

FAITH IMPACT FORUM MAY 2022

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.

Safeguarding the Integrity of Creation

2. Instruct the Forum, in partnership with the Assembly Trustees, General Trustees, Social Care Council and Eco-Congregation Scotland, to continue to develop plans and activities towards meeting a 'Net Zero by 2030 Strategy' and to report to the General Assembly in 2023. (Section 3)

Global Justice and International Partnerships

3. Give thanks for the life and witness of Mission Partners who have died, acknowledge with gratitude those who have completed their period of service overseas, and uphold in prayer all who continue to serve. (Section 4)
4. Urge the UK Government to do more to ensure Covid-19 vaccines are available throughout the world, particularly in resource poor countries, and instruct the Forum to make representations and to promote this campaign with church members. (Section 4.1)
5. Instruct the Forum to share with congregations and Presbyteries the work of Mediterranean Hope and other international partners providing humanitarian and integration support to displaced people, and promote opportunities for local churches to respond with prayer, action and giving. (Section 4.2)
6. Instruct the Forum to continue to support work with asylum seekers and refugees, alongside Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees, and encourage congregations to participate in the 'Faithful Welcome' project and to explore Community Sponsorship so that they may be directly involved in refugee resettlement. (Section 4.6)
7. Commend the Korea Peace Appeal and instruct the Forum to promote the appeal to church members and congregations for them to sign as part of the effort to bring an end to the Korean War. (Section 4.8)
8. Note the report of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Pakistani Minorities: Abductions, Forced Conversions, and Forced Marriages of Religious Minority Women and Girls in Pakistan; instruct the Forum to continue to engage with ecumenical and international partners on the issue and to provide resources to encourage church members to write to MPs urging the UK Government to implement the Report's recommendations. (Section 4.9)
9. Commend to congregations this year's Stamp Appeal which will support the Church in Lebanon in its ministry. (Section 4.10)

Interfaith Relations

10. Commend the Jewish-Christian glossary produced this year for study and action particularly by ministers, OLMs, readers and worship leaders, to shed light on divergent uses and understandings of theological and political terms that relate to the Holy Land. (Section 5.1)
11. Note with concern that Islamophobia remains widespread in the UK, and in line with other faith-based, social, political and governmental organisations, adopt for internal use the All-Party Parliamentary Group's (APPG) definition of Islamophobia, and its guidelines, to aid the Church of Scotland in challenging Islamophobia. (Section 5.2)

Societal and Political Issues

12. Acknowledge that the practice of Conversion Therapy is harmful and endorse the definition of Conversion Therapy as outlined in the 'Memorandum of Understanding on Conversion Therapy in the UK', noting that the Methodist Conference have supported and adopted this definition and the Church of England General Synod have endorsed a similar statement; urge the Scottish Government to ban Conversion Therapy and instruct the Forum to make representations to the Scottish Government and Scottish Parliament. (Section 7.3)
13. Instruct the Forum, in consultation with CrossReach and others, to report to the General Assembly of 2023 on issues relating to drugs and substance use. (Section 7.4)
14. Instruct the Forum to convene a cross-Church group to explore the benefits and opportunities afforded to the Church of Scotland by digital technologies and to support congregations in their utilisation of these. (Section 7.8)

Report

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 With the 5 marks of mission and emphasising leadership development and the encouragement of the under 40's, the staff and Forum have sought to fulfil the deliverances set out by prior General Assemblies and to ensure the Church's witness in society. Updates follow in the Report.

1.2 As we celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Society, Religion and Technology project, which first raised climate concerns for the church decades ago, Net Zero and the climate emergency were key areas as minds and attention turned to the countdown to the COP 26 in Glasgow in November 2021. It was important for us not just to focus on activities in Glasgow, but also to encourage people throughout Scotland to be part of COP26, and many took part in the International Day for Climate Action in their own areas, despite the howling gales and rain. We will seek to share with our partner in Egypt, The Synod of the Nile, learnings from this experience as COP27 will be held in Egypt in November 2022. We welcome the ongoing work across the church on the Church's Net Zero goals. There is much to be done, so it is good to see that the momentum and appetite across the church is also great.

1.3 There is also much to be done with regard to the legacy of slavery. Again, there is cross Church working, tying in with the work of the Equality Diversity and Inclusion group looking at racial justice. This work continues. Looking back, we are faced with past cultural contexts which, we acknowledge now, caused grievous harm for particular sectors of society and demeaned them. The Forum appreciates the First Minister's statement, on International Women's Day, apologising for the way in which, predominantly women, were accused and condemned of witchcraft, and acknowledges that, often, the Church played a part in feeding the fury, and deeply regrets that to be the case. We are grateful for the work of Integrity which seeks to mitigate against such things in the present, and urge the church to make use of the training sessions which are offered.

1.4 The Forum, alongside the whole Church and many around the world, is deeply concerned at the invasion of Ukraine. The Moderator has visited the Ukrainian Catholic Church in Edinburgh and written to the Ukrainian Orthodox and Catholic leadership in the UK in sympathy and solidarity with those who suffer. Many congregations and members offered generous support to our partners in the Reformed Church in Hungary Aid, which has directly helped those fleeing to the border areas of Ukraine – into Hungary, Slovakia, Romania as well as Poland and Moldova. The Forum and Moderator have also encouraged the government to offer a generous welcome to refugees.

1.5 We do not forget others facing similar challenges and displacement in Myanmar, Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan, and Palestine. The work of Mediterranean Hope with refugees and migrant people in Italy and beyond is inspirational and we are glad to have renewed Fiona Kendall's contract, in cooperation with the Waldensian Church, Global Ministries in USA and the Methodist Church in the Britain and Ireland, as we together offer solidarity in the work Mediterranean Hope is undertaking as a witness to God's love for all people.

1.6 The Forum aims to find ways of enabling the Church, on every level, to recognise the need for a vibrant, full bodied faith involving every fibre of our being so that, as individuals and as communities of God's people, we think, act, listen, pray and 'do' our faith in such a way that it becomes the selfless, liberating, healing, tour de force, that Jesus embodied: transforming individuals, society, communities, nations and the world, so that those with the least find they have what they need, the broken are made whole, those imprisoned in whatever way are set free, and the planet is cherished.

2. UPDATE ON 2021 DELIVERANCE

2.1 The General Assembly of 2021:

9. (i) Appoint a Special Committee of five persons to consult with the Faith Impact Forum, the Church of Scotland Investors Trust and the Assembly Trustees to consider the best framework for future recommendations about the ethics of investment practice being brought before the General Assembly, and report to the General Assembly in 2023.

(ii) Instruct the Selection Committee to consider carefully the range of skills and diversity of backgrounds required for this task and present the names for this Special Committee on ethical investment practice to a later session of this General Assembly.

The Special Committee has been hearing from many different parties on the key issues involved in the ethics of investment practice and how different churches and organisations interpret and engage with ethical approaches and will report to the 2023 General Assembly.

2.2 *10. Urge the UK Government to do all that it can to ensure Covid-19 vaccines are available throughout the world, particularly in resource-poor countries, on the basis of clinical need to preserve human life.*

The Faith Impact Forum has supported interventions led by Christian Aid and the ACT Alliance of Christian-based international development organisations and will continue to press the UK Government to do to all it can to improve vaccine distribution and take-up around the world.

2.3 *12. Instruct the Forum to call for the development of safe and legal routes for people desperately seeking sanctuary so that they can travel, live, work and contribute to our society with respect and dignity.*

In spring 2021 the UK Government consulted on its 'New Plan for Immigration' to which the Forum responded on behalf of the Church. Subsequently the UK Government introduced the Nationality and Borders Bill, which (at the time of writing) is being considered in Parliament. The Church has joined the Together With Refugees coalition and the Forum and Faith Action staff have worked with UK ecumenical partners to raise these points with Parliamentarians and in the media during the Bill's passage. More information is included below at section 4.4

2.4 *14. Deplore the decision of the UK Government to cut overseas aid programmes and call on the UK Government and Parliament to continue to provide a minimum of 0.7% of Gross National Income as Overseas Development Assistance in line with the International Development (Official Development Assistance Target) Act 2015 and all main parties' 2019 manifesto commitments.*

Faith Action staff worked with ecumenical partners to produce a briefing urging Church members to write to their MPs asking them to reverse the cut. However, a vote in the House of Commons in July 2021 agreed a smaller budget, in a move described by the Moderator as a "moral failure": <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/news-and-events/news/2021/articles/church-brands-decision-to-cut-international-aid-budget-a-moral-failure>

2.5 *15. Welcome the cross-Church work on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, and of engaging with the experience of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) people within the Church of Scotland; and instruct the Faith Impact Forum, the Faith Nurture Forum and the Assembly Trustees to consider how best to ensure the necessary resources are available to act on the outcomes.*

Faith Impact Forum has welcomed the progress and acknowledges the cross-cutting nature of strategy and activity contained in the Assembly Trustees' Report

2.6 16. Urge Kirk Sessions to take part in the basic training provided by Integrity – the Church of Scotland’s Violence Against Women Task Group.

Faith Impact Forum now has a budget for three open training sessions and up to five bespoke training sessions for any Kirk Session or church leader to attend training. See Integrity report. (Section 7)

2.7 17. *Instruct the Forum, in consultation with the Ecumenical Relations Committee, to renew and strengthen ecumenical dialogue, partnership and collaboration on public affairs with: (1) the Church of England; (2) through the new Scottish Christian Forum; and (3) within the Joint Public Issues Team.*

The Faith Impact Forum and Faith Action staff have continued to work closely on opportunities for collaboration. In light of the Columba Declaration and St Andrew Declaration, plans with the Church of England and the Scottish Episcopal Church on various projects are now developing. Although the Scottish Christian Forum has not come into being as anticipated at the time of writing the 2021 Report, ecumenical dialogue and action on public affairs among Scottish Churches has been strengthened by the evolving roles of the Scottish Churches Leaders’ Forum and the Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office. The Church of Scotland remains an associate partner of the UK Methodist-Baptist-URC Joint Public Issues Team and shares in a number of projects and goals.

2.8 18. *Urge congregations to support the Reset the Debt campaign; instruct the Forum to promote the campaign, and to call on the UK Government to establish a Jubilee Fund to provide grants to pay off and cancel unavoidable debt accrued by households because of the Covid-19 pandemic and restrictions.*

The Faith Impact Forum supported and promoted this campaign with local congregations and with secular anti-poverty partners. Further information about the campaign and future plans to address issues of household debt are on the website <https://resetthedebt.uk/>

2.9 19. *Instruct the Forum to promote “Meet Your MSP” resources and encourage congregations to approach their MSPs, especially those newly elected to the Scottish Parliament, in order to establish and strengthen relations with elected representatives.*

Following the Scottish Parliamentary elections, the Meet Your MSP resources from the Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office have been revised and represented with a new web presence. Congregations seeking advice on engagement with politicians are encouraged to find out more and contact the Faith Action staff team www.scpo.scot

2.10 20. *Commend the report on Artificial Intelligence; urge the Church to engage with the issues raised, especially in relation to pastoral care, worship and mission; and instruct the Forum to provide resources to support this engagement.*

The Faith Impact Forum, through the work of the Society, Religion and Technology Project, is at the time of writing producing resources which will be shared and publicised in due course. More on the Society, Religion and Technology Project can be found below at section 8.

3. SAFEGUARDING THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION Climate Justice and Net Zero by 2030

3.1 The Faith Impact Forum has responsibility for convening the Net Zero Strategy Group to enable the delivery of the carbon emissions monitoring, reduction and offsetting targets in order to reach net zero by the year 2030. The Group includes representatives from different parts of the Church including the Faith Impact Forum, the General Trustees, the Assembly Trustees, CrossReach, Eco-Congregation Scotland, and Faith Action Programme staff.

3.2 Congregations were urged to join Eco-Congregations Scotland in the General Assembly Deliverance of 2021, and since then there has been an 18% rise in full membership and a 7% rise in registered congregations.

3.3 The Group aims to set directions for a “Net Zero by 2030 Strategy”, with sub groups involving staff and volunteers in developing and implementing specific projects. The initial goal for a Strategy is to understand the baseline of existing carbon emissions, from which to plan and implement reductions. To this end an ‘Environmental Footprint Tool’ is being developed in partnership with the Church of England, and will be introduced in the second half of 2022. The tool will enable congregations to measure energy use and carbon emissions on an annual basis, to monitor progress.

3.4 A Net Zero Pathway is being developed for launch later in 2022. This will be an online resource aiming to facilitate change by informing and encouraging congregations to identify practical actions to reduce emissions, ranging from the simple and free to more complex investments that require planning and resources.

3.5 Two projects that are currently being explored include resources on tree planting (as a way to support carbon offsetting as well as improving biodiversity), and investing in electric vehicle charging infrastructure. At the time of writing the Group is working to deliver ‘Project Eve’, a pilot scheme exploring the installation of electric vehicle charging points in church grounds. Initial installations are expected in the first half of 2022. Subject to review, this pilot is the first step in a broader initiative to explore low emission transport options for churches.

3.6 Through the work of the Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office, Faith Action staff have been in discussion with ecumenical partners to discuss strategies for reaching net zero across Scottish churches (where a number of other denominations have now also set 2030 targets), including taking forward direct approaches to the Scottish Government about access to advice and financial support.

3.7 The effects of climate change are being brought to the front and centre of our attention regularly by partner churches and as this report is being finalised, Mozambique is being battered by Cyclone Gombe, only weeks after the devastation caused there and in Malawi by Tropical Storm Ana. These, and other weather-related incidents cause havoc in the lives of our Partner Churches, the effects of which are both immediate and longer term. It is the stories from them that encourage us to fight for Climate Justice and seek to become a Net Zero Church.

4. GLOBAL JUSTICE AND INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

4.1 Covid Vaccine Equity

4.1.1 At the General Assembly of 2021, the Moderator called on members of the church to give a donation to Christian Aid as a thanksgiving gift when receiving their Covid-19 vaccine. This would be used in work to support people across the world who did not have access to the vaccine. As well as advocating for a just vaccine rollout, Christian Aid's work with vulnerable communities helps to limit the impact of the virus on health, livelihoods and personal safety. Lord Wallace urged everyone to join him in supporting the appeal and helping vulnerable people stay safe as they waited for the vaccine. Nearly £12,000 was donated in the name of the Church of Scotland and these donations saved lives.

4.1.2 We have witnessed spectacular collaboration across the world in order to develop and roll out a vaccine, which science tells us can save lives. However, in Africa, Asia and many low- and middle-income areas across the world this vaccine is not getting into the arms of the many, but the privileged few. There are reports of vaccine hesitancy as the cause for such a low take up; this is untrue.^[i] The All Africa Conferences of Churches has made a plea to 'Fast Track Vaccines for All, Now!'. Whilst many in the UK and Europe are in the privileged position of having both vaccinations and a booster and for some three doses and a booster there are millions across the world who have not been afforded the same privilege.

4.1.3 Gordon Simango, the AACC Director of African Union Office & Advocacy said "Vaccine equity is a fundamental right, and any spokes put in its way must be vehemently denied. The world must rally behind the call for a waiver on patenting rights, as well as robustly fight corruption both on the local and global fronts. It is a pity that human lives are being thrown on to the line, while human and corporate greed is meant to flourish. Profits before human life is unethical." The recent Omicron variant saw an immediate 'red listing' of six Southern African countries, whilst there was evidence to suggest Omicron had been circulating in Europe long before it was discovered in South Africa,^[ii] yet no European countries were red listed. These actions suggest policies motivated by racism rather than facts.

4.1.4 Similarly, the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) stated at an online seminar in June 2021, "As faith communities, we must support and amplify the need for equitable sharing of vaccines and enforceable frameworks for vaccine development and distribution; countries must be bound by agreements rather than arbitrary limits which maximise profits for a few. Short-term thinking of caring only for the rich and the privileged few should not be the aim, but the health and wellbeing of all God's people, in the long run, should be the goal."

4.1.5 Dr Mathews George Chunakara, the General Secretary of the CCA, in his opening remarks, stated, "the prevailing inequitable distribution of vaccines is leaving millions of people vulnerable to the COVID-19 disease. In responding to such a crisis, national governments normally tend to follow their own interests rather than a globally coordinated approach to share the vaccines with less privileged ones. We now face a situation where countries are pushing for first access and are holding on to key components of some aspects of production, as well as stockpiling vaccines, which we consider 'vaccine nationalism'. This has negative consequences for how well the global pandemic is managed and contained; not only in the long term but with immediate effect." "There is a lack of effort towards the goals of global solidarity and equity for access to vaccines, and this continues to persist. It undermines every effort towards disease control and derails the project of achieving a pandemic-free world. Everyone in our regions must have the knowledge, access, and resources for advanced research and development to make the vaccines locally." If we are to be the voice for the voiceless and speak out against injustice then we must call on our government to not only fulfil the Covid-19 vaccine pledges that they made, but for them to go further and ensure equity for all.

4.2 Mediterranean Hope and SOS Rosarno

4.2.1 Our Mission Partner Fiona Kendall works with partners in Italy – the Waldensian Church and the Federation of Protestant Churches' Mediterranean Hope project. The project has grown exponentially in recent times, with new pieces of work in different areas, including support for exploited workers in Calabria. Many of these people are fruit pickers and, through SOS Rosarno, a Fair-Trade cooperative, Mediterranean Hope has developed a brand called Etika which ensures a fair price for farmers and, subsequently, a decent wage for the workers, many of whom are migrants. 10% of the price is also allocated to local social projects, including those of Mediterranean Hope. To support Etika, and to highlight the work of Mediterranean Hope, Fiona shared the story with her partner congregations in Scotland, and from that 'Operation Orange' was conceived. It was hoped to have oranges freshly picked from the Calabrian trees in time for Christmas but due to red tape at UK customs this was delayed until February 2022. This small hiccup is nothing in comparison to the difficulties with official papers, permissions and passes which those who have migrated have to deal with as they seek to find a safe and secure place to live, work, and build connections and relationships. Sharing the story of the migrants and the support of Mediterranean Hope is an important element of 'Operation Orange', supporting congregations to engage with the issues and speak out and act in support of justice for migrants.

Mediterranean Hope is also active in "managed migration" programmes and advocacy work at a European and global level. The award-winning humanitarian corridors pioneered by Mediterranean Hope in 2015 are going from strength to strength, with a number of corridors now running from the Middle East and North Africa into Europe. In the course of last year, a new corridor was opened from Libya and a protocol has been signed to enable Mediterranean Hope to welcome Afghans. Fiona and her colleagues are currently working directly with the Italian government to develop a new community sponsorship framework for Italians to host people on the move. All of this is helping to involve Italians directly in welcoming refugees and, ultimately, to disrupt the toxic narrative concerning migration.

4.3 Ukraine

4.3.1 Just as the report was being finalised, Russia invaded Ukraine. We immediately sent out a letter of solidarity to Bishop Zán Fabian in the Reformed Church in Transcarpathia. Contact was also made with the world and European church bodies to help coordinate responses, and offer support. The Rev. Balázs Ódor, Ecumenical Officer for the Reformed Church in Hungary, was in direct contact with us and with the Reformed Church in Transcarpathia and

highlighted the presence on the ground of Reformed Church in Hungary Aid, in western Ukraine, as well as in the border areas in Slovakia, Hungary and Romania where they were able to access buildings belonging to the Reformed Churches in each place. The Convener spoke out and highlighted the work of the Reformed Church in Hungary Aid as a way for people in Scotland to be able to channel support quickly and effectively as they were already present on the ground and had established relationships and work. The generosity of congregations and individuals was deeply welcomed as an act of love and faith, of solidarity and kindness. Information is available on the Reformed Church of Hungary (English) website: <https://reformatus.hu/english/news/emergency-response-for-ukraine>

4.3.2 The Moderator wrote to the Ukrainian and Russian consulates urging a peaceful resolution to the conflict and to the Home Secretary to urge a smoother and easier visa process for people coming to the UK, and urged the government to be generous in its approach.

4.3.3 On Ash Wednesday, 3000 people from 80 countries gathered virtually for a Prayer for Peace organised by some of the major world communions, and including people in Ukraine, and from the different churches. A video recording of the service is available: <http://wcrc.ch/news/a-pall-of-ashes-covers-ukraine-christians-join-prayer-for-peace>

4.3.4 Krisztina Bado, from the office of Bishop Zán Fabian in the Reformed Church in Transcarpathia, wrote to partners after the visit of the Reformed Church of Hungary Bishops to Western Ukraine in early March to offer solidarity and share in worship together:

"In the city of Beregszasz, 71 reformed pastors participated from our side... We are very thankful that these Hungarian bishops were with us and they strengthened our pastors and us as well with the words of God. It was really uplifting. Our pastors could feel that they are not alone and they have brothers and sisters in the Homeland. It is a miracle that our pastors are still in their places and trying to strengthen our congregational members and those families who remain without husbands and those old people who stayed behind. It is not easy. We pray together for peace, for wisdom, for hope, faith and for strength."

It is, though, a time of great challenge for the small Reformed Church in the border area of western Ukraine. The 71 pastors try to give psychological support to those who are left behind (poor families, old people, large families, ill people) and try to find ways to help those displaced from the war zone. Those who cannot move to other countries will stay there, and the church also wants to offer care for their spiritual life too. The churches have been busy as people pray for an end to war and for a proper peace.

In other neighbouring countries, small Reformed Churches are also being supportive, the Reformed Church in Poland is very small, but is doing what it can to support those arriving in Poland. Some Parishes are hosting refugees. One is trying to create a retreat and recovery centre for traumatised people. Rev Semko Koroza in the congregation in Łódź, where there were already 250,000 Ukrainians living before the war, is cooperating with a Roman Catholic foundation, and seeking to support children and students living and studying there.

4.3.5 St Columba's Church in Budapest opened the church and mission centre to give sanctuary and a place of rest to refugees as they journeyed through. On one night in early March, there were 15 Nigerian students who had travelled solidly for three days to get to safety, as well as women and children. Rev Aaron Stevens and the congregation offered a service of love and care to those in need.

There is also an unpleasant side. The All Africa Conference of Churches condemned the invasion and offered solidarity to the people of Ukraine and "the majority of the people of Russia" but also had to condemn the actions of some people who discriminated against African people fleeing the war. <https://www.aacc-ceta.org/posts/list/category/aacc-statements>

4.3.6 Fiona Kendall, working for the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy which sent a group to assess what needs they could offer help and support with, noted that those arriving were deeply traumatized, and a key priority was shelter and psychological support. While the level of support offered to those fleeing is remarkable, with flight, also comes risk. Traffickers exploit the chaos for their own ends; women who accept a lift to the border and then disappear; unaccompanied minors who are preyed upon. There are no depths, it would seem, to which some will not sink.

4.3.7 Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees (SFAR) has **compiled a list of seven ways your faith community can respond to the situation**. As well as advocacy, prayer and donating you will see ways in which Presbyteries and Congregations can be welcoming of refugees coming to Scotland.

4.3.8 As we pray for Ukraine and offer support, we need to remember too, others throughout the world who struggle: those in occupied Palestine, Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan, Myanmar for whom there is not the same upsurge of international support.

4.4 Faithful Welcome Project

4.4.1 The Church of Scotland continues to lead and have responsibility for the multi-faith partnership Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees (www.sfar.org.uk). In September 2021, with Faith in Community Scotland as lead partner, Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees was successful in securing external funding from the New Scots Refugee Integration Delivery Project for work lasting until October 2022, called *Faithful Welcome*. The project invites people from Scotland's rich diversity of faith traditions to be part of creating a more welcoming and inclusive society for refugees and asylum seekers. Faith plays an important role in many refugees' lives and churches have provided a sense of belonging, hope, and comfort as well as practical support when all else has been lost. Through *Faithful Welcome*, local congregations are supported in their work to show hospitality to refugees and asylum seekers, and enable them to be an integral part of community life.

4.4.2 Local congregations are invited to link in with *Faithful Welcome*, whether they have been involved in this work for many years or if they are wanting to welcome refugees for the first time:

- Join free workshops and information sessions on refugees, asylum and integration.
- Work with the staff team for one-to-one support and build capacity to welcome newcomers.
- Engage in networking opportunities and connect with like-minded people.
- Benefit from funding and practical advice.

To find out more visit: <http://www.sfar.org.uk/faithful-welcome/>

4.5 Afghanistan, Resettlement and Asylum

4.5.1 New resettlement routes, including from Afghanistan, have provided new opportunities for congregations to welcome refugees locally. For more information on the Afghan resettlement schemes and what congregations can do please visit: <http://www.sfar.org.uk/8-things-you-can-do-to-respond-to-the-situation-in-afghanistan/>

4.5.2 At the time of writing, the UK Home Office is still housing asylum seekers in hotels in other parts of Scotland beyond Glasgow, a policy which marginalises people from communities, limits their access to comprehensive support, makes it hard to connect to a local community and contribute their skills, thereby limiting opportunities to integrate.

4.5.3 Local church communities continue to have a vital role to play in saying, 'You are welcome here.' and offering care and support to refugees and asylum seekers from all parts of the world. Across Scotland, Churches, and other faith communities, have been organising trips for people stuck in hotels, coffee mornings, English language practice and kids' activities. With the expansion of the resettlement schemes and changes to the way asylum seekers are cared for, it is vital that the Church's work to welcome the stranger continues and is expanded in all parts of Scotland. The Church can play a critical role in what are often very dark and lonely situations. For support on how you can do this, please contact the Co-ordinator of Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees (Sabine Chalmers schalmers@churchofscotland.org.uk) or connect with the Faithful Welcome project.

4.6 Community Sponsorship

4.6.1 As the UK Government continues to develop hostile policies towards refugees and asylum seekers, congregations can display hospitality and directly impact the number of refugees that are given sanctuary in the UK through Community Sponsorship. Community Sponsorship is a refugee resettlement programme with local people at its heart. It provides a safe route for refugees at risk to reach Scotland and build a life here as part of a supportive community. It is a shared endeavour where one or more congregations or local groups can work together to prepare for and welcome a refugee family to their local area. The group then supports the family through their first year in the UK to live independent lives, learn English, and access schools, benefits, healthcare and employment and participate fully in the community. More information can be found here: <https://www.sponsorrefugees.org/>

4.7 Nationality and Borders Bill

4.7.1 At the time of writing, a major piece of legislation is being considered by the UK Parliament at Westminster. The Nationality and Borders Bill follows on from the Government's 2021 'New Plan for Immigration' which the Faith Impact Forum responded to on behalf of the Church (<https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/news-and-events/news/2021/articles/church-proposes-alternative-to-uk-government-asylum-reform-plans>). Working with ecumenical and interfaith partners, and as part of a secular coalition called Together With Refugees, the Church of Scotland has expressed profound concern and disappointment with the UK Government's proposals. By the time the General Assembly meets, the legislation is expected to have completed its Parliamentary consideration and the final text will be known. Whatever the outcome, this legislation is expected to have a major impact on the poorest and most marginalised people on the planet, and how our society offers a hand of friendship or a cold shoulder of indifference.

4.8 Korea Peace Appeal

4.8.1 Seventy years ago, the Korean War was raging, not ending until June 1953, with an Armistice rather than a peace treaty. Nearly five million people died, more than half – about 10 percent of Korea's pre-war population – were civilians. Among the military casualties were 1,114 British soldiers. Perhaps 10 million families were separated on either side of the 38th Parallel. The Republic of Korea entered 34 years of military rule, while the Kim dynasty in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) devised the Juche political doctrine that has led to isolation, widespread poverty, and human rights abuses while at the same time enduring the harshest sanctions regime in the world. South Korea pays \$1 billion annually for hosting 28,500 United States military personnel.

4.8.2 At a webinar in January 2022, hosted by National Christian Council in Korea (NCKK) and Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI), churches in Britain and Ireland were urged to support the Korea Peace Appeal (<https://en.endthekoreanwar.net/>) to bring about a Peace Treaty to formally end the Korean War, end sanctions against DPRK, promote links between North and South Korea, and sustainable peace on the Korean peninsula. NCKK is one of over 370 civil society groups, that include each of the country's seven faith communities, campaigning to end the Korean War by collecting 100 million signatures by June 2023, the 70th anniversary of the signing of the Armistice Agreement.

4.9 Forced Conversions in Pakistan

4.9.1 On freedom of religion or belief, Pakistan has, for a long time, been a country of particular concern. Its government has systematically enforced blasphemy and anti-Ahmadiyya laws and failed to protect religious minorities from abuses by non-state actors. Abduction, forced conversion to Islam, rape, and forced marriage remain threats for religious minority women and children, particularly from the Hindu and Christian faiths. All the evidence indicates that such incidents are on the rise with more than half involving minors. Provisional estimates suggest up to 1,000 religious minority women and girls face this fate every year, however, the true numbers may never be known. The Pakistani

government has done little to ensure minor girls' safety and return them to their families, while authorities often take no action in abduction cases that are brought to the courts.

4.9.2 Our partner organisation, the Centre for Legal Aid, Assistance and Settlement (CLAAS) has reported on many cases of forced conversion and contributed to a report published by the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Pakistani Minorities: *Abductions, Forced Conversions, and Forced Marriages of Religious Minority Women and Girls in Pakistan*, released in November 2021^[iii].

4.9.3 In 2021, the Church of Scotland and the Church of England, in partnership with and support of the Church of Pakistan, organised a series of Roundtable Briefings on Forced Conversions and Forced Marriage in Pakistan to help broaden the understanding of the situation and to support churches and concerned people around the world to engage in more informed, targeted, and joined up advocacy. The Roundtables provided an opportunity to hear from voices on the ground as well as those that are documenting abuses and supporting victims seeking legal redress, and explored what churches and related agencies can do to show solidarity with affected communities and the steps that can realistically be taken to affect change. These Roundtable Briefings have continued in 2022.

4.10 Lebanon

'Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up' (Galatians 6:9)

4.10.1 We have looked on in despair at the deteriorating situation in Lebanon, a country which has suffered greatly over the last few years. Our partners report a devastating economic collapse, a lack of electricity and water, and a poverty level which has increased to over 80%, with an unemployment rate of 40%. In the face of this disaster, the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon (NESSL) continues to provide much needed care and relief to the people of Lebanon, as emphasised by the biblical reference above that they are using as their guide.

4.10.2 They are a shining example of the Church working in a situation of poverty and need, seeking to provide basic food, heating and medicine to the families in and around their churches. The need for this would have been unheard of just two years ago. Students are unable to attend school without major financial aid, and even the pastors are in a situation of not being paid. This has led many people to leave the country in search of a new life.

4.10.3 However, being a shining example does not come without pain and desperation, and financial hardship. Now, more than ever, we need, as a Church, to look out for those who are in difficulties and need, whether they be in Scotland or further afield, and support our brothers and sisters in the crucial work that they are doing for God's Kingdom. Only then will we see the harvest that the writer to the Galatians envisages. Our **stamp appeal** for 2022-23 is to support pastors in NESSL.

4.11 HIV

4.11.1 In a major report last year, UNAIDS highlighted how Covid-19 has shown the fragility of the health and development gains made over the past decades in relation to the AIDS pandemic and exposed glaring inequalities amongst populations.

4.11.2 Working alongside the World Council of Churches Ecumenical HIV and AIDS Initiatives and Advocacy (WCC-EHAIA) to promote HIV competence among churches and addressing the root causes of the pandemic, the Church of Scotland HIV Programme and its partner churches play an influential role because they are deeply rooted in the communities they serve around the world. They can be a force for transformation – bringing healing, hope and accompaniment to all people affected by HIV.

4.11.3 In a typical year the Church of Scotland HIV Programme raises much of its income through donations from Souper Sunday Services and other events such as the Heart & Soul Swing Band Concerts. In 2021 this was not possible but we were thankful to receive a substantial amount of legacy monies and are grateful to supporters who leave such gifts in their will to the programme. This means we can continue to support projects of Partner Churches internationally as well as partner organisations in Scotland, and be able to support what can sometimes be seen as small initiatives, but actually provide real opportunity for transformative work. Supporting partners to continue their project work through the Covid-19 pandemic has allowed people living with HIV to live well. This includes provision of PPE and other necessary nutritional, medical, emotional and spiritual support.

<https://www.unaids.org/en/Global-AIDS-Strategy-2021-2026>

<https://www.oikoumene.org/what-we-do/ehaia>

5. INTERFAITH RELATIONS

5.1 Jewish-Christian Glossary Project

5.1.1 Church of Scotland and Jewish community representatives were in a formal dialogue process from 2017-2019, with the objective of repairing relationships between the Jewish community and Church of Scotland after the *Inheritance of Abraham?* report to the General Assembly in 2013. The dialogue set about to establish a frank theological exchange on this report, and the politics and theological ideas it contained. The broader aim for this dialogue was always to share insights and mutual learning that reflected the dialogical process for those who could not be involved directly. This objective was the subject of a meeting with the Chief Rabbi and the Convener of the Assembly Trustees, along with participants of the dialogue and staff support, in February 2020. It was agreed that a small group of Ministers and Rabbis should begin a process of focused dialogue that concentrated on terms and words that either directly or implicitly convey beliefs and attitudes to the politics and theology of land. These words and terms were identified because of their prominence and importance with overt theological connections to Israel and Palestine such as 'holy land' and 'Israel'. Some were chosen because they were very specifically important to the beliefs of one

faith and identity in relation to Israel and Palestine, and would aid understanding by drawing attention to them. These include 'Chosen People', 'Kingdom of God' and 'exile'. An additional reason some terms were chosen was because there are often underlying assumptions that terms will be mutually understood and heard in the same way. In reality however, these words often contain different signifiers, associations and ideas for Jews and Christians, both between and within our faith communities given different denominational cultures, beliefs and contexts.

5.1.2 Words are living things and therefore fluid and, even when used by people from the same or very similar backgrounds, can carry underlying nuances that are assumed and often go unnoticed. This would be true of any words we use in virtually every context, which means that any glossary cannot be an exhaustive and conclusive interpretation of the words under its consideration, merely a marker in what are, of necessity, continuing conversations that will, like shifting sands, carry on evolving.

5.1.3 The challenges of agreeing which words would be examined, how to manage the fact that some terms will have more significance to one faith, and how to ensure that individuals could be honest and curious put a lot of emphasis on what format we designed for the dialogues and how entries would be displayed. The first initial meeting therefore began with agreeing expectations, determining the values of this work that would be important and identifying the principles that would help the group work together. The values that were chosen were friendship, collaboration and understanding and these values represented the attitudes and spirit in which we approached our task. The principles of the group's approach also convey important principles bear in mind for when this glossary may spark future dialogues. These include the fact that our understanding of the 'other' is often overestimated and it is only through true and careful listening that we discover the myths and bias underpinning our initial perspective. It was also reflected from the outset that no single participant could represent a whole faith, that there is a myriad of beliefs behind each word. Participants could, however, be mindful of a spectrum of meanings and attitudes that we could bring to the glossary in order to shed some light on several different views within both the Church of Scotland and amongst Orthodox British Jews.

5.1.4 The process following from the initial meeting involved participants splitting into pairs and using an interview format to discover the meanings and significance of the term for their respective faith tradition, how that term relates to Jewish or Christian identity and how it has featured in the history of each faith group. At the end of the session, the key differences and similarities were identified and discussed as a group with each answering what would be helpful for the other faith to know about how this term is used by either Jews or Christians. Jewish and Christian answers have then been placed side by side to shed light onto each other, whilst ensuring that this glossary does not attempt to conflate the meanings and thus dilute the differences. Participants were asked to give a spectrum of beliefs and answers from within their traditions. However, the focus is naturally limited by the fact that participants come from Orthodox Jewish and Church of Scotland backgrounds. Glossary entries therefore reflect ideas and attitudes that participants felt confident describing and cannot be seen to represent all Jews and Christians. The hope is that those who come to use the glossary will benefit in three important ways:

- Firstly, that they will learn new things about their own faith as well as another;
- Secondly, that they will appreciate seeing the different meanings and significances alongside one another, to discover similarities, key differences, ambiguities and sometimes common roots of terms that took on new and diverging meanings as the two faiths developed from the first century onwards; and,
- Thirdly, it is hoped that users of this glossary will approach these terms in a new way, particularly in relation to how they may preach and express hopes and prayers for peace and justice in Israel in Palestine.

One of the main reported impacts of creating this glossary for the project participants has been that they are more intentional and mindful of how terms may be heard and understood outside of their own tradition. The glossary is a tool for testing assumptions as well as granting access to learn the impact of those assumptions. This represents a rare privilege in a world where one often learns about impact once the damage is done. One of the themes that can be seen across multiple entries and was voiced in multiple dialogues is the tendency with which Christianity has unintentionally fossilised Jewish concepts, beliefs and ideas due to the fact that Christian roots are indelibly tied to Jewish origins. Jewish participants have similarly been surprised to see how terms often start out having very similar meanings but then go on to be used and understood quite differently in Christianity, showcasing the different priorities, beliefs and journeys each faith has been on. The interview process has allowed participants to be open and honest, with themselves and their partner, allowing new opportunities for understanding and friendship to emerge. The intention is for this glossary to be a useful resource to spark future dialogues, both within our own Church and with our friends and colleagues in the Jewish community. An example entry from the glossary can be found in *Appendix 1*.

5.2 Islamophobia

5.2.1 The Faith Impact Forum has agreed to support a campaign for the widespread adoption in local authorities of the All-Party Parliamentary Group's (APPG) definition of Islamophobia. In lending the Church of Scotland's support to this campaign it has also agreed that it would be helpful for the Church to also adopt this definition. The APPG definition is: "Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness." It is useful to the Church and society as a whole because it defines Islamophobia as a form of racism. Seeing Islamophobia in this way helps to frame it as something more structural and multifaceted than overt expressions of religious hatred or abuse. It helps to demonstrate that this form of prejudice is rooted in a profound 'othering' that belittles, sees as intrinsically alien, generalises and stereotypes Muslims. Going further, it also helps us understand how Muslims are subject to a system of discrimination, control and socio-economic exclusion. The reasons the Faith Impact Forum agreed to adopt this definition and support the campaign for widespread recognition and adoption are threefold:

1. It would be an important act of offering solidarity to the Muslim community which is dealing with this issue on a number of fronts from the UK government to the streets of our cities and towns.

2. The definition captures all the different forms of Islamophobia that may otherwise go unnoticed and we, as a Church, should be championing this approach.
3. It helps us understand what we are opposing when we say 'we oppose Islamophobia' and it helps us recognise it when it happens in the Church. By adopting it along with the guidelines we will have a tool to reflect on speech and actions from members and leaders as well as our communications, reports and resources should they stray into relevant subjects. It also can inform any future policy work relating to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI). While this would be a tool, it wouldn't affect how we then respond to instances of Islamophobia from members and leaders, that would still be a matter for the disciplinary and complaints process.

6. INTEGRITY – VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN TASK GROUP

6.1 At the 2021 General Assembly, the increase in domestic abuse and violence against women in Scotland was noted through a brief report on the impact of Covid 19, including the effects of associated multiple lockdowns and the impact on women's equality more generally. This year the full consequences of the pandemic are beginning to emerge, and parish ministers are seeing their effects on the lives behind the statistics as women find themselves turning to friends and leaders in the hope of a safe space and a caring, sensitive response. The Church has a stark choice when facing this issue. Church members and leaders can either ignore it as something that happens 'out there' in other homes and communities and parts of the world that look and sound very different from ours, or they can begin to address how and why violence against women takes place. This involves examining the justice issues underpinning it and the various cultural frameworks, found in all parts of our society, that provide justification for both trivialising and normalising domestic violence, aspects of which we all contribute to. Most importantly the Church can choose to address the fact that violence against women happens here in Scotland, in affluent as well as poor communities, in rural as well as urban contexts, and in a broad spectrum of homes, including those of church members and leaders.

6.2 The Church of Scotland's violence against women task group, Integrity, has been working to ensure that the Church of Scotland can be a place people can turn to, where they will be believed and helped. An integral dimension of its approach is the focus on gender inequality as the key issue through which to understand why violence against women takes place, can be ignored and becomes normalised. It is only by recognising its source and nature that we can hope to bring an end to this targeted form of violence. The focus of 2021 has therefore been to roll out a training pilot that provides an introduction to violence against women in order to increase awareness, understanding and confidence in speaking about the issue within the Church. Thanks to a great deal of interest, and recognition of the Church's potentially beneficial role, Integrity managed to coordinate six pilots in very different parish settings. Through testing material, reflective exercises and methods of delivering information, an interactive and practical training module has been developed and has begun to be rolled out from the start of 2022. Integrity has now been able to offer this training to anyone in a position of leadership and pastoral responsibility by offering three open events this year and up to four bespoke sessions for groups within congregations. With a small budget to ensure we have professional input from an expert on the theme of violence against women, participants are encouraged to discuss how the Church can be a place that is welcoming, supportive and where all violence is challenged, with the hope that the Church can encourage equal and healthy relationships and enable anyone experiencing abuse to come forward and seek help. Those who participated in the pilot training reported leaving feeling 'more confident if someone were to approach them' (Brightons Parish, Falkirk). 100% of participants also reported that the training had given them helpful ideas when it came to improving gender justice in their congregation.

6.3 In October 2021, a strategy day took place with stakeholders present from across the Church. At this event, Integrity members could reflect on achievements from the past two years and how priorities have developed since then. The main outcome of discussion and feedback from stakeholders has been a call to focus on capacity building within the Church so that at every level the Church is confident and responsible in responding to the issue as well as being equipped with the practical skills to help individuals within parishes to seek help and support. It was also felt that the theological and spiritual aspects of what Integrity brings needs to be emphasised. The role of spirituality in resisting all forms of violence is at the centre of real and lasting change. Furthermore, it is recognition of the importance faith and spirituality that differentiates Integrity's work from secular campaigns and helps give credibility to this issue within Christian contexts. For this reason, Integrity hopes to focus its efforts through capacity building and awareness raising with an exploration of Christian beliefs and Church of Scotland cultures to underpin the content of the resources it promotes and training it develops. This will involve continuing training of all leaders and collaboration with others in the Church on matters that relate to gender justice and domestic abuse (with the hope that Integrity will work with Safeguarding to produce e-learning training on domestic abuse to be in use by 2023). Integrity will also collaborate with safeguarding and others in the Church on a survivor's policy and a trauma informed approach. Integrity's communications subgroup will aim to ensure that the 16 Days of Action Against Violence Against Women in November/ December, Thursdays in Black (an ecumenical campaign that encourages people to speak out against all forms of gender-based violence) and International Women's Day are engaged with across the Church, to become key features of worship, reflection and inspiration for all Church leaders and members.

7. SOCIETAL AND POLITICAL ISSUES

7.1 Poverty

7.1.1 The longstanding commitment of the Church of Scotland to the gospel bias to the poor continues to be reflected in the work and priorities of the Faith Impact Forum, particularly with regard to our societal and political activity. The General Assembly has in the past called for more Government support for social security payments to help people out of poverty. Child poverty in particular has been a particular concern. Over the past year the Church has joined with other faith groups and anti-poverty organisations to call on the Scottish Government to double the Scottish

Child Payment to £20 for eligible children; we were very happy with the announcement by the Finance Secretary, Kate Forbes MSP, that this change will take effect from April 2022 and will make a real difference to children living in poverty. However, more work and effort are required, and the main responsibility for welfare spending and decisions remains with the UK Government Department for Work and Pensions. We remain committed to working with UK Church partners to seek further changes, including as part of a new campaign 'Scrap the Cap' which seeks to end the benefits cap policy, which has a detrimental impact on larger families or households where there are complex needs.

7.2 Assisted Suicide

7.2.1 Soon after the 2021 Scottish Parliament elections, Liam McArthur MSP announced he intended to introduce a Member's Bill that would permit assisted suicide in Scotland. The General Assembly has previously said that the Church does not support any change to the law which would permit assisted suicide (sometimes called assisted dying). The Faith Impact Forum encouraged ministers and members to respond to the consultation and we submitted a response on behalf of the Church of Scotland. More information and a copy of the response which details the arguments we have put forward is available on the website <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/about-us/our-views/end-of-life>

7.2.2 If Liam McArthur can gain enough cross-party support, his Bill will be introduced and follow the normal Parliamentary process. If this happens the Faith Impact Forum will continue to share the opinion of the Church that opposes any introduction of assisted suicide.

7.3 Conversion Therapy

7.3.1 The Scottish Government's 'Programme for Government 2021-2022' says that they "will protect LGBT people from harm by banning the damaging promotion and practice of conversion therapy, bringing forward legislation that is as comprehensive as possible within devolved powers by the end of 2023, if UK Government proposals do not go far enough." At the time of writing a UK Government consultation process is ongoing,^[iv] and the Scottish Government have announced plans to establish an expert advisory group to assist them.^[v]

7.3.2 The proposal for a ban on Conversion Therapy would prohibit any kind of therapeutic process which would seek to change (or 'convert') someone's sexual orientation to be heterosexual and trans to cis (birth) gender. Such practices have been sometimes used by religious organisations and so the language of 'conversion' has often been used. Research has shown that therapies aimed at altering, changing or 'converting' someone's sexual orientation have not been proven to have the intended outcome, and many practices connected to such therapies were harmful to the recipient.

7.3.3 In 2011 the General Assembly adopted the following statement on the pastoral care of homosexual Christians:

It is contrary to God's will that Christians should be hostile in any way to a person because he or she is homosexual by orientation and in his or her practice. In other words we view homophobia as sinful. We do not include in the concept of homophobia both the bona fide belief that homosexual practice is contrary to God's will and the responsible statement of that belief in preaching or writing.

It is the duty of the Church to welcome, minister, and reach out to people regardless of their sexual orientation and practice. The Church should strive to manifest God's love to all of his people.

In particular, the Church should recognise the heavy burden which a homosexual orientation continues to place on some who find it difficult or impossible to reconcile their orientation with their understanding of God's purposes as revealed in the Bible. There is a particular need for the Church to reach out pastorally to them and to make them welcome.

7.3.5 In light of this position, the Faith Impact Forum recommends that the Church of Scotland should concur with the position of the Church of England General Synod and the Methodist Conference, namely that there should be a ban on Conversion Therapy. We note the support of the Church of England and Methodist Church to use the 'Memorandum of Understanding on Conversion Therapy in the UK'^[vi] as an important and widely understood definition of Conversion Therapy that is backed by more than 20 health, counselling and psychotherapy organisations including the Association of Christian Counsellors.

7.3.6 In the creation of legislation to ban Conversion Therapy we hope there will be wider attempts with and within religious institutions to address issues of spiritual abuse or psychological pressure. There is no place in pastoral care for activity which is coercive or exploitative. We aspire to the highest standards of conduct and practice that is done in the name of the Church. Through provision of pastoral care, ministry and support to individuals, Church ministers, elders and members should follow best practice in their conduct and we recommend that the policies of Pastoral Care UK and the Confederation of Scottish Counselling Associations be understood and followed. The Church has its own Safeguarding policies and procedures for work with children and vulnerable adults.

7.3.7 Information about how to complain about the inappropriate or unethical behaviour of someone involved in the life the Church of Scotland is available on the Church's website.

7.4 Social Care and Substance Use

7.4.1 Over the last year the Faith Impact Forum has worked particularly closely with CrossReach. In the autumn the Scottish Government consulted on plans for a 'National Care Service for Scotland', implementing recommendations of an independent review headed by Derek Feeley which reported in early 2021. The consultation suggests the Scottish Government are planning far-reaching reforms to the way social care is planned and managed, and will have an impact on formal service providers, such as CrossReach, as well as informal and voluntary led activities (that might work to tackle loneliness and social isolation) such as church coffee mornings or pastoral visiting. The Faith Impact Forum and CrossReach issued a joint response to the consultation. For more information see <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/about-us/our-views/social-care-reform>

7.4.2 It is anticipated that the Scottish Government will introduce a Bill in the Scottish Parliament in 2022 and the Forum will continue to work with CrossReach to highlight opportunities and concerns from the Church of Scotland.

7.4.3 Scotland’s relationship with and treatment of substance users has increasingly come under the spotlight in recent years. The number of deaths caused by drug use in Scotland is at a record high, and is far higher than in other parts of the UK, and in other European countries. Last year the First Minister appointed Angela Constance MSP as Minister for Drugs Policy and some new funding for residential rehabilitation was announced. Late in 2021 the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party leader, Douglas Ross MSP, introduced a proposal for a Member’s Bill that would introduce a Right to Addiction Recovery, with the aim of improving access to a range of treatment services. The Forum also noted the remarkable joint visit by the First Minister and Douglas Ross to Bluevale Community Club in Glasgow, and their shared commitment to work together to tackle Scotland’s drugs deaths crisis. In the Church, as well as the important work of CrossReach’s range of substance use services, there are a number of congregations and parish ministers who have been involved in local work for many years, including the former Moderator the Very Rev Dr Martin Fair and the incoming Moderator, the Rev Dr Iain Greenshields. With this wealth of experience, and the current appetite for new ideas and collaboration, the Faith Impact Forum thinks that the time is right for the Church to collectively reassess our work, actions and policies with regards to drugs and substance use; the last time the General Assembly considered a report on this topic was 1995. The Forum invites the General Assembly to instruct that work be done and to receive a report in 2023.

7.5 Legacy of Slavery

7.5.1 The General Assembly of 2020 instructed the Faith Impact Forum to report to a future Assembly on the issue of racial justice, the legacy of slavery and the Church of Scotland, in partnership with the Faith Nurture Forum, Assembly Trustees, and General Trustees and to consult widely with people of colour in the Church of Scotland and with Black Majority churches in Scotland. This work commenced in the Spring of 2021 and we aim to present the report to the Assembly in 2023.

7.6 Gender Recognition Act Reform

7.6.1 The Scottish Government have indicated that they will soon begin legislating to reform the Gender Recognition Act. The General Assembly has not considered the question before, and there is likely to be a wide diversity of opinion among the membership of the Church. The legislation is likely to lead to two debates in wider society.

7.6.2 The first is on the detail of the actual legislation, which will be about amending the process by which someone can apply for a Gender Recognition Certificate and whether or not it should be made easier for people in this situation. The second will be on much more general issues not addressed in the Bill itself, around diverse gender identities, trans rights and the acceptance (or discrimination) of difference within society as a whole. The two conversations are connected, but the Bill only deals with the former.

7.6.3 On the first debate about the Bill, the Faith Impact Forum will seek to consult and engage constructively on the issues that will soon come before Holyrood and where the views of the public will be invited. We urge individual ministers, elders and members to consider the ideas for reform themselves, and if they are so moved, to make representation to their own MSPs. The Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office will publish a briefing on the issues once the legislation is introduced.

7.6.4 The second debate around gender and transgender issues more generally has, regrettably, often become a battleground for controversy and angry disagreement. This is not a helpful atmosphere for the consideration of people’s identities and a topic that is possibly new or unfamiliar to a large part of the general public.

7.6.5 The Church of Scotland published a very helpful resource *Diverse Gender Identities and Pastoral Care* <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/resources/learn/publications/diverse-gender-identities-and-pastoral-care>, and recognises the need for further thought and study of the issues of human identity. The publication of the very helpful resource speaks to the matter from a pastoral care perspective, but we have been missing serious and considered theological reflection and we have not done enough to resource meaningful and serious conversations at a local church level.

7.6.6 The debates around the Bill are likely to generate controversy, and we urge prayer for those who feel afraid, misunderstood or marginalised on both sides of the argument. We hope that as legislation is brought forward, its consideration can take place in an atmosphere of empathy, kindness and co-operation. Campaigners, politicians and those commenting on public life have a role in contributing to this culture, and no one on neither side of the debate should have to face personal attacks for expressing their thoughts, feelings, opinions or experiences.

7.6.7 The Bill also creates an important opportunity for many people to learn more about the issues involved. The conversation about trans issues will not be confined to legislative scrutiny and we feel the time is right for the Church of Scotland to begin to address issues of gender and transgender identity. The starting point for this thinking is reflected in the work of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion group, set up by the Assembly Trustees in 2021: who are asking the question about Church practice and policy: what does “All God’s People” and “All Are Welcome” mean?

7.6.8 The Church of Scotland, through the Faith Impact Forum, should seek to remain proactive in considering the transgender debates, as it does for many public issues in society. We ask the General Assembly, through receiving this report, to note that we will keep gender and transgender questions on the agenda over the coming months, especially in relation to the Bill in Holyrood. We hope that this may allow for conversations to develop with the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion group and the Theological Forum and others in the Church to deepen our understanding and to come up with some responses to an ongoing dialogue – within the Church and to wider society. Our hope is that we will be known as a Church where all people can speak and be listened to in a safe space and a respectful manner. The Church has a role as reconciler and healer on an issue which has generated so much controversy and hurtful comment.

7.7 Society, Religion and Technology

7.7.1 Following a review of their activities, which wholeheartedly endorsed the value of the project, while making constructive recommendations as to its future direction, the Society, Religion and Technology Project continues to help the Church engage with ethical issues in science and technology, and also to work around issues of health and wellbeing, at both a policy and a congregational level.

7.7.2 The SRT Project is committed to producing, over the next 3 years, a series of interlinked studies around the special role which the Church has in addressing the many health challenges which we face as a society. From isolation and loneliness, use of social media, climate change, the Covid-19 pandemic, there are many factors having serious adverse effects on mental health and wellbeing in Scotland and globally. SRT is well placed to help develop the Church's response to some of these issues. In addition, the SRT will explore use by the church of digital technologies in worship and beyond (e.g. present practicalities such as websites and Alexa apps, as well as looking further to our potential presence in the metaverse).

7.8 Digital Church

7.8.1 It is widely recognised that all of our lives are increasingly being lived online. The Church of Scotland should be making the best use of digital technologies, and it is an area of our life which requires urgent attention.

7.8.2 While it is clear that the current Covid pandemic has meant that many of us have been on an uncomfortably steep learning curve to use digital technologies in worship and beyond, there are many ways in which these technologies provide opportunities for the Church to extend its reach.

7.8.3 As this affects all aspects of church life, the Faith Impact Forum is suggesting the pooling and sharing of ideas and creative thinking across a range of committees and departments. We recognise that the first port of call for information for most people is to look online. We need to begin to help churches to think strategically about present practicalities. For individual congregations, this may mean things like more accessible websites, or the livestreaming of worship services on platforms which we already use such as Facebook.

7.8.4 While many Presbyteries and congregations do well in providing online information, we are aware that there are many who struggle, and who would benefit from practical support and help in these areas.

7.8.5 We appreciate that there is much which could be learned from other denominations. For example, the Church of England has helped to pioneer the use of contactless payments for donations and the collection of weekly, they have created a process to assist in the collection of data to help measure energy consumption in church buildings, and they have deployed missional tools such as daily devotions on Amazon Alexa. Several Church organisations have interactive Apps, which share prayers, bible studies and news, as well as showing where a nearby church is. There are also some great examples of innovative practice within the Church of Scotland which could be shared more widely. Our impression, however, is that there are many who would appreciate help and guidance from those with experience or skills in this area.

7.8.6 We should also acknowledge that a growing number of people, (perhaps especially younger people) are "digital natives" – who have grown up surrounded by technology. They might be as comfortable (or perhaps even more at home) online as in the real "analogue" world. How does the Church, inhabit both places with authenticity and integrity? What is the potential for our involvement in these technologies? What would a Church of Scotland presence in the 'metaverse' look like? What would its absence mean for mission? There is much to be done, and many questions to be asked. We need to make progress on the digital journey.

In the name of the Faith Impact Forum

VERY REV DR SUSAN BROWN, *Convener*
REV ALAN MILLER, *Vice-Convener*
REV DR SCOTT SHACKLETON, *Secretary*

Addendum

Rev Alan Miller

Alan has served as Vice Convener of the Forum since its inception, and prior to that, as Convener of the Asia Committee, then Convener of the Europe Committee of the former World Mission Council. He has brought to these roles wisdom born of both knowledge and experience, as well as a passion for Christ's mission in the world in all its facets. Alan is a man whose words are measured not by volume but by their carefully chosen, thoughtful and incisive nature.

The Forum is grateful for the calm sough Alan has kept, for his loyal commitment to the work of the Forum, for his social and political thoughtfulness, and for keeping the Church of Scotland engaged with the world church, its concerns and hopes, and helping build and sustain supportive relationships internationally.

VERY REV DR SUSAN BROWN, *Convener*

Appendix 1

Meaning(s) within Jewish tradition

Peace or *shalom* refers to completeness and harmony. It refers to both a tranquillity and non-belligerency i.e the absence of war or conflict. There is a strong sense that there can be no flourishing without peace.

Peace sits alongside truth and justice as the core values of Judaism. There is an obligation to strive for peace, this means it is not just valued but actively sought. A famous Talmudic sage, Hillel, states that we should ‘be of the disciples of Aaron, loving peace and pursuing peace.’

A story from the *Genesis Rabah* 85:8 stanza 7 (Midrash, which is an ancient commentary on the Hebrew scriptures) offers a story illustrating the relationship between truth, righteousness, justice and peace. In it we find the ministry of angels divided over whether or not God should create Adam. “Mercy and truth collided, righteousness and peace clashed”. Mercy and righteousness both argued for Adam to be created saying that he will do merciful and righteous deeds. Truth and peace, however, said ‘let him not be created for he will be full of falsehood and will never stop quarrelling’. In this story God took truth and ‘threw it to the ground’. God sacrifices truth for the sake of peace. This story shows the tensions between all four values and gives us a sense of how sometimes truth needs to be seen as plural rather than singular, by fragmenting it, no single human can claim to possess it.

In the ethics of the fathers there is an idea expressed that any dispute for the sake of heaven will never end, there will be no victor, and both views are, arguably, right. Through this we see an idea of fragmented truth and peace not being about the victory of one view over another.

War is something which is given a legal framework within scripture, though there is no such thing as a holy war. There is an understanding that war can be commanded by God under certain conditions. There is therefore a tension between the scripture which points to and describes a Messianic era where all nations worship God and there is universal peace through a new holy order (as found in Isaiah) and the practical aspects of sovereignty over a land which involves both conquering it and protecting it through war. War is therefore seen as an acceptable and at times inevitable tool of foreign policy. In Exodus (15:3) God is joyfully praised as ‘Man of War’ and in Deuteronomy the Israelites are told: ‘For the Lord, your God, is He Who goes with you. To fight against your enemies, to save you. (20:4)

Meaning(s) within Christian tradition

Peace is understood as lying at the heart of everything. On an individual level it involves oneness with God, creation, others and yourself. Given that it runs through so many things, it can often be hard to grasp which leads to it being defined as the absence of something e.g. war, conflict, violence.

The word *Eirene* is the New Testament Greek word for peace. It overlaps with *shalom* in many ways but is broader in its usage.

There is similar attention given in Christianity to the relationship between righteousness and peace, with the idea that peace would be disturbed if one did not live before God and others in righteousness. There can therefore be no God for those who are considered wicked.

Peace is seen as coming through the Messiah as described in Isaiah and Micah. The departure from Jewish understandings is that Jesus is understood to be the Messiah so peace is achieved through his death and resurrection. This is why the passages from Isaiah heralding the ‘prince of peace’ are used in worship at Christmas as Jesus is understood to be this prince of peace. In John 14:27 Jesus says ‘my peace I give to you all.’ This is also understood to be peace between God and humanity and to restore this relationship: “We have made peace with God through our Lord Jesus” (Romans 5:1). With the idea of *shalom* as completeness Paul describes Jesus as our ‘peace’ given that he restores to completeness our relationship with God.

Working for peace is similarly commended in the New Testament ‘blessed are the peacemakers’ is one of the most used phrases to underline this, along with the instruction to pray for ‘your enemies and those who persecute you’ and to turn the other cheek when slapped, which for many is an example of the more radical pursuit of peace modelled in the Christian message and good news.

The commandment to be peacemakers also translates into understanding the importance of maintaining unity through the bond of peace, which requires humility, love and patience. This is meant to be channelled into how Christians conduct themselves and how to view the world. I.e. the Christian message is meant to restore brokenness as we see it in our world through poverty, broken relationships, conflict etc. Peace therefore becomes a message of wholeness rather than absence of war which is how it can be used in English.

The emphasis that gets to heart of what peace means is mutual flourishing.

Importance of the term in Jewish history

While there is an ethical and legal framework found in the Torah for how and when to wage war, there is a long historical gap from the era in which Jews were sovereign over their own land and the modern era of sovereignty in Israel. In addition, the modern state of Israel is not a theocratic state so it's hard to translate the legal frameworks found in the Bible onto a modern military.

There are however many on the religious right who interpret the Six Day war in 1967 to be one which was commanded by God.

The influence of history and how it converges with ethics and spirituality can be seen through the work of Israel's first and second chief Rabbis. Rabbi Kook who was chief rabbi in the 1930s expressed a mystical and universalist vision for Israel and an era of peace where Zionism would no longer be necessary. His son Zvi Yehuda Kook wrote after the Holocaust and illustrates much more mistrust of the non-Jewish world and thus the need to conquer and protect. In that sense the pursuit of peace is seen as a luxury which is much further away, out of reach, given the political reality on the ground.

As we get further from the Holocaust, this may change however we saw in Netanyahu's speeches a consistent rhetoric which drew on themes from the Holocaust to gain support for aggressive policies.

What meanings/importance does this term have in relation to Jewish identity?

The Jewish tradition does not mandate pacifism, nor peace at any price though some Jews become pacifists based on Jewish values.

Regarding identity and issues of peace within the diaspora, there is often a tension between seeing oneself as a vulnerable minority with limited autonomy and the also identifying with Israel which has power and autonomy. This sense of being vulnerable influences interpretation of Israel's' actions as it is underpinned with the sense of diaspora fear that the world is out to get us (both Israel and Jews across the world).

In Israel, while there may be a day to day absence of conflict, this is not a real peace because the security measures and policies of the state require the subjugation of others. This leads to uncomfortable but necessary conversations about peace and how to ensure that both peoples can flourish.

While peace is definitely the ideal, with the likes of Rabbi Hirsch pointing to a future without war, Jewish identity is caught between seeing it as something aspirational but far away and at odds with the present realpolitik of what's necessary for security.

On the other hand, there is a firm understanding that religious disagreement does not need to be settled through a violent conflict. Rabbi Sacks was keen to point out that the Jewish role is to bring a dignity to difference and to see it as valuable and important in the world. In other words, if one day the world turns to monotheism, this does not need to be pushed for through war or force.

Importance of the term in Christian history

As a faith which calls for a specific acceptance of Jesus as God and saviour, there is some difficulty for Christians in dealing with differences of religion and belief. This can be seen in much of history, as Christian rulers have interpreted Christian victory over others as a sign of God's favour and Christianity as the one true faith. This has resulted in a fear of dissent and different views and can be seen in the actions and events of the Crusades leading to the concept that war could be holy if it was seen as purging the world of enemies of Christ. It can also be seen in the violent persecution during the Spanish Inquisition and witch trials. It has also led to periods of national crisis when other nations were seen to be more powerful than Protestant Christian nations e.g. English horror at Spain's dominance in South America and the rise of the Ottoman Empire.

Christianity is a faith which developed from a very vulnerable minority with the mindset and scriptures of a small group that became the majority almost overnight. Arguably this has resulted in it looking to prove itself and its claims about the world through war and power rather than through the more radical message of peace contained in the gospel message. In this way power could be seen as the opposite of peace, given that pursuit of power it opposes any campaign for humility, love and patience.

What meanings/importance does this term have in relation to Christian identity?

There is a strong pacifist tradition within Christianity and many would see this to be part and parcel of living out one's faith but most mainstream Christians see war as a last but often necessary resort.

Peace is then something aspirational for humanity and achievable with God and in individual relationships.

Many Christians tend to slide into a way of thinking that sees peace as the absence of conflict. This then results in a vision that doesn't help lead towards lasting and real peace of human flourishing. It also doesn't help address differing views as it can result in conflict avoidance and the desire for one view to simply be 'right' and win. There is also a sense that those who are right will see suffering as a part of what it means to be right which then results in an idealised sense of martyrdom. It also results in the idealisation of victims and then seeks to identify the victim in any situation. This has definitely influenced how Christians may view the conflict in Israel and Palestine as many Christians automatically identify more with the Palestinian cause given the asymmetry of power which seems straightforward to so many.

Remembrance Sunday is difficult day on the national and Christian calendar as there is a tension between those more inclined to criticise all warfare and those who either served or saw it as a practical duty. It becomes a difficult day for ministers as they write the service with words carefully chosen in order not to glorify war but also respect the experiences and views of those wishing to honour those who made the ultimate sacrifice. One of the most moving parts of one Remembrance service was a dialogue between a 16-year-old and a Lancaster bomber. The congregation were moved to tears hearing the young person describe war games on his game console and the veteran describing the harsh reality of actual warfare.

What is important for Christians to know about the Jewish understanding?

Judaism has not had the length of experience of sovereignty that Christian nations have had given the past 2000 years of living in diaspora.

There is definite obligation to pursue peace in Judaism, which is an active commitment.

There does however have to be recognition that Jewish people have suffered and this has resulted in a policy of defensiveness which affects the other. There can often be an overly simplistic Christian view that Jews as victims have become perpetrators which paints Jews into a role.

There seems to be a lot of discomfort from Christians in the idea of borders and policing those borders given the ideas contained in the Kingdom of God. This means it must be hard for Christians to see Israel with such a strong army which is supported in Israel, this must seem particularly wrongheaded or anathema to Christians.

What is important for Jews to know about the Christian understanding?

Christianity has had a lot of experience of balancing sovereignty over nations and peoples with Christian beliefs. This has resulted in adaptations of ideals and grafting concepts such as 'holy war' onto the scriptures.

Christians have looked back on the wars waged in the name of Christianity and there has been a renewed emphasis on the need to pursue peace and reconciliation as both a Biblical commandment and a moral duty. There is also a practical call to pursue peace by addressing poverty, injustice etc as more structural reasons for conflicts and war.

Christians find disagreement of views hard to cope with and could learn from the Jewish tradition in many ways in seeing a dignity in difference.

Key Differences Summarised

- Jews and Judaism sees peace as one of the core values but something that is promised in a Messianic age this therefore means that war is still a necessary part of life and sovereignty.
- Christianity sees Jesus as messiah bringing peace to the world and restoring God's relationship with humanity.
- Jews have suffered at the hands of other nations and peoples which has resulted in more defensive instincts when it comes to sovereignty in Israel and protecting that sovereignty.
- Christian understandings of peace are influenced by a history of problematic and unjust uses of violence and war in the name of religion to push for peace in the world today. There is more of an emphasis on righting the wrongs of the past.

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