods can apply to different types of warnings. The period of validity should be clear. For example, as a guideline ACAS recommends that a first formal written warning might remain in force for up to six months while a final written warning may remain in force for twelve months (or more in exceptional circumstances). Warnings should cease to be 'live' following the specified period of satisfactory conduct. A decision to sever the pastoral tie should not be based on an expired warning but the fact that there is an expired warning may explain why the Capability Committee does not substitute a lesser sanction.

11.2 There may be occasions where a Minister's conduct is satisfactory throughout the period the warning is in force, only to lapse very soon thereafter. If such a pattern emerges, this should be borne in mind in deciding how long any warning remains in force.

Suspending the Procedure

12.1 If at any time during the course of the Procedure the Appointed Person decides that the concerns that have been identified should properly be dealt with by way of proceedings for discipline in terms of the Discipline Act (Act I 2019), the Appointed Person may by written notice to all parties suspend the Procedure. In such circumstances the capability inquiry will be sisted until such time as the Presbytery Clerk notifies all parties in writing either that the Procedure will be discontinued or that it will be resumed.

12.2 In no circumstances should the Procedure and Discipline proceedings operate at the same time in respect of the same conduct.

APPENDIX – THE CAPABILITY PROCEDURE

PART 1: INFORMAL STAGE – STEPS BEFORE INVOKING THE FORMAL PROCEDURE

1. The role of the Appointed Person

1.1 The oversight of parish ministry is the responsibility of the Presbytery, and it is for the Presbytery to use the Procedure to address inadequate service given by inducted Ministers. An Appointed Person will act on behalf of the Presbytery in these matters and to oversee the Procedure, particularly in the early stages. Where necessary, for example because of illness, the Appointed Person may ask a substitute Appointed Person to serve.

1.2 Any report that raises issues of capability should be referred initially to the Presbytery Clerk, who will refer the matter to the Appointed Person. When the Appointed Person is made aware of a potential capability matter, he or she should ensure that appropriate investigations are made to establish whether there is a capability issue and that written records are kept for later reference. The Procedure should not be taken further if the report that originated it is found to be vexatious or unsubstantiated.

1.3 The Appointed Person should collect information about the issue(s). If the person reporting the alleged capability problem is not prepared to be put on record or participate in the Procedure, the Appointed Person should normally not take the matter any further. If it appears to the Appointed Person that there is nevertheless an issue which requires to be addressed, he or she shall consult with the Presbytery Clerk and may decide to meet with the Minister to discuss any concerns.

1.4 The Appointed Person may discuss the matter with the Kirk Session where concerns have been raised on behalf of the Kirk Session and should ensure that both the person(s) reporting the issue and the Minister are informed about the substance of any such conversation.

1.5 The Appointed Person should consider any other information (which may include the content of a Congregational Action Plan) that helps to provide an overview of the Minister's performance. While some cases may be fairly clear-cut, others may be more complex and might require information to be gathered from a variety of sources.

1.6 Before deciding to implement the informal stage of the Procedure, the Appointed Person should:

- discuss the case with the Head of HR in the Church's HR Department;
- consider (in consultation with the Principal Clerk and the Solicitor of the Church) whether the case should be handled under another procedure e.g. complaints, discipline or ill-health. If poor performance is caused by ill-health, the case should proceed in accordance with section 10 of this Act.
- check whether there might be issues related to misunderstanding arising from (e.g.) cultural assumptions or whether the issue can be resolved in some other way, for example by a timely offer of help or advice.

1.7 Whenever the Appointed Person holds a meeting with a minister, a note-taker should be present.

2. Informal meeting with the Minister

2.1 If the Appointed Person decides to take the matter further, he or she should arrange a meeting with the Minister. The Appointed Person should write to the Minister a letter which complies with the requirements set out in section 4.3 of this Act. The meeting should be held without unreasonable delay whilst allowing the Minister reasonable time to prepare his or her case.

2.2 At the meeting the Appointed Person must review the issues with the Minister. In assessing whether there is a capability issue, the Appointed Person should take account of the Minister's particular strengths and gifts, but should remember that the primary issue will be the requirements of the charge and whether the post holder is meeting them to an acceptable standard.

2.3 One outcome may be that, after the facts have been gathered and considered, a complaint or concern is found to be unjustified or trivial. The Appointed Person may also take the view that the problems that have been identified are the result of particular circumstances or unrealistic expectations and do not give rise to any concerns about capability in the longer term.

2.4 If he or she decides that there is a capability issue, the Appointed Person should:

- indicate a commitment to identifying and overcoming shortcomings in the Minister's performance and a willingness to help with remedial measures;
- explore with the Minister any contributory factors (such as domestic circumstances);
- explore what can be offered to the Minister to assist in improving performance (see paragraph 3 below on helping to improve performance);
- seek to agree with the Minister a plan of action to improve performance;
- and set a date for reviewing progress, in no later than three months' time.

2.5 If the concerns were raised by others, the Appointed Person should inform them that action is being taken and that improvement is expected and will be monitored.

3. Helping to improve performance

3.1 Ways in which a Minister may be helped to improve their performance include:

- coaching
- training
- counselling
- altering working arrangements
- a period of special leave
- mediation
- mentoring
- exploring the possibility of transferring the Minister to other work, if such work is available suggesting that the Minister may wish to have an interview with the Church's People and Training Manager, who will be able to offer confidential advice about the Minister's abilities and help them consider whether it might be appropriate to explore the possibility of finding an alternative post.

3.2 This list is not exhaustive, and other options may be considered in the particular circumstances of each case.

4. Review of progress and decision on whether to move to formal stage

4.1 After the agreed interval, the Appointed Person should review with the Minister and separately with those who initially raised the concerns whether improvement has taken place as hoped. If this review does not include the Kirk Session, the Appointed Person may decide to seek feedback from the Kirk Session.

4.2 The Appointed Person should also review the evidence in consultation with the Head of HR.

4.3 Having carried out such reviews, the Appointed Person should decide, on the basis of information gathered from the Minister and those who have been monitoring his or her performance, whether there has been sufficient improvement and, if not, whether or not to move to the formal stage of the Procedure. If the Appointed Person decides that sufficient improvement has taken place, he or she should write to the Minister confirming this and that no further action will be taken in relation to these concerns unless there is a recurrence in the future. If the appointed Person decides that sufficient improvement has not taken place, he or she should move to Part 2 (the Formal Stage) of the Procedure.

PART 2: THE FORMAL STAGE OF THE PROCEDURE

5. Initiating the formal stage of the Procedure

5.1 The Appointed Person should inform the Minister and the Presbytery Clerk that formal action will be taken.

5.2 From this point on, the Head of HR (or another member of staff of the HR department in the national office), who should work with the Appointed Person to ensure that the Procedure is properly followed, should be involved at every stage.

6. The right to be accompanied

6.1 The Minister should be given the right (subject to making a reasonable request) to be accompanied at all formal stages by a colleague or other appropriate person who is not (other than as permitted in terms of paragraph 9.5 below) acting in a legal capacity. What is reasonable will depend on the circumstances of each individual case. However, it will not be reasonable for a Minister to insist on being accompanied by someone whose presence would prejudice the hearing.

7. Formal procedure stage one – Appointed Person and first formal written warning

7.1 The Appointed Person, after taking advice from the Head of HR, should write to the Minister requiring him or her to attend a meeting with the Appointed Person and a representative from the HR Department. The meeting should be held without unreasonable delay whilst allowing the Minister reasonable time to prepare his or her case.

7.2 The letter referred to in paragraph 7.1 should provide information about the alleged incapability including copies of any documents which will be produced at the meeting and an invitation to the Minister to request the support of a colleague or other appropriate person who is not acting in a legal capacity.

7.3 A Minister who cannot attend a meeting should inform the Appointed Person well in advance whenever possible. If the Minister fails to attend through circumstances outside his or her control and unforeseeable at the time the meeting was arranged (e.g. illness) the Appointed Person should arrange another meeting. A decision may be taken in the Minister's absence if the Minister fails to attend the re-arranged meeting without good reason being notified to the Appointed Person before the time of the meeting.

7.4 If a Minister's colleague or other appropriate person cannot attend on a proposed date, the Minister may suggest another date, so long as it is reasonable.

7.5 At the meeting, the Appointed Person should explain the nature of the issues to the Minister and go through the information and documentation that has been gathered. The Minister should be given the opportunity to set out his or her case and answer any allegations that have been made. The Minister should also be allowed to ask questions.

7.6 The Minister's colleague or other appropriate person should be permitted, with the Minister's permission, to ask questions and make representations, but they should not be allowed to answer questions on behalf of the Minister.

7.7 Following the meeting, the Appointed Person should decide whether or not there is an ongoing capability issue. If not, the Minister should be informed in writing, and the matter goes no further.

7.8 If the Appointed Person decides that there is a capability issue, he or she should then go on to consider whether a warning is justified or not. In coming to a decision, account should be taken of:

- the Minister's service as a whole
- the available information and documentation
- actions taken in any previous case involving the Minister;
- the explanations given by the Minister; and
- whether the imposition of a formal warning is reasonable in all the circumstances.

7.9 If the Appointed Person decides that a first formal written warning should be given, he or she should write to the Minister:

- setting out the performance problem which has been identified and the improvement required, including an improvement plan incorporating targets, standards, deadlines and any further support or assistance;
- seeking the commitment of the Minister to reaching the required standards;
- setting up regular progress review meetings during the review period;
- issuing a first formal warning with reasons, which the Minister is told will be placed on his or her personal file; and
- informing the Minister that if there is no satisfactory improvement within a specified time period (normally between six weeks and three months depending on the nature of the issue) the outcome may be severance of the pastoral tie.

7.10 The Appointed Person should at the same time give a copy of the letter referred to in paragraph 8.9 to the Presbytery Clerk and to the Convener of the Superintendence Committee (or equivalent body) of the Presbytery.

7.11 A copy of the letter should be used as the basis for monitoring and reviewing performance over the specified period. This monitoring should be carried out by the Appointed Person in consultation with the Head of HR and should involve discussion with the Minister, the Session Clerk and those who initially raised the concerns to determine whether improvement has taken place. Any separate conversations with those who raised the matter or with the Session Clerk should be reported to the Minister. If at the end of the review period the Appointed Person considers that there has been a substantial but insufficient improvement, he or she may decide to extend the review period for a maximum of a further four weeks.

8. Formal procedure stage two - final formal written warning

8.1 At the end of the period specified in the first formal written warning, the Appointed Person should again gather information as appropriate from those who have reported problems with the Minister's capability and others and from the Minister. The Appointed Person may decide that the required improvement has taken place; or that it is necessary to move to the next stage. He or she should inform the Presbytery Clerk accordingly.

8.2 The Appointed Person should write to the Minister as soon as possible after the end of the period specified in the first formal written warning.

8.3 The letter should either:

a. advise the Minister that the Procedure is being discontinued in view of improved performance, with the expectation that standards will be maintained and that if his or her performance falls below the expected standard in the future the Procedure will be re-commenced, or

b. set out the unresolved performance issues and invite the Minister to a meeting with a Capability Committee to discuss the matter. The meeting should be held without unreasonable delay whilst allowing the Minister reasonable time to prepare his or her case.

8.4 The same process should be followed as for the first formal meeting described above. Notice of the decision of the Committee, with reasons, should be given to the Minister as soon as possible after the meeting.

8.5 If the Committee agrees that a final formal written warning should be given, the Committee should write a letter to the Minister:

- setting out the performance problem and improvements required;
- issuing a final formal warning with reasons, which he or she should be told will be placed on his or her personal file; and
- informing the Minister that, if there is no satisfactory improvement within a specified time period (normally between six weeks and two months from the date of the final written warning, depending on the nature of the issue), the outcome may be the severance of the pastoral tie.

8.6 The Committee should at the same time give a copy of the letter referred to in paragraph 9.5 to the Presbytery Clerk and to the Convener of the Superintendence Committee (or equivalent body) of the Presbytery.

8.7 A copy of the Committee's letter should be used as the basis for monitoring and reviewing performance over the specified period. This monitoring should be carried out by the Appointed Person in consultation with the Head of HR and should involve discussion with the Minister, the Kirk Session and those who initially raised the concerns to determine whether improvement has taken place. Any separate conversations with those who raised the matter or with the Kirk Session should be reported to the Minister. If at the end of the review period the Appointed Person considers that there has been a substantial but insufficient improvement, he or she may decide to extend the review period for a maximum of a further four weeks.

9. Formal procedure stage three – severing the pastoral tie

9.1 The same process should be followed as for the first and second stages described above.

9.2 If at the end of the period prescribed in the final formal written warning the Appointed Person considers that the required improvement has taken place, no further action will be taken unless there is a recurrence of the concerns. If at the end of the period specified in the final formal written warning the Appointed Person considers that the required improvement has not taken place, he or she should write to the Minister notifying him or her that the required improvement has not taken place and requiring him or her to attend a formal hearing of the Capability Committee (which should where possible comprise the same people who sat on the previous Committee) to determine whether or not the pastoral tie should be severed.

9.3 The Appointed Person should give reasonable notice of the date of the hearing. The Minister should also be given:

9.4 If the Appointed Person and/or the Minister intend to call relevant witnesses they must give advance notice to the other party and the Committee members.

9.5 The Minister should be given the opportunity of making a representation to the Committee as to how he or she is able to meet the required standard and why the pastoral tie should not be severed. At this hearing (but not at any prior hearings) the Minister shall be entitled to legal representation and to apply for financial assistance towards the cost of such representation in terms of the Legal Aid in Disciplinary Proceedings Regulations (Regulations I 2018). The Committee should also have legal representation, provided by a solicitor within the Church's Law Department, if the Minister is legally represented at this hearing.

9.6 Notice of the decision of the Committee, with reasons, should be given to the Minister and to the Presbytery as soon as possible after the meeting. If so instructed by the Committee, the Presbytery shall forthwith re-categorise the Minister in the Register of Ministry and record any conditions attached to such categorisation. A copy of the Committee's decision shall be intimated to the Presbytery Clerk, to the Head of the Ministries and Mission, Faith Action Programme and to the Registrar of the Registration of Ministries Committee.

9.7 If the Committee decides that the pastoral tie should be severed, the Presbytery Clerk should normally serve notice in writing on the Minister:

- severing the tie with effect from a date three months after the date of the notice (the severance may be with immediate effect, with stipend being paid in lieu of notice and the Minister being entitled to remain in the manse for that three-month period);
- stating the reason for severing the pastoral tie;
- informing the Minister that he or she has the right to appeal;
- giving the Minister normally seven days after the date of receipt of the letter (or longer if in all the circumstances seven days is unreasonable) to indicate his or her intention to appeal in writing to the Solicitor of the Church as Clerk to the Capability Appeal Panel; and
- requiring him or her to state briefly the grounds of any appeal.

PART 3: APPEALS

10.1 If a Minister appeals within the period specified in paragraph 9.7, the Solicitor should promptly arrange to appoint a Capability Appeal Panel, who should invite the Minister to an appeal hearing. The appeal hearing should be held without unreasonable delay whilst allowing the Minister reasonable time to prepare his or her case. For the avoidance of doubt, the appeal shall be dealt with in terms of this procedure and not in terms of the Appeals Act (Act I 2014) nor the Ministries Appeal Panel Act (Act VII 2007).

10.2 No-one who is a member of a Capability Committee may serve on a Capability Appeal Panel in the same case, although the Capability Appeal Panel may ask members of the Capability Committee to appear before it or provide information in writing.

10.3 A Minister may appeal on the following grounds:

- that in the course of the stage three hearing there were irregularities in the process contrary to natural justice which may have had a material effect on the outcome, or
- that the decision of the stage three hearing was unduly influenced by incorrect or immaterial facts, or failed to take sufficient account of relevant material facts

10.4 The Minister's Notice of appeal should indicate briefly the grounds on which the appeal is based. The Capability Appeal Panel may request further information in writing prior to the date of the appeal hearing. A decision by the Capability Appeal Panel not to hear an appeal on the basis that no competent grounds of appeal have been put forward shall require the concurrence of the Principal Clerk and the Solicitor of the Church.

10.5 The appeal may be a complete re-hearing of the matter or it may be a review of the fairness of the original decision in the light of the process that was followed and any new information that may have come to light. This will be at the discretion of the Capability Appeal Panel depending on the circumstances of the case. The decision of the Capability Appeal Panel may be reached by a majority of two out of three members and may be to confirm the original decision, revoke the original decision or substitute a different decision. Notice should be given to the Minister as soon as possible after the appeal hearing setting out the decision of the Capability Appeal Panel, with reasons.

10.6 The appeal hearing should be attended by:

- the Appointed Person;
- a legal adviser, from the Church's Law Department;
- the Head of HR;
- the Capability Appeal Panel;
- the Minister and his or her companion (if any); and
- any relevant witnesses for either party where due notice has been given.

10.7 The Minister shall be entitled to legal representation at the appeal hearing and to apply for financial assistance towards the cost of such representation in terms of the Legal Aid in Disciplinary Proceedings Regulations (Regulations I 2018).

10.8 If an appeal is against severance of the pastoral tie, the date on which that takes effect will be delayed pending the outcome of the appeal.

10.9 The decision of the Capability Appeal Panel shall be final. Notice of the decision of the Panel, with reasons, should be given to the Minister and to the Presbytery as soon as possible after the meeting. If so instructed by the Committee, the Presbytery shall forthwith re-categorise the Minister in the Register of Ministry and record any conditions attached to such categorisation. A copy of the Committee's decision shall also be intimated to the Principal Clerk, to the Head of the Ministries and Mission, Faith Action Programme and to the Registrar of the Registration of Ministries Committee.

10.10 If the Panel upholds the decision of the Capability Committee to sever the pastoral tie, then once procedure has been followed under section 9.2 of this Act, the Presbytery Clerk should normally serve notice in writing on the Minister confirming that the pastoral tie has been severed with effect from a date one month after the date of the notice (the severance may be with immediate effect, with stipend being paid in lieu of notice and the Minister being entitled to remain in the manse for that one-month period).

Appendix V

ILL HEALTH AND INCOME PROTECTION ACT (ACT [ ] 2026)

Edinburgh, [ ] May 2026, Session [ ]

The General Assembly hereby enact and ordain as follows:

Definitions and Interpretation

1. For the purposes of this Act and the Schedule attached hereto:

(a) "absence" shall mean absence from duties through ill health and "absent" shall be construed accordingly; absence for any other reason, including compassionate leave or study leave, shall be notified to the Presbytery and, in all cases except where this is not reasonably practicable, shall be subject to the permission of the Presbytery, but shall not be otherwise subject to the provisions of this Act;

(b) "FAPLT" shall mean the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team;

(c) "Ill Health Committee" shall mean a committee of three persons, comprising the Presbytery Clerk (or his or her appointed substitute), one member of the Presbytery of the bounds appointed for a fixed term to that office and one staff member of FAPLT;

(d) "Income Protection" shall mean insurance, with a deferred period of fifty two weeks, to protect against loss of income due to long term ill health;

(e) "Income Protection Provider" shall mean the Church's income protection provider for ministers from time to time;

(f) "Medical Assessment" shall mean an assessment from the Income Protection Provider of medical information supplied to the Income Protection Provider, which Medical Assessment may be indicative or final and which Medical Assessment shall give a view as to whether or not the minister is at that time (i) able or unable to perform his or her current role, and (ii) eligible or ineligible for Income Protection;

(g) a "minister" shall mean a minister inducted to a charge;

(h) "OHP Report" means a report prepared by an Occupational Health Physician appointed by FAPLT as to the ability of the minister to perform his or her current role;

(i) "Overall Absence Threshold" shall mean an absence period of a total of 500 days in any rolling three-year period;

(j) the phrase "return(s)(ed) to work" shall include a phased return;

(k) "Trigger Date" means the date on which a minister's absence has extended to six months continuously, or has totalled 180 days out of any rolling twenty four month period;

(l) "UK State Pension Age" shall mean a person's UK State Pension Age as determined at the relevant time by the UK Government's calculations[1];

(m) Where months are referred to, that means calendar months.

(n) The headings in this Act are for information only and do not form part of this Act.

Procedure for notifying ill-health

2.

(1) Whenever a minister is absent from work due to ill-health, he or she shall inform FAPLT in terms of the Procedure appended as Schedule A to this Act.

(2) Failure to fulfil the requirements of Schedule A shall be intimated to the Presbytery, which may consider whether the minister is in desertion of his or her charge or whether any other matter of discipline has arisen.

3. The Presbytery shall be informed by its Clerk of the minister's absence (a) if an Interim Moderator is to be appointed, or (b) if the Presbytery requires to take any action in support or superintendence of the minister's congregation(s).

OHP Report

3A. At any time, whether or not a Trigger Date has occurred in terms of this Act, a Presbytery or an Ill Health Committee or FAPLT (in the case of FAPLT, after consultation with the Presbytery) may, in respect of a minister who is subject to the Presbytery's jurisdiction, make a referral to an Occupational Health Physician appointed by FAPLT and may require that an OHP Report be obtained. If this occurs, the minister shall co-operate fully in the preparation of the OHP Report. An Ill Health Committee shall consider, when following process under section 7 of this Act (ie in respect of a minister who is of an age such that after Medical Assessment he or she might be eligible to receive Income Protection), whether or not it might be helpful also to obtain an OHP Report in addition to ascertaining whether the minister might be eligible to receive Income Protection.

Pastoral support

4. FAPLT and the Presbytery shall work together throughout any period of absence of the minister to offer pastoral support, assistance and advice to the minister and to the affected congregation(s).

5. In relation to pastoral support of the minister, the following arrangements shall apply:

(1) Where an absence continues for four weeks or there have been several recent absences, the minister and FAPLT shall consult on the nature of his or her ill-health, and the extent to which it might be work-related;

(2) FAPLT shall, through its staff members or through external support services, offer to provide the minister with access to support interventions appropriate to the circumstances of the minister's absence, which may include provision of reasonable adjustments, coaching, counselling, supervision, therapy, Access to Work provisions, obtaining an OHP Report and/or phased return

(3) The minister will be expected to do all that he or she can to ensure a return to optimum health and to work.

Ill Health Committee

6. A Presbytery shall form an Ill Health Committee as required to deal with matters arising under this Act. Where a Committee is to be formed, the Presbytery shall request confirmation from FAPLT of the name of the staff member to appoint.

Minister's ill health – procedure for ministers eligible for Income Protection

7.

(1) Where the minister is of an age such that after Medical Assessment he or she might be eligible to receive Income Protection, the procedure set out in subsections 7(2) to (4) below shall apply.

(2) Following the Trigger Date:

(a) FAPLT shall as soon as practicable contact the minister to advise him or her of the terms of this Act and shall contact the Presbytery of the bounds to confirm that the provisions of this Act have been triggered;

(b) FAPLT shall as soon as practicable make a referral in respect of the minister to the Income Protection Provider, shall supply and facilitate provision of the required information to the Income Protection Provider and shall request that an indicative Medical Assessment on the minister is prepared; the minister shall co-operate fully in the preparation of any Medical Assessment;

(c) once the indicative Medical Assessment is available, normally around three months after the Trigger Date, the Ill Health Committee shall meet with the minister as soon as possible, to discuss the indicative Medical Assessment and to consider whether or not the minister is likely to be able to return to work within six months after the Trigger Date;

(d) subject to section 7(4), if the minister returns to work no later than six months after the Trigger Date then no further process shall occur under this Act at that time;

(e) the Ill Health Committee shall meet again with the minister once the final Medical Assessment is available, normally around six months after the Trigger Date. Within a further period of one month (ie by seven months after the Trigger Date) the minister must intimate whether or not he or she shall demit his or her charge with effect from a date which is at latest nine months after the Trigger Date. The Ill Health Committee shall, as soon as practicable after receipt of such intimation (or, in the absence of such intimation, within a period of eight months after the Trigger Date), report to Presbytery that the pastoral tie should be severed with effect from the date nine months after the Trigger Date, save that the Ill Health Committee shall have discretion to report otherwise in the following situations:

(i) the minister is undergoing medical treatment, or is in the process of post-operative recovery, and the prognosis is that he or she will be able to return to work imminently; or

(ii) the absence of the minister has resulted from more than one unrelated health cause in succession and it has not been possible to carry out a Medical Assessment for that reason; or

(iii) where FAPLT, after appropriate consultation, agrees that discretion should be exercised.

(f) Following the Presbytery's receipt of the Ill Health Committee's report under subsection 7(2)(e), the Presbytery (or those with delegated powers in this respect) shall meet within twenty one days to implement it. The Presbytery's decision shall be intimated without delay to the minister.

(g) If the Presbytery does not sever the pastoral tie, it (or those with delegated powers in this respect) shall meet again with the Ill Health Committee at regular intervals thereafter to consider whether the pastoral tie should be severed. If a minister has not returned to full work duties by the date which is twelve months after the Trigger Date, then subject to section 9A, the Presbytery shall sever the pastoral tie with effect from twelve months after the Trigger Date.

(3) For the avoidance of doubt, the Presbytery may sever the pastoral tie whether or not the minister is, in terms of the final Medical Assessment, eligible for Income Protection.

(4) This section 7 is subject to sections 8A and 8B.

Minister's ill health – procedure for ministers ineligible for Income Protection

8.

1. Where the minister is of an age such that he or she will not be eligible to receive Income Protection, the procedure set out in subsections 8(2) and (3) below shall apply.

2. Following the Trigger Date:

   (a) FAPLT shall as soon as practicable contact the minister to advise him or her of the terms of this Act and shall contact the Presbytery of the bounds to confirm that the provisions of this Act have been triggered;

   (b) FAPLT shall as soon as practicable make a referral in respect of the minister to an Occupational Health Physician appointed by FAPLT and shall request that an OHP Report on the minister is prepared; the minister shall co-operate fully in the preparation of the OHP Report;

   (c) once the OHP Report is available, the Ill Health Committee shall meet with the minister as soon as possible, to discuss the OHP Report and to consider whether or not the minister is likely to be able to return to work within six months after the Trigger Date;

   (d) subject to section 8(3), if the minister returns to work no later than six months after the Trigger Date then no further process shall occur under this Act at that time;

   (e) the Ill Health Committee shall meet again with the minister around six months after the Trigger Date and may request a further OHP Report. Within a further period of one month (ie by seven months after the Trigger Date) the minister must intimate whether or not he or she shall demit his or her charge with effect from a date which is at latest nine months after the Trigger Date. The Ill Health Committee shall, as soon as practicable after receipt of such intimation (or, in the absence of such intimation, within a period of eight months after the Trigger Date), report to Presbytery that the pastoral tie should be severed with effect from the date nine months after the Trigger Date, save that the Ill Health Committee shall have discretion to report otherwise in the following situation:

      (i) the minister is undergoing medical treatment, or is in the process of post-operative recovery, and the prognosis is that he or she will be able to return to work imminently; or

      (ii) where FAPLT, after appropriate consultation, agrees that discretion should be exercised.

   (f) Following the Presbytery's receipt of the Ill Health Committee's report under subsection 8(2)(e), the Presbytery (or those with delegated powers in this respect) shall meet within twenty one days to implement it. The Presbytery's decision shall be intimated without delay to the minister.

   (g) If the Presbytery does not sever the pastoral tie, it (or those with delegated powers in this respect) shall meet again with the Ill Health Committee at regular intervals thereafter to consider whether the pastoral tie should be severed. For the avoidance of doubt, if a minister has not returned to full work duties by the date which is twelve months after the Trigger Date, then subject to section 9A, the Presbytery shall sever the pastoral tie with effect from twelve months after the Trigger Date.

3. This section 8 is subject to sections 8A and 8B.

Overall absence

8A. Where a minister is absent for a duration of or exceeding the Overall Absence Threshold, whether or not Trigger Date(s) have been reached and whether or not process has occurred to any extent under sections 7 or 8 of this Act, but the minister is still inducted to the charge, the Presbytery, after consulting with the Ill Health Committee, may decide to sever the pastoral tie at any time thereafter. The provisions of section 9 as to overall stipend payments shall apply, and the minister may remain in the manse for a further period of up to three months after the tie is severed under the General Trustees' Standard Conditions for Occupation of a Manse on a Caretaker basis; if this happens, the minister shall be responsible for any payments due to HMRC in respect of his or her occupation of the manse other than any National Insurance contributions due, payment of which shall be made by the Presbytery.

Further absence

8B. Where a minister returns to full work duties such that no further process occurs at that time, but then is absent again within the twenty four month period following the date of his or her return to full work duties, such subsequent absence which occurs within any rolling twenty four month period will be taken into account for the purposes of calculating a new Trigger Date and implementing the other provisions of this Act.

Stipend and Income Protection

9.

(1) A minister who is absent in terms of this Act and who is eligible to be assessed for Income Protection benefit shall receive payment as follows, subject to sub-section (4):

(a) He or she shall be entitled to receive payment of an amount equivalent to (i) stipend appropriate to the charge and years of service at the date absence commenced for an overall period of twelve months if Income Protection is received, and fifteen months if not. Payment shall be at full rate for six months, half rate for the next six months and one third rate for a further three months (if applicable), (ii) the appropriate employer's pension contribution, and (iii) if applicable, Car Allowance, all subject to deduction of tax and National Insurance contributions

(b) Subject to sections 9(1)(c) and 9(1)(d), where such a minister is found, in terms of the final Medical Assessment, to be eligible for Income Protection, he or she shall be entitled to receive payment of an amount equivalent to one third of stipend appropriate to the charge and years of service at the date absence commenced (subject to appropriate deductions) plus the appropriate employer's pension contribution. Payment will begin on:

(i) where this Act is triggered by six months' continuous absence, the date twelve months after absence commenced, or

(ii) where this Act is triggered by an absence of 180 days out of a twenty-four-month period, the date six months after the Trigger Date.

Payment will continue until the minister is assessed by the Income Protection Provider as able to return to full work duties, or as no longer eligible for Income Protection, or until the date of the minister's UK State Pension Age, whichever of the three is earliest.

(c) During the whole time that a minister is in receipt of payments in terms of this section 9(1), the minister shall require to provide continuous medical certificates (fit notes) to FAPLT.

(d) The minister's eligibility for Income Protection will be determined according to the rules and procedures of the Income Protection Provider as they exist from time to time, which rules may include regular reassessment of the minister as to eligibility.

(e) The amount payable to the minister in terms of this section 9(1) may be reduced if income over a certain amount (determined by the Income Protection Provider) is earned by the minister while he or she is in receipt of payments under this section 9(1).

(2) A minister who is absent in terms of this Act and who is not eligible to be assessed for Income Protection benefit shall receive payment as follows:
He or she shall be entitled to receive an amount equivalent to (i) stipend appropriate to the charge and years of service at the date absence commenced for an overall period of fifteen months. Payment shall be at full rate for six months, half rate for the next six months and one third rate for a further three months, (ii) the appropriate employer's pension contribution, and (iii) if applicable, Car Allowance, all subject to deduction of tax and National Insurance contributions.

(3) Notwithstanding sections 9(1) and (2), FAPLT may agree, on the advice of the Ill Health Committee, that a minister who is absent in terms of this Act may, once payments under section 9(1) or (2) have expired and where the pastoral tie has not been severed, receive payment equivalent to one-third of stipend appropriate to the charge and years of service at the date absence commenced (subject to appropriate deductions) and employer's pension contribution, for such period as it may determine is appropriate, in its sole discretion, in the following circumstances:

(a) the minister falls under section 8(1) and the Presbytery has not severed the pastoral tie because the minister is undergoing medical treatment or is in the process of post-operative recovery and the prognosis is that he or she will be able to return to work imminently; or

(b) the absence of the minister has resulted from more than one unrelated health cause in succession; or

(c) the minister is awaiting the outcome of a review/appeal under section 12(2);

(4) Save as specified in section 9(3), and subject to the discretion of FAPLT, after appropriate consultation, no minister shall be entitled to receive, in any rolling three year period, overall payments equivalent to stipend, during period(s) of absence, of more than full rate for six months, half rate for six months and one third rate for three months.

Phased return

9A. On a phased return, the minister will receive full stipend for up to six weeks. If the minister has not returned to full work duties after six weeks, discussions shall take place between the minister, FAPLT and the Presbytery with a view to agreeing the minister's duties going forward, on the understanding that a part-time role may not be feasible and stipend paid shall be appropriate to duties performed.

Manse

10.

(1) Wherever this Act applies and results in the minister demitting his or her charge or in the pastoral tie being severed, then subject to subsections (2)(a) and (b) below, the minister shall be entitled to remain in his or her manse for one or other of the following periods:

(a) where this Act is triggered by six months' continuous absence, for a maximum period of fifteen months from the date when absence commenced, or

(b) where this Act is triggered by an absence of 180 days out of a twenty four month period, during that absence and then for a further period of nine months from the Trigger Date.

(2) Exceptionally, where the Ill Health Committee deems it to be necessary, the minister may remain in occupation of the manse for a further period of up to three months after the date ascertained by subsection 10(1) and that under the General Trustees' Standard Conditions for Occupation of a Manse on a Caretaker basis; if this happens, the minister shall be responsible for any payments due to HMRC in respect of his or her occupation of the manse other than any National Insurance contributions due, payment of which shall be made by the Presbytery.

Confidentiality

11. The Ill Health Committee shall conduct its proceedings and hold meetings in private and shall treat all its information and discussions in confidence. Meetings shall be minuted and the minute held in a Record Apart. For the avoidance of doubt, the Ill Health Committee shall retain in confidence all Medical Assessments and OH Reports received.

Appeals

12.

(1) An appeal against a decision of the Presbytery taken in terms of section 7(2)(f) or (g) or 8(2)(f) or (g) of this Act may be brought by a minister on the following grounds: (a) material irregularity of process; or (b) decision influenced by incorrect material fact. The intention to appeal must be intimated to the Principal Clerk by the minister within fourteen days of the date on which the Presbytery's decision was intimated to the minister. The appeal shall be heard by the Ministries Appeal Panel in terms of the Ministries Appeal Panel Act (Act VI 2007). For the avoidance of doubt:

(a) no appeal may be brought as to the terms of an indicative Medical Assessment;

(b) the terms of a final Medical Assessment may only be appealed as referred to in sections 12(2) and 12(3) below respectively; and

(c) no appeal may be brought as to the exercise by the Ill Health Committee or FAPLT of any discretion given to them under this Act.

(2) A minister who is aggrieved at the terms of a final Medical Assessment may ask FAPLT to invoke the Income Protection Provider's appeals process, in which case FAPLT, if it agrees, may do so, and the decision of the Income Protection Provider on the matter after the appeals process has been completed shall be final. To initiate this process, the minister must make a written request to FAPLT to invoke the Income Protection Provider's appeals process within fourteen days of receiving the final Medical Assessment.

(3) No appeals save as stated in sections 12(1) and 12(2) shall be available in respect of matters covered by this Act.

Registration of Ministries

13. Where in terms of this Act a minister demits his or her charge or a pastoral tie is severed, the minister shall thereafter be registered on the Register of Ministry in Category R or Category I, the decision as to which category being determined by the Ill Health Committee or the Presbytery, as appropriate. The normal rights of appeal against the decision of the Ill Health Committee or the Presbytery, as the case may be, (as set out in the Registration of Ministries Act (Act II 2017)) shall be available to the minister.

Meetings

14. Meetings between the Ill Health Committee and the minister may take place by conference call, video conference call or other appropriate medium.

Commencement of this Act & Transitional provisions

15.

(1) This Act shall come into force from 1 June 2026.

(2) Sections 1, 2, 3, 3A, 4, 5, 6, 11, 12, 13 and 14 shall apply from that date.

(3) In respect of the remaining provisions of the Act (ie sections 7, 8, 8A, 8B, 9, 9A and 10), they shall apply as follows: (i) if the Trigger Date for a minister is to be calculated on the basis of six months' continuous absence, they shall apply to any minister whose first day of absence is on or after 1 June 2026; (ii) if the Trigger Date for a minister is to be calculated on the basis of absence totalling 180 days in a rolling twenty four month period, they shall apply to any minister who reaches that total on or after 1 December 2026 (ie whose Trigger Date is on or after 1 December 2026); and (iii) all other ministers (with the exception of those falling within 3(ii))) who are already absent at 31 May 2026 shall continue to be assessed in terms of the relevant provisions of the Income Protection & Ill Health Act (Act VI 2019).

Repeal

16. The Income Protection and Ill Health Act (Act VI 2019) shall remain in force until such time as all ministers who are absent are being assessed in terms of this Act, at which point it shall be repealed.

Schedule A

Procedure for notifying a minister's absence to FAPLT

1.

(1) Whenever a minister is absent through ill-health, then such minister, or his or her appointed nominee, shall on the first day of such absence notify the Pastoral Support Team of FAPLT in writing.

(2) Where an absence continues for more than seven days, the minister, or his or her appointed nominee, shall, within fourteen days of the first day of absence, provide a medical certificate to the Pastoral Support Team of FAPLT.

(3) The minister, or his or her appointed nominee, shall continue to provide medical certificates covering the whole period of absence, and a final medical certificate showing the date of return to work, throughout the whole period of absence, each such medical certificate to be sent to the Pastoral Support Team of FAPLT within seven days of its date of issue. Payment of stipend during the period of absence, in terms of the foregoing Act, is conditional on compliance by the minister with this requirement.

2. Whenever FAPLT is initially informed by a minister of his or her absence due to ill-health, it shall notify the Clerk to the Presbytery of the bounds. FAPLT shall keep the Payroll Unit of the Stewardship & Finance Department informed as to stipend payable from time to time.

3. FAPLT shall maintain the appropriate absence records and shall provide information to the Presbytery upon request.

[1] Ascertained currently by the calculator found on the gov.uk website

Appendix VI

ILL-HEALTH AND INCOME PROTECTION ACT 2026 TABLE OF CHANGES FROM INCOME PROTECTION AND ILL HEALTH ACT 2019.

TITLE OF SECTION	CHANGE MADE	OLD SECTION	NEW SECTION
Definitions and Interpretations	Minor tidying up of wording	1	1
	Income Protection Insurance deferred period reduces from 78 to 52 weeks	1(d)	1(d)ff
	NEW DEFINITION Overall absence threshold to be 500 days in any 3-year rolling period		1(i)
	REVISED DEFINITION Trigger date	1(k)	1(j)
Procedure for Notifying Ill-Health	Minor tidying up of wording	2	2
OHP Report	NEW SECTION this highlights the procedure for obtaining OHP reports.		3Aff
Pastoral Support	Wording update	5(1)	5(1)
	Insertion of OHP report into list of support interventions	5(2)	5(2)
	New sub-section		5(3)
Ill Health Committee			

Minister's Ill health – Procedure for ministers eligible for Income Protection	Clarified wording	7(2)(b)	7(2)(b)
	Updates/tidying of wording	7(2)(c,e,f)	7(2)(c,e,f)
	Severing of pastoral tie moves from 18 months after trigger date to 12 months after trigger date.	7(2)(g)	7(2)(g) ff
	New section subject to 8A and 8B	7(4)	7(4)
Minister's Ill health – Procedure for ministers ineligible for Income Protection	Clarified wording	8(2)(b,g)	8(2)(b,g)
	Updates/tidying of wording	8(2)(c,e,f)	8(2)(c,e,f)
	New section subject to 8A and 8B	8(3)	8(3)
Overall Absence	NEW SECTION		8A
Further Absence	NEW SECTION		8B
Stipend and Income Protection	Change to stipend payments to 6 months full stipend, 6 months of one half stipend and 3 months of one third stipend.		9(1)(a) ff
	Change the combined absence rules from 300 days in any 22 month period to 180 days in any 24 month rolling period.	9(1)(b)(ii)	9(1)(b)(ii) ff
	Update of Wording		
	Agreed stipend paid during ill -health only once in a 3-year rolling period.	9(1)(c)	9(1)(c)
	Updates	9(1)(4)	9(1)(4)
	New sub-section	9(3)(b,c)	9(3)(b,c)
			9(4)
Phased Return	NEW SECTION		9A
Manse	Variation/update	10 (2) (b)	10(2)
Appeals	Previous Section 3 removed	12(3)	
Registration of Ministries	Unchanged	13	13
Meetings	Unchanged	14	14

Commencement of this Act & Transitional provisions	Updated wording and addition of transitional Provisions	15	15
Repeal	Updated wording	16	16
Schedule A	Minor Tidying of wording	1(1), 2	1(1), 2

ACT AMENDING THE CALL, ELECTION AND APPOINTMENT OF MINISTERS OF WORD AND SACRAMENT ACT (ACT XI 2025)

Edinburgh, [ ] May 2026, Session [ ]

The General Assembly hereby enact and ordain that the Call, Election and Appointment of Ministers of Word and Sacrament Act (Act XI 2025) be amended as follows:

1. *Delete the existing section 28 and substitute the following:*

"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 Vacancy Procedure Committee shall review the matter in consultation with the Presbytery Committee which has responsibility for implementation and review of the Approved Mission Plan. Thereafter the Vacancy Procedure Committee may either (1) remit the matter to the said Committee, which may resolve to review the relevant aspects of the Approved Mission Plan in accordance with the PMP Act or (2) if the Vacancy Procedure Committee is still satisfied that a minister should be appointed, resolve that the Permission to Call shall be reinstated and the Vacancy Procedure Committee shall proceed in one of the following ways:

(a) 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 Vacancy Procedure Committee shall proceed again in terms of this section of the Act and may select any option, including further extensions;

(b) 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 the Vacancy Procedure Committee so resolves. The process shall then be followed in terms of this Act from the point of the election of the Nominating Committee; or

(c) take steps to make such an appointment, proceeding as follows:–

(i) The Vacancy Procedure Committee 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 Presbytery and 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 2025) (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."

Appendix VIII

PROPOSED SABBATICAL SCHEME

What do we understand by a Sabbatical?

At its most basic, a sabbatical is an intentional period of time away from normal day-to-day work agreed between the person on sabbatical and their workplace. Increasingly, secular employers are seeing the value of giving people breathing space from the hectic pace of today's work practices.

For those in Christian service, the above understanding has the wrong focus. Whilst a pastoral sabbatical should include rest and involve time away from day-to-day duties, these are to allow the person on sabbatical to reconnect with God and to renew their soul for the next phase of Christian leadership.

Why undertake a sabbatical?

In the Old Testament, God instructed Israel to adopt rhythms of work and rest. Even the land rested:

> "Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy." [Exodus 8:9-11]
>
> "For six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield, but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave the beasts of the field may eat." (Exodus 23:10-11)

The Gospels also show Jesus taking himself away to a quiet place on numerous occasions. He too built rest into his rhythms:

> "Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed." [Luke 5:15-16]

Between ever-present emails and messages demanding an instant response, the world we live in today does not naturally offer times of rest. Whether you are at home, in the office or on the highest mountain, stepping out requires a conscious act of willpower. Over time, the effect of this can be to disconnect us from God because we spend so much time running just to keep up. How can you hear God when you are so busy keeping everything around you going?

A sabbatical offers the chance to slow down and refocus on God; to let go of the noise to hear God's voice, and to stop answering all the emails so we can see God is talking to us. A sabbatical should reinvigorate a leader for their next phase of ministry.

What is proposed?

Presbyteries would work with applicants to help ensure everything is in place to go on sabbatical.

This includes:

- Reimbursing congregations for pulpit supply fees during the sabbatical
- Managing Expectations
- Clarifying your reasons for wanting to go on sabbatical
- Clarifying expectations on what you want out of the sabbatical
- Clarifying your congregation's expectations of what the sabbatical will and will not be
- Clarifying what Presbytery is hoping to achieve from your sabbatical

Planning

- Ensuring preaching and pastoral cover is in place, to extend to the week following the end of the sabbatical, so you are not thrown back in at the deep end
- Setting the duration of sabbatical, from four to six weeks.
- Prayer support arrangements whilst you are on sabbatical
- Working with the congregation beforehand to identify boundaries, such as popping round to see you whilst on sabbatical or if a significant member of the congregation dies
- Working with you to clarify if you are staying at home or going away, and other practicalities
- Making clear the cost of your sabbatical and any split between local/presbytery funding

Other

- Any other areas to be settled prior to sabbatical

Eligibility

- Anyone in Christian leadership of a congregation
- Agreement of the Kirk Session of all congregations from which sabbatical will be taken
- Agreement of the Presbytery
- A minimum of 5 years within the current charge or congregation that went on to become part of the current charge
- A minimum of 5 years since last taking a presbytery sabbatical

Agreement to undertake a Ministry Development Conversation either at the start or end of the Sabbatical [MIN-Ascend-MDC-BROCHURE-WEB.pdf (churchofscotland.org.uk)] or to find a trusted colleague to support you throughout, who will report on the experience at the end of the Sabbatical.

Note: Pulpit supply will only be reimbursed when evidence of a Ministry Development Conversation or the appointment of a trusted colleague is submitted to Presbytery.

It is also important to remember that rhythms of rest and reflection should be part of our normal Christian lives. It is hoped this initiative will show the value of such rhythms and help applicants to embed them in their day-to-day practice long after their sabbatical period has concluded.

National schemes such as Study Leave, taking regular days off, going on retreat and regular supervision are all also commended to all.

Appendix IX

REGULATIONS AMENDING REGULATIONS FOR REMUNERATION AND REIMBURSEMENT OF PARISH MINISTERS (REGULATIONS I 2015) (AS AMENDED)

11

Edinburgh, [ ] May 2026, Session [ ]

The General Assembly hereby enact and ordain that the Regulations for Remuneration and Reimbursement of Parish Ministers (Regulations I 2015), as amended, be amended as follows:

1. *In the opening paragraph of section 2, after the word "congregation" on line 3 add* ", provided that any claim by the minister must normally be submitted within three months of incurring the expense".

2. *In section 2.7, after the word "duties" add* ", and the cost of subscriptions to programmes, applications and other internet services wholly, necessarily and exclusively required for ministerial duties".

   In the penultimate paragraph of section 2, for the words "Log Book" on line 1, substitute "record (either electronically or in hard copy format)" *and for the words "Log Books" on the final line substitute* "travelling expenses".

3. *In the second bullet point of the Schedule, Part 2, for "Regulations VII, 2007 (Manses) and III, 2013 (Manse Adjudication Committee)" substitute* "The Manse Adjudication Regulations (Regs [ ] 2026)"

4. *In the third bullet point of the Schedule, Part 2, for* "Her Majesty's Revenue and Custom" substitute "His Majesty's Revenue and Customs".

Appendix X

PUBLIC LIFE AND SOCIAL JUSTICE – 2025 DELIVERANCE ACTIONS

Summary of activity as a result of the Deliverance of the 2025 General Assembly in relation to the Report of the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team – Public Life and Social Justice Programme Group

Deliverance	Comment
JOINT REPORT OF THE THEOLOGICAL FORUM AND THE FAITH ACTION PROGRAMME LEADERSHIP TEAM ON ASSISTED DYING	
4. Acknowledging that the introduction of assisted dying legislation has the potential to negatively impact the quality and accessibility of palliative and end-of-life care, call on the Scottish Government to prioritise the development of excellent palliative care services to ensure that they are universally available and urgently review the funding models currently in place.	In our work in relation to advocacy on the Assisted Dying Bill, we have continued to prioritise the importance of palliative care, and we will continue to do so in future policy reviews and in our engagement with MSPs and the Scottish Government.
5. Acknowledging the diversity of sincerely held theological views within our broad Church, reaffirm the Church of Scotland's opposition to assisted dying.	We have been clear in our advocacy work that the view of the General Assembly was to oppose legislation allowing assisted dying. This deliverance has been the basis for our engagement and the Moderator's role, particularly in the run-up to the Stage 3 debate and vote.
6. Agree that if assisted dying is legalised, robust safeguards must be in place for all involved, including medical staff whose ethical and moral principles should be respected, and to support and protect potentially vulnerable groups, including those with life-limiting illnesses, disabilities, mental health issues and dementia.	In our advocacy and messages to MSPs ahead of Stage 3, we emphasised our concerns in relation to these points, should the Bill pass.
7. Acknowledge that further resources and pastoral care training will be required, from FAPLT, should assisted dying be legalised.	At the time of writing, we are still awaiting the outcome of Stage 3, but we expect it will be some years before the first assisted death would take place if passed. We remain committed to developing resources if necessary.
8. Recognising the value of open discussion around death and dying, commend the Report for further study, reflection and dialogue.	The Report and associated materials are available on the website, along with some discussion starter questions.
FAITH ACTION PROGRAMME LEADERSHIP TEAM – PUBLIC LIFE AND SOCIAL JUSTICE	
9. 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)*.	Work on this project has begun, though it was delayed somewhat due to the mid-year departure of the Programme Group Convener. We expect that a substantive report will be brought to the 2027 General Assembly.
10. 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)*.	We contacted the Fossil Fuel Treaty Initiative to confirm the Church of Scotland could be listed; we have spoken out against further offshore fossil fuel exploitation in Scottish waters, including Rosebank.
11. 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)*.	This Report is presented to the 2026 General Assembly.

12. Encourage the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team, as part of the Church of Scotland's witness in seeking justice, to consider the need to uphold truth and uprightness in the public square, and challenge misinformation and lies which so often lead to division and distrust.	The Programme Group, FAPLT and Media Relations team have kept in close touch through the course of the year and have sought to work together when making views known either in private or public. We recognise the risks of being seen to be party political, but also the wish of the Assembly that we remain steadfast in our support for truth and respect in public discourse.
13. Encourage congregations to engage with the anti-poverty Poverty Alliance march in October 2025 and instruct FAPLT to share information of the march with Presbyteries and instruct Presbyteries to share this information with Session Clerks and Ministers.	We were grateful to the many groups and thousands of people who participated in the event on 25 October, and we continue to work with the Policy Alliance for events, policy campaigning and awareness raising of the reality of poverty in Scotland.

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	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

FINANCIAL INFORMATION AND ALLOWANCES

IX.1 Stipends and Salaries

The Assembly Trustees approved an increase of 2.5% to stipend & salary scales for 2026.

Stipend Scale (including Associate Ministers) 2026

Point 1 £33,244

Point 2 £35,418

Point 3 £37,591

Point 4 £39,766

Point 5 £40,853

Ministries Development Staff Scales 2026

MDS General Scale

Point 1 £30,274

Point 2 £31,264

Point 3 £32,251

Point 4 £33,242

Point 5 £34,224

Team Leader Scale

Point 1 £36,859

Point 2 £37,682

Point 3 £38,503

Point 4 £39,328

Point 5 £40,150

Deacon Scale (Genuine Occupational Requirement)

Point 1 £32,251

Point 2 £33,242

Point 3 £34,224

Point 4 £35,213

Point 5 £36,200

Island Allowance

Island allowances also increase by 2.5% for 2026.

Outer Island Allowance: £2,166 pa

Inner Island Allowance: £852 pa

Travel Expenses 2026

Travel expenses payable remain as:

Rates for those providing their own car:

a) to be reimbursed locally 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

Ministers also receive capital reimbursement of £80 per month paid through central payroll.

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 locally to ministers and MDS providing their own motor bike for pastoral duties:
24p per mile travelled per annum

d) reimbursed locally to ministers and MDS providing their own pedal bike for pastoral duties:
20p per mile travelled per annum

IX.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.

IX.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.

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.

IX.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.

IX.5 Vacancy Allowance

From 1st January 2026 only vacant congregations who have permission to call 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).

IX.6 Guardianship Allowance

For 2026 the Guardianship Allowance remains at £933 per month.

JOINT REPORT OF THE FAITH ACTION PROGRAMME LEADERSHIP TEAM, THE ASSEMBLY TRUSTEES AND THE THEOLOGICAL FORUM ON THE LEGACIES OF SLAVERY MAY 2026

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Adopt the Apology for the Church of Scotland's historical involvement in transatlantic chattel slavery *(Section 2)*.
3. Affirm that the Apology forms part of a wider journey of repentance, justice and reconcilia-tion, and that its integrity will be demonstrated through sustained action: work that is in-tentional, focused, reparative and measurable in its impact *(Sections 7.0.1-7.1.2)*.
4. Instruct the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team, in consultation with the Assembly Trustees, the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Group and the Theological Forum, to establish a working group to identify the appropriate actions arising from this Apology in partnership with those who continue to be affected and bring recommendations to the General As-sembly of 2027 *(Sections 7.1.3-7.1.5)*.
5. Encourage congregations and Presbyteries to continue engaging with this work through education, reflection, and local exploration of historical and contemporary legacies, ensur-ing that particular attention is given to listening to and supporting those within our Church and communities for whom the legacies of slavery and racism are not historical abstrac-tions but lived realities *(Section 7.1.5)*.
6. Commend the listening, consultation, and ecumenical engagement undertaken since the General Assembly of 2023, including the Ecumenical Pilgrimage to Jamaica in 2024 *(Section 3)*.
7. Record its thanks to the members of the Legacies of Slavery Group for their diligence and faithful service and discharge the Group.

Executive Summary

This Report presents a proposed Apology for the Church's historical involvement in transatlantic chattel slavery and its enduring consequences. It acknowledges theological justification of slavery, direct and indirect participation in slave-dependent economies, and the material benefits derived from enslaved labour, recognising the lasting racial injustice and inequality that resulted.

The Report invites the General Assembly to adopt the Apology as part of a wider journey of repentance, justice, and reconciliation. It proposes the establishment of a working group to identify appropriate actions in partnership with affected communities, with recommendations to be brought to the General Assembly of 2027. Congregations and Presbyteries are encouraged to continue engaging in education, reflection, and local exploration of historical and contemporary legacies.

Grounded in a commitment to racial justice and informed by consultation and ecumenical engagement – including the 2024 Ecumenical Pilgrimage to Jamaica – this work represents an intentional and measurable step toward truth-telling, accountability, and repair.

Report

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 In 2023, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland received a Report examining the Church's historical ties to the chattel enslavement of Africans. In response, the General Assembly agreed a deliverance committing the Church to prepare a statement of acknowledgement and Apology to be brought to a future Assembly. This commitment arose from a growing recognition that the harm inflicted upon generations of Africans, and their descendants has not only contributed to the material inequalities that persist in the world today, but has also shaped the Church itself, both spiritually and materially. This statement of acknowledgment and Apology is presented to the General Assembly of 2026 by the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team, in partnership with the Equality Diversity and Inclusion group and the Theological Forum. This Report contextualises the wording of the Apology and adds background information to explain the process that brought us to this point.

2. THE APOLOGY

2.1 We, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, acknowledging our corporate and continuing identity with those who have gone before us, and acknowledging responsibility for the actions and failures of some of our past members and office-holders, confess the following;

2.2 That theological justification was offered for race-based slavery.

2.3 That race-based slavery was defended on moral grounds.

2.4 That, even when we were not attempting to justify it, we – individually and collectively – treated slavery as normal, which, as we know now (and should have known then), helps to perpetuate injustice.

2.5 That, after slavery was outlawed in Scotland, some members of the Church of Scotland, including some of our office-holders, continued to own slaves overseas.

2.6 That, after the abolition of the slave trade in the British colonies, some of our office-holders and other members lobbied against the emancipation of persons already enslaved or for delaying their emancipation.

2.7 That for years many of our office-holders and other members derived their income directly or indirectly from slave labour. Some of our members travelled to the British and American colonies to work as foremen who enforced enslavement, punished those who objected to their enslavement, and made possible the day-to-day extraction of uncompensated labour from unwilling hands. Some owned or worked in tobacco distribution or textile manufacture that depended on crops planted and picked by slaves. Some owned or worked in sugar sheds, refining and distributing sugar grown by slaves in the colonies. Some owned or worked in shipyards that provided the vessels required for shipping goods and people across the Atlantic.

2.8 That office-holders and members of the Church of Scotland inherited wealth from relatives who owned slaves, and this money contributed to the building of the universities that trained our ministers and the churches in which we gathered to worship. Some of those buildings are still in use and still contain plaques or windows dedicated to the memory of benefactors that profited from slavery.

2.9 That, when slaves were finally emancipated in the Caribbean, some of our officer-holders and other members received government compensation for the 'property' they had 'lost.'

2.10 That we did not return the money that had been extracted from the labour of the enslaved. Nor did we build the infrastructure or provide the opportunities emancipated slaves would need to flourish.

2.11 That, after enslavement was outlawed and the enslaved were set free, too many of our office-holders and members acted as though the wrongs of slavery were a thing of the past, ignoring the ongoing harms suffered daily by the descendants of those whose labour was stolen, whose lives were ruined, whose cultures and languages were trampled, whose identities as children of God were denied.

2.12 That the racism which was manifested in trans-Atlantic slavery is not yet a thing of the past in either our society or in the Church of Scotland.

2.13 We, the Church of Scotland, are sorry for the ways in which the Church of Scotland, collectively and individually, contributed to and benefitted from the enslavement of people of African descent. We are grieved beyond telling by the extraordinary suffering we have inflicted – through our actions and our inaction – on our brothers and sisters. As bearers of God's image loved by God, they should have been loved by us. Not only did we fail to love them, we failed to treat them with basic human respect. We repent, committing ourselves to changing course and bearing fruit worthy of repentance.

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3. BACKGROUND

3.1 Racial Justice

3.1.1 The Church of Scotland's engagement with the legacies of transatlantic chattel slavery is fundamentally a matter of racial justice. This was made explicit by the General Assembly in 2020, when it commissioned examination of the Church's historical links to slavery and their contemporary consequences. That mandate recognised slavery not merely as an economic or historical system, but as a racialised order that constructed hierarchies of human worth whose effects persist today. Subsequent work, including the 2023 *Legacies of Slavery* Report and the commitments arising from it, is grounded in this moral and spiritual framework.

3.1.2 Chattel slavery was built on the invention of race to justify treating human beings as commodities. It denied the humanity of African people, treating them as property valued only for their capacity to generate wealth based on their skin colour. The Church's members' and office-holders' participation in, and failure to sufficiently challenge, this exploitation was underpinned by theological distortion. Scripture was misused to legitimise racial hierarchy, and people of African descent were denied recognition as bearers of God's image. These legacies continue to shape material inequality, social relations, and ecclesial life, including within the Church.

3.1.3 In Scotland, the legacy of slavery has often appeared less visible because the plantation economy was located overseas, encouraging narratives of distance and exceptionalism. However, renewed public attention in 2020 prompted deeper scrutiny of institutional histories, inherited privilege, and memorials to enslavers in civic and church spaces, exposing the evidence and persistence of racialised hierarchies rooted in slavery.

3.1.4 In an overwhelmingly White society, and amid a growing backlash against confronting historical injustice, there is a risk of complacency. The Church's task is therefore to remain attentive and faithful: resisting minimisation, examining how these legacies continue to shape structures and attitudes, and translating moments of moral clarity into constructive, transformative work. The question is sometimes asked why the Church should concern itself with events that took place centuries ago. From a theological perspective, the answer is clear. The Church is formed around lives lived two thousand years ago and a cross that continues to speak across time to sin, repentance, and hope. The Cross testifies that the passage of time does not diminish moral responsibility, nor does it render suffering irrelevant where its consequences endure. To ask "why now?" is therefore not a neutral historical query, but a theological one – and the Christian answer is that truth-telling and repentance remain necessary wherever injustice is revealed.

3.2 Timeline

3.2.1 The 2023 General Assembly Report set out the Church's historical connections with slavery and the Caribbean and their continuing impact on Church life. Read alongside the Church's 2021–23 research into the experiences of people of minority ethnic backgrounds, the General Assembly recognised the clear and troubling links between historical injustice and contemporary experience.[i]

3.2.2 The 2023 General Assembly therefore instructed the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team, the Theological Forum and the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Group, to prepare a statement of acknowledgement and Apology for the Church's involvement in chattel slavery, to be brought to a future Assembly. Initial work was undertaken through the Racial Justice strand of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Group, in partnership with the Public Life and Social Justice Programme Group and the Theological Forum, with an initial target of May 2025.

3.2.3 In spring 2024, Church representatives took part in an ecumenical pilgrimage to Jamaica, engaging with partners developing shared approaches to repair in response to the legacies of slavery. This deepened the Church's learning and located the proposed Apology within a wider international and ecumenical conversation.

3.2.4 Alongside this, wider engagement took place across the Church, including presentations to Presbyteries. By late 2024, it was clear that a dedicated, time-bound task group, drawing representation from all three bodies, was needed to take the work forward. It was therefore proposed that the presentation of the statement be delayed by one year to allow for this group's formation and further consultation.

3.3 Stakeholders

The task group has engaged with several stakeholders inside and outwith the Church of Scotland.

3.3.1 *Internal*

- Those of African heritage within the Church
- Presbyteries, Church members, elders and all those in recognised ministries
- Assembly Trustees
- Principal Clerk
- Senior staff leadership team as well as individual departments within the central services.

3.3.2 *External*

3.3.3.1 Our international stakeholders include the Churches' Reparations Action Forum (CRAF), a Jamaican ecumenical body which bridges the Jamaican Government's work on reparations with Church leaders. CRAF have developed a seven-point Reparations Plan to address the enduring impact and trauma of enslavement in the Caribbean and diaspora. They led the Ecumenical Pilgrimage to Jamaica in which the Church of Scotland participated during Spring 2024. Our partner churches in the Caribbean, the United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands (UCJCI) and the Presbyterian Church in Trinidad and Tobago, are likewise significant external stakeholders.

3.3.2.2 Other UK-based external stakeholders who have expertise in reparatory justice issues include; Churches Together in Britian and Ireland (CTBI); the Racial Justice Advocacy Forum; and Christian Aid. Beginning in 2021, the Church of Scotland was a founding member of the Europe Roundtable on Legacies of Slavery, Colonialism and Racism and has participated in ecumenical conversations on repair and reconciliation. The Church has since regularly contributed to ecumenical conversation on the topic of repair and reconciliation.

3.4 Whole Church Response

3.4.1 In line with the 2023 General Assembly deliverance, which called for any apology to be shaped by and representative of the whole Church, the Legacies of Slavery Task Group undertook a programme of presentations and open sessions across the Church.

3.4.2 Reflections from presbyteries and open sessions directly shaped the drafting of the Apology. While many participants stressed that this work requires long-term, intergenerational commitment, others raised concerns about the timing and perceived relevance of an apology for the contemporary Church of Scotland.

3.4.3 Across these discussions, participants consistently emphasised that an apology is a start not an endpoint, and must be accompanied by visible, sustained efforts to repair harm and build solidarity grounded in equality, fairness, and historical and contemporary understanding. Redemption and reconciliation were understood not only as moral responsibilities but as expressions of faith.[ii]

3.5 Acknowledgment of Limitations, Internal Diversity and Power Dynamics

3.5.1 There is an inherent imbalance in how the legacy of slavery is addressed within the Church. It is neither just nor appropriate for those most harmed – particularly members of African descent within the Church and wider community–to bear the primary burden of explaining its significance to a largely White membership. Responsibility for understanding, naming, and responding to this legacy rests with the institution and, in practice, with its White majority.

3.5.2 At the same time, institutional ownership must not marginalise the voices of those most affected. The Church's account of its past and present must be shaped with, not merely about, members and communities of African descent. Ownership by the White majority must not become a means of controlling the narrative or centring White comfort.

3.5.3 A further limitation of this Apology concerns the scope of our responsibility. While we must be clear about the history in which we had agency, we must also avoid re-centring White European actors as though they alone shaped the story. We recognise that there is sensitivity not only around how an apology is framed, but also around how this history is narrated and whose agency is acknowledged within it. The Task Group has heard from African voices who highlighted the breadth and complexity of dynamics within the African continent, including systems of enslavement and social stratification that both pre-dated, co-existed with and ultimately fed into European involvement in the transatlantic trade. Our responsibility is to account for the part in which we were implicated: the theological, economic, and racial frameworks that enabled and justified chattel slavery across the Atlantic. As a Church that is still majority White, we take ownership of the racism that underpinned and defended that system – a legacy whose effects continue to be felt today.

3.5.4 In the church of the past, as in the church of today, power and agency were unevenly distributed. During the period addressed by this Apology, some individuals exercised significant influence, made deliberate choices, and accumulated substantial wealth through direct or indirect connections to slavery. The Task Group recognises that their power and responsibility cannot be equated with that of poorer people in Scotland whose labour or livelihoods were tied to industries connected to the slave economy, but who lacked meaningful power, choice, or benefit. At the same time, the legacy of slavery cannot be weighed only at the level of individual gain or blame. Even where many people did not become wealthy themselves, slavery contributed to shaping Scotland as a whole–through infrastructure, institutions, and patterns of material advantage that outlasted those directly involved. The same is true within the Church. The impact of slavery is not visible or felt in the same way everywhere, and it is not written into every building or local history. Yet it has shaped the life of the Church collectively, in both visible and invisible ways. This broader shaping is why a shared reckoning is required: not because responsibility is equal, but because the legacy has formed the whole body, and continues to influence who we are today.

3.5.5 An apology for slavery is necessarily limited. The Church can acknowledge its actions, omissions, and structural failures, but cannot fully capture the lived experience, intergenerational loss, or ongoing trauma of those affected. Gaps in research and the fact that slavery was not legally criminal for most of its history mean much of the Church's involvement remains unclear. These limits do not lessen the need for apology; they call for humility, attentiveness, and a willingness to listen. The credibility of the apology therefore rests not on saying everything, but on how it is offered: listening attentively, caring about what we hear, continuing to learn, and acting in a way that shows we mean what we say.

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4. THEOLOGICAL PRECEDENT AND FRAMEWORK OF THE APOLOGY

4.0.1 Much of the theological reasoning behind the relevance of contemporary apologies for historical wrongs was prepared in a 2022 paper by the Theological Forum.[iii] Additionally, the Group's engagement with presbyteries and other stakeholders has highlighted several distinctive and recurring theological questions and concerns that warrant further exploration. Drawing both on the 2022 paper and subsequent discussions, the Task Group have prepared the following theological groundwork that underlies the Apology.

4.1 Theology of Apology

'So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift' (Matthew 5:23-24).

4.1.1 In Matthew 5, Jesus makes clear to his disciples that anger, acrimony, and estrangement are not things we should simply accept as ordinary parts of everyday life. We should not mistake our own anger for righteousness. Nor should we rest easy if we are the object of someone else's anger. Instead, we should drop whatever we are doing – even if we are in the midst of prayer, or worship, or some other expression of our devotion to God – and make being reconciled with that person our top priority.

4.1.2 Jesus' prayer for his disciples was that they would be known by their love.[iv] Sometimes we almost live up to this calling, but all too often we fall short, sometimes markedly so. When we fail to love as we ought, our calling persists. How do we love our neighbour after we have hurt them? How do we love those whose hurts we have ignored?

4.1.3 Jesus does not go on in Matthew 5 to spell out the steps we should take to bring about reconciliation. However, in the intervening centuries the practice of offering an apology has become a key part of the process of seeking reconciliation. In most cases, an apology must begin by acknowledging our shortcomings and confessing our transgressions (sins, vices, misdeeds, guilty omissions, and other failures to live up to our calling to love our neighbour).[v] The Church's understanding of when, how, and to whom our failings should be confessed has varied over the years.[vi] Despite these variations, there is broad agreement across Christian traditions that we should confess our failings to four potential audiences: 1) the person we have wronged or offended, 2) God, 3) a priest, minister, elder, or other representative of the faith community, and 4) the whole community. Confessing our failings to the first of these audiences –

1. namely, the person we have wronged or offended – can perform many functions:
2. It can give the offended party information – about what we did, why we did it, what we thought it meant at the time, what we think it means now, etc.
3. It can express respect for the other person, indicating our awareness that they deserved better.
4. It can restore social balance, particularly in situations where confessing involves humbling oneself before someone we previously belittled (explicitly or implicitly).
5. It can indicate who we are and what can be expected of us, often by distancing our current self – with its commitment to shared understandings of who and what matters – from ourselves at an earlier moment where our actions belied such a commitment.
6. It can moderate offence and promote reconciliation.

4.1.4 Not every confession or apology needs to fulfil all these functions. In some cases, what matters most is the expression of respect rather than the provision of new information; in others, disclosure, self-redefinition, or the redressing of an imbalance may take priority. The form a good apology takes will depend on what is most needed in the particular relationship and moment.

4.1.5 Turning now to the second audience of an apology – God – there is a long tradition of seeing sin in all its forms as an offence against God,[vii] and we are frequently enjoined to confess our failings to God.[viii] In so doing, we are not giving God information God lacked, nor are we changing the power balance between us. Instead, our confession can serve the other functions identified above, and since God knows all our shortcomings, confessing to God can encourage naked honesty, even with ourselves.

4.1.6 In addition to God and the neighbour we have wronged, we are also enjoined to 'confess our sins to one another.'[ix] Although the Reformers departed from the medieval Church's way of following this injunction, they continued to think confessing one's failings to others a valuable part of Christian formation.[x] This was reflected in Reformed liturgy (which includes a collective prayer of confession) and in the emerging practice of pastoral home visits which recontextualised the priestly confessional.[xi] Confessing to another member of the Christian community invites them to join in the project of keeping us honest and encouraging our reform. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer observed, it 'is the God-given remedy for self-deception and self-indulgence,' to which we are all too prone.[xii]

4.1.7 Finally, some wrongs are so egregious, so widespread in their effects, or so publicly displayed that they call for a public confession.[xiii] Public confession is not meant to be a showy performance of piety. Rather, it is intended to address those who might benefit from learning the transgressor now recognises their failings for what they were.

4.1.8 No matter its audience, confession should involve more than simple acknowledgement and ownership of past failings. It should also involve contrition.[xiv] 'A contrite heart is a precious thing,' Luther observes.[xv] If we do not lament our failure to love our neighbour and grieve the hurt they have suffered as a result, our recognition of our failings lacks a crucial ingredient.[xvi] Part of loving our neighbour involves sympathising with them, rejoicing when they rejoice and weeping when they weep.[xvii]

4.1.9 In addition to confession and contrition, we are also called to repentance.[xviii] Having acknowledged our past failings, we need to reverse course and 'bear fruit worthy of repentance.'[xix] It is not enough to note we have wrongly caused or ignored another's hurt, or to feel badly about who we have been or failed to be, what we have done or failed to do. We also need to stop causing or ignoring such hurt.[xx] We need to commit ourselves to behaving differently in future.[xxi] Our actions need to reflect that commitment.

4.2 Group apologies:

4.2.1 Group apologies involve the same elements as individual apologies, but there can be additional complexity due to questions around agency and blame. For many, there is an understandable impulse to argue that individuals cannot be held to account for the actions of other individuals. However, both in scripture and in our theological tradition, a less individualistic approach to moral responsibility can be found.

4.2.2 The Old Testament is, in no small part, a collection of stories about a group (most often described as the children of Israel or, simply, Israel) and their God (YHWH). The group is frequently spoken of as a person whose relationship with Yahweh continues over time even as generations of its members are born, grow old, and die. In the tradition's oldest documents, the importance of group membership extends even to the punishment of groups for the actions of a small fraction of their members. The most vivid of these stories is of Achan, son of Carmi, who decided to take some silver and gold during the sacking of Jericho, despite having been instructed not to loot the city but to destroy everything within.[xxii] Although the sin was Achan's and he hid it from his companions, the writer tells us 'The Israelites sinned.'

4.2.3 The New Testament also treats communities as morally accountable agents whose identity persists over time. Paul's image of the Church as the body of Christ reinforces this shared responsibility: 'we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members of one another,'[xxiii] and 'if one part suffers, all suffer together; if one flourishes, all rejoice together.'[xxiv] This understanding of the Church is also reflected in our doctrine, where the Church of Scotland's Book of Confessions includes creeds that affirm our belief in 'one holy catholic and apostolic Church.'[xxv]

4.2.4 This unity is a crucial and defining aspect of our identity as the Church; we are invited in our scripture and in our theology to identify the Church not only with local congregations, but with the Church universal, across time and place. This means that we identify not only with the actions of present communities, but also with the Church's past actions, in both faithfulness and failure. Our unity in Christ calls the Church to acknowledge wrongdoing, grieve the harm caused and to commit to repentance and change.

4.2.5 While questions around agency and blame continue to arise in group apologies, 'not all apologies – not even all good apologies – are about accepting blame.'[xxvi] Likewise, this Apology does not seek to assign personal blame to individuals living today. Sometimes, what makes a group apology meaningful is that it is a way for the group to stand in solidarity with victims. For those who have been harmed, the primary concern is not usually internal distinctions of responsibility but whether their suffering is recognised, respected, and taken seriously.

4.3 Historical Apologies

4.3.1 The work of the task group has been informed by a range of previous apologies (see additional information document) and acknowledgements made both within and beyond the Church of Scotland. These examples have provided important theological, pastoral, and practical insights into how institutions can acknowledge historical wrongs with honesty and humility.

4.3.2 Within the life of the Church of Scotland itself, past General Assemblies have authorised apologies to groups who were harmed through the Church's actions, teaching, or silence. These include statements of regret or apologies relating to the Church's treatment of people of Catholic-Irish heritage (2002),[xxvii] LGBTQ+ people (2017),[xxviii] those accused of witchcraft (2022),[xxix] and Scottish Travellers (2025).[xxx] The Church has also issued heartfelt apologies to all those children who were abused in care settings operated by the Church's social care arm in past decades.[xxxi] Each of these apologies emerged from different contexts and addressed distinct forms of harm and in different ways, but together they demonstrate an established willingness within the Church to name wrongdoing, to listen to those affected, and to seek reconciliation where trust has been broken.

4.3.3 Alongside these precedents, the task group has drawn on apologies issued by other denominations and parachurch organisations, particularly where they have addressed historical injustice, collective responsibility, and institutional complicity.

4.3.4 The Theological Forum's 2022 paper helps clarify why historical apologies remain necessary, particularly when the harm experienced was not always the result of formal policy or explicit instruction. In many of the Church's previous apologies, those harmed were affected not only by official actions, but by the attitudes, silences, and practices of church members who acted in ways that were widely tolerated, implicitly sanctioned, or insufficiently challenged. Although these actions were not always undertaken "in the name of the Church," they nonetheless shaped people's lived experience of the Church and, in some cases, led to alienation, discrimination, or direct harm. Historical apologies recognise this continuity of experience and responsibility. They acknowledge that institutions are formed not only by their declarations, but by what they allow, overlook, or fail to confront – and that the consequences of such failures can endure long after the original actions have ceased.

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5. COMPLICITY

5.01 As the Church of Scotland looks back at its own role and that of its members in trans-Atlantic slavery, there are many things we need to admit and take responsibility for. Some of these wrongs were listed in a Report to the General Assembly in 2023.

5.02 While the Church itself did not own slaves or plantations, there were still ways that we – as a group or as individuals – failed to show love and care for others. Over the past two years, as we have worked with partners in the Caribbean, we have learned more about the suffering endured by our brothers and sisters, which continues to shape our relationship with them.

5.1 The 'We' of Our Apology

5.1.1 Our Apology begins with the words, "we, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland," to make clear that it is offered by the Church's highest governing body, speaking on behalf of this Church alone.

5.1.2 In speaking institutionally, the Apology encompasses the Church of Scotland in its historical and contemporary forms, including its governing bodies, office-holders (such as ministers, elders, and moderators), and its members, past and present.

5.1.3 Through the Church's history of division and reunion, it inherited buildings, resources, and institutional legacies that reflect the theological commitments, social attitudes, and economic entanglements of their time, including connections to slavery and its economies.[xxxii]

5.1.4 As a national church, the Church of Scotland has never existed in isolation. Its life has been interwoven with the wider social, political, economic, and religious structures of Scotland and the British Empire. Its responses to social and ethical questions therefore arise from a complex and layered history that resists simple explanation. These connections – some visible, others less so – mean that institutions and individuals have shaped and influenced one another in complex and often unrecorded ways. Our complex past forms part of who "*we*" are as a Church, even where responsibility is shared, diffused, or difficult to trace to a single source.

5.2 Actions or failures of the Church of Scotland

5.2.1 Belonging – to a community, a nation, or a Church – means inheriting obligations, stories, and moral debts we did not choose.[xxxiii] The question is not whether we inherit these legacies, but how we respond to them: whether we tell stories that celebrate our faithfulness while also reckoning honestly with our failures.

5.2.2 Although British merchants were involved in the enslavement and trafficking of people from Africa from the 1550s, the Church of Scotland did not take a public stand on slavery until the end of the 18th century (1788).[xxxiv] By that time, voices calling for abolition had already been active for decades. And even after condemning 'the African slave trade' for its 'injustice and cruelty' and declaring it 'inconsistent with the great principles of religion and morality' in 1792, the General Assembly still refused to petition Parliament to abolish it.[xxxv] The 2023 Report names Ministers and Moderators who were directly engaged in chattel slavery – yet as far as our research has shown us, no disciplinary action was taken by the Church. Both during this period and subsequently, the Church of Scotland benefitted financially from the labour of enslaved persons, as documented extensively – but not exhaustively – in the Report received by the General Assembly in 2023. To briefly summarise it benefitted in two distinct ways. First, many individual ministers and kirk sessions received donations from persons whose profits came directly from plantations. Second, it received donations from persons whose profits came from industries and commerce adjacent to enslavement, such as boat building or importing and distribution of tobacco, cotton, rice and sugar. Income marked with the stamp of slavery added at least 11% of the United Kingdom's gross domestic product during the 17th, 18th, and early 19th centuries. The Church of Scotland was not exempt. Among other things, profits from plantations funded the construction and decoration of sanctuaries for worship.[xxxvi] and lecture halls to train ministers.[xxxvii] Many are still in use today. The economic gains enjoyed in the UK came at a tremendous cost to Africa, Africans and the Caribbean, creating legacies of inequality and loss that are still felt today.

5.3 Actions and attitudes within the Church of Scotland

5.3.1 Evidence shows that ministers, moderators, and other influential figures within the Church of Scotland were directly implicated in the continuation and justification of transatlantic chattel slavery. Some clergy owned enslaved people themselves and continued to do so even after Scottish courts had ruled slavery morally and legally indefensible.[xxxviii] Others defended policies that delayed emancipation well beyond the abolition of the slave trade.

5.3.2 In the early nineteenth century, prominent ministers argued that emancipation should be gradual to protect property rights. Rev. Thomas Chalmers, for example, contended that because property ownership was 'sacred', enslavers should not be deprived of their 'property' immediately.[xxxix] Instead he proposed a system in which enslaved people would be paid for limited portions of their labour, allowing only the strongest and healthiest to purchase their own freedom over many years, and placing the burden of liberating family members on those already subjected to enslavement.[xl] Such proposals prolonged forced labour, fractured families, and rendered freedom conditional, deferred, and unequal, causing lasting social, economic and psychological harm across generations.

5.3.3 Alongside these positions, some members of the Church sought to justify race-based slavery through distorted theological, philosophical, and pseudo-scientific arguments. Biblical narratives were misused to legitimise racial hierarchy, including appeals to the so-called 'curse of Ham'[xli] while others argued that Scripture did not explicitly prohibit slavery.[xlii] The prevalence of these views was such that they were publicly contested within the General Assembly itself, notably in 1788, when Professor Andrew Hunter felt compelled to argue against them at length.[xliii]

5.3.4 Others advanced claims that enslavement was beneficial to those enslaved, that the violence of capture, transportation, and plantation life was exaggerated, or that emancipation would lead to racial violence.[xliv] Even apparently benevolent approaches could reinforce the same distortions, illustrating how Christian teaching could be severed from its ethical demands and made to serve an unjust status quo.[xlv]

5.3.5 The Church of Scotland, though not formally established in the Caribbean in the same manner as the Church of England, acted as a trusted colonial partner, promoting gradual 'moral improvement' and 'social stability' without challenging existing social hierarchies.[xlvi] Contemporary accounts praised its clergy as guides for all social levels, emphasising patience and incremental reform.[xlvii] The Colonial Church Union explicitly linked the Church to the 'Establishment,' by preventing dissent and unauthorised religious instruction among enslaved populations.[xlviii]

5.3.6 Even after slavery was outlawed in Scots Law in 1778,[xlix] members of the Church continued to enslave people, and profit from slavery, overseas. By the early nineteenth century, over 30 per cent of enslaved people in Jamaica were owned by Scots. These connections will inevitably have shaped attitudes back in Scotland as well as materially impacting our church, as has been shown in the Report to the General Assembly in 2023.

5.3.7 Taken together, these actions and attitudes represent more than isolated moral failure. They reveal a pattern in which Christian teaching was repeatedly distorted to defend economic interest, racial hierarchy, and social order at the expense of justice, compassion, and the clear ethical demands of the gospel. In doing so, the Church failed to recognise the full humanity of people of African descent as bearers of God's image and neighbours to be loved, and instead participated in sustaining a system whose harms continue to echo in the present.

5.4 Post-Emancipation; colonialism and missionary activities

5.4.1 The history of the Church of Scotland's engagement with the legacy of slavery after emancipation is complex. Most of the church office-holders and members who were outspoken in campaigning for abolition and emancipation were also active supporters of efforts to improve the lives and working conditions of the enslaved before *and* after emancipation.[l] Their concern for these people, the communities in which they resided, and the regions from which they (or their ancestors) had been abducted did not evaporate with the passing of the Emancipation Act in 1833 or with its full implementation in 1838. As the 19th century progressed, this concern was increasingly channelled through missionary societies and the churches, schools, and hospitals they established.

5.4.2 The seeds of racism that were planted and 'Christianised' in the 17th and 18th centuries to justify the enslavement of people of colour continued to be watered by 19th century missionary activities. It must be noted that the intentions of individual missionaries were not necessarily complicit with the aims of the government; many had a sincere desire to devote their lives to spreading the love of Jesus Christ across the globe. However, their impact cannot be extracted from that of the wider colonial context of the 19th century missionary movement. The missionaries who went to improve the spiritual and material lives of people in the Caribbean, the Americas, and the global south – and, to an even greater degree, the clergy sent to minister to settler populations in the colonies – were also tools of empire used to facilitate British domination and resource extraction.[li] Leonardo Boff, writing about Latin America, says, 'we must confess that the Catholic church has been a companion and an accomplice in the process of domination' of indigenous populations.[lii]

5.4.3 A similar confession is warranted in relation to Scottish missionary activities.[liii] An education in Christianity was also an education in European economic ideals and social norms.[liv] The assumption that 'civilising' was tied to the project of Christianising ran so deep that it formed part of the 1796 General Assembly's argument against supporting overseas missionary activity: the native inhabitants of Africa and the Americas, they contended, would need to be civilised before they could be evangelised. When the General Assembly decided a quarter century later (in 1824) to begin supporting overseas missions, it was still on the assumption that teaching people the gospel would need to go hand in hand with teaching them to reason in a Western way.[lv] In practice, this included repressing local culture, redesigning local economies on a Scottish model, and imposing Scottish, middle-class gender roles on indigenous communities, among other things.[lvi] And the stories that missionaries sent back to Scotland of the 'barbaric' practices, 'superstitious' beliefs, and 'squalid' living conditions of people in the global south reinforced racist beliefs that had been popularised in the previous century to 'justify' race-based slavery.[lvii]

5.4.4 By framing missionary work and cultural intervention as a moral and religious duty, the Church normalised attitudes rooted in colonialism, reinforced patronising views of Africa and other non-European peoples, and presented European culture and economic models as inherently superior, embedding a lasting hierarchy of power and value that justified both exploitation and paternalism.

5.4.5 At some point it would be fitting for the Church of Scotland to reflect on its ties to the injustices of 19th and early 20th century British imperialism. For present purposes it is sufficient to note that our actions during this period failed to fix what institutionalised enslavement had broken. This fact may have been inevitable, given the evils of slavery and the fallenness of humanity; but that does not make the suffering of those forced to live with slavery's scars any less. Eventually, we moved on as new social causes became pressing and new evils were perpetrated at home and abroad. Meanwhile, we continued to worship and study in the beautiful buildings that had been erected with the profits of slavery, while the offspring of those who had been kidnapped, 'sold', and forced to work without rights, wages, or respect were still hurting. We stopped suffering with those who were suffering from the legacy of slavery, but we continued enjoying the material benefits that were the legacy of slavery for us.

5.4.6 If, on occasion, we did look back on the Church's connection to trans-Atlantic slavery, we tended to focus on positive aspects of our history, such as the activities of the many church members and presbyteries that campaigned for abolition and emancipation. When we looked at our complicity, we were quick to compare ourselves to others we thought were worse, which helped us feel better about ourselves and our history. Meanwhile, preferences and prejudices that excluded some and favoured others on account of their race, class, or country of origin continued to exist within the Church of Scotland[lviii] and in the UK more widely.[lix]

5.4.7 The legacy for which the Church seeks to apologise is not confined to the past or to other regions but continues to shape the lives of those who belong to and engage with the Church today.

5.4.8 The legacy of slavery has been experienced differently across regions. Engagement with partners in West Africa and the Caribbean has made clear that, while connected, these legacies are not uniform. In West Africa, the legacy includes the trauma of loss – of people taken, communities disrupted, and agency eroded – followed by centuries of colonial domination that entrenched external control and violence. In the Caribbean, the legacy is woven into the landscape and institutions of everyday life: in place names and archives, in educational narratives that prioritise White abolitionists, in churches and memorials that remember enslavers and missionaries, and in records that catalogue human beings as property.

5.4.9 In Scotland, and across the UK more widely, the legacy of slavery is less visibly embedded in the landscape, yet it remains present through racialised attitudes, social inequalities, and everyday experiences of exclusion.[lx] This is particularly true for people of Afro-Caribbean heritage living in Scotland, whose lives continue to be shaped by colonial histories and persistent racialised assumptions. These realities are reflected both in wider Scottish society and in the lived experiences shared by people of African heritage within the Church of Scotland.

5.4.10 The Ecumenical Pilgrimage to Jamaica in 2024 further reinforced that these legacies are lived rather than abstract. Listening to partners speak about inherited inequality and spiritual harm challenged the Church to recognise that historical distance does not equate to moral distance, and that repentance must attend not only to history but to present relationships and structures. Some of the learning from Jamaica included:

- Extractive plantation systems entrenched financial inequalities, leading to a lack of long-term economic resilience. Colonial policies ensured dependence on European infrastructure and manufactured goods while raw materials were stripped and exported elsewhere, creating deep and enduring global inequalities.
- Racism, hierarchy, and colour prejudice. Systems that ranked enslaved people by skin tone to maximise profit have left lasting cultural legacies. In Jamaica, this is visible in colourism and in patterns of social and economic stratification shaped by skin tone.[lxi] Within the Church of Scotland, people of African descent report experiencing assumptions, patronising behaviour, and unequal treatment rooted in racial stereotypes about competence and belonging.
- Violence and control as shaping forces. Slavery was sustained through extreme violence, the effects of which continue to shape how authority, discipline, and power are experienced. Jamaican partners spoke of the psychological and spiritual afterlives of this violence.
- Distorted narratives of worth and history. In Jamaica and in the UK, national memory often privileges White abolitionists while marginalising the resistance and leadership of enslaved and formerly enslaved people. Within the Church, the histories, theological traditions, and voices of people of African descent are frequently under-represented or treated as supplementary rather than integral.
- Ecclesial relationships marked by imbalance. The Church of Scotland in the Caribbean supported gradual and social reform, and reinforced colonial control by limiting dissent, shaping religious engagement in the Caribbean and between the Church of Scotland and the denominations we partner with there. A theological approach reinforced social hierarchies under the guise of moral guidance: for the enslaved, it encouraged obedience, internalised inferiority, and restricted access to alternative spiritual traditions; for later generations, it perpetuated pernicious stereotypes, cultural marginalisation, and cautious, conservative attitudes toward social change

5.5 The Continuing Legacy in the Life of the Church Today

5.5.1 Engagement with this history and the long shadow it casts has made clear that it continues to shape society and the Church today, including the lived experiences of people of African descent within its congregations and structures today.

5.5.2 Research commissioned by the Church of Scotland into the experiences of people from ethnic minority backgrounds revealed both welcome and enduring challenges.[lxii] Many participants spoke of care, hospitality, and belonging within local congregations. Others described experiences of exclusion, invisibility, and unequal power that echo longer histories of racial hierarchy.

5.5.3 At a congregational level, this included experiences of superficial welcome without pathways into deeper participation or leadership; being overlooked or marginalised in decision-making; and encountering racialised assumptions or micro-aggressions that communicated a conditional sense of belonging. In some cases, congregants and young people of African descent were discouraged from full participation in worship or community life. These experiences within the Church often sit alongside experiences of racism in wider society adding to a deeper sense of isolation. These experiences are ones that many White church leaders and members may never fully understand without intentional education, humility, and prayerful listening. While such wider social experiences may lie beyond the Church's direct control, we are called to listen, to stand alongside those affected, and to ensure that within our own congregations we offer not a mirror of exclusion, but a genuinely different and more faithful experience of welcome, belonging, and justice.

5.5.4 Although the Church is increasingly diverse, participants described an internal culture that remains overwhelmingly White and shaped by inherited assumptions about belonging and leadership. This contributed to feelings of being welcomed but not fully recognised, included but not always trusted, and present without equal voice or influence.

5.5.5 The Church's own Reports on the experiences of people of African descent within its life make clear that harm is not usually expressed through actions that can be easily proven, attributed, or resolved by identifying individual fault. Rather, what emerges is a consistent pattern of experience: small exclusions, assumptions, silences, and forms of patronisation which, taken together, reveal a pervasive culture that can alienate and diminish. Attending to this reality shifts the Church's focus away from apportioning blame to individuals, congregations, or groups, and towards the more demanding work of examining the attitudes, norms, and theological imaginations that shape common life. This is not work that can be completed through a single policy, training session, or statement, but requires sustained, Church-wide commitment to repair how we understand human dignity, power, belonging, and difference in the light of the Gospel.

5.5.6 A similar humility is required in relation to global inequality. There is no single action the Church can take to undo the structural consequences of colonialism and slavery, yet recognition remains essential. We live in a post-colonial world in which Scotland, as part of a small but powerful island, benefitted disproportionately from systems that severely constrained the life chances of others. The wealth extracted through these systems remains visible around us. Acknowledging this reality invites the Church to act with greater alertness and responsibility: applying a racial justice lens to international partnerships, public witness, political advocacy, and global campaigns, and committing to relationships that seek mutuality rather than unconsciously reproducing inherited imbalances of power.

5.5.7 These realities confirm that this legacy is present in our everyday life. It remains in global relationships, institutional cultures, and lived ecclesial experience, calling the Church to repentance that is relational, sustained, and expressed through changed patterns of power, participation, and care.

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6. RECEIVING THE APOLOGY

6.1 This is a public apology for the Church's role in transatlantic slavery. We are not responding to a single act or group of victims but confessing complicity in a system that denied the humanity of African peoples and reinforced racial hierarchies – effects that continue to shape lives, relationships, and the Church itself. Some wrongs are so widespread that they call for public confession, not as a show of piety, but to show those affected – and the wider community – that the Church recognises its failings and is committed to genuine repentance.

6.2 It is proposed that the Apology be addressed broadly to all those of African heritage, including those in Africa, the Caribbean, the UK, and the wider diaspora. In identifying particular partners for deeper engagement following the Apology, however, this Report recommends naming the Church of Scotland's Presbyterian partners in the Caribbean and West Africa, as well as those of African heritage within the Church itself. This is not intended to narrow the scope of the Apology or suggest that harm was confined to specific places, but to recognise living ecclesial relationships shaped by shared history, theological inheritance, and enduring imbalances of power. In the Caribbean especially, Presbyterian life developed alongside – and too often failed to challenge – systems of enslavement and racial hierarchy.

6.3 This Apology is therefore offered in humility and openness, attentive to the African diaspora and mindful of how racialised legacies of slavery continue to shape global relationships. It is made with an awareness that restoration will require ongoing repentance, learning, and a willingness to re-examine inherited patterns of power. The Apology is not offered as an end point, but as one step within a longer journey toward more just, truthful, and mutual relationships.

6.4 Intricately bound with our Apology to those most affected is another key audience: God. Our statement of confession and Apology is not about telling God something God does not already know, rather confessing to God can encourage naked honesty, even with ourselves.

6.5 Our third audience is one another. On the floor of the General Assembly, this mutual confession calls us to step into one another's lives with honesty and vulnerability. As commissioners, we do not speak only for ourselves, but in the presence of the whole Church, bearing witness to one another's grief and sorrow.

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7. FRUIT WORTHY OF REPENTANCE

7.0.1 The statement of acknowledgement and Apology presented in this Report is a beginning. As outlined in Section 4, repentance is not measured by words alone, but by the fruit of action that follows.

7.0.2 The challenge is complex. The individuals most directly responsible for the Church's historical involvement in chattel slavery are long dead, and the Church has for generations recognised slavery as a grave moral evil. Yet there remains a deep value in truth-telling, in naming what was overlooked or justified, and in acknowledging how the Church

aligned itself – at times actively, at times through silence – with systems that denied the God-given dignity of others. This work matters not only for those harmed, but for the Church's own self-understanding and faithfulness today.

7.0.3 An apology of this kind also carries meaning for those who continue to live with the legacies of slavery. To acknowledge harm and to state plainly that people deserved to be treated with dignity and love is to affirm that dignity and worth were denied. Yet such claims are weakened if they remain only symbolic. The credibility of the Apology will depend, in part, on what follows it.

7.0.4 The Legacy of Slavery Task Group heard clearly from some members of African descent that this work touches a deep and painful wound. Their testimony underscored the real and unequal risks involved. For some, reopening this history feels unjustified unless the Church is genuinely prepared for deep and lasting change, particularly where trust in the institution's willingness or capacity to sustain such work is fragile. When institutions confront histories of racial injustice, it is essential that the Church does not proceed in ways that leave members of African descent isolated, vulnerable, or expected to carry the burden of education, explanation, or defence. Safeguarding those most affected must be integral to whatever follows this Apology.

7.1 What Might Faithful Action Look Like?

7.1.1 While determining specific actions lies beyond the remit of this task group, those most affected by the harms addressed in this Apology have consistently emphasised that words alone are not enough. Through ecumenical consultation, sustained engagement with partners in the Caribbean and wider research, an apology gains meaning only insofar as it helps guide the Church toward faithful action. What follows is therefore offered not as a programme, but as an invitation to discernment – indicating the kinds of questions and practices that may shape repentance over time.

7.1.2 The work of repentance will require time, humility, and sustained commitment. It cannot be achieved through one-off actions or delegated to a single body. It involves confronting distorted theologies, inherited assumptions, and patterns of behaviour that continue to alienate and exclude. Such change must be shared work – undertaken with, not merely for, those most affected by the legacy of slavery.

7.1.3 What follows an apology can either deepen or diminish its meaning. The task group therefore recommends that the General Assembly mandate a working group to support this next stage of discernment answerable to the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team in collaboration with the Assembly Trustees, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Group and Theological Form. Its purpose would be to advise the Church on possible expressions of repentance, strengthen global relationships, and help ensure that this work contributes to a more faithful and Christ-shaped Church. Responsibility for this work, however, rests with the whole Church.

7.1.4 Any such working group should be answerable to the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team, with a clear recognition that its work will span three interrelated areas: relationship-building and racial justice, financial implications, and theological reflection. Its remit should be to develop recommendations through open discernment, without presupposing outcomes or allowing any one strand – particularly financial considerations – to dominate or constrain its work. Care should be taken to avoid conflicts of interest, especially arrangements that could limit the group's freedom to make recommendations, including those with financial implications. If the composition of the group is specified, it should be majority African heritage and supported by an external oversight group able to act as critical friends, drawing on experience in restorative justice and related fields.

7.1.5 Should the General Assembly wish to proceed, careful thought should be given to the composition of any such group. In addition to theological, legal, and financial expertise, it is essential that voices from the Caribbean and African diaspora – including those of this heritage within Scotland – are meaningfully involved. The Church must not assume sole authority to define what repentance requires. The suggestions outlined here draw on the long, faithful, and often costly work of other churches and communities, particularly in Jamaica, whose reflections are shaped by lived experience, pain, and hope for repair.

- Indicative areas for further exploration include:
- rebuilding and reframing relationships with partners in the Caribbean and West Africa, grounded in mutuality rather than inherited power;
- sustained attention to material inequality shaped by slavery's afterlives;
- deeper theological formation and truth-telling on racialisation, repentance, and the misuse of Scripture;
- careful engagement with financial questions, learning from reparative and restorative models elsewhere;
- local and contextual pilot work, such as the Aberlour project,[lxiii] that connects historical awareness with present commitment.

7.2 Wider international context

7.2.1 The Church's engagement with its own history sits within a broader international and post-colonial context. Across the Caribbean, Africa, the Americas, and Europe, churches, governments, and civil society organisations are grappling with the legacies of slavery and colonialism in different ways, shaped by local histories and political realities.

7.2.2 There is no single global consensus (including amongst our international church partners) on how these legacies should be addressed. Some contexts emphasise formal apologies, others material repair, institutional reform, or truth-telling and education. What unites these approaches is a shared recognition that slavery was not an isolated historical episode but a system that structured the modern world.

7.2.3 Within this context, the Church of Scotland's work forms part of a wider ecclesial reckoning. Partner churches in the Caribbean and beyond are engaged in parallel processes of discernment, often from positions shaped by the long-term consequences of enslavement and colonial rule. This shared yet asymmetrical history places a particular responsibility on churches in former colonial powers to listen carefully, to act with humility, and to resist framing reconciliation on their own terms alone.

7.2.4 From the vantage point of the present day, the racialised nature of this legacy requires a wider examination of the Church's global relationships. The work of restoration and repentance to which this Apology points will necessarily include renewed attentiveness to relationships with churches and communities in Africa, with the African diaspora in the UK, and with partners in North America who share in the enduring consequences of this history. These relationships must be reviewed with a desire not only to acknowledge past wrongs, but to learn, be changed, and act differently as a result.

7.2.5 Understanding the legacy of slavery therefore requires holding together local Church history, global inequality, and theological responsibility – recognising that the past continues to press upon the present, and that faithful response demands more than historical acknowledgement alone.

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8. CONCLUSION

8.1 This Report has traced the Church of Scotland's involvement in transatlantic chattel slavery, not to rehearse guilt for its own sake, but to speak truthfully about who we have been, who we are, and who we are called to become. Slavery was not an accident of history, but a system sustained by greed, theological distortion, and the prioritisation of wealth over human dignity. The Church was not merely a bystander to this reality; it was shaped by it and, at times, benefited from it.

8.2 Scripture does not allow us to treat such truths lightly. As the First Letter to Timothy reminds us:

"Those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil... But as for you, man of God, shun all this; pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness." *(1 Timothy 6:9–11, NRSVA)*

8.3 This warning speaks with force to a Church reckoning with a history in which the pursuit of wealth was bound up with the denial of humanity. Repentance, therefore, is not only about naming past wrongs, but about reorienting our life towards righteousness, love, and faithfulness in the present.

8.4 The Apology offered here is one step on that journey. It is not an end point, nor does it seek closure. Its purpose is to open the Church to deeper listening, shared responsibility, and transformation – undertaken alongside those whose lives and communities continue to bear the weight of this legacy. If the Church is to be recognisable as the body of Christ, then this work must shape not only our words, but our relationships, priorities, and practices.

8.5 The calling before us is demanding, but it is not new. It is the call to love our neighbours truthfully, to resist injustice faithfully, and to pursue a Church that reflects more fully the image of God revealed in Christ.

In the name of the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team, the Assembly Trustees and the Theological Forum

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[iv] John 13:34-35, 17:20-26.

[v] Leviticus 5:1-5; 1 John 1:8-10; Desmond and Mpho Tutu, *The Book of Forgiving* (Harper Collins, 2014) 163-192; Annemarie Kidder, 'Confession in the Reformed Tradition,' *Liturgies* 34 (2019) 12-20.

[vi] See, for example, Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III Suppl., Fathers of the English Dominican Province, trans. (Christian Classics, 1981) Q6; John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, F.L. Battles, trans, J. T. McNeill, ed. (Westminster, 1960) 3.4, 622ff.; and Regis Duffy, 'Penance,' *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives* vol. 2, Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John Galvin, eds (Fortress 1991) 231-249.

[vii] This tradition is given voice in a particularly pointed way in Psalm 51.

[viii] See I John 1:9; Similarly, Calvin writes, 'to confess to God privately is a part of true repentance that cannot be omitted' (*Institutes*, 3.3.18 612).

[ix] James 5:16.

[x] The Reformers' objections to confessional practices were about the theological significance attributed to them by some and to the misuse of them by others. Luther continued to commend the practice of private confession to another member of the community of faith and to participate in the practice even after he was excommunicated (Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, G. Bromiley, trans. [Eerdmans 1998] 248). When Calvin wrote to Emperor Charles V in 1544 about 'the necessity of reforming the church,' he acknowledged the usefulness of confiding in one's minister and obtaining consolation and counsel from them (John Calvin, *Theological Treatises*, J.K.S. Reid, trans. and ed. [Westminster Press, 1954] 216). And he thought private confession or something similar should be retained in the Genevan church, even though he did not count it among the sacraments (Kidder, *Confession* 17).

[xi] Thomas Oden, *Pastoral Theology* (Harper Collins 1983) 175; Kidder, *Confession*, 16

[xii] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship,* RH Fuller and I Booth, trans (Simon and Schuster, 1995) 289.

[xiii] 'The Westminster Confession of Faith,' chapter XV.6, in *The Book of Confessions of the Church of Scotland* (Saint Andrew Press 2025) 91.

[xiv] Psalm 51:17; Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.3.3, 595; Tutu and Tutu, 167.

[xv] Martin Luther, 'The Babylonian Captivity of the Church,' ATW Steinhaeuser, trans, *Works of Martin Luther,* vol. 2 (Baker, 1982) 248.

[xvi] See 'The Westminster Confession of Faith,' XV.2, 91.

[xvii] Romans 12:15.

[xviii] Mark 1:14-15, Acts 2:37-42. See Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.3.5, 597.

[xix] Matthew 3:8. Building on this point, Harold O.J. Brown observes, 'true repentance will in some sense be visible' ('Godly Sorrow, Sorrow of the World: Some Christian Thoughts on Repentance,' *Repentance: A Comparative Perspective,* Amitai Etzioni and David Carney, eds [Rowman and Littlefield, 1997] 35).

[xx] On the importance of repentance in the early Christian community, see Mark Boda and Gordon Smith, eds, Repentance in Christian Theology (Liturgical Press, 2006). For a discussion of the actions and attitudes associated with repentance, see Paul Griffiths, *Regret: A Theology* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2021).

[xxi] Harvey Cox, 'Repentance and Forgiveness: A Christian Perspective,' *Repentance: A Comparative Perspective,* Amitai Etzioni and David Carney, eds (Rowman and Littlefield, 1997) 25.

[xxii] See Joshua 7.

[xxiii] Romans 12:5.

[xxiv] 1 Cor 12:26.

[xxv] 'The Nicene Creed,' *The Book of Confessions of the Church of Scotland,* p. 22. Similarly, see 'The Apostles' Creed,' p. 17.

[xxvi] Theological Forum of the Church of Scotland 2022 *'Apologising for Historic Wrongs'*

[xxvii] In 2002 the Church of Scotland produced a report examining sectarianism in Scotland and the Church of Scotland's role in perpetuating it and its responsibility to challenge it. On acknowledging the racist and damaging attitudes expressed by the General Assembly and Committees, particularly in the 1920s and 1930s, Church and Nation reported; ' From a current perspective, it is a matter of regret that the Committee and the Church could have taken such a position' Church and Nation Committee, '*Sectarianism*', Report to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, 2002, 12/10.

[xxviii] The Theological Forum, in its report '*An Approach to the Theology of Same-Sex Marriage*', included a deliverance inviting the church to 'take stock of its history of discrimination at different levels and in different ways against gay people and to apologise individually and corporately and seek to do better' Theological Forum, *'An Approach to the Theology of Same-Sex Marriage'*, Report to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, 2017 22/2.

[xxix] Faith Impact Forum passed a deliverance in recognition of the work done by the Theological Forum that year, also referenced in this report, on the role of apologies for historical wrongs: '...acknowledge and regret the terrible harm caused to all those who suffered from accusations and prosecutions under Scotland's historic witchcraft laws, the majority of whom were women, and apologise for the role the Church of Scotland and the General Assembly in such historical persecution. Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, 2022, '*Deliverances*' (collated Blue Book section), Faith Impact Forum Deliverance 19 p. 6.

[xxx] In response to the Scottish Government–commissioned report on 20th-century policies affecting Gypsy/Traveller communities in Scotland, Rev. Tommy MacNeil and Dr. Mike Cantlay, representing the Church's Faith Action Programme Leadership Team and Social Care Council, issued a statement acknowledging past harms and offering an apology for the Church's historical role in these injustices. This will be presented to the 2026 General Assembly.

[xxxi] Church of Scotland, *'Report of the General Assembly 2008'*, Edinburgh: Church of Scotland, 2008, 6.5/8.

[xxxii] For example, the University of Edinburgh (New College) and The University of Glasgow, both with strong links to the training of Church of Scotland ministers, have documented their own legacies of profiting institutionally from slavery, whilst the Free Church of Scotland – whose history and legacy is deeply entwined with that of the Church of Scotland directly received donations from slavery supporting congregations in America following the Disruption to support the Free Church by building new churches and manses. Following 1929 Union it is currently unknown how many of these churches (and manses) became part of the Church of Scotland.

[xxxiii] David Alston, *Slaves and highlanders: Silenced histories of Scotland and the Caribbean* (Edinburgh University Press, 2021) 308ff.

[xxxiv] Iain Whyte, *Scotland and the Abolition of Black Slavery, 1756-1838* (Edinburgh University Press, 2006) 71ff.

[xxxv] John MacNaughton, '*The Free Church and American Slavery – Slanders Against the Free Church Met and Answered in a Speech',* Paisley, April 1846. It should be noted that Reverend MacNaughton and his interlocutors disagreed about the moral significance of this fact.

[xxxvi] Faith Impact Forum of the Church of Scotland, *'Church of Scotland and the Legacies of Slavery'*

[xxxvii] See Stephen Mullen and Simon Newman, *Slavery, Abolition and the University of Glasgow* (University of Glasgow, 2018); Richard Anderson, *The University of Aberdeen and the Legacies of Slavery* (University of Aberdeen, 2023); Aileen Fyfe et al., *The University of St Andrews and the Legacies of Empire,* 1700-1900' (University of St Andrews, 2025); Nicki Frith et al., *Decolonised Transformations: Confronting the University of Edinburgh's History and Legacies of Enslavement and Colonialism* (University of Edinburgh, 2025).

[xxxviii] For example, Angus Mackellar was awarded two separate compensation claims in 1835/6 linked to his wife Helen's (neé Stirling) shares in both the Hampton and Kerr Estates, Jamaica, inherited on the death of her father in 1793. The main crops listed through the later 1700s were rum, cattle and sugar. Neither his family connections to slavery nor this additional income seemly prevented the Church from appointing him to the office of Moderator in 1840. Other ministers to receive compensation for interests in the Caribbean include Rev. Stair McQuhae – Minister of St Quivox, and Rev. Peter Robertson – Minister at Callander. Influential Elder John Ross – Chairman of the Calendonian Bank, Inverness owned a coffee plantation in Berbice and c.175 enslaved people. See Faith Impact Forum of the Church of Scotland, *Church of Scotland and the Legacies of Slavery*; See Alston, *Slaves and Highlanders,* 227.

[xxxix] Thomas Chalmers, *A Few Thoughts on the Abolition of Colonial Slavery* (Chalmers & Collins, 1826) Thomas Chalmers was, arguably, the most influential Scottish church leader of his generation.

[xl] Chalmers, *A Few Thoughts*, 7-9.

[xli] For a discussion of the development of Biblical defences of race-based slavery, see Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern*, 1492-1800 (Verso 1997) ch. 1; and Michael Taylor, 'British Proslavery Arguments and the Bible', 1823-1833, *Slavery and Abolition* 37 (2016) 139-158. Taylor cites Henry Duncan, a Church of Scotland minister, making the latter argument.

[xlii] See, for example, an extract from the Memoirs of Philip Thicknesse published in *The Scots Magazine* 50 (October 1788) 747. Similar views remained in popular circulation more than 40 years later and were rehearsed for a wider audience in the novel *Marly, or a Planter's Life in Jamaica* (1828). The novel was published anonymously, but its publication is associated with the Glasgow West India Association, which was a pro-slavery lobby group.

[xliii] Whyte, *Scotland* 79.

[xliv] Whyte, *Scotland* 80.

[xlv] Rev. John Witherspoon, for example, believed passionately in the importance of Christian instruction for enslaved people and promoted their evangelisation, yet failed to recognise the theological contradiction involved in proclaiming the gospel while upholding a social order that denied freedom and full humanity.

Witherspoon later went on to enslave people in the United States Witherspoon's complex relationship with slavery, including his own enslavement of Black Africans has been examined as part of Princeton University's "Princeton and Slavery" project, documenting the institutions ties with Black slavery – see Lesa Redmond, 'John Witherspoon' *Princeton & Slavery Project*, accessed 05/02/2026 available at: slavery.princeton.edu/stories/john-witherspoon

[xlvi] The evidence given by prolific Scottish enslaver William Shand to the *Select Committee on the Extinction of Slavery* (1832) also supports a view of the Church of Scotland's as part of the establishment and suggests that, at least in Jamaica, the Presbyterian and Established Church were not considered to be mutually exclusive, and one could easily attend the others' Church or appoint eithers clergy to minister on one another's estates. It appears though this did not extend to other denominations on the Island, who might give, in Shand's words, the *"impression that faith is sufficient without good works, which I consider extremely pernicious to impress on the negro mind".* Shand's attitude, as influential member of society and member of the Jamaican House of Assembly, demonstrates further that the Church of Scotland and the Established Church, in Jamaica, represented one 'safe' moral bloc for the plantocracy, whilst other denominations were considered dangerous.

[xlvii] "We do not know how benevolence to our labourers, or patriotism to the community, can be better shown, than by contributing to raise Kirks in the different Parishes of the Island. The Scotch Clergy will have the confidence of the proprietors and managers; they will be the friends and guides of the poor, a companion for the higher ranks, and a comforter for the lower. They are too well informed to push forward improvement by great and rapid strides; they know that men acquire new habits by imperceptible degrees; and that any sudden change may just be as reasonably expected, as it would be to expect, that a child put to bed at night should rise in the morning a full grown man!" Excerpt from *The Jamaica Royal Gazette, 13 October 1832 "Another Scotch Kirk."*

[xlviii] This quote from the memoires of Rev Waddell of the Scottish Missionary Society demonstrates the divisions amongst missionaries and 'sectarian' / non-conforming denominations and the Church of Scotland in Jamaica, as well as the role of the Colonial Churches Union. "The Unionists tried to draw the Scottish missionaries into their schemes. Owing, perhaps, to the number of Scotchmen in the colony, and the fact that our Missionary Society was in part connected with the Church of Scotland, they exempted us from the term Sectarian, and professed a design to erect Scotch kirks in all the parishes, as a new branch of the island Church Establishment. But we disapproved both of their objects and their offers. We had no desire to separate from the great missionary cause; nor to be allied with the only representative of the Church of Scotland (Rev James Wordie of the Kingston Kirk) in the country, or with the Established Church of the colony. Then the blandishments became curses, and pretended friends real enemies. We were denounced as Scotch Sectarians, worthy only of being treated like all the others" excerpt from, Rev Hope Masterton Waddell, *Twenty-Nine Years in the West Indies and Central Africa: a Review of the Missionary Work and Adventure, 1829-1858* (Scottish Missionary Society 1863)

[xlix] *Knight vs Wedderburn* 1778

[l] John McAleer, '"The Sharer of My Joys and Sorrows": Alison Blyth, Missionary Labours, and Female Perspectives on Slavery in Nineteenth-Century Jamaica', *Empires of Religion,* H.M. Carey, ed. (Palgrave Macmillan 2008) 199-221.

[li] Hilary Carey, *God's Empire: Religion and Colonialism in the British World, c. 1801-1908* (Cambridge 2011) 206-243; Laurie Guy, 'Missionary and Maori, 1840-1865', *Shaping Godzone: Public Issues and Church Voices in New Zealand 1840-2000* (Victoria University Press 2011) 33-60.

[lii] Leonardo Boff, *Liberating Grace,* John Drury, trans. (Orbis 1984) 73.

[liii] '[T]he very origin of the term "mission" ... presupposes the ambience of the West's colonization of overseas territories and its subjugation of their inhabitants. Therefore, since the sixteenth century, if one said, "mission", on in a sense also said "colonialism"' (David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* [Orbis 1991] 302-303).

[liv] John MacKenzie, '"Making Black Scotsmen and Scotswomen?" Scottish Missionaries and the Eastern Cape Colony in the Nineteenth Century,' *Empires of Religion,* H.M. Carey, ed. (Palgrave Macmillan 2008) 113-136.

[lv] Esther Breitenbach, 'Religious Literature and Discourses of Empire: The Scottish Presbyterian Foreign Mission Movement,' *Empires of Religion* 93.

[lvi] See MacKenzie and Breitenbach for examples.

[lvii] Breitenbach, *passim*.

[lviii] The Church of Scotland, *Towards a church where all are welcome*, accessed 05.02.2026, available at https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/about-us/departments/faith-action-programme-committees-and-departments/equality-diversity-and-inclusion-group/towards-a-church-where-all-are-welcome

[lix] See Mike Cole, '"Race" and Racism in the UK: Through History and Today,' *Education, Equality, and Human Rights,* Mike Cole, ed. (Routledge 2023) pp. 44-82.

[lx] Around a quarter of people from ethnic minority backgrounds reporting experiences of racism in the past five years. Rates are particularly high among people of Black Caribbean and Mixed White and Black Caribbean heritage – see Nissa Finney, Nigel De Noronha, BEMIS, *Racism, belonging and COVID's legacy of ethnic inequalities in Scotland: A report of the Evidence for Equality National Survey.* (Centre on the Dynamics of Ethnicity 2024).

[lxi] Colourism refers to prejudice or discrimination based on skin tone, privileging lighter skin over darker skin within the same racial or ethnic group. It can manifest in social and economic disadvantage, including pressure to lighten and bleach one's own or a child's skin in the belief that this will improve access to employment and opportunity. This is a widespread issue in the Caribbean with parents bleaching the skin of children as young as five.

[lxii] The research referenced here uses the terms "Black and Minority Ethnic" in line with Office for National Statistics (ONS) guidance at the time alongside census categories, which group those who do not identify as White British for analytical purposes. The Church of Scotland, *Towards a church where all are welcome*

[lxiii] The Aberlour project took place between May and September 2025 as a collaboration with the University of Highlands and Islands where schools and congregations explored local connections to slavery through education and art, demonstrating how historical awareness can shape present-day commitment and imagination.

CHURCH OF SCOTLAND GUILD MAY 2026

"LET US BUILD A HOUSE"

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Congratulate Wishaw New Kirk on the establishment of their new Guild and encourage other congregations—particularly those entering unions—to consider this as a positive model for forming a new Guild together *(Section 2.5)*.
3. Encourage congregations, Presbyteries and the wider Church to engage actively with the Guild as it prepares its five year Strategic Plan *(Section 3.7)*.
4. Encourage Presbyteries to identify and support young people to participate in the LIFT training weekend *(Section 5.4)*.
5. Encourage congregations to explore how they might contribute to the Living stones in Livingstonia appeal to equip a maternity unit in Bandawe *(Section 7.6)*.

Points for Information

1. Commend the Guild for the work of its Project Partnership Scheme 2024-27, recognising both the significance of the issues addressed and the vital funds raised *(Section 6.1)*.

Executive Summary

The Report focuses on the achievements made and the challenges faced by the Church of Scotland Guild in the past year. It celebrates the role Guilds have played locally, nationally, and internationally to bring communities together and to share God's love through practical action both here in Scotland and in other parts of the world. The invaluable work done by the Guild Project Partnership scheme is also highlighted.

Faced with increasing numbers of church unions and a resultant loss in membership, the Church of Scotland Guild is developing a strategic plan to secure the movement for the future. This strategy is focussing on four areas: diversity, perception and communication, language and formality alongside internal and external relationships. Engagement is taking place with a wide range of stakeholders. The Guild is particularly keen for congregations and Presbyteries to fully engage with this process to ensure that the invaluable work done by Guild members is safeguarded and strengthened for the future.

The full plan will be brought to next year's General Assembly for consideration.

Despite the challenges we face, the Church of Scotland Guild remains in good heart and confident that God walks with us as we build on the work that began almost 140 years ago.

Report

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Strategy and themes

1.1.1 The Guild's strategy for 2024–27, *Let us Build a House,* expresses our commitment to approaching both the present and the future with confidence and purpose. Its themes guide us to strengthen our faith through Sure Foundations, to live out our identity as Living Stones, and to serve others by going Beyond the Walls.

1.1. Together, these themes encourage us to look upwards to God, inwards to our own discipleship, and outwards to our communities—shaping both our personal faith and our shared life as a church.

1.2 Challenges and opportunities

1.2.1 In times of declining membership and shifting demographics, it can be tempting for the Guild—and the wider Church—to become defensive or inward-looking. This is especially true in a society where belonging and formal membership may feel less valued than in the past.

1.2.2 Yet the Guild is committed to resisting that mindset. Instead, we aim to challenge assumptions, confound the sceptics, and reaffirm the Guild's vital place at the heart of the Church and within our communities.

1.2.3 This is an ambitious calling, but it aligns with our longheld vocation of Worship, Prayer and Action. We recognise that serving faithfully is not always easy, but it is central to who we are.

1.2.4 Because we serve a living God, we can step forward with confidence. As we *Build our House* we trust in a God that works for the good of all who love Him.

2. THE PAST YEAR

2.1 During the 2025–26 session, the Guild has once again demonstrated remarkable breadth and energy in its work at local, regional and national levels, while also engaging enthusiastically with international partners.

2.2 Across Scotland, thousands of members have given generously of their time to support their groups, congregations and communities, and to contribute to the Guild's wider work nationally and internationally. Their commitment is something for which the whole Church can be truly thankful.

2.3 There have been many highlights, including our ongoing work with young adults through LIFT, our deepening relationship with Malawi, and the wide range of events that bring Guild members together across the country. Alongside these are countless individual stories of growing faith, encouragement and mutual care.

2.4 These moments of celebration sit alongside real challenges. An ageing membership and the impact of numerous Church Unions have led to the closure of several branches. This has been compounded by the increasing trend for groups to continue informally as "friendship groups", carrying out similar activities but losing the benefits and identity of being part of a national movement.

2.5 Although church unions have often been challenging, there are encouraging signs of renewal in some areas. A notable example is Wishaw New Kirk, where the union of three congregations—one of which had an existing Guild—has led to the formation of a new Guild. Under the careful leadership of a committed group and with the proactive support of their interim minister, this Guild has grown into a vibrant, welcoming community. It now brings together members from all three congregations, with former loyalties set aside and a shared future taking shape. This demonstrates how a union can flourish, with the Guild acting as a catalyst for unity and showing what is possible in a newly formed congregation.

2.6 These challenges and the success at places like Wishaw New Kirk, have prompted us to look afresh at the Guild—its structures, its language and its relationships. They have given renewed impetus to the development of a fiveyear strategic plan, and that work is now underway.

2.7 It is never easy to step back and examine critically the things we know and love. Yet this is the work before us, and it is our intention to bring the completed strategic plan to next year's General Assembly.

2.8 We also believe strongly that the whole Church must engage with the questions facing the Guild. Congregations, Presbyteries and national bodies alike should consider how they see the Guild's role locally and nationally. What does the Guild offer the wider Church? What can the wider Church offer the Guild? And what might the Church learn from the process we have begun?

2.9 As the Guild, we must continually remind ourselves that we are an organisation within the Church of Scotland.

2.10 As a Church, we must recognise the same.

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3. STRATEGIC PLAN

3.1 Developing a Strategic Plan for an organisation as diverse and far reaching as the Guild is a significant undertaking. Its scale, history and breadth of activity mean that careful thought and wide consultation are essential.

3.2 A central challenge is finding the right balance between change and continuity — embracing new opportunities while honouring the heritage that has shaped the Guild for generations.

3.3 We must also hold together leadership and innovation with the Guild's longstanding commitment to democratic governance, ensuring that members remain at the heart of decisionmaking.

3.4 As we consider changes to practice and operations, we remain anchored in our core purpose: inviting and encouraging both women and men to commit their lives to Jesus Christ, and enabling them to express their faith through worship, prayer and action.

3.5 The work of the Strategic Plan will focus on four key areas:

- Language and formality
- Perception and communication
- Internal and external relationships
- Diversity within the Guild

3.6 The plan we bring to next year's Assembly will not be our final destination but a significant step in a journey that spans almost 140 years. It will enable us to *Build a House* of faith, confident that God walks with us and guides our way.

3.7 A vital part of this journey is consultation. Guilds Together groups—and, through them, local Guilds—will play a central role. We also want to engage with Probationers, Ministers, Kirk Sessions, Presbyteries and the National Church to explore how the Guild can best support spiritual and community life in their contexts, and how they in turn can support and encourage the Guild as a valued part of the Church of Scotland.

3.8 The Strategic Plan presented next year will reflect these conversations and offer a framework that strengthens the Guild's reach and equips us to serve the Church in new and imaginative ways.

4. WORSHIP, PRAYER, ACTION AND FELLOWSHIP

4.1 The Guild year opened, as is our tradition, with the Annual Gathering held in Perth North Church on Saturday 13 September 2025.

4.2 We were pleased to welcome the Moderator, Rt Rev Rosie Frew, who spent the day with us and offered a thoughtful reflection on our theme for the year, *"Living Stones"*. Her words provided real encouragement to members. We were also grateful to hear from Lyndsey Brown of TASH: Tayside and Strathearn Help for Ukraine, who spoke movingly about the support being offered to people in Ukraine, many of whom are living and serving on the front line of the conflict.

4.3 The Guild has long taken pride in being forwardlooking in its worship and practice. During the Gathering, members had the opportunity to learn new songs from *God Welcomes All* with Phil Mellstrom, Worship Development Officer for the Church of Scotland. These new expressions of worship were warmly received and eagerly taken back to local Guilds and congregations. The contribution of the PopUp Guild Choir added further joy to the occasion.

4.5 The day was marked by fun, faith and fellowship, strengthening longstanding friendships and creating new ones across the Guild family.

4.6 This year's Annual Guild Week focused on the ongoing work of former Project Partners and the ways in which the initiatives first supported by the Guild have continued to grow. We heard from L'Arche in Inverness, whose inclusive communities challenge perceptions of disability; from Comfort International, who updated us on progress in peace and reconciliation housebuilding in Rwanda; from the Iona Community, who shared developments in their work with young people; and from Scottish Love in Action, reflecting on the longterm impact of work with children in Tuni, Andhra Pradesh, India. Members valued the opportunity to see how their past fundraising continues to bear fruit.

4.7 Our now wellestablished Christmas Big Sing once again took place in the Tron Church. Demand was such that two gatherings were held, and an impressive £1,100 was raised for the Living Stones for Livingstonia Appeal.

4.8 Throughout 2025, a series of minigatherings were held in partnership with our Project Partners. These events offered an accessible and meaningful way for members—particularly those from smaller Guilds—to engage directly with partners and deepen their understanding of the work being undertaken.

5. LIFT (LOVE IN FELLOWSHIP AND TRUST)

5.1 The Guild has always held a deep commitment to supporting the young people of our Church, and this continues through our encouragement of LIFT, which provides a space for young adults aged 18–40 to meet in fellowship and support one another in their journey of faith.

5.2 In September, LIFT held a weekend retreat where participants explored themes of faith, relationships and the future direction of the group, under the excellent leadership of Phil Mellstrom. Although attendance from Presbyteries was lower than hoped, those who did take part found the time valuable, reflecting on their learning and being encouraged to plan further events throughout the year.

5.3 While LIFT continues to meet primarily on the last Friday of each month, the group has also begun organising inperson gatherings. The first of these—a wellreceived day event in Fife Presbytery—proved a positive step forward. Additional events are planned for June in Aberdeen and for August in Ayrshire.

5.4 Plans are underway for a further weekend gathering in the autumn, and we would encourage Presbyteries to identify and support individuals who may wish to attend and benefit from the fellowship that LIFT offers.

6. PROJECT PARTNERSHIP SCHEME

6.1 We are now almost at the midpoint of the current cycle of Partnership Projects, and the results of the fundraising efforts have seen donations of £171,029.97 being sent to project partners.

6.2 There is no doubt that the scheme plays a hugely important role in the life of the Guild at every level. Raising awareness of and acting on the key issues, reflecting theologically on them, and offering financial support brings many blessings to all involved.

6.3 We wish our partners well as they prepare for the second half of our partnership, and we encourage the wider church to consider how they might engage with the projects during this period.

6.3.1 *Operation Hope — Release International*
This project supports the Christian community in Upper Egypt by distributing basic living needs such as roofing materials or food parcels, supporting income generating activities and providing pastoral care to individuals and families.

6.3.2 *Bibles for Bairns — Scottish Bible Society*
This project aims to ensure that any baby born in Scotland, whose parents wish it, receives a Bible and accompanying resources from their first to fifth birthday. In 2025, over 700 babies were registered, adding to the 900 registered across 2023 and 2024.

6.3.3 *Build My Church — Bear Necessities for Bulgaria*
This project is establishing a new worshipping community in Sliven, Bulgaria. We are delighted that more than 30 people have begun meeting for prayer and Bible study, with their first church service due to take place soon.

6.3.4 Playful Beginnings — CrossReach
This project supports perinatal counselling services in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Inverness, and Moray, alongside the community-based Daisy Chain project in Glasgow, which offers support to children under 12 and their families, including support for children with additional support needs.

7. THE PAST YEAR

7.1 Our partnerships with the Guilds of the CCAP Synod of Livingstonia continue to grow and deepen. This longstanding relationship brings mutual benefit to all involved. Opportunities to meet in person allow each group to understand and appreciate one another's context more fully.

7.2 This year, a group representing our twinned areas spent time with our brothers and sisters in Northern Malawi, as part of the visit they attended the 150th anniversary celebrations marking the establishment of the CCAP by Christian pioneers from Scotland. Our then National Convener, Christina Paterson, had the privilege of representing the Moderator at the event. The weekend was filled with joy, love, and heartfelt thankfulness to God for his faithfulness over the generations.

7.3 The group also attended the biennial conference of the Women's Guild in Mzimba, bringing greetings from the Church of Scotland. These moments of sharing, learning, and encouraging one another strengthen our fellowship and help us grow together in faith.

7.4 The delegation included representatives from our twinning partnerships, all of which continue to develop well. Clyde and Mzuzu are jointly running workshops for young women, teaching them to make reusable sanitary products and to use these skills to build small businesses. Mzimba and Ayrshire are progressing their community garden and treeplanting project, which will provide food to support Guild work among the poorest in the community. Shetland and Dwangwa have been offering practical support to families who lost their homes in recent flooding.

7.5 These visits included time spent in each twinned area, learning more about the work and witness of the Guild and how our relationships with Malawi enrich and strengthen that work.

7.6 To mark the 150th anniversary—and to honour the kinship that has grown between the Guilds in Scotland and Malawi—we have launched an initiative to help equip a maternity unit in Bandawe, one of the earliest mission sites established by 19thcentury Scottish pioneers. To date over £10,000 has been raised for this appeal. This unit will stand as a lasting tribute to their legacy and will provide vital, practical support to pregnant women and newborn babies in this lakeside region of Malawi.

In the name of the Committee

KAY COULL, *National Convener*
KAREN GILLON, *General Secretary*

Appendix

Guild Finances 2025

Memership 9.965
Groups 441

General Fund Income	£	General Fund Expenditure	£
Members' Contributions	161,958	Management and Admin	186,789
Donations and Grants	5,705	Objects Expenditure	31,338
Sale of Goods	9,351	Cost of Sales	6,279
Project Support	22,090		
Other	28,882		
Total	**227,986**	**Total**	**224,406**

DONATIONS TO THE WORK OF THE CHURCH

Sums given by Guilds in 2025, based on returns received to 13 March 2026, were as follows;

	£
To Ministry and Mission Funds via Congregations	23,876.90
To Congregational Funds	140,724.04
To work of the Church, including projects	161,419.73
To work outwith the Church	71,785.69
Total	**397,806.36**

2025-2027 PROJECT DONATIONS FROM MARCH 2025 TO FEBRUARY 2026

	£
BEAR NECESSITIES – Build My Church	37,079.76
RELEASE INTERNATIONAL – Operation Hope	33,037.41
SCOTTISH BIBLE SOCIETY – Bibles for Bairns	45,445.68
CROSSREACH – Playful Beginnings	55,467.12
Total	**171,029.97**

REPORT OF THE SOCIAL CARE COUNCIL (KNOWN AS CROSSREACH BOARD) MAY 2026

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Note the opportunity to take part in CrossReach Sunday on 1st November 2026 and strongly encourage all congregations to commit to remember CrossReach during the course of the next year and consider how best to support and collaborate with this area of the Church's mission *(Section 4)*.
3. Instruct CrossReach to work alongside the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team to produce briefings and resources for Presbyteries and congregations, which will allow them to make representation on the key issues affecting social care *(Section 6)*.
4. Approve further exploration of growth and development opportunities for CrossReach services, recognising that these are an important part of the Church's mission to the people of Scotland, and instruct the Social Care Council to work with the Assembly Trustees, and others, as appropriate, on financial planning for such growth *(Section 7)*.
5. Note the findings of the governance review of the Social Care Council and instruct the Council along with the Nomination Committee and Assembly Trustees to review the current situation and bring forward recommendations to General Assembly of 2027 *(Section 8)*.

Points for Information

The sections outlined below do not require decision.

1. Sections 1-3 and Section 5 describe the roll out of the strategy 'Love from CrossReach'. Section 2 highlights stories of change and transformation from the services and Section 3 reports on recruitment and retention. Section 3 also contains the details of senior staff changes following the untimely death of our Director of Older People Services and retirement of the Director of Children and Family Services.
2. Section 9 contains performance information pertaining to finance and quality.

Executive Summary

At the General Assembly of 2025, the Social Care Council (CrossReach Board) reported on the launch of its new 5-year plan: https://flipbooks.crossreach.org.uk/Strategy.

Entitled 'Love from CrossReach', it set out a clear way forward for the work of the Church of Scotland's social care arm and expression of its wider mission. Based on feedback from the people who are supported by CrossReach services, its employees, members of the Church of Scotland and wider stakeholders, the strategy captured what was important to them and distilled it down to 5 main themes.

This report outlines the first year of implementation of that strategy and the progress under those themes: **The People We Support; Our Workforce; Strong and Sustainable Services; Our Partnerships and Advocating and Influencing**, highlighting some of the main achievements of the year. It seeks support for the continuation of this work and an ongoing commitment to explore collaborative and mutually beneficial relationships within the wider Church of Scotland locally, regionally and nationally, outlining some of the initiatives which are already underway (*Section 5)*.

The work which has been undertaken in taking forward the campaign for Fair Work in Social Care and a wider drive to ensure that social care in Scotland is recognised for its value to the people of Scotland, and is funded appropriately, is described in Section 6. In that section, there is also a further call to action from the Church to ensure that the new Scottish Parliament, which will be elected in May 2026, makes a commitment to social care by tackling the longstanding pressures within the sector.

The report goes on to explore the imperative for growth and development for CrossReach as it continues to grapple with the chronic issues of government underfunding, in the full knowledge that the need for the type of support it provides on behalf of the Church, is more critical than ever. It seeks approval to explore the type of investments and funding streams which will be needed if meaningful and sustainable growth is to be achieved *(Section 7)*.

Finally, it reports on the internal governance review undertaken and an identified need for an increased number of members for the Social Care Council to oversee the work of this large, complex and busy area of the Church's work and mission *(Section 8)*.

Overall, it describes a busy and challenging year, but one in which much has already been achieved, and which lays down a good foundation on which to build for the future. More information can be found on our website https://www.crossreach.org.uk and in the Impact Report Link: https://www.crossreach.org.uk/impact-report-202526.

We are grateful for the dedication of each member of the CrossReach workforce as well as all of our volunteers and would wish to record our thanks for their committed service over the last year.

Report

1. STRATEGY – INITIAL ENGAGEMENT

1.1 When 'Love from CrossReach' was first launched it was clear that for the plan to be successful it would need to be well communicated and understood, helping all of the individual stakeholders to understand they had a part to play in taking it forward.

1.2 During the course of the year, the CrossReach senior team met with service managers and representatives from Presbyteries and congregations at a series of 4 local engagement events in Inverness, Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen. Focusing on sharing the 5-year strategy 'Love from CrossReach' and providing an opportunity for questions and conversation, the events were well received by our managers and allowed time to renew acquaintances and build new relationships within the Church. A video capturing the experiences of people who are supported by the services was particularly well received (*Love In Action:* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vDB-vFJC51A). We would want to thank those who took time to talk with us at those events, and for the positive developments now underway as a result. We are particularly grateful to the Presbytery of the North East and Northern Isles for supporting an event at Fountainhall Church at the Stocket, and to the Right Rev Rosie Frew for being our host and talking about experiences of getting to know CrossReach during visits to services which took place in October and endorsing the need for this type of mission. Thanks also to the Rev Dr. Richard Frazer, founder of the Grassmarket Project, Edinburgh, for talking so sensitively and openly about the need for the Church to remember and offer practical as well as spiritual support to people in dark times, and to share hope.

1.3 The engagement events were also a good opportunity to talk through the recently reviewed values with managers and the importance of embedding them within CrossReach culture, fostering a compassionate, inclusive, and respectful environment where individuals feel valued, safe and supported.

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2. THE PEOPLE WE SUPPORT

2.1 'We love because he first loved us' (1 John 4:19) is at the very heart of our work and is a clear response to the imperative to walk in His way.

2.1.1 Social care underpins the fabric of society, supporting people to live well, independently and as fully as possible, whatever their circumstances. When the right support reaches the right people at the right time, it can be life transforming, preventing breakdown and promoting wellbeing. CrossReach services are there for ordinary people in both their ordinary and extraordinary circumstances. They are there to support our families, friends and communities when life gets tough, and when specialist help, offered by trained, qualified and experienced staff members is needed; importantly, they are there as an expression of Christ's love in action for the people of Scotland in their most vulnerable times.

2.1.1.1 *"This organisation has helped me in two of the most difficult times in my life. They are a Godsend".* (Quote from 2025 survey of people supported by CrossReach).

2.1.2 Each of our 3 operational areas recognise this call to loving service as they have developed their own plans, linking to the strategy, over the past year. There have been many stories of transformation and many causes for celebration.

2.1.3 It has been a year where we have focussed on the quality of services, and the annual survey, which goes out to those using our services for support, gives us a snapshot view of what is going well and where we need to improve. The survey has a focus on the 5 principles of the National Health & Social Care Standards. Opportunity was also given to individuals to give their views on the specific type of service they receive and to express their views in their own words.

2.1.3.1 521 people completed the survey, with 4 words coming out most strongly: Safe, Happy, Supported and Listened to. There were many positive comments received with some reflecting just how hard it had been to access the right support for them.

2.1.3.2 However, there is always room for improvement. The results are broken down to service level and where themes are identified, these are built into an action plan for the service to take forward. The survey is anonymous so individual follow up is not possible.

2.1.3.3 The survey may capture a moment in time, but it illustrates the difference experienced by supported people every day. The work of CrossReach goes on quietly in the services and the stories below simply serve as a snapshot of some of the changes that have happened in 2025.

2.2 Adult Care Services

2.2.1 CrossReach Abstinence Recovery Service (CARS), formerly Rainbow House, marked 40 years of operation this year. Across that period, it is estimated that over 2000 people have been supported by the service. Commissioned by Glasgow City Council and other Alcohol and Drug Partnerships from across Scotland, CARS supports 18 people at a time through a 12-week structured CBT based programme to enable them to build positive longer term abstinence based recovery. The service continues to support them and their families as they move on from their 12-week stay and begin their reconnection with positive community and family supports.

2.2.1.1 *"I am so grateful to be given the chance to get better and I am loving the topic groups although it can be very emotional. Love the walks in the park! My worker is amazing, got trust in her which is really hard for me, gave me hope in my recovery".*

2.2.1.2 *"I feel safe here, the staff have been incredible in listening and support me though my recovery. They give good advice".*

2.2.1.3 "The knowledge we need and receive is first class and comes from a very educated and understanding staff team".

2.2.2 Nevis House, the new CrossReach residential rehabilitation service, which is an extension to the work at Beechwood House, formally opened on 14th August 2025 with a visit from Maree Todd, Minister for Drugs and Alcohol Policy and Sport. Funded by the Scottish Government's Drug Mission, it will provide an additional 22 placements a year and improve access to residential rehabilitation services to people in the Highlands, the Northern Isles, Shetland and Orkney.

2.2.2.1 Whilst the overall statistics are important, the real stories are in the individual lives transformed. We were delighted when William who had been supported at our Glasgow Residential Recovery Services, was selected to represent Scotland in the Homeless World Cup in Norway in August 2025. William has been supported through the Whiteinch Move on Service and has recently taken up employment and moved into his own home, a major milestone for him.

2.2.3 The rebuild of Gaberston House in Alloa was completed towards the end of the year, and we are awaiting final sign off from Clackmannanshire Council, to allow this new design of service to become active. Once opened, the new service will allow 16 people, with a need for long term support for their mental health, to move into purpose built supported accommodation and to have their own front door. This will be a first for many of the adults supported.

2.3 Older People Services

2.3.1 Keeping older people in our care homes in touch with their loved ones and the communities around them is vital to their health and wellbeing. In 2025, the Care Inspectorate issued best practice guidance around supporting meaningful connection. We are pleased to record that this year, there has been a real focus on intergenerational activity, particularly in and around the North of Scotland, where Whinnieknowe (Nairn), Cameron House (Inverness) and Walter and Joan Gray (Shetland) have been delighted to welcome in children from nurseries, primary schools and playgroups round about and take part in a variety of activities including exercise classes, reminiscing, speaking in Gaelic, and other fun learning opportunities. These sessions are thoroughly enjoyed by all and are an important factor in supporting people to feel in touch with and included in community life, as highlighted in the *Intergenerational newsletter.* (https://flipbooks.crossreach.org.uk/Intergenerational).

2.3.2 Heart for Art, our community and care home based creative art classes welcomed 150 participants supported by 80 carers. The highlight of a busy year came as they were invited to exhibit at the Scottish Dementia Arts Festival. The service showcased their exhibition, 'Mindful Journey', to attendees at the 3-day event at the Macroberts Art Centre in Stirling. One of the artists, recently diagnosed with dementia and who has painted for a number of years, has joined a local group and is enjoying the opportunities it gives. He is preparing to launch a solo exhibition in February 2026, with proceeds going back into Heart for Art.

2.3.3 Moving into a care home is a big step and takes a lot of preparation. This year, work has been undertaken to refresh the creative suite for each of our care homes with a view to helping people understand better what the care homes look like and can offer. This will help people come to a decision about their care for the future, particularly where the state requires them to fund that care for themselves. Each home will have a new brochure, a 90 second video clip, and a 360-degree tour of the interior. The majority of that work has now been completed and will continue to be refreshed into 2026.

2.4 Children and Family Services

2.4.1 It has been an industrious year for pupils at the Erskine Waterfront Education Campus, with a high success rate achieved across Nat 1 – Nat 3 units. 17 pupils achieved a total of 240 SQA units with 14 gaining 21 additional qualifications. Strong performances were noted across literacy, numeracy, science, employability, personal development, cookery, PE, ICT and creative arts. Pupils also enjoyed skills development through Youth Scotland with awards which included sailing, indoor climbing and swimming. An HMIE report commended the school, which supports children with special educational needs, for working closely with parents and local authorities to build strong, trusting relationships. Across the year, the school had an average roll of 30 young people and this year was awarded the ADHD Friendly Schools Award. The awarding panel was particularly impressed by the support the school provides for all year groups and the strong support for parents and carers.

2.4.2 Following the report at General Assembly of 2024 indicating that the centres were under review, and following the Scottish Government's decision not to award future funding to them, Polmont Prison Visitor Centre was transferred over to Apex Scotland in September 2025 with staff being TUPE'd where appropriate. Perth Prison Visitor Centre still remains within CrossReach service provision. The Scottish Government are part funding the centre and encouraging conversations are ongoing with the Presbytery of Perth about the service and its future.

2.4.3 CrossReach Counselling provides a wide range of counselling and therapeutic support from our services across Scotland. Our trauma informed, COSCA-registered Counselling Services offer therapy face-to-face at our Buckie, Glasgow, Edinburgh, and Inverness premises, as well as in schools, and from various community hubs. We also offer telephone and online counselling, allowing us to reach those who do not live close to or have difficulty accessing our centres. CrossReach Counselling has sector-leading expertise in working with children and young people, including those with care experience, clients expecting a baby or with an infant up to 3 years old, and those affected by substance use. Many of our services have strong links with their local church communities.

2.4.3.1 In total during 2025, CrossReach Counselling Services supported over 1,900 clients and their families, offering over 15,900 individual counselling sessions. 43% of our clients were referred by statutory services. 42% of our clients live in the lowest SIMD areas in Scotland, many facing complex challenges. Over the last 3 years, for over half our clients, anxiety and stress have been consistent reasons for referral. Reflecting the significant funding gaps for both national and local government, and recognising that many cannot make a donation towards their counselling sessions, we are enormously grateful for the Church's financial support of **£589,605** in 2025 and appreciate that ongoing support for 2026. Alongside the money raised by The Guild, this financial contribution has helped us to support over 700 clients (36%) through our donation services across Scotland.

2.4.3.1.1 "*Honestly this service has been invaluable, and I strongly believe saved my life. I am finally enjoying motherhood. Thank you so much. Also having my daughter in the crèche meant I could take the time to do the work and have a space to breathe*".

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3. OUR WORKFORCE

3.1 The success of the services is largely dependent on having a strong, well trained and resilient workforce. We continue to find ways of investing in them to take forward our ambition to deliver fair working practices, despite a wider care system which still does not allow for that, and create a workplace where every member of the CrossReach team feels valued.

3.2 **Reframing The Values:** Getting the culture right was identified as a necessary first step to achieving the strategy. The newly refreshed values as presented to the General Assembly of 2025 have been communicated to the workforce in a number of ways. These include running a session on them at the engagement events with managers as well as issuing a booklet explaining the importance of them to every member of staff. '*Working Together'* was also the theme of the CrossReach employee awards where we recognised the exceptional achievements of a number of employees and volunteers as nominated by their peers. Find out more about our CrossReach Values here: https://flipbooks.crossreach.org.uk/values.

3.3 **Employee Wellbeing:** It is widely understood that 1 in 4 of us will experience a problem with our mental health during the course of a year. Supporting mental health in the workplace is therefore increasingly important and we are committed to ensuring that our employees feel able to get help when they are struggling. In 2025, CrossReach joined forces with See Me Scotland and invited employees to take part in the *See Me in the Workplace* survey as part of World Wellbeing Week activities. The results are now being analysed and will form a work plan which will allow us to better support employees who are struggling with their mental health. We do already have a number of supports in place, including counselling, which can be accessed through our Employee Assistance Programme provider, HSF.

3.4 **Recruitment:** At the General Assembly of 2025, we urged Presbyteries and church partners to help us in our recruitment efforts. We are pleased to report that recruitment and retention across the organisation continues to improve with a monthly average of 10% FTE vacancies from a headcount of 1300 permanent employees. Investment in local recruitment initiatives, advertising campaigns and development of the team has helped to reduce this figure year on year by 6%. There is still work to do but this continued improvement is welcome and we are grateful for the support given in advertising vacancies across Church of Scotland networks.

3.5 **Visa Sponsorship:** In September 2025, CrossReach was successful in gaining a visa sponsorship licence which will allow us to issue a certificate of sponsorship to a small number of employees who will then be able to remain in the UK and work for CrossReach once the visa they currently hold has expired. We are working with our partners Morton Fraser McRoberts to ensure that those considered meet the strict eligibility criteria and we can fully comply with the guidance in place around this complex area.

3.6 **Internal Communications:** Facilitating two-way communication is important in sustaining good employee/employer relationships. In 2024, we launched a staff hub where we could post items of interest to our employees and make policies, procedures and guidance easily accessible to all. 2025 saw continued investment into resources available on the employee HUB. The CrossReach Board also hear directly from the employee representative group to discuss issues important to the staff group on a biannual basis, and this takes place in addition to the regular schedule of meetings between management and staff.

3.7 **Leadership Development:** Implementing a strategy well takes intentional leadership. We have a regular focus on the strategy and the topic of growth at our senior management team meetings. In order to invest in our leaders, we offer all of the senior management team access to the resources available through Charity Leadership Scotland. In October 2025, we also signed up to be ambassadors for The Calling 2026, Scotland's leadership summit to be held on Friday 2nd October 2026. 4 of our senior team were also given the opportunity to attend a leadership development course aimed at those with leadership roles in large charitable organisations.

3.8 **Senior Staff Changes:** Tragically, we lost our much-loved Director of Older People services, Allan Logan, who died after a short illness in October 2025. Allan had been a part of the CrossReach team for over 30 years and Director of Older People Services since July 2013. He was a huge character and left a significant legacy behind him. He is much missed. Jennifer Gibson took up the position on a temporary basis during Allan's period of illness and has agreed to continue in the role for the next year, offering much needed stability to that area of service.

3.8.1 Our Director of Children and Families, Sheila Gordon gave her notice of retirement in August 2025 and will leave us at the end of March 2026. Sheila has been with CrossReach since 2017 and has led the Children and Family section well, focussing in on relationships, quality and financial stability. She is replaced by Anne Currie who brings extensive experience from within the sector.

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4. STRONG AND SUSTAINABLE SERVICES

4.1 2025 was a year of strenuous activity for the CrossReach Board and senior team as we worked through a year-long plan of reviewing services and finding a way forward for them wherever we could. There were a number of significant meetings with our local authority commissioners to take forward negotiations around contracts which were deemed to be unsustainable. These negotiations covered all 3 areas of our operations and over 20 services were under scrutiny over this time. We are pleased to report that a positive way forward was identified for most of these services, but we have had to take further action on some.

4.2 Learning Disability Support in South Lanarkshire: This service was significantly affected when a sustainable way forward could not be found based on the funding contract in place. As a result, we have had to say goodbye to a number of people who have been supported by CrossReach for many years, along with some of the staff who worked with them, as their support has been passed over to another provider in the area. The transfer of clients from Threshold West of Scotland will continue into the early part of 2026 and has been particularly difficult for the teams as it is so disruptive to the lives of the supported people affected. These decisions are never taken lightly but are necessary if CrossReach is to be sustainable into the future.

4.3 Residential Care Homes (Older People): Although results improved in 2025, the residential care homes for older people continue to struggle financially. Recognising that this is still an important area of work as the elderly population in Scotland continues to grow, we have invited an external agency to work with us to carry out an exercise looking at the key challenges and the options available to remedy these. We are already seeing the dividends of that work, which will continue into 2026. It is anticipated that a progress report will come to the General Assembly of 2027.

4.4 Agency Costs: There was a significant drop in agency costs in 2025, which was welcome. However, they still remain higher than is acceptable so will involve further focus throughout 2026.

4.5 Aged Debt: Outstanding aged debt also came into focus in 2025, and we deployed additional resource to deal with some of the backlog which had occurred. This started to reverse towards the end of the year and we would want to thank the Church of Scotland Law Department for their help, when legal advice became necessary.

4.6 Financial Performance: We had set a negative budget of £1.01m for 2025 which was subsequently impacted by £900K due to the additional and unforeseen Employer National Insurance Contributions (eNIC's) changes at the end of 2024. However, all of the efforts described above helped bring us in better than budget by £12k, and marks significant progress towards reaching a financially sustainable position for CrossReach.

4.6.1 Sustainability is not just about the finances however but involves a shift in our digital efficiency, investment in buildings, and tackling our carbon footprint.

4.7 Cybersecurity within CrossReach: We have made significant investments to strengthen how we protect the sensitive information we hold. A key part of this is our Managed Detection and Response (MDR) service, which gives us 24/7 monitoring across our devices (laptops/desktops), servers, and cloud systems. MDR alerts us quickly to unusual or risky activity and provides external expert support to investigate and contain threats before they can cause harm. This investment gives us a much stronger early warning system and a faster, more reliable way to respond to cyber incidents.

4.7.1 We are also investing in staff cyber training, recognising that people are one of our most important defences. Throughout 2026, CrossReach staff will receive regular, straightforward training to help them spot phishing attempts, how to use secure passwords, and the safe handling of CrossReach data. Short learning modules and realistic phishing tests help build confidence and reduce the risk of accidental data breaches. This ensures everyone across CrossReach has the knowledge they need to help keep information safe.

4.7.2 Our cloud file systems and email services now include advanced scanning and filtering tools that we have invested in to block harmful links, detect suspicious attachments, and prevent impersonation attempts. Files stored or shared in the cloud are automatically checked for viruses and unusual activity. These tools stop many threats before they reach staff, reducing the risk of ransomware, data loss, or unauthorised access.

4.7.3 Together, these investments form a strong and practical approach to protecting CrossReach data. MDR gives us expert monitoring and rapid response, staff training reduces human error, and cloud and email scanning keep threats out of our systems. This combined approach strengthens our resilience, protects the people we support, and helps us maintain trust across the organisation.

4.8 Care Docs: Our digital care records system, having been in place since 2021, was flagged as needing attention in the later part of 2025. The agreed proposal, to migrate our existing system to the upgraded platform during 2026, will ensure that the electronic file system is not tied to specific devices or installation-based licensing. The simplified recording tools will allow staff to spend more time delivering person centred care and less time on administrative tasks that can be repetitive.

4.9 Finance System: The need for better systems to allow us to capture, deal with and understand information for the future has been an area of focus in 2025. During the latter part of the year, we appointed Optimum PPS to help us to specify the requirements for a new Finance and/or HR system which could better interface with other digital processes and streamline management information. Work in this area will progress throughout 2026.

4.10 Capital Investment: There has been a significant investment made in upgrading the facilities at a number of our residential care homes over the past year and refreshing the décor. This has made a difference to the quality of the environment and residents have enjoyed the improvements.

4.11 Carbon Net Zero: CrossReach recognises the global climate emergency and is committed to playing its part in Scotland's national endeavour to end our contribution to climate change within a generation. Our Energy Saving Framework delivers projects that reduce energy costs, are self-funding (where savings cover the cost of the assets installed), reduce carbon emissions, and improve the comfort of our buildings. Since our last report, we have installed over 500 solar panels across 7 sites. This is forecast to generate 180MWh of renewable electricity annually (enough to power roughly 65 homes) whilst also reducing our operational costs. Through a strategic funding partnership with Eco-Congregation Scotland, 5 of these installations were completed with zero capital investment from CrossReach. Eco-Congregation Scotland will use the income generated as a result of this partnership to fund their ecumenical work supporting local churches to achieve Net Zero. Work is already underway to expand this solar initiative to 14 additional sites as we move towards our goal of 100% renewable electricity by 2030.

4.12 Fundraising: Diversifying income streams and finding ways to attract new investment is a key part of our strategy to allow us to sustain what we have and invest in the future. We are pleased to report that in 2025, over £1m was raised through fundraising initiatives. We are grateful for the financial support from 1500 private donors, 35 trusts, our ongoing partnership with the Guild, and 135 churches for helping us reach this milestone. We are also glad to report that 45 churches signed up to specific activities in celebration of CrossReach Sunday in 2025, offering prayer, donations and a platform to share ideas. We continue to build relationships in this area for both the benefit of CrossReach and for the supporting congregation. This year there will be an opportunity to take part in CrossReach Sunday on 1st November 2026. Supporting materials will be available on the resources for worship page of the Church of Scotland website. We would want to encourage all congregations across Scotland to find out more about CrossReach and to build in some time during the course of the year to remember our work, to pray about it, and think about ways in which they might offer support.

5. OUR PARTNERSHIPS

5.1 We are pleased to work collaboratively with a number of partners, large and small, to make a difference in communities across Scotland, and there are already several growing partnerships across the Church. Section 5.2 – 5.4 highlight some of our church partnerships including that with The Guild and Sections 5.5 – 5.8 showcase some of our wider partnerships from 2025.

5.2 Heart for Art: These therapeutic art groups provide an opportunity for people living with dementia to express themselves freely and find new ways to communicate. They also give advice and support to carers. Heart for Art helps break down barriers by holding regular exhibitions of artwork in different types of venues, which provides opportunity for discussion around the stigma and isolation that often accompanies a diagnosis of dementia. We currently work in partnership with 9 churches as an outreach into their local communities as well as holding Heart for Art groups in a number of our care homes.

5.3 Tayside Support Services: CrossReach provides recovery advice, support and activities in the Dundee area, operating in collaboration with local congregations, the main partner being Coldside Church. Support is provided once a week through the operation of a recovery café where individuals can get help to access different types of support which they might benefit from e.g. housing, health care and transport. A range of activities are delivered by volunteers, including naloxone training, crafts and baking. The service also offers supported day placements to people on home leave as they prepare to leave prison and reconnect with their local community. Coldside Church has recently been linked with Steeple Church to form Dundee Law Church and the collaboration continues despite this significant change. We are exploring wider partnership with the Presbytery of Perth for recovery outreach in Tayside as well as with the Perth Prison Visitor Centre, supporting families with a loved one in HMP Perth, and thank them for their continued interest.

5.4 Playful Beginnings: This CrossReach project is supported within the Church of Scotland Guild's 3-year partnership 'Let us Build a House'. Playful Beginnings helps support children and families with young children who attend our Daisy Chain service in Govanhill, and the Perinatal Counselling Services in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Inverness and Moray. In the last year, Daisy Chain and the 4 perinatal counselling services have provided vital support to over 860 families, helping children all over the country to get the best start in life.

5.5 CCPS Scotland: Through CCPS, we have collaborated extensively over the past year to raise issues pertinent to the funding of social care in the voluntary sector. This work has been vitally important as we tried to tackle issues of general underfunding as well as specific issues like the eNIC's changes which came into force in April 2025. CCPS Scotland were particularly grateful for the advice and support of Baron Jim Wallace of Tankerness at that time who helped guide them through the complexities of dealing with UK Government legislation.

5.6 Daisy Chain: A collaboration between The Robertson Trust, Glasgow City Council Early Years Team and Glasgow Caledonian University has been researching ways of improving educational outcomes by enhancing the learning experiences of children in their earliest years and exploring different ways of offering support. This research has included the Daisy Chain Stay and Play model and has involved significant input from parents who access that service.

5.7 Everyone Home Collective: CrossReach is an active contributor to the Everyone Home Collective where we work with other partners to optimise service provision to people experiencing homelessness and highlighting concerns to Government. This year has seen a focus on the importance of prevention of homelessness and emphasising the need for investment in housing.

5.8 Residential Rehabilitation Providers Group: CrossReach is a founding member of this forum and has contributed to a number of Scottish Government working groups on substance use to ensure there is easier access to residential rehabilitation across Scotland.

6. ADVOCATING AND INFLUENCING

6.1 There have been a number of ways in which we have engaged with national and local government over the past year to raise matters of importance to those who are supported by the services and our employees. Key areas of activity are outlined in Sections 6.1 to 6.4.

6.2 Social Care Underfunding: There has been significant focus on this over the past year. Working with our partners in CCPS Scotland (Coalition of Care and Support Providers in Scotland) who represent the voluntary sector, we have taken part in several meetings with government ministers and the Cabinet Secretary to outline the potentially catastrophic consequences of the current funding policies. We were a signatory on an open letter to the First Minister in

August 2025 Open Letter to John Swinney and the Chief Executive was interviewed as part of a follow up piece featured in The Herald which was published on the 17th August 2025. The situation remains completely unsatisfactory and the recent Audit Scotland report points to the failures of national and local government to address the most critical issues. (Audit Scotland Performance 2025: https://flipbooks.crossreach.org.uk/CommunityHealthandSocialCarePerformance). Moreover, a recent exercise undertaken by CCPS indicates that the gap is widening, rather than narrowing, in terms of the pay awarded to frontline social care workers and their equivalent counterparts in the NHS: "*A 2019 £2,400 difference in pay between a NfP social care worker and their NHS equivalent increased to a £3,770 disparity by April 2025".* https://www.ccpscotland.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/CCPS-Briefing-Stage-3-Fund-Social-Care-Like-It-Matters.pdf

6.2.1 We continue to be deeply concerned that there is no appropriate provision made for social care in Scotland and that addressing that deficit has not been presented as a national priority. In the run up to the Scottish Parliamentary elections, we urged candidates to commit to the following 5 promises; deliver dignity of work; invest in early intervention and prevention; address current inequalities; include people who access services in policy making and commit to sustainable funding, and we will continue to call on the new Scottish Government to commit to those changes. That will only happen if the people of Scotland understand the importance of these commitments to them and their families for the future. We are asking for the support of our church communities and congregations to help highlight the issues and demand change in this area.

6.3 Anne's Law: The Chief Executive has been part of the Annes's Law oversight group for the past 4 years. It was originally formed in March 2021 as the Open with Care (OwC) Oversight Group, when lengthy blanket restrictions on care home visits during the Covid-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of residents. In response, Scottish Ministers committed to making a law to ensure that people living in adult care homes can stay connected with their loved ones whatever the circumstances. That law is known as Anne's Law and was enacted in July 2025 as part of the Care Reform (Scotland) Act 2025.

6.4 Scotland Demands Better: CrossReach supported the Scotland Demands Better march on 25 October 2025 which had as one of its areas of focus, better jobs with fair conditions and wages that pay the bills. This fits with the activity that CrossReach has been undertaking over the past couple of years to raise the issue of fair work in social care which the Government undertook to take forward on the back of the Fair Work Convention 2019 report into conditions in the sector, but which has not yet been fully delivered.

6.5 Participation Group: We also have a participation group which brings people who use services together in different ways to give voice to the issues which affect them and their families. It is led by a Participation Officer, and we are grateful to the funding from the Sir Duncan Carmichael Trust which helps to make dedicated time possible. This year, one of the themes for that group, also echoed in our National Learning Disabilities Forum, was Inclusion. Work is currently underway to ensure that those with a right to vote are included in the election process and understand what the candidates have to offer.

7. THE WAY FORWARD – GROWTH

7.1 Whilst we have taken determined action on many aspects of driving the strategy forward dealing with a number of challenges, during the latter part of the year we began to look at opportunities for growth and development of services. This is a not only a necessary part of sustainability but, we believe, is an important part of a wider discussion on Church of Scotland growth priorities; *growing in faith, growing in service, growing in impact*.

7. 2 Over the course of the year, we have looked at demographic information to ascertain where our support is most needed, and we have gained knowledge of gaps based on comments that were made during the survey of people who are supported by our services.

7.2.1 Some of the key information follows:

- **Drug Deaths:** Figures published in September 2025 (ISO) show 1,017 deaths for last year, tragically, still the highest in Europe.
- **Aging Population:** The biggest change in age structure is for the oldest age groups. It is projected that the number of people aged 75 and over will rise by 341,300 over the 25 year period between mid-2022 and mid-2047. (Scottish Public health Observatory).
- **Mental Health:** The percentage of people reporting mental health conditions more than doubled in Scotland and increased sixfold in young people between the 2011 and 2022 Scottish Censuses. This upsurge was the largest increase across all health condition types. (Royal College of Psychiatrists 2025).
- **Child Poverty:** Nearly 1 in 4 children are living in poverty, and poverty rates amongst the Scottish Government's so-called priority families remain particularly high. Over half of all children in poverty live in a household where someone is disabled. (Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2025).
- **Prison Population:** Scotland's prison population in 2025 hit record-high levels, reaching 8,430 in October 2025 and rising to 8,441 by 11 November 2025.

7.2.2 Feedback from people who are supported by our services:

"*We absolutely love coming to Daisy Chain's little marvels and notice how happy and content my little A is before and after the club compared to other clubs we go to but i'm starting to feel sad and anxious that little marvels is for up to 5 years old and my son will be 5 soon and is being home educated and the club has not only helped him but also me in so many ways you wouldn't even imagine. I hope and pray there will be an older kids service in the future as children and adults with autism become familiar, safe and content going to the same place week in week out so will be a huge loss in our lives when A turns 5".*

"I appreciate the opportunity to experience counselling at a rate I can afford".

"The downside is the length of time waiting. The waiting lists are long".

"After 10 years of trying to get mental health support from other sources, i feel that, through my experience with the centre, I am finally feeling progress, peace and hope".

7.3 There are many other data sources available to us, and the CrossReach Board and senior managers have spent several sessions exploring growth and development of services throughout the year. They have started to bring together a number of potential options, some of which will require initial funding, either from within the current resources available to the Church of Scotland or externally. There will be a full report detailing options presented to the CrossReach Board in April 2026. Whilst no final decisions have been made, we are seeking the approval of the General Assembly to continue to explore areas of need, working within the plans being developed by the Assembly Trustees and involving local congregations wherever possible, to bring together more detailed plans for future growth and development and report progress to a future General Assembly.

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8. GOVERNANCE REVIEW

8.1 In April 2025, the Board undertook a review of governance, using the Turcan Connell Good Governance Questionnaire as a guide to ensure that they were acting with appropriate regard to the delegated authorities invested in them through the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) agreed with the Assembly Trustees. Whilst the answers given generally indicated a Board which is competent and confident in its ability to drive things forward overall, there were several areas identified where there was a high degree of consensus about the need for further discussion and action.

8.2 These in the main concerned:

- The number of members of the board and specific skillsets.
- Overall capacity for growth and expansion.
- The sense that some board members feel underqualified for the task, and that pulling on experience of members with more experience of the social care field would be useful.
- The degree of control afforded to the Board.

8.3 The question of growth and capacity remains under discussion as highlighted in 7.3.

8.4 We have now entered into discussion with the Nominations Committee about the need for one or more additional members for the Social Care Council given the size and complexity of the work it oversees, and are asking this General Assembly to approve a review of the size of the Social Care Council (11 members plus ex-officio CEO) in order to ensure that it is appropriately equipped to continue to drive forward in line with the strategy.

8.5 A set of financial principles now in place helps address the question of delegated authorities and a review of the MOU and reporting to the Church of Scotland Governance group will take place during the course of 2026 to ensure that these remain appropriate and fit for purpose.

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9. PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

9.1 Care Inspectorate Results

9.1.1 CrossReach has 53 services which are inspected by the Care Inspectorate.

9.1.2 During 2025, 26 services were inspected. Grades are awarded for each inspection theme ranging from 1 (unsatisfactory) to 6 (excellent).

9.1.3 The inspection themes are:

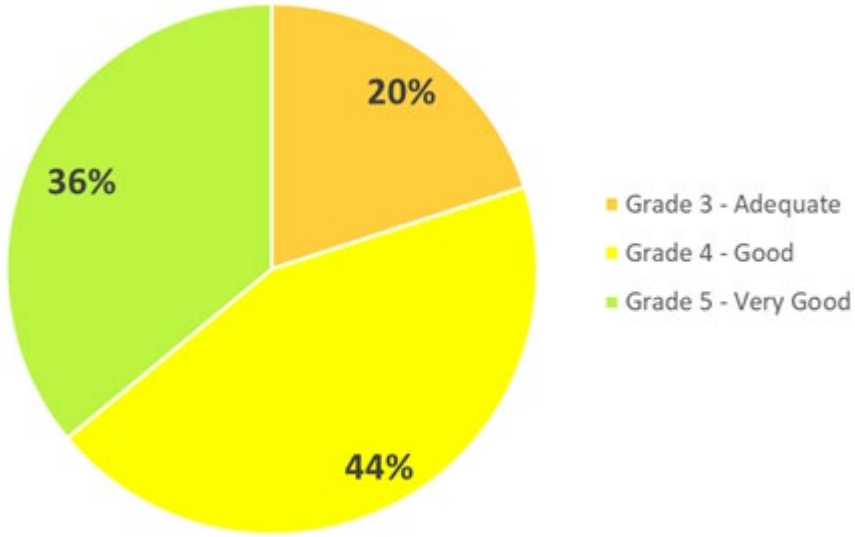
- How well do we support people's wellbeing?
- How good is our leadership?
- How good is our staff team?
- How good is our setting?
- How well is our care and support planned?

9.1.4 Not all inspection themes are assessed in each inspection, but most inspections cover the following areas:

9.1.4.1 Area A – How well do we support people's wellbeing?

9.1.4.1.1 Of the 26 services inspected during 2025, 25 were inspected on this theme. 80% of our registered services inspected on this key question achieved a grade of at least 4 (Good), with 36% of these services achieving 5 (Very Good).

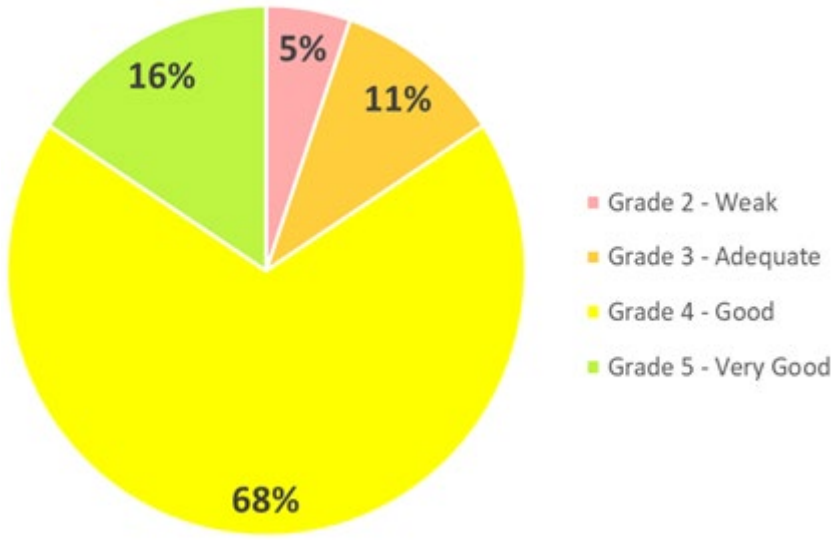
Graph A Care Inspectorate Grades – How well do we support people's wellbeing?



9.1.4.2 Area B – How good is our staff team?

9.1.4.2.1 Of the 26 services inspected during 2025, 19 were inspected on this theme. 84% of our registered services inspected on this key question achieved a grade of at least 4 (Good), with 16% of these services achieving 5 (Very Good).

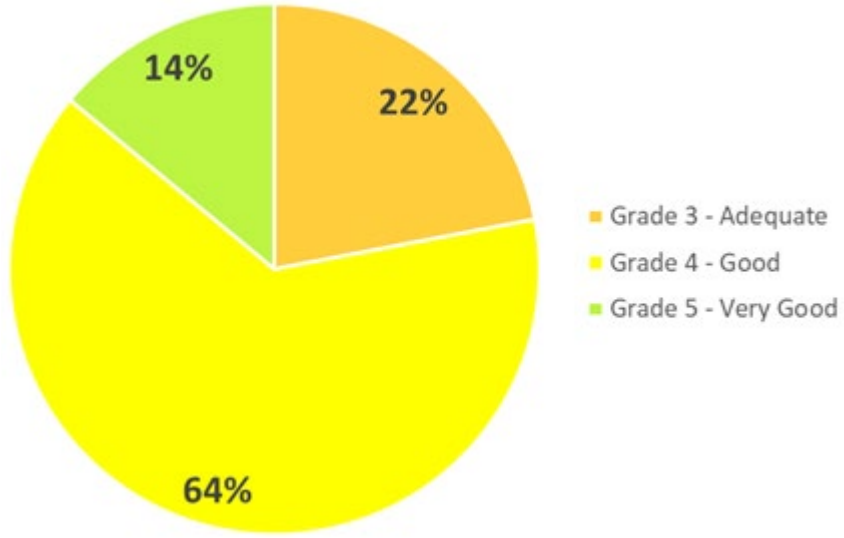
Graph B Care Inspectorate Grades – How good is our staff team?



9.1.4.3 Area C – How well is our care and support planned?

9.1.4.3.1 Of the 26 services inspected during 2025, 14 were inspected on this theme. 78% of our registered services inspected on this key question achieved a grade of at least 4 (Good), with 14% of these services achieving 5 (Very Good).

Graph C Care Inspectorate Grades – How well is our care and support planned?



9.2 Erskine School Inspection Results

9.2.1 In September 2025, Education Scotland inspected CrossReach's Erskine Waterfront Campus School. Education Scotland also use a 6-point scale as part of their 'How good is our school?' inspection process. The inspection themes are;

- Leadership and Management: How good is our leadership and approach to improvement?
- Learning Provision: How good is the quality of the care and education we offer?
- Successes and Achievements: How good are we at ensuring the best possible outcomes for all our learners?

9.2.1.1 Erskine Waterfront Campus was graded in 2 of these themes – Learning Provision and Successes and Achievements – receiving grade 3 (Satisfactory) for both.

9.3 Service User Survey Results

9.3.1 The results from the annual survey of people who access our services yielded the following results.

Graph D How the survey was completed

I completed this survey myself	244	47%
A CrossReach staff member assisted me to complete the form	168	32%
I completed this form on behalf of someone who uses a CrossReach Service	79	15%
Someone other than a CrossReach staff member assisted me to complete the form	16	3%
Did not specify	16	3%
	523	

Graph E Participation by operational directorate

Adult Care Services	128	24%
Children & Families Services	176	34%
Older People Services	217	41%
Did not specify	2	0%
	523	

9.3.2 For this section of the survey, services were categorised as outlined below, allowing questions to be tailored to each service.

Graph F Participation by service survey areas

Children & Young People's Residential Houses	14	3%
Counselling Services	79	15%
Day Services & Respite Care	131	25%
Housing Support / Care at Home Services	33	6%
Residential - Adult Care Service	87	17%
Residential Care - Older People Services	158	30%
School	20	4%
Did not specify	1	0%
	523	

9.3.3 The service user survey had questions designed for each service area, but they all included the same questions based on the Health and Social Care Standards. The results were as follows:

Graph G Health and Social Care Standards based questions

	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	523	424 81%	73 14%	12 2%	3 1%	0 0%	11 2%	497 95%
Compassion CrossReach staff are kind and caring to me	523	417 80%	81 15%	15 3%	0 0%	0 0%	10 2%	498 95%
Be Included I receive the right information at the right time and in a way that I can understand	500	359 72%	91 18%	26 5%	7 1%	1 0%	16 3%	450 90%
Responsive Care and Support If I make a complaint or raise a concern it is acted upon	500	324 65%	98 20%	40 8%	10 2%	3 1%	25 5%	422 84%
Wellbeing I feel safe and protected	500	405 81%	60 12%	16 3%	1 0%	4 1%	14 3%	465 93%

9.3.3.1 A number of questions were also asked within each service area, with a focus on environment.

Graph H Children and Young People, Adult Care and Older People Services, Residential Care Services and School

	Total Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Did Not Answer	Total Positive Responses
I have a choice of different spaces to use depending on how I feel	256	157 61%	61 24%	21 8%	5 2%	3 1%	9 4%	218 85%
The service feels the right size for me and supports my comfort and wellbeing	256	160 63%	61 24%	14 5%	10 4%	4 2%	7 3%	221 86%
I feel comfortable and respected here, with safe places for my belongings and spaces that meet my individual needs.	256	163 64%	63 25%	14 5%	7 3%	2 1%	7 3%	226 88%
I am happy with where this place is located, and it helps me stay connected to the people, services and community that are important to me	279	167 60%	68 24%	21 8%	8 3%	7 3%	8 3%	235 84%
I have access to the furniture, equipment and resources I need to take part in activities that are meaningful and enjoyable to me.	256	162 63%	58 23%	20 8%	6 2%	1 0%	9 4%	220 86%
The rooms, furniture and shared spaces are clean, tidy, well maintained and welcoming.	256	171 67%	67 26%	8 3%	2 1%	2 1%	6 2%	238 93%

Graph I Counselling Services

	Total Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Did Not Answer	Total Positive Responses
The counselling premises feel safe, calm and welcoming when I arrive.	79	72 91%	4 5%	2 3%	0 0%	0 0%	1 1%	76 96%
The rooms used for counselling support my privacy and dignity.	79	70 89%	6 8%	2 3%	0 0%	0 0%	1 1%	76 96%
The rooms, furniture, lighting and surroundings help me feel comfortable, supported and able to focus during my sessions.	79	58 73%	9 11%	8 10%	0 0%	1 1%	3 4%	67 85%

Graph J Day Services and Respite Care

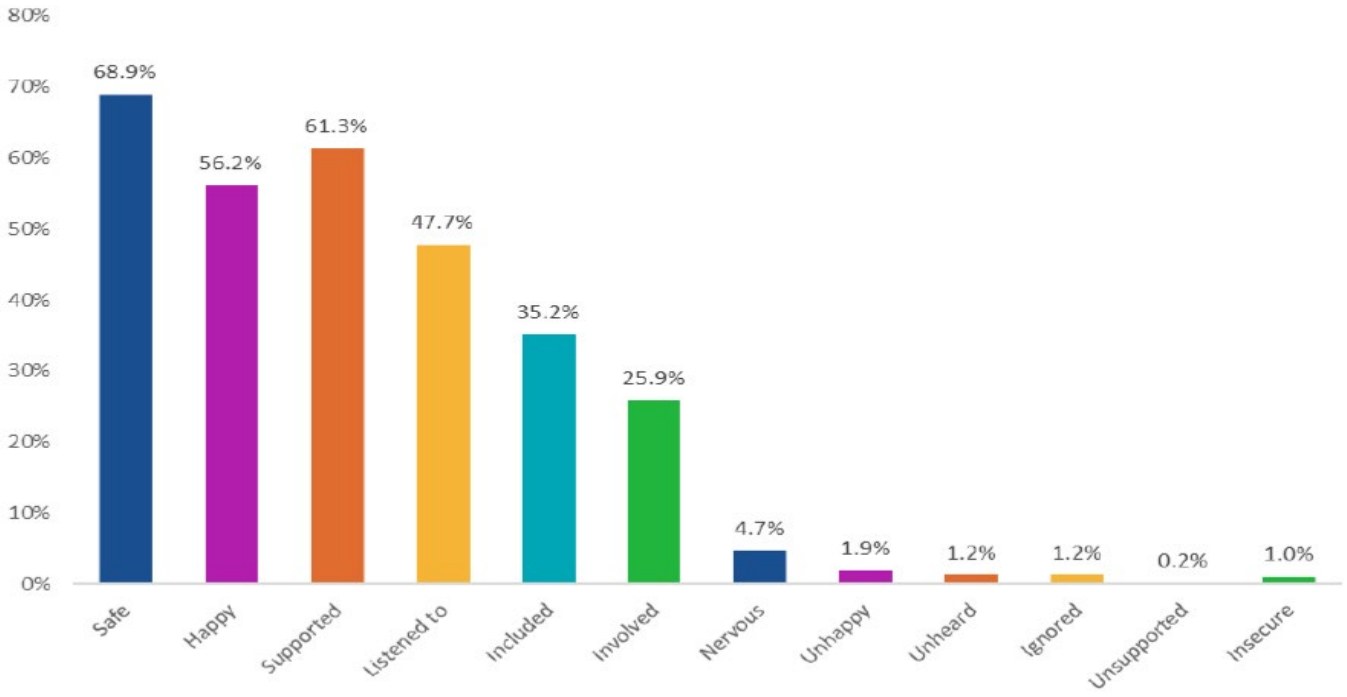
	Total Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Did Not Answer	Total Positive Responses
The building feels safe, welcoming and well organised when I arrive.	131	112 85%	13 10%	3 2%	1 1%	0 0%	2 2%	125 95%
The spaces I use are comfortable and suitable for the activities I take part in.	131	90 69%	19 15%	2 2%	0 0%	0 0%	20 15%	109 83%
There are quiet areas and shared spaces available that meet my needs while I am here.	131	94 72%	23 18%	11 8%	1 1%	1 1%	1 1%	117 89%
The layout and size of the building help me feel at ease and able to take part fully.	131	107 82%	15 11%	7 5%	0 0%	1 1%	1 1%	122 93%
The furniture, equipment and materials provided support my comfort, safety and enjoyment.	131	103 79%	21 16%	3 2%	1 1%	1 1%	2 2%	124 95%
The rooms, furniture and equipment are clean and well maintained.	131	108 82%	19 15%	2 2%	1 1%	0 0%	1 1%	127 97%

Graph K Housing Support and Care at Home Services

	Total Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Did Not Answer	Total Positive Responses
Staff respect my home and personal space and help me use my home safely and comfortably.	33	28 85%	3 9%	1 3%	0 0%	0 0%	1 3%	31 94%
I am supported to use the rooms and spaces in my home in ways that suit me, including quiet spaces and, where possible, outdoor areas.	33	25 76%	6 18%	1 3%	0 0%	0 0%	1 3%	31 94%
I am consulted about any décor, equipment or adaptations provided or arranged by the service to help me feel safe, comfortable and at ease in my home.	33	24 73%	7 21%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	2 6%	31 94%
Staff help me keep my personal belongings safe and respect what matters to me in my home.	33	30 91%	2 6%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	1 3%	32 97%
The support I receive helps me feel calm and comfortable in my home.	33	28 85%	3 9%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	2 6%	31 94%
Any equipment staff have responsibility for in my home is clean and well maintained.	33	21 64%	9 27%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	3 9%	30 91%

9.3.4 In addition, an exercise was carried out asking people who use our services to pick their top 3 words after receiving CrossReach support. The graph shows the top words that the people chose.

Graph L Pick 3 Words

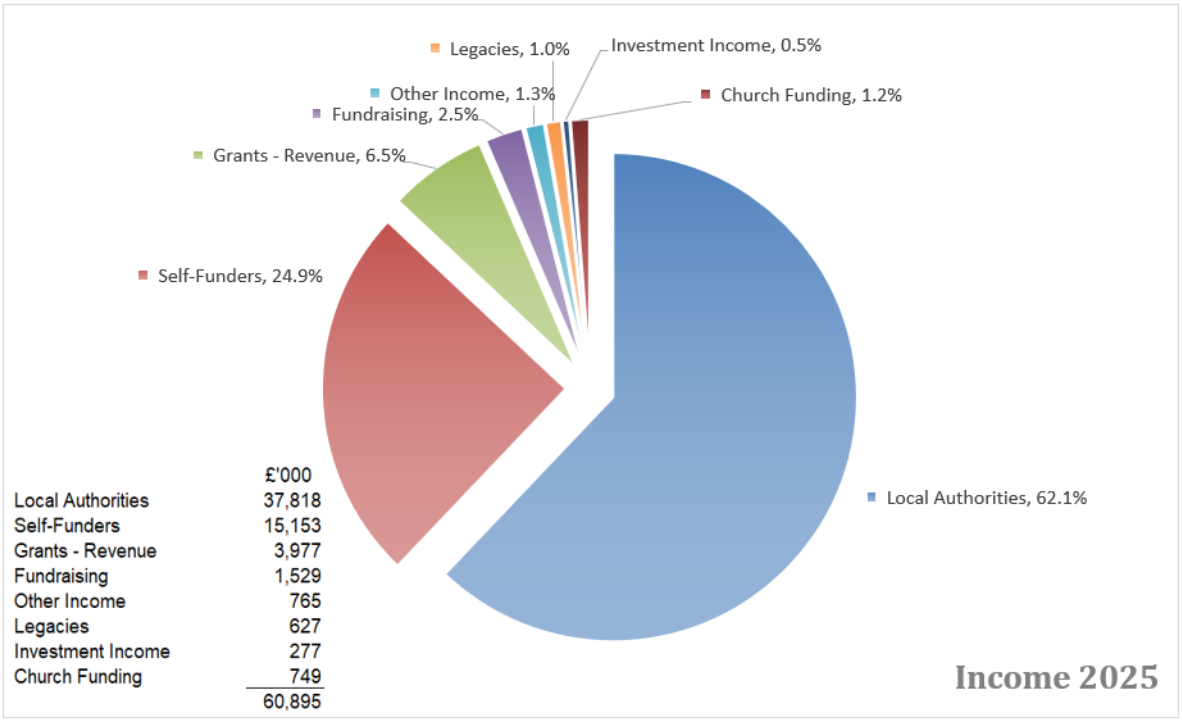


9.4 Financial

9.4.1 2025 was another challenging year for CrossReach, with c.£900k added to costs due to an unfunded increase in National Insurance costs. This increase was announced after the CrossReach budget for 2025 had been set. In spite of this, and of continuing local authority pressure on income from care and support, CrossReach came in ahead of budget for the year. Year on year service delivery costs increased by 5.4%, while income from charitable activities increased by 5.6%. The increased cost of service delivery derived primarily from a Scottish Government mandated pay increase for frontline staff which, as always, was welcome. However, in line with earlier years, it did not fully cover the cost of the increase, it did not cover the wider staff group, and there was no recognition of the inflation in non-wage costs.

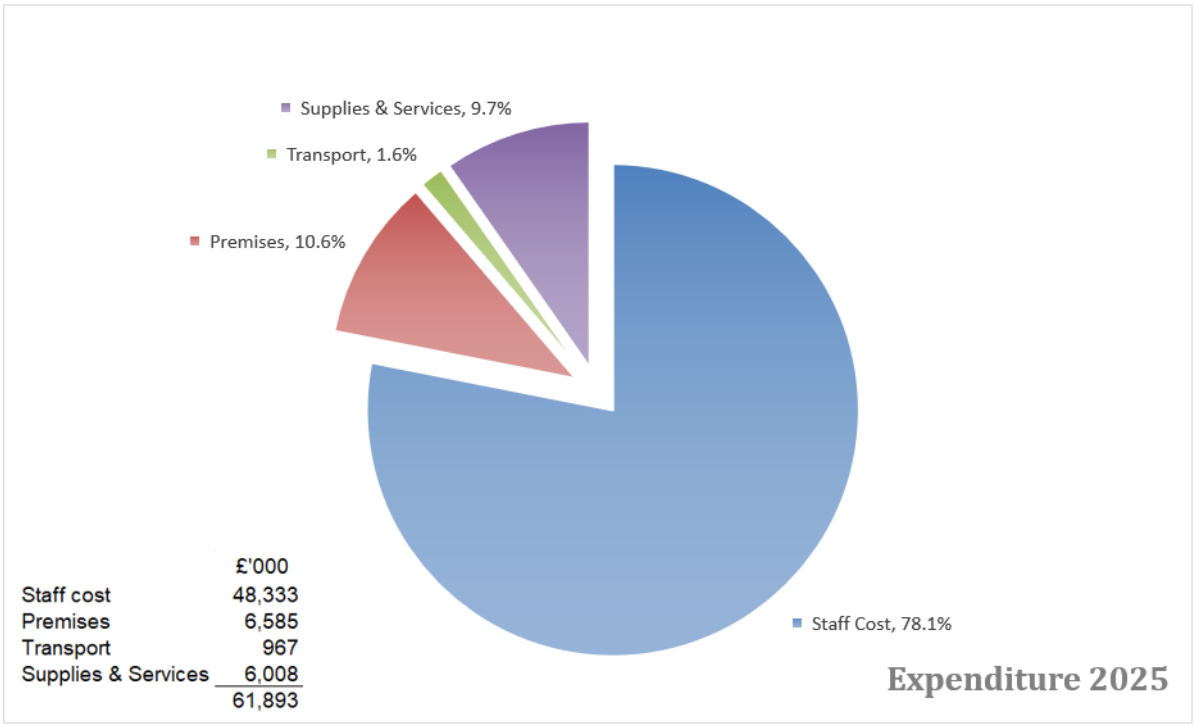
9.4.2 The work to tackle agency usage continued in 2025, with a drop in agency cost of 10.94%. As prices had increased, this represents a greater drop in actual agency hours used.

Graph M Income 2025



9.4.3 Taking into account the unexpected and unfunded National Insurance increases, and the shortfall in funding for charitable activities mentioned in 9.4.1, the net outgoings of CrossReach in 2025 still reduced to £998k from £2,109k in 2024 (2023 – £3,141). This shows welcome progress towards sustainability.

Graph N Expenditure 2025



In the name of the Social Care Council (known as CrossReach Board)

MIKE CANTLAY, *Convener*
DOUGLAS HAMILTON, *Vice-Convener*
VIV DICKENSON, *Chief Executive Officer*

Addendum

Viv Dickenson, A Career of Service and Leadership at CrossReach

Viv Dickenson joined the then Board of Social Responsibility in 1995 after serving in the Prison Service (England and Wales) in senior operational roles during the early part of her career.

She took up a one-year part-time temporary contract in the perinatal counselling service as the family moved up to Scotland, but was soon offered a permanent position, and decided to stay. During her time at CrossReach, Viv has held a number of roles including Manager of the Perinatal Services, Head of Service Mental Health, Justice and Homelessness and Director of Children and Family Services. For the last nine years she has held the post of Chief Executive Officer of CrossReach and Secretary to the Social Care Council.

During her long career she has advocated for change in a number of areas including better psychological help for parents in the early days of parenthood, better access to loved ones for residents in care homes, and better pay and conditions for care and support workers. She has also sat on a number of boards of large and small organisations including that of Barlinnie Prison Visitor Centre (The Croft) as that missional work was initiated by St Enoch's Church, and, more recently, The Coalition of Care and Support Providers Scotland, which is the membership organisation for around 90 of the most substantial care and support providers in Scotland's third sector.

As Chief Executive Officer she has worked hard to stabilise CrossReach, helping to make it a more sustainable and better governed organisation which will serve the Church of Scotland well as a part of its overall mission in the years to come.

Viv has been privileged to work with a great bunch of colleagues from within CrossReach, throughout the wider Church, and beyond, whose passion, dedication and friendship she has enjoyed and appreciated, and wishes her fellow pilgrims every blessing for the road ahead.

MIKE CANTLAY, *Convener*
DOUGLAS HAMILTON, *Vice-Convener*

Appendix 1 – List of CrossReach Services

Adult Services

Justice Services
- Dick Stewart Service (Glasgow)

Homelessness Services
- Cale House (Inverness)
- Cunningham House (Edinburgh)
- Kirkhaven Project (Glasgow)

Learning Disabilities
- Eskmills (Edinburgh)
- The Bungalow (Stonehaven)
- Threshold Edinburgh
- Threshold Glasgow
- Threshold Support Services – Community and Short Breaks (North and South Lanarkshire)
- Threshold Support Services – Housing and Residential (North and South Lanarkshire)

Mental Health
- Allarton (Glasgow)
- Gaberston House (Alloa)
- Lewis Street (Stornoway)
- Morven Day Services (Kilmarnock)

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)
- Dumbrock House (Strathblane)
- Finniescroft Farm (Lennoxtown)
- 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

Counselling, Support & Training

CrossReach Counselling North and West – 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, Glasgow (Broomhill)
- Heart for Art, Musselburgh – Paused due to lack of local funding.
- Heart for Art, Strathaven
- Heart for Art, Stonehaven – Paused due to lack of local funding.
- Heart for Art, Dunfermline
- Morlich House (Edinburgh)
- Oversteps (Dornoch)
- Queen's Bay Lodge (Edinburgh)
- South Beach House (Ardrossan) – Dementia & Heart for Art in the Care Home
- 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 – Day Care Centre and Heart For Art
- 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

ECUMENICAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE MAY 2026

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Instruct the Committee to send copies of the Ecumenical Audit to all Presbyteries, and the Presbytery and Partnership Support Programme Group *(Appendix 1)*.
3. Note the intention of the Committee bringing an amended Local Ecumenical Partnerships Act (Act XI 2012), as per the instruction of General Assembly 2025, to the General Assembly of 2027.
4. Approve the delegates to Assemblies, Synods and Conferences of other Churches, and the appointment of representatives to Ecumenical Bodies *(Appendix 2)*.

Points for Information

The Committee is planning towards holding a conference in Autumn 2026 focussing on the implications of the 1700th anniversary of the Nicene Creed in 2026, entitled: "1701: The Story Continues".

Executive Summary

The report of the Ecumenical Relations Committee in 2026 emphasises the importance of working together in unity in many different and rewarding ways. The Ecumenical Audit of 2025 gives us some useful insights as to how we might best employ our resources together. It acknowledges the work being undertaken in so many areas across a number of Christian denominations. It encourages us to hope that we might continue on this trajectory, while enjoying the richness and vitality that each tradition brings to the household of God.

Report

1. "BUILDING GOD'S HOUSE, COUNTING THE COST – A SHARED NATIONAL MISSION"

1.1 Foundations

1.1.1 Last year, the General Assembly affirmed the universal dimension of the Church's character as expressed in the *Articles Declaratory* of the Church of Scotland. In Article I of the *Articles Declaratory*, it is affirmed that the 'Church of Scotland is part of the Holy Catholic or Universal Church'. Later in Article VII, it is declared that:

> 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.

1.1.2 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.

1.1.3 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 to enable 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).

1.2 Building God's House

1.2.1 The constitution of the Church of Scotland makes it clear, therefore, that ecumenism is not a distraction from mission, but is the *very means* that Jesus identities for the evangelism of the world.

1.2.2 While this vision is core to our identity as a Church, we are not only called to affirm this vision, but to *realise* it. We are called to build it, in concrete ways, across the breadth of the land. Many congregations are familiar with the hymn, "Let us Build a House", with its refrain "all are welcome" (*Church Hymnary 4th Edition, Hymn 198*). It encourages our congregations to be welcoming. Yet it also encourages a lively hope that our Christian welcome might extend beyond the walls of wood and stone into our communities. This year the Ecumenical Relations Committee asks us to consider how we welcome those in other denominations, as well as celebrating the welcome we receive from them.

1.2.3 Pursuing this avenue of collaboration, we hear the words of Scripture, which encourages us to be "diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker that need not be ashamed" (*2Tim.2:15 CSB*). Yet, it is clear that there is much work to do as we build God's house together and realise Christ's prayer for the Church and the world.

1.3 Counting the Cost

1.3.1 The Ecumenical Relations Committee notes the imperative for the General Assembly Trustees to produce a balanced budget by 2027 and seeks to support that aim so far as this is possible within the scope of its work. However, it notes that the cost to the denomination in building God's house is more than monetary. Our members are encouraged to support their local congregations in the stewardship of their time, talents and money. We hope this call, across all

denominations and particularly the Church of Scotland, might be heeded. For our greatest capital is not to be found in our wealth, but in the talents and skills and creativity that God has given to the souls in our care. These people are found across the whole Scottish Church, as well as those in Church of Scotland congregations, and in the "common weal" of the general population across the country.

1.3.2 Similarly, the cost becomes not just an expenditure to be optimised and corralled but also the investment of our resources to produce the maximum good for the Kingdom of God. While the Ecumenical Relations Committee has sought to make good use of restricted funds it has also begun to look at the way we invest in those souls who might serve our communities best. Examples of this are where there are joint posts in communities and in single congregation Local Ecumenical Partnerships, internships, such as in the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), and in the encouragement for Presbyteries to support ecumenism in their own work and the work of our congregations.

1.3.3 One of the challenges faced by the Committee since November 2025 has been the secondment of the Ecumenical Officer and Secretary of the Committee to serve as Acting Principal Clerk. As a consequence, the capacity of the Committee to fulfil all that might have been undertaken during the months since then has been considerably reduced. One specific issue arising from this was the lack of capacity to take forward the work on revising the Local Ecumenical Partnerships Act (Act XI 2012), which was scheduled to be completed this year. We would crave the indulgence of the General Assembly to grant a further year to complete this necessary work to a satisfactory standard.

1.4 Shared National Mission

1.4.1 Over the course of several years, conversation between denominations in Scotland has increasingly come together in the Scottish Church Leaders' Forum (SCLF) and the Ecumenical Officers' Forum, (EOF) with these being the constituent elements of the Scottish Christian Forum (SCF), which is now recognised as the national ecumenical body. Further work on the SCF is required in order to make it more fully a reality, albeit that the constituent elements are actively functioning. The Assembly will wish to note that Action of Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS) remains in existence as a grant-making body and their generous contribution to the cost of the Ecumenical Audit (see below) is much appreciated.

1.4.2 The reports from a succession of General Assemblies, Synods, Conventions, and Connections have made it plain that the appetite for working together is steadily growing. Almost universally, the attitude appears to be one of "how do we make this possible?", rather than raising roadblocks. Invitations of support are becoming more frequent, in some cases between several denominations rather than just bilaterally.

1.4.3 However, it must be admitted that progress is much slower than hoped, with Presbytery Mission Planning and congregational adjustment with their commensurate change of leadership and focus being cited as leading to setbacks. It may be that this has been inevitable as relationships and institutional knowledge rely on the individuals in appointments.

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2. ECUMENICAL AUDIT

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 In evidence of mutual support and joint working, we were pleased to see an initial summary of the 2025 Ecumenical Audit brought to the General Assembly of 2025. We are now delighted to present an analysis of this audit by its author, the Rev Dr Fiona Tweedie (*Appendix 1 -"Better a nearby friend…" An Ecumenical Audit of EMU-C congregations in Scotland*).

2.1.2 The 2025 Ecumenical Audit surveyed 790 congregations across the Church of Scotland, Methodist Church, Scottish Episcopal Church, and United Reformed Church—reaching 63% of all of their congregations in Scotland. As the report notes, it aims to describe "the locations and co-locations of [these] congregations" and how they work together.

2.1.3 91% of all congregations have another congregation within 5 miles, enabling local cooperation. As the formality increases, the proportion of churches engaging in joint working falls for all denominations. Around three-quarters (73%) work together at least occasionally, and more than a third (35%) are members of a Churches Together group, yet only around 11% share buildings and 3% are in covenanted partnerships. There are just seven single congregation Local Ecumenical Partnerships in Scotland, including those in which the Church of Scotland is involved.

2.1.4 While a great number of congregations are engaging with ecumenical neighbours in both worship, study, and other joint activities, it is notable that the vast majority can be described as brief, or one-off encounters. While there is the World Day of Prayer and the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, far fewer congregations participate in regular worship activities such as summer services, pulpit supply or joint Sunday schools.

2.1.5 While worship events tend to be occasional and one-off, Scottish congregations are engaging in a wide range of other ecumenical activities. Christian Aid Week and social gatherings are popular, as is the running of food banks. Indeed, this is the activity deemed most effective for strengthening cooperation. Local projects – such as joint outreach, fundraising and community projects – are also relatively popular, and these do require longer-term engagement. When the focus moves away from the immediate local area, however – such as shared overseas partnerships or One World Week – the number of congregations involved drops considerably.

2.1.6 Memories of local ecumenical cooperation can be lost as leaders change and congregations or parishes are adjusted. Members of congregations may be the holders of the "institutional memory" of previous joint ventures. As change occurs, it is important to safeguard what has worked in the past, as this may be easily re-started and cooperation increased.

2.1.7 The Ecumenical Audit indicates that there is still significant work to do in embedding ecumenical thinking throughout our institution. Nevertheless, where it is present it is already bearing fruit, and as the Audit title suggests, "Better a nearby friend…".

3. PRESBYTERY ENGAGEMENT

3.1 The Committee continues to applaud the model of ecumenism produced by the Presbytery of Fife, a model of which was presented to General Assembly 2025. In conversations with office bearers of other Presbyteries, this is the example of ecumenical cooperation most often highlighted and, following discussions, the Presbytery of Forth Valley and Clydesdale have incorporated ecumenical support into its Committee on Mission and Care. The Committee notes that the Presbytery of Glasgow has for some time supported ecumenism through its Committee on Ecumenical Relations and Interfaith Matters.

3.2 Alongside this, the Committee were pleased to note the development of different forms of local ecumenical partnership in the Presbytery of Fife and the Presbytery of Perth respectively and note that these are very much founded on the good local and regional relationships that exist with our partner churches. In similar fashion, the Committee has been involved in discussions within the Presbytery of England and the Channel Islands around the establishing of local ecumenical partnerships in contexts furth of Scotland. Alongside this, the Committee has been party to ongoing discussions in the Presbytery of Lothian and Borders in relation to the possibility of enabling shared witness in one of the major housing developments within East Lothian.

3.3 The Committee continues to engage with those Presbyteries in which there are single congregation Local Ecumenical Partnerships: Clyde, Edinburgh and West Lothian, Forth Valley and Clydesdale and the South West, and is grateful for the willingness of the respective Clerks to work with the Committee in addressing the opportunities and challenges that this brings.

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4. CONFERENCES

4.1 Diaconate Council

4.1.1 During the course of the year, we were pleased to receive a report from the Diaconate Council, which contained many good examples of ecumenical work. The reflection offered a positive, affirming account of the 94th Diaconate Council, emphasising the vitality, identity, and ongoing significance of the Diaconate within the Church of Scotland. The author begins by challenging the idea of deacons as "liminal," insisting instead that *"deacons can never be on the margins... but are always the Church wherever they are"*. The Council reaffirmed the Diaconate as a vibrant, Spiritled ministry grounded in baptismal calling and lived discipleship. Stories shared across the weekend revealed common threads: gradual discernment, overcoming initial hesitations, and a profound sense of peace in responding to God's call.

4.2 World Council of Churches

4.2.1 In October 2025, Professor Paul Nimmo (University of Aberdeen) represented the Church of Scotland at the Sixth World Conference of the Faith and Order Committee of the World Council of Churches. The event took place over six days at the Logos Papal Centre of the Coptic Orthodox Church, located at Wadi El Natrun in Egypt. The conference took place in the year of the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, the first ecumenical council of the Church, which composed the original version of the Nicene Creed.

4.2.2 The theme of the conference was 'Where now for visible unity?', and delegates considered papers that explored the obstacles impeding the unity of Christ's Church.

4.2.3 The first difficulty explored related to the way in which minority churches in certain parts of the world face threats to their existence on a daily basis, encountering persecution, violence, and dehumanisation on account of their faith. Delegates were painfully aware that the Coptic Orthodox Church in Egypt itself has long experience of suffering for its Christian faith. A second difficulty related to the way in which churches around the developing world represent communities still experiencing the effects of brutal enslavement, historical colonialism and imperial power into the present day. Several contributions from church leaders in Africa spoke with particular power about this issue and its poisonous legacy, and there was a strong sense that any road to visible unity would also require to be marked by repentance for past sins, decolonisation of attitudes and programmes, and reorientation to justice and reconciliation. Indeed, the fact that the Council of Nicaea itself was a tool of imperial power and ecclesiastical discrimination did not pass without critical observation and comment. A third difficulty related to the way in which the world itself is in many ways divided and polarised in the present, with violence and war wreaking death and devastation in so many places, and a consequent apathy and complicity in the face of injustice. The danger of hopeless and apathy in face of such oppressive forces was recognised at several points to be clear and present, and to be a prominent concern particularly with a view to ongoing mission in the world.

4.2.4 There was a happy consensus, embodied in the shared worship sessions, that the churches and Christians represented at the conference agreed more than they disagreed on core matters of the faith. There was also a profound belief that the visible unity of the church could be furthered by increasing efforts to talk together and to walk together in a movement of life together.

4.2.5 There was some disappointment that the conference did not engage more fully with questions of doctrine, with little reference to questions concerning the Lord's Supper, baptism, and different perceptions of what it means to be one, holy, catholic and apostolic. At the close of the conference, however, delegates were nevertheless able to release a 'Call to all Christians: Message of the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order' alongside an 'Ecumenical Affirmation' entitled 'Deepening Unity, Journeying in Love, Restoring Hope', both of which were agreed by delegates. These documents convey well the positive and uplifting spirit of the conference, and some of the wide range of conversations that had unfolded. They express the way in which the unity of the church is a charism that is already given to it, and challenge Christians and churches to live together on the way to reflecting that unity in visible ways.

4.3 World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC)

4.3.1 The World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) met for its 27th General Council from 14 to 23 October 2025 in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The theme for the General Council was "Persevere in your Witness" and it was hosted by the Church of Christ in Thailand. The Church of Scotland was represented at the General Council by Dr Gemma King and Rev. Tara Curlewis as delegates and Mr William Gibson as an adviser to the Youth Caucus and member of the Communications Team.

4.3.2 Through a combination of bible studies, listening sessions, small group discernment sessions and decision making sessions the General Council set the agenda for the next seven years of the WCRC – the major debates were on the issues of human sexuality and Israel-Palestine.[i] At the WCRC General Council Dr Victoria Turner of the United Reformed Church was appointed as a member of the Executive Committee.

4.3.3 The book *Receiving Nicaea Today: Global Voices from Reformed Perspectives* was launched at the General Council. This book contains reflections on the reception of the Nicene Creed and the Nicene faith in churches today from 39 authors from across the world including two Church of Scotland contributors, Rev. Dr. Liam Fraser and Dr. Gemma King.[ii]

4.3.4 At the General Council the WCRC celebrated its 150th anniversary. The constituent parts of the present Church of Scotland were among the founding members who met in London in 1875. 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. WCRC is now a communion of over 200 Congregational, Presbyterian, Reformed, United, Uniting and Waldensian churches worldwide, with its offices now located in Hannover.

4.4 "1701: The Story Continues: The Nicene Creed for the Church today."

4.4.1 2025 marked the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, and the Nicene Creed continues to shape the faith of Christians across traditions. For many, this anniversary has not only been a historical commemoration but an invitation to renewal. The Nicene Creed is one of the confessions that most Christian communities can proclaim together and thus offers both a sign of and a pathway to unity.

4.4.2 As we move beyond 1700 years into what we have styled "1701", we recognise that the work of receiving, interpreting, and embodying this shared confession is ongoing. In a troubled world, the Creed calls us afresh to hope in our shared witness to the Triune God, to deepen relationships across ecclesial boundaries, and to seek more visible expressions of the "one holy catholic and apostolic Church" to which we belong. The anniversary has therefore become not an ending but a prompt to prayer, to theological reflection, and to renewed ecumenical commitment in Scotland and beyond.

4.4.3 An example of the outworking of this has been the crafting of an ecumenical "Saint Margaret Liturgy", based on the Saint Margaret's Declaration (2022), for use in appropriate local contexts. The Liturgy has been used already, and the Committee intends to publish it in their Report to the General Assembly of 2027. We trust that this will be a useful resource for congregations of different traditions coming together in a mutual desire for harmony.

4.4.4 In light of this, the Ecumenical Relations Committee intends to host a day conference in October 2026 entitled "1701: The Story Continues: The Nicene Creed for the Church today." This conference will offer space for theological exploration as we ask what the Creed asks of, and offers, to the contemporary church.

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5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The prayer of Christ, and the constitution of the Church of Scotland commits us to building a more united Church, one in which all God's people can live and work together. While there is still much work to be done to embed this attitude of collegiality throughout our denomination and the communities of Scotland, the Ecumenical Audit demonstrates the potential that exists. It is for commissioners, and the Church at large, to realise this potential, and help to further Christ's mission to Scotland through the witness of a united church.

In the name of the Committee

ROSS BLACKMAN, *Convener*
PAULINE WEIBYE, *Vice-Convener*
JOHN L McPAKE, *Secretary*

Addendum

Pauline Weibye, Vice-Convener

The Ecumenical Relations Committee has been enriched for many years by the contribution of Pauline Weibye, and latterly so during her term as Vice Convener. Pauline brought to the work of the Committee an extensive knowledge and insight generated through her involvement in the Church at a local level and in her service in Presbytery, as well as in her former service in the National Office of the Church. A commitment to the life of the Church has been the hallmark of all of Pauline's contributions to the work of the Committee and we are indebted to her for this. Readers of the Reports of the Ecumenical Relations Committee over the years will, of course, be familiar with their elegance and style, and above all, with their grammatical exactitude. This has been due, in no small measure, to Pauline's diligence in this regard.

In the name of the Committee

ROSS BLACKMAN, *Convener*
JOHN L McPAKE, *Secretary*

Appendix 1

"Better a Nearby Friend…" An Ecumenical Audit of EMU-C Congregations in Scotland

Contents

Survey Responses
"Who is my neighbour?
Formal Partnerships
Congregational Activities
Ministerial activities
Ecumenical working: highlights and hindrances
Geographical Analysis
Final Reflections
Appendix I – Survey
Appendix II – Data Tables
Appendix III – Local Ecumenical Partnerships

Survey Responses

This report sets out the responses to the audit survey (Appendix I) received from each denomination. It begins with the gospel question, "Who is my neighbour?", describing the locations and co-locations of the EMU-C congregations. How often congregations work together is then included, both within and beyond the EMU-C group.

Formal partnerships such as the sharing of buildings, Covenanted Partnerships and membership of Churches Together groups form the next section. Attention then turns to how congregations do work together and what they feel is effective. The final section considers ministerial activities, membership of ecumenical clergy groups and providing cover for e.g. services, pastoral care and occasional offices.

"Who is my neighbour?"

With its 871 parishes and territorial ministry, the Church of Scotland has more than twice as many congregations as the other three denominations combined. The SEC has almost 300 congregations across Scotland, while the Methodist Church and URC are rather smaller and restricted to central and urban Scotland and the Northern Isles.

The composite Map 1 overleaf shows the locations of the congregations in each denomination, and from where responses were received. A combined map is associated with this report which shows congregations from all the denominations.

The size imbalance skews the ecumenical involvement of the denominations. There are many Church of Scotland parishes without another EMU-C church, while congregations of other denominations almost always have a nearby Church of Scotland congregation.

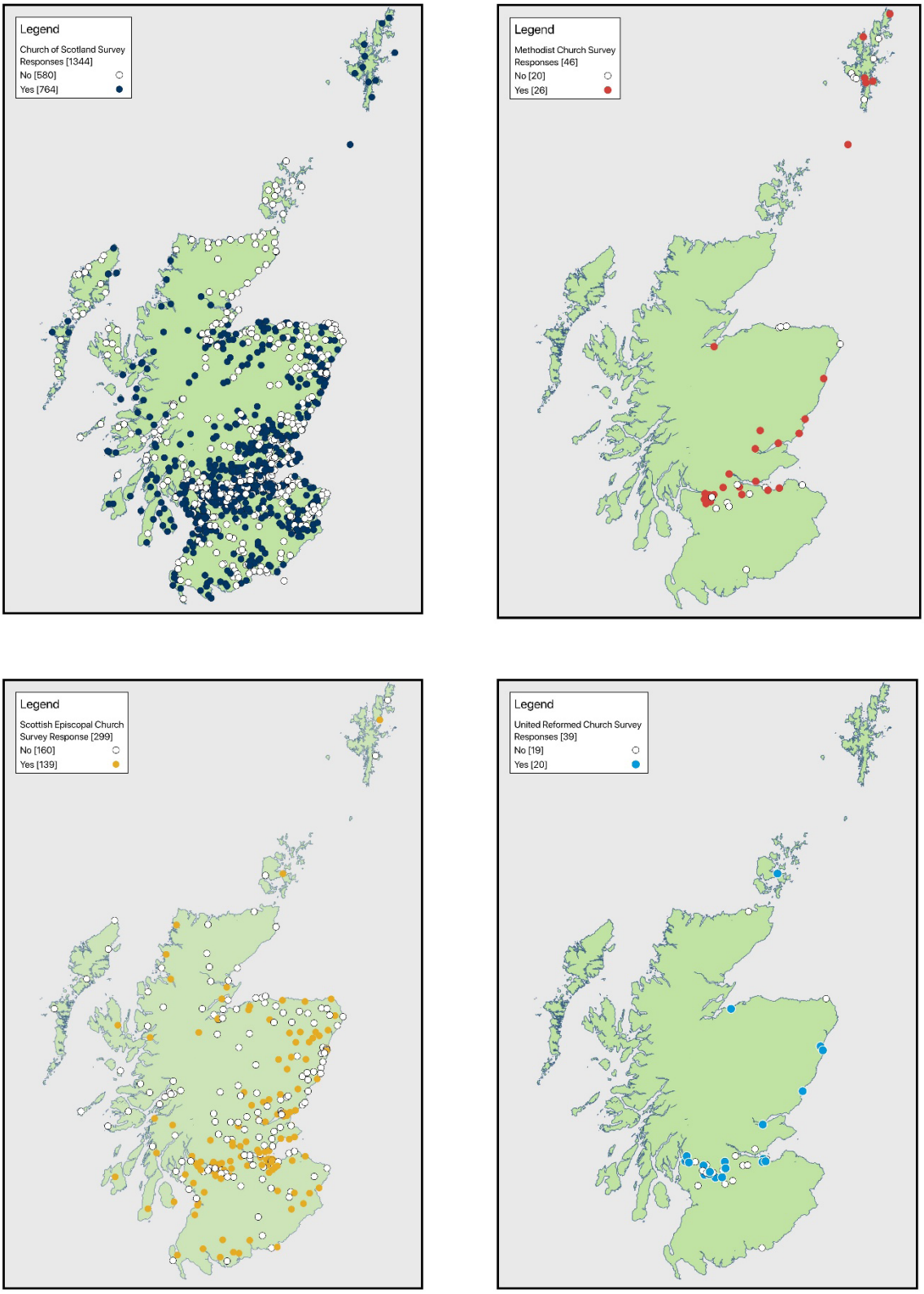
Table 2 below shows the percentage of responses from each denomination reporting that the other denomination was present in their area. Thus, for example, 93% of Methodist churches reported a nearby Church of Scotland (highlighted in bold), while 15% of SEC congregations reported a nearby URC congregation.

	Present in area			
Denomination	CofS	Methodist	SEC	URC
Church of Scotland		6%	38%	5%
Methodist	**93%**		57%	27%
SEC	96%	16%		**15%**
URC	92%	48%	64%	

Table 2: Presence of EMU-C denominations

Only 5% of Churches of Scotland indicated that a URC congregation was within their parish, and 6% for a Methodist church. Conversely, at least 92% of other denominations reported a nearby Church of Scotland.

The survey gave congregations the opportunity to list all of the denominations present nearby. The full table is given in Table 19 in Appendix II.



Map 1: Survey responses from EMU-C congregations

Working together

Congregations were asked how often they worked with other denominations, with possible responses of "never", "occasionally", "frequently" and "always". Table 3 shows how many congregations worked with other denominations at least occasionally. Church of Scotland congregations are more likely to work with congregations from other denominations, while those in SEC, URC and Methodist churches are more likely to work with EMU-C congregations.

	Working together at least occasionally[iii]		
Denomination	Anyone	Within EMU-C	Beyond EMU-C
Church of Scotland	67%	36%	58%
Methodist	97%	90%	83%
SEC	96%	92%	79%
URC	84%	80%	64%
TOTAL[2]	**73%**	**48%**	**63%**

Table 3: Working together with other congregations

Figure 1 and Figure 2 show how often congregations within EMU-C work together.[iv] Congregations in the Methodist and SEC churches are most likely to work with other EMU-C congregations, while those in the Church of Scotland are least likely. This is at least partly due to the smaller number of Church of Scotland congregations with an EMU congregation within their parish.

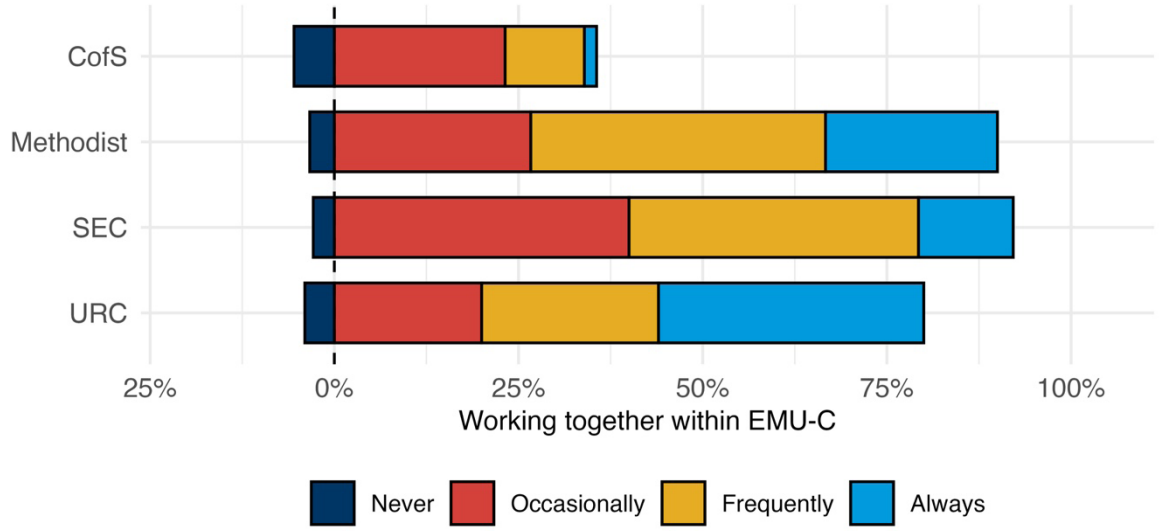


Figure 1: Working together within EMU-C

Beyond the EMU-C congregations there is a similar pattern, shown in Figure 2.

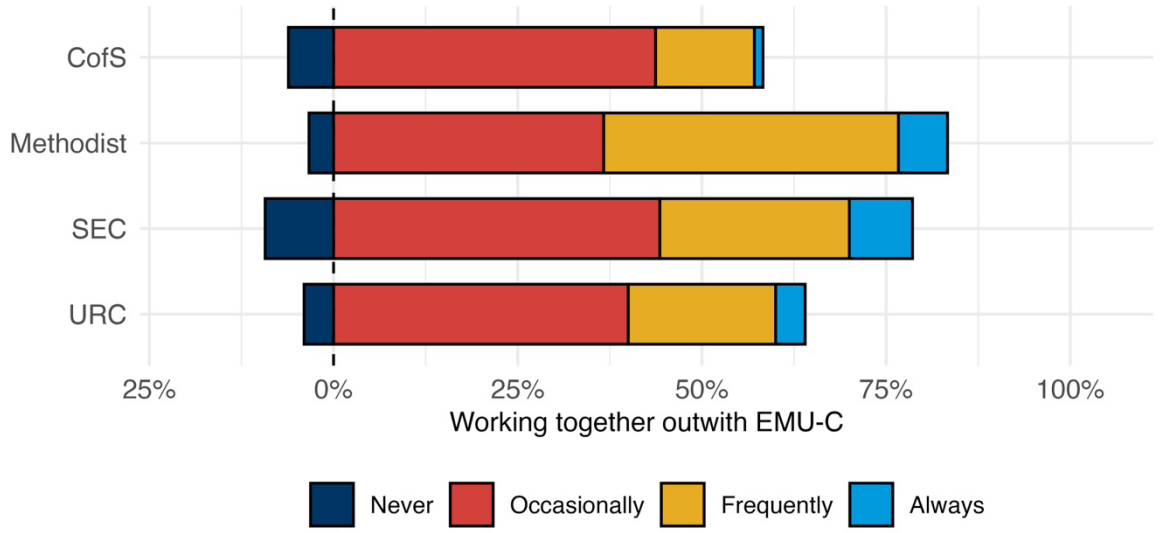


Figure 2: Working together beyond EMU-C

Converting these terms into an estimate of weeks per year – where "occasionally" is 1 week per year, "frequently" is monthly, 12 weeks per year, and "always" is weekly, 52 weeks per year – we found as shown in Table 4. Figures are given including LEP congregations, which are the embodiment of denominations "always" working together; figures in parentheses only include congregations which are not LEPs.

	How often do you work together? estimated weeks per year[v] (excl. LEP figures in parentheses)			
Denomination	CofS	Methodist	SEC	URC
Church of Scotland		0.4 (0.3)	1.8 (1.7)	0.7 (0.3)
Methodist	11.7 (9.1)		5.4 (4.0)	9.1 (4.4)
SEC	10.8 (10.5)	1.7 (1.3)		1.2 (0.9)
URC	17.6 (9.5)	9.4 (4.2)	6.4 (4.9)	

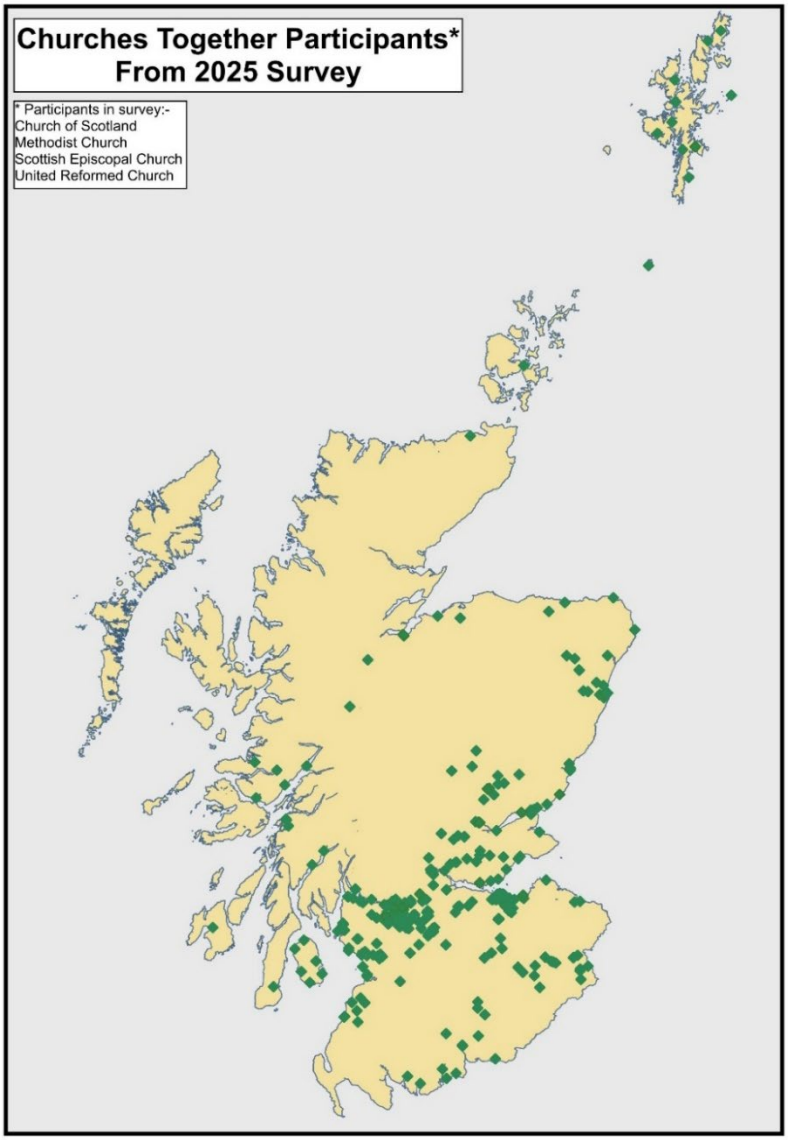
Table 4: Frequency of working together

Tables including other denominations are given in Appendix II, Table 20 to Table 23.

Formal Partnerships

Single Congregation Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEPs) represent the closest possible links between denominations; the LEP congregation is a full member of more than one denomination. In this section we consider formal partnerships below that level. These include being a member of a Churches Together group, sharing a building, Covenanted Partnerships, and sharing in the process of appointing clergy.

Churches Together
Map 2 below shows the locations of all congregations who said they belonged to a Churches Together group. They are widespread across the country, including the Northern Isles, but generally fewer in rural areas.



Map 2: Locations of Churches Together groups

Table 5 and Figure 3 show the percentage of congregations of each denomination belonging to a Churches Together group. Just over 30% of CofS congregations, at least 40% of URC and SEC congregations, and half of all Methodist congregations are members. The discrepancy may be due to geographical differences in where groups can be found, as seen in Map 2, and shown in Figure 5 below. Areas that are more rural tend to have fewer reported groups.

Denomination	% Members of CT	Denomination	% Members of CT
Church of Scotland	31%	SEC	46%
Methodist	50%	URC	40%

Table 5: Churches Together group membership

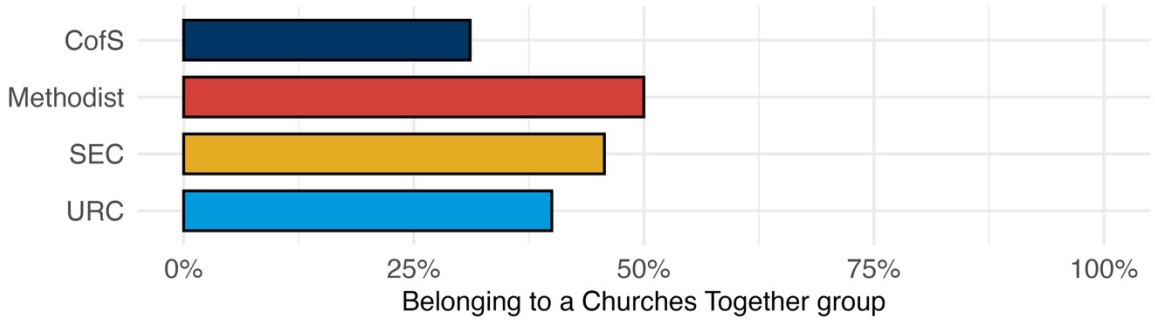


Figure 3: Congregations belonging to a Churches Together group

Figure 4 shows the levels of involvement in a Churches Together (CT) group. Most congregations that belong to a CT group report at least receiving regular news about the group. The Methodist church has the highest percentage of congregations who say the CT group "shapes" their life. Data is given in Appendix II, Table 24.

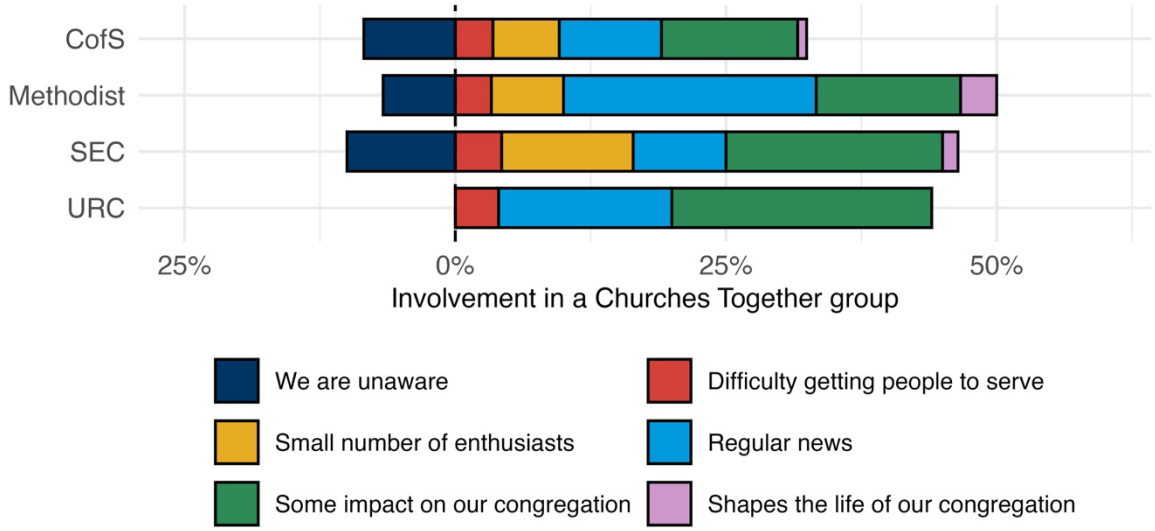


Figure 4: Levels of involvement in Churches Together groups

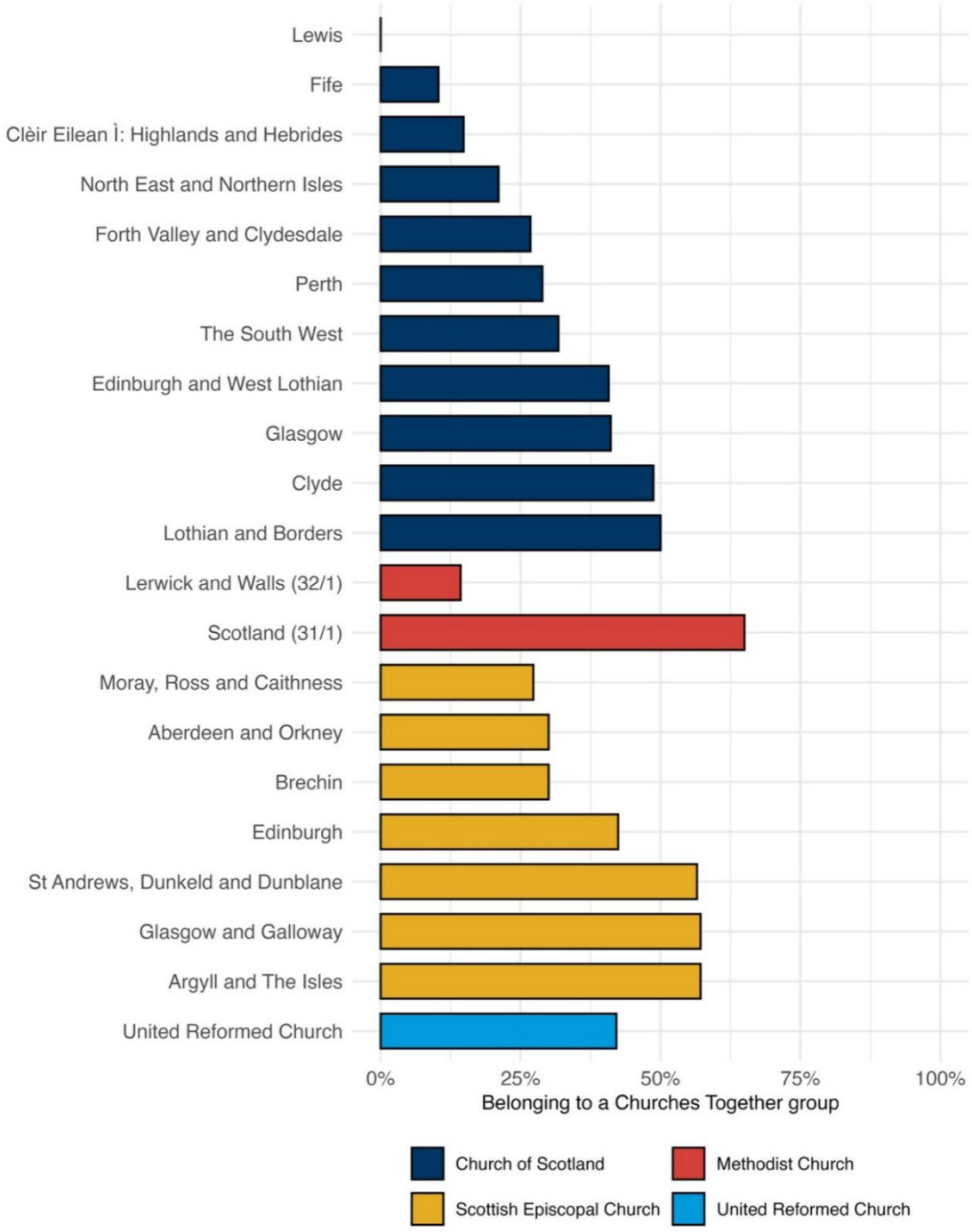
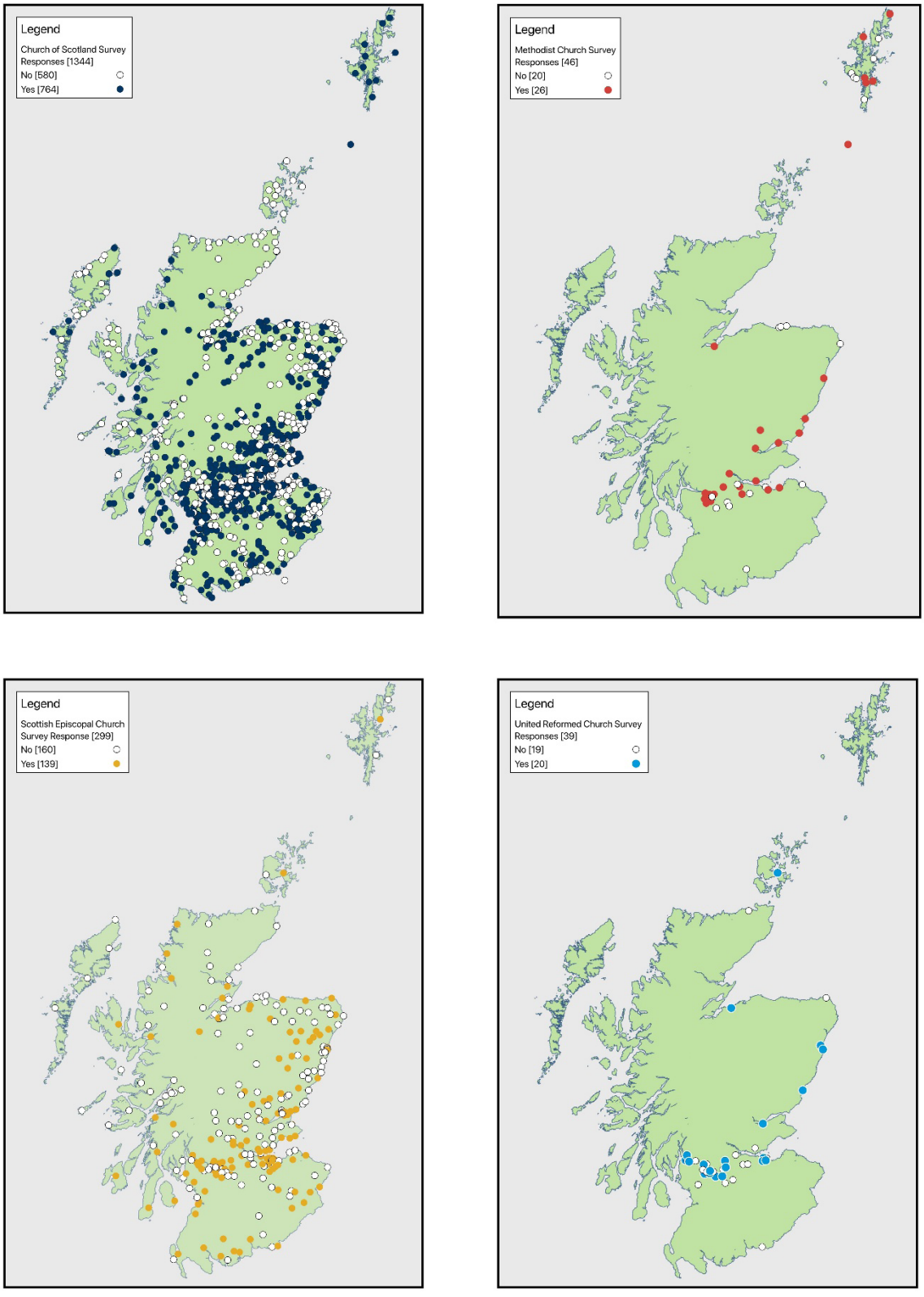


Figure 5: Regional variation in membership of Churches Together groups

Given Map 2 above, we can consider the membership of Churches Together groups by region[vi], as shown in Figure 5, with data in Appendix II Table 25, and regions in Map 3. It's clear that there are areas of the country with fewer such groups. While we might expect the Highlands and Northern and Western Isles to have fewer groups due to distance, it's surprising to see low figures for Fife and the North East.



Map 3: CHANGE TO REGION MAPS

Buildings
Despite the high costs in time and money of maintaining buildings, few congregations within EMU-C share their buildings with another congregation.

Congregations within the Methodist Church and United Reformed Church are more likely to share buildings, as shown in Table 6 and Figure 6. Within EMU-C congregations, 13% of Methodist Churches share a building, and almost 30% of URC congregations share a building with another congregation (not necessarily an EMU-C congregation). Few Church of Scotland congregations share their buildings.

	% Sharing a building			% Sharing a building	
Denomination	**Within**	**Beyond**	**Denomination**	**Within**	**Beyond**
Church of Scotland	1%	7%	SEC	4%	9%
Methodist	13%	10%	URC	4%	24%

Table 6: Congregations sharing a building, within and beyond EMU-C

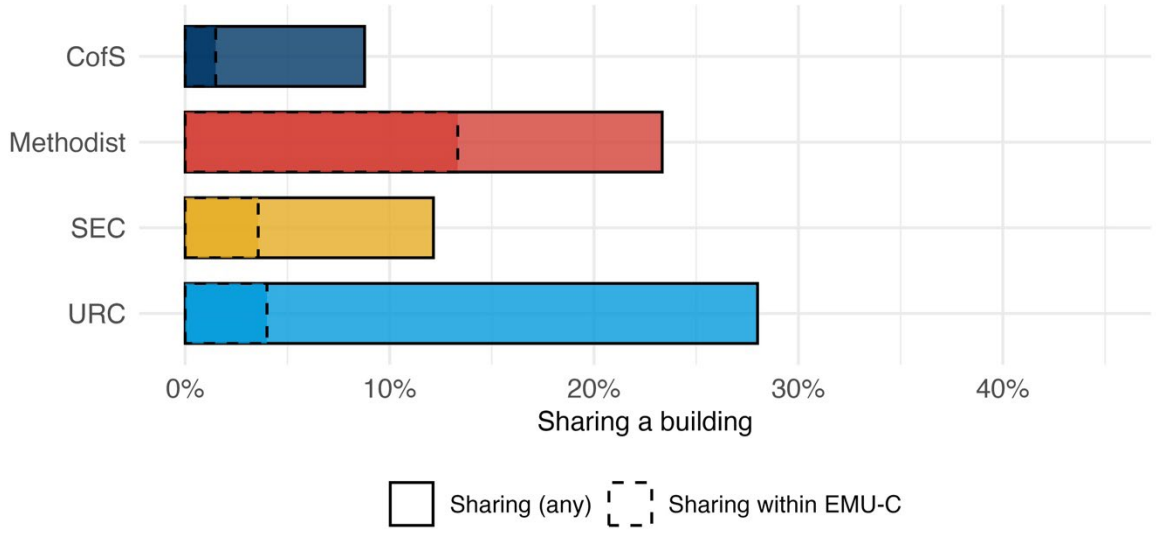


Figure 6: Building sharing arrangements

Only two congregations described having a Shared Building Agreement, details of which are given in Table 40 in Appendix II.

Covenanted partnerships
While few congregations shared buildings, even fewer reported being part of a formal Covenanted Partnership, as shown in Table 7, Table 41 (Appendix II), and Figure 7.

Denomination	% Covenanted Partnership	Denomination	% Covenanted Partnership
Church of Scotland	1%	SEC	6%
Methodist	3%	URC	20%

Table 7: Congregations in a Covenanted Partnership

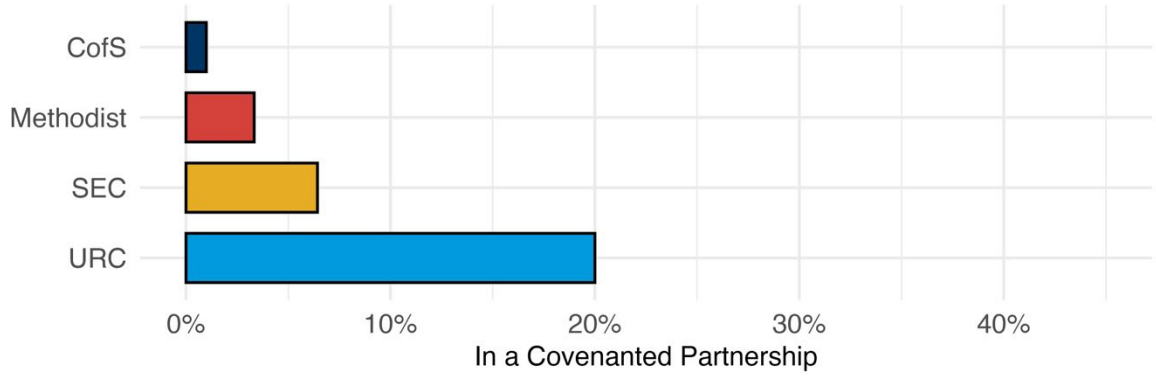


Figure 7: Congregations in Covenanted Partnerships

Ministerial appointments
Few congregations reported having ecumenical partner involvement in appointing clergy, as shown in Table 8. Such involvement, where present, was often reciprocal.

Four Church of Scotland congregations (1%) had partner involvement in appointing a minister to their charge, and the same four congregations had been involved in appointing a minister to a partner congregation.

One Methodist congregation (3%) had ecumenical partner involvement in the Stationing process in their Circuit. No Methodist congregations had been involved in appointing clergy to a partner congregation.

Three SEC congregations (2%) had ecumenical partner involvement in appointing a priest to the charge. Two of those congregations (1%) had likewise been involved in appointing clergy to a partner congregation.

Two URC congregations (8%) had partner involvement in appointing a minister to their charge. One of those congregations (4%) had been involved in appointing a minister to a partner congregation.

	Ecumenical Partner involvement in clergy appointments	
Denomination	Appointing clergy to **your** congregation	Appointing clergy to a **partner** congregation
Church of Scotland	1%	1%
Methodist	3%	
SEC	2%	1%
URC	8%	4%

Table 8: Ecumenical Partner involvement in clergy appointments

Reflections
At each level of increasing formality the proportion of churches engaging falls for all denominations. Around three-quarters (73%) work together at least occasionally, and more than a third (35%) are members of a Churches Together group, yet only around 11% share buildings and 3% are in covenanted partnerships. There are just seven Local Ecumenical Partnerships in Scotland.

Ours is a time of declining rolls and increasing governance, placing strain on the maintenance of congregational life. Administration might be shared and larger groups formed if the case can be made for more or simpler formal partnerships and sharing of resources. It is imperative that this does not lead to yet another layer of administration or work to be done, but releases congregations into mission and care for their people and communities.

Congregational Activities
In contrast to formal agreements and activities, almost all congregations engaged in joint ecumenical activities. Services for the World Day of Prayer and the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity were most common worship and study activities, while practical action such as running a foodbank or raising money for Christian Aid were also popular.

Worship and study

The vast majority of respondents participated in some type of ecumenical worship and study opportunity (85%) with neighbouring churches of other denominations. Table 9 below gives the breakdown by denomination. Figures are also given excluding those congregations which said they had no ecumenical neighbours; that is, they said they had no one there with whom they could work.

	Joint worship and study		**Other joint activities**	
Denomination	All	Excl. no neigh	All	Excl. no neigh
CofS	82%	91%	79%	86%
Methodist	100%	100%	80%	83%
SEC	92%	93%	90%	91%
URC	92%	96%	92%	96%

Table 9: Joint activities, by denomination

We asked about the effectiveness of various joint worship and study opportunities for strengthening cooperation between churches of different denominations. The figures are shown in Table 10 below, and in Figure 8 overleaf. World Day of Prayer services, Holy Week services, Advent services, and Week of Prayer for Christian Unity services were the most widely used and were regarded as somewhat or very effective by the greatest number of respondents.

Activity	% taking part	% saying effective
World Day of Prayer	72%	52%
Holy Week services	66%	52%
Advent services	44%	31%
Week of Prayer for Christian unity	43%	26%
Lent study groups	29%	18%
Communion/Eucharist	23%	14%
Summer services	22%	11%
Joint Bible studies	19%	13%
Pentecost service	19%	7%
Regular pulpit exchange	16%	8%
Adult Christian education	13%	7%
Praying for other churches	8%	4%
Joint Sunday school	7%	2%
Other	11%	8%

Table 10: Engagement with worship and study opportunities

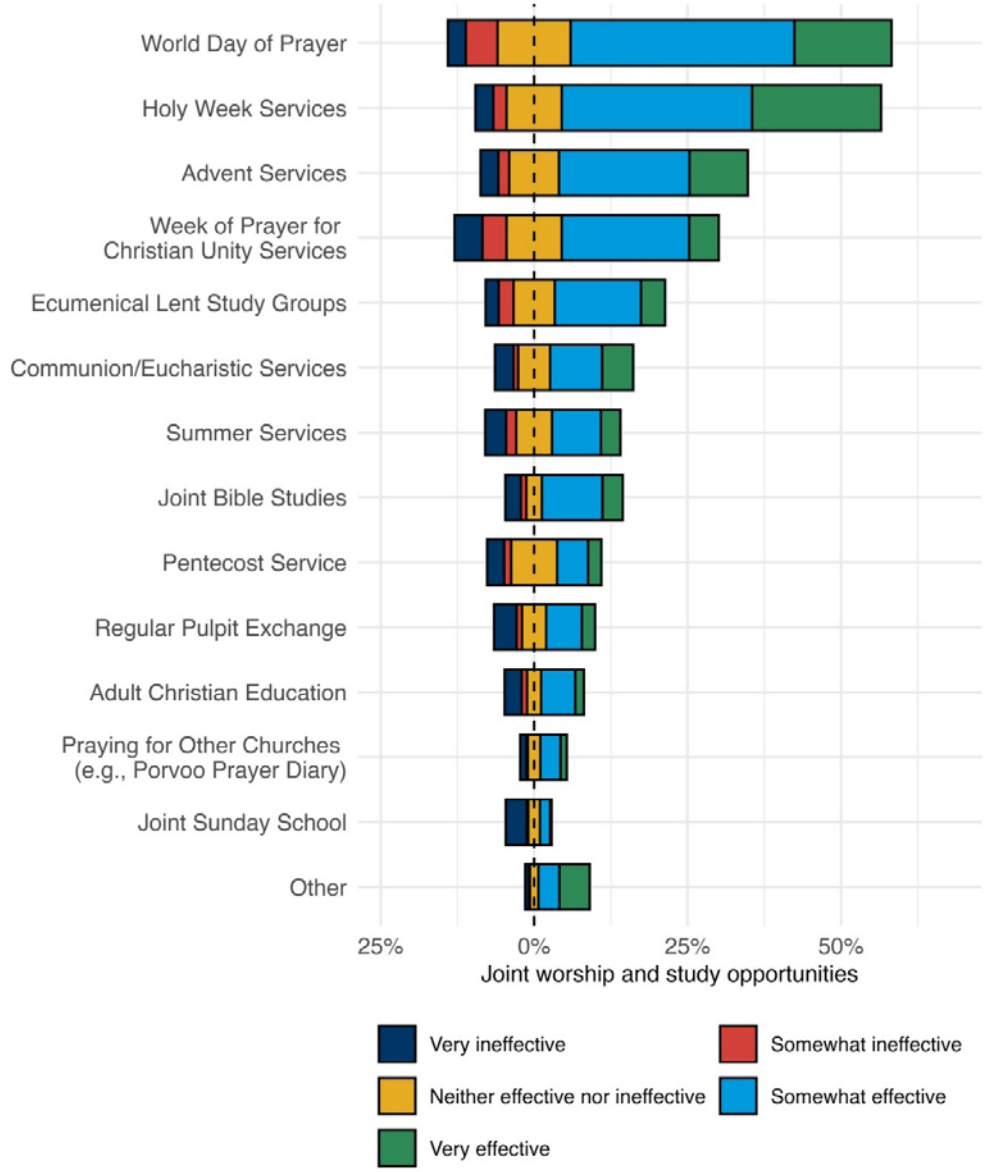


Figure 8: Effectiveness of joint worship and study opportunities

Effectiveness by denomination

World Day of Prayer services were popular and were regarded by respondents from all four denominations as effective for strengthening ecumenical cooperation between churches, shown in Figure 9, with data in Appendix II, Table 26.

Holy Week services were also widely regarded as effective for strengthening ecumenical cooperation, shown in Figure 10, with data in Appendix II, Table 27.

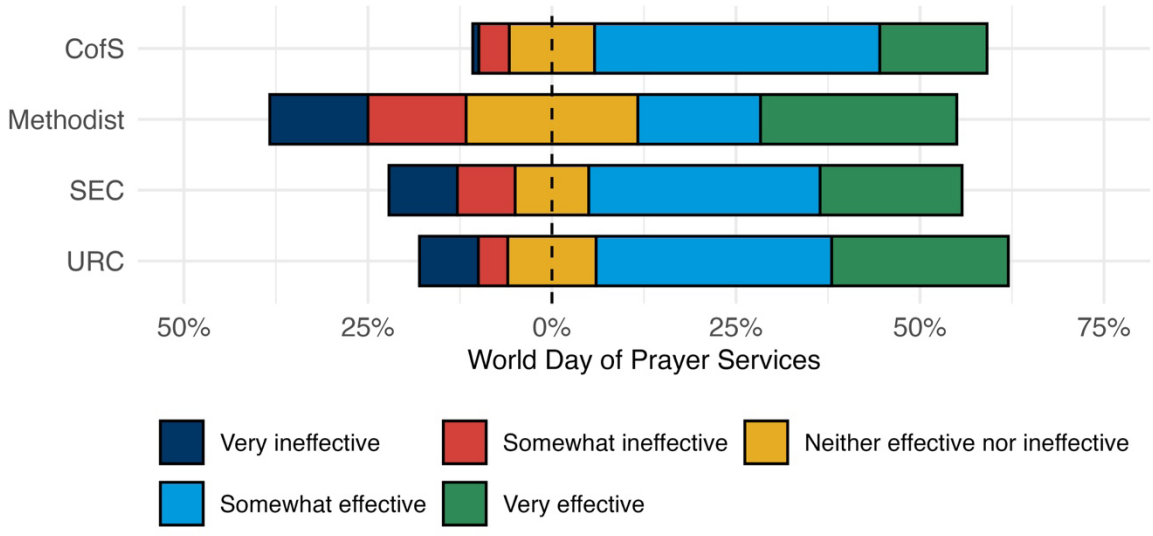


Figure 9: Effectiveness of World Day of Prayer services

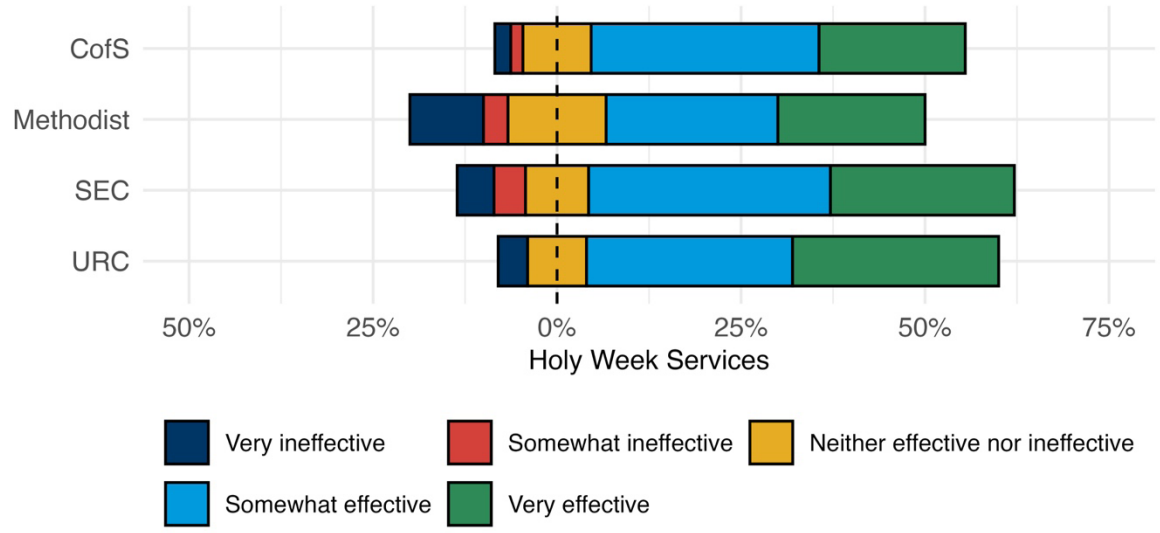


Figure 10: Effectiveness of Holy Week services

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity services were not as common as World Day of Prayer and Holy Week services. Nevertheless, they were widely regarded as effective for strengthening ecumenical cooperation, as shown in Figure 11, with data in Appendix II, Table 28.

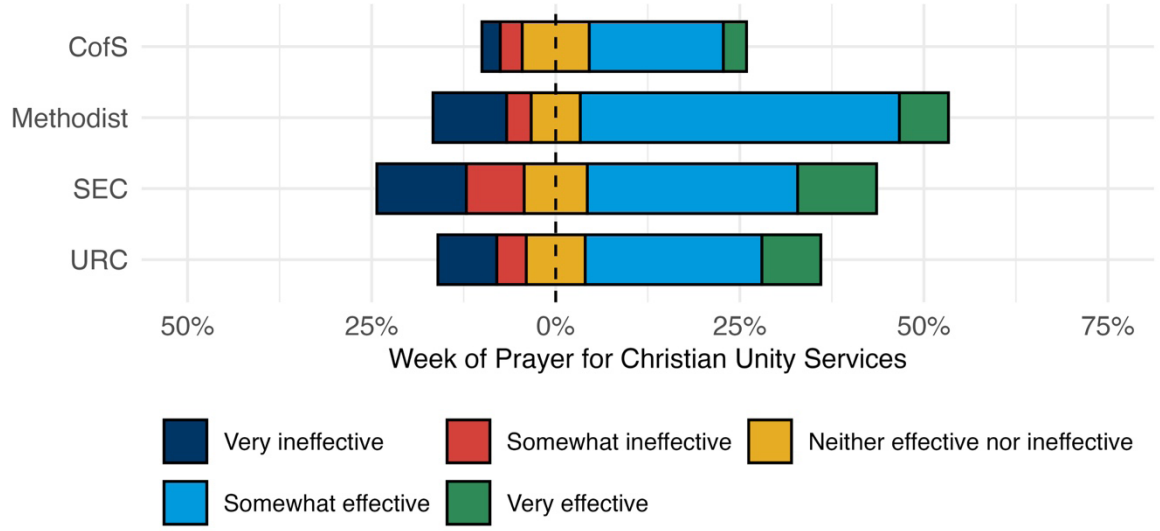


Figure 11: Effectiveness of Week of Prayer for Christian Unity services

Advent services were regarded as effective overall for strengthening ecumenical cooperation by three denominations, shown in Figure 12, with data in Appendix II, Table 29. However, 36% of Methodist congregations regarded them as "very ineffective" and only 29% found them "somewhat effective".

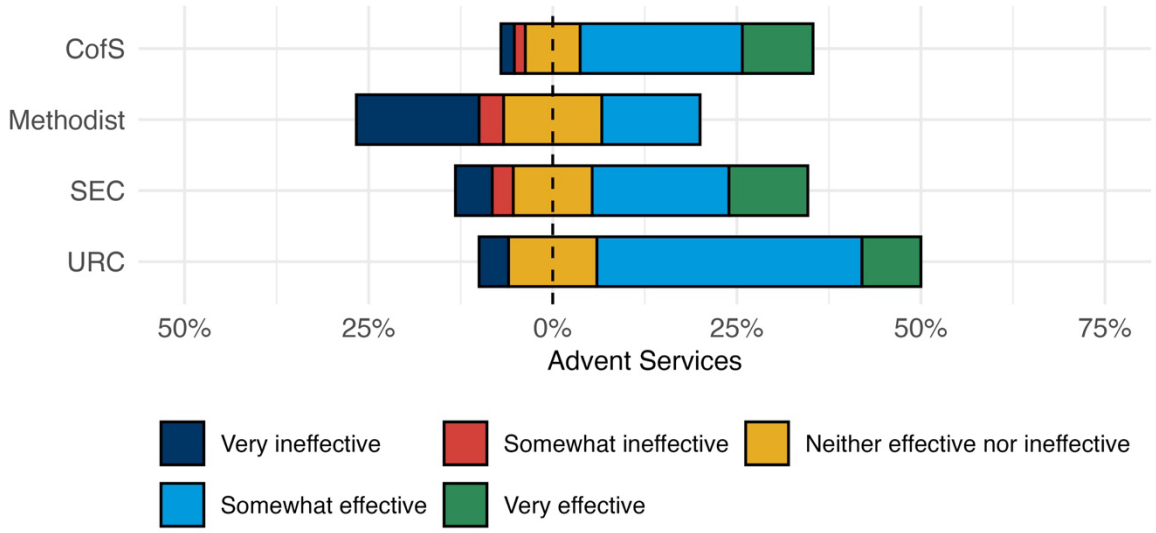


Figure 12: Effectiveness of Advent services

Other activities

Among other joint activities beyond worship and study opportunities, running a food bank, Christian Aid Week, and social gatherings were the most widespread and were regarded as somewhat or very effective by the greatest number of respondents, shown in Figure 13 and Table 11.

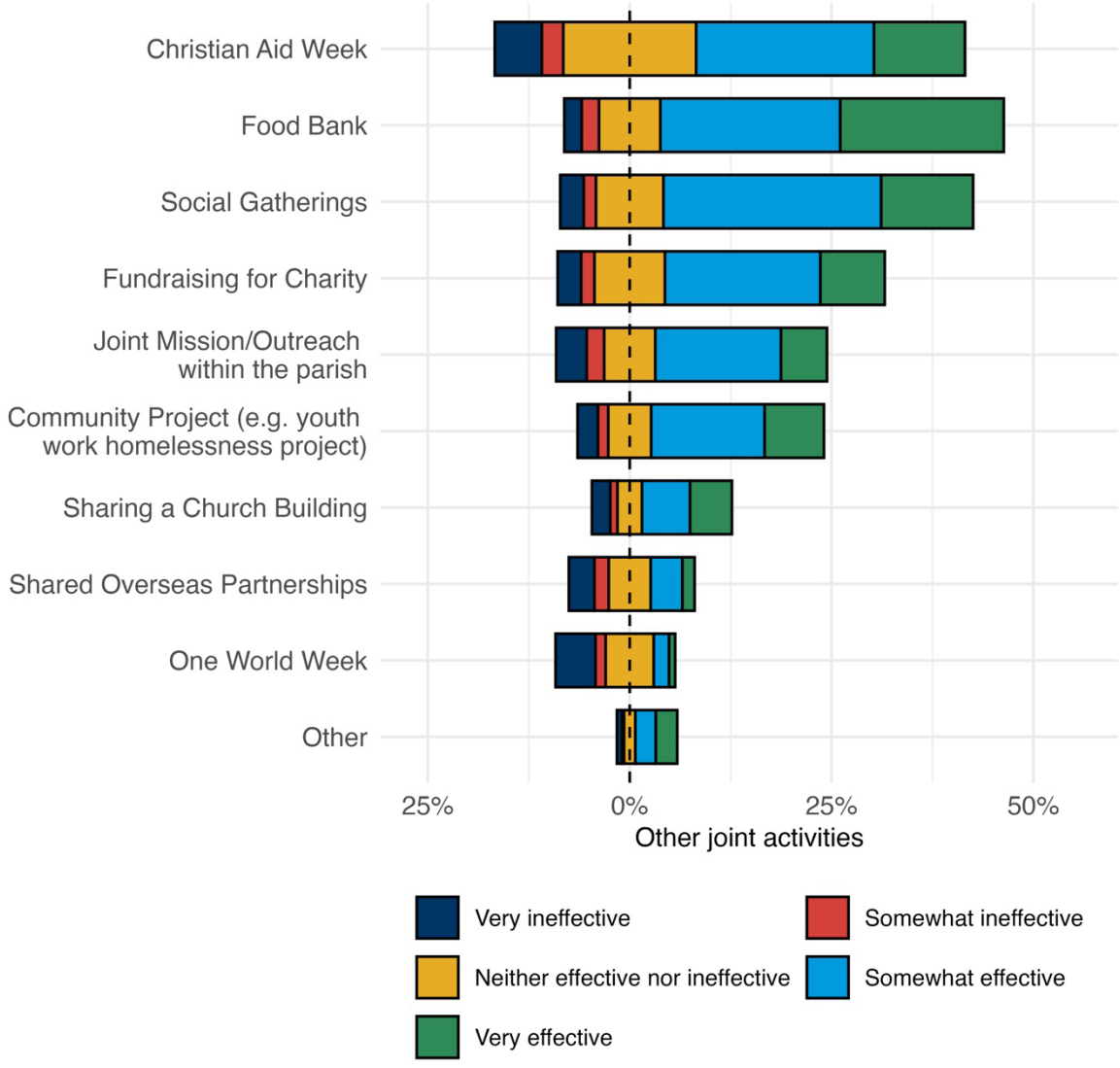


Figure 13: Effectiveness of other joint activities

Activity	% taking part	% saying effective
Christian Aid Week	58%	33%
Food bank	54%	43%
Social gatherings	51%	38%
Fundraising for charity	41%	27%
Joint mission/outreach	34%	21%
Community project	31%	21%
Sharing a church building	17%	11%
Shared overseas partnerships	16%	5%
One World Week	15%	3%
Other	7%	5%

Table 11: Engagement with other joint activities

Effectiveness by denomination
Running a food bank together with neighbouring congregations of other denominations was widely regarded as effective for strengthening relations with neighbouring congregations of other denominations, shown in Figure 14, with data in Appendix II, Table 30.

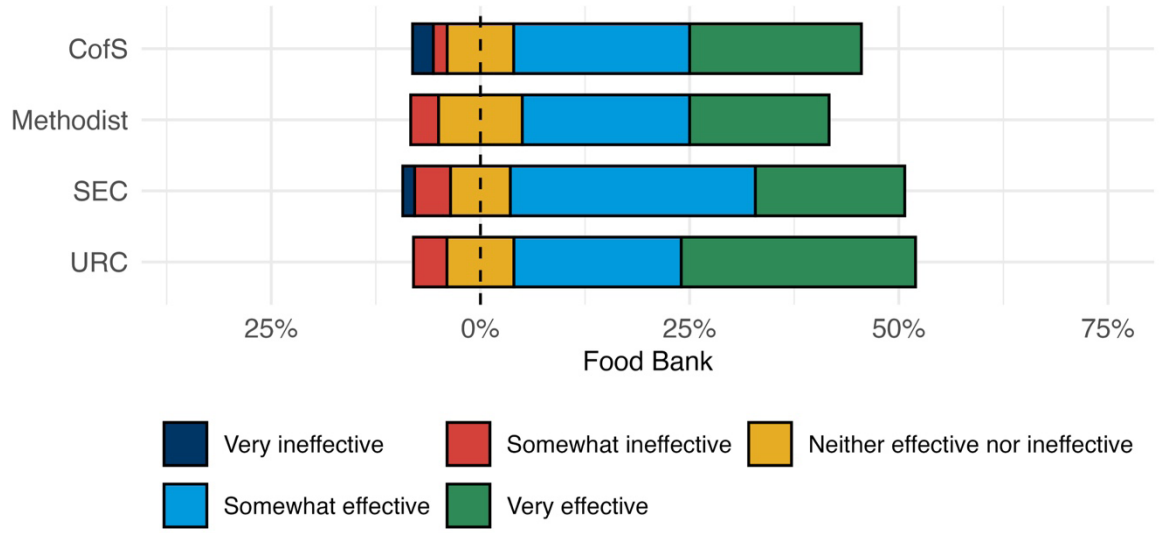


Figure 14: Effectiveness of running a food bank

Christian Aid Week activities were also generally regarded as effective for strengthening ecumenical relations by respondents from all four denominations, shown in Figure 15, with data in Appendix II, Table 31.

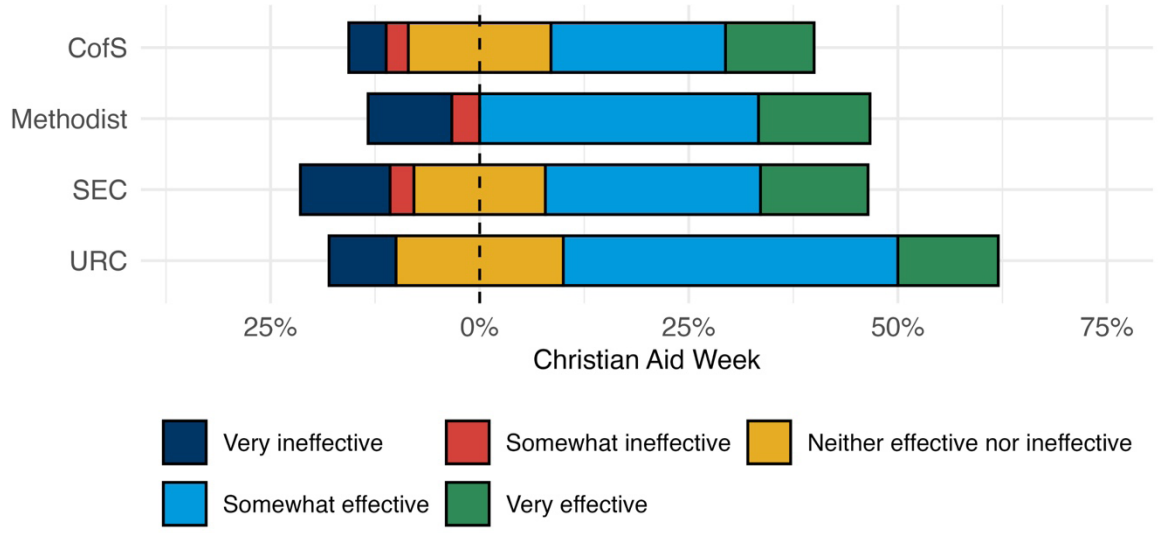


Figure 15: Effectiveness of Christian Aid Week

To a lesser extent, joint social gatherings were regarded as effective for strengthening ecumenical relations, shown in Figure 16, with data in Appendix II, Table 32.

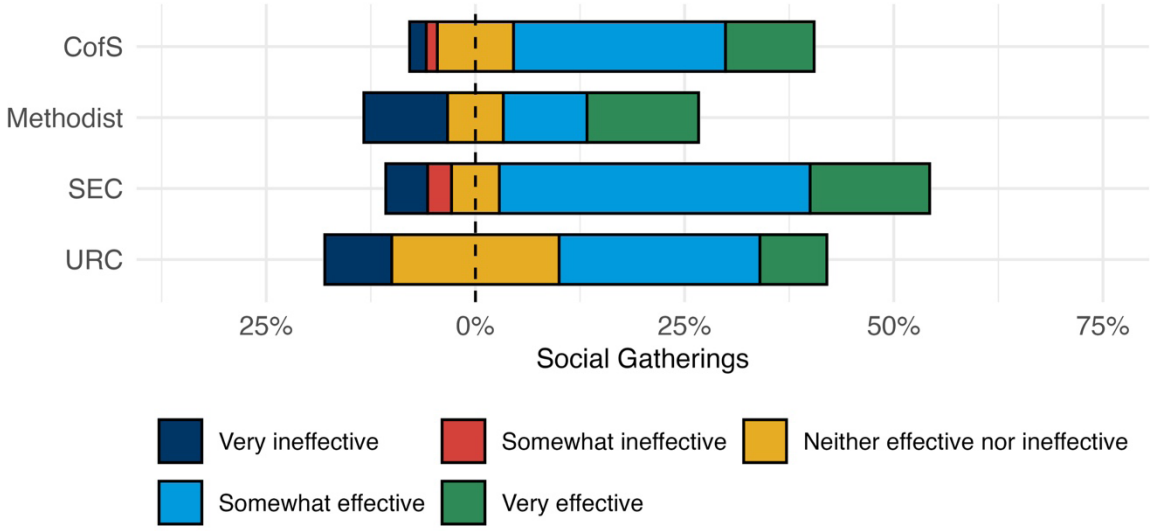


Figure 16: Effectiveness of joint social gatherings

Although charity fundraising in conjunction with neighbouring congregations was less common, those who participated generally regarded it as effective for strengthening ecumenical relations, shown in Figure 17, with data in Appendix II, Table 33.

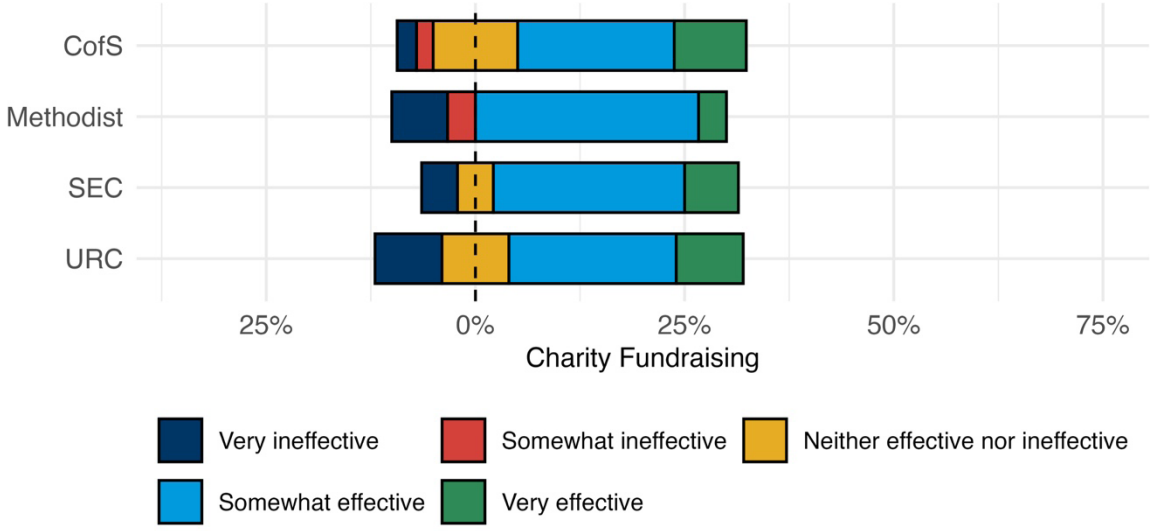


Figure 17: Effectiveness of charity fundraising

Reflections

The picture illustrated in this section seems to stand in opposition to that of the preceding one. Here we see congregations across Scotland getting on with working together in myriad ways, from the World Day of Prayer to Advent services, and from providing food banks to social gatherings.

While a great number of congregations are engaging with ecumenical neighbours in both worship and study, and other joint activities, it is notable that the vast majority might be described as brief, or one-off encounters. There is the World Day of Prayer and the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Far fewer congregations participate in longer-term activities such as summer services, regular pulpit supply or joint Sunday schools.

There is a similar pattern with the other activities – Christian Aid Week and social gatherings are popular. Conversely, the long-term project of running a food bank is the most frequent activity and the one deemed most effective for strengthening cooperation. Local projects, such as joint outreach, fundraising and community projects are relatively popular and these do require longer-term engagement. When the focus moves away from the area, such as in shared overseas partnerships or One World Week, the number of congregations involved drops considerably.

Memories of local ecumenical cooperation can be lost as leaders change and congregations or parishes are adjusted. Members of congregations may be the holders of the "institutional memory" of previous joint ventures. As change occurs, it is important to safeguard what has worked in the past as those activities may be easily re-started and cooperation increased.

Ministerial activities

Over half of ministers in the Methodist and URC congregations are members of an ecumenical ministers' group, with 41% of SEC ministers and 27% of those in Church of Scotland congregations. This last figure may reflect the current high vacancy rate within the Church of Scotland as well as geographical distance.

Denomination	Ministers' group	Cover supplied	Type of cover				
			Routine	Funerals	Weddings	Holiday	Other
CofS	27%	28%	10%	22%	6%	16%	2%
Methodist[vii]	63%	27%	10%	17%	-	3%	-
SEC	41%	36%	13%	12%[viii]		12%	13%
URC	52%	48%	8%	48%	16%	8%	4%

Table 12: Ecumenical ministerial activities

Table 12 shows the percentage of congregations who reported that cover is supplied from other denominations. Cover for funerals is most common, followed by holiday cover, while only around 10% assist with routine pastoral care.

If no ecumenical cover is supplied, Table 13 shows that most Church of Scotland and Methodist congregations find cover from neighbouring congregations in their own denomination, whereas SEC and URC congregations are more likely to have resources within their own congregation.

Denomination	Neighbours provide cover	No one nearby	Congregation has resources	Other
CofS	53%	7%	46%	5%
Methodist	70%	3%	27%	-
SEC	31%	3%	56%	19%
URC	12%	-	44%	20%

Table 13: Other sources of cover

In terms of effectiveness, cover for funerals, holidays and routine pastoral care are seen as being most effective across the denominations, as shown in Figure 18 and Table 14 overleaf. Denominational figures are given in Appendix II, Table 34 to Table 38.

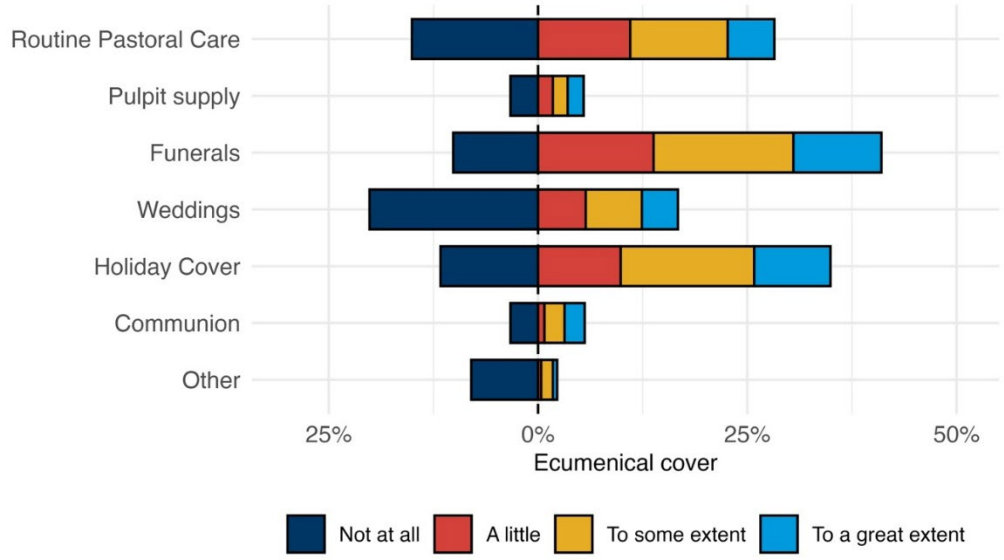


Figure 18: Effectiveness of ecumenical cover for strengthening pastoral care

Type of cover	% taking part	% saying effective
Routine pastoral care	43%	28%
Pulpit supply	9%	5%
Funerals	51%	41%
Weddings	37%	17%
Holiday cover	47%	35%
Communion	9%	6%
Other cover	10%	2%

Table 14: Ecumenical cover

Reflections
Ecumenical cover for ministerial activities is less frequent, with either the congregation resourcing themselves, or a denominational neighbour covering. In the most frequently shared tasks – funerals and holiday cover – they might be seen as "extra-ordinary". Particularly if the funeral is one where there is no active church connection, it may be of little interest or notice to the congregation, and holiday cover is clearly "unusual", so the expectations are already different.

Where the "usual" activities are – e.g. pulpit supply, Communion or Eucharist and other activities – we see far fewer sharing or covering. It seems as though a degree of ecumenical cover or sharing is "permitted", but congregational routine demands their own minister or one from their own denomination.

This being said, the rates of sharing and working together are higher than seen in the formal congregation work seen above. Those who are able to work together at a local level are "getting on with it" without the formal agreements.

As with congregational activities, the pace of change as well as high vacancy rates may leave newer clergy feeling isolated or unaware of what has gone on before. Finding ways to bring colleagues together in times that are upbuilding and encouraging rather than draining would be of great use.

Ecumenical working: highlights and hindrances

The best things about ecumenical working
Congregations were asked to list up to three of the best things that ecumenical partnership and working had brought them. 488 congregations responded. By far the most commonly mentioned theme was friendship and fellowship (56% of responses). This was followed by responses mentioning an increase in understanding and appreciation of other denominations, leading to a sense of unity in diversity, "being part of a larger whole" (44%).

Other themes that were widely mentioned included worshipping together (20%); demonstrating Christian unity, particularly against sectarian prejudice (15%); sharing resources (15%); sharing events, outreach, or mission (11%); prayer and Bible study (10%); sharing in one another's church events (9%); and meeting practical needs of the community through initiatives such as food banks and school chaplaincy (8%).

What hinders ecumenical working?
Congregations were asked what prevented or hindered them from working with other denominations. There were 627 responses, 10% of which were variations on "nothing" or "no barriers". The most commonly mentioned hindrance was the lack of other denominations in the area (24%), closely followed by a lack of time or energy to take on anything new (23%). 16% of responses mentioned that other denominations had been approached but were not interested in working together. 13% mentioned theological differences or historical baggage as a barrier to ecumenical working.

Vacancies, some of which had lasted for several years, were mentioned by 9% of respondents. Church of Scotland mission planning and readjustment were specifically mentioned as a hindrance to ecumenical working by SEC and URC congregations along with many of their own (7% of all responses).

Although 7% of congregations and 5% of clergy were reported to lack interest in ecumenical working, 6% of congregations mentioned that they were keen to do more despite other hindrances.

Geographical Analysis

We are grateful to the EMU-C denominations for providing the locations of all of their congregations within Scotland. This allows us to examine distances between congregations in more detail, considering questions like:

- How many congregations in EMU-C are within 1 mile, 5 miles, 10 miles of each congregation?
- How near is an EMU-C partner church to each congregation?
- How close are congregations within the same denomination?
- How does this change when road distance or travel time is taken into account?

The initial three questions can be answered by examining Table 15. Each row represents a denomination, and is divided into three sections, each with three distances. The first three columns give the percentage of congregations in that denomination with **any other EMU-C** congregation within a radius of 1 mile, 5 miles and 10 miles. Thus, for example, 63% of Church of Scotland congregations have at least one other congregation of the EMU-C denominations within 1 miles; 84% of SEC congregations have at least one other congregation within 1 mile. Conversely, all Church of Scotland, Methodist and URC congregations have another congregation within 10 miles and all URC congregations are within 5 miles of another congregation.

The second set of columns shows only congregations in **other EMU-C** denominations. Here 51% of Churches of Scotland have a Methodist, SEC or URC congregation within 1 mile. The figures for Methodist, SEC and URC congregations are the same as the first set of columns due to the ubiquity of Church of Scotland congregations.

The final set of columns shows congregations **within the same** denomination, hence 48% of Churches of Scotland have another Church of Scotland congregation within 1 mile, while only 4% of Methodist congregations do. Only 1% of Church of Scotland congregations have no other Church of Scotland within 10 miles.

Straight line distance	Any congregation within			Other EMU-C congregation			Within denomination		
	1 mile	5 miles	10 miles	1 mile	5 miles	10 miles	1 mile	5 miles	10 miles
CofS	63%	95%	100%	51%	86%	96%	48%	92%	99%
Meth	79%	96%	100%	79%	96%	100%	4%	51%	64%
SEC	84%	97%	99%	84%	97%	99%	15%	61%	86%
URC	97%	100%	100%	97%	100%	100%	0%	61%	79%
ALL	70%	96%	100%	61%	90%	97%	37%	82%	94%

Table 15: Straight-line distances between congregations

Road distance and driving time

The data above is based on straight-line distances between the geographical locations. This is a minimum distance that can be easily calculated given the coordinates. What is more realistic is road distance and driving time, particularly in remote areas with mountains or sea lochs.[ix] Table 16 shows the percentage of congregations in each denomination within 1 mile, 5 miles and 10 miles by road.

Road distance	Any congregation within			Other EMU-C congregation			Within denomination		
	1 mile	5 miles	10 miles	1 mile	5 miles	10 miles	1 mile	5 miles	10 miles
CofS	54%	91%	98%	42%	80%	93%	36%	85%	96%
Meth	72%	89%	98%	72%	85%	96%	4%	43%	57%
SEC	80%	95%	98%	80%	94%	98%	11%	47%	78%
URC	92%	100%	100%	92%	100%	100%	0%	47%	71%
ALL	62%	92%	98%	54%	84%	94%	28%	73%	89%

Table 16: Driving distance between congregations

There appears to be little difference between Tables 15 and 16 as most congregations will be in less remote locations and the difference between straight line distance and road distance will be negligible. It may be more useful to consider other radii or to limit calculations to remote congregations.

However, when comparing these tables, we do find that now 4% of Churches of Scotland are more than 10 miles from another, a quadrupling of the 1% above. Similarly, the other denominations have fewer churches within the 10 miles road distance radius. A closer look at these results would be informative.

Driving time	Any congregation within			Other EMU-C congregation			Within denomination		
	10 mins	20 mins	30 mins	10 mins	20 mins	30 mins	10 min	20 min	30 mins
CofS	95%	99%	100%	84%	96%	99%	90%	98%	99%
Meth	89%	100%	100%	83%	96%	100%	23%	55%	81%
SEC	96%	98%	99%	96%	98%	99%	51%	85%	92%
URC	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	39%	76%	79%
ALL	95%	99%	100%	87%	96%	99%	76%	93%	96%

Table 17: Driving time between congregations

Considering driving time, Table 17 gives the percentage of congregations in each denomination with at least one other EMU-C congregation within a 10-minute, 20-minute, or 30-minute drive. The layout of the table is the same as the preceding table which only considered straight-line distances and did not take account of local geography.

Again, 51% of Church of Scotland congregations have at least one other congregation of the EMU-C denominations within a 3-minute drive, as do 78% of SEC congregations. All URC congregations are within a 10-minute drive of another congregation.

Walking time

	Any congregation within			Other EMU-C congregation			Within denomination		
Walking time	10 mins	20 mins	30 mins	10 mins	20 mins	30 mins	10 min	20 min	30 mins
CofS	38%	57%	65%	30%	44%	55%	20%	41%	51%
Meth	62%	74%	81%	62%	74%	81%	4%	4%	9%
SEC	70%	81%	85%	69%	81%	85%	6%	13%	15%
URC	79%	97%	100%	79%	97%	100%	0%	0%	5%
ALL	48%	65%	71%	42%	56%	64%	16%	31%	40%

Table 18: Walking time between congregations

Looking more locally still, Table 18 shows the percentage of congregations in each denomination with at least one other EMU-C congregation within a 5-minute, 10-minute, or 15-minute walk. Nearly one-third (30%) of Church of Scotland congregations have a neighbour of another EMU-C denomination within a 10-minute walk and one-fifth (20%) have a Church of Scotland neighbour within that same distance.

Reflections

This geographical analysis may be something of an intellectual exercise – distance between congregations is only one out of many reasons why or why not congregations work together. However, we would recommend it as indicating the opportunities available. Almost **half** of the congregations in Scotland are within **10 minutes walk** of another EMU-C congregation. This represents on one hand the desire amongst Christians to reach every community, but on the other it is a relic of historical competitive church planting and divisions over theology, church governance and other matters.

Finding ourselves in post-Christendom times, and in a more mobile society but increasing demands on congregational and charity governance, the luxury of such ubiquitous congregations may not be one that can be enjoyed for long.

Accompanying spreadsheets

The tables in this section are shown for denominations and the EMU-C denominations as a whole. The accompanying spreadsheets give information for each congregation, indicating:

- Congregational information
  - Denomination
  - Area (Presbytery/Diocese/Circuit)
  - OSCR number
  - Congregation name
  - Congregation location (longitude and latitude)
  - Denominational ID
- Nearest neighbour in each denomination
  - OSCR number
  - Congregation name
  - Distance or time
  - Number of congregations within radii of time/distance

Spreadsheets are given for straight-line distances, driving distances, driving times, walking distances and walking times. Times and distances may include ferries.

Final Reflections

This report gives a snapshot of how congregations within the EMU-C denominations are working together in 2025. It is wonderful to see EMU-C congregations worshipping God and serving their people across Scotland, from large urban areas to small island communities.

The vast majority (85%) of those who responded to the survey are working together as congregations, generally in shorter term worship and study activities, but also committing to partnering in work for their community. Ministerial cover is less frequent and tends to be used sparingly – there is little evidence here of deeper partnerships.

In contrast to this work, formal ecumenical partnerships, from Churches Together groups to Single Congregation Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEPs) are far rarer. This must raise questions as to their practical usefulness if so few take them up, in comparison with informal arrangements.

At a time when rolls are falling, demands of charity governance are increasing, buildings costs are rising, and rural areas are seeing reduction in other services, finding ways for congregations to share resources – buildings, expertise, governance – without institutional barriers put in the way must be prioritised. In practice this may be realised in a range of ways: resources such as publicity about what is being done, guidelines for good-practise in what can be shared or facilitated for office-bearers, denominational working to reduce administration in shared congregations, or even a simpler "LEPs-lite".

At present governance is more complex in shared work, making it difficult for national denominations to make things happen and with a dearth of guidelines and resources. Consequently, creating anything new and/or different needs time and attention to begin with as processes are established. But the benefits of less formal arrangements are the different perspectives, releasing creativity and expertise. This can free congregations from the administration and demands of many institutions, allowing them to reach out in mission and service.

Appendix I – Survey

The Saint Andrew Declaration Contact Group, with the support of the EMU Steering Group and funded by ACTS, contracted Brendan Research to survey and report on the ecumenical activities of its congregations in 2025.

The reports are based on the responses from congregations in Scotland within the "EMU-C" group; that is, congregations within the Scottish Episcopal Church (SEC), the Methodist Church, the United Reformed Church (URC) and the Church of Scotland (CofS). It is clear that there are congregations in all areas of Scotland, who can be "a nearby friend" (Proverbs 27:10 MSG), particularly when other congregations of the same denomination may be further away.

790 replies were received from 1,246 EMU-C congregations in Scotland (including seven Single Congregation Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEPs)) – a response rate of 63%.

Denomination	Locations[x]	Congregations	Responses	Response rate
Church of Scotland	1,353	871	604	69%
Methodist	47	47	30	64%
SEC	299	299	140	47%
URC	38	38	25	66%
TOTAL[xi]	**1,728**	**1,246**	**790**	**63%**

Table 1: Participating denominations

Acknowledgments

We would like to record our gratitude to all those who completed and returned the survey, telling us of their work together.

Fiona Tweedie, Elaine Farrow and David France

Brendan Research

March 2026

Appendix II – Data Tables

	Denomination			
Present in area	CofS	Methodist	SEC	URC
Associated Free Church	1%	13%	4%	
Baptist Church	29%	50%	52%	52%
Church of Scotland		93%	96%	92%
Congregational Federation	4%	20%	5%	8%
Free Church of Scotland	13%	23%	21%	32%
Independent Fellowship	20%	50%	42%	44%
Methodist Church	6%		16%	48%
Minority Ethnic	5%	13%	8%	16%
Orthodox	1%	7%	7%	8%
Pentecostal Church	8%	30%	20%	28%
Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)	3%	17%	14%	12%
Roman Catholic Church	52%	77%	81%	64%
Salvation Army	11%	43%	22%	48%
Scottish Episcopal Church	38%	57%		64%
United Free Church of Scotland	6%	20%	9%	12%
United Reformed Church	5%	27%	15%	
Other	14%	30%	17%	40%

Table 19: Presence of other denominations in the local area

	Denomination			
Present in area AND works together	CofS	Methodist	SEC	URC
Associated Free Church			1%	
Baptist Church	19%	40%	31%	28%
Church of Scotland		87%	89%	68%
Congregational Federation	2%	13%	3%	8%
Free Church of Scotland	7%	7%	9%	20%
Independent Fellowship	11%	23%	23%	20%
Methodist Church	4%		11%	40%
Minority Ethnic	2%	7%	3%	4%
Orthodox		7%	4%	8%
Pentecostal Church	4%	13%	9%	16%
Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)	1%	7%	7%	8%
Roman Catholic Church	39%	53%	66%	36%
Salvation Army	7%	33%	14%	32%
Scottish Episcopal Church	31%	47%		52%
United Free Church of Scotland	4%	13%	6%	8%
United Reformed Church	4%	27%	9%	
Other	6%			12%

Table 20: Working with other denominations in the local area

	Denomination			
Working together within EMU-C	CofS	Methodist	SEC	URC
Never	5%	3%	3%	4%
Occasionally	23%	27%	40%	20%
Frequently	11%	40%	39%	24%
Always	2%	23%	13%	36%

Table 21: Working together with other EMU-C congregations

	Denomination			
Working together within EMU-C	CofS	Methodist	SEC	URC
Never	6%	3%	9%	4%
Occasionally	44%	37%	44%	40%
Frequently	13%	40%	26%	20%
Always	1%	7%	9%	4%

Table 22: Working together with other congregations beyond EMU-C

Frequency of working together: estimated weeks per year[5] (excl LEP figures in parentheses)	Denomination			
	CofS	Methodist	SEC	URC
Associated Free Church				
Baptist Church	0.8 (0.8)	3.9 (3.9)	1.8 (1.7)	1.6 (1.4)
Church of Scotland		11.7 (9.1)	10.8 (10.5)	17.6 (9.5)
Congregational Federation	0.1 (0.1)	0.5 (0.6)	0.3 (0.3)	0.6 (0.7)
Free Church of Scotland	0.3 (0.3)	0.1 (0)	0.6 (0.6)	0.2 (0.2)
Independent Fellowship	0.5 (0.5)	1.3 (1)	1.5 (1.5)	0.6 (0.2)
Methodist Church	0.4 (0.3)		1.7 (1.3)	9.4 (4.2)
Minority Ethnic		0.1 (0.1)	0.1 (0.1)	
Orthodox		0.1 (0.1)	0.5 (0.5)	0.1 (0.1)
Pentecostal Church	0.1 (0.1)	0.6 (0.2)	0.5 (0.4)	1 (0.7)
Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)		0.1 (0.1)	0.3 (0.3)	2.1 (2.8)
Roman Catholic Church	1.5 (1.5)	4.5 (4.5)	5.5 (5.5)	2.2 (2.2)
Salvation Army	0.3 (0.3)	2.2 (2)	1.2 (1.1)	2.1 (2.1)
Scottish Episcopal Church	1.8 (1.7)	5.4 (4)		6.4 (4.9)
United Free Church of Scotland	0.2 (0.1)	2.6 (2.9)	1 (1)	0.1 (0.1)
United Reformed Church	0.7 (0.3)	9.1 (4.4)	1.2 (0.9)	
Other	0.4 (0.4)	0.4 (0.4)		1.4 (1.9)

Table 23: Frequency of working with other denominations in the local area

Involvement in Churches Together	Denomination			
	CofS	Methodist	SEC	URC
Shapes the life of our congregation	1%	3%	1%	
Some impact on our congregation	13%	13%	20%	24%
Regular news	9%	23%	9%	16%
Small number of enthusiasts	6%	7%	12%	
Difficulty getting people to serve	3%	3%	4%	4%
We are unaware	8%	7%	10%	

Table 24: Involvement in a Churches Together group

Involvement in Churches Together by Presbytery/Circuit/Diocese excl LEPs[6]		
CofS	Lewis	
	Fife	10%
	Clèir Eilean Ì: Highlands and Hebrides	15%
	North East and Northern Isles	21%
	Forth Valley and Clydesdale	27%
	Perth	29%
	The South West	32%
	Edinburgh and West Lothian	41%
	Glasgow	41%
	Clyde	49%
	Lothian and Borders	50%
Methodist	Lerwick and Walls (32/1)	14%
	Scotland (31/1)	65%
SEC	Moray, Ross and Caithness	27%
	Aberdeen and Orkney	30%
	Brechin	30%
	Edinburgh	42%
	St Andrews, Dunkeld and Dunblane	57%
	Glasgow and Galloway	57%
	Argyll and The Isles	57%
URC		42%

Table 25: Regional membership of Churches Together groups

	Denomination			
World Day of Prayer	CofS	Methodist	SEC	URC
Very effective	15%	27%	19%	24%
Somewhat effective	39%	17%	31%	32%
Neither effective nor ineffective	12%	23%	10%	12%
Somewhat ineffective	4%	13%	8%	4%
Very ineffective	1%	13%	9%	8%

Table 26: Effectiveness of World Day of Prayer services for strengthening ecumenical cooperation

	Denomination			
Holy Week services	CofS	Methodist	SEC	URC
Very effective	20%	20%	25%	28%
Somewhat effective	31%	23%	33%	28%
Neither effective nor ineffective	9%	13%	9%	8%
Somewhat ineffective	2%	3%	4%	
Very ineffective	2%	10%	5%	4%

Table 27: Effectiveness of Holy Week services for strengthening ecumenical cooperation

	Denomination			
Week of Prayer for Christian Unity services	CofS	Methodist	SEC	URC
Very effective	3%	7%	11%	8%
Somewhat effective	18%	43%	29%	24%
Neither effective nor ineffective	9%	7%	9%	8%
Somewhat ineffective	3%	3%	8%	4%
Very ineffective	2%	10%	12%	8%

Table 28: Effectiveness of Week of Prayer for Christian Unity services for strengthening ecumenical cooperation

	Denomination			
Advent services	CofS	Methodist	SEC	URC
Very effective	10%		11%	8%
Somewhat effective	22%	13%	19%	36%
Neither effective nor ineffective	7%	13%	11%	12%
Somewhat ineffective	1%	3%	3%	
Very ineffective	2%	17%	5%	4%

Table 29: Effectiveness of Advent services for strengthening ecumenical cooperation

	Denomination			
Food bank	CofS	Methodist	SEC	URC
Very effective	21%	17%	18%	28%
Somewhat effective	21%	20%	29%	20%
Neither effective nor ineffective	8%	10%	7%	8%
Somewhat ineffective	2%	3%	4%	4%
Very ineffective	2%		1%	

Table 30: Effectiveness of running a food bank together for strengthening ecumenical cooperation

	Denomination			
Christian Aid week	CofS	Methodist	SEC	URC
Very effective	11%	13%	13%	12%
Somewhat effective	21%	33%	26%	40%
Neither effective nor ineffective	17%		16%	20%
Somewhat ineffective	3%	3%	3%	
Very ineffective	4%	10%	11%	8%

Table 31: Effectiveness of Christian Aid Week activities together for strengthening ecumenical cooperation

	Denomination			
Joint social gatherings	CofS	Methodist	SEC	URC
Very effective	11%	13%	14%	8%
Somewhat effective	25%	10%	37%	24%
Neither effective nor ineffective	9%	7%	6%	20%
Somewhat ineffective	1%		3%	
Very ineffective	2%	10%	5%	8%

Table 32: Effectiveness of joint social gatherings for strengthening ecumenical cooperation

	Denomination			
Charity fundraising	CofS	Methodist	SEC	URC
Very effective	9%	3%	6%	8%
Somewhat effective	19%	27%	23%	20%
Neither effective nor ineffective	10%		4%	8%
Somewhat ineffective	2%	3%		
Very ineffective	2%	7%	4%	8%

Table 33: Effectiveness of raising funds for charity together for strengthening ecumenical cooperation

	Denomination			
Routine pastoral care	CofS	Methodist	SEC	URC
To a great extent	5%	7%	9%	
To some extent	12%		12%	4%
A little	11%	10%	11%	20%
Not at all	14%	13%	21%	20%

Table 34: Effectiveness of routine pastoral care for strengthening ecumenical cooperation

	Denomination			
Funerals	CofS	Methodist	SEC	URC
To a great extent	11%	7%	9%	4%
To some extent	18%	7%	13%	20%
A little	14%	7%	11%	32%
Not at all	7%	7%	23%	8%

Table 35: Effectiveness of cover for funerals for strengthening ecumenical cooperation

	Denomination			
Weddings	CofS	Methodist	SEC	URC
To a great extent	4%		5%	
To some extent	7%		7%	8%
A little	6%	3%	4%	12%
Not at all	19%	17%	27%	24%

Table 36: Effectiveness of cover for weddings for strengthening ecumenical cooperation

	Denomination			
Holiday cover	CofS	Methodist	SEC	URC
To a great extent	9%		13%	4%
To some extent	18%		13%	8%
A little	11%	3%	9%	
Not at all	10%	20%	17%	32%

Table 37: Effectiveness of holiday cover for strengthening ecumenical cooperation

Other cover[xii]	Denomination			
	CofS	Methodist	SEC	URC
To a great extent	1%		16%	
To some extent	2%		13%	
A little			7%	
Not at all	10%	10%	17%	4%

Table 38: Effectiveness of other cover for strengthening ecumenical cooperation

Appendix III – Local Ecumenical Partnerships

Single Congregations

There are seven Single Congregation LEPs within Scotland as shown in Table 39 below, and we have survey responses from all of them. A response from the Church of Scotland and Methodist Single Congregation LEP in Malta is excluded from this audit as it is outside Scotland.

Location	Responses via	Partner denominations	Building owner
Canobie	CofS	CofS/United Free CofS	CofS
Grahamston United, Falkirk	CofS	Meth/URC/CofS	CofS
Granton United, Edinburgh	URC	URC/Meth	Meth
Livingston United	CofS	CofS/Meth/SEC/URC	CofS
Morningside United	CofS	URC/CofS	URC
St Ninian's, Stonehouse	URC	URC/CofS	CofS
Trinity Oakshaw, Paisley	CofS	URC/CofS	CofS

Table 39: Single Congregation Local Ecumenical Partnerships in Scotland

Shared Building Agreements

There are two Shared Building Agreements and we have survey responses from both of them; one of them has two responses.

Location	Responses via	Denominations	Building owner
Rosyth	SEC and Methodist	SEC/Methodist	Methodist
St John's, Dumfries	SEC	SEC/Methodist	SEC

Table 40: Shared Building Agreements

Local Covenanted Partnerships

There are ten Local Covenants.

Location	Partners	Location	Partners
Burntisland Covenant	CofS/UF CofS	Fife Covenant	Cong. Fed/URC
Cathcart	CofS/UF CofS	Murrayfield Churches Together	CofS/SEC/URC
Drumchapel Churches Partnership	CofS/RC/ SEC/URC	St Andrew's Irvine	CofS/SEC
East Kilbride Christians Together in the Murray	CofS/Salvation Army/SEC/ URC	Tayport	*unknown*
Edinburgh City Centre Churches Together	CofS/SEC	The Local Church, Edinburgh Old Town	CofS/SEC/URC

Table 41: Covenanted Partnerships

Other Local Ecumenical Partnerships

Other arrangements of which we are aware include:

- EMU – SEC, Methodist and URC denominational grouping,
- Annandale Learning Agreement – CofS and SEC,
- Barrhead – informal sharing between Methodist and URC congregations,
- Montrose – CofS and United Free Church of Scotland,
- St Anne's Dunbar – Methodist group worshipping as part of SEC congregation as part of Ecumenical Welcome.

Appendix 2

Delegates to other Churches and Ecumenical Bodies
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: N/A this year

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

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:
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

References

[i] Proceedings of the 27th General Council of the World Communion of Reformed Churches can be found on the WCRC website. https://wcrc.eu/resource/proceedings-of-the-27th-general-council-of-the-world-communion-of-reformed-churches/

[ii] Available as a free ebook here: https://www.eva-leipzig.de/attachments/9783374079759.pdf

[iii] Ignore works-with answers for denominations that are not reported to exist in the local area.

[iv] Ignore works-with answers for denominations that are not reported to exist in the local area. Where there are some works-with answers, we have treated any missing works-with answers as "Never" for denominations that are reported to exist.

[v] Taking "always" as 52 weeks per year, "frequently" as 12 (monthly), occasionally as 1 (annually). Mean taken across all responses, excluding those with no response.

[vi] LEPs have been excluded from the regional breakdown figures. URC congregations were not divided regionally but are included for reference.

[vii] The figures for prevalence of cover supplied to Methodist churches by other denominations were not supplied and have been inferred from the answers to questions about the effectiveness of such cover.

[viii] The SEC survey combined these types of cover and additionally asked about Eucharistic cover – here under "Other".

[ix] To calculate road distances, driving times and walking times, we used the openrouteservice API, openrouteservice.org by HeiGIT. API results are licensed under CC-BY-4.0

[x] Each Church of Scotland parish is a separate charity with its own OSCR number. Following considerable recent parish adjustment, many Church of Scotland parishes have more than one worship location, hence the different columns.

[xi] Here, and throughout this report, Single Congregation LEPs are counted within each partner denomination, but only once in total counts.

[xii] The SEC survey asked about pulpit supply and cover for Communion services; those answers have been combined here. The three other surveys asked an open question about other ecumenical cover.

REGISTRATION OF MINISTRIES COMMITTEE MAY 2026

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Pass an Act amending the Registration of Ministries Act (Act II, 2017, as amended), as set out in Appendix I *(Sections 3 and 4, and Appendix I).*

Points for Information

1. Overview of the Committee's Work
2. Engagement with HM Forces *(Section 2).*
3. Augmenting the criteria for assessment following experience and reflection *(Section 3).*
4. Changing Category R and Category I *(Section 4).*

Executive Summary

In its Report, the Committee informs the General Assembly of the number of individuals who have sought a change to their category of registration, where such a change requires the Committee to make a decision. Secondly, there is mention of engagement with the Committee on Chaplains to His Majesty's Forces, referencing the Convener's attendance at the tri-service Forces Chaplains Conference. The Report also proposes changes to the Act and its accompanying Schedule 2. Schedule 2 lists criteria for assessment for the Committee to use in engaging with those seeking to change their category of registration, and the Committee seeks to include involvement in local church life, and the devotional life of applicants in this list of criteria. The second change to the Act is a renaming of categories, substituting P for R, i.e. Practising for Retaining, and R for I, Retired, for Inactive.

Report

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of the Committee

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/40xH9kq 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: https://bit.ly/4cjG9YA

1.2 Annual Review of the Register of Ministries by Presbyteries

1.2 Over and above this, the Committee 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 Principles

It is worthwhile repeating what was said in last year's Report; the task of the Committee is to explore with those seeking Category O registration whether those who seek to enter, or return to, parish ministry, or to service as an Ordained Local Minister, 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. The members of the Committee are committed to engaging in a relational manner which is informal yet probing and robust in exploring relevant areas. The Committee wishes to assure the Church of its pastoral commitment to those with whom it engages to ensure that those presenting have the requisite skills and gifts for the ministries to which they are committed.

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2. HM FORCES

2.1 When this Report is received by the General Assembly, it will be nine years since the Registration of Ministries Act was passed. The Act as it stands requires appropriate input to the annual tri-service conference for Forces' Chaplains, and the Committee is pleased to report that the Convener took part in this conference at the Defence Academy in Shrivenham, in September 2025, and also attended a subsequent meeting of the Committee on Chaplains to His Majesty's Forces. At time of writing, it is also hoped to engage further with the Chaplains following the General Assembly, including attendance at the tri-service conference in September 2026.

3. CRITERIA

The Committee reported to the General Assembly of 2025 that it intended to bring proposals regarding the criteria for assessment as outlined in Schedule 2 to the Act. In its engagement with those seeking Category O Registration in order to apply for a pastoral charge, it became clear that the criteria required to be augmented in a number of areas. The criteria do not include meaningful engagement in congregational life nor do they reference the applicant's spiritual and prayer life. The General Assembly of 2025 approved a competency framework for inducted ministers of word and sacrament, and it makes sense to be part of the criteria for assessment used by the Committee. Amendments to the criteria for assessment relating to these are included at Sections 7 and 8 of the amending Act referred to in Section 4.5 of this Report, presented at Appendix I.

4. CATEGORISATION – CATEGORY R AND CATEGORY I – PROPOSED CHANGE

4.1 In its Report to the General Assembly of 2025, the Registration of Ministries Committee was instructed by the General Assembly to consider the designation of the existing categories within the Registration of Ministries Act and to report back to the General Assembly of 2026.

4.2 The Committee wishes to retain all Categories, with the exception of the current Category R and Category I, standing respectively for Retained and Inactive.

4.3 The Committee in its operation of the Act, particularly at the time of annual review with the Presbyteries between March and June, has found confusion around the understanding of these last two Categories. Some hurt has been felt by experienced ministers who have found themselves in Category I for Inactive, and Category R has been misinterpreted as meaning Retired, rather than Retained.

4.4 In order to make things simpler, the Committee proposes to replace the current Category R with Category P, with P standing for Practising. The Committee further proposes the repurposing of the letter "R" to replace "I", with a change of definition away from Inactive to Retired, which better reflects the position for many currently in Category I who find such a designation hurtful.

4.5 An amending Act to the Registration of Ministries Act (Act II 2017) can be found as Appendix I

5. GRADUATE CANDIDATES

The Faith Action Programme Leadership Team ("FAPLT") agreed to extend the validity of certificates of eligibility for ministers in the Admissions and Readmissions Programme. In response to this, and in the interests of consistency, the Committee considered the situation with regard to graduate candidates who had been impacted by the sist on vacancies as a result of the Presbytery Mission Planning process, primarily those graduate candidates issued with an exit certificate in 2022. For those graduate candidates who were not in a charge by 31 December 2025, the Selection and Training for Full-Time Ministry Act (Act X, 2004, as amended) requires such graduate candidates to seek Category O registration by applying to the Registration of Ministries Committee. For those in this situation who were part of the Assistant Ministers' scheme at that time as part of the 2022 cohort of Probationers, the Committee agreed to a six-month extension beyond the normal window, to allow them the time to continue applying for charges. Their Category E registration, or graduate candidate status, will convert to Category O on induction to a charge, subject to their Presbytery confirming their good standing.

6. STATISTICS

In the window from June 2025 to February 2026, the Committee conducted six interviews and granted all six applications; three were from Category E holders; two were from Category R holders; and one was from Category I. All applications came with the support of the relevant Presbytery.

7. FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

7.1 In last year's Report, reference was made to the possibility of compulsory Continuing Ministerial Development as part of the work of FAPLT. That work continues, and the Committee continues to collaborate with FAPLT in developing proposals which will come to the General Assembly of 2027. The work of FAPLT on Capability and Competence, building on the Formation Framework presented to the General Assembly of 2019, will eventually impact on the work of the Registration of Ministries Committee.

7.2 The Committee indicated in its Report to the Assembly of 2025 that it wished to look at its work with Ordained Local Ministers. That has not been possible due to staffing issues, and the Committee will report to the General Assembly of 2027.

7.3 Around four years ago, the Committee engaged in a series of roadshows, with three in-person events, and one on-line event. These were well received, and with the turnover in Presbytery Clerks, it makes sense to repeat the exercise. The Committee will work on this and report to the General Assembly of 2027.

7.4 The Committee wants to encourage every minister to consider and reflect on his or her vocation, whether settled in a parish, or seeking to enter or begin afresh in Parish Ministry, and commends 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/40EDGAB.

In the name of the Committee

ROBBIE HAMILTON, *Convener*
HILARY MCDOUGALL, *Vice-Convener*
ANGUS R MATHIESON, *Registrar*

Addendum

Hilary McDougall was appointed as Vice-Convener for the Registration of Ministries Committee in 2022, and her term comes to an end at the General Assembly of 2026. She has made a significant contribution to the work of the Committee in her role, including one year when she found herself presenting the Committee's Report to the General Assembly at relatively short notice.

Hilary's service in parish ministry, in Robroyston, and currently job-sharing an interim ministry assignment, alongside her time in the Presbytery of Glasgow as Depute Presbytery Clerk and Congregational Facilitator, as well as being a national assessor, have been invaluable experiences which she has brought to her role as Vice-Convener. Her commitment to ensuring that congregations will be served by those who are best equipped to serve as Parish Ministers, or as Ordained Local Ministers, has been much appreciated by her colleagues on the Committee. We wish her all the best in this next chapter in ministry, and would support her in her endeavours to spend more time on the tennis court.

ROBBIE HAMILTON, *Convener*
ANGUS R MATHIESON, *Registrar*

Appendix I

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

Edinburgh, [ ] May 2026, 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. *Throughout the Act, substitute* "Faith Action Programme Leadership Team" *for* "Faith Nurture Forum".
2. *Throughout the Act, substitute* "Category P" *for* "Category R" *and* "Category R" for "Category I".
3. *In the table at section 11, substitute* "Category P" *for* "Category R" *and* "Category R" *for* "Category I" *and substitute the following meanings for Category P and for Category R:*

P	Practising, retaining status as a minister and authorised to perform the functions of ministry outwith an appointment covered by Category O or Category E.	This may include retired ministers whose Category O registration has lapsed.

R	Retired, or non-practising, retaining status as a minister but no longer authorised to perform the functions of ministry, save where authorised under section 16 of this Act.	This may include an individual who declares to Presbytery that he/she no longer intends to perform the functions of ministry. It may also include a person so registered by Presbytery.

4. *In the table at section 12, substitute* "Category P" *for* "Category R" *and* "Category R" *for* "Category I" *and substitute the following meanings for Category P and for Category R:*

P	Practising, retaining status as a minister and authorised to perform the functions of ministry outwith an appointment covered by Category O.	

R	Retired, or non-practising, retaining status as a minister but no longer authorised to perform the functions of ministry, save where authorised under section 16 of this Act.	This may include an individual who declares to Presbytery that he/she no longer intends to perform the functions of ministry. It may also include a person so registered by Presbytery.

5. *In the table at section 13, substitute* "Category P" *for* "Category R" *and* "Category R" *for* "Category I" *and substitute the following meanings for Category P and for Category R:*

P	Practising, retaining status as a deacon and authorised to perform the functions of the diaconate outwith an appointment covered by Category E.	

R	Retired, or non-practising, retaining status as a deacon but no longer authorised to perform the functions of the diaconate, save where authorised under section 16 of this Act.	This may include an individual who declares to Presbytery that he/she no longer intends to perform the functions of the diaconate. It may also include a person so registered by Presbytery.

6. *Sections 2, 3, 4 and 5 of this amending Act shall take effect from 1 July 2026.*

7. *Amend Schedule 2 (Criteria for Assessment by the Registration of Ministries Committee) by adding the following new criteria in paragraph 1, as sub-sections (2), (3) and (4):*

"(2) The extent to which the applicant has knowledge of and current involvement in congregational life in the Church of Scotland and their understanding of current issues in the wider Church.

(3) The health of the applicant's prayer and spiritual life.

(4) The terms of the Competency Framework for Full-Time Ministers of Word and Sacrament."

8. *At the end of Schedule 2 (Criteria for Assessment by the Registration of Ministries Committee) add the following:*

"In the course of their application, the applicant may also be asked about their motivation for applying for category O registration."

Consequential amendments

Act IV 2001 (Ministers and Deacons in Public Office)

In section 2(2), substitute "Category P" for "Category R" and "Category R" for "Category I".

Act VIII 2010 (Deacons)

In section 8(d) and Appendices A & C, substitute "Category P" for "Category R".

Act VI 2019 (Income Protection & Ill Health)

In section 13, substitute "Category P" *for* "Category R" *and* "Category R" *for* "Category I".

Act VI 2023 (Church Courts)

In sections 13.1.6, 13.2.1, 21.1.1 and 21.1.3, substitute "Category P" *for* "Category R".

IONA COMMUNITY BOARD MAY 2026

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Urge congregations and Presbyteries to support all who protest peacefully for justice and peace (*Section 2.1*).
3. Encourage congregations to offer 'quiet processes and small places' where groups gather for honest, courageous, truth-telling and enlivening conversations about faith, belief, prayer and actions for justice and peace (*Sections 2.2 & 3.1*).
4. Note the Iona Community's updated position paper on Israel-Palestine (*Section 4.2.3*).
5. Call on members of the Church to join with ecumenical partners and Christian Aid in prayer for peace in the Middle East on the 24th of each month (*Section 4.2.6*).

Points for Information

1. Information about the Fingerprint Labyrinth can be found here:
   www.fingerprintlabyrinth.wordpress.com;
   https://www.instagram.com/fingerprintlabyrinth
   https://www.youtube.com/@IonaCommunityOnline/shorts
   https://artrightstruth.com/conversations-with-reports-amnesty-international
2. The Wild Goose Resource Group is available to congregations and faith communities across the country interested in "encouraging, enabling and equipping the shaping and creation of new forms of worship that are relevant, contextual and participatory." Contact us at wgrg@iona.org.uk.
3. To find out more about our nine Common Concern Networks, and to read our public Position Papers, visit https://iona.org.uk/our-resources/common-concerns/.
4. To join the Iona Community, volunteer with us on Iona, or stay as our guest in community, visit www.iona.org.uk.

Executive Summary

In a world where safety in countries considered democratic is under threat; where truth is often a mirage and where violence is increasing our task of witness as followers of the Prince of Peace is huge. The Iona Community remains concerned about the infringement of the right to protest against injustice, and the increasing criminalisation of protestors. To highlight this, a group of our Members, craftivists working with Amnesty International, created an award-winning Fingerprint Labyrinth that toured the UK and Europe throughout 2025.

In our work for justice and peace, rooted in faith, we are inspired by the call to *"pin our hopes to quiet processes and small circles, in which vital and transforming events take place." We know that we are neither alone in this work, nor separate from the pain of the world. 2025 saw the culmination of a member-led programme of reflection on what it means to belong to a Christian community today. In small local groups across the movement, and gathered as a whole in plenary, we asked questions such as: "How do you understand 'God' working in your life?" And "What does prayer mean to you?"*

We know we are not alone in the work of seeking God's justice and peace. We were pleased in 2025 to work alongside our Methodist and URC friends in Scotland, the universities of Edinburgh and Glasgow, and the Joint Public Issues Team as we work together to develop resources for learning. Working closely with our global companions in intentional community, and through festivals in the UK, we are aware of a wide and deep yearning for justice and peace rooted in Christian worship.

In 2025 we updated our 2023 position paper on Israel–Palestine, responding to the existential threat to Palestinians, the moral crisis and ecological catastrophe and to appeals from our Palestinian Christian partners. Our position is given greater urgency by the issuing of the 2025 Kairos Palestine document: "A Moment of Truth: Faith in a Time of Genocide" (KPII). Despite decades of visits, reports, and statements from churches, Palestinian Christians issued KP II because earlier appeals did not lead to the urgent action they sought. Their message is clear: the church is called not only to humanitarian support, and praying for peace, but to costly solidarity that precisely challenges the structures causing suffering.

The 30th Conference of the Parties in Brazil (November 2025) saw the malign influence of climate denial put brakes on much momentum of previous COPs, losing touch, in the final statement, with the previous crucial resolve to phase out fossil fuels. Lobbyists from corporate interests swamped attendance.

Iona Abbey continues as 'a sanctuary and a light', where people from all walks of life share a 'common life', connect with one another, express solidarity with world's concerns, pray for healing, justice and peace, and sing, reflect and engage in life in community. We stand in solidarity with all those places and spaces around the globe where people meet for such shared hospitality, worship and action.

Report

1. 'PEACE I LEAVE; MY PEACE I GIVE YOU' (JOHN 14)

1.1 In a world where safety in countries considered democratic is under threat; where truth is often a mirage floating out of reach; where violence in word and deed is increasingly accepted as the norm; and where the global institutions, including NATO and the United Nations, that has maintained a broad coalition of peace since 1945 is being systematically challenged and dismantled, our task of witness as followers of the Prince of Peace (Matthew 10) is huge.

1.2 Jesus calls us to the ministry of peace, justice and reconciliation. The Sermon on the Mount is a cry for justice, peace and truth-telling in the public sphere (Matthew 5). Peacemakers are named as blessed (Matthew 5: 9), and exhorted not to seek an easy peace (John 14:27), or a worldly peace but a peace that is rooted in the hope of a just kingdom in which all are honoured as equal.

1.3 The right to peaceful protest has been eroded across the globe, including in western democracies, particularly over the last year. Members of the Iona Community are concerned about this development. In the course of 2025, a small group of Members based in London galvanised thousands to engage peacefully in a prayerful act of resistance against this development. Our report this year is woven through with the story of the Fingerprint Labyrinth as a symbol of this call to peace with justice.

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2. PROPHETS AND RECONCILERS

2.1 Fingerprint Labyrinth



2.1.1 In this time when language is weaponized against truth, justice and compassion we value arts, poetry, song, music and imaginative expression as dynamic and creative ways of communicating God's prophetic protest.

2.1.2 Members of the Iona Community remain concerned about the infringement of the right to protest against injustice, and the increasing criminalisation of protestors. To highlight this, a group of craftivists (artists, wordsmiths, musicians), Members of the Iona Community Londo n Family Group, working with Amnesty International, created an award-winning labyrinth that toured the UK and Europe throughout 2025.

2.1.3 Combining the ancient form of the labyrinth with the modern reality of fingerprinting, the Fingerprint Labyrinth invites participants to walk, reflect, and engage prayerfully with issues of protest and justice. A musical soundscape and poetry accompanies the experience, and participants are invited leave their own fingerprint as an act of solidarity.

2.1.4 During 2025, the full-sized cloth labyrinth travelled to 11 venues across the UK and continental Europe, including two installations in Glasgow and one at Iona Abbey. More than 3,000 people interacted with the installation directly, with over 1,000 website views and thousands of social media engagements.

2.1.5 The fingerprint framing emphasised the reality that peaceful protesters are often fingerprinted by authorities. A 'ribbon of hope and peace' which surrounded the Labyrinth was created, patch by patch, as the Labyrinth travelled.

2.1.6 Video and online descriptions can be accessed here:
www.fingerprintlabyrinth.wordpress.com;
https://www.instagram.com/fingerprintlabyrinth
https://www.youtube.com/@IonaCommunityOnline/shorts
https://artrightstruth.com/conversations-with-reports-amnesty-international

2.1.7 The Iona Community remains deeply concerned about the ongoing restrictions on the right to protest. We continue to work with partners such as the Network of Christian Peace Organisations, and Sabeel-Kairos recognising Scotland's strong culture of peaceful protest – from the Red Clyde to Coulport and Faslane, from the Poll Tax to Make Poverty History – a tradition we are committed to upholding.

2.2 'Quiet Processes and Small Circles'

2.2.1 Global gatherings of Iona Community Members took place in 2025 in London and in York where, led by Paul Parker, Recording Clerk of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), we explored what it means to be both prophets and reconcilers. Meeting in silent worship, and engaging in conversation about the impact that small, passionate groups of people can have, we were filled with hope and courage.

2.2.2 We were inspired by the words of Quaker Rufus Jones. In 1937, when the world was so plainly drifting toward a second and more terrible conflict than the First World War, Quakers held a World Conference in the United States. Rufus Jones was asked to preside over the meeting, of which he wrote:

"In regard to the World Conference, I sincerely hope for good results, but I have become a good deal disillusioned over 'big' conferences and large gatherings. I pin my hopes to quiet processes and small circles, in which vital and transforming events take place."

2.2.3 Ruth Harvey, Leader, offered a Time for Reflection to the Scottish Parliament on this theme on Shrove Tuesday.

2.2.4 Members of the Iona Community around the globe continue to engage in 'quiet processes and small circles', in Family Groups, Regions, Common Concern Networks, Advisory and Working Groups. We do this knowing that here is where 'vital and transforming events take place.' We know that we are neither alone in this work, nor separate from the pain of the world. Daily in our prayers we acknowledge the part we play in this brokenness, as we 'confess to turning away from God in the ways we wound our lives, the lives of others and the life of the world.' In the knowledge of God's forgiveness, Christ's renewal, and the enabling of the Spirit, we turn again and again to the work of upholding hope, love and trust.

3. BOUNDARIES, BELIEF AND BELONGING

3.1 Member Conversations

3.1.1 2025 saw the culmination of a member-led programme of reflection on what it means to belong to a Christian community today. In small local groups across the movement, and gathered as a whole in plenary, we asked questions such as: How do you understand 'God' working in your life? What significance does Jesus Christ have for you on your spiritual journey? What does prayer mean to you? What happens when you pray? What do you see as the role, place and value of the Bible within our life in community? In what ways is our commitment to 'justice, peace, wholeness and reconciliation' a spiritual task?

3.1.2 A Community rooted in orthopraxy as much as orthodoxy, we place as high a value on *what we do* in response to Christ's call, as on *what we believe*. As with the impact of the Fingerprint Labyrinth, we aim to weave together a cohesive set of transformative practices with a deep understanding of the breadth of beliefs within our community to make sense of our calling to transformation. We place a high value on the opportunity to listen well to the breadth of views about faith across our ecumenical community.

3.1.3 One Member shared from their perspective: "Language changes and evolves and the language we use to talk about our faith is foreign to so many in our society, many of whom are searching for spiritual connection and belonging. I think there is a real opportunity for us to engage more widely with others if we can find different ways to talk about belief."

3.1.4 While 2025 saw the conclusion of this series of workshops, the honest, truth-telling conversations about our life as a Christian community will continue as a thread woven through our life in community. The limitations of language can never fully express all that the mystery of faith contains.

3.2 Resourcing Worship

3.2.1 Our Wild Goose Resource Group led a 'Worship in the Wilds' week on Iona in July with the core question: 'The world has gone wild, so why does worship matter?' We explored themes of resisting, surviving and dreaming in coping with wild times. We dug deep into Biblical stories of Jeremiah and Josiah; experienced silence and stillness in the Hermit's Cell; processed in noisy protest around the Cloisters. In our evening service of prayers for Justice and Peace, the Abbey aisle held a large, long roll of paper with 'peace' in many languages. It was torn apart in dramatic symbolism and laid before us. Small candles were later placed in the breach as signs of our commitment to keep praying and working for the mending and tending of the world.

3.2.2 Our team also worked with the United Reformed Church in St Albans in October: a full weekend with Friday evening 'Conversation & Song'; Saturday workshops on singing, the shape of liturgy, Biblical exploration, crafting prayer, learning styles and more on song; and Sunday worship engaging with how a prophet, a group of exiles and an early church leader faced their own tough times and what their stories bring to ours. Parts of the sanctuary were transformed into Habakkuk's watchtower, the River of Babylon, and the scroll from Paul to Timothy.

3.2.3 The Wild Goose Resource Group is available to congregations and faith communities across the country interested in "encouraging, enabling and equipping the shaping and creation of new forms of worship that are relevant, contextual and participatory." To find out more, and to join in with their monthly 'Second Sunday Sing', contact us at wgrg@iona.org.uk

4. LOCAL AND GLOBAL COMMUNITY

4.1 Rooted in Scotland

4.1.1 We were pleased in 2025 to work alongside our Methodist and URC friends in Scotland, offering retreats and workshops to support their growth and to nurture those in leadership. We are delighted also to maintain a strong connection with our two university partners, University of Edinburgh and University of Glasgow, as we work together to develop resources for learning.

4.1.2 Our relationships extend beyond our shores, with a new partnership signed between the Iona Community and the Wellspring Community, our sister community in the lands we now call Australia. And we continue to give thanks for the partnerships that flourish at the various festivals of faith and the arts at which we are present, including Solas, Greenbelt and Glastonbury.

4.1.3 In 2025 we renewed our partnership with the Joint Public Issues Team. This partnership will help to strengthen the Christian witness for peace and justice. In a joint press release, JPIT and the Iona Community said: "We are committed to walking together and to supporting each other, recognising that each partner brings particular strengths and resources to this task. While we will not always speak together, through this partnership we seek to create opportunities to collaborate, share expertise, build community and deepen relationships between those involved in this work, so that both partners can have greater reach, resolve, effectiveness and impact."

4.1.4 Simeon Mitchell, JPIT Team Leader commented: "As JPIT and the Iona Community have worked more closely together over the last year or two, we have found we have many shared hopes and also complementary strengths in this work. At a time when working for justice and peace can be so challenging, I'm delighted that we are entering into this new resourcing partnership, and pray that it will offer support and encouragement to members of the Iona Community and JPIT's partner denominations."

4.1.5 The 'Scotland Demands Better' protests, uniting people in Scotland to demand better in terms of poverty and economic justice, saw around 5,000 people attend a march in Edinburgh on 25th October 2025. We were pleased to join with Churches and other aligned bodies as we marched, making visible a togetherness in the face of so much division. We were left convinced of the need to 'demand better' all the time.

4.1.6 With local elections held recently across Scotland, we affirm once again the role of church and faith communities as spaces for difficult conversations, for diverse views to be held and expressed, and for the nuance of belief, passion and conviction to be held with respect, kindness and accountability. The search for truth in a world riddled with 'fake news' calls us to hone places and host spaces for expansive respectful conversation.

4.2 Reaching Out

4.2.1 Our nine Common Concern Networks offer online spaces for just such truth-telling conversations as described in 4.1.6. In 2025 four of our CCNs published public Position Papers outlining why we take a stance on certain issues. These can be read and shared here: LGBTQ+ CCN Position Paper; Inter Faith Relations Position Paper; Peace and Reconciliation Position Paper; Challenging Racism CCN.

4.2.2 With the leadership and generous wisdom of allies from Refugee Integration through Education, Languages and the Arts (RIELA) of Glasgow University, we were pleased in 2025 to receive training for our 150 volunteer leaders in 'Challenging Racism.' We commend the Church of Scotland's apology for its role in transatlantic chattel enslavement, and commend the wider journey of repentance and reconciliation of which apology forms a part.

4.2.3 In July 2025 the Iona Community updated its 2023 position paper on Israel–Palestine, responding to the existential threat to Palestinians, the moral crisis and ecological catastrophe and to appeals from our Palestinian Christian partners. Our position is given greater urgency by the issuing of the 2025 Kairos Palestine document: "A Moment of Truth: Faith in a Time of Genocide" (KPII). Despite decades of visits, reports, and statements from churches, Palestinian Christians issued KP II because earlier appeals did not lead to the urgent action they sought. Their message is clear: the church is called not only to humanitarian support, and praying for peace, but to costly solidarity that precisely challenges the structures causing suffering.

4.2.4 It is incumbent upon us as Christians and as churches to respond to the cries of our Palestinian siblings in Christ and be led by them in our opposition to apartheid, settler colonialism, Zionism, and genocide. In so doing, Members of the Iona Community have continued daily witness alongside partners in Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon and in our local communities worldwide. With all people of goodwill, we stand publicly for justice, drawing on the deep wells of liberation theology and our own Community's longstanding commitments. We have continued to educate and equip our members and the congregations they serve. We have continued to support Palestinian individuals and families. We share the concern expressed by church leaders—including Cardinal Pizzaballa of Jerusalem about the "Board of Peace"—that organisations claiming to promote peace and reconciliation in Palestine/Israel without challenging settler colonisation, in fact, reinforce structures of injustice.

4.2.5 In our Position Paper we say: "In 2025 we were witnesses to the deliberate starvation and slaughter of the people of Gaza. In response to an Open Letter from Palestinian Christians, we join with the UN Special Rapporteur on the occupied Palestinian territory as well as lawyers and academics, NGOs, and kindred spirits in all faiths and none – all of whom name the State of Israel as committing crimes of genocide, apartheid and ethnic cleansing. We again assert God's love is for all people."

4.2.6 Christians across Scotland pray for peace in Palestine and Israel on the 24th of each month, in an initiative supported by the Church of Scotland and co-ordinated by Christian Aid. We commit ourselves as a Community to continue to work and pray for peace and justice, and extend an invitation to the whole Church to join in. https://www.christianaid.org.uk/get-involved/campaigns/prayers-for-peace

4.2.7 Members of our Community joined together in August 2025 at the gates of Faslane Naval Base to mark, in a service of worship for peace, 80 years since the devastation of the weapons of mass destruction dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Coordinated by Justice and Peace Scotland, we co-led the worship with leaders of the Scottish Episcopal Church, the Church of Scotland, the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), the United Reformed Church and the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland. We continue to protest the presence of all weapons of mass destruction.

4.2.8 November 2025 marked the 30th Conference of the Parties (COP30) in Brazil where the malign influence of climate denial put brakes on much momentum of previous COPs, losing touch, in the final statement, with the previous crucial resolve to phase out fossil fuels, and to honour and build "loss and damage" commitment. Lobbyists from corporate interests swamped attendance. We believe that it is still better that COPs happen than they don't, and COP remains both a high-level meeting-place for climate scientists, and a global occasion for prayer and protest, highlighted in Scotland by the Mass in Glasgow's Roman Catholic Cathedral.

4.2.9 The very encouraging march organised by Friends of the Earth in Glasgow at the time of COP integrated the many justice issues impacted by the Crisis of Nature and Climate.

4.2.10 Commending the Church of Scotland's joining of the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty movement, we look forward with hope to the First International Conference for the Phase Out of Fossil Fuels, to be hosted by Colombia in 2026.

4.2.11 These global concerns woven into the fabric of our local lives stress the urgency of the peaceful right to protest, as expressed in the Fingerprint Labyrinth.

4.3 Global Communities of Hope

4.3.1 During Advent 2025 we met, weekly, for prayer and reflection with leaders of three partner global ecumenical intentional communities. Tony Jaques of the Othona Community in Dorset reminded us of the importance of 'keeping the rumour of God alive'. Theresa Edlmann, Bob Faris and John de Gruchy of the Volmoed Community in South Africa reminded us that when we recognise the failure of democratic systems, it only needs an element of a dysfunctional system to work well in order to influence the whole. Our faith communities are small circles where quiet processes can gently 'beg to differ' in a world that is falling apart. Our time together gave us faith, hope and courage that, united across the globe, we can, to quote Mahatma Gandhi, 'be the change we want to see in the world.'

4.3.2 By way of an example, and in the knowledge that this was written for advent, Alex Wimberly, Leader of the Corrymeela Community in Northern Ireland offered us this prayer based on Matthew 24:26-44

God, the thief who breaks into this world;
God, the child who cries out with new life:
as we prepare ourselves for Christmas,
and bed down for this season,
surprise us in the night.
Steal us away from the gloom.
May we find ourselves separated
from monotonous tasks
and ready
for the coming of light. Amen.

4.3.3 As we look towards 2028 when we celebrate our 90th birthday, we join with our friends at Volmoed who celebrate their 40th birthday in 2026, and with our friends at Corrymeela who celebrated their 60th birthday in 2025.

4.4 North America Membership

4.4.1 While celebrating and affirming our identity as a community rooted in the life of Scotland, we are pleased to promote the growth of global interest in belonging to an intentional, ecumenical, Christian community. As tensions and instability within the United States continue, we are particularly glad about the revival of our North America Advisory Group in 2026, supporting a stronger Iona Community infrastructure across North America, including Canada and Cuba.

4.4.2 Our Members and Associate Members living in North America continue to meet monthly online in a North America Family Group. Says one Member: 'In these most challenging days in both the US and Canada, being in community through the Iona Community is a beacon of embodied hope for us in the NAFG. We are able to encourage each other, offer specific ideas and resources for support, and pray with and for each other."

4.4.3 "Peacebuilding in a World of Conflict", a programme week hosted at Iona Abbey in August 2025 by members of our Peace and Reconciliation Common Concern Network, gave 50 participants from Scotland, England, Germany, Canada, the Netherlands, USA and Ukraine the opportunity to explore themes like the biblical foundations of peace, alternative concepts of security, peace and reconciliation in worship and prayer, and the impact of military activities on the environment and climate change.

4.4.4 Participants were also given the opportunity to share examples of peacebuilding from their own home situations and encouraged to renew their commitment to peacebuilding.

4.4.5 Iona Abbey itself became a place of sanctuary and solidarity, and a locus from which to protest the right to peace with justice in prayer and action, including a red line vigil in solidarity with Gaza at Iona jetty.

4.4.6 Ephesians 4: 3 urges us to 'make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.' The solidarity across the globe, felt in our monthly online service of worship and experienced in our nine, monthly Common Concern Networks is an outward expression of this inner call.

4.4.7 *"I show up because I need to be part of a community of hope, peace, and justice. I show up because I need to hear voices of joy, of wonder, of doubt, of longing. I show up (whenever I can) because when I don't, my life is emptier."*

Thom Shuman, Associate Member in North America

4.5 A Common Pursuit

4.5.1 We believe in the transformational power of community to change lives and the world; and that it is only in community that justice and love can be done. Our Members commit to a four-fold Rule of Life which binds them in to this vision. And it is through our Members that this vision: God's vision for a just and peaceful world, is fully lived out.

4.5.2 We depend on around 150 volunteer Members and Associate Members to give life to the structures and the processes that enable this transformation in community to happen. Our thanks go to each of these committed, wise and gifted individuals who steer our Council; serve on committees, Advisory and Working Groups; guide our life of prayer; inspire our Regions and our Family Groups; lead our Common Concern Networks and more.

4.5.3 In turn, our Members, Associate Members and Trustees acknowledge the wisdom, professionalism and dedicated passion of our small staff team both at our island centres and on the mainland, who prepare resources, repair our buildings, support our volunteers, publish and sell our books, welcome guests, tend our finances, nurture our membership, maintain our compliance, extend our partnerships, craft our communications, and lead our movement. It is with the gifts and the grit of each of these individuals that our life in community can flourish.

4.5.4 After five years of a renewed Governance and Leadership structure our Trustees conducted a thorough review, in conjunction with staff and Members. While the new structure, which gives greater clarity to lines of accountability and responsibility, is working well, changes are being made to enhance communication between Trustees and membership, and to introduce a new Senior Management Team to strengthen cohesion across our staffing team and whole movement.

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5. ISLAND CENTRES – 'YOUTH AT THE HEART'

5.1 Iona Abbey continues as 'a sanctuary and a light', where people from all walks of life and of all ages share a 'common life', connect with one another, express solidarity with world's concerns, pray for healing, justice and peace, and sing, reflect and engage in life in community. We stand in solidarity with all those places and spaces around the globe where people meet for such shared hospitality, worship and action.

5.2 Along with a range of creative programme options, we continue to host an annual Youth Festival at Iona Abbey, prioritising involvement of young people living with the impact of injustice. We know that young people's lives are transformed when they are empowered to live and worship together in community. We are also honoured to continue to create these empowering spaces for young people at festivals such as Solas, Greenbelt and Glastonbury.

5.3 Weekly we welcome friends and strangers to join us in community at Iona Abbey. All are welcome to join us around the Refectory tables, in the Chapter House for great conversation and wee sings; in the Abbey church for twice-daily worship; in our cosy Common Room for chat around the fire; and on and around the beautiful island of Iona for inspiration and tranquillity. Programme details for 2026 are here.

5.4 For generations, living-flame candles have brought beauty and atmosphere to Iona Abbey. Replacement liquid paraffin candles, however, introduced some decades ago, had begun to be problematic. Abbey staff and volunteers were keen to ensure that visitors to our daily services would enjoy the atmospheric lighting safely and without risk to the building or the environment. Thanks to a legacy, and in collaboration with Iona Cathedral Trust, Historic Environment Scotland, and lighting designer Nich Smith, we have been able to modernise the candles in the Abbey and in the Michael Chapel.

5.5 We are extraordinarily grateful to all who support the work of the Iona Community. We appreciate all gifts, no matter how small. Anyone who would like to make a donation, to remember a friend, or to leave a legacy through supporting the justice and peace work of the Iona Community, you can find out how to do this here.

5.6 Our youth and adventure centre on the island of Mull, Camas, is currently closed for essential repairs. Members, Trustees and clients have overwhelmingly upheld the ministry of adventure and transformation that is offered in that place. Young people tell us that they leave Camas empowered, and with courage to build systems and structures of justice and peace in their local community. A campaign is under way to raise the necessary funds to work towards Camas reopening to young people living with the impact of injustice in 2027.

5.7 To keep updated with developments and opportunities at the Camas Adventure Centre, sign up to our newsletter here.

6. KATHY GALLOWAY

6.1 We close our report with a tribute to Rev Dr Kathy Galloway, past Warden of Iona Abbey and Leader of the Iona Community, who died in August 2025 after a short illness. Kathy grew up in Edinburgh where she began to develop her lifelong passion for justice, her sense of wonder and her capacity for discernment. Kathy studied theology in Glasgow as a candidate for the ministry of the Church of Scotland, pioneering a new wave of Scottish women clergy in an overwhelmingly male environment. Along with her husband Ian, Kathy was co-Warden of Iona Abbey and was at the heart of a dynamic generation of Community Members. Together they sought new ways to incarnate, to ground, to make real, their commitment, through integration of work and worship, building community for the work of justice with peace.

6.2 In 2002, with a raft of powerful books of poetry, theology, scriptural reflection and social comment under her belt, she was elected Leader of the Iona Community, a task she fulfilled with utter commitment, passion, hard work and creative energy. She challenged assumptions of power and privilege all her life and facilitated the process of making the Iona Community more equitable and inclusive.

6.3 Kathy's spirit lives on in the life of our Community and in the lives of the many whom she influenced. She shaped the Iona Community as it is today. And in turn it shaped her vision and practice, her commitment to the Life of life. For her life, we give thanks.

6.4 *Sunday: Resurrection*

I do not know
what resurrection is
(though I'm almost sure
it has something to do
with hallowing the common ground).
Of course, that's not all of it.

I expect one day I'll get up
and find that it sneaked up on me
while I wasn't looking,
and maybe even that it's been there all along.

That's as may be.
There's no point in trying to see things
before you are ready.
You have to walk before you can run.

In the meantime,
I believe in it.
And now it feels like an initial step.
For now,
it will do.
It is enough.

<u>*Love Burning Deep*</u> by Kathy Galloway, SPCK, 1993

In the name of the Board

SIGRID MARTEN, *Convener*
RUTH HARVEY, *Leader*

COMMITTEE ON CHAPLAINS TO HM FORCES MAY 2026

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 1).*

Points for Information

1. This report notes the significant contribution of HM Forces personnel in a variety of theatres, notably continuing support to the Armed Forces of Ukraine, operations in the Middle East and Europe, maritime deployments and training exercises around the world and in preparation for a transition to potential major conflict in the near-term future *(Section 1.1).*
2. The Committee welcomes the continuing interest in military chaplaincy and encourages all eligible ministers of the Church to consider service as a Chaplain to HM Forces, Regular or Reservist *(Section 2).*
3. The Committee encourages those eligible to consider service as Chaplains in any of the Cadet organisations and thanks all serving Cadet Chaplains for their work with these organisations *(Section 2.2).*

Executive Summary

The Committee on Chaplains to His Majesty's Forces is the Endorsing Authority for ministers who discern a calling to service as chaplains to the Naval Service, the British Army or the Royal Air Force. This is important work, especially in the current climate when our Service personnel need spiritual and moral support more than ever on operations, exercises and potential Transition to Conflict. It is rewarding work, but also demanding and our chaplains and their families deserve the thanks of the General Assembly and the prayers of the Church. The Committee promotes recruitment of potential chaplains, noting that numbers are low and that several of our more senior chaplains are due to retire soon. We encourage all those with a potential interest in chaplaincy in the Armed Forces or Cadet organisations to get in touch with us to learn more. The Committee continues to work for the pastoral care, welfare and Continuing Professional Development of our chaplains and has been in discussion with the Registration of Ministries Committee to ensure that chaplains have routes back to ministry after their time in uniform. The Committee is also working with Presbytery Armed Forces and Veterans Champions, and with chaplains of other faiths through the Tri-Service Faith and Belief Advisory Group to promote chaplaincy and support chaplains.

Report

1. THE WORK OF CHAPLAINS

1.1 Routine and Operational Work

The operational tempo continues to affect the whole of the Armed Forces and their families. In early 2026 the UK Armed Forces are heavily committed across the world and especially in Europe. Operations in the Middle East and the High North in the Arctic, support to our NATO partners in Estonia, Poland and Romania, monitoring unfriendly activity at sea, submarine deployments to the Far East, Air training exercises in the United States and the continued provision of training to personnel from Ukraine, including their military chaplains. In all of these deployments, and in routine training at home, our sailors, soldiers and airmen are supported by their chaplains. They deserve our thanks and prayers. All three Services are now working on the assumption that there is a real possibility of war in Europe in the near future and are making preparations to ensure that they are ready to Transition to Conflict when the time comes. The Armed Forces are also developing new capabilities to meet the changing demands of warfare in areas such as combatting cyber mis-information and increased use of remotely-operated vehicles (drones).

1.2 Royal Navy Chaplain of the Fleet

The Committee congratulates Rev Dr Mark Davidson KHC RN, a Church of Scotland Chaplain serving with the Royal Navy, on his appointment in 2025 as Chaplain of the Fleet at Navy Command HQ. As his Deputy Chaplain of the Fleet is Rev Stephen Ashley-Emery KHC RN this means that the two most senior chaplains in the Naval Service are currently Church of Scotland chaplains.

2. RECRUITMENT

2.1 Since the Committee's deliverance to last year's General Assembly there have been further expressions of interest in military chaplaincy. One minister endorsed by the Committee, as a part of its constitutional role as Endorsing Authority for potential chaplains, is about to start training at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst as an Army chaplain, and another is beginning chaplaincy work for the Army Cadet Force. Two other endorsed candidates are currently working through the Services' recruitment processes. However, a number of senior serving chaplains are due to retire in the next few years, so it is imperative that we maintain our efforts to promote the value of chaplaincy in the Armed Forces and to attract interested candidates. We invite the Church to join with the Committee in praying for an increase in vocations to this important and valued ministry.

2.2 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. In the military, the majority of personnel are under 40 and chaplains are reporting an increased number of young Service people at worship as well as increased attendance in opportunities to explore faith. The Committee has also received reports of several recent adult baptisms across the Armed Forces. 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.

3. CHAPLAINS AND THE CHURCH

3.1 Tri-Service Conference 2025/26

The Tri-Service Conference (Continuous Professional Development) for Presbyterian (Church of Scotland and Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI)) Chaplains was held at the Armed Forces Chaplaincy Centre, Shrivenham, in from 1-3 September 2025. It included session of global developments and long-term plans for the Forces, and moral injury, where persons experience being at odds with their commanding officers and their personal beliefs. The Committee very much values the shared fellowship with PCI and the cooperative relationship developed with its parallel committee in the PCI.

3.2 Returning to Parish Ministry from Chaplaincy

The Tri-Service Conference also heard about returning from military chaplaincy to parish ministry from a former military chaplain. It noted that chaplains of both denominations sometimes feel disconnected from their parent church and, in the case of the Church of Scotland, are not recognised as Category O. However, other denominations are envious of the recognition Church of Scotland chaplains receive at the General Assembly. The Committee is grateful to the Registration of Ministries Committee for further positive discussions on this question, for advice on how chaplains can prepare for returning to parish charges or other ministry and for the offer of further training for chaplains in this area.

3.3 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.

3.4 Moderator's Visit to HM Forces

In February, the Moderator and Vice Convener visited the British Army at Andover and Aldershot, including the Army HQ itself, the Soldier Academy at Pirbright and active service units. Each provided the opportunity to meet serving chaplains and the soldiers in their care and, at Aldershot, to share in fellowship with the congregation of St Andrew's Garrison Church, established after the First World War as a memorial to all chaplains of Presbyterian denominations. The Committee is grateful to the Chaplain General and the wider Army community for their welcome and hospitality, and to the Rev (Colonel) David Anderson, Assistant Chaplain General, Field Army Troops at HQ Army, for coordinating the visit.

3.5 Armed Forces and Veterans Champions

The Committee continues to work with the Armed Forces and Veterans Champions now appointed by almost all Presbyteries. Initial discussions have begun to understand the needs of those in such roles and how the Committee can best advise and support them in their work.

4. GOVERNANCE ISSUES

4.1 Tri-Service Advisory Group

Through its membership of the Tri-Service Faith and Belief Advisory Group (TriAG) the Committee continues to contribute to changes to Defence policy on chaplaincy to the Services. With the first non-religious pastoral carer now appointed to service in the Royal Army Chaplains Department and Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints established as an Endorsing Authority for chaplains to HM Forces, work continues to establish Muslim and Rastafari Endorsing Authorities. The Royal Navy recently welcomed its first uniformed Hindu chaplain to complement the well-established and successful Christian and World Faiths chaplaincy to HM Forces. TriAG discussions have also highlighted the work being done in other churches (notably the Church of England and the Methodist Conference) to prepare their priests and ministers to deal with the potential for large-scale Armed Forces casualties in the event of future conflict and the impact that this would have on families and communities. The Committee will monitor this continuing work and consider whether similar activity would be of benefit to the Church and its ministers.

4.2 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

This has been another busy year for the Royal Navy and its chaplains, with ships and Royal Marine units deployed around the globe. Although the nature of warfare and the global geopolitical context continue to change at pace, the Navy's core mission remains relatively unchanged – to work with allies to police the seas, to support the rule of international law, and to protect Britain, her Commonwealth and her interests.

Rev Dr Mark Davidson KHC, Chaplain of the Fleet (COTF) and Principal Denominational Chaplain (PDC, CSFC)
Chaplain Mark Davidson continued to serve as Principal of the Armed Forces Chaplaincy Centre (AFCC) until September 2025, when he assumed his new role as Chaplain of the Fleet. The final six months at AFCC were very positive, overseeing the final stages of its transition into an internationally-acclaimed academic Centre of Excellence for military chaplaincy training. In his new role as COTF, Mark has strategic oversight of the Royal Naval Chaplaincy Service and responsibility for the spiritual, ethical and pastoral wellbeing of all service personnel within the Royal Navy. It is a stimulating and rewarding role which blends religious duties with aspects of military, ethical and civic leadership. Mark is currently working on two academic projects – gathering chaplaincy 'lessons identified' from the war in Ukraine, and editing a book of essays on Spiritual Resilience within NATO. He continues to work closely with other senior NATO chaplains as a member of the Military Chaplaincy Strategic Coordinating Group, and continues to provide pastoral care to all Church of Scotland and Free Church chaplains in his role as Principal Denominational Chaplain.

Rev Stephen Ashley-Emery KHC, Deputy Chaplain of the Fleet (DCOTF)
As DCOTF, Chaplain Stephen Ashley-Emery's main aim in the last year has been to manage and deliver, in concert with the COTF, a chaplaincy that is forward, informed and engaged, and so meets the demands of defence in a maritime environment. Having completed the MOD's Strategic Defence Leadership Programme, DCOTF Ashley-Emery is focused on the delivery of proactive readiness, operational literacy and fostering interoperability. As a result, Royal Naval Chaplaincy Service (RNCS) is now recognised as a profession delivering RN chaplains that are spiritually grounded, operationally literate, and morally courageous. His role as the Training Requirement Authority in this last year has developed how RN chaplains now train and are to embody the development of spiritual leadership, spiritual resilience and the moral component of operational capability.

In terms of interoperability, as DCOTF and a KHC, he has visited Bahrain, Baghdad, and Indonesia where he attended a multinational event celebrating alliances between 29 separate nations and 14 world faiths and Christian denominations. In this last year, he has served in naming the first autonomous submarine Excalibur and HMS Glasgow type 26 frigate along with a number of defence engagements around the UK and RN ceremonial events.

Rev Mark F Dalton RN, Chaplaincy Team Leader, HMS Sultan
Chaplain Mark Dalton returned to the training environment last year, when he began his new role in HMS Sultan. HMS Sultan is a phase 2 training establishment that trains the Royal Navy's air and marine engineers, and this year celebrates its 70th anniversary since commissioning. For Mark, it is a privilege to once again be working with trainees, ranging in age from 16 to late 30s. As part of the training team, the chaplains develop the trainees' spiritual resilience to equip them for operations in both peacetime and war, through the delivery of the Beliefs and Values Royal Navy (BVRN) training package and Moral and Ethical Leadership training.

Chaplaincy also provides weekday morning prayer, an Alpha Course and a Prayer Course on weekday evenings, a mid-week celebration of Holy Communion, and 500 bacon rolls to personnel each Tuesday morning. Together with other nearby establishments, the Sultan chaplaincy team provide an area Duty Chaplain, 24/7, 365 days of the year, for personnel who require crisis pastoral intervention. Pastorally, many of their trainees – across a spectrum of ages and spiritualities – trust the chaplaincy team to help them process challenging issues and work with them (and the other available support agencies) to discern a way forward. After many years of chaplaincy, Mark remains committed to Naval Chaplaincy. As he puts it, "although the job can be frustrating, the positive effect chaplaincy can have is hugely rewarding, and there is indeed a sense that somehow, God is working through my serving as I daily attempt to follow the way of the cross".

Rev Fergus Cook, Chaplain HMS Scotia
This year has been busy for Chaplain Fergus Cook in his role as a Royal Naval Chaplain in the Naval Reserves. He is now the Chaplain for HMS Caledonia & HMS Scotia. This has entailed numerous duties, including providing the lead at the 'State Ceremonial', Scottish National War Memorial Annual Service of Commemoration. This was in addition to the usual annual Remembrance Services at Pattiesmuir Douglas Bank Cemetery and at HMS Scotia. The summer was especially busy for Fergus, with 3 weeks spent on the QNLZ as she transited from Portsmouth to Rosyth for scheduled refitting. In amongst the ongoing training, Fergus has provided pastoral care to numerous people from the many different units that utilise and visit HMS Caledonia. As the base continues to grow, he has become more heavily involved in the creation of a new Chaplaincy & Welfare Hub for the use of all personnel.

Appendix 2 – Army Report

It is clear we are living in uncertain times in which the rules, laws and certainties we have lived by for generations are being tested day and daily. That continues to be the situation across Defence. We have many wicked problems offering significant challenge to our people and our equipment which make life in the Army both challenging yet still rewarding. It continues to be our privilege in the Royal Army Chaplains' Department (RAChD) to 'care for the Army's people' through thick and thin wherever we find ourselves.

We currently have ten Regular and four Reserve chaplains serving across the UK and overseas. We have sadly had to say farewell to Mike Goodison who has retired from service with 105 Royal Artillery (Reserve) in Edinburgh. We thank him for his service and continue to wish him every blessing in his parish ministry. We are preparing to welcome Kleber Machado when he begins Regular service in May this year. We wish him well and pray for success and resilience as he begins his journey. Our Army Cadet Force chaplains continue with their sterling service to our youth across the nation. Our service continues to be highly valued and sought out as these reflections from a selection of our chaplains testify:

Rev Hector MacKenzie, Senior Chaplain Infantry Training Centre
The year since the last General Assembly has been a busy one for the chaplaincy team at the Infantry Training Centre. There have been both highs and lows and the call upon chaplains to offer spiritual support, moral guidance and pastoral care has been as strong as ever.

The chaplains journey through the training experience with the recruits and a particular highlight is the Pass Off Parade at the end of their time in training where they gather on the parade square in their Service Dress Uniform, watched by family and friends, and march off the square to commence the next stage of their career in the Field Army. They have worked hard, come through many challenges and they and their loved ones can feel rightly proud.

As chaplains, we offer some words of encouragement and a prayer of blessing at the close of the parade. It is a significant privilege and a joy for us to see them at this stage. We have watched the transformation from civilian to soldier, seen the growth in confidence, capability, and character; we have observed individuals who arrived with no real purpose in their lives acquire standards and find an inner strength they never knew they had.

We remember the stories that have been shared with us, the burdens offloaded, and the lives turned around. As a minister of the Church of Scotland, it is particularly pleasing to be able to connect with young men and women from 'home' to set them at ease as you tell them that you know where they're from. Even this week I met with a young Scottish recruit who wanted to discuss a pastoral concern, and it turned out we had a mutual acquaintance and I had been his chaplain in 2008. As I write these notes, I pause and reflect once more on the incredible privilege that is ours to care for and minister to the Army's people.

Rev Christopher Rowe, 5 Military Intelligence (MI) Battalion
Annual Continuous Training for 5MI Bn was in Ballykinler in Northern Ireland, where amidst the rain and the shadows of the mountains of Mourne, there was occasional sunshine. Alongside getting wet in the field, we were able to enjoy a bit of mountain biking. As with everything, the Padre joined in, and managed to come off his bike (I was not alone in this) – fortunately nothing other than my pride was dented – and it demonstrated commitment. More gently I led a Capacitar Tai Chi session one afternoon for PT, which was something a bit different but was well received. Alongside the more visible signs of presence and joining in, there are the quiet conversations, the weekday pastoral support for young men and women who are not immune to the same challenges that everyone faces but add a few more specific to their balancing act as reserve soldiers and officers. This year 5 MI Bn will be disbanded, which brings both grief and opportunities for troops and padre.

Rev Ken Jeffrey, 7 Battalion, Royal Regiment of Scotland (7 SCOTS)
I was privileged to conduct a field baptism for one of our Lance Corporals at Castlelaw in August. He had come to faith around the start of last year and told me about his conversion during a training weekend at Barry Buddon in February. Since then, we have had a fortnightly telephone call bible conversations and prayer times on Thursday afternoons. I have also noticed an increase in the number of 'spiritual' conversations I have been having. There appears to be a greater increase in matters of the soul and a willingness to speak about these things openly.

Rev David Anderson, Assistant Chaplain General, Field Army Troops, Army HQ Andover
It was our privilege in the Land Force to have the Moderator of the General Assembly, Rt Rev Rosemary Frew, visit this year. She was accompanied by the Rev Amy Bender, Vice Convener of the Committee to HM Land Forces. The visit gave us a critical opportunity to inform a senior religious leader of both the work of HM Forces today and the support to those we serve.

The team are very thankful that the new look General Assembly will continue to grace us with time and place for our annual report and we look forward to as full an attendance we can muster given Operations, Exercise and essential duties.

Should anyone be thinking about any form of service to chaplaincy in HM Land Forces and want to take a 'look at life' then please don't hesitate to get in touch with any of our chaplains at any time. It is a hugely professionally satisfying and deeply rewarding ministry amongst some of the finest and best.

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 51 Infantry Brigade and HQ Scotland	Edinburgh
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 SCOTS	Perth
Rev Christopher Rowe	5 Military Intelligence Battalion	Edinburgh
Rev Nathan McConnell	215 (Scottish) Multi Role Medical Regiment	Glasgow

The Rev Mike Goodison, previously the chaplain with 105 Regt Royal Artillery in Newtonards, retired from Reserve Service in January 2026.

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 Fiona Wilson	West Lowland, ACF
Rev Ecilo Selemani	Glasgow & Lanarkshire, ACF
Rev Cameron McKenzie	Lothian & Borders, ACF
Rev Sean Swindells	Angus and Dundee, ACF
Rev Cameron McKenzie	Lothian & Borders, ACF

Appendix 3 – Royal Air Force Report

At present the RAF have 2 full-time Church of Scotland chaplains in active service. We continue to actively recruit chaplains for full and part-time chaplaincy in the RAF and pray for ministers to feel a sense of call to this important ministry. Chaplaincy in the RAF is a challenging but meaningful opportunity to provide pastoral care, spiritual support and ethical understanding to a very diverse (and predominantly young) community of men and women.

Rev (Wing Commander) Craig Lancaster reports:
I have now completed a year in post serving as a chaplain to UK Forces based in Europe, many working within NATO. The opportunity to travel and lead Remembrance services at historically significant locations have been the highlights. I remain grateful for the prayerful support of the Kirk and asks for continued prayers for those whom I minister to, serving in interesting times.

It's a fascinating time to be a chaplain on the outskirts of NATO, supporting the UK personnel involved in that partnership. One of the many highlights has been the opportunity to work with international chaplaincy colleagues from a host of different denominations and faith backgrounds. The opportunities to participate in things like the Small Ship Service in Dunkirk and Remembrance at the cemetery containing the first and last UK servicemen to die in the Great War are also a genuine privilege.

Reverend (Squadron Leader) David Young reports:
Over the past year I have continued to serve as Station Chaplain at RAF Honington, a Phase 2 training establishment responsible for forming RAF Regiment personnel. The pastoral tempo remains significant, particularly among young trainees navigating the demands of military formation, separation from family, and the moral complexity of contemporary service life.

Alongside routine pastoral care, sacramental ministry, and delivery of the RAF Beliefs and Values Programme, the year has involved substantial safeguarding and welfare advisory responsibilities to senior command. The chaplaincy continues to provide a trusted and independent presence within the chain of command – offering confidential support to personnel of all ranks and backgrounds, and ethical counsel in complex circumstances.

For a sustained period, I have operated as a single-post chaplain, maintaining full-spectrum ministry across trainees, permanent staff, and families. In addition, I have been held at Prior Planned Augmentation readiness (December–March), available at short notice to deploy in replacement of a chaplain in theatre. I am currently preparing to deploy on Operation SHADER later this year.

It remains a privilege to represent the Church of Scotland within the Armed Forces, serving those who serve, and bearing witness to the Church's pastoral presence in demanding and often unseen contexts.

The RAF in 2025:
The Chief of the Air Staff (CAS), Air Chief Marshal Sir Harv Smyth, reflected on a busy and challenging year for the RAF. He highlighted the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, the RAF's commitment to the 'safe skies' initiative, and the need to remain agile, integrated, and ready for any eventuality. At a time when the whole RAF is struggling with workforce numbers this is particularly challenging and demanding on all personnel. Chaplaincy continues to receive high demand for support to the RAF, which we do our best to fulfil.

Looking ahead, we anticipate much that will test the RAF's readiness to respond to threats. CAS has reiterated the importance of the RAF's core values – Respect, Integrity, Service, and Excellence (RISE) – and calls for inclusive behaviour and high standards. Chaplaincy plays a key role in supporting this, through teaching on the Core Values through Phase 1 & 2 training, modelling these values, and being willing to challenge individuals and commanders when appropriate. These are challenging days, when much will be asked of our chaplains.

GENERAL TRUSTEES MAY 2026

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Instruct all congregations to put in place the Manse Memorandum of Understanding with inducted Ministers in post no later than 30 September 2026, or within one month of an induction of all new ministries or new manse provision; and instruct Presbyteries to ensure congregational compliance in the matter and make a report to the General Trustees by 31 December 2026 *(Section 6.1.5)*.
3. Pass an Act amending the Church of Scotland General Trustees (Properties, Funds and Endowments) Act (Act V 2024, as amended by Act XV 2025), as set out in Appendix 3 to this Report *(Section 8.1.1 and Appendix 3)*.
4. Pass the Manse Regulations set out in Appendix 4 to this Report *(Section 8.1.2 and Appendix 4)*.
5. Appoint Mr D Chris Dunn, Mr Fraser Ellis, Rev Bryan Kerr, Rev Lisa-Jane Rankin, Mr Hugh Campbell-Adamson and Mr David Inglis as members of the General Trustees *(Section 9.1.5)*.
6. Authorise the payment of £2,200 to Rev Dr Scott Rennie as Chair and pro rata for Mr Alan F K Kennedy as former Chair (four months) and Mr Michael Pearson (eight months) as Vice-Chair for their services over the past year *(Section 9.1.6)*.

Executive Summary

The General Trustees continue to play their part in seeking the Church's future growth and flourishing by providing financial and other significant resources to assist congregations in meeting their building and property needs and aspirations for the future. The mantra of 'Well equipped spaces in the right places" has never been more relevant. We are glad to work in partnership with partner agencies including Presbyteries, the Assembly Trustees, the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team and other Church agencies and bodies. The Trustees are pleased to be providing more resources than ever for investment in buildings necessary for parish ministry and mission. The General Trustees and Church as a whole must face the challenge of a more co-ordinated system for the care and maintenance of our church estate, in order to be better stewards of our buildings and financial resources.

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 funds which are maintained for the benefit of congregations.'

1.2 The General Trustees submit to the General Assembly their ninety-ninth report since their incorporation under the Church of Scotland (General Trustees) Order Confirmation Act 1921 and their Annual Report and Financial Statements for 2025.

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.

1.4 The Consolidated Fabric Fund is largely derived from the capital of net sale proceeds of buildings in the ownership of the General 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.

1.5 The employment of Presbytery Building Officers has significant benefits for the Church at large and the General Trustees. We have a locally based yet national team of Building Officers available to offer guidance and advice to Presbyteries and congregations, and able between them to bring national expertise on matters to bear on local and specific challenges.

1.6 The General Trustees are fully supportive of the principle that the future mission and outreach work of the Church at a local level is largely at the direction of Presbyteries and are pleased to report that senior staff officers have excellent relations with each Presbytery and enjoy working collaboratively with Presbytery office bearers. That said, the General Trustees are concerned that there appear to be inconsistencies between Presbyteries in their approach to duties and responsibilities with regards to building and fabric matters.

1.7 Under provisions contained within the 2024 Act, Presbyteries have substantial obligations in terms of instructing and receiving reports and property attestations as well as associated responsibilities concerning enforcing works to buildings as highlighted as necessary in such reports. The General Trustees have received very few attestation of records summaries for buildings from Presbyteries since 2021, despite this being a clear General Assembly requirement. Whilst a number of Presbyteries are indeed actively enforcing and implementing recommended and required works to buildings, there is undoubtedly a discrepancy in consistency of approach in this area as between

Presbyteries and this is having a considerable impact on the ability of the General Trustees buildings team, including Presbytery Building Officers, to assess future repair requirements and implementation of same. Non-implementation also has a serious detrimental long-term effect on the resources of the Central Fabric Fund, from which the General Trustees make grants available.

1.8 Additionally, the General Trustees remain concerned at the level of requested information being returned by Presbyteries with regards to general manse assessments and, in particular, Energy Performance Certificates (EPC values). It has been a long-standing requirement for Presbyteries, first instructed by the General Assembly of 2012, to oversee provision of EPC values in manses but very little information has come back to the General Trustees in the intervening years.

1.9 Another area of concern is the "slippage" of disposal dates regarding category "B" buildings as per agreed and approved Presbytery Plans.

1.10 All the foregoing issues require to be addressed urgently and the General Trustees request that (1) Presbyteries adopt a homogeneous and consistent approach to property and land responsibilities, all as required under provisions contained within the 2024 Act, and (2) all Presbytery officers and office bearers who deal in fabric matters become fully conversant with the Presbytery obligations contained within the 2024 Act, in particular those outlined in Schedule 1.

1.11 The Consolidated Stipend Fund contributes significantly to the cost of ministry, offsetting for a great many congregations local Giving to Grow obligations.

1.12 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.

1.13 These past few years have been a time of significant change for the national Church, and the work of the General Trustees has been at the vanguard of that change. The last five years have seen an overhaul in the staff make-up of the General Trustees office, with the move to employing senior staff with more of an architectural, health and safety and surveying background. The result is we are better equipped than we have ever been to face the challenges, brought on by Presbytery Planning and the Covid pandemic, which has affected our wide and varied estate.

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2. APPRECIATION

2.1 The General Trustees wish to thank all members of their staff for the service they provide to them, Presbyteries and 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 General 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.

2.3 The General Trustees look forward to continuing their strategic partnership working with the Assembly Trustees.

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3. GOVERNANCE

3.1 The General Trustees reported about their governance review to the 2024 General Assembly and continue to implement the recommendations.

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4. PROGRESS WITH THE 2025 GENERAL ASSEMBLY DELIVERANCES

4.1 Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme

4.1.1 Further changes were announced by the UK Government effectively ending the scheme. A working group has been established to raise awareness and lobby the UK and Scottish governments (for further information, please see section 5.1.8).

4.2 Communionware:

4.2.1 A number of sales have been agreed, and, in some cases, loan agreements have been drawn up for local museums to display items.

4.3 Property Inspection Records:

4.3.1 This issue was discussed at a workshop in November 2025 with Presbytery representatives to highlight its importance. It is hoped that the Digital Transformation Project will introduce online processes which will improve visibility and enable compliance to be monitored (for further information, please see section 5.1.11).

4.4 Use of glebe land:

4.4.1 This is an ongoing part of the management of glebe land (for further information, please see section 5.2).

4.5 Insurance Forum revamp:

4.5.1 With the transfer of COSIS to Howden having been completed in November 2025, the Insurance Forum meets regularly (for further information, please see section 5.4.3 and section 7.4).

4.6 Implementation of levy increase:

4.6.1 This has now been implemented for building sales.

4.7 Manse Standards:
4.7.1 The Manse Handbook has been published and will be updated annually to reflect feedback and any agreed changes to standards (for further information, please see section 6.15).

4.8 Condition of Manses:
4.8.1 This was discussed at a workshop in November 2025 with Presbytery representatives and is reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

4.9 Pipe Organs:
4.9.1 The relocation of pipe organs is included in the closure process but is restricted by the number of churches wanting one, lack of funding and requirements for listed building consent. A small number have been successfully relocated.

4.10 Consolidated Fabric Fund Capital and Revenue:
4.10.1 The Head of Policy and Planning has engaged directly with Presbyteries through workshops and presentations on the scope of access currently permitted under the Consolidated Fabric Fund and will continue to do so. Congregations successfully accessed the Consolidated Fabric Fund for non-fabric purposes during 2025 (for further information, please see section 7.1).

4.11 Income Generation:
4.11.1 The General Trustees funded a conference for those parishes interested in the commercial collective. The Faith Action Programme Leadership Team is taking the lead on providing guidance as most aspects are non-property related. An innovative on-line platform for hall lettings has been showcased.

4.12 Signature Churches Network: please see section 5.3.9.

5. COMMITTEE REPORTS

5.1 Fabric Committee

5.1.1 The work of the Committee continued, and the General Trustees provided guidance and financial assistance to congregations following approval from Presbytery. The number of applications received continues to increase along with the level of financial assistance provided as expected with the implementation of Presbytery plans.

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 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 The Fabric Committee meets ten times per year, usually in the second half of the month, and to December 2025 awarded £4.1m in grant assistance, £0.2m in loans (both from the Central Fabric Fund) and £0.3m in Bequest Fund grants. In 2025, the Fabric Committee also approved advances from the Consolidated Fabric Funds totalling £2.5m to assist congregations with either the purchase of new manses or works to buildings to be retained in advance of anticipated income from the sale of redundant buildings. The table below shows a comparison with 2023 and 2024 demonstrating both the increase in funding and the consequential increase in the number of projects being supported.

	2023	2024	2025	Variance (2024 to 2025)
Grant Assistance (Central Fabric Fund)	£0.8m	£2.4m	£4.1m	+£1.7m
Loans (Central Fabric Fund)	£1.8m	£1.1m	£0.2m	-£0.9m
Bequest Fund	£0.07m	£0.5m	£0.3m	-£0.2m
Advances from Consolidated Fabric Fund	NA	NA	£2.5m	+£2.5m
Consolidated Fabric Fund		£4.3m	£15.6m	+£11.3m
Total	**£2.67m**	**£8.3m**	**£22.7m**	**+£14.4m**

5.1.4 To summarise, building repairs and projects have, therefore, benefitted from £22.7m of capital funding in 2024 through the work of the Fabric Committee. The large increase in funding demonstrates a significant investment by the General Trustees in our buildings and the commitment to ensuring the right spaces are in the right places.

5.1.5 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. Our report in 2025 reminded congregations that the revenue account can in some circumstances also be used for payment of costs that do not relate to buildings providing they relate to the five Marks of Mission.

5.1.6 To assist congregations, applications can be made retrospectively for costs incurred within the last two years. In 2024, £3.67m was drawn down from the revenue accounts from the total available fund of £12.7m. In 2025, £4.9m was committed from the revenue accounts towards fabric-related costs, leaving an available balance at 31 December 2025 of £13.5m. The General Trustees welcome the increased use of the revenue funds to provide financial support to the congregations.

5.1.7 In person and on-site visits continue with General 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 General Trustees at the earliest possible opportunity where a project or major scheme of works, whether repair, refurbishment or new construction, is being considered.

5.1.8 Listed Places of Worship Scheme

5.1.8.1 In 2025, the UK Government announced changes to the Listed Places of Worship Scheme (LPWS) which limited the amount of Value Added Tax (VAT) that can be reclaimed for each listed place of worship to £25k up to the 31 March 2026 and introduced an overall cap on the Scheme of £23million for places of worship across the UK. This had a negative impact on any project costing over £125k in value. Additional grant funding of £1m from the Central Fabric Fund was made available to assist congregations with projects that were adversely impacted by the changes to the Scheme.

5.1.8.2 In late January 2026, the UK Government announced that the LPWGS was being closed and it would no longer be possible for congregations to recover any VAT beyond the closing date of 31 March 2026. The new funding announced by the UK Government is only available to churches in England. This announcement will impact current projects as well as ending a Scheme which has been vital over many years, and without it will add further financial burdens to congregations and the Church as a whole. The Scottish Government had not been informed in advance about the details of this change or whether any additional funding (allocated through the Barnett Formula) would be available.

5.1.8.3 A church wide working group has been formed to raise awareness of the changes, work with other denominations and lobby both the UK and Scottish Governments. At the time of writing, it is unclear whether the Scottish Government will be making any additional funding available for listed churches.

5.1.9 Support to Congregations and Presbyteries

5.1.9.1 The Presbytery Building Officers (PBOs) continue to provide invaluable advice to Presbyteries and congregations, as well as to the General Trustees. PBOs are now in post for all Presbyteries in Scotland and their invaluable input into projects is clearly demonstrated by the large increase in funding approvals during 2025.

5.1.9.2 Since 1 January 2025, the total cost of employing the PBOs (payroll costs plus expenses) has being met by the General 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.

5.1.9.3 The assistance provided by the PBOs is wide-ranging. The General Trustees are currently funding a pilot project in Perth where many congregations have opted to take part in a contract awarded by the General Trustees which means that proactive maintenance of rainwater goods and basic high-level repairs are undertaken on a biannual basis. This has resulted in significant cost savings to the individual congregations and ensures that the buildings are better maintained. It also helps to avoid more costly remedial works as any defects can be addressed promptly. The Geneal Trustees will review the pilot results, with a view to rolling out similar contracts to other Presbyteries and will also investigate the feasibility of appointing contractors for other essential planned works such as testing of electrical installations, lightning conductors, gas safety inspections, etc, with the aim of reducing the costs to congregations, ensuring statutory compliance and demonstrating good practice.

5.1.9.4 The General Trustees hosted a workshop with Presbytery Clerks and office bearers in November 2025. The aim of the workshop was to improve communication and understanding. Topics covered included roles and responsibilities (see Appendix 1 to this report), manses and applications for funding. The workshop was well received by all attendees. Further workshops will be arranged for 2026 and will be held regularly going forward.

5.1.10 Climate Change and Net Zero

5.1.10.1 The General Trustees have approved financial support towards the appointment of a new strategic role jointly funded by the Assembly Trustees to enable a new Net Zero strategy to be developed.

5.1.10.2 The General Trustees are pleased to support congregations with their projects which include net zero initiatives such as the installation of solar panels and heat pumps as well as improving insulation and our officers continue to promote external sources of grant funding to congregations including the Benefact Trust, National Churches Trust and CARES.

5.1.10.3 As part of their current roles, the PBOs 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.
- Through the Quinquennial Reports, gather data such as information relating to the existing heating system and insulation.
- 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.

5.1.10.4 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.

5.1.11 Attestations

5.1.11.1 The General Assembly of 2024 instructed Presbyteries to fulfil their obligations under Schedule 1 of the 2024 Act in respect of annual attestation of property inspection records and five-yearly survey reports, with such records and reports being sent in summary to the General Trustees by 31 August each year.

5.1.11.2 The attestation process is essential to enable the proactive management of property and demonstrate basic statutory compliance. 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.

5.1.11.3 The response from Presbyteries is varied and the inability to demonstrate basic statutory compliance represents a major risk to both congregations and the General Trustees.

5.2 Glebes Committee

5.2.1 The General Trustees encourage all congregations who have glebes to engage with the Committee 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.

5.2.2 To maximise income for the long term and, in many cases, provide much needed housing in rural communities, the General Trustees are keen to engage with local congregations on long term planning for potential development of glebeland. The General Trustees engaged with the local parish in Beith to assist in fulfilling their aim to provide an area of glebeland for the construction of 44 houses that were needed in their village. This has resulted in significantly improved annual income for the congregation from the Consolidated Stipend Fund towards their Giving to Grow. Dornoch Firth has taken on an occupancy lease of part of the Edderton glebe to allow them outside space for missional work, particularly with children after school, in partnership with other community organisations. A number of glebe sales have been undertaken to support the sale of church buildings that are no longer required in order to provide amenity ground.

5.2.3 Leases

5.2.3.1 Income from agricultural, grazing and amenity lets in 2025 was higher than last year despite land sales. During 2025, the General Trustees entered into 102 new leases and 103 rent reviews of existing leases were carried out to ensure that rents remain at market rates. Total income generated from glebe rents was £481k, which assists the financial commitment of congregations to support their Giving to Grow contributions.

5.2.4 Sales

5.2.4.1 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.

5.3 Presbytery Support & Buildings Committee (PSB)

5.3.1 The Presbytery Support and Buildings (PSB) Committee operates under delegated authority from the General Trustees' Board to support and guide Presbyteries on General Trustees matters. Its remit primarily relates to the management and release of buildings, property disposals, special projects, and Presbytery Mission Planning. Two working groups report to the Committee, covering Presbytery Mission Planning and the Signature Churches Network respectively.

5.3.2 The Committee places particular emphasis on the development and refinement of General Trustees' guidance and policy. Recent examples include community guidance relating to the off-market transfer of properties, further guidance to congregations on the disposals process, and guidance relating to insurance claims.

5.3.3 In 2025, the General Trustees approved and instructed the sale of 150 properties: 73 churches, 55 manses, 22 other property types including halls and offices. By comparison, in 2024, the General Trustees approved and instructed the sale of 122 properties, comprising 63 churches, 39 manses, and 20 other property types and in 2023, 71 properties were approved for sale (32 churches, 25 manses, and 14 other property types).

5.3.4 While the majority of disposals continue to be progressed through the open market, there has been a continued increase in off-market transfers, as previously reported in 2024. The community guidance referenced in 5.3.2 was developed to support communities through this process and is available on the General Trustees' resources webpage. At present, the General Trustees, through the Committee, are managing approximately 70 live requests for off-market transfer. In 2025, 25 sites were remitted to the Law Department for the off-market sale process to be progressed with a preferred bidder.

5.3.5 The Committee has engaged with a range of external stakeholders in relation to the disposal and management of church buildings. This has included engagement with the Scottish Government through consultation on the Community Right to Buy process, as well as ongoing dialogue with a number of community-focused organisations in relation to off-market community transfers. The Committee has also engaged with Historic Environment Scotland regarding the identification and management of risks to highly significant heritage assets.

5.3.6 From time to time, the Committee is required to provide direction on more complex disposals that are unable to be progressed through the standard marketing and conveyancing route. Such complexities may include health and safety concerns, issues involving incumbent tenants, the presence of items of historical or cultural significance, or title complications. The Committee also considers proposals involving the leasing of premises vested in the General Trustees, recognising that leasing arrangements can introduce additional risk, management complexity, and ongoing liabilities for the charity.

5.3.7 The Committee has engaged with social housing providers and developers over 2025 to explore potential opportunities for the redevelopment of redundant sites to provide affordable and social housing. This work will continue into 2026.

5.3.8 The Committee continues to receive and review Annual Evaluation and Development submissions, as well as ad-hoc amendments to the categorisation of buildings. The Committee is represented on the Presbytery Partnership Support Programme Group, through which feedback on submissions is issued to Presbyteries. In addition, the General Trustees have provided building-related advice to Presbyteries and congregations in the context of Presbytery Mission Planning. The Committee also supports the Fabric Committee by providing Presbytery Mission Planning-related information, enabling the Fabric Committee to make fully informed decisions when considering applications for works and financial assistance. While engagement with many Presbyteries continues to be constructive, the level and timing of consultation has been variable, and in some cases has not taken place in advance of Presbytery approving an amendment, as is required by the amended Presbytery Mission Plan Act. This impacts the General Trustees' ability to consider applications for works or financial assistance relating to buildings whose categorisation has been determined without prior consultation.

5.3.9 Signature Churches Network

5.3.9.1 The Signature Churches Network has met on multiple occasions, exploring areas including tourism, fundraising, event management, and maintenance. The Network is currently seeking grant assistance to enable the engagement of additional professional expertise to support and drive its work forward.

5.4 Finance & Resources Committee (F&RC)

5.4.1 The F&RC is responsible for the production of the General Trustees' Annual Reports, the review of draft budgets and, after their approval by the General Trustees, and monitoring performance through quarterly management accounts with summaries being provided to the Board.

5.4.2 The F&RC also has responsibility for reviewing the investments under the control of the General Trustees as well as assessing any new investment opportunities that may be presented to the Board. During 2025, the committee undertook a review of all of the investment holdings under their direct control with support from Mercer, the Trustees' independent investment adviser.

5.4.3 The Insurance Forum working group reports to the F&RC. On behalf of the General Trustees, the working group provides strategic and operational oversight of the Church's insurance arrangements, including the partnership with Howden which came into effect in November 2025.

5.4.4 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. During 2025, the working group successfully negotiated improved tariffs for both electricity and gas supply.

5.5 Audit & Assurance Committee (A&AC)

5.5.1 The A&AC has met to ensure that appropriate governance procedures are in place. The appointment of internal auditors to review the systems and procedures currently in place, has delivered the impetus to identify important improvements. As a leading property owner in Scotland, there is an increasing emphasis on risk awareness to ensure that General Trustees and staff can focus their attention on areas containing the greatest potential for hazard in terms of financial stewardship and reputation.

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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 General 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 At the Assembly last year, the General Trustees announced the release of the Manse Handbook which consolidated guidance relating to manses, updated manse requirements to reflect the needs of current ministers and their families and provided performance related criteria for the selection of manses. The Handbook has been well received, with the new manse condition schedule actively being used as a tool to review existing manses and compare manses for united congregations to enable informed decision making. The condition schedule is also being used to ensure that potential new manses are fit for purpose**.**

6.1.5 The Manse Handbook now includes a new section 3 which is a Memorandum of Understanding between the Kirk Session and Minister. This an important document which seeks to enable both the Minister and the congregation to understand what is required of them and seeks to avoid future misunderstandings and potential conflicts, and it should be negotiated and completed by all congregations and inducted ministers, not simply by those moving to a new charge or manse. Accordingly, the General Trustees invite the Assembly to instruct all congregations to put in place the Memorandum of Understanding with Ministers (except in the case of a vacancy when it should be agreed immediately upon induction) and to have it completed and signed by all parties no later than 30 September 2026, with Presbyteries instructed to ensure congregational compliance and report back to the General Trustees by 31 December 2026.

6.1.6 Following feedback, the manse handbook has been updated to reflect the following:

- New section added relating to buying and selling of manses to be provide clarity on processes required by all parties
- Advice for demitting ministers regarding the occupation of manses
- Considerations in relation to Minister's family members living in a manse
- Advice relating to income from solar panels

6.2 Energy Performance Certificates (EPCs)

6.2.1 As reported to previous Assemblies, high energy bills and poorly performing buildings remain one of the major issues raised by ministers.

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 continued to see a steady increase in the number of congregations reviewing manses, undertaking upgrade works or buying replacement manses, however, as reported at the last Assembly. Most manses, however, do not have an EPC of C or above. This is in line with the EPC ratings for residential properties throughout Scotland; the average EPC rating for Scotland is D.

6.2.3 To support congregations, the General Trustees will be contacting congregations with manses without EPCs to encourage them to obtain them, and contacting congregations with manses with very low EPC ratings (E or below) and encouraging them to undertake upgrade works or purchase a replacement manse.

6.2.4 The Scottish Government is planning on introducing new legislation requiring privately rented properties to reach EPC ratings of C or above from 2028 for new tenancies and by 2033 for all privately rented homes. The General Trustees have attended workshops to understand the proposals. Exemptions are proposed and the General Trustees will continue to monitor the proposed legislation to assess the impact for manses.

6.3 Caretaker Occupancy Agreements and Letting of Manses

6.3.1 The General Trustees would like to remind all congregations that save in exceptional circumstances, they will normally no longer consent to Caretaker Occupancy Agreements being put in place as they 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 15%) 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.

6.3.2 As reported at the last Assembly, the General 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, unless there are exceptional limited circumstances. Where a congregation does wish to let their manse, contact should be made with the General Trustees in order that the matter can be talked through on a case by case basis. See also section 8.1.2.5 below. Financial Boards should not enter into letting agreements or any other type of occupancy arrangement in their own names and, where a manse is let, should ensure that rent is charged at full market rates. If rent is charged at discounted levels, this is likely to make it more difficult to recover vacant possession of the manse in due course as tenants will be understandably reluctant to move to another property if in doing so their rent will be substantially increased.

6.3.3 The General Trustees have encountered a number of issues concerning invalidly arranged letting agreements between letting agents and Financial Boards. In terms of manses owned by the General Trustees, all letting arrangements must be between the agent and the General Trustees. This affords the relevant congregation a large measure of protection and support in matters concerning building liability, tolerable standards and eviction proceedings.

6.3.4 The General Trustees noted that the number of residential properties with titles held in the name of the General Trustees far outweighs the number of required manses, Records show that there are over currently 900 residential properties compared to a requirement for around 600 manses. The General Trustees will, therefore, be undertaking reviews with Presbyteries and congregations to target surplus residential property which is not required to encourage the sale of these properties so that the capital released can be reinvested into manses that are required along with churches and halls.

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7. FINANCIAL RESOURCES (APPENDIX 2)

7.1 Consolidated Fabric Fund ("CFF")

7.1.1 This restricted fund provides financial assistance by way of capital and revenue grants.

7.1.2 Capital Accounts

7.1.2.1 The total committed from capital in 2025 for fabric projects was £15.6m. In certain limited circumstances, if the fabric funds held for the benefit of a congregation are in excess of its reasonable requirements (Section 36 (iii) of the 2024 Act), transfer may be allowed to the Consolidated Stipend Fund. In 2025 there were no such transfers. Withdrawals in restricted cases for local mission purposes may also be permitted. In 2025 there were 13 such transfers totalling £373k.

7.1.3 Revenue Accounts

7.1.3.1 The total revenue account funds available rose from £12.7m at the beginning of the year, to £13.5m at the end of 2025. During the year, £4.9m was committed towards fabric works, utility, energy or insurances costs. The General Trustees continue to urge congregational treasurers to submit claims to the Consolidated Fabric Fund Revenue Account to cover utility and insurance costs, which can be significant. The General Trustees, again, remind congregational treasurers that these revenue funds may also be applied towards a range of non-fabric purposes, where those purposes meet at least of the five marks of mission. During the year, only £775k revenue funds were committed towards non-fabric purposes.

7.2 Consolidated Stipend Fund ("CSF")

7.2.1 The Consolidated Stipend Fund is held for the benefit of 822 congregations. The capital invested within the Fund is largely derived from the sale of glebeland. As agreed with the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team ("FAPLT") and adopted and reaffirmed by the General Assembly on a number of occasions, most recently in 2016, the CSF is managed as if it were a permanent endowment with an investment strategy for the very long-term.

7.2.2 The investment objective of the CSF is to maximise the long-term capital value of the Fund, whilst providing annual distributions from the CSF to FAPLT to support parish ministry; assisting individual congregations with their parish ministry costs. The distribution for 2025 was £4m; the distribution will increase with inflation until at least 2029.

7.2.3 As at 31 December 2025, £124.6m of the fund was invested with Mercer, and £3.1m held as a loan facility to CrossReach. The Assembly Trustees provide indemnity in the event of default by CrossReach,

7.3 Central Fabric Fund

7.3.1 This restricted Fund provides financial assistance for approved fabric projects by way of grants and loans, as well as covering all costs associated with providing Presbytery Building Officers, and managing and maintaining buildings transferred from dissolved congregations.

7.3.2 One of the Fund's main sources of income is levies applied on the net proceeds of sale on the disposal of congregational buildings. The levy is currently set at 15% and generated £3.2m for the Fund in 2025.

7.3.3 Grants totalling £4.1m were awarded in 2025. The grant budget has been increased for the past two years to allow for the catch-up of major capital works to church buildings, resulting in grant expenditure exceeding income. The grant budget is expected to reduce over the coming years in order to address this annual deficit.

7.3.4 The General Assembly 2023 provided that 50% of net proceeds from the sales of redundant building from dissolved congregations would be held within a sub-fund of the Central Fabric Fund for the benefit of Presbyteries. As at 31 December 2025, £614k is held in this sub-fund for the benefit of four Presbyteries.

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. COSIS 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.

7.4.2 As reported at the General Assembly of 2025, the Board of COSIS, took a decision, endorsed by the General Trustees, to transfer the brokerage business with its clients to Howden Scotland Limited ("Howden"). The transaction successfully took effect on 17 November 2025.

7.4.3 Following the transfer, staff from COSIS have been transferred to Howden under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations ("TUPE"), and oversight responsibility for the church scheme transferred to the General Trustees. Regular liaison meetings are now up and running between Howden, Aviva and senior GT staff members.

7.5 Investment Update

7.5.1 The aim of the General Trustees' investment policy is to seek reliable and sustainable levels of income to finance the work of the General Trustees, while also seeking capital growth to protect the General Trustees' work into the future.

7.5.2 Historically, the General Trustees have primarily invested in the Deposit, Growth and Income Funds of the Church of Scotland Investors Trust ("COSIT"). Following a strategic review in 2024, the General Trustees took the decision to diversify their investment holdings. As a result, over a three-month period in late 2025, the General Trustees' holdings in the Consolidated Stipend Fund, totalling £122m, were transferred from the Growth Fund into a new tailored portfolio to be managed by a number of specialist fund managers and overseen by Mercer Investments.

7.5.3 During 2025, the General Trustees also undertook a review of the holdings in the Consolidated Fabric Fund with the aim of improving the Fund's income and growth return prospects. This is expected to result in a significant reduction in the Fund's holdings held in the Deposit Fund during the course of 2026, with a corresponding increase in Growth and Income Funds to be managed by COSIT and Mercer.

7.5.4 Notwithstanding this change to a "multi-manager" approach, the General Trustees' investment philosophy remains to invest in a manner which reflects the ethos of the church and takes into consideration the guidance and recommendations from the Ethical Oversight Committee, which was established at the General Assembly of 2024.

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8. LEGISLATION

8.1 Legislation Amendments

8.1.1 2024 Act

8.1.1.1 The General Trustees request amendments to the 2024 Act (as amended by Act XV (2025), as set out in Appendix 3 to this Report in the following respects:

- It is not currently possible for capital in the Consolidated Fabric Fund to be released for expenditure on buildings not in the ownership of the General Trustees or where there is no Assembly Control clause in the titles. Where there is a mix of ownership (i.e. General Trustees and local trustees) in terms of titles to buildings following an Adjustment (usually union), and where such Adjustment brings with it or introduces holdings in the Consolidated Fabric Fund held by the General Trustees for the benefit of the new congregation, the General Trustees wish to ensure that all buildings pertaining to the new congregation are eligible to have capital monies in the relevant holding in the Consolidated Fabric Fund expended on them. Accordingly, in cases of Adjustment, it is proposed that titles to all locally owned properties are transferred to the General Trustees.
- A Fire Risk Assessment for all church and hall buildings should become mandatory. The Fire and Risk Compliance Manager will be available to assist in this regard.
- In terms of works to buildings which are necessary to comply with statutory requirements and not simply as a result of issues highlighted in a condition report, in the absence of such works being instructed by a Financial Board, the General Trustees may instruct such works at their discretion, the cost being met by any funds which the Trustees hold for the benefit of the relevant congregation in the Consolidated Fabric Fund.
- Similarly, if a building is deemed unsafe for normal use, the General Trustees will have authority to direct that access to and use of the building is restricted or ceased and the building closed until such times that it is considered that the building is safe to use.
- In such cases as the scenarios noted above, a practical approach is required as to whether it is sensible to expend funds on remedial works. If it is deemed uneconomic in that regard or if the cost of the required works cannot be met by the congregation or by grant or loan funding from the General Trustees, the General Trustees, at their discretion and with the approval of the Presbytery of the bounds, may determine that the building should be disposed of.
- Formal provision is made for the Presbytery to oversee the ongoing inspection and maintenance of buildings which are to be disposed of following dissolution of a congregation.

8.1.2 Manse Regulations

8.1.2.1 The General Trustees propose the enactment of the Manse Regulations, as set out in Appendix 4 to this Report, to replace the current Schedule 4 in the 2024 Act.

8.1.2.2 The obligations on congregations with regards to the maintenance, insurance and inspection of manses remain within Schedule 1 of the 2024 Act.

8.1.2.3 The following are the principal changes which have been made in the new proposed Regulations:

- As regards letting of manses, these provisions have been adjusted so that where a manse is required for ministry post-Adjustment, it may be possible for the General Trustees, where the manse is owned by the Trustees, to allow a letting of the building but only where it is anticipated that the congregation will remain vacant in ministry for at least six months. It is important that the anticipated length of a vacancy is aligned with proposals to let a manse, and the General Trustees consider that a term of vacancy considerably in excess of six months may, in due course, be more appropriate.
- The Act already provided that where a manse is redundant as a result of Adjustment, it should be sold and this provision is repeated in the proposed Regulations.
- The Financial Board was already obliged to ensure that the manse meets the statutory tolerable standard before it is let, and this has been expanded to include reference to gas safety, carbon monoxide and electrical installation testing.

8.1.2.4 In terms of Ministers applying to the Manse Adjudication Committee (MAC) for permission to depart from their manse and live instead in their own home, working with FAPLT, the Office of the General Assembly and the Solicitor of the Church, the General Trustees propose that the new Manse Regulations contain a number of amendments to what are the existing provisions contained in Schedule 4 of the 2024 Act:

- The application is now one for the Minister to live in his or her own house, rather than the manse (as opposed to one to designate the Minister's own house as the manse of the charge).
- If such an application to the MAC is successful, the Minister will have been deemed to have declined to accept this part of their stipendiary remuneration (ie provision and maintenance of a manse) and, accordingly, the congregation will not have to pay the Minister rent for living in their own home and the congregation will not be liable to meet Council Tax nor the repair and refurbishment and insurance costs pertaining to a minister's own home as they would with regards to a designated manse.
- The requirement for a Minister to be living in the designated manse at the time an application to the MAC is made is deleted.
- The Solicitor, or Depute Solicitor, will be the Clerk to the MAC.
- The factors set out in Appendix 1 have been adjusted in light of the fact that the MAC will now be deciding whether or not to allow the Minister to live in his or her own house, as opposed to whether the Minister's own house may be designated as the manse of the charge.

8.2 Determinations made under Act V 2024 (as amended by Act XV 2025)

8.2.1 The General Trustees report that, under the powers delegated to them by the General Assembly by the 2024 Act (as amended by Act XV 2025), they have made 219 Determinations during 2025 as set out below in Appendix 5.

9. OPERATION OF THE GENERAL TRUSTEES

9.1 General Trustees and Advisory Members

9.1.1 The General 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 2025.

9.1.2 General Trustees: Retirements

- Mr Robert Bell (May 2026) (Fabric Committee)
- Mr William A Hall (May 2026) (Glebes Committee)

9.1.3 General Trustees: Resignations

- Mr Walter H Barbour (October 2025) (Glebes Committee)

9.1.4 Advisory Members: Resignations

- Mr Chris Johnstone (November 2025) (Fabric Committee)

9.1.5 Advisory Members: Appointments

- Mr D Chris Dunn (August 2025) (Audit & Assurance Committee)
- Rev Bryan Kerr (August 2025) (PSB Committee)
- Rev Lisa-Jane Rankin (August 2025) (Fabric Committee)
- Mr Hugh Campbell-Adamson (November 2025) (Glebes Committee)
- Mr David Inglis (November 2025) (Fabric Committee and PSB Committee)
- Mr Fraser Ellis (February 2026) (Audit & Assurance Committee)

9.1.5 The General Trustees ask the General Assembly to appoint Mr D Chris Dunn, Mr Fraser Ellis, Rev Bryan Kerr, Rev Lisa-Jane Rankin, Mr Hugh Campbell-Adamson and Mr David Inglis as new members of the General Trustees.

9.1.6 The General Trustees recommend that Rev Dr Scott Rennie (Chair) receives the payment of £2,200 and Mr Alan F K Kennedy (Chair for four months of the year) and Mr Michael Pearson (Vice-Chair for eight months of the year) each receive a pro rata payment for their services as authorised under S.38 of the 1925 Act.

9.1.7 The General 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.

In the name of the General Trustees

SCOTT RENNIE, *Chair*
MICHAEL PEARSON, *Vice-Chair*
BRIAN D WALLER, *Chief Executive*

Appendix 1

Summary of Responsibilities

Kirk Session (Congregation Level)	Presbytery (Regional Level)	General Trustees (National Level)
Keep Property Register & Manse Condition Schedule updated and submitted	Oversee Mission Plan and general supervision of congregations.	Hold titles for property and glebes; manage purchases, lettings and disposals.
Inspect buildings (annually if occupied, weekly if empty).	Have a Fabric Committee with skilled members.	Provide technical, financial, and administrative advice to congregations.
Maintain manse to rental standard.	Review congregations' property & manse reports annually.	Approve major works, sales, and listed building works under Ecclesiastical Exemption.
Arrange repairs/urgent works (use professionals for major projects).	Report to General Trustees annually.	Step in if congregations fail to carry out necessary repairs.
Report budget needs to Financial Board.	Instruct congregations to carry out repairs.	Manage church funds (Fabric Funds, Stipend Fund).
Get approvals from Presbytery/GTs/ statutory bodies before major works.	Arrange 5-year surveys and share reports.	Provide health & safety and fire safety advice.
Manage insurance through an insurance provider.	Arrange energy surveys if needed.	Run energy supply contracts and national insurance scheme.
Oversee health & safety (appoint lead, report accidents/damage).	Approve major works and sales; send records to GTs.	Ensure buildings are aligned with Presbytery Planning.
Approve non-congregational use of buildings (with Financial Board and Minister).		

Transfer of responsibilities in the event of dissolution

In the event of a dissolution of a congregation, the responsibilities of the Kirk Session are passed to the Presbytery and General Trustees as recorded below:

Responsibility (additional notes and actions in italic)	No Longer Applicable	Presbytery	General Trustees
Completing and maintaining the Property Register and Manse Condition Schedule. *(superseded by weekly inspections during dissolution process).*			
Inspecting the occupied and buildings on an annual basis to enable the Property Register and Manse Condition Schedule to be prepared and updated. *(superseded by weekly inspections during dissolution process).*			
Reporting on the budget required to maintain the buildings *(urgent wind and watertight/H&S works only).*		PBO	PBO
Arranging for the necessary works to be undertaken to the buildings to ensure that they are maintained in good condition *(urgent wind and watertight/H&S works only – see below).*			
Ensuring that the manse meets the same standard of condition as if it was being let on the private letting market *(urgent wind and watertight/ H&S works only – see below).*			
Seeking the necessary statutory approvals and approvals for the works from Presbytery and the General Trustees.			
Carrying out any works to the buildings which are urgently required in the interests of safety or the preservation of the buildings.		To arrange	To instruct
Insuring the buildings through the Church of Scotland Insurance Services and complying with the insurance policy conditions *(GT to confirm buildings that are unoccupied to insurer)* .			
Appointing a volunteer Health and Safety administrator.			
Complying with risk and safety requirements as outlined in the Health and Safety Toolkit.			H&S officers

Responsibility (additional notes and actions in italic)	No Longer Applicable	Presbytery	General Trustees
Reporting any injuries to people sustained within the buildings or grounds and also any damage (including fire damage) to the buildings or grounds immediately to the Presbytery and General Trustees.			
Obtaining professional advice for all works which are more than basic repair or refurbishment from qualified building professionals *(wind & watertight and H&S works only – minimal input from external consultants anticipated)*.			PBO
Applying to the General Trustees and Presbytery for the necessary approvals for selling or leasing buildings vested in the General Trustees or where the titles contain an "Assembly Control" clause. *(In the event of dissolution, all buildings are to be sold)*.			
Inspection of unoccupied buildings on a weekly basis, keeping a record of the inspections and actioning any issues discovered during those inspections.			
Approving any use of congregational buildings for anything other than congregational purposes or purposes of an ecclesiastical or charitable nature.			
Managing the disposal process for buildings which are being sold *(further details below)*.			
Taking due part in the creation and updating of the Presbytery Mission Plan.			
Prepare inventory for churches and halls.		To prepare	SDO to review
Answer presale questionnaires.			
Removal of loose items to comply with insurance conditions and prepare for sale *(arranged by Presbytery, costs to be met by GT)*.			
Inform Law Department of any current leases and GT to instruct terminations if applicable.		Inform	Instruct
Transfer of utilities and insurance to name of GT.			
Payment of bills and invoices associated with the above.			

Appendix 2

Funds of the General Trustees

	31/12/2025 £000	31/12/2024 £000
Restricted for the benefit of congregations		
Glebes (Land)	30,033	29,212
Stipend Fund (Investments)	127,642	119,190
Total Stipend	157,675	148,402
Buildings (Churches & Halls)	225,907	237,242
Buildings (Manses)	288,659	296,849
Fabric Fund (Investments - Capital)	121,334	111,766
Fabric Fund (Investments - Revenue)	13,450	12,688
Total Fabric	649,350	658,545
Individual Funds	886	1,440
Total restricted for the benefit of congregations	807,911	808,387
Other General Trustees' funds		
General Fund	18,613	12,169
CoSIS	3,044	7,675
Central Fabric Fund	23,591	22,587
Glebe Improvement Fund	470	457
Historic Property Fund	41	75
Individual Bequests	7,439	6,596
Total other General Trustees' funds	53,198	49,559
Total	861,109	857,946
Total represented by land and buildings (restricted for benefit of congregations)	544,599	563,303
Total represented by cash and investments (restricted for benefit of congregations)	263,312	245,084
Other General Trustees' funds	53,198	49,559
Total	861,109	857,946

Appendix 3

[ ] ACT AMENDING THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND GENERAL TRUSTEES (PROPERTIES, FUNDS AND ENDOWMENTS) ACT (ACT V 2024) (AS AMENDED)

Edinburgh, [ ] May 2026, 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. *Delete section 2.4 and substitute:* "In relation to manses, the provisions of the Manse Regulations (Regs [ ] 2026) shall apply."

2. *Amend the definition in section 1(e) of Schedule 1 of* "General Trustees' Financial Limit" *by adding the following words at the end:* "…, (and which defined term is used in sections 16 & 17 of this Schedule 1)".

3. *Amend section 7, Schedule 1 by inserting the following at the end of the first sentence:*
"The Financial Board shall undertake and publish a Fire Risk Assessment for all of its Ecclesiastical Buildings (excluding manses and any other residential dwellings)".

4. *Delete the heading "**General Trustees instructing works**" to section 13, Schedule 1 and substitute: "**General Trustees' Powers**". Thereafter, re-number section 13 as section 13 (i) and insert new sub-paragraphs (ii), (iii) and (iv) as follows:*

   "(ii) Where it comes to the attention of the General Trustees at any time that works to an Ecclesiastical Building are required in order to comply with statutory requirements, the General Trustees may arrange for such works to be undertaken at the cost of the congregation.

   (iii) In any case where, in the opinion of the General Trustees after taking suitable professional advice, an Ecclesiastical Building is unsafe for the purposes for which it is being used, the General Trustees may issue a direction to the Kirk Session requiring use of such building to stop and instructing such measures as may be appropriate to prevent access being taken to it. The Kirk Session shall be obliged to comply with this instruction and ensure that all use of the building is discontinued until such time as the building is again rendered safe for use and has been certified as such by the General Trustees.

   (iv) The General Trustees shall consult with local parties and with the Presbytery with a view to determining whether it is practicable or prudent for the necessary remedial works in terms of sub-paragraphs (i) or (iii) above to be carried out by the congregation in light of the designation of the building in the Presbytery Mission Plan or whether the cost of doing so is uneconomic. If it is apparent that the cost of the required works cannot be met, or is not met, by the congregation or by grant or loan funding provided by the General Trustees, the General Trustees shall, with the approval of the Presbytery of the bounds, be entitled to proceed to sell or otherwise dispose of the building without the requirement for the approval of the Financial Board of the congregation. The Financial Board of the congregation or congregations concerned will have a right of appeal to the Appeals Committee of the Commission of Assembly against the decision of the General Trustees to sell or dispose of the building. The General Trustees shall at the same time as intimating that decision to the congregation advise the Financial Board or Boards in writing of their right of appeal and the time limit which applies. A Financial Board wishing to lodge an appeal must intimate the same in writing within fourteen days in terms of the Appeals Act (Act I 2014) and thereafter the provisions of that Act shall apply."

5. *Add a new section 10 in Schedule 2 and renumber thereafter:*
"Where, following Adjustment, funds are held in the Consolidated Fabric Fund for a united congregation, title to all properties of the united congregation if not already so vested shall require to be transferred to the General Trustees prior to any monies being released for works to any of the properties of the congregation".

6. *Add a new section 5 in Schedule 3 and renumber thereafter:*
"In circumstances where a property is to be sold in anticipation of or following the dissolution of a congregation, the Presbytery of the bounds shall oversee the ongoing inspection and maintenance of such property until such time as a sale is achieved".

7. The existing Schedule 4 shall be deleted and Schedule 5 shall be re-numbered as Schedule 4.

Appendix 4

[ ] MANSE REGULATIONS (REGS [ ] 2026)

Edinburgh, [ ] May 2026, Session [ ]

Definitions

1. (a) **"Adjustment"**: any of the forms of adjustment carried out in terms of the Presbytery Mission Plan Act (Act VIII 2021).
   (b) **"Appeal"**: an appeal to the Ministries Appeal Panel against the decision of the MAC either as a tribunal of first instance or as an intermediate appeal tribunal.
   (c) **"Charge"**: a sphere of pastoral duty to which a Minister is inducted and may include a Team Ministry Charge as referred to in section 7(10) of the Presbytery Mission Plan Act (Act VIII 2021).
   (d) **"congregation"**: 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 an Interim Moderator) and a Kirk Session, for Christian worship, fellowship, instruction, Mission and service.
   (e) **"FAPLT"**: Faith Action Programme Leadership Team or any successor body.
   (f) **"Financial Board"**: the Kirk Session, Congregational Board, Deacons' Court, Committee of Management or other congregational authority responsible for finance and for the maintenance of the ecclesiastical buildings of the Charge.
   (g) "**GTs Act**": the Church of Scotland General Trustees (Properties, Funds and Endowments) Act (Act V 2024).
   (h) **"MAC"**: the Manse Adjudication Committee.
   (i) **"MAC Hearing"**: a hearing of the MAC to determine whether or not the Minister shall be permitted to live in his or her Own House instead of the Parish Manse.
   (j) **"Manse Condition Schedule"**: the document contained in Appendix III of the Joint Report of the General Trustees and the Ministries Council to the 2007 General Assembly[1].
   (k) **"Minister"**: the minister who at the time of making an application to the Manse Adjudication Committee is currently inducted to a Charge or is considering induction to a Charge.
   (l) **"Own House"**: any residential property owned solely or jointly and severally by the Minister or in which the Minister is otherwise entitled to reside.
   (m) **"Parish Manse"**: the Manse of the Charge provided for the occupation of the Minister and which he or she would normally be expected to occupy in the performance of his or her duties.
   (n) **"Presbytery"**: the Presbytery of the bounds unless the context otherwise requires.

The Basic Position

2. A Minister's remuneration comprises both a stipend and a Parish Manse. Accordingly, before a Minister is inducted to a Charge, Presbytery has to be satisfied that there is a suitable Parish Manse within the Charge or in close proximity and that all work needed to make it so has been carried out.

3. A Minister has the right to live in the Parish Manse and a corresponding duty to occupy it.

4. Every congregation has a duty through its Financial Board to provide a wind and watertight Parish Manse which is habitable and to keep it in a good state of repair and decoration during its occupation by the Minister and family. The Minister should not have to spend his or her own stipend to achieve this.

5. A Minister must treat the Parish Manse fabric, including fittings and fixtures, with due care and consideration and, where these are provided by the congregation, must leave them in the Parish Manse as the property of the congregation.

6. Presbyteries must ensure that Parish Manses are inspected at least once every year by the congregational Fabric Committee, that the Manse Condition Schedule is annually reviewed and that both necessary repairs and agreed annual maintenance and decoration are undertaken.

7. In order to facilitate this process the Minister must allow for suitable arrangements to be made for this annual inspection and the Minister and Financial Board should agree on access being provided for the annual programme of maintenance and decoration to be carried out.

8. The Financial Board must recognise its responsibility to have in place a rota for the systematic internal and external decoration of the Parish Manse. (A recommended programme is shown as part of the Manse Condition Schedule).

The Regulatory Essentials

9. It is a requirement that the Parish Manse of the Charge at the very least meets the tolerable standard criteria set out in section 86 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 so that the standards are the same as if the building was being let on the private letting market.

10. The Financial Board must:
    10.1 take responsibility for the completion of a Manse Condition Schedule and thereafter be responsible for its revision at the onset of a vacancy or whenever it becomes unoccupied, at a five yearly inspection, or at the completion of major works/repairs;

1 This is available at: https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/resources/building-and-property-resources#manses

10.2 ensure that all required works identified in the Manse Condition Schedule are carried out timeously and to a good standard;

10.3 take responsibility for the upkeep of the grounds where these extend beyond the bounds of a reasonable garden surrounding the property. Otherwise the Minister shall be responsible, where the garden is of normal domestic proportions, for maintaining the garden and grounds in a neat and tidy condition. (The parameters for this will be set out in the Manse Condition Schedule);

10.4 budget to meet the costs of the agreed programme of redecoration and repair.

Letting of Manses

11. A Parish Manse vested in the General Trustees may, subject to the approval of Presbytery and the General Trustees, be let when it is not occupied by a Minister and it is anticipated that it will not be so occupied for a period of at least six months. Rent received will be credited to the benefit of the congregation in the revenue account of the Consolidated Fabric Fund. All lets should be at market rent levels and must be issued in the name of the General Trustees and no Financial Board may enter into any letting agreements or other occupancy arrangements in its own name or without the approval of the General Trustees. In cases where the manse in question is redundant as a result of Adjustment, it should be sold.

12. It is for the Financial Board to ensure that the Parish Manse meets the statutory tolerable standard referred to in section 9 prior to entering into any letting arrangement and that statutory annual gas safety, carbon monoxide (where appropriate) and electrical installation testing is undertaken throughout the let.

13. A Parish Manse vested in local congregational trustees may, subject to the approval of the Financial Board of the congregation and of Presbytery, be let when it is unoccupied by a Minister and it is anticipated that it will not be so occupied for a period of at least six months. In cases where the manse in question is redundant as a result of Adjustment, it should be sold.

14. In all cases, the Financial Board must give careful consideration to the limited grounds on which vacant possession may be obtained, in the light of statutory tenant protections and the difficulties that are likely to be experienced in regaining vacant possession of the Parish Manse. If a potential tenant may have difficulty in finding alternative accommodation, whether because of the scarcity of similar-sized letting properties in the area or for any other reason, or is seeking medium to long-term accommodation, the Parish Manse should not be let to that tenant.

Manse Adjudication Committee
Powers and Constitution

15. Any application by a Minister to live in his or her Own House instead of the Parish Manse shall be sent to the Solicitor of the Church as Clerk to the MAC, and the MAC shall decide whether or not the Minister shall be so permitted.

16. Where the Parish Manse falls within the scope of Schedule 3 of the GTs Act (i.e. the title to the Parish Manse is held in the name of the General Trustees or it contains a section placing the trustees in whom it is vested under the control of the General Assembly so far as disposal is concerned), then:

(a) the MAC shall comprise two representatives of the General Trustees, one of whom shall be the Convener, and two representatives of FAPLT;

(b) the MAC will receive representations from the Chief Executive of the General Trustees (or his or her Depute) and a nominated senior staff member of FAPLT (or his or her Depute); and

(c) the Solicitor of the Church (or his or her Depute) shall act as the Clerk to the MAC and shall advise on matters of law and practice arising.

17. Where the Parish Manse does not fall within the scope of Schedule 3 of the GTs Act, then:

(a) the MAC shall comprise four representatives of FAPLT, one of whom shall be appointed as Convener;

(b) the MAC will receive representations from a nominated senior staff member of FAPLT (or his or her Depute); and

(c) the Solicitor of the Church (or his or her Depute) shall act as the Clerk to the MAC and shall advise on matters of law and practice arising.

Pre-MAC Hearing Procedures

18. A Minister who wishes to be permitted to live in his or her Own House instead of the Parish Manse shall in the first instance consult with the Financial Board.

19. In the event of the Financial Board agreeing in principle to the Minister living in his or her Own House instead of the Parish Manse, the Minister and the Financial Board shall make a joint submission to the Presbytery or, where the Financial Board does not agree to the Minister's request, the Minister alone may make a submission to the Presbytery.

20. The Presbytery shall meet separately with the Minister and the Financial Board. The Presbytery shall, after such further investigation as it deems appropriate, and on the basis of the factors set out in Appendix 1 to these Regulations, and taking account of the report referred to in section 21 of these Regulations, make a decision as to whether or not to support the Minister's application to the MAC to permit the Minister to live in his or her Own House instead of the Parish Manse.

21. There must be submitted to the Presbytery a written report from an independent chartered surveyor or letting agent advising on the level of rent which could be received for the Parish Manse if it were let, taking into account factoring and other charges which may be incurred in respect of the letting of the Parish Manse. The written report shall accompany any subsequent application to the MAC.

22. In the event of:

(a) the Presbytery not agreeing that the Minister should be permitted to live in his or her Own House instead of the Parish Manse, the Minister, with or without the support of the Financial Board, shall be entitled to submit an application to the MAC. In this case the application to the MAC shall be characterised as taking the matter to an intermediate appeal tribunal, the Minister bringing the matter forward as an appeal or a dissent-and-complaint against the Presbytery's decision; or

(b) the Presbytery agreeing that the Minister should be permitted to live in his or her Own House instead of the Parish Manse, the Minister, with or without the support of the Financial Board, shall be entitled to submit an application to the MAC. In this case the application to the MAC shall be characterised as an application to a tribunal of first instance.

MAC Hearing and MAC Decision

23. The Minister shall apply to the MAC for a decision as to whether or not he or she shall be permitted to live in his or her Own House instead of the Parish Manse.

24. In determining whether or not the Minister shall be permitted to live in his or her Own House instead of the Parish Manse, the MAC shall consider all of the factors set out in Appendix 1 to these Regulations, and shall also take into consideration the independent report referred to in section 21 of these Regulations.

25. The MAC Hearing shall proceed in accordance with the Rules of Procedure set out in Appendix 2 to these Regulations.

Post-MAC Hearing Procedure/Appeal to Ministries Appeal Panel

26. The Clerk to the MAC shall forthwith notify the Minister, Financial Board and Presbytery in writing of the decision of the MAC, which may be an interim decision pending the production of such further evidence as the MAC shall require.

27. Within 14 days of the date of intimation of the MAC decision, any of the parties attending or represented at the MAC Hearing shall be entitled to submit an Appeal to the Ministries Appeal Panel.

28. An Appeal must be made on the basis of one of the following grounds of appeal:

(a) that in the course of the MAC Hearing there were irregularities in the process contrary to natural justice which may have had a material effect on the outcome; or

(b) that the final decision of the MAC Hearing was influenced by incorrect or immaterial facts or failed to take sufficient account of relevant material facts.

29. In the event of an Appeal, a representative of the MAC shall be entitled to be heard by the Ministries Appeal Panel, along with the Minister, the Financial Board and the Presbytery.

30. The Ministries Appeal Panel shall then determine the matter in accordance with the terms of the Ministries Appeal Panel Act (Act VI 2007).

31. In the event that the MAC decides that the Minister shall not be permitted to live in his or her Own House (and no Appeal is taken to the Ministries Appeal Panel or an Appeal is unsuccessful), then the Minister must reside in the Parish Manse (and if not already living there, must make immediate arrangements to do so).

32. For the avoidance of doubt, where the final decision of the MAC (including after any appeal) is that Minister is permitted to live in his or her Own House, the congregation shall not be required to pay any of the costs of the Minister's Own House, such as mortgage, rent paid to a third party landlord, Council Tax, insurance, repair, renewal, maintenance or decoration costs, all of which shall be the responsibility of the Minister, nor shall the congregation pay any rent to the Minister in respect of his or her Own House. The Minister shall in such circumstances be deemed to have declined to accept that element of his or her remuneration which would comprise the right to live in the Parish Manse.

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Miscellaneous

These Regulations shall not apply to the situation where there are two co-habiting adults and both are ordained ministers of the Church of Scotland, are inducted to different Charges and are living together in the Parish Manse of one of the Charges.

APPENDIX 1

Factors for determining whether or not the Minister shall be permitted to live in his or her Own House

The MAC shall consider:

(a) whether or not the location of the Minister's Own House is within a reasonable distance of the Charge and the sphere of ministry;

(b) whether or not there are suitable office and meeting facilities available at a church or hall within the Charge;

(c) whether or not the Minister's Own House is of a size and layout to enable confidential and/or sensitive oral and/or written conversations to take place there in the course of the Minister's work;

(d) whether or not there will be an adverse impact on the financial position of the Charge as a result of the Minister being permitted to live in his or her Own House, taking into account whether or not there may be periods when the Parish Manse is un-let (if such letting is permitted), and noting that extra costs and responsibilities may arise in terms of insurance for unoccupied property; and

(d) whether or not there are exceptional circumstances justifying the Minister's request that he or she should be permitted to live in his or her Own House instead of the Parish Manse;

Examples of exceptional circumstances may include:

- that the Minister is within less than 12 months of retirement; or
- that the Minister or a member of his or her family residing with him or her has a disability which means that the Parish Manse is not suitable for occupation by such person(s), and the MAC is satisfied that the Parish Manse cannot be made suitable for such occupation or cannot be made suitable at a cost which is affordable by the congregation.

In coming to its view on the factors set out in this Appendix 1, the MAC shall be entitled to request that relevant supporting evidence is made available, such as reports and photographs about the Minister's Own House and other facilities available within the Charge, insurance information, and medical, occupational health or social work reports.

APPENDIX 2

MAC Hearing Procedures

1. The MAC shall be deemed to be acting in a judicial capacity so that the rules of natural justice will apply.
2. The Minister, representatives of the Financial Board and representatives of the Presbytery shall be given the opportunity to make verbal submissions and to speak to any written evidence lodged in support of the application.
3. Professional advisers shall not be permitted to represent the Minister at a MAC Hearing.
4. The Minister, representatives of the Financial Board and representatives of the Presbytery and any other witness permitted by the MAC shall be heard separately and after giving evidence shall be asked to withdraw from the MAC Hearing but may be recalled in the event of the MAC seeking further information.
5. The MAC Hearing may take place by audio and/or video conference call or other appropriate medium.

Appendix 5

Determinations made under Act V 2024 (as amended by Act XV 2025)

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:

Churches, Halls and Other

- Aberdeen North – sale of Northfield Church;
- Aberdeen St Machar's Cathedral – sale of St George's Tillydrone Church and Hall;
- Aberlour – sale of Craigellachie Church;
- Alloway and Fisherton – sale of Fisherton Church;
- Altnaharra and Farr – sale of Bettyhill Church;
- Altnaharra and Farr – sale of Syre Church;
- Appin & Lismore – sale of Church House;
- Arbuthnott, Bervie & Kinneff – sale of Arbuthnott Church;
- Annan St Andrew's and St Bryde's – sale of Dalton Church;
- Ardrossan – sale of Saltcoats North Church and Hall;
- Ayr St Andrew's – sale of St Andrew's Church and Hall;
- Balfron and Fintry – sale of Fintry Church;
- Bellshill West – sale of Bellshill West Church;
- Bo'ness St Andrew's – sale of Bo'ness St Andrew's Church;
- Bridge of Weir – sale of St Machar's Ranfurly Church and Hall;
- Caputh and Clunie – sale of Clunie Church;
- Caputh and Clunie – sale of Caputh Church;
- Carlingwark – sale of Corsock Church;
- Carnbee – sale of Carnbee Church;
- Central and East Sutherland – sale of St Callan's Church;
- Central and East Sutherland – sale of Bunilidh Church;
- Cheviot Churches – sale of Hownam Church;
- Cheviot Churches – sale of Linton Church;
- Clydebank, Faifley and Duntocher – sale of Faifley and Duntocher Church and Hall;
- Cowdenbeath Trinity – sale of Crossgates Church and Hall;
- Cromar – sale of Coull Church;
- Culsalmond and Rayne – sale of Rayne Kirk;
- Cumbrae, Fairlie and Largs – sale of Largs St Columba's Church and Hall;
- Culross & Torryburn – sale of Culross Abbey;
- Cumbernauld Trinity – sale of Kildrum Church and Hall;
- Dalkeith St Nicholas Buccleuch – sale of Dalkeith St Nicholas Buccleuch Church;
- Dalrymple – sale of hall;
- Drumchapel St Andrew's & Yoker – sale of Yoker Church building and all related adjoining land;
- Drymen and East Loch Lomond – sale of Buchanan Church;
- Duffus, Spynie & Hopeman – sale of Spynie Church;
- Dundee Broughty Ferry – sale of St Luke's and Queen Street Church;
- Dundee Broughty Ferry – sale of Broughty Ferry St James Church and Hall;
- Durisdeer – sale of Durisdeer Church;
- East Caithness – sale of Wick St Fergus Church;
- Edinburgh Meadowbank and Willowbrae – sale of Willowbrae Church and Hall;
- Edinburgh New Town – sale of Church Officer's cottage;
- Edinburgh New Town – sale of Greenside Church and Hall;
- Edinburgh: North and South Leith – sale of Leith North Church and Hall;
- Edinburgh: North and South Leith – sale of Leith North Hall (Session House);
- Elderslie and Linwood – sale of Linwood Church;
- Fallin – sale of Fallin Church; Fallin – sale of plot of land;
- Falkirk Bainsford – sale of Bainsford Church;
- Falkirk Camelon – sale of Camelon Church and Hall;
- Forfar All Souls Church of Scotland – sale of hall;
- Forfar All Souls Church of Scotland – sale of St Margaret's Church;
- Fortingall, Glenlyon, Kenmore and Lawers – sale of Kenmore Church;
- Fraserburgh and District – sale of Fraserburgh Old Church;

- Fraserburgh and District – sale of Fraserburgh West Church;
- Fraserburgh and District – sale of Rathven West Church;
- Fraserburgh and District – sale of Sandhaven Church;
- Gairbraid – sale of Gairbraid Church and Hall;
- Glasgow Hillington Park and Priesthill Trinity – sale of St Christopher's Priesthill and Nitshill Church;
- Glasgow: Ibrox – sale of Ibrox Old Church;
- Galashiels Parish – sale of Galashiels St John's Church and Hall;
- Girvan Valley – sale of Girvan South Church and Hall;
- Grangemouth Parkview – sale of Abbotsgrange Church and Hall;
- Gretna Old, Gretna St Andrew's, Half Morton and Kirkpatrick Fleming – sale of Gretna Old Church;
- Haddington West – sale of Haddington West Church;
- Haggs – sale of Haggs Church and Hall;
- Hawick South – sale of St Mary's Old Church;
- Irvine Valley – sale of Loudoun Church;
- Isla Parishes – sale of Ruthven Church;
- Isle of Bute – sale of hall and flat;
- Isle of Bute – sale of Trinity Church;
- Kilbirnie New – sale of Kilbirnie Auld Kirk;
- Kilbirnie New – sale of Kirk House;
- Killearnan – sale of Killearnan Church and Hall;
- Kinross-shire – sale of Cleish Church;
- Kirkmaiden – sale of Kirkmaiden Old Kirk;
- Kirkmichael, Straloch and Glenshee – sale of Glenshee Church;
- Kirkmichael, Straloch and Glenshee – sale of Kirkmichael Church;
- Larbert Cross – sale of Bothkennar and Carronshore Church;
- Larbert Tryst – sale of Stenhouse and Carron Church and Hall;
- Larbert Tryst – sale of Airth Church and Hall;
- Larbert Tryst – sale of Larbert West Church;
- Lomond – sale of Gartocharn Church and Hall;
- Lugar – sale of Logan Hall;
- Motherwell North and Craigneuk – sale of Craigneuk and Belhaven Church;
- North Coast and the Flows – sale of Reay Church;
- North Coast and the Flows – sale of St Andrew's Church;
- Paisley St George's – sale of St George's Outreach Centre (formerly Glenburn Church);
- Parish of Latheron – sale of Dunbeath Church;
- Partick Victoria Park – sale of Balshagray Victoria Park Church and Hall;
- Polbeth Harwood – sale of ground adjoining Harwood Church;
- Rannoch – sale of Braes of Rannoch Church;
- Ruberslaw Country parishes – sale of Bedrule Church;
- Ruberslaw Country Parishes – sale of Minto Church;
- Ruberslaw Country Parishes – sale of Southdean Church;
- St Colmon (Arnsheen, Barrhill and Colmonell) – sale of St Colmon Church;
- St Monan's – sale of St Monan's Church;
- St Ninian's and Auldearn & Dalmore – sale of Auldearn Church;
- South-West Ross – sale of Kirkton Hall;
- Stevenston – sale of Ardeer Church;
- Strathbrock – sale of St Machan's Church;
- Stow St Mary of Wedale & Heriot – sale of Stow Church;
- Strath and Sleat – sale of Broadford Hall;
- Strathnairn and Strathdearn – sale of Cawdor Church;
- Strathnairn and Strathdearn – sale of Cawdor Hall;
- Tomintoul, Glenlivet and Inveravon – sale of Inveravon Church;
- Troon – sale of Troon Old Church and Hall;
- United Irvine Church of Scotland – sale of St Andrew's Church;
- Upper Annandale – sale of Wamphray Church;
- Watten – sale of Watten Church;
- West Cowal – sale of Colintraive Church;
- West Mearns – sale of Glenbervie Church;

- West Mearns – sale of Forrest St Laurence Church;
- West Moray – sale of Rafford Church;
- Whitburn Burnfield Valley South – sale of plot of land;
- Wishaw New Kirk – sale of Wishaw Old Church and Hall

Manses

- Aberdeen North – sale of former Northfield manse;
- Altnaharra and Farr – sale of manse, Bettyhill;
- Alyth – sale of manse;
- Ardchattan – sale of manse;
- Ardoch & Blackford – sale of manse;
- Ardrossan – sale of manse, Saltcoats;
- Ardrossan – sale of manse, Ardrossan;
- Banff – sale of manse;
- Bellshill West – sale of manse;
- Bonnybridge St Helen's – sale of manse;
- Buckie North and Rathven – sale of manse;
- Buckie South, West and Enzie – sale of manse;
- Cambuslang – sale of manse;
- Campbeltown – sale of manse;
- Clydebank, Faifley and Duntocher – sale of former Faifley and Duntocher manse;
- Coatbridge Townhead – sale of manse;
- Crossford and Kirkfieldbank – sale of former Crossford manse;
- Dalmuir Barclay – sale of manse;
- Dalriada Mid Argyll – sale of former Glassary manse;
- Dalriada Mid Argyll – sale of former Lochgilphead manse;
- Dalry Trinity – sale of manse;
- Dornoch Firth – sale of manse;
- Drumchapel St Andrew's and Yoker – sale of manse;
- Drymen and East Loch Lomond – sale of manse;
- Dunblane Cathedral, Kilmadock and Blair Drummond – sale of manse;
- Dunblane Cathedral, Kilmadock & Blair Drummond – sale of manse;
- Dunfermline St Margaret's Community Church – sale of manse;
- East Caithness – sale of manse; East Kilbride – sale of manse;
- East Neuk Trinity – sale of manse;
- Edinburgh Newington Trinity – sale of former Craigmillar Park manse;
- Edinburgh South East Edinburgh – sale of two manses;
- Falkirk Bainsford – sale of manse;
- Falkirk Camelon – sale of manse;
- Falkirk Grahamston United – sale of manse;
- Falkirk Laurieston – sale of manse;
- Falkirk St Andrew's West – sale of manse;
- Fauldhouse & Harthill St Andrews – sale of two manses;
- Fintray, Kinellar, Keithhall – sale of manse;
- Forfar All Souls Church of Scotland – sale of manse;
- Forfar East, Old and Inverarity – sale of manse;
- Galashiels Parish – sale of former Trinity manse;
- Girvan Valley – sale of manse;
- Glasgow Kinning park – sale of manse;
- Grangemouth Abbotsgrange – sale of manse;
- Haddington Parish – sale of manse;
- Hawick South – sale of manse;
- Heart of Fife – sale of two manses
- Isle of Arran – sale of manse;
- Isle of Arran – sale of manse;
- Kilmarnock St Marnock's – sale of manse;
- Langbank – sale of manse;
- Larbert Old – sale of manse;
- Larbert Tryst – sale of former Airth manse;

- Linlithgow and Avon Valley – sale of former Linlithgow St Ninian's Craigmallen manse;
- Lochmaben – sale of manse;
- Lockerbie, Dryfesdale, Hutton, Corrie & Applegarth – sale of manse;
- Lomond – sale of former Jamestown manse;
- Maxwelltown West and New Abbey – sale of manse;
- Monifieth South Angus – sale of manse;
- Monkton and Prestwick Trinity – sale of manse;
- Netherlee and Stamperland – sale of manse;
- Newbattle – sale of manse;
- North Mull – sale of manse;
- Old Kilpatrick Bowling – sale of manse;
- Orkney Islands – sale of manse;
- Peterculter – sale of former Drumoak manse;
- Shetland Church of Scotland – sale of former Northern Isles manse;
- Strathmore – sale of manse;
- Strathnairn and Strathdearn – sale of manse;
- Troqueer and Caerlaverock – sale of manse;
- Tulliallan and Kincardine – sale of manse;
- Uphall South – sale of manse;
- Wishaw Cambusnethan North – sale of manse;
- Wishaw New Kirk – sale of two manses;

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:

- Arbroath and District – sale of whole of Arbirlot Glebe;
- Burntisland and Kinghorn – sale of whole of Burntisland Glebe;
- Creich, Flisk and Kilmany – sale of part of Moonzie Glebe;
- Dunblane Cathedral, Kilmadock & Blair Drummond – sale of whole of Kincardine-in-Menteith Glebe;
- East Neuk Trinity – sale of Kilconquhar Glebe;
- Falkirk Upper Braes – sale of part of Muiravonside Glebe;
- Fife Eden Tay – sale of whole of Dunbog Glebe;
- Forfar All Souls Church of Scotland – sale of whole of Rescobie Glebe;
- Fortingall, Glenlyon, Kenmore and Lawers – sale of part of Kenmore Glebe;
- Fraserburgh and District – sale of whole of Piltsligo Glebe;
- Isle of Arran – sale of part of Kilmory Glebe;
- Isla Parishes – sale of whole of Glenisla Glebe;
- Isla Parishes – sale of whole of Lintrathen Glebe;
- Isla Parishes – sale of part of Ruthven Glebe;
- Isla Parishes – sale of whole of Ruthven Glebe;
- Kirkmichael, Straloch and Glenshee – sale of whole of Kirkmichael Glebe;
- Larbert Cross – sale of whole of Bothkennar Glebe;
- Mid Kintyre & Gigha – sale of part of Muasdale Glebe;
- Mid Strathearn – sale of whole of Monzie Glebe;
- Mormond West – sale of part of Tyrie Glebe;
- North and West Islay – sale of part of Portnahaven Glebe;
- St Cyrus Church of Scotland – sale of whole of Benholm Glebe;
- Stevenston – sale of Stevenston Glebe;
- Whitburn Burnfield Valley South – sale of part of Whitburn Glebe

Miscellaneous Sales:
The General Trustees made the following miscellaneous Determinations:

- Dundee Balgay (Dissolved) – sale of manse;
- Dundee Balgay (Dissolved) – sale of Balgay Church;
- Dundee St David's High Kirk (Dissolved) – sale of manse;
- Glendevon (Dissolved) – sale of Glendevon Church;
- Musselburgh St Clements and St Ninian's (Dissolved) – sale of St Clements and St Ninian's Church and Hall;
- Symington (Dissolved) – sale of manse;
- Symington (Dissolved) – sale of Symington Church

NOMINATION COMMITTEE MAY 2026

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Instruct the Assembly Trustees to ensure that any new Standing Committee created by the General Assembly should have staggered terms of membership from the outset *(Section 2.5)*.
3. Instruct the Nomination Committee to investigate the processes undertaken by the Standing Committees of the General Assembly for the appointment of Conveners and Vice-Conveners, and to provide a report on such information to the Legal Questions Committee, to enable the Legal Questions Committee thereafter, and following consultation with the Nomination Committee, to report to a future General Assembly with a recommendation on whether or not any amendment to the process for such appointments should be made in the Standing Orders of the General Assembly *(Section 2.6)*.
4. Instruct the Nomination Committee and the Assembly Trustees to continue their discussions on the process of making nominations to the Assembly Trustee Sub-Committees *(Section 3.2)*.
5. Make alterations to the Standing Committees of the General Assembly as set forth in the Report *(Section 6)*.
6. Appoint Douglas Horn as Convener of the Audit Committee for one year *(Section 6.1)*.
7. Reappoint Andrew Tait as Convener of the Chaplains to His Majesty's Forces Committee for one year *(Section 6.1)*.
8. Reappoint Ross Blackman as Convener of the Ecumenical Relations Committee for one year *(Section 6.1)*.
9. Reappoint Val Brown as Convener of the Ethical Oversight Committee for one year *(Section 6.1)*.
10. Appoint Bryan Kerr as Convener of the Nomination Committee *(Section 6.1)*.

Points for Information

1. The Nomination Committee notes the changes to the membership of the FAPLT Programme Groups as outlined in the Report of the Assembly Trustees.
2. The Nomination Committee thanks the EDI Group for its work done on the new Equalities Monitoring Form introduced as part of the nominations process *(Section 2.2 and Appendix 1)*.

Executive Summary

The Nomination Committee thanks those who have offered their skills to serve the Standing Committees of the General Assembly through the nomination cycle of 2025/26. The Committee is pleased to report that it has been able to make nominations to fill most of the vacancies on Standing Committees. The Committee continues to keep its processes under review and, in the past year, it has updated the nomination application form and extended the deadline for applications. With the help of the EDI Group, an Equalities Monitoring Form has also been introduced to the nominations process. The Committee has met with Assembly Trustees to discuss the processes for making nominations to the Assembly Trustees Sub-Committees and it is hoped that discussions will continue during the coming year.

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, 11 vacancies remain unfilled on Standing Committees.

1.1.3 The Committee is grateful to the Communications Department for distributing two short videos to promote the work of the Nomination Committee on the Church of Scotland website and social media platforms.

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 As in previous years, the Committee held two main meetings during the year; an Autumn meeting to plan the nominations process of 2025/26, and a two-day meeting in February to make nominations.

1.2.2 Committee meetings in 2025/26 once again took place in a hybrid format in order to reduce costs and contribute to the General Assembly's strategy towards a Net Zero Pathway.

1.2.3 The Committee makes nominations through a combination of methods; principally through a careful consideration of the application forms received, along with the personal knowledge of the members of the Committee, and also through taking into account the particular needs of the various Standing Committees as expressed by their Conveners and Secretaries.

1.2.4 The Committee is grateful to the Assembly Trustees' liaison trustee for their presence at its meetings.

1.3 Appointments to Legal Bodies

1.3.1 The Committee also received names at its February meeting from the Convener of the Legal Questions Committee, Acting Principal Clerk and Depute Clerk.

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2. NOMINATIONS PROCESS FOR 2025/26

2.1 Applications

2.1.1 In 2025/26, a single closing date of 18 January 2026 was set and clearly communicated across the Church through emails, the Church website and social media channels.

2.1.2 The application form for 2025/26 was revised in a number of ways. To aid accessibility, the full form was made visible to applicants before they were required to begin completing the form. Applicants were also able to set out separately why they were seeking nomination for up to three Standing Committees. The Committee is continuing to monitor the impact of this change to the form, in that it appears to have a detrimental impact on the number of applicants allowing their names to be considered to serve on any Standing Committee, recognising that such willingness affords greater flexibility to the Committee and maximises the opportunity for applicants to be nominated for appointment to a Standing Committee. There was also a simplified application form for reappointments.

2.2 Equalities Monitoring Form

2.2.1 In its report to the General Assembly of 2025, the Committee said that it would consider the introduction of an Equalities Monitoring Form at the end of the application form. With the assistance of the EDI Group, for which the Committee is grateful, an Equalities Monitoring Form was included with the application form for 2025/26. The information generated can be found in Appendix 1.

2.3 Committee to Nominate the Moderator

2.3.1 The Committee is grateful to those selected by Presbyteries as possible nominees for the Committee to Nominate the Moderator who completed the application form as requested by the Nomination Committee. This form greatly aided the Nomination Committee in making nominations to reflect the diversity required by the General Assembly.

2.4 Faith Action Programme Leadership Team – Programme Groups

2.4.1 Discussions with FAPLT have identified a benefit in regularising the size of all the Programme Groups, to provide both increased continuity of membership and further opportunities for participation by those who are interested in serving. The Nomination Committee notes that a proposal in this regard is being brought by the Assembly Trustees in their report.

2.5 Ethical Oversight Committee

2.5.1 The Ethical Oversight Committee was established as a Standing Committee of the General Assembly in 2023. Its initial members were not appointed on a staggered basis, meaning that all members are due to retire at the General Assembly of 2026.

2.5.2 At the start of the February meeting of the Nomination Committee, it was not clear that there would be sufficient nominees to fill vacancies on the Ethical Oversight Committee. However, with thanks to the Convener who is willing to be reappointed for a further year, and to others willing to be appointed or reappointed, the Ethical Oversight Committee can continue to fulfil its remit.

2.5.3 However, the Committee invites the General Assembly to instruct the Assembly Trustees that, when any new Standing Committees are set up in future, there are staggered terms of membership from the outset to avoid this issue.

2.6 Appointment of Conveners and Vice-Conveners

2.6.1 The Nomination Committee is required to satisfy itself that an "open and transparent process" has been followed in respect of the appointment of Conveners and Vice-Conveners for all Standing Committees (Standing Order Schedule E.15).

2.6.2 The Nomination Committee itself undertook a search process for both a Convener and a Vice-Convener this year which included the intimation of the vacancy and opportunity for an expression of interest to all Committee members, and a robust interview conducted by a panel of three members of the Committee. The Committee then discussed fully each vacancy and the recommendation of the interview panel at a Committee meeting.

2.6.3 It would be very helpful to find out more about the processes followed by other Standing Committees for the appointment of Conveners and Vice-Conveners, to see whether it would be helpful for the Standing Orders of the General Assembly to be amended, and invites the General Assembly to instruct the Nomination Committee and Legal Questions Committee in this regard.

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3. FUTURE WORK

3.1 Nomination Processes

3.1.1 The Committee is committed always to keeping its processes under review and to making improvements wherever possible.

3.1.2 The Committee is aware that it has a larger membership than most other Standing Committees. Given the different ways in which it makes decisions about nominations, this larger membership may be required. However, the Committee plans to review its membership numbers during the coming year.

3.1.3 The Committee also hopes, with the assistance of the Legal Questions Committee, to introduce a process whereby any questions over the suitability or capacity of applicants to Standing Committees can be considered in an appropriate and confidential manner.

3.2 Assembly Trustees and Sub-Committees

3.2.1 The General Assembly of 2025 approved the following section of deliverance from the Nomination Committee:

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.

3.2.2 The Convener, Vice Convener and Secretary of the Nomination Committee met with the Convener and Vice-Convener of the Assembly Trustees in June 2025. The different processes for making appointments to the Assembly Trustees' Sub-Committees was discussed, and it was noted that there are different processes for each Sub-Committee. The Nomination Committee would welcome the continuation of these discussions, in order to ensure that the processes for these appointments are as streamlined as possible.

3.3 Social Care Council

3.3.1 The Nomination Committee notes the Social Care Council governance review and looks forward to working with the Council in collaboration with the Assembly Trustees to further the recommendations of the review.

3.4 Selection Committee

3.4.1 In the light of the four-day General Assembly in 2026, the Committee understands that the Assembly may be invited to amend its Standing Orders, so that instead of nominations to any new Standing Committee or Special Committee being made by a Selection Committee established for this purpose, that task may come to the Nomination Committee to carry out after the close of the Assembly. The Nomination Committee would be willing to take on that work if required, in accordance with guidelines to be provided by the Legal Questions Committee.

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4. APPOINTMENTS TO THE ASSEMBLY TRUSTEES AND SUB-COMMITTEES

4.1 Assembly Trustees

4.1.1 The Nomination Committee is satisfied that new appointments from 2026 being proposed by the Assembly Trustees have been selected in a fair and transparent manner.

4.2 Seeds for Growth Committee

4.2.1 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 from 2026 to the Seeds for Growth Committee was fair and transparent.

4.3 EDI Group

4.3.1 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 from 2026 to the EDI Group was fair and transparent.

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5. FACTS AND FIGURES

5.1 A total of 72 (2025: 54) proposed nominees were considered with several individuals proposed for more than one Standing Committee, and a further 20 (2025: 17) individuals agreeing to serve on various Legal Bodies.

5.2 From the online forms submitted, 36% (2025: 44%) heard about the nomination process through e-mail directly from the Nomination Committee, and 25% (2025: 20%) heard of the process through a member of the Nomination Committee or another Standing Committee. Others heard through their Minister, Session Clerk, Presbytery Clerk or Facebook.

5.3 Of the 46 people who applied to serve on Standing Committees as a new member, almost 76% (2025: 42% based on all applications (including reappointments) had not served on a General Assembly Committee in the past 10 years.

5.4 Of the nominees considered for new appointments, 48% (2025: 40% based on all applications not only new members) indicated that they would be willing to be considered for serving on any Standing Committee.

5.5 Of the application forms received for the 72 nominees considered, 36% (2025: 41%) came from Ministers, 11% (2025: 9%) came from Presbyteries, 42% (2025: 39%) came from the Standing Committee, 7% came from Standing Committee Support Staff (2025: N/A), and 4% (2025: 11%) came from Kirk Sessions.

5.6 Of the forms received, 14% were from applicants under the age of 45 (2025: 14%), 58% were in the age bracket 45-64 (2025: 58%), and 28% (2025: 28%) were 65 and over.

6. NOMINATIONS FOR APPOINTMENT TO STANDING COMMITTEES

6.1 The Nomination Committee recommends the following appointments:

** denotes a reappointment*

Assembly Business Committee

Vice-Convener Retiring Sheila Kirk
Vice-Convener Appointed James Teasdale (Glasgow: Eastwood)
Minister Retiring James Teasdale
Minister Appointed Anikó Schütz Bradwell (Lammermuir)
Elder Retiring Graeme Barrie
Elder Appointed Graeme Barrie* (Glasgow: Easterhouse)

Audit Committee

Convener Retiring Kenneth Baldwin
Convener Appointed Douglas Horn (West Calder and Polbeth) (1yr)
Members Resigning Barbara Finlayson, Douglas Horn
Member Appointed Malcolm Cutt (Edinburgh: Fairmilehead) (3yrs)

Chaplains to HM Forces Committee

Convener Retiring Andrew Tait
Convener Appointed Andrew Tait* (Tullibody: St Serf's) (1yr)
Minister Retiring William McLaren
Minister Appointed Craig Dobney (Comrie and Dundurn)

Committee to Nominate the Moderator

Ministers and Deacons Appointed Alistair Cumming (London: Crown Court), Alistair Drummond (Kilmuir and Logie Easter), Fraser Edwards (Innerleithen, Traquair & Walkerburn), Andrew Gardner (Dundee: Broughty Ferry), Alan Gibson (Motherwell: South), Gillian Paterson (Methil: Wellesley), Pamela Scott DCS (Lochgelly and Benarty: St Serf's), Dawn Westwood (Bathgate: Boghall)
Elders Appointed Robert Kinloch (Lomond), Isabel McDerment (Glasgow: Scotstoun), Andrew Morton (Lockerbie: Dryfesdale, Hutton, Corrie and Applegarth), Matthew Philip (Aberdeen: Springfield)

Ecumenical Relations Committee

Convener Retiring Ross Blackman
Convener Appointed Ross Blackman* (Hamilton: Old) (1yr)
Vice-Convener Retiring Pauline Weibye
Vice-Convener Appointed Conor Fegan (Edinburgh: The New Town)
Minister Resigning Conor Fegan
Ministers Retiring William McLaren, Eileen Miller
Minister Appointed Rhona Dunphy (Linlithgow and Avon Valley)
Members Appointed Andrew Morton (Lockerbie: Dryfesdale, Hutton, Corrie and Applegarth), David Neilson (Kirkmahoe)

Ethical Oversight Committee

Convener Retiring Valerie Brown
Convener Appointed Valerie Brown* (Williamwood) (1yr)
Ministers Retiring Jenny Adams, T Nigel Chikanya, Justin Taylor
Ministers Appointed Sarah Smith (Forthview), Justin Taylor* (Guernsey: St Andrew's in the Grange)
Member Resigned Julia Corcoran Jul 2025

Faith Action Programme

-Leadership Team

Depute Convener Appointed Jonathan Fleming (Greenock: Lyle Kirk) (2yrs)
Vice-Convener Resigned Emma Jackson Oct 2025
Vice-Conveners Retiring Alistair Cumming, Sally Sheail
Vice-Conveners Appointed Sarah Brown, Public Life and Social Justice Programme Group Leader (Aberdeen: St Machar's Cathedral), David Gray, Resource and Presence Programme Group Leader (Glasgow: Govan and Linthouse), Sally Sheail Nov 2025 Public Life and Social Justice Programme Group Leader (Fife: Forthview)
Minister Resigned Nathan McConnell Jan 2026
Minister Retiring Ibidun Daramola
Ministers Appointed Ibidun Daramola* (Foveran), Drausio Goncalves (Dundee: North East), Kay Haggarty (Edinburgh: South East)
Member Retiring Marie Locke
Ministers from Presbytery Retiring Peter Johnston, Graeme Wilson
Ministers from Presbytery Appointed Robert Allan (Falkirk: Trinity, Presbytery of Forth Valley and Clydesdale), Jonathan A Clipston (Brimmond, Presbytery of North East and Northern Isles), James McNay* May 2025 (West Kilbride, Presbytery of the South West), Dave Rankin* May 2025 (Perth: Riverside, Presbytery of Perth)
Member from Presbytery Retiring Frances Heafield
Members from Presbytery Appointed Lorraine Fraser* May 2025 (Dunfermline: Abbey, Presbytery of Fife), Frances Heafield* (Ettrick and Yarrow linked with Selkirk and Ashkirk, Presbytery of Lothian and Borders), Chris Mackintosh* May 2025 (Burnside Blairbeth, Presbytery of Glasgow)

-Mission Support Programme Group
Ministers Resigned Tony Foley Jun 2025, George Sneddon Nov 2025
Ministers Appointed Gillian Rooney (Giffnock Orchardhill linked with Glasgow Merrylea), Steven Sass May 2025 (Campbeltown: linked with Saddell and Carradale linked with Southend), Anne Stott (Perth: North)
Member Appointed Katie Hart Sep 2025 (Aberfeldy linked with Dull and Weem linked with Grantully, Logierait and Strathtay)
Members Retiring Katie Hart, John Hodge
Member Appointed Katie Hart* (Aberfeldy linked with Dull and Weem linked with Grantully, Logierait and Strathtay)

-People and Training Programme Group
Ministers Appointed Elijah Obinna (Carluke and Law), David Sutherland* (Glasgow: Hillington Park and Priesthill Trinity)
Ministers Retiring Irene Bom, David Sutherland
Member Resigned Lorna Laughland Jun 2025

-Presbytery and Partnership Support Programme Group
Minister Resigning Alistair May
Minister Retiring James Reid
Minister Appointed James Reid* (Burntisland and Kinghorn)
Member Retiring Daniel Gunn

-Public Life and Social Justice Programme Group
Minister Retiring John Ferguson
Member Retiring Aaran McDonald
Members Appointed Brian Drummond (Edinburgh: Pentlands), Elisabeth Manson (Carlingwark)

-Resource and Presence Programme Group
Minister Resigning David Gray
Ministers Retiring Timothy Mineard, Teri Peterson
Minister Appointed Teri Peterson* (Gourock: St John's)

Iona Community Board
Ministers Retiring Sarah Brown, Alan Miller
Ministers Appointed Alison Jaffrey (Auchterless and Auchaber), Bruce Sinclair (Glasgow: Blawarthill linked with Glasgow: Jordanhill linked with Glasgow: St Columba)

Legal Questions Committee
Minister Appointed Elspeth McKay (Huntly Strathbogie Drumblade)

Appointment to Legal Bodies

-Appeals Committee of the Commission of Assembly
Vice-Conveners Retiring Janet Foggie, J G Grahame Lees
Vice-Conveners Appointed Janet Foggie* (Eden Tay), J G Grahame Lees* (Dunblane Cathedral, Kilmadock and Blair Drummond)

-Discipline Tribunal
Conveners Retiring Roddy John MacLeod, Ian Miller
Conveners Appointed Ian Forrester (Brussels: St Andrew's), Kirsty Hood, Roddy John MacLeod* (Edinburgh: Greyfriars Kirk) (2yrs), Ian Miller* (Edinburgh: Corstorphine St Ninian's)
Vice-Convener Resigning Kirsty Hood
Vice-Convener Retiring Andrew Stevenson
Vice-Convener Appointed Andrew Stevenson* (Glasgow: Newlands South)

-Judicial Commission
Convener Retiring Richard McFarlane, Morag Ross
Convener Appointed Morag Ross* (Edinburgh: Portobello and Joppa)

-Judicial Panel
Elder Retiring Alan Cox
Elders Appointed Helen Dunn Jan 2026 (Houston and Killellan), Eunice McConnach (Aberdeen: Fountainhall)
Minister Appointed Philip Ziegler (King's College, Aberdeen)

-Ministries Appeal Panel

Vice-Convener Retiring Janet Mathieson
Vice-Convener Appointed Janet Mathieson* (Williamwood)

-Mission Plan Review Group
Ministers Retiring Neil Glover, Graham McWilliams, Alison Meikle
Ministers Appointed Neil Glover* (Aberfeldy linked with Dull and Weem linked with Grantully, Logierait and Strathtay), Graham McWilliams* (Cumbrae, Fairlie and Largs), Alison Meikle* (Grangemouth: Parkview)
Members Retiring David Alexander, David Brackenridge, Michael Cunliffe, J G Grahame Lees, David Menzies, David Robertson, Donald Thomas, David Watt, Raymond Young
Members Appointed David Alexander* (Uddingston: Viewpark), David Brackenridge* (Peebles: St Andrew's Leckie), Michael Cunliffe* (Edinburgh: The New Town), J G Grahame Lees* (Dunblane Cathedral, Kilmadock and Blair Drummond), David Watt* (Airdrie: The New Wellwynd), Raymond Young* (Perth: St Matthew's)

-Safeguarding Appeal Panel
Members Appointed Barbara Finlayson Sep 2025 (Edinburgh: The New Town), Shona Haldane Jan 2026 (Edinburgh: Wardie)

Nomination Committee
Convener Retiring Andrew Gardner
Convener Appointed Bryan Kerr (Kilmacolm)
Vice-Convener Resigning Bryan Kerr
Vice-Convener Appointed Jillian Storrie (Glasgow: Netherlee and Stamperland) (2yrs)
Ministers Retiring Hilary Beresford, Corne Randall
Ministers Appointed Pam Bellis (Penninghame), Joanne Foster (Loch Tay and Glenlyon linked with Rannoch), Julia Meason (Orkney Islands)
Member Resigned Ann Gammack Feb 2026
Member Resigning Jillian Storrie
Member Retiring Fiona Macdougall
Members Appointed Glenn Liddall (Edinburgh: Wardie), Fiona Macdougall* (Glasgow Castlemilk) (3yrs)

Presbytery Review Committee
Ministers Resigned Andrea Boyes Feb 2026, James Teasdale Dec 2025
Ministers Retiring Margaret Mateos, Fraser Penny
Minister Appointed Margaret Mateos* (Dunfermline: St Leonard's)
Member Resigned Pat Munro DCS Jul 2025
Members Retiring Sheila Nicoll, Douglas Vallance
Members Appointed James Houston (Stranraer), Jimmy Maxwell (Easter Ross Peninsula), Sheila Nicoll* (London: St Columba's) (3yrs), Alistair Walker (East Kilbride: Old) (3yrs)

Registration of Ministries Committee
Vice-Convener Retiring Hilary McDougall
Vice-Convener Appointed Alison Meikle (Grangemouth: Parkview)
Member Retiring Richard Henderson
Member Appointed Richard Henderson* (Edinburgh: Balerno)

Safeguarding Committee
Minister Retiring Malcolm Kinnear
Minister Appointed John Ferguson (Perth: North)
Member Resigned Corrine Morrison-Gillies Jun 2024
Member Appointed Eleanor Stenhouse (Lomond) (2yrs)

Social Care Council – CrossReach Board
Vice-Convener Retiring Douglas Hamilton
Vice-Convener Appointed Douglas Hamilton* (Traprain) (1yr)
Minister Resigned David Nicolson Aug 2025
Ministers Appointed Shaw Paterson (Strathaven: Trinity) (1yr), Catherine Rawlinson-Watkins (Edinburgh: Davidson's Mains)
Member Resigned Donald Carmichael Aug 2025
Member Retiring John Graham
Members Appointed Lynne Borland Sep 2025 (Leuchars: St Athernase and Tayport), Janine Glen (Airdrie: Jackson) (2yrs)

Theological Forum
Ministers Retiring Pamela Kennedy, Hector Morrison
Ministers Appointed Barbara Suchanek-Seitz (Ardrossan), Innes Visagie (Dingwall: Castle Street)
Member Retiring Andrew Torrance
Member Appointed Scott Spurlock (Stonehouse: St Ninian's)

In the name of the Committee

ANDREW GARDNER, *Convener*
BRYAN KERR, *Vice-Convener*
VICTORIA LINFORD, *Secretary*

Addendum

Rev Andrew Gardner, Convener
Andrew has brought many gifts and skills as a member, Vice-Convener and, since 2023, Convener of the Nomination Committee. As well as serving locally as an interim minister and parish minister, Andrew has been passionate about serving the national Church and enabling its Standing Committees to be populated with equally gifted and skilled people. His kindness both to members of the Nomination Committee and to applicants for vacancies in the various Standing Committees of the General Assembly has been notable, as has his commitment to see vacancies across the Church filled despite the challenges of a decline in Church membership. Andrew has graciously led the Nomination Committee through its own strategic review and as new structures have evolved throughout the Church. We wish Andrew well in his ongoing ministry.

BRYAN KERR, *Vice-Convener*
VICTORIA LINFORD, *Secretary*

APPENDIX 1

Equalities Monitoring

As part of the 2025–2026 nominations cycle, all individuals applying for committee positions were invited to complete an Equalities Monitoring Form. The purpose of collecting this information was to develop a clearer understanding of who within our Church is putting themselves forward for, and being appointed to, committees and forums. This benchmarking will help us identify any potential barriers within the nominations process and inform future outreach efforts. Over time, it may also highlight patterns in who is consistently opting out of deeper participation in the Church's governance. This data-gathering initiative reflects our commitment to strengthening diversity, equity, and meaningful participation across the Church's governance structures. This data will not be used to determine whether candidates are successful in an offer to a committee position. The Committee are grateful to the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Group of the Church for interrogating the data and providing the analysis.

Participation and Data Scope

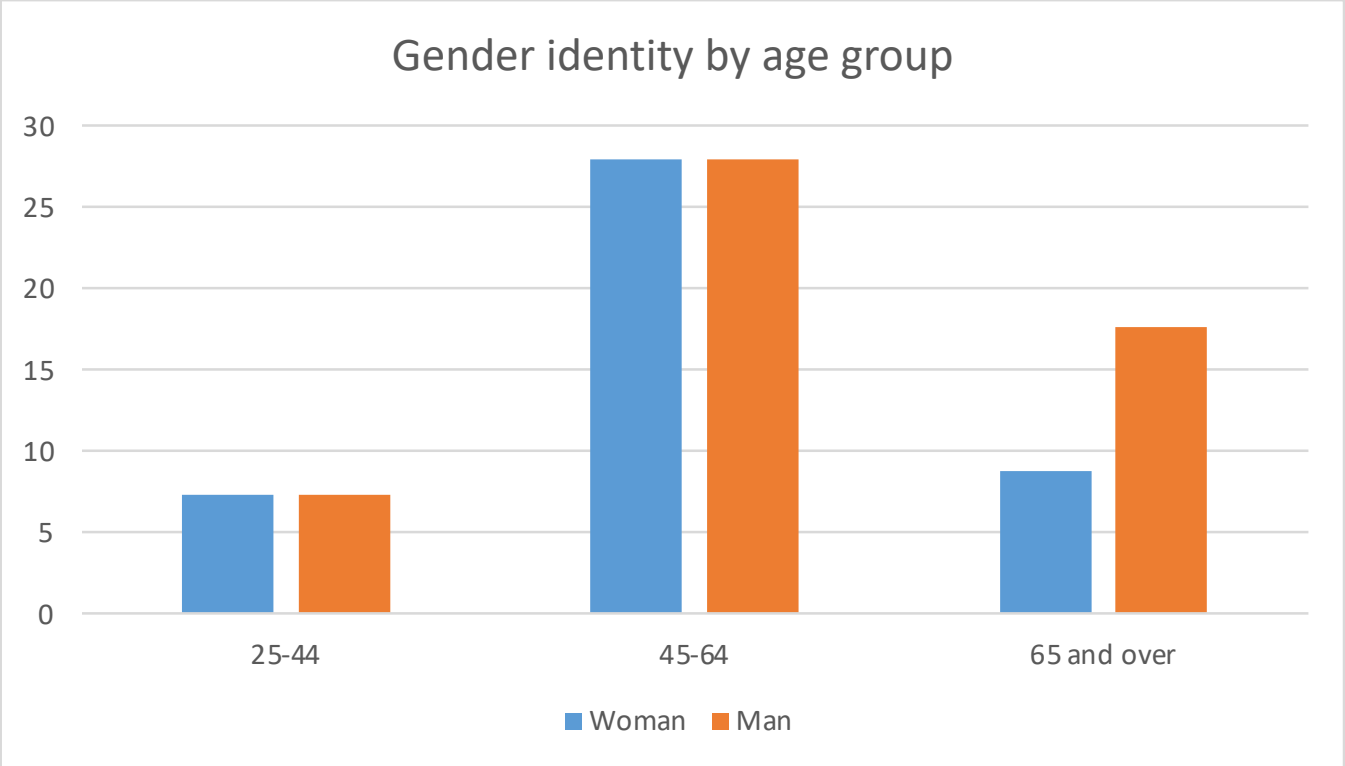
A total of 68 candidates completed the nominations process this year, with 60 candidates ultimately offered and appointed to committee roles. The EDI analysis in this paper refers to the full applicant group, rather than only those offered, to understand the diversity of the candidate pool as a whole. All collected data will be retained to monitor trends over time and to evaluate the success and inclusivity of future nomination cycles.

Due to the modest sample size in this first year of collection, it is not possible to publish all detailed demographic breakdowns without risking potential identification of individuals. However, each question has been reviewed, and the following narrative highlights the key themes and trends emerging from the data.

Gender identity by age groups

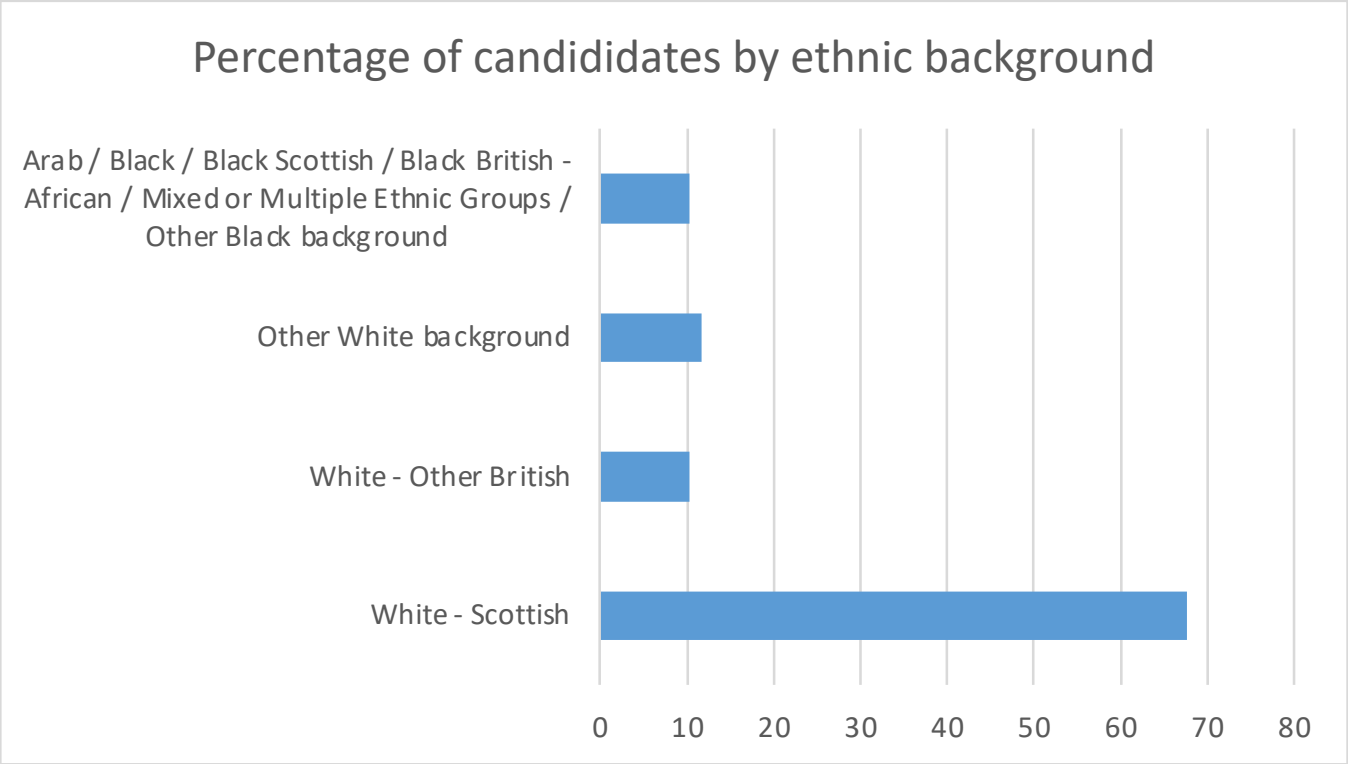
Applicants identified across a range of gender identities, with women and men forming the majority of responses. The gender balance, in the first two age groups aligns broadly with Census data 2022, with regards to gender responses. A small number of candidates responded with 'prefer not to say' and other gender identities which will not be published.

The candidate pool displayed strong representation in the older age brackets, particularly among individuals aged 45 and above. This aligns with historical patterns of committee participation and congregations. The majority of candidates, 57%, represent the 45-65 years group with equal representation from women and men.



Graph 1: Shows percentage of candidates responses by age group and gender. Prefer not to say and other gender identities are not included in the graphic due to risk of identification of individuals for the small data pool.

Ethnic and Cultural Backgrounds
The majority of applicants identified as White Scottish or White from other backgrounds, with smaller representation from Black, and other minority ethnic groups.



Graph 2: Shows percentage of candidates responses by ethnic background.

Disability, neurodiversity and caring responsibilities
A meaningful proportion of applicants, 15%, identified as having a disability, longterm health condition, or impairment. Responses included mobility, sensory, and long-term medical conditions, as well as mental health. Separately, over 10% of candidates identified as neurodivergent with under 65 year old age brackets increasing representation to 15% which is in line with Census data 2022. Candidates with caring responsibilities, 18%, represented a range of care for under 18 year olds, adults with disabilities and older adults.

Sexual Orientation
Of candidates, 88% reported their sexuality as heterosexual /straight. Prefer not to say and other sexualities represented the remaining candidates. This falls in line with Census data 2022.

SocioEconomic Background
Applicants reported diverse parental occupations at age 14, spanning senior professional roles, skilled trades, service roles, administrative work, and manual labour. This range suggests engagement from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds and will provide a valuable baseline for monitoring classbased diversity in future cycles.

Limitations; trends within data and small numbers
As this is the first year in which demographic information has been collected from those nominated, offered positions, and appointed within our nominating structure, it is not possible to identify or report on trends at this stage. It is hoped that trend data will become available in future years as further information is gathered.

The relatively small number of individuals nominated, and the slightly smaller number appointed, presents challenges associated with small data sets. In particular, there is a risk that individuals could be identifiable through the data.

As a result of these factors, there are limitations on what can appropriately be said about the information collected and reported. Small numbers, combined with the need to anonymise data where individuals might otherwise be identified, can lead to significant fluctuations in reported percentages across different demographic categories. Care has therefore been taken to avoid both inaccuracies and the reporting of potentially identifiable data. Consequently, only high-level information is presented in the Committee's report.

As data collection continues, and depending on how future data is used and what additional information is gathered, it is hoped that a more complete and robust picture of representation across the wider team, group, and committee structures of the General Assembly will be possible in due course.

CHURCH OF SCOTLAND PENSION TRUSTEES MAY 2026

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Approve the appointment of Gary Yeaman as Employer Nominated Trustee (ENT) of the Staff Scheme and Anne-Marie Gillon as ENT of the MDS and Ministers' Schemes *(Section 1.4.1)*.
3. Approve the re-appointment of Lin Macmillan as ENT of all three Schemes *(Section 1.4.1)*.
4. Note the transfer of the Schemes' administration to XPS Group and the move towards winding up the Schemes *(Section 3)*.

Executive Summary

Scheme funding: The Ministers' Scheme sections maintain strong funding levels (110-121%), whilst the Staff Scheme and MDS Scheme are now fully insured. All schemes are self-sufficient with no current requirement for funding from employing agencies.

Pension increases: Statutory increases of 3.8% (for benefits accrued 1997-2005) and 2.5% (for post-2005 benefits) were applied from 1 January 2026. The Ministers' Scheme provided discretionary increases of 3.8% (Main Fund) and 4.5% (Widows and Orphans Fund and Contributors Fund).

Investment strategy: The Ministers' Scheme maintains a low-risk strategy with full hedging against interest rate and inflation movements using gilts. The MDS and Staff Schemes purchased a bulk annuity policy with Just in December 2024, with surplus assets held in cash.

Trustee changes: John Montgomery passed away in February 2026, and Stuart Stephen resigned in November 2025. Gary Yeaman is proposed as Employer Nominated Trustee (ENT) for the Staff Scheme, and Anne-Marie Gillon as ENT for the MDS and Ministers' Schemes.

Scheme wind-up: The MDS and Staff Schemes gave notice to wind up at the end of March 2026, with the process expected to take 6-12 months. The Ministers' Scheme has commenced the process of moving to a bulk annuity policy, with eventual wind-up expected to take around two years.

Administration changes: Pension payments transferred to XPS Group in November 2025. The Pensions Administration Team will transfer from Church of Scotland employment to XPS Group on 1 April 2026 under TUPE regulations.

Report

1. BACKGROUND & STATISTICS

As at 31 December 2025, 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 4,300 members. This Report is made by the Trustees of each of those Schemes (the **"Trustees"**). As at 31 December 2025 the Trustees held, in aggregate, total assets of approximately £310 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 31/12/2024	Funding level at 31/12/2025
Ministers' Scheme, Main Pension Fund	**110%**	**110%**
Ministers' Scheme, Widows & Orphans' Fund	**118%**	**121%**
Ministers' Scheme, Contributors' Fund	**115%**	**113%**
Staff Scheme (CSC Section)	**N/A now fully insured**	**N/A now fully insured**
Staff Scheme (SCC Section)	**N/A now fully insured**	**N/A now fully insured**
MDS Scheme	**N/A now fully insured**	**N/A 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 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 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 2026, were 3.8% in respect of benefits accrued between 6 April 1997 and 5 April 2005 and 2.5% 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 3.8%.

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.

2026 Pension Increases

The Trustees of the Ministers' Scheme decided to implement increases as follows

- Ministers' Main Fund: 3.8% increase on pre-1997 pensionable service for all pensions in payment as at 1 January 2026
- Widows and Orphans' Fund: 4.5% increase on benefits as at 1 January 2026 for all deferred and pensioner members' benefits
- Contributors' Fund: 4.5% increase on benefits as at 1 January 2026 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 predominantly means holding assets which match the nature and duration of the Scheme's liabilities.

These matching assets are 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 maintain 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.

The investment managers had full discretion over voting rights for the stocks they held in the pooled funds on behalf of the Scheme during the year. The Scheme disinvested from the pooled funds that held stocks in July 2025, in line with the Trustees' de-risking strategy.

MDS and Staff Schemes

The investment strategy employed by the Trustees reflects the objectives of the Schemes.

In December 2024, the Schemes purchased a bulk annuity policy with the insurer 'Just'. At the time of the transaction, the Schemes 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.

As the Schemes invest in a cash fund, the Trustees retain no voting or engagement rights. The Trustees also had no voting or engagement rights in respect of the buy-in policy.

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 where a positive impact could be made. However, the Scheme disinvested from all growth assets during 2025 and therefore there is not deemed to be any notable ESG integration within the Scheme's investments. Nonetheless, during the year the Scheme held the Baillie Gifford Defensive Growth Fund and the Alliance Bernstein Sustainable All Market Portfolio which are both considered to be suitable and have achieved the highest ESG rating available, as assessed by the Scheme's Investment Advisers.

MDS and Staff Schemes

The Schemes bought a bulk annuity policy during 2024 with no attached voting rights. However, during the due diligence process for selecting an insurer, ESG was considered by the Trustees. The surplus assets from the buy-in have been held in cash since and with no voting rights attached, therefore have limited scope for any ESG integration.

1.3.2 Investment Markets

Ministers' Scheme

The Trustees, 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 Scheme to deviate significantly from the movement in the value of the liabilities. During 2025, the assets of the Scheme outperformed the liability value. The Scheme remained well funded at the year-end due to a combination of the liability hedging assets performing as designed and strong growth asset performance.

Throughout 2025, global markets were heavily influenced by ongoing geopolitical tensions, heightened trade disputes, and evolving monetary policies. Fortunately, given the low-risk investment strategy of the Scheme, these challenges were all managed and the funding level was protected by the interest rate and inflation hedging strategy of the Scheme.

The Scheme's 12% allocation to growth assets performed well over the first half of the year prior to disinvestment, with global equities once again rallying largely due to easing monetary policy and growth in US tech stocks, despite trade tensions causing a temporary market shock in April. Strong investor sentiment continued as the year progressed and improving corporate earnings growth saw strong performance across growth markets, such as global equities. In credit markets, credit spreads continued to tighten, and, across the UK and US, interest rates fell during the year, with the UK base rate falling from 4.75% to 3.75%.

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.

MDS and Staff Schemes

As the surplus invested assets are held in a single cash fund, ongoing investment risk is very low. The Statement of Investment Principles outlines how the residual risks are monitored and managed.

Throughout 2025, global markets were heavily influenced by ongoing geopolitical tensions, heightened trade disputes, and evolving monetary policies. Global equities rallied, largely due to easing monetary policy and growth in US tech stocks, despite trade tensions causing a temporary market shock in April. Strong investor sentiment continued as the year progressed and improving corporate earnings growth saw strong performance across growth markets. In credit markets, credit spreads continued to tighten.

As the Schemes' invested assets are in cash, it is primarily affected by changes in interest rates. Across the UK and US, interest rates fell during the year, with the UK base rate falling from 4.75% to 3.75%.

1.4 Changes in Trustees

1.4.1 Trustees

John Montgomery sadly passed away on 21 February 2026. The Trustees are greatly saddened by John's death and would like to express their thanks for his dedicated service and contribution as a Trustee to the Pension Schemes.

Stuart Stephen resigned as ENT of all three Schemes in November 2025 after 5 years of service. The Trustees are grateful for his dedicated service to the Pension Schemes.

We are pleased to propose the appointment of Gary Yeaman as ENT of the Staff Scheme and Anne-Marie Gillon as ENT of the MDS and Ministers' Schemes. Lin Macmillan has taken over the Trustee Chair role for the Ministers' Scheme and Ray Martin has taken over the Trustee Chair role for the MDS and Staff Schemes from Stuart Stephen.

We are still running with one vacancy for a Member Nominated Trustee (MNT) in the Ministers' Scheme and we have agreed, with confirmation from our legal advisers, that we will keep that vacancy open.

We are fortunate to be served by so many skilled and experienced people willing to serve in this way.

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2. PLANNING FOR FUTURE

MDS and Staff Schemes

As mentioned at 1.3, the assets of the Schemes are now held with the insurer "Just" in a bulk annuity policy. At the end of March 2026, the Trustees of the MDS and Staff Schemes gave notice to the relevant employers of each Scheme that they will wind up the Schemes. This involves transferring the policy with the insurer, into individual policies in the members' own names providing identical benefits to those under the Schemes. The Trustees will then distribute any remaining funds, after expenses, at their absolute discretion, to members and/or the employers. This process should take 6 to 12 months.

Ministers' Scheme

The Trustees of the Ministers' Scheme have commenced the process of moving the assets of the Scheme to a bulk annuity policy, in a similar manner to the action taken with the MDS and Staff Schemes last year. This involves a rigorous selection process to assess an appropriate insurer, including asking for tenders and interviewing a shortlist. Factors taken into consideration during this process include the necessity of maintaining member benefits with built-in annual increases and ensuring that members receive a good experience from the insurer in the future. In due course, it is anticipated that the Scheme will be wound up when the bulk annuity policy is moved into individual policies in the members' own names. This is likely to take around two years to complete.

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3. SCHEME ADMINISTRATION

3.1 Changes to the Administration

The Trustees of all the Schemes regularly review the administration to ensure that it is cost effective and fit for purpose. As a result of the review carried out in 2025, the Trustees decided to make significant changes to the administration. This was partly to address issues that would arise as the Schemes move towards wind-up, and partly to achieve some cost savings, which in turn would be passed on for the benefit of the Schemes' members.

3.1.1 Payroll and Accounts

In November 2025, payment of pensions to members was moved from the Church of Scotland payroll to XPS Group, who are currently the Actuarial and Investment Advisors to the Schemes. This will result in a substantial cost saving. Following the completion of the accounts for the year ending 31 December 2025, all the accounting procedures for the Schemes will also move to XPS.

3.1.2 Pensions Administration Team

The Trustees were mindful that the moves towards winding up all of the Schemes would have a significant impact on the staff of the Pensions Administration Team, who have up until this year been employed by the Church of Scotland, on behalf of the Pension Schemes, and who have been located in 121 George Street.

On the one hand the Trustees wished to retain the services of the highly experienced team until wind-up is completed. On the other hand, the Trustees recognised that wind-up would eventually mean that the services of the team would no longer be required and that the staff would face redundancy at that time.

Following discussions which took place between the Trustees, the staff team, and senior management from the Church of Scotland, it was agreed to approach XPS Group to ascertain if they would be willing to take on the employment of the staff and thus the complete administration of the Schemes until such time as wind-up takes place. XPS Group were pleased to agree to this proposal and therefore the staff will cease to be employed by the Church as of 31 March 2026 and will commence employment with XPS Group on 1 April 2026. The move will take place under Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations, which ensure that the staff maintain contractual rights and benefits. XPS Group has additionally indicated that as the work on the Church Schemes diminishes, the staff will be able to move to work on other Schemes administered by XPS, thus protecting their long-term employment prospects.

The Trustees would like to take this opportunity to thank the Church of Scotland for hosting the administration of the Schemes for many years, and also to wish the staff team well as they take up their employment with XPS Group.

3.1.3 Member Communications

Mailings to all Scheme members have been sent out to inform them of the above changes, particularly on the alterations as to how to contact the Administration Team. The Trustees will endeavour to ensure that members will continue to be informed at every stage as the moves to winding up the Schemes progresses.

The Trustees will continue to monitor the Team's performance on a regular basis, and welcome feedback from Scheme members on the service that they have received from the Team.

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4. GOVERNANCE

4.1 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 short topical sessions as part of quarterly meetings.

In the name of the Pension Trustees

RAY MARTIN, *Chair MDS and Staff Schemes, Vice-Chair Ministers' Scheme*
LIN MACMILLAN, *Chair Ministers' Scheme and Vice-Chair MDS and Staff Schemes*

CHALMERS LECTURESHIP TRUST MAY 2026

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Instruct the Trustees to bring before the General Assembly of 2027 detailed proposals for the Lectureship Cycle 2027-2031.

Points for Information

1. It is anticipated that the book from the 2022-2026 lecture series will be published in 2027. The provisional title is 'Defiant Hope: Theological Conversations in a Traumatised World'.

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.

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2. PUBLICATIONS

2.1 'Defiant Hope: Theological Conversations in a Traumatised World'

2.2.1 It is anticipated that the book from the 2022-2026 lecture series will be published by SCM Press in 2027. The provisional title is 'Defiant Hope: Theological Conversations in a Traumatised World'.

2.2.2 We have been provided with an overview of the book as follows:

'*This book is a theological dialogue on the nature of hope in a traumatised world. It is an adaption of material begun with the 2024 Church of Scotland Chalmers Lectures series, delivered by John Swinton and Katie Cross. Structured as a series of lectures and responses, it offers a dynamic conversation between two theologians grappling with the meaning of hope amidst suffering, lament, and presence. Rather than providing neat resolutions, this book invites the reader into a space of theological attunement—an ongoing, open-ended exploration of hope as an embodied, relational, and defiant practice.*

Through reflections on trauma, witness, friendship, and sacred attentiveness, the book resists superficial optimism in favour of a theology that acknowledges despair while remaining committed to the radical possibility of hope. Engaging with the theological traditions of lament, presence, and radical solidarity, this book is aimed at theologians, ministers, students, and anyone seeking to think deeply about faith's response to trauma. Its unique conversational format fosters reflective engagement, making it a valuable resource for both individual readers and study groups.'

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3. TRUSTEES

3.1 All Trustees, except for the Trustees *ex officiis* who are the Moderator and Clerks of the General Assembly and the Principals or Heads of the Colleges of Edinburgh, Glasgow, St Andrews and Aberdeen, complete their terms of office in May 2026. It has not been possible to finalise details of proposals for the appointment of new Trustees before this Report goes to print, but such proposals will be brought to the Assembly of 2026 via a notice of motion from the Chair containing the appropriate section of proposed deliverance.

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4. LECTURESHIP CYCLE 2027-2031

4.1 After the Assembly of May 2026, work will commence on scoping out proposals for the Lectureship Cycle 2027-2031.

In the name of the Trust

JOHN L McPAKE, *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 2025

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Appoint Rev Dr Karen Campbell and Mrs Deborah Zuckert as Trustees of the Church Hymnary Trust *(Section 4.2)*.

Report

1. CHURCH HYMNARY 4TH EDITION AND SUPPLEMENT

1.1 In the year to 30 September 2025 the sales of the various editions were as follows:-

Words:	62 units compared with 261 (2024)
Full Music Edition:	223 units compared with 358 (2024)
Melody Edition:	78 units compared with 269 (2024)
Large Print Edition:	187 compared with 230 (2024)
CD-Rom:	22 units compared with 21 (2024)
God Welcomes All	1038 units compared with 1277 (2024)
GWA words edition	898 units

1.2 The commission due to the Trust calculated in respect of the year to 30 September 2025 in respect of CH4 was £4,287.67 compared with £4,797.42 in the previous year. From this, royalties were paid to the authors of £5,456.04, the first £2,000 of which is met by the publishers with net commission due to the trust of £861.63.

2. CURRENT WORK

2.1 The Trustees are pleased to report that they agreed grants of £1,929 to a congregation for a large screen and associated equipment to aid hymn singing, £350 to a church choir for purchase of hymn books for annotation, and £2,730 to the Edinburgh Sacred Art Music Festival towards an event celebrating the 375 year anniversary of the Scottish Metrical Psalter. Applications for grants are actively encouraged.

3. FUNDING FOR PROJECTS

3.1 Funding is available for a range of different projects, provided they fall generally within the Trust purposes noted below. Informal 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 are:-

"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 and in the distribution and making available of the same in books, discs, electronically and in other media for use by the Church of Scotland ... 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 Three Trustees had indicated their intention to resign as Trustees, Marjorie Williamson and Reverend Joanne Hood with effect from September 2025 and Reverend Charles Robertson with effect from May 2026. Their resignations had been accepted with regret and they were warmly thanked for their service to the Trust. Reverend Charles Robertson is synonymous with church hymnody in Scotland and has been an active Trustee since 1989. His cheerful input into all aspects of trust work and in particular to CH4 at every stage of its compilation and publication had been invaluable. Marjory Williamson had been a trustee since 1991 and her financial acumen combined with her interest and involvement in church music had been greatly appreciated.

4.2 The Trustees propose that Reverend Dr Karen Campbell and Mrs Deborah Zuckert be appointed to be members of the Trust.

In the name of the Trustees

PHILIP H BRODIE, *Chair*
ANNE STEELE, *Secretary and Treasurer*

TRUSTEES OF THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND HOUSING AND LOAN FUND MAY 2026

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Re-appoint Mrs Barbara Finlayson as a Trustee of the Fund *(section 10.1).*

Points for Information

1. The Fund has a new Secretary, replacing Hazel Bett, who has retired, and two additional members of staff (section 9.1) who are helping roll out the Fund's energy efficiency and repairs programme.
2. The Fund remains in a strong financial position and was able to donate £2,650,000 at the start of 2026 to assist with the work of other parts of the Church *(Section 6.3)*

Executive Summary

The Trustees are pleased to report that the past year has been uneventful for the Housing and Loan Fund. It continues to provide assistance for those people who meet its eligibility criteria and are in need of help with housing, and to maintain its existing housing stock, all in accordance with its Constitution and relevant Legislation.

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. Potential applicants should contact the Secretary to discuss their situation and the assistance which may be available to them.

1.2 Help from the Fund takes one of two forms – either a house to rent or a loan to assist with a house purchase. The current maximum house purchase price, set in December 2025 is £280,000. 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 2025, of £196,000 for Shared Appreciation Loans and £50,000 for Standard Loans.

2. HOUSING TRANSACTIONS: 2025

2.1 Assistance provided during 2025 is detailed in Appendix 1. The property market varied both throughout the year and from place to place, with some prices being well above, and others at or below, valuation. That makes for uncertainty but as the Fund both buys and sells properties, it is not always bad news.

2.2 The Trustees owned 182 houses at the end of 2025, a decrease of 7 over the year. Appendix 2 shows the number of purchases and sales during the year, and the average prices paid or attained. At the end of 2025, 9 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 Although the Fund remains in a good financial position, rents had not been increased since 2013 which is not a position that could continue indefinitely. The Trustees therefore considered rental income and projected expenditure and decided that there should be a 3.8 % increase in rents for 2026/7. This is based on the RPI figure of 3.8% when the review was conducted.

3.3 Rental income has been sufficient to cover maintenance and repairs, though costs continue to rise. Routine visits to rental properties are carried out and reported maintenance work dealt with as expeditiously as possible.

4. LOAN TRANSACTIONS: 2025

4.1 The Fund provides loans by way of Standard Loans and Shared Appreciation Loans.

4.2 Standard Loans in 2025 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 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 £196,000. 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 2025, 11 loan visits were carried out.

4.4 Short Term Bridging Loans, granted for a specific period, and in specific circumstances, at the discretion of the Trustees, attracted a rate of interest 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 3.75%. The change in pension provider in 2025, and that provider's decision not to implement repayment mandates, meant that the Trustees had to consider whether Bridging Loans should still be offered. Taking account of the risks to the Fund, the need for good and prudent stewardship, advice from the Law Department and the relatively low numbers seeking Bridging Loan help, the Trustees decided that such loans would not be offered other than in rare and exceptional cases, and always at their discretion.

4.5 Details of each of the three types of loan outstanding as at 31st December 2025 are given in Appendix 3.

5. DONATIONS, BEQUESTS ETC.

5.1 The Trustees gratefully acknowledge donations, bequests and gifts received by the Fund during 2025, amounting in value to £30,980.

6. FUNDS

6.1 During 2025 the amount realised from sales of houses, net of the expenditure on house purchases, was £2,197,187. This substantial and unusual gain was due to two main factors: the sale of a large property originally bequeathed to the Fund, which realised just under £1 million, and a higher than usual number of sales - 21- compared to just 14 purchases. The net increase in long-term loans during 2025 was £102,500.

6.2 Investments at market value and cash deposits at 31st December 2025 amounted to £23,964,996. This is higher than the equivalent figure at the end of 2024. However, donations of surplus funds totalling £2,650,000 had been earmarked in 2025 for payment in January 2026, thus decreasing the Fund value to a similar level as at the end of 2024.

6.3 The donations of £2,650,000 comprised £2,000,000 to the Assembly Trustees and £650,000 to the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team. Of that latter 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 63 enquiries about assistance in 2025, with 17 new and 5 updated applications approved. Details of commitments for the next five years, and approved at 31st December 2025, 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 2025 and the number on the Preliminary Applications List for assistance can also be found there.

7.2 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.

7.3 In December 2025, 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 the Fund's resources, the Trustees agreed that the house purchase price limits for 2026 be increased. Thus, the maximum price for a house to rent increased by £10,000 to £280,000 and the maximum price, or value, of a house in respect of which a loan would be given increased to £280,000. 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 not always easy.

8.2 Work to increase the energy efficiency of the Fund properties continues. In 2025, solar panels were installed in 26 properties and new boilers in 18, with further such work being planned for 2026. In addition, at the end of 2025, 74 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.

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9. STAFF

9.1 There were various staff changes in the course of 2025, with the recruitment of Tom Hall as Building and Energy Efficiency Supervisor, Sausan Cameron as Property Administrator (part time) and Lynsey Orbegozo as Secretary, replacing Hazel Bett who had undertaken that role for 6 years.

9.2 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.

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10. MEMBERSHIP

10.1 Mrs Barbara Finlayson 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 Trustees and Secretary would be delighted to hear from anyone interested in becoming a future Trustee of the Fund.

In the name of the Committee

DOROTHY U ANDERSON, *Chair*
BRUCE H SINCLAIR, *Deputy Chair*
LYNSEY ORBEGOZO, *Secretary*

Appendix 1

Assistance provided	**2025**	**2024**	**2023**
Number of Ministers retiring*	35	36	48
Percentage assisted with a house to rent	26%	6%	17%
Percentage assisted with a house purchase loan	6%	8%	6%
Total percentage assisted	32%	14%	23%
Instances of assistance provided*	**2025**	**2024**	**2023**
Retiring Ministers	11	5	14
Ministers already retired	6	3	2
Widow(er)s & Civil Partners	2	4	1
Spouses	2	0	0
Total	21	12	17

** Assistance may be provided in a different calendar year to that in which the Minister actually retires*

Tenants as at 31st December	**2025**	**2024**	**2023**
Ministers	107	104	115
Widow(er)s & Civil Partners	50	53	51
Spouses	14	12	12
Commercial rental	2	2	2
Vacant	9	18	8
Borrowers as at 31st December	**2025**	**2024**	**2023**
Ministers**	62	61	62
Widow(er)s & Civil Partners	35	37	36
Spouses	0	0	0

***2 Borrowers have dual loans*

Appendix 2

Rental Housing			
	2025	**2024**	**2023**
Total number of houses owned at 1st January	189	188	185
Houses purchased during year	14	8	12
Total cost of purchases	£3,146,871	£1,541,121	£2,703,418
Average house price	£224,777	£192,640	£225,285
Houses sold during year	21	8	9
Total amount realised	£5,344,058	£1,728,500	£1,960,310
Average proceeds	£254,479	£216,062	£217,812
Houses bequeathed/gifted during year	0	1	1
Houses relet during year	3	0	1
Total number of houses owned at 31st December	182	189	188
Average market rent of property purchased during year	£11,764	£11,212	£10,520
Average rent of new tenancies – Ministers/Spouses	£5,882	£5,606	£5,260
Average rent of new tenancies – Widow(er)s	£2,941	£2,803	£2,630

Appendix 3

Housing Loans			
	2025	**2024**	**2023**
Long term loans outstanding at 1st January	100	100	101
Value of loans outstanding	£6,333,050	£6,232,750	£6,191,250
New loans granted during year	4	4	2
Value of loans granted	£540,000	£328,300	£195,000
Loans fully repaid during year	7	4	3
Loans partially repaid during year	0	0	0
Value of loans repaid	£437,500	£228,000	£153,500
Long term loans outstanding at 31st December	97	100	100
Value of long-term loans outstanding	£6,435,550	£6,333,050	£6,232,750
Short term Bridging Loans outstanding at 1st January	0	0	0
Value of Bridging Loans outstanding	£0	£0	£0
Bridging loans granted during year	0	1	3
Value of Bridging Loans granted	-	£49,575	£175,280
Bridging loans repaid during year	0	1	3
Value of Bridging Loans repaid	-	£49,575	£175,280
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	**2025**	**2024**	**2023**
For next 5 years			
Houses to rent	11	20	15
Housing Loans	6	6	5
Value of outstanding commitments	£3,882,000	£6,219,296	£4,581,150
Preliminary Applications	**2025**	**2024**	**2023**
For those retiring between 5 - 10 years	2	2	2

CHURCH OF SCOTLAND INVESTORS' TRUST MAY 2026

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Approve the re-appointment of Mr R Black and Mr G Young as member of the Investors Trust from 1 June 2026.
3. Approve the appointment of Mr G Anderson as a member of the Investors Trust from 1 June 2026.
4. Receive the Annual Report and Financial Statements of the Investors Trust for 2025.

Executive Summary

The Church of Scotland Investors Trust presents its report to the General Assembly, documenting a year of strategic restructuring and resilient financial results. In 2025, the Investment Manager was replaced on the Growth Fund, from Newton Investment Management to Wellington Management and M&G Investments. This transition, completed in November 2025, coincided with the withdrawal of the Consolidated Stipend Fund, leading to a reduction in total net assets from £569.2 million to £498.7 million.

Financial performance remained strong despite a volatile global landscape characterised by geopolitical uncertainty and a sharp market sell-off in April 2025 triggered by new US trade tariffs. As inflationary pressures eased, the Bank of England lowered interest rates from 4.75% to 3.75%, yet the Trust's portfolios remained robust. The Income Fund was a particular highlight, delivering a total return of 8.97% and continuing its decade-long trend of outperforming its benchmark. The Deposit Fund also proved effective, yielding an average interest rate of 4.23%, which successfully exceeded the falling base rates. While the Growth Fund experienced moderate underperformance during the management transition, unit prices ultimately increased by year-end, reflecting the broader recovery of global stock markets.

In accordance with the terms of the Constitution, the Trust seeks the re-appointment of Mr R Black and Mr G Young, while recommending the new appointment of Mr G Anderson, all effective from June 2026. We also express profound gratitude to Mr R Burgon for his distinguished service as he retires from his role.

Report

The Church of Scotland Investors Trust, which was established by the Church of Scotland (Properties and Investments) Order Confirmation Act 1994, submits its thirty first 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; and 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 At the end of 2024, the Trustees completed their review of the investment management arrangements for each of the three COSIT funds. While no changes were made to the managers of the Income Fund (Royal London Asset Management) and the Deposit Fund (Thomas Miller Investments), the decision was taken to replace Newton Investment Management with two managers: Wellington Management will manage an equity portfolio and M&G Investments a multi-asset credit portfolio. The process of transitioning to these new management arrangements took longer than anticipated but was completed in early November 2025.

1.5 The withdrawal of the investments in the Growth Fund related to the Consolidated Stipend Fund which was reported in last year's Report was carried out alongside the transition to the new managers. The Trustees are grateful to the General Trustees for their cooperation in this process.

2. ENVIRONMENTAL, SOCIAL AND GOVERNANCE (ESG) 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, oil and gas, and recreational cannabis. Although the wider ESG field has seen a softening in attitudes towards armament makers as governments have increased defence spending in the face of growing threats, COSIT has no investments in that area. 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 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, though progress is being made.

2.2 The Trust is a member of the Church Investors Group (CIG), an ecumenical grouping of investment bodies charged with investing funds for churches and church-linked organisations in the UK and Europe. CIG offers an opportunity for faith-based investors to share good practice, produces research and develops investment policies which are consistent with the Christian faith. Through its co-operation with other ESG organisations and through its own activities, CIG is able to exert significant influence on corporate behaviour. COSIT is represented on the Board of CIG by its Chair, Dr John Millar.

2.3 Three COSIT trustees have continued to participate in the work of the Ethical Oversight Committee (EOC) which is discussed in the Deliverance from the EOC, and COSIT is enacting a number of policy measures which have been recommended by the EOC, for example on voting.

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3. INVESTMENT PERFORMANCE AND OUTLOOK

3.1 Despite continuing geopolitical volatility and economic uncertainty, global stock markets performed well in 2025. In the UK, the FTSE 100 index rose 21.5%, the largest increase since 2009, with the wider MSCI World Index rising by a similar amount. This was despite a sharp sell-off in April after President Trump's introduction of high tariffs on imports to the United States. With inflationary pressures easing and economic growth lacklustre, central banks continued to cut interest rates, with the Bank of England base rate falling from 4.75% at the end of 2024 to 3.75% at the end of 2025. Against this backdrop, both the Growth Fund and the Income Fund saw increases in unit prices.

3.2 The total net value of funds due to investors was £498.7 million at 31 December 2025, down from £569.2 million at 31 December 2024 due to the withdrawal of the Consolidated Stipend Fund's assets from the Growth Fund.

Growth Fund (£237.1 million (2024 £342.4 million))

3.3 As noted above, the Growth Fund was solely managed by Newton Investment Management until the beginning of September, when the transition to the new management arrangements started. From early November, the Growth Fund has been managed by a combination of Wellington Management (equities) and M&G Investments (multi-asset credit) on an initial 70:30 split. The change in managers during the year makes comparisons against the benchmark more difficult, but the period during which Newton managed the Fund was again characterised by moderate underperformance of the benchmark.

3.4 The income payable to investors in respect of Financial Year 2025 was 13p per unit (2024 13.5p).

Income Fund (£88.4 million (2024 £85.5 million))

3.5 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 8.97% (2024: 6.81%) against the composite benchmark return of 6.90% (2024: 1.71%). This marked another year of outperformance and the Fund remains ahead of its benchmark over every period since the appointment of Royal London in February 2012.

3.6 The total income distribution to investors for 2025 was 60p per unit, the same level as in 2024.

Deposit Fund (£173.2 million (2024 £141.3 million))

3.7 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. The Fund has seen substantial inflows in the last two years, and the list of deposit-taking institutions has been expanded. The average rate of interest paid by the Fund in 2025 fell as UK interest rates were cut by 1 percentage point over the course of the year, though the manager has still been able to place deposits at rates slightly higher than base rates.

3.8 The average annual rate of interest paid for 2025 was 4.23% (2024: 5.09%).

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4. MEMBERSHIP

4.1 In accordance with the terms of the Constitution, the following members are due to retire by rotation at 31 May 2025: Mr R Black and Mr G Young.

4.2 Mr Black and Mr Young have indicated that they wish to seek re-election. It is recommended to the General Assembly that Mr Black and Mr Young should be reappointed as from 1 June 2026.

4.3 Having stepped down as Chair in May 2025, Mr Robert Burgon will retire as a trustee in May 2026. Robert has served with diligence and distinction, and we are grateful for everything that he has done.

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5. ANNUAL REPORT AND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR 2025

5.1 Copies of the 2025 Annual Review and the Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year to 31 December 2025 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

J MILLAR, *Chair*
A RICHMOND, *Vice-Chair*
J LEE, *Executive Officer*

DELEGATION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY MAY 2026

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

1. REPORT

1.1 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. 59 congregations adopted the Unitary Constitution in 2025 compared to 97 in 2024. Since 2004, the Unitary Constitution has been issued to 1,100 congregations.

1.2 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

JOHN L McPAKE, *Chair*
MARY E MACLEOD, *Secretary*

ETHICAL OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE MAY 2026

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Commend the documents: Proxy Voting Policy (Appendix 1), AI Ethical Investment Guidelines (Appendix 2) and Asset Manager Assessment for Compliance with Church of Scotland Ethical Investment Guidelines – Phased Implementation Proposal (Appendix 3), to be used by all those investing within the Church of Scotland, nationally, regionally and locally *(Section 2)*.

Executive Summary

The EOC is sharing a set of resources to help those who invest for the Church to be well prepared in engaging with investment managers. The Proxy Voting Policy is grounded around the Five Marks of Mission and the conviction that investments must reflect our commitment to proclaim the gospel, nurture communities, serve human need, challenge injustice, and safeguard creation. The policy on Artificial Intelligence, recognises that AI is now in widespread use and offers some parameters for consideration within the investment industry. The Annual Asset Manager Assessment of Compliance helps investors to evaluate how asset managers are implementing the Church's Ethical Investment Guidelines in their investment activities.

Report

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Ethical Oversight Committee exists to support the whole Church – nationally, regionally, and locally – 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 we have worked with FaithInvest to develop a set of resources for the Church of Scotland Investors' Trust (COSIT) and other parts of the church to use with Investment Managers.

2. DOCUMENTS

2.1 Proxy Voting Policy

To go alongside this, we have also developed a Proxy Voting Policy. One of the things this General Assembly has repeatedly talked about is engagement and how effective that could be. We have now put in place a clear set of guidelines that are grounded around the Five Marks of Mission and the conviction that investments must reflect our commitment to proclaim the gospel, nurture communities, serve human need, challenge injustice, and safeguard creation. Asset managers engaged by COSIT are expected to make best efforts to vote in accordance with these guidelines whilst exercising appropriate professional judgement and upholding their fundamental fiduciary duties. We recognise that asset managers must ultimately act in the best financial interests of the Church of Scotland. When circumstances arise where adhering to these guidelines would conflict with prudent investment principles or fiduciary responsibilities, asset managers should inform COSIT of such situations, provide clear rationale for divergent voting decisions, and engage in constructive dialogue about how to balance the Church's values-based objectives with sound stewardship of financial resources. This approach maintains the Church's witness whilst respecting the professional expertise and legal obligations of our investment partners.

2.2 Artificial Intelligence

The EOC spent time considering the use of Artificial Intelligence, AI, and we are bringing a draft AI policy to the General Assembly, recognising that there is a lot more work to be done in this area and that this is a document that will evolve. This policy is based on the Church of Scotland's Society, Religion and Technology report on AI and the Church of England's AI report. Clearly AI is now in widespread use and eliminating it from the portfolio would be all but impossible, however we do need to consider how AI is being used and try to give Investment Managers clear and workable parameters to ensure that where AI cuts across established General Assembly principles, they are able to respond to that. We are not looking to prohibit investment in companies who are ensuring robust AI ethical oversight, but where companies are using AI without the necessary governance in place, or using AI for weapons manufacturing, or to replace human labour, or in other ways that dehumanise or cause harm, then we would be looking to ensure investment managers were clear that the Church would be unhappy with that.

2.3 Annual Asset Manager Assessment of Compliance

The Annual Asset Manager Assessment of Compliance is a questionnaire that COSIT will work with the Investment Managers to complete. This will allow COSIT to evaluate how asset managers are implementing the Church's Ethical Investment Guidelines in their investment activities. It will allow COSIT and the EOC to see how our policies are being implemented, where Investment Managers are struggling, what success we have had in making investments more ethical, and what room there is for improvement year on year. There will be a phased approach to this, giving the Investment Managers time to familiarise themselves with the priorities of the Church.

2.4 These documents were produced alongside COSIT and largely for COSIT to engage with, however we encourage all parts of the church, locally and nationally, who hold investments to consider using these documents as guidance.

3. OTHER MATTERS

3.1 One of the issues that has been brought to the EOC by a Presbytery is that of not investing in armaments, whilst as a Church commending those who support the armed services. The EOC and COSIT have looked at this and, with the support of FaithInvest, reviewed what other churches are doing. Whilst there is an opening up of ESG investing to include some weapons manufacturing, especially after the invasion of Ukraine, most churches are holding with their blanket exclusions or ensuring that their exposure sits below the 10% threshold. Whilst we are not a pacifist church, the question of how we derive profit is what we have considered. It is General Assembly policy that we don't invest in armaments, tobacco, alcohol, pornography, gambling or fossil fuels because of the harm they do to people and planet. That does not prevent us individually or corporately from engaging with these sectors, but it does prevent the Church of Jesus Christ profiting from them.

3.2 Once again, we acknowledge that what COSIT is doing now is good, and the task of EOC is to work with COSIT in support of a trajectory which will make it better. In this way these documents are part of a trajectory of travel, they are not something to limit the work of COSIT. It is not envisaged that all 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.

3.3 The EOC is currently made up of seven members. There are four members appointed by the Nomination Committee, including the chair, three representatives of COSIT, and one from the General Trustees. In its work, the EOC has been supported by staff from FaithInvest, who have been able to bring broader research from the Faith Consistent Investment community internationally into the EOC. 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 Ethical Oversight Committee

VAL BROWN, *Convener*
IAN W ALEXANDER, *Secretary*

Appendix 1

Proxy Voting Policy

Preamble

The Church of Scotland ("Church") exists to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ, and our financial and investment activities are an integral part of our mission and faith expression. The Ethical Oversight Committee (EOC) seeks to ensure that proxy voting reflects the Church's holistic commitment to the Five Marks of Mission. This includes not only stewardship and peace, but also the promotion of digital equity, health justice, and educational inclusion. The EOC recognises that proxy voting represents one of the most important tools available to influence corporate governance and business practices in alignment with our faith values and to promote long-term shareholder value creation.

Proxy voting provides an important mechanism for addressing systemic risks that threaten sustainable value creation. Shareholder resolutions often highlight risks associated with short-term profit maximisation strategies that can undermine long-term business sustainability, stakeholder relationships, and ultimately shareholder value. By supporting proposals that encourage long-term thinking and responsible business practices, proxy voting helps align corporate behaviour with both our faith values and sound investment principles.

This proxy voting policy provides guidance to the Church of Scotland Investors Trust (COSIT) and its asset managers for exercising voting rights on behalf of the Church's investment funds. These guidelines are advisory in nature and complement our Ethical Investment Guidelines approved by the General Assembly.

Asset managers engaged by COSIT are expected to make best efforts to vote in accordance with these guidelines whilst exercising appropriate professional judgement and upholding their fundamental fiduciary duties. We recognise that asset managers must ultimately act in the best financial interests of the Church of Scotland and its affiliates. When circumstances arise where adhering to these guidelines would conflict with prudent investment principles or fiduciary responsibilities, asset managers should inform COSIT of such situations, provide clear rationale for divergent voting decisions, and engage in constructive dialogue about how to balance the Church's values-based objectives with sound stewardship of financial resources. This approach maintains the Church's witness whilst respecting the professional expertise and legal obligations of our investment partners.

Philosophy and Principles

Our proxy voting decisions are guided by our commitment to the Five Marks of Mission and seek to promote:

- **Tell** – Proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom: Supporting companies with ethical communications and community engagement
- **Teach** – Teach, Baptise, and Nurture New Believers: Encouraging companies that prioritise education, training, and capacity building
- **Tend** – Respond to Human Need by Loving Service: Promoting companies that protect human dignity, labour rights, and social inclusion
- **Transform** – Challenge Injustice and Pursue Peace: Supporting social justice, equity, and nonviolence while opposing systems that perpetuate inequality
- **Treasure** – Safeguard Creation and Sustain the Earth: Prioritising environmental stewardship and the integrity of creation

These principles are to be interpreted dynamically as new societal and environmental challenges emerge. Asset managers are expected to respond to both longstanding and emerging systemic risks, such as digital misinformation, biodiversity loss, and racial inequity.

We recognise that proxy voting provides an opportunity to engage constructively with companies to promote positive change consistent with our faith values and mission.

Governance Principles

Director Election Resolutions

Board Independence and Effectiveness

- Support proposals requiring boards to be at least two-thirds independent
- Support annual election of all directors
- Support separation of CEO and Board Chair roles to ensure independent oversight
- When there are concerns about board effectiveness or independence, vote against the chair of the board first; if no progress is made, consider escalating by voting against additional directors

Board Diversity

- Support proposals requiring disclosure of board diversity characteristics
- Support directors who demonstrate commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion
- For UK companies, expect boards to meet Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) diversity targets:
  - At least 40% of the board are women (including those self-identifying as women)
  - At least one senior board position (Chair, CEO, Senior Independent Director-SID, or CFO) held by a woman
  - At least one member from a non-White ethnic minority background
- Consider voting against nominating committee members at companies that fail to meet these standards or provide adequate explanation for their diversity approach

Director Accountability and Attendance
- Consider voting against directors who fail to attend at least 75% of board meetings without justification
- Consider voting against directors at companies with poor environmental, social, or governance practices
- Support proposals requiring director candidates to have relevant skills and experience
- Consider voting against directors who are "overboarded" (holding excessive mandates that may compromise their ability to fulfil duties effectively)

Director Responsiveness to Shareholders
- When 20% or more votes have been cast against board recommendation on a resolution, expect the company to explain its response and address shareholder concerns
- Consider voting against the chair when management closes issues that received substantial shareholder support without adequate response
- Consider voting against directors where there has been an unsatisfactory outcome to sustained engagement on issues within their responsibility

Companies with Controlling Shareholders
- Where a controlling shareholder holds 30% or more of voting rights, assess whether the proportion of board directors connected to that shareholder is appropriate
- Consider voting against the chair if both the chair and senior independent director are connected to a controlling shareholder

Board Committee Considerations
Nominations Committee
- The nominations committee is responsible for board composition and diversity
- Consider voting against nominations committee members where board diversity targets are not met without reasonable explanation
- Support nominations committee approaches that prioritise skills, experience, and diversity

Audit Committee and Auditor Independence
Audit Committee Responsibilities
- The audit committee is responsible for areas within its control, including auditor independence, tenure, and conflicts of interest. The audit committee is not responsible for the content and quality of accounts, which remains the auditor's responsibility.
- Support audit committees composed entirely of independent directors
- Support proposals requiring audit committee financial expertise
- When there are concerns about auditor independence or tenure, consider voting against the chair of the audit committee first, with potential escalation to other committee members if concerns persist

Auditor Appointments
- Support auditor appointments when auditors demonstrate independence and competence
- Consider opposing auditor appointments when:
  - Non-audit fees exceed audit fees without reasonable explanation
  - Auditor tenure raises independence concerns without adequate safeguards
  - Auditors have been involved in accounting irregularities or material weaknesses
  - Alternative dispute resolution procedures limit auditor accountability
- Support auditor rotation as a mechanism to enhance independence while balancing efficiency considerations

Remuneration Committee
Performance-Based Compensation
- Support compensation plans clearly linked to long-term company performance (ideally 5-7 year timeframes)
- Support inclusion of material environmental, social, and governance (ESG) metrics in executive compensation
- Oppose excessive compensation packages that are not aligned with performance or stakeholder value
- Consider voting against remuneration committee members where executive salary increases significantly exceed average employee increases without justification

Transparency and Fairness
- Support proposals requiring disclosure of CEO pay ratios
- Support proposals addressing gender and racial pay equity
- Oppose tax gross-ups and excessive severance packages
- For UK companies in the MSCI UK IMI, expect Living Wage Accreditation

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Shareholder Rights
Voting Rights and Access
- Support one-share, one-vote principle
- Support majority voting for director elections
- Support reasonable proxy access provisions for long-term shareholders
- Support shareholders' right to call special meetings

Environmental and Climate Priorities
Given the Church's strong commitment to climate stewardship, we place particular emphasis on environmental matters:

Climate Action
- Support proposals requiring companies to set science-based emissions reduction targets aligned with limiting global warming to 1.5°C
- Support proposals requiring disclosure of climate risks and transition plans consistent with the Paris Agreement
- Support proposals requesting companies to align their business strategies with net-zero emissions by 2050
- Consider voting against directors at companies failing to establish adequate climate action plans, particularly at high-emission companies

Environmental Disclosure and Management
- Support proposals requiring comprehensive environmental impact reporting
- Support proposals promoting renewable energy adoption and energy efficiency
- Support proposals addressing water stewardship, waste reduction, and biodiversity protection
- Support proposals opposing environmentally harmful practices such as deforestation
- Support proposals requiring biodiversity impact assessments and nature-related risk disclosures
- Support proposals promoting circular economy initiatives and waste reduction
- Support proposals addressing plastic pollution mitigation and toxic chemical phase-out timelines
- Support independent climate expertise on company boards
- Support climate lobbying disclosures and alignment with Paris Agreement goals

Just Transition
- Support proposals ensuring that climate transitions consider impacts on workers and communities
- Support proposals requiring companies to invest in retraining and support for affected workers

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Social Responsibility
Human Rights and Labour
- Support proposals requiring human rights impact assessments
- Support proposals promoting fair labour practices and living wages across global supply chains
- Support proposals addressing modern slavery and supply chain transparency
- Support proposals promoting workplace safety and worker rights

Community Impact
- Support proposals encouraging corporate responsibility to local communities
- Support proposals addressing access to essential services and products
- Support shareholder resolutions requiring pandemic preparedness and healthcare accessibility, especially in low-income countries
- Support proposals addressing drug pricing transparency and ethical pharmaceutical practices

Financial Services
- Support proposals on responsible lending, financial inclusion, and anti-predatory lending practices

Operations in Conflict-Affected Regions
- Consider case-by-case support for proposals relating to operations in conflict-affected regions, including the Occupied Palestinian Territory
- Support enhanced due diligence in conflict zones and high-risk jurisdictions

Technology, Ethics, and Digital Inclusion
- Support proposals addressing algorithmic bias, AI governance, and ethical use of technology
- Support content moderation policies that balance free expression with public harm mitigation
- Support proposals promoting digital inclusion and bridging the digital divide

Diversity and Inclusion
- Support proposals promoting workplace diversity and inclusion
- Support proposals addressing discrimination and promoting equal opportunities
- Support proposals requiring diversity reporting and targets

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Peace and Security
Consistent with our commitment to peace building:
- Oppose proposals that would expand involvement in weapons manufacturing
- Support proposals encouraging companies to withdraw from conflict zones where appropriate
- Support proposals promoting peaceful resolution of conflicts
- Support proposals recognising and protecting Indigenous land rights, especially where corporate activities intersect with sacred lands
- Support transparency and responsible sourcing of conflict minerals
- Consider case-by-case proposals relating to companies with defence-related activities

Implementation Guidelines

Asset Manager Responsibilities

Asset managers are expected to:

- Vote in accordance with these guidelines while exercising appropriate judgement
- Provide regular reporting on proxy voting activities and alignment with these principles
- Engage with companies on material ESG issues prior to and following proxy votes
- Consult with COSIT when facing complex voting decisions not clearly addressed by these guidelines
- Recall lent shares for key ESG votes where Church priorities are implicated
- Engage in or support shareholder resolutions where corporate behaviour conflicts repeatedly with Church values

Case-by-Case Considerations

For proposals not specifically addressed in these guidelines, asset managers should consider:

- Alignment with the Five Marks of Mission
- Consistency with our Ethical Investment Guidelines
- Potential impact on long-term stakeholder value
- Company's track record on ESG issues
- Materiality of the issue for the specific company and sector

Engagement and Dialogue

We encourage asset managers to:

- Engage with companies before and after shareholder meetings
- Support shareholder resolutions that promote positive change consistent with our values
- Collaborate with other faith-based and responsible investors when appropriate
- Provide clear rationale for voting decisions, particularly on contentious issues
- Default to supporting shareholder resolutions filed by Principles for Responsible Investment (PRI) signatories, unless there are compelling reasons to the contrary

Reporting and Review

Regular Reporting

Asset managers shall provide COSIT with:

- Annual reports on proxy voting activities, engagement activities and outcomes
- Notification of any votes cast contrary to these guidelines with rationale
- Proxy voting disclosures that include explanations for contentious or high-impact votes
- Engagement reports that track outcomes and escalation steps taken

Annual Review

The EOC will:

- Review these guidelines annually concurrent with our Ethical Investment Guidelines review
- Assess effectiveness in promoting our mission objectives
- Update guidelines as new issues emerge that impact our faith values
- Report to the General Assembly on proxy voting activities and outcomes
- Include annual reflection on how proxy votes aligned with each of the Five Marks of Mission

Items for Future Consideration

1. The EOC may consider adding the following provisions in future policy revisions:
2. Specific overboarding thresholds: Define mandate limits (e.g., non-executive directorship = 1 mandate, non-executive chair = 2 mandates, executive director = 3 mandates, maximum 5 total)
3. Executive compensation caps: Specific limits on bonus structures (e.g., maximum annual bonus of 100-200% of base salary, total incentive remuneration not exceeding 6x base salary)
4. Short vs. long-term remuneration balance: Requirement that short-term maximum bonuses not exceed long-term incentive rewards
5. Political donation thresholds: Specific caps on acceptable political contributions
6. Proportionality rule for controlling shareholders: More detailed guidance on when to vote against directors connected to controlling shareholders

Conclusion

These guidelines reaffirm the Church's responsibility not only to steward resources wisely but to bear witness to the gospel through how we vote and engage in the corporate world. We recognise this as a living document that evolves as our understanding of justice, sustainability, and faithful witness deepens. Through thoughtful proxy voting, we seek to promote companies and practices that contribute to God's kingdom and the flourishing of all creation.

The EOC recognises that implementing these guidelines requires wisdom and discernment. We encourage ongoing dialogue between COSIT, asset managers, and the EOC to ensure our proxy voting activities effectively support our mission to transform lives and communities in accordance with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

This policy is advisory in nature and complements the Church of Scotland Ethical Investment Guidelines. COSIT trustees retain sole discretion over investment management decisions.

Proxy Voting
Asset Manager Implementation Guidelines
Asset Manager Responsibilities

- Make best efforts to vote in accordance with these guidelines while exercising appropriate judgement and upholding their fiduciary duties. Asset managers should not vote in alignment with this policy if they determine that doing so would be contrary to prudent investment principles or would not be in the best financial interests of the fund.
- Provide regular reporting on proxy voting activities and alignment with these principles, including an annual report that specifically identifies:
  - All instances where votes were cast differently from the policy guidelines
  - Clear justification for each variance, explaining the investment rationale and fiduciary considerations that led to the divergent vote
  - The potential financial or risk-related implications that informed the voting decision
- Engage with companies on material ESG issues prior to and following proxy votes
- Consult with COSIT when facing complex voting decisions not clearly addressed by these guidelines, or when material concerns arise about aligning the policy with prudent investment practices
- Recall lent shares for key ESG votes where Church priorities are implicated
- Engage in or support shareholder resolutions where corporate behaviour conflicts repeatedly with Church values

Case-by-Case Considerations
For proposals not specifically addressed in these guidelines, asset managers should consider:

- Alignment with the Five Marks of Mission
- Consistency with our Ethical Investment Guidelines
- Potential impact on long-term stakeholder value
- Company's track record on ESG issues
- Materiality of the issue for the specific company and sector
- Fiduciary duties and prudent investment principles

This approach recognises that asset managers must balance the Church's values-based objectives with their fundamental fiduciary responsibility to act in the best financial interests of the fund. By requiring transparent reporting of variances, COSIT maintains oversight whilst respecting the professional judgement of asset managers in complex voting situations.

Appendix 2

AI Ethical Investment Guidelines

Introduction

These Guidelines establish the Church of Scotland's approach to evaluating artificial intelligence practices in investment decisions. They are proposed as a two-year policy framework whilst the Church develops a comprehensive AI strategy through broader consultation with the Theological Forum and other relevant bodies.

This document addresses AI-specific ethical concerns that extend beyond the scope of the main Ethical Investment Guidelines. Where AI issues intersect with existing Guidelines, such as environmental impact or labour practices, those established principles continue to apply.

Theological Foundation

Our understanding of humanity as created in God's image calls us to exercise our God-given creativity responsibly. The Church of Scotland embraces a participative theology that seeks engagement with the world rather than dominance over it. AI technologies must serve human flourishing, protect relationships, honour human dignity, and contribute to the common good.

These Guidelines are grounded in the Church's Five Marks of Mission and the conviction that investments must reflect our commitment to proclaim the gospel, nurture communities, serve human need, challenge injustice, and safeguard Creation.

Purpose and Scope

This policy establishes principles for evaluating companies' artificial intelligence practices, with primary focus on identifying and excluding investment in organisations whose AI activities conflict with values-based investment principles. Asset managers engaged by COSIT are responsible for applying these Guidelines to investment decisions involving companies that develop, deploy, or significantly use AI technologies. Asset managers must demonstrate compliance through regular reporting on evaluation processes, exclusion decisions, and ongoing monitoring.

Core Evaluation Framework

The following criteria address AI-specific ethical concerns. They supplement rather than replace the environmental, social, and governance considerations established in the main Ethical Investment Guidelines.

Governance and Accountability

Companies must demonstrate responsible corporate culture in AI adoption through:

- Established ethics oversight with documented responsibilities and clear AI principles integrated into business operations
- Dedicated personnel for AI ethics with appropriate authority and resources
- Regular independent auditing of AI systems and practices
- Clear accountability mechanisms including audit, appeal, and redress processes
- Appropriate training for all personnel using or overseeing AI systems
- Executive accountability for AI risks and ethics

Evaluation focuses on independence and expertise of oversight bodies, genuine integration of ethical considerations into business strategy, and evidence that AI enhances rather than replaces human capabilities where appropriate.

Transparency and Explainability

Responsible companies publish regular AI transparency reports detailing system capabilities, limitations, and impacts, particularly for high-stakes applications. They provide accessible explanations of AI functionality, maintain grievance mechanisms for AI-related concerns, and engage in ongoing communication about development priorities. Assessment examines quality of disclosures, responsiveness to stakeholder concerns, and proactive communication about system limitations and risks.

Privacy and Human Dignity

Companies must implement comprehensive data governance with privacy-by-design principles, meaningful consent mechanisms, and robust user control including data access and deletion rights. AI's capacity for mass data processing and inference creates privacy risks requiring specific technical safeguards. Evaluation considers alignment with leading privacy frameworks, evidence of data minimisation practices, and strength of security infrastructure.

Bias Prevention and Fairness

Organisations must maintain active bias testing and mitigation processes throughout AI development, supported by diverse development teams and regular algorithmic auditing. Meaningful engagement with affected communities in system design and effective remediation processes for identified bias demonstrate commitment to fairness. Assessment examines comprehensiveness of bias detection strategies, team diversity metrics, and track record of addressing fairness issues.

High-Stakes Applications

Companies deploying AI in healthcare diagnostics, criminal justice, financial services, employment decisions, or other high-stakes contexts must demonstrate robust governance frameworks, rigorous testing protocols, fail-safe mechanisms, and continuous monitoring. Evaluation assesses comprehensiveness of safety measures relative to application risk and evidence of stakeholder consultation in deployment decisions.

Labour Impact and Workforce Transition
Where AI adoption is likely to result in job replacement or displacement, companies must consult with stakeholders and provide clear transition strategies with meaningful reskilling opportunities. AI systems should enable workers to learn more and work more efficiently, prioritising human-AI collaboration over wholesale replacement. Evaluation considers quality of workforce transition support and evidence of collaborative AI implementation.

Environmental Stewardship
Companies must disclose environmental impact of AI development, deployment, and use, including energy usage for training models and data centre operations. Assessment examines commitment to minimising unnecessary resource consumption and emissions. This supplements the environmental stewardship requirements in the main Ethical Investment Guidelines.

Note: This supplements the environmental stewardship requirements in the main Ethical Investment Guidelines.

Regulatory Engagement
Companies should proactively adopt emerging best practices, engage constructively with policymakers, and contribute to responsible AI development initiatives. Assessment examines leadership in standard-setting and commitment to evolving practices.

Implementation Framework
Due Diligence and Classification
Investment evaluation requires comprehensive review of documentation including annual reports, ethics statements, independent assessments, and regulatory filings, supplemented by direct management engagement and stakeholder consultations.

Companies are classified into tiers:

- **Exemplary performers** demonstrating industry leadership
- **Acceptable companies** meeting minimum standards
- **Conditional investments** requiring active engagement for improvement
- **Excluded organisations** failing fundamental requirements or engaging in prohibited practices

Ongoing Monitoring
Annual comprehensive reassessment of portfolio companies incorporates evolving standards and stakeholder feedback. Active ownership through shareholder engagement, values-aligned proxy voting, and collaboration with other investors promotes continuous improvement and industry-wide change.

Exclusions and Restrictions
Categorical Exclusions
The following categories of companies are excluded from investment:

- Companies developing AI for autonomous weapons systems
- Organisations with significant regulatory violations or ethical breaches related to AI
- Companies refusing governance engagement on AI ethics and risk management
- Entities systematically violating human rights through AI use, including surveillance capitalism, oppressive surveillance systems, or AI deployed to persecute religious or ethnic groups
- Organisations deploying AI in ways that systematically commodify or dehumanise individuals

Restricted Investments
The following require enhanced due diligence, time-bound improvement commitments, and regular progress monitoring:

- Companies using AI in high-stakes applications without robust governance frameworks
- Organisations with documented instances of algorithmic bias causing harm to marginalised communities
- Companies deploying AI systems without adequate transparency or accountability mechanisms
- Entities using AI in ways that significantly displace workers without adequate transition support

Review and Adaptation
These Guidelines will be reviewed annually, or more frequently as needed, to ensure they remain relevant to rapidly evolving AI technologies and emerging ethical frameworks. During the two-year policy period, the Church will develop a comprehensive AI strategy through consultation with the Theological Forum and other relevant bodies, which may result in revised or expanded Guidelines.

Implementation Note for Asset Managers
These Guidelines identify AI-specific ethical considerations requiring evaluation beyond the Church of Scotland's main Ethical Investment Guidelines. Where AI intersects with established areas—such as climate change, labour practices, or human rights—the main Guidelines continue to apply. Asset managers should integrate these AI-specific criteria into their existing ethical investment evaluation processes.

Why Separate AI Investment Guidelines?
Theological Foundation
The Church of Scotland's May 2021 report "Artificial Intelligence: Opportunity and Challenge for the Church" establishes theological and ethical principles addressing privacy, surveillance capitalism, algorithmic bias, transparency, accountability, and human dignity. This report remains the theological foundation for the Church's approach to AI.

Practical Application for Investment Decisions

These Investment Guidelines translate those theological principles into practical criteria for asset managers. The 2021 report was not designed to guide investment decisions. Asset managers require:

- **Specific exclusions and restrictions:** Clear boundaries defining which companies are excluded (autonomous weapons, surveillance capitalism, systematic human rights violations) and which require enhanced due diligence
- **Concrete evaluation criteria:** Measurable standards for ethics board independence, auditing frequency, transparency reporting, bias testing, and stakeholder consultation
- **Implementation processes:** Due diligence methodologies, company classification systems, documentation requirements, and reporting structures
- **Integration with existing framework:** Alignment with COSIT's investment processes, proxy voting policies, and annual assessments
- **Environmental impact disclosure:** Specific requirements for AI's energy consumption and resource use, which has grown significantly since 2021
- **Adaptation mechanisms:** Annual review processes for rapidly evolving AI technologies

Complementary Documents

The 2021 report explores faithful Christian engagement with AI. These Guidelines apply those principles to investment decisions. This relationship mirrors how the main Ethical Investment Guidelines translate the Church's theological commitments into practical investment criteria. These AI Guidelines serve the same function for AI-specific concerns articulated in the 2021 report.

Appendix 3

Asset Manager Assessment for Compliance with Church of Scotland Ethical Investment Guidelines – Phased Implementation Proposal

Overview

The EOC recommends implementation of a process to assess asset manager compliance with the Church of Scotland Ethical Investment Guidelines using a phased approach. Phase 1 establishes foundational reporting on compliance with objective investment restrictions and qualitative considerations including climate and sustainability, economic justice, peace building, and diversity, equity and inclusion. Each subsequent year will add depth systematically, allowing asset managers time to develop internal capabilities while enabling COSIT and the EOC to evaluate and adjust based on experience. Future topics to be included in the assessments include: proxy voting, mission alignment, governance, climate alignment, impact, and handling of more complex issues (e.g., Occupied Palestinian Territory, Indigenous rights considerations, and conflict minerals transparency)

Year 1 (Phase 1): Foundation

Year 1 (2026) focuses on compliance with the Guidelines' objective investment restrictions and core qualitative considerations. The Phase 1 assessment covers investment restrictions compliance (the 10% turnover threshold for excluded activities), climate and environmental engagement aligned with the Guidelines' climate and sustainability principles, social responsibility and human rights aligned with economic justice principles, AI ethics assessment and exclusions, simple engagement counting, and required documentation submission. Starting here establishes baseline reporting without overwhelming managers, tests systems, and identifies gaps before adding complexity.

The attached Appendix is a template for administering the assessment.

Annual Asset Manager Assessment of Compliance with Church of Scotland Ethical Investment Guidelines (Phase 1)

Purpose: Annual assessment of asset manager performance in implementing the Church of Scotland Ethical Investment Guidelines.

Reporting Period: [Date Range]

Asset Manager: [Name]

Fund(s) Assessed: [Fund Names]

Completed by: [Manager Representative]

Date: [Completion Date]

Introduction to Annual Asset Manager Assessment

This annual assessment enables the Church of Scotland Investment Trust (COSIT) to evaluate how asset managers are implementing the Church's Ethical Investment Guidelines in their investment activities.

Security Selection Process and ESG Integration

Before completing the detailed compliance sections below, please provide a comprehensive description of your security selection process, with particular attention to how ethical and ESG considerations are integrated into your investment decisions.

Please address the following:

1. **Security Selection Framework**: Describe your overall approach to selecting securities for investment, including the stages of your investment process (screening, research, portfolio construction, etc.).
2. **ESG Factor Integration**: Explain the extent to which you consider environmental, social, and governance (ESG) factors in your security selection process. At what stage(s) are ESG considerations evaluated, and how material are they to your final investment decisions?
3. **Church of Scotland Ethical Investment Guidelines**: Describe specifically how you integrate the Church of Scotland's Ethical Investment Guidelines into your security selection process. Do these guidelines influence:
   - Initial screening and exclusion of securities?
   - Due diligence and research on potential investments?
   - Portfolio construction and weighting decisions?
   - Ongoing monitoring of existing holdings?
4. **Proactive vs. Reactive Approach**: To what extent does your security selection process proactively identify and avoid companies with ethical concerns, versus relying on post-investment engagement to address issues? Please provide specific examples where your selection process led you to decline an investment due to ethical or ESG concerns aligned with the Church's Guidelines.
5. **Integration Benefits**: How does integrating the Church's ethical criteria into your security selection process reduce the need for active engagement with portfolio companies? Are there categories of concerns that are better addressed through selection versus engagement?

Your response (please provide 300-500 words):

Understanding your security selection process helps COSIT assess the extent to which ethical considerations are embedded in your investment approach from the outset, rather than being addressed solely through post-investment engagement activities.

Section 1: Compliance Overview
Investment Restrictions Compliance
Please confirm compliance during the reporting period:

- [ ] No investments exceeded 10% turnover threshold for excluded activities (fossil fuels, alcohol, tobacco, gambling, weapons, etc.)
- [ ] All new investments were screened against the Church's exclusion criteria
- [ ] Ongoing monitoring systems identified any compliance issues

Key Statistics:

- Total investments screened:
- Investments declined due to restrictions:
- Any compliance issues identified: [ ] Yes [ ] No

If yes, please describe:

Section 2: Core Implementation Areas
2.1 Climate and Environmental Action
Climate Engagement:
Please describe your approach to climate engagement with portfolio companies, including:

- The scope and focus of your climate engagement activities
- Whether you have engaged companies on climate issues during the reporting period
- Examples of science-based emissions target discussions or outcomes

Provide one specific example of successful climate-related engagement:

2.2 Social Responsibility
Human Rights and Labour:
Please describe your approach to human rights and labour engagement, including:

- The nature and extent of your engagement on labour rights and human rights issues
- Your process for assessing modern slavery risks in portfolio companies
- How you prioritize companies for engagement on social responsibility issues

Provide one specific example of social impact engagement:

Section 3: Engagement Summary
Overall Engagement Activity:
Please provide a summary of your engagement activities during the reporting period that reflects your firm's approach and scale:

- Description of your overall engagement strategy and priorities
- Overview of engagement activities undertaken (recognizing that different managers employ different approaches and scales of engagement)
- Assessment of engagement effectiveness, including examples where engagement resulted in measurable positive change

Provide one example of successful engagement that resulted in concrete corporate behaviour change:

Section 4: Required Documentation
Please provide the following supporting materials:

- [ ] Summary of proxy voting record for the period
- [ ] List of companies engaged with and key outcomes
- [ ] Any investments declined due to ethical restrictions
- [ ] AI policy compliance documentation (if applicable)

Section 5: Self-Assessment and Planning
Overall Alignment Rating:
How would you rate your alignment with the Church's Ethical Investment Guidelines this year?

[ ] Excellent [ ] Good [ ] Satisfactory [ ] Needs Improvement

Top Priorities for Improvement:
What are your top three priorities for improving alignment in the coming year?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Declaration
Manager Confirmation: I confirm that this assessment accurately represents our implementation of the Ethical Investment Guidelines during the reporting period.

Signature: _____

Name: _____

Title: _____

Date: _____

For Asset Owner Use Only

Overall Assessment: [ ] Exceeds Expectations [ ] Meets Expectations [ ] Below Expectations

Key Strengths:

Priority Areas for Improvement:

Follow-up Actions Required:

Owner Representative: _____

Date: _____

THEOLOGICAL FORUM MAY 2026

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.

Points for Information

1. The Theological Forum has been represented on the Legacies of Slavery Task Group by members Prof Glen Pettigrove and Ms Jennifer Stark, and Secretary, Ms Nathalie Mares MacCallum. Prof Pettigrove is Chair of Moral Philosophy at the University of Glasgow and 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 particularly grateful for his contribution to the Task Group's 'Legacies of Slavery' report, which is being considered by the Assembly this year.
2. The Forum is grateful to its Convener, Prof Paul Nimmo, for drafting Part I of the Report, 'Church Decline: Reflecting on the Causes and Building for a Better Future', which is being considered by the Assembly this year.
3. The Forum has worked with the Legal Questions Committee over the past year to undertake a review of the Ministers and Deacons in Same Sex Civil Partnerships and Same Sex Marriages Act (Act I 2015), as instructed by the General Assembly of 2025. The conclusions of this review can be found in the Report of the Legal Questions Committee.

Executive Summary

As detailed above under 'Points for information', much of the Theological Forum's work over the last year has been carried out with other Standing Committees of the Church and the results are therefore located elsewhere in the Blue Book. The Forum's Report below provides an outline of the process of confessional reform, which began in 2018 and which culminated in January 2026, when the Church officially adopted the new Book of Confessions and made corresponding changes to the Articles Declaratory, the Preamble to ordination services, the Vows of Ordination and the Formula of Subscription that all office-holders must sign. The Report details the production and contents of the Book of Confessions and highlights the official launch event that took place online with Saint Andrew Press. It also draws attention to the accompanying Church of Scotland Learning module on the Book of Confessions, which seeks to bring deeper understanding and practical application of the material. Most importantly, the report reflects upon the significance for the Church of this reform, which marks the first major confessional development in the Church of Scotland's constitution since 1690.

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:

a) To 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) To express the theological vision of the Church in its worship, fellowship, witness, and mission in and beyond contemporary Scotland;

c) To 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) To draw to the attention of the General Assembly theological matters which the Theological Forum considers to be of pressing contemporary relevance;

e) To 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 tasks assigned to it by the General Assembly of 2025 and prior General Assemblies. Its work has been carried out through substantial reading, discussion, reflection and prayer, and through consultation with other Standing Committees 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 is offered as an update on work carried out over the past year.

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2. CONFESSIONAL REFORM

2.1 Background

2.1.1 Doctrine is crucial to the healthy life of the Church. Indeed, Article Declaratory IV states that the Church has the right to adjudicate finally in matters of doctrine, worship, government and discipline.[i] Doctrine is therefore one of the key areas of its life to which the Church must attend according to its own constitution. Over the last eight years, the Theological Forum has been completing an important doctrinal project on confessional reform.

2.1.2 The process of confessional reform began back in 2018, following a successful Overture to the General Assembly that instructed the Forum to produce a new report on the confessional position of the Church. Work carried

out in fulfilment of this instruction included an academic conference in 2019,[ii] an interim report in 2021,[iii] a webinar, a consultation with Presbyteries, Kirk Sessions and individuals, the production of video resources,[iv] and a final report presented to the General Assembly of 2022.[v] In that report, the Forum proposed the creation of a new Book of Confessions to contain the subordinate standards of the Church, while also clarifying the location of the 'fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith' referenced in the First Article Declaratory and in the ordination vows of office-holders. The General Assembly accepted an Overture based on these proposals in May 2023,[vi] which set in motion the Article VIII procedure that concluded in May 2025.[vii]

2.1.3 The outcome of this process was the adoption of the new Church of Scotland Book of Confessions, along with corresponding changes to the Articles Declaratory of the Church of Scotland, the Preamble to ordination services, the Vows of Ordination and the Formula of Subscription that all office-holders must sign. These changes came into effect on 1 January 2026.[viii] A full account of the Church's journey of confessional reform can be found in the 2025 General Assembly Report of the Committee on Overtures and Cases.[ix]

2.1.4 It is worth pausing to reflect on the significance of this confessional development. Since 1647, the principle subordinate standard of the Church of Scotland has been the Westminster Confession of Faith. The phrase 'subordinate standard' comes from the Second Article Declaratory[x] and refers to confessional statements that function as doctrinally authoritative while being subordinate to the Word of God contained in Scripture. These statements express the common beliefs of the Church and are intended to guide and regulate the beliefs and conduct of office-holders. The recent confessional development is therefore not merely an academic exercise but becomes part of the life of the Church through the vows that office-holders sign upon their ordination. The creation of a new Book of Confessions to contain the revised subordinate standards of the Church marks the most foundational confessional development in the Church of Scotland's constitution since 1690, when the Westminster Confession of Faith was re-established as part of civil law.

2.2 The Book of Confessions

2.2.1 Over the past year, the Theological Forum has devoted a significant amount of time to compiling the text of the Book of Confessions and preparing it for publication. This has been a large and complex piece of work: the final manuscript, standing at 132 pages in length, has required numerous hours of drafting, editing and proofreading. It contains the primary texts of the Creeds and Confessions, together with an Introduction and Prefaces authored by the Theological Forum. These 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.

2.2.2 The Book of Confessions contains the Church's revised subordinate standards, which are:

- The Apostles' Creed
- The Nicene Creed
- The Scots Confession
- The Westminster Confession of Faith
- The 1992 Statement of Faith

2.2.3 The Book of Confessions will be an aid for office-holders as they teach and disciple in twenty-first century Scotland. Office-holders will promise in the Formula of Subscription to be 'guided in [their] life and doctrine by the Book of Confessions of this Church'. Ministers and other recognised ministries will now have a single point of reference for seeking to understand and explain the teaching of the Church to members and enquirers, and will have rich theological resources from across the history of our Church to bring into conversation with Scripture and contemporary issues.

2.2.4 The Forum extends its thanks to the following members who contributed to the production of the Book of Confessions: former Convener, Rev Dr Liam Fraser, former member, Rev Dr John Carswell, current Convener, Prof Paul Nimmo, Secretary, Ms Nathalie Mares MacCallum, and current members Rev Dr Alasdair J Macleod, Rev Dr Lynn McChlery, Ms Jennifer Stark and Prof Andrew Torrance. The Forum also extends its thanks to Dr Duncan Sneddon, Lecturer in Celtic at the University of Edinburgh, for his assistance with proofreading the original Scots text of the Scots Confession, and to all those at Saint Andrew Press who helped to bring the Book of Confessions to print.

2.2.5 The Book of Confessions of the Church of Scotland was published by Saint Andrew Press on 28 November 2025. Hard copies are available for purchase from the Saint Andrews Press website: https://standrewpress.hymnsam.co.uk/books/9781800830592/book-of-confessions-of-the-church-of-scotland An online PDF version is also available: https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/143584/printBookofConfessions.pdf

2.2.6 An online launch event for the Book of Confessions took place on 11 December 2025. It included a discussion of the book's themes, inspiration and creation, as well as a Q & A with the audience. A recording can be accessed here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ztWYWz4xpzI

2.3 Church of Scotland Learning Module on the Book of Confessions

2.3.1 A Church of Scotland Learning module, titled 'What Do We Believe?', has been created to accompany the Book of Confessions, to help bring deeper understanding and to identify practical application of the material that is contained in the Book. This training is designed for all members of the Church who are interested in learning more about the Church's historic faith, and most importantly, how this historic faith is a living faith.

2.3.2 If you are already a member of Church of Scotland Learning, the module can be accessed here: https://church-of-scotland-learning.circle.so/c/individual-learning-module-overview/what-do-we-believe. Alternatively, please sign up to Church of Scotland Learning to access all available modules by clicking on this link: Register for Church of Scotland Learning.

2.4 Online Companion Volume

2.4.1 The Forum received an instruction from the General Assembly of 2024 to produce an online companion volume to the Book of Confessions 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", as well as the Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechisms. Having taken advice from the Legal Questions Committee, the Forum has provided links to these documents on the Church website so that they are readily accessible. For anyone accessing these documents, it should be noted that some aspects of them may have been superseded or become obsolete. The documents can be accessed here: https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/about-us/our-faith/book-of-confessions.

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3. FUTURE WORK

3.1 The Forum stands ready to assist the General Assembly and its Standing Committees in any relevant matter of theology and doctrine and would welcome consultation at an early stage in respect of any substantial pieces of work that are anticipated.

4. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

4.1 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 responses.

In the name of the Theological Forum

PAUL T NIMMO, *Convener*
LYNN McCHLERY, *Vice-Convener*
NATHALIE MARES MACCALLUM, *Secretary*

References

[i] https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/about-us/general-assembly/church-law/church-constitution#articleiv

[ii] The papers of this event are online at https://ojs.st-andrews.ac.uk/index.php/TIS/issue/view/188

[iii] https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0014/80303/10-Theological-Forum.pdf

[iv] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Cmq_tG_mWw and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7_YkZfCWLuU

[v] https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/93374/theological-forum.pdf

[vi] https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/107851/theological-forum.pdf

[vii] https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0016/120913/Chapter-9_Report-of-the-Committee-on-Overtures-and-Cases.pdf and https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0018/133434/4.-Committee-on-Overtures-and-Cases.pdf

[viii] The updated wording of the Preamble, Questions and Formula can be found in the Appendices of the Book of Confessions, pp. 121-132. https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/143584/printBookofConfessions.pdf

[ix] https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0018/133434/4.-Committee-on-Overtures-and-Cases.pdf

[x] https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/about-us/general-assembly/church-law/church-constitution#article1

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